

No. 230

STREET & SMITH'S

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Complete

STORIES

APRIL 1

**SIX RED
HANDS**
by
COLE RICHARDS



MRA
CODE

*Cole Richards
with ink*



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APRIL 1, 1935

Whole Number 230

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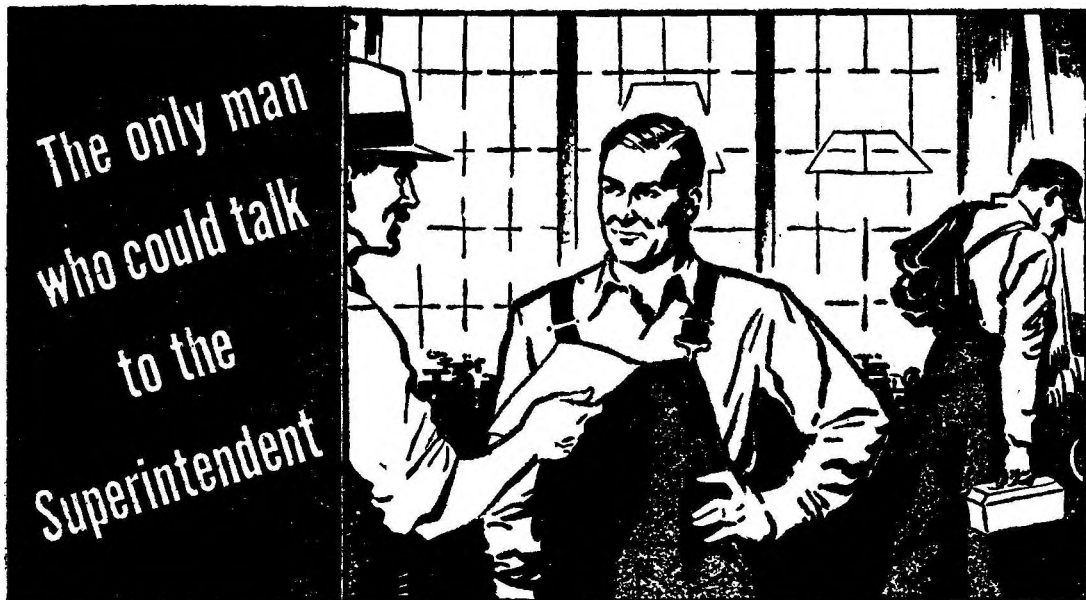
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to the
Superintendent

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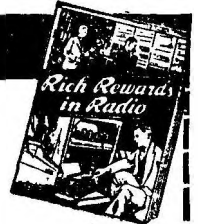


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28x4-74-20	2.50	28x4-74-20	2.45
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CHAPTER I. CASUALTY.

RETURNING with a tour party from the pueblo Sipapu cliff ruin, Ranger Hamilton got out of his car at park headquarters as white and limp as a dead man walking. His cat eyes shifted from the superintendent to Ranger Bowden, who were standing under the flagpole. He stared at the powerfully built, gray-haired superintendent and at the rangy, blond Bowden, of the police detail, as if they were behind a screen, and on that screen was a picture more terrible than man should see.

"Casualty," he said tonelessly.

"Permanent?" Bowden asked. His steady voice did not betray the iciness at his heart.

Hamilton stared at the horrible picture only he could see. "Suppose so. I started with ten cars and twenty-nine people. Now I've got ten cars, and twenty-eight. He went without a sound."

"Take it easy," the superintendent advised. "Maybe you missed count."

"I didn't miss count!" Hamilton flared. "I'm always sure who's in my party, when I'm ordered to Sipapu, because I can't be sure they'll all come back." The words rushed out like water spilling over a dam. "I told Dunn that Sipapu was cursed when he excavated it. I've said since that it should be closed. Three deaths showed I was right. And here's one more!"

"Sit down." The superintendent's calm was a rebuke.

Hamilton sank into a folding chair. He shifted to the edge, and kept his weight on his feet, with his five feet six of spring-steel muscles ready for action. His cat eyes shuttled from the superintendent to the road leading off the mesa. They were greenish, those cat eyes.

Ranger Bowden ran along the line of tourist cars, ordering the drivers to keep their places. The superintendent followed more slowly, checking the occupants of each car and unobtrusively taking the license numbers. The real intent of his questions was hidden behind a quiet smile.

"You had a good trip? Didn't lose any one?"

One by one, the motors pulled away, until a green roadster was left. The top was down, disclosing the lone motorist as a slender man with long hands resting easily on the wheel. From field boots to blue wool shirt he was well, but carelessly, dressed. His bronzed face was bony, with a sardonic mouth and tired eyes.

"Some trouble, ranger?" he asked, when Bowden told him to wait.

The big, broad-shouldered, blond ranger said nothing to that. It was not his business to spread rumors. It was his business to keep the peace on the mesa. Keeping the peace now meant avoiding any commotion over accidental deaths on the cliffs. And death was not yet proven.

EVER been here at the park before?" Bowden asked, by way of conversation.

The other nodded. "This makes the steenth trip. And I've been here several months this time. My name's Wilson. Fascinating spot, the park. Mysterious in some indefinable way. To me the dwellings, and kivas, and temples are mystery stories done in stone. These stone walls hold secrets."

"Yes, they've seen stories that'll never be told," Bowden answered. "But the stories aren't hard to guess at. You can repeople the ruins with your friends, allowin' for a difference in customs. Same reasons for quarrels, same hates, and loves, and ambitions."

"Same old human na-

ture." The man in the green roadster smiled. His tired eyes narrowed. "This ruin we just visited—Sipapu—has rather a macabre history, hasn't it?"

"It's as inaccessible as any ruin in the park," Bowden evaded. "Visitors are warned not to try it unless they're sure-footed and steady-headed."

"But they will try, and three fell," Wilson persisted. "I've met Hal-leck Dunn, who excavated Sipapu and supplied the funds. Fine fellow. He would hate to see a man, a woman, and a child sacrificed to the ruin he opened. They say he found a chief's grave. Could there be a curse on it?"

"Oh, you don't believe that stuff!" Bowden exclaimed. He was relieved of a further answer by the superintendent's approach.

The superintendent nodded a greeting to Wilson, and glanced at his notebook. "Did I miscount," he asked genially, "or were there two in this car?"

"There were two when we started. A chap asked me to take him along. He dropped out, somewhere en route. I thought he was riding back with some one else. No trouble, I hope."

"We hope not," the superintendent returned gravely. "He wasn't a friend of yours, then?"

"Far from it!" Wilson said fervently. "It seems he used to be a guide in the ruins, and the yen to lecture is still on him. He knew the whole book! Didn't give the ranger a chance



to get a word in edgewise. I wasn't sorry to lose him. His name, by the way, was Casner."

"A former guide," the superintendent repeated, making notes. "Casner. When did you last see him?"

Wilson considered. "He didn't get in the car after we left Sipapu. Come to think of it, I missed his monologue in the ruin. Some of the party had got disgusted with him, and I thought they had shut him up."

"I see." The superintendent looked as if a weight were slowly lowering on him. "Hamilton is afraid Casner has met with an accident. I cannot believe that he fell without being seen or without shouting for help. I rather think he returned alone. You understand," he added, "we don't want anything said until we are sure."

"I'll keep quiet," Wilson assured him. "Matter of fact, I had checked out of the lodge. I intended making Gallup to-night."

"As you were the last to see him, it were better if you stayed." The superintendent's voice was quiet, but there was no misunderstanding the order.

Wilson touched his hat. "You're the doctor," he said. He turned the ignition key, listened to the purring motor, then turned it off. He was bent over the wheel, and the light filtering through the windshield's green sunshade gave an unearthly color to his sardonic face.

"The three others who died at Sipapu—didn't they, also, go without a sound?" he asked.

The switch snapped on. The motor roared. The car leaped out from under the superintendent's hand. Wilson disappeared in a cloud of dust.

THAT crack calls for an explanation," Bowden snapped. "We'll get it if Casner's dead. Hamilton! Go back over the trail with Bowden. I'll have a search made for Casner in the camp. I think we'll find him."

"I think so, too," Hamilton said sourly. "At the bottom of a cliff."

Riding with Bowden down the motor trail to the starting point for Sipapu, Hamilton said bitterly:

"The super's kidding himself about Casner's being alive. The instant I missed him I knew he was dead. It's a jinx ruin. Three accidental deaths in two months. And now this one. Dunn made the greatest finds in the ruin that have been made for years. It was a house of importance, and I say there was a curse on whoever disturbed the burials." "Jinx expresses it," Bowden said thoughtfully. "We've taken every precaution with the trails. The tough place is that one ladder on the round cliff, across the canyon from Cloud House. It's high, of course. Fifty steps. And the ledge it stands on is narrow. But with ordinary care any one should get up it in safety."



"Three didn't," Hamilton said. "There was a different ranger with each party, so it wasn't due to his carelessness. And none of the three had shown signs of dizziness before they got to the ladder. Each one was almost at the top when he, or she, fell outward, hit the iron guard rail, and bounced"—Hamilton sucked in his breath at the thought—"a seven-hundred-foot fall."

"You saw one of them go, didn't you?"

"I saw all three of them go," Hamilton corrected. "I was working in Cloud House, across the canyon. One thing I'm sure of. They went like Casner did, without a sound."

"I don't see how you could be sure of that, with women in the party screaming."

Hamilton glanced at him impatiently. "There were no screams. The tourists didn't know what had occurred. Each victim happened to be at the tail end of the party. You know how the top of the cliff runs straight back from the ladder. The ranger was the only one to see the fall."

They had come to the starting point. Hamilton got out of the car and faced Bowden. Yellowish lights glowed in his green eyes. A haunted expression shadowed his face from his cat eyes to his thin-lipped, drooping mouth.

"They let go," he repeated, "and dropped backward without a sound."

The two men followed the trail, which at first was no more

dangerous than stairs in an office building. It wound through junipers on a gentle slope, then ran down steps cut in living stone between two long shafts of rock. On the sheer face of the canyon, a strong ladder made of sturdy pine and reinforced with rawhide thongs carried them to a ledge three feet wide. Walking along it for some fifty feet, they came to the fatal ladder.

Bowden looked over the iron guard rail. He saw no crushed body in the yellow brush at the distant base of the cliff.

"He's not down there. That's something."

They ran up the ladder, swung over the edge, traversed another ledge and wriggled through a low arch in the rock. The two men stood within a deep sandstone cave. In the front of the cave yawned three roofless kivas. Behind the

kivas, a row of stone walls in various states of ruin made a graph below the cave roof. Sipapu was not noted for its outward architecture. The finds had made it famous. The debris had given up mummies, tools, pottery, feather work, and a number of superb turquoise mosaics.

"Casner!" Bowden shouted. "Casner! Casner!"

A whisper could be heard from one end of the ruin to the other. Bowden's voice boomed in the cave, and rolled out over the canyon. It echoed back, more faintly each time, "Casner! Casner! Casner!" The



Wilson

echo died away and joined the voices that for twenty centuries had rung and echoed and died away in the ruin.

"Look down here!" Hamilton cried, leaning over the stone parapet. "Isn't that a body?"

Bowden joined him and peered into giddy space. Seven hundred feet below, he discerned a dark object under a clump of juniper. It somewhat resembled a sprawled body.

"Looks like fallen tree limbs and a rock," he commented. "It'd take hours to get there. I'm going to look through the ruin."

"You're only wasting time," Hamilton said irritably. "If he's dead, it's because he went over the cliff."

Bowden did not answer. He squeezed between the parapet and a high round tower, to gain the unexcavated portion of the ruin. He walked cautiously here, for he did not know where the kivas lay, with their mantraps formed by rotting roofs. In this portion, the ruin was a low wall, almost hidden by débris and heaps of sand. He peered into square rooms and into ovenlike structures that had been granaries.

Returning to the excavated portion, he chose to go back of the round tower. He went through a passage between the tower and the cave wall, and was confronted by a large boulder which had fallen from the roof in ages past. Atop the boulder the cliff dwellers had erected a chamber of

stone slabs, filling the cracks with pebbles and adobe mud. A removable slab closed the front. It was a sweat bath, from which many and many a Pueblo had come glistening and clean.

The boulder necessitated another squeeze between it and the round tower. Bowden started through, and came to a dead stop. His right hand was on the incised masonry of the round tower. His left knee scraped the sweat-bath boulder.

His glance was frozen on a single scarlet drop on the boulder, just under the sweat bath. Blood.

Bowden was galvanized into action. He whipped around the boulder to the rear of the sweat bath, where the original slab and airtight plastering had fallen out. He reached in. His hand met a shoe and trouser cuff.

"Hamilton," he called, grimly steady of voice, "here's Casner."

After a pause that lasted a second and seemed an eternity, Hamilton asked:

"Dead?"

"Dead as a doornail."

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN THE GREEN ROADSTER.

HAMILTON saluted the ruin ironically. "Si-papu! Christened in blood!"

"You better report this," Bowden said. "I'll stay on guard. Make it snappy. They'll want to catch everybody in the party before any more of 'em leave for Gallup or points west."



Hamilton

Hamilton crawled through the low natural arch, descended the jinx ladder and was lost to view. Bowden searched the ruin, found nothing out of the way, and settled himself to await his superiors. They were not long in coming.

The superintendent arrived, accompanied by Hamilton and two more rangers of the police detail.

"Found him, eh?" The superintendent's frosty eyes snapped. "Murder?"

"Must be. He'd hardly cram himself in like that. The only blood is on the boulder, and it's only a drop."

"So I see." The superintendent looked in at the rear of the sweat bath. "I phoned the marshal. He's at Mancos to-day, so he'll be along pretty soon."

"Did you find out how Casner got to the park?" Bowden asked. "If he had a car, he wouldn't have ridden with Wilson."

"Must have hitch hiked. I sent a man to the entrance to check. If he used to be a guide here, he probably lived somewhere around the mesa. We located his cabin, but I didn't stop to go through his baggage. The marshal can do that." The superintendent shook his head and made a doleful clucking with his tongue. "It's a shame. Why did they pick on Sipapu?" He paced around the edge of a kiva and halted suddenly. "Bowden, did you find the coin matcher I mentioned? I had another complaint a few minutes ago."

"No. But I'll get him."

They had to wait two hours for the marshal. In that time, all the members of the tour party had been instructed to wait until they could be questioned. They were not told what had happened.

United States Marshal Poe was a lanky, sleepy-looking man. He pushed back his hat and shoved his hands in his pockets while he surveyed the cliff house. After a glance into the sweat bath, he said laconically:

"Light?"

A flashlight was produced. He looked at the body from the rear of the stone chamber. Then he removed the stone from the front, opening what had originally been the entrance to the bath.

"Who found him?"

"I," said Bowden. "Hamilton missed him on the party and thought he had fallen. When we couldn't see the body at the foot of the cliff, we looked around in here."

"Do you find a weapon?" Hamilton asked.

"Can't tell yet," the marshal replied. "Hard to see. Let's have a better look at him."

Under the marshal's watchful eye, Bowden and Hamilton carefully pulled out the body. Hamilton grasped the flexed legs while Bowden kept the arms in place. They put Casner on the cave floor in the same position he had held in the sweat bath.

Casner's shoes were scuffed by rocks, and the trouser knees were dirty. The body was



shabbily clothed in dark trousers and gray sweater. It had a narrow face, with protruding upper lip. A pipe was still clamped between the teeth. One fist was doubled tightly. The face and clothes were covered with the blood that had gushed from nose, ears, and eyes.

The marshal ran his hand over the dead man's head.

"Fractured skull. Unless it was done when cramming him in there, some one gave him an awful wallop."

He went through Casner's pockets, turning out small change, a tobacco pouch, a red pencil, and a letter minus the envelope. It carried no date or town, and stated tersely that the writer could give him no help at that time. Initials signed it.

"Broke," the marshal commented. He looked up at the superintendent. "Know who was on the tour?" He seemed surprised when they told him all the members had been located. "Where are they? Get 'em here."

"Is it necessary?" the superintendent asked. "It's not an easy climb. There'll be a risk. And they'll be excited and shaken."

"That's why I want 'em here. Question 'em before they can think. Cover the body with something and get it out of sight. I want to hear what they say before they know what's happened."

When the witnesses came to Sipapu, there was a ranger for every four tourists. The superintendent was taking no chances on an-

other accident at the jinx house. The tourists puffing from their climb, gathered in a circle around the marshal. They were wide-eyed with curiosity.

Bowden counted five children, ten women, and thirteen men. They were young, middle-aged, white-haired, short and tall, fat and thin, clad in hiking breeches and shorts, in business suits and knit dresses. All but five of them had the look of stunned amazement which marks the cliff-ruin tourist. Wilson was one of the five exceptions. Bowden swiftly recognized three more.

"There's Keyes," he remarked to Hamilton, indicating a skinny man in dirty whites, with unruly hair and wild eyes. "I didn't know he'd finished his jail sentence for breaking museum cases."

"Yeah. And our friend Mike Chaves, the Hopi, is with us again."

Hamilton nodded toward a round-faced, proud-mannered Indian who wore his hair in braids with an air of defiance. "He hates everybody who excavates a ruin; says it's grave desecration."

Another whom Bowden recognized was Mozley, an amateur archæologist, sullen of mouth and brooding of eye.

"Who's the breezy guy in business suit and Stetson?" Bowden asked.

"I think some one called him Berrier," Hamilton replied.

Bowden eyed Berrier with professional interest. The breezy man



spoke with the range twang which had been mentioned in descriptions of a coin matcher who had wrought havoc with vacation budgets in the park.

These were the five who lacked the usual tourist's amazement at the ruins: Berrier, Chaves, Keyes, Mozley, and Wilson.

A spectacled, fat woman, with a sweater tied around her hips, clasped her hands and bestowed on the marshal what she believed to be an alluring look.

"Oh, ranger, I think it was wonderful of you to bring us back," she gushed. "I cannot get enough of the ruins. I feel deep thoughts welling up in me. How do you suppose the cliff dwellers felt when they finished this work, ranger? Wouldn't they feel there was nothing left in life? What would they do?"

"Build more houses," the marshal grunted. He looked at her with sleepy eyes. "So you didn't get a good look at the house on the other trip?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she gushed. "The ranger told us to rest before his lecture. He gave us permission to browse about for ourselves, with strict instructions to keep off the walls and out of the entrances, of course." She smiled on him beatifically. "I walked with the cliff dwellers, ranger. Oh, the deep, deep thoughts——"

The marshal interrupted. "I'm not a ranger." He frowned at her. "So there was a time in which you

were all hither and yon, moving around as you pleased." He glanced at Hamilton. "Is that customary?"

"It is with me. I always give them a rest here."

"Um." The marshal chewed his lip. "I'll talk to each of you separately."

HE retreated to the far end of the ruin. Bowden sat on a ruined wall, with a notebook on his knee, taking down the testimony. All of them remembered Casner, in shabby trousers and sweater. They knew he had been a guide. His gesture of holding his pipe an inch from his mouth while he expounded at length on discoveries and history, had become a thing of hatred to them. One man remembered avoiding him in the unexcavated portion of Sipapu. There Casner vanished. No one remem-

bered seeing him when the party went on. No one had noticed any peculiar actions on the part of any other.

The marshal returned to the group. "Now I want each of you to think carefully. Show me exactly what you did when the ranger let you wander."

For a moment, none of them moved. The spectacled, sweated fat woman went to the square tower. Her confidence inspired the others. Soon they were all scattered. Some men leaned on the guard wall; others went into the unexcavated portion. Children played tag on the parapet



Keyes

in imminent danger of tumbling over; women peered into rooms and kivas and granaries. Bowden noticed that no one approached the sweat bath or remained near the round tower.

The fat woman gazed up at a wall painting, manifestly acting for the benefit of the marshal. She turned and looked over the ruin, where the tourists were "exploring" busily.

"That isn't right!" she exclaimed. She pointed at Wilson. He had been strolling aimlessly, and now he was trying to crawl through the entrance arch. "You weren't there at all! You were standing over by the sweat bath all the time."

"So I was," Wilson agreed smoothly. A faint smile touched his sardonic face. "I really couldn't remember what I did."

Her spectacled eyes became brightly birdlike. She looked at each of the others, who had come to a dead stop. "Yes," she said, "you're all in your places. I remember distinctly, because I was re-peopling the house. The cliff dwellers must have been much like us, don't you think, rangers? They had our hopes and fears and ambitions." She could have gone on at length, but something in the marshal's expression halted her.

"Go on," he said, regarding her with sleepy eyes.

"I was re-peopling it by thinking of what each person would be doing as a cliff dweller. I remember that man"—she pointed at Wil-

son—"standing by the sweat bath, and it occurred to me that he was a hunter. He had just come in from the kill——" The words faded out. Her spectacled eyes grew big. Intuition crackled like a spark. She pointed accusingly at the sleepy-eyed marshal. "You're a coroner or something!—Some one has been killed!"

"You are positive," the marshal asked, "that this man was by the sweat bath all the time?"

"Oh, positive. He was in the shadow and I could see only his face. It seemed to me he was a Pueblo. He is that type, don't you think? I could see him clad in the skins of animals. And then"—her eyes rolled up and her hands clasped tragically—"the illusion was lost forever. Some one bumped him from behind and he moved forward into the sunlight."

"Some one bumped him?" the marshal snapped. "Remember that, you? What's your name?"

"Wilson. I remember it," he said thoughtfully. "But when I looked behind me, I saw no one. I thought at the time it was one of the children playing hide and seek. I'd like to know," he drawled, "the reason for these questions."

"It's murder!" the spectacled woman cried.

The marshal nodded to the superintendent. "That's all. Take 'em back. Keep 'em in the park. You," he said to Bowden and Hamilton, "stay here. You, too, Wilson."



When the last of the group disappeared on the trail threading the junipers, the marshal turned to Wilson.

"Occupation?"

"Travelogue writer. I've been in the park since May. I brought Casner on this tour in my car, at his request."

"Weren't you," Hamilton asked, "on the tour each time before when there was an accident?"

"Yes. I've been on it some twenty times. I'm doing an article on the tourists."

"You've no idea," asked the marshal, "why Casner should have been murdered?"

Shock flickered in Wilson's eyes. "Murdered? It's the first time you've used the word. No, I cannot think why he should have been done in." He smiled sardonically. "I had no connection with any of the other victims of the ruin. And my family has never displayed any homicidal mania."

"It would take a strong man to push another into that sweat bath," said the marshal. "Casner was crammed in, and it must have happened while you stood there. It's remarkable you didn't hear the hard breathing of any one making the exertion of lifting. You didn't hear any of the sounds that would necessarily come of shoving a body in through that opening?"

"I did not," Wilson answered with a marked effort at control.

"Um," the marshal grunted. "We'll let you

think it over. Maybe somethin'll occur to you."

"Meaning I'm under arrest?" Wilson asked.

The marshal regarded him with sleepy eyes.

"No," he drawled. "Not yet."

CHAPTER III. A BROKEN PESO.

THE marshal had not yet tried to open Casner's clenched right fist. With the aid of a stone and Bowden's closed pocket-knife, they worked at the death-locked fingers until the object they held slid out.

It was a flat wedge of silver with the upper end rounded. Part of a shield was stamped on it, and the rounded edge carried the letters, "Tad." Once they had made part of the word "*Libertad*."

"Peso," said the marshal. "Broken. No good."

"Wonder if it's allee samee as a nickel in his hand?" Bowden asked.

"No doubt." The marshal looked down at the ledge approaching the jinx ladder. A group of four men approached, carrying a basket and ropes. "Coroner."

After the coroner had been told the whole story, and the ticklish job of hoisting the body down ladders and up trails was completed, the marshal turned to Bowden.

"Casner's baggage is next. Come along."

The party withdrew from the ruin in the



last rays of the setting sun. A ranger was left to be on guard all night, because the marshal preferred to delay his examination of the cliff house until he had advantage of the morning light. Bowden looked back from the mesa rim. The guard leaned on the parapet. He had removed his hat, and the creeping shadows blurred his uniform. The still figure looked unutterably lonely against the ruin. Years and centuries rolled back, and the guard became a Pueblo, last to leave the ruin, lingering over a farewell to his canyon in the sunset.

At Casner's cabin, Bowden and the marshal found a ranger on guard. He pointed to a worn gas-mask case on the bed.

"That's all the baggage. I haven't smoked. The cigarette butts are his."

Bowden looked at the brand of the cork-tipped ends in the ash tray. They were expensive cigarettes. They did not match at all with the dead man's clothes and small change, nor with the gas-mask case. They had been crushed out when half smoked.

"Somebody was jumpy," Bowden commented.

"It wasn't Casner," said the marshal. "He didn't smoke fags. Pipe."

The gas-mask case contained a shirt and socks, a few toilet articles, and a .45 automatic. There was also a pamphlet on the ruins. The marshal hastily flicked through it and was about to throw it

down when red penciling on the back caught his eye.

"Map. Sipapu?"

"Looks like it, but its screwy," Bowden replied. "It places the ruin on the side of the canyon, and Sipapu is at the head. But there's the square tower, and the round tower, and the three kivas. And those are the Sipapu trails."

Some one tapped apologetically at the door. It was a white-jacketed porter, rubbing his hands in a washing gesture.

"You're the marshal, sir? Investigating Casner's murder? I have something to tell."

"That's a relief," said the marshal. "Everybody else tries to impress me with how much they don't know." He pushed his hat back and stuffed his hands in his pockets. "Spill it."

"I was passing the cabin this morning, about seven. The windows

were open. A man was leaning in the window. He was a big man in a gray suit, with a Stetson over one eye. He looked daggers at me, without even seeing me. Un'stan'?"

"Yep," said the marshal. "He was sore, huh?"

"More than that. He was hopping mad. And disappointed, too. He had tears in his eyes. I hope," the porter said apologetically, "you don't think I'm imagining that."

"No. You're durn observing. Go on."

"I heard a man in the cabin say, 'I'm sorry, Berrier.' And the man in the window said, 'It's easy to be sorry, Cas-



ner.' Oh, he was choking with rage and disappointment. And Casner said, 'Damn you, I'm honest.'

"Yeah? And what did Berrier say to that?"

"He said, 'Honest, hell! You're a cheat and a welsher!'"

The marshal looked at Bowden. "Broken peso in his hand. Cheat and welsher."

"Shall I pick up Berrier?" Bowden asked.

The marshal looked at his watch. "Grub time. Eat first." He glanced at the porter. "Know anything more?"

"Nothing. I went on to my work."

The marshal pocketed one of the cigarette stubs and they left the guard to his lonely vigil.

AFTER he had eaten, Bowden got the number of Berrier's cabin. Late twilight hushed the mesa. Voices, the roar of motors, all the clatter of modernity could not break the stately calm of the green mesa.

Bowden approached the cabin quietly through the junipers. The windows were open, although the curtains were drawn. He heard the clink of money and various terse, low-toned remarks characteristic of poker. He paused by the window.

A man said, "All I had was treys. Take it, Chaves. Time out. I want to stretch."

Another voice, recognizable as Wilson's sardonic drawl, said, "Berrier, your stack is low."

"Yeah. 'Tis. And haow 'bout mah five bucks, Wilson? Match you a dollah."

"You're matching me? Mine's a head. Well, darn if you didn't."

"Ah'll play the two. Gotta get mah gas money back. Cain't coast from here to Oklahoma."

"Eh," thought Bowden. "Here's

the coin matcher who had the super worried. It's Berrier, all right."

"Darn," said Wilson. "That's four dollars I've lost. Where's my luck. I'll make you coast to Oklahoma or bust."

Bowden waited until Wilson was twenty-five dollars in the hole. Wilson had called quits twice, and each time Berrier had razed him into another bet. He showed signs of proceeding into the hundreds.

Bowden quietly mounted the steps and entered.

The wild-haired Keyes and sullen-mouthed Mozley sprang to their feet. Chaves gazed at him with true Indian stolidity. Wilson tipped back his chair and looked up from under the rim of his hat. Berrier wrapped an arm around a stack of dollars and bills in front of him.

"Any law agin' this?" he asked.

"There is most places. The park's no exception," the ranger answered. "Sorry, gentlemen, I have to break up the game. The marshal wants to see you, Mr. Berrier."

BERRIER began to collect his winnings. He shuffled the paper money into a sheaf and reached for the dollars. His hand was stayed over the heap of silver. His face was amazement done in bronze.

"Where'd that come from?" His eyes were on the scattered dollars under his lifted hand. He flashed a look at each of the others, demanding shrilly: "Which of you-all put it there?"

The deck of cards had been tossed down in the center of the table. They ran out in a fan to touch the silver. Just visible, under a card touching the dollars, was a broken peso. Bowden knew at a glance that it would fit the piece found in Casner's death-locked fist.

"It's yours, isn't it?" he snapped at Berrier.

The stunned eyes lifted to meet his. "Yes, it's mine. I had two pieces. Luck pieces. Lost 'em both yesterday. Now this shows up." He sprang to his feet, glaring from one man to the next. "Which of you throwed it there?"

Stubborn silence met him. Impassive faces met his glare.

"What difference does it make?" Wilson drawled. "What's so terrible about the peso?"

Berrier weakened, sat down and stacked the dollars.

Bowden went through his uniform pockets. "Thought I had a cigarette," he said, in annoyance. "Anybody want to donate?"

Keyes offered him sack and papers. Chaves, Mozley, and Berrier each extended a pack. Not one was the expensive brand he had seen in Casner's ash tray. Wilson pushed his package into Bowden's hand.

"Try one of mine, ranger." There was a taunting note in his voice and a sardonic gleam in his eye. "Or, were you looking for this brand?"

"No," Bowden replied, "but I'll smoke one."

"Somebody's comin'," Keyes whispered. His wild eyes glittered under his unruly hair.

"The marshal," Bowden told them. "He wants to see Berrier. Guess you forgot it in the excitement of the broken peso."

"That, and the cigarettes." Wilson smiled.

Their glances clashed, the ranger's questioning, Wilson's mocking.

THE marshal strolled in, sleepy-eyed, hands in pockets, hat on the back of his head. His eye caught the money at once. "Who won?"

"Ah did," said Berrier.

"I lost," Wilson offered ruefully.

"You paid, eh? He wasn't a cheat and a welsher like Casner was? How about it, Berrier?"

"Ah don't get yah," Berrier said, but he had paled and his eyes glittered with fright.

"Maybe you'll get this: 'Damn it, I'm an honest man.' Or this: 'Honest, hell! You're a cheat and a welsher.'"

"Casner welched on a bet, and Ah was plumb mad," Berrier said quickly. "But shucks, Ah wouldn't kill him ovah no ten dollars."

"You were hopping mad and ready to cry," the marshal affirmed. "No husky like you is going to get that upset over ten bucks. You're not a coin artist by trade, Berrier. Why don't you tell the truth? Aren't you from Gallup?"

"Yes. Ah match coins for fun. Ah'm a dealer in Indian curios."

"And what did Casner promise to get for you?"

Berrier's eyes grew large and expressionless. A vein in his throat pulsed under the sudden beat of his heart. "He owed me a ten-spot."

"No!" The marshal shook his head. "It won't do. You wouldn't get that mad over a ten-spot." He picked up the broken peso. "I have the other part of this. I guess you know where I got it." He paused.

A quiet fell, like the calm before a storm.

"Berrier," the marshal thundered, "what was Casner going to steal and sell to you?"

Berrier looked at the table. He did not answer.

"Think it over to-night, Berrier. It'll be easier on you to tell the truth."

Feet clattered on the porch. Hamilton entered, accompanied by a man in travel-stained tweeds. He was broad-shouldered and bronzed, in

his middle twenties, with a determined mouth, and the eyes of a dreamer. This was Halleck Dunn, the man whose private fortune and skill had made possible the excavation of Sipapu.

Dunn nodded to Bowden and the marshal. After a swift glance around the room, he spoke to each man in turn, except Wilson. Berrier answered him sullenly. Keyes was grudgingly polite. Mozley and Chaves scowled.

"How are you, Mr. Dunn?" Wilson drawled.

"Well, thank you. You look familiar, but I can't place you."

"I was with a student field party which visited your dig in the La Platas," Wilson told him.

"Ah!" Dunn's questioning glance ran from Wilson to the others, as if he wondered what connection there was between them. He turned to the marshal. "Casner's dead? They told me at the lodge."

"Murdered," the marshal returned bluntly. "Come with me. I'm through here." He paused with Dunn and the rangers on the edge of the lamplight and looked back at the big Westerner crouched over the pile of dollars.

"The truth, Berrier, to-morrow. It'll be easier on you."

CHAPTER IV.

RED HANDS.

THE marshal led the way to the road, out of earshot of the men in the cabin. He stopped under the junipers.

"It's this way, Mr. Dunn. Casner went into Sipapu with Hamilton's tour. Some one may have been layin' in wait for him, but it looks more like somebody on the tour knocked him in the head. We found him stuffed in the sweat bath, with a

broken peso in his hand. Now, Mr. Dunn, how come you arrive to-night lookin' for him?"

Dunn's answer was a bolt from the blue. "Casner wired me. Said something was wrong at the ruin."

"He wired you? We're gettin' somewhere." The officer took the telegram Dunn offered and read it under an arc light. "Um," he grunted, chewing his lip. "Wired from Mancos. Doesn't give a hint what was wrong." He squinted at the ranger. "You know of any trouble at the ruin lately?"

"None," Bowden answered. "We hadn't heard a whisper."

Hamilton echoed, "None."

"Where was Casner living?" the marshal asked Dunn.

"I don't know. I scarcely knew the man."

"What do you know about those birds in the cabin? They didn't seem to feel very good toward you."

Dunn replied: "Berrier is a buyer of museum pieces and rare Indian curios. He and I disagree strongly about scattering the ruin finds among private owners. He became quite dangerous last year when I wouldn't divert the Sipapu mosaics to him. They're turquoise mosaics of beautiful workmanship, rare and valuable."

"What's Keyes got against you? I know he has a delusion that his ranch should have been purchased at a high price and included in the park. I know he's spent about six years in jail for setting fires, breaking museum exhibits, and for causing an accident by sawing through a ladder."

"His delusion centers on me," Dunn answered. "He believes that I turned thumbs down on buying his ranch." He considered a moment. "Chaves, the Hopi, objects strongly to disturbing the burials. He con-

siders the ruins his ancestral home, and he's no doubt right. He is a brilliant fellow, but embittered."

"And Mozley?"

"Oh, Mozley!" Dunn chuckled. "He attached himself to a field party when I was a senior. He was out to prove that the cliff dwellers were of Egyptian origin. He made himself obnoxious. I made and planted a clay figurine of the god Ra, and let him 'find' it in the dig. He was wildly excited. He wrote articles about it as proving his Egyptian theory, and trotted back to the *Smithsonian* before he found it was all a joke. He doesn't feel kindly toward me. But," Dunn added, "that wouldn't have anything to do with Casner."

"No," the marshal said. "Seems queer Casner wired you something was wrong at your ruin, and you get here to find four men who dislike you were on the fatal tour. Looks like his murder had something to do with you."

"Did you suspect any of them in particular?" Dunn asked.

"Wilson was near the sweat bath at the time we think Casner was put in. Berrier admits owning the broken peso. Keyes is always a suspect when there's a crime in the park. Nothing has shown up against Mozley and Chaves, yet. Well," the officer sighed, "it'll all come out in the wash. When I find out where Casner has been living, I'll learn plenty. G'-night. I'll be at park H. Q. if you want me."

THE marshal sauntered away, leaving Bowden, Dunn, and Hamilton under the trees.

"I've paid for Sipapu," Dunn muttered. "How I've paid!"

"Don't take it to heart because Casner got himself in a jam," Hamilton growled impatiently. "You

didn't agree when I said the other deaths were the result of a curse. Why get excited now?"

"I didn't believe a man of your education could seriously credit a curse," Dunn replied steadily. "Certainly, there is no connection between the three deaths on the ladder and this one. They were accidents. This wasn't."

"Accident or murder, it's part of the curse," Hamilton insisted sullenly. "I don't say some dumb cliff dweller put a curse on any one who should touch his rotten bones. I say a curse follows any man who robs a grave. It doesn't pay to disturb a man's last sleep, even if he has lain there centuries."

"Strange talk for an archæologist," Dunn commented sadly.

"Remember I'm not an archæologist from choice," Hamilton growled. "You forced me into it. It's a ghoulish business."

"We have to learn from specimens, and we make the finds in the burials," Dunn said patiently. "It's worth something to know the history and living habits of those who've gone before us on the mesa. Personally, after I'm gone, I'll sleep as peacefully in a museum case as I would in a garbage heap, and I think the cliff dwellers would, too."

Hamilton's reply hit Bowden like a physical blow.

"You can afford to be cool. The curse isn't hitting you. It's hitting your heirs. Three gone! You have no one left, but me and Serena."

"So that's it!" Dunn exclaimed. "You're afraid you'll be next. You have my permission, Hamilton, to leave the park, take up a new career, do as you please."

"Not now!" Hamilton snapped. "I'm in it and I'll stick. Then if anything happens to me, Serena will

be yours. That's what you want, isn't it? To have a clear road with her?"

"We'll discuss that somewhere else," Dunn replied, in cold rebuke. "I'm going down to Sipapu. I don't want you with me. I want Bowden."

Dunn and Bowden drove away in Dunn's car.

"I made an awful mistake," said Dunn. "I am only four years older than Hamilton, but I have all the money. He's my cousin, you know. I forced him to take this career by threatening to cut him off. He's unfitted for it, and his unhappiness has caused him to get into all sorts of trouble." He sketched Hamilton's life story: A man forced into a career he hated, losing his sweetheart's love to Dunn, and now convinced he was scheduled for death.

"Is it true," Bowden asked, "that the other three who died here were your heirs?"

"True. They were distant cousins. Serena Lake was my heir because I had hoped to make her my wife. We were to have been married next month, but it's all off now. I didn't tell Hamilton that. Let her get his hopes up, if she wants him. We quarreled when she burned a manuscript I had worked on for a year."

Bowden shivered inside. Driving through the moonlight with Dunn was like riding with a lost soul. Dunn's work had brought him the hatred of Chaves; his humor, the hate of Mozley; his opinions, the hate of Berrier; his domination, the hate of Hamilton. Keyes hated him for an imaginary hurt; the woman he loved had turned against him.

Bowden came sharply out of his thoughts. Dunn was still talking.

"Hamilton firmly believes there is a curse behind these deaths. If

there were, it certainly would not have touched Casner. He meant nothing to me, and he was not with me during the excavating."

"You hadn't heard from him until he wired something was wrong at the ruin?"

"Not a word."

THEY came to the end of the motor road. The ruin of Sipapu lay under the cliff brow at the head of the canyon. A full moon was suspended overhead. Moonbeams washed the dun sandstone masonry. It brought out softly the round tower, the uneven walls, and the tall square tower which almost touched the cave roof. Kivas made black, mysterious hollows between the walls and the cliff edge. A clump of juniper, swaying in the breeze, sent strange shadows racing in and out of the entrances and over the walls.

"Do I see some one moving down there, Bowden?" Dunn whispered.

"Yes. A ranger. It was late when the marshal came and the light was bad. He'll look over the ruin in the morning for the death weapon and so on. Besides, we left the guard to keep curiosity seekers from breaking their necks."

The man who had attracted Dunn's attention moved along the parapet as swiftly and noiselessly as a ghost, until the darkness of the round tower swallowed him. He was walking away from them.

Dunn and Bowden went down the trail and along the ledge and up the jinx ladder. Bowden crawled through the entrance arch, and whistled.

"Bowden!" he announced himself. His voice rang hollow in the empty rooms, and an echo whispered it in the canyon. The ensuing silence was as deep as death itself. Bow-

den shouted his own name until it boomed under the cave roof.

The ranger on guard did not answer.

"Look! He's leaving!" Dunn exclaimed. "See him up there?"

At the far end of the ruin, a ladder clung to the sheer rock. Top and bottom of the ladder were hidden by rocks and shrubs. On a patch of moonlit rungs, a man was scuttling up like a squirrel.

"Ranger!" Bowden shouted.

The fleeing man did not answer. He vanished in the darkness over the rim of the mesa.

Bowden sped for the ladder where he had seen the climber. He raced up, but his chase came too late. When he got to the top of the mesa, the throb of a fast-moving motor car floated back faintly through the junipers.

Bowden returned to the cliff house.

"Look in the kivas," he directed grimly. "I'll take the houses."

"Look! What for?"

"For the body of a ranger. Don't be afraid. You saw the murderer go up the ladder."

DUNN ran to the nearest kiva. Bowden went through a ruined entrance into the rear of the cave. The moonlight coming through small square openings in the walls made blocks of light on the cave floor. He passed through the ruin until he came out at the natural round tower, and met Dunn in front of the sweat bath. Dunn was about to go into a kiva in front of the round tower.

"Hear anything?" Dunn whispered.

They hearkened to a faint scratching that echoed and reëchoed in the cave.

"Rats?"

The scratching became a thudding, and they heard heavy, desperate gasps. Then came the rustle and clatter of a man sliding down the rock. A ranger staggered out from behind the sweat bath. He lunged forward, weaving blindly, unaware of his surroundings in which pitfalls opened on every side.

"Stand still!" Bowden commanded.

The ranger halted in a fighting crouch, left fist out for defense, the right close to the side, ready to smash. Blood dribbled from his nose and from a cut on his forehead.

"Ranger! This is Bowden. What happened?"

The ranger slowly relaxed his fighting pose, as his senses cleared. He looked around, with jerky, cautious head movements.

"Watch out, Bowden. I heard a sound in the big kiva. Leaned over to flash the light in. That's all I remember. He must have black-jacked me."

"Got your light now?"

Then Bowden saw the flashlight on the edge of the big kiva. This round construction of masonry was the last work done at Sipapu by the dwellers of the cliffs. A narrow passage led from it to the round tower.

Bowden made sure the kiva was empty before descending the ladder. Dunn followed him. Blood had spattered the kiva wall when the ranger had been hit. Otherwise the floor and seat-ledge around the wall were clean. There was nothing to show why the assailant had entered.

Bowden traversed the narrow passage and went up into the round tower.

"Bowden!" Dunn called. "Come

and look!" He was quick to explain the excitement in his voice. "It has nothing to do with Casner's murder or to-night's attack, but it is typical of the finds in these ruins. We make the most unexpected finds at the strangest times. Here's something I never saw before."

Bowden returned to the passage, where Dunn had been striking matches. Dunn took the pocket torch and turned the light on the passage wall, near the floor.

"This wall marks the end of the excavated portion. It was built long before the kiva and round tower were thought of. It was once part of a house, and was built, of course, by a woman. Look here."

The light shone on rubble masonry, chinked and plastered with adobe mud. A section of the plaster had fallen away. On the stones thus disclosed, Bowden saw six red imprints. The first was heavy and sharply outlined; the others grew gradually fainter. There was no misreading the shape they took.

"Hands!" Bowden exclaimed. "A woman's hands. What's the red coloring? Paint?"

"It may be," Dunn answered, "but it looks more like blood to me. After it dried, the plaster went on. The house was built about 1234. Those marks have remained seven hundred years. Count them, Bowden."

"Six. How did they get there?" He answered his own question. "She was putting the stones in place."

"I touched a dead man's living hand," Dunn quoted.

Back rolled the years, back rolled the centuries. A brown-haired, flat-faced woman stared aghast at her hands printed in blood on the stones. Hurriedly, desperately, she mixed the plaster to cover the six hands from human eyes.

CHAPTER V.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN ME!

BOWDEN remained on guard, while Dunn took the injured ranger to the hospital and reported to the marshal. He was relieved very shortly. The new guard carried a rifle and four torches. After lighting a torch at the foot of the entrance and exit ladders, he climbed up on the square tower, whence he could watch both.

By the time Bowden arrived at headquarters, a search was being made for all the persons who had been on the fatal tour. As rapidly as they were found, they gave alibis. Within a short time, the list of suspects was cut to the five men who had been playing poker. Suspicion deepened when it was learned that the game had stopped as soon as the marshal had left them.

Alibis sprang up like mushrooms. Wilson produced a garrulous old woman who had been talking with him for an hour. Berrier had been discussing business with a curio man in the lodge. Chaves, the Hopi, had gone to the nightly camp-fire talk with an army captain and had not left his side.

Keyes could not be found.

Mozley stubbornly insisted he had gone straight to his cabin from the poker game. The ranger who went after him found him quietly reading a magazine. Mozley, very sullen-mouthed and brooding of eye, presented himself before the marshal at park headquarters. He carried the magazine, his forefinger marking his place, to emphasize that he had been interrupted. He regarded the marshal as he would regard an inferior who had dared an unwarranted intrusion.

"What did you have against Casner?" the marshal asked. "He

caught you at some dirty work, didn't he? And he wired Dunn, so you killed him before he could talk."

Mozley's face was impassive. "Think so?" he inquired icily.

"You're sore at Dunn. Wanted to get back at him for something he did to you years ago. You planned sabotage at Sipapu." The marshal was an adept at making his guess sound like an accusation.

"I dislike Dunn," Mozley admitted, and his tone showed that "dislike" was an understatement. "I have good reason. He made me the laughingstock of the country, by planting the figure of an Egyptian god in a dig." Bitterness welled up in him. "I was made the butt of jokes in weekly magazines and musical comedies. Nevertheless"—he wagged a forefinger at the officer—"you're barking up the wrong tree. I did not kill Casner."

"Go on. You have more to say. I'm listening."

"You'll look far," Mozley prophesied, "if you look for Casner's murderer among Dunn's enemies. They're legion. Even Hamilton hates him and is jealous of him."

"Got any more bright ideas?"

"I have," Mozley retorted. "Casner struck me as being unbalanced mentally when we were on the tour. His movements were jerky; he talked constantly; he kept watching over his shoulder as if he feared attack from the rear. Isn't that right?"

"Yes. The others noticed it."

"I say he sent the telegram as a cry for help for himself, knowing he was about to go over the edge of insanity."

"And then crawled in the sweat bath and knocked himself in the head," the marshal said sarcastically.

"It's possible," Mozley returned,

"for a man to kill himself by knocking his head against a wall."

The marshal pushed back his hat and shoved his hands in his pockets. "As a matter of fact, weren't you trying to sneak the death weapon out of Sipapu to-night? And didn't you hit the ranger with the same weapon that was used to kill Casner?"

Mozley gave him a look of weary disgust. He half turned away. He had taken refuge in silence.

At this juncture a ranger entered with the entrance registration book. He pointed at a signature. Bowden glanced over his shoulder, and read:

"A. Casner, care of Fred Keyes, Rural Route, Mancos, Colorado."

"Bowden," the marshal snapped, "see if you can find Keyes. Nobody else could locate him."

FINDING Keyes should not have been hard. He was always to be found at the center of events, on the lookout for an opportunity to destroy something. He was doing a life term on the installment plan, because he could not resist an audience when he broke museum cases or set fires.

With this in mind, Bowden went down the winding, torchlit trail to the camp fire.

The cedar logs were ablaze in the open fireplace, making a friendly glow without lighting up the stone amphitheater. The figures of the spectators were dim. Here and there a cigarette glowed or a match flared, momentarily lighting up a face intent upon the lecturer.

Bowden strolled along the back of the amphitheater, looking for Keyes. He thought he saw him in the middle row. The lecturer was nearing the end of his talk. Bowden waited until he had finished.

The cedar logs sent sparks wheel-

ing up toward the stars, to die against the velvet night. Up canyon, a nighthawk sounded his mystic, haunting cry. Down canyon, the head of a mesa reared majestically; it gazed into infinity, where the tourists' camp fire was but a spark among the centuries of camp fires that had twinkled on the mesa.

The lecturer talked with dramatic sincerity, and the spellbound audience watched the ancients building their cliff houses, stone by stone. Bowden idly watched the sparks fly upward. One refused to die. It dipped and moved, like a diamond sliding across velvet.

Suddenly Bowden went up on his toes. That point of fire he saw was not a spark. It was the light of a pocket torch on the canyon rim opposite, and it was moving down through the trees. Bowden silently cursed the moonlight, which flooded the near side of the canyon and left the opposite side in darkness.

Though Bowden had no way of telling absolutely, he believed that the man behind the flashlight had sat down on the side of the canyon. It could be a ranger or one of the Navajos who worked in the park. But Bowden felt it was not. Some guifty intention transmitted itself from the man on the canyon side to the ranger.

The lecturer finished, but Bowden did not go after Keyes. He wanted to see what would happen.

A ranger briefly announced the Navajo dance about to be presented. Before the dying embers of the camp fire, Navajos employed on the ruins would go through some of the steps of the Night Chant. They would wear, he explained, costumes that came down from the Spanish days, white pants and velveteen jackets.

A boy sitting below Bowden

nudged his knee eagerly. "Ranger, is it true about the ghost?"

"What ghost?"

"Why, a guy told us that a Navajo was killed workin' on Sipapu, and that every night his ghost reappears there in white pants. They said he was diggin' up a grave."

"Don't believe it," Bowden returned. "You hear lots of stuff about the ruins, and most of it's bunk. A live Navajo won't go near a burial. The minute one is unearthed, a Navajo'll scoot for elsewhere. He's always got important business two miles off. There might be ghosts in the ruins, but they're not Navajos."

"Gee!" the boy whispered. "Here they are."

The six Indians took their places, with backs turned to the audience. Some were in black, some red, some blue jackets. All wore white pants and high moccasins. Some had red headbands, some blue. The dying fire caught the glint of silver bracelets and necklaces.

ACROSS the canyon, a light shone and vanished. In the middle row of the amphitheater, Keyes stood up and abruptly sat down.

Bowden barely saw the Indian dance. He but faintly heard the shuffling stomp, the falsetto chant.

The three dances were finished before Keyes moved again. When the last Navajo disappeared from the firelight, Keyes ran after them. Bowden was close behind.

Keyes darted along the narrow ledge to the spot where the grouped Indians were counting the evening's receipts. He said a few words to a Navajo who sat on the edge of a tool box. The two men went off through the junipers. Bowden followed.

The Navajo's white pants showed like signals in the moonlight. Keyes's white trousers, being dirty, were less easy to see. The two men disappeared completely in the trees. Then the Navajo emerged on an open space between the trees and the canyon rim. He walked back toward Bowden, turned and started the other way.

Across the canyon, a rifle flame burst in a yellow flower. A whining hum cut the silence. The Indian dropped flat.

Keyes sped past Bowden, sobbing and gasping to himself. "It might have been me!" he whimpered. "It might have been me!"

Bowden grabbed Keyes's arm. Keyes spun round, clawing and spitting like a wild cat. His wild eyes glared from under the hair streaming into them. A fierce, brief struggle ended when Bowden pinioned the man's arms.

"So it might have been you, Keyes? And you knew it when you saw the signal, and got the Navajo to go in your place?"

"No. So help me." Keyes struggled futilely in the ranger's iron grasp. He gave in, and stood still, his breath coming in frightened sobs. "The shot came so close. That's why I said it might have been me."

The Navajo was wriggling through the underbrush, which he had gained in one quick flop after he dropped. He stood up cautiously, with a tree between him and the canyon.

"Come out," said the ranger. "You're safe. I'm Bowden."

"Lightfoot," the Navajo identified himself, but he did not move.

"What were you looking for out there, Lightfoot?"

Keyes attempted to talk, but Bowden's hand clapped over his mouth.

He got out a series of muffled gurgles.

"I look for you," was the Navajo's startling reply. "Keyes say you there and want me quick."

"I wasn't and I didn't," Bowden informed him. "Somebody was going to shoot at a pair of white pants, and Keyes didn't want to be in 'em."

The Navajo giggled. Keyes squirmed and mouthed a curse into the ranger's palm.

"The marshal wants to talk with you, Keyes," Bowden said. "You're safe, until the sniper finds out he missed. If I were you, I'd rather have him in jail than to have myself on a morgue slab."

When they arrived at headquarters, Keyes faced the marshal in stubborn silence. He stood with head down, and his trailing, unruly hair hid whatever there was of fear or guilty knowledge in his wild eyes.

Threats and urging were of no avail. He would not tell who had shot at him. Even when faced with the registration book, he would not admit that Casner had stayed at his ranch.

"You know, Keyes," said the marshal, "the annoying thing about a murder is that the man who knows most about it is dead. He would like to help us, but he can't. Why don't you talk before you're killed?"

"I won't be killed. I can take care of myself."

"You're in this Casner case up to your ears, and you know it. It's the jug for you again. When did you get out?"

"Two months ago. It was all Dunn's fault," Keyes rambled wildly. "If it hadn't been for him, they'd 'a' bought my land for the park and I'd be rich."

"Who shot at you?"

"I dunno."

"I'll arrest you as a material witness."

"Go ahead."

When midnight struck an exhausted marshal gave up the questioning. Keyes, alive by the grace of a Navajo's white pants, went almost gratefully to the lockup.

CHAPTER VI.

A CHARRED LETTER.

EARLY in the morning, the marshal was at the park with four industrious young men who packed equipment down to Sipapu. They prepared to spend several hours photographing and measuring there and, later, fingerprinting the members of the tour. The early-morning search did not unearth the weapon with which Casner's skull had been fractured.

Meanwhile, the marshal was busy checking on the members of the tour party. He had a sheaf of telegrams from home-town police; each tourist had been checked up as to his address and occupation. One by one, he let them go until only the five original suspects were left. Four of them, at least, had held a grudge against Dunn; the marshal believed a personal hate was behind the "something wrong" discovered by Casner at Sipapu.

Bowden was standing in front of headquarters when a mild-looking, bald-headed man approached and asked for the marshal.

"Hullo!" the officer called, through the window. "How's the hardware business in Durango?"

"It doesn't pay much, but it's honest." The other smiled, twirling his hat. "I heard you were in the park, and I've wanted to see you for a couple of days. I wonder if you know a man named Casner. Used to be a guide here."

"Uh!" the marshal exclaimed. "I've heard of him. Why?"

"Well, he came in and bought a .45. Then he hung around till I went out to lunch and he bought a hunting knife from the boy. I wouldn't have thought anything of it, but he came in a day or so later and——"

"When was this?" the marshal interrupted.

"Two weeks ago he bought the gun and knife. A couple of days ago, he came in and asked me to get him some tear-gas bombs. He wanted three. He asked all about 'em, would they fit in his pocket and so on. Now, I can get 'em for him, but I didn't know if you would want him to have 'em. Is he on the square?"

"Did he say what he would use them for?"

"No, sir. Not a word. Said they'd stop a man without doin' much harm, and he hinted at tradin' the .45 back to me. But he didn't say how or where he aimed to use 'em."

"You can forget the deal," said the marshal. "Casner met with an accident." He watched the hardware merchant leave. "Tear-gas bombs. Stop a man." His eyes met Bowden's. "What d'you know about that?"

Before he had a chance to fully recover, a grizzled, sunburnt man in field boots and khaki walked up smartly from a car labeled, "Indian Service." He touched his battered Stetson.

"How, marshal. Long time no see."

"Longer'n that," the marshal agreed. "What's on your mind?"

"Bird named Casner. They tell me somebody picked him off." He waited for the officer to nod. "I don't know if this'll help you or not, but I thought you should know."

I've got a road gang working. Indians. Couple of 'em came up on the mesa one night to visit their friends. Used the truck. On the way back to camp, Casner held 'em up."

"He did!"

"Yep. But listen. He didn't take anything. Looked through the truck and said he'd made a mistake. That was a month ago. Three nights later, the mother of one of the boys had an experience. She lives down here on the edge of the park. The old lady was headed for Mancos, by horse and wagon. Darn if Casner didn't stop the wagon and go through the same stunt. I didn't think much of it at the time, but, when I heard he was bumped off, I thought it might fit in."

"Yeah," said the bewildered marshal, "it'll probably fit in somewhere."

THE road builder departed, and the marshal blinked at Bowden.

"Tear-gas bombs. Holdin' up trucks. Lookin' for somethin' he didn't find. Darn me." He came outside and scowled at the merciless blue sky. "You know what's worryin' me? It's how anybody could jam Casner in the sweat bath without causin' Wilson to turn around. That is, if Wilson's tellin' the truth." The frown passed into a smile. "Hello, son."

A twelve-year-old boy in khaki shorts and open shirt grinned at him in a mixture of hope and worry.

"Mom said I must come to see you. There's something I thought wasn't important. She says everything's important."

"Oh, you were on the tour! Yes, sir, everything's important. Spill it."

"We had been playing tag," the

boy explained. "We changed it to hide and go seek. I ran into the nook between the round tower and the cave. It wasn't a good place to hide, and I thought the sweat bath would be better. I guess I said it out loud. Anyway, a man pushed me to the side and shoved past me. He had come into the nook from the unexcavated part of the ruin."

"Did you know him?"

"He was little and he smoked a pipe and he'd been doing a lot of lecturing. He said to me, 'There's a good place to hide,' and he pointed at one of those little granaries in the cliff wall. I ran there. When I was in place and peeked out, I saw his feet disappearing into the sweat bath."

"Was any one near him?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Mr. Wilson was at the front, looking away. But Mr. Casner crawled over the boulder from the back."

"Sure, sure. That way nobody would see him. Then what happened?"

"Nothing. I ducked my head till they yelled, 'All out's in free.' Then the ranger called us, and we went on."

"Thanks, young fella," said the marshal. "That's O. K." He turned to Bowden. "And that is the way Casner got into the sweat bath. Crawled in of his own accord. Why he did it, I can't guess." He shoved his hat to the back of his head. "Are you on duty?"

"Detailed to you," Bowden answered.

"Good. We'll go see what Keyes's ranch looks like."

THE ranch was only six miles from headquarters in a straight line, but they had to drive fifty miles to get there. They found the ranch a group of adobe

buildings on a wide, treeless plain. The house was almost a ruin. The mud plaster had been neglected for years. Great patches of plaster were gone and the adobe bricks beneath were pitted by wind and rain. A scraggly collie ran out to bark at them, chasing scrawny pigs out of his way. Chickens roosted on the doorstep. Bowden looked past them to a mud floor.

A thin, brown woman, who had been badly bested by life, came out to stare silently at them. When the marshal said, "Mrs. Keyes?" terror dawned in her eyes, and gave way to hopelessness.

"What's he done now?" she asked dully.

"Nothing," the marshal tried to reassure her. "Your husband is all right. He has been aiding us in clearing a small mystery."

The hopelessness had deepened. "Who," she asked, "did he kill?"

"Whom do you think?" the officer parried. "Why did you expect it?"

She answered the last question first, answered it with an eloquent glance. Her eyes ran over the run-down ranch, then up to the green mesa. Her glance told of Keyes's obsession, which occupied his mind until he neglected everything but the pursuit of revenge. This was why she constantly expected trouble. Then she answered the first question.

"He killed Casner, I suppose."

She stared long at the marshal, waiting for him to speak. He kept his silence. The minutes ticked out.

"Casner had been around here for two months," she began, speaking like one under a spell. "He was campin' out at first. I seen him, but I didn't tell Keyes—he gets excited about things and I'm afraid of him. One day I went to see my sister in Durango. Drove the truck. Things

were lookin' up," she remarked in explanation. "Keyes had the truck and a little money. On the way back, at night, when I was almost home, Casner stopped me on the road. He looked all through the truck. There wasn't nothin' in it, but groceries. Right after that, Casner come here and moved in."

"How long ago?"

"Two weeks ago he moved in. He didn't say nothin'. Keyes didn't say nothin'. Casner was here, and that was all. He used to go after the mail. Never let me go. He had Keyes worried."

"Did they quarrel?"

"No. Casner he never said much, but I knew Keyes was worried. He sleepwalked. One night I found him at Casner's door with an ax. And once he tried to put poisoned wheat in the cooked whole wheat for Casner's breakfast." She pushed her hair back wearily. "I hadn't ought to tell it, I guess. But I'm plumb tired of Keyes's actin' up. In an' out of jail, all the time. He oughta be put away before he does somethin'." She stared hopelessly at the marshal. "Only he's done it a'ready, ain't he?"

"You said he had some money. Where'd he get it?"

"I dunno. He's close-mouthed."

The marshal glanced up sharply. "What was that sound?"

"Hogs," she said wearily, "rubbin' agin' th' adobe."

Bowden pushed past her and opened an inner door. A smell of burning paper floated out. He entered a dirt-floored bedroom, containing a small adobe fireplace.

Before the mantel knelt a man, poking a letter into the fire. He looked up at sound of the ranger's step. It was the Hopi, Chaves.

Bowden leaped on him and hurled him away from the fireplace. The

marshal snatched out the letter and slapped the fire from it. Most of it was burned. Bowden saw the scrawled words:

Dere Mr. Dunn: Well, things have been happening at Sipapu that will no dout supprise you. There is three of them mixed in it, thickern cream, and another ayding and abetting them. That is Keyes and Chaves and—

The marshal put it in his notebook. "Burned papers can be read nowadays, Chaves. We'll take those ashes along with us. We'll find it out anyway. You may as well tell. Who are the other two men?"

The Hopi's broad face became impassive. The mesas and cliff ruins would reveal their secrets before Chaves revealed his.

CHAPTER VII. SKELETONS.

THE Hopi dusted ashes from his hands. In his stolid face, his eyes were black slits. Chaves was educated, a linguist capable of expressing the most delicate shades of thought in three languages. He had the greater ability of holding his tongue, and telling only what he chose.

"What you find out from the burned papers will be no more surprising to you than it was to me," he said.

"I doubt that," the marshal said emphatically. "What have you got against Dunn?"

"Nothing, personally. I hate all archæologists. You jail men who dig up your cemeteries. When they rob your burials, they're ghouls. When they rob ours, they're scientists. I know the burials in the ruins are a thousand years old. They're our ancestors, just the same. Dunn's so-called science is desecration."

"And what have you been doin' to get back at him for this insult?"
"Nothing. Dunn hasn't been hurt."

The marshal tapped the charred letter in his notebook. "This says you and Keyes were going to do something to Sipapu. Casner was warning Dunn."

"Casner," the Hopi drawled, "was a limelight fiend. He wanted to be center of attention. The loss of his job as guide at the ruins was unbearable. A limelight fiend usually plans a crime, in which he is to be the hero. Consider Casner's actions. His telegram to Dunn—"

"How did you know about that telegram?" interrupted the marshal.

Chaves covered the slip with an easy, "Those things get around. His telegram hinted at trouble, and was mysterious enough to bring Dunn at full speed. He had played sleuth and searched trucks, as if something had been stolen. He spied on Keyes for days before moving in here."

"How do you know that?" the marshal rapped.

"Every Indian north of Shiprock knew it," Chaves returned stolidly. He went on, as if there had been no interruption: "His plans failed when he died by accident."

"Isn't it true," Bowden cut in, "that Keyes has been spending a good many nights at Sipapu lately? Hasn't he been there so much in his white pants, that it gave rise to a rumor of a Navajo ghost?"

Chaves stared at him heavily. He tugged at a braid of hair and twined it round his finger.

"Perhaps a Navajo was there, or Casner in whites. Keyes hasn't a corner on the white pants market."

"How about this accident?" the marshal prompted. "You say Casner died in an accident?"

"Casner was alive when he entered

the sweat bath. He entered from the rear. By keeping his head down he would lie there unnoticed, though the front was open."

"But it was closed!" Bowden exclaimed. "The stone was in place when I found him."

"I'm coming to that. If you'll remember, the stone which closes the front of the bath is larger than the hole, and there is a round plug cut on it to fit the hole, making the bath air-tight."

"So what?" the marshal asked.

Chaves drew a deep breath. His eyes were heavy, as if he dreaded what was now to come.

"We have Casner inside, for some purpose of his own. We have the stone in its usual place, at one side of the opening. We have a party of tourists poking in all corners of the ruin." The Hopi drew a deep, shaky breath and twisted the braid of hair in his fingers. "We have a man who, although often before in the ruin, never before noticed that stone plug. He picks up the stone. It is heavy. He slams it in place, with all his strength behind it. He unwittingly chooses the exact moment when Casner has crawled in and has his head at the hole. Perhaps Casner is giving himself the final push to get in. The stone crashes against his skull. He dies."

"That would fracture it," the marshal admitted. "Did you see any one pull such a stunt?"

"I did it," said Chaves. "I am that man."

"You!"

"I bumped Wilson, but as I was then stepping back between the boulder and the round tower, he did not see me. I'd have told of the accident as soon as I learned of the death, if it had not been for Casner's strange actions. You can see the position I was in."

COM-3B

"Yeah," said the marshal cynically. "That's your story and you'll stick to it, I suppose." He tapped the notebook containing the charred letter. "This'll tell the truth. Let's get out of here."

Mrs. Keyes dully watched them withdraw. She had grown used to Keyes's troubles, and she apathetically waited for successive blows to fall. The marshal's visit had not brought trouble, but that did not mean that the sword was lifted.

"Sorry we bothered you," said Bowden.

From the depths of bitter experience, she answered, "You'll be back."

BOWDEN paused outside the adobe house to have a good look at the surroundings. He could not forget the wild-eyed rancher's terrified whimper, "It might have been me." Sipapu. Keyes and Chaves. "Something that will surprise you," Casner had written.

Bowden strolled through the adobe stable and a lean-to, seeing nothing out of the ordinary. Outside once more, he looked over the landscape. South and west, the desert stretched into the hazy horizon. On the east, the mountains were broken into gorges. He looked north, into a green mesa canyon, the head of which Sipapu graced. In the sunlight, the ruin was dull amber in the dark green junipers. Bowden's glance ran down to the canyon bottom and came back to the river and the ranch.

He stared and blinked as he found that his glance was following a wagon trail. Two ruts ran from the canyon to the muddy waste of the Mancos River, as straight as a crow flies, and came on from the river to the ranch.

"Coming, Bowden?" the marshal asked sharply.

Bowden ran and got into the car. He did not mention his discovery of the wagon trail on the drive to the park.

The marshal took Chaves to Durango, and Bowden was temporarily relieved of duty. He went at once to Sipapu. When he came to the ledge leading to the jinx ladder, he paused to reconnoiter.

Cloud House, across the canyon, was empty. Sipapu also was silent and deserted. The guard had been withdrawn after the investigators had finished their measuring and picture taking. A lizard raced up the yellow wall. A gopher sunning himself on the parapet sat up to stare at the ranger.

Bowden looked down at the wagon trail. He could trace it clearly from the river into the canyon. On the rocky canyon floor, the ruts vanished.

Bowden started to walk along the ledge, only to spring back into the shelter of the junipers. A man had suddenly appeared on the ladder at the other end of the ruin. He descended with his face toward the cliff, stopping at intervals to look up. There was something furtive in his slow descent. He seemed to expect interference from above or from some one in the ruin.

AT the bottom of the ladder, a narrow ledge ran around a jutting rock, with a heavy rope slung on iron posts to protect the unwary from the sheer drop. The newcomer leaned out on the rope to look at the ruin. His back was still turned to Bowden. He took a cautious step toward the cliff house.

At that instant, a figure appeared on the mesa, to the climber's left

rear, about fifty feet above him. This second man was wrapped in an Indian blanket from head to foot. One arm was free of the blanket. It lifted high above his head, brandishing a spear. He lunged forward and hurled the spear with full force.

It made a clean, swift dive, and struck the jutting rock beside the man who was gazing at the ruin. It missed killing him by inches. The clash of the flint spearhead on the rock echoed along the canyon. The spear was thrown back by the impact. It disappeared over the precipice. The man in the Indian blanket raced off and was lost to sight.

His intended victim whirled when he heard the spearhead strike. The weapon was gone before he could see it. After a glance around, he ran into the ruin, utterly unaware of the narrowness of his escape. He ran along the parapet to the round tower, and disappeared into the nearest kiva.

Shortly after, Bowden entered the ruin. He had no hankering to lean over the kiva and take the blow on the head that another ranger had taken. He stole through the houses to the round tower, from where the passage ran to the kiva. Bowden entered the round tower by stepping over a wrecked section of the wall.

A ladder jutted from a narrow opening in the floor. He stealthily slipped through and descended, face forward. It brought him to a slot, curving around the natural rock on which the round tower was built. He crept around the rock into the straight passage leading to the kiva.

A man crouching in the passage leaped to his feet. Bowden was face to face with Mozley.

This was no longer the sullen-mouthed man of superior manner, who had brooded for years over

Dunn's joke. He was a cornered beast. A curse snarled from his set teeth. His hand flashed over his belt. A blackjack slapped into his palm, and lashed out in a vicious chop for Bowden's temple.

Bowden ducked sidewise, and caught the blow on a raised forearm. His fist drove under for the solar plexus. Mozley had jumped back, and the blow missed.

Mozley emitted a sound that was half chuckle, half snarl, as he repeated the vicious blow to the temple. Again he leaped back. He was trying to get to the kiva, where he could lift his arm high and give his full force to the blackjack.

Bowden caught the second blow on his upper arm, as he rushed. His left snapped up to Mozley's jaw, and his right crashed in over the heart. Mozley crumpled on him, and would have collapsed but for the terror that gave him maniacal strength.

His fingers clawed into Bowden's throat, tearing at the jugular like teeth. The blackjack beat a murderous tattoo on Bowden's back. The ranger grabbed out wildly, and got Mozley's collar. He struck out again and again, but each time a bob of Mozley's head kept the fist from slamming into his jaw. Mozley was sobbing and chuckling insanely.

Bowden thrust out his left foot, hooked it behind the other's knee, and pulled. Mozley fell backward, dragging Bowden with him. Mozley's throat hold was loosened in the nick of time. Bowden was almost senseless. He had been mercilessly beaten against the passage wall during the fight. Now he struck out once more for the jaw, and felt a skidding impact. Mozley's maniacal strength had enabled him to wrench a full three inches along the floor, in spite of Bowden's

weight atop him. Bowden pinned the man's shoulders to the floor, knelt on his stomach and lifted a clenched fist. He saw the terrified eyes set in the sweat-streaked face, as Mozley awaited the blow.

Then it happened.

Bowden's left knee was on Mozley's stomach. His right foot was pressed against the ancient stone wall of the passage. Suddenly the wall gave way beside his foot. He heard a rumbling roar, and glanced back in time to see the world crash down in a storm of stone and plaster. Stones big as building bricks pelted him into unconsciousness.

BOWDEN returned to consciousness slowly, hearing some one call his name. He struggled to rise, and was surprised to learn that he was not pinned down. Not enough stone had fallen to bury him. Mozley was still out. A square rock lay across his nose, and blood dribbled from the corner of his mouth.

"Bowden! Bowden! Are you in there?"

He saw Dunn peering over the rim of the kiva.

"What's left of me is here."

Bowden struggled out and felt himself for broken bones. "Saw Mozley go in," he explained. "When I went down, he came for me from all ways at once. We knocked the wall down."

"Zowie, what a scrap!" Dunn commented. "I didn't know he was capable of it." He peered into the passage. "There's a good wall wrecked. I examined it last year and thought it would stand for ages yet. I didn't know it needed bracing."

"Will the round tower fall?"

"No, it was built on a rock, entirely separate from this wall."

Bowden leaned over the pile of débris. "What's that white thing? Looks like a skeleton."

"It is a skeleton. And there's another."

Dunn turned on a flashlight. The two men knelt in the débris of the covered passage, gazing at a scene which had been enacted seven hundred years before.

Another wall confronted them, built parallel to the one that had fallen. Between the two walls lay two skeletons, on their faces. Each wore a deerskin apron. Sandals were fastened to the feet, and each had feathers pleated into its long hair. One had an eagle feather in its topknot, a turquoise necklace and bracelets of cougar teeth. A long dart stood upright, the flint head wedged in the spine between the shoulders.

The hand of this skeleton was outstretched. Just beyond the fingers was a fetish, a stone crudely carved to represent a deer. The fetish had dropped from the man's hand as he fell.

The other skeleton had only blue feathers in the hair, and no ornaments. The bony fingers were almost on the fetish, and the knees were bent as if he had been in the act of reaching for the fetish when his skull was crushed by a falling beam.

"The guy with the dart in his back owned the fetish. He dropped it and was about to pick it up when the other fellow rubbed him out," said Bowden.

"You have good eyes," Dunn replied. "And the murderer was reaching for the fetish when the beam fell. Maybe some one tipped it on him."

"More likely not. If he did murder for a fetish, you can bet no one was around. He leaned on that beam

when he struck with the dart. Golly!" Bowden exclaimed, "murder will out, won't it? Here's one that was kept hidden seven hundred years, but we see the motive and method of crime, and the punishment."

"More than that," Dunn said eagerly. "We know the murderer's last thought. The fetish brought its owner food and fur clothing and honor. Why does a man want those things? For a woman. The murderer's last thought was, 'The fetish got him everything in life and it has protected him in death.'"

Bowden looked about him, frowning. "Isn't this the wall that the woman made with bloody hands?"

"This is the wall. They fought over her, and she walled them up and left them."

"Golly," Bowden repeated. "I need air."

He staggered out, and did not know that he had been looking squarely at the solution of Casner's murder.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEATH ON THE LADDER.

NEXT morning, Bowden, recovering from bruises and stiffness, sunned himself on a stone bench. He soaked up the warm fragrance of pine and juniper, and idly watched the cars lining up for the morning tour.

The marshal, driving by, saw him and stopped.

"I hear you got your nice yellow hair mussed," he remarked. "Must have been quite a fight."

"Don't credit Mozley with all the damage. There were a few stones falling. Well," Bowden sighed, "the question is—"

"Who killed Casner?" the marshal finished his thought.

"Wonder why Casner crawled into the sweat bath? And how did the broken peso get in his hand? And who put the other piece of it in with Berrier's winnings?"

"Berrier admitted to me," the marshal drawled, "that Casner was goin' to steal a turquoise mosaic for him. That may be half the truth, but it ain't all, by a good deal."

"Haven't found out where the cigarettes came from in Casner's ash tray? Or why he drew the map of Sipapu?"

"About all I know for sure is that it was Mozley who knocked out the ranger, but I can't guess what he was doin' in the ruin. When he was comin' to in the hospital, they say he thought he was in the kiva and he blackjacked the ranger all over again. And when you saw him, he was in the passage leading from the same kiva. He had some reason for bein' there."

"Before I saw him there," said Bowden, "a man threw a spear at him." He described the scene, adding, "I'd lay a month's salary, the same person tried to get Mozley who shot at Keyes."

"No doubt. Casner's letter to Dunn said three were in the scheme, with another aiding. Chaves, Keyes, Mozley. Who else? Berrier?"

Bowden stretched his uniformed legs and tipped his hat to shade his eyes from the sun. "You know, marshal, I can't get over the bloody hands Dunn and I saw. Did he tell you?"

"Bloody hands!"

"Oh, the prints were made centuries ago," Bowden hastened to assure him. "A woman made 'em on the wall in the kiva passage. Six of 'em. I keep countin' 'em and saying 'Chaves, Keyes, Mozley, Berrier.'"

"That leaves two."

"One might be Wilson."

"It still leaves one. Nope, I don't follow you, Bowden. Present-day murders are enough to keep me awake nights, without going back to the prehistoric past. Well, I'm on my way. Won't need you this mornin'. Better rest."

He left Bowden sunk in thought.

"I guess I didn't get my idea over about those hands," Bowden said to himself. "But I can't help thinkin' it's queer we should find them and the skeletons of a murderer and his victim, just at this time."

A SHADOW fell across Bowden. He looked up into Wilson's sardonic face.

"Where are all the suspects?" the writer asked.

"Two in the jug and one in the hospital. Mozley'll be out this afternoon. He wasn't hurt bad."

"Do you feel like exercising?" Wilson asked abruptly. "There's something I'd like to talk over with you before I tell it to the marshal."

"Trying it out on the dog?" Bowden smiled.

Wilson looked at him seriously. "Yes. That's it. I have thought about it a good deal, but never put it into words. I want to hear how it sounds."

He led the way to his car. They drove along the familiar trail to Sipapu.

"You know," Wilson began, "the three tours to Sipapu in the last few months, on which a man, a woman, and a child fell from the ladder?"

"Yes."

"I was on those tours. I was next to the last to go up the ladder. That is, I was just above each person who fell. I was topping the cliff at the time of the accident. I was questioned, of course, and I heard their names. All three were different."

"They were Dunn's cousins and heirs."

"I learned that recently," Wilson replied. "Also I hear that only two heirs remain, Hamilton and Dunn's fiancée. Some one would profit by those deaths. The identity of the three crystallizes what was only a hazy suspicion of mine."

"You believe they were murdered?"

"I'm sure of it. I was off the ladder before any of them started up. But I looked back each time to be sure they made it, particularly when it was the woman and the little girl. Each of them fell back without a sound. But of this I am positive—before each one fell, I heard the sound of a blow. It was a dull thud."

"They weren't shot," Bowden began. He cut off the sentence and corrected himself. "No inquest was held. The coroner said each was an accident. They fell a long way and were badly battered. There's a bed of sharp rock at the bottom of the cliff."

"So that the skulls were shattered," said Wilson, "and a hole would be taken for a rock puncture, if the mortician gave it more than passing attention."

"Golly!"

"Yeah," Wilson said grimly. "Golly!"

"But Casner wasn't a relative, nor an heir, nor even a good friend of Dunn's."

"Granted. But Casner was suspicious. Dunn tells me he wired that something was wrong at Sipapu."

"Yeah," Bowden drawled hesitantly. The ranger said nothing of the burned letter, which hinted at some scheme. The letter and Casner's strange actions would not dovetail with the deaths of the Dunn heirs.

WHEN they came to the Sipapu foot trail, Wilson led the way to the fatal ladder.

"People get dizzy here," Wilson remarked, walking along the ledge. "This is what makes the last ladder so dangerous."

"It's broad enough," Bowden argued.

"It seems so to you, but there is something about the view that gives a sensation of an abrupt drop. I have seen more than one woman sway here, and men have been shaky after crossing it."

At the ladder, Wilson said, "Wait." He climbed almost to the top, now and again looking down and swinging himself back over the canyon. Bowden felt giddiness coming over him the last time Wilson indulged an acrobatic swing.

"Hey, man, what're you doing?"

"Trying out the angle of fall. Suppose I fell off the four lower steps. I would slump down at the bottom of the ladder. But if I were to fall here, close to the top of the ladder, I'd go out over the railing, see? And each of the three fell from near the top."

He pulled a paper target from his pocket and thumb-tacked it to the ladder. Then he ran down nimbly.

"You came prepared," Bowden remarked.

"I've been thinking it over for a long time. Come on. We're going to Cloud House."

In order to reach the small ruin tucked high in the cliff across the canyon, it was necessary to drive back to the head of the canyon and down again along the side. Cloud House had been partially excavated and repaired. No visitors were allowed there, and no ladders had been placed to make their descent easy. A knotted rope swung from an iron

pole cemented into the living rock atop the cliff. The two men lowered themselves, one at a time, walking down the cliff, with the rope to balance them and give them handholds. Wilson carried a .22 rifle.

Standing within the sand heaps and rocky débris of Cloud House, Wilson pointed across the canyon.

"See the target?"

"Not very well. I couldn't hit it."

"Now try." Wilson handed him the rifle fitted with a telescopic sight. "Fire it."

Bowden drew on the target and fired. He nailed the bull's-eye.

"Don't know whether a .22 would kill at that distance," he remarked.

"It might. But it didn't have to. The bullet only had to hit hard enough to make them let go. They would be dizzy from that narrow ledge. A sudden sting would do the trick."

"There were Navajos working in Cloud House each time one fell," Bowden objected. "They'd have heard the shot."

"Ah!" Wilson answered, his sardonic face keen, "but silencers are obtainable. Hard to get, but they can be purchased. They break up the sound so that it is impossible to tell where it came from. And if they did hear the *plop* of the muffled gun, they'd forget it the next instant, when some one fell from the ladder."

"You think the man who did it was here in Cloud House?"

"Oh, I doubt it," Wilson said quickly. "That would be too dangerous. He could find a spot on the mesa from which to shoot, but I wanted a clear view in a hurry, so I came down here. Well," he went on, "that's the theory I have for the marshal. Casner's murder was one of four. But I do not know the motive, unless he happened onto

proof of the first three killings."

"The marshal should be able to find that out, after getting this break."

WHEN they got to the car again, Wilson was deep in thought. "Perhaps I'm breaking a confidence, but I must tell this. Do you know that Dunn has the unhappy quality of rousing deep, primitive passions? Men don't dislike him. They hate him with all the venom they possess. He told me this morning that the reason he broke with his fiancée was that she burned a manuscript on which he had worked for a year. Do you see how he rouses the passions that lead to violence?"

The car sped along the cliff road. Above Sipapu, Wilson brought it to a sudden stop.

"I just saw Hamilton going down toward the ruin. I want to talk with him. He may be the last of Dunn's heirs."

They went down by the trails ordinarily used for the exit of the ruin. They descended a ladder, squeezed through a crevice and again descended a ladder. Hamilton, on the ledge where Mozley had almost met death by spear, saw them coming and waited for them. Only the rope strung on iron poles was between him and a sheer drop into space.

"Hello," he said cheerfully. "What's the rush?"

"I want to talk to you," Wilson said, from the top of the ladder. "Hamilton, I believe you are in danger. Terrible danger."

"I know it. Haven't I talked of the curse till I'm hoarse? But I'm not leaving. I'll fight it out on this line." He grasped the rope and, in a gesture of bracing himself for battle, leaned against it.

Of a sudden, he was not there. The rope had parted. Hamilton pitched over.

Bowden was on the second rung of the ladder. As Hamilton fell out, Bowden lunged for his knees. His arms wrapped them as he crashed full length on the stone. Wilson had a firm clutch on Bowden's belt, and one arm over the rung of the ladder. For an instant they lay still, Wilson clinging to Bowden's belt, and the ranger hugging Hamilton's knees.

"Got him?" Wilson asked.

"Yes. I can hold him if you'll hook my toe on the ladder. You pull him up."

Wilson swung down the cliff with an arm around the pole to which the rope had been fastened. He dragged Hamilton up to safety. His breath had been knocked out, and the sudden rush of blood to the head muddled his speech.

"Tha's aw' ri'," he said thickly. "Had hold of rope."

He was still gripping the rope that had parted. Bowden showed the two ends to Wilson. They had been almost cut in two. Hamilton's weight had parted them. It was the unspoken thought of both men that some one besides Hamilton might have leaned there.

"It's a murder trap," said Wilson. "Murder with no reason. Any one might have fallen."

"No. Not any one," Hamilton corrected him, thick of speech. "I saw somebody down here. He cut the rope for me."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

Bowden made a quick search of the cliff house, but it was empty. The last place he looked was in the round tower, which he had come to associate with all murders in the ruin. There, seeking Hamilton's

would-be murderer, he happened to reach up to ease a shoulder tendon which had been hurt when he caught Hamilton.

He reached up the stone wall and closed his hand. The fingers closed over the wooden handle of some weapon hidden in a niche of the tower. Amazed, Bowden brought it down.

It was a stone hammer, bound to the handle with rawhide. The nose was oval and blunt. He held it out and saw hair on it, and dried blood.

CHAPTER IX.

BOWDEN KEEPS A SECRET.

SO Mike Chaves was bulling when he said Casner died by accident," Bowden muttered aloud.

"On the contrary," said Wilson. He and Hamilton had come up, unheard by the ranger; they had seen the weapon and overheard Bowden's remark. "I suppose Chaves told that to the marshal," Wilson went on. "He told the truth. The sweat bath was not plugged when I passed it. While I stood there, I was absorbed in thought. After being bumped, some seconds elapsed before I turned. I noticed then that the plug was in place. Does Chaves say he fractured Casner's skull by shoving the stone in?"

"Yeah," Bowden drawled suspiciously, "but I don't see how you gathered that from my remark alone."

"It's my business," Wilson said earnestly, "to fill in stories from a chance remark, or a look, or a slight action. Please believe in my innocence, Bowden. I'm playing square with you. I want this affair cleared up for Dunn's sake."

"Let's skip it," Hamilton suggested. "Get back to the murder."

Chaves thinks he killed Casner accidentally. What do you think, Bowden?"

"The murderer was inside the round tower. He leaned over the ruined part of the tower wall and swung the stone hammer. Wilson shielded him from view."

"It seems strange to me," Hamilton said, with a narrowing eye, "that Wilson, standing so close, didn't hear the hammer smash the skull."

"Do you know how much sound it makes?" Wilson asked. "About as much as smashing an eggshell. Consider, the children were running and shouting. A woman shrieked at a boy on the parapet. Some one on the cliff had started stones rolling. Amid all those noises, would you have heard a crunch? If you had heard it, would you have known it for what it was? Or would you have thought some one had stepped on a patch of sand and pebbles?"

"Perhaps you're right," Hamilton conceded. "At any rate, Chaves came along the next moment, slammed in the stone and innocently helped conceal the crime."

"Innocently?" Wilson asked.

Hamilton was not inclined to argue that. "The murderer was somebody more than ordinarily familiar with the ruin. You didn't find the hammer on the floor, Bowden?"

"No. It was in a niche, high on the wall."

"I thought so. A cliff dweller left it and the murderer found it, and kept the news to himself. I know the ruin pretty well, but the hammer was news to me. That's why I say the murderer was more than ordinarily familiar with the place."

"That could apply to any number," Wilson remarked. "There were the Navajos who excavated. I've been here with twenty tours. Chaves and

Mozley know the ruin as they know the palms of their hands. No telling how often Keyes has been chased out."

"I said 'some one more than ordinarily familiar,'" Hamilton reminded him. "That could only be Dunn."

WILSON gave him a quick, penetrating look. "Dunn was on the train, on his way here, when Casner died."

"Dunn came in by plane and was looking over the lay of the land six hours before the killing. I saw him." Hamilton stood with elbow on his folded arm, a finger stroking his jaw. "It's strange that the three who died on the ladders were each the last in line. Some one must have told them to go up that way. I said this ruin was cursed, because I couldn't account for the deaths otherwise. I can account for them now."

"You can?" Wilson prompted.

"Yes. Dunn has spent too much time among scenes of death. He thinks in terms of eons, not of years. He thinks of men in terms of race culture, not of lives. What is one life to him, who has dug up a hundred burials? It's nothing. A man is a chip floating on the stream of time."

"Yes?" Wilson prompted again.

"Sipapu is his passion. It becomes overly important to him. He wants it to be successful. He has studied human sacrifice as part of his work. When something slips in his brain, what does he naturally do to insure success? He sacrifices humans. Simple, isn't it?"

"No. Not that simple," Wilson answered. "There's more to these murders than any one has guessed. I wangled part of the story out of Casner while bringing him over

here. And I doubt if he knew all of it. However," he went on, "I will admit one thing. Four murders have been committed. You only suspect that the first three were murders, Hamilton. I can prove they were murders. The rope almost added you to the list. I repeat what I was saying when the rope broke. You're in danger."

"I don't deny it," Hamilton said, with a tight smile.

"You'd better go away until the matter is cleared."

"Never!"

"It's no disgrace to protect yourself!"

"This isn't a question of disgrace. Dunn told me to leave, the other night. He pretends he believed me too cowardly to stay. The truth is, he dared me to try to escape death at his hands. I won't run. Whenever and wherever he wants to try to kill me. I'll be waiting for him. We're going to fight it out here."

"Be it on your own head, then," Wilson shrugged, "but you're wrong in accusing Dunn. Come along, Bowden. We'll get that hammer to the marshal."

"Wait!" Hamilton called. "What story did you wangle out of Casner?"

"I'm not prepared to tell. It doesn't jibe yet with other discoveries I've made," Wilson shouted.

AT headquarters, they found the marshal pacing the floor, scowling and muttering to himself. He was more than willing to tell what was on his mind. The more he thought about Chaves's confession, the less he liked it. He was convinced the wound was made with a more pointed instrument than the sweat-bath stone.

"Blunt," he explained, "but more pointed."

"Like this?" Wilson asked, producing the stone hammer.

"Bless me! Where'd you get it?"

Bowden opened his lips to answer, but Wilson interrupted. He told in full of the finding of the hammer, but he said nothing of the experiment with the rifle at Cloud House.

"The murderer was in the round tower," Wilson explained. "When he swung the hammer, I was standing in the right place to shield him from view."

"That's the how of it," said the marshal. "And now to find the who, and the why."

"May I ask," Wilson drawled, "if it's true that Dunn came from the East by plane, and was on the mesa six hours before Casner died?"

"How did you find that out?" the marshal snapped.

"A little bird told me."

"It seems to me you know a lot you're not telling."

"I'm almost ready to tell. How's Mozley?"

"Wouldn't stay in the hospital. He's on the mesa somewhere. I'm having Chaves and Keyes brought here. Waitin' for 'em now. I let Keyes glimpse a letter last night, and gave him the night to sweat over it. He's a scary bird. He'll break."

The marshal turned to the desk. Wilson and Bowden accepted the unspoken dismissal.

"I don't like this," Bowden said, when they were outside. "I'm withholding evidence, and it's not so good. The marshal should know about the deaths on the ladder. And you should tell what Casner told you."

"If we tell about my guess that the three were shot, the marshal will start lookin' for the rifle. He'll exhume the bodies and otherwise raise a racket to warn the murderer. Give

me until morning. Then I'll tell all I know, cross my heart and hope to die."

Bowden glared up at the flag snapping in the breeze. "I'm not running the show. The marshal should know what Casner told you."

"Listen!" Wilson snapped. "I haven't any time to waste. We left that damn target on the ladder. Now I'll tell you what Casner told me."

BEFORE the startled Bowden could draw breath, Wilson had made him partner to Casner's knowledge.

"You see how it is," Wilson went on. "I suspect a great deal, and I don't know anything."

"We're all in that boat. If all the evidence were put together, it might work out."

Wilson sighed. "You'll go to the marshal the minute I leave. Listen, I'll compromise. Give me until six o'clock to-night before you tell him."

"O. K."

"Good lad. Now I'm going to Sipapu. You know the square tower with the steps cut in the cliff?"

"I do. It's dangerous. You keep off it."

Wilson patted Bowden's arm soothingly. "There, there. Inquisitive scribbler isn't going to fall down and break your pretty ruin. He's climbed worse places than that. All I want is a few hours of undisturbed thinking, and that's a swell place to get it."

"Besides, you think the murderer will go back to Sipapu, to look for Hamilton's body."

"Something like that," Wilson admitted.

"Do you think it will be Dunn?"

"Oh, no!" he scoffed. "Hamilton's sacrifice theory is all rot." Wilson

turned away, and looked back over his shoulder. "Stroll down about six with a sandwich in your pocket, will ya?"

Bowden promised grudgingly.

Wilson got into his car, and leaned over the wheel to turn the key. The sun, piercing the car's green sunshade, gave an eerie cast to his sardonic face.

"Bowden," he said abruptly, "about the broken peso which was thrown on the table with the money Berrier won from me. Remember?"

"Yes."

"I put it there. Some one put it in my pocket, either at the ruin or there at the poker game. Anyway, I knew the significance of it. As soon as I found it in my pocket, I got rid of it."

The key turned. The motor roared. Wilson sped away.

Bowden had not a minute to himself the rest of the day. Chaves and Keyes were brought out for questioning, but they would not break in their stories.

The hour was close to seven o'clock before Bowden got a chance to go to Sipapu. He called Wilson, but got no answer. His voice echoed hollow in the ruin, and faintly over the canyon, as it had echoed when he called Casner. "Wilson!" The cry struck harshly on the quiet evening.

At last he made his way up the steps into the high square tower. Wilson sat against the cliff, his legs stretched out, his hands in his lap. His head was tipped back and Bowden thought at first he was asleep. Then he saw the open eyes and an expression of unbounded amazement on the sardonic face.

Wilson had recognized his murderer before dying of a bullet between the eyes.

CHAPTER X.

THE SIXTH RED HAND.

TURNING from the body, Bowden saw a movement in the unexcavated portion. It was cut from his view by the round tower. He scuttled down the stone steps and ran noiselessly to the tower. A light scuffing sound came from the underground passage between round tower and kiva. Bowden went face forward down the kiva ladder.

He saw a crouching shadow in the passage. He tensed himself to leap aside if a gun flamed.

"Come out of there!" he commanded.

The crouching man emerged, and straightened to full height. It was Dunn.

"How long have you been here?" Bowden asked.

"About a minute. I just arrived. Why? Has anything happened here?"

"Were you," Bowden parried, "expecting something to happen?"

"I've had a feeling all day," said Dunn, "that I've come to the end of the trail. I've stayed away from here, because I could feel death in the ruin for me. That sounds like bosh, but I can't tell you how strong it is. It's as if a man put his hand on my shoulder and spoke into my ear. But I couldn't stay away any longer. There was something I had to find out."

He turned on a flashlight. The first gleam struck the kiva floor stones. Dunn turned the light into the passage.

"Here!" Bowden snapped. "Turn that back here."

The darkness melted away under the beam and there at his feet lay a .22 cartridge case and a cigarette stub. He picked up the stub. It

was the same brand as those which had been in Casner's ash tray. Bowden took the flashlight and shot the light up toward the square tower. At one spot in the kiva, he could see Wilson's head through a crack in the tower wall.

"All right," he said. "What were you going to show me?"

"It struck me," said Dunn, "that the wall which fell in your fight had been undermined. Remember I had tested it only a few months ago, and it was in good condition. There was no reason why it should fall."

He cast the light into the niche where they had found the skeletons. The two men had died against the house wall, and the woman had built another wall to entomb them. Bowden stepped over the débris and laid his hand on the standing wall.

"What if it falls?" he asked.

"Nothing will happen. The round tower is built on the rock."

"Here goes, then." Bowden crashed the wall with his shoulder. For an instant, nothing happened. Then the wall bulged and cracked and tumbled down.

He flashed the light into a large underground chamber, cut up with ruined walls. This was the unexcavated portion of Sipapu. It should have been filled with sand and débris. The floor was as clean as the cave above them. The light picked out roof beams so new they still smelled of pine.

ON the left, he saw a juniper. In his first amazement, he thought the tree was growing inside the ruin. Then he saw that he was looking at it through a small hole in the cliff rock.

"Gone!" Dunn muttered, in tones hushed by shock. "Everything's gone. Cleaned out. They came into

the hole in the cliff by the juniper, and braced a roof, and excavated. But why? The specimens weren't worth much money, except for the mosaics. Why should they risk their lives getting them? The specimens wouldn't repay the trouble and danger."

Bowden had a glimmering of the truth. "There are some things in this world that money can't buy."

Dunn looked at him dully. He was stricken by a loss which was as money and lands, kith and kin to him.

"What can't money buy?"

"I'll tell you later. We have things to do. You go back to headquarters and report a murder at Sipapu. Dunn!" Bowden grasped the archæologist's broad shoulders and shook him like a puppy. "Come out of it, man! Wilson has been murdered."

"Oh," Dunn answered blankly. "That's too bad. I'm going."

He sped up the kiva ladder. Bowden heard him running along the parapet and climbing the ladder to the mesa. Bowden leaned over the parapet to look into the canyon. He knew now where the wagon tracks went. They started in the canyon below the disemboweled ruin and ran straight to the Keyes ranch. After that, he could not follow them in his mind.

"And this is why Casner wired Dunn," he said to himself. "He meant theft when he said something was wrong at Sipapu. He was suspicious when he was searching the trucks and it was to protect himself against the thieves that he wanted the .45 and the tear-gas bombs." He strolled around the edge of the kiva. "Chaves and Keyes were in on it. So was Mozley; the two times he was caught in this passage, he was examining

that wall to make sure it would hold. That's three who were in on it. Berrier makes four. But there were six red hands. Funny. I can't get over thinkin' there's some connection between the cliff dweller's murder and this one. Funny." He paused. Aloud he exclaimed, "I'll be damned!"

THE solution had come to him. He knew why the ruin had been robbed, and who tried to kill Keyes and Mozley, the two weak links in the chain. He knew who had talked with Casner when the guide drew the cliff-ruin map, and who had killed Wilson. He knew it all because of two skeletons, one killed by a dart and one by a falling beam, seven hundred years before.

Shortly after, the ruin once again heard the tramp of official feet and the torrent of questions. Once again, it was searched, but it gave up only the .22 case and the cigarette stub. Once again, the body of a murder victim was carried up the ladders and along the trails.

"Where's Dunn?" Bowden asked.

"He got a message," the marshal replied. "He left the mesa like a bat leavin' a barn door. Said something about going to Keyes's."

"And Hamilton?"

"Haven't seen him for hours. Last I saw of him, he was pretty shaky because he fell through a cut rope. Dog-gone it," said the marshal, "this is turning into a holocaust."

"You said it. And if we don't get to Dunn, there'll be another victim. Come on. I've got a lot on my conscience I'll tell you while we ride."

When they were speeding along the highway, the marshal exclaimed:

"This affair has got me going. Casner's letter, that was half burned, tied up Chaves and Keyes to what-

ever dirty work was goin' on. But when Wilson was killed, they were both with me. I don't get it at all."

"I've figured out some things, and some I know because Casner told them to Wilson, and Wilson told me not long before he died." Bowden continued hurriedly, to avoid explaining his lapse: "Casner liked to wander the trails and ruins by himself, to spite the rule that visitors must not go there unaccompanied by rangers. One night in Sipapu, he saw what he thought was a Navajo ghost. He saw it several times before he got close. It was Keyes. And Keyes was lowering specimens from the ruin to the canyon floor. Casner heard a wagon creaking down canyon. Later, he found out it went to Keyes's ranch. By spying day and night, he learned that Chaves, Keyes, Mozley, and Berrier were removing Sipapu piecemeal. Do you know what they were doing with it? They were building a ruin in Keyes's cayon. Imagine 'em makin' a cliff ruin. Can you beat it?"

"I can't even tie it. Go on."

"Casner figured out why they did it. Berrier was to get the turquoise mosaics. Keyes would have what he always claimed to have, a cliff ruin on his ranch. Chaves could secretly laugh at all archæologists, whom he hates as grave robbers. Mozley, all burned up because Dunn once played a joke on him, had got back with a joke on Dunn. You see why they were in on it, and they could have put it over."

"Except for?" the marshal asked.

"Casner barged in and threatened to tell unless they gave him the job of guide on the newly 'discovered' ruin. They agreed and he kept quiet for a couple of weeks. Then his conscience bothered him. Casner loved the park and every ruin in it. He decided to tell. That's why Ber-

rier called him a cheat and a welsher. That's what Casner meant when he said he was an honest man."

"Oh." The marshal ran the car down off the mesa, and stepped on the gas for the straightaway desert drive to Keyes's ranch. "Go on."

"The four of 'em didn't quite know what to do. I don't believe any of 'em would have tried murder, except Keyes. That nut tried it on Casner, when he was sleepwalking. Anyway, they knew Casner had wired Dunn, and they knew Dunn was on the mesa. They tagged Casner, and even followed him on the tour. Casner was afraid they were going to kill him. He kept watching behind him."

"And he crawled in the sweat bath to duck them."

"Yes. But it was no go. Casner had talked. He had talked to a man who burned up expensive cigarettes. While telling the whole thing, Casner drew a map of the new ruin. Remember we thought it was Sipapu, but it was on the side of the canyon. Well, Casner talked to the one man he thought should know."

"And that man, for reasons of his own, killed him."

"Killed him, tried to kill Keyes and Mozley, killed Wilson. Casner and Wilson each talked to the same man."

"Here's the ranch," the marshal muttered.

HE thundered on past the ranch house and the stable, and followed Bowden's directions to get to a canyon two miles from the house. Here Bowden turned the searchlight up until the white ray caught the faded yellow sandstone buildings in a cliff ruin. It was tucked up under a cave roof, and was built on the same general plan as Sipapu.

"There's a light moving along the trail," said the marshal. "Somebody carryin' a lantern. I'm going to drive away, or we'll scare him off. You start up. I'll sneak back."

Bowden raced up the side of the canyon. He could see the lantern light going briskly along the trail. This was Dunn, walking to a rendezvous that meant the end of a man's life.

Bowden reached the cliffs, and began to climb, desperately trying to gain the ruin before Dunn could reach it by the trail. Desperation gave him uncanny knowledge of the cliff he never had seen before. He found handholds and footholds at which he later was to marvel. He found crevices in smooth sheer reaches of the rock. Where a boulder jutted over the canyon to cut off his trail, he found a pine growing from the living rock, and hauled himself up.

The moon was rising. Light traveled down the opposite side of the canyon. Higher and higher Bowden climbed, until all the giddy height was below him and his hands found the edge of the guard wall. He scrambled over. The moon floated out above the canyon. Every nook in the ruin was flooded with light.

Dunn's lantern gleamed on the ledge below a ladder which, for danger, was much like the jinx ladder at Sipapu. It ran straight up the cliff, and it stood on a narrow ledge below which the cliff dropped sheer for hundreds of feet.

Bowden crept on hands and knees to the nearest kiva. Through a break in the guard wall, he could see Dunn carrying the lantern, rung by rung up the ladder.

In the kiva below Bowden, a man crushed out a cigarette, lifted a slender rifle to his shoulder.

Bowden leaped on his shoulder. The two men fell in a heap. The rifle cracked, and the bullet showed dust on them from the cave roof. The prisoner did not try to fight. He lay limp beneath Bowden's weight.

BOWDEN turned on a flashlight. He looked first at the crushed cigarette, the same brand found in the ash tray and in the kiva from which Wilson had been killed. Then he turned the light on his prisoner.

"Well, Hamilton," he drawled, "you came close to being as certain of Dunn's death as you were of Casner's. Did you have a broken peso to put in his hand, too?"

"I wouldn't kill Dunn," Hamilton growled. "Why should I?"

"For the same reason one cliff dweller killed another seven hundred years ago. You wanted honor and money and a girl. You thought Dunn got the girl and the honor because he was 'lucky' enough to find ruins. The ruin was a fetish with you, and you tried to take it from him. You would have 'discovered' this house. Meanwhile, you killed the other heirs and you were going to kill Dunn, to get the money. Right?"

"She wanted money," Hamilton burst out. "That was the only reason she preferred him to me. They'd have thought he fell from the ladder."

"She wasn't much," Bowden commented. "She burned a manuscript that Dunn had worked on for a year."

He searched Hamilton and let him get up. When Dunn came, Bowden tersely sketched out the whole plan. While he was talking, he saw lanterns and flashlights coming along the trail at breakneck speed. The

marshal, the superintendent, and three rangers burst into the cliff house.

"Dunn!" the marshal exclaimed. "Thank Heaven, you're alive. This telegram came a few minutes after I left the mesa. They've been chasing us with it. It came from a woman named Serena Lake. Know her?"

"I did," Dunn answered reluctantly. "Is it for me?"

"For me," said the marshal. "It reads:

LOOK INTO THE THREE KILLINGS ON THE LADDER STOP HAMILTON DID THEM STOP HE INTENDS TO KILL DUNN

"She tried to save me," said Dunn.

"She would have saved you," said the marshal.

Only Bowden saw the truth, remembering the six red handprints, and the cliff-dwelling woman. She had walled up the two men who fought over the fetish, and she kept all that the fetish had brought.

The telegram was timed to arrive after Dunn's death. Then Hamilton would have been arrested and, according to the terms of Dunn's will, Serena would have had all the money. As surely as though she built the wall, she would have let one kill the other, and then would have walled up both of them. Bowden alone knew. Bowden alone could see her red handprints in the plaster.

"Bowden!"

He came out of the brown study, knowing his name had been called twice by the efficient superintendent.

"Bowden, as soon as you get back to the park, talk to the four boys in the Illinois car, about rowdyism. And take a look at this police circular. I think this fellow came in today. He's wanted for money-order thefts."

"Yes, sir," said Ranger Bowden.

Life went on.



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The Private and the Lady

By Murray
Leinster



A gallant
battle — a
gallant
victor.

BITTERLY upset that he felt no flash of high courage or enthusiasm, Samuel Higgins took his place in the steam launch. Abysmal misery filled him. The night was moonless, starless, and soundless save for the slapping of waves against the *Miami's* side. Far away

COM-4B

across the water were the rebel-infested North Carolina pine woods. Their odor reached Samuel even here and mingled with the inevitable naval smell of oakum and tar. Somebody was passing down the muskets. Somebody else was handing down canister shell for the twelve-pound howitzer in the bow. The launch's

furnace door opened for a moment. By its glow, Samuel saw Lorenzo Deeming examining a grenade. A curt voice ordered him to put it down. More figures came down the boarding ladder. The launch shuddered as their weight settled down. Somebody's voice came conversationally from the deck overhead, "Now, Cushing, if you're taken prisoner by the Rebs——" The steam launch heaved and swayed gently. And Samuel Higgins crouched down in the small space assigned to him and was bitterly disappointed because his misery continued; because he felt no thrill of high adventure.

He ought to be thrilled, he knew. That secesh girl, Nancy, was going to hate him for this. But Samuel knew only an increased bitterness at any thought of either Nancy or Lavinia. Nancy, as a secessionist, hated him because he was fighting for the Union. And he had a letter from Lavinia in his pocket, full of grand commonplaces about Mr. Lincoln and "that abominable Jefferson Davis," and urging him on with a trace of impatience to prove the heroism that would make him worthy of her. Maybe he ought to feel a thrill because he was out to prove that heroism now; but he didn't.

He shifted his position and discovered that the seat was hard all over and no change of position would alter the fact. The wind blew smoke in his face and he closed his eyes and waited patiently. The patience was habitual. In a moment he could breathe again and he heard Wilkes swearing and gasping and choking. That was habitual, too. Samuel didn't swear, much. Even being in the navy under powerfully pious and powerfully profane officers hadn't made swearing come natural to him yet.

Lavinia approved of him for that. She'd said so. And he ought to be grateful to her, because, of course, Lavinia was condescending a great deal in being betrothed to him. She was a lot different from that secesh girl, Nancy. Lavinia'd been "Miss Lavinia" to Samuel all his life, until he got old enough to join the navy and fight for the Union. Then she'd noticed him, really flung herself at him. The thought came startlingly, and he felt guilty and ashamed. She was a little bit older than he was, of course. She wasn't like Nancy. But he was betrothed to Lavinia.

"Below there!" commanded a voice from the *Miami's* deck. "Make that line fast!"

Samuel started, and heard a slight splashing sound. Then somebody was making fast a wet line to the launch's stern. A couple of sailors had eased the cutter around the ship and up to the launch. Now they fended it off the *Miami's* side and dark figures began to slide down a rope into it. They scrambled to seats, clattering a little and exchanging occasional low-voiced words. One of them said something—Samuel didn't catch what—and there was muffled laughter.

"You've got plenty of greenbacks?" That was up on deck again; an officer talking to Lieutenant Cushing. "Rebs may hate us, but they like our money better than their own."

Wilkes whispered something to Lorenzo, and Lorenzo snickered. He was thrilled, all right! Samuel wished passionately that he could be thrilled. But he could feel only a vague deep hurt somewhere in his soul. Nancy was going to hate him for this night's work, but it would make him a hero. Lavinia would be pleased. She'd be disappointed with him because he wasn't an officer.

Failing that, she'd insisted that he become a hero. He was trying to, and under the best possible auspices, too. But Samuel suddenly hoped desperately he would be killed.

Going anywhere with Lieutenant Cushing was an act of heroism. Cushing had commanded the flotilla in the lower Nansemond, in Virginia and done a lot of damage to the Rebs. He'd come mighty near capturing General Hébert in his own camp, back in February, and he'd made raids in small boats time after time. So the mere fact that he had volunteered to go with Cushing ought to satisfy Lavinia of Samuel's heroism. And this was a special occasion. The ram *Albemarle* was just as dangerous as the *Merrimac* had been. She was tied up to a wharf in Plymouth right now, but she'd licked the whole Albemarle Sound fleet once; the *Sassacus* had rammed her at full speed and got only a smashed bow and a blown-up boiler for her pains. Any time the Rebs felt like it, she could come out and take New Berne right away from the Union army. That would tickle that secesh girl, Nancy, it would! She'd bragged of it.

THE many sliding figures had stopped. The cutter back there was full, and so was the launch. There was barely room to turn around with men and arms and such. A lot of the bow of the boat was taken up with the boom and pole for the spar torpedo, and everybody was crowded toward the stern.

There were ceremonial noises up at the head of the landing ladder. Two figures came down. The launch shuddered again. Voices called from above:

"Good luck, Cushing!"

Lieutenant Cushing's voice, very

cold and precise, answered them. With a throbbing noise, the engine began to run. Somebody cast off the lines. The steam launch forged ahead, then checked with a sickening lurch as the towline to the cutter tightened. There was a burst of muffled laughter as somebody tumbled to the bottom of the cutter.

Now there were comforting noises: the engine hum and the hissing of the bow wave, and muted, inarticulate sounds from up forward. The dim bulks that were the ships of the fleet grew vague and monstrous astern. The *Miami* was biggest. That blob on the water was the double-ended *Mattabesett*; designed, so Nancy had said mockingly, so that she could run away from the *Albemarle* both ways at once. There were all the rest of them, dark shadows which grew darker and faded utterly from view as the launch chugged on.

One mile. Two. Three miles. Samuel Higgins was thinking of Nancy. A slow, queer anger was growing up within him. She'd laughed at him, a couple of days ago, and bragged about those "butternut" Rebs and the rebel ram *Albemarle*.

"You'd better tell me good-by, Mistuh Higgins," she'd warned him. That was in New Berne, before he'd volunteered for this expedition; before anybody knew there was going to be an expedition, and while the *Albemarle* was a constant danger and a threat. "You-all ain't goin' to be down this way much longer! My cousin Bob, he's joined the *Albemarle's* crew, an' he says they' gettin' might tired of yo' Yankee fleet squattin' down in the Sound up theah. They'll be sailin' out before long to send you-all skedaddlin' back home!"

In the throbbing steam launch, bound upon a mission he knew the Northern newspapers would be talking about in a couple of days, Samuel felt a grim, preliminary satisfaction. The *Albemarle* would send the whole fleet skedaddling, would it? With a hundred and fifty pounds of gunpowder in the torpedo this launch carried, with Lieutenant Cushing to set it off, and a cutter load of Union sailors to do the fighting? With—

Samuel heard a curious clicking noise beside him. He looked up, startled, and saw Lorenzo stuffing something in his mouth. The clicking stopped. Lorenzo saw that he was observed. He leaned over. His hoarse whisper reached Samuel's ear.

"Yep, I'm scared!" said Lorenzo desperately, "now we' started. But so are you! So's everybody, excep' maybe Lieutenant Cushing. An' if you say a word about it I'll whop you till you can't stand, soon's we get on shore!"

Samuel said "Huh!" and turned away his head. He managed to find a partial rest for his back and relapsed into a vague misery in which indefinite things went through his brain quite to the exclusion of his present and future peril. Lavinia's grand commonplaces about Mr. Lincoln and the Reb president, Jefferson Davis, and the necessity that Samuel strike a mighty blow for the Union. For it was a condescension for Lavinia to marry him, and he had to prove himself worthy by some signal act of heroism. Otherwise people would think it queer that she, who had "position," should marry him. Samuel contemplated his mental picture of Lavinia without elation. Then Nancy's face swam into his inner consciousness and dull misery overwhelmed him again.

THE launch was checking, out here on the open Sound where there was nothing at all except slowly heaving waters and the smell of pine woods and warm humanity, and steam and smoke and oil. The cutter bumped the launch's stern. A tall form loomed up—Lieutenant Cushing. His voice came, crisp and cold and precise.

"I am giving you your last orders," he said. "If the picket on the *Southfield* hails us, the cutter will dash for it and take it, keeping them from sending up a signal rocket. We go on in the launch. We are going upon a desperate errand. Many men upon the fleet think it impossible. But impossibilities are for the timid. We shall not fail!"

Samuel found himself thinking cynically that it was time for a cheer, now. But a cheer would ruin everything. There was a dead and uncomfortable silence until the launch started forward again. The two tiny boats went on, rolling and lurching and swaying across the Sound.

Presently somebody hissed for silence, up forward. The speed of the launch lessened again. The noise of its engine died down until it was barely audible even to Samuel. He felt its throbbing, but the hissing of the bow wave had diminished to a faint sibilance he could barely hear. There was a footstep on the planking. Somebody's teeth chattered on the other side of the launch. The cutter, behind, was not even a shape in the blackness that deepened and deepened, until Samuel realized that tall pine trees were looming up to port and intensifying the darkness of the already moonless night.

The chattering of teeth stopped abruptly. Whoever it was had prob-

ably stuffed something between them, like Lorenzo. Samuel stirred. A hand clutched him warningly and he felt an unreasonable irritation. He wasn't scared. He was too miserable to be scared. He hadn't got a single thrill out of all this. He didn't care if he died. He didn't care if the Rebs caught him. He couldn't care if everything blew up.

A small voice whispered "Treason!" in his brain, and he stopped thinking in alarm. But he didn't mean treason! He'd no more think of turning secesh than of—well, jilting Lavinia. He was loyal to the Union. He'd joined the navy, hadn't he? He'd risked his life, hadn't he? He wasn't hoping anything would go wrong with Mr. Lincoln's plans. He'd give the last drop of his blood for the Union.

But there was a dull ache in his heart that he couldn't stop. Maybe it was worry. Maybe it was Lavinia. Maybe it was that secesh girl, Nancy, who'd laughed at him. He tried to get mad at her, by remembering the first time he'd asked to walk with her, in New Berne. She'd carried some jellies and things to the hospital for the wounded soldiers. He'd found an excuse to talk to her. She was pretty, and high-spirited, and defiant.

"I'm s'prised," Samuel had said heavily, when she let him walk beside her toward her home, "that a secesh girl would bring things to our soldiers."

"I don't hate Yankees," said Nancy. "Not when they'ah flat on theah backs!"

Her eyes twinkled, making no secret that she was a secesh. Laughing at him. Defying him. Mocking. Though Samuel had thought privately that he was a pretty good figure of a man in his uniform.

She'd baited him all the way home. She'd trampled on him, figuratively, and Samuel wondered miserably why he'd let her. Other Union fighting men knew how to handle these secesh girls, let them see "what was what." But Samuel couldn't. When she reached her home, he yearned to be invited in. It was poverty stricken—all these seceshes were poverty stricken, it seemed like, maybe it was the war—but he was homesick for just the feel of a house that people lived in. She didn't ask him to enter.

"Thank you, suh," she'd said, dropping him a mocking curtsy as she stopped at the gate. "You ain't as bad as some Yankees, Mistuh Higgins. Walkin' home with you wasn't as unpleasant as it would've been with some of you-all."

Samuel, then, was inspired to great daring. He was lonely. He was miserable. He proffered a daring request, and Nancy's eyes twinkled. "I'm lonesome. I'd like to come an' talk sometimes, when I can. That's all."

He'd watched hopelessly while she considered. And when she introduced him to her mother—and Samuel saw the light of weary hatred in her mother's eyes—his heart was still pounding crazily because she had consented, however mockingly and however she had trampled upon his self-respect in consenting.

THERE was a sharp click somewhere in the boat. Then some one was bending over the man who had cocked a musket and was swearing furiously at him in a whisper. The trees by the bank of the river loomed high overhead, now. These woods ought to be full of secessionist pickets, watching

against just such raids as this one was meant to be. Any minute there might come a challenge or a high-pitched rebel yell and the crimson splashes of musket fire. Or maybe they'd been seen and somebody was tearing away with the news, and they'd be let come right under the guns of a battery and then it would open on them. The *Albemarle* was the strongest boat on the Sound. It'd been built way upriver, and it'd come down and chased away the Union gunboat fleet and just plain smashed the Union artillery in Plymouth, so the secesh General Hoke hardly had to do more than march in and take the town. It was tied up there now, after later fighting one pitched battle with the Sound fleet and fighting it to a standstill. The Rebs would be watching out to guard it. Samuel felt for the first time a little thrill that somehow nullified the misery which filled him.

There was a tiny change of course. The trees receded. Dim stars glowed faintly in the cloud gaps of a mackerel sky. Samuel heard whispering up forward. The engine stopped and the launch went on by momentum. Then, slowly, something long and black emerged from the deeper blackness. There was the loud scrape of a foot on planking, and Samuel's heart stood still. But that noise wasn't in the launch or the cutter. It was off there on that black object.

There was an infinitely faint noise behind—the men in the cutter, getting ready. This was the *Southfield*, lately a Reb gunboat, but sunk the time the *Albemarle* fought the whole fleet. Its upper works were above water, and the Rebs had a picket on it with rockets and such to give warning of enterprises such as this. Somebody stirred, over there on the *Southfield*. But a voice

drawled lazily, unalarmed, while the launch and the cutter drifted silently closer and ever closer. "Yes, suh! The mo' I think about it, the mo' I think that damn sergeant is stealin' some of ouah vittles." Samuel heard a nervous, almost hysterical snicker beside him.

The launch went drifting onward through the water. The way of the launch died down. Then the engine started very, very softly. An eternity passed with that faint throbbing the only sound in all the world. Samuel somehow knew that Lieutenant Cushing was gazing behind with cold, intent eyes. If a rocket went up— Half a mile. A mile. He gave a low-voiced order. The engine stopped. There was a little sougning sound of the faint breeze in the treetops. There were lapping noises of the river against the shores on either hand. But that was absolutely all. No rocket had gone spitting flame toward the sky. The picket had not even suspected their passage. There had been and there would be no alarm.

The smell of the pine woods was stronger, here, and the curiously pungent odor of river mud.

"So far, good," said Lieutenant Cushing. "From now on we must be prepared for instant battle."

A TINY windlass squeaked faintly. Somebody was busy at the stern. Samuel had an impression of movement beside him, and the launch heeled slowly, and as slowly heeled back to an upright position. He knew what had happened, of course. The torpedo spar had been swung around to its active position ahead.

There was a stubby mast up near the bow, and the windlass rope passed over it. There were muffled

movements in the bow. Lieutenant Cushing was seeing the torpedo fixed in place. It was a hundred and fifty pounds of gunpowder in a shell-shaped case, fixed on the end of a pole. The windlass raised and lowered the pole, and consequently the torpedo. When the launch gathered way again, there was the heavy bomb swung out ahead of it at the end of the long spar. The whole launch was converted into a moving missile, with all its destructiveness carried before it and with firing lines from the explosive brought back to the commander.

The launch went on softly, again. More soft movements sounded up forward. Somebody climbed over the massed bodies of the crew and handed something to the man by the engine. Samuel caught his hoarse whisper, "This line to your waist. The other one to your ankle." He tried unsuccessfully to imagine what it all amounted to. Lieutenant Cushing was arranging his lanyards. Two to the engineer, to give him signals for working the boat. Two more to the torpedo. One to release it from the spar and the other to explode it.

Far away, out of the darkness, a voice came thinly, singing. The ringing echoes of the pine woods made the notes sound like bells. The launch was silent again, going upriver to where the *Albemarle* was tied to a dock, with Reb batteries to guard it besides its own guns, and Reb soldiers all around. Nancy's cousin was one of the crew of the *Albemarle*. He'd be shooting at Samuel presently, and Samuel would be shooting back—unless he was shot.

Desolate, awful depression settled down upon Samuel like a pall. An impotent, savage rebellion flared

up in him. If everything went well, Lavinia would be satisfied. He'd be a hero and she'd marry him and be proud of him. But Nancy would hate him even more than she did now.

Samuel wanted to die. He suddenly knew that he didn't want to marry Lavinia. He suddenly knew bitterly just how men felt who did that horrible thing called "jilting." Samuel was unable to fight back any longer the realization that he wanted to jilt Lavinia. He didn't want to be a hero. He was praying desperately that he would be killed, because if he lived and he was a hero he would have to marry Lavinia and Nancy would hate him. Nancy wouldn't even mock him any more. She wouldn't taunt him. She wouldn't say things that stung and infuriated him, and then smile wickedly so that he could only grin sheepishly and suffer. If he lived through this, Nancy would simply look at him with a weary hatred in her eyes and never speak a word to him, and he would die—he would die!

Samuel's throat hurt. He knew that he could spoil this raid. If he made a noise at the wrong time the Reb batteries would open up. He might be captured. He would probably be killed. In any case he would be out of all this. But it did not occur to him that he might do anything like that. That would be treason. It would be disloyalty to the Union. Samuel knew that it could be done, but it was not even a temptation. He simply hoped dumbly that he would be killed, because he did not want Nancy to hate him.

"I don't hate Yankees, when they'ah flat on theah backs," she'd told him with twinkling eyes. "My cousin Bob, in the *Albemarle's* crew, he

says he hates all of yo'-all. But I forgive yo'—soon as yo' got lead in yo'."

THERE was a light ahead. The town of Plymouth. More lights spread out in straggling rows. Samuel strained his eyes in the blackness. There was an indefinite murmur. All the Negroes of any given town are never asleep at any given moment. There is always some one awake. Nobody knows why. And there would be sentries somewhere—on the batteries, anyhow—and there would be pickets. At any instant there might come a hail or a shot, and then in seconds the whole town would be awake and there'd be a storm of lead and iron and canister churning up the water all around them. The cannon would boom hollowly. Muskets would spit little sparks. And the launch—well, there was that twelve-pounder in the bow. It would open up, too, firing defiantly, if hopelessly, at the concentration of guns upon it.

But nothing happened. The peace of the night remained unbroken. The engine slowed again. Samuel could barely hear it working. Every man in the launch seemed to be holding his breath. The silence was terrifying. A horse was moving, somewhere ashore. Hoofs thumped on a plank road. There was the rumble of a wagon behind it, though this was the middle of the night. Tiny waves were lapping at the river banks, then a little later they seemed to slap fretfully at pilings in the water. The course of the launch was changed.

Metal clanked upon metal, a long distance off. The course of the launch shifted again and slowly a dark line, which was a wharf edge, swam out of the blackness, and there

was the smell of a warehouse and of wet piling and mud. The wharf drew nearer and nearer.

"Who's theah?" snapped a voice, startled and high. It wasn't on the wharf. It was ahead somewhere, a little bit out of the stream. "Who's theah?" it repeated, almost breaking with strain. There seemed no interval whatever between the second hail and the spurt of crimson flame which was simultaneous with the crash of a musket.

For an instant, utter silence followed the report. Then yells sounded in the town. There was a confused tumult ashore.

A man came running on the wharf, panting. He yelled suddenly and his musket went off. The bullet hit the gunwale not three feet from Samuel. He heard the man on the wharf struggling with his musket to reload it. Another musket went off fifty yards away. Men were shouting back and forth. Musket shots increased in frequency. Then a vast bellow accompanied the hugest flash of flame yet. Something shrieked into the water ten yards away.

"Full speed ahead!"

That was Lieutenant Cushing's voice, metallic and unfeeling.

"In the cutter! Go back and get the *Southfield* picket!"

The cutter dashed away. Straight ahead, the spitting sparks of muskets increased in number. That was the *Albemarle*. Then somebody set light to a star barrel, on shore, and the ruddy glow shone on the Confederate ram. Gray-clad figures were running about on the top of it, and from them came spitting flames.

The air was full of whining noises. Samuel heard Lorenzo gasp, then heard him begin to swear. The

splashing astern grew farther away. The cutter was racing to attack the picket on the *Southfield* and clear the way for their escape. The fire on shore grew brighter, and another gun opened up. Water fell upon Samuel. Something had splashed somewhere, and a fine mist fell all over the boat. Now Samuel heard some one cursing in a steady voice, and he raised himself out of his seat to look, and saw that between the launch and the ram there was a floating barrier of logs.

SAMUEL waited numbly. Another blaze was being started somewhere. A bullet screeched off the boiler cover. Two bullets went through the smokestack. The roar of muskets and the tumult of yells ashore was appalling. The whole rebel army seemed to be blazing away at the launch. Samuel actually smelled the reek of the blazing tar barrels, and he felt the launch throbbing under him. It lurched as the helm went over.

Something scorched Samuel's shoulder. He was gripping his musket tightly, waiting for orders or even for permission to shoot. The launch was steaming swiftly up to the log boom. Then it sheered out into midstream. The *Albemarle* was between it and the fires, now, and the gesticulating figures on the ram's roof were outlined against a glare of red. Samuel turned his eyes and saw the back of Lieutenant Cushing's coat rip raggedly away from his body. That was buckshot. The bullets hitting the launch sounded like somebody tapping on a log. A voice yelled from the *Albemarle*:

"Surrender, you damn Yanks, or we'll blow y'out o' the water!"

The launch came around again, facing the mountainous iron ram

which had defeated the whole Sound fleet in single combat. The launch roared, now, every bit of power the boiler could deliver being poured into the throbbing engine. Lieutenant Cushing said something Samuel couldn't hear, all of it aimed at the launch. But in the glare of the fires on shore he saw Willet jerk the lanyard of the howitzer in the bow. A blinding sheet of flame leaped out, and Samuel felt the whole launch shiver from the recoil. It was a midget defying a mountain, but it sped on and on. Samuel crouched down as something ripped across his back. Then there was a terrific shock. The launch careened and lurched, and slowly its bow tilted downward, then it slid over something and was upright again. Picking himself up from the bottom of the boat, Samuel felt a moment's excitement. They'd rammed the log boom that had been put out just to prevent such attacks as this. The logs had been a long time in the water. They were slimy. They'd hit one log squarely and it had bounced down under water and they were inside the pen with the ram! There was the *Albemarle* dead ahead, looming up. Something projected from it, with a hole in it.

Samuel realized that he was looking squarely into the mouth of a cannon. He heard men shouting orders inside the ram. They were barely thirty feet away. The men up on top were shooting down into the launch now. Somebody—it was Houghton—began to cough suddenly.

"Lower!" said Lieutenant Cushing.

It was curious, thought Samuel, that he could hear the squeaking of the windlass that let the torpedo sink in the water at the end of the spar ahead. He was waiting to die. He wasn't frightened, but it didn't

seem possible that anybody could live any longer. Bullets were coming from every direction. He even heard some of them tapping upon the armor of the ram.

"A little lower!"

A spurt of flame came from the other side of the launch. Somebody had started to shoot without waiting for orders. Samuel looked forward to Lieutenant Cushing, absorbedly guiding something in a storm of bullets that had torn his uniform to shreds. He didn't order the firing stopped. Lorenzo began to shoot, swearing frenziedly. Samuel aimed at one of the milling figures on top of the ram, so clearly outlined by the blazing tar barrels behind them. He pulled trigger, and as the musket butt kicked his shoulder wondered if he'd hit anybody. He got ready, fired again and reloaded. Then he was aware that Lieutenant Cushing had straightened up and was pulling absorbedly, delicately, at a single line attached to his wrist.

WATER overwhelmed everything. Only later did Samuel realize that there had been an explosion. A mountain of water, mixed with mud, hurtled upon the launch. It flung Samuel back and crushed him at the same instant that it swamped the launch. He did not leave the boat. It seemed to dissolve from beneath him and there was only water about him, through which he struggled desperately. Then he broke surface and knew there were bodies floundering all about him. Some of them were Rebs, flung from the top of the *Albemarle* by the shock of the explosion.

It seemed an age that Samuel swam before he struck upon a slime-

covered log. He clung there, panting, and heard shouts arise.

"Take 'em prisoner!" roared a voice. "Theah boat's sunk! Cease firin'! Boats!"

Samuel turned his head. Already the ungainly bulk of the *Albemarle* was tilting. The torpedo had blown a hole in the hull. The raftlike bow and stern were leaning over sideways. The gunwale nearest him was under water. The other side was higher. Samuel heard the gurgling roar of water pouring in.

Panic seized upon him. He ducked under the log boom. Boats were pulling out from shore. Voices cried out, "She's goin' to turn over!" There was a noise of oarlocks. In a boat a man was cursing, sobbing while he cursed. Samuel dived again. He came up and saw figures being drawn from the water. He heard Lorenzo's voice, shrill and triumphant, even as he was being made a prisoner. Lorenzo wasn't scared now.

Samuel swam for the shore. The water was cold. His uniform was heavy. He'd be taken prisoner, but he was a hero. A wave slapped his open mouth full of water, and he gasped and choked. With an amazing swiftness his muscles grew weary and leaden. Terror invaded him. He'd drown. But then his hand was bruised as it reached out for another stroke he was afraid would be his last. He caught frantically at the thing that had bruised him. It was a pile, a support for the wharf on the river bank.

He wrapped his arms about it and clung, gasping for breath, until he should be rested enough to reach the shore. The tar barrels flamed higher yet. Clinging desperately to the slimy pile, Samuel watched the small boats scouring the surface of the river. Presently he fumbled

with his legs. He could reach the river mud. He was safe. He rested, up to his chin in water. But he felt himself growing bitterly cold. He forced himself to exchange the safety of this pile for another farther inshore.

There was pandemonium by the sinking *Albemarle*. She filled slowly, slowly, and settled until her bottom rested on the river mud with her upper works above water. She'd heeled back, and sank nearly on an even keel. But sunk, she left the Union fleet in undisputed possession of the Sound. This town of Plymouth was doomed to recapture by the Union forces the *Albemarle* herself had driven out. A mighty blow had been struck the Confederacy. Samuel Higgins was a hero. He realized it, and he felt no elation whatever.

The boats which searched the river came one by one to shore. Samuel saw a flat-bottomed bateau beached barely fifty yards behind the wharf which hid him. Men got out of it and went away. One man remained. By the flare of the tar barrels Samuel saw him sitting upright in the stern. And Samuel, in sudden terror of a Confederate prison, wanted that boat. The figure was drooping in its seat. Samuel turned to stare for watchers, for other men who might creep toward it. When he looked back, the figure had disappeared.

An hour passed before the watch fires had died down enough for Samuel to dare creep, low down and close by the water, toward the boat he wanted. He had barely reached it when he heard voices. Men were tramping toward him.

"Someweah around heah," a voice was saying. "He said it wasn't bad, an' he thought he'd get back. Who's theah?"

At the challenge, Samuel flung himself forward, running madly. Somehow the anguish of soul which had possessed him before the sinking of the *Albemarle* no longer affected him. He wanted to live. He wanted to be free. He wanted that boat, to get downriver where the cutter's crew still held the wreckage of the *Southfield*.

A yell sounded behind him. A gun roared. The bullet took Samuel through the fleshy part of the arm. It felt like a violent slap and swung him around. He groaned and set his teeth and flung himself at the boat, shoving it off, pushing it out, wading in the darkness until he was reminded of his wounded arm by its failure to work for him. Then he clawed his way desperately into the floating hulk and gasped incoherent curses at the shore behind him.

Two or three muskets fired at him. Somebody came running. He saw the figure in the dimming firelight. The firing redoubled. Then there was a crashing, tearing noise in the boat—a bullet, splintering wood. Then the firing stopped suddenly.

Samuel sat down and wound his handkerchief about his injured arm. He twisted it tight. In the darkness, he held his other hand under it to find out if the flow of blood had ceased. Then he felt water splashing under his feet. The boat was leaking. He began to bail as the current carried him down toward the Sound and the fleet.

When the gray dawn came he beached the boat. He couldn't keep it afloat, bailing with one hand. And with the dawn he saw a figure lolling helplessly in the stern. That figure, in gray, opened its eyes. The lips parted.

"H'illo, Yank," said a thin, pain-racked voice. "I sure thought were

goin' to sink one time las' night. Got any water?"

TEN days later Samuel went ashore in New Berne. He was pale and tottered on his legs. He drove himself desperately to make the long walk to the sanitary commission. He had to report there. He sat in the shadowy waiting room with flies buzzing audibly all around him, until the surgeon looked over his arm and hurt him horribly in doing it. But he got himself passed as a walking case. Then Samuel rested, from the pain. Presently he staggered to his feet and went outside.

The sunlight was warm, but Samuel felt cold a lot of the time now. He went on doggedly, walking because he wanted to be left a walking case. He had a letter in his pocket which he hadn't opened yet. It was from Lavinia. If she heard he was wounded and in a sanitary commission hospital she might think he was a hero. He wasn't going to allow that. Maybe, he said hopelessly to himself, if she got disgusted enough she—

Things whirled around dizzily. He caught hold of something in a queer panic and steadied himself. Presently he marched on blindly. It felt like he had thick felt soles on his feet. His forehead felt cold. But he was a walking case and he was going to stay one! His whole body ached with a dull despair, but he wasn't going to be a wounded man and a hero to—to anybody. He'd been lucky about the hero business. It was five days before he got back to the fleet, and the excitement was over. Lieutenant Cushing was Commander Cushing now, and folks were glad to see Samuel, but they didn't make much of a fuss over him. The *Albemarle* was sunk,

and he'd got back too late to share in the glory. So he wasn't a hero and Lavinia couldn't be proud of him.

Things whirled around him again. He clutched for something by which to steady himself. There wasn't anything in reach. He fought to keep from falling. Walking case—then somebody had caught his arm, steadying him. Small hands held him up. He straightened up desperately. Then an exquisite agony of soul possessed him.

It was Nancy. Her small, sun-browned hand still had hold of him, but her eyes were bright and hard. Looking into them, Samuel wished passionately that he had died. He stammered, and weak tears came into his eyes, and he summoned all his strength.

"Th-thank you, ma'am," he said unsteadily. There was no sign of recognition in her face at all. "Th-thank you, ma'am."

"You'ah a Yankee," said Nancy, not mockingly at all, "an' I'd do that much for a dog. You been hurt. You better set down. I don't hate Yankees when they got lead in 'em."

A gate clicked. He was stumbling up the path. He wanted to tell her that he hadn't meant to walk by her house. He hadn't. Nancy hated him. His knees were trembling. Presently they'd cave under him. He found himself sitting down on the porch just as things started to whirl around again. When his eyes cleared, Nancy was still standing, still looking at him without friendliness, without scorn, without anything, but the impersonal regard she would give an enemy soldier who was hurt.

Samuel wished very bitterly indeed that he had died. Anything would be better than this strange

new look upon her face. He drew a deep breath and said desperately, before his lips quivered:

"Ma'am, I—I know y'don't like us. I'll just—rest a while an' go on. I'll—I'll read my mail that I got this mornin'."

Nancy vanished. The world went misty before Samuel. He'd known he was weak. His arm hadn't even been dressed beyond what he could do to it himself, before he got back to the fleet. That had been five days. But if he could get up and go, he would. Nancy hated him. He stared mistily before him, wondering vaguely how anybody could suffer quite so much. Nancy hated him. He'd walk on in a minute. He mustn't let her think he was trying to work on her sympathies. He'd read the letter Lavinia had sent him. He'd better. He was going to marry Lavinia if she didn't get too disgusted with him for not being a hero.

HE pulled the letter out of his pocket. Sitting on Nancy's porch. Nancy inside, not recognizing him. Saying she'd done no more for him than she'd do for a dog. Samuel would much prefer to be dead, than feel like this. He would greatly prefer to be dead.

His one good hand fumbled the letter open. The opening line, in that angular cultivated hand of Lavinia's:

"Dear Mr. Higgins:

Deeply as I regret to have to give you pain——"

He read on. His hand shook. Presently he sobbed.

He heard a rustle of skirts beside him. Nancy.

"What's the mattuh?" she demanded in a crisp, impersonal tone.

Samuel Higgins staggered to his feet.

"I wish to heaven," he said thickly, "that I was dead! I don't care! I wish I was dead! Here's Lavinia gone an' married somebody that's a lieutenant in the quartermasters, an'—an'—it don't do me any good! I helped sink the *Albemarle* an' now you hate me. You hate me!"

He wavered on his feet. Nancy called quickly. Some one else came. There were two women. They were leading him somewhere. There were two Nancy's, and they put him in a chair that rocked as he sank into it, and there was somebody soothing him, and somebody else putting a glass of something to his lips. But he jerked away his head.

"No!" he said thickly. "I don't want it! I don't want anything! Nothin' will do me any good! I helped sink the *Albemarle*——"

A firm hand pressed him down. Somebody went away, it seemed hastily. Nancy stayed.

"Mistuh Higgins," said Nancy's voice, not too steadily, "when you went to sink th' *Albemarle* you knew my cousin was on bo'd her."

"Yep," said Samuel bitterly. "I knew it."

"You tried to kill him," said Nancy wearily, "because you were a Yankee an' he was a secesh. An' he tried to kill you." Then her voice changed subtly. "But after the fightin' was over an' you were in that leakin' boat, an' you found out theah was a Confederate soldier in the boat with you, wounded, what did y'do then?"

"I found out he was your cousin," said Samuel, more bitterly still. "An' I'd taken him away from the folks that were goin' to carry him to a doctor. Yep. I know that, too. But who told you?"

There was a pause. Samuel gathered his strength. All feeling, even all bitterness left him.

"I don't blame you for hatin' me," he said dully. "It ain't as much as I hate myself. I'll be goin'—"

She pressed him down again.

"Bob was a mighty nice boy," she said, with a flash of bitterness, "to die like he did. But y'looked after him, as well as y'could."

"I couldn't do much," he told her. He wished very terribly that he was dead, or that he could die, or something.

"Y'didn't do much?" demanded Nancy. Her voice rose. "Yo' bandaged him, hidin', an' yo' stole water an' milk for him, knowin' yo'd get sent to prison if they caught yo'! An' when it seemed like he was hurt worse than either one of yo'-all b'liev'd at first, yo' went an' captured another Confederate soldier with my cousin's own pistol, an' took him to wheah Bob was layin', an' tol' him to get a doctor fo' Bob, an' then—an' not till then—yo' went on an' escaped back to yo' fleet!"

There was warmth, and indignation, and many other things besides in her voice. Samuel tried to speak.

"Don't answer me, suh!" she

stormed. "Bob, he lived long enough to tell that! He sent us word, because yo'd told him about me! He'd got to be friends with the man yo' tried to kill! Yo' told him all yo' secrets. An' Bob, he sent me word that fo' a Yankee yo' were more like a good secesh than anybody he ever saw. An' he told me yo'd told him yo' loved me."

Samuel gazed at her dumbly. He was amazed at what he had heard. He was even more amazed at what he saw. Nancy was smiling at him, with her lips quivering suddenly. Smiling at him without a trace of mockery. Tears came suddenly to her eyes. She reached out her hands, which trembled a little.

"Samuel!" she cried. Her voice broke. "Yo' damn Yankee, tell me some o' the things yo' tol' my cousin Bob after yo'-all had finished tryin' to kill each other! Tell me, yo' dam' Yankee! Tell me!"

She was crying through the first unmocking smile she'd ever given him, as he pulled her to him with a quite unsuspected strength. But the thing of which Samuel was most blindingly conscious was that he was very, very glad that he was not dead. It would have been terrible to have been killed when the *Albemarle* was sunk.

Every day

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... A I D S D I G E S T I O N





Flora was no
angel—but she
knew

SOCK APPEAL

By
H. R. Marshall

ABE PRAEGER, fight promoter, smirked across the table at Flossie Barnes, known in burlesque circles as "Flora de Flora." "We gotta work fast, Flossie," he announced, listening for steps in the hall. "Kid Tarzan'll come bustin' in any sec and we gotta have an understandin' first."

"Giving your new palooka the double cross already, eh?" drawled

Flossie. She gazed at the swarthy, squat promoter with contempt, lingering on the pouches under his eyes and the flabby jowls. "Abe, you're a worm!"

"You're no angel," Praeger replied. "But you're O. K. in a deal, eh? Let's say two grand for you if——"

"Don't get tongue-tied," primed Flossie, staring intently at her finger nails, which were much too pink,

just as her hair was much too yellow, her face too white, and her lips too red. "What's my play? If it's dirty work, count me out. I'm going straight."

"It's clean," Abe Praeger declared. "Listen! This Kid Tarzan that I picked up while he was fightin' behind a bar in Arizona——"

"Where you went to hide after your last mix-up with the boxing commission," interjected Flossie.

"Can't you shut your trap and listen? This Kid Tarzan is the greatest fighter I ever managed. A natural. A wow. Hard as nails and how he can take it! He was a sheep-herder, see? Took to fightin' in bars and dance halls for amusement and he learned plenty. Them cowboy fighters are no set-up, see, but Tarzan could take 'em on two at a time. Five feet seven, built like a locomotive with fists for pistons and——"

"Cut the testimonial and give me the low-down. Where do I make my entrance?"

"Comin' to that. This Kid Tarzan—his real name's Andreo Christobal Fernando Ossi, half Basque, half Mexican—well, I've pushed him up the ladder to the top, played him straight——"

"You're straight as a corkscrew, Abe."

"And now he's a contender for the championship, see? That's where the damn commission steps in. 'Let's see your contract with Kid Tarzan,' says they. I produces one real quick—one-third of all receipts to the dumb Basque, two-thirds for me. 'Nothin' doin',' says they. 'Fifty-fifty split for Tarzan.' Imagine that! Our split from the Killer Kilgore-Kid Tarzan battle to-morrow will tote thirty grand. Me give half of it to that half-wit?" Abe Praeger winced with pain at the very thought. "Say, he'd still be chaper-

onin' sheep on the desert if it weren't for your Uncle Abe! I made him everythin' he is and I'm entitled to——"

"You're talking big money," Flossie scoffed. "S'pose you want me to steal the split from your Kid Tarzan, eh?"

Praeger's black eyes flashed eagerly. "Yes—no, I mean. Play it fair, that's Abe Praeger's motto. What I mean is, s'pose you give the Kid the razzle-dazzle. He'll fall for you, right—easy, Flossie, take it easy. I don't mean nothin' wrong. A good clean love affair, see? He's soft as a schoolboy about women. Never really knew one in his life. So you and him get engaged to be married, see? You're his fiancée and you cop the fifteen grand for safe-keepin', or just because he's so dumb he'll give it to you when he's in love. You keep two grand for your work and slip me the rest. I've got him all primed. Without even seein' you, he's already in love. Listen! Here he comes! I'll make the knockdown and leave you together. You work on him and work fast! Get engaged to him!"

"You are a worm, Abe!" Flossie declared admiringly. "But two grand don't come my way very often, so I'm on! Bring in your Kid Tarzan!"

WHEN Abe Praeger returned two hours later he found "Kid Tarzan" sitting at the feet of Flossie Barnes like a shaggy, friendly dog. His eyes—the far-away blue of the desert sky—were wide and adoring, and said, "Here is an angel sent me from heaven."

Flossie rose quickly at sight of Praeger and nodded. "Love at first sight" she caroled, in her hard voice. "The Kid and I were just made for each other, weren't we, Kid? He

hasn't given me a kiss yet, nor the ring, but we're engaged and he's going to. He's just grand." She patted Tarzan's shaggy head and the fighter looked up with lovesick wonder in his eyes.

"Congratulations!" shouted Abe Praeger. "Say, that's the stuff! We'll have a drink on it, eh?"

"Drink!" The blonde whirled on the promoter. "What's eatin' you? The Kid fights to-morrow!"

"Aw, go roll your hoop, sister! It ain't goin' to hurt that big bozo. Do him good to break trainin' a little. How about it, Tarzan?"

"Si, señor. If you say so. You know."

Praeger glared defiantly at the blonde and drew a bottle from a bureau drawer. He poured three drinks: two small ones and a large one. The large one he gave to the fighter and a small one to Flossie. "Here's to you both!" he announced, raising his glass.

"All right, big boy," Flossie said, glaring at Kid Tarzan. "If you're dumb enough to let this guy put this over on you it's your funeral. Little Flossie gets hers, win or lose!"

The Kid smiled and raised his drink. "Always I give you everything," he said softly.

Flossie flushed and drew back her hand as if to hurl the glass at the fighter, then changed her mind. "You are dumb!" she said. "I'm getting out of here. Praeger, you give me the gripes, but I'll play your game this time." At the door she paused. "Say, will you do something for me some day, Kid?" she asked.

The Kid nodded anxiously. "Si, si. Anything!"

"Hit that bloody fixer on the button then!" she shrilled. "And hit him hard!"

The door slammed behind her.

COM-5B

Praeger sighed with relief. "It's a break she's gone!" he breathed. "Somethin's eatin' that hell-cat!"

The Kid rose half out of his chair. His fists clenched, his blue eyes smoldered. "You call her what, señor?"

Abe Praeger's alarmed eyes rested on the Kid's fists. "Nothin', Tarzan, nothin'," he stammered. "Sit down, Kid. I didn't mean nothin'. She sure is a wonderful lady, big boy, and you're lucky to win her."

The fighter sank back into a chair and closed his eyes to dream of Flossie and of the desert. What a place the desert would be with her there!

The telephone bell rang. Praeger answered. His fat face creased into a crafty grin.

"Sure. Come right up!" He turned to Tarzan. "Joe Marco and Tommy Sullivan. You know 'em. Big-shot gamblers. They got plenty of dough up on you, big boy. We'll have a couple o' drinks with 'em. Just kid 'em along."

"Si, señor."

A CAUTIOUS rap sounded on the door. Praeger opened it. Marco and Sullivan stood in the corridor. Sullivan was a tall skeleton of a man with a sad, cadaverous face, while Marco, like Praeger, was short, fat, and swarthy, with bright shifty eyes. Praeger stepped outside and the three held a whispered conference. Sullivan raised his voice.

"Sure. I know. He ain't in shape, but he could take Kilgore anyway—one hand behind his back."

"Yeah," Marco chimed in. "You say the dumb bozo does anything you tell him. Sure! Won't move a fist unless you say, 'Go!' But how do we know it ain't the bunk? We're puttin' up twelve grand at one to

four and we ain't standin' for no double from you, Abe."

The conversation again lapsed into whispers, Praeger arguing heatedly, the two gamblers shaking their heads. At last they seemed satisfied and Praeger led them into the room to introduce them to the Kid, who gave them his slow, cloudy smile.

"You goin' to take Killer Kilgore for a buggy ride to-morrow night, Tarzan?" Marco demanded.

"*Si, señor.*" The big Basque nodded his head. "Praeger, he say so, and what he say, I do."

"You don't look in shape, you look rotten!" Sullivan's voice was wispish in keeping with his body. "Kilgore will knock you for a loop."

The Kid looked worried. "I do not feel very well, señor," he admitted. "But Praeger, he say I am all right."

Praeger nodded; he was pouring out drinks—three small ones and a large one. Into the large one he dumped a paper of white powder before he handed it to the fighter. "Sure! You're fit as rain. It's just too bad for Kilgore." There was a false ring to the geniality in his voice. "Yep, you'll make Kilgore look like a bad nickel to-morrow. Nothin' like breakin' trainin' a little before a tough fight, eh, boys? Here's how!"

When the party broke up three hours later Kid Tarzan was sitting on the floor in a corner singing a Basque song to the accompaniment of "Frankie and Johnnie" shrieked by the promoter, who had been dumped fully clad into the bathtub by the two gamblers. Sullivan was wearing Marco's coat, the sleeves of which came just below his elbows, and Marco was draped in the tall gambler's garment, turned inside out. They stood arm in arm in the doorway viewing the scene with

tipsy satisfaction. Marco raised a half-filled glass.

"Here's lookin' at you again, Kid Tarzan," he cackled mockingly. "To-morrow the great Kid Tarzan will send Kilgore by-by, eh? Sure! Who says so? The great Señor Praeger!"

Sullivan roared with laughter, slapping his thin shanks. "Sure, he'll take him!" he roared. "Señor Praeger says so! In a pig's eye he'll take him!"

The door closed behind them. Kid Tarzan remained in the corner singing his Basque song softly to himself, dreaming of his desert and herd of sheep, of the wonderful lady who had come into his life.

THE Kid sat dejectedly in his dressing room wrapped in a gayly colored blanket. Through the thin partitions he could hear the roars of the crowd as they cheered and booed two young hard-working preliminary fighters.

The preliminaries were almost over. The Kid's hands had already been bandaged and inspected. He felt rotten, sick and deserted. Praeger hadn't shown up and the Kid couldn't understand it. Always Praeger had talked to him an hour before each fight, drilling into the fighter's slow mind just what to do, what to look out for, how to meet it. He wondered if Praeger would be at the ringside. That would help. When Praeger was close the Kid sensed just what the fat little manager wanted him to do—it always worked.

Maxie Muller, the trainer, waddled in accompanied by a red-haired sports writer, Delaney from the *News*. Maxie was worried.

"How do you feel now, Kid?"

"Bad, Señor Muller."

Maxie snorted and turned to the

sports writer. "Praeger told me that the fool went out last night and got binged. Plastered the night before the big fight!"

The Kid felt hurt, betrayed. Protest came to his lips, but he couldn't find words to express it.

"Oh, sure," the sports writer snorted. "Little Abie told you that, eh, Max? I wouldn't be surprised if the crooked bum got the Kid tight himself. It's about time he threw the big boy down. He's put every other good fighter he ever had on the skids."

Muller shook his head doubtfully and the two left the dressing room together. The sports writer's voice came back from the doorway. "If the Kid loses this fight he's through. Sure he is. He won't get a cent. The boxing commission will hold up his end of the purse. Won't do any good to howl that Little Abie did the dirt. They'd say the poor dumb-bell was in on it."

The Kid mulled the words of the sports writer over in his slow brain. Abe Praeger betraying him? No, it couldn't be!

The steady roar of the crowd suddenly hushed like a lull in a storm and then increased to an ear-splitting crescendo. A knock-out. Max Muller entered quickly, removed the blanket from the fighter's body and replaced it with a bright-red bathrobe which had "Kid Tarzan" embroidered across the back. The Kid thought it was wonderful.

"How you feelin', Kid? O. K.?" This from "Spinner" O'Neill who breezed in, important in his capacity as the Kid's second.

Kid Tarzan nodded. "Where is Señor Praeger?"

Spinner shook his head. "I don't know. He was sittin' in his regular place during the prelim with that

big-shot gambling team, Marco and Sullivan. Let's go!"

Muller patted the big Basque's shoulder. "Take Kilgore quick, Kid," he advised. "You ain't trained for a long pull."

Followed by his seconds the Kid made his way down the darkened aisle to the pyramid of light in the center of the huge arena, and climbed into the ring. "Killer" Kilgore was already there, mitting the crowd. The champion was unpopular and got little applause, but the house roared when Tarzan raised his gloved hands. Kid Tarzan was a bone crusher. He'd take two for one any time. He had "sock appeal" and fight fans loved him for it.

THE Kid turned his slow grin on that sea of blurred white faces and they roared again. Spinner led him to his corner and slipped back the bathrobe. Tarzan twisted his head to see if Praeger were in his accustomed seat right behind the fighter's corner. He was. The promoter's face was flushed. He stood up and thrust his head under the lower rope and the Kid got a whiff of his alcoholic breath.

"Take it easy, Kid," he advised. "Take your time! I'll tell you when to crown that long-legged palooka! You'll take him, but don't plaster on the K. O. till I give you the tip. Understand?"

Tarzan nodded. His forehead puckered in puzzlement. Max Muller had said to bore into Kilgore and knock him out quickly, but Praeger said to take it easy. Max was his friend and trainer and ought to know, but Praeger was his manager and Praeger was always right. He'd take it easy until Praeger said to turn loose.

The referee motioned the two fighters to the center of the ring.

Kilgore, a big, gangling, freckled bruiser, swaggered from his corner, flashing a covert grin at Praeger and the two gamblers. "Hello, Kid!" he sneered at Tarzan. "I'm goin' to knock that dumb block of yours off to-night."

The Basque grinned. "Hello, Señor Kilgore."

The referee mumbled his instructions and lined the boys up for the cameras and movies, taking care to be in the middle of the group himself. The flashlight flares boomed and the movie cameras buzzed. The two fighters went back to their corners. The bell rang.

Kilgore leaped to the center of the ring, his tall, angular body erect, his long left out, his chin tucked close to his shoulder and protected by his right. The Kid shuffled forward like a huge bear, his shaggy head down, his legs far apart, his huge torso swaying back and forward rhythmically.

Kilgore led with a short left. The tip of his glove brushed Tarzan's nose, more a flick of the wrist than a clean blow. A dirty fighter, Kilgore. He pecked away again at the Kid's face. Tarzan shook his shaggy head. Kilgore grinned and again his left flicked the Kid's nose. Tarzan growled and rushed. This was what Kilgore wanted. He crossed with his right, but the Basque's weaving advance was hard to locate and the blow glanced off his shoulder. Kilgore backed off and pecked away again at the Kid's face. That was the way he fought. Cut, cut, cut, with the heel of the glove if possible, until his adversary's eyebrows were opened or the eyes closed.

The Kid rushed again. Kilgore's right met the side of his head jarringly, but he kept coming. Kilgore back-pedaled. The Kid forced him into a corner and began pounding

the Kilgore's mid-section. His heavy arms worked like pistons. One-two, one-two. A right found Kilgore's solar plexus. His eyes became glassy and his knees sagged. The Kid stepped back to measure him for the chin. That was the way Praeger had taught him. "Bore in and hammer the bread basket, then polish 'em off with one to the button." He started a right hook.

"Lay off! Lay off! Not yet, Kid!"

It was Praeger's voice, a sibilant whisper above the expectant silence. Tarzan pulled the punch. Kilgore fell into a clinch as the bell sounded.

SPINNER worked on the Kid between rounds. "Why didn't you polish that big palooka off when you had him ga-ga, Kid?" he hissed. "He was all set for the old K. O."

"But Praeger," the Basque gasped. "He say lay off."

Spinner looked puzzled. "I was right here," he said. "I didn't hear him. You give that big bum the works next time no matter what Praeger says, Kid. Get me?"

The bell sounded for the second round. Kilgore came sidling cautiously to meet the Kid in the center of the ring. His left darted forward, flicking. The Kid countered, but missed. Kilgore clinched and tried to rub the heel of his glove in the Kid's right eye, but the Basque jarred him loose with a blow to the kidneys. Kilgore backed off as the Kid bored after him, shooting short lefts and rights to the champion's middle. Again he got him into the near corner. The customers were standing on their seats now, howling. They had seen the Kid get his man in a corner before; it was all over for Kilgore. Tarzan threw a short left hook to the champ's heart

which shook him so that his mouth popped open. Now he measured for a right to the chin. He knew he had him, knew that after that blow would come the count, but even as the blow started on its upward journey he heard Praeger's voice, low but compelling.

"Not yet! Not yet! Lay off that!"

A portion of the Kid's slow mind fought the command, but another part instinctively obeyed. Too long had the promoter conducted the Kid's fights from the ringside. He pulled the blow and it slid harmlessly over the champion's shoulder, allowing him to stumble into a desperate clinch.

The crowd loosed as one man. Catcalls and jeers sounded in pulsating waves. Tarzan felt sick, mentally and physically. His heart was gone. His legs felt boneless and there was a gnawing in the pit of his stomach. A sudden wave of nausea almost overcame him. The bell sounded and he stumbled to his corner where Spinner waited disgustingly with a towel and sponge.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth rounds were episodes in a nightmare to the Kid. Sick, his brain cloudy, head down, his misty eyes followed the illusive figure of his opponent and he bored in doggedly. Kilgore, remembering the first two rounds, played a waiting game, flicking his wicked left into the Basque's face until it was a mass of cut, bleeding flesh with puffed and blackened eyes. At the end of the sixth round the Kid did not hear the bell and had a bad time finding his corner. Spinner worked hard over him between rounds, cursing Praeger under his breath.

"Damn dirty shame! Damn dirty shame!"

Kid Tarzan was done, washed up, finished. Blinded, sick, so weak he

could hardly raise his fists to protect his face, he was no longer a boxer, only a target for the punishing, long-armed blows of Kilgore. But his fighting heart had not quit, would never quit until the final knock-out. Where was Praeger? Why didn't he come forward, offer advice and encouragement to his fighter? Ah, of course, Praeger was sitting between those two gamblers, his crafty face red with liquor and triumph.

SOME thought moved through the Kid's slow brain, the words of that newspaperman: "If Tarzan loses this fight he'll not get a cent! He's through!" Not a cent, and he had promised that wonderful lady, Flossie, to let her have the money so that they could plan to get married. Kid Tarzan shivered, stiffened, and a strange gleam showed through the slits of his puffy eyes.

The bell rang for the seventh round. The Basque shambled forward with an ungainly shuffling gait. A flurry of gloves was followed by a sharp thud and the fighters clinched in the middle of the ring, braced against each other. To most spectators it seemed that Kilgore was holding the Basque on his feet, but the seconds and fight-wise fans knew differently. Tarzan had landed a terrific blow to the champion's solar plexus and Kilgore was out standing up, hanging on. From the ringside Praeger saw the situation. Like a flash he sprawled between the ropes, leaped to Spinner.

"Throw in the sponge!" he squealed. "The Kid's through! Throw in the sponge!"

Spinner gazed wide-eyed at the manager, too amazed to move. Praeger reached for the towel and the sponge, jerked them from Spinner's nervous hands, whirled to

throw them into the ring. He would throw the fight to Kilgore; that was the only way to beat Kid Tarzan now, double-cross him once more.

"No, you don't!" A feminine voice shrilled above the pandemonium, a blonde came piling into the ring. How she got there was hard to say—literally trampling over shoulders and heads until she pitched furiously through the ropes. It was Flossie, superlative Flossie. Her too-blonde hair straggled in wild wisps around her too-white face; her too-red lips were wide with shrill imprecations and challenge; her exotic hat was tilted rakishly on one side of her head, her eyes were those of an Amazon aroused.

"No, you don't!" She leaped like a tigress and clawed at Praeger's eyes. The promoter fell back a step, tripped over the water pail, landed heavily. He strove to sit up and toss the sponge into the ring, but Flossie caught his right wrist, bore it down and sank her teeth into it. "No, you don't, you double-crosser!"

Pandemonium reigned. The crowd, after a moment's silence of utter amazement, suddenly broke into wild cries, shouts of encouragement. Two policemen lumbered heavily between the ropes, pulled Flossie from the body of the prostrate Praeger, bore her out. As they lifted her between the ropes she twisted her head. Her hat dropped to the canvas-covered floor. "You got him, Kid!" she shrilled. "Finish him up! Finish him for me!"

Out in the center of the ring Kid Tarzan, ready to break from the exhaustion of holding up that long angular body of Kilgore, caught that discordant order. "Finish him up!" His dim eyes brightened again. The referee pranced forward, separated the two fighters. Kilgore had had time to recover and now he back-

pedaled rapidly. No good. The Kid was after him, terrific, irresistible, his ears echoing that shrill order: "Finish him up!" Kilgore was only a black shadow in front of him now, a shadow to be trapped. Suddenly he had it cornered. He swung with the last desperate ounce of strength. He felt the smack of glove on flesh. The shadow disappeared. Where was it? He must find it. He shuffled around blindly, seeking it.

There it was. On the floor. A long warped shadow on the blood-stained canvas. Some one was pushing him into a neutral corner. There was a roar like pounding surf in his ears, but his mind began to clear and the mist to raise. The referee was finishing the count over the prostrate Kilgore—"eight, nine, ten!"

IN the dressing room the Kid lay on a rubbing table while Max Muller worked over him. Flossie Barnes sat holding the fighter's hand. Her yellow hair was wild, her lips too red, her face too white as always, but her eyes had changed. They looked down at the Kid softly, almost maternally.

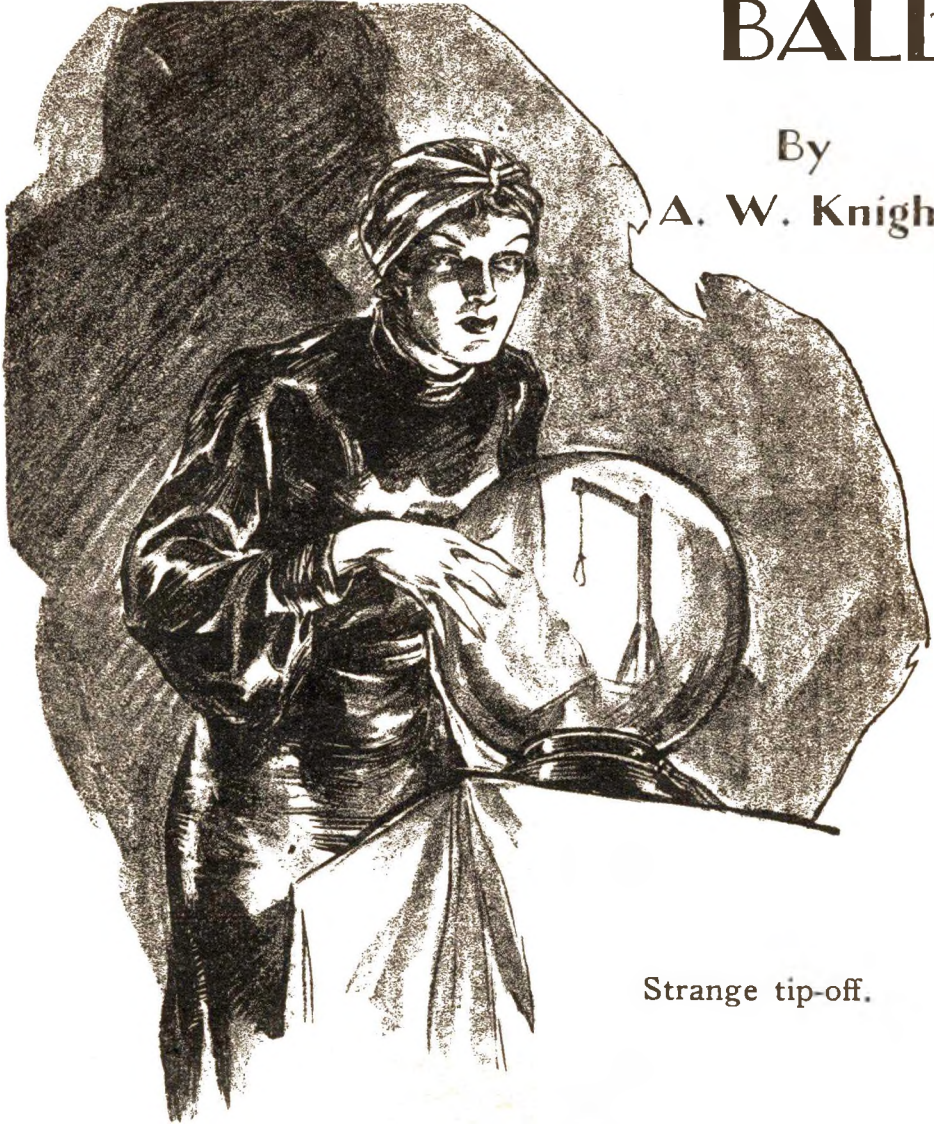
"Listen, Kid," the blonde was saying, her voice husky, "we're going back to Arizona. We're taking that money and buying a sheep farm somewhere, just me and you. Away from these slickers who play you dirt."

Andreo Christobal Fernando Ossi, alias Kid Tarzan, opened a puffed and blackened eye. "*Angela mia*," he sighed.

Flora de Flora, born Flossie Barnes, blushed for the first time in fifteen years. "Can that, Kid! I'm no angel. Say, I was going to double-cross you myself. Sure I was till—till—oh, hell! Guess it's like the papers say—your sock appeal!"

UNDER THE CRYSTAL BALL

By
A. W. Knight



Strange tip-off.

ONE Saturday afternoon in early October I went to see Madame Zambroski. My kid brother dragged me. So help me, that's the only alibi I've got. Me, Bert Norton, supposed to be a smart dick, rubbing noses with a crystal gazer with nothing on the ball! Or so I thought.

It happened this way. I was spending the week-end with my brother Jack. His wife was up in the country. What she gave out was that she was antique hunting, but maybe my visit had something to do with the trip. We don't get along: she claims that a private detective is two octaves lower in the social scale than a bootblack, and what I

claimed—but not to Jack—isn't printable. Anyway, she was away, and Jack and I woke up Saturday morning with nothing special to do. Jack had made me promise that over the week-end I'd forget the Snyder killing and concentrate on taking it easy.

Over breakfast I noticed that Jack seemed preoccupied. He kept looking at me sheepishly and saying nothing. Finally he blurted: "How'd you like to have your fortune told?"

I was surprised. "Don't make me laugh!" I said.

He leaned across the table, and he was in earnest. "This is on the level," he said, his eyes holding mine. "I've been to her myself. Twice. She told me things that—well, it's incredible!"

I grinned tolerantly and explained. "They're all fakes, kid. Sure they tell you things. But they work you. They're smart. They pump you and you don't realize that you are passing out information. They even pick your pockets for information sometimes. Lay off, Jack; they're the sweetest blackmailers in New York!"

"Not Madame Zambroski!" Jack insisted stubbornly. There was a queer glint in his eyes. "She told me my name. Everything! She even said I had a relative who was a famous operative. Said that for *your* good I ought to bring you around sometime. What do you think of that?"

I finished my coffee. I didn't know just what to think of it. It was rather unusual, to say the least, for a phony crystal gazer to invite a cop for a reading. They don't do that, you know. It got me to wondering.

We argued some more. Jack told me some strange things about this

Madame Zambroski. About her uncanny ability to forecast the future. Even knowing the racket, my hair curled a little.

Jack saw that I was a bit interested and clinched the argument by intimating that I was afraid to go, leery of knowing what was going to happen to me in the future on account of my work. I knew what he was up to, but even so, I couldn't take that, so we got our hats and hopped a cab. Which just goes to show how inconsistent human nature can be.

ON the way, Jack asked me about the Snyder case. In my line, you don't tell what you know. I was indefinite and pointedly unenthusiastic. Jack got sore and I laughed at him. We stopped talking about it, but I kept thinking about it.

J. J. Snyder, wealthy broker, had given me a retainer to work on solving the murder of his wife. The old lady had been stabbed to death, along with her chauffeur, less than two weeks before while returning from one of the "little" theaters out in Westchester. The killing took place on the Bronx River Parkway, and the police had messed up anything in the way of clues there might have been, by the time I was put on. However, the motive was pretty apparent. Robbery. The old lady liked to show her rocks whenever she went out, and whoever bumped her must have netted a couple hundred thou.

I talked to the family, police, servants—the usual routine; then began working on a hunch. I trailed "Spark" Bradley, one of the smoothest gem snatchers in the game. Bradley played a lone hand, and had pulled off some pretty big things in New York since leaving Chicago.

He hadn't been connected with any killings; but they all come to it sometime.

He threw me off—disappeared—but not before I had snooped around and discovered some interesting discrepancies in his alibi for the night of the double murder. I hadn't busted it open, you understand, but I had an idea that I'd be able to with a little luck and hard work.

Peculiar thing about this Bradley. He got inside information somehow that never went sour. They said he mixed with the have-arriveds on Park and Fifth. And I guess he did. But even that didn't explain the amount of inside knowledge he had on the plans and doings of the idle rich.

The cab suddenly swerved to the curb and Jack said, "Here we are!" He jumped out of the bus and paid the driver. He was pretty excited. I looked the neighborhood over—expensive part of Madison Avenue.

"She has a swell apartment," Jack explained. "Nothing cheap or underhanded about her!"

"So you say!"

He gave me a coldly scornful look and went through the revolving door. I followed, wondering if the poor sap had taken a tumble for the peroxide soothsayer. I was curious to see what she looked like.

We took the elevator up—all the way to the roof. I made a mental note of that. This babe was in the gravy all right if she could afford a penthouse! We got out of the elevator and Jack turned right, walking slowly down the corridor. He walked like a man walks whose knees are shaking hands. Either he was in love, or this table tipper had him scared silly of her abilities.

"By the way," I asked, as he paused before a walnut-paneled door, "what's the price? You know;

how much is she asking for a séance or whatever it is?"

Jack coughed. "Twenty-five," he said.

I pretended to look happier. "Oh. Two bits isn't so bad."

"I didn't say two bits. And this would be cheap at half the price!"

I knew what the kid had meant to say, but I had to have some fun out of the damn-foolishness. "Half the price?" I said politely. "Still doesn't sound cheap to me."

Jack said something under his breath and rang the bell.

I called his attention to the fact that the door wasn't altogether shut. "It's not on the latch. Let's just walk in and take a gander."

"We can't do that!" Jack told me. He seemed horrified.

I shoved the door open, calling over my shoulder: "Come on. If this dame is as good as you say she is, she'll be expecting us!"

THE reception room was small, exquisitely furnished, and rather dark. We stood in the center of the floor, looking for the madame. I half expected her to materialize suddenly with a phosphorescent glow in the darkest corner: one of their favorite stunts; and one which, though eerie to the uninitiated, is quite easy to explain.

Nothing happened, and I noticed that a dim light burned in the larger room beyond. I started for it, then stopped suddenly as the sound of angry voices reached me, low-pitched and tense. They seemed to come from a room to the right of the one in which the light burned.

Jack grabbed my arm. "Say," he said in a stage whisper, "maybe we'd better duck out!"

"We'd be twenty-five dollars smarter," I agreed, stepping quietly

into the larger room, "but you've got me curious."

The voices were clearer, more distinct, now. I got a little of what was being said.

"I'm wise to your racket, sister. An' I know somebody that'd give plenty to hear about it, see?"

I grinned to myself. The bird had a whining falsetto which nevertheless was threatening. Then the woman spoke. She seemed neither excited nor alarmed. Merely amused. And her voice was low and musical. She said:

"Why, you cheap grifter! Think you can shake me down, do you? I've got half a mind to——"

Again the whine; now with a note of stark terror in it:

"You wouldn't do that, sister. Don't tell him! I sort of thought you and me could have some fun, see? I wasn't going to squeal anyway, see. I only thought that maybe on account of old times——"

There was a short silence. I pussyfooted over to the closed door of the third room and glued my ear to the crack. Finally the girl spoke.

"I've had enough of your threats," she said, ominously quiet. "I think I will tell him." A pause, and then, in the same beautiful, deadly voice: "Yes."

Nothing more.

I tried the doorknob. It turned. I twisted it all the way and put my weight against the door slowly. It began to open inward. Suddenly there was an insane yell, a curious mixture of fear and hate, and the sound of a heavy body flinging across the room, upsetting furniture.

There sounded a guttural sobbing in the lower register, an insane growling, the words, widely spaced:

"You—won't—tell—nobody!"

The woman screamed once. Behind me, Jack said something unintelligible and surged forward. I flung the door wide and stepped into the room.

On the far side, flattened against the wall, was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Even with her tongue protruding, her face turning bluish black, and her eyes bulging, she was unforgettable. Her figure was blocked by the burly brute who was enthusiastically choking her to death, but her face, capped by raven hair which shone like raw silk, was Madonnalike. I saw, in the space of a moment, what it was that had hog tied Jack's emotions.

WHAT I saw and what I thought took place in a split second. Even as my mind formed opinions, I was sprinting across the room. I grabbed her assailant by the scruff of the neck and yanked. I'm supposed to be pretty strong; anyway, Mr. Blackmailer went spinning over the floor and drove his head against the opposite wall. He was a tough customer. He got right up and came back for more.

He swung with his right. I stepped inside his fist and poked my left in his face. His nose leaned to starboard, spouting blood. Just to make sure he wouldn't bother us any more, I stepped back, measured him with my right, and let fly. Then I turned my attention to the girl.

She still leaned against the wall. Her eyes were bright with a peculiar excitement. Her glance flicked my face like the caress of a hand. I saw that she was trembling and eased her into a chair. As I did so, one soft, white shoulder brushed mine, and—— Well, the contact affected me more powerfully than I

was willing to admit: this babe had everything!

She looked at Jack and said, "Good morning, Mr. Norton." It was still an effort for her to talk. Jack flushed and bowed. I could see he had it bad. She looked at me again; then over at the huddled figure against the wall. When her violet eyes swept back to me again she said breathlessly:

"Thank you. But—I don't quite see how you did it. He—he was very strong!" She shuddered.

"I'm strong, too," I said modestly, grinning. "And now, maybe you'd mind telling us what it's all about?"

Her eyes clouded with distaste. "He was my husband," she said quietly. "He has been bothering me for some time. You saved my life, Mr.—"

Jack introduced us. She gave me her hand. It was very soft, very cool. I held it a moment, wondering idly if she had told the truth. Wondering who she really was, what her game was. I decided to try to find out.

"If friend husband bothered you before, why didn't you tell *him* sooner?" I demanded suddenly.

"Him?" she repeated questioningly. Her face blanched. "You heard, then?"

"Some," I admitted. "But not enough." I tapped a cigarette on my thumb. "Who is this great god Brown?"

She hesitated a second. Then, with admirable composure and straightforwardness, lied: "Why, nobody at all. You see, I was pretending. Anything—anything to scare that animal there." She nodded toward the corner. I lit my cigarette. She was intelligent as well as extraordinarily attractive. That would make it harder, or was I crazy?

I stood up. The room in which we sat looked like a combination boudoir and stage wing. I guessed that madame gave her spooks a pep talk in it before producing them. My hat was on the chair next the girl and I picked it up, gestured with it, smiling.

"We'll leave the boy friend in the gutter on the way out," I said. "Nice to have known you."

Immediately she stood up. "No, you mustn't go! I mean, didn't you come to see me about something?" Her eyes spun imploringly to Jack.

The kid brother said: "Why, yes, as a matter of fact we did. I told Bert you wanted to give him a reading; got him to come over."

I held up my hand. "Sure, but it can wait. Some other time. You better get some rest, sister. You look like a laundry tag just through the mangle."

She made a face, came across the room and put both hands on my forearm. "I'm not tired, Mr. Norton. Really. Now that you're here, I'd love to give you a reading." She paused uncertainly, then continued: "It will make a lot of difference—to you."

I wondered if she were right. Then I heard a scraping noise behind me. Our amateur blackmailer was coming to life. I watched him come all the way, and told him to tag out of there. I also told him that I'd break his neck if he ever came back. He looked at me and believed what I said. After a sour, half-frightened ogle at Madame Zambroski, he dusted off his clothes and limped out of the apartment, holding his jaw. I knew he had a gun, but didn't think he'd use it. That type doesn't—unless you're looking the other way.

The girl asked us to wait in the large inner room. I shrugged and

slumped into the uncomfortable chair she indicated. Jack, visibly excited, followed suit.

PRESENTLY Madame Zambroski entered. She had on a diaphanous robe of silk, embroidered with stars and moons—silver on black. It revealed more of her figure than it did of astrology. She pulled a small table in front of me and sat opposite. She was cute.

There was a large crystal globe on the table before her. Also a pack of cards. The kid looked grave and seemed very nervous. She kept wetting her lips with the tip of her tongue and looking at me.

"Shoot!" I said. "Or isn't that in your bag of tricks?"

She didn't answer. Instead, she moved the crystal a bit and looked steadily down into it. Her beautiful eyes assumed the hypnotic stare of a sleepwalker's.

Presently, she began to talk. It was almost as though she were talking to herself.

As I've said, there was only one dim light in the room. It was eerie: the way she looked; the way she talked; the spectral illumination. All grand stand, naturally, but I began to understand how the yokels fall for it.

"Your name," she said, "is Robert Norton."

"Sure. And I've got a brother named Jack," I grinned.

The girl said tonelessly, "Please don't interrupt. Your work as a sectional operative has given you something of a reputation," she continued. "You don't take cases outside a certain area. You work from maps. You make it your business to know all about the criminals within the boundaries you mark on those maps."

"I see you read the papers," I said.

From across the room Jack hissed to shut up. Madame suddenly leaned forward. She seemed to see something important in the crystal. Her eyes widened.

"I see a man!" she whispered.

I couldn't help snickering.

She went on intensely: "He is tall and dark——"

I started to laugh louder, it sounded just like the usual tea-leaf gravy, but what she said next sobered me in a hurry.

"And there is a scar on his face, running from the corner of his left eye to just beneath the lobe of his left ear."

She paused dramatically.

"This man is suave, well-dressed." Madame Zambroski was speaking crisply now, her words clipped, impersonal. "But he is afraid. He is afraid of you."

I sat straighter, looked at the girl through narrowed eyes. No one knew that I was tailing Spark Bradley except myself and Jack. And there was only one man with a scar such as she had described: Spark had stopped a shrapnel splinter back in 1916.

The girl's beautiful eyes came up, looked straight into mine. She seemed to be seeing through and beyond me.

"This man is constantly looking over his shoulder," she said. "I see another man. This man is following the first. The second man is yourself."

I sensed, rather than saw, Jack's sudden start. Jack was thinking about Spark Bradley, too. I hadn't told him much. But he knew the general description; and he knew, too, that I had been tailing him, and that I was in a fair way to hang something on him.

I WAITED for Madame Zambroski to go ahead. There was something queer about the business. The room was very quiet.

She continued: "I see a rope. A noose. It is a gallows. That is what the tall, dark man is afraid of. And you"—she hesitated, looking directly at me with a strange expression—"are the hangman!"

I essayed a laugh. "Very pretty," I said. "But a trifle figurative."

She seemed not to have heard me. Her eyes refocused on the crystal ball and she resumed talking.

"I see a dance floor. Many people. Evening clothes. The first man is there. You, too, are there. There seems to be some connection between this place and the sign of death."

She paused, put both hands to her face as though completely tired. Then she glanced up, said slowly, "Am I right?"

Before I could answer, Jack blurted: "I'll tell the world! Bert's following a crook, and your description fits to a T. That ballroom you described is the Paradise Night Club, and the crook's alibi——"

I jumped up. My chair went over backward. "Shut up!" I told Jack coldly. I turned to the girl. Her glance flickered away.

I grabbed her by the shoulder and said, "What the hell is this?"

She twisted away from my grip. Her arm, beneath the transparent silken garment, was soft and warm. But her eyes weren't. Nor her voice.

"Take your hands off me!" She stood away a pace, glaring. "You're just the material-minded type that can't believe in supernatural phenomena because you won't. Simply because I tell you a few simple truths is no reason to start mauling me around. They don't burn peo-

ple at the stake any more for being psychic, you know!"

I bowed ironically, clicking my heels. The kid had put me in a funny spot. On the face of it, she was right and I was wrong. I couldn't explain away what she had said, and I wanted time to think. I picked up my hat.

"No hard feelings, sister. You surprised me, that was all. I'm sorry—maybe."

She stood staring, and though I might have been wrong, I would have sworn that I saw something like triumph in her gorgeous eyes. Tentatively, she said:

"I was right, then the crystal was quite correct?" She seemed anxious for an answer, and Jack gave the wrong one.

"Of course, you were right! Why, everything you said——"

I managed to stop him and get him out of the place before he told more. In the cab, going back, he was plenty sore. It seemed that I'd been a boor. Why, anybody could see that Madame Zambroski was genuine. Hadn't she proved it to me? And so forth and so on.

I explained that I had only stopped him from giving my life history so that, in case we went again, she wouldn't have advance information. That stopped him for a minute, but I had an idea that he was only keeping quiet in order to think up something else to say.

AT the kid's place, Jack produced cigars and whisky and soda. He knew my weaknesses. He wasn't through with me yet. Taking a comfortable chair, he threw his legs over an arm and went to work.

"Isn't she gorgeous?"

"Nifty," I admitted cautiously.

Jack snorted. "Well, what do

you think about the occult sciences now?" he demanded at last.

I blew some smoke rings.

Jack said, leaning forward, "Hell, she told you everything except your laundry mark, didn't she?"

"Maybe."

"Look," said Jack, "she described Spark Bradley perfectly. Said that you were shadowing him. Mentioned that he was especially frightened about the Paradise Club in connection with his alibi. Right?"

"As far as it goes," I agreed. "In effect, yes, that's what she said."

"And it was true! That's the amazing part of it. From the little you've told me, I knew that she had hung one on the button. Even if I couldn't have told it from the way you acted at the time."

"Well——" I said.

Jack was indignant. "Either you've got to believe in her system, or you've got to explain it, Bert!"

"I'm going to explain it, fella. The words are all right, but the music is sour." I leaned back, studying my glass.

Jack poured himself another drink. "About Spark's alibi. What about the Paradise in connection with it?"

"Ask the madame," I suggested.

I wondered if I hadn't already told too much of my suspicions and their partial confirmation to the kid brother. I couldn't remember exactly what I'd said. Bradley's alibi, at the time of the Snyder theft and killing, centered around the Paradise. I had asked some questions; just enough to get the idea that the alibi was too smooth to be genuine. Head waiters are good liars, but poor actors.

"Maybe I will ask her," Jack said.

I pointed a finger at him. "If you see her again, without me, I'll bash

your head in! I think I know how she got her information!"

Jack said, "How?" Then his face turned dull red and he frowned. "You mean you think I spilled the works to her the first reading she gave me?"

"It's possible, isn't it?"

He stood up, and there was no mistaking his sincerity. "I swear, Bert, that I didn't. Not a smell! What do you think I am, anyway?"

I was satisfied. In my racket you get to know when a man is lying. Of course, Jack might have given the information without realizing it, but I was inclined to give that theory the air in this case.

Jack continued, with the air of one under suspicion who realizes how ridiculous the accusations against him are: "Uncanny, eh? She had absolutely no way of knowing the things she told you, you know. Only we two know about your working on Bradley, and I didn't tell and I don't believe you did."

I'd done some thinking. I sat up and pointed at Jack with my cigar. "All right. Now I'll do some crystal gazing." I got up and paced nervously back and forth.

"Listen, Jack. We'll hear from Madame Zambroski again. Probably to-morrow morning. She'll call you and ask to speak to me. She will want me to come back for another reading—a very important one. And she will insist that I go alone!"

Jack's mouth dropped open. "How do you know—if you do?"

I grinned. "Me, I'm clairvoyant, too. Been meaning to tell you."

Jack's eyes were popping. "You're only guessing. Tell me what you've got to go on!"

"All right," I said. "Saturn is very dim to-day. Venus is favor-

able to romance. And there are sun spots on Walla Walla."

"Rats!" said Jack dispassionately.

I HAD quite a time getting to sleep that night. It was a queer business. There seemed to be only one solution; but even if I accepted it, there were a lot of questions begging for answers. At that, I wondered if my crack about Venus had been near the mark. I hadn't told Jack what Madame Zambroski had done while he was finding his hat.

She had come close and put her hands on my shoulders. She had said, very low, "You're funny. I could go for you." Then she had said, sighing, "You probably saved my life just now, and I——" She had stopped, biting her red lips. Then, without warning, she had kissed me full on the lips.

Even now, I could see her eyes as they had been at that moment. Bright, yet piercing me through with the softness of controlled emotion. Pleading, somehow. And terribly frightened and sick.

I turned over, feeling that the answer to the riddle lay in those beautiful eyes. Was I on the right track? I honestly didn't know. I was simply playing a hunch.

Would we hear from Madame Zambroski to-morrow or not?

We did. The call came through a few minutes after nine o'clock Sunday morning. Jack answered the telephone. "The wife," he hazarded, smiling the goofy smile of people in love.

But it wasn't his wife. He said, "Hello," then listened intently, his eyes widening. When he turned to me, his hand shook.

"For you. It's her. I recognized her voice. She says that it's terribly

important that she speak to you at once."

I took the instrument away from him, said, "Bert Norton speaking. . . . What's so important about it? Can't you tell me over the phone? . . . Oh, all right. . . . Alone, eh? . . . O. K., sister."

When I had returned the telephone to the hook, Jack yelled: "What did she say?"

I said, "About what I said she would yesterday." I scooped up my hat, stopping for a second at the door. "She wants to see me solo, Jack. If I'm not back in two hours, send the police up for a reading."

TWENTY minutes later, I was sitting across the table from Madame Zambroski. The room, as before, was in semidarkness. She had received me without a word, seated me at once. Now she stared at the crystal. Her eyes were big, and they seemed paler. Also her face seemed pinched by some secret terror.

That look on her beautiful face didn't go with what I thought might be going to happen. I kept one hand on the automatic in my pocket and suggested, shortly, that she tell me what it was all about.

"I've been thinking about you," she said softly, looking me full in the eye.

"So you called me up and told me you had to see me, that it was a matter of life or death!"

She ignored my sarcasm, continued: "I read the crystal this morning after you'd gone—I mean after you had gone last night."

"Well, which?" I said impatiently. "Or are you getting me mixed up with a couple other customers?"

"I saw something in the crystal which I believe I should tell you." She passed the palm of her hand

wearily across her forehead. Went on, more rapidly: "I must tell you. It is a matter of life and death!"

"Whose death?" I asked, thinking I knew the answer.

"Probably—yours."

If she had expected theatrics from me, she must have been disappointed. I said, "Well, well."

She leaned across the table, her pale face flushing with impatience.

"I'm telling you the truth! I've looked into the future, I tell you, and an attempt will be made on your life to-night!"

I grew wary. I hadn't guessed correctly, then. Or was this some sort of trap?

"How do you know that, sister?"

"You fool!" she cried, suddenly standing. "I have read the future. The dark man you have been following is going to kill you. At nine o'clock to-night you will be shot in your own apartment unless you listen to me!"

"I believe I'm getting interested." I grinned, leaning toward her. "How psychic are you? You've told me this much, now suppose you go the whole hog!"

She put a hand to her breast and took a step backward. "No. No! I have told you too—I have said enough already. Please go. It—it isn't ethical to have told you what I did. Now, please——"

"All right," I said. "I'll go. And thanks for the reading. What's the damage?"

"Nothing." Madame Zambroski seemed to wish to be rid of me in a hurry. Fear and regret and a sort of glory were written on her delicate features. She opened the outer door.

"Please!" she said, adding, "This isn't ethical. You won't tell any one?"

"How many times are you going

to tell me it isn't ethical?" I asked. "No, I won't tell anybody."

She took a step forward, handed me my hat. I took it, bowed, and said, "I sure wish you'd let me do something in return."

She pulled a fast one, then. She said, so low I could hardly hear the words, "You wouldn't kiss me—would you?"

Her eyes were veiled, but the faintest smile imaginable touched her lips. I told her I didn't mind if I did. I kissed her, then, and she clung to me a moment. Going downstairs, I remembered virtuously what somebody had told me once, or maybe it was me that told somebody else: Gigolos make poor detectives.

I needed to remember something like that just then.

Jack was waiting for me. When I told him what had happened, his eyes started to drop out on his vest.

"They can do that, you know," he said. "They can foretell death!"

"Of course," I suggested, "there's no question in your mind but what the dame is on the level."

"What do you mean?"

"This. You really believe, don't you, that madame can stare at that glass ball of hers and see the shadow of coming events?"

Jack shrugged aside the question. He began pacing nervously the length of the room. "Naturally. She's proved her capability already. What—what are you going to do about to-night?"

"Get shot—by proxy!"

I explained my plan. "It's vital," I concluded, "that I know whether Madame Zambroski can actually foretell the future—in this particular instance."

Jack wanted to know what was so vital about that. "Seems to me, Bert, that Spark Bradley is the man you ought to be worrying about. Ma-

dame Zambroski doesn't count; except that you're damn lucky you went to see her."

Jack's face was flushed, his eyes were dilated and unnaturally bright. "Gives me the shivers," he stated morosely. "She's uncanny. She does it, but how? How!"

"That," I said, "is what I want to find out."

THAT night I went to my own apartment uptown. Jack came along; I couldn't shake him. My living room is small, but there are two closets opening off it: One in an entrance hall, the other, a mirrored affair, at one end of the room itself. I chose the latter and installed Jack in the former. He had a gun and knew how to use it.

My dummy sat at a desk directly opposite the window. I had procured a dummy at a theatrical agent's and dressed it in my own dressing gown. It was a good dummy as dummies go, and read a book, propped before it, with commendable attention. Any one looking into the room from the window, and seeing only the shoulders and back of the wigged head, would be nicely fooled.

All we had to do was wait. I had a ground-floor apartment for obvious reasons; though its accessibility to an assassin wasn't one of them. Bradley, if the madame were calling her shots right, wouldn't have much difficulty in achieving his purpose.

I had no idea how long we'd have to wait; I wasn't at all sure that we weren't idiots to wait at all. Only the desk lamp in the living room burned, and the rest of the room was in a dusklike obscurity. From time to time I could hear Jack moving restlessly at his post. An hour passed. Two. And then, just when I was ready to come out of my hole

and give myself the horselaugh, it happened.

There was a hollow *plop*, the tinkle of falling glass; the dummy, slumped forward, dying a realistic and quite painless death.

I fired at the flash, out there beyond the broken window, automatically. Without hope of hitting anything. Then I barged out of the apartment, raced down the foyer hall and jumped out on the sidewalk, my gun ready.

I didn't expect to get a pop at any one, and I didn't. Pretty soon I ambled back in. People were getting curious and sticking their heads out the window. The would-be assassin had used a silencer, but I hadn't. Apparently everybody in the building had waked up but the superintendent.

Jack gabbled at me as soon as I stuck my head in the room, showed me a neat round hole in the back of the dummy's head. Sawdust trickled out. I felt funny, looking at that dummy. I would have been very, very dead if I had sat at the desk reading to-night as I usually did. If mental telepathy were among Madame Zambroski's accomplishments, she was properly thanked.

I switched off the desk lamp and we sat in darkness. Just in case Bradley—if it had been him—sneaked back for a look.

"Well, what are you going to do?" Jack demanded, in a stage whisper.

"Think!" I returned, in a loud voice.

I thought. I thought so hard that my head ached. But I had begun to see daylight—if it didn't turn out to be a false dawn.

After a while I sent Jack home to bed. He didn't want to go. He had, according to his lights, seen miracles

performed; and he wanted to see more, wanted to talk about what he had seen. You couldn't blame him. It was queer.

At the door I said, "If you get a phone call to-morrow, no matter whether it makes sense or not, ring me here at once!"

"Phone call?" Jack began to get excited. "You know something, Bert! You expect something to happen!"

"I do," I admitted. "And if it doesn't, you can pack me off to the nearest nut house!"

The kid ambled off, mumbling something about banshees and beautiful witches who forecast death with considerably better luck than the weather bureau calls its shots.

I sat for a while, smoking, the spark of my butt shielded by an old hat. I thought I had it. I felt that I knew what was happening, and why it happened. But not exactly why, at that. Was the motive revenge? Or was it—but, no, that was ridiculous. Eyes and lips could lie—for a price.

I KILLED the following morning loafing around the house.

Jack telephoned twice. He said he wanted to know what I was doing. The second time I told him that when I needed a nurse I'd use the agencies and bounced the receiver on the hook hard.

Waiting is bad. I had a peanut-butter sandwich for lunch and hopped a cab for the Paradise. I left the janitor's child in charge of the telephone with instructions to call me at the Paradise if any messages came through.

Bradley was at the bar, getting plastered. That was unusual. I kept out of sight and watched him. It only made me thirsty. But I fig-

ured that the lid wouldn't blow off so long as I had my eye on him.

He was a smooth-looking little bird; and he seemed to have matters of the soul on his mind.

I got worrying about that telephone call and went back to the apartment. The janitor's girl swore nothing had come over the wire. I thanked her with a half dollar and sat down at the desk. After a half hour passed, I got up, took my coat and hat off and sat down again.

Two hours passed. I began to fidget. I even considered the advisability of going up to Madame Zambroski's apartment. I discarded the idea: didn't want to go off half cocked.

When *would* that message come?

Ten minutes later, Jack called.

I recognized his voice and asked him did he get a phone call all of a sudden.

Jack chuckled. The sound made a funny buzz in the transmitter. He said: "Not all of a sudden; about three hours ago." He went on laughing.

I felt relieved. He would have called me if it had been important, if it had been the call I'd been expecting.

"What's the joke?" I asked. "And what do you want?"

"I'm laughing," he said, "because Madame Zambroski is a big fake. You were right to be leery right along. Guess what she's gone and done now!"

I wet my lips. "Did Madame Zambroski call you this afternoon?"

"About three hours ago, like I've been telling you."

"Jack," I snapped, "this may be serious! Damn serious! Cut the comedy. Did she call you to-day?"

My tone must have scared Jack.

"I'm telling you," he said, sobering. "And what she said, proves that she's a fake, because they can't foretell that, you know."

"What?"

"Can't"—Jack's voice had an edge of laughter again—"foretell their own death."

I squeezed the handle of the telephone hard. Said: "Listen. Listen to me. Chances are that in this particular instance this particular crystal gazer can do just that. I've reason to think she's going to be rubbed out; maybe has been already. Now spill it and in a hurry. When?"

Jack wasn't laughing now. I probably sounded wild to him, but he knew something was wrong somewhere.

"She called me. I told you how long ago. Said she had been reading the crystal and was about to predict her own demise. Set the time between five and six o'clock. But they can't do that, Bert. Everybody knows——"

"Shut up!" I said. I glanced at my watch. It was twenty minutes of six. I spoke rapidly. "There's a chance. Grab a cab. Go over. Cover the apartment door. Don't let Spark Bradley out, but don't go up until I get there. G'-by!"

I slammed down the instrument, scooped my hat off the rack and tore for the street. I hoped Jack would obey orders. I was sorry I'd told him to go over at all. He wasn't the law; and what could he do if Bradley didn't want to be stopped?

FINDING a cab was easy. I told the cabby to drive like hell and waved a ten-spot under his nose. With luck, I would get there about as soon as the kid.

I did. Our taxis hooked bumpers pulling to the curb in front of the apartment. We left the drivers to

talk things over. I bolted through the revolving doors, Jack at my heels.

"He may come down the stairs," I said. "Go up that way. I'll take the elevator."

That eased my conscience. I figured that what trouble there was going to be, if any, would be over before Jack could run up all those stairs.

I guessed right again. When I reached the floor where the madame resided, I turned down the corridor and shoved open her door: it was closed but not locked. The sound of voices came from the inner room. Neither voice—one masculine, one feminine—was raised. They spoke calmly, those two.

I was halfway to the room, when the shot was fired. I sprinted. I was too late to do much for Madame Zambroski, poor kid. But I was in plenty of time to shoot Bradley's gun out of his mitt and put the irons on him.

Then Jack got there.

I sent him downstairs with Bradley; used the phone to call the precinct and suggest they send up a bus to pick up the murderer. They started to argue and ask questions, then quit. They know me there.

Madame Zambroski was dead. A round hole in the temple proved it. I said something about Bradley under my breath and straightened the poor kid out as best I could.

You shouldn't speak of a corpse this way, but she was still beautiful. I stood looking at her, wondering why it had been necessary, in her eyes, to carry her two-timing game through to the bitter end.

Presently Jack returned. He was profoundly shocked and more than a little upset. I didn't blame him. I was that way myself.

"But how——" he began at last, in a dazed voice.

I interrupted with: "Say, did she say anything else over the phone? Anything you haven't told me?"

Jack considered. "Yes. She said something about the crystal always telling everything. She repeated it twice. Said that you would understand."

I nodded grimly and crossed to the table on which stood the crystal ball. I looked at it, picked it up. Underneath was a sheet of plain, white note paper, neatly folded in the middle. It was addressed to me.

"What's it say?" Jack demanded, as I stuffed it into a pocket.

"We'll run up to the apartment," I suggested. "We can read it there. Although I believe I can tell you what it says without looking at it."

When the cops came, we left. I said I'd be down to the station later. The cops looked doubtful and allowed us to go.

ALL the way to the apartment, Jack asked questions and got no answers. He acted a little dazed. When we reached our destination we grabbed off a couple of comfortable chairs and nibbled at our thoughts a while in silence. Then the kid began getting curious again.

"You said you know what's in that note," he reminded me.

I nodded. "I know. But there's one thing that doesn't click. Why did she go all the way through? I don't think she had to, you know. Here's hoping that the note tells us that little thing!"

"Read it!" he said.

"Wait," I said. "I'll do my guessing first. Then we'll check on it."

I lit a cigarette; scaled one at

Jack. He fumbled for a match and let smoke drift from his nostrils, looking at me expectantly.

"To begin with," I said slowly, "I was able to dope things out for the simple reason that I don't believe in this reading-the-future stuff. And I'm stubborn."

Jack made a grimace, and I continued.

"Now Madame Zambroski predicted certain things. These things came through just like she said they would. So I either had to admit she was super-super, or I could work on the theory that she was about as psychic as an alley cat, and was somehow or other able to forecast the future regardless."

Jack frowned. "How could she, though?"

"That's what I wanted to know. That first time we went to her, now. She was giving information to get it. I felt that absolutely. And a nice job of pumping she did, too. When you piped up and admitted that she had guessed correctly about my activity in the Snyder case, she had the look of a person whose suspicions are confirmed.

"Now there was only one way that she could have known what she did know—provided, of course, she had no occult power. You remember what you said: about only you and me knowing that I was tailing Bradley? Yes. Well, there was one other person who might have known about that. Bradley himself!"

"And you suspected, Bert, that she was in cahoots with Bradley?"

"I did more than suspect it. I was sure of it. But I had to have proof. As I went along, I doped it out that Madame Zambroski was Bradley's source of society information. She gave readings; pumped the bluebloods. Then, when Bradley had the info he wanted, he would

go into his act and give the papers something else to talk about.

"I'll admit, Jack, that occasionally that girl had me fooled. Once or twice, I doubted my doubts. That business of the strangle-minded gentleman at the time of our first visit threw me off a bit, too. I thought that it meant something. I'm convinced, now, that it didn't. The big moose probably was her husband.

"Then she overplayed her hand by telling me that Bradley was going to take a pop at me. I thought that it was a trap. And when you and I and the dummy found out that it wasn't, I was up a tree. I still don't see, exactly, why she did that. To get even with Bradley, maybe. How she must have hated him!"

"I think," Jack said thoughtfully, "there might have been another reason for it, too."

"Eh?"

Jack paid no attention. His face showed pinched lines of concentration. "But about her forecasting her own death," he demanded. "How d'you figure that out?"

"Easy. Bradley found out somehow that we fooled him with the dummy. Maybe he saw me at the Paradise the next day, though I doubt it. Anyhow, he knew that I'd been tipped off; and he also knew, believing in crystal gazers about as much as I did, that there was only one person who could have put me wise.

"Now the girl discovered that he was wise. Don't ask me how—how should I know? She knew, too, what his answer would be to her double-crossing. Maybe she figured that he would do the job in her place—it would be easier. And she doubtless knew that he would handle her *after* business hours. So that suspicion would be thrown on one

of her clients. That's how she could predict the time so accurately."

Jack gave me a peculiar look. "All right. But why didn't she pull out? I don't get it."

"Neither do I," I replied, reaching for the note which I had found under the crystal ball. "Maybe the answer is in here."

I read it through. Handed it over. "Read it," I suggested. "Out loud. Maybe if I hear it again that way, I can figure it better. Something I don't quite get—"

Jack read:

"Bradley killed me. I loved him once, but he is an animal. He isn't human. I hate him. I have hated him for a long time. You have guessed things, Bert Norton. I knew that. You'll be able to put two and two together. I could have run away after my husband squealed that I had tipped you off. But Bradley would have caught up with me sometime. He is like that. Besides, you would never have been able to hang the Snyder killings on him. His alibi was gold-bricked, but air-tight. Now you'll have him dead to rights. Your brother will tell you that I called, and when you come to the apartment, after I am dead, you will find this note. I am glad that I am doing something that will help you in your business. I tipped you off because—well, never mind that. I have money in my own name at the Midland Trust Co. Bury me with it. And, if you feel like it, attend the funeral services. I've been lonely."

Jack stared at the floor for a long time after he had finished reading the note. "That makes everything clear," he said at last.

I didn't agree with him. "Still don't quite understand why she tipped me off about Bradley's intention to shoot me in the back," I demurred. I frowned, shaking my head.

Then Jack said something queer.

He said, his face turning very red: "You're an awfully big damn fool, Bert."

The Language Of Flowers

By Victor Maxwell

They say daisies won't
tell, but orange blos-
soms—

CHAPTER I.

"MAKE A SHOWING."

THE rain, sweeping down from frayed, low-hanging clouds, dashed onto the pavements, then rose in a fine mist that glimmered in the reflected lights of store windows and traffic. The night was the kind in which nobody is out except policemen and taxi drivers, and in which they kept under cover as much as possible. Just as a particularly boisterous gust of wind swept through the city canyons, carrying the rain with it in stinging sheets, the whole sky was suddenly illumined with a sickly greenish glare, the disturbed air throbbed with a concussion, and the night again became black and swishing with rain.

Immediately following the glaring, greenish flash the telephone switchboard at headquarters began to sparkle and gleam with red and



yellow lights. Everybody wanted to know what had happened, was it earthquake or explosion, and where. Patrolmen reported it as "up north, beyond the city limits"; the best the operator could reply to queries was: "Don't know yet, trying to locate it. Outside the city, anyway."

Half an hour passed, then some one at the sheriff's office thought of the police, and telephoned over what it was. "The powder house out to Kingman's love nest—coupla our deputies 've gone over. Likely some wop smoking in the shack, trying to keep out of the wet. No, we ain't got no report yet, except what it was."

The switchboard operator was much relieved; he plugged in on the chief's line.

"Just found out what that was, sir," he reported. "The powder house up at Kingman's castle. Sheriff's men have gone out, sir."

Chief Roberts grunted, put his



telephone back on the desk. For a moment he smiled grimly as he thought of the foolishness of one of the city's richest men—and then he stiffened in his chair, reached for his telephone again, and snapped the hook with one finger.

"Give me the dicks. . . . Hello, that you, Riordan? . . . This is Roberts. Powder house out to Kingman's has blown up. . . . Yeah, that was what it was. You better hop in your bus and go out there. . . . I know it's outside the city, but Kingman is a big man and it won't do the department any harm to have somebody show out there. Take somebody with you and roll out. It'll make a showing."

Detective Sergeant Riordan, in charge of the bureau of criminal investigation from four o'clock in the afternoon to midnight, or whenever after that he was "cleared," answered respectfully, hung up the receiver, glanced out of the window at

the weather, and swore heartily. He had been skimming through the pawnbrokers' reports, with Detective Halloran at his side, and he turned to the veteran, two-hundred-and-eleven-pound sleuth with a grunt.

"Yuh might as well suffer with me, yuh big lummoX," he said. "That was the Old Man. He says that bump was out to Kingman's love nest, an' for us to go out an' make a showin'. Nice weather for a drive—go climb into yuhr divin' suit an' meet me in the garage. I'll get young Willis or somebody to sit in for me here. Now don't beef about it, but get on yuhr way."

EN ROUTE to the spot, Riordan and Halloran recalled the madness of old Luke Kingman, realtor and investor, one of the city's richest citizens. Some months past he had apparently suffered an attack of acute mental senility and

suddenly wed Myra Concannon, who was leading woman of a local stock company. After a honeymoon of a week, they had gone up the river to Kingman's estate on Rock Island, and there taken quarters in a rambling log cabin which the aged millionaire had utilized as a fishing lodge.

Interviewed by local scribes, Myra had declared "we are just too happy for words," and had further made copy for the press and at the same time launched a string of vaudeville jokes by adding: "and Daddy Kingman and I are going to live all alone in his big log cabin, where we will make our love nest. I'll do all the cooking and make the beds, and show him I can be a good wife."

Apparently she had. For weeks Kingman and his young bride had remained at Rock Island. Kingman's huge mansion in town was occupied only by a retinue of servants. His chauffeur drove daily to Rock Island and received from the "new missus" lists of such things as were wanted, went marketing, delivered his purchases at the log cabin, and then returned to the city. The press interviewed the Kingman servants and kept the public informed, more or less truthfully, of what was ordered for the love nest. But nobody saw Kingman or his bride.

That is, nobody but Walter Stowell saw them. Stowell was an architect, famous at thirty. The climax of his early success had been reached when he was summoned to Rock Island and commissioned to build a castle overlooking the river. "A castle for my queen," old Kingman had said; and Stowell let that get into the papers. It was good reading and it advertised Stowell. So the architect had prepared plans, had them approved by the newly

wed pair, and since then had been superintending erection of the pile: a huge, beetling structure of rock and masonry, rising sheer from the water on the western side of Rock Island. To quarry much of the material a contractor had been blasting rock from the upper end of the island, so there was a considerable supply of explosive on hand. And that, according to report, was what had caused the blast.

Riordan's big red roadster rumbled over the private bridge to the island just as he and Halloran had completed recalling to each other the details of Kingman's sudden marriage and following developments. As the car slid to a stop on the rain-soaked roadway they both piled out, stabbing at the night with the rays of their flashlights. The air was filled with acrid fumes and a dozen or so men were milling about, some with lanterns and some with flares. The driveway was covered with shattered branches and boughs, fragments of planking and other débris. A deputy sheriff, his star gleaming against his French-blue uniform, suddenly loomed up before the two city officers.

"Huh, you here, too!" he ejaculated. "Well, you're too late. All gone—all vamous."

"Meanin' what?" demanded Riordan.

"The love nest, sarge. All blown to hell."

"Yuh mean the cabin, the lodge?"

"Uh-huh. Nothing but a pile of junk. Can't find hair nor hide of them, either."

"Yuh mean Kingman——"

"Sarge, I mean if Kingman or his wife was in it, they're in the happy huntin' grounds now. The contractor's foreman has gone over to his camp to get a gasoline flare. When he comes back we can see more, per-

haps. Meantime there's no log cabin, no nothing. Just a hole in the ground."

AN ambulance rolled over the private bridge, siren wailing, and the piercing beams of the four headlights cut through the rain to reveal a scene of utter ruin. One side of the great cabin still stood, mainly intact, and served as a background against which the horror of the blast was revealed in all its stark tragedy. Except for the massive back wall, everything was a shambles of destruction.

The contractor's foreman, with some of his men, arrived carrying the gasoline torch. They got it set up and lighted, and the flaring brilliance only made the scene of destruction more complete. Halloran joined the sheriff's men and others in a methodical search of the ruins, while Riordan drew the foreman to one side.

"Tell me," he said.

"I can't tell you much, sergeant," answered the man. "I was in my bunk down at the shack, reading, when suddenly she gave a heave. The lights went out and there was a deafening crash. I scrambled out and made for the door. It was raining junk outside—bricks, bits of logs, everything. A teakettle came down a foot from me. I ran to the bridge and found the watchman lying on the planking, dead to the world. I yelled to some of my boys to phone for an ambulance, that the magazine must have let go. That's what I thought it was at first. Then I come up here and found this. I went back, got some of the best boys in my gang, and we been looking ever since—till the sheriff's men come and said we ought to have a flare. So I went back and got out the big torch. That's all I know."

"Yuh been over to the magazine yet?"

"No. It's on the other side of the island."

"Well, come on, let's go. Yuh show me the way."

The powder magazine was a low, stanch shack almost at the edge of the river. The door was open; a crowbar, together with the broken hasp, padlock still attached, was on the ground, telling a mute story. Riordan swept the ground with his flashlight. He pointed to the wet earth, upon which were still imprinted the marks of two pairs of rubber-soled shoes.

"Listen, we got to use our heads," said Riordan. "This is a job, sure. Yuh got any old boxes—powder boxes will do."

The foreman took Riordan's light, stabbed around in the night. A little way off were some discarded cases in which explosives had been packed. While the foreman held the torch beam upon them, Riordan retrieved several, placing them over the footprints near the powder magazine, and setting another over the broken hasp and padlock.

"Now," he said, "yuh keep off them boxes. Let's take a look inside at the powder. Yuh'll know how much ought to be there."

The two entered the magazine, and the foreman made a hasty check.

"Good gosh!" he exclaimed. "Three boxes gone! Enough to blow this island clear out of the river, if it was placed right. Three cases gone!"

Riordan nodded grimly. "That's that, shen," he said. "Now I'll tell yuh what yuh do. Yuh go back an' get one o' them sheriff's men an' tell him what we found. There's got to be a guard put on this stuff the rest o' the night, an' a guard on them

boxes over the footprints. Likely, when daylight comes, somebody can take a look at them prints an' tell us what we've got. I'll stay here till yuh get back. Go get one o' them sheriff's men."

THE foreman slipped off into the dripping night. Riordan, flashlight pointing down, peered under the boxes he had placed over the footprints. Then, still playing the rays from his flashlight on the ground, he followed the prints away from the magazine. They led toward the river, and seemed to disappear in the dark water. He circled back, went around the powder house, and found fainter prints, already partly washed out by the rain, and traced them. They seemed to run in the opposite direction: toward the side of the island on which the log cabin had been. He returned to the boxes, lifted one and, using his body as a shield to keep the rain from the ground, studied the prints intently.

"Huh," he said to himself. "Big shoes an' little shoes, eh? There was two of 'em—mebbe a man an' a boy; mebbe a man an' a woman. Mebbe jus' two men, one big an' one little."

He replaced the box, sat down in the rain and waited. Presently one of the sheriff's deputies came. Riordan warned him of the necessity of preserving the prints by keeping them covered, and then, leaving him on guard, went back to the other side of the island. Then he took a survey of the wreckage about the cabin, gathered in Halloran and climbed into his roadster, turning it about and heading back for headquarters.

"Well, yuh big lummox, what'd yuh make of it?" he asked, as they rolled along.

"Matt, that place was blowed up from inside."

"Huh?"

"From inside, Matt. There was three charges: one against the east wall, one against the west wall, and one against the south."

"Yuhr a powder man, are yuh?"

"No, Matt. But I know something about dynamite. The flooring was all blowed away by them three walls, and the concrete under it was pulverized. There was concrete all under that cabin, Matt, likely with the idea of keeping the dampness out. On three sides it was pulverized right where the center of the walls would be. Then, again, the logs was all blown away from the building, except on the north side. The north wall was out of plumb, leaning in. That would be the rush of air sucked it in. And, it being an inside blast, instead of one laid against the walls on the outside, it would account for how everything in the cabin was mince-meat.

"Matt, dynamite works hardest where it has the most to blow against. If them blasts had been laid outside, the logs might have been blowed to pulpwood, but some of them would have come in and covered up what was in there, so we'd have found something that wasn't all blowed to smithereens. Did you notice there was nothing whole inside at all, Matt, except all them white flower petals scattered all over the floor? Orange blossoms they was, Matt, all over the place. The only reason they was left was because they was so frail the dynamite could find nothing in them to work against."

Riordan gave a grim chuckle. "Yeah. I seen that. Orange blossoms in the love nest. I got me quite a kick out of that. An' now there's

nothin' left to show what was what—not until the chemists get there, an' say mebbe this stain is all that's left o' Kingman, an' that stain is all that's left o' Myra Concannon whom he married."

Halloran nodded. After a moment he turned toward his sergeant.

"You find anything, Matt?"

"Prints, big feller. Big shoes an' little shoes. They was round the magazine, two of 'em. But the rain's washing most of 'em out. I put boxes over some. They come in by the river an' went away by the river after they done the job. An' mebbe yuh think I ain't glad this is a county job, outside o' the city limits. Well, we made a showin' anyway, like the Old Man said. When we get in I'll report to him how yuh found all this out an' what yuh told me about it bein' an inside blast."

CHAPTER II. CROSS CURRENT.

CHIEF ROBERTS—the "Old Man"—was still at headquarters, and Riordan told him all about it. Roberts leaned back in his chair and listened. When the recital was finished he tapped on his desk with his fingers.

"It never does no harm to make a showing, sergeant," he said. "Especially when it's a case of an important man. You can never tell what will come up. But now you forget it—let the county dicks wrestle with this. You might tell them reporters you was out there—that I sent you. But don't tell them any more. Let the sheriff do the talking; then if this backfires on him, he'll have only himself to blame. So old Kingman's gone, eh? And his young wife. I'm sorry for her. As for Kingman, it's a mercy he went quick."

"You knew him, did you, sir?" Riordan asked.

"Knew him for a pestiferous old fool. And that's no disrespect to the dead, for he was. Always sticking his fingers into things, he was. He had an evil mind. A smart mind. That was how he made his money, seeing a chance to buy land cheap and sell it dear. That was how he got everything, poking round into other peoples' business. Finding chances. It was him that started the grand jury investigation in '96 about gambling houses. And after he gets the gamblers on the run he buys their places cheap and puts up new buildings with top-price rents. Gamblers naturally would have good locations, easy to get at."

"How come he married this Concannon woman?" asked Riordan. "Sort o' like December and May, wasn't it?"

"December and May, nothing!" snorted the chief. "He owned the property the theater was built on. The theater was paying less and less. He knew, for it was harder and harder for him to get the rent. He met her when he used to go down to collect every month. The movies had put the theater on the bum, and she was the best card the house had. So he married her. The company bust then, and he rebuilt the theater into a studio block. Got him a wife in the bargain, to take care of him in his old age. Well, you forget about this job. We made a showing out there, that's all anybody can ask. Good night."

THE sheriff did the best he could. He made two or three arrests, then turned the prisoners out for want of evidence. Gradually the case dropped from the front page, then dropped from the papers altogether. Kingman's will

had bequeathed Rock Island to the city as a public park, and the municipal administration got snarled in legal detail as to how it could administer land beyond the city limits. It was finally determined that the legislature would have to be asked for a special act, and the matter lay in wait until the State solons should convene.

TWO months after the blast, when the public had practically forgotten the tragedy, the thing leaped onto the front page again with the finding of Kingman's body in the river. A freighter, heavily laden with outgoing cargo, had touched on a shoal west of the channel as it backed from the dock in the southern part of the city. The churning of the screw stirred a cross current in the stream. An idle throng, standing on the dock watching the vessel's efforts to get clear, was suddenly thrilled when there whirled to the surface a sodden and bedraggled human form.

The harbor patrol retrieved the body, and at the morgue a startling discovery was made. Not only were the vestiges of the features recognizable as Kingman's, but dental work made the identification sure. Added proof was found in the serial numbers on the backs of fraternal emblems still attached to the clothing, and by documents found in the pockets. The left temple of the corpse was pierced by a bullet hole, but it was impossible to say at once whether the wound had been self-inflicted or not. The papers screamed the news with huge headlines, all the facts of the mysterious explosion at the "love nest" were rehashed and again blazoned in type; and the whole thing was dumped in the lap of the police, for this time the body was found within the city limits.

Chief Roberts summoned Detective Captain Brady to his office as soon as he had been informed of the gruesome find.

"The papers, Brady," he proclaimed, "will wait till the coroner has held his inquest, and then they'll be storming down here to know what are we going to do about this. Here's Kingman, that was supposed to be blown to thin air up at his island, is found in the drink with a hole in his left temple. Of course it's a cinch what the coroner will say, for somebody will tell him Kingman was left-handed. Death by suicide, he'll tell his jury to find. That will let him out, which will be what he wants. Then it will fall on us: why did Kingman blow out his brains, what happened to his wife, and all the rest of it. We got to get something on this before the storm busts."

Captain Brady scratched his head. "Why would Kingman, with all the money in the world, blow out his brains—if he had any? Here he was all fixed——"

"Brady, if you was eighty years old and had a swell young wife like Myra Concannon, mebbe you'd want to blow your brains out, too. But never mind why he did it. This thing is going to be put up to us different. Here is Kingman dead and a *corpus delicti* thrown to us out of the river, the papers will say. Now where is Mrs. Kingman and why? That is what they'll want to know. We can stall and say we're working on the case for a few days; but before the end of the week, Brady, the papers are going to begin to yell. And you know what that means. What I want is for you to get a handful of men out on this Kingman thing and dig up something—I don't care what—so we can have it when the papers yell."

The detective captain returned to his own department and put a couple of his men on the case, with, it must be confessed, scant enough hopes. And, at four o'clock, when Detective Sergeant Riordan came on duty for the remainder of the day, he passed the problem on to his aid.

"Boy, you was out to Kingman's love nest the night of the big bust, you'd better take hold of this," he said. "I suppose you've seen in the papers already that they got Kingman's body out of the river to-day. The Old Man is all on fire over it, and wants something turned up. I've put Reade and Wright on it, but you'd better take the job over. And leave me reports on everything you turn up, too."

CHAPTER III. OLD TRAIL.

RIORDAN went to his desk, banged it open, threw his hat upon it. He flung himself into his chair, thrust a cigar in his mouth, and glared at his captain.

"I was on the Kingman job once, chief, an' the Old Man jerked me off it—told me to forget it," he said. "It's a helluva time to wish it onto me again, now that it's all cold."

"Well, boy, dig into it and warm it up—that's all you got to do. The Old Man wants something ready when——"

"You think Kingman's wife is dead, too, chief?" Riordan interrupted.

"Of course she is, boy. She must have been killed in that blast. It stands to reason. She was a actress, wasn't she? Here was a big blast, Kingman gone—do you think if she wasn't dead, too, that she'd stayed quiet? Not a chance. She'd have jumped into the papers for the notoriety! And then, think of the

money. If she was alive she'd been Kingman's widow, and would have had a right to all that jack. Probably sued to break his will leaving his property to the city, too. No, boy, there's not a chance of her being alive—she was killed in the blast."

Riordan nodded slowly. "What was your idea of that job?" he asked.

"Boy, I think the sheriff had it right—even with Kingman turning up shot this way. You recall, boy, that the sheriff said it was a revenge job? That somebody who had it in for Kingman had gone up there and blown him up? Well, that was my idea. This finding Kingman now with a slug in his head fits in with that."

Riordan grunted. "Halloran an' me was up there that night, chief. The big moose says the blast was set off inside the house. I think he was right."

"Why didn't you report——"

"Because the Old Man tol' me to forget it. He said leave it to the sheriff. I done what he tol' me to; an' I kept Halloran quiet, too."

Brady gave a snort. "Well, you can put Halloran right back on it," he said. "Him an' whoever can work with him. If the big moose knows that much, he must have some ideas in his head by this time. Get him right on it, boy. I'm goin' home now, but you call me up to-night to home if he turns up anything."

WHEN he ordered the routine for the night, Riordan left Halloran off all the details. After he had his details under way and his men out, he called the huge veteran in to the office.

"Yuh big lummo," he said, "I got a nice chance for yuh. Yuh been just a common dick so long I'm gettin' tired o' lookin' at yuh. By this

time yuh should be retired, or be a sergeant. Here's where yuh can be either the one or the other—kicked out or promoted. Listen: The Old Man is all lit up over them findin' Kingman in the river. He's decided now it was a job, an' that we got to go to work on it. Yuh go down to the morgue an' take a look at Kingman an' see do yuh think he was blowed into the river. Then yuh smell round till yuh find out who handled Myra Concannon's legal business in the old days an' bring him in here. I mean her lawyer, if she had one."

Halloran leaned back in his chair, which creaked under the strain of his weight, and smiled serenely.

"Matt, I already been to the morgue. I went down when I read in the afternoon paper that they'd found Kingman. Doc Wilson was there, an' I stayed while he went over the old boy. Doc says Kingman bumped hisself off; that he was left-handed an' that the course of the bullet shows it. Besides, he found the bullet, an' he says even the bullet shows it was fired close; it hadn't had a chance yet to pick up what he calls inertia. So he says Kingman shot hisself, or else somebody leaned over him an' shot him when he was asleep, an' then threw him in the river. I been thinkin' about that, Matt, after what you told me you found out there that night. Them two tracks in the mud, big shoes an' little shoes, you said. Perhaps Myra Concannon an' Kingman had a spat, an' she shot him, an' got somebody to help her carry him to the river afterward. Then she blew the place up as a blind."

"Go on, what else yuh been thinkin'?" Riordan said

"Well, Matt, after gettin' that far, I decided she didn't. Because she would want her cut of the property

an' the money. An' there hasn't been no move to get at the estate, none at all. I know quite a number of lawyers. I been buzzin' them, on an' off, an' none of 'em has had any feelers on this Kingman estate at all. So it looks like Myra Concannon wasn't in it; she must have been killed when that stuff went off."

"Yuh figgered out anythin' else?"

"Well, Matt, you told me to lay off the case. But I been thinkin'. Myra Concannon has a sister, Matt. Amelia Concannon, her name is. Concannon is the real name, Myra didn't change it when she went on the stage. This Amelia Concannon is a old maid, Matt, what lives out on Foster Road. I would like to talk to her, only you told me to lay off it."

"Take a flivver, yuh big lummox, an' roll out to Amelia's place an' bring her in here," said Riordan. "We'll both talk to her. Tell her yuh want her to come down to headquarters to give us some information about Mr. Kingman. Play jus' as dumb as yuh look."

CHAPTER IV.

A WOMAN IN BLACK.

ABOUT nine o'clock Halloran returned, bringing with him a woman in heavy mourning; a woman with a thin, ascetic face; a woman well advanced in years, who appeared not to have led too enjoyable a life. The huge sleuth pushed forward a chair for her, then carefully closed the office door and turned to Riordan.

"This is Miss Concannon, sergeant," he said. "We was some time getting here, because Miss Concannon had a meeting of the ladies aid to attend, and she said it was more important than seeing the police. I didn't want to make no trouble, so

I went with her and waited till she was through."

Riordan, moonfaced, had been regarding the woman while Halloran was speaking. He felt like smiling as he visioned the huge detective escorting Miss Concannon to a ladies aid meeting, but no sign of humor appeared in his eyes.

"Madam," he said, speaking flatly, "we have asked you to come here to give us some information about Mr. Kingman——"

"I don't know anything about Mr. Kingman!" the woman snapped, interrupting. "I told this officer I didn't. I only saw Mr. Kingman once in my life. I don't know the man, nor want to. But the officer said I had to come here. I think it is an outrage!"

Riordan leaned back in his chair, his whole manner changing. "All right, madam, if you don't want to talk about Kingman, yuh don't have to. Where's yuhr sister?"

The woman's hand flew to her throat and her long fingers clutched her neck with involuntary tenseness. Then her eyes snapped with sudden fire, she returned her hand to her lap and straightened stiffly.

"You're cruel and heartless!" she spat out. "You must know my sister is dead. You have no right to speak——"

"Madam, I got a right to talk to yuh any way I want. Here's Kingman found in the river, with a slug in his head. The coroner's physician says the gun was held close to him when it was fired, that he might ha' been shot while he was asleep. Yuhr sister has disappeared, an' Kingman is found in the river. Where's yuhr sister, madam?"

"Don't call me 'madam,' I am an unmarried woman."

"Where's yuhr sister?"

"You're a brute. The sheriff said she was killed——"

"Where's yuhr sister?"

"Oh—— I don't know!"

"Good, ma'am, we're gettin' somewhere. Yuh'll find yuh will get along better if yuh answer my questions an' don't call me names. I try to be nice to ladies when they treat me nice. When they want to fight with me, I try to oblige 'em. Now forget the fight, an' listen: There was a explosion up at Rock Island an' the sheriff's men investigated. They couldn't find Kingman or yuhr sister. Naturally they figgered they was killed in the explosion. Now what happens? Kingman turns up, an' he wasn't killed in the explosion. Mebbe yuhr sister wasn't killed in the explosion either. We want to find out. Yuh say yuh don't know where she is. When did yuh see her last?"

Amelia Concannon regarded Riordan with bitter eyes. Then she drew a deep breath, smoothed the folds of her skirt, and sighed.

"I saw Myra last on the twentieth of May," she answered.

Riordan nodded. "You're sure of the date," he asked, his voice more gentle again.

"Yes, I am sure. She came to see me on the twentieth of May."

"You got a good head for remembering dates, have you?"

"Yes, I can remember dates."

"All right, tell me what happened on the fifth of May."

"You're insolent," she flared. "You're trying to bait me. Don't you believe what I say?"

"I believe what you say, Miss Concannon, but I don't believe you're telling me all you can. Do you believe your sister is dead?"

"The sheriff said——"

"Do you believe your sister is dead?"

"What else could——"

"Do you believe your sister is dead?"

"Yes."

Riordan looked at Halloran. "Yuh try," he said.

THE two-hundred-and-eleven pound police veteran pushed his red face and rheumy eyes close to Miss Concannon's face.

"When did you buy this dress of mourning, miss?" he asked.

The woman gave a little start, looked down at her skirt.

"I—I always—I have worn black for years."

"Then you didn't buy no mourning for your sister? You didn't stop any of your activities, like the ladies aid, because of her death. It didn't change things for you at all, miss?"

She flashed a glare at Halloran, and turned to the sergeant again. "What is the meaning of this?" she demanded. "You act as if—as if you thought I—as if you thought I was responsible for something."

"Suppressin' evidence, ma'am," Riordan said easily. "It's a felony. Yuh can be arrested for it. Failin' to give the authorities information about a felony, ma'am. Blowin' up Kingman's place was a felony. What did yuhr sister tell yuh on the twentieth o' May, when she come to see yuh? The love nest was blowed up the night o' the twenty-third."

The woman shuddered. "Don't—don't speak of it that way—call it a—love nest," she moaned.

"Oh, so that was it, eh?" Riordan leaned forward in his chair. "We're gettin' somewhere, eh? Well, now, let's be frank about this. Just you, an' me, an' Mr. Halloran. We're all grown folks, all of us has seen a good deal o' the world. The love nest idea was beginnin' to fade, eh?

Your sister tol' you that on the twentieth o' May, when she come to see you? Well, I should think it would sort o' get monotonous for her out there. Here was your sister and Kingman married. He was old enough to be her grandfather. I'm not sayin' he didn't care for her, or that she didn't care for him. But the love nest got monotonous, especially as she knew he had the big town house, all empty except for a raft of servants. Likely she wanted to go there an' become a great lady. But she didn't want to make the break an' tell him so, didn't want to hurt his feelings. Isn't that about right, didn't she tell you that?"

Miss Concannon looked down at the floor, nodded her head.

"Yes, something like that," she admitted, in a low voice.

"What did she say to you, ma'am? I mean, just what were her words?"

"She said—said she couldn't stand it any longer, that it was just like a prison."

Riordan nodded. "It would be—for her, ma'am. Her that had been used to the life of the theater, with lots of people and friends, an' everything. Did she say she was going away, ma'am?"

"She said she couldn't stand it." "You talked to the sheriff, ma'am?"

"He came to see me. I couldn't tell him anything."

"You tell him what you've told me? That your sister said she couldn't stand it?"

"No. He didn't ask me anything—like that."

Riordan shifted in his chair, rubbed his chin slowly with one of his hands. "Miss Concannon, I'm going to tell you some things likely you don't know," he said. Kingman was shot in the head. The coroner's physician says the gun was

held close. Either somebody leaned over him and shot him when he was asleep, or he shot himself. What is the conclusion? Either your sister, because she couldn't stand it any longer, shot him; or your sister went away because she couldn't stand it any longer, and Kingman shot himself because she'd gone. Now here's what you don't know: The big fellow here and I were out at Kingman's the night the place was blown up, and we found prints—footprints. Big shoes and little shoes—two people. These two people had been to the powder magazine, they'd been to the cabin, and they'd come from the river and gone by the river. Big shoes and little shoes might have been a man and a woman, or a man and a boy, or a woman and a boy. Matter of fact, it was a man and a woman. That mean anything to you?"

Amelia Concannon had turned as pale as the plaster on the wall of the room.

"Myra—Myra didn't shoo—didn't kill him," she said tensely. "I know she didn't."

"How do you know it?"

"Because—because she pitied him. She didn't hate him. She realized it was her mistake, not his. She never should have married him. She might have killed herself, but she didn't kill him."

Riordan sat perfectly still, looking at the woman. Tears rose in her eyes, she made a motion with her hand to brush them away.

MYRA was a fool," she said, after a moment. "But she didn't kill him. Not directly. I mean he may have—may have shot himself. She told me she couldn't stand it any longer. She said she was going away. She said she'd stood it as long as she could.

COM—7B

At first she'd thought it would be different, that they could get along. That she'd have money, a big house, everything. Things to occupy her. She'd had a hard life. And she wasn't getting anywhere in her profession as an actress. The movies were killing the theater, and she knew it. So when he took an interest in her, it seemed like a chance.

"She was a fool, and I told her so at the time. But she married him. He took her to that—it was a prison to her. You know what I mean, she found she was a prisoner. He tried to be kind, he was still infatuated with her; but it—it wasn't what she'd thought it would be. And it got so she couldn't stand it. She came to me and told me she was going away. I told her she'd made her bed and ought to lie in it, but she said she couldn't stand it any longer, not for all the money in the world. She was going away, she said. I guess she went—and he killed himself."

The little office was quiet for a moment. Miss Concannon found a handkerchief and wiped her eyes, settled back into her chair.

"Who was the other man?" asked Riordan levelly.

The woman jumped as if she had been struck.

"There wasn't any—why—"

"Who was the other man?"

"There wasn't any man. What makes you think—"

"Ma'am, these jobs are all of a piece. Two men an' one woman, or two women an' one man. Who was the other man that made her willin' to pass up a couple million dollars when Kingman died? He was eighty and due to die before long."

"You're brutal—coarse."

"Ma'am, I'm a police officer. I've seen these things before. In my business yuh see a lot of 'em. Who

was the other man? He must ha' been pretty well fixed."

"Really, there wasn't any other man. It was just that she couldn't stand it any more. I told her she was a fool, that she'd only make a bad matter worse, but she said she didn't care, she was going away."

"But she went with somebody," said Riordan. "Big shoes an' little shoes, they left prints in the mud. Who was the other man?"

"There wasn't any. And I don't know where she went, either. But she didn't kill him, and there wasn't any other man."

"I betcha, ma'am, there was another man, an' I betcha I get him an' put him in the jug. Yuh can go now—Halloran will take yuh home. But I'll tell yuh this: yuh'd better think it over an' make up yuhr mind—an' come in an' tell me the rest of it. I'm here every day from four o'clock on. An' the sooner yuh come in, likely the easier it'll be for some other people. Good night, ma'am."

Amelia Concannon stared at Riordan's moonlike face for several minutes, then, with taut lips, rose from her chair.

"There was no other man. And you need not send this officer home with me—I will get a taxicab."

Riordan laughed shortly. "Yuh'd better ride home with the big feller, ma'am. He won't mind. If yuh take a taxi, he'll follow yuh an' see do yuh stop at a telegraph office to send word to yuhr sister. Ma'am, I don't blame yuh; not a bit. But yuh'd better think it over, then come in an' tell me the rest. I'll get it anyway. It might be easier for yuhr sister if yuh talked, that's all."

Miss Concannon drew herself erect. "I have told you the truth. And since you say I would be followed, I will ride home as I came

down. You need not have my house watched. I do not know where my sister is, where she went. Sometimes—sometimes I almost hope she was killed in the explosion!"

CHAPTER V.

SIDE ISSUE.

KINGMAN'S funeral was an impressive affair; not only because he had been one of the city's wealthiest men, but because the ceremony took on the nature of a solemn declaration that he really was dead, and that there no longer remained any doubt as to what had been his fate when the "love nest" was obliterated by the blast. City and county officials joined in the line of march which followed the hearse down the broad reaches of Clermont Avenue. Among the marchers was Detective Halloran. When the procession broke up at the late realtor's final resting place, Halloran laid one of his massive paws upon the shoulder of a man standing near the grave.

"Come along, mister," he said. "Just walk off with me like I was a friend. We're going to headquarters."

The man gave a suppressed start, took one look at the bulk of the veteran detective, turned and plodded off at his side. Not once did he open his mouth to ask a question and, still silent, he entered the chief's office and took a chair. Halloran closed the door softly and stood behind the man, who looked first at Chief Roberts and then at Detective Sergeant Riordan, sitting across the little room. Nobody spoke for a moment. The man at last shifted in his chair, took a cigarette from a pocket case, lighted it.

"I don't quite get the drift of this," he said. "Am I under arrest,

or did the officer here make a mistake? As a citizen, of course, I am always glad to aid the police, but I can't do anything unless you tell me what you want. I'm not a mind reader."

"I thought mebbe yuh might be," drawled Riordan. "What would yuh suppose, now, yuh was brang in for?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. I have never seen any of you gentlemen before."

"Well, let's get acquainted then," said Riordan. "This is the chief o' police. I'm Detective Sergeant Riordan. The big lummoX behind yuh is Detective Halloran. Yuh're Walter Stowell?"

"Yes, that is my name. I'm an architect."

"Then yuh're the right man," Riordan declared. "Yuh're pinched—under arrest. Only thing I haven't decided yet is what for."

Stowell shrugged, glanced at the chief, then back at Riordan. "Might I inquire," he asked, "what led you to have me arrested?"

"Orange blossoms!"

As the answer to his query snapped from Riordan's lips the man tensed and the expression of faint boredom vanished from his countenance.

"I'll tell yuh frank, Mr. Stowell, yuh had me buffaloed at first," continued Riordan. "At first I thought them orange blossoms out to Kingman's love nest had been bought by Kingman. Yuh know, that'd be sort o' natural. A bit silly, perhaps, but a old man is apt to be silly when he marries a young woman. Orange blossoms—bride's flowers. I thought Kingman had bought 'em for her. But one thing led to another. I got sort o' curious an' put the boys to snoopin' around. The florists tell the boys orange blossoms ain't that

common yuh can pick 'em up every day. When a customer wanted orange blossoms, they said, they had to be ordered from some wholesaler or specialist. An' when we finally run down them orange blossoms, what yuh think we found? The only dealer who handles 'em here ships 'em in from a ranch down to California. Yuhr ranch, he says. Part o' his deal with yuh, he says, is that every so often he's to deliver orange blossoms to Kingman's love nest. Which strikes me as funny—yuh sendin' orange blossoms to Kingman's wife."

STOWELL studied the sergeant, wondering if the moonfaced policeman was as stupid as he appeared, and decided perhaps he wasn't.

"I have long been an admirer of Mrs. Kingman. When she was on the stage I always sent her orange blossoms." Stowell spoke evenly, easily.

"Did yuh say 'have been,' Mr. Stowell?"

The architect dropped his eyes. "What I mean is that I was a great admirer of her when she was on the stage. It was then I began having orange blossoms sent to her. She liked them. Probably the wholesaler kept on with the practice."

"Uh-huh, likely he did. He says yuh tol' him to. Stowell, I'm surprised yuh had the crust to show up at Kingman's funeral."

"I was an admirer of Mr. Kingman. He was a client——"

"Yuh admire lots o' folks, don't yuh? Here is Kingman blowed all to hell, apparently, out at that love nest o' his, an' yuh don't show up at all. All yuh do is order work stopped on this here castle o' his yuh was buildin' for him. But the minute yuh hear Kingman is a sui-

cide, shot hisself, yuh come rushin' to attend the funeral, like yuh was all too anxious to show yuh mourned his loss. Funny kind of a frien', I calls it, sendin' his wife orange blossoms, an' tryin' to get her to——"

Riordan paused, looked at Chief Roberts.

"Trying to get her to what—say it!" exploded Stowell.

The sergeant smiled. "Anxious, ain't yuh, Stowell? Want to know how much I got, eh? Huh, yuh'd laugh if yuh knew! Damn me, if I don't tell yuh! I been workin' on a missin' persons case, an' not on what yuh thought at all. I jus' happened to run acrost yuhr trail. Ain't that a darb?"

The architect permitted himself the luxury of a full breath, tossed his cigarette on the floor and lighted another one.

"That certainly was curious," he said. "Who is this missing person? If I can help you I will be glad to do so."

"I wonder if yuh would?" said Riordan, the smile still on his lips. "The missin' person I'm lookin' for, Stowell, is Myra Concannon. Her sister don't know where she is, an' is right worried."

Stowell tensed again.

"Yuh're in a helluva fix now, ain't yuh?" jeered Riordan. "If yuh tell me where Myra Concannon is, yuh'll be admittin' that yuh stole her from her husban' with yuhr orange blossoms. An' if yuh say yuh don't know where she is, yuh'll be showin' yuhrself up for a funny sort of a admirer o' hers, believin' she was killed in the explosion an' yuh not carin' a damn. Mebbe yuh're glad she's dead. Mebbe yuh blew up that love nest to get rid o' her, after yuh found out she'd shot Kingman while he was asleep. Yuh an' yuhr orange

blossoms—yuh didn't want to get dragged into a scandal."

The architect started to rise from his chair, but Halloran's hamlike hand dropped on his shoulder and pushed him back to his seat.

"Or, mebbe," said Riordan, "yuh killed Kingman, sneaked in an' shot him. Then yuh an' she had a ruckus, an'——"

"You can't accuse me of killing Kingman!" shouted Stowell.

"An' why can't I?"

"Because the coroner, the jury, says he committed suicide."

"Six bums picked up in the courthouse corridor for the inquest don't know everythin', Stowell. They didn't know about the orange blossoms. There wasn't much said to them about big shoes an' little shoes out by the powder house. Nice, new tennis shoes, Stowell, made by the Revere Rubber Co. Yuh didn't think, when yuh bought them shoes, that yuh can trace any pair o' shoes that's made, did yuh? Leather shoes, they got a serial number stamped on the lining, rubber shoes, they got a serial number in the soles, along with the trade-mark, on the bottom o' the arch. I was out to the island, Stowell, right after the blast, an' I had some o' the Bertillon men out there to take plaster casts o' the prints we found o' big shoes an' little shoes. We get the serial numbers an' we write to the Revere Rubber Co. Yes, they say, they sold them shoes to such an' such a jobber, an' from the jobber we get the dealer's name that sold them. The dealer happens to remember sellin' two pair o' shoes to yuh—one pair for yuh, an' another pair, much smaller, for a lady. Yuh didn't know all that, did yuh?"

Stowell shook his head vaguely. "But he killed himself, man, he shot himself," he said.

"He did, eh? Well, if that's so, why didn't his widow, Myra Concannon, show up? Why don't she put in her claim for her dower rights in Kingman's millions an' property? Why didn't she come to his funeral, instead of sending yuh?"

"She didn't—how do you know——" Stowell's exclamations burst from his lips before he could stop them. Then he sat silent for a long time, staring blankly at the floor. Finally he focused his eyes on Riordan's again.

YOU'VE got it all wrong," he said. "And having it all wrong, you misinterpret such evidence as you may actually have uncovered. I am going to set you right. Understand, this is a voluntary statement on my part. Just something I am telling you, man to man. If you have any of the instincts of a gentleman, you will regard it as privileged, and not reveal it. Out of consideration for My—for Mrs. Kingman. Mrs. Kingman has proof that her husband killed himself, committed suicide—or that he intended to. It is a letter, from him. He wrote her a letter and told her——"

"Wrote an' tol' her he'd found out she was gallivantin' with a guy who sent her orange blossoms, eh?"

Stowell hung his head.

"I saw you in his arms' was what he wrote, sergeant. Yet it really was perfectly innocent. Mrs. Kingman was looking at some of the construction work, and turned her ankle on a loose stone. To keep her from falling I grasped her——"

"Don't yuh alibi to me," interrupted Riordan. "I don't care what yuhr story is. He caught yuh, eh? An' his poor, fool dreams was all shot. So he said he was goin' to

end it all. Well, what didja blow up the joint for?"

The architect waved his hands. "It was all her fault," he exclaimed desperately. "She'd been out. She came back and found that note—the note from Kingman saying he was going to kill himself. She knew where he kept his revolver, looked there and couldn't find it. They were all alone on the island—his fool love nest idea. She couldn't ask the contractor's men to help her. She looked for him, for Mr. Kingman, and couldn't find him. She telephoned me. I went right out. We hunted all over the island for him, couldn't find him. We found his footprints leading up to the top of the bluff, that was all. He must have stood there, shot himself, fallen into the river. She showed me that damning letter—his letter.

"There was only one thing to do—get her away before there was a scandal, before they found his body. It was she who thought of blowing up the cabin. I had the tennis shoes in my launch, we'd planned to play at the Somerset Courts some afternoon. She helped me carry the stuff from the powder house. She made me do it. I put it where it would do the most damage. Then I got my launch, ran a wire to the ignition, and when we had left the shore I—I touched it off.——"

"Didn't she figger it would come out when she claimed her share of the estate?" asked Riordan.

"Why should she claim it? I'm pretty well off. She won't need anything."

"Yuh figgerin' on marryin' her?"

"As a matter of fact we were married a week after we left. We were not certain Kingman was dead, but we believed he was. It turns out now we were right."

"Uh-huh. That's why she sent

yuh to the funeral, eh? To be sure there was no mistake. Did yuh get a squint at Kingman, or what was left o' him?"

Stowell nodded, buried his face in his hands.

"Well," said Riordan, "as I told yuh, I'm workin' on a missin' person case. Jus' run acrost yuh by accident. Yuh tell me where Myra Con-cannon is, an' that'll be about all I'll want o' yuh myself."

"She's in Modesto. We have an apartment there. Later she is going to my ranch."

"Huh, I should think she'd had enough o' orange blossoms. But yuh can't figger the dames—she must like 'em."

Stowell ignored the jab. "I hope, sergeant, you will regard what I have told you as confidential. Myra—Mrs. Kingman—Mrs. Stowell would not care to have people here know——"

"Naturally she wouldn't. As a woman she must have some decency left."

Stowell shifted in his chair. "If you have quite finished, I'd like to go now," he said.

Riordan's lower jaw shot out. "Yuh'll go in a minute. I'm through with yuh, but wait a minute."

He reached for the chief's telephone, rattled the hook.

"Gimmie the sheriff's office. . . .

Yeah. . . . Hello, sheriff? . . .

This is Riordan, at the dicks. Say, yuh still lookin' for that bird who blew up Kingman's love nest? . . .

Well, send over for him. Halloran picked him up when he was lookin' for somethin' else. We don't want him here, it's a county case. . . .

Oh, I don't know much about him, he's sort o' mussed up. Tangled with Halloran, I guess. Yuh send over for him an' yuh can have him. Good-by."

"You can't do that!" shouted Stowell, leaping to his feet, as Riordan replaced the telephone. "You can't——"

Halloran reached forward and in-folded the architect in his huge arms. Stowell twisted, fought, kicked.

"Better be nice, Stowell," said Riordan. "The big feller gets rough when he's riled. The sheriff is sendin' over a coupla deputies for yuh. I don't know what he'll do to yuh. Dynamitin' a dwellin' is pretty tough in this State, but mebbe yuh can alibi to him. Yuh seem to think yuh're a good fixer. If yuh can't, yuh won't have to worry none about yuhr wife. Likely yuh're fixed so yuh can keep her comfortable till yuh get out—if she wants to wait. Yuh send her word to stay on that orange blossom ranch o' yuhrs. If she comes back here they might throw her in, too. I'll tell her sister where she is—she told me she didn't know."

Chief Roberts got up suddenly. "Halloran, take him out of here!" he barked. "Take him upstairs and pacify him. You ought to know how. We don't want him to be any trouble to the sheriff's men—wouldn't be right."

After the huge sleuth and his prisoner had gone out the door, Roberts turned to Riordan.

"Well?" he demanded.

"I guess the sheriff can give the papers a story that will keep 'em off the police department, sir," said the sergeant. "Captain Brady told me that was what you wanted: to have something for the papers when they begun to yell. Better for the sheriff to give it to 'em, sir; then they won't think of us at all, sir."

"Brady talks too much," rumbled the chief. "Well, you done a job, Riordan. Better go to work now."

Death of a Thousand Cuts

By
Jack Hulick



To defy Fate takes a
man!

BRADLEY'S position as manager of the trading post made him nominal ruler of So-Lan. And he had his own ideas about China and the Chinese. When the thief, Hun Lui, was brought before him for punishment, he declined to act, saying it was a matter for the villagers to decide.

"He has stolen from you. He is one of you. Punish him in your

own way, according to your consciences," he said.

The villagers were surprised and pleased by Bradley's decision. Hung Lui was stunned. He had confidently expected mild treatment at the foreign devil's hands. He knew that punishment, by his fellows, would be harsh and brutal, after the manner of China.

"Have mercy, heaven-born!" he cried. "They will kill me!"

"Ask, mercy of those who will punish you," answered Bradley.

"Mercy! Favored of heaven, have mercy!"

The coolie's voice rose to a wail of terror. Bradley regarded him steadily, no sign of the compassion he felt showing on his sharp features or in his gray eyes. Bradley was a man of some feeling for his fellows, but he could be hard when he thought necessary. This was such a moment.

The villagers dragged away their prisoner, grimly determined to make an example of the thief who had been burglarizing their homes, so cunningly that they had begun to believe it was the work of devils. They took him to the square before the temple, where a fire was built and flares lighted, until the sky glowed blood-red. Their shrill voices drifted up to Bradley, in his darkened bungalow, for the better part of an hour.

The voices ceased all at once, and a breathless hush fell. Seconds later, a long-drawn scream pierced the night. Shrill shouts followed, echoing and reëchoing over the hills. Then the flares died out one by one, and quiet settled over So-Lan.

Next morning, while Hu, his servant, was clearing away the breakfast dishes, Bradley paused in the act of lighting his pipe, and asked:

"How was Hun Lui punished?"

"When a man steals with his hands," Hu replied, "his hands are cut off that he may not steal again. Hun Lui was so punished."

"That was all?"

"He was stoned from the village, like the dog that he is. He will not trouble us again; he will not trouble any one. All is well now."

TIME passed. Though China was torn from end to end with civil strife, this part of Yunnan Province was quiet. Bradley, who knew the trading game, worked hard and encouraged the natives, and the village prospered with the post. Hun Lui was forgotten.

Then one day an American arrived in So-Lan, accompanied by two evil-looking Chinese muleteers and half a dozen mules. He had broad shoulders, reckless gray eyes, and a ready laugh. He was vague about what had brought him into the Mekong Valley, but Bradley wasn't surprised. There was no need to look twice at Jack Emmick to know he was of that restless brotherhood that roams the world, without rhyme or reason.

Visitors were few and far between at So-Lan, and Bradley gave the newcomer a warm welcome. Hu broke open the best canned stuffs, and turned out a passable American dinner. Afterwards, there was cognac and American cigarettes. The two men sat late on the veranda, stretched out in deep cane chairs, swapping yarns and watching the moon silver the evergreens. It was from Emmick that Bradley first heard of Tien Wang.

"China's a great country if a man's got guts, but a hell of a place if he hasn't," Emmick declared, warmed by the cognac. "Take Tien Wang; he couldn't get by any place else, but because he's here, he'll go far. He'll grab himself a couple of millions, marry a dozen wives, and go off somewhere and live like a king for the rest of his days. And what Tien Wang can do, any smart fellow can do—in China."

"Tien Wang? Who's he?" inquired Bradley.

"Never heard of Tien Wang? Why, he's got hell scared out of

everybody between Yunnan City and Canton."

"News is scarce up here. What is he—a new war lord?"

Emmick nodded. "One to keep your eye on, too. He's a real character. He sprung up about three months ago, and he's got half the cutthroats in South China under him already. Nobody knows much about him, except he hasn't got any hands—just a couple of iron claws that'll rip you to pieces. Wang would as soon kill a man as look at him. He loves it!"

"His name," Bradley observed ironically, "means Heavenly King."

"'Hellish King' would be better," Emmick said, with a mirthless laugh. "You've heard of the old chink way of torturing a man to death by cutting him in a thousand places, and not killing him till the last cut? Well, that's Wang's specialty. He's got a doctor who's his right-hand man; a hophead who got in some sort of jam in Canton, and had to light out. He's the fellow who does the job, and he's good. Keeps 'em alive till the last cut, and keeps 'em conscious."

"Pleasant way to die, eh!"

"They're devils, both of them." Emmick shook his head soberly. "You'd better get your shooters oiled up, Bradley. Wang's out to clean up the southern provinces, and he'll be along up this way sometime soon. Hates foreigners, too; swears he'll drive 'em all out of the country before he's through."

Bradley dismissed the notion with a shrug. "There's nothing in So-Lan to tempt such an ambitious bandit," he said.

Emmick left next morning, taking a trail that led south, toward the Burmese border, and that was the last Bradley heard of him for a while.

He soon heard much of Tien Wang, however. The "Heavenly King" marched across Yunnan with a sword in one hand and a firebrand in the other, plundering right and left, and leaving death and destruction in his wake.

He swung into the Mekong Valley in due time, as Emmick had predicted, and at last was encamped only two days' distant from So-Lan. The villagers were terrified, and many of them took to the hills. Bradley was not greatly disturbed; his stocks were low, and, if Wang raided, he would get little of value. Bradley did not consider his personal safety.

Then Jack Emmick returned, and brought hell down upon the village.

THE adventurer staggered into So-Lan one morning at day-break, a wild-eyed, blood-smearred ghost of a man. Coolies helped him reach Bradley's bungalow, where he collapsed. Several hours passed before he opened his eyes to find himself in Bradley's bed, swathed in bandages, one arm in a sling. His body was sore from head to foot, and his face was gray from loss of blood; but he grinned cheerfully as Bradley entered the room.

"Back again! I didn't think I was going to make it."

"You just made it, without an inch to spare," answered Bradley, dropping into a chair. "You looked like you'd gone through a butcher shop. What happened?"

"Those muleteers of mine tried to murder me night before last. Jumped me while I was asleep. We had a hellish row. I got one of 'em, but the other got away. The mules stampeded, and I had to leg it all the way down here. No food, no water to speak of, and this arm

nearly killing me. Am I done for?"

"Not a chance!" laughed Bradley. "Half a dozen flesh wounds, a broken arm, and the loss of a couple quarts of blood, more or less. Take it easy, and you'll be all right in a week or two. Cigarette?"

Bradley rose and handed Emmick a cigarette, then stepped to the mantelpiece for matches. As he turned around and started for the bed, he stopped abruptly. A startling change had come over the other. His face had hardened, his eyes had narrowed and suspicion was in them. One hand had slipped down inside the jacket of his pajamas, as though from force of habit seeking a pistol there.

Bradley was puzzled for some moments; then he understood. With a curt nod, he went to the bureau, opened a drawer, and got out a little canvas sack. He tossed it onto the bed.

"There you are," he said shortly. "I found it when I was dressing your wounds."

The silence lasted a full two minutes. Gray eyes met gray eyes in a challenging stare. Then the steely glint vanished from Emmick's eyes, and he relaxed with a sigh.

"Sorry, Bradley," he said. "I ought to have known better. Know what's in the sack?"

"I didn't look."

"Then take a look."

Bradley lighted Emmick's cigarette, touched the match to his own, then picked up the little bag and took it to the table. He slipped the draw string and turned the bag upside down. A stream of flashing gems cascaded forth, most of them of antique native cut. Bradley gave vent to a low whistle of amazement, then simply stood and stared.

"Do you wonder I got a jolt when I found they were gone?"

"Temple jewels?" asked Bradley, looking up.

"How'd you guess it?"

"The cut of the stones; they couldn't be anything else."

Emmick hesitated, puffing at his cigarette and eying Bradley searchingly. Then the last trace of suspicion left his eyes, and he nodded.

"You guessed it; they're temple jewels," he admitted. "I crossed the border into upper Burma after leaving here, raided one of the hill temples, and skipped back across the line. My muleteers helped me, and I promised them a cut. Then they figured they might as well have all of it. I knew they were a couple of beauties, but I didn't think they'd try anything like that."

Bradley fingered the gems thoughtfully. There was a fortune here; how much he couldn't even guess. He wondered how Emmick had managed it, and whether blood had been spilled in the getting.

"Going to turn me up, Bradley?"

Bradley started from his reflections, took a deep breath, and straightened. He looked at the other, shaking his head slowly.

"No," he said. "No, I'm not going to turn you up; I don't do things that way. Besides, I'm a fatalist about this sort of thing, Emmick. There's an old saying that a man is trapped by the fate of Providence or life he defies. It's true. I've never seen stolen wealth bring happiness to any man. You'll pay for this sometime."

"I'll risk it," Emmick answered promptly. "I've knocked around the world for fifteen years, and I'm tired of it. I came to China to make my pile and quit. When the chance came, I took it. You can think what you like, but I haven't any regrets."

Bradley shrugged, gathered up the stones, and put them into the sack.

"What do you want to do with them?" he asked. "There's a safe down at the store. Or you can hang 'em around your neck again, or put 'em in that old bronze vase on the mantelpiece, where you can keep your eye on them. Suit yourself. Nobody knows about them but you and me."

"Put 'em in the vase," Emmick said carelessly.

Oddly enough, neither man thought to connect the gems with Tien Wang. That is, not until the Heavenly King swept down on the village three days later, at the head of a flying squadron of horsemen.

BRADLEY had finished work for the day, and was smoking a cigarette with Emmick. The two men had taken a liking to each other, in spite of the wide difference in their characters. Or perhaps because of it, as men will. By tacit agreement, the gems had not been mentioned again.

The first shot came suddenly and without warning—the sharp, flat crack of a rifle. A ragged volley followed, followed by screams and shouts as panic struck the village. From the kitchen there came a shrill cry from Hu, and a sudden crash of pans.

"What the devil!" wondered Emmick.

"The devil himself, probably," muttered Bradley, as he came to his feet.

He strode out onto the veranda. The bungalow was set on a little rise of ground beyond the western limits of the village. Looking down, Bradley saw a column of horsemen sweeping into the village from the east. Men and women raced frantically through the narrow streets, seeking escape or shelter.

Bradley swung on his heel and re-

entered the bungalow, a gleam in his gray eyes.

"We're hooked," he announced. "It's Tien Wang, with twenty-five or thirty men."

"Thirty!" Emmick laughed shortly. "What d'you mean, we're hooked? Give me a rifle, and prop me up out there on the porch. I'll take care of half of 'em, and you take care of the other half. It's a cinch. I thought he had his army with him."

Bradley shook his head at once. "Too late; if we'd had a little warning, we might have put up a scrap. Some of the villagers have arms, and they're brave enough if they have a leader. But Wang's got 'em on the run, and we couldn't handle him alone—I've got one rifle and a pistol. Besides, there's nothing here for him to steal."

"Isn't there? Guess again."

"What d'you mean?"

"Why, the jewels, of course. That muleteer of mine got through to Wang and tipped him off about them. Why else would Wang be making a raid now?"

Bradley whistled softly and his eyes narrowed. Government troops, long in pursuit of the war lord, were at last closing in on him. Wang had fortified his camp, prepared to meet them in battle. So much Bradley had learned only yesterday. Only a fortune in gems could persuade the war lord to leave his camp at such a time. Bradley nodded slowly.

"We've been a couple of block-heads," he said. "That changes everything."

"We might as well go down fighting."

"That's all right for you and me, maybe," Bradley answered slowly. "But what about those poor devils down below? If we put up a scrap

and fail—and two against thirty is a long shot—Wang will have every head in the village.”

Bradley looked steadily at Em-mick. The latter read his thoughts, and hesitated only a moment.

“You’re right,” he said abruptly. “I got you into this mess, and I’ll get you out of it. We’ll try to buy him off—give him half the jewels. If that fails——”

Bradley whirled around as the other spoke. He got out an automatic pistol, slipped off the safety catch, and put it in the vase that held the gems. He grinned at Em-mick as he started toward the door, flung quick words at him.

“Leave it to me. You sit tight.”

Leaving a handful of men to guard the village, Wang soon appeared. He took no chance on stopping a well-aimed bullet, but drew rein halfway up the hill. A squad of men, dirty and depraved-looking, advanced upon the bungalow. They leaped from their horses and rushed at Bradley, who stood with his hands on his hips, eying them indifferently. Two of them pawed him roughly for weapons; then called out, and Wang rode up. Behind him a group of villagers stumbled along, urged by brutal jabs from the rifles of a rear guard.

TIEN WANG was big and raw-boned, and was dressed in a spanking new uniform, complete with ribbons and decorations. In place of hands, he had two barbed steel hooks, which glistened in the rays of the setting sun. Even from a distance there was something vaguely familiar about him. Recognition came as he dismounted, and Bradley’s brain reeled from the shock. He got hold of himself with effort.

Wang swaggered forward amid a

dead silence, his boots grating loudly on the walk. He paused at the foot of the steps, and the two men’s glances locked in a mutually defiant stare. Wang spoke first, his voice harsh and guttural.

“Look well, foreign devil!”

“You are Hun Lui,” said Bradley, without emphasis.

“I am Hun Lui, the coolie who once groveled at your feet, on these very steps, and begged for mercy.”

Their glances held half a minute longer; then, with a grunt, Wang mounted the steps and dropped into a chair. His manner was arrogant, as one accustomed to power, to having his slightest whim obeyed. He eased his belt awkwardly, flung one leg over an arm of the chair, and looked around with the air of a conqueror.

“A long time since I was here,” he observed. “A very long time! But I have not forgotten you, foreign devil, or the miserable dogs who cut off my hands. Mercy! You will know what it is to scream for mercy before I am through with you.”

Bradley kept a grip on himself with effort.

“You were punished,” he reminded the war lord, “as any thief would have been punished.”

“Bah! These dogs hated me. They would have killed me, if they had dared. Well, foreign devil, you will see that Tien Wang dares what others fear to do.”

Wang gestured toward the group of villagers, who stood gray and trembling with fear. Among them was the squat, broad-shouldered coolie who had cut off Wang’s hands. Bradley looked at them, then looked back at the war lord. He said nothing, but deliberately got out a cigarette, lighted it, and flipped away the match.

"Men change, foreign devil." Wang's buck teeth bared in an evil grin. "I am no longer Hun Lui, a miserable coolie, but Tien Wang, the future emperor of all China. At a word from me, men die."

"Emperors die, too," retorted Bradley coolly.

"So? We shall see." Wang lifted his head and looked around. "Where is the other foreign devil? The one with the jewels."

"Inside, laid up," Bradley answered without hesitation.

"Good! And the jewels—what have you done with them?"

"That," replied Bradley steadily, "is my affair."

Wang's eyes flashed for a moment; then he laughed, and shouted a name. A thin, saturnine fellow, his skin the color and texture of old parchment, rose from where he had been sitting on the steps. His features showed intelligence, but his eyes had the glassy look of a confirmed opium smoker. He came to attention, saluting languidly.

"Doctor Lao, my second in command," Wang announced impressively to Bradley; to his soldiers, he roared: "Well, what are you waiting for? Get busy! Chain the foreign devil to that post. Line up those dogs and shoot them. That one"—he pointed to the coolie who had cut off his hands—"we will save till later. The foreign devil must know what to expect."

Lao saluted again, and turned away. Bradley reached out and gripped his arm, stopping him. Bradley did not look at him, but at Wang.

"What did you come here for—the jewels or revenge?" he asked.

"Both," grinned Wang.

Bradley shook his head slowly. "You can take your choice," he said.

"I have the jewels, and I will give them to you only on one condition."

"And that condition is—"

"That you leave here at once and harm no one. Our deaths will gain you nothing; the jewels are worth a fortune."

Bradley spoke boldly and with finality. But even as he spoke, he knew he was wasting his breath. He knew the type of man with which he was dealing, knew what to expect. He was making a desperate bluff, and Wang promptly called it. The war lord turned to his second in command, a thin, sneering smile upon his saffron face.

"Do as I have ordered," he snapped.

Wang heaved himself out of his chair, and strode past Bradley without giving him a glance. Preceded by several of his men, he entered the bungalow.

Bradley offered no resistance as men seized him, and snapping chains on his ankles and wrists, fastened him to one of the veranda pillars. He was thinking swiftly, however. His conversation with Wang had been heard by Emmick, who would know it was hopeless to try to buy Wang off. There was the pistol in the vase.

Bradley waited, tense and alert, for the shot that would mean that Emmick had got Wang. No shot sounded. Instead, Wang suddenly reappeared and strode up to Bradley, scowling darkly.

"You lie!" he grated. "The other foreign devil is not here."

"Then he has departed for the hills," shrugged Bradley, though his heart leaped.

Suspicion lingered a long moment in Wang's eyes, before it passed away. He laughed and threw out his chest, pleased by the fear that his mere presence inspired. He re-

entered the bungalow, and from the sounds that issued, Bradley knew he was searching for the gems.

Lao lined up the villagers, detailed a firing squad, and ordered them to attention; then lighted a cigarette and waited. Minutes passed. The sun dropped behind the hills, and a blue haze crept into the valley. A new uneasiness grew upon Bradley. What had become of Jack Emmick?

WANG came out at last, and from the grim set of his jaws, it was plain that he had failed to find the gems. He strode up to Bradley.

"Where are the jewels?" he demanded harshly.

"Ask of the hills," shrugged Bradley. "They might be anywhere."

Wang thrust his face close to Bradley's, his eyes glittering. "Have you ever seen a man die the death of a thousand cuts?" he asked softly. "The ears go first. Then the joints of the fingers, and the toes. The nose comes next, and the eyelids follow. Cut by cut, one thousand of them, with salt rubbed in to keep you conscious till the last cut. One thousand hells, foreign devil. Choose!"

"You heard my terms," Bradley replied. "Harm no one, and you depart with the jewels. Touch a hair of my head, or the heads of any of those men out there, and the jewels will remain forever lost. It is for you to choose, Tien Wang."

Coolly, Bradley met the murderous anger that flared in Wang's eyes. The war lord swayed backward, half lifting one of his frightful iron claws. He controlled himself with an effort, and for some minutes measured Bradley craftily. Abruptly he jerked his head.

"I agree to your terms, foreign

devil. Time presses, and an army descends upon my camp. I must return at once. Tell me where the jewels are hidden, and I will harm no one."

Bradley nodded, though he knew what was going on in the other's mind as certainly as if Wang had shouted his intentions. Once the jewels were in Wang's hands, he would laugh at his promise. The firing squad would mow down the condemned villagers. Bradley himself would die the death of a thousand cuts. Bradley, however, gave no sign that he was aware of this.

"Take off these chains," he requested.

"First tell me where the jewels are," retorted Wang.

"Take off these chains."

Wang hesitated, then gave the order; but his scowl deepened and his mouth twitched, leaving no doubt that he meant to take bitter payment for the white devil's insolence.

Freed of his chains, Bradley was in no hurry to move. For the moment, he was master of the situation, and he meant to make the most of it. He knew the effect a display of conscious power has upon the Chinese mind. He stepped to the veranda, and looked down at the village. It was quiet, veiled by the swiftly gathering twilight. A few of Wang's men loitered in the square. Vague shapes were sprawled here and there in the dust. Otherwise, no one was in sight.

"Come along," Bradley then said, and turned toward the door.

"Wait!" The war lord turned to his second in command. "Take four men. Light the lamp. If the foreign devil makes one false step, shoot him."

Wang looked back at Bradley, a thin smile on his lips. Bradley

merely shrugged and lighted a cigarette. But his desperation increased, for he saw that Wang was wary of trickery, alert to meet it.

When the lamps were lighted, Bradley entered the bungalow, followed closely by Wang. He appeared calm and unafraid, though his heart was pounding and his muscles were tense as springs. The Chinese crowded into the bedroom after him, Wang and Lao standing in the doorway, flanked on either side by two men armed with rifles. The rifles were trained on Bradley.

Bradley went to the mantelpiece, took down the vase, and slipped his hand inside. Next moment, his brain was whirling dizzily and he felt cold all over.

The vase was empty. The jewels were gone, the pistol was gone. Emmick, then, had betrayed him. Had saved his own skin, and his fortune, leaving Bradley to his fate. For what seemed an eternity, Bradley did not move.

"Come, foreign devil!" Wang snapped impatiently. "Give me the jewels."

The war lord's voice steadied Bradley, brought him back to his senses. He was suddenly calm; calm as only a man can be when he comes face to face with death. The end had come. There was no escaping it now. His only choice was whether he preferred the slow death of torture or the quick death of a bullet.

BRADLEY turned slowly and faced the six men. In the yellowish light of the lamp, their faces glistened weirdly; shadows lay around their cruel mouths and tiny flames burned in their eyes. Bradley's fingers gripped the vase, he gathered his muscles, prepared to spring.

"The jewels——" he began, but got no further.

A pistol had exploded. The sound came from the village, and was not loud; but every man in the room jerked and stiffened. Heads went up, eyes rolled in startled surprise. The pistol cracked out again, and a rattle of rifle fire followed, to be drowned by a wild burst of shouting.

A thin smile touched Bradley's lips. He knew the sound of that pistol, knew who had fired it. Swinging the heavy vase over his head, he leaped forward.

Lao had a pistol in his hand, and Bradley struck at him first; a glancing blow that dropped the yellow man in a heap. His pistol clattered to the floor. In the same movement, Bradley flung himself bodily against the two men nearest him, knocking them off balance and spoiling their aim.

Wang roared a curse, and raised his arm to rend Bradley with one of his iron claws. The hook caught in the door curtain behind him. Bradley laughed and sprang forward. His fists smashed into the war lord's face and blood spurted. Bradley struck twice more, and Wang crashed to the floor.

A rifle exploded with a deafening roar, and a cold wind fanned Bradley's ear. Then he swept up Lao's pistol, and backed away, his finger pressing the trigger.

Down in the village just then, Jack Emmick, in pajamas and with one arm in a sling, was coolly picking off the half dozen guards Wang had left there. He got three, then the others turned and fled. Meanwhile, the villagers tumbled forth from their huts, and in two minutes the square was filled with them.

"Follow me!" shouted Emmick, and started up the hill.

A wild yell burst from the vil-

lagers, and they almost swept Emmick off his feet as they rushed after him. Up the hill they surged, knives and clubs in their hands, murderous vengeance in their hearts, careless of the twenty-odd rifles that sought to stop them.

Two hundred, a hundred, then fifty feet, separated the two groups. Panic struck Wang's men as the maddened villagers swept on. Without a leader they were lost. First one and then another turned and ran. Then all at once, as if by a prearranged signal, the whole band turned.

"After 'em!" yelled Emmick, and though the villagers did not understand his words, they plunged on in pursuit of the fleeing bandits.

Emmick staggered up the steps of the veranda, just as Bradley emerged. They stopped and stared at each other in surprise. Bradley was battered and bleeding in half a dozen places, his clothes torn half off of him. Emmick's pajamas were wet with blood. He grinned cheerfully.

"You look like you'd had a scrap."

"What about yourself?" returned Bradley.

"I told you I'd get you out of this mess, and I did. I slipped down to the village, sneaked from house to house, and got the villagers lined up. Then I started the show, but they're finishing it now. Where's the Heavenly King?"

"Take a look," invited Bradley, and nodded toward the door.

Tien Wang lay upon his living-room floor, securely bound. His second in command lay beside him.

"Well, that's that," Emmick said.

He swayed as he spoke, tried to catch himself, and pitched forward. Bradley caught him and carried him into the house. Emmick opened his eyes as he was laid on the bed.

"I'm done for this time. Hole in my chest."

"You'll pull out of it."

"Done for," repeated Emmick. "The gems are in my pocket. Take 'em back where they came from. You were right, Bradley; they're bad medicine. But it was a good scrap."

Emmick's eyelids fluttered and he went limp. Two minutes later, he was dead. But looking down, Bradley saw there was a smile on his lips.

Later, the villagers gathered before Bradley's bungalow, to hear him pass judgment on Tien Wang and his few remaining men. They were pleased but not surprised when again he declined to act, saying it was a matter for them to decide. They dragged their prisoners away in grim silence, to the square before the temple. Flares were lighted and the sky glowed blood-red until dawn.

HU found Bradley slumped in a chair when he came to prepare breakfast the next morning. Hu went around opening the blinds, to let in the sunlight. Bradley looked up, hollow-eyed and gaunt.

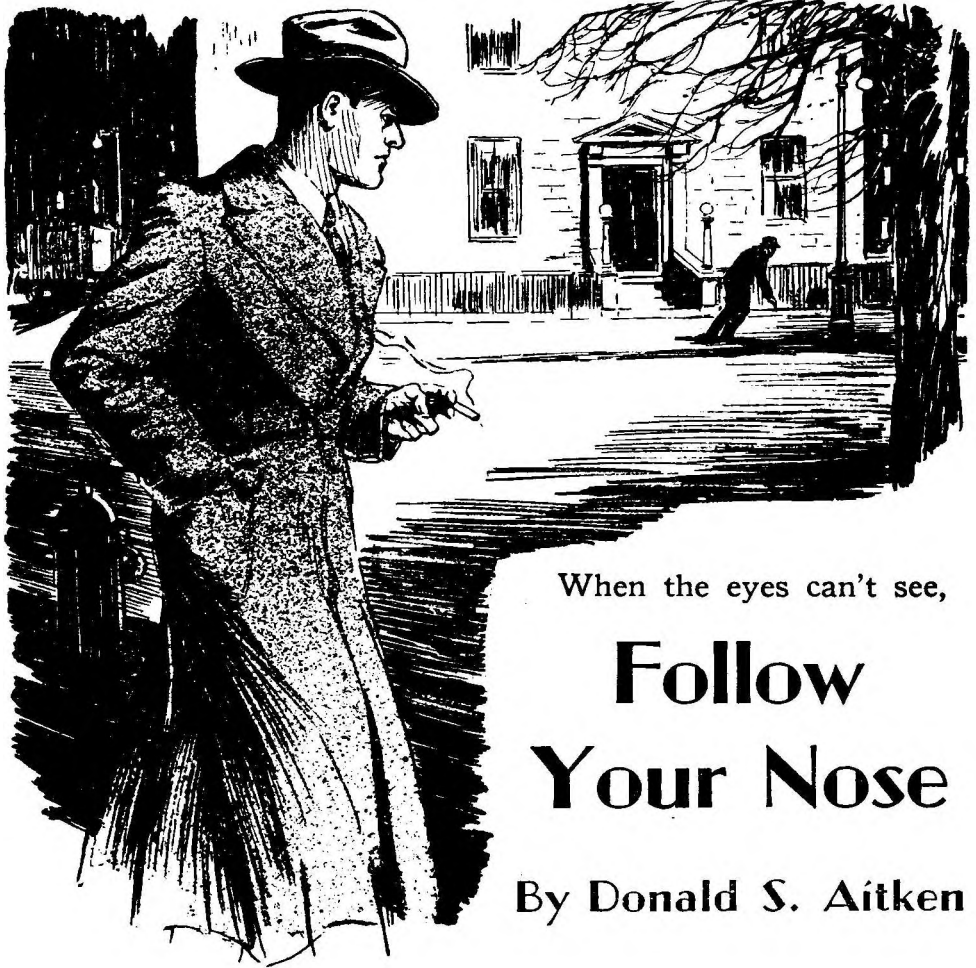
"How was Tien Wang punished?" he asked.

"He died the death of a thousand cuts," answered Hu, without hesitation.

"Who did it?"

"The man, Lao, who was very good. But he will do it no more. When he had finished, he was beheaded, as were the others. It was just punishment. All is well now."

Hu folded his hands across his heart, agitated them briefly, then slipped away, humming softly to himself.



When the eyes can't see,

Follow Your Nose

By Donald S. Aitken

AS he was nearing his rooms on East Fifty-first Street Bob Baxter noticed a man staggering along under a street light farther down the block. The midnight air was chilly. Thin, ragged clouds scudded across the moon.

As a rule, Baxter believed in leaving drunks alone; but this fellow seemed in a particularly bad way. He was stumbling along, arms hanging limply. If he fell he'd probably pitch forward and make a mess of his face.

So, when Baxter reached the brownstone steps leading up to his door, he waited.

COM-8B

The man came reeling along, chin down, black felt hat askew on the back of his head, lacking an overcoat. He would have gone right past if Baxter hadn't spoken.

"If I was you, brother, I'd grab a cab and go home."

The stranger rocked to a halt, lifted his head and blinked in the direction of the voice. "Gosh!" he muttered hoarsely. "I'm all in! I——"

Baxter reached out and caught him by the arm. Then he saw that blood was trickling from the man's temple. It ran down in front of his ear, followed the curve of the jaw and dripped from his chin.

"Say! What's happened?"

The man was shivering. He grimaced. "I've been held up. Two men—slugged me. Took my overcoat."

Baxter jerked his head toward the house. "I live here. You'd better come in and get your head fixed. I'll phone the police."

They went up the steps together. Baxter's rooms were on the first floor. He assisted the man into the living room and eased him down into a chair. Then, after throwing off his own hat and coat, he strode across to the phone.

The man on the chair lifted a hand in protest.

"Never mind the police," he said weakly. "I didn't lose much—just a few dollars. My wife—I don't want her to know. She thinks I'm in Boston on a business trip." He leered.

Baxter pressed his lips close and squinted curiously at the man. He judged him to be about thirty-five. Something horrible had happened to his seamed face. Most of his nose was missing. Only the bridge remained, humped like a peanut shell, scarred and misshapen. The nostrils were oval pits in white skin. His eyes, too small and too close together, shone like little black pills. Gray hair thinned out to a bald spot. He was wearing a crumpled blue suit.

BAXTER juggled the receiver a moment, then shrugged his broad shoulders and hung it up. He walked into the bedroom, a long-limbed, well-built figure of a man. Almost at once he was back with a wet sponge and first-aid kit.

He wiped away congealed blood from the injured man's face and head. The cut was a small one and had stopped bleeding. Over it he

placed a small square of folded gauze, fastening it down with strips of adhesive tape.

Then he produced a bottle of whisky, poured two drinks.

The man brightened. "Ah!" he breathed, smacking his lips. "That was great!" One hand went up and explored the dressing. "I feel a hundred per cent, now. You must be a doctor."

Baxter, grinning, slapped the whisky cork back into the bottle with a stiff palm. "Nothing so refined. Just a private dick—Baxter's the name."

The little black eyes opened wide. "Private detective, eh? Well, I hope I can do something for you some day. My name's—Johnson."

The man had lowered his eyes and hesitated slightly before pronouncing the name. There was a brief, awkward silence, while Baxter rolled a cigarette and wondered why the man was concealing his identity. He extended tobacco tin and papers.

"Smoke?"

"No, thanks." He seemed uneasy now, kept fingering his bow tie. Finally he came out with, "I hate to trouble you any more, but—"

"What's on your mind?"

A friend of mine was to meet me at the end of the block on Second Avenue. He's probably waiting in his car now. If he knew where I was he'd come up and get me—"

"Sure!" Baxter picked up his tweed topcoat and pulled it on. This would be a good chance to get rid of his visitor.

"How'll I know the guy?" he asked.

"He drives a roadster with Jersey plates. There'll be a girl with him."

"O. K." Snatching up his shapeless felt hat, Baxter jammed it on the side of his shaggy, blond head and went out.

There was no sign of any roadster at the corner. He hung around four or five minutes, then started back.

He climbed the steps again and entered the front door. In the hall, one foot came down on something round and hard. The foot skidded from under him and shot ceilingward. He felt himself falling. A frantic twist in an effort to grab the hall stand availed nothing. He landed heavily on his back, fetching his head a smart crack on the floor.

He rose cursing. Scattered at his feet were a number of small white objects. He picked one up, rolled it between thumb and forefinger, sniffed it and exclaimed, "What the hell—moth balls!"

In his rooms another surprise awaited him.

Johnson was gone.

The door leading to the bedroom was open, the lights on. On the carpet in front of a clothes closet lay a crumpled heap of thick brown paper. It was a large, moth-proof garment bag, ripped open.

Baxter looked inside the closet. His brow darkened.

"Of all the cheap swine!"

He turned quickly, ran out of the bedroom and started for the front door. Before he could get out of the living room, the telephone bell jangled. He pulled up short, crossed the room in two long strides and jerked off the receiver violently.

"Hello! . . . Who?" His voice softened. "Oh, hello, Jack. . . . You what?" He listened intently. "Sure I'll come over. Right away. You were lucky to catch me though. . . . Yeah, a guy just pulled a fast one—skipped off with my camel's-hair, winter overcoat. I didn't even wear it this year yet. . . . Yeah, the rat stole it! . . . No, the hell with it now!"

He hung up the receiver, chewed on the inside of his cheek for a second, then took a loaded .32 revolver from a drawer. He slipped it under his topcoat into his hip pocket.

On his way through the hall, he kicked aside more moth balls. The man with the disfigured nose must have thrown them out of the pockets of the overcoat as he made his getaway.

JACK HALLING lived only a block away in a private house recently converted into small apartments. He came down in his shirt sleeves to let Baxter in. A tall, gangling youth with reddish hair, he was holding a rubber ice bag against an ugly, purple bruise on his forehead.

He led the way upstairs to a small, comfortably furnished apartment. A bookcase was filled with law volumes. Other law books were piled on a table behind a divan. On one wall panel were a pair of crossed fencing foils above a silver plaque.

Halling closed the door. "Damn white of you to rush over here like this, Bob. I'm in a hell of a jam!"

Baxter skimmed his hat into a leather armchair. Back in the kitchenette he poured Scotch into highball glasses, swished soda into them. He brought one out to Halling.

"Here, swallow this, then give me the details."

Halling sank into a chair and gulped the drink. He was obviously shaken up. He commenced to speak.

"I went on the razzle to-night, Bob. Dropped over to the Purple Feather—the first night club I've been in since I started law practice. I picked up with a jane and danced with her until she started telling me about her poor old invalid mother who was going to be dispossessed—

then I left her flat. I drifted upstairs where Gus Greenbaum has his roulette layout.

"It was my lucky night—at least, I thought so, then. By eleven o'clock I was ahead nearly a thousand. A fellow watching me make the plays became sorta friendly. We had drinks together. He persuaded me to quit when I hit the grand. Guess I was a little tight then, because I invited this guy home with me.

"Up here, we had some more high-balls. Maybe he slipped me some knock-out drops—I don't know. I remember waking up on the divan and this fellow was rolling me over, trying to get my wallet out. There was a bottle on the floor. I grabbed it and hit him. He sagged a bit, but recovered and came at me with a blackjack. Before I could get up—smacko!

"I was out half an hour. When I came to, he was gone and the wallet as well. Bob, you gotta get it back! The dough doesn't matter, but there's important papers in it that I have to produce in court to-morrow morning."

Baxter was sprawled back in the leather chair, legs stuck straight out, feet crossed. He frowned, ran fingers through blond hair. "Gosh, Jack! This may take——"

"If I don't get those papers by ten o'clock to-morrow, I'm busted! This is my first important case. If I lose and it comes out that I was robbed of my client's documents after getting cockeyed in a night club, it'll ruin me. You get 'em back—you can keep the dough."

The expression on Baxter's face was not very hopeful. "Who was this fellow?" he asked. "What did he look like?"

"He didn't tell me his name. But I'd know him again anywhere. He had only a part of a nose, most of it

had been cut or chewed off or something—what's wrong, Bob?"

Baxter had jerked upright, made his empty glass leap into the air as he brought his fist down on the table beside him. "Good gosh!" he exclaimed. "That's the same bird who stole my overcoat!"

He told Halling of his meeting with Johnson.

"Sure, that was him!" Halling groaned. "He left his own overcoat here."

Baxter commenced to pace up and down the apartment, biting his lip. He didn't look happy. Stopping suddenly, he pulled out his watch.

"There's one chance. Gus Greenbaum may know something about this bird. I'll go over and find out." Baxter grabbed up his hat and started for the door. "You get to bed, Jack. You need sleep if you've got to be in court to-morrow."

He hurried out.

GREENBAUM was a plump, paunchy man, bald, wearing diamond rings on fat fingers. He didn't seem pleased at the way Baxter brushed the head waiter aside and came straight to him.

He muttered his displeasure under his breath. "Some of these days, Baxter," he predicted, "I'm gonna have a coupla my boys drag you out and throw you clear across the street! What d'ya mean, bustin' in like this with your hat and coat on?"

"Some other time, Gus! Some other time. I'm in a hurry—want to talk to you."

"Yeah? Well, you'll talk in my office, not out here." He turned and led the way.

Inside his office, Greenbaum lowered his ample form down carefully between the arms of a swivel chair. He waved Baxter to a seat. Baxter remained standing, hat pushed back

on his head, a hard glint showing in his gray eyes.

"A friend of mine named Halling was in here to-night, Gus. He won some dough on one of your wheels. After he left, he was robbed."

The night club manager extended his palms, shrugged. "So what?"

"This is what! Some guy in here fastened onto Halling when he saw him raking in the dough. He went home with Halling, blackjacked him and got away with a wallet containing some important papers besides the cash. I want to find out who that guy was."

Again Greenbaum shrugged. "I wouldn't know. Johnny runs my wheels. See him."

"This bird I'm talking about had a funny face. His nose looked as though it had got the worst of an argument with a meat grinder sometime."

The manager of the Purple Feather became suddenly interested. He leaned forward in his swivel chair.

"That must have been Scudder Smith!" He bit on a thumb-nail a moment, looked up again and pointed a pudgy forefinger at Baxter. "Look here—keep me out of this and I'll help you all I can. That guy was a damn nuisance to me. He never paid any of his dinner checks, and is always hanging around annoying the customers. I couldn't throw him out because in the old days I used to buy my liquor from him. He might have blabbed a few things."

Baxter's face brightened. This was better than he had hoped for. "I'll see your name is kept out of this Gus. Just tell me where this Scudder Smith hangs out."

Greenbaum was fumbling in an open drawer among a heap of papers. "I've got his address here somewhere. But you'll have to work fast.

For weeks he's been trying to bum the fare to Frisco. He'll lam out on the first train."

BAXTER stepped out of a taxi on Central Park West in the Eighties. He paid the driver and strode westward. The hour was after two. The street was deserted. Dark clouds overhead threatened rain.

On the next corner was an old-fashioned, four-story brick apartment house. Baxter slowed down as he walked past, noted the street number on the transom above the glass swinging doors. A solitary bulb was burning inside a narrow, shabby hall.

He continued on around the corner, then came back. Turning in boldly through the glass doors, he started up the wooden stairs in the rear. Three short flights brought him to the top floor.

Under the door of Apartment 4B a thin thread of light showed.

He halted, transferred his revolver from his hip to the pocket of his tweed topcoat. Then he put an ear close to the upper panel of the door.

Within, he caught the faint strains of a radio playing. Some one was moving around. He listened for voices; could hear none.

Taking a firm grip on his gun, Baxter tried the door with his left hand. The knob turned halfway, no farther. The door was locked. He eased the knob back and released it.

After a moment's deliberation, he crept along to the end of the corridor where a red bulb over a door marked a fire exit. Steps, thick with dust, led to the roof.

The night was pitch dark on top of the building. Rain was commencing to fall. He got his bearings, then felt his way among radio aërials to the parapet overlooking the street.

A fire escape zigzagged down. Baxter descended to a platform running along under the window of Apartment 4B. The window was open about a foot at the bottom and two inches of yellow light showed beneath a tattered blue shade.

He crouched down and edged his way along until he could see into the room.

Scudder Smith was inside hurriedly throwing things into an open suitcase on a leather davenport. He was bareheaded; the square piece of gauze was still in place on his left temple. Over his blue suit he was wearing a camel's-hair overcoat that was too large for him. Baxter's brows furrowed; a hard glint came into his eyes.

A radio somewhere in the room was playing a waltz. Cautiously, Baxter raised the muzzle of his revolver above the sill. The fingers of his left hand sought the bottom of the torn shade, drew it down the fraction of an inch.

When Scudder's back was turned, he released the shade and quickly threw up the window to its fullest extent.

Scudder Smith whirled round as the clattering shade snapped up onto the roller. His jaw sagged as he caught sight of the leveled revolver. Fear showed on his face; the open nostrils twitched and became mere slits. He shot a furtive glance across the room to a closed door.

"Go ahead—try it!" Baxter urged.

The man remained rooted. Keeping him covered, Baxter thrust one big foot over the sill and crammed his big bulk through the window.

Advancing, he said: "Been having a lot of fun to-night, haven't you? That overcoat doesn't fit you very well. You should have told me—I'd have had it taken in a bit!"

HE went through Scudder's pockets and found nothing except a blackjack, which he tossed away.

"All right, where's the money you stole?"

Alarm showed in the little black eyes. "What d'ya mean? I didn't take any money—I was going to return this coat anyway. I only——"

"You damn liar!" clipped Baxter. "Where's that wallet you stole from Halling?"

"I dunno what you're talking about."

"Oh, you don't, eh?"

Baxter reached over to the davenport and tipped the contents of the open suitcase to the floor. A cheap alarm clock rolled away. Shaving kit, socks, shirts, pajamas, were spilled out. Baxter raked over them with his foot. The wallet was not among them.

He turned to Scudder again. "I'll give you one more chance. What did you do with that wallet?"

Scudder licked his thin lips nervously. "I took the dough," he admitted, in a voice that was something between a whine and a snarl. "But I haven't got it now. Two guys—just like I told you—robbed me outside Halling's house."

There was a pause. The husky tones of a blues singer beseeching the river to stay away from her door were filtering through the radio. Baxter's brow was dark. He picked something off the arm of the davenport. It was a printed bus schedule, folded back at a page giving details of transcontinental bus service.

Baxter threw it down savagely. "How the hell were you going to get to Frisco without any dough?" he demanded. He put the revolver away in his coat pocket.

Scudder failed completely to get the significance of this last action.

He answered sullenly. "I tell you, I ain't got——"

Baxter's right hand had bunched into a fist. It came up in a short jab. Scudder's head was snapped back as the blow smashed his mouth. He dropped.

"Maybe now you'll quit stalling!"

Scudder raised himself off the floor on one elbow. He spat blood onto the carpet. Baxter reached over, caught him by the collar of the camel's-hair overcoat, jerked him upright.

"That was just a sample. Where's that wallet?"

Cringing back, Scudder crooked an arm to protect his bloody face. "Damn you!" he cursed. "It's out in the kitchen."

Baxter's grim expression relaxed a little. He took out his revolver again. "That's better! Get it. And remember—I'm right behind you with this gun."

They crossed the room. The radio was close beside the door leading to the kitchen. Scudder fumbled with the doorknob, seemed to have difficulty with it. A voice at Baxter's elbow was announcing, "You are listening, ladies and gentlemen, to a program of popular——"

"Come on!" Baxter ordered. "Open it!"

SCUDDER leaned against the door, pushed with his shoulder. As it flew open he threw himself forward into the darkness of the kitchen, diving for the floor.

"Hey, you!"

Baxter started after him. A snarling shape came launching out of the kitchen, struck him in the chest and sent him staggering back against the door jamb.

It was a huge, ferocious police dog.

The sudden, unexpected impact

had knocked the revolver from Baxter's hand. He grappled with the animal, managed to get hold of its collar. But the brute's fierce lunges sent him lurching back into the apartment. He tripped and fell against the radio, which immediately burst into raucous blare of sound.

As Baxter went down with the dog on top of him, he got a momentary glimpse of Scudder reaching for a wall switch just inside the door. The lights went out.

Above the din of the radio came Scudder's voice. "Kill him, Rex! Kill him, boy!"

Baxter was flat on his back. The huge dog was snarling; straining and leaping against Baxter's hold. Its hind feet scraped and scuffed over Baxter's legs, striving for leverage.

Baxter could not have recovered his revolver, even if he could have located it in the dark. He dared not let go of the dog's collar. Luminous, yellow eyes jerked up and down less than a foot from his face. Snapping fangs strove to reach his throat, tore at his sleeves.

Scudder's voice again. "Kill him, Rex! Kill him!"

Suddenly changing his tactics, Baxter jerked the animal to him. At the same time, he kicked out with his legs and rolled over. For one sickening second the dog got its head free and sank teeth into his shoulder. Then Baxter's fingers found its throat in the dark and began beating its head up and down against the floor. His thumbs dug deep into the hairy throat, pressing against its windpipe.

The brute's struggles grew weaker and weaker. Finally they ceased.

Baxter released his grip and pushed himself up onto his knees.

Across the room, a spurt of yellow flame stabbed the pitch blackness. A

bullet fanned his cheek, ripped into the wall above the wailing radio.

Baxter cursed, bent double and stumbled forward. Bumping against the davenport near the center of the room, he halted and crouched down at one end. Scudder had evidently picked up the revolver before dousing the lights.

The radio was grinding out dance music in ear-splitting reverberations.

Minutes dragged by slowly. Baxter's nerves grew taut under the strain. Scudder was somewhere in the room, waiting to blast him down. Damn that infernal radio!

He felt around in the dark for something to use as a weapon. Close at his feet, his fingers closed on a heavy circular object. It was the alarm clock that had rolled out of the suitcase. He spread his hand over the back, gripped it with the glass face outwards.

SECONDS passed. The radio continued to blare forth. Sweat beads broke out on his brow; the suspense was terrific. If Scudder circled around and switched on the lights, his only chance—a slim one—would be to rush him. He felt a puff of damp, cold air on his cheek.

He swung around to face the open window, wondering if he dare risk creeping over to it. If he bumped into Scudder—he froze suddenly.

Scudder was behind him!

Baxter, crouching, pivoted on the balls of his feet. His eyes strove vainly to pierce the darkness that was as impenetrable as a black velvet curtain. The radio roared on.

He knew that Scudder was close!

He prepared himself for a spring. His only hope was to take Scudder by surprise. He gripped the alarm clock firmly, braced himself.

He leaped into the darkness, forward and upward.

Scudder had been even closer than he expected. His left shoulder took the ex-bootlegger in the pit of the stomach, hurtling him over backward. The revolver exploded close to Baxter's face. Burned powder and acrid smoke snuffed up his nostrils. Before Scudder could fire again, he smashed down with the alarm clock. A scream of pain followed. Baxter dropped the clock, found Scudder's right arm, grappled with it and succeeded in wrenching the gun free.

All the fight was gone out of Scudder now. He lay squirming and cursing.

Baxter got up. Breathing hard, he took a step backward and felt in his pockets for matches. He struck one, threw a glance at Scudder, then picked his way across the room. He stepped over the body of the dead police dog and snapped on the lights. Then he silenced the screaming radio.

In the kitchen he found a small brief bag which he brought back into the living room. He opened it on the davenport.

Inside was a fat wallet crammed with bills and containing also a sheaf of legal-looking documents. Baxter slipped it into an inside pocket, then looked over at Scudder.

"How're you enjoying your big night?"

Scudder was sitting up, dazedly wiping blood from his face with spread fingers.

"Damn you!" he muttered vehemently. "How the hell could you jump on a guy like that in the dark? I couldn't see a thing!"

"Me either, brother! But that coat of mine you're wearing happens to have been in moth balls all summer. It reeks of 'em. When you came close, all I had to do was follow my nose!"



SWAMP BULLY

By Leslie Gordon Barnard

A captain—for a ghost army.

THE main street looked as if a cyclone had struck it while the town was being built and nobody had ever bothered to straighten it out. Somehow halfway down its length a cluster of ancient wooden erections housed the bright-light district of the community. That was

where our crowd came when "Bully" Herkimer paid us now and again. Herkimer had belonged to this district when both mining and lumbering were good and the railway came in, and when the tide of prosperity went out he stayed, a slimy monster left high and dry on the beach.

Herkimer owned all that was left

of Little Bonanza—owned it body and soul. And if he owned anybody or anything more than another it was our crowd at the Swamp Camp. We were as shabby a lot of down-and-outers as you'd gather if you advertised for all the misfits in creation.

Pay day had come and we were all in Little Bonanza, spending. Trust Herkimer to let us off for that. He knew that within forty-eight hours the money he'd paid us would be back in his own coffers.

Then Bully Herkimer would be there roaring:

"Get on to work now, every son of Satan! Into the swamp, and if I find any soldiering, I'll push his nose level with his ears."

IN the Little Bonanza Café, "Pop" Price's girl, Lenore, was busy. She managed the eating-place end of things, and tried to run it clean and straight. Why she stuck at all, why she didn't get out and hit the trail for civilization I couldn't ever figure till Luke Lowney tipped me off.

"Bully has the goods on Pop," said Luke. "He's just got to open his yap to the authorities and that'll be all."

Maybe Lenore knew it and she stuck by her dad; she was that kind of a girl. Her looks took after her mother. Mrs. Price was a sort of legend out our way; when the boom was on she had been the toast of every camp, and it was her death—a horse got unmanageable and threw her—that changed Pop into the fleshy hopeless creature he became.

Lenore came over to our table now, and gave us the once-over with a slow smile she has.

"Well, boys, back again?"

"It's sure good to see you," said Pratt Henderson. He was a thin rail

of a man with a face you couldn't ever fathom, a derelict whose memories, I guess, went deep. Suddenly, looking into his eyes, she said:

"Why don't you quit all this—all of you? You work for Bully, get paid dirt wages, swallow everything from bad food to bad temper, and then come and let him milk you—and send you back to start all over again."

I saw Bert Huestis, who was opposite me, go a greenish color. He tried to mouth some words, but the words didn't come out. I swung around.

Bully Herkimer was standing right behind Lenore.

"So?" he said. "Talking pretty behind my back, ain't you?"

He wasn't a pretty sight any time, but still less so now.

"Every word of it's true," she said. "You think you can bully and beat men into being slaves for you. You think——"

She broke off, her eyes going to the doorway that opened into the rambling regions at the back. Pop Price had just come into the room. In Pop's eyes, almost lost in the flesh of his puffy face, was a haunting, terrible sort of appeal. Lenore just wilted. Bully was quick to see that. He always knew when to strike was safe. He caught her arm in a hard grip.

"You'll pay for this," he said.

I say it in shame to all of us sitting there that for a moment we were too paralyzed to move; the old habit of bowing to Bully's brutal will had us by the throat.

That was the first any of us noticed the stranger.

He'd been sitting at a table in the shadows, and when he came forward there was something about him I couldn't place at all. He walked with a sort of easy swing, and he

looked as if he had some power about him. When he got alongside he didn't more than come to Bully's mouth.

"Let go that girl!" he said.

Bully's piggy eyes glinted. He loved a fight—with a guy smaller than himself. He always picked them that way for his camps. He gave the stranger a sidewise glance, and his fingers tightened. Then, before we could quite believe it, Bully Herkimer reeled between two tables that crashed over on the floor.

Pop Price started forward, but Bully, bellowing with rage, shouted to him to keep out of it. The stranger stood braced, ready, and Bully, blind with rage, made a dash for him. Those big fists were like flails in the air, but there was something about the way the smaller man stood poised and watchful, which gave me hope. But only for a moment. His hands, tensed, ready for action, became little more than a shield before him, a defense which was like putty before Bully's mad rush.

Then the stranger lay bleeding, groaning a little. Bully towered over him, kicked him once contemptuously with his heavy boots, then turned away and stamped out into the street.

A moment later Lenore Price was kneeling beside the victim. We carried him upstairs, and laid him on a bed, and Lenore got busy fixing him up.

BY Sunday night the usual had happened. Those who weren't sleeping it off were counting up a few dimes and nickels and wondering why they still believed in luck. If Bully Herkimer didn't get them one way he got them another. And there we were, in the pale light of another pay day aftermath, trekking swampward into the

Monday sunrise. It was a ghost army, none saying much, all a bit blur-eyed, a bit stooped, a bit shambling.

Then, suddenly, I saw that we had a recruit—the stranger of the café brawl. We knew now that he went by the name of Preston Smith. I fell in step with him. Pratt Henderson's lank form loomed up in the mist on the other side, and we put it up to Smith what he meant.

"What does what mean?" he asked us. "I've landed a job, that's all. That big palooka offered me a job, and I grabbed it."

"Herkimer offered you a job?" we said together.

"Why not? He made it up to me like a gentleman. We shook on it and there you are."

It was the first time we'd heard Bully called anything like a gentleman. Pratt coughed as if he'd something in his throat. Then we saw Luke Lowney shambling along with us. He'd heard and a heathenish sort of grin was on his face.

"Don't let me disabuse your mind ner nothin'," drawled Luke, "but when I meet a friendly rattlesnake I'll begin to believe nice things about Herkimer. Maybe you don't know what you're headin' for? Take a tip from an old hand and scram while you've got any spirit left in you to get out. This outfit isn't for a kid like you."

"Didn't Lenore Price tip you off to keep out of this swamp gang?" I asked.

He flushed slightly.

"She doesn't know."

We tramped on in silence. The way was getting oozy and slime fastened on your boots like glue.

"It's hot!" said Smith.

"Like hell!" Luke agreed. "Talk-in' about that," he said. "You've heard of hell ships, buddy? Well,

this is a hell camp instead. There's not even sea breezes and a sight of sail against the sky."

I'd never known Luke's past, but now I read into it the rolling freedom of the high seas. It was like seeing a window opened.

"Don't you get it?" Pratt Henderson rasped into my ear. "Bully isn't through with the kid yet. He's brought him out here where he can cat-and-mouse him until he's bitten him clear in half."

I said nothing, knowing Pratt had the rights of it. We just went on in silence, and the bush, rising pale and green out of the swamp, swallowed us up.

BULLY had two aids after his own heart, but even these were in fear of him. It was rumored that one, the cook, was a bird flown without leave from behind iron bars; that the other, the foreman, had a past that also was a secret between himself and his boss. The cook was a burly man, who worked more often than not stripped to the waist, with a dirty white hat perched over grizzled, unkempt locks, and a cigarette forever drooping from thick lips.

Preston Smith first bumped up against the cook, when, on the second day, the soup contained a butt of a cigarette, and somebody—as a joke—ladled it out to Smith. I'd seen him from the first eyeing the dirty cookhouse and its uncouth occupant with disfavor, and now, before any one could call him off, Pres was heading that way, his mug of soup in hand. We watched, awed, as he held up the mug and pointed out the offensive thing.

The cook, still smoking, looked into the mug then up at the recruit.

"Complaint?" he said. "Give it to me."

Pres handed it over. With an oath the cook tossed the hot greasy mess into his face, and the tin after it. We saw Preston Smith stand quivering like a young colt that's first tasted the whip. Except for blood trickling down his cheek, he was white as salt. We thought him about to spring at his aggressor, and then a voice boomed out:

"What's to pay here?"

Bully Herkimer came striding up the path from the swamp. Beside him was Connolly, the foreman, a hard-bitten devil if ever there was one, with lips that hadn't smiled for years.

Smith saw him, and turned. In three strides Herkimer was alongside.

"There was a cigarette butt in my mug of soup!" said Smith, in a queer voice. "And his kitchen's as dirty as he is!"

You could feel something in the air, a little stirring as if the blood in us old derelicts had grown younger, the eyes brighter, the shoulders stiffer.

A bellow came from the cook, but before he could charge, Bully Herkimer shouted an order, and the cook came to heel like a dog.

"Fetch another mug of soup," said Herkimer.

A gasp went out from all of us, to see Bully take the new man's part. Somebody ran to obey. Herkimer took the mug, looked into it, and into Preston Smith's eyes. Then he reached out, jerked the still glowing cigarette stub from the cook's fat lips and tossed it into the mess.

"Now get that down," said Herkimer. "And make it snappy."

Smith flushed red, then paled.

"I—I couldn't, sir."

In a moment Herkimer had him by one arm and Connolly by the other.

"Feed it to him," snarled Bully.

When the cook was through, Preston Smith's face was a mass of blood and greasy soup, but he'd choked down most of it. There comes over me a red flood of shame that all of us stopped there watching, enduring the thing we saw.

Pres lay in his bunk retching; then, utterly spent, he was as still as death, except now and again for a spasmlike sobbing that shook him. But he was up and about again soon, doing his work, standing up to brutal treatment. We got to talking about it amongst ourselves. It was bad enough that wasters from the ends of the earth should come to this; but to see a young fellow being broken was something that made us buzz a little like bees stirred in a hive.

I USED to see Bully Herkimer eyeing his newest recruit in a way that he'd never quite watched any of the rest of us. Perhaps he sensed there was something in Smith unbroken, and beyond his power to break. Perhaps it was because—as I know now—he was jealous of the place Preston held in the eyes of Lenore Price. That Bully should aspire to the girl was monstrous, but that wouldn't trouble a mind like his.

Pres got under my own skin a bit. I used to get him aside and try and get him to talk. I wanted to find out what was behind his being with us.

"Every one of us," I hinted to him, "have done things—things we don't like to think on."

He sat on a log, chucking stones into a bit of a creek that ran by. Then he said:

"There's one thing I haven't done. I haven't broken a solemn word of honor—not yet." He jumped up,

lips twitching, then sat down again and laughed in a strange sort of way. He looked up. "What's the matter with all the rest of you? Aren't you men still? Has he bullied all that out of you?"

I told him: "We've been battered about a bit. After a time I guess you don't care."

He put a hand on my arm. "We've got to change that," he said. "We've got to change that." And then he got up and walked away, and I saw him later under a smoky oil lamp, writing as if his ideas had gone mad and had to spill out. He got one of the truckmen to take the letter into Little Bonanza and mail it.

From now on Bully started to take it out on Pres in a new way. I think Bully had got to know that Smith just stood and took a lot of things, and that this hurt him more than a rough-and-tumble, even with himself on the underside. So Bully Herkimer worked on him through the girl. He got insinuating things about Lenore Price, pointing out that Preston Smith had been bunking at Price's place for the better part of a week before the fracas, and to take a hand in the girl's affairs must mean something. Bully didn't say just what, but he left no doubt of his meaning.

I was there when Bully Herkimer said this right out before us all. Pres flushed, then sprang up, lips white and his whole body shaking.

"I'll knock those words down your throat," he said.

Bully stood and blinked; then roared with a taunting sort of laughter.

"Come on," he challenged. "Come on and try it, my bucko." You could see he wanted to get his fists into the lad's face. Preston took a step forward, and all of us rose a little where we were. I think if, at that

moment, Smith had gone for Bully, every man jack of us would have followed.

Then Pratt Henderson who stood, fists clenched, breathing hard beside me, groaned.

"The yellow pup! As yellow as the lot of us!"

Preston Smith had turned and scuttled for the woods as if seven Bullys were hotfoot after him.

Bully watched the flying heels disappear, then turned on us.

"I'll deal with him later!" he barked. "As for you—into the swamp and get a move on. And if anybody lifts his eyes from his work I'll give him something to remember."

We figured Bully would flay Preston Smith alive, but he had other ways of getting vengeance. He let the lad go on his way unscathed except by the embarrassed looks of his fellows, and the open contempt of the cook, Connolly, and himself.

Even the truckmen got wind of it, and the fellow who brought Smith a yellow telegraph form pushed it into his hand kind of scornfully.

"It's all about town!" he told Smith.

"About town?"

"Sure—about your runnin' like a rabbit after challenging the boss."

Pres turned away, and then I saw him read the wire. Some of us got the truckman aside and quizzed him.

"Sure," he said. "I seen the message down to the office when they were givin' it to me."

He told us what it was, and we stood staring at him and then at each other. We'd thought maybe somebody had left Smith money or something. But the truckman stuck to his story. The telegram, he said, was unsigned and had just three words.

"Hop to it."

We all laughed a little, but we went away wondering.

BRINGING Pop Price and Lenore to camp for a visit was typical of Bully. He was clever, was Bully, but he had his blind spots. And he wanted to humiliate Preston Smith before the girl. He wanted her to see just what kind of a rabbit the young fellow was.

It's queer how rumors get around, but we sweated in the swamp under the lash of Connolly's tongue, driven harder than ever by Bully's orders, there was a whisper running everywhere. It hummed through the swamp like the buzz of insects, but nobody could quite interpret it. We knew we were all uneasy and excited, hopeful and depressed, talkative and moody. Some of the boys came out of their secrecy and told things they'd never let word be heard of before—things out of their past; not the bad things so much as those that'd show we once were like other humans, and had hope and faith and vigorous pleasures. It seemed as if the coming of Preston Smith had done something to us we hadn't thought could be done. Luke Lowney began to talk of days at sea. Pratt Henderson stood up a bit straighter, and spoke of a woman he had once known who'd believed in him. Bert Heustis hauled out a picture, cracked with age. "I used to own her. She was the finest thing on four hoofs," he said, and we stood round and looked at a mare with intelligent eyes, young Bert mounted on her.

When the girl and Pop Price arrived in camp, the weather had turned sticky again. That night I lay awake listening to the shrilling of the frogs, and now and again the

hooting of owls, and, in the silences between, the queer oozy sounds made by water sucked into the thousand treacherous mouths of the marsh.

Next day we were all under the lash of Connolly's tongue, sweating and moiling, when through the bush we could see Bully Herkimer. With him were Pop Price and Lenore. We'd been expecting this visit; Bully had meant to show his guests over the camp to-day and Preston Smith had decked himself out in a fresh khaki shirt that he kept for good. Partly it was because of the girl, I suppose, and partly that his old one had got torn until we kidded him a bit about it.

They came near where a group of us were hard at it, and stood watching: then Bully Herkimer spoke.

"You, Smith! Come here!"

Pres lifted his head, looked, wiped his hands on his trousers, and obeyed. Bully reached out and plucked at the new shirt.

"This isn't a public holiday," he said. "Who asked you to get all dressed up?"

Smith kept his head.

"It's just a shirt, sir. My old one is torn."

"It is, eh? Sure you haven't prettified yourself up like a lady-killer? Well, take it off!"

We all stood now not working, and I guess that suited Bully. He liked an audience. The cook had been tipped off, for I could see him leaning on a stump, the everlasting cigarette drooping from his big lips, his eyes full of anticipation. He'd never forgiven Smith.

Pres didn't make a move; just stood, tensed.

"You heard me?" demanded Bully.

Smith said nothing. With a quick movement Herkimer reached over, and caught the shirt at the collar.

The fabric was tough, but under Bully's fingers it split down the back; he pulled again and Preston Smith stood stripped to the waist. We saw the red blood run under the smooth skin.

"Now get back to work!" said Herkimer.

Still Smith kept his head.

"When I get another shirt, sir."

Bully's face mottled.

"Now!" he shouted. "Get on with it or you'll feel the weight of—"

His hand was raised; I think he couldn't have controlled the blow longer, but the girl ran forward and caught his arm.

He turned on her with words that set our ears tingling, and at that moment Preston Smith leaped. Before the astounded Bully could move, two lefts and a right had found his jaw. Instantly Connolly and the cook ran to his support, but Bully shouted:

"Get back. Leave him to me. I'll teach him. I'll kill him!"

BULLY'S head snapped back under the impact of Preston's blow. There was an area of level land just here and by common consent we moved in a circle about it, making a ring. The movement of Smith's muscles under his skin was a marvel. Bully Herkimer had brute strength, terrific, crushing; he had the advantage of height, of reach, of weight, but Preston Smith was a wizard on his feet, and he had science. Yet even that, in the face of Bully's impact, and against the ability of the big man to take punishment, got him no great way. Bully began to land more frequently, the smooth torso of the younger man was red and bruised, his face was cut, the old scarcely-healed wound made by the rim of that mug of soup, opened again.

Herkimer got in a terrific right to the mouth; Smith staggered and went down on one knee. Bully struck again, but by an inch Smith swerved and took the blow obliquely. It bowled him over on the ground, and Bully, beside himself, launched a kick at the recumbent figure. With a shrill cry of protest, echoed by our own shout, Lenore Price sprang at Herkimer. He flung her brutally aside. In that moment Pres was given a power no man could stand against. He was on his feet, and before his swift blows Bully staggered. Into those blows went all long stored-up feelings, buttressed now by this last offense. Now Herkimer was on his knees, now he was up again; and a shout from us rang through the desolate trees of the swampland, for in his eyes was a look of cowering fear; of a man who has found his master, who has at last tasted defeat. Then Bully lifted his voice in a cry: "Connolly! Cook!" At the sound both these burly aids sprang to his side.

It was Luke Lowney who gave the next command.

"At 'em boys!" he shouted. "All hands on deck!"

He sounded almost gay. Then something more than our bodies leaped. We carried scars for many days, and found them honorable.

A sudden order halted us in the end.

"Stand back, boys. Let them be now." It was Preston Smith. He cleared us away from three cowering, desperate men, fear showing in them: the cook, Connolly, and Bully Herkimer.

"They've had enough," said Preston. A pale sort of smile came to his lips. He couldn't tell us then what he confided to us later. "I once nearly killed a man with my

fists," he told us, "in a black, uncontrollable rage. He was a friend of mine, too. I swore to him I'd never use my fists in anger again." It was this, of course, that had almost broken him, and sent him wandering until he fell foul of Herkimer. Then we understood the letter and that telegram, with its crisp release from a solemn promise.

We learned all this later. Just now he stood between us and any further vengeance we might have worked on Bully, who beaten, crushed though he was, snarled a defiance.

"You'll pay for this—double, all of you." His eyes went to Pop Price, who shrank back, knowing that secret of his past, whatever it was, lay in Bully's power. Herkimer turned even on his own aids, cursing them for not striking sooner. I saw their eyes on him in sudden fear and hatred. Then, wiping the blood from his eyes, with a backward movement of his hand, he turned and strode blindly into the bush. It did not occur to us to stop the big cook nor Connolly as they followed on after him.

WHATEVER the secret of Pop Price's past, it is still a secret. A week later we found the crushed body of Bully Herkimer half submerged in a low portion of the swamp. The cook and Connolly were gone, nor did we ever hear of them again. Pop Price is mayor of Little Bonanza now, but his son-in-law is the power behind the throne. We're quite a thriving community since gold prices stiffened and some of the old mines opened; but there is still timber lying unclaimed and rotting in the swampland where Bully Herkimer drove derelicts who now have become men again.

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DEATH WITH GREAT



CHAPTER I.

ACCIDENT—ON PURPOSE.

A BLAST of flame roared up from the bow of "Red" Sheridan's small boat, scattering packages and shooting back in Red's face, which he instinctively tried to shield with his hands as he

dived overboard. When Red came to the surface, the flaming craft was swinging back toward him. He watched it coming and dived again. The Sacramento River was too muddy for him to see the boat pass, but he could feel the chug of the propeller go by, and when he came up again, he saw his boat slide under the water with a final hiss of steam.

A smudge of oily smoke drifted up from where the boat had disap-

HONOR

By Homer King Gordon



Too much to
live for!

peared. Red's eyebrows were burned off. His lips were seared, and he felt welts of burns on his chest and arms, but, as he stroked out in an easy crawl toward Diamond Island, less than a mile away, there was a grin of satisfaction on his face.

A mile swim is nothing to a man who has been on an Olympic swimming team and who is less than two years out of college training. Red rolled over on his back and kicked off his tennis sneakers. He had not been wearing a hat. His mop of red hair felt singed, but there was enough of it left to mark his progress through the water. He splashed

about unnecessarily for a few moments, then raised his face toward the island. A long motor boat was putting out toward him. Red grinned again as he continued to splash and swim desperately.

There were two men and a girl in the boat that came up. Red had been working at swimming so hard that he was actually winded when he straightened up in the water and waved to his rescuers. He was so tired that the tall, thin, dark-faced man crouched out in the prow of the motor boat almost stabbed him with a vicious swing of a boat hook. Red saw the boat hook just in time and managed to dodge. There was

no mistaking the murderous intent in the thin man's eyes.

As he went down Red caught a glimpse of a square-featured, short, heavy-set man at the wheel of the motor boat, and just a glance at the terror-stricken face of one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen, as she leaned over the side of the boat and made a futile grab at his hair. The boat had come dangerously close to ramming him, after the boat hook missed, but Red sensed that the girl was sincere in her efforts to get him out of the water.

When the boat swung back, Red had his head up and was ready to take care of himself if necessary. However, the dark man had laid aside the boat hook, and the girl was standing beside the other man at the wheel.

"Major Grey, help him!" the girl cried.

"I'm all right," Red panted, throwing a bare foot over the side of the boat. "I'll—make it."

He felt a powerful hand at the waistband of his old duck trousers and a heave sent him sprawling into the boat. The girl bent over him, concealing the two men, but he heard the one she had called Major Grey speak to the other one.

"Look around where his boat went down," he ordered.

THE motor boat shot off into the channel. Red kept his eyes closed, pretending a great deal more exhaustion than he felt. The girl was brushing water away from his cracked lips and his burned eyelashes with her handkerchief, and imploring them to hurry back to the island where his burns could be treated.

"I'm just winded," Red protested.

"Please don't try to talk," she begged. "You're burned badly."

Wrapping him in a piece of canvas she pillowed his head on a cushion and sat beside him on the floor of the boat, as it circled slowly. The dark man lying out on the prow fished several floating objects out of the water before Major Grey grunted impatiently and turned the boat back toward the island. He left the wheel long enough to take the canvas off Red and look at him briefly.

"Nothing wrong with him," he told the girl.

"But look at the burns," she protested.

"Scratches," Major Grey scoffed.

Red kept his mouth shut and his eyes closed until the boat nosed into the mud bank which was Diamond Island landing.

As soon as the boat touched, the girl leaped out and ran up a path toward a cottage standing apart from the other cluster of buildings. Major Grey helped Red free himself from the strip of canvas and step unsteadily from the boat.

"Bring that stuff, Franko," Major Grey directed the thin, dark man, indicating the water-soaked packages, which had been fished out of the river at the spot where Red's boat had gone down.

Red stood beside the boat for a moment, looking about. In front of the boat landing was an old, weather-beaten, two-story frame house. A mud walk extended around it, but the absence of porches made it barren and forbidding in appearance. Back of the big house were several old sheds, and apart from them, but nearer a small cottage to which the girl had gone, was an open-sided shed.

Under the shed roof were several tanks, a motor-driven pressure pump, a bricked retort, and other items of machinery which suggested

a miniature oil refinery. Two men came from this shed.

"Go on up to the house," Major Grey ordered, when Red would have loitered.

The door to which Red was led was open. They entered a kitchen, a big room hung with cooking utensils behind an old-fashioned wood range. Major Grey kicked a chair back from the kitchen table and motioned Red to sit down.

He dismissed Red's burns with one glance, and took the wet bundles from Franko and examined them carefully, sniffing at each one. They were all packages of vegetables and food.

"Now. What happened?" he asked curtly, tossing the packages aside.

"My boat blew up." Red grinned, fingering the welts across his chest. They were not burned badly, although they stung under the pressure of his finger tips. His eyes and lips were smarting.

"I want to know how and why it blew up," Major Grey demanded. "These are soaked with gasoline. Where did they come from? Who are you and what were you doing out there in the channel opposite this island?"

"My full name's Mark Randolph Sheridan. I was born twenty-six years ago in St. Louis, Missouri. For the past three months I've been taking care of the Green Back Duck Club down on Emerald Island, living in the clubhouse, building up blinds and baiting the feeding ponds, and I bought those parsnips up at Antioch this afternoon, because I'd about run out of anything to eat. Who in hell are you and what business is it of yours who I am or what I was doing? I didn't invite myself here. You came out and got me, and tried to break my

head open with that boat hook and then run me down when your Franko friend missed!"

THE two men whom Red had seen leaving from the shed came into the kitchen and stood by the open door. One was a big-shouldered, low-browed, stupid-looking giant of a man, with dangling arms and muscular hands. The other was small, with an oval, slant-eyed face.

Major Grey, with an almost imperceptible gesture, stopped them by the door.

"These are soaked with gasoline," Major Grey repeated, ignoring Red's question.

"I shouldn't be surprised, the way that boat blew up," Red admitted.

"Why, and how?"

"I had a gallon can of gasoline up there with them. It must have been leaking, or else I put it in upside down."

"For your outboard motor?"

"No. For a gasoline lamp I use over at the island," Red declared. "I have to use white gasoline in it or it won't work."

"What exploded it?"

"I was sprawled out smoking a cigarette. Guess when I tried to flip it overboard I either aimed wrong or the wind carried it back into the boat. You don't think I deliberately tried to blow myself up, do you?"

"I was wondering," Major Grey retorted.

"If you'll just give me some oil, any kind for these scratches"—Red indicated his burns—"I'll be much obliged if you will put me back somewhere on the mainland, or anywhere that I can get a boat. I don't want to keep you wondering any longer than necessary."

"This is a very important experi-

mental station," Major Grey stated curtly. "We don't encourage visitors and, when one appears, we make sure, before he leaves, that we know everything there is to know about him and his motives in coming here."

"Does that mean I'm going to be held here a prisoner?" Red demanded.

Major Grey shrugged.

Before Red could speak the girl ran into the room with a tube of burn lotion. Just behind her came a silver-haired man wearing an acid-stained smock. Keen blue eyes and a sensitive, educated face set him apart from the other men in the room. He stared at Red for a moment, then stepped up, taking Red's extended hand.

"Why, Red Sheridan!"

"Hello, prof." Red grinned.

"Do you know this young man?" Major Grey demanded of the older man.

"I was in one of Professor Baker's chemistry classes up at the university," Red explained.

"Of course, I know him," Professor Baker declared. "Why, this is a surprise! You didn't meet my daughter Phyllis, did you, Red? I believe she was away at school. And this is Major Grey. And—well, imagine meeting you here. Phyllis said there'd been an accident."

"My boat blew up."

"You would be in the water. Let's see—swimming and water polo wasn't it, Red? And didn't you make the last Olympic swimming team?"

"Dad, he's burned," Phyllis protested.

"Here, I'm so thoughtless." Professor Baker bent over to examine Red's burns, running his fingers gently over the red welts. "Just let me have that ointment, Phyllis. They don't appear to be deep burns.

Painful, though, probably. You'd better come over to the cottage, Red, and let me treat these properly."

"Don't bother, professor," Red said. "I wasn't hurt."

"Well, you at least need some dry clothes. Come along—and no argument. Major Grey, can't you find him a pair of your old trousers and a clean shirt?"

Major Grey turned to Franko and jerked his head significantly. When Red was urged out of the house and along the path toward the cottage, Major Grey trailed along.

THE cottage was a small one-story structure with two bedrooms opening off a combined living and dining room. Making Red sit in one of the wicker chairs in the big room, Professor Baker clapped his hands sharply. Immediately a Chinese youth came out of the kitchen. He was dressed in white duck, and appeared to be twenty-five years old. Red gave him but a glance, remembering later that he had been somewhat surprised to find a Chinese cook so intelligent in appearance.

"Some hot water, Lun, and some bandages from my kit."

While the professor was cleaning the skin around Red's burns and covering them with oil, Franko came to the cottage with the clothes Major Grey had ordered. Major Grey took them at the door.

"I thought you were aiming at government service, Red," Professor Baker remarked. "Wasn't the career going to be in the diplomatic service?"

"I'm still cramming on languages and international law," Red said uneasily. "Waiting for an opening."

"Major Grey might be able to help you," Professor Baker declared. "It's supposed to be a secret, but not

among such old friends. Major Grey represents the government. I'm making some important tests, experiments in——"

"Professor Baker," Major Grey interrupted, "are you forgetting our agreement?"

Professor Baker laughed uneasily.

"I—I probably was. But you see—one of the boys from my college. I'm taking a sabbatical year for this work."

"And you aren't doing that right," Phyllis said, taking the pad of gauze from her father. "I'm afraid if I'd known you were a champion swimmer, Mr. Sheridan, I wouldn't have worried so much over your safety."

"Just plain Red—and I was plenty tired when you picked me up."

Phyllis's eyes smiled at him speculatively.

"You'll not be going back to your island until after dinner, will you?" Major Grey asked.

"Certainly not," Professor Baker declared. "He must stay for dinner. Why not stay over and visit for a day or so, Red?"

"After dinner will do nicely," Red said.

"Then I'll have the boat ready whenever you want to start," Major Grey stated, leaving them abruptly. However, he came back in a moment, speaking to Professor Baker.

"I must ask you to remember, professor, that our work here cannot be discussed."

"You are quite right, of course," Professor Baker agreed. "However, I'm quite sure you can have every confidence in Red's discretion."

Lun began moving noiselessly about the room, cleaning up bandages and the odds and ends of lint and gauze.

"Mr. Sheridan is staying for dinner, Lun," Phyllis said. "Can you fix something special?"

"Yes, Miss Baker," the Chinaman said quickly, just a trace of accent slurring his soft speech.

WHEN Lun had left the room, Professor Baker beamed proudly on Red.

"Lun is an exchange student, a graduate of Yale. He came to me at school, wanting work. He's remarkable. You wouldn't find one of our college graduates willing to be a house boy so that he could earn money to do graduate work."

"He helps dad with—with his work," Phyllis explained.

"He has the making of a fine chemist," Professor Baker declared. "He has more patience than I have."

"Which isn't much," Phyllis laughed. "But you've seen him break test tubes, probably."

"Yes, indeed." Professor Baker sighed.

"Do the others eat here?" Red asked.

"They mess at the other house. Major Grey insists on eating with them, although I've asked him to eat with us," Professor Baker answered. "He's a strict army man. Why not have him over to dinner, too, tonight, Phyllis? He might be able to give you some valuable pointers, Red."

"Please," Phyllis said quickly, then hesitated in some confusion. "I mean probably you and Red would enjoy being able to talk over your campus affairs without feeling it necessary to explain everything to a stranger. Of course, if you'd rather——"

"You're quite right, dear," her father agreed.

Red sensed something more than appeared on the surface in her objection to Major Grey's presence.

However, the conversation was switched to another subject and Red

made no attempt to speak of Major Grey again. After a little while Professor Baker excused himself and went out to his open-shed laboratory.

"Are those other men in the army, too?" Red asked Phyllis.

"I don't believe so. Major Grey hired them to act as watchmen—and helpers."

It seemed to Red that she manufactured an excuse to go into the kitchen so that she could avoid saying more. At least, it gave him an opportunity to look out of the window at the strange laboratory where Professor Baker had been joined by Major Grey and Franko.

Major Grey was talking emphatically to the professor, punctuating his remarks with positive gestures of his closed right hand. Professor Baker nodded occasionally, but did not argue with him. Franko, in the background, stared at the window where Red was.

Behind the laboratory was a kind of underground storeroom which had not been visible from the boat landing. The strong padlocked door had been set into the ground about two feet below the surface. Steps led down to it. The chamber to which it led had been covered with a mound of earth. Red had seen such storehouses used for the storage of explosives.

Several steel containers stood in a row back of the retort. They resembled containers used for carbonated gas. Whatever it was Major Grey was saying, he finished and, with a final gesture, turned and strode back toward the big house, followed by Franko.

Professor Baker came slowly back to the cottage, his head bowed thoughtfully. Phyllis was still out of the room, when he entered and came over to Red.

"Major Grey is quite perturbed over your presence," he said simply. "I suppose that's the army influence. He doesn't seem to realize accidents happen by their own accord."

"What branch of the army is he in?" Red asked.

"Chemical warfare," Professor Baker answered. "You see, we're out here perfecting a new type of gas I accidentally discovered a few years ago. I see no harm in telling you that. You know enough about chemistry and equipment to have guessed that the moment you saw my laboratory."

"I did," Red admitted. "But if you'd rather not discuss it I certainly won't be offended."

"Unfortunately, I've promised him I wouldn't," Professor Baker sighed. "It's a pity, too, for I'm sure you would be interested. Perhaps later I can invite you over to see one of my demonstrations."

"I'd be glad to see one, but not if it involved you in any trouble."

"After all, it's my gas," Professor Baker said sharply. "But let's talk about the old school now."

CHAPTER II. PRISONER.

WITH the approach of darkness a light fog commenced to drift down over the island. Soon Professor Baker switched on lights and turned on the radio.

"We have our own lighting system," he explained. "If it wasn't for the radio I don't know what Phyllis would have done. She hasn't been off the island since we came down here several months ago."

"Why not?" Red inquired. "It's just a short ride over to Antioch in that motor boat."

Professor Baker hesitated.

"It was part of my agreement with Major Grey. Rather unnecessary, I thought, but Phyllis knew of the conditions and still insisted on coming with me. I tried to induce her to spend the year traveling."

"And you thought I'd leave you to take care of yourself," Phyllis said, from the kitchen doorway. "I know how you work day and night if some one isn't around to make you keep regular hours. How's the invalid?"

The radio was playing a dance by one of the San Francisco hotel orchestras. Red stood up and stretched out his arms.

"Dying—for a dance. Come on."

He ignored her protests over his condition and, until Lun, smiling and bowing from the kitchen, announced dinner for the second time, they danced.

"I'll take a few burns for the chance to dance with you, any day," Red said.

"You must come over often," Professor Baker declared. "I haven't seen Phyllis so gay since we came here."

A forced and wistful note crept into her gayety as the end of the dinner approached, as though she was fighting against some secret fear. Red made a clumsy attempt to find out what it was she feared, but not until Professor Baker went into an adjoining room to get his humidor of cigars did he have any success with his questions.

"Why don't you and your father ride back to my island with me, when Major Grey takes me home?" he suggested. "It's foggy, but I think you'd enjoy cutting through the fog."

"I would enjoy riding over there with you," she admitted frankly. "But I might not enjoy coming back."

"You mean Major Grey——"

She nodded.

"But please don't mention that to dad. I can take care of myself. It would only worry him more than he already worries."

"I wasn't thinking of saying anything to your father," Red remarked.

"Don't you underestimate Major Grey," she warned. "He is dangerous and ruthless. It's not for myself alone that I'm afraid. It's for dad, too. I—I think he realizes, too, that as soon as—as his work is done here——"

Red patted her unresisting hand.

"Suppose——" He looked about and lowered his voice. "Just suppose what happened this afternoon wasn't an accident by any means."

"I think, Red Sheridan, I could love you for telling me that. Let's dance," she said softly. "I want to dance, I want to sing."

"Come on," Red invited.

"So you knew dad was here?" she whispered.

"I like the way you wrinkle up your nose when you smile," Red drawled. "And I like your eyes."

FOR a man so completely overcome with exhaustion and burns only a few hours before, Red was an extremely active invalid when Major Grey rattled the cottage screen door to call attention to his presence several hours later.

"Come on," he said, scowling at Red. "I want to get back here some time to-night."

Professor Baker and Phyllis went down to the boat with Red. Franko and the surly-faced giant were already aboard. Major Grey waited for Red to get in before pushing the boat off the mud.

"As soon as you can, Red, we are expecting you back again," Professor Baker declared. "I insist that

you agree to Red's coming here as often as he can, Major Grey."

Red waited. Reluctantly Major Grey growled something which none of them understood.

"I insist, Major Grey," Professor Baker repeated firmly.

"He can come here to visit you any time he decides such a visit is worth the effort," Major Grey said smoothly. "All I am concerned with now is getting him back to his island."

"You will come?" Phyllis said softly.

"Sure." Red squeezed her hand and jumped into the boat.

Major Grey pushed it off the mud bank and jumped on the prow as Franko gave the engine a turn. It did not start, nor did it start after repeated efforts had been made to get it going. Wind and the current pushed the boat into the sedge-fringed bank. Giving up finally, Major Grey ordered the big man to get them back to the landing.

"There's a spare bedroom upstairs," Major Grey said grimly. "He'll have to spend the night. Something's wrong with the engine. I'll find out what it is before morning."

"We could put him up at the cottage," Professor Baker suggested.

"He could sleep on the davenport," Phyllis offered.

"Why do that when there's a bedroom upstairs not being used?" Major Grey demanded.

"That will be fine," Red said quickly. "I don't want to bother you any more than I have."

"But it isn't late. You can come over to the cottage for a while," Phyllis insisted.

Red realized that she was trying to warn him of something, but her efforts were too obvious. Major Grey saw through them, too.

"We get up early," he said bluntly. "If we have to take him to his island in the morning it will mean we get up earlier. I'll show him his room now."

"That's best," Red agreed.

Saying good night to Phyllis and her father, Red followed Major Grey and his three companions into the big house. At the door Major Grey turned to Franko, speaking in Italian.

"See what's the matter with that motor if you have to tear it down," he ordered.

Franko nodded and went back to the boat. A stairway led up from the kitchen and Major Grey took Red upstairs to a small bedroom just off the stairway landing. It was furnished with an iron cot, a single chair, and an unpainted washstand.

"You'll be called," Major Grey stated, going out and closing the door.

RED had taken some cigarettes from Professor Baker's cottage. Without undressing, he lay back on the cot, smoking and staring out across the island through the single double-paned window. Ribbons of fog swung across the sedge-studded levees.

He had smoked several cigarettes when some one came up the stairs and, without knocking, opened the door and entered his room. It was Major Grey, carrying a broken piece of metal in his hand.

"Fuel jet. It's been smashed with a hammer," he stated grimly.

Red looked at the battered metal. It was unmistakably smashed.

"So what?" Red asked.

"I merely wanted you to know that you were not getting away with anything," Major Grey said coldly.

Slipping the broken jet into his pocket, he turned and left the room.

Red heard a key turn in the lock. The door was tried, then Red could hear Major Grey going back downstairs, leaving him locked in the bedroom.

The position was not one that Red relished. Going to the window, he raised the lower sash and looked down. The ground was twelve or fifteen feet below him, and there was nothing to break the drop if he tried to escape that way.

On either side of the spot where he would land if he dropped, were lighted windows, with the blinds up. Undoubtedly the noise he would make would be considerable. Leaving the window up, Red turned out the single hanging bulb suspended from the ceiling over his cot, and lay back to consider what he could do.

He was in no actual danger, he decided. By yelling he could arouse Professor Baker and Phyllis, and he did not think any of the men in the big house would dare molest him in the Bakers' presence or with their knowledge.

Just as a precautionary measure against a surprise he moved the washstand over against the door. He had no weapons except his fists, and there was nothing in the room except the chair which he could use for defense.

Lights downstairs were switched off, the men came upstairs, and soon the house was quiet.

CHAPTER III.

THE ISLAND'S SECRET.

SEVERAL hours after Red had fallen asleep, something small and hard struck him on the chest. He brushed at it and his fingers became tangled with thread. Investigating, he found a small iron washer on his bed. The thread was

attached to the washer. Following the thread to the open window, there was enough light to reveal a slight figure pressed against the side of the house.

Red began drawing in the thread, his heart pounding, for he thought he had recognized Phyllis. A string was attached to the thread and to the end of that was tied a thin rope.

Moving his cot over to the window as noiselessly as he could, Red tied the rope to the iron foot rail of the cot, placed it against the window sill and then, climbing over the cot, lowered himself down the side of the house.

Lun was standing there. Motioning Red to silence, he led him away from the cluster of buildings, keeping in the shadows until they were a quarter of a mile or so away from the nearest building.

Not until then did he speak.

"We can talk now." Clearing sedge away from a water gate, he motioned Red to squat beside him, hidden from view completely to every one except from the levee path directly above.

"Did—did Professor Baker send you?"

"I came without being sent," Lun said quietly. "It was I who made sure the motor boat would not run—while you were dancing."

"Why, might I ask?"

"Because I am not the only one who knows that you are a special government agent who came here to find out what was happening," Lun stated softly. "Major Grey has suspected it ever since your presence on Emerald Island became known to him, which has been for several weeks."

"You seem sure of your information," Red said slowly.

Red felt rather than saw Lun's shrug.

"It comes from a source I have never questioned. If I am permitted to remark, I was instrumental in bringing it to Major Grey's attention, indirectly as best suited my purpose."

RED marveled at Lun's command of English and his almost perfect diction. He realized that he was speaking to an educated lightning-quick mind. Superior to his own in patience and adroitness.

"Since it evidently suits your purpose to have me here, suppose you tell me why," he suggested.

"I saved your life to-night by smashing the motor-boat engine," Lun stated, without making his statement melodramatic or a boast. "While they were eating I overheard Major Grey instruct the big one—Paul, he is called, and a Slav, I believe by birth—that to-night, while you were being taken to Emerald Island, Paul should break your skull with a hammer and push your body into the river."

"If I do not report within a few weeks, there would be hell popping around here," Red commented.

"Within a few days, Major Grey hopes to finish his work and be gone from here," Lun said.

"I still don't see your motives," Red said.

"I serve my government," Lun declared proudly. "It means perhaps as much to me as your government does to you."

"And Major Grey?"

"Do you know anything of what Professor Baker is manufacturing here?" Lun asked.

"Nothing except that it is a gas."

"It is a gas which might easily change the map of the world," Lun said soberly. "It is a gas which is odorless, colorless, and effective be-

cause it lingers for weeks where it is once spread."

"Other gases have been called revolutionary."

"But this gas destroys not humans or animal life, but all plant life," Lun explained. "Spread with the wind behind it, a drum of this gas will kill every growing plant in a forty-acre field within less than forty-eight hours, and enough of it will linger in the crevices of the earth to cause the ground to be barren for at least two years."

"That's pretty hard to believe," Red said skeptically.

"I have seen it demonstrated," Lun declared. "In the middle of this island you will find a patch of ground several acres in size which is devoid of all plant life. That has happened within the last two weeks."

"Where does Major Grey fit in the picture? I know that he is not representing this government," Red stated.

"Such a gas in the hands of unscrupulous men would make the world their oyster," Lun answered. "My government does not wish to buy such a gas, nor does it wish such a gas ever to fall into the hands of its enemies. With that weapon famine, revolution, madness could be fostered."

"Major Grey spoke to Franko in Italian to-night."

"Franko is Italian. Paul——" Lun hesitated. "He is a tool, the only one Major Grey trusts. Tobe, the other one—I know he speaks and reads Japanese. Major Grey has money—from where I do not know. But he is playing for the highest stakes or the highest bidder. Honor means but little to him."

"He did serve for a few months during the War," Red commented.

"As an officer commissioned after

being hired as a civilian expert in chemistry," Lun agreed, showing Red a surprisingly accurate fund of what he had considered confidential government information. "He sat at a desk in Washington."

"What are you suggesting that I do?" Red asked.

"Professor Baker believes that he is conducting this demonstration at the request and for the benefit of the American government," Lun replied. "When he is shown that such is not the case this experimental station will cease to exist."

"Why haven't you told him what you know?"

"After all, I represent a foreign government," Lun said quietly. "I am in no position to prove my statements. I can be of no use to my government with my head smashed in, and, if necessary, my government can use the formula for this gas if it becomes the property of other nations."

"In other words, if you can't stop it you intend to steal the formula," Red declared.

"At least I would rather see the formula destroyed than sold or stolen," Lun reminded him. "I am serving your government as well as my own by telling you what I have related, and by helping you escape to-night."

AFTER a few moments of sober reflection, Red had to agree that Lun had made a wise suggestion.

"I haven't escaped yet," he reminded Lun.

"I have a small boat hidden," Lun said. "Major Grey is sure of himself. It should be daylight before he discovers you have gone."

"How about yourself?"

Lun shrugged.

"My small insignificant life

against many cannot be considered. Perhaps they will suspect. Who knows?"

"Why not go with me?"

"Professor Baker and his daughter have hired my hands. They are entitled to my loyalty."

"And besides, you are not taking any chances on losing track of Professor Baker's formula," Red commented. "Let's not kid each other, Lun. If you had the formula in your pocket, what then?"

"I work for my government," Lun admitted. "But there were times when I might have put the formula in my pocket, had I been sure my weak shoulders would have carried such a load wisely."

"I apologize," Red declared, gripping the Chinaman's slender hand. "You're an officer and a gentleman, Lun. Compared to you, I'm a bull in the china shop. What's our first move?"

Lun stood up and looked carefully around.

"Come." He beckoned to Red to follow. "There is time to see what such a gas can do."

He led Red across the island through a heavy growth of marsh grass and sedge-choked drainage canals until they suddenly stepped from a low levee onto ground which was covered with dry vegetation. It broke and scattered before Red's shoes, seemingly turning to brownish powder at his touch.

"There're several acres," Lun explained. "Only a small amount of the gas was released from the levee we just left."

"Is it all right to strike a match?"

"We are screened from the house."

"I mean, is the gas explosive, is there enough remaining?"

"It is never explosive, even as it leaves the drum," Lun told him. "I have seen that demonstrated."

Red scratched a match and bent low over the ground in what had once been a thick patch of weeds. What now remained of them seemed to be merely brown ash.

"With this weapon, men in gas-throwing cars could devastate a county in a single night," Lun declared. "Within less than a month an entire agricultural State could be made barren. Given enough of this gas, within a year an entire nation could be reduced to a starving, famine-driven horde."

"I've seen enough," Red said grimly.

"Given the secret of this gas, an unscrupulous man could control the destiny of an empire," Lun concluded. "You understand now the stakes Major Grey gambles for."

CHAPTER IV.

THE KNIFE.

SKIRTING around the edge of the island away from the big house they approached the cottage where Professor Baker and his daughter lived. Lun had a key for the back door. He was guiding Red through the kitchen when Professor Baker called out sharply.

"Who's there?"

"Red and Lun," Red said softly. "Don't show a light."

"Wait where you are," Professor Baker directed uneasily.

"What's happened, dad?" It was Phyllis speaking from the other bedroom. "Is that you, Red? I'm getting up, too."

"I'd rather you wouldn't, Phyllis," her father remonstrated.

"Too late." Phyllis moved softly to the door with her father. Red could see them against the gray light of the doorway as they moved into the big room. "What's the matter, Red?"

"Lun, I'm surprised that you are up at this hour," Professor Baker said, more to quiet Phyllis than to reprove Lun, Red thought. "And, Red, whatever you have to tell me, can't it wait until morning?"

"I'm afraid it can't, prof," Red replied. "And don't worry about Phyllis. She already knows why I'm here."

"You are a government agent, aren't you, Red?" Phyllis asked.

"Rest assured that he is, Miss Baker," Lun said solemnly.

"A government agent? And why are you so sure, Lun?" Professor Baker demanded.

"He represents his own government, prof," Red explained.

"A spy!" Professor Baker exclaimed indignantly. "Lun, I trusted you."

"An honor which I deeply appreciate," Lun said softly. "And a trust I serve, but do not betray."

"That's right," Red said. "Major Grey is the one who's been duping you, prof. Where did you happen to meet him and let him into your confidence?"

"Why—he came to me with letters from the chemical warfare division of the war department. I had no reason to doubt his authenticity. Less, perhaps, than I have to doubt your amazing statement made just now, Red, forgetting that you were once my student."

"His letters were forged then," Red declared. "They might be on letterheads he got during the War. He was in the army at one time, but I can assure you, prof, he has no connection with the American government now."

"Can you prove that, Red?"

"Prove it? Ask Lun."

"A confessed spy?" Professor Baker said bitterly.

"Dad, you know yourself what you

have told me about suspecting Major Grey," Phyllis broke in.

"That has no bearing on this matter, Phyllis," Professor Baker said sternly.

"Naturally I didn't come here with identification papers in my pockets," Red said slowly. "I've got them and I can show them when it's necessary. Suppose you listen to what Lun has to say. Tell them what you know, Lun, and exactly what happened to-night."

"Gladly," Lun offered.

Professor Baker listened in silence until he had finished.

"So far," he observed to Red, "Major Grey has made no outward move against you. You suspect him of planning harm to you, but that state of affairs could simply exist in your imagination."

"The door of my bedroom was locked," Red reminded him.

"If Major Grey suspected you of tampering with his engine he would have been within his rights to take that means of protecting himself," Professor Baker said.

"How about Lun's story?" Red protested.

"I have been warned that spies might seek to prevent the delivery of my gas formula," Professor Baker answered. "Unquestionably Lun is clever. His story is exactly what a clever man might invent to gain his own ends."

LUN sighed, but did not attempt to deny this. Phyllis, however, spoke up promptly.

"Well, I don't like Major Grey. I've never trusted him, and you haven't either, dad. You could have given him that formula a long time ago if you'd been satisfied with him. I'm in favor of believing Red and Lun until some one's proved a liar."

"That's exactly my point, dear,"

Professor Baker said wearily. "We'll lay the matter before Major Grey and come out frankly with our doubts and questions. If Red can show us that Grey has no connection with the government, then, of course, I will not give Major Grey my formula."

"I have a better suggestion than that," Red said. "Give me your word that you will not turn the formula over to him for at least forty-eight hours. Lun has a boat hidden. I'm leaving the island before daylight. When I come back it will be with enough men to put Major Grey and his confederates in jail."

"That is entirely reasonable, Red," Professor Baker agreed readily. "I would not give him the formula anyway until I was sure in my own mind that he represents our government. But by the same token, you must prove your own position."

"I know he can," Phyllis declared.

"And as for you, Lun," Professor Baker spoke firmly. "You will return to the mainland with Red."

"I'd prefer that he stay here," Red said.

"No." Professor Baker was firm. "I cannot allow the agent of another government to spy on my work. There is no argument."

"My work has been done," Lun said sadly. "It leaves me with regret that I have forfeited your esteem by doing it, but you are an honorable man and in time I hope that you will respect me for possessing honor."

"Anyway, it will make Major Grey less suspicious," Phyllis declared. "He'll simply think Red hired Lun to help him escape."

"But it will leave you and your father without any protection until I get back," Red reminded her.

"Possibly there has been a mistake," Professor Baker suggested. "I am hoping that you both represent our government. It is quite possible that your department was not informed of what Major Grey represented. Such a situation is not impossible."

"It's not likely, though," Red warned him. "I'd rather you let Phyllis go to the mainland with me."

"No," Phyllis said quickly. "If dad stays, I'll stay."

"Why not both go with me?" Red suggested.

"That is impossible, unless Major Grey would consent to such an arrangement," Professor Baker exclaimed. "Utterly impossible."

"Very well. I'll be back," Red said, realizing that nothing he could say or do would sway the old college professor from his strict code of ethics and honor.

Phyllis followed Red to the kitchen door, where she caught his arm and drew his head down near to her lips.

"Please hurry," she whispered. "I'm afraid."

"I'm going to try to be back before they know I'm gone," Red promised. "Keep away from them and, if you have a gun, don't hesitate to use it."

Professor Baker stumbled over a chair, coming toward them, so Red said nothing more, but his fingers touched hers for an instant, before he stepped out of the cottage and followed Lun into the shadows along the edge of the river.

THEY have no guns," Lun stated, as Red tried to follow his stealthy progress through the sedge.

"How about you?" Red demanded.

"My eyesight is poor for shooting," Lun explained. "My nation

invented gunpowder for noise. For weapons we still use other things more efficiently."

"I wish you were staying here," Red growled.

"I am," Lun announced quietly. "I can remain hidden, but within reach should my poor presence be required."

They crossed several open ditches, floundering through the water with more noise than Red liked. However, Lun moved ahead confidently, finally halting at a water gate over one of the larger canals.

"Here it should be," he declared, slipping into the water on the outside of the gate.

"Yes. It will require your help."

Red waded into the ditch beside Lun until his foot struck the side of a submerged rowboat.

"Wait, the oars are under the seats," Lun said, as Red began lifting the edge of the boat to turn it over.

He groped about, finding first one oar and then the other, placing them against the canal bank. Then, working together, they turned the boat upside down, lifted it almost out of the water and then rolled it over. It floated with an inch or so of water in the bottom.

Lun found a bailing can under the stern seat and began taking out this water while Red held the boat tipped over. They had abandoned all attempts at silence. Lun was making considerable noise as his bailing can scraped against the boat. Neither of them heard Paul approach. He was standing on the water gate just above Red's head when they discovered him.

"So, like I think, you try to get away by the little boat." Paul loomed overhead, his long arms outstretched, a note of guttural satisfaction in his thick voice.

Red heard Lun's warning gasp as Paul jumped, arms outstretched and fingers reaching for Red's throat. The ditch was narrow, not more than twice the width of the rowboat. It was about three feet deep, but the bottom was slimy with mud and tangled with sedge.

Red could not get entirely out of Paul's way. He did dodge, pulling the boat after him, so that Paul struck against it as he fell. For a moment he floundered in the water, clinging to the edge of the boat, his face unprotected.

Red struck out with his right fist, putting all his power behind the blow. It caught Paul on the side of the jaw. He shook his head and grunted.

One arm shot out and circled around the back of Red's neck. Paul made a guttural sound of satisfaction as he reached down with his free hand and, grabbing the prow of the rowboat, he forced it between them.

RED was hitting blindly, but his fists were beating a useless tattoo against the giant's head. Paul was laughing at the blows as he braced himself in the mud and, spreading his fingers around the base of Red's head, he began slowly pulling Red toward him across the boat.

He ignored Lun, who seemed to be splashing aimlessly about in the sedge, trying to avoid the boat. Red felt his feet sliding in the mud as Paul applied his great strength. Quitting his efforts to smash free, Red fought the grip at his neck, and tried to brace himself.

He suddenly doubled his knees and tried to sink into the water, thinking he could break Paul's grip in that way, but the big man was waiting for that move.

He relaxed just enough to let Red start to fall, then, leaning over the boat, he used both hands to whirl Red around so that his shoulders were now against the gunwale. Paul's hand slid up and his fingers closed over Red's chin.

Chuckling with pleasure and anticipation, Paul began pulling Red's head back. Slowly, inch by inch, the giant let Red slip until only a jerk was needed to snap Red's neck. He was helpless, his arms grabbing desperately at the boat. His feet were churning mud. He realized dully that Paul could kill him any moment he chose, wondering why the giant toyed with him, mouthing words that were in an unknown tongue.

Then, abruptly, the fingers about his chin relaxed. Paul shouted one gurgling howl of pain. Red fell forward, twisting around in time to see Lun, sitting astride Paul's back, one arm churning up and down, as gasping, he flung himself away.

Paul groaned, attempted to straighten up, then fell slowly across the boat. For a few moments only the fallen man's sobbing groans and the swish of water disturbed the sudden calm. Then Lun spoke, breathing hard, but cold, practical, and matter of fact.

"Other's may follow him. My knife is broken off in his back."

Red leaned over the boat, his hand touching the wounded man's shirt. It was warm and wet with something sticky that was dripping into the bottom of the boat.

"He is still alive. Help me lift the rest of him into the boat," Red ordered.

Lun came reluctantly to where Red stood.

"One life means little to the millions left alive. Better he should be buried in the mud of this ditch,"

he commented. "He would have killed you with enjoyment."

"Then I'm different," Red said shortly. "Lift on that foot."

Together they dumped Paul into the bottom of the boat, where he lay without moving.

"You'd better come with me now," Red said. "When they discover he's missing and start a search, you'd not have a chance here. Besides, I will need help to get him to a hospital if he's still alive when we reach the mainland."

"As you think is wise," Lun agreed quietly.

He helped Red push the boat out to open water, then crawled into the stern, where he sat brooding, while Red began to row away from the island, through the low-hanging river mist.

CHAPTER V. BRAVERY.

IT is not that I have ever killed before," he spoke up, after they had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile. "But that I have been taught to believe that the life of one human is of little importance if it is time to die. Your time to die had not come. His had. I do not regret killing him to let you live, no more than I would have regretted dying for the same reason."

"I'm grateful for having my neck saved," Red declared. "Don't think I'm not."

"Alive, you can accomplish your purpose," Lun agreed gravely.

"Alive! I'm alive!" Red exclaimed. "I guess I'm not cut out for any exalted hero stuff."

"You are modest," Lun said politely.

"Well, anyway, I'm honest," Red observed.

He had rowed only a few strokes

more when the stutter of a motor-boat engine sounded from the direction of the island. The mist still hung over the water, but it was not heavy or continuous. Rather it strung out in ribbons that drifted into patterns following the still water.

"We're in for it now," Red predicted.

A few minutes later the beat of the engine became more distinct and they caught the gleam of a searchlight swiveling low over the water.

"I didn't see a searchlight on their motor boat," Red commented, hoping for an instant that it might be some other river boat.

"One is kept in the locker when not in use," Lun told him.

The boat began working up and down the channel, gradually leaving the island and nearing their boat. It was only a question of time until they would be discovered.

There was only one possible avenue of escape which Red could suggest.

"Can you swim?" he asked.

Lun hesitated before answering.

"My father's people own a river boat on the Yangtze. As a child I learned to swim."

"Then we'd better swim for it. If we let the boat drift, they'll pick it up and find Paul. He's still alive. They'll take him to a doctor or they'll go back to the island and send for a doctor. It's about four miles to the mainland. If you can swim that far, good. If you can't, drift down with the current and cut back to the island."

"And you?" Lun inquired.

"I'm going to try for the mainland," Red declared. He quit rowing and began to undress, stripping down to his shorts. "Better kick out of your clothes."

Lun continued to sit quietly in

the stern of the boat, watching the searchlight on the motor boat as it gradually drew nearer.

"Since I will go back to the island, it is wise you leave the boat first," he suggested. "Two swimming together would make a wider ripple than two men swimming far apart. Besides, there is time yet."

There was logic in what he said, Red realized. To a man intending to swim to the island, it would be foolish to start while the motor boat was between the rowboat and his objective. Rolling his clothes into a compact ball, Red took one of the metal oarlocks and weighted the bundle so that it would sink, and tossed it into the water.

"Hide when you hit the island. I'll be back there with help. Good-bye and good luck."

Lun took his hand and shook it gravely.

"Your time for death is not yet. And when it comes may it come with great honor."

RED slipped over the side of the boat into the cold muddy water.

"Why not row back toward the island?" he suggested.

Lun crept to the center of the boat and grasped the oars as Red loosed his hold and began swimming toward the mainland. It was a long swim ahead of him, but he was in good condition and did not doubt but that he would make it. There was an element of uncertainty, however, as to where he would touch the mainland, and how long after getting there it would be before he could get in touch with his superiors.

Red settled down to a distance crawl. He had not gone far, however, when he heard the motor boat sweeping down toward him, saw the

searchlight flicker past him, then heard men shouting excitedly. He thought at first that he had been discovered, but the light did not fall on him. Rolling over on his back, he saw that the searchlight was focused on the boat.

Lun had not left the boat. He was sitting where Red had seen him last, rowing aimlessly toward the island.

As Red watched, an automatic rifle sputtered and he could hear bullets cut through the boat and see them send up a trail of spray beyond it. Still Lun did not attempt to dive overboard. Ignoring the motor boat and the searchlight, he continued to row, until the rifle stuttered again and he wilted slowly forward on his face.

Red felt suddenly weak with horror. Had Lun deliberately used himself as a decoy to attract the attention of the men in the motor boat and thereby give him a chance to escape, or had he lied about his ability to swim?

There was nothing Red could do about it now. He was too far away to hear what the men in the motor boat said when they drew up beside the sinking rowboat, but he could see them lifting the bodies of Paul and Lun into the larger boat.

The searchlight swept in a quick circle. Red saw it coming toward him in time to sink beneath the water until it was past him. He dodged the light twice more while the men in the boat argued and finally decided what they would do next.

Evidently having no idea when or where he had left the rowboat, they started back toward the island landing, leaving Red to make a decision. Without a great deal of risk, he could strike out for the mainland, and hope that he reach there in time

to return and rescue Professor Baker and Phyllis.

While he was doing that, anything might happen on the island now that Major Grey was definitely fighting against time and the discovery of the murder he had just committed or had had committed. Going back to fight them single-handed and unarmed was sheer madness. But Lun was not the only one who could face odds. Red wanted to keep on swimming toward the mainland, but he turned about in the water and headed back toward the island in the wake of the disappearing motor boat.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HONOR AND THE GLORY.

DAYLIGHT was breaking through the gray mist over the river when Red dragged himself through the sedge which skirted the island. He was cold and tired, and streaked with mud. The sharp-edged plants sliced his back as he wormed his way toward the cottage. His bandages were all gone. The red welts across his chest where he had been burned were ribbons of pain.

A light burned in the big house, dimly yellow against the dirty windowpanes, but there was no sign of life at the cottage. It meant exposing himself in the open to get to the cottage. Instead, Red continued along the levee, slipping down into the water again as he approached the boat landing.

The boat was there, drawn up on the mud bank. It was not occupied. Red longed to creep into its cabin and rest for a while. The thought gave him an idea. There was just a possibility it could be done. And if it was, there was no time to be lost.

A shallow ditch ran around the big

house, approaching the cottage from the rear. Red did not go directly to the boat. He went around it, swimming noiselessly in the river, then crawled out at the mouth of the ditch he intended following.

The ditch passed the rear of one of the small sheds back of the big house. As he passed the shed, Red was startled to hear a groan, thin, plaintive, and unmistakably made by some one in pain. It might be Paul. Red sensed that it was Lun and he did not hesitate to expose himself long enough to enter the open shed from the front, where he could have been seen by any one in the big house, had they been looking from the back windows.

Lun was lying on his side, arms and legs bound behind him, his shirt streaked with blood. He opened his eyes when Red bent over him and, recognizing Red, tried to smile.

Red cursed his numbed fingers as he worked at the knotted rope with which Lun was bound. It was finally untied, but when he attempted to raise the wounded Chinaman up to a sitting position, Lun shuddered with pain.

"Please—it does not matter. Let me lie down."

Red explored the blood-soaked shirt and found a bullet wound which ranged from one side to the other. It looked ugly and bad. Unless he had treatment at once, it would be fatal, Red knew.

There was nothing he could do there in the shed to make Lun more comfortable, unless it was to provide a wadded sack on which Lun could rest his head. The wound was not bleeding much. Exploring it, or attempting to bandage it might only start it bleeding again.

"I'll be back," Red promised.

"Take them—and go," Lun urged.

There were no faces at the win-

dows of the big house, when Red darted around the shed again and threw himself flat in the ditch. Worming his way along, he passed Professor Baker's outdoor laboratory, and finally placed the cottage between himself and the other house.

Phyllis came to the window when he rapped on it. She was joined a moment later by her father, who raised the window sash. Red did not enter the house.

"Lun's been shot. I think Paul is dead. I came back to try to get you away from here. Dress and walk down to the boat. I'm going to try and get Lun into it. He's still alive, but he's badly hurt. You both understand."

Phyllis, white faced and trembling, nodded. Professor Baker worked his lips soundlessly at Red's appearance, and the information he had just given.

"Don't argue," Red said grimly. "You're dealing with a madman who won't hesitate at anything."

"How—how soon do you want us at the boat?" Professor Baker asked.

"Give me ten minutes," Red specified. "Don't hurry unless you hear the motor start, then, if you do, run."

RED backed away from the cottage until he reached the shallow ditch again, then stretching out prone, he began worming his way back toward the shed where Lun was.

Again he got into the shed unobserved. Lun's eyes were open. He listened silently while Red explained his plans.

"Would it be easier to leave me here?" he whispered faintly. "It does not matter where I die, if my body goes back to the land of my birth."

"You'll carry it back yourself," Red predicted, with more assurance than he actually felt. "I'm going to carry you. If they see us I may have to run. It'll hurt, but I'll be as gentle as I can be."

He picked Lun up in his arms. Lun jerked with a spasm of pain, then set his teeth and closed his eyes. Red could feel him stiffen and fight against an outcry.

There was nothing to be gained by waiting or attempting to sneak out. The ditch was too shallow to hide them both. Thirty yards away the sedge would give them concealment.

Walking steadily and watching the ground in front of him, Red stepped out of the shed and went directly toward the levee with its screen of sedge. Every moment he expected a shout of alarm from the house, or the crash of a gun, but Major Grey and his confederates were either careless or no watch was being kept, for Red reached the sedge unmolested.

Carrying Lun through the shallow water was difficult, tripping over sedge and going silently enough not to arouse suspicion, but Red reached the boat unobserved, and laid Lun in the cockpit.

He was pushing the boat off the mud bank when Professor Baker and Phyllis appeared.

"Get in," he ordered.

Phyllis looked back and screamed. "Red! They're coming with guns!"

They did not have a chance to get away. Phyllis and her father were in the boat. Red had it floating and was about to jump aboard when Major Grey's cold voice snapped out an order.

"Hold that boat just where it is or I'll commence shooting!"

Red looked over his shoulder.

Major Grey was standing on the elevated bank, pointing an automatic rifle at him. By his side was Franko, with another gun. Tobe stood off to one side with a shotgun. If the boat were pushed out, it would float in a small lagoon of open water. Before it could be gotten far enough away, or before the motor could be started, they would all be killed.

Red pulled the boat back up on the mud bank, and raising his hands shoulder-high, turned to Phyllis, who was crouching down beside Lun.

"It's no use, Phyllis."

"Rope, Tobe," Major Grey commanded. "Come on up here, all of you."

Red helped Phyllis and her father out of the boat.

"Bring the Chinaman," Major Grey ordered.

Picking Lun up in his arms, Red carried him to the top of the levee, where Professor Baker and Phyllis were standing before Major Grey's gun.

"Put him down."

"Thank you. Without me——" Lun's voice trailed off and he closed his eyes, murmuring something in his own language.

Tobe, the slant-eyed one, came back from the big house with a coil of rope. He waited with it, eyeing Red wearily, until Major Grey stepped back and commanded Red to turn around and cross his wrists behind him.

Red submitted to being bound without resistance.

"The girl next," Major Grey snapped.

"Wait a minute," Red protested. "She had nothing to do with anything. They were both taking orders from me. There's no use treating them like animals."

"You're all taking orders from me now," Major Grey said curtly. "Bind her hands, Tobe."

"It's all right, Red. I don't mind," Phyllis said.

AFTER her hands had been tied behind her, Professor Baker also was bound. He made no comment, nor did Major Grey, except to issue directions that he be secured.

"How about him?" Tobe inquired, kicking Lun.

"At least you can let him die in peace," Red said indignantly. "Unless you're afraid of a dying man."

"Afraid?" Major Grey snorted. "I even have a purpose in keeping him alive. Go over there to the laboratory, all of you. Make that Chinaman walk, Tobe."

Lun was unable to rise under Tobe's kicks, but when Major jerked him to his feet, he surprised Red by staggering part way to the open shed, unassisted, before collapsing. Tobe dragged him the remainder of the distance, dropping him finally by one of the upright posts which supported the shed roof.

Breathing heavily and slowly, Lun lay where he had been left, his skin pallid, his eyes closed. Red saw a fresh stain of blood show on his shirt.

"Now," Major Grey said, addressing Professor Baker, "it's time for a show-down. Do I get that formula?"

"No man representing the United States would act as you are acting," Professor Baker said slowly.

"I represent myself," Major Grey boasted. "That might as well be understood now."

"Then your letters were counterfeit?"

"That's as good a term as any. You've been using my money here

on the island for your demonstrations. Where I got it is none of your business."

"And your confederates?"

Major Grey shrugged.

"They killed Paul, the only man I trusted. Franko is probably a spy for his country. Tobe, I wouldn't trust out of my sight. Sheridan is a government spy. The Chinaman is a spy for his government. I'm playing a lone-wolf hand, and I've got the winning cards."

Professor Baker did not lose his temper. He continued to be patient and conciliatory, talking to Major Grey as he might have talked to an unruly student.

"And what is it you wish me to do?" he inquired.

"I want the formula for the gas you demonstrated," Major Grey demanded. "And I want it now."

"If I give it to you—what then?"

"I'll take the formula, the boat—and get out. Sooner or later a boat will come along and pick you up."

"How about Franko and Tobe?"

Major Grey hesitated.

"I'll take them," he stated. "Then I'll know what they're doing."

Franko and Tobe exchanged sickly grins, but made no objection, at least audibly.

"And if I don't give you the formula?" Professor Baker asked.

"I know some interesting methods of torture," Major Grey declared grimly. "There're the Chinese systems. I would try those first on the Chinaman. Then I picked up some from the Turks. I'd like to try those on this dumb red-haired bungler."

"But neither of them knows the formula," Professor Baker reminded him gently.

"You do, though, and it might persuade you a little to watch them suffer—particularly when you knew

that your daughter was next on my list."

"Phyllis?"

Major Grey grinned mirthlessly.

"None other. She's shown her open contempt for me. There're several interesting little experiments I could try out that you might not want to watch."

"I'm not afraid," Phyllis said proudly. "Let him torture me."

"There's several old savage customs you might not like," Major Grey went on. "Franko and Tobe would enjoy helping me, wouldn't you, boys?"

"Give him the formula, prof," Red said quietly.

"And if you do, will he let you live once he has it?" Phyllis cried bitterly.

"Perhaps not, but he won't be likely to molest you," Red said. "I'd rather die than know he had done that."

"Of course," Professor Baker agreed. "But I know you won't accept my word that I've given you the correct formula."

"Certainly not," Major Grey assured him. "You write the formula down and we'll test it out, right now. If it does what the other drum of gas did, then—the prisoners are yours."

"It will take some little time."

"We have all we need."

"If you'll permit me to talk to my daughter alone for a few minutes," Professor Baker requested.

"Go ahead," Major Grey offered. "Just keep within sight."

PHYLLIS accompanied her father toward the cottage and they began an earnest conversation that lasted for many minutes, as they walked back and forth before the cottage door. Instinctively Red began straining at the

cord with which his hands were tied. He found it tight at first, but by patiently flexing the muscles of his wrists and forearms, it gradually began to loosen.

Working it loose was slow business, because he had to watch the three men who were watching him. Fortunately they were more interested in the outcome of Professor Baker's deliberations than they were in Red.

By the time Professor Baker and Phyllis came back to the laboratory, Red was sure that, given enough time, he could free himself if his efforts remained undiscovered and the cord was not tightened again.

"If you'll loosen my wrists, I'll write out the formula," Professor Baker stated calmly. "I don't envy you the money you get from selling it to some government, but I do hope the gas is used for defensive purposes only."

"It'll be used to make me the most powerful man this world has ever known!" Major Grey said exultantly.

"Then I'm glad I'm being forced to surrender it, and that I am not merely being duped," Professor Baker declared quietly.

When his hands were freed, and he had rubbed circulation back into his fingers so that he could hold a pencil, Professor Baker slowly and carefully wrote a set of directions on paper which Major Grey had given him.

"I'd better help in the preparation of the gas," he suggested.

"You can watch and direct," Major Grey said grimly. "I know enough about chemistry to do the mixing."

He studied the formula carefully for several minutes and was apparently satisfied. Franko opened the underground storeroom at his or-

ders and brought out several large glass acid containers. Tobe, in the meantime, was building a fire under the retort.

"Is it necessary to keep my daughter bound?" Professor Baker asked.

"Yes," Major Grey informed him.

Professor Baker did not insist. Phyllis once attempted to approach Red, but Major Grey waved her back, a move which Red was glad occurred, for he was tugging desperately at the rope on his wrists at every opportunity and he knew that Phyllis would attract attention to his efforts if she came near.

Under Professor Baker's directions, jar after jar of acids were put in the containers that were connected by air pressure to the one big mixing pot over the fire. The pressure pump was started and a peculiar biting odor began to spread over the laboratory.

Major Grey tightened all the escape valves. One in particular was tightened thoroughly. It was a large hand valve that led to an outlet pipe, and undoubtedly the main drainage vent for the tank, Red decided. Through it the finished gas would be forced into containers when the gas was ready to be released. After pressure was put on the main tank, a thin sulphurous wisp had started curling out before Major Grey had tightened the hand valve.

DURING the mixing operations Red was startled to look down at Lun and observe that the Chinaman's eyes were open and he was watching the mixing operations closely. Lun caught Red's glance and shook his head slightly, then closed his eyes.

Lun was trying to tell him something. Red did not understand what. The rope around Red's wrists was

now loosened so that he could almost reach it with his fingers. Circulation had returned to his hands. Had he been working too openly and was that what Lun meant? Or was it that Lun had seen the chemicals they had put into the tank and was trying to tell Red that the gas they were mixing was not the secret gas Major Grey wanted?

Lun kept his eyes closed and avoided Red's silent questions. Lun had been watching the retort, and not him. It must be that his message concerned the gas, Red decided, and a thought came to him that almost stopped his heartbeats.

Given Professor Baker's expert knowledge of gases and chemicals, what would he do under similar circumstances. Red tugged, and one of his hands was free. He held the loosened rope with the other to keep it from dropping and betraying him.

Professor Baker stood beside the big tank, his face old and gray, lined with anxiety. He was avoiding looking at Phyllis, who stood beside the underground storeroom, a few yards away. Instead he watched the pressure gauge. Red caught him furtively looking at Franko, who stood on the other side of the retort, an automatic rifle cradled in his arms. Tobe's shotgun leaned against a post at the far side of the shed, near where he stood, ready to do whatever Major Grey wanted done. Major Grey had laid his gun aside. Red could not see it, but he was wearing an automatic in an open belt holster.

Red measured the distance to Tobe's shotgun. The little slant-eyed man was never more than a jump away from it. Before he could reach Tobe's gun, Franko or Major Grey would have him riddled with bullets, Red realized.

There had to be some way, but

that was not it. The sudden hiss of something being released under pressure gave Red the impulse upon which he acted. It was an act of hysteria and desperation. Major Grey bent over to look at one of the gauges. Before he could straighten up Red leaped to the main escape valve and grabbed it with both hands. A slight turn and it was loosened so that a minute curl of gas hissed free.

The other men heard him move. They heard the gas hiss. Startled into momentary paralysis, they looked at him bewilderedly.

"Don't move!" he shouted. "This is death. There's enough gas in here to kill an army."

Tobe hesitated, his slant eyes flickered and the move toward his gun that he was about to make slowly became rigid attention. Franko's eyes widened with realization. The muzzle of his gun remained pointed down. Even Major Grey stopped, caution and momentary fear controlling the impulse that had sent his hand toward his automatic.

"This is not the gas you wanted," Red laughed, his voice strained and harsh. "It's death. Rather than be a traitor he chose suicide for us all. Ask him."

Professor Baker stood hesitant, peering uncertainly at Red, his lips working wordlessly.

"He knew you wouldn't know. He thought I wouldn't guess," Red went on, talking fast. "He welcomed death to what you had planned. And damn you, death is what you get if you move. Now let's see you brag and boast."

Major Grey darted a quick look at Professor Baker and recoiled a step.

"Stay where you are," Red warned. "Franko, put down that gun."

Franko hesitated, and Red turned the valve a trifle. Instantly Franko laid down his gun and raised his hands.

"Professor Baker. Take that gun away from him!" Red snapped.

IF Professor Baker had moved quickly enough, Red might have won out then by taking Major Grey by surprise, but the old professor hesitated, looked around at Phyllis. Then, when he did move slowly toward Major Grey, it was too late.

Major Grey's hand slid down, and he unloosened the catch on his automatic, half raising it at Red.

"Fire and I'll send us all to hell," Red invited. "You can't kill me quick enough to stop me from opening this valve."

"Wait."

It was Lun speaking from Red's shoulder. In some manner he had gotten to his feet and stood now, swaying against the gas tank, one hand touching Red's forearm.

"True the gas is poison," he said weakly. "That I know."

"You lie," Major Grey growled. "I know poison gases."

"Not this one," Lun said with slow difficulty. "It is new. I have helped with it. I know. You will see."

He turned to Professor Baker, speaking in a low-voiced plaintive whisper.

"Have I your word as an honorable gentleman that if this test is successful, your true gas will never be sold, unless it is to defend your country from invasion. That you will keep the secret until your country is threatened with invasion?"

Professor Baker nodded.

"Yes, Lun. I promise that."

Lun looked proudly at Major Grey.

"Death with honor can come to any man but once."

With a surprising burst of strength, he pushed Red's hand off the valve, gave it a half turn and filling his lungs with the puff of yellow, biting gas that hissed out of the escape vent, pitched face up at Major Grey's feet.

Phyllis screamed. In a subconscious move, Red closed the valve and ducked to escape the raw gas that bit at his throat and lungs. Tobe and Franko started to run toward the boat landing, when Major Grey's maddened shout made them turn.

"Come back here, you cowards!" Major Grey roared. His gun was on them. Slowly they turned and started back. The gas fumes slowly disappeared as they came back step by step.

Major Grey's gun swung over to cover Red.

"You think you can bluff me. Go ahead. Open that valve. I'll die with the rest of you rather than rot in some Federal prison. Open it up. I dare you. You've bluffed. I'm calling it."

Franko was at Major Grey's elbow, but he was scared. Red could see his face twitch and his hands tremble. Tobe was behind him. Red could not see Tobe's face.

It could not have been more than an instant, but to Red it seemed to be an hour as Major Grey leveled the automatic and took slow aim. He could see the fingers tightening over the trigger.

"Open it, Red," Phyllis wailed.

"He hasn't got the nerve." Major Grey's mocking words had hardly penetrated his brain before Red's fingers wrenched at the valve.

It was Franko's hand that flew up

as Major Grey's gun roared. The bullet ricocheted off the escape pipe and screamed past Red's head.

A BILLOW of choking gas shot out of the pipe. As he threw himself on top of Major Grey, grabbing at the automatic and getting it as another shot was fired, Red dimly saw Tobe and Franko running desperately toward the boat.

He did not remember getting possession of the gun. He did remember fighting the searing gas in his throat, of rolling around on the ground, of pounding something with the gun, of hitting madly, blindly with all his power and wondering why he was not dead, until Professor Baker emerged from the haze of yellow gas and tried to pull him off Major Grey's limp body.

"Don't kill him, Red," Professor Baker begged. "He's out."

Red was astride Major Grey's body. He looked up in slow bewilderment to see Phyllis beside him rubbing at her red and swollen hands. She was choking and coughing, but she did not seem to be afraid of the gas. Neither did Professor Baker, although he sneezed occasionally.

But there was Lun on the ground, his wide staring expressionless eyes testifying to the deadliness of the gas.

"It's harmless. Just a harmless combination of chemicals," Professor Baker said assuringly. "It didn't kill Lun. He must have been dying and knew it. You gave him an opportunity to realize the honor he sought. He was magnificent."

Red was too astounded to speak. Franko's gun was on the ground. He picked it up and looked toward the boat. He had not heard the motor start.

"I think you'll find them in the boat," Professor Baker declared.

That is where Red did find them, cowering under a screen of canvas they had thrown over the cockpit to protect themselves from the cloud of poison gas they had imagined was spreading over the island. They had been too frightened to even attempt to start the engine, and they offered no resistance when Red bound their hands and told them the gas was not deadly.

He bound Major Grey when he came back to Professor Baker and Phyllis and found them watching the battered man, who was still very much alive.

Paul he found in the big house with a blanket over his face. There was a bullet hole in his head from one of the bullets that had been fired at the boat containing Lun.

With his three prisoners and the two dead men, they left the island in the motor boat.

"It was Phyllis who suggested I give him the formula for some harmless gas," Professor Baker explained, as they churned across the muddy river toward the nearest town. "I was afraid he would realize I was fooling him."

"But why——" Red protested.

Professor looked at Phyllis and smiled tenderly.

"She was sure you'd be able to rescue us all if we could only give you a little time."

Phyllis was flushed, but she did not evade Red's look.

"And you were wonderful, too."

"Lun was wonderful. I was scared stiff. I didn't want to die. There's too much to live for, isn't there?"

The question did not have to be explained or answered right at that moment, for they were both pretty sure of what the answer would be.

YOUR HANDWRITING TELLS

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If you are just starting out to find your first job; or if you are dissatisfied with your present occupation and are thinking of making a change; or if the character of your friends—as revealed in their handwriting—interests you; or if, as an employer, you realize the advantage of placing your employees, in factory or office, in positions for which they are best suited—send a specimen of the handwriting of the person concerned to Handwriting Expert, Street & Smith's Complete Stories, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. All samples submitted will be analyzed by Shirley Spencer, and her expert opinion will be given, free of charge.

The coupon, which you will find at the end of this department, must accompany each handwriting specimen which you wish to have read. If possible, write with black ink.

Your communications will be held in strict confidence. Only with your permission will individual cases be discussed in the department, either with or without illustrations. It is understood that under no circumstances will the identity of the person concerned be revealed.

Miss Spencer will not assume any responsibility for the specimens of handwriting, though every precaution will be taken to insure their return.

William E. N., Michigan: The size of one's writing may vary according to the amount of one's concentration at the time. When we feel more expansive our writing becomes larger. There are those persons, like yourself, whose writing shows marked concentration at all times. Probably the size of your writing varies very little.

*and I would be very grateful
to receive as to what sort of
work would be best for me. I have been*

And interest in both science and literature is shown in your small, well-formed script. Since you say that the sciences do not appeal to you, it follows that you should devote yourself to literature. You have a scholarly mind, artistic taste and ability, and capacity for a high type of mental work. Any mental

work of an artistic nature would be suitable. You are precise, fastidious, persistent, fussy about small matters, sensitive and shy.

L. R. H., Pennsylvania: I am using your script as a contrast to that of the young man from Michigan. Here we have the typically large script. You hate details and you want to have change and variety, physical activity, and freedom from mental responsibilities.

*analyze this type
of hand writing*

Your personality is your greatest asset. You are sociable, friendly, pleasant, generous, and gay. You

are ambitious for personal success and are independent and proud.

C. E. S., Saskatchewan: In your script we have the combination of physical activity and capacity for mental work. The capitals and loops are long and large, but the small letters are small.

Kindly enclose a copy of your list of books in graphology

The fine rhythm in your writing, together with those *t*-bars, indicates a magnetic personality. You have a good mind and nice personality.

D. C., Massachusetts: My first advice to you is to study law. You are definitely fitted for that profession. I don't know just what your present work entails and what are your opportunities, but you should make every effort to become a lawyer.

situation for the last three I should like to know a few of my handwriting would

Your angular writing, heavy and with pointed *t*-bars, reveals an analytical mind. You are shrewd in spite of your young years, and you should capitalize that keenness of mind.

J. W. G., Minnesota: I am not so sure that you are willing to overlook the faults of others. I think that might possibly be your blind spot. You think that you have overlooked them, but the fact that you see them so plainly to be overlooked

means that you are very much aware of the faults in others. How about it? Your script indicates a very exacting person.

do not make friends. I am very bold, strong, and a whole lot of other things.

Notice how tight your letter formations are, squeezed and narrow. There is not much generosity indicated. You are a very sociable person because of an emotional nature which seeks affection, but you are secretive, persistent, and narrow. Do you suppose these qualities have something to do with your inability to make friends?

Mrs. R. B., Missouri: Yes, it is permissible to inclose other samples if you are sure to inclose a coupon for each one. The samples should be sufficient for an analysis, however. Don't send penciled scraps, envelopes, et cetera. I need a letter written in ink and the natural signature, such as you have sent me. Thank you.

at. I have only a high school education. I am choosing the right work? Not decided what work to take up.

I think if you analyzed the situation yourself you could answer your question. A literary career at the best is a most difficult, heartbreaking procedure. Any complications or obstacles just make the possibilities of success less. You are a bookkeeper in a small mine and have only a high-school education. What do you think are your chances for successfully competing with highly

specialized and trained minds? If you were unusually talented, I'd say go ahead. The battle is always interesting and the chance exciting, but when the cards are stacked against you, the best thing is to look at it sensibly and practically. A little newspaper work for your home-town paper would be the best test. You do have some constructive ability.

L. B. is very much like you, with the exception that she is less poised and less practical. She is much more nervous and emotional than you, yet will probably tend to become more and more like you as she matures. The writing has a definitely family resemblance. She ought to make a fine teacher.

W. B. is evidently a young child, for the writing is quite immature.

She is not at all like you in temperament. She is shy and quiet, without imagination or initiative. She lacks a strong will, but has good powers of concentration. She will be able to do detail work, but home life will probably prove most suitable.

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In the April 22nd Complete



GET TOGETHER!

ON HANDWRITING

THE interest in what is called the science of graphology has been steadily growing in the past twenty years. Frequently handwriting has been used as evidence for or against a prisoner at the bar, and the opinion of an expert on handwriting, or graphologist, has been a determining factor in establishing the evidence.

But our interest in graphology is more personal and at the same time much wider in scope. There is in all of us a fundamental and primitive passion to know the worst about ourselves. We don't really want to

know anything bad about ourselves, but we pretend we do. We really believe only the best about ourselves and our future and we want some one or some thing to reveal this future. We therefore resort to all sorts of ways and means, legitimate and illegitimate, to read what fate has in store for us.

MANY people come to confuse the legitimate ends of graphology with the pseudo-arts of astrology and fortune telling. They expect a handwriting expert to tell them when Prince Charming on his white steed is to stop at their

front door, or when Fate is about to introduce them to the lords of fame and fortune. These expectations are part of the mental make-up of young lads and ladies—boys and girls in their teens—and therefore perfectly understandable and touching. But the playthings of a child are put away when he grows up and lays his hand on the realities of life. Nobody is able to read the future or to disclose the fate of any individual beyond the general promise of success or failure which the individual already foreshadows by his own character and his own activities.

In the first place, put it down as a first principle of your thinking, and a determining factor in your conduct, that no one can reveal your fate or foretell your future.

GRAPHOLOGY, of course, is not a real science. It is trustworthy as far as it goes, but all real science is based on physical measurements, and there is no absolute and unvarying relation between the measure of a man's handwriting and his character. Like many arts and pseudo-sciences, it is only more or less true. It does not reveal the absolute truth, the final and ultimate truth, about anything. And no one should expect it to.

The psychologist and the graphologist can tell us many interesting and many important truths about ourselves, but we must never attach too great an importance to any of their findings. We must regard

them as more or less true. If we keep this cautious attitude toward graphology and psychology, undoubtedly we will save ourselves many false expectations and some false starts.

A man's character is frequently to be deduced from his physical features. In the same way, his soul will reveal its secrets through his handwriting. That is to say, a man's talents and his tendencies are deducible from certain twists and quirks of his writing. No handwriting expert pretends to read your future or your fortune; he cannot foretell your success or failure. All he can do, or pretend to do, is to deduce the leading traits of character or the outstanding talents of a man or a woman who has submitted an example of handwriting.

WE have all a natural curiosity about ourselves; we are primarily concerned about our own future, our own success or failure. A man therefore is acting perfectly natural to want to know all about himself and to take any and every legitimate means to arrive at this knowledge. We are delighted to find how many readers are interested in our handwriting department, but we are not surprised. We all have a natural and secret interest in ourselves. Our handwriting will undoubtedly reveal things about ourselves, that, perhaps, we did not know; in any case, it may amuse and divert us.



FRANK McHUGH

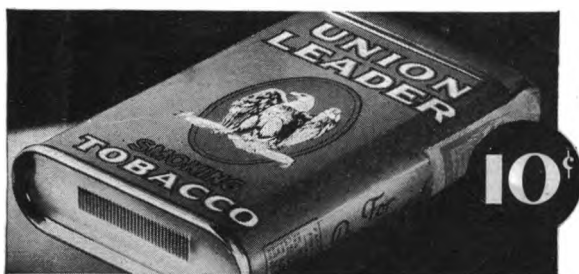
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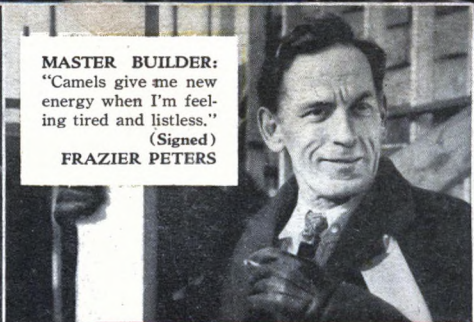


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THURSDAY { 9:00 p.m. E. S.T.
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