

"Armored Pay Car"—and a silent grudge against the world. . . . A novelette by STEUART EMERY

Short Stories

April 10th

Twice A Month

25c



Once more—

the Shame of Arizona!

"48 Hours for Henry"

by **W. C. TUTTLE**

When you're in line for his COLD—Look Out!

Gargle

LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC

Quick!

Germs reduced up to 96.7% in tests

IF YOU have been in close contact with other people who have colds, or if your feet get wet or cold, or if you have been exposed to sudden changes of temperature, it's only sensible to gargle with Listerine Antiseptic as promptly as possible.

Guard Against Mass Invasion of Germs

Such exposure may lower body resistance so that germs called the "secondary invaders" find it easier to invade the throat tissue and produce many of those miserable aspects of a cold you know so well. Listerine Antiseptic reaches back on the throat surfaces to kill millions of these "secondary invaders."

In tests, germs on throat and mouth surfaces were reduced as much as 96.7% fifteen minutes after the Listerine Antiseptic gargle; as much as 80% one hour after. You can see why it can help Nature in guarding against a mass invasion of germs.

Fewer Colds in Tests

Bear in mind Listerine Antiseptic's impressive record made in tests over 12 years: Those who gargled with Listerine Antiseptic twice a day had fewer colds and usually milder colds than those who did not gargle . . . and fewer sore throats.

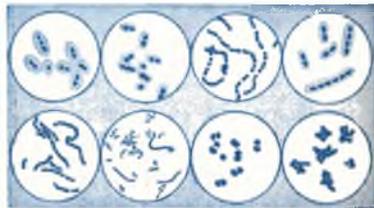
So, remember, at the first hint of a cold, use Listerine Antiseptic. Better still, make the Listerine Antiseptic gargle a morning-and-night habit.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, St. Louis, Mo.



**"SECONDARY INVADERS,"
Potential Troublemakers**

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TOP ROW, left to right: Pneumococcus Type III, Pneumococcus Type IV, Streptococcus viridans, Friedlander's bacillus. BOTTOM ROW, left to right: Streptococcus hemolyticus, Bacillus influenzae, Micrococcus catarrhalis, Staphylococcus aureus.



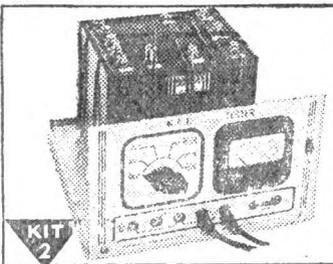
I Will Show You How to Learn RADIO by Practicing in Spare Time

**I Send You
Big Kits
of Radio Parts**



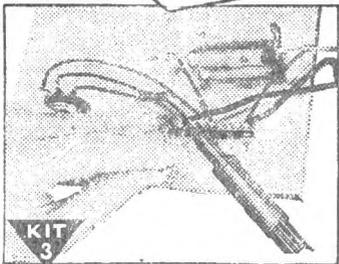
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I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



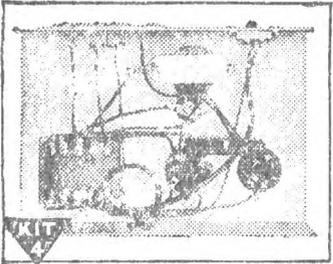
KIT 2

Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



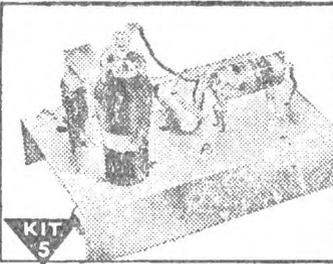
KIT 3

You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



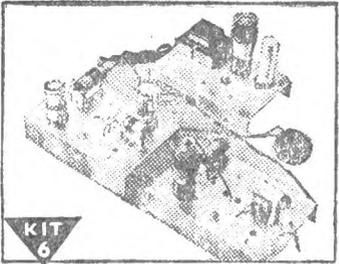
KIT 4

You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with jacks of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



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GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH RECEIVER SERVICING

How to Be a Success in RADIO TELEVISION ELECTRONICS

Short Stories

TWICE A MONTH

THE
BEST
OF
AMERICA'S
ACTION
ADVENTURE
MYSTERY

- THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE** 4
FORTY-EIGHT HOURS FOR HENRY
 (A Long Novelette) **W. C. Tuttle** 6
Henry Said That All Gamblers Have a Past—and a Very Uncertain Future. As for Himself He'd Bet on Craps, Poker, Horse Racing or the Weather, but Not on the Verdict of a Wild Horse Valley Jury
- TO LAUGH AGAIN** **H. S. M. Kemp** 31
Quite a Sizeable Chunk of Country Was Pelc Logan's Domain. He Watched Its Wild Life, Its Trees and Mines—but Most of All Its Men
- COAL, ICE, BUT NO GRAVY** **Berton E. Cook** 40
"What's Wrong with a Night's Sleep All Snug and Sheltered!" . . . "Plenty. Coal's Scarce in Boston and Folks Are Cold!"
- FLYING TINTYPES** **Jim Bay** 49
ARMORED PAY CAR
 (A Novelette) **Stewart Emery** 50
"So I Go All the Way from Camp Shanks to the Elbe Without a Scratch Just to Get a Load of Scrap Iron in Brooklyn!"
- DEADLINE ADVANCED** **Steve Hall** 63
Ycs, Advanced a Lot. Outside the Boomer's Window the Mad Confusion of the Outfitting Dock Was Like a Four Alarm Fire Gone Out of Control

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April 10th, 1947

CONTENTS

HIGH COUNTRY

(Third Part of Four) Peter Dawson 74

*It Was Bad Enough to Lose His Horses; but It
Looked as if Jim Had Also Lost His
Girl and His Best Friend*

KNOW YOUR HEADINGS Giff Cheshire 97

*... You Got to Smell It a Long While to Really Know
the River, to Be a River Man*

BAD JOSS FOR KAKA AND KAKAPO
(A Long Novelette) Andrew A. Caffrey 104

*Two Yank Airmen—Who Couldn't Be Awed by Old
Mother Nature, the New Zealand Department
of Internal Affairs or Even by the
Necessity of Accounting for Certain
Happenings after They Might
Return to the Home Base*

PABLO'S WELL Philip Ketchum 131

*Even Men Who Were Familiar with the Desert and
Knew the Unmarked Short-Cut by Pablo's
Well Often Preferred to Take the Longer
Route. The Desert Was Not Kind to
Those Who Invaded It*

ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB 138

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER Pete Kuhlhoff 139

COVER—Pete Kuhlhoff

*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of
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EVERY
AUTHOR'S
FINEST
AND
LATEST
STORIES
NO
REPRINTS



What You See Without a Gun

ONE of our favorite authors, H. S. M. Kemp of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, tells us that the northern part of that province has been virtually isolated from the south. We kick around here if our trains are an hour or so late. Well, Mr. Kemp tells us that he's just been riding back of three locomotives and a snow plow and pulling into his destination 18 hours late which is "practically on time."

But the mails are still running—well, maybe *limping*—so we know how "To Laugh Again" came to be.

It's about like this; so says Mr. Kemp.

"As a matter of fact, this story was all set out for me, so that my job was merely to type it. Well, almost. It happened like this:

"For the past five years, my hunting partner and I have walked many a weary mile in knee-deep snow trying to find elk. Last year, we ran into a herd of 'em on the twelfth day of the hunt and five miles from camp. We began to think that they were non-existent. This year, elk were closed; the only big-game legal were jumpers and caribou. We're a bit too far south for caribou, so we went out for jumpers.

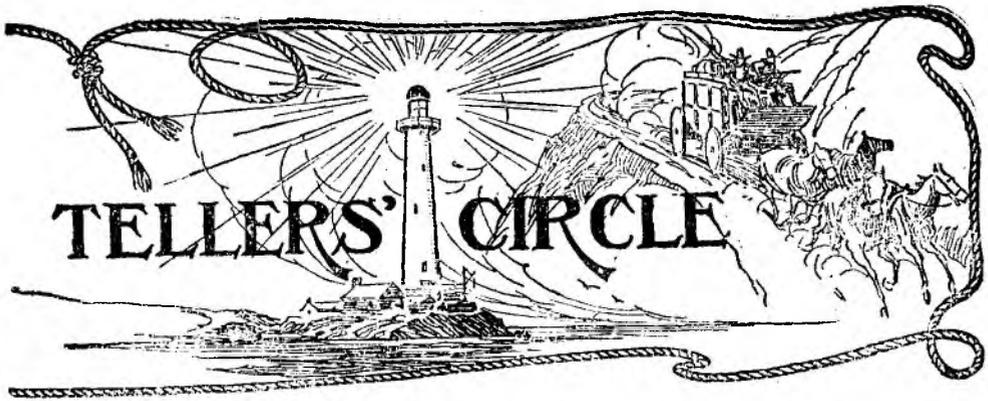
"We camped with an old German homesteader on the edge of a muskeg, right 'where the North began' and with only the wilderness between us and the pole, we hoped for the best. It was very cold and very stormy and, like the Swede, we shoulda stood in bed; but we made a mile swing and found ourselves a scant half-mile from the shack. Then you know what happened? Two hundred yards ahead of us and on the south side of a little hill, six elk got to their

feet. There was an old buckskin-colored bull, two cows and three calves. And as the wind was right—from them to us—they just stood and looked us over.

"Sure we drew on 'em. After hunting for years that came natural. But something whispered in our ears about a two hundred dollar fine, and we lowered the guns again. But it sure hurt. These babies sniffed the breeze, stretched themselves, then slowly walked over the hill. We saw them again twice after that, and we could have taken the lot of them. It upset us so badly that when, a few minutes later, a great gray timber-wolf stood in some stunted spruce and looked us over casually, our minds were so full of elk that we didn't recognize Lobo for what he was. Mebbe he was after the elk, and mebbe he had better luck than we did. I dunno.

"Later we did the usual sour-graping: we couldn't have taken the meat out, anyway, for a track of a sleigh from the kill to the camp would have been a dead giveaway. The old homesteader never owned a gun in his life so he wouldn't have done the killing, and we were the only hunters in there. So what? Anyway, elk need to be protected. They used to roam this country by the thousands, but the way the timber-wolves have been after them has sure thinned them out. But what Spence and I are asking ourselves is why, after the myriad miles and myriad hours we put in hunting elk in open seasons and couldn't find 'em, why, again, should we run onto this bunch of 'em in the closed-season the first half-hour of the first day out? I guess the answer lies in the old gag about 'what you see when you haven't got a gun.'"

H. S. M. Kemp



Kaiser's Madmen

"**D**EADLINE ADVANCED" is, according to its creator Steve Hail, sort of a hybrid critter—portions of imagination and yet based on facts.

With the rapid, oh so rapid transition from war to peace time with its inevitable change in our thinking, most of us will find ourselves thinking of "Kaiser" merely as the name of a new automobile.

We'll be forgetting the fabulous "Henry J." and the astounding things he did in shipyards.

Steve Hail knows about those things. He was there.

"Yes, I was there all right," he tells us. "I put in a couple of hectic years in Kaiser's Richmond Shipyards, having gone there several months prior to the war as a means of escape from the sea, a profession I had followed reluctantly for a dozen years. It turned out to be merely a change from one madhouse to another. Kaiser at that time had obtained a contract from the British for construction of thirty freighters, forerunners of the later American version, the Liberty ship.

"The fabulous Henry J. built up an organization of his own construction men and dam builders around a nucleus of established, old-line shipbuilders. The resulting clash of methods and personalities was, if the end hadn't been so urgent, a mad comedy of confusion and conflict.

"Kaiser's wild men—'production geniuses' they were called—could, would and often did try anything. I got my first gray hairs during that period. The payoff incident in 'Deadline Advanced' is typical, al-

though for the sake of the record not all such occurrences worked out so happily.

"However, in the end the results justified the means. Kaiser's madmen did build ships. A lot of 'em and fast. and, contrary to some negative propaganda at the time, good ships." Steve Hail

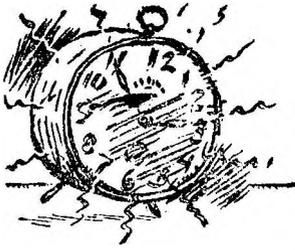
Hill Born

By S. OMAR BARKER

WITH a faraway hill to look at,
Or a nearaway sea to smell,
No window thin can shut me in,
Nor ever quite compel
My soul to wear the shackles
Of a slave to sell-and-buy,
Nor drain my blood of a hardihood
Born of the open sky.

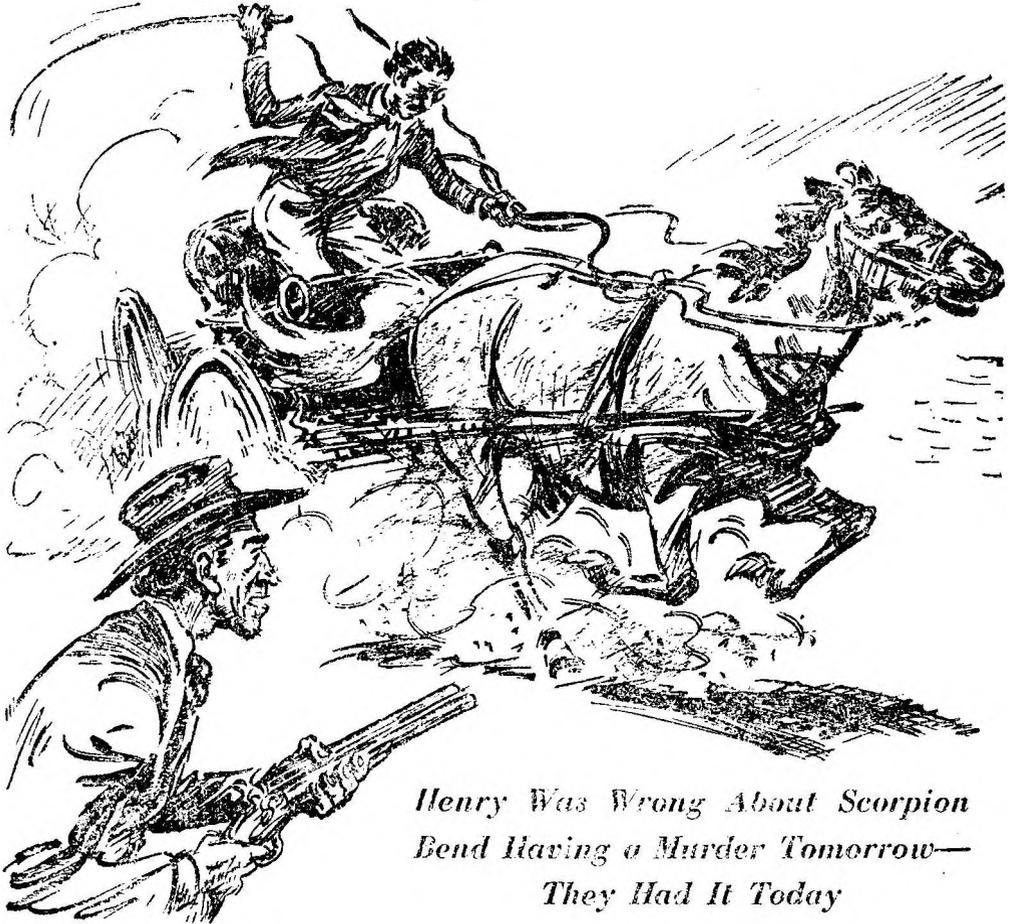
Everything pivots on papers!
Shuffle them over again!
For that is the way of the world today
The world of the Business Men.
I have no word of censure
For the ways of indoor earning,
But I am the seed of a different breed,
Caught in the big wheel's turning.

And yet—with a hill to look at,
A river or sea to scan,
I still hold fast to a rugged past
In the blood of a hill born man!



FORTY-EIGHT HOURS FOR HENRY

By W. C. TUTTLE



*Henry Was Wrong About Scorpion
Bend Having a Murder Tomorrow—
They Had It Today*

IT WAS a good fight. That is, it was a good fight, while it lasted. Two cowboys came over to the saloon from the Scorpion Bend dance hall, quarreling over a girl, and proceeded to take assorted and sundry swings at each other. A big miner, trying to get a better view of the slug-fest, stepped on Oscar Johnson's favorite corn.

Oscar, being six feet, four inches tall, weighing two hundred and fifty—and with

a love of battle, proceeded to knock the big miner squarely between the two belligerent cowboys, taking them both off their feet—and the gang-fight was on.

Slim Pickins, a skinny, long-necked cowboy from the JHC, got hit on the nose. Slim's nose was very long and very thin—before he got hit. Now it was very short and stubby. Slim managed to get outside. Frijole Bill Cullison, cook at the JHC, was sixty-five years of age, about as big as a

pint of soap after a heavy washing, bow-legged—and internally loaded for bear. Frijole was hardly able to navigate under his own power.

Hardly understanding the cause of the commotion, he wandered into the maelstrom of flailing arms and kicking legs, and ended



up on the seat of his overalls on the sidewalk outside the saloon. After due deliberation he got to his feet, staggered over to the JHC buckboard, managed to drag a jug from under the seat, and helped himself to a deep draught of his own prune whiskey.

He braced his back against the left rear wheel of the buckboard and began singing in a reedy, high-pitched voice:

"Shall we gather at the reever, at the bright and shi-i-ning re-e-e-er—" Then he slid sideways and sprawled in the dirt.

Oscar Johnson, the giant Swede, staggered out of the saloon, his shirt almost torn from his huge body. As his big feet hit the wooden sidewalk he laughed raucously and declared, "Ay can vip any man on eart!"

Clunk! A beer-bottle, thrown from inside the saloon ricocheted off Oscar's head and hit a porch-post. It would have knocked down a mule, but not Oscar Johnson, who staggered, caught his balance, picked up the bottle, and slammed it back through one of the big saloon windows.

"Slim!" called Oscar. "Vere de ha'al are you?"

"Ride here," replied Slim. "My nose id buzzed."

"Good! Vere is Frecholey?"

"Ober by de bugboard, I thig."

They found Frijole and gently placed him in the back of the buckboard, his legs, from the knees, hanging out the rear. Slim climbed on the seat, while Oscar untied the team.

"Liddle early to go hobe, ain't id?" asked Slim.

"Yust right," declared the Swede. "If ve stay around here very long, somebody vill get hurt. Dig the yug out of the back, Slim—ve must have von more drink before ve go. Yudas, das var goot fight!"

They drank from the jug, almost shuddered the seat loose, corked the jug and pulled away from the hitching-rack.

"Tb god a dabled sore dose," complained Slim.

"Did Frecholey get hort, Slim?"

"He got drug, I thig."

"He vars drunk before the fight. Blow hard on de nose, Slim—maybe it vill vork better. Maybe it is yust pushed back little bit."

Slim experimented with his nose, while Oscar sent a willing team at full speed over that rough road.

Oscar's suggestion worked pretty good, and they stopped for one more drink. Frijole was sleeping peacefully, so they didn't waken him.

By the time they reached the dangerous grades around Lobo Canyon, they were both singing, trusting to the half-broken team to keep them on the grades. There was no moon, and the stars were obscured by a haze, making it very dark.

HOW many times death was only an inch away from their outside wheels on that treacherous grade, they did not know—nor care. They finally went down the last steep grade to the valley floor, the team at a half-run, as they struck the level going. There were ruts down there that would help keep them on the road. They swept around a sharp curve, crashed into something, which neither of them saw, and went on, careening down the road.

Oscar managed to check the team and pull to a stop.

"Ay tink ve hit somet'ing," he said owlishly.

"I know blamed well, we did!" grunted Slim. "The question is—what wazzit?"

Oscar lighted a match, and the momentary illumination showed that they had lost Frijole Bill, and also the jug of prune whiskey.

"We've gotta git that whiskey," declared Slim. "S'all we've got."

"Yah, su-ure," agreed Oscar. "If ve are lucky, maybe we vill find Freeholcy, too."

They found Frijole, only when Slim tripped over his prostrate body in the darkness, but they could not find the jug. Grumbling over their bad luck, they loaded Frijole into the back of the buckboard again and went on.

Tonto City was dark, as they went through. Even the King's Castle, the one big saloon and gambling house in the town, was dark.

They drove out to the JHC, put away the team, after which Oscar picked up the unconscious man in the back of the buckboard, and went up to the ranchhouse. Slim lighted a lamp, took one look at the man Oscar had dumped on a cot, and sank into a chair. It was not Frijole! Oscar stepped back, looked closely at the man, and gasped:

"Yudas Priest! Slim! Ve picked up de wrong von!"

"Wrong one, huh?" gasped Slim. "Oscar, this'n has been shot!"

"Ay will get a frash yug," whispered Oscar. "Ay need it."

They each drank a cupful of the powerful liquor, and sat down to try and figure out what happened. Finally Slim said:

"Well, we better de-liver this'n to Henry—and then hunt for the one we lost."

"Yah, su-ure," nodded Oscar. "Ve can't use dis von, Slim!"

"We shore can't—he's deader'n a door-nail. Wait a minute! Hey! I know that hombre! He's a jewelry drummer."

"Ay don't care who he is," declared Oscar, "A vil trade him for Free-holey. Go hitch de team, Slim."

Daylight was streaking across Tonto City, as Slim and Oscar drove the buckboard team into town. Henry Harrison Conroy, sheriff of Wild Horse Valley, and Judge Van Treece, his deputy, were snoring a duet in the Tonto Hotel, when Judge suddenly said, "Um-m-m-flugg-g-g—fit ugg-g-g-g."

They both sat up in bed. A swamper from the King's Castle Saloon was filling his buckets at the corner pump, which had not been oiled in ten years, wailing like a lost soul.

"The curse of humanity—men who pump at daylight," said Judge solemnly.

Henry Harrison Conroy, short, fat, almost bald, faced like a full moon, and with the biggest and reddest nose in Arizona, twitching a little at each shriek of the pump. Van Treece, six feet, four inches tall, his nightgown hiked up around his big ears, the face of a disappointed tragedian, hair, what there was of it, standing on end.

NEITHER of these men could, by any stretch of imagination, remotely resemble an accepted description of a peace officer in a wild-riding valley of the West. Henry Conroy, born backstage in the theater, featured for years as an entertainer, pitchforked by fate from the footlights to the cow country, had in his own queer way, made good as a sheriff.

Judge Van Treece, destined for a top-spot as a criminal lawyer, succumbed to a great thirst, a drifting derelict, became Henry's appointed deputy. These two, together with Oscar Johnson, jailer, made up what the Scorpion Bend *Clarion* had dubbed, "The Shame of Arizona." Henry owned the JHC cattle ranch, inherited from his uncle.

"As a matter of self-protection," said Henry, "we should oil that damnable pump, Judge."

"Should have done it a year ago," sighed Judge. "It has annoyed us every morning, sir."

"It is too early for an argument," sighed Henry. "We may sleep for another hour."

Henry drew a deep breath, stretched out again, and at that moment a team and buckboard drew up at the front of the hotel.

"He-e-ey!" yelled Slim's voice. "Will somebody call the sheriff?"

Henry groaned, got out of bed and went over to an open window, where he could look down on the buckboard. He leaned out and said:

"What on earth is the matter with you two?"

"Hyah, Henry," said Slim. "We've got a dead man for yuh."

"A-a dead man for me?" parroted Henry. "Who is he?"

"Got him here in the back," said Slim. "I think he's a drummer."

"What on earth is he talking about?" asked Judge, as Henry made a slow-motion drive to pick up his pants.

"A dead man, Judge," groaned Henry. "A drummer," Slim said.

"Huh! Drummer, eh? What sort of a drummer?"

"A dead drummer, Judge. At least, that is Slim's opinion."

THEY dressed hurriedly, but found a crowd around the buckboard. Henry ordered Slim down to Doctor Bogart's place, and while the old doctor, still half-asleep, examined the corpse, Slim and Oscar told Henry and Judge how they happened to find the body.

"But where is Frijole?" asked Judge. Oscar replied, "Ay don't know, Yudge—Ay t'nk he yust up and vent."

"This poor devil was shot in the back, Henry," informed the doctor grimly. "Probably killed instantly. His coat is burned a little indicating that the gun was held very close to his back."

"The man," said Judge is—or was—Harry Mosher, a peddler of jewelry. Not exactly a salesman for a firm, but rather a purveyor of baubles. He tried to sell me a diamond of three carats weight."

"Big one, huh?" queried Slim, "How much, Judge?"

"I am not exactly sure, but I believe it was six dollars and seventy-five cents."

"Gosh! I'd have paid that for it."

"I have no doubt," said Judge dryly.

"We shall go out to the spot where you found this man, Slim," said Henry. "No doubt he was on his way back to Scorpion Bend, when you crashed his buggy."

"Yuh mean—a dead man was drivin' it, Henry?"

"Somebody was, one would suppose."

They went back to the main street. Frijole Bill had just ridden up to the office, mounted on a horse, which was still partly harnessed. The little, bow-legged cook still had the jug, and there was an accusing glint in his eyes.

"Fine friends I've got!" he spat wrathfully. "Throw me out of the blasted buckboard and leave me there to starve!"

"We hunted for yuh for hours, Frijole," declared Slim.

"Yuh did not! I was there, right in plain sight."

"In plain sight of what?" queried Slim.

"Huh! Startin' t' lie yourself loose, eh? If I hadn't found this here horse, I'd—"

"Where'd yuh find the jug, Frijole?"

"Find it? I had it with me, blast yuh both! I was startin' to take me a drink, when yuh hit a rut. Loosened up all m' front teeth, too. I had t' walk a mile to find this here horse. It's jist plain luck that yuh ever seen me agin."

"Ha'lo Freeholey," grinned Oscar. "Ay am glad to see you alife."

"Yo're a liar—yuh left me t' starve."

Tommy Roper, the stuttering stableman, came over from the feed corral and looked at the horse. The same outfit owned both the stable in Tonto City and Scorpion Bend. Henry walked over to Tommy and said:

"I presume you recognize this horse, Tommy."

Tommy nodded violently. "It bub-bub-bub-bub belongs to the sus-sus—"

"To the stable in Scorpion Bend," concluded Henry. Tommy nodded.

"It was driven by a jewelry salesman named Harry Mosher," added Judge.

Tommy Roper nodded. "Where's the bub-bub-buggy?"

"That is something to be determined," said Henry. "Get in, Judge. Want to go along, Frijole?"

"I jist about damn well don't," replied Frijole. "In fact, I ain't trustin' nobody from now on. I may be awful lonesome, but I'll be awful safe. Right now, I crave somethin'

to eat. Prob'ly git poisoned, but it's a chance I've got t' take."

They found the wrecked buggy at the foot of the grades, examined the wreckage carefully, but found no clues. Judge was sure that the man had at least two valises, but none was in the buggy, nor along the road. Nor was there any blood on the seat. There was a smear on the back of the seat, where the body had rested, but it was evident that the man had not been shot in the buggy.

They went back to Tonto City. Oscar stayed in town, but Frijole and Slim went back to the JHC. Henry and Judge sat down in the little office, both of them rather glum. As far as the law was concerned, things were going very badly in Wild Horse Valley. Two big gold strikes had brought a lot of undesirable people into the valley, no doubt the old order of things was changing, and not for the better, it seemed.

THERE was a new owner of the Tonto Hotel, a gambler named Silver Dollar Dean had bought and paid cash for the King's Castle Saloon and gambling house. New gamblers had been brought in. The jail held one prisoner, Johnny Thomas, a young cowboy, facing a murder trial. He was accused of shooting his father.

This, of course, had nothing to do with the gold rush; or did it? Tornado Jim Thomas owned the Circle T cattle spread. Tornado Jim was about sixty-five years of age, not exactly beloved of anybody. Johnny worked for his father, and was generally liked. Tornado Jim discovered a vein of gold on his Circle T, far out against the hills and it developed so good that Tornado Jim sold it for seventy-five thousand in cash. He called it the Road Runner mine.

Then Tornado Jim Thomas took a trip to Chicago. What happened there, only Tornado would know, but it developed that he met a woman, fell deeply in love and married—all in one week. No one in Wild Horse Valley knew this, until they came back to Tonto City.

Mrs. Thomas was a woman about forty years of age, well kept, rather pretty. At least, Tornado didn't select a girl. He was no howling beauty himself, and with the disposition of a badger. The two cowpokes of the Circle T, tied on their war-bags and

left the spread, when Mrs. Thomas proclaimed openly that she didn't care for them. She didn't care for Johnny either. Perhaps it was mutual. At any rate, Tornado Thomas made out a new will, cutting Johnny out of any inheritance, and Johnny started drinking. Tornado Jim was doing his share of drinking, too, and he let slip the information that on the day he married he gave his new wife fifty thousand dollars.

Things began to happen in Tonto City, new strikes were made, the King's Castle changed hands, and, in the excitement, the trouble of the Circle T were shoved into the background.

It is supposed that Johnny Thomas, brooding over the way his father had treated him, got too much Tonto City whiskey inside his belt, and went out to the ranch, seeking an interview. It was about nine o'clock at night, according to the evidence, when Johnny called his father out on the porch of the ranchhouse and shot him. Johnny was found wandering around the yard, apparently too drunk to explain anything. His gun had been fired once.

They buried Tornado Jim Thomas on the hill above town, and the widow took over the Circle T. She hired two drifting cowpokes, Al Treager and Dude Wells, and settled down to ranching. Little was known of Treager and Wells, except that they were from New Mexico.

The law moves slowly in small places. Johnny had already been in jail two weeks, and would not be tried for at least a month. It was a tough break for a wild-riding young cowboy, who didn't know just what did happen out at the Circle T.

"I drank too much," he told Henry. "It hit me all of a sudden, and I don't remember a blamed thing."

"Did you go out there to shoot your father?" asked Henry.

"I don't know why I went out there—it's all too hazy."

Henry and Judge sat in the office for a while, busy with their own thoughts. Finally Henry said, "I wonder who killed Harry Mosher?"

"Eh?" grunted Judge. "Oh, yes. And also why, Henry."

"One thing at a time, sir. If I can find the killer of Harry Mosher, I suppose the reason for the murder will reveal itself."

Henry went over to the King's Castle. It was the biggest place in town, the general center of information. He found Silver Dollar Dean, reading a newspaper. Dean was tall, lean, slightly gray, with a long, emaciated-looking face, lines deep enough to conceal a pencil, and two very hard eyes. Dean was a cold-blooded gambler, with no sense of humor, and, in Henry's opinion, not too intelligent.

He greeted Henry with a half-hearted wave of his hand. Dean had long, feminine-looking fingers, and affected yellow diamonds.

"Heard you've got another murder on your hands, Sheriff," he remarked, rather maliciously, Henry thought.

"A man has been murdered," admitted Henry. "Did you know him?"

Dean smiled. "Am I a suspect, Sheriff?"

"Nonsense! I didn't know him, but I understand he spent part of his time here, when in the city."

"He was around here," said Dean. "I suppose he used this place as sort of a headquarters. I have heard that he always came here, before I took the place over. Everybody comes here—and Mosher had jewels for sale. I was not a customer, if that is what you mean, but he did make sales to some of the boys—possibly to the girls, too."

"It seems possible," said Henry, "that he may have been shot and robbed. His valises are gone, there was no money on his person, and we have never heard of him having any trouble with anyone."

"Very likely true," nodded the gambler. "I understand he had a few genuine diamonds and some very good watches—for discriminating customers, of course. I didn't know him personally."

Henry went out on the street, where he met one of the swampers, possibly the one who creaked the old pump that morning. He was an old derelict, known as Skinny.

"I heard that somebody gunned down the jewelry peddler, Sheriff," he said.

"Yes, somebody did, Skinny," admitted Henry pleasantly. "Did you know him?"

"Yea-a-ah. He's been here several times. Nice feller."

"When did you see him last, Skinny?"

"Yes-day afternoon—late. I was right here, leanin' agin one of them posts, and he came along. I seen the widder Thomas

over across the street, talkin' with somebody, I dunno who now. This jewelry peddler stopped there with me and after a while he says to me, 'Who's the woman over there?' I says, 'Mrs. Tornader Thomas, who owns the Circle T spread.' I says, 'Her husband got shot by his son.' He says, 'So that's who she is.' I says, 'Do yuh know her?' and he says, 'I ain't never had the pleasure of meetin' Mrs. Thomas.'"

"Did you see him leave town, Skinny?"

"No, I didn't, Sheriff. I said to him, 'She's a mighty pretty woman—and she's a widder.' I was kinda kiddin' him. He says, 'She sure is,' and that's all he said. Now he's as dead as a doorknob, they tell me."

"I believe that is a good simile, Skinny," smiled Henry.

"I never went for women very much," offered Skinny.

"Quite understandable, I am sure, Skinny."

Henry talked with others, but no one seemed to know what time the jewelry peddler left Tonto City. As an afterthought, Henry went to the livery-stable to talk with Tommy Roper.

Tommy listened to Henry's question regarding the leaving time of the deceased, and the stuttering Tommy said, "Huh-huh-he lul-lul—"

"I understand that he left here, Tommy—but at what time?"

"Sus-sus—"

"Six or seven, Tommy?"

"Sus-seven."

"Did he say he was going to Scorpion Bend?"

Tommy shook his head.

"Didn't say anything, eh?"

"Huh-huh-he did."

"Good. Now just what did he say, Tommy?"

"Gug-gug—good-bub-bye."

Henry's eyes were a little moist, as he walked back to the office. Judge was tilted back against the wall in his old chair, glasses on the end of his long nose, a dog-eared copy of Shakespeare in his hand. He tilted his head and watched Henry sink down into his old swivel chair.

"The old bloodhound returns," said Judge quietly.

"With two salient facts," sighed Henry

"Fact one, Mosher had some real diamonds in his possession. Fact two, he saw and admired the Widow Thomas, at a distance."

"And fact three," said Judge slowly, "is that he is very dead."

"He left here at about seven o'clock last evening, presumably heading for Scorpion Bend. At sometime, possibly at about two o'clock this morning, he is in a buggy on Lobo Grades. The stage came through from Scorpion Bend, arriving here about eleven o'clock. Had Mr. Mosher and his buggy been on the road at that time, the driver would have necessarily seen it. Ergo, Mr. Mosher was not on the road during those hours. From seven to possibly two o'clock, where was the gentleman in question?"

"Where, indeed?" sighed Judge.

"I am afraid, Judge, that all men in the valley are not honest."

"And that," said Judge soberly, "is a gross understatement. I am doubtful that Diogenes, were he here, would even light his lantern."

"It pains me to think that anyone in Wild Horse Valley would stoop low enough to kill and rob a peddler," said Henry sadly. "We who have always lived above such things. Rustling, horse-stealing, stage-robbing, or just plain homicide—yes. We have always devoted ourselves to the nobler phase of crime. Judge, hast anything left in that last jug of Frijole's fantasma?"

"Hast," murmured Judge. "Not much, but sufficient. You must plead with him to use less horse-liniment, Henry. Frijole should stick to his tried-and-true recipe. Prune juice, corn-squeezing and scorpions."

"Each batch is a prime adventure," said Henry soberly. "At least, there is no monotony, Judge."

"One never knows," sighed Judge, putting his book aside. "After two drinks, you either fall in a hole, climb a tree, or merely sizzle. This last batch is a sizzler."

"Get the cups, my friend," smiled Henry, "I feel like sizzling."

JUDGE was filling their cups, when a man came in. He was short and fat, well-dressed, wearing glasses and a vacant smile.

"Oh!" said Judge and quietly placed the jug on the floor.

"This is the sheriff's office, I presume," remarked the stranger.

"You are correct, sir," replied Henry. "I am the sheriff."

"Excellent! I am Edgar West, representing the *Clarion*. Mr. Pelly sent me."

"You—uh—represent—uh—Mr. Pelly," said Judge. "Well, well! Has the *Clarion* grown to such stature that it—er—hires a man?"

"In order to cover all the news," nodded Edgar West. "It is my first effort in prose, as you might say. I have been a poet."

"Good Heavens!" exploded Henry. "You have? Well, well!"

He grasped the limp right hand of Edgar West and shook it violently, much to the young man's amazement.

"A poet, Judge!" exclaimed Henry. "A poet in Tonto Town. Can you imagine a bigger honor Mr. West, meet Mr. Van Trecce."

"Well, well! You come at an opportune time, my dear boy. A third cup, Judge. We must make this an occasion."

"Please—no," said Edgar. "I—I rarely imbibe of alcoholic beverages."

"Alcohol?" asked Henry, in amazement. "This, my boy, is merely the juice of the plebian prune."

"The juice of a prune?" queried Edgar curiously.

"Well, of more than one, of course. Before we drink, my boy, I must tell you the secret of prune juice. In order to get the full-bodied flavor of this beverage, one must drink it down at once. It is not like a wine. In fact, it is not like anything else on earth. You understand what I mean, of course."

"I—I believe I do, sir. You drink it all at once."

"Perfectly correct. Gentlemen, we drink to Mr. West, a poet. Bottoms up!"

Mr. West followed directions to the letter. Although the cup was empty, dangling from one finger of his right hand, Mr. West's mouth remained open, his eyes shut. Slowly that index finger relaxed and the tin cup clattered on the wooden floor. There was no sign of respiration, until, at one fell swoop, his lungs tried to corner all the oxygen in the room. His mouth shut, his eyes snapped open and he reached for the corner of Henry's desk.

"I—I—" he whispered vacantly, "don't just remember."

"The second one brings your memory back," said Judge soberly.

Edgar West shuddered. "Sus-second one?" he whispered. "Why, I—"

Then he took a deep breath, exhaled whistlingly and began to smile.

"Mr. Pelly warned me," he said huskily. "I—I told him I would find out all things for myself, if he didn't mind."

"He wouldn't," said Judge. "Won't you sit down, sir?"

"Do you mean to say," said Edgar, a trifle owlshly, "that I drank prune juice?"

"And like the man your are, sir," applauded Henry. "You have passed the test of Tonto Town, my boy. You are one of us now."

Edgar giggled. "Thank you, shir; I 'preciate it."

That stuff worked fast. Henry said soberly, "I suppose that James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly warned you to not eulogize my office in any way, Mr. West."

Edgar West stiffened haughtily. "I am, shir," he declared, "the mashter of my own shoul. Sa-a-ay, what the devil is in that stuff?"

"Don't you like it?" asked Judge.

"Cer'nly."

"Just what can we do for you, Mr. West?" asked Henry.

Edgar West grinned foolishly and shook his head. "I knew, when I came here," he said, "but I have forgotten. Oh, yes—the murder of the jewel salesman. I came to attend the inquesht."

"This afternoon, sir," nodded Henry. "Isn't this an innovation, a reporter for the *Clarion*?"

"Correspondent," corrected the young man.

"And poet," added Judge. "Blank verse, no doubt."

Edgar got quickly to his feet. "I reshent that," he said, and went out, striking his right shoulder against the side of the door.

Henry and Judge looked at each other soberly.

"Very thin skinned, it seems," was Henry's comment. "Oh, well, it doesn't matter. You may as well fill them up again, Judge. Blank verse. Not bad."

"The young man has possibilities, Henry.

Perhaps we shall see a rhyming editorial ere long. Here's to Edgar, the Bard of Scorpion Bend."

FRIJOLE and Slim came in for the inquest that afternoon, and they brought a fresh jug of Frijole's latest distillation. They placed it carefully on Henry's desk, backed up, saluted soberly and sat down.

"There she is, gents," announced Frijole. Judge wrinkled his long nose and sniffed audibly.

"Frijole, yuh didn't—or did you?" he asked severely. "I do not mind scorpions, but I do draw the line at—"

"Wait a minute, Judge," grinned Slim. "That smell ain't in the jug. A pole-cat—"

"I'll tell it," interrupted Frijole. "It concerns William Shakespear, the rooster. Yuh see—"

"Before you even get started—it's a lie," declared Judge.

"Have done, Judge," said Henry. "Before he even gets started—I believe it. Proceed, Frijole."

"Well, yuh see," began the little, bow-legged cook, "Ol' Bill's particular friend is Cleopatra, a little pinto hen, which is awful broad-minded. She—"

"Broad-minded hen!" snorted Judge.

"She is so, Judge. She's the only one of his harem that don't hop onto him, when he's full of mash. Well, sir, she brings off a hatch of seventeen little chicks, and O' Bill's so proud that he don't eat no sour mash for a week. Then, all to once, them little chicks start disappearin'. By the time there ain't only three of 'em left, Ol' Bill's so worried that he staris moultin'. Yuh see, he's only got seven, eight feathers left, except his wings, so it don't show much.

"I made this last batch of liquor, and I figured that Ol' Bill ain't in no mental shape to start imbibin' alcohol; so I hid it in the bottom of an old barrel. This mornin' I'm out in the yard and I see Ol' Bill come up out of that barrel. He falls back in a couple times, but he finally made it. He crows a couple times and I can smell his breath plumb over to the house.

"Well, he kinda went snakewise down across the yard, head up and feet a-reachin'. He managed to git up on the corral fence, climbed up on a lean-to, and danged if he don't make it to the top of the stable, which

is a long ways up. I jist wondered why the old boy desires elevation, especially in his condition. He's got a crop on him the size of a pool-ball. Every once in a while he goes, 'Hic!' and has to wave both wings to stay up there.

"Well, sir, a few minutes later I seen one of them hydrofoby skunks pesticator' around in the weeds behind the chicken house. Watchin' him, I kinda lost track of Ol' Bill. I've got m' forty-five in hand, ready to salivate this here stink-kitten, when the skunk comes out to the side of the hen house. There's a hole, where the little chickens can come out. The skunk's there to dry-gulch the first one that shows up. I cock my old hawg-leg and git ready to do m'self some shootin', when I hear a whistlin' noise.

"Gents, I give you my word, here comes Ol' Bill from the top of that stable, wings set, and he's hummin' like a spike. Looks jist like a eagle, I tell yuh. Man, he hit that stink-pussy dead center, hooked in his spurs, set his wings for elevation, and took right off with the most scared skunk yuh ever seen in yore life. The last I see of 'em, they was headin' for the rim of the canyon, that pore skunk ridin' limp. It was a hour, before Ol' Bill came back. Well, sir, I went out and shook hands with him and—"

"You shook hands with him?" asked Judge.

"Shore—that's where we got that smell."

HENRY'S eyes were filled with tears, but he had no comments. Judge said, "Slim, did you see all this?"

"No-o-o," drawled Slim soberly, "I didn't see it, Judge—but I smelled it."

"I believe," said Henry, "we will abstain from making a test on that jug, until after the inquest."

"I do know one thing," offered Slim soberly. "When Frijole dumped that mash he accidently dropped his forty-five into it."

"What happened to the gun?" asked Henry.

"She's a thirty-eight now," replied Slim. "Shrunk somethin' awful."

"I can well believe that," said Judge seriously.

Henry left the office, heading for the courthouse, but ran into Mrs. Thomas

in front of the hotel. Mrs. Thomas dressed well, and she was good-looking, even though a trifle on the portly side.

"And how are you today, Mrs. Thomas?" asked Henry.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Conroy," she smiled. "Lovely day."

"The day is perfect, my dear. Came in for the inquest, I suppose."

"Hardly. My shopping is of more interest than the investigations of the law."

"I suppose. By the way, did you ever know Harry Mosher?"

"The man who was killed? No, I never had that pleasure, Henry."

"He was interested in you, Nell."

"Interested in *me*?"

"Yes, indeed. At a distance, I suppose. However, he said you were a beautiful woman—or words to that effect."

"Henry Conroy, are you ever serious?" she asked soberly.

"My dear Nell, I am one of the most serious of humans. Harry Mosher asked one of our solid citizens who you were, and then remarked that you were mighty good to look upon. Personally, I had rather fancied the role of Cupid, but the gentleman in question ran foul of a bullet and ruined the act."

"You had promotional ideas, did you?"

"There were possibilities. A lonely woman, very pretty and accomplished, and with money, of course—and a man with a diamond."

"A real diamond?" she asked seriously. "I had no idea."

"Love, my dear, is supposed to be blind. What matter—a bit of glass or a bit of pure carbon."

"Yes, I suppose that is true, Henry. You have never married?"

Henry shook his head. "No woman could understand me."

"Why not, Henry?"

"Because I have never understood myself. I am a very amazing person, Nell."

"Yes, I believe you are, Henry. Well, I must do my shopping."

"And I must dispose of my dead."

"Come out and see me, Henry. There is always a welcome for you at the Circle T."

"Thank you, my dear—I may surprise you one of these days."

"It would be a surprise. Bring Judge, too—he is amusing."

"I will, and thank you—from both of us."

The inquest, poorly attended, brought out no facts not already known. Slim and Frijole, together with Oscar, testified. That is, Frijole testified to finding the buggy horse and riding it back to Tonto City. With the prompting of Henry, Tommy Roper told them what time Mosher left Tonto City, presumably heading for Scorpion Bend. Edgar West was there, making copious notes for the *Clarion*.

John Campbell, the prosecutor, stated that in his opinion it was a plain case of murder and robbery. The jury felt the same way about it, and, as the *Clarion* said, "Being declared a 'plain murder,' the Shame of Arizona can go back to their mental hibernations."

Judge was indignant. "Mental hibernations, indeed!" he snorted.

"Not bad," commented Henry. "Rather new, too. Perhaps we can credit Edgar West with that remark."

"But we do not have mental hibernations, Henry," protested Judge.

"A rose by any other name, Judge."

"Yes, I suppose it is true—but very distasteful."

THAT night as they were undressing to the music of the across-the-street King's Castle orchestra, a heavy fist almost knocked their door loose from its hinges.

"Das is Oscar!" rumbled the big Swede. "Open de door!"

Henry let him in. Oscar, panting just a little said:

"Ay yust come from the livery-stable, Henry! Gompliments from de *El Pintado*! Yudas Priest!"

"Very likely a howling example of Frijole's whiskey," said Judge.

"Sid down!" snapped Henry. Oscar sat down, his jaw sagging a bit.

"Now," said Henry, "you may speak again—but 'make it sensible."

"Ay am sensible."

"What on carth is *El Pintado*—and why compliments?"

"On his short, right here," explained Oscar, fingering the bosom of his shirt. "On piece paper—gompliments of de *El Pintado*."

"On whose shirt?"

"De dead man, Ay am telling you. Yust like shipping-tag."

"Another dead man?" asked Judge shakily. "Who, in heaven's name, has been killed now?"

"Sam Lohman, Yudge. Yust as dead as ha'ai."

"Sam Lohman—the lawyer!" gasped Judge. "At the livery-stable?"

"Yah, su-ure. Vit a knife in him."

They got their clothes back on as fast as possible. There was only Tommy Roper at the stable, guarding the dead lawyer, who sprawled on the seat of one of Roper's buggies. With the aid of a stable lantern they examined him. He had been both shot and stabbed. Tied to the handle of the knife was a piece of paper, on which had been crudely printed in pencil, COMPLIMENTS OF EL PINTADO.

THERE was very little blood on the buggy seat, indicating that Lohman had been killed and later placed there. Someone had been thoughtful enough to tie up the lines, too, knowing that the horse would come back to the stable.

"Huh-huh—he said he was gug-going to the Rut-Rur—" began Tommy, but Henry said, "Road Runner mine, Tommy?"

"Uh-huh."

They notified Doctor Bogart and John Campbell, the prosecutor. Sam Lohman had been a Tonto City attorney for only about two years. He was a rather inoffensive person, who minded his own business.

"Why on earth would anybody kill the poor devil?" propounded Campbell, "and who is *El Pintado*—the Pinto? Henry, this looks to be rather serious."

"Life is always serious, John."

They took the body down to the doctor's office, where he made a further examination. The knife was an ordinary sheath-type, hunting knife, nearly new. The doctor said, after a while:

"The bullet killed him, Henry. I would say that he was dead, when the knife was driven into him."

"And he went out to the Road Runner mine," mused Henry. "Judge, we are going out there and see if he ever got to the mine."

"Tonight?" asked Judge. "Wouldn't tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow," replied Henry soberly, "we

may have a new murder. We had better work fast on this one, if you do not mind."

They took the same buggy, merely tossing a blanket over the seat, and set sail for the Road Runner mine. It was a miserable road, out past the Circle T, and up into the hills. It was quite late, and the Road Runner was working only one shift, but there were lights in the main office and in several of the buildings, as they drew up near the office. Several men were on the steps, and two of them came out to the buggy. One of them said, "Who is it?"

"Sheriff Conroy," replied Henry. "Anything wrong?"

"Sheriff?" queried one of the men anxiously. "A man has gone to saddle a horse, headin' for Tonto City to get you. It's murder!"

"My gracious!" grunted Henry. "Who has been murdered?"

"Jim Blain, the general manager, Sheriff. Come with us."

JUDGE and Henry followed the two men into the office. It was a large room. In the corner, at one end of the room, was a huge safe, wide open now. Sprawled on the floor was Jim Blain, his head bashed in by some heavy instrument. The place was bloody, papers scattered on the floor, a chair upset. Henry looked it over carefully. Judge said, "Well, who knows anything about this?"

A man said, "I'm the watchman here. Name's Miller. Maybe a couple hours ago I saw Blain and two men go into the office. It didn't mean anythin' to me. Blain works evenin's once in a while, and sometimes he talks to the men in there.

"Later on a man came in a buggy, and I seen him walk in. I didn't pay no attention to that either. A little while ago I was down past Blain's shack, where he sleeps alone. There wasn't no lights and the door was open. I called to him, but he didn't answer; so I shut the door and came up here. The horse and buggy was gone, and there wasn't no light in the office. I tried the door and it was unlocked. That was wrong; so I went inside and lit a lamp. Well," the watchman drew a deep breath, "you can see what I saw."

Henry nodded soberly and said, "Who is Blain's assistant?"

"I am," replied a man. "My name is Corliss."

"Oh, yes," nodded Henry, "I know you, Corliss. Have you any knowledge of what was in that safe?"

"Yes, I believe I do, Sheriff. We pay the men in cash, and there was approximately twenty-five thousand in currency. There was also twelve bars of gold in there, approximating fifteen hundred ounces. I would say that we have lost over fifty thousand dollars."

"Whew!" exclaimed Henry. "That is a loss. Corliss, do you know Sam Lohman?"

"The lawyer? Why, yes, I know him. He handles some of our legal work."

"Did," corrected Henry dryly.

"What do you mean, Sheriff?"

"Sam Lohman came up here tonight. Just before we left, he came back in that same buggy, shot dead. That was why we came here."

The men looked at each other in amazement. The watchman said:

"That must have been Lohman in that buggy."

"Undoubtedly," said Henry. "Have any of you men ever heard of a bandit who calls himself *El Pintado*?"

Henry received only blank looks for his question. Corliss said:

"Any connection with this job, Sheriff?"

"Possibly. The body of Lohman bore a placard, 'Compliments of *El Pintado*.'"

"The Pinto," said one of the men. "Queer name."

"Queer person," said Henry. "Will you see that nothing is moved or changed, until I can get the coroner here early in the morning?"

"I'll lock the place and stand guard," promised the watchman.

Henry and Judge rode back to Tonto City, turned the rig over to Tommy Roper and went to bed.

"You were wrong, Henry; wrong about us having a murder tomorrow—we had it today," remarked Judge.

"Tomorrow," said Henry wearily, "isn't in full-bloom yet, sir."

THE murder and robbery at the Road Runner mine, together with the appearance of a new bandit, gave Wild Horse Valley food for conversation. Doctor Bogart

told Henry that a further examination of Lohman's body disclosed the fact that he had been hit on the back of the head, fracturing his skull.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "They must have really wanted to be sure he was dead, Doc. But it clears up part of the mystery. Mr. Lohman walked in on the crime and was knocked out. Evidently he was taken away from the mine, after the robbery was completed, and shot at some other place. It accounts for the fact that no shots were heard."

"I would say," said the doctor, "that Mr. Blain was struck over the head with a gun-barrel hard enough to have killed a steer."

"A terrible deed," said Henry. "It would seem that the men captured Blain, forced him to go to the office, open the safe—and then they killed him. Doc, somebody knew that the money and gold was in the safe. Three murders in a very short time—and no clues for the last two."

HENRY went to the jail and talked with Johnny Thomas. The young cowboy said bitterly, "Well, they can't accuse me of those two murders. I didn't know Blain, but I did know Lohman. He was my father's lawyer. I wish I'd busted his long nose while I had a chance."

"Johnny," said Henry, "did your father tell you that he had disinherited you?"

"No, he didn't. In fact, we never talked about it. Lohman told me the day my father was killed."

"But you and your father quarreled, Johnny."

"I know we did. I told him he was a blasted fool to fall for that woman. Oh, I wasn't talkin' behind her back; she was there. I overheard her talkin' with Red Corliss, from the Road Runner, and they sure wasn't talkin' about the weather."

"Red Corliss, eh? The assistant to the manager. They will probably promote him now."

"It's all right with me—Red's not a bad hombre."

"Johnny, just what did your father say to you, when you told them what you had overheard?"

"He said I was a damned liar, and that he never wanted to see me on the Circle T again."

"But you went back, intending to start trouble."

"I don't believe I did, Henry. Everything is kinda hazy. I had a few drinks, but I'm sure that Silver Dollar Dean can testify that I wasn't drunk when I left the King's Castle."

"What had Silver Dollar Dean to do with it, Johnny?"

"Well, I had a couple drinks with him, before I left. It wasn't my intention to start any trouble. Some of my clothes and a few other things were still out there, and I was goin' out to get 'em. I must have been pretty drunk, not to know what went on. I told Dean that I had the stuff out there, and might go out and get it, but I didn't want any trouble over it. He said, 'They can't object to you takin' what belongs to you.'"

"Johnny," said Henry, "do you know anything about Dean?"

Johnny smiled slowly, as he replied:

"Only what I've heard, Henry. A cattle-buyer who was in here quite a while ago seemed to know Dean. He told me that Dean didn't have a very good rep. He said that Dean was run out of a town in Nevada for crooked card work, and that he had been a tin-horn gambler for a long time. He said that Dean and his wife—maybe it wasn't his wife—worked together for a while, but she got arrested on a bad-check deal and went to the pen. After that Dean worked alone."

"All gamblers have a past," smiled Henry, "and a very uncertain future."

"What do you think of my chances of ever gettin' out?" asked Johnny anxiously.

"Johnny," replied Henry soberly, "I'd bet on a crap game, poker, horse-racing or the weather, but the most uncertain thing in the gambling line is the verdict of a Wild Horse Valley jury."

Nothing new was learned at the double inquest. Ben Miller, the watchman at the mine, told the same story to the jury that he told at the mine, after the murder. Edgar West, the poet, was there, but this time he was accompanied by James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly, owner and publisher of the *Clarion*. Pelly was a skinny, little individual, with near-sighted eyes and vitrolic pen.

He kept one eye on the witness and

the other on Oscar Johnson, the giant Swede. Oscar was Pelly's pet obsession.

Following the inquest, both Pelly and West came down to the sheriff's office. Judge looked them over with jaundiced eye. Pelly said:

"Mr. Conroy, I have talked with *all* the commissioners today."

"Ah, yes," said Henry. "An estimable body of men, I assure you. I admire them greatly."

"The admiration is not mutual, I can assure you of that."

"I suppose," remarked Judge sarcastically, "they appointed *you* to convey their respects to us."

"Nothing," replied the editor, "was said to me in confidence."

"They realized, of course, that you would not hold anything in confidence. But, get to the point, man; you have me on tenter-hooks."

"They are considering a change."

"At your suggestion, I suppose," said Henry.

"The *Clarion*," replied Pelly haughtily, "works only for the best good of our county."

"Best good?" queried Henry. "Then we have different grades of good."

"You know what I mean, Conroy. It is my intention to force the county to make a change in this office. I have suffered mental and physical indignities at the hands of you and your misfit organization. I engage the services of a very fine correspondent, and the very first time he comes here, you compel him to partake of that damnable—that damnable—that—"

Oscar Johnson's huge bulk blocked out the doorway. Pelly's discourse played out. Oscar saw him and grinned widely.

"Va'al, hallo dere!" he boomed. "Vel-come, welcome to you."

"As you were saying," prompted Henry dryly.

But Pelly had no intentions of continuing.

"Talking is a very thirst-impelling pastime, Henry," said Judge.

"It is, indeed. Procure the cups and the jug, sirrah."

Pelly's shoulders sagged and he looked appealingly at Oscar, but the big Swede grinned as he said:

"Das is a goot idea, Henry. Strong men, strong drink. My ancestors were Vikings, and they drank from horns—big horns, too."

"Taken from their own heads," added Henry.

"Yah, su-ure—Aye have seen the pictures."

"Interesting," said Edgar West. "Do you know any drinking songs?"

"Yah su-ure. I know goot von," said Oscar, and began bellowing:

"Ay vars born in Minnesota, den Ay vent to Nort' Da-koota, ride on Yim Hill's big, red vagon—Yeeminee, Ay feel for fight!"

James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly got to his feet.

"I demand that you get out of that doorway," he said sternly. "I am a citizen, and you have no right—"

Judge began pouring the drinks into tin cups, and the gurgle of the potent liquor distracted Pelly, who sank back with a groan.

Edgar West grinned feebly, as he accepted his cup. Pelly held his in both hands, staring at the floor.

"To the Crusader of Wild Horse Valley," said Judge soberly, "and I may explain that the word crusader was merely coined to designate a man of inferior complex, who has been frustrated."

"Bottoms up!" exclaimed Henry.

J W. L. PELLY had tasted that liquor before, and he knew what to expect, as did Edgar West. Pelly bowed over, reached for the desk-top with his empty cup, but dropped it on the floor three feet wide. The poet merely sagged back, his lips in a perfect O, as he whistled for air.

"Yudas!" exclaimed Oscar. "Das is goot!"

"That is a lie," whispered Pelly. "I am not frustrated."

Gradually they became normal again. Pelly said, in a very thin voice:

"I resent that toast, Van Treece—I have no inferiority complex."

"You feel inferior to Oscar Johnson."

"Uh—all right," said Pelly. "If that is—I shall not drink one more cup of that! You may slay me and—"

"No bird ever flew with one wing, Pelly," said Judge.

"But I don't want to fly!"

"Mr. West is not complaining," remarked Henry.

"Misser West," grinned the poet, "is wonderin' what two would be like."

And Mr. West found out. About thirty minutes later, Jim Benton, newly appointed chairman of the commissioners, met Pelly and West in front of the Tonto Hotel. Benton was on his way to talk with the sheriff, following his talk with Pelly earlier that day. West ran into the pump at the corner, and tried to start an argument with it. Pelly was giving him his moral support, with Benton as an audience.

Pelly saw Benton dimly, tipped his hat and said, "'Snice day, Misser Benton."

Benton had no comments to make on the weather, nor did he go to talk temperance with Henry. He said to himself, "At least, no one has ever seen Henry or Judge making a holy-show of themselves on the main street," and let it go at that.

LATER that evening Henry and Judge were in the King's Castle Saloon, packed with miners, cowboys and business men, not to mention the "girls" and the gamblers. They saw Corliss, the assistant manager of the Road Runner mine, playing the roulette-wheel, and Corliss was very drunk. Judge remarked, "I suppose they made him manager, and he is celebrating his good-fortune."

Later on, Henry stepped in beside Corliss at the bar, and said, "Mr. Corliss, I would like to congratulate you."

Corliss looked rather owlishly at Henry, blinking his eyes.

"Whazzat?" he asked.

"They made you manager of the mine, I hear," lied Henry.

"They—hu-u-uh? Made me—tha's news to me."

"My mistake," smiled Henry. "No harm done."

Henry walked away, and Corliss leaned on the bar, staring at the back-bar mirror.

"Who'szat fat feller?" he asked the bartender.

"That's the sheriff, Red."

"Oh, yes—I 'member him. Huh! What'd he want of me?"

"I'm sure I don't know—I didn't hear the conversation, Red."

Two cowboys came past, saw Henry and

stopped. They were Al Treager and Dude Wells, the two hands from the Circle T. Treager was a big, hard-faced cowpoke, always in need of a shave and hair-cut. Dude Wells was tall and slender, good-looking and rather neat.

"They're kinda givin' yuh a tough deal, ain't they, Sheriff?" asked Dude. "Murder's gettin' popular around here, it seems."

"Not popular, Dude," said Henry soberly. Corliss left the bar and went past them. Treager said, "Corliss is as drunk as a timber-jack."

"I heard they made him manager of the mine," said Henry.

"Na-a-ah!" snorted Treager. "He ain't got brains enough to be a mine manager."

"Do you know," said Henry confidentially, "there's a rumor going around that the—that Mrs. Thomas looks rather kindly upon Mr. Corliss."

"Who told yuh that?" asked Dude quickly.

"Oh, I didn't get it first-hand, Dude."

Dude and Treager looked at each other sharply. Treager said:

"Aw, he comes down to the ranch once in a while, but—well, you know how it is, Sheriff. Mrs. Thomas knowed him before he came here."

"Oh, just an old friend, eh?"

"That's right—an old friend. Why don't yuh come out and visit us once in a while? We've got a mighty good cook."

"I'll have to do that," smiled Henry.

Silver Dollar Dean was very busy, but he stopped long enough to sympathize with Henry.

"Yes, I have my hands full," admitted Henry, "but it will all be cleared up, Dean; I am positive of that."

"Any clues as to who *El Pintado* is, Henry?"

"Oh, yes. Naturally, we are not giving out any information."

"You'd be a fool to do that," said Dean, and walked on.

"I'd also be a liar," added Henry, to himself.

IT WAS two days later. Henry was half-asleep in the office when Judge came down the sidewalk, his boots thudding on the wooden sidewalk. Judge was in a hurry, a copy of the *Clarion* clutched in his

left hand, the other hand swinging violently. He stepped into the office and slapped the paper down on Henry's desk.

"There, sir," he roared, "is the most damnable—most—well, read it! Don't blink at me, Henry! If that isn't libelous—"

Judge sat down, panting in his wrath. "It is on the editorial page," he half-whispered. "Ye gods, I'd like to—well?"

It headed the editorial column, printed in bold-faced type. There was no caption. Henry read aloud:

"There's a spot in the West, where crime flows along, unhampered and unchecked by law, where the thieves and the killers are safe from all harm; it's the best spot that they ever saw.

"Where the law winks at violence, laughs loud at assault, applauds murder, with never a frown, where they laugh at the rights of the law-loving folks—those lawmen of old Tonto Town."

"That," declared Judge, "is scurrilous, Henry. A horsewhip is too good for Pelly."

"We have been put in a poem," said Henry soberly. "Judge, do you realize that we are in a class with the spreading chestnut tree, the country churchyard, the—er—headless horseman? Lawmen. I like that. Behold, the christening of Edgar West. Foolish boy. He fired all his ammunition in a salute. From now on, Judge, he can't say anything worse about us."

"Henry," said Judge huskily, "you condone that libelous blast?"

"Would you suggest that we cancel our subscription, Judge?"

"We should sue that damnable sheet."

"True," nodded Henry soberly, "but only after we have proved the *Clarion* to be wrong. Judge, we have three murders on our hands, and none of them have been solved. Oh, I know, we have a prisoner, but I do not believe Johnny Thomas is guilty—as much as I would like to feel that one murder has been solved. We must strive to our utmost to clear up the situation, and," Henry's voice changed, "we will, Judge, or we shall damn well lose our jobs."

"What would you suggest, sir?" queried Judge mildly.

"As a diversion, I would suggest a supper at the Circle T."

"We have murder on our hands, and you suggest a diversion. Well, I have always felt that the widow is well worth looking upon. Do we go soon, if I may ask?"

"Tonight, Judge—I promised her yesterday. She said to bring you along—you amuse her."

"I amuse her?" snorted Judge.

"She has, I believe, a rather tragic sense of humor, Judge."

"Do we dress?" queried Judge. "Before you answer, sir, I should like to remark that I consider your gray suit, pearl-colored derby and gray spats damn bad taste. Of course, if you are trying to impress the widow—"

"Why not?" queried Henry. "After all, she is a handsome woman, and I am a man—I believe."

"Not in your Sunday garb, if I may say so, Henry."

"Ah, well, under those conditions, Judge—After all, I want you to be proud of me."

"I believe we should have a drink before we go, Henry. If I am to play Sancho Panza to your Quixote—"

"We are going to supper, my dear Judge—not to tip over the windmill at the Circle T."

NELL THOMAS was a very gracious hostess, clad in a becoming print dress, and she made them very welcome. Sing Low, the one-eyed Chinese cook, was a better chef than the ordinary ranch-cook. Al Treager and Dude Wells, the two cowpokes of the Circle T, ate in the kitchen, but made themselves at home in the main room, following the meal.

The conversation finally turned to the wave of crime in Wild Horse Valley, and a general discussion of things.

"The directors of the Road Runner mine met today at the mine. That robbery hit them rather hard," said Mrs. Thomas. Red Corliss dropped in, on his way to town this morning, and told us of the meeting."

"Will they make him mine manager?" asked Judge.

"I doubt it," replied Mrs. Thomas. "I don't believe Red has the ability to manage the mine."

"You have known him a long time, I understand," remarked Henry.

"No, not a long time."

"We was talkin' about Red," said Treager, "and I told Henry that you knowed Red, before he came here."

"Well, yes, I knew him—slightly," said the woman.

"I was inclined to be just a little jealous," said Henry soberly.

"Jealous of me, Henry?" she asked in amazement.

"After all, my dear Nell, you are the only beautiful woman in Wild Horse Valley. Even Judge—"

"No!"

"Yes," said Judge soberly. "But I happened to see my bare knees in a mirror. I would look like the devil in tights—and if there were no stairs to the balcony—"

"There is no balcony," laughed Nell, "but we could use the top of a corral fence, Judge."

"A total lack of romance, I'm afraid," said Judge.

The conversation finally included Johnny Thomas, languishing in the Tonto City jail.

"I'm afraid that Johnny hates me, Henry," Nell Thomas said sadly.

"I do not believe that Johnny understands you, my dear."

"Perhaps it is the same thing. Henry, do you believe that Johnny is guilty?"

"I did—at first. Johnny is tight-lipped, and I believe he knows much more than he has told. John Campbell, the prosecutor, believes the same. John has talked with the boy several times, and we have discussed the case at length. Just between us, Nell, I believe he will explode a bombshell in the court."

"Just what sort of a bombshell, Henry?"

Henry shrugged. "I cannot say what sort. I asked him, in confidence, just what his defense would be. You know, he refuses to engage a lawyer. Well, he says he does not need a lawyer."

"Aw, he was too drunk to even know his name," said Treager.

"At the time," nodded Henry. "The human mind is a queer thing. Possibly certain things registered, like an image on a photographic plate, later to develop. I have no idea what he knows—but I am quite sure that he knows something."

"What about this here *El Pintado*?" asked Wells.

"We are firmly convinced that *El Pintado* is merely a red herring, being drawn across the trail, if you know what I mean."

"I don't," said Treager.

"The robbers and killers," said Henry, "are afraid of me—afraid of my ability to ferret them out. So they build up a fictitious outlaw, which they call *El Pintado*, to try and divert me from my single purpose."

Judge looked at Henry in amazement.

"Do you really believe they fear you, Henry?" asked Nell Thomas.

"There is not a doubt in my mind, my dear."

TREAGER and Wells managed to suppress a laugh. The idea of an outlaw fearing Henry Harrison Conroy! Judge wanted to say something, but decided to keep still. Henry expanded further.

"I should have gone into criminal work long before I did," he said soberly. "I feel that I could have developed an uncanny ability as a detective. If I may say so, I have an analytical mind."

"That is interesting," said Nell Thomas. "Have you formed any opinions as to why that poor jewelry peddler was killed?"

"Somebody swiped his diamonds and killed him," interjected Wells.

"His jewels were missing," said Henry. "Presumably, he was killed during the process of being robbed. However, I have my own theory, Wells. But that will be proved later. Everything in its own time, I always say."

It was about ten o'clock, when Henry and Judge bade the fascinating widow good-night, and rode away. They were hardly away from the Circle T, when Judge said: "Henry Harrison Conroy, you are an ass."

"I beg your pardon!"

"Do not quibble, Henry. For the past hours you have done nothing but preen your feathers and exhibit your vanity. At times you became almost maudlin in self-praise. The Great I am—Henry. In comparison to you, Sherlock Holmes was a driveling idiot. Egad, I was so ashamed that I did not dare look at you."

"I noted that you rarely took your eyes off the widow."

"Have done, sir! The widow means nothing to me. Again I repeat, sir—you are

an ass. I might add the adjective 'unmitigated.'"

"Was I as bad as that, Judge?" asked Henry meekly.

"You were drunk with your own importance."

Henry chuckled. "A very cheap form of intoxication, if true."

"And," added Judge, "you were not impressing the widow."

"Is that statement prompted by jealousy, by any chance, sir?"

"Certainly not! I am not of an impressive age. Analytical mind—indeed! What have you ever analyzed? Why, my heavens, you gave them the impression that you—well, had the criminals already hanging by their heels."

"I did?" gasped Henry in amazement. "Well, Judge, after all I still have some histrionic ability left."

"That, my dear, Henry, was not acting—it was lying. Of course, if you were able to clean up all this trouble, it would be quite a feather in your cap."

"Feather in my cap!" exclaimed Henry. "My dear Judge, I would be so covered with feathers that I would moult like a chicken, every time the weather turned warm."

FAR from becoming general manager of the Road Runner mine, Red Corliss had been summarily discharged. In absentia, of course, because he had not been back to the mine, due to an overabundance of liquor. In other words, Red Corliss was on a binge—a lone drunk, and almost to the point where little, red devils, with tin hats might at any time, dance on the rim of his glass.

Oscar Johnson was keeping an eye on Corliss. Corliss had a gun in his pocket, and Oscar meditated over confiscating said firearm, and rendering Mr. Corliss rather null and void. However, the ex-assistant manager of the Road Runner was not belligerent. In fact, he was rather a sad dog in his cups.

Oscar was in front of the Tonto Hotel that morning, and he saw Red Corliss in front of the King's Castle Saloon, holding up one of the porch-posts. Red looked bad.

No shave for a week, and he had slept in his clothes. Finally Corliss sagged

away from the post, stepped into the street and started for the sheriff's office.

Oscar sauntered down there, coming in behind the drunken man, who weaved into the office. Henry and Judge were there, Henry at his desk, Judge tilted back against the wall in a flimsy chair, reading a dog-eared copy of Shakespeare. They looked up at Corliss.

"You wished to see someone, sir?" asked Henry. Corliss didn't answer, but looked owlishly at Henry, who said quietly:

"You wanted to tell me something, Corliss?"

"Wha' d'yuh mean?" queried Corliss.

"You wanted to tell me who shot Jim Blain, Corliss."

That statement seemed to jolt Corliss. He blinked, swallowed, and for the moment seemed partly sober.

"Jim Blain?" he mumbled. "Bes' friend I ever had—Jim Blain."

"Who killed him, Corliss? Don't lie to me—you know who."

Corliss leaned forward, his left hand on a corner of the desk, and drew out that short-barreled Colt revolver with his right.

"Tryin' t' pin that on me, eh?" he snarled. "I'll shoot your fat belly full of lead and—"

Whap! Oscar Johnson reached from the doorway, slapped Corliss' head sideways, knocking him completely off balance. The gun went off, and the bullet smacked into the wall only a few inches over Judge's head, but the next moment the gun went flying across the room, and Corliss was held helpless in the brawny arms of the giant Swede.

"Thank you, Oscar," said Henry. "The poor fool might have shot me."

Corliss cursed helplessly. Oscar said, "Ay would enjoy to tie him in a knot."

"No, Oscar; we will put Mr. Corliss in a nice cell. Just take him as he is, Oscar—I will unlock the cell."

Red Corliss cursed Henry, but finally sprawled on the cell cot and cried.

"He's all right," said Oscar. "First, he has shooting yag, and now he has crying yag. Ay vars vatching him today."

"Thank you, Oscar. But for you, I might have been killed."

"Va'al," replied the philosophical Oscar, "ve can't live for always."

Judge was still in the office, trying to

figure out just how far that bullet missed his head.

"What was all that nonsense—asking Corliss who killed Blain?" he asked Henry.

"Well," replied Henry soberly, "it seems that the only way I can find out who killed him is to ask."

"Did you expect Corliss to know who killed him?"

"Well," sighed Henry, "I thought he might be a good person to ask. I wanted to see his reactions, Judge."

"I hope you are satisfied," said Judge, looking at the bullet-hole in the office wall. "He reacted very fast, it seems."

"Yes, he did."

"Henry, do you think Corliss killed Blain?"

"No, I do not, Judge—but I have a peculiar feeling that Corliss knows who did. However, he quickly resented my query, and seemed inclined to ventilate my abdomen."

Henry shuddered and sat down.

"I am, I believe, allergic to bullets in the abdomen, Judge."

"Being of the same mind, sir," remarked Judge, "would it be amiss if I brought in the jug?"

"You have all the instincts of a gentleman, Judge. You have my permission to proceed at once."

After their drink Henry wandered up to the stage depot, where he secured a telegraph blank and the use of a pen and indelible ink. After a lot of deliberation, tongue-in-cheek, he proceeded to write a telegram to himself, filling in the cabalistic letters and figures usually found on a telegram. Then he wrote:

Description covers. Am sending officer to identify and make arrests. Hold Corliss. May be one of the gang.

Jim.

Henry blotted it rather badly, folded and unfolded it several times until it looked as though it had been perused a number of times, put it in his pocket and went over to the Kings Castle Saloon. Just who Jim might be, he had no idea.

SLIM PICKINS and Frijole Bill sat on the porch of the JHC ranchhouse that evening. Perched on the porch rail was a

small, brown jug. Both men dangled tin cups in their hands, and both men's faces showed a rather dazed expression. Frijole said owlishly:

"Whazza verdic', Schlim?"

Slim's burp was almost like the report of a gun. He grabbed for the hat he didn't have on his head, grinned foolishly and replied:

"I think you've made shomethin', Frijole. Wha'd yuh use?"

"Wazzit taste like?"

"Horse-lin'ment, onion-tops, mus'rd, pain-killer, skunk-oil—"

"You've got perverted tas'er, Schlim," interrupted Frijole. "The mash's made of corn, wheat, barley, potatoes and maguey. Then I put in—what'd I put in, I wonder? I mus'n forget. Hm-m-m. Half-pint of pain-killer, lemon extract, vaniller—and what else? Don't yuh like it?"

"I don' know," whispered Slim. "I'm numb all over."

"Henry'd love it," said Frijole,

"Tha's it!" exclaimed Slim. "Henry! We'll git his opinion. Nope. No, no, we can't do that."

"Why not?" queried Frijole.

"Because," replied Slim, "we can't get t' the stable t' hitch up the team. That stuff stitched me right to this here chair."

"Aw-w-w, shucks!" snorted the cook. "Can't make it! I'll do her. You watch a man do the job. I'll hitch up that team. Man, right now I could hitch a grizzly bear to a—a—I could hitch a grizzly bear to a—you watch me. No danged liquor ever got Bill Cullison halfway down. You watch me!"

Frijole Bill got out of the chair, missed the steps entirely and fell headlong over the porch-rail. Slim whooped with mirth, while the little cook clawed his way to his feet.

"You was more'n halfway down that time!" whooped Slim.

"What'd I come down *here* for?" asked Frijole.

"Aw, you wanted to hitch a grizzly bear t' somethin', Frijole."

"Tha's right—an' I c'n do her. You watch me."

Frijole bowlegged his erratic way down to the stable. Slim shrugged his thin shoulders, grasped the rail and got to his feet, where he wobbled uncertainly.

"S'awful stuff, boy," he told the world at large. "Awful stuff. Might's well set down and take it easy. I reckon."

Slim sat down, three feet away from the chair. After the initial shock was over, he grinned, leaned back against the wall and went to sleep.

IT WAS nearly midnight when Frijole and Slim came to Tonto City. In their condition, time meant nothing. Frijole had a small jug of his latest distillation, and they wanted Henry's opinion on it. Except for the lights of the King's Castle Saloon, the street was dark as the two worthies wended their way down to the sheriff's office. There was no light in the office, but the door was unlocked. Oscar Johnson slept on a cot in the office, and he always locked the door when he retired.

They opened the door and stepped inside. In a dazed sort of way, they heard voices coming from the short corridor which led to the cells. Someone lighted a match, and they heard a man say:

"Yeah, I got the keys all right, but I can't find the right one."

"Don't talk so damn loud!" hissed a voice.

"Wha's goin' on?" asked Slim in a husky whisper. "Better look."

"This is it!" exclaimed the man. "All right, Red—get out."

Slim took one stride forward, collided with someone on the floor, and went headlong toward the corridor. It was quite a crash. There was a sharp yell from somebody down the corridor, and men came on the run.

"Git out of here—fast!" panted a voice, and the man stepped on Slim's neck.

Someone knocked Frijole Bill into a corner, the door banged shut, and Slim sat up, clawing around. He encountered a hand and an arm, and the next moment found him in a vise-like grip. Slim yelled, but to no avail. He was swung aloft, and flung bodily through the front window of the office, crashing on the wooden sidewalk.

"Ay vill learn you to hit me on de head!" husked Oscar's voice.

There was silence for several moments, and then Frijole said:

"Oscar!"

"Yah."

"This is Frijole."

"Oh, hallo, Freeholey."

"Are yuh all right, Oscar?"

"Ay t'ink my head is bosted, Freeholey. Ay have been hit."

Henry and Judge were crossing the street to the Tonto Hotel when they heard the crash of glass, and came running. Slim Pickins was sitting on the sidewalk, singing mournfully, "Oh where is my wanderin' boy tonight? The boy of my tenderest care. Once he was—"

"Slim!" exclaimed Henry. "What happened to you?"

"Well, it was like this," replied Slim. "There was three of us in the boat and the oars leaked."

"Talk sense!" snapped Judge. "Henry, look at our window!"

Oscar and Frijole stumbled out of the office.

"Henry, you've done lost Corliss!" said Frijole. "Somebody conked Oscar over the head and took Corliss out of jail."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "Such goings on. Oscar, you tell it to us."

"Ay don't know much," groaned Oscar. "Ay vars gone to bed. Somebody knock on de door, so I got up and open. Ay t'ink somebody hit me on de head—Ay don't remember."

"Slim, who threw you through the window?" asked Judge.

"Was that how I got out here, Judge? Well, ain't it lucky I hit a winder instead of the wall?"

THEY trooped into the jail and looked things over. Oscar's keys were on the floor, Corliss' cell door open. Johnny Thomas was in the other cell, sitting on his cot. Henry asked him what he heard.

"Not very much," replied Johnny. "They woke me up when they worked on the cell door. I reckon they had trouble findin' the key. Then I heard a crash out in the office, and they beat it."

"They took Corliss with them, eh?"

"Yeah, I reckon they did."

"Did you hear what they told Corliss, Johnny?"

"Well, I heard 'em say, 'We're gettin' yuh out of here, while the gettin' is good.' Corliss said, 'They ain't got nothin' on me,' and one of them said, 'There's a hell of a lot you don't know, Red.'"

"That statement," said Judge dryly, "could apply to all of us."

They went back into the office, where Henry examined Oscar's head. Over his left ear was a lump the size of a small egg, and the scalp had been broken. Henry said, "Go wake up Doc Bogart and have him fix it up, Oscar."

"No," grinned Oscar. "Ay don't need fixing."

"What stinks around here?" asked Judge, sniffing. "Smells like someone had mopped a saloon."

"Heavenly angels!" wailed Frijole. "The cork came out of the jug, and it's all spilled on the floor. I plumb forgot about it."

"What on earth was it?" asked Henry.

Frijole looked at Slim and Slim looked at Frijole.

"Come, come!" said Henry. "It wasn't that bad, was it?"

"Yeah," said Frijole, "I reckon it was."

THE jail delivery of Red Corliss was evidently the straw that broke the camel's back. The commissioners met in Tonto City next morning. James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly and Edgar West were at the meeting, as was John Campbell, the prosecuting attorney. The decision of the commissioners was written out and John Campbell took it to Henry Conroy. In substance it said that the present sheriff would be given forty-eight hours to recover his prisoner and show definite proof that action was being taken against the killers of Harry Mosher, Sam Lohman and Jim Blain. Otherwise, the Board of Commissioners would accept the resignation of Henry Harrison Conroy.

Henry read it unblinkingly. John Campbell, the big, slow-moving lawyer, said, "I believe the *Clarion* has influenced them greatly, Henry." Judge swore feelingly, but Henry remarked calmly: "After all, John, the people of Wild Horse Valley are entitled to protection. You know the facts of each murder. Outwardly, I have done nothing, but deep in my own heart, I have the conviction that I have done much. John, I am on the verge of a great discovery."

The big lawyer smiled slowly. "I hope so, Henry. Forty-eight hours is a mighty short time."

"Short? Why, John, kings have been de-

posed, the map of a nation altered in less time than that. It is sufficient for my needs."

"Henry, I sincerely hope you are right. You know I am, and always have been your friend. I shall watch with interest."

John Campbell went away. Judge peered over the top of his glasses at Henry.

"So you are on the verge of a great discovery, eh?" he commented quietly.

Henry nodded slowly. "I am, Judge."

"If I may be so bold as to ask—what in the devil are you about to discover?"

"I am about to discover just how to make a living for all of us on an almost-defunct cattle ranch, Judge."

"The inevitable result is already discouraging, sir," sighed Judge. "Our future has a slight indigo tinge."

"A Conroy, sir," declared Henry soberly. "never surrenders. We have our backs against the wall, Judge. Are we mice or men?"

"What do you think?" queried Judge quietly.

Henry shrugged. "I have always loved cheese," he said, "but I have never been trapped."

"The issue," sighed Judge, "is still in doubt."

Henry stared thoughtfully at the blank wall, his brain working fast. Forty-eight hours is a short time.

"Judge, I want a rumor floated," he said finally.

Judge scowled at Henry. "You want a rumor floated?"

"Listen closely, Judge—and do not interrupt."

For several minutes Henry talked quietly, soberly. When he finished his instructions, Judge said, "It sounds asinine, sir. And again, there is the ten dollars."

"It will be ten dollars well spent—and we might win."

"Well," sighed Judge, "I feel that I am compounding an asininity, but, at least, something is being done—against time."

Judge put on his hat and went over to the King's Castle Saloon, looking very much like an old sand-hill crane. He could feel that the crowd in there had been talking about the decision of the commissioners. J. W. L. Pelly was there, as was Edgar West, the poet. Silver Dollar Dean was at the bar, drinking with John Campbell and one

of the commissioners. Dean invited Judge to have a drink with them.

Dave Miller, the commissioner, excused himself, and went out. Judge smiled dryly, as he said:

"Mr. Miller embarrasses very easily, it seems."

Dean laughed. "After all," he said, "forty-eight hours is not a long time, Van Treece."

"Sufficient," replied Judge. The crowd was listening closely.

Judge lifted his glass, looking through it at the light, and his gnarled hand was steady, as he said:

"I am not a prophet, nor have I been informed, but I firmly believe that within twenty-four hours the killers of Wild Horse Valley will either be in jail or in the gentle hands of Doc Bogart."

"That sounded rather definite, Judge," remarked the lawyer. "On what do you base that statement?"

"If I knew, John, I would not tell it here. But I do not *know*. The commissioners have given Henry Conroy forty-eight hours. You know what Henry has done before. He has told me that the sands of time are running out for the killers, and, knowing him as I do, I believe their doom is near."

"Interesting, but not quite enough," said Pelly. "We have all lost our faith in Henry Conroy."

"You?" queried Judge. "You had none to lose, Pelly. I feel certain that Henry will make you and your damnable sheet cat crow again."

"In forty-eight hours," said Pelly, "the commissioners of Wild Horse Valley will appoint a new sheriff."

Judge looked keenly at Pelly for several moments. Then he smiled and drew a ten-dollar bill from his pocket.

"Pelly," he said quietly, "this is the only money I have with me. I will bet this ten against your one dollar that Henry wins."

"You are offering odds like that?" asked Silver Dollar Dean.

"I wish I had a thousand on the same odds," replied Judge.

No one had any more comments.

"Would you like to take the bet, Pelly?" asked Judge.

"I never bet," replied Pelly stiffly.

Slowly Judge folded the bill and put it in his pocket.

"I would willingly offer any of you the same odds," he said, "except that I do not covet your money."

Then Judge turned and went out of the saloon.

"What do *you* think, Campbell?" asked Dean.

"Personally," replied the lawyer, "I would not cover the bet."

"You mean—he might know something?"

"I believe he does, Dean. It will be interesting to see what develops."

"I think he is bluffing," declared Pelly.

"Why didn't you cover the bet?" asked Campbell.

"Because I am not a gambler!" snapped Pelly.

"You may not gamble," said Campbell quietly, "but you better get your teeth sharpened."

"Why should I get my teeth sharpened?"

"Crows are often rather tough, Pelly—and you may have to eat heartily."

Henry listened to Judge's story of his rejected bet, and smiled widely. "Excellent, my dear Judge!" he exclaimed. "Excellent!"

"The excellent part of it, sir," remarked Judge, "is the fact that Mr. Pelly did not cover the bet. I could use a drink."

"You, my dear Judge, are not only a good actor, but an opportunist, as well. Fetch the jug and glasses, and we will drink to confusion."

"We may as well drink to me," said Judge. "It amounts to the same thing. But wait a moment, Henry. Just suppose the killers take your statement as the truth?"

"If they do, Judge," replied Henry soberly, "you may have my pearl-colored spats and gold-headed cane."

"Thank you—no," said Judge seriously. "I should hate to feel that the death of a friend made an ass of me. I have neither cold insteps nor a limp."

"Go get the jug, before I break down," begged Henry. "I had no idea of the depths of sentiment in your soul, Judge."

IT WAS ten o'clock that night, when the stage came in from Scorpion Bend, and a rather frightened traveling salesman came into the hotel lobby, where Henry was

talking with the hotel keeper. Henry knew him, and he came straight to Henry.

"I have had a most terrible experience, Henry!" he exclaimed. "The stage was held up by two masked men on the grades. They made me come out. One held a gun against my heart, while the other lighted matches to look at me. Imagine that?"

"Was it someone who ordered a suit from you?" asked Henry.

"Ordered a suit? No, I—I don't know. They didn't say. After looking me over, one of them said, 'That ain't him—I know this feller,' and they shoved me back into the stage. Oh, here is the driver now!"

Jimmy Elder, the little, bow-legged stage driver, grinned widely.

"Funniest holdup yuh ever seen, Henry," he declared. "Never even asked for the strong-box. They got this feller out, looked him over and dumped him back into the stage.

"Told me to keep goin'—and that's all there was to it. Must have been a-lookin' for somebody special."

"Could you identify either of them, Jimmy?" asked Henry.

The driver shook his head. "It was dark, Henry. They wore masks, too. All I saw what they showed in the match-light. Both of 'em talked like they had bad colds."

"Well, I was certainly frightened," declared the salesman. "I'm glad I wasn't the man they expected to find."

"This country is gettin' worse and worse," sighed the driver.

"It is the people, Jimmy—the country remains the same."

Henry found Judge at the office and was telling him what happened, when James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly showed up in the doorway.

"I suppose that the solution of this hold-up is included in that twenty-four-hour bluff, Conroy," he said sarcastically.

"Your supposition is absolutely correct, Mr. Pelly."

Pelly blinked behind his glasses. "Twenty-four hours," he said thoughtfully. "I hate to admit any faith in your prophecy, but perhaps I better stay here in Tonto City."

"How about some prune juice, Pelly?" asked Judge suddenly.

Pelly didn't reply—he just faded out.

"Henry, how long can we keep up this bluff?" inquired Judge.

"Twenty-four hours, Judge—and I am not bluffing. Now, if you do not mind, we will go out to the ranch. I believe it will be safer out there, and I also want to discuss something with Slim and Frijole. It is barely possible that we might need their assistance."

THINGS were very quiet around Tonto City next forenoon. Frijole Bill and Slim came in with Henry and Judge from the ranch. It was quite hot on the main street. Henry sauntered up to the bank, where he sat down on a chair in the shade of the wooden porch. The bank did a thriving business in Tonto. Men came and went, nodding to the sheriff, passing the time of day.

Silver Dollar Dean came over from the King's Castle, stopped to exchange a few words, before going on into the bank. Men who knew of Henry's declaration that he would solve the murders within twenty-four hours, looked curiously at him, as they passed.

A team and buckboard swung in at the hitch-rack in front of the bank, already overcrowded. In it were Mrs. Thomas, Al Treager and Dude Wells. Mrs. Thomas smiled at Henry and remarked about the weather.

"It is really getting warm, my dear," said Henry. Treager and Wells left her at the bank doorway, and went over to the King's Castle. Henry sauntered into the bank. Mrs. Thomas was not in evidence, but he could see dim figures through the frosted glass of the banker's office door. So Henry went back outside and moved slowly down toward the office, glancing casually toward the wide doors of the livery-stable on the opposite side of the street.

He was nearly down to the office, when he saw Tommy Roper, the stuttering stable-keeper, come to the doorway of the stable. He took off his hat and wiped his forehead with his sleeve. Henry stepped off the wooden sidewalk and went slowly across the street. He stepped into the wide doorway and looked into the stable.

Tommy Roper's assistant was just finishing a job of hitching up a tall bay horse to a buggy. Standing just away from the buggy was Silver Dollar Dean, drawing on a pair

of buckskin gloves. He glanced up quickly and saw Henry.

"Going some place, Dean?" asked Henry quietly.

"I'm going to Scorpion Bend—on business," replied Dean coldly.

"Oh, I see. Scorpion Bend. What sort of business, if I may ask?"

Dean's eyes hardened, his jaw set for a moment.

"I don't quite get that question, Conroy," he said. "After all, my business is my own—not yours."

"Very true, Dean—very true. But in this case, I am interested."

"You are, eh?" Dean's voice was brittle.

"Yes, I am. You see, I know quite a few things, Dean, and I really do not like to have you leave Tonto City, until we have discussed them. No doubt you can explain everything—but I must insist on your explanation."

Dean's attitude changed quickly. He relaxed, moved in and tossed his loose glove on the buggy seat.

"Well, certainly, Sheriff," he said. "If there is anything I can do to help you, I shall be very glad to do it. You see—"

Before Henry realized what Dean intended doing, he leaped into the buggy, grabbed the lines and the whip, all in one motion. The nervous horse leaped ahead, fairly yanking the light buggy off the floor of the stable. Dean slashed the horse with the whip, and Henry narrowly missed being run down.

Dean swung the running horse to the left, and for fifty feet the buggy was careening on two wheels, throwing a cloud of dust. Henry ran out of the stable, gun in hand. Through the dust he saw the lanky Judge in front of the office, waving a shotgun.

A horse and rider came out the alley beside the King's Castle, the rider flipping out a loop, as he came. It was Slim Pickins on his roping horse. There was nothing indolent about Slim with a rope, and he was the best roper in Wild Horse Valley. Al Treager and Dude Wells had just climbed into the Circle T buckboard, when Silver Dean came spinning out of the livery-stable.

The tilted buggy righted itself again. Dean was on his feet, a la Ben Hur, slashing the horse with the whip, but ignoring the lines. Slim Pickins spurred in even

with the running horse, his loop swung out, dropping easily over the head of the running horse, and the trained roping horse set itself on skidding hoofs, as the slack went out of that hard-twist rope.

Al Treager and Dude Wells were standing up in the buckboard, so intent on the action that they forgot their own danger, until it was too late. The head of the running horse was down, when the shock came, and the animal turned upside down. It seemed as though the buggy went completely over the animal, and into the Circle T buckboard.

For several moments the air was full of loose buggy wheels, parts of the buggy and the smashed buckboard. The buckboard team, knocked down, when the careening buggy tried to yank the buckboard loose from them, got up and added their bit to the confusion. The cinch on Slim's saddle snapped from the strain, Slim turned over just once and came down on the seat of his pants in the dusty street.

HENRY was running up to the wreck, a gun swinging in his hand. Judge was in front of the bank, his double-barrel shotgun, both hammers cocked, waving in his two hands. Frijole Bill, astride a roan, came in from the other side, his old Winchester at his thigh.

Men poured from the King's Castle and from every other place on the main street. Silver Dollar Dean was flat on his back in the middle of the street, Treager was sprawled against the wooden sidewalk, while Dude Wells was half-under the buckboard, upside down, with only one wheel left on an axle. That wheel was still spinning.

Henry shoved his way to the front. John Campbell, the prosecutor was there, as was Doctor Bogart. Campbell said, "Henry, what on earth happened? Why are you carrying that gun in your hand? Judge, what are you doing with that shotgun?"

"Uncock it, Judge," said Henry. "There is nothing left to shoot."

"Silver Dollar Dean is dead, Henry," informed Doctor Bogart.

"This is terrible!" snorted the lawyer.

James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly and Edgar West came running. They had seen the catastrophe from a room in the hotel.

They tried to question Henry, but Henry ignored them and hurried toward the doorway of the bank. Mrs. Thomas and Frank Stillman, the banker, had just reached the door in time to hear a man say, "Silver Dollar's deader than a doorknob, out there, and I dunno about Treager and Wells."

Henry met them in the doorway. Mrs. Thomas' face was white and she seemed on the verge of a collapse.

"Dean is dead?" she asked in a husky whisper. "You—you—"

"He lost his nerve, my dear," said Henry quietly.

Mrs. Thomas looked at Henry, a queer, fixed-stare in her eyes. The crowd was coming up on the sidewalk. They wanted information. Mrs. Thomas stared at them, then she said huskily:

"I—I forgot my bag—I'll have to get it."

Then she turned and headed back for Stillman's private office. Henry looked at her, as she opened the door.

"I've got to stop her!" he exclaimed, and started for the door.

BUT before he could reach the knob, from inside the private office came the thud of a revolver shot. Henry flung the door open, stared inside for several moments, quietly shut the door and came back, his own face just a little white.

"I was afraid of that, Frank—she took the easy way out," he said to the banker.

"Easy—way?" queried the banker. "Henry, she just took out a ten-thousand dollar mortgage on the Circle T! She drew out all of her money, too—she was investing in a mine."

"I see," murmured Henry. "So was Dean, I believe."

"He—uh—yes, that is true."

John Campbell came in and Henry said, "Mrs. Thomas just shot herself, John. She's in Frank's office."

"My God!" gasped the lawyer. "What is the meaning of all this?"

Henry rubbed his big nose thoughtfully. "What about Treager and Wells?" he asked. "Are they alive?"

"Treager is conscious, but Wells isn't. But what—"

But Henry was hurrying outside, where they had Treager and Wells laid out on the sidewalk, with Doctor Bogart working over the latter. Henry leaned over Treager, while the crowd leaned over Henry.

"Mrs. Thomas just shot herself, Treager," said Henry.

Treager blinked, his lips shut tight against the pain of broken bones. Henry continued:

"Dean was killed, Al. There's a rope waiting for both you and Dude Wells, Al. We've got enough evidence to hang both of you, but the first one to turn state's evidence—might get off cheaper. Want to do a little talking, Al?"

"Get—me—a—drink," whispered Treager. "I'll talk. What the hell—I might as well."

Someone went to get a drink.

"Mrs. Thomas staked Dean to the money to buy the King's Castle, didn't she, Al?" inquired Henry.

"Yeah," he whispered. "She was married to Dean. Thomas didn't know it, when he married her, but he found out—later. Dean killed him that night. He gave Johnny Thomas somethin' in his drink, and the kid didn't know what happened."

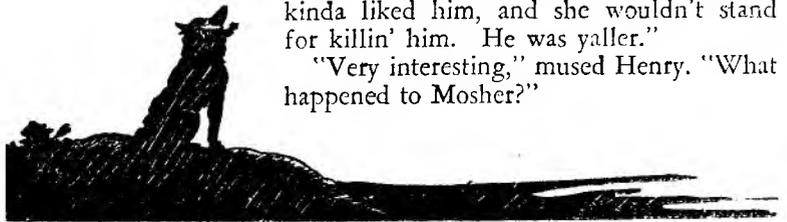
"Correct so far, Al," said Henry. "What about Sam Lohman?"

"Sam wanted more'n his share. He horned in on that robbery at the Road Runner, and they knocked him out. He knew that Nell forged a new will for Thomas, and wanted his share. I dunno who shot him."

Someone brought a big drink of raw whiskey and gave it to Treager, who gulped it eagerly. It brightened him quickly.

"Corliss was just dumb," he said. "He gave us the information about money at the mine. He's tied up at the Circle T. Nell kinda liked him, and she wouldn't stand for killin' him. He was yaller."

"Very interesting," mused Henry. "What happened to Mosher?"



"He knew too much. He knew Nell and Dean in Chicago. He knew that Nell served time for forgery. Mosher was crooked enough to demand a cut—or he'd spill the whole story. Nell shot him herself."

"And," said Henry, "that *El Pintado* thing meant nothing."

"It was Dean's fool idea. He wanted to build up an outlaw to kinda fool folks. But," Treager looked up at Henry, "they said you was too dumb to ever figure anythin' out, Conroy. How in hell did you figure all this out?"

"That," replied Henry soberly, "is what, I believe, they call a trade secret, Mr. Treager. Thank you very much."

"I'm moving both of them down to my place, Henry," said the doctor. "I have had the men take Mrs. Thomas' body out the back way."

"Thank you, Doctor. Judge, you haven't uncocked that shotgun yet."

"Ah, yes," murmured Judge. "Well, I merely wanted to be sure."

"John, we are going down and turn Johnny Thomas loose at once—we can get a court order later."

"Go ahead, Henry," smiled the lawyer.

HENRY and Judge went down to the office, trailed closely by James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly, who wanted a more complete report of how the case was solved. Henry and Judge came from the corridor with Johnny Thomas, who still didn't understand all of it.

He was free, and would still get the Circle T, and that was enough for him. Henry gave him back his gun-belt and gun, shook hands with him, and Johnny went marching down the street. Pelly said:

"Mr. Conroy, the *Clarion* hates to apologize—but it does."

"Thank you, sir," said Henry gravely.

"I hope we are friends again, Mr. Conroy," offered Edgar West.

"Oh, indeed, yes. Why, my dear boy—Judge! Fetch the jug and the glasses. We must cement that friendship with a flowing bowl. Judge didn't move, but Pelly and West did. Slim came in, limping a bit.

"Sit down, thou good and faithful servant!" exclaimed Henry.

"Much obliged—but I'll do all m' homework standin' up."

"And here is Frijole! You did well, my boy."

"All I done was hope," replied Frijole. "I had that ol' smokepole all ready for salivation, but they was all supine and comatose. Tommy Roper said he'd be down later to git his drink."

"Tommy did well—excellent!" exclaimed Henry. "He signaled me that Dean drew every cent he had in the bank, and he signaled me, when Dean was having an equipage readied for his getaway. It was all well done. Judge, please secure the jug and glasses."

"Henry, yore a wonder," said Frijole. "How in hell did you find out all this dirty work?"

"Very simple, my boy. Brains and hearing. I used my brains to figure out a few things—trivial things, no doubt. Then I built up a scarecrow. I wrote a telegram to myself, lost it in the King's Castle, and saw Silver Dellar Dean find it. The shoe fitted him, if I may use that expression, and things began to happen."

"Just where does hearing enter into it, if I may ask?" queried Judge.

"Listening to Al Treager tell what happened, Judge."

Judge came slowly back, squinting at Henry.

"You—you plotted the capture—and—er—you mean, you didn't know *anything*? You—you merely guessed—until Treager's confession?"

"That is right, sir. I merely let their conscience be their guide."

Oscar came in, grinning widely.

"Ay have never laughed so much in my life," he said. "Ho, ho, ho! Das vars funny. De cinch bosted and Slim sat down so hord he bust de scat from his pants. Nobody tell him."

Slim felt behind him and backed against the wall.

"There is a Divinity that shapes our ends," quoted Judge.

"Yeah," said Slim ruefully, "and I think his name is Henry."

When It's Sizzling on the Pan, How Can You Tell If It's Horse, Buffalo or Elk? Yet It Was the Ranger's Job to Know



TO LAUGH AGAIN

By H. S. M. KEMP

HIS official title was Field Officer, Department of Natural Resources, Province of Saskatchewan; but to the loggers and the pulpwood cutters, the homesteaders, the trappers and the fishermen that made up the population of his huge district,

Pete Logan was merely "The Ranger." And as there were two titles for the man, so were there two schools of thought concerning him. One school held that Pete Logan was a rat, a sidewinder, a proper so-and-so; the other was equally vociferous that Pete was the squarest guy that ever stood up in boots.

As old Tom Horricks patriarch of the district, put it, "Pete's all right if you treat him right. But try slippin' anythin' over on him, and he'll give you both barr'ls." Pressed, old Tom would explain things further. "What I mean, Pete ain't th' sort that'll worry over a guy gettin' himself a jumpin' deer in th' summer if he needs it or downin' an extra one in th' huntin' season for campmeat; but he sure as guns'll go after the guy that makes a hog of himself or figgers he's just too smart t' get caught."

So that when, that cold December morning, Pete ignored the odd rifle-shot that rolled and rumbled over the hills, he became suddenly stern and hard-faced when the herd of elk almost ran atop of him. For there were only six elk in the herd; and there should have been eight.

It was in the middle of the hunting season; and, this year, the hunting was for jumping-deer alone. No more tracking down moose; no more sneaking up on a bunch of elk. Even the shaggy woodland caribou were protected. For hunters and timber wolves—and Pete knew it was mainly the wolves—had made the bigger stuff more than ordinarily scarce. But jumpers remained; and this year they were almost as thick as rabbits. They ran with the cattle, hung around the logging camps, fed in the uncut alfalfa fields that had been caught with the frost. Ranging the edges of the settlement, they felt safe. And safe, to a degree, they were, despite the number of hunters. Their living with man had taught them man's habits—especially the habits of a man with a gun.

All this had the result of shifting more responsibility onto Pete Logan's chunky shoulders. Throughout the year he had to check on grazing and fire-permits, on the cut of the timber berths and the stumpage of cordwood; each hunting season he had to see that the nimrods were equipped with licenses, wore white suits and didn't kill each other. This year he had to see that the hunting was directed against the jumping-deer alone. Thus, when those six elk broke in on him and hardened his face, there was every reason for it. There were only six elk—and there should have been eight.

It was on the edge of a little muskeg, where Pete was boiling his noonday kettle.

His rifle leaned against one spruce tree, his stampede pack hanging from a branch of another. He sat on a log, toasting a frozen meat sandwich over the fire. Earlier, he had left his truck some distance up the trail and had cut in to look over a stand of spruce that a small-time operator wanted to convert into lumber. After lunch, Pete would take a northern swing by way of a pulpwood camp and so come out near the truck. He was thinking of all this when, from behind him, he heard the snap of a twig and a short, snuffling whistle. He turned quickly on the log, and faced a bull elk not twenty feet away.

If Pete was surprised, so was the bull. For a moment it stood there, head up and ears forward. It hesitated, wheeled as though to vanish the way it had come, but was hampered by five other animals immediately behind it. Then a mad scramble took place.

The elk in the rear shoved forward till they, too, saw what they considered to be danger. They milled, got in each other's way; and Pete got a full look at them.

There was the bull, perhaps a six-year-old, two cows, two calves and a younger cow, a two-year-old. Six of them. Then the bull was angling and crashing through the timber with the others at his rump and flanks.

Pete stood up, watched them. After a moment he sat down on the log again. The sandwich from his improvised toasting-fork was charring in the fire; but Pete didn't bother with it. He was thinking; and thinking hard.

THIS was the fourth time since freeze-up he had run across that particular bunch of elk. He recognized them chiefly from the leader. The seven-year-old bull was light, even for his sex; almost a buckskin. If the season for elk had been open, Pete would have taken him himself long ago. A head like that, mounted, would look pretty nifty in the ranger cabin. But on the other three times, there had been eight animals in the bunch. And running over them in his mind, Pete recalled the missing. They were an old cow and a spring calf.

Hard-faced, thoughtful, Pete dug out another sandwich and skewered it over the fire. A cow and a calf. Well, where had they gone?

Pete knew that it was unlikely the pair

had broken away from the herd to forage on their own. Elk, in the winter, seldom did that. Which left two possibilities. Either wolves had got them, or some hunter had snagged himself a nice supply of meat.

Pete chewed on his sandwich and chewed on the thought. If wolves were to blame, there wasn't much he could do about it. He shot them whenever he could, and the Government had put a good, high bounty on the skins. Some day, somebody might bag the brutes responsible for killing these elk; then the bloody circle would be complete.

That for the wolf angle; and when it came down to the human, Pete knew what he was up against there. His district was huge, and they that dwelt therein were a crafty lot. They knew all the tricks of the illegal-game racket, they knew how to circumvent him. Certainly, they seemed to know more about the Ranger's movements than did the Ranger's own wife. Bess Logan often had no knowledge of when Pete Logan might come home, but the citizenry of the district all seemed to know when he was away.

Pete spared a thought to the craftiest of the lot: to Jerry Mindon. Jerry had a homestead where settlement and bushland met. The man owned a cow, a team of horses, and five acres of alfalfa. The cow produced a calf annually, which Jerry butchered and sold, and the five acres of alfalfa entitled him to be listed as a farmer. As sidelines, Jerry Mindon cut cordwood, trapped, and guided. Incidentally, he hunted the year round as befitted a taxpayer with fifty per cent Indian blood in his veins.

Pete Logan knew all this and much more. He knew that Jerry Mindon wasn't particular what he hunted, and that when he pointed his gun at anything, that thing went down. He knew, too, that Jerry kept the larders of his less fortunate neighbors well stocked with meat and that occasionally he made midnight business-trips to town that had nothing to do with the sale of alfalfa seed. But what Pete Logan was most acutely aware of was the fact that one day in his wrath he had sworn to nail Jerry Mindon's hide to the Ranger-cabin fence, but that he hadn't been able to make good his boast.

Now, as he sat brooding over his fire, something told him that the fate of the missing elk was bound up with the movements

of Jerry Mindon. The elk moved around in about a five-mile circle, and the nearest orbit of their swing was a point in a muskeg not more than a mile from Jerry Mindon's house. Pete himself had seen their tracks there, so it was safe to assume that Jerry Mindon was also aware of the fact.

Pete nodded. "Yeah. So maybe it won't do any harm for me to mooch around Pete's place for a while. It just might pay."

He finished his lunch, drained his tobacco-can tea pail, stowed it away in his packsack. Ready to leave, he looked around him. The wind was from the northeast, blowing toward him. From the direction the elk had stood. Well, it had to be. That's why the elk had blundered onto him without getting his scent or the smell of the smoky fire. But there was more to the direction of the wind than that. Pete predicted snow in it; and snow was something he wasn't so fussy about just now. He had to head north for a couple of days, and when he returned he wanted to poke around Jerry Mindon's immediate backyard. And a backyard without a lot of covering snow to blanket Jerry's tracks.

He sighed, struck off. All he could do was hope for the best.

A HALF-MILE further on he topped a jackpine ridge. It was part of the Height of Land. Surrounding him was a rolling wilderness of snow-covered hills and muskegs, rivers and lakes. Far to the south, beyond the blue horizon, a faint smudge hung in the sky. He knew it for the smoke of the city, but it produced no feeling in him. What did interest him was another sight, less than a quarter of a mile away. Half a dozen ravens swooped, dived, rose again, their croaks and squawks jarring his ears.

"Yeah?" grunted Pete. "Oh, yeah? Well, mebbe we'll mosey over."

He couldn't miss his way; not even in the spruce groves and the willow hollows. The noisy convention directed him. And when finally he broke through to a little poplar glade, there was a swishing of inky wings as the carrion-eaters flapped their way upwards.

It was much what he had expected: the site of a kill. There was crimsoned snow, packed hard by the feet and the claws of

marauders; a burst animal-stomach with its semi-digested food; a hide, frozen, thrown away in a careless heap; an elk's head, with its eyeless sockets staring at him.

Nothing more; but it was enough for Pete Logan. He kicked at the head with a moccasin-rubbered toe and took a glance at the hide.

"The cow," he grunted. Added, "But no calf."

For some moments he stood there, chewing on his lips. He shed his gloves, rolled a cigarette and lighted it. Then he made a slow circle around the place. He gave another grunt.

"Smooth boy, ain't you, Jerry? Made the kill just before it snowed so I couldn't track you." His heavy face went heavier. "And it took a lot of snow to cover the track of that horse-toboggan of yours."

He faced south, in the general direction wherein Jerry Mindon's shack would lie, and for a moment hope rose within him. Jerry might fool himself this time. The shack would be at least three miles distant, and in three miles some sign of the flat-sleigh track should show. True, it had stormed a lot a few days earlier and the kill must have been made at least a week ago. The wind, too, in the open spaces would wash out tracks as though they had never been; but in the sheltered spots Pete might find enough to satisfy both himself and a sympathetic Justice of the Peace out in town.

But if Pete Logan could ponder along these lines, so could Jerry Mindon. And a full week before. For the way south ran over a sparsely covered poplar hill, down through some straggly willows, then out onto a long, dismal and wind-swept muskeg.

Pete knew that muskeg, and he knew that beyond it was a string of fire-killed-jackpine hills. Beyond that again was another muskeg. For Jerry Mindon it might be the longest way round but the safest way home. And contemplating the vista before him, Pete Logan ground his jaws.

"Sure! He had the wind and he had the snow. What chance has a feller got?"

Savage, and with a sense of frustration, Pete swung at right angles and onto his original course again. As he cut across hills and swampland and ducked hanging branches, he told himself that this business with Jerry Mindon had gone too far. It

was bad enough when Jerry got his sexes mixed and downed cow-elk in the seasons when bull-elk alone were open; but this contempt, this utter flaunting of the law in a fully closed season had to be stopped.

Pete knew how it all added up. There were those amongst Jerry Mindon's friends and customers who'd buy all the elk meat he'd sell them. They weren't fussy about the wildness of jumper-meat nor the muton-like taste of caribou, but if they could buy the equal of blue-ribbon beef from Jerry at ten cents the pound, why pay forty at the butcher's and mess with a lot of coupons?

"A sweet racket," mused Pete Logan. "Sweet money in it, too. But it'll take a lot of ten-cent pieces to square the two-hundred-dollar fine I'll crack you if I ever get the chance."

But it did not seem as though the chance would ever come. Pete couldn't be everywhere in his district at the one time. All Jerry Mindon had to do was to learn when the Ranger would be away, pray for a snow-storm, then sneak out and do his dirty work.

"Yeah," grunted Pete. "Simple as that. Only, Jerry," he added, "I think I got an idea."

The idea was as simple as Jerry Mindon's strategy, and Pete lost no time in putting it into effect. Each hunter he ran into, each pulpwood—and cord-wood cutter he met were all left with the same impression—that the Ranger was heading north for the Mississippuskwow country and wouldn't be back for a week or ten days.

It was the green light for the evildoers, the go-ahead signal for every mother's son who had a dark deed to perform. Pete knew it, and went into it wholeheartedly. For he knew also that one of the first to hear the glad tidings would be Jerry Mindon. Then, by a circuitous route, Pete reached home again and sat himself down at his baited trap.

BUT he didn't have long to sit. The following morning, his near neighbor, Bucktooth Robbins walked in on him. Bucktooth Robbins, and Algy Brown.

The two men shuffled into the office, but Pete knew it was going to be Bucktooth's party, Algy Brown was only moral support.

Pete shoved back his chair, turned. "Well? What's on your mind?"

Bucktooth gave a grin. He was an under-sized scarecrow in an oversized mackinaw, with rattish features, rattish, yellow hair, and a pair of sharp black eyes that could also have fitted a rat. He wiped his moist lips with the back of a dirty hand and asked Pete Logan if he was interested in elk.

"In elk?" Pete frowned. "Why not?"

Bucktooth gave a shrug. "Thought you might like to see where one's bin downed."

Pete studied his man. Up in the Height of Land country?"

"No. Just northwest o' here. Mebbe four-five miles."

"Yeah?" Pete squinted. "Who downed him?"

Bucktooth's bright eyes sharpened. "I could guess—on the reg'lar basis."

Sometimes, in Pete Logan's life, there were times when he'd have loved to swing out with the back of his heavy hand—to feel it connect with a slobbering mouth, to thrill to the satisfaction it would give him. He wanted to do it then, at that moment. Bucktooth was so ready for it.

For Bucktooth was part of the scum that had risen to the surface under the existing game laws. He was an informer, a stool-pigeon, a squealer. He had the goods on somebody, and for a consideration was prepared to sell that somebody out. The consideration would be half of the resultant fine.

Pete Logan, a man's man, felt towards these squealers as he might towards a polecat, or a cockroach. They should be wiped out, stepped on, squashed. But he had to put up with them; was supposed to. They had a certain usefulness; as jackals have.

Tough-facced, he looked at Bucktooth. "You'll get it. Now spill it—and spill it fast."

Bucktooth shot a sideways glance at his companion. Algy Brown, big, bulky in a goatskin coat and sweating, looked none too comfortable. But he gave Bucktooth an encouraging nod; and Bucktooth plunged ahead.

"Mc an' Algy here," he explained, "we was out huntin' jumpers. Last evenin'. We took after a big buck, and he led us up into that muskeg back of Jerry Mindon's place. First thing we know, we come onto a little

jackpine hill, facin' south, and we seen where an animal's bin killed. It was an elk, a purty-fair-sized calf. We seen the head and the hide."

Pete Logan frowned thoughtfully. "I know that little hill. Favorite spot for 'em bedding down."

"But that ain't all we saw," volunteered Bucktooth. "There was a sleigh-track. A flat-sleigh track; a toboggan. It run right from the kill to old Jerry Mindon's barn."

Pete Logan's fingers tapped on the arm of his chair. Something warm was burning inside him. "Right to the barn, eh?" he muttered.



Suddenly he got up, walked over to the window and looked out. The wind was from the east now, and it was a mournful, lowering wind. It meant snow, and snow that was already overdue.

He turned to Bucktooth and Algy Brown. "Okay, you guys," he decided. "We'll take a run up there right away."

"Up *there?*" Bucktooth let a yelp. "You don't want us along!"

"You're darn right I want you along," growled Pete Logan. "And why not? You scared of old Jerry Mindon? Well, you needn't be. You'll have to face him in court."

Bucktooth looked at Algy Brown; Algy seemed sweaty and more uncomfortable than ever.

"So I'll get the truck out of the garage," said Pete, "and we'll wheel her."

Algy Brown pointed out that his own truck was outside. He and Bucktooth would ride up in that.

"Okay, then," said Pete. "Let's go."

THEY stopped short of Jerry Mindon's shack, struck through the bush and came out on the muskeg. Pete took the lead; and in a few minutes he picked up the tracks of Bucktooth and Algy Brown. They followed them, and in ten minutes rounded a jackpine bluff, zigzagged through a hundred yards of hummocks and climbed Bucktooth's little jackpine hill.

The scene was much the same as where Pete had found the remains of the cow. There were the squawking ravens, the head, the hide, the bloodstained snow. But there was something missing from the other picture but in evidence here—the flat-sleigh track leading due east and towards the shack of Jerry Mindon.

They followed it, came out of the muskeg, crossed the small alfalfa field. Smoke issued from the stovepipe sprouting out of the shack's sod roof; and Jerry Mindon's "Come--in!" answered Pete's thump on the door.

They herded inside, found seats on two chairs and the bunk. Jerry was at the table and said they were all in time for a bite to eat. Looking at Pete Logan, he said, "I just got in, me. Bin out for a couple days on the trapline."

Now this was not Pete's first visit to the cabin. Nor the first time he had tried to cross swords with Jerry Mindon. Jerry was not known as a poker player, but Pete swore he should have been. The man was a master at the game of bluff.

"So you just got in, eh?" Pete observed. "How did you do?"

"No good," averred Jerry. "Still, I wasn't

expectin' much. Only had two-three traps out, but I got 'em all strung now."

Pete gave a grunt, and Jerry Mindon allowed his eyes to stray towards Bucktooth and Algy Brown. "You guys huntin'?" he asked.

It was Pete Logan who answered. "Yeah. Elk. And what d'you know about 'em?"

Jerry Mindon looked back again. "What do I know about 'em?" he gave a grin. "I know I'd like to get me one if the season wasn't closed."

Pete Logan had to admire him, admire his cool, brass nerve. At fifty years of age and with a lifetime of dodging Rangers behind him, Jerry Mindon could look at one now with nothing but clear innocence in his dusky eyes. But Pete Logan wasn't here to fool.

"I'm talkin', Jerry, about that calf you killed down in the muskeg. The one you hauled home on your sleigh."

The statement may have jarred Jerry Mindon, but his Indian features gave no sign of it. "Tell me more," he suggested.

"I sure will," the Ranger agreed. "We saw where you killed this calf, and we saw where you hauled it home. And this run-around of yours about being out on the trapline is no good. The only trapping you've done in the last two days is elk-trapping. And with a gun—down there in the muskeg."

The half-breed gave a tolerant smile. "Somebody's bin kiddin' you, Pete. I never killed no calf nor hauled him home. Look around, and if you can find it, I'll buy it off you!"

Pete sprang up. "Thanks. I'll just do that."

He began first in the cabin. He peered under the bunk, lifted the flap in the floor and searched the small dugout cellar. With the possibilities of the shack exhausted, he announced his intentions of going further afield.

"Sure," agreed Jerry Mindon. "And I'll help you!"

Outside, hunched against the raw east wind, stood the half-breed's two horses. Over again the small barn was a heavy flat-sleigh. To one side stood a granary. Pete Logan headed for it.

But the granary was a disappointment. It held a collection of odds and ends, bits of

harness, some nondescript trapping-gear and a couple of sacks of alfalfa seed. But there was no meat; no elk, nor vestige of one.

Outside, Pete Logan saw Jerry Mindon staring in the direction of the muskeg. He was following the flat-sleigh track.

"Kind of hard to explain, eh?" suggested the Ranger.

"No." Jerry Mindon turned. His Indian face was impassive. "Just means somebody used my horse and toboggan while I was gone."

Pete Logan gave an explosive laugh. But there was little of humor in it.

"Who's kiddin' now?"

"Not me," said the half-breed. "Somebody went huntin', got himself an animal and wanted to haul it home. My horses run outside all winter. He just helped himself."

THERE was something in the way the man said it, something so cocksure, so matter-of-fact, that Pete Logan frowned. This Jerry Mindon was nobody's fool. Not only was he as slippery as a fish and a cheerful liar, but he knew something of the law as well. The excuse he was handing out for the flat-sleigh track was a good one; in a court of law he could make it stick. And unless Pete Logan produced the body—the body of the elf-calf or a part of it—Jerry Mindon would be free to laugh again.

"I'll try the barn," growled Logan.

Only then did the half-breed put in a word of hindrance. And it was more a suggestion. He said, "That'd be a swell place to keep meat—in a barn!"

But Logan wasn't going to be deterred. And in a manger, shoved in a big bran-sack and buried under old, chaffy hay, he uncovered the left rib-portion of something that could only be a young elk.

He took it outside, spilled it out on the snow. "Okay, Mister," he told Jerry Mindon. "What's your excuse for that?"

The half-breed stared, and for the first time his face showed some expression. His lips seemed too thin, the wrinkles in his face tightened. When he looked at Pete Logan, there was smoky anger in his eyes.

"I bin framed," he said.

Logan wanted to laugh. "You've been framed, all right. You framed yourself. This chunk here—" and he kicked at the ribs, "—isn't good enough to peddle. Too

smashed up where you hit him in the back. But it'd make good soup; good mulligan, with a few spuds and onions." His voice seemed to go hard. "No, Mister, you heard I'd gone north for a few days so you figured your chance had come. Well, you had your chance. Only it'll set you back about two hundred bucks."

Jerry Mindon faced Bucktooth Robbins and Algy Brown. His lip curled, so that he looked like some old husky set to rip and slash.

"You two coyotes turn me in? Yeah, sure, you did! It don't matter who killed that elk—me or the other guy—here's your chance to make a bit o' dough!"

Bucktooth wetted his lips, as though to deny the charge. But the words wouldn't come. Fat Algy Brown backed a step or two out of range.

"You pair o' squealers—!" sneered Jerry Mindon. "Why, I wouldn't dirty my hands sockin' you! It don't matter that when you was both hard up, when you was livin' on spuds and home-ground bread, I fed you! Your kids would never ha' smelled meat if I hadn't gone out and lugged it home to 'em!" The half-breed spun on Pete Logan. "Sure, I did! Killed anything I wanted any time I wanted it! And not for myself, either. For guys like these. These sidewinders—who'd sell me out for fifty bucks apiece!"

Pete Logan nodded. "I know, Jerry, just how you feel. But this time, you killed once too often. I guess you got to pay the shot."

Then, suddenly, Jerry Mindon was chuckling. His rage had left him as quickly as it had come.

"It's a good 'un—a good 'un on me. You got me this time, got me cold. Only it's for something I didn't do. Believe me, Pete," he said, and there was simple sincerity in his words, "I never killed that elk."

Pete Logan studied the man, calculatingly, appraisingly. This was a new Jerry Mindon, a Jerry Mindon he hadn't met before. All the bluff, all the cool insouciance was gone. Jerry Mindon was speaking from his heart.

Pete Logan was baffled. The case he could have built up against the half-breed was crumbling. The evidence was still there, and if he had wished, he could have obtained a conviction on it. But Pete knew the case would never go into court. Jerry Mindon was speaking the truth.

He looked up at him. "These horses of yours—you say they run outside all winter?"

"Why, sure."

"And anyone can catch them?"

"Anyone who can reach out a hand."

Pete looked across the alfalfa field, off towards the muskeg. He turned back to the others.

"Okay, you guys. Head up to the house, and wait there till I get back."

Jerry Mindon asked, "Goin' some place?"

"U-huh. And I want you guys where I can find you."

Bucktooth Robbins seemed to shiver inside his machinaw. He glanced furtively at Jerry Mindon. The half-breed grinned.

"Feel kinda goosy, Bucktooth? You needn't. You'll be safe enough with me."

PETE LOGAN struck off. He crossed the muskeg, came to the kill, looked painstakingly around him. From there he backtracked himself, Bucktooth and Algy Brown and came at last to where the three of them had, a little earlier, cut in from the road. Here, too, forked off the tracks of the other two men; the tracks of Bucktooth and Algy. These, too, came towards him; and they would be the ones made by Bucktooth and his companion the previous evening, following the buck jumper that led them into the kill.

In time, these tracks, too, brought him out onto the road again and a good mile south of where he and Algy Brown had left their trucks. For a moment he seemed undecided whether to turn south or north; then abruptly he wheeled and struck north in the direction of Jerry Mindon's place.

He reached it; and when he walked into the shack he was lugging the elk-ribs with him. Jerry Mindon was sprawled out on the bunk, Bucktooth and Algy Brown, jumpy-looking, occupied the two chairs.

Pete Logan zipped open his windbreaker, shoved the cap to the back of his head and rested his fists on his hips.

"You!" he said to Bucktooth. "You say you followed a buck last evening to where the kill had been made. Where did you first pick up his tracks?"

Bucktooth frowned, but only for an instant. "About a mile and a half southwest of here. Beyond where we swung in. On the edge of a tamarack swamp."

The Ranger looked at him coldly. "You're a liar. I backtracked you clear to the road. There's lots of jumper tracks cutting across yours, but you never swung in on one of 'em. Another thing," he went on, bluntly, "following a jumper's tracks, you leave 'em once in a while. You know, places where a jumper can squeeze through a tangle but a man has to go all the way round. I never saw no buck's tracks in places like them."

Jerry Mindon sat up, swung his feet to the floor and seemed interested. Bucktooth seemed interested, too, but in a flustered sort of way. While he made an effort to speak, Pete Logan went on.

"But I'll tell you what I did see. And it was something I missed coming up. About a hundred yards south of where the kill was made, our tracks angle around a spit of timber. And right there are a lot of tracks. Like a couple of guys would make coming round that spit and suddenly seeing half a dozen elk bedded down on the side of that little jackpine hill. Like they'd make getting their guns ready—getting ready to shoot."

Pete Logan suddenly turned to Jerry Mindon. "Got an axe; a hand-axe? I could do with one."

The half-breed crossed to the wood-box and rooted out a hatchet he apparently used for kindling. Logan took it and turned to his elk-ribs.

He studied them for a moment. As well as the ribs, there was a section of the backbone, split lengthwise down the middle. On the inside the bone was smashed and bloody, but on the outer side the flesh wasn't marred.

"Here, Jerry; hold it," he said.

With his axe, Logan chopped, pried, chopped again. Bits of bone fell to the floor, and finally he was working something loose with his fingers.

It was a mushroomed, copper-jacketed slug.

The Ranger turned it over, scraped away some of the gore that was clinging to it. He turned to the half-breed. "Still use that old .38-55?"

Pete Mindon was frowning. "Why, sure." He indicated a rifle standing in a corner of the shack. "There she is, right there."

"And this one," said Pete Logan, jug-

gling the slug in his hand and looking directly at Bucktooth, "would be about a .25-35." He added, "So don't you think it's about time you came clean?"

THE following evening Pete Logan returned from a trip to the city. Supper was waiting, and as he prepared himself for it, he unburdened himself to his wife.

"Rawest thing I ever heard of. Bucktooth tried to bluff his way out of it, but few J.P.s are tougher than old Knowles. Finally, with his rifle and the bullet on the courtroom table, Mr. Bucktooth cracked. Yeah, admitted everything. Said he and Algy blundered onto those seven elk, and they got the calf. Then, while Bucktooth dressed it, Algy fetched his truck up to Mindon's."

Pete dug out a comb, slicked his hair at the mirror, went on.

"They caught old Jerry's horse, skidded the calf, and planted the ribs in the manger. Cute, eh? Old Jerry'd take the rap, and they'd get the meat and the squealer's share of the fine."

Bess Logan shook her head. "Poor old Jerry. He has sins enough of his own without carrying the sins of others."

"Ain't it a fact?" agreed Pete. Then he added, "I dunno; mebbe I've been riding the old coot too hard. He's no model of virtue, but it seems as though there's others in the country just as bad as him. Take that cow that was killed over to the Height of Land—I blamed it on Jerry. Chances are, if we knew all about it, we'd find it was killed by this rat of a Robbins."

Bess Logan smiled. "Perhaps. But you'll never know now."

Pete drew into the table, and with a healthy man's appetite, addressed himself to the steak. But he soon looked up.

"Nice chunk of meat. Where'd you get it?"

Bess smiled. More, she seemed to be amused at something. "Jerry Mindon sent it down."

"Jerry Mindon?" Pete stared at her. "Jerry Mindon, you say? He's got no meat. I frisked him yesterday."

For an answer, Bess Logan produced a folded scrap of paper. "This came too," she observed.

Pete grabbed it, scanned the few scrawled lines:

"Dear Pete. I sure apreshate what you done for me. You got me out of a mean spot and I won't forget it."

The note was signed, "J. Mindon."

But it was the postscript that was intriguing. This ran:

"Heres a little snack for you and the misus. I hope you like it. I butchered last week."

Pete read the note a second time, then, harsh-faced, shot a glance at Bess. "This—this snack he talks about—how much of it did he send down?"

"Quite a nice-sized piece. It's out in the kitchen."

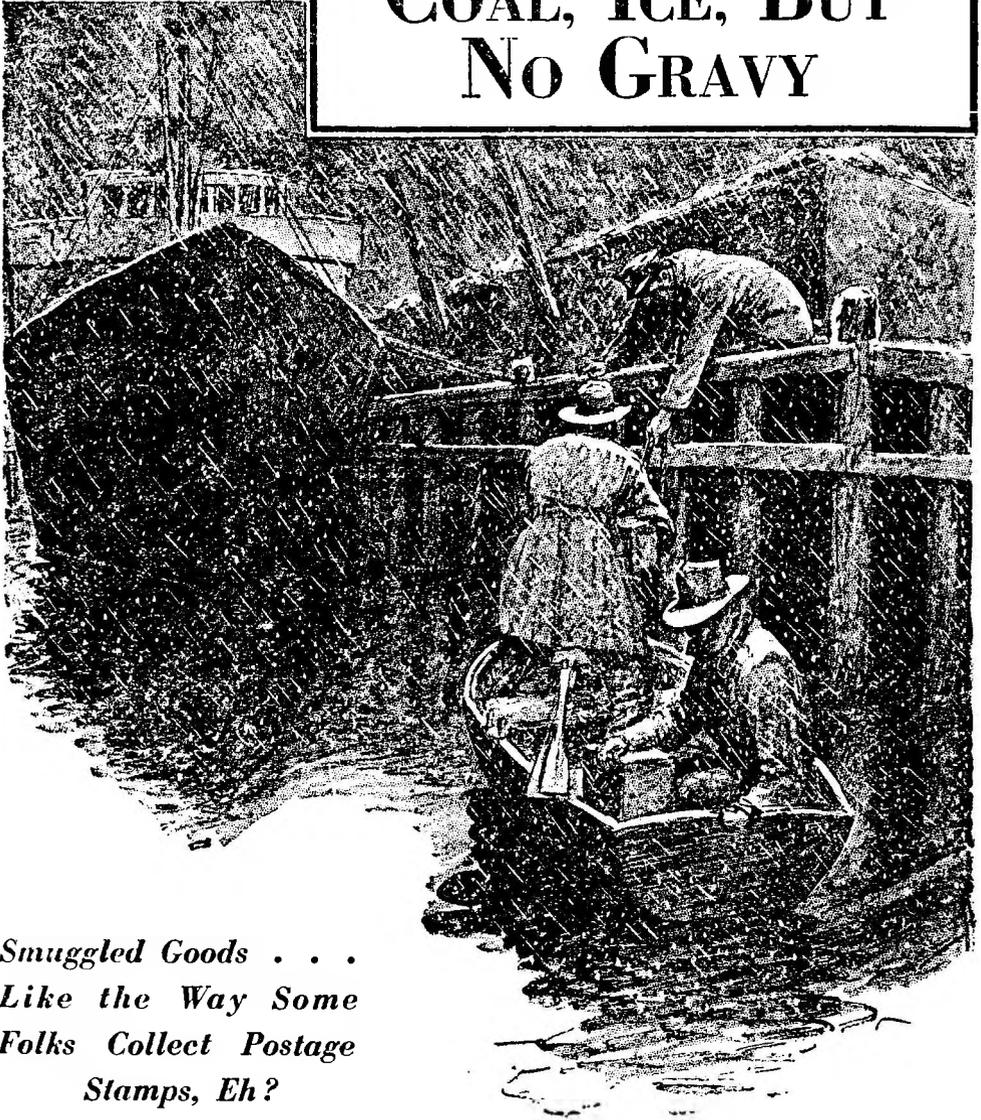
He followed her there, took the five-pound block and scrutinized it closely under the lamp. "What is it?" he growled. "Elk-meat, horse, or buffalo? I know what it is—but because I can't prove it, I can't say a thing!"

He scowled at the note again. And when he glanced up, there was a faraway look in his eyes. He was back in the Height of Land country, with the squawking ravens, at the cow-elk kill.

"He 'butchered' last week. Yeah, he sure did!" Pete Logan blinked, and found his wife laughing at him. "Go on!" he told her, grimly. "Have your fun. I'll never nail old Jerry. Not even when he tells me the truth!"



COAL, ICE, BUT NO GRAVY



*Smuggled Goods . . .
Like the Way Some
Folks Collect Postage
Stamps, Eh?*

By B. E. COOK

JOHN CABOT BLAINE brought his fist down onto the glass-topped table with the force of a career man who had arrived—almost. "I order you to accept that package," he exploded in muffled rage.

Captain Severidge Blaine pointed to the shattered glass. "You've ruined it and you've been here less than a month, sir. I'm no

longer your mate. You're not on the bridge."

"You heard my order."

"Lucky if somebody else didn't," his son fired back. "I tell you again, father, this smuggling stolen war surpluses leads to but one end—federal courts. As your mate—and son—I had to receive the watches you're moving up here to black markets. Now I'm the master of the *Aspenwald* and if the

F. B. I. does close in, I'll have to go to trial with you. No thanks."

J. Cabot Blaine expelled a lungful of smoke to glare at the one and only rebel in his carefully developed personnel in the racket. A rebel, thought he, becomes a threat. He requires special handling, first by playing on his emotional sense of duty; then, if necessary, apply pressure.

Emotions first. The big, newly appointed port captain laid aside his cigar in a calm assumed to match his son's. "Sev," said he, "I made you. Took five years to beat down your indifference and wake you up to the fact your future lay on the bridge, an officer instead of a fo'castle hand and a—"

"Don't you attempt to make me out stupid. I had other ambitions—and engineers still get the ship where she goes."

"I know"—waving it aside—"but you're a skipper because I worked you up to it. Now that you have to admit how far it's got you, you pretend you don't. Okay, be stubborn, but do try to remember I'm still your superior. And I want a personal favor."

Captain Blaine's eyes widened, then narrowed. "You admit that moving stolen valuables from the Roads to Boston is not in my line of duty, sir. Very well. I refuse!"

So soon! thought J. Cabot Blaine. So soon must the pressure be applied to him?" "Cap'n Blaine," said he, coldly formal, "I hold your future. If I should fire you, not a company on this coast would hire you. Right?"

The youngest master in steam on the Atlantic scaboard flushed. His father had brandished the one threat he dared not defy. Cornered, he conceded, "Okay, you've got me."

J. Cabot Blaine chuckled, "Dam' right I have and don't get smart in the toils."

"Meaning?"

"No double-crossing. I'll have you watched closer than any of your touted federal men would do the job."

Sweeping his cap off the shattered glass, the young skipper gave his first real enemy eye for eye. "Be yourself, father; we're both Blaines. My object was and is to keep the both of us from disgrace. And you're forgetting something: you'd have farther to fall, I'd still have my life before me."

But the older Blaine snorted. Hadn't he already made half enough to retire, as well

as buying up some coveted voting stock of the Valley Vein Coal Company's marine division of colliers and sugar ships? He relit his Havana and stated firmly, "It'll come aboard you after midnight the nineteenth. You will send your second and third mates home to Norfolk for the night. Your First will handle the stuff."

"What stuff?" Severidge demanded irritatingly at the door.

J. C. purpled in a flood of wrath. "Watches, dammit! What the hell do you care what? You can't be trusted to touch it, you rebel."

CAPTAIN SEVERIDGE BLAINE headed the *Aspenwald* for Hampton Roads with the family's good name heavy on his mind. He thanked fortune that at least he'd inherited the "impractical idealism" of the Severidges; while his mother had lived she had at least held at bay the Blaine greed in her man. Now, only seven months after her decease, big John defied law, decency and luck to make a quick fortune in the under-cover scramble for war surpluses—service watches, for instance, one package of which might net him in the thousands sold black market.

Which directed his thoughts to his mate, the man J. C. had advanced to First when promoting his son to skipper. The First gave no clue to his attitude toward J. C., toward smuggling or his new skipper. But he did spirit aboard ship the stolen goods and that stamped him as a J. C. trusty. At what price?

Off Winterquarter the captain attempted to sound him out. "J. C. spoke with you, mister?"

Bell's eyes darted both ways. "He did."

"The Second and Third both go home when we dock, you know?"

"I know," Bell murmured and went down a companionway.

Useless to pump him further. Was there nobody else involved? Nobody who foresaw the inevitable consequences clearly enough to join in obstructing the racket? The answer appeared to be: John Cabot Blaine, terrible enemy if crossed up, tight organizer. His packages got onto a pier, were found as directed, were spirited aboard the ship. When he had been her master, he himself had concealed them: now Bell hid them where? Even now who might be tracing

those thousand-dollar shipments, waiting only to identify all persons involved before pouncing?

The *Aspenwald* began loading in mid-afternoon. Said the wharfinger, "A strike or something's making up. Anyway, orders is to dish it aboard, and fast."

Surveying the bright clusters of cargo lights high over his vessel, the confident young skipper chuckled. No monkey business for J. C. could be pulled off under that glare and he'd be to sea inside five or six hours. She was deep and trimmed before midnight, but Bell came above to report steward in a rage; his ice and Virginia potatoes had not arrived. Blaine intervened and the ship sailed after midnight. He was confident that this trip J. C. would have to whistle for his merchandise.

The cargo was half out of her when her mate came directly from the wharf pay station to the master's cabin to report: "J. C. wants to see me."

Thought Blaine—no package, Bell's in for a mauling. He said, "You look tough enough for the gaffing, mister. When?"

The poker face opened enough to say, "Now."

"Both Second and Third are aboard, go ashore."

The skipper gave the interruption some quiet consideration, however, and he reached into a vest pocket, feeling for the key to his father's office. Presently he turned the ship over to his Second and caught a taxi up on the street. He couldn't miss this opportunity to learn directly the relationship existing between Bell and J. C.

So it was that he stood in the office alone, tuning his ears to the voices in the inner room. Until he could catch the basso rumble of J. C. saying, ". . . will be fine. About three a.m., yes. What? . . . Oh that night watchman's okay. . . . Yeah, those light clusters are bright but you got the stuff aboard. . . . Away for'd, huh?"

Bell's voice rose. "Where's the skipper stand? He's different since he took over the ship."

"O-o-oh, I knew you were bothered about something. He's young for the job, she's all he can take on nowadays. Don't trouble him with this business; the way I told you, see."

"Another thing—I had a hunch I was watched that night."

The listener outside stiffened. Had secret service agents begun their vigils? Hijackers? In either case, the moment had come to—he walked in. "This ends it," he declared.

Never had John Cabot Blaine come so close to slugging it out with his son, but he managed somehow a crooked, deprecating grin and said to Bell out the side of his mouth, "Forget your hunch," and nodded toward the door.

Still startled and unassured, the mate left them.

"Severidge, you can't quite put it over, can you? And you never will get the upper hand," J. C. declared more composedly.

"Never mind upper hands, as master of that vessel I come pretty near knowing what she ships, sir, or we'll take the issue higher up."

Only with extreme difficulty did the older man retain his show of self-assurance. "Cap'n Blaine," he said, too softly, "you are fired." It was his supreme bid for domination.

It failed. Severidge sat down, saying, "I refuse. You don't quite dare to turn me loose. So, that settled, I repeat: 'This ends it.'"

J. C. tapped thick, stubborn fingers on the new glass top, thinking, so the puritan would blow the works, and damn it I can't risk it. I've been port cap'n only thirty days—must be other ways to circumvent him. Suddenly his eyes brightened. Feary, the bigshot! Coming at two-thirty about the threatened tieup. He and Feary should hit it off—at a price. Three of those eighty-five dollar watches? Half a dozen if necessary.

Blaine's sharp gaze emerged again into the present, but what tack could he possibly take now? He was face to face with a man as stubborn as he ever was.

"Made your plans, of course, to deal with the impending walkout of your stokers and water tenders?" he asked.

The totally irrelevant and unexpected switchover succeeded. The skipper could only reply, "Chief Burgess says there's nothing to be done. What are your orders, sir?"

J. C. relaxed in a smile. "Young man, you've enough on your hands. Keep that ship and crew on your coal charter without dabbling into my side affairs. Orders? Yes.

Get back aboard ship where you belong and invent ways to hold your men."

Partly recovered from surprise, Severidge retorted, "Coming from a veteran skipper, that sounds like a red herring to confuse the issue between us."

Which brought the big man to his feet shouting, "Feed 'em like kings, you greenhorn fool. Work on their spokesman. Do things worth doing. What the hell 're you paid for?"

The self-satisfied port captain, dialing a number, muttered aloud, "Allston 33741 . . . Hello! Jack Feary? . . ."

Outside, the son, smarting under the whiplash of the calldown, overheard J. C. phoning. To think that already he could have put their angry set-to aside and moved on into another matter! He returned to the ship, successful in having ascertained the relations between Bell and J. C., but more deeply concerned with his half hour alone with his father.

That afternoon a caller in J. C.'s office exclaimed guardedly, "My, Gawd, what watches! Four? I haven't seen a good watch in eighteen months."

"Who has?" J. C. chuckled. "Pick yourself one, then maybe you've got three friends? Now about tying up my ship-- Let her sail next day. Her skipper's my son y' know, Jack."

NO CONDENSER water discharged from two ships the *Aspenwald* passed on entering the Roads; a third one had to be towed to an anchorage. Evidently the walk-out was on aboard those three and Chief Burgess remarked, "Here's where we test out the success of talking and ice cream desserts."

But the *Aspenwald* docked, started loading and none of her men showed a sign of quitting her. Once again she should get away inside five and a half hours.

Within a hundred and fifty tons of full cargo, a stranger leaped to her guard and went directly to the skipper. Simultaneously the overhead loading machinery stopped dead.

In his cabin the skipper received his notice without comment, then saw the stranger ashore and said to his chief, "Injunction."

"Until when? What are the conditions?"

"Not clear. Presumably your firemen are supposed to leave."

"Do we stay here to the dock or do we anchor?"

"I don't know yet; anyway we'll be given no choice. Meantime I'll stay." Blaine's sentences were clipped because his memory was saying: "What the hell are you paid for?" and "Keep that ship and crew on your coal charter." Would his failure to do so provide J. C. with an excuse to remove him from command? Tough old scrapper though he was, would J. C. dare go that far?

After the black gang filed onto the pier, Blaine called Boston long distance to report conditions. "I know all about your mess," J. C. responded. "Your first real test as master of a ship. . . . Well, you sit in on that gabfest tonight in the Pickett Building there. Condense their talk and report it to me at two a.m. Call me at—wait a minute. . . . Yeah, phone me at Allston 33741."

A chastening perspiration drenched Captain Blain when he emerged from the booth. His resentment rose in the cooler air; in the cold outside he resented and questioned J. C.'s real motives in promoting him to command. Maybe he hadn't dared to appoint any of the seasoned masters so close to his racket. Throughout the evening while listening to demands and objections and long arguments in that one of several parleys along the coast, Severidge Blaine harked back to the telephone conversation, to his last session with J. C.

By two o'clock nothing worthwhile had developed despite three toll calls to New York, but Blaine put through his own call and reported. He was back aboard ship when his cumulative thinking all evening long began to make sense. For several facts tied in suspiciously. J. C. had said, "I know all about your mess;" J. C. had talked with somebody else in an aside during both telephone conversations, making expensive calls seem in themselves unimportant while dragging the last one on and on. Finally, J. C. had talked at two o'clock from Allston 33741.

"Allston—Feary—here's why J. C. knew four days ago we'd be tied up. Either he's double crossing his owners or he's got a deal on with Jack and paying him for the special favors." Murmuring his conclusions, the skipper could not settle into sleep. Nor

could he reach J. C. by phone before six. He was on deck by five, vowing that he'd force J. C. to clear the ship or he'd appeal to Feary. Something told him that neither wanted their connection in this matter known.

HE WAS framing just what he would say to the port captain when from the bridge he looked aft at the last of the black gang quietly filing back aboard. And the local agent coming forward to order, "Get your lines. Hail nobody on your way out."

A master whose sole purpose was to get to sea would have taken it in stride; a more chastened man would have let it go at that. Not so, Blaine. He had another, a personal consideration; John Cabot Blaine was heading both himself and his son into certain trouble with the law. Bell he might by then have written off as a mere pawn, but the mate forced his new attitude upon his skipper.

By the time the *Aspenwald* stood east of Henlopen, Bell's manner, his sly smile of self-satisfaction betokened something more than a welcome for the end of an injunction.

When he took to avoiding the skipper, the latter decided to do something about his mate's part in the J. C. affair. He planned to search the ship. But eliminated the aft end; neither the chief nor steward would have tolerated Bell or his activities back there. They despised him. Nor would it be worthwhile to search the rooms in the bridge; both J. C. and Bell were too smart to conceal packages anywhere in this structure.

Which narrowed it down to the forward end of her, so he began to hunt.

During Bell's morning watch when he could not leave the bridge, the captain knelt at the foot of the little ladder down in the forepeak hold before an open box weighing about thirteen pounds. Some two hundred best quality watches glittered in his flashlight's beam. "Suppose J. C. gets forty-five dollars apiece," he conjectured. "Nine thousand dollars minus his small cut-in to Bell!"

He hunted further, expecting nothing. Two feet away, however, he lifted an old snatchblock aside and pried open another box. Expansion bracelets worth, he figured, three thousand dollars! Hidden off by itself,

this package gave him a brand new slant on the smuggling.

He emerged into the sunlight on deck with one grim certainty; his father was not the type, not sly enough, not criminal enough to unload so much value trip after trip without becoming hoodwinked by some one smarter at it or at best by being designated to take the rap when the law should close in.

Mr. Bell on the bridge studied the skipper's face in the sunlight while the latter gave himself over to his thoughts. Again he experienced that creepy sensation he'd known when he'd thought he was being spotted and his new wave of satisfaction was gone.

Early that evening the bosun did, for him, an extraordinary thing. He slipped in on the captain with stagey circumspection and blurted tensely, "I have to go ashore soon as we hit the pilings, sir."

Amused by the manner and caution, the skipper asked, "And why?"

"Wife's sick, sir."

On a bright impulse, Blaine said, "That means somebody in your place on the fo'castle head. Go tell the mate."

The interplay of reluctance and strain on the bosun's face gave him away. But he went above and Blaine wondered whether here was the person Bell had resented in the dark. The proof would be forthcoming.

Sure enough, directly off watch at eight came the mate. "I've got to have a word with you, cap'n."

"Spring the catch lock."

Plumping to the settee, Bell knit his gnarled fists and sought the captain's eyes.

"Well, I want to talk man to man; I've got something."

Blaine nodded slowly and asked, "A hot potato, Mr. Bell?"

Impulsively the man rose and paced the cabin while saying jerkily, "A man gets to whittle off o' his conscience down the years, cap'n, to get ahead. He compromises till—for some of us—we get cornered; then we wish we'd sort o' stuck to our silly old ideas 'bout right and wrong."

"When did you get religion, mate?"

Bell dashed the sweat of futility off his face and confronted his skipper frankly. "I know why you sent the bosun up to me."

"His wife is sick," Blaine remarked blandly.

"Wife! He divorced her five months back and she died the week you took command of this vessel. Cap'n, he's hell bent to get J. C.'s car ahead of me to—"

"To report he saw me go under the fo'castle head," the captain finished. "And what does it matter to you? You've worked with J. C. and against me all along. You knew he'd framed that two a.m., toll call to hold me ashore while you received and stowed the stuff below in the forepeak. Why come crying on my shoulder? That's not what's griping you, so talk plain to me."

MEANTIME the mate had dropped to the settee again, listening with head lowered. Now it snapped upward, his gray eyes bored the captain's in a long questioning, startled stare. Blaine had the man where he wanted him and he declared flatly, "Mister Bell, you sure are cornered. How did you hope—"

"Aw, first it was only gov'ment men to watch out for. Then you worried me till you broke in on us in J. C.'s office. Then I sensed some one spotting me and now I know it's that cussed bosun. So J. C. trusts none of us and I be rotten damned if I'll work under spies! So I'm here to report first to you that I'm quitting soon as we dock."

"Mister," responded the young skipper without emotion, "I'll say to you exactly what J. C. once said to me; 'You can't quit.'"

Bell laughed in his face. "You watch me."

"Mister, er—which package down forward is yours, the watches or the handsome bracelets?"

The mate paled, his shoulders slumped, his hands shook. Awe stricken, he managed to mutter, "You *did* find them—both! That's what the bosun'll tell J. C."

"Precisely, and can you imagine anybody hoping he is going to get away with two-timing John Cabot Blaine? No, you're not quitting. Nor would I myself allow it; I'm breaking in no new mate until this racket ends."

Bell's brows lifted challengingly—"You crack your own father?"

"Between you and me, he is already at the cracking point. The watches are his, the bracelets yours, I judge."

Bell did not deny it.

"You and the bosun! Mister, I'm the one who'll go ashore. We'll arrive in late afternoon and neither you, bosun nor either of the other mates are to leave this vessel until I return to relieve you."

Climbing echoing flights after elevator service hours, Severidge Blaine wondered what chemical change overtook men like his father in middle life. They grabbed for property, for money and high estate after they'd already spent their aggressive years during which acquisitions mattered vitally to them. Having phoned J. C.'s office and apartment and club without locating him, Blaine had attended to ship's business. Again and again, however, he had phoned around in vain; nor had a call to the wharf located him. Jack Feary had no clue to offer, hadn't contacted him in thirty hours.

So many things could have happened to him! By then really upset, the young captain arrived in the dark and falling snow at the apartment to see for himself. No J. C. there. He checked in at the club by late evening; no word of him. Now it was far into the night as he entered the office's darker, moody stuffiness and listened while shaking off light snow.

Presently came small sounds from that inner room. At the same instant, he switched on a light and flung open the door. John Cabot Blaine raised tousled gray head and leaden eyes. The lips moved without sense or sound. The blunt, uncertain hands groped, one toward a glass, the other for a bottle, but his son's hypnotic eyes held him, stayed the hands.

Severidge Blaine never revealed how he brought his father back to clear thinking processes, that evil night. Falling snow in a laggard dawn became the object of J. C.'s fixed gaze when his brain steadied. Severidge sat out the silence with him; his father would break it when he was ready.

"Sev, son, I've been put in a bad hole." Thus it came, in slow contemplation.

"Huh, you sound like my mate."

"Bell—and he complained about being spotted. In spite of the bosun though he managed to unload two-three thousand bracelets this—yesterday afternoon. Call it twenty-five hundred times three dollars per? That's bad."

"Bad as your two hundred watches?"

At this revelation, J. C. raised himself heavily to cast his bloodshot gaze toward his son; so Severidge had seen the shipment, last trip. He eased back in defensive mood saying, "So you know. Ah, you only think you know. I have not been after money for the money alone; I'm using more 'n half of it to buy up what Valley Vein Coal Company stock I can lay my hands on."

"I see. Like collecting postage stamps, a sort of hobby."

"Don't get smart! I've seen the Shipping Division of this company mishandled by land lubbers for years. You know them, men wise in stocks and banking and bonds that don't know helm from binnacle. All right, I get me so much of the stock that they'll understand my language when I apply for the job. Yeah," he sighed, "I'd be the first sea cap'n ever put at the head of the shipping."

Son Sev confined his reactions to, "I understand."

"Oh you do, eh? For twenty years I've aimed for it—and you say you understand," J. C. snorted.

"But your plans flopped."

"The idea's okay, I tell you, but you buck it, Bell two-times it, that sloe-eyed bosun smells stookey and—and I don't dare unload this latest batch of items." He passed a hand over his forehead to add, self-righteously, "And they're badly needed; watches are mostly imported and the Swiss 're ready to cut their American allotments even smaller. It's a shame."

"But Bell managed to unload his bracelets, did he?"

"Your mate's a scared man this morning, Sev. He found this port is peppered with federal men—after he got rid of his stuff and couldn't call it back, and before I could dump mine."

"Obviously, then, we'll bring no more stuff north. Fine."

Again J. C. roused himself. "That's what I've been here for all night, you ninny-pate, figuring how in hell to refuse to accept more. But those birds at the other end won't hear of my quitting; I know too much. Listen. I phone one. We talk double talk nobody but us understands, see, so wire-tapping can't get us. We argue; I

lose. They order me, mind, order me to take on more packages and more and still—Phooey! All night and I still don't know the way out, the answers."

So J. C., who hadn't allowed his son to quit, as he'd called it, now became the victim of the same tactics. Nor could his son offer him a solution but he did say, "Damned if I'll allow any more of this aboard the *Aspenwald!*"

J. C.'s head swam but he croaked, "You can't prevent it; they've got us. One of them would have somebody tell somebody else to tip off a government man to put the finger on John Cabot Blaine, then he'd take the rap while the racket took to cover awhile or moved somewhere else. Sev, forget your lily white righteousness; you've got to stick with it and us. Always remember, you're involved too. Nobody can beat this one."

"Nah, you figured your way into it, figure the way out. Your best chance is to call in the government yourself. Pay up, give up and you might escape the federal pen and public disgrace. Sa-a-ay, that's the solution!"

"O my God!" J. C. wailed.

HAVING failed to win over his father, Captain Blaine put to sea with a plan of his own. By timing the ship's arrival in the Roads, he'd have her loaded between dawn and nightfall and leave before darkness could give the insistent smugglers their opportunity to spirit their packages aboard. He assumed that once the interruption was effected, while the Boston area swarmed with agents, the entire venture could be discouraged.

And it sounded good until the weather intervened east of Five Fathom. An overcast came on a stiff easterly wind and sea that delayed the *Aspenwald* and threatened his schedule. He conferred with the chief and they drove the ship enough, so they figured, to overcome lost time and compensate for rough going.

Inside a few hours the wind hauled more to the southward and again the skipper talked with his chief. But Burgess had another matter on his mind and he took that occasion to voice it. "Just before you came back aboard in Boston, cap'n, my second assistant quit and he wouldn't give

a reason. Right away came a new man with orders for me to hire him."

Captain Blaine recalled J. C.'s low opinion of the bosun. Was this man going to do the spotting on Bell? Worse, had Jack Feary taken a hand in the racket?

"The only thing he admits to me is that he did not deal directly with the port cap'n," Burgess added. "Somebody's musing in. What?"

"Or closing in to bust the racket wide open!" Blaine exclaimed.

The *Aspenwald* lost her race against time. Worse, she had to anchor and that just about wrote finis to her skipper's plan. In a last desperate hope, he whistled for a tug; either it would provide the excuse for all this or he'd go ashore in it and get action. But no tug came. He ordered a boat lowered; he'd go anyway.

The boat swung free in its falls when out from the far side of a pier puffed a tug with directions to dock in berth four. The delay? Oh, the loading machinery or something had required temporary repairing. To Blaine in his anger it smacked of subterfuge; his ship was destined to spend another night at a pierside and his plan to leave by daylight was a gonner.

But he refused to submit to it this trip. Thwarted by one interruption close upon another, he hit upon a new scheme. The rising tempo of the storm certainly betokened no sailings out the Roads for hours to come, and the slow, intermittent coal arrivals over the cargo hatches indicated the longest loading session in several trips here. Nevertheless he worked right on into his plan until by late afternoon he had the details completed.

He began preparations immediately. First he ordered his second mate to handpick four men to stand by the lines after dark, unobtrusively, "with sharp axes hidden handy." The chief quietly went after full bunkers as soon as possible, cargo or no cargo. Blaine, meantime, conferred with his steward on stores to come before midnight and on such apparently unrelated matters as coffee for supper and the ship's medicine chest. Finally he enlisted the bosun in the key move of the daring plan.

As though he defied the cause of his former defeats, he based his bold scheme

on close timing—and the success he himself would wring out of a telephone call ashore. In this, he would presume to speak for J. C. without consulting him; he would risk both their futures in a clean breast of the situation and get what terms he could.

The day waned early under the low overcast. Snow came spitting down the wailing wind at intervals. At dark the company's local agent came crunching over the coal littered deck to say, "Northeast warnings are up, cap'n, for a big snowstorm and weather forecasts warn of a cold wave right after it. So you're here for the night anyway."

"How splendid," Blaine responded sarcastically.

"What's wrong with a night's sleep here all snug and sheltered?"

"Plenty. Coal's scarce in Boston. Our charterers happen to serve homes and apartment houses—and you gloat over delay!"

THE tension mounted all evening, climaxing in the arrival of Chief Burgess beside his skipper in the wheelhouse overlooking the pier. Together they peered into the silence beneath the lofty loading equipment, on the pier floor where the telephone call had told Blaine to expect action.

"Almighty rough outside the capes in this wind," Burgess remarked, as he adjusted his binoculars.

Without taking his own off the pier, Captain Blaine said, "Pull out the hood on yours and look under the fourth row of scaffolding down there."

"Yeah, two of 'em. By gosh I saw their skiff go in by the other side when I came above, making heavy weather of it."

Blaine stepped out the farther door to signal the second mate as Burgess reported what he himself had already discovered—several figures coming down the wharf, from one concealment to another, closing in. Inside quickly again, he resumed the vigil, asking, "See the bosun yet? He should be on the pier at least."

"Narry a sign of—" the wind whirled a tiny cyclone of coal dust across his vision.

And in its wake the captain barely discerned a crouching, crawling blob of blackness that was a man. "Got him!" he exclaimed guardedly. "Almost out to the end. Now he's cutting back and over. . . . He's

to the far side snug by the stringpiece and creeping toward those two."

"Look. One is securing the painter to their boat while the other's taking something under his coat to that small pile of coal—"

"There bose cuts the painter almost before the guy's turned his back to join the other one. He'll gum the works," Blaine complained anxiously.

"He's not going to get left ashore to be rounded up with those fellows," Burgess grunted.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the men who had come to hide a box of watches under the pile of coal suddenly heard on the wind or discerned between whirls of dust the force of human shadows closing in on them from up the wharf. One pulled at the other. Together they made for the line they had secured to a cleat on the stringpiece. Gone! Again they faced the landward end, the only other way off; again they saw and this time knew they had been trapped.

The only possible way of escape was to jump aboard the ship. They started for her headlong. At that instant Blaine signaled his second mate with his flashlight. Axes made chopping sounds on the wind. The *Aspenwald's* screw raised a sudden throbbing noise and whitened the dock water with foam while Burgess still whistled down the speaking tube.

The collier was twenty feet or more off the edge of the pier and going out into the stream when the pair reached the edge at berth four—too late to jump.

Three a.m. and pitch dark as midnight, somewhere east of the Cape Charles Lightship. Driving snow on a forty-mile wind and piling seas. This was what Captain Blaine had anticipated, why he had specified full bunkers for his half-laden ship. He had clawed his way off a lee shore, now he could head her into the weather to make what progress was possible until the wind veered or hauled or abated.

Braced in weather clothes to the after dodger, he tried to give her behavior his entire attention; for he was driving her, punishing her into doing a bit more than hold her own against the storm. Hadn't she done it before? And she rode it best in half cargo. . . .

But along with the noises of her plunging and pounding to the seas came John Cabot Blaine ghosting into his thoughts. And well he might for son Sev had sold out his racket to federal agents in J. C.'s name and his own, in a mutual sharing of responsibilities. True, he had made a second call to J. C. himself, but only to inform him of what already was an accomplished fact and John had hung up on him, cursing.

Yes, J. C. would bellow some more in another torrid session in Boston, but at least he would not go to court nor would the name Blaine become a byword in shipping circles.

Toward daybreak the skipper lunged into the wheelhouse to thaw his face and fists. Automatically he counted heads every time he entered and this time at long last there was one more. Mr. Bell had come above.

"Well, mister!" the skipper exclaimed.

"I never slept sounder 'n my life," Bell apologized.

"You must be in the pink for this watch. Keep her up to it. Nothing to the north-ward," the skipper ordered and went below.

But not to rest. Aft in the steward's room, he said, "Big dose you put in his coffee. He's still yawning."

Noting the twinkle in his eyes, the steward replied in kind, "One makes it a point to comply not only with the captain's orders but with the wish behind it. The man was removed effectively from the scene of er—last night's activities, sir?"

"Effectively is a good word, steward."

A GHOSTLY white vessel crossed Massachusetts Bay among the vapors in her impressive coating of ice. Although she brought only four thousands in coal tonnage, she stood well down toward her plimsol marks as a sub-zero norther whistled a strange tune around her upperworks. The hard sunlight sparkled all over. She entered Boston Harbor. Doubly welcome for her coal.

Halfway to the dock, just before a tug reached her, a plane brought a press photographer circling over her. She featured a column in that evening's edition.

Captain Blaine clipped a copy to keep in his cabin and he labeled it:

"Coal, ice, but no gravy."

FLYING TINTYPES

BY JIM RAY

MOISANT ~
FLYING SOLDIER OF FORTUNE.



JOHN B. MOISANT WAS ONE OF THE MOST COLORFUL OF EARLY PROFESSIONAL FLYERS. SON OF A POOR CHICAGO FAMILY, HE DREAMED OF A CAREER AS AN ARTIST, BUT WENT OFF TO JOIN HIS BROTHERS WHO OWNED A SUGAR PLANTATION IN SALVADOR. CAME THE REVOLUTION OF 1907—ONE OF THE MANY IN CENTRAL AMERICA—AND MOISANT WAS IN THE MIDST OF IT. HE RAISED AN ARMY IN NIKARAGUA, ATTEMPTING TO OVERTHROW HIS OPPONENTS, BUT WAS DEFEATED.

THEN CAME A CAREER AS FREE-BOOTING SOLDIER IN CENTRAL AMERICA. FORCED TO FLEE TO FRANCE, HE BOUGHT A BLÉRIOT MONOPLANE, INTENDING TO RETURN TO SALVADOR WITH AN AIR FORCE. LOUIS BLÉRIOT TAUGHT HIM TO FLY IN AUGUST, 1910. A MONTH LATER HE FLEW FROM LONDON TO PARIS, CARRYING A PASSENGER.



MOISANT ALWAYS CARRIED HIS GRAY KITTEN, 'PAREE' ON EVERY FLIGHT.

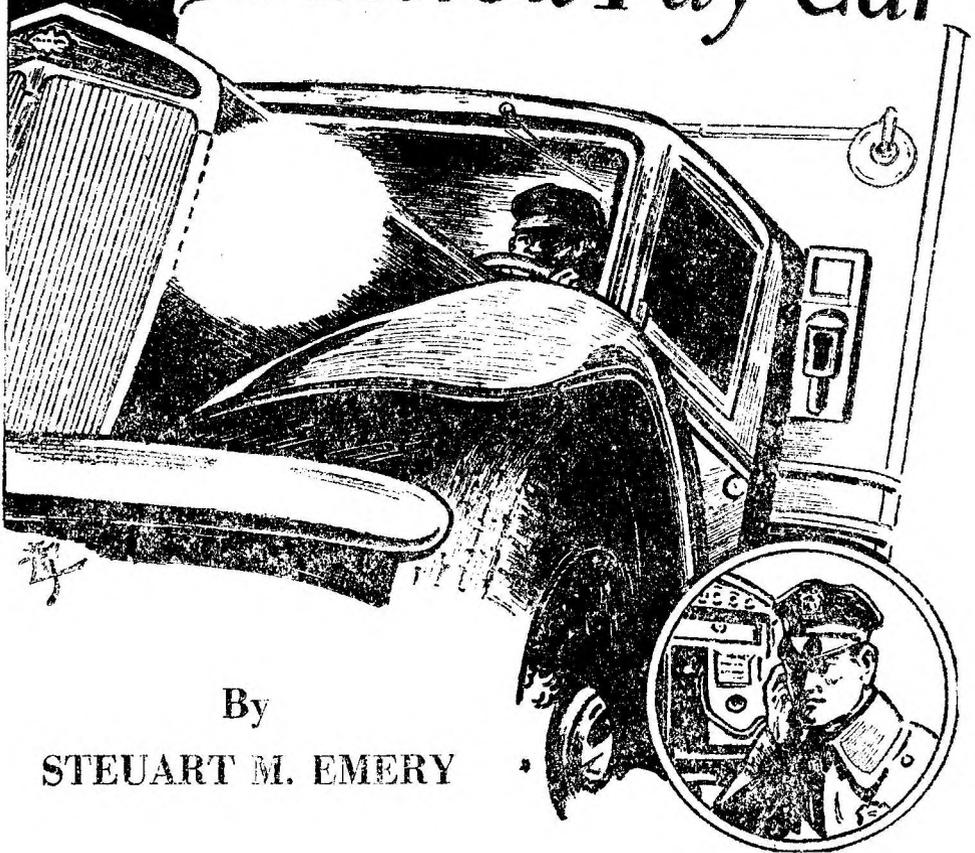


SAILING FOR NEW YORK HE WON A \$10,000 PRIZE FOR FLYING AROUND THE STATUE OF LIBERTY. IN AN ATTEMPT AT THE ALTITUDE RECORD, HE WAS ONCE SO FROZEN HE HAD TO BE LIFTED FROM HIS PLANE AFTER LANDING WITH A DEAD ENGINE. IN DEC, 1910, HE FELL TO HIS DEATH, ON



THE WAY TO CENTRAL AMERICA. MOISANT DIED AS HE HAD LIVED - A PICTURESQUE ADVENTURER AND A HERO OF AIRCRAZY AMERICA.

Armored Pay Car



By

STEUART M. EMERY

I

CHANCE BLAKE'S right hand dropped from the steering wheel and touched the butt of the Colt at his belt for reassurance. Warily, he was taking the big gray armored car down the torn-up street with every sense alert for the destruction that could come blasting at him and his crew any second from hidden positions. That yawning trench could hold machine guns, around the corner of that building a cannon muzzle might jut flame. Too many times he had piloted an armored vehicle through the blazing streets of war-racked villages for him to take a chance.

Behind his cab someone suddenly struck the armor with a thud, a voice yelled.

"Step on it, Chance! I'm late to meet the ever-loving wife now."

Chance jerked abruptly back to the present. This was no war-torn street he was driving the armored car on in the last flare of the sunset, it was a New York side-street with gas main improvements going forward. The sign "Men At Work" stared him in the face, not a sign in French or German. He wasn't mentally demobilized yet, that was all. He still looked for trouble and battle over the rim of his wheel.

His face was too lined for his age, his eyes mirrored too many memories. They took you into a war too young and when you came out you felt too old. He had clear gray eyes and a good, squarish jaw but the eyes had seen strange countries and stranger sights and the jaw had set often and hard. Reconversion could be slow with a man as well as a factory.

The pounding on the inner shell of the armored car began again as Chance rolled

. . . Never Gripped When the War Got Rugged, but Gave the Impression That He Had a Silent Grudge Against the World



past the end of the block. He grinned and his over-serious young face lightened with the grin.

"Shut up in there, Charley. I don't care if your fists get blisters, but think of the company's paint. I'll have an ever-loving wife of my own on my mind soon."

He dodged a pair of trucks, traveled almost the full length of the next block and turned in at the door of the garage under the sign: "Metropolitan Armored Car Service." He braked the big gray car to a stop over by the far wall where another car stood, and got down, luxuriously stretching his tall, rangy frame. It had been a two-hour

run into the Island, over the traffic-packed Queensboro Bridge, one of the list of long-distance payroll jobs that Metropolitan handled.

A grease-saturated mechanic ambled up. "I stuck another old tanker, lookin' fer a job, out in the crew room, Chance. Till the Old Man gets shed of bein' busy. You want to talk to him?"

"Tanker, you said, Joe?" Chance swung for the small rear room that Metropolitan's Old Man had fixed up for his employees, and entered it.

"Red Molloy! Where in the world did you come from, Red?"

Tough and bitter, and good-looking as ever, Red Molloy stared at Chance, his old tank crew mate. He was small and wiry with a suggestion of speed and endurance about him and his thick, dull reddish hair

matched his sanguine complexion. His blue eyes were startlingly clear. He had always been taciturn and sullen, except in battle when he seemed to come alive all over, one of those strange stormy petrels who are actually happy in combat. He never griped when the war got rugged, but he gave the definite impression that he had a silent grudge against the world.

The little locker and rest room with its worn but comfortable furniture became oddly overlaid by another scene, the battered corner of a building, an improvised shelter with the remnants of a tank blazing in the metal-swept street. A haze of ghastly pain and shock—Red Molloy's face, fierce with combat, bending over him.

"Last time I saw you, Red—Remagen bridgehead. That sure was hell. And when that shell hit our own can—that's all I remember. You pulled me out of that tank, Red?"

Red Molloy nodded and spat the butt of his cigarette on the floor.

"Yeah, Chance, I got you out."

"I always figured it was you. So I owe you for saving my life." He held out his hand. "Thanks, Red."

MOLLOY grinned wryly and released the grip. "You'd have done the same for me. I just happened to be the nearest to you. Forget it, Chance, pal."

"Anything I can do for you, Red, you just name it. You came in to look for a job here? I'll back you to the limit with the Old Man. He's a good citizen who gives a GI a break every time he can."

"Glad to hear of somebody who does." It was almost a snarl. "Houses, rooms, decent jobs—even food, where are they? I never did know what we were fighting for but sure as hell it wasn't that. We were sold a gold brick, Chance." The bitter look deepened on Molloy's face. "Well, by God, here's one Ruptured Duck who is going to turn that gold brick into a real one and fast. Period."

Chance frowned. It was a hard world and a changed one which he and millions more like him had come back to. The GI's took it on the chin and they took it in two different ways. With a smile or a curse. Molloy cursed. He, himself, managed a smile, although at times it was a forced one.

"Afraid you won't get rich here, Red; but it's a living and a future. Fifty a week I get right now and you'd get the same. But on that fifty a week I not only can get by but I'm getting married."

"On fifty a week! The Civilian Distinguished Medal to you for gallantry far above and beyond the call of duty. You getting married on those peanuts? You're screwball!"

"Oh, not so screwball," said a girl's gay voice.

Chance looked up beyond Red to the door where the pair of trim and slender figures stood and his somewhat forced smile grew deep and real. Here she was, laughing and honey-bobbed, rushing unexpectedly into the crewroom as she had rushed utterly unexpectedly into his life at that Service canteen here in New York when he had wandered in, just another GI from Oklahoma on leave from the embarkation camp looking for he didn't exactly know what in a strange, huge city. And he had found it, or rather her—Mary Morton—hot and tired from serving the java to endless hundreds of GI's and dancing her feet off for them.

He had told her on the second day that if he came back from overseas, he was certainly never going back to the oilfields of Oklahoma, and she knew what he meant. Her shining eyes told him that, her letters that rode with him through blazing weeks from Omaha Beach to Remagen bridgehead told him more. Four hours from the separation center he had met her in the lobby of her office building downtown, four minutes after that everything had been settled. Red Molloy and thousands of others might not know what they were fighting for, but Chance Blake did. There was something basically serene and sure about Mary.

"Mary," he grinned. "This is Red Molloy, my old tanker pal. He saved my life."

"Forget it," growled Red Molloy for the second time.

"Nobody ever forgets anything like that," said Mary swiftly. Her eyes that were shining at Chance, shone on Molloy. "Take my thanks, too. For getting him back to me. This is Miss Edie Ives, Mr. Molloy."

The smaller and younger girl, metropolitan from the top of her perky hat to the soles of her four-inch heels, moved forward.

"Call me Swooner, Red," she announced.

"They all do. I faint at the movies with admiration for my glossy-haired dream men."

She held out her hand and Red Molloy gulped, taking it as though it were a piece of brittle china.

"And now, boys," remarked Mary. She slapped the big brown-paper parcel she was carrying on the table top where it thumped hearteningly. "This is why I broke in on you on the way home. Frothing dogs and citizens, also frothing, followed us for blocks."

"It was my act did it," pronounced Swooner. I fainted in the butcher shop and told Mr. Schmidt it was either for lack of strong meat inside me or a strong man's arms about me, and begged him for both. Being married and with a suspicious Mrs. Schmidt and eight little Schmidts, he thought it better to compromise on the meat."

"Shut up, Swooner," grinned Chance. It was impossible not to like gay and irresponsible little Swooner, who looked utterly youthful and helpless. Just another ex-bobby soxer, grown up parentless in the atmosphere of war, who worked in the same office as Mary and whom Mary had taken in with her.

"I'll shut up when, as, and if I feel like it," lilted Swooner. Her hand swept to the heavy package and its contents were bared. It was red, it was two inches thick, it was unbelievable in the dreary weeks of meat shortage.

"Lookit, lookit, lookit! Porterhouse!"

"For four!" exulted Mary. "And there's four of us here. Red Molloy, since you saved this man Chance's life—seven tonight at the town mansion, three flights up on Third Avenue, ring Ginsberg's bell."

"So I'm valued at a hunk of steak," said Chance. "Okay, Mary, okay, Swooner; you'll hear the hoofbeats of the hungry herd on your stairs at seven sharp."

Joe, the mechanic, put his head in the door. "The Old Man's free now if you want to go in, Tanker," he said to Molloy.

"I'll take you in myself," said Chance. Red Molloy had a peculiar look. He was staring after the two slim figures going out the front door of the garage. "Let me give with the opening sales talk on the job."

"Oh, yes, job."

THE words seemed to be jolted out of Molloy. They started to walk across the floor to the business office, a big room partitioned off alongside the front wall with its own entrance on the street.

"Funny our running into each other this way, Red."

"Why?" Molloy scowled. "I was born in this burg. East Side, cold water, railroad flat stuff. How many tankers are trying to horn in on the armored paycar business, do you suppose. I never had a regular job in my life. So what do I have to give besides I know how to drive and shoot? Hell, Chance, that takes in a few million Ruptured Ducks. This is about the fourth armored car outfit I've tried to join and this town hasn't got so many."

"I was lucky," agreed Chance. "Mary has lived in this neighborhood all her life and all the old residents know each other. Her father and the Old Man were kids together. So I fitted in just at the right minute when the Old Man's business began to pick up. Some guy. Name of Maginnis."

Michael Maginnis sat in his shirtsleeves with his vest open at a flat-top, littered desk. His face was broad and weathered and the cigar, Chance had never seen him without, stuck out under his thick gray mustache. Metropolitan's Old Man had come up from the driver's seat of a horse-drawn truck on tumultuous, waterfront West Street to the top of his own modern business by hard work and hard thinking. He was fair and square and he knew what it was all about.

Michael Maginnis' mouth twisted in a smile and the cigar, jutting in its corner, twisted with it. His glance went to Molloy then back to Chance.

"Hello, Chance, what's on your mind?"

"My friend, Red Molloy here, is, Chief. Old Tanker pal. I'm around because of him. He wants a job with the armored cars."

Maginnis grunted, his old eyes shrewd but kindly.

"Discharge with you, Molloy?"

Molloy brought out a paper and passed it over.

Maginnis furrowed his thick eyebrows over it. "H'm. Native New Yorker. Age—height—schooling, Molloy?"

"Grade school. One year high."

"We want more education here, a high

school diploma. We can pick and choose in this business among discharged vets, Molloy." The Old Man's gaze went down the sheet, he turned it and read on. "A-humph—three citations for valor . . . Omaha Beach, Remagen bridgehead—"

"He yanked me out of the tank there, Chief," cut in Chance.

"Nuts," husked Molloy.

"And the Elbe—" Maginnis looked up. "We'll dispense with the extra three years at high." He put his finger on the line. "These three are good enough. But, Molloy, I'm sorry to tell you that right now there's absolutely no vacancy. In two, three months, I hope to put on another car and then you'd fit in fine, but this minute—"

Chance drifted over to the window, depressed, and pulled a package of cigarettes from his pocket, lighting one. He sat down in the chair that looked out onto the side alley running along the wall of the garage.

"Can you stake yourself through the next three months, Molloy? I don't want to be personal, but—"

"Three months?" Red Molloy laughed harshly. "Oh, yes, easily. The apple crop will be in long before then. What I don't sell, I can eat myself."

Maginnis frowned. "I'm sorry, Molloy. I'm sorry as hell. But I can't take on an extra man without another car. We're running overtime now with night pickups from a lot of stores that don't want to keep their day's receipts in their tin-can safes. In fact, I've got a skeleton night crew—two guards and a driver going."

From somewhere down the alley, shadowed now with the swift New York dusk came a cheerful whistling, approaching the garage. Chance craned around the window and looked along the alley. He could see the tall figure in the blue armored car service uniform, walking under the light that only half-relieved the murk.

"Relief driver coming now—Bill Williams," he said. "Nothing on his mind but his hat, as usual."

"So, without a vacancy, Molloy—"

"Good God!" burst out Chance.

HE HAD caught the shadow that swept out from the deeper shadows behind Bill Williams, leaping on him from behind, one hand uplifted. He saw the blow that

crashed onto the back of Williams' head and sent him pitching forward. Williams' hand had reached the gun at his belt, as he went down under the shock he half-rolled and got it up. The right hand of the attacker that had wielded the blackjack dropped, his left hand came up and two quick jets sprang from it. The shots echoed down the murky alley and Williams sank back on the pavement.

"Bill Williams slugged and shot!" shouted Chance.

The old battle alertness had swept back into his fibres. He was flinging himself over the low window sill into the alley, almost without conscious thought, and his own gun was out. Cheerful, careless Bill Williams knocked down and shot in cold blood! From beside Williams the attacker looked up. He was small and thin and his face under the pulled down hat-brim was small and thin also, split by a twisted nose. Right now it snarled murderously.

"Stop, blast you, stop!" yelled Chance and plunged on.

The man's gun lifted, smashed and a slug whipped past Chance's face. He brought his own automatic up, firing, and the alley roared battle. Chance was closing fast in the face of his opponent's metal. Suddenly the small man turned and was a racing figure in the gloom. Headed for the alley's mouth with a shot-out gun.

Chance stopped, drew a deep breath and took careful aim. Once more his Colt slammed and the man's hat blew from his head, scaling into the dirt. He spurred on and Chance went into full speed again. But he knew that the chase was hopeless, the small man with the twisted nose ran like a deer. He struck out of the alley into the cross-street just in time to see his quarry vanish into the cluttered doorway of an old-law tenement house across the street while a startled crowd jabbered excitedly but made no effort to stop him.

Chance pulled up, panting, and slipped his gun back into its sheath. "Clear away," he told himself angrily. "Through that tenement hall, across the backyard, over the fence, and out through the next hallway into the next street or maybe up onto the roofs and down a block from here."

He swung back into the alley for the garage. Already he could hear the siren of

the oncoming police radio car and he could see the crowd around Bill Williams' stricken form. He came up and pushed his way through. The usual onlookers were pressing in, sprung from the pavement, but Michael Maginnis and two of the Metropolitan's guards had cleared a space around Williams.

"That you, Chance?" grunted Maginnis. "Your man got away?"

"Yes, damn him!"

"I dialed the station. The ambulance is on its way, too." The radio car's crimson lights shot into the alley and it came for the group. "This way!" called Maginnis in the headlight's flare. A big-bodied figure with sergeant's insignia swung out as the car braked to a halt. "That you, Sergeant Knott?"

"It is, what's up, Maginnis?"

"Bill Williams, driver of mine, slugged and shot right on our doorstep, blast them! He's bad."

Chance took another look at Bill Williams. There were dark stains on the chest of his uniform. His eyes were closed and his face ghastly. He had seen plenty of men that way before on the road to the Rhine and everything depended on the next few minutes. He gave a sigh of relief as those minutes came and went, and the long, swift bulk of the ambulance left the alley, traveling at top speed for the hospital with its load.

"All right now," said Sergeant Knott gruffly. "Any witnesses?"

"I'm the only one who saw it, Sergeant," said Chance. "I just happened to be looking out of the office window. This is how it was—"

HE SPOKE swiftly while the big-bodied sergeant with the heavy, cleft chin, listened in concentrated attention.

"Let's go inside, Carr!" The patrolman stepped forward. "Find the hat this driver knocked off that gunman's head."

In the office of Metropolitan Sergeant Knott stood like a rock in the center of the floor.

"Now why did he do it?" said Knott. "Did Williams carry a lot of money on him ordinarily so we slate it as a hold-up?"

"He won a \$200 baseball pool and was to be met and paid off at Jimmy's Tavern

sometime today," put in Chance. "He always stopped there for a beer or so and a sandwich before he reported for duty. It's just half a block from the alley's other entrance."

"If he flashed two hundred bucks around a tavern that could be the answer, okay. Trailed to the nearest dark corner and jumped. But that mugg from your story, Blake, had his getaway mapped in advance. It doesn't seem to fit into the picture. And the picture, not only in this Williams business but all over town, all over the country is getting damn black. New York has got one of the worst crime waves in its history building up, right now."

He paused and his heavy, cleft chin set in an even grimmer line. "Maginnis, you'd better start needling up your drivers and guards to be on the extra-alert. There are bound to be attempts to hijack the armored payroll cars and the loads they carry. Not only have we got the old-time criminals still operating but the ones who were out of circulation when they were drafted into the army and a whole fringe of new recruits who know how to shoot to kill and nothing else."

Involuntarily Chance started at the repetition of the words he had heard so short a time ago. He sent a look at Red Molloy who stood impassive and silent in the background.

"There are plenty of these veterans, hungry, war-nervous, wild for excitement and easy money and sore at everything after what they've been through. They're comers for the already organized gangs who needle 'em up, against society. They go out on their own in hold-ups and God knows what else. Every war sees a backwash like this, and the bigger the war the bigger the backwash. These gangsters who try to lure the discontented veteran in are as much the veteran's enemies as the Germans were."

"My men can take care of anything Metropolitan gets to deliver, Sergeant," said Maginnis firmly. "And I don't mind telling you we've got some big cash accounts coming. It won't be long before my cars will be rolling piled to the roof with the old John Q. Currency."

"Maybe it won't be long before they have lead rattling off their sides," said Knott abruptly. "That's just the kind of heavy

payroll dough that a topflight gang goes for. And by the tip-off from Chicago, 'Greek' Vardas and his gang are headed for here, after six months of payroll holdups in the Middle West that netted them weighty sugar and made him and his gang as hot as strip tease dancers. Headquarters is asking for their mugs, their descriptions and their fingerprints so we'll be waiting for them, if they show up. Greek Vardas works deep, he plans his jobs like Eisenhower planned D-Day, no slipups, everything like clockwork and if anybody tries to reach for a gun against him, damn the dead bodies. He's tough, all right, a hair-trigger finger and a hair-trigger mind. Well, Carr?"

The younger officer, who had just entered, held out a hat, holed through its top and defaced with dirt. "The hat that was shot off the gunman's head, Sergeant. It was down a good ways from the body."

Sergeant Knott held out his hand, took the hat lightly in a practiced way and spun it over.

"New. Chicago Loop store seller's label. Welcome to New York already, Greek Vardas."

"I shouldn't be surprised. This goes to the Fingerprint Bureau pronto. So long, Maginnis, remember what I've told you. Extra alert, and I'd suggest extra guards."

THERE was silence in the private office as the pair of officers shouldered out and the police car went on its way. Michael Maginnis hunched at his desk, thought carving lines in his face. Red Molloy shuffled his feet.

He looked taut and an unexpected flare glinted in his eyes.

"Chief," said Chance quietly, "Bill Williams will be out a long time, if he pulls through. And what the sergeant said—"

"Would be true. Knott knows his job and I know Knott." Maginnis' eyes rested on Molloy in a long appraising stare. "I don't like this attack on a driver right where Metropolitan lives. Molloy!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Here's the vacancy out of a clear sky. It may mean gunfire and plenty of it. Are you on?"

The flare in Molloy's eyes deepened. His voice was hard.

"Sure, boss, I'm on."

II

CHANCE stepped on the brake and the big armored car came to a jolting halt at the red light. He eased himself back in his seat, beside him sat Red Molloy—a sub-machine gun held carelessly in his lap. One more early night run was over and they were headed back for the garage after shuttling between stores and the Night and Day Bank.

"Too late for a movie now," said Chance. "We'll have to let the girls down with a few dances and drinks."

"Suits me," said Molloy. His face in the drifting half-light, half-shadow of the street showed hard. "I could do with some stiff ones."

Red Molloy was doing with too many stiff ones, reflected Chance. Red had moved in with him in his rooming house at Chance's urging, arriving with a single battered suitcase from some tawdry billet that he had been occupying. Molloy was throwing them into himself when not on duty, hard and fast. Night after night he would leave their room to roam the streets and, evidently, the taverns, coming home at all hours, silent as to where he had been. "Trying to hike off the jitters," he once had snapped. Well, a great many of the men who had seen the endlessly stretched months of combat were that way and they looked for release in various outlets. Red Molloy was drinking but he never seemed to get drunk. He fought his jitters with alcohol and the sleeping pills that he seldom finished the night without.

The red light went green and Chance sent the car rolling ahead. He was in a hurry to hit the garage, for right after that he and Mary and Red and Swooner would be together again. Every night for ten days now they had made up their party of four—dinners at Mary's, movies, juke-box dancing and in those parties Red Molloy had been quiet but inscrutable. The blocks passed as Chance drove on, busy with his thoughts, with Molloy sitting in silence beside him. Suddenly he spoke.

"Chance, what would you do for big dough? Big dough like this folding money we hauled around tonight?"

"What d'you mean, Red? Here we are."

Chance swung the car past the alley mouth and curved the wheel.

"Nothing," rasped Molloy. "Plenty of nothing."

The car stopped in the garage and they got out. The guards riding inside dropped out of the opened back.

"Red," began Chance, "you—"

"In here, Chance and Molloy," Michael Maginnis stood in the door of the private office, beckoning. "I've got some news."

"Blast him!" growled Molloy. "We'll never get to the tavern."

Chance shrugged as they walked into the office. Maginnis' keen old eyes were sweeping them in a satisfied way.

"Well, boys, we've got the big order Metropolitan has been waiting for. Healthiest one-piece cash haul, we've had yet. One hundred and fifty thousand cash. And that ain't hay, it's the real asparagus."

"Swell, chief," said Chance. "Whose asparagus is it?"

"It's the semi-monthly payroll of the Langner Clock Company over in Brooklyn, together with cash bonuses. They're a big, old-fashioned outfit on the waterfront that make everything from grandfather's clocks to those little teasers that get you up on time in the morning. You know, 'If It Doesn't Go Off It Isn't a Langner'." The Old Man smiled pleasedly at his own joke and stepped to the big borough map on the wall, stump of a pencil for a pointer. "You take Car Number One, Chance driving, Molloy, riding front seat machine gun guard, out of this shop at nine sharp. Over the Brooklyn Bridge to the Third National Bank, a quarter mile or so from the other end of the bridge, where you pick up the payload." The pencil went its guiding way. "Then cut over onto the waterfront avenue and follow it up to the factory, across from Staten Island. Mile-high sign on the factory, can't miss it. You got it?"

"Easy," said Chance.

"The payload goes to their second floor office. You pull up at the steps in the middle of the plant's loading platform opposite the stairway entrance. The guards do the rest. I'll brief them tomorrow before you roll. I'm giving you Faraday, Owens and Bell, our best and oldest men. The other car has a job, too, at the same time, it goes up into the Bronx. Yes, business is picking up. A hundred and fifty thousand is a nice little nest egg for Metropolitan to tote."

"And a nice little nest egg for somebody to lift off Metropolitan." Sergeant Knott had come into the office unnoticed by the group at the map. He looked tired and serious as he took a handful of photographs out of a manila envelope and faced them upward on the desk. "Greek Vardas and his crowd are in town, all right. I've been down to Center Street for these copies. It took time to get them all together. Recognize this one, Blake?"

CHANCE stared at the thin face in the Crogué's gallery photograph, the twisted nose that showed in full-face. "That's the gunman who got Bill Williams, sergeant."

"His prints were on the hat-brim with a mess of others—coatroom girls, no doubt—but they were where a man pulls his hat-brim down. Coke Peters, that's him, trigger man with two stretches in stir behind him, dangerous as they make 'em like all the rest of the Greek's ripe little olives. Here's the Greek, no mug record but this is blown up from a shot at a fight ringside."

It was a powerful round and swarthy face that Chance looked at, the face of a leader, an organizer. It was super-intelligent and also super-cruel, the too-full lips were carnal.

"So I'm tipping you off, Maginnis, and Headquarters is tipping off the rest of the armored paycar services. Watch out from now on, peel your eyes and keep them peeled. Greek Vardas cases for weeks and does his best to get a finger man into every job. He's here in town, we're certain now, we want him, dead or alive. Remember, Vardas' mob has shown up on your doorstep, Maginnis. They pull the actual holdup with from five to seven usually, but the organization is big. Thanks, Blake, for your confirmation. I'll pass it along to the upper levels. I thought I'd drop in and make sure. Keep 'em rolling, Maginnis."

The big-bodied sergeant shouldered out and Maginnis moved his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

"Well, boys," he said, "you heard—extra careful from now on. That's all, I reckon, the piece the sarge spoke goes for both of us."

His face broke into a grin. "And, oh, yes, the glamor girls are at the tavern. Mary phoned a quarter of an hour ago, wanting to

know if you're just late or are they stood up. Get traveling boys."

Chance and Molloy changed into their street clothes at the lockers in hurried silence and headed out of the garage.

"My tongue is hanging out," said Red.

"Then speed it up. Look where you're going, will you?" Pushing into top pace he had almost collided with the figure that lurched from the alley onto the sidewalk. It was that of a man in working clothes, badly in need of a shave and a place to sleep it off, to gather from the aroma of cheap whiskey that he exuded and the half-empty flask in his hand. His face was seamy and his jaw undershot.

"Grr-way!" gabbled the alcoholic one, reeled and caromed off Molloy.

"Okay, okay, tanglefoot," said Molloy. "Blow your horn."

The man shambled to the side of the building and without a further look at him Chance led the way down the street. The tavern was hardly more than a block away, its neon sign flashing into the night. They reached its door and went in, stepping into a low-ceilinged room clouded with tobacco smoke and smelling of hearty food. This was a neighborhood place where the ages and classes of the customers varied from young to old, from shabby to substantial. Sporting prints hung on its imitation oak-paneled walls, a bar was racked with a shining array of bottled wares and an electrically-lighted juke box blared almost continuously. Every neighborhood had a dozen such places, some orderly, others not.

"Hey, hey, it's about time!" From the usual booth in the far corner Mary was waving and calling and Chance's face lightened with its old smile. "Three quarters of an hour late. And have we run up a check on you!"

Crossing the room Chance slipped into the smooth leather seat beside Mary and their hands met and locked under the table. Molloy went in beside Swooner, signaling to a waiter. The juke box blared on and Swooner began to move her slim body in time to the music. Her eyes, her small, oval face—everything about her—was bright and irresponsible.

"Hurry it up, dream man," she urged. "I want to be jitter-bugged."

A queer grin cracked Red Molloy's face

as he downed the bourbon the waiter had set before him.

"We'll leave you two dull old almost-married people to discuss the kitchenware in Bloomingdale's basement or the bedspreads in Macy's attic and whether the shower curtain is to be shocking pink cretonne or brown burlap."

"Get along, Swooner," smiled Mary.

The couple rose and moved onto the patch of dancing space in the rear. Chance watched them idly, Red took anything Swooner said to him and seemed to like it. And Red could dance, his small, tough, wiry figure was keyed to rhythm. But now his grin had gone, his face seen through the smoky distance was masklike again while the juke box sounded away.

"What's on Red's mind?" asked Mary suddenly. She too was watching the dancing pair.

"Nothing," said Chance. "Nothing except the problems of the usual Ruptured Duck who hasn't found his feet yet. Leave Red alone, he's all right."

"No, he isn't," said Mary in an odd, serious tone. "There's some kind of desperation he's fighting. He's all torn up inside."

"Forget it," said Chance swiftly. He intended to forget it himself, the night prowlings of Red, the strain that was showing in his eyes. "Combat fatigue, probably. Stay in long enough and you get it."

"Swooner has fallen for him like a ton of brick. And Swooner I have to look out for, she's like a younger sister to me. What kind of a man is Red really?"

"A little on the tough side, perhaps, too bitter, but—" Chance frowned. His instant defense of Red stopped in mid-career as knowledge struck that he knew about Red Molloy absolutely nothing except that he was a soldier and in a battle the best man he had ever had beside him. A courageous, desperate tanker. What was enough to know once was enough no longer. "Oh, Red's the McCoy," he finished loyally. "I'll guarantee him. You know what he did for me."

"But what is he going to do for—or to—Swooner? She's starry-eyed."

"Stop worrying."

Mary's smile flashed at him but the tiny line stayed between her eyebrows. "Women

always worry, it keeps them busy. I'll stop worrying about Red and Swooner for a while, but not about you, Chance. How much were you carrying tonight?"

"Around \$15,000, I guess. But tomorrow, honey, we go into the big stuff the Old Man has been looking for. We're running \$150,000."

Mary's eyes widened. Chance felt the grip of her hand on his tighten. "Chance, I know what happens in this neighborhood. Everything spreads like wildfire—every grocery, market, drugstore. I've heard about Bill Williams, your other driver, and how he was knocked out in your alley. He's recovering, yes, I heard that, too; but Chance that might have been you! And tomorrow you say——"

"A hundred and fifty grand, honey, to the Langner Clock Company in Brooklyn. A couple more jobs like that and Metropolitan will be on its way to the top. More cars, more drivers, more guards, more pay. And the Old Man likes me. He'll need an assistant in his office, that's a big up."

"But if you're attacked!"

Chance's jaw hardened. For an instant he saw blazing streets again. "If we're attacked, we'll shoot it out."

The words struck into a sudden silence and heads turned from nearby tables. The juke box had jived its last, the dancers were drifting off the floor. Red and Swooner slipped into their seats on the opposite side of the table.

"What a man!" breathed Swooner. "Did I hear some talk about shooting? Is it going to be that kind of a wedding? If you want some shooting, I've just found out something about my dream man here." She rayed her smile at Red. "He packs a gun under his armpit while dancing."

"Huh?" snapped Chance, startled. "You pack a gun, Red? I leave mine in the locker at the garage."

Red Molloy's lips formed a straight line. "Why not, if I feel like it? I got the permit as a Metropolitan guard. New York ain't a Sunday School town after dark."

"I could go for a man who packs a gun," caroled Swooner. "Or should I call it a roscoe like the private eyes do in the movies? That's the kind of a man who would make his moll drip with diamonds and bend over hump-backed with minks.

Why don't you bring me home some salad from those truckloads of folding lettuce you run, Red?"

"Shut up, Swooner," said Chance, half angrily. He could see the flush that Swooner had driven to Red's cheeks ebbing and now they were rigid. Red's glance swept away from the laughing Swooner and out toward the bar. His hand slipped into his pocket.

"Fresh out of cigarettes. They got a machine," he mumbled, rising. "Juke box needs another feed, too."

He was gone, cat-walking between the tables and bringing up at the cigarette vending apparatus against the far wall. Someone else was there, trying to get coins in the slot. Chance saw the other man half turn and take his package out. But he didn't leave. He hung beside Red Molloy's shoulder and Chance had the picture of a liquorous figure in working clothes stumbling out of Metropolitan's alley. It was the same man, now sobered more or less. His lips moved and Red Molloy's lips moved, also speaking back to him out of the corner of his mouth. The man lurched for the rear of the tavern, undershot jaw thrust out.

"Chance," said Mary's voice in his ear, "I just can't help it, but who knows about the big load you're running tomorrow?"

Chance dropped the remnant of his cigarette abruptly. He hadn't realized that it had gone so low it was burning his fingers. "No one—that is, no one except the Old Man, Red and myself so far. The guards will be briefed about it before we roll tomorrow."

"Chance, are you sure?"

"Yes," he said, and didn't understand why his voice had gone hoarse with sudden tenseness.

Red Molloy came back to the table, dropping a pack of cigarettes on it.

"Red—" said Chance quietly, "that other customer at the machine. It was the drunk who came out of our alley."

"Was it?" Red's eyes slitted and he shrugged. "I didn't notice. He wanted the men's room. How about another gallop, Swooner, and then let's head for home. I feel sorta fatigued tonight."

They were out on the floor again and once more Chance and Mary were watching them.

"Chance," she began, "I can't help thinking—"

"Drop it for a while," he urged. The strange depression that gripped him was deepening. It was still there twenty minutes later as they walked along the shadowy avenue, headed for the girl's apartment. This time Swooner was ahead with Chance, unexpectedly taking him by the arm.

"I'll try you for a while, Chance. Tell me about all your fascinating budget problems!"

"Good idea," said Chance dully. He stepped off the curbing at the sidestreet, stumbled awkwardly and straightened up, stopping.

"Chance, Chance!" In that split second he caught Mary's scream. "Look out, Chance, Look out, Swooner!"

Out of the night behind him, swerving in from the avenue at top velocity came the big black shape, looming like a building on wheels. Chance acted faster than he thought. He had Swooner by the arm, gripped her viselike and slung her out of the path of the speeding car. She went reeling backward, tripped and fell. Chance felt the fender of the black car brush his leg as he dodged madly, then it jerked away and rushed past, tearing along the sidestreet, as though driven by some madman. And in the light of the corner arc Chance had seen the face of the madman, hat pulled low over his forehead, thin nose with a crook in it, the face of the man who had shot Bill Williams.

"Swooner!" rasped Molloy. He was bending over the girl's sprawled figure. She was gasping with surprise. Then he was up on one knee, eyes flaring and hand darting under his armpit. It came out and the automatic's muzzle glinted in the wavering light. "Blast him, blast that hit-and-run buzzard! I'll——"

He lowered the useless gun. Far down the street, the fleeing black sedan had cut in ahead of a slower car and it was gone. Swooner had scrambled up and was brushing at her skirt.

"I've learned my lesson," she said. "Never swap boy friends while crossing a street. Don't worry, Red, I'm okay."

Slowly the combat urge died in Red's eyes and he slipped the gun away. They went on down the avenue in silence. Death had

brushed two of them by in a flashing second and nobody felt like talking about it. They came to the door of the girl's apartment house and stopped for the usual goodnights. Mary drew Chance aside. Her face was taut.

"Chance, I saw that car two blocks behind us, running slowly. Was it trailing us, do you suppose?"

"Just a drunk," said Chance. "This town is full of them in cars after dark. Good-night, Mary, see you tomorrow."

"Yes, Chance! Her voice suddenly broke. I'm frightened. You're the second driver for Metropolitan——"

Chance edged her gently toward the door that Swooner had opened. "Take a couple of aspirins, honey. You're getting into a dither."

The door closed behind the two girls and Chance and Red Molloy stood on the sidewalk. Red's right hand jerked up as though to finger the weight under his armpit in an unconscious action linked with some deep and private thought. He scowled blackly.

"I've got the jitters, Chance. I'm going to walk 'em off if it takes the rest of the night. I'll be home when I get there. So long."

He swung off down the ill-lit pavement and Chance turned for their own rooming house. There was nothing he could say to Red, this was another one of his bad nights. But instinctively he stepped into a doorway next the sidestreet and his eyes followed Red's small figure, going at a fast pace and now three blocks away. He saw Red's hand rise and the taxicab that caught his signal and turned into the curb, taking him in.

III

CHANCE turned over onto his back and opened first one eye and then the other, staring at the ceiling. It was full morning and he had slept longer than he had expected to. The other bed in the dingy-papered room was empty and tumbled and from the adjoining bathroom came the sounds of Red Molloy's motions. Chance reached for the cigarettes on the stand beside the bed and got one alight. His gray eyes narrowed in thought. Red had come quietly home with the first pale streaks of dawn and had gone to bed without a word

but as he passed the open window with the arc-light flooding through, Chance had seen his face and it had been stiff and wild with a look on it he had never seen before.

Molloy emerged from the bathroom, shaved and trousered. "Hiya, pal," he hailed Chance. "We're due at the garage in forty minutes. You got plenty of time. Java?"

He held out the nicked cup. There was a lame excuse for a kitchenette in the bathroom but it was good for a coffee eye-opener.

"Thanks, Red." The strong coffee was heartening. "Red, there's something I'd like to talk to you about. We used to be in the tanks together, now we're in the armored car service together. I don't want to go into your private business—"

"You stay out of my private business, Chance," said Molloy harshly.

"You've got the jitters bad, Red." Chance felt utterly baffled. "Why don't you run out to Halloran General on Staten Island and let the docs have a whack at you? You don't want to go N-P."

"Who's going N-P? What difference does it make if I do go N-P? Have another java, Chance, and leave me alone. I'm going down to the dump early. I'll snatch my eggs in the one-arm on the corner."

He disappeared into the kitchenette-bathroom and came back with a second steaming cup. He put it on the bedside stand, slung on his coat and left. Chance heard him going down the stairs and the front door closing. He frowned and made for the bathroom and a quick shave. He didn't want to go on thinking, he wanted to get his dressing done and go after Molloy. He was just starting on a soaped-up chin when the knock came at the door.

"Who is it?" he called.

"It's me, Mister Blake," the throaty voice answered. "It's the day for the change of sheets."

"Come in, Mrs. Thaxter," he called back, half-smiling.

Mrs. Thaxter, the plump and fiftyish landlady with her mop of dyed hair would sidle in and her conversation, carried on from the bedroom to him through the half-open bathroom door would be endless. All the gossip of her lodgers would pour from her in a steady stream while she did her

chores. All her ailments, imaginary and real, would emerge.

"Go right ahead, Mrs. Thaxter. Don't mind me."

A vague wheezing rose. "Oh, my back! It is late hours all you young men are keeping this week. Young Doctor Sherman one flight up front, he didn't come off his hospital dooty till seven this mornin'." Chance, busily scraping away, made no reply. None was necessary. "And Mister Finch on the newspaper, I found him asleep halfway up the stairs with his hat on backwards, such a nice young feller and so overworked. Would that be a nice strong black cup o' coffee I see here by the bed? Now a nice, strong black cup o' coffee—"

"Help yourself, Mrs. Thaxter," called Chance. "I won't have time for it. No use in waste, you know."

"Thankee, Mister Blake." There was the sound of pleased gulping. The rambling report began again, punctuated by the sound of sheets being whipped off a bed. Chance doused his face in cold water, combed his hair and got into shirt and trousers. The rambling had somehow become disjointed, mixed up with peculiar noises. "Arrh, and as I wassh a-shayin'—"

Chance came out of the bathroom. Mrs. Thaxter's plump figure had collapsed in an armchair by the first bed; her eyes were tightly closed and she was breathing stertorously. "What in—? Out cold! Stroke or what?"

He went for the stairs on the jump and banged heavily on the door of the front room, next floor up. A sleepy voice called out and he wrenched the handle and plunged in. Young "Doc" Sherman, interne at the big hospital a few blocks away, cocked a drowsy eye at him. They knew each other, as fellow lodgers, and they liked each other.

"Hello, Blake, where's the fire?"

"Mrs. Thaxter. Passed out cold in my room downstairs. Get up, Doc."

The interne swung himself easily out of bed and shoved his feet into slippers, worming on a cigarette-burned dressing gown. "Not the first time the worthy Widow Thaxter has passed out unexpectedly in a lodger's room," he grinned. "The last time it was in this one. I'd left three-quarter of a bottle of gin on the bureau. Our con-

genial landlady gets into everything that's loose around the place. Okay, Blake, young Doctor Kildare will reach for the stomach pump."

They hurried down the stairs and Doc Sherman went straight to the half-recumbent, now snoring Mrs. Thaxter. His examination was swift and professional. He still grinned as he turned.

"Passed out, all right. She's good for at least eight hours' sweet sleep. No *spirita fermenti* odor. She's simply full of slumber balls."

"Slumber balls?" said Chance startled.

"She gives every sign of being loaded to the mudguards with sleeping capsules. But there's no danger. Why she should want to load up with bye-bye medicine at this hour of the morning is beyond this young medico but there's no accounting for tastes. Maybe the rent collector is coming around, or maybe she took 'em for a headache by mistake. We'll just stretch her out on the bed. It's my day off so I'll be around the premises all day. I'll look in on her every now and then."

From somewhere in the distance drifted the sound of a church clock chiming the hour. Chance started. He was late now for his run and a terrible urgency rode him.

"So long, doc," he blurted. "See you later."

HE WAS plunging down the stairs and **II** out into the street, almost running. Metropolitan was hardly more than blocks away and he did the distance in record time, oblivious to the stares and the exclamations of the passersby, who got in his way. At the garage door he breathed in deeply and tried to look casual for his entrance. Fear struck, this time heavier than ever. The garage was empty, there was not a car in sight.

"Number One, Joe?" he demanded of the mechanic.

"She's rolled, Chance," said the mechanic. "Red Molloy took her out fifteen-twenty minutes ago. Other car and crew gone on their job too."

"That you, Chance?" Maginnis came out of the private office into the garage, the inevitable cigar clamped in his jaw and his eyebrows drawn together. "What are you doing here? Red Molloy said he was pick-

ing you up a bit ahead of time at the drug store down the avenue a couple of blocks. He said you had a stomach upset and went there to get some stuff they could make up fast."

"Number One rolled out with Red driving?" Chance's tongue was dry, his stomach muscles were taut.

"Red driving and Faraday, Bell and Owens locked up in the shell. Short-handed now. Shy a gun on the front seat. And the front seat covers the rear of the guard's when they take a payload into a building. I don't like that."

"Just a slip-up," said Chance bitterly. "With only twenty minutes start I can catch them in a taxi and swing aboard."

"Then go to it," said Maginnis. "I'll rustle you up better than a taxi. Climb into uniform."

Chance dove for the locker in the rear room and crammed himself into his armored car kit, strapping on the gun. He was trying to stop the thoughts that pounded at his brain, but they wouldn't be stopped. The deadly, accusing pattern had been forming too long, now it was coming clear. How was it that Red Molloy was on the spot in Metropolitan's garage looking for a job just at the time that gunfire created the vacancy? Where did Red go, who did he see on his lone wolf midnight prowlings? Why did that drunken loungeur who lurched out of Metropolitan's alley show up beside Red at the tavern and what did the loungeur actually say to him? Where did Red go last night in that taxi? Red's wild look when he had crept home that morning, the sleeping pills that Chance knew now had been put into his coffee.

Red Molloy meant to drive the \$150,000 payroll alone on the front seat. Chance bit his lips until the pain was almost unendurable but it was nothing to the pain in his mind.

He owed his life to Red Molloy; his whole train of thought, after all, might be nothing but nervous suspicion.

Call the police in and warn them of what? Be the dirtiest heel that ever came out of the tankers because he let his mind get full of rotten thoughts about a pal? No, go it alone.

"Here's your bus, Chance." Joe was just rolling into the garage from the street in

a fast-looking little car. "From the Drive-Yourself, next block."

Chance swung for the running board and stopped. The insistent jangle of the phone had been rising in the office and he heard Maginnis shout. "Call for you, Chance. You can take it, if you cut it short. "It's Mary and she says it's emergency."

Chance got there fast.

"Hello, honey," he said into the phone.

His voice had strain in it but it was nothing to the strain in Mary's. The words tumbled from her over the miles of city streets. "Chance, what's up? What's going on? With Red? Swooner is in a panic. Red phoned her from a pay booth down near the Brooklyn Bridge and—"

"Go on, honey."

Red down near the Bridge! He must have pushed the armored car like a racing driver.

"He asked her out of a blue sky if she'd marry him. And, of course, she said yes she would. Then Red said he meant if he ever came back. He sounded all harsh and funny. Just as though he were going off to another war, Swooner said. And he told Swooner to tell me you were sick at home and for me to get up there and take care of you. I called Mrs. Thaxter's place and some young interne answered and said it was Mrs. Thaxter who was ill, you'd just left for the garage. What's up, Chance, what's up? Red hung up on Swooner like—"

"Like I've got to hang up on you, honey," said Chance. Even seconds were precious with the big armored car rolling somewhere near the bank in Brooklyn by now. "Don't worry. Tell Swooner not to worry. I'm off after Red."

"But, Chance, Chance—!"

HE PUT the receiver down and went for the Drive-Yourself car. He took it out of the garage on a swift curve and aimed it east for the avenue. Along the avenue he let it go, running past red light after red light. Twice traffic officers stopped him, scowling, but let him through when they spotted his armored car service uniform and the gun at his belt. He was in a way, an officer himself, of a protective force. Red Molloy, it came to him, must be passing the red lights in the same way himself with the car for priority.

The Bridge's towers and cables loomed up and Chance sent the fast little car out

over the stretch of the East River, white-waked and lively with hooting tugs and harbor traffic. The houses of sprawling Brooklyn closed in about him as he swept off the eastern end and arrowed on. He wasn't going to follow the trail of the paycar to the bank. It had certainly picked up its load there and was heading for the waterfront and the factory. Chance was taking short-cuts, estimating some kind of a route angle that would get him to the objective first. Still chaos hammered at his mind. What was this last minute phone stunt of Red's? It didn't make sense. It put him on the spot for slugging Chance's coffee, sending Mary to nurse him. And why didn't Red know if he were coming back from this run? Where was he going from it? Over the hill, over the Border?

Again and again the sentence of Mike Maginnis burned his brain. "The front seat covers the rear of the guards taking in the payload." And the rear was the place from which to deliver a devastating surprise attack. Red Molloy knew his war.

Blocks went past and in Brooklyn's streets, sparse with traffic Chance made time. Far down one street he glimpsed the sheen of water between buildings, the south shore with the green of Staten Island opposite. Three-quarters of a mile more, half a mile, and he would be at the factory. He swung his car onto the waterfront artery and coursed along it. Ahead of him he saw the stacks of the factory, the high-electric lettering sign that crowned its roof, the broad street that ran to the edge of the loading platform.

No, he wasn't going to get there ahead of the armored car. Its gray bulk was sweeping in to the edge of the platform and halting, its back to him, as he jammed on the accelerator. The rear door opened and two guards in uniform jumped out, hands close to their automatics. A third bulked in the car behind and above them. The first two men swept their surroundings with their eyes, turned and lifted down the big double-handled money valise. The third guard leaped down and they started up the steps, the last blue-clad figure falling in strategically to the rear. Every one of the guards had his hand on his gun-butt but the two with the bulky money valise swung between them were obviously hampered by its weight.

It was the normal, careful delivery of just one more payroll that Chance was looking at. No one was in sight except a lone man in carpenter's overalls a few yards from the factory door toward which the guards were heading. He was on his knees sawing at a plank in the platform, a long, deep wooden tool box beside him. Hardly a figure moved in the wide street, empty parked cars stood here and there along the curbing where a pair of waterfront saloons seemed to be doing a heavy daytime business. Chance rushed down upon a scene of peace and suddenly he felt limp all over. He had strung himself to battle pitch, he had lashed his mind into a fever and after all, it was over nothing.

"Thank God, I didn't call the cops in," he breathed. "Thank— There they are!"

SAVAGELY the exclamation broke from him. The uniformed group had passed the carpenter busy with his saw. The shadowy doorway took in the two men with the burdened valise. The third guard was just going in after them. In a lightning-like move the man in carpenter's kit rose, swept back the lid of his tool box and jumped for the last guard with the tommy gun the case had hidden.

Chance saw its muzzle jam into the guard's back, he could tell without hearing it what the brief, harsh command was. The guard's hands lifted above his head, his revolver dropped to the planks in obedience and the man in carpenter's overalls forced him swiftly forward through the door and out of sight. The trap had been sprung in less than four seconds.

No shots clattered from the front seat of the armored car as Chance swept up beside its cab, braked and flung himself out. He tore the door open and scrambled up to the seat. Red Molloy, machine-gun gripped in his hands so tightly that his knuckles showed white, turned to him. His whole face was intent, his eyes flamed as Chance had seen them flame in battle. He had seen the whole business and he wasn't doing a thing about it.

"Red! Good God, Red, you're in on this!"

"You're damned well right I'm in on this! But you aren't supposed to be. I thought I'd laid you out."

"The landlady got the coffee. Red—you fingered the payroll for a gang! You tipped them off, your whole job was a plant to get in with us and sell us out. Red!" Chance drew his gun. "You don't get away with it. It's twenty years if they catch you."

"You can drop that gun," said Red harshly. "I drew its bullets back at your locker long ago. Yes, pal, you've called the turn. This is Greek Vardas' gang at work. I ran into one of them when I was down and out, and they propositioned me. Hell, Chance, I told you I was out for big money fast. No starving ex-GI stuff for me!"

Chance let his gun drop between his knees.

"Bill Williams—the vacancy—that drunk in our alley and at the tavern you talked to—I saw you get into that taxi last night, Red."

"You think fast as usual, Chance. You got it doped right. That phony drunk was a lookout, he told me to report to the Big Shot. Oh, I'd been contacting the gang on my night strolls. Greek Vardas and more are inside that door now. The payroll guards found a coupla carpenters working on the stairs and so they brushed past 'em and got guns in their backs. They're being tied up and gagged and put under the stairs right now. Give us a minute more, pal, and you'll see Greek Vardas and the boys come busting out of that door with the bankroll. There's a fast motorboat tied up not half a mile from here. And here comes the getaway car."

A block away a car parked in front of a saloon had come to sudden life. Two men were in it and it was heading for the loading platform.

"Slick chick, Greek Vardas, hey, pal? Everything timed to the split second. Every angle inspected, and accounted for all in a few hours."

"So you've gone crooked. The war got you, Red. You're N-P as hell. Your mind is all twisted."

"So are the minds of a hell of a lot more vets, ain't they? We're the guys who're the pickings for a good talker like Vardas, like that Sergeant copper said. Kicked around by the country we saved, better off under those wooden crosses maybe. Big money waiting for guys with nerve who can shoot."

That's the line Vardas gave me. And it's—"

"It's wrong, Red—it's wrong!"

Molloy's mouth twisted in a thin, ironic smile.

"To some guys it sounds okay. So I took it all in, seeing I was down to my last five bucks. Oh, I saw things Vardas' way, I was ripe for a fall. That vacancy, well—I hadn't reckoned it would be done by gunfire in a man's back. But when Greek Vardas does anything he does it thorough. He tried for you last night with that black sedan, so I'd drive alone."

"I know it," said Chance. "Coke Peters was driving."

"Correct. I gave Greek Vardas the briefing we got for this payload job down at his hideaway and he went right at the hold-up staffwork. That alley bum, pal, I spotted him as we were going into the garage, huddled up under the private office window like a drunk. He heard every word of Maginnis' spiel and all I did was confirm it. Greek Vardas, he leaves nothing to chance, he's had a watch on me steady. So here we are. Five grand is my cut."

"So you make your getaway with the gang," said Chance harshly. "And Swooner? — You just called up and asked her to marry you. Swooner they damn near got along with me last night!"

"Yeah. You take care of Swooner, Chance. You and Mary. That's why I had to try and Mickey-Finn you with the java. Somebody's got to be left after this job for the jills—they can't get both of us. Duck and stay ducked when the shooting starts."

"When the shooting starts?" Chance stared at Molloy. "I've no bullets in my gun. Metropolitan's crew is tied up. And you're in with the gang."

"So you think and so does the Greek. Sure I fell for that snake-tongue but I didn't stay fallen. The first shot into Bill Williams broke me out of that line of easy dough. My mind snapped back, pal; it's stayed snapped back. I strung with the gang to wreck their little Operation Payload and last night when they didn't care whether they washed out Swooner along with you, by God, they wrote their own funeral tickets! I want these buzzards red-handed, I'll holler for no coppers. I want them all to myself. And here they come!"

THE door into the factory building erupted a group of figures. The leading pair were dressed in carpenters' overalls and they swung the double-handled money valise between them, guns ready. Behind them stalked a third carpenter and two hard individuals, also with automatics out. Last of all shouldered the swarthy, round-faced man of indeterminate age, full-lipped and predatory-eyed, with a tommy gun. Vardas, himself, and his crew, moving with trained precision for the getaway. It was the payload guard's procession in reverse.

"So long, Chance. Here goes!" Red swept the cab door open.

"Red, Red, for God's sake! I'm coming with you!"

"You stay back with that empty gun, Chance. You keep out of this. I kill my own snakes!"

Red Molloy swung lightly from the armored car's cab onto the loading platform. The sub-machine gun in his hands rose, his voice rose also.

"Stick 'em up, you! Vardas, and the rest of you, stick 'em up or I blow the guts out of you!"

Vardas' teeth drew back over his full lips and the machine-gun he carried swept up. Here was a criminal who took in the change in a situation in a split second.

"Doublecross, Molloy, you rat!"

"Doublecross, hell! You've hooked your last GI. Here's the wrong one you picked—the one that hooks you back. Drop that gun or I drop you! Drop everything, you sons!"

"Get him, boys!" shouted Vardas and his gun belched.

Hands went to automatics, machine-guns slashed and lead screeched over the loading platform. Molloy stood like a rock, firing. His cap blew from his head, metal tore his coat and trousers, but still he shot on; a strange, clear light in his face. Grim and gay again, it came to Chance, the perfect fighting man, shooting it out with his enemies.

Kill or be killed, get as many as you can get before they get you. Make them pay for what they've done.

And Red Molloy was getting them. Two men were down sprawling, Red staggered as metal caught him, braced and fired

ou. Chance scrambled for the cab door. Instinctively he shoved out his own automatic, caught a shooting figure over its sight and pressed trigger. Even as his finger squeezed he groaned with recollections. "Empty!" The gun jumped in his hand, the shooting figure staggered. "Red lied! To keep me out!"

He swerved his bore to take another target and the windshield began to star. The getaway car had reached the loading platform, he glimpsed it drawn up not thirty yards away, with Coke Peters behind its wheel and a youngish, hard-faced man beside him on the front seat, both slamming at him with automatics. The bullet-proof glass of the cab took their slugs and stopped them cold.

"All right, Vardas!" he heard Red yelling. "Try and live forever!"

SMOKE drifted across the platform, from above it where the office windows ranked women's screams split the tumult, men ran out from the buildings across the street. Red was reeling now but still his gun rattled. Standing with the dropped money load in front of him, Greek Vardas loosed his blasts, his face an olive-tinted mask of murder. Suddenly Chance saw his chest collapse, he seemed lifted from his feet by the impact, balanced awkwardly on heels that would not hold him up. He went over backward, twitched spasmodically and lay still. Red went down, the tommy gun loose from his grip and skidding to the edge of the platform.

"He got the Greek! Finish him!" came the snarl.

Chance took the snapshot that caught the gangster in the shoulder and spun him around as he jumped forward for the kill on Red's prostrate form. He blew the second gangster off his target with a high one that tore his scalp apart above the ear. His trigger clicked on emptiness and he reached out and snatched for Red's machine gun, its butt just within reach. He lifted it, switched it clumsily to his left shoulder and let it go out of the cab into the front of the getaway car that now boiled with men who fired at him or leaped into it. The car burst into power and Coke Peters took it in a curving arc for escape out of Chance's angle

of fire, its windshield torn to fragments and half its load of men shot up.

Red Molloy lay on the platform and Chance reached him in swift bounds. It was over, the brief battle had finished, one of those affairs of destruction-laden seconds in which one lives through years, if one lives at all. Greek Vardas would never move again, his two carpenter-clad men lay moaning, unable to rise. Red's eyes were open, his mouth twisted in pain as Chance bent over him.

"Squared off—Remagen—Chance," he got out. "I saw you get those heels jumping me. Me—I—shoulder gone."

Above in the office windows the pale faces of women employes, the excited faces of men, appeared.

"Get a doctor! Phone a doctor someone!" called Chance. He got Red's uniform open. His left shoulder was a sodden, bloody pulp. Now his eyes were closed.

"He's coming," called down a clerk. "We got an industrial doc on the grounds."

The new sound came, traveling fast and high, the screeching of the radio car sirens. Chance could make them out, two of them in the distance, and the getaway car was running right into them. A yellow taxicab raced in the near foreground.

"We called the police, too, driver."

The radio cars went into action to take the last of Vardas' mob. Expertly they swung to block and the gunfire opened. It stopped as the getaway car reeled in its headlong course, skidded, hit the curbing and went over, spilling its occupants onto the sidewalk. So Coke Peters was attended to, among others.

"The cops cleaned up the ones you missed, Red," said Chance. "And the story is that you chopped down Greek Vardas and his whole olive orchard. Here come our guards, untied. They'll be sore you used them for bait, just like I'm sore about being left out, but what can they do about it? Here comes the doc, too."

The medico, kit in hand, was running from the far end of the platform, a factory nurse in white behind him. A third radio car, breaking into the vista was speeding fast. The yellow taxicab was braking to a halt at the platform and its two slim passengers swept out and up the steps.

"Mary! Swooner! What in—"

"Last night you told me, Chance, where the armored car was going. So Swooner and I took the first taxi and made him step on it. I guess we both went crazy, we had to come out here. There was a hold-up, then! And Red—"

"Red Molloy, all by himself, wiped 'em out. It's the Vardas gang. Got that, sergeant?" The officer who had jumped from the radio car looked startled. "I shot a round or so, but it was Red wrecked 'em."

"Red!" said Swooner softly and went down on her knees beside him next the doctor. "Open the old blue eyes, Red. It's Swooner."

Red's eyes came open, half-dulled with pain but the merciful syringe was in his arm already.

"Hiya, Swooner." The old thin grin was there but there was no irony, no bitterness in it. His paling face for the first time was oddly free of strain. "So I go all the way from Camp Shanks to the Elbe without

a scratch just to get a load of scrap iron in Brooklyn. All the way—"

"He'll be okay," said the doctor quietly. "Bad knock, but—"

"All the way from Camp Shanks to the Elbe not knowing what in hell I was fighting for anyhow. Still there, Swooner? . . . I guess I'm . . . now I know what it was all about. . . . Chance had it all along, but guys like me didn't . . . five cent phone call . . . Bloomingdale's basement . . . Macy's attic . . . pink shower curtains."

"I want 'em blue, Red," said Swooner.

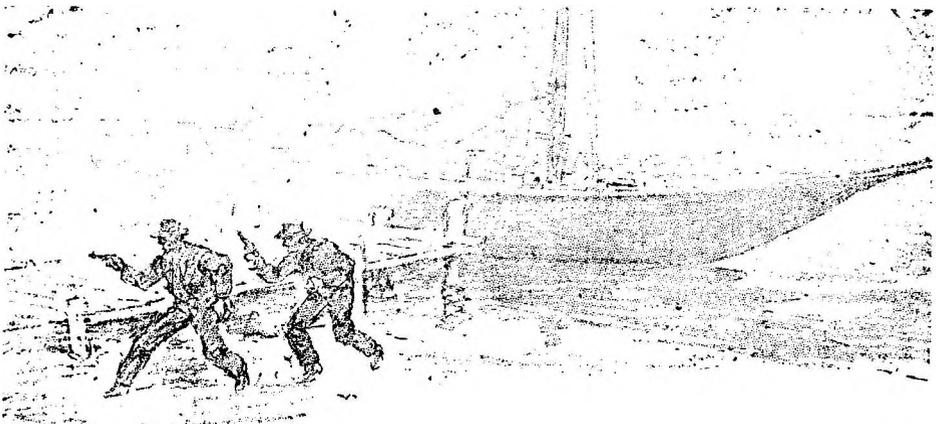
The ambulance was approaching. The doctor rose. "He's raving a little now, but that's to be expected. Don't worry about it. He'll be in St. Stephen's in five minutes."

"Raving?" said Swooner. She bent and kissed the quiet, tranquil face of Red Molloy. "He's talking the best sense I ever heard come out of him. Get him out of bed in two weeks, Doctor; it's the end of May and you know what a girl likes to be in June."

"Death Comes Rustling"

A novelette of a tough Chicago cop, who wouldn't take California as a gift—but nearly got it, anyway by

DAY KEENE



In our next issue—April 25th



DEADLINE ADVANCED

By STEVE HAIL

PETER CASADY, recently hired yard superintendent for Western Shipbuilders, Inc., cocked his boot-ed feet on the desk, rolled a be-draggled cigar expertly from one corner of his carefree mouth to the other, and reached somewhat furtively for a bat-

tered book secreted in the bottom drawer of his desk. He sighed contentedly.

A chance to settle down like this, after a long career as dam builder, railroad constructor and catch-as-catch-can expert at a dozen lesser vocations, could signify nothing less than reflected favor of the gods. A

reminiscent shudder of distaste passed through Pete's big-boned frame at the memories of his boomer days.

But that was of the past. Here was a steady, established shipyard. Wartime production madness was a thing long gone, with only routine repair jobs remaining on the schedule, just enough and no more to keep a man's hand in. There would be no more drifting around the countryside for Peter Casady. This was a home. Nice.

Pete opened the book to a dog-eared page and immediately became engrossed in his spare time passion of ancient history. The volume was entitled, "Life and Times of the Ancient Greeks."

"Casady!"

Pete sighed again, but not in content. He recognized the bellicose roar of Michael Gorham, Western's vice-president and general manager. He tossed the book hurriedly in the general direction of the drawer and clumped his feet to the floor just in time.

Gorham burst into the office with the debatable grace, but all of the purpose of an incensed bear.

"So!" the general manager bellowed. "You sit here blistering your stern assembly, instead of the palms of your hands, when its production we're needing? It's chewing cigars you are, when the *Ariadne* out there's got to be delivered by the first!"

Peter Casady took advantage of the mention of the ex-transport to let his eyes fall away from the fire under the Old Man's grizzled brows and stray out the window to where the big single-stacker was nuzzling the pilings of the outfitting dock. She was unlovely in her blotches of yellow chromite and draperies of welder's staging, but nearing completion for all of that, for her new life as a cargo carrier. Gorham was either mistaken or nuts, Pete thought uneasily. The production schedule called for delivery by the tenth, not the first. And with nearly two weeks to put on the finishing touches—

"Look, Mr. Gorham," Pete started in placatingly, "the *Ariadne*—"

"Yeah!" the Old Man snapped. "I've looked at her. Now you look at this!" He thrust a temper-crumpled telegram under Pete's smouldering stogie.

The yard superintendent read, and as his eyes digested the contents, the lumpy good humor of his features dissolved rapidly into

hardened lines of disbelief. The message said in part:

"... in view of the recent cancellations of cost-plus contracts by the government, the regional office of the Maritime Commission finds it necessary to advise you that as of the thirtieth of the current month, repair facilities in three of our four local yards will be terminated.

"However, by directive from Washington we are authorized to retain the facilities of the one yard showing the best production record up to and including the above mentioned date.

"Our contractual records reveal that Western Shipbuilders, Inc., will fall one delivery short of attaining this result. If, however, the S. S. *Ariadne*, previously scheduled for completion the tenth of next month, could conceivably be delivered by the first . . .

"In event the S. S. *Ariadne* is not commissioned by this advanced date it will become the unpleasant duty of this office to cancel all further contracts with Western Shipbuilders, Inc., and award same to a more productive concern. It is further urged . . ."

"Whew!" Pete said. He took the telegram between a spatulate thumb and forefinger and laid it gently on the far side of the desk.

"Well?" Gorham snarled. "The outfitting dock's your baby. You know what this means?"

"Yes, sir," Pete said. He glanced up at the dusty calendar on the far wall. "The *Ariadne's* got to come around the corner into berth one, the trial basin, by tomorrow night, instead of a week from now, if we're going to run a dock trial and deliver by the first."

HE TOUCHED a buzzer on the side of the desk. "I'll notify all department heads."

"Don't bother," the Old Man said caustically. "I've done that already. You drifted in here with a lot of big talk, Casady. You're drifting out again with your wages and the toe of my boot if that ship isn't delivered by the first."

The frame building shook to the sudden thunder of booted feet taking the stairway

outside the office two steps at a time. Pete barely had time to compose his features into a semblance of executive imperturbability before the doorway filled with the wrathful figure of Dan Jensen, master rigger.

"Do I," Jensen bellowed without amenities, "or don't I get crane service on that steel hulk you're wantin' by the first?"

Pete glanced out the window at the three long-boomed revolving cranes working the two ends and 'midship section of the *Ariadne*. He waited for the raucous clamor of the nearest rig to stop, then touched a match to the inch of cigar remaining in the corner of his mouth.

"There's them three whirleys working the ship already, Dan," he said, frowning. "If I put another one on I'll have their booms wrapped around the stack like pythons on a sideshow charmer."

The rigging boss cuffed his tin hat backward. "It ain't the rigs, Casady. It's what they're lifting. Staging, scrap, joiner-work. Light stuff, and I wait days before I get my heavy rigging aboard. My anchor chain's been lying out there on flat cars for two days waitin' for those bleedin' rigs to unload it." He paused, giving threat to his next words. "I don't get those lifts, you don't get the *Ariadne*."

Pete gave up trying to get smoke out of the sodden butt. He chewed. "You'll get 'em, Dan," he sighed. He gestured toward the clerk that had answered his summons.

"Al—" he began.

The boy glanced uneasily from Jensen to Gorham.

"You've promised that to four other department bosses already, Mr. Casady," he said, gulping. "And I..."

Pete winced. "Hm," he growled. "Guess I did."

He spoke again to the master rigger in what he hoped was a confident tone. "I'll see that you get your lifts, Dan. Somehow."

Jensen shot him a pitying glance, grunted, and left as he had entered.

Pete coughed in the settling dust.

The sound aroused Michael Gorham to speech. He raised baleful eyes from the book Pete had tossed hastily, but inaccurately at the drawer. "I'd advise you, Casady," he said with biting sarcasm, "to forget about Greeks. It ain't restaurants or wooden horses we're needing. It's ships!"

THE door slammed shut behind the general manager's irate back. Pete waited for the plywood walls to settle back to plumb, then reached for his cement crusted hat and started for the dock.

"Call Bluestack Towboats, Al," he flung over his shoulder to the clerk. "Two tugs for tomorrow evening. The *Ariadne* 'll move." Pete hoped that he was right.

Outside, the mad confusion of the out-fitting dock was like a four-alarm fire gone out of control. Pete, deep in thought, threaded his way absently through the bedlam of moving material, trucks, cranes and workmen like a sleepwalker in a strange bedroom.

At the far end of berth one, the empty trial berth that ran at right angles to the main dock, he stopped and looked back over the scene. Pressing another crane into service, as he had told Jensen, would only add to the turmoil of the already overcrowded dock. Maybe if—

He faced around into the wind to touch a match to his cigar stub. Maybe—

He started, staring out across the channel. The match burned unnoticed to his fingers.

There was still a far look in his eyes as he climbed over the rail of the yard's lone gasoline launch. "Emco Construction," he told the operator, jerking his thumb toward an idle derrick barge tied to pilings across the fairway. "That is," he added grimly, "if they'll let you come alongside when they see I'm your passenger."

He stepped ashore to a reception hardly less cordial than he expected.

Jud Emmons, thumbs hooked into his belt, squinted out from under a dented derby. "You ain't welcome, Casady," he warned, then added suspiciously, "What you want here—seein' as I haven't set eyes on you since Western refused my bid for dredging your trial berth?"

Pete spat to the channel tide. "Wasn't my fault, Jud. You just couldn't meet the competitive bids."

Emmons grunted sourly and pushed a beligerent jaw at Pete. "What you want?" he invited again. "You ain't making no social call."

Pete inclined his hat brim toward the idle derrick barge. "What you doing with that broken down relic?" he asked deprecatingly.

Emmons snapped, "Nothin'—if it interests you. Nothin'—since your political chiselers wangled your double-A priority on rough pine for staging. I can't build cribbing with lumber I ain't able to buy."

Pete pushed his crumpled felt forward over his eyes and scratched the back of his neck thoughtfully. "Maybe we could get your cribbing for you, Jud. That is, if—"

"You?" Emmons exploded. "Western ain't giving anything away, and you know it." His curiosity got the better of his suspicion. "Okay, let's have it. What're you after?"

Pete said bluntly, "Your derrick barge, Jud. Snake it alongside the *Ariadne* over there and start pulling staging and scrap. Work the offshore side with your rig, and I'll work the dockside and heavy stuff with our whirleys. We need lifts. You need lumber. You can have all you can pull. A deal?"

Emmons' vinegared countenance softened almost imperceptibly. "It is," he grunted. "I'll be alongside in an hour."

It was even less than the promised hour when Pete, watching from the office window, saw the whirleys going to work on Jensen's anchor chain and the other heavy lifts. He sighed long and thankfully.

BY THE end of the shift on the following day the progress reports of all departments were on the yard superintendent's desk. Ballasting and last minute pick-up work would take a few hours, but if all went well the *Ariadne* should be ready to rock her main engine by graveyard. It was time to move around into the trial berth. It looked good to Peter Casady.

He reached over and picked the malignant telegram off the desk, rolled it tightly, and held a lighted match to its end. When it was burning freely he leaned back in his chair and touched it to a fresh cigar.

His feet were on the desk, a smile of satisfied accomplishment curling the corner of his mouth free of the stogie, when the clerk knocked diffidently at the door.

Beaming good humoredly, at peace with the world. Pete called admittance.

"Bluestack 'phoned," Al said in a frightened voice. "The towboats are on strike. We don't get any."

Pete's boots struck the floor with window-

shattering violence. His mouth opened and the cigar fell unnoticed to the desk.

"They—they what?" he asked incredulously.

"Struck," Al said weakly. "They do once in a while."

Pete retrieved his cigar, his hat and his self-control all at the same time and bolted for the door. He remembered, just in time, to open it.

Shorn of welding leads, air hoses, fire lines and gangplank, the *Ariadne* champed at her singled-up mooring lines. A group at the gangway's foot dissolved as Pete stamped up.

Dan Jensen, hard hat at an acute angle, rolled down his sleeves and wiped grime from his flushed face. "Well," he told Pete, "we done it. Don't ask me how. She's ready to move."

Pete ran uncertain fingers along the curve of his jaw. "She isn't moving, Dan," he said wearily. "Can we run the trial where she lays?" He asked the question hopefully, yet knowing the answer.

Jensen's blond eye brows arched suddenly upward. "You crazy, Casady? We got to ballast her six feet to get her propeller under water. By then she'd be two feet in the mud. We gotta have deep water. Berth one. Where's your tugs?"

Pete's voice was bitter. "They aren't coming, Dan. Strike. Every steam and Diesel job on the bay."

The rigging boss gave his hat a twenty degree list to the opposite side. He whistled silently. "If we can get steam we can haul her around with the warping winch," he suggested finally.

"I've checked with the engineers. No steam on the boilers till midnight. Maybe not till morning."

Jensen shook his head hopelessly.

Pete turned back toward the office. His cigar tasted like gall. "I'll call every gas launch on the bay," he told Jensen over his shoulder. "We get enough of them and maybe we can handle it. Keep the *Ariadne* singled up and ready. We'll move her somehow, if we have to haul her by hand."

"Yeah!" the boss rigger jered, returning to character. "Like cement buggies on those dams of yours, mebbe!" He spat forcibly.

In the gloom-charged sanctuary of his office Pete ruffled a listless thumb through

the classified section of the directory, looking for Launches, Gas. He was about to reach for the telephone and start in at the top of the list, when his eye fell on an open page of his neglected and forgotten book where Gorham had dropped it the day before.

He read, slowly, absorbed, his lips moving silently around the raggedness of his clenched cigar. His eyes took on a faraway expression.

Short seconds later he had come to a desperate, quick-formed decision and was on his way back to the dock.

"Get your men aboard to handle the lines," he ordered the master rigger. "We're moving."

JJENSEN looked up from manicuring mourning-bordered nails with a scrap of welding rod. "Sails, mebbe?" he asked sardonically. "Or oars, even?"

"Look," Pete said, making his voice hearty, "we'll hook the dragline from Emmons' barge, anchored 'cross channel, onto the *Ariadne's* bow and haul her forward till her 'midship section is off the bumper piling at the break of the dock. Then——"

The look Jensen raised from his grimed nails should have been enough, but he saw it wasn't.

He said, "You're going to haul a ten-thousand-ton steel hull with a three-quarter inch wire and a broken-down derrick barge? You're crazier'n even most boomers, Casady. No ship man is going to try a screwball stunt like that. Leastwise me."

"She'll move, Dan," Pete argued earnestly. "Why once on the railroad——"

"Railroads! Dams! Highways!" Jensen stormed. "This is a shipyard!" He slapped his tin hat down over one eye and glowered at Pete with the other. Then faint, grudging admittance crept into his voice. "All right, you move her with the barge. Mebbe. Then you'll bend her in the middle, you'll be telling me next, to get her around the corner."

Pete jerked his battered felt downward to match the set of Jensen's. Cement dust powdered his cigar. "No, we don't bend her, Dan. We spot a truck crane at the far end of berth one, block the wheels, and run her winch wire directly off the drum to the *Ariadne's* bow bits. When Emmons slacks

off, the crane heaves away on the wire and we pivot her around the corner."

Jensen's one visible eye opened wide in poorly concealed scorn. "Yeah? You're breakin' ten thousand tons around the corner with an eleven-ton rig?"

"I am," Pete said.

"I want none of it, mister. The tide and wind'll catch her. She'll end up high and dry across the channel. Me, I'll wait for tugs."

Pete regarded the other soberly, and doubt knotted hard in his stomach. After all, who was he to question the opinions of an experienced ship handler like Jensen? Maybe the boss rigger was right and he, Peter Casady, was just another floater with more brass than brains. Maybe he ought to start drifting again and leave this to someone who . . . Then he remembered what had brought him charging back out here to the dock. Hell, in every age, on every job, there had to be men who would gamble on breaking with tradition, or the world would go backward.

He straightened, and his jaw muscles lumped as he bit down on the cigar.

"Okay, Dan," he said quietly, "wait for the tugs, or for the resurrection. I'm moving the *Ariadne!*" He turned on his heel and stomped off down the dock.

Jensen's hat jerked forward, blinding his other eye. A hard half-hour's work, with Pete doing the most of it, had the wire cable hooked up between the bow of the vessel and the derrick barge.

Pete stationed himself on the corner of the dock and signaled Jud Emmons on the barge. The cable tightened, sang with strain, slackened, then grew taut again. The ancient boiler on Emmons' rig wheezed asthmatically, blew a white streamer of protest to the sky, then settled down to rhythmic spasms of effort. Gradually, protestingly, inch by hard won inch, the freighter crept forward until finally the bridge was abreast of the angle of the wharf.

Pete took a deep breath and raised his hand to the operator on the truck crane. The rig reared back and squatted down on all eight wheels for the pull. It looked for a moment as if it might be jerked over the stringer piece into the channel as its front wheels pawed air. But the *Ariadne* seemed to sense the struggle to give her life and

slowly, then faster, her bow swung into the tide, with her midship section pivoting on the corner like a ponderous ballerina.

Pete breathed again. The rest was routine.

Within minutes she was alongside, nestled to the log fenders of the trial berth. Pete was conscious of the master rigger standing behind him. Jensen was mumbling to himself. Pete turned.

"Not bad for a boomer," the rigging boss admitted grudgingly.

Pete grinned. "What boomer?" he asked. "I figure on staying a while."

THE three men sat around the desk in Michael Gorham's office sampling the general manager's contribution to the celebration occasioned by Western's renewed repair contracts.

Dan Jensen corked the bottle and handed it back to Gorham.

"Whush!" he said to Peter Casady when he was finally able to speak. "If you don't mind me askin', where'd a construction floater that don't know his fantail from seven dollars a week about ships, ever get an idea like that? Me, I been movin' 'em all my life and I wouldn't-a give a stranded winch fall for your chances."

Gorham returned the bottle to a desk drawer.

Pete retrieved a succulent butt from the ashtray. "Well, Dan," he said, puffing,

"even boomers learn things. First, I remembered about a railroad job down Mexico way. We moved a string of gondolas with a tractor when the switch engine broke down."

Jensen, with hopeful eye on the closed drawer, said, "Yeah, but railroad cars don't weigh no ten-thousand tons. A ship . . ."

"Oh, that," Pete said modestly, and looked at Gorham.

The general manager bent over the desk again. He pulled out Pete's worn book, opened it, and pushed it across the desk to Jensen.

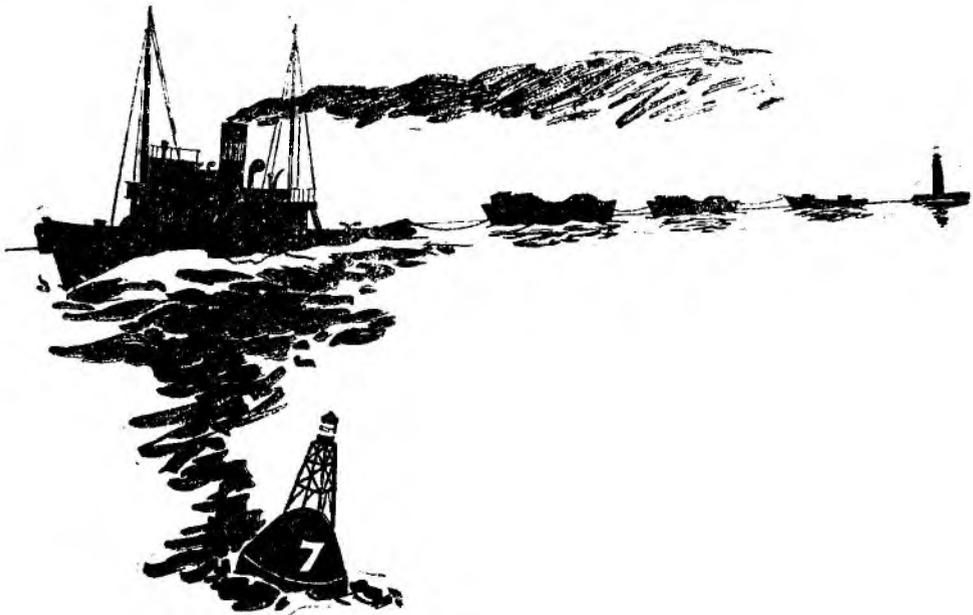
The boss rigger, masking his disappointment at the article retrieved from the drawer, read:

". . . a vessel floating in a liquid medium may be moved by a silken thread if constant and even strain is exerted on. . . ." —*Archimedes*, A. D. 221.

Western's vice-president and general manager broke the silence. "An interesting study, history," he said complacently. "We can learn much from the ancients. I've borrowed Pete's book to read myself."

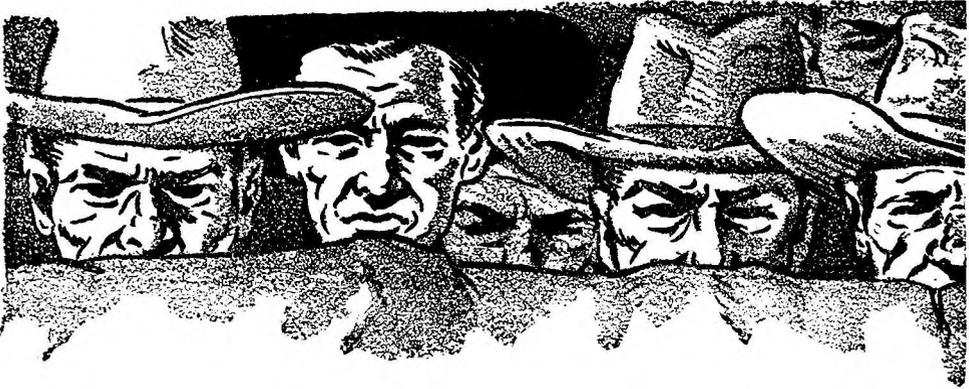
Pete Casady winced suddenly as his cupped match scared one of his newly gained blisters.

Gorham grinned, but not in sympathy. "An admirable combination for a shipyard," he said. "Books and blisters."



HIGH COUNTRY

By PETER DAWSON



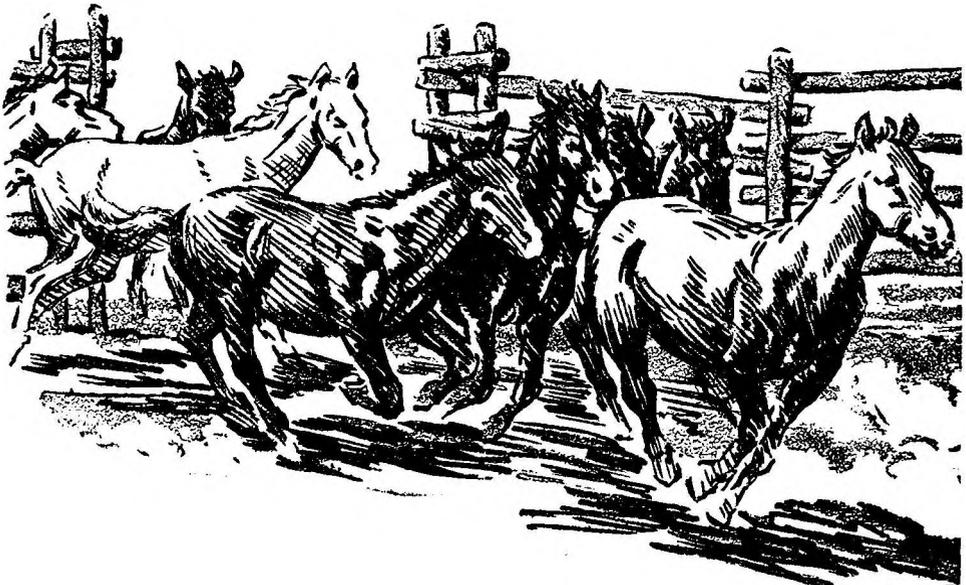
Part III

THE STORY SO FAR

JIM SHERILL had lost a band of horses, and because he was so mad about it, he started off alone to get them back. The law would have helped, but Jim just wouldn't wait for the law. He wanted to make his own way into outlaw country though his partner, Ted Rawn, thought he was crazy to go it alone, though he has the support of

a "wolfer," Jack Henry. However, George Lovelace, whose daughter, Ruth, was engaged to Jim, thought he should settle down at Hannibal and not go chasing horses all over the West; in fact said he'd have to or he couldn't have Ruth.

Then Jim gets involved with another girl; Jean Ruick accuses him of horse stealing and before he gets that straightened out he visits Jean's home. It's the Anchor



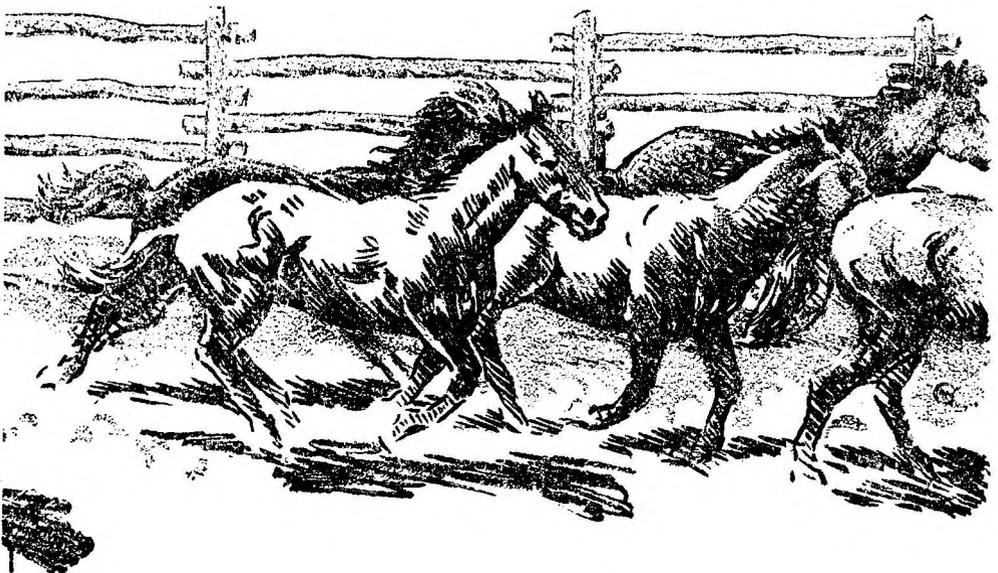
*It Was a Big Band of Horses for Three Men to Handle—
Two Riders and One Wolfer on a Mule*



ranch, owned by Jean, but managed by her uncle, "Major" Donovan. Incidentally, Jean doesn't trust her uncle, but Jim doesn't know that till later. Once he's cleared himself with Jean, he arranges to lease part of the Anchor range for his horses, then starts once more in pursuit of them into a hideout corral. It soon is apparent that Jim's horses were stolen by an outfit with Donovan at its head—though Jean knows nothing of this aspect of her uncle's activities. Jim

allies himself with Mitch Lockwood, one of Donovan's men, and hopes to induce Donovan to accept him in his gang—as one way to get a line on his own horses.

Then there comes to Donovan, George Lovelace, who wants him to get rid of Sherill—he no longer wants his daughter to marry Jim; he thinks Ted Rawn would be a better match. But Donovan's only thought is that he must move the stolen horses even deeper into the Breaks.



NED RAWN took more than usual pains with his appearance that night as he got ready for the Lovelace party. He had gone to Kelly's for a bath and a haircut and now he brought the lamp over to the bureau and combed a little pomade into his mustache. Then he meticulously clipped two stray hairs that were out of place over his right ear. He was careful when he pulled on the pressed gray pants. He dusted his highly polished boots. Finally he tied his tie that was two shades darker than the suit.

He was a vain man and after he had pulled on his coat and buttoned it he went to the mirror again, shrugging his bony shoulders so that the coat-collar hit the back of his neck just right. He gave his hair a final smoothing, thinking, *You look it, even if you aren't*, picked up his hat and went along the hallway to the Lovelace's door. Having just reminded himself of how broke he was—he had lost most of that borrowed thousand last night—he was trying not to think about it.

At least the Lovelaces still thought of him as wealthy.

Ruth answered his knock, pulling the door open and stepping back for the effect it would have on him, saying petulantly, "They've left me all alone, Ned. Dad's down there on the boat fussing with things. He even took Lou. She wasn't here to help me dress."

"Then you should always do it alone," he said gallantly.

Her smile was quick and happy. "You like it?" she asked, holding out the flowing white skirt and turning daintily around for his inspection.

He invariably searched out the unexpected thing to say to a woman and now was no exception.

"Lucky devil," he drawled.

"Who?" Ruth was plainly startled.

"Jim."

Her face took on a flush of pleasure at his indirect compliment. But then she turned serious long enough to say, "Let's not think of him tonight, Ned. I want so much to be happy for a few hours."

"I'll see that you are, Ruth."

He helped her into her light velveteen wrap, letting his touch linger at her shoul-

ders, and when they went down onto the street she took his arm, laughing gayly at something he said. In front of the warehouse directly below, the street lay in near-darkness and he drew his elbow in tighter, pressing her arm. She came closer to him and he could feel the swell of her breast against his arm and the sudden lift of his desire was a thing he had to fight down.

They rounded the end of the warehouse and before them lay the *Queen* brilliantly lighted by her own lanterns and what others George Lovelace had been able to buy at the two hardware stores.

During the day the big stern-wheeler had been moved up and away from the littered stretch of the levee and now lay with her bow stage resting on a smooth approach of clean-swept gravel.

Presently they sat down to a dinner far and away the best Ned had ever eaten in Whitewater—fried chicken and country ham, corn pudding, creamy whipped potatoes, squash, rich gravy, pickles and relish, white wine with the main course and, after the apple-cobbler a heavy port, all delicacies that came from the *Queen's* boiler-deck coops and bins that had been stocked in a richer country than this.

It was a gay gathering, ruled by the Commodore's boisterous talk and hearty laughter. All these people were his friends made over ten years of successful trade along the upper Missouri and if one or two felt that they had paid dearly for his services they forgot it as the food and the wine mellowed them. To most of them the gilt-decorated and polished dark paneling of the saloon, its crystal-pendant chandeliers, the deep-upholstered chairs, the maroon carpets and the flowered china were seldom-seen luxuries. So for a few hours these twenty-odd men and women were forgetting the drabness of their lives and enjoying this to the utmost.

Ruth sat at her father's right at the head of the heavy-laden oval table. Across from her Ned Rawn divided his attention between looking at her, talking to George Lovelace and dropping an occasional word that kept a constant stream of talk flowing from Judith Ledbetter, the judge's attractive daughter. The judge occupied the chair facing Lovelace at the foot of the table, and by the time the wine made its fourth round his tight face had reddened and lost its reserve

and his seldom-heard laugh was gustily challenging the Commodore's.

Time and again Ned caught Ruth's eye and drew a smile from her. She would invariably let her glance drop, avoiding his. Tonight, having made up his mind to something, Ned was keenly aware of her physical attraction and he sensed that she realized it. Once she caught his glance on the white roundness of her bare shoulders and, as he lifted his eyes and looked into hers, he smiled faintly and she didn't look away and some unspoken thought passed between them.

He went around the head of the table when the meal was finished and told her, "Let's go look at the river, Ruth."

She laughed softly, happily, as though they shared some secret. She led him out onto the deck and up the steps to the texas, high above the dark river. She stopped abruptly and before he expected it, and he came roughly against her, his arm automatically reaching out to steady her. She turned into the bend of his arm and her face tilted up to him, suddenly grave.

He saw nothing to make him hesitate and he kissed her. He could feel her breathing quicken and slowly her arms came around him and then there was no reserve in her.

Shortly he drew his head back and looked down at her, saying, "I've known for days that this would happen, Ruth."

"So have I."

He kissed her again, this time in the ungentle way of a man no longer hiding his hunger. Music all at once echoed up from the saloon below. Neither of them heard it.

AT ABOUT the time Lovelace's guests were finishing the second course of their dinner, Jim Sherill was wading his gelding into the levee several hundred yards above the *Queen*. The boat's deck-lanterns laid bright fingers of light across the dark water and, observing this, Sherill thought wearily, *Just one more thing*, deciding that this late activity could mean but one thing. Lovelace was loading the boat and would be leaving on the down-river trip in a day or two.

He hardly cared. The thought that he might have seen the last of Ruth did little to deepen his depression and, matter-of-factly, he now accepted this possibility along

with the other disheartening one the afternoon had brought him.

He had been a fool to let his curiosity over Donovan take him to Anchor. Donovan right now probably knew every word of his conversation with Jean Ruick. If that were true, he had lost every advantage a month's work had given him. Ed's crew would once more be on the hunt for him if he ever again rode those hills. Which meant that tonight he was even further from his goal than he had been when he last saw the Lovelaces.

The sorrel lunged up the levee-bank and Sherill threaded his way through the maze of merchandise strewn across the broad expanse of ground. Further along he saw the dark shape of another boat, no light showing. He rode the alleyway between two of the warehouses and, coming upon the street, passed a nearly finished brick building and read the legend on its cornerstone, *First Territorial Bank, 1879*. Then he was in the jam of the night-traffic, the sorrel tossing his head in nervousness at the noise and the movement around him.

Sherill's glance idly roved the crowded street and just as idly he was wondering whether he'd eat or drink, possibly break a long-standing habit and drink a lot. Maybe Ned could help out there. The prospect of seeing Ned somehow eased his worries.

He left the sorrel at Kramer's lot and afterward turned out onto the crowded walk, losing himself in this town's odd assortment of humans. Here were wide-hatted riders like himself, somber-clothed professional men and gamblers, overalled homesteaders and miners and prospectors fresh off the river boats, women dressed more gaily than those who frequented the street by day. The saloons were going full blast, the barkers shouting from their high stands. Sherill could smile thinly as he passed the *Fine and Dandy*, noticing the burlap that hung across the glassless windows.

He was a higher and wider shape than most along this walk, and because of that and the clean look of him, a young woman stepped out of the shadows of a dark alleyway and came in beside him and took his arm, saying, "Haven't seen you before. Just come in?"

"Just." He looked down at her with an open smile and made no move to withdraw his arm. "Some town."

"The worst there is," she said in a hard way. A man roughly jostled her but she took no notice, matching Sherill's slow saunter, adding, "Except for one or two places I could show you."

"Some other time," he said.

They moved into a store-window's pale wash of light and her thin and painted face tilted up at him as she asked petulantly, "What's wrong with tonight?"

"Something else on."

She sighed, slowly withdrawing her arm from his. "You looked different," she said, not pretending now. "Lately I've had all the bad luck there is."

She turned away and he stopped, watching her fade back into the shadows. "Not quite all," he breathed, wishing too late that he could have told her just that.

There had been a grim note of conviction in her voice that now blunted the thin edge of his self-pity and, as he went along the walk, he could think back more rationally upon those minutes with Jean Ruick that had so changed things for him.

He was exactly where he had started three weeks ago. Thinking of George Lovelace's ultimatum, he almost laughed. He wondered what the Commodore would say now if he knew how things stood. And, wondering, he decided that he would tell him. Tonight. Now.

He was taking a perverse satisfaction in imagining what their meeting would be like as he climbed the steps to the wide veranda of the *River House*. Then he was remembering how Ruth had come down here to give him that parting word as he left two nights ago, remembering it and thinking how odd it was that he hadn't once thought of it since. Today, as yesterday, Jean Ruick had been in his thoughts more than any other person and it suddenly came to him that ever since meeting her he had unconsciously been making comparisons between her and Ruth. Now it made him uneasy and a little angry to realize that, because he had so seldom thought of her, Ruth must have suffered by these comparisons.

He thrust all these disquieting uncertainties aside as he went along the upper hallway and knocked on Lovelace's door. There was no answer.

His disappointment was short-lived before the prospect of seeing Ned, and as he

went back along the corridor he could even feel a small relief at not having to face the Commodore just now.

Ned's room was dark, empty. He struck a match and had a brief glimpse of the room's disorder, the bed unmade and a rumpled suit lying on it. He caught the sweetish odor of the pomade and idly thought, *Who's the lucky girl?*

He asked for Ned downstairs at the desk. "Try that boat down on the river," the clerk told him. "Lovelace is giving some sort of a shindig tonight."

Now he knew the reason for all the lights on the *Queen* and as he came back onto the street and turned down past the warehouse toward the levee he had given up the thought of seeing Ned and was instead wondering if he could find Ruth, get her away from her father and have a real talk with her.

He walked quickly up the wide stage and onto the feebly lit boiler deck. Two crewmen, Negroes, were lying on a mound of baled hides and watched him incuriously as he picked his way through the tiers of close-packed boxes and barrels and climbed the broad companionway to the hurricane deck. There were lights up there, and as he rounded the fore-end of the cabins he found several people standing at the rail looking off across the river, the colorful gowns of the women at odds with the Sunday-best suits of the men.

He spotted Tom, Lovelace's colored boy, coming toward him carrying a tray of glasses. He waited there, asking as the boy came up, "Tom, where'll I find Miss Ruth?"

"Up above, suh," the boy told him, giving his toothy grin.

Sherill thanked him and walked down past the group at the rail and turned up the narrow steps climbing to the texas.

Once his head was above the level of that top deck the lights from below were blocked out and he was staring into a darkness only faintly relieved by the glow coming from the head of the street. He hesitated there, looking on past the cabins and along the low-railed deck.

Then he saw them standing there in the deep shadow of the texas, Ruth's white gown blending into the darker outline of Ned Rawn's gray suit. Their backs were to him and he could see Ned's arm circling Ruth's waist.

All at once a constriction was in his throat and his head had that swollen, near-to-bursting feeling of uncontrollable fury. He stood there several seconds, wanting to be sure, feeling a knife-edge of disbelief and bitterness cut into him. His face was paling and bleakly set as he finally turned away and went back down the steps.

He was turning into the wide foredeck stairway when he met Tom again. The boy looked at him and asked, "You feelin' bad, Mist' Sherill?"

"Nothing I won't get over, Tom," Sherill answered, going down the steps.

This galling bitterness was something he had never before experienced, brought on solely by having witnessed Ned's betrayal of him. Oddly enough, he could feel little dismay over Ruth. The pattern of her shallowness and insincerity stood out in dozens of small things now etched with startling clearness against this background of deceit. All that remained of his feeling for her was a self-loathing at his own blindness and shallow wants.

But Ned stood for something different, for something far more deeply rooted in his past. He was remembering all the fun they'd had, all their fiddle-footed wanderings and all the hard work that had bound them in sure and easy friendship. Yet he had just seen something that made all these things meaningless. To realize that this Ned wasn't the one he had known in the old days was no salve to his feelings.

He walked up between the warehouses, glad for the quiet and the darkness here that were letting him get a new grip on his thinking. Dispassionately, without a trace of self-pity, he looked at all the facts.

He had come to Whitewater to marry a fine girl, to meet an old friend, last of all to make a little money. Today he had lost his chances at the money and he cared so little about it that now he could shrug that knowledge aside. He had lost Ruth and in so doing had discovered himself lacking in discrimination, a disquieting fact he must always guard against. But what stuck deepest, jarring the foundations of his belief in his judgment, was Ned's turning against him. He couldn't understand it, couldn't begin to see the reasons behind it.

He was coming up along the walk fronting the hotel veranda when a man sitting

at the far corner of the railing saw him and came erect, calling in a low voice, "Sherill?"

When Sherill stopped, Mitch Lockwood climbed over the railing and swung down to the walk, saying, "I played a hunch and hung around. Rawn wasn't in."

"No," Sherill said, staring down curiously at the shorter man, asking, "How did you know my name?"

"Ed," Mitch said, his look surprised. "Why?"

"Nothing. What's on your mind?"

"Ed's gone north. Left around noon. So I came straight on down to let you know."

"Fine." Sherill tried to sound grateful even though his thought was, *Why bother about that now?*

But then a cold and wicked anger was in him at so mildly accepting this long run of bad luck. Tonight he had had proof of certain flaws in his judgment where Ned and Ruth were concerned. Just now, perhaps, he was too hastily misjudging another situation. He was giving up too easily. Stubbornly, angrily, he told himself, "The hell I will!" saying it aloud.

"The hell you will what?" Mitch wanted to know.

Sherill laughed, unaccountably relishing a thought. "Nothing, Mitch. Nothing." Then, more soberly, he drawled, "We're going up there after those horses, Mitch. Tonight."

V

SHERILL and Mitch rode those forty odd climbing miles to the hill-ranch in a little more than five hours. Sherill had thought of going on to the river line-shack to get Jake but had given up the idea as a waste of too much time. He had set a killing pace all the way up through the timber, Mitch at times falling far behind. Then finally the sorrel had given out and Mitch had caught up again and they were together when they came to the foot of the meadow. It was long after midnight and the ghostly light of a waning moon laid tricky shadows through the pines as they approached the cabins.

On this long ride, the core of Sherill's resentment had burnt itself out to be replaced by a near-forgotten urge of wild recklessness that harked back to the old carefree days with Ned. But tonight that reckless

urge was tempered by a cooler judgment and a definite hardness that was something he had never before experienced.

"Wake 'em up," he told Mitch as they drew near the bunkhouse. "We move out right away. When you're ready, call me. I'll be up in Ed's place."

Mitch asked, "How do you think you're goin' to swing this? Purdy's a cold-blooded devil."

"I'll take care of Purdy. Tell him I want to see him."

Sherill went on toward the small cabin, Mitch to the bunkhouse. Sherill heard someone call out and, as he swung aground, saw a lantern's glow in the bunkhouse window.

He went into Ed's office and lit the new lamp in the bracket above the desk. He went on into the other room a moment, giving it a cursory glance that showed him nothing but a bed, two chairs and a wash-stand made from a packing-crate. Back in the office, he set the lamp on the desk and opened the drawers, going through them quickly.

He was looking for something, anything, to tell him more about Ed and the man who bossed Ed. His thoughts about Donovan were neutral now, waiting to be swayed either way. He admitted that he was reserving judgment of the man only because of Jean Ruick, because of his strong instinct for liking her and his unwillingness to believe badly of anyone so close to her.

He was pulling out the desk's big bottom drawer when a furtive step at the door brought his glance up. A slat-bodied rider of middle age stood there, a man whose light hazel eyes were beady with controlled anger and suspicion as he drawled:

"Mitch says you wanted to see me."

"You're Purdy?" The man gave a grudging nod, whereupon Sherill asked tersely, "Where did Ed put the bills of sale on those horses?"

"There never was a bill of sale on the place."

Purdy had a face that was immobile as a slab of granite. Only his eyes betrayed his wariness of Sherill. He wore his gun as Sherill did, low along the right thigh. One thing definitely hinted that he had come here cocked for trouble. The fingers of his right hand were spread open more than those of his left, not quite relaxed.

Sherill saw all this, then heard the scuffle of boots in the yard beyond Purdy. He knew at once that the others were watching this, that he would have to make his play for the horses here and now, that Purdy was the man to make it against.

SO HE kicked shut the bottom drawer of the desk, impatiently drawling, "How in hell do I make a trade on these horses without a bill of sale?"

"Ed said to sit tight. We don't move any horses till he's back."

Sherill came around the end of the desk now, almost within reach of the man. "If we wait that long we lose the chance."

"Then we lose it."

Sherill asked, "Didn't Ed tell you about me?"

"Yeah. But he didn't mention anything bein' on the fire."

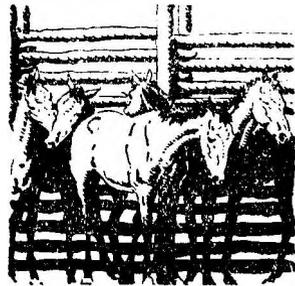
"What if he didn't? Does that mean I can't make a deal? Go on, get your men ready and we'll move out."

Purdy's stare narrowed a little as he drawled, "The hell with that! Those horses stay—"

He saw what was coming and his hand clawed up along his thigh, really fast. Sherill hit him with a full swing, wanting to hurt him. Purdy's Colt's lanced halfway into line but suddenly dropped as his head snapped back to thud hard against the door-frame. His frame buckled and he sprawled loosely out across the door-sill.

Sherill stepped over and toed Purdy's inert bulk out so that he rolled off the step and onto the ground.

"Mitch," Sherill called, "you're in charge. Get that corral open." Then he deliberately



turned his back on the door, going around behind the desk once more.

He heard an angry voice mutter something out there and for a moment nothing

would have surprised him. Then Mitch's voice drawled, "You heard what he said. Let's move."

They drifted away, their steps fading in the night's stillness, and Sherill stopped holding his breath.

Sherill stayed in the office a few minutes longer, going through that last desk-drawer and discovering nothing that told him any more about Ed than he already knew. Finally he went over and lifted down the three carbines from the wall-rack, then blew out the lamp. He picked up Purdy's Colt on the way out and walked over into the trees and dumped all the weapons into a thicket.

He mounted the sorrel and rode out past the barn and up to the big corral in the meadow. Vague shapes moved against the blackness and he found the crew working the horses out through the gate.

He reined in alongside a man he couldn't recognize in the faint light, curtly telling him, "Cut me out a fresh one."

"Sure thing," came the willing answer.

Once a rider wheeled in out of the blackness and in the brief glimpse he had of the man Sherill recognized Slim.

A quarter-hour later he was riding a big-chested bay, one of his own horses, helping push the herd from the gate on south out of the foot of the meadow into the timber.

Long after all sounds of the herd's going had died out, Purdy staggered over to the bunkhouse, rolled a few things in a blanket and went to the small corral for a horse. Presently he headed up along the meadow, riding at a stiff jog and fighting down his nausea, his aching head letting him wonder how long it would take him to catch up with Ed.

EARLY the next morning Brick and Jean left Anchor's barn-lot in a buckboard, Brick holding the team of grays in to a stiff trot. It was cold, with a wind out of the north and the sky heavily overcast. They took the turning off the trail into the road and then the wind wasn't in their faces and Jean sat a little straighter, no longer hunching her shoulders against the chill that seemed to congeal her thoughts, suspending the need for making the decision she knew she must make before reaching town.

Presently Brick's dry voice sounded over the singing rattle of the buckboard's iron

tires. "He ain't acting any different, youngster. Quit worryin'."

It was Brick's habit to break long silences in this fashion, remarking on a thing without preliminary, leaving it to his listener to puzzle out what he was talking about. Now, Jean knew he referred to the possibility of the Major having seen her yesterday when Sherill left, when she had run over to the cookhouse.

So she said lifelessly, "It doesn't really matter."

"Maybe not. But he'd have been in askin' me about it if he was wise to what's goin' on."

"What is going on, Brick?"

He reached over and slapped the mare across the rump with rein-ends before he said in seeming irrelevance, "This Sherill now. I'd lay my bets with him."

"You've never even talked with him. How can you know what kind of a man he is?" Asking the question, Jean wondered why, when her instinct was to believe in Sherill, she had to take this opposite attitude toward him.

"I got eyes, ain't I?" Brick asked. "When you've seen as many men as I have, you get to know the right ones."

"But how could he say a thing like that about the Major?"

"You said it, he didn't. The way you told it, you jumped down his throat before he had a chance to say anything."

She nodded, knowing she had done exactly what Brick was saying. But that same fear she'd felt yesterday was in her now and she said, low-voiced, "Whatever the Major's been doing, it can't be that he's a common horse-thief, Brick."

"Why did he leave the army? A man just don't up and quit a job like that at his age."

"He might have had a perfectly good reason."

"He don't drink. And if he gambles he's pretty quiet about it." Brick went on musingly, paying no attention to her remark. "So it was something else that kept him away those times. And where'd he spend night before last?"

"I wish I knew," she said wearily.

He looked around at her. "Get over this idea that none o' your flesh and blood can do anything wrong."

"I'm over it, Brick. If there's a range detective in town, I'm going to tell him what I know."

"Tell Sherill what you know."

"No, I'd rather do it this other way."

BBRICK retired behind a gloomy silence and they went on following the bend the road took toward the river. They left the rolling grassland and dipped down across the flat of the river bottom and it was where the road turned west again that Brick pulled the team down to a walk, looking off toward the north, toward the river.

"Something movin' off there," he said.

In a moment Jean saw what he meant, saw the haze of dust perhaps a mile distant that obscured the green fringe of cottonwood and willow marking the river's line.

"Horses," Brick told her.

"Could be Sherill?" Jean caught Brick's shrug and on sudden impulse said, "Let's go over and see."

Brick at once lifted the reins, turning the team off the road.

In another minute they could see the horses plainly. There were quite a lot of animals strung out and heading east toward the range Sherill had leased. Soon they were close enough to distinguish a man working the near flank of the herd. Then a tall rider on a bay appeared out of the dust of the drag and came toward them.

It was Sherill. Sight of him laid a quick embarrassment through Jean and she said hastily, "Let's go on, Brick."

He gave her a thinly amused glance before deliberately pulling the team into a stop, drawling, "Let's see you eat your crow like a lady, youngster."

She knew how stubborn he could be and she had to sit there watching Sherill ride in on them.

Then she halfway forgot her embarrassment as she saw the change in Sherill. A two-day growth of beard shadowed the square lines of his face. As he rode in on Brick's side she saw that tiredness lined his face with a gravity that was reflected in his eyes, and she wondered what had brought the change in him.

He lifted hand to hat as he drawled, "You're out early."

She nodded. Then, knowing Brick was waiting for her to speak, she said humbly

"I'd like to apologize for yesterday. It wasn't very nice of me."

A brief smile touched Sherill's eyes. "Those things happen. I should've kept my lip buttoned."

"Then you meant what I thought you did?" she asked, that fear of yesterday at once striking through her again.

"Suppose we forget it." He tilted his head in the direction of the herd. "There are the horses. So it's wound up all right."

His answer was anything but satisfactory and Jean was about to tell him so when Brick asked, "Have much trouble?"

"Not much. But we're short-handed."

"There's three men sittin' around our place with damn' little to do," Brick went on with a surprising garrulity, and Jean sensed that he was purposely talking to keep her from speaking. "They're yours for the askin'."

"We'll make out." Sherill looked at Jean. "That money of yours will be in the bank today."

Once again, before Jean could speak, Brick inserted his word. "There's some extra beds stuck away in the tool shed. Better help yourself."

"Brick, will you let me say something!" Jean put in angrily. Then she told Sherill, "I'm glad it's turned out so well for you. But I must know something. Did the Major really have anything to do with your losing those horses?"

"Jean, that's a fool question to—"

"Did he?" Jean asked insistently, cutting in on the old cook.

Sherill regarded her without his expression breaking from its seriousness. He was thinking, *She's proud and it would hurt her.* So he said, "I tried to tell you yesterday you'd be taken off on the wrong foot."

"There," Brick said triumphantly.

"Yesterday you started to say something about the Major," Jean said, ignoring Brick. "What was it?"

Sherill shook his head. "If I did, I forget now what it was."

Brick gave Sherill a look and a nod of approval.

So, when the girl said, "Try and think, can't you?" Sherill touched the bay with the spur on the side away from her and the horse took several quick steps out from the buckboard.

He pretended to discipline the animal, jerking the reins so that the bay tossed his head and nervously sidled even further from the rig. "We'll talk it over later," he called and, lifting his hand, let the bay go.

As he cantered obliquely over toward the herd, he was wondering who Brick might be and how much the old man knew. He obviously did know something. What that something was, Sherill intended finding out. He would ride across to Anchor the first chance he got and have a talk with him.

Just now he and Mitch were having their hands full with the horses and, coming up on them, he could see that they were straggling. During the night the impact of his authority had worn off and, one by one Ed's crew had slipped away in the darkness. He had halfway expected that some such thing might happen and it hadn't mattered much, since the main need he'd had of them was only in getting clear of the hideout. But it was tedious work now for only two of them to handle these sixty head of horses and when he finally came up with Mitch, who was see-sawing across the drag trying to keep the animals moving, Mitch said relievedly:

"Five more minutes and they'd have been spread clear across the county."

"An hour more ought to do it, Mitch." Sherill pulled his neckpiece up over his face and got to work.

The bay knew this business, not waiting for a touch of the spur to turn back some animal trying to leave the bunch. So Sherill put his thoughts to other things. He was feeling better about Jean Ruick now that he'd seen her again. He couldn't explain the incongruity of his not having asked her if she had told the Major of their conversation yesterday. Back there he'd thought about it and, on the point of asking, had checked himself with the queer notion that to ask would offend her. He had been strongly inclined to believe just then that she had somehow treated the matter as a confidence between them.

Now he wasn't so sure. After all, it didn't matter with the horses safely out of the hills. So, he put from his mind the thought of their misunderstanding and remembered the way she had looked, her face reddened by the chill wind and brightly alive and altogether beautiful. For the first time he admitted that she strongly attracted

him, that he was hoping something would smooth out the troubled course of their acquaintance.

During last night's long drive out of the hills he had often thought of her, wondering which of half a dozen excuses he could use for riding over to Anchor this morning. Now he regretted that their meeting was over, that he couldn't be sure of finding her at Anchor if he did ride in there later.

So finally he dismissed that idea, deciding to help Mitch work the horses as far as the line-shack where Jake had been waiting since yesterday afternoon, then to leave Mitch and Jake with the herd and go on in to Whitewater. He would sign the lease, make his payment on it and then go find Ned.

He hadn't let himself think too much of Ned and Ruth this morning. But now he was suddenly impatient to see how Ned would act when they met. He had tried time and again to think of some logical explanation for what his friend had done, had failed to find one. Yet a slender hope that there was that explanation, and that he could discover it, was what was taking him to Whitewater.

He wanted to believe in Ned as much as he had ever wanted to believe in anything.

THE gusty wind ran off the peaks under the leaden clouds and hit the river-bottom with a cold spasmodic violence. By midday it was whipping the dust along Whitewater's main street, scattering bits of paper and rubbish, worrying the animals along the hitch-rails and the people on the walks. Today had the makings of one of late spring's freakish storms and the freighters that crossed the choppy river on the ferry and headed out the Arrow Creek road were wondering how long it would be before their heavy wagons were up to the axles in mud.

Down along the levee, the small stern-wheeler that had arrived yesterday was disgorging her cargo. Above, thirty-odd men were feverishly loading the *Queen*. George Lovelace would occasionally appear on the hurricane deck to shout something down to his mate, taking in all this activity with an impatient eye.

Just past twelve, Jean Ruick came down the outside stairway from the Cattlemen's Association offices over the bank. She walked

along to where Brick waited by the buckboard in front of the courthouse and he helped her up onto the seat and they drove straight out of town.

Had Jean come along the walk five minutes later, she would have met Ned Rawn hurrying along, carrying a new alligator-hide suitcase. Ned was stopped three different times by men along the walk and all three passed a cheerier word than usual with him and shook his hand in parting.

At the *River House*, Ned went up to his room after taking a lot of good-natured joshing from a group of men in the lobby. An hour later, he had his back to the door when someone knocked. He didn't even turn as he called impatiently, "Come in."

Jim Sherill stepped in the door and was closing it before Ned faced around to see who it was.

Sherill was watching him closely and first saw his face redden deeply, then saw him drop the stack of shirts he'd been holding in one hand.

Too affably, Ned said, "Where you been keeping yourself, stranger? Thought I was going to miss you. Sit down. Here, let me make room."

He lifted the suitcase from the room's one chair, moving the chair out from the bed onto which he had emptied the contents of the dresser, a small, brass-bound trunk and a battered war-bag.

"Goin' somewhere?" Sherill asked as he took the chair. He sat in it backward, long legs thrust out and arms folded over its back.

Ned had recovered from his momentary confusion and his smile was genial as ever now as he said, "Am I! All the way down the river."

Sherill was surprised. "That'll take time. When do you get back, next fall?"

"Never, if I have any luck. Jim, Lovelace has offered me a job. I'm going with the *Queen*."

Sherill sat straighter. The news of the *Queen's* departure he had half-way expected. But Ned's going was a real surprise. "Thought you had a job," he said.

"I have." Ned turned serious. "But there's something you don't know about, Jim. Nothin' to do with the job. You see— Well, hell, you might as well know. I've been hittin' the cards too much. This

crowd won't let me alone. Now I'm stone broke and figure it's a good time to quit. If this other works out, I'll never have to look at another card."

Sherill was on the point of reminding his friend that the Mississippi country was also card country.

Instead, he merely said, "Maybe I'll see you down there."

"Man, if you only would." Ned's tone lacked the heartiness he intended. "We could tear Hannibal apart. How soon do you figure to make it?"

Sherill shrugged. "Soon now. We brought the horses down last night."

Ned's eyes opened wide. "Jim, that's the best news I've had in a long time," he said, his enthusiasm strangely unconvincing. He thought of something, quickly asking, "Have you told Ruth and the Commodore?"

"Not yet."

Ned seemed relieved. "You haven't much time. The *Queen* leaves in the morning."

"Then you've got some work to do." Sherill rose, thinking, *If they wanted me along, he'd be saying so now.* He said, "This leaves me high and dry for ninety days. Until I can deliver the horses."

"Who cares how long it takes you?" Ned asked, again with that forced geniality. "By the way, this morning I mailed a letter to Dave Ramsay at Fort Selby. Told him you were the best man with horses I'd ever known. All you have to do to get in the remount business is go over there and see him and get the keys to my desk from Kramer."

"But now that I've got the horses back that's all changed, isn't it?"

"Maybe it is," Ned said, adding, "Of course, if anything should happen, you could always take up where I left off."

"Just what could happen, Ned?"

"Who knows? You might even decide not to come down to Hannibal for another year."

"Is there any reason you know of why I wouldn't?" Sherill was watching his friend closely now.

"Not a one." Ned forced a smile, saying with a false gusto, "And you better not trump up a reason."

Sherill took out his tobacco, rolled up a smoke and tossed the sack to Ned. As they

lit their cigarettes from Ned's match, Sherill drawled, "Wonder where I can find Ruth?"

Ned shook his head. "No tellin'. Maybe she's down on the boat by now. I've heard a lot of moving around up at the other end of the hall."

"Go ahead with your packin'," Sherill said.

AS NED turned away, Sherill stood looking out the window across the back lots, his thinking almost idling as his conviction strengthened that Ned was deceiving him in something beyond the thing he already knew. There had been no mention of the party last night. And Ned's enthusiasm for his coming on to Hannibal was obviously forced. Something was wrong here, 'way wrong. Ned was acting like a boy caught stealing a fresh-baked pie from his mother's kitchen. Slowly, surely, that depression and fury of last night was settling through Sherill again.

Finally he could no longer stand the turn his thoughts were taking and he sauntered across to the door, saying, "See you later. Maybe I'll go say good-bye to Ruth and the old man."

"Hope you can find them," Ned said.

Sherill stepped out into the hall asking, "You're sure about this, Ned? Sure you want to go back there and never see a hill higher than your hat? That country's all fenced in."

Ned sighed and threw out his hands.



"Who said I wanted it? Lovelace has thrown a good job my way. If it doesn't work out, I can always come back. Besides, you'll wind up there. If it's good enough for you, it'll suit me."

Sherill smiled briefly. "Okay. You always did have a mind of your own."

He turned toward the head of the stairs and Ned called after him, "So long," and he lifted a hand, not turning, noting that Ned hadn't offered to shake hands.

The bar downstairs was crowded and Sherill went in there and bought a drink, thinking he might see Lovelace. But he hadn't by the time the drink was finished and he went out onto the street half-decided to go down to the *Queen*. In the end he changed his mind, not knowing exactly why, and turned up-street instead, nursing his anger and bewilderment, restlessly wondering how much basis there was for his distrust of Ned beyond what he had seen last night.

He was passing a hardware store when someone called his name and he turned to see Fred Spence coming down off the doorway step. The sheriff came over to him saying, "Thought you were going to keep in touch with me, Sherill."

Jim Sherill was in no mood to make excuses, so he simply said, "That's right, I was."

Spence gave him a look more of amusement than anger. "Never mind, Ned explained things," he said with an abrupt warming smile. "Did you have any luck with the horses?"

"Some."

"If you need me, all you have to do is holler," Spence said quite cordially. Then he thought of something: "By the way, what do you think of Ned marrying the Lovelace girl?"

It was as though he had thrown a hard blow at Sherill, although there was nothing visible to show it. Sherill stood there so long without speaking that Spence gave him an odd look. And Sherill's words were quite toneless as he said, "Hadn't heard about it."

The sheriff said heartily, "Well then, get on down there to the hotel and hit Ned for a cigar. They were hitched this mornin' at the church. You should've been the first to know."

Sherill nodded. "I should, shouldn't I?" he said, and turned away.

Fred Spence couldn't understand it. Instead of going toward the hotel, Sherill headed in the opposite direction. The sheriff would have been more puzzled had he seen

Sherill riding out of town some minutes later.

PURDY had traveled slowly during the night and at dawn, with the high-country blanketed in cloud, he was tempted to turn back. But he was nursing a deep hatred of Sherill that outweighed the prospect of any physical discomfort and when it started snowing he pulled on his slicker and kept doggedly on.

He had been through here twice before with horses and followed the only way he knew, keeping generally north and remembering his landmarks well even though the country was shut in and he could catch only infrequent glimpses of the higher peaks. He was as hard on himself as he was on the horse, stopping only once in the next two hours to build a fire and spend a few minutes thawing himself out.

If he hadn't reasoned that Ed would be laying over in this foul weather he might finally have turned back. But the hunch that Ed's camp was closer than the hideout was strong enough so that, toward the middle of the morning, he was only faintly surprised to see the orange glow of a fire ahead through the fog of lightly falling snow.

He rode straight on in, came out of the saddle and without ceremony went up to the blaze to warm himself. The fire lay on ground kept dry by the spreading branches of a lofty balsam. Purdy was sure that this was Ed's camp and that Ed had either seen him coming or heard him and was now probably playing it safe. And, shortly, Ed Stedman came walking in through the trees.

Ed took one look at him and asked, "What the hell hit you?" Purdy told him.

Ed listened without once interrupting. When Purdy had finished, Ed was deep in thought and walked over and broke up several branches to toss on the fire before saying, "You should've had more sense than to buck him. This may be the best hand we've held yet."

Purdy gave him an angry look. "Dammed if I see it."

"Suppose Sherill really had a buyer for those horses? You say he was lookin' for bills of sale."

"Pawin' through your desk. I nearly let him have it! Now I wish I had."

"No," Ed said patiently, "you should have

stuck with him, played along until you were sure of one thing or the other. If it was a real sale, then you wouldn't of made a fool of yourself. If it was a steal, you'd be there now to swing the thing our way."

Purdy only glared at him, making no answer. Finally Ed shrugged and said, "So now we go back. Ten to one you've wasted two good days of my time. And Sherill won't like that." He unrolled his slicker, pulled it on and trudged out after his horses.

They broke camp half an hour later, Ed leading his pack-horse and not liking the prospect of this long ride.

AT ABOUT the time Sherill left White-water after seeing the sheriff, Jake was riding the foot of the draw where he and Mitch were holding the horses. The herd had settled down and there was little to do beyond turning back an occasional animal drifting toward the river.

Jake and Sherill had picked this spot yesterday, a quarter-mile wide sweep of good grass separating two low ridges between which a willow-rimmed creek snaked its last mile to the river. In his cautious way Jake had so far kept clear of Mitch, following his natural instincts even though he was impatient to learn how Sherill had managed the seemingly impossible in bringing his herd out of the hills. Finally now, after these four hours, his curiosity had become so strong that he headed the mule out across the draw to where Mitch sat his horse below the ridge to the east.

Coming in alongside Mitch, he asked, "You on your way back up there tonight?"

"Not tonight or ever," Mitch said.

"So it's that way, is it?" Jake didn't try to hide his astonishment. He realized that there was a point beyond which his curiosity couldn't go openly. So he drawled acidly, "I would be down here last night instead of up there."

"It was a pretty thing to see," Mitch admitted.

"It would be if Sherill had anything to do with it. There ain't a better man alive."

"I'm beginnin' to believe that."

There was one way to find out about last night, Jake saw now, only one. So he told Mitch, "Time was when I thought I could twist the tail of anything from a mountain cat to a real mean longhorn. Then I tangled

with Jim Sherill and learned different. He persuaded me to leave the Yellowstone country as soon as I could walk afterwards."

Mitch looked puzzled. "You two had a run-in?"

"We did. A real one. Maybe I could lick him with a knife. But I wouldn't even be too sure of that. Anyway, this time I speak of we tossed all our hardware away and just went to work on each other."

Jake tilted his head over, lifting a hand to point to a white scar along the line of his jaw. "Sherill did that. With his fist. Must've hit me there twenty times. Just picked that spot and kept after it. Finally it jarred my knees loose. It was three days before the knees were worth a damn."

"What brought all this on?" Mitch was grinning now.

Jake shrugged. "I'd been eatin' deer meat so long I'd worked up a sharp taste for beef. But I picked the wrong critter. It was Sherill's. He caught me dressin' it out. He couldn't see it my way, so we got into that disagreement."

Mitch was softly laughing. "Maybe I know how you felt."

"And maybe you don't," Jake said ruefully.

"If I don't, then Purdy does."

"Who's Purdy?"

"The *segundo* up there. Last night he couldn't see it Sherill's way about movin' these nags out. So Sherill rocked him to sleep."

"Where was Ed Stedman all this time?"

Mitch eyed the wolfer queerly. "You know Ed?"

"By sight. I run my traps up in the hills."

"Then you've seen me?"

"Sure. A man has a right to pick the place where he draws wages. Now you've picked this one. A good move."

"Sherill's not payin' me wages," Mitch bridled. "I wouldn't take anything for this."

"Me either," Jake said solemnly.

Mitch took that in, then said, "Ed left the layout yesterday. I let Sherill know and he made his play. It worked."

Just now his glance went beyond the wolfer. Something caught his attention and his stare narrowed as he asked, "Who's that?"

Jake looked back over his shoulder to see a thick-set rider crossing the foot of the

draw along the river four or five hundred yards below.

He had his careful look at the man and finally said, "That would be Donovan. He runs this outfit."

Mitch at once lost interest. "Now all Sherill's got to do is hang onto this herd for another ninety days and his worries are over."

"So he told me," Jake agreed idly. His attention was still on Donovan, who was now disappearing beyond the foot of the opposite ridge. He was thinking back on what Sherill had said about Donovan night before last at their camp in the ravine. Sherill hadn't been at all sure of that hunch about the Major.

Now, on sudden impulse, Jake told Mitch, "Think I'll take a look around. Can you get along without me for a while?"

"Sure. These jugheads won't stray," Mitch said.

IT WAS Jake's way to be furtive about a thing like this. So he told Mitch nothing of his intentions and rode out the head of the draw instead of taking the much shorter way along the river. Once out of Mitch's sight, he kicked the mule to a faster trot and began a wide circle that finally brought him back to the river a good mile above the foot of the draw. He started down toward it with the mule at a slow walk, as though riding aimlessly.

Donovan wasn't in sight and Jake made two long casts over toward the river-bank without picking up any tracks, which meant that Donovan hadn't come this far. That in itself struck the wolfer as being queer, as indicating that Donovan wasn't on his way up the river as it had seemed when he and Mitch sighted the man.

He was abreast a half-acre grove of cottonwoods when he abruptly came on fresh sign and knew it to be Donovan's. The sign lined out straight for the trees, which grew clear to the river's edge. Jake noted that but drifted on past the cottonwoods, still holding the mule to that indolent walk. Anyone watching him would have thought that he was riding quite aimlessly.

He continued on and, crossing the foot of the draw, looked up and saw Mitch where he had left him and waved. He went on beyond the lower ridge and around a gradual

bend of the river. When he had gone far enough so that he could see nothing but the opposite bank of the bend upstream, he kicked the mule to a run and headed for the river, not caring that it was so deep here that the mule would have to swim. He was in a hurry.

He took a wetting to his waist before reaching the far bank, all the while thinking back on what he knew of this section of the badlands he was heading into. Once across the river, he swung the mule sharply downstream. He covered a quarter-mile at a hard run, still well out of sight of anyone who might be watching above the bend.

Finally he struck a high-walled wash and turned away from the river, still running the mule. This wash lifted sharply and at its head opened out onto a wide wind swept flat. He held the mule to a fast trot all the way across the flat and then, in the hills beyond it, swung sharply west, up-river.

Forty minutes later, after a series of swings that took him much deeper into the hills, he stopped the badly-blown mule and walked up to the crest of a low rise. Just short of the crest he went to hands and knees and crawled the last five yards. He picked out a low-growing cedar, crawled in behind it and looked over into a shallow coulee.

Along the bottom of the coulee ran the definite line of a trail, lighter in shade than the surrounding ground. Jake spent a good five minutes studying the trail above, where it lifted out of the coulee. He was finally satisfied that no dark markings showed on the trail. To him this meant that no one had traveled it for the past several days.

He crawled back down the slope and again took to the saddle, this time riding leisurely only a quarter-mile. He stopped the mule again in a stunted clump of yellow-pine, from this point looking down and out across a stretch of ground he knew the trail crossed.

Ten minutes later he saw Caleb Donovan top the lip of a wash a good quarter-mile below. And for the three minutes Donovan was in sight he considered which of several choices to take, once muttering aloud, "Now why the hell didn't I let Lockwood in on it?"

His discovery had him excited. Here, to Jake, was proof of what Sherill suspected. Donovan was on his way to the hill-ranch, which meant that he must be the man who

had gone up to see Ed Stedman two afternoons ago. It was important that Sherill should know about this. But wasn't it even more important that Sherill should know why Donovan was riding up here today? The Major had obviously seen the horses. What was he going to do about having lost them?

Jake carefully considered the time involved. It would take him at least two hours to get in to Whitewater. Supposing he missed Sherill? Even if he found him, it was a good six-hour ride back up to Ed Stedman's layout. And in that length of time Donovan might already have started his move, if he was to make one.

He had to go on, Jake decided, get up there and watch the layout and see what happened. Only when he knew what was to happen should he see Sherill. No sooner was the decision made than he was astride the mule again and heading up-country.

Not once in the next three hours was he within sight of the trail Donovan traveled. He made good time, knowing these hills. He was on the ridge above the layout when Donovan rode in a little after four o'clock.

It was cold and gray and the wind whipped down across the meadow rippling the tall grass so that it looked like a choppy lake. Jake shivered against the still-damp chill of the buckskin. But what was going on below soon made him forget how uncomfortable he was.

Within two minutes of Donovan's arrival, several men had appeared from the bunkhouse and from the corrals Ed Stedman and Purdy were the only ones Jake knew by name, although three of the others were familiar to him. Ed and Donovan were the center of the group that stood by the bunkhouse door out of the wind.

It didn't take long, whatever they decided. In fact, the group broke up before Jake had read their intentions, three men going to the small corral to saddle horses, Ed and Donovan crossing to the small cabin to reappear almost at once, carrying carbines.

Jake got out of there then, climbing higher along the ridge and several minutes later taking a last look down at the layout. By that time all eleven men were mounted and heading for the trail. Donovan and Ed were in the lead, their horses at a fast trot.

They're in one hell of a hurry, Jake told

himself. Then he suddenly realized what this meant to him. All the men down there were riding fresh horses, even Donovan. And he, Jake, was riding an animal that had already seen a lot of hard work today. All at once he was afraid. The fear came when he saw that they might travel the distance to the river faster than he could.

He dropped to the far side of the ridge and pushed on recklessly and fast, trying to think of ways of saving time, deciding finally that the trail was the quickest and easiest way out of here. So he covered the next two miles as fast as the mule would go. Then he dropped down into the trail. He knew that they would probably see his sign. But it occurred to him that this might work to his advantage, that it might slow them if they discovered someone besides Donovan had used the trail today.

Over the next hour and a half he punished the mule without mercy, much as he hated it. Several times he reined in at high points along the trail and looked back. While it was still light, he didn't once sight the men who were following him and with the dusk his hopes lifted a little.

It was long after dark when he finally reached the river and waded the mule across to the cottonwood clump above the draw. He pushed on down-river, a fast jog the best he could get out of the mule.

He turned into the foot of the draw and bawled, "Lockwood!" reining his animal to a stop, listening for an answer.

No voice answered him over the gusty whine of the wind. He was worried as he realized there was probably not time enough to ride to the head of the draw and find Lockwood.

So he rode across until he came upon a small bunch of horses and started them up the draw.

He came to a single animal, pushed him on ahead of him.

He had made three of those back-and-forth swings across the draw, gathering horses and working them deeper between the ridges, when a sound toward the river stopped him.

He sat listening, wondering what it was he had heard. Then warily, he drew his Navy Colt and swung aground.

Hardly had his moccasins touched the grass when a gun's muffled blast rode down

from the head of the draw. The echoes of a second and a third shot were whipped away by the gusty wind. Then he heard the slow-rising mutter of hoof-falls and knew that the horses were running toward him, away from the shots.

He wheeled and peered off into the darkness in the direction of that first sound. All at once a high shape, indistinct as yet, drifted in toward him. A moment later he saw that it was a rider.

He called out sharply, "This is Jake!" lifting his gun.

He saw the rider wheel quickly away. He lined the Colt and fired, immediately running for his mule. Astride, he swung the mule out after the rider. The animal had



taken only half a dozen strides when she suddenly shied violently aside.

Jake reined in, seeing a vague shape lying on the grass. He got down again and walked over to it, gun held ready. A man lay there. Bending close, Jake saw nothing familiar in the blurred make-up of the features.

Several horses pounded past as he was going to the saddle again. From up the draw came a rising thunder of hooves now and in his rage Jake lifted the Colt and emptied it into the air, hoping to turn the herd back. Then the guns above spoke once more and he knew there was nothing he could do.

He ran the mule across to the foot of the east ridge, reloading the Colt. He was rocking shut the loading-gate when he briefly glimpsed a rider trotting past. He raked the

mule's flanks and brought the rider into sight again, having his quick look at the man's shape and knowing it was neither Sherill nor Lockwood.

He lined the Colt and threw three swift shots, gaining on the rider. He was close behind when the man's shape swayed and toppled from the saddle, the horse wheeling off out of sight. Jake reined in then, listening to the horses running past, a cold and baffled fury holding him helpless.

Out beyond him someone shouted, "Chris! That you?"

Jake headed toward the voice, gun held ready. Over all the racket of the wind and the running horses he finally answered, "Over here," hoping to toll this man in to him.

Hardly had his voice died out when a gun blasted at him sharply to his left. He swung that way, firing at the wink of gun-flame. Then he heard a horse pounding away and knew that he had missed and couldn't follow.

It was over quickly as it had started, the sounds of the running animals dying out toward the river. Jake tried to run the worn-out mule down there. But now the animal was completely played out, hardly moving under gouge of Jake's sore heels.

Then Jake heard the remote rolling echo of shots striking in out of the east. The line-shack was off there and at once he was afraid of what he would find as he headed the mule for the ridge.

JIM SHERILL rode off the windy west ridge into the draw as the day's gray shadows were thinning with the early dusk. He had forgotten the passage of time before the somber run of his thoughts and now he realized that it had been several hours since he had left Whitewater. He couldn't remember traveling the road or even turning off to come across here to see Mitch and Jake.

He saw Mitch cross the creek and ride toward him and in the minute before Mitch came up to him he tried to collect his thoughts, to shut from his mind the bleak ponderings that had been with him since seeing Fred Spence.

"How'd it go?" he asked as Mitch joined him.

"Easy," was Mitch's reply. "These nags like it here."

"Where's Jake?"

"Been gone since noon. Said he was havin' a look around." Mitch had noticed the lifeless quality in Sherill's voice and was wondering at it as he added, "He must've decided there wasn't enough to keep us both busy. And there wasn't."

"Let's eat," Sherill said then, and reined away.

"Do we just leave 'em?"

"Why not?"

Mitch was willing, for he was hungry and had several times this afternoon dozed in the saddle. So now he fell in alongside Sherill and they started up along the east ridge.

What if something does happen? Sherill asked himself. Briefly, he debated sending Mitch on alone to the line-shack and staying here himself to watch the herd. But then he remembered that the crew hadn't tried to help Purdy last night and that Ed Stedman was away. Without a leader the crew would stay put. Furthermore, he had run a good bluff last night and they might still think that he was one of them. Finally, Jake Henry wouldn't be off somewhere prowling around on his own if he thought the herd wasn't safe.

Once more the things he had learned in Whitewater today took possession of his thoughts and he and Mitch rode the half-mile to the line-shack in silence.

They turned their horses into the small corral with barely enough light left to find the grain-bucket in the lean-to. They were wordless as Mitch got a fire going in the small shack's hogback stove. Sherill opened another can of tomatoes and added it to the stew in the dutch-oven that Jake had cooked last night, telling Mitch:

"Tomorrow we eat better. I'll pack some grub out from town."

"We could always butcher one of those Anchor steers," Mitch said, grinning.

His hunch that something was wrong strengthened when Sherill let this remark pass. In the light of the candle he saw the tight set of Sherill's face and knew that something beyond tiredness was wrong with the man. He made one more attempt to stir Sherill from his moody silence before they ate. But his levity made no impression and he couldn't even be sure that Sherill heard him.

Finished with the meal, Mitch said, "I'd better get back out there."

"I'm taking the first turn," Sherill told him. "You get some sleep."

Mitch was about to protest when Sherill went on. "This is going to be a long haul, Mitch. It'll be another ninety days before I can sell. Stay with me a week and I'll be set to do it on my own. Before you leave, the best gelding in the bunch is yours."

"Hunh-uh," Mitch said at once. "I got all I ever wanted out of this last night. Watchin' you make suckers out of that pack o' curly wolves. And if it's all the same to you I'll stick the whole ninety days."

Sherill gave him an odd look. "Then what?"

Mitch lifted his heavy shoulders in a spare shrug. "I'll think about that when it comes along, *amigo*."

Sherill briefly considered that use of the Spanish word. There was something he wanted to know about Mitch and he said finally, "I run a few cattle down on the Yellowstone. The layout's forty miles from anywhere. Would that be too far south for you to hang your hat as long as you want to stay?"

"No. Sounds just about the right distance from Arizona," Mitch drawled with surprising candor.

Sherill nodded, now knowing all he wanted to about Mitch. "I boarded up the place when I left and ran my beef in with a neighbor's," he said. "So there may be some work gettin' started again. There'll be only the two of us to begin with."

"When you left the place you weren't countin' on comin' back?" Mitch asked.

By the sober way Sherill shook his head, Mitch was warned to pursue this line no further.

"Fair enough," he said. "Work's never hurt me yet."

That was the end of their talk and shortly Mitch finished his smoke and spread his blanket in one corner and turned in. It wasn't long before Sherill blew out the candle and went outside. For the few minutes before he dropped off to sleep, Mitch listened to Sherill restlessly pacing back and forth beyond the door, knowing that something was worrying the big man. Mitch's last waking thought was a wish that he could help Sherill with whatever had gone wrong.

No one could have helped Sherill just then. His thoughts had been a monotonous merry-go-round ever since leaving the sheriff in Whitewater this afternoon. He would look back upon his visit to the Lovelaces a year ago and all too clearly remember how desirable Ruth had been during that carefree week in Hannibal. He would look a year further into the past, to the late summer when he had first met Ruth in Cheyenne at the home of her uncle, a cattle-buyer. At first sight of her there had been the conviction that she was the one girl he wanted.

Then there were his memories of the old days with Ned. He would never again smell the scorched hide and the dust of a roundup, hear the bawling of cattle or the quick hoof-drum of a running horse, or look out from some mountain pass across half a hundred miles of country without being reminded in some small way of Ned.

He stood there now, leaning against the corner of the cabin, bareheaded and facing the chill bite of the wind, lost in the bare beginnings of an understanding of how all this had happened. He could see the weakness and insincerity in Ruth now where before he had been blind to her shortcomings. He would be able to forget her, he knew, although his pride was deeply hurt. But Ned was something different. He had long been aware of Ned's quirks and had understood them with never a thought that they could harm him directly.

He was, he decided, too tolerant of the faults in people he really cared for. Yet against his wrong judgment of Ruth and Ned he could weigh his right instincts toward others who had proved out. *Mitch, for instance*, was his involuntary thought, *and Jean Ruick*. Little as he knew Mitch, he was sure of his judgment in having trusted the man. Jean, of whom he knew even less, he couldn't picture as ever being deceitful or inconstant. Beneath her quick responsiveness and changing moods lay a bedrock of intelligence, of strong character. It showed in her face, he had seen it even in the sure and graceful way she carried herself. Now that he thought of it, Ruth was vacillating and her beauty was shallow because there was little depth to her. She rarely put her thoughts to anything beyond fashionable nonsense. George Lovelace was perhaps the best gauge in understanding Ruth, and he

squirmed at the possibilities there, wondering at never having seen certain obvious likenesses between father and daughter.

Quite suddenly now some of the tension eased from his nerves and the rancor in him subsided to the point where he was once again aware of his bone-deep tiredness. He yawned, stretched his long frame and stepped back out of the wind, for the first time today really wanting to sleep and feeling irritated that he couldn't. He was reaching for the shack's flimsy door when the sharp *crack* of a rifle rode down the wind.

At the same instant a splinter flew from the face of the door close to his hand and from inside the shack came the hollow banging of the stovepipe falling to the floor. Hard on the heels of that sound came the brittle explosion of a second shot. And over in the corral a horse snorted and began wildly pounding around the enclosure.

Sherill lunged through the door, called, "Mitch!" and ran for the corner where he had thrown his blankets. He snatched up his shell-belt from his blanket and was swinging it around his waist as Mitch ran out the door carrying his carbine.

A deafening clang smote the restless silence and suddenly the stove toppled over, the lids rolling off and a shower of hot coals cascading across the floor. Sherill gathered all the blankets and ran for the door as the floor burst into flames.

Off in the west, in the direction of the draw, guns were sounding now. Another shot came from riverward, closer this time. Over in the corral Mitch was deliberately cursing.

Sherill ran to the corral and found Mitch standing by his horse. The horse was down, motionless, and from the far side of the enclosure came the shrill neighing of Sherill's bay and the hollow thudding of his hooves striking the poles.

Mitch cursed again, said, "He got 'em both." A moment later he lifted the carbine and fired. By the flickering light from the flames leaping before the shack's window Sherill saw a vague shape at the far side of the corral melt groundward. He drew his Colt and walked over there and found the bay shot through chest and head.

Now the rifle beyond the corral sent its deliberate explosions ripping in out of the darkness. Sherill caught the whisper of

one bullet passing close to him and ran back to Mitch, pulling him down so that they lay behind the lowest grounded pole of the enclosure.

The shots broke off, began again a few seconds later from a different quarter. The shack's window jangled apart suddenly and they could hear other bullets ripping through the thin pine slabbing of the walls. The fire was spreading to the roof and shortly they were lying in a strong light, feeling exposed and helpless.

Then, from far off in the direction of the draw, the muted echoes of more shots faintly reached them and Mitch swore time and again, saying finally, "There's last night's work shot to hell!"

The wind was making a huge torch of the shack, the light spreading further outward beyond the corral. Sherill lay looking in the direction from which the shots had come. The rifle out there was silent now.

He saw something move against the curtain of blackness off there and said quietly, "Let's have the Winchester, Mitch," reaching back for it.

He laid the weapon against his cheek and looked along the sights, plain in this light, at the indistinct shape out there. He slowly squeezed the trigger.

The rifle's sharp explosion was muted by the wind and the roar of the flames. He saw the shadow out there move and then move faster.

Abruptly he could hear the quick drumming of hooves.

A horse and a hunched over rider raced in on the corral. He brought the carbine around. But now a bend in the corral's bottom pole suddenly blocked his view and he hugged the ground, saying sharply, "Watch it!"

He had one brief glimpse of that pony, now riderless, running past fifty yards out from the corral. And alongside him Mitch drawled, "Bull's-eye!"

Much later, after the fire had burned out and they could risk it, they walked out there and found Ed Stedman, dead.

VI

AFTER the dishes were out of the way that night, Jean carried the lamp on into the living room, lit the second one on

the center table and still found the room quite cheerless. The wind was making her restless and now she went out to the porch-corner and carried in some rounds of pine and laid a fire on the wide hearth. When the blaze had caught, the room seemed a little brighter. Still, she was dissatisfied and stood for several moments looking around with a critical eye, wondering if in white-kalsomining the mud-chinking between the logs she could relieve the room's somberness. Except for the square rosewood piano slanted across one front corner, and the small table and slender chair her mother had brought from England as a girl, this was a man's room with many strong reminders of her father. A pair of deer antlers hung on the broad stone chimney above the fireplace and crossed below it were her father's carbine and the sword he had worn at Antietam. For the most part the furniture was heavy and durable, the chairs rawhide-backed. The bright Indian blankets and the red-checked calico curtains were the only splashes of color.

I'll never change it, she decided finally out of loyalty to her father. Her mind made up, she went to her room to get her new maroon-plaid dress. Back again, she sat on the couch facing the fire and started to baste in the hem of the dress.

The wind laid its howling echoes around the eaves to heighten her nervousness and she wondered about asking the Major to close the shutters on the north window.

She had laid her sewing aside, about to go to his room, when she remembered that he hadn't been around this afternoon when she and Brick returned from town. She had told Brick that she wanted to see him when he came in. Brick wouldn't forget a thing like that, which meant that Donovan was still away somewhere.

So she went back to work at the dress, only mildly curious as to what was keeping Caleb Donovan out so long after dark. She tried not to think of him now, for her mind was exhausted from the day-long effort at reasoning out some explanation for his strange absences and for Sherill's strong hint about him yesterday.

She had been discreet in what she had said to Angus Palmer at the Cattlemen's Association office this morning. Yes, he could put a range detective to work for her immedi-

ately, any day she named. But what did she want investigated? She had balked there, afraid that her suspicions were too groundless to talk over with a comparative stranger. So she had told Palmer that she would probably be calling on him again shortly.

Then on the way home Brick had talked her into seeing Sherill and having a talk with him before she decided anything about Donovan.

She was thinking back on all this when distant gunshots sounded muffled and faint over the whine of the wind. She sat listening, at first thinking she was mistaken. Then the sound came again, stronger as the wind momentarily died.

She hurried out into the kitchen and opened its north-facing door and she was standing there, hearing a lift in the tempo of the firing, when someone ran past this end of the house and out toward the barn-lot.

Hurrying back to the living room, she threw a coat about her shoulders and was crossing to the front door when Brick's broken step sounded on the porch and the door opened.

"Something's goin' on down toward the river," he announced without preliminary. "Phil and Joe just left to see what they could find out. Now stay here and don't fret about it."

He was closing the door when she said, "Brick." Then, when he opened it again: "Could Sherill be in trouble?"

"Can't tell," he answered impatiently. "Let you know the first thing I hear." And he went out.

She stood listening, hearing nothing now but the whining of the wind. She sat down once more and picked up her needlework. Minutes later, when she found her stitches running two inches out of line, she laid the dress aside and went out into the kitchen and poured herself a cup of coffee.

In that moment was born her first awareness of her real feelings toward Jim Sherill. Suddenly she realized that she was quite miserable and afraid, that her imagining of what could have happened to Sherill was the one thing responsible for that emotion. The intensity of her feelings shocked her at first, then filled her with a glowing warmth until, admitting that she cared deeply for Sherill, she was proud and unashamed.

This was a new experience for her, this intense interest in a man so different from her last-remembered girlhood romance. She tried to shut out the fear of what might now be happening and to think of Sherill as she had seen him today and yesterday. For several minutes she quieted her restlessness and worry in that way.

THE slamming of a door at the far end of the house jarred her thoughts rudely back to the moment as she realized that the Major had just come in. She put the cup down and started into the living room, thinking he might know the meaning of those shots.

Halfway across the living room, a sound coming from the office wing stopped her. She stood listening and heard it again. Someone was whistling. She told herself, *It's someone else*, for never since Caleb Donovan had come to live here had she heard him whistle a note or give anything but his spare smile as an indication of light-heartedness.

Yet the next moment she heard his door open and recognized his heavy tread coming along the short hallway. He was still whistling, softly, tunelessly.

He came on into the room, saw her and stopped. His heavy face was patterned with a broad, unnatural smile and he swayed a little as he stood there.

Then he was saying, quite courteously, "Good evening, Jean. Brick said you wanted to see me." He spoke in a deliberate way, more slowly than usual and slurring his words.

She said, "Yes. Sit down, won't you?" and watched his unsteadiness as he came over and took a chair. She knew then that he had been drinking.

She laid her dress across the back of the couch and sat down. She was about to speak when a step, Brick's, sounded on the porch and the door opened and the old cook came in.

Brick Chase gave the Major a long look, then glanced at Jean. "Need me?" he bluntly asked.

Jean was watching Caleb Donovan. "I don't think so, Brick."

"Why not?" Donovan asked, still smiling. "Have a chair, Brick."

He pulled back his coat and ran a hand across his vest, having to make two tries for

the pocket before thrusting his thumb in it and taking out one of his quill toothpicks. His eyes were heavy-lidded and he seemed to keep them open with difficulty as he tilted his head back and stared at Jean, saying, "Why not have Brick sit in on this? You two've been whispering around together for days now. So why don't both of you put me on the carpet?"

"Major, we'd better wait until tomorrow to talk about this," Jean said, more amused than angry at his insolence. She had never known that Caleb Donovan was a drinking man. She could even catch the odor of whiskey in the room now.

"Wait? Why wait?" Donovan wanted to know. "You've got something on your mind. Get it off."

"You've been drinkin', Major," Brick put in.

Donovan's glance swiveled around and his smile slowly faded. "Who wouldn't with you two always watching me? Sure, I've been in to town and I've had a few." He looked back at Jean. "You'd like me to quit, wouldn't you?"

"Let's don't talk about it now," Jean said quietly. But at last she was angry.

"Come on. Out with it, whatever it is," Donovan insisted.

Jean gave him a cool regard for a long moment, then said, "All right, I do have something to ask you. Where did you go the day you told me you were going to Sands?"

The Major seemed all at once more wide awake. "Who said I didn't go to Sands?"

"Ben. I went out for the mail that day and Ben asked about you. If he'd seen you on the Sands road that afternoon he would have mentioned it."

"So?" The Major's face hardened perceptibly. "I have to account to you for my time, do I?" He had worked the toothpick to the corner of his mouth and was talking around it.

"No, you know you don't," Jean said angrily. "But when you pretend to be off looking after my business and then do something else I have a right to an explanation."

"Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Yes," she said hotly. "Why did you lie last winter about being in Whitewater during the blizzard?"

Donovan's glance turned wary for an in-

stant before he caught himself. "Who says I wasn't in Whitewater?"

"Brick went to town the afternoon you got back. He didn't see your tracks in the snow."

"Can't a man ride from here to Whitewater without following the road?" Donovan coolly asked.

"No. The road's the shortest way. Besides, you'd run into fences nearer town."

The Major rose from the chair. He was quite sober and he was sneering openly now as he first looked at Brick, then at Jean. "So you're taking the word of a couple of broken-down old saddle tramps instead of mine, are you, Jean?"

"I'm not. I'm only asking for an explanation."

He stood looking down at her in such an intent way that she was almost afraid of him. Then she angrily thrust aside that small fear and felt nothing but contempt for him. And suddenly the wind's note rose to a gusty shriek and big drops of rain were beating at the window along the back of the room.

Donovan said with a show of dignity. "I'll pack my things and be out of here. Tonight."

Jean was caught unawares. Before she thought she said, "I don't want that. I simply want you to tell me I'm wrong in the things I've been thinking."

"And just what have you been thinking?"

"Many things. None of them things I want to think."

"I won't bother asking you to name them," he said quietly. "I'm leaving."

He turned away and she called, "Major, you can't—" She broke off abruptly, seeing that he was ignoring her.

They heard him go along the hallway and then his door slammed.

Brick said, "He looked guilty as hell."

"No, Brick. I hurt him terribly. I shouldn't have done it. What would Mother think of me?"

"I don't know," Brick Chase said quietly. "But John Ruick would be mighty proud of you, youngster."

She didn't look up as Brick left the room and softly closed the door.

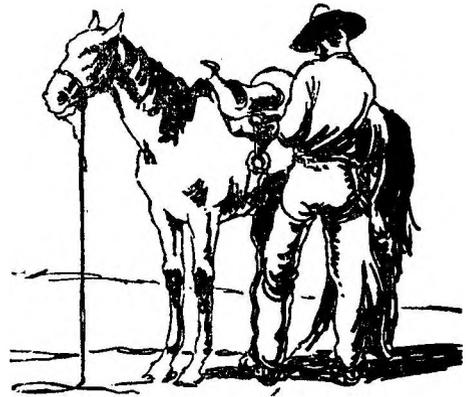
BBRICK was halfway across the yard, headed for the bunkhouse, when he heard the hoof-echo of a running horse

sounding across the wind, coming from the east. He turned and hobbled on around the house and down through the cottonwoods, ignoring the needlelike rain that wet him to the skin before he reached the corral.

He was raging inside, hating Donovan, wishing Jean had been more severe, wishing he had two good legs so that he could take care of himself as he had in the old days before a horse had crippled him.

He was waiting there at the corral when a rider pounded in out of the darkness, heading for the cabin. He yelled, "Phil!" and Phil Rust slid his pony to a stop and reined over to him.

"That you, Brick?" Rust was breathing heavily as he spoke down to the old cook. He didn't wait for an answer but went on hurriedly, "Lord, they've got damn' near every steer we own! The wind had drifted most of 'em down into that cut below the



new tank and all they had to do was head 'em for the river. Me and—"

"But the shots sounded north," Brick cut in.

"They was. Sherill got it, too. They cleaned him out. Me and Joe saw a blaze off there by the river, so we went that way first. The shack's gone. We found Sherill and one of his side-kicks and two dead ponies. Sherill got the jasper that shot up the shack, killed him."

"Who was he?"

"Never saw him before. But Sherill lost his horses, every damn' one! We'd no sooner got down and was lookin' over the fire than we heard this racket over east. So Joe stayed with the others and I rode across there in time to find 'em drivin' the last of

our critters into the river. They threw some lead at me and I got the hell out. A man can't do a thing on a night like this. It's blacker'n the inside of a boot, Brick."

"I know," Brick said tiredly, turning back toward the cabin. Water was running down his face and he said with no life in his voice, "Let's go on up and tell Jean."

"You think I could've done anything?" Rust asked, walking his horse alongside Brick.

"Course not," Brick told him. Then he saw the lantern swinging in behind the trees, the light coming toward them. He remembered Donovan and quietly told Rust, "You go on and break the news, Phil. I'm seein' the Major."

"Is this him?"

"Yeah. Better stay clear of him. He's on the prod."

Rust grunted something unintelligible, but nevertheless, eloquent of his poor opinion of Donovan, and reined off into the darkness. Brick stood there watching the swaying lantern, wet and miserable, shivering against the cold, seeing the pattern of what had happened tonight a little more clearly. Donovan had been away most of the day and this fact Brick now placed alongside Sherill's strong hint of yesterday about the man.

Caleb Donovan, wearing a ground-length slicker, almost bumped into Brick before he saw him and took a startled step to one side. Donovan lifted the lantern, scowled at Brick and then without a word went on past him and in on the shed near the corral gate. Brick followed.

The Major lugged his saddle from the shed, hung the lantern from a nail on the gate-post and went in for his horse. Brick came up to the gate and leaned against it, waiting, a cold and killing hatred gathering in him.

Presently Donovan led his saddled bay horse out through the gate. He was closing it when Brick drawled, "You're not so drunk now, Major. Or had I better make it 'Captain'?"

Donovan swung suddenly around and Brick thought he was ready to hit him. Then, typically, Donovan decided to ignore him and turned away.

Brick watched the man climb to his saddle, waited until he had settled himself and wrapped the slicker around his knees. Then: "You didn't mention the fire, Captain."

In the lantern's pale light, Donovan's glance came down and he asked, "What fire?"

"The line shack down by the river burn-in," Brick said. "If you came out from town, you were within a quarter-mile of it, Captain."

Donovan had looped the reins around his left arm and now thrust both hands inside the slicker as he looked down at Brick, his glance steady and a trifle amused.

He said, "You know I saw that fire, Brick."

"Sure I do." Brick was thrown a little off-guard by this bland admission but said stubbornly, "If you didn't start the blaze yourself, you know the man that did."

"Right again," Donovan drawled. "Ed Stedman picked that chore for himself."

"He picked the wrong one," Brick said over his strong surprise. "He's dead." Then rage rode in over his surprise, and he added, "So will you be soon, Captain."

Donovan smiled. There seemed to be a little sadness in his glance and in his tone as he said, "Not before you are, Brick."

A hollow explosion pounded the slicker out from his right thigh and the smoke that curled out of the hole in the slicker hung there a moment before the wind whipped it away.

With a brief glance down at Brick, Donovan lifted the reins and rode off into the darkness.

Brick bowed his head, leaning there against the gate-post below the lantern. All at once his bad leg buckled on him and he turned against the post, one arm wrapped around it and his other hand pressing his chest.

He let himself slide slowly down to his knees, moving his head from side to side as though not understanding something.

He lay down very quietly in the hoof-churned mud and didn't move. The only odd thing about the look of him was that his face was buried in a pool of water.

(To be concluded in the next SHORT STORIES)

KNOWING YOUR HEADINGS

By GIFF CHESHIRE



A Good River Pilot Knows His Headings as Intimately as a Man Knows His Way Around His Own House in the Dark

IT BEGAN the day Cap Zangwill was killed; yet, thinking about it later, Lew began to believe that it really started the day his brother Ollie was born. Ollie must have got the idea while they were bringing the Cap down the river,

his giant's frame stilled there on the bunk in his cabin on the *texas*, the mark above his right eye showing what had stilled it.

Maybe Ollie got the idea in that moment when, at the wheel of the steamboat *Swallow*, he heard the blast in the engine

HUMISTON

room when the cylinder head blew out, with steam and pieces of metal flying. Whichever it was, he had been ready to act by the time they were tied up in Portland and someone had come to take the Cap ashore for the last time.

Out of The Cascades and downbound, the *Swallow* had been misbehaving, and the Cap had gone below to consult with Joe Tranto, the engineer. Joe had been knocked out cold in the explosion, for they both had been there by the cross-compound engines. Aside from the Cap, the only damage had been this and a short scare to the passengers, and after emergency repairs, Ollie had brought the packet on home on one engine. He must have been recognizing his opportunity and planning his steps with every turn of the big stern wheel.

Coming down through the dull November afternoon, Lew had kept to the purser's office, glad of his duties. Upbound, the packet was always loaded with gold stampedeers heading for eastern Oregon and Idaho, and they expected the purser, in addition to the packet's regular clerical chores, to advise them at length on the best place for a man to try his luck and on his outfit and all the legal aspects of locating and filing a claim and growing rich from it.

Coming down, the situation was different only in detail. Some of them were bound only for Portland, and they wanted to know where a man could have a good time. Others meant to coast on down to San Francisco and there were endless questions about the big ships in the seaboard trade. This day they all had wanted to know about the explosion and the Cap and Joe Tranto, mainly.

Lew was glad of this pre-occupation, for he had liked the captain tremendously. Lew Vail, who was twenty-two, had been on the river less than two years. Because his brother Ollie was second mate and had stood in well with the captain and the line, and because Lew was the one of the Vail brothers who had had the benefits of extensive schooling, he had started as an officer, here in the purser's office. A big lad of slow gait and quiet, pleasant tongue, he filled his blue uniform splendidly, and his sober face, under the boat cap, was handsome.

When they had tied up in Portland and the passengers were discharged and cargo

operations were under way, Ollie came into the purser's office. Ollie was much slighter than Lew, and he had pulled gravity onto his lean, weathered face, but beneath it burned something with the intensity of a high fever.

"We'll be tied up tomorrow while we make repairs."

Lew knew what he was thinking. The day after that they would be on the run again, for heavy as the traffic was the company could not spare one of its biggest packets for an hour longer than it had to, and Pete Wilmot, the first mate, would likely be in permanent command.

And Ollie was thinking about Pete Wilmot's weakness and not of the fact that Pete's elevation to the captaincy would make himself the first mate instead of the second, and this preoccupation was what had fired him beneath the soberness demanded by the occasion.

"Yeah," Lew said. "I'd like to go to the Cap's funeral. He was tough, but he was all right."

"They'll want to keep the old girl in service." Ollie Vail was not even thinking about the funeral. He was thinking about the river and the coming promotions, and he was on fire with this.

LEW felt a moment's understanding. He shared Ollie's love of the river. Ollie had worked his way up from a deckhand and while doing so had made it possible for Lew to have schooling he himself had never had. "The higher you can start, the higher you can go," Ollie had always maintained. "It sure wouldn't hurt to have a Vail in the shore-side set-up." Ollie's every waking moment was given over to the problem of advancement.

Lew knew that he would never cease to be grateful to Ollie for the sacrifices that had made it possible for him to go to school. This made it impossible for him to tell Ollie that he just wanted to be on the river, like Ollie and Pete Wilmot and the Cap, that he wasn't particularly interested in the shore-side structure and desk routine. This made it out of the question to tell Ollie to be glad that he and Pete were stepping up a rung together, even if he couldn't be very sorry about the Cap, and not to get any sly ideas.

At this point he had only sensed what Ollie was about. Later, in Pete Wilmot's cabin where he liked to go in his idle hours, Lew saw how accurate he had been. Pete was stretched out on his bunk with his boots off, scratching one foot with the toes of the other, and he had waved Lew into a chair. Before they got to talking the door opened, and Ollie came in and he had a bottle of whiskey in his hand.

Ollie said, "I think we ought to have a drink to the Cap. We were his officers."

Pete sat up in the bunk, and Lew saw him lick his lips and felt a moment's sickness pass through him. He saw then what Ollie was up to, clearly and to its logical end, and he would have stopped it there but for all the things that lay between himself and Ollie.

Pete said, "Get some glasses, pup," and Lew got them. They were water tumblers, and Ollie poured them half full and handed them around. As he took his, Lew noticed that his long fingers were trembling, and there was a tightness around Ollie's narrowed eyes.

Ollie said, "Good sailing, skipper!" and because this was exactly the way to drink to the Cap, Lew felt a warmth that was almost like tears in his eyes. He took his gaze away from the hungriness in Pete Wilmot's face and sipped his own drink. He did not like raw whiskey and lacked the courage to dilute it with water, so he sucked it between his lips in a thin trickle.

Ollie put down his empty glass and left, and he did not take the bottle of whiskey, which was hardly touched. In this moment's clarity, Lew knew that Pete Wilmot saw the trap, too. Pete was eyeing the whiskey with a strangeness in his face. For an instant Lew decided that when he left he would take it, with a laugh, saying that Ollie was too tight-fisted to have forgotten it if he hadn't been upset about the Cap. Then he knew that he could not do this, for it would be too obvious. It would say to Pete, "Everybody knows you can't be trusted with it, Pete. Just like Ollie knows it. Just like he wants to get you started on one of your benders so you'll be filthy drunk when they decide who's going to take the Cap's place. So they'll promote him over your head."

Lew knew that Pete wanted him to go

now, so he left, hating what this thing had become. Pete had been sober for weeks on end, and now he wanted to be alone with that bottle. He wouldn't come out of his cabin until it was gone and he had slept it partly off. Then he would go ashore and wander up town, then come back with maybe four or five quarts of whiskey and shut himself in his cabin and not show up for four or five days. That was the way Pete Wilmot drank, with deadly seriousness, alone and trying to destroy whatever it was in him that brought on the black mood.

Anger rising, Lew went to Ollie's cabin. "I'm surprised you're not already ashore having more stripes sewed on your sleeves."

Ollie grinned. "I know it when I've got a chance to cut a corner, kid." He seemed to feel no embarrassment, no need to justify himself. Nobody had ever tried to help Ollie Vail, he would sometimes say. Plenty had tried to knife him. He had learned to punch when he saw an opening and to hell with the man it hit.

LEW knew that there was some basis for this. Competition for officerships and command was keen on the river. A lot of men won promotions who had not earned them through merit. He tried to think of how it had been when Ollie was a mere roustabout, with little promise of doing better for himself. He tried to remember how unselfishly Ollie had kept him in school. Ollie didn't care much for good times, but he did care about money in the bank. He could have had a lot more of it except for his kid brother.

Lew didn't say anything more. Ollie was doing the smart thing, according to his own lights. After all, maybe Pete Wilmot deserved it.

Everybody liked Pete Wilmot for just this irresponsibility. With more self-control, he would have been a master long ago. Back in his own cabin and sitting glumly on the bunk, Lew thought about it. Pete was one of those men whose natural skill and adeptness made everyone overlook his faults. He was ten years older than Ollie, and he had been promoted in spite of himself, simply because when sober he was a damned good river man and because he religiously respected the company rules against drinking on duty. Since nobody

ever saw him drunk, his periodic lapses were overlooked. Aboard and ashore.

The Cap had liked Pete and done much to protect him. They had been good friends. This is why it put a feeling close to nausea in Lew's stomach to think that Ollie had picked a moment when grief would be in Pete to pose his temptation.

AS WITH everyone who is popular, there were stories about Pete Wilmot. A tall, gaunt man, slow moving and soft speaking, quietly humorous and always thoughtful, he captured the interest of everybody, and people talked of him frequently in a way that could scarcely be called scandal-mongering.

Yet the only first-hand information Lew had about the man was that Pete's wife had left him a year before, and that there had been a little girl. This, though, was not the cause of Pete Wilmot's drinking but one of the consequences. Before then, Pete had gone on his benders at home. Lew had felt a secret sympathy for Mrs. Wilmot. She had not wanted the little girl to grow up watching those things. There must have been many a pleading before she decided it was hopeless.

Lew had never seen Mrs. Wilmot, but he knew something that Pete would not like for him to know. Once when Pete kept to his cabin unusually long, Lew had gone there. Pete had been asleep on the bunk, and the cabin had reeked with unwholesome fumes, and Lew had turned to leave again when he halted, staring.

There was a small locker fastened to the bulkhead at the foot of Pete's bunk, as in all the cabins, for storing personal gear. Now the small, hinged door was open, and Lew saw that there was a picture fastened to the back. A pretty woman with blonde hair, and with a little girl beside her who was the image of her mother. Both looked a little self-conscious and proud.

Pete Wilmot had kept this picture on the back of the locker door, so that it could be shut from sight whenever anybody else was in his cabin, so that it could be opened to him when he was alone, and particularly when he was stretched on his bunk.

There was one bleakly hopeless thing that he might do, Lew decided. When the bottle was empty, Pete would sleep sod-

denly. If Lew could catch him, just when he awakened with the fires of thirst burning hotly in every nerve, Pete might be persuaded out of it. Lew had little hope of this, but he awakened at dawn and went at once to Pete's cabin, but Pete was gone.

It was a gray, chill day, and presently rain began to tumble out of the overcast, splashing the wharf and the packet. The *Swallow* remained tied up, with mechanics working below on the engines. An hour later, as he watched from his cabin, Lew saw Pete come across the dock, a carpet-cloth valise in one hand but lurching because of more than its weight. It was worse than usual this time, and Pete had quenched his fires ashore, and it was again too late.

Lew was in the shore office that afternoon, working on the packet's paper, when Ollie came in to see Bill Seymour. He heard Seymour say, "Where's Pete?" and Ollie replied in the calmest way, "Busy."

"Well," Seymour said, "tell him he's taking the *Swallow* out in the morning, and I want him to be fit for it."

"Sure," Ollie said, as mildly as if there was no doubt that Pete would be.

Lew hated his brother at that moment, seeing the cold thoroughness of Ollie's plans. Dropping no hints, covering up for Pete just as the Cap had done, laying himself open in no way. Ollie knew that Pete would never speak of how he happened to get started this time. He knew that his kid brother would never speak of it. Objectively, Pete Wilmot was bringing about his own downfall, and who would question it if this also meant a windfall for Ollie Vail.

Finished with his clerical work, Lew went back aboard the packet, going immediately to Ollie's cabin.

"Why don't you go ahead and move into the Cap's cabin?" he asked harshly.

Ollie looked at him for a studious moment. "Listen, kid, I'm getting tired of your talk."

"You're going to hear more of it." All night Lew had wondered how to say this, and now all his carefully rehearsed words slipped from mind, and he was saying in a breathless rush, "You know I'm grateful for what you've done for me, Ollie. Anyhow, I can pay you back the cash. I meant to pay you back another way, but I know I can't do it, now. You figured you were

helping me to cut a big corner when you sent me to school, and probably that was right. We cut another when I signed on as an officer, without coming up from the deck force or from the engine room. I don't want it that way, Ollie. It's not making me a river man, even if I can wear a uniform and cat with the passengers and cuss out a deckhand if I feel like it. I want to learn the river, and I'm going to start on another packet as a deckhand, if I can."

He saw that it was even more of a slap to Ollie than he had expected. There were stains in Ollie's cheeks, but not from anger. Then Ollie made it easier for him. "A fine thing, when I've given you a start that might put you in Bill Seymour's job, someday!"

"Do you want me there for my sake or yours, Ollie?" He knew it was the cruelest thing he ever could have said, yet even as he spoke Lew knew that it had some basis of truth. Grimly, he said, "You've cut a lot of corners yourself, Ollie. Maybe you were long enough in each job to be a river man now, maybe not. Sure you've taken the *Swallow* up the river, and you've brought her down. But you always had Pete Wilmot and the Cap aboard. If you take these two jumps at one time, you'll be on your own, and are you sure you can cut it?"

Ollie was getting genuinely angry now. "I know damned well I can cut it." Yet there was more than ruffled temper. For years Ollie Vail had known that he had been his kid brother's hero. He knew that he was no longer that. He knew that he was despised. He did not like this but it was patent that his determination was not one whit diminished.

Pete Wilmot was still in his cabin when the *Swallow* slipped her lines the next morning and stood out into the Willamette. He had not emerged when later they were on the Columbia, heading eastward toward the great gorge in the Cascades. Lew Vail knew grimly that Ollie was going to have to earn every iota of his promotion. He would have to keep at the wheel the entire trip.

The deck force was buzzing now about Pete, and this was true down in the engine room. They all liked Pete Wilmot, and Lew doubted that one of these would talk out of turn. The trouble would come when

they were again in Portland and Ollie again took care of the master's port details. Bill Seymour would know the truth then. He would realize that his own tolerance of Pete had been imposed upon. He would be angry that Pete's long record for strict sobriety on duty had made it seem unnecessary to check to make personally sure that he was in shape for work. That would be Ollie's hour.

They nooned at The Cascades and received passengers and cargo coming down from the upper flights, portaging here around the fierce rapids. The rain fell hard all morning, but for a time at The Cascades it slackened. When the *Swallow* stood downriver again at two in the afternoon, it seemed to Lew that the overcast had dropped, cutting off the tips of the vaulting, green-conifered mountains. Cloud wisps floating nearly motionless across the faces of the cliffs, lending strangeness to the familiar panorama and the feeling of constriction. They would be lucky not to be slicing fog with the jackstaff by the time they reached the Willamette. Then his purser's duties claimed him and, a careful man, Lew gave them his full attention.

Two hours later Lew looked out across the river to see a definite milkiness in the air that masked the Washington shore, and he noticed by the throb of the engines that they were moving at slackened speed. When he emerged onto the deck he saw that neither shore was visible, that visibility held for only a few hundred feet on the channel ahead. At that moment the *Swallow's* whistle cut loose, on a sweet, rising chord, then abruptly ceased. In a couple of seconds the echo re-bounded, and Lew knew that this was telling Ollie, up in the wheelhouse, the distance to the nearest shore.

Lew climbed to the roof and stepped into the wheelhouse. Without taking his eyes off the limited channel ahead, Ollie said, "It just closed in like this. Damunit, I was sure hoping it'd hold off until we're out of the gut!" There was a tightness in his voice that was not usual to him.

Lew knew that they were in no danger, even as Ollie knew it. A good river pilot knew his headings as intimately as a man knows his way around his own house in the dark. Ollie had done this before and with ease, but now he had tightened up. Ollie

was not unmindful of the scores of passengers on the deck below or the extremely expensive packet for which he was solely responsible. Lew thought he knew what Ollie was missing. It was backing; the backing of a more seasoned head.

It grew worse, and Lew could not tell if they had passed Crown Point and Rooster Rock and emerged from the gorge. Once Ollie said, "Did you mean it about transferring to another boat, kid?" and Lew said, "I guess I did, Ollie." Then they were boring on through the fog.

Abruptly rain began to fall through the fog, needling the water, Lew could see Ollie growing tenser, and he said, "What if you can't find the Willamette? If we kept going we'd wind up in Astoria," and he heard Ollie swear under his breath.

"What're you trying to do?" Ollie snapped, and there was a hint of panic in his voice.

Lew regretted his efforts, then, and reassured himself with the thought that he hadn't really believed that Ollie could be panicked by this. He thought of the passengers whose safety was in Ollie's hands.

They raised a small, midchannel island then, and Ollie heeled her over so fast that Lew had difficulty in keeping his feet. That was bad, dangerously bad, and if this feeling kept building in Ollie it could only end in serious trouble.

Lew was thinking only of the passengers when he hurried back to the Texas. The door to Pete Wilmot's cabin was not locked, and Lew shoved it open. The close, reeking air of the cabin hit him as he stepped inside. Pete was stretched on his bunk, fully clad, snoring loudly, and there was a half-empty bottle of whiskey on the deck beside the bunk.

Lew shook him. "Pete! Pete! Wake up!" Caught after sleep and restrained from further drinking, Pete might be sober enough to be of some use. He kept shaking the man.

Pete stirred presently. "What d'you want?"

"Pete, there's a tulle fog, and Ollie's getting rattled. You'd better stand by!"

After a moment Pete grumbled. "To hell with it. Ollie wants to be captain. Let him be captain."

Lew's eyes fell on the gear locker at the

foot of the bunk, then. Without thinking, he said, "Pete, your wife and little girl're aboard. They come aboard at The Cascades."

Pete sat up, staring at him. Then he said flatly, "You're crazy."

"I'm not, Pete. I've never seen them, but Mrs. Wilmot has blonde hair, doesn't she? And a dimple in her left cheek? And she's kind of shy and proud, isn't she? And the little girl's just like her. I happened to hear somebody call her Mrs. Wilmot."

Pete's eyes gradually lost their look of incredulity. "It could be. She's got an uncle in Dalles City. They could've been up visiting him." He reached instinctively for the bottle.

"Cut it out!" Lew said harshly. "Come down to the galley and let's have some coffee."

Ten minutes later, when they stepped into the wheelhouse, Ollie only glanced over his shoulder. It was an awkward moment.

"You sober?" Ollie snapped at Pete.

"Did I ever come in here when I wasn't?"

Lew could see the tension running out of Ollie, and this was what he had hoped for. With his rival half-sober again and standing by, Ollie would not dare let himself go to pieces.

Ollie knew this, and it was Ollie who took her on down the Columbia, then up the Willamette to Portland. And Ollie's little game was not spoiled, for anybody coming within feet of Pete Wilmot would catch the reek of whiskey.

As the deckhands made her fast at the wharf, Ollie turned to look at Pete. He said, "Pete, I wish you'd kick me hard as you can make it. You've got a right to hate me, but I hope you'll keep me on as your first."

There was only a mild wonder in Pete Wilmot's voice. "I'm not fit for the job, boy. It's yours, and no hard feelings."

"Huh-uh." Ollie stared at him; first of all, he was a river man. "The minute you stepped in here, I started to get hold of myself. It wasn't that I didn't want you to see me scared. It was because I suddenly knew that everything was all right." He paused a moment, then said, "Brother, I want to practice a while yet before I take that onto my own shoulders."

"You got to smell it a long while to

really know the river," Pete agreed, and stepped out.

LEW did not follow him immediately. Nearly an hour had passed when he knocked at Pete's cabin and stepped into it at the mate's invitation. He was only half surprised that Pete was sitting quietly in a chair, and that the picture had come out of hiding and now was openly displayed on the standtable. The partly empty bottle of whiskey was where it had been before, and now Lew saw three full ones under the standtable. At first Lew could not tell if Pete had touched it after he came back.

Lew said, "Pete, I've got to admit that I lied to you. I saw that picture one day and I knew how to describe them. But they weren't aboard."

Pete nodded. "I wasn't sure. It's all right, kid." Then he added, "Do you know that's the first time I ever broke one right in the middle? They've always had to run themselves out before they'd let go of me."

"But why, Pete? Why do you always do it?"

"There's no reason. It's a disease."

Lew was angry then at Mrs. Wilmot. Pleading wasn't what Pete had needed, nor censure, nor shame. He had needed to be shown that Pete Wilmot was stronger than

anything that could be poured out of a bottle. Without thinking, Lew said, "Pete, you couldn't let the passengers down, could you? It's because of them that you broke it in the middle, isn't it?"

"I reckon so."

"But you did let your family down, didn't you? In another way they were strictly in your hands, too."

"I been thinking about that. I come back here because I needed a drink, but I ain't taken it, yet."

"Why don't you take the job, Pete? Bill Seymour doesn't know about this, and I don't think anybody's going to tell him. You've never been drunk on duty before, and Ollie tricked you into it. I've got a feeling that if you took the job and kept this thing busted, Mrs. Wilmot would be happy to have you back again. It's worth a try, isn't it?"

"I reckon it is, Lew." There was a hard tension in Pete Wilmot's homely face.

Like a sigh, Lew said, "All right. Now, do we have a drink on it?"

After a long moment, Pete grinned. "We do. Coffee, kid. Come on, let's you and me go down to the galley."

And Lew went with him for, like Ollie, he wanted above all else to be a real river man.

In Our Next Issue—**SHORT STORIES**—April 25th

"Diamond Dust"—a story of an off day that lasted eighteen years.

by

WILLIAM HEUMAN

"A Gunman's Mule"

Old man trouble dabbled a loop

CADDO CAMERON



BAD

JOSS

FOR

KAKA

By
ANDREW A. CAFFREY

AND

KAKAPO



CHAPTER I

SPEAKING OF FUN

NORTH ISLAND, New Zealand, wasn't the place you'd choose for soldiering if you had your choice for soldiering. But New Zealand was on the lifeline when the Allied cause was hard pressed for something resembling a lifeline. Twelve hundred miles to the west, in Australia, they said the Yanks were having fun; and the same, to a lesser extent, went for the G.I.s in Tasmania to the South. But in New Zealand it was hard to find, was fun, unless you worked at the thing and made your own.

Licut. "Brolly" Goodenough, blasé Yank, late of the Royal A. F., had managed to

times, turned out the hell-raising stuff whole sale. He could be relied upon for something more than just a feeble effort. At times his output was downright heroic. Well, hadn't the British dubbed him "Brolly" for that very reason? "Brolly" being their designation for the parachute and Brolly Goodenough being a boy who had hit the silk no fewer than four times during the Battle of London, in the defense of the English cousin. He was high with the English.

And Brolly Goodenough was also tiptop with the Fellow Yanks on that east-of-Lake-Taupo training field in central North Island. He was Mr. Big, even Mr. Extra Big, as far as the run-of-camp G.I.s were concerned. He was a guy with a war record at a time before Yank records began to ascend, when only a Kelly had written his name in the sky above Luzon, but before the O'Hara

Volcano . . . ? No Foreign Blow Torch Can Challenge the American Eagle in Flight



conjure up a certain amount of grief-dispelling joy for the boys. Truth is, Brolly, at

had knocked down six Japs in one frame, or the Bongs and McGuires and Boyingtons

had begun to run up the long scores. And it was good for an outfit to have a Brolly Goodenough on hand to boost sagging, dragging, easily-browned-off morale, 'cause you've got to have heroes. You've got to have somebody who makes men look up; and if you don't, the command will look down—and go that way.

Col. "Kaka" Kelly, the commanding officer, didn't like the cut of Brolly Goodenough's jib; and Kaka Kelly wouldn't look up to that cocky Yank under any condition, outfit morale or be damned! In the same official boat, and with like chip on shoulder, rode Major "Kakapo" Wade, the post adjutant. He couldn't see Brolly Goodenough a-tall, not for a minute. Brolly, in an idle moment, had given the two high gentlemen those two high names—Kaka and Kakapo. It seems a kaka is a New Zealand parrot, of olive-drab coloring, with gray and red, and so was Col. Kelly. Also, the kakapo is definitely of the parrot family, but does not fly. Neither did Major Wade, beyond a few fluttering hours of airwork required each month in order that he might qualify for flying pay. Some thought that Brolly had done a masterly job in naming; and the commanding officer and adjutant knew about that. They kept Brolly Goodenough under the gun. They tried to keep at least one jump ahead of the fly guy. However, in the past, they had found themselves at least a mile behind.

Brolly was really a cheesed-off character. He had been too long in the Down Under, and far too long under Kaka and Kakapo. A training field is no place for a man who has already been where the big boys fought and died and there was no Kakas and Kakapos. Worst of all, this east-of-Lake Taupo establishment was absolute bottoms as training fields went. It was a post where they had and housed nothing hotter than Piper Cubs. They were training reconnaissance men for the day when MacArthur would start northward from island to island, for that time when brave-enough gents must drop these small Cub jobs in on limited beaches and cramped jungle clearings. But even when that day came, it wouldn't be for Lieut. Brolly Goodenough, he being listed as an instructor, a member of the permanent party, a guy due to stick, and he stuck. For a hotshot, hell-hootin' military

man, with wild ideas of his own, there's nothing quite so style-cramping and heart-breaking as that thing of being on the roster as "permanent party." Man, oh man, that word "permanent" can mean rooted, anchored, petrification, jail with the key thrown away.

Anyway, Brolly had tried everything under the sun in his effort to get over to Australia and aboard with the fighter groups making up there; and everything had failed. He knew it was because Col. Kaka Kelly and Adjutant Kakapo Wade had gone thumbs down on the business in hand. And why did they stand in his way? Was it because he was such a valuable instructor? Was it because he could not be easily replaced? Was it because they were so short-handed in good men? Not at all. It was simply because they didn't like the guy, didn't like the stuff he had pulled in the past, didn't like the stuff he was certain to unfold in the future, yet men are so perverse that these two official gents were determined to hold him on—though they knew damned well that something was bound to blow up right in their face and cause them to go boom!—right down on their well-rounded posteriors, as in the past.

IT WAS a quiet afternoon, and the Saturday lull was heavy on the post. All guys who had drawn passes were long-gone for town, and only those remained who were either surfeit with town or had other plans. Napier, fifty-odd miles away, could wear out a man's soldierly enthusiasms in no time, being a scant 20,000 in population. As for the Promised Land, Wellington and its 150,000, that and its 165-mile rail trip was the weekend prize won only by the in-right boys with the over-night tickets. Needless to say, Brolly Goodenough could not get an over-night Wellington bid past Adjutant Kakapo Wade's desk. Nor could Lieut. "Tex" Cooper, a guy called "Tex" because he hailed from up Oregon way and had associated with horses and cows.

Tex Cooper was sitting on his bunk doing a handy stint of housewifery sewing on a few missing buttons when Brolly Goodenough came down the long aisle and stood gazing down at him.

"Got any ideas beyond buttons, Long-horn?" asked Brolly hopefully.

"Go way, wicked devil," Tex said without glancing up from his domestic work. "Go far, far away. I'm clean, innocent, in right with Kaka and Kakapo, and I want to stay that way. Go way before I call the guard. You got any good ideas, Broolly, you heel?"

"Yeah," Broolly said, glancing over his shoulder toward the few other bunk-fatiguers in the long barracks. "I was just speaking with Tirua and Mokau over in the kitchen. They tell me that old Levu is in his shack making medicine, or what the hell it is that these natives do when they're pulling the mystery stuff."

OLD LEVU was either a native Maori or a Chinese, maybe some sort of a cross, with a bit of Hindu tossed in by way of irritating the heaven. He was head cook in officers' mess. As a rule he was very dour, not at all like the happy-go-lucky mess-boys, Tirua and Mokau. But the boys held the old one in something close to fear. They knew that old Levu had the powers—that he had what it takes to make either good or bad joss.

"The old wahoo is full of opium," Tex Cooper said. "I saw him this noon. Hell's bells, he's so badly snowed under that we'll have to call out the rotary plow, unless we want to eat the stuff Tirua and Mokau rack up."

As a rule, any army post goes to the devil over the weekend; and the cook on shift—black, white, brown, yellow or pink—is the first to go.

So this thing of old Levu betaking himself to the smelly confines of his own shack, and there holing up with either medicine-making or pipe-dreaming, was nothing new.

"But the boys say old Levu can make medicine," Broolly insisted. "You know—this dam' jungle voodoo stuff."

"Mebbe," Tex agreed, biting off an end of thread. "Any dam' ol' Indian or Chink can make medicine. Of course, in polite society, we call it poison, or murder. Wish you could see some of the old Siwash medicine men up my way, back in God's country. Hell's hinges, Broolly, they've been known to wipe out unfriendly villages. And all because of their drag with the Great Spirit and a few gallons of poisoned liquor. Say,

listen, what you leading up to, white boy? What you got in mind?"

Again, Broolly took a look at the other men in the barracks. Then he took a seat on the next bunk, grinned, and said, "Why can't we rig old Levu to make some bad medicine for Kaka and Kakapo? If the old boy knows his joss maybe we can get rid of those gents for a spell. Those characters cramp my royal-American style, and with them off the post you and I might be able to get back on the beam."

"No catchum," Tex Cooper said. "What do you want old Levu to cook up for 'em—a dirk in the dark or a slight case of poison?"

"Use your head, Longhorn. Nothing so definite," Broolly said. "Look, it's this way: both Kaka and Kakapo are pretty damned fat and well past forty. They both flew swivel chairs in that other war. You remember the war—wooden ships and iron men? Well, anyway, they've had plenty soft army years of easy living and too much Mex cooking. They're all shot to hell, no matter if the Medical Corps does allow 'em to pass their physicals."

"So what? asked he," said Tex, getting a slight idea of what was coming. "Go ahead."

"They're both subject to what we medical men call a gouty condition. Now you take all these fat old guys and gals here in the islands, they're gouty, too. That's why they have to carry 'em around in pole chairs. Well, old Levu, being a long-time cook, must know what it takes to cure gout. And he must also have some damned good ideas what brings on gout. So there you are. Get the old boy to make his very worst bad joss—even if he has to serve it at meals—and bring back the misery to old Kaka and Kakapo."

"IT WON'T take much bringing," Tex said. "I get it pretty straight that old Kaka was laid up with some sort of heavy leg when he was confined to his quarters for two or three days last week. . . ."

"You know, Broolly the Brute, you're really a genius, except for one thing. You don't consider results at the same time you plan cause and effect. All you'll do is make that mean pair meaner."

"Sure," Broolly agreed, "but they won't be

here to bother us. They'll hotfoot it for Rotorua."

"Oh, you silly So-and-so!" Tex Cooper wailed. "You'd hand those run down heels a swell layoff at Rotorua, just what they'd give a right arm to win. Hey, why don't we get the gout and get sent up there ourselves? You ever think of that?" Rotorua, the great watering place, was the site of the New Zealand government sanatorium, perhaps the finest of its kind west of Hot Springs or east of Baden-Baden, and, as to be expected, it was now all loused up by fortunate well-dressed U. S. officers from all over Down Under. They say the brass even asked unit and divisional chaplains to pray for them—for gout and such—so they'd be sent to Rotorua.

"Think of that? Forget that," Brolly said. "You and I, Longhorn, have some air work to do. Remember, I'm still thinking for us."

"That's what I was afraid of," Tex Cooper said.

CHAPTER II

GOOD JOSS AND BAD

TIRUA and Mokau were still in camp. They had to be on the job when old Levu was indisposed behind closed doors, either making good joss—as they said—or hitting the dream pipe—as Tex claimed. Anyway, the native boys seldom went over the fence until after sundown, then only to visit the small, close-at-hand villages, such as Moana, Tarawera or Mohaka. When Brolly called them in, furnished the cigs, then outlined a plan roughly, Hirua and Mokau warmed to the idea. They would, for both boys had circulated with Brolly and Tex in the past. That is, they had flown out with the wild pair on fishing trips, and such, and they loved the queer medicine made by the Yank nuts. Of course, as to be expected, Tirua and Mokau couldn't fully savvy the why and wherefore of the operations, as turned out by Brolly and Tex, but there was always a laugh in it. And the native boys sure liked a good laugh.

On the other hand, neither Kaka Kelly nor Kakapo Wade were ever good for a real belly-shaking laugh, and the boys called them "big bel bel fellers live house

sing sing"—the fat men who lived at Officers' Club.

They said that old Levu had little or no use for Kaka and Kakapo, this due to the fact that the high brass were a bit too exacting. But, Tirua added, Levu had been cooking with the fat men's welfare in view. And it was with anti-gout purposes. It seems that Kaka and the medical colonel had talked things over with old Levu.

"Swell, just as I said," Brolly enthused. "See how she lines up, Longhorn? Old Levu's been making good medicine for the heels, and now, if he'll listen to reason, he can make a switch and reverse the doings—make some bad joss.

"Tirua, you ketchum makem bad joss?" Brolly then asked.

"Me two feller ketchum," the boy answered, laughing and including Kokau in the understanding. "Him feller grass belong chin makum good bad, all kind same, medicine,"—the old feller with the chin whiskers, old Levu, he could make the required medicine, good or bad. "Him feller Levu savvy number one feller belong sky."

"The hell he does!" said Brolly. "The hell you tell—old Levu's no sidekick of God, not the God I trade with. No siree."

So the two boys were dispatched to do a deal with old Levu. And when they reported back, they said the man with the chin whiskers can do, would do, but—cumshaw. "Ye olde squeeze," Tex said.

"Money talks," Brolly agreed, turning to Tex, "but why can't it pipe down, so far from pay day? How much, Kohau?"

"Ten Mex," said the boy. "Number one feller belong sky ketchum five. Old Levu ketchum five."

BROLLY pulled out a very fat billfold and produced an American ten. "Damn that old opium eater for a robber! But hop to it, boys. Get things rolling. You two boys wantum big bird ride like before too much when we go over soda water?"

The boys grinned and said they did, for Brolly had referred to the last time he and Tex had taken them via air over to fish in Hawke Bay, on the east coast, at "soda water," the sea.

"Him feller grass belong face want big f'og an' lezar?" Tirua then added. "Must have. No f'og an' lezar, no bad joss."

"Add that up, Longhorn," Brolly commanded. "You figure it out—'f'og an' lezar', come come, my man."

"Easy," Tex decided. "He wants a frog and some of these New Zealand lizards. How the hell do you think a real medicine man can work without frogs, snakes or lizards?"

"All right, we'll get him frogs and lizards," Brolly said. "Where do we get 'em?"

"That's no problem," Tex said. "I've seen plenty of lizards out in the bush, tree toads too."

Tirua grunted and shook his head. "No dam' good—so so little lezar an' bird toad," he made know. "Tuatara. Bigum tuatara an' Spephen Island f'og."

"Oh-oh," Tex said. "Old Hitum-the-pipe Levu wants to do it the hard way, the very hardest way."

"How come?" Brolly asked. "What's this tuatara thing?"

"You know what a tuatara lizard is," Tex reminded Brolly. "Remember we saw one in the zoo at Wellington? They're those big damned living fossil things. Don't you remember? Sure you do. They date way back with the dinosaur and three-day passes. They're about two feet long and look like old Kelly with a hangover."

"Oh, sure, sure, sure," Brolly recalled. "Didn't the guy say they only found them on one of the islands to the west of Wellington?"

"Now you're hitting on all one," Tex enthused. "Stephen Island is the place. About fifty or sixty miles off Wellington. And, as Tirua says, that's where you find Stephen Island frogs too. If I remember right, that guide in the zoo said it was the only place on this man's cockeyed world that those particular frogs are found."

"I never saw a particular frog," Brolly said, "and I'm not going to stand for any of those slimy devils getting high-hat now. We'll find our croakers right down here at the edge of Taupo."

"Nuh, Master Brooley," Tirua objected. "Levu say Spephen Island f'og. Makau an' me, me two feller, come from D'Urville Island, little bit long way from Stephen Island. Me two feller ketchum fat tuatara an' f'og, walk about strong (in a hurry)."

"That's right," Tex said. "D'Urville is

'a little bit long way' from this Stephen Island, about two miles south, as the penguin swims, as you'd know if you knew enough to look at a map now and then. But it's close to two hundred miles from here. She begins to look like a large order, Master Drooley Brooley. Maybe too big, eh?"

"Tush, my little man," Brolly said. "This thing arouses my adventurous American spirit. We'll get them there damned old daisies for the fair maiden—say nothing of a tuatara and a Stephen Island frog or two for good old Alma Mater Pipe-Hitting Leaping Levu. Now let's get organized. Tirau, what kind ground ketchum Stephen Island?"

Tirua reported that Stephen Island was very high land, about the size of the airfield upon which they were—a square mile. He said there were very few inhabitants—a few whites and even fewer Maoris—and only sheep running on the levels.

"Sheep?" Tex mused. "That's what we want to know. If those damned baas have been ruining that ground—say for the last few hundred years—well there'll be plenty of bare spots where a Cub can land." Mokau and Tirua, hearing that, and being such airfield experts, enthused and agreed with Tex. Maybe the boys had visions of going home in white-man style, via airplane.

"Let's see," Brolly speculated. "I think Kaka and the dog at heel went down to Wellington for the week-end. But Wasp is on the post. I heard him tell Major Seater that he was going to hole up and see if he couldn't shake off a cold. We'll see Wasp and make a problem of this. A strategic school operation planned to probe the feasibility of landing a Piper Cub on a hitherto unobserved offshore island."

"The problem of landing *two* Cubs," Tex corrected. "Don't forget that I want in on this. Remember who comes across with the last few yards of drive each time you fumble the ball on a third down, close to the goal line, with five seconds to go. But I doubt if you can cut the buck with Wasp. He's all right, a good John, but you're absolute anathema in official circles, even in Operations."

"Fancy words and higher education won't get you anything here, Longhorn," Brolly said. "Wasp thinks I'm the nuts. Anyway,

as staff instructors on this post we have a right to devise and execute flight-operations problems."

"That word 'execute,'" Tex said. "Don't use it here."

CHAPTER III

THE MAN SAID YES

COL. WASP, officer in charge of Operations, was reading in quarters when the knock came on his door—he lived in Officers' Club and had a door, leading into a private room. When Brolly and Tex Cooper walked in, Wasp made a quick grab for a Maori spear. He cradled it in his right arm and warned, "Remember I'm armed—and no fair, coming at me two to one. Can't you men lay off even for a quiet week-end?"

"Aw, you've got us wrong, sir," Brolly said. "Coop' here and myself are just co-operating, working for the school, trying to think hard and build up fine, exemplary operational results for our commanding officer. In other words, while Col. Kelly and his good adjutant are busy with their week-end drinking in Wellington we are here on the home post busy with our week-end thinking."

"I know I'm asking for it," Col. Wasp said. "But shoot."

Col. Wasp listened while Brolly explained and Tex Cooper, now and then, aided and abetted. Wasp was hardly older than the two exponents of offshore Problem A, Operation Bad Joss. What's more, Wasp, like Brolly Goodenough, had seen action in England, he having been with one of Uncle Sam's "observation" groups, in Britain and on the Continent, before and just after Hitler struck. And like Brolly, Wasp considered his present job as Operations officer as being very close to absolute zero. So he listened, and, now and again, he grinned. He even threw back his head and laughed. He also said, "You dizzy hellers," or "You'll ruin me yet," or "You feller belong coconut hut, and no damned fooling."

But in the end he said, "A logical proposition, gentlemen. We should know whether or not it is possible to land a Cub on a thousand-foot-high rock sticking up out of the Pacific. We have a right to know

whether sheep are able to graze off a landing strip for emergency usage. Yes, sir, this problem is in order. Now I realize that you men are entitled to your week-end rest, but due to the lack of flying personnel on this post, I must ask you to hold yourself in readiness for an operational flight. I'm going to detail two ships on this mission. For observers—now let's see—I think we'll need native guides. Tell you what—there are two expert native guides right here in the kitchen. Tirua and Mokau. They know that island. No argument, gentlemen. You'll be ready to rise and fly first thing in the morning.

"Now"—and Wasp had spread a map—"it scales about 180 miles to Stephen Island. You'll have to touch in and refuel, going and coming, at the emergency landing field near Marton, on the coast. And for the love of Pete, gentlemen, keep away from Wellington. Don't let that wicked city lead you astray. Please promise me you won't think to remember that you'd like to drop in there and jazz the hats off Col. Kelly and Adjutant Major Wade. Have I your promise?"

"You have, sir. Duty, sir, is our only purpose. Lips that touch Wellington shall never touch ours," Brolly promised.

"One thing more, lieutenant—lieutenants," Col. Wasp said, yea begged—"this time bring the ships back. Will you do that, just this once? There'll be the devil to pay if Col. Kelly has cause to regret that I detailed you gentlemen to Operation Questionable."

"Operation Bad Joss, sir," Brolly corrected. "And all we need is just average breaks and we'll make good. By the way, sir, you don't want a wee bit of gout, do you? Just enough to get a few weeks at Rotorua?"

"Not with the company you're intending to send there," Col. Wasp objected. "Well, good luck to you two—and me, too. Will you gentlemen get to hell out of my quarters?"

On the threshold, Tex Cooper hesitated and turned back. He asked, "You wouldn't want a tuatara for yourself, colonel?"

"Hell no! Go way," Wasp yelled. "A tuatara be damned!"

"How about a penguin—a nice little feller with a tux?"

"O'o'o'o, you nellers! You keep these ships out of the sea. This is what I'm afraid of. Hell's bells. I'm the guy you're going to set up for bad joss. Get out, get out, before I have a complete return of good common sense and call the whole thing off," Wasp warned. And the man's attitude showed that he was beginning to hear small inner voices which were telling him that he shouldn't do this, that, or the other thing—anything that gave flying freeway to either Brolly Goodenough or Tex Cooper.

AT MESS that Saturday evening, as to be expected, there was only one table of post officers, a mere baker's dozen. When Col. Wasp came in he handed slips of paper to both Brolly and Tex Cooper. They were Operations office clearance blanks to be presented either to the officer of the day or the acting sergeant of the guard, first thing in the morning. Without such slips, of course, the guard would not allow hangars to be opened or ships to be flown. Some of the other officers at the table sort of opened their eyes when Brolly and Tex received the Operations slips and said, "Thank you, sir."

For a moment, just as Col. Wasp was taking his place at the head of the table, old Levu the cook cracked the kitchen's swinging door just a head's width, and then stood there gazing out, maybe just by way of estimating the number to be fed, and the eyes above the goat beard in that old-parchment face were bright. No use talking, the old one was on the pipe. Half seated, Wasp seemed frozen by those Oriental eyes, eyes in a face that, hitherto, he had considered aged and benign, the face and eyes of old Levu the cook, the old one who turned out some pretty damned fine dishes. But now, with the talk of great ancient lizards and Stephen Island frogs and bad joss and Brolly Goodenough and Tex Cooper all mixed up in his brain, Col. Wasp wondered about those eyes. Maybe they weren't the eyes of an ordinary cook picked off the beach in Wellington by a mess officer in a hurry to get a new officers'-club mess into being.

Maybe—Wasp thought—all the male forebears of sweet Lucrezia Borgia were hidden, lurking and waiting, in the dim distances of time behind that goat beard

and those eyes that sparkled diamond-bright.

"Don't let it get you down, colonel," Brolly Goodenough whispered, as Wasp pulled his chair forward, at Brolly's right, and slowly reached for his napkin. "Levu's our old vo-de-o-do voodoo."

Under his breath, Wasp said, "After you men get back I'm going to find my food at the PX, or in one of the flight messes—for the next few days."

"Coward," Brolly said. "Don't you know the voodoo boys merely have the lizards and frogs for the back-room trance stuff? You didn't think that old Levu was going to feed them. Hey, just a shake! I'll see you at the PX, or at that enlisted-man's mess. But it's going to be fun. Yes, sir, I think we're going to do something big for science, medical science, and for mankind in general."

CHAPTER IV

THEY BRACKET A VOLCANO

SUNDAY morning was bright and clear. There was no set hour for breakfast, and the few officers were free to come in at any time and call upon old Levu for short-order service. That being the case, Brolly and Tex had no trouble when it came to separating Tirua and Mokau from their bus-boy and serving duties. Maybe the dishes would pile up, but the boys could wash down that pile as soon as they got back from Stephen Island. The two Piper Cubs so generously assigned by Col. Wasp were two of the best equipped on the post—No. 32 and No. 41. They were advance-training ships, each craft being fitted with the latest thing in radio; the sort of last-word equipment used for schooling-contact between men in the air and the tactical-practice groups in the bush and on the beaches—the boys with the walkie-talkie units. Wasp had provided these radio ships because he understood that the New Zealand Territorial Force had all outpost islands—such as Stephen—garrisoned against likely Jap invasion, hence such islands would be radar equipped, and incoming planes, even with Allied insignia, would be required to clear themselves via radio and ask for landing permit.

So, at eight o'clock, with a whoop and a holla and a yoicks-and-away, the two wild men put power to their small craft and got under way. With pick and shovel tucked away—for tuatara digging—Tirua rode behind Broolly; and Mokau with Tex. There's nothing really exciting about a Cub getting under way, but there was always a certain oomph in the way that pair held their ships close to the ground for the first few hundred yards of cross-field rush, then pulled the nose into the blue—just to see how far up that small engine could zoom a plane before old Mother Gravity began pulling it down. The officer of the day and his sergeant of the guard stood there on the deadline and just shook their heads. Watching from his quarters, Col. Wasp just observed it closely, cursed a bit under his breath, and saw to it that he saw nothing officially. For the next few hours, as Wasp fully realized, anything could happen on North Island, New Zealand, or slightly offshore to the west. Maybe a war would be won.

Almost directly on their course, some forty-odd miles southwest of the post, was the active volcano Ruapehu whose 9,175-foot crest was presently hiding itself under the smokes and vapors of active eruption. Ruapehu, North Island's best fireworks display, had been flashing its intermittent glow across the heavens during the past few weeks, and the press and radio news dispatches told all about the scores of Allied scientists who had assembled to observe the doings at Volcano House, the government observation post about halfway up the slope. As a rule Volcano House had been safe enough during other minor eruptions, but now there was some questions as to the advisability of the Allied big shots remaining there under the mighty fire-power of old Ruapehu.

Even during normal times, Ruapehu and the other volcanoes were out of bounds for Yank flying personnel—and Broolly Good-enough and Tex Cooper had seldom gone near them. That is, not while anybody was watching. But on this Sunday they were flying an Operations mission, and the course put that old 9,175-foot pile of lava-tossing hell right in their way. So they'd either have to be American cowards and give way for a volcano or else be brave Yanks and

stand up for the rights of all free men; and they weren't the men who'd let their old Uncle Sam down, not for any damned old foreign blow-torch that saw fit to challenge the U. S. eagle.

When they were within a few miles of the north slope, Broolly spoke Tex via radio-phonc. "Fly it to the right, my man," he ordered. "I'll go round to the left. Keep your eye—the good one—open for all enemies. Don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes in the smoke—and, Longhorn, be damned sure it's not the whites of my eyes or Tirua's. And keep that ship out of the crater."

They had 9,000 on the altimeters when they parted to go right and left. That being just about the elevation of old Ruapehu's fiery, smoke-belching crest, Broolly, on the windward east side soon lost sight of Tex. On the latter's leeward side of Ruapehu, the smokes and vapors were being blown down, and flying visibility was quickly limited to zero-minus. Anyway, when Broolly finally rounded the southern shoulder of the volcano, five minutes later, Tex Cooper was hard to find. Above the hamlet of Ohakune, down there where the railroad skirts the base of Ruapehu, he stopped to circle and wait.

"You ketchum other ship, Tirua?" he yelled over his shoulder to the native boy. Tirua sang back that he no ketchum, but he was all-eyes and still looking. Finally he yelled and began pointing down and to the northwest—far down and far to the northwest. Broolly followed the point, then spotted a crawling something that must be Tex Cooper's ship. It was way down in the valley of the Wanganui, with its slow-moving silhouette and shadow close together on the surface of that river. But soon it was coming up and getting a bit closer. And once more Broolly spoke via interplane.

"What you doin' down there, white child?" he asked, when Tex had acknowledged the contact. "You playin' bug-under-rug?"

"Man, that you should ask!" Tex answered, and there was just a bit of shake remaining in his voice. "Brother, that damn down-shoot, when we got in the smoke, sent me right into the ground. For a fact, feller, I was taxi-ing on the side of old

Ruapehu, and I didn't get any air—in me or under me—until I had 900 feet on the altimeter.”

“Longhorn, you're going to get hurt one of these fine days,” Brolly said. “You should be careful, Longhorn. First thing you know, Tirua and I won't take you along with us when we go out for fun. Some fun, eh kid?”

“T'heell with you and your fun, you heell! You take it to the right, sez you!” Tex recalled. “Dammit, why can't I remember that I'm out in bad company again. Take it to the right! Over.”

“Okay, Licut. Cooper,” Brolly acknowledged. “Carry on, my man. And don't forget to remember who's ranking heel here.”

CHAPTER V

SO THE MAJOR WENT AWAY

AFTER the two ships had touched in on the emergency field near Marton, Ranking Heel Brolly Goodenough led off for the eighty-five-mile over-water hop to small Stephen Island. It called for no great degree of navigation, for, at seven thousand, you had the North Island west coast always within distant hazy view, and before half the distance was covered the high headlands of large D'Urville Island was standing above the low fogs and mists that had not yet burnt off that part of the Pacific. All in all, it was such nice going that Brolly began to search the surrounding sea for some signs of Navy—any man's navy—for it was always nice to jazz and harass the guys belonging to the opposition branch. What's more, and better, the guys of the opposition branch would take a lot of abuse before they'd report an Air Forces man to Air Forces' brass hats. However, it was a dull Sunday morning, and Navy must have been ashore in Wellington and Nelson, for Stephen Island's thousand-foot-high pile of brush-grown rock came into easy view before anything of a surface nature showed up as a distraction. Soon, with his own radio flipped in, Tex Cooper could hear his ranking-heel mate trying to reach the ruling powers squatting on Stephen's high top; and, sure enough, the twang of a Down Under voice was asking, “what the devil do you bleedin' Yanks want way out here

where no decent cove would be found loose of his own free will?”

Tex heard Brolly explain that this was a scientific mission, top-drawer secret, and would they please put down some sort of a “T” of white rags or sheets or paper on the best landing spot. The Down Under voice warned that no plane had ever found a best landing spot on Stephen. However, the voice said, they'd do what they could, for all present would like to see somebody try the thing.

A few minutes later, side by side, Brolly and Tex dragged the north-to-south length of that high top, and it looked like very tough pickings. However, they could see that the Territorial Force men had gone into action. They were horsing a generator truck, two or three mobile searchlights and some other rolling equipment toward the west side of what looked like a sheep pasture—yes, and they were driving off a flock of baa-baas too. Then they put down a “T” of half a dozen bed sheets, and the scene was set.

Over his interphone, Brolly asked, “How does it look to you, boy? . . . Think you can get in there with the other sheep?”

“I could handle it with my eyes closed,” Tex boasted.

“This time, Longhorn, try it with your eyes open. I'm sick and tired of seeing you wash out ships. So that's how you've been doing it, eh? . . . Well, all right. Go in and give it a try, then I'll know whether or not Tirua and I should play around here with you or go down to D'Urville and land on a regulation field. Go ahead. And remember one thing—I'll be pulling for you every foot of the way—even to the last pounce and bound, if you pile up. Over.”

“Roger!” said Tex Cooper. He was already in his approach glide.

THERE was a fairly stiff morning breeze rippling through the heavy brush and slapping the free ends of the tarpaulins which covered the elephantine searchlights and other installations, and that wind on his nose was all to the good, but Tex would have to be on the job when his Cub reached for ground—and he'd have to hold her there, and pin her down, or said breeze might lift and plump him over the offside cliff. So, flying just above him, Brolly went

right along with Tex and gazed down on the piece of work in hand. He knew that Tex was the boy who could handle the detail. Naturally, all members of that New Zealand Territorial Force unit were watching the landing with close interest. And they saw Tex put his wheels on the northern edge of the very-limited clearing, and they felt satisfied that the landing was good, but they failed to watch their flock of sheep—the baa-baas so recently driven from that grassy slope. And just as Tex put his wheels to the ground, those sheep broke from the brush cover and spread their dirty-white wave across his landing approach. From just above, Broolly saw what was happening, and he knew that this could be it, and that it could be hell.

Things began to happen. Tex, with that breeze trying to take things out of his hands, had to hold power on his nose—for just a few more rods at least. But the fool baa-baas, running true to form, had turned their wave and started running toward the plane; and in no time at all Tex Cooper was right in among 'em, trying to rudder through 'em, bouncing over 'em, trimming 'em off the ends of his low stabilizer, but, through benefit of a minor mystery, not breaking his propeller on 'em. Finally, Tex bounced his Cub off the clearing—over at the southwest end—and into and through two wall tents. Then it was New Zealanders, and not sheep, who did all the running and skipping and jumping. Anyway, the prop was stopped by then, and Tex Cooper pushed open his door and stepped out into the wreckage. "Hi, gentlemen; anybody home?" he asked. "Cooper's the name. Ol' Tex Cooper, U. S. A."

When the sheep had once more been defeated and driven from the field, Broolly came in and bounced to a nice stop—with his own Cub's nose pretty close to the wreckage of those two tents wherein Tex Cooper's ship still reposed half buried. "Never mind my boy, gentlemen," Broolly sang out, " 'cause he's a card, and he'll do anything for a laugh. And anyway, he can't keep away from sheep. Old Shepherdder Tex Cooper is what he's knowed as in our outfit.

"Hope there's no damage done here that a little Lend-Lease can't fix up. Hell's hings, my New Zealand cousins, run up

your bill and we'll have Uncle Sam build you a new island. Don't be at all backward about it. Nothing's too big for us. Just get it all on paper, and ol' Tex here will sign for the damage before we leave."

"The hell you tell!" Tex wailed. "Mr. Ranking Heel, this party is on you. You'll sign the claims-for-damage chits in this gay clubhouse."

Off to one side, Tirua and Mokau were talking with a small group of Maori sheep-tenders. Tirua was laughing and saying, "Me two feller ketchum ho-ho biggom fun. Flyin' feller, them belong coconut hut. Ho-ho."

Broolly heard, and he turned to Tex and said, "Tirua says you're nuts."

One of the New Zealand cousins interpreted and said, "The boys says you're both a bit balmy, Yank."

"The boy could be right, Anzac ol' toff," Broolly agreed, "but now to business. This is why we're here. By the way, who is in command on this wind-swept outpost of empire? . . . Oh, hello, sir . . . Goodenough is my name. This is Lieutenant Cooper. Maybe you met him—on the fly. Well, sir, as I reported via radiophone, we have been dispatched here on a scientific mission. We want one live tuatara and a small selection of choice Stephen Island frogs, the rare kind, those frogs that live under stones and never see water. . . . Say, maybe they know what they're doing, eh?"

"So do we," said the major in command. "You know, Yank, the tuatara is protected by law. They're almost extinct. It usually requires a permit from the Department of Internal Affairs to secure and remove a tuatara from Stephen. For all of me, lieutenant, you could route out and cart off every last one of the beggars."

The major shoved a wrist far out of his trenchcoat's sleeve, then studied the watch thereon. A captain and two lieutenants close by in the group did likewise. Then the major said, "Sorry, old man, but Captain Stag and the lieutenants—and m'self—must be pushing off. We're going down-bay to Nelson, you know. My word, we're behind time already. Tell you what I'm going to do, Lieutenant Goodenough. I'm going to leave you gentlemen in Sergeant Major Smithson's capable hands. The sergeant major will show you our island,

and he'll explain more about the bleeding old tuatara, and why the ancient, ugly living fossil must receive the blessing and protection of a country so hard pressed to defend itself. So take care of yourself and goodbye. Oh, Sergeant Smithson. Just a mo'. Meet the Lieutenants Goodenough and Cooper. And take care of them, sergeant. I said, sergeant, *take care of them, sergeant*. Hi-ho everybody."

When the four officers had departed down the cable-car runway which led to the boat landing, thus stripping the upper level of anything resembling brass, the two Yanks squatted on their heels alongside Smithson and his fellow noncoms. They talked of this and that, but mostly about tuatara lizards. Broolly even went all out and explained old Levu, bad joss, Kaka and Kakapo—and the dire need of removing the latter pair from the home base. Broolly knew that Anzac noncoms could fully appreciate the dire need, for there's nobody harder on brass hats than is the Down Under enlisted man.

"A colonel? A major?" S/M Smithson mused, and laughed. "Coo, as the English say, I'd love to be in on it, Yank. But listen, old man, you won't have to scuff around amongst the rocks for your bloody old lizard. The boys here have a few in captivity, and I know they'll donate one for science. But now about the frogs. You know, I've never m'self seen any of the slimy things. But I know they're here on the island. I've heard tell of 'em.

"Oh, Amuri!" he called to one of the natives. "Amuri, you savvy Stephen Island frog?"

Amuri answered that he knew where they were to be found. "Little bit long way," he said, nearby, in fact. "Me two feller walk about strong, ketchum f'og," and so saying, Amuri and company, with Tirua and Mokau along, started for one of the rock-pile slopes almost within view of the ships, the only rocks in the world under which the Levu-desired frogs might be found.

"You men got plenty of gasoline, sergeant?" Broolly asked.

"Tons of it," said Smithson. "Do you need some, Yank?"

"We'll need some if you men want to get in some air work. You want some air work, don't you? You'll get a hell of a boot tak-

ing off this ledge, and landing, too. What are we waiting for? Think we're just moochers and never givers? Come on, damned if two ships shouldn't be able to hop this entire command by the time the frog hunters get back. Get your ship out of that logjam, Longhorn, and this time watch how I set it down. Try to keep away from sheep. Remember you're supposed to be a cattleman. Want me to write back to those Oregon waddies and tell 'em you're wearing boots and picking choice grass spots for the ribbon ewe?"

CHAPTER VI

SO PEOPLE LOOK UP

IT WAS mid-afternoon before all those desiring to ride had had their ride. In the process, each ship had blown one tire; and because there were no replacements at hand, each had gone on flying on the rim. Tex, too, had given his landing gear a bad twisting, but with the aid of crowbars, pipe-wrenches and plenty of Anzac manpower, the skewgee tubular struts had been twisted back again. A few head of sheep had given Tex another go at the thing, as before during a landing, and he had tipped his prop. But it was a wooden stick and a bit of jack-knife work had balanced the blades in no time; and the passenger work had gone ahead with all hands very happy. Needless to say, the New Zealand cousins had furnished a few exhilarating snorts—stuff that was absolutely extinct except on Stephen Island—of brave water, and the party was going like a swell dream when Broolly just tipped the north rim of the shelf, on a landing, and lost his tail wheel. Of course, as he said, that wouldn't stop air work, but it was a thing that brought out the pilot in a man. But all through the day, the undersurfaces of the two Cubs had been taking a terrible beating from the brush that stood hip-high here and there on the sheep slope; and they were really badly beaten-out craft by the time Ranking Heel Broolly Goodenough was forced to notify the new friends that the visiting Yanks would have to get under way for home.

"We're on a scheduled mission, you know," he said, "and Col. Wasp, Operations officer, will be waiting—on pins and

needles, tenterhooks, maybe in fear and trembling. And old Kaka Kelly and Kakapo Wade, the C. O. and adjutant I was telling you about, they might be back, and watching the sky—if they are able to see the sky at this stage of the game. So me two feller fetter go-go-go before kechum too dark time. Gotta crosssum big soda water, but she's been number one fun, an' no damn foolin'. All right, Tirua. Oh, Mokau. Walkabout strong, cutum talk talk. . . . What's a matter—you two Maori feller belong coconut hut?"

Tirua had something pretty large in a gunny sack, and he shoved it into the back seat and laughed. "Cockeroo feller," he lied, saying that it was a chicken. But, at the same time, an Anzac cook came alongside and spoke to Brolly. He said, "Not even over your own dead body, Yank, do you tell 'em that you got that tuctara from Cookie Roice. They toik their bloody old scaly ancestors serious in the Department of Internal Affairs. They'd burn us, so they would."

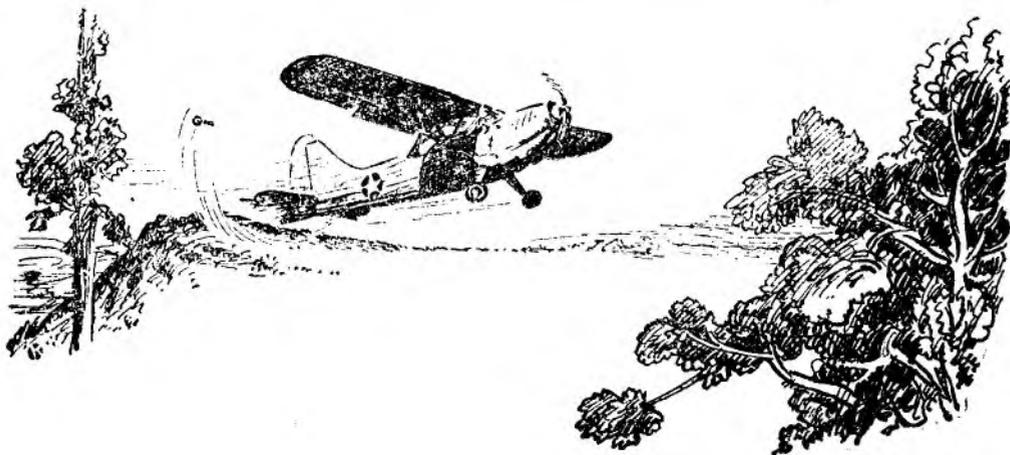
Mokau handed a sack into the rear seat of Tex Cooper's ship, then climbed aboard himself, yelling goodbyes to his Maori friends. That sack of Mokau's was heavy and pulsating. The frog business must have been good, and old Levu would have enough voodoo material for plenty bad medicine and giggom bad joss.

So, running on a rim and with tail wheel missing, Brolly once more eased power to his Cub and got under way. Tex Cooper came along so close that he seemed to be pushing Brolly off the south end of the high shelf. Then, airborne, they both dipped

their nose far lower than the island's top elevation, came up and over in a zoom, side by side, and down and across the clearing for one farewell jazz; and they were on their way north and east. Going home with the day's hard labor accomplished, and with two of the command's best cubs looking as though they had been to war and back again.

The brisk breeze that had swept all day across the top of Stephen Island went right on in its northeasterly sweep and put a nice tailwind behind the homebound Cubs. The cross-water passage was ticked off in a half hour flat, so Brolly interphoned Tex and said they wouldn't touch in for fuel at Marton. "I'm afraid to trust you on even one more landing, and take-off, Longhorn. Oh Lord, I wish you could get a peck at the ship you're flying. Man, oh man, are you a mess! I don't know how you're going to explain yourself to Wasp, or to the top heels. . . . Yes, sir, you look like a guy coming in early in the morning after a hard night spent in the gutter. . . . Now look. When we get to Ruapehu this time, be a gentleman. Don't get mixed up with that down draft on the wrong side of the crater. You better stick close to me and see how it's done. Get that, cheap help? Over."

"Roger," Tex acknowledged. "I wouldn't leave you for the world, Chief Big-Wind-Off-Number-Three-Hole. Now let's use the old beans and get these ships back to the post. I want to do some air work this week. To hell with this thing of being always marked on-the-ground just because I play around with you. . . . Hey! Hey! keep that damned wingtip out of my prop! Over."



"You keep away from me—you're drifting," Broolly said. "Now I'll tell you what we'll do—hey, take a squint at Ruapehu, and is that old blowtorch doing herself proud!—we'll go past on the Volcano-House side and give the scientific folks a wave. They like to have intrepid aviators wave at them. I know because I used to be one of those ordinary people who stand on the ground and look up at ships that pass in the sky. . . . Ain't that a nice thought?"

TEX COOPER was watching mighty Ruapehu come closer, and the slanting rays burnished the high rim of the smoke cloud with a dazzling glow. The sight ahead was on the "awful" side, even for men at war who had either seen or expected awful things. It was enough to awe the average man, but the two Cubs weren't in the control of even averagely average men; and they couldn't be awed—not by old Mother Nature, the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, or even by the necessity of accounting for certain happenings after they might return to the home base. So, instead of gazing with wide-eyed awe at the mighty spectacle, their vagrant, errant attentions went ahead to Volcano House, and the various people populating the wide observation roof of that establishment. They were already close enough to notice a goodly sprinkling of varicolored garments atop that roof—dames. And the flying cult has always been hell on dames.

Truth is, no member of the flying cult has ever been able to sight dames, from the air, then go right on with his air work. Somehow or other, good air-going common sense ends where sight-of-skirts begins; and this wasn't the time or place for two Yank airmen to start reforming old established institutions or rewriting rules of accepted procedure. They owed something to flying tradition.

Volcano House's observation roof is just that—a great flat top from which the tourist or scientist or on-pass goldbrick might stand and gaze upward at the fireworks, or downward to the south toward Wellington. Nothing in the line of a secondary shade roof stood in the way of that view. There was a thigh-high railing bounding the platform on all four sides, a simple two-by-four

affair, with a continuous, plain top rail. Naturally, many of the varicolored costumes were along the right and left rails—as the flying Yank gentlemen approached.

"Air Marshal Goodenough calling Sub-heel Lieutenant Cooper. Air Marshal Goodenough calling Sub-heel Cooper," Broolly interphoned. "Are you there, old twirt?"

"The brains answering Ranking Heel Goodenough. The brains answering Ranking Heel Goodenough—against the brains' better judgment," Tex acknowledged. "Over, under and straight ahead."

"Straight ahead is right, Longhorn," Broolly said. "Take a look at that observation roof. I ask you, is that dangerous? Should all those nice ladies be standing so near that rail? What if they should fall off, straight down into the valley, or fall straight up toward the crater? It looks dangerous to your superior, my man."

By then the two ships were within a mile of Volcano House. They were flying nose-on to that spot and at its precise elevation, about halfway up Ruapehu's 9,175-foot slope.

"Tell you what we'd better do," Broolly continued. "Let's go in close enough to yell, then warn the nice people to stand back from those dangerous rails. I'll take care of the folks on the valley-side rail. You see what you can do for the people on the left. Understand? And no damn foolin', my man. Over."

"Roger!" Tex sang out. "And, by hell, I'll remember it's an order. Well, here goes."

All those fine folks atop the observation roof were watching the approaching planes. And the folks along the valley-side rail and the slope-side rail began to move back, cautiously, when the two oncoming ships seemed bent upon putting a pincers movement on the place. Then somebody a bit more alive than the others, maybe one of the service personnel present, yelled, "Everybody in and down! Hit the deck!" And everybody, tumbling and pratt-falling, did crowd the center and hit the deck, like vari-colored wheat before a scythe, or two scythes. For Broolly's left wingtip was well in above the right rail, and, at the same time, Tex Cooper's right panel was scraping its brace struts along the left coping. And both friendly gents had their side win-

dows open, heads far out, yelling, "Hi'ya, folks! . . . Better be careful, folks! . . . By-by, folks!"

Then they were gone—but not before their eyes went groundward to the parking place on the north side of Volcano House. In that parking place, where even fast-passing eyes might see, were several U. S. Army cars, jeeps and larger. Cads, by hell! And Cads mean high brass.

Looking back over his shoulder, Brolly saw stars on those Cads. And it sure could be a case of seeing stars—one awful bop on the dome. So he spoke to Tex again. "You see what I saw?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, Ranking Heel Goodenough—and with both good eyes," Tex made known. "I even pushed a fat Yank general into a fat old girl's lap, and did he look surprised and downright funny? Oh, my dear ranking officer, I cry for you."

"Aw, nuts," Brolly answered. "Weren't we only fooling? Sure we were. Do you think for a minute that Yank high-rankers are too thin-skinned to take a joke? A Sunday afternoon joke? Don't be silly, Longhorn. They all like to see aviators close-up."

CHAPTER VII

IT MUST BE THE REBELS

IT WAS getting along toward the Children's Hour when the post's two most beguilingly precocious youngsters came in over the south fence and kissed the main runway. Brolly, of course, had to manage a wheel landing, because of the tail wheel's absence from his aft end. The tireless wheels rattled like the very devil on the cement runway; and sitting at his desk in Operations Col. Wasp screwed up his face in agony, realizing that the boys were home, and still proving that boys will be boys and be damned to you!

Thoughtfully, Brolly had brought his wheel-landing run to its end—with the wheelless tail finally scraping roughly on the hard cement—directly before Salvage hangar. Perhaps it should have been delivered to Erection-and-Repair, but that was merely a matter of opinion. Tex, too, thought it was a sensible destination for his bus, so he came to a stop alongside. Then

they jumped out, called for Tirua and Mokau to walkabout strong, yelled for a corporal of the guard who happened to be talking to the sentry on the apron, opened Salvage hangar quickly, pushed in two near wrecks, shut the door with a grinding roll, then looked happy.

"Trapped, by hell," Brolly said. "Two nasty old Cubs trapped. Let's get out of here. . . . You boys gotun lizar an' fog, eh? Good. Takum old man grass belong face, and tell that old stiff to start making big medicine. You boys tellum big bel bel fellers maybe come home house sing sing dam' tootie de sweet."

"Ho-ho," Tirua agreed, and laughed. "Me two feller tellum ol' Levu makum bad joss. Tam tootin'! Ho-ho, you two feller ketchum bel bel belong me cry?"

"Us hundry? No," Brolly answered. "You feller tellum old grass-belong-face Levu that me two feller—and Col. Wasp too—don't ketchum big medicine all same Kaka and Kakapo. You savvy?"

Tirua laughed a little louder, but said he savvy that.

About then the sergeant of the guard came from someplace and met Brolly and Tex just as they were starting for flying officers' barracks. The sergeant made known Col. Wasp's desire to see the Lieutenants Goodenough and Cooper. "He's in Operations now," said the noncom of the guard.

"Operations?" Brolly asked. "What's the colonel doing there, working a Sunday shift?"

"Sort of," the sergeant answered. "He's had some hurry-up wires and phone calls coming through, and the biz has the colonel cussin' blue and running round in small circles. Better hump."

Starting to hump, Brolly said, "Shucks, Sergeant, we'll take care of the colonel's troubles in no time."

"Or," Tex added, "fix 'em so's nobody else will ever have to fix 'em."

COL. WASP had just hung up and pushed the phone away when the pilots knocked and walked in to make their report. They said the required big medicine had been captured on Stephen Island, and that the officer in command there sent his regards to Col. Wasp.

"The major, sir," Brolly added, "even

complimented you on the high-type of able pilot you dispatched to Stephen—our efficiency, gentlemanly bearing, hint of fine family, adaptability and—

"The adaptability," Wasp cut in, "I can understand. Your ability to meet things as they show up, your— That call I was just ending when you came in was from Volcano House. Volcano House. Does that mean anything to you gentlemen?"

"Volcano House? Yes, sir. As I was telling Tex—that's out of bounds for this command. A wise prohibition, too, sir, for old Ruapehu is sure blowing its top today. We could see it from the distance. From forty or fifty miles away. Quite a sight."

"That's what Col. Kelly reported. You recall Col. Kelly. I believe some of the brash young men—maybe the enlisted men—sometimes refer to him as 'Kaka', he's the commanding officer on this post. That is, when he isn't on week-end vacation viewing mighty Ruapehu in company with a few generals of our American Southern Pacific Command. Col. Kelly just called to report that two Cubs had dragged the observation-roof rails there at Volcano House, causing some disconcertion and much tumbling among the sedate observers on said observation roof. You two gentlemen didn't see any ships in that vicinity—eh, from a forty-mile distance?"

BROLLY looked into Wasp's honest eyes, and he gazed at Tex Cooper—a boy with a perfect deadpan expression—then he said, "When we landed in at Marton, for refueling, sir, there were five Cubs from one of the South Island fields. That was on our way over to Stephen. Coming back, we didn't touch in at Marton, but I could see that some of those Cubs were still there. And, sir, come to think of it—a few of them were in the air, jazzin' along the railroad right-of-way just west of Ruapehu. For my own part, I wouldn't put anything past those South Island Yanks. After all, those damned Southerners aren't true Yanks. They're rebels. I hear they import mint and serve juleps."

"Is that bad?" Wasp asked. "I come from Atlanta, G. A."

"As I was saying, sir," Brolly added. "I still think the South gave the North one hell of a beating. They were just cheated on

points. Give me a Southern gentleman every time, even if he does jazz hell out of those visiting Yankecs on the observation roof. Eh, didn't Col. Ka—eh, Col. Kelly get the ship numbers?"

"That's a logical flying-field question," Wasp said. "Fact is, Lieutenant, I asked that of Col. Kelly. The colonel almost blew the phone wires between there and Volcano House when he answered. He said something about him, Major Wade, two or three fat ladies and any number of others being all tangled up on the floor. Sounds almost like the end of a swell night in a swank hot-spot. And, of course, Col. Kelly was very hot—over the wire—but no ship numbers."

"Careless. Thoughtless. Damned unob-serving of a commanding officer," Brolly remarked, with heat—and some satisfaction. "No numbers grabbed! Did you hear that, Lieut. Cooper?"

"That's the luck of those South Islanders," Tex Cooper said. "Good Lord, if you and I went out behind the barn without written permission every man-Jack on the post would run to the officer of the day and tell him we were doing it. Those Southerners! But, as you said to the colonel, they sure beat hell out of us Yanks."

"Thanks, gentlemen," the colonel from Atlanta, Georgia, said. "You-all don't know how that touches me. You-all's a pair of damned Yank hellers."

Brolly tried one more question. "Eh, sir, did the colonel tell Col. Kelly that he had assigned Lieutenant Cooper and me to this Stephen Island problem?"

"Almost but not quite," Wasp said. "Col. Kelly was just beginning to ask whether or not any of our ships were in the air when something went wrong with the line. His voice faded, then there was the usual bad-order buzz, and I couldn't get him again. It was a nice break for you gentlemen. Naturally, if the colonel knew that you were abroad in the air, he would have ordered me to have you stand by for questioning. Needless to say, you'll be able to explain all angles when you tell Col. Kelly and Major Wade about those South Island Cubs you saw on the Marton field. Yes, sir, I have an idea you'll heap coals of fire on those rebels and convince our commanding officer that they are responsible for old Ruapehu's present eruption. By the way, I presume you

brought both ships home. Or am I presuming?"

CHAPTER VIII

MORE AND BETTER

THE phone rang again. Col. Wasp picked it up. The Communications Office switchboard operator said, "Long distance call for you, Col. Wasp. Hold it just a second."

Wasp cupped a hand over his phone. He said, "Don't go away, gentlemen. I think this is more of that. Don't go away."

In a few seconds Col. Wasp was saying, "Oh, hello, Gen. Hass. How are you, sir? . . . Yes. Oh, that's tough luck. Both ships, you say? . . . Yes, I understand. They're both Cubs, sir? Well, that's okay. All our equipment on this post is Cub. Yes, sir. Right away, General. You bet we'll take care of the damage. Good-bye, sir."

When Col. Wasp had finished his phone conversation he once more turned to Brolly and Tex; and the man's face was overloaded with either deep thought or heavy concern. "That," he said, "was Brig. Gen. Hass. He's in charge of all American air on South Island, you know."

"By any chance, sir," Brolly asked, "was the general calling from Volcano House?"

"No. From the government rest center at Te Aroha," Wasp answered. "Was that air going out of a blown tire, or were you just heaving a sigh of relief, Lieutenant?"

"It must have been a tire, sir," Brolly said. "I was just glad to know that the general wasn't at Ruapehu when those rebels jazzed the place. You know how it is—I don't like to see those young irresponsible kids get in bad with the big boys. By the way, sir, about us bringing back the two ships—we did. But they are both in bad order. It will be good for an operations report, however. It proves that such an island as Stephen is definitely a problem."

Wasp cradled his face in both hands, elbows on the desk, with troubled eyes gazing blankly between spread fingers. "Go ahead, Lieutenant," he said. "How bad?"

"Well, as I say, it was a tough landing and a short takeoff. We each took off one tire, and I lost my tail wheel on the rim of that high landing spot. Then, of course, the

fuselages took quite a beating from the high brush. And, oh ycs, Tex here sort of skewgeed his landing gear, but the New Zealand men had the beef and the bars so they skewgeed it back into shape again. However, I thought it best to shove both ships into Salvage hangar. Just in case anybody wants to know where they are when flying starts tomorrow morning."

"You're so thoughtful and thorough, Lieutenant," Col. Wasp agreed. "But you did get the lizard and the frogs?"

"Yes. And that, sir, demanded the utmost in diplomacy."

"You mean you had to steal them?" Wasp guessed.

"In a way, ycs. You see, sir, the tuatara—fortunate ancient devil that he is—is protected by the New Zealand government. Naturally, the officers on Stephen wouldn't consider allowing one to be removed, not even by the flying emissaries of a friendly power. So I had to induce the major in command, and his few officers, to take the day off. They went south to Nelson, and the rest was easy."

"Difficult or easy," Wasp said, "you're the man to handle 'em, Lieutenant. Let's see what you can do for me now. Sit down. You, too, Lieutenant Cooper. Now, as I said, that was South Island's Gen. Hass on the phone. He's up at Te Aroha with a two-ship party." Wasp got out of his chair and walked over to the big wall map of all North Island. He put a finger on Te Aroha, the watering place some forty miles north of more-popular Rotorua. "Let's see," he said, scaling the distance roughly, "it's about one hundred from here. I've never flown up there, but it must be a devil of a rough field they're using. The general reports that he blew a tire and tipped his prop. The second ship blew both tires, shattered its stick, knocked off the tail wheel, and, as you put it, skewgeed the landing gear."

"Must have been a lieutenant- or major-general—flying the second ship," Brolly guessed.

"It was," Wasp said. "Major General Patrick."

"Oh-oh, Mr. Tops himself," said Brolly. "Man, oh man, will he put a curse on that field!"

"And on this post, too," said Wasp, "unless we bestir ourselves and bring succor to

the stricken. They want aid and quick assistance. You know what that means, Lieutenant. *As soon as possible* means *right now*, and those were the words used by Gen. Hass. Well, the problem is mine, but the ball is yours if you'd like to carry it."

"Let's get organized, sir," Brolly suggested, always willing to carry the ball. "Tell you what we could do, sir. The lieutenant and I could take two ships—two more ships—and hop up there right now."

"Before Col. Kelly and Major Wade get back to this post?" Wasp asked.

"Something like that, sir," Brolly admitted. "We could each take a good mechanic with us." Brolly pointed through a side window toward where two liberty trucks were unloading the Week-end men just back from town. "We'll fly these two ships up to Te Aroha, then we'll have the macs rob them of the parts needed, shifting said parts to the generals' Cubs. We can work well into the night and have them ready by morning. Then, sir, you can send the new parts, via rail if you wish, and we'll get our own Cubs ready for the home trip. No great hurry. We could wait forever up there."

Wasp studied the clock. "Five-twenty now," he said. "You still have two hours and better of daylight. I'll take you up on this. Pick your macs, get some grub, and get under way."

"Okay, sir," Brolly enthused; and he and Tex got to their feet. "Col. Kelly and Adjutant Wade will be pleased to think that we're doing something nice for the generals."

"Something nice for the generals?" Wasp repeated. "Dammit, man, I know I shouldn't do this. Something warns me that the whole north end of North Island is going to blow up—and right in the generals' faces. Go 'way, go far away, before I change my mind—as though a man can retain a mind, laboring in the vineyard with you damned Yanks."

CHAPTER IX

IT BRINGS OUT THE PILOT

WHEN Brolly Goodenough and Tex Cooper once more took the air they had the Sergeants Hill and Kidder riding in the back seats, plus prop-wrenches and the

necessary tools for the apt robbing of two ships and the quick restoration of those belonging to the South Island generals. Just back from week-end pass, Hill and Kidder were tickled pink to find added flying freedom so unexpectedly offered. Needless to say, Brolly and Tex had offered the boys a promise of fun. Rumor had long since indoctrinated the segregated post with the understanding that swank Rotorua and Te Aroha just bulged with fun for the right people. Up till then, flying people had always been the right people wherever they saw fit to shoot a landing, stroll in and say, "Let's start."

So keeping just above the brush and out of the weeds, the four merry gentlemen on wings herded some cattle along the east shore of large Lake Taupo—that old place of tempting waters—and, a little later, bunched some sheep into the Waikato River where that stream empties into the northeast end of the lake. The Maori sheepherders didn't seem to like it; and somebody on the ground proved it by putting a slug right through Brolly's Cub, between where Sergeant Hill's knees ended and Brolly's neck and shoulders began. Both men heard that slug arrive and depart. Brolly screwed around to look at the hole in the floor and the opening in the crown, and he said, "That was damned good shooting, Sergeant. Lucky we've got guys like that on our side."

"Wait till we come back, sir," Sergeant Hill yelled. "I'll have me a cockpit full o' rocks. I didn't come from Arkansas fer nothin'."

For a long time after that both ships went along the Waikato's winding basin just to see what they could see; and they politely got off the water whenever a native boat of any sort got in the way. Now and then they passed through small villages, and no other word than "through" can describe their passing. The horses and cattle in and near those villages even stood on their fore legs and kicked upward at those hellish things in the sky. However, up there where the Waikato was losing its small waters in the rising mountains of the west, clouds began to crowd in on them; and the sun was finally taken away before it had reached the true horizon.

With visibility narrowed down to an almost zero-zero status, and even contact

flying becoming difficult, Broolly interphoned Tex and said, "Cling to Mama's apron strings, Longhorn. Keep that old tail of mine right in your prop. This is the stuff that calls out the pilot in a man. Lucky you—being with *the* man."

"I'll keep it in my prop," Tex Cooper promised, "even if I chew it off up to your hips—you silly monkey, you. Watch your flying!"—this when Broolly put his Cub between two trees, one on either side of a deep ravine, and took a bit of greenery from each tree via the cutting edge of each wingtip. They had quit the rough headwaters of the Waikato by then and were scarching in among the trees—and under said trees—for the railroad which comes down from Te Aroha and points north to Rotorua. If a flying man can find a rail right-of-way his troubles, as a rule, are over—'cause if you can't remain airborne, you can at least taxi—maybe just off the ground—though it is an operation which brings out the pilot in a man.

"The man to the boy! The man calling boy!" Broolly called. "It begins to look like rain, son. Wouldn't it be just our luck to reach Te Aroha and be pinned down there for two or three days, maybe longer? Nothing to do there but eat, sleep, drink, take the waters, circulate with generals and society people, and awe the natives? You ever awe the natives, Longhorn?"

BROLLY never got the answer to that one. Of a sudden, he had a line of telegraph poles swishing past his right wingtip, and there was the railroad. Still interphone, he said, "Boy, oh boy, we're out of the woods. I could fly this with my eyes shut."

"This time," Tex cut in, "try it with them open, wise guy. I don't want to tangle with two generals. Maybe four such, 'cause we don't know who they have riding in those rear pits. Well, here's Morrinsville, the junction, and we turn right and ask the first filling station for the key. It won't be long now, Ranking Heel."

Te Aroha, as towns go, only goes as far as any two-thousand-population hamlet can go. Even under the black blanket of a ground-hugging storm-in-the-making, it wasn't too hard to find for such smart young hotshot pilots in slow ships. The government sanatorium, no mean establishment,

showed its many lights in the gloom. Then all you had to do was fly low above the ground terraces, or just a bit lower under the upper verandas, throttle your engine to its just-staggering stage, then yell: "Hey! Hey, where's the landing field?"

Then guys came rushing out on the drives and began pointing off to where you should find the town's landing spot—though, of course, guys pointed in several different directions; and you had to strike an average, then go hither and find the open space where other pilots had swiped off wheels, tipped and shattered props, and put the twist on a landing gear. It wasn't too hard for a Broolly Goodenough and a Tex Cooper.

But both boys, for once, were flying with their eyes wide open. They had to be that way, for night and its cloudy blackness had closed in on them with a suddenness that might have thrown a scare into more timid souls—or even into a self-styled ranking heel. Anyway, they found the rough field; and they leveled it off like experts, coming to earth without damage. There was a new hangar of sorts with lights showing within and beyond its open doors. And sure enough, there were two respectable U. S. Air Forces Cubs, down-at-heel and shame-faced, waiting in the gloom against the rear wall. There was a Yank noncom, on soft detached service, in charge there. He said, "Hell, men, I understood you were bringing up the parts. The big boys are in a hurry, and there'll be hell to pay."

"Keep everything under control, sarg." Sergeant Kidder urged. "We've got the parts right here"—he hooked a thumb over his right shoulder toward their two ships—"and we'll start robbing, and shifting, as soon's you're ready. Let's go."

"Is it going to rain here?" Broolly asked.

"They say it is, sir," the Te Aroha noncom answered. "The glass is away down. We're expecting a beaut. Maybe two or three days. They say this part of the island is long overdue, and maybe this is it. Tough luck if you're going to be hung up here."

"Very tough," Broolly Goodenough agreed. "But I'd like to lay you a little bet—say ten-to-one—that we're not going to do any unmanly crying. No sir, sergeant, not over spilt rain."

CHAPTER X

LEVU WALKABOUT STRONG

IT WAS quite late, sometime after taps, when Colonel Kaka Kelly and Adjutant Kakapo Wade returned to the post. First, they touched in at Officers' Club and routed out old Levu, saying that they hadn't had food since Volcano House, and that was a long time ago. They wanted something by way of a before-bed snack—any little thing that old Levu might have handy: a side of beef, a couple of cold sheep, or maybe only a ham or two. Col. Kaka even cracked a bit of a joke. He said, "Never mind the diet, Old one. Col. Patch isn't with us. You go bout bout fixum diet tonight. Ketchum?"

Old Levu ketchum. Maybe he was glad that Col. Patch wasn't on hand, for Patch and his dietetics had long since become a pain in the neck for the old cook. Patch was ranking medico at the post hospital. He, like Kaka and Kakapo, was pretty well along in army years, well up in on-the-hoof weight, and, at times, hard put to pass the physical inspections and requirements of his own department. So Patch and Kaka and Kakapo had been sharing a private table in officers' mess. And at that table old Levu had been required to serve very special stuff. The other officers claimed the very special stuff was always the best cuts of whatever came into the kitchen. However, the big men at that special table had taken great care to inculcate their underlings with the true facts: they were merely being served *poorer* dishes than the others, poorer in that they were oftentimes tasteless, moretimes without condiments, all times without zip or tang, in short just damned old diet fare. Yes, sir, the fellow officers should thank the Lord they didn't have to eat under such conditions, and under Col. Patch's watchful eyes.

After putting old Levu to work, Kaka and Kakapo hurried into quarters to wash up. Coming out of quarters, a few minutes later, they noticed that Col. Wasp's lights were still burning. Kaka rapped on Wasp's door. He then asked the Operations colonel to come into the dining hall and talk to him and Kakapo while they ate.

A few minutes later when old Levu

brought in the slight repast, Wasp, eyeing the offering, took care not to laugh. Old Levu had certainly lost no time with his big medicine making. What he put on that table was big and greasy. It might have been part lizard and part frog, or all lizard and frog, but whatever it was it looked mysterious. Even Kaka and Kakapo eyed the heaps of steaming stuff, and it was obvious that they had never seen its like before. They tried to ask old Levu about it. He just rolled his hands, grinned, and said, "Mebbe, you two feller ketchum cockeroo feller. Mebbe."

"Chicken—hell!" said Kaka. "But whatever it is, Old One, we're the men who'll put it down the hatch. Well, here goes."

FOR the time being, both Kaka and Kakapo seemed in good humor, this, no doubt, being due to the fact that they had taken care of their week-end drinking in royal style. Wasp, sitting well back from the table, just looked on, knowing that the mood was going to change any time now—just as soon as the eaters began to remember why they had asked him in to talk.

"Damned if the old one can't tickle a palate when he makes the effort," Kaka enthused, reaching for a third helping of a very mysterious pile that adorned a central platter. "Pull up a chair and dig in, Wasp old man," he invited. "Plenty for all."

"No thanks," Wasp said. "I wouldn't sleep a wink if I took on heavy food now. But don't let me stop you gentlemen. That dish certainly looks good."

"Good is right," Kakapo cheered. "Hell's bells, sir, our serious mentor, Patch, would be hog wild if he could see us now."

"Right," Kaka Kelly grinned. Then he turned to Wasp and explained: "We're rid of Patch and dieting for a few days. He was with us at Volcano House . . . Volcano House! Dammit I knew there was something we wanted you for, Wasp. But, as I started to say, Patch was with us. We met some of the staff from South Island. Patch and one of their medicos got to talking shop. It seems the South Island medico has a ward of burnt men—a barracks fire that hit them when a plane came through the roof and pinned half a dozen enlisted men to their bunks. Well, anyway, Patch is quite an expert on burn treatment and

skin grafting so he agreed to fly back with the South Island men. He'll be gone several days. Lucky us!"

"About Volcano House, sir—" Adjutant Kakapo Wade nudged.

"Volcano House! Dammit to hell, Wasp, who was in the air from this post? Don't tell me those weren't our ships?" Kaka yelled.

"Sir," Col. Wasp said, "we had only two ships in the air. They were flying a little school problem that I wanted to work out. They went out to Stephen Island, made their landing and take-off, then came directly home. Fact is, sir, I was surprised at the directness and dispatch with which our two pilots carried out the problem."

"Who flew the ships?" Kaka asked.

"The Lieutenants Goodenough and Cooper volunteered, sir."

"Goodenough!" Kaka yelled. "I thought I knew that voice. I told Wade here that I knew that voice. Wasp, those were your ships assaulting Volcano House. This damned outlaw Goodenough, and this Cooper, yelled at us as they passed over. Passed over, be damned! As they passed through our company there on the roof."

"We should have known, sir. Hell, sir, we should have known," Kakapo added. "It couldn't be anybody else."

"I asked the lieutenants about it, sir," Wasp said, "and they reported seeing several South Island Cubs in that neighborhood. And you yourself say that Col. Patch flew back with those South Island ships. For that matter, sir, two South Island ships



passed west of this post, going north to Te Aroha, at about the time you telephoned me. That was just before the lieutenants returned. I saw those two Cubs passing. Aerially speaking, they're lousing us up."

"How do you know they're South Island ships? How do you know they went to Te Aroha?" Kaka demanded.

"They phoned in from there, sir. They're in trouble, had some landing damage. They

requested repair parts. The Generals Hass and Patrick were aboard."

"Hass! Patrick!" Col. Kaka Kelly gasped, said gasps being due to the fact that those high rankers had, time and again, looked in on Kaka's post, on various inspections, and always found Kaka Kelly & Co. wanting, lacking, very short of what it takes to run a school properly. Worse yet, 'twas said that Major General Patrick had warned both Kaka and Kakapo to stop their in-town, day-by-day, night-after-night drinking.

Wasp—just for the hell of it—said, "I understand we have a provost at Te Aroha now, sir. I could get him on the phone and suggest that he question Generals Patrick and Hass. Hass, you know, used to be a pretty hot pilot before his elevation, and—"

"Wasp, are you crazy?" Kaka Kelly belatedly, and lumbered upward to a standing position, with the edge of the table in his belly. He was red of face, breathing heavily, and, maybe, scared. "Keep out of this. Don't you start running off at the mouth, you and your idea that the generals might have jazzed Volcano House!"

"Look, Wasp. Goodenough and Cooper are on-the-ground, as of now. See to it that they don't fly tomorrow, and have them report to me first thing in the morning."

"But they're not on the post, sir. I had to send aid north to the generals. Goodenough and Cooper were the only available pilots handy. They volunteered. Yes, sir, they came in from that Stephen Island mission, and then, without rest, actually volunteered to hop to Te Aroha and put the generals' planes back in condition. Truth is, sir, Lieutenant Goodenough remarked that you, sir, would be pleased to think that he and Lieut. Cooper were doing something nice for Generals Patrick and Hass."

"Something nice! Something nice! Ye gods, Wasp, if that pair don't cut two general throats we'll be lucky. Hey, Old One! Levu! . . . How about another helping of this? And what the devil is this, Old One?"

"Mebbe ketchum bullamacow," old Levu grinned.

"Canned beef, hell. Bullamacow, nuts. You can't kid me, Old One. But anyway it's damn good. . . . You ketchum some same stuff tomorrow, eh? . . . Hey, Wasp, get that pair of pirates back to this post."

CHAPTER XI

LIFE AND LEVU GO ON

WHEN Wasp tried to reach Te Aroha first thing Monday morning switchboard advised him that one devil of a storm was sweeping the northern end of the island, and that all telephone and telegraph facilities were washed out for the time being. That news didn't cause any grief for Wasp, and he remarked to his next in Operations command, Major Seater, that he might write a letter, and send it by snail. However, Colonel Wasp did detail Sergeant Moore to take care of the shipping of those necessary parts. So Moore made out the essential stock requisitions. Wasp O.K.'d them. Then Sergeant Moore went over to the stockroom and had the required propellers, tires and landing gear crated. Then he even secured a pickup truck from transportation and took the shipment into Napier. It was all quite a job for Sergeant Moore. He had had a stinko week-end. He was really walking on his heels, with that awful dark-brown taste in his mouth, and a head that was absolutely out of this world. Truth was, Moore and everything in that head was out of this world, so the sergeant made one slight mistake. Instead of shipping the crates via railroad to Te Aroha on North Island, he dispatched them to just "Ahaura," a still smaller town three hundred and fifty miles away, down on South Island. After that, being in Napier, Sergeant Moore went somewhere to get a belated eyeopener; and after he was gone for two days, Wasp remarked to Seater that Moore was a good man—that he must be carrying those crates to Te Ahora—and by way of back trails. "Damned good thing for us that Garcia isn't lost in the bush and waiting for another message," the colonel said. "Or even a message."

There was some flying assigned and carried out that day, but north and west behind Lake Taupo the sky was big and black, and little aviators knew enough to keep away from that cloud ogre. Just after starting time Col. Kaka Kelly had called Operations and asked Wasp what he had done about getting Brolly and Tex back to the post. Wasp, of course, reported the communications-destroying storm. After

that, every five or ten minutes, either Kaka or Kakapo called again for the same purpose and got the same answer. They even tackled Wasp at noon mess. And Wasp stood there near the special table, realizing a certain joy when he gazed down upon the Levu medicine being eaten by the headquarters pair. The storm might be delaying things for Kaka and Kakapo, but old Levu wasn't. That stuff on their plates sure looked like the fat of the land, and chances it was.

Along toward three o'clock Wasp got tired of the thing, so he stepped aboard his own Cub and headed north. But along toward the upper end of Lake Taupo the sky was right down on the ground, and there was no top for a Cub's limited climb, so Wasp had to turn back; and when he set down on the home field the first big drops of rain were splashing on the cement runways. The storm was going to take care of all North Island, for it was riding a north wind and rolling all that black stuff down the Ruahine Range toward the south tip and Cook Strait. Maybe a man would be able to curl up with a good bottle and forget generals, fly flying lieutenants, wrecked ships, telephones, Kaka and Kakapo.

LATE Tuesday Wasp was advised by switchboard that Te Aroha could be had, and after a big try long distance located Brolly Goodenough for Col. Wasp. Brolly reported very bad weather up there, very poor company among general officers, very little chance of getting off the ground, even for two first-class pilots, even if their ships were ready to do it. "Those extra parts, sir," he said, "haven't arrived. I was just over to the express office now."

Wasp said he'd have to see Moore about that, then he added that he'd have to find Sergeant Moore first, after that he would be able to tell Brolly why the parts weren't in Te Aroha. "We'll stand by, sir," Brolly said, "and try our best to bear up. Anything for the home post, sir. About old grass-belong-face Levu and the big-bel-bel-fellers?"

"Operation on schedule, lieutenant," Wasp reported. "Boy, the old medicine man has them up to their chin in stuff no gouty gent should even see, say nothing of eating. From where I sit, the stuff would be bad joss for a hog. And they love it."

Sergeant Moore got back to camp late Wednesday afternoon. Visiting the non-com in durance vile that same evening, Col. Wasp asked the still-befuddled Moore to recall what he could of that parts shipment intended for Te Aroha. "You remember, sergeant, you sent it out last Monday, assigned c/o Lieutenant Goodenough, 'Te Aroha."

"*Abanra*, sir," Moore insisted. "A little damn dump hell 'n' gone down on South Island. I got that stuff away okay, sir."

"Thanks, sergeant," Wasp said, turning on his heel and quitting the guardhouse. "And may they throw the key away on you."

Forthwith, Col. Wasp went to Officers' Club, pulled the lieutenant in charge of aerial supplies away from a poker game, then worked till along toward midnight—getting another shipment of parts crated and under way for Te Aroha. Something warned him that a stroke of apoplexy might account for Kaka—before the big medicine had a chance to work—if something wasn't done about those wild men in the north. What's more, something else way down inside of Wasp kept telling him that those wild men really shouldn't be loose in the north—not with two general officers in the same small area.

THE storm was like the traditional first hundred years of army life—a case of it starts bad and gets rapidly worse. All of North Island was wind-whipped and rain-lashed, even to the extent of taking off three hangar roofs and flattening a north-end messhall. When Saturday came—with the storm still doing its stuff—the post was practically thrown wide open. Two-day passes for the asking, passes going begging, if you could find any way to go and get someplace. Well, up till that time, no Yank trooper had ever allowed weather to stand between him and what a two-day pass could provide; so the command went.

But neither Col. Kaka Kelly nor Adjutant Kakapo Wade seemed inclined that way. Kaka hadn't showed up for any meals on Friday, nor was he present in headquarters. His dogrobber told other dogrobbers in Officers' Club that the colonel was having the old leg trouble again. The guy was in bed, said the dogrobber.

"Ye gods, Seat'," Col. Wasp said to his assistant. "That old Levu don't make big medicine. He makes big T.N.T. Do you suppose he's knocked old blubbergut off his horse as quick as this?"

"No can tell," Major Seater laughed. "Did you notice Wade at Officers' Call this morning? He looked like hell, hell on heavy legs, too. Maybe there's something in this big, bad medicine stuff."



"Sure—lizards and frogs and rich grease, and that's what big, bad army men are made of," Wasp laughed. "Or unmade by."

Neither Kaka nor Kakapo showed out of their quarters on Sunday. Old Levu, however, was very solicitous about their food, cooking the same mountains of fine rich stuff and seeing to it that the grinning Tirua and Mokau bring that fine fare to their rooms. What's more, the two boys returned with empty, well-lapped dishes. Sitting in the messhall, after all others had gone from the

evening meal, Wasp noticed the boys going back to the kitchen and remarked to Major Seater, "Big bel bel fellers sure as hell big bel bel pigs, ketchum all time bel bel belong me cry—in other words, they have the great hunger. How the devil long can one lizard and a bag of frogs last?"

"Long enough," Seater laughed. "Too bad the mighty Goodenough and the equally-as-great Cooper are not on hand to observe and finish this business. I fear, my dear colonel, that lesser men such as you and I can hardly hope to bring out the most salient aspects of this present set-up. Things are ready to pop. By the way—Col. Patch is due back either tonight or in the morning; and will that old boy hit the ceiling when he finds all his dietetic labor so undone? And through the weird influences of mystic joss."

Col. Wasp was called away from that after-dinner smoke. Col. Kaka Kelly's dog-robber said the commanding officer desired his presence in quarters. Kaka, having had such a fine meal, was now in a state of fine dudgeon. "How about these men, Goodenough and Cooper, Wasp," he demanded, "are they, or are they not, coming back to this post? Or did you think I was talking for exercise when I gave that order a full week ago?"

"But the storm, sir," Wasp said. "The crippled communications and other considerations. Moreover, there was a shipment mix-up which delayed the delivery of parts. I'll get on the phone right now, however, and see what Lieut. Goodenough has to say."

"You tell him and Cooper what I have to say!" Kaka Kelly roared. "Tell them I say to start back tomorrow, storm or no storm, ships or no ships, even if they have to walk, crawl and swim. Get 'em home, Wasp. Get those hellers back where I can question them."

After a few hours of trying, long distance was able to bring Brolly to the phone. He was feeling tiptop. He reported that the parts had arrived and that the sergeants were doing a night shift and getting all set for the hop. Yes, he said, the storm was lifting. "Well," Wasp said, "you two avid aviators get under way first thing in the morning and get back here, so kiss the generals good-bye tonight."

"Oh, say—about the generals," Brolly enthused. "I was all wrong. They're not bad

company, sir. No, sir, we're pals. We've been partying together. That's a fact. I wouldn't kid you. We even call them by their first name—and put them to bed at night, or in the morning, as the case may be and usually is. Another thing, sir—the generals are going to fly south with us and drop in on you people. We've been telling them about all the swell things you do, also about the things Kelly and Wade do. The generals were very, very interested. Oh, and another thing, and you'll like this: there's a swell Hollywood U.S.O. troupe playing here. Been here two days. It's traveling by bus, big stuff, big time. They're due to play the old home post next. Should be in there shortly after we arrive. Big names, Colonel. I've fixed something nice for you, and for Major Seater, too."

"Not interested," Wasp said. "Good Lord, Lieutenant, how many of those flag-stop U.S.O. outfits have we had, and they're all the same. Anything that Hollywood sends out this way is just the same."

"Ah, but you're wrong, sir," Brolly objected. "What we've had before was what Hollywood sent *away*, not what they sent out."

CHAPTER XII

THIRTEEN'S BAD LUCK

PERHAPS by way of spreading grief—and to throw a bit of a scare into Kaka and Kakapo—Col. Wasp went directly to the big boy's quarters to drop a hint that generals were coming. Kaka and Kakapo dreaded anything that moved behind stars. Kakapo was sitting in a chair at Kaka's bedside when Wasp arrived. What was more, Col. Patch had also arrived. He was right there, and all in a lather over the present condition of his diet men. Because he ranked Kaka by a few years, and topped Major Kakapo by two jumps, Patch was in a position to tell 'em off, and he was sure doing it when Col. Wasp appeared on the doorsill. He glanced around, saw Wasp, and said, "Hello, Wasp. . . . Come in. Why the devil don't you take care of this post while I'm away?"

"Meaning what, Colonel?" Wasp asked, and grinned.

"Meaning that these two damned fools

have been eating their heads off—and digging their own army graves—while I've been away," Col. Patch stated, and how he stated it! "Dammit all, the second I move out old General Disability moves in."

"Speaking of generals," Wasp said, "I came in to tell Col. Kelly that the Generals Patrick and Hass are going to pay us a visit."

Kaka Kelly sat up in that bed as though all its springs had suddenly been released and bounced him toward the ceiling. "You say Patrick and Hass are coming in on us? Who said so?"

"I had Lieut. Goodenough on the phone, sir," Col. Wasp answered. Wasp knew when to rub it in. He went on. "It seems, sir, there's been some loose talk about school conditions here on this post. Lieut. Goodenough sort of warned me—or us, perhaps—that the generals are due to fly south with chips on their star-studded shoulders. Eh, Col. Kelly, could I have a few days off? I'd like to go down to Wellington and—"

"Time off, be damned, Wasp!" exclaimed Kelly. "Major Wade and I are heading for Rotorua. We've got to get up there for the cure before this damned gout drives us crazy. I'll have to turn over this command to you. We've got to get away first thing in the morning. You'll have my ship, no two ships, all ready for us; and you'll assign two good pilots. And you, Wasp, you'll have to whip this post into shape for the generals' arrival. Y'say they're due in tomorrow?"

"With the Lieutenants Goodenough and Cooper," Wasp said. "Lieutenant Goodenough gave me the impression that he and Cooper have made a fine impression on the generals."

What Kaka Kelly said about Goodenough and Cooper and their fine impression was terrible to hear. Then he cooled down by several degrees and said, "Tell you what, Wasp. First thing in the morning, you and Seater fly us up to Rotorua. Damned if I'll trust any of these young school hellers. They're all Goodenoughs and Coopers. You can get back here in time to receive the generals."

And listen, Wasp, listen. Don't you let anybody tell Hass and Patrick that there's anything wrong with this school set-up. And, by hell, don't let me forget about that Volcano House thing when we get back. Say, you don't suppose that Hass and Patrick

could have done that jazzing, do you? You say they're thick as thieves with Goodenough and Cooper. Patch, listen, you get off your tail and fix up our papers for Rotorau. And do it tonight, like a good guy, will you? Hop to it right now."

"I forgot one other thing, sir," Wasp thought to add. "Lieut. Goodenough informed me that that star U.S.O. unit, the one with all those big names that's been playing this area, is due on this post within the next few days. Too bad you and Major Wade must miss it."

AND that was the toughest blow of all. The faces of both Kaka and Kakapo showed it. They had always considered themselves uniformed wolves, a bit over-age but still able to howl. And in the past, they had always howled and monopolized the female members of any U.S.O. unit hitting camp, regardless of whether the talent had been sent *out* or sent *away* by Hollywood. Anyway, the two big boys appeared very sick, entirely deflated and flattened out, when the Colonels Patch and Wasp said goodnight and went down the corridor.

Next morning—and it was clear and quiet, with all storms gone south—Col. Wasp saw to it that the headquarters-hangar crew had his and Major Seater's private school Cubs out on the line and ready to go long before first call for general fatigue. Col. Kaka Kelly had said "first thing in the morning," and it was one order from the top which Wasp was anxious to comply with. He, of course, hadn't wanted those days off for a trip to Wellington, nor did Wasp have any desire to fill in as commanding officer in Kaka's absence, but he would do anything under the sun to make that absence a condition in the being, and as quickly as possible.

The big men were early, too. The short trip from Officers' Club to deadline, however, was too much and too far for their poor Levu-jossed legs; so the jeep that trundled them out came to rest between the two waiting Cubs. All that Kaka Kelley had to say was, "Let's get under way, Wasp. You have got to be back here when Generals Patrick and Hass arrive. Let's go."

So they went, Kaka riding Wasp's rear seat; Kakapo Wade filling Seater's. And, of course, both Kaka and Kakapo had what it

takes to fill any small airplane seat to capacity.

Because the day was after-storm clear, with all North Island available as a relief map below him if a man rode high enough, Wasp and Seater went up for altitude with that view-all intention. When 8,000 feet came to the altimeter's slow-moving pointer, Wasp decided it was enough; so they just sat back to breeze through the last forty or fifty miles of the eighty-mile trip. On a morning like that, you could spot small Rotorua town and the nearby lakes as soon as you got a few thousand under the ship. The lakes near the resort—Rota-rua, Rota-iti, Tarawera and the lesser ponds—glistened like jewels of the north. Lakes and ponds always call to flying men—as a rule they mean air fun—and Col. Wasp was a good airman, usually full of fun. Studying the lake region, his keen air eyes spotted something else—four very small spots that caught the morning sun, now and again, and glistened like flashing hand-mirrors. The shining four spots were just north of the lakes, off toward Te Aroha. Wasp knew they were the four southbound Cubs, so ably manned by two of his own gay lieutenants and two generals—four guys who had learned to like and call each other by first names.

The four Cubs were very low, perhaps not more than a hundred feet above the trees, just hedgehopping. Also they were in-line, Indian file. Could it be that two generals were playing that old, always-forbidden, hare-and-hound game so dear to the wildest of wild flying-school fledglings, and playing it in company with two lieutenants known for their willingness to play everything and anything possible with planes? It was possible; and Wasp got a devil of a kick out of the thought that maybe two generals and two lieutenants, after several days of party-

ing, were still pretty well lit up—and chock-a-block full of happy hell.

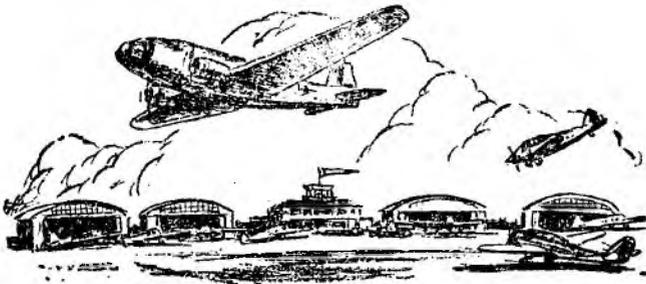
Wasp couldn't resist the temptation, so he turned in his seat, yelled for Kaka Kelly's attention, then pointed far ahead to where the four spots were flying, now closer and much clearer.

"The generals and our men!" he yelled. "See what they're doing, sir? Hedgehopping. Jazzing the terrain. Two general officers, sir. Remember what I told you about them flying north at about the same time as Volcano House was buzzed? Look at them now!"

Wasp had a right to exclaim. Just as he shouted that "Look at them now!" the Indian-file four hit the main street of small, five-thousand-population Rotorua; and they went directly down that main street—with the highest roofs taking them from the aerial view of Wasp & Co.—then zoomed, still in-line, stalled on the top of the climb, leveled out and came on. Wasp could hear old Kaka Kelly cussin' behind him. Maybe he'd like to burn a couple of generals—say nothing of what he'd like to do to a couple of guys named Goodenough and Cooper, now safely consorting with generals.

Carrying on as before, Wasp and Seater flew side by side at 8,000 elevation. Glancing over, Wasp could see that Seater was laughing, his eyes still on the four southbound playboy out front.

The playboys, after quitting Rotorua's main street, won a few hundred feet of altitude for themselves; and, at the same time, they quit the Indian-file formation and now flew wing to wing on a company front. What was more, and very enticing, the four were aimed directly at the northbound pair. However, they hadn't allowed more than a thousand feet of altitude to interfere with their contact flying. There's no fun too far above



ground; for, after all, man belongs to the earth.

Col. Wasp, knowing that he had superior officers out front, made a radiophone contact with Seater. "By the count now," he said. "We'll wigwag the generals a passing salute. One, two."

So saying, both Wasp and Seater rocked their ships, side to side, a mere mild form of aerial how-dee-do. Nothing spectacular, nothing difficult, but nice, friendly form.

The four oncoming ships saw and appreciated the salute; so by way of acknowledging it, the four, as one, and still on that company front, dipped their noses, kicked in rudder, and booted the Cubs through as if a barrel-roll as they'd do—still as one.

Bless such generals! Wasp and Seater could learn to love such fine flying gentlemen.

"We'll answer the *beau geste*, Major Seater," Col. Wasp interphoned. "Gen. Patrick rates thirteen guns, thirteen loops, so by the count . . . One . . ."

So saying, Wasp and Seater lowered their noses, put full throttle to the effort, and began pulling up through the first loop.

KAKA KELLY and Kakapo Wade, knowing what was coming, began grabbing things and yelling like hell. But the salute went right ahead. The four on-company-front Cubs passed under. Little Rotorua came close. By the time Wasp and Seater had counted their tenth loop, Rotorua was right down there—almost directly below—and a reading of 2,000-feet was on the altimeter. There had been nothing sloppy about the first ten loops, and you can't loop a Cub like that unless you're willing to sluff away altitude. Well, they had a landing directly ahead, so they could afford to give away all of the former 8,000.

Kaka was still yelling, grabbing and cussing when Wasp counted "eleven," and, chances were, those old, blown-up legs were hurting like the very devil. Same for Kakapo. So both pilots went into loop No. 12. By then Rotorua was passing aft, and there was less than 1,000 feet on the altimeter. But a good job of saluting was nearing its end; and two just-passed generals should be flushed with pride. Yes, sir, the *beau geste* had been answered in kind.

When the salute-flying pair went into the thirteenth and last loop they had the sparkling waters of Laka Rota-rua directly ahead—and so close that a real long-armed man might have reached from the cockpit and rippled his fingers along the surface. And in Wasp's rear seat Col. Kaka Kelly was still yelling to high heaven, also throwing his weight—Wasp could feel the shake of ship each time Kaka lurched and bulged his muscles, or beef. He was irate.

Kaka, as a rule, seemed to throw his weight hardest each time Wasp started down the back—recovery—part of the loop; and now that the water was so close, too close, Kaka must have had the fear of God in his final yelling lurch. And he heaved his left arm against the throttle, then raked it backward. Wasp's engine pulled back to "idle," and the mischief was done. The prop lost its bite. The power fell to nothing. Wasp fought for control. He half turned and yelled. But Kaka's eyes were on the water, and his beefy arm was still on the pulled-back throttle, holding that all-important control in lethal chancery. Wasp had only one thing left to him, and he took it. He ditched, and right away. The Cub splashed water in the shallows, not more than fifty feet from the north shore; and when the settling was complete both he and Kaka Kelly still had their chins above water. Wasp had a right to feel proud of that.

"What the hell, Wasp!" Kaka yelled. "What was the idea of all that dam' fool looping? D'ya hear me, Wasp! Damned if I won't have you up for a court-martial! What was the idea?"

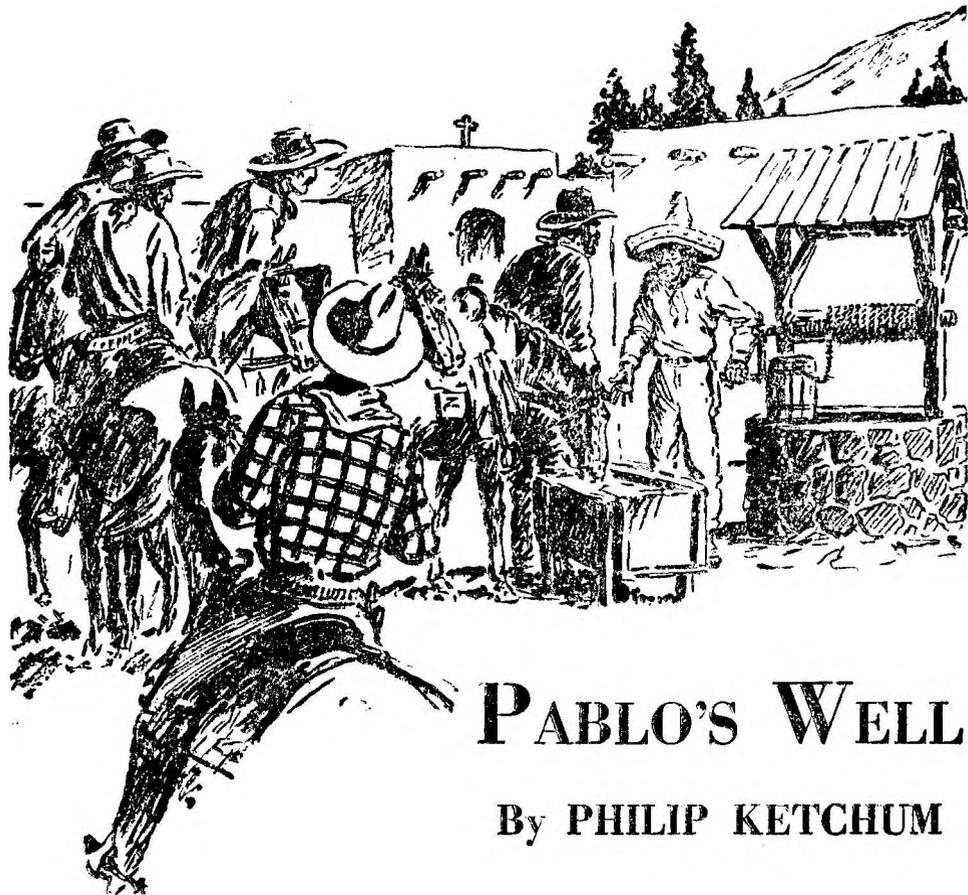
"A salute, sir," Wasp said, and he tried his best not to laugh. "Thirteen, sir. Gen. Patrick rates thirteen."

Major Seater came back just above them. He throttled very low, hung his head out the side window, and yelled, "Don't go anywhere! Stay right there! We'll send a boat!" Then he was gone.

"Send a boat!" Kaka yelled. "Send hell! Send guys with white coats! Mark my words, Wasp, I'll . . . blub, blub."

"Better try standing up, sir," Wasp suggested, and the Joss over both North and South Islands flapped its wings, so to speak. In salute, no doubt, to the spirit of enterprise.

*Water in the Desert Was a Gift from God, and It Was Right
for No Man to Possess It, or to Hold It from Another
or to Charge for Its Use*



PABLO'S WELL

By PHILIP KETCHUM

IT WAS a four-day trip by horseback from Tubec to San Esteban, but if a man had a good horse and the courage to risk it, he could cut the journey almost in half through crossing the desert by way of Pablo's well. This shortcut was not marked, and only men familiar with the desert would try it. Many who knew the way preferred to take the longer route, for the desert was not kind to those who invaded it. Its every shifting sands were hot and heavy and the breath of the wind which swept across it could sear a man's throat.

Only at Pablo's well was there any break in the desert's ruthless monotony. Here, in a sheltered valley almost midway between Tubec and San Esteban, there were trees

and several buildings and a well. Here, a man risking the journey could find water for himself and his horse and could eat at Pablo's table and spend the night as Pablo's guest. There was no charge. If a man stayed a week there was no charge. If money was left in the face of Pablo's protest it would be turned over to Father Galvez at the mission in San Esteban when Pablo rode into town for supplies.

Pablo's reason for this was quite simple. He did not feel that he owned the well which was known far and wide by his name. He considered himself merely the custodian, the *curador*, of this watering place in the desert.

Water in the desert was a gift from God, and it was right for no man to

possess it, or to hold it from another, or to charge for its use.

Pablo was quite old. He had been here in the desert most of his life. According to the story which was told, Pablo, as a young man had started across this desert with Father Serra and two others. It was then wholly unknown and unexplored. Four days out of San Esteban they had reached this place but there were no trees here then. There were no buildings. There was no well. They were without water and had been without water all day. One of the men was half crazy from thirst.

All that night, the story went, Father Serra had prayed, and in the morning, near where Father Serra lay exhausted, Pablo had put his hand to the ground and found it moist.

He had scooped away the sand and in a moment the hole he made was filled with water. There, before they left, the well was dug and lined with rock and to the well Pablo returned after their journey was ended. Father Serra, he reported, had charged him with the responsibility of seeing that the well was cared for so that men traveling across the desert could make use of it.

There were some who scoffed at this story and while it may or may not have been true, the miracle of Pablo's well was an actuality and men who crossed the desert were thankful for it. It became a custom for the travelers who came to Pablo's well to burn a candle in the rock grotto he had built near it, and perhaps to offer a prayer of thanks for the water and for the safety and the safety of other travelers. Men of all religions, or of no religion, did this; honest men, and some not so honest; for the way across the desert was a quick escape from the various towns bordering it.

SAM AIKEN, the sheriff at Tubec, was well aware of this and there came a time when he talked to Pablo about those who rode the desert by night.

"You know if you didn't give 'em water, Pablo," he said scowling, "they wouldn't be so quick to risk a trip across this country. They might make it but their horses couldn't."

Pablo's hair was almost white. He was short, stooped. His face was deeply

wrinkled and was so tanned from the sun that it was the color of old leather.

"And what should I do, senor?" he demanded. "Am I to look at two men and say that one is good and shall drink and another is bad and shall thirst? Did not God make water for all?"

Aiken's scowl grew deeper. He had known this would be Pablo's answer and he knew that argument wouldn't change the man. Even if Pablo knew that one of those who stopped here was a murderer, it would make no difference. He would not deny the man water or food from his garden.

"You could use a little more judgment," he growled. "You're going to get into trouble, Pablo."

"A man born into this world is born into trouble," Pablo answered, shrugging his shoulders.

"You'd yell for help mighty quick if an outlaw band took over your place."

"Senor, that could never happen."

"Who would stop it?"

"I would, senor," said Pablo quietly.

Sam Aiken turned away. He was still scowling. He half wished that there wasn't any such place at Pablo's well, for it was too deceptive a dispersal point. Outlaws, heading this way from Tubec could continue on to San Esteban or swing north or turn south or even risk the journey toward the Marlow if they knew the desert well enough. The trail they might leave was quickly hidden by the shifting sands.

TRAVELERS crossing the desert usually started out in the early morning so as to make it to Pablo's well by late afternoon or in the first evening hours. They would stay overnight and leave before dawn on the second lap of the journey. Night travel was not safe excepting when the moon was bright and a rider could see to avoid the heavier sands and the scattered ravines. There were some, of course, who tried it either through choice because of the heat of the day, or out of the necessity for traveling fast. Sometimes there might be several people at Pablo's well, sometimes there were none. Pablo never knew how many to expect or at what hour to expect them.

On the night when the Tubec bank was robbed he had a single guest, a

rancher named Carlson who was traveling from San Esteban to Tubec and who had made this journey many times before. Pablo met Carlson when he arrived, cared for the man's horse as was his custom, and spent the evening with the rancher. They were old friends and there was much to talk about, the desert and its storms and shifting sands, Father Sera and the mission in San Esteban and Pablo's son.

Pablo was late in getting to bed but he was up early and he went with Carlson to the chapel where the rancher lit a candle at the altar and made whatever prayer was in his mind, or perhaps no prayer at all. Afterwards he watched Carlson mount his horse and ride toward Tubec.

He was working in his garden when the five men who had held up the Tubec bank came into sight. He didn't know that, of course.

He knew from the direction in which these men had appeared that they had probably come from Tubec and that they must have met Carlson on the way. From the time of day he guessed they had traveled most of the night. He was sure they would be thirsty, tired and hungry. These general suppositions passed through his mind as he quit his garden work and walked toward the well to meet them. The garden, naturally, could wait. This was his real work, to care for the men who came here.

Pablo had water drawn and in the trough by the time the men rode up. He gave them his usual greeting. "Welcome to Pablo's well, señores. How can I be of service?"

The leader of these men was known as Red Garvey. He was wanted in a score of towns in Texas. His record was as red as the beard he wore. He was a broad-shouldered man, tall, heavy, and he had a perpetual scowl on his face. His eyes were sharp and dark.

"Are you the one they call Pablo?" he demanded.

Pablo nodded.

"You are alone here?"

"The wife of my youth is dead," Pablo answered. "My sons have gone, though one day the eldest will return here to care for this well. His name is Pablo also."

"It's like I told you, Red," said Jim Otway who had guided these men here. "The

old fellow's all alone. He's lived here all his life, knows the desert like a book."

The horses had watered by this time and three of these men had dismounted and had had a cool drink from the extra bucket Pablo had drawn. The fourth man now swung to the ground and had his fill of water. Pablo, staring into the faces of these men did not like what he saw, but men such as these had stopped here before. Men of all types crossed the desert. He was not their judge. His responsibility was the well, and the comfort of any who came here.

"I will take your horses and care for them," he offered.

Red Garvey shook his head. "Not so fast there, Pablo. Do you know the way to the Marlow?"

Pablo nodded. The Marlow valley, far to the north and west, made its deep cut into the desert. There was water in the Marlow and a town, but it was a two days' journey from Pablo's well and few men ever attempted it, particularly at this hottest time of the year.

"Could you guide us there?" Garvey asked.

"No, señor. I must stay at the well. It would be better for you to go back to Tubec and take the old road through the hills to the Marlow."

"We'll decide what's best for us," Garvey snapped. "Have you got a horse?"

"Of course, señor."

"Saddle it."

Pablo frowned though it is doubtful if Garvey noticed it for Pablo's face was so deeply wrinkled the scowl made little change. He shook his head stubbornly. "I cannot leave the well."

A harsh laugh broke from Garvey's lips, a laugh in which there was no trace of humor. He said, "Hollister, fill all the canteens. Get those extra water bags by the well and fill them. Manheim, you scout around and see if you can turn up a few more canteens and water bags. We'll take all we can carry. Fallon locate Pablo's horse and saddle it. I'll get the dynamite ready."

"Dynamite!" Pablo gasped.

"Sure, dynamite," Garvey answered. "The men chasing us can't chase us very far if they don't find any water when they get here."

Pablo drew in a long, slow breath. He couldn't believe what he had heard. He

the years of his life hundreds, perhaps even a thousand men had stopped here. Some had been bad men as these men must be, yet all who had had a drink at his well had given thanks of some sort for the water. Never before had anyone sought to destroy it.

He couldn't believe these men meant to destroy it, couldn't believe he had heard correctly. He stared at Garvey and then at the others, shaking his head. He watched the man filling the canteens and the extra water bags. He saw a man catching his horse in the corral back of the house in which he lived. He saw Garvey with the dynamite, three sticks of it.

"Senor, senor," he cried. "I will guide you to the Marlow. I will take you there as straight as a bird could fly and so quickly you will be amazed, but do not destroy the well. I beg of you, do not destroy the well."

Garvey had dismounted and walked up to the well. He paid no attention to Pablo. He had his drink, then stooped over and jammed the dynamite between two of the rocks in the wall.

Pablo caught his arm. "Senor," he implored, "listen to me, I beg of you. Do not destroy the well. I will do anything you ask but do not destroy the well."

Garvey turned on him and pushed him away, pushed him so hard he lost his footing and fell to the ground.

"You listen to me, old man," Garvey ordered. "Soon as we blow off that dynamite there'll be no well here. The water may be there but it'll be under tons of rock where no one can get to it in a hurry. You're showing us the way to the Marlow. Lead us straight an' we won't hurt you. One false step an' you're through, finished with life, finished in a hurry. Understand."

Pablo didn't understand. He understood the words and what they meant but he couldn't understand why anyone for any reason would destroy water in the desert. Surely these were not men, for men did not act this way.

The canteens were filled and as many water bags as the men could find. Water was poured into the trough again and the horses drank once more. Pablo's saddled horse was brought to him and he was told to climb into the saddle and he did this, still unable to comprehend what was hap-

pening. Then a good distance away from the well and while one of the men held the bridle of his horse he saw Garvey touch a match to the dynamite fuse and seconds later he heard the explosion.

When the dust lifted it hurt him to look, for Pablo's well was gone. Where it had been was a jumbled mass of stone ripped out of order by the explosion and caved in over the water which had been his responsibility to guard.

"That'll do it," Garvey said with satisfaction. "Let's get on our way."

"We ought to burn a candle before we go," said Jimmy Otway, the man who had guided them here.

"Burn a what!" Garvey asked.

"A candle," Otway repeated. "That little building by the well is sort of a chapel. It's supposed to be good luck to burn a candle there. Nearly everyone who stops here does it."

Red Garvey laughed. "Well, they won't do it any more. If I'm any judge of things, Pablo's well is finished, buried, ended. Anyone who stops here from now on will just stop to die. Forget the candle. Let's ride."

"We ought to do it," Otway grumbled. "It's still supposed to be good luck. I wish I had a candle."

Garvey turned toward Pablo. "How's the quickest way to the Marlow?" he demanded.

"That way," said Pablo slowly, pointing north. "And then east after we pass the high dunes."

"There is no quicker way."

"No, senor."

"All right," said Garvey. "Show us the way. And understand this, old man. We shot three men back in Tubec and another on the way here. We'll shoot you just as quick if you don't play straight with us. You know where we want to go. Get us there."

Pablo stared toward the north. He nodded his head. "I know where you are going. I will get you there."

THEY rode in single file with Pablo leading the way. They climbed from the narrow valley in which Pablo's well was located and headed north across the drifting white sand of the desert. There were no distant mountains or hills to mark their course. There was nothing to guide them

save Pablo's sense of direction and the position of the sun. By night there would be the stars if a man could read the stars.

Pablo rode slowly and not in a straight line. He avoided the heavy sands as much as possible for the heavy sands were a drag on the horses feet. A blistering, hot sun burned down from the sky and the wind sweeping across the desert seemed to have tongues of flame. A man couldn't take much of this. Without water he would have no chance at all.

They stopped after the sun was down for a brief rest and to eat some of the tinned food the men had brought along. They talked to Pablo asking him how far they had come and how far they still had to go. They gave him food and water but very little water. All afternoon these men had been nipping at the canteens they carried. They didn't have too much water.

"Can we make it by morning?" Garvey asked.

Pablo shook his head. "Not by morning, but before noon."

"If we rode harder?"

"Senor, we could not ride harder. See how weary the horses stand even now."

"Then let's waste no more time here."

The sun was down but it was still hot and there was still the wind, always the wind. It picked up the heat from the burning sand and drove it against them. Pablo mounted and started on again and the others followed. It grew darker and the stars came out and the wind shifted so that now it was blowing against their backs but it was still insufferably hot. And suddenly Garvey called a halt and rode up to where Pablo waited and the others gathered around them.

"Which way are we headed, old man?" Garvey demanded.

"North," said Pablo, "and a little west."

"The wind was in our faces. It is now behind us."

"The wind is always changing. It will shift again before morning."

Garvey studied the stars in the sky and the others looked up at the heavens.

"The north star is there," said Pablo pointing. "Our course lies a little west of it."

The men stared in the direction he was pointing. Not many stars were out but they could see the one he indicated and Ot-

way nodded his head. "Yep, that's the north star all right," he said to Garvey.

"It had better be," Garvey growled. "Don't you make any mistakes, old man."

They rode on. More stars came out until the heavens were filled with them and they were bright over the desert and so close it seemed as though a man could almost stand up in his stirrups and touch one. Pablo was continually shifting his direction to take advantage of the contour of the land but there was always a bright star ahead for there were bright stars everywhere.

The hot air sucked the moisture from their bodies and ate steadily of their strength. This was the second night during which they had had no rest and several of the men dozed in their saddles in spite of the heat. The wind seemed to have shifted again and was now blowing across the way they headed and then was in their faces as it began to grow light in the east and as the sun climbed over the horizon. There was no question, now, about the direction they were taking for the morning sun was to their right.

They had stopped again and were gathered around Pablo.

"How much farther, old man?" Garvey demanded.

Pablo shrugged his shoulders. "Six hours, ten. It is hard to say."

"Who's got some water left?"

FALLON handed him a water bag. It was almost flat but Garvey drank deeply. "Anyone can last half a day," he declared. "We've almost made it. Almost made it."

The others drank and Pablo noticed that there was very little water left in any of the bags or canteens. A tight, almost hidden smile came to his face.

"Straight ahead is it, old man?" Garvey asked.

Pablo nodded gravely. "I will show you."

He led them on again while the sun climbed into the sky and sent its withering heat against them. It had been hot during the night, hot the day before, but the heat of the morning was almost more than they could bear. The men hunched in their saddles, now and then lifting their heads to stare with bloodshot eyes to the north. By mid-morning one of them was babbling incoherently, begging for water.

Pablo looked around and again he smiled. "It is not far, now," he called over his shoulder. "Another hour, perhaps. Or maybe two." And a little later he called to them again. "It is just ahead, now, the break into the valley. It is over there."

He pointed a little to the left and reined up his horse and watched as the five men urged their horses past him. Garvey was in the lead, was ahead of the others, and could see, now, the rim of the break and drove his horse toward it. "Here it is," he shouted hoarsely. "The Marlow. We've made it! We've made it."

And suddenly he was at the rim of the break and was staring not at the Marlow but into a narrow valley in the desert, a valley where there were trees and several buildings and where a pile of rock marked the location of Pablo's well. The others were with him, now, were staring at what he had seen and not a sound came from any of them. Perhaps, like Garvey, they couldn't at first believe the evidence of their eyes, couldn't believe that they were back again at Pablo's well.

"The old man," Garvey cried hoarsely. "Where is he? Where is the old man?"

He clawed up his gun and turned in the saddle and looked back. Pablo was circling to the left, circling toward the place where the San Esteban road cut down into the valley. Garvey fired at him but Pablo was a good distance away and Garvey's hand wasn't very steady. Garvey fired again and again. He fired until his gun was empty but none of his bullets reached the old man and Pablo didn't even look toward him.

"Water!" Fallon croaked. "Water! There's a well down there."

"We blew it up, you fool," Garvey answered.

"But we can dig it out again," Fallon cried. "We've got to have water. We've got to dig it out."

He turned his horse to hurry after Pablo and Otway followed him, and Manheim and Hollister and finally Red Garvey. Fallon was right. They had to have water. They could dig out the well. They had to dig out the well. There was nothing else to do.

THE posse from Tubec had followed the main road which skirted the desert and too late had discovered that the men they

were after had taken the cut-off to Pablo's well. A good many of them turned back when they learned this, but Sam Aiken and a few others headed for Pablo's well on the chance that they might pick up the trail from there. Vultures led them to the spot where they found the body of Ben Carlson and in the early afternoon they came to the rim of Pablo's valley. There was activity at the well. It seemed to have caved in. Men were crawling over the stones, tugging at them, rolling them aside. Aiken counted the men working at the well. There were five of them. There had been five in the band which had held up the Tubec bank.

"There are the men we are after," Aiken said to those who had come with him. "It looks like the well wall gave away and they're having to dig it out to get water. We'll get down there an' cover 'em. We'll let 'em finish the job, too, for that well's mighty important to this part of the country. I wonder where Pablo is?"

Pablo wasn't in sight and they saw no sign of him as they rode down into the narrow valley. They spread out and moved up to the well, covering the men who were working there and they couldn't help but notice how desperate and how haggard these men looked. And how weak they were, for some of the rocks they were trying to move they could hardly handle. They paid hardly any attention to the posse, either. They were intent only on getting to the water which lay below the rocks.

Pablo appeared in the doorway of the chapel he had built, and Aiken, noticing him there, said to the men who had come with him, "Watch these fellows. Let 'em dig. I'll try to find out what happened."

He dismounted and walked toward the chapel and as he reached it Pablo held out a candle from the supply he always kept on hand.

Aiken took the candle. He carried it to the altar Pablo had built. He lit it and set it in its place. He was not a religious man and he made no prayer but for some reason he felt strangely humble.

"What happened, Pablo?" he asked, turning away. "What happened to your well?"

"It will soon be repaired," Pablo answered. "If you wish water I have some here in the chapel. I have always kept

water here as an offering to the saints. It would not be wrong to drink it. I have had some."

Aiken shook his head. "I can wait. But why didn't you offer this water to the men outside. They look as though they really needed it."

"They are not men who would come to the chapel, senior."

"I should say they're not. They held up the bank in Tubec, killed three men. They met Carlson on the desert and killed him. They're the kind of men I was talking about the other day. You're mighty lucky we got here when we did."

"Perhaps, senior."

"Pablo, you can't go on furnishing water to men like those fellows out there. It's not right."

Pablo scowled. "God has put the water here," he said slowly. "He did not label it

only for those who are good. It is for men who are thirsty."

Sam Aiken threw up his hands in disgust. He wondered if he would ever understand Pablo.

"I ought to leave your well filled up," he said under his breath.

Pablo shook his head. "You could not do that, for though you call this Pablo's well, it belongs to you and to any who come this way."

Aiken grunted. He stepped to the chapel door. The men working on the well were now lifting out rocks which were moist, were down to the water, were drinking of it. Sam Aiken motioned to his own men to close in on them. He turned to Pablo.

"Well, Pablo," he nodded, "your well's fixed up again."

"Of course, senior," Pablo nodded. "Wait and I shall draw you some water."



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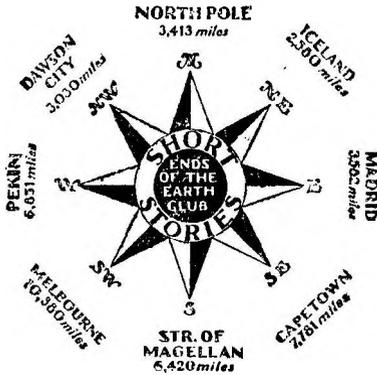
“DEVIL ON THE LOOSE”

A novelette in our next issue; it takes its characters (and the readers) out of the land of men and devils into the land of the gods! by

KENNETH PERKINS



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Chief Torpedoman's Mate

Dear Secretary:

I would like to register my name and address with your club. I have been in the U. S. Navy for the past ten years and have traveled to many far and interesting ports.

I would like to correspond with members of foreign countries, or of the U. S. A., who like the sea, ships or sailing.

At present I am training naval recruits at Great Lakes.

Very sincerely yours,
Michael J. Theiss
Chief Torpedoman's Mate

Quarters 44-C,
Foss Acres,
Great Lakes, Ill.

A Friend from Belgium

Dear Secretary:

Here I am again, after several years of silence. Sorry I can't give you my number of membership you addressed me with your kind letter of February 9, 1939, it has

been lost; being bombed out in 1944 by a German V-1. You know that don't you? Anyhow, we are still alive and should like to re-enter the big partnership of "The Ends of the Earth Club." So please may I ask you to let me have a new one?

Perhaps you have served in the U. S. Army and have visited Europe, maybe Belgium? How do you find the Old Continent? As to me, I find the Americans fine people, perhaps—in the eyes of a European—a little too modern, your mode of living and manners being so different with ours. In some way, incomprehensible to us, but maybe we are incomprehensible to you?

Will you please put my name and address in the list of one of your magazines? Many thanks for it.

Yours sincerely,

Adolf Craen

13, Avenue August Van de Wiele,
Deurne, Antwerp, Belgium.

Wants to Contact Old Friends

Dear Secretary:

Have you discontinued "The Ends of the Earth Club?" Just back from overseas and wish to contact some old friends.

Yours truly,

Frank S. Wilton

2508 Saturn Avenue,
Huntington Park, California.

Done Any Boating or Fishing In South Florida?

Gentlemen:

Please register my name and address with your club. I am interested in boating and fishing in South Florida.

Yours very truly,

George Kelly

3210 N. W. 35th Street,
Miami 37, Florida.

Are There Any Chess Fans In the Audience?

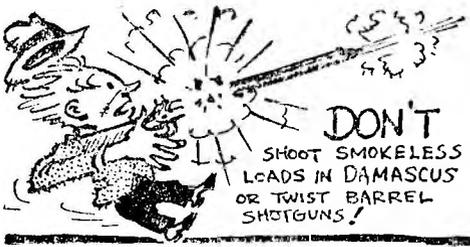
Dear Secretary:

Please accept my registration in your club. I very much like your magazine and am fond of chess, philosophy, the classics in general, and, when I can, like to go fishing.

A would-be adventurer,

Bart MacFarland

551 Elmwood Avenue,
Evanston, Illinois.



THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by
PETE KUHLOFF

Old Hogleg and Blanks

QUESTION: I have been reading your material for some time now and just recently had cause to write and ask you a couple of questions.

I have acquired a single action .38-40 Colt revolver and would like to know where I may purchase another one to match it. The barrel length is 5 inches.

Also, where can I get some blank shells for them and if I can't, please tell me where I can get instructions and tools for making them myself. **TEXIE HOLLE, Missouri.**

ANSWER: The Colt Single Action Army revolver has not been manufactured since before the war. I really don't know if it will ever be produced again. The Colt people are making every effort to meet the demand for law enforcement weapons and guns wanted by target shooters.

I imagine that the old Hogleg will eventually be back on the market due to popular demand.

This revolver was made with three different barrel lengths, $4\frac{3}{4}$, $5\frac{1}{2}$, and $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Yours evidently has the $4\frac{3}{4}$ -inch barrel.

New guns in this model are hard to come

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by. I haven't seen one in several years. The best bet is to contact your local gun dealers or you might write to Stoeger Arms Corp, 507 5th Avenue, N. Y. 17, N. Y., or to Klein's Sporting Goods, 229 West Washington, Chicago 6, Ill.

Blank cartridges haven't been on the market for some time. No telling when they will be manufactured again. If you wish to make your own, write to the Lyman Gun Sight Corp, Middlefield, Conn., explaining your problem. They manufacture reloading tools.

War Guns

QUESTION: Very much interested in your current article in SHORT STORIES on auto- and semi-auto firearms, particularly your revelation that attempts to develop such weapons date as far back as 1664. This reminds me of the time I got all excited over discovering a peep sight on a crossbow in the Museum of Arts. Up to then, I'd considered the peep sight a modern innovation.

But your writing about the submachine guns of the recent fracas was what really got me het up. I was small arms instructor in the AAF and worked with all those you mentioned. The Thompson was my favorite, primarily because I like a sturdy weapon and I'm big enough to handle one. The youngsters I had to instruct, however, were on the average too light to manage it from the shoulder so I threw the book out the window and taught them how to shoot from the hip. I had all the ammo I wanted to use and the free use of the range in my spare time, so I attained considerable proficiency with my personal Tommy which helped in demonstrating to the kids just what could be done with the weapon.

The M3 we called the "grease gun." The kids took to that like ducks to water because it was light enough for them to handle and its slower fire rate enabled them to hold it down in sustained bursts. Funny thing about that queer-looking contraption was that it would not climb as the Thompson did but the barrel would rotate in about an 8-inch circle all through a sustained 30-shot burst. It was originally designed, you know, to be dropped to guerrilla fighters,

had interchangeable barrels and magazines so that it could be used with German and Japanese ammo as well as our own .45's. Once you got the hang of the trigger squeeze you could control down to firing one shot at a time if you wanted to. The one thing I didn't like about it was the nasty crack it made with no wood to deaden the report. When I think of 75 trainees cutting loose on the firing line at the same time my ears hurt all over again.

In the early stage of the war we had a miscellaneous collection of weapons to work with including old Springfields that were slotted for the "Patterson Device." I understand that this was something worked out toward the end of World War I to convert the Springfield into a semi-automatic. I couldn't get much information about this. In fact, I didn't have the time to dig into the story of this Patterson Device. Do you have any dope on it? I'd like to know just how it worked and if it ever was used in combat.

You kind of slipped up a bit when you wrote that the M3 could be fired single-shot or full automatic if you meant that it had a selective fire control like that on the Thompson. The trigger squeeze was the only control.

W. R. MARSDEN, New York.

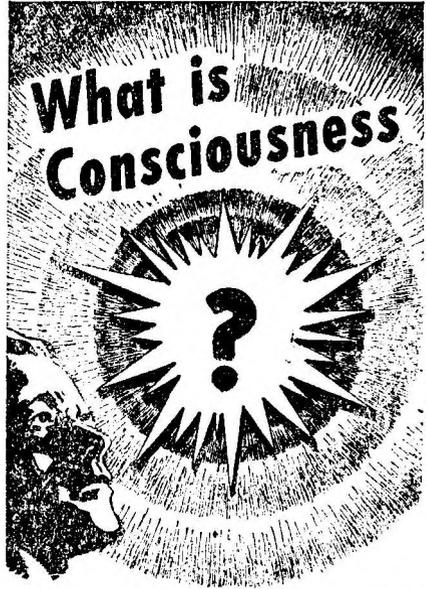
ANSWER: I'm sorry if I gave the impression that the M3 (grease gun) had a selective fire-control mechanism. I have never seen one of these guns that couldn't be fired single shot by the simple expedient of being a little easy on the trigger.

The Pedersen Device was one of the best kept secrets of World War I. It has been estimated that for ten or fifteen years after the war not more than fifty individuals knew anything about it.

J. G. Pedersen, the well-known firearms engineer and designer is the man responsible for its development.

At the end of World War I 65,000 of these mysterious devices had been manufactured and with the war's end complete destruction of all this equipment was ordered. A bit of stupidity, it seems to me.

The Pedersen Device was known as "Automatic Pistol Caliber .30 Model of 1918" and was actually an automatic bolt replac-



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ing the regulation Springfield bolt. The magazine of this device held 40 rounds of a .30 caliber cartridge that has the general appearance (slightly longer) of the well-known .32 automatic pistol cartridge.

I have several of these cartridges in my collection and have found them to be loaded with 3½ grains of Bullseye pistol powder behind an 80-grain jacketed bullet. The velocity of this bullet when fired from a Springfield rifle is around 1,300 feet per second, and would kill at 500 yards (so I'm told). The cartridge is very light in weight and a soldier could easily carry four or five hundred rounds.

The only changes necessary in the Springfield rifle (except the removal of the regulation bolt and replacing it with the Pedersen bolt) was the cutting of an ejection port in the left side of the receiver, a little tripper in the rear to function with the device, and two grooves in the magazine cut-off. Rifles so altered were stamped "MARK I" on the receiver ring.

Since the end of World War II I have seen several such rifles that were issued to civilian rifle clubs and others sold through the D.C.M.

The Pedersen bolt was constructed so that the small cartridge seated in what might be termed an auxiliary cartridge of .30-'06 cartridge shape. As the gun was fired a slide (similar in appearance to an automatic pistol slide) moved to cause the fired case to be ejected and to reload the piece.

The war ended just before the Germans were to be surprised with the weapon, thus the Pedersen Device was never used in actual combat.

.45-70 Shotgun

QUESTION: I would like to have some information on a .45-70 shotgun. And also where I can get ammunition for this gun. Some people mistake it for a rifle but it is a shotgun. It was made by Harrington-Richardson Arms Co. Patented 1900. Wayne Hoppingarner, Indiana.

ANSWER: If you want to shoot your .45-70 shotgun you will have to "roll your own," as this type of cartridge is not being produced.

It isn't difficult to reload cartridge cases. In fact, it is a lot of fun. If you are interested in this activity write to the Lyman Gun Sight Corp, Middlefield, Conn., enclosing 50 cents for their Ideal Hand Book on reloading ammunition.

Ammo Don't Fit

QUESTION: I have a 9-mm. P-38 German automatic, a war souvenir. The ammunition I have is of the right caliber but is too long in the case. They fit the clip but will not slide all the way into the breach. Could you give me any information on this?

TEX NORRINGTON, Canada.

ANSWER: I don't know just what cartridge you are trying to use in your P-38 but imagine it is the 9-mm. Browning Long. The case of this cartridge is a little longer than that of the 9-mm. Luger cartridge for which the P-38 is chambered.

It is quite dangerous to mess around with unidentified wartime ammunition, especially in foreign arms. For instance, the 9-mm. Luger cartridges as used by the Germans in their submachine guns were heavily loaded and certainly are not to be used in pistols.

It is becoming more and more apparent that the P-38 is a very much over-rated pistol.

Info Wanted On Old Shotgun

QUESTION: I've a ten-gauge I. C. Smith shotgun Model 1884 that I don't seem to be able to get a line on anywhere. Maybe you can help.

The only odd feature about this piece is that instead of having a thumb latch to break it you push the forward trigger ahead.

I've looked in Stoeger's and have asked innumerable gunsmiths about this piece but no one has ever seen one like it.

Incidentally, I've been hunting (geese) with this gun since I was sixteen and that's twenty years. Bagged all I could use this year. CHARLES C. CHERRIE, California.

ANSWER: I'm sorry but I have never owned a shotgun similar to yours. Have seen them used years ago but never shot one. Perhaps one of our readers may be able to give us some detailed information about it.

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The barrels are undoubtedly of twist (Damascus) construction and I would consider it unsafe to shoot, using smokeless powder ammo., especially heavy geese loads. The piece might stand up indefinitely and again it might let go with the next shot.

No Fodder for Old Shotgun

QUESTION: I would like to know if it is possible to buy ammunition for a .44-caliber shotgun made by The Hopkins & Allen Arms Co.

WALLACE PERLY, Minnesota.

ANSWER: As far as I know the ammunition producing companies are not making metallic cartridges loaded with shot, such as the .44 at the present time.

Amateur Gunsmithing

QUESTION: Guns are my hobby and I would like to know where I can get gun tools and parts. And also where I can get gunsmith books on gun repair.

D. L. DALTON, Nevada.

ANSWER: First of all, send in your order for The New 1947 No.38 "Shooter's Bible" which will be available about April 15. It costs \$1.25 and is published by Stoeger Arms Corp., 507 5th Avenue, N. Y. 17, N. Y. It contains pictures and prices of most everything available in the gun line.

Also write to T. G. Samworth, Plantersville, South Carolina, enclosing a 3-cent stamp for his catalog describing the gun books that he publishes.

Alcoholic Content of a .45

QUESTION: In W. C. Tuttle's story in this issue, did you notice that when Frijole accidentally dropped his .45 into the mash for some of his famous desert drink it came out shrunk to a .38? Have you any comment on this? (Adv.)

ANSWER: That's nothing, nothing at all. If it had been dropped into the stuff we used to drink back in Oklahoma it would have come out a .22 or disappeared completely.

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