RING GUNNER . . . . . Jackson V. Scholz

Short Stories

August 10th

25¢

W. C. TUTTLE
W. C. BROWN
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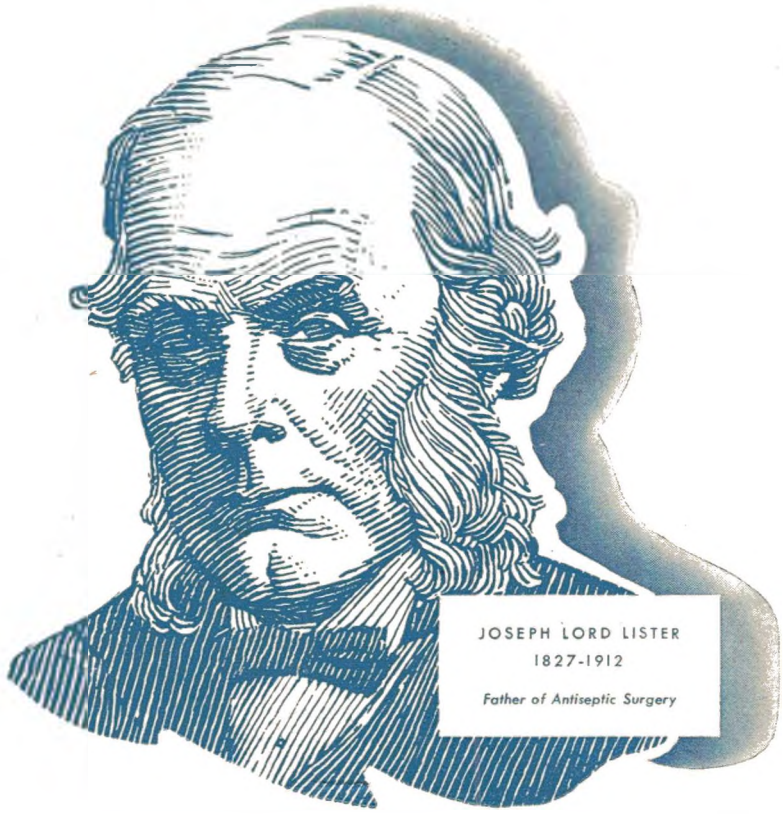
An epic of Early California

CAPTAINS AUDACIOUS

G. A. Shaftel



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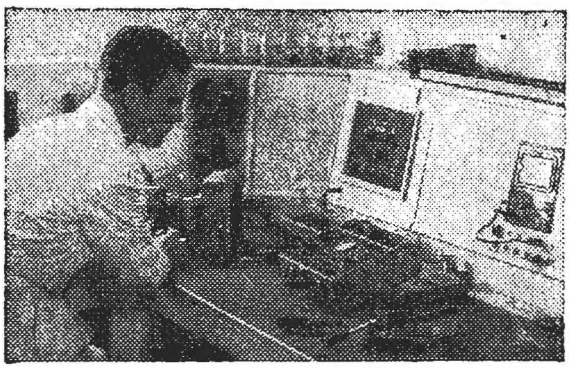

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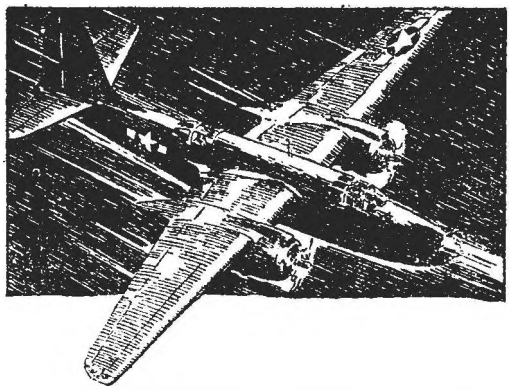


Joint Operations: War and Sports

IN THESE days of vitally important joint operations undertaken by American and British forces all over the globe, it is interesting to note the impressions Jackson V. Scholz brought away with him following several years of athletic competition in England. Jack Scholz, as many of you doubtless know, was one of our greatest Olympic sprint stars not so long ago.

Observes the author of "Ring Gunner":

"I can't claim to speak with much authority on the cousinly relations between the British and the Americans as a pair of separate races, but in the dim and distant past I was more or less closely associated with numerous Englishmen in an athletic capacity, from which I was able to draw the profound conclusion that the American and English athletes got along okay, or even a little better than okay. We liked them fine, and they seemed to like us without any obvious effort on the part of anybody, despite the fact that we had not been indoctrinated with a love-your-neighbor policy before leaving our own shores.

"After the 1920-24-28 Olympic Games, the American team was invited to England for post-Olympic meets against the English team. The rivalry was healthy and unstrained. The English, it is true, run clockwise instead of counter-clockwise, which may have something to do with their custom of driving on the left-hand side of the street. At any rate, once under way, we found it easy enough to keep on going, even though it was almost like running back after something we'd forgotten.

"Their track and field athletics, similar to ours, draw from a representative cross-section of the country, permitting us to meet all types of Englishmen. If there was friction of any nature, I did not see or hear about it. I may be drawing my conclusion on too slim a premise, but, based on athletic competition, it seems sound; namely, that English and American young men should not experience too much difficulty in seeing eye to eye, even under the crowded conditions which now exist in England."

Jackson Scholz.

Writing Rigger

FROM a Maine shipyard where he's lugged his typewriter for the duration, Francis Gott writes us:

"The background and characters for 'Gull on the Beam' have been sifted out of a lifetime of living. Pete the gull comes from the past when, as a boy, I raced the rocks of the shores and cliffs and dory pulled the waters of Swan's Island, Maine. The fishermen of that time used to catch young gulls from the nests on the outer rocky islands and raise them. These gulls became quite tame, were distinct individuals, and were known to all the fishing people.

"I was born in Brooklyn, New York, of a Maine sea captain father and a Nova Scotian mother of Scottish and Irish decent. My father's family, in the person of Peter Gott, my progenitor, and Daniel Gott, his cousin, were among the half dozen families first to settle Mount Desert Island and Swan's Island before the American Revolution. Maine at that time was still a part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Three of the other families were Smith, Mayo and Stanley. All these people came from the environs of what is now Gloucester, Massachusetts. Peter and Daniel were descendants of Charles Gott who was of the party of

John Endicott. They came from England shortly after the turn of the year 1600 and settled near what is now Gloucester. John Endicott later became governor. I also carry a strain of French blood which comes down to me from my paternal grandmothers' great-grandmother who was a Frenchwoman.

"The other characters in the yarn are Down-easters, too. Cat-gut is a composite of all the big hearted, honest, capable little men whom I have palled with in shipyards and on fishing boats. These men are always willing to fight at the wink of an eyelash for right and justice. May God preserve the breed.

"About two months before Pearl Harbor I received a note from one of the government employment offices informing me that riggers were needed in our Maine shipyard building destroyers. I had just quit eighteen months of teaching in the CCC, seamanship and coastwise navigation mostly, with a scattering of history, English, etc., mixed in. I intended giving full time to writing from then on. But riggers were needed, war clouds were threatening, and I told the Mrs. that it looked as if rigging would be more important than writing. So, knowing from past experience that it would not be too pleasant working bare handed in the winter, aloft, on icy rigging, I took the job. I have been there ever since. There's not much work aloft on destroyers, though.

"Previous to the CCC I had put in five or six years as able seaman, quartermaster and bos'n on deep water cargo ships, passenger ships and large private yachts. I have hit West and North African ports, ports in Southern Europe, and in Turkey, Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea. Also South American and West Indian ports. Also about that time I took an occasional job as a rigger in shipyards in or near New York.

"I get restless for the clean sweep of deep water, but as I am now partly deaf, have a wife and three small children under six, I guess I am in the rigging trade for the duration.

"However, I have a brother who is carrying on the gold braid tradition of the family. He's a lieutenant in the Coast Guard. Although almost blind in one eye he has been with the Marines during the invasion of the Aleutians, Tarawa, and other Pacific landings.

"We have girl riggers now, sure. When women first began filtering into the war plants an old rigger in our loft said they'd never get in the rigging department, but there they are. Capable, too. There's one, a school teacher before she came into the loft, who can tuck in a splice as good as an old hand and knows what to do with a ship's hawser. Outside of my wife's, I never saw a pair of violet-blue eyes that could hit harder.

"Now I suppose all you guys will want to be riggers. But wait until my young wife reads this!

"At present I live on a seven acre farm in a Maine fishing village. Have a couple of Nubian goats, an Airedale, a cat and a couple of kittens and some hens. Outside of ships and the sea and going out to the inshore fishing banks with the trawlers as a boy down on Swan's Island, there hasn't been much else. Except on the way somewhere I must have picked up a degree from New York University for there is the parchment hanging on the wall behind me in a small frame I made out of oak and mahogany."

Francis Gott.

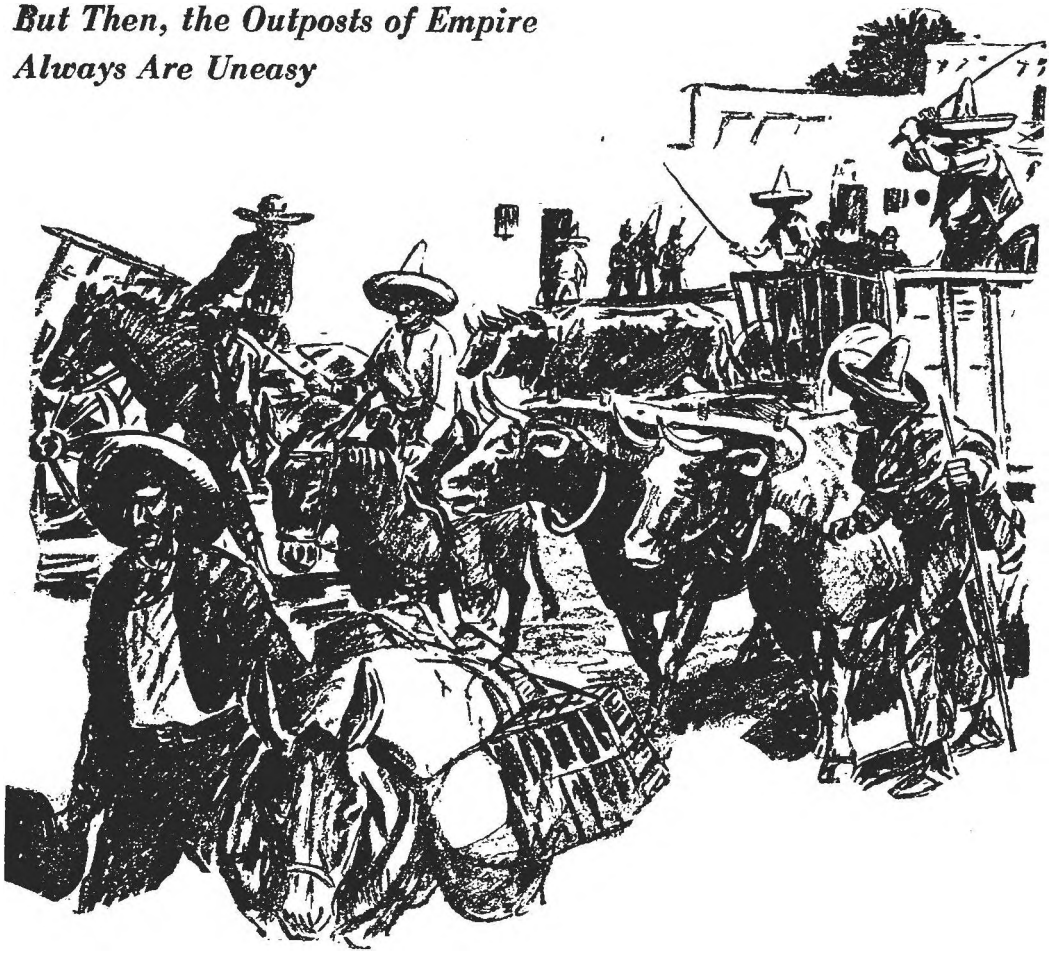
Language Lesson

CONCERNING "Chinese Run-around" E. Hoffmann Price gives us the following lesson in Chinese:

"The initial discussion of the Chinese language, early in Chapter One, though not in quotes, was of course intended to be a cross section of Burke's bewildered mind, and not necessarily the strictly accurate exposition you expect an author to do when he is expounding directly. Now, *kwei* does

(*Continued on page* 139)

But Then, the Outposts of Empire Always Are Uneasy



CAPTAINS AUDACIOUS

By GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL

Author of "White Gold," etc.

FROM the Spanish outpost at Yerba Buena he had crossed San Francisco Bay in a small boat as the guest of a mission padre whose Indians sang a hymn as they wielded paddles against the tide. And then he had trudged northward across the lofty shoulder of a mountain that silhouetted against the sky like a sleeping princess. Then he walked through aisles of lofty redwoods cathedral-like with hushed peace made glorious by sunlight that streamed as if through stained glass. A winding canyon led him through the coast hills out upon a narrow, wind-swept beach. On northward he hiked, the surf a ceaseless thud and shouting upon his left.

Several nights he brooded over a fire in a sandy cove, hardly able to sleep for the hammering pulse of the ocean, and for the anticipation that was like a swelling shout prisoned in his throat. It was a long march to Fort Ross, and yet a mere stride compared to the way he had already come. He had crossed the continent, and spent two years doing it: he had been nineteen when he

started, and a student used to the shelter of a seminary—he was twenty-one now, and he had known fear that retched his innards and the savagery of dealing death to a foe and wolfish appetite after long hunger, and yet in the sober firmness of the man remained the boy who could dream again when there was time for it.

The third day he came in sight of Fort Ross, and he saw the girl when he was but a pistol shot distance from his goal. She was not Indian, and she was not Spanish, and her full skirt and basqued jacket were of a cut foreign to him. She carried an armload of bright poppies and blue lupines; and as he stopped to watch, she dropped to her knees and carefully laid the flowers upon a low mound there at the edge of the sea bluff. Done, she put her face in her hands and began to weep, the sun shining bronzy-gold upon her bent head.

He hesitated, loath to pass her; but the path along the rim of the bluff led past the little clearing in the thicket of flowering heliotrope in which she kneeled. And there, beyond a cove through which a stream purled into the sea, rose the flat on which stood Fort Ross. There cliffs a hundred feet high fronted upon the sea, natural ramparts of defense; and behind, the stronghold hills gloomy with pine rose in a barrier against the east. Forgetting the girl, he stared—

Fort Ross! Not English at all, that *Ross,* but Russian. And Russian was every aspect of the fortress. Here in California where the Spaniards built homes of enduring 'dobe mud, the Russians had built of heavy fir and pine. Logs twice the height of a man ranked together to form a square-cornered stockade. From two corners rose stout blockhouses. Wall and bastion bristled with cannon, scores of cannon; and at gates sentries paced alert. Within the enclosure were log buildings, squat and heavy of structure: barracks for officers and barracks for *soldats,* storerooms for fur and trade goods and beef and wheat, repair shops, and governor's mansion, and, dominating all, a bulbous-domed Russian church.

He sighed. So alien, this Ross! Its squat

gloominess conjured images of dour skies bulging with avalanches of snow and of savages screaming to attack with red-stained steel. Why so formidable a fortress in this sweet, sleeping land? What was there to fear from siesta-loving Spaniard and timid Digger Indian? He frowned, thinking, but then, the outposts of empire are always uneasy.

He started past the clump of heliotrope, walking lightly so as not to disturb the girl. But she looked up and saw him, and cried out in sudden fright.

He said, "I'm sorry I startled you."

She answered, but he could not understand her words.

He spoke in Spanish, then, but she did not understand. So he tried French, saying, "I do not speak Russian. I am an American."

Her eyes lit up wonderfully. Blue eyes they were, so deep blue they were almost purple. She was very pretty, he realized.

"American!" she said, answering in French. "And you speak French! I thought you were a savage. But no barbarian can speak French. You will not kill me and torture me and tear the hair from my head, will you?"

"Indeed not," he said gravely. "It is very pretty hair, and a very pretty head."

She smiled, and protested, "But I have been crying until my eyes are swollen."

"You have a loved one buried here?" he asked gently.

"Oh, no." She reddened. "This is—make believe. I have been married one year, but my husband was drowned when hunting sea otter with the Aleuts. He was lost at sea and I know not where. Here I bring flowers when my heart overflows, and here I come to sit and weep."

"It's best so," he said, nodding. "It's best to ease the heart with weeping." In English, he would have been self-conscious making such talk; but in simple, formal French it seemed natural enough.

"I did not love him deeply," she said matter-of-factly. "I did not know him long enough, and he was a man of temper. Still, he was all I had, and when I am lonely and homesick, here I find solace."

"I am going to the Fort. Will you show me the way?"

"**But gladly.**"

SHE was tall, and shapely, and she carried herself with supple grace. He looked sidewise at her as they walked; and it pleased him that the top of her head came almost to his lips, and that the sun had not tanned the smooth creamy texture of her skin.

"But if you are lonely," he said—"surely at Ross there are lonely men who wish to marry you?"

She nodded and said, "But certainly. There is"—she counted off on her fingers—"Captain Kuprin, and Lieutenant Gobulov and Gospodin Rynin and the captain of hunters, Lurie, and—"

"But you care for none of them?"

"No." She said it with pouting lips, and yet it was crisp and curt. "Captain Kuprin is a widower and has a little boy, a darling, sweet enough to smother with kisses! But the captain is always hoarse and always clearing his throat like a rusty cannon. Such a barking and wheezing! He sounds like a whole congregation being bored by a sermon. My little lieutenant, Gobulov, is nice. But such calf love! He sighs and swoons and writes me poetry. But such *bad poetry!* And once we were married he would consider the job done and get fat and comfortable. Gospodin Rynin is a different matter. He is wealthy and handsome and ambitious. His eyes devour me, and every Sunday when we walk back from chapel he asks me to marry him—"

"*Every* Sunday? Rain or shine?"

"Every Sunday, and twice on Easter." Her lovely eyes crinkled with laughter. "But always I say *no, maybe*—because if I married him, if I got fat he would hate me and if I had a fit of temperament, demanding this and that, he would beat me. Which would be all right, if he did it lovingly, but he would *mean* it. So—" She shrugged eloquently.

"But it's a waste for a lovely girl not to marry."

"So I tell myself. Still I cannot say yes to Gospodin Rynin. I think, perhaps, I am waiting for someone. For a stranger to come, someone different, someone strong, someone—" she glanced around frankly at him. "Like you, perhaps."

"Good Lord, no," he blurted in English.

"Of course, you are not handsome," she said judiciously, brow puckered, "except

when you smile. But then, all great men are homely men with an inner light that makes their faces brilliant when they smile. You are a person of importance, I am sure."

"Wait, hold on," he protested, wanting both to laugh and to run. Remembering then, he said in French, "I am but a poor traveler, Madame, a penniless trapper—"

"What does it matter? I am rich. Both from my family and from my dead husband—"

He took her arm firmly and firmly he said, "Plea . Guide me to the Fort. I must see Governor Kuskov."

She smiled up at him, her lovely eyes warm with approval.

"I think, when you have shaved and bathed—you smell almost like an Indian, you know—when you have got out of your worn buckskin and put on linen of my dead husband's which I shall give you—I think I shall like you very much." She hugged his arm against her breast. "My name is Marina. Marina Krylenko. What is yours?"

"John Randolph."

"Randolph." She gave the *r* a luscious little trill; and murmured, "I like it, I like it very much."

"You've heard it before, of course."

"No, never."

"But you must have! How long have you been here?"

"More than a year."

He stared at her.

"Come on. I must see Governor Kuskov."

AS THEY climbed the bluff toward the fort, he studied the vessels at anchor in the cove below. Three small schooners lay there. The brig *Sweet Ellen* was not among them. His forebodings deepened. He had come so far, and perhaps for nothing! . . . He had been going to school in Boston when his widowed mother died. Quitting his studies, he had gone to St. Louis, then, to work for the uncle who had been supporting them. But John Randolph had not liked filling orders and marking change in a store. When a chance came to accompany a party of trappers headed up the Missouri to take beaver on the Yellowstone, he had eagerly departed. Venturesome of spirit, the party had followed the trail blazed by Lewis and Clark a dozen years before—from the Mandan villages through the Gates of the Mountains and the Lemhi Pass of the Shoshones into the Bitterroots. And there a war party of Assiniboins had jumped the outfit. Only John Randolph had escaped, afoot, alone, without grub or blankets.

He did not turn back east, but continued on west, to the Snake River. He shot deer; friendly Indians gave him salmon. In a patched up canoe he drifted down the Columbia to its mouth; and there found a trading vessel which had come from Honolulu, put in at Sitka, Alaska, to trade with the Russians, and now was bound for California. It had brought him to San Francisco Bay.

But it was all for nothing! *Lucien isn't here. He hasn't been here for a year! Now maybe I'll never find him!*

Outside the stockade of Fort Ross, he saw, was a teeming village. Here were the hovels of the Aleutian hunters whom the Russians had brought from Alaska to secure the precious sea otter pelts for them. And here were workshops and barns for which there wasn't room inside the stockade.

Guards armed with cutlasses stood at attention outside the gates of the enclosure. They spoke respectfully to Marina; but they stopped John Randolph, held him until a runner brought an officer, crisp of speech and regimental of garb. Marina quickly explained, but the officer's appraising glance was cold.

In French he said, "Come with me." And he did not permit Marina to accompany them. In the officers' barracks, John Randolph waited.

AT CLOSE range, the fort looked even more formidable than from a distance. The logs used for construction were thick, heavy. Within the gate, guarding them, stood two brass cannon. The snouts of heavy cannon stuck from apertures in the bastions, commanding approach from every direction. And guards and lookouts paced on duty in strict alertness.

The officer returned, then, and conducted him to the Governor's Mansion. Within the door a cannon stood ready—as if the Russians figured to fight to the last ditch even if the stockade were over-run. Up a stairway the officer conducted John, and at the top rested a heavy barrier which could block these stairs. Then down a hallway they

walked—and here on stands reposed cutlasses and pistols and muskets.

It was a strong fort, this Ross; perhaps the strongest north of Mexico.

He was conducted into a large sunlit room. An officer in fine uniform rose nervously from behind a desk. He was a small, compactly-built man with a lined thin face, prematurely gray, with an intense, commanding air about him.

"Randolph," he snapped in heavily accented English. "The guard says your name is Randolph."

He seemed excited, incredulous and angry.

"Yes. I'm John Randolph. Governor Kuskov?"

"Yes, I am Kuskov. Why have you come here?"

Spots of color burned into John's lean cheekbones. He wasn't exactly polite, this Kuskov.

"Captain Lucien Randolph is my brother. I came here to find him."

"He's not here, and he's not very likely to come here, though we wish he would—we wish very much that he would return," Kuskov said, a glint in his dark eyes.

John's fists clenched as his own temper fired up. Sternly he checked his runaway feelings, reminding himself that he had better try using calm cool judgment instead of impulse for a change.

"I do not understand your manner, sir. You speak of my brother as of—an enemy, or a criminal."

"You are quick of discernment. Or else you *know* why we would like to get our hands on Captain Lucien Randolph!"

"I have not heard from my brother in two years," John said steadily. "I do not know to what you refer—and I do not like your manner of speaking of him."

Governor Kuskov flushed hot with anger. He was, evidently, not accustomed to being talked to in this way.

"All right, I'll explain," he snapped. "Captain Randolph was the last Yankee shipmaster with whom our company made a contract to hunt sea-otter. Your brother furnished his vessel, the *Sweet Ellen,* we furnished Aleut hunters and their *bidarkas.* It was your bother's responsibility to take our officers and the Aleuts down the coast to the Farallones, to the Channel Islands and into the coves and bays along the coast as far south as Magdalena Bay, and to bring them back here with their catch of sea otters. For transporting our hunters and the use of his ship as a base of supplies, we gave your brother a full half share of the otter pelts gained by my men. And that was generous, considering that on some voyages as many as 1,600 pelts have been taken. Unfortunately," Kuskov said, "on this last voyage, your brother was not satisfied with a mere half of the cargo of pelts."

"Go on," John insisted.

"Even though it was a very prosperous voyage, and some 1,700 fine otter skins were taken—Or should I say, *because* it was such a prosperous voyage?" Kuskov's irony was heavy. "No, Captain Lucien Randolph decided to take the full cargo of pelts for himself! He did not return here to Ross with them, but sailed straight across the Pacific to Canton and there sold the otter furs and kept the proceeds for his own pocket!"

"No," John said. "That's not so. I don't believe it. You can't make me believe it!"

"Since 1803, the Russian-American Fur Company has dealt on a contract basis with Boston ship-masters. With men like O'Cain, and Winship and Swift and Kimball. Never before was there cause for even a hard word. Never before were we cheated of a single ruble's worth!"

"My brother did not rob you!"

"The fact is that he *did* rob us. God in Heaven, man, you dare set your mere word against the *fact?*" Kuskov jumped up and took a turn about the room, his face dark with anger. "Robbery! Some 1,700 pelts, fine pelts, each worth almost a hundred American dollars in gold at Canton. Bad enough! But do you think *that* is the extent of Captain Randolph's crime?"

"I know my brother. An honester man never lived," John insisted vehemently.

But Kuskov seemed not to hear him at all.

"The pelts we could write off as a loss due to bad judgment. But the men, sir! The *men.* My *soldats* and Aleut hunters who were aboard the *Sweet Ellen!* Lieutenant Karsakov, and eight soldiers, and sixty Aleutian hunters. Where are they? Where are they, I ask you!"

"My brother did not harm them, I insist."

"Whether Captain Randolph was merci-

ful enough to merely maroon Karsakov and his men and the hunters upon some empty island—or whether my men were murdered in their sleep and dumped over the rail for the sharks—we do not know! But they are gone! And for us there is but one conclusion—"

"No! Not Lucien!"

"Captain Randolph is responsible for the death of Lieutenant Karsakov's detail and sixty of our Aleutian men. And for that crime, if Captain Randolph ever comes into our hands, he will stand trial."

Governor Kuskov plumped down onto his chair.

"Sir, you've got to believe me," John said. "Lucien is eight years older than I am. We were orphans and he looked after me. I *know* Lucien. In some ways he's a reckless and hard-driving man, yes, but there is not one drop of mean or dishonest blood in his body! He would not steal, and he would not kill to steal! I'd stake my life on it. He did not often go to church, but Lucien was a practicing Christian in the fine and real sense of the word. He had too damn much pride to lie and too damn much self-respect to steal. He did not steal your cargo of pelts—and he did not kill your men!"

Governor Kuskov gestured to the officer who had brought John to him.

"Volkof, you will lock this man up and post guards over him."

JOHN'S lean bronzed face went white. With angry contempt he said, "Is it your idea to take revenge upon me, sir?"

Governor Kuskov had worked off his rage; he was cool, calculating, now.

"You are, no doubt, innocent of anything your brother has done, and you are quite right in feeling that reprisals taken upon you are unjust. But I have no choice. I can leave no single stone unturned in my effort to bring Captain Randolph to trial. Here is what I have in my mind: Captain Randolph put his ship into the South American trade, after selling our otter pelts at Canton. He changed the vessel's name from the *Sweet Ellen* to the *Santa Rosa*. I shall send word, by way of Monterey to Callao, that Captain Randolph's brother is held a hostage here at Ross." He shrugged. "That my plan will have much chance of success, I doubt. But I shall send word that unless Captain Randolph returns here to Ross to stand trial for his crimes, I shall send *you* to Siberia for my superiors to deal with. What they will do with you, I cannot say."

"Good Lord, man, what kind of justice is that!"

"Did Lieutenant Karsakov and his soldiers and hunters deserve *their* fates?" the governor retorted. "But you forget. You run no risk. Your brother is a man of honesty and Christian principle! He will not let another suffer for his crimes. When he learns that you are held here as a hostage for his return, he will immediately return so that you will be freed. Is that not so?"

"Certainly!" John said.

"I do not believe it! I tell you, Captain Lucien Randolph is a rapacious scoundrel!" Kuskov banged a fist to his desk in his anger. "He will not come back. He will not lift a finger to help you."

Quietly John said, "My brother did not steal your cargo, and did not kill your hunters. From wherever he is, when he hears that I am held here as hostage for his return, he will come. I know that."

"For your sake, I hope that is so. Volkof, you may take your prisoner now."

John did not turn away.

"Tell me, sir," he asked unsteadily. "When my brother returns here, you'll send him to Siberia?"

Kuskov's answer was prompt and emphatic.

"Indeed not! We will hang him from the highest beam in the fort!"

LIEUTENANT VOLKOF took John to a storeroom at the rear of the stockade, locked him in and set a guard at the door. The room had no window and smelled of musty grain. After a while the door was opened and a rough chair handed him. There was no other furniture of any sort. Ruefully he paced the floor. How long would he be penned in here? Months?

At sunset, footsteps approached and the door was opened. It was Marina Krylenko, and she was carrying a tray with covered dishes from which lifted aromas of cooked food that made John realize suddenly that he was famished. The way his face lit up made Marina laugh delightedly.

And then she looked past him and saw the room in which he was confined and her

sweet lips formed an O of consternation, and then she got angry. Eyes flashing, she lashed the guard with words of such furious Russian that he backed away, protesting his blamelessness. She turned to John.

"My dear, what have they done to you!" she cried in French. "A pig shouldn't be held in such a place. Come out! You will eat in my quarters, and meanwhile I shall see to it that you are given a room fit for humans." She turned and spoke to the guard again. He shook his head frantically—then turned his head and bawled toward the barracks.

Volkof came running. Marina turned her scornful Russian on him, and Volkof, at first haughty and superior, cooled and dwindled under her superior haughtiness.

Marina linked her arm through John's then. "It's all right, John! Volkof will arrange everything. Come with me."

The guard followed, embarrassed and crestfallen. Marina took John to the governor's own mansion, to her own suite within it. The rooms were elegantly furnished with fine Russian pieces. Pelts of the great Alaskan brown bear covered the floor, and upon the huge bed lay a coverlet of fine otter pelts; hangings of Chinese silk hid the log walls.

"Begin eating, John," she urged. "I'll start the samovar. Don't wait for me—I'm in no mood for food."

He asked, "Where's that guard?"

"Outside the door." She pouted her lips in distaste. "But don't worry!"

Nearly lightheaded with hunger, he attacked the cutlets and *kasha* and the fresh vegetables that obviously must have been raised here at Ross. As he ate, Marina bustled about the apartment. The lamplight was ruddy gold in her shining hair; and she had a way of standing, deep in thought, a finger over her pursed lips, and then of darting toward a cupboard or drawer with little exclamations, that delighted him. She was lovely, he thought; sort of unpredictable, perhaps, but lovely.

Suddenly he realized that it was a man's clothing that she was so busy laying out on the bed. Coat and trousers of fine dark cloth, and linens of luxurious texture.

"Marina! Are you getting those clothes out for *me?*"

"But yes, my dear! I told Governor Kuskov that you are a gentleman, and you have simply got to *look* like a gentleman."

"B-but—are those your dead husband's things?"

"Yes. He won't mind."

He gulped. Slowly he continued eating.

Marina said, "I have a tub ready in the next room, and the Indian woman will bring hot water. Would you like for her to scrub you?"

"N-no!" he choked.

"I will shave you myself, and trim your hair."

"I can do it myself."

"Nonsense! I often cut my husband's hair, and he was finicky—he had a bald spot to hide. You haven't, have you?"

Before he knew it, her slender fingers were moving through his thick dark hair. He jerked aside, with a "Hey!" that startled her. She stared at him, wide-eyed.

"But, dear one, why do you move from me?" Her eyes were suddenly brilliant with tears and her lips quivered.

"But I didn't mean it that way, I just—" He choked off, confused, realizing that he was blushing hot. "Oh, go ahead and trim my hair. G-glad to have you do it," he said miserably.

She brightened up wonderfully, and hastened to dig up scissors and mirror and hardly let him finish eating before she got busy. He fidgetted, at first; but the comfort of a good meal under his belt, the glow of wellbeing that warmed him, presently made him relax. Marina was pretty, very pretty, he thought as she cut his hair. Her skin was smooth and creamy, and her bronzy lashes were amazingly long over her brilliant eyes. Her youthful throat lifted clean and fine from her shoulders, and her profile had a cameo perfection, and the elusive fragrance of her bright hair set his blood to pounding. She was nice to have around, Marina.

John had his bath, then; and he shaved himself. Marina handed the clothes into the other room for him, and he dressed.

He really felt pretty good when he came back into the room—well-washed, well-fed, well-dressed. When Marina saw him, she clapped her hands, her eyes shining.

"But you are *distingué,* my darling!"

Delightedly she flung her arms around him and kissed him. For an instant he stood

taut, her lips warm upon his mouth; and then his arms gathered her up hungrily.

When he released her, Marina whispered to him, "We will be happy together, you and I."

KNUCKLES rapped on the door and when Marina opened it, Lieutenant Volkof and Governor Kuskov entered. Kuskov's eyes widened at sight of John and an instant change came to his manner; he spoke with something of deference in his words.

"I have arranged another room for you, sir, where you will be more comfortable. Please go with Lieutenant Volkof."

It was a room in the officers' barracks to which Volkof took him, decently and comfortably furnished. But a guard was placed outside his window, and another at his door. Governor Kuskov was taking no chances.

John tried to sleep, but could not. Lying on the bunk, staring into the darkness, the heartaching confusion of the afternoon took possession of his mind. Vivid memories of his older brother came to him.

Their father had died at sea when a gale broke a mast of his brig and he was dragged overboard in the snarl of rigging. When the news finally reached home, John's mother was prostrated. Lucien became the strong bulwark of the family. John recalled his own wild grief and Lucian's calm, steadying arm about his shoulders. Lucien had taken responsibility, then, for support of his mother and brother. Lucien was wild to go to sea. But there was no money at home, and there were debts to pay. So Lucien worked for a ship chandler, hating the drudgery of clerking and keeping books but sticking to it to feed and house his family, and to pay off every last cent of debt.

He wasn't a burly fellow, Lucien, but wiry of build, sandy-haired, a taut gray-eyed keenness about him. A man quick to dare anything and to forgive anything. There was the time he dove under the ice of Miller's Pond, broken by skaters, to fish out a mongrel dog which had fallen in. There was the time Lucien fought a neighborhood bully a head taller than himself, for teasing John. Lucien had taken a licking, but made it expensive for his opponent. And so often had Lucien, coming home dead-tired from overtime work, still found the heart for a grin and joke with his young brother, and the interest and energy to sit up and help John with his books, though he rocked in his chair with fatigue.

Eventually, their dead father's partner had carried enough cargoes in his ship to enable him to pay the boys for their inherited share of the vessel. With his money, Lucien had bought an interest in the brig *Sweet Ellen* and finally had gone to sea as her supercargo. Later he became her master. John, meantime, started to seminary. Until their mother's death, Lucien had regularly sent money toward her support. Since her death, John had not once heard from Lucien at all.

Governor Kuskov's angry accusations repeated themselves in John's mind. He stirred restlessly in his blankets.

Damn it, he could not, *would* not, believe them!

Lucien would not steal a cent from anybody. Never! And there wasn't enough money on the whole wide earth to make Lucien needlessly harm the meanest, mangiest savage alive!

"Lucien did not steal Kuskov's cargo of furs. He didn't kill Kuskov's hunters, either —and I'll keep on saying so to the last breath in my body!"

ALL next day he paced the narrow confines of his room. Inactivity was dull torment to his tall, rangy body. He tried to relax in a chair, to ease his mind enough to do some sane clear thinking about his predicament. But his thoughts were too burdened.

When Marina came at supper time with a tray of food she herself had cooked for him, he felt a wild leap of heart. He almost caught her right into his arms. She noticed it, she read the full intensity of his feelings. She was amazingly keen about sensing his feelings. She fairly glowed with delight over it. *Good Lord,* he raged at himself. *Am I beginning to take this girl seriously?* He intended to be perfunctory about kissing her when she left. But when the moment came, he realized he couldn't be casual with Marina Krylenko. Not if she wished it otherwise.

His boredom, next day, intensified his gloomy worries almost beyond bearing. He began to understand why a tiger suddenly caged by trappers, or a wild stallion penned in a corral, might dash his brains out against

the confining wall. He *had* to learn to tolerate it, he warned himself. He might have months of imprisonment. More than months.

This evening, Lieutenant Volkof was with Marina when she came to the door. Marina's lovely face was radiant.

"John, darling, Governor Kuskov has requested that you have your evening meal with us all from now on. Isn't that splendid?"

It was. It was more than that—it was a triumph. For, from the fleeting curl of Volkof's lips, John understood. This invitation wasn't Kuskov's idea; it was Marina's wish, and Marina had had the charm and the tenacity and will to get her wish. He realized suddenly that it would be a mistake to underestimate Marina.

She took his arm, and they walked to Governor Kuskov's mansion, into the big dining room. It must be a custom here, John figured, for the officers of the Fort and the important civilians of the Russian American Fur Company to dine formally together in the evening. Considering how far they were from home, and how long they had to endure their exile, this was a very wise custom.

Governor Kuskov welcomed him with dignity, but with no hint of how he really felt about having a prisoner at his own table. Others of the officers made poor attempts to hide resentment. John understood their feelings as Marina introduced them. Captain Kuprin cleared his throat impressively. Little Lieutenant Gobulov had fire in his eye. Gospodin Rynin was suave, but his cold gray eyes were calculating. John almost chuckled to himself; these were Marina's admirers. They would hate him even if he had been sent here by the Czar himself on a mission of state, and he couldn't blame them.

They did themselves well, these exiles of Fort Ross. Candlelight gleamed on fine linen and silver; and the food was ambrosial to a man who had lived for two years on trapper's lean fixin's. At first, most of the hum of talk was in Russian. But Governor Kuskov used English occasionally, out of politeness to John; and Marina spoke only in French, and gradually the conversation confined itself to French. And John began to realize something.

There were three other women at the table, wives of officers. It was Marina Krylenko, however, who was the vivacious center of the talk of the group. Charming small talk seemed effortless for her. She spoke of plays she had seen in St. Petersburg; of poetry she had read; of Governor Baranof's rowdy yet efficient administration of Alaska. She by no means monopolized the talk. The easy skill with which she started Gospodin Rynin talking about Nikolai Rezanov's first voyage to California, and Lieutenant Volkof to telling of a fight with Spanish soldiers in an otter cove to the south, made John realize that she had social skill that was sheer artistry.

And then she actually had him talking, in French, about a savage fight with the Shoshones during his travel westward—

"We were in the Shoshone country, trapping beaver. There were eight in our outfit, but we'd split into two parties. Four of us were working up a river, afoot. The Shoshones have been friendly to whites ever since the Lewis and Clark outfit passed through a dozen years ago, so we never dreamed of trouble. We never suspected a thing until we walked right into an ambush, and heard warwhoops and saw the arrows coming at us."

Odd how the shock of that first, stunned half-instant of attack could come back upon him! Those arrows—arching in the sun, feathered ends gleaming, so many of them it seemed they came like a wild storm-gust. Bigfoot Harris had screamed and tugged at the winged shaft projecting from his throat, and sprawled headlong. And Lafe Newlin had fallen, an arrow in his side and another in the hump of muscle at the base of his neck. John and Bill Wilson grabbed up Lafe and carried him into a clump of aspen as a second volley of arrows arched and dipped at them. Bill Wilson stumbled, and swore, but caught himself. Back of a bunch of boulders they found momentary shelter.

"The Indians weren't Shoshones, but Assiniboins, a raiding party that had sneaked into Shoshone country to steal horses. They charged us, whooping and letting fly with their arrows. They had no firearms, lucky for us. Bill Wilson had caught an arrow in his back, but it hadn't crippled him enough to keep him from working his rifle. There must've been fifty of the Assiniboins. They could've run over us like wildfire if they'd

been of a mind to. But we dropped three of them as they came, and they stopped, fading right into the brush. Indians don't fight like white men. They count the cost and they try to keep their own losses as little as possible. Real sensible of 'em. Instead of charging us, then, they set about sneaking up on us. It's more fun that way, for them. For us, it was bad medicine."

Bill Wilson had cursed himself for a chuckle-headed idjit. Expecting no trouble, he had let his party leave camp with but a few balls for their rifles. Now they had left just a couple dozen bullets. No more. *John, lad,* Bill had said, *we'll have to have help. I'll go back to camp for the other men.* John had protested that Bill was wounded. *Not too bad. I got enough Injun savvy to crawl through these varmints. You haven't.* But John, since he was unhurt, insisted on making the attempt.

"So, after sundown," John continued in French, "I crawled through the line of Assiniboins." He had never been so scared in his life, nor so angry. Twice an Assiniboin almost walked onto him. Then a brave discovered him. The Indian had heard him and asked something, turning. John sprang at him. Caught the brave's throat between his hands. Desperation made John efficient. The brave had no chance to yell an alarm. "It took me until midnight to reach our main camp where the rest of my party were to wait for us. When I got there, I had a surprise." Even yet, force of that surprise had power to constrict his throat and make a hoarse whisper of his voice. "The Assiniboins had come onto our other partners first. I found all four of them spreadeagled on the ground. Dead, and scalped, and—" He paused, steadied his voice. "Our camp was looted. Furs and traps and gear and supplies had all been stolen."

Impulsively Marina put her slim hand on his arm. Her lovely eyes were bright with tears.

"I thought of asking the Shoshones for help, then. But I realized that Bill Wilson had to have help by morning or it would come too late. There was just one thing I could figure out to do. I started looking for our horses, praying that the Assiniboins hadn't found them. I was lucky—I located two of our saddle animals grazing where I'd last left them. I mounted one and, leading the other, I headed back toward the fight."

Such a hopeless thing to do! He didn't even have a gun, since he'd left his rifle and powder and ball with Bill Wilson.

"It was dawn by time I neared the grove of aspen. I saw smoke from the Assiniboins' campfires. If I'd known more about Indians, I'd have turned back right then." He *had* had premonitions. Indians attack at dawn. Why was this war-party so calmly cooking food? Afoot, he led his horses close. Then abruptly he had mounted, and spurred his horse into a wild run. "Right through the Assiniboin camp I galloped. Caught 'em completely by surprise. A brave lunged to grab my bridle, but I swerved and hit him and knocked him head over heels. Some arrows whipped past me. But I rode straight toward that clump of rocks yelling for Bill."

Bill! Bill! he'd shouted. But he had got no answer at all. He jumped to ground behind the clump of rocks. Bill Wilson was there, all right. And Lafe and Harris.

"My partners were there. But they were dead. All three of them. I tried to take Bill Wilson out, anyhow. I picked him up and laid him across my saddle. But the Assiniboins were coming on the run now. Before I could mount, my horse plunged away from me. He had an arrow in his flank. Then I staggered as an arrow got me in the arm. Somehow I got onto my second horse, and spurred him into a gallop. Couple of arrows whizzed past my head, but I got away."

AS HE finished talking, some of the gloom and heartache of that black day was again upon his spirit. Always he had felt vaguely traitorous, for escaping; as if, by rights, he should still be with his partners, lying back of that rock clump in the aspens, dead.

Marina was pressing his hand. "You did all that could be done," she said. "You must not blame yourself any more."

It startled him a little to realize how plainly Marina could sense his feelings.

After a little pause, Governor Kuskov said in friendly fashion, "I've been thinking that you'd be more comfortable here if we did not keep you locked up as a prisoner. I am quite willing to give you complete freedom of the fort if you will give me

your parole to make no attempt to escape."

It was a generous offer, and John's pulse leaped wildly.

But then he reconsidered.

"No," he said. "No, I can't. I can't do it. I must tell you, sir, that at the very first chance I shall escape!"

Kuskov reddened. The others looked shocked. Only Marina, who had been waiting tensely for his answer, relaxed as if in deep relief. She was looking at him now, her lovely eyes warm with reassurance.

But later, as he was locked into his room again, John wondered if he had not been a fool.

Marina had a surprise for him next day. In mid-afternoon his door was opened and she stood there, with two guards.

Smilingly she explained, "I persuaded Governor Kuskov to allow me to take you out for a stroll about the fort. I convinced him that you'd make no attempt to escape with two *soldats* holding muskets at your back. You'd like to come out?"

She made it sound like such an easy trifle!

"You're a wonder," he said unsteadily.

It was pleasant to be out in the sun again, to be free to walk a space larger than the confines of his dark cell room; and it was pleasant to walk with Marina's arm linked in his. But he listened with only part of his attention to her light talk, for he was studying the fort, seeking a way to escape when the chance came.

But discouragement grew on him. It would be hard to get over the stockade. Very hard. For it was made of heavy redwood timbers over twice the height of a man, mortised at the top into a horizontal timber and surmounted by iron spikes. True, there were port holes for the big 12-pounder carronades; but he could not hope to squeeze out through one of the port holes unless the cannon was pulled back into the fort, and one man could not do that. There were two sets of gates in the wall—on the seaward side, and at the back; but they would be vigilantly guarded.

Those front gates opened, then, and a strange procession entered the fort.

A Russian officer and several *soldats* led a line of squat, strongly built men who packed heavy burdens upon their bowed shoulders. They were smiling little men dressed in waterproof parkas of sea lion bladder. Their broad cheekbones and the slant of their dark eyes and the dark contrast of their skin against the white of their teeth gave them a Chinese cast of features.

"Our Aleut hunters," Marina remarked. "The *Chirikov* has just brought Lieutenant Tarasov's party back from a hunting voyage."

"Those bales they're carrying—they're sea otter pelts?"

"Yes."

John uttered a low whistle.

"They certainly can't complain about their luck!"

HE AND Marina followed the procession past the soldiers' barracks to a big storehouse. A heavy door was unlocked, and the Aleuts filed in one by one to deposit their loads of pelt. John caught a sharp breath of amazed realization as he noticed that the strongly built house was piled high with the precious furs. Among them would be seal skins as well as otter pelts. Just the same, here was a treasure of fine furs worth at least half a million dollars. And this was just the accumulation of pelts between shipments to the main base in Alaska.

Marina introduced Lieutenant Tarasov to him. The officer hardly glanced at John; just stood there holding Marina's slim hand and looking at her in smiling pleasure. John reflected that they all loved Marina, here at Ross.

The Aleut hunters, after depositing their bales of otter skins, were hastening away. Hurrying out of the fort to their own little village outside the stockade, where their families waited for them. John watched them go with a tightening in his chest. Sturdy, likeable little men they seemed, hard-working and good-humored.

And then, in his mind echoed Governor Kuskov's stern, angry voice—*It was a party of hunters just like these, sixty of them, that your brother left to die on some desert island while he sailed off to China with a loot of stolen furs.*

"No!" John told himself. "You can't make me believe it! Lucien could never have done a thing like that!"

He walked outside the front gates of the fort with Marina. She drew him to

the edge of the bluff that fronted the sea. Below, the cliff dropped sheer a hundred feet to the little beach of the cove that was Ross harbor. Already seamen were at work, loading stores from the boathouse onto the little schooner *Chirikov* at anchor near shore. Beyond, sunlight was a dancing golden warmth upon the calm sea.

Marina leaned against him, and smiled up at him. The two guards had stopped at a discreet distance; yawning, they half-turned away, making their presence felt as little as possible.

"You know, John, Ross has always seemed a lonely, far-off place of exile to me. But since you came, it's changed."

She said it so quietly and matter-of-factly that there was just nothing he could say in answer. But he thought to himself that this was just another fine trait in Marina. Those she loved, she loved with all her heart; and in that love she could find full contentment.

He said, "But I won't be staying at Ross. I've got to get away from here, or be shipped to Siberia by Kuskov."

"You are so impatient! But I knew you would be, so I took steps—though sometimes I wonder if that impatience of yours isn't going to give me some bad times."

"What do you mean, you took steps?"

"You see? Already!" But she was laughing. Then, in a lower tone, she said, "Tonight, after the change of guards at midnight, you will find your door unlocked. Dress warmly, and walk out—"

"But there'll be two guards on duty."

"They will not see you."

"Won't see me!"

"No. They'll be temporarily blind, and very accommodating of them, too."

"Good Lord, are you serious?"

"Just let me talk, dear one. When you leave your room, be careful to keep to the dark side of the houses. Go to the rear gates. They'll be open. Slip out and—"

"But the gate sentries! Are they going to be blind, too?"

"For a few moments, yes. Go out the gates, then hurry through the orchards towards the hill. On the road to Halfway Farm there will be two horses, saddled, and with packs of blankets and food. The two fastest horses belonging to the fort."

"Marina, you're a wonder!" he said huskily, his arm tightening about her shoulders.

She laughed. "Not me. My rubles." Soberly, then, she said, "We can ride south to Monterey. There—"

"*We?*"

"But of course, my dearest. I could not bear to let you go alone."

"No."

"John! You can't leave me here!"

"I can't take you with me."

"You love me. You *do*. The way you kiss me; why, even just the way you look at me —It's so plain that everyone in the fort knows it."

"Even so—Oh, damn it!" he blurted in English. Then in French, "Marina, try to understand. I have no money, I have nothing, I'm an alien in a strange land—"

"But I'm rich, John. I've told you. I own shares in the Russian-American Fur Company, and at home I have estates—"

"That's in Russia."

"Here's what I've planned. We'll ride to Monterey, and there we'll wait for a ship bound to Hawaii. Most vessels bound for China stop at Hawaii, and we'll take passage to Canton; and from there to Russia—"

"No," he said hoarsely. "I'm an American. I won't go to Russia."

"Very well. We *won't* go to Russia." She said it without hesitation. "Wherever you go will be home for me."

"No. I can't provide for you."

"I'm not worried, so don't you worry."

For a moment he said nothing, just looked down at her uptilted face, lines tightening about his mouth.

"Consider, Marina. When I leave here, I'll go to Monterey. I intend to ship on the first American vessel that trades down the coast, though I'll likely have to sign on as a seaman. I figure that if I stay on this coast, sooner or later I'll get word of my brother. Do you see it, now? If I took you along, I'd have to leave you stranded in Monterey. And if I got a ship bound for China, I'd be gone a year on a single voyage. No, you'll have to stay here!"

"But, John, you'll never be able to come back here for me," she pointed out. Tears filled her eyes. Abruptly then she pressed his arm in warning. Capt. Kuprin and another officer were approaching up the path from the cove below. She whispered, "Remember. Just after midnight, tonight!"

HE HEARD the tramp of marching feet as the guards were changed at midnight, the thud of musket butts hitting the ground and low words of Russian, then the regular pacing of sentries. He waited a quarter of an hour longer. Carefully, then he tried the door of his cell room. It opened to his push, hinges creaking slightly. He waited, every nerve taut, peering into the darkness. Usually two *soldats* guarded his door.

He saw them. One sat on his haunches, back against the building, smoking. The other was pacing his beat. At the far end of his walk, he paused, lowered musket butt to the ground and stood peering off toward the governor's mansion.

"They heard my door open. Must have, if they aren't stone deaf!"

Carefully he stepped out of the cell. Keeping close in the darkness against the house, he moved noiselessly toward the rear of the fort. And then his heart choked up into his throat, as in the darkness, he stepped upon a stick that snapped loudly under his weight.

But the guards gave no sign that they heard at all.

He hurried past the barracks, then, and storerooms, toward the rear gates in the stockade. Guards should be pacing in front of those gates. But as he neared them, he saw no one at all.

For a moment he had the panicky thought that perhaps this was a trap: the moment he touched the gates, hidden sentries would fire on him. But he had to risk that.

Carefully he approached the gates. Then he saw that they were open, that the heavy bar which locked them shut was missing from the iron brackets. Cautiously he leaned against one massive gate, and it swung ajar with a rasp of hinges that sounded like an obscene shout to his ears. Instantly he slipped out through the opening and started toward the orchard on the slope beyond.

He had taken hardly a dozen steps when behind him he heard the gate hinges rasp again, and then a heavy thud. Instantly he lunged into a wild run toward the orchard.

But he heard no shouts of alarm behind him, and no muskets blared fire. Glancing back, he saw no *soldats* racing after him.

"Nobody's chasing me. What I heard was the gate being shut behind me and the bar being dropped in place to lock it. That's all!" He almost laughed aloud in his relief. Marina had got good return for her generous rubles!

Confidently he ran through the orchard. Waiting on the road beyond he should find a good horse.

There it was! No, two horses.

And then he stopped short in his tracks, and crouched low, to hide. A figure moved near the horses. Someone was there.

"John? That you, John?"

It was Marina's voice. He hurried forward, his feelings in aching confusion. She came running to meet him, and kissed him and clung to him.

"Everything's all right now!" she said, and her voice shook with relief.

"Yes—Marina, I can't even try to thank you. Saying goodby is hard, too. But I *am* grateful, with all my heart—"

"John! You're not leaving me behind!"

"I've already told you—"

"No, John! No!"

He grasped her elbows, gently shook her out of the intensity of his feelings.

"I'd like to take you, Marina. God knows, I *want* you. It tears me in two to say no. But I've got to say no. You're staying here. You're going to marry some officer who'll take you back to Russia and the kind of life you're suited for."

"But I love *you*, John!"

"Listen to me! Try to understand. After all you've done for me, I can't let you in for the risk and uncertainty that I've got to face. It wouldn't be fair."

"You—you realize that if you leave me now, you may never be able to come for me?" she asked, fighting to keep her voice steady.

He bent, kissed her hard, and held her for a long moment as if he could not let go of her. Abruptly he turned away and grasped the reins of the nearer horse.

"Ride fast, John. All night, and all day, too." Her low voice broke, but she spoke on, "Take both horses and change often."

"Why? They'll be coming after me?"

"Yes. You see, my dearest, they've *let* you escape."

"But you bribed—"

"The guards would never have taken bribes to let a prisoner escape. True, I did give the sentries presents, but they shut their

eyes and left the gates open on orders from some of the officers. You see, everybody at the fort thinks that y-you and I are eloping. So, everything was—arranged. Governor Kuskov couldn't simply pardon you, not after the charges that are down on the record against your brother. But if you escaped, that could be put down in the books and no blame would attach to him. But n-now—now when they discover that you did not take me with you, that you left me—they'll be so very angry. I'm afraid they'll try to catch you. So ride fast. And take care, my dearest! I shall love you always!"

He savagely spurred his mount into a run. His decision had been the only possible intelligent one; but if he delayed another moment, he was going to break it.

PANIC held the town of Monterey.

Capital of the province of California, Monterey was a tiny city of adobe. About a dusty, sleep plaza were grouped the presidio and barracks and governor's house and a few *tiendas* and homes. Below the slope of the town, the empty harbor waters glistened under the sun. Usually, at the hour of siesta, in Monterey time itself seemed in a pleasant trance and neither soldier nor padre nor Indian acolyte stirred from his napping. But today, this noon of Nov. 20th, 1818, officials and citizens of the capital of California were hurrying about in the frantic haste that nothing but great fright could induce in them.

Carretas were being laden with women and children and started up the road toward Soledad Mission, drivers raving and lashing whips at the oxen in swearing, useless effort to urge them to speed. Youngsters were frightened into crying by the rush, and women were trying to soothe them, unwittingly shrill in their own anxiety; and over the hubbub the ungreased wooden wheels of the carts raised a nightmarish caterwauling. At the presidio, muskets were being passed out to the *soldados,* and powder and ball; and in the fort, the cannon were being carefully loaded. Down along the beach a group of 4 eight-pounder cannon were being emplaced behind a cover of logs masked with brush, officers shouting orders and bawling curses in their haste.

Amazed, John reined up his horse in the plaza and sat in saddle, watching the activity which raged in the town like a runaway fever.

"They're panicky. No two ways about it. They're acting like they're preparing to fight for their lives to the last gasp."

A corporal and a trooper stepped up beside him. He was asked in curt Spanish to dismount and accompany them. Considering it merely a formality, he obeyed. They took him down the beach toward the battery being readied behind the log barricade. There Governor Sola was watching the preparations, and the two soldiers took John straight to the Governor himself.

The graying, stockily-built official looked at John, realized suddenly that he was no *Californio,* and started with surprise that seemed, to John, to balloon into wild anxiety.

"Who are you? Where did you come from?" Sola asked sharply. "Where are your companions?"

"I do not speak Spanish well—"

"Talk English then! I can understand. What's your purpose here?"

Briefly, John told of having come overland to the coast, and of visiting at Fort Ross before coming here. "Now I want to stay in Monterey until I can get passage on a vessel in the South American trade."

Governor Sola's anxious face did not ease its tension.

"I'm going to have you locked up in our prison."

"What in the world for?" John gasped.

"You are an alien. For all I know, your story is all lies and you are a spy."

John stared at him, dumbfounded.

"Good Heavens, sir, you must be joking! I'm no spy."

"Do these cannon look like a joke to you, Senior?"

Sola snapped a command to the corporal, then; and John was hustled along the beach toward the presidio.

"What is all this about?" he demanded of the corporal.

"We expect attack, Señor."

"From whom, for God's sake?"

Corporal Trias jerked a thumb out toward the horizon. Looking, John saw far off the masts of two vessels coming up over the curve of the sea.

In jumbled Spanish and English the corporal said, "They call themselves privateers,

but when they attack without good cause, you understand, when they loot and burn, they are plain pirates. Is it not so?"

"Who are they? Why're you so sure they're going to loot and burn Monterey?"

"We know because one *Capitan* Gyzelaar —He is in Hawaii last month, you understand, and there he sees two ships which fly the Argentine flag. They are under command of a Frenchman, a certain *Capitan* Hippolyte Bouchard. They are commissioned as privateers in the revolt of Argentina against Spain. In Hawaii they are taking on stores and drilling and recruiting. Señor Gyzelaar talk to seamen of the two vessels, and he learn that Bouchard will lead them to do battle against the provinces still loyal to Spain. Señor Gyzelaar, he do not delay. He sail at once here to Monterey to warn us that these pirates will come to loot and burn. For weeks, now, we wait for this devil Bouchard. Nothing happen, and we think it is all a mistake. But look!" Corporal Trias pointed out to sea. "They come now, and we fight. Governor Sola worry very much because the ships so late. He think, maybe, they put men and guns ashore first, then come attack. And those men and guns will attack us from behind. That is why, Señor, he is suspicious of you."

"I'm no pirate," John said curtly. "But you have cannon, eight-pounders. Can't you drive those ships off?"

Corporal Trias shrugged.

"They are heavily armed, the *Argentina* and the *Santa Rosa,* and they carry almost three hundred armed men, while we—"

John grasped the corporal's arm.

"Did you say the *Santa Rosa?"* he demanded.

"*Si,* Señor."

"Was she an American brig, the *Sweet Ellen?*"

"That is what we have been told. The *Santa Rosa* is armed with twenty-six guns. The *Argentina* carries thirty-eight heavy guns and two *violentas*—what you call light howitzers. And their crews, Señor, are men of all nations, the scum of the seaports, Frenchmen and Argentinians and Scots and Americans and Englishmen."

"Good Lord!"

"And against their three hundred men and their fifty-six cannon, Señor—here in Monterey we have just eight cannon, and forty men. It is so, Señor. Eight cannon and forty men, among them some old, some pot-bellied and some who should grow more to look like men. That is why we send our women and children to Mission Soledad, Señor. That is why we are alarmed."

"Then you intend to fight these privateers?"

"These *pirates.*" Corporal Trias corrected. "*Si,* my friend, we intend to fight."

They had reached the *castillo,* now, and the corporal hurried John across a patio toward an open cell, motioned him into it, and then pulled the door shut and locked it. The cell was dirty and stinking and light came in from a single barred window so small that most of the room remained in darkness. Furniture consisted of a rough bench and nothing else. He slumped down onto the bench, limp with consternation. So now the *Sweet Ellen* was the brig *Santa Rosa,* flying the flag of an Argentine privateersman! And even that flag was a snide mask for piracy. Captain Lucien Randolph —a *pirate*!

"No! Not Lucien. That I'll never believe!"

FROM the barred window, John watched the approaching vessels as they grew large against the horizon. The *Argentina* furled sails and dropped anchor outside the harbor; but the *Santa Rosa* came on and anchored within good cannon range of shore. John strained to recognize his brother among the men on the quarterdeck of the brig. With a glass, it would have been easy; but without it the distance was too great.

Commandante Jose de la Guerra sent a request to the *Santa Rosa* for her ship's papers. It was refused.

"In the mornin," came the answer.

For John there was no rest that night. Doubt and dismay and forebodings made anguished chaos in his mind. When the *Argentina* and the *Santa Rosa* turned their guns upon the town, their fifty-six guns against the defenders' eight would crush Monterey. *And I'll be caged in here as helpless as an animal in a deadfall!* Knowing that the eight-pounders of his brother's brig was hurling round shot and grape upon the town would make the end no easier. His brother's ship—but Lucien was having no part in this attack. *I know he isn't!*

John tried to ease his dejection by pleasant thoughts—of Marina, at Fort Ross, of the delight of holding her in his arms and the ardour of her soft lips and the play of sunlight in her bright hair. Then the realization that he would probably never see Marina again was added grief to the weight already upon his spirit.

At daybreak, John peered from his barred window. The *Santa Rosa* had promised to send a boat ashore with her papers this morning. Perhaps Capt. Lucien Randolph himself would be in the gig—

"No! Lucien's taking no part of the doings of the *Santa Rosa.* He's no pirate. If he's aboard the vessel at all, he's a prisoner. Maybe he isn't aboard. Maybe he came down with fever in Callao, or maybe he sold the brig and is master of another ship. For all I know, he might even be d-dead. But he's no pirate!"

How well, though, could one man know another, even his own brother? Maybe there were weaknesses in Lucien. Even the best of men are sometimes twisted awry and broken by harsh circumstance. Even as fine a man as Lucien conceivably might be driven to do murder. *But not to marooning a whole crew of Aleut hunters! Not to becoming a pirate! Nothing on earth could force him to that.*

Commandante de la Guerra and Governor Sola and their officers had assembled on the beach, watching the *Santa Rosa* and waiting for her papers. The tide had swung her on her anchor chains, closer toward shore. The larger vessel, the *Argentina,* was still holding out to sea, beyond range of shore cannon.

The *Santa Rosa* did not send her boat shoreward. Instead, as John watched, her anchor came up, her sails were shaken out—and then, from her starboard side, he saw a line of fire, a dozen ugly bursts of sooty flame tonguing from her gun ports, he saw the brig heel from the recoil, and then he heard the crashing roar of a whole broadside as the eight-pounders round shot arched shoreward and smashed into the fort and presidio and houses bordering the plaza.

On the shore, the waiting men sprang into action, officers and soldiers sprinting to their stations in the fort and back of the masked battery on the beach.

And off-shore, the *Santa Rosa* paid off and fell away before the wind, bringing her port guns to bear. Again her gunners touched off a whole broadside. Again 'dobe walls and tile roof crumpled and shattered under the crash of metal. Almost the whole salvo struck the fort, and John felt a thudding under his feet and a jarring quiver in the 'dobe walls about him.

Then he yelled. For the four guns in the fort were replying, and the battery on the beach was hurling shot at the brig. Though Governor Sola's artillerymen numbered but a scant dozen who were veterans, that dozen were men of skill and daring. John yelled with satisfaction as he saw a ball smash through the crosstrees of the brig, and another hit her quarterdeck and a third go through a gun port and smash an eight-pounder and its crew into wreck and shambles.

But here in the fort, men screamed when the brig's next salvo hit; and John was realizing that a gun crew was hit when, overhead, there was a crash, and tiles and wooden beams and 'dobe gave way—and blackness enfolded his senses.

THE sharp bite of dust in his nostrils and a throbbing ache at the back of his head and a weight across his chest were his first sensations as consciousness returned to him. He stirred, and groaned involuntarily as pain darted through his head, and opened his eyes and hastily shut them, wincing from the glare of sunlight full upon his face. Presently he looked again, and saw that a corner of the cell had been caved in, 'dobe crumpled inward and rafters broken down. It was a wooden beam across his chest which held him in a debris of 'dobe and shattered red tiles.

"That was close," he realized and wondered dazedly if he had any broken bones. But he was able to move his arms, and to twist and get his legs under him so that he could back out from under the slanting beam.

Outside, the eight-pounders were still thundering across the harbor waters.

He swayed dizzily when he stood up, and leaned against a wall. The vertigo passed, however, and his strength was coming back to him. He climbed over the debris and out of the hole knocked in the side of the room, into the open. Shielding

his eyes with his hand, he stared out into the bay.

The *Santa Rosa* had moved closer. And from the continuous flash and roar of her guns, her men were firing as fast as they could work their cannon. Answering fire from the shore had slackened. Only two eight-pounders were now still replying from the fort; and one of the guns of the beach battery had been knocked out.

"And the *Santa Rosa* is coming in close to pointblank range to finish the fight in a hurry!" he realized.

She had taken punishment, he saw then. Her quarterdeck was wreckage, part of the rail was smashed away, part of her rigging was a snarl of splintered wood and cordage and in her sails were gaping holes. But she seemed sound enough still to fight and was being deliberately sailed in closer for the finish.

John started running toward the battery on the beach.

"I've got to tell Sola! He's got just one hope—"

The *Santa Rosa's* guns were all turned onto that beach battery, now. Her round shot plowed into the sand. Shot struck the barrier, knocking logs flying apart. One of Sola's guns was hit, and knocked from its carriage, and two of its crew killed. But the other two eight-pounders roared out, and one shot tore through the brig's cabin skylight.

Then John had reached the artillerymen, and he shouted, "Fire at her water line! She's a trading vessel, she wasn't built for fighting, her planking won't stand against shot. Let her get close and fire at her water line!"

Ensign Estrada, in charge of the battery understood his English and immediately shouted new commands in Spanish to his gunners.* And as the men shouldered the guns into position for the next shot, John moved to the nearest cannon and lent his weight.

From the fort the two eight-pounders hurled their metal. The round shot smashed through the rigging of the *Santa Rosa,* collapsing one sail in a mess of canvas and rope and splintered spars upon the deck. The brig lost way and would not mind her rudder; but she was close to shore now, close enough for deadly effect with her many guns, and she was swinging broadside toward the beach. Frantically Ensign Estrada's men loaded their cannon.

"Quick!" John yelled at Estrada. "Get your shots in low!"

The two shore guns went off then. John peered at the brig, recklessly exposing himself over the barrier of logs. And he yelled as he saw the two round shot, aimed pointblank, strike true. Just above the water they hit the swelling flank of the *Santa Rosa,* bursting in the planking. Water poured into the vessel's hold. Her cannon were retorting then; a couple of shot hurled over the battery ashore, several plowed into the sand of the beach, and one hit the barrier, and a splintered log struck down two gunners, breaking one's leg and knocking another senseless to the ground. John leaped to the gun they were serving and helped load.

Again Estrada's two guns roared out. The heavy balls again hit the brig's side and stove in planking. So much water gushed into the vessel that she began to list.

"That's got her!" John realized.

For now she could not maneuver; and though the brig's guns continued to fire, she was listing so badly presently that her shoreward guns could not elevate enough to get range on the beach, and the brig could not be turned to bring her opposite cannons to bear. *She's helpless, now,* he realized; *Estrada can smash her under the water. And if Lucien is on board her—*

"But he's not!" he told himself savagely.

And then, at the rail of the *Santa Rosa,* a white flag was lifted and waved frantically,

"Cease firing," Estrada gave the order —and the men serving the batteries yelled in triumph. Estrada sent a man posthaste to Governor Sola for further orders.

From the *Santa Rosa,* small boats were being lowered, filled with men. Estrada curtly ordered his cannon loaded and made ready. But the small boats did not turn toward the beach. One after another, until six had been rowed from the brig's side,

* Governor Sola had placed in charge of this shore battery Alferez (Ensign) Jose Estrada and Alferez Manuel Gomez. Though Sola had had warning of the impending raid, communications with Mexico City were so slow he had no chance to secure additional military aid.

they were pulled out to sea, toward the larger privateer, the *Argentina.*

Governor Sola came hurrying to the shore battery. He gave orders. Ensign Gomez, through a brass ship's trumpet, hailed the *Santa Rosa* in English.

"Send your officers ashore or we will sink you!"

From the brig another boat was lowered; two seamen and an officer got into it, and it approached the beach.

John's nerves drew taut and he strode toward the water. That would be Lucien coming ashore! Pulse pounding heavily, John waited in suspense, every stroke of those dipping oars seeming endlessly slow. And then, as the small boat drew near enough, he saw that the officer in her stern was *not* his brother, was not Capt. Lucien Randolph. And John felt relief, keen relief; and with it, then, dismayed bewilderment. He'd known that Lucien would not be on this privateer! But where *was* Lucien?

The small boat was pulled up onto the sand, and the ship's officer stepped ashore and strode toward the waiting Californios. Ensign Gomez and a half-dozen *soldados* came to meet him and the two sailors, and escorted them back to Governor Sola, at the battery.

"My name is Joseph Chapman, sir. I'm an American," the officer said to Sola.

"You are master of the *Santa Rosa?*"

"No, sir. I'm second officer of the brig."

Angrily Governor Sola said, "But I directed that all your officers come ashore, or I shall sink your vessel!"

The tall, lean-jawed American shrugged.

"I would not advise that, sir."

"Where is the master of the Santa Rosa?"

"The other officers of the brig have gone aboard the *Argentina.* I was ordered to come to you with an urgent message, from our commander-in-chief."

"Yes?"

"Captain Bouchard demands unconditional surrender of the province, sir."

"*Nombre de Dios!*" Sola choked.

"Otherwise, sir, Captain Bouchard will level Monterey with his cannon, and will consider no clemency is deserved by you."

"We respected your white flag—and you tricked us and answer with this insolence!" Sola answered angrily. In Spanish he ordered Corporal Trias, "Lock up these three men in the fort, at once! Estrada, resume firing on the *Santa Rosa.*"

But Ensign Estrada had been staring out to sea.

Worriedly he said, "I think, Your Excellency, we would be very wise to save our powder and ball. If you will look, sir—"

He pointed out to sea. The forty-gun *Argentina* was approaching the harbor under full sail.*

CORPORAL TRIA'S detail were escorting the three Americans to the guard house. John darted after them.

"Chapman!" he called to the *Santa Rosa's* second officer. "Is Captain Randolph still aboard the *Santa Rosa?*"

Chapman looked at him. Said curtly, "No."

"Where is he?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"My name's Randolph. I'm his brother!"

Chapman stared at him again, then answered, "Ask aboard the *Argentina.*"

Corporal Trias was opening the door of a room in the guard house, and gestured for Chapman and the two American seamen to enter.

"Wait!" John begged Trias. "Chapman, d'you mean that my brother's aboard the *Argentina* now?"

"This town is going to be under heavy bombardment. Get me moved to a safer place," Chapman answered, "and I'll talk to you."

Trias locked the door behind the prisoners. Then the Corporal turned to John.

"Señor, you help us fight these pirates. Yet you seem to have a brother among them. I must report this to my *commandante.* I must tell you that you are under arrest. Come with us."

As they started back toward the beach, they heard the roar of a cannon from the fort.

The *Argentina* was sailing into battle range.

But the vessel had not opened fire. As John and the running *soldados* reached the beach, they saw another round shot from

* In describing this attack by Captain Bouchard's ships on Monterey H. H. Bancroft does not say why the *Argentina* hung back and let the smaller brig attack. Possibly the privateersmen figured that the *Santa Rosa* could do the job alone. And perhaps the *Argentina* stayed outside the harbor to intercept any vessels which might arrive on the scene to interfere. Once the *Santa Rosa* was defeated, however, the *Argentina* took over.

the fort arch out toward Captain Bouchard's ship and strike the water short of the target.

The vessel pulled up, furling sails and losing way. And then, one after another, small boats were lowered from the *Argentina*—small boats crammed with armed men Governor Sola studied them through a spy glass, muttering to himself. In all, nine boats pulled away from the ship, and four of them carried small cannon.

The nine boats did not come toward the beach at all, but were being rowed toward Point Potreros.

Governor Sola lowered his spy glass, his taut dark face quivering with angry hopelessness.

"They are rowing to Potreros, two hundred men with four cannon. While we fight the *Argentina*, the land force will attack us from the rear. To remain is to be caught in a trap. Ensign Gomez: Take twenty-five men and rush them to Potreros!"

"Twenty-five men?" Gomez echoed, going white. "Against two hundred?"

"I don't expect you to stop the pirates. Delay them as best you can, but don't sacrifice your men. Fall back when necessary, and meet us at *rancho del rey.*"

From the *Argentina,* then, boomed a salvo of cannon reports. She had moved into range, now, and her round shot crashed into the walls of the presidio. Sola yelled further commands, and his officers and men obeyed on the jump.

John was left to his own devices as Corporal Trias and his detail left for Point Potreros. The Californios were too worried now to bother about him. He moved down to the beach, near the battery, to watch what he realized now was a hopeless battle.

Until the early nightfall, Governor Sola's men kept up their artillery duel. Obviously Captain Bouchard was holding his vessel at long range, merely marking time, until his land forces would come up onto the defenders of Monterey from the rear. Then the *Argentina* would move in close and all her guns would work together for the kill.

But Governor Sola was not fool enough to wait. When darkness came, he gave new orders. The eight-pounders on the beach and in the ruined fort were overloaded with powder and fired, bursting them. And his kegs of remaining powder, after his men had taken as much as they could conveniently carry, were deliberately spilled and set afire. Then, with a single two-pounder gun on a cart, some 6,000 rounds of musket ammunition, and the provincial archives, Governor Sola led his remaining men in hurried retreat to the *rancho del rey* at Salinas, leaving the cannon-battered little capital of Monterey unprotected before the advance of the invader.

JOHN did not accompany Sola's men in flight. Hidden in brush near the deserted battery on the beach, he waited for morning.

The re-echoing report of cannons wakened him. He had fallen asleep in the brush, and now it was daylight.

Off-shore, closer to the beach than she had been the night before, was the *Argentina.* She was coming still closer, though cautiously; and her guns were hurling their hot metal into the presidio.

"Her shore party is due to attack, and she's raising a big hullabaloo to attract attention," he reasoned. "They're wasting powder and ball."

Captain Bouchard presently realized that fact as no answering round shot came flying back at him, and as not one soldier was visible on the beach. Bouchard silenced his own guns. Fearing a possible trap, he anchored off-shore, closer than the damaged *Santa Rosa,* but still at a cautious distance. Two boats laden with armed men put off for the beach, slowing warily as they came through the breakers, then tumbling out of the boats and charging up the beach to rout any foe lurking in hiding.

A mixed, motley outfit they were, John realized as he studied them from hiding. Yankees, Englishmen, Chileños and Frenchmen and even Argentinians, no doubt, fighting under that *Argentina* flag. Adventurers, that's all. Rapacious for loot.

It took them but a few minutes to overrun Monterey and to discover that the town had been deserted by its defenders. Word to that effect was signaled back to the *Argentina.*

"Now," he reflected, "maybe her whole company will come ashore." His pulse jumped as he thought it. Maybe Lucien Randolph would be among them. If not, he himself would have to go aboard the *Argentina.* One way or another, he was going to

learn for sure whether Lucien was with these pirates or not.

In mid-morning, there was some commotion as a column of armed men charged down the hill slope into the town. At first, the pirates who had landed from the ship thought that the *Californios* had returned with reinforcements, and hastily took to cover. But the newcomers were the *Argentina's* strong land party. The only shots fired were in hurrahing celebration as the pirates recognized each other.

Officers held a brief confab—and then the looting began.

The presidio, the fort and the *soldados'* barracks, the little stores about the plaza, and then every last single home in Monterey was entered and for all intents and purposes turned inside out and shaken like a sack being emptied. Little enough was there to steal from the poorer 'dobes; but the home of Commandante Jose de la Guerra, and of Governor Sola, yielded some ten thousand dollars worth of personal belongings which the men of the *Santa Rosa* and the *Argentina* grabbed for themselves. As the thieving proceeded, the remaining men aboard the *Argentina* started coming ashore. John studied each boatload, his heart in his throat, looking for his tall brother.

Captain Bouchard came to the beach, and immediately some discipline controlled the looting. The main storehouses of the presidio were opened, in which the missions of California stored their products for sale to visiting traders, and goods they had received in payment. All these stores were seized. And burly, florid-faced Captain Bouchard sent details of men to strip the orchards of Monterey of their fruit, and the gardens of their produce; and every cow and beef animal that the marauders encountered was promptly shot and butchered. Every boat which unloaded men on the beach, went back to the *Argentina* laden with loot. Captain Bouchard was filling locker and larder.

With fresh beef at hand, and garden truck, and wine available, and a victory to celebrate, a big feed was inescapable. Late in afternoon the cooking was started; and every man who could be spared was brought from the *Argentina.*

And finally, then, John saw the man he was searching for—tall, heavy of shoulders, his yellow hair streaked with gray so that it almost looked white, heavy shadows under his piercing, deep-set eyes, his mouth tight-lipped over a craggy chin, Captain Lucien Randolph jumped from a boat onto the beach and went striding up the sand toward Captain Bouchard.

John, stiff and cramped from lying hidden in the brush, slumped flat, lowering his face onto his arms. All along, hoping against hope, he had been reassuring himself, telling himself over and over, that Lucien could not possibly be a member of Hippolyte Bouchard's pirates. But he'd been wrong. Right now Lucien stood at Captain Bouchard's side.

AFTER gorging themselves on beef and bloating themselves with wine, the men of the two privateers stretched out to sleep on the beach around their cooking fires. Captain Bouchard seemed to be a strict disciplinarian; before the men slumped to rest, he had numerous sentries posted.

Gradually the fires died down to coals. In all the camp, only one fire was renewed to flare brightly against the night—about it sat Captain Bouchard and his top officers. Among them was Lucien Randolph. And toward that group John began carefully to stomach his way.

Sentries were posted along the landward side of camp, since obviously the *Californios* could not possibly attack by water. So John crawled along the dark shore, shivering and gritting his teeth against the cold whenever a wave sent water lapping up against him. Near Bouchard's campfire was a boat pulled up onto the sand; and in the black shadow under it John froze to watch and listen.

Captain Hippolyte Bouchard was loud-voiced, talkative, jubilant, dominating. The dozen officers sprawled and squatting about the fire listened and nodded to his talk, toadying to him. Lucien Randolph alone sat staring into the campfire, his gray eyes intense and brooding, as if he hardly heard what Bouchard was saying.

"I'm sure you will agree with me, gentlemen, that this raid upon Monterey is but an appetizer, an opening gun, a mere rehearsal to the possibilities ahead of us."

"More than that, sir," an officer pointed out. "Consider what supplies—"

"True, true!" Bouchard butted in impatiently. "All right then, here we have sup-

plied ourselves with extra stores, so that we can continue our operations just that much longer without delaying to procure supplies. The point is, gentlemen—this raid is hardly profitable on the scale we all anticipate!"

"It has been a good demonstration to our men—"

"Exactly! It has whetted their appetites, and sharpened their fighting hunger. Splendid! But now, gentlemen—*now* we must plan our next, and more profitable step." He paused a moment, turned his head and said, "Captain Randolph!"

Lucien Randolph looked across the fire at him.

"Sir?"

"The Russians at Fort Ross ship their yearly catch of seal and sea otter pelts to Alaska, do they not?"

"Yes."

"But in between shipments, all the pelts brought in by their hunters for a whole season is baled in their storerooms. Am I right?"

"You're right."

"What would you say that the furs they have stored, right now, at Fort Ross are worth?"

Lucien Randolph hesitated.

"Just make a rough guess," Bouchard insisted, "on the conservative side. How much?"

"Any where from a quarter-million dollars to a half-million."

Captain Bouchard folded his arms across his chest and smiled around the circle of his listeners.

"Does that attract you?" he said then.

"But Fort Ross!" one officer blurted. "It's no Monterey to fall into our hands like a ripe plum. The Russians are alert, they have a hundred trained soldiers and as many Aleut fighters—"

"And a hundred cannon, a good many of them 12-pound carronades with longer range than ours," Lucien Randolph said.

"True, true enough!" Captain Bouchard agreed, vigorously nodding his head, but smiling still. "It will be a hard prize to snatch, but one—" he leaned forward, the smile vanishing from his hard face "—*worth fighting for!*"

"You can't loot Ross," Lucien Randolph said bluntly.

"Well find a way. There's always a way," Bouchard snapped. "We will fit our tactics to the problem, Captain Randolph! Tell me, sir— Do you know the country surrounding Fort Ross?"

"I do. I know it well."

"Could a strong party of armed men approach close to the fort, at night and by land, without being detected?"

"No," Lucien Randolph said instantly and emphatically. "Not a party of men who do not know every foot of the rugged countryside."

"But suppose this attacking party were led by a guide who *did* know every foot of the countryside?"

Lucien Randolph thought about that a moment, then he said, low-voiced, "Yes, I believe I *could* lead you close to the fort. The Slavyanka River empties into the cove just south of the fort. The river winds through brushy country between forested hills. If we landed on the coast some miles below Ross, then marched inland and turned north until we hit the winding canyon of the Slavyanka, we could follow it to just below the fort. But we'd still be outside the stockade, and at night the gates are locked and guards on the alert."

"We could take the light howitzers with us," an officer suggested.

"Those howitzers would be as useless as pea-shooters against that redwood stockade," Lucien Randolph retorted. "But what would work, if we wish to risk it—"

"Whatever will work, we'll risk," Bouchard snapped.

"Then take kegs of powder along. If we reach the fort without causing an alarm, we can send men crawling to the base of the stockade with kegs of the powder, and—"

"*Blast* a break in the stockade!" Captain Bouchard finished, banging a fist to palm in delight. "And while the Russians are still dazed from the explosion, we'll rush in and take the fort!"

"It won't be quite that easy," an officer demurred. "The Russians are fighters."

"Surprise can take the guts out of the best fighters!"

"Say, Randolph. Any women at Ross?"

"Some. Wives of the Aleutian hunters, and some Indian women."

"I mean, any white women?"

"Two or three."

Captain Bouchard laughed. "Be patient. With your share of the spoils, Lieutenant Conde, you can have plenty women when you return to Buenos Aires. Now, gentlemen, let's turn in. We have work ahead of us!"

JOHN lay rigid against the dark side of the boat at the water's edge, fighting back anger and disbelief and alarm like waves of racking nausea. If ever a man had told him that Lucien Randolph could calmly, cold-bloodedly plan a theft the way that his brother had just now planned this raid upon the Russians, he would have knocked that man flat in the dirt. Lucien was honest, Lucien was a man of decent impulse—always he had believed that of Lucien, and always he would have backed that belief with the last drop of blood in his body. But right now, in his heartbroken despair, just one thing seemed right for him to do—and that was to get hold of a musket and take careful aim and put a bullet through Lucien's head. That was exactly what Lucien deserved.

But he didn't have a musket; and even if he had had a gun, he wasn't sure that he could imitate Lucien's own calm, cold-bloodedness enough to shoot him. Though that was the one way he could make sure that Bouchard's pirates would not pull a sneak attack on Ross.

"There *is* another way!" he told himself then. "I'll go back to Ross. I'll warn Governor Kuskov about these pirates!"

If he did that, the Russians would prepare an ambush for Bouchard's land party—and probably wipe them out to the last man. And with them, Lucien Randolph would die. If he *did* escape being shot, the Russians would — How had Kuskov put it? *I'll hang him from the highest beam in the fort!*

"I can't do that to Lucien!"

But could he sit back, do nothing, and let Bouchard's pirates take Ross? He was trembling, and there was a writhing agony through his innards; but he set his teeth and slowly, carefully, he backed away from the raiders' camp, into the brush at the end of the beach. He swayed on his feet when he rose, and for a moment he leaned against a cypress bole to steady himself. Then he started running at a dog-trot. He would have to swing wide of Bouchard's camp, then head north toward San Francisco Bay. Somewhere en route he would get a horse from a ranchero. At top speed he must ride to Fort Ross!

AT THE first rancho he came to, east of Monterey, he told his need. Don Felipa Lugo gave him four horses and a *paisano* to accompany him. They rode hard, stopping at intervals to breathe the horses and change mounts. At San José they ate a hasty breakfast; then John rode northward alone. He had to swing east of San Francisco Bay, then cross the straits and head northwest toward the coast. In late afternoon he reached the Pinole ranch, and here he fell asleep while eating. But within two hours he awoke, and was riding hard again. At dawn, he rested for an hour.

The countryside was fresh and green from the first autumn rains, and the vistas of bay and far-off hill and mountain was dream-beautiful. But his mind was too full of conjecture and foreboding, his feelings too taut and aching, for him to notice. At the end of this furious ride would be Fort Ross—and Marina. Thought of her gave him pleasure that made his pulse leap and race giddily. But there at Ross would be Governor Kuskov and his soldiers; and that jail from which he had escaped so easily with Marina's help. Kuskov might not put him in that jail when Kuskov learned why he had returned: but Kuskov then would plan a trap for Captain Bouchard's raiders—*and I'll have helped set an ambush for my brother to walk into!*

But Lucien deserved it. Lucien had it coming to him.

Damn it, that doesn't make it easier! That doesn't make it any easier at all!

IT WAS late afternoon again when he neared Fort Ross from the south; and again he approached by trail along the rim of the bluff. And as he passed the clump of fragrant heliotrope near the cliff edge, he paused and glanced within it—and to him came the strange, breath-taking sense of having turned time back, of living the past over again. For there in the sunny little bower, a little cove of quiet sweet-smelling with blossoms and so peacefully ahum with bees and alight with butterflies—there again he saw a girl who stood with

bowed head, the sun bright upon her bronzy-red hair, whose slim shoulders quivered as she wept.

"Marina!"

It burst out of him; and the next instant he had flung himself off his horse and was striding toward her. Marina had turned, startled. For a taut, unbelieving moment of stunned surprise, of wild dizzying happiness, she started at him—and then flung herself into his arms and clung to him, and then kissed him, again and again, her sweet warm lips salt with tears.

"John, my beloved, my dear one—I was so broken-hearted I wanted to die—"

"Easy, now. Let's dry your eyes."

"You've come back for me! You couldn't do without me!"

He couldn't answer that, so he evaded it. He said, just to make talk, just to ease her wild emotion, "What were you doing here? Making a little shrine to my memory, too?"

"Yes," she said, and he started, upset. "Look, darling."

But when he looked, he saw that she had an easel set up here, and had been sketching. It was a portrait of his own face that she was drawing. From memory. And its faithfulness of detail amazed him while it touched him to the quick. She had not romanticized his features at all; she had not made them more regular and handsome than they really were. On the contrary, she had worked in every unflattering detail as well as the flattering ones. The little scar beside his lip, the little hump on the left side of his nose left by a bad fall, the crow's feet of sunsquint about his eyes. So lovingly exact the sketch was! So sharply was his face etched upon her mind—and heart.

"John, you wait here for me. I will get a horse, and a few clothes from the fort and—"

Excitedly he interrupted her. Full-fledged into his mind flashed a plan, a solution.

"Marina, listen to me! You—"

"Or if you prefer, darling, I won't go back to the fort at all. Right now I'll go away with you."

"Marina, here's what you must do. Hurry to Governor Kuskov. Tell him that you met me here—"

"But he's so angry against you!"

"Tell him that I came back from Monterey with a warning for him. Tell him that Captain Bouchard's privateers have looted and burned Monterey, and that now they are on their way here to Fort Ross to loot and burn again."

Marina turned white.

"They're not privateers, then. They're pirates."

"Of course! Tell Kuskov that they will not attack by sea at all. Captain Bouchard will send a strong party by land, at night, approaching through the canyon of the Slavyanka. Go at once, Marina. The attack may come tomorrow—or even tonight."

"I'll go. But you, John? You'll wait for me?"

For an instant he hesitated. It was his plan, now, to travel up the canyon of the Slavyanka himself—*to meet Captain Bouchard's party.* He would go right up to his brother and to Bouchard. He would tell them that it was no use marching farther toward Ross, *for the Russians already knew of this impending attack and were laying an ambush to crush this invading force.* If necessary to convince Lucien that he wasn't bluffing, he would admit that he himself had warned Kuskov. He hoped this wouldn't be necessary.

"John, you *will* wait for me?" Marina repeated, pleading.

Deliberately he lied. "Yes, I'll wait. Hurry, now!"

But she kept looking up at him; and then, shaking her head, she smiled tremulously. "No, you won't wait. But, darling, whatever takes you away—when it's done, come back for me."

Her arms tightened around him again, and for a moment she laid her cool cheek against his face, then she turned to go.

It was then that John saw the file of *soldats* come up the trail out of the cove, on their way south from Ross to Halfway Farm. Captain Kuprin rode at their head—and Kuprin had already sighted him, had already turned his head to shout a command to his soldiers. And as they spurred their horses into a run forward, John realized that he was caught, that to attempt to escape on his worn-out mount was hopeless.

Wildly Marina gasped, "Ride, John!"

"No." He tried hard to keep his sickening despair out of his voice. "I guess now, Marina, I'll take that message to Governor Kuskov myself."

GOVERNOR KUSKOV had a nervous habit of pulling at a lock of his iron-gray hair as he listened in concentration. Lines about his thin-lipped mouth tightened ominously and he leaned across his desk as John finished telling him of Captain Boucard's plans to raid Fort Ross.

"You say this raid may hit us tonight, Randolph?"

"It may. You must be ready for it!"

"Count on that."

"Now," John said, hesitating a moment, "I ask you to release me. I've earned it!"

"Yes. I think I can promise to release you—in two or three days."

"But—let me go at once, sir!"

Instead of answering, Kuskov demanded, "Captain Bouchard's ship was the *Argentina*, you said. What was the name of the other vessel?"

"It—it was painted out, sir. To hide its identity."

Kuskov's mouth hardened. "Captain Gyzelaar, who brought word to Monterey from Hawaii that Bouchard's sea bandits were planning to raid California—Captain Gyzelaar stopped in at Ross after sailing from Monterey. He told me that the vessel accompanying the *Argentina* was the *Santa Rosa*. And the *Santa Rosa*, as you know, was formerly the *Sweet Ellen*." Abruptly he leaned across the desk and demanded, "Your brother is with Bouchard, is he not? Lucien Randolph will guide Bouchard's men through the Slavyanka Canyon to attack us in the night!"

"No—*no*, I tell you!" John wet his lips, thinking desperately. "I've f-found out about Lucien, sir. Listen to me. He's not to blame for what happened to your Aleut hunters and the cargo of otter pelts that was stolen from you."

"Then who is to blame? What happened? Tell me!"

"The crew, sir. Men of the crew, sir. It—it was a mutiny. They had been gone from home so long, sir. They were working for shares, not wages, and they weren't satisfied with what they were going to get after such a long voyage. They took over the ship and *forced* Lucien to sail to Canton with your cargo of otter pelts."

Kuskov shook his head.

"Your lie is a little too—frantic. I understand how much you want to save your brother, and I respect you for it. But I know that the one likely man to guide Bouchard's raiders to Ross is Captain Lucien Randolph. I'm convinced he will be with this party of thieves who will come to attack Ross; and if we catch him, we will hang him!" Kuskov looked down at his desk a moment, then; and in a lower tone added, "But this much I will do; I will give certain orders to my soldiers. I will see to it that Captain Lucien Randolph dies from bullets while fighting."

John choked up, and couldn't answer.

Captain Kuprin and Lieutenant Lurie and other officers stalked into the room then. Kuskov motioned for John to take a chair to one side of his desk. The officers then started planning an ambush for Bouchard's party of raiders. John listened, relief for Ross forgotten in an increasing heartsick dejection.

"Where the trail along the Slavyanka goes through the narrow gap below that last grove of redwoods would be the ideal spot," Kuprin was saying. "We can post our men on each side of the narrows, with light cannon loaded with grape that will sweep the trail. There the walls are cliffs which those pirates would find very difficult to climb."

"Flares!" Lurie suggested. "With gunpowder we can make flares that will light up the canyon as plain as day."

"Our men will be hidden, while Bouchard's men will be dazzled by the glare upon them. They'll be easy targets for our guns."

And among those targets—a very *special* target—would be Captain Lucien Randolph. John blinked, to clear a hot mistiness from his vision, and looked out the window at the sunset. Soon it would be dark, soon the Russian trap would be set.

The speed with which the detachments of soldiers left Ross and departed up the trail into the little Slavyanka River Canyon was proof of their excellent discipline. They would do a good job, John realized. Any of Bouchard's men who survived would be lucky.

It was an hour after dark before Kuskov had finished all his preparations, and the officers remaining in the fort went to the evening meal. John sat between Kuskov and Marina; but he was too numb with grief of what was coming to make even a pretense of

eating. Marina pressed his hand once, and when she looked at him her lovely eyes filled with tears. But none of the tension which had spread through the fort as news of Bouchard's raid became known was obvious in her manner. She talked easily and casually, as if there was no reason for anyone in the fort to be unduly concerned. She was as smart as she was brave, John reflected; and he wished that he could be alone with her and find comfort for his own heartache in her warm sympathy.

The long meal was almost finished when the interruption occurred.

Outside the house was the sound of running feet, a sentry's sharp challenge, then excited words of Russian. Hurrying footsteps approached the door.

Governor Kuskov pushed back from the table, rising, and exclaiming, "This must be news from the Slavyanka!"

The door was flung open, and into the room burst Lieutenant Tarasov and a sentry —and a prisoner.

And seeing that prisoner, John cried out and leaped to his feet, upsetting his chair. He was a tall man, the prisoner, with hair so light that the gray in it made it almost silvery. His deep-set gray eyes were haggard, and lines of pain and crushing fatigue were cut sharp into his lean face. He wore the serge suit of a Yankee shipmaster; but now upon his side was an ominous spreading blotch, and he sagged against the sentry who held him as if he would fall without the soldier's help.

"Governor Kuskov," he said. "Kuskov—"

Kuskov blurted, "So my men finally caught you, Captain Randolph."

"No. No!" Lucien Randolph stiffened up, and his voice strengthened. "I came here of my own free will, sir. To bring you warning, sir, to—"

His strength gave out and his knees buckled and he started to fall. Tarasov and the sentry caught him.

John left the table and darted across the room.

"Lucien! Lucien!"

Lucien Randolph was being eased onto a chair, and John bent over him and grasped his arms.

"Lucien, don't you recognize me? I'm John! I'm John!"

Lucien Randolph's sunken eyes widened in amazement, and for a long breathless moment he just stared.

"But— How in the world— So you came west, boy."

"Yes. To find you. We hadn't heard for so long—"

Lucien Randolph was going slack with weakness. He interrupted, his voice an anguished straining to be heard.

"Kuskov—I've lost so much blood—Kuskov, Bouchard's pirates are on their way to raid Ross. You'd better—"

Consciousness faded from him then, and he slumped inert.

"Just fainted, from loss of blood," Kuskov said briskly. "Carry him to Dr. Chernik's cabin."

But John whirled on Governor Kuskov, and John's eyes were shining.

"I told you," he said. "I told you that Lucien was no thief. He just pretended to help Bouchard—and he risked his life to get here to warn you. I *told* you!"

DR. CHERNIK dressed Lucien's wound. He began to stir out of unconsciousness as the doctor finished. He didn't come to his senses peacefully but as if straining, as if something was driving him.

"Kuskov," he breathed then. "Kuskov!"

"What is it, Lucien?" John asked. "Kuskov isn't here."

Lucien opened his eyes. "*You*, John! I was thinking I'd dreamed it. Johnny, go to Kuskov. Tell him Bouchard's men are coming—"

"He knows. They're coming down the Slavyanka."

"No! We started that way. But where the trail cuts up over the cliff that juts into the stream, I led them north and over into Deer Creek Canyon. Then I ran off from them. They took some wild shots at me in the dark when they realized what I was doing."

"So that's how you got wounded!"

"Johnny, tell Kuskov that Bouchard's party is on Deer Creek. They're lost, and they'll likely wait till sun-up to find their way back to the coast. So there's no danger of them attacking the fort at all."

John swallowed hard, nodded, and started away.

"So you see," he told Kuskov five minutes later, "Lucien not only isn't one of Bou-

chard's pirates, but he sidetracked them so they couldn't attack Ross at all."

Governor Kuskov nodded thoughtfully.

"Now I must send word to Captain Kuprin to look for Bouchard's men on Deer Creek."

"Let me go to Kuprin, sir."

Kuskov looked at him for a taut instant, and nodded.

"Very well. But arm yourself, and—Good luck, my boy."

ON HORSEBACK, with a hunter as guide, John rode hard up the Slavyanka trail to the ambush set by the Russians. A sentry challenged John and his companion —and led them, then, to Captain Kuprin. Quickly John told Kuprin that the party of raiders were lost in Deer Creek Canyon. The guide had brought a written message of confirmation from the governor, too.

Kuprin shouted orders.

Carefully, led by hunters who knew the countryside intimately, the detachment marched over a range of wooded hills onto the watershed of Deer Creek. Then the soldiers waited, while their scouts searched the stream. Two hours passed, and then the hunters returned, jubilant. Bouchard's raiding party was up ahead some miles. Feeling secure on a sand flat between steep walls of the ravine, they had lit campfires to keep warm. The Russian scouts had found them.

At dawn, Captain Kuprin's strong force was in place at the summit of the west rim of the steep ravine.

As the sun rose and light slanted into the narrow little canyon, the raiders camped on the sand flat below began to stir. Cook fires were lit and breakfast started. There were almost two hundred men in that raiding party, John estimated. More than was in this detachment of Russians.

Captain Kuprin, at John's side, whispered tautly in French: "We must hit them like a thunderbolt. Paralyze them with surprise."

"Yes! The way that they planned to hit Ross!"

Kuprin's subordinates already had their orders. The troops leveled their muskets. Everyone took careful aim on a man in the force below. And when Kuprin shouted his sudden command, fifty muskets spoke at once in thunder that re-echoed between the narrow walls of the ravine. And in that one instant the strength of the raiding party was broken. Hardly a bullet was wasted. As the wind whipped aside the blue swirl of powder smoke, John saw men of Bouchard's party crumpled headlong onto their own campfires, saw men stagger and collapse in their tracks while their comrades stared in stunned amazement.

"Quick," Kuprin ordered John. "In English, tell them to surrender!"

John obeyed, shouting the command.

Bouchard's pirate crew looked up. They saw the Russians. They saw a foe that they could draw a bead on. Recklessly, frantically, they sprang for their guns.

Again Kuprin ordered "Fire!" and the fifty Russian soldiers who had waited with loaded muskets in reserve, pressed trigger. And again a deadly volley took a toll of destruction among Bouchard's raiders. Dead and wounded dropped there on the sand flat. Not half of the whole force was left on their feet. Wildly those who survived emptied their guns at the canyon rim.

Kuprin ordered John, "Tell them to throw down their weapons or we shall kill them all!"

Again John shouted.

But the beaten raiders were caught up in panic. The threat set them off. Down the gulch they fled pellmell, crashing through the brush like a herd of deer startled by a gunshot. Some few had thrown down their muskets and raised their arms aloft. But they were bowled over in the rush, and infected by the blind terror, and scrambling up they joined in the wild rout. Some Russian bullets fired over their heads was an added spur to their flight.

"We'll let them go," Kuprin said. "We'll be busy enough caring for the wounded."

"GOVERNOR KUSKOV, I asked Dr. Chernik to send for you," Lucien Randolph said. He was sitting up in John's room in the barracks. The doctor had been a little reluctant to let Lucien talk; but the wound in his side no longer looked dangerous, and Lucien was insistent.

Kuskov nodded gravely, and sat down in the chair John pushed forward.

"We have serious charges against you, Captain Randolph," Kuskov said. "If you have anything to say in your defense, we will listen sympathetically. But I'm afraid

that all the leniency I can promise you is to send you to Siberia for my superiors to put on trial."

Lucien's deep-lined face was very sober.

HE NODDED. "For months I've realized that you've believed I slaughtered the crew of Aleut hunters and Russian soldiers I had aboard the *Sweet Ellen*. Believe me, that hurt. But the truth is, I did not steal your cargo of otter pelts, and I did not kill your hunters. Let me tell you what happened.

"We'd had very good luck in getting otter down along Magdalena Bay and coves of Lower California, and we came back and picked up the hunters we'd left in the Santa Barbara Channel Islands. We had about 1,700 fine otter pelts by that time. But we were short on beef, and we anchored in the cove off Refugio and I went ashore with a party to kill some cattle grazing near the beach, and to get some fresh water for our kegs. We planned to pay if we could find the ranch owner. But we had no chance. The rancher must've seen us coming and rode off to make an alarm, because we no sooner had shot some beef animals when a force of Spanish soldiers under a Sergeant de Ortega jumped us. Caught us completely by surprise. Lieutenant Karsakov and two of his men were killed at the first volley. To prevent any more loss of life I yelled to my men to surrender. I figured to pay this Sergeant de Ortega for the cattle we'd killed. But he wouldn't listen. He started marching us to Santa Barbara, to put us in a stinking prison.

"Well, something had to be done. As soon as it was dark, I ordered my men to make a break for it. We did. Most of us got away, but I got two bullets into me. My seamen helped me back to the cove, and a boat from the *Sweet Ellen* took us back aboard. I was badly hurt. In fact, I was raving with delirium by the time I was laid in my bunk on the *Sweet Ellen*.

"My first mate, Johansen, took charge of the brig.

"I've never trusted Johansen entirely. I've known he was reckless and not too honest. But I always figured I could handle him. I never expected to be in such shape that I couldn't handle him.

"I nearly bled to death from my wounds. Then I was in delirium for days. And when that passed, I lay in a coma. We had no doctor aboard. It was Johansen himself who took care of me. I was nearly bled white—and Johansen wanted me flat on my back and unaware of what went on. He would change my dressings, so he said; what he did was open my wounds afresh. So it was some weeks before I was strong enough to get onto my feet. And then we were sailing to Hong Kong.

"And Johansen explained to me that since I'd been hurt, he had sailed the *Sweet Ellen* back to Fort Ross and landed the Aleut hunters and given half the cargo of furs to you, Governor Kuskov. Then, with the rest, he set sail—as I originally planned—to Hong Kong to sell them. I believed him. I signed the various ship's papers and cargo invoices. The furs were sold and the *Sweet Ellen* left China without any trouble with authorities and no suspicion anywhere that the brig had been taken over by thieving members of the crew.

"One thing troubled me. Johansen said I was out of my head with delirium while the *Sweet Ellen* put in at Ross to land your Aleut hunters. Why, I wondered, didn't Governor Kuskov have me brought ashore to be tended by Dr. Chernik? *That* worried me. Also, when I started going out on deck for a few minutes each day, I noticed that there were new faces among my crew —and old faces missing. Johansen explained, when I asked, that he had put in at the Sandwich Islands and hired new men to replace a number who wanted to leave the ship. I know now that some of the men before the mast had been gotten rid of with the Aleuts because they had no stomach for piracy. The new hands were men of Johansen's own stripe.

"Still, I did not suspect the truth.

"Johansen was very shrewd. In China we had put aboard a very fine cargo of spices and goods and tea. He sold the stuff in Callao and Valparaiso, adding double profits to the money made from the stolen otter pelts. Then we headed around the Horn—for home, I thought. Still so weak I could hardly stand, it was tonic to think that we were finally headed home after a mighty prosperous voyage.

"But we put in at Buenos Aires.

"I had not ordered that. I called Johansen in and dressed him down. He knocked

me flat to the floor with a back-handed slap. I was that feeble.

"He was changing the name of the *Sweet Ellen* to the *Santa Rosa,* he told me. He was going to fly the Argentina flag, and take the brig into service as a privateersman, sailing under command of Captain Hippolyte Bouchard, who owned the *Argentina.* I had a pistol in a locker, and I jumped for it. He was able to take it away from me.

"He hadn't killed me, he said, because I was very useful to him. But he *would* kill me if I didn't continue to make myself useful. The thing he wanted me to do now was go ashore and, as listed owner and master of the *Sweet Ellen,* ask to have the brig commissioned as a privateersman under the Argentine flag.

"I told him to go to hell.

"There would be rich loot for us, he promised. I struck at his face, and he knocked me down again.

"Besides, he went on, I was already known to my Russian friends as a thief. Then he explained that the *Sweet Ellen* had never sailed back to Fort Ross to land her passengers, the Aleut hunters—and had not delivered half the catch of otter pelts we had taken off the California coast. No—" Lucien Randolph's voice choked. "We had sailed off to China with the whole catch of furs and sold them and kept the full proceeds.

"I asked him what had been done with the sixty Aleut hunters who'd been our passengers. He said that the Aleutians had been marooned on an island. I asked *what* island? What the hell difference did it make? he said.

"He wanted an immediate answer. Would I go ashore and offer my brig to Captain Bouchard? Or did I want a bullet through my head and a burial at sea!

"I—I knuckled under. For a reason. I did exactly what he told me to. Because I wanted to find out where the sixty Aleut hunters had been marooned. And I wanted to get word to you, Governor Kuskov, of where your men were."

Lucien stopped talking a moment, to rest. Kuskov lightly put his hand on Lucien's shoulder, in a gesture of such confidence and trust that Lucien's gray eyes misted.

He went on, "Johansen would not tell me where the Aleuts had been set ashore, nor was I permitte . to leave my cabin to talk to the crew. I' was just a month ago that I was able to get into the galley and talk to Old Job Latham, my cook. Governor Kuskov—" Lucien's voice rang, now "—if you'll send a schooner south to Revillagigedo Island, some five hundred miles west of the coast of Mexico, you'll find your Aleut hunters unharmed. Johansen set them ashore without boats or weapons, but the island swarms with wild fowl and the coves are full of shellfish. I'm positive you'll find your men alive and healthy."

Governor Kuskov did not speak for a moment. Then, his voice unsteady with emotion, he said, "I'll send a schooner to Revillagigedo for them—if you will go as master of her, Captain Randolph. Will you?"

Lucien caught a sharp breath.

"But how can you trust me again! There's still that cargo of otter pelts you've lost because of me."

"You've repaid that many times over. But for you and young John, Bouchard's raiders might have looted and burned at Ross as they did at Monterey. You saved us from that."

He smiled at John as he spoke, and John blushed, embarrassed and happy.

Then he blurted a question which had been preying on his mind.

"But what became of that renegade—Johansen?"

Kuskov answered, "He's dead. Captain Kuprin lists him among the raiders killed in the fight at Deer Creek."

Lucien's face hardened.

"I'm sorry to hear that. I had plans for Johansen."

John put his arm about his brother's shoulders.

"It's better this way, Lucien."

Governor Kuskov said, "I still wait for your answer, Captain Randolph. I'd like to add that bringing our Aleut hunters back from Revillagigedo Island is not all I have in mind for you. Our schooners are too small for our needs. We plan to buy an American brig. I'd like to place you in command of her, with young John as supercargo. Will you accept?"

Lucien looked up at him, his gray eyes shining; and, too choked up to speak, Captain Lucien Randolph nodded mutely. John wanted to yell, to jump up and shout. In-

stead, he turned and almost ran out of the room. This was news he simply *had* to share.

MARINA was walking past the barracks as he came out. She saw him, and darted toward him; and from the anguished question in her lovely eyes he realized that it wasn't mere accident that she was here. She'd been waiting for him.

"John," she whispered. "Are they going to lock you up again? Don't worry, if they are. I'll arrange—"

"No, Marina. Everything's all right. Listen, I—"

He looked around. Soldiers were passing. A big, bearded sentry on guard at the store house was grinning as he looked at them. John took Marina's arm.

"Something I've got to tell you. Come on!"

"Where, darling?"

There was just one place he could say what he had to say—in Maria's little bower of heliotrope on the rim of the bluff south of the fort. Somehow, whenever he thought of her or looked at her, the fragrance of azure blossoms and the soft touch of sun upon his face was vivid upon his nerves.

"Come on," he repeated.

She looked puzzled, but came along. The sentry let them out the main gates without a word, saluting briskly. As John turned with Marina down the path which led to her secluded nook on the bluff, she understood, and the fright left her sweet face and she laughed lightly and pressed his arm against her breast.

He kept his silence until they reached the little cove in the heliotrope on the bluff rim. He turned to her, grasped her elbows without realizing how tightly he was holding her, and asked, "To marry a man who's not of your faith—how'd you have to arrange it?"

Just as soberly, but with a twinkle in her fine eyes, she said, "To arrange things properly, first I would have to ask permission of Governor Kuskov, who is a sort of guardian for me. Then I would have to go back to Russia. I would have to go to Court. You see, the Czar is head of our church, and to marry outside of my faith, I would have to get his own gracious permission. He might not grant it, or he might take months to decide. And meanwhile," she said in mock anger, then, "you would have found another to console you! A Spanish girl, or a girl in New England. And if you think I'm going to risk that, you are very, very foolish. I'm going to marry you right away!"

"But wouldn't that make things awkward for you, back home?"

"Back home? Dearest one, there is no back home for me. Home is here, with you, or wherever you are—now, and always."

A long unsteady breath eased past his lips, and he smiled with relief.

"Marina," he said softly, "I wish that I could speak French well enough to tell you all that's in my heart—"

"If you could speak a dozen languages, darling, you could never say as much as your lips can tell me without speaking at all."

He bent, and kissed her. It was better than talking. A whole lot better.

BRAINS ON THE BORDER

By W. C. TUTTLE

"YOU can't," declared Howdy Hepburn, "make a silk purse from a sow's ear."

Terry McCune scratched his left shin with the heel of his right boot. When Terry thought deeply, he scratched his left shin. It helped.

"Can't, huh?" he said. "Why?"

"Aw, that's just an old sayin'," replied Howdy wearily.

"Is, huh? Well, who wants a silk purse? Who wants any kind of a purse? Who's got anythin' to put in a purse? And why bring pigs into it?"

"It's just an old proverb, Terry," said Howdy patiently.

"What," asked Terry, "has old proverbs got to do with us workin' for Cut 'n Slash McGowan? I just said you'd have to use a gun-barrel to beat any decency into his hard head—and you start talkin' about sow's ears and silk purses. It don't make sense. Mebbe it's the heat."

Howdy Hepburn was several inches over six feet tall, about as heavy-set as a sand-hill crane, with a long, sober face, tired-looking eyes, and a penchant for not paying his bills. Terry McCune was a fly-weight in both height and weight, freckled, argumentive, and always ready for fight or fun. They were cowboys, pure and very often simple.

"When I spoke of a sow's ear, I spoke of Mr. McGowan, Terry," said Howdy.

"Callin' *him* a sow's ear? Ain't you gittin' awful cultured in yore re-marks, cowboy?"

"The Hepburns," said Howdy stiffly, are cultured folks."

"They are, huh? Cultured. Uncle Ezra got his in a penitentiary for stealin' cows. Oh, I know—you mean them that ain't been hung, huh?"

The stage from Caliente came down the main street of Porcupine City and drew up at the stage office, only a few strides away from the two cowboys. They looked at it indifferently, until Oswald Arkright Knott got out of the stage. Oswald was short, rather plump and decidedly pink, his expensive clothes disheveled. Oswald was of the Kewpie or Cupid type, decidedly out of place in Porcupine City.

Oswald went over and stood in front of the stage-office, trying to adjust his necktie in his reflection in a very dusty window. Howdy and Terry moved down and looked reprovingly at "Coyote" Cowley, the driver, who was taking the lash-rope off Oswald's two valises.

"Don't blame me," whispered Coyote. "He was drunker'n a fiddler's pup, and said he wanted a ride. Called me 'Cabby.' He ain't *my* funeral."

Coyote dumped the two expensive valises on the wooden sidewalk, and went into the office. Oswald turned from the window and beheld the tall and short cowboys.

He essayed a weak smile and said, "Howdoo-o-o-o."

"Sounds like a nestin' turtle-dove," whispered Terry.

"I am Oswald A. Knott," said the visitor.

"Oswald a knot," murmured Terry. "I'll bet he left a hole where he came from."

"I am still a bit irked," said Oswald. "I thought the man said Sacramento—and he said Caliente. I got off, and the train left me there."

"And then what?" asked Howdy soberly.

"I met that man who drives the stage, and asked him to have a drink. We have many things in common, including a thirst. I told him I wanted to go to California, and he said he wasn't sure, but he thought it would be a short-cut for me to come down this way."

"Yea-a-ah—it would be," agreed Howdy, "except that you'd have to walk about a hundred and eighty miles over the hills, or go back to Caliente."

"I'll buy a drink," offered Oswald.

Oswald ran a poor third to the Oasis Saloon, where the bartender looked with deep compassion upon him, wondering, no doubt, if this ornate stranger should be left to the tender mercies of Howdy and Terry.

"Are you two gents workin' for Cut 'n Slash McGowan?" he asked.

"We is, are and am," replied Terry. "And a fine gentleman, he is. A heart of gold, if yo're interested in insides. Give that bottle a nudge, Howdy."

"I heard," said the bartender, "that he spent a year in the pen."

"Purely a mistake," said Howdy. "He went there to visit his twin brother, and it took 'em a year to find out which was which."

"How did they find out?" asked Oswald.

"They didn't," said Terry. "His brother's time was up; so they let both of 'em go at once."

"Interesting," murmured Oswald. "I should like to meet him."

"He'd love yuh," declared Terry. "His tastes run to derby hats and shiny shoes. And that necktie! Man, he'd love yuh like a brother!"

"Has he lived here long?" asked Oswald.

"A year," said the bartender. "He bought out the Circle C, which was as poverty-stricken as any cow spread along the Border."

"What do you gents do down there?" asked Oswald, fortified with two good drinks of Porcupine's best.

"We," replied Terry, "are his go-betweens, Oswald."

"Go-betweens? Go-between what?"

"Between the Circle C and Paraiso. Yuh see, Howdy's got a seen-yuh-reeta down there."

"Is Mr. Howdy a proxy for Mr. McGowan?" asked Oswald innocently.

"Proxy?" queried Howdy. "Proxy? It is jist possible that it's a good thing I don't know what that means."

"I mean that you are making love *for* Mr. McGowan."

"My Gawd!" breathed Howdy. "Could a human sink so far?"

"John Alden did it for Miles Standish," said Oswald stiffly. "That is historical."

"If Howdy done it for McGowan, it'd be hysterical," said Terry soberly. "Who bought that last drink?"

"There's only been one bought—and you didn't," said the bartender.

"My mistake," said Oswald. "Set them up again."

HOWDY patted Oswald on the shoulder. "My friend," he said, "you interest me greatly. Given a little time, I might make something of you."

"A horse-thief—or worse," murmured the bartender.

Oswald heard it. "Do you actually mean he could teach me how to steal a horse?"

"What you need now," said Howdy, ignoring the insult, "is a bad case of sunburn and a change of clothes."

Oswald inspected Howdy's raiment closely. It consisted of a faded pair of overalls, very tight, a nondescript shirt, topped by a once-red handkerchief, a battered sombrero, high-heel boots, slightly run over at the heels, a cartridge belt, with holster, and an old, black-handled Colt .45.

"And a gun, too?" asked Oswald.

"No," said the bartender quickly. "You'll do—without a gun."

"Do what?" asked Oswald.

"Stay out of jail, I reckon."

"I see. Suppose we indulge in another drink?"

"If you feel the need of a gun—you have one," said Terry. "Yuh never can tell what'll turn up."

"Do things turn up down here?"

"Toes—mostly," sighed the bartender. They enjoyed their drink.

Oswald was a boon to Howdy and Terry, fifteen days before pay-day. When it came to credit the Porcupine bartenders were adamant. Even the bartenders at the Joya Cantina in Paraiso were getting stiff-necked about credit. Parasio was a far cry from being a Paradise. Far removed from any other towns, it was ruled by one, Pancho Rojas "Red Frank," who was only red in deeds—not in color. Rojas was a short, fat person, with fierce mustaches, an eagle-beak nose, and a solid aversion to water in any form.

McGowan's Cut-and-Slash spread was between Porcupine and the Border; a tumble-down ranchhouse, mostly adobe, a few sprawling corrals and few cattle. There was little work for Howdy and Terry, but they didn't mind, as long as McGowan paid them a salary. McGowan didn't know much about cows. He seemed to have plenty money. About a year ago he had come into Porcupine, bought out the Circle C, and proceeded to register the Cut-and-Slash mark.

Neither Howdy nor Terry liked McGowan but he paid well. While punchers on other spreads received the usual forty-a-month, McGowan paid them sixty. But he was unfriendly, arrogant, and had no sense of humor. He was short and fat, waddled like a duck, and was nearly bald. He spent much of his time at Caliente, playing poker—which was all right with Howdy and Terry.

Oswald was a good spender.

" 'S long's I'm here," he said, "I might ash well shee the coun'ry."

" 'Solutely," agreed Howdy. "Oh, indubitably. By all means, Oshwal'. Am I right, Terry?"

"Don' argue with me," replied Terry. "I'm 'bout t' walk off a pink cloud. Shay, we better gittum somethin' t' wear. Ol' Cutt'n Slash'll kill him in them duds."

"Ze mean?" asked Oswald owlishly.

"Bitecher eyebrows off," declared Howdy.

"Wha' do you work for him for?"

"Six'y a month—and found."

"What'd you find?"

"Ain't he funny?" choked Terry. "Awful comic'l. C'mon."

AT THE general store they outfitted Oswald. He fell backwards twice, trying to balance himself on high-heel boots, but they got him to the buckboard and headed for the Cut-and-Slash, his suitcases piled up in the back. There was no place to pack his derby hat; so Terry tied a string to it, and tied the string to the rear of the buckboard—and they towed it.

McGowan was not pleased. He couldn't see anything funny about Oswald.

"Who is he, why did he come here, and what is his business?" asked McGowan.

"I think yo're right," nodded Howdy, "and ain't he a spechimen?"

"Why in hell did you cart him out here?" asked McGowan.

"Didn' you ever hear of Weshtern hoshpitality?" asked Terry. "Didn't, huh? Shomebody ort t' learn yuh."

"Listen to me," said McGowan severely. "I hire you two half-wits to punch cows for me, and you bring *that* out here. A pink-

faced punk, wearin' his first boots. Well, why don't you say something?"

"How-doo-o-o-o," cooed Oswald. "Hol' still—I want to shee what you look like, Misser McGowan."

"Take him back to Porcupine!" snapped McGowan.

"We are entertainin' the gent," explained Terry. "We promished him a trip to Paraiso."

"Why to Paraiso?" asked McGowan.

"He ain't," explained Terry, "never been to Mezzico."

"That suits me," growled McGowan. "You two are not doing any Cook's Tour on my money. Take him back where you got him."

"Do you want to break his heart?" asked Terry.

"And," added the elongated Howdy, "in his condition, Misser McGowan, any great dis'pointment like that might prove fatal."

"Hepburn, you are a fool," declared McGowan.

"I bow t' s'perior knowledge," said Howdy gravely.

"All right," growled McGowan. "If you've got to go, I'll have you take a letter to Pancho Rojas. I want those Mexican calves he promised me."

"It would be a pleasure, I 'sure you," replied Howdy. "I'd like to hand him a sock in the chin, too—but that can wait."

"You try socking him," said McGowan, "and you'll find yourself in jail. Rojas is the boss down there, and don't forget it."

"Misser McGowan," said Terry soberly, "are you tryin' to tell me and Howdy somethin' about the flora and fauna of Mezzico?"

"I use-a have a girl named Flora," said Oswald. "Wonnerful girl."

"All three of you are crazy," said McGowan.

"M' Gawd!" gasped Oswald. "I'm triplets!"

"That's a great relief t' me," said Terry. "I thought m' eyes was bad."

McGOWAN gave an envelope to Howdy and the three men climbed back into the buckboard. They were still towing the derby, which was only a brim now. They met the Border Patrol, three hard-faced riders, who looked them over with grim amusement. Oswald was particularly amusing to look at.

"Gettin' kinda dudish, ain't yuh, Hepburn; ridin' in a buckboard?" asked one of them soberly.

"At the salary I'm a-gettin'," replied Howdy, "I don't have to ride a horse."

"What salary do you get?" asked Oswald, and they bumped along over the rough road to Paraiso.

"Sixty a month," replied Howdy proudly. "Ord'nary punchers only get forty."

"And no cows to worry us," added Terry.

"What do you do?" asked Oswald.

"That," said Howdy soberly, "is somethin' we ain't never found out yet."

They drew up in front of the Joya Cantina. Just why it was named Jewel, no one ever knew. It was low-ceiled, tawdry, reeking of spilled liquor and unwashed bodies. The floor hadn't been swept for days. A wide-hatted Mexican, bowed low and took charge of their equipage. Howdy said to Oswald:

"Yuh see how we rate, don't yuh? A flunkey takes care of the team."

"How long you be here, Señor?" the Mexican asked.

"Oh, mebbe a couple hours," said Howdy loftily.

"Esta buena—gracias."

"I suppose," said Oswald, "you own the keys to the city."

"They don't lock it—they tie it up," said Terry soberly.

Howdy explained to Oswald about tequila: "Yuh put a little salt on the back of yore hand, and take a lick before every swaller."

"Why?" asked Oswald, who wanted to know everything.

"Because," explained Terry, "this tequila is the nearest thing the Mexicans have to embalmin' fluid. The salt helps yuh *keep* better."

"Heavenly days!" exclaimed Oswald.

"That," said Terry, "comes after the sixth drink."

"You are a funny little tyke," grinned Oswald. "You really are, Terry."

"Yeah, and I git funnier and funnier, as yuh go along. I even git to a point where I laugh at m'self, Oswald. But when I do that—gimme room."

"Do you get mean?" asked Oswald.

"Do I? They used to call me Boot Hill McCune."

"What does that mean?"

"Let's not worry about it," suggested Terry. "Pass the salt, Howdy."

After six drinks they were well organized, and went hunting for Pancho Rojas. They found him in a small cantina, playing a jumping-bean game with some other Mexicans. Howdy gave him the note from McGowan. Pancho was short and fat, rather wheezy in his conversation, and inclined to look with suspicion upon any strange *Americano.*

His liberty, possibly his life, depended on not being caught across the Border, where he had pulled successful raids on cattle and horses.

"You tell Meester McGowan," said Pancho, after reading the note, "that those calf weel come pretty queek."

"Take yore time, Pancho," said Howdy, who didn't relish the shipment of calves, which would mean days of branding.

"Much tiempo," grinned Pancho.

"Yeah, that's right—plenty time."

THEY went back to the Joya Cantina, where a maguey-cutter and a sheepherder got into a fight. It was a good fight, while it lasted, and in the excitement they lost Oswald A. Knott, when the sheepherder mistook him for his opponent and chased him out the back door. The shepherd came back, but not Oswald.

After stumbling around the town for an hour, Howdy and Terry gave Oswald up as being lost. The Mexican brought their buckboard and team back to the cantina hitch-rack. More tequila made Oswald's absence more poignant.

"Somethin' has happened to our li'l playmate," said Henry.

"He was such a joy," sighed Terry. "I'll never be the shame again."

Howdy said chokingly, "Never to shee his roshy cheeks again, nor hear the pat'r of li'l feet 'round the housh."

"Y'r breakin' my heart," declared Terry. "Le's go home."

They made their way outside, but the buckboard and team were gone.

"Oh, m' Gawd!" wailed Terry. "We've been robbed, Howdy! Call th' p'lice! Call the—well, why don'tcha call shomethin'?"

Howdy, being a careful soul, felt all along the top-pole of the hitch-rack.

"Shometimes," he said owlishly, "tequila makes things transhparent."

"Th' thing t' do," declared Terry, "is to fin' Pancho Rojas. He's top man here. He's responshible, Howdy."

"Tha's right. Good ol' Pancho."

They went hunting Pancho Rojas, but couldn't find him. Their search ended up at the smallest cantina in the town, where they tried to impress upon the bartender that their credit was first-class.

"Two dreenk—*uno peso,"* declared the bartender. "No onnerstan' cradit."

"It works like thish," explained Howdy. "We pay some other time."

"Sure," grinned the bartender expansively. "Pay cash those time. Come back. *Mucho gracias."*

"I hope your chil'ren all have warts," said Terry, and they went outside, where they ran into Conchita.

Conchita was the señorita that drew Howdy to Paraiso. She was forty, looked eighteen in lamplight, and knew all the answers—in Spanish.

"Querido!" exclaimed Howdy. "W'ere have you been?"

"I 'ave been 'ont for you, my 'andsome *Americano.* I go every places, but you are not there. You are een gr'at danger. Come een the shadow—queek!"

They moved away from the lighted doorway.

"You mus' go 'ome—queek," said Conchita. "Sometheeng ees wrong. Pancho arrest those friend from you — those Oswaldo. Now he look for arres' bot' of you."

"Wait a minute," said Terry. "You say Pancho arrested Oswald? Why?"

"Sometheeng terrible. I theenk maybe he keel somebody. Pancho put heem een jail. I try to find you. Go queek—biffore he put you een jail. I mus' *vamoso,* biffore he fin' me, too. *Buenas noches."*

Conchita glided away in the darkness. Howdy sighed deeply.

"Ah-ha, I shee it now, Howdy. Pancho stole our equipage!" said Terry.

"Yea-a-a-ah!" Oswald in jail, our buckboard con-confishcated. Hm-m-m-m. Lemme think. Terry, I've gotta idea. C'mon."

They went back up the little street, cut

down across a vacant lot and reached the little adobe jail. It was only about ten by fifteen feet in size, built of thick adobe. There were no windows, and the one door, which was hinged to open outward, was of heavy oak, with the two huge padlocks.

Howdy hammered on the door, but got no vocal response from inside the jail.

"Knocked out or gone to sleep," said Terry. "Wha's the next foolish thing you can think about?"

"C'mon," said Howdy. "I believe I c'n open that jail, if I can find the thing I'm hopin' t' find—Pancho's automobile."

Pancho Rojas owned the one and only auto in Paraiso. It was a Model T, sans top, sans fenders, sans most everything else—but it would run. They found Pancho's shack, and the auto was in front of it, the wheels against a tree. It had to be started in that way, because there were no brakes. It was very dark, and the auto had no headlights.

Howdy got behind the wheel, while Terry cranked it. After some back-breaking labor, it suddenly came to life, tried to climb the tree, but failed. Terry climbed in beside Howdy, who backed the contraption away, spun the wheel, and away they went across lots, swinging wide of the main street.

"Hold her nose agin the wind!" yelped Terry, clinging to the seat with both hands. "Look out f'r that housh. Wowee-e-e-e!"

They missed the house, but took a corner off the fence, waded through a pile of tin-cans, and crossed the main street with all the silence of a 50 caliber machine-gun in full action. Howdy skidded the machine around, tore through another fence, and ended up in front of the little jail.

"Ropes in the back!" panted Howdy. "Tie off to that door, and tie to the rear axle. Use plenty rope! I'll back this jiggernaut around."

NO ONE seemed to pay any attention to the sound of that car. Perhaps it was a common sound for Paraiso. Terry tied off plenty strong, and Howdy took up the slack.

"Give 'er the gun!" whooped Terry.

Howdy stepped on the gas, and the ancient car reared like a frightened bronco, but its weight and power yanked the door off its fastenings, and it went off across country, towing the gate, before Howdy could stop it. He came back and stopped against the wall of the jail with a crash.

"Whoa, Blaze!" grunted Howdy, and fell out.

It was so dark inside the old jail that they could not see anything, but they fell over the prisoner, tied up in the middle of the floor.

"He ain't dead," panted Howdy. "He's still warm."

"That tequila wouldn't cool off, anyway," grunted Terry. "What'll we do with him?"

"Pack him in the back of the car. We'll show Pancho that he can't steal our rollin' stock and keep us in his village of vices. C'mon!"

They carried him out and dumped him into the back of the car. They were in such a hurry that they didn't even stop to take the ropes off. Howdy backed the car into a tree, as he tried to turn around, but managed to only knock the step away from the jail, when he made the turn. Then they headed back into town, in order to get back on the main road.

No one tried to stop them, as they narrowly missed a post in front of the Joya Cantina, but they heard a voice yell:

"Viva la Rojas!"

"Pancho must be a good driver, too," remarked Terry, as they bounced and clattered over the rough road.

There was a gate at the Border, but they didn't see it, until it disintegrated. Both front tires went with the gate.

"Hit somethin'?" yelled Howdy.

"I think Oswald burped!" yelled Terry. "Keep on the road."

"M' valves need grindin'," said Howdy. "Hear that knock?"

"That's my knees!" whooped Terry. "Stay on the road and don't mind anythin'!"

They reached the ranch. The big gate was open, but Howdy didn't see it; he took out a low section of the rail fence, and ended up against the rickety ranchhouse porch so hard that Terry flew over the smashed windshield and knocked the door open.

The room seemed full of men. Terry opened and shut his eyes several times, trying to get in better focus. There was Oswald, standing beside a table. There was also the three men from the Border Patrol. Howdy staggered in, still carrying the steering-wheel. He looked at Oswald and said:

"You win—you went further than Terry did. But how in hell didja git out of the back of that car?"

Then he saw McGowan, sitting in a chair, his wrists handcuffed. Howdy rubbed his skinned nose and took a deep breath.

"I mus' have been hit harder'n I thought," he said huskily.

Two of the Border Patrol went outside, but came back in a few moments, carrying —of all things—Pancho Rojas. Pancho was conscious now. He saw Oswald and his eyes opened very wide.

"Sometheeng gone wrong—I theenk," he said hoarsely.

"What have you got to think with?" asked Terry. "Good gosh, we went to all that trouble to take Pancho out of his own jail."

"Nice work, boys," said Oswald. "Maybe I better explain. When that sheepherder ran me out of the cantina, it gave me a good chance to work alone. I went to the stable, where they took your horses and buckboard, and I saw them, together with Pancho, loading the horse-collars with drugs. You boys don't know, but every time you went down there, you brought back a cargo of drugs for Mr. McGowan to distribute. We traced them back to Mr. McGowan, but we had to find out how he got them. That was my job. Anyway, Mr. Rojas got the drop on me and took me to his private jail. Thinking I was too full of tequila to start trouble, he became careless; so I locked him in his own jail. I couldn't find you boys; so I took the team and came back."

"You—you done all that?" marveled Terry. "You done that alone?"

"With your cooperation—yes," smiled Oswald.

"Our cooperation?" queried Howdy. "How did we cooperate?"

"By thinking I was dumb."

"By thinkin'—oh- yea-a-ah. That's right, Oswald—the ol' brain-work. Me and Terry are awful smart."

"Yeah—smart," whispered Terry. "Got a job, nothin' t' do—sixty a month. Now we'll have to take a job with some danged cow outfit that's got some cows—at forty a month. Ol' brain-work Howdy Hepburn."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said McGowan seriously. "You two go outside and shoot each other six times—and I'll give the ranch to the survivor."

"You'd have to pay for the shells," said Terry, "the ranch ain't worth twelve forty-fives."

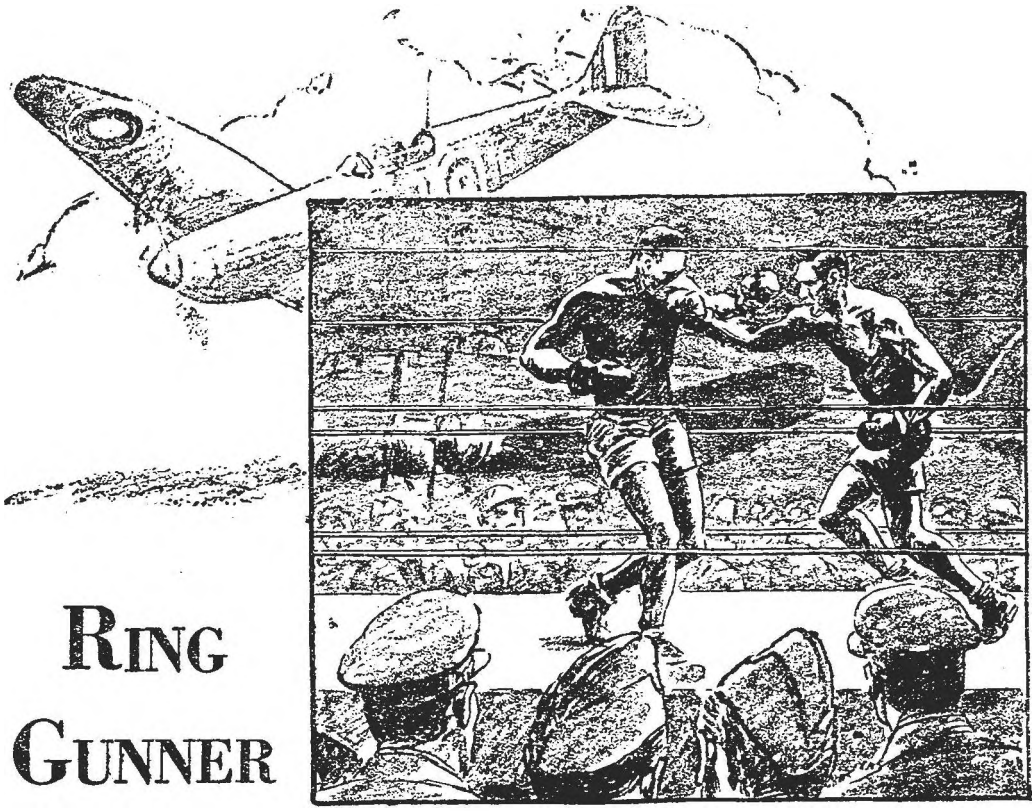
"I weesh I have some brain, too," sighed Pancho.

"Where you are going," said Oswald, "you'll have somebody to do your thinking."

"Smart men?" asked Terry curiously.

"Well, a bit smarter than Mr. Rojas," said Oswald.

"You won't be bad off, Pancho," sighed Terry. "I'll still have Howdy to think for me."



RING GUNNER

By JACKSON V. SCHOLZ

Author of "All Blood Is Red," etc.

A GOOD many of the men in the 12th Squadron wondered how Clipper Shane had smuggled himself past the probing questions of the medical psychiatrist. It was assumed that a tail gunner in a Fortress should be sane to a high degree, but there were those who still suspected Clipper Shane to be a trifle loopy.

Grounds for the suspicion were based upon Shane's bland ability to regard the war as no more than an irritating interlude. His attitude was that of a man who has to climb from a warm bed to let the dog out.

Clipper Shane was not aware of this to the point where it caused him much concern. He was too involved with the colorful, illuminated letters on the scroll of Destiny—his destiny, the lightweight championship of the world. It was written thus.

A series of related circumstances, which included his prime age of twenty-three, his even primer physical condition, and an adamant draft board had robbed him of his chance to meet the champ, a cluck who was undoubtedly rejoicing at the narrow squeak he'd had.

The rejoicing was not shared by Clipper Shane. Angry and resentful, he compromised with patriotism, blamed the British for the opportunity he'd lost, a feeling which maintained tenaciously beyond the point where he regained his splendid singleness of purpose, the high resolve to let no circumstance, not even war, detract him from his goal. He'd be the champ in spite of Hitler and

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The Lightweight Crown Was His Goal; the War Only an Irritating Interlude Along the Way

the other lousy bums across the Channel. He would keep himself in shape, in top-notch fettle for his hour of triumph.

Most of his spare time was dedicated to this purpose. There were interruptions, of course, such as an occasional raid on Germany, but Shane did not permit these interludes to interfere too seriously with his training.

He had established his training quarters in the corner of one of the big hangars. The lay-out required but modest space, which was gladly made available by Captain Foster, Athletic Officer of the squadron, who reasoned logically that Shane's activities might serve as a stimulus and diversion to the enlisted personnel.

The equipment was first rate. There was a ring of regulation size with a padded canvas floor. There was a light bag, a heavy bag, and skipping ropes. There were also plenty of interested spectators, and no lack of sparring partners among those who were glad to risk a moderate mauling for the privilege of making casual mention:

"Yeah. Clipper Shane and me is just like that. I used to spar with him when he was tunin' up to meet the champ."

All of which, the watchers, the admirers and the feeling of importance, was no handicap to Clipper Shane. Grim as he was in the ultimate achievement of his purpose, his resolve was not impaired by this evidence that others, as well as Shane himself, considered him hot stuff. In fact, the effect on him was noticeable. His performances were sometimes more elaborate than they had to be. He made it evident to all that he was master of his trade, leaving no doubt that, if he'd wanted to, he could have slaughtered the lesser men who faced him.

HE WAS engaged in this one afternoon. His volunteer opponent was willing but inept. Shane massaged him with light punches. Shane looked good. He was good. His one hundred and thirty-three pounds were distributed with artistic care, making him look almost slender, fragile, an optical illusion. His G. I. haircut showed a well-shaped head with reenforcement where it counted in the ring. His jaw was rugged, his nose not big enough to make it brittle. His gray eyes had an honest spacing, but their clearness held a sultry look of discontent, the expression of a man who was staging a grudging effort to make the best of a bad deal.

Inasmuch as his opponent did not require his entire attention, Shane's eyes kept flicking toward a group of half a dozen Britishers who had wandered over from a Spitfire squadron based at the same field. They were ground men, mechanics, wearing their grease-smeared coveralls.

Their presence irritated Shane because he'd schooled himself to dislike Englishmen on general principles. Their long dead pans annoyed him. Why did all Englishmen consider it so damned important to look bored, to stare with fishy eyes along their noses? These were the first who had visited his training quarters while they were in use, and Clipper Shane resented the intrusion.

There was nothing he could do about it, though, except to wish they'd take a powder and relieve him from the pressure of their flat, blank stares. In the meantime his conceit obeyed a normal impulse to convince the mugs that they were watching something super-duper.

The name of the man in the ring with him was Weld. Weld was the type of eager beaver who made an excellent stooge. He had a lot of uncoordinated energy which he was willing to spend lavishly. He cavorted about the ring and swung his mitts with great abandon, secure in the knowledge that Clipper Shane was pulling all his punches.

At which Shane was an artist. He speeded up the pace and let his gloves slash savagely at the numerous exposed places on Weld's head and body. The glove would come in like a thunderbolt, but would stop within the space of its own padding. It would land with an alarming smack, but would not much more than tickle Weld.

Shane wasn't sure, exactly, what went wrong. Maybe Weld got clumsier than usual, or maybe Shane let his mind wander to the Englishmen too often, and got careless.

At any rate, Weld's jaw was not precisely where it should have been when Clipper Shane whipped in a sizzling right. It didn't stop in time. He felt the solid impact through his wrist and up his arm into the shoulder. He had known the feeling much too often to be kidded by it. He had landed a Sunday punch dead on the button, and

young Weld hit the canvas like a poleaxed steer, out cold.

Shane was horrified, not so much at the minor damage he had done to Weld, as at the blow to his prestige. It made him look like an ordinary heel. He even felt like one. He had always prided himself on the fact that he never threw his weight around. It was a firm principle of his, and now look what had happened.

He worked rapidly on Weld, who was durable and came to fast. When Weld was able to sit up and bring his thoughts in line, Shane blurted:

"Hell, guy, I didn't mean to let that fast one go! I swear I didn't! You believe me, don't you?"

Weld focused his eyes, and managed a weak grin. "Yeah, I believe you, Clipper."

So far so good. Assured that Weld was still in working order, Shane carried his appeal to the fans.

"Look, fellas," he explained. "It was an accident. See? That right cross gets away from me. I don't bop the guy on purpose. I ain't that kind of a rat. You know I ain't."

They seemed to know he wasn't. His earnestness could not be questioned. There were sympathetic nods as well as vocal confirmations:

"Keep your shirt on, Clipper. We know you ain't a butcher."

"Weld ducked into it himself. I saw him."

"Forget it, Clipper. No harm done."

Shane's breath came easier until his eyes turned toward the Englishmen. They stood in morbid silence, their faces bleak with disapproval, and distaste. They looked like men who had discovered weevils in their bread.

SOMETHING involuntary happened to Shane's nerves. He had been squatting beside Weld, but he came upright now with a smooth deliberate motion. A chill settled in his eyes as he crossed the ring, placed his hands upon the top rope and faced the Englishmen beyond. He asked:

"You birds got something on your minds?"

They considered this, blank faced. Then one of them, ignoring Shane, spoke to the others.

" 'E didn't 'ave a chawnce, poor bloke," referring, obviously, to Weld.

The others nodded solemnly. One of them replied, "Just like a Spitfire shootin' down a blimp. I think it weren't exactly sportin'."

Slow nods of agreement, whose abrasive action on Shane's nerves was marked. The muscles twitched along his shoulders, but his voice was silky as he said:

"It ain't possible, is it, that one of you guys figure you'd have a better chance than the guy I just kayoed?"

The Englishmen eyed one another owlishly. One of them said finally, " 'Ow about it, Freddie? You've 'ad the leathers on before. 'Ow about givin' the Yank a bit of a go?"

Freddie, the man addressed, was a man of approximately Shane's weight. He was red-faced, long-featured, with a pair of mild blue eyes. He scratched his head thoughtfully with a big splay-fingered hand.

"Well now," he reflected, "I 'aven't 'ad much boxin' work of late."

Shane slid a tongue-tip hungrily across his lips. His voice was wheedling. Nothing mattered, now, but to get one of those Limies in the ring. Shane said:

"Just a friendly little work-out, huh? I'll take it easy, Bud. I won't let another fast one slip."

In this, Shane was sincere. All he wanted was to get the stupid-looking Britisher in the ring, and to make a fool of him. Of course he just *might* add a little more zing to his taps than he used against his pals, but, fresh from his recent experience with Weld, he had nothing really lethal in mind.

Freddie, still torn by indecision, scratched his head a little more, then said, "Just a short go, Yank. Easy does it. Wot?"

"Easy does it," Shane conceded. He went for the gloves young Weld had used, and brought them back to Freddie, big ten-ounce pillows.

When Freddie had stripped down to his shorts and a pair of heavy socks, Shane's eyes widened somewhat as they studied Freddie's build. Freddie was slightly less hirsute than an airedale, but this was not the feature which interested Shane. It was the way the long flat muscles were laid on Freddie's torso and grouped about his shoulders. The guy showed power, and, probably, could hit.

His legs were sprung a little at the knees, but seemed to carry his weight well. Shane asked:

"Three-minute rounds suit you?" Freddie nodded. Shane said to Zombie Harker at the ringside, "Give us a bell, Zombie."

Harker studied his wristwatch for several seconds, and then said, "Bong!"

Freddie didn't seem to get the idea right away, but when Shane raised his guard and moved toward him, Freddie followed suit, got his mitts up, too, and fell into a posture which he must have figured was a fighting crouch, head in like a turtle, shoulders high.

IT LOOKED ludicrous, at first, and might have fooled a less experienced man than Clipper Shane. Shane sensed by little things, however, that the man before him was no novice. That sort of fighting stance, if mastered, was a tough one to combat. A guy drawn in like that was hard to hit. On the other hand, a fighter of that type could generally be counted on to hook, instead of snapping straight ones.

Forewarned, Shane circled daintily and flicked a left to Freddie's head. There was no steam behind the punch, and Freddie bunted it away, unlimbering a left hook at the same time. Shane, with the grace of a matador allowed the punch to plow a furrow in the air beneath his arm, then countered swiftly with a straight right before Freddie could recover.

The counter-punch was pulled, and nicely timed. It spatted loudly on the side of Freddie's head, but scarcely rocked it. Freddie stepped back automatically, until it dawned on him he wasn't hurt. Some of the blandness left his eyes. Shane's consideration seemed to peeve him. He came in fast, ripping another left hook at Shane's ribs.

Freddie's speed was deceptive, but Shane caught the move in time to beat him to the punch with a straight left calculated to upset Freddie's balance. It succeeded only to a moderate extent, landing high on the Englishman's head, but not overcoming his momentum.

Freddie got home with his hook, and Shane didn't get his elbow down in time to block it. The clout landed with a bruising force which bent Shane's ribs and brought a grunt out of him. It annoyed him some, but amused him more. This humpty dumpty, incredibly, was playing for keeps, impelled by some fantastic belief that he could sneak across a sleeper on the redoubtable Clipper Shane.

Shane grinned as he tied Freddie in a clinch. He also winked reassuringly across Freddie's shoulder at his friends. He thought to himself, "If this bimbo wants to play rough, he's come to the right shindig."

Shane had no intention of pouring it on, of course. His professional pride would not permit it. But he was convinced, by this time, that Freddie's ruggedness would easily absorb an occasional stinger, and that Freddie's dumb aggressiveness needed toning down a bit.

Zombie Harker, acting in the capacity of a remote referee as well as time keeper, yelled, "Break!" and the two men moved apart. Shane whipped in a left jab that had a little juice behind it. It connected with Freddie's nose, and while Freddie was still blinking from the jab, Shane stepped in fast and rammed a punitive right hook to Freddie's midsection.

The wallop didn't get all the way home, a fact which surprised Shane some. Freddie's elbow got down in time to block it partially, and, whether it was skill or luck Shane wasn't sure. He decided it was luck, because he'd had that wallop nicely timed. Freddie clinched, and Shane found that Freddie knew the trick of tying his opponent up. This was a surprise, too, and Shane decided to be warned by it. Both men broke at the command.

Shane, a smart fighter, began to take time now to study Freddie's style, and Shane found the style to be definite and assured. There was nothing haphazard to it. Freddie's guard was sound and hard to crack. His hooks were quick and accurate. The guy could be dangerous to a man in his own class.

Shane's amusement increased slightly, as he decided Freddie's presence was by no means accidental. It looked to Shane like some sort of a clumsy frame-up. The Limies were trying to pull a fast one by phenegeling this pug into the ring with him. It was a good trick if you could do it, but Clipper Shane was not the sort of dope to fall for it. On the other hand, he wasn't dope enough to let Freddie catch him napping.

Freddie kept swinging earnestly, but the

set-up soon was clear to Shane. Freddie did most of his swinging with his left hand. His right was always cocked, ready for an opening. Old stuff. The mark of a ham-and-egger. Freddie probably carried knock-out drops in that right mitt. It's where he kept his Sunday punch, but, so far as Shane was concerned, Freddie might as well have stored that punch in moth balls. He'd never have a chance to use it—not against Clipper Shane. Shane knew the angles.

He kept circling to Freddie's left, keeping the stumble-bum off balance, letting him heave his left hook all he wanted to. Shane had that left hook figured, but never for an instant did he permit himself to forget the trouble wrapped up in Freddie's right. Shane kept an eye on it, meanwhile giving Freddie a moderate going over which should serve as a good lesson to the Britisher.

Shane set a stiff pace, a strategy which told him something else. At the end of the first round Freddie's breathing was not labored. A novice didn't know the trick of breathing, had a tendency to hold his breath. Yes, Freddie had been around.

AT THE start of the second round, Freddie was still willing and full of beans. He took up his earnest slugging where he had left off in the first, constantly trying to maneuver to a spot where he could use his right.

No chance. Shane kept that right immobilized, and gave Freddie plenty to think about along other lines. He splattered him with lefts, and put a little weight behind them now and then.

But Freddie was persistent. He kept trying to line his sights for a right punch. It began to annoy Shane, bringing him finally to the point where he decided to give Freddie the chance he wanted. Might as well find out how much steam that right mitt really packed. Let Freddie have his fun. Let him shoot his Fourth of July firecracker.

So Shane pretended to be negligent. After shooting a left jab he stayed put instead of moving to the left. He kept his shoulder down, leaving his jaw an open target ready instantly, however, to yank the shoulder up to catch the force of Freddie's right.

The maneuver worked. Shane saw the right get under way. His left shoulder came up smoothly. Then something exploded like a hand grenade on Clipper Shane's *right* jaw.

He was on his back when he came to. Faces swam above him like a group of misty moons. The faces gradually came into focus, and he began to recognize his fans. There were looks of consternation in their eyes. Shane sat up slowly. Zombie Harker was kneeling on the mat beside him. Harker said:

"My God, Clipper! What in hell went wrong?"

Shane shook his head, and felt his thoughts come flowing back. Smiling bleakly, he admitted:

"I forgot to duck." Then, looking around, "Where's Freddie?"

"They left, the dirty rats! They framed you!"

Shane thought this over carefully, sitting cross-legged on the canvas. "No," he said. "They didn't frame me. I framed myself."

"Come again," growled Harker.

"I asked the guy to spar with me. I could have kept my mouth shut."

"You're still slug-nutty," Harker said. "Don't you know *yet* who that guy was."

"Who was he?"

"Freddie Cribb."

"Well, I'll be damned."

Cribb was the leading British lightweight. Shane's manager had tried to get a match with him, and when Cribb had refused to fight, giving the war as an excuse, Shane's manager had released some questionable publicity on the matter, suggesting Cribb was scared to battle Clipper Shane. It was dirty stuff to print, and Shane had thought so at the time.

"Do you *still* think you wasn't framed?" demanded Harker.

"Maybe," Shane admitted. "But that don't make any difference. I knew the guy had been in the ring a lot before, but I let him fool me with that right. He can sock with *both* mitts, and I was too dumb to dope it out."

Harker stared at him disgustedly. "Ain't *you* the sporting gentleman," he growled.

Shane let that pass, surprised at himself for regarding the matter so dispassionately. Mulling it over later, he could only arrive at the solution that fighting, with him, was a business, a strict question of the old

mazuma, a fact which precluded any personal feeling against Cribb as an individual.

The feeling he had on the subject, however, was intense. It grew in volume and centered against the English as a race. He did not minimize the catastrophe of being cooled by Freddie Cribb. It was a formidable spectre in his scheme of things, because when the news inevitably got out it would chalk a nasty mark against his claim as logical contender. The champ could sneer and say, "Go get yourself a reputation." Boxing was a tricky sport, and shots at championships had been decided by lesser things than this.

The answer to his problem, though, was clean-cut, simple. He found it out through Zombie Harker who possessed a dormant talent which erupted, now, like Mt. Vesuvius. Harker suddenly came to his true calling. All his instincts, all his latent force unfolded in full bloom. He was probably destined from the first to manage fighters.

Zombie Harker was cadaverous, horse-faced but filled with energy and shrewdness. Receiving Shane's permission, he took over. He handled a delicate situation deftly. Introducing just the right notes of internationalism, entertainment for the boys, and British-American cousinhood, he contacted the right people and arranged another bout between the British champ and Clipper Shane.

THE idea was a natural. It took hold like a flame-thrower. The date was set, and the men went into training. Shillings, even pounds, changed hands. Short odds were placed on Clipper Shane, but Yank gamblers didn't quibble. They covered all the English dough which showed its head.

Zombie Harker wisely did not try to coach his man in ring technique, but tried cautiously along other lines. He said sensibly:

"Look, Clipper, better watch your step on what you say about the Limies. Sort of keep the old lip buttoned till the match is over. *We* all know you don't like Britishers, but if the brass hats find it out they're liable to call off the fight. It's supposed to be a friendly bout."

"I've got nothin' against Cribb," said Shane, "except that he's an Englishman."

"But what's wrong with Englishmen?" insisted Harker. "Most of the guys like 'em fine."

"They got us in this war," Shane recited doggedly. "It's their brawl, but they want us to do the dirty work."

"You got the wrong idea," Harker argued patiently. "It ain't that way at all."

"I'll change my mind," snapped Shane, "when some Englishman goes to bat for *me.* Just think that over, son."

Harker raised his shoulders helplessly. "Okay, okay," he said. "But you'd better keep your trap shut just the same. Otherwise you'll find yourself without a fight, and I ain't kiddin'."

Thinking it over, Shane decided it made sense. The coming scrap with Cribb was almost as important to Shane as the championship itself, because a crack at the championship might depend entirely on how quickly he could down Cribb for the count.

That part didn't worry him, because he knew the fight would never go its scheduled six rounds. He'd nail Cribb in the second frame, or maybe in the third. Until then he decided he could keep his dislike for the English to himself.

Meanwhile there was a war to fight, a war toward which Shane's attitude was warped, illogical. He was abetted in this attitude by his unqualified conviction he would survive the war intact. He never doubted it. He simply knew it, and the knowledge wiped away all fear of combat.

He was a good man in the tail of the huge B-17, which is to say, he was an excellent gunner, cool and accurate. He had been on several raids, and had two Focke-Wulfes to his credit, a distinction he accepted stoically. It didn't mean much to him. Ring fighting was his game, and he never let himself forget it for an instant. The war was a nuisance, an imposition. It was England's war.

As a member of the crew he was inadequate, impersonal, lacking the fierce pride in his ship which the other men possessed. Recognizing this, the others eyed him with resentment, but Shane didn't mind. He had nothing in common with these men, and didn't want to have.

UNTIL one day when their Flying Fortress was limping back from Germany. Fighter opposition had been weak, but

bushels of flak had smothered them above the target area. The bombardier had laid his eggs with nice precision, but the ship was chewed up badly. One of its motors cut out on the homeward trip, forcing the big craft out of the formation. It was on its own.

Shane didn't worry. Faith in his own destiny remained supreme. They'd get back home okay. He wanted to polish up a little on his short right cross. The timing was a little off. Damn these cramped seats in the tail. It would take a couple of rounds of rope-skipping to work the stiffness from his legs.

The Fortress was rumbling over Belgium at twenty thousand feet when the Messerschmitts came up. The belly gunner saw them first, and his voice showed frank alarm.

"Jerries! A mess of 'em! At least a dozen! They've got us pegged!"

"Looks like our busy day," the pilot said. "No clouds around, so you'll have to take 'em on, boys. Give 'em hell."

An unaccustomed tightness came into Shane's throat. Twelve Messerschmitts, one crippled Fortress. The odds were not attractive, and it grew upon him swiftly that the war had never been as close to him before. This was an element he had previously ignored—the actual possibility of death. It was ugly in its starkness. It confused him.

He tried doggedly to maintain his grip upon the former solid belief he would survive, but found his hold becoming tenuous, uncertain. Twelve Messerschmitts — one crippled Fortress—these were facts.

He wasn't scared, but he recognized this fact without much satisfaction. The sensation which engulfed him now was worse than fear. It was a feeling of colossal loneliness, a black, disheartening belief that he was checking out all by himself.

It was a moment when he needed desperately the things he'd thrust aside, deliberately ignored. The men behind him had the things he lacked, the things he might have had if he had known he'd need them. The men were kidding back and forth across the intercom, boosting their morale with horseplay, facing the thing ahead of them with knowledge that their pals were also facing it. Shane envied them as he had never envied anyone before. No word addressed to him came back across the intercom.

The Messerschmitts gained altitude and pounced. The Fortress trembled to the recoil of its many heavy guns, and shuddered from the impact of the Nazi slugs which poured into it.

Shane fought a cold, deliberate fight, believing, now, it was the last he'd ever stage. The Fortress couldn't last much longer, not against the overpowering weight of Nazi guns.

Someone yelped across the intercom, "A Spitfire! The crazy flyin' fool! He's tacklin' the whole damn Jerry air force!"

Shane caught glimpses of the miracle. A single Spitfire doing everything it could to save the Fortress. The Spitfire bagged a pair of Messerschmitts, disorganizing the attack. The Fortress staggered on, with a chance, now, to get home. The Englishman stayed with it. He downed another Messerschmitt before they ganged on him and blew him from the sky.

Shane saw the end of it. He saw the Spitfire lurch, skid wildly, then explode. Its pilot didn't have a chance. He went down with his ship. Shane's face was very white, his stomach drawn into a knot. The Fortress crossed the Channel, found its field, and landed safely.

Zombie Harker showed strong signs of worry in the few remaining days before the fight. He fluttered like a mother hen.

"Damn it, Clipper," he accused, "you've over-trained. Lay off the work, guy. You look lousy. Your legs're dead, and you couldn't fight your way out of a paper bag. Rest up, or Cribb'll knock you kickin'."

"Shut up," growled Shane. "I know what I'm doin'. I've trained for fights before."

"But, damn it, Clipper, you—"

"Shut up, I tell you!"

IF SHANE had only had someone to talk it over with, it might have helped. As it was, he had to try to dope it out alone. He racked his brain for a solution, and found none. His thoughts kept banging hard against dead ends.

He always paid his debts. It was a fetish with him. He also played square with the men who backed him—another fetish. He had it in his power to pay back, partially, at least, the greatest debt he'd ever owed. It

was a sacrifice, combined with penance, which he wanted doggedly to make, yet he was blocked in this by all the dough the Yanks had placed on him.

The fight was held inside a hangar. The place was packed with English and Americans. Excitement ran high, tense, but it had a healthy, friendly undertone.

The fighters were seated in their corners. Cribb was stolid, unemotional, assured. Shane looked as if he'd passed his peak. There was too much color in his cheeks. Fine lines were etched about the corners of his eyes. The eyes themselves were slightly glazed with the strained look of a man who can't come to a decision.

When the men were introduced in the center of the ring, Clipper Shane stared hard at Cribb, hoping probably, to find some answer to his dilemma there, but Cribb gazed blankly past Shane's ear. They went back to their corners. Then the bell. Shane started for the center of the ring, and Cribb came shuffling out to meet him. The referee, a captain, moved in with them.

This was the first fight Shane had ever started without a plan of action in his mind. He felt the absence of it. Cribb seemed like a stranger to him, whereas Shane should have known exactly how to handle him.

Shane risked a flicking left. It was a sweet jab, but Cribb blocked it with the glove of his right hand, and hooked a sizzling left to Shane's ribs. Shane dropped his elbow, blocked the hook and stepped back out of range.

Cribb followed. Shane snapped another left, but Cribb caught it on his glove again. Cribb showed the decided effects of training. His timing had improved. His reflexes were more accurate, sharper. Shane stored this knowledge automatically away, grasping at any straw which might help him come to a decision.

He fought a defensive fight in the first round, scarcely knowing that he did so. He was thinking hard, groping desperately for some clue to aid him. He held Cribb off with stabbing lefts, but Cribb kept boring in.

Shane didn't look so hot in that first round, a fact which was brought home to him by his impatient fans. They yelped for action, a demand which Shane finally had to recognize.

He quit retreating with a suddenness that took Cribb by surprise. Cribb sent a looping left, and Shane stepped swiftly inside it. He rammed a solid right against Cribb's belly, but it was just like meeting a piece of corrugated iron. The Englishman was really in good shape.

Cribb didn't clinch. He stepped back a pace for clearance, and began pouring in the hooks, ripping them at Clipper Shane from right and left. One of them smashed into his ribs and hurt. Shane brought up a short left uppercut, and rocked Cribb's head upon his shoulders. Cribb grunted, settled back for an instant on his heels, and started another left hook.

HE GOT it off too slowly, though. Shane saw it start, and judged its arc instinctively. Instinct also started Shane's right cross in a savage counter. It was halfway to its target before something seemed to grab the muscles of Shane's arm. The punch would have floored a buffalo if Shane had let it travel all the way. He didn't though. Some outside power cut down its speed. It landed hard enough to stagger Cribb, but not to floor him. Shane let him move away, then struggled with his own conflicting, tearing thoughts.

Part of his brain was glad he hadn't knocked Cribb out. The other part raged furiously at Shane with ugly epithets. The mildest thing he called himself was a stinking double-crossing louse.

The conflict made him reckless. A bitter urge to get the business over with in any way at all took hold of him. He went at Cribb like a tornado, believing, with some logic, that the wallop to Cribb's jaw might still be having its effect.

So Shane went ripping in. He uncorked a savage left, but let it go a trifle early. He saw Cribb's countering right hook coming in, and seeing it in time was the only thing that saved him. He knew he couldn't block it altogether, but he managed to hunch his left shoulder high enough to save his jaw.

Cribb's punch came blasting over like a six-inch shell. It deflected from Shane's shoulder, and crashed against his head. Shane saw the Northern Lights, and felt his legs cave under him. He felt his shoulder bang against the canvas, a fact which gave him a belated satisfaction. He hadn't been

knocked out. Otherwise he never would have felt the floor come up and hit him.

He heard the alarmed howling of his fans, could even distinguish words. That too was a good omen. He came smoothly to one knee. Everything was working fine. His brain was clear. The referee was counting four. Shane started to get up when an inspiration in full bloom held him where he was. Incredibly, it seemed Cribb's punch had driven the thought home. A bewildering sense of peace came over Clipper Shane.

When he stood upright at the count of nine, a grin was on his face. Freddie Cribb's came galloping from a neutral corner, prepared to polish his opponent off. Shane slid away from Cribb's first rush, and rocked him with a stabbing right. Cribb looked surprised, came back for more, but was halted by the bell.

Shane sat relaxed and thoughtful between rounds, letting Harker work on him.

"Hell, have I gone nuts, or are you finally back into the groove again?" blurted Harker.

Shane grinned at him, and said, "I guess I'm back."

"Well I'll be damned," said Harker.

THE buzzer sounded, then the bell. The fight got under way again, and Shane had lots of careful work to do. His confidence was back.

Testing himself out, he found that everything was perfect for his strategy. His timing was a symphony. Never had he known it more exact. If a fly had landed on Cribb's nose, Shane felt he could have picked it off without so much as touching Cribb.

He found himself to be Cribb's master in every phase of ring technique. He didn't jump to this conclusion. He found it out by careful, accurate study, devoting the second and third round to his research.

Meanwhile, he made Cribb look as good as possible. It wasn't hard, because Cribb had the guts and willingness. Shane's plan was helped along unconsciously by Cribb, who went back to the former strategy of keeping his right cocked as a constant threat. He had reason to believe this strategy was good, because he'd used that right to floor Shane in the opener. Shane knew the kick was there.

Shane showed Cribb's right profound respect, but tried not to overdo it, tried to pretend he was falling into Cribb's trap by degrees. Shane took two rounds to build this up. When they came out for the fourth, Shane believed the groundwork was laid.

He kept himself relaxed and watchful. When he judged the time was ripe, he went through the careful series of maneuvers he had worked out in his mind.

He kept circling to Cribb's left, keeping from the range of Cribb's cocked right. He mixed in flurries of fast action which he hoped would serve as smoke screens. He staged his build-up cannily, then faked a sudden lapse of memory.

This time he didn't circle to the left. He caught the warning flicker in Cribb's eyes, and knew he'd guessed correctly. The whole thing happened in a fraction of a second, but so highly was Shane tuned to it, it seemed to take place in slow motion.

Cribb feinted with his right. Shane set his guard against it, leaving himself open to the left he knew would come. His timing had to be exquisite, now. It was.

Shane's right came up in a blasting uppercut. Cribb's jaw was open, waiting for it. Shane felt shock hit him from all sides. His uppercut smashed home, just as Cribb's left hook crashed solidly against his jaw.

Both men were out long past the count of ten. When Shane came to he fought against swift panic, a panic which was stilled when clearing vision showed him Freddie Cribb still stretched beside him on the mat.

The British, jolted from their customary reticence, were yelling just as loud as the Americans. The fans all seemed to feel they'd had their money's worth. The yelling grew in volume when Shane and Cribb shook hands.

Even Zombie Harker seemed well pleased. Leaving the ring, he said excitedly to Shane:

"Oh, boy, I can promote another fight! Double knock-out! All bets off! I'll fix up a return engagement. It's a natural, Clipper."

"Huh?" inquired Shane absently.

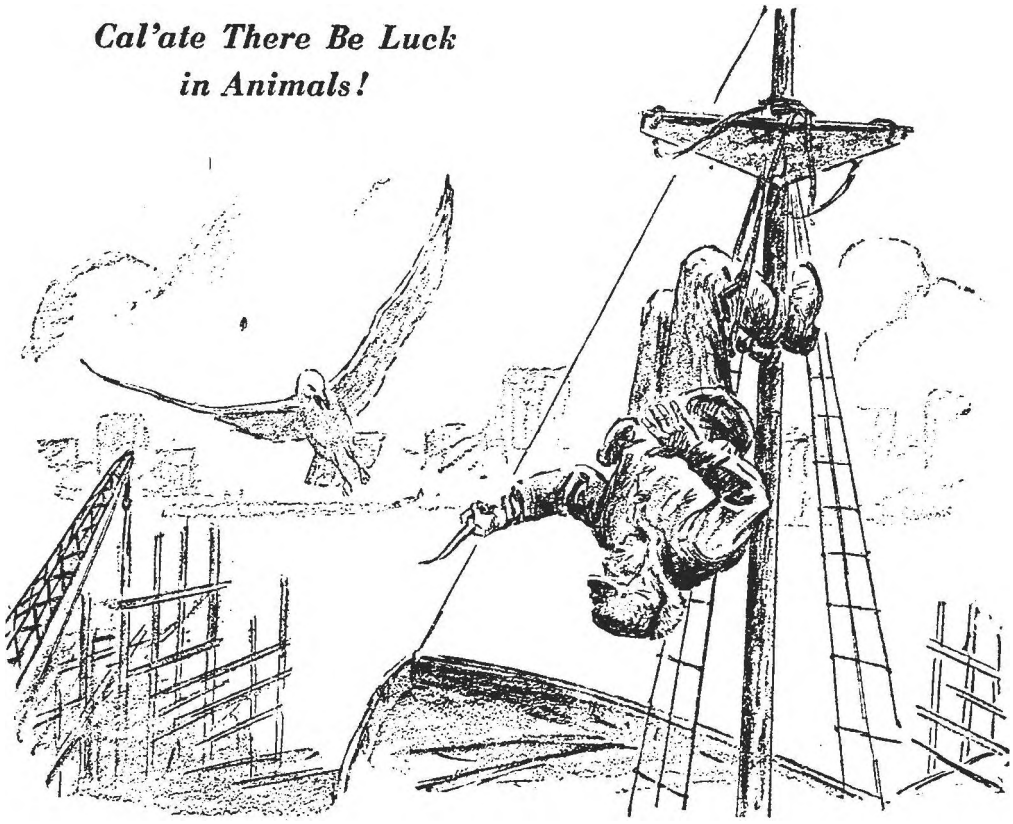
"Another fight with Cribb, you dope! It's in the bag."

"No dice," Shane grunted briefly.

"What?" gasped Zombie Harker.

"No dice," repeated Shane. "I've got a war to fight."

Cal'ate There Be Luck in Animals!



GULL ON THE BEAM

By FRANCIS GOTT

Author of "It Ain't Sammy's War," etc.

LIKE a bandy-legged spider, clad in sheepskin coat and down-turned hunting cap, Cat-gut Wimple squatted in the rigging of the new tugboat, scratching himself with a marlin-spike. Only a rigger, one inured to working aloft in bitter cold weather, could have remained quiet so long. From here, however, he stood a better chance of spying out his boss, Walrus-eye Ingram, among the twenty thousand iron workers in the shipyard.

"Wumpft't!" he snorted through cold-stiffened lips. For a moment he was overcome by self-pity. Then he shoved the fourteen inch marlin-spike back in his gear belt. "The jealous old coot! Dodgin' me. There'll come a day—"

He was sure that sooner or later during the day that Ingram would show up. The new tug, hull 222, was the yard's pride. The critical eye of the navy was on her, too. So that it behooved Ingram, rigging foreman, to ooze forth from the warm loft twice a day to inspect her.

Of course, Wimple could confront Ingram in the warm confines of the loft with his problem, but that would be only as a last resort; for in the loft, surrounded by his henchmen, Ingram would be too solidly entrenched. No, he'd have to catch Ingram out here in the yard, alone.

Wimple reached behind him, scooped out a thumbfull of tallow from the cow's horn swinging from his gear belt, let it soften in the warmth of his cupped hand and then applied it to the stubborn marline with which he was seizing on ratlines.

"I'd like to tar them white moostachers o' his'n, damn blat 'im!" he swore. He drew out his spike, snaked a marl hitch around its point with an end of marline and heaved viciously to tighten the seizing. "Reg'lar walrus in a manger, he be. Wantin' all him own self and keepin' first class rigger in second class pay."

The brittle marline broke with a snap. Wimple took a header and swung from his knees, head down. He espied a lone gull, huge, ragged of feather and of great age, flapping up the river. Taking advantage of a down draft, the black, white and gray bird swooped close to the little rigger on the masthead, let forth a raucous scream.

Wimple looked at the old gull, beady eye of rigger meeting beady eye of gull. "Get on 'ome, Pete!" he commanded, jabbing with his spike. "Be seein' ye turn supper time."

Pete glided past, wheeled high and then winged his way back down river. Wimple clutched the ratlines, righted himself in the gantling, and stared affectionately after his pet. Pete, dependent on the splay fingered hand that had raised him, was not much of a scavenger—and this was winter. Wimple, upset because Ingram had not come across with the long looked for raise, had forgotten to give Pete breakfast.

Wimple worked for a while longer, casting hopeful glances from time to time below him and along the docks. Ingram, the pompous old walrus, was down there somewhere in that teeming hive of industry that was a shipyard riding the boom. He would be peeking around corners, feeling the wind with his drooping mustachios, ever fearful lest Wimple catch him alone—and ask him for a raise.

Wimple sighed. Tough as he was, he began to feel stiff where the bowline in which he sat pinched his legs. Perhaps Ingram, catching sight of him aloft here, had already scuttled back to the loft. Wimple doubted that he had been seen, though, for Ingram was so near sighted that he could scarce get on the right ship more than twice running.

IT WAS almost hopeless trying to pick out one man among thousands in that wondrous maze that had mushroomed in two short years since Pearl Harbor. Fifteen ships on the ways, quivering, vibrating, tortured masses of metal taking shape hour by hour. Myriads of shacks, shops, offices, tucked away here, there, everywhere. New warehouses, welding flats, bending floors, the sprawled immensity of the machine shop, formed larger blobs of wall and shadow. Off to one side, almost enwrapped about by the other buildings, was the centuries old blacksmith pit. Dark, noisome tunnels, lapped by tidewater, ran under the ways. Streets, alleyways, railroad tracks snaked into what looked like dead ends but were not. Gliding by were flatcars loaded with big guns, giant propellers, machinery—

Wimple's wonder at what war could do was rudely disrupted when he saw Ingram coming up the gangway. For once, luck smiled on Wimple's wizened features—Ingram's cohorts, his right hand man, his sircchocs, Nate Simpkins and Lew Hobbs, were not riding his wake. Drunk probably.

"Haw! A-hoy! Below there!"

Wimple was a little man with a voice. His bellow clubbed through the terrific din let loose by a brace of riveters and a chipper.

He watched Ingram crane his bullet head on his neckless torso. His near-sighted eyes flecked about him, baffled, then aloft. The walrus-faced old foreman turned hastily and waddled back down the gangway.

"Ho!" Wimple shouted. "Ye needn't make him out he didn't spy me, Ingram. I seen them walrus hair tooshers o' yorn quiverin'."

In his agitation, Wimple's stiff fingers failed to slip the safety knot that held him aloft.

"Tamnation!" he muttered, casting a worried glance below. "Ol' Walrus-eye him be gettin' away from me ag'in."

The rigging foreman was waddling as fast as his stubby legs would take him. off the gangway and up the dock. With a sulphuric cuss word, Wimple watched him duck into the alleyway between the blacksmith pit and the bending shed.

Wimple's discouragement gave way to hope when he felt the wind of a four-foot steel dump bucket sweeping past his head. He signaled the craneman, sixty feet above the dock in the glassed-in cab of his twenty-ton crane. The craneman grinned. He dangled the bucket a foot from the rigger's nose. Wimple wriggled out of his boat-

swain's swing and plopped into the bucket like a spider into a thimble.

As Wimple was jerked aloft a good seventy feet he clung to the chain holding the bucket and studied the sky from which came pellets of snow, stinging his face. He shook his shaggy head until his too large cap wobbled. A storm was making up with the coming of night and they had to shift the new tug in another half hour or so. The job, to be done after four o'clock in order to let the workers ashore to punch out with the day shift, might take longer because of bad weather. Ingram, always braying his authority, couldn't see well even in good weather. All of which meant that Wimple would be late getting home to his bachelor quarters —and his animals would remain unfed.

The craneman, enjoying himself hugely, his freckled face split in a wide grin, hairy red hands on control levers, snapped in the whip until Wimple was high above the yard. Then he swiveled the cab around on its circular table, booming the one hundred and five foot neck in a sweeping half circle until Wimple could look down into the alley into which Ingram had scuttled. With omniscient clarity he spotted Ingram below him waddling in haste, puffing and wiping his beefy features with a red bandanna. Having the upper hand, Wimple felt a wave of pity sweep through him for the unsuspecting rigging foreman. However, the little rigger was adamant; he signaled the craneman.

LIKE a bolt out of the gray sky the craneman dropped the whip. He jerked the bucket to a stop before Ingram's startled eyes, then settled it onto a pile of frozen snow with a clang. Wimple popped out.

"Ha!" he said.

"Ha!" said Ingram, foolishly.

"Nor'wester makin' up," said Wimple.

"Ho!" said Ingram.

"How be ye, Walrus-eye?" asked Wimple.

"Kinda poorly, Cat-gut," puffed Ingram. "I got a touch o' asthma. Breathin' comes kinda hard this afternoon. I get took real sudden sometimes."

"So I noticed," commiserated Wimple.

"Yep," said Ingram uneasily. "I got to get back to the loft. The warm air—"

His little eyes shifted this way and that. He took a hopeful step to get past Wimple, but his move was blocked.

"Cal'ate I could tooken some responsibility off'n ye, Walrus-eye," mused Wimple. "For a raise."

"Raise!" moaned Ingram. "Now, Cat-gut—"

"Yup!"

"You gettin' a $1.14?" asked Ingram as if he didn't know.

"Yup I wants a $1.20," stated Wimple. To be a swaggering first class rigger—that was ambition personified. The money didn't matter.

"Now, Cat-gut," moaned Ingram. "The office is orful hard on me 'bout recommending men for more money. Besides, 'tain't hardly patriotic, bein' war time, to think o' money."

"'Tain't comin' out'n your pocket," pressed Wimple. Despite the dire need of scoring a raise out of Ingram, he stooped to pick up a stray kitten, mewing and shivering in the icy wind. He stuffed the tiny animal into the left pocket of his sheepskin.

Ingram wiped a tear from one metallic eye. He patted Wimple on the shoulder, and his voice took on a quiver. "Them poor sodjers an' sailors—"

Wimple choked up, too. He wiped a tear from his own eye in sympathy. They both had a good cry together and Ingram patted Wimple again.

"Now get back to your job, Cat-gut. Every minute's precious; they want 'em boats, you know."

Ingram, hugging his big mackinaw about him, started to step past Wimple. The little rigger caught the flicker of smug satisfaction that passed over Ingram's fat cheeks. Wrath exploded in him. He jumped off the ground, got a tenacious grip on Ingram's drooping mustachios and climbed aboard.

"Ye cheatin' ol' rascal!" he screamed. "Las' year ye tooken' present o' nice twelve hunnerd dollar bonus from the company for keepin' poor rigger men slavin' eve'y minute for less money. An' ye hollar 'bout a six cent raise for a man. Ye dirty—"

Quite beside himself at the injustice of it all, the walnut sized rigger pummeled Ingram with one gnarled hand while he hung to his hairy anchorage with the other. The yellow haired kitten poked her head out of Wimple's pocket and spat. Ingram, bellow-

ing in pain, tried to claw the human tornado from his face.

Just as Wimple was getting warmed up to fully enjoying himself, he was dragged off Ingram's capacious paunch by two pairs of strong albeit unsteady hands. He was lowered to the ground to find Nate Simpkins and Lew Hobbs standing over him like two befuddled mastiffs. Protected from the hardships of the world by a blanketing ballast of whiskey, Ingram's cohorts had arrived.

"Whut's up?" asked Simpkins, huge jowls slobbering dejectedly. "Yuh got somepin' in your eye, Boss? Yuh hadn't orta let Cat-gut stan' on yuh stomach that way. Might give yuh cramps or somepin'. Let 'im stan' on a barr'l"

"Yup," agreed Hobbs, bending his powerful shoulders and attempting to fix his lugubrious stare first on Wimple then on Ingram in a vain attempt to puzzle out the situation. "Cinders in a eye be bad thing. Lemme hold Cat-gut up to ya, Boss, so he can take good aim to jab cinder outta eye."

"Shuddup!" Ingram bleated. "Me eye's all right." He smoothed his twitching mustachios in an effort to regain his pompous dignity. "The little dried up wart had the nerve to ask me for a raise!"

"Whut's he want a raise for?" asked Simpkins, big hands clutching his gear belt as if trying to steady his drunken swaying. "Whut's ah lil' feller want wit' so much money?"

"A six cent raise!" cried Wimple bitterly. "Ye two overgrown bloodhoun's 'ad o' stay away 'nother twenty seconds an' ol' Cat-gut'd 'ad a first class rating out'n Walrus-eye."

The added worry of the increasing wind and snow troubled him. Uneasiness crept over him; this had the promise of becoming a long day. His animals would be hungry and his coal fire in the kitchen range would be getting down.

"A raise!" snorted Ingram, pointing at Wimple. "He wants a raise. Look at 'im, the shrunk up little sea'orse! Don't amount to nawthin'. Skin 'n' bones. Always pickin' up animals an' cartin' 'em 'ome. Look at that measly kitt'n pokin' out'n his pocket. An' wantin' more money out'n the company so's he can feed 'em. An' he calls 'imseff a rigger."

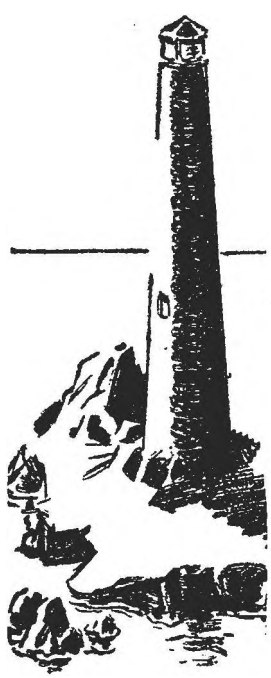
"More rigger'n ye be," said Wimple with conviction. "Cuss'd ol' cheatin' walrus toosher."

"Now, now," mumbled Hobbs, graying hair tumbling into his eyes in a woebegone attempt to light a stub pipe. "Le's not get excited. Eve'body be ca'm—"

"Aw, hell!" growled Wimple, and headed back toward the new tug.

Ingram, emboldened by the presence of his right hand men, shouted after him.

"Cat-gut! You stay aboard 222 when the stop work whistle blows. We gotta move 'er down to the new dock so's the navy can take 'er over come mawnin'. Quite important; she's a new type."



WIMPLE shrugged a scrawny shoulder. By the time he got aboard, the four o'clock whistle sounded; iron workers began streaming toward the time clocks. Fifty or sixty left the new tug. Wimple, alone on her, looked her over. He grunted in satisfaction. The finishing touches had been slapped on; she shone. She'd had her dock trial and was ready for her shake down cruise. He'd have to take that gantling down, though, and the block that held it to the pad eye, he saw, looking up at the mast. Anyway, he'd seized on the last ratline.

Five minutes later as dusk rode the driv-

ing snow across the river, Ingram, followed by Simpkins and Hobbs, came aboard.

"Where's uh rest of 'em riggers?" asked Wimple suspiciously.

"I got a man on the wha'f to cast off all 'cept the snubbin' line," wheezed Ingram. "He can run across the ramp to the south dock an' catch our lines after we snub 'er down there with the tide."

"Ha!" growled Wimple. "Ye be too damn mean, Walrus-eye, to give a man a bit o' overtime wu'k. Nate an' Lew's too teaed up to see ary line, let alone bone at 'em. An' ye're so hog-fat lazy ye wouldn't lay onto a line to lift your smokin' stern out'n a bubblin' hot try-pot full o' tar. Which as leaves me an' that sucker of a helper on the wha'f to do all the tuggin', heavin' an' gruntin'."

"Ain't no job to snub this little tug down to the lower wha'f," defended Ingram, tucking the ends of mustachios up over his ears inside the earlappers of his black cap.

"Hah!" chortled Wimple. "Afraid ye mought'n get your tooshers wet, ain't ye?"

"You know as well as I do that they whips about somethin' fearful in a high wind," said Ingram, trying to pierce the thickening murk with a worried eye. "Cast off, Cat-gut!"

Wimple shouted to the helper on the dock to cast off. Then he hauled in two six-inch breast lines, a spring line and a stern line. Simpkins and Hobbs fell over themselves in a vain attempt to keep pace with him.

"Now ease 'er down to the new wha'f with that long bow line, Nate," bade Ingram. "Take 'bout three turns 'round that new towin' bit."

Wimple barked a sarcastic laugh. "'Bout all Nate'll ease 'imself into'll be'll snoozin' pass-out."

Dextrous of movement, Wimple laid hold of the bow line, whipped it from deck bitt to towing bitt and began snubbing the tug down stream with the tide.

"Tide's strong, but wind's settin' 'er off," he muttered, busy keeping a critical eye on the straining hawser. "Ol' Walrus-eye should o' brung a stern line up from the south wha'f to haul in on. The poor feller ain't no seaman, though, an' he won't listen to nary body as 'tis."

"How much line you payed out a'ready?" asked Ingram. "Quit your growlin' an' tend to business. I can't see the wha'f any more, snow's kickin' up such a smother an' dark's shuttin' down so quick."

"'Bout forty fathom," said Wimple. Then, with conviction, "She ain't gointer hit the south wha'f 'count o' wind settin' 'er off!"

"Who says she ain't?" snapped Ingram truculently, bending close to Wimple so that he could see the little rigger in the increasing darkness.

"I do!"

"How'll we haul 'er back, then?"

"Can't," snapped Wimple maliciously. Then, under his breath, "'Less'n we can get the engine to going an' winch 'er in."

"Skoot aft, Cat-gut," bade Ingram, voice taking on a sharp edge from worry. "See iff'n you can see the south wha'f."

WIMPLE started to throw a couple of hitches around the bitt, but Ingram stayed him.

"Lew'll ease 'er down while you keep a sharp eye out astern. Sing out when you sights the wha'f."

"The wind's pooshed 'er off in the stream I'm tell'n ye," growled Wimple.

"Shuddup!" rasped Ingram. "Lew!"

Like a mournful shadow, heralded by whiffs of whiskey, Hobbs came near, high stepping with elaborate care. His deep-breasted six foot two came close to smothering Wimple as he laid hold of the line. With a dubious grunt, Wimple let him have it.

"Better bend another line onto it," he advised.

"Lew knows what he's doin'," Ingram reproved. "Lew's a first class man."

Growling to himself, Wimple headed aft. His beady eyes squinted into the driving snow.

"First class man! Wumpff't! Ain't nary one of 'em wu'th a lead shackle to sink 'em to bottom."

Astern, he knew full well by the set of the tide and the sweep of the wind that the tug had been set out too far to stand any show now of sliding alongside the south dock. His judgment was vindicated when he saw, briefly, the loom of a crane's spotlight cutting the murk where the yard ought to be.

"Yep! We're set off all right."

A tremor clawed through him when he felt the tug give a slight lurch. Into his seawary brain there flashed a picture—Hobbs had fumbled, had lost the line.

He went forward along the narrow port side. His felt boots scuffed up a blinding cloud of snow in his haste. He reached the foredeck and Ingram pounced on him when he spoke.

"We're adrift!" the rigging foreman wailed.

"So what?"

"The line got slippery with snow 'an Lew let get away from 'im."

"'Twan't the snow," stated Wimple. "'Twas whuskey."

Ingram threw an arm about Wimple's shoulders and, bending, shrieked into his ear, "We'll get stove up! We'll lose our jobs—if'n we don't get drowned first."

Wimple grinned maliciously into the biting snow. "I don't give nary damn."

"It's that damn fool kitt'n you got in your pocket that's Jonahed us," accused Ingram. "If'n you'd leave them animals alone an' tend to business—"

"Don't ye dast be speakin' in disrespectful terms o' nary one o'my critters," Wimple shouted.

Guiltily, for he had forgotten the kitten, he put a hand in his pocket. The kitten was warm, comfortable.

"How we gointer get us'n out of this mess?" demanded Ingram, shaking him.

"How should I know?" Wimple shot back. "I be on'y a second class rigger."

"You gotta do somethin', Cat-gut," begged Ingram. "Tide's takin' us down river somethin' fearful."

"Well, we can't drop nary anchor," Wimple stated. "'Cause we ain't put 'em aboard. Another job your valuable first class men forgot to 'tend to today. So I cal'ate we gotta take what the guid Lord gives us, Walrus-eye."

"Ow!" wailed Ingram. "You handle 'er, Cat-gut. You been a lobster fisherman."

"Tell ye what, Walrus-eye! Ye put in a recommendation to raise me to first class pay an' I'll get us'n ashore safe."

"How?"

"I dunno—yet."

"What kind of a durn fool proposition you tryin' to put over anyway?"

"Take ut or leave ut."

"All right."

"Ye'll make me a first class rigger?"

"I said it, damn your scrawny hide!"

"She be a promise?"

"Yep."

"Say ut!"

"A promise."

WIMPLE gnawed at a calloused thumb. Ingram had his faults, but he was a lodge member in good standing; he'd have to keep that promise. As for his part of the bargain—

"Where's 'em fool rigger'n gone?" he shouted.

"Nate's gone to sleep inside that hawser," said Ingram, feeling about with his foot. "An' Lew be a huntin' for 'im. Claims Nate dumped feathers down his neck, ticklin' 'im an' made 'im lose the turn."

"Purty far gone, ain't they."

"I cal'ate."

"Well, we gotta sober 'em. Nate uster be a oiler. Mebbe he can start the engine; Lew can he'p him."

He stooped and, with Ingram's wheezing aid, dragged Simpkins into the shelter of the galley. Then they went in search of Hobbs, whom they found on the fantail, aft, shaking his fist and waving at the river, bellowing for Simpkins to come back aboard and fight like a man. He, too, they dragged into the galley.

Wimple clicked on a switch. A deckhead light blazed. With considerable disgust, he looked at his crew. Ingram was shivering, whining and wiping his mustache. Hobbs sat hunched up on the settee, wet snow dribbling from his jumper and forming a puddle under him on the leather seat. Dark pouches showed under his eyes and his flaccid jowls were dragging his face down into the utmost depths of mournfulness. Flat on his back on the deck, lay Simpkins, snoring. His heavy head lolled with the rolling of the tug; he looked even more lugubrious in sleep than his mate did in wakefulness.

By dextrous slapping, Wimple got Simpkins to his feet. The tug careened far over to a heavy sea and Simpkins slid, bolt upright, against the bulkhead.

"I'm sea sick," he said dully. Red flecks of anguish in his eyes reflected the reddish tinge of his hair. He jerked his head,

glared about him. "I been shang'haied. I'm at sea! Nate Simpkins knows the feel o' salt water under his feet."

"Yep! We be out'n the river an' in the bay by now," agreed Wimple, getting set to throw another slap at Simpkins. "Get down into the engine room an' start 'er up."

"I ain't signed on, Chief," argued Simpkins, trying to focus his swimming eyes.

"Ye'll wu'k or drown."

Ingram, white-faced as the tug began to heave to mounting seas, shoved his head out the lee door. The curling mane of a comber, laced with snow, lashed over the tug, wetting him. He turned a bedraggled mustache to Wimple.

"Tide's settin' us straight out to sea!"

"I hopes we don't grind up ag'in a ledge," Wimple consoled him.

"Oh, Lord!" moaned Ingram.

On tip toe, Wimple slammed a pine knot of a fist into Simpkins' jaw. Simpkins' heavy jowls quivered, his eyes swam together, and he bent over in a fit of coughing. Quite by instinct, he wove a pattern to the door, took the lee side and slipped down into the engine room. Wimple followed. By turning a switch, he filled the engine room with light.

"Devil take the black-out reg'lations," he muttered to Ingram's objection. "We're at sea an' I'm skipper."

By the time Simpkins had sobered sufficiently to handle the engine, two hours had passed. Mauled by snow, wind, tide and sea, the tug had drifted offshore. Where?

Wimple didn't know; he had lost any close reckoning.

However, with relief he felt the tug's engine vibrate into life. Hurrying up into the pilot house, he took the wheel. Ingram was blown in through the windward door, wheezing, wet, tired and hungry.

"Well?" he gasped.

"I dunno," said Wimple, caressing the newly varnished ash of the wheel. "Leastways we got power an' can keep us'n off'n the rocks."

"You don't know where we be?"

"Nope. Not exact. We better take it easy till the snow scales up."

"Can't," moaned Ingram. "We gotta get 'er back somehow tonight, before the navy finds out I lost 'er. Nice lobster-man you be, Cat-gut, to lose your bearin's this way."

"If'n I had a lead line an' could get a sniff an' a taste o' a pinch o' mud from bottom, we could sound our way in—but 'em fool rigger'n o' your'n forgot to put ary bos'n's stores aboard."

Ingram's eyes glittered. "If'n you don't get us to a wha'f before mawnin', nary first class rating for you, Cat-gut Wimple—ever."

Sweat beaded on Wimple's wind-seared forehead. His beady eyes turned glassy as he listened to wind, sea and snow skirling a dirge about the tug. He'd have to feel his way in! He'd just have to. But where was in?

They might be ten miles out to sea and a dozen miles down the coast by now. The new fangled instruments in the pilot house and chart room were meaningless to him, except the compass and that only told him where the coast lay. He shuddered as he pictured the granite ledges and cliffs making up that coast. He bade Ingram turn on the light and get the time.

HE LEFT the wheel, shoved his head out the lee door to listen for breakers. A flapping apparition, pointed beak wide in a frightful screech, long tongue flecking a caress, burst out of a sheet of snow and spray into the electric light streaming from the door. Pete! The old gull, up to his old tricks again, had come out to look for him. Many times in the past had Wimple followed the wise bird home after a hard pull at his lobster pots. Wimple's heart

purred to the tune of the purring kitten in his pocket.

"Get on 'ome, Pete!" he commanded.

Pete screeched in ecstasy. He wheeled, dove into the murk in a bee-line. Wimple jumped for the compass.

"No'th by east a quarter east!" he cried.

"You gone crazy?" rasped Ingram, nerves taut.

"Yep!" agreed Wimple. "We're headin' 'ome. Shut off that light!"

Pete always made straight for the black spindle, a half mile out from the entrance to Wimple's cove. Wimple was as sure of himself now as if it were broad daylight, clear, and flat calm. He hauled out a half point to allow for the set of the turning tide, figured out the wind and let the new tug have it. He turned his sharp features toward Ingram.

"Get the lead out'n your pants an' stan' watch on the bridge. Listen for the bell buoy off the Spindle."

"I'll freeze to death out there," Ingram objected. "My asthma—'sides I can't see more'n ten feet."

"Seein' won't do a mite o' good," Wimple sniffed. "But ye got ears like a cat. Get!"

A half hour later, Ingram staggered into the pilot house.

"I hear it!" he wheezed. "Your bell buoy, Cat-gut. Close—on—bow." He pointed and collapsed on the settee.

Wimple's heart softened. The old man had stuck it out. He turned to the engine room speaking tube, blew, bent his ear close. Simpkins answered.

"Stan' by, Nate," Wimple bade him.

He stuck his head out the door, saw the bell buoy glide by ten feet abeam to starboard. He jangled the telegraph to "slow speed." He felt like a sea captain, damned if he didn't. It wasn't any harder handling a deep water tug than it was a twenty-four foot lobster boat, damned if it was.

Navigating by ship's clock and compass, he made the Spindle a minute later. Five minutes later and he was through the channel and in the harbor. Two minutes more and he was alongside his own sturdy dock with Pete shrieking at him from a spile.

At the "finished with engine" signal Simpkins and Hobbs scrambled up from the engine room. Frozen bights were thrown around pilings and made fast to the bitts.

"Where we be?" asked Ingram.

"At me own wha'f in the harbor just around the p'int from the shipyard," grinned Wimple. "Navy can take 'er over 'ere in the mawnin'. Ye can tell 'em ye took 'er out on 'er shake-down cruise an' that she responded nobly."

"Can't figure out how you made it, Cat-gut," said Ingram, awed.

WIMPLE chortled a contented laugh. He was home and he could feed his animals.

"How's 'bout some grub, ye fellers?"

He stopped only long enough in the fish house to dig out some frozen cod heads for Pete. Then he climbed the banking to his white-frame house. Ingram, Simpkins and Hobbs came in his wake.

A goat bleated. Cats rubbed about his legs. A dog sniffed at the kitten in his pocket.

Safe, warm and drying out, Simpkins and Hobbs kept staring at each other, at Wimple, at the tame crow, the red parrot, the two chirping canaries, the gold fish and other animals crowded together amicably in that kitchen. The riggers' sagging pouches under their sad eyes quivered, their hanging jowls jiggled, their drooping lips pursed in agreement as they nodded big heads up and down.

Said Simpkins, "The little feller brung us through."

Said Hobbs, "It's a gift."

"Take off your gear belts," Wimple invited expansively. He turned bacon in a spider, sniffed brewing coffee. "Eat hearty. Don't be afeered o' ration p'ints; I grows me own hog meat. I cal'ate I be a first class rigger now."

"Cal'ate ye be," agreed Ingram, wolfishly eyeing the cooking food, bedraggled mustache forgotten.

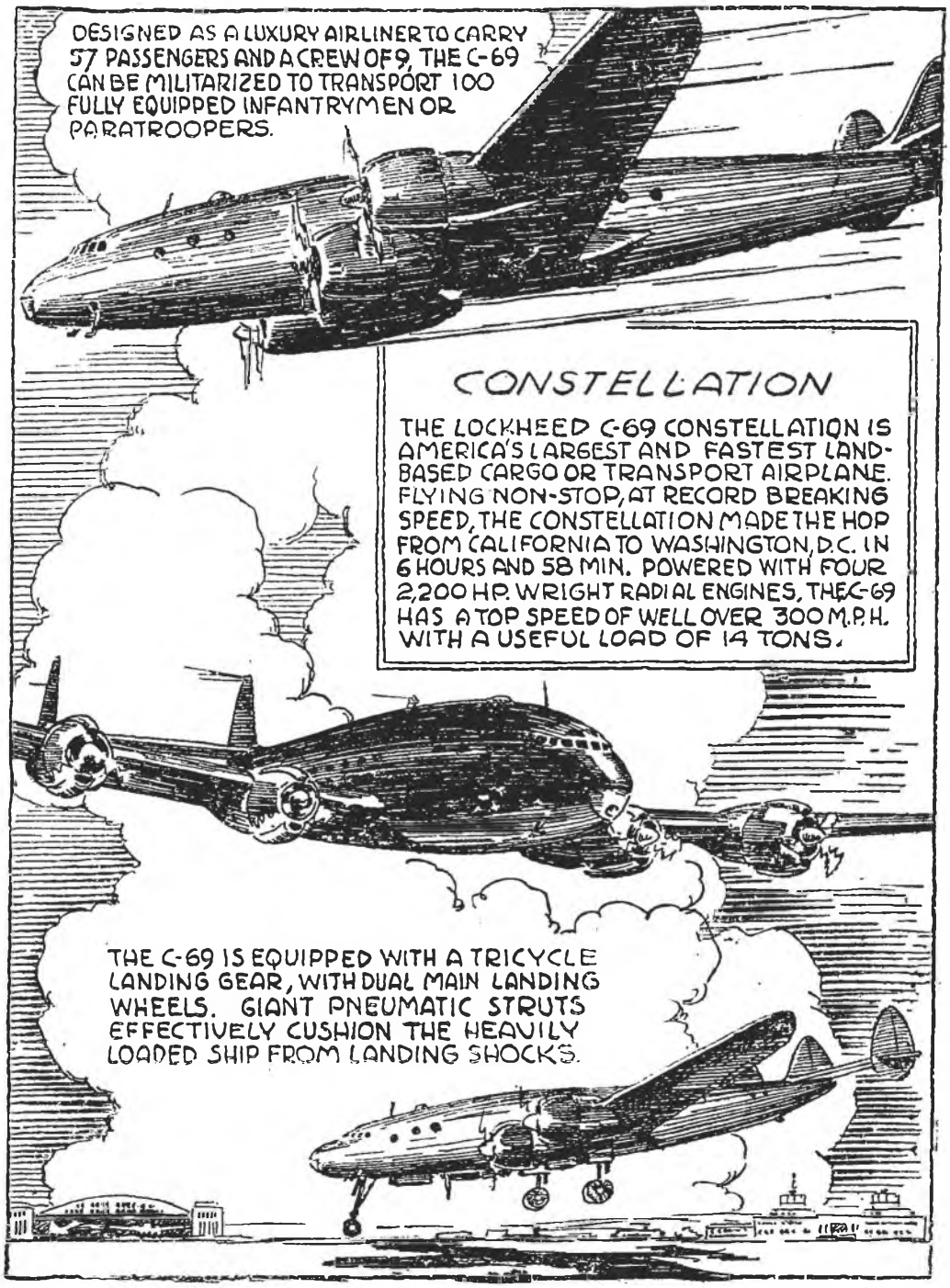
"They's luck in animals," said Wimple, setting out milk for the new kitten.

"Cal'ate they be," his three guests agreed.

Wimple grinned, and speared a piece of bacon with his marlin spike with a swagger.

Wings for Victory

BY Jim Ray



BARB WIRE

By W. RYERSON JOHNSON

Part III

THE STORY SO FAR

"PIG-TIGHT, horse-high, and bull-strong," that was barb wire. It would spell progress for the West, some dared to predict. Three of these were Open-range Carson from Sweetgrass Basin and Dr. Clyde Arington, who had both invested in the wire, and Barb-wire Barney a demon salesman.

Carson is murdered as he returns West and sometime later Barb-wire Barney mysteriously disappears. The salesman's home office receives some of his effects by express, including a chunk of lead and a piece of barb wire. A note says that Barney was tagged by the barb wire sign—the enclosed bullet was dug out of his heart. It concludes: "Anyone else working to fence off Sweetgrass Basin will get the same. Yours for an open range, signed: The Blue Blazers."

Doc Arington goes West to avenge his friends. He learns that Sweetgrass Basin and the town of Gunsight have been terrorized by a bandit known as the Indigo Kid, head of the Blue Blazers. He also finds out that to mention barb wire is almost the same as committing suicide. Sooner than he expects he meets up with the Indigo Kid who wants Arington to be the Blue Blazers' official medico. After leaving the bandit Doc runs across Myrna Chilcott, her father, who is one of the big land owners, and Lige, son of Open-range Carson. They talk and

There'll Likely Be Blood On the Wire That Sounds the Death Knell of the Open Range

Arington discovers that he has been tagged with the barb wire sign. He's told that this means his end will be violent and sudden.

Later at the Crystal Palace Saloon in Gunsight the Doc meets Deuce Le Deux, proprietor and boss of the town. The saloon owner is also anxious to get Arington's services. "I can use a medico who can cut a man's heart out as easy him standing up as stretched out on an operatin' table. My last doctor, I had to kill him myself—he was squeamish."

Doc Arington agrees to attach himself to Le Deux's outfit exclusively. In the saloon later the physician is fuzzy-minded from liquor when both he and Deuce Le Deux find each has been tagged with the barb wire sign. Just before fog closes in on his brain Doc Arington remembers something the Indigo Kid said.

"You can't be friends all around, you'll have to take sides, or else!"

The doctor had already taken sides. And it looked like the wrong side!

CHAPTER XI

DOC SOAK—GUNSIGHT JUDGE

CONSCIOUSNESS came back to Doc Clyde Arington in a muddled flow that was somewhat the reverse of what he had experienced in going out. First, there was the boy. Everywhere he looked—the boy. . . . Is not tomorrow, boy, the Ides of March? . . .

But overshadowing the boy was the man with the beaded vest. The man's eyes were angry spots. . . . The angry spot doth glow on Cassius' brow. . . .

But overshadowing even Cassius was another! Barbed wire! The doctor's head was wrapped in the stuff and rolling away from

his body down a long hill. A man in a blue mask waited at the bottom. He kept tossing the head to the top of the hill and watching it roll down again. That was because the doctor had chosen to run with the wrong pack. He had given his answer to the wrong man. And his life must be the forfeit.

But there was something that overshadowed even the man in the blue mask. And that something was, time. It was something to laugh about if a man knew the whole story. They couldn't kill him. He had a secret and they couldn't kill him. As a matter of fact, he was one of the most untouchable men in the world. They couldn't even hurt him. Not the Indigo Kid or Deuce Le Deux, or even the girl with the cool lips hurt him. The secret was there in the sheet of a calendar if anyone could read it. It was in the very thick of a watch—

Time. . . . What time was it anyway? Where was his watch?

"Boy, bring me my watch."

"Here it is, *Jefe*. But it will not run. You broke it on the head of the *renegado*, remember? Now the time stands still."

So there *was* a boy! The doctor pushed himself up. There was not only one boy. There were a great many, all whirling around. The boy said time stood still. That was the one thing that must not happen—

He slumped down again.

The next time he roused himself he had a headache as big as the world; but there weren't so many boys. At increasing intervals, in fact, they all came together and formed one.

The boy held water to his lips. Strange water. The doctor recoiled. The boy was firm. He pressed the earthen bowl to the doctor's lips and tipped it until liquid ran down his chin.

"Drink it, *jefe*. I have pounded the pulp of a barrel-cactus, and to the juice which I got I have added Mexican pepper. Also vinegar and some garlic. Drink. It will make you well *pronto*."

"As a man believeth in his heart, so is he," the doctor muttered.

He drank, shuddered, and felt better—*pronto*.

He looked around. He was in a smoke-blackened "dobee," a one-room hovel, reclining on the floor in a heap of rags.

"What is this place?" he asked.

"It is where I live, *jefe*."

"You're the boy from the saloon, aren't you?"

"*Si*."

"You had them bring me here?"

"*Si*."

"Where are your folks?"

"Someday I will tell you about that."

"You live here alone?"

"I used to. But now I live with you."

The doctor's interest in this forthright little saloon waif quickened. Ragged and undernourished, the boy certainly was. His brown eyes peered out from his pinched face, big and round. But undeniably he had spirit.

"What's your name, son?" the doctor asked.

"Cabeça de Vaca Salvador Goya Jaime Leon Torre."

"You're about as big as a button—or a bean. Suppose I just call you *Frijole*."

"*Frijole*," the boy said gravely, "is a better name than any of them. A *frijole* I could eat."

"You're quite a little man, *Frijole*."

"*Si, jefe*."

The doctor's face hardened suddenly with resolution, and the lightness left his voice. "Where is my watch? What time is it?"

"Here is the watch." Frijole put it in his hand. "The time stands still."

"That's only when you're a boy, Frijole. As you grow older it races, it swoops, it dives." The doctor threw the broken watch against the wall. Reaching in his coat pocket he took out the folded sheet he had torn from the calendar in the saloon at De Kalb. He fumbled until he found a pencil. Then he looked at the boy. "How long did I sleep?"

"All day and all night. It is now day again. You were very tired and very drunk."

"I concur with your diagnosis, Frijole—quite." He bent his haggard face over the calendar sheet, and with a jittery hand crossed out the days that had passed since he left the train at Deep Wells. He looked again at the boy. "Tell me, Frijole, wasn't Deuce Le Deux here? I seem to remember—"

"*Si, jefe*. The lady also."

The doctor stared. "What lady?"

"I do not know. She wanted to take you away. I would not let her."

A wry grin flickered on the doctor's face. "This lady—was she pretty?"

"Just another lady, *jefe.*"

The doctor continued to grin. "So that's how you are about ladies! Can't you tell me anything about her at all?"

"I saw her coming to the door, and quick I fixed your tie where it was crooked in the collar. At the saloon I noticed how you liked to have your tie hang straight."

"Frijole, you're a pard. Shake."

Frijole shook hands with him gravely. "The lady said she would return."

"She did!" The doctor struggled to his feet. "If a lady's coming I'd better get cleaned up."

Frijole scurried around. "Here is water in this jug. On the bench is the bowl. There is even some soap. But no towel. You have to shake."

The doctor was still shaking when Frijole called from the door. "Your tie, *jefe!* It is a little to one side again. Quick—the lady comes!"

The lady was Myrna Chilcott.

She stood in the doorway, a vision in sun-kilned loveliness, as poised here against the background of this miserable hovel as she had appeared on the rolling KZ range. Her coppery red hair, from under the brim of a wide hat, touched the shoulders of her tight-fitting jacket of crisp green linen. The wind pressed against her linen skirt, moulding her lissom figure.

"May I come in?" she inquired.

The doctor bowed. He turned and flipped a silver dollar at Frijole. "This is the same one you wouldn't take yesterday, pardner. Go out and buy us some breakfast, will you?"

Frijole took the dollar and scampered away.

The doctor faced the lady.

"I—I came to town for some shopping," she began. She stepped closer. "Are you all right?"

"Couldn't feel better."

"Do you—do this often?"

"Quite often," he assured her.

"But why? You're a doctor. You know that this kind of drinking can kill a man."

There was no doubt about it now; the lights that swirled deep in his eyes were mocking. "I'm immune," he went on, "from all the hurts of the world."

She brushed aside his assurances. "I heard how you tangled last night with Al Ochs. You didn't even have a gun of your own! Don't you care what happens to you? Don't you want to live?"

"Very much so, yes. But speaking of last night, did you also hear I was tagged again?"

"You mean the Indigo Kid and his barbed wire sign?"

He nodded.

"But that's serious!"

"Deuce Le Deux seemed to think so. He was tagged at the same time."

Her hazel eyes widened. "Then that means," she said slowly, "that all the twos and twos I've been putting together about the hand-in-glove deal between the Indigo Kid and Deuce Le Deux have added up to threes! The Indigo Kid runs one criminal pack, and Deuce Le Deux runs another."

"It appears that way. It was a surprise to me too. I'd even begun to think that the Indigo Kid was Deuce Le Deux with a blue mask."

"You know, I'd thought of that! I'm glad to hear it's not true. Two criminal forces fighting each other will be easier for us to down than two who are banded together."

"Us?" the doctor questioned.

"My father, Lige Carson—all the big ranchers."

"Not the little ones? What about the nesters at the Patch that I've heard about?"

Almost imperceptibly her manner cooled. "What could they do except get in everybody's way?"

The doctor let the matter drop. "Where do you place me in your line-up?"

"You're with us, aren't you?" she asked, then added lightly, "unless you're playing the Indigo Kid's game."

HE SMILED grimly. "The Indigo Kid evidently believes I'm playing Deuce Le Deux's game."

"You couldn't! I won't believe that."

"Is Deuce Le Deux so much worse than the Indigo Kid?"

"I think so. He's always tried to get on the good side of me. And I hate the man. I can't bear him. He gives me a snaky shudder. He's utterly ruthless, I think."

"And you think the Indigo Kid isn't?"

"No. Somehow I never could believe he's the conscienceless killer that they say."

"I hold with you just halfway. You're right about Deuce Le Deux. He'd knife his own mother if it put power or money in his hands.

"I know, personally, of at least one man he's killed. But I'm also ninety-nine per-cent sure that the Indigo Kid has killed another man! Both killings have been perpetrated for the same reason. So even though they fight each other we have to fight them both."

"You must be right, of course. Father says the same thing. It's only—I've found it hard to believe all the horrible things I've heard about him, that's all. Tell me, doctor, what's he like? They say he rides a steel-blue roan and wears a blue mask. They say he's big. And his eyes—they say you can't look at them, can't meet them." She paused, her own eyes dreamy, her lips slightly parted. "Sometimes I've even wished I could meet him!"

"I imagine it could be arranged," the doctor said dryly. "It's the blue stuff and the mystery that gets you, I suppose. Take my advice; keep this killer for a dream and preserve your illusions."

SHE looked at him a little scornfully. "Do doctors know about illusions?"

"This one does," he assured her. He was standing where he could see out the door. "Here comes Frijole with the groceries. Will you have breakfast with us?"

"No, thank you," she said hastily. "Tell me, what are you going to do about this boy?"

"The question is," the doctor said, "what is he going to do about me? He's a stout little fella, Frijole. He seems to have adopted me."

"But you can't stay here!"

"Why not? I'll get this place slicked up. Frijole can be chief confidant and bottle washer. What do you know about the little rascal anyway?"

"Very little. He's been hanging around the town like a starved pup. I was glad to see him accept your dollar. He never would take anything from me."

"But where are his folks?"

She hesitated. "There have been stories—"

"You mean," the doctor struck in the dark, "they're victims of the big trouble around here?"

"That's as good a name for it as anything."

"Blotted out by the anti-barbed wire boys in their grab for land? So it isn't only the big ranchers who are gunned out of their way? The little fellows too? It would be, of course. Don't the little fellows always get it, both ends and the middle?"

"The little fellows, as you call them, should never have come out here," she insisted. "From the very nature of it, ranching has to be a big-scale operation if it's to be anything at all."

"Both Deuce Le Deux and the Indigo Kid would agree with you on that," the doctor said shortly.

Her lip trembled. She reached a hand to his sleeve, this self-contained girl, almost timidly. "Where is this all going to end?" she breathed.

"Just off-hand," he said, "I'd guess it would depend on how soon you begin to co-operate around here—big rancher, little rancher, everybody who could be hurt by the Indigo Kid or Deuce Le Deux."

She won back her composure. "In some ways," she said, "you remind me a lot of Lige Carson."

The doctor bowed. "I take that as a compliment. Incidently, next time you see Lige tell him I have something to say that he'll want to hear."

That very day the doctor went about setting up office in this squatter's "dobee" with Frijole. Both of them pitched in and washed down the house and everything in it.

"Will I have to wash my face and hands too?" Frijole wanted to know.

"If you're happy the way you are," the doctor said, "why should you? Dirt on the outside won't hurt you."

"I want to if you do."

"Don't take me for a pattern in everything, Frijole," the doctor warned.

While the doctor was opening his pack, Frijole danced around like a wild Indian.

"Where are the dead snakes and the monkey?" he asked.

"The what!"

"Another doctor came through here once in a colored wagon. He had dead snakes in big bottles. The doctor played a banjo and made a lot of talk and sold his medicine.

The monkey went around with a red hat and everybody put money in it."

"Frijole," the doctor said, eyes twinkling, "you're pretty good medicine for me yourself. The only monkey around here is you, and I'll get you a red cap if you want me. The only snakes are the ones I'm going to start seeing if I go on many more benders."

The doctor hung his medical school certificate on the wall, propped up a volume of Rusk's "Anatomy" and a Steinholtz' "Handbook of Therapy" on the shelf over the fireplace, and laid out a few tools of his trade. There was more space on the shelf, and he filled that up with bottles of colored pills.

He intercepted Frijole's speculative glance on the pill bottles. He opened a bottle and let the lad pop a pink pill in his mouth. At the first taste he made a bitter face and started spitting.

"I'm sorry, son," the doctor said. "But you'd never have believed me. You had to find out for yourself. Lots of grown folks are that way too. There will be only two rules around here, and one of them is about the pills. Never touch them. Some of them not only taste bad, but they'll give you a stomach ache. Candy's better ever time, and every time you want candy, you just let me know."

FROM among his gleaming array of knives, forceps, scalpels, scissors and such, he selected a tooth puller and gave it to Frijole. "That's yours," he said. "You can tear the house down with it. But never touch any of these other instruments. That's your second rule. They're bright and shiny, and nice to look at, so take a good look before I cover them with a clean towel."

A little while afterwards the doctor stood thinking. "I ought to have something for an operating table, a couch or a chair that tipped back—"

"I know, I know!" Frijole shouted. "The barber got a new chair, and he put his old one in the shed. It still works sometimes. It goes around and tips and bends."

"Just the thing, Frijole. We'll buy the barber's old chair."

They bought it, and one of Frijole's dreams was realized at that moment. When everything else was ready, it was Frijole, himself, who attached the doctor's shingle to the outside of the house. It was a magnificent thing, with gold letters under thick glass that spelled out:

DR. CLYDE ARINGTON.

Frijole stood off a little way and looked at it, and then he wasn't so much impressed. The letters weren't anywhere near as big as the ones down the street that spelled out:

CRYSTAL PALACE SALOON.

But at least the doctor's letters weren't faded. Maybe, some day, if enough people were sick, the doctor could buy a bigger sign.

THE way it turned out, it didn't seem to matter much whether the doctor had an office or not. He spent most of his time at the saloon. The doctor and his black bag came to be almost as permanent a fixture as the crystal chandeliers. The hangers-on accepted him as an eccentric drunk, harmless when let alone, uncalculable in his violence when baited. They continued to call him Doc Soak and Doc Barleycorn. He didn't seem to mind that.

One night while the Crystal Palace roared, Deuce Le Deux quieted them down with a short speech. "It's come to my ears," he said. "that certain ones among us have been saying we ought to have more legal law in Gunsight. I don't have to tell you it's the same ones who think Sweetgrass Basin needs barb wire. The West is growing up, they say. The railroad's already here, and barb wire ought to be, and we need more law."

He paused. An ominous silence closed over his words. There were men of both minds in the saloon, and none of them knew what he was driving at. They found out soon enough.

"All right," the saloon boss shouted. "We'll give 'em more law! We'll give 'em a town marshal and a judge. I've sent to Chicago for a gold-plated marshal's badge and a judge's hardwood polished gavel. And here they are." He held them up. "Now, we'll keep this legal. I'll do the nominating. But you fellows can do the voting. All right, for marshal of Gunsight I nominate Topaz Bane. All in favor say, aye."

Deuce's henchman brought the rafters down with their ayes.

"Contrary, no."

There was no one suicide-minded enough to vote no.

"Carried," Deuce ruled, and pinned the gold-plated marshal's badge on Topaz Bane, while his men cheered.

Deuce Le Deux raised his hand for silence. "Now we come to the important position of Judge of the Gunsight Court. I am pleased to nominate a man you all know and esteem, a man of culture, education, and refinement, a man of sterling character and unswerving devotion to duty, one who can be depended upon to dispense justice as it ought to be dispensed. Gentlemen of Gunsight, I give you—Doc Soak!"

Again a din of cheers and laughter shook the place. Doc Soak, braced against the bar, gave them a bow.

"Put him to work, chief," someone shouted. "Make him judge somebody."

Deuce Le Deux played along with them. He put the gavel in the doctor's hand and told him to pick any man here and judge him.

The doctor pounded the bar with his gavel—and picked himself! Turning to shake an unsteady finger at his reflection in the bar mirror, he harangued thickly, "I pronounce you a no-good drunken bum. I find you guilty on all counts of drinking too much and too often. I hereby sentence you in the name of the Gunsight Court to have you head tipped back and whiskey poured down your throat until dead. Amen—I mean so be it—hear ye, hear ye. Court is adjourned till the Ides of March. Let's everybody have another drink."

From that time on a subtle change came over the town. The predatory restlessness which touched Deuce Le Deux became a thing of more deadly imminence. Months before, Barb-wire Barney, in reporting back to his boss in De Kalb, had remarked that, "There's somethin' squeezy about the set-up down there. It's like all the time a tornado's about to blow."

That same air of brooding and dark waiting had permeated the basin ever since the doctor had come. But now it was as though the tornado wind had actually gathered its destructive force, soundless as yet and high up, but already on its terrifying downward swoop.

So far as was observable the doctor did nothing to stave off the tornado doom. When he wasn't in the saloon, he was at his office, or riding about the basin, presumably safeguarding the health of such patients as Deuce Le Deux allowed to come to his attention.

The doctor had a large potential practice among the outfits of the small ranchers; and the nesters from the Patch, those families which had been induced by the glowing promises of land agents to "pick up their beds" and come west. The invention of barbed wire, they had been told, had transformed the West into a stock breeders' and dry-land farmers' paradise.

But barbed wire hadn't come to Sweetgrass Basin, and the nesters grubbed to keep one jump ahead of starvation.

The doctor asked permission of his chief to treat these people.

Deuce Le Deux told him flatly, coldly, "No."

Those of Deuce's own pack whom the doctor worked on were agreeably surprised to find how steady his hands were for holding surgical instruments and dressings. Night after night of reeling about the saloon hadn't shot his nerves, it seemed. He'd go to pieces all of a sudden, they surmised.

There was one thing that only Frijole knew about. No matter how late the doctor was in getting to bed, he was always sober enough the next morning to check off a spent day on the calendar sheet. This went on day after day until the time came when there weren't any more days to check off.

FRIJOLE would never forget that day. The doctor wadded the calendar sheet and threw it against the wall the same way he had the watch on that first morning. Then he started to whistle. Frijole had never heard his God whistle before. It was low tuneless whistling, but it sounded beautiful to Frijole because the doctor's face had such a beautiful look—like one of the saints in the cathedral window in Old Mexico, the time Frijole had gone there when his father and mother were alive.

Frijole actually looked for the halo, and the way the sun slanted in, touching the doctor's crow-black hair, it did look like a halo there. The doctor was happy all day long in a quiet bubbling way, as though he knew a good joke which he was keeping to himself.

Frijole thought he knew the answer to all this. The doctor had visited the KZ

ranch the day before. That was where the lady lived. The lady who had come to see him the time he was the drunkest of all. Frijole was certain it was something about the lady that made the doctor so happy.

As a matter of cold record, however, the doctor hadn't seen the lady. She sent word out that she wasn't sick, and she couldn't think of any other reason why she would want to see him.

The doctor's luck was no better when he attempted to see Lige Carson. Every time he had ridden to the *Tres Pinos* spread, Lige had been absent. No one would say where he had gone or when he would be back. On his last trip to the ranch the doctor made note of a disturbing factor. He saw a hard-bitten puncher come crab-stepping up from the corrals. The doctor would almost have sworn that he had seen this man at the Devil's Pasture!

He couldn't be absolutely sure. He'd had such a load of liquor on that day, that everyone looked more or less alike. Nevertheless, this was the kind of thing that might well be expected. If the Indigo Kid aspired to take over the basin, it would almost certainly be a part of his strategy to spot his men where he could keep track of the ranchers' movements, to pave the way for cattle run-offs or even eventual raids on the ranch headquarters.

All in all, the doctor's covert sleuthing netted him more information than anyone gave him credit for. In one respect, however, he ran slam into a stone wall. That was concerning the girl he had met at the Devil's Pasture. She had made an indelible impression on him. But his most painstaking search failed to uncover the slightest bit of information about her. She might as well have been someone he had dreamed about.

Then came the fateful night when the doctor's dream came true.

It was just after dusk. The chitter-sparrows were quarreling in their communal nest on the roof. The doctor was preparing to leave his office and go to the saloon, when without warning, the door was pushed open from the outside. The girl who entered was the girl from Devil's Pasture!

She stood there for the barest instant against the door, slim and brown and straight in her faded gingham dress.

"Turn out the lamp—quick!" she said.

CHAPTER XII

THEY ARE ALL WOLVES

IN THE gray darkness that flooded the room when he turned the lamp out, the doctor was excitedly aware of being alone with the girl. He could still see her in his imagination, her hair the same tumbled disarray of brown ringlets held back from her face by the velvet band, her voluptuous lips; her eyes, still challenging, still worried, and still lustrous. Who was she? An outlaw's woman? Staked out, the Indigo Kid had said. A captive, perhaps, at the Devil's Pasture? But now she had escaped and come straight to him?

Her first words shattered his romantic imaginings.

"The Indigo Kid sent me," she said.

"Yes?" he questioned, the darkness hiding his wry smile.

"For your answer."

"My answer?"

"Have you forgotten? He promised to send for your answer. He's warned you twice since then."

The doctor thought of the barb wire signs, the one that had been attached to his medical license, and the one that had appeared on his coat lapel the first night in the Crystal Palace. "The number is correct," he said tightly.

"Well?"

"I didn't expect you to be the one to come for my answer."

"What you expect doesn't matter," she told him, flatly.

"What choice have I got? The answer is yes."

"Then get your instruments and come with me. Bring plenty of bandages. And may God have mercy on your soul if you're drunk."

"You saw one man die under my hands—"

"My brother," her low, taut voice cut in.

Out of instinctive sympathy he paused before continuing, "And you're willing to have me operate on another?"

"My answer must be the same as your: what choice have I?"

Outside with the girl, he asked, "Where's your horse?"

"I didn't ride," she told him. "It was safer to walk. Keep close to me. If you

hear anyone in the dark, drop to the ground, lie still and wait for them to pass."

Before they had cleared the town, the beat of hoofs sounded from the direction of the saloon. They grew louder, then stopped.

"I think it's somebody stopping at my place," the doctor whispered.

"I think it is too," she said harshly. "Come on."

They skirted the big livery barn and stumbled into an arroyo.

"We'll hold to this cover," she directed. "It runs a quarter mile to Crooked Wash Creek."

When they reached the trickle of water that ran in the creek bed, some of the squatters' shacks loomed dimly through the night. The girl threaded her way among them and the doctor followed. They crossed two garden acreages.

"Is here were you've been all the time?" the doctor marveled. "Right here in the Patch?"

"Not all the time," she said. "Keep coming."

At a shack where only a thread of yellow light shone beneath the window curtain, she paused, rapped twice, softly, on the door.

The door opened and a big man stepped out. He was so tall he had to stoop to clear the door sill. There was just enough light for the doctor to tell that has face was masked.

The Indigo Kid!

When he spoke the doctor was sure of it. "Go inside, Carolina," he said to the girl. "I'll take care of the doctor."

HIS hand lashed out to the doctor's face. The doctor wasn't braced and the attack took him off balance. He fell with considerable force.

"A trap!" the thought flashed through his mind. Then, bitterly, came a following thought. "And the girl was the decoy!"

All thoughts were jarred out of him as the Indigo Kid's hands slapped right and left across his face. Then the doctor felt himself being picked up and dragged across the yard.

"Cool off in the horse trough, Doc," the Indigo Kid said. He dunked the doctor in the water and dropped him, sputtering, to the ground.

The doctor swore angrily. "Before you go beating a man up and drowning him, why don't you find out if he's drunk first?"

"Can't take any chances, Doc. The job I've staked out for you requires steady nerves."

Inside the house the scene was disquietingly reminiscent of the one in the shack at Devil's Pasture where the Indigo Kid had warned the doctor that he must save one man's life, or the buzzards would feed on two carcasses. There was water steaming, and near the bunk where the man lay with a bullet in his back, the girl, Carolina, hovered, ready to assist with her capable hands.

The patient's face was in the shadow. The Indigo Kid picked up the lamp and carried it close. When the doctor saw that face, the shock of recognition was so great that his fingers spread wide; he dropped his instrument case. The case fell on his toe. It was a heavy case. At any other time it would have hurt. Now he didn't feel it.

Bug-eyed in disbelief, he was staring at his patient. He tried to speak. He couldn't. All he could do was make a rasping sound while his throat muscles jerked.

His patient talked to him. "Hello, Doc," he said weakly. "From how they built you up, I knew it was goin' to be you. I'm glad. . . ." His voice trailed off, then steadied. "Reach in my coat pocket somebody; put a stogy in my mouth. I want somethin' to bite my teeth into when the doc starts cuttin'. What you goin' to use for lacin', old hoss, barb wire?"

While the doctor stared, trembling, the Indigo Kid reached over and put a stogy in the patient's round fish mouth. The man had a round fat face, mild blue eyes; and with his yellow-thatched head denting the pillow, he looked absurdly like a child.

"Barb-wire Barney!" the doctor finally wheezed the words out. He rubbed his hands over his face and looked again. Even now he couldn't believe it. How could he believe it. Barney was dead—wrapped in barbed wire and rolled down a long hill. . . .

In the end, of course, the doctor had to believe what his senses told him. He rolled up his sleeves and washed his hands and thanked the Gods that doctors live by, that tonight he was not drunk. From then on he moved with deft, mechanical efficiency. The bullet had plowed an upward course and lodged beneath the clavical. It was as

difficult a case as any the doctor had been confronted with during those days when he was recognized as the best surgeon anywhere around De Kalb.

But now Dr. Clyde Arington was washed up, a has-been. Nobody in De Kalb knew why. They only knew that it was so. The doctor himself, would have been the first to agree. But tonight to his everlasting peace of mind, his hand was sure, his brain was cool. He probed for the bullet and got it, with no injury to ligaments, with a minimum displacement of tissue. He stopped the bleeding, sutured, and bandaged the wound—while Barney sweat and chewed on his stogy.

IT WAS only after his job was finished that the doctor slumped a little, and his hands started trembling, and the sweat beaded cold on his forehead.

"Give Barney another slug of whiskey," he ordered, "and if there's any left, hand it to me."

"You earned it, Doc," the Indigo Kid said. Then he made another remark that later the doctor was to do some thinking about. "Been hearin' you were taperin' off," he said. "Been hearin' that even when you were reelin' around, talkin' thick, the whiskey fog wasn't in your eyes. Puttin' one over on the public, Doc?"

The doctor didn't answer that one. Not then. His mind was still on this present drink. "On second thought," he said, "you drink it. I've been tapering off long enough. I'm through."

The Indigo Kid's eyes, from above his blue mask, bored hard at the doctor. "You've been getting smarter ever since I met you." He looked toward the girl. "Got business in town."

Carolina's eyes followed him as he strode across the floor, ducked the door sill, and disappeared into the night. The doctor watching her, made a discovery. There was worry and apprehension in her eyes. But not for herself. For the Indigo Kid! She half started toward him as the outside darkness swallowed him up. Her eyes held a burning softness infinitely revealing. She might be a captive at Devil's Pasture, but if so, she was a willing captive!

What could that mean? Simply that physically, unexplainably, she was drawn to this outlaw? Did the blue stuff get her, as it did Myrna Chilcott? The doctor felt that he was on the edge of learning important things.

For instance—Barb-wire Barney was still alive. He hadn't fallen a victim to the Blue Blazers, as their callous death notice had affirmed. That meant that now there was no actual proof that the Indigo Kid was a killer. In securing surgical attention for Barney tonight he had, in fact, saved Barney's life. Was he then a friend to Barney? If so, why had he mailed that death notice to De Kalb?

The doctor tried to conceal his excited interest as he put questions to the girl. Her first words beat down his struggling hope that the Indigo Kid might be anything except what at first he had appeared to be—an outlaw playing no favorites, fattening ruthlessly on the Gunsight gang of Deuce Le Deux, and the ranchers of Sweetgrass Basin alike.

"He fights them all. And why should he not?" the girl defended him. "They are all wolves. The big ranchers are as bad as Deuce Le Deux."

It had been first from Myrna Chilcott that the doctor had learned of the ill will between the big ranchers and the little ones of Sweetgrass Basin. Myrna, as the daughter of the biggest rancher of them all, naturally sided with the grassland barons. But Carolina was a daughter of the people. It was evident enough that her interests lay with that second wave of western immigrants, the small ranchers and farmers brought in by the railroads.

The doctor told her the same thing he had told Myrna Chilcott. "As between lawless raiders of the type of Deuce Le Deux and the Indigo Kid, your interests are clearly with those of the big ranchers. Why don't you band together? Big rancher, little rancher. Oppose your common enemy with a common front."

Emotion shook her voice when she said, "You saw my brother die. We had a small ranch of our own in against the *Tres Pinos* of Lige Carson. It wasn't much, but it was a start. We were working night and day to build up a blooded herd. With luck and barb wire we could have done it. Who wiped us out? Deuce Le Deux? The Indigo Kid? No! It was a rancher's bullet that killed my brother!"

The doctor said nothing. Clearly there was a bitterness here that words could not erase.

Carolina Gilpin continued. "I have another brother. You know him. The one you knifed at the Devil's Pasture. He's outlawed with the Indigo Kid. What else was there for him? Nesters want to live too."

"The Indigo Kid permits them to live?"

"The Indigo Kid raids where the picking is best," she said tersely. "That's not with the nesters."

"You make no exceptions among the big ranchers?"

"Which one are you thinking of, doctor?"

"Lige Carson."

Her answer was uncompromising. "He's a big rancher, isn't he?"

The doctor swung the talk around to Barb-wire Barney. Barney was resting easy now, under the effect of the opiates the doctor had administered. "He ought to pull out of this in good shape," the doctor said. "His physical condition is excellent. Was this—" he hesitated—"a rancher's bullet too?"

"It was!"

The doctor's thoughts flicked back. "Those men who rode up to my office just after we left—"

"Yes," she anticipated his question, then added bleakly, "they may have caught a few of our bullets too!"

The doctor made his next question sound casual. "It's a prevalent opinion around here that Barb-wire Barney is dead. Where in the world has he been hiding out all this time?"

"That's something you can ask Barney," she said tightly.

"Fair enough," the doctor said. "But tell me one thing. If I'm the Kid's medico, I'm in a sense part of his outfit now. What's our attitude toward Barney? Are we friends or are we not?"

"The Kid's gone to considerable risk to secure quick treatment for Barney. Doesn't that answer your question?"

"Not precisely. Why does he want him cured? What's he using Barney for?"

"That's something you can ask Barney too."

It wasn't much consolation for the doctor. Between that grim death notice received in De Kalb, and the Indigo Kid's present action in saving Barney's life, there were stark unanswered questions. But there was hope in this: he would have to treat Barney's healing wound, and somewhere along the line he would have a chance for sleuthing.

Before he left, he took the gold toothpick from his pocket. "Let the patient amuse himself with this when he wakes up," he told the girl. "I'll guarantee it will do him as much good as my medicine."

On the way back to his office the doctor proceeded by a more direct route, but he heeded the warning the girl had sounded when he left, and took a course where he wouldn't risk meeting people. The course, as he neared town, took him in behind the Crystal Palace Saloon. He groped his way through the clutter of kegs, broken bottles, and packing cases, guided by a thin streak of light that showed from the window of Deuce Le Deux's office. Opposite the window he stopped in sudden shocked wonder.

Between the partly drawn blind and the window sash there was a space of a few inches. The doctor could clearly see inside the room. Two men were there, sitting with a bottle of the Napoleon brandy between them. There was a hard smug look on the face of each, as though they were in complete and utter agreement about something. As though in celebration, or at least in token of an understanding, in that moment while the doctor watched, they touched glasses and drained their drinks.

One of the men was Deuce Le Deux. The other was the KZ owner, bull-dog faced Ed Chilcott!

The doctor drew away, stumbling in the darkness—stumbling in his mind as well.

What could this mean? Was the KZ owner selling out the other ranchers, adding his gunmen to those of Deuce Le Deux in the interests of greater plunder for them both? Or was he, possibly, an elected representative of all the big ranchers?

The doctor was reminded of the Indigo Kid's words on that trip out from Devil's Pasture. "The KZ is a hungry brand." He remembered Carolina Gilpin's passionate damning of all the big ranchers. And he remembered Myrna Chilcott's own candid worried face.

What was the meaning of this unnatural alliance?

He learned a little more about it when he reached his office.

The moment he entered the door he had a creepy feeling that something was wrong. He lit the lamp, turned the wick high. In the spreading yellow bloom of light he had ample evidence that his feeling of unease was justified.

CHAPTER XIII

WHOSE DOCTOR ARE YOU?

IN THE lamplight two men were revealed. Chilcott men, the both of them. One, "Notches" Lablaw, stood against the far wall, holding Frijole in a strangle-grip to keep his mouth closed. The other man lolled in the doctor's second-hand barber chair, his six-gun resting on his knees. This one was Chilcott's boss gunner, Ditch Tatum.

With that scar across his cheek pulling his mouth into its perpetual frown, Ditch Tatum swung the chair around to face the doctor squarely.

"We been waitin' on you, Doc," he said.

"What can I do for you?" the doctor asked. He turned to look behind him as three more men pushed in from the outside darkness. With exaggerated carelessness they leaned against the wall.

"They're with us," Ditch Tatum said. "They been waitin' too."

"One of you need my services?" the doctor inquired, his voice unnaturally quiet.

"Why, yeah, Doc," Notches Lablow said. He released his choke-grip on Frijole and moved to the middle of the floor. One hand hung by its thumb to his cartridge belt. With the other hand, he waved out, indicating the doctor's instrument satchel.

"I see you're totin' your black bag. Where you been?"

"Out counting stars," the doctor told him, in a perfectly grave voice. "Every sixth star I pull it down and put it in my black bag."

The men against the wall stirred restlessly. But Notches Lablaw followed the doctor's lead. "Now Doc, that ain't no polite way to answer a patient. That's what we been waitin' for, to ask you some questions."

"Where you been, Doc?" Ditch Tatum, from the barber chair, demanded, his voice turning uncompromisingly hard.

"The ethics of my profession—" the doctor began.

"Ethics, hell! Talk, Doc."

The doctor's grip on his black bag tightened. "As I started to say, the ethics of my profession dictate that I keep my patient's affairs a private matter—"

"Listen, Doc," Ditch Tatum chopped in, "we'll talk a little. Then maybe you'll be more reasonable. A man was killed tonight. A law-abidin' Sweetgrass Basin cow-poke. He was killed by an outlaw. One of the Indigo Kid's hellions. But we got reason to believe we left one of our own bullets in the killer. The man got away, but we got further reason to believe he's hidin' out close. Doc, you wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

"Not a thing," the doctor said.

"Doc, I'm givin' you one last chance. You can put yourself on the side of law and order in Sweetgrass Basin, and tell us where your criminal patient is. Or you can line up with the rustlers—in which case you'll be treated like one. Where's your patient, Doc?"

"I haven't a thing to say."

Ditch Tatum's scarred face twisted in a grotesque grin. "I'm goin' to enjoy what's comin' next, Doc. . . . There's ways and ways of makin' a man talk, and we know all of 'em." Still relaxed in the barber chair, Ditch Tatum's hand waved out. "All right, boys; take him apart."

The Chilcott gunners moved in on the doctor, their faces ugly from the relish they showed for the job at hand. It was evident they intended to leave just enough life in the doctor for his lips to talk.

Five range-hardened men to oppose one lank, liquor-sodden doctor! that was the way they sized up the situation. They certainly weren't expecting any difficulty. That was why, the next moment, they were think-

ing that either a tornado or ten more men had come in.

What happened was this: The doctor reached out and gave the second-hand barber chair a swing that caught the three men advancing from the wall and knocked them one against the other so that all three fell, like bowling alley pins going down. At the same time the chair which, as Frijole had expressed it, "worked sometimes," broke down and tipped Ditch Tatum on the floor with the others.

Almost in the same breath the doctor heaved his heavy instrument case at Notches Lablaw, the only one of the KZ gun-hands still on his feet. The case caught Notches in the stomach. He jacknifed with a groan of agony, and collapsed on the floor with the rest.

For a moment then the doctor was a warrior victorious, lord of all he looked at; himself unarmed, and five gun-heeled attackers sprawled in a cursing tangle at his feet. The way to the door was cut off, so the doctor took the next best course. He lunged forward, escaping Notches Lablaw's out-clawed hands. Sweeping the glass chimney off the lamp, he smothered the flame with his hands. The last thing he saw before darkness swaddled in, was Frijole, bouncing around the room like a jumping bean, socking all exposed legs, arms, and heads that he could reach with his pair of tooth pullers.

At the top of his voice the doctor ordered the lad out of the fight. "Lie down!" he called. "Lie down by the wall."

IN THE darkness he had no way of knowing whether or not the boy obeyed. From the sound of curses scraping the air, he had a grim suspicion that Frijole remained on the job. This made the doctor's own job more difficult. He had heaved the unlighted lamp with good effect; but now, armed with a stick of firewood, he was slowed considerably because, in order to be sure he didn't strike Frijole he had to feel out contours before he swung his stick.

A six-shooter's close roar rocked the room. By the light of the saffron gun flame the doctor saw dim movements.

Ditch Tatum's voice followed close on the six-gun's blast. "Cut it out, you damn fools! One of him and five of us. You'll kill each other. . . . Get out of here. Not so dark outside. We'll get reorganized."

The furor that swept the room died away as Ditch Tatum's men stumbled after him through the door. Groping around, the doctor located Frijole.

"You all right, son?" he whispered.

"I'm fine," Frijole crowed. "Doc, you know what? Sockin' 'em with the tooth pullers. One of 'em I pinched him with it!"

"That's fine," the doctor commended.

He lifted Frijole to the window, pushed him over the wide "dobee" ledge, and heard him drop softly on the ground. Quickly, he prepared to follow. He had one foot over the ledge when he heard heavy boots grind in the gravel from around the corner of the house.

"Cover the window," a hoarse voice called. "We'll smoke that sawbones out, front and back."

The doctor knew well enough it would be suicide to go out. And yet if he stayed here— He moved back as five guns opened up in a murderous cross-fire through door and window. The doctor froze back against the wall, safe for the moment. But that couldn't last. They knew he was unarmed. They'd be forcing an entrance—

The words of Carolina Gilpin came back to him. "They are all wolves. The big ranchers are as bad as Deuce Le Deux."

Now with Chilcott's pack at his throat, the doctor was ready to agree. It was going to be ironical if now at the last he died, and Barb-wire Barney lived. Barney would have to live! Somebody had to organize and carry on the fight of the dispossessed men of Sweetgrass Basin. Barney was the man who could do it. Would the Indigo Kid help him? Was this desert desperado something more than a plundering outlaw? Was he a kind of rangeland Robin Hood? The girl, Carolina Gilpin, thought so.

But was he? The doctor was forced to admit he didn't know. Certainly there had been no proof of it. Even now the Indigo Kid's intentions toward Barney were unknown. With the doctor out of the running there would be no one for sure to carry on the fight. . . . Yet, in more ways than anyone knew, it was going to be ironical if now the Ides of March caught up with him—

There was a scurry of activity at the door. The doctor hurled a three-legged stool, and felt around for something else as bullets streaked the room, pelting into the sun-baked clay of the walls with sodden *pluds*.

Curiously, perhaps, at this last minute, he thought of Myrna Chilcott. She had stood in the same doorway where now her father's hired gunmen were trying to blast his life away. He could remember vividly how she looked—her red hair in the wind under the green linen hat. Would she learn of her father's deal with outlaws? Would she wake up and identify herself with the people in their fight for freedom, for life? Or had she been too long the unquestioning and pampered daughter of her father?

"Inside again," Ditch Tatum bawled. "And stay in this time! Lead him down!"

The gunfire increased. But it wasn't the bite of gunlead into adobe walls that put the extra tempo to the doctor's pulse. It was the pound of many hoofs outside, close and coming closer. New voices and new gun blasts! Was Deuce Le Deux buying into this game? Were these his men bearing down from the Crystal Palace? Wasn't five to one enough without Deuce horning in?

All at once the doctor's tragic speculations ceased. They ceased because the close-in firing ceased. There remained only moving-away shots that echoed distantly.

Then a quick pound of hoofs sounded in the gravel outside the window. A stirringly familiar voice wafted in. The voice of the Indigo Kid!

"One good turn deserves another, Doc.... Keep your powder dry."

Gravel scudded again under the horse's hoofs. Was it the steel-blue roan? It was too dark to see, although the doctor craned his neck from the window as the Indigo Kid spurred away to join his Blue Blazers who were already hounding Chilcott's KZ gunners out of town.

Frijole crept back. The doctor found another lamp and lighted it. An ominous silence hovered over the place as he surveyed the wreckage. This wasn't victory, he knew. It was only a breathing spell. Now in addition to everything else, he would be bracketed with the Indigo Kid. Deuce Le Deux would certainly demand an accounting for this night, because with Deuce Le Deux and Chilcott teamed together—

The doctor's face hardened with sudden decision. He wouldn't wait for Deuce Le Deux's third degree. He'd go to Deuce first with a story. Carry the fight to the enemy, that was the idea. There might be a slim chance that the enemy would never find out that he had you beat. At the very least the advantage of surprise would be on your side.

WHILE the smell of gun smoke still hung over his place, the doctor stalked into the Crystal Palace to run his bluff on Deuce Le Deux. Outside, the single straggling street of Gunsight was alive with restless men, questioning each other about the source of the firing at the other end of town. Inside the saloon, the normal catch-dollar, honk-a-tonk activity continued.

The doctor presented himself at the door of Deuce Le Deux's office in back. The chief's grizzled watch-dog, Chewed-ear McCabe, was on guard. The doctor demanded an audience and got it.

Facing Deuce Le Deux alone in his office, he started right in dealing from his own cold deck. With simulated fervor, he said, "I want to thank you, chief, for saving my life. I don't imagine your boys have had time to report back to you, but I'm here to tell you that you got them there just in time."

The Crystal Palace gambler played the deal around with the doctor's cards. "No, I haven't had a report on it yet. Go ahead; feed down the details."

"I'd been called out to doctor a horse that had bloated himself on somebody's garden truck at the Patch. When I got back to the office a pack of cowboys, waiting there, ganged me. I put up a fight with a stick of firewood. They started shooting. I thought I was a dead doctor. But your men gunned down on them just in time and drove them off. It was Ed Chilcott's cowboys who ganged me. I can identify every one of them for you if your men bring any of them in alive."

Deuce Le Deux didn't ante to that round, and the doctor proceeded to build up his own jackpot. "Those cow herders are asking for trouble would you say, chief, when they come raiding us on our own home grounds?"

Deuce bought into the game then. The way he bet his hand the doctor couldn't tell whether his play to attach himself securely to the tail of Deuce's kite, had succeeded or not. "Which ones of my men in the rescue party did you recognize?" Deuce asked.

"It was dark," the doctor told him. "They didn't unhorse. They came in fast, and

left the same way. I couldn't recognize any of them for sure."

"Then how do you know they were my men?"

The doctor seemed taken aback. "Why—who else could they be?"

"You can't think of an answer to that one?"

"Why, no. With your men running this town, no other armed gang could come in. Everybody knows I'm your medico anyway. So no one else would have an interest in prying me out from under the guns of a bunch of drunken cowboys."

The chief's cynical glance rested in hard speculation on the doctor. Then abruptly Deuce said, "All right, we'll skip that. But whose horse was it you went out to doctor?"

"I don't know. Some fellow hazing through."

"And he was stoppin' at the Patch?"

"No. Just camped near there. His horse strayed."

"You wouldn't, would you, Doc?"

"Wouldn't what?"

"Stray toward the Patch?"

"Hell," the doctor answered, "I've had my orders on that."

"Keep rememberin' 'em, Doc. Those nesters at the Patch, and the small ranchers in against Carson's *Tres Pinos* are as much our meat as the big ranchers. They all have to go down together." He leaned forward, his mouth in a tight straight line across his face. "It won't be long now, Doc. You better start sharpenin' up your cuttin' instruments."

On the way out of the office, the doctor felt like patting himself on the back. Then Deuce Le Deux threw *him* a question.

"Whatever became of that gold toothpick you used to flash around?" Deuce asked.

The doctor went through the motions of searching through his pockets. "I must have lost it!"

Deuce stood up, stretched his superbly muscled body.

"Like a big cat," the doctor thought. The tone of the chief's voice at his next words made the comparison even more apt.

"Lost it where?" he purred.

"In the mix-up at the office a while ago, I suppose."

"I thought maybe at the place where you treated the sick horse," Deuce said.

The doctor was sweating when he left the office.

HE SWEAT some more during the next few days. It was the cold sweat of apprehension. It didn't take him long to find out that, day and night, he was being shadowed. No further word came from the Indigo Kid, so the doctor had no knowledge of Barb-wire Barney's condition. Time after time he started out in a roundabout way to visit his patient on his own initiative. But each time he had to abandon his purpose because he was followed.

But the doctor kept trying, and finally, through Frijole, he did succeed in contacting the house where he had gone that night on his fateful emergency call. The way he worked it was to have Frijole call in at every house in the Patch. That way, attention couldn't be focused on any one place.

After Frijole made his report the doctor rested a little easier in his mind. The house was empty, Frijole said. That could mean only that the Indigo Kid had spirited his patient away!

That was all right; the wound would stand moving. And the fact didn't worry the doctor so much any more. Since his rescue from Chilcott's gunners he was swinging around to Chilcott's daughter's unreasoned feeling that the Indigo Kid could not be as bad as he was painted.

But even if he was as bad, and worse, there was nothing the doctor could do now except wait. He didn't do much of that before Deuce Le Deux sent Hymie Wert to tell him he was wanted at the saloon.

The doctor started to get his case, but Hymie shook his close-cropped head, and his steel-trap mouth opened to say, "You don't need it. You're too handy with them knives and such. The chief said special for me to see that you left the black bag behind."

"But how am I going to treat a patient—"

"The chief said to tell you it was in your capacity as judge that you're wanted."

The doctor had almost forgotten that lurid night when he had been appointed judge of the Gunsight Court, and Topas Bane had been dubbed marshal. The anticipatory look in Hymie Wert's mean little eyes, the cruel set of his steel-trap jaws didn't afford the doctor much joy in the recollection.

CHAPTER XIV

DOCTOR DEATH

THE Gunsight Court was convened that hot summer evening in the Crystal Palace Saloon. When Hymie Wert arrived with the doctor in tow the big hall was already overcomfortably filled, not only with Duce's men, but with cowboys from all over the Basin, cowboys and a liberal sprinkling of nesters.

One way or another, word of the trial must have gone the rounds. Evidently it was an affair of some moment. The doctor noted Lige Carson in the tense audience, and Ed Chilcott too. Suddenly, he caught his breath as he recognized someone he hadn't seen since the first day he had stepped off the train in Deep Wells.

It was Jim Juniper, the one of the Blue Blazers that the Indigo Kid had introduced as "an ornery lookin' grizzly . . . old-time hoss-thief and long-rider." Jim Juniper, the doctor guessed, must be so new with the Indigo Kid that word of his affiliation hadn't circulated. Otherwise he wouldn't be showing his shaggy head here. The old outlaw gave no sign of recognizing the doctor.

For that matter, no one accorded him special recognition. Tonight there were no laughs and cat-calls when the doctor appeared. It wasn't a good sign, the doctor felt. This silence wasn't natural. There was menace in it.

Menace for whom? For the man he was to judge? The doctor looked around. He saw no prisoner. But Deuce Le Deux motioned him to come to the bar.

Men parted silently to let the doctor through. His apprehension mounted, and his hand tugged nervously at his watch chain. He had taken to carrying the watch again, although it didn't run.

Two empty beer kegs stood on the bar.

"One of 'em's for you to sit on, Doc," Deuce Le Deux told him, "and the other's to pound your gavel on."

Before the doctor knew what was happening, two men grabbed him and hefted him to the bar. They left him teetering on the edge with his elbows punching air as he struggled for balance. Somebody reached over and pushed him down on one of the beer kegs.

"Who am I to judge?" he gasped.

"You'll find out, Doc," Deuce Le Deux mocked. "Have to open the court officially first. This has all got to be legal and in due course." He caught the eye of one of his gunners at the door.

In a leather-lunged bellow the gunner sounded off, "Here ye, hear ye; the court is now open!"

Barrelhouse had been appointed keeper of the gavel on that night when "legal law" had first come to Gunsight. He rescued the gavel now from among a case of empty bottles and handed it to the doctor.

"Pound on your keg, Doc," Deuce Le Deux instructed, "and holler for order."

The doctor pounded. "Order," he bawled. "Order in Gunsight Court!"

He acted drunk, and most of his audience thought he was. A few laughs broke through the tension which had clamped over the place.

"Order!" the doctor bawled fiercely, "or the court will have you impounded for contempt!" He looked at Deuce Le Deux. "You are the prosecutor, I presume?"

"I plead guilty, Doc Soak, your honor," Deuce said, and laughed.

The doctor banged his gavel. "Then produce your prisoner."

"Prisoner," Deuce bawled.

The door to Deuce's office opened and two men struggled forward, supporting a third man between them. One of the crystal chandeliers hung a little way in front of the bar on a direct line with the doctor's vision. He couldn't see at first. He craned his neck and squinted his eyes against the yellow glare of the lamps.

When he did succeed in identifying the prisoner, a wave of weakness coursed his body that left him limp and shaking.

The prisoner was Barb-wire Barney!

Deuce Le Deux, as the prosecutor, rushed the case along.

"Doc Soak, your honor," he pleaded, "there's two charges against the prisoner. One of 'em's murder and the other is rustlin'. I'll dispose of the murder charge first. On the night of—last week sometime, whenever it was—the prisoner, known as Barb-wire Barney, shot and killed a puncher who rides for one of our most respected outfits. I refer to none other than Ed Chilcott's KZ-Connected. The murder was without provocation and it was witnessed." He motioned to Ditch Tatum and the two other

Chilcott gun-hands. "Step up, witnesses. . . . Swear 'em in, Judge."

"Raise your right hand," the doctor said, then went through the rest of the rigmarole about the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The procedure at least took up time. And time was woefully needed here, time to think and time to act.

Deuce Le Deux questioned the witnesses. They said they saw the murder.

"I rest my case on that," Deuce Le Deux said. "Now I'll take up the rustlin' charge. As you know, Judge, all our outfits have been losin' cows." He held up Barb-wire Barney's gold toothpick. "I want to enter this as exhibit number one to prove the rustlin' charge."

"Entered," the doctor ruled, helplessly. He took the toothpick from Deuce's hand.

"And identified, Judge?"

The doctor hesitated.

"Of course," Deuce said impatiently, "there are any number of men here who will gladly identify it."

"Identified," the doctor ruled.

"Now then," Deuce proceeded, "this toothpick which his honor himself identifies as belonging to Barb-wire Barney, was found with a microscopic particle of beefsteak adherin' to it." He motioned to Ed Chilcott. "Step up, witness. . . . Swear him in, Judge."

WEARILY, the doctor went through the mockery of swearing in Ed Chilcott.

At Deuce Le Deux's question, Ed Chilcott's bulldog jowls tightened in a self-conscious grin. "Sure," he said, "I identify the microscopic particle as once bein' part and parcel of a KZ cow."

"I rest my case complete on both charges," Deuce Le Deux said.

The doctor's gavel banged on the head of the beer keg. The travesty on justice was too raw. He couldn't contain himself. "Evidence disallowed," he bawled, "on the grounds that a microscopic particle can't be identified without a microscope."

The cruelty never more than lightly veiled in Deuce's eyes, flared openly. But then he bowed. "This bein' a law-abidin' court, we accept without question your decision, your honor. But it grieves us to have our rustlin' case break down like this. We had hoped to hang the prisoner on two counts. Now we can hang him on only one."

The doctor banged the gavel. "The murder case is thrown out too! Same reason. Insufficient evidence. You didn't even name the victim."

There was a restless stir throughout the room.

Deuce Le Deux's words were heavily edged with sarcasm as he said, "Your pardon, Judge. An oversight. The victim had a name. It was Joe Whatchamacallit. Now give us a rulin' to make it legal and we'll get on with our hangin'."

If there had been any doubt of it in the beginning, the doctor knew now that it wasn't only Barney who was on trial. These gun-wolves were sitting in judgment on him too. He had been rash in revealing his interest in Barb-wire Barney on the day of his arrival. Now it was starkly evident that Ed Chilcott and Deuce Le Deux had compared notes about him and come to the conclusion that his interest in Barb-wire Barney was a friendly interest. They had arranged this sham trial for the purpose of seeing him sentence his friend to death.

Let him do that, let him disavow his friend and be reinstated conditionally in the wolf pack's graces. Or let him support his friend—and there would be two hangings instead of one.

"We're waitin', Judge," Deuce Le Deux reminded softly. "Guilty or not guilty?"

From his beeg keg seat on the bar the doctor looked out over the silent faces; avid, uncompromising faces, etched by the overhead lamps in highlights and black shadow. For a quickening instant his glance rested on Jim Juniper. Stoney-eyed, Jim Juniper returned his glance. But what hope could come from Juniper, even if he was disposed to help? The doctor recognized no others from Devil's Pasture. This was more than a one-man job.

In despair, the doctor looked back to the cynically smiling face of Deuce Le Deux. Every man has his price—that was the only code Deuce knew. The price he confidently expected now of the doctor was betrayal of his friend.

Into the doctor's voice and into his muscles surged a strength that he had never known he possessed. Hate and anger, like a searing flame, consumed him.

"Mistrial!" he bellowed. "I throw the case out of court!"

He brought his gavel down with a re-

sounding whack. But not on the beer keg. On Deuce Le Deux's head!

Without moving from where he sat, he let his long arm unbend, and he dropped the boss of the Crystal Palace with a single clopping blow. While he was about it he kept his gavel pounding, first against the shorn bullet-head of Hymie Wert, and then right and left indifferently as far out as he could reach from his perch atop the bar.

The gavel handle broke. He lurched to his feet, aimed a kick at Barrelhouse who was coming at him from the other side of the bar with a whiskey bottle upraised. His kick missed. Barrelhouse made a pass with the whiskey bottle. The doctor jerked away. Before Barrelhouse could get set for another swing, the doctor planted a foot in his face, and the beefy bartender reeled back to fall among his bottles.

In the same split-wink the doctor bent, secured a grip, top and bottom, on the empty beer keg before him, and heaved it out into the room.

Even before that beer keg smashed into the low chandelier, showering glass and oil and flame, the place was in an uproar. Men milled and shouted—and got in each other's way as they tried to get at the doctor. But now with broken glass cutting down on them like grape-shot, and gouts of flaming oil descending to their shoulders, their attention for the moment was directed away from the doctor.

THOSE at the rear of the crowd still pushed and shoved in an attempt to break through and pull the doctor down. But those in front had an even more compelling motive. The doctor could wait. Their first consideration was to escape the flaming oil. They started slugging, throwing wild blows to all sides in their frantic effort to break through the human wall which hemmed them in. Before any kind of order was restored it was an even bet that some hot-head would start shooting his way out.

From his perch on the bar the doctor viewed the havoc his action had brought. From the instant he had struck down Deuce Le Deux, he had been living in a shimmering aura of red rage. Now, although the destructive fury within him was unabated, the ice water of calculation trickled through his flaming rage.

His original idea had been no idea at all. He had bopped Deuce Le Deux on the head simply as an act of emotional desperation. The brutalities, the sickening disregard for human rights shown by these vultures of Sweetgrass Basin, as evidenced by this farcical trial, had suddenly been symbolized by the sneering face of Deuce Le Deux. And the doctor, in his wrath, had struck him down.

He hadn't counted the consequences of his rash move. What consequences were there to count? He was a dead man anyway. So was Barb-wire Barney. So were all the honest men and women of the basin. Living on borrowed time, they were. With Deuce and Chilcott—yes, and the Indigo Kid—combining to squeeze them, they would soon be dead in their graves, or dead in their hearts and souls under the slave rule the anti-barbed wire crowd had planned for them.

The doctor's only thought had been to go down fighting.

But now cold reason struck through his rage. He would still go on fighting. Yes But maybe he wouldn't have to go down! They were a hundred and he was one.

Very well, then he had a hundred-to-one chance!

They were disorganized now, snarling and lashing out at one another. If he could keep them like that—

He raised his voice in a leather-lunged bellow. "If there's a man in the house who owns a piece of land, or would like to own a piece of land, and live on it safely, now's your chance! Listen to me! Now's your chance to strike at the range-hogs and gun-scum. Deuce Le Deux is rolling on the floor. Put Ed Chilcott there, somebody!

Fight, men, fight . . . for your homes . . . for your lives! Fight!"

Gun roar cut off the doctor's appeal. The bullets, aimed at the doctor, snarled low over the heads of the milling men and shattered the bar mirror. The doctor stooped, heaved up the second beer keg. Holding it high over his head he lurched three steps on the artificial mahogany, and put the keg into the air against another of the crystal chandeliers.

More glass flew. More burning oil drenched down. The doctor let the descending beer keg act in the nature of a battering ram for him. He followed it closely, leaping among bullets that drove up from the floor. At finger's-length, jammed in among the mob, he wasn't such a likely target.

The confusion had become pandemonium now, a veritable stockyards brawling, with men fighting fire and each other, trampling, slugging, cursing, gunning. Through the middle of it the doctor ranged up and down, calling on the free men of Sweetgrass Basin to stay free, to fight . . . fight . . . fight. And while he ranged, exhorting, he did his share of the fighting.

He had a formidable weapon. He had jerked his watch from his pocket. Holding it by the end of the chain, he swung it on its short destructive arc, chopping men down as though by an ax. The hunting case of the watch didn't fly open now and spill the works in every-which direction. That was because, since the time he had first broken it on the head of Hymie Wert, he had doctored it considerably. Now the watch could hammer through a high-domed sombrero to knock a man groggy.

Here and there the fire was biting into solid wood now, and smoke was added to the other hazards. It grew thicker by the moment—acid to the eyes, a knife to the lungs. Men on every side were giving up the fight, following the screaming house girls out of the building. Windows were shattered, the bat-wing doors up front were torn from their hinges.

But many men still remained to fight. Among them was the doctor. Through fire and smoke and gun-lead he had chopped his way to the place where he had last glimpsed Barb-wire Barney. He had a dim unreasoned hope of rescuing him.

But Barney was nowhere to be found. Had he been taken out and and shot by Deuce's paid executioners? Had he been trampled under foot in the smoke-reeking room? The doctor had no way of knowing.

He kept looking. Driven before the ever encroaching fire, the mob was thinning fast now. . . . At the last, the doctor was virtually alone. Sounding far-away and unreal against the close seething crackle of flames, he could hear the gun firing continue outside. So maybe the men were continuing their fight for life and land in Sweetgrass Basin. A little surge of gladness struck through to him with the thought. He had been of some use after all. It was he who had roused them, given them the necessary impulse to band together against their common enemies, against outlaws and range barons.

HE WAS weaving now, groggy from the smoke and heat, and from exhaustion. But he was still looking for Barb-wire Barney. He was shrieking Barney's name, but he wasn't aware of it. He was exhorting men to keep on fighting too . . . when he was the only man left to fight!

In between times he croaked passages from Shakespeare.

"Graves have yawned and yielded up their dead. . . . Cowards die many times before their death. . . . " He didn't neglect the Ides of March, of course.

He was stumbling over his own feet now. Each time he fell he was slower in getting up. He sensed more than saw another man loom finally through the fire-streaked smoke.

"Barney?" he croaked.

But it wasn't Barney. Barney was fatter. This was another one who had to feel the weight of his watch! He still had enough strength left for one more swing. . . .

He struck out . . . and collapsed in the man's arms.

"Easy, Doc, old fellow," the man rasped. "Easy."

The doctor retained enough of a grip on reality to know that the man picked him up and threw him over his shoulder. . . . Outside the building the doctor felt himself being dumped on the ground. He was breathing in wrenching sobs. But with every breath of the sweet night air that he put into his tortured lungs, his strength returned.

"You all right, Doc?" It was Lige Carson asking. Lige Carson, he knew now, who had

come looking for him in the burning building.

Lige had saved his life.

But that was only the doctor's first thought. The second was that he didn't want to be beholden to Lige Carson or to any of the big ranchers. The girl from Devil's Pasture had the right idea—they were all wolves, hide and fang of the same litter as Deuce Le Deux.

The doctor pushed out with trembling hands. "Get away from me. Leave me alone. . . ."

"Doc, snap out of it!" Lige said sharply. "We've got to ride. You've got to come alive enough to stick in saddle."

"I don't ride with range hogs," the doctor told him defiantly.

Lige Carson gave him the same kind of workout then that the Indigo Kid had twice meted out. He slapped the doctor's face. The stinging flat-hand blows rocked the doctor's head from side to side. He fought back weakly. Lige only laughed, reached down and yanked him up by the collar. Shadowy figures were struggling through the night, bringing up tubs of water to the fire. Lige commandeered one of the tubs.

"All right, Doc Soak," he said, "take a drink."

He forced the doctor's head under. The cold water felt good to his scorched skin. He came up sputtering—and more inclined to listen to reason.

"Like I said before," Lige told him, "we've got to ride and ride fast. Think you can make your way back of the livery barn? I've got a horse there for you, saddled and waitin'. I had a man grab up your medical truck at your office, and it's there too."

"Frijole—" the doctor began.

"He's there too, waitin'."

The doctor was still a little groggy. "I'm needed in Gunsight," he said stubbornly. "I came here for a purpose—"

"Whatever your purpose is, Doc," Lige cut in, "you can accomplish it better from any place in the world than from here. From now on your hide in Gunsight isn't worth a nickel." He laughed shortly. "Mine isn't either."

"Yours?" the doctor questioned, wonderingly. From the first he had been aware of gun shots echoing in the near distance. The firing increased sharply now, drew nearer. The doctor added a second question to his first. "They're still fighting—the nesters and the two-bit ranchers?"

"Give my men some of the credit, Doc," Lige Carson said.

"Yours! You mean to tell me that the proud *Tres Pinos* is throwing in with the so-called rabble of Sweetgrass Basin?"

"Listen, Doc," Lige said tensely, "I've got a hunch we both don't know enough about the other. I've had business that's kept me ridin' around, kept me too long from gettin' acquainted with you. We'll correct that at the first opportunity. For now it'll be enough for me to tell you that we were set tonight to try and spring Barb-wire Barney. You beat us to the gun, Doc. Before the time was right for us, you pushed the fat in the fire—and how! We got Barney out of it, but in the process I had to tip my hand. I had to make an open stand. I'd been avoidin' it up to now because the time wasn't right. You've pushed the clock ahead for all of us, Doc."

The gun shots were sounding every moment louder. Spent bullets commenced to dig dirt within the wide circle of light thrown out from the burning saloon. No one was even pretending any longer to do any good by throwing water on the blaze.

"The Crystal Palace is a gonner," Lige Carson said. "And so will we be if we don't start movin'. These are my men fallin' back. It's all right. They've been fightin' a rear-guard action to allow for the withdrawal of the group that's got Barb-wire Barney safe in tow. Feel strong enough to make it to the barn under your own steam, Doc? We'll join the rest of them out of town."

Stumbling along with Lige Carson on the way to the livery barn, the doctor asked, "Where will we be riding?"

"To my place," Lige said.

"You mean the *Tres Pinos?*" The ranchhouse?"

"Where else would I mean, Doc?"

The doctor put another question of his own. "What happened to Deuce Le Deux?"

"He's on his feet again." Lige laughed shortly. "After the way you hammered him down with that gavel, I'll bet long odds this is his last venture in 'legal' killin'."

"Let me get it straight once and for all," the doctor asked. "You and your *Tres Pinos* cowboys have declared open war on Deuce Le Deux?"

"That's the size of it, Doc."

"Then," the doctor said fiercely, "you're also fighting your own neighbor, Ed Chilcott."

"Then," Lige said as fiercely, "I'm fightin' Ed Chilcott."

Lige's words were a frank acceptance of a situation. But what struck the doctor most was that they showed no surprise.

"Do you mean," he pressed, "that I'm not telling you anything?"

"That's right, Doc."

"You've known about Chilcott all along?"

"For quite some time now, Doc."

The doctor's thoughts jerked back to the day he had arrived in the basin. He spoke slowly, "So that's why you were so cagey that first time when we were all together on your range—you, Ed Chilcott, Myrna, and myself. You didn't know me, and you didn't trust Chilcott. But you weren't ready yet for Chilcott to know you didn't trust him. So you played his game, yessed everything he said. You made it tough figurin' for me, mister. I knew your father in Chicago. Open-range Carson was a scrapper. He said you were too. He talked a lot about you. I thought I knew you even before I came out here. Then when I got here I thought I didn't know you at all. But now I know you were just playin' 'em cagey, as they say here."

"You had me fooled too for a while, Doc, with your drunk act. I wanted to come clean with you on a few things, but I couldn't take a chance until I knew you better. I'd built too carefully and too long."

"Sure," the doctor added. "And with me pretending to be Deuce's man it looked worse than ever. Old Doc Soak! No wonder you didn't trust me."

"You've got a new name now, pardner."

"How's that?"

"They're not calling you Doc Soak any more."

"No? What are they calling me?"

"Doctor Death!"

CHAPTER XV

THE DOC PRESCRIBES A BATH

AROUND moon frosted the range as the doctor racked along with Lige Carson and ten or a dozen of his riders. Mile after mile they rode, deeper and deeper into *Tres Pinos* territory. Close to their left the railroad track streamed beside them. They had followed the glinting rails ever since leaving Gunsight.

Lige reined in closer to the doctor. "Keep your eyes open," he cautioned. "When we top that rise ahead you'll see something."

"See what?"

"I'm keepin' it for a surprise," Lige said. The doctor could catch the white flash of his teeth as he grinned. "Somethin' about the railroad."

The steel trail was new to the West. Lige remarked about it. "Gives a man an uncommon curious feelin' to see these rails stretchin' into distance, knowin' they hook up an ocean on both ends, and tie a thousand towns together in between. Makes a man realize he's part of a country that's bigger than the West."

"To swipe an expression from Barb-wire Barney that Barb-wire Barney swiped from me," the doctor said, "the steel trail represents the rolling tide of progress. It's bringing the East to the West, and the West to the East. As I see it, they'll both benefit. The West can refresh the East on its own frontier tradition it's too fast forgetting.

And it can send the East beefsteak by the trainload!"

"The East can send us two things equally important," Lige remarked. "The first is, law. The law that's put down in books and been tried out through the years with the purpose of makin' life safer and happier. Not rich man's law. Every man's law. It's somethin' we've always meant to have in the West, but just never got around to it, mostly because, I reckon, we've had to spend all our time chasin' cows. That brings me to the other item the East can send the West —barb wire by the trainload!"

"I've been wondering if you were going to get around to that," the doctor said. "You

know I was with your father when he ordered the first carload that was ever sent out of the factory in De Kalb."

"Barney's been tellin' me about that."

"You want me to start in where Barney left off?"

"Now's as good a time as any, I reckon," Lige said tightly. "Let's hear it, Doc. Can you name the man?"

"I could once."

"What do you mean by that?"

"He's dead now."

"Dead?"

"I killed him."

"Al Ochs!" Lige bit the word off harshly.

"Al Ochs," the doctor echoed.

"Been wondering about him," Lige said, "ever since the night you tangled with him at the Crystal Palace. Yeah, he'd be the logical one all right. He's been with Deuce from the first. But I never could get any proof on him. How'd you do it, Doc?"

The doctor spoke about his stop off at St. Joseph, Missouri, about the .44 lead and Mexican gold clues, and about the "big trouble" that Open-range Carson himself had foreshadowed.

"There were three reasons I came West," he concluded. "Your father was one of them. Barb-wire Barney was another."

The finality in the doctor's voice caused Lige to ask, "Didn't you say *three* reasons, Doc?"

The doctor was looking straight ahead as he rode. "The third," he said, "is a highly personal reason. No point in going into it now. It concerned a lot of whiskey and the Ides of March. . . . But here's one you can answer, my friend. I was not only on the spot when your father ordered the first carload of barbed wire. I was there when your trainload order came in—and when it was cancelled."

Lige's voice was harsh. "You've been around here long enough now, haven't you, Doc, to get some glimmer of why it was cancelled?" The first carload I never strung up because my moss-backed neighbors talked me out of it. If one fenced, they'd all have to fence, they claimed, with unnecessary expense to everybody. But I grew up in my thinking, Doc. I began to see that barb wire was not only needful, it was inevitable. So I put in my trainload order. What happened then was that Deuce Le Deux—and Chilcott, though I didn't know it at the time—declared a war of extermination on the *Tres Pinos* brand. They killed my cattle, they burned my forage, they killed off and scared away some of my men. Even then I would have kept on fighting them. But they managed to rouse the whole basin against me—all the other ranchers. I had notes outstanding on the *Tres Pinos*. The ranchers ganged up, served an ultimatum. If I brought barb wire to Sweetgrass Basin, they'd buy up my notes, force payment on the line. In other words ruin me, because with the losses I'd been having, the expense on the wire and all, I couldn't pay on the line and they knew it. They had me dead to rights, Doc. I had to lose the ranch or cancel the order. I canceled the order."

Their horses had topped the rise now. Ahead the doctor saw lights that were not caused by moon glimmer or straight steel rails. They were moving lights, blobs of yellow in the night, that resolved themselves into lanterns. Men working cattle, was the doctor's first thought.

BUT when he rode closer he saw that was not it at all. The men were laying a sidetrack along the main line of the railroad. The work was proceeding with furious energy. The switch was already in, and the rails were being laid down across the prairie. It was an emergency job, the doctor observed, with a minimum amount of roadbed grading, the ties for the most part being put down directly on the grassland floor.

The doctor turned inquiring eyes to Lige Carson.

"I put in another order, Doc," Lige made laconic explanation. "I've got a trainload of barb wire rollin' in tomorrow."

The doctor stared. "But you couldn't get away with it before. How can you expect to now?"

"I've made certain plans," Lige said bleakly.

Lige's men stopped off here to help with the track laying. The doctor and Lige rode on, turning away from the railroad. The stirring, hopeful sound of sledge steel against spikes faded in their ears. They rode until they reached ranch headquarters.

White under the moon the ranchhouse sprawled, low and rambling, with a roof of Mexican tile, and adobe walls bastioned

like those of a mission church. Framing the house on two sides, a windbreak of feathery salt-cedar made a jet smudge in the night. To the front, as black under the moon as the house was white, three pine trees reared, like serrated minarets.

The pines were a little out of their altitude, but through the years they had defied the hostility of nature, clinging to life with a tenacity that was at once a symbol of promise and a constant reminder to Lige of the fortitude of his pioneer father.

Under the shadow of the pines Lige stepped from saddle, and the doctor wearily followed suit. Lige had recently sunk a deep well on the place and installed a mail-order windmill that pumped water to a storage tank near the pole corrals. From the tank he had water flumed to a wooden horse trough in the ranchyard. While Lige and the doctor stretched their legs, the horses dipped their noses in the trough and drank noisely.

The doctor looked about with interest. "So this is the *Tres Pinos* ranchhouse?"

It seemed an obvious thing to say, considering he had been here a few times before. Lige regarded the doctor with some speculation. His hand waved out. "Here's the three pines, Doc, that give my brand its name. The Old Man set out a hundred trees before he even built the house. These were the only ones that survived the first winter."

The doctor had been exercising himself, moving aimlessly it seemed. He paused with Lige between himself and the water trough. He was very close, close enough to have touched Lige without unbending his arm. With his eyes still on the pines, he said in an absent-minded way. "I guess this settles it—the *Tres Pinos* headquarters, yes."

Lige stirred restlessly. "Where the hell else could it be?"

"I thought maybe the Devil's Pasture," the doctor told him.

He didn't raise his voice. He gave emphasis to his words in a more dramatic way. With the speed of a striking rattler, his hands lifted. He slapped Lige across the cheeks; stuck out his foot, pushed, and tripped him. Lige fell backwards into the water trough.

He climbed out dripping, a slow, wry smile on his face. All he said at first was, "I see you've been in the West long enough to learn our strenuous brand of humor, Doc."

The doctor didn't answer, and Lige said again, in a low voice, "That isn't all you've learned either. Where'd I slip up, Doc? When did you first learn the truth about me? There've been plenty of folks who have guessed and guessed wrong that the Indigo Kid is Deuce Le Deux; but far as I know you're the only one who's really called the turn. I'd admire to know, Doc, when did you figure it out that the bandit in the blue mask, the scourge of the rangeland, is Lige Carson?"

Subdued excitement tremored in the doctor's voice. "In town tonight," he said, "when you slapped and splashed me back to consciousness after dragging me from the fire. It was the same technique the Indigo Kid used on me twice before."

Lige Carson's low laugh sounded. He slapped at his wet clothes. "I reckon this pays off for that time I ducked you at the Patch, the night you operated on Barney. You weren't really needin' it that time, were you, Doc?"

The doctor laughed too, and felt more emotional release than had come to him since he left De Kalb. "No," he said, "I didn't need it that time. I hadn't been drunk for a week. As a matter of fact, after that first night, a lot of it was pretense. I could learn more that way. People are careless about talking in front of a drunk."

"They won't be careless around you any more—Doctor Death." Lige reached out his hand. "Let me see that watch of yours." The doctor lifted it from his sagging pocket. It slipped through Lige's hand and dropped on his booted toe. "Wow!" he exclaimed, as he bent to pick it up. "Feels like lead."

"Ought to." The doctor chuckled. "Lead's what's in it. The works flew out the time I first clopped Hymie Wert. So I filled the case with melted lead."

"First thing tmorrow," Lige said admiringly. "I'll have the boys start on your six-gun and Winchester education. You'll be Doctor Death up to a thousand yards!"

"I'll have to go some to develop as scary a reputation as yours."

Lige nodded somberly. "Some of my reputation as the Indigo Kid is deserved. But the worst of the stories you've heard, the 'shoot 'em down from behind, wrap 'em in

barb wire and roll 'em down a hill' stuff—Deuce Le Deux is responsible. Hiding behind a blue mask, it wasn't hard for him to terrorize the little fellows, the nesters and two-bit ranchers, and let the blame go to the Indigo Kid."

"You'll be glad to know," the doctor said, "There was one person he didn't fool."

"Who's that?"

"Myrna Chilcott. She told me herself she didn't think you were as bad as you were painted. I disagreed with her at the time, thinking you had murdered Barney. She even said she'd like to meet you. There was a flush on her cheeks and a mist in her eyes when she said it!"

Lige Carson was non-committal. "Myrna always was romantic," he said.

"She thinks a lot of you, Lige. With you and her father gunning at each other across the barb wire, what's the girl to do?"

"I don't know," Lige said flatly. "It'll be the first real decision she was ever called on to make. She's been pretty much the rangeland princess. . . . Shall we go in and see Barney now?"

As they turned toward the house, the doctor heard a slight noise behind him. He turned, saw two men step out from the shadows of the pines. They came close. One of them was that "ornery-lookin' grizzly" Jim Juniper. The other was his silent Indian partner, Charlie the Ute.

"You know these boys, Doc," Lige Carson said. "They safe-conducted you to the Devil's Pasture, remember?"

"Will I ever forget! . . . You mean to say they've been standing there all this time?"

Lige nodded. "I'm takin' no chances. The big trouble the Old Man talked about to you in De Kalb is buildin' to a high bullet-whine peak tomorrow when my trainload of barb wire comes in. I've emptied the Devil's Pasture, Doc. My whole range is covered." Lige rested a hand on the shoulders of both his Blue Blazers. "Just our good luck, Doc, that it was this pair on guard here. A couple of the more excitable boys in my string would have plugged you when you pushed me in the water."

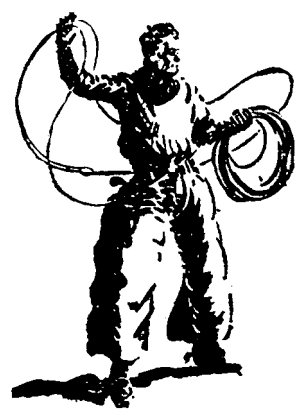
"I'm still wondering about this 'outlaw string' of yours," the doctor said.

"We'll go into it more later, but just in brief, I organized the Blue Blazers when abuses in the basin got so raw that men were being gunned off their holdin's as an ordinary matter of course. The blue mask wasn't just a pose. I had to disguise myself if I wanted to keep on ranchin' as Lige Carson. It kept me some busy playin' both games. That's why I never got around to talkin' this out with you before. Summin' it up, we met pressure with so much pressure that things have quieted down a lot from how they were. We gave those gunnies plenty to worry about on their own side the fence. We rustled cows till hell wouldn't have it, we stuck up poker games, lifted pay-roll cash, and even on one occasion robbed what passed for the Gunsight Bank. But in every case it was to get back value for value to repay some poor sodbuster for losses unjustly sustained."

"But you didn't have to play Robin Hood to the little fellows," the doctor said, feeling Lige out. "You're one of the big augers around here."

"Far as that goes, it was to my own advantage," Lige declared. "The main pressure play of the Deuce Chilcott combine was to keep barb wire out of the basin. Long as they could do that they had a chance eventually of tyin' everything up in a Deuce-Chilcott knot. All the other big ranchers more or less silently backed them on that, claimin' barb wire was only for the little fellow. But Barney convinced me I could profit by it too."

"The fact remains," the doctor insisted,



"you didn't have to identify yourself as completely with the little fellow as you have."

"Shucks, Doc; there's no law says a big rancher has to be a range-hog and killer. It rubbed me wild when I saw the way these new settlers were bein' pushed around.

They'd come out here on the railroad to take up land they'd bought in good faith. I believe in democracy, don't you, Doc? I could have hired me a bunch of gunmen and paid 'em fightin' wages for the rest of my life and I reckon I could have held my own against Chilcott's gunners. But what kind of life is that to have gunmen for neighbors, and have to go gun-belted all the time yourself just to keep alive? No, I figured I'd smash the rule of the dictators in Sweetgrass Basin once and for all. So I worked out this Blue Blazer business. Wait till you get to know my Blue Blazers, Doc. Toughest fightin' men you'll find in the West."

"You're tellin' me? I met some of them, remember? You might say I've got a knifing acquaintance with them. You must have a pay-roll like the United States army's."

"Doc, there's not a paid gunner in the bunch!"

"Then who are they?" the doctor gasped.

LIGE looked at Jim Juniper. "Tell him, fella."

"They're men with a grievance," Jim said fiercely. "The kind of men that rare up on their hind legs and punch back when they're pushed around too much. Sod-busters and two-bit ranchers, the bulk of 'em. And their sons and hired hands that in one way or another have been under the lash in Sweetgrass Basin."

"Honest men all," the doctor echoed.

"Wouldn't go so fer's to say that," Jim Juniper came back. "Not in your eastern meanin' of the words, some of 'em ain't honest. There's a few ex-hoss thieves among us; a few Indians like Charlie the Ute here, slipped off the reservations where they got tired livin' like monkeys in a cage; a few Mexicans on this side the Border for their health; and a sprinklin' of genuine, double-distilled longriders come down the owl-hoot trail. You know, contrary to eastern opinion, an owl-hooter ain't necessarily a back-knifer and a skunk."

Lige Carson nodded. "There's reasons and reasons why a man forsakes the company of his more conventional fellows. And sometimes the reasons are all to his favor. Take Jim here; he's a hooter from away back. His picture's still on more reward posters than he likes to remember. He's wanted by the law—but its the kind of law that Deuce and Chilcott make."

"Yeah," Jim Juniper snorted. "I couldn't stand it. I ducked out on that kind of law from a place in Montana thirty years ago. Since then I been makin' my own law."

"Come on," Lige said. "We'll all go in the house and make some more of it. We'll hold a war parley." He looked at the doctor. "Barb-wire Barney's in there, with Carolina Gilpin and Frijole both takin' care of him."

The doctor's face brightened. "He couldn't be in better hands."

They moved on. Before they reached the low veranda, Charlie the Ute cupped his hand to his ear and uttered one word, "Hear!"

They stopped, listening. Faintly, wafted over the range, they could hear a drumming. It grew louder, closer.

They all walked back to the water trough and waited. Charlie the Ute's guttural voice sounded. "Somebody come so fast—kill horse mebbe."

While they waited, the rider shaped up through the night. The drumming increased to close hoof thunder as a bronc hauled to a stop in a snorting lather. The slim rider was curiously humped in saddle. He pitched sideways off the horse, literally falling into Lige Carson's hands. Lige was already wet from his ducking in the trough, so at first he didn't feel the blood that soaked the rider's clothes.

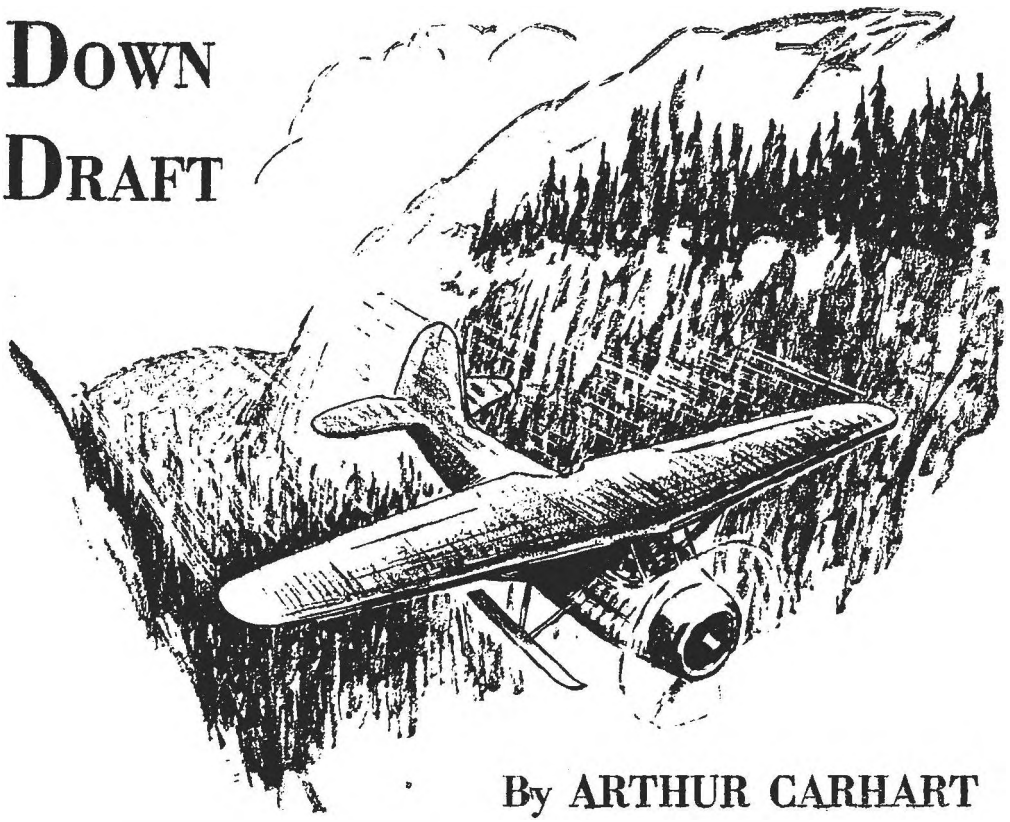
But then he saw it on his own hands, black in the moonlight. "Eddie," he said in alarm, "you've been shot!"

The boy—he wasn't much more than that—lifted his head. The doctor, with a little pang he scarcely could account for, recognized this hard-breathing rider for the tow-haired youngster he had pinked with his knife at Devil's Pasture. Carolina Gilpin's brother—the one who hadn't died. The doctor started forward to offer what help he could. But Eddy Gilpin pushed him away.

"Indigo, listen," he gasped. "It's leaked out! Deuce knows about our barb-wire comin' in tomorrow. And listen . . . him and his pack, they're on the way out here. You got to do somethin' quick!"

(*To be concluded in the next* SHORT STORIES)

DOWN DRAFT



By ARTHUR CARHART

CHIEF CLEERY was at the dumpy little railway station checking on a shipment of high-test gasoline that should have come but hadn't, when he received the telegram. He read it, could not believe it, read it again, then started toward Amonton's Main Street, methodically cursing the stupidity of some people.

A blue and silver plane sloped in from the wintry sky, circled Amonton, then side slipped in toward the makeshift airport on a sagebrush flat near the edge of the small mountain town. The Chief turned and hurried to the air field.

A tall youngster, with slightly curly, blond hair, was spreading a tarpaulin over the engine of the little plane as the Chief approached. The youngster said "hello" and his blue eyes gave Chief Cleery a hostile glance. Then he turned back to anchoring the tarp.

"You got the wire, didn't you?" Johnny Bridges tossed the question over his shoulder.

"I got the wire," said the Chief. "I couldn't believe it. It says you got the contract to fly the elk census here."

"I had low bid," said Johnny Bridges. "I can pay the balance I owe on this plane with what I'll get out of this job. Get my debts paid before I go to the Army. You're not sore are you, Chief?"

"Not sore," said the Chief. "I'm amazed."

"Just because you're the one who's always piloted the plane on the Game and Fish Department's elk count is no sign you can keep on forever doing it." Johnny yanked a knot on the lash rope holding the shrouding tarp.

The Chief started a hot reply, bit it back, and walked toward the shed hangar where his own crimson plane was housed. If he stayed to talk to Johnny Bridges, they'd get into a row. The Chief entered the cold, rough-boarded hangar and lit a cigarette.

The Plane Has to Have Soup and the Pilot Savvy

He had to figure some way to persuade Johnny Bridges not to fly that little blue and silver plane on the state elk census. He blew a puff of smoke at the nose of his crimson plane, and scowled. Kids were like that; headstrong and wilful.

He'd been bullheaded when he was a kid. He'd not be flying today if he hadn't been.

Born Thomas Porfirio Cleery, the Chief had run away from grade school near the close of the first World War in a vain attempt to join the Air Corps. He was eight years old then, and could not qualify. At eighteen he was traveling with a barnstorming aerial circus. At twenty-eight he had started a flying school in the valley over the mountains to the south. The field and equipment may have been haywire, but the instruction was iron-clad.

HE HAD picked up the name of Chief before he left the flying circus. Someone had tagged that title on him when they learned Comanche Indian blood ran in his veins; a good redskin heritage along with a touch of Spanish, Irish and Yankee ancestry. The Indian strain showed in his high-arched nose. And something steady in his eyes. It was revealed in the way his leathery skin clung to the bones of his face, in his lean body, in the way he walked.

As he saw the second World War coming, the Chief had tried to get into it. He was informed he was too old. In a spirit of revolt he had taken his plane over the Cristos that day, dodging peaks, rifling through passes, surging into the updrafts, plunging through the down drafts, riding the winds until anger passed. He knew the ways of the eagles soaring through turbulent mountain winds, and this was part of the lore imparted to those youngsters who came to his school that now trained men for war combat. Those who finished the course under Chief Cleery passed through something resembling the old Indian ordeals that young bucks endured before they became warrior braves. Chief Cleery's students either hated his guts or worshiped him.

Johnny Bridges had been one who hated. He had the makings of a superb flyer but he was restive as a colt. He had quit, a month before the end of his course, before he had had that last man-testing series of flights, through the torn winds of the mountains.

Some fool had signed a contract with Johnny Bridges for the elk census in the Amonton district; the toughest, most hazardous job of flying that could be encountered anywhere. The kid simply wasn't seasoned enough to tackle the job. The kid was taking a small handbag from the cabin of his plane when the Chief walked out from the hangar.

"I'd like to talk to you, Johnny," said the Chief.

"Don't start lecturing," said the kid. "I'm not in your flying school any more."

"I remember that," said the Chief. "I'm dead serious, son. Neither you nor that plane can buck the down drafts in this part of the Rockies. The plane hasn't enough soup and you haven't enough savvy."

"Thanks a lot for the advice," said Johnny. "But I've signed a contract to do the job. You don't mind my carrying out the contract, do you, Chief?"

"Those winds in the mountains don't know about any contract, kid," the Chief said, as Johnny swung away toward town.

The Chief went back to the hangar, and warmed up the engine on his crimson plane. He checked the small blocks under the ski runners of the craft. That was another thing Johnny Bridges didn't have; ski runners instead of wheels. It wouldn't matter down at the airport where the snow was only an inch or two deep, but up in the hills there were at least three feet of snow, crusted, and a death trap for any plane with wheels that tried to land. The Chief shut off the engine, closed the hangar and headed toward town. He decided to talk to Doc Jordan about this.

Doc was game warden of the district. He would be the observer in the plane making the elk count. Last year and the year before, Doc had ridden with the Chief. Doc knew how a pilot had to get right down on the tree tops to drive elk out of timber. They wouldn't move out where they could be counted unless a plane came low. And if a plane got that low up there around Pinnacle Ridge where air torrents poured across into the flats of Pole Park, the ship and its occupants were in high danger. Maybe Doc, who knew this business, could find a way to sidetrack young Johnny.

But Doc Jordan shook his grayish head and said, "I can't do a thing about it, Chief. I know—it's no job for anyone who hasn't mountain savvy. There's some state regulation that forces the Game Department to take the low bid on any job. Johnny was low."

"But you ought to be able to telephone someone in the Department and explain that—" began the Chief.

"I couldn't explain a thing," said Doc hotly. "There's a new man, a curly-headed know-it-all in charge, who believes he's the right hand of godalmighty. All that would come out of it would be a hell of a bawling out. I know that."

"You're going to ride on that count with Johnny?"

"Orders," said Doc. "Under this new guy, it's all orders. You follow orders—or resign. That's the way she's run now, Chief."

Doc's hand was shaking a little as he lit his pipe. He was a slight, wiry, darkish man; the nerviest observer Chief Cleery had had on previous elk counts. Doc knew the technic of airplane counts on elk. Knew about elk; how they could be spooked out of timber by a plane raking the tree tops, while deer would not leave cover. Doc was worried, too; because he knew the trouble Johnny Bridges might get into trying to drag right down against the ridges where the wind currents boiled.

"I guess this job's got to be done," said Doc slowly. "Some of the ranchers say there's too many game animals. Sportsmen are hollering as loud that there aren't enough elk on the range. This is the last count, sure, before the end of the war. Guess I've got to ride it out with Johnny."

"Look, Doc," said the Chief, "if you're uneasy about this, I'll ride as observer."

Doc looked up out of small, brown eyes, and said, "I've got orders to ride with Johnny, whether I'm uneasy or not."

THE door to Doc's cottage opened and Sue Jordan entered. She halted, and Chief saw Johnny Bridges directly behind her. Sue was dark, almost as tall as Johnny; they made a sightly couple, framed there in the doorway.

"Looks like you two were holding a post-mortem on this flying job," said Johnny thinly. "Better wait until it's finished, hadn't you?"

"Son," said Chief, "I'm just trying to keep you from getting into trouble. You're one of the best prospective flyers I ever trained—but you didn't finish. You haven't had that mountain training. Your plane hasn't ski runners on it; wheels are poison if you have to land in high country snow. Some of the worst down drafts in the mountains are on the east side of Pinnacle Ridge and that's where the Pole Park elk will be hiding so you'll have to skim the timber to put them into the open."

"Yaah," breathed Johnny, "I've heard about down drafts."

The Chief smothered a retort, because he always was lecturing his students about that wind trap found on the east side of most mountain ridges. He got up slowly and said, "I'll be going. I wish you'd listen, son."

Outside he looked toward the Pole Park and Pinnacle Ridge country. The sky was cloudless; metallic blue. But the roar of high country winds came in a steady growl from the far heights. In January the weather sometimes held like this for days, wind pouring in tumbled torrents over peaks and parks. A storm might follow, but for days it might merely blow.

Chief was at the airport next morning when Johnny and Doc took off. Sue Jordan had brought them out in the warden's car and she saw Chief at the hangar; swung over there to pick him up for the short ride back to town.

"They're flying Carter Creek ranges today," Sue told the Chief after he had asked a question.

"Not bad there," said the Chief. "The tough stretch is Pinnacle Ridge. With that flat stretch of Pole Park east of the ridge, there seems to be an up draft on the far side that sucks the air down. It's bad."

"You shouldn't have said what you did to Johnny," said Sue earnestly.

The Chief turned on the car seat, stared, and asked, "Why?"

"You think Johnny despises you," she said seriously. "He acts that way. But he thinks you're the most wonderful flyer that ever lived. You simply undermined his confidence when you told him he couldn't handle the plane on an elk count."

"I hope I undermined it enough," said the Chief dryly.

"All you did was to make him more determined than ever to go through with it, and make him uncertain about his ability to do it. He'll get up there, get in trouble, and do something wrong. Chief, I'm worried!"

"There's two of us in the same boat." He saw the haziness of tears starting, reached a hand to pat her shoulder, and said, "I meant it when I said the kid is one of the best potential flyers I ever had. But he's bullheaded—as bullheaded as I was at his age. Maybe he'll come through."

The silver and blue plane came in that night. Chief was there at the hangar to see it drop to a perfect landing. The shipment of high-test gas the Chief needed to get back over the Divide had not arrived and he'd have to have it before he started on his way back to the school.

The wind continued to roar under a blue sky the next morning. Chief saw the blue and silver plane wing out. It headed toward the elk ranges that lay around Pole Park.

The train from the east was late, but it carried the shipment of gas. Chief got the local trucker to cart the gas cans to the field. There still was time, after he filled the tank of the crimson plane, to cross the Divide, and be that far on his way back to his school in the valley. Hal Turner was in charge but it wasn't quite the same with the Chief absent.

The Chief went to the hotel, packed his kit bag, but delayed checking out. He kept straining to hear the solid shiver in the air that would announce the return of Johnny and Doc. He finally threw his kit bag back on the bed and walked out to the field.

Dusk was in the purple shadows where pine forests blotched the snowy hills. The sun set in a clear pool of flame orange. The sound of a motor hurried him to the door. It was the warden's car, driven by Sue, and she came on a run when she saw the Chief.

"They've not come in, Chief." Her voice caught.

"There's still light," he said. "They may have stayed out hoping to finish the count in that section all in one day."

"It isn't that," she stated. Her slim hands began to twist inside driving gloves. "Chief, after what you said about the risk, I'm—"

Tears came. He tried to soothe her. She whirled as the sound of an exhaust began drumming in the air. But it wasn't Johnny's plane; it was the section car on the railway sputtering in with chilled men clinging to it.

Darkness was coming swiftly. A first star twinkled. A coyote began singing across the river. That eerie voice and the soft quarreling chatter of the ice-fringed river were the only sounds after the section car passed.

"If he got into one of those down drafts—"

"Chief, they've crashed!" Sue's voice trembled. He felt the shaking of her hands as she caught his arm.

"I've got to know if—" He left the sentence unfinished as he turned to haul back the doors of the shed hangar.

Sue helped him shove out the plane. Just before he climbed in to start the engine, he heard the coyote yammer rise from across the river. It was a lonely sound in the new night. Then the racket of the motor drowned all other sound. Sue had clambered into the plane beside him. He started to order her out, then said nothing as she fastened the safety belt.

The ghostly runway that had been dragged out the sage, lay like a strip of white cloth before them. The ski runners bounced over little mounds and depressions; then they were riding the air.

Fields lay like white cement aprons under the darkening sky. From even a little height, they looked smooth and flat. That was an illusion because there were no shadows.

The winds in the higher levels poured in a steady, hard-thrusting stream. The freezing cold stabbed through crevices in the little two-seater cabin. They entered a stretch where the plane bucked like a frantic horse. They hit a pocket where the plane dropped two hundred feet. The propeller caught in the first sound air and the plane bored upward.

There was something the CAA didn't know; something the Chief had kept to himself. He had built up the power in this engine beyond its allowed rating. He had to have that overpower margin in this kind

of flying. That was another point where the little silver and blue plane was short.

He saw the serrated crest of Pinnacle Ridge and the spread of white on the meadows of Pole Park beyond it as he turned to Sue and shouted, "This is going to be rough. We've got to go right down over the ridge."

As he side-slipped the plane down to the west side of Pinnacle Ridge, the up draft tossed them toward the ragged crest. Then the down draft hit.

They were falling, falling, falling—

The black mass of forest swept underneath; pine stands reaching a thousand spires to catch at the plane's wings. The Chief was flying more by instinct than calculation. He had met down drafts at other points, but this had a force that was fabulous. The flats of Pole Park came flying at them. The Chief straightened out and they skimmed the meadows a hundred feet above the snow.

Maybe, thought the Chief, he had prayed a little as they came shearing down that slope. Not prayers such as are printed in books or intoned from pulpits, but an unvoiced appeal to wind gods—gods he knew.

He turned the plane to traverse the edge of the timber along the west side of the white-blanketed meadows. He would have missed the tiny spot of fire in the timber if Sue hadn't been along. Her cry, her pointing, headed them toward that little flame.

One figure, only one, raced out into the open, a tiny form against the white of the snow. They could see arms waving. Then they hurtled by.

"Aren't you landing?" Sue's shout came thinly through the wind racket. She tugged at his sleeve until it threw the plane off course.

"Not without daylight!" There was no chance to explain; maybe she would understand the impossibility of putting down on the meadows without light enough to show shadows of half-buried rocks, the tip of gullies, the bumps of little mounded earth. It would be risky enough to land in full daylight.

"Which one came out of the timber?" Sue asked, as the engine shut off after they had taxied to the hangar at the Amonton field.

"I can't say," said the Chief soberly. He wondered what might be in the girl's thoughts. Was she hoping it was her father who had signaled the plane—or Johnny?

They got into the warden's car and Sue drove to the forest ranger station. There were maps there, and the Chief pointed to the spot where the fire had blazed just inside the timber belt.

"No trail open back there," the ranger stated. "It's going to take a day in, and a day to come out. Skis—and we'll take a toboggan along in case—one of them is injured."

After he had sat an hour at Doc Jordan's, watching Sue stare out of the window into the night, after he had tried to get her to talk and she just sat, not hearing his words, Chief went to the hotel. The innkeeper had to speak to him twice before he understood; long distance had been calling all evening.

Chief still was thinking of that speck of fire in the mountains, the one moving figure seen against the snow, when he heard the voice of Bourgett, the CAA man, coming over the wire.

"Where have you been?" demanded Bourgett. "I've had hell's own trouble getting hold of you and it's important. A Major Scott is here; will be here until tomorrow noon. There's an opening for you in the Army, Chief—if you get here tomorrow morning to sign up for the job, but I've got him to hold off a final decision until tomorrow noon. Come on in."

"Tell this Major Scott if I'm not over there by ten I'll not be in," said Chief.

"Don't talk foolish," said Bourgett. "I can't tell you what this job is over the phone. But it's good. You get in here. And if you can get hold of that young Johnny Bridges, tell him the area air commander wants him in here before tomorrow evening at nine. He's due to leave for training in the east on an Army transport at ten; tell the kid he's in the dog house if he misses this. See you tomorrow."

"Or at some later date," said the Chief, and hung up.

HE CLIMBED the stairs slowly. Someway, that meeting with Major Scott didn't seem so darned important; not so important as what lay out there in Pole Park. Later he reasoned more deeply; the

ranger and the rescue party would get Johnny and Doc out. The kid had gone bullheaded into his own trouble. Let him get out of it.

Or had he done just that? Was what Sue had said the truth; that the Chief's own talk had undermined the kid's confidence? No way of being sure.

What pea-brained sort of an official had set this up, anyway? Someone that old Doc had said believed he was the right hand of godalmighty. Chief paced. Later he was tramping the street as dawn came.

A rescue party already was forming at the ranger's house. Sue was there, clad in field clothes, carrying skis.

"Call it off," said the Chief, shortly. "All I need is a plane and a pair of snowshoes. After I set down in Pole Park, one of the party will have to mush out on the webs. The other two can come in my plane. If my plane isn't in here before eleven, start out with a couple of toboggans. I'll be up there, too."

At the field he warmed the plane. Sue had driven him to the air field. He blocked her request to go along before she made it.

"That plane's a two-person job," he said. "As it is, someone's got to come back on foot. You'd make it two who would have to mush out. I've got to make this ride alone."

The ski runners, skimmed the light snow, the wings breasted the chilly air, and he swung the machine into the low-slanted sun flood of early morning. In that direction rose the crest of the Divide; beyond it he could meet Major Scott. For several moments, the Chief traveled in that direction. Then he veered toward the slopes of Pinnacle Ridge.

He hit the race-ways of air over the ridge and rode the up-lift streams pouring over the top from the west. The plane was tossed up like a leaf. He felt the quick tug of the down draft on the east side. The pines smeared into a ragged carpet beneath him.

With all his skill, with all the power the little plane possessed, Chief Cleery threw into the down draft. There was no chance to fight it. Like a swimmer who rides a freshet, he had to go with it, using its push and by the power in the engine, going faster than the wind itself.

But the down draft was mastering him! The spires of the evergreens reached to tickle the wings. In an instant they would be tearing those wings.

This was what Johnny Bridges had hit; a force of which he often had been told but never could realize until it had thrown him to a crash.

With a desperate twist the Chief turned the plane into a canyon. The trees on the sides were above the wing tips. There were rock walls that loomed on either side. He was rifling down the straight gulch like a thrown dart.

He came out past portals like an eagle swooping. He hit the up-curling edge of the down draft. The plane bucked into the air, rising a hundred feet in one frantic leap.

The Chief smiled. He'd made it.

THE white spread of Pole Park lay all around. He could see the light shadows of snow-covered rocks brushed out over the snow. There were dimples of shadows on the westerly side of little hummocks. And there were smooth stretches, in flat white where lay safe landing.

It was Johnny Bridges who stood in the open as The Chief skidded his crimson plane to a stop just out from where the twisted wreckage of the silver and blue ship hung on a furry thicket of lodgepole pines. There was a moment when the Chief stood gravely waiting for Johnny to speak. A lot depended on what was said.

"You were right, Chief," said Johnny. "Down draft got me. I didn't have the soup in my plane to pull out nor the savvy of mountain flying."

There was no good reason to rub it in. The Chief nodded and asked, "What about Doc?"

"His leg is hurt. Can't stand on it. Wrenched badly, or a small break. You've come to take him out?"

The Chief pondered a moment. He realized now, that he had carried a hazy hope that Doc could use the snowshoes; that he and Johnny could both fly out, and on to the city, answering their calls to service beyond the Divide."

"I'm snowshoeing out," said the Chief finally. "You're taking Doc out in my plane."

He saw uncertainty leap into the kid's eyes. Sue had been correct. Johnny's confidence had been undermined. The crack-

up in the pines had finished that job.

"There's down drafts as you go out of this park," said Johnny, and his hands began to grip.

"Sure," said the Chief. "You know where they prowl now. Sure there's down drafts."

"I can't—risk it!"

"Son," said Chief Cleery, and he laid his hand on the kid's shoulder, "every man's got to learn for himself, more or less. You've found out the hard way. All right. Now you know. Remember what you've learned when you're flying hilly country in combat. The winds are your friends if you'll play on their side. If you know how to meet them and ride them through. Just remember that. When there's some enemy pilot on your tail, and there's a ridge below, there's a down draft there that's your friend—and his destruction. Take him into it. He'll probably not pull out but you will, now."

Johnny shook his head and said, "I cracked once, and I'll do it again if I try to take your plane out of here."

"Listen," said the Chief, "you're going to fly that plane in with Doc. You're due to catch the noon train to the city. You're riding an Army transport out tonight for advanced training. And remember, son, every time you're in the clouds, there's part of the old Chief riding with you."

Johnny turned toward the crest of Pinnacle Ridge where the winds curled over and swooped into the flats of the Park. Chief saw the tight, drawn corners of Johnny's lips.

The kid had to fly out of here or he'd never recapture confidence.

DOC JORDAN came hobbling, using a forked stick as a crutch. They helped him into the plane. Old Doc's face was sweat beaded, his lips tightly clamped, his eyes closed as he sat there, letting the pain dull. Chief took the snowshoes out of the cabin and fitted the harness over his shoe pacs.

"Listen, Chief, I can't risk—" began Johnny.

"You go to hell," said the Chief and then started away.

He had gone but a little way when he heard the bursting roar of the engine. He paused to see it lift gracefully into the air; watched it circle for altitude. He saw it sweep high over the crest of Pinnacle Ridge to the west and disappear. He looked back toward the wrecked plane. It wasn't too badly damaged for salvage. After he finished the elk census, he could rig a wind sled and come in here over the snow to salvage much of that plane; it could serve other young flyers at the school.

He had plodded to a point near the lower end of the flats and the encircling ridges of the park rose before him when he heard the voice of the plane again. He turned in surprise.

The fleck of crimson came floating over the ridge to the west. He saw the fangs of the down draft catch it and shake it fiercely. He saw the deft swoop of the plane as it began that fearful downward plunge. He held his breath; letting it out in a gusty sigh as the plane straightened out over the park and came skimming toward him.

Johnny Bridges was grinning as he opened the door for the Chief. His blue eyes were dancing, the cocky kid again.

"No time to lose," said Johnny. "Let's go."

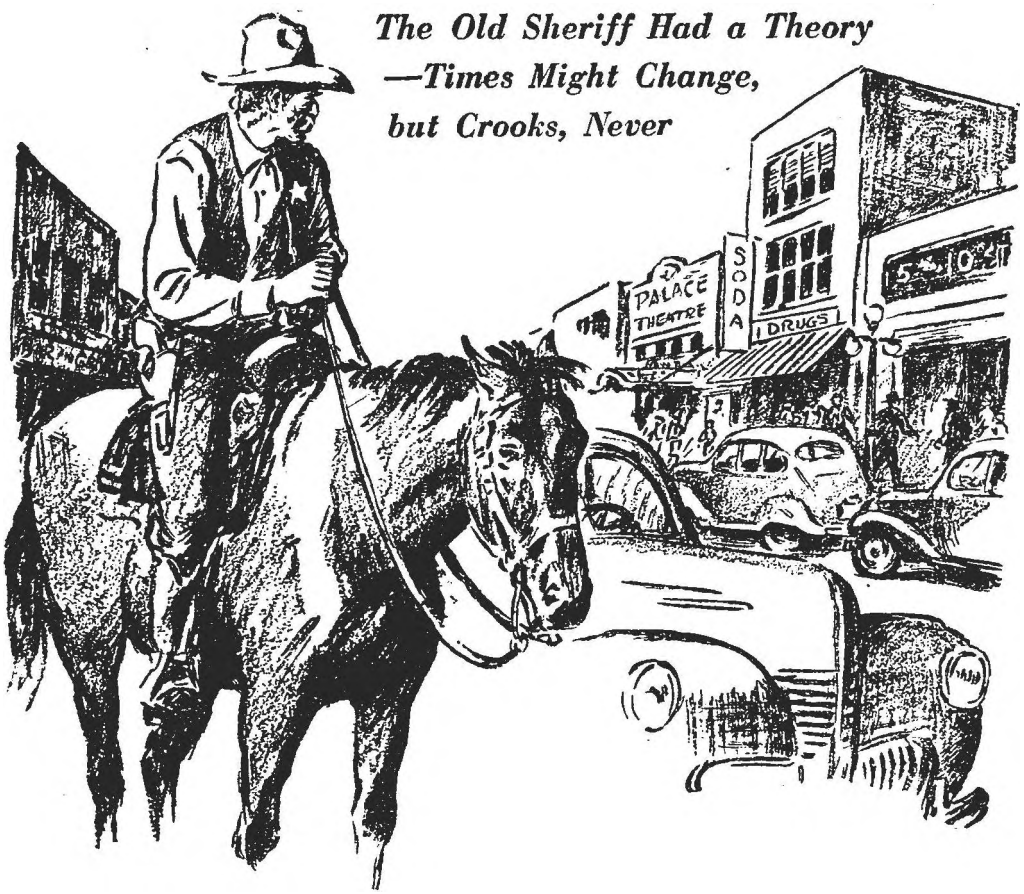
They hit a down draft again over the ridge, and rode it. Chief watched, knowing he need say no word. Something big, and spongy and full of pride bunched up in Chief Cleery.

Sue waited at the field, reporting her father already had had a doctor's care. A bad sprain in the knee might take days to heal, but that was all.

"You're due in the city to see some army officer named Scott," said Johnny. "You'll have to ride alone over the divide. I've got time to catch the train, Chief. Let's go."

"You go," said the Chief. "I don't." The kid looked at him quizzically. "I'm too old a flyer to learn new tricks," said the Chief thoughtfully, "but I'm still good for teaching young flyers old ones. I'll be riding with you, Johnny, over there; with every one of my kids who fly in battle."

The Chief suddenly felt as though he was caught in a down draft of his own. He'd ride it through. He knew the how and he knew where it would take him. There was work here. The elk census to finish, winds to ride, and young eagles to train to follow Johnny Bridges into the skies.



The Old Sheriff Had a Theory —Times Might Change, but Crooks, Never

BREATH OF LIFE

By WALTER C. BROWN

Author of "The Hungry Mandarin," etc.

SHERIFF CLEM WARNER of Brackett County had worn the silver star since away back near the turn of the century. Old Clem had seen many changes—the coming of the railroad, the automobile, the radio, the airplane. He'd watched Slaterton, the county seat, develop from a crossroads store into a tidy town.

The war only increased the rate of change. Right after Pearl Harbor the company that owned the old copper mine on Saddletop Mountain landed a big government contract, and things began to hum. Almost overnight the population of Brackett County doubled.

About the only thing that didn't change was Clem Warner. The county had bought him an official car, but Clem still made his rounds on a big bony sorrel, just like the old days when he was range boss for the Lazy Loop outfit. He'd ride through the crowded streets of Slaterton, a lean, ramrod figure with frosty blue eyes and a bristling white mustache, throwing sour looks at the hooting, honking tangle of autos. Old Clem hated change, he hated noise, and he hated machinery.

But Pete Carter, Clem's deputy, did not share Clem's old-fashioned ideas. Pete had taken the State Police training course, and he talked the County Commissioners into buying the latest police equipment—a teletype, a short-wave radio, a micro-camera, a filing cabinet for fingerprints.

"Things change," Pete said. "We've got to move with the times."

"Things change, but people don't!" Old Clem snapped. "Crooks and killers ain't changed any in the forty years I been carryin' the star. Maybe my methods are old-fashioned, like you say, but they get results, and that's what counts."

Pete and Old Clem had endless arguments on the subject. Good-natured arguments, until the day Pete arrested Bill Vance for the murder of Ben Griscom, the bank messenger who drove up Saddletop every Friday afternoon with the mining company's payroll.

Griscom's car had been found halfway up the mountain road, with Ben slumped over the steering wheel, riddled with bullets, and the canvas sack of money gone.

"Don't be a danged fool, Pete," Old Clem barked. "I've known Bill Vance for some twenty-odd years. He's no thief—and he's no killer."

"His fingerprints were on the door of Ben's car," Pete said.

"He told you how they got there," Clem replied. "He met Ben on the road and stood talkin' to him for a minute."

"That's Vance's story," Pete said. "But he only told us that *after* he'd been arrested."

"Fingerprints!" Old Clem scoffed. "I suppose if you'd found my paw marks on the door, you'd have arrested *me!* Pete, I always knew somethin' like this'd come out of your foolin' around with all those new-fangled gadgets."

"Clem, I'm standing pat on the legal evidence," Pete said.

"And I'm standin' pat on my original statement that you're a danged fool," Old Clem shot back.

Nobody except Pete Carter had any idea that Clem believed Bill Vance was innocent. Everywhere there was talk about Vance's prospects in the coming trial, and Old Clem just stood around and listened, saying nothing.

BUT Pete knew Clem carried a paper with a list of names on it. Once in a while he'd see Clem cross off one of the names. And Pete knew that a certain visitor went on the quiet to Clem's frame cabin on Sweetwater Creek. A couple of times he caught a glimpse of a bone-white Stetson hat fading out on the back trail—the hat of Tex Corey the gambler.

"What's doing between you and Tex?" Pete asked. "Not taking him on as assistant deputy, are you?"

"I could do a lot worse," Clem replied. "Tex is a mighty handy man to know, Pete."

Then one day the bone-white Stetson came to the cabin on Sweetwater, but Tex wasn't under it. The hat was floating upside down in the lazy current. Old Clem fished it out of the water, took one look at its battered crown, and emptied his Colt into the air as a summons for help. Pete Carter and more than a dozen others came running.

"Something's happened to Tex," Clem said, showing them the hat. "We've got to make a search upstream."

Just beyond the footbridge at the Forks, they found Tex Corey's body, with his head all battered, stuffed into a ledge between two rocks.

"Clubbed!" Pete Carter said. "And dead as a doornail."

"Let's make sure of that," Clem said. "Anybody here got a broad-blade knife?"

One of the men handed over a hunting knife. Clem rubbed the blade on his sleeve, then knelt down and held it close to Tex Corey's nose.

Clem looked at the polished surface and then hopped up, all excited. "Look, boys, it's misted over! He's still breathin'. Quick—carry him back to my cabin! Somebody run for Doc Fentriss!"

They put Tex Corey on Clem's bed in the back room. Doc Fentriss arrived, and Clem cleared everybody else out of the room while Doc made his examination. In a few minutes Clem appeared, closing the door carefully behind him. He spoke in a cautious whisper.

"Tex is still breathin', boys, but that's about all. Doc says he can't save him, but there's a chance of revivin' him long enough to tell us who did it. Now everybody but Pete wait outside—Doc wants it quiet while he's workin'."

Clem drew Pete over to the window. "Pete, this links up direct with the Griscom killin'. Tex Corey's been helpin' me check up on a certain person. Tex must have turned up somethin' definite, and so he was ambushed on his way here to see me."

"That's not jury proof, Clem," Pete Carter

pointed out. "It's no good unless Tex Corey lives long enough to make a statement."

"I know that," Clem said.

"Who is it you've been watching?" Pete asked.

"I'll wait for Tex Corey to name him," Clem replied, and looked through the window at the gathering crowd outside, growing larger by the minute as the news spread. "But he's out there right now, Pete, hangin' around the edge of the crowd. Prayin', probably, for Tex to die with his mouth shut."

Then Doc Fentriss stuck his head out of the door and motioned to Clem. They whispered together, and Doc gave him a slip of paper before he closed the door again.

"It's a list of stuff Doc needs," Clem said to Pete. "Take Doc's car and rush this note over to Mrs. Fentriss. Tell her the main item is this ad—ad——"

"Adrenalin," Pete said. "That keeps the heart going."

"Hurry it up!" Clem urged. "We don't know how much longer Tex will hang on."

PETE CARTER raced off, and was back in a matter of minutes with the required articles. Clem snatched them from his arms and handed them in to Doc Fentriss, who had his coat off and his sleeves rolled up.

The crowd outside the cabin was still growing when Clem came out on the porch and held up his hand for silence.

"Boys, Doc Fentriss is tryin' to bring Tex around long enough to talk. I want two independent witnesses to stand in that room, so they can swear in court to what Tex says —if it works."

A dozen men pushed forward, and Clem picked out two, waving them toward the back room. "Pete," he said to his deputy, "I got a special job for you. Get on the outside edge of that crowd, and if anybody tries to sneak off, stop 'em."

Clem disappeared into the back room. The tension of the waiting crowd grew tighter and tighter as the minutes passed. Then Old Clem came out again, and this time he didn't have to hold up his hand for silence.

"Gillis!" he shouted. "Dan Gillis!"

As if by magic a lane opened up through the crowd, straight as an arrow, to a thick-shouldered, heavy-browed man loitering on the outer fringe.

"Come on, Gillis!" Clem roared. "You're wanted inside!"

Dan Gillis sprang backward, and a hasty circle widened around him as a gun appeared in his hand. "Damn you, Warner!" he snarled, and squeezed the trigger.

His bullet nicked the porch post beside Clem's head and chunked into the wall. The sound of Gillis' shot was smothered by the sharp bark of Clem's long-barreled Colt. With a yelping cry Gillis spun around and flattened out in the grass.

By the time Clem reached him, Gillis was sitting up, both hands clutched tightly over the flow of blood from his wound. "Get me a doctor!" he moaned. "Quick! I'm bleedin' to death!"

Old Clem looked at him with a face like granite. "You'll get a doctor, Gillis—*after* you've told us where you hid the payroll money you got by murderin' Ben Griscom! Now talk—and talk fast!"

And wracked by pain and panic, Dan Gillis talked—and talked fast—before they lifted him up and carried him away.

"Well, Pete," Old Clem said grimly, "next time mix your fingerprints with a little old-fashioned horse-sense. Better go let Bill Vance out of jail, hadn't you?"

"Clem, I'm still sweating in my shoes," Pete Carter said. "Only this stroke of luck kept me from sending Vance to trial. Just think, Clem—if Tex Corey had died silent—"

"Stroke o' luck, nothin'!" Old Clem snorted. "Listen, Pete—Tex Corey *did* die silent! He was dead when we found him."

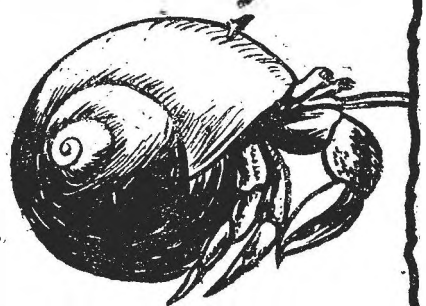
"Dead!" Pete Carter stared at him. "But —but his breath was on the knife blade! I saw it!"

"Sure, because *I* breathed on it, while I was kneelin' over him," Old Clem said very quietly. "I saw Tex was dead, and I had to do some fast thinkin'. This whole thing at the cabin was just an act I fixed up with Doc Fentriss; I was sure Gillis was the man and hoped if he thought Tex was still alive, he'd get panicky. Guilty conscience, that's what tripped up Dan Gillis."

Curioddities By Weill

TRICERATOPS OF 60 MILLION YEARS AGO HAD THREE HORNS ON HIS FACE. ALTHOUGH RESEMBLING A RHINOCEROS, HE WAS REALLY A REPTILE LIKE ALL OTHER DINOSAURS, AND DESPITE THE FACT THE TRICERATOPS HAD A VERY LARGE HEAD, HE HAD ONLY A TINY BRAIN!

THE PUBLISHED WORKS OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT NUMBER BETWEEN TWO AND THREE THOUSAND TITLES. DURING HIS LIFE HE ALSO WROTE NOT LESS THAN 150,000 LETTERS!



THE HIND BODY OF THE HERMIT CRAB IS SOFT, WEAK AND DEFENSELESS. IT IS THEREFORE NECESSARY FOR IT TO USE A BORROWED COVERING, AND A SHELL FORMERLY OCCUPIED BY A UNIVALVE MOLLUSK IS SECURED AND BECOMES THE CRAB'S GARMENT AND HOME!

CHINESE RUN-AROUND

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Author of "According to Plan," "Chinese Gamble," etc.

I

"QUIT *tripe like Children's Day in Chunking reel,*" Globe News told Tod Burke. "*Losing your touch. Stop. Am also fed up with routine battle stuff.*"

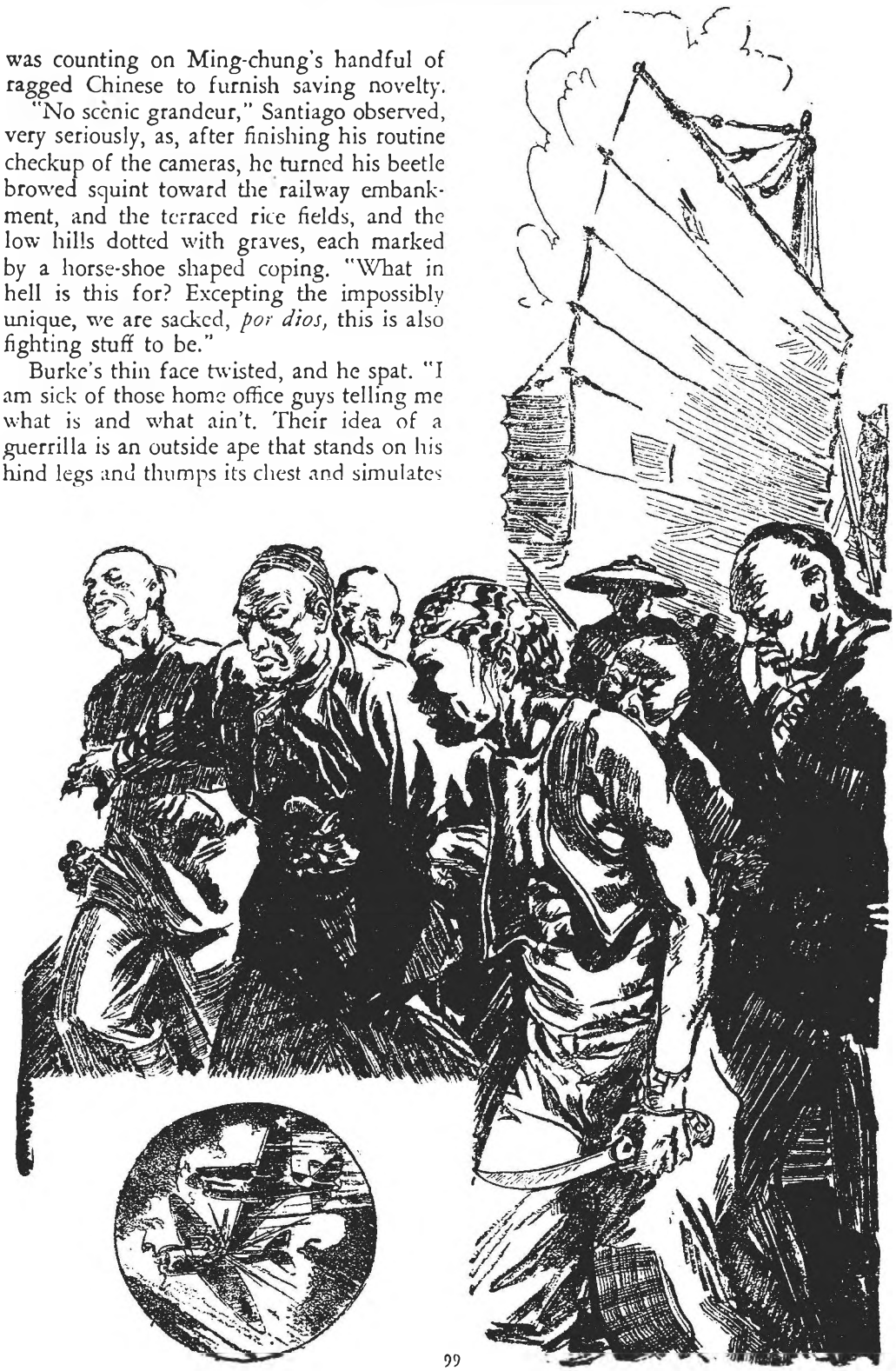
Tod Burke cabled back, "*So's the enemy,*" after writing a few replies which the censor refused to pass, despite their not containing a shred of military information.

All of which was why Tod Burke and Santiago Garcia were crouching under cover which overlooked the railroad connecting Kwang Chau Fu and Sam Shui. He still did not quite know how he had wheedled Wang Min-chung into letting him and his Filipino assistant accompany a guerrilla band; the result spoke for itself. He was there, and however the big boss might gripe about the monotony of battle stuff, Burke

was counting on Ming-chung's handful of ragged Chinese to furnish saving novelty.

"No scenic grandeur," Santiago observed, very seriously, as, after finishing his routine checkup of the cameras, he turned his beetle browed squint toward the railway embankment, and the terraced rice fields, and the low hills dotted with graves, each marked by a horse-shoe shaped coping. "What in hell is this for? Excepting the impossibly unique, we are sacked, *por dios,* this is also fighting stuff to be."

Burke's thin face twisted, and he spat. "I am sick of those home office guys telling me what is and what ain't. Their idea of a guerrilla is an outside ape that stands on his hind legs and thumps its chest and simulates



Tarzan. So I am showing them what a guerrilla looks like and works like, and if they don't care for it, they can bill me for the film."

Santiago drew and lovingly fingered the edge of his bolo. He plucked an eyebrow, flicked the blade, slicing the hair in half. "*Señor,* if we get the sack, then maybe we become guerrillas, this Ming-chung is one smart fellow."

"He must be, or he'd not be alive," Burke conceded, closing his eyes, and frowning as he saw in his mind the blank, pie-face of Ming-chung. "But he hides it."

"Because you do not speak the Chinese. Me, I learn some in Manila."

Santiago had been springing these surprises for something like two years. Burke forgot the monotony of waiting, the monotony of the landscape. "You rummy, you might have used some the last twenty times we were stumped for an interpreter!"

"Is here in Kwang Tung they speak what I understand, not like other parts of China. Like in Alabama, they have English not understood elsewhere. Only Kwang Tung Chinese is much more not-understood other places in China."

BURKE threw up his hands. Malay, Urdu, bazaar Arabic, they weren't bad, but these singing languages were dynamite for a fellow who had no ear for music. And the Pointie-Talkie book didn't help much, you usually tried it on a Chinaman who couldn't read his own language!

The same word meant a mushroom, a turtle, or an evil spirit, depending on how you sang it; and probably the other five or six tones made *kwei* signify, in turn, *pipe organ, flat iron, full dress shirt, carnival parade,* and *you first, my dear Gaston.* No wonder they murdered missionaries in the old days, the missionary first having murdered the language.

"Well, what did Ming-chung say?"

Santiago winked. "Ming-chung not knowing my knowledge of Kwang Tung dialect, spoke out of turn. This today is minor amusement, real business is capture puppet minister of the navy, for trial and execution for treason." He pointed in the general direction of the eighty mile triangle of silt between the Pearl River and the Si Kiang, a maze of sloughs and creeks. "The gunboat patrol is not stopping piracy, so the Minister of Navy goes to inspect."

Santiago summed up his eavesdropping by making a swishing stroke of his bolo. Burke brightened. "By God! The old bunch was ticking! Guerrillas of land and sea. Pirate patriots. Boy, we'll caulk that sour puss in New York!"

A FAMILIAR buzz and pop made Burke flatten behind a rock, joining his cameras. Santiago observed, "Someone is shooting."

A dull rumble shook the air; the blast was heavier than that of any field gun or artillery shell. Black smoke billowed from the further gap. Steam geysered up. Burke saw, and understood, and went cold with fury.

"That damn double-crossing pie-faced son of a guerrilla," he howled, "he told me he'd dynamite the Skibbie train here in this gap, and he's done it a mile away and Gawd-amighty—"

Santiago's somewhat apish features went bland, almost Chinese. "You see, Ming-chung is smart man, nobody expects blast in ordained place, not even the Skibbie *chingados.*"

Burke snapped into place a telephoto lens whose barrel was of howitzer proportions, but even as he did so, he knew that the range was far too great.

Through field glasses, he watched Jap soldiers stagger groggily from the wreckage, only to be hewn and shot down by ragged, barefooted scarecrows, armed with everything from Mausers and captured Arisakas to scythes and meat choppers. Elsewhere, the Skibbies were pulling together, forming combat groups; some counter-attacked.

Fire spread through the derailed train. Machine-guns began to rattle. The guerrillas were closing in. Santiago danced about, slashing with his bolo and jabbering in Tagalog and bamboo Spanish; he was more dangerous than stray bullets.

And then Burke's rage snapped clean off. "Put that knife away, you dizzy Gugu, put it down! We got something, boy, we got something!"

He snatched the Eyemo, and bolted down the slope, and toward the gap where the battle should have been. Santiago gaped,

then yelled, *"Zus-maria-y-zef!"* and followed as fast as his short legs could carry him. Camera kit in one hand, bolo in the other, he bounded.

Burke halted, took a good stance, and began to grind. As the fantastic action filled the finder, he flicked the turret to get the hundred milimeter lens into play, and resumed shooting. Those faces! He had filmed faces in battle, faces in victory, faces in defeat; stolid Sikhs, Mongoloid Gurkhas, horse-faced Britishers; and Japs aplenty, but never any Jap like this one.

"What in hell are you doing?" he yelled, becoming aware of Santiago, now well to his right, and racing toward the rail embankment. "Nail the son of a gun! I got him!"

He drew the Colt which he carried, in wilful violation of the international regulations pertaining to correspondents, and propped the barrel across his cocked left forearm, hoping to pop the Jap who bobbed up and down, pumping the handle of the hand car which was carrying him to safety.

The Colt bucked. The frantic pumping did not miss a beat. Santiago was charging up the bank. Burke's first thought was, "The fool's going to board it with a bolo!"

Typically Filipino, the coffee colored shrimp would tackle a battleship or a locomotive with a bolo and a grin.

BUT once, for just once, Santiago's cold clear intelect functioned. He had a hefty rock, it was so large that he narrowly missed flinging himself with it, and into the path of the pounding section gang car.

A crash.

Derailment.

Car and Jap tumbled end for end. Santiago, clear by an inch, pounced down grade, bellowing like a mad carabao and making blinding arcs with his bolo.

"Hold it, hold it!"

Burke stretched his legs, yelled himself hoarse. He managed to intervene, just as a badly battered Jap drew a tiny 6 millimeter pistol. Colt barrel whacked down, the peashooter's bullet went wild, and Santiago, bolo still swishing, hurdled the group; he had been unable to check his charge.

"Ay, chingado!" he yelled, wheeling about. "A colonel, pumping like hell."

The officer was damaged nowhere but in his dignity. He had a good face, for a Jap; sensitive, and intelligent. And his decorations showed that he had a record of valor in an army whose dead-level of fortitude and courage has few equals. A soldierly looking man, not the one to succumb to panic. The fantastic flight puzzled Burke.

And then Ming-chung came up with his guerrillas. They were loaded with loot, and they looked as if they had spent a week in a slaughter house. Nothing remained behind them, except the dead and the burning, though a few Japs had retreated according to plan.

The pie-faced leader was not the least embarrassed at facing the movie man he had double-crossed. "My men," he said, blandly, "are ignorant persons, they fear that being photographed will capture their souls, you understand."

Long pent-up wrath made Burke forget that shouting at a Chinaman is worse than useless. "Then why didn't you say so! Why didn't you tell me?"

Ming-chung smiled with studied effect. "That would have been unpolite, sir, brusque answer is always bad for friendship."

Burke gulped and cooled down. "Well, here's something that may interest you, the high-speed colonel. I photographed him on the run, I emptied my gun at him, and he's still alive, tell your men that having your picture taken is harmless."

Ming-chung beamed. "Oh, yes, Mr. Burke. My men have great sense of humor, laughter and mirth promoting good fellowship and mutual understanding, making them laugh will help. But—this officer's fate does not give confidence in being subject of photography."

The way he said that last made Burke almost sorry for the captive colonel, whose future was going to be unhappier than his past.

II

THE screen was sun-bleached canvas stretched against the sandstone wall of the cavern in which Ming-chung's guerrillas hid; the wobbly projector came from the ruin of a well-bombed mission; and by a few shortcuts not difficult to a field photographer, Burke had contrived to make a posi-

tive print of the slapstick side of Ming-chung's deadly business.

The guest of honor was Colonel Hakamoto, whose hand-car flight from ambush had, as Burke had suspected, a sound and military motivation. First, that officer had not been in command of troops on that train; second, as the bearer of written and verbal orders, in his capacity of liaison officer, escape had been his duty, and he had done his best, with quick wit and resource, considering the force of the blast which had handicapped the entire train load of soldiers with a first rate case of concussion.

Burke put a cigarette in Hakamoto's mouth, and gave him a light. Effectively arranged wire kept the colonel motionless.

"It is perfectly possible, Colonel," Burke said, "that Ming-chung will arrange an honorable exchange for you. This is the first time he has ever taken a prisoner, or . . . um . . . kept one more than say fifteen seconds longer than necessary."

"Thank you, Mr. Burke, but I can hardly consider Ming-chung's intentions with any pleasure."

Then Burke set to cranking the projector.

The farmers, the ricksha coolies, the shopkeepers who had joined Ming-chung gasped: this was their first movie. And then laughed until they choked. Some, retaining a shred of control, flung dirt at the ever enlarging figure on the screen.

"Ting-hao!" they howled, *"Ting-hao!* Run it again! Let's see some more!"

Watching that tiny, far-off figure bobbing up and down, and second by second growing, a high-ranking Jap doing coolie work, fascinated them. When the face filled nearly all the screen, and they could see him sweating and gasping and straining, they felt that this paid for their hunger and their wounds and the far worse hardships endured by their scattered families. A Jap had lost face; all Japs, in fact, lost face, in having one of their number shown in full flight from the smoke and the far-off figures slashing and shooting in the background.

Ming-chung finally told them that the performance could not go on indefinitely; so, resigned and content, they stretched out on the rock floor to sleep.

Several sub-chiefs, however, conferred with Ming-chung. Their jabber and protest were too fast for Santiago, though he told Burke, "There is something they do not like about the show."

"I guess they want the looting of Canton in sound and color," Burke grumbled.

Later, Ming-chung explained, "We had casualties. Some of those showing in the background recognized the spot where they lost comrades."

"Didn't they always have losses?"

"Oh, yes, but this worries them, being dead is not bad, we are used to being killed, our people always have been used to it, they do not fuss and get indignant like your people, they do not strut and feel proud like the monkey men, they just say, life begins and life ends, you cannot change the arrangement, why complain when you cannot act?" Ming-chung paused to let maximum benevolence register. "You preach, *do not kick against the pricks,* Saint Paul says that, missionaries teach this, only you people always kick when heaven does not speak aloud."

"Oh, all right! You've got something there. Your name means Bright Philosophy, someone told me."

"That is right." Ming-chung looked more pleased than ever.

"Well, it is not brightening my life a bit! Look here, some nice, zippy pictures of today's fighting would be swell for your people, far behind the lines."

"We do not need what you call pep talks."

SO DEADLY true that Burke's teeth clenched audibly; then he sighed and went for a fresh start. "But you can do with more guns, more shells, more shoes, and if anyone back home saw what you guys use, and the results you got, today—see what I mean?"

Ming-chung clasped his hands, bobbed his head. "Correction, please. Seeing how well we do with nothing, they say, why send them something?"

"You don't believe a word you're saying, you don't expect me to believe that you believe it! So run me out of here, right now, or give me a break."

Ming-chung considered. "Yes, Confucius states that frankness between friends is beautiful."

"God bless Confucius."

"Truth is, Mr. Burke, Chinese are lazy,

indolent people. When alive, working like hell, not forty hours weekly with overtime for next eight hours, but seventy, eighty, ninety hours, all the time not squawking. But, when dead, Chinese do not want to work."

"Huh?"

"Today's dead, their ghosts worked overtime tonight, every time you crank the film. Generously giving pleasure to surviving friends, very good, but going from movie to movie, all over United States, too damn much, Mr. Burke. I do not believe this tripe, but I must humor my ignorant men."

"Please, Ming-chung, *why* didn't you tell me that a couple days ago, right after the raid?"

"Sorry, anxious to see picture of pumping colonel. Now, the colonel wishes to bargain with us, come, Tod-Burke, you listen, he will speak English."

"If you just untied his hands, he'd soon be cutting paper dollies," was what Burke thought as he went with the guerrilla chief.

The forthcoming bit of frankness promised to be impressive.

Ming-chung said to the captive, "Colonel Hakamoto, your orders were interesting, but I do not have enough men to take advantage of what we learned."

"I hear that with pleasure, but without surprise."

When the guards had unwired Hakamoto sufficiently, Ming-chung offered him a tiny tea-cup of *ng ka pay,* which was around a hundred proof, and tasted like a blend of kerosene and orange shellac. Burke and Santiago drank with captor and captive. The difference between *ng ka pay* and the death of a thousand cuts was that with practice, one could become accustomed to the former.

"As liaison officer," Ming-chung went on, "you know about the movements of Tsen Ling-tze, Minister of the Navy."

Hakamoto did not deny this, because his papers had revealed enough to justify the guerrilla's statement.

"Now, I do not ask you to sell your Japanese comrades, because there is nothing I can do for you to persuade you."

"That is right."

The Jap's words were sure and well weighed. He knew all about Chinese methods of inducing confidential conversation, and he knew that he could face the worst; and Ming-chung also knew, hence this bargaining.

"Now, Tsen Ling-tze is a Chinese you do not respect any more than I do."

"That is right."

Ming-chung smiled amiably. "Tonight's movie would distress your fellow officers. Out of fraternal reciprocity, I might not send it to them. Also, you are the only surviving officer of your train."

Hakamoto's silence was more impressive than speech.

Ming-chung continued, finally, "You can always buy another traitor to be puppet minister of the navy. You have no loss, I have some gain.

"Otherwise, I have no gain, and you have much loss when fellow officers see this film."

"I will tell you," Hakamoto decided, "provided that you allow me an honorable departure."

"Granted."

So he told, and Burke listened. The answers rang true. And to cap the compromise, Ming-chung made another; he told Burke that while accompanying the guerrillas into the mazes of the delta could not be permitted, it could easily be arranged for Burke and Santiago to go in their own boat to the ambush, and film the raid from cover.

"House boat, fishing boat, manure boat, any suitable boat," Ming-chung elaborated, "furnishing concealment."

"Will this be at dusk, or dawn?"

"Heaven has not spoken. But if by night, very good chance of artificial illumination for much of action."

"You'll furnish parachute flares, huh?"

Ming-chung ignored the heavy irony. "Once the show starts, you are welcome to set your flares for good pictures, unless enemy objects. But we may furnish nice lighting."

"That train," Burke admitted, "would have given plenty at night."

So he went to his corner, packed his equipment, and rolled up in his blankets. Regardless of Ming-chung's bargain, the pumping colonel would be grand for American consumption; and he went to sleep with that good thought.

Santiago awakened him when the sun was well up. He was almost stuttering from trying to grin and talk at once. Burke rubbed

his eyes and demanded, "They been butchering another buffalo?"

Blood splashed Santiago's shoes and hands. He thrust out the camera, holding it as he might a silver charger with Tojo's head. "*Señor*—by God—this is not Children's Day in Chungking—this is not slapstick—this is colossal, I did it myself."

"Sit down!"

"Colonel Hakamoto's honorable escape, I filmed her."

"You let the son of heaven go?"

"I helped him, oh yes, *Señor,* with the boss' permission."

"Spill it, spill it."

"Losing face," Santiago explained, "Colonel Hakamoto wishes to commit *hari kari,* and Ming-chung, very honest Chinaman, lives up to bargain as made last night."

Honorable exit: Japanese release from the undignified. Burke had missed the point, until this moment, and now, getting it, he grimaced. That Z-shaped cut in the stomach, even in a Jap, wasn't the best appetizer for breakfast.

"You *helped* him. Isn't he supposed to do it himself?"

"Sure, *Señor,* he make the cutting, with own hands, but *bushido* says he must fall face forward, and he does not have suitable sash. And friend must stand by, to make second stroke, at back of neck. Colonel Hakamoto has no friend here."

He drew and flicked the bolo.

"Only me. Love thy enemy, the *padre* used to say. So I make Hakamoto happy, and get damn good film too."

Oriental philosophy, coming from friend and enemy alike, left Burke groggy; and he had his misgivings about the accuracy of the information with which Hakamoto had bought the privilege of honorable exit.

"But I can't back down," he told himself. "I'd lose face. Who the hell said the Chinaman is dizzy?"

III

TWO boatmen, Ah Lin and Ah Sam, were doing all the work, which left Burke nothing to do but whip down his impatience and the mosquitoes, both of which increased as the day wore on.

Santiago observer, "SAILING DIRECTIONS FOR WEST SHORE OF CHINA SEA says, *pilots can generally be obtained, but very few know all the creeks of the delta.*"

"I can damn well believe that."

Burke regarded the winding slough, and the house boat colonies on either bank, and the barges towed by puffing steam launches; half of China seemed afloat in the maze of passages which threaded the forty mile width of the Delta, south of Canton. "Ask the guy how far to Tam Chau."

Santiago twisted about, poked his head from the horseshoe shaped canopy amidships, and singsonged at the steersman; Ah Lin grinned, and jabbered back. "He says," Santiago reported, "plenty quick."

"Said that ever since noon," Tod Burke grumbled.

Ming-chung, after flatly reneging, had finally compromised by saying to Burke, "My men are ignorant fellows, it would frighten them if I told you precise time and place of ambushing the gunboat. You go to Tam Chau to wait in the house of friendly farmer, you will learn when show starts, meanwhile, you are happy, ignorance is bliss, not burdening you with heavy responsibility of knowledge."

An elegant way of playing safe by putting Burke on a limb, yet in all honesty, neither he nor Santiago could complain; a guerrilla certainly had to avoid needless risks.

At all events, they had the Si Kiang well behind them, and with it, the Japanese gunboats which patrolled the river, though, since the two passengers wore mushroom-shaped hats, and blue shirts whose tails flopped outside the knee-length pants, there was nothing conspicuous about the cameramen; and as far as the *wupan* itself was concerned, it smelled as though it had divided its time between fishing, and the manure hauling trade. Nevertheless, Burke was glad to get into the crazy tangle of the Delta, some of whose islands were dyked to keep salt water out of the rice fields at high tide.

Every so often, Ah Lin hailed a house-boatman or villager; the exchange sounded disconcertingly like question and answer. "What're they saying?" Burke demanded, and squinted at the thickening dusk. "These mugs don't know where they're going."

"They speak something I do not know,"

Santiago answered. "Each time I ask, they say, plenty quick."

"If they're going by landmarks, it is just too bad."

Everything looked just like everything else; villages squatting behind low walls, rice fields hiding behind dykes, an occasional knoll whose grave markers were bright against the darkening background. Here and there, stubby gray watchtowers rose from the junction of channel and smaller slough. And by now, mosquitoes interfered with Burke's queries; they at least knew where they were going.

When anything is on time in China, it is news. "We won't get there on time," he muttered, "But neither will the Minister of the Navy, and neither will Ming-chung, it'll all work out."

ONE consolation was that the guerrilla, regardless of preliminary dawdling, invariably got to the point of a situation ahead of the other fellow. But Ming-chung was not convinced of the value of cameramen to publicize civilian resistance, and now the recollection of his politeness made Burke straighten up with apprehension. "Look here, did you hire these dopes yourself, or did you let Ming-chung fix things?"

"Oh, *Señor,* I fix it myself. At the boatman's *hong.* In that little town the Japs blown all to hell, they do not like Japs, so I tell them—"

"That we're friends of Ming-chung?"

"No, *Señor,* I show them one little piece cut from the film, and they laugh and say, *ting hao!*"

"Which means either great stuff or turtle soup or a silk hat, depending on how you sing it."

Santiago retorted, with dignity, "*Señor,* I do this like you order, not telling Ming-chung. Maybe if I told him, we get boatmen who know the way."

"Okay, okay, you win."

An hour after dark, the *wupan* ran around. Ah Lin and Ah Sam began to jabber.

Santiago translated, "They say, cannot find the way until morning, but is small town nearby."

Ah Lin wanted to carry Burke ashore, pick-a-back. "Uh-uh, I've had enough of your bungling, I am taking no chances of your stumbling again," he countered, and grabbed a camera case.

He went over the side, and into water not quite knee deep. Santiago followed with the rest of the equipment. The scramble up the bank was easy enough, and the smell of cooking made it even easier.

Everything, in fact, proved to be just too easy.

Burke and Santiago found themselves wedged in the center of a clump of jabbering Chinese who fairly carried them along a stone-paved path. In the branch slough, a motor idled; there was the smell of gasoline. A hinge creaked, and the blackness of a low, dark mass straight ahead momentarily broke; by lantern light beyond, Burke saw a compound jammed with armed Chinese.

"*Señor,* do not go for the gun, there is no chance."

Burke snorted. "Don't worry, someone just grabbed mine. And if this is a mistake, then I am the King of Siam."

A MIDDLE-AGED Chinaman wearing a tweed suit and a red necktie was waiting in the first room off the compound. "Sit down," he invited in English, and gestured toward chairs. "I'm Willie Pao." He chuckled affably, hitched up his gunbelt, and dug for a pack of Golden Bat cigarettes, whose Japanese origin did not give Burke pleasant memories. "Smoke? Guess you fellows are wondering what the score is."

Burke took a cigarette, and jerked his thumb at the dozen rifle armed men who lounged on benches, and divided their time between smoking and spitting at the whitewashed wall. "More guerrillas?"

Willie Pao shook his head. "Yes and no." He grinned. "For your purposes, probably no. I guess you're sore at Ah Lin and Ah Sam?"

"I'd not recommend them for medals. Where'd you learn English?"

"I was raised in Frisco, and came home on a visit, and got shaken down by pirates between Hong Kong and Pakkai, so I had to go to work on the railroad, and I didn't like it. How are you fixed for dough?"

"Not so good. They hold out most of my pay for War Bonds."

Willie Pao nodded. "Patriot, huh? Well, I'll give you special rate, I usually get $20,-

000, U. S., but I'll make it $15,000 for you. Including the cameras and everything."

"What is this, piracy?"

Pao rubbed his nose, cocked his head. "In a way, yes. It always has been tough, making a living farming or fishing on the Delta. Not enough farm, not enough fish, and too many Chinese. So it's $15,000, and I'll allow for war time delay in raising the cash."

There wasn't a trace of the tough guy, but his matter of fact attitude made it needless for him to add, "—or else."

THE Chinese government couldn't do a thing about it; even before the war, its authority dwindled a few miles down the river from Canton, and reached a vanishing point past the middle of the Delta. The Hong Kong-Macao ferries, despite a guard of soldiers, and boiler plate armor about the wheel house, were regularly looted, all hands and passengers shaken down, and those with ransom possibilities taken ashore. Stubborn customers were tied to stakes at the low water mark, and were not removed at high tide.

On the other hand, the pirates were realistic; they didn't ask a dime more than the prisoner could dig up.

Burke's real danger was that the home office would stall and dawdle, and come across after Willie Pao's patience had been exhausted.

"How much for my assistant?"

"Who'd pay for a Gugu? But I got to keep him here till things are fixed up for you, one way or another."

"Look here, we're allies," Tod Burke protested. "We're fighting the Japs. I've been in plenty of front line action. With a gun, not just a camera."

"That's not paying my overhead," Willie Pao countered. "Anyway, the Japs aren't bothering the Delta."

"Damn it, you're Chinese, and they're bothering the rest of China, and me, I've been pitching. And Santiago was at Bataan. We're entitled to a break."

Willie Pao considered for a moment. "Back in the States, you mean, a fellow that fights the Japs wouldn't be knifed, like that?"

"That's it, exactly."

Pao jerked his thumb at the radio in the corner. "How about those strikes in the war production plants? Think up a better one than that."

"Fifteen thousand is too much. Five would be laying it on, and three would be pretty stiff."

"I'll study on that." Pao spoke to the bench warmers on his right, and they got up, rifles in hand. Then, to the prisoners: "Don't try to make a break. You'll get hurt."

Burke chuckled sourly. "How far would a fellow get without a native guide? Probably to the next pirate nest."

"Well, eat hearty."

So the guards marched Burke and Santiago out of the room, and into an inner court along three of whose walls were brick cubicles.

Holding the lantern aloft, the leader of the guards pointed. A coolie, coming from the rear of the group, set out a bowl of rice, some soy bean curd, and a pot of tea.

A lean, rangy, thin-faced man came out of the dog house adjoining the one to which Burke and Santiago had been assigned.

"Thank God, a bloody Christian!" he exclaimed. "Cobber, how'd you blunder into this bloody corner of hell?"

"Well, I'm damned! Long way from Australia."

"Too far, chum. What's that, your striker?"

"That, *Señor,*" the Filipino informed him, "is Santiago Garcia y Guevara, assistant camera man."

"Allies home week," Burke went on. "Where's the rest?"

"The rest," the Australian answered, "is in the corner over there, a bloody little Jap, a major or the like."

Burke divided the rice and soy bean curd with Santiago and fell to, all the while listening to Hubert Piggot's account of his escape from internment in Hong Kong.

"And so when I get to Macao, and a missionary arranges it for me to go up the bloody river, what'n 'ell has to happen but my boatman gets lost and, here I am, held for enough to ransom a regiment. And sitting here trying to keep my hands off that Jap, throttling him would cost me his ransom. Valuable property, that's what he is."

Burke sighed. "If I weren't short of money," I'd say, "let's split the expense and enjoy ourselves before Willie Pao feeds us to the fishes."

Piggot snorted. "That ain't funny. I didn't half like the sight of the bones wired to the stakes at low water mark."

IV

BURKE settled down to convince Willie Pao that cameramen were expendable, and that Globe Newsreel would not go a great deal higher than the cost of sending a replacement, along with equipment, to the theatre of operations. "Hell, I don't own the company, I just work for it, you hear a lot of crap about Americans being humanitarian and sentimental, but that's just on special occasions. Sorry as hell for China, but selling the Skibbies all the war supplies they wanted. And would they dig up to fortify Guam and Manila? They said the Japs wouldn't dare get fresh. And I'll get a horse-laugh, asking for all that dough, they'll say today no Chinaman could possibly get tough with an American buddy."

Willie Pao was open-minded. "Lucky I lived in the States, there's not another farmer on the Delta who'd listen to that line."

"I got no rich relatives."

"Some Americans are that way."

"Those I got, they never invited me over for the week-end."

"That's another thing most Chinamen couldn't understand. We'd bail out a relative even if we hated his guts. Anyway, I'm reasonable, maybe $15,000 is a bit steep. Make it $12,000."

Burke got up. "If it's that way, up it to fifty, it's more dignified giving me the works for lack of that amount. I don't want to lose face along with my neck. For rice field fertilizer, how much am I worth? But two thousand is good when it's put into Chinese currency."

Pao eyed him. "Losing everything, including face, that's tough. You're making me cry. Get out, while I think."

"Mind if I take some pictures?"

"Go ahead. We're all wanted and known. Just don't wander too far."

He was at it when a motor boat purred into the inlet. The coolies who tilled Pao's rice fields unslung their rifles and covered the launch until they recognized the crew members who came ashore. That two Japanese officers were with the party did not interest the farmer-pirates.

Pao's black hulled cabin cruiser, quite unguarded, had enough engines for a PT. However, making a break for it ranked high in useless occupations. Given a clear start, which way would one go? As far as Burke could see, there was nothing but low-lying rice fields, and criss-cross canals. All the previous day, he had been comparing the delta with the Louisiana bayou country, in which many a stranger and even an occasional native had disappeared for keeps. So, going back to the prisoners' compound, Burke was convinced that bargaining was the only out.

He sat down to think on that. Hubert Piggot sat in the sun, his long face puckered in a scowl as he played solitaire with a deck of Chinese cards. Santiago, with no chance to use a bolo, was stretched out on the flagstones, sound asleep.

Ming-chung, Burke admitted, was not responsible for this jam; the way it all added up, Ah Lin and Ah Sam, having some kinfolk or friends in the pirate industry, had turned the trick for a bit of cumshaw. Or, though Pao remained non-committal, they might well be spotters, on a par with those outside agents who shipped as deck hands, boring from within and making it easier for the boarding party.

A puppet minister must have dough, lots of it; unless the job paid off, no Chinaman would want it, if only because of the danger. Only a month previous, three agents from Kungming had assassinated the governor of Kwang Tung Province, and very handily, too.

"Uh-huh, turn Willie Pao a bit of business," Burke reasoned, "and if we crab Ming-chung's game, okay. Once the guy has paid his ransom, Ming-chung can have another go at him."

Then Burke met the captive Japanese officer. He wore horn-rimmed glasses, prominent teeth, and a uniform which, despite captivity, was clean and well pressed. He halted some paces from Burke, bowed, hissed ceremoniously, then said in intelligible English, "Mutual hostility can be suspended by common peril."

"I'm Bill Smith," Burke said, for his name was on a number of Japanese black lists, "but I'm not so sure this is a pleasure, Major—"

"Major Oroku." The little man bowed and sucked in his breath. "In union is strength. By strategizing, escape not impossible."

"You mean you know where to go from here?"

"*Sssss!* Pre-war experience."

Burke was thinking, "*The little guy probably spent years spying around here, serves him right getting nabbed.*" But he said, "I don't know as I'm interested, pirates are better company than Japs. No thanks."

"So sorry for misunderstandings. But not necessary to go to Japanese protected China. For cooperation, you go to Portuguese neutral Macao."

Piggot slapped down his cards. "I say, throttle the blighter, he'll jolly well stab you in the back."

"No harm hearing."

Piggot's big hand got the edge of a loose flagstone. "I can't afford having the chappie charged to my account, but if my bloody ransom don't come presently, I'll be hanged for a sheep, not a bleeding lamb."

While Burke wondered what kind of a deal Major Oroku would make when he heard that two fellow Japs were about to join him, one of Pao's guards came in, jabbered, and pointed at Burke.

Pao was waiting in an ante room. "Don't talk out of turn," he cautioned. "What goes on has nothing to do with Major Oroku. But it has plenty to do with you."

In the front office, Burke saw what he had not previously noticed; the two officers wore side arms. Instead of being prisoners, they had apparently arrived under safe conduct.

Pao pointed to Burke as at an interesting exhibit; question and answer followed, presumably in Japanese. Finally Pao said, "These gentlemen are making me an offer. They'll pay your ransom if it isn't too high."

This put Burke uncomfortably close to being sick. The enemy's scrutiny was intent and personal and pointed; it wasn't any general whimsy which led them to an attempt to outbid Burke's counter-proposals.

He said to Pao, "I can raise just so much dough. This bluff can't increase the amount."

"This is no bluff. They're bona fide delegates, you're just a side line to the call."

"Delegates? What is this?"

"Some of us farmers," Pao explained, "are being propositioned to—um—plough under some of our crop. You know how it was back home, we're going to get paid for not pirating."

PAO was serious about it. The Japs had only a division of troops around Kwang Chau Fu and cleaning up the delta would take far more than that number; unlike the guerrillas, the pirates had the latest in weapons. Even with air and gunboat support, the Japs could not succeed in a dyke-to-dyke clean up of the labyrinth; and if they tried, they'd merely lose face, men, and material. These delta men weren't peasants or simple fishermen, they had a thousand year old tradition of daring, hard fighting, utter ruthlessness.

"What do they want with me? They're not running you competition."

"I think it's personal. Must have recognized you. Ever see them before?"

"Do they speak English?"

Pao asked, then said to Burke, "Do not speak."

"I didn't think they were in any of my classes at U. C., though a lot of the Jap army was!"

"What's the limit you can raise?"

"I told you."

Pao sighed. "They topped that. They really want you. Well, it is your hide, not mine."

Either the Japs had a personal interest, pointed by something concerning an affront to *bushido*—such as, for instance, photographing a colonel pumping a handcar—or Pao was high-pressuring Burke. "Wait," he said, "I've got an idea, we'll both win. Be back in a minute."

Pao spoke to the guard, and the man followed Burke back to the prisoners' compound.

The handcar reel was miles north, but Burke remembered how the missionary's projector had jammed, and how, instead of splicing the film, he had clipped out a snarled foot. He dug into the case into which it had been dropped.

It should have been removed, but it had not been. "Stay of execution," he stuttered, and grinned shakily at Santiago.

Then he pulled himself together, and went to the front, where he explained to

Pao. "That's why these boys want me at such a fancy price. It's the reel, not me. Take it, it's yours, to use, lease, give away, or otherwise convey, to their heirs and assignees."

Light headed, Burke was running off at the mouth; he checked himself when he saw the amused gleam in Pao's eyes. "Sell it, and you and I will talk turkey about me."

"Where is the reel?"

The Japs' eyes sharpened behind their thick lenses. They were twitching with eagerness, and doing their best to look uninterested in anything but the funny jargon of English.

Burke answered, "My man can get it. Better not say the name, I might say it right, and they'd understand."

Pao nodded, and then offered the scrap of film, with sound and gesture. Burke sat down on the bench. His knees needed a rest. He felt now the way he had felt every time he'd thought, for some weeks after the event, of his escape from Moulmein the night the Japs took over.

Finally Pao said, "Go back. I think they are interested."

Burke gulped. "Just a second. What makes these tramps so anxious to bribe you into line right now?"

Pao chuckled. "Minister of the Navy is going to give the puppet regime a lot of face by making a gunboat cruise down the delta, to prove how law abiding things have become under the Co-Prosperity. War dries up one kind of revenue, but it brings another, just like back in the States, starving car salesmen get rich on overtime in defense plants."

He winked, and gestured, and then the guard took over; for by now, Burke's legs were fairly steady.

V

THE three prisoners were listening to Major Oroku's remarks on cooperation. "We are not close guarded because fugitive of standard quality gets lost without hoping. You see?"

"Yeah, but your big heartedness!"

Oroku giggled. "Greek with gifts, as per proverb, always to be looked into the mouth. Yess. And Mr. Piggot, animosity amputates nose to inflict vengeance on features. Listen, please. Everyone here is muscular, including self. But one athlete in solitude, unable to paddling own canoe fastly enough. Four brawny rowsmen, that facilitates."

Piggot brightened. "Three of us could bloody well row rings around you." Then, to Burke, "I still cawn't trust the little lad —I say, I say, how do four of us outrace a bleeding boat with three engines?"

Oroku smiled, wagged a finger. *"Ssss!* Before I give explanation, let us drink tea. Amicable relations first."

"Business relations," Burke corrected.

Santiago scowled. "Is not right, *Señor,* giving aid and comfort this *chingado* of an enemy."

"That is cutting it fine. All right, Major, you and me, these boys are conscientious objectors, I'm not. You won't knife me, even if I do sit in front of the boat."

Piggot pondered for a moment. "Might consider it, but no bloody tea. Not even if it was proper tea."

"Fine sentiment," Oroku said, equably. "Gentleman hoping to inflict bodily harm at completion of truce and cooperation, hence not sharing refreshment."

SO Oroku turned to get a wicker hamper from his cubicle. Santiago whispered in Spanish, *"Señor,* that is what I do not trust, this prisoner gets food from friends, I smelled *saki* too."

"Mmm—according to the book, the delta pirate is an extremist. Quick changes from coddling to throat cutting. Or sending a spare toe or something home to speed up the ransom."

Whatever the two Jap officers who had arrived under safe-conduct were cooking up in addition to what Pao claimed their business to have been, none of it seemed to concern the major; and while this was not necessarily illogical, it teamed up with Santiago's suspicions.

"But why would he bait us with a phony escape?"

Santiago didn't pretend to know.

Piggot grumbled, "Quit talking, Dago."

Oroku even had charcoal in his hamper. He was hanging out a small painting, the *kakimono* which graces a ceremonial tea. All this implied prolonged negotiations.

"That," he said to Piggot and Santiago, "means we get a fair chance to raise cash."

HE COULD not risk telling his companions about the visitors who had come to bribe the pirates into ploughing under a year's output. There was a chance that Oroku's ransom request had been pigeonholed, and that comforts he had asked his friends to send had been supplied by Pao; in a word, the major's fellow officers might consider him as missing, and after suitable civilian reprisals, had written him off; and that they'd not learn their error until after Pao had collected for not raising hell with shipping.

All guesswork; but so was teaming up with a Jap. The fact that there could not be any motive for trickery was exactly what made Burke suspicious; Piggot was right, regardless of his reasoning.

So they knelt about the tiny table, and went through the solemn foolery of bouquet-inhaling, and listening to the conventional beautiful thoughts turned into mangled English.

Santiago sipped his tea as though it were poison. Piggot uncompromisingly refused. Burke said, "More than seven lines is too long for a poem. But four would not be right."

Oroku's face brightened. "Ah—so you know? Yes. Five lines, or three."

"Like blossoms on a stem."

"Or stems in a vase."

The Jap was homesick enough to get a lift out of this lead-hoofed *ersatz*. To Burke, the ritual was gibberish, on a par with flower arrangements, or the keeping of pet crickets; but he sensed that the Jap was doing his best to show his cultural side in his campaign to win allies. It was ridiculous, and it was pathetic, and finally, revolting; because while the man seemed on the level, he must certainly be playing a game.

Burke could not help but wonder when one crossed the fine line that divided permissible loss of Japanese dignity, and the loss which demanded "honorable exit." Maybe Oroku was stir-happy.

Finally Burke thanked him for the tea, and doubtless completed the raping of ritual. "We'll think it over, Major," he said, and got off his cramped knees.

Oroku drew in the most ceremonious hiss, and went into his dog house, where he had a wooden pillow and a straw mat.

An hour or two later, Piggot reached in to grab Burke's ankle. He followed his warning by crawling into the cubicle and whispering, "If he's in danger of costing his family the last bloody *yen* they've got, or if it's his neck, he may mean business. What do you say?"

"He's in danger, but there's more to it than that. But what he didn't say was how four guys with paddles can outrun a powerboat."

"Shifty little stinker. Tea instead of facts."

Burke said, "Wait."

He crept toward the Jap's cubicle, until, huddled against the wall, he closed his eyes. Oroku's breathing indicated that he was asleep. So did the man's stirring, and the mumbled half dozen syllables, scarcely audible.

Once he had his head within the darkness of the dog house, Burke opened his eyes, giving them time for further dilation in the gloom. His business made him far more than ordinarily aware of the eye's power of accommodation; a darkroom which at the start seems utterly without light will, after half an hour, seem alarmingly bright, yet not sufficiently so to fog even the most sensitive film.

HE LISTENED to the sluggish lapping of the water in the canal outside the wall; the tide was coming in. Elsewhere, water trickled from one dyked rice terrace to a lower one. Immobile, he endured the maddening mosquitoes.

Finally he was able to spot the tea-box. Holding his breath, he inched along, until, reaching the bursting point, he had to exhale in an agonizingly slow trickle, and then inhale just as cautiously. But at last he had the hamper, and was moving it, without any betraying rustle or clatter.

Back to the doorway, and into the now brilliant outer shadows; he paused before turning to scuttle away with the prize which might well be a false alarm.

Too late, he sensed the scarcely perceptible tug as he moved; there was a thread connecting the box to the owner's toe.

"Please, box contain only cultural objects," Major Oroku objected from the darkness. "But willing to share luxuries with ally to be. Allow me to make rationing."

Burke did not let embarrassment at being

caught at sneak-thievery hamper him as it normally would have.

"Major, we want to check this box, not steal it. It's just that asking you to dump it out for a going over would have been tactless."

The little man smiled. "You have almost Japanese manners."

Piggot had crept up. "I ought to bash in your bloody head for saying that, but let it pass. We're both looking."

Oroku took out item at a time. "Tea pot, nothing concealed. Tea parcel. More of same. Preserved plum jar. Object of art. First aid kit, American made, very nice."

They frisked the dog house. They studied the pillow, which was a cylinder of wood supported at each end on trestle-legs.

It was not as heavy as it looked. Burke shook it, and heard a muted sound. "Do I break it open, or will you open it?"

"Ceremonial tea," the major insisted, after unscrewing the end of the cylinder and taking out a package.

"Ceremonial nuts! What're these sockets? And these sticks of bamboo?"

The last named were threaded to screw together into an assembly. "Fly casting, what?" Piggot grumbled. "Only I don't believe it."

"Nice rocket, Major," Burke said, and proved his point by unmasking the fuse. "What for?"

Oroku went poker faced.

"Speak up, you little bum, or I'll tear you in half," Piggot whispered. "No one's going to ransom me, not a bloody shilling will any one send, and that pirate'll feed me to the carp anyway. I have nothing to lose and a lot of fun to gain."

Oroku didn't twitch.

Burke thrust at Piggot's chest. "Get back, Hubert." Then, "Major, I'm taking this rocket to Willie Pao and see if he is interested."

The Jap smiled. "Keen perception makes you respectful ally. Do not be hasty. The Chinese say, *wu wei wu pu wei.* Do nothing, and there will be nothing you cannot do."

"Bloody rot, a Chinaman knows better," Piggot scoffed.

"No, it makes sense," Burke corrected. "It means, until you've made a move, you've got a choice of all moves, but once you've made a move, you've lost your choice. It doesn't mean, sit on your pratt never doing a thing."

"Ha!" Piggot brightened. "But a silly way of talking. Let's quit the bloody dialogue and *do* something!"

"I begin to see why they send in an Australian when there's nothing left but to do something hard and do it quick. But the major is right. Once we tell Pao, we have told Pao. Okay, Major, but I am not crapping you, I will see Pao unless you sound good."

"Yes, and how'll we outrace a bloody power boat?"

"This," the Jap answered, "is Nipponese cleverness. A rocket fired marks a position. I can find my way out, yes, but how could I find my way back, leading soldiers? This is a marker for observers. Pirates are obnoxious, this one most of all."

Piggot caught the point. "Observers on both ends of a base line, spotting the rocket rising, they figure out this position like in artillery practice?"

"Yes. And person lingering here after setting off rocket—need I say more?"

He didn't. Even if he escaped the pirates, the saturation bombing of the square mile or so around the marked spot would finish the hero. The Japs considered that obliterating Willie Pao, and at the cost of but one officer, was doing a necessary job and doing it economically. As a guess, the capture of Major Oroku had been a set-up.

"I think this is a good bet," Burke said, and Piggot agreed. "Where's the boat?"

Oroku gestured toward the corner of the compound. "Beyond wall."

"Let's be sure."

He went to look.

Burke got to work with the fragment of a broken bottle, and while he slashed his fingers, he also mangled the sides and end of the rocket cylinder. The job was done, before Oroku, after intent myopic squinting into the darkness, returned to say that all was clear.

He set up the rocket and arranged the time fuse. The prisoners made a circuit of the compound, looking and listening. There were guards on duty, and awake, but they were more concerned with a game of *ma cheuk,* judging from the mutter of voices, than with any considerations of security.

On the basis of sounds, there were quite

a few games. New money must have come to headquarters; the Jap payoff, Burke told himself.

Escape was easy simply because the pirates, knowing the treacherous delta, were convinced that no prisoner could get far. It was merely a matter of clambering to the top of the corner cubicle, and sliding down the face of the wall, which had a considerable batter. In a moment, Burke was catching the camera cases as Santiago lowered them. Finally came Major Oroku, who had struck a match to the long fuse.

The boat, instead of a blunt-ended *sampan*, was a slender, streamlined shell. Each paddle stroke stepped up the speed, and the tide was right. Looking back, Burke could no longer distinguish the dark bulk of the pirate *yamen*.

VI

OROKU began to count, giving a cadence. They squeezed another knot out of the frail, burnished hull. She had undoubtedly been designed for boarding by stealth; larger boats of like design, with twenty rowers, could outrace anything but a high-powered launch.

"Take left fork," the major gasped.

"What left fork?"

Paddles up, they lost way. After some thirty seconds, the Jap said, "Now!"

"Bloody well knows the country," Piggot admitted when the gloom dissolved enough for him to note the branch bayou.

No mention of the rocket; but Burke, who sat directly behind Oroku, noticed that the little man glanced anxiously over his shoulder.

Then came a ruddy glow, as of a bonfire seen through river mists. Burke counted seconds, ignoring the Jap's faltering cadence. The glow died out in about the time of a rocket's flight.

"Defective pyrotechnics."

Oroku's voice was flat, steady, wholly controlled, but Burke could almost feel the schemer's despair. Piggot must also have perceived the guide's emotion, for he said, "You're not going back to try it again. We'll bash your bloody brains out if you don't get us through, do you understand?"

"If you carry on," Burke added, "you may have another chance."

"Very logical," the major admitted. "Next objective, Macao."

Resigned to failure, he carried on, seeming to realize that if he made a circle and returned, it would be futile and not merely fatal. "The Way of the Gods" included no excuse for failure. As an officer, he was already dead. The difference between him and an actual corpse was that he might conceivably devise another attempt.

Burke's paddle dug mud. In another moment, the boat was aground. Piggot scrambled out to brain the Jap. Santiago closed in from the other side. "Wait!" Burke protested, and caught the Australian's arm, deflecting the blow, but the furious Filipino shattered his paddle against the major's head.

The Jap lurched face forward into the mud.

"Now we are stuck!"

He got a small flashlight from the officer's pocket, and stooped to examine the battered head.

"Look! The tide can't change that fast!"

Even as they watched, the water level lowered perceptibly.

"Put out that bloody light! Why did you tamper with his rocket? There'd not be a pirate alive to wonder about it," Piggot cried, fiercely. "You fumbling fool!"

Burke retorted, "You'll be telling me he lowered the water level to strand us, you damn blockhead!"

"*Señor*, I am the *pendejo*. It is my habit to hit a Jap."

PIGGOT chuckled sourly, clapped Burke on the shoulder. "Chum, I can't understand your orderly's lingo, but if he's trying to take the blame, skip it, grousing doesn't get us to Macao."

Then the Jap coughed and sat up. "Obsequies most premature. I did not lower water level. Permit me to lead way on the feet, boat can be carried to next navigable stream."

But they didn't go far. Flashlights blazed, lanterns bobbed in the gloom. Military rifles whacked, kicking up mud. The portage halted. Santiago translated the first command: "He says, carry boat that way, we go back to starting place."

Except for his eyes, Willie Pao looked amused and sounded amused when he

met his bedraggled prisoners. He addressed Oroku.

The Jap straightened up. His face became composed. The little man was undeniably dignified. He spoke a few words, precisely, ceremoniously, as though instead of standing before a captor, and in the midst of an ever widening puddle of mud, he was at a palace reception.

Piggot whispered, "The little stinker is facing it like a man. Hope we can take it as well."

Pao answered, just as ceremoniously. The two exchanged bows. Then a man stepped up behind the major, held a pistol to the back of the battered head, and pulled the trigger. He holstered the gun, and went back to his fellows.

Pao turned to the remaining captives.

"You fellows want separate trials, or—"

"We were together in this," Piggot cut in.

"That is right," Santiago affirmed.

Pao nodded. "You men don't have much cash value. No matter how much the Jap had, I am not money minded enough to care. I figured out easily why the rocket. Observers could locate our position to within a few yards, and saturate us with bombs. We were paid off not to snatch the Minister of the Navy, so we are here, doing a bit of sociable gambling, all of us. To be wiped out, like that. Major Oroku seems to have known the country, but he didn't know we could open a couple of sluices, and make water flow backwards. The Si Kiang is damn near twenty feet higher than the Chu Kiang. Funny, isn't it?"

Burke drew a deep breath. Sweat was beginning to wash the mud from his face. "Look here, Willie, there is another thing the major skipped. I slashed the sides of that rocket and the end of the tube so it wouldn't rise, so it'd go *fft* and jitter around the compound, like a nigger-chaser."

Willie Pao rubbed his snub nose for a moment. "Proving that might make a difference."

"Get the tube and look, I hacked it with a bit of glass, and I hacked my fingers." He held his hands out. "Find a bit of bloody glass."

"Why that trouble?"

"I'll go find it for you."

"No, the trouble of cutting the rocket."

"Using a Jap is one thing, helping one is another. You were to be saturation bombed. Man to man, I'd be all for that—but not when a Jap wants it done. He was against you, so I was for you. I could have plugged the rocket with dirt and made 'er blow up like a firecracker, but I wanted you to know it'd been tinkered with, and you'd not know from a few scraps of paper."

"Mmm—why care, you expected to be away from here, one way ticket?"

"I was hoping you'd put two and two together, and decide to double-cross the Japs, and keep on raiding them. And take a crack at the Minister of the Navy when he comes down the river to prove that pirates don't exist."

Pao considered, then said, "Find me that glass and that rocket."

They found the evidence.

The pirate said, "Okay, Oroku goes alone."

And then Burke played his advantage. "Big-hearted Willie Pao, not shooting us."

"You've earned your ransom, all of you. No cover charge either."

"Oh, nuts for that! Ming-chung brushed me off, he wouldn't let me track along to film the surprise party for the Minister of the Navy. Are you game to tackle a gunboat? Can you beat him to it?"

Willie Pao yawned. "You're talking me into something. But suppose you don't really know what Ming-chung expects to do, he brushed you off."

"He just didn't want us with his gang."

"But he trusted you with his plans?"

"It's a cinch he knew we'd not get in touch with the Japs to sell him out. We were to wait at Tam Chau till the show opened. Your stooges, Ah Lin and As Sam, fixed that!"

"If we don't snatch the minister first, what do we get? Settling a gunboat costs money, and how will we find our man in the shuffle?"

"Where's your—your—"

"Patriotism, huh?"

Burke faced the man's smiling contempt. "I hate the word too! Every stinker and four-flusher in the world uses it for a decoration," he fairly shouted. "The Minister of the Navy claims he's a patriot. You've got a record as long as a box car, you've got a date in the plaza some day, with your

hands tied behind you, and a two-handed chopper whacking down on your neck, there is no pardon for you, no matter how much you do for China, you'll end with your head off and between your knees. But damn it, don't waste this chance."

"What'd I get?"

"You'd win face. With the other pirates. The little ones who think you're too big for your pants."

"You ought to be a salesman, you're wasting your time cranking a picture box."

So the pirate flotilla slipped out, powerful engines muffled to a barely audible purring.

"This'd better be good," Willie Pao said. "If it isn't, I lose face."

And as he squatted in the tightly packed cockpit, Tod Burke began to wonder if it wouldn't have been better to have accepted transportation to Sam Shui and a receipted bill for ransom. Piggot muttered, over and over, "We're bloody fools, this don't make sense, he can't just barge in and do what that guerrilla has taken days to plan."

"You didn't have to get in on this!"

"Oh, I didn't? It's our show."

"Then stop your damn crabbing!"

Santiago was snoring.

Close to dawn, the power boat slipped from the Chu Kiang and into the mists of the delta. Burke neither saw nor heard the others of the flotilla. Finally, berthed in what must have looked, either from air or from river levee, like a rice warehouse, he heard the farmers coming to work their fields.

Looking through the palm thatch, Burke could see the river, now swarming with fishing boats. Tugs puffed and chugged, towing barges.

Tackling a gunboat, even the most insignificant, now seemed insane. The Minister of the Navy, making his inspection to gain face, would surely cruise by day, not only as a matter of safety, but to be seen, so as to prove that there was no pirate menace.

IT WAS a long day. The outlaws gambled and wrangled. Willie Pao was apparently making the rounds of the flotilla. The prisoners had far too much time for useless thinking. And then, an hour before dusk, a gunboat came steaming down the one channel deep enough for her draft.

She flew the Rising Sun. A band was sounding off. Even from a distance, the martial music, German, since Nazi compositions had been declared Asiatic, drowned the rumble of engines being revved up.

The power boat raced crazily down a slough. Her wake was muddy. If she had a foot of depth to spare, Burke doubted it. The engines were winding up. Blank faced, slant-eyed men set machine-guns in their mounts, while others broke out automatic rifles. One locker contained five-gallon paint cans; these would be bombs or stink-pots, Burke guessed as from force of habit he got his camera.

The weaving and pitching of the polished black hull flung him against the bulwarks. Spray drenched him. He wiped the lens.

"That damn thing a gunboat?"

"What'd you think she'd look like, a cruiser?" Piggot jibed.

The *Ching Lung* looked neither golden nor yet dragonish, she had no turrets, and amidships, her freeboard was so low that boarding her from a *sampan* would be easy enough, were it not for the barbed wire which guarded her rail; and she bristled with machine-guns. Crews manned the three-inch rifles which were short barreled, and on pedestal mounts.

Smoke and flame masked the Dragon's tail; a shell burst some fifty yards astern of the pirate boat. The roar of the engines drowned the hammering of machine-guns. Piggot snatched an automatic rifle and got in a burst, hosing the *Dragon's* rail, and then, overhauling her, they zigzagged, leaving her astern.

Black smoke was already pouring from the exhaust stacks. It surged and billowed over the water, hiding the gunboat; but the enemy still blazed away, three-inch shells kicking up geysers where the target had last been sighted.

Then Burke caught the point of Willie Pao's strategy; as the engines throttled down, men heaved overboard a pair of improvised mines, joined by cables and supported by floats. Stink-pots followed. These were on small rafts. Their fumes, dark and choking, blanketed the water, taking the place of the now thinning smoke screen spewed out by the engines. The entire channel was littered with bobbing little volcanoes.

The *Dragon's* prow loomed up, though vaguely, for the floating smoke screen was rising slowly. Her forward rifles blasted, sharp, ear-splitting whacks against the insane chattering of machine-guns. Burke filmed perhaps five feet when Willie Pao yelled, and the engines revved up, and suddenly enough to pitch Burke to the deck. The swerving and heeling rolled him from locker to bulwark, and Santiago, trying to check him, was added to the scramble.

Piggot laughed and shouted, "Give me another clip!"

Someone understood his gesture.

And when the lanky Australian had reloaded his automatic, there was no target. The speed boat, after skating on her beam-end, dug in and piled on the knots—fifty—sixty—sixty-five—

Burke cursed. Now that he was on his knees, he could see nothing to film. Old-fashioned Chinese battle tactics; a lot of noise, smoke, fire-crackers, nothing missing but the whanging of gongs to frighten the enemy! Though it'd made a grand sound track, as a picture it was a flop.

And then there was sound: a rumbling blast, a concussion somewhat a blow, and somewhat a numbing compression as of a monstrous strait-jacket. Contemptuously ignoring the floating stink-pots, the skipper had overlooked the two cans which contained explosive instead of stench, and when the prow hit the cable joining the mines, they had whipped back, hitting the gunboat's thin plates at the water level.

"All right, Yank, there's your picture!" Piggot yelled, and the pirates howled as the black hull completed her arc and swooped back to close in.

What followed was a three-ring nightmare. *The Golden Dragon,* plates on either side blown in, was settling in the mud. Her Pedestal guns were useless at close range; and from the branch sloughs, farmer-pirates, packed into swiftly paddled boats, were closing in on the stalled gunboat.

Smoke bombs, hand grenades; long swords and axes to slash the barbed wire; and the defenders broke out steam lines to hose the howling mobs which boarded the *Dragon* amidships, and from the fantail. But there were too many pirates now, and not enough crew.

Along the rail, and sunk below deck level, was a runway which reached from poop to forepeak; a sea-going trench, Burke called it, as he lurched through a gap in the barbed wire and took a header to the bottom instead of getting a footing on deck.

Santiago had an *ersatz* bolo; Piggot, a tommy gun. With lead and steel, they won working room, and clambered out of the trench. "Here's your bloody picture," the Australian yelled, "it'd better be good!"

They were mopping up when a powder magazine let go. Fire raced through the hull. In the smoke and confusion, Burke saw Japanese officers, and Chinese members of the puppet minister's staff hustled over the side and into the waiting boats.

There was no time for looting. Reprisal would quickly follow from the air.

Later, Willie Pao handed Burke a parcel, the size of a melon, wrapped in a piece slashed from a blanket. "Give this to Ming-chung when you see him. He'll be sore as hell, but he's got no business muscling in on the delta. I'm running it these days. When do I see the pictures?"

"Depends on my getting up the river. And what'll you do for a projector?"

Willie grinned. "I got a boat for you, and don't worry about projectors, the Skibbies'll furnish me that."

Some hours later, they were ashore, and watching the pirate boat racing downstream. "I still can't believe they let us go," Piggot muttered. "Craziest blighters I ever heard of."

"The real grief is what Ming-chung will think, if he doesn't like his present."

Santiago said, "*Señor,* is nice present, he will not be sore too much."

THEY found Ming-chung in his limestone cavern. He had not been down the delta, and apparently neither he nor his guerrillas had any intention of going in that direction. The maps he had spread out on his straw mat were of Shensi Province.

He accepted the present with both hands, and unwrapped it.

"Willie Pao," he said when he looked at the badly damaged face which stared up at him, "is a very nice fellow."

"You're not griped?"

"Not at all. Willie gets face for doing the work. I get face for having this souvenir." His smile made him glow like a full

moon. "Chinese compromise. Something for everybody. What Confucius calls the middle way. You Americans have no damn sense, whole-hog-or-none is childish. Did you get some nice pictures?"

"We'll go into that later. Tell me one thing, were you just horsing us about intending to nail the minister? Or did you figure—heck, if you'd not trusted us, you'd have bottled us up, kept us here—I don't make it!"

Ming-chung's smile widened. "When I hear you are kidnaped, I am heart broked, but it was foolishness for you to go, all your fault.

"Then I reason, you will talk the pirates into line, to save me work. Or, if Willie Pao getting tough, well, it is not polite, enjoying life while a friend is losing a few toes to show him ransom must be quick. So I stay here."

"Heart broked, huh?"

"Very sad." He got out his jug of *ng ka pay,* and filled tea cups. "Now we drink to the next raid, you will go with me. *Gaan bay!*"

Bottoms up it was. When Burke could finally speak, he stuttered, "Hey—you mean —we go on your next party?"

"Oh, sure, first time, thinking you are damn fools, but now—" He regarded the present Willie Pao had sent, "I see you are smart."

"Lucky," Burke corrected.

Ming-chung clasped his two hands and bowed. "Same thing, smart men always lucky, damn fools have bad luck."

And Burke was smart enough not to ask Ming-chung just why the superstitious Chinese had suddenly decided that being included in a newsreel wouldn't affect living conditions in the Chinese heaven which no guerrilla expects to dodge very long. And now that the run-around had ended, maybe New York office would have less reason to gripe about routine battle stuff.

. . . . Arrogant, Uncompromising, a Born Fighter. Well, Bob Warren Had Been to War, Too!

RED TERROR

By THOMAS FRANCIS NORRIS

Author of "Mesteno," etc.

EARLY morning, on the slopes above Apishipa Creek, came a low, rumbling bellow, dreadful, sinister, like fiendish defiance from the netherworld. The thundering challenge, uttered with distended muzzle swinging from side to side, echoed and re-echoed from wooded recesses along the creek's edge. The ominous warning gave definite promise of gory violence to any victim found in the area. Nearer, nearer, came the blood-curdling sound with ever heightening crescendo. A herd of fleet-footed antelope, paused for two seconds in their feeding, then scurried up a wind-swept hillside in frantic flight.

Suddenly a big red bull with a massive head and blazing eyes came out into the open. He was the biggest bull ever seen on any western range—a pure strain Shorthorn with a long line of pedigreed ancestors. Red Terror was proud of his might, prouder still of the fact that he wasn't a weakling, whenever or wherever he found

an antagonist. Among a herd of other cattle, he loomed colossal, standing nearly five feet to the top of his ponderous shoulders, with an estimated weight of fifteen hundred pounds, all bull from the tips of his pointed horns to his broad rump—arrogant, uncompromising, a born fighter. He was feared and hated in that vast stretch of rugged terrain between Apishipa Creek and the Rattlesnake Buttes.

Late winter snow, still visible on the higher levels surrounding Rattlesnake Buttes, was rapidly disappearing under the early May sun. From the upper-slopes, the whole area resembled a huge green fan with its diverging streams and arroyos, now filled with torrents of rushing water which emptied into Apishipa Creek.

This vast stretch of country, dotted here and there with cedar thickets, grass-covered valleys and rock-edged mesas was known as the Burkett Range, operated by Joe Burkett, a hard-bitten cattle baron whose enterprising genius resulted in yearly profits while other cattlemen in the surrounding country regarded his success with increasing envy.

Red Terror's sudden appearance wasn't without provocation. Along the highway, on the farther side of the creek, Bob Warren, ex-foreman of Paradise Ranch, was riding a high-spirited Hambletonian horse and was staring resolutely at the approaching bull, secure in the knowledge that the high-banked creek was between them.

Torredor, too, had heard the terrifying bellow. Gripping the bridle bit in his teeth, he pulled sharply to free the reins from Warren's grip. Then rearing upward, he lunged toward the creek's edge, vigorously pawing the air with his fore feet. Torredor had been bred for the race track. But following Warren's enlistment a year previously, his training had been pushed into an indefinite future. Now, after a year of freedom on the grassy slopes of Paradise Ranch, he had become unmanageable—almost to the point of viciousness—a beautiful horse, tall, rangy, whose sleek chestnut coat set him apart from the others in the range herd.

He was unlike others, too; he had an intense dislike for cattle. Whenever they strayed into his feeding grounds, he would chase them away with vicious lunges. A great change had come over Torredor during Warren's year of absence on Overseas Duty. On the first day of his furlough, before he could adjust the saddle on his prized racehorse, he had been obliged to muzzle him for his own protection.

Now, the high-spirited Torredor was ready for battle. Reaching over, Warren patted his neck. "Calm down, Old Boy, you're not going to be messed up with that fighting bull. We're just going to bag a few sage-hens before going home," he soothed, thinking what a dangerous antagonist the bull would make in a free-for-all battle.

FOR a while after that, Warren thought little about Old Joe Burkett's bull until one day he was making a short-cut toward the only crossing over the creek. Riding along a little used trail, he turned down into a gully where he saw a herd of Burkett's cattle, the Red Terror among them. The first intimation of trouble came when he heard an explosive roar. Torredor, sensing disaster, refused to be restrained, wheeled suddenly and bolted up a slight rise of ground in the direction of the creek bridge. This was of a temporary nature, being constructed by loggers in the previous summer.

Arriving at the top of the ridge, the bull was about one hundred yards behind Warren. In a short race, the Terror's speed nearly equaled that of the horse. Reaching the temporary bridge, Warren could hear the explosive efforts of the maddened bull. To his horrified surprise, his horse refused to cross over the bridge. Instinctively gripping the 12-gauge shotgun, Warren jumped then raced across the wobbly structure. Two jumps more, and he threw one leg over the framework of an open well, then let himself down into the boxlike hideout.

Bewildered for several seconds over Warren's disappearance, the horse whinneyed wistfully, then, swinging around, he planted both hindfeet on the Terror's jaw. The bull wavered for another second, then began pawing the soft earth. Desperately, Warren leveled his ineffective shotgun and pulled both triggers. The charge of shot seared a spot on the animal's neck as he resumed his bellowing and tried to locate his intended victim in the sawmill area. He stood there, grimly, challenging, like the uncompromising fighter that he was, then

with a long, deep rumble proceeded back to the herd.

RETRIEVING Torredor, Warren started back to Paradise Ranch, which is located five miles above the Burkett Range. The two properties are separated by an intervening hog-back covered with scrub cedar and jack-oak. The ridge ends abruptly, providing ample space for the Apishipa School, which to his surprise had been reopened after being closed down during the previous year. Instead of its former ramshackle appearance, improvements had been made. New outbuildings had been erected with a fresh coat of paint on the whole property. The most surprising thing about the improvements was a newly constructed steel-mesh fence surrounding the whole schoolyard.

Warren had ceased to have any interest in academic pursuits, but the presence of the blond-haired teacher, Louise Trevor, led him into the schoolyard. It was her first experience in the teaching profession —a slight, blue-eyed girl who seemed little older than some of her pupils.

"So you're a teacher?" he chided laughingly.

"I'm trying to be one, Corporal Warren."

Warren's face puckered, "This place reminds me of the stockades that are erected for prisoners in the Solomons. Is the school board afraid you'll run away?" he grinned incredulously.

Miss Trevor colored. "Mr. Burkett put it up to keep his range animals out of the schoolyard. I refused to accept the teaching contract until it was done," she explained.

"Range animals? You mean—oh, I get it," admitted Warren, thinking that the girl had more faith in the effectiveness of the steel-mesh fence than she should. It required no imagination to figure out what would happen if that maniac bull slipped into the schoolyard during one of the recess periods. It was outrageous to permit such a vicious animal to run at large, he thought, watching the apparent nervousness of the girl even when she mentioned the matter. Red Terror was a very appropriate name for the treacherous brute, he thought. Suddenly the school bell clattered sharply above his head.

"I must go now," Miss Trevor said. Then ventured in a more pleading voice, "You'll come back—won't you?"

Warren grinned. "I'll be seeing you again," he said. Saluting discreetly, he rode out from the schoolyard. Might just as well do a little reconnaissance work here too, he reflected. Over in the Solomons, it was the treacherous Japs—while along the Apishipa it was old Joe Burkett's bull.

THE conversation with Louise Trevor came into Warren's thoughts on the following day. Red Terror was in the same area of the ranch property. He watched the grim-looking animal approaching the creek's edge with a slow, malevolent tread. Taking out his glasses, what he saw made his blood run cold. It was little wonder that everyone was afraid of him, he thought. The ogreish eyes, the sharply pointed horns, the drooling slaver from his muzzle told far more than mere words about the Terror. Halting briefly, the bull began pawing alternately with each forefoot, his stubby tail lashing against his heaving sides.

Warren shook his head. "Darned if you aren't a tough-looking baby!"

Recalling the first encounter on the previous day, Warren wondered whether the Terror had any retentive faculties. It might be the scent of his horse or the reflection of sunlight against his shotgun barrel had registered in the animal's brain. But whatever it was, there was little doubt what would happen if the creek wasn't between them.

Obviously, the Terror had no sense of fear. Warren, even though he had sworn vengeance on the vicious animal, had to admit that there was many things to admire about him. He fought openly, engaging a foe whenever and wherever he found them. Across the creek, he watched the bull in puzzled amazement. Suddenly, the animal began roaring with increasing fury, jerking his head upward, then downward as if to impale an imaginary object on the pointed horns, then he began throwing chunks of mud over his back.

Warren estimated the distance across the creek at twenty yards. The seared scar along the bull's neck gave mute evidence where the charge of bird shot had struck that night when he found safety in the open well. He regretted the fact that he hadn't a .30-30.

Glancing up the slope, Warren's eyes widened. Directly in line with the enraged bull, he saw a lanky white horse proceeding toward him with long, easy lopes. He recognized the man in the saddle immediately. "Old Joe Burkett," he said half audibly. He looked again. The features now were plainly visible. Not a hard face but never without determination. The large protruding jaw, wide-open mouth with firm, thin lips that could smile or as easily twist into a curse.

Formalities are unknown in cattle-land. An unwavering glance presupposes more than words. Neither man spoke. Warren sat motionless on his horse—waiting for Old Joe to make the first move. Instantly, the gaunt face took on a stony hardness. Warren adjusted himself in the saddle.

A deep, rumbling bellow again rose in the Terror's throat. Burkett had a long braided blacksnake whip in his hand. Circling around, a well-aimed thrust of the whip bit into the bull's rump. "Beat it, you—you cantankerous old son-of-a-gun!" he cried angrily.

Whether it was the sting of the whip or respect for Old Joe's authority, Warren couldn't tell. But the enraged animal shook his head with apparent disgust, then trotted up over the slope.

Burkett's lips twisted. "Is this all you have to do, sitting over there tormenting my bull?"

Warren shifted again in the saddle. "I've as much right sitting here on this side of the creek as that murderous beast has on that side. I guess you're reasonable enough to admit the fact," retorted Warren.

"I knew you'd think of something like that to say," retorted Burkett, "but if you had paid no attention to him and gone about your own business, he wouldn't have noticed you."

"Perhaps not," admitted Warren, thinking about the narrow escape he had experienced when he climbed down into the open well a week previously. "One thing is certain, if he belonged to me, I'd either pen him up or make hot-dogs out of him before he kills somebody," he ventured testily.

Burkett sniffed. "I've signs posted all over this property which plainly state that trespassing is forbidden. So whenever anyone disregards this warning, they do it at their own risk," he returned meaningly, spurring his horse into a lope up the same route that the Terror had taken.

Warren watched Old Joe until he disappeared over the ridge. It was preposterous that any sane person would stick up for such a vicious animal. Then he thought about the similarity between Red Terror and his owner. Their natures were exactly alike.

Warren realized that Old Joe was within his rights when it came to any question of trespassing on his property. There was no legal point to be decided in that respect. But would Red Terror pay any attention to boundaries? That was a moot question. It seemed strange that no action could be taken until some tragic incident occurred.

It was Burkett's attitude that irritated Warren. He sat there for two minutes longer in stony silence. The more he thought about the Red Terror, the angrier he became, then the hard lines on his face softened as he heard the soft chimes of the Apishipa School bell. He glanced at his watch. Nine o'clock. Stirring restlessly in the saddle, fear came suddenly into his mind. Would the newly constructed wire fence around the schoolyard offer sufficient protection for Louise? A grim scowl settled on his face as he reined the Hameltonian around and started down the rutted road that followed the creek. Then he complained aloud bitterly, "That girl shouldn't have accepted that school in the first place. Old Joe Burkett wouldn't care if that devilish bull of his killed all the youngsters in the district and their teacher along with them." Warren shook his head over such sordid contemplation.

TWO miles down the rutted trail, Warren saw Mike Wallace's farmhouse. Mike's chief interest in the Apishipa School came from the fact that he held a yearly contract for furnishing firewood for heating the building.

Mike's industry was apparent when Warren rode into the yard. A well-rounded load of firewood had been placed on a small-sized jeep ready for delivery.

"Howdy neighbor," Mike greeted.

Warren's thoughts were on the Red Terror. A forced smile came into his serious face when he said, "Hello!"

"Travelin' 'er just goin' somewhere?" Mike grinned.

Warren came to the point immediately. "Just came over to see if something can't be done about that maniac bull of Old Joe Burkett's."

Mike gave Warren an amused glance. "I guess you're more interested in the little schoolma'am than you are in Old Joe's bull. Don't blame you though, 'cause she's prettier'n a bud on a peach-limb."

Warren smiled over Mike's comparison. But his apparent indifference to Louise's safety was disappointing. "You know Old Joe pretty well, don't you?" he ventured, attempting another approach.

"Ye-ah, I know him too well to want any trouble with him," said Mike.

"Afraid of him, are you?"

"Not exactly that. But he's never caused me any trouble. So I don't see any reason for me to butt into his affairs. There's one thing I do know, Old Joe thinks a lot of that bull. Ever since he's had him —that's six years—he's got top price for his yearlings on the open market and it's my guess if you go tramping on his toes, you'll have a fight on your hands," Mike returned, nodding his head with conviction.

Fight! Warren was amused. Home on a furlough from the South Pacific. Ambushed for three weeks. Fought his way out over the bodies of a platoon of yellow-bellies. Thrusting his hand under his shirt, he rubbed an itching scar, now healed, but still annoying, the tell-tale evidence of a bursting shell that had kept him in a base hospital for two months. Then had come a furlough and home.

"Fight, did you say?" Warren repeated with a laugh.

"Ye-ah, Old Joe is a tough hombre!" explained Mike.

Warren realized that there was nothing to be gained in discussing measures to get rid of the Terror. He knew that Mike had erected the wire fence around the schoolhouse for Old Joe and he also knew that he had been well paid for the job. Money talked! It had talked loud enough for Warren to realize, too, that Burkett himself was uneasy over the fighting proclivities of his prized bull, even though he wouldn't admit it.

Warren bristled, "It's a dead-cinch that I'm not going to let that vicious animal cause Louise any trouble, and I don't mean maybe!" He knew that the ultimatum would be carried to Burkett.

SHORTLY after daylight the next morning, Warren headed back toward the Burkett Range. The tang of growing things was in the air. Even the spirited Hambletonian shied at imaginary objects along the highway. A quarter-mile up the slope where the hogback dips toward the schoolhouse he saw the Terror on the outer fringes of a large herd of cattle. A deep guttural roar shook the early morning stillness. Warren stood up in the stirrups and raised his glasses. What he saw filled him with anger.

Directly across from the spot where the Terror was putting on a demonstration was the home of Seth Robbins, partially hidden in a grove of elm and cottonwood trees. Robbins, a retired farmer, even in his more robust days would have been unequal to match strength and wits against such a formidable adversary.

Nearing the little farmhouse, Warren's eyes widened with an explosive curse. The aged Robbins was sitting astride of a large obtruding limb in a gnarled cottonwood tree. The Terror was pawing viciously on the ground, roaring with vengeful fury. An empty porcelain bucket was sitting near the base of the tree.

Warren rode slowly up to the tree. His sun-tanned face became a shade lighter. "Are you hurt?" he cried, pulling out a formidable looking .38."

"Can't tell. My left shoulder feels pretty sore where he struck me. Hope it ain't broke!" explained the old man nervously. "I was coming back from the well with that bucket full of water when the damned varmint struck me. If it hadn't been for this here cottonwood I'd be a gonner right now," he deplored shakily.

The Terror advanced a few steps toward Warren, pawing and roaring with demon-like fury, then paused for a second, bracing himself for a charge.

Warren backed his horse to one side of the cottonwood, then gripped the .38.

"Don't use that gun!" cried Robbins. "Old Joe'll kill both of us if you do!" The

old man stuttered in excitement. "Get over behind the barn where he can't see you!"

"I'll get him if he comes too close," Warren said, wheeling the horse around as he flashed behind the barn. Ten seconds later Warren circled around behind the Terror. He had a long-tined pitchfork in his hands.

"Fight now, you son of Satan," he cried, dashing up—and two tines sank into the bull's rump. The animal, writhing in pain, roared defiance as he swung loose from the sharp-pronged fork.

Warren was too quick for the ponderous Terror. Another thrust of the sharply pointed hay-fork, and there came a frenzied grunt as he tried to swing around to bring the sharp horns into action. Furtively Warren sank the fork-tines deeper—prodding with all the force he could command. Unable to escape from the harrowing attack, the bull sank down with an agonizing roar, then gave a leap forward and broke into a run while Warren followed, jabbing savagely.

Breathing heavily, Warren returned to the Robbins' farmyard. Glancing back, he saw that the Terror had rejoined the other cattle that were moving slowly back toward the slope. Suddenly, he paused on a slight rise of ground and began bellowing revengefully at his erstwhile tormentor.

Seth Robbins, climbing down from the cottonwood, grinned, "You didn't take all the fight out of him yet!"

"Apparently not. But I gave him something that'll stick in his brain for a while," Warren said, abruptly reining his horse around and riding away.

It was a strange situation; nearly everyone with whom he talked expressed himself as being afraid of Old Joe Burkett. But stranger still was the way that Old Joe condoned the bull's actions. Perhaps he was only bluffing, but what was worse he might actually have an utter disregard for the rights of others in permitting the animal to run at large.

Warren's nerves were a little taut from the fact that his furlough expired in another week. There would be no one to protect the teacher and school children from the treacherous bull. He needed no further evidence to place the facts fairly before Old Joe. Spurring the horse, he rode directly to Burkett's home.

Warren had no intention of bringing others into whatever discussion he might have with Old Joe. So long as the neighbors put up with the situation, it was their affair. But the thoughts of the teacher and her charges at the Apishipa School made it his.

Burkett was repairing a corral when Warren rode up. Neither of the men exchanged a greeting. After a prolonged silence Old Joe glanced up briefly.

Warren cleared his throat. "Burkett, I came over to see what you intend to do about that maniac bull of yours. As I see it, there's no use in mincing words, either pen him up or run the risk of having him filled full of lead."

Burkett stiffened. "The hell-you-say! And where do you come into the picture?"

WARREN hesitated for a second. "I came into *the picture* as you call it, when I talked to the teacher at the Apishipa School. I also knew about a few other fracases that your bull has pulled off. Now, get this straight, Burkett; I'm not afraid of you. I can't be bluffed nor scared. You'll either pen up that animal or take the consequences."

Old Joe regarded the younger man with sullen contempt. Not a quiver came into his sallow face. "That bull is as peaceable as a lamb. He never bothers people until he's molested," he said without emotion. "There's a good many who would like to hunt on my range but they're afraid of the bull. He's better than any watchdog I could get," he said with a mirthless chuckle.

"Watchdog, hell!" Warren scoffed. "It's quite apparent that you don't know what you're talking about. There's no use in continuing the argument over that treacherous animal. There's only one thing that'll stop him and that's a rifle bullet."

Burkett gave Warren a meaning glance, "An eye for an eye, is my code, young fellow." It was steel rasping against steel.

Old Joe remained true to his reputation, Warren thought as he rode away. It became quite evident why all the other ranchmen in the area were afraid of him. Come to think about it, there would be some difficulty in deciding which was the more dangerous, Old Joe or the Red Terror.

TWO days still remained of Corporal Warren's furlough. He would be obliged to leave the day before school was out. The greater part of his time had been spent in daily reconnoiters around the Burkett Range. He hadn't seen the Terror since the morning he had had the argument with old Joe. Apparently his visit to the rancher's *hacienda* had borne fruit. Beyond a doubt he was keeping the bull with his cattle on the upper-slopes near Rattlesnake Buttes.

On the way down to the Burkett Range that morning, Warren rode over for another visit with Seth Robbins.

Robbins was delighted to see his former rescuer and friend. "Morning," he greeted amiably with outstretched hand.

Warren grinned. "How are you and the Red Terror coming along?"

"Ain't seen the critter since the morning you chased him with that pitchfork. Gosh-'amighty, that was some battle!" chuckled the old man.

"Perhaps Old Joe has penned him up?" ventured Warren.

"Not that brute. There ain't a pen in the county that'll hold him," returned Robbins.

Warren felt that the old man's conjecture was probably correct. It was the previous year when the Terror had first begun to demonstrate his contempt for man-made constrictions. "If my memory serves me correctly, he stirred up a lot of trouble some time ago," he observed.

"They closed up the school two months before the term expired," explained Robbins. "A lot of people thought it was on account of money matters, which wasn't the case at all. The school directors got into an argument over which one was to file a complaint to have the animal killed. But on account of Old Joe being the biggest taxpayer in the district, they didn't want to make him sore. So they closed the school."

Burkett remembered that he had made an attempt to impound the Terror at that time. It seemed that an enforced confinement within the eight-foot walls of a prison-like structure had fanned his evil nature to a demoniacal degree. In the first place, it had taken six of the best cowhands to drive him along with ten other three-year-olds into the prison. When the decoys were let out, one by one, he began to sense his plight. Enraged over the loss of accustomed liberty, the Terror had become as ferocious as a caged lion—pacing slowly along the sides of his pen, raking the heavy poles with his horns, throwing his ponderous weight against the unyielding walls.

Wearied over repeated attempts to dislodge the heavy beams which formed the main portion of the corral, he had then directed his attention against the heavily barred gate which had been constructed with greater permanency than the other parts of the pen. Two upright twelve-inch posts had been sunk into the ground and secured at the top by a beam of equal size. The gate was constructed from eight-inch plank and swung from the post with heavy iron hinges.

Circling around the inclosure, hundreds of times each day, the bull would return to the gate, rubbing his shoulders against the upright posts, bellowing deeply, pawing the ground. For two weeks he kept up this onslaught. One day at the rear of the corral, he swung around quickly, no one knowing whether it was the pent-up fury of his long confinement or a crazed determination to escape from the corral that inspired his sudden bolt for freedom. Head-on, he struck one of the upright posts—there was a splintering crash as the Terror galloped down through the narrow lane leading out to his old familiar range.

Perhaps it was the impressions of his confinement that had been seared into his brain that had made him wary and suspicious of the inventions of men.

"Burkett has made his bluff stick with his neighbors," remarked Warren, thinking about the conversation he had had with him a few days previously. "But I got him told. Don't be surprised from now on at anything that happens."

LATE afternoon, a brisk wind was sweeping down from the Rattlesnake Buttes whose familiar outline was covered by heavy dark clouds. Warren's eyes swept the upper slopes. Old Joe's cattle were drifting slowly down toward the creek.

Riding along slowly, Warren heard the deep, rumbling bellow of the Terror rolling down from the slopes above the creek not a quarter mile away. Turning suddenly,

he reversed his route and started back towards the schoolhouse. Whether the animated herd was purposely drifting with the cold wind or headed for water in the creek, he didn't know. As he drew nearer, he could see the Terror proceeding slowly in the vanguard of the herd. Obviously, he was in an ugly mood, swinging his ponderous head from side to side, emitting a thunderous challenge, evil, sinister, like that morning when he saw him across the creek.

Suddenly a score of children raced from the schoolhouse, laughing and shouting. Warren glanced at his watch. It was the afternoon intermission period. In their playful excitement they never saw the Terror until he raced along the new wire fence.

Through an open window, Louise Trevor heard the ominous challenge, and ran out the door to spread the alarm among the children. It might have been her billowing red skirt that caught the attention of the Terror. Stamping his forefeet, roaring madly, he plunged through the wire fence as though it was made from paper—tearing away one whole side of the inclosure.

In her panic, Miss Trevor ran around the farther side of the building, the enraged bull a few leaps behind her, bellowing madly, coming to an abrupt halt at the rear of the school building. The girl, with only one avenue of escape, climbed to the top of a large pile of firewood—her bright-colored skirt whipping in the wind.

The Terror began pawing the ground, his flaming ogreish eyes filled with rage. After repeated attempts to charge the frightened teacher—he found that each time the loose firewood yielded to his bulky weight. Hesitating briefly, he began thrusting his sharp horns into the pile of wood—scattering it about in maddened fury.

Warren breathed a silent curse as his Hambletonian leaped across the flattened-out fence. The horse whinneyed in apparent fright, reared up and flashed past the bull and headed around the schoolhouse. It happened so quickly that Warren seemed unable to control the animal.

"Don't lose your head, Louise, I'll get him before he can hurt you." Rope poised for the first opening cast, he circled around for a throw at the brute's head. Each time he got in position, the maddened bull would jump to the other side of the pile of wood, roaring frightfully at the distracted girl.

Suddenly the opening came. The rope whirred, striking between the enraged animal's horns and looping under his jaws. It was a strangle hold. Warren slipped the rope around the saddle-horn — the noose tightened. Sensing the pull on the rope, the Terror leaped forward. Head down, he charged with a thunderous roar. Torredor side-stepped from the thrust. Again the rope tensed under the weight of the bull. Warren unsnapped the steel muzzle on the horse, realizing that it was to be a battle with teeth, hoofs, and horns—a .38, too, if necessary. Frantically, he tried to unfasten the rope from the saddle-horn. The Terror swung around, there was a heaving grunt, a sharp horn shot through the saddle-girth—blood spurted from Torredor's flank. In a flash, Warren regained his balance in a tangle of rope.

Thwack! Thwack! Like an exploding shell, the Hambeltonian's hind feet crashed into the Terror's head, then wheeling instantly the horse sank his teeth into the bull's spine. Bewildered over the unexpected attack, he dropped to his knees.

Before he had recovered sufficiently from the onslaught of the frenzied Torredor, Warren flipped a rope under his jaws, spurring his horse away, this shut off the Terror's wind. Grunting helplessly, the battling bull stretched out on the ground. Warren worked quickly. Taking a hobble chain that he always carried in his saddle-bag, he fastened one end to a forefoot then back to the opposite hindfoot in such a manner that the animal could get to his feet but would be unable to walk. Then unfastening the throttling rope from the bull's head, he stepped aside.

"There, that's hold you until Old Joe Burkett get here," he remarked grimly, puffing heavily from the exertion. Turning, he walked over to the pile of stovewood, and, reaching up, helped the hysterical girl to the ground. "I'll admit that I was scared for a while too, Louise," he said grinning, holding the girl tightly in his arms. Then he whispered in her ear, "If you're still frightened, I won't let go!"

"I refuse to answer!" she smiled, looking up at him.

All in our next issue

SHORT STORIES for August 25th

GORDON MacCREAGH

One smooth double cross is as many as any one but a fool will chance—even in Calcutta

"Picaroon"

WILLIAM G. BOGART

A summer stock company sees murder—and even the deputy sheriff used to be in vaudeville

"Death in Stock"

JACKSON V. SCHOLZ

The fascinating story of a bunch of flat-top pilots who were ready to chew clouds, but harbored a secret jinx about any fellow who got his 17th Zero.

"The 16 Club"

WILLIAM HEUMAN

A baseball novelette of the dog days of August when a pennant can hang on very little

"Diamond Double Cross"

NO KIDDING — — Patrick O'Keeffe

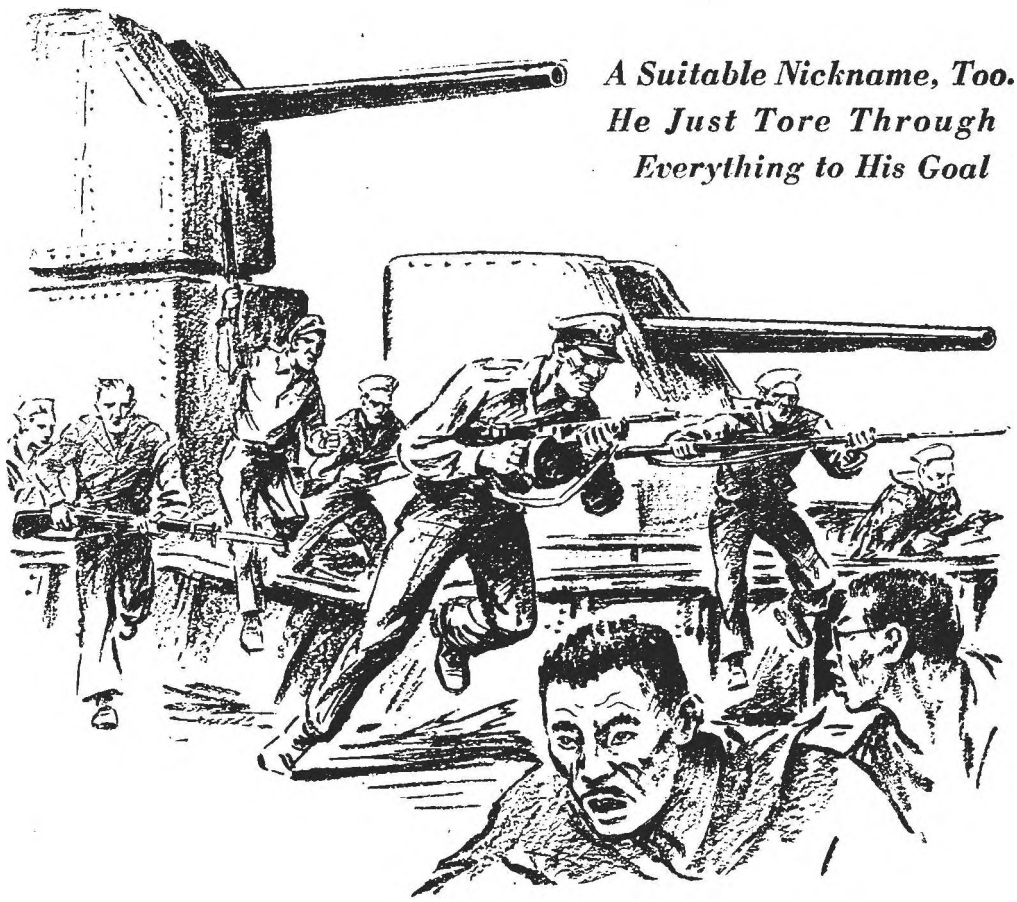
He was a great kidder, the chief steward—but kidding a U-boat boarding party—Whew!

"Like hummin'-birds lookin' for gee-raniums—" That was the way Hashknife liked bad men to take off from his immediate vicinity, but they didn't always do it. Sometimes it looked as if that was the way troubles came at him and Sleepy.

Take, for instance, the novelette in our next issue

"Fate and Some Fools"

W. C. TUTTLE



A Suitable Nickname, Too. He Just Tore Through Everything to His Goal

THE HONORABLE WILLIWAW

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

IF THE Navy is raising hell with the Japs around the Kurile Islands soon, chalk up a nice hunk of credit to Lieutenant Commander Mike Vernon, U. S. N., alias *The Honorable Williwaw.*

If you knew Mike as a seven-year-old you'll recall his father to say, "He's the darndest kid I ever saw. If he thinks the goal is worth while, all hell can't stop him. I hope he doesn't go in for crime."

In his teen age he was forever carrying the torch for a lost cause. Then he decided an appointment to the navy school at Annapolis would be a worthy goal. He took a lot of bumps, but he made it.

In those days, you'll recall, Army pushed Navy around in the annual football game. "This sort of thing must stop," Mike declared. It took three quarters to do it, but Mike built himself up into a one-man riot and punched over the winning touchdown.

He was a battleship ensign, at San Pedro, California, when he met his first Jap. Mike didn't like him. Behind the bows and smiles he saw craft and hate in dark eyes. He noticed that *fishing boats* which never smelled of fish, followed the fleet around. "This sort of thing must stop," Mike declared.

Although one school of thought claims that the admirals and ensigns do most of the work in the navy, the latter draw very little water. Everyone seemed to be too busy to do much about the Japs. From an Alaskan

canneryman Mike learned that the Japs were fishing — and taking soundings — all along the Alaskan Coast and the Aleutian Islands.

"The hell they are!" Mike exclaimed. "Isn't something being done about it?" But brass hats weren't listening to ensigns.

Mike made a bee-line to the chartroom. Our charts revealed large, inadequately surveyed areas. "I'd hate to command a ship in those waters during a war," he said. "Ye gods! We've almost nothing on the Kurile Islands. They're an extension of the Aleutian stepping stones to Japan. It's high time we sent a fleet of *fishing boats* to the Kuriles. If there's a war there'll be hell to pay and we'll be fresh out of pitch."

Someone smiled quietly, and someone else expressed the opinion that the Japs weren't crazy enough to become involved in a war with us. Ashore it was the general conclusion that one American could lick five Japs, any way. "Not without charts of the Aleutians and Kuriles you can't," Mike argued.

It was then that Mike began studying the Japanese language. "So that he can curse them in their own tongue," many said.

When Mike was a lieutenant-commander and skipper of one of the World War I destroyers he worked a couple of angles and found himself in Aleutian waters. He'd send boat crews ashore to climb mountains with the hope of catching Japs on the other side of the island.

Late one afternoon a boat crew raced down a mountain, and Mike knew a Jap ship had been spotted in our waters. "Taking soundings," a bosun's mate panted.

UNDER forced draft, through tide rips and heavy seas, Mike's destroyer sped to the scene. The Jap *fisherman,* was already tearing through a strait, bound for the open sea.

Instead of opening fire, Mike tried to drive the Jap, the *Okuda Maru,* onto the beach. You'll remember Mike's ship hung up on an uncharted reef. The Jap missed it neatly because he had charted a break where the depth of water was ample. Mike tossed a shell into the *Okuda Maru* with the idea of stopping her. He slowed her down and she limped into Dutch Harbor.

The Jap government, you'll recall, raised merry hell. The *Okuda Maru's* skipper stated that he had taken refuge in American waters to escape "The honorable Williwaw." (A sudden gale, often with a wind velocity of eighty, or more, miles an hour.)

"We saw no honorable Williwaw," Mike testified. And that was how he won a nickname that would stick through life.

You'll remember the Japanese government demanded an apology and punishment for Mike. The apology was forthcoming and one of the Navy's biggest brass hats reprimanded Mike — and gave him the warmest handshake in naval history. "But," the admiral asked, "why the devil were you trying to beach the *Okuda Maru?* Why didn't you sink it?"

"It looked like a swell idea, sir, at the time," Mike answered. The admiral, on the theory that what he didn't know, he couldn't recognize officially, did not press Mike further. But the gleam in the younger officer's eye intrigued him.

That's why Mike was given command of a crack new destroyer several months after Pearl Harbor and sent on patrol duty to the North Pacific. "And don't hang her up on a reef," the admiral warned, "unless — it's worth while."

MIKE'S radar picked up a swiftly moving mass nine months later. "A destroyer," he concluded, well aware there were doubtless mine fields this close to the Kurile Island. He had a hunch the Jap's radar wasn't up to ours, and that the watch might not be too alert in home waters. Besides, he was thinking about reefs and mines. He drove ahead at full speed until he picked up the enemy's wake, then followed it through the fog.

She was a half mile dead ahead, when the fog lifted slightly, and his forward guns knocked out the Jap's after turret and messed up her deck with the first salvo. She turned to bring her forward guns and tubes to bear, and Mike's second salvo knocked out everything up front. "We can blow her to hell with a torpedo, sir," a chief said, almost in tears. He'd spent a lifetime in torpedoes and had never fired one for keeps.

"We aren't going to sink her," Mike yelled. "We're going to board her."

The boys thought of the old days of John Paul Jones and Decatur and they rather liked the idea. Some of them had been at Pearl Harbor and there were personal grudges to pay off.

Another salvo slowed her to a walk and sent live steam pouring out of her stack. Then Mike's ship came abeam and hit her port side with a staggering crash. Fire flashed as steel struck steel, frames bent and plates crumpled. It was the last thing the Japs expected, and thirty or forty of Mike's men were aboard the Jap before they knew what was up.

Mike, with a tommy gun spitting flame, led the way. A burst cleared the wheel house, and Mike was inside, prowling through the debris. His tommy gun empty, he drew his service automatic and shot it out with the Jap skipper.

There was a jeweled hara kiri sword which Mike picked up for a souvenir. "I didn't come for this, men," he yelled.

Fifteen minutes later Mike's ship came abeam of the Jap again. And once more frames buckled, and plates were torn. Three dead and five wounded were sent aboard, then Mike ordered his ship to put about and retrace her course. "Okay," he said a few minutes later to the chief. "You can throw a fish into her."

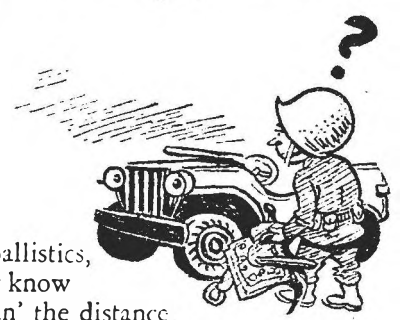
He was grinning when an officer reported the ship's damage. "Cheap," he said. "Cheap. I got what I came for—a complete set of Jap charts of the North Pacific and Kuriles. That's what I was after when I tried to beach the *Okuda Maru*. And I can read the damned things, too. That's why I put in years learning to read and speak their blasted lingo."

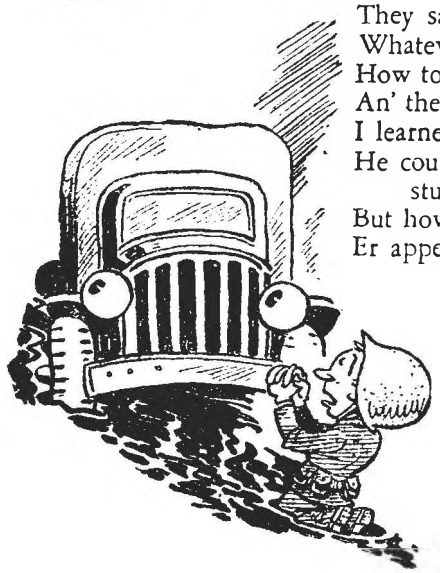
As Mike's father had hinted, it was a good thing for the nation that Mike didn't make up his mind to go in for crime.

Trainee

By CLARENCE EDWIN FLYNN

I CAN'T git the hang o' this army.
I've heard about battles, an' wars,
An' saddles, an' sabers, an' muskets,
An' the gittin' o' bayonet scars.
I learned about fightin' from Gran'pap,
An' I figgered he learned me a heap;
But how can you spur up an airplane
Er curry an' saddle a jeep?





They say I must study Ballistics,
Whatever that is, an' must know
How to figger the wind, an' the distance,
An' the angle an' curve o' the throw.
I learned about fightin' from Grand'pap.
He could coax his mules out when they stuck,
But how can you plead with a motor
Er appeal to the heart of a truck?

A gentleman's war's what I call it,
An' the weapons is funny and strange.
They're things that the folks never heard of
In the old wars an' out on the range.
I learned about fightin' from Gran'pap,
But what would become o' the guys
That wait fer foes to keep comin'
Till they sighted the whites o' their eyes?

Had the Green Skipper Been Brought to the Top Too Fast for His Own Good?

THE SEARCH

By B. E. COOK

THE old saying persists that a debt is a debt—to be paid in full. It assumes the impossible; one kind of debt never can be totally discharged. For the value of a life is beyond all media of exchange and the debt for a life goes on and ever on, yet Kirk Vail believed that he had done his full duty by Jonnie Blair.

Captain Vail blamed himself for the situation. Today he even doubted the advisability of singling out a likely looking lad to help and hustle him up the serious climb from ordinary seaman to a master's ticket. Jonnie Blair had been keen and eager enough to gratify any officer's efforts; but now that he was a master, he took no more advice.

The skipper watched the aneroid, its needle going downward, low already in the twenty-nines. Not that he lacked faith in his own vessel against northeaster, but Jonnie Blair had the little *Canadienne*. Both Blair and the *Canadienne* presented a vastly different problem.

He moved along the *Coalway's* swaying bridge, contemplating that other ship. She had been designed and built for St. Lawrence River and occasional Lakes traffic. She was just the length to pound off one big sea onto the next. She lacked those vital, strengthening, longitudinal frames which so reassuringly reinforced the *Coalway's* hull. Old "Dividends" Syphers, who owned and operated this coal fleet with the large white S on its funnels, had boasted of the *Canadienne* as one of his sharp bargains. But he expected his masters in her to push her in conformity with his touted, one-word policy "Quickcoal."

Kirk Vail saw the first rain coming over the graybeards as the *Coalway* rooted into

a big one, but his thoughts now centered on Jonnie Blair. Whose name, by the way, was Clive; but ever since Kirk and another lad had stolen a rowboat and got caught out in a thunderstorm over the bay, back home, Kirk had assumed a deep responsibility for this Clive's career—and had thought and talked of him as Jonnie. For Clive's brother Jonnie had drowned, that day on the bay, had come up under their overturned boat and screamed for help which Kirk could not give.

Today Kirk Vail still felt to blame for Jonnie Blair's death, felt guilty for stealing the boat, for their venture out around the Point where searchers found him alone, clinging to the skiff—much too late to save Jonnie.

Through years of advancement he had been making amends by doing for Clive what he believed Jonnie would have done. Now, in the face of a northeaster with Jonnie—Clive—Blair out ahead, already fighting the weather in a river vessel, Kirk doubted his own judgment in the matter.

For he had warned Jonnie in the Roads: "The other skipper in that *Canadienne* got by in her by avoiding the big storms. Your glass and the weather stations farther north warn you this'll be a bad one. Anchor. Wait out the worst of it."

"Listen," Jonnie countered, "you pushed and coached and steered me around for years. Okay, I appreciate that. Today I'm on my own, been years waiting for it, so I'll decide what the *Canadienne* can weather. Old man Syphers says 'Quickcoal'. I'll captain a white S collier only so long as I play the Syphers game."

"But look to your own future as well," Kirk reminded him.

"Dammit, I tell you that's my business. I'm on my own!"

Kirk could do no more. Now he reflected belatedly that he'd brought this lad to the top too fast for his good. For a green skipper to acquire basic judgment by experience can prove disastrous to himself, his crew and his vessel.

The wind struck up a wilder tune in the stays. He watched the *Coalway's* bow go into it green, burying the winch on the fo'castle head, driving a bow lookout pellmell off there to the safety of the bridge. Kirk should have called him above before; he was too engrossed in a mental picture of the *Canadienne*, somewhere up ahead, pounding her bow with only eight knots power.

Restlessness and anxiety drove him inside the wheelhouse if for no better reason, to be with people. In there, veteran Mr. Tanner, his First, hung to a halfdown window. Said he, "Goin' to get tough, Cap, come dark."

"I suppose. Tougher for that *Canadienne*."

"Yup. Hell, that other skipper never took her outside in the face o' gov'ment warnin's the likes o' this."

Kirk said tightly, "Nor me this one. Eats too much bunkers if you have to heave to, and Syphers raises the devil over the waste of good coal."

"But here we are," Tanner droned.

"Because," Kirk replied evenly. "Jonnie Blair is."

"Ahr!" Tanner snorted, musing forthwith over the penalties of developing what he called "boy wonders in braid."

Which, as conversation, only served to deepen Kirk's uneasiness. And when four o'clock came, he knew he had failed in coming out at all. He had expected to overtake the *Canadienne*. Already the day was fading out, the rain restricted visibility, and Jonnie Blair? Despite his vessel's slower speed, somewhere in the mounting head-on storm she had eluded Captain Vail. Blair probably had set a course well clear of a lee shore; by this hour he well might be into the teeth of the wind, slowed down or even hove to.

Kirk went below to the radio room. In over the weatherboard, however, he checked his impulse; he could not wireless Jonnie. Old "Dividends" enforced strict rules regarding the sending of radio messages; he detested the unavoidable arrangement by which the law obliged his coastwise colliers to carry radios at all; he chased at the control the radio people retained over their operators aboard his ships.

Tonight Kirk would have given plenty merely to know Jonnie's position. He could not broadcast for the *Canadienne's* latitude and longitude—nor could he be at all certain that headstrong Captain Blair would give it if he had it. "Now I'm on my own," Jonnie had warned; he had meant precisely that. So Captain Vail hovered awhile be-

side Sparks, licking at his lips; so handy, all this equipment, yet so out of his reach tonight!

"Sparks," said he at length, "keep your ears peeled all night. The *Canadienne* might radio. We're probably the only two vessels out here in this."

"Okay, Cap'n. Damn glad I'm not on that one. They say her equipment is junk, old as hell. Antique model."

"Yeah? Receiver or sending gear?" Kirk tried to ask it indifferently.

"Both, sir. One of those Syphers bargains, they say. Mike Kozinski in the *Fire Rock* is a topnotch op. He really can build 'em, but he gave that outfit just one look."

Kirk entered the wheelhouse again in time to overhear: "—youngest master on this coast, that Blair—and wettest behind the ears."

THAT night in the *Coaluay* took years out of Kirk Vail. The storm's fury intensified on a forty-mile wind. The *Coaluay* plunged and parried, traded force with solid seas, yet she bored on like the rugged fighter she was.

Blasts of wind slewed her aside, black walls crashed onto her open deck; she shook to the beat of her screw and went on, always on.

Never once did she worry her skipper. He knew all her ways in several such beatings, she was a tough baby all the way. But he knew she must have passed the *Canadienne* somewhere back there in late afternoon or evening. East or west, somewhere on this vast, darkened wilderness in tumult, a small river steamer, deep in five thousands o' coal cargo, was being buffeted like a sluggish chip—

And no radio from Jonnie. Maybe he was getting by, weathering this hell; maybe, but just as likely he'd be overrating his ability and his ship's capacity for punishment. "I wish I'd held him back longer as mate," Kirk muttered, "and made him learn more about hulls."

About three a.m., Kirk dropped in on Sparks again. Rather, he was pitched in over the coaming by a nasty boarding sea that broke over the starboard rail, black as the night that had spawned it.

"Not a flicker yet," Sparks reported, and the skipper noted a quart of black coffee banked and shored with everything handy to hold it down.

Boom—whang-ooh! came another sea against the bridge and Kirk watched his chance to get back above. No word from the *Canadienne*, no word from Jonnie, no word, no word.

DAWN sneaked peacemeal over that drab, racing world as though ashamed of itself. The skipper shook the rainwater from his stubbled visage, tugged impatiently at his collar and flexed stiffening legs. Where was that cussed *Canadienne* now? Still pounding in this ceaseless uproar? He cursed the Sypher's policy that risked a young cub in the command of a river tramp that other master's didn't have to take. He gripped the bridge rail, turned to stare over the stern, yet knew he would not see the other vessel today. He growled into his collar about Bair's wilfulness, his own folly in aiming such a man toward command.

For on that early morning Kirk Vail, rankly, was scared. It had been too long with no word from Blair to somebody and this weather was too much for Blair's vessel under any skipper's hand. It was the worst gale in—Sparks had picked it up in a whisp of news from the coast.

"Good God!" Kirk cried into the wind when a black squall came over and the rain poured down in torrents. "If I don't hear from him, if Sparks doesn't intercept something about him within the next two bells, I'll—"

Whatever it was he'd do, he didn't. Up a companionway behind him came Sparks in the downpour. "I caught something, but it's fuzzy and weak."

"From the *Canadienne?*" Kirk demanded heatedly.

"Dunno, sir. Some guy on his emergency set. Damned weak signal and it is a distress M."

"Sounds to me like no generator, on an emergency battery set. Then it is within forty or fifty miles of here. What direction?" impatiently.

"Hell, I drilled him for his position but—"

"Get that position. Pound brass, kid. Pound like hell for it!"

* * * * *

The rain had ceased for awhile but the

wind held even stronger, its fury compensating for the letup. The *Coalway* had moved into the southeast with no guide save a desperate, hurried, radio appeal. She must estimate the position of the vessel in distress; therefore her skipper assumed that—if it was Blair—he had been hove to all night and falling away to leeward. As for the prospects of finding that ship, Captain Vail refused to discuss the matter. The chances were mighty slim.

"But, *Canadienne* or any other ship," he did admit, "their situation would seem to be desperate where they're down to an emergency radio and don't manage to get away a position."

So the *Coalway* plowed the evil, gray mountains in a methodical box-search and her master looked his eyes out for a squat funnel careening up over some random sea. He set lookout men forward, aft, even on top of the steward's galley. He stationed himself up abaft the standard compass while mates got the idea and went into the bridge wings with binoculars.

All that violent day the search persisted over miles of foam-flecked gray under grayer skies. A spoondrift persisted like low fog. Squalls rattled like fine shot in their strange, bleak song the ship over.

And Kirk mulled over the Jonnie he had brought to sea. From the outset he had been a proper fool for courage, impulsive to enter a new port. Jonnie the bosun who had cussed out the winch with a blow from a braking iron when the chain lodged. Mister Blair, the new Third with a mania for new charts and all the pilotage he could memorize. Captain Jonnie in his first flush of command, in the *Canadienne*, after experienced masters had turned her down.

All day he seemed to see the young skipper, on his way up, at the top. But he saw, too, a thousand great winrows roll out of the mists, and masts and funnels—that were not there. Loss of sleep and disregard of hunger were playing tricks with his thinking. At odd moments the wind's noises became the original Jonnie's shrieks underneath that overturned boat in the bay. At times, he thought sure he heard the *Canadienne's* familiar, whoofy siren.

Then night caught up with him again, another day spent and nothing to show for it. Yet he persisted in box-searching. Somewhere out here was the lad he had helped too generously, the vessel old Syphers should not have put into this business, and a crew the *Coalway's* men wanted to save. He put the *Coalway* into the weather, across it, in and out of nearly quiet valleys, down the wind on a tail sea. Hunt, hunt, and hunt on!

Seas buried her at times, leaving only her two islands above an acre of suds. She rolled the crockery out of racks, lids off the galley range, an urn over the tiled floor. One lifeboat, on a change of course, was ripped bare, and bashed; Kirk heard the grunt of metal, the tear of cloth.

The next dawn was intensely welcome, for they could all cease looking for flares, for rockets, and Very lights—all signals of despair in grim darkness. The skipper rubbed bloodshot eyes as a mess man clawed up a ladder to him with bitter coffee.

He got it halfway to his lips when the Second in a wing of the bridge yelled out: "—three-ee points on our port bow!"

Kirk dropped the coffee to stare. Out of the spoondrift a slender mast wove its jerky way upward, then downward. A darker blotch rose a short distance from the spot. It bore a white S. Now the house appeared. The *Canadienne!*

The *Coalway's* crew shouted the news fore and aft. The two mates came out of the wings. Faithful old Tanner came from his window outside to join them. But he eyed that spot on the sea without speaking. He backed to the rail to peer above at the skipper, then he grunted. For Kirk Vail niether saw nor heard what his men were doing then; his eyes were fixed on the black *Canadienne*. Something brand new was seeping into his consciousness.

And well it might. The *Canadienne* was

not sinking. Her portside boat still hung in its davits, too. True, great seas had boarded her at some time or other and one at least had caught her radio room door aswing. That was the key to the entire situation aboard that vessel; it had slammed inside, it had probably wrecked her sending apparatus.

Kirk selected a safe position and hove the *Coalway* to while, in his careful mind, he considered his moves in the immediate future. He also came to completely revise his years' old relations with Jonnie Blair, for he was little short of appalled. What he beheld over there on the seas was not the breaking up of a vessel so much as the crackup of a man. It was far worse.

He spoke to Jonnie by radio. In its terse language made more terse by the man at the other end, Kirk Vail forced the bald facts out of the young, cocky skipper now somewhat deflated. John Blair had lost his head.

The story was not complicated at all. A huge graybeard had caught the *Canadienne* almost beam on. It had ruined the old sending outfit in her radio room and carried one boat away. Its suddenness, sheer mass and tremendous power had shocked all hands. Even Jonnie, who, despite his cockiness, knew well the reputation his vessel bore, had showed his misgivings in that awful three minutes.

He had stood speechless in water swirling around his feet. He went stark white—and whiter when his half drowned radio man reported "That junkpile o' mine is dead." Unfortunately all quarters and mess rooms, engine room, bridge—everything of human occupation aboard the little vessel was housed inside the one house aft. So the news passed like wildfire from man to man: one boat's gone, radio's dead, skipper's scared white!

The chief had kept silent about the water below, but a wet armature broke that piece of news for him; all lights went out at once. Thence on, too many men without faith in Jonnie Blair, too many voices saying, "Looks like ev'ry man for hisself, and keep above or you'll get trapped like rats in her." And a lot more of such drivel that lost nothing in repetition.

Until neither mates nor engineers could get work done and the young skipper absolutely forbade resort to force. Instead, he tried reasoning to induce firemen back to fires. He talked to sailors who took mistaken cues from the looks exchanged by mates.

The radio operator did get his emergency battery set working with eager, volunteer help and thus the *Coalway* received the last of his persistent calls for help. Then she rolled his wet cells round and he lost what power they had because there was acid running over the cubbyhole floor. The *Canadienne* was lying in the trough with no stokers below decks, no lights, engineers working with torches at the big generator, oilers and engineers trying to fire and get rid of water through half plugged strainer holes.

Cap'n Jonnie's mate caught eight men stripping the one remaining lifeboat. But no boat could have survived its launching in that running sea, so he went after them. They turned on him as one man. The Second and Third joined him. All this while Jonnie was below with the chief, impatient for lights, plenty chagrined, aware too late of the fact that a pokerface on his part could have tided things over the effect of that sea.

Now he gave Kirk the story. Kirk asked practical questions without once offering criticism or suggestion. He demanded more details until Jonnie came to feel that old-time domination boring in upon him all over again. He sensed that Kirk was drilling it out of him, and unduly, like a prosecuting attorney establishing a point in a trial. No doubt it was Kirk's price for eventually sending a line downwind for the towing job or for taking off the mutineers, the second-rate crew, from this Jonah vessel.

In time, Jonnie hit upon a further reason for Kirk's prolonged messaging. Kirk was about to play the hero for rescuing one of Syphers' vessels. Kirk was going to use Jonnie to build up himself with Syphers, eh? At his, Jonnie's, expense? Hell, no guy could use him for a ladder!

CAP'N KIRK stood grim and unwavering beside his radio man. He came to recognize, as the conversation progressed, what had been building up in Jonnie's mind. Every detail gleaned had told him that what both he and old Tanner had suspected from the first sight of the *Canadienne* was true; Cap'n Jonnie Blair in his first real tussle with weather and a doubtful crew had gone off the deep end in that fraction of a min-

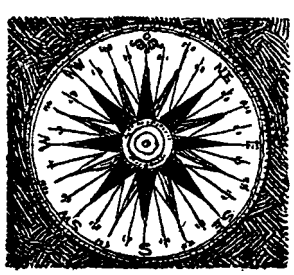
ute which spells faith or lost confidence in any skipper.

Kirk stood there while he launched his blunt demand for a towline rescue job; while irate Jonnie accused him of cashing in on the damned situation to take advantage of him and penalize him for not heeding the advice while at dockside. Patient and forebearing indeed was the Kirk Vail who heard and endured the translations while the *Canadienne's* weak, patched-up battery grew ever weaker.

Meanwhile he gave random thought to that other angle; his revised policy for his dealings with Blair. Through Jonnie, he had thought to pay a debt, to compensate for his part in the drowning of the other Jonnie under the skiff. Today he recognized that somehow such debts never can be paid; a life cannot be exchanged for any amount or quality of service to somebody else. And he saw in the *Canadienne's* condition out here his longtime error; he had done altogether too much for Blair. Belatedly he discerned that intangible line beyond which solicitude only creates dependence—and Jonnie, insisting upon help right now, proved it.

It wasn't easy to listen to the accusations, to hear demands and appear to be trading on them. Nor any easier to waste old Syphers' bunker coal out here in a dirty half gale and wait for the battery in the *Canadienne's* emergency set to run down to the point where it couldn't send a message farther than, say, fifteen miles.

But he went through with the dour grind, took the grief and felt like a bully in doing so. There was no alternative. Day and night he had searched this wild ocean to save a ship—or her crew; he had arrived, instead, to rescue her young skipper from—from himself. If that other Jonnie had only taken the plunge out from under the skiff he might have been alive today. If this Jonnie could be forced to fight his own way out of his crisis, he should emerge from the ordeal a real, genuine master in steam, master of himself and any future crew fate might hand him. But it was a big "if"!



Said Sparks, "Phew, what a long breeze session! And is that man hot! His battery's running almighty low, too, Cap'n."

"How low?" Kirk asked solemnly. He looked around and discovered old Tanner standing there, interested, waiting.

"Oh," Sparks opined, "it might send a few miles."

"Beyond the horizon in clear weather, say?"

"Aw no, Cap'n; maybe sixteen miles." He swung around abruptly, looked up into Kirk's drawn face and tried to read what he suspected. "Hell, I can only estimate a thing like that," he blurted.

Kirk turned to Tanner. "Everything right topside, mister?"

"Cap'n, do we lead the lines aft to lay him a tow?"

Kirk said to Sparks, "Take this 'You are not disabled. Your vessel has weathered it, even beam on and out of control. Your crew is intact. Now get under weigh.' Send him that, Sparks, and thereafter maintain radio silence."

He and Tanner left forthwith and together went above. It was the beginning of another siege for Kirk Vail and in some respects a harder one. Until this hour, he had battled against such tangibles as weather; from now on he must succeed or fail in his purpose by doing nothing, by waiting for Blair to do, by presuming that Blair would heed his final injunction.

Uneasily he scribbled a note to Sparks. It ran, "He will radio us. Record every message and send it up here. No replies, though."

To Tanner, he said, "The *Canadienne's* charter being to Providence, we'll head for there ourselves. But first we'll go over the horizon out of his sight, then we'll ease off west and go along with him about twelve miles—or less—away. Ring for full ahead."

CAPTAIN VAIL little realized it, but that final message to John Blair was a masterpiece of psychology. Its effect was a trenchant and sudden as a blow square between the eyes.

They say John Blair jumped away from the radio bench and cursed in three tongues. They say he stormed out of there like a marine. Until then he had suffered with mental hiccups; Kirk's unexpected refusal to help him startled the hiccups clean out of him. They filled him with bursting rage and chagrin.

He corralled his mates and chief in the little wheelhouse and made a declaration of independence of his own in plain, unvarnished language. In short, he'd take the *Canadienne* to Providence if he had to brain a few recalcitrant sailors and firemen himself and heave the rest of them bodily at their stations. Minus firearms, he and the four officers seized whatever they could lay their hands on and swing. They hunted down the crew and waded in.

As usual in such instances, the ringleaders were singled out for special favors—and granted same. The set-to was no picnic, but it proved short, sharp and successful.

Within the hour, roses were cleaned, mud-boxes cleared, lead bends tunked where partly flattened—all prepared for the thrust of water from the pumps. Meanwhile, all the stokers turned to, passed coal, started fires that were fires and soon got the gauges wiggling upward for steam poundage. Judicious use of a blowtorch dried generator parts. Sailors and firemen both turned to below, that morning.

Well into late morning, the *Canadienne* worked some condensation out of cylinders and headed out of the trough. Rain and wind had died away in a mild, southerly breeze, but dense fog blanketed the sea—

And both vessels. Captain Vail in the *Coalway* muttered, "What next? What else can contribute to this infernal nightmare?" For ever since leaving the *Canadienne* he had expected John Blair to radio, to curse him, to dot-dash fiery defiance, to reveal thereby just what he proposed to do and, above all, where he was as the *Coalway* stood by somewhere abeam of him out of sight.

Not a word from the *Canadienne's* radio. For two hours, Kirk had stood off there to the westward, the time he had judged necessary to get the little vessel under weigh. Two hours were scarcely gone when fog closed in from all directions and ruined his plan to stalk John Blair to port.

But supposing they discovered real trouble in her boiler room and could not get going? That haunted him. He could not abandon a disabled ship and crew out here after standing by nearly an hour!

"East," he ordered. "Not one call from them, mister. We'll have to run back there and see."

They canted over the rounded old sea still running. An hour of this and they reached the estimated spot. They circled, they whistled, they found absolutely nothing. Kirk began to doubt his own wisdom right then; that little river vessel could have sailed sooner, but she also could have gone down. A thousand misgivings haunted his conscience.

"Now what, Cap'n?" Tanner sounded unsympathetic.

Kirk felt hot iron at the pit of his stomach. Had he risked too much in a single throw? Had Blair, under such a tension at the time, actually given him all the details to judge their situation by?

"Nothing more we can do now. It's out of our hands, Cap'n," old Tanner sighed and the solemnity of doom rang in his voice. He still rated Blair for a "boy wonder in braid"; he itched to have done with this personal matter and get back about the business of shipping coal to New England.

Kirk knew well his moods and opinions, he recognized the itch of impatience. And the old gentleman was right, damn it; the only thing to do now was to get on. "Nor'-west," he ordered. "Full ahead."

"Nor'we— To Providence, Cap'n?" Tanner asked, almost challenging it.

"Aye," for Kirk hoped that he might get a scale of fog and he might spot the *Canadienne* somewhere along the course to that port. He might.

THAT evening, sheer exhaustion of mind and body put him sound asleep on the wheelhouse settee. His First felt it in the silence around him. By and by he went abaft the helm to speak to him; halfway there he changed his mind and came back to his open window. He had made one break already in that questioning the course to Providence, one was enough for one trip. But he muttered, "Bringin' up boys ain't all beer and skittles, and when it ain't y'r own flesh and blood—I dunno." He signed.

Captain Vail came off the settee all standing. "Where away?" he cried.

"Sir?"

"I heard that *Canadienne* blowin. I heard—" He yawned.

"Must 'ave dreamed that one, Cap. I've heard no whistling. I've been at this open window—" Tanner cut short what he'd started to say. He had not been at the window all the time, he had started to call Kirk. There conceivably could have been a whistle somewhere in this thick mull.

The dream had seemed so real to Kirk that he couldn't toss it aside. Jonnie was on his way in, Jonnie was blowing in the fog, going home. Some dream! But it sent Kirk outside onto the bridge where he'd be certain to hear it if it came again—if it was real. "Phone the chief, mister, to cut speed down to the *Canadienne's*," he ordered as he stepped out.

His conscience nagged him. He should not have been asleep. Now he listened till his ears rang, cocking first one ear, then the other, moving from the wings to midships and back again. Until Tanner at his window, to ease his tension, remarked, "You'll git over that when you're old's me. You're just hearin' that horn aboard the *Flying Dutchman*."

All through the night Kirk maintained his vigil. All night the fog packed around the *Coaway* and kept him cursing as it ruined visibility, muffled sounds and played tricks on his hearing.

Tanner came on again at four for his middle watch and sized up his skipper expertly. Said he, "Cap, if you don't snatch yourself inside here, you nor y'r ears won't be worth a hoot all day."

"Ah no. No more dreams like that one. I still think I actually heard the *Canadienne*."

"Well then, I'm brewin' you the blackest coffee this side the Amazon."

"Okay, Tanner." Kirk walked out into a wing again.

By and by, with the sun's return, the density of the fog began to vary. Now the bow lookout would disappear, now the jackstaff would come out of it. Once Kirk actually saw open water out ahead. "At last, this is going to scale off!" he murmured. Once it did so, he'd see the *Canadienne* if she had come away before he had gone back to where

she had been. For he had made up the distance she would have gained on him, then cut the *Coalway* down to Jonnie's pace. Somewhere on this course he should find her, at times he imagined he could almost feel her presence—or that of the ghost ship, the *Flying Dutchman* that Tanner liked to rave about.

"Coffee, Cap?" Tanner blurted. "Coffee's your luck, y' know; remember you was takin' coffee on the wheelhouse when you first spotted the *Canadienne*. Want it out there?"

Kirk came to the open window for it. His head was down, he was scalding his lips when the bow lookout yelled. Kirk wheeled around and shouted back, "What's that?"

"I think I saw a bit of black hull f'r an instant. 'Bout four points on the port bow, sir."

"Port bow!" Kirk exclaimed softly, licking burned lips.

"Ah fish!" Tanner exploded. "No *Canadienne's* over that side of us. We are just about crossin' the traffic lane into New York though."

"But—" Kirk began hopefully, grasping at the straw.

"Ah, bow lookouts in a fog hear more and see more than the best huntin' dog ever pupped," Tanner growled. "Gittin' us all het up—"

But the coffee and that lookout's story did things to Kirk Vail. He heard occasional whistling willy nilly. He did not, however, see anything to verify it. He began to feel as though several ships might be crossing his course. He paced the bridge in the quieting sea and visualized Jonnie away back there overwhelmed by stubborn men, Jonnie coming at a snail's crawl. After years of too assiduous tutoring, he had turned against the fellow, capped it all with a foolish desertion in a storm!

The *Coalway* came to the southward of No Man's Land some eight or nine miles off before he realized it; he was too deep in his regrets and anxiety. Almost to a landfall with a cargo for Boston and far to the westward of his rightful course. What old Syphers would do about this!

All at once he awoke to change around him. The fog was off the water, scaling above the land. Presently the *Coalway* ran out of it as abruptly as you'd leave a room. Kirk shook his weary head unbelievingly.

He looked to starboard for the *Canadienne,* then to port. He stared over the stern in his last hope of seeing her—emerge from the fog wall.

Disappointed all around, he contemplated the course to Boston as he faced forward again. Suddenly he was looking directly at that black little stern and a smoke stream pouring off a funnel. It was up ahead. He almost shouted, *"Canadienne!* Good boy, Jonnie!" He had been hearing that siren all the way home and the bow lookout must have seen her that tiny moment. Jonnie had come through, come along with the *Coalway.* Here he was!

Kirk blew the salute to the other vessel. But the response he got from Captain John Blair was that nasty, prolonged, half-pull groan—the old razzberry. There was a welter of bad blood in that reply.

THE *Coalway* lay half out of cargo to a Boston pier. Dirt coated her decks and dirt of a strictly personal nature made itself felt inside Kirk Vail. Too much kindness. The false notion that a debt could be paid. An eternal enemy of John Blair in the hour when it all had become clear. Now Kirk was in port, had been in some forty-two hours, and not so much as a tempery, defiant blasting from Jonnie.

Nevertheless, Captain Kirk Vail still knew that he had done the right, the only, thing to save the situation out there in the storm. He had obliged John Blair to regain command of ship, crew and self; he had led the man by extreme methods to resume his way to port, really master, henceforth, of the *Canadienne* and whatever other ship he might take his license aboard. Kirk had done a splendid thing; it was his only recompense today.

That night, his crew was ashore. He sat in his cabin behind the evening paper. The door opened quietly. He looked up over the newspaper— .

"Damn you, Kirk Vail," said Jonnie Blair with twinkling eyes, "that was the best thing you ever did to me!"

The Story Tellers' Circle

(Continued from page 7)

mean, according to tone or context or both, mushroom, turtle, or evil spirit. Some spell it *'k'uei.'* If you think I have been extravagant in my oblique representation of Burke's perplexity, let me give the facts from Soothill's 4000 Character Dictionary.

"*Kwei* means:

Tone 2: Open and clean a fish; fabulous exorciser; fine, eager horses; cross roads or thoroughfare; walrus, reverential.

Tone 4: Breathe heavily, sigh; draw, embroider, red strings.

Tone 3: Step; exhausted; rut or rule; spirit, devil.

Tone 1: Scepter, token; zenana, virgin; jasper; tortoise; a term of abuse.

Tone 5: Cassia, cinnamon; honorable.

"Now, you may have a keen ear for tone differentiation, and can without error distinguish between the tones, but you'll undoubtedly wonder whether your host is, when speaking in tone one, discussing jewelry, inquiring as to your virtue, offering you a scepter, or calling you an offensive name. And picture the G.I. in China trying to talk to a lady. He'd feel a bit awkward about *kwei,* tone one; just which of the meanings would she decide he intended? Then, too, suppose he did risk saying, 'Peach Blossom, I just put a jeweler to work engraving your name in jasper.' Suppose he got the wrong tone, and she understood *walrus* instead of *jasper;* or maybe cinnamon, or an evil spirit. She'd think he was nuts, huh?

"It is bad, but not quite as bad as it sounds.

"For instance, in English, we have *two, to,* and *too; bore* has three meanings; also, *bare, bear;* there is at least one homonym which has five different meanings, and no one ever is confused, since the context makes the sense clear.

"Still and all, it can't be a cinch to address the Canton Rotary Club or make love to a sing-song girl! Though anyone who'd decline a chance at the latter would be a mouse, not a man.

"Someone may accuse me of fraud by asserting that the run-around devised by the skeptical guerrilla isn't exclusively Chinese property, and that the trick is practiced in the good old U. S. A. Which is precisely what I was getting at: to wit, the Chinese, while many of their ways are different from ours, are basically geared up very much as we are. Get beneath the superficial strangeness and you find another human being; and some of his seemingly cockeyed ways and views are actually more sensible and realistic than our own.

"I have not overdrawn the daring, the power, and the prevalence of the Delta pirates; if anything, I've understated. Much of the whimsy and logic I've put in the mouths of these characters originated with Chinese friends of mine.

"Finally, sea guerrillas (which is politer than 'pirates') did actually nail a gunboat and did capture the puppet minister of the navy, some time last year. Other Chinese patriots, just a couple months back, assassinated the puppet governor of

Kwang Tung Province, of which Canton is the capital, though no Chinaman ever says 'Canton,' which is an English corruption of Kwang Tung; the name of the city is Kwang Chau Fu.

"Don't hesitate to drink *ng ka pay* if your Chinese friends offer you a shot. The description I give is the typical American reaction after the first glass. One gets to like it. I've tossed it off all evening. Got stinking drunk, but not sick, and no hang-over either.

"I've learned to enjoy Chinese music. At first it does jar, though not half as much as a singing commercial, or radio laughter, but once the strangeness wears off, the peculiar rhythms become fascinating. It's simply a matter of dumping overboard a lot of preconceived opinions and giving a new idea a chance to register, instead of pigheadedly fighting it.

"All in all, I think it's time we discovered the Chinese. If we'd known enough about them some years ago, and given them a few breaks instead of coddling the Japs, we'd be better off now. But quite aside from such considerations, we can learn a lot from them in the way of realistic thinking, and good manners; far from sending missionaries to convert China, we ought to import a couple hundred reasonable facsimiles of Lin Yu Tang to debunk and deflate a lot of our pet fallacies on life and living. We can dish out the means of a higher standard of living, and in return perhaps get some pointers on a higher standard of thinking!"

E. Hoffmann Price.

Prejudiced Juror!

FROM Colorado, Thomas Francis Norris, whose "Red Terror" appears in this issue, sends words:

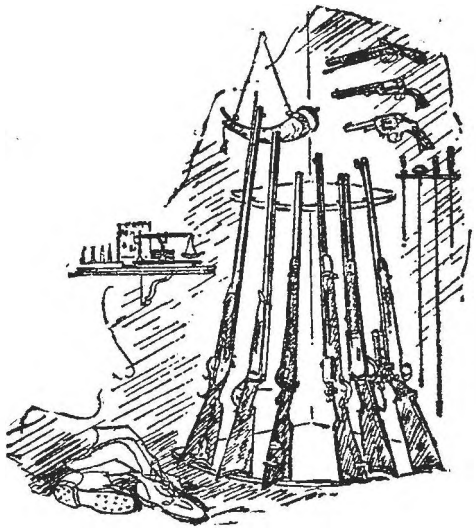
"The germ of this story came to me in a most unusual way not to say it grew out of an embarrassing situation.

"The thing happened several months ago when I was subpoenaed for jury duty on the regular panel of the District Court, a duty that I was loath to perform from the fact that the Docket was filled with a long list of civil and criminal cases involving defendants whom I knew personally.

"I tried to tell the sheriff that I was a very busy man and he'd be doing me a great favor if he would select someone else for the job. He only said, 'report in the Jury Room at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.'

"As the last resort, I decided to call on His Honor, the Judge. I framed a plea which I thought to be 'hole proof' and that the Venerable Dispenser of Law would gladly yield to my wishes. So I hied myself into his august presence in the mahogany appointed chambers. Just as I opened the

(*Concluded on page* 144)



THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by PETE KUHLHOFF

Riflemen in War

CIVILIAN rifle shooting (rifle training and rifle competition) in peace time is considered by the average person as a small-time sport, just the hobby of a few. Unfortunately it takes a long time and a lot of hard but interesting work to develop a really fine rifleman. It evidently takes a war to bring this fact home to most of us.

Even in wartime it takes time and battle experience to get down to the fundamentals —and we are learning that riflemen are the boys who really count. It takes mobile artillery (planes and tanks) to capture an objective—but it takes GI Joe to hold it.

Interesting reports about our riflemen and our newer small arms are trickling in from the European War zone.

First of all the semi-automatic M1 (Garand) which received a lot of criticism

in its early days, seems to be very popular with most soldiers. In fact, it is considered just about perfect for covering fire, especially when used in conjunction with machine-guns.

In certain instances where it was quite cold, the M1 has refused to operate due to too much oil in the mechanism. This will cause 'em to freeze practically every time. All the boys know this but still it happens now and then.

The .30 caliber carbine has been criticized by a few soldiers who have used it on jobs for which it wasn't intended. This little gun was originally designed to take the place of the pistol—in other words it is a short distance arm. So, of course, when the boys try to use it at four or five hundred yards it just hasn't got the punch. It has worked out wonderfully well for close work (for which it was intended) such as street fighting where accurate snap shots pay off.

The sniper's rifle, which is the 1903, .30-06 caliber bolt action (Springfield) rifle, with a 2½ or 3 power scope mounted over the action is a "piperoo" for long-range work. The last one I examined was officially known as the 1903 A4. It was equipped with a 330 Weaver scope in Redfield Jr. mounts.

Believe it or not, experienced shooters have been knocking off individual enemy soldiers at distances as great as 900 yards —which is indeed fine shooting.

Incidentally did you hear about the fellow showing up in the South Pacific completely equipped with shooting coat, spotting scope, a batch of match ammunition, and a heavy barreled gun sporting a 15 power

target scope. This lad is reported to have wiggled into his sling and to have calmly gone to work on distant Jap targets.

In most cases where phenomenal shooting has been done you will find a former hunter, old-time army man or a target shooting fan.

And it seems to me these riflemen should receive a little more public attention, for when their stories are dug out, they are found to be just as thrilling (or more so) as the exploits of the lads in the more glamorous branches of the armed forces.

More power to these lads, they are the backbone of the American Army—and all of them have proved their worth in this as well as all previous wars.

The future can be insured only by civilian as well as military rifle practice over the years.

Civil War Gun

Now and again I receive several letters all asking practically the same question. Whenever this happens I figure that for some reason or other quite a number of readers are interested in that particular item or subject.

Lately there seems to be a run on the old Spencer rifle.

This gun is generally credited with being the forerunner of the modern lever action repeating rifle.

C. M. Spencer was granted patent No. 27,393, dated March 6, 1860, which covered this arm.

It was (is) a seven-shot rifle and was loaded through a trap in the butt plate, and was made by the Spencer Repeating Arms Company, Boston, Mass.

The Army Model was .52 caliber, had a 29½ or 30 inch barrel and was chambered for the No. 56 (56/52) Spencer rimfire cartridge. It weighed around 10 pounds empty.

A carbine was manufactured with a 22 inch barrel. This gun was improved somewhat in that it could be used as a single shot breech-loader and as a repeater.

Then there was a 19 inch round barrel carbine which was a variation of the 1865 Model. This carbine had a cut-off and was loaded by a cartridge box containing ten tin tubes each holding seven cartridges.

Also a .50 caliber carbine having a 20 inch barrel was manufactured. The cartridge was known as the 56/50 Spencer rimfire.

The Spencer was extensively used during the Civil War and was more popular than the Henry, though the Henry was the better gun.

Out of some four hundred thousand carbines of about twenty different makes purchased by the War Department, over 94,000 were Spencers.

Originally the Spencer was without cut-off, but this defect was removed when E. M. Stabler (in these days he'd be called a gun-bug) who was living in the woods recovering from tuberculosis, rebuilt or made over one of these guns to suit his own ideas. His cut-off devise worked out so well it was adopted by the Spencer Company.

After the War between the States was over several models of the Spencer were manufactured. But by 1869 the company was in a bad way and was sold out at auction. Winchester took over in 1870 and sold Spencers usually through one of their sales representatives until about 1872.

Winchester had already taken over the Henry works, and the Winchester Model 1866 was going over like wildfire. So nothing was ever done with the Spencer patents. Thus we progress!

The Story Tellers' Circle

(*Concluded from page* 140)

appointed chambers. Just as I opened the door, another fellow-juror who obviously felt the same way that I did was attempting to wriggle out of serving on the panel. Unexpectedly, the Dispenser of Justice cleared his throat, then exploded, 'the next juror who approaches me for a release from jury duty, will be fined for Contempt of Court!'

"I was mentally and physically sunk as the Judge turned to me with, 'Mr. Norris, is there anything that I may do for you?'

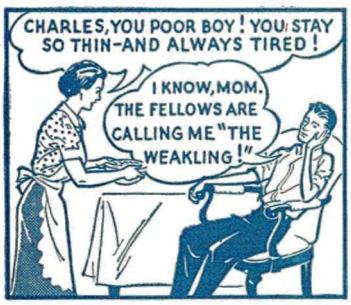
" 'No,' I gulped, 'I was just looking for somebody.'

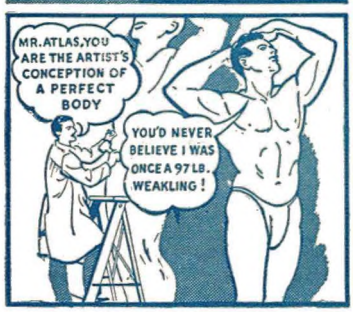
"The 'Red Terror' happened to be one of the principals in one of the Civil Cases that was tried at the time and when I was discharged from jury duty, I decided to write the thing up for SHORT STORIES. When the book reaches the newsstand I am going to get a copy for His Honor and tell him the part that he played in the story."

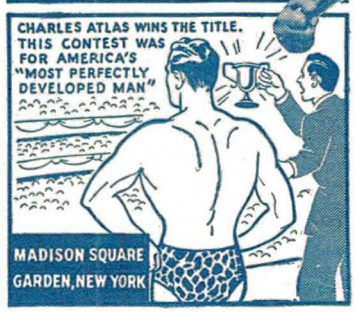
Thomas Francis Norris.

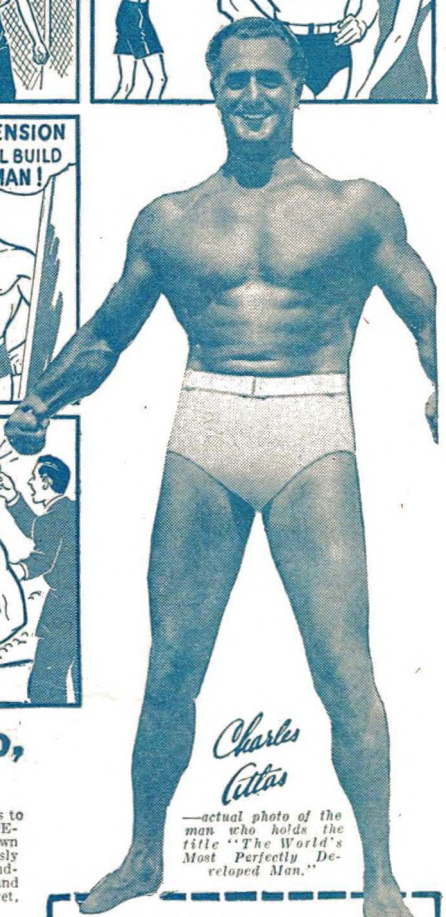
HOW A 97-Lb. WEAKLING Became the "WORLD'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN"

The inspiring story of CHARLES ATLAS









Charles Atlas

—actual photo of the man who holds the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

I Can Make You a New Man, Too, In Only 15 Minutes a Day!

If you're the way I USED to be—if you are skinny and feel only half-alive—if the better jobs pass you by—if you're in the service, but are being "pushed around"—if you're ashamed to strip for sports or a swim—and if you want a HE-MAN's body—then give me just 15 minutes a day!

I'll PROVE you can have a build you'll be PROUD of; *"Dynamic Tension"* will do it for *you*, too! *That's* how I changed my own build into such perfect proportions that famous sculptors and artists have paid me to pose for them. My body won me the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now I can give you solid, beautiful, USEFUL muscle wherever YOU want it!

"DYNAMIC TENSION" Does It

In only 15 minutes a day, *"Dynamic Tension"* can bulge up your chest, broaden your back, fill out your arms and legs. Before you know it, this easy, NATURAL method will make you a New Man! In fact, I GUARANTEE you'll start seeing results in the first 7 days!

I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. You simply utilize the UNDEVELOPED muscle-power in your own God-given body—almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY. And it's so easy—my secret, *"Dynamic Tension,"* does the trick!

FREE BOOK

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