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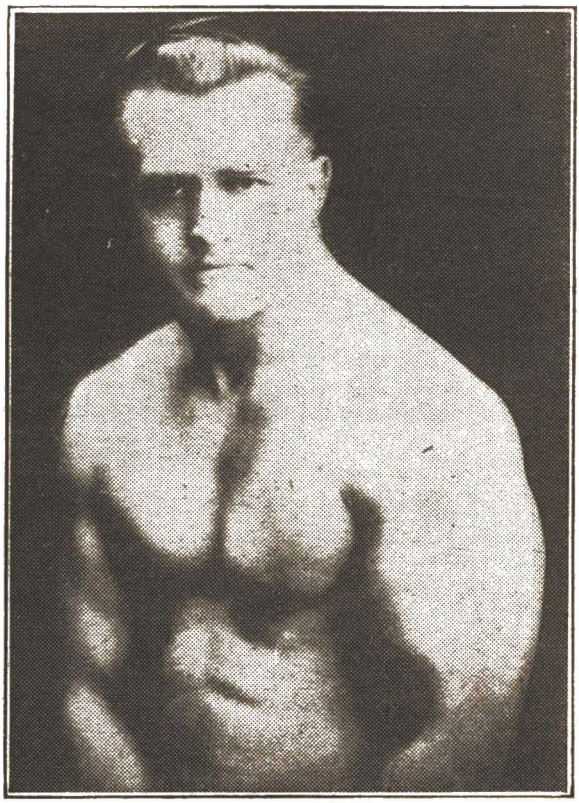

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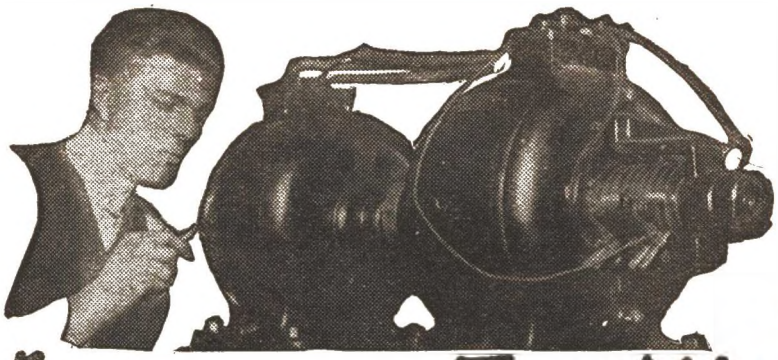

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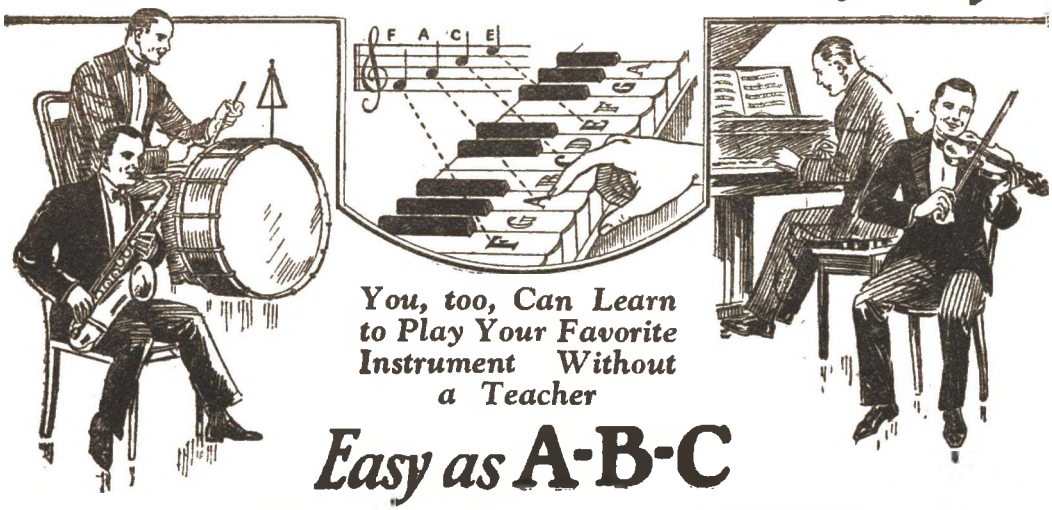

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Short Stories

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CONTENTS

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Horn in and enjoy yourself

The next issue April 25th

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It was to a hot Fandango at the Ox Bow Ranch

by

Ernest Haycox

THE MONTANA MADMAN

He came sky-hooting across the fields of war-torn France

by

Thomson Burtis

THE TERROR OF THE BIG TOP

In a crisis it pays to know your own jaguar

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TWICE A MONTH

ShortStories

APRIL 10th 1929

The Last Frontier—Humph!

PEOPLE keep talking about "the last frontier," but strangely enough during the last month or so, I have seen it seriously mentioned in newspapers or magazines and placed in no less than ten different parts of the world. To mention some of them, they include the Antarctic region being explored by Byrd, northern Canada where they are driving a railroad close to the Arctic Circle, the great Amazon jungle, the North African desert, the Central African jungle, and the airways above us, to say nothing of various unsettled parts of the United States. There is no question of the sincerity of the various writers who have thus glibly called the particular section in which they were interested the last one where frontier conditions exist. There *is* some question of the inclusiveness of their view, or of the extent of their knowledge.

In short, it is just a little too easy for people to make credit for some particular part of the world by calling it the last frontier and assuming that all the other far places are explored, charted, civilized, and settled. As a matter of fact, there never were so many and so varied expeditions of explorers roaming the face of the earth, penetrating the sky above and the depths below as there are today. And owing to the new methods of transportation, record making (such as motion pictures and recording phonographs) and scientific observation there has never before been reaped such a harvest of information. When Stanley went into Darkest Africa he could bring out his own account, together with a few specimens of animal and plant life. Today an explorer brings out reproductions of sights, sounds, and correct scientific data of every sort as well as complete collections of specimens.

Nor have they anywhere near exhausted the far places where man is either primitive or entirely absent. Dr. Roy Chapman Andrews has found that the wild and fantastic life of the Gobi Desert remains as untamed as it was generations ago, and even in the United States there are plenty of places little known to man. It was only a few years ago that the Rainbow Bridge in the vast desert stretch north of the Grand Canyon was discovered by white men and definitely mapped. The Craters of the Moon, that volcanic desert in Idaho is so little known that probably few white men know its strange trails. Then of course there are other sections of Idaho and of eastern Oregon, northern Arizona, etc., where the ubiquitous railroad is still unknown and where ranching and fur trapping are carried on pretty much as they were fifty years ago.

The last frontier indeed! I'll show you places in the ancient New England state of Maine where you will think a white man never stepped. As for the West, as Will James says, "There are still plenty places where a feller can swing his rope and not get it tangled on fence posts."

THE EDITOR.

THE CLANGOR OF THE BRONZE SKULL

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

FROM THE GREAT MONASTERY OF THE BORO NOR IN THE NORTHERN WASTES OF MONGOLIA THE NEWS CAME. IT DRIFTED FROM MOUTH TO MOUTH OVER THE LANDS WHERE THE CLANG OF THE GREAT MONASTERY BELL FILLED WAYFARERS WITH TERROR. IT TOLD OF AN AMERICAN WHO HAD FALLEN INTO THE HANDS OF THE PRIESTS OF EVIL. THE AMERICAN, MEN SAID, WOULD ONE DAY DIE THE DEATH OF THE SKULL. AND SO CAPTAIN DOUGLAS, UNITED STATES ARMY, GOT OUT OF HIS UNIFORM AND STARTED NORTH, BEYOND THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

CHAPTER I

NEWS TRAVELS FAST IN THE EAST

THERE is a secret guarded room in one of the Government buildings in Washington which sends and receives many cryptic messages. There is nothing remarkable about this room except that it is heavily guarded, day and night.

Its innocent-looking, coded messages flash swiftly through thousands of miles of singing telegraph wire and undersea cable or are flung through space across half a world. Men go forth and do strange things on receipt of these innocent seeming messages.

One message came to Tien-Tsien, in far off China, and caused a regimental commander of American infantry, his adjutant and his sergeant major to sit up half the night. And the activities of these three percolated down to the rank and file of the regiment, so that Sergeant Miller, intent on teaching Yuan Chang, the suave Chinese silk merchant, the ins and outs of the royal game of poker, was called away from the game in time to save his last ten dollars from Yuan Chang's innocent and clumsy plays.

One came to the representative of a big American oil company in far away Kalgan and made him neglect his oil invoices half a day while he puffed slowly and carefully at his pipe, studying and reflecting. It is at Kalgan that the trumpeters of the Chinese military force blare forth from the city's walls at evening, blare forth defiance to the deserts of Inner Mongolia, stretching far to the northward. Their defiance is a little tinged with fear, for out of those deserts from time immemorial, have rolled hordes of shaggy horsemen to burn, and rape and plunder.

FAR away in the Philippine Islands, a squadron commander faced a full strength squadron of negro cavalry, four hundred seasoned and trained black soldiers topping a row of bronze colored horses. From a distance the squadron looked like a solid block of bronze and eb-

ony. Flickers of scarlet and white whipped above it. In front of it against the dark background of the colored troopers, stood the white officers, sitting their horses, statuesque and silent.

A mounted orderly brought his horse up to the captain and saluted, handing over a yellow envelope. A faint trumpet call echoed from the cantonment, a call that like mess-call, can never be too faint for the soldier to hear, the notes of recall from drill.

Douglas opened the envelope and read the message typewritten there. It was only three lines but it brought a frown into his face—he knew the game had begun. He looked a little wistfully at his splendid squadron of colored men, a squadron which he had tempered and trained until it was as a fine blade in his hand. Yet almost at once he had forgotten the dusty drill field, his mind ranging itself automatically upon the task ahead. He was playing the Game again, and could not altogether regret it. Washington's secret room had spoken.

Chapter II

THE BOLSHEVIK SPY AT KALGAN

GIRDED by strong walls, entered by tower-flanked gates, the Chinese city of Kalgan is the last jumping-off place between China proper and the broad steppes of Inner Mongolia. Beyond these steppes stretch the sandy wastes of the Gobi Desert and the Great Khan-ship of Outer Mongolia. Its capital, Urga, is the dwelling place of the Living Buddha, his Holiness Bogdo Ghegan, Djebtsung Damba Hutuktu Khan, High Pontiff and temporal prince of the Mongolians.

Kalgan is a good sized city but it is not so large that the presence of a new "foreign devil" does not excite comment in the bazaars and tea houses. And when that white foreign devil is accompanied by a huge, imperturbable and exceedingly benign black man, the bazaars and tea houses can be depended upon to do full justice to the subject.

It was known of this new white foreign

devil that he stayed with the agent of a big American company. Undoubtedly he was a merchant in oil, for it was also known that he had left his shipment of great five-gallon oil drums in the go-down of the wealthy and muchly respected Sin Yian.

Furthermore, to lend spice to the gossip, it has been noised abroad that the stranger, accompanied by his huge black servant, was setting forth across the Mongolian desert, and many were the heads shaking in the bazaars at the news. Of a surety his oil were destined for the "Bloody Mad Baron" at Urga, that strange White Russian leader, Baron Sternburg, who had conquered Outer Mongolia and had installed himself at Urga with his army. Much oil did the baron need, for had he not installed at Urga, an electric lighting plant and a radio station so that half Asia marveled?

Many were the disputes concerning the new foreign devil, but that the tall stranger's chances of reaching Urga were of the slimmest, nobody disputed.

The rumors and conjectures reached the rear office in a small go-down near the southern gate of the city and the white man who sat there, the most pronounced Slav type, a man whom one would put down instantly as a brainless and stupid nonentity, if one did not take a second look at the eyes, which were remarkably alert underneath their overhanging, bushy eyebrows.

"And what do *you* think of this fellow, Lun Hua-Shan?" the Russian asked the powerfully built Chinese who squatted on his heels smoking a small pipe. He asked the question in sing-song Chinese of the dialect of Pekin.

"I have told you, the stranger is no merchant. He is a warrior and a chief of warriors."

"How do you come to that conclusion?"

"It is plain to be seen," answered the Chinese, "his belly is close to his backbone from hard living, his hips are lean from the saddle, not like a merchant who grows broad and fat from much sitting down. No, and he walks as one accustomed to the swing of the sword at his side. And when he seats himself he does not place his feet back against the seat, he places them farther forward, so far forward as would make room for the steel that such as he wear on their heels, the spurs. And his eyes are as the eyes of a man used to obedience."

"And there is no word from our people in Pekin concerning him?" the Russian was thoughtful.

"No word."

"And his servant, the black man?"

The Chinese looked at the Russian, an oblique, sideways glance, then his eyes became veiled again.

"He *is* his servant," he announced quietly.

"Yes, yes, I know," the voice of the Russian was a little testy, "but what else?"

THERE was a long silence in which the only sound discernible was the slight noise made by the Chinese as he sucked at his small pipe. Taking his pipe from his mouth, the Chinese finally broke the silence.

"Nothing else, except—you have heard what they say in the bazaar, who this black man looks like?"

"Yes, I have heard that," answered the Russian impatiently. "Nothing but Oriental superstition," and he dismissed the subject.

The Chinese shrugged his shoulders.

"The Orient is ruled by superstition," he objected mildly, but the Russian did not hear him.

"I will see these two myself," he said and rose. He was seized with a sudden thought and turned at the threshold.

"It would be advisable to search their supplies—they are at the go-down belonging to Sin Yian. See to that while I keep the fellow engaged in talk," saying which, he departed.

So it happened that afternoon at the tiffin hour that a broad-faced, rather stupid looking Russian in loose and baggy white cotton, dropped in to pay a visit to the American agent of the great oil company. From under the shaggy brows of the Russian, keen and alert eyes peered forth at the guest of the agent, a tall dark-haired

man whose face was bronzed with much exposure to sun and wind.

"You are remaining long with us in Kalgan?" asked the Russian suavely.

The tall American shrugged his shoulders.

"A year or a day. One never knows in the oil game," he returned lightly, then in the same matter of fact tone, "Are there many Russians in Kalgan?" he asked.

"Yes, a small colony, about eight or ten of us."

"And they live peaceably together?" asked the American with a smile that removed the sting from the words. "It has always seemed such a pity that the Russians, who can be so charming, should be so irrevocably divided against each other on political questions."

"Yes," answered the Russian guardedly, and waited.

"I suppose that most of the Russians here are White refugees?" asked the American idly, then without waiting for a reply, he went on. "I should think the White refugees would all join Baron Sternburg. What do you think of that fellow?" he jerked out suddenly.

"Why, he is all right I imagine," answered the Russian slowly, then saw too late the trap into which he had been led. He should instantly have answered strongly for or against Baron Sternburg, for no Russian was neutral on the subject. But the American gave no sign that he noticed the point. For from that subject he jumped to the ancient and honorable subject of poker, asking if the game was popular with the Russians as a whole and telling several excellent poker stories. At the end of the repast the Russian was as much in the dark as at the beginning.

Only, reflected the Slav, those shoulders and that back have certainly been moulded by a tight fitting uniform. He has worn higher collars than the one he now wears, else why that line about his neck, the upper part so red and the lower so white?

IMMEDIATELY upon the departure of the Russian the tall American turned to his host, Thornton, of the big oil company.

"Now why do you suppose that bird came around here snooping and watching?" he asked.

"Suppose he wanted to find out what he could," grunted Thornton removing the pipe that always hung from his mouth.

"No," the tall one shook his head, "he had something else on his mind, for he kept glancing at his watch. To try him out I started to rise once as though going out. Did you notice how he speeded up the conversation? I'll tell you what, he's up to something. I'll bet you a dollar to the hole in a doughnut that he's had somebody down searching my stuff at the go-down."

Thornton shook his head.

"Wait a few minutes," cautioned the other.

Scarcely had the words left his mouth when there was a step on the veranda. There was a knock at the door and it opened slowly. A huge Negro, dressed in faded khaki trousers and a blue serge coat, his black face serene and untroubled, entered with his hat in his hand. There was something infinitely benevolent and peaceful in the air of this man. It was as though there had descended upon him such calm as millions of the followers of Buddha strive for but only few achieve.

"Suh, Captain," he began and his voice was low and exceedingly musical with a deep undertone of vibrancy. "Suh, Captain, Ah has to repoht that a gang o' these here Chino's done entered the warehouse where we has our stuff and puhsonally investigated every last can we all done put theah. Uccordin' to the captain's instructions Ah said nuthin', done nothin' and kep mahself scahce as hen's teeth, watchin' and obsuhvin' from a position in hiding," and the big Negro beamed on the two and waited.

THORNTON examined him curiously, studying the rounded fullness of the black man's face.

"What did I tell you?" Douglas said jubilantly and it was only then that Thornton came to life and sat bolt upright in his chair.

"But," he cried, "didn't they find all your stuff?"

The tall American and the Negro looked at each other. A smile passed between them.

"They missed it for the simple reason that it was not there," Douglas said.

"But where were the things?"

"They are not in Kalgan," Douglas answered simply. "They are enroute from Pekin, packed in a shipment of Chinese coffins."

And Thornton, reflecting on the size and carrying capacity of the large cedar logs that the Chinese cherishes for his last resting place, nodded sagely and admitted that the scheme was good.

In the little office behind his rented godown, the stupid faced Russian sat, a dissatisfied frown on his face.

"Can you get word to Hun Djurdok?" he asked his Chinese at last.

The man nodded.

"Get word to him immediately that he is to use all his horsemen to prevent this American reaching Urga alive."

Chapter III

"A Leopard Needs No Lantern"

THAT evening, when Douglas returned to Thornton's house, a stranger, tall, dark and with piercing eyes, rose swiftly from a lounge chair, clicked his heels and bowed. This man was young and looked like a falcon of the desert, so clear and high and courageous was his glance.

"This is Konat," said Thornton briefly; "he's a Kirgez Kazak."

Douglas was startled, for he had seen many Kazaks of that romantic tribe, the Kirghez, but never a man who bore himself as did this one. In the first place he was tall and built like a grayhound, his nose was more acquiline and he was full bearded, while the ordinary Kazak has only a few scanty hairs on his smooth cheeks. As the man stook quietly, waiting, there was something fine and high and well born about him. Douglas was not surprised to learn that the man had been an officer in a Cossack Regiment of the Imperial Bodyguard.

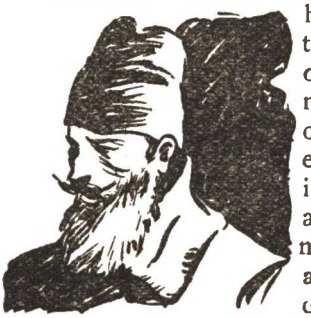
"He wants to go with you," explained Thornton; "he's a dependable bird and speaks several languages and dialects. He would come in handy."

"Why do you wish to join me?" Douglas addressed him for the first time, speaking in Russian.

Konat threw up his head and his eyes glowed.

"To kill Gorodoff," he answered simply enough.

"Gorodoff!" Douglas looked at the Kirghez officer in astonishment. Gorodoff was the murderous chief of the Bolshevist espionage force in Manchuria and Mongolia, a man who stopped at nothing, including torture and murder. Douglas himself cherished no love for Gorodoff, seeing that the brute had nearly done for his life on several occasions.



"Why Gorodoff especially?" he asked.

"He strangled my younger brother two months ago," Konat's voice was calm and matter of fact. It was simple enough; Gorodoff had killed his brother and now he must kill Gorodoff. It needed no argument nor any explanation.

"Konat is a good fighter," Thornton spoke up.

Konat sat very erect and straight in his chair as a man might sit in the saddle.

"We be warriors, thou and I," he said to Douglas.

"You have told him——" Douglas flashed an inquiry at Thornton, who nodded.

"Then you know that there will be much need of guile as well as fighting," Douglas spoke again in his halting Russian to Konat.

"Good!" replied the Khodja emphatically.

Then he turned to Thornton and spoke in guttural Mongolian.

THORTON took his pipe from his mouth, his eyes anxious, and asked a question or two, shaking his head at the replies. There was silence for a space until finally Douglas grew impatient.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"Not so good, not so good," Thornton's tone was worried, "Konat tells me that he saw some of Hun Djurka's men in town today."

"Yes?" Douglas raised an inquiring eye.

"He's the leader of all the bandits and cutthroats between here and Urga, mostly Chahars. He levies tribute on the caravans that leave here for Mongolia. You'll have to either pay him a thundering big tribute or fight your way through his gang."

"Chahars, eh?" Douglas's tone was a little thoughtful. He knew those people, warlike tribesmen living outside the Great Wall, sometimes fighting Chinese and sometimes hired by the Chinese to fight Mongolians. Hired by the Chinese! Something clicked in Douglas's brain as he remembered this. Of course, it was the old combination, Chinese Government and Bolsheviki allied against the Mongolians and the White Russians.

"Hun Djurka's men will be in conference with this Russian bird with the dumb face who was in to see us yesterday; what was his name? Kanine," he said slowly and thoughtfully. "Even now they have probably arranged to stop us."

Thornton nodded watching Douglas curiously.

"And they'll demand tribute in any case —whether they mean to give use safe passage or not," continued Douglas.

"They have," interrupted Thornton.

"How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars gold."

"I wouldn't pay ten thousand dollars gold for the whole of Monoglia with half of Tibet thrown in," stated Douglas flatly.

IT WAS Konat who suddenly changed his attention from Douglas to the door. His head went up much in the manner of a hunting cheetah sniffing the breeze. Then very noiselessly he uncoiled his long figure and leaped swiftly at the door, flinging it open so suddenly that the Chinese servant on the outside had scarcely time to straighten out from his listening attitude and turn to flee.

"Let him go," said Thornton sagely. "I've been suspicious of him for some time and I'll save a month's pay on him."

"But we'd better guard against that sort of stuff," commented Douglas and raised his voice, calling loudly for Carter.

There was a hurry of approaching footsteps and the huge form of the Negro stood in the doorway, benign and smiling. Konat looked up suddenly as the bulk of the black man filled the doorway. When he caught sight of the Negro's face he gasped sharply and stared, leaning forward.

"Was the captain callin'?" asked Carter mildly, his rich voice vibrant with an indescribable musical undertone.

"Yes; hereafter you guard the doorway while we do any talking. We don't want to have any one listening in on us. Understand?"

"Ah, shuah does, suh, Captain, ain't aimin' to let nobody hear nary word from what you all is sayin', yes sah, they'll shuah have to have a mighty long and powerful tin ear to hear anything while ole Carter's is standin' gyard," and the Negro chuckled. That deep-throated infectious chuckle brought smiles to every face in the room, except Konat's, for that tall Kirghez continued to regard Carter with something like wonder and awe showing in his face.

Douglas, seeing the expression on the face of Konat, allowed the flicker of a smile to pass over his lips and looked well content.

But Carter had something on his mind.

"Suh, Captain," he cleared his throat. "Ah shuah had a plumb nasty experience wid dese here people hereabouts. Ah stahts to go into mah little room, that theah room behint the warehouse when who does Ah see comin' out but a funny lookin' feller wid a fur hat on his haid, a funny lookin' fur hat wid earflaps laike our winteh fur caps.

"Ah says to him, 'How come you come moochin' outa my place widout permissio, Big Boy?' Ah says, speakin' very soft but he don't say nothin', no Sah, he jest natcherlly leaps at me wid a big ugly knife in his fist. 'That ain't no way to ack, at all, at all, Big Boy,' Ah says, and kinda pushes him in de face wid de flat o' my hand." Carter raised his hand to illustrate, an enormous hand more like a full sized ham.

"Yes, and what happened then?" Douglas was interested.

"Ain't nothin' happened, suh, Captain,

Ah musta pushed him a lil bit hahder than Ah intends for what does dis here boy do but curl up and pass out. Yas, sah, right dere on de floah, jest lettin' out one kinda gurglin' screech befoah he dies. Jest to be shuah he ain't makin' off wid any o' mah property I frisks him and heah's what Ah finds, suh, Captain." Carter handed over something he drew from his pocket.

Douglas took it and looked at the article silently, his eyes extremely thoughtful. Without a word he passed it over to Thornton. Thornton after giving one look at the object, dropped his pipe and swore profanely and picturesquely.

"Do you know what this means?" he cried.

Douglas nodded. Konat examined the object curiously and even his swarthy features turned pale.

"The ones who believe that a leopard needs no lantern are worse than the Bolsheviki," he stated quietly.

Carter stared at the three of them, puzzlement in his eyes.

"But you can't go into Mongolia with those people on your trail," Thornton was dogmatic. "It can't be done!"

"It has to be done," returned Douglas quietly.

"But you don't realize," Thornton was excited. "This is the symbol of the dugpas, the cruellest, the most blood thirsty, the most debased people in the world, the third and secret and sinister sect of Lamas, worshippers of the serpent, followers of the Bon. You can't go into Mongolia with the whole sect of the Black Lamas against you!"

"I know, I know," Douglas shrugged his shoulders, "but it has to be done, and that's that. I had a run in with them once before and came clean; I can do it again." Douglas frowned as though in pain at some unpleasant memory.

"Whether you were lucky once and got away with it has nothing to do with the case. If you have any lingering prejudice in favor of remaining alive and sane you'd better give up this idea of yours. You know, they don't necessarily kill people. Sometimes they turn them adrift, shrieking insane."

"I know," Douglas's face was grim.

Konat rose very swiftly and very lithely. In one stride he was at Douglas's side.

"We will face them together, thou and I," he asked simply and placed one hand on Douglas's bowed shoulder.

The American straightened out suddenly and smiled. "You're damn right we will!" he said, looking at the man who stood beside him.

"Suh, Captain," Carter's rich voice broke in. "Dese 'ere dog—dog—dogpapas ain't such a muchness. Ah shouah'd laike to push a few moah of 'em in the face."

Thornton shook his head, retrieving his pipe and grumbling to himself.

Chapter IV

GORODOFF TIGHTENS THE NET

THAT evening an exceedingly polite and excessively suave Chinese called on Douglas. The fellow spoke a species of broken English which was sufficiently intelligible to get across his purpose, which was to demand the ten thousand dollars in gold for safe passage for Douglas through to Urga.

"You demand this money, but I don't know who you are," Douglas was very brusque. "If your chief wants the money let him come to me and I will deal with him directly."

This was his last word and a Chinese left the house, trying very hard to dissemble his chagrin under a flow of polite words.

It was not more than three hours later that the Chinese messenger returned, this time accompanied by his chief. From the short time it took to locate and bring the leader, Douglas reasoned that his force could not be very far out on the road to Urga.

The Chahar leader was a hard looking specimen, a tall emaciated figure with enormous arms hanging below his knees, his face blackened by long exposure to wind and sun. An ugly scar ran transversely across

his cheek bone, taking in one of his eyes and leaving it blind. The ferocity and keenness of the remaining eye more than made up for its lack, however. Hun Djurka looked exactly the type of man one would not want to meet in a lonely street at night.

Thornton listened in amazement while Douglas bargained and chaffered like a very horse trader, knowing full well that Douglas had not the slightest intention of paying a cent on the tribute demanded. After an hour's wrangling the sum finally agreed upon was four thousand dollars in gold and the bandit chief left, well satisfied. More than satisfied for he was being paid from both sides, receiving also a large sum for preventing Douglas's trip to Urga. Through the hard bargaining and the intense interest that the tall American had displayed in reducing the price of the tribute, the Chahar leader was quite convinced that Douglas meant to pay him—which was the reason that the American had wrangled so long. He knew full well that nothing excites quite so much suspicion in the East as an easy acquiescence to the first sum demanded.

Thereafter there was activity in Kalgan, much hiring of camels and camel drivers, of porters and guards.

The Chahar leader, hearing daily reports of this activity, smiled to himself and bided his time at a camping place some twenty miles from the North Gate. When he heard, as it was meant that he should hear, that the tall American was making preparations to return to Pekin to secure the gold for the tribute, the Chahar already felt his grasp tightening on the good yellow metal.

THE advent of a new "foreign devil" is remarked in the city limits of Kalgan when such a foreign devil comes in a manner and style befitting such a one. But when the foreign devil elects to come in dressed in baggy blue denim, his face darkened with stain and his form enveloped in a dirty, quilted Chinese coat, shuffling along at the rear of a line of creaking Chinese carts, no attention is paid to him any more than to the other hundreds of coolies dressed in the same manner whom he so closely resembled.

Thus it was that Sergeant Miller came shuffling into Kalgan, remembering, moreover, to shuffle right up to the time he entered Thornton's quarters. Here the first thing he did was to ask for a "honest to Gawd cigarette."

"Captain, if anybody ever so much as tries to speak of rice and soy bean sauce in my presence again, I, sure as my name's Miller, will try to brain him. How do they live, these Chinks, on such belly wash?"

Douglas waited patiently until Miller had managed to put himself on the outside of a square meal and sat relaxed once more, with his outlook upon life less misanthropic and gloomy.

"Yes, sir, everythin's set. The stuff is ready. But I don't see how Lieutenant Hamilton came to get hisself captured so easy. Of course, the lieutenant ain't very practical——"

Miller would go no further in criticism of an officer and Douglas smiled, knowing the bespectacled and serious Hamilton, a typical engineer officer, a graduate of the military academy ranking among the first ten highest cadets in studies, a man who could run a quadratic equation to the dim recesses of its lair and conquer it, and who could make an isosceles triangle stand on its head and do tricks. And Hamilton was captured, held prisoner somewhere in the mysterious distances of Mongolia. With the bespectacled and serious Hamilton, a certain section of the general staff at Washington was very anxious to have, so anxious to have that they had sent Douglas to get them, trusting of course, that he would incidentally rescue Hamilton at the same time.

"Yes, sir," Miller answered another question, "everything's set down the line. We got the two cars backed up on the sidin' with two men guarding them. No news yet where Lieutenant Hamilton's bein' kept prisoner?" he asked.

"Not a word. We're going to head out and look for him. I'm just about set to start.

I'm waiting for one more of the gang to come here and camp on our trail. He's due in at any moment. As soon as he gets here where I can have an eye kept on him, we start."

"Who's he, sir?" asked Miller.

"Gorodoff, head of the Bolshevik secret service of Manchuria and Mongolia."

MILLER whistled softly.

"For the love a Mike! Is that guy still on the job?"

"Worse than ever."

"Is he the one you had the run in with in Pekin, the guy who said he'd kill you like a rabbit if he caught you in Mongolia?"

Douglas nodded, and Miller smiled.

"What was it you said to him, Captain? First catch your rabbit?"

Douglas nodded again but his face was serious. He remembered without any particular pleasure that meeting with Gorodoff in the Wagon-Lits Hotel, Gorodoff the unprepossessing Russian with angry, hot eyes which continually forbore to look directly at one. It was only a matter of time until Gorodoff arrived here in Kalgan.

It was the day following, that Douglas, seated drinking tea from a blue flowered bowl, at a tea house much frequented by Russians, looked up at a commotion at the door. He saw no less a person than Gorodoff himself, entering with several truculent looking Chinese armed with staves in his rear.

The Russian came directly to his table and stood before him, staring down fiercely, as though he would strike terror to the heart of the American by the very intensity of his gaze.

"Why hello, Gorodoff," Douglas greeted him easily. "Like the bad penny, you are always turning up somewhere."

"Bad for some people," growled the Russian, "I know all about *you,* Meestaire Douglas, I know what you are trying to do, Meestaire Douglas, and I tell you Meestaire Douglas, I will have you killed like that—*Pouf!*—if you do not turn back. I will have no mercy on you, Meestaire Douglas."

DOUGLAS leaned back in his chair and laughed as one frankly enjoying the scene.

The veins in the neck of the Russian swelled and corded themselves. His face turned white.

"Why look here," Douglas replied, "threatened men are supposed to live long. At the rate you have been threatening me ever since I met you I should live to be as old as Methuselah."

"Take care how you talk, Meestaire Douglas, take care! I have only to crook my finger and your life is forfeit."

"Well for God's sake crook it then!" exclaimed Douglas. "Twist your whole damn body as crooked as a dog's hind leg if it makes you any happier, but in the meantime don't annoy me with your far from welcome company. I'll grant you that if it were possible to kill a person by talking them to death, I'd have been dead long ago. Gorodoff, you are amusing, you should go on the stage, but your company gives me a pain in the neck. Run along and sell your papers and let me read mine in peace," and Douglas picked up a copy of the Shanghai *Times* he had been reading and began to study it as though Gorodoff did not exist.

Suddenly the paper was torn from his hands. Rising, an annoyed frown on his face, he faced the Russian who stood shaking his fist.

"*Svorloch!* (Garbage heap!)" shouted the Russian.

Douglas measured the distance between them very dispassionately, knowing full well that the epithet just hurled at him was a deadly insult to a Russian.

Gorodoff shouted again, and half turned as though to call the group of husky looking Chinese who stood by the door.

It was at that precise second that Douglas uncoiled his great length and drove with the full force of his body behind the blow, catching Gorodoff on the point of the jaw, so that the Russian whirled, throwing his arms upward wildly and fell backward and was silent. Douglas looked at the ef-

fect of the clean knockout he had administered, looked at it with detached and scientific interest, scarce glancing at the door where there was a shout and the stamp of advancing feet.

The Chinese came on, a compact group, then stopped suddenly staring with awe and fear at a figure that had materialized from the shadows in the back of the tea house.

It was the benign black face of Carter which appeared over Douglas's shoulder; Carter, his hands in his pocket, where he carried a heavy Colt automatic. Farther to the rear was Miller, still dressed in coolie clothing, but a threatening figure nevertheless.

THE group of Chinese suddenly lost their enthusiasm and began to filter backward through the door. The Russian Gorodoff, began to stir, moaning faintly on the floor.

Miller came forward and stared at him dubiously.

"That was sure a pretty knockout, Captain, but does the captain think it's wise to get this fellow so riled up? You know, sir, he's makin' this business a personal grudge fight against us now and is neglectin' everything else to run us down.

"Exactly what I want him to do," replied Douglas, and Miller staring at this chief of his, nodded to himself and was satisfied.

But it was as Miller said. Gorodoff, when he recovered consciousness, marshalled his men from all points of the compass and set them to guarding the exits from Kalgan, especially the camel trail that led northward a hundred miles or so to Urga, the capital of Outer Mongolia. He also set men to watching the camels so recently hired and the men hired to care for them. Over Douglas's pile of oil drums in the go-down he set an especially heavy and an especially well secreted guard.

These matters being arranged, he sat down grimly to await the return of the American from Pekin, whence he had gone for the tribute money, knowing full well that Douglas could not get his supplies and camel train through the fine network of spies he had set about him.

Chapter V

THE DEATH BY THE BRONZE SKULL

THE train for Pekin carried not only Douglas but it carried Carter as well, a thing which excited no comment seeing that it was an accepted fact that the huge Negro was the tall white man's servant. Also, farther back in the train, the presence of an unobtrusive coolie in a certain crowded third class car caused no remark, even though that coolie was dumb and could only make signs when spoken to, a hard pose for Miller to maintain. Konat swaggered aboard another car without looking to right or left, only he took pains to show no recognition of Douglas while they were on the train.

Tickets had been bought for Pekin. But the train had not progressed more than twenty miles from Kalgan when the four men, seizing their opportunity, lost themselves among the polyglot crowd at a small way station and the train went on without them.

The four gathered at the far end of the station and watched the lessening tail light of the last car as it disappeared in the darkness. It was Miller who took charge, leading the way back along the track to the end of a small siding. Here two ghostly figures loomed up threateningly.

"It's only us," whispered Miller huskily and the two figures resolved themselves into the forms of two men, dressed in Chinese costume. They were two soldiers who had been detailed from the American infantry regiment at Tientsin, Corporal King and Sergeant Rethers.

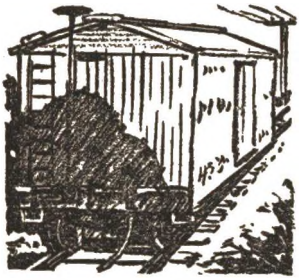
"Sure glad you all turned up," whispered King. "There's been a funny lookin' bird, dressed in a fur hat and kinda queer clothes, been hangin' around all afternoon. We chased him away twice and still he come back. I was all for policin' up the landscape with him, but Rethers here, he says to leave him be, so I let him live."

Douglas, worried, asked about his costume. The two gave further details. Konat listened impassively as Douglas told him about the mysterious stranger.

"Do you suppose it could be one of the dugpas?" he asked Konat finally.

"Of course; from the description it is

a Mongolian. No mongol would be interested in two baggage cars otherwise. Yes, it is undoubtedly the dugpas. They are like hounds on the trail, impossible to shake off once they are started. Not for nothing are they called the 'smellers of blood'," concluded Konat.



But there was little time to worry about this now. The two baggage cars loomed up before them, the small baggage cars in use on the Chinese railways. Very swiftly and very silently they all got to work, Douglas first sending out Konat as sentinel to warn them of any intruders.

RAMPS already cut and fitted were brought forth from the cars and set up. Down these were eased two small American cars of a popular and serviceable make. From the interior of the baggage car boxes and bales were handed out and passed quickly from hand to hand and the two automobiles loaded. The whole operation did not consume more than half an hour. The cars stood ready, loaded with food and ammuntion, with oil and gas and all manner of supplies necessary to the work in hand.

"I shore as hell hate to start these engines roarin' in this here quiet village," Sergeant Rethers remarked, "but I guess there's no help for it."

"They'll think it's one o' their heathen gods on a jamboree, or the second comin' o' Buddha hisself," comforted Miller. "Though I don't know as they believe in any second comin' o' the great god Buddha Do these heathens figger on a second visit from the old boy, Captain?"

"I don't know if it's a second coming they believe in, but they think another Buddha will appear sometime. And they figure, strangely enough, that he's coming from the West. They even have statues of him in their temples and they always show him sitting on a chair, like a white man, not squatting like one of their own race."

"And very sensible of them, too," nodded Miller, as he fussed with the packages of one of the cars. "They sure as hell need a little pep in this here religion o' theirs ——" But the attention of the group was directed elsewhere.

OUT in the darkness where Konat had been posted as sentinel, there came the sound of a struggle. Grunting and whining and the heaving and threshing of bodies in conflict came from the shadows. Douglas, followed by the rest, hurried toward the sound, flash lamp in hand.

Into the glow of the electric torch there stepped Konat, half dragging and half leading a stumbling figure which he held in a tight grip.

It was a man in Thibetan costume, a Mongol, his clothing bearing resemblance to the clothing of a Buddhist monk.

"I caught him spying out there," said Konat, breathing hard, "and meant to kill him but I thought that he might yield us some information."

"Good!" nodded Douglas. "Ask him who sent him and what he is doing here."

Konat addressed some word in Mongolian to the captive who looked as though water had never touched his skin in a lifetime. But the man stared sullenly up from under a thatch of greasy hair and refused to reply. Konat shook him until his teeth rattled in his head but his sullen silence continued.

"Tell this fellow," said Douglas to Konat, "that he must speak. Tell him I have sent for a powerful spirit who will rend him from limb to limb and carry his scattered fragments to the lowest depths of the earth where they will be immured for centuries."

KONAT looked a little startled but spoke seriously and heavily to the man. The fellow shook his head, somewhat impressed however.

"Tell him to watch, that this demon who obeys our word is coming even now. It will come from behind that car."

The whole group stared where Douglas pointed. Suddenly they all drew back affrighted. The prisoner screamed faintly and dropped grovelling on the ground.

For advancing toward them out of the darkness was a horrible form. Its face glowed with a strange greenish colored light that wavered and flickered until the terrible features seemed to recede and advance. At either side of the head waved an enormous pair of hands shimmering with the same unearthly light.

It was enough for the prisoner. He begged Konat for mercy, shielding his facef rom the horrible vision which steadily advanced upon him.

Douglas spoke and the vision disappeared. The man gained a little courage though he continued to gaze in fright at the place whence the vision of the demon had come. Carter, wiping the phosphorescent paint from his face and hands, went on with his arranging of the stores in the rear of one of the cars.

FROM Konat came a guttural series of questions which the man answered. The catechism was soon finished. Konat shook his head at Douglas.

"It is as we feared. This one here," he kicked the man lightly with his foot, "has told me all that he knows. The dugpas, the priests of the Bonpa, are seeking us. They are desirous of taking you alive in revenge for something you have done to them. They know by now that these supplies of ours are here, as this man has already sent them word. They are working with the Russian Bolsheviki. The man to whom they report

is a Russian and sits with their leader. His name is Akasoff as nearly as I can make out. The Chahars have promised to deliver you alive to the dugpas after you have paid the tribute and been captured."

There was a silence as Douglas digested this information. Then he looked up quickly.

"Ask him," he directed, "where Hamilton can be found."

Konat commenced anew his guttural questioning. The dugpa looked sullen and almost frightened. He refused to answer. Konat's voice rose. The dugpa nodded at last and said something, almost in a whisper.

The tall Kirghez turned to Douglas in excitement.

"He says that Hamilton is a prisoner of the dugpas and is somewhere not very far from here. He is still alive but is going to be put to death."

Douglas, gripping himself to maintain an outward calm, asked Konat another question.

There was more guttural question and answer.

"He says," answered Konat, "that he is at the monastery of Boro Nor and——" Konat's face flushed with excitement, "that the dugpas are preparing him for the Death by the Bronze Skull!"

Again striving to keep the tremor of excitement out of his voice Douglas asked another question.

"He says," Konat replied after speaking with the dugpa, "that they will give him to the Bronze Skull at sunset day after tomorrow."

"In other words we have to get to Boro Nor as rapidly as possible," returned Douglas decisively. "We've got nearly two hundred miles of desert to negotiate before we get there. Thank God we know where he is, anyway! What will we do with this bird?" he looked at the dugpa. "Better search him first, anyway."

THERE was little found on the man, except a short, very sharp, stabbing knife and a copper plaque hung suspended on a dirty string around his neck.

Konat held this up. "See!" he exclaimed. "It is the sign of the Bonpa, look at the two serpents intertwined around the leopard's head!"

It was the same sort of symbol that Carter had found on the body of the man whom he had discovered searching his room at Kalgan. Douglas nodded thoughtfully, and gazed over toward the cars.

"All tuned up and ready, sir," sang out Sergeant Rethers, sitting at his wheel, and Corporal King nodded in confirmation from the driver's seat of the other car.

"We can't leave this fellow behind to give information about us—we'll have to

drag him along," said Douglas, studying the dugpa thoughtfully. "Tie him up and put him in the bottom of one of the cars. We'll dump him out in the desert somewhere, that sort of rat can live anywhere."

And so it was done. Douglas, Konat and the driver, Sergeant Rethers, occupied the first car, Douglas sitting with the driver. In the second car rode Miller and Corporal King while Carter, who had managed to scrape most of the luminous paint from his face, guarded the prisoner in the rear.

With a rattle and roar the cars woke into life and suddenly the leading one moved out, followed by the second. To the surprise of Miller sitting in the rear auto, the car containing Douglas, headed back along the railway toward Kalgan again.

Where they were going no one in that party knew except Douglas,

The road was deserted and they made good progress through the night in spite of the roughness of the going, Chinese thoroughfares not being remarkable for smoothness. Once the lights of the leading car illumined the front of some Mongol yurta planted like a huge dome-shaped beehive along the side of the way and again they passed through a silent and dark Chinese village, seeing naught but the frightened face of a native framed for a single instant in a doorway.

"You are returning to Kalgan?" Konat asked leaning forward to speak to Douglas.

"No, around it."

AS THEY approached the city Douglas began to search the side of the road with his eyes. Soon he found that for which he sought, an almost obliterated track which led off to the right and to the northward.

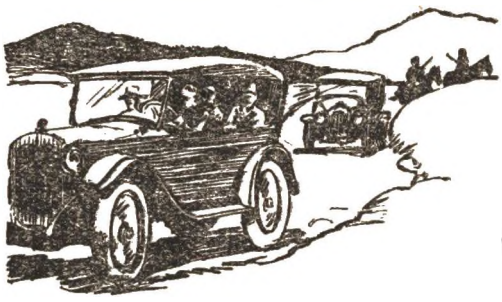
As his car turned in to follow the new road, he looked down the main road toward Kalgan. The headlights of the second auto lighted up this main road for sixty or seventy yards. Full in the glare of the lights rode two blue coated Chahar troopers,

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERY OF THE WATCH TOWER

DOUGLAS heard a low pleased chuckle behind him as he sighted the two Chahar troopers and turned to see Konat's face lighted up with the joy of battle. The two troopers were swallowed up in the darkness as the second car turned in. Behind them they heard a rifle shot and a bullet whined overhead. The side road was, if anything, even more vile than the main road and the cars strained and heaved over gullies and ruts so that it was impossible to make much speed.

Douglas kept going, hoping that the two



Chahars were nothing but scouts. This proved to be the case, as there was no pursuit and no more shots were fired.

But he looked none too pleased as he faced toward the front again. The Chahar scouts would undoubtedly race back and give the alarm which meant that stronger forces would come up. The worst of it was that his return toward Kalgan, and his attempt to get around the city and out into the open desert, was discovered.

The cars continued to strain and plunge through the bad going, while the drivers swore, picturesquely and whole heartedly. Konat gave no heed to such small difficulties as a bad road bed, he was happy at the prospect of fighting. Above the noise of the motor Douglas heard him singing, or rather chanting, a wild and savage air, which fitted in very well with the dark night and the sky overcast with scudding black clouds.

"Igor's brave army will rise no more, no more," sang Konat.

"Far has the falcon flown, driving the birds by the sea,
The shields of the vanguard are shivered,
The eagles scream, calling the beasts to a feast of bones
Igor's brave army will rise no more, no more."

He chanted the words defiantly, his head upflung, all the fighting spirit of his race afire.

Sergeant Rethers, occupied with keeping his car from wracking itself to pieces, was in no mood to appreciate music.

"If that dumb bird wants to sing, why don't he hire himself a hall?" he growled, bent low over his wheel.

ANOTHER mile of hard going brought them into a cross road. From Kalgan and heading toward the northeast, ran a good road. Douglas indicated this, watching toward Kalgan as Rethers slowed up the car.

Konat stopped his singing long enough to lean forward.

"That other road goes to Urga," he stated, "the road to Urga runs northwest. This is the road that goes to the Monastery of Boro Nor."

"I know," nodded Douglas. "We go to the monastery of Boro Nor."

Konat sank back content. As for Sergeant Rethers, it was all one to him whether he went to Boro Nor or Timbuctoo, and he turned to the northeast.

"How far is this here place, Captain?" he asked as the car gathered speed on the better road.

"About one hundred and ninety miles," but knowing what was on Rethers's mind he added, "but we eat before we get there, and maybe sleep."

Rethers looked pleased.

It was long after midnight when finally they drew up to a Chinese *gugun,* a fortified trading post. The great gate swung on one hinge and there was no sign of life anywhere. Searching the place with their flashlights, they found it tenantless as far as they could discover. It was built in the form of a stockade and inside the high walls were fighting platforms to protect the merchandise. In the center of the enclosure stood a watch tower of stone, its loopholes protected by wooded shutters.

The night had grown cold, as nights generally are in that high elevation and they were all glad to get down and stretch their limbs when finally the cars were run into the compound. The great gate was closed and barred.

In one of the shops an earthen fireplace was found and a welcome blaze was soon going. Carter bustled around cheerfully, with some pots and pans. In a very short while he had concocted a warm and tasteful stew of canned meats, dried onions and potatoes. With hard bread, canned peaches and hot coffee to top it off the spirits of the crowd were soon in a cheerful state of contentment. From the open front of the booth they could see out into the compound and overlook the entrance gate. To make assurance doubly sure, Douglas made another tour of the place, inspecting the walls. They were solidly built. Not even a mouse could find its way through. The peace loving Chinese traders who built them had no illusions concerning bandits, and had taken no chances.

AT THE last he inspected the watch tower, followed by Konat, who carried his sword in hand as they ascended the narrow, spiral staircase, its short, stone steps unprotected by any guard rail so that it had to be negotiated carefully. The steps were thick with dust and cobwebs.

"No one has been up this stairway for many months," remarked Douglas flashing his torch on the undisturbed expanse of dust which covered each step. Konat agreed, but they explored the tower nevertheless, climbing up to the topmost platform under the roof whence they peered out through the loopholes. Here they could see the light of the fire far down below in the courtyard and the shadows of the men moving about.

The heavy wooden shutters were closed and, with the officer's instinct to leave other people's property in a foreign country in the same state in which they found it, the two closed the shutters again carefully before descending. It had taken some expenditure of labor to move the clumsy arrangements on their stiff hinges.

All were seated comfortably about the fire when they returned, except Corporal King, whose tour of guard duty it was. He had taken post near the gate of the compound, armed with an automatic pistol. It was also his duty to be responsible for the prisoner, the evil faced monk, who was securely tied and locked in a small room they had found near the gate. Attempts to give the Mongolian food had been met with snarls of hatred, the man's red-lidded eyes

looking like those of some beast of prey as he glowered at them.

"Let him alone, he'll get hungry before long," Miller was philosophical about the matter. "He needs a bath worse'n he needs chow."

Konat brought out his sabre and oiled and polished it lovingly, crooning softly to himself the while in some unknown tongue. They sat around the fire at ease, pipes and cigarettes going, belts loosened and comfort and well being writ large on everyone's features.

"Now this ain't so bad," admitted Sergeant Miller; "it's something like soldierin'," and the rest nodded, well satisfied. All except Douglas, who peered into the night, thinking of the difficulties ahead. He wondered if all the scattered threads of his plans would materialize into the definite warp and woof of a completed task, wondered if young Hamilton's life would be spared until he could get there.

Konat rolled back luxuriously, his sword once more in its sheath and crooned a Sart love song of such mournful cadence that Miller shook his head and Sergeant Rethers grunted. It was Carter who instilled a more cheerful note into the gathering, as he chanted while he cleaned up the pots and pans.

"The jedge asked me what Ah was a-doin'
in the mawnin', in the mawnin',
Standin' in a crap game doin' no harm,
mah honey, mah sweet thing,
The jedge and the jury they say to me,
You killed three niggers in the first degree.
Mah heart stopped!"

Carter seemed cheerful enough about it at that. Konat stopped his attempts at song and watched the big Negro, marvelling as the firelight played upon the black face.

DOUGLAS studied his map, Miller watching him in silence for a space.

"Does the captain think that gang o' murderin' Chahars will catch up with us?" he asked.

"I don't know. We've made about sixty miles tonight. They'll have to hustle to do it. But those little Mongol ponies can cover almost unbelievable distances."

Douglas did not look particularly worried as he sat on his blanket. This cold night on the vast steppes of Asia, where there was shelter of a sort from the wind, grateful heat from the fire, and where his men were well fed and had tobacco.

Yet to him alone was a quiet spirit denied. For to the leader, to the one responsible for success or failure, serenity is denied. That is one of the penalties of leadership.

Under his urge the men had already brought the rifles from the car, light automatic rifles of the new model, each one of which could pour a rapid and devastating fire. Konat had been issued one of these and taught to manipulate it and seemed well content. The ammunition clips had been stacked in easy reach and Douglas could think of nothing else before trying a few hours sleep.

"There are many evil things said of the monastery of Boro Nor," spoke up Konat, out of a long silence. But to Douglas he would vouch no further information, saying that he did not know, it might only be rumor. No, he had never been there. No, he was vague on the question of the Bronze Skull, men talked and you could place no dependence on their talk. And Konat withdrew into thoughtful silence.

SERGEANT MILLER began to yawn sleepily and looked over at Douglas at the opposite side of the fire, meaning to ask him if there was anything further to do before turning in. But the words did not come. He stared at the captain curiously.

For Douglas, who had been leaning back against the box, suddenly sat bolt upright. He was staring aloft at the watch tower. Miller followed the direction of his glance and froze into immobility.

Konat was the next to sense something out of the ordinary. When his gaze followed the eyes of the other two he leaped silently to his feet, in that peculiarly feline way he

had, and swiftly drew his sword from its scabbard so that the blade gleamed dull red in the firelight.

The others by this time were aroused. The silence was broken at last by the voice of Carter.

" 'Fore Gawd!" breathed the Negro, "dis heah place is haunted!"

High up in the tower the men below watched fascinated as one of the heavy wooden shutters slowly, silently and steadily opened from the inside. It was uncanny and weird, in that deserted place.

Then as they watched, they saw a gleam of something white against the darkness of the shutter, something that resolved itself into a hand, pushing steadily and relentlessly. The hand was withdrawn. The opened loophole stared down at them dark and silent. They felt the scrutiny of unseen eyes upon them and the feeling was not pleasant.

Chapter VII

ENEMIES WITHIN AND WITHOUT

THE six men around the fire stared at each other in wonder and silence, a silence which was broken at last by Douglas.

"There's bears in them there mountains," he quoted. "Has anybody seen my flashlight?" his voice was intentionally practical and matter of fact.

It brought a little sanity into the group, a small group of men suddenly made panicky and superstitious by the totally unexpected and inexplicable. In that deserted place, far from human habitation, the sensation of eeriness was increased tenfold.

But Douglas, his flashlight found, started toward the entrance to the tower. Miller carefully drawing his pistol from its holster and releasing the safety catch, followed him while the others crowded behind.

The tower was closed as he and Konat had left it. Flinging it open, he looked into the interior, flashing his light on the narrow stone steps that wound up into the obscurity above and lost themselves in impenetrable darkness. The dust on the steps had been so thoroughly disturbed by the passage of himself and Konat on their first visit to the tower that little could be told of any new foot prints.

There was nothing for it but to mount, and up they went, Douglas leading with the flashlight which cast a swiftly moving circle of light here and there, on beams and walls and steps. The stairway wound ever upward, its highest point always bathed in darkness. Slowly and carefully Douglas had made his way nearly half way to the top when the whole crowd froze into immobility again.

A shot rang out from below, near the gate.

"The Chahars!" Miller grunted and turned to descend toward the sound, looking almost relieved as he moved away from the mystery and the silence of that dark tower rearing its bulk above him. The other men were no less relieved and piled down the stairway after him, Douglas in the rear was so acutely worried by the new development, that for a moment he forgot the unsolved riddle above him.

Hurrying to the gate, they found Cor-

poral King staring through a small port-hole, into the darkness that lay beyond the entrance.

"There's somebody out there!" he whispered. "I seen two or three people and blazed away at one, but I dunno whether I got him or not; anyway they dropped out of sight."

ABOVE them stretched the platform from which the defenders could protect the gate against attack. Douglas went to the ladder and climbed quickly up, peering out into the darkness from over the wall. His hand waved down to the men waiting below, commanding silence. There in the stillness he listened and watched.

So dark was the night that he could see nothing, only vague shadows that might or might not have been living beings. It is the peculiarity of these vague, night-seen shadows that the longer one looks at them, the more do they seem invested with movement and form. And it was so in this case and Douglas was about to give up his attempt when suddenly he ducked his head.

Something had whirred past him out of the gloom, whirred silently and swiftly and so near his head that he felt the air from its passage. Whatever it was, seemed charged with vicious import, so deadly was its silent flight.

Miller called from below and went forward near the fire, picking something up. It was an arrow as Douglas could see before he started down the ladder to the ground. Examining it they found it to be a steel pointed Mongolian arrow of hard dark wood, marked with fine lines in red.

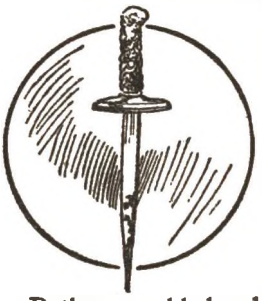
"Chahar," announced Konat briefly after one look at it. The rest of the group stood around silently regarding it.

FROM the gate, where Corporal King still stood on post, came a low excited shout. Douglas hurried toward him. King pointed silently into the small room at the left of the gate, where they had confined the Mongolian monk. Flashing his light into the place, Douglas repressed a gasp of amazement.

For the Mongolian, his body slumped grotesquely, a horribly ferocious leer on his face, was dead, a long handled knife sticking through his chest with the point coming out through his back.

"That was done while we was lookin' up at you on the platform there——" Corporal King looked plainly astonished and a little apprehensive, staring about him as he spoke. "Why, Captain, whoever done that couldn't have been more'n ten feet behind me!"

"That's the queerest part of the whole affair," Douglas stared thoughtfully at the body of the Mongolian. "Why should they have killed him, one of their own men? Well," he reflected aloud, "there's evidently some one in this place whom we haven't found. Also, there is some one or many ones outside. We've got to watch our step carefully. Two of us will have to be on guard all the time while the others sleep. Otherwise, they will wear us out. But first we've got to investigate the tower. Konat and I will look into that, Miller stay with Corporal King at the gate, Carter and Sergeant Rethers stay with the guns near the tower. Keep your eyes open so that no one slips up behind and sticks a knife into you."



Rethers nodded soberly, Carter peered into the darkness surrounding them and edged over nearer the fire. Miller took up his position near Corporal King at the gate, much to the obvious relief of the good corporal whose nerves had been rather shattered by the murder done silently and mercilessly so near his unconscious back.

With Konat behind him, sword in hand, Douglas mounted the tower stair case again, lighting up the gloom above as well as he could by means of the small torchlight. The two went up steadily, pausing now and again to study the dust on the steps, a study which gave them no information. The tower was silent as the tomb. No sound came from outside, although Douglas paused to listen, being apprehensive for new developments.

As they neared the last and highest platform of the structure, Douglas loosened his pistol in its holster, unbuttoning the flap so that the weapon would be near to hand. He

paused a second with Konat, and they both stood and listened a moment before mounting the last few steps which led into the tower room.

All was silent. The two men glanced at each other and Douglas strode up the last few steps. Flashing his light into the room before he entered, he held the light to one side of his body and slid through the doorway, quickly followed by Konat.

Hither and yon about the floor he flashed the light, finally examining the walls and roof. There was no one there, and no sign of anyone having been there.

"I think we all must have imagined seeing some one up here," stated Douglas.

Konat shrugged his shoulders and pointed at the shutter which hung wide open on its hinges.

"We left that closed," he said quietly.

BEFORE descending again, Douglas took a long look out the opened loophole, staring at the velvet blackness of the night which covered the plains like a heavy shroud. Nothing could be seen in the darkness, nothing except the small fire below in the compound. Near its blaze he could see the figures of Carter and Sergeant Rethers. In the dim radiance cast by the flame it was barely possible to see at the gate those other two, Sergeant Miller and Corporal King.

Douglas and Konat descended the stairs as quickly as possible and found themselves in the compound again, with something very like relief evident on their faces.

"Anybody there?" asked Sergeant Rethers.

The two shook their heads. Rethers and Carter looked dumfounded, Carter casting a glance of something very much like superstitious terror at the dark bulk of the tower reared above him.

When the two from the tower approached King and Douglas at the gate they found them both listening intently. Sergeant Miller raised a warning hand as he peered through the small loophole in the gate.

Douglas waited for several minutes, he and Konat straining their ears. Suddenly Douglas leaned forward the better to hear. There was an indefinite rustling sound from the outside. It might have been the breeze or it might have been the passage of many feet in the dry grass. A stir and whisper went on around them outside the stockade.

Raising his head, he found Konat looking at him. Both men nodded.

There were enemies outside.

Chapter VIII

THE STRANGER IN THEIR MIDST

TO DOUGLAS the prospect seemed none too bright. The dark region outside the stockade was filled with unknown enemies, while inside was a mysterious person who seemed able to move and slay at will.

True to training, however, he kept his worries to himself and his orders came, quick and decisively. They had the effect of sending Sergeant Rethers hurrying to one of the cars where he worked feverishly at detaching a small but powerful searchlight from the windshield. The car was pushed forward by hand up near the gate and a length of wire run out with the searchlight. Sergeant Miller brought forward in the meantime a box filled with small, lemon-shaped balls of steel. These were carried up on the platform above the gate. The searchlight was tested on the ground, then extinguished and brought up likewise. Everyone, except Konat, was provided with two of the steel balls.

To Konat was given the task of bringing up the automatic rifles and ammunition, which he did, working at a feverish pace.

The work was done silently, and while Douglas waited, he listened to the sounds in the darkness outside the gate. By the time the searchlight was ready he had fairly well located the source of most of the activity, which seemed to be well concentrated in the vicinity of the gate.

"Are you all ready?" he whispered and heard the low voiced assents.

"Here goes!" he whispered and turned the searchlight full on, directing it out from the gate about ten yards.

The bright glare lit up a suddenly startled group of Chahars who were doing something with a heavy beam, getting ready, as a matter of fact, to ram the none-too-strong-gate.

As the searchlight beam caught them,

each one of the four men on the platform above the gate released a catch on the steel balls and brought them up in a peculiar over-hand motion of the arm, very much as a cricketer throws the ball. Four steel objects described a graceful curve through the air landing amongst the Chahars, who seemed confused and uncertain. There was a few seconds' awful silence, followed by four explosions. Back on the platform four arms came up again; again four steel balls hurtled through the air; again there were four heavy explosions. The air was filled with dust and the sounds of men screaming and running. The hand grenades had created terrible havoc in that crowded gang of Chahars.

The searchlight picked them up as they fled, leaving many silent figures on the ground. Miller started to bring his automatic rifle into action when Douglas called to him. The enemy had been driven off, there was no use wasting ammunition on them, and still more important, in disclosing the presence of the guns.

From afar off they heard the sound of galloping horses growing gradually fainter in the distance and then all was silent.

The men on the platform were jubilant.

"Did you see them babies run?" chuckled Miller. "We kinda gumfoozled 'em that time!"

"This here captain o' yourn ain't so dumb at that," whispered Sergeant Rethers.

"He's dumb, yeh, he's dumb like a fox."

And so they whispered among themselves as they scanned the ground in front of the walls for more enemies. Konat joined Douglas, humming happily under his breath as he saw the damage done by the hand grenades.

CARTER'S jubilation was tempered by the exceeding queerness of things that had been happening in the compound. He turned around to cast another apprehensive look at the tower reared up behind them, dark and forbidding. As he turned he gasped and clutched the arm of Sergeant Rethers.

"Fo' Gawd, do you all see what Ah sees?" he asked, his voice trembling.

Rethers turned.

"Well, for crying out loud!" he snorted, then called to Douglas. "Captain, look what the cat dragged in—down there by the fire!"

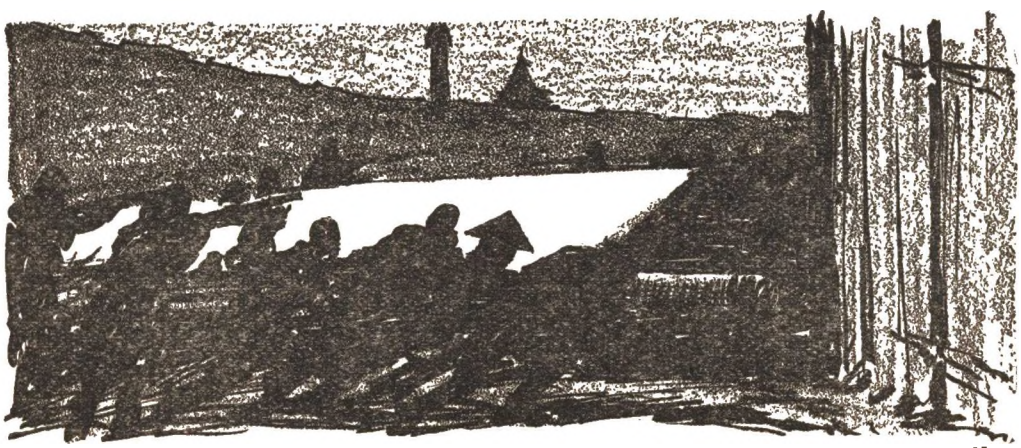
By this time they all had turned and grew exceedingly silent at what they saw. For there, standing near the fire, was what appeared to be a boy of sixteen or eighteen years. Miller swore and drew his pistol, leaping down from the platform and advancing on the strange new arrival. The rest followed.

What they closed in on was a rather good looking, somewhat effeminate featured young man with smooth cheeks and very large and rather haunting eyes. He was dressed in breeches and boots and a sheepskin coat, and wore on his head one of the Mongol hats with their big ear flaps sticking up like the ears of an alert hound.

The stranger stood very straight, looking a little frightened at the threatening mien of Miller and the gun he so carelessly waved about.

"I don't savvy his lingo," Miller confessed to Douglas as he arrived.

"Russki?" asked Douglas.



The effect was instantaneous. The stranger broke into a volley of exceedingly rapid fire Russian delivered in a hysterical rather strained voice and with hands fluttering nervously.

It came almost too fast for Douglas. It was Konat who came to the rescue, stopping the flood of oratory by asking questions. Question and answer succeeded each other in Russian while Douglas waited.

"What's it all about?" he asked at last.

THE stranger turned to him with outflung hands and Douglas found something rather attractive in the gesture, but Konat interrupted the new outpouring of passionate language to translate.

"He says that he has lost his way from a trading caravan, that he has been two days without food and that he came here, seeing that we were white men, hoping that we would shelter him and give him food."

"Who is he?"

"He says his name is Kamenev."

"Who was his father?"

"He says that his father is a White officer serving with Baron Sternburg, that he is trying to rejoin him at Urga."

"How did he get in here?" asked Douglas.

"It was simple enough," said Konat. "He was here when we arrived and hid underneath a counter in one of the trading booths."

Douglas looked at the hands of the young man.

"Ask him if he was up in the tower at any time."

"He says no."

"Ask him if he knows who was up there."

"He says no, that he has seen no one except us."

"Does he know who murdered the Mongolian?"

"No, he saw no one."

"All right, we'll see that he has some chow," and Douglas explained the situation to Carter.

"Yas, sah, Ah'll shore get that poor chile sompin, sho, sho, two days widout nothin' to eat, sho, sho," and Carter bustled away clucking sympathetically as he fussed among his boxes and bags.

IT WAS Sergeant Rethers's turn to relieve King on guard. Douglas decided to keep two men on duty and took the first tour himself. Miller and King rolled up in their blankets and slept immediately. Konat watched the fire for a few minutes and then he curled up and went to sleep. Douglas prowled around the compound, listening and looking. Carter put a frying pan on the fire and worked away, while the young Russian watched him with hungry eyes.

On his inspection of the place, Douglas retrieved the knife that had killed the Mongol monk and brought it to the fire, wiping it on the earth as he sat down.

By now Carter had prepared something to eat and handed a heaping mess kit to the starving Russian who fell to like a wolf, finally ceasing with a sigh of repletion.

Then in his slow Russian, Douglas began to question the new arrival.

"The trading caravan you were with, it traveled to Kalgan?"

"Yes," the young man answered eagerly, "four days ago."

"I see," agreed Douglas, "and it traveled in this direction—toward Boro Nor?"

"Yes, yes, toward Boro Nor."

"How did you happen to get separated from it?" went on Douglas.

"Why, you see, it was this way——" The young man sought for words, then went on with a rush. "I walked away from them while they were halted and when I returned they were gone."

"But a caravan travels very slowly," suggested Douglas, "you could very easily have caught up with them."

The Russian seemed nonplussed for a second then started to explain that he had walked very far away.

"The truth of the matter is," said Douglas gently, "that no caravans go to Boro Nor from Kalgan, and moreover, no caravan left Kalgan four days ago, nor four weeks

ago, as I happen to know. Why did you tell that story?"

The Russian was silent and confused for a space and then answered in a low voice.

"I had to tell some plausible story, I was afraid of you and your men."

"Then why did you say that you were not in the tower?"

"How did you know that?" the Russian looked startled.

Douglas glanced at the white hand of the stranger.

"It was your hand and no other that I saw moving the shutter."

The Russian seemed to shrink within himself, into his eyes crept a look of fear.

"And why did you kill the Mongol priest?"

"I did not do that!" the fellow replied very passionately.

Douglas leaned forward very quickly and pulled aside the sheepskin coat worn by the young stranger. On his belt was a sheath for a knife. It was of the same size as the knife Douglas held, and the sheath was empty.

THE Russian bent his head. Douglas could not tell whether or not he was crying but he thought he saw the glint of tears.

"And why," he went on gently, "are you masquerading in men's clothes?"

"You are a devil," the voice of the Russian explained passionately, and a very beautiful girl suddenly broke into a storm of weeping.

Carter had finished cleaning up his culinary arrangements.

"Get some sleep, Carter," admonished Douglas, "you'll need it tomorrow."

"Foh Gawd, Captain, Ah sho' hates to sleep around this heah spooky joint. 'Pears to me laike somebody'll come along and slip a knife into ole Cahter's ribs when he's dreamin'."

"You go to sleep and I'll see that no one bothers you," and Carter went away, dragging his blankets. He found a place and rolled up, grunting. It was not two minutes before his breath came evenly and regularly.

The moon had come up and the compound was bathed in its soft light. The fire had died down and Douglas replenished it with some branches until the sparks rose high.

The girl wept, silently and heartbrokenly, so that it was painful to hear her. Very quietly Douglas waited until she should get over her tears, knowing full well that a woman is always the better for them when she is overstrained.

CHAPTER IX

THE BONPA WARNING

FROM somewhere in the recesses of her sheepskin jacket the Russian girl brought forth a powder puff and began to repair the ravages of her weeping. Douglas judged from this infallible sign that the patient had recovered and that all was well once more.

In a country where women can be as full of deadly potentialities as men, Douglas was inclined to take no chances on this mysterious visitor. That she had lied was self evident from the start but what her object was in lying he could not tell and therefore set himself to find out.

"I suppose you think I am terrible," she remarked, her voice showing that she had recovered her poise.

"Yes," replied Douglas.

His answer took her completely by surprise.

"But I am not," she answered after a moment, with a show of spirit.

Douglas said nothing, waiting for her to prove her point.

"I will be perfectly frank with you," she said at last, a little thoughtfully. Douglas sighed a little, knowing full well that when a woman says that, it is high time to be especially wary.

"You had best be frank," he informed her. "I am not disposed to risk the lives of my men by misplaced kindness to a very suspicious stranger."

Her woman's intuition told her that he meant what he said. Her voice was more humble as she began to speak.

"It is true what I told you, that my father was an officer in the Imperial Army and naturally a White, after the Revolution. But my mother and I were captured and held by the Bolsheviki after we had fled

to Siberia. My father is somewhere in Mongolia fighting. My mother died—I escaped and since then I have been seeking my father. I sold my last jewel in Kalgan and bought a horse. Riding this animal I went forth, hoping to make my way to Urga. But I lost the road. And I was pursued by Mongolians sent to seek me, Mongolians of a certain Lamaistic sect, the followers of the Bonpa, who are allied with the Bolsheviki. I fled here. They captured my horse and I hid in this place. When you came with your men I feared you, thinking you might be Bolsheviki. I went up into the tower to hide from you and tried to

watch you through the loophole. Then you saw me open the shutter. You started up to seek me and I was ready to fling myself down the stairs when you ran out again. I hurried down and crept close to you, hoping that you might be friends after all. It was then that I saw the Bonpa priest, your prisoner. Thinking that he might be one of the men pursuing me, I killed him. But then I knew that you would not have a Bonpa prisoner if you were Bolsheviki and so I decided to surrender to you. That is all, and it is the truth as God is my judge."

Douglas nodded. "Yes," he said, "I believe you this time. Now take a blanket and get some sleep, for we will be traveling in a few hours."

The girl smiled gratefully at him, taking the blanket he offered her and disappeared somewhere to sleep.

All was quiet in the compound. Douglas strolled over to speak to Sergeant Rethers on guard at the gate.

"Everythin's quiet enough outside," whispered the sergeant, "but I was thinkin', Captain, these guys we run off will be back here with the rest of their gang if we don't get outa here pretty pronto."

"Yes, I've thought of that, but at the same time we can't go on forever without sleep. We'll have to chance another hour or two."

"How'd them babies get on to our trail so quick? Horses can't march that fast and we must 'a' put sixty miles behind us since we started."

"They didn't follow us. They sent word by the *oulatchens*."

SEEING that the sergeant looked mystified, Douglas went on, "The *oulatchens* are a sort of pony express, relays of horses and men who carry messages. The Mongols have them all over and they can carry messages very rapidly. They probably sent a message from Kalgan to some outlying body of Chahars who got on the job immediately."

"Yes, sir, and there's nothing to prevent their sending back word and ganging the whole bunch up on us before we get outa this joint." Sergeant Rethers was none too optimistic.

Douglas shrugged his shoulders.

"That's one of the chances we have to take," he answered more lightly than his worries warranted, for what Rethers said was perfectly true. There was nothing more likely than that the defeated Chahars would get reinforcements and return to the charge as quickly as horses could cover the ground.

But Douglas had his own reasons for not wishing to move before daylight. He watched the east anxiously, studying the luminous dial of his wrist-watch. There was a faint lighting up of the horizon which looked hopeful. Leaving Sergeant Rethers, he inspected the stockade again, listening intently in the pauses of his tour. The Sergeant was sent to get a little rest and Konat waked up to replace him.

Konat, like some wild animal, was awake all over and on his feet instantly when Douglas touched his shoulder. He insisted upon standing guard with his drawn sword and took his post very statuesquely, upright like a graven image by the gate.

The faint light in the east grew imperceptibly but so slowly that Douglas became more and more anxious. It was still too dark to see without the aid of artificial light and this condition might obtain for another hour at least. And in the meantime, as he well knew, the Chahars would not be idle.

IT WAS Miller, who, turning over sleepily, saw Douglas by the fire and immediately rose up and insisted that he take his place. It was easier to acquiesce than to argue so that he took the sergeant's advice and tried to rest while Miller took over his duties.

Suddenly Douglas was awake with a shout in his ears. Miller was standing over him, a startled look on his face.

"By God, Captain, look!" and Miller pointed at an arrow stuck into the ground beside Douglas and still quivering from its impact.

"You was havin' nightmare, Captain, and all of a sudden you give a grunt and a heave and rolled over and that there arrow landed plump in the ground where you'd been layin'!"

Douglas was alert instantly.

"That arrow was aimed," he exclaimed, leaping to his feet and staring about the walls of the stockade. But in that silent place, already beginning to lighten up with the first premonition of daybreak, there was no sight or sound.

"This damn place is gettin' on my nerves, Captain," confessed Miller. "It's too blame creepy," and reaching down he pulled the arrow from the ground and stared at it curiously.

"What do you make o' that, sir?" he asked and pointed to something wrapped about the shaft near the feathered end. It was a piece of linen, tied with a bit of thread. Cutting the thread, Douglas unrolled the small square of cloth. On it in red, was the crudely drawn likeness of two writhing snakes intertwined about the head of a leopard.

"The Bonpa!" both men exclaimed at the same instant and stared at each other.

"Yes," remarked Douglas quietly. "It's time to get out of here. It didn't take these people long to catch up. Wake up the gang and we'll be on our way. We can get breakfast out in the open somewhere."

"You said it, Captain; s'far's I'm concerned we can't get out in the open any too soon," and Miller hurried away, waking up the rest of the crowd.

The autos were packed in short order. The Russian girl rolled out from somewhere, sleepy-eyed, and was put in the car with Douglas and Konat. The gates were opened and after a careful scouting around the outside had shown the absence of any enemy, the two cars rolled forth. As they passed beyond the walls of that eerie place, they all drew a sigh of relief.

It was good to take again to the open road, where a man could see his enemies across the expanse of rolling plain.

The first weak rays of the rising sun showed them the limitless surface of the desert stretching away to the harsh horizon, drab and brown and bare, its stunted trees writhing their limbs in tortured agony. There was no green, only gray sparse grasses and the yellow and red of crumbling clay.

There was no sign of life along the dusty road which wound past the stockade and led on into infinite distance toward the Monastery of Boro Nor. The stockade stood alone in the plain, aloof, silent and mysterious. They could see it for a mile or two as they bumped and rattled along the none too smooth road.

Far ahead they saw the high yellow banks of a stream wandering between parched and shrunken willows. Carter's eyes lighted up as he saw it, figuring that the captain would stop there for the morning meal.

They drew the cars up beside the road a few yards from the bank of the stream, concealed more or less by the grove of willows. Carter began bustling about his preparations and soon the cheerful crackling of thorn stalks and the welcome odor of coffee and bacon cheered up the hungry and discouraged.

It was Konat, seated with well-heaped mess plate in hand who looked up at the willow tree in front of him and saw something white fluttering there. Curious, he rose and plucked forth the object, a small square of linen. On it was the symbol of the Bonpas the now familiar twined serpents with the leopard's head.

The group seated around the fire greeted this phenomenon in silence.

Chapter X

THE DANGER IN THE DESERT

IT WAS Konat who finally broke the silence.

"The Bonpas are bad enemies," he said, "and the nearer we get to the Monastery of Boro Nor the worse they become."

"Why?" asked Douglas curiously.

"Well, the Pandita Ghegan of Boro Nor, the abbot of the monastery, is old. Discipline is slack and the Bonpas have grown strong among his monks. Boro Nor is a long way from the Dalai Lama at Lhasa. That is why Boro Nor is avoided by travellers these days, that is why the caravans no longer pass that way. For some reason unknown, the Bonpas are going to try to prevent us from going to Boro Nor. And —I—would advise turning back before it is too late."

Douglas shook his head.

"It's impossible. My orders are to rescue Hamilton and forward the maps he has been correcting. I would rescue him anyway if I had no orders. No, we must go on. I only hope to God we get there in time."

Konat shrugged his shoulders. "Well, we'll have some trouble before we arrive. And the worst trouble will come after we arrive."

Noticing Miller listening curiously Douglas translated for his benefit.

"Trouble is it?" Miller shook his head. "Trouble is all that grows in this Godforsaken country. But there's one sort of trouble anyway we ain't draggin' along, a skirt. Real trouble never starts until a woman hoves into view. We ain't so bad off at that."

"But we have a woman with us," Douglas announced with a straight face.

"A woman!" Miller looked startled.

"A skirt!" Sergeant Rethers growled.

CORPORAL KING, being younger, looked interested. Konat twisted his mustaches and stared around inquiringly. Carter looked amazed. With one accord they all turned to stare at the Russian girl in the man's clothes.

She, not one whit abashed by all this sudden attention, returned the stares.

"Where does she fit into the scheme, Captain?" asked Miller, a worried frown on his face. And Douglas explained as well as he could. There was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm amongst the old soldiers, but Konat took a new lease on life. Without looking at the girl he began to sing a wild Sart love song.

His voice rose and fell, very musically,

but she paid no more attention to him than if he were non-existent. Only at the end of his song, when he looked at her smiling, the girl drew a dagger from somewhere and began quietly to strop it on the soft leather of her boot.

They started forth again, the sun now mounting higher in the heavens. There seemed to be no living thing in this desolate place, if one could except the little, green-gold lizards which darted here and there, leaving tiny trails in the sand.

The girl vouchsafed the information that her given name was Piotr or Peter, to Anglicize it. Therefore she was called Nadina Petrovna after the Russian fashion.

And in the clear light of day, Nadina Petrovna was not at all hard on the eyes. A clear, healthy skin, oval face and well cut lips and firm rather piquant nose, made her attractive even with the handicap of men's clothing and heavy sheepskin coat. It was when she took off her round fur cap and let her black hair tumble in profusion about her face, that she looked truly feminine and all the men were surprised that they had not sensed it instantly.

As the car alternately climbed one rise and slid down another depression, Douglas watched ahead and to the flanks, but heard Konat and Nadina chattering away behind him. Konat's voice was deep and musical, the girl's high and clear and rather pleasant to the ear. Time after time Douglas heard her laugh and felt cheered up by it, in spite of the troubles ahead and behind and the uncertainty all around him.

Toward noon the going became worse, the road traveling through a succession of low plateaus, rising one above the other and separated by ranges of granite gneiss,

varied with red clay. The road was covered with polished pebbles which made poor traction for the cars. The radiators began to boil and they halted now and then.

IT WAS in this bad going that Douglas first sighted the roving horsemen on the front and flanks. Far ahead, on the road they were following, a mounted man would appear suddenly, only to disappear as quickly as he had come.

Another one appeared away to the right and yet another to the left. As the cars toiled through the scattering pebbles a constant surveillance was kept up by these strange newcomers who were so far away that it could not be told whether they were Mongols or Chahras or Cossacks. The men in the cars grew silent watching them, and waiting for more to appear. But there never were more than four or five in view at the same time and gradually the party left off worrying about them.

Douglas, however, redoubled his scrutiny of the road ahead, moving forward to the seat beside him one of the automatic rifles, loaded with a fresh clip and ready to fire should they be attacked suddenly. The others followed his example.

The road led downward toward a dry creek gully, down which it was necessary to ease the cars slowly. On either hand the sides of the passageway led up very steeply to hills of granite gneiss.

It was an ideal situation for a trap and Douglas half decided to venture ahead on foot to test the way. He motioned Sergeant Rethers to slow up but the sergeant shook his head, pointing at the slipping, sliding progress they were making.

To lack the courage of one's convictions at a crucial moment is very often fatal. Douglas did not press the point, deciding instead to chance the passage.

It was an imprudence of which the captain was seldom guilty but an imprudence nevertheless. Scanning the high walls which enclosed them as in a prison, he sat, strained and worried, in his seat, listening to the rattle of the many small pebbles as the tires slipped through them. The road required every second of Sergeant Rethers' time, so winding and treacherous it was.

THERE was no sign of life about them, not a shadow to disturb the desert tranquility, not a sound except the noise of the engines and the rattle of the progress of the cars. Douglas's worried anxiety had communicated itself to the others and silence had fallen upon them like a pall.

It was when the first car rounded the last turn before hitting the creek bottom that Douglas saw the obstruction—when it was too late.

Across the narrow mouth of the passageway there had been erected a barricade of stones, too broad and high and steep for any car to negotiate.

Rethers brought his car to a stop.

"That's a hell of a obstruction to have on a road," he growled and waved to the car in rear to stop. It was then that the shout came from behind them.

Douglas, staring back, saw the road behind them filled with Mongols, rifles in hand. Above them on the tops of the heights crowning the road on both sides, other Mongols appeared.

"Looks like the house is pinched," stated Rethers, tightening his brake.

Douglas estimated swiftly that there must be all of fifty rifles trained upon the little group in the cars. So far not a shot had been fired.

CHAPTER XI

GORODOFF CRACKS THE WHIP

IT SEEMED to him as he sat there, that any second would be his last. It needed only the tightening of one finger upon one trigger to do the trick. It is said that a

drowning man reviews in one swift second his whole life before losing consciousness but Douglas found himself reviewing very rapidly the various incidents that

had led up to this rather inglorious end. His squadron in the Philippines, his selection of Carter from among his men to accompany him, his careful preparation of the expedition in Pekin and his subsequent moves thereafter, all passed through his head in a rapid moving picture effect.

As slow second succeeded slow second, he began to wish that the suspense would end, that some one would do something which would break this terrible silence.

Through the corner of his eye he noticed a stir and a movement among the group of men directly above the car. Then down the steep hillside came an authoritative figure, a white man, plainly a Russian.

"You are my prisoners," said the man as he reached the car. "There is no use making any trouble. I have you covered by a hundred rifles!" Douglas knew without being told that there was nothing but certain death to be gained by resisting. He nodded his head, thankful at any rate that he had to deal with a white man and not one of these sublimely cruel, sublimely indifferent Mongols.

"Who are you and whom do you represent?" asked Douglas quietly.

"That is a matter of little moment," returned the stranger, a tall, thin, fiery-eyed person, his eyes sunk deep in his head. "It is sufficient that you are captured by superior strength." The Russian turned and called to some men behind him. As they came slipping and sliding down the steep bank, the man gave them some orders and they quickly and very efficiently searched the party for weapons, taking the automatic rifles and pistols.

The men who had searched them stood, their rifles at the ready, as a new group of Mongols came down the bank in response to another command and quickly began to destroy the barrier across the passageway, throwing the rocks to one side and working very rapidly. It was only a few minutes until the road was clear again.

The leader of the band then climbed on the running board of the foremost car next to Douglas.

"Tell your drivers to move forward on the road remembering that if they make a single false move they will be shot down without mercy," ordered the Russian.

DOUGLAS translated and Sergeant Rethers and King started their motors again and moved slowly forward. Before them and behind them suddenly appeared two groups of Mongol horsemen carrying their carbines on their thighs, and effectively closing off escape in either direction.

Moving with difficulty through the rocky bed of the stream both cars climbed the far bank. At the top of the hill another group of horsemen joined the party. Counting them, Douglas made out nearly a hundred men, armed with carbines and swords and keeping some sort of order in their groups in spite of the dirt and disorder of their clothes and equipment. They seemed plentifully supplied with ammunition, if the heavy bandoliers crossing each man's shoulders were any indication. Try as he might, Douglas could not make out the origin of the weapons carried by these nomads. They looked like Russian cavalry carbines as nearly as he could judge.

Behind him in the car, Konat and Nadina were silent, Konat sitting with his eyes glittering dangerously and his brows knitted, Nadina with the collar of her sheepskin coat high about her face and her cap low on her head so that her face could not be seen.

Sergeant Rethers started to say something to Douglas once but the lank man on the running board shook his head violently.

"No talk," he commanded in broken English and his eye gleamed angrily, so that perforce they rode on in silence.

THEY must have proceeded at least two miles after this fashion when suddenly the Russian ordered Rethers to turn to the right following a dim trail that led off to a low range of hills about half a mile away. The going was somewhat better across this stretch of prairie than along the road, and instinctively Rethers started to accelerate his speed somewhat. There was a warning shout from the Russian on the running board and he flashed a nasty looking revolver under Rethers's nose. It was sufficient warning, for the sergeant immediately slowed down, cursing under his breath as he did so.

As they approached the low range of

hills, they saw that the trail wound around a projecting shoulder of one of the larger ones. Once they had rounded this they found themselves in the entrance to a small valley wherein ran a small willow bordered stream.

A few yards farther into the valley and they rounded another turn, finding a whole village of Mongol *yurtas* spread across the floor of the place, looking like great black dome-shaped beehives. The place was nearly deserted, except for a few men who seemed to be sentinels. These, with a few women and children who stared intently at the strange spectacle of the two cars, made up the population of the place, if one excepted the mangy, half-starved nomad dogs and the inevitable shaggy ponies grazing in a herd a few yards from the camp.

The Russian directed the sergeant up through the camp to a *yurta* which loomed larger and finer than the others. Here he ordered them to stop and dismounted from the running board, entering the *yurta* before them. The two drivers shut off their engines and Douglas could hear the sound of voices inside.

SOON the Russian came out, bowing low as to some one of importance inside and turned toward the cars.

"You will leave your cars here," he ordered, "and follow me."

There was nothing to do but obey, with the carbines of their guards pointing so uncomfortably in their direction and Douglas rose and stepped out of the car followed by the others. They were led to another *yurta* some fifty yards away and directed inside. Bending to pass the low entrance Douglas went in, followed by the remainder of the party, Carter, at whom the natives stared curiously, bringing up the rear with many a nervous backward glance at the ready rifles of their captors.

Once inside they found the place bare of anything except a few sheepskin rugs on the earth floor and a clay fireplace in the center.

There was a strange and heavy odor about the *yurta* which Douglas recognized immediately. It was the strong scent of *mahorka* the cheap Russian tobacco made from the ground up waste of the tobacco plant, an odor as typical of Russian buildings as are the chewed sun flower seeds scattered everywhere in that country. So there were many Russians there? This was interesting.

Outside they could hear their guards pacing about. From the noise, there were evidently many of them.

"Well, what do you suppose they figger on doin' to us, Captain?" asked Miller.

"Cheer up, they probably mean to shoot us," replied Douglas with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Fo' Gawd, Captain, you don't mean it!" Carter's eyes gleamed white in the dusk of the tent, so patent a picture of worry that it gave everyone immediately a slightly superior feeling of courage.

"No, I was joking, Carter," Douglas said, his voice kindly. "They have treated us well so far, let's hope they'll continue it. I'd like to know who they are anyway and what they represent. Do you know?" he turned to Konat, asking the question in Russian.

Konat nodded, "Yes, I know. They are the men of Aksakoff the Russian."

"Of whom?" Nadina spoke up suddenly.

"Of Aksakoff, the chief of the Bolsheviki in Mongolia." None of them noticed Nadina's face turn pale, nor did they notice the strange light in her eyes as she sat there, her fingers twisting and untwisting as though she would strangle some one had she the opportunity.

They did not observe these things because they saw a form darken the entrance to the *yurta*.

The brisk voice of the Russian who had captured them fell on their ears.

"You are to come with me," he addressed Douglas.

As Douglas rose to follow, the rest of the group looked at him anxiously, especially Konat, who rose from where he had been sitting cross-legged on one of the sheepskins.

"Good-bye, my friend," he said simply, extending his hand.

"Oh, no," Douglas was more skeptical. "I don't think they mean any harm."

"I know them better than you," answered Konat gravely, "and therefore, I say good-bye." It was not exactly a pleasant prelude and Douglas tried to shake off an evil premonition as he followed his guide.

The interior of the large *yurta* was half in shadow so that it was a few seconds before Douglas made out a table and several chairs placed at one end of the enclosure. Behind the table sat two white men. As his eyes adjusted themselves to the light Douglas had hard work to keep from starting involuntarily.

For there, before him, grinning evilly from behind the table, sat Gorodoff, the unprepossessing-looking Russian with the angry, hot eyes which continually forebore to look directly at one, he whom Douglas had derided at Pekin and had knocked out at Kalgan. Certainly the tables were turned now and the prospects looked none too bright for getting out of this mess alive.

So taken up was Douglas with this unexpected appearance of Gorodoff that he scarcely noticed the man sitting beside him. This one was an older man, gray haired and of rather commanding figure but with his dignity gone, and eyes expressing somehow a great horror and a sickness of soul. Truly a sad figure, thought Douglas swiftly, and turned again to Gorodoff, who was speaking.

"Well, Meestaire Douglas, we have a verree nice meeting once again. I can not tell you how very glad I am to see you once more."

"That's more than I can say for you," returned Douglas crisply, a little of the contempt that this man always excited in him, showing in his voice. Gorodoff flushed and his eyes grew even hotter and even more angry looking.

"Well, Meestaire Douglas, it is my business to find out what plots you are carrying on with the Butchering Baron von Ungern-Sternburg at Urga—an' Meestaire Douglas, eet is my intention to find out even if this should cause you a great deal of bodily pain." Gorodoff leered at him.

TWO thoughts immediately struck Douglas; one was that they did not yet know his real purpose in coming to Mongolia, and the other one was that they meant to torture him to find out what his intentions were in regard to Baron Sternburg, that arch-enemy of the Bolsheviki. Making up his mind very swiftly as to the course of action he should pursue, he waited silently.

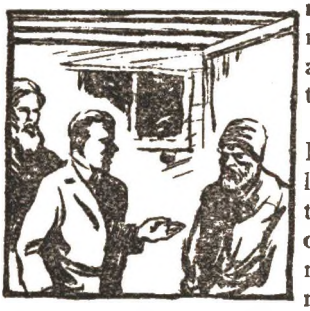
"Yes, Meestaire Douglas, we have you now where we want you. You are no longer in Pekin, no longer in Kalgan, but out where *we* rule—with the aid of our good friends the Bonpa priesthood. It might interest you to know that they have demanded your person and I suppose that you know what *that* means?" again came that leer.

Douglas knew only too well what that meant. Once before he had met the Bonpas and the experience was not pleasant. That he had outwitted them and escaped that time, did not increase the chances for gentle treatment this time. They were thirsting for his blood as he well knew. He could think of many more comfortable ways of dying than the fiendish prolonging of their victim's agony which was a specialty of the Bonpas, those terrible, debased believers in the old primitive snake-worship which antedated Buddhism.

Gorodoff turned to the older man at his side and said something in hissing, guttural Russian that Douglas did not understand. The older man nodded, but Douglas thought he detected in his eyes a look of loathing for Gorodoff, a matter which caused the American to wonder a little.

"Now, Meestaire Douglas, we will give you one hour to think thees matter over. At the end of that hour, your companions will be taken out one by one and killed before your eyes. If that does not make you talk, you will be turned over to the Bonpas who want to make you acquainted with the Bronze Skull; look, even now they wait for you——" And Gorodoff pointed across the *yurta*. For the first time Douglas saw another man sitting there, a slight enough figure, evidently a Thibetan by his dress, a man whose age was indeterminate but whose yellow, wax-like face was marked and scarred by more evil than seemed possible for a man to encompass in a single

life time. He exhaled evil. There was about his eyes a chill, impersonal glitter of cruelty, of cold and vicious cruelty that one sees in the eyes of a snake. Peculiar eyes they were of a most surpassing deadness. The man could be none other than a Bonpa, he was true to type.



"That is all, Meestaire Douglas. Remember that you have one hour to make up your mind—I should advise you, Meestaire Douglas, to make it up quickly."

Chapter XII

DOUGLAS MAKES A STRANGE REQUEST

AS HE returned with his guard to the *yurta* that acted as the prison for the party, Douglas narrowly observed the guards and their disposition around the structure. A group of about ten were to the right of the big felt covered tent, there were five or six in rear and in front some six or seven more. They glanced at him coldly and incuriously as he went by. The occupants of the *yurta* looked up hopefully as he entered.

"Well, Captain, what's the bad news?" Miller asked.

"Pretty bad. They insist on killing you all off at the end of an hour and turning me over to the Bonpas for torture."

"What's the big idea?" asked Sergeant Rethers.

"They want to get some information about our plans. If I don't tell them something we're done for."

"Can't you give 'em some kind of a fancy story, Captain?" asked Miller.

Douglas shrugged his shoulders.

"That's just it; no matter what I tell them, they'll do away with us anyway. I ran into Gorodoff in there. That bird isn't going to let us get away with a whole skin if he can help it."

"So we get it if we do and we get it if we don't?"

"That's about it."

There was a long silence as they digested this. Miller finally looked over to where Nadina sat alone.

"I never knew it to fail that a woman brings trouble with her. I ought to know, I been married four times," stated Miller, eyeing Nadina with no very friendly gaze.

She, sensing that she was being blamed, raised her head quickly.

"They mean to kill us, the ones in there?" she pointed toward the large *yurta*.

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Douglas replied. There was no use disguising the seriousness of the situation.

Nadina took the news very calmly, nodding her head as though she had expected nothing else.

"And these plug-uglies has got this shack completely surrounded?" asked Miller.

"Completely. A rabbit couldn't get through."

"Only thing I see is to make a rush for it," Sergeant Rethers suggested. "Some of us might get alive to the cars and make a getaway. The goin's good between here and the main road, we could get up a big burst of speed."

"Yeh, but none of us would ever get as far as the cars with all them gunmen drillin' holes in us," Miller disposed of that scheme.

"Well, we gotta figger out somethin', an hour goes mighty fast," Rethers replied defensively.

MILLER looked speculatively at Douglas.

"Dollars to doughnuts the captain's got somethin' figgered out right now," he said. The eyes of the group turned hopefully to Douglas.

"I've got sort of a half of a scheme," he admitted. "There's something that puzzled me. I met two men in the big *yurta*, Gorodoff and another Russian. And if I'm any judge, the other Russian didn't like Gorodoff one bit. There's a way out there somehow if we could find it."

A form obtruded itself in the entrance.

"The Commissar says that half the time is gone and asks if you have any message." It was the voice of the man who had captured them on the road.

"No," said Douglas.

The man disappeared.

"The other man is undoubtedly Aksakoff," Konat spoke up. Again Nadina looked up. "Which Aksakoff is that?" she asked. "Not Count Peter Aksakoff of the Imperial General Staff?"

"Yes, the miserable renegade, the traitor —that is the one," replied Konat with some heat. Then he looked searchingly at Nadina. She had raised her head defiantly.

"Why do you ask?" inquired Konat in a dead silence, in which the Americans studied this by-play, wondering what it was all about.

"Because he is my father," said Nadina.

"Your father!" both Douglas and Konat stared at the girl in astonishment. She nodded her head, her face white, her fingers twisting and untwisting strangely.

"But how—what——" Douglas started to question her.

"It is simple enough, it is what I feared," she said. "The Bolsheviki held my mother and me as hostages, threatening to kill us if he did not do their will. He is here serving them to save our lives. He does not yet know that mother is dead and that I have escaped. And if the Reds know that I am here they will spirit me away again as hostage for his good behavior, or they may kill us both."

DOUGLAS rose decisively. Striding to the entrance to the *yurta* he called to the nearest guard, pointing toward the big *yurta* in the distance.

The guard slouched away. Douglas turned back to the group inside.

"Now I know the answer," he said. And it was proof of their confidence in him that no one questioned him but accepted his statement at face value.

It was only a minute before the Russian who had captured them returned with the guard, walking very swiftly.

"I will talk with Gorodoff," said Douglas.

"Good!" grunted the Russian and led Douglas toward the big *yurta*.

Gorodoff sat in the same place at the table and Aksakoff sat to one side.

"You are disposed to be sensible, I see, Meestaire Douglas." There was an unpleasant smirk about the man, an illy concealed glee. Seeing it, Douglas realized more than ever that his life and the lives of his men were forfeit, in any case, whether he gave the required information or not.

"Yes, you might call it being sensible," he replied, "but look here, Gorodoff, I don't like you and you don't like me. If I do any telling of my plans it will have to be to your friend here, and not to you."

Gorodoff looked if anything more nasty than ever as he digested this. Then he started to argue, angry and stubborn.

But Douglas stood like a rock, refused to tell a word except to the other man, until at last, seeing that he could make no headway, Gorodoff acceded with what grace he could muster. Before leaving the *yurta*, however, he spoke sharply and authoritatively to Aksakoff. The older man bowed his head in assent. Gorodoff went out.

Watching the entrance of the *yurta* for a moment, Douglas assured himself that the unpleasant Commissar was out of hearing.

Then he leaned forward.

"Your daughter, Nadina, is with our party!" he said.

Aksakoff at first did not comprehend.

"What?" he asked and Douglas repeated the information. Aksakoff turned pale, but still doubted. Douglas went on to reassure him, telling him of the finding of his daughter and her inclusion in the party. Of the death of the mother Douglas spoke as well, gently and considerately.

BUT Aksakoff repressed his sorrow. Joy at his daughter's presence, the realization that he was no longer under the thumb of the Bolshevists brought him back quickly to a sane consideration of ways and means.

"You understand that it would probably mean death for both my daughter and myself if the relationship is discovered?" he stated.

Douglas nodded.

"How can we get away from these peo-

ple? I am nearly helpless," said the old man. "Gorodoff is all powerful here."

"Tell Gorodoff that you were unable to understand me, he does not know that I speak Russian. Then I will insist on my point of not telling him directly. But I will offer to write it out for him if he will permit me and my men to prepare our food first for we are very hungry. Our food is in the cars. I want to go to the cars with one or two men and get it, under guard of course; see that it is allowed."

"Yes, yes," the older man was puzzled, "all that is simple, but what after?"

"Things will begin to happen about then, you join as quickly as possible. Do you understand?"

"I do not quite, but I will do my best; Nadina my daughter," he added half to himself.

Gorodoff was called in. He came in eagerly, glancing with ill-concealed suspicion at the two.

"Your friend here does not speak any English and I was unable to make him understand," explained Douglas.

Gorodoff rubbed his hands.

"Ah, well, you see, it was better after all to tell me," and waited hopefully.

"But I won't tell you, and that's all there is to that." Gorodoff's face fell, then he flushed with anger.

"I won't tell you, as I said," Douglas went on, "but I will write it all down."

"Fine, excellent." This was even better than Gorodoff expected and he rubbed his hands again.

"But before I write it down we must eat, my men and I. We have had nothing since early morning and it is now late afternoon."

GORODOFF refused to consider this. Turning to Aksakoff he reiterated the refusal in Russian.

"Let them eat," said Aksakoff. "Men condemned to death are always given a good last meal."

"Let my cook, the black man, go out with a helper and bring us our food," broke in Douglas in English. "Also he can bring my writing case at the same time and I'll put the whole thing down in black and white for you to send to your chiefs."

Gorodoff thought this over and finally gave his consent.

So delighted was Gorodoff with the idea of having a written report to turn in, all the plans of the Americans in the handwriting of the man responsible for carrying them out that he felt that he could be generous about the other demands.

But Gorodoff was nobody's fool, he inquired if all weapons had been seized from the car. On being assured that this had been done, he went ahead cheerfully.

So anxious was he to have the matter expedited that he walked back to the prison *yurta* himself, accompanying Douglas and personally gave orders to the guards to accompany the men who were to bring the food from the cars.

AS HE went in the *yurta,* Douglas called to Sergeant Miller and Carter speaking to them in a very authoritative voice. "You two go down immediately to the cars and get us food and don't forget to bring plenty of canned stuff. *Plenty of canned stuff,"* he repeated. Miller and Carter nodded. The two went forth, accompanied on either side by Mongol guards.

CHAPTER XIII

"Plenty of Canned Stuff!"

THE two returned in five minutes, their arms laden with packages and cans. These were placed on the ground in the *yurta.* Douglas looked over the supplies they had brought and shook his head.

"Not quite enough," he said, "make another trip," so the two fared forth once more returning with some more packages.

"Fifteen minutes is enough time for your meal," said Gorodoff. "After that I expect you to start writing your plans," and he withdrew.

Douglas immediately distributed the packages and the canned stuff.

"Now," he whispered, "we've got to make a break for the big *yurta,* seizing our automatic rifles and pistols when we get there. They are all piled in the interior on the left as you enter the door. There are three groups of Mongols on guard around us here. The first group is about fifteen yards from the entrance here. The

other two groups are at the sides. Miller, Rethers and I will go out first. I'll take the right hand group, Rethers takes the left hand group and Miller will account for the people in front. The rest of you will mass here by the door. As quickly as we do our stuff you'll rush out, following us, and streak it for the big *yurta*. King and Konat will cover the rear, Nadina here will follow right behind us. As soon as we get in the big *yurta* we'll grab the guns and pistols, load inside and then fight our way to the cars. Rethers and King will get busy immediately at starting the cars, while Miller, Konat, Carter and myself hold off any attack with the rifles. Get in the same car you came in. If Aksakoff comes, pile him in anywhere. Is everything clear?"

Everyone nodded.

"Nadina, you carry all the extra ammunition," he continued in Russian, explaining the maneuver to Konat and Nadina.

Douglas went to the entrance and peered out.

Beckoning to Miller, "There's our first target," he said, and pointed to where the guards sat squatting on their heels talking together, their backs turned to the *yurta*.

"Is everyone ready?" Douglas asked. Heads nodded in affirmation.

"All right, Miller, do your stuff," and Miller doing something with one of the articles of "canned stuff" lobbed it gently so as to fall behind the group of guards in front. The men who searched the car had not noticed the hand grenades!

THERE was a dull, heavy explosion and a great cloud of dust. Without a second's delay, Douglas sped swiftly outside to the right of the *yurta* and threw his grenade at the group there. To the left of the edifice there was another heavy explosion followed almost like an echo with the crash of Douglas's grenade exploding on the right. The guards who were not killed or wounded by the grenades were paralyzed with surprise and fright. So suddenly had it happened that they stood with open mouths while the group of prisoners rushed forth and sped toward the big *yurta* outside of which stood the cars.

Shouts and yells echoed through the camp and the noise of running. Aksakoff met them at the entrance to the big felt tent. Douglas saw him embrace his daughter for a second then rushed into the *yurta*.

There was no sign of the Bonpa priest nor of Gorodoff. The place was empty. Hurriedly picking up one of the automatic rifles he went to the outside again.

King and Rethers were starting their motors, Konat came out with two rifles and threw them in the car and returned bringing his beloved sword and another rifle. Carter and Aksakoff and Nadina brought out the remainder of the ammunition and the automatic rifles and pistols.

There was a shot from the far end of the camp and Douglas turned his rifle that way, firing a burst into the *yurta* from whence the shot had come. Another shot came from behind them and Carter hurried around with his rifle but returned without firing. By now everything was loaded into the cars. The motors were racing, Rethers and King leaned over the wheels.

THERE was no sign of Gorodoff. Of the Mongols few could be seen. A group of them appeared somewhere near the vicinity of the *yurta* in which the prisoners had been confined. Douglas and Miller turned the rifles on this group, firing two or three rapid bursts, which effectively scattered them.

Signalling to Miller, Douglas leaped into the foremost car. It swept forward almost before he was aboard, and he turned, poking his rifle over the side as the car gathered speed. Behind him the second car followed and the two small machines pitched and rolled but covered the ground at high speed.

A scattering shot or two followed them. Far in rear they could see the Mongols beginning to appear and could see them running for their horses. The cars leaped forward over the prairie and it was only a minute or two before the intervening shoulder of the hill shut off the view of the camp.

A few minutes more and they had reached

the main trail again and it was here that they headed the cars north, toward the Monastery of Boro Nor once more.

Behind Douglas in the rear seat sat Aksakoff, his daughter's hand fast in his and both of them crying silently; whether tears of joy or of sorrow, Douglas could not tell, being occupied too much with watching the road ahead.

"We kinda put one over on 'em that time," Sergeant Rethers gloated as he bent to the wheel and skillfully twisted the car in and out of depressions and washed out sections of the road.

"But they'll be right on our trail," cautioned Douglas, "don't forget that."

"Fat chance they got to catch up with us, on them miserable pocket-size, oathounds they ride," returned Sergeant Rethers.

THE words were hardly out of his mouth when with a bang and a lurch the front tire blew out. They were going at such speed that it took some quick work with the wheel to right the car and some quick thinking to bring it to a stop. The other car drew up not ten feet from them. Douglas looked toward the rear, worry showing on his face. But so far there was no one in sight.

"How long will it take you to change that tire?" he asked Rethers.

"Not more'n ten minutes, sir."

Ten minutes? That would not give them much of a lead. But Douglas waited with what patience he could muster, narrowly scanning the road to the rear. The ten minutes seemed hours.

"Kind of a close shave, Captain," Miller's voice broke in on his thoughts.

"Too close for comfort," admitted Douglas.

"We're headin' straight in to this monastery?" asked Miller.

"As straight as the road will allow."

"They tell me that monastery ain't none too healthy," opined Miller.

"What have you heard about it?" asked Douglas always on the alert for information.

"Konat has been tellin' me that the place is lousy with Bonpas. He says he saw back at the Mongol camp one of their priests that came from there. He says that the Bonpas was fixin' to take you there for a little polite and friendly trimmin'."

"Perhaps. But we've got to get there. And we've got to take a chance. It wouldn't be the first one we've taken together."

"You said a mouthful, Captain, here's hopin' it won't be the last."

The tire was repaired. Rethers went back to the wheel and they started forth once more, much to Douglas's relief.

But with automobile tires, when one goes another generally follows it after a short interval. And it was so in this case. They had scarcely gone five hundred yards when the second tube, this time a rear tire, blew out with neatness and despatch.

The tire had selected the worst place along the road in which to fall down on the job. The two cars were at the foot of a hill, in a small trough, with another hill ahead of them. It was a beautiful place in which to be jumped by an enemy force.

What Sergeant Rethers had to say about tires in general and this tire in particular was nobody's business. He called that tire names that even surprised Douglas, accustomed as he was to the fluency of mule skinners and the cavalry service in general.

There was no use taking chances. Douglas immediately sent Konat up the hill in front, armed with an automatic rifle, to act as sentinel. Taking Carter and Miller with him, all three equipped with rifles and ammunition, he led the way toward the hill in rear.

Arriving at the top the first, the two others were startled to see him sink down suddenly, waving them both to do likewise. They crawled slowly up to the crest. There advancing toward them, and not five hundred yards away was a column of Chahars, riding in column of threes, looking very fit in blue coats and white and dark coonskin caps, their leaders three men in white coats, riding at their head, one of them carrying a scarlet banner.

Chapter XIV

THE BATTLE WITH THE CHAHARS

THERE must have been about eighty men in the Chahar force as nearly as Douglas could estimate on short notice. Not that there was much time for estimating anything. He waved back to the car to signal for more ammunition.

The three ones below the hill crest loaded and set their sights at battle sight and waited. The Chahars advanced rapidly. So close did they come that Miller and Carter looked imploringly at Douglas to let them fire.

"No, if we fire too soon they'll scatter and attack us in flank," he cautioned.

They saw the reason in this and waited tensely. Now they could see the men's faces and the ornaments on the saddles. When it seemed that the Chahars were about to ride over them, Douglas nodded.

The three rifles rattled forth a veritable hail of death. The light automatics sprayed the thoroughly surprised and confused Chahars with a spray of lead that swept down horses and men.

But the Chahars were irregular cavalry. After the first flurry of surprise, in spite of the fact that the road was filled with fallen men and horses and the air was filled with bullets, the remainder dispersed like a band of swallows and fled in all directions into the plains on either side of the road.

The three riflemen followed them with their fire as long as they could see a Chahar but the nomad riders disappeared as though swallowed up in the gullies and depressions of the plain.

"Now they'll sneak back and pot shot at us from the flanks," said Douglas and looked back to where the two cars stood on the road.

Sergeant Rethers still worked over the tire. Corporal King had the hood of his car up and was doing something with the engine, both men working frantically with many a backward glance at the firing taking place on the hilltop above them. Konat was standing upright, a clear target for miles, facing the valley instead of watching the ground on his front.

Leaving Sergeant Miller to watch the hill in rear, Douglas hurried down the road. Sergeant Rethers said he'd be ready in ten minutes. Corporal King complained of his carbureter which had begun to be temperamental in that altitude. It looked like another quarter of an hour at least before they could get away.

Hurrying forward Douglas sought out Konat and cautioned him against neglecting his post. From Konat's vantage point he could see the country far to the right and left of the road. There did not seem to be a sign of life anywhere.

Signs and portents fail however when dealing with nomads accustomed to hunt and fight in concealment. It was not two minutes after he arrived on the hilltop with Konat that Douglas heard a rifle shot and saw a spurt of dust kicked up not ten yards from where Sergeant Rethers was working. That was entirely too close for comfort. Another shot came, luckily no nearer the car than the first one, but it was only a matter of time until they ranged in on the good target provided by the two standing cars.

The shots came from the far right of the roadway. Two or three more, equally badly aimed, came from that side when suddenly a diversion was provided by the arrival of what seemed almost a volley from the left side.

"There's a good sized bunch of the Chahars over there," thought Douglas and scanned the plain for signs of them. It lay bare and yellow in the setting sun. By staring intently he saw a tell-tale flicker of dust as another scattering volley was loosed. The dust at the muzzles of the guns showed the position taken by the nomads and Douglas was quick to range in on them with his gun.

His first burst kicked a cloud of scattering gravel some two hundred yards short.

He corrected his range and saw the strike of the bullets all around the place where he had observed the indications of the enemy. Once on the target he let go and fired burst after burst, so that fountains of gravel spurted up and the whole plain around the enemy hiding place seemed in eruption.

This kept down the fire from that direction, but the lone rifleman or two on the other flank were being reinforced by now and their shots were lobbing into the road with more frequency.

IT SEEMED an age before Sergeant Rethers at last threw his tools into the car and climbed aboard. Corporal King worked a minute or two longer and followed suit so that Carter and Miller ran forward and climbed aboard and the two cars came on up the hill toward Douglas. The enemy, seeing their prey about to escape, redoubled their fire and bullets were whining and singing through the air all about them. Some six or seven had gone through the tops of the autos, one had broken a lamp, but luckily no other damage had occurred.

The two cars made the hill and descended on the far side safe from the fire of the nomads. They had not gone many yards however when far off near the horizon, Douglas saw horsemen appear and disappear, looking at that distance like grim, gray wolves circling on the trail of their quarry.

This constant surveillance was beginning to get irksome. All thought of arriving at the monastery after nightfall was out of Douglas's mind. It was too risky an undertaking even in the daytime. The main thing now was to find some sort of a place where the weary travelers could find security for the night.

Progress was slower now as Douglas was taking no more chances on being ambushed again. He approached no suspicious looking ground without first halting the cars and either going forward himself on foot or sending some one of the others, each taking the task in turn. It was considerably slower but infinitely safer.

At one of these places, espying an approaching dust cloud, Douglas had the cars backed against a hillside and everyone dismounted, rifle in hand. The dust cloud resolved itself into a traveling family of Mongols, their household goods packed on the backs of great lumbering, sulky looking camels. The women rode with the household goods; slant-eyed creatures they were, none too cleanly looking, their hair done up in fantastic horns sticking out on either side of their heads and their persons profusely adorned with turquoise and silver ornaments. The men rode the shaggy Mongol ponies, their knees high in the saddle somewhat after the manner of jockies.

KONAT engaged these people in conversation while Douglas listened. When the tall Kirghez asked them about the monastery of Boro Nor, the nomads looked queerly at each other and shook their heads, refusing to answer.

No, they had seen no armed men on the road ahead. Yes, there was wood and water at the House of the Hermit about a mile farther on.

The wood and the water answer was good news. The travelers passed on with much crying of "Ok! Ok!" to the disgusted looking camels. A little cheered up by the prospect of shelter for the night, the party pressed on.

They came at last to the head of a small valley wherein were many black *yurtas*. Judging from the number of horses grazing in the vicinity Douglas figured that there were many Mongols camped here. Konat went forward to investigate, returning after a few minutes.

"It is the camp of the Noyon Jassaktu, a very strong Mongol Prince. He bids you welcome and asks you to stop at his *yurta*. It is safe. No one would dare attack him with all his force. He has nearly two thousand people here or near here. He is also very angry against the Bolsheviki."

This sounded favorable. Without any more worry about the matter Douglas gave orders to proceed. They drew up in a few minutes before a large black *yurta* in front of which floated a yellow silken banner from a lance.

Douglas was bidden enter the *yurta* and followed Konat in.

An old man in a blue silk robe, wearing

a high pointed beaver cap with a scarlet silk top surmounted by a red button with the long peacock feathers of rank streaming out behind, was seated on a low divan clicking the beads on an ornately carved rosary of yellowed ivory. He was very polite and courteous, inviting Douglas and Konat to seat themselves before a fire burning in a copper brazier.

The interior of the *yurta* was richly lined with silk and the ground covered with soft rugs. The officials of the old Prince threw the ceremonial *hatyk,* a square of silk, over the shoulders of the guests and the old man commanded refreshments.

One of his men came in, bowing low and whispered something into the ear of the old man.

The Noyan looked up sharply. Turning to Konat he spoke in a very decisive, angry sort of tone. Unable to follow the guttural Mongol tongue, Douglas sat worried while this conversation went on.

At last Konat turned to him.

"He says that you have among your party a terrible man, a Bolshevist, the leader of a depraved sect, a man who is hated throughout the length and breadth of Mongolia. He means Aksakoff. He says that he is very sorry but that he will have to have Aksakoff killed immediately."

Chapter XV

The Monastery of Boro Nor

DOUGLAS did some swift thinking. Useless to explain to this nomad chieftain all the complicated circumstances surrounding Aksakoff's defection to the Bolshevists and his subsequent return to his own side. In the first place, the Mongol would not understand it and if he understood it, he would not believe it.

"Tell him that Aksakoff is my prisoner," Douglas spoke very authoritatively, "and tell him that it is not my pleasure that he be killed. I am bringing him to where he will be tried and condemned for his numerous crimes."

Konat translated. The old Mongol prince was impressed by Douglas's forceful tone and nodded in assent.

"Also tell him that before we join him at table I must see to my men, ask him if he will excuse me for a few moments."

The old man bowed and smiled at Douglas as the message was translated and his eyes followed his figure admiringly as the tall young officer went out of the *yurta.*

The Prince's followers had already assigned a *yurta* to the party and Douglas found Carter singing away as he prepared the evening meal over the earthern fireplace provided.

It seemed wise in view of the uncertainty of things in this country to establish a guard, and a roster was accordingly arranged with one man on duty constantly.

Wood and water being provided and food in course of preparation Douglas returned to the *yurta* of the Prince where he found that servants had set out a low table and were engaged in placing food upon it.

There were plates of massive silver filled with milk and nuts, with steaming lamb and kid, there were jugs of wine and bowls of tea, there were plates of *borsuk,* sweet rich cakes, and there were cubes of dried cheese and dates and raisins and nuts. In all, a good feast to a hungry man, though the old man ate little, watching his guests with a benevolent eye as they satisfied their need. A small silver pipe was brought to the prince and he smoked while Douglas and Konat took out their cigarettes. The little fire glowed cheerfully in the brazier, and warmed the air upon which the chill of the evening had descended.

THE old prince was a devout Buddhist and kept clicking his rosary from time to time as he talked. And talk he did, his conversation ranging from the glory of the golden roofs of Lhasa melting and flaming in the yellow air, where he had made pilgrimage in his youth, of the Abbess of the Samdung convent on Lake Yamdok, she who is revered all over Tibet, of her nuns who fare forth to aid the sick and needy; of the buried monks of Nyang-to-Kyi-phu who immure themselves for life

in living tombs, only putting forth their hands through a small orifice for food; of the exceeding holiness of the Delai Lama at whose presence all the candles of the high altar illumine themselves; of the sacred books at Urga which contain the sum of human wisdom; of the black stone of Genghis Khan which was lost, and the great tribulations that have fallen on the Mongols from that day; of the coming of the new Buddha from the west who shall unify the nomad tribes and make them a power in the world again.

Of these and many more things did he discourse, his voice flowing easily and tirelessly pausing now and again while Konat translated.

It was against all the laws of hospitality to ask a guest whence he came or whither he was bound, but it was Konat who told the old prince that they were on their way to Boro Nor.

"You go to Boro Nor?" The old prince nearly dropped his pipe in his astonishment, scarce believing when Konat nodded. The old fellow shook his head.

"There is much nameless evil at Boro Nor," he said quietly.

"The Pandita Gheghen of Boro Nor, he allows this evil?" asked Konat.

"He is an old man, his bones are brittle and his strength is departed. What can he do, surrounded with black-hearted men?" he grunted and sat in thoughtful silence for a space.

Raising his head suddenly. "You will inevitably meet with misfortune," the prince stated; "there is too much evil in that place. I am old and have acquired some wisdom. Be warned by me and do not enter that foul place."

DOUGLAS was curious concerning this reputed evil, demanding more information upon it. He could secure little except vagueness. It was a nameless dread, said the old man, a thing that affected mind and body, they were masters of the Black Art in Boro Nor, sorcerers and wizards of evil who commanded strange forces to do their bidding.

"Ask him if there are many Bonpas there?" Douglas spoke to Konat. The Kirghez was a little unwilling to ask the question but phrased it carefully.

The effect upon the old man was sudden and startling. He made no answer, only rose in sign that the meeting was concluded and thereafter, as his guests took their departure, clicked his rosary fast and furiously, gazing the while into space as though lost to the scene around him.

At the entrance of their own *yurta* they found Carter on guard over the two cars.

"Ah done saved some suppah fo' the Captain," Carter informed Douglas. "Ah don't take much truck in dis here heathen grub."

Inside the group sat around a glowing fire, from which the smoke rose fitfully through a hole in the roof. Nadina and her father sat together, silent on the edge of the circle. The crowd was well tired out from the excitement of the previous twenty-four hours and the lack of sleep. Blankets were unrolled and it was not many minutes before the *yurta* was in silence.

THE next morning they took an early start and were well on their way to Boro Nor by sun-up. There was no sign of their enemies of yesterday. The complete absence of any interfering Chahars, of any combative Mongols, seemed a little ominous to Douglas. That the enemy should have fought them every inch of the way up to now and then at the last allowed his party to enter the territory of the monastery undisturbed, argued too much confidence on the part of the antagonists that it would get all that was coming to it without any aid from outside sources.

To Douglas it felt exactly like the calm before the storm. They at last saw the lake of Boro Nor before them, looking gray and cold and sullen.

Turning to the right they followed the shore. Before they had gone very far they came upon a party of monks cutting wood. The monks, some fifteen black-browed and

husky looking specimens, stared up at them, frowning, as they passed by and then very pointedly turned their backs.

Later they came to a grim and desolate looking place covered with rocks. Gleaming white among the rocks they saw many human bones. A pack of dogs were worrying at some object they could not see clearly. As they came nearer the dogs scattered, showing their fangs. They had been gnawing at a naked corpse.

"The monks' burying ground," stated Konat.

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust and dogs to dogs," snorted Rethers, slowing down the car to crane his neck and watch the dogs return to their feast. The sight was not calculated to lighten the spirits of the crowd already somewhat depressed over all the warnings they had received.

"The old prince last night told me to be sure and eat nothing or drink nothing that we did not prepare ourselves," said Konat. "These people are experts on poison."

"And torture?" inquired Douglas.

Konat nodded. "They are even more refined and subtle than the Chinese, which is saying a great deal."

From afar off they could see the black walls of the monastery buildings, rising cold and forbidding, from the banks of the lake.

For the first time they heard the dull, musical boom of a great bell, tolled slowly and regularly like a funeral bell. As they gradually approached the monastery the booming of this great bell seemed to fill their ears to the exclusion of any other sound.

Konat shuddered when he heard it.

"Some poor devil is dying a horrible death now," he said and crossed himself after the Russian fashion.

"I hope to God it isn't Hamilton," said Douglas, "but unless that dugpa lied to us, they don't intend to kill him until tonight."

Chapter XVI

The Booming of the Bell at Boro Nor

"LOOK at the place," said Konat, "what does it remind you of?"

Douglas stared at the grim forbidding building with its high walls. Above the outer wall in the face of the main structure there ran a line of windows, irregularly spaced and crude in outline. Above them was a gallery behind which was a great jagged window. Still higher were two great windows that looked not unlike eye cavities. With a shock Douglas realized suddenly that the building looked exactly like a huge skull, the lower row of windows formed the teeth, the balcony and the opening behind it looked exactly like the nasal cavity while the eye sockets stared out at the approaching travelers with all the blank horror in the eyes of a blind murderer. The great rounded roof carried out the effect.

The bell boomed slowly and steadily. One's nerves grew taut with expectancy so long was it between each dull booming reverberation and so certainly and so fatefully did the huge booming sound come. The clangor seemed to arrive from all directions, floating up from the ground and down from the sky making it impossible to say where the bell was located. The air quivered and vibrated to the deep toned and sepulchral thunder of its resounding bronze.

"It's a goofy place!" announced Sergeant Rethers.

"Sort of depressing," admitted Douglas.

The volume of sound from the ringing of the bell gradually diminished. It crashed less loudly on the ear but its effect was in no wise lessened. Rather it seemed more nerve racking than before. Konat lifted his head sharply as the steady reverberation began to come more softly. With each bronze stroke it grew fainter until at last all that was left was a faint stirring of the air and the echo of a vibration, each echo falling at the same interval.

"Some poor devil's ordeal is finished," said Konat as the sound gradually grew

fainter and at last died out, still leaving a faint overtone in the air.

Douglas had signaled for the cars to stop. He called Carter up to him.

"I don't know what the effect of your midnight colored face is going to be on these people," he said, "and to avoid having you hurt, I wish you'd wear your collar high and your cap low."

"Shu ah will, sah, Captain," and Carter suited the action to the word. "Ole Cahter ain't wishful for to git hisself carved up none."

The bell again deepened its note, its bronze clamor increasing in volume until it again filled the ear and beat into the brain with its dull, heavy note. From where the cars stood, Douglas could see the entrance to the monastery, a great gate flanked by two stone towers. Above the gate grinned a row of human skulls, still further giving a hideously saturnine air to this lonely monastery upreared on the desolate rocks of the lake shore. All the warnings they had heard concerning this place, all the queer sidelong glances that had been cast upon them when they had announced their intention of coming here, returned with redoubled force to their memories.

The situation might have been less gloomy had it not been for the reiterated impact of the vibrations of the bronze bell on their taut nerves.

The cars crawled toward the monastery which showed no sign of life, except for the sepulchral booming. Its high walls stared at them coldly, its windows showed no watching face, but Douglas had the feeling that hundreds of eyes were secretly regarding them.

AS THEY came under the shadow of the gate a wicket opened and a brawny monk stepped forth. The fellow was clad in scarlet. His massive arms were folded across his chest, his black eyebrows drawn down, his eyes were hostile.

"Seyn beno," greeted Konat.

The monk nodded curtly but vouchsafed no other reply.

"The word 'welcome' on the mat don't mean us," commented Rethers.

"Tell him, Konat, that we are paying a visit to the Pandita Gheghen and would like to be led to him," directed Douglas.

The request was translated. The monk then spoke for the first time shaking his head and pointing to Douglas.

"He says," translated Konat, "that only the leader and one other of the party can enter. The others must remain outside."

Douglas narrowed his eyes at this for a second or two, then nodded in agreement. Directing the rest of them to remain with the cars he selected Konat to accompany him.

"Suppose they pull some rough stuff on you in there, Captain," Miller inquired, "how long before we sail in and clean up the place?"

"If we stay longer than an hour you'd better inquire for us, and don't *pay any attention to anything except a written message from me,"* warned Douglas. Miller nodded, drawing forth an immense silver watch that he always carried and verifying the time.

The black browed monk showed signs of impatience. Preceding them through the wicket, he waited on the inside until the two had entered and then closed and barred the small door.

THEY found themselves in a small, tunnel-like entrance, dark and damp. The monk strode ahead. Douglas looked back at the barred door, making a motion with his head toward it. Konat grasped the idea instantly and quietly and swiftly sped back and silently undid the bar and as quickly rejoined Douglas without being seen by their guide.

At the end of the tunnel-like passage they came into a large courtyard above which towered the galleries and cells of the monastery in some three stages. Facing them across the large courtyard was a huge door swung open. From within it came the sound of chanting, the crash of drums and cymbals and the hoarse and raucous blaring of horns.

There were three or four scarlet-clad, black-hatted monks in the courtyard, men who ostentatiously avoided looking at the strangers but twirled their prayer wheels with energy as though to ward off the evil effects of the strange presences. While these studiously avoided looking directly at

them, Douglas caught a malevolent side glance or two that made him press his arm reassuringly against the pistol, couched in its shoulder holster under his arm.

The courtyard was filthy with the refuse of generations but colorful with many banners, huge squares marked with a crudely drawn horse pictured in each center, the *Lung-tas* which ward off evil demons. Blue and scarlet they showed against the walls and from the roofs, varied occasionally by the long and narrow *Cho-pens* each inscribed with some text. On the far side of the courtyard was a great door out of which came the sound of drums and horns.

Above them, drowning out the noise from the interior behind the great door, the bell boomed its monotonous note, the air quivering with its vibration. It was impossible to see whence came the sound. After the impact of each bronze note, Douglas thought he could hear another sound, more human and yet almost animal in its deep pain. It sounded like a groan as might only be retched up from the very innermost being of a man suffering well-nigh insupportable agony.

THEY passed through the courtyard, following their guide to the large door on the far side. Within the porch they were confronted by four terrific images, none other than the images of the Guardians of the Four Quarters, Nam-tho-sie, Guardian of the North, whose color is green and whose symbol is the tiger; Phag-kye-po, Guardian of the South, he of the ferocious mien, whose color is yellow and whose symbol is the sword; Yul-Khor-sang, Guardian of the East, a milder one this, whose color is white and who carries a guitar; and Je-mi-zang, Guardian of the West, whose color is red and who carries a *chorten* or reliquary.

Fantastic paintings of saints and gods, of beasts like men, and of men like beasts, covered the walls of the porch. At the far end Douglas saw a huge painting of the Wheel of Life and hoped that he would have the time to examine that complicated work with its thousands of lines, each of which has its own meaning.

Within the gloom of the interior the sound of the great bell overhead was lessened by the chanting and clash of cymbals and the screech and sob of horns.

A great statue stood within the entrance and obstructed the view of the temple itself, the statue of Chak-Dor, Wielder of the Thunderbolt, at least three times life size. Rounding this they then came into the temple proper, a gloomy high-vaulted place dimly lighted by flickering lamps which fitfully disclosed the presence of a vast assemblage of monks and lamas, all ranged in order of rank. Their guide motioned them to wait here while he went forward into the gloom. From where they stood they could see that the walls of the building were decorated with mural paintings and many silken banners. Rising through the gloom they could see many images, life size for the most part, images of Buddha Gotama, the mystical Dhyani Buddhas. Bodhisattvas and saints.

Douglas noticed at once that the image of Buddha Gotama did not occupy the place of honor, that this place was usurped by the "wizard priest," Padma Sambhava, who sat holding a human skull filled with blood in his left hand.

Both men saw at the same time the image

of Maitreye, the Buddha to come, a blackened statue, represented as sitting in the fashion of the European, and not seated crosslegged as is the custom in the Orient.

"That's the one they expect to come from the west," Konat whispered.

"Do you notice anything peculiar about that statue?" asked Douglas. Konat stared at it puzzled for a few seconds then drew in his breath sharply.

"God and the devil!" he swore, marvelling, but had no time to say any more, their guide having returned, followed by a lean yellow-faced lama, dressed in a golden yellow robe, with a great blue sash about his middle and a lacquered hat upon his head.

Chapter XVII

THE TORTURE CHAMBERS OF THE BON

THE face of the lama was of a semi-transparent, waxlike yellow. His eyes were the strangest part of him. They seemed absolutely opaque and lifeless in his head, lacking all semblance of having a soul behind them. Absolutely chilling in their impersonal scrutiny, they were like the unwinking eyes of a poisonous reptile. It was the Bonpa priest of the Mongol camp, who had sat in the *yurta* while Gorodoff talked. How he had arrived here before them was a mystery.

Douglas was not surprised to see Konat quickly thrust forward two fingers of his right hand, in that ages old, universal gesture of protection against the Evil Eye.

"Tell him that we must see the Pandita Ghegen," said Douglas.

Konat translated the words into Mongolian.

The lama nodded. "You are expected," he replied, his voice coming as from a great distance and speaking in Russian, much to Douglas's surprise. But Douglas was not surprised when he saw, on the finger of the lama, a ring in silver and turquoise, carrying the intertwined serpents and the leopard's head of the Bon. The man was a *dugpa*, a leader of the debased believers in the pre-Buddhistic Tantric mysteries, in other words a black magician of the deepest dye.

The lama turned, beckoning them to follow and they passed through a dark passage down into the obscurity, emerging at last into a large square chamber dimly lighted by butter lamps. As their eyes grew accustomed to this new somberness, they found themselves in a veritable chamber of horrors with a monstrous statue of Siva the Destroyer, threatening them from one wall, while another gross statue, that of Kali, the Drinker of Blood, glowered at them from the side. There were many more statues, of wierd and horrible demons and evil spirits, including Lhamo, a female demon, riding upon a fire-breathing horse, her crown and her saddle girths fashioned of human skulls. The wall was painted with pictures representing the Youl-ha, the spirits who guard the lands and houses, at war with the Sa Dags, the goblin demons of mountains and plains, of waterfalls and waste places.

There was one statue standing alone, the face of which was covered with a veil. Konat asked the lama what it represented, and whether they might see its face. The lama frowned and shook his head in displeasure, hastening to lead them out of the place.

"This is the room of the Bon," whispered Konat; "here's where they practice magic," and he pointed to the oddly-shaped vessels on a sort of altar in the center of the room. Above this altar hung several banners in scarlet silk, embroidered in strange fashion with triangular forms and figures and eight-sided geometrical designs, the mystic diagrams called *yantras*.

EVEN in the dim recesses of this room they could hear the booming of the great bell, slow and methodical and remorseless.

They had entered another dimly lit chamber when they heard a sound of movement above their heads and looking up saw a steel cage suspended from the ceiling. In it was something which bore a faint resemblance to a man, a bent and emaciated figure with bloodshot eyes which glowered down upon them bestial wise.

The cage was cunningly contrived so that a man could neither stand upright in it, nor rest prone, nor could he sit down but must ever crouch, all his muscles taut and strained, fearing the contact of needle-pointed steel lance heads which thrust them-

selves up from the bottom of the cage.

They next entered into a long gallery wherein their nostrils were assailed by a fetid odor so overpoweringly unpleasant that they attempted to hurry their guide through this. But he, as though enjoying their discomfort, seemed rather to slow his steps than to hurry them.

In the gloom which surrounded them they heard the stirring of life. A narrow cleft in the wall admitted a few rays of light which fell on the opposite side of the room and showed the iron bars of a cage. It was one of a row which lined the walls, cages no larger than the height of a dog, and used to confine men! As the sound of their progress through the dark room fell on the ears of the prisoners they set up a fiendish howling, sounding like lost souls deep in the Pit. The sound made the blood freeze in the veins, so terrible it was and so animal-like in its accent of pain and misery.

Ahead of them their guide walked slowly and gravely and Douglas suddenly conceived the idea that this leading them through these chambers of horror was done deliberately and with some preconceived plan in mind.

As they came into a larger, lighter room they saw two monks stripped to the waist, their arms bloody up to the elbows. The two were engaged in wiping and putting away many peculiarly shaped, bright steel knives, faintly reminiscent of surgeon's knives. Spread out on a flat broad slab of stone, tied spreadeagle fashion lay what might have been once a human being but was now no more than a pulpy bloody mass of bones and flesh. They could see the heart of this creature laid open to view and to their horror, saw that it still pulsated faintly.

Douglas reached instinctively for his pistol but Konat seized his arm and hurried him on past the two ghoulish-looking torturers and their fiendish workmanship.

"We've got to find Hamilton," warned Konat.

Sick with the horror of the sight and all that portended of beastliness, Douglas allowed himself to be led out of that gruesome human abattoir.

"The Death of the Thousand Slices," whispered Konat, his face grim. The tolling of the great bell above them took on an added sinister significance as they hurried on into another gloomy passage.

THEIR guide led them into the courtyard again at last, much to their relief, halting them in the shadow of a doorway not far from the entrance of the temple they had just come from by such a circuitous route. Here he bade them wait and stood silent beside them, twirling his prayer-wheel vigorously.

A fanfare of hoarse-toned trumpets fell on their ears coming from within the portals of the temple. Three boys wearing a sort of bronze armor, and carrying helmets on their heads and spears on their shoulders, marched into the courtyard. They were followed by twelve yellow-clad monks blowing upon trumpets made from human thighbones. After these came men clashing cymbals and beating upon drums made from human skulls. There followed these a group of higher lamas wearing golden yellow cloaks thrown over their scarlet gowns. On their heads were great helmets made of wool and crested with golden yellow, looking very much like the horse-hair crested helmets of the days of ancient Greece.

Through all this clamor of drums and trumpets the great bell beat out its single resounding notes, dominating and almost drowning the processional music, if it were possible to classify these weird sounds as music.

A little spare old man, luxuriously garbed in flaming scarlet silk, wearing in his hat the peacock feather and mandarin button of high Chinese official rank, followed after the lamas, walking very slowly and clicking the beads of a coral rosary.

"The Pandita Gheghen!" whispered Konat and Douglas studied the weak and

rather tremulous but not unkindly face of the old fellow.

AFTER him there followed monks carrying many trays covered with small red images. These were placed on the ground in the center of the courtyard, the Pandita Gheghen muttered some prayers over them and sprinkled some powder on them after which they were set alight and burned brightly to the banging of drums and cymbals and the hoarse blare of the horns and the voices of the chanting monks.

The old Pandita, escorted by several lamas, left the ceremony at this stage, and went slowly up a staircase to the right.

Beckoning them to follow, the yellow-faced lama, their guide, led them after the Pandita and they climbed the stairs in his wake, arriving at last on the first gallery. Here they were bidden to wait while their guide disappeared into the quarters of the Pandita. They occupied their time in staring down at the colorful scene in the courtyard where the monks and lamas continued their chanting amid the blare and crash of the instruments. From this vantage point Douglas hoped to be able to locate the position of that mysterious great bronze bell which had not ceased its tolling since their arrival. But try as he might he could not see it, nor any sign of it, although the vibration of its clangor quivered in the air around him. He had watched narrowly for any sign or token of Hamilton but without result.

Glancing at his wrist watch, he saw that half an hour had elapsed since their first entry into the monastery. Another thirty minutes and Sergeant Miller would start on the war path.

Their guide returned at that moment, beckoning them to follow, staring at them impersonally with his hard dead-looking eyes.

Chapter XVIII

THE PANDITA GHEGHEN OF BORO NOR

THEY were ushered into a large and luxuriously furnished room, its walls hung with Chinese embroidered silks, its floor deeply piled with rare Bokhara rugs, soft and lustrous. The Pandita Gheghen, a vivid splotch of scarlet in his silken robes, sat in meditation on his cushions at the far end. As they approached he looked up quickly, and, as Douglas thought, a trifle fearfully, at their guide, the lama with the dead opaque eyes.

Nearby sat a queer little old man with a mahogany-colored face deeply pitted with smallpox. He was clad in the lama costume of red and yellow and clicked his rosary industriously as they approached, not failing however to take in every detail of the two strangers with his keen bright eyes.

Afterward they learned that he was a Tibetan doctor of a type peculiar to that country, his duties consisting in the main, of looking after the bodily well being of the head of the monastery—so long as the policy and conduct of the head of the monastery was acceptable to the Dalai Lama. Should an abbot offend, or be too extravagant, or act too independently, the Tibetan doctor was there to see that the abbot was transferred to another life, aiding him thereto by a liberal dose of poison.

Behind the Pandita stood a young *chela*, a boy of some seventeen years.

The Pandita rose in his place, his manner noticeably nervous, and greeted his guests, throwing over their shoulders the ceremonial *hatyk*, or square of silken cloth.

Their guide, the lama, stood for a while in the doorway, surveying the scene with his emotionless eyes. Then he disappeared abruptly followed shortly by the little poison doctor.

There was a noticeable relief showing on the attitude of the Pandita and his *chela* as the lama left the room, a relaxation from strain and a return to normal.

A black, teakwood table, fantastically carved with writhing dragons and inlaid with mother-of-pearl was brought forth by the *chela* and from somewhere he brought tea, a gray colored concoction brewed with butter and salt. It was served in extraordinarily fragile jade-green porce-

lain cups, set in exquisitely fashioned silver filigree studded with coral.

Remembering the warning about poison in the monastery, Douglas and Konat forebore to do more than touch their lips to the cups, it being no difficult matter, in any case, to refrain from drinking the greasy, salty mess. Their host however drank down his cup with much hearty smacking of his lips and had another portion furnished him.

SOMETHING akin to pity for this rather kindly, obviously harassed old man entered Douglas's heart. The old fellow was so obviously sitting on a volcano, not knowing at what moment it might erupt and blow him into Kingdom Come. Gentle he was and his eyes were too benign for one ever to hold him responsible for the cruel beastliness which went on in the dark places in this brooding place of evil.

The old Pandita had greeted them in Russian. It was in that language that Douglas addressed him.

"We have come from afar to see you," he said.

The old Pandita inclined his head.

"I am honored," he replied.

Douglas looked narrowly at the *chela* behind the Pandita and swiftly decided that he was to be trusted, undoubtedly being in the old man's confidence and devoted to him.

"I find, after my arrival here, that your enemies are my enemies as well," Douglas said quietly. "A common enemy should make good friends."

The Pandita betrayed no sign that he had heard, except that he shot a single glance at the American's face, then lowered his eyes.

"Yes?" he inquired at last.

"My enemies believe that a leopard needs no lantern," returned Douglas quietly.

The old man looked up again swiftly and sharply, with something like a gleam of fear in his eyes, and with something rather pathetically hopeful at the same time. But the look of hope faded again. Douglas read his thought.

"We are small in numbers but great in strength," he added.

"But you are surrounded with enemies," answered the Pandita quickly, then in a lower tone, "as I am. As I am," he repeated hopelessly, with head bowed.

"You have about eight hundred monks here?" asked Douglas, trying to keep the sympathy he felt for the old man from showing in his voice.

THE Pandita nodded.

"And of these eight hundred how many do you suppose believe that a leopard needs no lantern?"

"I don't know—I don't know. Perhaps not so many but they are cruelly powerful —listen!" he commanded and Douglas heard in the silence the continued booming of the great bell beating out its slow and fateful tocsin. The old man shrugged his shoulders and sighed despondently. The significance of that bell puzzled Douglas but it would not do to ask for enlightenment now, as he well knew.

"Have you seen anything of a Russian named Gorodoff?" was Douglas's next question.

The old man nodded.

"He is even now within the monastery. Such a one will undoubtedly be reborn as a worm in the intestines of a dog."

"Will you give me leave to rid you of his presence?" asked Douglas. "Also to take away my officer who is prisoner here?"

The Pandita betrayed not the slightest surprise but inclined his head. "Gladly, but how?" he said. "You know," he explained with a sidelong look, "Gorodoff is one of them, and they hold your officer prisoner."

"I know—I will need your permission to bring my men inside the monastery."

"My permission can be given but it will avail you but little."

"You are master in your own monastery, your power is absolute," suggested Douglas.

THE old man shrugged his shoulders hopelessly, but gave no other sign.

"Your Chho-timba is faithful to you?" asked Douglas, the Chho-timba being a very important personage in a monastery, acting as sort of Provost Marshal.

"He is a follower of the True Way."

"Good. And have you others whom you can trust?"

"A few."

"Assemble them around you. Send for the worst of the evil ones and punish them openly and publicly. A show of strength will bring the uncertain ones to you immediately."

The old man sat silent for a space, his eyes closed. Then he opened them again.

"It may be that you are right. In any case things could not be worse than they are and it is worth trying to improve them." He turned and gave some order to his *chela*. The boy bowed his head and departed eagerly.

In a few minutes a huge Mongol monk with a broad, good-natured face, came in. He was followed by seven or eight other monks.

The Pandita gave another order. In a minute there entered the large monk who had admitted them to the monastery on their arrival, the black-browed keeper of the gate.

Looking insolently at Douglas and Konat, he turned with a poorly concealed sneer to hear what the Pandita had to say.

The old man gave him some order, short sharp words having the ring of command in them. The monk shook his head, his eyes heavy lidded with insolence, his hands on his hips. The Pandita looked nonplussed for a space.

"Have him seized and bound!" suggested Douglas.

The monk turned and glared angrily, but the old Pandita was quick on the trigger. He jerked a thumb at the rebellious one and in a trice the huge Chho-timba had leaped upon him, overthrown him and had him neatly bound, tossing him easily into a corner of the room.

Douglas nodded with immense satisfaction. A likeable sort was that big shouldered Chho-timba, neat and workmanlike.

"Now if you'll send this one with us to the gate I'll bring my men in," he said to the Pandita.

The old man, flushed and a little proud of this first easy victory, straightened out his shoulders and ordered that it should be done. The Chho-timba grinned cheerfully and led the way after taking a great iron key from the belt of the trussed and vengeful keeper of the gate.

"We will return in very few minutes," said Douglas and followed the new guide down the steps and into the courtyard. The bell continued to boom overhead and Douglas caught himself again wondering what the special significance of it might be.

THERE were few monks in the courtyard. Of the lama with the opaque, dead looking eyes there was no sign as they crossed the court toward the entrance passageway. It was when they were about to disappear in this that Douglas, giving a single backward look, saw the man standing in the shadow of one of the galleries staring down at them.

It lacked two minutes of the hour they were supposed to be in the monastery when they reached the little wicket gate. There was a low whistle in the darkness and Douglas saw Miller detach himself from the shadows near the inside of the gate.

"Just comin' to look for you, Captain, there's a gang a' Chahars ridin' hell bent for election toward this place around the shore o' the lake."

"How far away are they?"

"They can't be more'n ten minutes distant."

"That doesn't give us much time to lose. Burst out through the wicket and have the cars ready to move. I'll have this big gate opened and we can dash in here." Then he added under his breath, "trusting to God we don't get attacked both before and behind!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE WITH THE DUGPAS

IT WAS Konat who translated to the Chho-timba Douglas's orders to open the great gate so that the cars might be admitted. It seemed an age before the huge lock was turned, the chain unlinked, and the massive bars removed and the heavy iron-studded gate swung slowly on its creaking hinges.

The cars were quickly run into the passageway. Peering out through the gate Douglas saw the Chahars, of whom he estimated there must be at least seventy, lashing their horses in an effort to arrive before the gate was closed. But the great barrier was slowly pushed back into place, the first bar being fastened when the foremost horsemen were scarcely fifty yards away. Standing by while the bars were being replaced and the gate made fast, Douglas followed the two cars into the courtyard where they awaited him.

The entrance of the two automobiles caused much excitement in the monastery. The monks came scurrying out of their rooms from all directions. The lama of the yellow face and the dead seeming eyes had not reappeared as yet.

The huge Chho-timba marched imperturbably ahead of them leading them to the guest chamber which lay across the courtyard to the left of the entrance to the temple. Here they found a long narrow room with a stone floor. Its windows were closed with heavy wooden shutters. The room had one entrance onto the stone flagged porch and another in the rear leading into a dark passage that went somewhere into the interior of the temple.

Douglas ordered the cars run up onto the low stone porch directly in front of the door of this room. Nadina and Aksakoff, her father, Sergeant Rethers and Corporal King, Carter and Miller, all alighted and surveyed their new quarters. Carter

immediately began to make arrangements for the evening meal, unloading his packages and boxes after inspecting the single stone hearth in the center of the room, a hearth that had no chimney but from which the smoke was supposed to go out the windows or door. This was well enough in theory but in practice it worked out that the occupants went out the door and the windows while the smoke stayed in.

From somewhere the Chho-timba returned with fuel, dried camel dung and thorn root for the most part.

In the meantime the great bell continued its tolling while the courtyard was filled with monks and lamas who milled about uncertainly and in great excitement. At the gate some sort of a parley was taking place which required the presence of the Chho-timba. He returned after a time for conference with the Pandita Gheghen only to go to the gate once more where he admitted a burly Chahar, one of their leaders to judge him by his white coat. The lama with the dead eyes met them and escorted the Chahar to the room of the Pandita Gheghen.

"It's time we got on the job again," Douglas called to Konat, and the two picked their way across the court after leaving orders that the rifles and grenades were to be unloaded and placed within reach. They pushed their way arrogantly through the crowd of sullen monks, paying no attention to the black looks and the guttural insults directed at them.

The stairway leading to the rooms of the Pandita Gheghen was crowded with monks craning their necks in curiosity. Upon seeing Douglas and Konat they fell back, giving them room but in no very friendly manner.

ENTERING they found the old man seated, facing the Chahar officer who stood before him with folded arms. The lama with the dead eyes was bending over the old Pandita, his manner threatening. As Douglas and Konat came in the door the Pandita shot a troubled glance at them, then something akin to a sigh of relief came from him. The yellow-faced lama straightened, turning to face the newcomers.

"The Chahar here demands that I surrender you and your men to him," said the old man, "or otherwise he attacks within the hour."

"Tell the Chahar pig that if he attacks the monastery I will kill every man he has in his command!" Douglas's voice rang out and his eyes blazed, so that the Pandita, seeing and hearing him, was comforted and returned a spirited answer to the Chahar.

That individual turned away, muttering

something under his breath and strode toward the door to gain which he had to pass Douglas, whose attention was concentrated on the evil-faced lama. For the first time he saw the dead opaque eyes of this man flare up and wondered at the cause. The Chahar was within two paces of him. The lama's eyes should have warned Douglas. As it was he did step backward a pace, still keeping his eyes on the lama.

Konat, whose keen eyes were on the Chahar, suddenly leaped forward lithe and swift as a cat, and grasped the wrist of the Chahar leader. Something tinkled on the floor, a long razor-bladed knife. Konat twisted the bandit leader's arm until it cracked and the fellow screamed in agony when the tall Kirghez shoved him violently toward the door.

"Go, woman, to your tent and scream!" he said contemptuously as the fellow stumbled out and down the stairs.

"Thank you, Konat," said Douglas casually.

"If you will be answerable for the loyalty of your monks my men will be answerable for the defense of the monastery from any Chahar attacks," he then stated, thinking of the almost impregnable situation of the place with its high stone walls, its loopholed walls and towers. It would be easy to defend it against any sort of attack save that of modern troops armed with artillery.

The Pandita, before answering, looked up in dread at the yellow-faced lama whose eyes had resumed their usual dead emotionless expression. And the lama began to speak, smoothly and easily, as one habituated to bending men to his will, never giving even a sidelong glance to where Douglas and Konat stood.

"It is no quarrel of ours, this warfare between the Chahars and these white men, much better give them up than to risk harm to the monastery through fighting. The monks are in no mood to be subjected to such affairs. I cannot be answerable for their behavior—they will very likely take matters into their own hands." He went on, every word he said a covert threat, meanwhile fixing the Pandita with his cold expressionless eyes, his glance so hypnotic and compelling that the old man began to waver. His eyes shifted unhappily from the lama to Douglas and back again.

The Chho-timba, serene and unperturbed, returning from having escorted the Chahar to the gate, had entered the room quietly moving near the Pandita.

Douglas broke into the talk of the yellow-faced lama.

"Are you master here, Pandita Gheghen, or is this one master?" and he pointed to the lama. "If you are master here, stop this man's evil, for he is evil past all imagining, as you well know, and the cause of all your woes. Have him seized and bound!" Douglas shot the words out with all the force of a command. The effect on the Pandita was instantaneous.

"Seize him and bind him!" he echoed Douglas's words, pointing to the lama. Without a second's hesitation the Chho-timba and two others, of whom one was the *chela,* leaped at the yellow-faced one.

AND then occurred a surprising thing. The lama stood there facing them. To all appearance he did not move a muscle nor lift a finger. Yet those three men, hating him and desiring mightily to drag him down, recoiled from him suddenly as though they had been repelled by a strong electric shock.

It was incomprehensible and uncanny. Before anyone could make a move to stop him the yellow-faced lama had moved swiftly to the door and past out into the hallway.

From outside came a shout and the sound of running feet. The Chho-timba and several of the loyal monks rushed to the door just in time to repel the attack of eight or ten men armed with clubs and knives. The mob at the door surged backward and forward, neither side giving ground. From somewhere in the courtyard came the sound of a shot. Douglas began immediately to figure out some method of getting back to his men.

The fight at the door ebbed and flowed, the adherents of the Pandita struggling mightily to keep the Dugpas from entering.

It was then that Konat went into action, his long keen sword leaping from the scabbard. His height gave him a tremendous reach and he stood behind the loyal monks,

thrusting outward with his sword, the keen blade snaking forward lightning-fast, again and again until the pressure against the door lessened and the monks were finally enabled to close it.

"Is there any way to get from here over to where my men are?" asked Douglas of the Pandita, his voice calm and business-like.

The old man who, to give him credit, took the whole thing very calmly, nodded and beckoned them to follow. Pushing aside a tapestry at the far end of the room, he opened a small door and led the way down a narrow, steep flight of stone steps. At the bottom the way led along a dark stone passageway, too dark to do anything but feel one's way along by touching the walls on either side.

Although he felt he trusted the old Pandita, Douglas was none too comfortable in that dark subterranean passage. Behind him adding a little note of comfort, he heard the footsteps of Konat and the rest of the party.

From ahead the Pandita warned him of steps which he mounted slowly feeling his way step by step. At last a door was opened ahead by the Pandita and he came out through this narrow exit. Looking back, he saw that the narrow door was at the base of the big statue of Chak-Dor, Wielder of the Thunderbolt, which stood just within the entrance to the temple.

They had to move forward a few paces in order to see what was going on in the courtyard. The place was crowded with monks, fighting; two groups struggling by the steps leading to the Pandita's room and another group near the entrance passageway to the gate.

"Is there another key to the gate than that possessed by the Chho-timba?" asked Douglas suddenly.

"Yes, the lama who leads the dugpas has a key."

So the lama with the dead eyes possessed the keys to the gates? This was something to worry over, reflected Douglas as the party began to move cautiously toward the guest chamber.

Their progress was arrested by a loud shouting and a scattering of the fighting group near the entrance passage to the great gate.

Out of this passage, galloping their horses, and laying about them with their swords, shot a group of blue coated Chahars.

"We are lost," said the Pandita calmly.

Chapter XX

MYSTERY IN A BUDDHIST TEMPLE

THE entrance of the Chahars did not help matters much but worse was to come. Edging along, close to the wall, to avoid being seen, Douglas had reached the door to the outer porch when a shouting and trampling came from the direction of the guest chamber where he had left the party.

A huge figure, head bent low, honest fright written on every feature, came bounding around the corner and nearly bowled Douglas over.

"Le's get outa here, sah, Captain," panted Carter looking wildly behind him. "Le's get away from dis here place!" and he headed toward the temple interior, looking behind in terror.

"What's the matter?" called Douglas.

"Dey all been captured, come along wid me, Captain, they'll grab you sho' as shootin'!"

A yell went up from the courtyard where several of the Chahars saw Douglas and galloped their horses toward him. The group in the temple entrance, led by Carter, fled precipitately into the interior of the great gloomy hall, Douglas shutting the heavy door behind him and barring it as the Chahar horses thundered onto the stone flagged porch.

"What's it all about?" Douglas demanded of Carter. "What happened?"

The big Negro's eyes were rolling wildly, he was about as scared as a husky six-foot colored man can be without collapsing.

"Sah, Captain, you all knows Ah ain't scared a nothin' that walks laike a man."

"Sure, I know that, go on, what hap-

pened?" Douglas was worried and impatient.

"Well, sah, Captain, Ah'm standin' out yonder on the pohch by one of the cahs lookin' foh a can o' sugah Ah misplaced somewheahs, when Ah—Ah hears a horrid yell comin' from behind me. Ah looks around and sees Miller and the rest of 'em fightin' with a bunch o' skeletons."

"What!"

"Yes, sah, Captain, Ah sweahs on a stack o' Bibles that they was fightin' with skeletons, big white skeletons. And Ah says to mah feet, 'Feet get me outa here quick.' Ah says. Ah don't hold no truck wid dem kinda goin's on at all, at all!" Carter's voice contained a note of grieved wonder.

There was a great pounding and shouting on the door. Douglas listened to it in silence. Whoever had done it, evidently Miller and the rest of them were captured by the dugpas—which meant that the ammunition and guns were captured as well.

THE Pandita sat at the foot of a statue clicking his rosary. Konat was listening to Carter's tale, the loyal monks, a little handful, were standing behind the Pandita. Douglas took stock of the situation.

Although they were safe for the moment, there was no telling how long the door would last against the assault directed upon it. The great hall behind them was dimly lighted with the flickering gleam of many butter lamps, its high ceiling lost in obscurity. Above their heads stood the life sized statue of Maitreye, the Buddha to come, seated like a European in a chair, his benign broad face blackened with the smoke of many butter lamps.

There was no denying that they were in a bad way. Konat had his pistol and sword. Douglas had his pistol, the Pandita had nothing but his rosary, while the monks had a club or two between them.

The pounding upon the great door continued, then it ceased as suddenly as it had commenced. The clamor was succeeded by a silence heavy and portentous. Dimly they could hear the boom of the great bronze bell which jarred faintly in their ears.

"They can gain entrance here by another route," the Pandita spoke up, pointing. "There, behind the statue of Maitreye," and Douglas hurried behind the benign, black-faced statue and found a small door. He was not a second too soon, for as he reached the door it opened slowly outward and the head and shoulders of a Chahar appeared. With the butt of his pistol, Douglas smashed at the man's face and heard him groan and fall backward. Hastily slamming the door to, Douglas sought for some means of fastening it, but could find neither lock nor bar. Leaning his weight against the door he looked upward at the heavy statue of Maitreye over his head.

"Maitreye will have to save us from attack through this door," he called to the Pandita. "Tell your men to lift him down."

Willing hands tipped the heavy stone statue over on its side and lowered it gently to a place on the floor where it was shoved and pushed against the door, effectually barring that entrance.

Where the benign statue of Maitreye had stood there was only a bare platform.

"Are there any other entrances to the temple?" Douglas asked the Pandita.

"That I cannot say, but I am afraid that there is another somewhere which comes from the secret room of the Bon," replied the old man and went on clicking his rosary as though the matter was of little moment.

Suddenly a solution of their problem came to Douglas; the gods should fight for them. But he must first try to find the other entrance to the temple and guard it against approach. Calling Konat and Carter to him he spoke to them in a low tone. Both men nodded and hurried away, Carter with a pleased chuckle. Douglas meanwhile narrowly examined every wall and cranny and every place where a door might be placed. His search was unsuccessful.

The silence was almost uncanny, accentuated as it was by the low throbbing note of the mysterious bronze bell somewhere overhead.

Of the fate of Miller and the rest of

the party, of what might be happening to Hamilton imprisoned somewhere in the building, Douglas did not dare think. He hoped against hope that the Chahars or dugpas might spare their lives, waiting until all were captured before starting any executions or any torture.

KONAT returned to him pistol in hand. "Have you any ammunition?" he asked. "I have only two cartridges."

Douglas groaned inwardly but handed over his extra magazine clip containing five cartridges. This left him with nothing but the five in his own pistol and with no reserve.

No trace could be found of any other entrance to the temple, although the monks searched as well. If there was one it was known only to the leaders of the dugpas and they could be depended upon to make use of it.

Douglas decided to retire back upon the main altar, taking position with their backs against its wall, selling their lives as dearly as possible should the temple be entered.

From where they stood, a little group of men huddled together awaiting they knew not what fate, they could see the great door and the statues reared up along the floor of the temple, some of them so vast that they lost themselves in the obscurity of the temple roof. None of the group spoke, all straining their eyes and ears for sight or sound of the enemy.

A man's eyesight is prone to strange tricks when he watches in the gloom with his nerves strained. Therefore Douglas discounted the shadow that he saw near the great door, even discounted it after he was certain that it had advanced half the length of the hall and was crouched under the darkness of one of the images.

Wondering if Konat's eyes had also seen it, he turned and found the tall Kirghez loosening his blade in its scabbard. Konat nodded in confirmation. Evidently then, it was not his eyesight that had played tricks on him, for Konat had seen it as well.

ANOTHER and another dark shadow fitted across near the main door. There came to their ears a faint sound as of many men stirring and creeping in the gloom. Nearer and nearer came the creeping, rustling sound. From somewhere came a steely tinkle, as of a knife being dropped on a stone floor.

The little group of men by the altar stood as if carved from marble, Douglas wishing that the awful suspense would end, that this crawling and silent danger would break into active malignancy and bring things to a conclusion.

His hand clutched on his pistol, he leaned forward, straining his eyes toward the foot of a statue near the altar. Was there a shadow there that moved? Staring intently he saw the shape crawl forward inch by inch and lose itself behind the darkness of a nearer image.

Very calmly and almost gladly, he loosed the safety catch of his pistol waiting for the figure to reappear. There it crawled at last, slowly and cautiously from behind the base of the nearer image, this time in plain view.

Raising his pistol, he took careful aim and began to squeeze the trigger when a whisper fell on his ears, and someone plucked at his elbow. Lowering the weapon he turned to find the Pandita at his side, his face alight with a strange fire.

"My eyes are old," whispered the Pandita. "You who are younger tell—did we not remove the statue of our Lord Maitreye from its base and place it against the small door?"

"Yes," said Douglas eagerly.

"Look, you with your younger eyes, and tell me, is not the stature of our Lord Maitreye back once more upon its pedestal?" the old man's voice was full of suppressed excitement.

Looking down the length of the hall, half way to the door, where the base of the statue stood, Douglas's eyes followed up to its top.

The statue of Maitreye was back in place! Carter had begun to play the desperate role his master had designed for him.

Chapter XXI

THE BRONZE SKULL OF BORO NOR

A MIRACLE!" breathed the Pandita ecstatically and turned to tell his monks.

The shadow on which Douglas had drawn his sight was still in place. Again he raised the pistol, taking slow and careful aim, and pressed the trigger. The roar of the shot filled the silent temple. The shadow half rose and then fell backward silently and moved no more.

It was as though the shot had been a signal, for suddenly the temple in front of them became alive with men. From behind statues from dark corners, from the very floor and walls they materialized. But still they made no sound but continued to advance, the light from the butter lamps reflecting the gleam of steel held in their hands. Chahars there were amongst the monks and a few of the lamas of the monastery, their faces cruel and blood hungry.

Slowly and silently they advanced, step by step, converging from all points on the little group standing on the raised steps of the altar.

A voice rang suddenly through the temple.

"Hold a moment!" it commanded and all eyes turned toward the rear of the hall where under the statue of Maitreye stood the lean figure of the lama with the dead eyes, his hand pointing forward in a gesture of command.

"You, Pandita Gheghen, and you men upon the altar, surrender yourselves! By surrendering now you can have your choice of deaths—either to perish by the fire, by the steel or by the cord. If you struggle against your fate you will perish under the rigors of the Bronze Skull. Heed my words while there is yet time!"

There was a murmur of horror behind Douglas, the Pandita and the monks whispering among themselves.

"The Death of the Bronze Skull," they whispered, fear in their voices. "Let us surrender!" and Douglas felt them moving behind him and edged slightly away, afraid that they would seize him and surrender him in spite of himself. Turning he held them all with his pistol, Konat drew his sword quietly and ranged himself beside Douglas.

"I give you one minute to decide," the voice of the lama rang out again. The Chahars and monks on the floor of the temple gathered themselves for the last rush on the small group, the men behind Douglas crouched, ready to leap upon him. Dead silence fell upon the immense gloomy temple.

Suddenly the voice of the Pandita rang out, shrill, half terrified, half exultant, and Douglas could have hugged the ancient fanatic.

"A miracle!" he screamed. "A miracle! Behold the vengeance of our Lord Maitreye!"

Every head in the hall turned toward the statue of Maitreye. A gasp of wonder and a groan of superstitious horror rose from all those men.

FOR the statue of Maitreye was seen to rise, slowly and majestically, to advance to the edge of its platform and to glare down at the lama whose head was on a level with the top of the dais. The lama gazed up, frozen with astonishment. The statue of Maitreye leaned forward silently and swiftly, there was the sound as of a meat ax hitting the block and the lama dropped to the floor as though smitten with a thunderbolt.

"Behold the miracle!" screamed the Pandita. "The Lord Maitreye has avenged his honor and the honor of his servants!" his voice rang through the hall like a clarion.

"Miracle of miracles—that I should have lived to see this!" the Pandita's voice was half a sob, then a mounting note of anger grew in it. "To the dust, your faces in the dust, vile ones, crave the mercy of Lord Maitreye for your desecretion of his holy temple."

All over that vast hall groans went up. Weapons dropped from nerveless fingers. Chahars, monks, lamas all that evil crew, fell on their knees and abased themselves, their foreheads in the dust.

"Have mercy, have mercy, Lord Maitreye!" a vast groan rose in the temple, and strangled cries of fear and wonder.

"Miserable worms!" the Pandita's voice rose clear and strong. "Pray to the Lord

Maitreye that he does not turn you into the maggots that crawl in the dung of the swine!"

"Have mercy, Lord Maitreye! Have mercy!" the cry continued from the vast hall.

THEN all voices were stilled at a new wonder. For the statue of Maitreye, standing, its hand outstretched in the attitude of benediction, began to chant.

The sound arose, rich and musical and vibrant, the words and music flowing together in beautiful harmony, so powerful that it sounded now like the notes of an organ and so sweet that anon it died away like the whispering of a violin.

Douglas blessed his black servant's histrionic ability.

"It is the Ancient Tongue!" Konat spoke up, awe in his face. "He speaks to us in the Language of the Gods!"

"Listen, O ye miserable," the Pandita shouted, "he speaks with the tongue of the Gods, the Ancient Language forgotten of men, the language of the Kingdom of Agharti."

The voice of Maitreye rose and fell, gripping all hearers by the powerful sweetness of its rhythm. Strangest of all, the bronze bell that had dominated all other sounds for so long, ceased on a sudden its reverberant clamor. It was as though the bell itself listened to the voice of the Master.

That the Lord Buddha himself had appeared in the temple of the monastery ran through the place like wild fire. The great outer doors were opened, letting in new worshippers who, after seeing for themselves that a miracle was taking place, threw themselves in abject humility on their faces.

The great temple was now filled to overflowing with worshippers. The chant of the god grew stronger and rose in volume so that it reverberated against walls and roof.

"If one could only understand his words!" the old Pandita wrung his hands.

"I understand a little of the language of the Gods, I have been to the Kingdom of Agharti," Konat spoke up, and paying no attention to the Pandita's joy at this unexpected aid, he went on, "The Lord Maitreye commands that all dugpas renounce their evil and return to the true way."

The old Pandita raised his voice, full of fervor, his eyes afire with a great light.

"Listen O ye miserable ones, to the words of the Lord Maitreye. All followers of the Leopard, all worshippers of the Bon are commanded to renounce their evil and return to the true way!"

"We hear! Mercy, Lord Maitreye!" moaned the vast horde in the temple.

"The Lord Maitreye commands that all prisoners be released from the cages, especially the white man below the Bronze Skull, that the Russian Gorodoff be bound and thrown into the lake," Konat spoke in sort of an ecstatic sing-song which communicated itself to the Pandita. The words were hurled forth by the old man's shrill voice so that they penetrated to the farthest corners of the temple. Again came the heartfelt response, only this time certain ones near the door rose and seized a man standing within the portal and carried him away, kicking and protesting, his angry hot eyes filled with abject fear.

"The Lord Maitreye commands that all scorcery and black magic be kept from the monastery, that the place be cleansed of evil and that the Pandita Gheghen be obeyed so that evil shall no longer be found under the roofs."

HALF crying with joy, the old man repeated Konat's words to the mass on the temple floors.

"We hear and we obey!" they moaned.

The god suddenly brought his chant to a close, leaving the rich overtones of his voice ringing in men's ears, leaving in Douglas's ears moreover the ring of the words and the music of "All God's Chillen Got Shoes!"

Quietly and majestically the god sank back on his chair. Slowly and silently his limbs and body resumed the classic pose

of the seated Lord Maitreye and before their eyes he seemed to freeze again into stone.

"Oh, ye unworthy ones," the Pandita's exultant voice broke the awed silence, "it has been given you to see the Miracle of Miracles. Men in ages to come shall speak of this day with awe and wonder. The fame of this monastery shall travel to the farthest edges of the world. From the golden roofs of Lhasa to the border of the Indus men shall marvel at this wonder. Countless generations yet unborn shall chant the story of the Miraculous Return of the Lord Maitreye at the Monastery of Boro Nor. To your cells, unworthy ones, to your cells and pray and meditate; to your cells and chasten your hearts!"

"We hear and we obey!" came the groaning of the host on the floor and quietly, with bowed heads, they drifted out of the temple followed by the Pandita himself, wrapt in religious ecstasy so that he heeded no one nor noticed that his guests were left alone.

It was Miller's glad shout from the door of the temple that first apprized Douglas that all was well with the rest of his party.

But with Miller came another, a serious, bespectacled white man, whose face showed traces of suffering and strain.

At first Douglas did not recognize him, so much had he changed, but after a few seconds' scrutiny of the newcomer he put out his hand gladly.

"Hello, Hamilton," he said, "we got here in time after all. Have you had a rough time of it?"

"They've hazed me pretty badly," admitted Hamilton, "I thought I was done for time and again. If I hadn't kept memorizing tables of logarithms I would have gone insane. It was that infernal Bronze Skull thing that worried me the most. I'm —what I mean is—you know——" he floundered, "I'm awfully grateful to you."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Douglas, "we simply carried out our orders. Are the maps all right?"

"All complete. When they captured me they took them away but they gave them back just now." Hamilton looked over Douglas's shoulder to where Carter stood. "Is that the colored man that impersonated their Buddha? He certainly looks like Buddha come to life at that!"

CARTER joined them, very proud of his impersonation of a heathen god and felt almost too superior to aid Douglas and Corporal King and Konat and the rest in placing the heavy statue of Maitreye back in its place. Carter was all for enjoying some more of this impersonation but Douglas quietly negatived it.

"Keep that remarkable face of yours concealed," he ordered, "or they'll make you a prisoner and feed you through a hole in the wall for the next ninety-nine years. Your looking like their expected god isn't going to keep on fooling them forever."

"Fo' Gawd, is that the way they acts?" Carter could not hurry enough to pull his cap down and raise the collar of his coat up.

Night had come and all was black outside. The group stood there in the temple, talking over the day's experiences. Konat was deep in some exceedingly serious talk with Nadina and judging from the preoccupation of those two they were evidently on the point of agreeing to live out the rest of their lives together in disagreement, which is as it should be.

"But how did you come to get captured?" asked Douglas of Miller.

"Captain, I'll be eternally hamstrung if I know. We was watchin' all that fightin' between the monks in the courtyard when suddenly we was jumped by what looked like a gang of skeletons. But they were monks dressed up in this funny devil dance stuff they wear. First thing I know I got a clout over the ear from behind. The next thing I know these people have got us all tied up like chickens, have grabbed our guns and everything else (they give 'em back just now) and are draggin' us up to a funny place where they keep the Bronze Skull."

"Did you see that? Where is it? Show me!" Douglas was all eagerness, and followed where Miller and Sergeant Rethers led up a winding staircase giving at last upon the roof of the temple. A sort of pagoda stood here and the three went toward it.

"There's a dead man in there, Captain, he looks kinda ghastly if your stomach feels

at all weak." Miller looked inquiringly at the captain.

"After today I can stand anything, lead on," replied Douglas and they opened the door of the pagoda. There were some dim lamps burning in the gloom of the interior. In the semi-obscurity Douglas made out a vast mass hanging above them suspended from the roof of the pagoda on a great transverse beam.

Studying it more closely he saw that it was hollow and moulded into the form of a human skull. Directly underneath it lay a sort of a pallet. Upon this was stretched a prone figure, twisted out of all semblance to a human being.

"What's it all about?" he asked puzzled.

"Why, you see, it's like this, Captain; come under this here bell and listen."

Douglas did as he was bade. Miller picked up a beam of wood and dealt the bell a resounding thump so that it boomed forth sepulchrally and powerfully. Douglas felt his hair rise on the back of his neck, felt the muscles of his back and legs twist, felt himself writhe all over with the strength of those terrible vibrations.

Very quickly he got himself out from under that bell.

"How long do you think you could stand that racket over you without going crazy?" asked Miller.

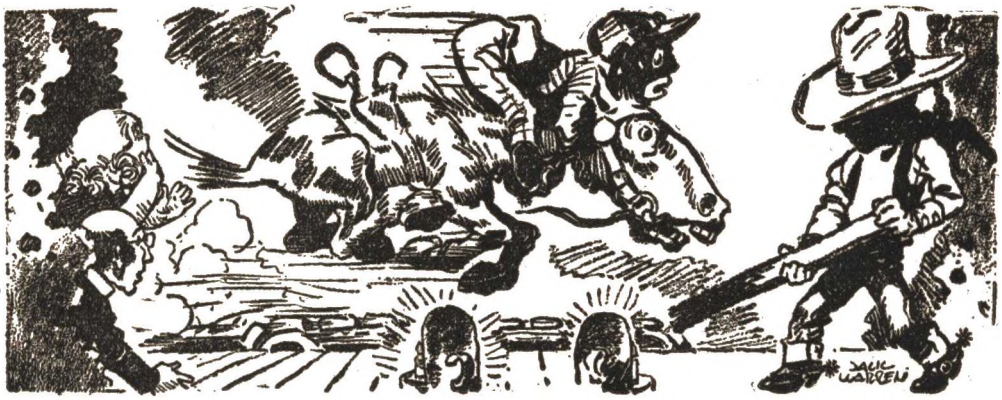
"About an hour of that ought to make any one crazy," admitted Douglas.

"It takes about three hours to make a man crazy and about five hours to kill a man—and it is supposed to be the most horrible torture in the world. At least that's what the old Russian, Nadina's father told us. They call it the Bronze Skull and it ain't any picnic to be invited for a party under its big mouth."

THEY left that monastery in a blaze of glory, showered with presents by a grateful Pandita, the vast courtyard filled with monks and lamas, brilliant in scarlet and golden yellow, the air resounding to the beating of drums and the clashing of cymbals.

In due time a cablegram reached a certain room of a certain government building in Washington, and the fact was noted, in dry official wordage that corrected maps and reports of "Subsection AQ327-X9, Section Mongolia, Inner; Continent, Asia," were being forwarded to the Information Section General Staff. It is safe to say that no mention of the miracle which had taken place at the Monastery of Boro Nor found itself in this report even though the story of the miracle had run the length and breadth of Asia.

The Information Section, General Staff, is most emphatically not interested in miracles.



"THE CURSE OF DRINK"

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "The Keeper of Red Horse Pass," "Three On and Everybody Down," etc.

THE COWTOWN OF SAN PABLO AIMED TO GIVE A PLAY FOR THE BENEFIT OF PARSON JONES' CANNIBALS. THOSE ABLE PUNCHERS, PEEWEE PARKER AND HOZIE SYKES, AIMED TO ACT IN IT. THEY DID—QUITE SOME. BUT WHEN THE LAST CURTAIN—AMONG OTHER THINGS—FELL, THE CHIEF WINNER FROM THE RIOT WAS EVELINE ANNABEL WIMPLE

MAN," says "Judgment" Jones, "is of few days and full of woe."

Well, I reckon he's right. I'm of a cheerful disposition, kinda goin' through life with a wide grin, tryin' to see everythin' in the right light and do well by my feller man; but when Old Man Woe sneaks up behind and swats yuh with his loaded quirt—what'll yuh have?

"Peewee" Parker says that as long as yuh stick to what the good Lord ordained for yuh to do, yo're all right. He picked me and Peewee to be first-class cowpunchers, that's a cinch, 'cause we ain't never goin' to be no good for anythin' else, if for that.

And then there's "Boll-Weevil" Potts, first name Hank. He's about six feet six inches lengthways, and with no width to speak of; bein' built a heap like a single-shot rifle. Hank's all right, but nature was in a playful mood when she laid out his specifications. And he runs to ears so fluently that he has to wear a six and seven-eighths hat on a seven and a quarter head to keep it from wearin' the top off his ears. As a distinguishin' mark, he wears a brown derby.

I don't hold that any man has a right to wear that kind of a war-bonnet in a cow country. It is jist a invitation to those desirin' a legitimate target. But Hank owns the No-Limit Saloon, along with the HP cow outfit, and that kinda gives him the right to look kinda doggy, as yuh might say.

Me and Peewee runs the HP outfit for Hank. Peewee Parker weighs two hundred and fifty on the hoof, and he ain't so awful tall. I'm "Hozie" Sykes, one of the real old Sykes family. My folks was in this country when the Mayflower came over. I've heard paw tell about one of his great, great grandfathers, who was livin' down in Arizona at that time. He heard about this boatload of folks comin' over; so the old man hitched up his oxen and headed for California. He said the damn' country was gittin' overrun with foreigners.

I'm merely tellin' yuh this to prove my pedigree. Peewee don't know much about his family further back than two generations, but that don't hurt his chances to be a good puncher. Owners of cow outfits don't question yuh much, when yuh apply for a saddle-slickin' job.

Hank Boll-Weevil Potts married Susie Hightower. Sometimes I look at Hank and know dang' well he wishes it was merely an unfounded rumor. Susie weighs two-twenty, and takes after her pa—and that's

takin' quite a lot. "Zibe" Hightower is somethin' for to take after. He ain't very big, but if all the rest of the meanness in the world was give him, you'd never notice the difference in his actions.

Zibe wears flowin' mustaches, two guns and a scowl. He's been in the San Pablo range since long before they built the hills and made the cuts for water to run off in, and he says he'll be here long after it's all flat land again. Nobody knows how old he is, but I've heard him tell how he showed the cliff dwellers how to build their huts.

EVERYTHIN' was goin' along all right, except for an occasional fight among ourselves or with the town of Oasis, that sink-pot of iniquity to the south of San Pablo, when along comes Eveline Annabel Wimple. Now, I don't mean any disrespect to a pretty lady. They're necessary, I reckon. Hank showed me her card, and it says, in real pretty gold letters—Eveline Annabel Wimple, D. T.

I got a good look at her, and I says, "Well, they ain't so bad to see."

"What ain't?" he asks.

"Them D. T's. I had an idea they was more serpentine, as yuh might say."

"That D. T. stuff means Dramatic Teacher."

"Pertainin' to actin'?" asks Peewee.

"With flourishes," admits Hank. "She learns yuh stage actin'."

"I've allus hankered to be a contortionist," says Peewee. "Yuh don't suppose she teaches yuh how to bend, do yuh?"

"Does that come under the headin' of dramatic?"

"It shore would, if Peewee ever bent," says I. "He lays on his back now to pull on his boots. But what in hell is a dramatic teacher doin' in San Pablo?"

"It ain't clear to me jist yet," says Hank. "Judgment Jones and her kinda holds several pow-wows, and it's somethin' to do with the church. Judgment has been tryin' to raise money enough to buy himself some fresh pants, or a pulpit or a bell, or somethin' needful for Christianity. He ain't flourished yet, as yuh might say. He said he'd have some news for me in a short time."

"That woman is pretty," says Peewee. "You better keep away from her, Hank."

"I'm a married man—and I'm satisfied."

"Satisfied that yo're married?"

"Thoroughly convinced," said Hank sadly. "Oh, it's all right with me, but when I see a damned old hi-ree-glyphic like Zibe Hightower shinin' around her, grinnin' like a Hallowe'en cat, I git hot. I said to him, 'You ought to have more sense, you danged old shadder of a vanished age.' And he says, 'I'm single, ain't I?'

"I told him he was worse than single—that he was minus one, and he got hot. Said jist because I was happily married, I was tryin' to keep him from marriage bliss. Marriage bliss! And Mrs. Judgment Jones is kinda on the warpath, too. She thinks Judgment is showin' this here D. T. woman too much attention. She told Mrs. Zeke Hardy that she knowed Judgment was smitten, 'cause for the first time in years and years he washed the back of his neck. She said the only reason Judgment faces the devil is 'cause he's ashamed to turn around on account of his neck. Oh, I dunno. The whole town is kinda stirred up."

"Susie stirred up?" I asks.

"Most always is. She's learnin' to shoot a six-gun. Hurt her arm the last time she throwed a flat-iron at me. Them things kinda keep a man active, I s'pose. Some married men kinda git in a rut, but if I ever do I'm a goner. Well, I took her for better or worse, and I shore got it."

WE LEFT Hank to his reveries of a squirshed love, and has a few drinks at the No-Limit, after which we're unfortunate in runnin' into Zibe Hightower. He's wearin' a clean shirt and he shore smells of perfume.

"Heel-yuh-tripe?" asks Peewee. "Zibe, yuh shore smell tainted. Mebbe it's 'cause yo're so old—kept too long, as yuh might say."

"I smell to suit m'self!" snaps Zibe.

"Exclusive of everybody else. Why all the odor?"

"Ain't this a free country?"

"With certain limits. You ain't learnin' dramatics, are yuh, Zibe?"

"Why not? All the world's a stage."

"And that makes us all stage drivers," says I.

"Yo're funny," says Zibe. "Yuh ought to study comedy. Pers'nally, I've got the physical assets to make a tragedian—voice, carriage——"

"Squeak and a buckboard," interrupts Peewee. "Tragedian!"

"I have so. I could do Shakespeare."

"Shore—in a horse-trade. As far as that's concerned, I ain't never seen anybody yuh couldn't do, Zibe. Yo're in love."

"No such a damn thing!"

"How old is she?"

"I ain't askin' no lady her age. Anyway, age don't make no difference; so — sa-a-a-ay, what lady are yuh talkin' about?"

"The one Judgment Jones is nutty about."

"That old Scriptural scorpion!"

"He's here to save yore soul. Said so last Sunday."

"Well, he don't need to worry about my soul. I don't."

"Yuh would, if yuh had any. Right now all yuh need is one of them little bird whistles to make yuh imitate a flower garden. Man, yuh shore smell like a bed of Sweet Williams."

"Some day, Peewee Parker, I'm goin' to hang yore hide on a bobwire fence."

"Pick yore day, feller, and bring the lady along."

Not bein' interested in dramatic teachin' nor the troubles of married folks, me and Peewee goes back to the HP ranch. We're dependable and as honest as the average run of cowpunchers. Of course, we don't cut down no cherry trees, and then run our legs off to tell folks about it, but we git along. As long as the law keeps away from us. we'll keep away from the law.

That night at supper time, Peewee gits to tellin' me about one time he acts in a play. I figure he's lyin', of course, but a good lie is interestin'. Accordin' to Peewee, he's a pretty good actor. He shot six men in this play—two at one shot. He's one of them pyramid liars—keeps pilin' one on top of the other. I stopped him before he got too good. I ain't never done no actin', but I never seen anythin' a Sykes couldn't do; that is, anythin' that's honest.

"It took me a long time to git as good as I was," says Peewee. "I'll bet I was good enough to git a job in New York actin' on a stage."

"You wasn't a good actor—you was a good shot. All the good actors I ever seen killed 'em with knives."

"Well," says Peewee, "I was a good actor. I wanted to kill 'em with knives, but the boss said, 'You go ahead and shoot 'em, Peewee—knives is too messy.'"

"You never played in Shakespeare, didja?" I asks.

"Nope, only in Dry Lake. This was a home talent show. But I'm good. The stage shore got robbed when I turned my talents to punchin' cows."

"Yeah, and for turnin' yore talents yuh ought to be arrested for cruelty to dumb animals," says I.

THE next day Hank Potts showed up, unfolded from his bronc, and sat down with us on the porch of the adobe ranch-house. Hank looks kinda shopworn, as yuh might say.

"I came out to rest m' nerves," says he. "I'm a actor."

"What kind of a actor?" queried Peewee.

"Good. I'm the leadin' man—hee-roo—gits the fair damsel in the end."

"Who is the fair damsel—Miss Eveline Annabel Wimple, D. T?" I asks.

"Don't be comical, Hozie," says Hank kinda sad-like.

"Speak—yo're among friends," says Peewee.

"It's thisaway," sighs Hank. "We held a meetin' last night. Miss Wimple aims to put on a show for the benefit of the church."

"And the meetin' busted up in a fight," says Peewee, bein' somewhat of a prophet.

"A discussion," says Hank. "Miss Wimple has a play of her own, which she desires us to play. Bein' as she is to furnish the play, train the actors, et cettery, and all that, she's to receive seventy-five percent. of the profits, the other twenty-five percent. goin' to Judgment Jones and his church.

"That started a argument among us.

Miss Wimple argues that her play is a dinger, and the only available play in this county, when my wife——"

"She would," agrees Peewee.

"I never knowed Susie wrote a play," confesses Hank. "I never knowed a thing about it, until she steps out and says we can have her play free."

"It would be worth at least that," says Peewee.

"She calls it—" Hank stops to sigh deep-like—"*The Curse of Drink*. And me runnin' a first-class rum shop."

"Mebbe," says Peewee, "she meant sody water or some soft drink."

Hank shakes his head. "I read it, Peewee."

"What's it all about, anyway?"

"Gawd forgive me for sayin' anythin' against my wife, but I don't know what it's all about. Miss Wimple read it. Judgin' from the expression of her face, as she read it, it's a comedy. Even if Susie don't think so. I'm goin' to be Howard Chesterfield, a jockey. I'm the jigger," says Hank sad-like, jambin' his derby down over one eye, "what wins the race, saves the mortgage and wins the girl."

"That'd be worth goin' a long ways to see," says I.

"That's what Miss Wimple said. But we're short of actors. Susie suggests that we git you two fellers to play with us. But I said neither of yuh knowed the first thing about actin', and Miss Wimple said that mebbe I was right, 'cause, as she read the play, it needed somebody with more brains than an ordinary cowpuncher has to play them parts."

"Lemme tell you somethin'!" says Peewee. "I've done more actin' than you ever seen. I was a actor before you ever knowed there was anythin' but a four-wheel stage on earth; and I never seen any part I can't play."

"I ditto all that and sign my name," says I. "When it comes to play actin', a Sykes jist falls naturally into the part."

"This is a hard play to act," says Hank.

"That's my meat," declares Peewee. "I've shore bit off some hard ones."

"Didja ever see a horse on the stage?" asks Hank.

"Well," says Peewee, "I kinda have, but I never favored 'em."

"This'n has got to have a racehorse for me to ride. Susie said we ort to have a lot of horses to make up the race, but—I dunno."

"Yuh might use Tequila," says I, and Hank kinda shudders. Tequila was a racehorse. I say "was," meanin' the present time. Hank bought him off a horse-trader for a hundred dollars. Fastest horse on earth for a hundred yards, and then crossed his front feet. Always crossed his front feet. Worked himself into a lather, looked like a racehorse, ran like a scared coyote for a hundred yards and then—well, Hank kept him.

"Might use him," admitted Hank. "Got a lotta sense."

HANK wouldn't commit himself further, and went back to San Pablo. We don't hear nothin' more about it for a couple days, when cometh "Dog-Rib" Davidson, of Oasis. Dog-Rib almost runs Zibe Hightower a dead-heat, when it comes to bein' mean, and if all the hate in his carcass was laid end to end, yuh could use it for a trail marker from New York to Honolulu.

"I've been laughin' m'self hoarse for two days," says Dog-Rib. "Them there San Pabloers are goin' to put on a play-actin' show, with Hank Boll-Weevil Potts as the big he buzzard of the flock. Calls it *The Curse of Drink*. Haw, haw, haw! Can yuh imagine it? I can't. I've seen shows in my life, I have."

"You look like yuh had seen plenty, but never had none," says Peewee. "You shore look to me like a man who never had a show from the start."

"I've allus got along," says Dog-Rib.

"I reckon all of Oasis will be at the show," says I.

"Oh, shore. Accordin' to their epitaphs, every ticket will have a number on it, and the lucky ticket will win Hank Potts's racehorse. The tickets are one dollar per each, and no questions asked. Alkali and Oasis has shore invested heavy in them tickets. But it'll be a awful show."

"It's about time they asked us in to learn our parts," says Peewee, after Dog-Rib

goes away. "We've got to have a little time."

But by that time the next day there hadn't nobody showed up to tell us; so we saddled up and went to San Pablo. The bartender at Hank's place tells us that the actors and actresses are all over at the San Pablo Hall, where the *Curse of Drink* is to make its showin', and then he gave us a couple of handbills which read:

WORLD PREEMEER
"THE CURSE OF DRINK"
By
SUSIE H. POTTS
A PLAY IN SEVEN ACTS &
SOME SEENS

THE CAST:

Eveline Annabel Wimple, D. T.
Gwendolyn Witherspoon
Hennery Potts.....*Howard Chesterfield*
Zibe Hightower.....*Simon Legree*
Limpy Lucas.....*Lord Worthington*
Mrs. Thursday Noon..*Lady Worthington*
Zeke Hardy.....*Uncle Tom*
Olaf Swenson.....*Jason*
SUSIE HIGHTOWER POTTS as
LITTLE EVA

Presented by Eveline Annabel Wimple, D. T., under the auspices of the San Pablo Church and Susie Hightower Potts.

Tickets are one dollar including a chance on winning the racehorse used in this production.

Don't miss this chance to see Howard Chesterfield win the big DERBY RACE and see LITTLE EVA go to heaven. Either one will be worth the price of admission.

"When is this here show to transpire?" asked Peewee.

"Tomorrow night," says the bartender. "Eight o'clock sharp. She's goin' to be a dinger, gents. I've seen some of it, but from now on, she's private. I tell yuh, they had a hell of a time gettin' Tequila up there. Took him up this mornin'. Built a platform plumb across one end of the hall, and they've been carpenterin' and paintin' up there for three days. If it ain't worth seein', I never seen anythin'. Every danged seat in the house is sold."

"We ain't got none," says Peewee.

"Well, yuh won't git none. They're all gone. Alkali and Oasis shore bought 'em in quantities."

WASN'T that a nice thing to do—sell 'em all out thataway? I shore intended to speak to Hank Potts about it, but he never showed up; so me and Peewee got a gallon of hard liquor and went back to the ranch, brewin' up a hate against San Pablo. We left word with the bartender to tell Hank Potts what we thought of him and his show.

"Two of the best actors in the country—and they left us out," mourns Peewee. "Tha's great. And me, who made Bill Shakespeare turn over in his grave twice in one evenin' in Dry Lake."

I'm kinda hazy about things after that. A gallon of Hank's liquor would make a jackrabbit waylay a lobo wolf. Time don't mean anythin' to yuh, and I thought it was the night before, when I realize that Hank Potts is among us, and with him is a beautiful lady. I remember tryin' to shake hands with her and got Hank's nose in my hand.

"I'm layin' my cards on the table," says Hank. "You fellers said yuh knew how to act, didn't yuh? In two hours we're due to lift the curtain, and we're shy two actors. Zibe Hightower and Zeke Hardy got into a fight, and Olaf Swenson tried to help Zeke, until Susie bent a two-by-four over Olaf's head. Zeke is plumb out of order, too. For the honor and glory of San Pablo, I ask you to help us out. Hozie, you'll be Uncle Tom, and Peewee will be Jason."

"Please, gentlemen," says the lady. "I am Miss Wimple."

"I'll bezzer wife don' know yo're out here with thish woman," says Peewee.

"The curse of drink," says the lady softlike.

"If you think I'm drunk now," says Pee-

wee, "you ought to shee me, when I'm right."

"Yo're both too drunk to act," says Hank.

"Zasso? Who is? Me and Hozie? Say! Feller, I could play all the parts in yore show, includin' the racehorsh, without any rehearshal—tha's me. Go and git the horshes, Hozie, 'f yuh please."

Peewee bowed to me, hit his head on the corner of the table, and wanted to fight Hank for hittin' him when he wasn't lookin'. Anyway, we got to town an hour before the show is due to commence. I got me a couple more drinks, which I didn't actually need, and then they took me up into the hall. The back of that stage is full of actors and actresses, and I remember Judgment Jones shakin' hands with me and God blessin' me for helpin' 'em out.

"The Sykes fambly never ignores a call for help," I says. "Bring on yore crowd and lemme act."

I ain't never played in a show before, but I thought I had. That's what jiggle juice will do for yuh. I kinda relaxed for a few moments, and when I realized things again, I finds Hank Boll-Weevil Potts and Zibe Hightower workin' over me with somethin' that smells a heap like turpentine.

"Keep yore eyes open, Hozie," says Hank, "they might stick."

BEIN' in a happy state of mind, I let 'em go ahead, not realizin' that they was paintin' me black as the ace of spades. It don't hurt none, except kinda makin' me stiff around the eyes. They left me in the chair and went about their business, and pretty soon I finds I ain't got no shoes on, and my feet are so black they shine. And by that time my face is so stiff I can't spit and I can't blink my eyes. All I can do is stare at things.

"In the first act, yuh ain't got to say a word," says Hank, "except at the end, where you and Zibe walk out, you say to Susie, 'God bless yore kind heart, Miss Eva.' Can yuh remember that, Hozie?"

I kinda nods. Remember? Shore I can remember. If somebody would crack the paint around my mouth, I might say somethin'.

I can hear Judgment Jones out in front of the curtain, explainin' things, and I hear him tell that me and Peewee has been added to the show. Miss Eveline Annabel Wimple finds me, and she says in a voice what is kinda choked, "Uncle Tom, yo're goin' to be a knockout."

Then along comes Zibe Hightower. He's wearin' an old plug hat, long, black coat, which Judgment Jones uses on Sunday, a pair of striped pants and boots. He's got some big black eyebrows painted up above his scrawny ones and his mustache is as black as ink. In one hand he's packin' a blacksnake whip, and he's seven-eights drunk.

There's Susie Hightower Potts, wearin' a knee-length white dress, and she's wearin' more paint than a warpath Apache. Susie weighs two-twenty on the hoof, and she ain't over five feet tall. Cometh Hank Potts, ready for the fray, wearin' one of his wife's polka-dot waists, a pair of tight pants made out of a sheet, and a pair of boots, which he has painted with black enamel. On his head is a little speckled jockey cap, with a long beak.

"Limpy" Lucas is almost in-cog-neeto in a boiled shirt, glasses and Hank's old brown derby. Mrs. Thursday Noon is wearin' a necklace of them cut-glass dinguses off a chandelier, a feather fan, and a dress so danged tight that she couldn't set down without havin' a accident.

THEN cometh a interruption in the shape of Dog-Rib Davidson, Roarin' Lyons and "Nebrasky" Smith. The two former are from Oasis, and the latter is from Alkali.

"We've been appointed a committee," states Dog-Rib. "We bought tickets in good faith, expectin' to see a show, but we finds that you've done fired two of yore best actors—Zeke Hardy and Olaf Swenson—and we know why yuh ditched 'em. It's 'cause Zeke used to live in Oasis, and Olaf used to hibernate in Alkali. We hereby demand our money back."

"No, yuh can't do that," says Hank. "We're ready to start the show."

"Money or scalps," says Roarin'.

"Let us arbitrate," suggests Judgment Jones. "We've got two better actors to take their places, and the show will be much better."

"That's what you say," grunts Dog-Rib. "Where's the proof?"

"How's it better, I'd crave to know, that's what I'd crave," says Roarin' Lyons.

"Brother, you've got a cravin'," agrees Nebrasky, "and so have I."

"Well," says Hank sad-like, "the only way to prove it is to go ahead and play her out, boys."

"I'll tell yuh what we'll do," says Dog-Rib. "I'm a fair man and I'll allus do the right thing. Us, as a committee, will judge. We'll watch yuh do this here play-actin', and if we decided it ain't as good as Zeke and Olaf could have played her, you give us back our money."

"My Gawd!" groans Hank. "In yore opinion! Well, I reckon it'll be all right, Dog-Rib."

"We'll be on the front row," warns Dog-Rib, "and yuh better give us plenty show for our money. We'll be especially watchin' Peewee and Hozie."

And me without a voice in the matter. I'd quit right now, if I could talk enough to resign. The rest of the outfit gits around me, and they shore told me a lot I didn't know about actin'.

"You two jiggers ain't the leadin' parts in this here drammer of the Sunny South," says Hank, "but right now yo're prominent as hell. On you depends about five hundred dollars; so act. San Pablo is watchin' yuh."

"I'll do my bes'," declares Peewee, "and if it comes to the worsht, I can lick about three of that committee. How about you, Hozie?"

I don't say nothin'. Peewee takes hold of my face and squeezes it a little. It left my nose out of line and my lips open, as though I was goin' to whistle.

"Hank, that paint hardened on Hozie," says Peewee. "He can't talk."

"All right. Mebbe it'll be better. There goes the openin' music."

It's the three-piece orchestra—bull fiddle, accordion and drum, playin' "My Old Kentucky Home," with variations.

AFTER that, the show started, and Hank led me and Peewee around to where we can see what's goin' on.

"This first act is the drawin'-room of the Witherspoon mansion," whispers Hank. "Watch Susie and Miss Wimple; they do this well."

I reckon I got some paint in my ears, 'cause I don't hear so awful good, but I hears Susie sayin', "—since my darlin' pappy died——"

And then Dog-Rib stands up and says, "Wait a minute, will yuh. Lemme git this straight. Is Zibe Hightower dead?"

"That's worth the price of admission," says "Kansas" McGill, "if she gives the right answer."

Old Judgment Jones steps out and says, "This here is all actin', and Zibe ain't dead. Now, we don't want no more interruptin' from nobody. Amen."

"You shore act cheerful while givin' bad news," says Kansas, and the show starts in ag'in.

I can't git head nor tail to any of it. Mrs. Thursday Noon comes on, and the audience gives a big whoop. She shore sparkles, but forget what she came out there for, and proceeds to knock over a table and hit her chin on the edge of the sofy, where Miss Wimple is settin'. Her necklace got up around her ears and the dress busted between the shoulders, but they got her propped up on the sofy. The thing seems kinda deadlocked out there, so Hank Potts goes on. They gave Hank three cheers, but he don't mind. He's got somethin' to say, and he's sayin' it.

"When yore daddy died he called me to his bedside and he says to me, 'Howard Chesterfield, everythin' I own has been swept away, except my two daughters and my racehorse, and I—I——' "

Hank goes bug-eyed and forgets the rest.

"The horse was too fast and one daughter was too heavy, eh?" suggests somebody from Oasis.

"Go on, Howard; go on," begs Miss Wimple, and Hank mumbles for a minute.

"You are goin' to ride Thunderbolt in the big race?" asks Miss Wimple.

"That's it," grins Hank. "Thunderbolt will win, and you'll all git back yore fortune."

"But we haven't money enough left to enter the horse."

"I—I've saved my salary," says Hank. "I'll enter the horse."

"But we can't afford to hire a jockey."

"I'll ride him," says Hank, hammerin' himself on the chest. "I'll wear the glue and bold of the Witherspoon stables. I—I mean the bold and glue."

"Oh, you hero!" explodes Susie. "I knew you'd be loyal."

Old Zibe has come around where we are, and now he hammers on a loose board with the butt of his whip. From the other side comes Peewee Parker, all dressed up in a funny lookin' blue suit.

"Someone at the door, Jason," says Miss Wimple. Peewee goggles around, and Zibe motions him over to us. When he's out of sight of the audience, Zibe grabs me by the wrist, and the next thing I know I'm out there in the middle of the stage, with Zibe hangin' onto me. He takes off his hat, bows to the ladies and then takes a look at Hank.

"So yo're the jockey who is goin' to ride Thunderbolt, eh?" says Zibe. "Well, go on back to the stable—I want to talk with high-grade folks."

HANK flops his arms like he was sad all over, but goes out. Zeke grins at Susie and Miss Wimple.

"I'm Simon Legree," says he, "and I want to sell yuh a nigger."

Susie takes one look at me, jumps up and throws up both hands.

"Uncle Tom!" she yells. "Uncle Tom! What have they done to you?"

Jist then my mouth busts loose, and I says, "They got me drunk and painted me with black enamel, and I can lick any damn' man——"

Zibe kicked me on the bare ankle and hisses in my ears, "Shut up, you danged fool!"

"Haw, haw, haw, haw, haw!" roars Dog-Rib. "That's actin'!"

"O-o-o-o-oh!" wails Susie. "They sold you, Uncle Tom."

"Somebody got gypped," says Nebrasky Smith.

"I got him in that boatload of niggers down at Nashville," says Zibe. "I recognized him right away, and I knowed you'd like to buy him back."

"Oh, I'd love to buy him back," says Susie, "but we ain't got no money, Mister Legree."

"Lotta good work left in that nigger," says Zibe. "How about tradin' me yore racehorse for him?"

Zibe kicks me in the ankle and whispers, "Beg her not to. Go ahead and beg."

"Ma'am," says I, tryin' to work my face into shape for talkin', "don't let this jigger make any trades with yuh. He's a——"

Whap! Old Zibe steps back and wraps that bullwhip around my legs.

"Git back, nigger!" he roars. "Git back, or I'll cut yore legs off!"

I ask yuh if that wasn't a dirty trick. I didn't like Zibe, anyway; so I took a wild swing at his jaw, knocked him silly with one punch, took him to my bosom and pitched him headfirst into the committee on the first row.

"The nigger wins by a knockout!" yells "Greasy" Easton, and somebody cut the curtain loose, with the *Curse of Drink* outfit haulin' me back by the slack of my overalls.

Well, I got told all about myself, while old Zibe manages to get around to the back, where he got his gun and wanted to assassinate me, but they took his gun away. The committee comes up and says that the show begins to look like it was worth the money, but they've got to see it all first.

While they're tryin' to fix the stage for the next act, Hank explains the show to me.

"In that first act, the father of them two girls has just died, leavin' 'em nothin' but that racehorse. I was their father's jockey, and this horse is to win a big race. That's the climax. Legree owns a horse in that race, but he knows it can't beat our horse; so he schemes to git our horse. Legree is the villain, yuh see. Yo're an old nigger, which was owned by the old man, who went broke and had to sell yuh, along with other slaves. Legree buys yuh. He knows Susie is crazy about yuh, and he figures to trade you to her for this racehorse. She won't trade the first time; so he beats yuh up——"

"He tries to, yuh mean," says I.

"That was all in the play, Hozie. You ruined it. There won't nobody know what it's all about now. We've got to go ahead with the second act. This act——"

COMES a lot of racket, and I thought the audience was goin' to assault the stage, but it was merely female against female. Judgment Jones comes back and kinda tearfully explains that Susie Hightower Potts and Eveline Annabel Wimple has had a battle, and Susie swears that Eveline and Hank ain't goin' to do no love scenes, except over her dead body.

Hank said he'd talk with her, but he came back pretty soon, nursin' a black eye. The audience is plumb impatient, and the committee comes back to see what's keepin' us.

"We'll give yuh five minutes more," says Dog-Rib, "and if yuh ain't actin', we declares this here show null and void. We come here to see actin', and we'll see it to our fullest capacity or take our money back."

Then they single-files out again. Judgment Jones flops his arms and his face registers ashes-to-ashes, even unto the last ash. Hank rubs his black eye and ponders deep-like. Pretty soon he says, "There's jist one thing to do and that is to jump this show to where them snake-hunters will see plenty action. We'll put on the last act and them three scenes—the kidnappin', the death of Little Eva and the finish of the race."

"But they won't know what the show is all about, unless we act it all."

"Let 'em guess at it—that's what I've been doin'. C'mon."

I've decided that I've had about enough and starts to walk across the stage to where I can get out, but all to once I starts walkin' faster and faster, but don't get nowhere. The floor is goin' out behind me, and all to once I lands on my chin and rolled over against the wall.

I fans a few stars out of my eyes and looked at Peewee, who humps down beside me.

"I was wonderin' if that thing worked," says he, "and I see it does."

"What works?"

"That treadmill jigger they made for the horse race. They explains it to me that we're all in there, playin' we're watchin' the race, and at the finish Hank rides Tequila onto that treadmill and the audience can see everythin', except the horse's feet. Then they drop the curtain."

Oscar Tubbs, "Burlap" Benson and "Fetlock" Feeney, the blacksmith, show up, and I wonder what they're the committee for. They talk with Hank, and then climb up on a two-by-six, which extends across above the stage. I don't sabe their idea, unless they want to git above all trouble. Hank comes to me and takes me up front again.

They've got the same room fixed up a little different, and there is Limpy Lucas settin' at a table, with a bottle of liquor.

"You go in there," says Hank. "All you've got to do is fool around. In a little while Zibe will come in with me as his prisoner. You won't have a thing to do, until Susie asks yuh to rope both Limpy and Zibe. There's ropes back there on the floor. This will be easy for you. Now, go ahead and we'll lift the curtain."

Well, all fools ain't dead yet; so I went ahead. The curtain went up and I said, "Limpy, I'm as dry as a lost match in Death Valley."

"Nigger," says he, "don't speak to me. I am Lord Worthington, a scion of British aristocracy."

"I dunno what a scion is, but the rest of it's a lie. You was born down in Cochise County and yore father was a squawman. Gimme a drink."

"That's the stuff!" yells Dog-Rib. "That's real actin'."

JIST then in comes Hank and old Zibe. Hank's hands are tied behind him, there's a handkerchief around his eyes, and Zibe is proddin' him with a gun. He makes Hank set down in a chair, and then he turns to Limpy.

"So yo're here, eh? Playin' the game my way, eh?"

Limpy begins to wipe his eyes and beller.

"I have been a proud man," he states emphatic, "but likker brought me to this. I have bited the hand that fed me. I sold my soul for gin, Simon Legree. Yes, I will go in with you, even to the depths of hell."

"Ah, ha-a-a-a-a!" sneers Zibe. "Well, we win, Lord Worthington. Without Howard Chesterfield that horse never can win—and there sets Howard Chesterfield. We hold him until after the race. He will be disgraced in the eyes of his sweetheart, who will marry me. Ah, ha-a-a-a-a!"

I swear I never did see Susie, until there she was on the stage, with a two-barrel shotgun in her hands, pointin' it at Zibe.

"Hands up, you foul beast," says she, and Zibe puts up his hands.

"You think his sweetheart will marry you, Simon Legree? Bah! If you was the last man in the world, I wouldn't marry you. Uncle Tom, will you take ropes and bind these foul vultures?"

Well, I shore tied 'em up tight. Susie took the ropes off Hank and he stood up straight and looked down at her.

"Thank yuh, Little Eva," says he. "I heard what yuh said to Legree, and I hate to disappoint yuh. I'm a fair man, and no falsehood ever passed my lips. I don't love you—I love Gwendolyn."

Susie takes a deep breath, points her nose toward the ceilin' and says, "Oh, woe is me, I am undone!"

And then she let loose all holts and went down so hard that she busted two boards in that floor. Hank puts one hand over his eyes and kinda staggers around sayin' "I've broken her heart, I've broken her heart!"

"Yo're right!" yells somebody in the audience. "I heard it break, Hank."

Hank flops his arms and turns to me.

"Uncle Tom, I believe I have killed her. I'll have to carry her home."

Hank tried three different holts and they all slipped.

"Damn it, Susie, help yourself a little, can'tcha?" he whispers.

"I'm supposed to be swooned," she whispers. "Pick me up, you idiot."

"Git her by the legs, Hozie," whispers Hank.

"You touch my legs, and I'll kick yuh loose from the surroundin' country," hisses Susie.

Hank straightens up and turns toward the audience.

"Ah, I cannot touch her," says he. "She looks so peaceful in death."

Susie took a kick at me and I got away fast. She turned over and got to her feet, as Hank lifts up both hands and says real loud, "I'll leave her here for the angels, while I go to ride for love."

BUT he didn't. Susie socked him one on the back of the neck with a right swing and he went off the stage into the three-piece orchestra, with both legs in the air, while the committee stood up and whistled through their fingers, and somebody had sense enough to yank down the curtain.

The committee brought Hank back with them. He was smiling sweetly, but as an actor he's a total loss.

"This here show," says Dog-Rib, "is kinda jumpy, it seems to me. We've been tryin' all along to find out what it's all about. That there last act was plenty actful, as yuh might say, but we dunno what it was about."

I didn't wait to listen to the argument. Peewee got that bottle they used in the last act, and we emptied it together. We're leanin' up against a black curtain at the back of the stage, and all to once somethin' hit Peewee and knocked him plumb up past the treadmill, where he landed on his hands and knees.

"Yuh better git away from there, Hozie," says Limpy. "That racehorse is behind the curtain."

We stretched Peewee out on the floor in a corner, and the rest of us are asked to come out on the stage. They're all inquirin' for Miss Wimple.

"She's gone down to the hotel to git the money," says Judgment. "She said, bein' as the play turned out like it did, she wanted the money out of her hands; so I told her to bring it up here for a settlement. Her and Susie had a fight over them love scenes, and she was through up here."

"We don't need her," says Susie. "If she was actin' for saw mills, she wouldn't git a sliver in her finger. Is everythin' all set?"

Susie laid down on the floor and Zibe fastened a belt around her. She's all dressed in white, with a couple things that might be mistaken for wings. We all squats down

around her. They've got a heavy wire runnin' up from that belt. Somebody pulled the curtain, and the three-piece orchestry begins playin' "Nearer My God to Thee," kinda soft.

"Uncle Tom," says Susie, her voice kinda cracked, "I'm goin' to leave yuh. I'm goin' to my place beyond the skies."

Mrs. Noon begins to blubber.

"Don't cry," says Susie. "It's better this way. Tell Howard that I forgive him for everythin'. Ah, I hear the angels callin'. Can't you hear 'em, Uncle Tom?"

"She's dyin'," wails Mrs. Noon.

"Git yore feet braced, Burlap," says Oscar Tubbs, up there on that two-by-six.

"Angel voices," says Susie. "They're callin' me home."

"Pull, you damn' fools!" yelps Oscar.

And Little Eva starts on her long trip, as yuh might say. Up and up she goes, head and feet down, them spangled wings straight up. I've allus had my own idea of an angel, and Susie didn't fit that idea.

Then the angel stopped and kinda hung there, swingin' around.

"Keep her goin'!" hisses old Zibe from the side of the stage.

"The angels are takin' her away," wails Mrs. Noon.

Cra-a-a-ack!

THAT two-by-six snapped by too much weight, and down comes the handmade heaven. Susie lit on her head, and here comes Oscar Tubbs, Burlap Benson and Fetlock Feeney, follered by that busted two-by-six. Oscar lit on his feet, busted plumb through where Susie had already cracked the boards, and stopped with only his head in sight.

It shook the whole stage and also the whole danged house. One of Burlap's boots hit me in the head, but as my lights went dim, I heard somebody yellin', "Three angels gone to hell a'ready, and the fourth one dropped for reasons knowed to all of us!"

I woke up with Zibe and Zeke Hardy moppin' me head with cold water, and I can hear Dog-Rib arguin' at the top of his voice, "I don't care a dang if Hank is still knocked out—we'll have that there hoss race, or our money back. You've done advertised a race, and we crave a race."

"But there ain't no jockey to ride that race," pleads Judgment. "You can see for yourself that Hank Potts ain't fit to ride nothin'."

"Suit yourself. I've done sent a couple men down to the hotel to set on that safe, where yuh keep the money. Oasis and Alkali towns crave that horse race; so it's shore up to you."

They go stompin' out, while the crowd out in front makes all kinds of noise. I sabes them people, and if we don't give 'em what they want, they'll take the hall apart.

"Are you loyal to San Pablo, Hozie?" asks Zeke.

"Look at me and answer yore own question."

"You're a good rider, Hozie; ride for the honor of San Pablo. Never let Oasis say that we didn't make good. Yo're the man of the hour—the best rider in the San Pablo range. Think of poor old Judgment Jones and the starvin' cannibals he aims to help with that money. Will yuh, Hozie?"

I said I wouldn't—and swooned. When I woke up, I've got on Hank's jockey clothes, and they're helpin' me on Tequila, that big, cold-jawed, leg-crossin' sorrel. The horse is blindfolded, and it takes three men to hold his head down. The boards are crackin' under his feet, and the blamed brute is scared stiff.

To the right of me is a thing like a big window, and in that window is Susie, Zeke, Zibe, Mrs. Noon, Oscar Tubbs, Burlap Benson and Fetlock Feeney, and they're all yelpin' their heads off, as though they're lookin' at a race, yellin', "C'mon, Thunderbolt! Come on, Thunderbolt!"

"Let go!" yelps somebody, and they turned Tequila loose.

"Spur him straight ahead, Hozie!" snorts somebody else.

Spur nothin'. The next thing I knowed I was back on his rump, and he was climbin' through that window affair, and the next

thing I knowed I was out on his head, with both legs wrapped around his neck, and we're on the edge of the stage, facin' the stampede. The air is full of sombreros, all sailin' at us, men are yelpin', "Whoa! Whoa!"

I GOT one flash of the committee goin' out the door on the heels of that stampedin' mob, when somebody threw a chair, which landed on my head like a crown. It shore made me see a lot of stars, but I kept my presence of mind, as Tequila whirled around and went buck-jumpin' straight to the back of the stage, knockin' down everythin' in sight, with me still out over his ears —and then we hit that treadmill.

Did we go? Man, that Tequila horse never ran so fast in his life. Why, he never had time to cross his legs. We wasn't goin' no place, but we was sure goin' fast. Out from a pile of busted lumber I sees Peewee raise up, his eyes wide at what he sees.

"Can'tcha stop this?" I yells at him. He picks up a busted two-by-four, staggers over and shoves it down in the treadmill. They told me afterward that it throwed Peewee plumb against the back of the buildin', but it shore stopped the machine.

I'm only about ten feet from the rear of the stage, which is covered with a black cloth, and this rear of the stage is the front of the room.

Wham-blam! We went off that treadmill like a skyrocket. I hears the crash of glass, the rippin' of a cloth, and there I am out over the main street of San Pablo, two stories high, with nothin' but air above, below and on all sides.

I spread my arms like the wings of a turkey buzzard, turned over once and landed settin' down on a buckboard seat, which smashed like a egg under the impact. It also knocked me a little colder than I was, but I knowed the team busted loose and was runnin' away. But I didn't care. What was one little runaway beside what I'd been through? The rush of night air was coolin' to my fevered brow.

And all of a sudden we went high-wide and handsome. *Rippety-bing-bang-boom!* There's a bell ringin', somethin' roarin', and then I landed on the seat of my pants on the depot platform and almost skidded into the train, which was ready to move. The team and buckboard was just leavin' the other end of the platform.

I'm knocked kinda silly, but I heard a woman scream, as she ran past me and onto that train. The depot agent's boots are stickin' up from behind a trunk, where the runaway knocked him. I sets there and watches the train go out of sight. Beside me is a lady's handbag, jist a little one with a white handkerchief stickin' out of it. I put the thing in my pocket and got to my feet. I say "my feet" merely because they was hooked onto me. I didn't have no feelin' in 'em.

Then I wandered back down the street, stoppin' now and then to get my toes pointed right, and finally got to the No-Limit Saloon. For a while I ain't recognized, even if I have got most of the enamel knocked off my face. There's Judgment Jones, talkin' with Dog-Rib, and they come over to look me over.

"It's all right, Hozie," says Judgment. "Oasis and Alkali are satisfied we done our best. Dog-Rib says they expected more action, but I been tellin' him it was jist a little rural play. Next time we'll do better—I hope. But, take it all in all, we got our money's worth—but no money.

"No money," says he sadly. "Miss Eveline Annabel Wimple, D. T., took it all and pulled out durin' the play—we think. Anyway, she ain't here, and the money was given to her in the hotel. The hotel keeper said she was in a big hurry, and she put the money in her handbag. Now, we're goin' to raffle the racehorse—if he's still alive."

I FOUND Peewee settin' on the sidewalk, and we went home. He's so bent out of shape that his saddle don't fit him,

but we got back to the HP ranch and found the horse liniment. After the first or second deluge, I said to him, "Peewee, that Wimple woman got away with the money."

"Did she? Good for her."

"You don't believe in stealin', do yuh, Peewee?"

"Not stealin'—takin'."

"If somebody happened to find her handbag and kept the money, would that be stealin'?"

"Finder's keepers."

I tosses the handbag on the table, and Peewee goggles at it. He don't ask no questions. That's what I like about Peewee. After while he blinks one of his purple eyes, the other one bein' shut tight, and says, "Thinkin' it over, Hozie. I'm wonderin'."

He opens the bag and there's a envelope, folded in the middle; and we can feel the money inside—paper money. On it is written: *Funds of The Curse of Drink.* It's Judgment Jones's writin'. Peewee shakes his head.

"We can't do it, Hozie. Old Judgment is the most honest man on earth. He needs that money for the heathen. I could never look him in the face again. He wouldn't do wrong to anybody, and he needs that money. He trusted that woman, jist like he trusts everybody. Why, he'd even trust me and you."

"That's right," says I. "We'll give it back."

But I wanted to see how much money they took in for that show; so I steamed the envelope open and dumped it out. I looked at Peewee and he looked at me. Money? Nothin' but a lot of old newspaper, cut to the size of bills. We sets there and does a lot of thinkin', and after while Peewee dumps the whole works into the stove.

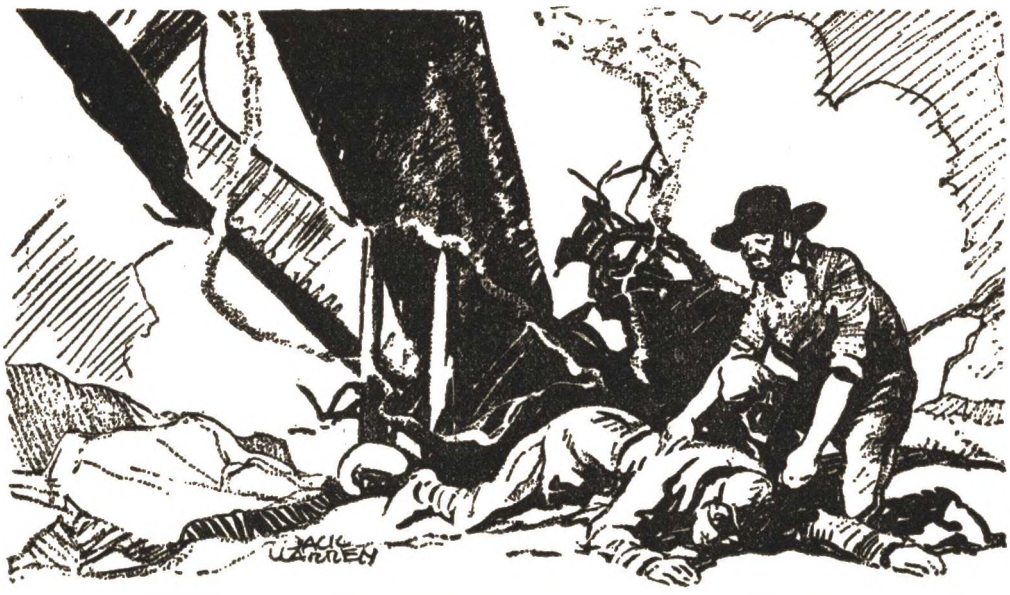
And as far as we know, the heathen are in jist the same shape they were before we put on this show. Peewee wanted to be a contortionist, and for once in his life he got tied in a knot. Peewee's satisfied. Hank's satisfied, but Susie ain't; she wanted to go all the way to heaven. I'm satisfied—that a cowpuncher ought to keep off every kind of a stage, except one with four wheels.

Susie says it's too bad we were obliged to miss the moral of her play, but I said I didn't.

"What was the moral?" she asks.

"Don't kill yore jockey before the race starts," says I.

And I'm right, too.



FLYING DOWN A RAINBOW

By HOMER KING GORDON

Author of "The Sky Pirate," "The Morgan Kid," etc.

AS THE OLD-TIMER SAID, "GOLD'S A FUNNY OLD GAL. SHE'LL FLIRT WITH YOU FOR YEARS AND THEN GO THROW HERSELF ON SOME TOTAL STRANGER'S NECK." AND IT SEEMED AS IF IT WERE GOING TO BE THE SAME EVEN IN THESE DAYS WHEN THEY GO PROSPECTING IN AIRPLANES

JIMMY DEVLIN handed the pilots of Pacific Field a laugh when he paid four hundred dollars for the old biplane wreck that had been lying in Hangar Number Three ever since the field opened. Jimmy himself indulged in a laugh, but it was a hopeful one. He had gone over the wreck pretty thoroughly and knew exactly what he was buying. The landing gear was pretty much of a mess. One of the lower wings would have to be almost completely replaced. The prop was splintered and the crankshaft of the engine was broken. So were several tie wires, one wing strut, and the tail skid.

It took practically all of his money, two months of his time, several square yards of fabric, and many buckets of dope before Jimmy was able to wheel his wreck out of the hangar and convince a deputy instructor from the Department of Commerce that it was an aeroplane. The inspector stood on the grounds while Jimmy made a couple of flights around the field to prove his contention. It was a successful demonstration and he got a license to carry passengers in it.

That, of course, was just a beginning. In the three or four weeks which followed, Jimmy had but one passenger. Competition was too keen for Jimmy at Pacific Field. His patched and remodeled old flying crate would not stand comparison with the new modern planes used by the other commercial pilots. Nor could he afford to hire salesmen or runners to circulate among the spectators at the airport and solicit business, as did the other pilots.

Had Jimmy been a more determined salesman, he might have circulated among the prospective customers himself and drummed up business, but he was too modest to extol the virtues of his second-hand ship and his own skill as a pilot.

JIMMY was a favorite among the other pilots at Pacific Field. They liked his sunny disposition and his hearty laugh. But business was business, and he had invited competition, by trying to break into their

established commercial traffic. They dubbed his plane the "Calico Peacock," and kidded him unmercifully about his inability to get any passengers into it. Jimmy did not mind their fun, but the situation began to get desperate. He would have moved to some roadside cow pasture and tried to pick up passengers from the highway, but he owed the field a forty-dollar hangar bill and had nothing with which to pay it. He was considering putting the Calico Peacock on the auction block and knocking it off to the highest bidder when he had his first lucky break.

It happened early one Saturday morning. Jimmy's Calico Peacock was one of the first aeroplanes on the starting line. After he had made sure that enough gasoline remained in the tanks to accommodate a passenger if some miracle should happen and one should appear, Jimmy wandered over to the field headquarters and stretched his lean, lanky frame against the side of the Administration Building to soak up some of the warmth of the morning sun.

Sunshine was not a very satisfactory substitute for a hearty breakfast, but Jimmy couldn't afford the breakfast, and the sun was free. He had not been there long when the field superintendent came out of his office and looked questioningly down the field toward the spot where the commercial passenger planes were being trundled out onto the field. It was so early that none of the flying salesmen had appeared.

"Got a job for somebody, Cap?" Jimmy asked eagerly.

The field superintendent looked at Jimmy for a moment and then grinned.

"Made to order for you," he chuckled. "But don't blame me; you asked for it."

A STOOP-SHOULDERED old man with thin, straggly white hair came timidly from the Administration Building and stood at the field superintendent's side.

"Am I too early?" he asked timidly, his mild blue eyes apologizing silently for his temerity in addressing such a magnificent personage as the field superintendent, resplendent in correct cut flying togs and polished riding boots.

"Here's one of the best pilots on the field." The field superintendent turned to Jimmy. "His plane's one of the fastest ships on the ground."

Jimmy stepped forward promptly.

"This is Jimmy Delvin—Mr. Weber."

"Ed Weber." The old man offered his hand shyly. "I am pleased to meet you."

"Take good care of Mr. Weber, Jimmy." The field superintendent winked broadly and sauntered back to his office.

"Where was it you wanted to go, Mr. Weber?" Jimmy asked. "Did you just want to take a little ride around the field or did you want to go somewhere particularly?"

"I want to go to Keno, Nevada," the old man confided.

"You mean Reno, don't you?" Jimmy asked.

"No, I mean Keno," the old man said. "But I don't wonder you never heerd of it. 'Tain't nothin' more than a water hole to begin with, and it's way out on the edge of the mountains more'n a hundred miles south and east of Reno."

"Is there a landing field there?"

Jimmy realized that his question was foolish, and, furthermore, that the old man did not know what he meant.

"I mean a level place, maybe half a mile long or so where I could land the plane."

"There's a flat down between the hills where I reckon you could maneuver her into a place to set down," the old man explained. "But how much will you take to fly me there?"

Jimmy took the old man off behind one of the hangars where he would not be grabbed by one of the other pilots and then got out his map. Keno did not show on the map, but Weber made a pencil cross to indicate its approximate location.

"What is it—a town or a ranch?" Jimmy inquired.

"Wal," Weber explained. "there used to be a shack there where a man could get a drink and maybe a slab of bacon and some beans, but I reckon there ain't much

right now except the water hole. Figgerin' it conservative, though, inside of three days there'll be five thousand men there and the name of Keno will be spread over the front page of every newspaper in the U. S."

The old man chuckled quietly at Jimmy's bewilderment.

"It's a gold strike, son," he said quietly. "I've got a sister living up there in that country. Last night I got a long distance telephone call from her saying that an old hard pan miner had staggered in with a bag of samples and his tongue hanging out, blabbing about the strike he'd made at Keno."

"When do you want to go?"

"Jist as soon as we can get started, son," the old man said earnestly. "Here's the way I've got it figgered out. If we can get into Keno today we'll be ahead of the first of the rush. Old-time gold strikes don't happen often nowadays, but there's still enough prospectors and would-be prospectors left to make a fairly sizable gold rush. But at the best, they can't commence to come in until tomorrow morning. I know every foot of that ground. I always knowed there was gold around Keno somewheres. I found plenty of rich float but I was never able to track it down. From the information I got over the telephone last night, I know just where the strike was made, and if we can get there ahead of the rest of them, I'll stake out a claim that will put me on Easy Street for the rest of my life."

"Say," Jimmy asked excitedly, "is there anything to prevent me from staking out a claim too?"

"Not that I know of, son," Weber replied, "and I'll help you pick out a good one too. Then we'll fly down to the Carson Land Office and register them and the trick's done. I guess I'll have to go back and see that nobody squats on the claim, but once they're registered they'll be safe unless it's so rich that they have to be watched night and day."

JIMMY made some rapid calculations. Such a trip would require a capacity supply of gasoline and oil and a landing on the flat might mean broken landing gear and a repair bill.

"I don't see how I could do it for any less than a hundred dollars," he declared. "Of course if I could pick up a passenger there for the return trip, I might do it cheaper."

"I've only got fifty," Weber said. "I've throwed up my job collecting bills for the light company and bought enough grub to last for the trip, and that's all I've got left."

The old man tried to hide his disappointment, but Jimmy saw his shoulders sag and an expression of hopeless discouragement spread across his face.

"I'm taking a chance of wrecking my plane," he said, "but if I agree to try the trip for fifty, will you agree to pay the repair bills if anything should happen to the ship?"

"If we get there ahead of that rush, son, I'll buy you a new ship," Weber promised. "You ain't never seen a gold rush, have you?"

Jimmy admitted that he had not.

"But I've got the fever to see one," he grinned. "If you'll let me have the fifty, I'll get the Calico Peacock ready for the hop."

"Where's your aeroplane?" Weber asked. "Which one is it?"

Jimmy could detect no expression of disappointment in the old man's face when he pointed out the Calico Peacock. That pleased him, although he knew that Weber had probably never been near an aeroplane before. Paying half his hangar bill, Jimmy and one of the oil station attendants trundled the Calico Peacock up to one of the gasoline sumps where it was filled with gasoline and oil.

The old man's luggage consisted of a heavy canvas sack filled with provisions and a tarp-covered roll of blankets.

"If you've got any blankets ready, you'd better take them along," he advised Jimmy. "'Tain't likely that we can get away from Keno until tomorrow morning, so we'll have to spend tonight under the open sky."

JIMMY was able to borrow some blankets. The Calico Peacock had been fitted with a couple of passenger seats ahead of the pilot's cockpit, and there was plenty of space for Weber and the luggage. Jimmy loaned the old man a pair of flying goggles. Weber had provided himself with a bear-

skin hunting cap which pulled down over his ears. Before they took off, Jimmy got out his maps again and they went over them carefully.

From the spot where he had located Keno, the old man traced the course of the valley on down to a spot where fan-shaped valleys converged to form a single broad, shallow valley.

"I spent three years there," he explained. "I'd have been up there yet, too, if my sister hadn't worried me into coming down here and getting a job and living in a house.

She was scared that some day I'd slip and fall and get hurt and nobody would ever know where to go to look for my bones. She pestered me until I finally give in, but I ain't surprised that they struck it up there. No, sir! I knowed it was comin' and for a long time I've been waitin' for it to happen. I had my plans all laid. When she called me up last night, it didn't take me half an hour to be all ready to start."

"Are you sure that there's enough flat space up there to land?" Jimmy asked anxiously.

"There's plenty of room," Weber assured him calmly. "I wouldn't be taking you up there on a wild goose chase. This means too much to me. I knowed there was gold there. I've seen the float. But you know it's a funny thing. I was expectin' it to be found over on Stink Crick."

He pointed to one of the valleys to the west of Keno.

"I prospected that Keno flat, but I finally came to the conclusion the main ledge was over on Stink Crick. You know, it's funny about gold strikes. I'll bet a hundred men have prospected Keno at one time or another without ever locatin' this strike. You'd never guess how it was finally found."

"How?"

"Wal, sir, it jist shows you how these things go," Weber said reminiscently. "Accordin' to my sister over the telephone, this old hard pan miner that made the strike had a dog that he took along with him to keep him company. It was just a little rat-tail mutt not much bigger than a rabbit. While they was camped up here at this Keno water hole, this mutt chased something into a hole and commenced to bark and snarl and try to dig it up. He made so much racket that this old hard-shelled prospector went over to see what all the fuss was about, and believe it or not, his dog had uncovered the ledge that all of us had been lookin' for."

"I'll bet that dog gets a good home," Jimmy grinned.

"Wal, that's the way it goes," Weber declared. "Maybe I've set on that very ledge of rock and cussed because I couldn't uncover any color. I heard tell of a strike made down in Arizona when a burro kicked off a piece of rock and uncovered the ledge. Gold strikes are made like that."

"Are you sure we'll get there in time to get a claim?" Jimmy questioned.

"Unless somebody thinks of going there in an aeroplane like we are, we'll beat the leaders," Weber predicted. "They kain't get there until before tomorrow morning at the best, and that means travelin' around the sun. It ain't a big valley, though, and if anybody gets there after tomorrow night, they'll be out of luck. There'll be five thousand men make the rush, and there'll be a lot of land staked out that's plumb worthless."

WHEN all their preparations were made, Jimmy helped his passenger into the Calico Peacock and buckled a safety belt around him.

"Try to relax and take it easy," he advised.

"You're not goin' to be scared any, are you?" the old man asked.

"Not until we start looking for a place to land, anyway," Jimmy answered.

"Wal, I'm goin' to be up here with you. It ain't goin' to do me any good to get scared if you ain't, son."

One of the field mechanics spun the stick of the Calico Peacock and a few moments later, they taxied down to the runway and were off. Jimmy swung the Calico Peacock out over the bay in a wide spiral, gaining altitude until he could clear the east bay hills and cut across the Sacramento

Valley. The engine fired regularly for a while, but Jimmy could see it was beginning to heat. Since he had overhauled it, Jimmy had not been able to afford a long cross-country flight to get it properly broken in. It was not surprising to him that it now began to heat under a full throttle and a heavy load. He cut down his r.p.m. as much as he dared and hoped that it would gradually cool. Instead, it grew hotter.

BETWEEN Stockton and Sacramento the engine began to smoke. It was a race between a forced landing in some grain field or landing at the Sacramento airport. Jimmy made Sacramento, but by a narrow margin. He landed with a dead prop and an engine that was practically frozen stiff. Mechanics came out across the field and pulled the Calico Peacock out of the way of incoming ships.

"Anything wrong?" Weber asked.

"Engine's heating up," Jimmy explained. "We'll have to wait here a while until it cools off."

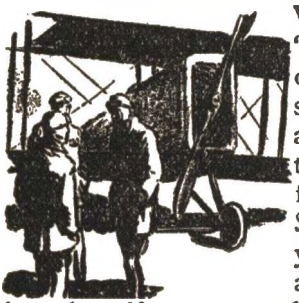
"Then can we go on?" Weber inquired. "We'll make it, won't we?"

"I think so," Jimmy assured him. "Unless we crack some of the bearings we'll be all right as soon as this cools off a little."

"You know, a gold strike's a funny business," Weber mused. "You can't put your fingers on gold. Just when you think you're all ready to make a stake, something comes up. It's always been like that."

"We'll make it or bust." Jimmy promised.

"I wasn't thinkin' so much of that," Weber declared. "I know you're doin' your best, son, but you ask any old prospector. Gold's a funny old gal. She'll flirt with you for years and then go throw herself on some total stranger's neck, right in his lap, as it were."



A pilot friend of Jimmy's sauntered over and inquired their trouble.

"You headed for Keno, too?" he asked, looking in the passenger cockpit and seeing the blanket rolls and grub sack. "Three planes have left here already for that destination. They say they've made a big gold strike up there."

"You know who went?" Weber asked eagerly. "I mean, who the passengers was?"

The pilot shook his head.

"I reckon it don't matter none anyway," Weber said, " 'Tain't likely they know Keno like I know it. Most likely they're just mining men anxious to be the first on the ground and ready to buy good claims if they can't stake them themselves."

"We'll get off as soon as we can," Jimmy promised.

"Take your time, son," Weber cautioned. "There's plenty of land up there for the first forty or fifty that shows up. Just so that we get there ahead of the old sourdoughs that'll be driftin' in in the mornin'. You know this contraption better than I do, so I ain't aimin' to give you any advice. But I just want you to understand that I spent all my life just lookin' for the end of the rainbow and if I miss it once again, it ain't goin' to get the best of me. Don't take no chances with your flying machine, son, or risk your neck tryin' to get an old crackpot like me up to Keno."

WHILE they waited for the engine to cool, Jimmy told his passenger about buying the Calico Peacock and reclaiming it for passenger purposes. The old man displayed keen interest while Jimmy showed him the repairs he had made, and the patches he had put on the wing fabric. He also confessed that the engine was heating because it had never been given a thorough test after being overhauled. The old man did not appear to think that he had been victimized. Instead, when he had inquired into the cost of operating a plane and what dope and fabric and replacements cost, he seemed to appreciate Jimmy's generosity in attempting the trip for fifty dollars.

"You stand to lose more than I do," he commented. "If we don't get there, all I'll lose is somethin' I never had, while if anythin' should happen to us, you'd lose your whole investment. And after you tellin' me how you've worked to put the Calico Pea-

cock in shape, I can appreciate what it means to you."

From the field officials Jimmy learned that the other planes for Keno had flown almost directly east, crossing the Sierra Nevadas above Sutter Creek and the other famous old gold mining landmarks. This was the shortest route to Keno, although it offered no emergency landing fields to Jimmy's knowledge. He would have to cross the Sierra Nevadas at a high altitude, which made the trip a gamble if his engine started to heat again. Jimmy was willing to take the chance, but he explained the risk to his passenger.

"If there's any safer way, son, you'd better take it," Weber advised. "I'm sayin' that, not on my account, for the shortest way there will suit me best, but I'm considerin' your interests."

"My interests are yours," Jimmy declared. "I want to take the short way if you're willing to take a chance on landing in the tree-tops. Even if the engine does start to heat up, we ought to be over the tops of the mountains by that time."

"I'm leavin' everything to your judgment," Weber asserted.

"Then we'll take the short cut," Jimmy decided. "Let's get going."

LEAVING Sacramento, they headed eastward and began to climb. Almost immediately they were over the rolling, grass-covered foothills. Then they came to the scrub oak country. The rolling hills became steeper. White water appeared in the streams under them. Mine stipples showed above the roofs of the small mining settlements as they entered the famous Mother Lode country.

Jimmy put the Calico Peacock into as stiff a climbing angle as he dared and opened the throttle wide. As they neared the summit the engine began to heat again. It was too late to turn back. They were out of reach of any emergency landing field.

The tree tops began to approach nearer and nearer as the Calico Peacock came closer to the ceiling it could attain with its pounding, smoking engine.

They were not more than fifteen feet above the tree tops when they shot over the ridge at the summit and looked down over the eastern slopes of the mountains. The smell of hot oil and burning metal made Jimmy clamp his teeth shut grimly, as he eased the nose of the Calico Peacock down toward the horizon and took some of the load off the engine.

Weber pointed out a low depression in the hills off to the southeast and motioned for Jimmy to head the ship in that direction.

For a while Jimmy thought they were going to make it. The engine began to cool off somewhat as they picked up speed and descended to a lower altitude. They were within sight of a saucer-shaped depression in the hills which Weber yelled back was Keno, when the thing happened which Jimmy had been fearing.

A connecting rod bearing burned out. Instantly the engine began to pound. The din was terrific. There was only one thing to do. Jimmy closed the throttle, cut off his ignition, nosed the ship over, and commenced to pick out a spot to land.

Weber looked back with a silent question.

"Bearing's busted. We've got to land!" Jimmy yelled. "Brace yourself and get ready for a crash."

The old man looked off toward Keno and then nodded his understanding. They would land fifteen or twenty miles short of their destination. It looked as though he had just missed the rich strike once more. Jimmy spiraled down over a narrow valley. Trees crowded down to the bank of a little creek. There was no clear spot in which to make a landing. Jimmy headed the Calico Peacock into what appeared to be a patch of young aspens and then braced himself as the crash came.

He expected the ship to nose over as the wing fabric was ripped off and it settled down into the trees. He was not prepared, however, for the demolishing crash which followed as the plane settled. A ledge of rocks had been concealed by the trees. The Calico Peacock nosed head on into the

rocks and crumbled into a tangled mass of wreckage.

WHEN Jimmy regained consciousness, he found himself several yards away from the wreck. Rough splints and a bandage were around his right forearm. One of his eyes was swollen shut and a bandage was wrapped around his head. His left leg throbbed with pain. He was lying on a blanket and another blanket was spread over him. A few yards away Weber was bending over a fire. The old man's clothing was torn, but he moved about as though he was not seriously injured.

Jimmy moved and Weber came over to him immediately.

"How do you feel?" he asked solicitously.

"Like the devil," Jimmy groaned. "That was some smash."

"The blankets kept me from getting hurt," Weber explained. "I saw it was coming and held them up in front of me." He was bruised and his face was discolored and scratched, but otherwise he did not appear to be injured.

"I wasn't expecting such a smash," Jimmy said. "I tried to pick out a bunch of young trees. I thought we'd simply settle down, maybe turn over."

"Well, it could have been worse," the old man said philosophically. "That was a nasty crack you got on your head. I was afraid you wasn't goin' to come around."

"Have I been out long?"

"Nearly three hours, I reckon," Weber informed him. "But don't you worry none. I had no more than got you pulled out and bandaged up before one of them other planes began circling over and diving down to take a look at us. Accordin' to the way they waved around, I figger they're goin' to the nearest place for help. Some one will be coming in here after us as soon as they can get here. Either they saw us go down or were just flyin' over and happened to see the wreck."

"How far from Keno are we?" Jimmy asked.

"About fifteen miles, I figger," Weber said. "This is Stink Crick that I was tellin' you about. I've come up and down this very crick many a time. Here's where I figgered the strike would come instead of over at Keno. But that just shows you how gold strikes happen."

"If you started now, you could get over to Keno before the rush got there, couldn't you?" Jimmy asked slowly. "I suppose you know how to get over there from here."

"Yes, I know the trail all right," the old man admitted.

"And you could beat the rush there, couldn't you?" Jimmy insisted.

"Wal, I reckon maybe I could," Weber said.

"Old-timer, you go right ahead," Jimmy said, "I'm feeling pretty good now. You strike out across the hills and get your claims located. Somebody will be along here later and pick me up, or else I'll stay here till you get back."

"I reckon gold ain't worth that much, son," the old man said gently. "Your arm's broke and your leg's bruised up, and there's right smart of a hole in your head. I'll never miss what I ain't never had. You've done your best and you've lost your grub stake doin' it. No, son. Don't you fret none about me. There'll be other gold strikes. I'm goin' to build up a fire and make you a pot of coffee and fry up some bacon and you and me will wait right here until some help comes to get you out."

"Listen, old-timer," Jimmy pleaded. "I'll be all right here. You go ahead. Stake out a claim for both of us."

"Son," the old man said, "there's lions, bears, and wolves still roamin' around in this part of the world pretty thick."

"Leave me your gun; I can take care of myself," Jimmy protested.

"It ain't goin' to be necessary," Weber declared. "No use of you gettin' up a fever by arguin'. I got you into this mess, and I'm goin' to stay right by you until you get out of it. I've been thinkin' it over for the last hour or two, and after all, maybe that Keno strike don't amount to much. Every strike I've ever heard of was always the world's biggest bonanza, but they generally all peter out. I don't mind tellin' you I was a little disappointed when your engine commenced to get hot goin' up over the summit and I could begin to figger that we'd never make it. But I'm all over that now."

Jimmy protested and argued until he was too weak to say any more, but the old man remained obdurate and would not reconsider his determination to stay with Jimmy until help came. He built a fire and commenced to make coffee, and then after this was finished and Jimmy had eaten a little and drunk a cup of hot coffee, Weber commenced to make a bed of young green twigs on which Jimmy could pass the night in comfort.

Just before sundown a plane came over and dropped a message to them, saying that rangers had been notified and that help was on its way. After diving down close to the tree tops to get a reassuring wave from Jimmy and the old man, the plane passed rapidly out of sight.

Weber did not go to bed. He wrapped Jimmy in all the blankets they had brought and made him comfortable. But he spent the night by the campfire. Jimmy did not go to sleep until late, but it was sun-up when he finally awoke.

WEBER had breakfast ready. After Jimmy had taken a cup of coffee, the old man sat down by his side and showed him a handful of rock.

"Son, did you ever see any gold-bearin' ore?" he demanded.

Jimmy suddenly saw that the old man's hands were trembling and that he could hardly control his voice.

"Where did you find them?"

"We flew right down on a rainbow and landed smack-dab on a bag of gold," the old man declared exultantly. "I've come up and down this crick a dozen times, but I never found anything but a few pieces of float. But, this Calico Peacock of yours dug its nose smack-dab into the richest gold ledge that's been uncovered in this country for years. We're rich, son. We're so rich I don't dare figger out how much we're worth for fear I'll wake up. I've got our claims all staked out. Last night after you'd gone to sleep I went over there to see if I couldn't find my pipe. I struck some matches and scratched around on the ground and picked up a piece of this rock that had been busted off the ledge when we hit. There it was, out before my eyes."

"Do you think it's better than Keno would have been?"

"Keno!" the old man said contemptuously. "Why, son, inside of three days there'll be twenty thousand men stakin' claims around here. We don't have to work our claims. We can sell them inside of twenty-four hours for a fortune apiece. Didn't I tell you that there was no calculatin' how or when a strike was goin' to be made?"

HORSE SENSE

WHEN a rider is lost, and knows it, it sometimes happens that the horse knows the way back to camp, and will return if given a chance. This rule, however, does not apply to all horses or to the same horse under all conditions. Some horses seem never to be lost, while others possess practically no sense of direction at all and are lost most of the time. Some horses know the country they are in, while others are strangers in it.

When the rider realizes that he is lost and decides to let the horse drift at will, hoping to get back to camp, several troublesome things may happen. It may happen that the horse is thoroughly tired, in which case he stops unless urged, and chooses his direction at random. If he is tired, he will turn back and retrace his steps rather than climb a hill; and whenever the trail forks, he will choose the route which is most nearly on a level grade, neither uphill nor downhill. And sometimes a horse that knows and remembers the country, will take the lost rider to some place other than camp, although this is infrequent.

It is the nature of a horse, however, to return at night to the place he started from in the morning, and most horses will do so. To what extent this trait can profitably be taken advantage of depends not only on the horse but on the rider. Most experienced riders prefer to use their own judgment when they get turned around, and not depend too much on horse sense.—J. H. H.

THE VELO CITY WONDER

By WEED DICKINSON

Author of "One Screaming Pain in the Neck," "The Jazzbo Kid," etc.

IT WAS THE GENERAL OPINION AMONG THE COUGARS THAT THAT LEARNED COLLEGE RECRUIT, WINFIELD DESCARTES PHILLIPS, WOULD NOT ONLY BE AN ADDITION TO THE TEAM'S CRIPPLED PITCHING STAFF BUT WOULD PROVE A GREAT DIVERSION BETWEEN BALL GAMES. BUT AS IS CUSTOMARY WITH GENERAL OPINION, THIS WAS WRONG

SPIKE CANLON, veteran catcher and pitching coach of the Cougars, was really responsible for the nicknaming of Winfield Descartes Phillips; though it was only Spike's mistake that accounted for it. As a southpaw, Winfield would have fallen heir to the inevitable "Lefty" in the natural course of baseball events, had not Spike been as profoundly innocent of erudition as Phillips was guilty of it. But except for his ability as a developer of boxmen, Canlon was not what might be termed a savant. All that he had been able to acquire of more or less abstract knowledge were the signals, the fact that it is sometimes unwise to draw to an inside straight, and a series of dates which, if investigated, would have proved to be pay days.

Spike had matriculated in the school of experience. Winfield was a graduate of Southmore College, the head of his class as became the son of Dr. Philip Descartes Phillips, professor of physics at Southmore and a scholar of almost international standing. But along with his father's great aptitude for science Winfield had inherited from his mother a robust physique and a love of exercise that eventually made him the most effective college pitcher of his year as well as one of the heaviest hitters. Mrs. Phillips had never failed to regret that a broken arm had prevented her from being the woman tennis champion of the United States some twenty years before, and at that precise time she had turned in mingled sorrow and disgust from the field of physical prowess to the field of physics, marrying a lowly but brilliant young instructor named Phillips—perhaps out of pique, or perhaps because it is not likely that a person will break a brain and thus ruin a career! Mrs. Phillips hated to be foiled; particularly in the matter of careers.

SOUTHMORE was a small fresh-water college; but Gabby Cooke, scout for Manager McNulty of the Cougars, read everything pertaining to baseball and went everywhere. Accordingly in due course he saw young Phillips shut out Southmore's ancient rivals in the last game of his collegiate days, allowing one scratchy hit and pounding in five of Southmore's six runs himself with a homer and two triples. Shortly thereafter Winfield was on his way to pick up the Cougars, badly in need of pitchers, on their first swing through the western end of the circuit.

When he caught up with the club it was

mid-afternoon and there was no need of going to the park. So the stocky, blond collegian presented himself at the hotel where the Cougars were stopping and was assigned to room with Canlon. There Spike and Speed Kendral, the club's best kidder, found him an hour or so later, a large academic looking tome on "Dynamics" spread out before him on the table and several sheets of paper littered with notes.

"You Phillips?" inquired Spike, advancing on the rookie. Winfield assented.

"Gladda metcha," continued the catcher. "Mac told me a rookie named Phillips would be reportin' today. Pitcher, eh? This is Speed Kendral, a good shortstop even if he don't hit the size of his glove! Whas is?" and he picked up the top page of paper on the table. Across the top of it, in Winfield's large, scrawling hand, was the heading

"Velocity"

and underneath it the somewhat cryptic announcement:

"The velocity produced in a body free to move without resistance in a unit of time will be directly proportional to the intensity or amount of the impressed force, and inversely proportional to the mass of the body."

There was much more, but that was enough for a beginning.

"Velo City," Spike spelled out laboriously. "That's where you pitched, hey? I never hear of it before. What league's it in?"

SPEED took the paper from Spike's hand.

"Velocity, you bonehead!" Kendral laughed. "That's speed, you big sap!"

"Well, it looks like 'Velo City,'" insisted Spike. "Howinell am I to know?"

"What's all this stuff?" continued Speed, who had been examining the writing with growing wonder. "I can't make head or tail of it."

"It's a treatise on dynamics," Winfield informed them, a little awkward under the keen, steady gaze of the two ball players who were sizing him up.

"A what—on which?" asked Kendral suspiciously.

"A—well, an essay, you know, on dynamics. That's the science which has for its object the investigation of the laws governing the action of forces," insisted the boy.

"Whacher doin', tryin' to kid us, Bush-leaguer?" growled Spike.

In denial Phillips only succeeded in making matters worse. After a few more futile attempts to elucidate, he finished, almost apologetically:

"My father is a professor of physics at Southmore College. You see, I rather specialized in dynamics. It's interesting stuff. You can apply it to baseball, you know. In fact it was while I was studying the effect of the action of forces as applied to curve pitching that I first got interested in the game. For instance, when a body in motion is constrained to move in a curve, the force which causes it to deviate from the tangent is found by multiplying the mass by the square of the velocity and dividing by the radius of curvature."

"I can hardly believe you!" ejaculated Speed in mock astonishment. "By golly, I'll bet Mac will be glad to hear about that! Come on, Spike, let's waste no time telling him! We'll see you later, Phillips!" And with an ingenuous grin he towed the bewildered Canlon from the room, hastily shutting the door after him.

ONCE outside he held his sides and shook with hushed merriment. He could have had a pretty fair time kidding Spike about the location of "Velo City," but here was a much richer vein of enjoyment to be worked!

"The Velo City Wonder!" he chortled joyously. "Oh, boy! What a grand nut he is! All southpaws go cuckoo, o' course, but this guy is the champ! He ought to be in a clock!"

"What was he sayin'?" Spike asked helplessly, with a touch of animosity. He felt he had been given the bird, without knowing just how. "I didn't understand anything he said except the 'Hello!'"

"I dunno!" returned Kendral heartily. "I guess he doesn't either. But ain't he a pip? Can you imagine with that kind of language what he'll get when he protests a ball and strike decision with old Fish Face Hendricks umpirin' behind the plate? Say, 'the square of the velocity' he'll go out of

the park with won't be anybody's business!"

"When he pitches big league ball, I'll be cachin' for the Baltimore Orioles up in heaven!" prophesied Canlon gloomily.

Within the hour Speed had collected a few congenial souls and sent them, one at a time to Canlon's room, there to urge Winfield Descartes Phillips to initiate them into the mysteries of dynamics! With all the pretended seriousness which can be equalled, perhaps, nowhere else as well as with a baseball club on the road the extended ribbing of the recruit went on, its victim entirely unsuspecting. Winfield had led a very sheltered and studious life in the little town that straggled about Southmore College. He had lived at home, subjected largely to the scholarly influence of Dr. Phillips. Even his contacts with his fellow students had been casual enough; and his standing as the best pitcher Southmore had set him apart. These circumstances, coupled with a guileless nature which was the essence of tolerance and good humor, had prepared him not at all for the reception it was inevitable he would receive.

THE next morning, to the huge glee of a group of assembled onlookers, Winfield Descartes Phillips was inveigled into conducting an extemporaneous class in dynamics in the lobby of the hotel. The "students," somewhat purple in the face from suppression, were under the leadership of Speed, who carefully plied the rookie instructor with questions when he showed any signs of running down.

"Now that 'centrifugal force' you spoke of," Kendral drawled softly. "I don't know that I quite understand all about that. Would you mind explaining it?"

"Not at all!" acquiesced Winfield readily. "The centrifugal force is the influence that tends to draw a body away from the axis; and it is directed outward when any body is constrained to move in a curved path——"

"In a moment I will be constrained to move your body through that window in a curved path if you don't stop choking that way!" whispered Speed behind his hand to an athlete back of him who seemed about to explode.

"——In order to constrain a body to move in a curved path," continued Winfield, "one must apply centripetal force—that is, a force directed inward toward the center of curvature. The moment that this force ceases the body moves off at a tangent, and it this constant tendency to move in a straight line, in other words the 'inertia' of the body, which in its aspect of opposition to the centripetal force is called centrifugal force."

There was a smothered snort from Hap Weaver, the lanky first baseman, who was one of the group standing behind Winfield; but before the recruit could determine the nature of the noise Hap was led away by strong hands to a place where he could indulge his merriment in safety.

"If this 'inertia' causes things to move in a straight line, I know what makes 'Cavity' Dunn head for the dining-room like he does three times a day!" offered a voice. Cavity, besides being the Cougar's champion left and right handed eater, was also celebrated for his laziness.

THE laugh which followed broke up the class, but Speed and Truck Tinney escorted Phillips in to breakfast and continued the kidding process, while a large table of assorted pastimers adjoining nearly went into spasms at the seriousness of the three.

Once Winfield interrupted the explanation of an abstruse point to remark. "They're a jolly gang, aren't they? I wonder what they're laughing at?"

"Oh, probably some nut stuff!" Speed answered loudly, with a broad wink at the neighboring table. "Now, about this 'theoreum of the force of parallelograms' you were explaining——"

"The theoreum of the parallelogram of forces," corrected Phillips. "It's like this—" and he drew a bit of paper and pencil from his pocket, proceeding to demonstrate it geometrically, with Speed and Truck hanging on his every word, nodding uncom-

prehending heads, while a series of risibilities running the gamut from grunts to guffaws swept the dining-room.

Long before the time for morning practice it was the general consensus of opinion among the Cougars that as an addition to a crippled pitching staff Winfield Descartes Phillips would probably prove a great diversion between ball games. But as is customary with general opinion, this was wrong.

"Warm up this Phillips down in the bull pen and see what he's got—if anything!" Manager McNulty ordered Canlon as soon as the players were assembled at the park—and forthwith he started batting practice grounders to the infield.

SPIKE grumbled something about "nuts being only good for squirrels," and took his charge to deep right field where the pitchers usually shook the kinks from their salary arms. There the Velo City Wonder divested himself of his sweater and started lobbing the ball with a regular thud into Spike's big catcher's mitt.

"Take your time, take your time! Rookies is always throwin' their arms out startin' too fast!" commanded Spike as the ball began to sizzle across the intervening space after the first few easy throws. "You're puttin' too much speed on 'em!"

"That isn't fast," Winfield assured him. "I have much more speed than that, Mr. Canlon!" He said it without arrogance, as one would state an elemental fact, and with something of surprise in his voice.

"All right!" grunted Spike. "You show it to me when I tell you—and not till then!"

After a time Spike called for it—and got it! Gradually increasing the "inertia" of Mr. Spalding's famous collection of molecules in a horsehide cover, Phillips turned loose a rifle-shot ball that fairly smoked as it hit Canlon's mitt. Winfield had been right—his early efforts had not been fast, by comparison! About five minutes of this and Canlon called a halt, removing his glove and rubbing his horny palm.

"Ump!" he conceded, which, had the rookie known it, was Canlon's highest praise for a busher. "Got any curves?"

Winfield Descartes Phillips thereupon drew upon his knowledge of centripetal force and turned loose a drop that broke like a frightened horse, a vicious in-shoot, and a bewildering change of pace. These Canlon handled without comment, albeit at times with difficulty. Presently he halted the workout.

"But I have another curve I haven't shown you, Mr. Canlon," Phillips complained mildly.

"The hell you have!" retorted Spike with emphasis. And he added under his breath, "There ain't any more!"

"Yes," rejoined Winfield confidentially. "It's one I worked out just before I left college, and I found it very efficacious. It acts sort of queer, and it doesn't always break the same, but it's a slow ball so you won't have any trouble with it. It's the result of two empressed forces acting on a body—in this case the ball—at opposite poles, or points, at the same time, and the result is that the angular velocity and the moment of inertia intersect and nullify each other. That's what gives it the queer twist. Because the radius of gyration is that radius the square of which is the mean of the squares of the distance from the cover of the ball to the axis, it follows that——"

"Dry up—and pitch it!" advised Spike disgustedly, but with vastly more respect in his tones than he would have displayed half an hour earlier.

Winfield wound up and delivered the ball, with a peculiar, swooping side-arm motion which ended in a snap. The sphere drifted up toward the coach in an easy arc. Then, when it was about three feet from him, it seemed to hesitate for an instant and actually *hang poised* in the air! The fleeting halt was followed by a sharp break, in and down!

Spike Canlon called upon his God, and there was no irreverence in his tone. For

despite the slowness of the "floater" he had barely been able to get his mitt in front of it when it changed direction.

"I call it a 'Woggle Ball.' It acts peculiarly, doesn't it? Do you think it will be any good?" Winfield asked modestly.

"Wait here!" charged Spike as he started for the infield where McNulty was officiating. "And put on your sweater so that arm won't get cold," he yelled back over his shoulder, hardly noticing that Winfield was already taking this precaution.

"What's he got?" Mac asked the veteran as several pastimers trotted in to be present at the reading of the report. Because of his erudition, not because they expected anything of him in a baseball way, Phillips had become a character of importance in their lives—particularly since he was so easy to clown.

"He's got *everything*," Spike answered definitely, to the utter astonishment of every man in the group. Canlon was usually notoriously conservative in his estimate of rookies. "A drop that breaks your back, a great in, an' more speed than Walter Johnson in his prime! An' he's got a 'What-is-it?' curve that he calls a Woggle Ball! I'm damned if I believe it's true, but I just caught it! Go down and see for yourself!"

McNULTY stalked down to the bull pen, and Phillips dutifully went through his paces for the manager. When he returned to the infield after leaving the new recruit in charge of Spike, he called all his men in to the bench with an air which the Cougars knew by long experience presaged a reading of the Riot-act.

"The Old Man's all boiled up!" whispered Speed Kendral uneasily as he slipped into an inconspicuous place on the bench. "I wonder what's the trouble?"

With McNulty's first words he found out.

"Kendral!" growled the diamond leader. "Did you start this kidding Phillips about dynamics, or whatever it was I heard in the lobby this morning?"

"Sure!" returned Speed with what nonchalance he could muster. "He's a nut on that crazy stuff! You oughta hear him! I just told a few of the boys and we were having a little fun with him, that's all."

"Well, there'll be no more of it from now on!" warned McNulty in his best "thirty-day-suspension" tone. "I just had a long talk with him, and unless I miss my guess that kid is very sensitive—and temperamental! Possibly shakey, too, if he gets rattled. Right now he doesn't even know he's been kidded, and I'm going to be sure he doesn't find out! There's lots of kinds of dumbness, and I have all but one kind right here on the bench this minute. That's the kind Phillips has got—'book dumbness,' if you want to call it that. You never can tell what the razzberry is going to do to that kind of youngster. It might raise the devil with his nerves and send him right up in the air. These college kids ain't used to being given the bird! Now treat this guy nice, and act just like he's the same as anybody else, get me? The next guy that wants to learn anything about dynamics can look it up in the library!"

"Is he that good, Chief?" inquired Truck Tinney.

"I don't often make predictions," returned McNulty, "but I'll say that if he goes along as he ought to he'll hang up records the league's never dreamed of before the season's over!"

HOW accurate was one of McNulty's few predictions was instanced that afternoon when the Velo City Wonder was tossed into the box on his first day with the club and let the league-leading Greenlegs down without a hit! But for a fumble by Speed Kendral Phillips might have attained that very rare eminence of pitching fame—a perfect game, with no runs, no hits, and no man reaching first. As it was, the Cougars took the contest, 6-1. The only Green score came when the batter who had been given a life by Speed stole second, went to third on an infield out, and came home when Spike Canlon let one of Winfield's Woggle Balls get by him for a passed ball!

Literally overnight, and from complete obscurity, Phillips became front page stuff. A raw recruit, a collegian from a little institution nobody had ever heard of, had stepped into the box and mowed down the heavy-hitting Greenlegs like so many schoolboys, pitching a no-hit game the first time he started in fast company! It was something to rave about—and the sports writers raved!

So did the general public. So, too, did some of his team-mates, who saw in this stocky, queer duck their hope for a share

in the pot of gold that is at the end of every world's series rainbow. But in the face of this sudden storm of adulation Winfield smiled in a pleased manner, was uniformly considerate and courteous to everybody—and returned, almost nightly, to the interminable correspondence with his father on statics, kinetics and dynamics in general!

When the club returned home they had climbed back into the first division and were crowding the leaders. Phillips had won seven games in as many starts, four of them shut-outs, and had permitted an average of a fraction more than three hits a game in the process!

The home town fans presented this startling new celebrity with a snappy sport roadster, for which Winfield was properly grateful and which he promptly loaned indefinitely to Spike Canlon while he worked on a new theory of his concerning the operation of molecular force.

"He just ain't human—an' he pitches the same way!" was Spike's analysis of the situation. "But he's a damn' fine kid, even if he is a little nutty!" Which about expressed the attitude of the rest of his team-mates. Winfield was liked. Despite his strangeness, they found him very likable.

HE PROVED himself in particular one day when he stepped off the coaching lines and knocked out Big Mike Romano, first baseman of the Black Sox, with one well-timed wallop. Mike was a notoriously dirty ball player. Little Shrimp Wallace, lead-off man of the Cougar batting order, had taken a big lead off first and was nearly trapped by a throw He slid back safely, but Romano with obvious intention clapped the ball down with stunning force on the back of the runner's head, just behind the ear. Shrimp rolled over once, kicked, and went limp.

Winfield leaped from the coacher's box, swung Romano around with one hand and as the big fellow lunged for him let go a lightning inside right which caught the first baseman flush on the point of the jaw.

Mike was a fighter, but he fought no more that day. He had been hit many times and never knocked off his feet. Yet he lay there, cold as a herring, until long after Shrimp had been revived. Thereafter the liking of the Cougars for the Velo City Wonder ripened rapidly into respect.

But the process of "ganging aglee," which as Bobby Burns pointed out is as apt to affect men as mice, overtook the Cougars in general and Phillips in particular just when it was most important that it should not. A few weeks before the close of the season, with a scant two games separating the Greens and McNulty's club in their battle for the pennant, things suddenly went awry.

Perhaps it was a chance remark dropped by some Cougar player in an unguarded moment. Possibly it was simply that unaccountable grapevine system of underground communication by which news and gossip manages to circulate through a league. In any case, the soundness of Mac's hunch that something might happen if the young and eccentric sensation were badgered about his beloved dynamics was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt.

It began during the third inning of a game with the Freebooters. For the first two innings Phillips had gone along with his usual well nigh perfect control, mowing down the visiting batters in one-two-three order. The Cougars had made two runs, and that looked like twenty with their pitching ace on the mound.

Then from the Freebooter bench came two players, one with a dunce cap and the other with spectacles. The latter carried a bulky volume and a small baton which he used as a pointer. They took their places on the coaching lines behind first and third respectively, and as the first batter stepped to the plate the bespectacled athlete howled in a clarion voice:

"Dr. Phillips's class in dynamics will please come to order!"

The player behind first bustled about, dragged up an imaginary chair, and pretended to sit in it, folding his hands in front of him and squatting on one leg with the other knee crossed over it.

"Professor, what is this dynamics? I wanna learn all about it!" he fog-horned back across the infield.

"Dynamics," intoned the "professor" gesturing with his pointer, "is the investigation of the laws and principles which govern the action of forces."

"Then a force play at second is a dynamic?" queried the class in stentorian tones.

Winfield Descartes Phillips had watched these proceedings with vague but growing disfavor. He pitched three balls in succession to the first Freebooter batter, and Spike Canlon went out toward the box to remonstrate with him.

"Hey, don't let those guys get your goat!" he warned. The next pitch was a strike, but the following one was a ball and the batter walked.

"The components of each force may be found by multiplying the magnitude of the force by the sine of the angle which its line of action makes with the direction of the component," shouted the professor from behind third, cleverly misquoting the encyclopedia from which he had copied his notes.

"Cosine, not sine of the angle!" grunted Winfield to himself—and hit the next batter with a pitched ball!

He walked the third man on four straight balls, filling the bases with none out, while the erudite cacophony behind the coaching lines continued.

McNulty stormed out of the dugout and objected.

"Get those bums off the coaching lines!" he urged the umpire. "That ain't baseball!"

THE manager of the Freebooters cantered, snorting, to the scene with counter objections.

"Nothin' in the rules to prevent a coacher wearin' a cap, or glasses, an' studyin' a little, is there?" he demanded. "Besides, Swede's eyes are awful weak, an' Lord knows they're both dumb enough so a little education won't hurt 'em! I want 'em to study, an' they get their lessons better if they say it out loud!"

Eventually the arbiter could find no logical reason for evicting the "professor" and his "class." It was really simple razzing—pitcher baiting of a different kind. So the instruction was allowed to continue.

Mac retired to the bench in disgust. There could be no doubt but that his young sensation, the Velo City Wonder was blowing—nay, had blown! After he had forced in a run and pitched three straight balls to the following batter, McNulty yanked him and sent in a relief hurler. But most of the damage was done, and before the fatal inning was over the Freebooters had the game on ice, 9-2.

Two days later McNulty started his star again; and again came the crossfire from the coaching lines.

"The important principle is established that the product of the mass of a body, multiplied by have the square of the velocity, divided by the radius of inertia and subtracted from the cosine of a head cheese is equal to a lot of boloney!" shrieked one coacher to another. To which equally pertinent and impertinent retort was made. With a bellowed babble that ran from straight quotations on dynamics to the wildest burlesque, they whip-sawed the young pitcher's nerves into ribbons.

The Velo City Wonder blew. He couldn't locate the plate with a telescope, and when in sheer desperation he did put them over he dared not put anything on the ball. In one inning he was clouted to the far corners of the lot, and removed with the howls of the multitude ringing in his ears.

OF ALL the mill-run folk who in the bulk are jocularly referred to as human nature, there is no mass disposition so prone to fickleness as that of a baseball crowd. And so it proved in Phillips's case. When the boy went up for the third time a few days later and was ignominiously taken out, his removal was accompanied by howls, cat-calls and hisses from the stands. Gone were the days of his glory and the memory of his sky-rocket success.

The Cougars were desperate. Individually and collectively, on the field and off, they argued with Winfield to pay no attention to the razzing—but you might just as well have advised a horse to pay no attention to pestiferous flies. Winfield agreed that he wouldn't—and did, as two more starts clearly revealed. He could not seem to help himself. And the Greenlegs, under the

impetus of a sustained winning streak, swept into the Cougar's lair for the final three games of the year with a two-game lead. To win the pennant, Mac's men must make a clean sweep of the series.

That night the Cougar leader held a council of war with Spike Canlon. He had just two pitchers besides Phillips on whom he could count with any hope of success, and neither of them was in a class with the Velo City Wonder. If he could take the first two games of the series with these hurlers, well and good. They would be tied with the Greens. But who could he use for the third contest?

"Phillips can never do it!" admitted Mac dourly for the third time. "I had a hunch the kid was temperamental and would get rattled at the right kind of a razz. He never got used to it in college, and besides this dynamics stuff of his is an obsession with him. He'll go up like a balloon the minute the Greenleg coachers start riding him!"

"Looks like it," agreed Spike. "It's tough because the kid is just dyin' to get back in there and show 'em!"

WITH the help of heavy hitting the Cougars managed to nose out the first two games behind indifferent pitching. But what hope was there for the final, all important contest? Shaw, the hurler of the first game, was stale from overwork as it was. Blyfield had twirled yesterday, and was never effective against this particular club. Kennedy had a lame arm. The others were impossible.

An hour before game time it was still uncertain who would be the choice for mound duty. McNulty warmed up three men, but none of them looked too good. At last he determined to take a long chance with Shaw. But just before the umpire made the battery announcements Winfield Descartes Phillips, who had been absent for a few minutes after sitting moodily on the bench all during practice, rushed up to the manager

"Let me go in, Mac!" pleaded the boy. "Just let me go in for one inning and show you. I know I can do it. I know I can."

McNulty shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry, Kid," he answered. "Sorrier than you are, but I can't take a chance on you. It's too much of a risk."

"Just let me pitch to one man—just one man!" entreated Phillips. "If I don't strike him out, remove me then. Just to one man, Mac, *please!*"

There was something arresting in the boy's deadly earnestness. McNulty considered. It might be bad for the club's morale to start them off by having to yank Phillips in the first inning. But then, one man—literally one—could do no great harm.

"All right," he nodded finally, holding up his finger. "Just one man, remember! If you don't retire him, out you come."

"If I don't strike him out I'll come back of my own accord!" Winfield insisted as he grabbed his glove and rushed out to the umpire who was already announcing "Shaw and Canlon" for the home club.

"Change that to 'Phillips and Canlon,'" he said. And with grim lines about his mouth he stalked to the mound, looking neither to the right nor the left.

With the announcement the stands roared a crescendo of mingled glee and embarrassment, while renewed activity along the coaching lines at once became apparent.

"The next class in Dr. Phillips's dynamics will meet in the clubhouse, under a shower, in about three minutes!" squalled the Greenleg's lead-off man as Winfield went by him on his way to the box. But the young Cougar did not so much as give him a glance.

The coaches, the batter, and the Greenleg bench burst into a bedlam of jargon on the subject dealing with the "laws and principles governing the action of forces," and in the dugout Manager McNulty watched, eagle-eyed, for the first sign that would lead him to copper his long-shot bet. The boy certainly looked calm—more in command of himself than he had on any such occasion before.

Winfield Descartes Phillips pitched three times to the Greenlegs' first batter, who had instructions to wait him out. All three were called strikes, and the visitor went back to the bench without ever lifting

his bat from his shoulder. The coachers redoubled their efforts to rattle the young hurler, but Phillips appeared as cool as an iceberg.

"By heck, I believe he'll do it!" muttered McNulty, as the team strung in from the field.

WHATEVER strange metamorphosis the boy had gone through, continued inning after inning with superb continuity. His drop was hooking across the plate with the swoop of a veering bird, and his in almost cut the letters from the Greenleg chests, dusting 'em off without even touching them. The famous Woggle Ball had them swinging as meaninglessly as a Bock Beer sign would swing today in a breeze. In the first six innings he fanned ten men of a possible eighteen, and not once did four men face him in a single stanza.

"Whatta pitcher!" sighed Spike Canlon under his breath to his chief. "He's goin' like a cyclone! I wonder how he did it? We can't lose now!"

"You can always lose in baseball!" returned McNulty. "And if we don't lose, how we going to win without runs? This Moose Mitchell is pitching some game himself!"

It was, indeed, a tough spot to pick a winner. Any little break might decide it. Mitchell, the Greenleg ace, had been saved for this game and was at the top of his form. No man on either team had reached third in safety.

At the end of the ninth the score was still 0-0. But twenty-nine batters had faced Phillips, and the Greenlegs had two hits, one a scratch infield tap, to their credit. The Cougars had nicked Mitchell for seven, but the Green's star had kept them widely scattered.

In the twelfth Phillips, the first man up, caught a fast ball on the end of his bat and drove it whistling to right center for a clean triple.The Cougar fans went wild at this prospect of a score. The visitor's infield drew in to cut down a run at the plate, and the head of the Cougar batting order came up.

WITH no one out, things looked rosy. But the count was one and one when Speed Kendral, coaching at third, detected the Greenleg left fielder sneaking in on the unguarded hot corner. Winfield had taken a long lead off the bag and was ready to sprint for home.

"Look out, look out!" bellowed Kendral to the pitcher.

The stands, too, took up the message in an anticipatory howl of warning. But not until Mitchell had turned to throw to third did Phillips see that he was trapped. He was caught off, flat-footed, despite a desperate dive for the bag.

Out!

The wail of fifty thousand disappointed rooters rent the air; and what Winfield was called when he returned to the bench would not make lyrics for a hymnal! To all the statements as to his sleeping ability, brain-power and personal character the boy shook his head sadly, said "I'm sorry, boys!" and relapsed into grim silence.

"You can't take a guy out that's pitching like a maniac for one bonehead play!" grumbled McNulty to himself as the team again took the field. "But why the hell didn't that bozo kid listen to Kendral's coaching?"

The youngster made up for it three innings later. Canlon doubled with two down, and the Velo City Wonder singled smartly to center to bring him home with the winning run of a fifteen inning 1-0 game! The kid was once again a hero. Maddened fans who swarmed over the field nearly mobbed him, carrying him halfway to the clubhouse before he could break from them and rejoin his team-mates in the locker room.

"Wonderful game—two hits in fifteen innings!" Mac complimented him as the players surged around him, slapping him on the back and deluging him with congratulations. "And you won it yourself, boy! But why in the devil didn't you pay attention to Kendral in that twelfth? He was yelling for you to get back, and not ten feet away from you!"

Winfield Descartes Phillips smiled into the manager's face without understanding, and remarked casually:

"I can't hear a thing you're saying, Mac! Will you get the club doctor to come down here with a syringe and fix my ears? I filled them with mud under the stands just before the game, and the stuff has caked in there so that I can't get it out!"

BOWERY MURDER!

The Final and Authentic Version of New York's Greatest Murder Mystery

By WILLARD K. SMITH

Author of "The Tooth of Time," etc.

PART III

From the *Graphoid*, Friday, April 27th, 1928.

KILLED TO SAVE HER NAME

ROSE KILLED WOODWARD AFTER HE HAD INSULTED HER

SHE MAKES AMAZING CONFESSION

The weirdest murder enigma New York authorities have dealt with in years—an enigma which even last night had not exhausted its gamut of bewildering developments—reached its emotional climax in the breathless statement of Rose O'Neil as she walked about the private office of Police Commissioner Howard last night.

An Amazing Tale

Admitting that she killed Woodward after he had slandered her name before her father and her sweetheart, Watts Gordon, Rose O'Neil told the police of an amazing persecution by Woodward in which he had used everything but actual force to make her acquiesce to his desires.

But the part of her story that struck the Police Commissioner as most remarkable was the recital of the cool, calm way in which she said through the suggestion of the District Attorney that Gordon signed a confession admitting his guilt and thus kept Rose's guilt from becoming known.

Rose Reveals Past

The real background of the tragedy was given by Miss O'Neil in a long voluntary statement. "Woodward from the first endeavored to get me to go out alone with him. I did twice just after I met him. He was the backer of the show Mandalay in which I was appearing and it seemed necessary that I be polite to him. After the second engagement with him I refused to be seen in his company except when there were others present. I knew his reputation and he did not in any way respect my insistence that I was not interested in any of his amazing offers of money and jewels.

"I returned a pearl necklace to him a month ago which was worth nearly a hundred thousand dollars. He sent the bill with it. He simply could not understand that any

woman of the stage was not willing to trade her goodness for his wealth."

Woodward Threatened

Woodward when he found that his wealth could not influence Rose O'Neil then tried to use other means. Once he came into her dressing room at the theatre and she threw a jar of cold cream which struck him in the face inflicting a bad bruise. He threatened then to have her dropped from the show. She defied him to do so.

"Then he told me that he would broadcast to the world that I was his mistress and the world would believe him and not my denial. I replied that if he did so I would kill him as quick as I would a snake. I came from a Bowery family that has taken care of itself for generations in the hardest part of New York. And I meant what I said."

Finally Woodward made his threat good. Wednesday night in the back room of the Bowery Bar before Rose's father and Watts Gordon, and other witnesses who do not figure in Miss O'Neil's confession but whom the police believe were present, Woodward attacked Rose's character and then she shot him.

A notice which appeared in the *Tabloid News*, Friday, April 27 ,1928.

$500.00 REWARD

If the person who sent a letter addressed to the editor of the *Tabloid News* yesterday, signed "One Who Knows," concerning a startling bit of information concerning the late Thomas Woodward, will come forward in person to the *Tabloid News* or designate a place at which he can be met, he will be paid the sum of $500.00 provided he can prove or will publicly sponsor the statement he made in the letter. His entire confidence will be respected and no steps toward publicity of the startling information he gave will be made without his consent.

BOWERY MURDER!

WILLARD K. SMITH

A Brief Review of the Beginning of the Case.

THIS is a novel and unique presentation of a thrilling murder mystery, as the New York newspapers told it from day to day as the case developed. The tabloids with their sensational headlines, the more conservative accounts of the other papers all place the story before you as millions of people read it and as the police went to work to solve it.

The man who was murdered in the Bowery Bar was a financier, Thomas Woodward, whose stock manipulations in United Omnibus had brought ruin to thousands. At first, speculation as to his murderer was rife. Had he been shot by one of the men or women he had ruined? Had the murder been a political one, owing to the pressing question of a franchise for the United Omnibus Company? Had Woodward been shot in revenge by one of the many women who had played a part in his life? Many theories were advanced.

Then came a confession to the crime. This was from young Watts Gordon, a reporter on the *Post*, who said he had shot Woodward in the presence of Peter O'Neil, East Side political leader and his daughter Rose—who was starring in musical comedy. Woodward was shot by Gordon during a quarrel following upon the reporter's request for an interview concerning Woodward's part in United Omnibus Crash.

There were many queries as to why Woodward was in the Bowery Bar—his whereabouts after the stock market crash having been unknown—and then it further came out that McDermott, the District Attorney, was also in the Bowery Bar the night of the murder. Remarks began to be made of the rivalry of the District Attorney and the Police Commissioner for the mayoralty nomination.

Watts Gordon, held for the murder, refused to make a statement beyond a bare confession, but other facts begin to come out. A pearl handled pistol is found in the barroom and its ownership traced to Irene Williams, a screen star. Later it transpired that both Miss Williams and Lila Carroll a Broadway favorite, were in the Bowery Bar that night, and later they are both arrested as accessories after the crime. Lila had accused Irene of the theft of a famous diamond given her by the murdered Woodward, but later this stone is found by the police in the possession of an East Side gangster.

The final sensation before the newspapers take up the story in this issue of SHORT STORIES is the discovery of Rose O'Neil and her confession that she and not Watts Gordon shot Woodward.

From the *Tabloid News* (New York) Saturday, April 28th, 1928.

ROSE, LILA, IRENE HAD TALK

CLERK AT HOTEL TELLS OF CONFERENCE

By
Forrest Savid

The mists originally surrounding the Woodward case or the Bowery Bar Murder as it is equally well known, are slowly clearing but in their place new fogs are appearing. Today a clerk at the North American Hotel where Rose O'Neil had been in hiding told the *Tabloid News* that he was certain that Lila Carroll and Irene Williams had come to see Rose O'Neil early yesterday afternoon. She confessed last night. He identified pictures of the two women who had been drawn into the case previous to Rose's confession, as resembling very closely two women who had come to the hotel, entering the elevator without coming to the desk and being taken upstairs to her apartment.

Conference Apparently Arranged

Testimony of an elevator operator checked the clerk's statement. The former remembered two women who had got off at the tenth floor yesterday. They were not guests of the hotel and instructed to note all such persons, he had reported their presence to the clerk who had seen them come in. They arrived separately about fifteen minutes apart, were in Rose O'Neil's apartment together but left alone, about five minutes elapsing between their departures.

Assuming the identification is certain the question arises as to the nature of the conference and what bearing it had upon Rose's confession made a few hours later. Inquiry at Police Headquarters brought no answer to this query nor was much interest shown in the disclosure. Acting Inspector Dan Carr who has charge of the case, said, "That news is not surprising. Do a little more investigating and you'll probably find that District Attorney McDermott was there too."

Inspector Carr would not explain this remark but admitted that he had questioned hotel employees concerning Miss O'Neil's visitors and had learned of the two women.

The clerk is Freddy Lovering, living at 137 Maple Street, Manhattan and is employed only during the day. He stated that he had been quizzed by the police along with others of the hotel staff.

See Picture on First Page

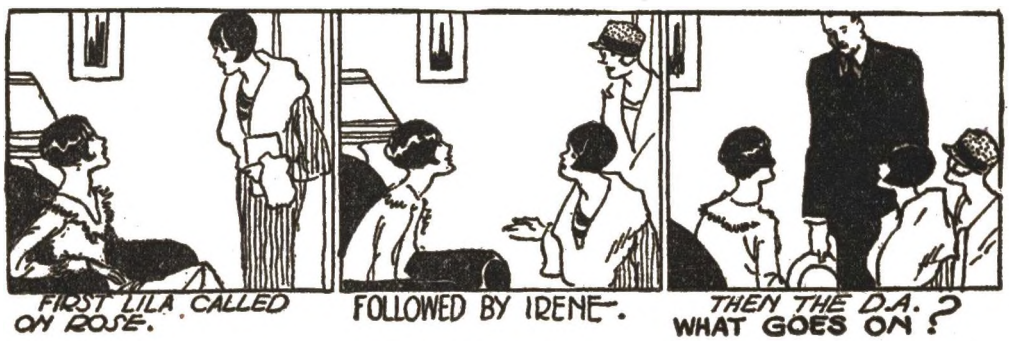
CHAPTER IX

From the *Daily Tabloid* (New York) early afternoon edition, Friday, April 27, 1928.

ROSE'S CONFESSION FALSE! GORDON AND O'NEIL SAY SHE DID NOT KILL WOODWARD

Rose O'Neil, the "Belle of the Bowery" deliberately lied when she confessed last night to Police Commissioner Howard that she killed Thomas Woodward, according to the emphatic denials of her statements by two who were present at the murder.

Watts Gordon, confessed killer, stated from the Tombs early this morning that her confession was absolutely false. Her father,



Strip from the *Tabloid News*

Peter O'Neil, Bowery leader, was more emphatic in denying that his daughter had shot Woodward. "She is crazy!" says he.

Who is right? Is Rose trying to shield Gordon?

The Police Commissioner believes her story. The District Attorney discredits it. The latter stated today to the *Tabloid News*:

"Miss O'Neil did not shoot Woodward. Of that I am convinced. Her story is simply one to draw a false herring across a trial that leads directly to Watts Gordon. She is trying to protect this man who is in love with her. I will pay no attention to the confession."

Gordon Gives First Interview

Watts Gordon broke his ten day's silence this morning and requested that reporters be given access to him. Tombs officials granted this request. He received the representatives of the press in the head keeper's office. His manner was earnest and after a few personal greetings, he gave out the following statement:

"Miss O'Neil's confession is almost a pure fabrication. I cannot understand why she made it. There is only one bit of truth in what has been given to me as her official statement. Woodward did pursue her and made himself very obnoxious. She did not kill him, however. I have confessed to that. The whole affair has evidently upset her to such a degree that she has decided to take the blame. It is a noble gesture which I cannot permit. She is absolutely guiltless in the matter. I swear to this before God."

Refuses to Answer any Questions

A rapid fire barrage of questions was addressed to him but Gordon waved them all aside. "I cannot give you boys more than that. If the police hold Miss O'Neil they are holding the wrong person. I shot Woodward. No woman is directly concerned with his death. Miss Williams and Miss Carroll may have been there that night but neither of them killed Woodward, who deserved what he got. I would do it again in the same circumstances. That's all."

He requested the keepers to take him back to his cell and the interview ended.

Rose O'Neil's father also for the first time consented to see reporters when they flocked to the Bowery Bar. He appeared almost immediately, and was in an apparent angry mood.

"I am not responsible for my daughter. This story she told to the Police Commissioner last night is absolutely applesauce. She had nothing to do with killing Tom Woodward. Gordon shot him as he has confessed. If the Police Commissioner is foolish enough to believe her story he ought to be tried for his sanity. I feel like having my girl up before a lunacy commission after reading what she confessed. Tom Woodward was a gentleman. He never pulled those remarks in front of me that Rose says he did. Gordon shot him on account of an argument over a cock and bull story about a million dollars worth of graft I was supposed to get."

Denies Graft

"Do I look like I had cleaned up a quarter of a million out of United Omnibus? I'd be down in Florida or out on a yacht if I had. The *Post* is trying to get an investigation. Maybe they will and maybe they won't, but they won't hang me on their fake evidence, dug up by Gordon, about United Omnibus. Sure I had some of the stock. Who didn't? Woodward told me to buy it like he told a lot of friends. But I got out in time. That was the difference between me and some of the soreheads that's been running him down."

O'Neil was asked if his daughter had consulted him about her confession.

"I haven't seen her for over a week. I did not know where she was, and I don't know why she left me. She is all that I have now, and her attitude in this matter has been an awful jolt."

Concerning the murder itself, O'Neil repeated much that has already been given out by the police. He had nothing new except the statement that the noise of an automobile parked outside and passing of a heavy truck, effectively drowned the noise of the shots and prevented anyone on the sidewalk from hearing them. Relative to the presence of Irene and Lila at the Bar, he stated that

they must have been there if they said so, but that he would only give testimony on that subject in court.

Howard Attacks McDermott

"If the District Attorney will not ask for an indictment against Miss O'Neil," Commissioner Howard stated late this morning, "an indictment will be had through one of his assistants. The prosecution for crime cannot be stopped in this great city simply because the elected public prosecutor feels that he must protect his own interests."

District Attorney McDermott termed this attack by the Police Commissioner as "just political bunk to get the nomination for mayor."

Rose O'Neil occupied a cell in Jefferson Market jail this morning. Breakfast was sent in to her and she was visited by her maid who brought a suitcase full of feminine necessities. It was stated by those in charge that she had especially requested that no one be permitted to visit her except Former Lieutenant Governor Porter of Pennsylvania who is her counsel. All attempts of the press to visit her were denied.

From the *Tabloid News,* Saturday, April 28th, 1928.

ADMITS THEFT PEGGY'S SPARKLER

RATKOWSKI CLAIMS DIAMOND STOLEN BY DIXIE BLAKE

Max Ratkowski came across today with another "true" story of how Lila Carroll's three hundred thousand dollar spot light came into his possession. It was given to him for safe keeping by Dixie Blake, a habitue of his Chinatown establishment and a woman with a police record. She turned it over to him in front of the Bowery Bar the night Woodward was shot and asked him to keep it for her.

His Story

Ratkowski who talks with a strong foreign accent told the police the following story.

"Dixie, who hangs out all the time in my place, I met her that night in front of the Bowery Bar just after I closed up on account of the police. She said she had something to give me to keep for her, and turned the diamond over to me. She said it was given to her by a friend for keeping and she was afraid of having it on her. She asked me to put it in my safe. When I found out afterward it belonged to Miss Carroll, I did not know what to do and I put it in my clothes to try and find her. Then I was arrested."

Max Ratkowski

He was asked if it were not unusual for anyone to turn such a jewel casually over to him.

"I am honest, ask anybody. Max Ratkowski, his name is known from Manchuria to New York as honest. My word is my bond."

Diamond Turned Back

The stone has been returned to Miss Carroll, who today apologizes to Miss Williams for having accused her of the theft. Miss Williams in turn has dropped her suit for one million dollars against Miss Carroll for criminal libel. Thus everything is friendly again, between the two famous blondes. The clash that is bound to come when their testimony is given in the trial of Watts Gordon is something else again. Each has accused the other of implication in the murder of Woodward. Perhaps before that time they will have decided that their suppositions are all wrong.

Dixie Blake Missing

Despite the fact that Dixie Blake is an important police witness in the Bowery Bar case, she has apparently slipped away from the detectives who were watching her. After Ratkowski's confession, which is the third he has given concerning the sparkler, police operatives immediately sought Dixie to bring her to Headquarters. They have not found her at this time. No explanation was forthcoming concerning her disappearance from either Commissioner Howard nor Acting Inspector Carr, in charge of the case.

From the Morning *Herald-Tribune*, Saturday, April 28, 1928.

BOWERY BAR SECRET DOOR EXPLAINS MYSTERY OF EXITS

Entrance Through Rear Hall, Discovered by Herald Tribune Throws Doubt on All Testimony of Exit and Entrance Time

KNOWN ONLY TO O'NEIL'S FRIENDS

Reporter in Night Search Unearths Round-About Way of Getting Into Bar

By
W. K. Smith

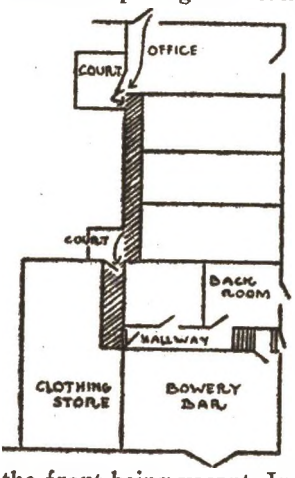
The police have had undisputable evidence of numerous persons entering or being in the back room of the Bowery Bar just previous to Thomas Woodward's murder. Equally positive witnesses have testified that they did not see those who entered leave, or see Watts Gordon or Rose O'Neil enter as they claimed. The discovery of a secret entrance into the rear hall of the Bar explains this mystery. Last night a reporter for the Morning *Herald-Tribune* after considerable investigation discovered a previously unknown method of getting into O'Neil's famous barroom.

It is a devious passage which begins in a private office on the ground floor of 39 Bayard Street, opens out into a covered court, twists through rear hallway and finally emerges into the Bowery Bar. A six foot mirror in the rear hall of the Bar makes the door leading to it.

Frequently Used at Night

Investigation by the Morning *Herald-Tribune* of occupants of the building adjoining indicates that the secret way has been used frequently at night. Positive testimony concerning those who may have entered or left through it the night of Woodward's murder has not been possible to obtain, although one woman has a distinct remembrance of seeing two finely gowned women come out hurriedly at different times and hail taxis. She was unable to specify the exact night when this happened but she believes it was the night of the murder.

A diagram in an adjoining column shows the secret passage in detail. Entrance is obtained on Bayard Street by entering the hallway of No. 39. This is an old three-story building occupied by a furrier on the second floor, and by pants manufacturer on the third. The ground floor is divided into two offices, the one to the front being vacant. Inquiry reveals that it has not been occupied for several years.



In the rear, facing a small back yard is the office of the Hercules Trucking Company. This office is a dingy room with a dilapidated desk and a few chairs. From it a door opens into a small enclosed court which cannot be reached by any other exit from the building. The doors, in contrast with the flimsy appearance of the furniture are all solid oak wood with patented locks, operating cross bars.

Into Cellars of Three Houses

From the covered court, steps lead down into the cellar of an adjoining house and a small passageway then continues under the three houses to steps leading upward to a second small covered court directly behind the Bowery Bar. This underground passageway was evidently made by bricking in the end of the cellars and piercing the walls between the houses.

All indications showed that it had been built years ago.

Adjoining the Bowery Bar on the Bowery is a clothing store with small lofts above. Entrance to the lofts is obtained by steps leading up from a hall entrance. Under these steps is a second hall which leads back to the small covered court in back of the Bowery Bar to the middle of the wall between the bar and clothing store. Here is a door opening into the rear hall of O'Neil's saloon, the inside of which is hidden by a tall mirror. Occupants of the cloth-

ing store did not know of the hall under the steps nor did those living in the flat houses know that the cellars had been blocked in to make a passageway.

O'Neil Owned Buildings

Peter O'Neil, owner of the Bar, has at one time owned the entire block of houses along Bayard Street between the Bowery and Division. Search of ownership records show that at present he has title to all except one of the four buildings which are part of the passage. The end one in which the trucking office is located was sold several years ago to his political lieutenant, Harry Kelly.

By means of this secret entrance persons could get into or leave the back rooms of the Bar without anyone in the barroom seeing them, or without anyone standing on the corner being aware of the fact.

O'Neil Denies Use

O'Neil upon being questioned by Acting Inspector Carr of the Police Department denied that the passage had been in use for a long time.

"It was put there for serving Sunday customers before prohibition," he said. "There used to be a foolish law about closing the bars on Sunday and that's the very day a poor working man wants to get a good glass of beer. The passage was used then. Once in a while maybe it's been used since. I was going to close it up some time ago but never got around to it. Nobody left through there the night of Woodward's murder so far as I know. The door in back of the mirror is locked."

However, the situation according to O'Neil, indicates that the passage way was free and could be used. Its existence opens up startling new possibilities concerning the death of Woodward. It can account for the exits of several persons connected with the crime and can also account for possibilities of persons being present who were not seen to enter the Bar that night.

Compiler's Note

AS A matter of fact I took upon myself too much glory for the discovery of the secret passage. I really conceived the idea that there might be some other way of getting into the Bar than by the publicly known entrances, but I had no idea of just where such a doorway might be. Irene had herself suggested another entrance.

O'Neil after the murder closed his two back rooms as far as the public was concerned despite the fact that he could have made a fortune in permitting the insatiable curiosity seekers to have the privilege of drinking near beer or soft drinks in them at $1.00 a bottle. After the news of Woodward's death became known, crowds besieged the place and for a time there were patrons two or three deep at the bar during the evening. O'Neil, to his credit, discouraged this and from the onset of the case closed the back rooms except for a few friends.

I had early visited the Bar and knew the physical layout of the whole place. I felt in reviewing the possibilities of a secret doorway then, that there was only one place where it might be. That was the inside end of the back hall which was practically covered by a large mirror. This glass seemed quite out of place although it would have been possible that it was a spare mirror from the Bar placed there just to get it out of the way.

On Friday afternoon previous to my story I investigated the Bar but could not get admittance into the back hall. Finding a "Floor to Let" sign on an adjoining building on Bayard Street, I went to the agent and passed myself as a sign manufacturer looking for just such a place as he had to offer. I was quite cordially escorted to the adjoining building by one of his bright young salesmen and during an inspection of the loft, made it a point to look out the back window.

What I saw of the small covered court convinced me of the possibilities of an entrance such as actually existed. I made inquiries in the neighborhood and felt that 39 might have some connection with the Bar. I then took Dan Carr into my confidence and with the proper search warrants we went to work Friday evening. We started at the Bowery Bar, and accompanied by three husky detectives we visited O'Neil who happened to be in his flat. He protested violently against letting us do any searching, and only when Carr showed him the warrant and told him that he would break

down the door of the barroom, did O'Neil give us admittance. We went immediately to the mirror and after search discovered the method by which it swung back, revealing the door.

I was quite jubilant at this discovery and got a good cursing out from O'Neil who up to that time had thought Carr was alone responsible. We found that the secret door opened easily and had no difficulty in pursuing the course of the passage up to the back door of the Hercules office. This was locked but Carr started to break it in.

O'Neil told him he had no warrant to do that but Carr replied characteristically,

"Maybe I don't have a warrant, Pete, but I've got three husky men and you can sue me in court next year for trespassing and see what damages you can collect. They'll have to bring you down from up the river where you'll be serving a perjury charge on account of this case."

O'Neil decided rather than have the locks forced, he would open the place up and we finally emerged on Bayard Street. In going through the cellar passage, which by the way was lighted by occasional electric lamps, although we didn't have them on, Carr used a flashlight and just before we came to the steps leading up at the end, Carr who had been searching the floor carefully, found a knot of silk fringe caught upon a nail in the brick work about a foot from the floor. A little later he found a hairpin. He carefully gathered both up and put them away. I realized their significance instantly but did not comment at the time. On the steps we found the butt of a cigarette of Russian make, the kind that has an open end for an inch or two to keep the fingers from being soiled by nicotine. He put this away in his wallet.

"I wonder if our Russo-Chinese friend smokes these," he whispered to me. I did not answer because O'Neil, who had been following, came up to us then. When we got outside, leaving O'Neil to go back and close up the doors Carr turned to me:

"I'll bet you friend Rose knew of this way in and out."

"That fringe didn't come from any shawl she wore that night," I returned. "I don't think Rose O'Neil needed to use this way in and out."

"Sure she did. She wasn't so keen about coming home every night and going into the side entrance of the Bar. Her old man made her live at home, do you know that? She was afraid of him, take it from me. He was proud of having a daughter like she was, and he made that upstairs flat into one of the finest places you ever saw. I've been up there before. She stuck to Pete too, blood always counts more than anything else down here on the Bowery and she probably kept living with her father even if she didn't care about it."

"What about that fringe?" I asked.

"I'm going to do a little matching in colors and knots in a day or so, I'll get Irene in on the carpet. That hair pin didn't belong to her though. Her hair is bobbed too close. But there's another woman who uses hairpins like this. I saw one in her hair at police headquarters.

"Who's that?" I asked.

"Not so nosey, young fellow," he replied. "I'm not ready to have it all in the papers now. You can run anything you want except the fringe and the hairpin."

"How about giving you credit for finding this?"

"Take it yourself. You need a little boost with your editor."

From the *Evening Sun* Late afternoon edition, Saturday, April 28, 1928.

LILA CARROLL TELLS POLICE COMPLETE STORY

Gives Details of Her Visit to Bowery Bar—Quarrel Between Gordon and Woodward—Rose O'Neil Had Gun

Lila Carroll came voluntarily to Police Headquarters late this afternoon and gave to Commissioner Howard what she claims is true and final version of her part in the Bowery Bar Mystery in an attempt to clear herself. Without dramatics of any kind she told of following Woodward to O'Neil's famous bar after he had left her at Ratkowski's Chinatown gambling den and of finding him there engaged in conversation with O'Neil. She told of Irene Williams's entrance; of a quarrel between Irene and Woodward; of the entrance into the back room of Rose O'Neil and Watts Gordon; and her own departure before any shooting

took place. Finally when asked if she had seen any pistols, she admitted that she thought she saw one in Miss O'Neil's handbag.

Her story is one which the police seem inclined to credit despite the fact that she is out under bail for complicity in Woodward's murder. It is, in some essentials, the same as she related when she was arrested a week ago.

"I met Mr. Woodward," Miss Carroll stated, "about eleven, perhaps a little earlier. He was very nervous and overwrought and he told me that he needed some relaxation. I suggested we go to Ratkowski's where I enjoyed playing roulette. He agreed and we took a cab. I do not know where he had been previously during the evening."

Woodward Always a Gambler

She was asked where she had met Woodward and replied that their usual rendezvous was the studio of William Alexander, a theatrical publicity man. Mr. Alexander, a rather dashing young man in the twenties confirmed this statement by telephone.

"At Ratkowski's I saw, as I stated previously, Miss O'Neil and Miss Williams. It was early and those were the only persons I recognized that I know by name. I played roulette and Mr. Woodward after a few bets, left me to go into another room. I remember asking him if the stock market weren't enough gambling excitement for one day. He replied, 'Yes and no. This is more of a gamble.'"

Miss Carroll played for perhaps a half hour and then a Chinese attendant came to her and said that Woodward wanted to see her in Ratkowski's private office. She immediately gave up playing and went to the second floor where the proprietor had a palatial private suite.

"Mr. Woodward was with Ratkowski. He asked me to sit down. 'Now I don't want you to get excited,' he said, 'but I am going away tomorrow. A trip abroad and no one will know where I will be for several months. You won't be able to write to me, although I may, if you want, give you an address where word can be relayed. I would like to have you join me at Monte Carlo some time in early June.'

"I told him," Miss Carroll continued, "that he flattered himself if he thought that announcement would get me excited."

"Was Ratkowski a witness to this conversation?" the police asked her.

"Yes, he was there but busy in back of the room."

"Was Woodward on good terms with Ratkowski as far as you could see?" she was questioned further.

"It struck me that they had been having some argument because Mr. Woodward was quite irritable and bossy in his manner."

She Followed to Bowery Bar

Woodward and Miss Carroll discussed for a while some mutual interests and then he told her he had some business to attend to immediately. She could stay at Ratkowski's or he would send her back to her apartment. He made arrangements to meet her later at Alexander's apartment.

Drawing from the theatrical page of the *Evening Sun*

Miss Carroll then went back to the roulette table and Woodward left the establishment. She had noted Miss O'Neil previously in the place but on returning to the first floor did not see her.

"I wondered whether Mr. Woodward had deceived me in telling me about a business engagement. I knew he was chasing this O'Neil girl and her disappearance at the same time as his, struck me as odd. I wasn't jealous, but I don't like any man to think he can put anything over on me," Miss Carroll stated. "I inquired of one of the attendants and gave him a five-dollar bill.

"He returned and said that Woodward had gone to the Bowery Bar. I don't know where he got his information. Ratkowski may know. About that time there was a row in the place, somebody got hurt, a detective I was told, and we all hurried through a side entrance."

"I decided then to go up to O'Neil's place having been there several times before with Woodward who had some business with

him. I thought I might look in. I had met Irene Williams in the hall but lost track of her." Lila Carroll then arrived at the Bowery Bar and went to the side entrance on Bayard Street, which she had used before when with Woodward. She found the door unexpectedly open and entered.

"Mr. Woodward was seated at a table talking to O'Neil and there were some glasses between them. I did not get the drift of the conversation but it seemed argumentative."

"What the hell do you want here, Lila?" Woodward asked me. I realized that I was perhaps interrupting a business conference and did not resent his words. I explained about Ratkowski's being closed and he said, "Well, come on in and have a drink and then I'll go along with you." O'Neil apparently wanted to talk some more and said something to Mr. Woodward about having a jane in on all his business. Woodward shut him up.

Irene Williams Arrives

"I went in and sat down and then the side door opened and in came Irene Williams. O'Neil said, 'What the hell is this, a public bar? What's the matter with the lock of that door?' Woodward jumped up and asked Miss Williams what she wanted and in no uncertain language. A lady really can't repeat what he said, or what Irene replied.

"She then asked, 'What's this I hear about your going to Europe tomorrow? There's twenty-five thousand dollars coming to me and I want it before you go."

"An argument started between them and I went over to O'Neil and said, 'This is no place for an innocent girl, how do I get out of here?' Just then Miss O'Neil and young Gordon whom I didn't know, came in through the hall entrance and an argument started between all of them. Woodward was considerably peeved because Irene was spilling all the dirt in front of us, I suppose. Gordon had some grievance against Woodward too, concerning Rose O'Neil. I didn't try to get all of it, because it seemed to me there was going to be a four cornered battle and I didn't want to get taken in from a Bowery speakeasy."

O'Neil then took Miss Carroll and escorted her out into the hall and opened a door in back of a mirror which led into a closed court and finally she emerged on Bayard Street close to Division. The time was about 12:30 A.M. She walked to the corner of Division Street and took a cab. She did not see any one on the street.

"Did you notice a pistol, on any of the persons present?" she was then asked by Acting Inspector Carr who was present at her recital.

"I can't say for certain. Both Miss O'Neil and Miss Williams had hand bags. As I left the room I noticed that Miss O'Neil's bag was open and it seemed to me there was a pearl handled gun in it. I can't be certain." Miss Carroll could not be led into a direct statement that she saw a pistol.

Asked to Keep Silent

On being questioned concerning her previous false stories of her activities the night of the Woodward murder she replied that she had been called up on the phone at her apartment about three o'clock Thursday morning, about two hours and a half after Woodward had been killed, and notified of his death by someone who would not give his name.

"This man told me," she said, "that a man had shot Woodward and had confessed to the crime and that he was under arrest. He told me that there was no need of bringing in all details of who was present and that I should keep silent concerning the case despite any questioning. He told me that would be the only way in which I could hope to keep my own name out of it. Naturally I shut up."

"Did District Attorney McDermott talk to you at any time about this case?" Commissioner Howard asked her.

"Not once, except in the presence of my lawyers when he asked me some questions concerning Miss O'Neil's connection with Mr. Woodward. I told him that I never regarded the attachment as serious as he (Woodward) was always chasing around in a casual fashion. My relations to Tom Woodward were strictly that of an ordinary friend."

Reporter Laughs

At this juncture one of the reporters present gave a short laugh and Miss Carroll

turned indignantly upon him with a vehement tirade. The Police Commissioner had done an unusual thing when Miss Carroll appeared and said she wanted to tell her story. He asked her to wait a moment and sent for several police reporters of the city newspapers, stating that he had nothing to conceal in the matter and wanted them to get the story direct.

At the conclusion of her statement, Commissioner Howard took issue with her concerning her reply that District Attorney McDermott had had no conversation with her. He stated that as a matter of fact it was McDermott who had called her on the phone and that she knew who it was at the time.

This Miss Carroll denied and the Commissioner turned to the reporters. "We know that McDermott called Miss Carroll and that it has been through his influence that she has kept quiet." He then turned to her.

"Did you see District Attorney McDermott at the Bowery Bar?"

"No, I did not."

With that her testimony ended and she left Police Headquarters with her attorney who had been present but who had taken little part in the conversation.

From the Morning *Herald-Tribune* (New York) Sunday, April 29, 1928

GORDON TELLS NEW STORY; QUARRELED WITH WOODWARD OVER ROSE

Woodward Insulted Miss O'Neil Then Pulled Gun; Threatening All

EXCLUSIVE HERALD-TRIBUNE INTERVIEW

Gordon Rushed Financier to Attack Him and in Struggle Woodward Killed in Single Shot.

By
W. K. Smith

To a reporter of the Morning *Herald-Tribune* last night, Watts Gordon told a new and dramatic story of the quarrel which led to the killing of Thomas Woodward.

It differs essentially from that previously given out by the police. In the recent version, Gordon supports Rose O'Neil in her confession as far as her testimony concerning Woodward's language is concerned. In this he directly contradicts the statement of her father yesterday in which the latter said Woodward had offered no insult to his daughter.

Watts Gordon still takes the entire blame for the death of "Big Hearted Tom"—an appellation which Watts characterizes as a blatant untruth.

Gordon was calm during the recital of the events leading up to the murder which was the first statement he had made concerning it, and there was every indication in his manner that he was speaking the truth. The reporter to whom he talked was an old friend who had gained admittance to the Tombs shortly after seven o'clock to ask Gordon for his story. Through the entire recital, it was evident that Gordon's chief concern was the establishment of the innocence of Rose O'Neil. His statement follows:

Woodward Threats

"Woodward was a rounder of the worst type. I knew his reputation as did every newspaper man in New York. He made a specialty of befriending stage women in difficulties only to try to cash in on his aid later. He tried his best to seduce Rose O'Neil and didn't succeed. He threatened to close down the show. He offered to put up fifty thousand dollars for a new one for her. He even suggested that he would buy a play of mine and put it on in order to gain her favor. She had to be civil to him in the beginning. He practically owned the show. It wasn't until a day or two before he was killed that he began to use the vilest of threats against her."

"Up to that time she went out in his company when accompanied by others in the play she was in. Her manager insisted that she do this, and as she was endeavoring to make a name for herself on Broadway she felt that she must not antagonize powerful theatrical interests.

"I did not know about Woodward's proposals. I learned of them just that evening.

"We came into the Bowery Bar through the secret entrance you found. We had been down to Ratkowski's. Rose wanted to see the place. I wanted to get some evidence.

We were there only a short time. When Miss O'Neil and I appeared in the bar, Woodward began to attack me verbally. Two women were present both of whom have admitted being there. They had been quarrelling with Woodward. Miss Carroll, I believe, arrived first. Miss Williams followed her. I did not hear much of what the argument was about. Apparently Woodward was ditching both of them to go to Europe. There was some talk of a diamond. I was particularly interested in talking to O'Neil to check up certain details of Omnibus graft which I had been working on for weeks. He was implicated and I wanted to find out what his public position was on the matter.

"I had no chance. Woodward was in a rage when we came in. He opened up on me and then used language concerning Miss O'Neil which would make any decent man get fighting mad."

"You're a damned lying cur," I told him, "and you'll apologize on your knees for what you just said."

"Like hell I will," he replied. I rushed at him and he pulled out a gun. "I'm ready to shoot this place right up right now—with the whole gold-digging pack of you." He made a swing with the pistol toward Rose O'Neil and then I grabbed for it.

Pistol Fired by Gordon

"He jumped back but I had my hand on his gun. It went off. By that time I had wrenched it away from him but fell down on my knees in doing so. Woodward rushed at me ready to kick with one of his big shoes, and I fired as his foot struck me in the side."

"About the pearl handled gun the police found in the spittoon—I don't know anything about it. Probably one of the women wanted to get rid of it after Woodward went down and simply dropped it there as the quickest means of hiding it. District Attorney McDermott came to the Bowery Bar shortly afterward and I made a confession then which he read. He was not present at the time of shooting. We agreed that we should keep Rose's name out of the case. There was no necessity to drag her in and I made up the story about the interview. McDermott knew that and it was sensible as long as the police had my confession. There was nothing to be proved."

Gordon was asked about the pistol which Miss O'Neil claims she carried.

"I knew she occasionally carried one in her handbag because she frequently came home alone to her apartment over the Bar where she lived with her father. I do not believe she had it with her that night."

Asked what might be Rose O'Neil's motive in making a false confession to the police, Gordon could give no adequate answer. "I don't know unless it is a courageous and glorious quixotic attempt to prevent me from standing trial. Yes, I have been in love with her. It would be useless to deny it in face of what has already been printed, but I—we were not engaged. She had her stage career to think about. There was time enough to go into the matter of an engagement after she had finished her work in 'Mandalay.' "

With Gordon's statement the Woodward case seems to be bearing toward a solution, although his corrected version of the events that occurred in the back room of the Bowery Bar does not entirely explain many features of the case, and does not satisfy the police who have evidence not yet disclosed concerning phases of the murder which are not explained by any statement made so far by any of the principals in the case. This evidence has been only hinted at so far by police officials.

One fact that has been bothering them is the relation of the dive keeper Ratkowski and his assistant manager, Charlie Whango, to the case. The former as has been previously reported is being held under fifty thousand dollars bail for the possession of narcotics and under an additional fifty thousand dollars for grand larceny—the possession of Lila Carroll's large diamond pendant which she claims was stolen, being the evidence against him on the latter charge. The police strongly suspect that these two men are concerned somehow with Woodward's death but have been unable so far to tie their suspicions to actual facts proving the contention. Gordon's recital gives no clue to this angle nor to certain suspicions concerning the number of shots fired which are now known to have been more than two.

The Morning *World* (New York) Sunday, April 29th, 1928.

Woodward Guard States Employer Left Gun at Hotel

PISTOL HE USUALLY CARRIED LEFT WITH ATTENDANT NIGHT OF MURDER

NEW EVIDENCE DISCREDITS GORDON STORY

Ex-Policeman Who Guarded Woodward Makes Startling Statement to the *World*

After ten days of silence, Alex Lambe, a former policeman who had been acting as personal guard to Thomas Woodward, stated today that his employer left the Hotel Murray, the day of his death, without the pistol he customarily carried. It had been turned over to Lambe by Woodward earlier in the evening with instructions for Lambe to keep it until later when Woodward might want it.

Woodward, it will be recalled, left the hotel secretly without getting in touch with his guards, two of whom had been employed by him for a week or more to keep him from being accosted or harmed by those seeking him because of the market action of United Omnibus.

A .38 Calibre Automatic

Lambe who told his story to the Morning *World* exclusively, stated, "Mr. Woodward carried no gun with him so far as I know when he left the hotel that night. He had a .38 calibre automatic which he had been carrying for a week. I told him he ought to get a license for it and he said he would. I got him the papers but he never signed them. When we came back to the hotel late in the afternoon, he gave the gun to me to keep, telling me that he would get it later.

"He had told me before that he went around sometimes in queer places and since the stock market was bubbling so, he figured he might run into some crank and need a weapon.

"The night he was killed, he slipped away from us. He had done that before. I figured he had business that wasn't any of ours. He knew where we were, waiting down in the lobby and if he wanted us to go along, he would have notified us. The other guard who worked with me and myself, we waited around till about ten o'clock and then we knocked off, leaving word with the

THE WOLF'S FANG WAS CLIPPED.

Cartoon from the *Morning World*

hotel where we could be found. Woodward generally didn't use us at night."

Weapon Turned Over to Police

Lambe stated further that he had never been questioned about Woodward's gun by the police and that he knew enough not to butt in where he wasn't wanted. Police records show that he was dropped from the force about two years ago on charges of having slugged a citizen who interfered in an arrest he had made in a rather brutal manner. Lambe turned Woodward's weapon over to the *Morning World* reporter, stating he was glad to get rid of it. It was immediately forwarded to Police Headquarters.

CHAPTER X

Compiler's Note

INSPECTOR CARR said to me within an hour or two after he read the foregoing story in the *Morning World*:

"That sells you on the idea that Gordon killed Woodward, don't it?"

"Not entirely, but I'm certain he had more to do with it than you say," I said.

"How do you figure this O'Neil's story then?"

"I don't quite figure it. She's evidently

trying to take the blame from him. Possibly she is in love with him."

"Possibly? Don't you think she's nuts over him?"

"I don't know. She may be deeply obligated to him somehow, rather than in love."

"Ah, you're sweet on her yourself. She killed Woodward. Gordon is *one* of those *two* who is pulling the 'put the blame on me' stuff. Listen to me if you don't believe that. I haven't given you all the inside stuff we have but I'm doing it now because you know Gordon and seem to be the only one who can get him to talk. What have you seen in the newspapers about any gun that was used?"

"Irene, was supposed," I replied, "to have had a pearl handled pistol. You didn't seem to trace its ownership so well because Irene claimed it belonged to Lila."

Carr snorted in indignation.

"I traced the ownership of that rod all right. It belonged to Irene, don't kid yourself. There was no doubt of that. But what have you ever got about the gun that killed Woodward? Nothing—I'll answer the question for you. Irene's little gat was a .32 calibre. The gun the police got right after Woodward was killed (Quinlivan turned it in) was a .38. And *that* was the gun which Gordon said he shot Woodward with—the same one that Woodward pulled out of his pocket, according to Gordon's story.

"Now Woodward was killed by a single bullet and I know it was of .32 calibre!

"There are too many guns in this case, I tell you, too many.

"And a new gun has come into it. One that'll interest you. Out in Flushing on the ash can heaps, a wop picker found a gun a couple of days ago—another nice little pearl handled trinket of .32 calibre. It was empty and had got there from being in an ash can. This wop has a brother-in-law's cousin, or somebody like that, who is a cop. He tells him about it, and the result is that the weapon is brought into headquarters just on the chance that it might be of interest.

"Our specialist looks it over and gets the number on it. I take enough interest in the number on general purposes to see if any of our pistol permits have it. And I find that two years ago we issued a permit to Miss Rose O'Neil for the same gun. That's that. But I'm not through with the artillery yet. I had no dope on the gun Woodward carried because he had no permit for it.

"The gun turned in by Quinlivan as Woodward's, proves to be a Police Department pistol, belonging originally to one of our detectives who lost it during a raid on Ratkowski's old dive over a year ago. What do you think of that?

"It has never shown up and moreover it has been carried by Ratkowski ever since. Quinlivan never noticed this fact. He's a political cop that's why.

"You heard Lila tell her story in Headquarters yesterday with the fact that she saw Gordon and O'Neil at Ratkowski's. That was real news. I don't understand why we never got any wind of it before. There must have been a lot of people saw them there. Of course nobody would admit he or she was down at that joint, but we might have got the tip anonymously. We've got enough *bum* dope.

"There always was a crowd of swells hanging out down with him and Charlie Whango. He has three places so far that we have closed up and we have the goods on him this last time. He's going up the river and wants to tell all he thinks it's safe to spill, hoping to get a light sentence. But he don't seem to know anything. He's probably lying. He admitted finally the gun was his, and that he picked it up during the raid a year ago. Said it disappeared from his desk the night of the murder.

"That may or may not be true. Everybody is lying in this case. We'll have them all up for perjury after the trial if they testify in court the way they have so far. We do know this though—Ratkowski was outside the Bowery Bar that night. He talked to Dixie Blake while she stood on the corner. He was one of the two giving her drinks according to her story, at the very moment Woodward was shot."

"Where did you find that out?" I asked Carr. "Go to a fortune teller?"

"No, Ratkowski said so. I questioned him, told him we would give him a third degree that would cripple him for life if we suspected he was not telling the truth. It didn't faze him much but he wasn't quite sure whether we wouldn't. Then I told him we had two witnesses that swear he was in

the back room of the Bowery Bar when Woodward was shot. That was bluff, too, but I wanted to see how he took it. He denied it, of course, but he was worried. I insisted.

"Finally he bursts out, after I got him in a corner on a misstatement, with the fact that he saw Dixie.

"I shust stood on de corner," he said. "I never went in. Miss Blake she can testify to dot. I talked to her. I gave her a drink. You ask her."

"Well," I said to him, "it's too bad you weren't there. It seems about half your clientele was present besides any number we don't know about."

CARR smiled at his own joke, and started on with his recital but I held up my hand.

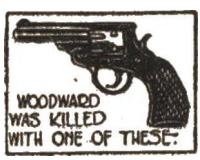
"Who tried the other two cases against Ratkowski—when you had him up before?" I asked Carr.

"Why, McDermott did. Conducted the case himself."

"And Ratkowski wasn't convicted either time, you say?" I insinuated.

Carr thought over my remark for a moment.

"I hadn't considered that fact before. Mac didn't seem to try so very hard but his witnesses went back on him. The only thing about those trials that strikes me funny now is that Mac took them on personally. Generally some assistant handles small cases. McDermott himself only picks an occasional big one to prosecute."



From the *Graphoid*

Carr cocked his massive head on the side, squinted an eye, and pondered a bit. Finally he spoke.

"I wonder if Mac wanted to convict this Ratkowski. Maybe he was afraid there would be a conviction and ran the case himself to make sure there wouldn't be. Why now? It's something to think about some more. But to get back to this gun business. I went to Gordon and said to him.

"Look here Watts, the gun you turned in didn't kill Woodward. You know that."

My interview with him was just after we took in Ratkowski. I had the facts before then but wanted to get the Jew first. He is one, you know, not a real Russian.

Gordon never blinked an eye and replied, "I didn't turn in any gun, Inspector."

I asked him how Ratkowski's gun came to be in the case. He didn't know, and I believed him. I don't take everything he says for God's truth though. Well, we argued the matter and all he would say was,

"I shot Woodward with a gun he had in his hand. I don't know the calibre or who owned it or what its number was or whether he had a permit to use it or what. And I put it on the table. Somebody turned it in. I didn't."

And there I was. No information from him.

"What about this gun of Rose O'Neil's?" I asked Carr.

"I'm trying to find out about it from her. I may be able to do so some time today. And I have got two of my best men on the trail of this gat of Ratkowski's, trying to find out how it came to be in the Bowery Bar. Maybe they'll find that Woodward wasn't killed in the Bar at all. Nothing would surprise me. But there were blood stains on the floor that night in the back room, and I had the scrapings analyzed and the stains were human. So my men got to get pretty good evidence if Woodward was killed outside.

"I personally am going to work on Charlie Whango tonight. I've got a good Chinese interpreter, and I've had most of Ratkowski's servants and personnel rounded up. You know I used to go down to the old place once in a while. I was a big awning and tent man from St. Louis. Not much of a disguise, just different clothes, a pair of horned rimmed glasses and some hair dye that washes out over night. When you make my white hair a deep brunette, I'm a different guy. I got the evidence a year ago, so I knew most of the bunch he had with him.

"All Chinamen look alike to you, I guess. Well, after you been a cop in Chinatown for a while you begin to spot the differences between the Chinks. I made it a specialty. You can line up a dozen of them, let me look 'em over and I'll pick those dozen out of fifty, unless they've got twin brothers or something like that."

"What do you want me to do on this gun business?" I asked. "Suppose I run this story tomorrow, then what?"

"You do," he threatened good naturedly, "and I'll get some husky detective to take you in on suspicion and he won't be careful how he handles you in making an arrest.

"But I'm not through with the gun story yet. You can put this down in your notes and can use it for your newspaper story when I give you the word. Howard will probably give out something on it pretty soon. I'm telling it to you because you're a good listener and when I'm spieling my thoughts seem to get together better."

"I'm sort of like that old crook, Cardiff Jack, who's up now for a long jolt on the river. He's served about half his life in stretches in the pen. Whenever he was planning some racket he'd talk it all over to himself. We finally got him because he was half full of rot gut and started to talking to himself about breaking some crib, and next to him were sitting two Headquarters dicks in plain clothes. When I try to talk to the Commissioner he asks too many questions."

"Well, go ahead, Dan," I suggested, "give the dope of the guns."

"There are four of them," he continued. "Four rods, four gats, in this murder. Four we know of. There may be a whole armory full of others that haven't come to light yet.

"First there's Ratkowski's gun which was turned in by Quinlivan as the rod that killed Woodward. I said it was a .38 but I think he was killed by a .32. The medical examiner could not quite decide but he favors a .32, although he ain't certain. It had two empty shells."

"How about the bullet?" I asked.

"That will come along later, just hold your horses a minute. Then there's Irene's little pearl handled weapon that I found in the spittoon. It had one empty shell. Ratkowski's gun had two empty shells in it. They all said two shots were fired. So we don't check this far. Next comes Rose's rod. Another fancy weapon. I haven't been on a case with two pearl stocked guns in it for years.

"We've found out that the particular part of the ash dump where that gun was found was filled by a group of wagons from downtown New York. I had sixteen ash can drivers up to headquarters and out there on the dump and from a couple of them discovered that the refuse put on the spot where the thing was found came from the Bowery. This gun of Rose's had five chambers and the barrel was spotted with powder.

"We went out on the dump with a gang and two or three big screens and sure enough before we got through with the day's work, we got five shells out of the dump right close to where the wop found the gat. Three loaded and two fired. Whoever threw the gun away opened it up first, spilled the shells in the same ash can and then threw the weapon in after it. Not so bright but it might have worked. And two shots were fired out of it remember that."

"There's three of the artillery. Next is the one owned by O'Neil which he sometimes carries. I asked him for it. It's a .38 Smith and Wesson, an old one but it works O.K. Pete raised hell when I asked to see it. He has no permit for it and I threatened him with the Sullivan act and he came across. It was fully loaded, cleaned and there was no way to tell whether it had been fired or not. I had our expert scrape the inside of the barrel and he got out some burned powder, but not enough to decide how long ago it had been used."

"Did you ask him when he fired it last?"

"Say, do you think I'm crazy. I've got some kind of a reputation to hold up. He'd of given me the laugh and told every cop in town he knew that I asked him if he shot Woodward."

"You might have got his reaction," I remarked.

"That's the trouble with this case. Everybody in it has been used to being before the spotlight. You can't faze O'Neil a bit. Lila would lie and you'd swear she was telling the truth. Gordon, the same way. Ratkowski who's got a police record in five countries will shrug his shoulders, or start to cry, or look surprised and you can't guess whether it's real or not. Irene's a moving picture queen, used to showing any kind of an expression. Rose O'Neil's another actress. Woodward, who might tell us the truth, is dead. There's only Dixie Blake that

I believe. She's afraid of the cops and looks worried when you get her in a tight place. Yet I found out one lie she told me.

"She said she met Lila on the Bowery that night as she (Dixie) was going to Ratkowski's. That was a lot of bologny. She was at Ratkowski's, and was on her way from there. I'll bet the whole gang was down in that hop joint—Dixie, Lila, Irene, Woodward and maybe McDermott. Dixie probably followed Lila out of the place to see where she was going.

"I've lost Dixie, now. A couple of dumb second grade detectives that I had following her were bone headed enough to let her walk in one door of the Yorkshire Hotel and disappear out a side entrance while they were buying cigars. They're in uniform now for that. Dixie just evaporated, which is too bad because I'd like to ask her some questions. She'll show up though, probably's in some dive."

"Did you see Woodward's body?" I asked Carr.

"No, I didn't see it stripped, it was lying in Shropshire's place that morning when I went down with the Commissioner. The shirt was open and you could see the wound. Why, what's the idea?"

"I was wondering if he had been shot more than once."

"Not that I saw, nor what the medical report said. The bullet went in between the heart and the throat. It wasn't a straight shot. It might have happened just as young Gordon said, particularly if he had thrown Woodward's arm up. But that don't account for two empty shells in Rose's gun, two empties in Ratkowski's and one in Irene's.

"Now finally here is something you can put in your paper—I'll give you a little inside on it for past favors."

Carr then gave me details of the startling news which appears in the following item. I was as surprised as Gordon proved to be later, and I asked Carr the same questions as Watts did. In reply Carr assured me that the bullet which he found carried certain definite marks upon which his pistol expert could not mistake. I asked him for some explanation of his amazing conclusion but he had none to give me at the time.

The best I could do was to immediately break away and phone the story to the rewrite desk and then hurry down to the Tombs to see if I couldn't get Gordon to talk. It took some tall salesmanship to effect a midnight entrance into that citadel of the criminal courts, but fortunately the man in charge that night knew me, and knew that I would probably see that he was suitably compensated.

I was admitted finally and Gordon came down as the story states—the early edition did not carry his statement. I was somewhat surprised at his appearance. The confession of Rose and the developments of the case had evidently been worrying him. He had grown thinner and looked haggard. He was barely cordial to me but I can't blame him for that. I was a bearer of evil tidings, waking him up out of a sound sleep to give them to him. The strain of affairs was beginning to tell upon him and I hoped for a revelation. But I was disappointed to a large extent.

From the Morning *Herald-Tribune*, Monday, April 30th, 1928.

FATAL BULLET CAME FROM ROSE'S PISTOL

Police Department Announces Bullet Killing Woodward Came from Pistol Owned by Rose O'Neil

GORDON SAYS POLICE THEORY IS IMPOSSIBLE

Inspector Carr Confirms Rose O'Neil's Guilt by Pistol Evidence

Startling confirmation of Rose O'Neil's confession that she killed Thomas Woodward, received skeptically in many quarters, came last night with a statement of Acting Inspector Dan Carr, in charge of the case, that the bullet killing Woodward was fired from a pistol owned by Miss O'Neil and for which she had received a police permit. The permit was granted two years ago.

The pistol itself together with the shells was found several days ago upon an ash dump near Flushing, Long Island. Two shells had been fired.

The bullet which passed through Woodward's body was already in the hands of the police. It had landed in the wall of the back room of the Bowery Bar in the corner

of a bit of moulding where it was practically invisible and was located only after careful searching the night of the murder. The markings made upon its surface by passage through the barrel of the pistol, corresponded identically with those made upon bullets fired through the weapon by the police, who state that such evidence is almost as certain as fingerprints, each pistol having characteristics of its own.

First Confirmation of Confession

The evidence shown by the bullet is the first real confirmation of Miss O'Neil's confession, her statement of guilt having been denounced as untrue by Watts Gordon, Peter O'Neil, and other witnesses of Woodward's murder. The police are certain of their tests and that there can be no mistake in their conclusions.

Watts Gordon, in the Tombs, when notified of the statement would not believe it until he was shown a copy of an early edition of the morning *Herald-Tribune*. He professed the utmost amazement and stated that such a thing could not be possible. He was aroused at midnight by a reporter of this paper, a personal friend, who sent word to him through keepers that there was important news for him. He reluctantly agreed to talk to the reporter and was brought down to the head keeper's office in pajamas.

"The police are deliberately trying to fasten the guilt of Woodward's murder upon Miss O'Neil. This evidence of theirs is absolutely ridiculous. She had no gun. I don't care if they found twenty of them in a dump. She lost it months ago and someone else evidently found it and then threw it away.

"The bullet that killed Woodward came from a thirty-eight. It was a gun that Woodward took from his pocket and threatened me with. I ought to know. I fired it in the struggle. Miss O'Neil had no pistol in her hand when Woodward was shot."

"How do you account for the positiveness of the police statement then?" he was asked.

"I never tried to account for their vagaries in so-called news given to the press. They have reasons of their own always and they justify gross untruths on the basis that lies may bring out truth. This is a trick of theirs to get Miss O'Neil or myself to say something rash. Unfortunately it may give her a chance to entangle herself further in a confession which was false from the beginning and which I have never been able to understand."

"How do you know the weapon you used was a thirty-eight?" was asked of him.

Gordon Says Gun Was A .38

"I know something about pistols, and I can tell the calibre without much trouble. When Woodward first threatened us with the gun he carried I recognized it of heavy calibre and that decided me to get it from him because of the possibility of a fatality should anyone be hit by a bullet from it.

"Listen," he concluded, "for heaven's sake, don't let the police get away with that fairy story. How can they tell barrel marks on a piece of lead that's smashed through a man's body and then buried itself in the wall? It's just a chance for publicity for some police gun expert. I'd like to quiz him when the trial comes up.

"You can say for me in your best *Herald-Tribune* style—that bullet business is pure bologny—they are still trying this case in the newspapers. I don't exactly blame you boys for playing it up, I'd do the same, but you've been taken in on that story."

Gordon then asked to be excused saying he was sleepy and the interview terminated with his being taken back to his cell.

Compiler's Note

Record should undoubtedly be made here of my visit to Jefferson Market prison Sunday afternoon to visit Rose O'Neil. Dan Carr's story of the bullet was all set for Monday's early edition, and I hoped to get a statement from her concerning it. The little barred anteroom of the prison opening off of 10th Street was closed to the press, for orders had come from some most authoritative source that no one was to be permitted to see her without a special pass and there were no details concerning from whom this pass was to be obtained. Almost every reporter had tried to show some kind of an order signed by police or judiciary but all were refused as not being the open

sesame. Sunday seemed to be the day that all the boys and girls of the press wanted to see Rose.

When I arrived I disclaimed any press connection. "I come from Miss O'Neil's lawyers," I told the haughty turnkey. "Give her this note together with my description if you think I am giving you a phony deal and see if she won't see me. Further here's an order from Police Commissioner Howard."

My note was the story that was to appear the next day. I suspect it was Howard's influence that had prevented the press from gaining admittance. No one else had an order from him. The turnkey accepted the note, the order, looked me over, glanced down at a ten-dollar bill folded in the note and said, "Wait a minute."

He returned shortly and admitted me through a barred wicket.

I learned Rose was in the fourth tier of cells. The buxom matron in charge was so pleased that Rose was having a visitor that she almost took me into her arms.

"A visitor for that lovely Rose O'Neil," she said in a rich brogue. "Shure the poor girrl needs one. She's as blue as a corpse today."

Then she called out so that the whole jail heard her.

"Miss O'Neil. Oh, Rose. A visitor to see yez."

Most of the women confined in the jail had been let out of their cells and were in the corridors chatting, sewing or reading the tabloid accounts of their own or Rose's affairs. Immediately all personal work of that kind stopped and all eyes were upon me.

I mounted the stairs and found Rose standing by herself looking down the iron steps. A nearby group of street women, pickpockets, shop-lifters, bobbed hair bandits and what not, eyed her expectantly.

She was somewhat paler than usual. Confinement in prison naturally does not make for pink cheeks and she had apparently not used rouge. Rose was one of those few stage women I have met in a long newspaper experience who did not wear excess make-up off the stage.

She greeted me rather brightly.

"I did not think you came from my lawyer," she said. "It seemed an excuse but I really wanted someone to talk to. They tell me there are a thousand reporters downstairs but I am so afraid of them. I know I can trust you. But I've nothing to say that you can publish. Promise me that first and I'll take you into my nice stone boudoir. It's the only private place I've got up here."

I assured her that I was up to see her strictly on my own and that for the time being I had forgotten that such a thing as a newspaper existed.

"I wish they really were all suddenly put out of existence," she said, "but I'm the only one here that does. All the 'girls', and we're really very clubby and exclusive on this fourth tier, simply can't wait to see the newspapers. One of them, the bobbed haired bandit, has a whole clipping book full of notices. She takes as much pride in them as I used about first night opening criticisms."

"This is just like the play 'Chicago,' isn't it," I remarked as she led the way to her cell.

"Exactly. I never believed that was real stuff but it is. I'm the heroine up here. The bandit was extremely jealous at first because I apparently took precedence over her, but she seems reconciled now. I do find one thing about this place that surprised me. It isn't half so bad as I thought, but it's the most expensive place to live I was ever in. It's worse than the best hotel.

"I never get change for any money. A package of cigarettes cost me ten dollars the other day. I need about a hundred dollars worth of ones. They all think I am frightfully rich and they all say I was crazy to confess. I guess I was. I've been garrulous to you but it isn't due to any feeling of levity. Inwardly I am terribly, terribly worried and concerned."

I immediately did my best to indicate that there was little danger of her ever being convicted.

"The worst will be the trial and all the publicity. There isn't a chance in the world of a conviction, even if a trial does eventually come up," I said.

"Oh, it's such a terrible mess. I'm just as low as these poor women around me. I never before experienced such a feeling of self criticism and loathing for myself."

"Please don't," I remonstrated. "I know

this is a horrible experience for you, but why don't you really tell the truth? The story I sent up is making things worse. Do let me advise you a bit."

"All right then, now tell me concerning this pistol of mine, that you have a story on. Can there be any doubt that my pistol was found out there?"

"I'm pretty certain it's your gun that was picked up. They couldn't fake a story like that. Or rather wouldn't."

"Your friend Carr was here last evening trying to get me to tell him a lot but I didn't say a word. I couldn't make up my mind. Have you seen Watts?"

I told her that I had. "He says the bullet story is crazy and that he suspects you are too, from your confession."

"You mustn't blame him for that. I sympathize with him greatly. After he permitted himself to take all the blame, then to

Drawing of Rose O'Neil from the *Graphoid*

have a foolish woman like myself who can't control her feelings, suddenly and hysterically upset the whole scheme of things, is something that is terrible, I know. There's something I never told you about my confession—something that led up to it. I was afraid the police might find a bullet from my pistol in the wall. But I didn't know they would know it was a .32 or that it came out of my gun."

"And you won't let me publish that," I asked. "You know you're making me violate all my reportorial training and inclinations."

"Not a word." she replied. "You promised. The tabloid papers are horrible. Pictures of me in a cell, just made up out of imagination and never taken, entitled 'Woodward's Murderess.' How I dread leaving here, even if it is a jail. I'm at least protected from the reporters. You are the only one I've been frank with. I'm afraid my confession was futile. It's made matters all the worse. But I couldn't stand aside and let Watts take all the blame when he wasn't guilty."

"Rose," and this was the first time I had used her given name, "Rose," I repeated, "are you really guilty?"

She nodded slowly.

"I had my pistol with me that night. I had told Woodward I would kill him if he didn't let me alone. That is God's truth. Lila Carroll was right when she said she saw it in my purse. I don't understand though how two bullets were fired from it. I shot only once. I threw the gun away later in an ash can on Christie Street first emptying out the shells. That was foolish of me but it helps to prove my guilt now, doesn't it?"

"Did you use the secret passage into the bar that night?" I asked.

"Yes, I often came in that way. Watts and I entered the bar from Ratkowski's that night coming through it. After the shooting, I went out the same way. Watts could have got away but he insisted on staying to take the blame. What do you think will happen to me. Will they put me on trial?"

"I imagine there'll be a lot more truth come out before then that may alter things," I said. "But, Rose, you are not being frank with me despite your assertion. You haven't told everything. Please let me help you; forget I'm on a newspaper. You need someone to guide you now. You don't realize how serious this murder charge can be. The police really believe your story to a large extent."

She looked straight into my eyes for perhaps five seconds, then started to formulate some word on her lips. Suddenly she changed her mind and began to act again.

"There's nothing more I can say. You are like my father and Watts." But I had made an impression with my seriousness for she turned thoughtful again and then said, "I wish I could tell you everything but I can't. To no one," she added. "My whole thought is to get Watts released." She looked away from the bars that separated us, and walked to the back of her cell. When she returned I could see that she had framed a question to ask me.

"Can they absolutely prove that it was a bullet from my pistol that killed Woodward? That's amazing."

"I think they can, Rose. Why should it be so remarkable if you really shot him as you say?"

"It's just the fact that they can, I guess," she answered. Then she asked, "You saw Watts. How is he standing the strain of my getting into the case the way I have?"

"It's worrying him," I answered. "It seems to me that it surprised him beyond all measure and that he is thoroughly upset."

My answer affected her. I could see her face assume a troubled expression. "I'm so sorry for Watts. He's a noble soul. Oh what a mess it all is. If Woodward had only let me alone. If my father hadn't been so insistent on my being nice to him."

"Your father?" I questioned.

She was startled a moment, as if she hadn't meant to mention him. Then apparently making up her mind to be frank, she continued.

"You see, my father is the only relative I have in this whole world. He is tremendously fond of me and I of him, but yet he believes a child should obey implicitly. He more or less beat it into me, not literally exactly, but I always did as he said, except when I went on the stage. He didn't want me to do that. Then in order to mollify him, I agreed to be nice to Woodward and Drake and some others with whom he was trying to make connections. He wouldn't approach them directly. He was too proud."

"But not too proud to use you," I interjected.

"Please don't be critical of him. He was of the old school, that believed children should do as they were told. He thought I might be useful to further some of his ambitions for power and money. I knew it wouldn't work out but I tried as a dutiful daughter to help. Drake wasn't so bad. He was at least a gentleman.

"Woodward, I despised from the first. But he had an interest in the show and I had to be polite. I only went out with him when there were others along. With Drake I had dinner once or twice. He was married and sort of fond of his wife in a way. She was about his age—over fifty. Drake occasionally liked to eat with me at the Ritz. He said he told his wife and she was quite willing for an old dog like he was to see if he could get a thrill. Both were working with my father on franchise affairs."

"What happened to Drake," I asked, "that you dropped him?"

"I was quite willing to. I had no ambition to be seen with married men and when my father told me to let Drake alone and confine my attention to Woodward, I did so, willing to get rid of one chore, even if the remaining one was harder. Finally, a night or so before Woodward was killed I told my father I was fed up with Woodward and that I wouldn't let my reputation suffer any more. I hoped by bringing in my reputation that would influence him.

"He asked what Woodward had done, if he had insulted me. I told him yes. He said, 'All right, that's that. I think I'll be through with Woodward in a day or so. Don't break with him till then. He more or less has me in his power at the moment but I'm working out. In a day or so I'll be clear.'

"There's the story. There's been so much scandal written about Woodward and myself that I want some one to know the truth. Watts Gordon knew it and constantly tried to persuade me to throw the Bowery Bar, father and all, overboard. But I couldn't."

"Did you tell either of them of your threat to kill Woodward?" I asked.

"I told my father and he said I was a crazy little fool. He wanted to take the pistol away from me. I hid it. I really needed it down in that district. Twice in two years I was accosted at night and only got away because I threatened to shoot. When I pulled it out of my bag that night I was

simply blind with rage at Woodward."

"Your father denied that Woodward said anything out of the way," I suggested.

"He did that because he—well, because he had to."

"Now Rose, please," I pled, "you're not frank. Why not tell me everything and let's work a way out."

"You are worse than Watts's lawyer. He claims he does not know anything either. But he doesn't call me Rose. He says Miss O'Neil."

"I'm sorry, but we reporters all get so used to first names. You understand it's purely professional."

"The usage may be," she said, "but the tone isn't. But if you want to, why—well why not? I'm unburdening myself like you were a lost mother to me. Am I to suppose these flowers you send me are also 'professional'?"

At this moment a turnkey who had been keeping strictly in the background came up and touched me on the shoulder. "I'm sorry but you're way over the permitted time, mister. You can't stay any longer. I've got to get downstairs. No, you can't fix it with me. No, come on."

"The turnkey's right," Rose broke in. "I don't want you to stay any longer. Your manner is too encouraging for confidences. I've said too much already. Now, on your honor, not a word to any one, not even your friend the inspector. I'm really serious. You must promise."

I promised, and cursing both the turnkey and my luck, went down below.

From the *Tabloid News*, Tuesday, May 1st, 1928.

WOODWARD A HOP KING; OWNED NOTORIOUS DIVE IN CHINATOWN

Not content with robbing innocent investors of their savings through his stock manipulations, Thomas Woodward owned and operated through his agent, Max Ratkowski, at least one dope and gambling joint where he ruined the bodies and minds as well as the fortunes of his victims. This startling information, obtained exclusively by the *Tabloid News* has been corroborated by the Police Department through questioning of Max Ratkowski, who was arrested last week and held as owner of an opium dive.

Ratkowski admitted today that Thomas Woodward was his real backer of a palatial gambling and hop joint on Doyers Street where Ratkowski acted as manager, receiving a portion of the receipts, while Woodward retained the balance. He said that as high as $500,000 a year had been taken in by his establishment. Running expenses ran about $100,000 a year. Woodward netted a large share of the $400,000 profit.

Gordon Knew

Watts Gordon, the confessed murderer of Woodward, knew about the latter's interest in the gambling and opium dive, according to Ratkowski. The night of Woodward's death, Woodward told his manager that a newspaper man had found out about his connection with the place, and had suggested that some plan be devised to "shut this Gordon squirt up." Ratkowski stated that he would have nothing to do with any violence, and after some conversation Woodward decided to close out his ownership entirely. He offered to sell out to Ratkowski for $300,000, which the latter characterized as an exorbitant sum.

They could not agree upon a price and the matter was left undecided. Later that same night Woodward was killed.

Ratkowski Moved Headquarters

After Woodward left Ratkowski's establishment just before he was shot, there was a mysterious slugging in the place, presumably of a detective, although the police have not given out the story in detail. Ratkowski immediately closed down and opened headquarters in a dive of his own on Mulberry Street.

Woodward had no interest in this place, although Ratkowski indicated that he had intended to ask Woodward to take an interest. It was in this second dive that Ratkowski was arrested. The Doyers Street house has been closed ever since Woodward's death.

A year ago the police closed down Woodward's first dive and caused him a loss of several hundred thousand dollars in equipment and patronage. They did not know,

however, of Woodward's connection at the time. The second one, known as the Plum Blossom, was opened about three months later and operated continuously up to his death. Ratkowski denied that any protection money had been paid to the police, who he said, did not know of the places.

From the *Tabloid News*, Same Date, Later Edition.

WAS WOODWARD VICTIM OF RACKET?

AS OWNER OF DIVES MAY HAVE BEEN KILLED BY RACKETEERS.

By Harry B. Gregg

With two confessions in the hands of the police, the mystery of Tom Woodward's murder is still not solved. Can both Gordon and Rose be mistaken or are both deliberately deceptive? Could Woodward have gone down before the guns of some racketeers trying to work blackmail out of his shady connection with Chinatown dope and gambling? He would have probably defied gangsters. He was never a "lamster" the term applied to one in underworld who ducks away.

Woodward may have encroached upon the preserves of some other dope group. He was not suspected of being an addict himself. The best that can he said of his ownership of the gambling hell is that he often played there himself and his intense love of gambling, often led him to lay bets on any size against all takers. He would lose heavily at times and even played the house against himself. Were not evidence found of dope selling there might be some small excuse for his ownership of the Doyers Street place. He was perhaps America's greatest gambler.

And it is possible that he may have run afoul of racketeers who killed him. Was Gordon mixed up with such a gang? Who knows? When bootleggers have the dress, manners and suavity of English gentlemen, could not a reporter, even a model one, be part of an underworld gang?

Ratkowski has confessed that Gordon knew of Woodward's gambling hell activities. There alone is an explanation of the murder, coupled with the oft repeated maxim, "A Gangster Never Squeals." Gordon may be taking the blame entirely to shield others. Were he known as "Louey the Dope" or as "Snifter Watty" with a gang reputation there would be no mystery in his silence. Simply because he is Watts Gordon, a reporter and well bred, a college education, must we expect that he cannot be a racketeer?

Is the Underworld Changing?

Perhaps the gang world is changing. There are gentlemen bootleggers now on every hand, there have been Raffles in real life—gentlemen crooks. Gordon's reputation was of the best, but that means nothing in these days when almost every month sees some man exposed in a double existence—one respectable and honest, the other crooked.

It is the opinion of certain competent observers that Watts Gordon may possibly have been mixed up with sinister and crooked friends, whom he is now protecting.

CHAPTER XI

Compiler's Note

THERE'S hot stuff now in the Bowery Bar case for you newspaper boys," Inspector Carr said to me Tuesday night.

From the *Tabloid News*

"Big Hearted Tom, a Hop King.

"Who the hell would have thought that? You know, I always guessed that Ratkowski had a backer, but we never could find out. The Bolshevik was right in saying he paid no graft to the police. That Doyers Street place was well hid, and the entrance was through a Chinese restaurant, run also by Charlie Whango. I never knew about it till a night or two before Woodward was killed and I hadn't got around to raiding it.

"The dick who was hurt was one of my men trying to get evidence so we could get in. You can't smash your way into those dives because they've got too many entrances and the doors are too heavy. Everybody gets away unless you've got every entrance covered."

"How did the *Tabloid News* get its scoop on the case?" I asked him. "They must have given you the story."

"They did. Some guy writes them an anonymous letter that said Woodward owned Ratkowski and was the real king pin. He signed it 'One Who Knows' or something like that. The *News* couldn't do much with that, so they offered a reward and this bird answers by a telephone call and suggests he be met way over on East 15th Street near the river. He had an open space all around him so he could get away. They sent the city editor and a reporter and got his story.

"This bird was half Russian and half Chinese named Pluto for some reason, at least that was the way he pronounced it. He told them he used to be a pardner of Ratkowski's and was sort of a head waiter in the Doyers Street place. Now I've got three or four of the boys that worked there locked up right now trying to find out something from them. They had mentioned Pluto and we had followed his trail for a while but lost it.

"At any rate he knew that Woodward was the real boss of the place. Ratkowski let several things slip from time to time. Pluto tried to get ambition and stole several thousand dollars. Woodward threw him out bodily one night. Young Gordon apparently knew Pluto or ran into him just before the murder. He wormed some facts out of the Chink, but I suspect Gordon already knew something about Woodward and Ratkowski before. That isn't part of this story now though.

"Pluto was sore at Ratkowski and at Woodward and finally decides to write a letter to the papers. He wouldn't, of course, come to the police because we suspected him of a murder or two, or at least, he thought we did. As a matter of fact my talking to the Chinese attendants that I've got locked up, just got me the information about him and the killing of two tong men.

"He tells the *News* all he knows and they bring the story to me for confirmation. Ratkowski is a snow bird, you know, and his ration has been cut down to almost nothing since he's been in a cell. He'll come across with information for just a sniff or two. So I got him into the office held out a few crystals and asked him about Woodward. He told us the story that the *News* has."

"Did they get everything? How about a little morsel of news for me that you're keeping under cover?" I asked.

"Ratkowski didn't tell everything though. He's wise. He don't want us to get anything that would look like a motive for his killing Woodward. The finding of his gun has got him anxious as an old lady at mass with bread in the oven at home."

"Come on, Inspector, give me the rest," I plead. "I'm starving for news."

"Well, I don't want to because it mixes the case up all the more and the dear public already is razzin' us but here it is. Ratkowski and Woodward had a row and a big one up in that private office before Lila was called in. Charlie Whango told me that. I've got him locked up and he's anxious to get out.

" 'Ally time big talk. Make fists. Loud. No gun,' the Chink tells me.

"They were arguing about Woodward's closing the place up. He was going to Europe and wanted to close out entirely. I guess Gordon had him scared to death. I don't know yet how Woodward learned that Watts had the goods on him. Maybe the kid went in to get a slice of money. I wouldn't think so but you can never tell. At any rate, so Charlie tells me, Ratkowski wanted to buy the place. Woodward said no, he was finished. They argued and I think the Jew threatened Woodward that unless he sold him the joint, he could spill the beans.

Then Woodward apparently told Ratkowski that he would spill them first and get the Jew locked up. Woodward left after that and about fifteen minutes later, my detective gets hurt in the place. One of the Chinks slugged him. Maybe Charlie who is anxious to be in right with us now.

"Ratkowski didn't use the ordinary Chinese boy. He had smuggled in some hard boiled yellow Bolshies from Manchuria. They're a wicked lot. Three of them I'm holding would just as soon cut your throat as ask you the time. Charlie is afraid of them.

"What happened after that I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine. What Gordon and Rose were doing there is something else you can guess, too. The *News* has a sob story about Gordon maybe being a dude gangster—college boys now coming into the racket business. Maybe so.

"It pays but it takes guts although any good lad used to using his head in football ought to be able to put it over on any of the regular gangsters whose heads are thicker'n Fifth Avenue traffic."

"Watts Gordon is never mixed in with a dope gang," I commented.

"I don't know what he's mixed up in, but it's something. I've got a theory. Just figured it out today that's maybe the solution. And it's simple. I ought to have thought of it long ago.

"No you can't have it. Too early. Wait till I get set and work it out."

"Did that bit of fringe you found in the cellar tunnel from the Bowery Bar match up with Irene's shawl?" I asked Carr.

"Oh you guessed that, huh? Well, it did, she must have went through there in a hurry. I checked on the shawl. Irene almost threw a fit when I insisted she get the shawl out. But the hairpin, young fellow, belonged to Rose O'Neil. She went through there fast too. She uses a hairpin on each side of her head where she sweeps those bangs of hers up."

"They're not bangs," I corrected.

"Well, I never went to college and I'm not up on hair dressing. But it was her hairpin," he insisted.

"Rose admitted to me that she came in and went out through the secret entrance to the bar, so that the hairpin simply checks on that. How about that cigarette butt you found?" I asked.

"It belonged to Ratkowski. He smokes the same brand. There's not another bird on the Bowery uses that particular cigarette. They're hard to buy in New York."

"So Ratkowski was in the Bar, too?" I suggested hoping to get a story.

"He was in that passageway, anyhow. Now what I want to know is why Rose was down at his joint, why his gun was turned in and how come Rose's gun killed Woodward. Answer that for me and you'll have a good headline. Maybe Rose is a dope."

"What?" I exclaimed. "Don't be crazy, Inspector."

"Well, they'll fool you some time. But I'm going to get the answer out of that Jew down in the Tombs if he had anything to do with killing Woodward, and what he knows about Rose O'Neil. I still maintain she fired that little lead pill into that big bum."

"McDermott doesn't think so," was my answer. "Let me read you a bit of copy that's coming out tomorrow in the first edition of my celebrated sheet, obtained exclusively by its celebrated reporter detective."

I HAD visited McDermott two hours previously and had obtained an interview with him. What he said had already been phoned in and was on the press and I had a proof of it. The text follows:

District Attorney McDermott this evening reiterated his belief in Watts Gordon's confession and ridiculed the statement of Miss O'Neil that she killed Woodward.

"Regardless of Woodward's connection with opium dives, I believe Watts Gordon killed him. Miss O'Neil if she told the truth would say that she saw him fire the fatal bullet. Her present story can be demolished on the witness stand in five minutes. I understand the Police Department have found a pistol belonging to her which corresponds in caliber to the bullet that killed Woodward.

"That means nothing. I can produce such pistols. My ideas are not based on hearsay. I was in the Bowery Bar on a matter of duty within ten minutes after Woodward was killed. I went there to tell O'Neil that it was going to be my duty to prosecute him

on a bribery charge. The charges of the *Post* were known to me that evening for the first time. O'Neil was a friend of mine and I went to urge him to confess, to turn State's evidence and let us have the evidence that would make conviction certain for the others.

"I have not divulged all I knew, unlike the Police Commissioner, who seems to think that if he makes enough arrests he may get the guilty party. That party is already in the Tombs."

"What do you think of that statement?" I asked Carr when I finished.

"Bunk, he's getting virtuous now and is going to prosecute on those graft charges. He finally admits he was at the Bowery Bar. But he doesn't say he was there before the murder, too, does he? And what did he see? Was he in the back room when the killing was done? And he wasn't down there on the graft business, take that from me. I don't know what his game was, but if he was urging Pete O'Neil to turn State's evidence, O'Neil would have kicked him out on the first suggestion."

From the morning *Herald-Tribune*, Wednesday, May 2, 1928.

WOODWARD STRUCK BY TWO BULLETS SAYS UNDERTAKER

Shropshire Gives Opinion That Second Bullet Scratched Woodward

NOT NOTICED BY POLICE

A Bare Scratch Under Arm Made by Second Shot

J. Henry Shropshire, the Cornish undertaker to whose establishment Woodward's body was taken after he had been shot, broke a three weeks' silence yesterday and admitted the startling disclosure to the morning *Herald-Tribune* that a second bullet had struck Woodward. Apparently the police had not noticed this slight wound, or knowing of it, have refrained from disclosing their knowledge.

The second bullet struck Woodward under the arm pit making a slight wound which was not visible except when his arm was raised from the body. Shropshire states that he had not noticed it at first but during the embalming process, he found the scratch. Had it been three inches further in the bullet would have passed just over the heart, and probably been a fatal wound.

Woodward died from a bullet which passed through the body just at the juncture of the throat and the shoulder and which severed the large artery which passes through the neck. This bullet was found—lodged in the wall of the room. The second bullet encountered practically no resistance and made a bare nick in the tendon of the arm pit.

Little Blood on Body

"There was very little blood on the body when it was brought to me," said Shropshire. "There had been a couple of doctors working over him so I wasn't surprised at that. Maybe when he was first hit he bled very badly. I should suppose so. That would make it hard to find this second wound because it didn't amount to much and was sort of hidden except when you raised the arm up. But it was a bullet crease all right. I've seen them before. I bury most of the boys who get hit down here in gang fights, and they generally have three or four such marks where machine gun bullets just barely nick them."

He was asked if he said anything to the police about his find.

"Well, they didn't ask me anything and I figure the best policy is not put your nose in other people's business. They told me to keep quiet about his death in the beginning. That was all right. I've seen them shot, embalmed and buried down here without anything getting in the newspapers so there was nothing unusual in that.

"The reporters certainly bothered me at first. I had two funerals to do and had to let them go to competitors. No paper ever offered to pay me my lost profit on them.

"And I might have collected a big reward too from one of the papers if I had opened my mouth.

"The only person that ever offered me good money on this murder was some Chink who came down here a week later and said he'd give me $500 if I'd give him some dope on the caliber of the bullet and if there was more than one wound. I kicked him out.

I'm a good Christian and don't cater to the heathens."

Story May Be New Clue

While Shropshire's evidence does not seem to be of great importance in view of the fact that this second wound may have come from the first accidental discharge of Woodward's weapon in his struggle with Gordon, it does bring up the possibility that more than one bullet may have been shot at Woodward. It is believed that more than two pistol shots were fired and that they were not all from the same weapon.

The police attach considerable importance to the story, however, as it may account for the second shot fired from Miss O'Neil's pistol. It is reported by attaches of Police Headquarters that Police Medical Examiner Mastine who examined Woodward's body was called to Commissioner Howard's office late last night, after the Commissioner had been informed by this newspaper of Shropshire's statement.

From the *Daily Tabloid,* Noon Edition, Wednesday, May 2, 1928.

CHARLIE WHANGO MURDERED IN TOMBS

MAYOR OF CHINATOWN, WOODWARD WITNESS MYSTERIOUSLY SLAIN IN CELL

A new mystery entered the Bowery Bar murder when Tombs' keepers this morning found the cold, stiff form of Charlie Whango, stretched out in his cell, a bullet through his heart. During the night a silent, mysterious shot forever closed Whango's lips from revealing whatever he may have known of Woodward's death.

Surrounded by five-foot walls, watched by guards, in a separate cell, locked and bolted, seemingly in the most secure place possible from an assassin's bullet, Whango met his death during the night. His dead body was discovered when keepers tried to awaken him this morning from what they thought was a deep sleep.

And it was a deep sleep, one that will last forever. Charlie Whango has served his last opium pipe to Woodward's clients. His black slitted eyes will never again peer out of a narrow wicket to appraise the character of those seeking entrance to his dives. And what he might have had to say about the murder of Thomas Woodward will never be known.

No One Heard Shot

Not a guard, not a prisoner, not an official of the prison, heard a shot or saw a flash, according to the answers they gave detectives today. Yet a bullet entered Whango's heart during the night. No mystery of such deep proportions has ever confronted Tombs officials.

Every cell on the same tier as Whango's was thoroughly searched, together with the prisoners but no weapon of any kind was found. Guards on duty in the corridor were subjected to a long grilling but could give no clue as to who fired the shot.

On the same tier and facing Whango's cell at an angle are cells in which are confined three Chinese attendants of Whango's gambling and opium establishment alleged to have been owned by Thomas Woodward.

Further down the corridor is the cell occupied by Max Ratkowski, Whango's Bolshevik overlord who hired Whango as manager, and who reported, according to Ratkowski's own evidence, direct to Thomas Woodward. While these men were immediately suspected, the police have not found any clue connecting them with the murder of Whango.

Why Was Whango Killed?

The police suspect that Whango's death has some connection with the murder of Woodward although the Chinese gambling master was not apparently a witness in the Woodward case, nor was he directly concerned with it. Ratkowski had already given details of Woodward's connection with gambling hells in Chinatown.

Whango was being held on a narcotic charge and had not been booked as a Woodward witness. There may be unrevealed facts which, however, indicate that Whango knew a great deal about who killed the notorious gambler.

The police believe that some prisoner in a cell which faced Whango's fired the bullet from a gun equipped with a silencer. The bullet was of .25 calibre and entered almost directly upon the heart. Its angle was very slight, but since it is not known in

what position Whango stood when he was shot, little deduction can be made from the angle according to the police.

The belief is that some prisoner fired the shot as Whango looked out of his cell door and the pistol was afterward disposed of in a secret manner. There is no possibility of any outsider having got into the Tombs to commit the murder.

Police Comment

"In my opinion," said Acting Inspector of Detectives Carr, "Whango was killed by some prisoner. There are four or five right there on the same corridor who have been in close contact with him in the past and they may have had reason to do so. I can't understand why the Tombs guards could let anybody get away with a killing like this and not know about it. There's something rotten in the Department of Correction when a prisoner can be shot in his cell and his death not discovered for five hours."

Herbert K. Lobally, Commissioner of Correction when informed of Carr's statement curtly remarked that that police officer should mind his own business and find Woodward's murderer before he began to criticize other city departments.

"I am making a personal investigation to determine who killed Whango, and expect developments within the next few hours," the Commissioner said. "We aren't supermen. Whoever planned this murder was clever and probably had everything arranged so that his guilt could not be found except after a long investigation. The gun used was unquestionably a silent one. I should say a powerful air pistol. The guards are all men of integrity. I feel sure that no one connected officially with the Tombs had any hand in Whango's death."

From the morning *Herald-Tribune*, Thursday, May 3, 1928.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS HEIGHTEN MYSTERY OF WOODWARD DEATH

Ratkowski, Dive Owner, Now Held As Accessory. Sought Woodward in Bowery Bar.

Admits Presence But Denies Guilt

MET ROSE O'NEIL, IRENE WILLIAMS AND McDERMOTT IN SECRET PASSAGE AFTER SHOOTING.

To the four men and women now held in the murder of Thomas Woodward, the police have added Max Ratkowski, the notorious and picturesque gambling den keeper who was already under arrest on other charges.

Last night Acting Inspector Carr of the Police Department obtained positive information that Ratkowski had used the secret passage into the Bowery Bar just after Woodward was shot. This coupled with the fact that his pistol was found in the Bar led to his arrest as an accessory to the crime.

After two hours of interrogation at Police Headquarters, he confessed that he had entered the Bowery Bar by the secret entrance and was standing in the back hall just as Woodward was shot.

He did not see the room, according to his statement, but heard three or four shots. He immediately went back into the passageway, intending to rush out, but changed his mind, fearing arrest if he ventured onto the street.

He hid himself in the cellar corridor connecting the Bowery Bar with 39 Bayard Street. In about fifteen minutes he heard

From the *Daily Tabloid*

someone approaching and then saw Miss Irene Williams come along the tunnel accompanied by District Attorney McDermott. They recognized him and McDermott told Ratkowski to keep his mouth shut about what he had seen or heard. The District Attorney then accompanied Miss Williams to the other end of the passage and returned to talk with Ratkowski.

A few minutes later, Miss O'Neil came hurrying along the passageway. She carried a pistol in her handbag according to Ratkowski's confession. McDermott and Miss O'Neil left, and within five minutes Ratkowski took courage to make an exit to Bayard Street, where he was seen and recognized by Dixie Blake.

Claims He Was Unarmed

Ratkowski states he carried no pistol and had no knowledge of what occurred in the back room of the Bowery Bar, except for the pistol shots of which he counted three or four. He had gone to the Bowery Bar to make a new offer to Woodward for the gambling and opium dive which he claims was owned by the former and operated by himself.

The police in obtaining this startling information connecting District Attorney McDermott directly with the killing of Woodward can be congratulated upon clever detective work. It was learned some time ago that Woodward and Ratkowski had quarreled in the Doyers Street dive just previous to Woodward's death. In searching the secret passage, Acting Inspector Carr found a cigarette butt which later proved to be Ratkowski's. The latter was seen by Dixie Blake who talked with him on the corner in front of the Bowery Bar about the time of the murder. Miss Blake, whom Ratkowski accused of giving him Lila Carroll's $250,000 jewel, disappeared several days ago and was only relocated yesterday. She was taken to headquarters and is now being held in the Tombs as a material witness.

Compiler's Note

I FIND that the news account of the foregoing developments are inadequate in describing the various events which led up to Ratkowski's direct association with Woodward's death. Carr's story, coupled with my own previously unprinted observations, are a far more detailed and interesting account.

"We had lost Dixie," Carr told me. "And there was no news of her until one of the inside men in the Tombs found a note concealed in a sugar bowl which was on a tray of food being taken in to Ratkowski. I had suspected that Ratkowski was getting information in some way, and as prisoners being held before trial are allowed to send outside for food, I suspected that Ratkowski might be using this as a means of getting notes. I also figured that the gun that killed Whango might have been sent out of the Tombs concealed on a tray. Trays are gone over when they come in, but often there is no inspection of them as they leave. I put a man especially to work on the tray end and we found a note in cipher. When we got our expert to dope it out it was about like this:

" 'Ratkowski, I need five thousand dollars and don't want any argument from you about it. Blaming me for stealing Lila's diamond is all lies. You were in the Bowery Bar that night and unless I get the money I am going to the police with what I know.' "

"Now what I want to know," I remarked to Carr. "Is how could Ratkowski figure that code out. It was made up of slang terms and he doesn't know American slang."

Carr snorted in indignation. "He don't? Listen, he can write and talk better English than both of us put together when he wants to. He's as smart as they make 'em but he throws out that he's just a dumb kyke who can't spik de Englis. Don't kid yourself. He can talk underworld jargon in six languages. The Paris police have a case against him. He ran a bunch of Apaches there for a year or more. And I hear he's on the police records in Rome, too. He could figure out what Dixie meant easier than we could because she was writing the special code they used all the time."

"As soon as I got the translation, I jumped a car up to 179 E. 49th Street and there I found Dixie, just putting on her hat to run around to the neighborhood speakeasy.

" 'Come along with me, dearie,' I told her.

'We can have a nice cold glass of beer in the back end of Berger's Bar around the corner while you tell me a cute little story about what you really got on your friend Ratkowski.' "

" 'I've got nothing on him, the bum,' she replied. 'But he's trying to lay the stealing of Lila's aeroplane beacon on me. I never gave him that stone. Do you think I'm crazy to turn over a chunk of real diamond like that to a hopbird like the General?'

" 'Maybe not,' I said, 'but I'm not interested in that so much as I am in the fact that you've been giving me a stall about Ratkowski. Why didn't you tell me you knew he was in the Bowery Bar that night?'

"She argues with me—we had gone down to Berger's by the way, for a draught of beer, and so I said to her, 'Well, let's talk this over down at the Tombs, Dixie. You can then have your friend Ratkowski right close by and won't need to send him any more notes."

"She opened up those trick eyes of hers then.

" 'That's how you found out where I lived, huh? And where you got your dope? Well, I can't get money out of him now I guess. Listen, if I tell you everything I know, honest, now Dan, right straight out from the heart, will you let me out of this case? I'm afraid of it. I got into it by accident, but I'm scared I'm going to be framed up somehow.'

"I didn't promise, but let her think I'd be willing to listen to reason. So then she tells me the right story, and I know she was giving me an honest straight spiel for once.

"She stood on the corner and didn't see anyone come out of the bar just as she said before. Ratkowski met her and talked to her a little while before the murder.

" 'We had a drink out of his flask,' she says. 'And then he said he was going into the Bar but was going to take a walk around the block first as he had an errand to do.'

"He turned away and Dixie saw him go into 39 Bayard Street. She didn't know then that this was the entrance to the passage. A little after one o'clock, just as Dixie was about to leave she saw Ratkowski coming out of 39. He was pretty much excited and beat it down toward Division Street like there were six bulls after him. She didn't know then about the cellar way of getting into the Bar.

"Later when your story comes out about it, she knows and figures that Ratty was in the Bowery Bar. Being hard up, she tried blackmail again with that note and got caught and I've got her down to Jefferson Market jail so she won't slip away again."

"What about Ratkowski?" I asked.

"I'm coming to that. Let me alone," he answered. "Dixie, as I say, is down on 9th Street now. Irene ought to be there too, but I didn't fix her bail. The judge let her out.

"I then went back and got hold of the Jew. He is bland as a cat that swallowed the canary until I jolt him with the fact that I'm going to charge him with Woodward's murder because he was in the Bar when it happened, and further, because his gun was turned in as the weapon. Further, I told him, I had a story from Charlie Whango that I got before he was shot. That surprised Ratkowski more than anything, and I saw that I had him scared. Further I saw that either Ratty or one of his Manchurian gunmen had croaked Charlie to shut him up.

Theatrical page drawing of Dixie made in 1925

"Ratkowski wanted to bargain with me then. I told him I wasn't interested but that we had witnesses that would send him to the chair. He believed me. God forgive me for all the lying I've done in this case, but I had to do it. Ratkowski swore he had nothing to do with killing Woodward. He took oath by sixteen kinds of heathen gods so I didn't believe him. Finally, when I tell him Dixie has come across, he finally decides to tell his story and what a one it was!

"Ratkowski and Woodward had a row. Woodward left and Ratty thought maybe he was going to tip the cops off to his own place. So Ratkowski, learning that Woodward was going to the Bowery Bar, decides

to follow along and make Woodward a final offer for the joint they run together. He was afraid of Woodward and during the row they had in the gambling joint, Ratkowski had quietly opened up a drawer of his desk to look for his gun. He claims it was missing, had disappeared within an hour.

"When he started to follow Woodward to the Bowery Bar he hadn't time to look for the gun. First, he had closed his joint up after the detective was shot and he didn't want to go back to get another gun. He always carries a blackjack, he told me, and he decided that it was enough.

"Now that's where he lied like hell. And that's just why Whango got a bullet through his heart. You see, I had a long talk with Charlie. Had him brought down out of his cell and made him feel easy. I sort of apologized at first for having busted him one with my gun a couple of weeks ago when I first got Ratkowski. Then I told him that it was certainly nice weather outside and that Sing Sing was a rotten stinking place and any Chink as fat as he was would pass in his checks inside of a year up there. Whango agreed. Finally I made him a deal that if he came across with everything he knew that I might see he got off scot free.

"With that he opens up like a box of fireworks that a kid had accidentally dropped a piece of punk in. You know he talks English fast with every other letter a couple of l's. I'll come back to Ratkowski when I get through with Charlie. Whango says, the best I can repeat his lingo.

" 'Woodw'd and the Genelal have velly, velly big flight. Tlalk, tlalk all time. Goddamn all time. Almlost flight. Woodw'd go out. Genelal velly sore.'

"I can't keep up his lingo but at any rate after the place was shut up, Ratkowski and Whango left and the Jew decided to go up to the Bowery Bar and have it out with Woodward. He told Whango he would buy the dive from Woodward or kill him, and I believe he woull have, if he actually didn't. Everybody in New York that had anything to settle with Woodward seems to have gone to the Bar. But the thing that's important is this. Ratkowski did lose his gun out of his desk. It disappeared just like he said it did. But Ratty didn't wind up at the Bar with any blackjack. He borrowed a small .32 calibre gun from Whango. The Chink kept one always on him, tied up under his arm pit. Ratkowski took this. Whango was afraid of cops picking him up and finding it, so he was glad to turn it over to his boss.

"That's why Charlie Whango was given a ride in the Tombs. Either Ratkowski or one of his Manchurians plugged him. They didn't know how much he had told me and they figured they would shut him up forever, either as a safeguard or as an example to anybody else not to blab.

"Now to come back to Ratkowski. With the blackjack in his pocket as he claims, but really with Whango's gun, he slips across the Bowery to Bayard Street. There he met Dixie as he said. He talked to her a bit and then went back along Hester Street and into the passage. He knew of its existence for he knew O'Neil pretty well. There was a secret lock to the office door, operated by pulling open a little door on the side and everybody knew this trick who used the entrance.

"Ratkowski told me he went through the cellars and found the door behind the mirror open. He stepped out into the back hall and immediately heard Woodward's voice in argument. He also heard O'Neil and some women's voices. Being afraid of being caught by McLarney, the bartender, he went back out of the hall, but then his curiosity got the better of him and he decided to listen in and find out what Woodward was trying to pull off. Accordingly he went back into the hall.

" 'I vaited der a few minutes,' he told me. 'And I hear Woodward calling everybody names. He says Rose was his mistress. Den I hear some vomen's voices and somebody yells, 'For God's sake get dot gun!' Den dere's a lot of moving around und some vomen yells, 'I'm going to give it to him!'

" 'Den Voodward says somet'ing very fast, dot I couldn't get it all und I hear O'Neil yell, 'By God, Voodward, dot's enough from you!' Der's a lot more shouting und screaming all at vonce und den I hear a shot. Den de door in de hall opens qvick and Kelly, de gang leader, jumps outa de bar into de back room witout seeing me. Den dere's two, three, four, five shots, all

at vonce again. I don't know. I vas t'rough mit dot place. I jump back t'rough de door by de looking glass and go back into de cellar.'

"Five shots, are you sure o'that?" I asked him.

" 'Sure. I know. If you'd 'a' been shot at as much as me, Inspector.' he says. 'You could count the bullets fast. The last three was all close together.'

"Now, there's some new dope," Carr went on. "Five shots, maybe and Kelly in on the first one. That means Kelly knows what went on in there. Maybe the Jew ain't telling the truth. Most of what he said he could have read in the newspapers but I think he wasn't giving me any applesauce. His story's straight finally and it brings Kelly into the picture. That's the first outside corroboration we've had of his being an actual witness. All these crooks start out with a story that's fuller lies that a pup is with fleas, but they all get around to the truth finally.

"After Ratkowski got down in the passage he began to figure that if he went out in the street he might be picked up, so he hid himself in the subway. After a while he hears voices and tries to squeeze himself into the bricks but can't do it, and along comes McDermott with Irene. She was all excited and weeping hysterically according to Ratty. They spotted him right away and McDermott asked what the hell he was doing down there. Ratkowski told him he was on the way to the Bowery Bar to see Woodward. McDermott replied that Woodward was dead and that if Ratkowski didn't want to go up the river, he better keep his mouth shut and to wait till he (McDermott) came back. The D. A. evidently went up to the street with Irene, let her out and came back.

"Now here's the funny part of this. McDermott told Ratkowski that Woodward had been shot by somebody but he didn't know who. McDermott, Ratkowski said, was all excited himself.

" 'There's been a bad shooting back in the Bar,' Mac told Ratty, 'and you probably know something about it. I haven't got the lay of it straight yet. I wasn't in on it.'

"Now Ratkowski and McDermott knew each other pretty well. In fact, I do know Woodward, the D. A. and the Jew were pretty thick and I'll bet five dollars to an empty beer mug that Mac knew Woodward was running a joint in Chinatown. Mac had too much money for the bum lawyer he is. At any rate, Ratty agrees to keep his mouth shut no matter what happens.

"While they are talking, who comes along but Rose O'Neil and in a hurry. She sees Ratkowski and gets alarmed but McDermott says everything is O.K. and that he was delayed in getting back. She had a hand bag which was open and in it the Jew says he saw a gun. McDermott saw it too and told her to close the bag up. Rose says very little and then McDermott takes her along the passage, or rather follows along behind her pulling Ratkowski along. Rose goes out on the street and Ratkowski follows a few minutes later.

"He didn't know what became of McDermott, whether he went back to the bar or came out on the street. Ratkowski is in a hurry, naturally, to get under cover and beats it to Division Street like a bat out of hell, which he is, and is out of sight within a minute.

"There's the Jew's story. It may be true. Part of it is anyway because he couldn't make it all up. I can check up with Rose and Irene and find out whether they actually met him as he says. But Ratkowski knows I can check so he must be giving me a straight steer. I asked him then about killing Whango.

" 'Dere's a Chinese proverb goes, 'Dere's no use calling de tiger to chase away de dog,' he said to me. 'Vy should I trouble myself about Whango?

" 'I don't know,' I replied, 'except that he had something on you maybe.' And I gave him back a little Chinese saying. 'Listen, Ratkowski,' I said. 'There's another little motto that maybe you've heard from your Chink friends. It goes something like this, 'If you can't catch a fish, you got to catch shrimps.' Now I've got you, and you're going to be held for Woodward's murder. How do you like that?'

"He looked scared for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders. 'All right, vat can I do? But I didn't have no gun.'

" 'Yes, you did,' I told him. 'And your own gun was turned in as the one that put

Woodward out, and you were in that hallway, and, further than that, you had a hell of a row with Woodward back in your joint. You said that you would kill him in the next hour unless he promised to sell you the place and shut up about its existence.' "

Here I interrupted Carr's story. "Can I publish that?"

He winked slowly. "Listen, boy, I'm a cop and it's my job to get things like that but keep 'em to myself. But listen to the rest, except you can't publish it now. In a day or so, maybe it'll be O.K.

"When I told the Jew that last, he looked at me and then drew back just like a snake about to jump.

" 'Who says dot?' he snarled. 'Dot's lies, all lies. Whango say dot?'

" 'You know it's true, you dirty faced murderer!' I shot back. 'Charlie Whango knew that. He was in on the argument. You knew he knew it and that's why you had him croaked by one of your Chink thugs that were across the corridor!'

" 'Whango, Whango,' he repeated. 'Did he tell you dot?'

" 'Yes he did, and in the presence of witnesses. What do you think about that? We got that out of him about two hours before he was killed. You thought you shut him up, eh? Well, you were too late. Further than that, he saw you looking for your gun after Woodward left, and says he saw you pick it up out of a drawer.' This last was fake, of course, but I wanted to see what he'd say.

" 'Dot was no gun. It was a blackjack. I couldn't find my gun. It was a bolice bistol.'

"You didn't tell him that Whango had given him his gun?" I asked Carr.

"No, I wanted Ratty to think that we were working on the .38. That was turned in and was direct evidence. The .32 which he took from Whango, I never saw. If I could get my hands on it, it might prove a great deal. My idea was to make the Jew slip up on his story; to get him alarmed over the .38 which I'm sure he didn't use and in that way get some dope on the .32.

"Finally I had to come out right straight and ask him about Whango's gun. He denied that he had it. Said Whango was kidding us. And I couldn't get any further with him. So I put him under arrest as another accessory. Pretty soon I'll have half the town in coolers as accomplices."

"Well, there's one you've left out, and if Ratkowski's story is true, it looks like you might find out something more about him," I said to Carr.

"Who's that?" asked Carr.

"Why O'Neil, himself. Didn't your Russian friend tell you he heard O'Neil say, 'That's enough from you?' "

"I've got that in mind. I didn't miss it. There's two or three things yet to do and I think I'll have this case settled. I'm going to get an exact story from everybody as to exactly the number of shots fired. Then I'm going to get a description of the positions everybody occupied. I may take them all down to the Bowery Bar to do it. But don't let the dear public have an idea of this. There'd be a mob of a million. I think every one is going to tell a different story.

"Can you get them there?" I asked. "Some are out on bail."

"Listen, I know where to find anybody in this case any time of day or night. There's twenty plain-clothes men on the job tailing everybody. And if anyone that's out on bail tries to make a getaway, I'll pinch them P.D.Q. I'll get court orders on the whole bunch including McDermott. That seance in the Bowery Bar, if I pull it off, will be the greatest sensation ever put over. And it will elect Howard mayor."

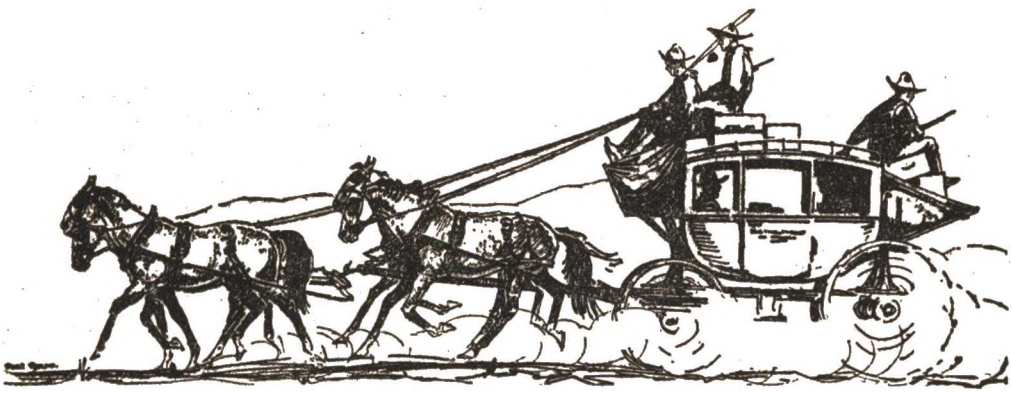
"And make you Commissioner of Police?"

"Not for me. I'm through pretty soon. I wouldn't take the job for fifty thousand a year. I'll be forty years a cop when I retire in a few years an' that's all I want."

"How about O'Neil?"

"I've got a warrant for him that I can serve any time. I'm not ready yet. I'm going to see Rose first. Want to go along?"

(The final solution of this famous case will be described in the next issue of SHORT STORIES.)



THE TENDERFOOT SLEUTH

By E. S. PLADWELL

Author of "The White Thunderbolt," "Get Your Man," etc.

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS TELL ABOUT THESE RAH RAH COLLEGE BOY SHERIFFS. THEY MIGHT GET ON THE WIRE AND DO SOMETHING OR OTHER WHEN IT COMES TO ROUNDING UP OUTLAWS

SIT down and make yourself comfortable, Mister, because I'm plumb partial to tenderfeet nowadays, though time was when I'd have left the print of my boots on your pants and mebbe sent you gallopin' over yonder ridge with a few forty-five slugs warmin' them stylish tan shoes of yourn. But I guess I'm gittin reconciled to your sort o' pest because one of my young deputy-sheriffs was the same kind o' critter and he showed me that a college education and a suit of Klassy Kut clothes wasn't such drawbacks as they looked.

I didn't want to give this here Charlie Hendricks a job in the first place, but the boy was a forty-second cousin which had just graduated from the university and so my women-folks kept sayin' how lovely it would be if I could make a place for such a nice, clean young man which would be a credit to the sheriff's office because he has such sweet blue eyes and such a darlin' blond pompadour. I fit like a tiger for several weeks but you know how women-folks are when they gets started, so finally I made him a deputy to git rid of him.

I ain't ornery or mean by nature but a man can only stand so much, and it looked like my only way out was to send him down to Cache City, which was the toughest town in the county and then some. Not that I wanted to hurt this here lovely boy but I heard he was the best long-distance runner in college and I was big-hearted enough to give him plenty of chance to show how good he was.

"You go down to Cache City and find who is responsible for all them holdups and shootin's which has baffled me for a year," says I, "and don't come back till you've got somethin'."

"Yes, sir," he says, without battin' an eye. "And what will I do with them when I catch them?"

"Pinch yourself and wake up," I snorts. "But to show that I've got a conscience, I'm sendin' Jim Morton along to help you in case the shootin' gits too promiscuous. Jim ain't up on triggernometry and his clothes looks as if he'd slept in 'em for the past ten years but he's got five notches in his gun, so treat him gentle because he's the best deputy I've got. Let Jim manage this crusade into that low-down robbers' roost while you live and learn. *Sabe?*"

"Yes, sir," he says; and then he kisses all my women-folks and starts off with Jim on the stage for Cache City.

THE stage didn't have anything much in it but the people had whispered that a payroll was bein' taken along for the Juliana Mine, so the stage was held up about ten miles this side of Cache. The driver and messenger shoved up their hands, but Jim's nerves was on edge for some reason or other, so he let fly with his six-shooter at the whole gang, which started them to shootin' back.

Young Hendricks was bendin' and blinkin' among the lightnin' flashes and he managed to drag out his nice new gun which he had just bought, but he couldn't seem to sight it at anything but the roof, so Jim grabbed it out of his hands.

"Run back and telephone!" yelled Jim, as he emptied six more shots at the people in the brush. "I'm hit!"

Young Hendricks dived over the rear seat and landed on his face in the road and wiggled into the brush till he circled northward to the road again. The shootin' was over by this time but Charlie obeyed orders, racin' along with record-breakin' speed for fve miles till he busted into the road-house of old Dan Philpot's where they had a telephone which got me out of bed.

"The stage is held up!" pants Charlie. "Jim is shot!" And then he told me what had happened.

"Well," I snarls, "you'd better take Jim to a ranch-house somewheres and call a doctor, and then you'd better come home."

"But I want to solve who done the holdup!" he says.

"Well, you won't solve it from Philpot's roadhouse, five miles away!" I roars. "Besides, old Amos Philpot's the gentlest old coward in the county, and if he hears that peace-officers are pesterin' around his place for bandits you're likely to put a good eatin' house plumb out o' business, because him and his wife is ailin' anyhow and they're liable to grab their hearts and keel over if there's any excitement. So get to hell out o' there and do your solvin' somewheres else before you kill one o' the finest old couples which ever came to Arizony!"

"Yes, sir," he says. "I will report next from Cache City." Then he hung up.

But pore old Philpots heard Charlie's talk and begun to shake and shiver and have a fit, so Charlie had to carry the old man to bed while Mrs. Philpots barred all the doors and put out all the lights and sat tremblin' in the bedroom upstairs with a hot-water bottle while Charlie had to hold her hand and tell her the bandits was headed the other way and there wasn't no danger nohow because he was on the job and would protect them if he had to battle to the death. So Charlie didn't find where Jim had gone till next day when he went hikin' into town and put up at the hotel where the stage driver had taken Jim within an hour after the holdup.

CHARLIE reported to me immediate over the phone.

"Jim's got a fractured leg and a busted left arm and he won't be much good for a while so I'll have to start solvin' this here case myself."

"All right," I growls, "but don't poke your fool head outdoors after nightfall because it's likely to git shot off. The town's a leetle mite too tough for you."

"But it ain't a tough town," he argues.

"Then you've got somethin' to learn," says I, plumb disgusted.

"But it ain't a tough town," he repeats. "It's a nice little town. They've got a plaza and a Ladies' Aid Society and some nice houses and some fine lookin' gals, includin' one at the Racket Store and one at the Telephone Central and one in Sheehan's Modern Laundry, and two in the hotel."

"You come home!" I yells.

"No, sir," he says. "That ain't quite fair, sir. You told me to look into certain things and now you ain't givin' me no chance to make good, which looks to me like you are prejudiced."

"Go to hell, then!" I roars. "Stick there till they nails your doggoned hide on the wall!"

"Yes, sir," he says. "I will stay here till I solve the case."

I WAS so plumb tee-totally outraged by this here smart college boy that I didn't pay no more attention to happenin's in Cache City except to send Jim the best doctor that money could buy; but about a week later I got a long-distance ring from Sally Blaine, the little chestnut-haired filly which runs the telephone layout at Cache.

"I only wanted to ask you if somethin' couldn't be done about poor Charles," she says in that soft two-toned voice which made cowpunchers fight for the privilege of usin' the phone at every ranch-house for miles around.

"I've been wonderin' the same thing since first I laid eyes on him," says I.

"But I'm serious," she comes back, with a little tremble in her voice.

"Yeh," says I, noticin' how she spoke. "It's beginnin' to sound like it."

"But I think you ought to be more sympathetic, Uncle Bill," she pleads. "The pore boy is havin' a terrible time with them ruffians over on Stampede Street because they're chasin' him all over the place and I don't think it looks dignified for an officer of the law to git chased all over the place. Besides, he's such a nice boy."

"Yeh," says I. "That's prob'ly why they're chasin' him."

"That's not true!" she flares up. "They're actin' that way because they're mean, nasty people which ought to be ashamed of theirselves!"

"Well," I asks, "what happened?"

"Last Sunday night," she begins, "Lew Butler shot at his toes in the Paradise Dance Hall and made him dance till the floor was full o' holes."

"My gosh!" I yells. "That floor was laid

in '91 and she used to be one o' the finest dance-floors in Arizony! Many's the good hoe-down we used to have there in the old days! It's like hearin' bad news about an old friend! This thing's gittin' serious! What else happened?"

"They mobbed him on Monday night," she wails, "and then they chased him over the roof of the blacksmith shop while they shot away the shingles under him, and then they ducked him in the waterin' trough, and then Lew Butler and them mis'able scoundrels tied him on a hoss which they sent gallopin' out o' town while they told the pore boy they'd shoot him if he ever came back."

"Well, where'd he go?" I asks.

"He reached the Philpot's road-house which is fifteen miles north," she sobs, "but his story frightened pore old Mr. Philpots so much that Mr. Philpots was afraid to keep him very long for fear the Lew Butler gang would come lookin' for him, so the pore boy had to leave next day and he's been wanderin' around like a lost lamb and you ought to do somethin' about it."

"I will," I promises through my teeth. "Is there any way I can git hold of this here lost lamb?"

"Yes, I will connect you," she says, and then there was a buzzin' and clickin' of wires till Charlie's voice came on the line from some ranch-house.

I STOOD back from my phone, holdin' the receiver in my left hand while my tremblin' right hand reached down to the butt of my six-shooter.

"So!" says I. "So this is the way you uphold the peace and dignity of the State of Arizony by gittin' chased over roofs and ducked in hoss-troughs! You damned slab-sided, fish-faced, empty-headed son of a half-breed idjut and a locoed sheep-herder, git to hell out o' that country and come in here so I can smash that damned lady-killin' face of yourn and kick your pants over the county line before you make us a laughin'-stock in front of the whole state!"

"No, sir," he comes back, polite but firm. "That wouldn't be fair to me. Besides, I'm solvin' the case."

"Solvin', hell!" I roars. "You come in here!"

"No, sir," he stands pat. "The case is almost solved and I'm only bidin' my time till things are ready."

"You git to bidin' any time around Cache City and you'll be ready for a few bullets!" I snarls.

"Then I will have to accept it as part of the job, sir," he says. "I ain't very good with a pistol and I can't lick a whole mob

with my fists, so I will have to put up with it."

Which was so spunky that I begun to have a grudgin' admiration for the pore tenderfoot kid.

"I respects your nerve," I admits, "but the town's a leetle mite too tough for you, boy. Better come home."

"But it ain't a tough town," he argues.

"It is!" I roars.

"It ain't," he says.

"It is!" I yowls.

"It ain't!" he comes back. "There's a lot o' rascals hangin' around and givin' it a bad reputation but the town's real nice."

"Oh," says I. "Sally Blaine, eh?"

"Well, somewhat," he admits. "And gals like Sally don't happen in towns which is tough all the way through, do they?"

"You come home!" I yells.

"Don't you approve of Sally?" he insists.

"I love her like a daughter!" I hollers. "That's why it's my duty to protect her! You come home!"

"I'm afraid that's out of your jurisdiction, sir," he says, and then he hangs up.

I WAS so doggoned mad that I wasn't myself for nigh on two weeks till the phone begun bangin' from Cache City one mornin' at nine o'clock. Charlie was on the line.

"Git a posse together!" he orders. "Ride over the back hills and meet me after dark in Cow Valley, six miles north o' Cache, but keep away from the road! The stage is goin' to be held up!"

"How do you know?" I roars.

"I'll stake my life on it!" he promises.

"You shore told the truth that time!" says I. "But considerin' that the stage is bringin' a hefty payroll to the mine tonight I'm goin' to give you the benefit of the doubt. The stage reaches Cow Valley at eight o'clock. I'll be there."

So I took sixteen men to Cow Valley and spread 'em out in a wide circle among the trees.

Pretty soon, after it was dark, eight riders came clompin' up the road from Cache City and settled theirselves comfortable in the road and on both sides of it, waitin' for the stage. After a while the stage came rattlin' along from the north, lookin' like a big Noah's Ark in the darkness.

I'd told my men to 'low the stage to be held up because you can't arrest people till after they've done their crime; so the

rascals stuck up the stage and grabbed the payroll, and then we came forward with guns and flashlights which subdued them bandits so complete that there warn't more'n six-eight shots fired before they raised their hands, includin' Lew Butler and his whole ornery gang.

"Somebody must have tipped you off!" wails Lew, who was plumb flabbergasted. "How did you know we was goin' to hold up the stage here?"

"A little birdie told me," says I.

"What birdie?" snorts Lew.

"Me," says Charlie, comin' forward in front o' the flashlights and holdin' up somethin' which looked like a pair o' pliers. "And this, gents, is my little weepin' which I uses to tame bandits around here to as to take the toughness out o' Cache City and make her a decent town which she is goin' to be from now on."

"What do you mean?" yelps Lew.

CHARLIE gives him one o' them sweet smiles which women-folks goes crazy over.

"Didn't you telephone to old Dan Philpots's road-house this mornin'?" asks Charlie. "Didn't you tell him to phone you when the stage left Philpots's for Cache City? Didn't you say you'd ride here to Cow Valley as soon as he gave you the tip?"

"Dan Philpots?" I groans, refusin' to believe it. "Why, he's the respectablest old citizen in the county!"

"And the timidest," says Charlie. "These here crooks terrorized him and said they'd wring his neck if he didn't do what they told him to, so they made the pore old coward put in a private wire which connected with their ranch-house, over the hills."

"How did you learn all this?" I gasps.

"I noticed how the old man turned white when I talked about holdups," he says. "It meant a bad conscience."

"Oh!" says I.

"Yeh," says he. "Then I begun to notice that all the holdups in the past two years was on southbound stages comin' from Philpots's to Cache City."

"Oh!" says I. "Yeh. That's right, come to think of it."

"Yeh," says he. "Then I looked around the Philpot place and I seen this here private wire leadin' across the hills, so I followed to where it went to. Then I seen the phone hidden behind the Philpot house. The regular company phone leadin' toward Cache City is in the front room. That line runs out of the south end of the house. So I took my little pliers and some wire and I hitched this here nefarious private line onto the company's main line leadin' to Cache City, and Sally Blaine listened in whenever the bell buzzed."

"Oh!" says I.

"Exactly," says he. "So every time this gang o' crooks talked to theirselves over the Philpot private wire, Sally wrote it all down. They told us all their plans. Everything. Here's the evidence, sir. Two books full. Enough to keep these here ruffians in jail for twenty years."

PLUMB filled with emotion, I laid my hand on Charlie's shoulder and apologized like a gent.

"Boy," I hollers, "you may look like a durned fool and you may act like one but you ain't and I'll tell the world you ain't!"

"So you're satisfied with my work, sir?" he asks, with a little rasp in his voice.

"I'm so tee-totally satisfied that I considers you the best deputy I've got!" says I, honest and frank.

"That's what I've been waitin' to hear," he nods. "Thank you. That's what I've worked and suffered for. I wanted to prove I could handle the job. A matter o' pride, you might say. All right, then; I resign."

"Resign?" I yelps.

"Yes," says he. "I'm goin' to take charge o' Sally's father's ranch. I like the country and I like the town. She ain't a tough town. She's a nice town. All she needed was a little cleanin'. So *adios,* Mister Sheriff, and you'll have to run the county without me because I've stood about all your damned foolishness that I ever intend to!"

"But listen!" I shouts, ignorin' his last remark. "Don't go 'way like that! I need you!"

"No," he says. "I'm aimin' to git married and settle down. You'll have to git along without me. But next time you meets up with a tenderfoot, Mister, treat him decent because he might be less of a durned fool than you think he is."

So make yourself to home, stranger, and the jail is yours, includin' the new powder-puff which we have installed for female malefactors which is sure to bulge into our midst as soon as we git a little more civilized. Make yourself comf'table. Time was when I'd have bounced you out o' here like lightnin', but—hell, what's the use! He may be right!

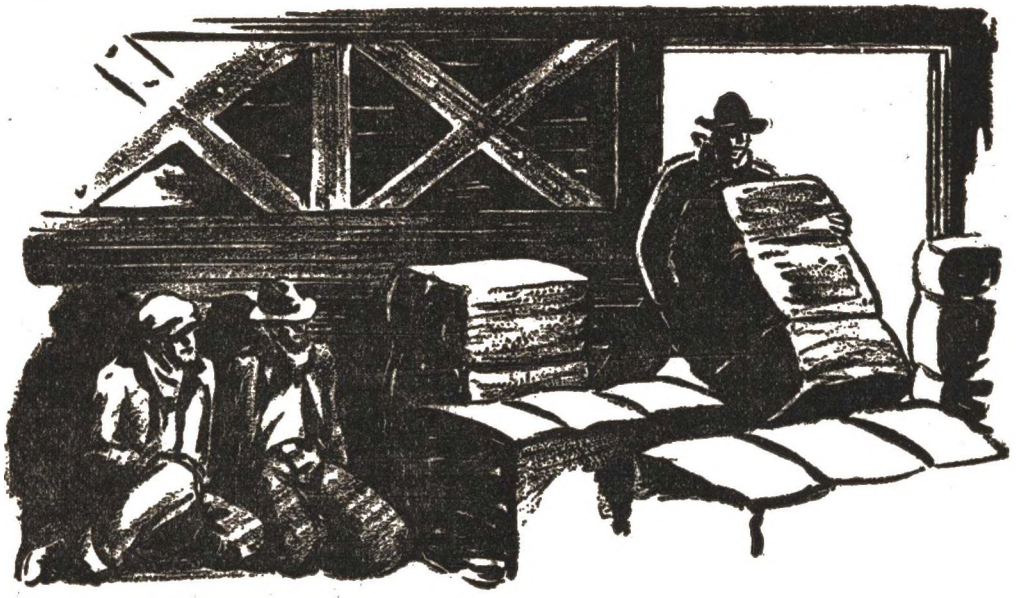
CAUGHT A WHALE IN HIS OIL WELL.

WHEN an oil well driller loses his bit or other tools in the hole he has to "go fishing for them" in the parlance of the oil game. But J. W. Pippin, manager of the American Well and Prospect Company, operating in the Randado, Texas field probably is the only man who ever caught a real fish in a well—a whale at that—and he wasn't really fishing when he did it.

Recently while drilling at a depth of 1,295 feet in one of his wells, Pippin observed that the bit was striking a very hard substance, which was penetrated with difficulty.

Interested, he baled the well and brought up a number of pieces of the skeleton of a prehistoric whale, which had died millions of years before, and whose remains had been buried and preserved in the slowly mounting sediments at the bottom of an ancient sea.

F. H.



THE HELL TRAIN

By RUSSELL HAYS

Author of "Gunmen, F. O. B.," "Alias the Whip-poor-will," etc.

A REPUTATION ISN'T A BAD THING TO HAVE, RIDING THE RODS ON A BITTER COLD NIGHT WITH A MURDEROUS BRAKEMAN ON THE RAMPAGE AND DEATH IN EVERY SWIFTLY TAKEN CURVE OF THE FAST FREIGHT

STARLIGHT flecked the sky like golden dust strewn on a dome of deep blue velvet. Pale yellow, the lop-sided half of a moon leered malevolently down on wind-bitten Kansas prairies. And through the night, like a giant steel bolt capped with light, roared No. 64; manifest, scheduled to make Denver before noon the next day. Braced against the back end of an oil tanker near the tail of it rode two 'boes, jaws set to mock the numbing cold.

The freight was making a slow curve, and the man on the inside could look up the gliding line of tankers, half the length of the train. His fingers clutched suddenly tighter on the pipe railing of the car. He leaned forward, head thrust out into the smudgy streamer of smoke whipped back from the engine.

"God a'mighty!" he whispered. "The shack's unloadin' the gang up there!"

The other 'bo pulled himself along the railing to see, his arm through a pair of crutches and his leather pad of a foot dragging on the runway. "Naw? Goin' this fast? For Pete's sake!"

They stared out through the night. A dozen cars ahead of them a lantern moved in small, eccentric circles. Shadowed figures, blacker blurs against the rounded face of the tanker, retreated before its pin-pointed glow. One of them threw up an arm defensively. Another climbed down the steps, poised there a moment, then leaped wildly. Was swallowed up in the flowing surface of the roadbed. The man behind him followed. The two remaining 'boes seemed to hesitate, seemed to protest. An orange-yellow dash of flame stabbed the night, the gun's report muffled in the roar of wheels and the clang of couplings.

"Usin' a gat! Plugged that guy. See 'im, he's swayin'—must be hit bad! There he goes. Right on his head!"

"Killed him?" whispered the crippie.

"Like as not. The other one, he's unloadin' now. Took it pretty."

THE yellow dot of the lantern grew still, as though the man holding it stood gloating at the empty runway before him. The wind hissed and shrieked down the smoke blackened car tops, eddied around the ends of the tankers. Steel groaned against steel in the swaying cars. The shack's coat must have been whipped in front of the lantern, for it seemed to flicker. Then it commenced moving toward the rear of the train.

The cripple grabbed at his companion's arm. "He's comin' this way!" he whined. "What—what we goin' to do?"

"Jump for it, I guess," said the other grimly. He was a hulking bruiser of a man with a flat, twisted nose and hard blue eyes, far seeing as a frigate bird's. "Nothin' else to do. He's got the law with him. What's he care if yuh break a leg? Probably give you a laugh!"

"But, man—I can't get off goin' this fast!"

Flat Nose turned to look queerly at the cripple. "Ain't you Nitro Joe?"

"Me? Naw, who's he?"

Flat Nose shrugged. "Well, yuh sure had me fooled! Why'd yuh think I been ridin' with yuh, huh? An' yuh ain't Nitro Joe! Joke on me. Well, I'm goin' to sneak back close to the caboose. Maybe bein' as you're a crip he'll let yuh stick—yuh feed 'im a good line."

The big 'bo turned to leap easily back to the next tanker. Landed lightly as a pouncing cat. The crip whirled to stretch out an arm entreatingly after him. Something akin to terror was on his thin pointed face, grayish looking through its mask of grime. "Aw say—yuh ain't leavin' me, Buddy? Give me a hand? We might be able to dodge around the car."

Flat Nose stopped to look back. He shrugged again. "Don't kid yourself! Give 'im a soft line. You're a crip. Hell!" He hurried away, following the pipe railing hand over hand like a sailor.

The crip cringed back against the rounded end of the tanker. His thin lips drew back in a snarl as he sent a curse after the fleeing man's back. "The yellow belly!"

FLAT NOSE glanced back at him once, annoyedly. "Huh, what's he want me to do? Get my neck broke on his account?" he muttered to himself. He moved faster, as one who flees from his conscience. "A crip ain't got no business hittin' the road, nohow!" He swung on to the next car. "He'd ought to be able to soft-soap that shack?"

The 'bo licked his chapped lips. Glanced back again. The square end of a boxcar was thrust up at the end of the tanker. He grabbed the ladder and swarmed up. Ahead of him, across four car tops, he could see the lighted tower of the caboose. It was empty. That was good. He could probably sneak up to the car next to it and ditch down at the bottom of the ladder until the brakie passed. Not much chance of the latter looking that close to the caboose.

A good enough plan—except for that damn crip! The 'bo's blue eyes narrowed and he scowled back across the tankers. The chill wind slapped at his thick, battered features. It would be pretty tough to be a crip that way. Likely break his neck if he got throwed off. Mean brakie. Must be pretty hard flashin' a gat so quick. Somebody ought to croak the devil!

He moved on again. There were end doors in these cars. A fellow might bust in one of them and hide out. Still, if a man got caught, it'd probably be two years in the stir. It wasn't worth it. Be a good place for the crip though. The fool! Now if he'd just been Nitro Joe they'd both been settin' pretty. Not much chance of the shack bothering Joe. But the crip. Damn that crip!

"He'd ought to be throwed off, tryin' to tie to a fellow that way," growled Flat Nose.

He spit disgustedly into the wind. Took a couple more steps toward the caboose, halted in indecision. He snorted angrily as he rubbed a calloused palm across the stiff stubble on his chin. Then he whirled abruptly and went racing back toward the tankers. He swung out on either side of them, trying to spot the brakie's lantern. The manifest was on the straightaway now, however, and he had no success. Too close, anyhow, no doubt.

The cripple still crouched at the end of the third tanker forward. He stared up hopelessly as Flat Nose leaped to the runway beside him. "What's the matter?"

"Nothin'. Come on, an' make it snappy. We'll try ditchin' in one of them boxcars back there." Flat Nose felt a strange tightening in his throat at the haunting look of gratitude the crip sent up at him. He swore to cover his feeling. "Think yuh can make it?" he demanded gruffly.

"If you'll lend me a hand. From the other side. I'll try 'er." The crip brought one of his crutches up under his armpit. He placed the rubber capped point of it on top of the coupling. If it slipped! Oh, well, a man died quickly.

Flat Nose had stepped to the other tanker and braced himself against the brake wheel. —He extended an arm muscled like an iron worker's. "All right, take 'er easy now. Ready? Hell, that was neat! You ought to get a job on the Orpheum."

THE cripple cackled mirthlessly. "I used to be there, one time," he said briefly. "Clogger." He lunged forward and caught the handrail. His agility was surprising. Clutching the rail with one hand, he moved swiftly along in front of Flat Nose with short, jerky steps, bracing himself with his crutch as he changed handholds. They came to the end of the tanker and swung over to the next one. When they had made it over to the last tanker, Flat Nose hurried on back to scramble up the ladder of the boxcar.

Looking up the tankers he could see the yellow glow of the brakie's lantern moving toward them a scant half dozen cars ahead. He dug a stubby knife from his pocket and hanging from the brake rod cut the seal of the small door in the end of the car. Luck was with him. The door slid back easily. He pocketed the knife and climbed over to the ladder. The crip was waiting for him at the bottom of it. Flat Nose reached out and caught his hand.

"Here, better let me take those crutches and throw 'em in," he said, as the crip made the ladder.

He took them and climbed back to the door. The cripple was right behind him, lowered himself down the brake rod and swung into the pitch darkness of the car. He looked out and saw the brakie's lantern bobbing along the side of the tanker they had been riding on. "Think he saw us?"

"Hope not!" panted Flat Nose, shoving shut the door. "It'd be the shoe factory for us. Nice an' warm in here, ain't it?"

The crip's teeth were chattering. "Yeh." He felt about him. The boxcar was filled to about three feet of the roof with closely packed boxes. He stretched out on them beside Flat Nose.

"If yuh ain't scared of gettin' crummy," said the latter, "we might as well spoon up together an' be comfortable."

The cripple pressed his back against the big 'bo's chest. They lay there breathing hard, the newspapers wrapped inside their coats crackling. After the numbing cold outside, the boxcar seemed cozily still and sheltered. The air was stuffy and smelled faintly of tar. No light penetrated through thick walls. Tomb-like darkness reigned, so jet black that it engulfed them like a cloak. The wind clutched at the roof with hissing fingers. Below them the wheels clicked monotonously over the rail ends.

Presently, there came a scraping sound from the direction of the ladder. A tiny sliver of light shone through the edge of the door.

"That damn shack," whispered Flat Nose. "Time he was gettin' here."

Heavy footsteps pounded along the runway on the roof. Stopped near the center of the car. Flat Nose could feel the crip holding his breath. Then the steps moved on again.

"Think he's wise to us?" asked the cripple.

"Naw—don't think so."

They lay there a quarter of an hour without speaking. The big 'bo stirred restlessly. He searched around in his pocket for a match. Scratched it on his shoe. Its sudden flare blinded them. Then, blinking, they saw that the car was loaded with closely-

built packing cases such as are used for shipping dry goods. The boxes were piled in evenly past the door, except for a space just beyond it where a couple were missing, probably a miscalculation in loading.

Flat Nose crawled over to where the name of the shipping firm was stamped on the top of one of the cases. His mouth tightened. He knit his thick, dark brows fiercely as he read aloud: "New Jersey Silk Mills, Inc." He turned back to the crip with a cold, musing stare. The match burnt down and died out. "We're in a hell of a mess!"

"Huh! Why?"

"Why? Buddy, this stuff is silk. We get caught in here, we'll be makin' shoes the next ten years. Likely a guard ridin' back in the caboose. Of all the damn rotten luck! I reckon that's why that lousy shack was unloadin' them fellows. Silk!"

"You think he was scared somebody'd bust in an' swipe it?"

"You said it. Boy, they watch this stuff like a hawk. Might of guessed it, bein' so close to the caboose this way. Well, the first stop they make, we're unloadin'. Yeh, an' I ain't ridin' this train out either."

"S-a-ay, I'm sure sorry." The crip meant it.

"Aw—that's all right. What the hell we care? All in the game."

They spooned back together again.

ONCE, they passed another train on a siding. The engine of the manifest answered its whistle with a high-ball and roared on into Colorado. The minutes dragged by. They had no conception of the world outside. Only of inky blackness and increasing cold. The cripple pulled his thin coat tighter about his bony shoulders. He shivered and cleared his throat huskily. "Who's this Nitro Joe you was talkin' about?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, him," said Flat Nose. "Ain't yuh never heard of Joe? Yuh must be new on the road."

"Yes, and I'll be stinkin' glad to get off it. Tryin' to make Frisco. Got an uncle with a filin' station out there. Goin' to give me a job."

"Huh, you're playin' in luck! Wish I had somethin' like that waitin' for me. But —funny about Joe. I'd a swore yuh was him when I lamped yuh. I seen 'im up in Wisconsin one time. Hell, though, you're liable to see him anywhere. Blowed in the glass stiff, that 'bo.

"Tell yuh about him. Seems he was ridin' a rattler down in Texas one time. Happened to be Waco Slim's train. Ever hear of him?"

"Huh uh."

"Well—he's a hardboiled brakie. Killer! Somethin' like the dude just went over this manifest. He got on durin' the strikes, an' they say he made a good thing out of it, pullin' down jack on the side one way another. I've seen 'im. He's a green-eyed devil an' quick as a cat. Joe was an old brakie himself. Got laid off by the strike. So when Slim comes along tryin' to shake 'im down, he tells 'im where to head in. They had a nice little argument till Slim throwed a gun on 'im and makes him unload.

"Then as Joe was goin' down the ladder, Slim steps on his fingers. Joe let go, and the wheels messed 'im up pretty bad. Got his legs, same as yours.

"I reckon Slim forgot 'im; but Joe didn't forget him. Soon as he gets healed up he climbs Slim's train again. Slim was hog lucky. Joe missed 'im, not bein' able to travel over the train account of his legs, till they pulls into Texarkana. Joe spots 'im tappin' hotboxes in the yards. He goes a-limpin' toward him, an' when he gets about thirty foot away pulls a bottle out of his pocket. A yard bull sneaks up an' grabs it just as he goes to throw it. Joe tries his damnest to rassle it away from 'im.

"'What're yuh tryin' to pull off?' the bull wants to know.

"'I'm goin' to kill that dirty houn'!" says Joe cold as ice, pointin' a finger at Slim. He makes a grab for the bottle, but don't get it.

"'Well, what've yuh got in this bottle?'

"'Nitroglycerine,' says Joe. 'An' I'm goin' to blow that devil to hell with it!'

"The judge gives him about ten months for attempted murder. That's how he got his name. Guess him bein' so serious that way, puts the fear of God in Slim. Soon as Joe gets out he gets him another bottle of soup. Goes huntin' for Slim again. Slim

gets cold feet when he hears about it. He beats it out to California an' goes to work under a phoney name. Joe is hot on his trail, but Slim beats 'im by a get away, 'fore he can get in range. They say Joe's been houndin' 'im all over the United States an' half of Canada.

"Yuh wouldn't think it to look at Joe. He's a quiet little duffer. Most the bulls don't bother him account of havin' been a railroad man. 'Nother reason is, a couple of bad brakies was found blowed to little pieces 'bout the same time Joe was seen goin' through them states. Nope, Nitro has got a year round pass any dang place he wants to go. Fellow back in K.C. told me he'd been kilt down in Florida somewheres. Dun't know. Sure did think you was him at first."

"Would be kinda handy if a man was plannin' to travel much," the crip agreed, a bit wistfully. "Blood-poison got my pegs."

"Sure tough."

THEY lapsed into silence again. Footsteps pounded along the runway.

"That cussed shack," said Flat Nose. "Maybe we're goin' on a sidin' if he's movin' up to the head end." He waited several minutes after the brakie had passed, then crept to the door. He shoved it back to make a peek hole of a crack. "Yeh, must be."

The engine sent out a long drawn out, wailing whistle in verification. Flat Nose followed the bobbing, winking eye of the brakie's lantern. "I'll get out soon as she stops. Chances is they're stoppin' to eat. 'Bout time."

A little later the manifest abruptly slackened speed. Couplings clanked and the boxcar bucked along as the brakes up in front took hold. The roar of the wheels quieted to a labored moan. The engine whistled again, shortly. The brakes went on with a bang and the manifest jerked to a standstill. Flat Nose opened the crack of the door wider. Peered out inquisitively into the starlit night, like a rat sniffing the air from the mouth of its burrow.

"What the heck!" he whispered. "Nothin' but a crossin'. Some jerkwater line. Ought to a remembered."

He closed the door again. They settled back down on the packing cases. A quick whistle. The brakes went off with a hissing sound. The rattling bang of couplings ran down the train. They moved on again, faster and faster. Roared through the night.

"They're sure makin' a long run. Ain't they got no division points out in this country?" asked the crip.

"Plenty of 'em, but they ain't no stoppin' places in between. These manifests ball-the-jack, run on a schedule same as limiteds. Jake with me, long as I'm out to make time. I'm figurin' on a minin' job down in Arizona. Guy up in Detroit told me about it. Diggin' copper. Huh, I was doin' a turn in a cooky factory back there. Too cold for my blood along them lakes."

"Cold, bu-r-r-r-r!" shivered the crip. "What the blazes? That shack's back again!"

"The devil must be roostin' on this car."

There was something stealthy about the footsteps on the runway. They came slowly to the middle of the car and stopped. The boes listened breathlessly. They could hear nothing. Several minutes passed. Then a dragging, scraping sound came down through the roof, moving toward the outside door on the south side.

"You think he heard me?" hissed the crip.

"Naw, he wouldn't be lookin' in that door. Somethin' funny here!"

The scraping sound continued. There was the bang of something or other that might have been a toe searching for a foothold against the side of the car. They could barely hear the sound of a mumbled curse above the din of the wheels. A clattering of the lock! The cripple clutched his crutches and stared fearfully through the inky blackness. Flat Nose, too, listened strainedly. His forehead wrinkled in a puzzling, worried frown.

"Cripes, I got it," he whispered. "It's

this damn silk! They're bustin' in. Goin' to dump it along the track an' have a pal pick it up in a truck. Must of come down from the roof with a ladder or somethin'. A hell of a pickle we're in!"

"Couldn't we sneak out, mebbe?"

"Not a chance. They's most likely two of 'em, anyhow. They'd think we's dicks. Plug us sure." Flat Nose reached out and tapped the crip on the shoulder. "Follow me close. I got an idea. There's a hole back here. 'Tain't likely they'll uncover it. Best chance, we got." He commenced creeping toward the space left in the top of the load but the two boes needed to level it off. The cripple kept one hand on his ankle to keep from losing him.

THEY made the hole and settled down in it. The crip leaned his crutches across the back of it, tried vainly to get them down out of sight. He finally managed it by thrusting the points down in a crack.

"Of all the stinkin' luck," Flat Nose was mumbling to himself. He fished a pair of brass knuckles out of his sock top and slipped them purposefully on his stubby fingers. "Well let the devils come, damn 'em!" His head stuck up above the hole, but as the door slid open and the moonlight flooded across the white lumber of the crates, he ducked down quickly.

Yet he had seen in a glance how the thieves, or thief, had worked it to reach the lock. A man swung at the end of a heavy rope, one hand grasping the sill of the door while he forced the door open with his foot. Flat Nose found a crack between a couple of boxes he could squint out through. The cripple sat straight and rigid, his chisel face a study in fear.

"That guy's got guts, I'll hand it to 'im for that," Flat Nose whispered in his ear. He scowled. "Now, what yuh know? It's the shack—the double-crossin' hi-jacker! So that's why he was makin' them boys unload! Say, wish I had a gat."

"Him—what'll he do if he finds us?"

"Don't ask it, Buddy. Just give 'im all yuh got. Shut-up! Can the talkin'."

They crouched there, forgetful of the cold. An ill assorted, grim and silent pair. The shack was losing no time. He went about his plundering with the knowing thoroughness of a house-breaker. Pulling himself into the car, his lean body a scant six feet from the crip's head, he dropped on his stomach to look back out the door, gazing searchingly back at the red lights of the caboose. Then ahead down the little used roadway that paralleled the tracks. A black square that might have been a truck was parked beside it. The shack reached out and waved a hand.

"Too cursed much light!" the 'boes heard him mutter.

He grabbed one of the silk crates by a corner and tugging mightily, worked it half out the door. With another quick glance up and down the train, he gave it a shove. The box hurled out and down to the graded side of the roadbed, bounced end over end and rolled to the bottom of it without breaking.

"Heavy stuff!" grunted the brakie.

He set to work frenziedly. Box after box went hurtling out the door. Some broke open as they landed, bolts of silk flying every which way. Others spun around and leaped as though they were made of rubber. Flat Nose half raised up to steal a glimpse of the robber's head. It was in the shadow however, and he was fearful of being seen. He crouched down again. It was worrying him considerably the way the brakie was eating into the load directly toward him. Curse him! A pretty scheme he had.

Flat Nose could see it plainly enough. The shack probably knew that the conductor was at his table in the caboose working over his papers. No chance of being seen from there. If there was a guard with the silk, he would no doubt feel safe with the brakie out running the car tops. Might be taking a nap? Or if he were looking, would be up in the tower of the caboose. No one would think of looking out the back of the tower. A slim chance. One worth taking.

After he had got his load off, the shack would most likely put a new seal on the door. That would be easy. The odds were that the robbery would not be discovered until the shipment reached its destination. Checking up on just where it had been rifled? Well, it wouldn't be so easy. The shack might be planning on making a getaway, anyhow.

A nice little stake he'd be making from this night's work!"

"Looks like he's cleanin' out toward us," the cripple whispered anxiously.

FLAT NOSE fingered his knucks. He placed his lips to the crip's ear. "Just you set tight. When he grabs this box in front of me, I'm jumpin' 'im! He won't have time to get out his gun."

The crip's hand, searching about the box beneath him, had found a short piece of board. "I'll try to bust him with this."

"Naw. Yuh stay out of it. See? I used to be in the ring. Give me plenty of room. I got a pair of knucks here."

"You better get him quick."

"Leave it to me, buddy."

The shack stopped suddenly, and they wondered why, apprehensively. He stood in the opening he had made around the door, gazing out up track. He seemed to be listening. Flat Nose's thick body grew tense. Then he sighed relievedly as the freight thundered over a trestle. So that was what he was waiting for? The brakie went to work again. But three boxes now stood between him and the hidden 'boes.

The crate he had grabbed hold of was wedged by the one on its right. The shack must have pinched his finger trying to jerk it loose. He swore nervously at it. Then laid hold of the wedging crate to trundle it savagely to the door. Evidently, this uncovered several more loose ones; for he dug a channel through the load nearly to the opposite door. A single box stood between it and Flat Nose's tense, squatted figure. The 'bo's flattened face was set and grim. His hard eyes slitted like an angry cat's.

He relaxed slightly as the shack left off digging into the car to take the boxes nearer the door. Flat Nose's left hand caressed his knucks. That had been close. Too damn close! He brushed against the crip as he leaned back the least bit. The man felt stiff as though he were frozen. Hell to be a cripple, Flat Nose was thinking.

"A dozen more now," he heard the brakie pant.

The shack paused a minute to breathe. Something seemed to amuse him. He chuckled half under his breath as though at some subtle joke. A rasping, nerve-scratching sound, it was. He tackled the silken spoils again, still chuckling.

FLAT NOSE realized of a sudden that he had cleared away all but one of the boxes shielding them. His pulse jumped. Another second. No use beatin' the gun. What the hell was he sweatin' about? He wiped a hairy wrist angrily across his brow. Hadn't they called him "The Iron Mucker" in the old day? What the hell! He braced his toes against the top of the box beneath him.

The brakie's back was turned as he wrestled a crate across the floor. Flat Nose raised up to steal a glance. Good thing to know the lay of the land. The boxes were piled two deep in the car. A space eight feet square had been cleared about the door. The moon showed clearly on the slivered floor. The shack's back was bent away from him. Something familiar about that back? Flat Nose scowled, licked his lips. What difference? What the hell!

The shack had hurled the box out into the night. Was back again. He grabbed the top crate in front of the 'boes. Tipped it over on the floor. Laid hold of the one underneath it. He sprang back, half raising his hands.

"Yeh!" snarled Flat Nose.

He crouched there, a hulking shadow. Leaped forward to the floor. His heavy fist whipped out from his waist in an upper-cut, swift as the tongue of a snake. The moonlight gleamed metallically on the knucks. They kissed the brakie on the point of the jaw, a glancing blow that slit the skin to the bone. "Stick up yur mitts! Damn yuh!" hissed the Iron Mucker.

The shack staggered back. His thin, nearly cadaverous face contracted in a startled grimace. He ducked in the same instant. Spit out a curse as he knocked down Flat Nose's left, following through with a jab

for his wind. Flat Nose had been right. The devil had guts! He drilled in with a straight to the 'bo's unguarded heart as Flat Nose set for a hook.

No dumb fighter, this bird! And he had the advantage of being warmed up. Flat Nose's long cramped limbs were leaden. He lashed out wildly for the killer's chest. Grunted heavily as the latter ducked and caught him in the groin. Flat Nose stumbled. They came up in a clinch near the door. Fists flying. The knucks gleaming in the moonlight. The brakie hooked both fists to the 'bo's jaw. Tried for the heart. Flat Nose swung with a hay-maker that took him on the cheek and hurled him back against the boxes.

THE 'bo rushed in to finish him off. They fought furiously, desperately. Their breath came in painful wheezes. They formed a blur of flailing fists; short, cutting, chopping blows. The shack's foot flashed up. Caught the 'bo in the stomach. Knocked him gasping to the floor. His hand shot into his pocket. Came out with a blackjack. It swung down on Flat Nose's head as he fought frenziedly to gain his feet. The 'bo slumped senseless, one arm dangling out the door.

"I'll fix you, smart boy!" muttered the brakie. He leaned forward, blackjack raised to crush the 'bo's skull.

"Stop—you!"

It was the cripple. He had slid to the floor. Stood there on his stub of a leg. His teeth showing from his thin face in a fearful grimace. Scared stiff! But in the half shadow he seemed to be grinning, leering. His barebone right arm was raised above his head, clutching the short length of board he had found. It looked small in the semi-darkness. Perhaps the shape of a bottle? He supported himself with his other hand. Hobbled forward.

The killer glanced back over his shoulder. Taken off guard, he cringed back. His hollow face went suddenly pasty, sallow! His eyes opened wide, in ghastly fear. As a murderer who sees a ghost!

"You—you!" he choked in a hoarse, strangled whisper.

The crip pushed closer. He was striking with his board. A futile blow. The killer raised a hand as though to ward it off. Shot a glance at the door, as one who measures infinitesimal fractions of an instant. Leaped toward it wildly, frantically. Saw too late that the train was crossing a trestle. He grabbed madly at the sill of the door. His fingernails clawed across in. Then as he shot out and down into the rushing darkness of a gulch bed forty feet below, he gave a terrible shrieking cry.

"God!" breathed the crip.

HE CRAWLED to the door and looked out. Shivered. He pulled himself over to Flat Nose. The 'bo was still breathing, moaning painfully. The cripple crouched there beside him, waiting for him to come to. The wind shrieked in the open door. The lonely miles unrolled swiftly. Lights appeared in the distance. Grew larger as the manifest roared toward them. At last, Flat Nose raised his head, shook it drunkenly.

From up in front the engine blew a throaty blast. A green switch light flickered past the door. The brakes went on.

"How you comin'? We got to unload quick!" the crip said excitedly. He crawled back to the boxes and got his crutches. Flat Nose got to his feet still groggy.

"Yeh, I can make it."

The freight jolted to a standstill. They scrambled out the door while the brakes still groaned. Hurried across the yards and gained the cover of an ice plant without being seen. The crip looked back to make certain. He sighed relievedly. "A clean getaway," he said.

Flat Nose rubbed his throbbing head. "What—what happened? After that devil floored me?"

The crip told him tersely. "I don't savvy it," he finished. "He acted like he'd seen a ghost! Jumped outta the door with the gosh-awfullest yell."

"The hell yuh say?" grunted Flat Nose. "An' yuh don't know why? Huh! That devil was Waco Slim."

THE BASSOON ZERO HOUR

By MELVIN LOSTUTTER

THIS PARTICULAR BANDSMAN WAS WORRIED. HE WAS A BASS-DRUMMER AND HE KNEW MARCHING ALONG WITH ONE ON AN ORDINARY ROAD IN THE WAR ZONE WASN'T SO EASY, LET ALONE JUMPING OVER TRENCHES AND BOB-WIRE WITHOUT MISSING A BEAT. BUT THERE WERE A FEW OTHER WORRIES IN STORE FOR HIM

WE WAS headed for the Front. Oh, why did I ever yearn to play the bass drum! Yes, and why was piccolo-players ever invented!

We been mostly ridin' in trucks, but we knowed damn good and well we wouldn't go over the top in no truck. Us boys o' the 419th Infantry Band had very little idea of what it would be like up there. We had heard so much about it and the reports was so conflictin' that we had just compromised by not believin' none of 'em. It seems funny now, but I had a kind o' hazy picture of us goin' over the top at the head o' the regiment playin' "The Stars and Stripes Forever"—playin' it by ear after the Heinies had shot our music off'n our lyres, and the tuba as full o' holes as the damn piccolo where the squareheads had let it have a load o' machinegun bullets.

So that is why I was cussin' about bein' a bass-drummer, because it ain't any too easy marchin' down a smooth road with one of 'em, let alone jumpin' over trenches and bob-wire without missin' a beat.

The clarinet players was worried about their lip, and the trombonists was feelin' kind o' modest about bein' clear up in front blowin' notes right in the enemy's face. We decided that of all the damn fools which joined the army, bandsmen was the worst.

To add to my misery was this Chester Wickens. I always did hate a piccolo player, but he was the worst one I ever saw. Even if he hadn't of been the big, fat slob that he was, I couldn't of felt very kindly toward him, for he could stick his instrument in his pocket and I wasn't sure I could even get mine in the trench. It's always hard to feel good toward anybody that's got it a lot softer than you have, even when they try to act half-way decent, which Chester didn't.

He was always braggin' about when he was in the conservatory of music, and I was just a self-made bass drummer. Learnt it by settin' in with the Salvation Army when they was short-handed. Besides, his folks back home sent him money while the

crap-shooters was takin' mine, and that's the way he beat me out o' my girl back at Noyers. I would of punched him in the jaw, but I couldn't reach it, and while I was hammerin' on his big feather-bed of a stummick, he crowned me with a empty bottle. After that, there was even less love lost between us than there had been before.

WE WAS hikin' nights and sleepin' in the woods in the daytime. We had left our instruments behind, but we expected 'em to be comin' up in a truck in time for us to lead the regiment over the top. We was gettin' pretty close now; could see the sausage balloons when it was light enough, and signal rockets after it got dark, and we knowed it would be about one more jump into the front lines.

Me and Chester had one little set-to on the way. I catch him alone one afternoon and tell him, "Big boy, we'll be havin' a chance pretty soon to see which one of us is the best soldier. When we get back to Noyers, Justine won't be able to see you for the medals on my chest!"

"Huh! She won't be able to see you at all—you're so little!"

"You'll be crawlin' in smaller holes than I can, when the bullets begin to fly," I retort. "You know why I don't beat the tar out of you, don't you?"

"Yes," says he. "Because you can't."

"Wrong again!" I sniff. "The reason is because I want you to see how a real soldier acts when he gets under fire. They'll be hangin' medals on me while they're still huntin' for you."

"All right," says Chester, very snooty. "I'll take you up on that. Whichever one of us does the best, the other one will step out of the way and let him have Justine when we get back."

So we left it go at that.

THEN one morning Lieutenant Christopher calls us all together and makes us a little speech.

"Men, I guess you have not heard what your duty is going to be in the drive which is about to come off. Well, you are going to be stretcher-bearers!" He hurried on when he sees us givin' each other a funny look. "This is a very noble and important duty. You will gather up your wounded comrades and carry them back to the dressing station so that their lives can be saved. I don't know just how well you are acquainted with this kind of duty. Are there any questions?"

"Yes," somebody pipes up. "Where will these wounded birds be at?"

"Oh, here and there," wavin' his hand indefinite. "Some of 'em will be where it isn't a bit dangerous to get them, hardly."

"What about the others?"

"Well, I wouldn't start worrying about them yet," says the looie.

He talks a while longer, and the more he says, the more I'm in favor of sendin' back after our instruments so we can lead the regiment over the top in a column of squads like we thought we was goin' to in the first place. Among other things, he says if we hear anyone holler, "First aid!" we're to run over and tie him up as quick as we can, and if any of us happens to accidentally get hit, for us to holler it ourself, then somebody will tie us up. He finishes by passin' out a bunch of arm-bands, white with red crosses on 'em.

"Before you go over," he says, "put these on your arms, and when you get up close to the Germans, maybe they won't shoot at you."

The next thing is to pair us off, for it takes two men to carry a stretcher. The sergeant calls several names, two at a time, then, "Private Tubbs——" that's me. "—— and Private Wickens."

Private Wickens—hell, that's Chester! Me and Chester is goin' to be a stretcher team!

Say, I don't like that arrangement a little bit. Even if I just loved piccolo players, I wouldn't want to work on the other end of a stretcher from a tall one like Chester! I know I'll have to carry most o' the load, for it will just naturally slide down on me. I glance over at the big slob, and I can see

he's mad about it, too; evidently he ain't thought o' that side of it.

That night we hike together so's we can take turns carryin' the stretcher. Before we have went very far, it's all I can do to keep from bustin' the big hayshaker. The road's full o' mud-puddles, and Chester wears No. 11 shoes; if he ain't crowdin' me over against the trucks on one side, he's shovin' me up against the machinegun mules on the other. I can't hardly get him to take the stretcher when his time comes, and then he begins pesterin' me right away to take it back again; he keeps makin' insultin' remarks, too, because he knows I know this ain't no place for me to shin up his leg and sock him in the jaw.

But after while we're up as far as the trucks care to go, and then we have more room; we don't mind the rain so much because we're soaked as full as we can get; the stretcher don't seem so heavy because our shoulders is paralyzed. So, from there on in, it ain't so bad—it's worse!

The road along here is chopped up pretty bad; there's trenches on both sides of it, and the rest o' the ground looks like it's been plowed. The Frogs had drove the Heinies out of it and back a ways; now all we have to do is drive them back a ways farther.

All of a sudden the air is filled with a noise like eighteen fire truck sirens comin' right at us. I hear somebody yell, "Hit the ground!" I'm too paralyzed to hit it; I just melt and run down on it. There's a flash and a roar, and something comes down on me like a ton o' bricks.

"Oh, lordy, I'm hit!" I yell. "First aid! First aid!" Then I feel the projectile climbin' off'n me, and it's only Chester.

PRETTY soon we angle off into the trenches where we are to spend the night, and a very uncomfortable night it turns out to be. I figure I'll be tickled to death when morning comes and it gets a little warmer, but, when all of a sudden the big guns begin bangin' away, I don't know whether I'm so glad or not—it's a little too goshdamn warm!

Over the doughboys go. Then over we go!

It don't take me long to see that whoever is runnin' this war has never run one before. He is *all wet!* Here we are—stretcher-bearers, not supposed to fight or be fought at—and they've put us in a place where it seems like there's more shells bustin' than any place else in the whole battle.

Me and Chester are just walkin' along carryin' our stretcher. That is, I'm carryin' it. He's too busy floppin' to the ground every time a shell comes along to be bothered with no stretcher. So far we haven't had nobody to pick up. Then I see a boy fall and roll over like he's bad hit.

"Come on, dumbell!" I sniff at Chester, whose natural position in a fight is horizontal. "Let's get this boy, and then we can start back in a direction you'll like much better."

So we do. We load the lad on as easy as we can. He ain't very heavy, but by the time we've went about fifty yards over that rough country and around shell holes, and so on, I am good and tired. Must o' been a kilometer to the dressin' station.

Soon as we unloaded, they hurry us back for another one.

Well, that's all we got to do for an hour or so; then they give us some prisoners to do the heavy work, and me and Chester tie the boys up that's hit, and take turns about goin' back with the stretcher while the other one hunts for and fixes up other wounded ones. And all the time, the shells is bustin' here and there over the country where we have to go.

About noon, the doughboys dig in. They have went as far as they are supposed to, and now all they have got to do is lay in the holes they have dug. Is that all we got to do? I'll say it ain't! We just keep right on huntin' for lads that are hurt, and bandagin' them, and chasin' our Heinies here and there with the stretcher. Now and then a Boche plane comes over and gives us both barrels.

Oh, why did I ever learn to play the bass drum!

Along in the afternoon, we have got most of the wounded out, except them up close to where the line is at, and the regular stretcher-bearers are gettin' them. So they change us to a burial detail, which is hard work and not very pleasant.

NIGHT comes on, and I'm feelin' about as cross at everybody else as I am at Chester. They relieve us of our prisoners and head 'em back for the bull pen. Me and Chester stagger back to the dugout that is servin' as a kind of a headquarters for the band.

"Well, I feel like I have earned my dollar today, all right, all right!" I mutter. "I'll sure enjoy my night's sleep."

But the words ain't hardly out o' my mouth till here comes the sergeant.

"All right, you Wickens, and you Tubbs, up you come! I've got a little detail for you." He calls off four other names, too.

"Detail!" I groan. "Aw, Sarge, I'm too tired!"

"Well, hell!" the non-com snaps. "If you didn't want to work, what did you join this man's army for?"

"To play the bass drum," I hell him.

We lay around in the dugout for a couple hours, sleepin' what we can, then the sarge comes along and says, "Outside!"

He leads us to a pile o' boxes and turns us over to a corporal.

"Grab yourself one apiece," says the corp.

"What's in 'em?" Chester asks.

"You'll enjoy carryin' 'em more if you don't know," says the corp. "Just don't shake 'em up too much!"

That kind of arouses my curiosity.

I pick me up one. It is heavy and awkward to carry. I stagger along in the dark a ways, then the corp lets us set our boxes down to rest a minute.

"Corp," I says, "you might as well tell what's in 'em, for I don't enjoy carryin' them anyway."

"They are Stokes mortar shells," says the corp. "That is why I suggested that you don't rattle 'em around, or drop 'em. If they would go off, you wouldn't be able to hold 'em in the box for all hell!"

We stagger along again, trippin' over the little, fine telephone wires the Signal Corps has scattered all over the ground, and getting caught in the bob-wire that's left, and havin' to tear our clothes to get loose on account o' not bein' able to use our hands, and afraid all the time we will drop our box or fall in a hole with it. The corp lets us stop again.

"You was right," I tell him. "I ain't enjoyin' myself now even as much as I was!"

We carry them boxes about two and a half kilometers up to where the mortars are at, and then go back after another load. Some gas shells fallin' along the way help us to keep from thinkin' about how tired we are.

When we get through, we tumble into our dugout for what's left o' the night, and me and Chester are glad enough to bunk together, for we haven't got anything only each other to keep us warm. That gives me the best o' the bargain.

It seems like these generals can't never be satisfied. Here they've captured about seven kilometers the first day o' the fight, and next morning early they're at it again. The barrage starts, the doughboys pile out, ant over we go right after 'em.

MAYBE I better explain a little about the lay o' the land before it gets too late, because that was important in the way things came out. Our line was along the north edge of a long, irreg'lar strip of woods which ran farther north on its west side than it did on its east. The Heinies was layin' in woodland, too, but theirs was more broke up in pieces. In between the lines was a little, thick woods over toward our right. I didn't know whether there was anybody in that one or not.

Well, it seems like our attack is more over to the left, and the doughboys ain't goin' to fast today. The Heinies has got a chance to get all set, and is makin' it too hot for 'em. I might say they was makin' it too hot for us stretcher-bearers, too. Seems like we have got right up to where the fightin' is at, and there is going to be plenty o' boys for us to pick up and hustle back.

I am dead tired and almost paralyzed, but not enough so that I don't mind the bang o' the shells right up close and the

pop and crackle o' the machinegun bullets past my ears.

Things are so confused that it's kind o' hard to tell it straight. Anyway, we're follerin' some outfit right out into that open country between the woods we been in and the one the Heinies is in. Just as we go past the west side o' that little woods I told you about, a machinegunner from some extra good place up front opens up on us. Down go the doughboys, and me and Chester too. Several of 'em was hit, and the rest are huggin' the ground so they won't be, includin' me and Chester.

The fire slackens, and the looie o' this platoon gets his men up and starts movin' forward again, but anglin' off more to the left, for I guess he don't want to go straight into that machinegun. Chester starts to foller.

"Hey, you big boob!" I yells. "Whaddye think you're out here for—just for the walk? Let's get some o' these wounded boys to cover!"

He acts like he thinks he would feel safer goin' along with the platoon, which I do too, as far as that's concerned, but he comes back. We find a feller that's hit pretty bad in the leg, tie him up, put him on the stretcher and start back. That gives us a chance to see something we ain't noticed before—there's a regular barrage tearin' up the ground back there where we'll have to go.

Then the machine-gunner cuts loose at us.

"Set him down!" Chester yells. He wants to flop, but I know that ain't likely to be good for our wounded boy or for us either, on account o' the ground here bein' so level.

"Set him down, hell!" I snort. "Let's try to make that little patch o' woods!"

So, much to Chester's dislike, we start for it on the double.

THE gunner changes his mind and turns his attention to someone else. We go tearin' in through the bushes to where the trees are big enough to protect us. Then we set the stretcher down for a minute so's we can catch our wind. I notice Chester gazin' out into where the woods is thicker. It's pretty dark in there.

"That's funny," he says.

"What's funny?" says I.

"I don't see no signs of any Americans," says he.

That makes me feel a little queer, because I'd forgot about this woods bein' outside of our lines, and, like I said, it seemed like the doughboys had avoided it when they started their attack.

"Let's look around a little and see what we've got into," I suggest.

"Not me!" he snorts. "We're tearin' out o' here for someplace we know about!"

That's against my better judgment, for I don't enjoy this flounderin' along through territory which you don't know who's in it. But we pick our stretcher up and start on, keepin' over to the edge so we can get out quick if necessary.

The old boy we're carryin' is gettin' pretty heavy, and we come to a lot of briars so we have got to take our choice of gettin' clear out in the open or goin' back farther in the woods. We stop to rest a minute and decide which to do. Then I have a sudden hunch that all is not so well.

"Chester," I says very positive, "I am goin' to take a look before I go any farther. If you don't want to, you can shut your eyes!"

"Better not," he warns. "Let's get out o' here."

"Aw, hell, just because you're scared ain't any sign I am!" I retort. I guess I was a little bit, but I didn't want him to know it.

I GO slippin' out into the woods, lookin' carefully this way and that. Once I glance back and see Chester is doin' a little snoopin', too, but stayin' closter to the stretcher. Then I leave him out of sight.

I don't go very far, and I ain't been gone very long till I hear a little confusion back there, so I tear back on the run. What do you suppose I see?

Chester all ruffled up like a settin' hen and shakin' somebody around like a rag doll—and it's a Heinie!

I'm plumb flabbergasted. "Why—why, where'd you get him?" I demand. I can't keep from talkin' respectful, for here Chester has went and captured a squarehead without any gun. He is still very nervous

and excited, but not too much for him to answer me proud and condescendin'.

"I—I found him in—in the bushes. I jumped on him just in time to—to keep him from shootin' me. See here?" He holds up a Luger pistol he's took off'n the Heinie. "Did you see anything out in the woods?"

I shake my head.

"Well, let's be gettin' on then," he says very authoritative, and I act like he's the boss, because he's kind o' got it on me now.

He makes his prisoner take his end o' the stretcher, and I take mine, which is far from a agreeable arrangement as far as I'm concerned. We haven't went very far till my awe at the big boob begins to wear off. I know it's just a accident that he captured the squarehead.

"Wait!" I puff. "Let's stop and rest a minute."

"No," says Chester. "We want to hurry and get out o' here!"

"Well, then you take this end o' the stretcher a piece."

"No. I got to guard my prisoner."

"Halt!" I snaps at the Heinie. And he halts. I set my end firmly down, and he follows suit after a questioning look at Chester.

"Now," says I, "I'm goin' to rest; and while I rest, I'm goin' to look again. This bird is probably not the only one in the woods!"

"Oh, yes he is," says Chester. "He said he was!"

"And of course you believed him!" I sniff. "Well, give me the gat for a few minutes."

"I'll have to have it to guard my prisoner," Chester replies.

"Why, you big bum, you could set on him that long!"

But he refuses, and I have to go out on my reconnoiter unarmed.

When I get out a little ways, I see some wooden barrack buildings about forty yards off. "That's where the Heinies will be if there is any more," I mutter, and start slippin' up to 'em.

Pretty soon I'm close enough so I can see they're pretty much messed up like a shell has hit 'em. I move up closer, very still and careful. I don't see nor hear nothin'.

Then I get where I can see into the clearin' between 'em. The ground is covered with pieces o' boards and tar paper which the shell has throwed in every direction. What's that shinin' dimly on the ground? Yes, and what's that thing that looks like a bass drum?

It's too much for my curiosity. I go slippin' in to take a close look.

It *is* a bass drum! Both heads out and the shell splintered, but still a bass drum. And the thing I saw shinin' is a trombone —held tight in the hand of a dead Heinie. There's two or three other instruments layin' around, all pretty badly battered up. Kind of a spooky sight for a bandsman! Looks like there's been a band quartered in these buildin's, and they have got took unaware by our bombardment. In spite o' my creepy feelin', I look around.

AND there, right by my feet is a bassoon! I always did want one o' them things. This one don't seem to be damaged much, only the white ring is gone from the top of it. I grab it up and start back to where I left Chester and the wounded boy.

Something tells me to be careful. Instead o' goin' battlin' back, like I would o' done, I slip through the trees and come up easy. And it's a good thing I do.

The first glimpse shows me there's somebody present besides my comrade and our prisoner. I slide up behind a low bush pretty close to 'em so I can see better.

There's Chester with his hands up, his face shinin' white as a sheet in the gloom o' the woods, and four new Heinies gangin' around him, guns pointed at him. The prisoner is jumpin' up and down for joy.

After the first shock, it's all I can do to keep from bustin' out laughin'. The idea o' Chester, so cocky two minutes ago about capturin' his Heinie, lookin' so meek and lowly now that the tables is turned. And I won't lose my bet, for it's goin' to be

easy to be at least as heroic as he'll be from now on in!

But this feelin' lasts only a minute. My mind begins workin' like lightning.

My first thought is to just slip off while the slippin' is good. Personally, I don't care if Chester is captured; it'll be good riddance.

Then another thought flashes through my mind—what about the wounded boy? They may kill him just to get him out o' the way. Not only that, but I suddenly realize that I can't even go off and leave Chester in a pickle like this! Much as I hate the big slob, he's an American, and it's my duty to stand by him. Besides, it won't do any real good to let him stay captured, for the Band will just get another piccolo player, and I'll be as bad off as I was before!

BUT what can I do about it? I don't have nothin' to fight with. I couldn't even tackle one o' these Heinies, let alone all five!

Then I have a hunch that almost takes my breath. Well, I'll try it, and if it don't work, there'll just be one more job for the next burial detail that comes along.

I rise up, yell and jerk the old bassoon down on the Heinies.

"Say *kamarad*, you gosh-damn kraut-eaters!"

They jump two feet in the air, and turn with their hands clawin' for the sky and their eyes big as saucers.

"Machinengewehr!" I hear one of 'em gasp. That means machinegun.

It's just what I was hopin' for. The end of a bassoon looks a good deal like a machine-gun, and would look more like it than ever in a dark woods, especially with a wild-eyed bird like I must o' been pointin' it at you. Anyway, it satisfies the Heinies.

Chester is still standin' there with his hands up, too dumb to know what it's all about.

"Frisk 'em of their hardware, dumbbell!" I snap. "For God's sake make yourself useful!"

Then he comes to and cleans my prisoners of their guns and trench knives, but he throws these tools in a pile.

"Hey!" I yell. "Keep a couple o' them gats and cover them birds!"

"Why, what's the use?" he asks in surprise. "What's the use when you've got 'em covered with a machinegun?"

"Oh, my lord!" I groan. "You're dumber than I thought you was!"

But he gets him a couple Lugers, and when I'm sure he's got the situation well in hand, I walk out with my old bassoon.

It's almost more than the Heinies can stand; they come pretty near startin' a riot!

I TAKE one o' the Lugers, we put the squareheads to carryin' the stretcher, and then we march 'em out into the open where the shells have about quit bustin' by now, and then on back to the lines.

I'm feelin' pretty good about winnin' my bet off'n Chester, for I know when we get back to Noyers he won't have the nerve to fool around Justine no more.

When I turn my prisoners over, they call the old colonel out, himself, to let him hear how I captured five Heinies with a busted bassoon.

"Who are you, and what outfit are you from?" he demands in amazement.

"Private Tubbs, sir, bass drummer of the Regimental Band," I answers with modest pride. "Bearin' stretchers just for the duration of the drive."

"Well, well," he says. "Young man, you're too good a stretcher-bearer to stay on with a measly band—I'm going to put you on steady!"

FRAGILE; USE NO HOOKS!

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

Author of "Lone Butte," "The Shoemaker of Salvador," etc.

INDIGO PETE WAS A DESERT RAT OF THE DEEPEST DYE. HE TOOK THAT YOUNG TENDERFOOT RODNEY CARSTAIRS UNDER HIS PROTECTION BECAUSE HE WAS SORRY FOR HIM AND THOUGHT HE COULD SHOW HIM A FEW THINGS. IN THE END IT WAS A QUESTION WHO HAD DONE THE SHOWING—THE WAY TO $1000 REWARD, FOR INSTANCE

INDIGO PETE, packing supplies on his burro, glanced up as the Limited stopped. Usually the Limited zoomed through Rainbow with an arrogant screech, in a whirl of dust and cinders. Even now, a few pulsating seconds and the train glided out, its slow, scornful staccato quickening to a stream of sound as it snored its way westward. It left a tall, thin young man in a tweed suit, straw hat and tan oxfords, standing on the station platform. He wore wide-rimmed glasses through which he gazed at the dwindling rails which vanished in a hot blur far down the desert. Pete's veiled but speculative glance veered from the tall young man to a large square carton on the baggage truck. Across the carton ran the printed legend: "Fragile. Use No Hooks." Pete nodded to himself and turned to his work.

The agent was locking up the office when the tall young man entered the waiting-room. Resenting the interruption—the agent's wife had just pounded on the floor above to call him to his noon meal—he slammed down the ticket window with unnecessary violence. "Pardon me," said the tall young man, "but there is no hotel here, is there?"

"Nope. Burned down."

"Quite so! I was afraid there was."

Taking this as a reflection on the town of Rainbow, the agent glared at the stranger a moment. "And no insane asylum, neither."

"Better and better; I believe I shall like it here." The tall young man's voice was mild, his blue eyes guileless as a babe's. The agent scowled at the other's fashionable raiment. "Anything else?"

"Why, yes; I would like to send a telegram. But first, would you mind telling me why there isn't an insane asylum here?"

"I ain't paid to answer fool questions," said the agent, turning to leave.

"But you are paid to send telegrams, aren't you? I wish to send a message, if you don't mind."

Having drafted the message the tall young man strolled out to the platform, blinking in the white glare of noon. He saw Pete and the burro, in the shade of the acacia near the end of the station. "What a charming little donkey!" he exclaimed as he approached.

Pete nodded. "Yes—all of that."

"I take it you don't live here?"

"Nope." Pete braced his foot against the

burro and hauled on the pack-rope. "And I'd sure hate to die here." The burro swelled against the rope. Pete longed to remonstrate in a fitting manner, but he knew the agent's wife would hear him, and possibly not approve.

"Why do you tie the little donkey up so tight?" queried the tall young man. "Has he been misbehaving?"

The rope went slack in Pete's hands and the burro swelled like an exponent of deep breathing. "Yes," said Pete. He kicked the burro in the stomach, and promptly hauled in about two feet of the slack. "Ever since she was born." Calamity, for such was the burro's given name, groaned like a lost soul.

"You brute!" The voice was distinctly feminine.

THE tall young man gave a start and glanced up at the window in the second story of the station. But he could discern nothing save a row of straggling geraniums in a flower box. "Those poor, deluded geraniums!" he said, feelingly. But he soon forgot the geraniums in watching Pete. He had read of such men, lean, hardy, slow of speech.

The station door popped open. "I'll learn you to call my wife a deluded geranium!" And the agent advanced swiftly on the astonished stranger. He had expected him to cringe, but the dude merely thrust his hands into his pockets and surveyed the belligerent agent with a mild stare. "Really! I didn't know you were married. You see, you didn't tell me. And I have no recollection of having spoken to your wife. As for calling her a deluded—Oh, I see! My dear fellow, my remark was occasioned by those wretched looking plants up there. I assure you I meant nothing personal."

"Don't you let that dude kid you, Joe!" called the lady behind the geraniums. "I heard him tell Indgo Pete you was a donkey, and Pete said you was ever since you was born. I heard him. And not satisfied with that, the dude calls me a deluded geranium! I heard him."

"But, madam, I haven't even seen you! However, I apologize if I have hurt your feelings."

"Talk is cheap," said the invisible lady.

The agent, bareheaded, his sleeves rolled up and a triangle of his red, hairy chest exposed to the world, wiped his hands on his striped overalls, as a butcher does when preparing to grasp a cleaver. He shook a bulbous fist in the stranger's face. "For two pins I'd mop up the street with you!"

"I'll admit it needs mopping. But you seem to forget that I have apologized."

"Don't let him kid you, Joe!"

"He don't kid me none!"

The tall young man's face twitched. He seemed perturbed. "I'm sorry, but I haven't any pins."

The agent laughed scornfully at his victim. Indigo Pete saw a tinge of red begin to surge up the victim's neck. "However," continued the stranger, "if you hit me when I have my glasses on, you're liable to arrest. On the other hand, if I take them off, I can't see very well. I might make a mistake and hit the other donkey."

Indigo Pete tugged at his long mustaches. The agent glanced round about, then the light dawned upon him. His eyes bulged, his chest swelled. He thrust out his chin, invitingly. "The other donkey, eh? Well, just hit that!"

"I'd really like to accommodate you, but I'm afraid of breaking my glasses."

THE agent unclosed his fist and slapped the stranger's face. The glasses went spinning. Indigo Pete hastened to salvage them. The tall young man blinked. *Pop* went his fist, missing the agent's chin, but not his nose. Such a quick and convincing delivery was staggering. To get one right in the beak like that from a pink-faced dude! And *pop*, went the stranger's other fist right on the same spot. The second *pop* drew red. Indigo Pete let out a joyful whoop. The agent rubbed his nose with the back of his hand, and charged, swinging both arms impartially. One of the wild swings landed. The thin young man's hat flew off and down he went. But he bounced up, blinking.

"Ah, there you are!" he cried cheerily, and working his arms like the side-rods of a runaway locomotive, he waded into his foe. He couldn't see any too well, but his sense of touch was amazing. The agent covered and backed, waiting for a chance to land a knockout. But having found the range, the thin young man kept right at it

with a series of straight rights and lefts disconcertingly quick and regular. The agent continued backing across the platform. The ceaseless barrage maddened him. He reached for a haymaker that would have knocked the roof off a boxcar, heard his wife call, "Look out, Joe!" and backed into the burro. Insulted, Calamity let go both barrels. Joe changed direction so swiftly that he literally ran into one of the stranger's stiff jabs, which touched the button. And Joe did the rest.

The thin young man staggered to the hitch-rail, breathing hard. "Is that the gentleman who invited me to hit his chin?" he asked, staring down at the agent

"That's him," replied Pete in a pleased tone.

"Too bad. I must have lost my temper."

"Well, here's your hat and your glasses, anyhow," said Pete.

"Thanks awfully! I don't suppose you know of a place where I could wash up a bit?"

Pete's reply was interrupted by the appearance of the agent's wife in the upstairs window. She was accompanied by a double-barreled shotgun which she held as though angling for bass. "Murderer!" she shrieked. *Bloom! Bloom!* exclaimed the shotgun, as though applauding her utterance. The lady vanished backward. Little spots of dust jumped up around the prostrate agent, who also jumped up and vanished down the street in a haze of speed.

"My goodness!" cried the tall young man. "That startled me."

"Him, too," said Pete in a happy tone. "Was you thinkin' of stayin' here long?"

"I had thought of it. The name, Rainbow, rather intrigued me And the place looked so restful. I tipped the conductor ten dollars to get him to stop, and see what has happened!"

"It'll cost you more than that if you stick around here long. The town constable is the agent's brother-in-law. And you seen what kind of woman his wife is." Pete jerked the tie rope loose. Heads began to appear in windows and doorways. Rainbow was slowly coming to life.

"Leaving?" queried the tall young man.

"Yes. Calamity's gettin' nervous."

PICKING up his suitcase the tall young man accompanied Pete to the edge of town. The few inhabitants naturally foregathered at the station. The tall young man hesitated. "You live somewhere out on the desert, I take it?"

"Yep. Somewhere."

"Would you consider taking a boarder?"

"Hell! They ain't room in the shack for more than me and my stove."

The tall young man shifted his suitcase to his other hand. "No objection to my walking with you a while?"

"Nope."

Calamity shuffled along. Pete followed. The tall young man glanced back at the town. "My name is Carstairs—Rodney Carstairs. I—that is—I have had a nervous breakdown, nothing serious, but I thought I would come West and see what the climate might do for me."

Pete stopped. "I'm Indigo Pete. Pete'll do. Glad to meet you." He turned and poked Calamity. They moved on. The sandy road became harder. The tall young man found it possible to walk beside Pete. "Do you know," he said, again shifting his suitcase which was becoming heavier with each step, "I have never hit a man in cold blood until today."

"You did a right good job for a beginner," said Pete.

"Of course I learned to box a bit, when I was at school. But my eyesight is rather poor when my glasses are off. And I have been told that I am very nervous. I was actually startled by that tremendous explosion. Was it their gas stove, do you think?"

"Nope, it weren't no gas stove. Scatter gun. And the old girl sure salivated her husband."

"Heavens! You don't mean to say the lady actually shot at us?"

"I reckon that's how she come to sting him."

Rodney Carstairs stopped and pondered a moment. They were quite a distance from Rainbow, and the desert round about was

beginning to look anything but hospitable. "If you were in—er—my shoes, what would you advise me to do?"

"Shake the sand out and keep goin'."

"You mean I may accompany you to your home?"

PETE nodded. He jerked the lash rope loose and packed the big, yellow suitcase on top of the load. Calamity groaned. They moved on again in a silence broken only by the crunch of their shoes and the soft shuffle of the burro's tiny feet. Young Mr. Carstairs had visioned the desert as a vast, smooth plain of glittering sand. He was surprised to see the land dotted with greasewood and cactus; still more surprised to see how little really flat land there was. In every direction lay ridges and hills, and beyond them dim ranges shimmering in the afternoon sunlight. They came to a forest of joshua trees, which Mr. Carstairs considered rather ghastly. Beyond the joshua forest the road plunged down into an arroyo, wriggled out of it somehow and skirted a group of grotesque erosions in strata of red, yellow and white. The pace was unhurried but steady. Occasionally Pete took advantage of a rise to survey the desert behind them. They had been traveling about two hours when he swung the burro from the road and onto a trackless flat covered with coarse pebbles. They had crossed the flat and had entered a shallow canyon when Calamity suddenly made a wild break sideway. Rodney Carstairs saw Pete slap his thigh as if a bee had stung him. Followed an explosion, a puff of smoke, and holstering his gun, Pete stepped over the writhing, headless rattlesnake. Rodney walked around it in a liberal arc. "You actually shot the creature's head off!" he said as he again overtook Pete.

"Yes. I like 'em better that way."

Presently Rodney sat down on a rock and shook the pebbles from his low shoes. When he caught up with Pete and Calamity they had begun the ascent of a dim, narrow trail which led up and onto a small plateau of a few acres in extent and as barren as a stove lid. Near the middle of the plateau Pete stopped and began to unlash the pack.

"Is the donkey getting tired?" queried Rodney.

"She was born tired." And down came the suitcase, off came the cowhide alforjas, pack-saddle and pads. Pete coiled the ropes. He hobbled the burro and picked up some greasewood roots he had gathered as he went along.

"Are we going to camp here?" asked Rodney.

"Right here." And Pete sliced bacon into a blackened skillet. "Early to camp." He put coffee into an equally black coffee pot. "Dry camp, but I reckon we can stand it." He arranged half of the roots in a little pyramid between two stones. "Somebody is followin' us on a gray hoss. Been followin' us quite a spell."

"Surely you don't mean an officer?"

"The constable at Rainbow rides a gray hoss. It's the only gray hoss I know about, around this section."

Rodney surveyed the barren plateau. He seemed perturbed. "But if it is an officer—which heaven forbid—why here I am, right in plain sight. There isn't the slightest chance of concealing myself. I don't regret having poked that blithering station agent, but one has to respect the authority of an officer."

"Some of them pills are mighty hard to respect. That constable is one of 'em. If it's him, and he don't lose our trail on that flat, back there, he ought to be pullin' in right soon. Suppose you crawl in between them alforjas and fold up all you kin. I'll throw this tarp over the heap. If he shows up he won't monkey with any of my stuff."

"But really, it seems perfectly ridiculous!"

"Sure, but do you notice Calamity's ears?"

"Yes. One can't help but notice them."

"Well, she knows there is some kind of a animal comin' up the canyon. You can't fool her."

RODNEY hesitated, looked around helplessly, and crawled between the alforjas. "Pull up them legs!" said Pete as

he laid the pack-sheet over the alforjas. He walked around the heap to note the general effect which he enhanced by laying a stone on each corner of the tarp. Then he made a fire and presently the invisible Mr. Carstairs could smell bacon and coffee. "Mr. Pete," he called cautiously.

"Now what's bitin' you?"

"Nothing, really. But premising the officer should become suspicious and raise the covering, what shall I do?"

"Nothin'. It's my outfit, and I didn't bust his brother-in-law in the nose."

Rodney failed to gather any comfort from Pete's reply. He recalled the killing of the rattlesnake, and surmised that Pete probably preferred constables and deputies the same way. He hoped the officer would not become suspicious. In such event, there would undoubtedly be a defunct constable, and a hanging bee in the state penitentiary. And he had come west for his health! His reflections were interrupted by Pete's voice. "Hey, Carsteps!"

"Yes?"

"Keep layin' still like you was a corpse on ice. Here comes the bride."

Rodney Carstairs shivered.

THE constable's faded overalls, black cotton shirt, cheap shoes and small felt hat lent him no distinction. Save for his badge of office and his six-shooter, he looked like a stray ranch hand. He rode a fleabitten gray horse that had an anxious look in its weary eyes. Having trailed two men and a burro to the rim of the plateau, the constable was surprised to see but one man and a burro, and the usual packs covered by a tarp. As he drew nearer he noticed that Indigo Pete was cooking a meal. Something queer about that, especially as there was a waterhole about three miles north.

As the constable rode up Pete speared a slice of bacon, laid it athwart a cold biscuit and poured a cup of coffee.

"Camping here?" queried the constable.

Pete's eyes bulged as he tried to swallow. A sip of hot coffee and he was able to reply. "Yes, I'm campin' here. Hell of a camp, eh? Fool burro went lame. Snake scared her down in the canyon. She jumped and lamed herself, somehow."

As Calamity was hobbled the constable had to take Pete's word concerning the lameness. "Yes, I seen the snake," admitted the officer. The burro might be lame, but that did not explain the absence of the man he was after. Pete devoured bacon and biscuit, and sipped coffee. The constable sniffed. He had ridden hard and far. Hunger gnawed at his vitals. "Gives a fella a appetite, ridin' this country," he observed genially.

"So I've heard." And Pete took another sip of coffee.

The constable swallowed hard. He was better than three hours from home and the sun would soon be down. "Say," he said, getting down to business, "did you see anything of a tall, thin young fella, dressed like a dude, with glasses and a straw hat up this way?"

"Straw hat up which way?"

"What I mean, he was wearin' a straw hat."

"He was wearin' it, eh?"

"Yes. And he was seen headin' up this way."

"Who seen him?"

"What I mean, he was seen leavin' Rainbow."

"Wearin' glasses?"

"That's him!"

Pete speared another slice of bacon. "Kind of thin-like, and pinkish in the face, with——"

"Yes. That's the fella!"

"Had on a gray suit, and yella shoes, and——"

"Yes. That's——"

"Say, who's describin' him, you or me?"

The constable bit his lip. "Listen, Pete. I don't want no trouble with you. I mean the fella that beat up Joe. You seen it, all right. If it hadn't been for the shootin' and me stayin' to help Doc White pick the birdshot out of Joe——"

"How many did you git?"

"What I mean, if I hadn't stayed to find out what the fella done, and help Doc White, I'd caught up with you fellas."

Pete gazed round about. "Which fellas? I don't see nobody but Calamity and me. And she's a her."

"Didn't a young fella like I said leave town with you?"

Pete emptied the coffee pot. "Sure; mebbe you seen his tracks down there in the canyon?"

The constable averred that he had.

"Well," said Pete, clearing his throat, "that fella was all right till we run onto that snake. Then he gives a yell and starts down the canyon on the high lope. He was tellin' me his nerves wasn't so good. And by the time I got Calamity up on her feet again, that fella was clean out of sight. Thinks I, if he can travel like that and him packin' a big yella suitcase, what could he do with nothin' on but his underdrawers?"

THE constable's unshaven face turned crimson. "You're mighty smart, ain't you! You think I'm goin' to swallow that?"

The constable's tone was ugly. The invisible Mr. Carstairs shivered as he listened for the first shot. But all he heard was Pete's voice, which, however, had changed in quality. "Mebbe not, Rupp. But here's somethin' you are goin' to swallow. Next time you come trailin' a dude, don't follow me. And if he was here you wouldn't take him back with you. The county line runs quarterin' across this butte about fifty yards south of where you're standin', so you're grazin' off your range. You never was much—but this side of the line you're nothin'. And another reason you wouldn't take him back, is *me*."

Constable Rupp was short, stocky and pretty handy in a rough-and-tumble, but there was that in Pete's beady black eye which told him he had better call it a day. He mounted, and jerking his horse's head around, rode toward the rim of the plateau. Pete sliced more bacon and poured water into the coffee pot. The constable disappeared below the rim.

"Come on out," said Pete.

"Has the officer departed?" asked Rodney lifting an edge of the tarp.

"Yes, he's went."

Rodney groaned softly as he unfolded his legs and emerged. He straightened up. "Most extraordinary yarn you told that officer. But it was rather decent of you. What a magnificent sunset!"

The absence of essential tableware failed to disconcert him. He sat down, split a cold biscuit and speared a slice of bacon with his penknife. Pete made a cigarette and smoked. Calamity approached Rodney Carstairs and sniffed. "Git to hell out of here!" cried Pete, waving her away.

PRESENTLY Rodney was startled by a harsh, ripping sound like the rending of some stout material. He glanced around. Calamity had her front feet on a portion of his straw hat which he had left near the packs. A spiral of straw dangled from her mouth. And the spiral was disappearing inch by inch. "Hey!" cried Pete and Rodney at the same time. Calamity, still munching, hopped away a few paces and turning stood and watched them.

"It won't hurt her none," said Pete consolingly.

"Most extraordinary! Do they fancy felt hats, also?"

"Sure! Hats, overalls, shoes, socks—why, I ketched Calamity eatin' a stick of giant powder once."

"Really? Didn't it make her sick?"

"Nope. Me. It was over to my place in Placer Canyon. When I come onto her chewin' that dynamite, I tried to git it away from her. Made her mad and she run me into the shack and started to kick the stove, me bein' behind it. When the oven door come off and like to bruk my leg, I lit out, figurin' to let her blow up if she felt like it. But she took after me again. Mebbe you heard tell of them Russians throwin' grub or a old uncle or somebody out so the wolves which is chasin' 'em will git a square meal and quit? Well, I didn't have no grub on me, so I pulls off my shirt and dropped it on a bush as I went by. Sure enough, Calamity stopped and commenced to eat that shirt. On account of the salt, most like. You see I was sweatin' plenty." And Pete stroked his long, black mustaches and gazed at the setting sun.

Rodney eyed him reproachfully. He suspected Pete of philandering with the truth. "Ah, yes; on account of the salt. No doubt! Did Calamity die, may I ask?"

Pete started slightly. He began to suspect that Mr. Carstairs was having a little fun, himself. Pete's dark eyes twinkled. "Yes, she died; choked to death on the neckband."

"Quite so!" Rodney's customary diffidence vanished. "An amazing instance of the reincarnation of a member," he gestured toward Calamity, "of the sub-genus asinus, or domestic ass, commonly called donkey. I don't imagine you have ever choked to death? No? You have missed something."

"Hold on," cried Pete, throwing up his hands. "You win!"

II

RODNEY CARSTAIRS sat up and yawned in the face of the morning sun. He felt in his suitcase for his glasses. His gaze slid down the cloudless sky to the edge of a far mountain range touched to gold by the dawn. His perspective shortened to Indigo Pete squatted before a tiny fire. Immediately Rodney Carstairs's recollections awakened. Rainbow—geraniums—blithering station agent—battle—flight—pursuit—business of folding up—arrival and departure of peace officer—Calamity's unnatural appetite—conviviality—talk—starlight—oblivion. And in spite of the hardest bed he had ever slept on, he had slept well.

He stretched, shivered, drew his flowered-silk dressing-gown about him. "Good morning, Pete!"

"Mornin', Rod. How'd you make it?"

"Er—what, may I ask?"

"Sleep. Kind of stiff and sore, mebbe?"

"Yes, rather. My hip feels like a knothole in a board." Rodney stretched again. "But a cold shower will tone me up amazingly."

"She won't rain, today, but you just take a dive into this here coffee. It'll set you to runnin' rings 'round yourself."

"Indeed? On account of the salt, possibly." Rodney removed and folded his dressing-gown. He took up a towel and rising, surveyed the morning desert. "I don't suppose there is a stream or a lake in the vicinity?"

"Nearest water is three miles north."

"Quite so. I'll postpone my bath."

Pete stared gravely at Mr. Carstairs who, clad only in a single garment of light texture, was arranging his shaving things. Presently Rodney asked if he might have some hot water. Pete shook his head. "All the water is in the coffee pot."

"The water for washing one's hands and face, and so on?"

"Yep. Out here I always aim to keep washed up a day ahead."

Rodney tucked his shaving kit back in the suitcase. "Of course, my fault entirely." Then, observing Pete's puzzled gaze, "I refer to the shortage of water."

Pete eyed the suitcase thoughtfully. "I have took mine straight when it was necessary."

"Absolutely!" And Rodney sunk his bare arms into the very vitals of the suitcase. Following an unheaval of silk and fine linen, out came the aristocratic looking bottle which he shook experimentally.

"Sounds reasonable," observed Pete.

And almost immediately the morning became brighter. To Rodney the battered coffee pot was a chalice and its contents a benediction. Bacon had a new and soul-stirring flavor. Cold biscuits were as manna, but becoming scarce. Feeling very much the outdoor man in sleeveless undershirt, tweed trousers, silk neckerchief and cap, Rodney offered to help Pete pack the burro. Pete drew the line at that. So Rodney watched and asked questions as Pete slung the alforjas, laid the pack-cloth and threw the hitch. "Amazing!" said Rodney, impressed by Pete's deftness. "But why do you lace her up so tight?"

"To improve her shape," replied Pete solemnly.

Rodney's sympathy found expression in patting the burro's flank. Calamity promptly retaliated by patting Rodney in the mid-section with an angling kick. He sat down and stared at her. "Ungrateful little beast!" he muttered, rubbing his waistline.

"Did she peel you?"

"It was not a glancing blow," replied Rodney as he got to his feet. "And furthermore, I don't care how tight you lace the little devil."

THEY drifted across the plateau and down into the canyon, a rugged, picturesque hollow which wound on and out to a morning expanse such as Rodney had never seen. He whistled. This was the life! You went when and where you pleased, stopped where you pleased, wore what you pleased, and when you craved entertainment, there was Pete, and—well, Calamity, if things got too dull. Most fitting name, that! The canyon opened onto an immense reach of brush-dotted land, rimmed by colorful hills. Not a bill-poster in sight. Nor a timetable. Rodney thought of the hotel suite waiting for him in Los Angeles. He would have to wire and cancel at the first opportunity. And his trunks, whizzing merrily westward. He visioned his uncle's expression upon receipt of the telegram advising him that his nephew had hopped off the train at Rainbow because he liked the name of the town. And would Aunt Hilda Carstairs rave! There would be a council of war at the Carstairs mansion. Rodney felt rather sorry for his uncle. "Aunt Hilda holds him responsible for everything, includng earthquakes," he reflected. And of course Aunt Hilda would call up Dorothy—Rodney flushed warmly as he murmured the name—and tell her that her fiance had not gone to Los Angeles, and, well, Aunt Hilda would imply that he had had another nervous breakdown. And Dorothy would come over and they would have a grand weep. Terrible mess! Rodney smiled grimly recalling his physician's advice, "Take it easy, Carstairs. Drink lots of water. Go to bed early. Avoid excitement. Refrain from strenuous exercise. Do not drink coffee, tea or alcoholic beverages." Since arriving in Rainbow he had broken seven of the eight commandments and had never felt better in his life.

A half-hour later they arrived at Rabbit Springs. Rodney gazed at the metallic scum on the white-rimmed pool, at the rusted tin cans, the wrinkled shoe curled up like a strip of overdone bacon, the ashes of old campfires. He decided to postpone his bath. He dipped his hands in the pool and washed them gingerly.

As they set out again Pete gestured toward the spring. "Somebody camped there last night. Came in from Death Valley way."

"Not police officers, I hope?"

"Nope. They weren't officers."

"Tourists, possibly?"

"Nope."

Rodney wondered why Pete had mentioned the matter at all. And why he seemed so preoccupied, for during the next two hours Pete spoke but twice. Once he said, "Hutt!" to the burro when she stopped, and once he said, "Hell, no!" when Rodney, who had been thinking of his fiancee, asked Pete if he were married.

BY MID-AFTERNOON they had arrived at the mouth of Placer Canyon. "My shack is up yonder about a mile," said Pete. Rodney was glad of the news. He was so hungry he could have eaten Calamity's halter with relish. They journeyed up a sloping and wide gravel bed strewn with immense boulders. Occasionally they passed a bleached and battered tree, stripped of its bark, and laying half-imbedded in the gravel. Above the wash the canyon narrowed. The far, low cliffs were edged with dwarfed trees. Just before rounding a bend Calamity stopped suddenly. Her long ears shot forward and remained rigid. Pete handed the burro's lead rope to Rodney. "You wait here a minute." And he walked to the angle of the bend and peered around it.

In a few seconds he came back. "Recollect them tracks I showed you at Rabbit Springs? Well, it looks like them fellas jumped my claim. They're up there at my shack. Got their saddle horses in my corral. Looks like they jumped my claim."

"But could they not be visitors, making a friendly call?"

"Not any. Visitors don't set in the doorway of your shack with a rifle acrost their knees, which one of 'em was doin'. The other was down by the creek, pannin' some dirt."

"This—these-ah—jumpers damage your claim at all?"

Pete drew a long breath. "No, they ain't

had time." And he explained just what claim-jumping meant.

Rodney was thrilled to the soles of his tan oxfords. "By Jove!" he cried as the situation began to dawn upon him. "It is possible I may be able to repay some of your kindness by helping you run off these jumpers. I have a Luger pistol in my suitcase—a present from my Uncle Gregory."

Pete shook his head. "Nope. That outfit don't look right to me. We'll try somethin' else, first. Say, are you willin' to bush out a couple of nights?"

"I have never done any bushing that I am aware of, but I am perfectly willing."

"I mean, sleep in the brush, like last night."

"Oh, that will be quite agreeable."

PETE swung Calamity around and they started down the canyon. At its mouth, they turned south and began a long climb into the high country. Just before sunset they halted in a clump of junipers and Pete unpacked and made supper. The subject of the invasion of Pete's claim was discussed while he dry-washed the cooking things. "From your description, I should judge they were rather desperate characters," said Rodney.

"If they ain't they're goin' to be. You see, Carsteps, they got hosses—saddle hosses but no pack hoss. And they got rifles, and this ain't no game country. And they come over from Death Valley way. I figure they jumped my claim, or else they're hidin' out."

"Do you contemplate surprising them, under cover of darkness?"

"I aim to set 'em afoot, first off."

"You mean start them walking?"

"I mean slip down tonight and steal their hosses so they can't travel."

"But don't you want them to leave?"

Pete restrained himself. He liked Mr. Carstairs. "I was forgettin' you wasn't raised in the West," he explained. "I'll try and give it to you in plain American talk. It's this way; them two night riders drifts over from Death Valley and beds down at Rabbit Springs, last evenin'. Come sunup they light a shuck for Placer Canyon. They trail up to my shack and findin' nobody holdin' her down they jumps my claim. By readin' sign they sabe only one hombre is workin' her, so, bein' heeled a plenty, and most likely on the prod, anyhow, they aim to run a whizzer on me when I show up. Mebbe they figure to make me ante up what dust I got cached, and the grub I'm packin' in, likewise. Then, if they don't tell me to curl my tail over the hill and keep goin', most like they plugs me and calls it a day. They got rifles. All I got is this here hogleg. I ain't organized to stampede 'em any."

"I see!" said Rodney, frowning heavily. "You plan to eject these jumpers by strategy rather than by force of arms."

Pete nodded, but said nothing. A little later Rodney followed him through a maze of junipers to the rim of the canyon. They lay on the rim and peered over. Almost directly below was the corrugated iron roof of Pete's cabin Between the back of the cabin and the canyon wall was a ragged pile of firewood. A distinct trail showed from the cabin to the pole corral, the lean-to where the tools were kept and a small stack of mountain meadow grass covered with a faded tarp held down by rocks. The buildings and corral were on a wide flat high above the level of the stream. Rodney noticed that the two horses in the corral were saddled, although their bridles were off. He could plainly hear voices in the cabin which was not over twenty feet below. A thin spiral of smoke curled from the stovepipe.

They lay listening and waiting for the invaders to appear. Finally Pete nudged Rodney. They rose and went back to their camp in the junipers. "No way of gettin' down except by jumpin' in the top of a tree and breakin' your leg, or slidin' down a rope," said Pete in reply to one of Rodney's questions. "I'm goin' up the canyon a ways, tie onto a juniper and slide down. But not till just afore daybreak."

"But suppose some unlooked-for contingency should detain you, perhaps permanently?"

"Why, you just take the hobbles off Calamity so she can rustle for herself. There's water up that gulch, there. Take the canteen and some grub and keep goin' downhill till you strike the trail to Rabbit Springs. The sun'll be on your left. From the Springs to Rainbow is a plain wagon road. You can't get lost."

"Yes. But premising you have been—that is——"

"Plugged?"

"Thanks! Yes. What shall I tell the authorities?"

"Tell 'em not to bother sendin' flowers."

III

ABOUT three o'clock Pete crawled from beneath the pack-cloth which was their only covering, and taking his pack ropes, told Rodney, who was but half-awake, that he expected to be back with the horses of the claim-jumpers about six o'clock.

"Good luck, old chap!" murmured Rodney, who hardly realized the importance of the occasion. In a few seconds he was again asleep.

At a spot well up the canyon rim from the cabin, Pete fastened his rope to a stout juniper and cautiously lowered himself into the canyon. Familiar with every rock and stub, he had no difficulty in making his way to the corral. The horses snorted and moved to the opposite side as he came up. As he would have to pass the cabin getting out of the canyon, he decided to ride one horse and lead the other. Then, in case the claim-jumpers heard him, he could go by on the run. He let the top pole down carefully, drew the next and lowered it, and was stooping to let down the third, when he heard the rush of feet behind him. He whirled, his six-shooter in his hand. Something crashed down on his head. Splinters of fire shot through his brain as he sank into a thundering abyss.

"Got him!" said Gregg to his partner Hornbeck, who came running from the lean-to. "I told you it was our play to bush clost to the horses instead of in the shack."

They dragged Pete to the lean-to, struck a match and investigated. "Desert rat," said Gregg. "Look at the soles of them shoes."

Gregg struck another match. Pete's face was chalk-white and streaked with blood. "Had a gun on him. Must have dropped it when I cracked him."

"I reckon we better light out of here," said Hornbeck. "Looks like you'd fixed him for keeps."

"You can't kill them kind," said Gregg, dropping the match. "You tie him up, while I go look for that gun."

SHORTLY after daybreak the two scraped up enough food to make a breakfast. Again Hornbeck suggested that they leave at once. Gregg cursed him for a fool. "We got to get some grub," he said, gesturing toward the empty shelves. "And we got to lay low for a spell on account of that Las Vegas job. I figure, by the tracks, that the fella that owns this outfit went out with a burro to get grub. And the way he left things looks like he was comin' back soon. We can't get any grub between here and the Panamints. Besides the horses are next to played out. Go get a bucket of water and I'll see if I can't make that rat talk. He ain't in here, afoot, without grub."

Rodney Carstairs awoke and realized with a vague feeling of apprehension that the sun had been up quite a while. His watch told him it was seven o'clock. Dressing hurriedly he stepped out of the circle of junipers and surveyed the slope below. Nothing but brush, sunshine and an occasional outcrop of rock met his troubled gaze. Even Calamity had disappeared. He decided to wait an hour, but after having awkwardly managed a breakfast of bacon and coffee, he became restless. Finally he strapped on the Luger pistol, and employing extreme caution, made his way through the junipers to the canyon rim. Near the door of the cabin and almost directly beneath him were two men, neither of whom, he realized at once, was Pete. Rodney could see the tops of their hats, their shoulders, not twenty feet below. The taller of the two gestured toward the pole corral. "There's his burro, all right. But where in hell is the pack?"

"If you hadn't just about brained him, mebbe he could tell us," growled the shorter man.

"He ain't so dumb as he makes out," declared the other. "And he's goin' to talk, or—" Rodney saw him touch the holster

at his hip—"he gits plugged."

Rodney was horrified. He surmised that Pete was the man who had been half-brained while trying to steal the horses. The men had mentioned a burro. Rodney's eyes veered toward the corral. Alongside it stood Calamity, who had during the night broken her hobbles and made her way home. As his eyes became adjusted to the sharp morning light, he began to survey the flat below in detail. Finally he discerned the figure of a man lying on the floor of the lean-to, his feet and legs in the sunlight, the upper part of his body in shadow. "This is terrible!" breathed Rodney as he crawled back from the canyon rim. He didn't know what to do. He thought of heaving a rock down on the unsuspecting jumpers. But he might miss them, or kill them, which would be worse. If he could get down into the canyon and manage to creep up on them with his Luger pistol, he might persuade them to refrain from plugging Pete. He moved along the rim, screened by the junipers. He came opposite the lean-to. In the shadows himself he could now see Pete clearly. He wished he could signal to him, let him know that he was in the vicinity.

PETE had descended by means of a rope. Rodney began looking for it, finally found it, saw that its lower end disappeared in the top of a small tree in the canyon bottom. He had never shinned down a rope. The very thought of letting himself over the edge of the cliff made him shiver. But he put his glasses in his pocket, gave a final glance round about, drew a deep breath and let himself over the edge. His long legs dangled in the air. The rope was small and hard to grip. "This," he breathed, "is going to be awkward." Closing his eyes he relaxed his grip slightly. He shot down, crashed through the top of the slender tree and landed on the ground in a breathless heap.

Gregg and his companion, who were sitting near the cabin doorway, jumped up and cocked their rifles. "It's that damn' burro!" said Gregg finally. Startled by the crash, Calamity had relieved her feelings by battering the corral poles with her hind feet.

Painfully aware of his hands, Rodney sat up, dazed but not discouraged. Putting on his glasses, he rose and peered down the canyon. The jumpers were standing near the cabin, evidently on the alert. He couldn't make a dash for the lean-to. So he got down and crawled from rock to rock, circling until he was behind the lean-to, where he paused to get his breath. Sweat was running into his eyes. He took off his glasses, wiped them, and adjusting them firmly, scurried around the end of the shed on hands and knees. "It's Carstairs," he whispered as Pete raised his head.

"How in hell did you git here?"

"Down that miserable little rope. Terribly hot, you know. Are you badly injured?"

"No. I just had my brains beat out, that's all."

"Yes, those jumpers. I heard them discussing it. Is there anything I can do?"

"Just cut these ropes off me and gimme that gun."

"Quite so!" And having liberated Pete, Rodney helped him to sit up. Pete stared at him dizzily. "No use!" he said, brushing his hand across his eyes. "I can't see good. But you gimme that gun and fix that rope around my legs like I was tied." And Pete lay back, while Rodney adjusted the rope. "Them fellas are out of grub and they are goin' to drift. They'll be comin' for their hosses, any time, now. You git behind the shed and lay low."

HUDDLED behind the shed, Rodney wondered what made his scalp so tight. Was it fear, or simply curiosity? He preferred to think it was the latter. He hadn't the least idea as to what might happen. With the chance of the jumpers appearing at any moment, he had had no time to question Pete. As minute after minute passed and nothing happened, he raised to his knees to stretch his cramped muscles. Level with his eyes was a large knothole through which he could see the interior of

the open-front shed and the corral beyond it. Pete lay with his eyes closed and his arms under him. He looked anything but dangerous, just then. Rodney heard voices, the sound of feet crunching across gravel.

"They're comin'," he whispered, wondering if Pete heard him. Two tough-looking men appeared in the open front of the shed. They carried rifles, and each had a bridle in his left hand. Rodney could not distinguish their features against the outer glare, but their general aspect was truculent. He saw Pete's arm leap up, heard his voice, sharp and venomous, "Drop them rifles!"

The shorter of the two dropped his rifle in sheer surprise. He raised his arms, the bridle dangling from his left hand. "Drop it!" snapped Pete as the other man hesitated. Pete was sitting up, the Luger centered on the desperado's chest. He dropped his rifle and raised his hands. But the men were still armed. Each had a holstered pistol at his hip, Pete was taking no chances. "Come and git 'em, Sheriff!" he called.

A tall, slim young man, wearing glasses, a golf cap and gray trousers to say nothing of a dudish-looking sweater, came around the end of the shed. He looked less like a sheriff than anything Gregg or Hornbeck had ever seen.

"Just take their guns," said Pete, referring to the six-shooters. Rodney thought he referred to the rifles on the ground. "Quite so!" he said briskly, and before Pete could warn him he stooped to pick up the nearest rifle. He came between the muzzle of the Luger and Gregg. With a yell to his partner to, "Get the other one!" Gregg jumped into Rodney, grabbed him and the two of them crashed down on Pete. In the melee Gregg's six-shooter fell from its holster. Pete, fighting like a wildcat, got his arms around Gregg's neck from behind and kept him from recovering the gun.

Rodney broke away and turned to engage Hornbeck who was circling the combatants, his six-shooter poised for a shot. Rodney grabbed up a shovel just as Hornbeck fired at him from the hip. The bullet spanged on the blade of the shovel and whined away into space. "You miserable jumper!" cried Rodney, and leaping at Hornbeck he whanged him on the head.

Hornbeck threw up his arm. Rodney swung again. The edge of the shovel caught Hornbeck across the wrist. With a howl of pain he dropped his pistol. "Take that!" shouted Rodney as he punched Hornbeck in the stomach with the point of the shovel. Hornbeck doubled up, saw his rifle just within reach and grabbed for it. "You would, would you!" sang Rodney, and the shovel swept down with a loud "whop." Hornbeck staggered, stared glassily, and melted to a heap. But the other jumper! Rodney swung around. Pete was down and Gregg was astride of him, choking him to death. "Drop it!" cried Rodney, as though Gregg were a fox-terrier and Pete was a much-prized golf cap. And without the slightest hesitation, Rodney swung the shovel, a deliberate downright blow that wilted Gregg like a thunderbolt.

ALWAYS at his best when excited, Rodney's mind was now working at top speed. He gathered up the scattered firearms and dropped them into a barrel. Then, fearing that the desperadoes might recover before he could find rope enough with which to tie them properly he seized upon the first thing at hand—a skein of baling wire, and fettered their ankles and wrists entirely to his satisfaction. Next, he went to help Pete up. But Pete's face seemed strangely blurred, his figure indistinct. Rodney put his hand to his eyes.

"What's the matter, Carsteps?" queried Pete in a groggy voice. "Did you git plugged?"

"I think not," replied Rodney. "I have just discovered that my glasses are missing." He remembered that during the excitement of battle he had been able to see quite well.

They found the cabin floor littered with torn paper, ashes and shreds of bark from the firewood. Unwashed cooking utensils littered the stove; tin cans, unwashed plates and cups were on the table. Pete picked up the coffee pot and shook it. "We

got to get that grub," he said. "Kin you climb a rope?"

"No, I'm afraid I can't."

"Me, nuther. But I got to be pretty sick when I can't ride a hoss. Recollec' where you come down that rope?"

"Quite well." Rodney gazed at the palms of his hands.

"Well, I'm goin' to ride 'round and lower the packs and your suitcase. You can unhitch' 'em as they come down."

"If you don't mind, lower my suitcase first. I have an extra pair of glasses in it."

WHILE Pete was gone, Rodney spent his time reviewing his experiences since disembarking from the Limited in Rainbow. He also wondered what his aunt and uncle would think when they heard of his escapades. It occurred to him that he had never been his own man—had never had a chance to be his own man until now. He recalled the label on thte carton in the station at Rainbow: "Fragile. Use No Hooks." He had merely noticed it then. Now it seemed like a sign and a portent. He flushed in the heat of a sudden resolution. Henceforth he would be captain of his own destiny. And immediately he thought of a girl named Dorothy, and speculated as to how much destiny a married captain could command. He strode up and down the cabin, which wasn't a great distance, but he covered several miles before a shout recalled him to his surroundings.

Making his way to the scene of his recent descent he found his suitcase dangling against the wall of the canyon. He unfastened the rope, which vanished. Equipped with his extra glasses he began carrying the packages and cans of provisions which Pete lowered in the alforjas, to the cabin. These he arranged on the shelves and then set about cleaning up the place. Pete arrived something over an hour later. Rodney had a fire going, and coffee on the stove.

"About the—er—jumpers," said Rodney, as they consumed a catch-as-catch-can meal; "isn't it possible that they need some attention?"

"Hell, I'm goin' to feed 'em, this evenin'. You can take 'em some water, if you like. But don't turn their hands loose. I'm goin' to turn in." And rising, Pete stalked to his bunk and lay down.

In less than five minutes Rodney returned. "Sorry to disturb you," he said, "but I think you had better come and look at one of the jumpers. He may be seriously injured. There is a very noticeable swelling in the region of his abdomen; the one I poked with the shovel."

"How much water did he drink?"

"None. He refused to drink any. The other one seemed quite thirsty."

PETE rose, grumbling and followed Rodney over to the lean-to. Gregg and Hornbeck sat propped up against the end wall of the shed. They exchanged a quick glance as Pete entered, then stared at him sullenly. "This one," said Rodney, indicating Hornbeck. Pete stooped, glanced at the "swelling" and with a swift movement jerked Hornbeck's shirt open. A narrow, newspaper-covered package tumbled out. Pete opened it and thumbed over the stiff, new banknotes. He thrust the package into his pocket. "Business must be good over Death Valley way," he said, gazing at his captives with renewed interest.

"We'll split with you," said Gregg.

"I'll do the splittin'," said Pete.

IV

THAT evening after the supper things had been put away, Pete counted the package of banknotes. "Set down," he said to Rodney, who stood watching him. "Now let's talk business. There's clost to ten thousand here, and we got the birds that stole it. Now if I take 'em into Rainbow and turn 'em over to the constable for breakin' into my shack and stealin' grub, they ain't goin' to tell him I got this dough, which same would be allowin' they robbed a bank, or somethin'. And they would git off easy, and naturally drift back here and lay for me. If I take 'em in and turn over the dough to him, most like he sticks it in his boot and says he never seen no money. He'd see me strung up for half what's here. Sooner or later they're goin' to trail these fellas up to this canyon. Suppose I just cache this dough and say nothin' and hold the fellas till a deputy shows up?"

"You mean keep the money?"

Pete nodded. Rodney looked around at

the meager furnishings of the cabin. "I suppose it is a temptation. But you don't really mean it, do you?"

"I could drift over to the coast and live comfortable the rest of my life, on ten thousand."

Rodney rose and paced up and down the room. Finally he came to the table and stood with his hands resting on it, looking at the sheaf of new greenbacks. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said, raising his eyes to meet Pete's unreadable gaze, "I'll buy that ten thousand. I'll give you a check for it. Then I can do what I please with the money."

"It's plenty to give a check for."

"Oh, I am rather comfortable, financially. And it would simply be an exchange of values, wouldn't it?"

"Mebbe."

"And if the money should be returned to the owner, those chaps would get a lighter sentence, wouldn't they?"

"Mebbe—if it was worked right."

"Very well." And Rodney opened his suitcase and fetched a checkbook and a fountain pen to the table. He made out a check and handed it to Pete. "I'll wire the First National, so you won't have any trouble collecting it. My uncle happens to be president."

Pete scanned the slip of paper, folded it and tore it in two "Fragile. Use no hooks," he murmured; then, "You win, Carsteps."

"On account of the salt, probably," said Rodney, smiling.

Pete stared blankly at him.

"I knew you didn't mean to keep the money," declared Rodney. "If you had, you would not have told me how much there was, nor would you have consulted me about it at all."

"You're sure whistlin' I wouldn't."

"Yes. But I can't quite picture you stealing in a second-hand manner. Your amazing dexterity with firearms and your attitude toward constables would incline me to believe that you would prefer to do your robbing first-hand, so to speak."

"And get away with it."

"Quite so. But you didn't, did you?"

For a long time after he had turned in for the night, Pete lay awake wondering just what Rodney had meant.

ABOUT two o'clock the following afternoon Pete arrived in Rainbow with his prisoners, who had walked the fifteen miles from Placer Canyon with their hands tied behind them. Pete rode one of their horses. Constable Rupp had been notified by wire to be on the lookout for two men who had left Las Vegas on horseback after robbing the bank. The description tallied with Pete's prisoners, but as a reward of one thousand dollars was offered, the constable feigned indifference when Pete suggested that the men might be guilty of a more serious crime than breaking into his cabin and stealing his food. Remembering his reception by Pete a few days before. Constable Rupp stood on his official dignity. "I don't need to be told how to handle these birds," he declared, as Pete turned the prisoners over to him. "You come quite a ways just to turn over a couple of bums."

"Yes. And it's the same distance to where you'll find their hosses and rifles, if you want to come and get 'em."

Singling out Mr. Perkins, local storekeeper and postmaster, from the group of curious townsmen in front of the store, Pete asked him to witness his delivery of the prisoners to the constable. Mr. Perkins intimated that he wished to converse with Pete in private. They had turned to enter the store when a shout and the sound of a pistol shot checked them. The group in front of the store dissolved, leaving Pete and the postmaster to witness that the recent captives had in some manner eluded the constable and were legging it for the railroad at high speed. Their luck seemed to have turned. A westbound freight, which had stopped at the water-plug, was pulling out. The fugitives jumped it, slipped between the ends of two boxcars and vanished. Constable Rupp boiled down the street after them, firing shot after shot at the departing train. Postmaster Perkins and Pete eyed each other. "You could have dropped both of 'em with your eyes shut," remarked Mr.

Perkins. "Just a thousand dollars gone to hell."

"It's a long time since we was in Nogales together," said Pete. "Recollec' that time you——"

Mr. Perkins raised his hand. "S-s-s-h! That agent's woman will hear you." And the postmaster ushered Pete into the store. "Telegram came for a man by the name of Rodney Carstairs, this morning. Rupp fetched it over from the station. Said to hold the man that called for it till he could come over. Here's the telegram." And Mr. Perkins laid an envelope on the counter. He glanced about then whispered a few words to Pete.

"Well, I didn't call for it," said Pete, picking up the envelope. "I just took it. Say, Pod, just stick this in your safe and keep it there till I want it." Pete pulled a flat package from his shirt and handed it to the postmaster. And after watering his horse, he mounted and rode slowly out of town.

V

SHORTLY after ten o'clock that night, Pete turned his horse into the corral in Placer Canyon, threw it some meadow hay and stumped swiftly down to the cabin. Rodney Carstairs was reading a novel, his chair tilted back and his feet on the hearth of the stove. On the table was a package of cigarettes, his Luger, some matches and his watch and fob. He jumped up as Pete entered. "Awfully glad you're here! Had a most refreshing bath and a shave. Slept a bit, also. Enjoyed myself amazingly, feeding the animals—and myself, after a fashion. Perfectly gorgeous sunset. Air grew a bit nippy so I kept the fire going. I really think I shall enjoy roughing it."

Pete's eyebrows arched but he said nothing. He shook the coffee pot, moved it to the front of the stove and then sat down. "I turned them fellas over to your friend the constable. Doggone if they didn't git the best of him and jump a freight. I lit out myself, right after that."

"They escaped?"

"Sure did. He must have took the ropes off of 'em and tried to handcuff 'em. I dunno."

Rodney laid down his book and lighted a cigarette. "Well, I can't say that I'm sorry. It must be rather dreadful to be confined in a penitentiary."

"It sure is! Say, Rod, what'n hell you dryin' gravel in the oven for?" Pete had happened to glance in the oven as he got up to pour a cup of coffee.

"Gravel! Why, I was keeping your dinner hot. Those are beans."

Pete fished the pan out of the oven with a dishcloth. He shook the pan. The alleged beans rattled like buckshot. "Well, you kept 'em hot, anyhow."

Pete opened a fresh can of beans and dumped them into the skillet. "About that dough—I left it with Perkins. He's the postmaster. We used to chouse around together, quite a spell ago. I guess this is for you."

Rodney opened the telegram Pete handed to him. He frowned and ran his fingers through his short, light-colored hair as he read it. "Absolutely ridiculous!" he cried as he jumped up and began pacing up and down the cabin. He stopped and turned to Pete who was munching beans like a contented horse. "My aunt, my uncle, to say nothing of Dorothy and her mother are leaving for California and will pass through Rainbow on the fifteenth. I am to meet them and accompany them to Los Angeles!"

"If you feel that way about it, Carsteps, why you and me to say nothin' of Calamity, kin set right here and let 'em pass, can't we?"

"But, my dear fellow, you don't understand! My aunt and uncle are my only living relatives. They brought me up. This is the first time I have ever really been away from them for more than two or three days. Evidently my telegram has led them to believe I leaped from the train and went dashing off into the desert like an insane person!"

"Well, ain't that just about what you did?"

"Why—why, to a certain extent, yes. But I didn't telegraph them to that effect. I

simply said I had changed my plans and had stopped off at a little town called Rainbow, on the desert." Rodney sighed heavily. "I suppose they think my nerves have given way again."

"Is that there Dorothy your sister, mebbe?"

"No. She's another chap's sister—perfectly splendid chap."

"Uh-huh. And your uncle, he kind of holds the nosebag, like?"

"Holds the nosebag?"

"Yes. Foots the feed bills."

"Oh, no. I am financially independent—even a little more so than Uncle Gregory, to be exact. No. They have rather got into the habit of—that is, directing my conduct in general. I have just begun to realize it since I came west." Rodney dropped the telegram on the table and sat down. "And I was really just beginning to enjoy myself," he added, lugubriously

"Say, Rod, you ain't married to some woman, mebbe?"

"Heavens, no! That is, not yet."

"And you ain't killed nobody?"

"Of course not!"

"Or robbed a bank, or broke out of jail, or anything?"

"Do I look as though I had?"

"No. But looks are awful deceivin'—'specially yours. What I mean, you been wearin' hobbles so long it's kind of shortened your gait and cramped your action. When you lit off the train at Rainbow and busted that there agent, you broke your hobbles, and when you come up here with me you thrun 'em away. Ever since you slid down that rope you been hittin' your full stride. And now along comes your uncle shakin' a pair of hobbles at you and you don't know whether to shy off and run, or stand. Speakin' of standin', there's a powerful lot of room out here to run in. Mebbe you noticed it."

"Yes, I have."

"Well, you're welcome to stay here just as long as you like. You was tellin' me you would like to learn how to pan a little dirt, and throw a hitch, and pack some, and handle that pistol of yours, and mebbe ride a hoss. You can't do such, settin' around a hotel. Me, I'd rather be in jail than set around a hotel."

"I may be able to make the comparison, if I go to Rainbow."

"You mean that constable? No, he won't bother you, now."

"Why not?"

"Well, I got him hog-tied. When I turned them two night riders over to him, I got the postmaster to witness it. And I got 'most ten thousand dollars where nobody but me can git it, the same bein' evidence that those fellas robbed the bank at Las Vegas. Now wait a minute till I git through. There's a thousand dollars reward for the capture of the bank robbers. I captured 'em and turned 'em over to the nearest deputy sheriff—for Rupp is a deputy, as well as bein' town constable. I git the reward. Rupp has got to explain how come his prisoners got loose. He hol ls his job from the railroad, and when the special agent comes over and finds out Rupp let two bank holdups git away it won't be so good for Rupp. But if he can tell the special agent where the money is, it will be different."

"I see. But how did you know they were bank robbers, and a reward had been offered? Surely the constable would be the last one to tell you."

"Yes. But the postmaster of Rainbow is a friend of mine. When he seen them fellas jump that freight he says to me, 'There's one thousand dollars gone to hell—Las Vegas job.' He didn't git a chance to say much more. But that was enough."

"I think I'll meet the train on the fifteenth," said Rodney, after a long pause.

FOR the next few days Rodney Carstairs shoveled and panned gravel as though his life depended on it. Since Pete had shown him what pay dirt looked like and had taught him to twirl a pan, Rodney never saw a streak of black sand but what he must pan a little of it to see if he could find any "color." Meanwhile, Pete kept working systematically, followng up the gravelly deposit on the bedrock like a laborer making day wages—which was exactly what he was doing. When they rested, Pete entertained Rodney with yarns about big strikes made in the Panamint country, and Rodney was pleased to imagine he might make a big strike. Even if he did not, the novelty of separating a thin string

of flour gold from the final handful of sand in the pan, kept him at it from morning till night. Meals became mere incidentals, although he did ample justice to Pete's free-hand cooking. And sleep was no longer a problem, and he all but forgot that he had ever had a nervous breakdown.

The afternoon of the day before he was to meet his uncle in Rainbow, Rodney glanced at his watch, threw down his shovel, and mopped his brow. "Let's knock off and scramble a bit of grub," he said, imagining he was employing the true Western idiom.

Pete gazed at him solemnly. "All right. It's early. But you rustle some wood and I'll wrangle the chuck."

That evening they had a long and confidential chat. The following morning they saddled up and started for Rainbow.

VI

AS THE westbound passenger train pulled into Rainbow and stopped, Gregory Carstairs, portly, brisk, radiating energy and affluence, stepped solidly to the station platform. His quick glance took in two or three loungers, and a couple of hard-looking individuals, evidently just in from the desert. They were dismounting from two equally hard-looking horses. Gregory Carstairs stared, started forward, and hesitating, frowned.

"Hello, Uncle!" cried one of the horsemen as he hastened up. "We just made it. Pete's horse went lame. Awfully glad to see you. How is Aunt Hilda?"

Gregory Carstairs glanced keenly at his nephew as they shook hands. "She's worried about you. You got my wire? Well, get your clothes. I have arranged to hold this train five minutes. The division superintendent is aboard—old friend, Boston Tech."

"Great! I'll have time to say hello to Aunt Hilda and Dorothy." And Rodney made a dive for the nearest Pullman. Gregory Carstairs stepped up to Pete. "My nephew, I noticed, rode up to the station with you. Possibly you know where he has been stopping. I have arranged to hold this train five minutes. Would you mind showing me where his room is, so I can get his clothes?"

"What name did you say?"

"Oh, pardon me—Carstairs, his uncle."

"Glad to meet you, Carsteps. What clothes he ain't wearin' is in my shack at Placer Canyon—about fifteen miles north of here."

"Fifteen—well, he'll have to travel as he is." Mr. Carstairs glanced at his watch. An exceedingly pretty and modishly gowned young woman stepped down from the Pullman and hastened toward him. "Mr. Carstairs," she said breathlessly, "Rodney says he is not coming to Los Angeles! I think he's perfectly horrid. Won't you speak to him?" And she fondled his arm with her gloved hand.

"Yes, Dorothy, I'll speak to him."

Pete moved slowly away as Rodney came briskly down the Pullman steps. "Awfully sorry. But you see I have arranged with Pete to get some lumber and build a sluice box and work the placer on a bigger scale. Tremendously interesting. Had no idea you were coming out until December."

"Rodney!" Dorothy's tone was imperative. "Are you coming with us?"

"Really, I'm afraid I can't just now. In a month, possibly. Rather short notice, you know."

Dorothy stamped her foot. "Rodney, you look like a tramp!"

Rodney smiled. "Quite so; you are simply ravishing!"

"Young man!" began Gregory Carstairs, in the outraged uncle manner, but Rodney was walking toward the car with the offended Dorothy. Mr. Carstairs blinked and stepped up to Pete. "I imagine this is a put-up job," he said confidentially. "This is the first time my nephew ever asserted himself—especially in that direction." And Gregory Carstairs chuckled. "Good work! Keep him at it till he gets all he wants of it. But for heaven's sake don't give me away."

"All right, Carsteps!" said Pete, shaking hands heartily with the portly Mr. Carstairs. Then, as one kindred soul to another, "You got to rowel 'em, once in a while."

"Exactly!"

THE conductor came from the station with a slip of paper in his hand. Rodney, standing in the vestibule talking with Dorothy, stooped suddenly and kissed her. "Hope you have a perfectly whizzing time in Los Angeles, Dot. I'll be along in about a month." Dorothy turned and swept imperiously into the car. Rodney stepped to the platform. "So-long, Old-timer!" And he shook hands vigorously with his uncle. "Meet you in Africa."

"Great! We'll ride the elephant." And Gregory Carstairs winked at his nephew. Then added, in a whisper, "But for heaven's sake don't tell your——"

"I won't. Eternal silence, price of liberty, and all that."

The wheels began to click. Gregory Carstairs turned to find Dorothy tugging at his sleeve. "Hurry, please!" she said breathlessly. And she hastened down the aisle.

"Has Hilda fainted?"

"No. It isn't that." And Gregory Carstairs followed Dorothy to the rear platform of the Pullman.

Her imperiousness seemed to have vanished. As Rodney saw her and waved his cap, she bent her gloved hand and threw him a kiss.

Rodney seemed stunned. He turned to Pete. "You don't suppose—" he hesitated, fumbling for the right phrase.

"I sure do; you got to rowel 'em once in a while, Rod."

"Quite so!" Rodney cocked his cap. "Now we'll settle this bank robbery matter. Have you seen anything of the constable?"

"He's over there by the door, talkin' to his brother-in-law. But wait a minute! What's your hurry?"

HEEDLESS of Pete's restraint, Rodney was halfway to the station doorway, and moving rapidly. "Pardon me," he said as he approached the constable, "but am I addressing Constable Rupp? Quite so! I have met this other gentleman. Mr. Rupp, I understand you allowed the bank robbers whom I captured in Placer Canyon to escape. Very careless of you! I had quite a time persuading them to listen to reason. I hope it will not be necessary in this instance. Arriving at bedrock, the facts are these: My friend, Indigo Pete, is entitled to the reward, having delivered the robbers to you. The money which these bank robbers stole is in his possession. I have seen it. It amounts to nearly ten thousand dollars. No doubt you would like to inform the bank in Las Vegas of the fact. My friend, Indigo Pete, who happens to be standing just behind you, is willing to tell you where the money is, *provided* you desist from annoying me by threatening to arrest me for poking this gentleman at your left. Perhaps you are not aware that he asked me to poke him, that he forced me to defend myself. However, we will let that go. I have made my proposal. If you wish to accept it, very good indeed! If not, I assure you that the money in question will be promptly returned to the proper persons without, however, connecting you in any way with its recovery. You see the point. It is a very simple matter to adjust. I might add that Indigo Pete and I have formed a partnership, which, though temporary, can be extended indefinitely to meet any possible contingency that may arise. Have you any suggestions?"

Constable Rupp saw the point, but he lacked imagination. "Got that money with you?"

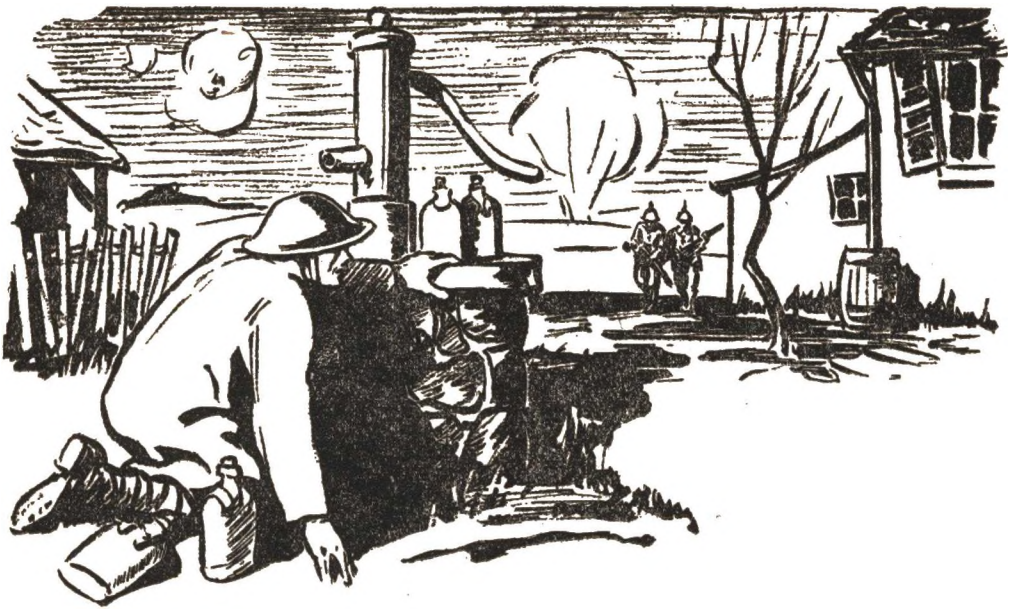
Rodney laughed. "Hardly! But I can get it in five minutes."

Constable Rupp glanced at the agent. The agent glanced at Constable Rupp. "It's all right with me," said Rupp. "How about you, Joe?"

AS THE agent's official reputation was not at stake, he hesitated to accept the armistice. Noting his sullen attitude, Rodney took his hand from his pocket and extended it. The agent started back, then realizing the gesture was not belligerent, but friendly, he shook hands with Rodney, though in a rather perfunctory fashion.

"Great!" said Rodney.

He turned to call Pete who had sauntered to the end of the station platform. Pete was absorbed in contemplating a large, square carton across which ran the printed legend: "Fragile. Use No Hooks." Emptied of its original contents and used as a catch-all, it was now half-filled with bolts, washers, bits of broken spring, railroad spikes, and over the conglomeration the desert wind had sprayed a thin coating of sand.



SACRIFICE ISLAND

By LARRY BARRETTO

JED SLOCUM WAS TO SEE MORE OF THE FRONT LINE FIGHTING, OF GRIM ATTACK AND COUNTER-ATTACK, OF DEATH AND HORROR, OF COURAGE AND DESPAIR THAN HE, AS AN AMBULANCE DRIVER, HAD BARGAINED FOR. AND ALL BECAUSE HE HAD YEARNED FOR A BATH

THERE was no sound in the trenches at all, and no movement in the darkness save where a distant beam of searchlight, springing from some German position, swung across the sky, a white band in the night.

The two men by the firestep in the angle of trench stared at each other without speaking. The body of one of them was tense as if about to spring, and his right hand had dropped to the revolver at his belt. His head was thrust forwarl, seeking to study the face of the newcomer which seemed to hang, a white blur in the darkness. The other man was slack, his jaw dropping with astonishment, his hands outstretched, but motionless, as if in protest at some huge mistake. They stood rooted there as they had come upon each other around the corner of the trench while the seconds dropped away.

The astonished man made a motion, felt rather than seen, and instantly the first man had drawn his gun.

"Keep your hands up," he warned sharply.

His order was reluctantly obeyed. "You'd think," complained the second man, "that I was in the German trenches instead of my own lines."

"I think you were in the German trenches —about ten minutes ago," the soldier with the revolver commented significantly.

Jed Slocum's brain reeled. It was more fantastic than anything he had ever imagined happening to him, the incredible climax of his drive from St. Bandry. Why had he risked taking a strange road back to his headquarters? Why had he been lured at all out of his own sector by the tale of a bath-house with plenty of soap and hot water which had been set up for the American troops in St. Bandry village? He could regret it, now that it was too late. His arms were beginning to ache with the strain of keeping them outstretched.

"See here," he argued reasonably, "if you think I'm a spy take me to an officer. If I can't prove that I'm as good an Amer-

ican as you are I deserve to be shot."

The other man laughed, a harsh sound with no vestige of humor in it as if his throat opened and shut automatically.

"You know damn' well there isn't an officer in this trench," he said.

"He's crazy," Jed thought, "or else I am." The latter seemed more probable; this was a type of warfare with which he had had no experience—the approach to the front through absolute silence, not so much as the distant crash of a gun; his entrance into the trench which so far as he could see was empty of defenders until this man had lunged at him through the shadows.

"Well," he said aloud patiently, "what are you going to do with me? I only dropped in on you for some information."

THE man with the gun sighed deep with satisfaction at this admission. "I can believe that. You *would* want information tonight, wouldn't you?"

Jed Slocum's fear vanished in irritation.

"Yes, information how to get to my own outfit," he asserted. "I'm an ambulance driver attached to the 162nd Division, French, and I'm lost. If you don't believe that you ought to be back passing out blankets in the S. O. S. for you're not fit to be up here." He almost expected to be pistoled on the spot, but his antagonist relaxed.

"You sound all right," he admitted. "Now just who are you?"

Jed told him. "I left the ambulance up the road a piece when I suspected I was near the trenches. There wasn't any noise of guns, you understand, but that damn' searchlight made me suspicious. I figured I'd be running into barbed wire if I kept on, so I walked. If I hadn't heard I could get a hot bath at St. Bandry I'd be all right now. So help me, Mike, I'll never take another bath as long as I live."

The revolver was suddenly lowered, and the soldier chuckled.

"That's more truth than poetry, buddy. I guess you've taken your last bath, and so have I."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind what I mean," said the soldier. "You're still my prisoner. Walk ahead of me now till I tell you to stop. There's a flashlight in the dugout and after I get a squint at your face I'll know better whether you're Boche or not."

THEY started off through the trench picking their way carefully over the uneven ground, until they came to a dugout scooped into the earth wall and roughly shored with boards. The man with the revolver reached within and flicked something off a shelf. The next instant a beam of light blazed over Jed Slocum, streaming across his uniform and coming to rest on his fair-skinned face and the light hair which showed where the helmet had been pushed back. The face was young with a mingled expression of anger and bewilderment on it and the eyes that lighted it were blue.

"You might be a South German—a Saxon," said the unknown man, "and then again you mightn't." He flashed the light away and for a moment it played over his own figure and face—the latter dark with a stubble of beard, the eyes sleepless and anxious. Jed noticed a sergeant's stripes on one sleeve.

"I'd like to put my arms down," he requested. "They're half paralyzed now."

The sergeant stepped close to him until the revolver pressed against the pit of Jed's stomach, then he ran a hand expertly over his clothes.

"All right," he said. "You don't seem to have even a trench knife. Watch yourself though—I'm watching you."

With a sigh Jed lowered his arms; he began rubbing the numbed fingers gently.

"You're a little too suspicious, Sergeant," he said with mild irony. "Some night you're going to hold up a general, and then you won't be a sergeant any more."

"Can that chatter," said the sergeant. "How do I know that you're a Yank? The Huns have plenty of American uniforms."

"Come back and look at my ambulance," Jed suggested. "I left it on the road about a hundred yards from where you picked me up. I might be able to slip through the barbed wire myself, but you'll admit I could hardly bring a Ford over, too."

WHEN the sergeant spoke his voice was altered, more human.

"You sound all right," he admitted, "but

how can I tell? Anyway I can't leave my post to look at your car, always supposing it's there, and you can't go back to it. I'm not taking any chances."

"He's certainly crazy," Jed thought. For a moment he listened hopefully for the sound of a footstep but the silence was deeper than before. The German searchlight had stopped playing across the sky. Aloud he said, "You've got the gun, Sergeant, and you're the boss, but I'd certainly appreciate it if you'd tell me how long I've got to stay. It's getting late and I'm expected to be back in headquarters by now."

The overstrained nerves of his captor suddenly found relief in speech. "Hell,

you might as well hear the truth. If you're a Boche you've got about as much chance of getting away as a cootie in a delousing machine, and if you're American you'll understand why you can't go. Listen. The Huns are due for an attack tonight. We have information that they're all set."

Jed doubted that. The night was too quiet and the trenches—this part of them at any rate—were bare of defenders, but he kept silent.

"The infantry have been withdrawn to prepared positions in the rear," the sergeant continued as if he had read Jed's thoughts. "When the Boche come over they're going to run into a fire that will make 'em wish they were back home in their beer gardens, and when they get through that they'll strike our infantry. You see now why I'm not taking any chances of your going across with information."

It sounded too reasonable to Jed to be the hallucinations of a maniac, but an objection occurred to him.

"Well, what are you doing here then if the infantry are withdrawn?"

"Oh, there'll be a bombardment first before they come across and somebody's got to notify our guns when they leave their trenches, so a man is stationed every few hundred yards or so to handle the rockets. I'm one of 'em," the sergeant said carelessly.

"Who wished that job on you?" Jed cried. "Why it's sure death! You'll be overrun in five minutes."

He was suddenly appalled at the vision of these lonely defenders fumbling with their rockets under a hail of shells and machine-gun bullets while a gray wave of men broke at them from the opposite trenches.

"No one wished it on us. We volunteered," the sergeant answered with a sort of bitter pride.

"Who'd enlist in the infantry?" Jed thought. "They've got guts all right. I couldn't do it."

THEN his own situation occurred to him. In his wonder at the sergeant's gloomy tale he had forgotten himself. If this man was remaining in the trench and if he would not let him, Jed Slocum, leave, then the said Jed Slocum would undoubtedly be present in the flesh, unless meanwhile a shell wiped him out, when that attack commenced. Being an ambulance driver he had never so much as fired a gun in his life, nor did he have a gun. As a prisoner he wouldn't even have the satisfaction of firing a rocket before the gray horde with bayonets gleaming had crushed him into the mud.

"See here," he cried so violently that the revolver in the sergeant's hand lifted, "I've got to get out of here. This isn't my job and I'm not going to have any part of it." He was quite determined as to that. It was one thing to volunteer for such work after due consideration, when farewell letters had been written home. But it was another thing to be held prisoner until a rain of shells roared down and blotted you out. The more he thought of it the more appalling it was. Back in the headquarters of his ambulance section he would be put down as missing—probably they would think he was a deserter. That would be pleasant news for his family at home, and there would not even be the satisfaction of receiving ten thousand dollars for his death. All this he told the sergeant urgently.

"You might at least come and see that I'm telling the truth about that ambulance," he said. "It won't take you fifteen minutes

and you can see me drive straight away from the lines. I've had enough of them. If I've got to die a hero's death I want to choose my own time and place."

"You can't go," said the sergeant inflexibly. "And besides it's too late." He flashed the light against his wrist watch. "We understand the Boche bombardment starts at midnight and it's that now."

"Your watch is fast," Jed cried, looking at the luminous dial of his own. "If we make a run for it——"

"Don't talk so much," said the sergeant wearily.

THE minutes dragged while the men stood facing each other, leaning against the wall of the trench—five, six, eight. At ten minutes past twelve the air was stirred by a breath, a faint moaning which climbed up and up until it was a shriek. Far to the rear of the American trenches came the dull crash of an exploding shell. Suddenly the sky behind the German trenches, all across the Champagne, was lighted by a tremendous flare stretching farther than the eye could see. The air above the two men seemed to be pressed down by the weight of hurled metal. The earth shook under the impact of the screaming mass.

In the flickering glare Jed could see the sergeant's face, all nervousness vanished now in fierce satisfaction. He flung his hand toward the ambulance driver and his lips formed words. He had shouted, but it came to Jed as a whisper:

"They've begun! They've begun!"

II

FOR a time part of their trench was shelled and they crouched together in the dugout. Then the shelling would lift again to swoop down on some more distant object, and in the comparative quiet that followed Jed reproached the sergeant.

"You might have known that if I was a spy I couldn't do anything. An attack of this size isn't stopped just because word comes back that the front lines have been abandoned. What do you think war is? There must be two thousand guns over there."

The sergeant said nothing and Jed too fell silent, hating him without words. In the splashes of flame behind the trenches the man's face was grim, rock-hewn, almost sullen in its strength.

"Probably he wants to die," Jed thought. "But that's a poor reason for taking me with him."

He resolved that if there was a slight lift in the bombardment to give him a chance he would escape even if he had to kill the sergeant doing it. This wasn't his outfit nor his attack either. Probably his own sergeant was at this moment raving and cursing at the ambulance that did not appear.

"It all comes of wanting to take a bath," he groaned. "The guy who said cleanliness is next to godliness was right. I'll be right among the godly before day breaks, I'll bet a month's pay."

A shell burst on the outer parapet of the trench and showered dirt down on them. Spitting, blinded by it, bending low, they went out into the trench itself. Jed looked longingly down the trench toward the abutment of it just showing in the darkness. If he could reach that point he would at least be safe from the sergeant's revolver, but the sergeant was only two feet away and the risk was too great.

"I'll have to take the first chance or there won't be anything left of the ambulance," he thought.

At that moment the shelling lifted and drifted away as if blown by a high wind.

The sergeant straightened up.

"A minute's rest," he observed. "I thought my eardrums would burst. If you are a Heinie I congratulate you on your artillery."

He turned and looked across the empty land between the trenches, trying to find in the darkness some sign of attack. A shell, with hardly a whine of warning in its swift descent, swooped down and burst beyond them in the trench. Jed flung himself against the earth wall, his face hidden in his hands. The air was hot with singing metal and little stabs of flame. When he looked again gray smoke was drifting down

toward him and the sergeant was lying on the ground. Jed moved forward a step and his foot struck the gun that had been dropped from the sergeant's hand.

An emotion almost of pleasure welled up in him. This man who had held him prisoner, who by his idiotic suspicions had got him into this mess, was lying before him disarmed, perhaps dead. The shelling had shifted to another sector. All that was necessary was to leave him here, find his car if it was still unhurt and drive off. The road would be dangerous tonight, but the trench was fatal. He took another cautious step forward.

"Now's your chance to beat it," said the sergeant from the ground. "I can't stop you." His voice was mocking as if he knew exactly what the other man would do.

ANGER burned up in Jed, consuming his desire to escape so that nothing was left of the impulse. Just because the sergeant was doing a heroic thing was no reason for him to deny all courage to everybody else.

"I want to see where you're wounded," Jed said gruffly. "After all, that's my job."

The sergeant's voice was subdued when he spoke. "It's my shoulder," he replied, "and I don't think it's much. Give me a hand up and we'll get to the dugout; you can look it over there."

On the way Jed picked up the revolver. "Here's your gun. Want it?"

"Keep it," the sergeant instructed him. "I was wrong."

The wound was not serious, Jed found, but it was bleeding freely. He tore open his first aid pack and bandaged the shoulder.

They squatted together in the darkness after the flashlight had been put away.

"You might look out and see if the attack is coming over," the sergeant suggested. "They're bound to raise their barrage first, I think, but we won't take any chances." Abruptly he reversed himself. "No, I'll go out myself. I made you stay here, so you might as well get whatever shelter this hole in the ground will give."

"Shut up," Jed answered. "Do you think you're the only man who ever saw a shell burst?" He stooped at the entrance of the dugout and went out.

Except for a curtain of smoke drifting across No Man's Land there was no sign of an attack. He returned to the dugout.

"Nothing doing yet. How are you feeling?" he asked reluctantly, indignation at the sergeant still uppermost in his mind.

"Fine," said the sergeant. "It didn't hurt as much as a louse bite." His voice was grim and a little faint. Jed was forced to admire him. He knew that after the first numbing shock had worn off there was nothing more painful than torn ligaments.

After a time the sergeant said, "If anything happens to me before they pull that attack fire off one of the rockets. They're in a case on the shelf above my head."

"You're not through yet," Jed answered. "We'll live to die together."

"Not if we can get to one of the isles of sacrifice," the sergeant muttered.

Jed thought this over for a long time. "What's an isle of sacrifice?" he asked at last, faint hope rising in his breast although the name did not sound very hopeful. But the sergeant did not answer. He was either unconscious or asleep.

IT MIGHT have been hours later when Jed noticed a difference in the character of the shelling. Now the trenches seemed to be out of range and the bursts were coming from far behind them. He went out, climbed up on a firestep and stared across at the German lines. It was too dark to see, but his quickened ears seemed to catch the sound of stamping feet. Irresolutely he looked at his watch. It was four-fifteen. Then there was borne to him faintly a confused shout. It rolled toward him and faded again, "Hoch! Hoch!"

Jed tumbled down the firestep with such violence that his helmet fell off and clanged at his feet.

"Hey, you!" he howled in the direction of the dugout. "Get outa there. They're coming!"

Almost at once the sergeant was beside him. "I thought you had beat it," he said. "Look out, I want to shoot this rocket." He bent and adjusted the stick; there was a sizzle at the fuse and a soft rushing sound. High above their heads the rocket burst, showering down red balls.

"They'll see that!" the sergeant cried

with satisfaction. Far to the left and nearer on the right other rockets soared into the air with crimson signals. There were still lonely watchers in the trenches who had survived the bombardment.

Seconds dragged so that each seemed like minutes and then from the American artillery positions there came a rush of sound and the air above them was filled with iron death. The crashing shells bursting between the trenches shut out for an instant the shouts of the advancing Germans.

"Come on!" yelled the sergeant.

Jed seized him by the lapel of his blouse and pulled him down until his mouth was next to the sergeant's ear.

"Go where?" he shrieked. "You damn' fool, are you going to start a counter-attack alone?"

BUT the sergeant wrenched himself away. "To the isle of sacrifice," he called and began to clamber over the back of the trench.

They found themselves running through a field that was ploughed by shells that made almost a continuous chain of holes. Sometimes the chain joined and formed huge craters out of which they had to climb, clutching the sliding earth to keep themselves from falling back. It had rained the day before and in no time their clothes were plastered with mud. It clung in their ears and seeped into their eyes and mouths. An illogical thought occurred to Jed:

"That bath at St. Bandry was certainly a failure. I'm dirtier now than I ever was."

Their retreat, however, was not impeded by mud and shell holes alone. All the German artillery in the world seemed to be concentrating their efforts on these fields in the fond hope of cutting off the American infantry which the enemy supposed to be manning the trenches. It crashed down with an intolerable roar, only to rise again in great showers of dirt and flying metal. Each moment Jed expected to feel a bayonet in his back—he could imagine the very spot between his shoulder blades where it would strike—and in spite of the sweat dripping from him he turned cold. What he did not realize was that retreating men always moved faster than their pursuers, and that the Germans would be delayed anyway in searching the empty trenches.

They stumbled into a shell hole, shallower than the rest, but when Jed ploughed out of it the sergeant still lay there. The ambulance driver paused, conscious that his guide was not at his elbow. Until now the sergeant had been slightly in the lead.

"Come on, Sarge," he shouted. "We're not home yet."

The dark man raised himself slowly to a sitting position.

"Go on alone, pill-roller," he ordered. "This wound's started bleeding again and I'm all in."

IT WAS after all a reasonable thing to do. To remain here in the dark on the edge of a rolling barrage with the enemy behind him meant certain death within a matter of minutes. Jed would have gone, for he had no love of the sergeant, but the word "pill-roller" infuriated him. It was applied only to those members of the Medical Corps who served in hospitals or dressing stations, and the ambulance men considered themselves apart from these. They had nothing to do with the wounded after they had been brought to safety.

"Pill-roller, my eye!" Jed grunted. "I'm as much a part of the advance units as you are. Let's see if you've got as much guts as you say you have. Walk and I'll help you."

Without any unnecessary gentleness he jerked the sergeant to his feet and placed one arm about his body. The man sagged against him, breathing heavily like a winded runner.

"Rise and shine!" cried Jed, heaving him forward. "Let's find this sacrifice island."

The ground became steeper beneath their feet, rising away to a slight hill crowned with trees—sycamores and elms. Against the sky, graying now with the coming of dawn, Jed could see that the trees were blasted and scarred by shell-fire, their branches lopped and hanging toward the ground. It was dark beneath the trees and

very still. Before them in successive rows wire had been strung on stakes, intricately coiling back upon itself in an impenetrable labyrinth. But a passage had been left among the wires, confusing enough to follow, although the sergeant seemed to know the way. Leaning on Jed he pressed forward, guiding him through the first two rows.

"Stop," said the sergeant. "If we don't let them know who we are they'll cut us down like wheat." He raised his voice in a feeble shout which was hardly more than a croak and then he pitched forward on his knees.

Jed regarded the fallen man with consternation. This time the sergeant had passed out cold.

"My God!" the driver thought. "Those trees are probably jammed with machine-guns. No doubt there's a password, and without it we'll be blown to hell. Well, there's nothing to do but carry this big bum. They'd hardly shoot down a man hauling a wounded in."

He gathered up the sergeant with difficulty and slung him across his back. Then, staggering, he moved on toward the woods. His breath was gone in a dry crackle, his arms and legs were leaden with fatigue and before his eyes red sparks danced. Now he could not look up for the weight in his arms. Overhead the Allied artillery raved defiance to the German fire.

"If I ever get back to my ambulance I'll never leave it," Jed groaned.

On the steep slope of ground above him men were shouting; they were running down the hill and the sergeant had been taken from him. Together they were being pushed and hauled past the last barbed wire. Other men were stringing new lines across the gaps that had been left open. Jed felt a searing pain in one leg and his breeches ripped from his belt to the knee where the cloth had caught.

"Slow up!" he croaked. "What's the hurry?"

THEY were beneath the trees at last, lying on the ground, and an officer, a captain, was bending over them.

"Sergeant Martin, you're a damn' brave man," he said, respect in his voice. He turned to Jed, peering closer. "Where did you come from? Medical Corps! But we didn't leave any medics in the lines—against orders." He was obviously bewildered.

Jed turned and sat up. His breath was coming back and the sparks were fading before his eyes. Here was an officer at last, and he supposed he should explain, but he felt too unutterably tired.

"I got out of my sector, sir," he answered. "Where are we now?"

"I'll say you got out of your sector!" the captain cried, not understanding. "You must have cut across country under the German fire. This is Sacrifice Island Number 8."

III

THE word "island" had no particular application to this position save that it was detached from other similar units strung along the front, but the word "sacrifice" had a very special meaning—it meant that the troops stationed here, equally volunteers with those few who had manned the trenches, were to be sacrificed so that the oncoming attack might be shattered before it reached the prepared French and American positions far to the rear.

Jed Slocum did not understand all this, nor did he know that this was the beginning of the German drive in the dawn of July 15th, their third and most famous drive which was to win the peace—so they said. All he realized was that this was a most uncomfortable position with a most dubious name. One does not read history in the making.

The woods and the fields leading up to the position were bristling with machine-gun emplacements and pits. Some machine-guns had been hauled into trees where they were wedged into notches, the gunners straddling branches behind them. Over the crest of the hill in a dell where they might be protected somewhat from direct fire some medical corps men had prepared for the wounded. Already several were lying on stretchers, for the hurricane of shelling that had passed over the lines had not ignored the grove. Jed could see the men with Red Cross brassards on their arms moving with bandages.

"Pill-rollers!" And he had once felt con-

temptuous of them. As the dawn grew lighter he could see that machine-guns were cleverly placed on either flank of the position in order to command the fields to right and left. If there were, as he suspected, similar sacrifice positions beyond there in the morning mist the advancing enemy, seeking to pass between them, would be badly bracketed.

This was all that he had time to notice, and then the captain came up to him. Jed got to his feet and stood at attention.

"Sergeant Martin has told me about you," the captain said. "At least as much as he knows which isn't much. How in the devil you got here and why you left your ambulance I can't understand, and I'm not going to try now. Martin says you did good work in getting him back or I'd put you under arrest for butting into a place where you're not wanted. I've got as much use for an ambulance driver here as I have for a Ladies' Aid Society. Now get back with the Medical Corps men and see if you can be of use." He returned Jed's salute briefly and hurried away on other duties.

"I'm about as welcome as snow in May," Jed thought, picking his way among the stretchers to where a grimy corporal was laying out tourniquets. "To the devil with their sacrifice. They're here because they want to be, but I'm an involuntary hero."

"When's this attack comin' off?" demanded the corporal looking up. "Me noives is all jazzed up waitin' for it."

"Listen!" cried Jed. One of the machine-guns began to chatter. "It's on!"

He felt an irresistible impulse to climb to the crest of the hill to see what was happening and then as a limb came tumbling down across one of the empty stretchers he felt an equally irresistible impulse to remain where he was. At least the slope was sheltered from direct hits. He stayed.

"You been under fire before?" asked the corporal.

"Yep," said Jed briefly. This crew didn't think much of ambulance drivers.

"Well, it's my bet you won't be again," the corporal gave his opinion gloomily. "But that's not what's botherin' me. The cap give orders for plenty water to be brought in for the wounded, but I forgot to see to it an' now they'll have to depend on their canteens. There won't be any—the lousy scuts always drink it up the foist thing. The cap'll slaughter me."

"You should worry if you're going to be shot," Jed consoled him.

"I ain't goin' to be shot. I was born to be hung. Listen to that!"

THAT was an outburst of machine-gun fire dwarfing anything which had gone before. Every bush and tree across the crest must be spitting flame that was punctuated with the sharp crack of grenades.

"That'll be Boche," said the corporal of the grenades, "an' in five minutes there'll be a call for stretchers. How'd you get here anyway? You ain't our gang." He lost interest temporarily in the battle.

"I was taking a bath in a dump called St. Bandry and on my way back I got mislaid," Jed explained facetiously.

He thought the corporal was about to weep; when he controlled himself the man said: "I was a rubber in a Turkish bath once, an' look at me now! They been runnin' us in an' out o' the lines for a month an' I ain't washed for longer than that."

"If I met you in the dark I'd take you for a Hun," Jed said.

"Ain't it the truth," said the corporal sadly. "An' you just had a bath, with soap an' everythin', I bet. Boy, you're in luck."

Jed was about to say that for all the luck it had brought him he had decided never to bathe again, when from the woods came a call:

"First aid! First aid!"

A stretcher-bearer who had been lying on his back smoking lounged to his feet and came across to the corporal after having pinched out the light of his cigarette which he placed carefully in his helmet.

"You go, too," the corporal said, nodding to Jed. "It'll do you good to see a little war at foist hand."

OBEDIENTLY the driver took hold of one end of a stretcher and he and the bearer went off.

"Of all the dirty cracks!" Jed muttered indignantly. "What does he think I've been seeing for the last six months?"

It was quite clear now and through the trees Jed could see the fields over which he and Sergeant Martin had come. As well as he could estimate the distance must be nearly a mile. Then his attention was claimed by what was happening close at hand. For the moment the attack had been repelled. Some killed had been dragged back and placed beneath the trees where already wounded were trying awkwardly to bandage themselves or were waiting patiently for the stretchers.

Other stretcher-bearers appeared from the woods and the hurt men were whisked away. There was just time for that when another attack started. Staring back with dilated eyes, Jed could see the gray men running and stumbling across the fields toward the island. They got nearer this time and there was the clang of bayonet lunging against bayonet, and guns were fired at point blank range. When the attack gave back another started almost before the defeated men could be reformed.

The place where the dressing-station had been established was now a shambles. The grimy corporal and his two helpers ran from man to man doing what they could, but it was not much. Hardly had a wounded man been bandaged before another claimed their attention. Supplies were running low. One man died and his dressings were torn off to use again. Somewhere from a point on the right the Germans had managed to set up a machine-gun and the bullets began thudding into the trees or dropping cut leaves upon the men below. Everybody who could stand worked overtime moving the wounded to a more sheltered spot.

One of the last men Jed carried was the captain who had greeted him on his arrival; but to take the captain back at all was merely a bit of sentiment, for the captain was quite dead.

A lieutenant took command, a pale young man with a light down of mustache whose voice was unconvincingly weak.

"You can't tell me that he volunteered for this; I won't believe it," Jed said to one of the stretcher-bearers.

"You wouldn't, but he did," the bearer retorted. "His brother was killed last week.

This guy's a mean little bugger in action. Don't get him wrong."

"Well, I never had a brother, I didn't volunteer and so I'm going to lie low," Jed announced firmly. At the moment there was no more work for him to do.

He found a sheltered place in the lee of a great rock where a radio man with his instrument attached to his ears was as calmly sending and receiving messages as if he were miles from the front.

"What's doing?" Jed asked when a lull came in the dots and dashes.

"They're in contact with our main line," said the radio man. He listened intently. "They've broken through somewhere on our right," he continued. "Go and ask the lieut if Sacrifice Island Number 9 has fallen. Headquarters wants information."

Jed hurried away. "I shouldn't be surprised," the lieutenant answered in his piping voice. "I saw rockets going up in that direction which weren't ours, and considerable numbers of Boche seem to be moving forward sheltered by the gully. Tell Headquarters that, and say that the left is still holding strong all the way to the farm. Do you want me to write it down?"

"No, sir," Jed answered and returned to the wireless.

He repeated his message. "Headquarters wants to know how many effectives we have left," the operator said.

"I wouldn't tell 'em," Jed answered earnestly. "It might give 'em heart failure. At least half the gang is back in the dressing-station and the other half is groggy over the guns."

"Ha!" cried the operator. "One more rush and we're done for. What?"

"I must say you take it easy," Jed grunted. For a time he sat and watched the placid operator while his own position weighed more heavily on him. "Could you send a message anywhere with that jiggus?" he asked at last.

"Sure," said the operator proudly. "There's plenty of juice."

"Then I wish you'd send out one to my lieutenant. I'm not afraid to die, but if I have to I'd like him to know that I was killed by the Boche and didn't desert. Tell him I was taking a bath at St. Bandry and got into the wrong sector."

"This is war; get hep to yourself," retorted the wireless man sternly. "If I sent a message like that they'd have my head."

JED retreated again to the dressing-station. "It's funny," he communed to himself. "They talk about being killed calmly enough, but when you come right down to it nobody expects it will be him."

In the dressing-station the corporal was standing beside the stretcher of a man who had just been brought in. His uniform was already so darkened with blood that it was impossible to tell where he had been wounded. But that he was badly hurt was evident.

"Who's this?" Jed cried, and looked again. It was his old friend the sergeant. "Why, he got his some time last night," the ambulance driver muttered. "I thought he had been tucked away on a stretcher long ago."

"Not him," answered the corporal. "It takes more than a scratch to keep Martin out of a scrap, I'm tellin' you. We joined up together at Camp Sills an' I know."

The wounded man opened his eyes. "Water," he whispered.

"There ain't any, old-timer," said the corporal huskily. "Not nearer than the farm."

THE sergeant's eyes turned slowly until they rested on Jed's face. A shadow of smile touched his thin lips. "Hello, pill-roller," he said. "How'd you get here?" The light faded from his eyes and again he muttered, "Water."

A sudden decision came to Jed, born of the turmoil and the hopelessness.

"I'll get the water," he said to the corporal. "Where is this farm?"

"On our left," the corporal answered, startled. "But you can't get there. Our machine-guns on the flank are firing directly at it, keeping clear the Hun advance, an' besides it's an exposed position."

Jed did not answer. He was gathering up canteens which he strung on a belt.

"You'll be killed," said the corporal.

"What the hell difference does that make?" Jed snapped. "Here or there it's all one to me, and I may get through. These men are thirsty." He slipped off through the trees, working his way down the slope. A certain relief came to his nerves.

EVIDENTLY the corporal had been in error regarding the effects of the fire from the machine-guns. Either it had been stopped or else the angle of the guns was above the burned grass and shelled earth through which Jed crawled, dragging his string of canteens.

He came to the farm at last, a mass of tumbled stones and gaping walls shattered by bursting shells. In a corner of the courtyard was, not a well as he had feared, for it would be too much to hope that the bucket still remained, but a spring, which bubbled up through a ledge of rocks and dripped away into a lower meadow. No doubt, he thought, this water had been poisoned either by sewage or gas, but the wounded would not object to that. It was clear, and cool enough to assuage their burning thirst.

The shelling had shifted and it was possible to stand upright. Jed crossed to the spring and dropped his belt of canteens in it. They bobbed around, floating on the surface, so that he had to kneel in order to press them under. He was conscious of thirst and decided to drink when the first canteen was filled.

Through the soft gurgling another sound caught his ear—something scraping against stone. Startled he looked up; round the corner of the ruined house two figures had appeared. They were dressed in gray, and heavy boots of black leather half covered their legs. On their heads they wore coal-scuttle helmets and there were bayoneted guns in their hands.

"Boche!" Jed's startled brain telegraphed to his legs in warning to escape, but his legs had become nerveless. He sagged lower beside the rock ledge until he was half hidden by it. The Germans were moving diagonally across the courtyard, seeking an exit on the other side. Evidently they were part of a patrol, for they kept looking back dubiously over their shoulders.

IT WOULD be necessary for them to pass within ten feet of the spring in order to go out of the breach in the wall beyond, and now their attention was concentrated entirely on that spot. They moved cautiously, stealthily.

Jed held his breath. They were abreast of him, and then a foot beyond, when from the spring there came a gurgling sucking noise. With horror freezing him, Jed realized what had happened. One of the floating canteens had filled and sunk to the bottom.

The Germans swung about. "Ach!" cried one of them and Jed could hear the breath whistling through his teeth. He was half a foot behind his companion and in their clumsy haste they impeded one another.

Automatically, without knowing what he did, Jed dropped his right hand into his pocket. There was a jar and a splitting crash. The foremost German whirled suddenly, dropped his rifle and gripped his stomach. Then he spun in a pivot and fell. Jed stared at him dazed. It was a full second later before he knew what he had done. Without consciously remembering that it was there he had fired the sergeant's revolver through the pocket of his coat.

The second German stumbled over the body of his companion, his rifle was deflected and then he lunged forward on the American. Arms locked, cheek pressed against cheek, they hung there until Jed fell backward into the pool.

THE German was pounding his head up and down. Jed could feel it bumping on the bottom. The water tasted brackish in his mouth. Then with a tremendous effort he tore one arm loose from the clinging body and clutched the German's throat. With a dying man's grip he dug his fingers in. He could feel the soft beard over the windpipe, and the sinews in the neck. He pressed harder. The German was gasping now; his arm dropped from Jed's body and he was tearing at the hand that strangled him. It did not relax. He flung himself frantically to one side and heaved Jed up. The American had an impression of sun and blue sky through the wet hair tangled across his eyes, then the German slipped back and Jed was on top.

As if it were a dream in which he had no part, Jed saw the man's face sink under water. There was a churning of feet and finally the man was still. It was not for some moments that Jed realized he still clutched the German's throat. Slowly he relaxed his fingers. They were so stiff that he could hardly move them.

He lay along the ledge of rock like a lizard warming in the sun while life began to flow back into him. Then he pulled the canteens from beneath the man in the spring and started to leave the farm. The German he had shot lay there on his back, startled blue eyes opened in death, a hand still clutching his stomach.

Jed looked at him once. "By God, I've killed a man!" he thought in awe. "I've killed two!" Slowly, painfully, with aching limps, his canteens dragging, he began to climb the hill.

IV

ON THE crest of the hill half a dozen machine-guns had been put out of action. With bent tripods and trailing belts they lay across the emplacements that had been made for them, and beside them sprawled their gunners, what remained of them. Four machine-guns still fired sporadically at a point where the crews imagined an attack to be forming, but on the right flank there was complete silence. All form of defense had died there.

"I thought you was dead," cried the corporal when Jed appeared in the dressing-station. "Does it take a week or ten days to get to that farm an' back? Martin's gone, but gimme the water."

Silently Jed handed him the belt strung with canteens. His head still ached with the pounding it had received and his limbs felt numb. The corporal shook the belt and over his face spread an expression of astonished rage. He looked at the ambulance driver

with as much enthusiasm as if he had been a poisonous snake.

"Why, you seven different kinds of a damn' fool!" he cried, shaking the canteens accusingly. "Why didn't you screw the caps on before you came back? There ain't enough water here to drown a louse." It was almost true. In all the canteens there was hardly more than a cupful. The rest had dripped away while Jed crawled.

The corporal looked at him more closely. "Well, I'll be damned if you don't go an' take a bath an' in your uniform, too! Twice in one day! You must be a doity hog."

"Listen, you," cried Jed in protest, but what he would have said was never heard.

THERE came a slamming roaring through the air and on the opposite side of the glade a great burst of earth and smoke rose up. Stretchers and men were tumbling skyward in what seemed a horrid dream. On the corporal's face was a look of helpless astonishment. His jaw dropped open and he sat down, then he tumbled over on his side and did not move.

Jed plunged or fell backward into a mass of low juniper bush. As he went he thought quite lucidly as if someone detached from himself was instructing him. "They've brought up field guns on our right."

When he came to the lieutenant was pulling at his arm. "Get up and fight!" he squeaked. "They're coming!" The lieutenant had been fighting himself. His uniform was torn in slits and there was a gash across one cheek.

Below the crest of the hill a gray wave was flowing steadily up. In the machine-gun pits a dozen men glared down. As Jed arrived, the last machine-gun went out of commission. There was a spatter of rifle fire, the gleam of drawn trench knives. The gray men were running, their yells sounding thinly through the smoky air. Jed pulled out the sergeant's gun; he fired it until it clicked empty.

"If they capture me I'll be shot," he thought. It was perfectly true; ambulance drivers were not supposed to fight.

A German officer was before him, his supercilious face perfectly contained. Something about it infuriated the American; the man was motioning to him to drop his gun. Jed hurled it with all his strength into the officer's face.

"Go buy yourself a new set of teeth!" he yelled.

Another shell, falling short, crashed down. Jed was picked up, hurled through the air. He was falling, dropping down into one of the dugouts. It was black; the sky was black—blackness was creeping up about him.

DAYLIGHT faded and night came. It was dawn once more. Back in his headquarters General Gouraud in command of the French and American forces was writing his order:

"You have the right to be proud. It is a hard blow for the enemy. It is a glorious day for France."

It meant nothing to the two stretcher-bearers who picked their way slowly over what remained of Sacrifice Island Number 8. The order was as yet unissued and they had never heard of General Gouraud. It meant nothing to the defenders of the island either. They lay as they had fallen when the German attack gave back.

"Let's go on," said the first stretcher-bearer. "They must have put up quite a pretty scrap here."

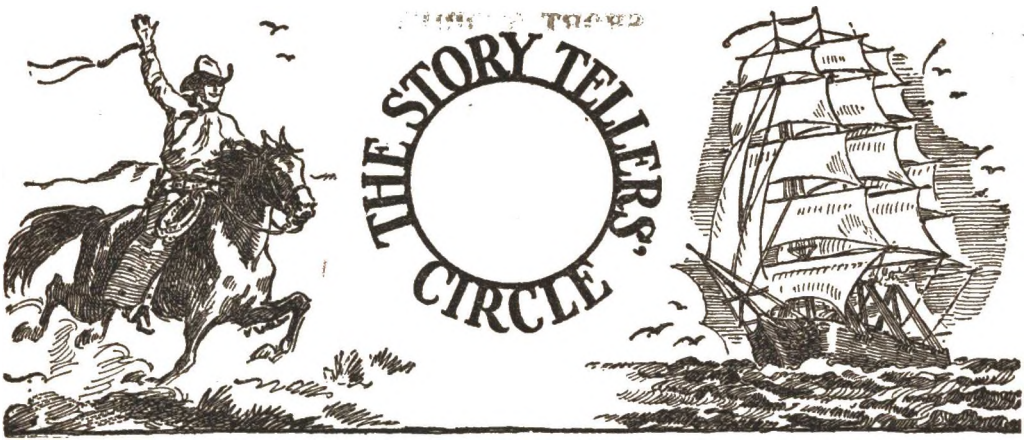
But his companion stayed him. "Here's one that ain't dead," he said. With expert finger he rolled back Jed's eyelid and looked at the pupil.

The first man joined him. "Nasty bump on the head," he gave his opinion. "Shell shock an' maybe a touch of gas. Heave him on the stretcher. After he's had a warm bath an' is tucked up comfy in bed with a pretty nurse to hold his hand he'll be all right."

Vaguely the words penetrated to Jed's brain, coming from an immeasurable distance.

"Lay off me!" he cried weakly. "I'm not taking any more baths. They bring me bad luck!"

The stretcher-bearers laughed. "This lad don't know what's good for him. Oh, boy, I'll say he's in luck! Heave him up."



Hidden Tibet

WERE any proof needed that "The Clangor of the Bronze Skull," Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's novel in this issue is neither exaggerated nor fantastically conceived, it would be proved by the following articles from the *New York Times*. Tibet, and North China, have long been ruled by Lamas, and the lands are in continual uproar. In such remote, ungoverned country, what may not happen? Here is the article.

"Long continuance of a state of anarchy in Tibet and the absence of any temporal authority since the Panchen Lama fled to China in fear of his life, have resulted in the disintegration of the country into more than two score small principalities.

"The smuggling of rifles and ammunition from China, from India and from Russian territory on the north has gone on incessantly, and now every little principality in that vast mountainous region has a 'standing army.' Some of these armies are made of only 300 or 400 men, while a few of the larger states have as many as 4,000 or 5,000 armed soldiers.

"One curious effect of this disintegration is the fact that all the large lamaseries have also armed themselves for self-protection. The monks have been taught to drill and to shoot, and since some lamaseries have as many as 3,500 to 5,000 monks, the result is that in the smaller states the monks frequently far outnumber the armies.

"This is leading to frequent clashes between the princes or temporal rulers and the lamaseries, and in some few cases the priests have seized the temporal power over large areas.

"Until 1925 Tibet was ruled in some unity by two authorities, the Panchen Lama or temporal ruler, and the Dalai Lama, or spiritual head of the state. Then began plots and counter-plots, and finally the Panchen Lama fled to save his life and sought refuge in Peking under the wing of Marshal Chang Tso-lin. He is now in Mukden with a large retinue, housed in a palace put at his disposal by Marshal Chang's heir.

"Meanwhile, in Tibet the ambitious Dalai Lama has seen the field of his personal authority shrink until now it does not extend far beyond the sacred city of Lhasa, and several independent monasteries report the discoveries of new 'living Buddhas,' so that the Dalai's spiritual domination is also imperiled.

"Just now, according to the latest word received in Peking, the States of Beyu and Dreewu are at open war and the monastery of Kanze, which has 3,000 monks armed with modern rifles, is being besieged by an army from the State of Drangu."

Ambulance!

OF COURSE you've heard of Larry Barretto. Some of his novels are known everywhere, and his short stories have found thousands of admiring readers. "Sacrifice Island" in this issue, is his first yarn in SHORT STORIES, but he'll be coming again soon, and, we expect, often. Here's what he says about himself:

"I claim the Eastern part of the United States as my home and more particularly New York City since I was born within twenty miles of it and continue to make it my headquarters. I slipped through school with one eye on the clock and the other on

the campus, and then to my surprise the day came when it was delicately intimated to me that I had better go to work.

"A number of jobs occupied me for the next eight years, but none of them lasted very long, usually because of a mutual dislike. Then war was declared which gave me an opportunity to satisfy an ever-growing curiosity and to quit work at the same time. That last was a delusion. During the nearly two years in which I served with the U. S. Army Ambulance Corps I never worked harder. My outfit was attached to the French Army and it gave me a splendid opportunity to see our allies in action. Kemmel Hill, Château-Thierry, Soissons—believe me, they were good. Along about midsummer of 1918 an emotional French general pinned a decoration on me—I'm still not quite sure why, but I've got the cross to prove it. The Armistice was signed at last and eventually I got home; there had been times when I wouldn't have given a lead nickel for my chances of coming back.

"Since Uncle Sam was no longer feeding me I had to go to work again, and I got a job as an assistant editor of a magazine. Before long I was trying my own hand at writing; I wrote a novel—not in business hours—and found a publisher. Then I turned to short stories which very soon occupied all my time, so I kissed the magazine good-by and branched out as a free-lance. That was about six years ago. Since then I have written four books, with a fifth on the way, and more stories than I care to remember. I'm happiest when doing war stories and particularly stories about my own ambulance corps. In spite of these millions of words clicking from my typewriter I have found time to go to Europe twice in the last four years, but my summers are usually spent in a very quiet house in a quiet part of New York State, planning more plots for my winter's work.

LARRY BARRETTO."

Tuttle, Artist

AND here's another piece of Tut's drawing—darn near as funny as "The Curse of Drink," the story with which it goes. Just look there at Hank, and Hozie Sykes with his face all black.

And while we're at it how do you like the drawings Jack Warren did to run with the story? We got a big laugh out of 'em, ourselves.

Lord of the Range

WE'VE about decided—and we'll bet the crowd agrees—that for dramatic, authentic writing, for living characters and the fighting, glamorous reality of the West, you can't beat Ernest Haycox. He gets, with incredible skill, that atmosphere of tense action, of battling men, of singing bullets. And nowhere has he done his stuff better than in his novelette, "Invitation by Bullet," which leads the next issue of SHORT STORIES. It's about Old Rube Mamerock, lord of the range, ancient, powerful and rich. The vultures are gathering, waiting for him to die, waiting to tear his pleasant range apart. There are killings at night, there are battles and intrigues, while Dead John and Playgood Nuggins fight it out.

Then our old friends Joe Breedlove and Indigo Bowers whom we have met in several other Haycox stories come riding out of nowhere into trouble. And when the show-down comes, they're *there*.

And, in the next issue, there's another big novelette by one of SHORT STORIES first string. Thomson Burtis has done us an air yarn of the war. "The Montana Madman" is about one of Tom Burtis's carefree, swellheaded youngsters careening over the French battlefields, engaging squadrons of enemy planes—not giving a damn for anybody or anything—and sometimes he broke the strictest orders because he was such a fightin' fool. You remember the remarkable war record of Frank Luke, the

Arizona Ace? Well this story will make you think of Luke.

Ever hear of anybody that was shanghaied and then found himself admiral of a navy before he knew it? That's what happened to the second mate in Meigs O. Frost's story "The Hell Ship Admiral" in the next issue. And there's another of Charles W. Tyler's Baldy Sours yarns next time. Baldy tries his hand at football in "Baldy Sours and the Pigskin Game" and we guarantee you'll get a good laugh.

Then there's another of Lee Robinson's fine tales of Marines in Nicaragua, called "Leatherneck, Model '98." That boy Robinson certainly knows his campaigners—and can write 'em too.

Add to all this the last bangup installment of Willard K. Smith's "Bowery Murder" where the tangle as to who murdered Woodward, and why is finally settled—and what better could there be?

THE MAIL BAG

A pig and a hogger

HAVING read the story "Bricks Dust" and the note by Clifford Knight saying that he was not sure of the origin of the name of the Hog law, my idea is that the name originated from the railroad slang which makes an engine a pig, and an engineer a hogger. I don't make this a positive statement, it is just my idea. I liked the story very much and would like to see more railroad stories in SHORT STORIES. It seems to me that railroading and steel milling are two great industries which hold a lot of action by the kind of heroes that are sung in SHORT STORIES, but unfortunately they have few chroniclers.

I never railroaded but I did put in a few years in the mills and I have seen some things happen which some one with the gift of words and some imagination could make into corking yarns.

Best wishes to the Eds, and continued success to their magazine.

W. H. STRONG.

Here's your chance!

I HAVE SHORT STORIES from 1923 to date. Will gladly give anyone copies they want if they will stand the cost of mailing.

I. STEINARD,
303 Craig St.,
Schenectady, N. Y.

The Boy's Travelled

I HAVE policed in the United States and Europe, prospected in Alaska and on the Western desert, shipped in the Navy, fought with the Army in France, flown along the border, and sailed all over the Pacific and the South Sea Islands, punched cows, railroaded, marched through the bush the length and breadth of Africa and served

READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

1_____ 3_____

2_____ 4_____

5_____

I do not like:

_____ Why?_____

NAME_____ ADDRESS_____

in the Foreign Legion. How did I do all this running around? Easy. Through reading. SHORT STORIES, *of course.*

W. C. WILSON, JR.,
Birmingham,
Ala.

Teaching with SHORT STORIES

I AM a school teacher and your editorial *"Dog or Monkey"* inspired me to write this letter. SHORT STORIES have helped me understand my boys. I have often wondered about the difference between city children and country children. Now I can solve it; country children have width to their characters and depth in their souls. These big country boys are sort of slow and lazy looking, but they do good work in the classroom. Children from crowded districts might be compared to the caged monkey. I've often wished on rainy days that some of your writers would happen along and tell my boys some of these great thrilling stories.

AGNES C. THORNTON.

Ceres, Calif.

Those Leathernecks!

DURING the latter part of 1913, I was just finishing a four-year enlistment in the U. S. Marines. I saved SHORT STORIES and kept them in my locker, and the boys used to borrow them, and I will say they took good care of them, too. One day while I was off duty, I was lying on a Corking Mat, reading the latest copy of SHORT STORIES. I happened to look up suddenly aware that someone was watching me, a Naval Lieutenant was standing near looking very interestedly at the magazine that I was reading. I started to get up, but he said, "All right, Sergeant, carry on, I was just looking at the magazine that you have there." "SHORT STORIES, sir," I said, and I handed him the copy. He looked through it, and then sat down beside me on the mat and started to read. I felt rather self-conscious. The idea of what would happen should the "First Luff" or the Skipper himself come on deck, leaves something for the imagination to work on,—a marine sergeant and a naval lieutenant sitting side by each on a Corking Mat! Well it simply isn't done in the Navy. So I said, "You are welcome to take it along and read it, sir." His head snapped up and he blinked for a moment and then he caught on, "By Jove, you are right about that, Sergeant," he said, and he got up and left nodding, "Thanks Sarg," he said grinning.

W W. HILL,
Newark,
Ohio.

OUTLANDS

OUTLANDS will give you news of the distant and dangerous places of the earth. It will collect facts from the lands of adventure, near or far, and present them briefly in each issue. If you know of any interesting facts or have had any adventures of your own, OUTLANDS will be glad to print them.

A Strange Wager

MR. B. GARDNER writes to tell us of an accomplished outlander and a lost bet.

"Captain Antonio Zetto, a member of a well-to-do Italian family, in an effort to win a unique bet made in 1918, has followed the trail of adventure around the world and

across practically every country on the globe. Zetto made a wager that he could cover the world in ten years. The conditions were that he should walk across every country in the world; when he crossed water he was to work his passage. He could not, by terms of the agreement, carry either firearms or water. Captain Zetto lost the wager. He began his hike, which is the longest ever attempted, on December 24, 1918, and it ended December 24, 1928, with his task almost completed.

"During the last ten years, Zetto probably lived through a greater number of adventures that were more varied, thrilling, and perilous, than any other man ever experienced in that length of time. He traveled from thirty to forty miles at a time in the Sahara Desert without water, since he was allowed to carry none, and several times almost perished from thirst. In contrast he almost froze to death battling the snows while crossing the Alps near St. Gothard. He tramped across every country of Europe and went through Russia to Siberia. In Turkestan he was set upon by Nomads, shot and beaten, and left to die.

"But after weeks he recovered and pushed on to Tibet, where he was held in prison by the Lama priests for six days. Escaping from there, he reached the Indian frontier, passed through Burma, and went on to the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, up to Mongolia and Honolulu. From Honolulu he worked his passage to Vancouver, Alaska, and went from there to Canada and the United States and Mexico. Some of Zetto's greatest perils were encountered in the jungless of Central and South America.

"From South America the adventurer worked across to South Africa where, among other things, he was treed by a ferocious rhinoceros in the Congo. Between Uganda and Abyssinia, he said, he was captured by a tribe of dwarfs; but managed to escape, and went almost without sleep for fifteen days and nights to avoid recapture.

"He continued on to Morocco and started through Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, Afghanistan, India, Ceylon, Australia, and Siam. From Siam he went to Indo-China, where he was when the ten years expired."

Alaska

THOMAS H. WHITE of Fairbanks, who claims to have the only caribou ranch in the world, was in Seattle, recently, to collect a crew of cowboys to ride herd on his strange "critters" in the shadow of the Arctic Circle.

White is known all through the interior districts as the "Caribou King." Over ten years ago he started his caribou ranch, which has for its purpose the breeding of a bigger and better meat animal by crossing the caribou with the reindeer.

Every spring and fall, caribou sweep by the millions across interior Alaska on their mysterious seasonal migrations. White established his ranch at the head of the north fork of the Chana River, about 100 miles north of Fairbanks, and in the path of the caribou trek.

He first started roping the animals but found this too slow a method, and so a few years ago constructed a gigantic corral about ten miles in circumference.

When his new breed is thoroughly tamed he will take his herd onto a range out of the path of the spring and autumn caribou run, he declares.

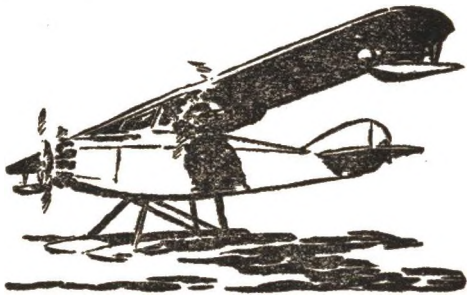
Before he built his corral, White had a herd of caribou tamed to such an extent that they wore bells. When a herd of wild caribou passed in the spring, he says they joined the herd and were never seen again.

Whales!

A BATTLE between two whales at least seventy feet in length about a half mile out at sea was reported by D. D. Bowen of the Deal (New Jersey), Coast Guard station. Bowen said the whales for a half hour flayed each other with their tails, rising at times twenty feet out of the water.

LAST summer a female whale cruised for weeks off the coast near Sidney, Australia, after its calf had been stranded on one of the beaches, and scared several fishing parties in boats a couple of miles out at sea. On two occasions the great mammal chased boats, and the occupants had narrow escapes.

AIR-WAYS



AIRWAYS is a new department and a new idea. SHORT STORIES has already taken cognizance of the great interest in flying with its fiction. It is now instituting a department which will contain flying news. Facts about what is happening in the air today. AIRWAYS will be glad to publish letters from readers containing accounts of true adventures in the sky.

Air Stamps

A LETTER from a modern philatelist. "Since 1917 countries have been progressing with airway plans, and, beginning in the aforementioned year Italy issued the first airmail postage stamp. Today scores of countries have airmail stamps used for letters going through the air. The United States and Canada each has a five-cent air adhesive. Esthonia has produced what are perhaps some of the most artistic airmail stamps; a set of three, triangular in shape and colored, each, with the central design of a different type of plane.

"Almost every month new airmail stamps are issued somewhere in the world. Special flights cause new cachets and cancellations; episodes like that of the Graf Zeppelin's or Lindbergh's flight, bring out new air stamps.

MONTGOMERY MULFORD,
Buffalo, New York.

Air Mail in Peru

AIR mail service has been inaugurated between Talara and Lima, and is available to American patrons of the American postal service.

Air mail service between Talara and Lima according to an announcement from the Postmaster General's office is available for letters dispatched on vessels sailing from New York, every second Thursday beginning November 8, 1928.

The air mail fee, in addition to the ordinary postage or registration fee, or both, will be 25 cents for each half ounce or fraction thereof. Both the postage and air mail fee (as well as the registry fee in the case of registered letters) must be fully prepaid with United States stamps.

Articles to be dispatched by this route must be clearly marked "Service Aero" in the left-hand bottom corner of the address side of the envelope wrapper.

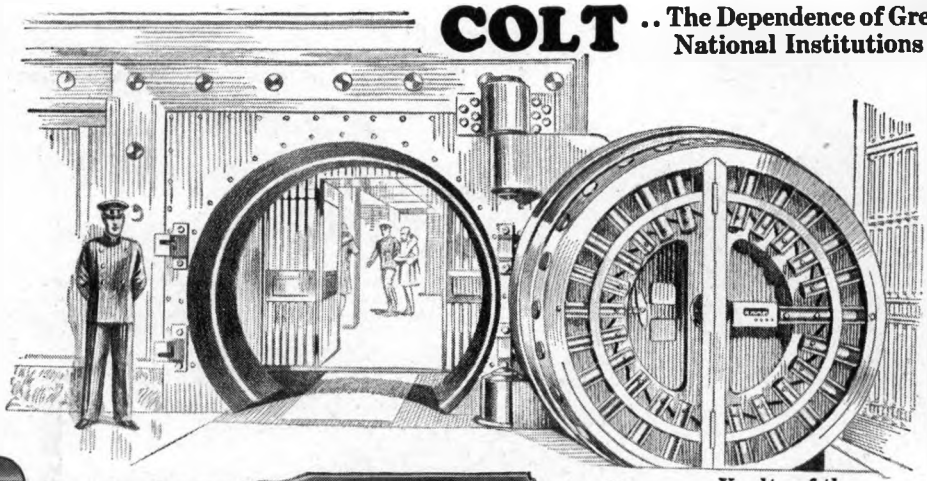
Frozen Motor? Who Cares?

CAPTAIN K. F. SUNDERS, of the Canadian Fairchild organization, landed on a lake in the northeast wilderness of Canada and went through the ice. The plane was finally hauled out, the Wright Whirlwind engine taken apart and thawed out, and when reassembled the machine was down back to its base.

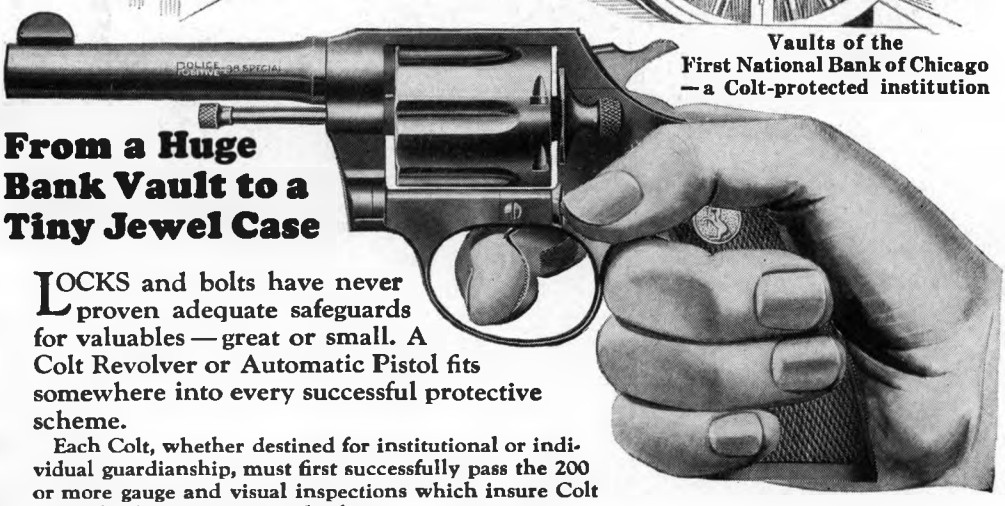
Gold in the Plane

THE British have found transport by air so reliable that the Royal Mint is now considering the aerial conveyance of gold from South Africa to London. An average of a ton of gold a day is shipped from the African Dominion in two streams, one to England and the other to India, and aerial transport firms are now finding heightened interest in the proposed commercial air route through Africa from Cape to Cairo, especially since the Rand gold-mining industry is said to be interested in the use of airplanes.

COLT .. The Dependence of Great National Institutions



Vaults of the First National Bank of Chicago —a Colt-protected institution



From a Huge Bank Vault to a Tiny Jewel Case

LOCKS and bolts have never proven adequate safeguards for valuables — great or small. A Colt Revolver or Automatic Pistol fits somewhere into every successful protective scheme.

Each Colt, whether destined for institutional or individual guardianship, must first successfully pass the 200 or more gauge and visual inspections which insure Colt dependability, accuracy and safety.

The Colt Police Positive Special .38 caliber Revolver shown here is no exception.

Every bar of steel from the mills, each of the thousand steps of forging, machining, finishing, assembly fitting and test until the complete Arm proves its precision in the Colt's Shooting Gallery is backed by Colt's 93 years' experience in Fire Arms manufacture. The Colt Positive Lock, embodied in Colt Revolvers, makes accidental discharge impossible.

It is because of this careful craftsmanship that Colts are the unquestioned selection of those who know Fire Arm requirements.

Colt's Service Department will help solve shooting problems; suggest the Arm best suited to your needs; assist you in forming or joining a Revolver Club.

Colt's new Catalog No. 28 is the most complete Fire Arms Manual ever issued. Write for it; also for your copy of "Makers of History," the thrilling story of Colt accomplishments.

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And Now A MACHINE To Make Shaving 50% Easier and 100% Cheaper!

Unique Invention Arouses a Whirlwind of National Interest . . . Achieves Amazing Records of Unbelievably KEEN, Cool Shaves . . . Special Introductory Offer in Force Right Now.

ONE BLADE LASTS 365 DAYS

THIS is the age of amazing scientific discoveries. And now comes the most surprising invention of all—a machine that absolutely revolutionizes shaving!

Just think of a device that can take any ordinary razor blade on the market and multiply its sharpness 50% to 100% in exactly 11 seconds! And just imagine what a slick, painless shave you can get when your blade is about twice as keen as any you have ever tried before!

No More Blades to Buy

But that isn't all. KRISS-KROSS not only strops blades to unbelievable sharpness—but it makes them last indefinitely! Day after day—week after week—you can keep using the same old blade and still get smoother, better shaves than you now get from a blade right out of a fresh package! Any number of cases are on record where one blade has lasted over a year and is still going strong. And M. T. Main of Kenosha, Wisconsin, has used one single blade for more than five solid years of the coolest shaves he ever got in his life!

Rejuvenates All Makes of Razor Blades

KRISS-KROSS is so remarkable that it is more a blade-rejuvenator than a stropper. It embodies 7 mechanical features that have long baffled inventors. Works on all brands of blades except Durham. Reproduces the magic diagonal stropping-stroke of the master barber. Reverses blade automatically, first one side and then the other. Starts with strong pressure and finishes light. Nickel jig flies up to notify you when blade is ready with the keenest cutting edge steel can take!

Generous Introductory Offer

KRISS-KROSS is never sold in stores—but only through authorized representatives in each locality. Right now, we are making a generous offer and are giving a new kind of 3-way, adjustable razor FREE to introduce KRISS-KROSS. Use the coupon below to get details of this unusual invention and offer. See for yourself how ingenious KRISS-KROSS is and what undreamed-of shaving comfort it holds in store for you. No obligation. Clip the coupon now. Mail it today!

AGENTS!

$30 a Day and More

KRISS-KROSS is an astonishing money maker and brings excellent profits to men who are willing to act as our representatives in their home territories. Many earn $30-$60 a day and others are making $5,000 and $7,500 a year clear profit. Spare-time agents often take in $6-$12 an evening and up to $200 a month. We give you an extremely generous proposition and show you just how to get started the easiest way. Write for information and see just exactly what we offer. It will pay you to investigate. Check bottom line of coupon below and mail it today!

Rhodes' KRISS KROSS STROPPER

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1418 Pendleton Ave.. ST. LOUIS, MO.

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39 Wellington Street East, Toronto 2, Canada

RHODES MFG. CO., Dept. D-3503
1418 Pendleton Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Without obligation, please send me complete illustrated explanation showing how KRISS-KROSS rejuvenates all types of razor blades (except Durham). Also give me details of your special introductory offer and the Free 3-way razor you are giving away at present.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

☐ Check this space if interested in becoming representative.