A STREET & SMITH MAGAZINE

JULY 1931

The Popular MAGAZINE

25¢
30¢ IN CANADA

A TICKET TO NOWHERE

BY

LIEUTENANT SEYMOUR G. POND

—

THOMSON BURTIS

—

ROBERT McBLAIR

Announcing GENUINE BLUE WHITE DIAMONDS *at lowest prices* IN YEARS

$27.50

FC 48 . . . Engraved, Bridal Blossom 18-K Solid White Gold "step" model Wedding Ring. Seven (7) matched genuine blue-white diamonds. *Only* $2.65 *a month.*

$50

FC 51 . . . Dazzling cluster of seven (7) matched genuine blue white diamonds; baguette effect, square prong ring. 18-K Solid White Gold. Looks like $750. solitaire. *Only* $4.90 *a month.*

$50

FC 49 . . . Richly hand engraved prong ring of 18-K Solid White Gold, with a perfect, genuine blue-white diamond in center and 2 matched genuine diamonds on sides. *Only* $4.90 *a mo.*

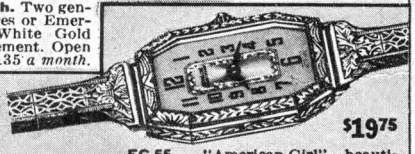
$75

FC 54 . . . The **"Love-Link"**—new, square prong, engagement ring, with the elegance and grace of much higher priced rings. Exquisitely hand engraved; 18-K Solid White Gold mounting; perfect, genuine blue-white diamond in center and 4 matched genuine diamonds on sides. **Special terms;** $5.00 with order. *Only* $7 *a month.*

$34.50

2 Diamonds
2 Emeralds or Sapphires

FC 53 . . . **Diamond Wrist Watch.** Two genuine diamonds and four Sapphires or Emeralds. Engraved 14-K Solid White Gold case; Guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Open link bracelet to match. *Only* $3.35 *a month.*



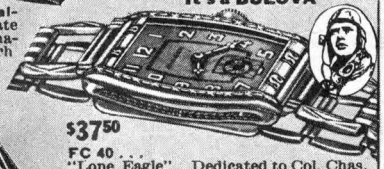
$19.75

FC 55 . . . "American Girl"—beautifully engraved White Gold filled rectangular case. Guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Flexible wristacrat bracelet to match. Sapphire set stem. *Only* $1.87 *a month.*

$22

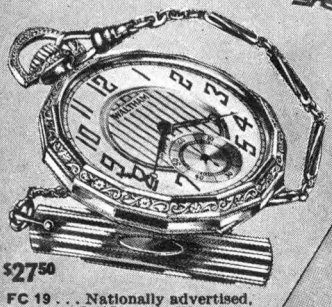
FC 42 . . . Nationally advertised **Waltham** or **Elgin**; guaranteed accurate and dependable. Engraved white permanent case, open link bracelet to match *Only* $2.10 *a month.*

It's a BULOVA



$37.50

FC 40 . . . "Lone Eagle" Dedicated to Col. Chas. A. Lindbergh—Handsomely engraved white permanent case, with a guaranteed 15-jewel **Bulova** precision movement. Radium hands and dial. Patented "dust-tite" protector. Link bracelet to match. *Only* $3.65 *a month.*



$27.50

FC 19 . . . Nationally advertised, guaranteed 15-jewel **Waltham** movement; 20-year warranted, engraved White Gold filled, 12 size, thin model, decagon case. White Gold Filled knife; fine Waldemar chain. All complete. *Only* $2.65 *a month.*

CATALOGUE
FREE
TO ADULTS

Send for copy of our latest catalog showing special values in genuine blue-white diamonds from $25. to $1,000. and standard watches from $12.50 and upward. Write now to get your free copy.

$48.50

FC39 . . . **"America's Sweetheart"**—Ultra modern 18-K Solid White Gold engagement ring; genuine blue-white diamond in center, 6 matched diamonds in engraved "step" effect sides. *Only* $4.75 *a month.*

$25

FC 34 . . . Richly hand-engraved 18-K Solid White Gold solitaire mounting; with fiery, genuine blue-white diamond. *Only* $2.40 *a month.*

$75

FC 50 . . . Gentlemen's massive, "step" effect ring; 18-K Solid White Gold or 14-K Solid Green Gold. Set with a perfect, genuine, blue-white diamond. **Special terms;** $5.00 with order. *Only* $7.00 *a month.*

Sent for 1 — **Balance 10 MONTHS TO PAY**

DIRECT DIAMOND IMPORTATIONS AND OVER $2,000,000 in orders yearly in our national mail order and retail chain store system, give us tremendous advantages in the world's most important buying markets—these benefits we pass on to you in the greatest values, lowest prices in our history.

HOW TO ORDER—Just send $1.00 with your order and your selection comes to you on **10 Days Free Trial. No C.O.D. to pay on arrival.** After full examination and free trial, pay balance in 10 equal monthly payments.

Satisfaction Guaranteed
10 Days Free Trial

You have the privilege of 10 days free trial—if not completely satisfied return shipment at our expense and the entire deposit will be refunded. Written guarantee bond accompanies every diamond and watch purchased.

All Dealings Strictly Confidential
No Embarrassing Investigations

Nearly a year to pay! No extra charge for credit—no red tape—no delay. You take no risk—**satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.**

Residents of New York City and vicinity, who prefer, are invited to call in person at our salesrooms for these marvelous values.

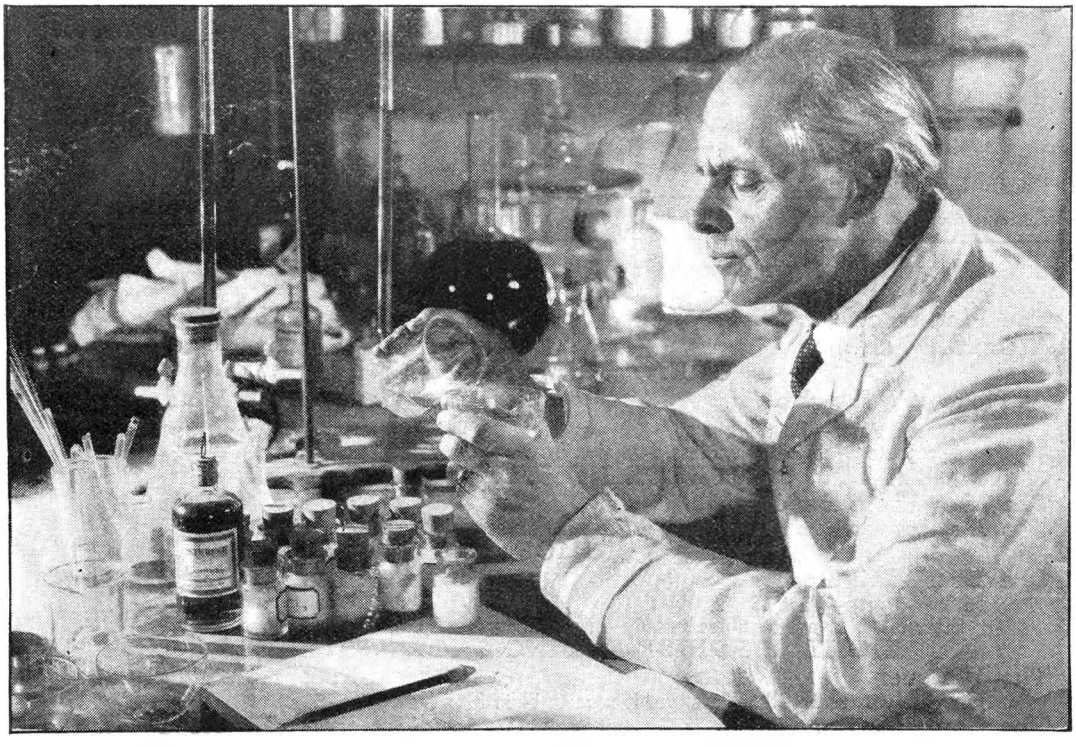
ESTABLISHED 1895

ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO.

ADDRESS DEPT. 52-U
170 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

Another Triumph for Listerine!

Instantly overcomes odors other antiseptics fail to mask in 4 days



Always the safest of antiseptics — now the swiftest of deodorants

The most searching scientific analysis ever made on the subject of deodorant power of mouth washes now reveals Listerine, the safe antiseptic, as the outstanding deodorant for oral use.

Repeated tests show that Listerine immediately overcomes odors that other solutions fail to mask in 4 days.

Because of its amazing deodorant effect, its power to kill germs in the fastest time, and its absolute safety, Listerine is the ideal antiseptic for oral hygiene.

For the treatment of halitosis (bad breath) there is nothing like it. 95% of halitosis is caused, dental authorities say, by fermenting food particles in the mouth and by infections of the oral tract.

Listerine instantly halts fermentation, and at the same time attacks infection. Having struck at these two causes of mouth odors, it then overcomes the odors themselves.

Use it every morning, every night. And between times before meeting others. It is your assurance that your breath will be sweet, clean, and wholesome, and therefore inoffensive.

Keep Listerine handy in home and office. Carry it with you when you travel. No other antiseptic mouth wash is so pleasant tasting. No other mouth wash has swifter deodorant and germicidal effect. No other mouth wash is more healing. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

LISTERINE ends halitosis *(UNPLEASANT BREATH)*

On sale the First Wednesday of each month

Volume CIII MONTHLY Number 3

The Popular Magazine

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office

Yearly Subscription, $2.50 Single Copies, 25 Cents

Contents for July, 1931

Monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $2.86. Foreign, $3.22.

We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

To facilitate handling, the author should inclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached.

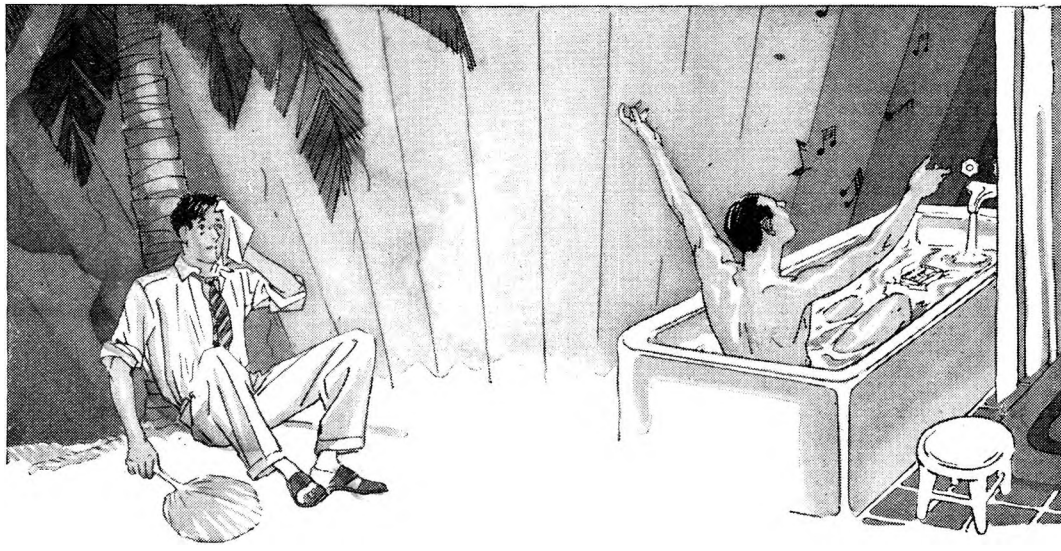
STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC., 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Patents and Lawyers

Detectives Wanted—Instructions

Help Wanted—Instructions



Fair *and* Cooler!

When it's too hot to stir and your skin seems to ooze and your clothes feel too tight and your feet fit no shoes—

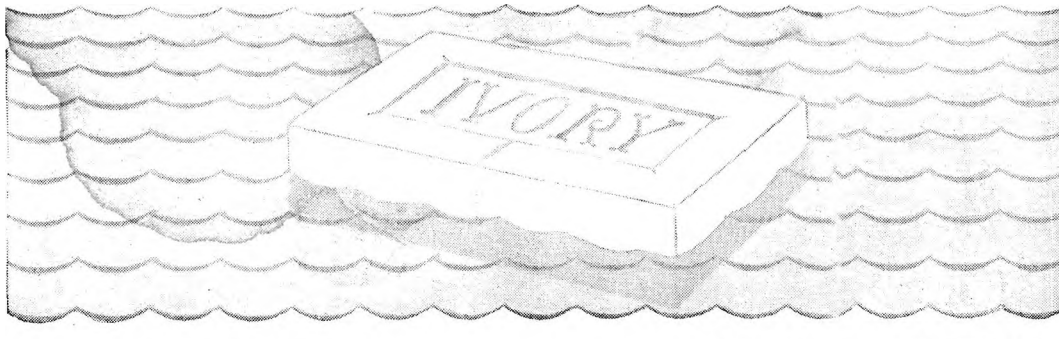
Then steer for the nearest bathtub! Disengage yourself from every clammy stitch of this summer's fashions. Renounce all worldly possessions except the purest thing you know—it's white and it's big and it always floats!

For immediate relief, go right into a heart-to-heart consultation with Ivory Soap. Spread a snowdrift of Ivory foam richly over your entire architecture. You will instantly feel as cool as a sprig of mint in a tinkling glass of iced tea! Then duck your shoulders under the water as a hint for every Ivory bubble to rinse away.

And then, take your choice . . . stretch out for a 10-minute rest cure . . . or splash about as if the tub were your old swimming hole. In either case the results are the same—a completely revived American!

And when you have swished your towel for the last time over your dry shoulders, how cheerful and smooth-tempered and refreshed your skin feels! That's because Ivory's par is always the same—$99\frac{44}{100}$% Pure!

. . . kind to everything it touches · $99\frac{44}{100}$% Pure · "It floats"



A Chat With You

A TRUE friend, when everything is all right, walks at your side with strides as long and gay as yours; but when you are injured and limping he puts a strong hand beneath your armpit and says: "Hold everything, buddy; we'll be there in no time now. See? There's a clearing ahead!"

You don't have to be physically injured; you may be simply tired of the grind, worried, or downright discouraged. Even then—or rather, especially then—it's great to have some one to buck you up.

* * * *

THIS is a time when most of us are worried, discouraged. Things have gone hard. Depression, unemployment. We've all been looking into the future and wondering how long it would last. We've been eager for any expression of hope, for any prediction that the trend had started upward. Newspapers question authorities everywhere for their opinions, and when those opinions are optimistic, we go about our work with a feeling of relief.

* * * *

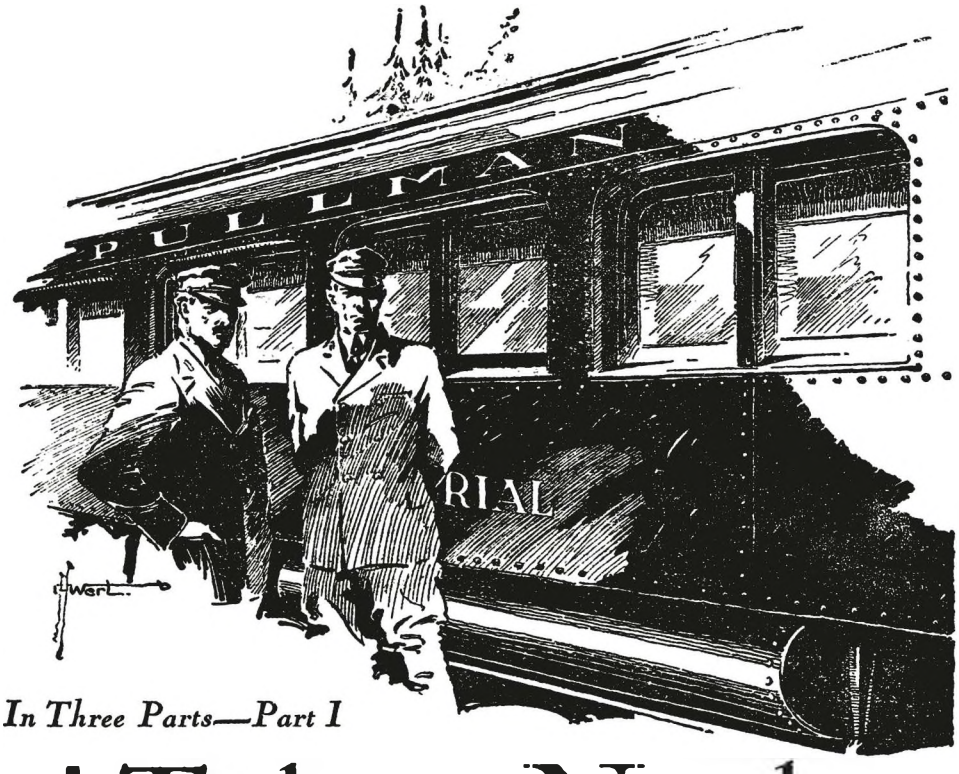
A GOOD magazine holds up the banner of courage. It walks at your side in the dark forest and tries to keep you mentally going in the right direction toward the clearing or the open side of a hill ahead. It realizes that there are always clearings ahead.

Its stories show you the open acres, the other side of the hill, the bright world beyond the tangled woods, the shining wide spaces of the sea. It shows you that obstacles and troubles can be smashed, if you are men.

IT reminds you of the remarkable things men have done, are doing, and will do. It points to the past, the present, and the future, steadily, firmly, and with far-seeing vision maintaining the ideals of hope and courage that, out of the wilderness, out of barbarism, and against incredible opposition and ruin, have wrought the homes and safety of mankind.

The men who crossed the unknown seas in days much darker than our own, had no time for despair. The men who came after them, who turned their faces westward and forced into the angry soil of a savage continent the healthy seeds of a new ideal in living—a reckless, splendid dream of young and vigorous cities, acres and acres of golden corn and wheat alive in the sunlight, and millions of people, with brave and eager faces, happily and with deep sincerity working out the vast experiment of a New World, while the Old World stared with amazement at our boundless optimism—they had no time for despair.

And we have no time for despair, either—you who read this magazine, or we who produce it. All writers, and in particular, because we know them, the men who write for this Street & Smith publication, The Popular, live hard, uncertain lives; yet they tell their stories with gusto—stories in which one quality stands out like an eternal beacon: *high morale!* These men never let down that banner; and that is why we feel strongly that The Popular, since this vital spirit is breathed alive into it by their work, is the friend who puts a hand beneath your armpit and says: "Buddy, there's a clearing ahead; hold everything!"



In Three Parts—Part I

A Ticket *to* Nowhere

He Went to Sleep in the Train Dreaming of Palms and Warm Friendless and Lost, at

CHAPTER I.
THE FLAMINGO EXPRESS.

Follow the sun to a land of palm trees, perpetual sunshine, and golden beauty! Yield to the enchanting spell of romance. Do what you will—yachting, tarpon fishing, horseback riding, bathing and gay days. Come, follow the sun to Florida!

JIM FOSTER looked away dreamily from the newspaper that he was reading and slid his feet down off his reporter's desk of the Cleveland *Press*. Carefully, he spread the paper out before him and read on:

Climate that washes the brain. The boom of the sea that sings an eternal song of happiness to man. The lullaby of the trade winds that make sleep like a purple voyage to a golden paradise. Sunsets that would bring smiles to the face of the dead!

For a moment Foster's blue eyes stared up and away toward the dusty windows that obscured the wild November night without. A booming gale was tugging at the casements.

"Sunsets that would bring smiles to the dead!" Foster laughed to himself sardonically. Was his soul dead? He had seen so much of the world, had traveled to the four corners of the world as a steamship mate. Was he becoming a sophisticate? He hoped not.

By Lieutenant SEYMOUR G. POND,
Air Corps, R. F. C.

Sunshine—and Woke Up to Find Himself Stranded, Penniless, the End of Nowhere!

His eyes shifted back to the paper. It was great the way these ad writers did their stuff. One knew that it was largely hokum and yet you liked it. The sort of thoughts that set the mind on fire and put the old vagabond virus in your blood.

From around Foster's desk came the raucous clatter of typewriters, pounding, pounding unceasingly; the eternal babbling of voices and the constant shuffling of hurrying feet, always hurrying. It was as though one's work was always on one's back, inescapable. A sudden revolt surged up through Foster's being. It was sudden at the moment, but it had been growing, gathering weight, over a long period of months.

"Sunsets that would——" he wondered. "Yield to romance!" He had always done that. It was inherent to his nature, a sort of a lovable lazybones that he was. Through those smoky windows and the distant halolike lights of the night Foster seemed to see those tawny, sandy beaches, the stars hanging down through the night like giant jack-o-lanterns, and the thrum of the age-old trade winds through the swaying cocoa palm trees.

"Hell!" he cursed in a low whisper

audibly. He hated it all there in the city. If he could only get away! He was no good on the job. He was restless as—— He felt, suddenly, some one near at hand. He looked around, somewhat startled. He had been dreaming again. It was Brady, the boss. There was a cold, analytical stare in Brady's eyes.

"Did you cover that Heights scandal assignment, Foster?"

"N-no, sir."

"Why not?"

"I didn't think that scurvy story was worth writing, sir."

"Oh, *you* didn't think it was worth writing, eh? Well, let me tell you something. You're not paid to do the boss's thinking here. You're paid to carry out orders. Get your time!"

"With pleasure."

There was astonishment on the boss's face.

"You're fired!" he flamed.

"Oh, I understand that all right, Mr. Brady."

The boss thrust his hands akimbo on his hips and glared after his reporter, ex-steamship mate, and news photographer, curiously. Foster was walking straight to the cashier's office. There was to be no demonstration, no remonstrance? He was to be taken at his word? The boss looked a bit abashed. Here, certainly, was a newspaperman who was different!

When Foster reached the street the cold night smote him in the face. He pulled his winter coat tighter around his neck. A few thin flakes of snow drifted down the night air. An engulfing depression settled over him as he started to walk through the city streets. He jostled into people dazedly. Deep in his overcoat pockets he clenched and unclenched his fingers tensely. Times were bad; perhaps they would get worse. It looked like a tough winter. Perhaps he had picked an unfavorable time to become temperamental. Well, there would be no Florida trip now.

His fingers touched a coin. It was, he knew, a Spanish peseta piece. He had carried it, since his last voyage to the Mediterranean, as a good-luck piece. It brought to mind, however, the subject of money. Jobs were scarce. He had his salary, though; that was sixty dollars. In addition, he had two dollars and two cents, and his—Spanish peseta. That was all that he did have in the wide world.

In Cleveland, he knew, there was no hope of his raising any more. From his home in Tampa, Florida, he could temporarily accept the hospitality of his people and his many boyhood friends, but pride forbade him from wiring them at any time for money.

If he didn't get a job soon he would be facing a tough crisis. What to do? Bewilderedly, he had been walking, walking through the blustery night. He looked up; he was headed down Euclid Avenue. Well, it didn't matter.

He had usually liked news work. He hated scandal-mongering, though. If Brady had let him cover marine news and do Sunday features as he had done on other papers, it would have all been different. Patches of snow, gray and dirty, stared up at him. The scene depressed him. Then through the iron grating of a fence his gaze was held by two dazzling red lights and an electric sign which read:

THE FLAMINGO

Thirty-eight Hours To Tampa.

It was the observation platform of the midnight train!

Tampa! Home! It had been more than three years since he had glimpsed those sun-bleached and palm-lined avenues of his home town and the blue waters of the glamorous Gulf of Mexico. He was blue and depressed. Home! His fingers clutched his Span-

ish peseta piece. It was a wild hunch, but one that he had not infrequently followed in his whimsical way during his vagabonding treks. He drew out the peseta, tossed it into the air, held out his palm to catch it, watched it flicker down through the night.

"Come heads, baby!" he murmured.

Chilling thrills raced through his veins. He stared. The face of Alphonse Trece looked up smilingly toward him. Heads! Impatiently he hurried into the big Central Station and up to the nearest ticket window.

"What's the fare, with Pullman, to Tampa?" he inquired.

A pause, a rustle of catalogues.

"Fare is forty-four dollars and thirty-six cents. The Pullman is fourteen dollars and sixty-three cents."

"O. K.," answered Foster hastily, lest he change his mind. "Give me one to Tampa."

The ticket agent went about the business of arranging the long ticket. Foster was gathering his thoughts fast. In ten minutes he could be back with his lone suitcase and clothing. He had nearly forty minutes before the train left at midnight. Queer, was his passing thought, how he had walked aimlessly through the streets and landed there at the station. Perhaps it was fate, or destiny, or whatever it was that molded the——

"That will be fifty-eight ninety-nine," concluded the agent.

Foster handed the money across the glistening counter. As he turned out of the station he took stock of his resources. He possessed exactly three dollars and three cents and—one Spanish peseta. That was all that he had. That was all that he would have for a day and half on the train, and he would not have that much when he landed in Tampa. But he would be—home!

When Foster hastened down the wind-swept platform, suitcase in hand, he saw the blue-uniformed conductor with his hands to his mouth. He was shouting at his loudest and best:

"A-ll a-bo-ard!"

A new promise filled Foster's being as he stepped up to the train vestibule. Of the darky porter he inquired:

"Is this the *Flamingo?*"

The Negro grinned, showing a handsome set of white teeth.

"Waal, suh, I allows yuh might call it that, suh!"

The train was already moving. With an agile bound Foster was aboard the Pullman. Handing his ticket to the porter, he said:

"Lower six, porter."

"Yas-ah! Right heah, suh. The conductor will get your ticket in the mornin', suh."

Foster was tired. In a few moments he had tucked himself away in his berth. The last that he remembered was dreaming of a sandy beach, of hearing the breakers boom shoreward under a platinum moon, and through it all hearing the resonant whine of the train's engine, roaring through the night.

CHAPTER II.

A TICKET TO NOWHERE.

IN the morning Jim Foster turned restlessly in his berth. He listened, scarcely awake. Silence. But what a deep, strange silence! There was something rather commanding and curious in that silence—just the moan of the wind and something that sounded like the swish of sand along the window ledge outside.

Raising on one elbow he pulled back the curtain and with sleep-riven eyes stared out. Stark chill, then, raced down his spine. He snapped to an upright position, now wide awake, and stared with something more than surprise in his eyes. Cold apprehension gripped him. As far as the eye could reach was the white glare of snow-covered lands!

Tall, majestic pine trees, their strong boughs bending with the weight of white snows, groaned their age-old complainings. Little clouds of white snow drifted and eddied along the window ledges. Snow! Ten feet deep it appeared, and everywhere, everywhere! And those pine trees!

Where was he? Surely he hadn't taken the wrong train? It couldn't be, and yet—— His mind raced back over the incidents of the previous evening, of how he had boarded the train. It had been just pulling out as he climbed aboard. Things had happened so rapidly that he had been dazed, bewildered by it all. He recalled, dimly, that the porter had grinned when he had inquired about the *Flamingo*. He had thought little of it at the moment.

Could it be possible that he had boarded the wrong train, that he was in the mountains of Pennsylvania, or Virginia? He didn't know, but he felt instinctively that there was something radically wrong. They should be farther South.

Hurrying, he struggled into his clothes while inside his berth. He couldn't afford to make any mistakes with his present inadequate resources.

Wriggling around on his berth, tucking in his shirt, and deftly slipping into his shoes, he slid out onto the soft aisle carpet of the Pullman. At the far end of the coach he saw the conductor gazing out across the white vistas of snow beyond. Just below the car windows he saw a small working hand car rattle past through the deep snows. The tracks he noted, were rusty and unused. The whole atmosphere of the countryside was of one remote from civilization. Where could he be? He hastened to the conductor.

"Where are we, conductor? What place is this?" he inquired briskly, eagerly.

The conductor, a man of some fifty railroading years, looked toward the young man standing before him, surprised. Then he looked casually out the window again.

"Why—why, one of the Canadian Lakes. Let's see. It's Lake——"

"C-Canada? C-Canadian? Lakes?" stammered Foster, stunned. "You, you mean that we're in—Canada?"

The trainman looked rather disgustedly toward his inquirer.

"Why, sure it's Canada!"

"Cer-iminy!" gasped Foster. "I'm sunk!"

"Where did you think you were?" asked the conductor pointedly.

"Why—why, Florida! In Tampa! That is, headed that way, at least. I—I thought——" But somehow the words left him hollowly in the air. As he stared out the train windows he was held spellbound by the scene—grim and relentless white winter, snow reaching miles on miles, seemingly unending.

"Florida, eh?" the conductor laughed. "You're a couple of thousand miles from Florida, now, all right," he muttered. Then he started to stare at Foster as though at a suspicious character of some sort. "Let's see your ticket."

For several seconds the trainman gazed over the long Florida ticket. His brows were wrinkled as he commented:

"Wrong train, all right," as though he might not have believed the story up to the present.

"Yes," answered Foster. "Wrong train is right. But what in *hell* will I do now?"

The conductor shifted his big feet.

"The first thing you'll do will be to buy a ticket from Cleveland to this point," he stated coldly. "This—this Florida thing is no good to me!" He flourished the long ticket dramatically. "This is just a ticket to—to nowhere, as far as I'm concerned."

Foster felt the hot blood mount to his cheeks. What a rotten situation!

"Well, wh-where do you go from here?" parried Foster. "Any farther?"

"No, sir. Far as we go. This is the end of the line."

"I *can't* buy another ticket," said Foster. "I bought this one with practically the last dime I had in the world, so I could get home and look for a job."

The conductor looked at his passenger exasperatedly.

"Hmph! Then wire your people in Tampa for some money."

Foster shook his head stolidly.

"Nope! Can't do that. That's *out!* That's the one thing I never do."

The eyes of the older man seemed to kindle somewhat on hearing this remark. He folded the long Florida ticket over in his hand a moment, thoughtfully. Then he gazed at Foster intently, as though he were endeavoring to convince himself that the man before him was not an imposter. Finally he tucked the ticket into his wallet.

"Hm-m-m!" he commented finally. "I suppose that *is* a pretty tough break. Well, the only thing I can do after all, I suppose, is to put you off here. I'll have to hold your Florida ticket for my Pullman records—or I'll be losing my job. After this I gather all tickets at night. You got a passport?"

"A passport? Why no!"

"Well! You're across the International Line, you know!" He laughed again—rather contemptuously this time, Foster thought. "You'll have *some* fight with the local authorities, all right. They'll probably run you in!"

Foster ground his teeth. What a snag he had run into! In some way, he warned himself, he would have to evade those customs authorities. Doggedly, he left the conductor and walked back to his berth. His heart was heavy. What was he to do? He was hung up on a hook, and in the winter time—and, of all places, in Canada, when he had wanted to get south to Florida! If that wasn't the irony of fate, then he never heard of it. Viciously he jammed his few belongings into his suitcase.

"Hell!" he gritted to himself. "A ticket to nowhere is right!"

He walked back to the vestibule with his suitcase then, to leave the train. But the authorities? As he descended the train steps he stared off across the snows toward the small village railroad station. Under its eaves, wide and overhanging, he saw a group of blue-uniformed Canadian customs officers.

The men looked toward Foster, then started walking slowly toward the train. Bewilderedly, Foster ran his hand into his inside pocket in a feint, as though he might have forgotten something. He felt like a criminal, but he was desperate. He left his suitcase, then, on the snow and stepped back hurriedly into the Pullman vestibule. He looked behind him a second; they were still coming.

Darting through the aisle of the coach, Foster raced to the end of the car. Reaching the observation platform, he vaulted the little brass fence and dropped to the snow. It was deep; he sank above his knees. He looked frantically ahead. He was, he knew, out of sight of the customs men. Ahead rose a small forest of tall pines. Through it he saw a narrow, winding path. Striking out for this, he bent forward almost into a run.

In the distance he saw the smoke of the town curling skyward. Steeples jutted here and there above the three beyond. He wondered where he was, what the name of the place was. He had neglected to ask, and he had not stopped to read the name over the railroad station. Not that it made much difference *where* he was, now. He might just as well be in Malaya, or Abyssinia, or Switzerland, in so far as friends and help were concerned.

The trail was slow going. It cut off through the trees for several thousand yards; but Foster felt eased in mind because their shadowy confines covered his escape. Breathless, he slowed a pace.

Soon he had reached the opposite edge of the forest, and came out onto a clearing. He stared around him hesitantly. An open lot and several narrow village streets hove into view. The town, he could see, was a rather snugly built-up little seaport, or port, on the lakes. Probably a humming little port, he figured, during the summer and open steamship season. He wondered again where he might be. The gray, wide surface of a lake spread into unending vistas before him.

Lake Superior, Huron, or Ontario? He wondered. Probably the latter, he thought. Instinctively he headed out and straight for the water front. As in all ports far from home, the shipping meant embarkation—a place where one might get a passage on a long trail across deep blue water. It was commencing to snow again—thick, fluffy flakes of immense size.

Reaching the wharves he looked furtively behind him. He felt like a hunted dog. He wondered whether he would be caught, and if so what would happen to him. He was, he realized, a fugitive from justice now. Circling around a great rambling dock warehouse, he reached a spot secluded somewhat from the wind, which seemed to be rising, and sat down on the pier, his feet dangling over the side.

Below him he stared over the decks of a schooner. It was an abandoned one—at least one abandoned for the winter. Its sails hung in tatters of wild disarray over the booms and decks, weighted down with great piles of snow.

Foster gazed across the lake. It was not yet frozen over—too early in the season for that. The wind was whipping its surface, though, into lashing whitecaps. The gray waters were turning into a more emerald green with the increasing force of the wind.

It was very cold. Foster knew that it was below zero; yet it was that dry, crisp cold that did not make one so uncomfortable as did the damp and chilly air of some of the more southern places such as Ohio or New York.

The wind swept down the docks and whipped fine clouds of misted snow through the air. Thin dustings of it crept down Foster's back and sifted along his collar bone. Suddenly he began to feel cold, and very much alone.

That great expanse of lake out there before him, tossing and formidable—a lake, the name of which he did not even know, stretching off into hundreds on hundreds of miles of unknown water.

Off there behind him, the groaning boughs of the tall northwoods pines, loaded with snow, and stretching endlessly off into the arctic North.

Boards creaked down the dock. Startled, Foster looked back. A small boy was trudging along through the snow toward him, a dog at his heels. He had a brown, disheveled cap drawn down over his eyes to keep the driving snow out of his eyes. It seemed good to Foster to see a human face at that moment—if only a small boy and a dog. As he looked in the direction of the approaching water-front urchin he caught sight of a yacht moored farther down the docks. The thought of a possible job there flashed through his mind. Lighting a cigarette he watched the boy ambling along beside the warehouse walls.

A small boy could usually be taken into one's confidence. The youthful mind was trustworthy and unspoiled by some of the sordidness and dross that sometimes gathers later with age. The lad was likely from one of the fishing smacks, Foster concluded from his appearance and location. He beckoned to the boy to come over his way.

"Say, sonny," he inquired, trying to be as casual as possible, "what lake is this?"

The boy, not over eleven years of age, stared at Foster in childish amazement.

"Why—why you mean this *big* lake, mister?"

"Yes. This one." Foster indicated it with a sweep of his hand out into the falling snow.

"Why that's Huron, mister. Just get in?"

"Uh-huh."

"But that"—pointing to the schooner below Foster's feet—"that ain't your boat, mister?"

"N-no, sonny, not this one."

For a moment Foster's deep blue eyes drifted dreamily out over the great expanse of the cold, gray lake. Huron, eh? Well, there were several hundred miles of shore along Lake Huron, even thousands. He might be anywhere along that stretch of lonely northern beach.

"And this little town up here, sonny—what do you call *it?*"

"Why that's Godrich, mister. Dontcha know?" The boy laughed hollowly. "Say, mister, you're just tryin' to see how much geography I know, huh? I know."

Foster smiled.

"No. Your geography is all right, sonny. It's a great deal better than mine, anyway."

The boy smiled wanly, kicked the snow about with his toes sheepishly.

"I ain't been to school none yet. Pop's a fisherman, you know, and the fishin's been right bad this fall. Pike, here," he said, jerking his stubby little thumb toward the mongrel at his feet, "and I have been having a purtty tough time. Pop, he don't like Pike, but I do. He thinks Pike eats too much. And you see, eatin' ain't been none too reg'lar. But I don't think Pike eats too much."

"Hm-m-m," mused Foster. "I wouldn't think so. Pike's got a nice face. What kind of a dog is he?"

"Well, I don't know 'xactly, but the watchman says he's a full-blooded Eskimo fishin' dog. He kin catch fish from a blowhole in the ice somethin' great."

Foster studied the dog intently.

"I'll bet he's a good pal."

"Sure is, mister. He's a good ratter, too. There's *some* big rats out here on this dock, too, mister. Pike's not as lively now as usual, though. He ain't hisself, 'xactly. You see, he ain't eat none fer goin' on three days now—'ceptin' o' course what he's rustled hisself."

The boy held his little mongrel up on his hind legs so that Foster could get a good look at him. Foster grinned. He looked first at the boy and then at the dog. On closer view it was hard to determine which of the two looked the more starved—boy or dog. He reached into his pocket and drew out a half dollar.

"Here, sonny, take this. You and Pike go and get yourselves something warm to eat with it."

The boy drew back.

"Oh, no, mister. I could never accept money that a way."

"Here now, sonny! Don't get high hat with me. What is your name?"

"Mickey, sir."

"Well, Mickey, we can't be friends if you're going to act like that, you know. When people are friends they want to help their friends out. Money is one of the best ways we can help people. What's more, you've got to look after Pike, you know. That's your duty. Pike can't get help like you can, or talk. Of course, you wouldn't want to be taking money from every one, but we, well, we're friends now, you see, and it's all right."

Mickey scratched his little freckled chin a moment and stared down at Pike who seemed to be pleading in his forlorn puppy eyes for something, anything, to eat. It was more than the lad could stand.

"Well, all right, mister. Just this once. I wouldn't do it, 'ceptin' Pike's might-ee hungry. I'm kinda holler my-

self, too. But you got plenty, mister, yourself?"

"Oh, sure. Plenty, Mickey."

The boy took the fifty-cent piece and looked at it.

"It's American. You American, mister?"

"Uh-huh."

"I kin get it changed at the bank."

"Don't need to. It's good anywhere, Mickey."

"Well, thanks, mister, ever so much, and Pike thanks yuh, too. And good luck to yuh, mister. I hopes yuh likes Godrich."

"Thanks, sonny."

The boy pattered up the dock. His shaggy little mongrel followed closely at his heels.

"Godrich, eh?" said Foster, half aloud. He had heard of that little port on Lake Huron. It was one of the most desolate of the smaller grain outposts of the great Canadian lake regions. It was a section where even the Indians were considered the most hostile and unfriendly in all Canada—one of the roughest and wildest parts of that wild and semiarctic northland.

Well, it would be a grim battle now, he could see. It was back to the old plan, the survival of the fittest, the raw, natural grain of life itself—of getting enough to keep body and soul together.

What would he do? Work! That was the first thing. But where? For several moments Foster roved his eyes around that desolate and wintry domain into which he had been so rudely dumped. Should he try the lumber camps? He was pretty soft, from office work and the confines of four walls, to tackle hard labor.

There were few stores. The possibilities for work in such a small settlement were very limited, and narrow—almost unworthy of consideration. The railroad? Hardly; that didn't smack of pleasant or friendly memories. His vision shifted out through the shipping. Fishing? He recoiled at the thought. Still, it would mean food and a place to sleep—his chief concern. And, he knew the sea.

He had his mate's license in his inside pocket. The lumber camps, of course, might give him enough work for a small stake that would get him out of the place. The sea or the land? It was a toss-up.

He fingered through his pockets for his Spanish peseta. Then he counted his resources. His total wealth was two dollars and fifty-three cents, and a five-dollar hunger. He held onto his peseta and thrust the remainder of his change back into his pocket.

For a few thoughtful moments he gripped the peseta in his palm. With dreamy eyes he roved his vision out through the shipping, then back landward across the timber-lined distant hills. The sea or the land? Which should it be? With a deft flip he sent the bright Castilian coin spinning up into the snow-laden air. He leaned forward breathlessly as the coin came down onto his palm, watching eagerly for its answer. In a low, inarticulate whisper he breathed:

"Heads for the land! Tails for the sea! Bring me luck, Señor Alphonse!"

In a flashing rebound the little coin dropped into his hand.

"Tails, eh? And better so. A chance to get home. A chance!"

CHAPTER III.

A RUSTLE OF THE DICE.

THE decision had been made. Foster stood to his feet. He always abided by his decisions. He would literally comb the water front for a job—any kind of work at all. A berth on a ship always brought two vital things with it—food, and a bunk.

He tucked the silver coin deep into his overcoat pocket and struck off down the docks. As he walked along through

the heavy snow toward the end of the wharf he saw again the brightly varnished masts of the yacht jutting skyward through the snow.

The yachting trade was, he knew, a superior line of work in so far as good pay and pleasure were concerned, in seafaring. Nor was it as strenuous for a man coming right out of an office as was he. It would be good—if there was anything doing.

The strong wind nearly bowled Foster over at the end of the dock. Slipping behind one of the taller pilings to get out of its cutting blast, he stood there in its lee for a time studying the small vessel before his eyes. The hatchway was pushed back. There was some one aboard. Foster ran his eyes over the yacht appraisingly.

She was a pretty thing. Rakish and slender of design, she still possessed that rare quality found in small yachts—sturdiness. There was a breadth of beam and a stalwartness of her timbers that indicated seaworthiness. About seventy-five feet in length, he estimated, and, from the shape of her funnel, probably a Diesel power plant. Above the roof of the V-shaped pilot house the gold lettering on a mahogany name plate revealed the words:

Silver Spray.

An attractive name, thought Foster. Her deck plankings were of sun-bleached wood and scrubbed to an immaculate whiteness. He had always liked wooden decks; they were more friendly and warm with feeling, somehow, than were metal ones.

On the trim quarter deck aft there were several piles of provisions, drums of oil, coils of rope, and sundry bundles. Foster, with his sea experience, realized that the little ship was doubtless preparing for a lengthy voyage. He wondered where she might be bound.

As he looked at the yacht he was suddenly surprised to see a bare blond head protrude from the companionway steps at the entrance to the main cabin, and a young woman emerge to the deck. In heavy mackinaw coat and plaid dress she wound her way among the various bundles of supplies cluttering the deck. Paper and pencil in hand, she was apparently preparing to check over the various items of provisions.

Foster stepped out from his protective niche and walked down closer to the edge of the wharf and the boat. On hearing the footsteps the girl straightened quickly. Passers-by were few on the docks that wintry morning. Foster looked at the girl. She stared at Foster inquiringly. For a moment Foster was held spellbound. The girl had jet-black eyes set against a pale, lovely skin. She was beautiful. Foster felt his blood tingle as he addressed the girl smiling before him.

"Pardon," he said, "but I—I'm looking for work as a navigator. I wonder if you might be in need of one?"

The girl smiled again.

"Why—why! Why, that's odd. I—I mean it's so odd, your being here. Not being here, exactly"—the girl flushed—"but I mean your looking for work as a navigator. That is, when father has been looking for some one. But now I believe he has made other arrangements. I don't know now."

Foster felt his heart sink. He knew there was something too good about it to be true. The girl toyed with the paper and pencil in her hand a moment, studying Foster with friendly eyes.

"Please excuse me if I seem incoherent," she said. "It's just that, well, men have been scarce. You see, it's late in the season now and—that is, I mean that men who can be employed on yachts are scarce." The girl blushed again. She hesitated slightly. "Well, won't you come aboard, please? You can talk to my father."

The girl led the way down the com-

panionway steps to the inner cabin. A slender man, gray at the temples, and his face seamed with lines, stared toward Foster with pale, watery eyes. Foster felt his feet sink into the lush, soft carpets as he stepped into the luxurious cabin. The old gentleman laid down his pipe onto the polished cabin table and stared with startled, hostile eyes. The girl lifted her hand introductorily toward Foster.

"Father, this gentleman is looking for a place as a navigator. I thought you might perhaps want to talk to him."

The old gentleman glowered toward his daughter.

"Why should I?" he snapped. "I've made all arrangements with Griffin. We're ready to leave now."

"But, father, you said you didn't want to take Will away from the mine."

"I know, I know, but he's made his arrangements by now."

The older man was studying Foster closely. Foster felt the eyes, penetrating and cold, piercing into the roots of his very soul.

"Who are you?" questioned the old man abruptly.

"My name is James Foster, sir," he answered. Then he took the mate's license from his pocket and handed it across for the older man to inspect.

Reluctantly the old gentleman accepted the document. There was an almost suspicious look on his face as he unfolded the license and read it.

"An American, eh?" he grunted.

"Yes, sir."

As he read on down the license he saw that it was stamped:

Tampa, Florida, the Office of the United States Steamboat Inspection Service.

He looked toward Foster then.

"From Tampa, eh?"

"Yes, that's my home."

"You're no relation to old Giles Foster who prints the Tampa *Times,* are you?"

Foster colored slightly.

"That's my father. We're a sort of a family of newspapermen. I just left a newspaper job in Cleveland."

The old man's pallid gray eyes searched Foster again.

"What you doing in Canada?"

"Well, sir, that will call for a confession to——"

The older man waved his hand aside.

"I don't want to hear any confessions. If you're old Giles's son you *ought* to be O. K." As he talked he continued to watch Foster. "There *is* a family resemblance, all right," he finally admitted.

Foster smiled to himself. The old fellow must have thought him some sort of a rogue up to the present.

"Your father and I spent a summer together on the Florida Keys—tarpon fishing. What experience have you had? Any?"

"Oh, yes," answered Foster. "Mostly on steamships, although I served my apprenticeship on Pacific coast sailing ships. I was second officer of the *President Harding* running to Europe for the United States Lines, for a year. After that I was second officer of the American Export Lines in the Mediterranean trade. My last berth was as first officer of a steamer belonging to the Red D Lines operating between New York and northern South America."

The old man lighted his pipe thoughtfully. Foster had a fine bearing and a courteous voice. Newspaper work had ably fitted him to understanding people and making the most of short meetings. For several seconds the old man puffed on his pipe in silence. The girl sat near by in a great maroon plush easy-chair and looked on with wide, wondering eyes. Finally the old gentleman said:

"You're too late. There's no doubt that you could handle the navigation all right. If you'd come a couple of weeks ago, I would have hired you, maybe. Still——" The owner of the yacht hesi-

tated thoughtfully. He tapped the bowl of his pipe slowly into a great brass ash container before him. It was evident that he was turning some momentous problem over in his mind. "I don't know, after all," he spoke reflectively. "I tell you, Mr. Foster, I will consider it."

Foster's being glowed with radiant expectation.

"My name," said the old man gruffly, "is Allison—Winston Allison. This is my daughter, Grace Allison."

Foster bowed graciously. The girl smiled warmly. Foster offered his hand to the older man, but rather doubted from his gruff ways whether the old man would shake hands—he was such a bear in disposition. Mr. Allison accepted the hand, however, and much to Foster's surprise gave it a firm, almost vicious grip. Inwardly Foster smiled. Perhaps, at heart, the old fellow wasn't such a bad sort, after all.

"I'll show you the yacht," said Mr. Allison, "if you want to see it. Would you like to?"

"Of course," replied Foster, "I'd like very much to see it."

"This way."

Mr. Allison threw back a heavy mahogany door. Two large and glistening engines jutted upward from the floor—the engine room. There came the pur of an engine turning over rhythmically. Foster figured that it was probably the small motor that operated the dynamo for heat and lighting, in the absence of the main engine's power.

"Engines from Denmark," explained Mr. Allison. "Diesel. They never fail. They're hundred horse each. Blunz make."

Foster nodded. With small boats, he knew, it was often a problem in remote ports to get gasoline. But even in the most inaccessible places kerosene was always available; if it was on hand for nothing else, it was used for lighting. The most difficult aspect of the Diesels usually, was in getting men who understood them.

"You have a good engineer?" inquired Foster.

"Yes. A man from the mines."

"You are in mining work, Mr. Allison?"

"Yes. I am president of the Kipawa Silver Mines, about ten miles northeast of Godrich." He walked on through a small stateroom which was obviously provided for the engineer and his helper, and climbed a narrow companionway to another cabin. "This is the chart room," explained Mr. Allison.

Foster was immediately interested. He looked around the room, over the chart cases, navigation books, chronometers, azimuth compasses, and peloruses, that were of the vessel's equipment.

"She is very complete, sir."

The old man nodded.

"You have your own navigating instruments, Mr. Foster?"

"Why, no, sir. I haven't—*with* me."

"No sextant?"

"Not with me, sir."

"Hmph!" snorted the old martinet. "What sort of a navigator are you? Isn't every steamship officer expected to bring his own sextant?"

"Yes, he is. They all do, but I—well, sir, you see, the way I happen to be up here in Canada is that I took the wrong train. I—I expected to be going to my home in Tampa, and I awoke in Godrich the next morning."

The old gentleman stared, clenched his jaws.

"Hmph! I'll have to have some one more responsible than you, I am afraid. Broke?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yes? Well, then this job would just be an undesirable task."

"Not at all, sir. I would really very much enjoy making a voyage on the *Silver Spray*—if you would try me. I understand navigation perfectly, Mr. Al-

lison, and could take your boat any place with safety."

"I'm afraid you won't do. Anyway, I had made arrangements with my mine superintendent, who is a civil engineer, to go with me. As you know, probably, civil engineers know something of navigation. I—I really can't spare Mr. Griffin from the mine, but he is willing to go. Another thing, life on a yacht, Mr. Foster, is quite different from that on a steamship. People live more intimately. It is like a small family. One has to be very careful as to whom is taken on board."

"I understand," replied Foster with disappointment.

"Well, I'll show you the rest of the yacht."

They pushed on out the chart room, and up a winding staircase to the pilot house. The brass work was brightly polished. Whistle lever shone like a piece of gold, and the rail before the pilot-house windows glistened beautifully. Foster looked at the compass binnacle. Its top was off and several tools lay at its base on the deck. On the top of the compass glass lay an iron screw driver. Foster lifted it off smilingly, placed it on the shelf, distant.

"Hardly the place for a screw driver, Mr. Allison," he said. "It's apt to throw your compass out of alignment, permanently."

Mr. Allison stared at Foster a moment understandingly, and nodded.

"Checking the compass?" queried Foster interestedly.

"No. Getting a new binnacle cover."

"You will, of course, before you go on your voyage?"

"I hadn't thought of it. Is it necessary?"

"Positively," assured Foster. "Every compass should be swung before each voyage. While your boat is laid up, or alongside the dock this way, the compass is likely to become affected and thrown out of true."

"What do you mean, 'swung'?" inquired Mr. Allison. There was a tone of apprehension in his voice.

"That means taking the vessel out into some open spot of the harbor and taking bearings with it in conjunction with known given points on land. With the checking up of these cross bearings and with the aid of the pelorus the exact error of the compass can be determined. There is always some deviation of the compass as well as variation on land, which comprise the total error of the instrument."

The old gentleman listened intently.

"Hm-m-m," he mused finally. "I don't believe Will has looked into that."

From there they went out on deck. Foster noted that there was splendid vision from the pilot house. She was a trim little ship, one that warmed his heart. Like a miniature big ship, she was, complete in every detail. On the forward navigating deck, however, he noted one feature that he did not like—a metal, upright stand, the base for a pelorus instrument used in taking bearings. There were freshly cut markings in the white deck which betrayed the fact that the standard had been fitted there in very recent days. He called Mr. Allison's attention to it.

"That should be moved, by all means," Foster advised. "The way it stands there now, to the right side of the mast, it would be impossible for one to get any land or compass bearings off the starboard beam. It is absolutely vital that one be able to take bearings of lighthouses or points of land, from any angle, either by night or by day. It should be moved farther forward."

Mr. Allison stroked his chin thoughtfully. It was obvious that the point brought to his attention worried him.

"Is that so? Hm-m-m. Mr. Griffin had it put there a few days ago." He stood over to one side of the standard. Before him faced the mast, where the water should have been. "That's so.

It *is* badly placed." The old man's eyes drew down with disfavor.

They walked forward then, looked into the forward crew's quarters, and inspected the anchor gear and lifeboat apparatus.

"A snug little ship," commented Foster. "A real little beauty!"

"Like her?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Foster enthusiastically. "I would like to make a voyage on her."

"We'll see, we'll see," said Mr. Allison. "I like your attention to details. What would you expect in salary?"

Foster glowed. At least the old fellow was thinking in the right direction.

"Well, why, I'd rather leave that to you, sir."

"Hmph! I wouldn't pay over three hundred dollars a month. Not a cent!"

Foster was thinking fast.

"How many months would this voyage be, Mr. Allison?"

"About five months."

Five months. That would give him a stake of fifteen hundred dollars. Out of that, at sea, he figured he should be able to save a thousand. That would put him on his feet. Now, if the old man would only come around——

"Come this way and I'll show you the owner's quarters."

They walked back through the engine room, through the main cabin, and into the stern of the boat. There were four complete staterooms luxuriously fitted with dark-maroon hangings drawn neatly back from the berths. Clothes cabinets and heavy plush chairs fitted the room.

In the owner's living room and private cabin were a long oval table of polished teak, and huge, carved teak chairs. The rest of the lounge was toned in dark, rich green to match the teak. It was a sumptuous yacht. As they passed out into the main cabin, then, Foster gazed on some beautiful oil paintings—seascapes of Northern waters. A great brass lamp hung from the main skylight in the main cabin.

"Have a seat a moment," said Mr. Allison. "I'm——"

There came voices from on deck. The old gentleman lighted up his pipe again, thoughtfully, and looked up toward the cabin hatchway to see who was coming. A medium-sized man of corpulent build, wearing a wide Stetson hat that did not become him very well, stepped down onto the cabin carpet.

"Hello, Mr. Allison!"

"Hello, Will! What brings you here? I thought you were running off that Eldorado smelting this morning?"

"Larkin is taking care of that. I just wanted to see how things were progressing for the trip."

Mr. Allison stood to his feet.

"Mr. Foster, meet Mr. Griffin. This is the superintendent of the Kipawa Mines."

"I see," acknowledged Foster. "Very glad to know you, Mr. Griffin."

The mine superintendent removed his hat, shook some of the snow from his shoulders and then looked pointedly and inquiringly first at Foster, then toward Allison. Slowly, Griffin withdrew a great-bowled brier pipe from his pocket —a rather oversized one, Foster thought. A decided tenseness seemed to shrink the air around them. The old gentleman coughed. The girl, sitting in one of the big plush chairs, shifted her feet uneasily.

"I am considering hiring Mr. Foster here as my navigator for the voyage," said Mr. Allison slowly, watching the effect of his words. "In fact, I have reached that decision."

Foster felt his blood warm. Those words were music to his ears. He realized that it was not his moment to speak, however. He looked toward Mr. Griffin interestedly. The mine superintendent's face, he noted, turned decidedly pale. He turned and looked toward the girl, who blushed slightly. Foster wondered

what there was between those two. One thing was certain: the mine super was distinctly disappointed.

"Why, Mr. Allison," he stated in a rather high-pitched tone, "there is really no need for this. It will only be an added expense for you. I can take care of all the navigation."

"In so far as the cost is concerned, Will, it would be much more economical for me to have your services at the mine. That is the chief difficulty. I really can't afford to take you away from the mine just now when we are smelting so heavily."

"But Larkin can carry on with the smelting, and with the drilling, for that matter. Why, everything is all ready. I am all packed, Mr. Allison. I don't see how you can do this. You know I've planned on this trip with you and Grace."

"I know, and I am very sorry not to have you with us, but you can go another time when I do not plan on being gone for such a long stay."

"But this—this man," queried Griffin, pointing toward Foster, "who is he? What do you know of him? You can't just take any one in on your yacht, with Grace, you know. You have to be careful ab——"

Allison cut him off with a wave of his hand.

"I will take the responsibility of that." There was rising anger in his voice.

"Has he any credentials? Anything?"

Mr. Allison's face flushed. He turned to Foster.

"Would you mind just showing your license to Mr. Griffin?"

"No, certainly not." Foster reached into his pocket, produced his document and handed it over to Griffin, who took it unwillingly.

"Mr. Foster," said Mr. Allison, "has shown me that he will be a very handy man on the *Silver Spray*. He has navigated steamships in the transatlantic trade, and is an expert seaman, to all accounts. I feel that I would have more confidence with him aboard on a long voyage."

Griffin's eyes were smoldering. This newcomer was usurping his glory. He was robbing him of his chances for the voyage. He studied the steamship license in his hands a moment, then glared at Foster with intensity.

Foster's blood rose. The air was getting even more tense. Griffin was shaking the license paper frantically, wrinkling it and soiling it.

"How can you do this, Mr. Allison, when——"

Foster reached over for the license. It was a quick, straight-arm thrust. Griffin then flung it upward, and leaped back at the same moment—leaped back somewhat startled as though he had been afraid that Foster was going to strike him. Perhaps it was his guilty conscience from his remarks about Foster, or in the fact that he had been handling the precious Federal document so carelessly.

The fact remained, however, that as he flung his arm upward and backward he struck Mr. Allison's pipe from his mouth and sent it spinning in toward the engine room. It rolled along the engine-room floor boards, a wake of live coals behind it, and fell directly under the starboard engine.

The girl screamed. Allison flung around behind him. With a bound the old man began to kick back the coals, and to stomp on them. Foster made a leap toward the engine room. Griffin blocked his path, pushed him rudely back with an oath.

"You keep out of this, you rotten meddler!" he fumed.

Foster flung Griffin's hand off his shoulder. Griffin swung out with his right at that rude motion. A white light seared through the air.

"Here, you fools!" shouted Allison. "Do something! The boat's afire!"

"Fire!" the girl echoed the words, and dashed up the companionway steps screaming for help.

Fire! The awful news descended on the group. Foster had seen a fire extinguisher in the engine room. He made a dash for it. Griffin blocked his way again.

"Get back, you! You have no business here! I'll take care of this!"

Foster knew that seconds were precious. This man Griffin knew nothing of boats. That was obvious. Red lights of anger darted before Foster's eyes. He drove forward with a vicious right. The corpulent man, however, was not downed so easily. He came back, and came back strong, with a rushing flaying of fists. Foster felt his head go crashing against the heavy bulkhead behind him. The air was becoming filled with smoke.

"Get out of my way," flared Foster. "The fire—we've got to do something about it. Let me by!"

"You let *me* by!" shouted Griffin in terror. "I'll put in the alarm. You're stopping me!"

Once again he rushed Foster.

"I'll have you both arrested!" shouted the old man. "My yacht! It will be burned to the water's edge!"

Somehow Foster plunged through the blows being rained on him by Griffin, elbowed his way aside, and drove for the engine room. The flames held him back. Somewhere outside he heard a policeman's whistle shrilly cut the air. Bells were ringing. Two dockmen, then, with a chemical fire hose, tumbled down the cabin hatchway. A white stream played over the two big Diesel engines in the *Silver Spray's* inferno.

A policeman jerked Foster upward, then, by the collar. Foster stared around. Another had grabbed Griffin.

"C'mon! Get outa that!" spat one. "Up on deck with you both!"

Reeling out of the little ship's cabin in a cloud of hurtling smoke, Foster was half dragged to the fresh air. He realized dimly that the fire was being rapidly extinguished. He felt sorry for old man Allison, and he was angry with himself in that he had not been able to do anything to help.

On the dock the policeman let go of Foster. The American dusted himself off. His face was bleeding, his eyes swollen, and his whole body racked with bruises. Bewilderedly he stared back toward the yacht. The smoke was diminishing.

His own policeman motioned him to move on along toward the group. The girl had joined her father and was looking toward Foster and Griffin, with angered, revengeful glances. Mr. Allison was talking with one of the policemen who was saying:

"Well, just come on up to the station house, anyway, Mr. Allison. I am sorry, but I shall have to demand that in the name of the law. The sergeant will want a statement from you. An investigation will have to follow. You understand that."

"Very well."

The crowd turned to look at the yacht. The flames and smoke had died. The chemical men were removing their equipment.

"Fire is all out, sir," reported one of the firemen to his superior.

"O'Brien!" called a tall policeman standing with Allison. "You stand by the boat. Keep watch. We're goin' up to the station house now. I'll send a man down to relieve you later."

O'Brien nodded:

"Yes, sir. All right, sor."

The policeman holding Foster eased him along by the arm. The crowd was dispersing. Griffin's policeman marched his man over nearer to Allison and his daughter. The group then walked on out through the great rambling dock warehouse to its end. The snowing had ceased, Foster noted dazedly, and a great rift of blue was breaking in the clouds

overhead. He could hear Griffin, up ahead, talking with the Allisons:

"I am very sorry, Mr. Allison. I was trying. I lost my head for the moment. If you will only forgive——"

The words were lost to Foster then as his policeman swung him around the opposite end of the wharf. Surely, thought Foster, Griffin wouldn't really get away with that? It was incredible.

"Up this way!" ordered the policeman with Foster roughly.

Foster stared. A police patrol! His heart sank. They would arrest him? As a newspaper reporter he had ridden many times in a "black maria," but this, somehow, was different. It was the one thing in life that he had never expected to do. The patrol was moving off as several other policemen jumped into it from the rear. But Griffin! He had gone with the Allisons in their private car!

In silence the patrol swung up through the lush white streets of the little northern town—that is, in silence in so far as talking was concerned. A fine cloud of snow mist drifted out behind the patrol as it drew to a halt with groaning brakes before a sturdy, squat brick building.

CHAPTER IV.
JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE.

ALL right. Out with you." It was the patrol policeman speaking to Foster. The reporter climbed down the rear step of the patrol. A small group of people was congregating. They stopped to look at Foster as he descended. He felt like a criminal. As they walked across the sidewalk to the station door he heard undertoned whisperings:

"There's Big Allison's car!"

"What's the trouble?"

"What's happened to the Allisons?"

Foster realized then, that the family was well known in the village. He was marched into the station house. The building was, he figured, a sort of small-town courtroom and police station all rolled into one. He was motioned to take a seat in front of the wide courtroom desk. It was a bench in the very front of the room. In a few seconds Mr. Allison, his daughter, Griffin, and the remainder of the police officers came in and took seats farther to the rear of the room. A tall, courtroom presiding officer in a flowing black robe then came in and took his seat behind the wide desk. He looked over the top of his glasses and inquired of one of the policemen:

"What is your report, Martin?"

"Well, your honor, I was walkin' me beat near Pine Street and the docks when I overhears a woman's scream down near the water. Naturally, I hastened to the scene of the trouble. I gets there—it turned out to be the end of Plymsol Pier—and I sees the *Silver Spray,* which, as your honor knows, is Mr. Allison's private yacht, burning. Acting on instinct, sir, I immediately turned in the fire alarm and summoned the chemical wagon from Plymsol Pier by blowing my whistle. This——"

"Very good work, lieutenant. That is exactly what you should have done," supported the magistrate, with a friendly eye toward Mr. Allison.

"Yes, sir. Well, I hurries out to the yacht then, to see what I could do to be of service to Mr. Allison, when I hears a lot of riotous scufflin' goin' on down inside the cabin. I leaps down into the cabin with my night stick to see what was the matter. At the same time the bells of the fire engines was ringin' in my ears and I knew that help was comin'. And when I gets down into the cabin of the *Silver Spray,* your honor, I sees two men wrestlin' and fightin' on the cabin floor."

"Who were these men?" questioned the magistrate, peering intently over the tops of his thick glasses.

"This man," said the lieutenant, pointing toward Foster, "was on top of this man"—pointing toward Griffin—"and they were tumbling all over the cabin—while the yacht was a-burnin', your honor!"

The magistrate glowered at the two offenders before him.

"They were doing nothing, your honor, absolutely nothing to prevent the fire, to prevent the vessel from burning to her very keel and——"

For a second Foster ashamedly realized that the lieutenant was right. He was sorry that he had done so little to be of service when the need had been so great. He realized that the Allisons must have held a great deal of animosity toward him for that, but so should they have had for Griffin as well. The magistrate was knocking with his gavel now.

"Just a minute, lieutenant! I believe Mr. Griffin wishes to speak."

"Your honor," stated the mine superintendent, "I was rushing out to place a fire alarm, when this stranger, this man here"—jerking a thumb toward Foster—"interfered. Mr. Allison and I had been having a slight discussion on the employing of this fellow as a hired hand on the yacht when this person butted in. He resented the fact that I was skeptical about his record, and immediately assaulted me. In the fracas I was shoved backward. This resulted in knocking Mr. Allison's pipe from his mouth. I was trying——"

Foster, his blood burning with rage, leaped hotly to his feet.

"Your honor, that's an out-and-out lie! I was reaching for a steamship document of mine which he was crumpling. He tried to prevent me from getting my own paper back, and in so doing he himself leaped back and knocked the pipe from Mr. Allison's mouth. The pipe fell under the starboard engine and set fire to the engine room. I was not in any way the direct cause of setting fire to the boat. If you——"

"That's a lie! A lie!" shouted Griffin excitedly.

Miss Allison, Foster noted, was crying. Old man Allison was shifting uneasily in his seat. The magistrate knocked agitatedly with his gavel for silence.

"Silence! Silence! If you please!" he demanded. He then turned toward Foster. "Did you see the lighted pipe knocked from Mr. Allison's mouth?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

The magistrate turned to Mr. Allison.

"Is it your opinion that Mr. Foster or Mr. Griffin knocked the pipe from your mouth, Mr. Allison?"

"Mr. Griffin was standing in front of me so that I could not see, right at the moment, just what happened. But it is my conviction that Mr. Foster lunged toward Mr. Griffin so that the pipe was thrown forcibly from my mouth."

The magistrate nodded his head.

"Is it your opinion, then, that this man is to blame for the fire that started on your boat?"

"Yes."

"I see." He turned toward Miss Allison. "What is your opinion, Miss Grace?"

"The same as father's. If Mr. Foster had not made that queer pass toward Mr. Griffin, I am sure that the trouble would never have happened."

"That's right! That's right!" shouted Griffin. "This fellow is the one who caused the fire!"

Foster felt the blood leave his heart, the chills run down his spine. Were they all against him? Why couldn't they say something in his favor? The magistrate was rapping with his gavel again.

"Just a minute!" he was saying. "Is it true, Mr. Allison, that this man whom you were considering hiring, attacked Mr. Griffin?"

"Well, it might be called that," answered the old man.

"Yes, your honor," spoke up the policeman. "I saw them fighting. They were wrestling all over the floor, and a right hot time they were having, too."

The magistrate turned again toward the girl.

"Didn't you state to one of the lieutenants, Miss Allison, that Mr. Griffin was trying to get help, when this stranger blocked his path?"

The girl ceased her weeping for the moment.

"Yes, that is—it appeared that way, your honor. They were both fighting and neither of them doing a thing to help."

Foster felt his heart shrivel in despair. He stared incredulously toward the girl who was now looking toward the floor. What did it all mean? Why were they shielding Griffin? Perhaps the girl was in love with him; or, perhaps, they were merely afraid of unfavorable publicity. But why were they throwing the blame on Foster's shoulders? He was dazed and crushed with bewilderment. He had tried to do what he could. Was this the gratitude he would receive? The girl had accused him! The magistrate was talking again.

"Mr. Allison, as I see it there is a charge against this stranger for disturbing the peace, and, perhaps, of assault and battery against your mine superintendent. Do you prefer these charges, Mr. Allison."

The old man pushed his hands into his overcoat pockets with a vicious thrust.

"Well, your honor, for disturbing the peace, yes! In so far as the charges of assault and battery are concerned, I think those might be dropped."

"Never!" shouted Griffin. "I'll prefer those charges myself."

The girl was talking excitedly with her father now. The old gentleman addressed the magistrate again:

"Your honor, perhaps the charges might be dropped altogether."

"No! Your honor! No!" objected Griffin.

"Order in the court!" said the magistrate angrily, pounding with his gavel. "Mr. Allison, I could hardly release this man, considering the facts, unless on bail. The present charges call for at least ninety days' confinement, assault and battery another ninety, making six months in all."

The magistrate turned again toward Foster.

"You are an American?"

"Yes, sir. But these charges are false, your honor. I assure you that I am innocent. I was only protecting my rights, and doing that which I thought just."

"I have reviewed the case," said the magistrate with finality. "The evidence against you is very unfavorable. There remains a charge of disturbing the peace, and of assault and battery, against you. You will now have to prove your innocence—when your case comes up again. You have your passport with you, of course?"

Foster flushed a crimson hue. They had him. He was trapped.

"Why, no, your honor. I do not have a passport."

"How can you prove that you are an American?"

"I will have to write to Washington, sir, and request the issuance of a passport. I don't suppose that this could be effected by mail, though."

"Then tell me this, Mr. Foster: how did you make your illegal entry into Canada?"

They had him nailed to the wall, now. He realized it. He could feel Griffin's eyes boring him through, and sense the gloating delight of his contemptible victory. Foster felt, at that moment, like a man without a country, a man without a friend assuredly, and stared at the judge in a confused and mystified em-

barrassment. His uneasiness was outwardly apparent to all.

"Well, sir. You see, your honor. It is like this: I got onto a train in Cleveland, Ohio, fully expecting to go to my home in Tampa, Florida. I boarded the train at night and I was somewhat disturbed over the loss of my job that day. The next morning I looked out the train window, expecting to be getting near Florida, and I found myself up here in your—your country, in Canada. I had boarded the wrong train, your honor!"

The magistrate stared at the American before him with curious glance.

"A very strange story. In your predicament, hardly one that could be taken uncritically. Supposing that we were to believe this part of your story, will you then explain to me how you passed our customs agents on the boundary, or in Godrich?"

"Well, I—I merely eluded them, your honor, knowing that I was without funds, and friends, and help. I avoided the customs agents by leaving the train through a circuitous route. I knew, your honor, that it was not legal, but it seemed better than the possibility of going to jail."

"Hm-m-m, I see. A very shallow story. In our profession we learn to believe every man, who comes before us in an unfavorable light, guilty until he is found innocent; at least, that is my policy. Mr. Foster, your actions, and your case in entirety, is a very suspicious one. I shall have to confine you to jail until your case can be thoroughly investigated. The rest of you may leave. The case is dismissed. Martin, lock up Mr. Foster."

"Yes, sir, your honor."

The policeman addressed took Foster by the arm and led him through the magistrate's room toward a long, stone-floored corridor. Bitterness surging through his being, Foster looked back over his shoulder toward Grace Allison and her father. The girl looked toward him in a forlorn sort of manner. Griffin, he saw, had a sardonic grin on his face.

Doors closed behind Foster then. Like an automaton he moved down those long corridors. His feet, somehow, seemed to be following from another body. His mind was thumping and throbbing like a trip hammer. His body ached from his recent combat.

Another iron door opened through the blue mists before him. Confused and bewildered by the queer quirks of fate, he stumbled through the doorway and entered his—cell! What did it all mean? Why had the girl defended Griffin? It was all so unfair, so beyond all reasoning.

Desperately he thrust his hands deep into his coat pockets and sank into a maze of thought. As he pushed his hands through his pockets he realized that his money had been lost—doubtless in the fight. Even those last few cents he had were deprived him. He had lost his job, that was certain. Even his mate's ticket was gone.

No money. No friends. No help. No resources. A man without identification as to his own country. In jail. What had he done, he asked himself over and over again, to deserve such a fate? How would he ever be able to get out of that black hole, that cold cell room, and regain his freedom? Disparagement and despair stabbing, stabbing at his soul, he stood anxiously to his feet, walked to the cell window at the far end of the room and stared out.

Blinding whiteness of the Northern snows! The sun, bleak and pale, was breaking through the hurtling clouds. The white light was blinding. Foster grasped the bars of his cell, and like an animal in a trapped cage stared savagely into those barren, unending miles of the Northland. Then he laughed a wild, hollow laugh through the open window. That laugh traveled out across

the snow and then seemed to reëcho back to him again in a mocking, maniacal challenge from across the silent snow lands—a driving, white challenge!

CHAPTER V.
FROZEN BARRIERS.

SLOWLY, Foster's hands slid down the bars of his cell room. Weary in body and beaten in mind, he dropped onto the hard mattress of his cot. Everything seemed so utterly hopeless, insurmountable.

Outside the prison walls the winter wind wailed a mournful tune down the lonely white spaces. His exhausted muscles and his throbbing brain finally gave out and he sank into a dull slumber.

It was several hours later when he awakened. With one leg crossed under him and his left arm in a sharp crook, his body was full of cramps. The mattress was as bad as none. He stretched himself for a moment and rubbed his eyes dazedly. How he had slept! He was—ah, yes—in Canada and in jail!

The sharp crackle of bending boughs of trees, ice laden and heavy with snow, met his ears. White challenge! The thought, the phrase had been dancing crazily through his fevered, sleeping mind. White challenge!

Rising to a sitting posture, he moved over to the edge of his cot and heavily dropped his feet to the floor. Then he bent over and cupped his chin in his hands. A challenge, eh? A white challenge of the Northland—a land new and strange to him. He ground his teeth. It was the old battle of the centuries, the survival of the fittest, he told himself. He would answer that challenge. By the gods, he would! He shook his fists toward his prison bars like a doomed animal in its cage. He would fight! He wouldn't leave that white land until he had squared his accounts with fate, and won a stake some way, somehow.

His sleep had refreshed him. Too, perhaps, the rigors of that Northern climate were driving into his blood. He did not know, but he did know that a new attitude was creeping into his veins.

From down the corridors came the odors of cooking food. Hunger pangs darted through his body. He realized suddenly that it was late in the afternoon and that he had not eaten a morsel all that day. No wonder he felt half starved. Apprehension, then, found its way into his mind. How would he get his freedom? Would he have another trial?

The Allisons, he was sure, could obtain a complete release for him, if they but would, with their supreme influence in that little Northern settlement. He knew, though, that he could depend on nothing through them.

Footsteps were sounding down the hall, coming his way. He stood to his feet and watched the great iron bars of his cage anxiously. A tall figure in dark-gray uniform, bearing a tray, stopped at his door. Came the rattle of keys and the metallic click of the lock. The door swung out into the wide corridor. The orderly entered. As he laid the tray down on a small stool he said simply:

"Your dinner."

"O. K.! O. K.!" answered Foster impatiently. "I was beginning to wonder if I was even going to get this much."

The door closed with a sharp clang. The lock turned over.

Foster stared at the food. Yellow, murky-looking soup. No telling what sort of truck was in it, was his conjecture. He lifted the heavy iron spoon, tasted it. Horrible!

He stuck the fork into a piece of thick stew meat. He lifted the meat to his lips, before he tasted it; how-

ever, the smell nauseated him. He finally tried it, though. Tough as shoe leather, and as tasteless as sawdust, even less so. A cup of something that resembled coffee steamed upward. He lifted that and sipped it. His appetite suddenly seemed to leave him.

He walked toward his window and peered out. He was becoming more and more infuriated with his predicament. It was an abominable mess he was in. From the far corner of his room he glared at his food. He was hungry, but—— He drew up his trousers, tucked in another notch in his belt, and cursed. Then he looked over his clothing. He certainly looked like a tramp. His ears suddenly tensed. Voices! But, one voice! There was no mistaking it. It was Grace Allison's.

Anger rose in Foster's being. He ground his teeth. His eyes narrowed to slits of blue vitriol hatred. He thrust his hands deep into his pocket and, backing against the wall, faced the door and waited. It was obvious that she was coming down the corridor directly toward his cell. What was up now? Was there to be more court trial? More deception? He asked himself these and other questions. A blue-uniformed officer strode up to the iron door, thrust in the key, and opened the door. Foster stared.

"You can go right in, miss," said the officer.

Foster, his hands in his pockets, his feet spread apart, stood and gazed squarely at the young girl as she entered. She was dressed in a white jersey tam-o'-shanter, white jersey sweater, white-and-tan plaid dress, and high tan leather boots. A pair of shining ice skates hung over her left arm. Under her right she carried a small parcel. The officer departed.

The trim appearance of the girl and the sight of the skates aroused Foster's displeasure, somehow, even more. He was in such unfavorable contrast to her in his disheveled condition and lack of any amusements. The girl, facing Foster's blazing blue eyes, hesitated a moment. Then, resolutely, she laid the parcel on the edge of the cot. There was sympathy in her soft black eyes and ruddy cheeks as she stared up at Foster.

"You must hate me, I know," she said slowly, "but if you will only let me explain a few things I am——"

"I hardly see how *anything* can be explained," retorted Foster hotly. "There are some things in life which can just never be explained. This is one of them."

"No, it isn't," stated the girl firmly. "You must listen to me. If you knew father as well as I do, then you——"

"I know him as well as I ever want to know him!" snapped Foster. "I hope I never see him again."

The girl tossed her head back sharply. Then, somewhat more calmly, she continued:

"I tell you, you must listen to me a moment. Surely, if you are the gentleman that I think you are, you will allow me a few words."

Foster sat on the cot and stared indifferently out the window. He wasn't in the least interested in being a gentleman, particularly, to this individual girl. Time, however, wasn't of any special value at the moment. The girl sat on the opposite end of his cot and laid her skates on the floor. Inwardly Foster grunted with disgust.

"Father," commenced the girl, "has a terrible temper and——"

"Hmph!" snorted Foster. "That doesn't require an explanation!"

"Please, Mr. Foster!"

Foster stood to his feet again impatiently.

"All right, all right. Please go on. Say what you are going to say."

His eyes strayed toward the girl's, watching her covertly. A few wisps of golden blond hair protruded enticingly

from her white tam-o'-shanter. Her eyes like coals of melting fire, she looked up almost pleadingly toward Foster. Vaguely, through his anger, he realized that she was a creature of beauty —but, spoiled by its taint of deception. He sat down once more on the cot.

"In the first place," said the girl, "I always have to humor father. He has been in ill health for over a year. It was all because of a nervous breakdown. That is why it is so bad for him to become excited. None of us want to see him have another attack. We gratify his every whim, mother and I. But father has a just and a generous heart. If you just let him have his own way in a crisis and be sympathetic with him, when he cools off he will see where he is wrong and be sorry for it afterward."

"So?" said Foster. "Well, perhaps he will be sorry in this instance—when he cools off!"

"Yes, Mr. Foster, he will—he is already. As I was able I quickly showed him that he was very much in error. He agreed to drop the charges against you."

"Charges! Charges!" reminded Foster. "If there had been no charges in the first place it would have been more to the point. I am in bad taint with the Federal authorities in Godrich, now, and will doubtless be held on the technicality of my not having a passport along with me."

"No," replied the girl. "Father talked with the magistrate again this morning and requested your freedom. A probationary release has been granted on the condition that father goes your bond until you have time to write to the state department in the United States and get yourself a passport."

Foster looked up, startled. The old martinet had done that? A queer combination of character.

"Well! That is the least that he could have done," he commented, cooling somewhat.

"Of course," acknowledged the girl. "I am sorry, though, that we will not be able to make the yacht trip—at least, not for quite a time. The *Silver Spray* will have to be reconditioned, and that will take some time. Too, father seems to have rather lost heart in the trip; he may not go at all, and he needs a vacation so very badly."

"I'll say he does," reflected Foster bitterly.

"Later, though, father will want a good navigator, and if you are still here and would——"

"I could never work for a man who had once double-crossed me," stated Foster sharply.

"I am sorry you feel that way about it," said the girl quietly. "None of us is perfect, you know. We all make horrid mistakes at times. We wouldn't be human if we didn't. I wish, Mr. Foster, that—that you would try to forgive my father and—myself."

Foster kicked at the floor with his toe, impatiently, uneasily. He dared not look at the girl. She was too enchanting and beautiful; it upset his sense of justice. Of all the sins in the world, Foster hated most a lie and deception. To him they were practically unforgivable and invariably unwarranted.

"Perhaps you can explain," suggested Foster bitterly, "why you covered Mr. Griffin, thereby placing me in the shoes of a criminal, by accusing me falsely."

"Yes—I—well, that is, you see, we have known Mr. Griffin for a very long time—since he has been in father's employ. He is an invaluable man in the mines, to father. He has been very indulgent with father's whims. He simply could not be replaced by any one. He knows almost everything that there is to be known about silver mining. He has worked in Nevada, and even in Mexico. Had the blame fallen on him it is likely that he would have quit father, and that would have been disastrous. Too, I felt sorry for Will. He

had planned so deeply in being with me—that is," she corrected quickly, "with us, on the voyage. You see, he was deeply disappointed when you arrived as you did and upset his chances of going on a long vacation. Oh, don't you see? It was just the way things converged. We meant no injury to you."

"I am afraid that I do see," stated Foster calmly. "That is just the trouble. Merely as a matter of convenience you accused an innocent man because he was a stranger and could not defend himself. It was the easiest way out, wasn't it?"

"Not so easy as you might think. You—you will not forgive me—us, then?"

Foster's thoughts were leaping back and forth in his mind. It had all been so unjust. Slowly the old anger pounded back through his veins. He looked at her and shook his head.

"No, I could not forgive that," he said, "but I am grateful for my freedom. Is that all?"

The girl looked away, then lowered her eyes.

"I am very sorry, but I cannot blame you," she admitted.

She opened her purse then. Foster stared, aghast. Surely she was not going to offer him——

"I brought you a letter. It is an introductory note to Mr. Larkin at the mine. He is the foreman under Mr. Griffin. He hires most of the men. I —I thought that you might be in need of work right away. There is always *something* open at the mine. I know that to be a fact."

She handed the letter across toward Foster. Face white, he stared at the girl.

"No, Miss Allison. I could not work for people who had deceived me. There would be no assurance that it would not happen again."

The girl dropped the note onto the cot. Her lip trembled slightly. Foster noted that her fingers were shaking as she closed her purse.

"Please think it over," she said. "It was all done because of father's ill health in merciful reasons. I'm going now." She held out a slender, girlish hand. "Good luck to you, Mr. Foster. Please feel free to call at the mine at any time. I'm just awfully sorry for—for everything."

The girl turned quickly then and slipped out of the room. As Foster looked after her he thought he saw tears in her eyes. He could not be positive, she had turned too quickly, but so it had appeared. He sat down on the edge of his cot. It was a queer situation. She had done that for her father, eh? He was in ill health. And to keep Griffin at the mines? The facts did seem to be logical, at that. His eyes fell onto the package and the white envelope lying on the cot. She had forgotten the parcel. He picked it up, felt it. It appeared to be lunch. He smelled it. Food!

He ripped open the paper. Two roasted chicken legs fell outward onto the glazed sandwich paper. Sandwiches! Olives! Caviar, sardines, and jelly! A huge piece of mocha cake. A container of something hot. He lifted the lid, carefully. Coffee, and what aroma! She had done that? She had left that lunch for him? Whether or no, Foster began on the sandwiches like a starved wolf that he had temporarily developed into, as, with a rush, his old hunger returned to him. He gnawed into the chicken legs with a vim, and devoured the sandwiches in massive bites. Then the hot coffee. What flavor! It was excellent.

In less time than it takes to tell it he had come to the cake and was finishing it. His eyes fell onto the white envelope. He wondered what the old fellow had said in the letter to his foreman? He reached over, and with the

cake in one hand and the letter in the other, he studied it. The envelope was addressed:

MR. JOSEPH LARKIN,
Foreman,
Kipawa Silver Mines.

Foster opened the flap and drew out the sheet of paper. Then he looked at the letter. It read:

MY DEAR MR. LARKIN: This will introduce to you Mr. James Foster, who is a friend of father's and mine.

You will give Mr. Foster immediate employment, with a comfortable salary, until such time as he may accompany father, as navigator of the *Silver Spray*.

GRACE ALLISON.

For several moments Foster held the slip of paper in his hands, thinking. The girl had written the letter, eh? Probably her father, he mused, would not have done it. He read the words over again, "You will give——" It was not a request. It was an order! Then he grunted disgustedly. How could he go to the mine looking for work with a letter from a woman? He couldn't. The idea was preposterous. He wouldn't any——

"You can leave, you know," there came a voice from the doorway.

"Ugh? W-what?" Foster swallowed a piece of cake in his throat, with a struggle.

A police officer stood at the door. It had been open all that time and he had not seen?

"The magistrate has ordered your release. You will sign the book and—leave."

"Yes. All right."

Grabbing his hat and coat Foster followed the policeman to the outer room where he signed his release papers.

"You are out on bail," reminded the sergeant at the desk. "Until you have returned and showed us your American passport."

"Very well."

Turning then, Foster walked out the police corridors and into the little village of Godrich, lying in the glow of the setting sun.

CHAPTER VI.
FREEDOM OF THE NORTH.

FATE had spun the roulette of life again. He was free! Deep in his heart Foster hoped that he would never again in his life see the inside of another jail. They were ghastly places.

Walking along the street he soon found himself in the center of the town. He gazed into the shop windows, small though they were, and found them interesting in their contrast to the city life to which he had recently been accustomed.

He cruised about the village and generally tried to get his bearings. As he walked down various streets he invariably discovered that he ultimately landed back at the hub, the central section of the business buildings. The town he saw was built something on the lines of Washington, D. C.—that is, like a wagon wheel, with the business at its center. It was perhaps a half an hour later, however, when his eyesight was held by a small sign over a frame building. It read:

THE GODRICH *JOURNAL*
"To Support the Cause That Is Just."

That slogan appealed to Foster with his recent upheavals of his credos and principles. For several moments he stood on the street corner while a few passers-by stared at him knowingly as a stranger to their realm.

What would he do? He was penniless. He had no place to sleep. He had no outlook for food, nor work. In his pocket his total resources were his mate's license and the letter he possessed. Most newspapermen, he knew, had hit the hard spots of life. He knew their language. He was one of them.

It was fast growing dark. Night would be on him—the grim Northern night of early winter. With desperation-impelled feet he turned toward the narrow stairway that led upstairs to the newspaper office. The main floor held the heavy printing presses. At the top of the creaking stairs Foster gazed around him. There came to his ears the old familiar odor of ink, and the metallic click of several typewriters. He judged, however, from the many vacant desks that it was an evening paper. A young fellow with heavy horn-rimmed glasses came over to him.

"Is the city editor in?" inquired Foster.

The lad smiled understandingly as he replied:

"Well, no. That is, the only editor we have isn't in."

Foster realized his error. A small town. They wouldn't have more than one editor.

"An evening paper?"

"Yes."

"Any openings on the reporting end?"

"Gosh, no! We're lucky to hold our own jobs." The young news man had been studying the stranger before him intently. "Just get in?"

"Yes, I did," Foster smiled, "I hopped the wrong train out of Cleveland, thinking I was headed for my home in Tampa, Florida. Landed here this morning. Was on the city news staff of the Cleveland *Press*. Broke, flat broke, and looking for any kind of work that will keep the old wolf from the door."

"Whew!" whistled the young reporter. "Headed for Florida—boy! That's a news story. Palm trees to snow banks——"

"Do you run a Sunday edition?"

"No, but we run a special Saturday night number that is its equivalent." The young fellow stared at Foster as though he were something a little short of a hero—this newspaper reporter from a big city paper. "Human interest—full of it," he murmured. "Say! Your trip would make a good Saturday night piece of copy. Maybe the boss would let you write it."

Here was an idea, thought Foster. He clutched at the possibility.

"When will the big shot be in, do you suppose?"

"Oh, about eight in the morning usually."

"Do you close here at night?"

"No. Never close."

"Good! Mind if I hang around, look over some of the back numbers and kill the night here? I haven't any place to stay."

"Shucks, no. Not at all. But here"—he tossed a big brass key out onto the counter—"my room's right next door. The number is 12. There's a double bed in there. I'd be glad to have you share it with me, if you like."

Somewhat stunned by the change of hospitality of the town, Foster looked at the lad gratefully.

"Many thanks, old fellow. That's extremely kind of you, but I'll just stick around here if it's O. K. I'm used to that, any way, you know. Many thanks."

"Oh, all right. Just as you say." He thrust out a burly palm. "Patterson is my name. General reporting."

Foster gripped the friendly hand.

"Foster's mine. General pest, I guess. Very glad to meet you."

The lad grinned amiably. Pushing back the small gate to the inner office, he said:

"Come in. The place is yours. Make yourself at home."

Night, with the white silences of the north, passed. Foster employed his time by studying over a lot of the old editions of the paper and getting a line on their feature material. Then, between the dim hours of two and four he gambled his time with fate and the

editor of the Godrich *Journal* by writing a little feature story, entitled:

WHEN FATE GAVE A FREE RIDE.

The *Journal's* hospitality furnished paper and typewriter for the doing of the story. There was no mention of the Allison affair in the article. It was merely, as young Patterson had suggested, a little human-interest story on the values of making sure that one was on the right train.

Daylight was streaming through the ice-incrusted windows of the newspaper office when Foster felt some one tugging at his shoulder. He slowly opened his smarting and bloodshot eyes. Warm steam rose up before his face. Then the fragrance of tea. He looked out before him. Patterson, hat on one side of his head and seated on one corner of the desk, was holding a steaming can of tea under Foster's nose.

"Here, old vet! Here's a mug of hot stuff, and a coupla crullers for you. Wake up and dream! You're in—Canada. In the wilds of Godrich!"

Foster came to with a smile.

"Say, you're a buddy! Got the makin's of a great newspaper man. You'll have your own column, or maybe paper, some day. Who knows?" he laughed. "But what you got here?"

"That? Why that's tea, ole-timer. Get your suction dredge workin'!"

"Tea? For breakfast?"

"Tea? Oh, why sure! You forget. You're in Canada. That's just about all you'll ever get here. No one drinks anything except tea, here, you know. Canadians hardly know what coffee is—except that the Americans drink it three times a day. You'll get used to it. Less harmful, you know."

"Hm-m-m," purred Foster. He was thinking back over events, and of the fact that a certain young woman had brought him a splendid draft of coffee. "That may be, but I'll gamble on the great hazards open in drinkin' coffee. But thanks, and sincere ones!" He accepted the can of tea gratefully.

Foster could not drive from his thoughts, for the second, how Grace Allison had brought him coffee. The young newspaper scribe noted that Foster was somewhat bewildered as he took the tea and began to drink it.

"Is—isn't it all right, Mr. Foster?" he inquired, watching the older man intently.

"Oh, yes. M-mm, gr-eat! It's funny, you know I was just thinking that a certain young—that is, I mean, some folks yesterday served me some very fine coffee and I thought nothing about it."

"Yes? Well, I'll tell you, mister. You must have had a powerful heavy drag with those folks. Canadians?"

"Oh, yes, Canadians, all right." Foster laughed. "It's a great world, isn't it, friend?"

"Yeah, and you won't think it's so bad, either, after you've been in Godrich a while."

"I hope not, Patterson."

"Hearts and sentiment are about the same the world over, aren't they, Mr. Foster?"

"Uh-huh. Just the same."

Footsteps sounded up the stairway. Patterson turned in his swivel chair.

"There's the big ink thrower himself—the boss. Soon's he gets in his office I'll take you in. Do you want to write that little feature for him, if he can use it?"

Foster tossed the few sheets of manuscript across the desk.

"I ground it out this morning. Think he can use it?"

The lad looked over the copy interestedly. Read on and on. It was evident that he was unusually interested. Foster finished his crullers and coffee. The lad rolled the sheets back and turned toward his newly found friend.

"Say! That's great! I'll betcha the boss'll buy that. Wait! I'm goin' in to see him. I'm takin' this with me."

"O. K."

In a moment Patterson came out, face glowing.

"I told him all about you. He says he'll see you in a few minutes. He's reading copy on that feature of yours. Listen; I don't want to discourage you, but I'm afraid the old man won't have a thing for you in the way of a job. He said he really had more help now than he needed. Pete and I are afraid one of us will get laid off any day. Things are sorta bad this winter, you know. Pete is my side-kick. Young in the game, but a comer."

Foster nodded. The door to the editor's office opened then and the short, squat figure of the editor appeared.

"Come in, Mr. Foster," he called.

Hurrying to his feet, his bones aching and stiff from his long night in various hard-backed chairs, Foster walked on into the sanctum of the editor.

"Stevenson's my name," the boss introduced himself. "Have a seat, Mr. Foster. Patterson told me about you. You had a bit of hard luck."

"Yes, sir. I did."

"Looking for a job, Patterson tells me."

"Yes, I am. Anything open, Mr. Stevenson? I can cover almost any type of news work that you may wish."

"I can see that from the way you handled this little human-interest feature. I'm afraid there is nothing—unless I might dispose of Patterson and Pete, and have you fill their places. Still, those men know their pencils and the people in Godrich, pretty well."

"No, no, Mr. Stevenson. Don't think of it. But what are conditions here? Where are there chances for work, if any?"

The editor scratched his bald pate a moment thoughtfully.

"Really, now, there's not a consarned thing, in so far as I know, outside of the Kipawa Silver Mines that belong to old Allison. They're always taking on and laying off men up there at the mines. You might perhaps get in on some timber-cutting work, but that's pretty tough work for a newspaperman. There's not a single place that I know of where I could send you or recommend. Things are bad in Godrich right now—all over Canada, for that matter—and it looks as though they might even get worse. I wish I might be able to do you some definite good, Mr. Foster, but that's the very best that I can do."

He fingered over the feature article before him.

"Patterson said you were broke."

"Right."

"Well, I'll be glad to buy this feature from you. It's damned well written. Be glad to have it for the special Saturday night edition. It's right attractive copy. But you know we don't pay any rates like the Cleveland *Press*. Ten cents an agate inch," he smiled, "about two dollars a column—that's the Godrich *Journal!*"

"Be very grateful to get it, Mr. Stevenson. How much does it amount to?"

The editor drew a long ruler from out his desk drawer and roughly scanned the pages.

"That'll run almost three columns. I'll call it that for good measure. That's six dollars."

Six dollars! And he had been accustomed to being paid twelve and fourteen dollars a column for feature material averaging twenty inches to the column! But, he was appreciative for the lift.

"All right, sir. That will be a real help."

"Glad to be able to do it." The editor reached into his own pocket. "One, two, three—six dollars," he counted them out. "And if you get stuck for a meal, come around. We don't want any American newspaperman starving in Godrich, you know."

"So many thanks, Mr. Stevenson. I won't forget your kindness."

CHAPTER VII.
UNWELCOME DECISION.

THE first thing that Jim Foster did was to drop into a clothes shop and purchase an inexpensive shirt. His old one, originally white, was a mess. Next he entered a tailor shop, had his tie pressed, which resembled a leather belt with two to ten turns in it, and had his clothes, including his overcoat, pressed.

He felt, now, that he was in a somewhat more presentable condition to hit the trail for a job. While the little Jewish tailor was doing his stuff, Foster made use of his wash room and refreshed himself. Two dollars out of his six had already been practically ruined. From now on it was strict economy, he warned himself.

While Foster didn't feel so rested after his harsh night among desks and stiff chairs, the rigorous Northern air pounded into his lungs and gave him a vigor and vitality that he had not experienced in a long time. With his present funds, he knew, it was a case of fighting against time to get work before he was again shaking hands with "Herr Wolf." Already he had exhausted one ordinarily reliable avenue of assistance—the local newspaper. He felt he couldn't go back there and look the local gift horse in the mouth again. Pride forebade some things.

Lumbering somehow had a glamorous ring to it for Foster. True, it might be a tough job for a newspaperman who had softened under lamplight and indoor work, but he was willing to try it, to tackle anything in order to get back onto his feet. At the cross corners he saw a sign which read:

WILLIAMS BROTHERS
Lumberers and Loggers.

Straightway he turned into the office. A tall, thin chap with a lean, weather-bitten face and steel-blue eyes looked up from beside a round, wood stove where he was sitting, engrossed in a newspaper.

"Good morning," said Foster.

"Good mornin', young feller. What kin I do for you?"

"I'm looking for work, sir. I'd like to get a job in one of your logging camps. Something out in the open, if possible."

The tall chap dropped his paper and gazed intently at Foster for a moment.

"Work, huh? Say, young feller, I wouldn't be a-sittin' here, if there was any work to do. No, siree. No jobs. Things are mighty dead right at this time of the year allus—and *this* year they died earlier. Nope, sorry. Nothin' doin'."

"Do you know of any place where there—there *might* be work?"

"W-ell, n-no, not fer sure. Of course, we allus tell folks to go to the Kipawa Mines. They work the year round and they're runnin' pretty strong right now, so I hear. You'll have to git a hack, if you want to get out there. It's on the Old Indian road."

"But I want to get a job in a logging camp, if possible," reminded Foster.

"Loggin's mighty quiet, son. 'Bout the only loggin's among the Indians. I hear they're cuttin' some spruce fer airplanes, but cuttin' timber in the winters up here ain't no child's play, you know, and you—you don't look none too hard, son."

"Perhaps not," smiled Foster, "and that's another good reason why I want to get out into the open."

"Fire feels pretty good in the winter, son," stated the old-timer, philosophically, taking up the paper again, signifying that the conference and counsel was drawing to an end.

"Many thanks," concluded Foster.

"S'all right, quite welcome."

Foster struck out onto the street again. Down more streets and into several more lumber offices he trekked,

making any quantity of inquiries. At every place, however, he met the same replies. Business was dull. There was very little timber being cut. In the spring things would liven up.

Several men spoke to him of the Kipawa Mines. It seemed as though he couldn't avoid that subject, as much as he wanted to.

He tried some of the hardware and logging, mining, trapping, and general equipment stores, even, for a job. Nothing, nothing, nothing, it seemed. Job hunting was heartless work, Foster knew that. He had done it plenty of times before. He had plenty of courage to face it. It wasn't that, but in a small place the size of Godrich—around ten thousand inhabitants—it didn't take one very long to come to a pretty conclusive decision whether there was work, or whether there was not. It was quite obvious that there was not.

Along late in the afternoon he found himself once more trudging through the snowdrifts along the water front. Somehow the water front had lost some of its lure in Godrich, since his disappointment with the *Silver Spray*. He entered a small ship chandlery to warm his hands and feet again and get a bit dried off. A white-haired and retired old shellback stuck his head up from behind the counter and piles of marlin, tarred rope, steel cable for rigging, binnacles, navigation books, and sundry ship's hardware.

"Just like to absorb a little of this heat," stated Foster, slapping his arms around his chest vigorously.

"Help yourself. There's lots of it going to waste. Looking for a berth?"

The old shellback was trying to get a line on the stranger new to his decks.

"Yes," replied Foster on a hunch. "Know of one?"

"Great mackerels, no! If I did, matey, I'd scuttle this old landlubberin' ferry I got in tow here, and put out to sea again myself—as old a walrus as I'm getting to be. The *Lake Crystal* will be in a week Tuesday, though. You might land something on her. What's your line? On deck, or the black gang?"

"Deck. Have a mate's ticket."

"Leapin' tuna! Godrich ain't no place for a seafarin' man with a mate's license. You want to get onto deep water, matey. Down to Superior, for example."

"Yes, so I know. But how, my friend? How?"

The old shellback shook his head in bewilderment.

"These fishing smacks?" queried Foster hopefully. "No jobs?"

"They wouldn't take you—a salt-water man! Never. You got to be on the know, matey, to belong. They don't like real salt-water sailormen up in these parts. Anyway, they're scrapin' barnacles and takin' their watches below a lot now. Things are pretty dead."

Foster nodded. He was certainly facing a crisis. It looked like a long, hard winter in the frozen North, and little doubt. A boat a week from Tuesday! It might as well be a year from Tuesday. He would be broke again by that time. The fishing business, and the rest, the meanest and most undesirable work, even, it appeared was not available. Discouraging and at his wit's end, Foster turned toward the door. He was warm again, and considerably dried off.

"Well, good-by to you, and thanks," he said over one shoulder to the old chandler.

"Good evening, matey, and good sailing to you!"

Out the place and back toward the little village Foster retraced his steps. He had covered the town that day and the previous night and exhausted every possible resource for work, or so it seemed. He walked unhappily through

those little streets and sought a hotel. He read a sign:

HOTEL CENTRAL
Rooms One Dollar and Up.

He entered the little lodging house. It was a modest and clean hotel. Obtaining a small room he washed up and went down to supper. He felt better after that. Taking a chair in the lobby of the main room he sat about and talked with a number of the traveling men and others who were passing the night there. Two rawboned men of immense dimensions, seated at the end of the line of rocking-chairs, were discussing mining. This interested Foster.

"Why, I wouldn't work for that low-lived tunnel rat if they gave me the mine!" said one.

"A bad time to quit, though, Hank," commented the other.

"I got a stake. I been workin' fer seven months. Why should I stay here? I'm goin' down to Arizona—back to the States. Some new tungsten mines openin' up down there. Why should I stay in this frozen hole all winter?"

"Yes, but you don't know for sure what——"

Foster had heard enough. The mention of a stake, of a man actually having work, of any one actually having a job, intrigued him. He walked over to the two hard-bitten old miners.

"Pardon me," interrupted Foster. "I overheard you men speaking about mining. I'm looking for work. Perhaps you can tell me if there's anything open in the mines in these parts?"

The two looked at Foster, then toward each other. Something of a knowing smile spread over the faces of both as they took in Foster's neat clothes and his bearing.

"Not many white-collar jobs in a mine, friend," said the nearest one, with a thick beard on both cheeks.

"I'm not looking for a white-collar job," replied Foster firmly. "I want to get out into the open, to get some exercise and fresh air."

"You'll get plenty of that in Canada, if you stick around one winter," grinned the far one, showing a set of yellow-stained tobacco teeth.

"But these mines," persisted Foster, seating himself on the edge of one of the rocking-chairs. "Can you tell me something about them? Is there any work?"

Both men laughed again roughly.

"Work?" mocked the bearded one. "Work! Hell! There ain't nothin' else but work. Work, and hard treatment—if you go to the Kipawa Mines."

"I'd rather not go there," stated Foster. "There are others?"

"Sure, but not around Godrich. Old man Allison's got 'em all sewed up. Bought up all the little fellows. I mean down in the States. There's the place to go minin'—in Arizona, or New Mexico, in the winter time."

"I haven't got the money for that," said Foster.

"Then better get a job up at the Kipawa. That is," said the bearded one gruffly, "if you can work for that old slave driver, Gangrene Griff."

Foster's head struck forward. He listened.

"Who—who is this? Your boss?"

"Yeah, I'll say he's boss. Old man Griffin. The gang calls him Gangrene Griff. He's straight poison. A frowsy hellion to work for."

"A great gazebo with the ladies, and a smooth talker, too," supported the yellow-toothed one..

"Yeah! That oily tongue o' his—that's what gets me," said the bearded one. "How he——"

Foster looked away for the moment thoughtfully. The mine certainly didn't sound attractive—*but,* it meant work, and work meant money, and money meant a stake with which he could square his fates and get onto his feet once more. A stake! It was a chance.

A challenge from the grim North perhaps, but a chance to get back to Florida.

"You say there's work positively?" persisted Foster.

"Aye, friend, plenty. The whole gang on level No. 9 quit this morning. He's needin' men right bad."

"How do you get out there to the mine?"

"Well, they's a bus marked Kipawa, or you can rent a hack for about two dollars. The bus leaves the hostelry around seven in the morning. Another at noon, and another at——"

"Thanks," said Foster. "I'll think it over."

"Take my advice and go—anywhere else!" rumbled the big fellow.

Foster nodded grimly and left the two men to their conversation. Then he wound his way meditatively up to his bedroom. Sitting on the edge of his bed, for a long time he pondered an exit. The very last place in the world where he wanted to go was the Kipawa Mine. He was not, however, altogether master of his own fate. A desperate crisis overshadowed him. Was there any other avenue open to him? Nothing! It was an unwilling, and an unwelcome conclusion to his long day's efforts. He thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. Should he go to the Kipawa in the morning? The blood pounded and thumped at his brain. Decision would have to be made and made quickly. Distaste filled his being on the thought. From his pocket he drew out his Spanish peseta.

"What do *you* say, Señor Alphonse?" he murmured softly.

A flip and the coin had gone spinning into the air and was descending to his outstretched palm.

"Heads, and I try something else!" he whispered.

He stared, head forward, at the bright coin. The coat of arms of old Spain with its crown, and cape with rising lion, and turreted embattlements faced him.

"Tails, eh?" He plunged his coin back into his pocket disgustedly. "Very well. I go at the crack of dawn to Kipawa!"

A few moments later Foster blew out the rusty oil lamp sitting on his table and climbed into bed. Sleep, hard won and almost instant, swept over him, while outside, the myriad white voices of the arctic North whispered down the starlit night.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHALLENGE ACCEPTED.

MORNING broke bright and clear. It was a little after six o'clock. Foster hurried into his clothes, washed and hastened downstairs to the dining room. There he had tea and toast with a few of the other early risers. Going to the desk he paid his bill and, hat and coat in hand, took one of the lobby rocking-chairs and sat down. He would await the auto bus that would take him to Kipawa—and his latest objective down adventure's trail.

In his pocket he possessed the letter of introduction to the mine foreman, Mr. Larkin, his mate's license, and his small amount of money. He was pondering about that letter. No doubt a letter of introduction would aid him in obtaining work, and perhaps get him a better job than he would get should he not use it. At the same time, the thought somehow revolted him, using a letter—and such a commandatory one—from a girl, to get work. There were some things in life that pride——

There came a roar of an auto engine purring through the great soft snowdrifts just at the corners of the hotel. Foster grabbed his hat and coat from the chair and leaped to his feet. At the big double doors of the lobby he looked out. Yes! the auto bus. The driver was bearing down on his klaxon. Hurrying out, Foster signaled the bus and leaped up into the warm interior

of the car. The air in between the hotel and the bus was like a cold, slicing knife.

"Is this the bus to the Kipawa Mine?" questioned Foster.

"Yes. That's her!" answered the driver, a man of some forty years of age, face weatherbeaten and seamed.

Foster took a seat just to the right of the driver. There were no other passengers at the hotel. From the general appearance of the man Foster figured that he must be an old-timer in the vicinity. It wasn't his clothes so much —they consised of a brown beaver fur hat, leather windbreaker jacket, and high leather boots—it was rather the facial features which assured Foster that he was a part of that rugged land.

"Where are all your passengers this morning?" questioned Foster amiably.

"Don't get many, mornings," remarked the driver, throwing in his clutch. "Most of the gang at the mine live there in the quarters provided. The traffic is all at night when they come in to see their best gals, or a movie—or both." He smiled. "You, you're new to these parts?"

"Yes."

Foster looked out the window. The bus, its windows rattling, was vibrating along with a mist of fine snow trailing out behind. They were leaving the outskirts of the town now and getting out into the country. The driver, he noted, was looking him over rather analytically.

"Looking for a job?" asked the driver pointedly. He drew out a cigarette pack.

"Umm," answered Foster. "How'd you guess?"

The driver offered the pack.

"Smoke?"

"No, thanks. Not in the morning."

"Waal, you see, I just sorta judged that," smiled the old-timer. "Most folks, especially strangers, that ride the bus in the morning are headed to Kipawa for a job."

They made a sharp turn. On the wide road, behind the great waves of drifted snow, Foster glimpsed several cabins. Dark-skinned people, resembling Indians, were cutting and piling timber. Their brilliant red-and-green lumbermen's shirts were silhouetted colorfully against the snowy background. Two men in the uniform of the Mounted Police of the Canadian Northwest stood beside their horses and talked to several of the natives. Here and there blue wisps of smoke curled skyward in friendly warmth from the rude cabins.

"Indians?" queried Foster.

"Yes. They're Tuscaroras. They really belong farther south and east, but they get in here from time to time. They're a bad lot on the whole."

"I see there are a couple of the Mounted Police there now."

"Waal, there's two Mounties stationed on every Indian reservation, you see. They sort of look after them and try to prevent outsiders from selling liquor to the Indians. That's against the law, you know. Farther up there's Wyandottes, too. They're not a bad lot, but they give the Mounted a bit of a tussle now and then."

"I should think that they might like the Mounted. They're looking after them, aren't they?"

"Yes. Well, some of 'em do, but mostly they hates the Mounted for some reason. I suppose it's because they feel that the redcoats cramp their style in drinking and having a good time. But if you want to get in right with the Indians I know all you have to do is to tell them a playful story that burlesques the Mounties, or make out that the Mounties are your worst enemy."

"Rather hard on the Mounted, I'd say. They're good fellows through this region, aren't they?"

"Oh, sure. They don't come no finer in the world. It's just that age-old hatred of the wild man for civilization as typified by John Law, I guess."

They turned in sharply, then. Behind them a gaunt hill some six hundred feet in height, covered with tall pines and spruce, hunched its snowy shoulders against the blue sky. Just below the foot of the hill there loomed to view fully a dozen mirrorlike lakes. Foster gazed wide of eye. It seemed he had never seen a bluer blue than those many gorgeous lakes.

"Beautiful lakes," breathed Foster lauditorily.

"Yeah. Every one that comes up here notices 'em. They're called Blue Lakes. The mine is right here at the foot of the hill."

"Don't see any houses, or offices," remarked Foster, looking around curiously.

"No. They're on the other side of the hill. There's a smelting plant there, too, where they run the silver into bars. A spur freight line runs out to the northern end. The main entrance to the mine is at the top of the hill. See that little shack up there?" The driver pointed upward from his seat as the bus bounded along.

Foster looked. There was a tiny shack at the crest of the mountain.

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, that's where you'll go if you're looking for general employment, or down at the smelting office if you want a clerk's job. That's around the hill."

"I'm looking for work in the mine. I want to see"—Foster thought a moment —"either Mr. Griffin or Mr. Larkin."

"Waal, you'll find them both up there in the main shaft. Mr. Griffin spends a lot of time in the smelter, too, but Mr. Larkin can just as well give you a job if there's anything open."

The bus came to a rolling stop. The driver jerked back a lever that opened the door.

"O. K. Here you are. Good luck."

Foster paid his fare.

"Many thanks," he said, and hopped off.

The bus turned and thundered on down a horseshoe turn among the trees.

For a few moments Foster stood still, his feet crunching through the soft snows, and looked around him. A few leaves of maroon and gold drifted down from off a lone, tall aspen near at hand. Rich fragrances of mellowed leaves, mosses, and splendidly living things assailed his nostrils.

The air was sharp and crisp with a dryness that put the fire of a tonic into one's blood. From somewhere close by there came the musical tinkle of running water—streams hurrying downward, ever downward toward the Great Lakes far below. The sky above was like a great beautiful crystal.

Foster took a long draft of air and started climbing the hill.

In the distances, from around the edge of the hill, he could hear the thumping noise of operating machinery. Doubtless the smelter at work, he figured. As he strode vigorously up that hill he felt glad to be out there. It was giving him a new grip on life. It did something to one away down deep inside, something that you couldn't explain.

Perhaps it was those tall, majestic pines, and the freshness of it all like the dewy breath of a new spring morning that set the red corpuscles to jumping inside one. Whatever it was, Foster felt that it was doing something to him, putting the fire into his heels and a battling force into his brain.

Despite the cold he was perspiring when he reached the top of the hill and the entrance to the mine shaft. Below him, now, he saw a thousand myriad lakes, or so it seemed to him. Everywhere were those tiny, glistening blue bowls of water shimmering skyward in the morning sun. It was glorious.

On the level of the shaft entrance he walked a space and entered a great wide door, passed a small, dark vestibule, and came out into a brightly lighted room.

Immediately before him there was a cagelike grating which was obviously the mine elevator. To his right, seated under a powerful electric lamp, a tall, thin man with the longest nose that Foster thought he had ever seen, stared toward him. He pushed a long ledger away from him and looked up at the new arrival.

"Hello!"

"Hello," answered Foster, "I'm looking for"—his thoughts jumped like a trip hammer for a series of fleeting secinds, and his mind flashed toward the letter he had in his pocket—"for Mr. Griffin."

"Yes? Well, Mr. Griffin is over at the smelter right now. Won't any one else do?"

"Well, is Mr. Larkin in?"

"Yes. He's down on level No. 1. I'll call for the elevator if you want to go on down. Mr. Griffin will be up some time later, but we never know when to expect him. He comes sort of unexpectedly. Just dashes in and out, you know, to see that every one is on the job. What is the nature of your business?"

"I'm looking for work."

"I see. Then we'd better find Mr. Larkin. Right this way." The clerk led the way toward the big shaft and pressed a button.

There came a rumbling and buzzing of smoothly working pulleys and cables. Soon a lighted elevator cage rose and stopped before them. The door rattled back.

"Take this man down to level No. 1 and show him to Mr. Larkin," ordered the clerk.

"All right. Get in."

Foster got in. A flash and they had dropped down the shaft some forty or fifty feet. There came the dank odors of earthy, underground work. In the faint distances Foster could hear the clang of hammers and the machine-gun-like tattoo of drills digging and cutting into the lower bowels of the earth. He would see Larkin—but that letter? Well, he would watch developments when he saw the foreman, and also when he came to meet up with Griffin; but in no case would he——

"Here you are. Level No. 1!"

The door sprang back. A long, electrically lighted tunnel opened before him. Foster stepped out onto the soft dirt that was the tunnel floor.

"Right over there into that cubbyhole of an office you'll find Mr. Larkin. Ask the time keeper to see him."

"Thanks."

The elevator rattled on down its shaft to other more remote parts of the mine. Foster walked briskly into the foreman's office and stepped up to the counter.

"I'd like to see Mr. Larkin," he requested of the time keeper.

"Looking for work?"

"Yes."

"Just a moment."

The time keeper walked back among a maze of flat-top desks and tables covered with blue prints and various surveying and mining instruments strewn about. Soon a short, broad-shouldered man with heavy black hair stepped down the aisles toward Foster.

"Want to see me?" The words were crisp but friendly.

"Yes, sir. You're Mr. Larkin?"

"That's me."

"I'm looking for work. Any kind of work at all. I would like to learn mining."

"What is your line? I mean, what are you? Driller, dynamite man, digger, or smelting?"

"I haven't had any mining expreience, Mr. Larkin. I'll have to start as an apprentice to——"

There came a raucous, harsh laugh from behind Foster. He stepped back quickly, startled. He had thought that he was alone with Mr. Larkin. He stared straight into the broad, red face of Will Griffin, who had his big hands

spread out over his hips, akimbo, staring at Foster. Foster could feel the air about them go tense, feel the sinister hatred of Griffin's eyes boring into him.

"An apprentice, eh? Who sent you up here, Foster?"

"I—why, the editor of the Godrich *Journal,*" said Foster.

Griffin's face drew down, seriously, for a moment. Foster judged that the newspaper must have had some influence with the mine super. His voice had something of a tempered tone to it as he replied:

"What can you do?"

Foster spread his hands out and down.

"I've a strong body. I'm willing to do anything."

"Surveying, or drilling, for instance, I suppose," said Griffin sarcastically. A thin smile played around the corners of his mouth. "You're too soft. Soft men don't last. The work is too tough. You'll quite in forty-eight hours. They all quit."

"I won't quit, if you'll give me a chance to show you that I won't," defended Foster.

"That's what they all say. *'I'll* be different. *I'll* show you! *I'll* stick.' That's what they all say. The cold, and the hard work gets 'em all. I'm tired breaking in greenies. It's too tough for inexperienced men. And you," he grinned, "you with those soft hands and white skin! You'd last about one day in the tunnels!"

Foster's blood was rising. He would like to have a go at Griffin with his fists; perhaps he would change his mind. Soft, eh? All the grit in life wasn't in a man's skin! Well, he was desperate. He must, if it was humanly possible, get his wedge in, somehow. The letter drove into his thoughts again. He knew it would open the trail for him, and yet he could not, would not, bring himself to using it.

"We can use some men down on level No. 9," suggested Mr. Larkin. "The gang left there, this morning, you know."

Griffin looked sharply around toward Larkin.

"I know who's working here and who isn't," he reminded tartly.

Larkin turned and walked back toward his desk.

"So! You think you're different, eh?" Griffin purred. "A navigator, eh?" Thoughtfully, he drew out a big black Havana and lighted it. Then he laughed musingly to himself. "That would be a hot one! A navigator on level No. 9 three hundred feet beneath blue sunlight. It—it *might* be interesting to watch, anyway," he said slowly. "All right! I'll give you a chance to get your neck broken in a shaft, or a hand smeared off with a drill. Let's see what you can do about it. Six dollars a day. Commence right now!"

Foster ground his teeth, bitterly. He wondered what plan Griffin might be devising in his crooked mind. Well, he was out to accept the white challenge of the North. The gantlet had been thrown in his face. Would he ignore the gesture?

"Right-o!" accepted Foster tersely. "I'll take it and thanks."

"Never mind the frills. Get the elevator down to level No. 9. Tell the boss slave driver, O'Toole, that I sent you down as extra. That's all. Step on it!"

Foster walked coolly through the office vestibule and out onto the soft dirt of the tunnel to the elevator cage. As he did so he saw Griffin pick up an iron freight hook from one of a number of baled cloth goods near the office entrance. Wondering what he wanted it for, Foster walked to the door of the elevator shaft and pressed the button. Griffin, a strange smile playing about the corners of his eyes, followed. The elevator came up with a flood of light. The door clanged back. Foster stepped in. For a second Griffin stared after

Foster condescendingly. Then he said in a soft, purring voice:

"Feel natural to be behind bars again, Foster?"

Foster felt the hot blood rush to his temples. The elevator operator stared queerly at his passenger.

"Level No. 9!" shouted Griffin in a wild voice. "And let 'er *rip!*"

Foster looked up, startled. On the same instant he saw a piece of bright steel thrust between the bars of his cage. The big freight hook curled around one of the cables, another. A sharp jerk! There came a screaming whip of cables lashing out. Foster felt the great iron cage drop out from under him as though he had been shot from a cannon. A high-pitched, bestial laugh rang out over his head:

"Now navigate! Three hundred feet to hell!" Griffin's voice echoed down the dark lanes of the mine shaft.

The cage dropped with the speed of light. The air to all sides was filled with whipping, slashing cables. Sparks flew everywhere. The stench of burning rubber filled the air. The lights went out! A torrential, head-splitting rush of air filled the blackness. Foster felt his feet leave the floor of the cage. His senses reeled. There came a roaring, hurtling crash. Something drove into Foster's skull. He felt his knees sag. Consciousness slowly oozed from his body. Down and down——

To be continued in the August number, on the stands July 1st.

HUMAN NATURE

YOU read about it, of course. They hanged a man in Turkey. That's not unusual. As a matter of fact, they hanged twenty-seven other men almost at the same time. There had been a revolt at Menemen, and these men had participated in it. Over there that means a lot; over here, thousands of miles away, it doesn't mean much. We shrug, saying: "They probably deserved it." We don't mind wholesale tragedies in distant countries. Chinese die by the thousands in floods and fires, and the events are in small notices on back pages of the newspapers.

But there was a new note in the Turkish affair. One of the condemned was a dervish named Hussein. He was twenty-five years old. He escaped. At the very moment of the execution, in the early, dank dawn, he tore himself away from the hangman and ran for his life. The others went to their doom. Hussein disappeared.

We read about that and were glad. Human beings are glad sometimes for the most unaccountable reasons. Maybe Hussein thoroughly deserved hanging; we didn't know. We saw him as a kid, a dervish, and a rebel, who had escaped in a spectacular manner, even as François Villon and *Robin Hood* cheated the gallows time and again. Secretly, we hoped Hussein would make good his escape. Perhaps the morbid crowd that watched the hangings was glad, too—for human hearts are thrilled as much by individual valor as much as they are by the sight of law in swift and decisive operation.

Well, they caught Hussein, caught him up in the mountains. He had wandered around for two weeks, starving. They brought him back and hanged him. That's the end of the story. What do you think of it?

His Blameless Past Rose to Blast Him.

The WHISPER

By ROBERT McBLAIR

THE Fireside Restaurant is well known to the more respectable element of Greenwich Village and the more economical element of lower Fifth Avenue.

It was at the fag end of lunch time when Hughey Burns, the youngish-looking but gray-haired proprietor, moved to the cash register and watched out of the corner of his eye the bony gentleman sitting at one of the smaller tables by the windows.

There was something familiar about that man; but the day had gone by when Hughey's heart would thump and his breath stop if he saw some one who looked familiar.

Instead, for many years he had been comfortably absorbed in making Molly, his wife, and Jeanette, his daughter, happy.

The Fireside, with its dark tables and wall benches, the old prints on the walls, its home cooking, and its clean and friendly atmosphere, stood as the bulwark which he had raised between his family and the dangers of the world.

Hughey Burns ran a powerful hand over his cropped gray mustache. There was something about this customer that was familiar and unpleasant. Perhaps it was the beard, which seemed dyed to a shiny black. Or perhaps it was the jutting chin. A shrill alarm of terror, which once would have jangled Hughey's nerves, rang now, but it rang faintly, like the sound of another man's telephone. Time deadens. Besides, a decent restaurant was the safest of places; and, in addition, he had never really committed any crime.

So when the stranger rose and reached

for his hat, Hughey, limping on the leg which had been pitchforked, moved cheerfully behind the counter. Perhaps this was a customer whom he should remember.

"Nice day," smiled Hughey Burns.

But the bony man, his brown hat pulled low, merely slid forward the check and a bill. Hughey impaled the check on the spike, rang the cash drawer, and pulled the bill through his fingers. Then he paused, undecided. He had taken in too many twenty-dollar bills not to know a bad one when he felt it. But, of course, he decided, the customer had come by it innocently. The Fireside catered to a very good trade.

"That's plenty good enough for you, Croaker!"

The man's whisper, so clear and distinct, paralyzed the home-loving restaurant man. It was as if he had seen an icy dagger plunged into his wife's heart. With magical swiftness the years fell away. He heard the clanking machinery of the jute mill. He saw a file of shaven, gray-clad, dead-alive figures —the lifers in the jute mill.

Hughey Burns drew a slow breath, trying to believe that he had not heard this impossible whisper out of the past.

"I am sorry, I can't change this," said Hughey Burns, a frightened look in his kind brown eyes. "Have you got something smaller, sir?"

The man's eyes, fixing the family man as on a skewer, were close-set and of a yellow gray. His broken nose leaned sidewise. Hughey Burns felt his bones turning to marrow. No use to deny that he knew this man. In spite of the mask of years, and the black-dyed beard, this man was "Greasy" Polin. The icy dagger, indeed, was at Molly's heart.

"Can the bull, Croaker," Greasy's whisper commanded.

Hughey Burns wet his dry lips, and swallowed.

"I am sorry, sir," he replied in a tight voice. "You have made some mistake. I don't know you."

The side of the mouth moved under the black beard.

"Say! A lifer on the lam wouldn't high hat an old fish, would he?" the whisper inquired. Then Greasy Polin leaned at ease upon the counter. His yellow-gray eyes took in approvingly the prosperous establishment. He spoke in a harsh, natural tone, and pushed four more bills across the counter. "Say! This is a break for me, ain't it? Cash the century for me, Croaker. You can shove the queer in this joint easy, see? Come on. Step on it, kid!"

Hughey Burns once more moistened his dry lips. For twenty years he had been building a safe and a comfortable protection for Molly and Jeanette, a rampart against the terrors of the world. Now the walls were crumbling, and he was helpless. Slowly he counted out a hundred dollars.

"I'm in a hurry now," said Greasy Polin as he verified the count. "But, don't worry. I'll be back, Croaker." In the yellow-gray eyes Hughey Burns saw the death of happiness for his wife and daughter as Greasy Polin nodded and went away.

The legs of the family man carried him as far as a table, where he sat down and poured a glass of water. Greasy Polin! He poured another glass as his mind ran desperately back to when he had bought the gun at the pawnshop for Greasy Polin. He had been only a lad then, and the twenty dollars, which Greasy had paid him for the service, had been so exhilarating that he had gone that night with the gang on the celebration.

It hadn't been Hughey Burns's gang. Hughey had come of a God-fearing stock, but, early an orphan, he had run into Greasy and the Banions along the Detroit water front. And he had gone on the party because of Greasy's insistence that it was Billy Banion's birth-

day, and the gang would think him high hat if he didn't.

The gang had more or less resented his presence, Hughey Burns remembered. In a barroom, Greasy had pushed him against Billy Banion, who had turned and knocked Hughey down. Seeing Billy Banion's hand on his gun, Hughey had controlled his fists and his temper, had explained the incident, and shortly left them.

But Greasy Polin had wakened him in the grisly light of dawn, advising him to skip out of town, saying Billy Banion was full of hop and was out to get him. And no sooner was Greasy gone than the cops had broken in, had dragged him out of bed, and had curiously found in his coat pocket the very gun which he had delivered to Greasy. One chamber had been fired, they said, Banion was in the morgue, and they had come to arrest him for the murder.

At the trial, Hughey had sat silent, because Greasy Polin had sent him word through the lawyer Greasy had got for him, that the judge and jury were fixed. The evidence brought out the blow in the barroom and Hughey's previous purchase of the gun from Ike, the pawnbroker.

Hughey's nickname of "Croaker," given him by a boy from Carolina, was ridiculed by the prosecutor, who would not let it be believed that it was really a kind of fish. Hughey remembered how the voice of the foreman quavered when he said the word: "Guilty!"

Only when the judge pronounced, "For the rest of your natural life," had Hughey tried to fight them; and then he had been overpowered and carried, kicking and shouting, from the room.

"Daddy!" It was his wife calling from the corner where she and Jeanette sat lunching. Hughey Burns rose and limped to the door of his office, where he was working on his figures and they would not disturb him. "Daddy, Jeanette says you don't look well. Have you got your flannels on?"

Hughey turned and looked at her. To some one else, his wife might have seemed a commonplace, too-stout woman, of a faded prettiness, with frizzy blond hair turning white in front. To Hughey Burns, she was an angel straight from heaven—for he knew Molly. He looked at Jeanette's honey-gold hair, fitting tight to her shapely head; at her amazing clear skin and sky-blue eyes, like Molly's. Molly and Jeanette must never, never know.

"No, I haven't," replied Hughey Burns cheerfully, for they must never know. "And that's not all, either. Those flannels itch like the devil!" And he closed the office door on their burst of happy laughter.

Filling a glass from the office cooler, Hughey was surprised to observe that his face in the mirror did not show his thoughts. Its ruddy-brown was perhaps a bit nearer to the gray of his cropped mustache, that was all. He tried to buck up.

"Maybe Greasy won't come back," he thought.

But Greasy, he remembered, had turned up even in stir—the prison suit matching his yellow-gray eyes. He had brought an unbelievable story of a crooked detective who had planted a borrowed gun on Hughey; he told of a complicated slip-up in the judge and jury fixing. But Hughey had remained convinced that Greasy had framed him into paying a life penalty for Billy Banion's death—had framed Hughey so that in the eyes of the vengeful gang he, Greasy, would be innocent. So, to mollify Hughey's attitude, Greasy had presently contrived a plan. You could always count on Greasy for a plan.

Months went to the perfection of this one, but the planners were spurred on by Greasy's report that Billy Banion's brother, "Conky" Banion, was planning to take a rap just in order to get to

Hughey and to kill him. And Hughey, at last, was buried deep in a bale of jute, and loaded with other bales on a truck.

The guards, it was known, had ceased bothering to probe the bales very deeply. But when Hughey's truck went through, every bale was turned and severely pitchforked. Hughey in his agony had felt the treachery of Greasy in this. That was Greasy's way—trickily to eliminate anything of danger to Greasy. So long as Hughey lived, there was danger that he might be able to convince Conky Banion that Greasy had caused Billy's death. So Greasy had wanted him disposed of.

Hughey had cut his way free in the first overnight garage, had changed his stiffening suit for an oily shirt and a pair of overalls, and had got away in a borrowed car to safety. But Greasy now had discovered him again. And this would mean the end of happiness for Jeanette and for Molly.

"Daddy, what are you doing?" It was Molly, her blue eyes wide, a hand to her whitening yellow hair. Hughey straightened from where he was tearing Greasy's counterfeit bills to bits over the office wastebasket.

"I took in some bad money," said Hughey. "Listen, Molly darling." She leaned against him. "These figures are getting on my nerves. I want you and Jeanette to run down to Atlantic City. Will you pack and go to-night?"

He knew that if she did not want to go, she simply wouldn't do it. And as he wanted them away while Greasy was around, he held his breath for her answer.

"If you promise me you'll put on your flannels," she said, "I'll go to-morrow morning, dear. Will you promise?"

She was going because she knew that he wanted her to go. He leaned and kissed her.

"I will. As soon as you are on the train. I swear it!"

She went out to tell Jeanette, and Hughey breathed a prayer of thanks. They simply mustn't see Greasy. Why, Molly's brother was a judge! Hughey went weak to think of such nice people as these discovering that an escaped lifer was in the family.

"Maybe Greasy won't come back!"

Hughey repeated the prayer more than once to himself after dinner. Upstairs, in their cozy, quiet apartment, the packing had been finished, and the family were starting to bed. But suddenly the bell of the front door rang. "S-s-sh!" motioned Hughey. "Let them go away. It's too late!" But a step was mounting the stair. A knock thundered. "S-sh!"

But some one had begun to kick violently on the door.

"Daddy!" cried Molly, outraged. "Make them stop that!"

It was Greasy Polin. Hughey knew that no one else would come kicking like this on his door. But what could he do?

"All right, dear," said Hughey heavily.

He opened the door. Involuntarily, he stepped back. Greasy Polin had shaved off his beard. He held his hat in his hand. In the half light of the hall glimmered the gaunt enormous chin, the bald skull, the hollows of the eyes. A specter out of the past stood at the door of his home, demanding entrance.

"Sorry," said Hughey, "but we are going to bed now."

But Greasy pushed by him and stood staring and grinning.

"Some swell dump, Croaker! I'll say! Who are the dames?"

"My name is Hughey Burns," corrected the family man. "This is my wife. And this is my daughter, Jeanette. We are going to bed now. If you will come back to-morrow, we can talk."

Greasy stared at Jeanette. He glanced at the pink-cheeked, respectable Molly, then looked at Hughey Burns. Into his close-set eyes seemed to creep a

pleased light of comprehension. Grinning, he sat on the sofa by Jeanette. Greasy was beginning to see now the extent of his power. And Greasy had no scruples. The powerful hands of Hughey Burns began to tingle.

"Got a letter from Conky Banion to-day," said Greasy. "That's funny, ain't it? He's in Boston, with Billy Banion's son. Last time I seen them, they said they was still looking for you, but they guessed you was dead."

Greasy took out an envelope, held it forth. Hughey was alert for one of Greasy's tricks. But the postmark and the return address were from Boston, as Greasy had said. The letter inside was in the same writing as the envelope, and ended:

Come up this week sure.

CONKY BANION.

This was no trick. Conky Banion believed that Hughey had killed his brother, and Conky was not the kind to forgive that. The trumps were all in Greasy's hands. And, however he played them, Hughey stood to lose. Lose everything. Greasy grinned.

"Say, Croaker, this is a break for me, ain't it? That was bum queer, and I was about to have to drop it. Conky's wrote me twice now to come up and get in on the dope racket, but that's plenty risky, and I ain't so young as I once was. Time for me to settle down." Greasy showed his broken teeth. "We'll put a first-class bar down there in the alcove, Croaker. It's a pipe."

"Sell whisky in the Fireside?" cried Molly.

"I'd never do that. Never," said Hughey Burns.

"What's that?" snapped Greasy. A gnarled finger pointed. "You'll sell it, and like it! I'm going to settle down, I said." The regard of the pallid skull turned upon Jeanette's gold young beauty. "How about it, kid?" His hand dropped upon her arm. Jeanette started like a frightened foal. "What the hell!" shouted Greasy, and seized her. "Give us a kiss!"

Hughey saw Jeanette's gold head bowed; then Molly's scream clouded the room in red. Hughey Burns came to, to find his breath short, his heart pounding. He released his thumbs from Greasy's windpipe, watching fascinated that evil stare. Greasy of course could tell the Banions where he was, or turn him over to a lifetime behind gray walls. In his hotheadedness, Hughey recognized, he himself had plunged the dagger into Molly's heart.

"I'm sorry, Greasy," said Hughey, his legs trembling. "I'm sorry. But you mustn't touch my daughter."

Greasy Polin's yellow-gray eyes were alive with evil.

"You can't do this to me, Croaker," remarked Greasy quietly. "No fish on the lam can do this to me. Not to me!"

"I'm sorry, Greasy." Hughey picked up Greasy's hat, laid a hand on Greasy's shoulder. "You'll come around to-morrow, won't you? We can have a talk then."

But the evil specter slammed out without a word.

"I used to know that fellow a long time ago," explained Hughey presently. "He is a bad actor. You and the kid go down to the seashore. I'll talk to this bird straight, and send him packing."

"All right, daddy. Jeanette, you stop that crying!"

Hughey drowsed once that sleepless night, and awoke wet with sweat: the prison siren was screaming in the throat of a passing fire engine. But morning came without the police. And, after he had put Molly and Jeanette on the train, he sat in the restaurant and tried to anticipate Greasy's revenge.

The tricky Greasy would either inform the police, or get a profit from telling the Banions. None the less, Hughey felt thankful that he had not

killed Greasy. Nothing which he himself had done should ever bring disgrace to his family. He had never committed a crime, much less killed a man. He never would. But if he got a shot in the back from the Banions, what about poor Molly and Jeanette then? Or if their daddy turned out to be an escaped lifer—that would be much worse. Yes, that disgrace would be much worse for them. Hughey felt the stirrings of a vague idea. Would it not be best for them if the Banions did kill him?

"Hello, Croaker! Where can we talk?"

It was Greasy Polin, his pale face twisted to show his broken teeth, his bony hand held forth friend-fashion.

"You and me been old pals, Croaker," Greasy said when they were closeted in the little office. "Why should you and me fight? Listen, Croaker. We are going to be partners in this joint, and I'm going to let you down soft. No booze. But, listen." He pointed a gnarly finger. "I can spill it to the bulls and you'll finish your natural in stir. Or I can give Conky the office and, no matter how you try to spiel him, you'll go on the spot. Tell me, have I got you, or not?"

What was the use of denying it? Hughey's cropped-gray mustache curved down, not up. "You've got me," he agreed.

"I'll say!" Greasy laughed. "Now, listen. I'm going to show you where I'm square. I don't want that jane of yours. I got me a moll. And listen!" He thrust his gaunt chin closer. "My moll's got a letter to Conky, see? If anything happens to me"—Greasy tapped his sunken chest—"she mails the squeal, see?"

"Yep," said Hughey grayly. "I see." Greasy had him.

"Now, I been looking you up, Croaker. You go ahead and run this joint just like it is, see? We split the net—sixty to me, forty to you, which is fair enough, considering. But I can make something on the side. I'll move over to your apartment, see? I seen you got a extra room. Get the play? Your dame's brother is a judge, see? The dicks would never think of searching your dump. Why, Jeanette could sleep with the stuff. Safe as a church for me, see?"

"Search my place? Search for what?"

"For what? Canaries. Coke. Happy dust. Su-ure!"

"No." Hughey's kind brown eyes grew black and fixed. "If you think you're going to bring that girl, and dope, into my family—no! You can let them kill me first. You can kill me!"

"Bump off my meal ticket?" asked Greasy, rubbing his enormous chin. "Not me, bo! Besides, I never pack a rod. More like it, you'll try to rub me out, not liking the set-up, with me in your rooms. That's why I got these papers for us to sign. To make things even. We're partners, see? Now we each sign a paper. If I croak, you get the joint. If you croak, I get it, see?"

Hughey saw. If Greasy tipped off the Banions in Boston, and they killed him to revenge Billy Banion's death, Greasy would get the Fireside Restaurant. It was a very simple plan, considering that Greasy had concocted it. And Hughey began to believe that Greasy perhaps meant merely to have this additional threat to hold over him —so that Greasy could come, with his business of smuggling dope, to live with himself and Molly and Jeanette. Hughey could imagine the kind of visitors they would have. He thought of his lovely Jeanette growing up among such people! But with Greasy holding the worse choice of a life sentence over him, how could he refuse? As long as he lived, he would be in Greasy's power.

"If I sign this," said Hughey, "you'll tip off Conky Banion to give me the works, and I'll lose my restaurant, too."

"No," said Greasy, spreading out a typed paper, "I'm going to Philly for the stuff, not Boston. Already got my ticket. Wait—I'm square. I'll sign my paper first."

He pulled out another paper, dropping a slip which Hughey retrieved from the floor. It was a railroad ticket to Boston! Hughey, feeling his breath stop, handed it back without showing that he had noticed. Greasy, running true to form, wasn't going to Philly, he was going to Boston. The Banions would be brought back to do his dirty work for him, and Greasy, perfectly safe, would inherit the Fireside. It was all worked out.

Hughey's powerful hand fondled a steel letter opener on his desk. But if a man were killed in the Fireside, the police would discover that he, Hughey, was an escaped lifer, which would be even worse than his death for poor Molly and Jeanette. Besides, he had never committed a crime. He never would. He belonged, by right of the life he had always lived, to the decent, self-respecting class of society. He would never change.

"Sign here," commanded Greasy. "And we got to have two witnesses. I asked a mouthpiece about that."

Hughey accepted the pen. As long as he lived, he would be unable to protect Molly and Jeanette from Greasy. As long as he lived—— Suddenly he felt confidence flowing back to his heart. An idea which had been forming vaguely came into his mind full blown. He could not protect Molly and Jeanette while he was alive. But he could after he was dead. He could make a final will, leaving everything to Molly. Then he could let the Banions bump him off! The gray of Hughey's cropped mustache and wiry hair came back into their own as Hughey's face recovered its ruddy-brown hue. His manner was alert as he brought in the cashier and the head-waiter to witness the signatures.

"When will you get back from Philly?" Hughey asked.

"To-morrow night. I hope to bring a couple of right guys with me. If I do, we can ride around and see the town."

Hughey suddenly felt a bit sick at the pit of his stomach. He was happy at the chance of saving Molly and Jeanette from the hands of Greasy, but the actual prospect of a ride to-morrow night with Billy Banion's brother, Conky, made his knees weak. But it was the only way. He shook hands with Greasy.

"Fine," he agreed. "We'll take a ride around."

As soon as Greasy was gone, Hughey went downtown and arranged to double his life insurance in Molly's favor. The next morning he called upon Molly's brother, the magistrate, leaving with a will which superseded all previous documents and bequeathed everything to Molly and Jeanette.

"But," thought Hughey Burns when he was home again, "suppose Greasy doesn't go to Boston, after all? Suppose he goes to Philly for the dope, and then brings it here? He'll have the lifer business to hold over me, and I won't be able to do anything. It looks like, to make sure, I've got to get the Banions down here myself!"

Hughey felt once more the sick sensation at the pit of his stomach. Bring the Banions down here himself! But it seemed the only way out. He wrote an unsigned note to Conky Banion, remembering the address on Greasy's letter and saying:

Croaker Burns runs the Fireside Restaurant in Greenwich Village. Greasy Polin can steer you.

His easy-going mouth in a straight line, Hughey mailed this letter. And then came the letter to Molly.

Locked in his private office, Hughey Burns wept over this letter, not for himself, but because he knew how Molly

would weep when she received it. He wrote:

DEAR MOLLY: A blackmailer has turned up claiming that I once killed a man. You know daddy too well ever to believe that. If you ever have any trouble with Greasy Polin, just tell your brother to get the police. Take good care of the inclosed paper. Tell Jeanette to use less rouge, marry some good man and have children.

Hughey's throat began to hurt so much that he ended abruptly:

You have been a perfect wife to me, Molly. I want to thank you for it. Your loving husband, HUGHEY.

He inclosed the new will; addressed and stamped the envelope. But before he mailed it, he had to be sure that the Banions were coming, or Molly would be worried needlessly.

The hours of the second day flew by like minutes. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner faded by like dreams. At the closing hour, Greasy and the Banions still had not returned. Hughey was snapping out the lights in the smaller room when two men entered the front door. Though Hughey did not remember ever having seen them before, he felt that he knew them very well.

The younger, in a black derby and a short form-fitting black overcoat, had pinched, colorless features and seemed about thirty years old. He had grown up since Billy Banion's murder. They sat down at a table not far from the cashier's counter and Hughey saw that the older was about his own age. A large, stooping hulk, with thin, sandy hair, bulging blue eyes, and a mouth like the edge of a knifeblade.

They would be the son and the brother, Hughey figured, of the Billy Banion who had been ambushed some twenty-five years before. They looked like the kind who would remember such a matter. Ordering coffee and cake, they stared at Hughey, who turned his head away. He tried to make himself think of what he was doing for Molly's sake, but his mind could hold only the curious, almost glittering quality about the two men. He seemed to hear the words of a guard in the old sixth cell corridor: "Show me a killer who says he ain't hopped up before he starts on a job, and I'll show you a lousy liar."

When the men walked up to pay their checks, Hughey could not raise his eyes. Twenty-odd years as a contented family man had softened Hughey. The men left, and a short while later the door opened to admit the gaunt Greasy Polin.

"Get your hat, Croaker. I got them two right guys here."

The sick feeling at the pit of the stomach came upon Hughey so strongly that he measured the distance of a flight to the back door. To go out for a ride with the two Banions was hardly a thing a normal man could agree to. Playing for time, Hughey drew the letter to Molly out of his pocket. As he pretended to read the address, there appeared before his mind the picture of his pink-cheeked Molly, weeping as she read what he had written. But she would know that he was doing this for her. The blood ran back to Hughey's heart. If he lived, he must bring disgrace and ruin on her. A man could go to ride with the Banions if he was doing it for Molly.

"All right," replied Hughey. "I'm ready now, Greasy."

They went out into the lamplit street, Greasy saying: "They'll pick us up here on the corner." Hughey saw the black car rolling toward them along the curb and remembered the letter containing the will for Molly. He reached for the mail box quickly. But Greasy said: "No you don't!"

"Give me that letter!" cried Hughey hoarsely.

But Greasy thrust Molly's letter into his pocket, and something struck Hughey gently on the leg. It was the swinging front door of the car. From the hollow of the back seat peered a pale

countenance with bulging blue eyes, like a beast of prey from a cave. "A couple of right guys," Hughey heard Greasy explaining. Numbly, he let himself be pushed into the front seat. Greasy got in behind. The doors thudded, the car turned in a graceful circle. Hughey shrank away from the figure in the black coat beside him. A passing light touched the mirror and showed the hulk behind him leaning forward.

Hughey dared not move. The car swung downtown and eastward, passing a policeman, but Hughey dared not shout. It crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. Hughey's love for life bred a tiny hope. Perhaps Molly and Jeanette were not to fall prey to Greasy, who had the will in his pocket. Perhaps, after all, these men were merely right guys, and were taking him somewhere to a party. The car cut out through the Brooklyn suburbs, where at this hour the residences were dark.

Hughey's throat made a clicking sound. Was it possible to ride to death like this, without making a move, without uttering a cry? And Molly and Jeanette—was he really to die, leaving them poor and in Greasy Polin's power? Hughey could not stand any longer the terrible silence. He spoke, thinking of Molly.

"It's kind of cold, eh?" croaked the friendly restaurant man. "I go for a ride and don't put on my flannels."

The man at the wheel gave him a startled glance. The car jumped swiftly forward.

"Turn right," called Greasy. They rolled along a bumpy, tree-lined road, and suddenly stopped. "Come on, Croaker."

Hughey's door was open. The figure at the wheel was sliding insistently against him. Hughey got out, but his knees wabbled, and Greasy supported him. "Up this way," said Greasy.

Their feet scrabbled on stones. The two right guys followed close. The procession emerged upon a weedy shelf. Beneath a black cloud, a sliver of moon pointed down to the gulf of an old excavation. Greasy stopped Hughey and turned him around. Then in the ghostly light Hughey saw that the two right guys each held in his hand a dark thing of shiny metal.

"All set, Conky!" announced Greasy.

He stepped aside. To Hughey, standing paralyzed and alone on the pit's edge, appeared the white, agonized face of Molly. Hughey wanted to smooth the whitened yellow hair from her troubled forehead. He wanted to explain that it was his love for her which had brought him to this place, that by the death which would come to him, he had hoped to make her and Jeanette comfortable and secure, that he had not counted on Greasy taking the will and keeping it.

But he could make no sound. And he became aware that the hulk with the bulging eyes was speaking.

"So," the hulk was saying, very deliberately, as if to make all things clear, "it is because you are too smart your number goes up. Account of your squawking on Ike for fencing that ice, so you get the Federal reward, Ike comes to me, after this long time, and tells me he sees Croaker give you the gun outside his shop. So we know it is you and not Croaker who gives the works to Bill."

Hughey heard from the throat of Greasy Polin, near by in the ghostly moonlight, a queer gasping sound.

"So," the deliberate hulk went on, "that is why we try to get you to come to Boston, so we could spot you there. So when you come and squawk to us about Croaker, and say you will put him on the spot for us in New York, we figure it is better to go with you and give you the works down here away from our Boston racket."

The younger man made an impatient sound. The two metal things spat

sparks and sudden thunder. Hughey observed the toppling figure of Greasy, the gaunt face twisted in surprise. Then the pit sent up a rattle of stone, and a splash.

"Well, 'at's his last squawk," remarked the younger man in a conversational tone. "Croaker next, eh, Conky?"

His voice intimated that a witness would squeal.

"Come wit' us, Croaker," the hulk commanded.

Numbly, Hughey followed to the car. The hulk took the wheel. Hughey climbed into the rear, beside the younger man. The black machine returned over the bridge, threaded a way along deserted streets. It stopped before the Fireside.

On his own doorstep! On the spot, while Molly and Jeanette, worrying at Atlantic City, waited to hear from him. Hughey Burns sat paralyzed in the rear seat. The hulk swung round.

"Hop out, Croaker," the hulk commanded.

Hughey sat paralyzed, unable to move.

The hulk spoke to the younger man.

"Croaker ain't going to squeal, wit' what he's got hanging over him. He's safe, see? Hop out, Croaker."

Numbly, clumsily, Hughey Burns stumbled over the legs of the younger man and climbed out to the solid safety of the sidewalk.

"See you in church," said the younger man.

He waved a hand in friendly farewell as the black car rolled on, vanished around a corner.

Watch for more stories by Robert McBlair.

A TRACE OF ATLANTIS?

REMINISCENT of Fred MacIsaac's serial, "The Last Atlantide," which appeared in this magazine a few years ago, is the news, coming from Venezuela, that proof has been found of the existence of the lost continent supposed to have sunk into the Atlantic Ocean.

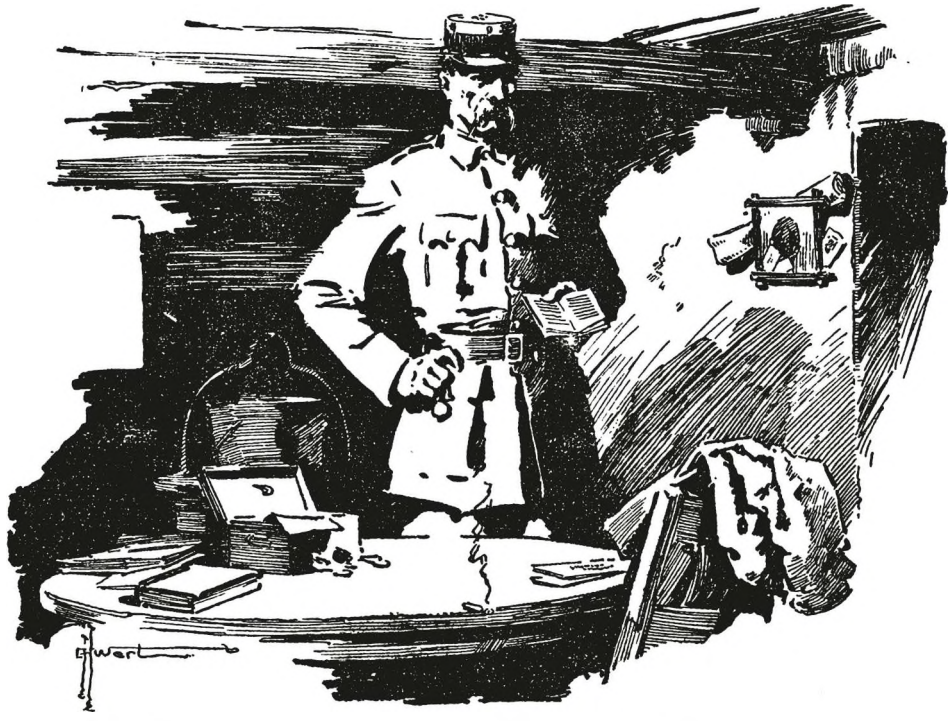
Reports of evidence leading to the support of the Atlantis theory have been frequent; but Doctor Rafael Requena, head of the State of Aragua in the South American republic above named, states that the *proofs* he will present soon in a book will create a sensation in the scientific world.

Doctor Requena has devoted many years of his life to research and excavation along this line. Not only does he trace his findings back to the mysterious, vanished Atlantis, but to as remote a place as Egypt. It is supposed that the discovery of various implements, writings, and other relics—relics showing an unmistakable Egyptian origin—have led Doctor Requena to this conviction. The survivors of Atlantis, he goes on to say, were Egyptians.

It will be interesting to see what is brought to light in his book. Ancient history, as it is now summed up, may have to be rewritten. Centuries that are now blank may become clear. Perhaps this earnest, quiet man, living and studying far away in Venezuela, is destined to change, in many respects, and explain, in many other respects, the past of the human race. Things like that have happened before. Why not in the twentieth century?

The COURT-MARTIAL

By Captain LEIGHTON H. BLOOD



Captain Tricot, Beloved of the Legion and Paris Alike, Works an Uproarious Miracle in the Capital of France!

A LETTER lay face up on the table. Beside it was an envelope with a red-and-blue border, in the corner of which were printed the words *"Par Avion,"* and the postmark was Paris.

Tricot sat staring at the square sheet of paper, a cigarette burning unnoticed, clutched by two fingers of his right hand. He had been in this same position for three minutes. Only the glowing end reaching the flesh of his fingers roused him into action.

Bending forward and dropping the cigarette, he took up the letter again, and slowly read each word. It was no ordinary letter, this. Since Sergeant Hamid Bey, the regimental *wagmaster,* had rapped at his door a half hour before, he had been thinking hard.

"A letter for you by the air post," the Turkish mail sergeant had told him. "It just came to-night, and I thought it might be important, so I have taken the liberty to bring it to your quarters, *mon capitaine.*"

Yes, it was important, mused Tricot. Damn important! A life was hanging

in the balance! No one knew this better than the big Basque as he read those words again:

PAUL TRICOT,
Capitaine, Légion Etrangère,
Fourth Regiment,
Marrakech, Morocco.

Mon Capitaine:

On the 14th I am to appear a *Conseil de Guerre* sitting at Paris, the official charge being that of desertion from the *Légion Etrangère* while on service in the Army of the Orient in Syria.

To the charge of desertion I plead guilty, but upon my word of honor as a former officer and gentleman, I was on my way to Sidi Bel Abbes to return for whatever punishment was due me and then serve out my enlistment, when apprehended in Paris. The officer assigned to prosecute me has the tickets booking me through to Marseilles, thence to Oran, in his possession, which is proof of my intention to again rejoin the legion.

My request that I be court-martialed by the *Légion Etrangère* has been denied because my name appears on the lists of the great War. My name in the *Légion Etrangère* records is Hans Ernst Folk, *soldat 2d classe,* No. 78,976, which is a *nom de guerre.*

Having been denied trial before the officers of the legion, and being fully aware that a court sitting in France can sentence me to transportation for life to French Guiana, South America, because of my activities as a commander on the western front in the Imperial German Army, using my desertion as a means to this end, I am asking you, as a gallant soldier, to appear as my counsel. If you, my dear captain, can see your way clear to defend a former enemy officer and a deserter from the *Légion Etrangère,* whose desertion was as excusable as any such serious breach of military law can be, and which I will explain if you decide to help me, I ask you to do so.

I am, most respectfully,
HANS ERNST FOLK-TRIER VON KOLENDORF.

Tricot folded the letter, put it back in the envelope, thrust it into a pocket of his tunic, got up, reached for his scarlet kepi with the three golden *galons,* and his blackjack crop, and left the room. In the street outside he strode through the hundreds of hurrying natives, unmindful of the narrow way and the hundred and one smells of an Arab city.

The legionnaire sentry on duty at the great gate of the old caid's palace, which now housed the general commanding troops in the High Atlas, snapped to attention. Tricot returned the salute of the soldier who had presented arms, and pushed open the little door set in the main gate and entered the great courtyard. Behind him he could hear the three-piece orchestra of the Café de Paris, in the Place of the Dead, a half block away, squeaking out the latest jazz tunes.

A burnoosed native servant bowed and hurried away, appearing a few moments later to take the big Basque captain's kepi and crop, and to murmur that the general would see Captain Tricot at once. Tricot followed him along a mosaic passageway to a great inner court where palm trees swayed and a fountain tinkled. It was after ten o'clock, but the general was still seated with his wife in wicker chairs.

"*Mais oui,* the great Basque!" ejaculated the general, rising up from his seat. "Come, do not tell me that you now pay social calls on your general at this hour! Or is it that you call on madame?" He winked toward his youthful wife, who sat smoking a cigarette and smiling at Tricot.

The Basque advanced, took her long, slender hand in his great paw, and gallantly kissed it, murmuring a greeting. Then he turned, saluted, and shook hands with the general.

"It is a pleasure to be allowed to call upon Madame le Général and yourself, even if upon a military matter," said Tricot. "But this is a personal one."

"Do not tell me that you are about to make a marriage, my old friend," laughed the lady. "But if that is the case—an affair of the heart—then I am the one to advise, not this old one who calls himself my husband."

The general snorted, and removed his

small, silver-rimmed pince-nez from his rather hawklike nose, and remarked that he was as young as the Basque and that if Tricot wished to marry he would be the first to felicitate him.

"Ever since she came to Morocco my dear wife has been romantic," sighed the general. "If she had her way she would no doubt set up a marriage bureau for all the single officers. But it is not any romance that brings you here, I can tell. Are you in trouble, my old friend? Well, am I not a general of an army corps? Come, sit down, and if it is anything I can do, then it is yours to demand."

They were two contrasts seated there in the dim-lit, tiled patio of one-time Moorish splendor. The general was of medium height and chunky, and his tunic was carelessly unbuttoned. A cigarette glowed under his shaggy mustache, and an empty liqueur glass stood on a table at his side.

Tricot, tall and as massive as a great bull of his own Basque country, wore a cheap khaki drill uniform with roll collar, and slacks, which the legion alone of the French army is allowed to wear, and then only on duty. In France, they, too, must wear the regulation French officers' uniform. On his left breast were long series of loops where decoration ribbons would be worn on ceremonial occasions, as would a Sam Browne belt; but this was no occasion for ceremony.

For long years the two had been friends. The general had crossed over as a colonel to France in 1914 with the Moroccan Division, of which the legion was a part. Tricot had been a sergeant then. The general became chief of staff of the division, and the Basque climbed the ladder as well. Now the small man had gained the heights, for he had been both a brigade and division commander and was now a general of an army corps with an active, fighting command. For almost a score of years they had been more or less together. They knew each other's actions and thoughts. There was mutual respect.

"I had a letter to-night," said Tricot, dropping his great frame into a chair between the two. "Would you, *mon général,* be kind enough to read the message it contained?"

Tricot withdrew the envelope from his pocket and passed it to the other, who adjusted his glasses and leaned forward so that a shaded light on the table cast its beams on the single sheet of paper.

The general's face was a mask as he read. When he had finished he carefully replaced the epistle in the envelope and passed it back to the big Basque. Only then did he speak.

"Von Kolendorf appears again," he said quietly. "You know him, my old friend? It is apparent that he knows you. Come, what is on your mind?"

With a glance toward the general's wife, who nodded her permission, Tricot lighted a cigarette before he replied.

"I met him one night in 1915," said the Basque, and an ironic smile played over his sun-blacked face and made his half dozen scars dance in the lamplight. "The situation was quite the reverse then, I assure you."

"So!" ejaculated the general, leaning forward a bit in his chair. "But in 1915 we were at war with Germany and he was an *Ober Kommander* at Lille. It was in that year that he was concerned with the deportation of the civilians and now finds his name among the 'War guilty.'"

"And do you, my old friend, not recall that for five days I was a prisoner in that year?" chided Tricot. "Come, come, even a general should be able to remember things that happened no longer ago than twelve years."

"*Mais oui!* I have not forgotten, my old one," ejaculated the general. "But four times they captured you—or

was it five?—and each time you managed, like a good legionnaire, to return to our lines. It became the *'mode Tricot,'* as we said in the staff. So that was how you met Von Kolendorf?"

"That was when I met him," admitted the Basque. "And it was five times I fell in the hands of the enemy. The last time, at his orders, a full platoon were my guards—but you cannot keep a legionnaire when he wants to leave, as you well know."

The general chuckled, lighted a cigarette and winked broadly at his wife.

"It takes more than a platoon to hold Tricot of the legion," he told her. "That was in August, 1918, when you came back last time."

For a space he sat there smoking quietly. Tricot said nothing. They were both thinking of those War days that seemed ages ago. At last the general spoke again, this time in a ruminative tone.

"I often wondered during the War what sort of a person Von Kolendorf was," he said quietly. "To me he was my opponent in a duel. It seemed that wherever the Moroccan division was sent I would find him opposite me. He was the divisional or corps chief of staff whom I must outwit. I suppose he often thought the same about me. *Eh bien,* and now my friend of the foils of war calls upon you as his counsel. At least he knows a soldier when he meets one. Tell me, my old one, how you came to meet him, and what Von Kolendorf is like."

The general reached toward the table, poured the Basque a large cognac in a glass the servant had brought, and took one himself. His face was eager with anticipation to hear from his friend's lips a description of the German staff officer who had so often pitted his wits against those of the French tactician.

"In 1915, you remember, *mon général,* we were sent into the line by the then general Foch with orders to hold the spring offensive," Tricot said. "Your own orders to the *Légion Etrangère* were not to give a single meter. We did not! I was wounded and captured, but I obeyed the command!"

"I recall that order, my comrade," said the general softly. "God, what slaughter—but the line held!"

"Yes, it held," admitted the Basque sourly. "They brought up reserves after most of us were killed or wounded. I did not know I was a prisoner for some hours. A blow on the head from a rifle!"

He unconsciously reached up a hand to a long, white scar at the hair line on his forehead, and the general nodded.

"The next day I was taken back to the division headquarters where they tried to make me talk," smiled Tricot broadly. "You see, I was a lieutenant then, and might have some information. When it was found that I was of the *Légion Etrangère* they *knew* that I must be aware of what was going on in the sector from whence I had come. After a while they passed me on to Von Kolendorf to try his hand."

He lighted a fresh cigarette from the one which he had been smoking.

"Von Kolendorf is a real soldier, no matter if he is now a deserter," he remarked irrelevantly.

"So?" asked the general quietly.

"They brought me before him," went on Tricot, picking up the thread of his story again, "and left us alone. Of course, he tried the old, old ruse of telling me that as I was a legionnaire I was a mercenary, and therefore had no reason to be loyal to France. I said nothing—to let the other show his hand is always good tactics."

"Of a certainty!" smiled the general. "And who knows it better than Tricot? —I ask."

"Von Kolendorf is smart and he knew that I must know the disposition and strength of the immediate units to the legion, and what to expect from a chief

of staff from Morocco, which was you, *mon général.* I knew, but I had lost my tongue."

The general laughed grimly, for he could picture that scene; he, too, had duplicated it with captured German officers, asking them what they thought Von Kolendorf would do next.

"When his threats had failed I spoke," said Tricot quietly. "What I said was not proscribed in the regulations. It was in very few words and so simple that a baby could not mistake them. 'I am a legionnaire and a Basque,' I said. 'My reply to you is—go to hell!' "

The general's eyes were alight with approval, and his wife said: "Bravo! Bravo, Tricot!"

"And what did the *Ober Kommandant* have to say to your words?" asked the general.

"He became very angry, my old friend, just as you would," smiled Tricot. "Then I told him, before he had a chance to say anything, that we of the *Légion Etrangère* may be considered the lost souls of the world, but that we had our honor and that before I would stain the honor of the legion I would die.

"I spoke in German, and Von Kolendorf understood. He bowed, and I saluted. You see, *mon général,* he is a *real* soldier. After that he had me taken away. Two nights later there was a little matter of knocking a brace of sentries' heads together, a salvaged overcoat and helmet, and I got back to our lines, thanks to having learned German in the legion."

"Did you ever meet him after that?" asked the general.

"The last time I was captured, during the offensive after the last battle at the Marne, Von Kolendorf heard, and it was he who ordered a platoon to guard me, under a lieutenant," smiled Tricot. "By that time escaping was as simple to me as any field maneuver, and besides, the guards were but little boys—and am I not an old campaigner? I feel sorry for the officer who commanded them. It must have gone hard with him."

The general was pouring another drink. Silently they tossed it off.

"I am glad to hear that Von Kolendorf was an officer and a gentleman," said the general. "Even the charge that he was in command of the deportations at Lille never went very far with me. He was only carrying out orders. But after a war the civilians must have their pound of flesh from the conquered army. That charge, I understand, had been dropped, but his name, of course, is still on the lists."

He hesitated and eyed Tricot narrowly.

"Did you know that he was in the *Légion Etrangère?*" he demanded.

"Yes," admitted the Basque, "I had heard that he came to us, but it was none of my affair. Old Tricot hears many things in the legion that do not concern him. I have not seen him in twelve years."

The general nodded.

"Why," he asked, "does he now send for you to try and save him?"

Tricot shrugged his great shoulders.

"As for that I cannot say," he admitted. "Perhaps he remembers our meeting. I am not unknown among the legionnaires and it is well understood that I would do anything to help a legionnaire."

"And you go to Paris?" asked the other.

Tricot got to his feet and stood very stiffly at attention.

"I request that you give me leave to go to Paris at once, *mon général*—so that I may take the mail plane from Casablanca in the morning," he said crisply. "A legionnaire has called. That is enough for Tricot."

"But a deserter, my old friend," said the general with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Since when have the officers of the *Légion Etrangère* been unable to try their own?" demanded the Basque in a hard voice. "We do not need the aid of others, who would send a good soldier to Devil's Island in South America to rot. No, I go, with or without your permission. He shall be punished for desertion but not for orders that he carried out twelve years ago."

The general got to his feet, pushed away the chair in which he had been sitting and looked up into Tricot's face.

"The great Basque goes to war in Paris, eh?" he chuckled. *"Bien!* I shall give him his orders to march! No, Devil's Island would be no place for poor Von Kolendorf. Perhaps six months of confinement for desertion when he comes back here—if you can succeed, which I doubt—would be plenty, for he writes that he was returning when apprehended. But you will be against a Council of War composed of strange officers, many of whom may dislike the legion. You are aware of the feeling at home—the legion for fighting but not for society."

"I go," said Tricot simply. "A Council of War is no new experience for this Basque. We shall see what we shall see."

"No," remarked the general dryly, and bowing toward his wife, "a court-martial is no new experience to you, my old friend. Come, I will write your order, and also inform Casablanca that the mail plane to France has the honor to take you as a passenger."

Alone in his quarters again Tricot pulled a tin trunk from under his bed and took from it the only regulation uniform which he possessed and had seldom worn. In Paris, before a court-martial, he must be dressed according to regulation.

For several minutes he hunted high and low for a tin box which he at last found behind some cast-off field boots on the floor of a clothes press. Opening it, he saw the many-colored decoration and campaign ribbons, with the little silver knobs that held them in the loops in his chest. Beneath lay the two *medailles militaire* which he had won as an enlisted man. A *croix de guerre* of the Great War, simply loaded down with stars and palms, and a colonial *croix de guerre,* as heavily decorated, so that they hung down almost six inches, covered the red ribbon of a commander's cross of the Legion of Honor. There were other medals galore. Only rarely had Tricot ever worn them or the ribbon decorations.

From the tin trunk came an old, much-thumbed book, printed in fine type. With a crafty, knowing smile, Tricot held it in his hand, standing under the unshaded electric light, and turned to the title page. There he saw the seal of the *Légion Etrangère* both printed in the paper and stamped by the official seal that is kept at Sidi Bel Abbes in Algeria, at great headquarters. A bursting bomb, encircled by the words. *"Légion Etrangère,"* and around that the belt of a simple soldier. He placed the book in his tunic pocket and buttoned the flap.

A knock came at his door. A legionnaire entered.

"The general sends his car to take you to Casablanca, *mon capitaine,"* said the soldier, saluting. "The plane leaves there at five o'clock. It is now midnight."

"I am ready, my little one," smiled Tricot, and followed him from the room.

The great limousine with the tricolor painted on the side pointed its sloping hood northward toward the coast and Casablanca. The legionnaire at the wheel pressed hard on the accelerator, and the kilometer posts seemed to scream by the car as they dashed down from the foothills of the High Atlas.

"Will we make Toulouse by nightfall?" Tricot asked the pilot as the big

Farman was wheeled onto the flying field just as dawn was breaking.

"Perhaps—if we have the weather," replied the aviator, with a glance at the sky and a shrug of his shoulders. These pilots, who fly from Toulouse to St. Louis, Senegal, covering seas, mountains and the great desert, seldom commit themselves. They fly the toughest route in the world and their casualties from death, after forced landings among the mountain and desert tribes in Africa, have written a gory record in man's conquest of the air.

Luck was against the great Basque this day. At Rabat a sand storm held them until long after noon. It was growing dusk when they at last set down at Alicante, Spain. There would be no more flying that day.

In spite of Tricot's storming in Spanish, the ship remained on the ground. Only at dawn on the fourteenth—the day Von Kolendorf was to face the Council of War in Paris—did they leave Spain and head northward toward France. Only for a few minutes, while flying over his own beloved Basque country, high in the mountains, between the two countries, did Tricot forget for a moment his mission as he gazed on his homeland below.

It was after midnight when the Basque stepped from the Toulouse train at the Gare d'Orsay, hailed a passing taxi and rode to a hotel. Once in his room he was busy with a telephone for almost an hour. The calls he made were to highly placed officers in the ministry of war, but all of them he had known when they had been minor military figures.

The court-martial had met that day and all but one batch of evidence had been submitted, he learned, after grouchy, sleepy general officers had been yanked out of warm beds by the insistence of Tricot. That they forgot their wrath at being called when the Basque spoke to them, was due to the fact that Tricot was loved and respected by every one, and that he was in Paris was enough of a sensation in itself to make his superiors forget sleep.

"Name of a sacred name, but I have put myself in a position," sighed Tricot after hanging up the receiver on the last call. "To-day I must have lunch with the *sous-chef d'état major général,* and to-night I must go with him to a gala, but I shall make him pay as sure as he is the deputy chief of the glorious staff. And, then, I have promised the chief of infantry that I will to-morrow tell his small sons about Morocco, not to mention a little dinner to-morrow night with the chief of the second bureau. Well" —he smiled to himself again—"I made monsieur, the chief of intelligence, promise me the dossier on Von Kolendorf, which will help. I am becoming quite a society man."

Tricot tumbled from his bed at seven o'clock in the morning in response to a tinkle of his telephone, and learned that an orderly officer from the minister of war was below.

"Send him to me," said Tricot, and sat up in bed and reached for a cigarette.

The orderly officer, when he had been yanked from the covers at five o'clock to bring to a Captain Tricot at the Hotel de la Tremoille, an order allowing the Basque to interview and appear as counsel for a legionnaire being held prisoner in the fortifications of Paris, had roundly cursed the Foreign Legion and every one connected with the breaking of his sleep. Nevertheless, he had obeyed.

Dapper and correctly groomed, he entered the room at Tricot's answer to his knock. Right then and there the youngster had the shock of his life. He saw, sitting on the bed, the largest man he had ever seen outside a circus—an apparition, for Tricot disdained night clothes as effeminate.

In a daze he saluted this enormous figure, whose body he saw now had numerous scars and whose face was crisscrossed with them. A smile played around the mouth, covered by a great black-and-gray mustache.

"Many thanks, *mon enfant,*" said Tricot, taking the order from the boy's hand. "Come, will you join me at a little breakfast?"

The orderly officer mumbled his thanks and fled, wondering what manner of a person this Captain Tricot was who could get such action from the almost inaccessible army chiefs, and at such ungodly hours.

The commander of the fort in the environs where Von Kolendorf was being held, took one look at the order that his adjutant handed him and went out to greet Tricot. His eyes rested for a moment on the chest of the Basque and saw there two ribbons of the *medaille militaire* and the red bar and rosette of the commander of the Legion of Honor, standing very much alone among many other vacant loops, and he knew that a soldier was facing him. Tricot had worn only those three bits of color, but they were enough. The others had remained in the box.

"It is an honor to meet you, *mon capitaine,*" the fort commander said sincerely. "I have heard of you many times in army orders and from comrades who have served in Africa. You wish to see Von Kolendorf alone?"

"If you please," answered Tricot with a smile. He hoped he would find such officers as this sitting as the Council of War, but that was too much to ask.

Tricot's eyes widened just a bit when the former German commander was ushered into the room by a sentry with fixed bayonet.

"You may go," ordered the fort commander to the soldier, and then turned to Tricot. "I, too, will leave you," he added, and saluted and walked out.

For a moment or two Tricot and Von Kolendorf stood there facing each other across the desk of the fort commander. Silently, openly, appraisingly, they regarded each other. Then Tricot stuck out his right hand and shook that of Von Kolendorf.

"You look differently, Von Kolendorf," said Tricot, breaking the silence. "Younger, I think, and not so tall. Perhaps it is the civilian clothes that make you appear shorter."

The German smiled at the Basque.

"I do appear taller in uniform," he said. "Since my arrest they have not allowed me to change clothes. In fact, these clothes are the only things I have retained. Only through the kindness of the commander here was I able to write to you."

Tricot seated himself and motioned to Von Kolendorf to do likewise, then pulled out a pack of cigarettes and offered them. The German took one gratefully.

Von Kolendorf was dressed in expensive civilian clothes, and was clean shaven and immaculate. It would have been hard to guess his age. Offhand one might have said anywhere in the late thirties, although Tricot knew that this was a score of years short. The German's hair was the blond type that shows no gray until very late in life. His skin was clear and the blue eyes bright.

"Why did you send for me?" Tricot asked when the cigarettes were lighted.

Von Kolendorf sat straighter in his chair and looked the Basque in the eye.

"I have never forgotten you since our first meeting," he said quietly. "In fact, after the Knapp Putsch, in which I played a part, and had to flee from Germany, I considered where would be the best place to go. I remembered what you, as my prisoner in 1915, had said of the *Légion Etrangère* and decided that it was the last refuge of a soldier no longer wanted in his fatherland. I knew you were a soldier, and it was

among soldiers that I wanted to be. In the legion I also learned that I had not been wrong, and that the name of Paul Tricot stood for loyalty to the legion and that you had a great heart. That is why I have asked you to defend me, although it is now too late. However, I appreciate your effort. It is no fault of yours that the court-martial sat yesterday."

Von Kolendorf was smiling. His attitude was one of resignation. Tricot eyed him closely, and then spoke.

"Why, having been a great commander, did you commit the one sin that is the blackest in the eyes of the *Légion Etrangère*—desert?" he demanded.

Von Kolendorf's face flushed red and his body stiffened as if Tricot had struck him a blow with a whip. For a moment he sat motionless, then slowly arose and stood before the desk. His right hand was plunged into an inner pocket of his coat and he withdrew a large leather wallet, silently handing it to Tricot.

Without taking his eyes from the man before him, the Basque flipped the leather open, glanced down and saw the picture of a beautiful girl.

"So!" he said softly. "It was a lady! But legionnaires do not desert for such a reason, my friend."

The German's face was losing its color now.

"That is my daughter," he said simply.

"Name of a name of a sacred name, forgive me!" said Tricot. "This is different! You wish to tell me more?"

Von Kolendorf's hands were working nervously now.

"No," decided the Basque, "I have no right to ask. All you need to give me is your word as a legionnaire that it concerned your daughter and that is enough for old Tricot. A legionnaire's word, my friend!"

The word of a legionnaire is his most sacred possession. It is his honor. He may lie and steal and do anything else, but if he gives his word as a legionnaire it means that he tells the truth or will keep a vow unto death.

Von Kolendorf suddenly straightened to the stiff attention of the old-time Prussian officer and his heels came together with a click.

"As to-day I expect to be sentenced to transportation for at least ten years, you will honor me by listening to my story," he said, bowing.

"I shall be glad to listen, Von Kolendorf," said Tricot.

For a moment the German stood there as if marshaling his thoughts in order and deciding what should be said and what left unsaid.

"After the Knapp Putsch I found it necessary to leave Germany," he began. "I knew that I had been named among the war guilty, but also that the Allied investigators had found that I but carried out the orders of the general staff in Berlin, and had recommended that there be no trial. This was done, but my name is still remembered, as you can see," he added ruefully.

"Some people never forget," admitted Tricot.

"Although I was past the age limit I still could pass for less than forty years old, and so I managed to enlist in the *Légion Etrangère,*" went on Von Kolendorf. "After training at Saida I was shipped with a draft for Syria. As a legionnaire I was a success. But why not? I have been a soldier all my life.

"After the relief of Soueida I had a letter from Germany. It concerned my daughter. A madness came over me. I had money. I did the one act that I as an officer had never forgiven one of my soldiers—I deserted.

"Back in Germany, some months later, I came up with a certain man and meted out the punishment that he deserved. With this done I started back to Sidi Bel Abbes to stand trial."

He hesitated a moment and looked at

Tricot, who sat immobile, listening to the story.

"You will find in that pocketbook before you the letter I received in Syria," he said quietly. "You may read it. God knows others have done so since my arrest!"

There was great distress in the voice and Tricot knew that Von Kolendorf was baring his very soul. Tricot deliberately closed the leather case, taking a last look at the face of Von Kolendorf's daughter, and passed it back.

"Tricot is not in the habit of reading the personal letters of soldiers of the legion," he said quietly. "I have your word. That is sufficient for me. The word of a legionnaire!"

Von Kolendorf's face brightened for a moment. For the first time Tricot had addressed him as a legionnaire—included him among the corps of the lost and forgotten—men who stand by one another until death.

"I appreciate your kindness," said Von Kolendorf.

"Come, tell me how they happen to have you here instead of proceeding to Sidi Bel Abbes in Algeria?" Tricot asked.

"Well, as the French say—*'C'est la guerre,'*" the other replied, smiling rather hardly. "There was a civilian at Lille whom I imprisoned for profiteering from the German soldiers during the occupation there. He saw me and had me detained. This letter I offered you gave them a clew and they found I was a deserter. The civilian is powerful and now he demands that I be transported to French Guiana. He has brought political pressure on the minister of war. Yesterday I was tried. To-day there is the record of the occupation of Lille to be presented, and then sentence. I am doomed, my friend. You see, I have pleaded guilty to desertion."

"But the Allied commission decided that you but carried out orders and should not be tried," said Tricot.

"I know that," smiled Von Kolendorf with resignation. "They are not trying me for that but for desertion. To-day, however, they can, of course, produce all records against me when considering sentence. It will be done this morning. I fear the officers of this court care little for the *Légion Etrangère.*"

Tricot grunted and lighted another cigarette, offering the pack to Von Kolendorf. Then he pulled his great frame erect and walked to a window that looked out into the parade. At last he turned, and the German saw a smile on the big Basque's lips.

"So this court-martial cares little for the legion, my friend. We are dogs. Is that not the case?" he demanded.

"It has that appearance."

"Très bien!" smiled Tricot. "To-day they will meet a dog of a legionnaire named Paul Tricot. They will find that the lousy legionnaires fight! You, my comrades, will keep your mouth shut when they bring you before these officers. I, Tricot, the Basque, with twenty-five years in the *Légion Etrangère,* will be there—by direct permission of the minister of war. Then we shall see what we shall see!"

"But I have pleaded guilty," Von Kolendorf reminded him.

Tricot snorted, and tossed his cigarette out of the window.

"Since when," he demanded, "has the *Légion Etrangère* had to call upon officers of the metropolitan regiments to try legionnaires? I deny that you pleaded guilty. You are not being tried by the legion. That is all, my friend. I go now."

He stuck out his hand and shook that of Von Kolendorf in a great grip. There was assurance in every word and action of Tricot's.

The sentry outside the room where the Council of War was meeting in the great ministry of war was excited.

Something of great importance was to go on inside, he knew. Had not the deputy chief of staff with his executive officer, not to mention the chief of infantry, just entered and seated themselves in chairs an adjutant had brought? And now, down the corridor, was coming the head of the all-powerful second bureau, the heart of the army, with the little major who was one of his trusted assistants, carrying a big record book!

The officers assigned to the court-martial were highly nervous as they took their seats, awaiting the prisoner. This simple little court-martial had changed overnight; how, they did not know. These men who could assign them to the jungles of Tonkin or Senegal were saying nothing, but on their faces were looks of anticipation. Perhaps they wanted to see this former *Ober Kommander* von Kolendorf. The court did not know, but it was plainly worried.

The prisoner was brought in, a sentry on either side, the long bayonets brightly burnished. Behind them came a big man in uniform who walked to the foot of the long table where the Council of War sat, and snapped to attention.

As his great hand swept to the visor of his kepi, row upon row of medals jangled. The officers of the court stared. Here was a captain of the famous *Légion Etrangère* standing before them with more decorations than a marshal of France. His tunic was literally ablaze with decorations, not only of France but of her allies.

Mechanically the president of the court returned his salute.

"I am Paul Tricot, *capitaine,* fourth regiment, *Légion Etrangère,* appearing by permission of his excellency the minister of war, as counsel for the accused," said the Basque, passing forward the order.

The president stood up and bowed, and Tricot seated himself. He had glanced neither to right nor left when he had entered the room, but he was quite well aware of the fact that seated against the walls were old friends. He heard the deputy chief of staff, who had once been his battalion commander, whisper to the chief of infantry, whom he had known as a mere line captain: "The old Basque does not change with the years, does he, my old friend?" And the chief of infantry, who had recommended Tricot for some of those medals, smiled and said: "The youngest soldier of France is our Tricot."

Plainly nervous, the president of the court glanced down the long table to his junior members and cleared his throat. Then he proceeded. He was in a tough spot, performing before his superiors. If he made a miscue here it meant military oblivion for himself and all the other members of the court. And, worst of all, he had no inkling of what the wishes of these great ones of the staff were. If he had he would have leaped to carry them out—which was but natural. They, however, were letting the game be played another way.

"I accept for the record the statement of the civilian against the former *Ober Kommandant* Hans Ernst Folk-Trier von Kolendorf, a deserter of the *Légion Etrangère* under the name of Hans Ernst Folk, whose serial number is 78,976, now charged before this Council of War," he droned. "It concerns charges made by a citizen of Lille."

"I object!" barked Tricot like the explosion of a seventy-five. "The charge here is desertion from the legion and has nothing to do with conduct during the Great War."

Right then and there the president of the court made the worst error of his career. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen the *sous-chef d'état major général* grin, and he thought it was in derision. Now the deputy chief of staff had never grinned in derision in his life at anything Paul Tricot had

ever said or done. What had brought that broad smile to his face was to hear that old, familiar voice again, snapped out like the lash of a whip. It brought back days of long ago, which the president of the court could not realize, having never soldiered with the legion. The general was rubbing his nostrils now, and in his mind seeing other scenes—sweating, cursing men, battlefields strewn with dead and wounded, and a husky young Basque carrying on. A soldier you could always depend upon. His ideal of a fighting man.

The junior members of the court took their cue from the president and frowned upon Tricot. Von Kolendorf, the defendant, however, suddenly felt that all was not lost. Too many years had he been a high officer of the Imperial German army not to be able to sense the actions of those three generals with their subordinates, who sat against the wall. He knew they were friends of Tricot's and therefore of his own.

"The court will consider this evidence," decided the president. "The prisoner had admitted the guilt of desertion in the field and before the enemy, and now we shall consider the sentence. It is well that we have before us this dossier regarding his actions in the World War."

"Those charges of the War have been dropped, as it was found that the defendant but carried out a military order, and in so doing kept within the provisions of the military law of his own country," asserted Tricot, rising in his place.

"There is no such evidence before us, so we shall consider them just the same," frowned the president of the court.

"I call the chief of the second bureau of the French army to the stand!" Tricot said the words quietly, ominously, and the members of the court leaned forward in their chairs. This was unheard of! He had not asked the court to call him! He, a mere captain of the Foreign Legion, had issued an order for a man with the rank of a general of division to take the witness stand! He must be crazy!

The president of the court started to protest, but the general ignored him and sat down facing Tricot, a knowing smile on his face.

"Is it not true, *mon général,* that investigation has shown there is no reason to punish Hans Ernst Folk-Trier von Kolendorf in the matter of the deportation of Lille civilians during the War?" Tricot demanded, but in the voice now of one friend to another.

"That is true," replied the general.

"And you have brought with you the file in which this decision is entered?" asked the Basque.

"For the inspection of the court," replied the chief of intelligence, passing the dossier to the head of the table.

"That is all, and the thanks of the *Légion Etrangère,*" smiled Tricot. "You understand that you always have my personal wishes."

The court gasped. The chief of the second bureau was considered as hard-boiled and military as they came, and here was this captain from the Foreign Legion talking to him lightly, as one intimate friend to another. The president decided to get this court-martial over with as soon as possible.

"We will proceed to pass upon the sentence," he said. "The junior officer of the court will write his recommendation first, and the others follow according to rank."

He reached forward for the little ballot box in which the slips would be deposited. In that way no one knew what the other had voted. Tricot was well aware that the ballot would show "transportation to French Guiana."

The Basque was on his feet now, and his shoulders were squared. The medals tinkled and clashed as he arose, and

every one was looking at him. His eyes were fixed upon those of the nervous little colonel who was presiding.

"But it is not within the power of this court to pass sentence upon a soldier of the legion," he said in stern, even tones.

The man at the other end of the table stared and sat forward. This was beyond his understanding. The deputy chief of staff tipped back his chair with a look of pleasure on his face and chuckled aloud.

"This Council of War is properly constituted and ordered," insisted the puzzled officer, after several moments of silence.

"I do not question that," was the noncommittal reply of Tricot.

"Then we shall vote," decided the president.

The Basque held up his hand. Now his eyes were flashing.

"This court cannot, and as long as I am able, shall not, sentence a member of the enlisted *cadre* of the *Légion Etrangère!*"

The words had boomed in the room, and seemed to echo from the walls. The president of the court lost his head. This mere captain of the cursed Foreign Legion was trying to tell him what to do.

"We vote!" he almost shouted.

"And your vote will be tossed to the sparrows," retorted Tricot.

There was assurance supreme in the big man's tone, and the colonel hesitated. Perhaps, he decided, it might be well to inquire why the court could not sentence a legionnaire.

"Under what law do you say we cannot pass sentence?" he asked, rather weakly now.

From his tunic pocket Tricot withdrew a battered and much thumbed volume, and turned a few pages. As he faced the members of the court-martial there was absolute silence in the big room.

"I read to you from the laws of the legion," said Tricot. "These were drawn up in 1830, nearly one hundred years ago. They have survived the changes of the monarchy and of the third republic. They concern but the legion."

The chief of infantry nodded his head in understanding. He knew that little, finely printed book in Tricot's hand. The Bible of the legion! What can and can't be done.

"There is one paragraph that concerns this court-martial," went on the big man. "It reads:

"For any offenses committed against the army of France a legionnaire shall be tried only by officers of the legion. Officers of the legion, on the other hand, shall be amenable for trial by such officers of other arms as may be available if this be necessary."

Without comment he passed the book to the head of the long table.

"You will see the official imprint of the legion on the first page," he remarked. "It is official. I have called the chief of infantry as a witness to that effect. Since 1830 the legion has grown and we try our own officers as well as men. You will note that a provision is specifically made for a Council of War to be established at the headquarters of the *Légion Etrangère.*"

The president of the court was reading the book now. At last he glanced up. It was only then that he fully realized that those three generals at the side of the room were friends of this burly captain.

"But this has never been brought to our attention in France before," he offered lamely.

Tricot snorted, and drew himself up.

"The *Légion Etrangère* has always been able to discipline its own members," he retorted. "We do not wish now to allow others to do that for us."

"I have only your word that this law still exists," said the president of the court.

Tricot's tanned face became darker

and his eyes blazed. Before he could answer, a quiet voice spoke from the side of the room:

"As for that, I am here to state that it is still the law, and further, that if Paul Tricot should tell me that black was white, I would believe. It is my suggestion that you turn this prisoner over to the *Légion Etrangère* where he belongs. Let me tell this court that I am making it my personal affair to see who was responsible for this hasty, uncalled-for and, to my mind, diabolical court-martial of a man whom I at one time had the honor to oppose in battle, and whom I admired then. Tricot is right. You cannot sentence him to Devil's Island or anywhere else!"

The officers of the Council of War sat perfectly still. The voice was that of the deputy chief of staff—the second highest-ranking active officer in the army. True, he had spoken unofficially, and not from the witness chair; nevertheless, his words were the law itself to an officer.

The general had arisen, and stood there impatiently, looking at his watch.

"Come, are you paralyzed?" he demanded. "You keep me from lunch with the best soldier in the army, whom you have had the honor to meet—Captain Tricot," he snapped. "If you do not know what to do I will tell you. Make a finding that you have no jurisdiction in this matter, and turn the one charged with desertion over to the *Légion Etrangère,* which is represented in person by Paul Tricot. That done, get back to your duties. It is simple enough!"

Probably never before had a court-martial come to so abrupt an end, as the flustered colonel obeyed, all the time wondering what fate, in the line of a transfer, held for him.

Tricot turned and faced the general.

"For a moment it was like being back serving under the best major who ever went out to Morocco," he said. "Always has the situation been well in hand when you were on the scene."

"Thank you, *mon vieux*, but hasten, for you cannot hold up the affairs of the army all day," laughed the chief of staff.

Von Kolendorf stood behind Tricot, very straight, and only lacked the uniform to set off his soldierly carriage.

"And bring along our former opponent, the one known as 'Legionnaire Folk,' for I have always wanted to know about that slip-up he made in the Champagne in 1916," smiled the general. "I dare say that when he gets back to Africa he won't have a chance to dine with generals for some six months."

He laughed and winked broadly at the chief of infantry.

"No," admitted Tricot, "I think for six months he will be confined to camp. Some may want to be lenient with him, but I shall insist upon six months."

"Why?" demanded the chief of staff.

"Why? Because must I not now become a dilletante and go to lunches and dinners and galas with my superiors and wear all these heavy medals and look like a man who spoils for a fight?" sighed Tricot. "Yes, he must pay for putting me out. If he gives me no trouble on the way back, perhaps we can forgive him and send him to the lines instead. Yes, that would be better. The place for a soldier."

"Thank you, *mon capitaine,*" said Von Kolendorf, and they turned to leave the room. "But not a soldier—a legionnaire!"

"Yes," said Tricot, "a legionnaire. You have suffered enough. You are a legionnaire and you shall go to a regiment. Come, old cabbage"—he turned toward the deputy chief of staff—"show old Tricot how well you eat in this Paris of yours, and the good wines you must drink. Even legionnaires must eat."

Captain Leighton H. Blood's stories appear regularly in these pages.

When a Cowboy Says, in a Deadly, Even Tone, "Reckon I Didn't Make Myself Plain"—Watch Out!

LOST VALLEY

By DALLAS BOYNTON

IT was just as he was beginning to admit the grim fact that the big woods had him licked that Sandy Ruggles, top-hand on the Bar T, caught sight of the cabin.

A groan of relief escaped his lips. After a man has lived on berries and flagroot for a week, tearing his way through the forest growth with nothing more than his two bare hands, the prospect of a square meal and a sheltered bunk releases feelings not easily checked.

Painfully he forced his long, lean legs across that last hundred yards of clearing to the cabin door, and knocked with a red, swollen hand.

"Halloo! Anybody home?"

The logs of the cabin gave back only the thin crackle of bark drying in the sun. Again he called; the silence held.

He reached for the door latch.

"Drop that paw!"

From behind, a roaring bull voice split the stillness. Sandy wheeled. Rounding the corner of the cabin was the hulking figure of a giant woodsman, his face livid with wrath, in his hand a blunt six-gun.

"How the hell did you git here?"

Lurching up in furious strides, the woodsman jammed his gun into Sandy's ribs and snaked the Colt from his holster: "Gimme that iron!"

Dully the cowman's face colored through his fatigue.

'Sa-a-a-y, stranger! Ain't you got me wrong? I'm just a stray that's drifted from the herd. Been on the trail for most a week now with no grub to speak of, an' not another mile left in me to save a right eye. If you can spare a bunk an' a meal till I get my legs back, I'll be slopin'."

"You'll be slopin'!" The roar of the woodsman came back from the mountainside in a booming echo. "Cowboy, you ain't leavin' this valley!"

Sandy coolly searched the black, evil little eyes glittering into his. The countenance of the man was uncommonly brutal and repulsive. A severed nerve had loosed one cheek so that it sagged low, exposing a blood-shot eyeball. The heavy uneven jowl was smudged with a stubble of black beard. Above, his long, unkempt hair lay matted in a thick black thatch.

"How come I ain't leavin'?" asked Sandy evenly.

The other snorted. "You ain't answered my question! How'd you git here?"

Sandy eyed the man estimatively, a little mystified by the intensity of his anger at so slight a cause as the stumbling upon his cabin in the woods. Manifestly, there was more here than appeared. Sandy had sat in too many poker games in the Bar T bunk house not to know when a man was tipping his hand.

The lanky plainsman calmly folded his arms; his words issued in a lazy drawl:

"Who's askin'?"

Flame whorled in the other's eyes as when a furnace door is opened and the cool air meets the hot coals; the voice thickened to a frenzied whisper:

"How'd you git here?"

Sandy, unmoved, leaned his long frame against the cabin; his level blue eyes peered out from his bronzed face placid as glacier ice. With a careless gesture he pushed his big sombrero to the back of his head.

"Stranger, where I come from, if a man wants information he says 'please.' I got nothin' to hide. I'd as soon tell how I come here as wink an eye. But I'm not tellin' a thing at the point of a gun. If you cal'late on learnin', yuh best bet is to drop that hardware."

There was a moment when the silence of the valley tightened like the strings of a harp; the shriek of a jay was as a trumpet blast. A stray puff of wind lifted the scarlet kerchief at Sandy's neck and flapped it lazily against his smooth, sun-browned cheek.

Then slowly the gun of the woodsman dropped.

"Spill it!"

Sandy shoved his hands listlessly into his pants pockets. His easy drawl flowed on:

"There's a peak up yonder that got itself all wrapped up in a piece of fog so as a pard o' mine couldn't see it, and he tried to drive an air bus straight through. He's up there now—what's left of him. I got bucked off into a spruce and climbed down without a scratch. Figured that brook yonder would sooner or later meet a river an' I was just followin' it back to Wyoming."

"Wyoming!" A bitter, raucous laugh broke through the woodsman's wrath. "Cowboy, you're a powerful long way from Wyoming, an' what's more, a mile down, that stream goes underground! What brung you to Canada?"

Sandy shifted his feet. "Ain't finished my yarn yet. Jim Barnes, who owns the Bar T, sends me to town after a wad o' jack to bind a cattle deal. When my bronc pulls a tendon, an old pard o' mine offers to fly me back to the ranch in his air wagon to git me there at twelve noon when the old man has to have his dough. We was no more'n started when the fog come down an' we was flyin' in circles for a day an' a night till we crashed up yonder. An' now no one back to the Bar T knows

but what I sloped with the boss's jack. They'll be sayin' I'm just a plain double-crossin' pizen cuss beside which a horse thief is an angel from the stars. I got to git me back to Wyoming pronto."

The black brows of the woodsman gathered. "Cowboy, you ain't a-goin' to git back to Wyoming!"

"No?"

"No. No man leaves this valley, for two reasons. One is, I'll salt him first, an' the other is, he'll kill himself tryin' to find the way out. Rope swinger, you've just hit trail's end!"

Sandy studied the dark, twisted face. Was the jasper loco? Did he figure to hold a man prisoner by force?

When the cowman spoke his tone was even. "Reckon I didn't make myself plain. I'm gittin' back to Wyoming pronto. It's the old man's jack."

A taunting sneer fled from the woodsman's twisted lips. "Seein' is believin'."

Sandy flushed; then he reached inside his shirt and drew forth a fat leather wallet. He made to open it.

Quick as the strike of a rattler, the hand of the woodsman shot out and snatched the wallet away. Sandy dived after it. As he bent, there was a thump and a flash; the ground swam; he met it solidly——

A lump began to rise where the butt of the woodsman's six-gun had caught him behind the ear.

Night had fallen when Sandy again opened his eyes. Above him was a roof of logs. He could smell bacon frying. Groping to locate himself, he lifted his head. Flames were leaping in the fireplace of the cabin. Near by bent the woodsman cooking supper.

Sandy dropped back on the bunk. He remembered now. The woodsman was threatening to hold him prisoner, and to keep him from getting back to the Bar T with the old man's jack!

Couldn't go that! Got to show up back at the Bar T. They'd sure take him for all kinds of a skunk, if he didn't. An' the old man would be just about bankrupt to boot. A squarer-shootin' hombre than Jim Barnes never drew breath. Give a waddy better than an even break every time. Couldn't play him dirt like this.

The woodsman had heard him stir. "Come an' git it! I don't aim to hand feed yuh."

Sandy sat up. His head felt big as a watermelon, but was reasonably clear. He rose and crossed to the birch-log table where the woodsman had spread the meal.

The latter, eating voraciously, nodded to a pan of steaming beans with an unspoken invitation for the cowman to help himself. "I'm easy to git on with once you git used to me. I gotta hunch you an' me is gonna hitch fine."

Sandy heaped his plate with beans. "Don't know what you call hitchin'. You sure got started off plumb hostyle."

The woodsman jerked his head. "Just a temper I lose quick, I'm all right long as you don't cross me. You'll like it here in winter. Plenty o' game."

Sandy noncommittally mouthed a slice of bannock. " 'Pears you know the country. Been in here long?"

"Long enough to get a yen for a little company. Which is why I ain't closed you out two hours ago. Play cards?"

"Some."

The big bruiser winked good-humoredly. "After supper we'll have a game o' blackjack. Been playin' nothin' but solo for three years."

Sandy imperturbably stirred his coffee. It seemed to him now that the big fellow was trying to curry favor. This was about as inexplicable as his first anger. Must be loco sure enough.

The cowman's eyes roamed reflectively about the walls of the cabin as he ate. He noted a side of bacon, a sack of flour and a box of canned beans. These, it was apparent, did not grow in the Canadian woods.

Idly he took a swig of coffee. "You can your own beans?"

The woodsman poised a fork in mid-air. The implication in Sandy's words did not escape him. "Cowboy, that food was packed in over a trail you ain't goin' to see right away."

Sandy swept the speaker with a calculating eye. "Don't like to call any man a liar over his own board; but, stranger, you're just askin' it. I figure to be movin' down that trail just about forty-eight hours from now."

The woodsman's grimy paws dropped to the table. "Cowboy, it's no use. You an' me has got to git acquainted."

"That goes both ways."

The eyes of the two met in a long, unflinching stare.

When the table had been cleared and the supper pans washed, the woodsman nodded toward a shelf in the corner.

"Pack o' cards there. Reach me 'em down."

Sandy turned to comply. As he picked up the pack, his glance fell on a handbill beneath. He picked it up.

WANTED FOR MURDER

$15,000 REWARD

Walter E. Dearden, alias "Drop-cheek" Maloney, alias Wallie, "the Slugger," alias "Dakota Jim" Deane

Above was a photograph, full face and profile. Sandy had no difficulty in identifying it as that of the woodsman whose hideout he had found. He rapidly ran his eye over the descriptive details of the triple assassination of a sheriff, a district attorney and a police stool pigeon in a far Western city.

The raw accents of the gunman's voice broke in upon him: "What's the matter? You blind?"

Sandy smiled thinly. "No, I can see."

He gathered up the cards and turned. The gaze of the two locked. Then Dearden's dark face broke into a leer.

"Now maybe we understands each other. Cowboy, you see why it is no man's leavin' this valley alive. I'm lettin' no one out to send back the redcoats. Now you've crashed into my hideout, no harm's done long as you stay. But if you ever try to lam out" —he leaned his big hulk over the table —"bronc-buster, I'm a-tellin' you, I'm bad."

Swift appraising lights played in Sandy's cool eyes. "I saw a bad man once. Some one had slipped a hemp necktie round his neck an' strung him up to a tree."

A snarl fled from Dearden's greasy lips. "An' I saw lots o' bimbos who got theirselves all filled up with lead from talkin' out o' turn." He slowly shuffled the pack. "There'll be a certain district attorney who leaves office come next spring. By then, things will have blown over so you an' me can make our way out, an' I can ship for Shanghai. But till then, I'm not showin' my face anywheres. Not this face." He touched his sagging cheek. "I'm too easy spotted."

Sandy casually lighted a cigarette. "I thought this was a game o' cy-ards."

Dearden dealt two cards apiece, face up and face down.

"If you've been on the trail a week," the gangster went on deliberately, "you got a good look at the country, an' can figure what your chances are o' makin' your way out. You got ranges on all sides risin' straight up a coupla miles in the air an' snow on top. If you feel like suicidin' by tryin' to climb 'em, that's your hard luck. The pass is somethin' you could look for a lifetime an' never find. An' besides me, the man don't live who can tell you. This is Lost Valley, bozo, an' men don't come this way. You could go for three hundred miles in any direction an' not find another human."

Something across the cabin drew Sandy's gaze. It fell on the window at

Dearden's back. Pressed against the glass was a human face. At discovery, the eyes lighted with alarm. Then they vanished and the window was black with night again.

Unconcernedly Sandy turned back to the game. "Gimme another cy-ard."

The face at the window—who's had it been?

After he had crawled into his bunk, after the lights had been put out, the embers in the fireplace banked and the windows opened, admitting the low moan of the wind in the evergreens, Sandy stared into the darkness, listening.

What had become of the man? Would he return? What was he up to? If he meant good, why didn't he knock and come in as a stranger normally would when stumbling upon a cabin in the woods?

The darkness gave back no answer. But it was plain to Sandy that another besides himself had made the discovery of an inhabited cabin in Lost Valley. And would Dearden, if he found out, attempt to hold both prisoners? The odds would be against him. More likely he would solve the situation by plugging a bullet into one or the other of them!

Gradually his ears, straining to catch the sound of a footstep in the night, relaxed their vigilance. No longer could sleep be staved off. He rolled over, pulled his blanket around his shoulders and slipped away into oblivion.

Dearden was up first and had breakfast well under way before Sandy opened his eyes. When they had finished eating, the cowman helped himself to a handful of cigarettes.

"Goin' out to take a look-see."

Dearden unconcernedly threw a log on the fire. "Go as far as you like. You'll be back."

Sandy sauntered outside. The morning sun was showering its gold into Lost Valley. He paused, struck by the beauty of the scene—the long lances of light spiking the tremulous larches, the spires of the spruces rising densely, tier on tier, up the precipitous flanks of the ranges, the gray desolation above the timberline and the ridges of snow cameoed sharply against the blue. The air had a rare limpidity and was fragrant with the moist breath of countless balsams.

To his plainsman's eyes, accustomed to the wide, measureless sweep of open prairies, the mountains, crowding down so closely, gave him a curious shut-in feeling. The valley, though perhaps a half mile in width, was, he saw, little better than a crevice among the massive ridges. The ascent on either side was sheer. Wherever foothold was obtainable, the evergreens, their branches interlacing, made a barrier miles in width.

There would be no easy egress from such a place, he very quickly appreciated, except by way of a pass. His glance swept the sky line in search of a saddle or depression which might give clew to a defile. But he detected none.

Two things he knew he must find out. The identity and whereabouts of the man he had seen at the window the previous night, and the course of the stream which he had followed into Lost Valley. It was the latter that engaged him first. If Dearden were right, if the stream did go underground, then the valley was a trap, a blind alley, a pocket in the hills from which escape in any direction, save that from which he had come, could be gained only over the range tops.

He crossed the clearing to the brook and started to trace its windings. It was perhaps an hour later that he stood by the mouth of a black cavern into which the water, with a gurgle and roar, poured madly and vanished from sight. Above, as far as his eyes could reach, towered a forest-clad peak. He knew then that Dearden had spoken the truth. It was trail's end.

He faced about and plodded thoughtfully back. Not without good reason,

he saw, had Dearden given him the freedom of the valley. Obviously, the gangster had wanted him to see how hopeless was the situation should escape be attempted.

To the north, the point from which he had come, was only the prospect of frozen tundras with never a sign of human habitation; to the east, west, and south, the mountains, massive, desolate, and forbidding.

Without food, without equipment—ax, rope, pack, blanket, without heavy clothes! Ruefully he kicked his high-heeled cowman's boots, which were already splitting apart from rough usage on trails for which they were never intended; doubtfully he eyed his thin flannel shirt as he thought of the sub-zero temperature on the range tops—Dearden was right, the attempt would be suicide.

Then force the gangster at the point of a gun to guide him out? Dearden would only say "Shoot!" The death house was waiting for him outside anyway.

Yet there was Jim Barnes going bankrupt, and himself being called the meanest kind of a thief—no careless, two-gun hombre riding the outtrail and taking his chances shot for shot as they came, but a sneakin' skunk, double-crossing a friend. He winced at the thought. Pass or no pass he was going to crash his way through to Wyoming and the Bar T!

As he neared the clearing where Dearden's cabin stood, his step grew cautious. Finding a thicket from which he had clear view of the lodge, he took cover and sat down to watch.

It was while he was hidden here, his senses quickened to sights and sounds that would indicate Dearden's whereabouts or the approach of a stranger, that his eye caught a movement in the evergreens behind the cabin. His first instinct was to pull back deeper into the undergrowth.

Again he saw the branches stir. A deer? A mountain sheep coming down to water? The boughs parted. The head that appeared was that of a man!

Slowly the figure began creeping from cover. Sandy grew rigid as he watched; his heart thundered in his ears. The stranger edged forward, revealing, as he did so, a squat figure in a bulky mackinaw and bearing a tremendous pack.

The newcomer made directly for the cabin. Sandy's breath caught. To his astonishment, he saw the stranger, without perceptible pause, push open the door and disappear within.

Sandy's eyes quickened with swift, excited lights. He broke cover and ran lightly in pursuit. Outside the lodge he paused. He could hear confused sounds within. Creeping toward a window, he raised his head to peer inside.

Dearden's booming voice assailed his ears! "Come in, cowboy. We got company."

Hiding as best he might his chagrin at being discovered, Sandy turned and entered the cabin. The stranger was kneeling on the floor, bending a swarthy Chinook face over the rawhide fastenings of his pack. At sight of Sandy he sat back on his haunches and stared dumbly.

The cowman recognized the face he had seen pressed against the pane the night before.

"Meet the rope artist, Pete," jeered Dearden. "Dropped in on me, he did, after trying to ride herd in the clouds. Tell him how to get out of Lost Valley, Pete! Tell him!"

The Siwash, ignoring the command, returned stolidly to his task with a low guttural, and shortly the pack began to disgorge flour, bacon, sugar, and other supplies.

Dearden's line of communication with a trading post, Sandy saw! A half-breed Indian!

The gangster resumed his taunting

strain: "He don't answer, hey, cowboy? An' why? 'Cause he can't talk, he can't hear, he can't write an' he can't read. Maybe you can find out something from him, hey, bronc buster?"

He broke off in a boisterous laugh. He appeared to relish his jest hugely.

Meanwhile Sandy's wits were working. The breed, he saw, had probably been overwhelmed with surprise when he looked in the window and saw Dearden, the recluse, entertaining a stranger. Not knowing what might be in the wind, he had hidden out in the woods till the coast was clear.

And here was a man who knew the pass. If Dearden could not be forced to show the way out, the half-breed might be, provided hands could be laid on a gun. Furtively Sandy fingered his empty holster.

Sitting down at the table, Dearden tore off a strip of wrapping paper and began to write laboriously with the stub of a pencil.

"Have to tell them back at the post to double the order," he explained. "Didn't figure there would be two of us denned up in Lost Valley for the winter."

Sandy grunted. "You and who else?"

"You'll know come spring."

The gangster winked and handed the note to the Indian who stuffed it in the upper pocket of his mackinaw.

Sandy watched the procedure reflectively.

"Couldn't talk, hear, write, or read," he mused. "How did a waddy figure to get anything out of him about the way back to Wyoming and the Bar T?"

Sandy had not, however, been raised alongside an Indian reservation without learning something of the red man's ways. He watched for his opportunity and found it that afternoon when the Siwash sat himself down on the bench in front of the fireplace to smoke the cigar Dearden had given him. The two were alone.

Sandy joined him and began to press him for information in sign language. The distance to the nearest trading post was the point of chief concern. He dug out paper and pencil and, while the Indian watched interestedly, sketched a mountain range with the sun rising behind, and another with the sun setting, and in the valley between the figure of a man walking toward a distant village beside a river.

Then, bit by bit, he tried to convey to the stolid Indian that the picture was intended to represent a day's hike, and across his knee with his first and second fingers he made the traditional sign of a man walking. The Siwash looked on glumly, betraying no sign of comprehension.

Again and again, Sandy repeated his motions, pointing to the sun shining above them, to the woods behind the cabin whence he had first seen the Indian emerge, and to the breed himself. Slowly the red man caught his meaning. He grunted. Sandy held up the drawing and one by one opened the fingers of his other hand. Pete understood. He held up three fingers.

Sandy's pulse quickened with a sense of triumph. It had been slow work, but he had learned what he wanted to know. Three days on the trail to the nearest village! Eighty—ninety miles! That was easily done.

But his triumph was short-lived. The stillness was suddenly shattered by a wild roar:

"Finding out something, hey? Cut that out!"

Sandy turned. Dearden was entering the cabin, his loose lips gushing a stream of lurid oaths. The six-gun in his hand coughed and the sketch the cowman was holding in his hand parted with a rip.

The murderer lunged forward, death glittering in his eye.

"Scum!" he bellowed, ramming the muzzle of the gun into the breed's ribs

while the latter recoiled in terror. "You tryin' to talk?"

There was a vivid moment when the balances of life trembled, when the finger on the trigger twitched hungrily.

But Dearden's anger ran itself out in a flood of black profanity. Slowly he drew back the gun, while he transfixed the Indian with a heavy, malevolent scowl.

Sandy, standing up, eyed the weapon intently. Possessed of it, he could tie up Dearden and force the Siwash to guide him out of Lost Valley!

He did not hesitate. Quick as the leap of a grayling, his arms shot out and his sinewy hands closed on Dearden's gun hand. Back and around he yanked it with a vicious twist that staggered the big bruiser and brought a howl of pain from his lips. As the finger on the trigger contracted in a spasm of agony, the gun spurted and Sandy felt the hot breath of powder along his arm. But his grip only tightened, and with a quick wrench he forced the pistol from the gangster's fingers.

The weapon clattered to the floor, yet Sandy dared not release his hold. He circled furiously, pulling the arm with him and exerting his full strength to fling the big man free while he dived for the gun. But it was like trying to rock a mountain; his best effort did no more than momentarily unbalance Dearden.

Seeing his chances slipping, and realizing that he could win only through surprise and speed, Sandy suddenly let go the hand of his opponent and dived for the gun. Here the Siwash, who had been standing petrified, came to life and, divining the cowman's intent, kicked the pistol out of reach just as Sandy's fingers touched it.

The next instant Dearden was upon Sandy. Choking with fury, his lips loosing hoarse, incoherent ravings, the burly outlaw tore in, his flailing arms trying to close with the cowman in a clinch where superior weight would count.

But Sandy was alert to his intent. Circling, dodging, ducking, he managed to keep free of those clutching hands while he rained lightning blows on the big hulk of a body, ever seeking to land a telling punch. It all, however, was like hail bounding off concrete.

Then, as Sandy backed away, the Siwash, watching his chance, stuck out a foot and tripped him. The cowman reeled—and Dearden had him!

Blindly Sandy struck, twisting, slipping, kicking; but the massive bulk of his beefy antagonist bore him down. Like the coils of some mighty python, Sandy felt the arms of Dearden closing irresistibly around him. Tighter grew the hold, until Sandy's own arms were pinioned fast, and the ponderous bulk of the other, full on his chest, was crushing out his breath.

He began to gasp for air; his eyes started. A moment later he felt the draw of a leather thong about his ankles. That would be the work of the Siwash. Dearden shifted his bulk and Sandy sensed the touch of a loop of rawhide around one wrist, now the other. The two were jerked tight.

Only then did Dearden rise. Once on his feet, he bent, grasping Sandy by the collar and hauling him upright.

"You louse!"

With the flat of his hand, he caught the cowman a stinging blow on the side of the head. Bound hand and foot as he was, Sandy dropped like a felled ox. For a moment or two his head buzzed like a swarm of bees. He had a vague sense of retreating footsteps.

He lay motionless.

Gradually his head cleared. The cabin was uncannily still; the feeling that he was alone grew stronger. He sat up and looked around. The pair had gone. For what? To arrange some fiendish death for him?

He saw Dearden's hunting knife lying on the table. Dragging himself across the floor, he pulled himself erect with the aid of a chair, and his groping fingers captured the knife. His eyes, swiftly searching the cabin, caught sight of a crevice in the stones of the fireplace, and, backing up to it, he inserted the handle of the knife to hold the blade steady while he ran the rawhide at his wrists along its sharp edge.

The thong parted; he pulled his hands free. In another moment he had cut the bonds at his ankles. Frantically his glance swept the cabin in quest of a gun. But Dearden had secreted his weapons well. The mackinaw of the Siwash was, however, hanging from a peg on the wall.

At sight of it Sandy's eyes lighted with a vivid thought. He tiptoed over and ran his brown fingers into the pocket where he had seen the Indian place Dearden's order for supplies. He removed the paper, found a stub of pencil and wrote a few hurried lines, and then returned the slip to the pocket of the mackinaw.

When Dearden and the Indian came in, Sandy was seated back to the wall, idly puffing a cigarette.

Dearden effectively masked any surprise he felt at finding his captive loosed from his bonds.

His voice was snarling. "You work fast, cowboy!"

"Lightnin' an' me is twin brothers."

"So? Well, me and the breed has just been pickin' a spot to lay you out. You had your lesson, or have I gotta brutalize you?"

Sandy blew a careless puff. "You said ask him. I was."

"I said he couldn't read, and I meant he couldn't read," roared Dearden. "Pictures or words all the same. He can't read. Do you get me, or have I gotta plug you?"

Sandy nodded. "I got you the first time."

"Well, then, that's that."

It was an hour or so later when the Indian slipped on his mackinaw and prepared to back-trail to the trading post.

Dearden pointed to the upper pocket. "Got my order O. K.?"

The hand of the breed went to the pocket, and for an instant it seemed to Sandy that his heart stopped. Death was lurking in those squat fingers as they began probing. They came out—empty, but with the Siwash nodding affirmatively.

"Good!" grunted Dearden.

Sandy took a long, slow drag on his weed.

A moment later the Indian stomped from the cabin and vanished into the evergreens at the rear.

Dearden, standing at the window, watched the thick forest growth close behind him. "Cowboy, there goes your guide."

Sandy gave a quiet chuckle. "It's me an' you with him next trip."

"Me an' who?"

"I cal'late you heard me. You'll be eatin' beef again, Dearden, before the month's out."

Dearden grunted. "You talk large, cowboy, but before I tastes fresh beef again, you're goin' to eat plenty beans here in Lost Valley. Now tell me, are you goin' to play the game, or do I have to blow you out here and now?"

Sandy shrugged.

"Far as I'm concerned, the game's all played. I ain't liftin' another hand against you."

The other leaned close. "Meanin' what?"

"Meanin' things are goin' as they lay."

The two eyed each other fixedly a long moment before Dearden turned away with a noncommittal grunt.

It was a week later that Sandy, angling for trout, heard a rustle in the

bush and glanced up to find himself looking in the muzzle of a gun in the hand of a redcoat of the Royal Canadian Mounted.

"All right, Dearden," said the trooper grimly.

"I'm not Dearden," Sandy hastened to reply. "I'm the hombre that wrote. Dearden's up the valley stalkin' some deer."

The Mounty pulled out paper and pencil. "Let's see your moniker."

When Sandy had written his name, the redcoat took a scrap of paper from his pocket and began to compare the handwriting of the two.

The slip which he held was the one on which Dearden had written his order for supplies. Below appeared the following lines in Sandy's hand:

To the Serg't Royal Canadian M. P.:
The bearer of this note knows the hide-out of Walter E. Dearden, alias "Drop-cheek" Maloney, wanted for murder. Reward of $15,000. Come and get him.

S. Ruggles.

The Mounty, satisfied, nodded. "You're the bozo, O. K."

Sandy blue eyes lighted. "Dearden said the Indian couldn't read. So I tacked that on the end when they weren't lookin'. The breed didn't know but what it was an order for a side o' bacon. Let's rope Dearden and get goin'. I'm due back to Wyoming and the Bar T pronto."

Another Dallas Boynton story will appear soon.

TELEVISION SOON

IF you were to read in this magazine a fiction story in which television played an important rôle, you would immediately assign it to that class of stories known as pseudo-scientific, or at any rate the kind laid in the vague future. And if such a story came into this office to be considered, we'd do the same. Thoughtlessly, we'd think: "This probably takes place fifty years from now, supposedly, or in the next century, with people eating pellets instead of roast beef, and airplanes in everybody's back yard."

Yet television is an established fact. Experiments are going on all over the world right now. Satisfactory tests have been made over long distances. There have even been public demonstrations. The curtain is about to ring up on television, as it rang up on the telephone, the movies, the talkies, aviation, and radio. Not long ago, M. H. Aylesworth, president of the National Broadcasting Company, predicted that television will be broadcast like, and with, radio in three years.

In 1934! Think of it! In your home, in your neighborhood theater, and even in your office, the television apparatus will be playing its important part in no time. For it is certain that television will not only be linked to radio, but to everything else possible. Did you know that television rights are being mentioned in book, dramatic and talkie contracts in many cases? This is the time—if indeed it is not almost too late—to realize and plan how your business will be affected or improved by the dawn of the new era! Wise people are looking ahead.

THE TEXAN

By Frank E. Barbour

IT wuz back in the years of the mossy-horned steers,
When cattle ran wild on the range;
And a lonely cowhand could 'a' built up a brand
With no one to think it wuz strange.

Like the West, I wuz wild. When a very young child
I could tie up a cow by its tail.
By the time I wuz ten I had killed a few men
And the sheriff wuz ridin' my trail.

I wuz quick on the draw and I ate my meat raw
And could shoot out the eye of a bird.
Then I threw a wide loop and I soon had a group
Of wild punchers a-workin' my herd.

I wuz barely sixteen and wuz gettin' right mean
When I met up with Billy the Kid,
And I went for my gun; it wuz me or him, one,
But he took to the timber and hid.

I wuz little, but, my! I wuz sure a hard guy,
And the life that I led it wuz tough.
There's an end to my tale. I broke out of jail
And decided I had 'most enough.

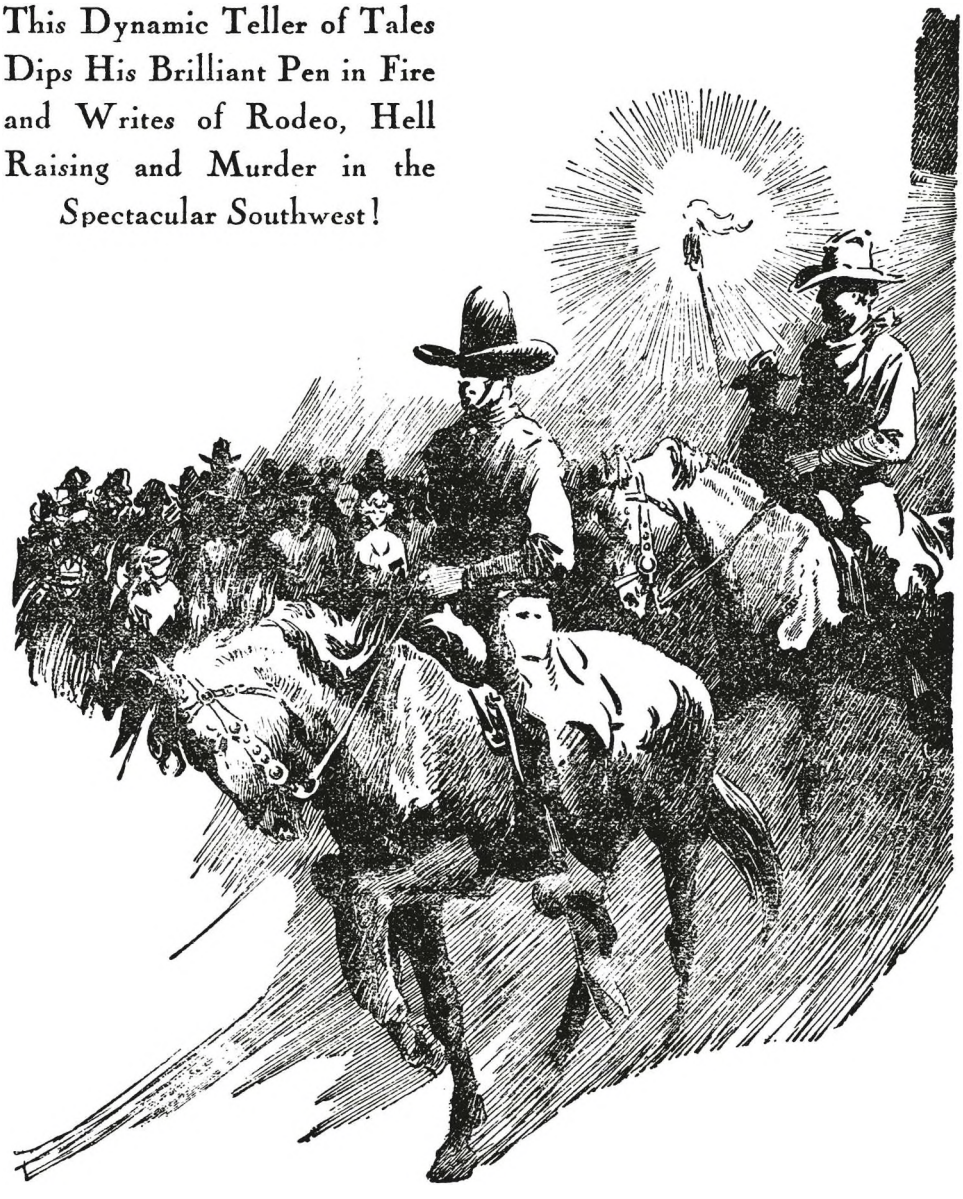
So I bought this hotel, but I ain't doin' well.
Oh, I see you're beginnin' to yawn.
Well, you youngsters all think it's not me, but the drink,
When I talk about times that are gone.

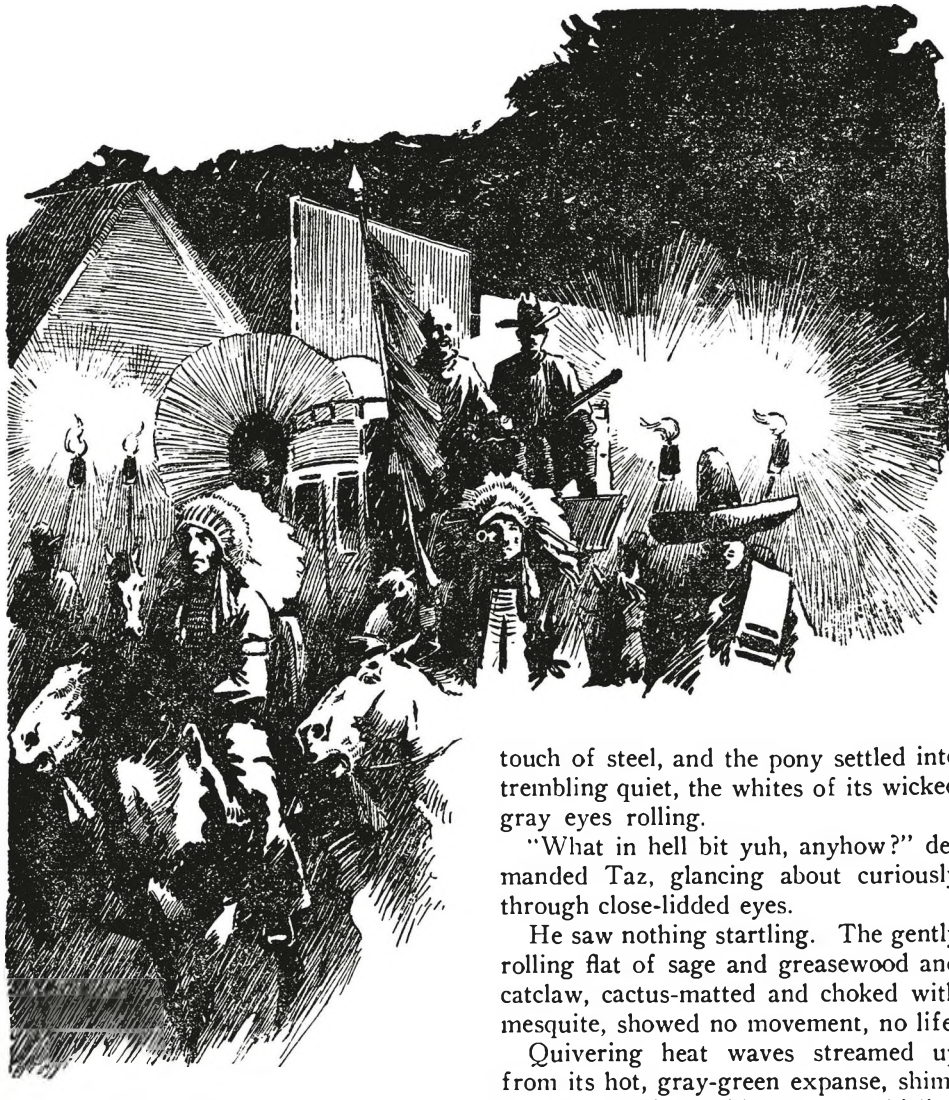
Oh, I know when I'm lit that I stretch it a bit,
But, fellow, I'm tellin' you true.
In them days you'd 'a' died if you told me I lied.
Why, thanks! Here's a-lookin' at you!

The Man *from* Bandera

By EDGAR L. COOPER

This Dynamic Teller of Tales Dips His Brilliant Pen in Fire and Writes of Rodeo, Hell Raising and Murder in the Spectacular Southwest!





CHAPTER I.

AN EXTRAORDINARY SHOT.

THE pony snorted, and stopped suddenly! Its delicate nostrils trembled nervously. It executed an abrupt about face. Alkali dust spat from under its hoofs.

Taz Benteen, tightening thigh muscles and knees instinctively, took up his rein slack and gave Jerky, the piebald, a touch of steel, and the pony settled into trembling quiet, the whites of its wicked gray eyes rolling.

"What in hell bit yuh, anyhow?" demanded Taz, glancing about curiously through close-lidded eyes.

He saw nothing startling. The gently rolling flat of sage and greasewood and catclaw, cactus-matted and choked with mesquite, showed no movement, no life.

Quivering heat waves streamed up from its hot, gray-green expanse, shimmering, dancing, iridescent; a whirling dust devil was winding its mad, erratic course across the meandering track ahead. Somewhere a chaparral cook cried stridently.

"Hell!"

Benteen's knees pressed against the saddle skirts as with a shrug he sent the nervous piebald moving on up the sandy trail. The spotted horse snorted again, and then Taz saw.

Heavy bodies were rising from the llano floor, winging ponderously and clumsily aloft, flapping about, circling overhead, reluctant to leave.

Benteen turned his pony off the track at a tangent, heading through the thickets toward the vultures' magnet. His coal-black eyes had squinted a trifle more.

In a little opening some hundreds of yards away, on the scabby alkali ground, the body of a man lay, face down. Just beyond, hidden in a pear thicket, an albino pony lay dead on its side, its body showing the marks of the black sky scavengers. It was saddled and bridled and carried a strapped war bag behind the cantle, and had been shot through the head.

Taz Benteen, tossing the reins over his piebald's ears, went on foot the few remaining steps, his questing black eyes on the inert shape of the man, searching, appraising, studying.

The earth and the llano had its messages for such as he—messages which easily might have been lost or overlooked by ninety-nine out of a hundred men. Warily, noiselessly, on the balls of his feet, he moved his jetty eyes flicking over the hot, hard soil.

He stopped beside the body, squatted on his heels, gently turned the dead man over and opened his blue shirt. He had been shot from behind, in the back, the bullet going in under the left shoulder blade.

A pistol lay on the ground near by, a .38 Frontier Colt on a .45 frame. Benteen gingerly picked up the gun, examined it. Two cartridges had been fired in the cylinder. A string tied the trigger back against the guard.

Taz carefully replaced the pistol where he had picked it up, and felt in his shirt pocket for tobacco sack and papers.

The dead man was little more than a youth—a tall, slender youngster probably in his early twenties. His hair was rusty-colored, almost blond, and inclined to be curly; his putty-colored features were clean cut and handsome through their layers of tan, even in death.

Glazed blue eyes stared unseeingly behind half-open lids; from his sagging mouth a dribble of blood had run down his chin, and dried. A gaudy neckerchief was loosely knotted around his throat, a pair of corduroy breeches, bleached almost white, incased legs and thighs, their ends stuck in short, eight-inch, spurred range boots. A few feet away a worn Stetson, with a carved leather band, lay on its side.

Taz Benteen carefully turned the youth back over as he had found him, got to his feet, and moved noiselessly away into the bush, after examining the horse. Ears and eyes alert to the faintest sound or sign, the rider followed his circle. And a hundred yards on up the llano trail he found what he was looking for.

Hoof marks made by iron shoes, marks of a fall—shown by the ground and a broken sage—reddish-brown spots now dry, sucked in by the hot earth.

The luckless young man had been riding in the same direction as his, Benteen's own, and had been drygulched from behind, then dragged well off the trail. His albino pony had likewise been led away from the track and finished off. Taz Benteen read a book there that was plain to his eyes.

He squinted at the westering sun and moved swiftly away, scouting in another wide circle. Yet he seemed to be following some invisible trail along the ground. Two hundred yards distant, behind a clump of greasewood, he found another wealth of sign that told its own story, as well as something else.

The killer had dismounted here, picketed his horse in a little swale, hidden himself behind the greasewood scrub. Half a dozen cigarette snipes told that some little time had been passed there.

Hand and leg and knee prints, almost invisible, showed how the man had knelt, sighted, and fired.

The empty cartridge lay a little more to the right. Benteen pocketed the brass shell, then followed the spoor to the spot where the man had fallen, and tracked it on back to the place the body now lay.

A low whistle, under his breath, escaped the rider's lips. The shot had been an amazing one, for such a distance, on the llano! Sun devils and whirlwinds and heat haze, in the scorching dry air, make sight and range calculations difficult with a rifle, but the killer had cut the mustard.

Taz Benteen mentally decided that this bushwhacker was an extraordinary shot with a rifle, at least.

"Pardner," he said softly to the still form on the ground, "you were most certainly laid out by careful hands! A dead man can't pretend."

Benteen's flicking orbs had missed nothing that his keen and thorough training told him was worth studying. He knew the spot where the killer had turned off the wagon track, knew his route to the place of ambush, knew how he had run back to the trail after his shot, caught the albino bronc and, flinging his victim across the saddle, led the pony back into the mesquite, dumped its burden, and shot it through the head.

Then the killer had retraced his steps to his own hidden mount, followed the line of track some three hundred yards, angled over to the wagon road, crossed it a hundred yards, then cater-cornered back to the wagon road and hit the trail southeastward toward Mobeetie, some fifty miles distant.

Taz Benteen, thoughtfully chewing a blade of mesquite grass, glanced over his shoulder at the sun, then up at the circling, cruising vultures who were swinging lower and lower every arc they made. Then he got to his feet with a muttered oath, untethered his pony and led it into the tiny clearing between the thickets.

A few minutes later he rode out into the trail again, carrying a burden as heavy as himself, face down across the saddle blanket, tied snugly against the cantle and held firm by a tarpaulined war bag.

No more did Taz Benteen ride carelessly, whistling, as he jogged westward toward Lampasas, twenty miles away. The killer might be holed up somewhere, more than ready to object to such close interest in his affairs. Benteen was alert as he rode and his black sombrero was tilted low over his eyes to keep out the rays of the low-hung sun.

CHAPTER II.

THE LIGHTS OF LAMPASAS.

UNDER his breath he cursed the lot that had gotten him mixed up in this affair. A flash rider and steer roper from the Bandera country, he was journeying to the town of Lampasas, on the Llano Estacado of west Texas, to take part in the famous Panhandle Stampede, the great rodeo and fair held at Lampasas each spring.

And to-day, Wednesday, was the eve of the celebration, which lasted three days, ending Saturday. To-night he would have to enter his name for contest registration, or he would be ineligible to compete in the events.

It was the first time Taz Benteen had made the Lampasas round-up, although he had ridden in rodeos at El Paso, Roswell, and Fort Worth. But he knew, and had heard, enough of the Panhandle Stampede to be aware that it was very much of a blood feud between the ranchers of the Palo Pinto Basin country, in which Lampasas was located, and the cattlemen of Paint Rock country, across a saddle of scrubby mountains toward Mobeetie and Toyah.

It had become a bitterly fought annual

event between Lampasas and Paint Rock that was a classic in the rangeland, and many expert riders, ropers, and bulldoggers were imported by both sides. The betting, it was reported, ran high into the thousands, even involving entire ranches.

Benteen was not aligned with either side to date. His services were for hire, or he would lone-wolf it, independent. He had ridden far the past few days, all the way from beyond the lower Pecos, and Atascosa Ranch, his home spread. And now, just on the eve of the round-up, he had butted smack-dab into a range mystery, and a murder mystery at that.

If! If he hadn't taken that short-cut cross country, saving him a full day's riding—nearly forty miles—he wouldn't have struck into the Mobeetie-Lampasas wagon road at all, but would have entered the basin by the regular Sweetwater stage road, some distance to his northeast.

Or if he had hit the wagon road three or four hundred yards this side of the buzzards, or that mess of sign on the track, he would still be riding on to town, nonchalant and whistling, instead of warily searching the thickets on both sides of the road—and carrying a dead man behind him on Jerky.

If! Taz Benteen shrugged a shoulder as he thoughtfully twisted a quirly and licked it into shape. He was letting the piebald follow the trail and set its own pace, which was an easy fox trot.

He was a little bothered as to what disposition to make of the corpse until he could notify the sheriff. It wouldn't do, at all, to ride calmly into town with the dead man behind his cantle. He, Taz, was a perfect stranger to the Basin country. Lampasas would be full of people, all there for the celebration, and it was a tough town. It had a mighty bad reputation, not only on the llano, but all over Texas as a typical frontier town, full of hard and salty hombres with loose holsters, saloons, dance halls, and gambling. It wasn't a tame country, nor was it frequented by tame men.

No, decided Taz Benteen, it certainly wouldn't do for any denizens of Palo Pinto to see him lugging in the youth's body back of his saddle cantle. But, strangely enough—and the fact didn't escape the black-eyed stranger—he encountered no travelers on the Mobeetie wagon road that Wednesday afternoon.

It was after sundown, and the long shadows were growing purple, when Benteen rounded a rocky hummock at the end of the narrow trail through the ridge and saw the town of Lampasas sprawled below him in the basin beyond the rim rock.

The trail joined the stage road which skirted the ridge and twisted down the bench into town, which was a fair-sized place squatting on both banks of the San Saba River.

An ace-high range country, the stranger saw at a quick survey—well watered, grassy, broken into gentle swells. No wonder so many first-chop cattle came out of the Basin, thought Benteen, kneeing his horse into the stage road and beginning the gentle descent. The naked plain was behind him now. Water and grass and fertile rangeland lay ahead—and a wide-open town, lights and liquor and music.

The man from Bandera didn't ride the stage road long. When he came to a bosky little hollow well off the track, heavily matted with mesquite and catclaw, he turned into it, and lay quiet until dusk had fallen.

Several times parties of riders passed along the near-by road, laughing and talking; two or three buckboards and spring wagons rumbled by. A moon, almost full, rode high in a blue-black, cloudless sky, whose bright stars seemed almost so close that one could reach up and touch them. Sounds came clear and far on the still, high air—the distant bark of a dog. the cry of a whip-

poorwill, the lonesome quaver of a screech owl.

Night had sifted out of the prairie and down from the peaks of Devil Mountains when Taz Benteen rode Jerky onto the road again, bright moonlight showing him the trail. The red eye of his quirly glowing, he followed the stage road for some distance, then angled off toward Lampasas, following a dim cattle track along fences and through gates.

He kept well away from any lighted houses, and presently came close to the outskirts of Lampasas, whose lights made a bright, reddish glow in the sky ahead.

Again he tethered his piebald in a dark draw, cached his rifle and saddle scabbard in a pear thicket, and entered the town on foot. His position was decidedly precarious. It was up to him to find the sheriff of Palo Pinto *muy pronto,* before some chance denizen stumbled across the pony and its grisly burden. In this quest luck was with the stranger, cheek and jowl.

Elbowing his way through the swarms of convivial and jostling cowboys who filled main street and the square, Taz Benteen struck out for the sheriff's office, after inquiring the way of a half-drunk mule skinner. It was at the farther end of town, in a two-story adobe building, which housed both the jail and sheriff's office.

Street and square were jammed with humanity, tethered horses and every kind of conveyance lined the hitch racks, but Benteen finally shoved and elbowed and forced his way to the door of the jail.

A tall, lantern-jawed, green-eyed fellow, wearing a ten-gallon hat and a long-barreled pistol, who was seated in the office with his booted feet cocked up on a deal table, regarded the stranger impersonally with very cold and hard eyes. Three or four other men were in the room, smoking and conversing.

CHAPTER III.

IDENTIFIED!

"HOWDY," said Benteen colorlessly. "Is the sheriff around hereabouts?" He eyed the lantern-jaw person with cool appraisal.

"Ain't in," was the drawled reply. "But I'm a deppity. Do anything for yuh?"

"I want to see the sheriff. Got any idea where he is, Mr. Deputy?"

"Out in the crowd, some'res. Want me to climb up on the roof and holler out his name?"—with a slow grin.

"I want you to herd along with me, and help find him," said Benteen coldly. "Don't know him myself, but I do know somethin' he oughta know, and know damned pronto, too!"

"Yeah?" The deputy stared narrowly at the stranger, then let his feet come off the table with a thump. He was beginning to discover things about this black-haired, black-eyed man that his casual surface scrutiny had failed to note. The stranger was regarding him unsmilingly, with a cold, level gaze, and something came to the deputy with great clarity and suddenness.

"Yeah," he said again, hitching up his gun belt. "Shore. Be sorta like lookin' for a needle in a hayrick, out in that crowd, but I reckon mebby we can find Ben. That's him, y'know, stranger—Ben Bowles, high sheriff of Palo Pinto. We might as well *pasear.* You, Cleve," he said to one of the men in the office, "keep an eye on things here till I get back, will yuh?"

They pushed down the street again, onto Courthouse Square. The two-story stone building of justice stood in the center of the plaza, surrounded by a little patch of sunburned grass and seared shrubbery and hitch racks. On all four sides of it were the business houses and saloons and restaurants.

The square was packed with people thick as sardines in a can—ranchers and

punchers, Mexican herders, waddy-gunmen, gamblers, cavalrymen from the fort, gayly garbed rodeo performers, mule skinners, adventurers, some Indians and many hard-faced breeds. Lurid oaths filled the air; whoops and yells and laughter sounded; fist fights and arguments were numerous.

It was indeed like looking for a needle in a haystack to find any certain man in that mob, but again chance, or luck, came to Benteen's aid after some twenty minutes of searching.

The high sheriff of Lampasas was found in the Three X Saloon, where the bar was packed three deep with noisy men. He was in a corner, talking to an oldish, rawhide-featured cattleman who wore his slouch Stetson at a jaunty angle on the back of his thin, gray hair and stood with his booted, range-bowed legs spread apart, thumbs hooked carelessly in his cartridge belt, from which a long-barreled single-action pistol hung. At a signal from the deputy, the sheriff nodded to the old rancher, and started toward the door.

Taz Benteen regarded Sheriff Bowles very thoughtfully. He was of medium stature, over fifty years of age, and had all the earmarks of a veteran frontier peace officer. His hawkish face was seamed and leathery, his eyes a pale slate-gray well bleached by the sun. He wore a high-crowned, battered sombrero, a scrawny mustache, and a bone-handled .45 six-shooter on a sagging cartridge belt. And he walked with a limp, for his left leg was minus a knee joint. His limp had given him the nickname of "Pegleg."

He was as grim and efficient-looking as the gun that hung at his hip. Taz Benteen instantly decided that he was going to get along with High Sheriff Ben Bowles.

"Well," said the officer coldly to the deputy, "what's the trouble? This buckaroo been shootin' up the town or somethin'?"

"Nope. Wanted to see yuh personal —somethin' important, he says. Bein' he's a stranger hereabouts, I helped him locate yuh. He didn't tell me nothin'."

"Hm-m-m." The sheriff looked at Benteen with a pair of very shrewd eyes, his face grimly curious. He saw a black-eyed, black-haired man of some twenty-nine or thirty years, lithe and closely knit, with a lean, cold, high-cheek-boned face burned the color of old mahogany by sun and wind and weather, and thin lips and a pair of eyes that had a trick of becoming very frosty. The pair of Colts on his thighs, resting in shiny, battered holsters, were tied well down below the heavy gun belt with leather thongs for an unhampered draw, and bespoke the professional.

Sheriff Ben Bowles, taking in the stranger from the toes of his saddle-chafed boots to the crown of his dusty black sombrero, let his eyes linger on the pantherish muscles that rippled beneath the faded black shirt, on the slender, rope-scarred fingers, on the cold, grim visage. His glance went once more to the thonged-down guns, to the stranger's right hand and elbow, and slowly traveled upward to his inky, frosty eyes. And the high sheriff of Palo Pinto knew that he was face to face with a range rider—and a gunman.

"What's on yore mind, stranger?" he said amiably, pulling out his pipe. "If I c'n do anything for yuh, spit 'er out."

"My name's Benteen," said the stranger levelly. "And I want you to take a little *pasear* with me down the street, sheriff. Got somethin' to show you."

"Yeah?" Sheriff Bowles struck a match on the seat of his pants, touched its flame to his packed pipe, and drew until he got the tobacco going redly. He regarded Benteen over the flame steadily. "All right, son," he said at last. "But don't walk me too fur—I'm kinda stove up. You c'n hang around till I get back, Newt."

Out of the square and almost to the far end of main street, the sheriff broke the silence. "What's this all about anyhow, stranger?" he asked, with just a shade of suspicion in his voice. "And where you goin'?"

"Down to that 'squite swale yonder," said Benteen, and thereupon aided in keeping the silence intact. The sheriff stole a quick glance at his companion, but sensed that ths stranger was canny when dealing with strangers, and said no more.

Arrived at the dark, moonlight-softened swale, Benteen led the way without hesitation down its slope and to where his concealed piebald was tethered to a mesquite tree. He waved an expressive arm to the staring sheriff, who was standing very still, looking at the stiffening burden behind Jerky's saddle cantle.

"Found him about three hours back on the Mobeetie trail," said Taz quietly. He removed his hat and wiped his forehead with a dusty sleeve.

"My God!" muttered Sheriff Bowles, moving quickly for all that he had one leg without a knee joint. He bent close, raised the dead man's head, and scanned the putty-colored features. "My God above!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE .45-70 WINCHESTER.

SHERIFF BOWLES slowly raised up, his slaty eyes cold as flakes of ice. "Why didn't yuh let him lay, and bring the news to me?" he rasped meaningly, his right hand close to the long-barreled Colt."

"I had to run off a score of buzzards to keep him from bein' eaten while I looked around," said Benteen calmly. "Nothin' else has been touched, and there's plenty of evidence left."

"Yeah? What sort of evidence?" demanded Bowles shortly.

"Sign—lots of it. Here's one bit." And the stranger reached in his vest pocket and handed the sheriff an empty cartridge case.

Bowles rolled the brass shell in his fingers, looking narrowly at the dented fulminating cap. ".45-70," he muttered. "Shot in the back, too." He glanced up quickly at Benteen. "Where's yore rifle? The saddle's rubbed where you been packin' one."

For answer Benteen went to the pear patch, reached down and carefully retrieved his scabbarded Winchester. "Mine's a .45-70," he said coldly. "Take it and keep it, sheriff. When you get back to town, look it over. And tomorrow I want you to shoot it, savvy?"

"Hm-m-m," said the sheriff. "Be plenty of time for that later. I'll just take charge of it for the present, though. You find King on the trail?"

The stranger told his story briefly, but not all that he himself had found out. He was willing, and more than willing, to let the high sheriff do some of his own work himself. As its conclusion, he asked: "You know him?"

"Know him?" echoed the sheriff. "I knowed him danged well! Been knowin' King Manderson since he was knee-high to a duck! He's old Dud's boy—Dud Manderson of the Fryin' Pan. You seen old Dud talkin' to me a while ago in the Three X. Lordy!" Sheriff Bowles wiped his face. "This'll hit his daddy powerful hard, mighty powerful hard! King was the Basin's best bet in the rodeo events—a champeen rider, bronc buster, and roper——"

The sheriff's rocklike face became like granite, his voice chill as Panhandle ice. "I got a mighty good idear as to who's behind all this, young feller. But believin' and provin' are hosses of different colors. I've heered several times, on good authority, that those Paint Rock buskies were comin' over here this year to pry the lid off hell, run the rodeo to suit 'emselves, and tote away all the money in the Basin. I can't prove nothin', yit—ain't got one smidgin' of

proof—but I'd bet my saddle, sheriff's badge and bottom dollar that Tobe Odom and Big Nate Wilcox from acrost the Diabolos knows plenty right now about this drygulchin'."

"Who are they?" asked the stranger.

"King-pin ranchers from over in Paint Rock country!" snapped Bowles. "Crooked as rattlesnake's shadders, an' ornery as sidewinders. They own, between 'em, most of the range over that way. I reckon Nate Wilcox's the ringleader, his spread bein' the biggest, but Tobe Odom ain't nothin' but a hairpin who's long-looped enough cattle the last six-eight years to start a brand of his own. Both of 'em are in town now, too."

"And the dead man?" queried Benteen, twisting a brownie. "He was to carry Lampasas's colors to-morrow, huh?"

"Eh?" The sheriff jerked himself together. "King? Oh, yeah. Old Dud is the biggest ranch owner in the Basin —king-pin of Palo Pinto, and one of the first settlers here. There's mighty bad blood 'tween him and the Paint Rock delegation, too—allus has been since the rodeo and Stampede started. Palo Pinto won the finals last year, thanks to young King. I reckon Nate Wilcox wasn't takin' no chances *this* year! He's got polecats on his time book that wouldn't think no more of pluggin' a feller in the back than they would of takin' a drink of wild-cat whisky."

The sheriff bent a keen glance on the stranger, who was cautiously lighting his quirly between closely-cupped hands.

"You come here figgerin' on enterin' the rodeo?" he asked curiously.

"Uh-huh." Taz Benteen inhaled. "I've done quite a bit of ridin' and ropin'. Thought mebbe I'd enter, and try my hand." At a question from the sheriff, Benteen told him where he came from, and where he had been working in the Bandera country. The officer seemed satisfied, and asked no more personal queries. A shrewd judge of men, he evidently discarded at first glance the possibility that the stranger had killed the Basin favorite. The sheriff tugged at his mustache uncertainly.

"We can't take King into town this a way, that's certain," he said at last. "And there's no use in my ridin' out the prairie trail to-night, for I couldn't see nothin'. Tell yuh what, Benteen. We'll kinda cover pore King up with your slicker, lead the cayuse into town by a back street, an' take the body to Doc Varnum's house. He's the coroner, and'll keep his mouth shet till to-morrer. This town'll be a shambles to-night if this comes out—Palo Pinto and Paint Rock would make them streets run with blood, likkered up like them cowboys are, and lots an' lots of innercent people would get kilt. We got to keep this under our hats, amigo."

"I got a better idea, sheriff," said Taz Benteen. "Let's leave the piebald tied here, go back to town, and come back in a spring wagon. Then we can be sure and take Manderson to the doc's place without anybody suspectin'. You can drive the wagon, and I'll ride my hoss in."

"Yeah," said the sheriff after a moment, "I guess that's better, son." They started back toward the glow of lights, and Bowles said slowly: "He couldn't 'a' been dead very long, the way them buzzards acted. You must 'a' been pretty close to there when he died."

"Mebbe," said Benteen shortly. "He was plumb limp, if that means anything to you."

"Hm-m-m. See anybody?"

"Nope. And didn't meet a soul comin' into town. I took a short-cut straight across country from Vaca Wells to the Mobeetie road, and hit into the wagon road about half a mile too far out. If I'd made it half a mile this side of that dry coulee, I'd 'a' been blissfully ignorant of the whole damned dirty shebang right now. But as she sets——"

Sheriff Bowles looked hard at his companion, then sniffed and began filling his reeking pipe.

"Who you aimin' to sign up with to-night?" he asked. "Palo Pinto Basin, or Paint Rock?"

"What do you mean?" asked Benteen, surprised. "I aimed to ride on my own hook—kinda lone-wolf it."

"Can't be did," said Bowles. "Every contestant's gotta be signed up with one town or tother. That's one of the rodeo rules."

"Didn't savvy that," said Taz Benteen. "Well, if somebody don't want to hire me, it looks like I've had my ride up here for nothin'."

They were silent until they reached the outskirts of Lampasas. Then the sheriff spoke calmly and slowly, looking straight at the lithe-limbed, black-sombreroed stranger:

"Tell yuh what, Benteen. You go on over to the Concho House, the hotel on the square, to rodeo headquarters, and sign up with the clerk in charge. Entries are open till twelve o'clock, midnight. Tell the clerk you're ridin' for the Fryin' Pan, and give him yore entrance fees. I'll take the responsibility for it—I c'n tell a range hombre fur as the next man. I've got to see old Dud, anyhow, and break the news to him, soon as I git King safe to Doc Varnum's, so I'll tell him I sent yuh to sign with the Basin riders. Lordy! I'd ruther take a wallopin' than carry the bad news to him. It'll jest about break ol' Dud's heart."

"Hadn't I better wait about signin' up, until you've seen Mr. Manderson?" asked Benteen.

"When you've finished that," went on the sheriff, as if he hadn't heard the query, "mosey back out to the 'squite swale and git yore hoss. At three o'clock in the mawnin', you, me an' Dud Manderson'll ride back out the prairie trail, and do some tall investigatin'. We'll be there by daylight, and have plenty of time to git back here before nine o'clock. Where you aimin' to squat to-night?"

"Reckon I'll camp out, down by the river," said Taz.

"Good enough," grunted Bowles. "See you later, then, cowboy." And, still carrying Taz Benteen's scabbarded Winchester under his arm, the high sheriff limped off down a very narrow, crooked and dark side street, and disappeared. And the stranger, flinging a thin, sardonic smile in the direction of the officer's vanishing back, continued on up the main drag toward the square, with its milling shooping crowds, and the Concho House.

CHAPTER V.
THE WEIRD, WAILING CRY.

HE pushed through the teeming lobby of the hotel. At one side was a long table, surmounted by a huge sign:

RODEO HEADQUARTERS.

Two men seated behind this table were signing up entrants, and collecting the twenty-dollar entry fee. A very drunk puncher was in front of the table as Taz Benteen lounged up, and was talking loudly and profanely.

"My name?" he was baying. "It's Ridenour—Ridenour of the K-Cross-O, Paint Rock. An' I c'n ride any fuzztail that's got hair an' hide an' four laigs! 'Sides that, I got a hunderd an' six dollars in my pocket, not countin' that twenty bucks I just paid you, fathead. An' I'll tell the West the twenty'll bring back a coupla hunderd iron men with it Saturday night, ole hoss. Whaddaya think of that?"

The gentleman behind the table accepted the twenty, but not the comment. He looked at Ridenour coldly. "King Manderson's ridin', waddy. Don't forget that."

"The name," hiccuped Ridenour, with a nasty grin, "seems familiar."

He turned away, and his eyes fell

on Taz Benteen, who was peeling out his registration fee.

"Riding for Fryin' Pan," Benteen told the clerk. "Here's your jack—gimme my number."

"Oho!" said Ridenour, his bloodshot eyes roving up and down the black-shirted rider. "Another pilgrim bein' led to the slaughter, huh? Got any money about yuh that yuh wanta bet, amigo?"

"No," said Benteen coldly. "Not any hundred and six simoleons, anyhow."

"Whaddaya mean, waddy?" demanded Ridenour, bristling. "What hundred an' six dollars?"

"The one you just said you had. What's the matter, you jug-brained?"

"Gittin' kinda pert, ain't yuh, stranger?"

"I never did have the tail-waggin' habit, buckaroo. Take it or leave it—it's *poco-poco* to me."

Ridenour scratched his head—he wasn't drunk enough to be nutty. And he knew a Simon-pure gun slinger about as far as the next one. "Where you from, rider?" he asked abruptly, not as free with his facial contortions, and keeping the inflection of his voice within safe limits.

"Santone—and points southwest. Anything else you'd like to know?"

Ridenour's face split with a wide, good-humored grin. He pushed back his broad-brimmed sombrero with a jerk of his thumb, and rubbed his hands together briskly. He beamed as he looked upon the stranger.

"Shore there's somethin' else," he chuckled. "My tongue is swelled, my mouth is hot and dry. I'm dusty inside, outside, and from here to yonder. I've tried water and found it good to wash in. How 'bout a bottle of pop, or a snort of hiccup sirup? You know any law in this one-lung prairie-dog town that's agin' you 'istin' a drink with me, amigo?"

A thin grin slid across Benteen's face as he said he did not. He accompanied the unsteady rider through the adjacent archway leading to the Concho bar, and bellied up to the crowded mahogany. Ridenour slapped five dollars on the counter, whacked the boards loudly with open palm.

"Fork out that bottle of Joel B., Snooty!" he bawled. "And a coupla glasses. An' leave the red-eye where I c'n reach it without gettin' a crick in my neck."

"One glass will do us, Mr. Barkeep," said Taz Benteen. "You got any sarsaparilla?"

The red-nosed man behind the bar leaned forward, frank disbelief on his blue-veined visage. His thick lips curved unpleasantly. "Sarsapar——" he began, not completing the word. "Well, damned if I got any. Or milk, neither."

"I know better than to ask for milk on a cow ranch," said Benteen. "What you got besides likker in this dump?"

"Hell, I got a lemon," said Snooty, his eyes shifting nervously away from the stranger's cold, level stare.

"You squeeze it in water, then," said Benteen, "and take a half hitch on those lips of yours."

The drinks disposed of, two rounds of them, Taz Benteen shoved a cigar into a vest pocket and left the barroom, despite the alcoholic protests of Ridenour, who was hell-bent on making a night of it. Walking as rapidly as he could through the press of people, Taz made for the mesquite swale east of town.

Sheriff Pegleg Bowles and his deputy, Newt McConnell, were already there in a light spring wagon. The body of King Manderson was placed in the conveyance, and snugly covered with a tarpaulin. The men went about the job in silence; the few words they spoke were terse and grim. Taz Benteen felt the deputy's green eyes boring into him time and again, and it made him smart in resentment; his was an old, inbred

animosity against the law. But he held his tongue, smoked cigarettes, and slowly followed the spring wagon into town at a safe distance.

He had no doubt but that Sheriff Bowles would smuggle the corpse to the coroner's place without detection. Cutting across town by way of many devious side streets and dark alleyways, Taz Benteen made his way toward the Saba River bottom on the edge of town, where he intended to pitch camp.

In the wooded bottom were many other camps, with smoke rising from their fires, which glowed like red bombs in the night. The dense willows, the tall sycamores and cottonwoods, reared high overhead, and the ground was sandy and gravelly. Sumac and elderberries grew thickly beneath the trees, and the dark sheen of the river was about fifty yards wide. Here and there icy springs gushed from the banks, making the bottom an ideal camp site.

Benteen picked his spot, stripped the leather and his gear from the piebald, and picketed the pony. Soon he had a brush and 'squite wood fire crackling cheerily, and the aroma of boiling coffee and broiling bacon scented the cool night air. The odor of cooking food came also from other fires. Horses champed at baled hay or pawed the ground. A rancher near by had a freshly killed beef hung up on a limb by its hind legs and was skinning it. Covered wagons and chuck wagons were parked everywhere.

From down the line came the musical plunk of a banjo going to the tune of "O Suzanna!" And farther up the line a man was sawing out "Buffalo Gal" on a fiddle, while some one accompanied him on a guitar.

And above all, a big Texas moon, round as a disk of molten silver, rode high in a cloudless, star-splashed sky; and a fitful night wind came out of the prairies, and crept like a sigh through the leaves of sycamore and cottonwood. Texas night, on the Panhandle.

Taz Benteen rose and stretched, his arms Indian fashion, then left his camp and walked toward town. The big night parade was forming at the upper end of Main Street, and he paused on the sidewalk to watch. He could see the starry banner carried high by the mounted standard bearer—a soldier from the army post.

A stage driver cracked his whip as he forced a lumbering Concord coach into line; a column of troopers galloped in from a side street and drew up to take their places.

Cowboys and riders in brightly colored garb, with numbers on their backs, milled and shouted the yippee'd, hazing their prancing ponies into position. And there were Indians in war paint and feathers, Mexican vaqueros in silver filagree, steeple-crowned sombreros and embroidered jackets, and plodding oxen yoked to ungainly prairie schooners.

A colorful, pulse-quickening scene, and Taz Benteen's blood reacted to it. He took the numbered square of cloth from his pocket, looked at it. No. 18. He started to get it pinned on his back, go for his pony and ride with the Frying Pan contingent, but after a moment's thought he shook his head and replaced the number in his pocket. He would just be a spectator to-night.

The clear, high notes of a bugle rang out. A tremendous howl went up from hundreds of throats. Anse Satterlee, president of the Stampede and riding at its head, heeled his spirited iron-gray horse into movement. The post band burst into blaring music—"Stars and Stripes Forever." Behind the president rode the two other rodeo judges. The prancing horses, the yipping Comanches in war bonnets and gaudy blankets, erect troopers wearing campaign hats and riding McClellan saddles, and the great crowd that packed both sides of Main Street and the four sides of the square, transformed the cowtown of Lampasas into temporary brilliance.

The files of torch bearers, strung along the whole line of march on both sides, added an eerie touch to the colorful scene. Their pine and resin knots burning redly, they kept along with the parade, painting the files in dancing crimson. A big freighter drawn by eight mules carried the band; two Concord coaches pulled by six horses were full of passengers, and carried the iron-bound treasure box under the boot, and guards armed with rifles.

Last of all came the cowboys and rodeo performers, strung out two abreast on horses of every color and variety, flaunting shirts of flaming crimson, baby blue, pink, and green, their heads topped by gray, yellow, and black sombreros.

"Hi! Yiiiiiii! Hi! Yiip-peeee! Ride 'em, cowboy! Hot iron! Slap it on 'em, and run her deep!"

Benteen saw Old Man Manderson riding at the head of the Palo Pinto delegation in a group of cattlemen, and the leathery-faced old rancher's visage was puzzled and troubled. His eyes, squinted against the glare of the torches, were narrowly and anxiously scanning the sea of faces along the sidewalks. He was looking for his son, young King, the Basin's hope to win the Stampede. Young King, who wouldn't ride to-morrow at the Fair Grounds, or ever again.

Then came the Paint Rock contingent, noisy, whooping, well-liquored. "Big Nate" Wilcox, a herculean old-timer, rode side by side with a chunky, thick-shouldered, bulldog-faced man—Tobe Odom of the K-Cross-O.

Wilcox was bearded, with eyes as cold as slush ice and a steel-trap jaw. Both were pretty salty, pretty grim-looking customers, and the cavalcade following them was a motley one.

Flashily dressed contract riders and gaudily outfitted punchers rubbed elbows with hungry-looking buckaroos who looked as if they'd been pastured all their lives on shad scale and salt grass. All wore their guns and had an air of watchfulness, for they were from beyond the Sierra Diabolos, and the Basin was enemy country.

Taz Benteen shook his head slightly, and turned away as the last of the parade passed, leaving the cheers and roars of the crowd behind. He entered a brightly lighted saloon which bore the name of the Old Oaken Bucket, and ordered a jigger of Old Crow. The barkeep, industriously polishing glasses, looked at him shrewdly as he spun a glass down the wet mahogany and set out a black bottle.

"Where's yore number, cowboy?" he asked jocularly, eying the twin guns on the stranger's thighs. "Ain't you ridin' to-morrow?"

"I reckon," drawled Benteen. "Here's luck, and a long summer."

"Keno," nodded the barkeep, whose name was Simmons. "What outfit you forkin' for, if it's any of my business?"

"Signed up with Palo Pinto. Looks like she's goin' to be a shore-nuff rodeo, amigo."

"Shore-nuff one is correct. Glad you're sportin' the Basin's colors, Mr.—er—what did you say your name was?"

"Didn't say," answered Taz, "but it's Benteen. Just got in a while ago."

"Have another one on the house, Mr. Benteen. I got some of the finest bourbon here you ever smacked a lip to. Think we got a purty good chance this year agin' the Paint Rock buckaroos?"

"Quién sabe?" shrugged Taz, filling his glass. "I'm a stranger out here in the Panhandle. But I reckon we can give 'em a run for the money. Well, here's a go, friend, and *buenas noches.*"

From down the street, outside, came the tinkle of glass and one pistol shot. And it was followed by a mighty wailing cry—a cry so weird and cold-blooded and savage that it seemed to come from a panther's red throat. Taz Benteen looked at the bartender.

"What the hell's all that?" he asked curiously, turning to go.

Simmons laughed without mirth, his mouth twisty.

"That's Poison-oak Slade, Paint Rock's act-up buster, twisting his own tail for to-morrow's contest!"

CHAPTER VI.
"GOT YUH!"

THE moon was westering, the stars gleaming brighter in the inky sky, when three horsemen left Lampasas by a roundabout way. They struck up the bench road toward the trail gap in the rim rock that led to Mobeetie and points northwest.

The Big Dipper hung suspended over a world of velvet darkness silvered with moonlight and starshine, awesome in its stillness, cold and empty beneath the moon.

Out on the llano a coyote howled; the hoofs of the three horses scuffled the coarse, hard sand.

It was ten minutes past three o'clock, in the morning.

Sheriff Bowles, old Dud Manderson, and Tazwell Benteen rode in stony silence for some miles, wrapped in their heavy coats and their own grim thoughts.

The scent of fresh sage and creosote bush tainted the chill air; ghostly clumps of cactus and pear and mesquite stretched endlessly into the night. Finally old Dud cleared his throat huskily.

"If the hombre that did this bush-wrackin' was ahead of you on the trail, he could 'a' been seen, out there, for quite a ways. Must 'a' beat you to town, huh, stranger?"

The old rancher's voice was like the rasp of a file on steel, and Benteen could feel those slaty eyes fixed upon him like gimlets. The man from Bandera turned in his saddle and looked at the old cattle baron.

"He started back the way he come," he replied coldly, his eyes frosty. "Toward Mobeetie. And if he didn't want to be seen, he couldn't have been seen for quite a ways, out there."

"Seems to me like you took a lot of interest in this here affair," muttered Manderson, his face twitching. "Yeah."

"Shouldn't I oughta?" asked Benteen, in quiet surprise. "All I wanted to know was two things: first, if there was any life in that feller to be saved; second, if the drygulcher was hangin' around within gunshot of me." He gazed coldly, evenly, at Manderson and the sheriff.

"If I'd 'a' had any sense I'd 'a' come on my way and let him lay there, and forgot all about it," he finished shortly.

"Tut!" broke in Pegleg Bowles. "No use to git ringy, son. Glad you didn't leave King out yonder. Dud ain't got over the shock good, yet."

"No," said the rancher, his voice hoarse and trembling with passion and grief. "No, I ain't. And the blank-blank skunk that done that trick is goin' to die—and die damned pronto—soon as I get one ioter as to who he is! They kilt him, those Paint Rock sidewinders did, jest to keep him from ridin' to-day! They knew there wasn't airy man on their list that could tech him on hoss-back, or with a lariat. And they've bet 'emselves naked and blue in the face on this rodeo!"

"I'll try to take your son's place, best I can, Mr. Manderson," said Taz Benteen quietly. "I've rode quite a little, as well as throwed ropes."

"Humph!" snorted Manderson beneath his breath, and hunched his bowed shoulders lower over the saddle. Sheriff Bowles took up the conversation after a couple of miles had been put behind. "Yuh notice anything special, Benteen?" he queried. "Any perticular sign?"

"Quite some cayuse tracks," said the stranger curtly. "I kept off 'em the best I could. The left front foot shows a broken calk."

"Hm-m-m," muttered the sheriff.

"And that's somethin' ag'in, son." Mile after mile rolled behind them, and dawn was graying the eastern rim of the prairie when Benteen drew rein and pointed ahead on the track.

"Here's where he was shot," he said, "and yonder's where I started. You want me to tag along?"

The answering grunts were affirmative, and the trio rode first to where the body had lain when Taz found it. In the cold, somber light of early morning Benteen pointed out the tracks, his own included, explaining briefly. They examined the .38 pistol on the .45 frame, with its tied-back trigger and two exploded cartridges, and the sheriff thrust it in his waistband, with the remark that King Manderson had never fired that gun.

Then they rode on to where the albino pony lay, now almost picked to a skeleton by buzzards. Old Dud peeled off saddle, bridle, blanket, and slickered roll, splitting the extra load up between himself and the sheriff.

"Where's the tracks of the feller that did the shootin'?" he asked hoarsely. His rawhide face, in the dawn light, was drawn and pinched; his eyes were bloodshot and sunken, with a dead and stony set.

They stopped again where the killer had holed up for the ambush, followed his sign to the place where young Manderson had fallen, back to where he was planted, on to where the albino was shot, then up to the point of ambush and back to the trail, where it was lost in many other tracks.

They didn't find the empty cartridge that had killed the horse.

The sheriff took from his pocket the brass shell that Taz had given him the night before, and idly turned it over and over and end for end. He had marked it with two "X's," scratched with his knife point.

"A caliber that ain't very talkative," he mused. "I know a dozen men hereabouts that use the same cartridge, not countin' what come over the mountains." He handed the empty to Manderson, glanced at Benteen, then drew Benteen's scabbarded Winchester from its boot, which hung on Bowles's saddle.

"Just so there won't be no misunderstandin's," he said. He pushed down the lever to see that the gun was loaded, fired into the ground, and caught the empty shell as it came out of the barrel. He examined the dented fulminating cap swiftly, held it out against the one in Manderson's hand, and smiled.

"Look at the prints of the firin' pins," he said. "Plumb different, Dud. Benteen's is deeper, sharper, and plumb center; the killer's is shaller, blunt and a mite to one side. His rifle was purty well wore, 'pearslike." He tossed the empty out of Benteen's gun from him before the stranger could check the movement, then chuckled at the instant retrieving of it.

The man from Bandera smiled grimly. He didn't try to justify his action, but he didn't intend to have that shell lying about on the scene of the murder. Sheriff Bowles handed him back his booted rifle.

"You got a clean bill o' health, son," he said. "Reckon there's nothin' to do now but jog back and hold the inquest. The rodeo begins at nine o'clock, and it'll go on jest the same."

Old Dud Manderson kneed his sorrel horse up close to Benteen, thrusting out a gnarled hand. "Thank yuh," he said simply. "And I'm right proud to have you ride under my brand to-day. We ain't got a chance of winnin'—now—but we'll shore go down fightin'. The Stampede'll go on just the same. We'll have the funeral this evenin', some time, I reckon."

Taz Benteen gripped the old rancher's hand hard, their fingers locked in the clasp of men. Then he turned his piebald's head toward the 'squite fringe, as he deftly twisted a cigarette. The first

red rim of the sun was just cutting the prairie edge, and flinging long banners of red across the gray-green sea of sage and whitebush.

"I'm goin' to scout around a little while," he said casually. "I'll be back in town in plenty of time for the opening gun." And with a nod he touched spur to Jerky, and disappeared in the screening brush.

For some minutes he was curiously busy. Closely he studied the tell-tale horseshoe track with the missing calk, photographing it in his memory. Next he mentally photographed the clearest print of the murderer's boots, measuring it with his fingers, squatting, with a cold quirly between his lips. It was not much later when he arose, mounted, and struck straight north on a course at right angles to the main wagon trail.

For some thirty minutes he rode, scanning the ground closely. Then, with a muttered curse, he wheeled his pony and circled back in the way he had come, crossing the wagon trail. He had been riding almost two hours when he came across what he was looking for—the tracks of a horse leading westward, in the general direction of Lampasas and the Basin. And on the left front foot was the faint imprint of a broken calk.

"Got yuh!" said Taz Benteen under his breath, his black eyes glowing like twin flakes of soot. He followed the spoor at an easy lope, making far better time than the man who had ridden the telltale horse made the night before.

For to Taz Benteen's expert eyes, the murderer had picked his way in the moonlit obscurity, and stopped many times to look and listen, as well as blundered about country. This showed beyond doubt that he was pretty much a stranger in the Palo Pinto country, and unfamiliar with the lay of land, though very adept at covering his trail. He had ridden back into the Mobeetie road, followed it some distance, then angled off and reversed his direction on the opposite side of the wagon track, heading toward the Basin in a roundabout way several miles from the main trail.

The sign language was plain as a nose on a face to Taz Benteen. The killer had either ridden out from Lampasas, which was most probable, or else cut into the Mobeetie trail some miles farther on. Then he had lain in wait for young Manderson. All his movements gave mute evidence that he was well informed as to his victim's plans for the afternoon. The whole dirty affair stank to high heaven of a carefully hatched plot to remove the rodeo star permanently from the lists. And now the killer, last night, had returned to Lampasas and his employers, reporting a job well done.

Perhaps he had been aware of the broken calk, perhaps not. But if he had, nine chances out of ten he would take immediate steps to remedy the telltale sign, and either put on a new shoe, or a whole set of new ones. That would either be done at a blacksmith's, or else the man would make the change himself.

His horse, Taz had found out, was a brown-coated animal. Back at the point of ambush, where the killer had staked his mount, the horse had rubbed and scratched against a creosote bush, breaking several twigs and leaving three strands of hair caught in a cracked crotch of limp. Neither the sheriff nor Manderson had noticed it, but the sharp eyes of Benteen, trained for just such trifles, had picked it up at once. And now the damning threads of brown hair lay carefully rolled in an envelope inside his pocket.

As the man from Bandera swiftly followed the telltale spoor to where it curved westward and reëntered the Mobeetie-Lampasas road to become lost and obliterated by scores of other tracks, he raised his arms again, Indian fashion, and gave Jerky a taste of Spanish steel. As the ugly-eyed piebald sprang

forward, nothing loath to burn the breeze for a stretch, Taz Benteen bent over and slapped Jerky resoundingly on the shoulder with open palm.

"Gotcha, kioty!" he said again. And the smile that thinned his lips and frosted his eyes was not a pretty thing for any human to see.

CHAPTER VII.
"BUST 'EM WIDE OPEN!"

THE coroner's inquest, held at the home of Doctor Varnum, the coroner, was short, terse, and grim. Possibly it lasted twenty or twenty-five minutes, no more.

The jury had three sworn statements, and were satisfied: the finding of the body, the course of the bullet, the position of the supposed murderer behind the creosote bush.

Not a single bit of detail as to other proof was demanded. Nothing of what Taz Benteen had found out besides those facts came to light—which suited the man from Bandera exactly.

But Lampasas was a cocked hair trigger that morning, a keg of powder with short fuse, when the news was made known. Cowboys and rangemen passed each other on the street, in the hotel and saloons, hand close to their guns, snarling. Eyes cold as rattlers', faces livid, the men from Palo Pinto Basin were on feather edge, roweled with shock and fury and grief. A single misstep now, one overt move, would be the spark to ignite the red flames of hate and murder and swift death. For death, ominous and sinisterly quiet, hung low in the air above the crowded cowtown that sunshiny Thursday morning.

After the inquest was over, Taz Benteen called the sheriff aside.

"Wish you'd kinda mosey around town to-day, and ask at all the blacksmith's shops if a feller brought a dun-colored horse in some time last night or this mornin' to be shod, said cayuse having a busted calk on his left front leg. If the fella was smart, he'd have all the shoes changed, but mebbe he ain't so intelligent, and just had one new shoe put on. He's a pretty big-sized feller, I'd say—big and heavy."

Sheriff Pegleg pawed at his ragged mustache, eying Benteen keenly. The man from Bandera continued:

"Mebbe he didn't go to a blacksmith. He could 'a', and might 'a', done it hisself. If you draw blanks at the shops, try those camps along the river bottom, or ask the wranglers and hazers behind the Fair Grounds if they've seen anybody shoein' their own horses. Meanwhile, I'll keep my eyes skinned for sign to-day, just in case the hombre slipped up and ain't noticed that busted calk. But that ain't likely, for he's showed himself to be pretty slick at coverin' his track."

"Young man," said the sheriff slowly, "how come you got to be so expert at readin' sign?"

Benteen slowly rolled a cigarette. "My dad lived among the Sonora Yaquis for a long time," he said brusquely. "I was raised south of the Line myself. I'm Injun in them things that to a redskin are most important, Mr. Sheriff—I can read sign like you can read the paper. Also, I can shoot a rifle or six-gun, fork a bronc, or sling a rope pretty fair. They're bettin' downtown, this mornin', that the Basin ain't got a thousand-to-one shot of winnin' the Stampede.

"Mebbe we can cut down those odds a little—the next couple of days."

And Sheriff Ben Bowles, looking at the raven-black hair and sooty eyes and high cheek bones of the stranger, nodded his head sagely and kept his own counsel. The offspring of an American father and a mother who hailed from south of the Line, beyond doubt. A combination of hellfire, damnation, and chain-lightning, if any one should ask the high sheriff's opinion.

"All right, son," he said briskly. "We'll see what we can find out in the way of dun hosses with a busted front calk. I'll get a-holt of Newt McConnell to help—he's a good hombre. You better be moseyin' out toward the rodeo grounds; it's close to nine o'clock."

"Just one question," said Taz Benteen. "Who's this curly wolf who was howlin' last night—the guy they call Poison-oak Slade?"

The sheriff's grim face darkened. "Humph!" he said shortly. "If you could cross a skunk, a grizzly an' a rattlesnake you'd have Señor Pizen-oak. He's half Umatilla Injun, an' half mestizo-breed white, an' come from some-'res over in New Mexico. But he's a rider, son—and he totes two tied-down, slick-hammered hawglaigs."

"I see," said Taz Benteen thoughtfully. "A smokeroo, huh? Do you know whether he's any good with a high-powered rifle, or not?"

"Dunno," said the sheriff, "but mebbeso it could be found out. The bushwhacker that got King was damn good with a rifle!"

"Which fact *I* found out," replied Taz dryly. "See you later, sheriff."

Again blaring hand music, waving flags, the *clip-clop* of many shod hoofs. The grand parade was finished, and within the shadow of the high board fence that surrounded the fair grounds, the riders fell out of ranks.

Benteen, who had ridden with the tight-lipped Basin contingent in the parade, fell out with them into the camp inclosure provided for performers at the rear of the arena among pens now filled with bawling steers, wild horses, and squealing bronchos.

There was war in the air. The Palo Pinto riders, lean and in top trim, looked as if they'd been fed on whang beef and cholla cactus for breakfast, and went about their tasks scarcely speaking to one another. All around the fence of the back lot where they were, ranged stalls and sheds, with horses munching hay inside, horses being curried and rubbed down, horses whose manes were being braided. Saddles, bridles, spurs, chaps, ropes—all the thousand and one varieties of range equipment—hung on pegs or were thrown on the ground covered with tarps. Little groups of men sat in front of the stalls or squatted on the ground, smoking and talking quietly, and all wore their guns.

War in the air was right, thought Taz Benteen grimly, as he stabled Jerky, stripped the leather from the piebald and dexterously rubbed down its mottled coat. The town, the entire place, was a hotbed of hate, and more blood would be spilled before the Panhandle Stampede was over.

The sun, getting hotter every minute, blazed down from a sky like scoured pewter, and its sting, beating upon the humanity packed pine-board seats in the uncovered arena of the Lampasas Fair Grounds, set fans and hats to moving, and increased the animated appearance of the huge crowd that filled the place.

Officials wearing badges, or with sashes across their chests, dashed here and there along the half-mile dirt track that circled the inclosure. A group of Paint Rock riders, huddled in consultation inside the fenced arena in the center of the big field, broke up and scattered in all directions. From the corrals, chutes, stables, and feed pens at the south end of the field came the bellowing of bulls, bawling of steers, blatting of goats, and the yelling of stock wranglers.

A bugle call rang out, clear and high fluted. The big white gates slowly swung wide, and through it came the cavalryman standard bearer with the flag. As the starry folds rippled in the breeze a mighty cheer burst from thousands of throats, and the band, following close behind, struck up the national anthem.

After them the cowboys and rodeo

performers, riding four abreast, entered and passed slowly around the track, horses prancing and curveting. The bright shirts and gaudy neckerchiefs, the flash of polished brass and steel, the multicolored horses, made a colorful spectacle. The enormous crowd was quick to catch the spirit of it, and a gale of hand clapping swept the stands.

In the judges' stand, a little house built on stilts on the line of the arena fence directly in front of the grand stand, the three rodeo judges stood at attention.

Once slowly around the track the parade went, then the horsemen maneuvered into the arena and formed into one long line, facing the crowd and the judges. Three men, hats in hands, left the judges' stands and approached the horsemen. In those hats were numbers, and the numbers designated the horses the bronc busters would ride the first day. Each waddy signed up in the bucking contests thrust his hand in the hats and drew a number as the sombreros were tendered him, until all were assigned.

Taz Benteen, scanning the slip he had pulled, read the number "7." And beneath it was written: "Pitchfork." That was the name of the outlaw he would try to tame in the arena that day. He heard a yowl down the line, among the Paint Rock contingent, and the voice was Ridenour's.

"Hot ziggedy!" came the bawl. "Lookit what I drawed, buckaroos! Ol' Hellamile hisseslf. Hot iron! Slap her on, and shove her deep——"

"Hey! Shut up! Hobble yore jaw!" The growls came from all up and down the front of restless men. Anse Satterlee, president of the rodeo, was holding up his hand for attention as he faced the line of riders. The crowd in the stands leaned forward, listening.

"This is the fifth annual Panhandle Stampede and Fair," he announced in a bellow, "and never, any place, have I seen such a crack spread of champeen riders and rodeo hounds as we have here this mornin'. Both Palo Pinto and Paint Rock are to be congratulated on their representation.

"It's a real show for real punchers, people. We have some wild horses that have never been rode. The steers are genuwine Old Mexico mosshorns. We got such man killers as Cannonball, Delirium Tremens, Lovey Dovey, Fadeaway, Rocking Chair, Plenty Trouble—lots of others. We got sunfishers that can't be busted, wild cows and ornery steers which it's plumb suicide to ride, and yet you'll find real cowboys that'll try. If you can't make a show out of this, it's your own fault.

"Open her up, buckaroos, and bust 'em wide open!"

CHAPTER VIII.
"RIDE 'EM, COWBOY!"

AGAIN a mighty cheer rocked the stands; the line broke and men began galloping in every direction. The band struck up "The Old Gray Mare" as they marched off the field, and took their places in the stand. The arena helpers, hazers, track and field officials took their places while the performers went to the corrals, and cowboys not on duty or call perched on top of the fences like so many black crows.

The flag went up. The crowd in the stands settled back, buzzing like a huge beehive. A pistol cracked at the far turn of the track and a dozen ponies came battering down the main stretch on the opening relay of the rodeo. Excitement broke out, roaring, from one end of the field to the other. The crowd was up and yelling encouragement to the riders swirling through the dust—yellow and red and blue flashed in the sun. The cowboy half mile was on.

Out of a corral gate into the arena a black-and-white-spotted Brahma bull dashed, bucking, bawling, and twisting,

with a cowpoke on its humped back holding onto the surcingle for dear life and raking the brute with his heels. "Hi! Hi-hi! Yipppeeee!"

"Out of chute No. 1, Bat Harris of Palo Pinto on Black Devil!" bellowed the announcer.

There was a sudden mêlée at the opposite turn of the track in the half-mile relay, and a pony went down in a cloud of dust, its rider turning a somersault through the air. A sigh like the passage of wind swept the onlookers. Then the race was over and the spilled rider sat up and waved his hand at his departing horse. Again a pistol cracked.

"Ladees and gentlemen!" bayed the announcer. "Winners—in the cowboy half-mile relay—just finished—are: Kaysee Ridenour, of Paint Rock, O-Bar-O, first money. Jug Haines, of Palo Pinto, second. Sandy Burrell, of Rockin' Rafter, Paint Rock, third. The next track event will be the cowboy mile relay. Riders in this relay—walk yore mounts to the judges' stand for instruction!"

Old Dud Manderson, his seamed and rawhide features drawn with grief and shock, galloped up to his spread's corral on a jughead roan. Taz Benteen, busy with the other Basin and Paint Rock riders preparing for the relay, looked up at the old-timer with a dry, shadowy grin slipping across his face.

"Startin' their dirty work already!" rasped old Dud bitterly. "This is strictly a cowboy race, stock saddles, owners ridin', but Paint Rock's run in two ringers—fellers that don't weigh as much as a peanut. They're regular jockeys. Wilcox has signed 'em up, so he claims, to ride on one of his ranches as punchers, an' they can't be ruled out. What chance has a hoss carryin' a one-hundred-and-eighty-pound waddy agin' 'em? We're beat before we start!"

"Nuh-uh," denied Taz Benteen quietly. "Two can play at that game, well as one. There's five Basin men in this race, ain't they? Well, three of us has got to lose, that's all."

"Whaddaya mean?" demanded a red-headed cowboy.

"I mean this: it'll take three riders to pocket those ringers. You'll have to lam hell outa yore broncs the first few minutes to take the lead. One man holds the rail—the other two crowd in and pocket 'em, while our two fastest get away for a win. And that's the only way we can beat 'em, amigos. Let the boss and the other owners pick the men."

The plan was adopted without argument, and the men rode out into the track. The entrants from Paint Rock were already in position, and they seemed to know exactly where to put their hands when they drew for places. One of the ringers got the rail, the other beside him. With a sly grin and a leer, the man who held the hat slunk away, spitting tobacco juice.

After one false start, the race got under way, the ringers slightly in the lead. Quirting their cayuses, three Basin riders swept up even, surged alongside, hurtling hell-bent as though they had only a quarter mile to go. A Walking-Y-Down horse forged ahead, took the rail. Two other Palo Pinto men pocketed the jockeys.

Taz Benteen, with the ugly eyed Jerky stretching his belly, swept into the lead a length ahead, two lengths. The piebald was in his element here, and ran like a fleeing shadow. A mighty roar went up from the Basin partisans.

Palo Pinto brought home the bacon—win and place. A Paint Rock rider—and not one of the jockeys—finished a close third.

The pocketed ringers raised a howl, and it was up to the three judges. Quince Craib of Paint Rock upheld them, but Satterlee and "No-time" Tatum voted against him, and the race was declared run. The disgruntled jockeys subsided, muttering, but kept

their thoughts to themselves as the black looks of the Palo Pinto riders were turned on them. The contestants galloped away to their corrals, the Basin entrants in better humor.

In the arena the bull and steer riding was going on at a furious pace. A snorting, bawling demon, a wriggling, plunging mass of red hide, tossing horns and lashing tail, bucked a rider off and chased him through the fence, then went charging around the inclosure, bellowing defiance. A long-mustached Negro, riding a fleet mustang and wearing a multi-colored clown suit and dunce cap, took after the longhorn, kneeing his fuzz-tail, ki-yeeing shrilly and swinging a lariat. Other hazers were galloping from the far side of the field to head the steer off.

Again the gun cracked, and the events went on. Palo Pinto won second place and showed in the boys' relay, open to youths under sixteen. They broke about even on the steer and bull riding; Paint Rock outpointed them in time on goat roping and tying, and in wild-cow milking.

Just before one o'clock, when the rodeo adjourned for dinner and a rest, Taz Benteen managed to bring home a first on the single-roping contest, and almost tied the world's record. He lacked but three seconds of duplicating the feat, and was far ahead of the closest competitor.

The way he and his piebald worked on the wild-eyed steers was a revelation to the stands, and set people to asking questions about him. Old Dud Manderson shook hands with him warmly at the conclusion of the single-roping event.

"We've helt our own, so far," said Manderson, "thanks to you, son. Yore work on the mosshorns was a sight for sore eyes. But"—and the old stockman's face grew haggard and grim—"watch yoreself, Benteen. There'll be plenty of polecats here that'll keep a skinned eye on you from now on. And there'll be three-four fellers I could name—without having to put on my thinkin' cap to remember 'em—that ain't goin' to like yuh a bit."

"Well," said Taz with a tight, thin grin, "I reckon they ain't the first men that didn't like me, Mr. Manderson, and I reckon they won't be the last. Likewise, maybe the next couple of days one or two of them men will have reason to dislike me a damned sight worser!"

CHAPTER IX.
THE BROKEN HORSESHOE.

THERE was no rodeo that afternoon, out of deference to the Basin ranchers and the funeral of young King Manderson.

After Taz Benteen had eaten dinner, he searched out Sheriff Bowles and inquired about his investigation of the horse with the broken calk.

The officer, as well as his deputy, had drawn blanks. No blacksmith in town had changed a shoe like that, either one or all four, on a broken front calk. And inquiry in the camps along the river, and among the rodeo hazers and wranglers about the corrals and stock pens, failed to turn up anything. There was no use in seeking for sign in the fair grounds, for the tracks were as thick and jumbled there as hog tracks at a mud wallow.

The man from Bandera didn't attend the funeral. Funerals depressed him in a peculiar way, and he never went to them. Instead, he saddled his piebald, and rode away from his camp in the bottom toward the wooden bridge that spanned the San Saba several hundred yards downstream.

When Old Man Manderson told him that several men in Lampasas would particularly notice him after his roping that morning, he hadn't spoken idly. For about the time that Benteen was leaving his camp, two men were in conference in a back room of the Concho Bar

behind a locked door. A third hombre lounged near that door in the barroom, while a fourth sat hard by in the vacant lot behind the saloon, idly whittling. And those two guards wore Paint Rock colors and numbers.

The men in the room were Big Nate Wilcox and Tobe Odom, the high aces and king-pins of the country beyond the Diabolos.

"He's signed up as Tazwell Benteen, Bandera," rumbled Wilcox, looking at a slip of paper in his hand. "And I don't feel just right about that waddy, Tobe."

"Well," suggested the thick-shouldered, bulldog-faced rancher indifferently, "there's allus ways—— What about it?"

"What about it!" snapped Big Nate, his cold eyes flashing. "Don't be a damn fool, Tobe! We can't pull anything right now, and you know it. Old Pegleg Bowles is watchin' us like hawks, and he's got every Basin outfit to back his play. The humor these people down here are in, they shore won't stand for any rank decisions, either. I've told Craib to watch his step, and the other boys at the grounds to work slick and under cover. I dunno—but I've shore got a queer feeling to-day about this."

"Aw, take a drink and fergit it," shrugged Odom, rolling a brownie. He stared closely, curiously a moment at the big, bearded man across the table. "We can't lose, Nate, with young Manderson out of the picture. There's not another buckaroo 'tween here and hell that can tech Pizen-oak on a fuzztail, an' you savvy it. Ridenour's almost as good. Why worry 'bout it?"

"Yeah, why worry?" grunted Wilcox sarcastically, his eyes icy. "I've bet myself blind on this Stampede, Tobe—close to forty thousand bucks. If I lose, it'll damned near break me!"

"An' I guess I'll clean up, likewise!" scoffed Odom. "Hell, I've bet my shirt on it, myself. An' I ain't worryin'—not a damn bit. If this Bandera waddy shows his teeth, an' begins to look salty bad in the events, he's liable to turn up missin' before the finals. He's the only dark hoss in their whole line-up, anyhow."

"Yeah," said Wilcox slowly, "but one dark horse can play hell in a thing like this, Tobe. Well, we've got to do somethin'."

"Leave it to me," grunted Odom. "Jest fergit all about this Bandera man, Nate. By the way, where's Pizen-oak Slade?"

"On the streets, somewhere, I reckon. And I hope he keeps halfway sober!"

"He'd better," said Odom significantly. "Yeah, he'd better." He laughed unpleasantly, stood up. "C'mon. Let's take a *pasear* into the saloon an' wet our tonsils. No use mopin' around in here any more. An', *amigo mio,* you just fergit about that Benteen feller. *Andiamo.*"

"All right, Tobe," said Big Nate Wilcox. "I'll leave him to you."

The man in question was, just about that time, sending Jerky up a steep little trail out of the Saba bottom toward the end of the wagon bridge that spanned the stream, and connected the town of Lampasas proper with its suburb across the river that went by the name of Chihuahua.

Chihuahua was "Mexican town," a huddle of squalid adobe hovels and narrow streets. And it was toward this unsavory purlieu that Taz Benteen turned his piebald's head that scorching Thursday afternoon.

Crossing the rickety bridge, it was like stepping into another country on the far bank. A crooked byway snaked through the settlement, closely hedged by aged dobe huts and intersected by narrow side alleys. The furnacelike air was tainted with the smell of garlic and drying hides; naked kids ran screeching like savages in the lanes or peeked

wide-eyed from dark doorways. In some of these doorways lounged swarthy, hard-visaged men, or women with greasy, unkempt hair. Pigs, dogs and tethered burros were everywhere.

A quarter seeping with poverty, vice and viciousness, this suburb of Lampasas commonly referred to by natives as "Across the Creek."

Tax Benteen scanned the houses closely, and finally pulled up his piebald before a dingy corner cantina. Dismounting, he entered, and stood just within the mud doorway, accustoming his eyes to the dimness of the cool interior after the fiery glare of the sun.

A hair-lipped, pockmarked *cholo* stood behind a crude plank counter, regarding the gringo covertly. Three Mexicans seated at a rough deal table against the wall also stared at him very steadily indeed. A *pelado,* with a red bandanna handkerchief bound around his greasy hair in lieu of a hat, shambled in from a back door, his beetlelike eyes sliding over the Americano. The cantina was wrapped in silence, broken only by the buzzing of innumerable flies.

"I'm looking for a blacksmith," said Benteen in easy, colloquial Mexican. "Who's a good one over here, hombre?"

The hair-lipped *cholo* moved uneasily, his beady eyes slipping around the room. He shrugged a shoulder, mumbled something unintelligible, not looking at Benteen.

"Talk, you!" snapped the gringo, stepping several paces into the room and pausing with legs slightly spraddled, thumbs hooked in his gun belt. "I'm not asking that question twice. You savvy Ranger?"

"Caramba!" whined the *cholo* thickly, his eyes frightened. "I have done no wrong, señor! As to the *herrero*—the blacksmith—there are two here, Señor Rurale. One is Felipe Joroba, the other Manuel Baja. Manuel is more better horseshoer than Felipe."

"And where do I find them?"

The *cholo* hurriedly gave the directions, and blew out a long sigh of relief when the gringo left the cantina. He knew the Texas Rangers from experience, and wanted no further dealings with those gentry. He was more than glad when Benteen rode away up the crooked street.

Joroba, a surly, piratical-mustached Mexican, was certain that he had not shoed any Americano's horse for weeks, and after a quick scrutiny of his tiny, dirty shop, Taz Benteen was convinced that he hadn't.

Manuel Baja wasn't at his place of business, but inquiry and search located him in the rear of a second cantina, squatted under the shade of a sycamore tree with several other countrymen, engaged in the occupation of priming-up two red gamecocks to a fighting mood.

Benteen called Manuel aside with a jerk of his head, and began asking questions. The Mexican was sullen and clamlike at first, but when the Americano mentioned the word "Ranger," Manuel became scared and talked plenty. He, too, had a wholesome fear and respect for those minions of Texas law, and readily told all he knew.

A man, late the previous night, had come to his home, roused him from sleep, and made him go to his shop and put a shoe on a horse. He, Manuel, had worked behind closed doors, by lantern light and the glow from his forge. The horse had a broken calk on the left front foot, and was of brownish-dun color. That had been about eleven o'clock.

The man who brought the horse was of medium build, very sun-browned and dark of face and sharp of feature, and wore two guns on a belt. He had on a gray slouch hat, a red neckerchief, and bullhide chaps with silver conchas. His eyes were muddy gray, and there was a cast in the left one. It never looked at a man, as did the right, but squinted away at an angle. A small white scar

was on his lower lip, and he paid the smith one dollar. Such was the person who roused him from *casa* and bed the night before, said Baja the *herrero*.

And Taz Benteen, watching him narrowly during the recital, was satisfied that the sharp-eyed Manuel was a most observant Mexican in a great many things. At a word the blacksmith accompanied the American back to his shop, and there, rummaging about in a pile of iron miscellany near his anvil, brought to view the broken shoe and held it up triumphantly.

Benteen, who had been closely studying the maze of tracks on the soft dirt floor of the shop, took it with a grim smile playing about his lips. For on the floor of the shop, as well as imprinted in the dusty earth outside the doorway, were the identical tracks that he had mentally photographed and measured out on the llano. The broken calk went in the shop, a brand new shoe came out. There was not the slightest chance of a mistake, there.

"Gracias, amigo," said Benteen, as he forked his piebald. "You've helped me out considerable this evenin', and here's one American peso for your trouble. Just keep your lips buttoned up about this whole shebang, and mebbe we'll slip this horseshoe around a certain hombre's neck when we stretch it."

Still smiling grimly, Taz Benteen rode back down the street, the damning link of evidence in his saddle pocket. He sensed the many black eyes watching him from shuttered windows and blank doorways, and his gaze grew more wary and chill. Luck, that day, had flipped him a valuable card across the board—and all on account of his playing a hunch. And there might be spies watching.

"You swapped a rattlesnake for a copperhead, brother!" he said to himself as he deftly built a quirly and licked it into shape. "You were plumb kiotyish about *some* things, but shore played hell in just changin' *one* shoe. I gotcha now, fella, and I pretty near got enough proof for a first-class hangin'."

CHAPTER X.

TAZ GOES INTO ACTION!

IT was that night when Taz Benteen became acutely aware that certain people in Lampasas were taking a more than ordinary interest in his affairs.

He had said nothing to the sheriff or his deputy about the discovery of the broken shoe in Chihuahua, content to let the two unearth a few clews and facts themselves. For his was an ancient, inbred animosity against the law, and once again he wanted to take the law into his own hands and play judge, jury, and executioner, all in one. But the canny caution that was also inbred in him exercised itself, and he secretly determined to acquaint Pegleg Bowles with his find in the morning.

His supper finished—in a little restaurant off the square called the Hole-in-the-Wall—he strolled about town with senses fine tuned and razor-edged, on the alert to catch any scraps of idle conversation in the saloons or gambling houses; for many such scraps, meaningless to most men, took on to him a peculiar significance, especially when he was on a spoor. Very little, anywhere, escaped Taz Benteen's eyes or ears, so uncanny was he in his peculiar training.

It was at the carnival midway, which was holding forth on a large vacant lot in the eastern purlieus of Lampasas, that the first inkling of Paint Rock's interest in him manifested itself.

Benteen was strolling idly along the rows of booths and tent shows, mingling with the noisy crowd. The raucous ballyhoo voices rose above the roar of the crowd and the tinny hobby-horse music; wheels of fortune spun while the counters clicked. The sharp pop of .22 rifles in shooting galleries, the hoarse shouts of touts and barkers, cut by occasional

shrill and loud yells from punchers who were feeling their oats.

"See Zo-Zo, the dog-faced girl! The wild girl from Afriky, folks! She eats raw meat like a wolf, she howls like a kioty! Step right up and get yer tickets. One thin dime, ten cents, one tenth of a dollah to see Zo-Zo, the wild girl!"

"He eats snakes, people! See him layin' down amongst the side-winders and rattlers, the copperheads and moccasins! Ten cents only, folks!" "Hit 'em on the coconut, Slim! One down, one seegar; two down, two seegars; three down, half a dollah! Try your luck, punchers!" A raucous voice extolled the wonders of a double-headed calf; another extolled the virtues of a patent medicine. Above all, torch lanterns sputtered and glowed redly, and the moon soared high.

Taz was passing a small stand where a crowd of men tossed rings at numbered stakes on a board, the prizes being a miscellany of cheap Indian blankets, pearl-handled pistols, secondhand watches, gaudily carved spurs, and the like. He loitered for a moment to watch, when somebody barged heavily into him from behind, almost knocking him off balance. Like a flash he whirled, looking around.

Three cowboys, all of them apparently much the worse for liquor, stood there, eying him belligerently, and all three wore Paint Rock numbers and colors on their backs! The one who had banged into him was of medium build, about the size of Benteen, almost as dark featured as a Negro, with shiny black hair and a pair of muddy, grayish eyes. The man from Bandera drew a long, slow breath as his own eyes rested upon the fellow.

For in his left orb was a decided cast, a cast which deflected the retina so that the eye seemed to be looking sidewise instead of directly at Benteen, as was the man's right one. The muddy gray color of those eyes contrasted queerly with the swarthy visage in which they were set, giving them a particularly villainous look.

Swaying a bit unsteadily on his booted feet, the puncher stared hard at Benteen, thumbs hooked in his cartridge belt, from which two guns dangled. "What the hell you think you're doin'?" he demanded harshly. "Tryin' to take up all the pike?"

Benteen's eyes narrowed, his lips grew thin as a slash. The men at the roping stand turned around, watching, and several passers-by halted.

"What's the big idea of buttin' into me, hombre?" asked Benteen softly—far too softly. "Think you're a curly wolf, and that this is yore night to yowl?"

The puncher cursed. "Why, you sawed-off, hammered-down, spavin-j'inted——"

"Ample," cut in Taz Benteen, his voice cracking like a bull whip. "That's plumb ample, *muchachito* (little boy)! It ain't my style to give lead poisonin' to a drunk, but I'll *give* you just half a minute to shed your artillery and vest, then I'll proceed to correct some mightily misjudged opinions you seem to have about me. Now git goin'!"

Taz's fingers went to his own gun belt buckle, hesitating, his eyes on the fellow in front of him. A man wearing a Basin number stepped from the assembling crowd beside Benteen, his eyes hard and alert. A second was slightly behind him, with plenty of elbow room. The two Paint Rock waddies with "Cockeye" said nothing, but suddenly seemed very sober, and their arms were tense. Cockeye wet his lips, half turned to his compadres with a wink, and unbuckled his belt. He handed his guns to one of them, shucked off his vest and hat, spat on his hands and rubbed them together.

Taz Benteen, shedding his own guns, belt and vest, gave them to the tall Basin rider who stood beside him, then

discarded his black J. B. He thumped away his cigarette, glanced once around the expectant crowd, then stepped toward his antagonist, his body slightly crouched.

"Wait a minute," growled Cockeye, rolling up his left sleeve to display a leathery, muscled arm. His snake eyes flashed upward from under lowered lids a split second toward Benteen, then without warning he drove a full, hard-fisted blow against Taz's chin. It was a dirty, lightning-quick slam, and Benteen's head rocked back with a snap. He teetered on his long-shanked Mex spurs, off balance, and fell sidewise.

It was a dirty, underhand, foul lick, and it caught Benteen unawares, for he was waiting for the man to finish rolling up his sleeves. And his body had no sooner hit the rock-hard buffalo sod than Cockeye flung himself forward and came down on Benteen on all fours, his arms flailing like pistons.

The circle suddenly widened as the two battlers threshed and rolled and twisted, fists rising and falling and whipping. Came a pained grunt, a stifled oath, and Cockeye hurtled tumbling backward with Benteen's boots in his stomach. Then the Basin rider was standing and breathing hard.

The two Paint Rock men, who had whooped delightedly when their companion knocked Benteen down, ceased their racket abruptly. Cockeye, his face murderous, scrambled to his feet. Blood trickled from a cut lip, and his features were smeared with dust and dirt.

"Want to play dirty, huh?" snarled Benteen. "O. K. with me—I'll show you things that ain't in the rule book."

For answer Cockeye lashed out with both arms, diving in like a mad range steer. They came together with a flat thud, grunting, swapped blows a moment, then clinched, wrestling. Cockeye tried to gouge Taz's eyes with his long nails; tried to grab an ear with snapping teeth.

Once, twice, a third time Benteen's rock-hard right fist smashed into his opponent's midriff, and Cockeye broke the clinch with another pained grunt. As he jerked free and swung viciously at Taz's face, Taz landed a savage left cut flush on the Paint Rock man's right cheek bone just below the eye. The man staggered back into the ring of delighted spectators.

Benteen half turned, waiting. Crystals of sweat stood out on his grimy face, and a small furrow of blood lay against one temple. A tiny patch of hide was off his chin; his knuckles were skinned and bleeding. When Cockeye scrambled to his feet again, Taz dived into him with whole-hearted savagery.

Another lightning exchange of blows and grips, another break-away. Benteen slipped to one knee in the mêlée, and barely dodged a brutal, lightning-quick kick from Cockeye's right boot, the tip of which just skimmed Taz's temple. On his feet in a jiffy, he landed two hard licks and then clinched as Cockeye lashed out with his boot again. Taz, twisting, caught the kick on his thigh.

He was mad through and through, now. Cockeye, again trying to fasten his teeth in Taz's ear, found his neck and head locked across the shoulder of the man from Bandera. Taz dropped to a knee; the whipcord muscles of his back and biceps played like writhing snakes. Cockeye, head, torso and legs, described a cartwheel over the kneeling Basin rider, and struck the hard earth with a resounding impact several feet away. He landed on the back of his neck and shoulders, and this time made no effort to rise.

Taz Benteen, wiping the sweat from his eyes, stood waiting, an ugly smile playing about his thin lips.

Cockeye staggered to his feet, dazed and sick at his stomach, white about the nose and mouth. One eye was badly cut and fast closing, his nose and mouth

were bleeding, spatters of blood were all over his face.

"That's enough," he said thickly through swollen lips. "This is yore game an' I was a sucker to play it. I want no more truck with yuh, anytime, anywhere. You stay clear of me, feller. Next time I'll say it with lead."

"Smoke talk, huh?" said Benteen softly. His level gaze hardened, his eyes flashed frosty as two chips of polished ebony. "Since you hand me the ticket, I'm damn shore callin' it. You all heard, amigos?"

"Yeah, we heard."

"Yuh damn tootin' we did!"

"Seguro miguel——"

"All right," nodded Benteen, as the muttered remarks came to his ears from the crowd. "Now, *muchachito,"* to the thoroughly whipped Cockeye, "I'm waitin' for that apology to them careless remarks of yores a while ago. If it ain't forthcomin', and instanter, what I've already done to you ain't goin' to be a fair sample of what's comin' up."

Cockeye hesitated, licked his bashed lips, then lowered his eyes.

"I'll take it back," he mumbled thickly. But the glance he flashed at Benteen was venomous as he turned and scuffled away with his two compadres, buckling on his gun belt as he left. Somewhere in the crowd a man laughed boisterously.

"That's givin' 'em hell and repeat, waddy," chuckled the tall Basin rider as he tendered Taz his belt and guns. "This salubrious occasion calls for a drink—three-four of 'em. You fellers pawed up enough dust to choke down a camel. Let's antelope for the nearest thirst emporium."

"Who is that cockeyed hombre?" asked Taz Benteen, when they were comfortably aligned at the bar of Grubb's Legal Tender Saloon, with a bottle of bourbon and two glasses in front of them.

"I know his moniker, an' that's all," said the Hashknife man. "He's a new un from over the way. Name's Wooten —least that's what he goes by on the books, and he rides for Tobe Odom's O-Bar-O. A Comanche-white breed, so 'tis said. I wouldn't give him hell room myself. And if I was you, amigo, I'd kinda watch the hind side of my vest."

"Will do," drawled Taz, and some time later left the saloon and his fellow rider. Rumors of the fight evidently had spread about town, for Benteen felt many pairs of eyes regarding him covertly or steadily, as the case happened to be. Most of the Palo Pinto cowboys were taking things easy that night, resting for the morrow, and not many were in evidence on the square. Evidently the burial of young King Manderson that afternoon had had a depressing effect upon them, and they were just beginning to react to the shock.

Taz went into the Concho House Bar, bought a sack of Durham and a book of meat-market papers, and was leaving when Kaysee Ridenour, the Paint Rock rider who won the cowboy half-mile relay that morning, came swaggering up from the rear of the saloon. His horsy face was split in a grin, and he was pretty well liquored up. He slapped Taz familiarly on the shoulder, then leaned back heavily against the bar, his body hitting with a jolt.

"Hyah, Sarsapariller," he beamed, "you old fightin', ropin' son of a gun, you! What you tryin' to do to-night—bust up our prize steer wrangler an' bulldogger? Ole Squinch-eye Wooten looks like he'd been whupped through hell with a prickly pear. Guess he was tryin' to play a li'l' joke on yuh, cowboy."

"I can take a joke," said Benteen grimly, "but not too damn many of 'em. He started to pass on out, but Ridenour grabbed his arm.

"C'mon, waddy, an' h'ist a glass of red-eye with me," he urged. "Just to show there ain't no hard feelin's in my

neck o' the woods, anyhow. I'm a ring-tailed-tooter from Missouri, and I'm gonna ride these Texas fuzz-tails high, wide an' handsome to-morrer. Abstitively and postilutely. Who did you draw for yore first rockin'-chair, friend?"

"A cayuse named Pitchfork," said Benteen, bellying up to the bar with the loud-mouthed Paint Rock rider. The fat barkeep expertly skidded glasses and a bottle along the wet counter surface, and they stopped in front of the two as if equipped with brakes.

"Pitchfork? Don't know him. But I drawed a heller, an' his name's Hellamile. Here's how, Sarsapariller. Hot iron, and ram 'er deep!"

Taz Benteen, draining his glass of red liquor, saw a movement at the far end of the bar. Three men came out of a back room and, walking casually up to the mahogany, ordered drinks. Taz watched them from the corners of his eyes, in the back mirror, and was aware that they were at the same time subjecting him to the same covert scrutiny.

They were Big Nate Wilcox, Tobe Odom, and Pizen-oak Slade.

Benteen, without seeming to do so, photographed Slade carefully in his brain. He was a gigantic man, well over six feet in height, with broad shoulders, massive thighs and thick, long arms. A heavy shock of raven-black hair crowned a swarthy, pock-scarred visage made more sinister by a stubble of unshaved beard. His eyes were cloudy, and of a peculiar dark-gray color. Behind his thick lips two gold teeth flashed as he talked in a deep, rumbling growl. Bareheaded, bare-armed, with shirt open at the throat to reveal a hair-matted chest and neck, he was indeed a striking and malign figure, and Taz Benteen felt the hackles stir on the back of his neck when Slade's dead and stony stare fixed itself upon him in the mirror.

He was conscious of the man's hostility; it was as tangible as a wall. Slade's thick underlip jutted out brutally as he watched Benteen.

"As I was sayin'," spoke Ridenour, with a wink at the bartender, "us fellas from Missouri have to *pasear* down here and show you Tehannos how to ride. Mebbe we could show some of yuh how to shoot, too, Sarsapariller."

Taz Benteen, looking away from Slade's fixed stare, glanced at the loud-mouthed waddy coldly.

"Then you'd better do your shootin' damned straight," he said with a thin, mirthless grin. "For there ain't any jury in the Lone Star that would convict a Tehanno, for sendin' out a Missourian."

Several near-by drinkers had put down their glasses to watch and listen; they burst out laughing at Benteen's comeback. Ridenour himself, far from taking offense or showing resentment, slapped his leg in high mirth and guffawed.

"Damned if you ain't all right, Sarsapariller!" he chortled. "You act sudden with yore tongue—as well as yore fists. How 'bout another li'l' jorum of rum before beddin' down?"

Taz shook his head. "Nope. Had aplenty. *Noches*—see yuh mañana."

And as Taz left the saloon, Pizen-oak Slade was stretching his huge arms in a prodigious yawn. By some queer trick of light, his shadow was cast, enormous and grotesque, on the far wall of the room—it looked exactly like a huge cross. Taz Benteen's eyes narrowed slightly as they fastened upon the coincidence.

Was that sign a warning, a silent monitor of things that were to happen the next two days? Did forthcoming events truly cast their shadows ahead? The man from Bandera shook his shoulders irritably, but he walked very warily, very stealthily, and most thoughtfully back to his camp under the San Saba cottonwoods.

CHAPTER XI.
PITCHFORK.

A RIDER was up, high against the sun. Beneath him a wild-eyed, side-swiping, sunfishing cayuse was tying itself in knots. A gun cracked and the ride was over.

The packed stands, howling with excitement, were a riot of life, and color, and furor. Action swirled out there in the oval. Another puncher was up, then down in the dust while savage hoofs flailed across his body. A gasp shivered the assemblage as pick-up men streamed away and new buckers came in.

The Panhandle Stampede was on in full blast, trying to make up for a lost half day.

"Pizen-oak Slade!" bawled an official. "Wanted at the saddling chute!" Other arena officers took up the hail.

Taz Benteen, standing at one side of the corrals smoking a cigarette, was looking over the field carelessly, his legs slightly spraddled, his neckerchief fluttering slightly in the wind, his uptilted black hat letting the sun shine fully on his lean, bronzed face. He was, at that moment, a splendid picture of a man relaxed and indifferent, entirely forgetful of the part he was to play, with his eyes half closed, and the quirly drooping from a corner of his thin lips.

He heard the men paging Slade; he saw Pizen-oak's huge frame sliding across the arena with the noiseless, sinuous motion of a catamount. Slade wore a sleeveless red shirt and batwing chaps, with a green bandanna knotted loosely around his neck. His big Stetson was jerked low over his eyes, with a braided rawhide passing from it under his chin. His long arms, bare to the shoulder and bronzed almost black, were hairy as an ape's. Mexican wheel spurs with cruel rowels jangled on his boots, and a quirt dangled from his wrist.

He passed within five yards of Benteen, who still leaned against the corral fence. Slade slowed his pace, poked a thumb against the brim of his hat and shot it upward, clearing his face. His jaws grinding solidly upon the wedge of plug tobacco between his teeth, he cast a look of cold malevolence at Benteen and deliberately spat, the brown juice almost splattering on the Bandera man's riding boots.

"Try that again," said Taz Benteen between his teeth, "and I'll kill you, drygulcher!" His lips were flattened to a white hyphen of fury beneath blazing eyes, and his voice cracked out like a pistol shot. Body tense as a fiddle string, he waited, arms slightly bent, although neither he nor Slade wore arms.

Pizen-oak's blotchy-gray eyes flickered, the lines about his nose pinched in, his lips drew back over the gleaming gold teeth. The fleeting shadow of some nameless fear swept across his face, to be instantly erased. His towering shoulders squared and his chest rose, once. Then Slade moved and walked on down the oval, without speaking a word or once looking back.

Benteen, too, did not open his lips again, but stood motionless a long moment, looking over the horizon and breathing deeply. And presently, with a hard smile that did not reach his eyes or express peace on earth and good will toward men, he slowly rolled another brownie.

"Pizen-oak Slade, Paint Rock, on Prickly Pear. Let her rip!"

A yellow outlaw shot out of the chute into the open as if propelled from a catapult, and immediately started to imitate a locoed wild cat on a red-hot stove. Twisting and sunfishing, he snaked down the field, bucking, plunging, rearing and pretending to fall, only to lunge forward again and come down stiff-legged on the buffalo sod with jarring thud.

Yet above the pounding and spurts of

dust and dynamic thrusts of Prickly Pear, Slade sat like a rock, his spurred heels roving fore and aft, naked right arm free and waving his hat, his eerie catamount howl sounding over the field and striking away back in the stands. A gust of cheering and handclapping greeted the ride, for it was a good one. The breed was certainly adept at sitting fuzz-tail wild horses.

Taz Benteen hitched up his chaps and flipped away his stub of cigarette when he heard his name called: "Benteen, Frying Pan, on Pitchfork!"

And Pitchfork, a paint mustang, more than lived up to his name. He reared and battered about the chute while the hazers were trying to saddle him, even though he was snubbed up, and worked himself into a lather. But at last the saddle was on, and Taz reached through the fence with a wire, pulled the web cinch toward him, slipped it through the ring and girted it firmly. The rope snapped into the halter, and the outlaw stood at the chute gate, his white eyes rolling wickedly.

Benteen settled his hat firmly, drew on his gloves, climbed onto the fence. The chute judges gave their O. K. A group of cowboys came by carrying a blood-spattered rider whose chest had been split on the saddle horn. Delirium Tremens, the man killer, had claimed his first victim, and that victim belonged to a Basin spread.

"Taz Benteen, Palo Pinto, on Pitchfork!" bawled the announcer.

The man from Bandera eased into the saddle, and the gate flung open. For a second the pinto stood immobile, trembling, then as Benteen raked home a spur, Pitchfork unwound. He shot out of the chute and hit the arena in a humped-up knot that caused a gasp to come from the spectators. Then he jumped, lit, sideswiped, jumped again, sunfished twice, swung about and spun around.

It was a picture of weaving, raw beauty to those thousands of watchers. Man and horse were one. Taz Benteen sat securely, yet swaying to each savage jolt of the cayuse. Silver flashed in the sun, the brown dust came swirling up. Once the Bandera man was far over, the horse with his head low and curling, and a yell of triumph echoed from the Paint Rock corrals when they thought the rider was gone. Pitchfork was a new horse at the Panhandle Stampede, and a plumb salty bronc; in fact, he was one of the worst. But when the dust screen drifted behind, Benteen was yet riding, matching contortion with rhythm, still touching neck and flank with his spurs. Pitchfork's four hoofs were off the ground and Benteen was on a precarious seat above the wings of the dust.

Old Manderson saw that picture and never forgot it—Taz Benteen with his right arm above him, black hat in hand, black hair gleaming, rein arm crooked rigidly, his lean face looking down between the ears of the plunging outlaw with the expression of a man whose whole will was thrown into the battle.

Suddenly Pitchfork stopped as if a lasso had snaked him, head down, eyes roving evilly. Benteen smacked the beast's lathered rump with his hat, dug home his long-shanked Mex rowels. The cayuse bawled, tucked his head, and barged straight for the arena fence, rocketing across the field in a running buck. Each wrenching bound seemed as if it would hurl the rider from his saddle as the squealing outlaw doubled-up, reared, twisted, changed ends, then quit abruptly, just as the gun sounded.

The gun broke the spell. Pick-up men and hazers streamed in, and a storm of applause rocked the stands. Taz Benteen slid neatly out of his perch and across a pick-up man's horse to the ground, then strode away off of the field, his body still weaving a little from the fight. And he was still smiling that tight, mirthless smile which didn't touch

his eyes, as he passed through a corral gate without turning his head.

But in the riotous stands bedlam held sway. Benteen's name was on scores of tongues. And a shrill voice was loudly proclaiming: "I know that feller! Hell, yes! I've seen him ride before at Fort Worth an' Santone! He's the ropin', bulldoggin' an' buckin' bronc champeen of southwest Texas—and kin he shoot!"

In the arena and among the corrals cowboys gathered in excited groups, and several fist fights started over the grounds. Up in the judges' stand the saturnine Quince Craib turned startled eyes toward the stands, where Big Nate Wilcox and Tobe Odom sat with a crowd of their partisans from across the Divide. Satterlee and Tatum looked at each other, their leathery faces grim and expressionless. Whoever was responsible for the death of young King Manderson had caught a sidewinder by the tail, and no mistake.

Big Nate Wilcox, king-pin of Paint Rock, slumped lower in his seat, his eyes cloudily cold, his face paling beneath the tan. Forty thousand bucks was forty thousand bucks, and to lose it would just about put the skids under him. He looked at Tobe Odom, whose drink-veined face was hard as granite and whose eyes were deadly as a king cobra's. The stares of the two men locked, held.

"I'll take care of him," grated Odom from a corner of his rat-trap mouth. "Take care of him plenty. Go ahead and play yore cards, Nate."

Back of the corrals a grinning, whooping, back-slapping bunch of Basin cowboys greeted Taz Benteen. "Some ride!" they exulted. "We got 'em now—got 'em goin' to a fare-you-well! Boy, we're gonna walk off with this rodeo! You've put new pepper into us, Benteen. Yeeoow-weeee!"

"I've got to hand it to yuh," said Old Man Manderson huskily, gripping Taz's hand hard. "King couldn't 'a' done no better himself, son. An' the hull Basin's powerful proud of yuh."

"We're gonna win like a deer in a walk!" stated a third mustached and elated Palo Pintoan. "Yes, siree-bob-catwallader-muckelbee!"

And win they did that Friday. The Basin spreads seemed invincible ,and made almost a clean sweep of the big events of the second day. In two magnificent and overwhelming victories, Benten had brought Palo Pinto well ahead on points when the final gun sounded that afternoon of the second day. The only Friday event Paint Rock won was the wild-cow milking contest.

The morrow, Saturday, would see the finals—the end of the annual Panhandle Stampede.

The Basin crowd had gone hog-wild as the full effect of the surprise dawned upon it. An excited mob surrounded the Frying Pan corrals, howling and cheering, and it was an hour before Taz Benteen could get a minute to himself. But finally he broke away from the milling mass of admirers and personally attended to polishing off his piebald to suit his own ideas of how that job should be done.

Taz wouldn't have traded Jerky for any cowhorse in the Basin, or in Texas, for that matter. The pie was a mean-eyed, lean-limbed range pony, vicious to strangers and ornery as a scrub bull, but it couldn't be touched when it came to stock work. Jerky was a mottled tornado after a ring-tailed maverick, a nerveless machine when swinging its rider against the ribs of a bawling steer in bulldogging, and a granite rock in holding a critter down at the end of a rope. And on top of all this, the piebald could run like a streak of lightning, and never seemed to tire. Taz Benteen knew his cayuse like a book, and Jerky knew him as well. Together, they made an almost unbeatable combination.

CHAPTER XII.
A SHOT.

THE Bandera man moved his camp late that afternoon from the river bottom to the Basin spreads' stock camp near the corrals. From now on he would have to walk warily, and keep his ears and eyes peeled every second, for he knew that the men from beyond the Diabolos weren't going to lose this rodeo without a fight. As he stabled his pony and bedded down his blankets, Taz heard the Frying Pan foreman giving instructions in low, crisp tones.

"We stand guard to-night as if this was a round-up camp," he was saying. "Three-four of you wranglers will be night hawks. We gotta watch our stuff every minute, for this place is swarmin' with kiotys. You fellers know what we're up agin', I reckon. Don't take no chances on some of 'em sneakin' up and lamin' your broncs—or lamin' *you!* All of us better wear our hog legs where we c'n grab 'em, pronto."

"War in the air," thought Benteen grimly, as he rolled a quirly. He wondered just how much Slade suspected after his, Benteen's, remark that evening about drygulchers? It was a break on his part, Taz admitted, but fury had roweled him into the taunt, and he hadn't missed the fleeting shadow of fear that swept like a cloud across Pizen-oak's face at the word. Well, things were fast heading to a show-down, and it wouldn't be long now before hell popped in Lampasas.

Dusk sifted out of the prairie, and the first stars shone in the darkening sky. The moon, like a disk of pearly silver, rode the meridian, and began painting the llano in its soft, bright wash. Cigarettes glowed redly, and mesquite chunk fires; the aroma of sizzling bacon, cooking flapjacks, hot coffee and Dutch-oven biscuits scented the air. Packs of cards appeared, and games started by lantern light. The harsh bray of a donkey cut through the night; far down the line of stalls a cowboy imitated the bray, and a girl's laugh tinkled merrily.

Benteen, his supper finished, strolled with apparent casualness toward the camp limits. The long sawtooth ridge of the Diablos, cutting the western rim of the Basin and diving the Palo Pinto range from Paint Rock grazing land, stood out on the moonlit horizon like a writhing black snake, and toward the distant foothills a coyote howled his plaint to the stars. Still walking idly, Benteen slid past the camp guards, then walked swiftly and by a roundabout way to the adobe jail.

Entering by a back door, he went into the sheriff's office and found Pegleg Bowles there with his deputy, Newt McConnell. Both officers looked up at his approach, and their faces were worried and serious. Benteen took a chair against the wall, out of range from doors or windows, and smiled tightly at the two harassed minions of John Law.

"Found out anything?" he asked, fashioning the inevitable brownie.

Sheriff Bowles shook his head moodily, no. He was as far as ever from solving the murder of King Manderson. "And if any wild rannies in Gib's camp start off on a high lonesome to-night," he finished, "they'll likely get a taste of what young King got. And—if somebody seen you comin' here, Benteen, you shore better watch the spot where yore suspenders cross. I'll be good an' glad when this dang rodeo's over."

"It'll be, to-morrow night, all 'cept the shoutin'," said Taz. "Sheriff, do you know that jasper I tangled up with at the carnival last night—a cockeyed hombre named Wooten? A breed ridin' for Tobe Odom's O-Bar-O?"

"Uh-huh. Heered of him, an' nothin' good. It's the first time he's been over here in the Basin, though I understand he's been on Tobe's time book for some months. Why?"

"Well, he's the sidewinder that had a broken calk changed on the left front foot of a dun horse night before last," said Benteen quietly. "A smith name of Manuel Baja, over in Chihuahua, did the work."

"Hell an' damnation!" swore the high sheriff. "Is that jest a guess, Benteen, or do yuh know what you're talkin' about?"

"I know what I'm talkin' about. I've got the busted shoe. Also I *know* who killed young Manderson, but right now I can't prove a damned thing."

The sheriff got to his feet, his eyes bleak and face set. "Well, right now I'm arrestin' that cockeyed breed for murder," he said grimly. "He'll find out blamed quick that he can't come into Palo Pinto with his dirty bushwhackin', and get away with it. C'mon, Newt, let's go."

"Hold on a minute," said Taz Benteen. "Wooten's up for arrest, all right, as an accomplice. But he didn't kill Manderson."

"What?" Pegleg Bowles glowered at the man from Bandera. "How come he didn't kill him? Don't the hoss belong to him, and didn't he have it shod?"

"The horse didn't belong to him," said Taz evenly. "But he did have it shod, yes—around midnight, and behind closed doors."

"Then who—who in tarnation did it belong to?" bellowed Bowles.

Taz looked grim.

"Pizen-oak Slade."

Peg-leg Bowles sat down abruptly, his jaw slack. "Good Lord!" he muttered, wiping his forehead with his sleeve. "Then, then Slade——" He left the question unfinished.

Taz Benteen nodded shortly. "Yes, it was Slade, I think. But we ain't got a smidgin' of proof, so far."

"Well," said the high sheriff, his jaws snapping together like steel traps, "we'll git that proof, and aplenty. I'll throw Slade in the jug on suspicion——"

"Won't do," said Benteen. "The fella you want to jug is Wooten. If we could manage to shanghai him up here in the juzgado without the whole town knowin' about it, and hold him incommunicado, I believe he'll spill what he knows. I learned a few tricks from the Yaquis about making men talk good and plenty——"

Suddenly, like a cat, Taz Benteen hurled himself sidewise out of the chair and his spurred heels hit the floor. A pistol shot cut a vivid slash in the darkness from the street outside, and a bullet smacked into the mud wall of the sheriff's office. Uncanny instinct alone had sent Benteen floorward before the report, and he came up fast after the shot with a bullet hole in his black Stetson and a .45 in his fist.

Quick as thought Newt McConnell had blown out the lamp on the table, leaving the room in darkness. In three lithe bounds Benteen was crouched by the window, his slitted eyes raking the moonlit street. Running footsteps padded away down an opposite alley, growing fainter and fainter. With a curse the Bandera man sheathed his gun, and turned to the two silent, heavily breathing officers.

"That's the chance we're lookin' for," he said savagely. "Just made to order, thanks to my hunch in hittin' the floor so pronto. You can arrest Squinch-eye Wooten now, sheriff—charge him with firin' that shot. Course we don't know he did it, or can't prove it, but play your cards and pull him in, anyhow. I'll hang around outside in the shadders till you-all come back—just in case, yuh savvy?"

"I savvy," gritted Peg-leg Bowles. "C'mon, Newt. There's a lot of polecats under the bresh pile, an' we're startin' right now to smoke 'em out. An' it'll be with powder smoke, likewise. *Andiamo.*"

"Hasta la vista," grinned Taz Benteen. "I'll be waitin'."

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE CHARGE IS MURDER."

IT lacked exactly eight minutes of being an hour when Sheriff Bowles and his deputy arrived back at the dobe jail with their prisoner, and three other deputy sheriffs accompanied them. Benteen, who had been scouting the lay of land from the darkness of the building, several times saw skulking shadows prowling in the vicinity, but none approached the bastile, nor was the high sheriff molested as he returned with Wooten.

The party entered the sheriff's office, and Deputy McConnell lit the lamp. Benteen, hidden in an adjacent anteroom with the door closed, could look through the keyhole and see as well as hear everything. It was in accordance with his plans to keep well out of the present picture, for Bowles had left the front window shade up, on purpose, for lurkers across the street to get an eyeful.

Wooten, clad in concha-studded chaps, hand-tooled boots and gaudy shirt, was minus his two six-shooters, but still wore a full cartridge belt and his empty holsters. He was defiant, sneering, and mad as a hornet, despite a black eye and puffy lips, and openly defied the high sheriff to prove anything on him.

"I ain't been near this damned shack all night," he loudly declared. "Yuh didn't find airy ca'tridge that had been shot in my guns, didja? Naw, yuh didn't! An' I been in the Concha Bar for the past hour an' a half. Got plenty of witnesses to prove it, too."

"Shore," said the sheriff, unperturbed. "*Yore* witnesses, yeah. I reckon you have got plenty of 'em, Wooten. I 'low you took a crack at that Bandera rider on account of him whuppin' yuh in yore li'l' ruckus last night. Leastwise, that's what a purty reliable witness tol' me jest now."

"Then he tole a damned lie!" snarled Squinch-eye. "I'd done forgot all about that fist fight. I was drunk, anyhow."

"Uh-huh," smiled the sheriff, his voice conversational. "And you done forgot a lot of other things, too, didn't yuh, Wooten?"

"Whaddaya mean?" demanded Squinch-eye, a shade of uneasiness flitting across his swarthy, evil face. "I ain't forgot that you're holdin' me here without no evidence!" he finished, leering. "Put that in yore pipe and smoke it, Bowles."

"I have," said the high sheriff grimly, getting to his feet. "Search him for hidden weepons, Newt, then lock him up. Meanwhile, we'll jest git them two witnesses up here, an' draw up the charge."

Minus his hat and gun belt, the snarling, protesting Paint Rock waddy was hazed out of the room and down the shadowy corridor of grated cells lit only by the uncertain yellowish glow of a single bracket lamp. A steel door opened, clanged shut resoundingly, and Squinch-eye Wooten was helplessly incarcerated. A quick survey of his prison convinced him that he hadn't a chance of breaking out. Prisoners didn't escape from the Lampasas jail.

He hadn't been in his cubby five minutes before a beam of wavering light crept down the corridor, and Sheriff Bowles appeared at the cell door, a dim lantern in his hand. And with him was Benteen of Bandera, unarmed, and carrying a bullet hole in his black sombrero.

The high sheriff unlocked the grilled door; he and Benteen stepped inside, closed the exit, and stood against the wall, eying Squinch-eye in silence. The Paint Rock man sneered, and stared belligerently from his seat on the bunk.

"Sent for my lawyer yet?" he asked insolently. "Yuh better light a shuck an' git Craib up here, Bowles. Him and Odom, too. Guess they'll both have

somethin' to say about this—and that say'll be plenty."

" 'Spect so," smiled the sheriff. "You gonna come clean, Wooten?"

"Hell! I ain't done nothin', and yuh got nary a thing on me, John Law. G'wan an' roll yore hoop."

Squinch-eye scratched a match on his thumb nail, lit his cigarette, and regarded Benteen malevolently with his one good eye. "If it'd been me doin' the crackin' down this evenin'," he said viciously, "I wouldn't 'a' missed none whatever, sheriff."

"Nooo?" drawled Peg-leg, slowly tamping his smelly pipe. Waal, Wooten, it ain't just a case of attempt to murder, this time. The charge agin' you *is* murder. First degree, bushwhackin' murder."

Wooten sat very still, his body stiffening. The cigarette between his lips, bitten through, fell in a shower of sparks on his knees.

"Murder!" Whaddaya mean—*murder!* Yuh crazy, sheriff?" The Paint Rock rider's face was set and tense, his fists balled into knots. He leaned forward, staring with startled eyes.

"Nope, I'm not crazy," went on Bowles noncommittally. "But I reckon *you* were, Squinch-eye, when you thought you could kill a man like King Manderson and git off. Why, hell! We found yore hoss's tracks, the empty cartridge outa yore rifle, the place where you holed in to wait for young King to pass. Even follered yore trail back to town."

"It's a damned lie!" cried Wooten, his voice rising. He sprang to his feet. "I never shot Manderson. I didn't do it, I tell yuh!"

"No?" drawled Bowles, watching him keenly. "Then how come you was so dinged anxious to get rid of that busted calk on the left front laig of the dun hoss night before last? Huh?"

Squinch-eye swallowed his Adam's apple, looked wildly around. His swarthy face had gone a dirty alkali white, and a nerve on one cheek twitched jerkily. His mouth moved, but no words came.

"Also," put in Taz Benteen, speaking for the first time, "you got rid of the busted calk over in Chihuahua, Across the Creek, at Manuel Baja's blacksmith shop. The broken shoe's in the sheriff's office now, along with Baja's sworn testimony. Sneer that off, you dirty drygulcher."

Wooten sat slowly back on his bunk, his face working. He had no way of knowing how much of this was truth, or how much was bluff and guesswork, but the fact that he had ridden the dun horse to the Mexican blacksmith's shop was more than plenty to swing him, in his opinion. And he knew he wouldn't live long enough to smoke half a cigarette if the Basin denizens got just a smattering of proof that he had killed young Manderson. Yet, on the other hand, if Wilcox or Slade found out——

"You'll be publicly charged in the mornin'," finished Bowles, ashing his pipe. "And I misdoubt, very much, that yore case'll git to a jury. C'mon, Benteen, le's mosey. I want to git outa here before I have to bury my clothes."

"Yeah," remarked Taz, turning away. "And I reckon Friend Squinch-eye will bury his to-morrow, too—but I'm afraid he'll be in 'em."

"Wait!" croaked Wooten hoarsely. "Sheriff! Wait! Don't cut yore wolves loose on *me!* I'm tellin' all I know about this here thing—on one condition. And that is—keep me in jail here till Pizen-oak's case is settled—*and don't let him come in here close to me!*"

Wooten wiped cold sweat from his face with his sleeve, and leaned forward, elbows resting on knees. He had caved in, completely. "I ain't gettin' my neck stretched to save *no* man!" he burst out. "An' what I'm tellin' you is face-up on the table. The time for lyin' is past, *now!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

TRAGEDY.

AN hour later Taz Benteen slipped out of the jail premises by a back way, and disappeared into the velvet darkness like a gliding shadow.

He took advantage of every bit of cover, moving silently as some night animal, his every sense alert. For he knew, that somewhere in the night, skulkers awaited him with intent to send him to Boot Hill. No lobo prowling the llanos traveled more warily that night than did the man from Bandera.

And again it was uncanny instinct alone that saved his life. He was passing along a row of adobe houses, far spaced on a side street, their yards dotted with clumps of yucca, chaparral and huisache trees. A slight movement behind one of those clumps sent him slithering to the hard-packed earth like a crouching cougar, pistol in hand.

Perhaps the tiny noise was only a leaf stirring, or some sleepy bird changing position, but Taz took no chances. It was lucky that he didn't.

For the crack of the twig was instantly followed by a singing noise, and something bright and flashing zipped past his head to land with a metallic clang on the roadway beyond. The hurled knife cut a bee line through the air directly where he had been standing upright—and it was thrown from behind him.

Before the weapon had struck the ground, Benteen's .45 spat once, twice, a third time, the reports mingling almost as one shot. The leaden slugs tore through the huisache bush, stitching a pattern upon the crouching, leaping, twisting shadow that darted away toward the shelter of an adjacent chaparral thicket. A choky scream rent the night—the shadow staggered, skidded into a whirling fall, to land threshing across a bed of spiny devil-finger cactus between two houses.

Taz Benteen, getting to his feet in one sinewy motion, faded into the silvery darkness downstreet like a wraith, moving swiftly for all of his cowboy boots. Spurs in his pockets, pistol in hand, he had disappeared from the scene before the aroused inhabitants of nearby houses came spewing out of their doorways.

"I'll be a heap interested to know," said Benteen with grim humor to himself, as he slipped inside the night-hawk guards of the Basin camp, "whether a soft-nosed .45 slug'll make the same sized hole in a knife-slingin' shadder as it makes in a man. Reckon I will know, mañana. Yeah."

The men behind the corrals had heard the shooting, and were more than a little restless. Camp fires blazed brightly, and riders kept their hands close to their guns. The guards, doubly alert, prowled about the edges of the encampment in the shadows, their eyes raking the darkness beyond the cricles of light. Benteen, seated well in the dark, cleaned and reloaded his gun, then ditched the three empty cartridge where they wouldn't be found. He had a decided hunch that the night wasn't over yet.

Some three quarters of an hour later two horsemen rode up to the edge of camp and halted in the shadow of a huge live oak. At the challenge of a guard, one of them sang out that he was Alf Metzger, one of Peg-leg Bowles's deputies, and wanted to speak to Taz Benteen a moment on important business.

Benteen, sliding around a shed and keeping hidden, began circling the remuda picket line so as to come upon the two horsemen from the side, and silently. A puncher who was on guard near the live-oak tree was advancing toward the halted riders, rifle held in the crook of his arm. He was only twenty feet away from the two shadowy horsemen, who had not moved from the obscurity of the tree.

A thick-witted, unthinking cowboy in the camp perhaps caused the swiftly en-

suing tragedy. For he called out to the guard, either jocularly or unknowingly: "Come back heah, Benteen—'fore yuh git arrested!"

Two seconds after that remark Taz Benteen, dodging around one of the picketed horses near the remuda tail, saw a man on foot step out of the brush slightly behind and to one side of the advancing guard, fling up a double-barreled shotgun and fire point-blank.

Benteen, his own gun blazing, saw the guard pitch forward on his face with a groan. Two remuda guards were also turning loose lead at the bushwhacker, and in the direction of the live oak, where a crashing of brush and tattoo of flying hoofbeats told of the riders making a fast retreat. But the man with the shotgun didn't make his get-away.

He lay sprawled on the ground, legs jerking in death spasm, with two lead slugs in his body. Benteen and the remuda guards hadn't missed their target, for they had fired at almost the same moment the bushwhacker did.

The attack, coming like a thunderbolt, caught the Basin men unawares. They tripped over saddles, tangled up in chuck wagon tongues, barged into one another as they spread out in pursuit. But pursuit was useless; the riders made a clean get-away. And Hat Sharpe, cowpoke guard, lay dead because the assassin had mistaken him for Taz Benteen.

"They aimed to make dead shore of me that time," mused the Bandera man as he returned to camp after a fruitless pursuit. "I reckon those two charges of buckshot just about tore that pore devil to pieces."

His surmise was correct. A crowd was gathered around the stricken guard. He had been killed instantly; never knew what hit him. The dead dry-gulcher identified as a Paint Rock wrangler and corral hanger-on. When Sheriff Bowles and his deputy McConnell arrived a few minutes afterward, they corroborated the identification.

"They got tit fer tat there," muttered Peg-leg grimly, looking at the two bodies. "An' one over," he added, sotto voce, to Benteen. "The Mexican we found in the cactus bed a while ago's still livin', but he won't last till mawnin' an' he's ravin' like a lunytic. Out of his head, yuh savvy. I 'low Big Nate an' his compadres are purty leery an' bothered, right now. But you've got to be powerful careful, Benteen—I'll bet a hoss Nate's offered a bounty for yore scalp."

Old Dud Manderson and his cowboys surrounded Benteen, who was making down his bed in one of the stalls, cigarette glowing between his lips.

"He'll be keerful all right," said Manderson grimly; "for we're goin' to guard him like he was our prisoner. And if any more fake deppities come ridin' up here callin' out names, there's gonna be a hell of a lot more work for Doc Varnum. Why don't you arrest Wilcox, Bowles?"

"He ain't quite run out to the end of the rope—*yit*," said Sheriff Bowles slowly, gratingly. "But when the time comes to snub it—which won't be long, Dud—I'll take up the slack so quick it'll break his neck."

CHAPTER XV.
THE BULLDOGGING.

THERE was a ring around the sun next morning, and the sun was blood red. The air was sultry and hazy, presaging a thunderstorm, and men gasped for breath and were wringing wet with sweat as they yanked at latigos and wrestled with forty-pound stock saddles.

Little puffs of furnacelike wind disturbed the stifling heat, and out across the Basin the sand swirled into the air in twisty whirlwinds—funnel-shaped wind devils that went spinning away toward the rim rock.

The Palo Pinto camp behind the corrals was like a military reservation. Guards armed with rifles and pistols stood all about the area, and strangers were not allowed to approach the camp or any of the live stock. The visiting Paint Rock punchers kept to themselves, warned by the grim faces and savage glances of their opponents. The killing of young King Manderson and Hat Sharpe had aroused these range riders to a fighting pitch, and the least overt word or deed would have ignited the flames of battle and wholesale killing.

The crowd that packed the stands on that last day of the finals also sensed the deadly, sinister pall that hung over Lampasas and the fairgrounds as the rodeo began. There was a low buzz of conversation, uneasy and nervous. A boy started through the aisles yelling "Peanuts and popcorn!" but disappeared when a score of harsh voices yelled at him to "Shut up and get out!" The final events started in dead silence.

Paint Rock won the first final on the cowgirl's relay, and a Paint Rock youngster won the boy's half mile. Bull riding and goat roping went on in the arena; then the finals in the single steer roping.

"T. Benteen, Basin, take yore steer at the chute. He's yourn when he crosses the flagline. Best time wins final money. Let her go!"

Like a galloping jack rabbit a scrawny brush steer shot out of the chute and was away—they had picked a fast one for the Bandera man. But if the steer was a jack rabbit, Jerky was a greyhound. The piebald raced after the dodging steer like a bullet. Benteen's rope whirled above his head, uncoiled, snaked forward and snagged the steer's horns. Jerky skidded diagonally, and braced himself for the shock as Taz left the saddle and landed running. Came a surge and a wrench, the taut rope sang its length and saddle leather creaked. The rope-wise pony braced its legs, turned still more at right angles, and heaved.

The big steer's head snapped to its right shoulder, and the animal spanked the turf broadside on, bawling in mingled surprise and alarm. It had barely landed in a hairy, writhing knot when Benteen tailed it down, tied the legs with the pigging strings looped in his belt, and raised his right arm.

"T. Benteen, Palo Pinto—time seventeen seconds flat!" announced the time keeper. A ragged burst of handclapping from the stands greeted the announcement. The field judges inspected the tie; the steer stayed down for five minutes and was released. It scrambled awkwardly up and away, loping.

Again the gun sounded, and the events went on. The sun bore down hotter and hotter, a haze of dust hung over the arena. Darkling clouds, edged with billows of boiling white, lay above the Sierra Diabolos. Men squinted anxiously at the sky, and the field officials hurried along the finals. Storm—Panhandle storm—was brewing beyond the Rimrock.

Another brush steer snaked from the chute and went bawling across the arena, with Jerky drifting close alongside and holding the pace. Like an uncoiling spring Benteen's whipcord body hurtled through the air and his steel-banded arms caught the tossing horns. Heels plowing the earth, a twist and heave of his frame slammed the bawling animal to the ground, neck and head twisted. Taz's right hand shot up.

"T. Benteen, bulldogging, time, six seconds flat!" droned the announcer.

It was winning time, championship time, and the first real roar of applause swept the stands. The best time Paint Rock could make on the bulldogging finals was seven and one-fifth seconds, and their rider only made that by knocking the steer down with his horse, and getting away with it. That rider was Señor Ridenour.

Benteen also qualified for the last final in the bronc busting, and the cayuse he drew that morning was a mean un. But he rode it faultlessly, and was one of the few Basin contenders in the final event that would take place that afternoon. Ridenour and Pizen-oak Slade qualified as high men for Paint Rock.

Old Dud Manderson as he joined the men who were to be in the last event. His grizzled, battle-scarred face was strangely working.

"I don't know how to thank you boys," he said huskily. "You've all worked yore hearts out for me, and Palo Pinto. It's all over but the finals in the bronc ridin' this evenin'. Right after dinner the last drawin' will come off. I reckon all of yuh know that Delirium Tremens got hisself another man a while ago?"

"Knowed he throwed one," piped up a puncher. "Hurt him bad, did he?"

"Kilt him," said old Dud grimly. "He was Lace Mulhurn of the Paint Rock spread. Plumb busted his neck. That makes No. 2 for that man killer. He got Sandy Hays yesterday. That devil oughta be took out and shot."

"What'll yuh bet, Mr. Manderson," said Taz Benteen quizzically, as he lit a quirly, "that I don't draw Delirium Tremens this evenin'?"

The old stockman cursed fluently. "Well, I ain't goin' to sanction you, or any other of my men ridin' that brute!" he flared out. "It means shore death or injury, and I'm not gonna permit it."

"How the so-ever," replied Benteen quietly, dribbling smoke from his nose and teeth, "if I pull down the bangtail, I'm tryin' my blank-damnedest to take him to the cleaners. And that's cold turkey."

Old Dud stared at the Bandera man a moment, snorted, and swung away on a heel, the twin six-shooters wabbling on his thighs. He was an expert enough judge of men to know that it would be useless to argue with Taz Benteen on the subject unless he wanted to lose the rider's services and perhaps his friendship. After all, the man was grown up, and if he did draw Delirium Tremens, and wanted to go ahead and get his neck broken, it would be his own funeral.

At the chuck wagon that noon, Sheriff Bowles and Newt McConnell drew Benteen away to one side and talked to him some ten minutes. Among things they said were: that the Mexican he shot the previous night had died without regaining consciousness, and that no clews had been found as to the identity of the two horsemen who halted under the live-oak tree behind the corrals. One other thing they talked about, and checked their plans carefully in regard to it, before the two officers took their departure.

Taz Benteen hitched up his gun belt, lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply. Unless he missed his guess a country mile, things were going to happen that afternoon, and start happening all in a bunch. Well, let 'em rip! One of the Paint Rock men was already in clink, writin' poetry on the walls, and two of their bushwhackers were cold as dead Eskimos.

Before night several others would inhabit the *juzgado,* or be turning their toes up in stiff indifference to all further proceedings. "And all hell and the lawyers can't get 'em loose!" muttered Taz Benteen.

CHAPTER XVI.
CANNONBALL.

THE morning's bucking had eliminated the unskilled; within an hour the second rides would be over and the choice narrowed down to the three best men.

And in the third and last ride would emerge that individual who had proved himself entitled to first place. All other events were finished: roping, bulldog-

ging, stage-coach marathon, fancy lariat work, horse races. It would be straight bucking from now on to the end.

Stands and rails were crowded more than ever before, and dust rolled along the arena. A Basin man was down, and the lists narrowed by one. A great yell sailed high up and far out—it beat across to where Taz Benteen stood by a corral chute. A bloodcurdling, catamout howl, and the announcer's voice sounded faint in the washing currents of sound.

"Slade up at the left end—Slade up on Vinegaroon. Watch out!"

The outlaw was a combination of spinner and flat-foot bucker who had a gift of unloading a saddle and getting himself a cowboy before the rider got set to handle himself, but he didn't unhook Pizen-oak Slade. Then Vinegaroon uncorked a whole bagful of skyrocketing tricks. He spun, head to tail, in a series of back-breaking jerks; he slashed and leaped and hit the dirt in a humped-up knot, spinning like a top. Three times, as he landed, Slade's head snapped onto his chest, yet he clung and rode slick, his savage yowl beating across the field, his spurs raking fore and aft. The crack of the gun presaged the end of the event, and a hoarse, prolonged cheer from the stands showed that the Paint Rock ace had done well.

Benteen was next, on a solid buckskin devil called Cannonball. He inspected cinches and hackamore, rubbed his hands dry of the sweat that always cropped out on his palms at the moment before swinging up. Cannonball left the chute dancing on his hind legs, trying to fall back and smash its rider against the board fence.

Taz Benteen raked the outlaw with his Mex spurs, and the buckskin went loco. He rose in a stiff-legged convulsion, turned a complete arc in the air, leaped like a tarpon and plunged to his knees. Up he came again, and down he landed on a spot a good-sized hat would cover. Then he reared again, spun on a hing leg and swapped ends, fell stiff-legged to his fore feet, his legs shooting straight out and up as his head went down. But he scrambled to all fours, bawling with fury, as a burning fire seared along his ribs and in his shoulders.

He tore away around the arena in a zigzag manner that brought the crowd to its feet. Bawling in a series of furious cries, wild-eyed, sweat-flecked, and frothy at the mouth, he humped and slashed, but at every leap he slowed up. Then he quit. Head down, lungs heaving, and flanks pumping, he stood spraddle-legged as the snubbers loped up and Taz Benteen slid off. The outlaw had given up before the gun sounded.

The announcer kept up his nasal droning, from rider to rider as the afternoon crept on and the shadows began to cut patterns along the side of the arena. The heavy bank of clouds hanging above the Diabolos was higher and blacker now, spreading all over the west, north, and southwest segment of sky. Distant lightning winked, and thunder muttered ominously. No wind stirred, save infrequent miniature cyclones on the far llano. Horses and men were drenched with sweat; steers and cattle bellowed and bawled incessantly. Dust hung like a haze over the fair grounds.

"Gonna be hell a-poppin' before night," remarked a weather-wise Plains stockman. "Old Man Storm's shore comin'."

Ridenour had been thrown. Joe Cotulla of the Basin, had managed to stick his bronc, but suffered a broken arm in doing it. Pizen-oak Slade, with blood dribbling from his nose and mouth, staggered across the arena a thin-dime winner over the vicious outlaw, Chowchilla. The next and last event was Tazwell Benteen on Delirium Tremens.

The Bandera man had felt that day, in his bones, that he would draw the man killer. And he had. Slade, crouched by a corral post crunching plug

tobacco, watched Benteen stride toward the chute, and a black grin was on his face. No one, yet, had ever ridden that tiger-spotted devil.

This was the last duel, the deciding fight. If Benteen managed to stick on Delirium Tremens, Palo Pinto would win the Stampede by a good margin of points and final events. The stands had grown awfully quiet; an unnatural hush lay over the scene. The calls and voices of arena attendants sounded raucously loud in the strained silence.

"Ladees and gentlemen!" bayed the announcer. "Taz Benteen of Bandera, rider for Palo Pinto, at the right chute on Delirium Tremens, the butcher! People, watch and pray!"

Basin riders slapped Benteen on the back as he mounted the board railing of the chute. The horse stood stiff-legged, his feet slightly apart, saddled, rolling his vicious eyes watchfully, his long jaw hauling against the snubbing rope and the muscles rippling uneasily across his haunches. When Benteen's hand touched him the outlaw froze on the instant, feet spread into the ground, all set to make that first terrific lunge and lurch that was history. Taz Benteen carefully examined cinch, stirrups, and hackamore, rubbed his hands along his shirt front, stepped softly into the saddle and let his weight come easily down.

There must be no relaxing here, not an instant's. This horse had uncanny perceptions, and was more than tough. He never gave a rider a chance once that rider was a hair's-breadth off balance. The crowd was a vast blur of silent faces; Taz Benteen's face was cold and tight and grim. He ran his hands along the rope time after time, after an old range custom, worked his feet in the stirrups until he felt them take a certain seat. With all his vital forces mustered to one point, he raised his free arm in signal and lifted his chest.

The chute gate flew open. Delirium Tremens's ears swooped toward the ground and Taz Benteen rose high. The fight was on.

The crowd marked each move of the law's frenzied battle, but Taz Benteen knew almost nothing of what the horse did after the first four jumps. With him everything was instinct, everything was feeling. Four terrific leaps took the spotted killer well away from the corral, and as the rider dug home the wheeled rowels, Delirium Tremens started a series of convulsions and contortions that made the tilt with the buckskin Cannonball seem like a burro ride.

Screaming and bawling, the mustang sprang for the fence, hurtled clear over it onto the track, spun like a whirring top, went to his knees, whirled on a penny and jumped the fence again, trying to tear its rider off against the boards and crush him against the railing. And a howl of admiration and amazement rocked the spectators when Benteen, by almost superhuman strength, yanked the butcher away from the fence and raked him savagely with his spurs, at the same time slapping him over the head with his black hat.

Then Delirium Tremens spilled his bag of tricks and began contorting and bucking proper. The wrenching shock of each stiff-legged landing began to tell upon Benteen. Hardened as he was to punishment, disciplined as were his nerves and senses to work along a set pattern without his conscious volition, the heart and back-breaking contortions of the killer were robbing him of his strength.

His sense of rhythm and balance had to serve him while his mind grew black with the riot of blood, as shock after shock ran along his body. The lurching rushes, the jarring stops, the lightning turns tore at ligaments and muscles as if to rip them from their sockets. His neck was being pounded by great sledges; he tasted the salty bitterness of his own blood that welled in his mouth and trickled from his nostrils.

It became torture to hang on as Delirium Tremens sought to tear him apart and leave him on the sod rolling in agony. Failure to dislodge his rider only seemed to infuriate the tiger-spotted killer more. Time and again he tried to rake Taz off against the fence. Slashing out with his heels, screaming like a maniac, tearing up the earth in long, twisty jumps, the mustang put out everything he had to get rid of the cocklebur on his back.

Benteen's spine was being driven up into his skull; the arena was gyrating drunkenly and darkly before his eyes. The mustang pretended to fall, then stopped so swiftly that Taz's teeth clicked painfully. Just as swiftly the horse's head swung around and he snapped viciously at Benteen's chaps, whirling like a dervish. A slap across the eyes with the sombrero started him bawling and rocketing across the field, his wind coming wheezingly and brokenly.

Two dim flashes of knowledge found a path in the congested cells of Taz Benteen's brain. He was raking the butcher according to regulations, and it wasn't good for a man to take very much of this kind of punishment. His stomach was afire. There was a point beyond which he couldn't go.

Again Delirium Tremens halted abruptly, head down, eyes roving evilly. Once more he whirled, snapping at Benteen's leg, then at the jab of the steel a bloodcurdling scream of rage burst from his frothing mouth. He reared straight up, hung poised for a split second, then deliberately threw himself backward, just as the gun sounded to terminate the contest.

His head reeling, Taz threw himself clear just in time to prevent the saddle horn from burying itself in his body. Twice he rolled over, then lunged to his knees. Delirium Tremens was struggling to his feet as the hazers and snubbers closed in; his glaring eyes fixed upon the rider on the ground. With a scream the killer sprang toward Benteen, hoofs flashing. A shot rang out, half a dozen others tailing it a split second. The tiger-spotted butcher lunged straight into the air and crashed, legs threshing spasmodically, neck stiffened. The arena attendants had smoking pistols in their hands.

Rough but gentle hands eased Taz Benteen to his feet; he stood stock-still until the curtain of black rose from his face and fresh daylight came into his eyes. His head throbbed as if a trip hammer were pounding it, and every ligament and nerve in his body ached, but he was grinning at the men who were swarming around to congratulate him. One of them handed him his hat, which was on the ground.

"What a ride! Cowboy, you shore cut the cake *that* time! Hi! Yiiiiiii! Yooow-eeee! Whooooo-peeeiiii!"

The massed crowd had gone wild. Standing up in the grand stand, laughing hysterically and crying, shouting, screaming, men and women became like crazy people. The judges were riding abreast toward the grand-stand railing, conferring together. Pizen-oak Slade still crouched by the corral post, his face black with passion. Deputy Newt McConnell loitered near by, thumbs hooked close to his twin guns, his face grim.

Taz Benteen smiled thinly and built himself a brownie as both Palo Pinto and Paint Rock punchers crowded around him to shake hands, their enmity for the moment forgotten. It was the most spectacular, daring and courageous ride ever witnessed at the Panhandle Stampede.

A crash of thunder, loud and reverberating, rolled above the fair grounds, and the black cloud was boiling onward. The throng still howled and cheered, but the judges were ranked abreast of the stands, and the nasal announcer was bellowing:

"Benteen—Slade—Cotulla—over here on the double!"

As the three riders in the finals went toward the mounted judges, the mob of corral attendants, arena hazers and track officials followed in their wake. Benteen, raking the throng with flicking black eyes, saw Sheriff Bowles and five deputies edging close to Pizen-oak, whose visage was black as the approaching storm cloud.

The stands grew quiet when Anse Satterlee, rodeo president, cleared his throat, his somber eyes fixed on Benteen and Slade, who stood with elbows almost touching. Finally he ducked his chin toward the man from Bandera.

"It's yores, Benteen," he rumbled. "Slade second money. Cotulla third honors. Palo Pinto wins Stampede on points as well as individual expertness in main events——"

"Over my protest!" snapped the long-jawed Quince Craib, Paint Rock lawyer and rodeo judge. "This man Benteen was thrown before the gun sounded, and therefore——"

A roar of rage from the stands drowned his metallic voice. Hisses and catcalls mocked him.

Satterlee held up his hand, and the tumult slowly subsided to growls and mutters. Craib had paled, and said nothing more. But Pizen-oak Slade did. He wrenched his huge bulk forward two steps, and fury blazed in his eyes and worked his big jowls. "This rodeo was framed!" he shouted. "The hull damped shebang was framed! You two dudes that call yerselves jedges are blind in one eye and can't see outa the tother. You been runnin' this rodeo too dang long, Satterlee!"

"That's plumb ample," cut in Taz Benteen with cold ferocity. "And you're a damned liar, and yellow *mestizo* to boot!"

Slade whirled, his face working and fists balling; his elephantine body went into a crouch. And at that second he felt the cold, hard ring of a pistol muzzle boring into his kidneys—heard a colder voice say:

"Put 'em up, Slade. Put 'em up—or else—— I ain't talkin' twice, either."

As Sheriff Bowles spoke, Newt McConnell stepped against Pizen-oak's opposite side and struck a .45 in his flank. The big Paint Rock rider slid his eyes around, and his mouth shut like a bear trap.

"Wha-what's the joke?" he snarled. But his hamlike hands went up even with his shoulders, and his face suddenly became drawn. The crowd became deathly silent, straining forward to listen.

"Call it a joke if you want to," said Peg-leg grimly. "You're under arrest, Slade for murder. I'm arrestin' yuh, right now, for drygulchin' young King Manderson last Wednesday evenin'. Squinch-eye Wooten's in jail, and he's spilled all he knows about the whole thing. We got yuh right."

For as long as one could count ten, stark silence gripped the frozen assemblage. Slade's face was maniacal; his features worked horribly and became mottled as dirty alkali. The breath wheezed hoarsely from his lips, rattled in his throat. He was the living picture of guilt incarnate.

"You—you——" he choked. "You lie! I never——" He whirled suddenly, fixed glaring eyes upon the stunned stands. "Damn yuh, Wilcox!" he screamed. "You're the jasper that got me inter this! Now git me out, or I'll——"

"No, no, Dud!" pledged Peg-leg Bowles, thrusting his body between the savage-eyed and stony-faced old rancher, who was making for Slade with pistols in each hand. "Don't do it, amigo. He'll swing shore as Christmas, legal an' proper."

A roar like a thousand mad bulls burst from the spectators as men began scrambling from the stands. Thunder

crashed overhead, following a vivid lightning streak that rent the clouds. A pistol barrel rose in an arc and smashed against Slade's skull; the hat with the rawhide chin strap was torn from his head. A wave of charging Westerners submerged him, submerged Sheriff Bowles, his half dozen deputies. The officers felt their arms pinioned from behind, felt their guns being taken from them. Two, three shots sounded in the mêlée, and a man hit by a wild bullet groaned.

Taz Benteen, springing backward toward the judges stand, leaped up four or five steps to get out of the riot, in his hand the pistol he had jerked from an armpit holster. The track and arena beyond the fence swarmed with running men—the crowd was completely out of hand and control now. Lightning zigzagged across the heavens again, and thunder smashed deafeningly. The first big drops of rain began to ease down at intervals.

"Git a rope! Bring the rope! Over at the big live-oak tree behind the corrals! Hurry it up, you waddies! Shove him along! *He killed young King Manderson!*"

The voices rose in a babel, roaring higher and higher. Women screamed and covered their eyes. Sheriff Peg-leg Bowles sat on the track, his hat lost, his pistol gone, face buried in his hands. Newt McConnell stood near by, absently wiping his cheek. The other deputies milled nervously, minus their guns.

Taz Benteen, a cigarette smoking between his lips, watched warily. Slade was getting just what he deserved, and he, Benteen, certainly wouldn't try to interfere with the grim frontier justice being dealt that late afternoon. Big Nate Wilcox, his bearded face haggard and white as death beneath the tan, was being herded out of the stands and onto the track by a score of Basin ranchers.

Tobe Odom, insensible from a blow on the head, was being dragged ungently behind Big Nate by two grim-faced stockmen. Sheriff Bowles saw, and slowly got to his feet, his unarmed deputies closing in around him.

"Bowles," said one of the Basin men, "take these two centipedes to jail and lock 'em up, pronto. I reckon both are guilty as hell, but that'll hafta be proved. We don't want no more necktie parties here this evenin'—if we c'n help it. The only safe place for 'em in Lampasas is yore jail. An' that ain't any *too* safe."

"I'm ready to go," said Wilcox hoarsely, looking furtively toward the now silent mob of men around the live oak. He wet his lips, bowed his head. "I'll make a statement when we get there—*if we do!*"

Benteen saw the sheriff and his deputies hurry the two Paint Rock ranchmen from the fair grounds, then squinted toward the gnarled live oak.

"When Lampasas whoops, she whoops!" he remarked grimly. "Well, the damn sidewinder had it comin' to him. Reckon he's findin' out this little necktie party's a thunderin' sight different from waitin' for a feller to show up across his rifle sights. Adios, Pizen-oak."

Taz Benteen had almost reached the square when the storm broke in full fury. It broke in a savage whirl of wind, rain, and lightning, and disbanded the angry mob at the fairgrounds quicker than any human agency could have done. As the Bandera man hurriedly turned into the shelter of the first convenient saloon, he met Ridenour of the O-Bar-O coming out. Ridenour had a patch of adhesive plaster on his cheek, and his eyes and mouth were grim. His saddled pony stood at the hitchrack, war bag whang-tied behind the cantle.

"Hi, Missouri," grinned Benteen, slapping water from his bullet-punctured black sombrero. "Leavin'?"

"Yeah," said Ridenour tightly. "Right now, me, I'm goin' places *muy pronto*. Ridenour's my name, and I'm ridin' far, wide an' plenty far. I've lingered long already, friend—much too long. This here Basin had better take a good look at me now—'cause it'll be their last chance."

Taz watched him mount and go trotting across the square and away from town. Señor Ridenour might be noisy and blustery, and he lacked a devil of a lot of being a fool.

And Taz Benteen nodded shortly to himself. He, Taz, had won the rodeo for Palo Pinto, almost single handed, tracked down the murderer of young King Manderson and seen grim frontier justice dealt him. Sheriff Bowles and his deputies would without doubt learn the parties responsible for shooting Hat Sharpe the previous night, for Wilcox had laid down his hand cold. Lampasas held no more interest for Benteen of Bandera.

The old Brasada country was calling, and calling strong. The drum of the rain on the roof, the cascades of water running from the eaves, the crackle of lightning and crashing rolls of thunder, made him restless as a caged jaguar. He had a sudden yen to get back to that hard, close-woven outfit of his on the Atascosa, miles and days away. And in the early dusk, with the drizzle of rain pattering down from a leaden sky, he made his way to the corrals behind the rodeo grounds, and his pony.

Carefully he rubbed and bedded down his piebald, gathered his traps together so that they could be rolled in his tarp quickly. The Basin punchers, sobered now after their necktie party, squatted around, smoking and talking in low tones. Old Dud Manderson, his leathery face still grim and set, shook Benteen's hand grippingly.

"Bowles has told me everything, son," he said huskily. "There ain't no use in me tryin' to thank yuh, but you savvy, anyhow. I got a foreman job open for yuh Monday mornin', with a chance to work up a brand of yore own the next two-three years."

Taz Benteen lit a cigarette, and the flaring match, cupped in his palms, revealed his lean, bronzed face in a grotesque gargoyle of high lights and shadows for a moment.

"I'm thankin' you, Mr. Manderson," he said, "but I'm pullin' my picket pin and movin' on early in the mawnin'. The Panhandle's all right, but I wouldn't trade a corner of the Starshine range on old Atascosa for the whole Estacado. This jest ain't my country, that's all."

And whistling "Dobe Woman" between his teeth, he rolled into his blankets and soon forgot the Panhandle Stampede, Pizen-oak Slade, a dry-gulching on the prairie, and a butcher horse named Delirium Tremens. For Taz Benteen slept the deep sleep of physical exhaustion, and he meant to be fit as a fiddle on the morrow.

Slept, with five hundred dollars in his pocket, and a six-shooter under his black head.

A new story by Edgar L. Cooper will appear soon.

A NEW KING OF THE LIGHTWEIGHTS

IN the National Museum in Washington is the lightest weighing walking stick on earth. Although full length and full size, it weighs exactly one ounce. It is made of barraguda wood, which grows in Brazil, and barraguda is the world's lightest known wood, being half again as light as balsa wood, the well-known airplane construction material. Barraguda is twice as light as cork, but nevertheless is surprisingly tough and strong.

SAND STORM

By ANTHONY AUTUMN

Mystery and Terror in the Cabin of a Gale-tossed Derelict Blimp!

JACK BAYLOR, pilot of the pony blimp *Lancer,* chewed his lower lip with impatience. A hot wind freighted with stinging particles of sand tugged at the eighty-foot bag that swayed above his head. The wind had increased noticeably in the past ten minutes.

The pilot glanced anxiously toward the southwest, and the murky yellow cloud that hung there. His experienced eye, measuring the space above a row of cottonwoods, told him the cloud was higher. That meant that it was nearer. Traveling fast, too.

"Sand storm, sure as shootin'," he muttered. "What a swell time to go to town!"

Luigi, boss vineyardist in charge of the five Italians who clung to the landing rope of the blimp, glanced at the cloud and nodded. He spoke little English, but he knew the words "sand storm." His own forehead was creased with apprehension, for driving sand would strip the tender new leaves from his grapevines as thoroughly as a visitation of seventeen-year locusts. His shaggy eyebrows lifted a trifle hopefully.

"Maybe notta bad here," he said. "Badda on desert."

The pilot shrugged. His eyes were focused on the sandy pencil of road which led toward the cluster of shacks five miles away that called itself a town. Edgeland was the name of it, and its

one excuse for being was the network of vineyards that stretched for miles between its one street and the barren desert that hemmed it in on the south and east. The population was largely foreign, but the town boasted a general store and one or two dilapidated produce markets where English of a sort was spoken.

It was this town that was causing Pilot Baylor's discomfiture. The blimp had finished its job of sulphur-dusting some ten thousand acres of newly leaved vines and was ready to return to its base at Los Angeles, two hundred miles to the west. "Dad" Henderson, Jack's partner and mechanic, had picked this particular time to go to town.

"Back in twenty minutes," he had announced.

Jack's shout of protest had been drowned in the roar of Luigi's ancient flivver.

Even twenty minutes would have been a long time with that sinister yellow pall rising higher every second, but the twenty minutes had stretched to half an hour and the half to three quarters. The pilot shook his head. Why in hell had Dad waited until the very last minute to run his errands! "Probably out of chewing tobacco," he muttered bitterly. "The old man would wreck us rather than go without his quid."

A gray ball of dust moved out of the green cottonwoods that ringed the town, and scurried rapidly along the road like a miniature cyclone.

The pilot sprang into immediate action. Leaping up the short landing ladder into the tiny glass-inclosed cabin, he pulled at the starter handle. The pusher-type propeller of the single motor moved a foot or two reluctantly. The motor coughed a sullen warning and gave the wooden arms a kick that set them to revolving with a loud roar of protest. *R-r-r-r-r! R-r-r-r-r! R-r-r-r-r!* The Italians strained to hold the tugging ship in place.

Gradually the motors steadied to a rhythmic pur. The pilot's eyes dwelt briefly on the row of pressure gauges. The balloonets could stand a bit of air. He pulled a cord that opened a valve in the big scoops. The propeller wash streamed into the bags and the dial hand moved up to its proper place.

Now that he was standing in the cabin, Jack could feel the blimp sway under the force of the rising wind. It bobbed and courtsied flirtatiously toward a weather-beaten packing shed at one end of which stood the mast to which it was moored. The wind was far from dangerous yet, but there was no way of telling when it might become so. These Santanas were hazardous, increasing sometimes from a moderate breeze to a howling gale with breath-taking suddenness.

The ball of dust approached rapidly. Its center evolved into an oblong of rusty tin which slid to a screeching stop within ten feet of the landing ladder. A short, fat man, with graying hair and a face tanned by sun and wind to a deep mahogany, leaped from behind the wheel without bothering to open the door. Despite his weight he moved with surprising ease. In his hand he held a small paper parcel which he waved at Baylor.

"I got it," he chirruped. "Had to turn the darn store upside down, but I found it."

"Found what?" asked the pilot, his voice heavy with sarcasm.

"You'll see, you'll see," returned Dad Henderson. "Just a little something for the kid. It's a surprise!"

Immediately Jack's heart softened. His tongue had been ready to hurl some scathing words incident to the fool delay the older man had caused. The kid was Jack, Junior—Jackie for short. Old Dad had neither wife nor child himself, and had long since become a sort of adopted uncle to Jackie. In fact, the pilot believed Dad was actually

more devoted to the kid than he was himself—which was saying considerable.

Yet here was convincing proof of it. This very day was Jackie's birthday. With good luck the blimp would be in Los Angeles in time for a little birthday party before the kid's bedtime. That was one reason why Jack had been fuming at the delay. Still he had to admit that Dad had gone him one better. Dad had been thoughtful enough to get the kid a present. Unless the ship reached the western city before the stores closed, the pilot would arrive home empty-handed. He frowned. He wasn't sure that he wasn't even a bit jealous of Dad.

"Come on, get in here," he ordered huskily. "Let's get out of this dump before the sand buries us."

And there this story might have ended but for the man in the shed. The man in the shed was "Snuffy" Blake. Neither Jack Baylor nor Dad Henderson knew Snuffy, yet Snuffy was well known. His picture had been widely circulated, both in newspapers and on handbills. In fact, as he crouched now in a corner of the packing shed watching the blimp through a crack in the door, there was a very good likeness of him hanging directly above his head.

The picture was not as complimentary as it might have been. There was too much cauliflower ear and broken nose showing to make it attractive. The eyes were small and set close together. Killer's eyes. Snuffy was a killer all right. The printed notice under the picture said as much. Bank robbery in which two men had been shot was his latest offense. The notice intimated that his presence on the coast would be greatly appreciated, dead or alive.

Snuffy had spotted the poster when he had darted inside the shed the night before. He had seen duplicates of it in a dozen places as he had dodged south and east from San Francisco in an effort to evade the panting hounds of the law. So far his flight had been very successful. But now he was at the jumping-off place. A scant hundred miles to the south lay Mexico and safety. But it was a hundred miles of trackless desert. Roads led east and west and north. All of them were closed to Snuffy. Only in this one direction could he flee; yet to attempt that stretch of burning sand meant certain death.

Snuffy was desperate. Despair with a capital "D" stared him in the face. And then he had found the blimp.

Snuffy knew practically nothing about airships save that they were capable of traversing with ease stretches of country upon which an angel afoot would not dare to tread. This big ship must belong on the coast. It was preparing to fly back there. If it could fly to Los Angeles it could quite as easily fly to the Mexican border. And make it in quicker time, too, for the distance was a great deal shorter.

Snuffy wiped his nose on his sleeve and chuckled softly to himself. This was a pipe. The dagoes at the drag ropes were not likely to be armed with anything more dangerous than a knife. Neither the pilot nor the fat mechanic had any weapons in sight. Besides, he'd have the drop on them from the start.

Dad Henderson had one hand on the landing ladder when Snuffy made his play. All Dad could see was a little, crooked-faced man with a big gun. The gun was a heavy automatic and it was pointing straight at Dad's face.

"Up with your hands!" snarled Snuffy. "No funny moves, now, or you'll get the works."

Jack Baylor, who was standing in the cabin doorway, instinctively started to draw back inside the flimsy shelter of the cabin. The automatic raised to menace him, too.

"Stand right where you are," cautioned Snuffy. "I guess you guys don't know who I am, so I'll interduce myself."

He stood a little to one side so that the poster on the door was level with his face. Dad Henderson gasped. Snuffy chuckled. He looked at the white-faced Italians who clung to the drag ropes as if for support.

"Geez," he commented. "I never saw guys so scared of a picture in my life before."

Jack Baylor found his voice. "What's the big idea?" he asked. "If this is a holdup we haven't got a cent."

"I don't want your money," said Snuffy. "I've got plenty. All I want is a nice little ride to the Mexican border."

Dad Henderson flicked his tongue over his dry lips. The muzzle of the automatic staring him in the eye looked as big around as a six-inch pipe. Dad had had little experience with violence in any form. He didn't relish it now.

"Oh, is that all?" he squeaked placatingly. "Sure, hop in. We'll take him, won't we, Jack?"

He appealed nervously to the pilot, who stood framed in the doorway at the top of the ladder.

Snuffy advanced toward Dad, his weapon waving menacingly. "How do you get that 'we' stuff?" he demanded. "You're stayin' here. There won't be no fat men on this trip."

"B-b-but——" sputtered Dad.

"Shut up!" ordered Snuffy. He reached out a dirty hand and grabbed the paper-wrapped package Dad still held in his trembling fingers.

"Present, eh?" he leered. "I like presents, too. I know right where I can use this down across the border."

Dad Henderson's face flushed red. A surge of anger swept him from head to foot. The bandit could have stolen his last dime and it wouldn't have made him see red the way he did now. That present was for Jackie. He had chosen it himself. Already it was something beyond ordinary value. His muscles tensed.

Snuffy saw the attack coming and fired. The bullet struck Dad in the chest and spun him around like the kick of a horse. At that instant Jack leaped from the top of the ladder. He had expected to land on Snuffy's head, but the bandit was too quick for him. A quick shift and the pilot fell heavily on his side. For an instant Jack was stunned. When his head cleared he found the cold muzzle of Snuffy's gun pressing his temple.

"One move and you're dead!" snarled snuffy. "Up that ladder now, and quick about it!"

The Italians had dropped their ropes and fled at the shot. The blimp was adrift, but had moved scarcely any. Semidirigibles are only buoyant enough to remain suspended in air. Their engines working in conjunction with tilting tail planes must take them aloft in the manner of heavier-than-air machines.

The pilot climbed shakily to his feet. He recognized the deadly earnestness in Snuffy's voice. He glanced at the huddled figure of Dad Henderson.

"You can't leave him like that!" he protested.

"Up the ladder!" barked Snuffy.

A dozen impossible schemes to get the better of Snuffy and go to the aid of the mechanic flashed through Jack's mind. Every one of them was made instantly null and void by the pressure of Snuffy's automatic in his back. He forced himself to think clearly. He must get a grip on himself. To rush matters now with Snuffy ready to pull trigger at the first twitch of his muscles would be suicide.

Mechanically he climbed the ladder, snuffy tight at his heels. The blimp was already nosing out from behind the shed. Gusts of sand-filled wind were beginning to blow the bow sidewise. The shed had offered more shelter to the ship than he had supposed.

Jack's first thought, once he had gained the floor of the cabin, was of the

motor. The propeller was turning over idly. It would be a simple matter to block the bandit's plan to escape to the border by stalling the motor. There was also the rip cord, hanging just above and outside the starboard door. A good swing on that and the blimp would be through traveling for good until a new supply of helium could be brought from Los Angeles.

But Snuffy had already given thought to that possibility.

"No monkey business, now," he warned. "If that motor dies you'll die with it. One false move and I'll let you have it."

Jack shrugged. The case was hopeless. There was nothing he could do but wait and watch. It was a hundred miles to the border. Perhaps he could catch Snuffy off guard, overpower him and turn back before they had gone very far. If he had to go all the way—— He groaned. The ship could do only fifty miles an hour under favorable conditions. Their course lay almost directly into the wind. Thirty or thirty-five miles would be the best they could do going down. More than three hours at the very lease. Of course, the ship would come back with the wind on its tail. Say, five hours for the whole trip to allow for an even stiffer wind. His heart lightened. That wouldn't be so bad. He wouldn't get to Los Angeles that night, but he would be able to get back to Dad Henderson. If the mechanic wasn't already dead, Luigi could be depended upon to get him to a doctor now that Snuffy and his menacing gun were gone.

Yes, that was the best way. Speed up the motor and get to the border as fast as possible—in the meantime watching for a chance to down Snuffy, of course.

Mechanically he took in the rope ladder and closed the port door. The smallness of the cabin became instantly more pronounced. The blimp was strictly a two-man ship. It had originally been equipped with an open-cockpit car scarcely larger than the cockpit of a two-passenger airplane. Jack had had the stationary seats taken out, the floor enlarged a trifle and the walls inclosed with glass. The primary purpose of the inclosure was to keep out sulphur dust as the ship worked over vineyards and orange groves, but it also made the cabin a more comfortable place in which to ride.

On either side of the control wheel was a folding camp chair. Jack took the one on the left while Snuffy stood behind him watching suspiciously every movement the pilot made.

But Jack was up to no tricks. He opened the throttle and the sixty H. P. radial motor roared lustily. The packing shed slipped swiftly astern. Jack eased the top of the control wheel toward him and the blimp began to rise.

Gradually the nose of the big bag swung around until it pointed directly into the yellow haze that hung over the desert. Jack shook his head gloomily. Out here in the open the wind was blowing hard. The ship was logy. Wind and sand beat against the cabin windows. The ground seemed to crawl past underneath. The driving grit was already frosting the forward panes. Jack could feel the gusts clutching at the elevating planes. It made the control wheel jump and buck in his hand.

He watched the lubber's mark as the compass card swung around. About south or southwest was the course he wanted. He juggled the rudder until the ship swung into line. There was a distinct tendency to yaw which told him eloquently of the gusty nature of the wind.

The packing shed disappeared from view, wiped out by a filmy yellow cloud that swept suddenly across it. The green cottonwoods that surrounded Edgeland were still visible, although farther away. Jack snatched a pair of binoculars from the rack and focused

them on the gray expanse of sagebrush west of the town. A ball of dust was moving along the road that led east from the packing shed. A little sound of relief escaped his lips. That would be Luigi taking Dad Henderson to whatever medical aid the town offered.

Snuffy grabbed the glasses from Jack's hand. His lips curled as he made out the scurrying flivver.

"Just a waste of gasoline," he said brutally. "When I plug 'em they stay plugged."

He wiped his nose on his sleeve noisily and hung the glasses back on the rack. He clutched the rack for support as the blimp hit an air bump. The floor teetered uncertainly for a moment, like a chip riding a series of ripples.

"Hey!" protested Snuffy, waving his gun threateningly. "Do you want to knock me down? Hold her steady or I'll squeeze this trigger!"

Jack smiled grimly. "You haven't begun to ride, yet," he said. "This is going to be a trip that you'll remember to the last day of your life. We're in for rough weather and you may as well start to hang on right now."

Another bump that almost knocked Snuffy's feet out from under him punctuated the pilot's words. Snuffy's face paled and he took a grip on the port hand rail. He used both hands, but he was careful to see that his automatic still pointed at the back of the pilot's head. The floor of the cabin was pitching and swaying in a most uncomfortable way.

Snuffy looked out of the cabin window. The last cottonwood had disappeared. On all sides the ship was shut in by a smoky haze. Directly below them the earth was still visible in patches of greasewood and mesquite that bowed before streams of yellow sand which swept past like currents of water. Gradually even these faded until there was nothing left but streaming sand.

The air about the ship seemed close and stifling. The day had grown noticeably darker. But now it began to lighten as the blimp climbed. A pale sun strove to reach the swaying car with timid fingers. It succeeded only in casting a ghastly light over everything.

Snuffy groped his way to the seat across the control wheel from the pilot. He felt rather shaky. The throb and roar of the propeller bothered him. The smell of dust that had filtered in from the storm, and of burning oil from the motor, together with the constant swaying of the car, made him feel queer at the pit of his stomach. Even the cool hardness of the automatic in his hand failed to reassure him.

He moistened his lips with his tongue.

"You can't see anything," he said. "Nothing but blowing sand. It looks like a fog from a mountaintop. We—we might get lost."

Jack looked at him keenly. Snuffy's lips were pale and slightly blue. The man was a trifle air-sick. The pilot struggled to keep a sudden hope from showing in his face. If Snuffy should get really sick——

"No," Jack said evenly. "We won't get lost. Not as long as——" He broke off abruptly, dismay written plainly on his face. His eyes had fallen mechanically on the compass. The indicator was no longer pointing to the north but was spinning erratically, whirling first one way and then the other. He rapped on the compass box in an effort to steady it. The card hesitated, twitched uncertainly a moment, then spun madly again.

The wind was swinging the bow a trifle in spite of Jack's efforts to hold it steady. This would normally throw the card a bit from side to side. In any wind at all it was always necessary to work inside a variation of from twenty to forty degrees. But that was easy because the swing was usually steady—so many degrees right, so many left. Halfway between was the right course.

But no bow swing was causing this. The card was spinning around the entire circle. Two or three complete revolutions one way, three or four the other. Jack's eyes sought swiftly for the answer. Any piece of iron or steel close to the box would pull the card a few degrees one way or the other. The only thing in sight was Snuffy's gun. Yet that would have no greater effect than a screw driver or wrench held in the same place. Only some powerful attraction would spin the card like this.

Jack admitted himself stumped. It was just one of those things. Perhaps the storm had thrown the compass suddenly out of order. Atmospheric conditions will play havoc with a compass sometimes.

Jack's own face was gray. His eyes swept the murky yellow world beneath them. Without a compass there was no telling where they might land. If they kept on going they might even end up in the Gulf. Or eventually crash into some mountain peak on the desert fringe. The wastelands of the desert was the very best they could expect.

How long had the compass been out of order? Jack had been paying little attention to it. Were they already off their course? If so, how much? Of course, he could keep the general direction by maintaining a course into the wind. The pull of his motor would indicate that, but even a few miles' variation would be serious. There were countless miles of uncharted desert waste along the Mexican border that he would be more apt to hit than the comparatively small settled portion toward which he had been steering.

Fear leaped into Snuffy's eyes at the look of consternation on the pilot's face. For a second the gun trembled in his hand.

"What's wrong?" he croaked. "If you're trying a trick——"

The pilot shrugged.

"No trick," he said. "The compass has gone haywire. We'll have to turn back."

Snuffy rested his gun on his knee in an effort to control its shaking. With his left hand he pulled at the collar of his shirt as if it were choking him. He managed to force a short, contemptuous laugh.

"Now I'll tell one," he said.

"It's our only hope," continued the pilot. "In ten minutes we'll be so far into this storm that our chances of finding a way out will be less than one in a thousand. If we slide back with the wind right now there is a possibility of making Edgeland before the storm has completely obscured it. Otherwise, we can only run blind until our gas gives out and then come down in the trackless desert. I guess you know what that means."

Snuffy nodded. "I also know what it means to go back," he leered. "I'll take the desert."

Jack set his teeth grimly. He had not expected to gain anything by the argument. At the same time he had not exaggerated their predicament. The blimp was in deadly peril and there was nothing he could do about it.

He tilted the elevating planes and the ship climbed a little. Shadows on the cabin floor sharpened. The sun was up there somewhere. If he could break through the ceiling of dust—— The shadows shifted as Jack swung the nose a trifle across the wind toward the west. Perhaps he could maneuver off the edge of the desert toward the coast.

The hope was short-lived. Snuffy's mind, made keener by weeks of dodging the pack, was alert to every movement that might threaten his safety. His gun rose menacingly.

"Swing her back," he ordered. "The sun belongs in front, not on the left."

The shadows moved back to their original places.

The cabin throbbed and vibrated to the roar of the straining motor fastened

directly to the stern of the control car. The ship rocked and pitched in the gusty wind like a small boat in a choppy sea. It fought valiantly against the gale. The pilot and Snuffy were fighting, too; the pilot against the incessant yawing that threatened to snap the rudder bar, Snuffy against a nausea that was clutching at his stomach, turning his face a pasty white, his lips a mottled blue and green.

The compass card whirled first one way and then the other like a thing possessed. For a time Jack puzzled over it, then gave it up, and bent his mind once more on the problem of Snuffy.

The bandit was getting sick. It was only a matter of time until Snuffy would no longer care whether he lived or died, for air sickness, like its sister malady sea sickness, is a terrible thing. Then Snuffy's gun would fall from his nerveless fingers and he would lie huddled on the heaving floor, asking nothing better than the hangman's noose if only it came to him on terra firma.

Yes, that time would come, but it would probably come too late. Even now Jack somewhat doubted his ability to find safety if they were to put about at once. East of Edgeland lay desert wastes as bad as those ahead of them. To the west of the town were towering mountain peaks probably hidden now by the scudding sand. To hurtle against one of those would mean instant disaster and death. Yet without a compass——

The *Lancer* staggered suddenly like a horse that has stumbled. Jack felt himself shoved down in his seat as if a huge hand were pressing on the back of his neck. The ship trembled and shook. The cabin tilted at a crazy angle. Tools pitched from the racks above the motor bulkhead and clattered on the floor. Snuffy was catapulted from his seat to fall headlong against the port door.

Jack struggled against the force of gravity which was riveting him to his seat. His eyes searched and found the altimeter. The needle had flicked from two thousand to two thousand five hundred in the bat of an eye. There it wavered for an instant then began to slip back. The ship was falling as swiftly as it had been shot upward but a moment before.

It was not only falling but was spinning like a top. The rudder bar threshed and kicked in spite of all Jack's efforts to counteract the thrust of the wind. Eighteen hundred, sixteen hundred, fourteen hundred; then suddenly, after a breath-taking drop that was all a dizzy blur, the needle touched eight hundred.

"God, we're going to crash!" Jack yelled, and reached for a red-handled lever on the cabin wall. Water sprayed against the windows as the ballast tanks dumped their loads. The ship lurched sickeningly for a moment, and began to rise. There was little the pilot could do but hang onto his control levers. At twelve hundred feet the ship leveled out and condescended to ride on a comparatively level keel.

Snuffy picked himself up and climbed shakily back onto his chair which was screwed to the floor. The sun had faded and the wind seemed to buffet the ship from all directions at once. Even Snuffy could see that it was no longer possible to judge whether they were flying south, north, east, or west. The ship was in the midst of a tawny yellow fog in which all directions looked alike.

"Geez!" whimpered Snuffy.

He wiped his nose on his sleeve. An icy hand clutched at his vitals and his face turned an olive green. Cold sweat broke out in glistening beads on his forehead. He swallowed once or twice and began to gag. Jack reached across the control wheel and pushed him sidewise in his chair.

"Get on back to the door," ordered the pilot, "before you make us both sick."

Snuffy's nausea was little more than a violent wave that passed as quickly as it had come. His eyes narrowed and he struck at Jack's arm with the flat of his automatic.

"Keep your dirty hands off me!" he barked.

The ship went into a rolling pitch that was particularly dizzying. Another spasm seized Snuffy. He groaned and staggered toward the port door.

In spite of their peril, Jack's lips curled in a grin. The expression froze on his face as his eyes chanced to fall across the compass. The card was no longer whirling, but stood nearly motionless!

He tried to stifle the cry that escaped him, but the surprise was too great. Snuffy whirled at the sound and strode back across the cabin.

The pilot's heart sank. He passed his hand over his eyes as if to clear his vision.

"Is that compass turning or not?" he asked.

"Of course it's turning!" snarled Snuffy.

Jack nodded wearily. "I'm seeing things," he said. "This storm has got my goat. I'd have sworn it was stationary a second ago."

"For the love of Pete, forget the compass!" whined Snuffy. "There must be some way we can get out of this."

The pilot's chin stiffened with sudden resolution. The time for further speculation on how to get rid of Snuffy, was past. Thought must give way to action. It was certain they would never reach the Mexican border now. It was equally as certain that Snuffy would kill the pilot and himself before he would consent to a landing near any civilized community over which they might drift.

"There's just one way out," Jack announced at last. "We've got to find a landmark. With the compass out we may be flying in a circle for all we know. Keep your eyes glued on the ground for buildings, roads, telephone poles, trees or railroad tracks. We've got to find something to get our bearings from or we're dead men right now."

Snuffy shivered and pressed his nose against the glass. Sand scudded beneath them like snow in a blizzard. Like snow, too, it seemed to be coming from all directions at once. Snuffy clung to the window ledge and tried to force his eyes through the haze. The sinuous currents twitched at his eyeballs and made them smart.

Then the pilot remembered something—a boy lost in a swamp near Dayton, Ohio, and a newspaperman he had taken aloft to search for him.

He reached over to the rack and lifted down the binoculars which swung there by their strap.

"Here, take these," he told Snuffy. "Search every inch of ground. I'm going to take the ship as low as I dare."

Snuffy took the glasses innocently enough. He didn't know how to focus them properly and the world looked somewhat gray and dim with the cabin window directly before the glass, but Snuffy didn't know but what things always looked like that through binoculars. He *did* know that you were supposed to be able to see better with their aid.

Any one who has ever used a field glass from a speeding airplane in an effort to pick out some object on the ground will know what happened to Snuffy. An airplane is steady compared with the sickening lurch of a lighter-than-air machine tossed about like an autumn leaf on a wayward wind.

Snuffy's illness no longer dallied with him. It hit him in head and stomach, both at once. Gun and glasses fell from his nerveless fingers and Snuffy settled into a white and crumpled heap on the cabin floor.

It was the pilot instead of the helpless Snuffy who sighted a landmark ten fear-fraught minutes later—two thin

rails and a line of telephone poles that appeared for an instant like driftwood on a lake of boiling sand. Jack's eyes flashed to the chart. The road was a branch from Edgeland to Maricopa. It couldn't be anything else. The poles had been on the far side as the ship had scudded across. Facing Maricopa from Edgeland, the poles were on the right side of the tracks; the chart showed it plainly. Then the ship was heading northwest. He bore hard on the left rudder and the blimp swung her nose to the northeast. Increased speed told Jack he was running before the wind.

Strangely enough, the compass was working again. Jack tallied it swiftly with the railroad tracks, now no longer visible but as surely beneath their course as though he could see them. The compass was correct.

Funny about that compass. It had steadied the moment Snuffy had left his seat and gone to the window. Jack lashed the rudder in place and deserted the control wheel long enough to bind Snuffy and obtain the automatic. Snuffy protested deliriously—not because Jack was binding him, but because the pilot would not go away and let him die in peace.

Jack held the automatic near the compass. The card shifted only slightly. The pilot had had some idea that the gun might have been magnetized in some way and thus had affected the compass. He shrugged. It was working all right now, at any rate.

Near the edge of the desert the storm was less severe. The streaming sand thinned out and the patches of mesquite and chaparral began to show through. Jack recognized a familiar line of cottonwoods.

It was a bruised and battered blimp that two minutes later drifted down toward the mooring mast at the end of the packing shed. There was a knot of men around the mast. One broke out from the rest and waved his arm excitedly. It was his right arm and the sleeve of the other blew empty in the wind. Jack gulped his relief. He had expected to find Dad Henderson dead or in the hospital, but here he was scampering about and jumping up and down like a jack-in-the-box.

Eager hands laid hold of the landing ropes and pulled the ship down behind the shed. Jack slid open the cabin door. He waved his hand airily at Dad, hiding his real feeling behind a mask of banter.

"So the devil didn't get you after all," he greeted.

Dad grinned. "Nope," he returned. "He had the coals all hot, but his expected guest didn't show up. A leetle bit lower in the chest and I'd have been there."

"Too bad," said Jack with mock solemnity. "Too bad, I mean, you had to get shot," he finished hastily.

"I thought you'd gone to Mexico," said the mechanic, setting his foot on the rope ladder the pilot had lowered.

"The compass went haywire, and I couldn't find it."

He gripped Dad by the right arm and hauled him up the final three steps of the ladder.

"I thought you was never coming back," said Dad. "Didn't take you a whole hour to get the best of this bird, did it?"

The pilot's eyes widened. "Hour!" he cried. "Do you mean to say I was only gone an hour? I thought it was two days at least!"

"An hour and ten minutes to be exact. The doc patched me up in a jiffy, and I came right back to the field. While I was waiting I read that notice on the shed door. There's a thousand dollars' reward for this guy. A tidy little sum for an hour's blimp ride if you ask me!"

Snuffy raised his bound hands and wiped his nose on his sleeve with a loud, wailing snuffle. Now that the ship was quiet he was feeling much better.

He would have sat up, but Dad pushed him back with the toe of one foot.

"Don't let that guy get near the compass," cautioned Jack. "There's something fishy about him. Every time he got near the front of the cabin the compass spun like a top. If it hadn't been for that we'd have still been heading toward Mexico."

It was Dad's turn to show surprise.

"The—the compass!" he gasped. "Why——"

Swiftly he bent above Snuffy. From the bandit's coat pocket he jerked a paper parcel. In two steps he was at the compass. He waved the parcel above it and the card began to spin.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he roared. "Don't tell me there isn't any justice. This fellow stole the one thing that blocked his own escape!"

Swiftly he stripped the paper from the package and revealed a foot-long horseshoe magnet. It was the kind of red-and-gray toy every boy has possessed at some time or other—the present Dad had been taking home to Jackie, Junior.

"It was in his left-hand coat pocket!" cried Dad. "Right beside the box when he sat in the chair. No wonder the compass went crazy!"

Jack grinned his understanding.

"One thousand berries' reward!" he muttered.

He looked at Dad inquiringly. The mechanic caught the look and nodded vigorously.

"You bet!" he chirped. "From both of us, and the magnet thrown in for good measure."

Jack laughed aloud.

"And now we don't have to get to Los Angeles before the stores close," he added. "The sheriff's office is open all night!"

Be on the lookout for another short story by Anthony Autumn.

THE AIR MANEUVERS

THE "defense" of the Atlantic seaboard, scheduled for May (at this writing it is not possible to tell the exact date), is demonstrating the extensive part commercial aviation will play in the next war, if there is one. Military planes are being used for the actual maneuvers, but commercial airports are employed as operation bases—with men who are now civilian experts taking care of the fueling and sheltering of the aircraft.

This proves a point which has been said to have been in dispute in official circles. It has been denied by various people in authority that the army and navy air divisions have ever underestimated the value of the work done by civil airmen. The very maneuvers that are taking place on the Atlantic coast would not be possible, they say, if commercial airports had not been established there to their present extent. And other authorities add that the fighting plane was evolved from the commercial plane—and that improvements developed by nonmilitary engineering experts have been gladly adopted by the government for use in military aircraft. In the field of aëronautics there is probably more coöperation and less professional jealousy than in any other line of work, it is said.

SAILING *at* ELEVEN

By WALTER McLEOD

What Would You Do if You Were Stranded in a Strange Port without Money? That's What Bill Melhuish Faced in London.

THE consulate clerk looked at Bill Melhuish with frank disbelief registered on his pink face.

"*You* got robbed?" he said, emphasizing the pronoun.

"Yes," Bill Melhuish blurted out feverishly. "Last night. I only got into London yesterday. I had my return ticket on the *Minnekahda* and about a hundred dollars. It was all I had left out of the money I saved for the trip."

"He must have been a smart fellow, that," said the clerk, with a touch of sarcasm that in his eagerness Bill Melhuish missed.

"I don't know who he was," said Bill earnestly, "except that he was from New York. We got talking, and I took him up to my room in the hotel. He was staying there, too. We had very little to drink—then I don't remember anything more till I woke up this morning with an awful headache. He must have drugged me."

The clerk laughed. "Drugged you," he repeated scornfully. "Say, is this your passport or not?"

"Sure it is."

"It's your photo, all right." The clerk folded up the passport he had been examining. "All I can say is that you've got a nerve to come here trying

to chisel us out of two hundred dollars with a cock-and-bull story like that."

Bill Melhuish stared back at the clerk, a look of complete mystification in his eyes. "What—what d'you mean?" he stammered. "Why shouldn't I come here? I'm in trouble and I'm an American."

"Yes, and it's a great pity you are an American," said the clerk with considerable heat. "Now you beat it right away. Here, take your passport and get out. You must think we're pretty soft round here to fall for a story like that." He handed the passport across the counter.

"But—but I don't understand." Bill Melhuish was baffled. Gradually the precise nature of his predicament became clear. Panic seized him. "Look!" he cried desperately. "You've simply got to help me. I've got to catch the *Minnekahda* to-night somehow or other. I've got to be back in New York by Saturday week. I've got a new job waiting for me and I spent all my money on this European trip. I don't know a soul in London I can go to. You've got to advance me enough to get back on the *Minnekahda* to-night—you've got to."

"You're a crook and you never ought to have come to London," said the clerk severely. "Now get out before we throw you out."

Bill Melhuish gazed incredulously at him and a flush spread over his face. "Why, you crazy——"

"That's enough!" cried the clerk, and raising his voice he called out to the colored porter in the hallway.

"This is outrageous!" Bill shouted at him. "You've got no right to talk to me like that. I'll complain about you to Washington. I'm an American citizen and you're a public servant. If you step round that counter I'll give you such a pasting you'll be in the hospital for a week!" He shook his fist wildly at the clerk. The clerk paled.

"Now then, mister," said the colored porter persuasively, "don't make any scenes here. Now you come along." Bill Melhuish shook off the hand that closed on his arm.

"Go outside and call a policeman," said the clerk. "Don't let him think he can get away with that strong-arm stuff here."

Bill Melhuish looked from one to the other. Several men and two curious stenographers had joined the clerk at the counter. They whispered to each other and stared at him with considerable interest mixed with a certain awe.

"You're all goofy," said Bill Melhuish defiantly. "What's the matter with you all?" The hand closed again on his arm. He saw cold hostility in the eyes that regarded him across the counter. With a puzzled expression he picked up the passport from the counter and hesitated, at a loss.

"Come on, mister," said the colored man.

Helplessly, like a man in a dream, Bill allowed himself to be led out onto the sidewalk of Cavendish Square where a fine, drizzling rain fell on the wet flagstones.

He looked up and down the street. A stout man with a derby and a brown overcoat watched him from across the street. After a moment's hesitation Bill turned toward Oxford Street and started off disconsolately through the rain. Bewilderment and panic filled his mind and his brain, dulled by the drug of the previous night, refused to function properly.

All that was clear was that to-night the *Minnekahda* sailed to New York—that there was no other boat from London in time, that his steamer ticket and his money had vanished, and that the people at the U. S. consulate had treated him as though he were a criminal instead of a young New York insurance clerk finishing his first European vacation and threatened with unemployment

should he fail to report for his new job next Monday week.

He did not see the man in the brown overcoat speak to the colored porter at the consulate. He bent his head down to avoid the stinging rain and stopped for a bus to take him to Bloomsbury and the cheap hotel where the unfortunate event of the previous night had taken place.

On top of the bus he sat down. He thrust his hand into his pocket for the pennies for the bus fare. His friend of last night had left him about a pound in change. As he leaned sidewise to reach his pocket a man took the seat beside him. It was the stout man in the derby.

"Excuse me," said the stout man, and a low chuckle rumbled in his interior. "Excuse me, Mr. Gazzi."

Bill Melhuish looked up. "My name isn't Gazzi," he said.

The stout man chuckled again. It was a sarcastic and triumphant chuckle. "I suppose your name's Gene Tunney, eh?"

"My name's Melhuish," said Bill gruffly.

The stout man produced a card from his waistcoat pocket.

"Well, my name's Jordan—Detective Constable Jordan of the criminal investigation department, Scotland Yard. You've heard of the Yard, no doubt?"

Bill Melhuish took the card and read it wonderingly. After the difficulty at the consulate his heart was a little shaky. There was something in the air to-day, something mysterious and sinister. His hand shook.

"Let me see your passport," said Jordan.

Bill took the passport from his inside pocket and gave it to the detective. Holding it between them, Jordan opened it. As it was spread out Bill's heart gave a leap and then almost stopped.

"Hey!" he cried. "For the love o' Mike, that's not mine!"

Jordan smiled and, turning, raked Bill with his gray eyes. The photograph was that of the New York gentleman of last night's adventure. But passport photographs are atrocious. It showed a dark, curly-haired young man of twenty-odd. It wasn't Bill, but it might have been. The photo was out of focus a little and blurred. To a man whose mind was already made up it was a speaking likeness.

"That's you, isn't it?" said Jordan, stabbing the photo with his gloved finger. "What d'you mean?"

"That isn't me!" cried Bill. "Look—the name's Gazzi—Pietro Gazzi. My name's Bill Melhuish."

"Aw, come off it," said Jordan. "You can't kid me like that."

"Damn it! I tell you it's the bird who drugged me last night and took my steamer ticket and my money. Are you all gone crazy?"

"Now, don't get rough with me," said the detective severely. "You're not in New York now. They want you at the Yard."

Bill Melhuish started to tell him the story. Words streamed from his mouth, spurred on by fright. Jordan listened. At last he spoke.

"I'll come along to the hotel with you and we'll see," he allowed after some hesitation. "I think you're a blinkin' liar."

Gazzi—the name was familiar somehow. At last Bill got it. Kid Gazzi, the gangster and racketeer. There had been a paragraph in the paper yesterday. Gazzi, the notorious gunman, wanted in connection with several murders back in New York.

"You don't think I'm a murderer?" he blurted out. "I don't look like a gunman, do I?"

Jordan laughed silently. "People don't get hung for the way they look," he said. "Best-looking chap I ever saw killed two wealthy wives with arsenic. Come on. We get out here."

In the rain Bloomsbury Square was depressing. People hurried to and fro in gleaming raincoats and dodged each other's umbrellas. Detective Jordan kept beside Bill as they entered the gloomy portals of the Museum Hotel. Bill went straight up to the office.

"Half a minute," Jordan interrupted him and spoke himself to the blond young lady at the desk. "Miss," he said, "d'you know this young man?"

"I think so," said the young lady, peering out.

"What's his name?"

"Don't know. Room No. 15, I think."

"No, it's No. 13," said Bill.

"You shut up!" snorted Jordan angrily.

"No. 13 left this morning," said the young lady decisively.

Jordan looked at Bill. Then he turned to the clerk. "What's his name?"

The girl opened a large book. "Gazzi," she said.

"There you are," Jordan announced triumphantly.

"This is crazy!" cried Bill desperately. "Look here, miss, you booked my room for me. You remember me coming in yesterday? My room's No. 13."

The young lady was suspicious. She shook her head, peering at him. "No. 13's gone," she said. "You can't be No. 13."

"Let's go up," Bill pleaded. "I'll be bughouse in a minute."

They went up a flight of stairs. Bill opened the door of room No. 13. It was empty. He caught his breath. "There's something wrong here," he said.

"Yes," Jordan agreed, "there is something wrong. Let's try No. 15."

With an eye on Bill Melhuish they went out and tried the door of the next room. When they opened it Bill gasped, for on the rack at the foot of the bed was his suitcase and over the rail his pajamas.

"He must have carried me out and changed the rooms," he stammered, knowing that stony disbelief looked at him from the eyes of the detective and the blond girl. The two rooms were exactly alike. Frantically he turned out his pockets.

"Here are letters!" he cried. "I'll prove I'm Bill Melhuish." But as the letters poured out on the bed he saw with dismay that they bore the name Gazzi. In no pocket, though he searched them all, was one sign that he was Bill Melhuish and not Pietro Gazzi. Only one thing supported his claim: his suitcase was initialed "W. M."

"What's he done?" whispered the girl.

"New York gangster," Jordan told her quietly as he watched Bill ruefully replace the papers from his pockets.

"Ooh!" murmured the young lady. "You don't say."

Bill turned toward them, mute appeal in his eyes. He held out his hands.

"Say," he pleaded, "this is terrible. I've got to leave the country to-night or I lose a good job and I'm ruined. I'm not Gazzi. Honest I'm not. This is a frame-up. He wanted to get my passport so that he could get out of the country. He jumped at the opportunity when he saw I was the same age and build and everything. Do I look like a crook?"

"Yes, indeed, you do!" cried the girl defiantly. She was thrilled to the core. "Has he murdered any one?" she asked Jordan.

"At least five," said Jordan. "Now, then, young fellow, let's move. I've got to take you along to the Yard. And don't start any trouble or you'll be sorry. Got a gun?"

"No," said Bill helplessly; but the detective ran expert hands over him.

"Five," murmured the girl. "Crumbs! Five."

Out on the sidewalk Jordan hailed a taxi and they got in. By this time the

whole staff of the little hotel had assembled in the doorway, round-eyed and awed. Several passers-by stopped and watched the proceedings. The rain still fell dismally.

In the taxi disturbing thoughts ran through Bill's brain. The *Minnekahda* —the new job at Hodgson's—the certainty that he would lose it if he were not back on time. Then even more disturbing ideas thronged into his head —frightening thoughts.

"What—what do they want me for?" he asked.

"Don't know," said Jordan. "Some of those murders, no doubt."

Then he thought of prison—a cell in a strange city where nobody knew him. It would be a long time before there would be any one who could identify him—who could say definitely that he was Bill Melhuish and not Pietro Gazzi the gangster. They wouldn't hang him, but—he shuddered. Panic was rapidly overcoming him. New York—he must get back to New York somehow or other. He must get to the boat. But he had no money. He cursed wildly, his eyes on Jordan. Plans surged about, forming and being discarded in his mind.

The taxi halted in obedience to the traffic policeman's command. They were in Oxford Street. Suddenly Bill Melhuish acted. It was the blind rage of a man who knows that reason has failed.

He swung a vicious jab into Detective Jordan's stomach and, as that officer doubled instinctively, Bill hit him on the side of the jaw. With a swift movement the taxi door was opened and slammed to again and Bill Melhuish was out in the stream of traffic.

He avoided certain death as another taxi swerved to one side. He ran and dodged, making for the sidewalk. Above the roar of the traffic, curses followed him from the drivers. He sidestepped and reached the crowded pavement. Passers-by cast startled glances at him, but nobody made an attempt to stop him. He darted into the Oxford Circus Underground station and slowed down. A shrill whistle sounded out in the street where Detective Jordan had recovered from the swift blows to the body and the jaw.

There was only one thought in Bill Melhuish's mind—to reach the boat by hook or by crook. What he'd do then he didn't exactly know except that he must get aboard—stow away, do anything to escape from London and be on his way back to New York and the job.

He snatched a couple of pennies from his pocket and took a ticket to the Bank; it was the only station he could remember and it was east—that is in the direction of the Royal Albert Docks where even now the ship was waiting, all ready to sail.

Clutching the ticket in his hand, he passed the barrier and walked down the moving escalator. He was out of breath. In the train he collected himself and asked the passenger beside him how he might get to the Docks. He listened attentively, feeling that every eye in the crowded coach was on him.

At the Bank he got out and caught the bus. As he rode along sitting on top in the rain, he began to feel better. Over the roofs of the shops he could see masts and colored funnels—some dirty with soot, others white with salt spray.

It was nearly midday and he was hungry. It was a long ride, and he was too busy making plans to think of food. He would go aboard and throw himself at the mercy of the first man he met. If he could get aboard without seeing any one, so much the better. Then he would hide until she had sailed and it was too late to eject him. At any rate, the ship would take him away from London or he wasn't Bill Melhuish.

At last he dismounted and turned off the busy road. Through dreary side

streets he made his way in the rain. Dingy warehouses loomed up around him and workmen passed in sodden clothes. He came to the gate into the dock area. A policeman stood on watch.

"What d'you want?" he demanded suspiciously.

Straight down through the gate a roadway ran. Farther down it turned around a large warehouse—a cargo shed. At the sound of the policeman's voice Bill Melhuish had a sudden touch of panic again. Like a flash he decided. He ducked his head and ran.

The policeman darted at him. A watchman ran from the shanty. It was too late. Bill Melhuish had won prizes for sprinting. Now his feet twinkled underneath him and his toes splashed in the shallow pools of rain water in the roadway. Behind him he could hear the heavy thudding of the policeman's feet. He shot around the big shed. There was an open doorway on his right. He dived in just as the policeman puffed around the corner.

Behind a bale of cotton he crouched panting. Before he had turned in he had caught sight of the funnel of the *Minnekahda* ahead behind the roofs of larger sheds. There it stood, a beacon that promised New York and safety to his tortured soul. He waited in the semidarkness. There were voices outside—a whistle.

When his breath was regained, he wiped his damp face and adjusted his clothing. He set his hat on straight and cautiously made his way back to the other side of the shed. Now people were moving about. He could hear them behind the heaped bales and cases. He found another door and was out in the rain again beside a chain of loaded railway cars. He dodged under the couplings and struck another road.

After a wide detour he reached the quay. His heart jumped as the hull of the ship reared above him. A little luck now and he would be aboard an American ship—a ship from home. He was desperately homesick for New York just then, desperately anxious to be out of this inhospitable city where detectives strove to throw him into a cell on an absurd charge of being some one he was not.

He hesitated and looked around. There was no sign of the policeman. Everything was quiet, only the soft patter of the rain and the rattle of a crane down the wharf somewhere. He pulled himself together. With a carefully assumed casualness he reached the gangway lowered alongside the vessel and walked up. In his mind he was rehearsing the speech he must make if he should be stopped. After all, they would be fellow-countrymen—they could hardly refuse to listen to him.

"Hey! What you want?" A gruff voice rasped on his ear. At the top of the gangway a burly sailor in a blue jersey barred his way.

"I just—I just want to have a look round," said Bill lamely.

Just then a whistle sounded down on the quay. Bill turned and saw with a look of horror that the gate policeman was waving frantically up to him. Several workmen had gathered around and were staring curiously up.

"Say, what's the big idea?" demanded the sailor.

"Look," said Bill, and all the pleading that he could command went into his voice. "I'm in a jam. Let me come aboard. I'll explain. I'm an American."

"Hey!" said the sailor roughly. "You beat it. What's the cops after you for?"

"It's all a mistake!" cried Bill, and as he spoke the policeman's voice came up.

"Hold that man there!" The policeman's feet were on the bottom of the ladder. Like a cornered rat Bill looked down at him and back at the sailor.

"Let me aboard," he pleaded. "Let me pass. I'm in a jam."

"I'll say you're in a jam."

Then Bill Melhuish threw himself bodily at the big sailor and the two of them went down in a whirl of arms and legs. Two more seamen reached them, running along the wet deck. The policeman came lumbering up the gangway.

Quickly Bill disentangled himself. His collar was torn and his face red. With a blazing eye he made a wild rush at the policeman and struck him on the point of the jaw. The big sailor rolled over and jumped up. With a roar of anger he leaped on top of Bill Melhuish and three men sprawled on the deck, while a rapidly increasing crowd of sailors danced around in an attempt to sort out the combatants.

A heavy boot caught Bill in the side and he doubled up with pain. The policeman threw himself on top of him. The big sailor lowered a knobly knee across Bill's throat until he was almost suffocated. He jerked a little and lay still. Then the policeman put handcuffs on him.

Slowly Bill rose to his feet and glared around him. Along the quay he saw a figure hurrying—a stout man in a brown overcoat and a derby. He recognized Detective Constable Jordan and his heart sank.

"You dirty son of a gun!" said the big sailor. "I got a good mind to kick you into jelly."

The policeman brushed his blue overcoat.

"Blimey," he said. "If I wasn't a policeman I'd give you the best 'idin' you ever 'ad."

They caught sight of the detective and waited for him to ascend the gangway. Jordan was excited. There was a dull red mark on his cheek where Bill's fist had landed.

"Good!" he cried. "The damn scoundrel! Gave you a lot of trouble, did he?"

There was murmur of assent from the seamen around. "Who is he?" some one asked.

"Kid Gazzi, the gangster," said Jordan.

"Gee!" The big sailor shook a red fist in Bill's face. "So you think you're a tough baby, do ya? Say, leave him to me for a minute before you take him away. I'll show him what tough means."

The crowd eyed him as if he were a caged lion. Some one sneered. "Come on," said Jordan suddenly. "Got to get a move on. They're waiting for him up at the Yard."

Led by the policeman, a sad cavalcade descended the gangway. Bill Melhuish was a fighter. As he took each unwilling step down to the quay he muttered an oath. So near and yet so far. Now for the moment he was checkmated, but he was not finished. He ground his teeth and stumbled on down the gangway.

The sky was gray and heavy with rain. The outlook was desolate. They splashed on through the puddles of water in the direction of the dock gates, Bill Melhuish between the policeman and the detective. He gave one backward glance at the ship and only rage saved him from breaking down in utter despair.

Outside the gates Jordan yanked him unceremoniously into a waiting taxi. When they had started the detective spoke.

"I'd like to have five minutes with you, my lad," he said viciously. "Just five minutes. I'd make a blinkin' wreck of you."

"Yeah?" sneered Bill. "Well, take these handcuffs off and see. I'm in just the right mood to take on a fat slob like you. Right now I don't care what happens. I've lost my job. I've lost the boat home, and I'm broke. It would give me a bit of satisfaction to knock hell out of you."

"Don't talk like that to me!" said

Jordan sharply. "Don't think we can't handle toughs like you in London. Keep your mouth shut before I lose my temper with you and forget myself."

"Go on, forget yourself," said Bill combatively. "If I were you that's just what I would do."

"Be careful," Jordan warned him.

"*You* be careful," said Bill.

For the remainder of the journey there was a resentful silence. They reached Scotland Yard and a constable came forward and opened the door for them. Suddenly Bill stood bolt upright and banged his head against the roof of the taxi. He raised his handcuffed fists.

"I'm not going in there!" he shouted. "Let me go! You've got no business doing this to me. Let me go!"

A hand caught his ankle and pulled his leg forward. At the same time a fist drove into his solar plexus. He collapsed and was dragged by the leg onto the sidewalk. As he slithered along the wet stones he kicked out with his free leg. The taxi driver leaped from his seat and two policemen came dashing up. A crowd was already collecting curiously.

"Stop that!" "Keep still, you bleeder!" "Hit him on the 'ead, Charlie!" Harsh, gasped-out commands and oaths rang in his ears. He was lifted to his feet by three stalwart men. He kicked. Then he felt his arm being twisted behind his back and the excruciating pain almost made him faint. He quieted down and allowed them to lead him through the doorway.

His head was ringing and one eye was closing rapidly. His clothes were torn and his collar entirely removed. There was blood on his face and his hair was rumpled. Inside he was a volcano of boiling rage. He stumbled on down a passageway.

With the bad eye and the blinding rage, he got a distorted vision of an important-looking gentleman who sat behind a big desk and glared severely at him.

"Pietro Gazzi, eh?" said the important gentleman.

Then something clicked inside Bill Melhuish. A waste-paper basket stood on the floor beside the desk. He took a running kick at it. It soared in the air and a shower of paper fell about the important gentleman. At the same time he swung his handcuffed hands into Detective Jordan's face. He kicked and cursed. Everything went around. He saw arms and legs and felt soft flesh as his boots and his fists found a mark.

It couldn't last long. All of a sudden there was a sharp pain in the head and —stars—constellations of stars. Then a blank.

When he came to be was being dragged along in the arms of two men in plain clothes. He was on his feet, but his legs were limp and his head ached furiously. Gradually life flowed into his limbs and he began to walk mechanically. Out in the street the wind and rain stung his brain into clearer working order and he stepped dully into a taxi standing at the curb. Jordan followed him and sat down.

Bill Melhuish lay back for a few minutes, breathing noisily through a battered nose. Then he turned to Jordan and spoke weakly.

"Where am I?"

Jordan turned on him threateningly. "Woke up, have you?" he snarled. "Had enough now, you bleedin' maniac?"

Bill Melhuish nodded weakly. "Yes," he said faintly, "quite enough. I'm through. Do what the hell you like with me now." He winced with the pain that was shooting through his head. After a long pause he spoke again: "What am I charged with?"

Jordan answered savagely: "Nothing —though you ought to have got six months for assault."

Bill Melhuish opened his eyes. "Not charged with anything? Then what are you guys doing with me?"

"We're showing you that you can't come over to this country getting into mischief. We don't want the likes of you here. You were pretty clever dodging us when you came in, but we're too smart for you. So out you go, my lad."

"But where are you taking me now?" Bill Melhuish was sitting bolt upright now, his damaged eyes as wide open as possible.

"To get your baggage from that hotel," said Jordan curtly, "then shove you aboard the boat and see you off back where you belong. And we'll be damn glad to see the back of you. You're being deported, my lad, that's——"

Bill Melhuish interrupted him. He caught at Jordan's sleeve.

"Boat?" he cried eagerly. "What boat?"

"Minnekahda," said Jordan. "And don't you get trying any more of your tricks."

Watch for another story by Walter McLeod.

LANGUAGE NOTE

A SALESMAN, traveling from New York down through Central America for a large medical firm, went prepared to speak both Spanish and English, in both of which tongues he is adept. On returning he remarked that he hardly spoke a word of either language during the entire trip. Instead, to his amazement, he had to fall back on his extensive, though little used, knowledge of German, in his commercial deals.

THREE PLEASANT INCIDENTS

A MAGISTRATE who buys meals for his prisoners, a man who paid for a plug of tobacco after sixty years, and a couple who, after thirty years, mailed their wedding fee and an apology to the minister who married them—these odd and pleasing bits of news brightened our day recently.

The Boston *Globe* told of the tobacco and the wedding fee. In the former case, G. B. Lease, of St. Louis, purchased a plug from J. G. Howell, who used to keep a grocery store in Indiana, threescore years ago. Mr. Howell's son received the cost of the plug—one dime—from Mr. Lease's nephew.

Thirty years ago a minister in North Carolina married a couple whose names are not given. The fee has just been paid by the still-grateful—we hope—twain, and the Reverend D. H. Tuttle, retired, has doubtless spent a number of pleasant moments in reflecting on the strange ways of human beings.

Magistrate Jonah Goldstein, of New York, is no Jonah to impoverished prisoners, but a Good Samaritan. He pays out of his own pocket for their luncheons during the court recess at noon, since it is not fair, he feels, for presumably innocent persons to go without food while he is eating. It is not, he states, up to the department of correction to supply their luncheons, since they cannot be said to be under the control of the department until they have been duly committed.

Nevertheless, the problem stands, and until something can be done about it, Magistrate Goldstein intends to continue as he has been doing. And he will not tell what he has spent. We salute him, and hope that the board of magistrates will remedy the situation.

ONE *Every* MINUTE

By THOMSON BURTIS

Slimuel X. Evans, the "Dumbest" Flyer in the Border Patrol, Goes Amiably on With His Kidnaping Yarn. Believe It or Not!

In Two Parts—Part II.

The Story So Far:

SLIMUEL X. EVANS speaking! About a month ago, folks, I signed off impolitely at the point where I was flapping earthward via parachute, somewhere in Texas. Listen for a minute now while I joggle your memory on the peppy events that led up to my ungainly descent.

It all had to do with the kidnaping of my best friend, Lieutenant Texas Q. McDowell, the best flyer in the Border Patrol. I'm the worst. Tex is the son of a millionaire cattleman—get the idea?

He and I were skyriding around and played good Samaritans to a couple of other guys who flagged us from the ground. They held us up, zoomed off with Tex and left me goggling on terra firma. I walked back a few hundred thousand miles to headquarters and slipped the yarn to Captain Kennard, our C. O. The boys of the patrol got busy and combed the border, without results.

Then things began to pop on the side. One Dave Fitzpatrick, known as the "boss of the Rio Grande," pulled, hoisted, and edged himself out of the hoosegow and waddled back into our ter-

ritory, announcing tartly that he wanted to be let alone to live the quiet life. It sounded fishy. I put him down as suspect No. 1 in re the disappearance of Tex.

Suspect No. 2 was Tony Galini, a newcomer to the patrol. He'd been a Chicago gangster. He was amiable enough, but I didn't cotton to certain things he did and said.

There were two or three others in my little cast of characters—Captain Kennard (above suspicion, though); Squirrel Seaver, one of the boys, but drunk usually, so that ruled him out since the kidnaping of Tex had been planned by a crafty bird; and Harry Jelke, a reserve officer who kept his private plane at our field. He'd made a bunch of dough in oil and had a couple of geologists, known as "rock hounds," surveying the surrounding territory.

Jelke gave me the low-down on Galini, and the evidence sure began to close in on that hombre when Jelke and I were beat up one night by two men and Galini. At least, we were certain it was Galini. Things looked worse when I found the body of Sergeant Clay, who'd gone out to locate Tex.

I got Clay's body back to the field, and just as I arrived a De Haviland dived down and I got a note from the air signed, "Squirrel Seaver." The little cuss had been kidnaped, too.

That was enough for me. I went up after him in another De Haviland. A third plane followed me up—and Tony Galini was in it! And I saw that Squirrel was accompanied by some unknown bloke in the front cockpit of that first ship.

I was in a swell pickle, and it was then that my alleged brain snapped and I nosed into Squirrel's plane, locked our two ships together, and watched Squirrel and his kidnaper go over the side in a waltz, using one parachute, hanging onto each other for dear life!

Determined to be the first to reach ground, I myself slid gently into the ozone then—and that's where I signed off. Now, if you'll just glide over this way, hombres, we'll go on with this goofy anecdote.

CHAPTER VI.

A NOTE FROM THE SKY.

SUDDENLY all seemed peaceful as I floated downward, turning gracefully end over end. Because of my abnormal condition, it was not hard for me to refrain from pulling on the rip-cord ring nestling in my hand.

On and on I fell, until I had passed Seaver's parachute like the Broadway Limited past a lumber wagon. Five hundred feet below them and about eight hundred feet from the ground, I pulled the string. I stopped falling.

For a second, I wished I had waited for the ground to slow me up. My joints creaked and my toe nails cracked as I bent at the middle like a jackknife and one of my own feet kicked me in the forehead. With the start of a three weeks' pain in my stomach muscles, swinging like a pendulum on a spree and bound for the clutching monte below, I can think of more comfortable moments I've spent here and there.

One hundred feet to one side the two De Havilands were plunging downward, and up above, Galini was gliding down like some watchful buzzard.

I had completely forgotten the fact that a 'chute drop into mesquite has all the possibilities of a head-on collision with a buzz saw. After all, a brain of my caliber can't think of everything. A second later, as I saw gnarled branches reaching up at me, I didn't feel so hot.

I slipped my 'chute by yanking down the shroud lines on the right-hand side just in time, and instead of plunking into the middle of a tree at some sixteen feet a second, my body crashed through the tips of the limbs of two trees.

For a second, I felt as though sev-

eral dozen cats were scratching at my face. My classy clothes were being ripped and torn and a couple of the sturdier branches fetched me a couple of solid smacks in various places. The 'chute caught in the foliage as I crashed on through to the ground. I landed in a heap, but without serious damage.

I had unsnapped the 'chute harness and loped some thirty yards to a spot directly underneath my falling beauties. By this time they had descended to an altitude of fifty feet. I had my Colt out, clutching it around the barrel as I placed myself in the tiny eight-foot-square clearing which they were miraculously going to hit. They were coming fast, although both of those peanuts together didn't weigh as much as one of my feet.

Up above, Tony Galini was only a couple of hundred feet high, cruising around to see what he could see, and no doubt wondering what the best way out for him was.

"Loosen up. I'll break your fall!" I yelled, and the next second they were tearing through my outstretched arms.

The shock of their descent deposited me ungracefully on the ground, and for a second we were a heaving mass of arms and legs, tastefully swathed in silk and shroud lines. I reached out and grabbed a scrawny ankle just as the stranger started to scramble away. I rolled free and took a firm grasp on the butt of my gun.

"Not a move out of you!" I snapped. "Squirrel, get his gun if he's still got it!"

He didn't have it. It must have been dropped in the mêlée up above. At that second, the two De Havilands hit the ground a couple of hundred yards away and in the light of their exploding gas tanks I had a good look at the cowering captive as well as at Squirrel Seaver.

The stranger was thin and sharp-faced, with ratlike little eyes, a pointed, ingrowing chin, and pasty skin that had been exposed to electric lights more frequently than it had to the sun. Then Galini's ship came hurtling above us barely fifty feet high, and in the dim light of dawn I could see him peering over the side to see whether we were all right. He disappeared, flying low, and directly east. I took time to do a little relieved wondering about what he might be up to.

Somehow I didn't feel like talking for a minute as I transferred my attention to Mr. Squirrel Seaver. His lower jaw was quavering and he was as white as a sheet, and as hollow-eyed as a mask.

"You certainly look as though you missed your liquor!" I informed him. "Who is this guy?"

"I don't know," quavered Seaver.

"Well, what happened to you?" I demanded.

The captive was sitting on the ground, watching me exactly like a rat looking out of a trap. He was not enjoying himself.

"I landed at the wreck and this fellow just comes up and sticks a gun in front of me and tells me to fly him away!" Seaver gulped, his eyes shifting briefly to the little man. "We landed somewhere in Mexico and then he made me fly with him to-night to drop that note——"

"You ain't gonna make me take the rap for this!" the stranger snarled suddenly.

"Shut up!" Seaver told him; but if it was a command it didn't have much conviction about it.

"So you haven't seen Tex, and there's nobody but this fellow responsible for your kidnaping, eh?" I asked.

Seaver shook his head.

"What's your name?" I asked the stranger.

"What's it to you?" he snarled back. "Call me 'Jackson.'"

"Where did you learn to fly?" I asked him.

He hesitated.

"All right, don't answer if you don't want to," I told him.

I was getting surer of my ground all the while. Nevertheless, I took three deep breaths and started the bluff in full force.

"The only chance in the world that you've got is to tell the truth, pronto!" I told him. "What do you know about Tony Galini?"

He stared back at me dumbly.

"Nuttin'," he said.

As I have already mentioned in regard to Galini, this bird, too, spoke as though the city streets and not the border had been the garden in which he'd gone to seed. I wasn't satisfied that Galini was a new name to him, but that could rest a while.

"Now, listen here!" I went on. "You can't fly any more than I can crochet!"

"What do you mean?" quavered Seaver.

"*You* were flying that ship up there and 'Jackass' here never laid a finger on the stick. I know he can't fly. You might just as well 'fess up now, sir, because you're going to be put in a ship up at McMullen and we'll soon know the truth."

Always in the background of my mind, there was the thought of Galini, who was now out of sight. If I had been in his place, I would have been figuring some way to knock off Seaver and me. Dead men tell no tales. He had perfectly good machine guns on his ship, too—it was one of the reasons why I didn't intend to get five feet from Jackson until further notice. If Galini couldn't hit me without hitting his probable ally, he'd think twice before he shot.

Deep silence enveloped the three of us. Seaver was as miserable-looking a white man as I ever saw. The little guy licked his lips and his shifty eyes darted between me and Squirrel. Seaver was twitching and quivering like a bowl of jelly with the St. Vitus dance.

"Come on!" I snapped. "You're never going to get away from me alive, and in a couple of hours the truth'll come out anyway. Can you fly or can't you?"

"No!" spat Jackson, and a mournful moan emanated from Squirrel Seaver.

"Well, what if he can't!" he flared. "He pulled a gun on me as I said!"

"Listen, you!" Jackson burst forth furiously. "I didn't like this lay from the start——"

"Both of you shut up!" I interrupted.

"Oh, what difference does it make?"

"I'll tell you the difference it makes, Seaver. If he can't fly, he wouldn't have shot you anyway? If he did, he and the ship would crash and he'd die in a more unpleasant way than you would with a good clean bullet hole through your bean!"

"Well, yes——"

"You could've got away any time you liked, and all this kidnaping business and the rest of it is the bunk!" I went on as pleasantly as a female bear defending her cubs. "And until further notice you, Mr. Squirrel Seaver, are part of whatever this whole damn mess is about. I'm telling you now, that ever since I saw what I did in the air, I've had you down as a sneaking, lying, little rat, and a double-crosser! Speak up, damn you, or I'll break you both limb from limb——"

He stopped me by breaking down into a series of sobs that shook him from head to toe.

For a minute it didn't mean much. Far in the distance, the drone of Galini's motor became audible again, but that didn't mean much to me either. Then, as Squirrel Seaver sat there on the sand, all hunched over, that weeping got me uncomfortable. He shed tears as I've never seen anybody, man or woman, do before. This Jackson sat there glumly, and I snorted and whistled and finally lit a cigarette.

"All right!" I said finally. "You've got to admit that I have every reason to be tough, though, Seaver. Come on, shoot!"

"I'll shoot plenty!" Jackson said suddenly in his husky voice. "I was down at the wreck, see?"

"Why?" I barked.

"I'll come to that. I was spotted there by a guy, probably one of them that kidnaped McDowell, in case any of you fellows landed. My job was to say that I'd seen the ship fly west toward the Big Bend and not south, see?"

"What more do you know?" I snapped.

"I know they did fly to Mexico, and I know about where they landed and where the headquarters is."

"Now we're getting somewhere," I stated, getting to my feet. "You're going to be a big help to us, Jackson. All right, go on about Seaver."

Seaver was just crying quietly now as if he didn't have strength enough left for those racking sobs. Boy, he was woebegone!

"Seaver here talks around a little bit, feels me out, and finally makes me a proposition," the shifty-eyed little fellow went on. "He says his aunt's got a lot of dough in trust for him. He says he's in bad trouble and needs plenty of money quick, and she won't give it to him, and he proves it to me by letters. And after all, he's an army officer. So he says he wants to kidnap himself and get his aunt to send the dough, see?"

"My, my, what a clever scheme!" I said as I felt a certain amount of relief. Squirrel Seaver wasn't quite as bad as I'd thought.

"So he talks me into it," Jackson went on. "There was some talk about making a deal with the fellows that had got McDowell, but we threw that out. Looked simple as A B C—fly away, land somewheres, send for twenty thousand dollars ransom, aunty'd wire it to-morrow, and we'd get it. Everything was going fine. We was even goin' to have Seaver, here, walk into McMullen free and put up a bluff that he'd given his word to get the money to me and not prosecute me and he'd get killed if he didn't keep his word. It looked so perfect to me, what with McDowell being kidnaped on the level, that I said it was a go."

"So that was your game, eh, Squirrel?"

"It's true!" that human rabbit burst forth hysterically. "I'm in bad trouble, and I had to have the money or go to jail. Up in San Antonio, I've got four thousand dollars' worth of bad checks hanging over my head, gambling debts, and everything. God, Slim, I was desperate, I tell you. I——"

Galini was within a few hundred yards of us now, and for the next few seconds nobody could be heard above the roar of the motor. As he came close to us, Galini zoomed and a note tied around a wrench crashed into the mesquite twenty yards away.

"Go get it, Squirrel!" I told him; and with head bowed, and his shoulders bent, he walked away wiping his eyes. Even his freckles seemed to have faded.

"Now, listen, you!" I said to Jackson. "Regardless of whatever scheme there was, you're in bad, get me? You've got just one chance—that's to spill everything. You don't know anybody called Galini or Roof? Never heard of either name?"

"Honest, no. I do know the outfit's got somebody at McMullen that's tippin' 'em off, though."

"Is Fitzpatrick in the deal?"

"I don't know. But the big shot is *big,* understand?"

"I see," I nodded. "Well, the tip-off man is Galini, and that's the bozo in that ship up there!"

The arrogant Antonio was circling around us now, going higher all the time. The sun had popped up above the horizon and it didn't take an astrol-

oger to know that it would be four degrees hotter than the hinges of hell in another hour.

"Oh, that's the layout!" grunted Jackson.

"Right. Does he know you, do you think?"

Jackson shook his head.

"I don't see how," he said, "but maybe he does. You see, this fellow Humphries I met in Kansas City—he's one of the guys that put away McDowell. He and me pulled a little deal. He's on the make as well as I am. He run into me in El Paso. He tells me what I'm to do—hang around and lie about where the ship went. He don't tell me much of what's goin' on, but naturally I gets the idea. Some rich flyer's goin' to be kidnaped and held for ransom. Before I go in on it, I want to know how in hell they're goin' to hide an airplane and a lot of other things; so he finally tells me enough to give me this much of the lay:

"They got a place all fixed up a hundred miles south of Laredo. It's not only a landin' field, but camouflaged so's you wouldn't likely know it, by false bushes set out here and there and that stuff. He gives me a description of it so I can come down there and join 'em after the deal is pulled. He says there'll be plenty more up if they get the dough for this flyer, and that he's workin' for people that've got plenty pull and plenty friends, and that the racket'll be swell for me, too, see? And that's all I know!"

Whether it was all he knew or not, it was all I could get out of him at the moment, or, in fact, at any later moments. I asked him a few more questions and then Squirrel Seaver came plowing back, holding the note in one grimy hand.

"He says there's a cabin with a few burros around it, four miles south," Seaver said wearily, "and a big clearing twenty miles due east that he can land in. Says to go over and get the burros and ride over there!"

He handed me the note. He'd told me the substance of it. The last two sentences read as follows from east to west:

> I'll go on back and land to save gas, and at eleven o'clock I'll get in the air again to guide you there. It's about five points north of east from the Mexican cabin and I'll fly the course for you after you get the burros.
>
> ROOF.

For a moment, I stood there making a frantic effort to think. Squirrel Seaver had done a kidnaping on his own which must have puzzled Galini, alias Roof, a great deal. I couldn't be sure whether he knew this Jackson's identity or not, but the chances were that he did. He would naturally be in on every move of the gang's. At the moment, he was way up in the air himself because he wondered why Seaver had been kidnaped, too.

There were a million angles to it and it could have been thought out, but I wasn't the man to do it. All I could see to do was to get to that clearing as fast as the Lord would let me. Then, if Mr. Tony Galini forced a show-down, I'd accommodate him—with hope in my heart, a prayer on my lips, and a cocked gun in my hand.

CHAPTER VII.

SHOWDOWN.

IN the immediate vicinity of noon, my private burro train was proceeding five points north of east at approximately two miles an hour. I could have worn my beast of burden for a watch charm. I must've looked like a clothespin astride a match.

On my port side, Squirrel Seaver rode slumped in his saddle, the picture of abject misery. To starboard, the ferret-faced Jackson rode his donkey with difficulty, bouncing around like a balloon

on an angry sea. He was swinging a heavy stick he'd picked up.

In the air, a mile away, Mr. Anthony Galini was circling to show us exactly where the clearing was. A pitiless sun fairly shriveled the shirt on my back. I'd have consented to be kidnaped myself for one bucketful of water. It doesn't cost anything to daydream, so I was riding along with the vision of an unlimited number of steins of beer floating before my eyes. You must admit that that's far from an unpleasant dream —which made the awakening all the more sour.

All of a sudden my burro brayed in anguish, reared, damn near threw me off, and then fell down. The next second, Jackson's mount was splitting the breezes through the thick chaparral at a high rate of speed. It took me a second or two to come to my senses. My burro had fallen partially on me, and I disengaged myself in a flurry of flying hoofs and that heart-rending braying.

"What happened?" I asked dazedly, as I stumbled to my feet.

"Jackson swiped your burro's leg with that stick! I think he broke it!" Seaver said jerkily.

That cleared my brain, and quickly. I jerked my gun and took a couple of shots at the galloping fugitive, but the mesquite was an impenetrable screen. I took a quick look at the poor burro. One of his pipe-stem legs was broken.

"Give me your burro!" I snapped to Seaver, and a second later I put a bullet through the brain of my beast. "Get to the clearing as quick as you can!" I ordered him as I flung myself aboard his mount.

I started my little donkey with my gun and got him going fairly fast. Jackson must have set off a charge of dynamite under his animal. As I galloped through the mesquite, dodging limbs all the time, I figured out what must be the explanation for Jackson's quick maneuver. He'd beat our time to Galini and the two of them would get away. Jackson knew the jig was up as far as Galini was concerned, so the terrified Tony might just as well come out in the open, steal the ship, and join his gang. I never cursed anybody any worse than I did myself, as the burro and I sped for the field. I had to give Jackson credit, though. It was a beautiful out for everybody except maybe Slim Evans, Squirrel Seaver, and Lieutenant Texas Q. McDowell. And I, dunce that I am, had blurted all I knew about Galini.

That ratty outlaw was nearly a quarter of a mile ahead of me, I estimated. As I got closer and closer to the field, my ears were straining for the noise of the motor. They must be together now. What was holding things up?

Then a thought hit me. Perhaps they were waiting for me for some reason of their own! As long as they were in the kidnaping business, why not take care of me, grab Squirrel Seaver, and pick up a few more thousand dollars for themseves? But that thought didn't affect me. I was blazing with fury mostly directed at myself, and *Don Quixote* aboard his mule having at a good windmill was the ideal figure of an intelligent, handsome knight alongside me. Clothes torn, face scratched, long legs scraping the ground, and a gun in my hand, my burro and I staggered into the open of the clearing, bound to do or die.

Nothing could have seemed peculiar at that moment. I'd half expected to be shooting it out with two men on the other side, but what I saw was this:

Jackson, still mounted, was wheeling his burro as I hit the open. Galini had lunged at him and just missed. For a second, Galini hung onto the back leg of the burro, but a swift kick changed his ideas. The next second Jackson was urging it across the clearing, headed north. Galini was scrambling to his feet. I switched my course and, with

my elbows flapping and my tongue hanging out, took after Jackson.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" I bawled.

Jackson turned in the saddle and there came the crack of a gun, and boy, that bullet came close! He could shoot. "Galini gave him a gun!" I thought stupidly, and then I cracked down at him.

I swear I aimed at the burro, and I can hit the ground at least once out of three times if I'm not too drunk. But I hit Jackson. A split second after the crack of my shot, he plunged forward over his burro's withers. The burro kept on going. The outlaw was dragged a few feet, and then his feet came free of the stirrups, and the riderless donkey galloped off through the jungle.

"Atta boy!" came Galini's voice as I dashed up alongside of my victim.

I'd got him almost squarely through the middle of the back. He wasn't dead, but instinctively I knew he hadn't long to live. His eyes were open as I turned him over gently.

"For God's sake, why did you make me do this?" I said to him as I bent over him.

His expression didn't change as his glazing eyes met mine.

"Hell, I'd double-crossed 'em and then squealed on 'em," he whispered.

I saw what he was driving at. There wouldn't have been much of a future for him, at that. Squealers get short shrift anywhere.

"I thought—Galini and I would get—away——"

And then he died. I got up to meet the limping Galini.

For the first time in the last minute, I realized that the comparatively unimportant dead man was not the main objective of the morning's work. Galini's lean, dark face was slightly flushed and those level triangular eyes had a smoldering glow in them. You could *feel* the fact that he was afire inside. It glowed through every pore of his bony face. He had his helmet off and I remembered noticing that not one lock of his smoothly combed hair was out of place. A saturnine smile was on his lips.

"Dead?" was the question he shot at me.

I nodded. My smoking gun was still in my hand, and I was in no mood for fooling. My gat came up quick and fast.

"Put 'em up, Mr. Galini!" I snapped.

He stopped dead, and that jeering, impersonal smile became wider. Slowly, he thrust his hands in the air.

"Mind if I sit down?" he asked, those two wrinkles from his nostrils like furrows cut with a chisel in the tight skin. "That burro kicked me."

"Sure," I told him. "When I get your gun, you can put your hands down, too."

"This guy's got that!" he stated.

"How come?"

"To tell you the truth," he said with that contemptuous smile, "I'd fallen asleep!"

"I see. Well, this is the show-down, Mr. Tony 'Candy Kid' Galini. That is your name, isn't it?"

He lit a cigarette nonchalantly.

"It has been," he said.

That sardonic smirk had been wiped from his dark face now and he was a very hard-looking egg. Brows, eyes, and tightened mouth were like so many parallel slits in a face sculptured out of stone.

"Dead men tell no tales, but that don't stop 'em talking before they die!" I told him nastily. That was a bluff, of course.

"Now, don't start in lying, Evans!" Galini said levelly. "You were called to Hal Jelke's house. He told you I was Tony Galini, a big Chicago gunman, and that I was working for Fitzpatrick, or at least was the finger man for these kidnapings. He also told you not to say anything about it to protect him, and that I'd be caught dead to rights if I was watched close enough. What

would've happened and may happen yet is that I'd be put on the spot, perhaps with the innocent aid of you clucks, by Mr. Harry Jelke himself! And, as you well remarked, dead men tell no tales!"

Well, lads, I was surprised at that emotionless and accurate summary, not to say astonished. In fact, I was nonplused.

I just sat there and stared at him dumbly.

"Well, what of it?" I said finally. "You are Tony Galini, and I saw your picture and biography in a Chicago newspaper!"

"Right!" he said. "I don't blame you, Evans, but put down that popgun, will you? You've had a tough night and you might get trembly. I've got a few things to tell you."

I put the Colt down alongside of me and lit a cigarette. I'd forgotten all about Squirrel Seaver for the moment.

"Now, listen!" said Galini, his eyes burning into mine. "The proof of what I say is in that dead body there. He told me who he was and wanted us both to beat it. I tried to stop him. That shows where I stand. Now get this! My right name is Anthony Galini. I was brought up in the worst slums of the south side of Chicago, and I was a professional gambler tied up with the big shots that ran the south side rackets. I was what I was supposed to be and couldn't very well help being where I grew up, if you get me."

"I do."

"I was not and never have been a gunman except in self-defense, and I took a year's rap for carrying a gun I had a permit to carry. Framed—politics—but that's neither here nor there. To make a long story short, I got loose, which isn't easy to do, from the mob, did some studying and got into the army under the name of 'Roof'! And I intended, and still intend, to work at it and obey the rules. Get me?"

He took a deep breath of his cigarette, and I relaxed a little as those suddenly hypnotic eyes shifted away from mine.

"Now, listen closely!" he said with the hint of a thin-lipped smile. "This Hal Jelke's right name, as long as you're interested in right names, is John Sandino. He didn't make his money in oil, he made it in booze around Chicago. And if he hadn't left the town just when he did, about six months ago, he'd have left it in a nice five-thousand-dollar coffin with flowers sent by all and sundry. We knew each other just slightly and disliked each other plenty. Now look!"

He leaned forward, one long, slim forefinger tapping on his bony knee steadily. Sitting out there in a clearing in Mexico under the blazing sun, what he was saying seemed so far away and so remote from immediate reality that it was more like a dream than fact.

"I didn't squeal on him while he was big-shotting around McMullen during the time I've been here, and if he wanted to call those gorillas working for him geologists or whatever he called 'em, it was none of my business. He beat me to it by getting you to his house and squealing on me because my past record, like his own, would automatically put either one of us in a spot. I know what he figured. Everything was to be secret, wasn't it? Well, I'd have waked up dead about this morning with false evidence planted in my tent or something, to make it all right and proper!"

Gradually, I came to see what he was getting at.

"Well, now that's a very pretty tale that fits together perfectly," I informed him. "Proceed. You interest me strangely even if I decide not to believe you!"

"You'll believe me!" he said grimly.

Suddenly, his face got a little harder and there was an ugly cast to it.

"And furthermore, until I get through I can stand it if there are no more insults, understand?"

"Perfectly," I shot back at him. "But until otherwise noted, I'm the boss here, and I'll say exactly what I damn please, so go on! You're on trial, not me!"

"There's very little I can say, now," he snapped.

He took a long breath as though to get control of himself, and then went on in emotionless tones:

"When Tex McDowell got kidnaped, followed by Squirrel Seaver—— By the way, where is he?"

"Be here any minute," I said.

"Well, naturally, when this kidnaping started, I figured Jelke was in on it. There was an inside man somewhere and it would be right up his alley. So, while you were upstairs, sleeping, I came in to see Mr. Jelke for a showdown. When I found you were upstairs, I had a good idea of why, on a night like that, you were in his house. He'd worked faster than I had, with the double motive of getting me out of the way so I couldn't put the finger on him, and also giving me all the blame so he couldn't possibly be suspected!"

"So, before you left, you shot him," I stated.

"Shot him, hell!" snarled Roof. "Those two gorillas came in, and I knew that I was going to get mine right then and there. I didn't even have a gun with me. I just threw myself out that window and beat it, and Jelke shot himself where it didn't hurt. He did that for two reasons, I figure—one, to make the finding of my body about two hours later look right; two, to have perfect evidence forevermore that he was working so hard for the interests of law and order that he got shot in the performance of his friendly duties!"

"You know I was beaten up by two men in a dark hallway," I put in, "and one of them said, 'Here's one for the Kid' or something like that——"

"You're dumber than I thought!" he shot back at me, "I suppose strong-arm men working for a guy mention the big shot's name when they're beating up somebody! Can't you see that they tried to make you think they were my men? Beat you up to make the pose good and used my name to drive another nail into my coffin!"

Maybe it doesn't sound convincing in print, folks, but then and there I decided that Mr. Tar Roof, Tony Galini, or whatever other moniker he was known by, was telling the truth and nothing but the truth.

"What did you tell Jelke during your soirée while I snoozed?" I asked.

"I told him that his whole past history, as far as I knew it, showed that he probably was concerned in the thing. I told him I wouldn't squeal for another twenty-four hours, but that if everything didn't come out O. K. by then, I'd say plenty and that he'd be worked on plenty to find out what he knew!"

"Well, he and Fitzpatrick certainly didn't seem to be friends."

"That was a carefully prepared skit in one scene entitled, 'Throwing the Border Patrol Boys Off the Scent.' In my opinion, that was one of the reasons for Fitzpatrick being there. The other one was for him to show up frankly and alibi himself in advance. The Chicago boys do it all the time."

"You know more about it than I do, I presume," I conceded, "and if it does you any good, I'll tell you that I'm commencing to believe you."

"Five minutes after we get out hands on Jelke, you'll finish believing me," he said slowly. "If this business hadn't come up and I hadn't gone in the air within two minutes after I hit the field, I'd be hiding out in the brush right now to keep from being murdered. How he wants to knock me off before I get a chance to talk! And now listen to one more thing!"

Again those eyes were burning into mine and the mirthless smile on his face gleamed white and wolfish against the dark skin.

"You found old Sergeant Clay murdered, didn't you?"

I nodded.

"Know who he was out with night before last and last night?"

I shook my head.

"With those two supposed geologists of Jelke's!"

My brain did three loops and a tail-spin before it settled down to rest.

"But, man, they wouldn't dare murder a man they'd been seen with the last two nights and just stick around a small town——"

"Course they didn't do it themselves! Don't you think there's anybody else within fifteen miles of McMullen that's in on this deal? God knows it's big enough! Stolen ship, and holding a man for ransom whose dad is worth millions! They'll hold out for a hundred thousand at least. And from what you say, Fitzpatrick wouldn't stop at anything just to get even."

"It's hard to remember how big it may be," I admitted.

"Sergeant Clay went out the second night for the deliberate purpose of getting them drunk and getting information out of them."

"That's the trouble with those cheapskate muscle men!" Roof grunted. "They've got to brag. Liquor'll get half of what they know and a dame'll get it all!"

"Well, here's what I've collected," I told him quickly.

I'd taken on my third lease on life and all of a sudden I was eager and excited and anxious to get the decks cleared for plenty of action. After all, Tex McDowell was still in the hands of the Philistines, and not phony Philistines either. You can't laugh off murder.

I told Galini about Squirrel Seaver fast and furiously. He listened as if every word was a swallow of water and he was dying of thirst.

"That's every bit of it!" he snapped when I finished. "The only thing that kept me from starting to work on Jelke right off the reel was that he seemed really knocked dead at the Seaver disappearance. So that lame-brained little woodchuck kidnaped himself, eh? And that small-time gorilla over there fell in with him!"

"Do you think he told the truth about their hideaway?" I asked him.

You have no idea how the hard countenance of that nerveless young man affected me. In some subtle manner, he acted and spoke as though he knew all there was to know about everything and was competent to take any situation in his stride.

He nodded shortly.

"The yellow guys when they squeal to save themselves don't stop halfway!" he informed me. "With what I know about Jelke as a starter and what the late Jackson told you, as the foundation for a bluff, we can start operating fast. Now here's what we'll do!"

For the next five minutes we chattered away like a couple of women with new operations. We argued and fought with asperity and enthusiasm, and by the time Seaver had dragged his woebegone body into the clearing, and deposited it alongside us, we were pretty well set.

"A fine cucumber you turned out to be!" Roof told him contemptuously.

There was just a bit of a change in Squirrel Seaver, as if the long ordeal of the morning had finally burned the nervousness out of him, calmed him down, and forced him to face himself and the future without blinkers on. His rabbit jaw wasn't quivering and his pale, freckled face wasn't twitching any more. His eyes met mine unwaveringly.

"I know there's going to be some fighting after what Jackson told you," he said slowly, "and it's liable to be tough. There's nothing ahead of me. Consequently you're looking at about the best man in the world in a scrap because I don't give a damn what hap-

pens to me. Slim, there's one favor I'd like to ask of you. It isn't for myself —I've got some friends and some folks, you know."

"What is it?"

"Let me be in on whatever happens and have a chance to go down clean, will you?"

He said it very quietly, without a trace of emotion, but his eyes were like a dog's very humbly pleading for mercy. I was uncomfortable as hell and my Adam's apple was starting to pound up and down my neck. I'd been asked to believe more things and make more decisions and connive at more underground stuff in the last twenty-four hours than a crooked booze agent in active operation. The tune of Jelke's hymn had been, 'Believe Me and Keep your Mouth Shut.' Same with Galini. Now Squirrel Seaver wanted me to do the same thing.

"Before this damn thing ends," I informed the world in general, "and whoever the culprits turn out to be, the law's going to have damn good grounds for accusing me of aiding and abetting in the conspiracy and being an accomplice before, during, after, and subsequent to the crime, as was adjacent! Even that lantern-jawed lulu that took a pot shot at me yesterday enlisted me as an accomplice to suppress information. Consequently, Squirrel, being already not only up to my neck but over my head, I don't see——"

"Please, Slim!"

"I don't see how I can do anything else," I concluded, "but keep my mouth shut for a while at least, and give you another chance."

Squirrel Seaver literally gasped with relief. Then a look of fright leaped into his eyes.

"How about you?" he quavered to Galini.

"I'll throw in with Slim," he stated. "But when the show-down comes, kid, you'd better not turn yellow again!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WE MEET JELKE.

THREE hours later, Galini and Seaver and I—Galini and Seaver strapped together with the observer's belt in the rear cockpit—landed at McMullen amid loud huzzas, not a few wisecracks, and a couple of ironical razzberries.

We made a bee line for Captain Kennard's office and that spike-headed gentleman shoved a bottle of tequila in front of us, lit a cigarette and demanded raucously with his eyes on me:

"What ho, my lads, what ho?"

"Good cheer, papa, good cheer!" I returned, and I spun my yarn in a few million well-chosen words, while Squirrel Seaver sat in dumb misery and Galini listened as though each word was a gem of purest ray serene.

The captain gave vent to a few assorted grunts and wheezes, and by the time I finished, his square face was set and his chin was out like a cow catcher in front of him.

"I see!" he snapped. "Well, here's a note in reference to Tex. Came in postmarked San Antonio."

I read the typewritten note aloud:

"Lieutenant McDowell is being held for one hundred thousand dollars ransom and will be killed unless the money is delivered as follows, to-day, the 23rd: First, Mr. Jelke is to deliver it by air in his own ship, which must be completely unarmed. Second, he will fly due southwest from McMullen until he reaches the little settlement of Guayma, Mexico, on the Laredo-Tampico Railroad. At that point, he will be joined by a De Haviland airplane between the hours of four and five p. m., which will lead him to a place where the money may be dropped. Upon the receipt of the money, Lieutenant McDowell will be produced and can fly back with Mr. Jelke."

"There was no signature or other identifying mark on the letter," Captain Kennard said. "If you're right about Jelke, do you see how clever the scheme is?"

"Sure," Galini broke in. "One of their own men carries the money down!"

"He's due out here any second," Kennard went on grimly.

He stopped as we heard the noise of a car drawing up at the steps.

"Speak of the devil and all hell breaks loose," he went on quickly. "It's him now. Hop on him, Slim, and let's see whether you've got the right dope!"

"The hell I will!" I told him. "He's got to be searched and a few other things before I start my tongue wagging!"

"Psh-sh! Here he comes now," said Galini.

A second later, the big, personable Jelke was standing in the door, a wide smile on his pink-and-white face. When he saw Seaver, his eyes widened. They shifted to Galini and then to me, and the smile was wiped off his face like chalk off a blackboard, and for an instant I saw cowering fear in his eyes.

"Well, well, home again, eh, Squirrel?" he said loudly. "Congratulations and what happened?"

"Hello, Jelke," I said, getting up casually and closing the door behind him.

With a sudden move, I ran my hands over him. The bulge of a gun in his rear pocket greeted me as he whirled on me, his lips suddenly snarling.

"What the hell?" he shouted, but by that time I had his gun.

"Not a thing, Jelke, old boy, not a thing. Sit down. I hear that you and Mr. Galini here know each other and we want to have a little social chat."

His face was as white as chalk, and in that instant I knew he was licked and was yellow. He fairly sank into the chair, and more beads of sweat were on his face than even a Texas sun could generate. I took a drink big enough to float a battleship while he waited in trembling fear. Galini was gazing at him in silent scorn, as sure of himself as though all the evidence was in.

"There's no use beating around the bush," I told Jelke levelly. "I've flown over half of Mexico since I saw you last. I've talked to a couple of outlaws, I got Squirrel Seaver, and I know this whole kidnaping deal. You're in the kidnaping plot, you sent the information about when Tex McDowell was going to fly, you tried to throw suspicion on Galini here, and your so-called rock hounds are the ones that killed the sergeant!"

"Why, what the hell do you mean?" he said, his voice quavering.

"Just what I said!" I interrupted him. "Now, listen. I'm not going to call you any names, but I am going to tell you what we've decided. You're going to fly your ship down to get Tex with the money all right, but you're going to have company and you're going to send them word by your private radio set or by whatever the hell it is you gossip with them by, that you're going to have company. And you'll tell 'em that there's no danger of your company acting rough, and that you are taking responsibility that it's the best thing to do."

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. He was in a funk as blue as the end of a reformer's nose, and I knew we had him.

"Why, we know your Chicago career and everything else," I told him. "You are, and never have been anything else, but a rat. And, mister, you listen to me. Captain Kennard has decided that your only chance to keep from swinging for the murder of the sergeant—swinging, understand me?—is to talk and to tell all you know. And listen some more. We've got work to do and we haven't got time to prove our case point for point. Do you talk or don't you?"

For a minute he wavered, licking his lips. Then:

"I couldn't help doing it. They had plenty on me," he moaned, and from there on the floodgates were open. He had a piece of wet spaghetti for a backbone and a tongue that was loose on both ends, and ran from both ends and the middle when it came to alibiing himself. In a short space of time, we found

out that the rock hounds were in the conspiracy, but that they had killed the sergeant on their own responsibility.

We found out likewise that there was a secret radio station out in the mesquite a mile and a half from Jelke's house. We found out that he thought, but couldn't be sure, that Fitzpatrick was the big man behind it and that Jelke had been scared for his own life for a month.

The head of the outfit had enough sources of information to know that a certain little corpse, found in Galveston four months before, had been partially due to Mr. Jelke's machinations. Oh, he talked, brothers, and how he talked! All the while, Galini, alias Roof, never said a word. Jelke agreed to send word to the bandits about being accompanied; he agreed to everything. Sort of gave me a pain in the region of my left ear to see a big strapping guy like him, crumble so completely.

"All right!" barked Captain Kennard after about ten minutes. "I'll see that the sheriff gets after these rock hounds pronto. Now, let's see. You boys are tired out, so I'll send with Jelke——"

"Oh, now, captain," I interrupted, riding on a high sea of tequila, "you're not going to deprive Galini and me of the satisfaction of finishing this job, are you?"

"Not if you want to do it!"

Suddenly little Squirrel Server was on his feet, his jaw quivering.

"Please, Captain Kennard, give me a chance to go, too!" he pleaded as though his life was at stake. "Give me a chance to try to make up for what I did——"

And on he went. If he'd been a lawyer and twice as homely and the entire jury had seen his client kill a man in cold blood, the plea he made would have won the case for him! More words fell from his lips than water has over Niagara Falls.

"Hell, captain! I'd appreciate getting shot if it would do any good," he ended, and then his taut body sort of collapsed into a chair.

"What about it, boys?" Captain Kennard asked.

That little hard-boiled martinet was so soft-hearted inside, he reminded me of a cream puff covered with concrete.

"O. K. with me," I said, and my Adam's apple was doing peculiar tricks, and I was swallowing hard for some reason. Squirrel was pitiful anyway you looked at it.

"And with me," stated Galini.

"So be it," nodded the captain. "Take a drink and then let's get going."

CHAPTER IX.
THE PARACHUTE DUEL.

ALL of which explains the fact that, an hour and a half later, a one-ship caravan was gallivanting southwestward over the Mexican monte. At the controls of the four-seated cabin job was that sterling master of the air and model of all the manly virtues, Lieutenant Slimuel X. Evans. His companions were Jelke, Tony Galini, and Squirrel Seaver. All of us were highly uncomfortable because the seats were not made for seat-pack parachutes, but I—and, I suspect, Tony Galini—was mentally comfortable.

Jelke had sent the message and got confirmation from the outlaws, and so we were on our way to have a little gab fest with Tex McDowell and his captors—as ill-assorted a quartet as ever you placed your eyes upon. I don't know why exactly, unless it was the fact that I knew McDowell so well, but somehow I had the feeling that there was going to be more to this little jaunt than met the eye.

We had the hundred thousand dollars in one package and a bunch of neatly cut papers in another one. The government, Old Man McDowell and about

everybody west of the Mississippi, had aided in raising it in cash. One nice feature of being on the jaunt was that I didn't have to stick around a bunch of newspapermen who had arrived at the field from all over Texas.

I got considerable kick out of looking around at my companions as the single Liberty motor roared along ahead of me. Jelke was white-faced and blank-eyed, hunched forward in his seat dejectedly. Little Seaver seemed to be suffering from a cross between melancholia and malnutrition. The scrawny little shrimp was slumped in his seat, his eyes gazing blankly into space.

Mr. Tony Galini, tight-lipped and with a slumberous glow in his eyes, looked like a determined hawk bound for his prey. Occasionally his eyes and mine met, and when they did the hint of a smile touched his lips. He was riding high, was Mr. Tony Galini.

We were less than forty miles from our objective at three thirty, and the big night behind me, plus the lulling strains of the motor, had made me somnolent, I guess. I was just sort of dozing along, with my so-called faculties working at slow speed.

Suddenly, a quick blast of air brought me back to myself with a snap. The next second, I saw that yellow-bellied Jelke diving through the open door into space. For a second it seemed as if Galini and I were paralyzed. Then, before either one of us could make a move, Squirrel Seaver had dived out behind Jelke. Galini was reaching down to the floor for one of the two Lewis machine guns hidden there as I banked the ship and wondered dazedly what it was all about. Jelke, too yellow to try to help save McDowell's life, was trying to escape, of course. Was Seaver, too?

"Look at him!" bawled Galini, his eyes two hot coals in his head. "Squirrel's getting underneath him!"

And it was true. Squirrel Seaver was doing my stunt, waiting to open his chute until he had fallen past the fugitive. As he came below Jelke the white umbrella flipped open and the two of them were swinging down about a hundred yards apart with Jelke one hundred feet higher than Seaver.

I was diving the plane like mad, now, spiraling widely around the two chutes as a center. Then my jaw dropped open like a gasping fish's as the supposedly unarmed Jelke brought a gun from somewhere. Very methodically, he trained it on Squirrel Seaver. Seaver had his Colt out now, and his spoke first. For the next thirty seconds, as Galini and I were diving toward them, the two men fought their aërial duel as the 'chutes dropped them toward the ground. Both were still swinging and accurate shooting was impossible. I leaned over to yell in Galini's ear.

"We don't want Jelke killed! He hasn't told half what he knows yet!"

Galini, who was getting a machine gun into position, roared back:

"I know! We don't want Seaver killed either, do we?"

"Of course not. Just threaten Jelke with the Lewis."

This we did, and Jelke ceased firing. Round and round them we circled, Galini with the muzzle of the Lewis poked out the open door of the cabin. Down below us, Seaver was swinging, making reassuring signals to me. At that, I remember thinking, the little shrimp had guts, to leap unhesitatingly out after Jelke in that wilderness.

Then something that I hadn't noticed before leaped up and hit me. There were a couple of very small clearings down there, and on the edge of one was a little shack. More important than either one of those things, a man was running toward the place where Seaver and Jelke would light, and he had evidently originated from that shack.

In a split second, a possibility popped into my brain. It didn't seem like Jelke to jump out over the wilderness like

that. He was too yellow. Immediately I figured that there was a possibility, at least, that this shack, only twenty miles or so from Guayma, might house some ally of the kidnapers and that Jelke had known damn well what he was doing when he jumped. Perhaps the man was only a curious peon, but in any event Mr. Jelke had picked himself a good spot for his jump.

I wanted more than anything in the world to keep possession of the body, and such soul as there was, of Harry Jelke, so I watched with consuming interest as Squirrel hit in the edge of a tree, bounced through the branches and snapped off his 'chute, apparently unhurt. Our ship was barely skimming the tops of the chaparral as Jelke, his face livid, hit squarely in the middle of a tree and was bounced from limb to limb in a manner which did no good to any of the bones in his body. He ended up hanging limply from his 'chute which had caught in the limbs of the tree. I watched Seaver, gun in hand, release the motionless body and set it on the ground. He signaled us that all was well. Jelke evidently was alive but unconscious.

I kept the ship going round and round to watch what would happen when the Mexican, now but a couple of hundred yards away, reached the scene. I saw him and little Seaver meet over the motionless body of Jelke and apparently talk for a minute. Then all of the sudden, it seemed that the two men leaped at each other like tigers. Galini and I, cursing helplessly, could do nothing but fly round and round as Seaver and his heavier antagonist kicked and clawed each other. I groaned as I saw Seaver's gun fall to one side, and when I saw the Mexican, lithe as a cat, shake himself loose and scramble toward the Colt, I groaned heartily.

His hand was on the gun when Seaver, torn and bloody, lifted a small mesquite log and crashed it down on the unknown outlaw's wrist. Then Squirrel staggered to his feet as the outlaw took time out to just lie there. The next second, Mr. Squirrel Seaver had applied the mesquite log to the head of the Mexican in a highly businesslike and none-too-gentle manner. Galini and I yelled so loud we could hear ourselves above the roar of the motor as that human woodchuck staggered to his feet and waved at us that he was all right, and then pointed toward the shack a quarter of a mile away.

"We've got to be getting on!" I roared to Galini. "Seaver will be all right for a while, anyway!"

"Right!" the flaming-eyed Galini yelled back. "That bird down there was in cahoots with the gang some way!"

I nodded as I sent the ship upward. I had a notion that Seaver had accomplished more than either one of us knew in subduing that Mexican down there.

"I wonder if Jelke's not being in the ship is going to crab our act with Tex McDowell!" I yelled, and Galini shrugged his shoulders fatalistically.

"We'd better be quick on the trigger!" he stated.

Within five minutes we were in sight of Guayma, which consisted of about fifty residences with walls built of poles set a few inches apart, and thatched roofs. It was Galini who spotted a speck in the air that wasn't a buzzard, circling about five miles south of the settlement. We suddenly decided, in view of the fact that our friend Jelke wasn't aboard, that I might as well be alone to all intents and purposes. Consequently Galini dropped to the floor with a machine gun ready to shoot out through the door any time we saw fit to open said door and the Lewis seemed necessary.

I flew to meet the ship head on and shortly discovered that it was the De Haviland that had been stolen from Tex McDowell and me the day before. As we got within five hundred yards of each

other, the De Haviland swerved to one side, but I continued to keep my nose toward it so that the people in the other ship couldn't see right away that Jelke wasn't with me. I mean the ship's nose, not my own, although either would have been an effective screen.

As I came within a couple of hundred feet or so of the De Haviland, what I saw was plenty. In the front seat, flying the plane, was the same snaky little Mexican pilot whom I had been introduced to the day before. He was snappily and comfortably equipped with helmet and goggles. In the rear seat was Tex McDowell, without benefit of either protection. It took two looks to make sure of it, however, for his hair and face were caked with blood. His hands were in plain sight, tightly bound together at the wrists. Even his shirt was black with blood, and as I looked at him I became a hearty believer in the art of murder for its own sake.

CHAPTER X.
I PULL A STUNT.

TAKING it by and large and reading from east to west, I have been through many a moment in my time, but I never remember one which seemed to be so touch and go as those few seconds when I kept the nose of Jelke's ship toward the circling De Haviland so that the pilot could not see who was in it.

As happens to everybody, I guess, at times like that, every nerve and faculty seems to get a quick shot of dope and you see all, hear all, and think all, at once. I was a little bit higher than the De Haviland and three details impressed themselves on my mind in the same instant that I automatically figured what I must do.

One of the said details was that the Mexican pilot had his right hand underneath his left armpit with a gun in it, pointed back at Tex. The second was that there was no joy stick in Tex's cockpit. The third was that the De Haviland's guns seemed to be in working order, complete with filled ammunition belts. Of course, I had no guns except the one that Tony Galini was hugging lovingly to his breast as he lay on the floor of the cockpit.

I've mentioned that at the same time I noticed all this, I realized that there was but one thing to do. That was to let Tex know who was in Jelke's ship without letting the pilot know. The Mexican was evidently waiting for Jelke to poke his head out the door or something to let him know that all was well. I maneuvered into a position slightly behind the De Haviland so that as I turned almost parallel to it, the motor kept the Mexican from getting a view of the cockpit. I could signal Tex, however, in the old border sign language.

As I gestured, the sudden realization swept over me that there wasn't one damn thing I could do. The Mexican would be bound to find out any minute that Jelke wasn't along, take fright, and then what would happen to Tex, or to Galini and me for that matter, no one could tell.

Galini couldn't shoot even if it were possible to knock off the Mexican without hitting Tex, because Tex had no means of controlling the ship from his cockpit, and I couldn't tell how completely he was bound. The best thing that could happen was for the Mexican to take a chance and give us an opportunity to drop the money regardless of Jelke's absence.

But I reckoned without the blood-stained, beaten-up McDowell. Although I have described his physical condition —and you can imagine what it was the result of—still you can scarcely understand what happened next without knowing both him and his father. His father had been one of the hell-roaringest old-timers Texas ever saw, and Tex was a block off the old chip.

For an instant he looked up at me as I signaled repeatedly, giving him the lay of the land.

Then I shrugged my shoulders helplessly as I held up my two hands close together to indicate that I understood his helpless condition.

At that second, Tex made his move. His bound hands darted out with the speed of a striking rattlesnake and an instant later the gun in the Mexican's hand dropped out of sight somewhere. It was a move the spig couldn't foresee, because Tex was bound and presumably helpless because of no controls in the back seat. I saw the blood-smeared Southerner unsnap his belt with his bound hands. The De Haviland was wavering dangerously as he grabbed the Mexican by the neck. His wrists were bound but his hands had play enough to surround the astounded pilot's windpipe. I was yelling like an old grad at a football game, and down below me Galini had opened the cockpit door to watch and was lovingly fingering the triggers of the double Lewis.

In the front cockpit, the Mexican, writhing helplessly, was clawing at his belt to release himself so that he could fight back. Now, flying automatically, I had the cabin plane barely twenty-five feet above the De Haviland and slightly to one side of it, so that every move of the struggle below was visible to me. I forgot for the moment that Tex would be helpless even if he won.

The De Haviland was hovering in a stall as the wildly struggling Mexican got his belt unfastened. As it snapped loose, and he started to writhe out of Tex's clutches, the six-foot-two Southerner's body heaved backward. The partition between front and back cockpits of the De Haviland was barely an inch wide and Tex was on his feet in the rear cockpit, bent almost double. He lifted that Mexican by the neck as though the spig had been a flapping rooster. The next instant, Tex had dumped him over the side of the ship and the outlaw was turning end over end as he went on his last flight.

Standing in the rear cockpit, barely able to reach the stick in the front, with his hands bound, one of the best fliers the border ever saw brought the De Haviland under control before it had thrown Tex off, too. Maybe I am too hard-boiled, but I knew that McDowell hadn't deliberately thrown any man over the side unless he had deserved it. So I never had a qualm as I saw the Mexican hit the solid ground, four thousand feet below.

Galini was sitting up now and never shall I forget that hawklike, tight-lipped, tight-skinned face. That is, that's what it had been. Now every shred of its masklike quality had gone. He was wide-eyed, grinning and glowing from every pore as though the raw excitement and thrill of that quick struggle had cut his shell completely away.

And, folks, contain yourselves. At the moment I felt entirely able to step out of the ship and walk on air. When I snapped back into some semblance of normality a few seconds later, I realized the deadly peril of Tex's situation. But the solution for it came almost as quickly as the realization.

He was standing in the rear cockpit, bent double to reach the stick. And, although I couldn't see it at the time, I realize that he was bound in some other way which prevented him from changing cockpits. He would have done that immediately if it had been possible.

I was to find out later that, for additional safety, his ankles were thoroughly shackled to the support underneath the stool in the rear seat. Those bandits certainly trusted him!

"You fly the ship!" I yelled to Galini, and explained what I intended to do.

"Sure!" yapped the transfigured ex-gangster. "Then you let me know what to do, huh?"

I nodded as I got to my feet. "If

you ever flew in your life, do it now!" I told him. "Fly by Tex first!"

This we did, and I signaled my intention.

You should've seen the countenance which looked up at me from the De Haviland below. It seemed as though McDowell's eyes were a pair of searchlights. The blood on his face cracked in the grin I knew so well.

This Galini could fly, too, and I wasn't taking many real chances, because I had a parachute on.

I inched out on the lower wing of our ship and got a good grip on the little hand opening at its tip, which he placed there for mechanics to get a grip when swinging a ship on the ground. Despite my parachute I got a thrill as I let myself down until I was hanging by my hands from the edge of the wing. With my left hand in the wing grip, I swung my right down to the wing skid. There was another tense moment as I released my grip with the left hand for a second to get both hands on the wing skid. Galini was inching along a few feet above the De Haviland, and Tex was flying as straight and level as was possible below. Galini brought the cabin plane's right wing, to which I was hanging, above the left wing of the De Haviland. For an instant, with the airstream buffeting me, I hung with my boots two or three feet above the De Haviland's upper wing. Then Galini dipped slightly and I let loose with a cross between a yell, a prayer, and a curse.

The next second I was on the De Haviland's left wing, all in a heap, clinging to the cabanne strut. I looked over at Tex as I sprawled flat on the wing, and he saluted me delightedly. For a second, I rested there. I'm not as young as I used to be, and my dandruff has weakened me.

Then I snaked along the wing and tumbled into the front cockpit. Tex made way for me and cut the gun for a minute. He was so radiant that even the bloody mask that covered his scarred and bruised face couldn't hide it.

"Beautiful weather we're having!" he yelled.

"Looked like rain for a minute!" I yelled back. "You're not looking so well."

"Looks are deceiving!" he bellowed back. "Loosen up my hands and feet and anything else that's tied up, will you? Then we're going to fly about fifteen miles south, you're going to lend me your parachute, and we're going to have a little tea party all our own—tea with lemon in it!"

CHAPTER XI.

"—OR WE'LL MACHINE GUN YOU!"

IT didn't take long for Tex to map out the layout for me. I loosened Tex's wrappings and we were on our way, followed in file by Mr. Tony Galini. Mr. Galini's rôle, as near as I could figure it, was to use his ship as a cross between an aërial ambulance and a high-flying hearse. Mr. Tex McDowell had not been treated with the courtesy suitable to a man of his caliber and he aimed to straightened that score pronto.

Within a few minutes, we were out of sight of the curious villagers and diving at a flat stretch of sand at the foot of a low, rolling hill. The hill was covered with chaparral, and there were a few trees spotted here and there on the flat stretch. These, according to Tex, could be uprooted at will to make it a landing field, and were propped up there as camouflage when it was not being used for landing purposes. At the foot of the hill, well camouflaged by chaparral, was a brown canvas tent, and it was at this that I was diving. Tex had a note ready in his hand and that note read as follows:

Walk out in the middle of the field and drop all your weapons or we'll machine gun you and call it a day.

No sooner had the note, wrapped around a wrench, been dropped, than the tall, lantern-jawed party, whom I remembered from the day before, ambled forth from his tent followed by two Mexicans. He read it while I climbed the De Haviland. I gave them a minute to see who was in it. While I wasn't close enough to see their faces, I have no doubt that they were surprised and not a little nonplused.

Up above, Galini was circling as Tex wrapped my parachute harness about him and prepared for the next move.

By the time I was fifteen hundred feet high, all visible artillery was in a heap on the ground and the three bozos below were standing quietly waiting for whatever might come their way. I got into position and Tex swan-dived over the side with great gusto. He had my Colt as an ace in the hole. His chute opened O. K. and he landed within one hundred feet or so of the three men. I dived merrily downward and circled the scene at an altitude of about two hundred feet. Galini came down behind me and we had movable grand-stand seats from which to watch what happened.

One of the Mexicans came forward with all the eagerness of a man going to the electric chair. There's no need of going into detail. Mr. McDowell stepped forward a pace or two himself and with his bare hands proceeded to turn that Mexican inside out. He knocked him down so fast that it looked as if he was fighting two men at one time and one of them was always on the ground and the other standing up. He played "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" on his nose and "The Anvil Chorus" on his chin and a couple of additional ditties on each eye.

When the Mexican was unconscious on the ground, it was the second one's turn. This one tried to run and I watched in amazement as the American caught him by the shirt and held him. This one fought like a cornered rat, but at the end he, too, was motionless on the ground.

For a second Tex stood there fifty yards from the American outlaw, and I knew he must be gasping for breath and weak in the knees. I was waiting with absorbed interest to see what the next move would be. Then I saw the outlaw raise his sombrero and sweep it low as he bowed congratulations to Tex. Tex waved a reply and then the two of them proceeded industriously to the business of uprooting four or five of those fake trees so that Signors Tony Galini and Slimuel X. Evans could land and pick up their cargo. I hit the ground first, but Tony wasn't far behind. He and I met Tex and the outlaw together. "Lantern-jaw," whose gray stubble had waxed like the green-bay tree into a luxuriant growth of whiskers, was the first to speak.

"You boys certainly do get around," he stated with profound melancholy. "How did you enjoy the fight?"

"Swell," I told him. "Too bad Dave Fitzpatrick wasn't here!"

I don't know just why that popped out of me, but it had no discernible effect on Lantern-jaw.

"Just between you and me and the whole world," grinned Tex, "Hopkins here has his good points. He refused to give me any information, but when I asked whether Dave Fitzpatrick had anything to do with this, he refused to answer either 'Yes' or 'No,' too. So, Slimuel, old socks, let's load up the freight ship and be on our way! How about it?"

"What about Squirrel Seaver?" Galini asked. "He may be in a tough spot sooner or later."

"You boys all ride the cabin plane," I told him promptly. "I'll keep circling to protect Seaver in case of any trouble, and you get two ships down to relieve me right away. One can keep watching him and the other guide him to a landing

field. No spig will bother him with guns in the air."

Galini nodded. "Well, how's the banditing business, Hopkins?" he inquired facetiously, and it was amazing to see the metamorphosis in the icily contained Chicagoan.

"Lousy, lieutenant. How's border patrolling?"

"Swell!" Galini told him as we started for the still-unconscious Mexican.

Oh, well, Tony hadn't been at it long!

Although I am a man of very many words, there is little more to tell. I watched over Seaver for a matter of an hour and a half until I was relieved, watched the process of Jelke's coming to and saw that Seaver, who had planted himself and Jelke in front of the cabin along with the bound Mexican, was doing some tall arguing with the blond giant who had fooled us all so thoroughly.

When I landed back at McMullen, I did the same thing that Galini had already done—which was go to sleep. I found out that about all of Texas was searching for Mr. Dave Fitzpatrick at the moment, but I didn't give three hoots in hell at the moment whether he was found or not.

I awakened around midnight somewhat refreshed and discovered, as I made my way toward the brightly lighted headquarters building, that no flyer was sleeping. As I walked in, I saw the reason.

Sitting like an image of Buddha in the middle of the entire flight of the border patrol, plus the sheriff and a few thousand newspapermen, was Dave Fitzpatrick, and he was paying about as much attention to the queries thrown at him as a graven image would. Men like Dave Fitzpatrick are as plentiful as gold teeth among gorillas. His stony eyes were resting steadily on Jelke, who was white as a sheet and handcuffed to Fitzpatrick.

"All right, Dave. Keep your mouth shut if you want to," the gray-mustached sheriff rumbled, "but it will go easier with you if you talk. Jelke talked plenty!"

I glanced at Seaver and he nodded. Still Fitzpatrick sat there silent as the grave.

"O. K.!" the sheriff said, getting to his feet with a gusty snort. "Come on, David. Our McMullen jail ain't quite as elaborate as the one in San Antone, but we'll get you back there quick. Captain, I'm leavin' Seaver up to you. Come on, Jelke."

A moment later the leonine old man was herding the two before him to his waiting car.

"You apparently did some heavy listening, Squirrel!" I stated as Galini handed me a drink.

"I worked on him plenty," the rat-faced little flyer said.

Sudden silence fell as everybody tossed off a drink. Captain Kennard's eyes were on Squirrel Seaver and suddenly I discovered that everybody's were. The little flyer gulped down his drink—he was already in his customary half-plastered state. He looked around him covertly, then straightened as he faced the stocky captain.

"Am I going to be allowed to resign, captain, or do I get court-martialed and kicked out?" he asked steadily.

Captain Kennard had seen a hell of a lot of water flow over the dam from South America to Alaska as an engineer, and from France to the border as a flyer. He poured himself another drink in dead silence. Then his raucous voice reverberated from the walls of the room.

"I'm leaving your case up to a board of three officers consisting of Slim Evans, Galini-Abraham Lincoln, or whatever else this bird is known as, and Tex McDowell," he stated.

This dignified board met the next day and Squirrel Seaver was allowed to resign. It really was the truth that he

had gotten out of Jelke all the details to convict Fitzpatrick, and it was proved that Galini was one hundred per cent right on the facts that Fitzpatrick was broke and actually engineered the deal more for the money than anything else.

As a matter of fact, Squirrel would have resigned anyway, I guess, as a result of the publicity. He got the offer of a swell job heading the airport of his home town, and there he is now, I believe, leading a heavy life, making speeches and rearing a large family of little Squirrels.

And there, in a manner of speaking, you are. Captain Kennard and the rest of us, I presume, are guilty of half the crimes on the calendar in covering up Squirrel from conspiracy to accessories after the fact.

A few hundred thousand words back, I started by wondering where an altruistic martyr leaves off and where a sucker begins. Well, it isn't a martyr that's born every minute, is it? And with this profound conclusion, we McMullenites—suckers and proud of it—sign off. There is nothing much to delight the eye or satisfy the soul in a sucker, but a snake doesn't give me any appetite, either.

THE END.

A new story by Thomson Burtis will be featured in the next issue of this magazine. Get your August number early. It will be on your neighborhood news stand on July 1st.

THE MODERN EAST

IF you went to China to-day you would find much that would make you scratch your chin and wonder whether you had really left the States after all. For China is a modern country. The latest evidence of this is the inauguration of an air-mail service between Shanghai and Hankow, and the start, on April first, of a mail-and-passenger schedule between Shanghai and Peiping.

The routes are plied regularly, and others are now being planned. It will not be long before every main part of China, every major city and port, has been connected up via the air. The East has awakened after centuries of slumber. Ultimately it may outdo the West in progress.

TREASURE AND TRAGEDY

HOW often they go together—treasure and tragedy! Gold—the password of the great door that leads to happiness or misery, has brought infinite good and immeasurable evil to mankind. Used to help science, it has prevented untold suffering and saved millions from death. Used in other ways, it has slaughtered more people than any epidemic.

There's a treasure hunt going on up in the neighborhood of Cherry Valley, New York. Five men are looking for it. A sixth man took his own life not long ago, after working his mine there for ten hopeful years. Ten years out of a man's life is a long time. Especially when it ends in that way. But other men are carrying on the search. Hope keeps on and on. And the State geologist conservatively says that if gold can be obtained there at a profit, it could be done also in other sections of the State, since the same rock vein extends across. Let us hope that the carnivorous appetite of that old Devil-Gold has been appeased by the tragedy of this man who took his own life, and that nothing but happiness will result from the working of the Cherry Valley mine.

ALIBI, AIR-TIGHT

By CHARLES NORTH

His Alibi *Was* Air-tight, Absolutely—and Yet——

"VELVET" LYNCH pulled one job a year, but it was always a big one, and it was always perfectly planned and executed. The police, although they knew beyond a shadow of doubt that Velvet was responsible for at least three murders and twice as many staggeringly profitable and daring holdups, had nothing on their records against him, and not a shred of evidence to go upon in pressing any of their charges.

Nor would they ever, Velvet meditated, softly stroking his neatly trimmed and waxed mustache, running over in his mind the details for to-morrow's raid.

"Fine spring weather we're having, isn't it, Mr. Steele?" said Charley Bucknell, the old accountant whose desk adjoined that of Velvet Lynch, alias Ralph Steele. "Steele" was the name under which Velvet had secured employment at the Acme Products Corporation, and he had spent three months as a respectable, industrious correspondence salesman, learning every inch of the ground he planned to loot.

"Yes," said Velvet pleasantly, leaning back in his swivel chair and looking up at the spindly Bucknell. "It's such nice weather," he added, with a slight emphasis, "that I think perhaps I'll go out and get drunk to-night. Soused."

The conservative, mouselike Charley Bucknell nearly fell from his perch on top of a high stool, so great was his horrified astonishment.

"Drunk? Did you say drunk, Mr. Steele?" he stuttered. "You mean, intoxicated with alcohol?"

Velvet laughed suavely. Holding Bucknell's eye with a straight, hard glance, he nodded.

"Stewed, that's what I mean," he said. "So stewed that I probably won't be in to work to-morrow."

That was the first step in building up his alibi. Planting the idea here and there, around the office, that he would probably not be at work on the next day. And then the rest would follow step by step. Velvet had planned a perfect alibi. He needed it, for this job. His raid on the Acme pay roll to-morrow would be a particularly audacious piece of work, one with which the police would be certain to connect his name, even if there were no witnesses to the actual robbery. He needed an alibi better than perfect. And, he told himself, he had one. It was iron-clad, airtight.

"What will Mr. Stickney say?" stammered old Charley Bucknell. "You'd better not let him hear about it. I don't think he approves of employees drinking, especially not in the cashier's department."

Velvet laughed again, and nodded pleasantly to the junior clerk who came down the aisle and seated himself at the desk on his other hand.

"I was telling Charley I'm going on a tear to-night," said Velvet to the clerk. "I probably won't be conscious when the whistle blows in the morning. Charley doesn't seem to approve."

The junior clerk grinned uneasily and said nothing.

"You oughtn't," said Bucknell obstinately.

"Why not?" said Velvet. "Stickney doesn't do anything to-morrow but make up the pay roll. There's nothing to do around here on Saturday, anyway. I might as well take the whole day off."

Half-heartedly, the junior clerk agreed, while Charley Bucknell continued to mutter warnings and obscure exhortations, glancing askance at Velvet. Then they worked on quietly until a few minutes before quitting time.

It was not quite five thirty when Velvet rolled down the top of his desk and stood up. He took his hat and coat, said good night to Bucknell and the clerk, and sauntered toward the front of the long room. There at the switchboard sat the only confederate Velvet had ever trusted or permitted himself to use—"Chicago" Sue. She had been his partner, on a strictly business basis, in half a dozen crimes, and Velvet placed in her almost as much confidence as he did in himself. But now as he passed her, disconnecting her switchboard for the night, no sign of recognition passed between them. Everything had been arranged and perfected long ago, down to the smallest detail.

Velvet shot a swift glance toward the corner of the room where Stickney, the head of the cashier department, had his office. The door was closed and the frosted window in it revealed no shadow. Stickney was old and as rigid in his habits as a machine. He would work until five thirty, on the dot.

Velvet swung open the gate in the low railing that inclosed the accountant's desks and the office cubicles, separating them from the elevator doors and the corridor that led to other departments, and with an air of jaunty indifference, walked toward the washroom. His manner said he didn't care a rap what any one thought of his being the first man to quit work.

Velvet washed his hands and face and combed his hair with such meticulous deliberation that most of the other clerks came and went, while he was still there, and at last Mr. Stickney came in. Stick-

ney nodded to several of the clerks, Velvet among them, and Velvet, returning the nod, gave his tie a final pat, and sauntered out.

With the same unhurried pace, and a manner of absolute casualness, Velvet returned to the cashier's department, which was now practically empty. With his coat over one arm and his hat in his free hand, he proceeded straight to Stickney's office, stepped inside. If any one saw him going in, they would suppose him to be seeking a word with the chief. But that was the last thing in Velvet's mind.

Inside the room, he crossed to a door that led to a small cubby-hole formed by the corner of the building, and by the office partitions on two sides of it. The cubby-hole was never entered—no one ever thought about it—and its only use had been as a storeroom for broken odds and ends.

Velvet threw his hat and coat over the top of the partition into the cubby-hole, then placing his foot on the door-knob, vaulted upward with silent agility, drew himself to the top of the partition by his hands, swung over and dropped down. There would be time enough to jimmy the door later. Just now his main concern was to conceal himself within the building, until all the employees had gone.

A moment after he had reached his place of concealment Velvet heard Stickney returning to his office. Stickney was drawing on his vest and coat, then his overcoat. Velvet, listening, heard Stickney cross the room again, heard him closing the door, locking it. Then there was no sound, except the far-away rattle of elevator cables, and the faint banging of doors. Every one in the department was gone.

The task of jimmying the lock on the flimsy door that led to his cubby-hole was the work of ten minutes for Velvet. After that, he oiled the door hinges, removed traces of his work upon the lock, and studied the results critically. But they satisfied him. The job, he told himself, was in the bag.

To-morrow morning, after the delivery of something over ninety thousand dollars by bank messengers and armed guards, Stickney would be alone in this office for three hours, checking up the lists and making out the pay roll for each of the Acme's several branch factories. Ninety thousand dollars! Sue's cut would be thirty grand, his own, sixty. That was their usual arrangement. The whole amount would be deposited with "Ma" Thompson as soon as it was grabbed. Ma was an underworld institution. Once a fence, she had graduated from that lowly state, becoming an unofficial bank. In her hands the money would be safe until all possible danger blew over, after the job.

Velvet Lynch had nothing to do now but wait for the morning. The night grew tedious, but he enlivened it with visions of the huge reward waiting at the end of it, and at the thought of the discomfiture of the police.

Inspector Halloran, in particular, would be disgruntled. He would have no difficulty in connecting "Ralph Steele" with the robbery. The next step, an easy one, would reveal to him that Ralph Steele was none other than Velvet Lynch. And once Inspector Halloran knew that Velvet was in the picture, he wouldn't require any further information; he would know beyond a shadow of doubt who had done the job. But—and there was the slight hitch that made Velvet chuckle as he contemplated it—there would be no shred of proof that would hold in a law court. And, to make assurance doubly sure, he had that air-tight alibi.

Velvet thought of the steely warnings Inspector Halloran had spoken to him, on numbers of occasions in the past. Halloran would have liked nothing better than to catch him in a tough spot, Velvet knew, and give him the limit.

For one thing, there was the murder of a certain harness bull, back in the dim past, and the police were notoriously anxious to avenge any killing of one of their number. And they knew, but they hadn't been able to pin it on him—any more than they would be able to make their charges stick after tomorrow's work.

For Velvet was going to accomplish a miracle. He would be in two places, widely separated, at the same hour. He would be in jail on a charge of being drunk, at the very moment that the robbery of the Acme pay roll took place, and the man who would prefer that charge would be none other than the unwitting Inspector Halloran himself! Yes, he was proud of his scheme. Velvet imagined Halloran's perplexity and chagrin when he realized that the man who had certainly committed the crime not only had a perfect alibi, with plenty of witnesses, but that he himself would have to be the chief witness in Velvet's favor.

Throughout the night Velvet dozed fitfully in the swivel chair at Stickney's desk, his feet propped against an open drawer. Three times he heard the watchman making his perfunctory rounds, but Velvet had no fear of being discovered.

In the intervals when he was not sleeping, he smoked endless cigarettes, carefully crushing the butts on the sole of his shoe and then tossing them through the window that gave onto a fire escape, ten floors above the street.

Then at dawn Velvet rearranged the office into perfect orderliness, went over with his handkerchief every place where he might possibly have left finger prints, and turned his attention once more to the door that led into the cubby-hole.

With the lock broken, but in a way not visible except by the closest scrutiny, the door swung open and shut noiselessly. It was directly to the rear of Stickney's desk, not more than three steps away. A perfect arrangement, gloated Velvet. Then sleep rolled from his eyes and his nerves began to tighten in eager anticipation, as he waited for the curtain to go up on the drama.

At eight o'clock Velvet heard the first elevator running, and began to hear sounds of motion throughout the building. Presently steps sounded in the cashier's department, and voices spoke. Velvet slipped into the room back of Stickney's, and waited, every fiber of his body on edge. But his tenseness was that of a cold, unerring beast of prey.

At half past eight keys rattled against the door of the adjoining office, and through a slit in the board partition Velvet saw Stickney come in. Stickney hung up his hat and overcoat, then took off his vest and coat. He was as methodical as a train schedule in everything he did, as rigid in his habits as a retired army officer. Then, as was his custom, Stickney gathered a number of accountance reports from his desk and went out, to issue instructions for the day to the rest of the staff.

The moment he was gone Velvet slipped from his hiding place and crossed the room to the clock that faced Stickney's desk. Swinging open the glass front of it, he moved the hands precisely thirty minutes ahead. Then he reached the watch in the cashier's vest, hanging on the hat rack, and set the watch, also, half an hour fast. These details attended to, he returned to the cubby-hole.

Not more than twenty minutes elapsed before Stickney returned to the office, and a moment later the bank messenger arrived. Velvet heard him enter, exchanging a word with Stickney, and set the valise containing the money on top of the desk. Through the open door beyond, Velvet heard two of the guards conversing. There were others downstairs, he knew, and as soon as Stickney signed the receipt for the delivery, these

two would join them. A group of them always waited upon the premises while Stickney, who testily claimed that the sight of their automatics made him ill, made up the various pay rolls alone.

"All right," said Stickney. Through the crack Velvet saw him pass the bank messenger the receipt, and the latter departed, the guards at the door following him.

Stickney sat down at his desk immediately and started to work. Velvet kept his eyes upon him, wondering when the cashier would glance at the clock, and whether he would notice anything peculiar about the time. Not that it mattered if he did. Stickney always, during the morning, asked for the exact time from the telephone service, and that little habit of his was meant to be his undoing. For Chicago Sue was on the switchboard outside, and, while pretending to put through Stickney's call for the time, she would answer it herself, verifying the hour registered on Stickney's clock and his own watch. After that, even if he had sensed something strange, for a moment, all his suspicions would be lulled.

Stickney worked until the clock facing his desk gave the hour as ten five. At that moment he glanced up at the dial, and seemed to hesitate for a moment. Then he rose and, as Velvet had imagined he would do, crossed to the rack on which his vest was hanging. He took out his watch and looked at it. Stickney was seemingly puzzled, and Velvet's pulse began to race. The moment to strike was approaching.

Briskly Stickney sat down at his desk again and reached for the telephone.

"Meridian 1212," he said presently, and resumed working with his figures, the phone against his ear. Then he abruptly paused.

"Ten five?" he said into the mouthpiece, repeating the time Sue had given him. "Correct. Thank you." He hung up, glanced once more at the clock facing him, then seemed to dismiss the matter from his mind, and went on working. This was the exact instant for which Velvet had waited.

A blackjack, a towel, and a bottle of chloroform were his tools. He hoped he would not have to use the blackjack; that always made things violent and messy. Velvet emptied the contents of the bottle of chloroform upon the towel and softly opened the door. The next moment he had leaped, like a jungle tiger, and his face was contorted into a hideous smile as his hands drew the towel over Stickney's mouth and nose tighter and tighter, in a grip of iron.

The cashier's resistance was feeble and only lasted an instant. Once or twice he pawed futilely at the air, and tried to turn his startled eyes upon his unknown assailant, but abruptly the chloroform took effect, and he grew limp.

After a long moment Velvet slowly loosened his grasp upon the towel and stepped back. The victim was unconscious. A few more inhalations of chloroform, and he would remain unconscious for at least another hour. But Velvet would not risk too much. After all, he never killed unless he had to.

Swiftly Velvet set to work. He scooped the money back into the valise in which it had come. Then he lifted the receiver of the phone and jiggled the hook three times. Sue responded immediately.

"O. K.?" she queried softly.

"You bet," said Velvet. "Ready to scram. How's the layout?"

"The freight elevator's clear, ninth floor. Beat it!"

Smiling softly, Velvet hung up, carefully wiping the phone to erase finger prints. Then he stepped to the clock over Stickney's desk once more, opened the face, and moved the hands back thirty minutes. He repeated with the watch.

Then he bound and gagged Stickney,

rolling him under the desk. When the cashier regained consciousness, a considerable time later, he would have no idea of how long he had been out. His clock and his watch were once more set correctly, and Stickney would remember only that he had been attacked shortly after ten five, though that was in reality half an hour later than the actual time. During that extra half hour, Velvet would be busy establishing his alibi.

Swinging into his hat and coat, and picking up the valise, Velvet stepped to the window that gave on the fire escape. A glance below assured him that no one was watching, and he crawled out. He dropped down one flight, to the ninth floor, and entered a huge room filled with ceiling-high shelves, used for storing stock.

Unhurriedly, Velvet strolled toward the elevator shaft. Figures moved about in the dim light at the ends of some of the aisles, but no one paid any attention to him. He came at last to the elevators.

Sue had known that the freight elevator on the ninth floor would be standing empty for the simple reason that she had called its operator to the ninth-floor telephone and requested him to report at the timekeeper's office on the floor above. Since the freight elevator did not go any higher than the ninth floor, the man running it would be sure to leave it standing open while he investigated the fictitious call. Velvet found it so, open and vacant. He stepped inside, closed the door, and began to lower.

At the main floor Velvet anticipated difficulty of some sort, but even there his luck held perfectly. The elevator opened upon a receiving and shipping platform, and there were bound to be numbers of clerks about. But none of them so much as glanced toward the car as the door swung open, and when Velvet strolled toward the street he was given no more than one or two passing glances. It was more than likely that he would be instantly forgotten. Even if he was not, none of the clerks would be able to identify him positively, and even if one or two of them did—there was his alibi. Stickney, Velvet knew, would stubbornly maintain his version of the robbery and the hour at which it occurred, to the contradiction, if necessary, of the rest of the world.

Valise in hand, Velvet Lynch reached the street and nonchalantly walked away. He reached a subway platform, and rode for two stops. Then he returned to the street and summoned a taxi. Fifteen minutes later he had deposited the valise with Ma Thompson, and he was ready to establish his alibi. Ma poured him a tumblerful of whisky and Velvet methodically drained it.

Then, his senses already beginning to swim, he went out and caught a taxi. Velvet rode in the cab to a street in the residential part of the city, then got out and paid the driver. He walked down the block until he came to a large, ornate apartment house, the predestined scene for the last actions in this, Velvet's masterpiece.

Velvet crossed the street to the other side. That was close enough for him. Sure enough, through the uncurtained downstairs apartment window, Velvet saw the old boy himself seated at a table, apparently enjoying a large breakfast. Not yet outside, eh? The lazy fool! Velvet would stir him up. In broad daylight, with scores of passers-by looking on in astonishment, Velvet Lynch opened his mouth and emitted a terrific howl. Then, with a flourish, he drew from his breast pocket a half-empty bottle of whisky, provided by Ma, and generously tilted it.

The hurrying crowds stopped hurrying for a moment and surveyed him in astonishment, some of the faces grinning, others registering disgust. Velvet howled hilariously once more. A paternal gentleman with a violin case

under his arm stepped to Velvet's side and began urging him to go home and sleep it off. Velvet, cursing, shook him off. Suddenly he drew back his arm, then shot it forward again. The whisky bottle sailed through the air, glittering, and crashed through the window of the apartment across the street. Instantly, a blue-coated policeman materialized, and Velvet, smiling inwardly, found himself under arrest for being drunk and disorderly.

"That sure is tough luck for you," said the policeman to the reeling Velvet. "Do you know whose window that was that you crashed in?"

"Who cares?" said Velvet.

"Inspector Halloran's—the big boy himself!"

"Well," said Velvet, "I'm sorry for his window."

The clock over the sergeant's desk, Velvet noticed as he was being booked, registered exactly ten five. In fact, he called attention to the time, pointedly. Then he was led away, to be sobered up and summoned for a hearing that afternoon. Genuinely dizzy with liquor by now, Velvet fell asleep on a jail bunk, wondering whether he would be fined five dollars and costs, or twenty-five dollars. Certainly, he could expect no heavier sentence. Then he would be free, with ninety thousand dollars, and an iron-clad alibi.

Late that afternoon Velvet was roused from sleep and brought to detective headquarters. There he found Fields, the assistant district attorney, and two or three newspaper reporters. Fields surveyed him coldly and shrewdly.

"Well, Velvet," he drawled satirically, "I don't suppose you know a thing in the world about that Acme holdup. Do you?"

Velvet smiled blandly.

"I didn't go to work to-day," he said. "What time was the holdup?"

"About ten o'clock," said Fields briefly, and studied Velvet through piercing eyes.

"Ten o'clock?" said Velvet. "I guess it was about that time that I was painting the town red." He laughed apologetically. "You heard about it?"

Fields merely leaned back and looked at him, a sardonic smile on his lips.

"I got drunk," said Velvet. "About ten o'clock I was pinched for starting a riot. I threw a bottle through somebody's window, and a cop pulled me in. That somebody turned out to be Inspector Halloran—or so, at least, the boys informed me. Tough, isn't it?"

"Yeah, tough all right," said Fields sarcastically. "Then you weren't anywhere near the Acme company at ten o'clock this morning?"

"No, I'll swear to that," said Velvet.

"You hear that, boys?" said Fields to the newspaper reporters. "You're witnesses to it. I warn you, Lynch, anything you say may be used against you."

"Sure," said Velvet.

"You were arrested at ten o'clock for creating a disturbance and throwing a bottle through a window?"

"Yes," said Velvet, "and there were plenty of witnesses."

"I know," Fields replied, "but I wanted you to admit it yourself. Because you might try to prove, later, that you were at the Acme at ten o'clock."

"You're delirious," said Velvet, grinning. "What would I want to do that for, and let myself in for ten or fifteen years up the river?"

"Because," said Fields, slowly and distinctly, while the smile faded from Velvet's face, "your bottle killed Inspector Halloran who was sitting in back of that window. We know you've had it in for him for some time. We're holding you for murder, Velvet, and we're going to see that you get the chair!"

Another story by Charles North will appear in a forthcoming issue.

The DEATH TRAP

By T. T. FLYNN

Jungle Passions—Loyalty Deep and Fierce, and Hate Implacable —Sweep Through the Story of These Men With Cyclone Fury!

A FLOCK of green wood pigeons flashed across the elephant path as it widened into a narrow glade, bright under the smiting sun. Midway of this glade a white-nosed monkey hung by one arm from a high, trailing liana and screamed warningly at Caruthers, walking two hundred yards ahead of the small safari.

Battered khaki sun helmet tilted over one eye, hands thrust into his trousers pocket, Caruthers strode into the sunlight, ignoring the monkey's warning. And behind him, ebony skin glistening with palm oil, walked his gun bearer, indolent, unseeing.

A dozen yards away, in the rank jungle growing thick at the edge of the glade, a spotted leopard raised its head from the partly eaten carcass of a bush buck. Green eyes blazed at Caruthers's approaching figure. Lips writhed back from white fangs. Long tail lashed nervously as muscles tensed.

And Caruthers walked ahead.

The first warning he had of the danger was a tawny, spotted streak that burst out of the thick growth.

Caruthers wheeled to his gun bearer, crying: "My gun!"

The native snapped out of his lethargy into terror—and the rifle slipped from his fumbling grasp as he thrust it out.

"You fool!" Caruthers gasped as he seized the weapon off the ground—and whirled into the charging leopard.

The impact of that snarling bolt slammed Caruthers to the ground. He went down, trying to shield his face and jam the gun muzzle against the leopard's side.

Shrieking with fright, the bearer bolted back toward the safari, where Rand was pacing in front of his gun bearer.

Rand heard Caruthers's shout, and looked up in time to see his partner go down. And as the bearer came running back, Rand snatched his rifle and sprinted forward, pumping a shell into the breech.

"Get off the path!" he bellowed in Bangala at Caruthers's cowardly boy, then raised the gun to his shoulder.

The boy thought Rand was going to shoot him, and dodged off the path.

Rand stopped, his face steady as a rock mask. No time to waste in running closer. Each flitting second, fang and claw were mauling the life from Caruthers. All he could see was a tangle of beast and man.

Caruthers's rifle exploded — and missed a vital spot. The snarls of the leopard redoubled as it tore and bit.

Rand's gun sight settled behind a jerking shoulder—settled, hesitated a fraction of an instant. His finger squeezed the trigger gently. The cordite shell barked—and the impact of the soft-nosed bullet knocked the leopard off Caruthers.

Heart shattered by the expanding bullet, the beast clawed at empty air and lay still. And Rand sprinted to the torn remnant that had been his sun-bronzed, steel-muscled partner.

Even Rand, wise in the terrible destructiveness of a rage-driven leopard, was appalled at the injuries Caruthers had received.

Suffering intense pain, Caruthers lay there and grinned through the sweat of his agony.

"Nasty beggar, wasn't he?" he whispered—and fainted.

The tiny safari of seven natives was up by now. Curtly, swiftly, Rand directed the disposal of loads on the ground, and jerked out a strip of cloth. He stopped the flow of blood where he could, bandaged swiftly against the flies that were already gathering thick. And as he worked, he ordered the small tent erected, mosquito netting put in place, leafy branches cut for a pallet. He had Caruthers moved in out of the dangerous sun by the time Caruthers came out of the faint.

"I say, Tommy," were Caruthers's first weak words, "about how long do you give me?"

Kneeling beside him, Rand looked down into Caruthers's pain-clouded gray eyes, and swallowed a lump in his throat as he grinned.

"About sixty years more for an ornery cuss like you," he said cheerily.

Caruthers fumbled for his hand, squeezed the fingers.

"Good old Tommy," he whispered. "Don't want to tell me, do you? But I know. Let's have it out now, and I'll try to carry through without making a messy business of it."

Rand clung to those pitifully weak fingers as if he needed them for strength. Eight years they had breasted jungle and desert together, James Caruthers and himself. Eight years of fierce hardship taken cheerfully, and danger lightly. And now—to face the end here—like this——

By Heaven—*he wouldn't!* He gripped the fingers, unconsciously, until Caruthers winced.

"You don't know a damn thing!" Rand said roughly. "There's nothing to have out! It's a hell of a business, I know! But *you're coming through!* Get it, Jim? We've always licked everything! We'll lick this! Won't we?"

"No, Tommy," Caruthers whispered honestly. "You know we won't. Might, if we had our medicine kit. Too bad that blasted hippo upset the boat and it was lost. You know how these claw-and-teeth wounds are. Sepsis, Tommy. It'll be all through me by to-morrow. I won't have a chance."

"DuFries's place isn't more than four hours away," Rand declared hoarsely.

Caruthers smiled wanly.

"I'm ripped too badly to carry there, Tommy. Wouldn't last an hour. And you know DuFries. He's sworn to get us. We're outlawed. He'd let me die, and laugh while I was doing it. Anyway, I wouldn't last there."

"He's got medicine! I can get there and back in time!"

"Not back, Tommy," Caruthers said calmly. "DuFries will shoot you on sight, or place you under arrest. He wouldn't bother to come back. Probably think it a trick. Too bad. I might have a chance if it was any one but DuFries. But not with him. You know it."

Rand knew it. For years they had toyed with DuFries, the grafting, boasting, cruel *administrateur* of this vast unmapped back district of equatorial jungle. It had been sport on their side, and business. The ivory they had taken out of these jungles would have made DuFries a rich man—in graft. Sport for them. Humiliation, anger, relentless hate for DuFries. They were outlawed. He had placed charge after charge against them downriver; and he waited like a bloated, merciless spider for the time they would fall into his hands.

Now DuFries had the medicine that meant life to Caruthers.

Rand rose to his feet slowly. His lean jaw was set in a wintry smile as he looked down.

"I'll be back before midnight with everything we need," he promised his friend slowly.

"Don't try it," Caruthers protested. "You won't come back, Tommy. Don't be an ass—for me."

"Go to sleep," Rand ordered, and turning on his heel, he ducked out of the tent.

The black boys were grouped silently in the open. Caruthers's gun bearer skulked in shame behind them. He was disgraced even in the eyes of his own kind. He had failed his master, had run away.

Rand ignored him now. Quietly, with a lash to his words, he gave orders that camp was to be pitched here. A hot broth was to be prepared from a monkey he had shot down the trail half an hour before, and kept waiting for Caruthers's pleasure. He broke out several extra clips of cartridges and slipped them into his pocket, then tested his automatic to see that it was working well.

Bona, his own Bafwaboli boy from the district east of Stanleyville, cradled his rifle in black arms and wore a belt of cartridges over a glistening shoulder. Rand slipped a hunting knife through his belt and said sharply to Bona:

"*Biki* (come here)."

Bona stepped to him.

"I am going to the house of DuFries," Rand said levelly to him. "It may be I will not come back. There will be shooting, perhaps. Is it your wish to stay here?"

Bona drew himself up. "Six years have I borne your gun, *mondele*," he said simply. "Has it not been always ready?"

"Yes," Rand admitted.

"I am a man, *mondele*," Bona said simply.

Rand turned away, satisfied. He broke out their one flask of cognac and took it in the tent to Caruthers, and put it by his side.

"All set?" he asked gruffly.

Caruthers smiled up at him, wasting no more strength in remonstrating. "My regards to DuFries," he said weakly.

They understood each other, these two. Their hands met in a short clasp; and then Rand was outside the tent, plunging down the trail, with Bona close at his heels.

The afternoon was halfway past when Rand started. The pace he set soon had Bona panting, taxing his rippling black muscles to their utmost. There was a short cut to the river and the *poste* where DuFries held sway with all the power of a feudal lord. A short cut through swamp land, where they struggled in slimy mud halfway to their knees, and fetid water sloshed around their waists.

Gaunt, dead trees thrust out spectral arms, and now and then a sinuous snake slid off a branch or swam out of their way. After the swamp came jungle—thick, dark, steamy, with close-laced growth through which Bona at times had to hack a way through with his machete.

The fiery sun ball slipped down, disappeared. Dark shadows were hovering somberly when Rand burst out of the jungle onto a narrow trail that ran along the bank of an oily river. His clothes were ripped, torn; his face was streaked with sweat and mud, drawn with fatigue—but his automatic was dry, and his movements were as sure and certain as they had been that morning when the safari took form on the trail.

There was a thrashing commotion on the bank below them, a loud splash as a big crocodile took to the water. Rand cast a quick look up and down the river, then melted back into the shel-

ter of the growth, laying a warning hand on Bona's arm.

A dugout canoe with four paddlers was slipping swiftly down the river, paddles dipping in time to a low, steady chant.

There was light enough to see the men looking over at the bank where the crocodile had splashed. A laugh, a spoken word, and the dugout slipped on down the current out of sight.

"Don't think they saw us," Rand muttered to Bona.

"No, *mondele,* they did not see us," Bona agreed.

"Don't want news of our presence to get in ahead of us. Let's go. Watch for any one on the trail."

Like two wraiths, they moved down the path through the gathering dusk.

The *poste* was set on a small hill beside the river, with a banana plantation on one side and an oil-palm plantation running off in back.

Rand knew it well, from the avenue of stately palm trees running before DuFries's big house to the factory beyond and the native village still farther on around a sharp bend of the river.

There were lights in DuFries's house; and there would be an armed sentry or two standing guard in front. DuFries was a pompous man. Out here, in the unmapped jungle, he managed to provide all the trappings possible.

Rand and Bona came up to the house from the rear, through the massive oil palms; and when they reached the edge of the trees and looked at the house it was quite dark.

"The sentries, Bona," Rand said huskily under his breath. "They will be in the way."

Bona fingered his machete.

"One man will not cry out," he stated. "And the other will only cry once, *mondele.* Is it your wish?"

"No. Don't kill unless you have to. This isn't their quarrel. We'll give the beggars a chance—although DuFries will probably whip them to death when he finds we've gotten past them. You take the other side of the house and I'll take this. When you hear me get my man, take the other. Use the gun stock—and *don't* split his head open."

"Yes, *mondele,*" Bona said obediently, and straightway seemed to vanish into the night. One moment he was there, and the next he was gone silently.

Rand slipped along the side of the house, past the lighted windows toward the front. From inside came a gross laugh.

"Another glass of the wine, monsieur?" he heard the thick voice of DuFries urging in French. *"Tiens,* but is it not true that one has all the comforts of Paris in this pig of a place?"

Rand heard some one else give a high-pitched, tittering laugh, but missed the reply as he glided to the front corner of the building and looked around the edge of the wide porch.

As he had anticipated, the low murmur of voices came from the front steps, where two armed guards were sitting at leisure while their master inside dined.

The stately, fan-shaped fronds of two wayfarer palms dropped on each side of the steps, and against the front of the porch a bank of bushes grew rankly.

Rand became a part of the dark shadows at the edge of the bushes. A man by his side would hardly have known that he moved. The automatic was in his hand, hunting knife in the other as he drifted up to the steps.

The guards were still talking; by a faint path of light coming from the front door, Rand could see their rifles across their laps. The man nearest him sat shoulder to him, some three feet away. Bona should be on the other side of the steps now, waiting.

Gripping the automatic, Rand took

one stride forward and smashed the barrel against the side of the guard's head. At the same moment he grabbed an arm and yanked. The man came off the steps, rifle clattering from his knees.

A startled cry burst from the other guard. He leaped to his feet, bringing his rifle up. A noiseless shadow leaped behind him. A rifle stock thudded dully against his skull.

Bona caught the man as he fell; but he could not keep the second rifle from clattering to the steps.

Bona dragged his victim over to Rand, laid him beside the other man on the coarse grass.

From inside the house, DuFries's gross voice shouted: "What is the matter out there? Ndoko, go out and see what made that noise!"

Rand flitted up the steps, crouched beside the door. It opened a moment later. A tall black man wearing only trousers stepped out on the porch and spoke sharply.

Rand jammed the automatic in his side and growled:

"Ndoko, it is a white man who will kill!"

"*Mondele,* do not kill!" the big black pleaded, standing perfectly still; and when Bona appeared before him with drawn machete, he began to tremble.

Inside, DuFries called impatiently:

"Ndoko, what do you find? Come here!"

"Bona, watch this man. If he moves, kill him," Rand ordered.

"Yes, *mondele,* I will kill him," Bona promised, thrusting the end of the rifle into Ndoko's side.

Rand stepped into the house. DuFries's back was to him. Across the table a small, wizened man in ducks stared at him pop-eyed.

"What is the matter, Monsieur Hectorie?" DuFries demanded with a trace of irritation. "You look as if you have seen the devil."

Monsieur Hectorie pointed past DuFries, at Rand. "I am not sure but that is what I see," he answered unsteadily.

DuFries twisted around in his ebony chair, and his face became livid as he recognized Rand.

"Species of Satan!" he gasped furiously, shoving back his chair and lunging to his feet. "What is this?"

"Quiet, my dear DuFries," Rand ordered thinly. "It would give me exquisite pleasure to put a bullet in that fat carcass of yours."

DuFries was a lumpy man swathed in stiffly starched whites. Little wisps of black hair lay across a partly bald skull. His face was like a lump of dough, from which a sharp nose jutted, and his mouth was as flabby as his pudgy hands. And now rage was forcing blood to his face in waves.

"So you are back in my territory again!" he spat.

Rand nodded politely. "Back again," he agreed with a slow smile. "It is a delightful surprise, eh?"

"*Sacre!* I will have you shot for this!" DuFries panted. "Species of infamy! What insolence, to come into my house this way! Why were you not stopped at the door? Put up that gun! You shall regret holding a weapon on an official of the government! Ndoko! Where is that——"

DuFries broke off abruptly as Rand took a swift step toward him and the little automatic made a little menacing gesture.

"Shut up and sit down!" Rand rapped out.

Mouthing silently, DuFries sat down.

"That's better. Now let me set your mind at rest, DuFries. You won't have me shot for anything. Not this trip. I wasn't stopped at the door because I thought it best to put your two guards out of the way for a time. Understand that? There aren't any rifles at hand to help you! And the nearest

soldiers are over at the barracks. I'm not only holding a gun on an official —and a fat pig—but I'm going to use it if you try any tricks. Does that percolate through your thick skull? Now, behold, I put my gun in my pocket, and keep my hand on it, where I can shoot you comfortably if you try to get help."

Rand slipped the automatic in his trousers pocket and raised the muzzle so that it covered DuFries. A stream of shots through the cloth would be a mere matter of squeezing the trigger gently.

"Monsieur DuFries, what is the meaning of this?" Monsieur Hectorie, the guest, asked querulously, staring at Rand's tall, lean, tattered figure. "You were just telling me what a safe place is this *poste* of yours, and how your word is law. Is it a custom for you to be threatened in your own house this way?"

"Mon Dieu, non!" DuFries choked "It has never happened before. It will not happen again. This man is an outlaw. An ivory poacher. He and his friend have given me trouble for years. There is a price on their heads. I do not know what brings him here, but he shall regret it!"

"Quite so, and perhaps," Rand said with a thin smile. "Now listen, DuFries, closely. Caruthers is dying from leopard wounds. We lost our medicine kit. I came here for help, not to threaten you. Will you give me what I need and forget about the matter for two weeks? In return for that honorable gesture of charity, I will exchange my word that we will leave your territory and not return."

A gleam of satisfaction brightened DuFries's eyes.

"Caruthers dying?" he grinned. "What news you bring! I have you both now. Go back and bring in Caruthers, and he shall have medicines to keep him alive until he faces justice. I will send you under guard to get him."

"Generous—as always," Rand smiled politely. "I expected it. We will dispense with the guard, my piglike friend. Open up your medicine chest! I will select what I need. And leave—alone."

"Not one roll of bandage!" DuFries refused point-blank, his grin of triumph giving way to an ugly scowl.

"It is a pity you value a small stock of bandages above life," Rand drawled. "Come! I am in a hurry!" And DuFries, looking into his face, realized that death was very near if he hesitated.

"This is robbery!" DuFries spluttered. "You threaten me! You take by force at the point of a gun! I will notify the home government about this! I will——"

DuFries broke off as a black servant glided into the room with a tray holding two dishes of food. Cunning glinted in the eyes of DuFries.

"Don't try anything rash," Rand warned calmly. "If there is any trouble, DuFries, you will be the first. That fat belly of yours wasn't built to digest lead. No? Tell the boy everything is all right, and you will call him when you want him again. And don't forget I understand the dialect."

The black servant stopped at the table, set a dish before DuFries and one before his guest, casting a wondering glance at Rand.

And Rand stood there smiling a trifle grimly, hand in his pocket on the gun, watching DuFries and the entrances to the room.

The guest was sitting in pale-faced silence, toying with a spoon. DuFries hunched in his ebony chair sullenly. His hand went slowly to a spoon and picked it up.

"That will be all," he said thickly. "I will call you when I want you."

The servant bowed, and his sandals slapped softly as he left the room.

"We will call it good sense, and not cowardice," Rand said approvingly. "Now get up."

DuFries got slowly to his feet, turning a livid glare on him.

"You, too, Monsier Hectorie," Rand said politely to the guest.

Hectorie demanded unsteadily: "What is it I am to do?"

"Get up."

Hectorie got to his feet.

"Now then, DuFries, to your medicine kit."

DuFries started to bluster. Rand silenced him with a brisk: "Shut up! Get to that medicine chest while you can walk! Monsier Hectorie, follow him and remain quiet!"

Before the lash in his words, DuFries lumbered out of the room, with his guest close at his heels. They went to the other side of the house, to a small room, where grass mats lay on the floor and a desk showed it to be the office of DuFries.

There DuFries opened a sizable wooden chest set against the wall. Inside were trays, bottles of medicine, rolls of bandage, boxes of pills.

"What is it you want?" DuFries demanded venomously.

"Bandage, tape, permanganate, a scalpel, needle and gut, cotton, iodine——" Rand listed off the things he wanted—and watched vigilantly while DuFries set them out on the floor.

"Now wrap them up. Use that grass cloth cover on the table there."

Cursing under his breath, DuFries stripped off the table cover and made a small, compact bundle of the various articles. Rand took it from him, tucked it under his arm.

"Now let's take a walk," he said cheerfully.

"I protest!" DuFries objected nervously. "I do not care to go outside! What is it you intend to do?"

"Nothing—as long as you don't make trouble. With your permission, I take this small torch from your desk. It will be useful."

Rand stepped to the desk, picked up a small electric torch that lay there. His gun pocket was turned away for a moment from DuFries. With an agility astonishing in a man of such bulk, the administrator darted through the doorway close beside him, shouting:

"Shoot that man, you fools! Help! I am attacked! Sergeant, call your men!"

There must have been soldiers in the back of the house who had been warned. Rand saw two men inside the doorway. A rifle bolt clicked smartly—and a shot roared loudly in the narrow confines. The bullet flicked through the side of Rand's torn shirt, smashed into the desk.

Monsieur Hectorie uttered a squeal of terror and dropped to the floor.

Rand shot once from his trousers pocket at the doorway, then hurled himself at the screened window beside the desk. He crashed through, sprawling heavily down to the ground as a second shot barked behind. And then he was running toward the front, calling: "Bona!"

Bona materialized out of the darkness, still herding his prisoner.

"Get out!" Rand snapped at the fellow, sending him off with a shove; and without further words, he led Bona back toward the oil palms at a run, clutching the precious bundle of medicines.

There was confusion and shouting behind as they went. Rand did not slow up until they had cut through the oil palms and put half a mile of the river path behind. The last sight they had of DuFries's house showed flaring torches burning around it, and men gathering.

Rand chuckled bitterly.

"He'll be after us," he commented to Bona as he strode along the path rapidly.

"Why did you not kill him, *mondele?*" Bona asked patiently.

"I don't know," Rand confessed. "I'll probably regret it."

Midnight was near when the last feeble rays of the spent torch struck into the glade and found the small tent. The trip back had been grueling, cruel. They had come through the swamps again, to lose their trail.

Rand lifted the tent flap anxiously. And his heart leaped as a feverish voice greeted weakly:

"A reckless blighter like you *would* make it, Tommy. What luck?"

"DuFries gave until it hurt," Rand chuckled wearily, spreading his parcel on the ground. "Now take a swig of that cognac, Jim, and grit your teeth."

An unpleasant half hour followed, during which Caruthers considerately fainted away and Rand worked furiously with the things he had brought. At the end of that time Caruthers was sewed up and sterilized, his chance for life safe.

Rand posted guards down the path, with orders to call him at the first sign of some one coming, and then he dropped down near Caruthers and fell into deathlike sleep.

He was up before daybreak, called three men, scouted back along the trail they had come over. A mile away he slipped back into the jungle for several hundred yards and had a small place cleared. Then, while Caruthers tossed in feverish sleep, they moved the tent from over him and the rest of the camp.

Next, Rand had a rude tipoy constructed of branches of lianas. Caruthers was awake by that time, tossing with fever, muttering wildly. He was put on the tipoy and carried to the new camp, and as far as possible, all traces of the old camp obliterated.

That was the best Rand could do for the time being. Caruthers couldn't be carried farther. If he lived, it would still be several days before he could travel far.

DuFries would be looking for them. He did not know which direction they were from the *poste*. The trail through the swamp could not be followed. Rand's jaw was set and grim as he conned their chances—and waited.

He waited all that day, while the jungle drowsed in the steamy heat, and another black watched down the trail. Caruthers's fever broke slightly in the afternoon; he was able to take nourishment and talk coherently. Rand described what had happened at the *poste*.

"You'd better cut and run, old chap," Caruthers urged. "DuFries won't forgive. And if he gets his hands on you he'll——"

"For that suggestion you get your dressings changed," Rand threatened; and he was as good as his word. And while he was doing so, Caruthers went off into the delirium again.

A party of natives from some village back in the bush passed shortly after that. Bona reported that they had stopped in the glade.

And then the sodden cloak of night brought more insects and the somber noises of the jungle. The natives muttered uneasily as they hovered together without a fire. For Bona had boasted of the way Rand and he had gone into the *poste* and helped themselves; and the name of DuFries had reached even the distant villages where these men had come from. They were afraid.

A gray dawn, and then the blasting ball of the sun found Rand haggard and weary from sleepless vigilance. Some time before noon he stepped out of the tent—to find no sign of the men. And while that fact registered, Bona came sliding through the growth and stopped before him.

"The tipoy of the *bula matadi* is on the trail with many soldiers," Bona reported impassively.

"Where are the men?"

"*Mondele,* the men have fled toward their homes, away from the wrath of the *bula matadi.*"

Inside the tent, Caruthers heard.

"Cut and run, Tommy!" he urged. "Leave me a pistol and I'll greet the dear old chap before he gets his innings."

Rand slipped the automatic from his belt and freed the safety catch as he stepped to the flap of the tent.

"I'll leave you nothing," he said gruffly. "You're balmy with fever. DuFries would enjoy a shot or two from you. He'd have you then, ripe for a bullet in return, under the name of armed resistance. Keep quiet. I don't think they'll spot this place. It's hidden pretty well. He'll think we've backtracked. I'll watch near the trail. If I can get a gun on him first, I'll have him. He's a coward. Cheerio, Jim."

"Cheerio, Tommy."

Masked by the thick growth, Rand waited near the trail, tensely, and beside him was Bona, calm and faithful, with his rifle.

It was not long before they heard voices, the pad of feet, and all the sounds of a big safari on the trail. There seemed to be no attempt at silence. A native laughed loudly. Another answered. There was conversation free and unrestrained as the head of the safari came up and passed without stopping.

Rand's tenseness relaxed somewhat as he caught glimpses of oily black torsos swinging by swiftly, making no attempt to search the jungle on either side. And when he saw the screened tipoy of DuFries pass, he heaved a silent sigh of relief. The Frenchman was casting far out in the jungle in search of them, and when that failed he would probably conclude they had escaped and relapse into cursing indifference.

When the safari had vanished, Rand returned to the tent. Yellow weaver birds were flying in the treetops above, and muted by distance sounded the harsh cackling of a flock of hornbills. But here was peace—and a chance for Caruthers to get better before they trekked out of DuFries's territory.

"Jim, old scout, we made it," Rand called cheerfully, lifting the tent flap.

And he stood rigid the next moment, looking into the ugly barrel of an express rifle.

"*Comme ça?*" asked the mocking voice of DuFries, squatting inside the tent.

A soft oath escaped Rand at the sight. Behind DuFries he could see Caruthers, gagged and helpless.

Rand's gun was in his belt. DuFries could drop him before his hand touched it—and would like the chance. He didn't move a muscle.

"Bona, get out!" he clipped forth without turning his head.

An instant later a rifle barked from the growth near by. Soldiers were planted there! Over his shoulder he caught a glimpse of Bona's black form lurching out of sight. A second gun spoke. A chip of bark flew from a tree trunk that had screened Bona an instant before. Three soldiers plunged out of hiding and ran after the elusive figure.

A few seconds away, back in the growth, a third shot sounded. The pursuit died away.

DuFries had watched Rand fixedly throughout the excitement—watched him like a squatting, loathsome white spider. The doughlike face was lined with fatigue. DuFries looked as if he had rested little since Rand had left him.

"Are you not going to try escape, species of carrion?" DuFries sneered, fondling the trigger.

"Like me to, wouldn't you?" Rand smiled softly. "But no; I stand here a meek prisoner. The regulations do

not allow of shooting under such circumstances, do they?"

DuFries swore at him. "Get back!" he snarled. And as Rand stepped back with his hands held out from his body, DuFries edged out of the low tent and stood upright.

A loud-spoken order materialized four more soldiers out of the growth. At DuFries's instructions they disarmed Rand. One of them hastened away toward the trail.

"Too bad, Jim," Rand said to Caruthers, who was watching them from his bed. "Monsieur DuFries has more brains than one would think from his stupid face."

Caruthers uttered a snort of agreement behind his gag.

DuFries swore at them both again. "You will not talk so freely when I am through!"

Rand ignored that. "How did you happen to think of this?"

"Fool! I have ways of getting information! As soon as I heard you had camped near here I sent out scouts. When they located you, I acted. And while the safari was drawing your attention to the trail, I came from behind. Now you will both go back—to justice."

"The justice of DuFries, which is another thing," Rand drawled.

DuFries's doughlike face purpled, but he gulped his rage, which was a bad sign.

The three soldiers who had gone after Bona straggled back—without Bona. One of them explained uneasily that Bona had escaped. DuFries cursed him, struck him across the face, and then ordered Rand's hands tied behind him.

The safari returned. The tipoy was brought to the tent. Two blacks loaded Caruthers on it. They took the trail to the *poste*.

At the *poste* they were left under armed guard before DuFries's house, while the Frenchman went inside. Monsieur Hectorie, the guest, was still there.

"It is a pleasure to meet again so soon," Rand grinned at him.

Monsieur Hectorie eyed him askance.

"Monsieur DuFries has been like a wild man," he said nervously. "I admire your courage, monsieur, but I fear it will go hard with you."

"Naturally," Rand agreed, "seeing that DuFries is what he is."

Scores of natives from the village gathered before the house, staring wide-eyed at the prisoners, listening to accounts of the affair from the soldiers who had been on the safari. And presently DuFries emerged. He had bathed, changed into fresh whites, and carried a glass of cool palm wine in one hand and a cruel elephant-hide whip in the other.

"Caruthers is doubtless suffering from thirst," Rand reminded.

DuFries shrugged. "It is a matter of indifference to me. I have other affairs to settle, now that this business is over."

He issued loud orders. In a few minutes three natives were dragged before the house and tied face in to the trunks of three palms in the avenue of trees that ran before the house.

One of them was the servant Rand had held up at the door; and the other two were doubtless the soldiers he and Bona had surprised. Rand's glance went to the whip in DuFries's hand. He sickened slightly at what was coming.

The soldiers had cleared the natives back and lined up around the trees in a three-sided square, open to the house. DuFries took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, uncoiled the lash, and brought it whistling down over a naked back.

No sound escaped the three victims as the lashing continued, but one by one they sagged inertly in the thongs that bound them.

DuFries finally stopped from sheer lack of strength, coiled the whip, and came to the porch, dripping perspiration and panting.

"That is the penalty for failing me!" he snapped, planting himself before Rand. "And, though it is not sanctioned, I promise you the same thing if an attempt is made to escape."

Rand's eyes were icy blue. "If you ever lay a whip on me or Caruthers I'll kill you with my bare hands," he promised levelly.

DuFries's restraint snapped. With an oath he flicked out the lash and slashed Rand across the face.

Venom, hatred, were in that slash. Rand felt the muscles of his cheeks crawl under the pain. Blood seeped out. The cords around his wrists cut deep as he strained at them involuntarily. And then he relaxed.

Monsieur Hectorie protested feebly: "He is a white man, monsieur!"

"Be silent!" DuFries stormed at him. "I am in command at this *poste!*"

Rand stared at DuFries—and the administrator paled as his anger faded. Then DuFries sneered: "You may report it when you go downriver to be tried!" He turned to their guards and ordered: "Sergeant, imprison these men in the quarters under the house."

DuFries's house sat high off the ground. Underneath, half sunk in the ground, was a long, stone-walled room with a stout door and a tiny, barred window in the other side. It contained one cot. Caruthers was laid on it. Rand was thrust in after him and the door slammed.

Caruthers was still gagged, and his wrists were tied. Rand backed up to him in the semidarkness and removed the gag. Next he freed Caruthers's wrists, and then Caruthers untied him. Rand still had a tin of cigarettes and matches. He lighted a smoke for Caruthers and one for himself.

"Here we are," he remarked slowly.

"The swine!" Caruthers burst out weakly. "Wait till his superiors hear about that lash in the face before the natives!"

"They won't," Rand said thoughtfully. "He wouldn't have done it otherwise. We're not meant for downriver."

"He can't keep us here."

"He can, until we try to escape. Then a couple of shots and the business is finished neatly. You see?"

"The swine!" Caruthers whispered again.

"Exactly," Rand agreed. "If we could get away and get a canoe, we're not more than forty miles from the line. Once across in Belgian territory we're all right. I think he's figuring on that bait."

"You should have gotten away while you had the chance," Caruthers muttered.

Rand reached down and gripped his hand for a moment. "Partners, Jim!"

Caruthers's voice was husky as he returned the pressure. "What'll we do, Tommy?"

"Sit tight until dark. Can you walk any?"

Caruthers sat up, got to his feet with an effort, waving aside Rand's hand. With difficulty he slowly paced the length of the room, and when he dropped on the cot again, cold sweat beaded his forehead.

"A bit rocky," he said through clenched teeth; and that was Caruthers's way of saying it was hell.

No food or water was brought them that long, hot afternoon. At evening DuFries came with a native who passed in a gourd of water and a loaf of bread.

"Eat well, messieurs," DuFries purred.

Rand demanded furiously: "Do you call this fit food for a sick white man?"

"The bread is of excellent quality," DuFries chuckled. "A few days of

it will work wonders. A pleasant night, messieurs."

They ate the bread and drank the water in silence. When they had finished it was dark outside. Overhead they could hear steps that marked the serving of DuFries's substantial meal. Several times they even heard the faint sound of DuFries's loud laugh. The administrator was in high humor.

Hours passed. Rand estimated it to be after midnight when: *"Mondele,"* came a faint whisper.

Rand tensed, not certain that he had heard right.

"Mondele," came the whisper again.

He located it this time at the barred window, and knew who had made it before he reached the window. "Bona?"

"Yes, *mondele.* I have found a canoe and left it at the river bank."

"How many men are guarding us?"

"None, *mondele.* But there are two standing apart in the darkness with rifles ready, and more waiting in front."

Rand stepped across to the door, tried it; and the door swung in easily. It was not locked. DuFries had made escape tempting—and planted two soldiers near by to shoot them down if they tried. A faint light from a window overhead illuminated the space before the door. Rand went back to the window.

"Got the rifle?"

"Yes, *mondele.*"

"Use it as you did last night," Rand ordered tersely.

"DuFries has laid a neat trap for us," he told Caruthers dryly. "If Bona pulls the sting, we may have a chance to start downriver. Get ready. I'll carry you."

It seemed ages, but was in fact less than ten minutes when the door swung in silently.

"Mondele, it is done."

Rand swung Caruthers up in his arms and stepped out, heading away from the house; and their going was not noticed.

There were lights in the house, as if the occupants were not asleep, and armed soldiers were at the front, sitting, lying about on the ground, waiting——

No chance to get at DuFries.

Rand postponed that pleasure to some other time. They came to the dark river bank, where the current rippled softly against bank reeds. Bona led them to a small dugout pulled halfway out of the water.

Rand laid Caruthers in it; he and Bona pushed off and paddled softly out and downstream. Their escape had not been noted when they passed from sight. Forty miles away was Belgian territory.

They floated noiselessly past the native village below the factory, and then drove the small canoe swiftly ahead.

Caruthers chuckled. "Won't DuFries be wild when he finds his trap sprung?"

"We're not out of his territory yet," Rand reminded.

A segment of moon hung high. The jungle lined the river like two black, ominous walls. A chimpanzee shrilled back in the trees. Once they heard the piglike grunting of hippos browsing and wallowing in the shallows.

Many times the bull bellows of great crocodiles sounded. Now and then one of the brutes slithered off the bank with a tremendous splash. The river seemed full of them. The boat bumped heavily over a hard, scaly back. A great tail lashed the water, rocking them dangerously. By a miracle they slid on to safety.

The false dawn came, gray and ghostly, and then the dawn, with veils of vapor trailing dismally off the dark water.

They were passing out of a mile-long stretch when Rand looked behind and saw a great pirogue, driven by at

least ten paddlers, coming swift and silent through the mists after them.

"DuFries is coming!" he burst out, digging the paddle deep.

Bona cast one look behind and redoubled his efforts.

Caruthers raised up and stared until the bend blotted out the sight. "Better land, Tommy. You can't make it this way. But you can get over the line before he cuts your trail."

"Not carrying you!"

"Forget about me!"

"Rot!"

Caruthers said no more, but he picked up the rifle and saw that it was ready for action. The paddles slashed rhythmically. Water hissed past the bow. But when the pirogue was next sighted, it was much nearer. Two more bends —and the distance had narrowed to less than a quarter of a mile.

The thin crack of a shot drifted to them, followed almost instantly by the shrill scream of a bullet. Then another —and a third that kicked up water close by. DuFries was standing up, potting at them.

They slid around a bend out of range. The pirogue was still nearer when it swept in sight again. The thin crack of DuFries's fire, the vicious scream of bullets, began again.

A bullet struck the gunwale, whined off at an angle. A few moments later the paddle splintered in Rand's hand.

"Get down, Bona!" he ordered calmly, tossing the paddle stub away.

The canoe lost headway, drifted off its course as Rand snatched up the rifle, dropped down on his stomach, and rested the barrel over the gunwale.

His first shot kicked up water beyond the pirogue. DuFries ducked down behind one of the paddlers. The four front men dropped their paddles, snatched up rifles and opened fire.

Rand dropped one of them with his next shot. DuFries's angry shouts at his men drifted over the water. The rest of the men in the pirogue left their paddles and picked up rifles. The crackle of fire echoed and reëchoed up and down the river. Bullets sang and shrieked about the small dugout; bored through its side, chipped splinters from it.

DuFries's white-clad form stood out among the black, glistening figures of his native men.

Rand got that figure in his sights. His finger nursed the trigger gently. And just as he shot, DuFries tottered and fell overboard. In that moment the rifle fire in the priogue stopped.

No man in the pirogue moved to help him. There was a sudden swirl in the water near DuFries; the flashing sweep of a long, scaly tail—and suddenly DuFries was jerked under water.

The little wavelets of his passing smoothed out. DuFries did not appear again.

Paddles replaced the rifles in the pirogue. The big craft turned swiftly and started upstream.

"DuFries's trap backfired. You winged the blighter and the crocs got him," Caruthers said with a breath. "I guess his men are glad to let well enough alone and get home with whole skins."

There were three last cigarettes in Rand's tin. He passed them around, and tossed the tin in the water and watched it sink.

"DuFries went overboard before I got a chance to wing him," he declared slowly. "One of his own men got him. Two of the chaps he whipped yesterday were behind him. The trap backfired, all right—but not the one he laid for us. He baited his own trap yesterday with that whip. I think we're safe now."

T. T. Flynn's stories appear regularly in this magazine.

A Pushcart Full of Snails Proves to be Deadlier than the Slugs of a Sub-machine Gun.

BULLETS *and* SNAILS

By WALTER SNOW

OLD Tony Giovannitti was worried. The only friend he had in the world was doomed. A shiftless reprobate, Tony had consumed many shots of bootleg in an effort to forget the threatening danger. But the thought continued to haunt him.

He sat hunched over on an olive-oil box, his head resting against the edge of his dripping-wet pushcart. Four buckets of fresh snails were spread out to entice the housewives of Harlem's Little Italy. The fat, wormlike delicacies poked their horned heads in and out of their circular shells. One even crawled on the frayed brim of Tony's black felt hat.

Absorbed in thought, the old vendor did not notice that all the other ragged peddlers were bowing to a tall young policeman, who strode up the west sidewalk of First Avenue, snapping a hickory nightstick back and forth with dexterity. He did not see the ruddy-faced officer stop in front of his pushcart. But he felt the stout end of the billy nudge him between the ribs. He shook his head, blinked red, bleary eyes.

"Chiocciolae!" shouted Tony in a weak, cracked voice. "Gooda snails! Gooda—— Why, it's Mr. Tim O'Neill!"

"Sure! Think I want any of your wop food?" laughed the tall policeman. "Been boozin' again, Tony?"

"No, me no drink!" protested the

snail vendor, shaking his head and tugging at his long, drooping white mustache. "Just *una de nero.* One bottle of black wine. Helps my bum leg."

"G'wan! You're stewed!" grunted O'Neill. His clear, blue eyes twinkled good-naturedly, but at the same time watched a dozen other pushcarts, two dirty-faced children crossing the cobblestoned avenue and an approaching produce truck. He snapped his nightstick out to the end of the leather throng, grasping the billy again with vim as it flew back.

"Better lay off Black Mike's bathtub gin. Hear that, you old bum!"

"I will, Mr. Tim," agreed Tony, gripping a stout, unvarnished cane and rising from his olive-oil-box seat. He leaned forward, whispered: "Listen, Mr. Tim. Look out for Nick."

"Yeah?"

"They're all talkin' about you. They say that Nick Alioto has sworn to get you 'cause you bumped off his brother."

"That so?" grunted Policeman Tim O'Neill. A worried expression flashed across his ruddy, wind-swept face a moment. Then he threw back his broad, muscular shoulders aggressively. The wrinkles left his forehead.

"I'll keep my eyes open. Thanks a lot!"

The tall officer broke into a forced laugh, walked past the entrance of a blind alley, just north of Tony's pushcart, and stepped up to a police call box on the wall of a grimy old warehouse fifty yards distant. Tony knew that O'Neill was worried. He had good reason to be.

Only yesterday the young policeman frustrated a holdup of the *Farmacia Italiana,* fought a running street battle with the bandits and killed "Gat" Alioto. The dead gunman had been no ordinary hoodlum. He was the brother and chief lieutenant of the notorious Nick Alioto, the big shot of Little Italy's racketeers.

All the street hawkers knew that Nick Alioto had sworn to get revenge. It was whispered everywhere—in fetid little wine cellars, in garlic-reeking tenement dwellings and all along the sidewalk-cluttered streets from the muddy Harlem River down to the car barns in Yorkville. Policeman Timothy O'Neill, member of the pistol team that won the national police trophy at Camp Perry, was on the spot!

Had Tony Giovannitti learned this news a month earlier, he would have shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the subject from his mind. Four weeks ago Tony had no friend in the world except the wretched "smoke" that he purchased with his scanty pushcart earnings. Now every one still regarded him as an old boozer.

But Tony considered that Policeman Tim O'Neill was his friend. Every day the big policeman stopped and spoke to him. O'Neill called him an old reprobate, it was true. Tony admitted that himself. Once he had been a man respected in the community. He had a little fish market and butcher shop then. A real store with electric lights. No dirty pushcart illuminated at night by a hissing gasoline banjo torch.

A fire and then a street accident, which necessitated the amputation of his right leg, reduced Tony to the pushcart status. Poverty-stricken and despondent, he went to the dogs. At first, he claimed that the friction between his scarcely healed stump and the ill-fitting cork leg needed the solace of strong alcohol. But long after he became accustomed to his artificial limb, he continued to haunt the "smoke" joints and speaks. He became the butt of a hundred pranks played by mischievous street urchins.

A month ago, however, things changed somewhat. Three young rascals found Tony dozing on his olive-oil box, head against his pushcart, lost in an alcoholic reverie. Half of Tony's collection of crawling snails were stuffed down his

back before Tim O'Neill saw what was happening.

Old Tony chuckled again at the memory of the aftermath. Tim O'Neill collared the ring leader, purchased all the remaining snails, stuffed them down the young rascal's back and made him stand at attention for ten minutes. After that, Tony knew peace while Tim O'Neill was pounding his beat. The old reprobate was profoundly grateful.

But now, so rumor said, his friend was doomed.

An icy blast from the Hell Gate Channel blew down First Avenue. Knife blades of cold stabbed Tony in the arms and neck. He grasped his cheap cane firmly and turned to the wrinkled, aged woman, wrapped in a red plaid shawl, who tended an artichoke stand just south of the pushcart of snails.

"Hey, momma," said Tony in a weak, cracked voice, "you watch my stand, hey? My cork leg hurts me again."

Old Tony hobbled down the sidewalk, his right leg dragging, heedless of a torrent of Italian, terming him a drunken, shiftless reprobate.

Three blocks down the avenue, he stopped in front of the gray-curtained windows of what once had been a licensed saloon but now bore no outward advertisement of its calling. He stared a moment at a speedy, low-slung blue limousine, parked in front of the speakeasy, with its motor purring softly. Then he pushed through the swinging doors.

Clouds of stale tobacco smoke hung like fog over a dozen round metal tables. Truckmen, hucksters, and the riffraff of Little Italy clinked glasses and guffawed. Old Tony hobbled up to a long hardwood bar, against which a score of men leaned. Three jovial, beefy barkeepers, wearing dirty white aprons and with their shirt sleeves rolled up, were busy serving drinks.

Tony planked a silver half dollar on the beer-wet bar, mumbled a single word and received a little glass of amber-colored liquid. As he raised the whisky to his thin lips, a burly truckman pushed up to the crowded bar and elbowed Tony out of the way. Half of the old vendor's drink spilled over his white mustache.

"Excuse me," Tony mumbled timidly. He wiped his mustache, retreated quickly a few feet and stopped suddenly.

At a table in the rear of the joint sat three familiar figures. One, with his back to the wall, was a short, flat-nosed man with the puffed cauliflower ears of a pugilist and a mop of black hair, cut short pompadour style. Nick Alioto, the big shot himself!

At his right was a pudgy, bull-necked individual—"Chopper" Leone, machine gunner of the Alioto mob. "Scar" Vario, a thin man with a two-inch livid gash on his dusky left cheek, was at the gang leader's left.

With a shudder, old Tony gulped down the dregs of his fiery whisky. Well did the First Avenue produce market know that trio. They were the self-elected officers of the Pushcart Peddlers' Protective Association, whose Constitution and By-Laws were the nine-shot Super .38 automatic and the .45-caliber Thompson sub-machine gun. Every week they collected dues. They would levy special contributions to give the dead Gat Alioto a silver casket and a sumptuous funeral. They also would snuff out the life of Policeman Tim O'Neill.

Tremblingly, the snail vendor stepped up to the bar and whispered an order for another whisky. A hundred crazy thoughts flashed through the old reprobate's brain. Would that he had the nerve of the young butcher-shop proprietor he once had been! With a heavy, razor-sharp meat cleaver in his hand, he might bash in the brain of Nick Alioto. Or would that he clutched a Tommy gun in hands that did not tremble. It would take only one sweep

of lead slugs and Tim O'Neill would be saved.

Tears came to Tony's red, bleary eyes. Wild dreams, fantastic ideas, would do no good. He was only a booze-soaked old bum. A young huckster, eager to reach the bar, shoved him out of the way. An aproned waiter, with a tray full of foaming beer mugs, snarlingly ordered him to get the hell out of the aisle.

He hobbled up to an empty table, slumped in a chair. His head whirled around in a daze. A familiar voice spoke.

"That damn mick flatfoot has just ten minutes more to live!"

Tony raised his bleary eyes, hesitatingly. One table away sat Nick Alioto and his henchman. Were they plotting Policeman Tim O'Neill's doom or waiting for others to execute him?

Tony fingered a pocketful of coppers and small silver pieces. He would get drunk, soddenly intoxicated. He would pass out until it was all over. After that, nothing would matter. O'Neill would be dead—— No, that would not do. Tony Giovannitti had a little strength left. He would sent a table crashing on top of Nick Alioto's head. Shaking bony fingers grasped the metal legs of the table. He could not even tip it. He was too weak.

His bleary eyes strayed to a wall clock. The hands pointed to eight minutes of three. Two minutes gone. Policeman Tim O'Neill was to go on the spot at three p. m. Summoning all his energy, old Tony staggered to his feet, hobbled across the smoke-filled speakeasy, pushed through the swinging doors and reached the clear, crisp air of First Avenue.

Had Alioto and his henchmen seen him leave? Would they suspect that he wanted to warn Tim O'Neill? Would they follow him? Would Alioto, the pugilist, knock him on the biscuit and chuck him into a corner until it was all over? The snail vendor gazed up and down the avenue. The sidewalk was cluttered with crates of wine grapes, baskets of produce and a milling throng of humanity. It was impossible to see far.

Still parked at the curb in front of the speakeasy was a speedy blue limousine, the motor of which was purring softly. The car had Jersey license plates. Probably an Alioto henchman had stolen it only an hour ago in Hoboken or Newark. A half hour from now it would be found abandoned in a lonely East Bronx thoroughfare.

Up the avenue Tony hastened. Fat housewives with market baskets and bulky leather shopping bags jostled him to the right and left. His eyes anxiously searched the swirling crowds for a familiar, blue-coated figure. Why was three p. m. chosen as the hour for Tim O'Neill's execution? Where would the young policeman be at that time?

Two blocks north of the speakeasy, Tony glanced backward. Out into the center of the avenue nosed an unforgetable blue limousine. A truck loaded with crates of live chickens temporarily blocked its path, then lurched to the gutter to make way for the big shot. Tony broke into a feeble imitation of a run. He stumbled over a little boy, who was dragging a red toy fire engine on a string. The child toppled to the sidewalk, with Tony on top of him.

A frenzied shriek came from a shopping housewife. A young woman seized Tony by the coat collar and, as he scrambled to his feet, started belaboring him with fists. Shaking himself free, the old vendor saw a fat, screaming woman swing a loaded market basket at him. Tony ducked. The basket knocked his black felt hat to the sidewalk. He pushed through a crowd of shoppers and hobbled on.

Suddenly he remembered that Policeman Tim O'Neill would step up to the police call box fifty yards north of the

snail pushcart at three p. m. The call box was located next to a blind warehouse alley that wouldn't be crowded with shoppers. A hail of lead slugs could sweep the alley and call box and only O'Neill and maybe a chance pedestrian would be chopped down.

Even Nick Alioto did not dare to make a wholesale slaughter of the innocent. That was why a definite hour had been set for the death of the underworld Nemesis.

A hundred yards ahead, projecting above the heads of shoppers, was the familiar soft-topped blue cap. The policeman was walking up the avenue. At each step the distance between O'Neill and Tony increased. The snail vendor cupped a hand to his thin lips and shouted. His weak, cracked voice was lost in the shouts and tumult of the pushcart market.

Unaware of the peril, Tim O'Neill weaved in and out of the throng of shoppers, reached the edge of the crowd and started across the blind alley—the driveway between two massive, silent warehouses. Nervously, Tony glanced around. In second speed, the blue limousine crawled up the avenue like a caterpillar tank, slowly, but moving with deadly precision. It was just half a block away now.

From the rear side window protruded the ugly snout of a Tommy gun, clutched firmly by the bull-necked Chopper Leone.

Alioto, rubbing his flat, formless nose, squatted beside the machine gunner. Scar Vario was driving.

Light-heartedly, Tom O'Neill stepped up to the call box. Turned his back innocently to the approaching blue death car. Picked up the receiver in one hand.

The coast was clear. No pedestrians were in the way.

"Look out, Tim!"

Old Tony's words were feeble. They were hardly audible twenty feet away and O'Neill was two hundred feet distant.

Panting heavily, the snail vendor stopped. Gasped a second for breath. He staggered up to his pushcart, heaped with fresh snails that poked their horned heads in and out of their circular shells. Tony felt dazed, exhausted. He clutched the side of the pushcart to keep himself from collapsing. Must he see his only friend shot down in a hail of hot lead?

Just a dozen feet to the south the blue limousine came on. The motor hummed smoothly. The road was clear. Tony bit his thin lips and made a tremendous effort. His bony hands clutched the handlebar of his pushcart, raised the tilting vehicle a half foot. Toward the street he shoved the nose of the cart.

The blue car drew up abreast. Tony acted. Over the cobblestone street he hobbled with the pushcart, and crashed the vehicle into the front bumper of the limousine. The glass of one headlight splintered. Scoopfuls of wriggling snails spilled over the front fenders, the radiator and engine hood. A wheel snapped off the pushcart. The jolt knocked Scar Vario's hands off the steering wheel for a split second.

But the brief fraction of time was sufficient. Scar Vario snarled a vitriolic curse as the pushcart was demolished to a mass of kindling and twisted metal. The death car lurched toward the curb a few inches. Threw the Tommy gun out of range. *Rata-tac-taca-tac-taca-tac!*

Tony ducked. Sharp, stinging pains stabbed one shoulder. The fender of the limousine ripped his shabby black coat open and hurled him to the rough cobblestones. *Rata-tac-taca-tac-taca-tac!* The drum of death rolled out its leaden missiles. But they only spattered the grimy bricks of the bare warehouse wall.

Another gun was roaring now—a police Positive. A .38 slug drilled a neat

little hole through Scar Vario's dusky left cheek, just an inch above a long, livid gash. For the second time the gangster-chauffeur's hands lost their firm grip on the hard-rubber steering wheel. The big limousine swerved wildly across the avenue. It ripped off the fender of a parked taxicab, crashed sidewise into a gasoline pump in front of a garage and hung there, crazily.

The *raca-tac-ing* of the Tommy gun became still. A man with cauliflower ears and a dusky face staggered out of the wreck. Brushing blood from one eye, he tried to aim an automatic. The police Positive revolver barked first. The ex-pugilist slumped in a heap to the ground.

Two garage helpers pried the limousine away from the bent gasoline pump and dragged the broken body of Chopper Leone from the wreckage. He lay bleeding and still until an ambulance arrived and took him and Nick Alioto to the prison ward of Bellevue Hospital.

Scar Vario also was removed to Bellevue, but he was carried in the Twenty-ninth Street entrance, taken to the basement and placed on a sliding metal tray in a cold room.

Beth David Hospital, in the heart of Little Italy, received Tony Giovannitti, and the Jewish staff was proud to have him. It was there that First-class Detective Timothy O'Neill visited the snail vendor.

"Well, old soak," said the tall Irishman, "I've got a nice hunk of reward money comin' to me. How about a trip to the old country?"

"What?" exclaimed old Tony, looking up from his bandages. "You give me money—enough for trip to Italy?"

"Sure! You helped earn it, didn't you, Tony?"

"Listen, Tim," said Tony, rising from his pillow, "I no have friends in the old country. I like this land. But I no have pushcart. Mebbe you loan me money to buy a little butcher shop and fish market, hey? I get on my feet again. I pay you back."

"O. K., old-timer!" laughed O'Neill. "But you must keep a good supply of snails. A pushcart of those wigglin' things are sometimes better than a drum of Tommy gun bullets!"

Another story by Walter Snow will appear soon in these pages.

A BUFFALO HIDE

THERE was going to be a ceremonial dance—a major event among the Indians who dwell in the Santa Clara reservation. But the hide of a buffalo was required, and even the most experienced hunters will tell you that you cannot find buffalo down there. Yet the dances could not go on without a buffalo hide.

There was, however, the Great White Father in Washington. And there was the department of the interior, a subdivision, so to speak, of the Great White Father. A request for help was not ignored. The department of the interior understood that the ceremony must go on. There was a buffalo in Yellowstone National Park. Providentially, it was dead. It had just died.

And so in no time at all the Indians of the New Mexican reservation were supplied with the hide they needed—cured and delivered. And certain officials of the department of the interior have been invited to be present at the ceremony—during which an extra dance will be rendered as an expression of gratitude.

NEW PLACES *and* NEW FRIENDS

By James Worth

I AM sympathetically interested in your problems. I am here to help those who wish to uproot themselves and strike out for new places and new ways of making a living—invalids who would like to learn about healthier climes; vacationists, tourists, and travelers who are perplexed about routes, rates, and time; campers, hunters, trappers, and hardy souls who want to seek adventure.

Your letters of inquiry will be welcomed and answered at once. When possible, I shall also be glad to put you in touch with other readers who can supply added information. I will help you, too, through correspondence, to make friends with readers of the same sex. Your letters will be forwarded direct when you so desire; otherwise they will be answered here.

To obtain information about new places, or to make new friends, write James Worth, care of the Popular Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will bring a prompt reply.

CALIFORNIA CLIMATE

The Pride of the Citizens of the Golden State

IF variety is the spice of life, Californians don't need to travel to be amused, as they have much to choose from right at home—at least, in this matter of climate. On the other hand, so famous has the climate of this Western State become that it attracts visitors from all corners of the earth. The following letter was written by one of our enthusiastic readers for the benefit of any one who may be uninformed about

this noteworthy feature of California life.

DEAR MR. WORTH: I've seen several letters in your department from readers who are interested in California, and so I am sending you some information about this State. The San Bernardino Sierra is the range crossed by most visitors coming to southern California. It lies within the eastern section of the Los Angeles National Forest, and is justly famous for its Big Bear Lake and Arrowhead and for its summits of San Gorgonio. It is also cherished as one of the prize playgrounds of the great Southland.

On one side lies the desert; on the other, the land of the orange, the olive, and the rose. Between these, in the wintertime, Jack Frost spreads a carpet of the whitest, most velvety snow, and dusts the giant pines with tiny crystals that wink mischievously at the surprised tourists, who even yet must learn of the wide variety of winter sports which flourish under our bright southern California sun.

Here in the San Bernardino Sierras we have a range whose general elevation is about six thousand feet, with numerous peaks rising above it anywhere from a couple of thousand to around eleven thousand feet. The charm of this vast forest lies in the fact that, like the chameleon, it can change from the riotous coloring of a wild-flower pageant to a snow carnival equally as interesting as those of the famous Swiss Alps.

For all lovers of the great open spaces, the winter scenes in California are of surpassing loveliness. On one hand is the great arid desert of the Mojave, its Joshua palms and cacti blending with the sand and hazy warmth of Death Valley, while on the other side the pungent odor of pines gives place to orange blossoms and groves of grapefruit merged with the avacado.

Here in the Golden State, one may have most any climate that one desires, from the snow-capped peaks to the glistening sands of the desert—skiing, tobogganing, or skating in the mountains; the tang of spring and ocean zephyrs in the valleys. From the sea-coast line to the towering ranges is but a matter of a few miles. To reach either is a drive of an hour. The summer evenings and nights are always cool, affording one refreshing sleep, even in the blistering desert lands.

I live here in the Indian Wells Valley, which has long been recognized as having a most excellent all-the-year-round climate for health. The dry desert air, tempered by the trade winds, makes the curative properties of this climate unexcelled. With an elevation of from twenty-two hundred to twenty-six hundred feet above sea level, free from fogs, it is an especially beneficial locality for those afflicted with throat or pulmonary troubles.

MRS. E. W.

Lone Pine, California.

And now we're going to turn California booster ourself and add a few remarks to those of Mrs. E. W. Not only does Indian Wells Valley have a healthful climate, but it possesses a profitable soil as well. Although the principal crop is alfalfa, almost every sort of vegetable and fruit may be grown here. Roads are excellent; there are good schools, fine hunting and fishing, and wonderful scenery. If any of our readers would like more information about the Indian Wells Valley of California, we shall be glad to tell them where an illustrated descriptive booklet may be obtained.

ANTICOSTI ISLAND

In the Gulf of St. Lawrence

THERE is certainly something romantic and fascinating about an island. Who has failed to thrill over the adventures of *Robinson Crusoe?* His shipwreck, finding the footprint in the sand, his man *Friday*—the whole atmosphere of romance has woven a magic spell from which we never really escape. Forever after, when we think of an island, we remember all this.

DEAR MR. WORTH: I am a regular reader of The Popular Magazine, and am so much interested in your department that I always read it before the stories. Having noticed that you seem prepared to discuss most any part of the globe, I'm wondering if you or some of your readers could give me any information about Anticosti Island? I have been thinking of that as a good place to go for a summer's sojourn. Do you know anything about the pulpwood industry there?

GEORGE A. F.

Nova Scotia, Canada.

Anticosti is an island situated in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It is one hundred and thirty-five miles in length and has a breadth of thirty miles. The population is small, being around two hundred and fifty, and consisting chiefly of the keepers of the numerous lighthouses erected on the island by the Canadian government. The coast is dangerous, and the only two harbors, Ellis Bay and Fox Bay, are very indifferent.

Perhaps George A. F. would be interested in the history of this island. It was in 1534 that Anticosti was sighted by Jacques Cartier and named Assomption. In 1763 it was ceded by France to Britain, and in 1774 became part of Canada. Wild animals, especially bears, are numerous; but prior to 1896 the fish and game had been almost exterminated by indiscriminate slaughter.

In that year Anticosti and the shore fisheries were leased to M. Menier, the French chocolate manufacturer, who converted the island into a game preserve and attempted to develop its resources of lumber, peat, and minerals.

We are sorry to say that we have no information about the pulpwood industry of the island, but we are giving George A. F. an address from which we think facts may be obtained. If any of our readers have any information on this subject, we wish they'd send it to George A. F. Address him, in care of James Worth.

UNCLE SAM'S FORESTS

Are Wonderful Summer Playgrounds

EVERY year more and more people spend their vacations in the national parks and forests of the West. Here the tired city man finds rest and recreation in the wilderness, far from the sound of telephones and taxi horns. Here the lover of nature revels in woods, lakes, and rivers. And here the sportsman may pitch his camp beneath a giant tree, fish in the flowing streams, cook his meals over a glowing fire, and sleep beneath the stars.

DEAR MR. WORTH: Can you give me any information about the Siskiyou National Forest out in Oregon? I expect to motor out there for my vacation, as I want to get entirely away from crowded city streets, city noises, and city people.

Will I find good hunting and fishing there? How does one reach the Oregon Caves, which, I believe, are in this forest? Are there are any good camp grounds, and where could I obtain a map of the forest? NED F.

Detroit, Michigan.

The Siskiyou National Forest lies in the Siskiyou Mountains of southern Oregon and northern California. As it is crossed by the Pacific Redwood, and Roosevelt Highways, Ned F. will find it quite accessible. Nor will he lack for outdoor sports, for this region is noted for the steelhead fishing on the lower Rogue River, as well as for possessing good deer, bear, and cougar hunting grounds. There is a resort hotel at Patrick Creek on the new route of the Redwood Highway.

Of course, the most notable attraction of the Siskiyou National Forest is the Oregon Caves, in the Oregon Caves National Monument. These are forty-nine miles from Grants Pass. To reach them Ned F. should take the Caves Highway, which leaves the Redwood Highway about a mile south of Kerby.

The Oregon Caves are located in Cave Mountain, a peak of limestone formation six thousand feet high. The main entrances to the caves are at an elevation of four thousand feet. The caves are more a series of galleries than of roomy caverns, although many beautiful rooms have been discovered. Galleries are numerous, and passageways lead in all directions. Meals may be secured at a chalet, and other accommodations are provided in a group of comfortable and attractive bungalows.

A reasonable fee is charged for

guides, who are absolutely necessary, as well as for the coveralls and lamps ordinarily required. The trip takes about two hours. The forest service maintains a free auto camp ground at Oregon Cave camp ground on Sucker Creek, eight miles distant on the way to the caves.

Lack of space is cutting short our remarks about this delightful summer playground, but we are telling Ned F. where he may obtain a very useful booklet on the caves and a folder map of the Siskiyou Forest. We shall be glad to give any other interested readers the same addresses.

ROADS TO CIBOLA

Over the old trails of the Southwest once traveled the conquistadors, searching for Cibola, the seven mythical cities of gold. Although we now know Cibola as New Mexico, those who follow the highways into this State will find, if not golden cities, much romance and adventure still waiting for them. For the Southwest is an enchanted region of desolate peaks, broad mesas, fascinating deserts, and wooded valleys.

Here one may visit an ancient pueblo, dreaming in the sun, or witness a fantastic and poetic Indian dance. Here one views impressive and beautiful scenery through a blue haze and makes camp under pine trees by a singing stream.

If you would like to explore the Cibola of to-day, write to James Worth, in care of The Popular Magazine. He will gladly tell you where to obtain descriptive literature and road maps of New Mexico.

WANTED—NEW FRIENDS

In Every Corner of the Globe

LETTERS are pouring in these days from readers who want to make new friends via the correspondence route. Perhaps you, too, would like to vary the monotony of existence by writing to somebody in foggy London or sunshiny Hawaii? If so, we'd suggest that you look over the following list of names and select the one which appeals to you most and forthwith set out on a trip over the Highroad of Friendship.

EVELYN B., OF LONDON, ENGLAND, is especially interested in South America and Canada and would like to hear from readers in these countries. She will also welcome correspondents from other places. One of her chief interests is reading, particularly adventure stories. She says, "I do not lead a very eventful life here in London," and will be glad to receive letters from Popular readers anywhere.

JOSEPH G. MC, OF FORT MILLS, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, is a soldier stationed on Fort Drum in Manila Bay. He is interested in South America, China, India, Australia, and the islands near there. He feels that he, too, has some interesting things to say to readers who would like to exchange letters with him.

GEORGE B., OF MEDICINE HAT, ALBERTA, prefers new friends in California, as he intends to visit that State this year, with the intention of settling there. He is nineteen years old and is fond of hunting. He will also be glad to give information to any readers interested in Alberta.

LAURA S., OF NEWARK, NEW JERSEY, confesses that she is a lonely girl. She would like to hear from readers around the age of thirty, and is particularly interested in the West.

JACK C., OF CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, is very anxious to get into communication with chaps in various parts of the globe. He expects to do quite a bit of traveling soon and would appreciate information from readers in different countries. He is twenty-one years old, a husky fellow, and fond of all sports, especially tennis.

CORA P., OF MINNESOTA, is eighteen years young, a blonde, and is nicknamed "Dimples." She has a passion for writing, as well as receiving, letters and promises to answer all communications promptly.

WALTER F. R., OF AKRON, OHIO, would like to hear from any Popular readers living in Canada.

JACOB F., OF NEW YORK CITY, has doubtless been reading about that wonderful California climate, for he is requesting readers who

live in the Golden State to send him some letters. Together with his buddy, he is planning to trek westward. These boys are eighteen years old.

WILLMERE H., OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, is twenty-one years old and likes such sports as swimming, horseback riding, and hiking. In spite of her activities, however, she acknowledges that she is lonely at times, and feels that a few congenial new friends would brighten up life considerably.

REBA H., OF ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, would like to correspond with a girl connected with a real Western cow ranch. Reba is seventeen years old.

JOSE A., OF WEST VIRGINIA, is very anxious for some new friends. He is eighteen years old and confesses that he is pretty clever at such dances as the tango and jota.

J. SMITH, OF MAINE, is sixteen years old and a junior in high school. She is fond of such outdoor sports as skating, skiing, swimming, and riding. She also plays basketball and is on the school team. She will gladly answer all letters from girls her own age and exchange snaps and photos.

Here, then, are a round dozen opportunities for adventures in friendship. Address your letters to the above readers in care of James Worth, and they will be forwarded promptly.

THE SUN MAY BE THE CULPRIT

ON Mount Wilson they recorded a magnetic storm upon the earth, occurring at exactly the same moment a solar disturbance took place on the sun. This one recorded case has led scientists to suspect that all our magnetic storms are caused by the sun, and twenty-five bureaus are being established to collect further evidence. In a sense, the sun is on trial before a jury.

It will take a year, it is said, for the observations to be concluded. Spectro-helioscopes, invented by Doctor George Ellery Hale, of Pasadena, California, will be used in the experiments. The "jury" of bureaus will be located in England, Germany, Italy, Arabia, India, China, Australia, Samoa, Peru, Massachusetts, New York, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Chicago, Ohio, and California. Some have already been started. Thus man tries and may indict the universe!

BACK TO THE FARM

UNEMPLOYMENT sends people back to the farm, the department of agriculture recently decided, while comparing country population figures of 1930 with the statistics of preceding years. Two million one hundred and fifty-five thousand people left their farms and moved to industrial centers in 1926. Since then there has been a steady lessening of this number. In 1929 the figures had come down to one million eight hundred and seventy-five thousand, with another decided drop in 1930, to the tune of one million five hundred and forty-three thousand people who were willing to try their luck in the cities. The farm population of this country has increased over two hundred thousand in the space of one year. Last year the total was estimated at twenty-seven million, two hundred and twenty-two thousand. On the first of January, 1931, it was placed at twenty-seven million four hundred and thirty thousand. The depression which smote the country was responsible for this gain, the department feels.

AND IN OUR NEXT—

IF you liked Thomson Burtis's two-parter, "One Every Minute," which ends in this present number, you'll be tickled to know that Mr. Burtis will be with us again, prominently, in the August issue.

Slimuel X. Evans, the Border Patrol lieutenant who is the narrator in "One Every Minute," is, to our way of thinking, one of the most original characters in the world of fiction. Six feet six, gangling and awkward, big-nosed and garrulous, Slim Evans is the kind of person who can keep you enthralled and chortling through many a long summer hour.

On July 1st, if you have previously reserved a copy of The Popular at your news stand, you'll be able to go gayly adventuring with Slim Evans again, this time in a big, complete, hilarious yarn about circusing, boom towns, and flying! Thomson Burtis and his fiction pardner, Slimuel, are "naturals."

* * * *

THE story of a man's fight for life—a young reporter who lands, broke, dispirited, friendless, jobless, and hopeless, in a remote little town the name of which is unknown to him—that is "A Ticket to Nowhere," by Lieutenant Seymour G. Pond.

A man who has knocked about the world, Lieutenant Pond writes with the truth and feeling that come from first-hand experience. He himself has known what it is to be thousands of miles from the home plate, what it is to be at the end of Nowhere, what it is to stand on chill, unfriendly cobblestones and toss a coin to see whether he'd try his luck inland or on the water front. "A Ticket to Nowhere" continues in the August issue. Every man who calls himself a man ought to be reading it.

* * * *

AS in the case of the number you now hold in your hands, the August Popular will be packed to standing-room-only capacity. The two bull's-eye hits described above will be followed in rapid order by a whole company of long and short stories and features. The men who write for this magazine are like you and ourselves. They understand us. They like what we like, and they turn out the kind of stories we all like to read.

James Stevens, for instance—he's an outdoor man who lives up in the Michigan big woods and likes to be called "Jim"—has written a short story that is every bit as good as "Three Black Devils." Remember? This one is called "Blood on the Snow"—and, man, it's powerful!

Who is the best Foreign Legion writer in the all-fiction field? We say that he is Captain Leighton H. Blood, discovered and featured by The Popular only. His latest yarn will be in the August number. It is saying a lot, when a man has already turned out a dozen or so stories that surpass anything any one, anywhere, has written about the Legion, to pronounce one of them his best. This is his best.

Thomson Burtis, Lieutenant Seymour G. Pond, James Stevens, Captain Leighton H. Blood—star performers, all of them. But we wanted to make this an *all-star* issue, and so we rounded up none other than Sean O'Larkin and Dallas Boynton, Leonard Lupton, and still others into the bargain! Mark down July 1st as the day when you're going to give yourself a rare treat.

JULY, 1931 VOL. CIII No. 3 ★ THE POPULAR MAGAZINE 25 Cents