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Short Stories

Twice A Month

25 CTS

DECEMBER 10th

A complete novel of South Sea Treasure

THE GOLDEN DOLPHIN

by

J. Allan Dun

Missing page

Inside Front Cover

Have *You* Seen

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Millions of people have accepted this offer—have made this ten-day test. They have found a way to whiter, cleaner, safer teeth.

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Short Stories

Twice A Month

OUT THE 10th AND 25th

The Next Number

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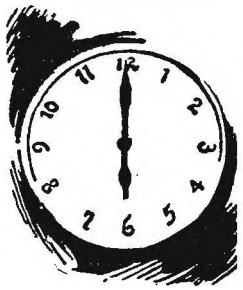

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December 25th SHORT STORIES

Out the Day It's Dated

DECEMBER 10, 1921

SHORT STORIES

Vol. XCVII., No. 5 Whole No. 384

HARRY E. MAULE
EDITOR

D. McILWRAITH
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

EVERY MAN'S HAND

Years ago we had a well loved dog and he seemed to us to have qualities that endeared him to us beyond any other mutt we had ever owned. His love for his unworthy master was as loyal, as unquestioning as is the love of every dog for his human friend. Came the day when we moved to another neighborhood. Next door lived a valiant little bulldog who jumped our pup when he was tied and so handicapped in battle. Other neighborhood canines joined in the scrap. Now, our Ruggles was bigger and stronger than the others and would soon have killed the pets of our neighbors. So we kept him tied. The other dogs, enjoying the sport, used to stand off and bark insults at the newcomer. With far less reason many a man has got the idea that the world was against him.

So our beloved Ruggles became embittered against all dogkind. We, human gods on the Olympus of our affairs, far above doggish feuds, saw it so clearly. Ruggles didn't really want to fight, nor did he have to. But he, like man, was beyond reasoning with when he got the idea that everyone was against him. He got loose one day and chewed up our good friend's terrier. So he killed the thing that he loved best; poor dog and poor us. For we sent Ruggles away after that—a sad, sad day—but what would you? A dog with a fixed idea that he must fight all the neighborhood is no more to be tolerated than a man with a similar obsession.

The gods of human affairs love us still with all our stumbling and blindness. But when we get the idea in business, or personal life, that every hand is against us, those gods, with great lumps in their throats, will eliminate us from the scene.

Apply it as you like—to your home circle, to your office, or to the German Empire convinced that only by overmastering power could it endure amidst the yappings of curs. And what did the gods do to the Kaiser? THE EDITOR.

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THE GOLDEN DOLPHIN

A Complete Novel

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Miser Mine," "The Mascotte of the Three Star," etc.

I

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

JIM LYMAN, wandering aimlessly down North Street, Foxfield, had it borne in upon him that jobs were hard to catch. The paper mills and the woollen mills and the big electric supplies factory that, taking advantage of cheap water power, had transformed Foxfield the village into Foxfield the city of fifty thousand, were either shut down or running half time with a greatly reduced number of employés. It seemed to Jim that the rest of these unemployed were standing on the curbings and lounging on the Common, parked wherever there were vacant spaces, their savings gone, their faces more or less disconsolate. Yet Jim Lyman had turned down a job no later than that morning.

It is true that he had regarded it almost as an insult, that he had found difficulty in gracing his refusal. Yet he was beginning to regret his rashness. He had a few dollars in his pocket but they were very few, and the high cost of living had not reduced on the same scale as the lowering average of wages. Most of the chaps standing about would have jumped at Jim's offer, he reflected, provided they could have qualified.

The job was out at Winnesota Lake where the summer season for holiday makers from the big cities was in full swing. A man was wanted to help in the hiring and care of boats—a launch, rowboats and canoes—to help people get into them without upsetting or stepping through the bottoms, to shove out and haul in, to swab, to generally stand by and hang around a wharf in a bathing suit—for fifteen dollars a month and found; the findings meaning fair meals and an indifferent bunk at the mock-bungalow of the owner of the boathouse, and boating privileges. A soft snap to almost any one out of a job, a vacation in itself, a chance for a good time with the city girls who were not averse to flirting with men of the "handsome brave life-saver" variety, but——

Jim Lyman was a sailor, a man who had served as second and first mate, who was qualified as a master mariner, who loved the sea and regarded a freshwater pond like Winnesota Lake much as a salmon would regard a bath-tub. That comparison is not vigorous enough. To Jim the idea of the job on the placid lake, handling toy boats when his heart longed for a stiff breeze, big seas and a heeling vessel working into the wind's eye, was a good deal like the offering to a lion tamer a position taking care of guineapigs.

Beggars may not be choosers, but Jim would never be a beggar, and he had a strong belief in his own star or in the general fairness of Providence. All of which was a testimony to his good nature,

his vitality and his good digestion, since he had just come through a severe pummelling at the hands of Fate: wrecked in the South Pacific; hungry, thirsty, blazing days in an open boat; despair; rescue; return to Panama aboard a smelly, inefficient ship inadequately run by Portuguese whose ideas of food were as limited as their larder; a chance to work his way back north and east as a handler on a fruit freighter, a brief visit at the New England home of the wrecked ship's purser-steward, companion of his misfortunes, and then the long hunt and the ultimate conviction that a sailorman was out-of-date, obsolete, and not much to be desired; a job as a rigger in an emergency contract, two or three jobs painting flagpoles and straightening vanes, wandering inland the while, the supposed opportunity to get on as rigger again with a contractor in Foxfield, only to find the man with barely work enough to keep his oldest hands together on half time.

There was adventure for you—or misadventure—which Jim had suffered and taken as part of the day's job, the risk that sharpened the edge of things. It was the tabasco sauce on life's oyster to Jim, just an appetizer. One could get too much of it, but now—now life was as flat and stale as ditchwater or the placid green and blue reflecting wavelets of Lake Winnesota.

The ancient adages—and you will generally find them well based—depict Opportunity as Knocking at the Door and Adventure Waiting Around the Corner. Jim was fairly confident of the truth of the latter saying, he was beginning to doubt the verity of the former. Or else he was always out or asleep when the knock came. Even adventure seemed infinitely remote, despite his comparatively recent experience.

There are few of us—older than Jim, who was midway between twenty and thirty—who have much of life to look back to and remember, who have not had times when, swathed in the bonds of the commonplace, either complacent resentful or despondent, seemingly as fixed as an oyster to its rockbed, the swift change of circumstance has not swept down upon us like a whirlwind from a clear sky and transported us to scenes and happenings we never dreamed of encountering. Opportunity and Adventure are sisters of the fates. Often the first, coming down the street hand in hand with the one who has opened the door to her knock, will turn the corner where Adventure lurks and the trio go on together, while Fortune smiles at another successful combination. So with Jim when he first saw clearly the gleaming emblem of the golden dolphin shining in the afternoon sun and felt that subtle quickening of spirit that we call presentment.

He turned from North Street, with its loafing tribute to slack times, and was strolling down a side avenue where elms met overhead in their June tracery of crisp green against the blue and gold of the sky. On either side he began to find the commercial district changing to the residential. He crossed the Winnetac River on its broad white-railed bridge and walked past old-time Colonial houses, not indicative of great wealth, but of vast comfort. There were lawns and lilacs, glimpses of more flowers at the back, robins listening-in for worms, grackles, and catbirds calling from the maples. It was a homey street and the sights and sounds and scents had their due effect upon Jim Lyman. Even as North Street had raised the ruff of his spirit in protest against the times, now it smoothed down like the ruff of a collie under the touch of a known and friendly hand.

Then he caught sight of the dolphin, ablaze in a direct shaft of sunlight, a

heraldic dolphin, skilfully wrought in metal and nobly covered with burnished goldleaf, not merely bronzed with baser metal.

It swung in a wrought iron frame —ungilded—that projected from a doorway with a Colonial Dutch hood. On either side the glazed-in porches showed old furniture, chairs, rockers, spinning wheels, rag rugs, warming pans, knockers, andirons—all of which confirmed the legend of the sign,

THE GOLDEN DOLPHIN
ANTIQUES
K. Whiting, Prop.

Jim did not notice the lettering at first, he was too busy looking at the dolphin. In a way it was his totem, it was the symbol of the sea that he loved. Jim knew dolphins, the porpoises of the Pacific and their sharper-snouted cousins of the Atlantic, the acrobats of the ocean. He knew too the true dolphin, the *dorado*, with its protuberant forehead and long dorsal

fin, the fish that really changes into exquisite degrees and blends of color as it dies upon the deck. The conventional form shown in the sign he knew also. He had seen it in ships' decorations, on ancient charts that he had studied; once, at least, as the figurehead of a ship. It was as a figurehead he had last seen it.

He shifted his gaze from sign to porch-window. His pupils dilated, his lids narrowed. He pushed open the picket-gate and walked in a daze up the path toward the left-hand porch, walked as a hypnotic subject will, with gaze fixed on the object that has enchained the senses.

In the window was a background of old furnishings, enlivened here and there with bits of Oriental embrodiery, lacquered trays, batiks, gleaming seashells. All these were subordinated—in the eyes of Jim—to the beautiful model of a ship, set on a low stand. The vessel was of exquisite design and its fashioning of rare artistry. The veriest landsman might see speed and buoyancy in the swelling streamlines of the hull, sweet as the contours of a *bonito;* the ambitious sheer of the stem, the curving counter, the rake of the four masts—the fore square-rigged, the others for and aft. The model was complete with rigging and canvas, with boats slung in davits, skylights and awnings, miniature wheel, and binnacle; the tiniest details made a part of the loving, skilful craftsmanship.

On the bow and on the stern, there showed in golden lettering the name:

GOLDEN DOLPHIN
BOSTON

And the figurehead was a replica of the sign that swung above the door of the shop, a supple, twisting body armored with golden scales, set with outspread golden fins that clung like fingers to the stem of the ship, a flowing tail and the goblin-like head with its rounded forehead and protruding lips that kissed the foam, as the windful sails drove on the gallant vessel.

Any ship-lover and sea-lover could readily replace the stand with curling waves, creaming at the stem and along the run to fanlike wake; ignore the background of antiques and visualize instead the flowing sea and bright horizon where cloud argosies sailed before the wind. But that was not what Jim Lyman, standing entranced with contracting pupils, with parted lips, beheld back of the graceful hull and tapering masts. To him the actuality of the model had suddenly blended with a vision, as pictures blend upon the film-screen, reality of the present with recollection of the past.

He saw a tropic tangle, rather—so completely did the fantasy enthral him—he was *in* a tropic tangle, peering through the rank growth of brush; palms and broad-leaved trees shot up high crowns that interlocked to bar out the sunshine and rendered daylight into a green twilight shot with golden beams hardly thicker than a cord and blobs of amber mottling the verdant floor. All about a riot of green growth wattled together with vines and ground shrubbery. Orchids were aswing, giving out waves of intoxicant perfume. Two great butterflies, scarlet and black, hovered about like protesting guardian spirits of the place to which he had unwittingly forced his way. In his ears were the faint swish of the breeze in the treetops, the hiss of surf on the nearby beach and its heavier drumming on the barrier reef.

Verdure had flung itself, writhing, tentacled, embracing the hull of a vessel as if the jungle claimed a prize and was striving to hide it from prior ownership or the envy of discoverers; a ship whose stem—battered a little but unbroken—bore the shape of a golden dolphin as figurehead. The dolphin was tarnished and half hidden by creepers, but sunlight spotted it with flecks of flame.

The masts, four of them, had gone by the board. One of them slanted from ground to smashed rail, cordage twining it like snakes, a handy ladder for a handy man.

Now at this point Jim took on double embodiment—scarcely triple, for he was quite unconscious of being in front of the porch-window. Still *in* the jungle, he saw, *from* the jungle, one Jim Lyman forcing his way through resistant boughs to a closer view of the jungle stranded ship. On the bows the name had been applied in metal letters. Some of them were missing. On the starboard bow he read:

G LDE D LP N

On the counter, in sunken carving, was the full legend:

GOLDEN DOLPHIN
BOSTON

He saw himself climbing that angling mast, reaching the deck, disappearing. The sudden shutting off of all sunlight, the deepening of the green twilight to gloom, the switch of palmtops in strengthening wind, the signal of a recall gun,

voices calling his name—all dimmed. Even the ship—now a model again—faded. Something else absorbed him, something made contact with his inner self, brought it back to the present with a strange sensation—the identical quickening of the spirit that had accompanied his first sight of the sign, yet deeper, more intimate.

At the back of the display someone was opening a French window from the inner room. Brocades had parted to the touch of a white hand, a girl's face appearing, pale in the dusk, with luminous eyes, looking at Jim. The expression, emphasized by piquant eyebrows, registered surprise at what the owner read in Jim's bemused gaze. A slightly amused smile came to the red lips, but there was no ridicule in it, only friendliness; a sort of intimacy, as if she, too, liked that ship's model, and knowing he did, acknowledged the link between them.

She leaned forward. A slender arm, bare to the elbow, rounded, soft and white of skin, reached out and slim fingers took up a blue and white pitcher. Jug and girl disappeared through the brocades.

The spell was broken. Jim, self-convicted of staring, imagined he must have looked like a moonstruck fool. While every lass may love a sailor, it is not every sailor that loves every lass, despite the ballads. The sweetheart in every port is a calumny born of jealousy. Your blue water salt is perforce a hermit for long periods. If he has brains he becomes a bit of a philosopher. He learns to think while on watch; and the rolling sea, the roving clouds, the chanting winds, the sun, the moon and the stars rolling in their appointed courses, are all good teachers. Jim was a bit of a poet at heart. So is every true sailor. He had had his own dreams of the measure of a girl, but he had had few opportunities for metrical diversion. Also he was a bit flustered in their presence. He did not understand them, they were like fine lace to a carpet weaver, admirable but strange to his craft.

The girl, so far, was but incidental to the main point. His jaw lines tensed as he went up the steps beneath the Dutch hood and through the door with the tinkling of an automatic bell. He half expected to see a customer inside in connection with the blue and white pitcher. And there would be the K. Whiting, proprietor. But the girl came forward to meet him out of shadows empty of other humanity though close set with furniture, tip-tables, chairs, sofas, standard lamps, and century-old belongings.

Jim's eyes were good, dark or light. He saw that she had on a dress of deep blue, ocean blue, flicked with small dots of lighter blue. Her eyebrows again arched quizzically as Jim stood, hat in hand, lost for opening words.

"Mr. Whiting in?" he asked. Somehow the girl took his breath a bit. Cool and dainty, self reliant, but utterly feminine. A face so good to look at that he did not know whether she was pretty or not. Womanhood, that was what she represented to Jim, though she was young yet, young and sweet. She was disdisturbing. He had come in to see about the ship and she made his desire vacillating. His will struck for the original motive, therefore he asked to talk with a man.

"There is no Mr. Whiting—here," she answered, a slight hesitancy before the last word, a fleeting shadow over her face. "I am the proprietor. You were looking at the ship? You are a sailor, aren't you?"

This is what the girl saw:

A man who had boyhood in his eyes and about his mouth, though the first were steady, the second firm enough; a face tanned deep; eyes of gray with little traceries of sun and wind about them; aquiline nose; good forehead; brown hair that was a little sunburned here and there, plenty of it and the barest suggestion of a wave; tall—about six feet—a hundred and seventy pounds of solidity, chest like a barrel and a lean waist; clothes, blue serge, fairly new, well kept; hands, well kept, but hands that were used to work and showed it, hands held slightly curved inward as if ready to grasp a rope. Being a woman, she took this all in at a glance, while to Jim's equal opportunity she was more or less a vague pleasantness. It was the combination of blue serge, the half open hands and the look in his eyes as he viewed the ship that had set him down as a sailor to the girl. She knew something of sailors. Also she knew that she liked Jim. Instinctively she felt that she could trust him. Women and dogs can do that at first sight—scent also, with the dogs. Man's intuitions are less blunted. It is not so necessary for him to be attracted or warned through his senses; he has developed other ways of obtaining informa-

tion, other ways of protection which often prove far less infallible.

"Yes, I am a sailor," he said. "Was, at least. Hope to be so again. Is the ship for sale? I mean does it belong to somebody here or did you buy it outright to sell again?"

Something of his excitement had spread to the girl, the atmosphere in the shop, transformed from original parlors, dusky save for the lighter space by the door where they stood, was becoming charged with magnetism.

"Why do you ask?" she said,

"I'm not a purchaser—though I'd like to be if I could afford it and had a place to put it." Subconsciously he was stalling, delaying the information that momentarily he more and more felt was going to start something. There was a knocking at the door of his inner self. Then he blurted it out.

"I've seen that ship before. Not the model but the ship itself, ashore in the bush on an island in the South Pacific."

The girl blanched, all color draining from her face and even her lips. Jim put out a hand to steady her as she swayed, but she caught at the high back of a chair and stood with the corner of her underlip caught between small teeth, her eyes masked for a moment. Then they widened, rounded, searched him.

"That was my father's ship," she said. "We have believed him lost at sea. Tell me about it, please." Jim hesitated, reluctant. He felt that he had unveiled a tragedy, that he had struck a deadly blow at this girl who met disaster so bravely. She even smiled at him, wanly but bravely.

"Please," she repeated and Jim knew then that her voice had power to compel him to do its bidding, now and for always; knew instantly that here was the last girl on earth he would have wounded.

"I know," she said. "You think he must be dead. But he is not. I have always been sure of that, quite sure." And despite Jim's contrary belief her tone carried conviction to him. "I knew he was lost somewhere, but he is not dead. You have brought me the best of news. And you will tell me all about it? It is closing time anyway, and time for lights."

She closed the door and set the latch, drew down a blind and turned a switch. Two old standing lamps with Chinese shades illuminated the place. She led the way toward the back of the room and motioned to a seat on a settle that formed a screen from the rest of the shop. There was a little table there and a businesslike looking desk.

"I shall be back in a moment," she said and vanished toward the back of the house. "Smoke, if you want to."

Jim did not want to smoke. With her departure the momentary belief he had shared with her that her father was not dead oozed out through his pores. The searchlight of his will was summoning details of his discovery in the jungle and now he could see, gleaming white among the ground vines distinctly as if it lay on the floor in front of him, a skeleton, the bones picked clean by ants, the cage of the ribs bound to backbone and pelvis by a network of tendrils—and a skull, with a gold bridge gleaming in its fallen jaw. It was not that of a victim of the sea. The dome had been rudely cleft by a blunt weapon. Surely the skull of a white man.

II

ADVENTURE

THE girl came back accompanied by a bony person with a bony face that suggested a horse, a thin, tall austere person who looked as if most of the blood had been drained out of her, and with it all of the milk of human kindness that her veins might have contained. She smiled at Jim, displaying big teeth liberally inset with gold. She was dressed in rusty black material that hung on her like stuff flung hastily over a clothes-rack. Her pale hair had brassy streaks in it. Her eyes were almost colorless, lacking eyebrows. The whole was redeemed, almost nullified, by a voice of wonderful contralto richness, suggesting in its beauty everything that the rest of her did not.

She bore a tray with plates and cups and saucers upon it, napkins of fine old linen, a dish of cake and cookies. The girl brought a pewter trencher bearing a teapot, cream ewer and sugar bowl of old Sheffield plate; the teapot under a quilted cosey shaped like a helmet. These they set down upon the table. To think of tea at a moment tense with the first news after months of suspense—years perhaps, for it was hard to guess how long the ship had lain in its canting jungle bed! The hospitality of gentlewomen. Jim recognized the quality though he was not used to sharing its niceties.

"I am Katherine Whiting," said the girl. "I should like to introduce you to my cousin, Lynda Warner, Mr."

"Lyman, Jim Lyman." Jim stood up,

heard the marvelous richness of that voice—though it did not seem as sweet to him as the clear, high note of the girl's—sat down, sipped some tea, broke a cookie and began his yarn. North Street and its unemployed seemed a thousand miles away. The whirligig of time was bringing about its own revenges.

IT'S NOT much of a yarn—my end of it. It happened on my last voyage. I've sailed on both oceans, Atlantic and Pacific, but I like the Pacific best. I was on this side, as it happened, the trip before last, and after we'd landed cargo at Porto Bello, we laid up for repairs, I took a notion to cross to the Pacific side. The skipper was agreeable. The owners were always willing to cut expenses and the ports these days are full of sailormen looking for a berth.

"Things were slack at Panama, but after a bit I shipped on the four-masted schooner *Whitewing*, bound for Tahiti, a forty-five hundred mile run. We never got there. East of the Paumotus we ran into a wicked storm, a hurricane. They call the group the Dangerous Islands and they've named 'em right. The danger is all around 'em. First our mizzen mast smashed off as if some giant had hit it with an axe. All we had set to that gale was a storm staysail and a bit of the spanker, but that was yards too much. That storm fair wrenched us apart. Before we could hack the mizzen clear it had smashed the rudder.

"There we bucked, five foot of water in the hold, and rising, seams opening, three men out of eleven hurt, to say nothing of the skipper himself with his head split by the spanker-boom. We got the steam-pump assembled finally and the water out of her, but not till after we'd been blown way out of our course, far south of Pitcairn, south of Rapa. Twice the jury rudder we had rigged gave way on us, and we were in a sad mess the morning we picked up that bit of land, a mountain top lifting up from the sea in a wrack of vapor clouds, like a finger stuck through a veil—and beckoning. Some of us fancied we saw loom of high land way to the west, but you couldn't be sure, the weather 'ud open up a bit and shut down again with all the horizon banked up with clouds that looked like dark gray wool.

"It was a lee shore at that, the wind still blowing northeast, and blowing hard. The barometer was jumpy and it looked as if it might boil up and over again into another hurricane any minute. Ordinary times we'd have kept clear of that place, but we had to have water, we needed fresh meat, and we wanted to get a chance to strengthen our rudder a bit. As we got closer we caught glimpses of patches of green. By the looks of the island we hoped to find pigs, doves, fish, and fruit: cocoanuts, papus, guavas, wild oranges, and bananas. If there were natives they'd do the provisioning, and if not we'd forage for ourselves.

"You must understand, miss, that we'd all, from the skipper down, had a tough time of it; cold victuals for days at a time, no chance to light the galley fire, soaked through, up day and night with just snatches of sleep. Sick and well, we were nigh tuckered out. Thought of getting ashore for the fruit and meat, most of all for some fresh water, got us close to crazy to make it. We discounted the risks. But we might not have, at that, if the sun hadn't suddenly rent through the sky like it was rotten cloth. For a minute it hung over the jagged peak and turned the green of the trees to emerald before it faded. That settled it. The first mate and myself—I was second—took four men apiece with water barrels, while the old man, with his head tied up, handled the schooner, off and on, outside the barrier reef. We didn't dare try to get into the lagoon unless it moderated, though we wanted to 'count of fixing the rudder. But we made sure of the water, anyhow.

"We were careful in landing for we didn't have any guns but a pistol apiece for the first and myself and the skipper's shotgun that I took along to try to get some fresh meat. My boat hung back a bit like a covering boat. It's the usual way in the islands, and we figured the natives would argue we were well armed. I show my shotgun barrel plainly enough. There was one freshwater creek opposite the gap in the outer reef, its flow having made the gate in the coral. It looked like another one flowed into the lagoon at the far end of the curving bay. Anyway there were cocoa palms there and we planned for the first mate to tackle the first creek and me the one by the palms. If there was no fresh water we'd get nuts.

"It was a narrow reef, as barrier reefs go, little more than a hundred yards wide but with a mean, jaggy entrance and the

waves spouting over the slabs of coral that looked like stone sponge layers. We didn't see a sign of natives. We worked fast in case of a hurry signal from the ship for, while the sun was blinking in and out, the sea was running high and every now and then the wind would blow in gusts that came like the explosions of big guns.

"There was no creek after all, where my boat went, so we went after the nuts. A native could have climbed the trees and thrown them down but none of us were monkeys enough for that—and we were all battered and bruised up anyhow—so we cut down the palms. I hate to cut down palms like that, they are so mighty useful, but we had no time to lose.

"I heard doves cooing and I thought I heard the grunting of a pig, so I worked into the stiff jungle that came bristling down to the beach, best way I could. Looking for pigs in there, unless you found a runway and had luck, was next to impossible. Most places the bush was woven together like high hurdles with the creepers and vines twisted about the trees. But I came across a lot of deadfall—trees uprooted in some big blow that hadn't happened so very long ago, to judge by the looks of them and the new growth. I had got half a dozen ringdoves, a jumperful of vi-apples, oranges, bananas, and mangoes when the sun worked through again and suddenly I saw something shine in the trees. First I thought it was some sort of idol—I was new to these South Seas and didn't know but what they had 'em of metal—and I went mighty careful, watching for savages. I was there after food, not to furnish it.

"Presently I saw what it was—the figurehead of a ship lying there prow on to the mountain, the decks aslant a bit but all cradled up in vines, half a mile inland from the lagoon and, so far as I had time to determine, undamaged. It was just as if it had been picked up from the sea like Gulliver did with the fleet at Lilliput; picked up by a kid giant for a toy and dropped in the forest like a toy yacht might fall on the grass."

Jim paused, sipping his tea, nearly cold now, declaring he liked it, making it an excuse to gather his thoughts. He wanted to eliminate certain details, to color others optimistically, but was not sure if that would be the right thing.

The girl and her cousin, the bony spinster, hung on his words with growing excitement, their eyes urging him on to the finish. Moreover, it was fairly evident that not only was his tale magic to them by reason of their personal interest, but that he had made it vivid to their imaginations. Under the glow of the lamp the girl leaned forward as eagerly as Desdemona must have done, her eyes luminous, her lips, soft and red as rose petals, slightly apart, her breath short. The glamor of the thing was upon the older woman. Finishing his cup of tea, Jim Lyman decided to submit the more gruesome details to her privately, and took up the thread of his yarn.

"It was a good ship. If the sea could have been brought to her I believe she would have floated. Strained a bit, of course, but sound. The masts were gone by the board. One lay over the port rail like a companion ladder. The others might have been alongside hidden in the heavy growth. I've got an idea they snapped off like carrots when she landed.

"You see, I figure she must have been flung ashore in some combination of great wind and tidal wave. Great rollers sometimes come up out of the ocean and sweep the islands. The skipper said afterward that they had them at Tahiti every so often. That would account for the ship riding unbroken over barrier and fringing reef, to be left high and dry inland. I have heard of such ships before.

"I went up by the mast. The deck was a mess, and the glass of the skylights broken. The slide of the main companionway was jammed, so I swung down through the skylight. Vines had worked their way in and the rains had mouldered things, but there was no sign of looting, no disorder outside of that natural to the jolt of such a landing. Now that, Miss, was proof positive to me there were no natives on the island. They would have dismantled the ship, gutted it, and probably burned it. I'd seen some lettering on the bows, raised letters with some of 'em dropped off, and I'd seen the full name on the stern. They tied up with the figurehead and name of that model in the window; they were the same as that sign you've got hanging up outside:

THE GOLDEN DOLPHIN
BOSTON

That was the name of her.

"The cabin was much the same as other cabins—a mast running through, transom cushions between the doors leading off to the staterooms, fixed table and chairs in the middle, swinging lamp with the chim-

ney busted, but oil in the container. She was well fitted up. It was getting dark outside and I could hear the wind rising, tossing about the treetops. I had to hurry. There was an empty birdcage, I remember, and books on shelves behind doors with the glass broken. The books were mouldy and had mostly come apart with the damp. I took along one of them that was small enough to get into my pocket. 'Gulliver's Travels.' That's how I happened to read it."

"Oh!" The girl gave the exclamation with shining eyes. "Father thinks that Swift is the most wonderful of satirists. He always had Gulliver with him. I gave him that copy that was in the little library. And the canary. Poor Dick! Go on."

"Well, Miss, that's about all, so far as the island goes. I told you it was getting dark. There was a recall from the ship, three shots from the saluting gun. My men were shouting for me and there was the schooner with a flag streaming from the main spreader. It was about mid-afternoon, but by the time we got aboard it was black as midnight. It was as if that big hurricane had been blowing in a circle and we had come from one edge of it through comparative calm only to go smack into it again. We clawed off that island by some miracle and away we went again, south and east. Our rudder went for the third and last time, we were blown along the top of the waste with no more control than a chip in a millrace.

"There are leagues of open water down where we were, to look at the chart, but there are deeps in the South Pacific, troughs, they call 'em, where the depth is five thousand fathoms—thirty thousand feet—and more, and right close to those troughs you'll find great reefs built up. I suppose they are built to sea level by the coral insects working on top of big peaks. They make big patches of shallows where, if it is calm, you see the sea breaking for miles at low tide. We saw nothing. There was as much water in the air as the ocean, it seemed. The spume blew level and stung like hail from the force of the wind back of it. There was no sky, no horizon, only a white welter, and the ship leaking, staggering along till she went smashing and dragging over coral that ripped her almost to splinters. There was no bottom left to the old hooker.

"And, then, just as if it had done what it set out to do, though you can't imagine such a hullabaloo to sink one schooner, or a dozen, for that matter, the wind vanished, blew out, the snarling sea worried over us for a bit and went down, though where it was deep the waves ran high enough, as we soon found out. The sky had cleared by sunset. It was the most gorgeous sight I've ever seen. The stars were out and the moon up before midnight, shining down on our two boats running before a sweet southeaster.

"We parted company that night. The skipper and the first mate were in the other boat. Far as I know they've never been heard of. Insurance has been collected on the *Whitewing,* I know that. We'd broken up on the Maria Theresa Reef, I imagine, or maybe the Legouve Reef. The last reckoning taken and set down was the one made by the skipper when the sun broke through at noon off the island; Dolphin Island, I've always called it, for want of a better name. There's nothing down on the charts.

"That's as far as you're interested, Miss, and farther. We had a pretty mean time. Ran out of grub and water, the usual open boat luck. Two poor devils died and another went made with drinking salt water, but we were picked up at last and brought back to Panama. There was a chap who was half purser, half steward along with me, and I came up north with him looking for a job. There was nothing doing on the coast so I worked inland after I'd stayed with his folks till I was ashamed of myself.

"That's all."

HE HAD dodged the skeleton successfully and the fallen jaw with the golden bridge. He could ask the spinster if Captain Whiting had bridge work in his teeth. It might establish his death and, if so, a relative could better break it to the girl. It seemed convincing that there were no survivors. For one thing—he had avoided mention of it—the ship's boats were gone. They might have been carried away in the storm that had flung her on the island; they might have been launched during that storm; they might have been launched from the island after the final catastrophe. If the crew had not been swept overboard, if they had not escaped in boats, they would surely have stayed with the ship and used it as headquarters, if not for a permanent habitation. Supposing the ship had been there a year even—in the hurry of departure Lyman had not thought to look for ship's papers—that meant that the boats had been lost, like the skipper of the *Whitewing,* long ago.

The island was uninhabited. Natives or white survivors of the *Golden Dolphin* would always have been looking for a ship. They would have seen the *Whitewing,* come down to the beach or signalled. Yet proof that one, at least, of the *Golden Dolphin's* crew had come ashore, lay in the skeleton of the man who had been murdered. Such dentistry would hardly be that of a common sailor. It was an enigma probably insoluble this side of the grave. But Jim Lyman had not begun to gauge the intricacies of the riddle.

The girl turned questioner and her inquisition showed that her knowledge of seacraft was not merely inherent, but acquired, and that she knew how to apply it.

"You said that the captain of the *Whitewing* took an observation that would give the position of the island?"

"Yes, Miss."

"And set it down in the ship's log?" Jim nodded. He saw what she was driving at.

"I suppose he had the ship's papers with him when you took to the boats?"

"Yes. I saw the entry in the log and copied it. I have a master's certificate and I have always kept a log of my own, as a matter of habit, whether acting as first or second. Just a pocket diary that trip. I told the skipper about the ship in the jungle and he noted it. He didn't seem to attach much importance to it. We had troubles of our own. And all of us in my boat were in pretty bad shape when we were picked up. The Portugee that rescued us wasn't over well found, though we were grateful enough to them. But they didn't have much of a medicine chest and Spigotty grub needs lifelong training. We had boatsores and scurvy on top of being famished, and we just about crawled ashore at Panama. I didn't know then but what our skipper might have been picked up or made a landing. It was his duty to report such a find and he would have turned in his log. But there's no question but what he's perished at sea, I'm afraid. I was in hospital on the Isthmus for awhile with Stallings, the steward—the rest, too, for that matter. I got a quick chance with Stallings to work north on a fruit freighter when I got out, and—though it may seem strange to you, being personally interested—I forgot about the *Golden Dolphin* until I saw your sign. It all came back in a flash when I saw the model in the window."

"Naturally. But you've got the position?"

"Yes. The diary is with my things in my room here."

"Ah!" The girl stood up with shining eyes. "Mr. Lyman, I am going to make you an offer for those figures."

"Why, they're yours Miss, of course, without the asking." She checked him.

"Wait. I am positive my father is alive. We were closer than most fathers and daughters. I have sailed with him and been his constant companion up to the trip of the *Golden Dolphin.* There were special reasons why he would not take me on that voyage. But if he had died I should have known it. I am sure of it—here."

She put her hand over her heart, speaking with a ring to her voice that carried the assurance of an ancient sybil. Jim supposed many people had felt that way about their loved ones, desire fanning the flame of hope. Again he felt the force of her conviction against his own force of logic.

"And now you have come here, a special messenger, coming as you thought by chance or coincidence. I do not believe in such things. It was not by chance you forced your way through that jungle; God brought you to me. I am a sailor's daughter. I am going to that island and I know that there I shall find the clew that will help me find my father, *alive.*"

Jim sat dumbfounded. He looked appeal at the spinster cousin and managed to convey a meaning in his glance that he had something to tell her in private. That the girl did not realize the magnitude, the expense, the forlorn chances of the quest she so proudly announced, he was certain.

"I shall find my father," she said again. "You are a sailor; you have been a mate; you have a master's certificate and you have been looking in vain for a berth. I offer it to you in exchange for the position of the island. More than that, I offer you a share in a fortune that is hidden safely aboard the *Golden Dolphin.*" She paused for a moment with her forehead wrinkled. "I am not alone in the matter," she went on, "but I have a third interest in the affair, my father another third. I offer you a sixteenth of all that we recover, in addition, of course, to your pay as master. Your share should be in the neighborhood of sixty thousand dollars."

Jim wondered if the girl was insane; if grief for her father had unsettled her

mind. But the eminently practical face of Miss Warner showed no such apprehension.

"It would cost a lot of money," he said. "And the chances of finding your father are——"

"I shall find him. I can find the money for outfitting. I have had good offers for this business. This old furniture is valuable. I have collected it personally and sold much at a good profit already."

"But I do not want pay for giving you your clew. I should despise myself if I did. Common humanity——"

"It is common justice that you should share if you bring the means of restoration. The money means nothing to me compared to the finding of dad. You are the only person in the world who could have furnished me with this clew. You have been brought half-way across the world to me. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you. You found the ship; I ask you to go back to it with me. I cannot take your information unless you agree to my terms. You would not rob me of my chance to find my father?"

This was placing him in the small end of the horn with a vengeance, Jim reflected. Common justice, she called it. He supposed it was the working of the New England conscience. But it was a fool's errand.

"You'll have to tell me more about it," he temporized.

"I will. But that should come with a full consultation. The *Golden Dolphin* was outfitted for a special purpose. There are others, two others, who have a third share between them. My uncle—the husband of my aunt, and his son. I can get in touch with them by telephone. We will hold a meeting tonight. I think it can be arranged. I'll see."

She went toward the front of the shop where the telephone stood upon a wall table. If she was insane, there was method in her madness, Jim told himself. He could imagine her capable in business. But this wild undertaking? He seized his opportunity and leaned toward the spinster, whispering:

"Did Captain Whiting have a gold bridge in his lower jaw?"

Alynda Warner's own jaw sagged momentarily, but she rallied to the occasion. Here was a keen-witted woman, Jim realized. And she did not answer one question with another.

"No. Every tooth in his head sound," she answered in the same tone. "Why?"

Katherine Whiting had got her connection and was talking over the wire.

"Found a skeleton beside the ship," said Jim. "Skull had gold teeth. I was afraid it was her father. Afraid to tell her."

"You needn't have been," retorted the spinster. "Though I appreciate your idea. Any signs of foul play?"

Jim nodded. The girl had hung up and was coming back. But how did Alynda Warner come to suspect that there should have been murder committed?

"They'll be over by eight o'clock," the girl announced, excitement glowing in her face. "You'll stay for supper, Mr. Lyman. We—we can't lose sight of you."

"But—" Jim wanted to spruce up a little. Here was an atmosphere or refinement, of elegance to which he was not accustomed. He felt suddenly self-conscious, unkempt. "I should get that diary," he suggested.

"That will keep for a little while. I have a thousand questions to ask you, lots to tell you. Will you wait for a few minutes here, alone? Lynda, will you come with me?" She vanished.

Her cousin, lingering at the door, said softly, "I will tell her."

Meaning the skeleton, Jim told himself. His head buzzed a bit. Here were adventure and opportunity hand in hand, bowing to him, like a pair of friendly djinns. Things had happened too swiftly for him to properly adjust them. He was like a player given a hand by a swift dealer. He had picked up the cards, glanced at them, but he had yet to arrange them in sequence, separate them into suits, appraise their true value. At first glance he saw he had some heart cards, but he was doubtful about them. Jim had not considered himself the type to fall headlong into love. On the other hand, he had never met a girl like this before. Jim was well enough born and bred. But he had a fair education and had taken postgraduate work in the greatest of all universities—the world at large. Long ago, in the little village of Maine, he had seen and known such things as surrounded Katherine—the diminutive of that would be Kitty, he supposed, if a chap ever got familiar enough with her to use it—and her cousin. There had been

antiques and old silver and fine linen with all the niceties that go with them in his mother's house. But of late years those things had gone by the board. He had roughened and toughened. He had lost his finer manners, perhaps his sensibilities.

He looked at his suit of serge. It had been cheap, because he could not afford any more than he paid. Cheap clothes in this day and time are shoddy and it had worn quickly and badly. It looked like a suit from the slop chest. The same way with his shoes, his tie, his hat, everything. A chap like he was would constantly offend the girl's ideas of life, he imagined. Then took himself to task for a fool for thinking about such things.

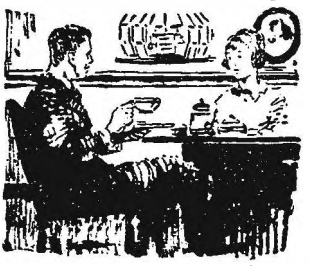
The chance to go away in a ship of his own—she had hinted he would be master—down to the South Seas, with her! She crept in again to the foreground of his dreams, tugged at him with a hundred warps of interest. To find a missing man and a missing treasure, here was romance, or folly, and Jim was not old or world-worn enough to entertain the suggestion that the two are twins.

It was Lynda Warner who reappeared and escorted him up a white, thin-spindled, mahogany-railed stairway, curving to the next floor. He found himself in a guest room with furnishings of white, and hangings of gay chintz, rag rugs on the floor, a door half open to a tiled bathroom. It was as different from the room he had at the National House, uptown, as the forecastle of a ship is to the cabins aft. Jim was used to the latter, but this increased his ill ease till he caught sight of himself in the glass and laughed at his reflection for that of an egregious ass.

"It isn't the clothes, you chump," he told himself; "it's the man. You're straight enough and decent enough under your artificial hide. You can always buy duds. You can always mend your manners. As for the girl, you've got to do your best to persuade her, or her cousin, that she'll be throwing her money away. Without butting in too personally, of course. If you can't, or if you get in too deep, it's up to you to drift off and fade away. She's a yacht built for speed in summer waters and summer winds; you're a trading schooner and out of her class. You belong moored to a copra wharf, not off a yacht club float."

The heart-to-heart talk did him good, and after he had washed up and brushed his hair and clothes, he went downstairs cheerfully with recovered poise. He appreciated the courtesy that left all talk of the vital question out of the meal, covering it so successfully that it appeared dismissed. And he appreciated the meal: crisp waffles with honey, fresh asparagus with poached eggs and a sublime sauce over all, a huckleberry pie that melted, crust and all, in one's mouth, and coffee such as he had not tasted for ten years. Lynda Warner exhibited a rare fund of anecdote and a sense of humor that the girl reflected and Jim enjoyed. The supper was savored with the best of condiments—laughter.

Only the porches and the two front rooms of the house had been given over to business, it seemed, though there were some goods stored in the barn back of the little garden. The rest of the house was private and the property of the girl's father—or the girl herself, Jim feared. The dining room held portraits of Avery Churchill Whiting, the missing skipper, a ruddy-faced mariner with gray hair and a blend of kindliness and determination in his strong features; and of James Avery Whiting, father of the aforesaid, also a captain, but in naval uniform. His sword hung below the frame.



There was a serving maid, angular almost as Lynda Warner, privileged by custom and her own indomitable determination to know all about everything that was going on. The elimination of all reference to the *Golden Dolphin* might partly have been staged for her benefit, Jim surmised. She was patently devoured with anxiety to know who he was, and how he came to be invited. She surveyed him between service with a puzzled face, her head cocked to one side like an undetermined hen.

They remained in the dining room, which appeared to be also used as a general living room, and the maid dwadled over clearing away. But she was gone at last and both women insisted upon Lyman smoking, producing cigars that were both good and properly moist. Gratefully enjoying it, he listened in his turn.

Avery Churchill Whiting had, it seemed, retired from the sea, inland to Foxfield where relatives had settled for land commerce. He had married late and was forty when Katherine Whiting was born—

the only child. Her mother died soon after and the two became chums, the girl going on voyages until Captain Avery decided he was fairly well fixed, that the merchant marine was rapidly going to the dogs, and that he hated steam worse than ever. Therefore he settled to enjoy his three delights; his daughter, trotting horses, and flowers.

His wife's brother, Stephen Foster, native of Foxfield, was the uncle who was coming at eight o'clock, with his son, Newton. He was a manufacturer of blankets and woolen goods and Jim gathered that he had made almost a million during the war. Gathered also from a hint of Lynda Warner that he was not averse at any time to making more; that, born on a farm, gaining footing in the office of a mill after factory experience, he had finally made good as producer in a small way until the war gave him his great opportunity. Now, having tasted power, he was obsessed with the desire of great wealth and what it might do to make him a ruler of men.

The son, it seemed, was a more negligible quantity, confining most of his activities to various amusements, a Yale graduate. Lynda Warner, with an inimitable trick of suggestion, drew these sketches, which Jim felt were excellent portraits, in a few words. It appeared that she was not over friendly to the Fosters, father and son, and Jim noticed that the girl entered no especial protest, save to disregard her caustic interjections.

The important factor was that the Fosters owned a third share in the *Golden Dolphin* and its hidden treasure. Lyman was glad that a man—and a successful business one—with a real interest in the affair, was to take part in the council. The talk of hidden treasure was attractive enough, but if it was of bulk small enough to be concealed on the ship it did not seem likely that it would have been left there. There was that skeleton! He wondered whether Lynda Warner had already told the girl about it. It would have to be mentioned at the conference.

"My father," said the girl, "once got to be very friendly with a chief named Mafulu, ruler of an island somewhere near the Bismark Archipelago. That is, he had been ruler until the Germans took his island away from him and made plantation slaves out of all his people. After that he hated all white men. He even mistrusted father for a long while after dad had saved his life. But they got to be blood brothers and called each other by the other's name. Mafulu was Vaitini—the nearest his tongue could come to Whiting—and father was Mafulu. They had not seen each other for years and father had quitted the sea.

"Mafulu, and some of his islanders, were employed as pilot and crew by a man, an eccentric millionaire who had taken up anthropology, with the tracing of the drift of the Malayo-Polynesian races as his especial hobby. As father understood it, Mafulu had graduated from pilot and come to be his right hand man. At all events, he accompanied this millionaire through the archipelagoes, to Tahiti, to Hawaii and at last to San Francisco. He was still on the ship, or yacht, when the owner dropped dead of heart disease. There was some squabble among the heirs, and Mafulu was dismissed. He had been too proud to accept actual wages, so he was practically penniless, unable to speak much of the language, bewildered by the bustle of a city, robbed, and cheated. Finally the fogs of San Francisco proved too much for him. He was a magnificent speciment of manhood, father said, and probably would have lived to be almost a hundred in his native haunts. As it was, he was found in a dying condition in a miserable sailors' lodging house where he had been the drudge—that fearless chief and warrior—for enough to eat and a hole to crawl to at night. It was consumption of the most rapid sort. Some reporter got part of his yarn and pieced together more, enough to make a feature story. It was copied by the Associated Press, more briefly.

"Father left for San Francisco within six hours after he had read the item in the local paper. That was like dad. Mafulu was a man, he said, and there were few men nowadays. He respected the obligations of his blood brotherhood. And Mafulu literally died in father's arms, died still hating all white men—was it any wonder?—save one, the one he called by his own name and who called him Vaitini.

"Father had the body cremated, much in the custom of Mafulu's tribe, and he promised Mafulu to take back his ashes

and have them properly buried on his own island. And Mafulu told father of the existence of a double atoll rich with virgin oyster shell, drawn on by Mafulu's ancestors for the pearls they used for trading. Its whereabouts were known only to the ruling chief and his son. Mafulu had no son. After the Germans annexed his land his people went no more to the atoll. He gave father the chart he had always carried and explained it to him. The hospital people had thought it was a charm and nobody had ever thought it worth while to steal it. Mafulu had kept it on a sinnet string about his neck. Father translated its directions into more modern shape and he gave the chart to me when he sailed. Here it is. Mafulu swore—and father knew him to be absolutely truthful under his oath of blood—that there were pearls there of such value that dad calculated there must be a dozen fortunes in the two lagoons."

Lyman took the chart and surveyed it with enthralled interest. It did not look much like a map. It consisted of slender reed sections bound flat, mat fashion, with strands of fibre woven into them in crosswise curves and lines. Here and there a small shell was attached. The whole thing barely covered the palm of his hand. No one would have guessed it to be the key to fortune.

"The fibres," said the girl," represent currents and sailing courses; the shells are islands. The trip has to be taken at a certain time of the year when certain winds prevail and certain constellations are above the horizon.

"On the strength of it my father persuaded my uncle, Mr. Foster, who was just beginning to make money then, to go shares in the expedition. They needed a ship and ships were scarce at that time, three years ago, when the war used every available bottom. They wouldn't take father for the war because of his age but he was in wonderful health and strength, really in his prime. They got a small shipbuilder father knew in Maine to build the *Golden Dolphin.* Mr. Foster thought a ship a good investment aside from the treasure hunt, and he believed in that. His son was at Camp Devens."

"Until the armistice," put in Lynda Warner.

"So the ship was built and launched. I christened it. I saw it built from the laying of the keel. Father almost lived at the yard. All his love of the sea returned. I begged for him to take me but he said the trip was too hazardous, especially with the added risks of German raiders. Only he and I knew the secret place where he intended to keep the pearls after he had got them. They were to visit Mafulu's island first, and if possible, recruit native divers, though they carried modern apparatus.

"It was hard work to get a crew at all. There was the draft and high wages for those who stayed ashore. Father was not satisfied with those he got. He said they were a rascally lot of longshore riffraff, but that he would make sailors out of them before they came back. At that, he was forced to sail short-handed, expecting to fill the complement with natives. So—they sailed."

The girl ceased talking and sat with her hands idle in her lap, lost in recollection. A tall clock ticked woodenly, wheezed and struck seven, arousing her.

"Lynda told me about you finding that skeleton," she said. "It was not my father. I do not know who it could have been. But it was thoughtful of you to ask my cousin to break it to me. I know this, that father delivered Mafulu's ashes and that they held ritualistic ceremonies over them. In gratitude many islanders shipped with him. I know that he found the island and the pearls. He wrote from Viti Levu in the Fijis. He was on his way home, and he was having trouble with his men. He did not think that it was serious or he would not have written me about it, and he has handled many a rough crowd before. I'll read you a part of that letter."

She got it from a lacquered box inlaid with mother of pearl, several sheets covered in distinctive writing. The date she read was twenty-seven months old.

"'I can trust my Bioto boys absolutely (Mafulu's men) but I shall be glad to get rid of some of the others. Tomlinson has been slack in discipline throughout and, if he were not a good navigating officer and hard to replace these days, I would have got rid of him. He is too friendly with the crew; I mean not only the whites but the other natives. It is much the same with Harvey, a first-class steward when he is sober, but drunk whenever he can get the chance and an inveterate smuggler aboard of liquor. Bird is a weakling. I have made fairly good sailors out of those longshoremen, but it has not been willing service. You can't

make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but you can use it as a receptacle in a pinch. One would think they would all be happy as clams at high tide on this return voyage with the pearls aboard, looking forward to the bonuses promised them. But they are a surly lot. I should like to discharge them at Tahiti if there is any chance. You know Tahiti is the great pearl market, and I shall get ours appraised there, and possibly dispose of some of them. But I should soon glut the market. We had wonderful luck. I could go back and get as many more and then again, but it would take long weeks and I am anxious to get home. And we are rich. We must have almost a million dollars worth of fine gems aboard—safely stowed where only you and I know. So I shall soon see you again and then for a trip to Europe as soon as the war ends.

" 'The Germans have all been driven out of the Pacific, thanks largely to the British cruisers. Our boys are nearer home or in the Atlantic waters, I understand. I am writing your uncle by this mail. The Bioto boys are to be sent home from here. Good, faithful lads and I hate to part with them.'

"The rest," concluded the girl, folding up the sheets and putting them away, "is personal and various remembrances. Tomlinson was a man who shipped as first mate. He applied for the job when father was almost despairing of filling it. He recommended Harvey and Harvey brought two or three men that he rounded up. Bird was second mate. They got him at Colon. He was an older man.

"So you see they started for home. I have imagined all sorts of happenings—storm, a German raider, fire at sea, even mutiny, but I have always been positive that father would come through. If you knew him you would think so too, Mr. Lyman."

"I am sure I hope so. But he was not with the ship. Would he have left the pearls behind him? If I found no trace of him——"

"You were on the island only a short time and then in the jungle. The weather was cloudy. They might have been on the other side. They might have been ill, away on a trip to that highland you spoke of seeing. A hundred things might have happened; there might be a thousand traces if one searched. And I will scour the island for him. Suppose he is there, waiting for succor? I cannot be dissuaded."

She spoke imperiously, passionately. It hardly needed the covert sign Lynda Warner made him for Jim to keep silence. Yet he could not help but feel that a man of Captain Whiting's character and experience would have left the lonely isle, if not in his own ship's boats then in some craft he would build from the forest timbers. Only, it would have been the easiest thing to reconstruct a smaller vessel from the ship itself. The mystery deepened the more one tried to solve it. And he could understand the love of the girl for her father refusing to pass over the one tangible clue.

In the back of his mind the thought of mutiny grew, the revolt of men who knew they carried a treasure aboard in which they held but slight shares compared with the possibility of even distribution. Piracy was not dead. He admired her pluck and beauty; he was amazed when he saw reaction suddenly set in. Her lip quivered; her eyes filled with tears that she made vain effort to stem; then her slim, lithe body was wrenched with sobs that were muffled on her cousin's flat but comforting breast. Lynda Warner nodded to him over the girl's bowed head to remain, then led the girl from the room, leaving Jim alone with his cigar.

The clock ticked on solemnly as he went over and over the strange story, the swift turn of events in which he had become involved. He felt impelled to offer his service, keen to undertake any fool's errand in company with such a girl, yet his innate honesty battled against his giving any suggestion of success that his common sense told him was remote. As for the offer of the money, he had forgotten that entirely. The matter that had caused the girl's grief was paramount. For twenty-seven months she had fought despair and now, clutching at the straw of hope, revulsion had come, perhaps because in spite of faith she realized the frailty of what she grasped.

The bell tinkled. He heard footsteps descending the stairway, the rustle of a gown. Then men's voices as the outer door was opened, one sharp, deep, and incisive, the other drawling. The Fosters had arrived.

III

CONSPIRACY

JIM rose as the four entered the room. Kitty Whiting—her cousin had called her Kitty and Jim henceforth thought of her as that—had with feminine magic removed all traces of tears. It was plain that she was not on excessively friendly terms with her uncle by marriage. She treated her cousin, a blood relation, more affably, though Jim formed a dislike to Newton Foster at first sight, an antipathy that he immediately wrestled with. He seemed about the same age as Jim, he was undeniably handsome with his black hair and dark eyes, he was more than merely well dressed in light summer clothes with belt, silk shirt, and buckskin shoes, while he carried himself with an easy grace and assured manner coupled with a politeness that could not be challenged. He wore a somewhat bored expression that heightened as he was introduced to Jim, an introduction that he recognized with an informal nod and a slight raising of the eyebrows.

Stephen Foster was the prosperous, confident man of business, inclined to stoutness. He wore a dark coat and striped flannels and carried a Panama hat. There was some resemblance to his son, but the warfare of commercial life, won by the shrewdness stamped upon his face, had left its marks upon him. His mouth was hard, his lips thin, closing when he delivered himself of any opinion—evidently considered by him the final word—like the slot of a letter box. His eyes were those of a man who has not considered the means to an end, who has matched craft with craft, and learned to keep his own counsel. They were hard as agate, expressionless as the eyes of a dead fish, though there was plenty of life and determination in them. He was cleanshaven, like his son, and the lines of his jaw proclaimed stubbornness. There was something catlike about him, Jim fancied, studying him; an overcare of his hands, a furtive tucking in of his thin lips in a smile that was covert, that hinted at a cruel streak somewhere in his nature. He treated Jim as he might a man applying to him for manual labor, an attitude which helped to color Jim's impressions.

At the offset he showed his attitude toward his niece's views with an attempt at tolerance and sympathy that the girl evidently resented. He refused her offer of cigars.

"Changed my brand for a lighter one, my dear," he said, selecting one from a leather case while his son lit a cigarette. "Now then, tell me everything."

"You know all that I do," she said. "And I realize that you think me foolish in believing dad still alive. But I do. And now I have something definite to work upon. It was good of you to come over. If Mr. Lyman does not mind repeating what he has told Lynda and me, perhaps that will be the simplest way. I will only say that it has determined me to go to the island of which he has the position and where he landed. You are interested in the returns of the expedition," she added with a slight curl of her lip. "I should like to know if you will join me."

"And me," said the spinster quietly. Kitty Whiting slid her hand into her cousin's. "You had no idea I should permit you to go without me?" the latter asked. The elder Foster put up his hand deprecatingly.

"We are going too fast," he said. "I imagined you wished for my advice, for a man's advice in this matter." The girl nodded noncommittally. "Now then, my man."

Jim swallowed his gorge and began somewhat grimly. The "my man" attitude nettled him. He was emphatically his own man and intended to remain so. Foster was not the type he would have chosen for employer under any circumstances. And he listened with an increasing incredulity he took scant pains to conceal. As for the son, Jim fancied he saw his assumed boredom enlivened with some interest as the tale advanced. Several times he noticed Newton Foster observing Kitty Whiting closely. When he had finished, Stephen Foster lit a fresh ciger and smoked for a moment or two.

"Those figures, the position of the island," he said, "you have them with you?"

"They are at my room. I can give them to you approximately."

Foster shook his head.

"Figures are tricky things, the foundation of success or failure. And approximate figures are like mortar that has got too much sand in it, a false foundation. Facts, facts, facts," he pounded each word into his palm as if driving home the spikes

of argument, "that's what we are after. Then we apply common sense.

"I have no desire to say anything derogatory against this young man's character. I will simply say that we know nothing about it. He comes without references, to tell an interesting story. I am going to be frank, to discuss the matter in a businesslike way, to speak as if he were not present, to set aside all personality, to look at all sides of the question.

"It would be quite possible, for instance, that someone accustomed to seafaring has seen the *Golden Dolphin* and gone aboard of her. Many must have done so, aside from her crew. Such a one, with the trained eyes of a sailor, would have no trouble in registering necessary details for an accurate description.

"He sees—this person, you understand, is quite supposititious—he sees, or hears at second-hand in maritime circles, the account of the *Golden Dolphin* being overdue, coupled with accounts of its building, launching and the story—foolishly spilled to the newspapers against my protest at the time—of her ownership, the romance of her captain returning to the sea upon a quest for treasure.

"This supposititious person later finds himself out of a job at a time when wages are ridiculously high and producers shutting down on production. Ships lie idle, commerce is at a standstill; the shelves and counters of the shops of the world are dusty, awaiting reorganization. He comes, this seafaring man, to Foxfield, spinning an interesting yarn to highly interested parties. Perhaps he looks for a reward; perhaps he smells a soft berth. Pardon me——" Again Foster lifted a deprecating hand. Jim Lyman had half risen from his chair, his hands clenching, his eyes blazing with indignation. Newton Foster looked on like a man at a comedy. Kitty Whiting was on her feet.

"Uncle! Mr. Lyman is my guest, here in my house. You insult him and me." Foster did not lose the urbanity with which he had greased his insinuation.

"Tut, tut, my dear. I am speaking purely impersonally. I cast no aspersions upon Mr. Lyman. That is one side of the question. For the other, assuming that his story is correct in every detail, I can see that he brings no assurance of the success of such a madcap expedition as you propose. We have talked much of this over before, my dear. I can fully appreciate your desire to believe your father alive. I would not for a moment tear down your hopes if I felt they held any basis. As for the pearls—if we could be sure of finding this island and the ship, the chances that the treasure would be still aboard are to me infinitesimal. The expense would be great, the risk, from a business standpoint, far outweighing any possibility of profit. I am accustomed to looking at such things mathematically. I have made my money upon sound, logical bases of chance. I do not allow my peculiar interests to blind my commercial vision. If a similar situation was laid before me I should, in the light of common sense, proclaim it a wildcat scheme. If your father were alive he would long since have found some means of communication. I have already invested heavily in this enterprise and written it off as one of the few failures with which I have been concerned. I do not care to throw good money after bad. That is my reaction."

His own blood still hot, Jim found it impossible to listen quietly to this cold-blooded argument, though his own opinion had trended in the same general direction. But Stephen Foster's thoughts were evidently centred upon the financial aspect alone. Captain Whiting he callously scored out of the affair. He thought only of his profit and loss columns, of the red ink figures that represented to him his share in the *Golden Dolphin*. He might present the facts in the inexorable light of logic, but it was unnecessary for him to be brutal. The cat had manifested itself. Jim felt the insincerity of the man as a dog scents a taint. The girl spoke coldly, mistress of her emotions, her face pale and set.

"I can readily understand, Uncle, that there being no true relationship, no tie of blood between you and my father, you can the more easily consider his life ended. I can comprehend the hesitation with which you contemplate any suggestion of spending your money without a sure return in sight. I am doing this for love. If I were a man and in your position, I trust I should be a better gambler. I thank you for your advice, but I do not intend to take it. I can sell this business tomorrow by the sending of a wire. I shall do so and spend my last penny in the endeavor to follow up a clew that my heart tells me will lead me at last to my father." Foster looked at her grimly, with tight lips, moving his head slightly from side to side as if to emphasize her folly. His son, gripped by the girl's eloquence, by the restrained fire of her purpose, the beauty

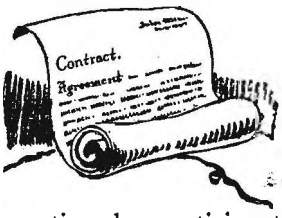
of her, was moved as Jim had been and was again. He went swiftly to her side.

"Dad!" he exclaimed, protestingly. Then to his cousin. "Kitty, you and I have some measure of the same blood in us. You are a sport and a wonder. I will go with you."

"Not with my consent. Not with my money," said his father coldly. The two faced each other. It seemed to Jim that a look of special meaning passed between them. The boy sat down, silenced but not crestfallen.

"If I recover the pearls—" began the girl. Stephen Foster interrupted.

"In the articles of partnership it is provided that a third interest in any profits of the expedition shall be mine in consideration of the money I advanced for building and outfitting. The name of my son, Newton, is mentioned as participant in that third. The duty of bringing back those pearls devolved upon your father, Captain Avery Whiting. It was part of his duty to use all due diligence and precaution in expenditures and the handling of his ship. According to his letters the pearls were secured. One third of them belongs now to me. If, by any miracle, they should be recovered, I should be prepared to stand my proportionate share of any extraordinary outlay—but I will not advance a cent.



"The sale of your business is your own affair, but I can hardly see you, even under the able chaperonage of your cousin, Miss Warner, outfitting and handling an expedition. You have no conception of the difficulties and cost of doing so, the predestined failure. Doubtless this young man will be glad to give you the benefit of his experiences—for a compensation." Jim's furious glance beat against the ice of the older man's expression as inadequately as the wintry sun tries to affect the polar planes. If only Foster had been younger, he thought. He had practically been called a liar, a cheap adventurer looking for a soft berth at the expense of a girl's affection for her father.

"I imagined," Stephen Foster went on, "that you attached some weight to my judgment or you would not have asked me to come over here tonight. You are not conscious of that weight in the very natural flurry of your stirred-up emotions. But I beg of you to sleep over the matter. Tonight you will not sleep; you are too upset. Make no decision until the day after tomorrow. I, too, will give it further consideration. We will take it up again. If you still insist upon what I now believe to be an act of quixotic folly, though praiseworthy from a purely sentimental standpoint, and if I have not changed my mind at that time—say forty-eight hours from now—I will promise to give you every aid possible and wish you God-speed."

Jim discounted the suavity of the speech with his strong sense of Foster's hypocrisy. He did not think the man had any human feelings. In place of a heart there was a cashbox; his brain was a filing system for commercial logic. He spoke as if he felt he had expressed himself too strongly, had struck more fire from his niece than he had expected, finding flinty indomitableness where he had expected wax. Yet the girl seemed softened.

"I will think it over until then," she replied. "I asked you here as a partner, Uncle. Without doubt you are entitled to your opinions and you have often practically demonstrated their value. But I do not think I shall change my mind. I thank you for your offer to help—for my father's sake as well as my own."

It was said gracefully, but it held a dismissal. Kitty Whiting stood, and the visitors perforce stood with her. She had the poise of a woman twice her age. She commanded the situation with dignity and assurance. Stephen Foster bade her good night with urbanity, Lynda Warner with the suggestion that she was somewhat of an inferior, whereupon the light of humor showed in the spinster's eyes and the twitch of her lip. Lyman he overlooked entirely. Newton pressed the girl's hand.

"Dad will come round," he said. "I'm coming along, anyway."

She gave him a grateful glance. Jim registered the belief that Newton Foster meant to express his ardent admiration of his cousin rather than any conviction in the success of the trip. The two left; there was the whirr of a starting motor, the closing of a door and the girl returned to find Lyman looking for his hat.

"You're not going?" she asked him, a complimentary emphasis on the first word.

"I think I had better," Jim answered, his decision confirmed by a little nod given to him by Lynda Warner over the girl's shoulder. He himself felt some of the strain Kitty Whiting must have been

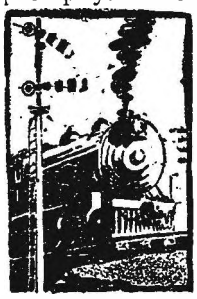
under. It was natural that they should want to be alone. He, too, wanted to think things over. "I'll bring over my diary tomorrow," he said.

"In the afternoon?" suggested Lynda Warner. "Tomorrow is a holiday, you know. The *Golden Dolphin* will be closed and I've an idea its inmates will sleep late." He caught the meaning, illustrated by the tiny brackets of tiredness about the girl's mouth as she smiled, the faint purple shadows ringing her eyes.

"I'll be over about two?"

"Just one question," said Kitty Whiting. "I'll worry about it unless you answer it. If you were in my position and going on such a quest, how would you set about it?"

"I'd take train to California," said Jim promptly. "To San Francisco. And I'd



try to charter a power boat. I mean an auxiliary engine aboard a sailing vessel—a schooner or a ketch. Times are hard and they are selling off yachts and launches every day on the Eastern coast. I imagine it's the same way out West. I'd rustle a crew out there. No difficulty about that. And it would save you time and money. But, if I was in your position, Miss Whiting, I am not at all sure I'd go. I don't believe——"

She broke in on him with a pathetic little gesture of her hands.

"You, too?" she said. Lynda Warner suddenly stretched out her hand.

"Good night, Mr. Lyman."

"Good night, and thank you," the girl echoed. And Jim found himself out in the street walking toward his hotel. His room there, lacking conveniences, utterly lacking in elegance or true comfort, was a far cry from the place he had just left. It was long years since Lyman had been received as guest in such surroundings, and he carried the contrast to himself, as he turned in, after making sure his diary was in his grip and looking up the position he had copied from the log of the *Whitewing*.

162° 37″ W.
37° 19″ S.

Cabalistic nine figures and two letters. One hundred and sixty-two minutes and thirty-seven degrees west from Greenwich, the longitude; thirty-seven minutes and nineteen degrees south from the equator, the latitude. Prick the spot on the charts and one would find vacancy—New Zealand a thousand miles to the west, the Cook Islands a thousand to the north, to the east nothing marked save the reefs of Legouve and Maria Theresa in all the long sea leagues to the South American coast opposite the isle of Juan Fernandez; to the south only the Sargasso Sea and the Antarctic drift. Yet those figures in hands no more competent that his could guide a vessel to where the *Golden Dolphin* lay stranded in the jungle with perhaps a million dollars in pearls aboard, with Captain Avery to be found, alive or dead; perhaps with nothing but what he had found and seen. Without the figures certainly nothing at all. Ships might search that ocean wilderness for years and never hit upon that beckoning mountain spur rending the mists, the shadowy highland in the offing.

The whole thing would have seemed like a dream to him had he not the water-stained diary in which he had made entry of the *Whitewing's* voyage, and memory of the fearful voyage of the open boat north and east, the men dying of exposure and thirst madness, and at last the rescue.

And Stephen Foster had taken him for a sea tramp, with a ready lie coined out of a few printed facts made up to play upon the sentiments of a bereaved girl! His blood surged hot again as he sat on the bed reading over the log. The cold-blooded money grubber, counting his risks! Yet in his heart Lyman was influenced by the decision of the business man, coinciding with his own. It was a wild-goose chase. If he went he had nothing to lose, and he gained a berth and salary, aside from any sharing of the pearls that the probabilities declared were not there. For the girl there would be heart-eating anxiety, hope long deferred, hour after hour of racking suspense, besides the perils of the voyage, and if failure came at last, crushing despair. If it was only the pearls at stake it would be a good gamble for a man, but for a girl, clinging to a faith blindly against all likelihood, it was a different thing. The one would be, at the worst, a glorious adventure; the other carried the hazard of endurance prolonged to the snapping point, the permanent bruising of a brave and sensitive soul.

Lyman suffered a natural despondency born of his treatment by Foster. He began to wonder what the girl really thought of him. He had the diary for proof; he could give her that and slip out of it, dropping all responsibility. To take up her

cause would be apt to label him an adventurer in the worst sense of the word, a speculator upon the credulity and sentiment of a woman. Failure would so label him, perhaps leave her penniless. Still——

He tried to thrash the matter out, to come to a decision. It was the remembrance of Newton Foster, handsome and easy-mannered, her own kind, of her own blood, announcing his determination to go if she went, that settled Lyman's somewhat hasty resolution. He would step aside, play the rôle of messenger as it had been given to him and let the play go on without him.

Love at first sight has been scoffed at by all but the scientists and young lovers themselves. Yet it is sure that certain types are attracted to each other the moment they meet, that such attractions, born of heredity, take no account of rank or fortune save as scruples and pride may creep in to break the attraction. Lyman, though he did not actually formulate the thought, sensed that a voyage with Kitty Whiting would see him tangled in a desire to win her. And what chance had he against Newton Foster, who had rallied to her side, who was versed in the ways of her world and had a hundred ways to appeal to her where Lyman might offend? A young man's first love is often tinctured with humility, with belief in his own unworthiness compared with a girl who has exhibited especial refinement, capable of commanding equality in her mate, trained to scorn any lack of culture, educated to enjoy things of which he was ignorant. He did not know that love levels. He saw himself coarse beside her daintiness, awkward, unfit. Man to man against young Foster—that was a different matter. Put Newton Foster in the same surroundings and he had no fear of contest, but he was nothing but a sea tramp after all, a shipwrecked devil out of a job.

He got to his feet, his mind made up. He would mail the diary and drift on, straightening vanes, working as a rigger, doing odds and ends until things straightened out again and he could go to sea once more. He had thought of the Navy, but enlistments were closed. He thought now of working west, harvesting, reaching the coast, getting across the Pacific—if he had to ship as oiler or stoker—seeking fortune in the Orient where opportunities were more plentiful and white men scarcer.

He had marked the street she lived on. No number was necessary for correct address. The Golden Dolphin would be sufficient, with the name.

In the hotel office he composed a short note, sincere if it did not contain all the truth:

My dear Miss Whiting:

Enclosed please find the diary with the position of the island under the date of June 27. I have no further use for the book, which is only the record of a voyage now over with, and I thought you might prefer to see the figures as originally set down. I appreciate the offer you made me, and regret I cannot see my way clear to accepting it, though I wish you all possible luck in whatever you may undertake.

I am expecting to leave Foxfield tomorrow morning so shall not have the pleasure of seeing you in the afternoon at two as I anticipated. Will you please give my regards to Miss Warner and believe me,

Sincerely yours,
James H. Lyman.

The note would do, he decided as he read the final draft. It did not say everything he wanted to but it did not say too much. She would infer, he felt sure, that he believed that the voyage had too great odds against success for him to tacitly, or otherwise, encourage it. She would not suspect that the offer of Newton Foster had anything to do with his refusal. In a week or two, whatever her conclusions, Jim Lyman would be only a shadowy person to whom she would attach a certain measure of thanks for giving her the latitude and longitude of the island.

He signed it with the feeling that he was helping to erect a permanent barrier between himself and the girl, but he believed he was doing the right thing, the best thing, in the long run. He got paper and string from the desk clerk, made a neat shipshape bundle of diary and note, had it weighed and attached the stamps. It was too late for registry but he placed additional postage and marked it *Special Delivery*, more as a way of insurance and means of tracing than to expedite the package. They said they would sleep late. He took it down to the postoffice and personally mailed it, hoping, after it had passed the lidded slot, that the messenger delivery would not awaken them too early. It thudded down into other mail like something falling into a grave. The burial of young hopes. An illuminated clock over

a bank on North Street showed him the time as ten-forty.

Back at the hotel, the clerk hailed him with the news that someone had been trying hard to get him over the telephone and had finally left a number with a request for him to ring up —2895. He got connection with somewhat of a thrill. No one in all the town would be likely to ring him up but Kitty Whiting—or her cousin. But it was a man's voice speaking, in the tones of Stephen Foster, suave, almost apologetic, in marked contract to that gentleman's manner earlier in the evening.

"Mr. Lyman? This is Stephen Foster speaking. That news of yours swept me off my feet a bit tonight, Lyman. Little out of the usual run of business, you see. I am afraid I may have approached it too abruptly, been a bit brusque with you. If I was, I apologize. It seemed a wild idea to me; I hated to keep open my niece's grief for her father. It is a wound already aggravated by her refusal to consider his death. Out of her love for him, of course, but unwise. Eh? Joy never kills but prolonged sorrow may. Never pays to be over optimistic.

"My son says that he does not agree with me, and we have been talking it over. I am inclined to modify my opposition if there really seems any hope at all. Also the trip may end harrowing uncertainty. If so, there is no time to lose. I wonder whether you could come up here tonight? I have some charts in my library that would help us and you would be of great practical use in discussing ways and means. It's late, I know, but the matter is not ordinary."

Lyman did not reply immediately, a little rushed off his feet by this change of face in Foster. Still he could hardly refuse to talk ways and means. He could stick by his decision not to go. And——

Foster was talking smoothly on.

"Any one can tell you where my place is. Out of town a little, to the south, the first road to the east after you cross the bridge over the river. About a mile, all told. I would send the car but we had some trouble with it going home and my man is tinkering with it. Can drive you back, I expect. May we expect you?"

The new attitude of Foster was flattering; he was putting the thing as a favor, Jim decided.

"I'll start from the hotel right away."

"Fine. And bring the figures with you. Good-by."

He could furnish the figures all right, though not the diary. They were indelibly stamped from now on upon his recollection.

162′ 37″ W.
37′ 19″ S.

Foster, as acknowledged partner in the expedition, was entitled to them. It was natural for them to plan ahead; they would probably offer him a berth. He knew the anchorage, just where to find the ship. But he could give them all that. He propped up a resolution that was beginning to waver a bit, railed at himself for indecision, knew it was on account of the girl, knew that he might pass out of her life, but not she from his. She was like a gleam of golden metal in the commonplace strata of life.

He checked directions with the clerk, whose eyes opened with a new respect at knowing that Stephen Foster, millionaire, had called up and invited this none too prosperous guest to his house.

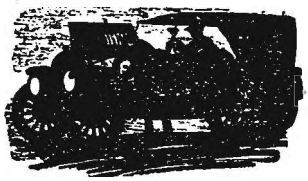
"You'll find it easy enough," said the clerk. "Only house along that road. Stands in its own grounds, back a ways. Can't miss it."

JIM soon decided that Foster's ideas of distance were conservative, as might be expected from a man who invariably motored any distance farther than a block. Walking briskly, it took him ten minutes to reach the bridge. The side road opened up like a tunnel, elms and maples shading it thickly. Already he seemed to have reached the open country, so abruptly did the character of the buildings change to the south of town. He had passed only scattered residences of the rich, if not of aristocracy, of Foxfield. Now and then motorcars passed him on the smooth state road, but once in this tunnel of leafage he seemed to walk in a world remote. He rounded a bend and saw, midway in the curve, the rays of an automobile headlight spraying the trees and hedgerow on the far side. A few strides more and he was in the direct glow. The machine was stationary, well to one side, seemingly out on the road proper if not in the ditch itself.

A voice called to him out of the blackness back of the ray, a voice that was eager, hoarse with motion.

"Give us a hand here, will you? The machine's ditched and my pal's hurt."

Jim ran toward the car. Back of the blinding rays it was hard to distinguish anything but a vague figure. The car seemed to have slewed violently so that the rear end was down in the ditch with one wheel apparently smashed. The man who had called to him was poking about with a dim pocket flash, while the headlights were pouring out a waste of illumination.



"Here," said the man. "At the back. The jack gave way somehow. He's pinned under there. I've got a pole. Maybe one of us can lift it and drag him out. Can you handle that rock? Make a lever out of it?"

His flashlight showed a big stone in the ditch of the type from which stone walls are made.

Jim bent to lift it. Something struck him at the back of his head where the skull meets vertebrae. Golden lights flashed out like an exploding firework and gave way to blackness and oblivion as he pitched forward.

IV

ACTION

THE first conscious sensation Jim recovered was that he was being slowly smothered; the second that he was riding fast, being jolted over rough side roads, presumably in an automobile. He reacted slowly, retarded by a dull headache that seemed to sap the vitality out of him. He was bound ankle and wrist, his arms strapped to his sides and a strap about his knees. They had made a good job of securing him, and not content with rope and leather, they had set him into a canvas sack, a sort of duffle bag into which he had been thrust feet first with the throat of the bag tight about his hips with draw strings. A second bag had been brought down over head and shoulders until it overlapped the first. He could breathe, but the air he got to his lungs was hot and smelly and none too pure. The necessary first aid supply of oxygen was deteriorated; he was like an engine trying to make power on bad gasolene.

It was hard to think consecutively but the searchlight of his objective reasoning played persistently upon the fact—it seemed to be a fact—that he had been deliberately waylaid on the road to Foster's. No one except the clerk at the hotel knew where he was going, outside of Stephen Foster, his son, and perhaps his household. If highway robbery had been their purpose his unknown assailants showed poor judgment in selecting him. They had had excellent chance to gauge him as he advanced in the full beams of the automobile headlights and Lyman was conscious that he looked like anything but a wealth carrier. On the other hand, if they had been deliberately waiting for him to come along, meaning to make sure of their man against any other person who might travel that lonely way at that time of night, the plan adopted was an excellent one. The wrong and curious passerby could have been dismissed with an assurance that the car was all right—as it undoubtedly was. It was more than likely he was now traveling in the same machine. The only slip up, a remote chance, would have been that Jim should arrive on the scene in company with someone else, and doubtless they had provided for that.

What was their purpose? He suspected Stephen Foster. Would Foster go to the length of having him knocked on the head and kidnapped in order to prevent his niece getting the figures and starting off on the expedition? That Foster was quite capable of such high-handed and unscrupulous procedure, he believed, remembering his impressions of the man, his cold eyes and letterbox mouth. Or was it with reason more sinister? Here Lyman abandoned all attempts at working things out under the circumstances. His head ached intolerably and he was suffering from thirst. But anger accumulated in him, awaiting the chance for action.

Hour after hour, it seemed, they jolted over the roads. There were plenty of good state roads in the region, he knew. They must be purposely choosing unfrequented ways, running like bootleggers to escape observation. Jim prayed that some prowling federal officer or state policeman might halt and search the car. He seemed to be on the floor of the tonneau, otherwise unoccupied.

Torture increased in his cramped limbs as circulation grew sluggish; he lost feeling in them. Still the car sped on through the night.

It stopped at last after climbing a steep hillside; the engine was shut off; the door of the tonneau opened and Jim

was lifted, an inert bundle, and deposited on the ground. He could not even draw up his knees. He could see nothing. He was not gagged, but efficiently muffled by the sacking. Through it he could not distinguish what the men who had brought him were saying.

They picked him up again and carried him a little distance. Then the top sack was withdrawn. Jim's eyes, slow to accept the quick change of light, made out ancient and cobwebby rafters high above his head with wisps of hay showing here and there, festoons of old rope, hooks, a pulley. He was on the floor of a barn. There was the reek of old manure. The dawn had broken and the upland air was cold. Twisting his neck, he saw his captors. One wore the leather hood of aviator and motorcyclist; the other had the wide peak of a cap well drawn down. Both wore big goggles with leather nose-pieces. One was unshaven, bristly; the other wore a square beard. A flask passed. Jim caught the smell of whisky. The chill air had cleared his head and he formulated a course of action. Good nature could lose him nothing if he could simulate it and cover the smouldering wrath that possessed him. And a sup of liquor with its quick stimulus might aid him. He was willing to take a chance on its quality.

"You might give me a swig of that," he said. "And loosen up a hole or two. My arms and legs are numb." The man with the hood looked down at him with eyes gleaming sardonically back of the colored lenses. Then he laughed.

"You're a cool customer," he said.

"Too cool in this air, with my blood stopped. You're not aiming to murder me, I figure, or you wouldn't have spent so much gas on me. If you aim to keep me alive, let me have a drink."

"Costs too much and there ain't more'n enough for two," demurred the bearded man.

"He can have my whack," answered the other. "You got him tied up too hard, Bill. No sense in that."

"He's worth money delivered. I'm proposin' to deliver him."

The man with the hood nevertheless loosened the straps a hole, slid off the lower sack, eased up Jim's ankles and supporting him, set the flask to his lips. Jim gulped at the stuff. He needed it. Pain shot through every nerve and artery as his heart, reacting to the kick of the liquor, urged the blood through to proper circulation. He lay back, fighting it as the two moved off, holding a consultation of which he caught snatches. It seemed based upon the question whether one of them should remain with Jim or both go to town. He strained his ears in vain to catch sound of the name of it. The pain in his limbs grew less acute. And while the back of his head was sore, it no longer throbbed.

He was miles from Foxfield. He figured they had averaged at least twenty-five miles an hour through the night for about six hours. And there would be no one to bother about him, save at the hotel where his few belongings were left. The clerk might well think he had left them rather than pay his bill. He had told Kitty Whiting that he was going away.

He was to be delivered somewhere and was considered a valuable package; that was a certain amount of information. Delivered to whom?

"Foster pay you well for this job?" he hazarded as the men came back.

"Shut up," said the one called Bill, now in ill humor. "I never heard of Foster, so quit ravin'. My partner's goin' down to send a wire and get some grub. He'll bring some up tous. You'll eat, but quit your gabbin' because it won't do you a mite of good. Hey, Bud, we can't leave him lyin' on the floor. Where you goin' to stow him?" The prospect of food sounded good to Jim. They might untie his hands. If he were left alone he might clear his bonds himself. He was resolved to wait for the first chance for freedom and then to make a desperate bid for it. He lay quiet while the pair prospected. But he put up a desperate protest when they came back and picked up the sack that had gone over his head.

"No sense in smothering me," he said. The pair did not seem unnecessarily brutal. They had not actually mistreated him since that first smash on the base of his skull. Bill was the harder customer of the two. "I'll not yell if you give me a chance to breathe," said Jim.

"You yell, and I'll tap you over the head. It won't be a love tap either," said Bill. "We'll give you a tryout. Come on, Bud."

They carried him down an alley between two rows of empty cow stanchions. Overhead he could see gaps in the roof shingles. He imagined the place to be the outweathered barn of an abandoned farm. Bill opened a door and he was thrust into a dark place smelling of mouldy grain. It was less than six feet square, too small for him to lie extended. The door closed on a bare glimpse of walls close sealed with tongue and groove, a chute leading upward, and two big bins against the far side. There was a click of latch or staple and he was left alone.

As a rule Jim was even tempered. He had bursts of dynamic fury that he could muster on occasions when rage was needed as lash and spur to urge others to vital effort. Now he had hard work to control his wrath. It steadily mounted until he saw red in the black grain closet, flashes and whirls of red. To get loose, to pin this outrage upon somebody and take it out of their hide was his one wish. That this capture was in some way connected with the *Golden Dolphin* and the proposed trip he did not doubt. Casting about, he wondered whether the maid of Kitty Whiting's, with her insatiable curiosity, had anything to do with it. He remembered the skeleton with the cleft skull, the suggestion from Lynda Warner that she was not surprised at foul play. Though he had not looked at it before from this standpoint, he realized that if there were pearls hidden in a secret place aboard the ship, then his information was indeed valuable.

Foster had told him to bring his figures. Perhaps they had searched him for his diary while he was unconscious. He dismissed the idea. If they were agents of Foster, and Foster wanted to get at the figures, the simplest way would have been the best. As an acknowledged partner Jim could hardly have refused to give Foster the position. Now it was different. Wild horses should not drag the information from him, if that was what they were after. And it was the only valuable, enviable thing he possessed.

But Foster would ultimately get the figures from the girl when they met as agreed the day after tomorrow—tomorrow now. It was a tangle. But Foster did not know that Lyman had already mailed the diary. Did he plan to get hold of the figures beforehand for his own purposes, and then denounce Lyman as the type he had already suggested, a charlatan who had been scared away by the discovery that he had a man of Stephen Foster's calibre to deal with? What would be Foster's purposes with the figures? Merely to dissuade his niece, make her project impossible? Or did he believe that the pearls might be on the wreck and mean to claim the whole for himself by outfitting an expedition in secret while demolishing Kitty Whiting's plans and hopes?

There was the secret place aboard the *Golden Dolphin* that the girl had said only she and her father knew of. But who had devised it? How impossible was it of being discovered? A man of Foster's type would take the wreck apart, crumble it and sift it if necessary, Jim fancied.

One fact seemed to Jim to stand out. He did not reason that he was in no position to argue soundly or logically, that he was biased by his capture and humiliation; but it appeared very clear to him that Kitty Whiting should not give out the precious figures to any one until—if she went—she were well on her way to the island. He had turned one little trick unconsciously in sending her the diary. To warn her further was impossible.

Thus revolving things, like a squirrel in its cage treadmill, Jim got little further than the squirrel progresses. Through some crevice the smell of tobacco came to him. Bill of the beard was outside watching that no one came accidentally to the abandoned farm, ready with an excuse if they did. Bud had supposedly taken the automobile. Jim began to cool down a little, the compression of his thoughts had carried them through heat to cold, to far more effective and energetic anger, once it got an outlet. He was able to shut off the roundabout process of his mind. Appetite for tobacco aided this, another physical need, hunger, assisting. It was with gladness that he dimly heard the arrival of a machine, then the voice of Bud. His door was opened and he was once more packed out like a bale, and deposited, seated, on an empty box. Bud produced a thermos bottle full of hot coffee, some rolls, butter, and crisp doughnuts. They untied the cords at Jim's wrists, giving him his share of the food and a rusty tin cup for his coffee. By pressing his chin into his chest and lifting his restrained hands he could just make connection with his mouth, though Bud had to tilt the cup for him to finish his coffee. Bud did not eat. He smoked. Bill growled.

"Suppose you had 'ham and' in town there?"

"Prunes, cereal, ham and, hot cakes an' maple syrup, coffee, and a cigar," said Bud. "What you kickin' at? You can't drive the car." Bill grunted and Bud gave him a cigar. He stuck a third in Jim's mouth and lit it.

"I'll remember that," said Jim with gratitude. Bud nodded.

"So do, brother, if you figure that'll do you any good. I don't believe you and me is likely to meet again in a hurry, though. Take your time. We've got to tuck you up again soon."

"If I give you fellows the figures now will you turn me loose?"

Both looked as blankly committal as men wearing goggle masks might be expected to.

"I don't know a damn thing about your figures, nor Bill either," said Bud. "We're expressmen in this game. Deliverin' you, brother, as per directions, charges collect, eh, Bill?"

"You talk too much," was Bill's contribution.

The cigars finished, Jim's wrists were once more tied. He begged for a chance to walk about the barn, but they would not grant it. After he was trussed they resacked him, despite his protests. He gleaned one scrap of information.

Bud, in response to Bill, answered. "'Bout thirty miles. Boss expects us round noon. We drive right into the garage, deliver and collect. That lets us out."

Who was the boss?

Jim had hoped to get a look at the license plates on the car but Bud, Bill & Company, illicit expressmen, were too smart for that. This time he was not only deposited on the floor of the tonneau in his sacking, but a rug was flung over all. It was quite a while before they started. Once they stopped and Jim knew they were getting gasolene and oil, for Bill came into the tonneau and sat with his heavy-booted foot close to Lyman's head, mutely promising what would happen if Jim tried to attract attention. The day was warm and he sweated profusely, and an infernal itching started, from which there was no relief. After a time they rolled over smoother roads and finally made a sharp right turn and came to a stop, the engine shut off. They had reached the garage of the boss. One of them went off to report and Jim still sweated in his sacks. Then the upper one was removed and he blinked up into the face of a red-faced man with a squash nose, little blue eyes and a bald head save for a tonsure of reddish hair; a big man with enormous chest and protruding paunch, with hair on his wrists and fingers, spiderwise. He surveyed Jim callously.

"That him?" he asked.

"No," said Bill. "It ain't him. We let *him* go. This is a pal of ours we rigged up this way because that's the way he likes to ride. You got the wire, didn't you? You know he was identified at the other end. What's eatin' you? Come through with that two hundred berries and take your package and we'll call it a day."

The consignee's red face turned crimson, then purple. His pig eyes glittered and he closed his great fists. Then he laughed.

"Comedian, eh? All right. Take him upstairs and put him on the bunk. Make me out a receipt for the money and I'll give you one for the sailor lad."

"Is this the boss?" asked Jim. The trio looked at him as if they had forgotten he was anything but a dumb parcel. The red-faced man nodded.

"I'll talk to you later," he said. Jim had already connected him with the sea. He could not be fooled in several small but significant tricks of manner, aside from the blue anchor tattooed on the back of the right hand—a fouled anchor, one end of the rope continued to form a circle and frame to the design. "Take him up, boys; I'll go and get your dough."

The room above, reached by an open stair, was fitted as a chauffeur's bedroom. The garage was a large one. Through a window Jim caught sight of a big house, elaborately built of stone, many windowed, tiled of roof, with a tower at one corner and wide porches. Like the barn it was set on a hill, though he had not noticed the gradual slopes by which they had reached it. Beyond trees and the tops of other houses he saw a dark blue line, pearly clouds above it, land beyond it, it was the sea, running into a deep bay. They had brought him clear across the state.

The bed was comparatively comfortable, bound as he still was. Bud found pen, ink, and paper on a table and commenced to make out a receipt. Bill strolled to the window. The red-headed man, the boss as they called him, could not be the owner of so fine a place Jim was certain. Care-

taker probably; caretaker of a big summer home not yet opened for the season, perhaps a sort of sailing master for a yacht of the owner later on. He came back by the time Bill had made out his receipt. Bills changed hands and two slips of paper. Bud came over to the bed.

"So long," he said. "Times are hard, pal. It was a chance to get some easy money. No hard feelings?"

"Only on the back of my head," Jim smiled. It was not the underlings he was after.

"You talk too much," snarled Bill. "Come on, if you want to get back tonight." They left the room and backed the car out. Jim heard it spinning over the gravel of the drive. He looked at Redhead, who had drawn up a chair by the side of the bed and seated himself.

"See here, my lad," said Redhead. "Those landlubbers have lashed you overtight. I'll loosen you up a bit. You and me should get along fine, seein' we've both smelt blue water. Aye, an' sailed it. You slip me your word not to try and get funny and I'll cast you loose entirely. Not that it 'ud do you any good. But I'm an amiable man, when I'm allowed to be, an' a mean cuss when I'm riled." He set his big hands in either pocket of his coat and brought out from the one an automatic pistol and from the other a slingshot—much the same weapon, Jim thought ruefully, that had laid him out at the other end of the trip.

"That goes," he answered. In a moment he was untriced, using his liberty to chafe his arms and legs, then sitting on the bed.

"Nothin' like bein' as comfortable as you kin," said Redhead. "My name is Swenson, my lad. You and me'll get along fine. All I want from you is a little information, and if you're a wise man you'll come through first instead of last, and save us both a heap of trouble. For you've got to come through." The rumbling voice deepened on the last words; the red face coarsened, if that were possible, with an outthrust of the big jaw and a malicious light in the little eyes accompanying the balling up of great fists. "Then we'll have a snack to eat and a taste of grog. The real stuff. They kin make drinkin' unlawful but they can't make it unpopular, an' what the public wants, they most usually gits. How'll that suit you?"

"What do you want?" asked Jim. Swenson winked.

"I want the latitude an' longitude, the true and correct position of a certain island somewhere in the South Pacific. Where's the little log, my lad?" Jim laughed.

"I gave it to a man."

"Name him."

"My Uncle Samuel." For a moment Swenson glowered, then guffawed.

"That's a good un. Fooled me at first. Mailed it, eh? Who to?"

"I'm not telling."

"No?"

"No." Swenson appeared to consider the quality of his refusal.

"That's what I get by treating you so smooth, eh? Well, I'll try the other tack. I'll treat you rough. I hear you've held a ticket. So did I. And they knew me as 'Hellfire' Swenson. Ever hear of Hellfire Swenson?" Jim had heard of the man. A few years before Swenson had been brought to New York on charges forwarded by the American consul at Capetown, accused of violating the seamen's act forbidding corporal punishment, during a voyage from San Francisco to the Cape. Also charged with murder on the high seas. It had been a case discussed on every American ship. There had been handcuffings followed by beatings with knotted towels and a club. The crew had been forced to obey orders at the muzzle of a revolver. A seaman had jumped overboard two months out of San Francisco, to avoid the abuse. Repenting of his act, he had clutched a rope trailing from the stern of the ship, begging to be hauled aboard, and Hellfire Swenson, it was alleged, had forbidden any member of the crew rendering aid. The sailor finally lost his grip and was drowned. Swenson had been backed up by his mates and the charges were, in the main, not proven. But Hellfire Swenson lost his ticket. Jim surveyed him without blanching but he wondered no longer that this blackguard had been named the boss. How he got the position of caretaker, if indeed he held it, was a mystery.

"You're on land now, Hellfire," he said. "Bully driving won't get you anything. But I'll tell you one thing and be damned to you. You can hand it on to Foster with my compliments. The little log is in the hands of the properly interested party." Swenson's fists tightened; he blinked his piggy eyes, but showed no other signs of special interest in what Jim had said.

"That's news. As for Foster, who-

ever he is, that's news, too. I'm actin' in this for myself, my lad."

Aside from the character of the man, Jim set this down as a lie. If Swenson knew the value of the figures he must know the history connected with them. Whether Foster was hiring him or not, the name would be familiar to him. Swenson went on:

"I reckon you took a good look at them figgers before you mailed 'em. I'm takin' your word about the mailin'. You're a smart lad. Never mind the log. You come through with the position, or it's no grog an' no grub an' worse to follow. I'll leave you to think it over. Lie down, stretch out. Spreadeagle. Turn over on your belly."

Swenson had broken Jim's own parole by his own actions. Liberty was stopped, the prospects of semi-starvation substituted. Hellfire was rising from his chair. He was a big man, but he moved quickly. And Jim was quicker. Pretending to obey, he stretched out his hands, half turned over and then reversed, plumping the pillow he had clutched fair and hard at Swenson. It took the ex-skipper in the face and chest with force enough behind it, combined with the way it shut off his wind, to send Hellfire staggering back a step. That was enough. He tangled with the chair and went over backward while Jim leaped for the door. There was a spring lock on it and the catch had been shot by Swenson when he came in. As Jim tugged at the handle and then sought for the combination Swenson rolled nimbly over, snatched his gun from his pocket and fired from the floor. The bullet slapped into the door panel too close to Jim's head to be either safe or pleasant.

"Stand up to the door there or I'll put a leak in your skull!" The voice of Hellfire roared with stentorian, after-deck purpose. That jig was over. Jim stood against the door Y fashion, arms up and wide. "Turn about, march over to that bed. On your back!" There was the clink of metal as Swenson groped in a drawer with one hand, the other holding his gun trained on his prisoner. Then Jim found himself handcuffed to the bedposts, a pair of cuffs for each wrist. His ankles, spread on request coupled with the muzzle of the gun thrust into the small of his back, were dexterously lashed to the foot posts, and he lay there with some play to hands and arms but secure as a hogtied steer, face upward.

"Now think it over, my bucko." Swenson left the room. Jim heard his tread descending to the garage floor, crunching on the gravel, dying away. Presently a fly began to bother him, a small but persistent tormentor that seemed to appreciate the fact that it was immune from pursuit. Another followed, reaming over his skin, exploring his ears, the cavities of his nose. Jim grinned and bore it. The morning passed; the sunlight shifted on the walls; afternoon came and his enforced position became well-nigh intolerable. He early realized that his ankle cords had sailors' knots in them and that all effort to release them meant only chaffing and cutting of the flesh above his low shoes. He could wriggle his body a little and shift his head on the pillow that Swenson had restored to the bed. He made up his mind to capitulate, but not to do so with too great appearance of eagerness lest Swenson should suspect the truth—that Jim was going to supply false figures. He had no cause to bother about the hurry; Swenson was taking his time. Jim got hungry, then drowsy. Sleep conquered stomach and he found surcease from all inconvenience in slumber. He did not wake up until twilight was approaching, which meant somewhere between eight and nine o'clock in the evening. Now he was ravenous, but he lay there in the growing dusk for quite a while before he heard steps outside coming up the ladder, and the opening of the door. A light was switched on and Swenson stood looking at him as he twisted himself for a survey.

"Had enough, my lad?" asked Hellfire. "I've got some sandwiches here and something on the hip for you if you're goin' to be sensible. I've had lunch and supper myself, piping hot. How about it?"

Jim strove to inject sullenness into his voice.

"I'm not a damned fool," he said. "I'll talk business."

"Nothing to talk about, my lad. You give me them figgers."

"I want to know where I get off. I'm out of a job. I expected to get a berth through them, or a stake."

"We'll fix that up. Berth or money. Mebbe both." There was something about Hellfire that dimly reminded Jim of Stephen Foster in the bland, apt way with which he made promises.

"I'll take some of the money now," he said. "Show me a hundred bucks and I'll talk. I'll want four hundred more later."

Jim never expected to see the four hundred. He was willing to accept fifty cash, but that much he needed. If Swenson had been willing to pay out two hundred dollars for the delivery of Jim he ought to be able to advance more for the contents of the package. Jim had no scruples about taking the money. He had had between eleven and twelve dollars in his pocket the night before. If it was there now he did not know, and had had no chance to find out. Bud would not have taken it, but Bill might. He owed seven and a half at the Foxfield Hotel and he did not know how far away he was from there. He was going there by the quickest way he could find and pay for, as soon as he got his release, or made one for himself. He did not trust Hellfire but he sought to allay the latter's alertness by his own acting.

Swenson counted out some bills from a good-sized roll and laid them on the bed, just beyond reach of Jim's hand.

"Five twenties there," he said. "Spiel the figgers and I loosen up; you pouch the money and then you pouch the food. Four hundred more later."

"It's one-thirty-two, fifty-four west, longitude," lied Jim.

"Hold on. Wait till I put it down." Swenson got pen and paper.

Jim repeated.

"One-thirty-two, fifty-four west, longitude. Forty-four, twenty-nine south."

" Got a good mem'ry, have you?"

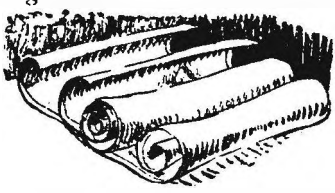
"Yes. Why?"

" If you should happen to repeat them figgers any time later on and not get 'em the same you're goin' to have a mighty hard time rememberin' anything from then on. Sure you got 'em right?" Jim repeated them with a laugh. And made a note to mark them down somewhere for handy reference as soon as he got a chance, though he had carefully selected them and felt sure of remembering them. But a threat like this from Swenson was not apt to be vague and he was far from out of the woods yet.

"Pretty far south, ain't it, for jungle?" asked Swenson a little suspiciously.

"No farther south than New Zealand. Almost the same latitude as Dunedin. Tropical enough there. And the Antarctic drift is well below fifty in that longitude."

"Some navigator, eh?" Swenson went over to a bureau and took a chart out of a roll, spreading it on the table and poring over it. It was a Great Circle Sailing Chart.



He supplemented that with a colored physical chart of the Pacific Ocean, studying them intently. Jim had picked his false position from memory. He felt certain that it showed absolutely blank on the charts; still—— "What did you say them figgers was?" barked Hellfire suddenly. "Reel 'em off now." Jim repeated once again and Swenson checked. Then he rolled up the charts, unlocked one handcuff. allowing Jim to take the hundred dollars and pocket them, and laid on the counterpane the sandwiches and a pocket flask. Jim bit into the bread and meat with avid content, ignoring the flask.

"Good hooch," said Swenson, almost good-naturedly. "Real, imported American rye, shipped to France and brought back again."

"I'll save it," said Jim. He had no especial taste for whisky and he believed Swenson quite up to the trick of doping him for his own ends—to get back the hundred, for example.

"Suit yourself."

"When do I get the other four hundred?"

"As soon as there's any chance for your using it." Swenson grinned at him without friendliness, a grin of self-appreciation.

"If we'd have got your little book, my lad," he said, "we'd have given you a short trip down the coast—say to Colon. As it is you're goin' along with us all the way, just to make sure you've given us the right figgers. Savvy? Also you're a handy man aboard. You'll know the holding ground and save time in more ways than one. I'll give you second mate's job with full wages, the four hundred an' the one you've got as earnest money. You'll get a share of what we find, same as the rest. But you go all the way. If the island's where you say it is, well an' good. If it ain't—well, *you don't come back.* Splice that into your lifeline, my lad. I'll read off them figgers to you. If you ain't *plumb certain* they're right, this is the time to alter 'em. Otherwise, we'll get 'em out of you; if we have to keel-haul you once a day." The emphasis Swenson

laid upon his slowly spoken phrases was infinitely malign. Their effect was as bleak as the wind that blows across a polar ice-floe.

"Suits me," said Jim carelessly. "Only I'd like to get my hands on the four hundred. When I've got money coming to me it always seems like it was better off with me. But that's all right. I'm not stuck on your methods, Hellfire Swenson, and, if I'm second mate, I'm not going to carry a belaying pin in my boot and back up every order with a wallop. Otherwise the berth suits me, and the share looks good. I made up my mind this afternoon it was no use bucking you. You're liberal enough and I'd be a fool not to take 'em. Only—I'm no hell-driver. I'll get the work out of my watch by my own methods."

Swenson, watching him keenly, as Jim did the other, carefully calculating the effect of ended resistance, plus a registered kick or two against Hellfire tactics, reached over and patted him on the back with a heavy hand.

"You'll do, matey," he said. "Glad you're sensible. This crew won't have to be tickled with a rope's end. They're all partners, you see. We'll go aboard in an hour, soon's it's dark. We go out tonight. Tide serves at midnight."

"Out of where?"

Swenson winked. "Never you mind. I'll give you your course when you take the desk. Don't you bother about where we start from, sonny. It's where we finish concerns you."

"All right. Turn me loose."

"Not altogether. I'll cast you loose from the bed after I've 'cuffed you up. You'll get liberty when we hit deep water, in case you change your mind about going along. You're a smart lad, Lyman, but I'm a wise old turtle myself." He took away the right handcuff and manacled Jim with the pair still on his left wrist. He cast off the ankle lashings and allowed Jim to get up off the bed and walk around the room, to look out of the window.

The water was no longer visible but there were blinking lights showing through a slight mist. Then the intermittent flash of a lighthouse.

"Hazin' up a little," volunteered Swenson. "Good weather for sayin' a quiet good-by. There's a dozen of us aboard knows the bay in our sleep. Have a cigar?"

Jim took it, accepted the light and sat by the window smoking, elbows resting on the sill. The night gathered and the haze thickened. He wanted to find out the name of the place. Somehow he must make a getaway, and a plan, indefinite as the mist, was vaguely forming. To further it he should know where they were. Looking out did him no good so he turned and started talking to Swenson about the island. He gave him many details that he had not given Kitty Whiting; directions for getting through the reef, for example, bearings, and suggestions for anchorage that Swenson made note of with little nods of his head while he gradually grew more confidential, almost chummy. But if he ever tried to make mooring or work through to the lagoon with those same directions, Jim could see his command piled on the coral. If Jim was along—but he did not intend to be. Still Swenson plainly imagined him as having accepted the situation and applauded his common sense—as viewed by Swenson. He insisted upon his sharing his own flask, bidding Jim to keep his for later. Jim stuck his tongue in the neck of the bottle, corking it, when it was his turn. Swenson swigged deeply and grew almost jovial, though the stuff had small real effect upon him.

At last a car came up the drive and hooted. Jim saw its lights before it sounded the horn.

"Here's our wagon," he said. "Do I still have to wear these bracelets."

"Sure do, matey. We're going by the back streets. No one'll see you or know you. Take 'em off when we're aboard an' clear. Give you the run of the ship. You're second mate. Bunk aft. Come on."

They went downstairs out through the garage to where a flivver wheezed and panted. The driver was a stolid individual who barely looker around but sat eating something out of a small bag. Swenson greeted him.

"'Lo, Jakey. Have a little drink?"

"No. Quit it."

"Chewin' candy instead? Suit yourself. Git in, matey." Swenson took seat at the back beside Jim and confidentially slid a hand under his arm. Jim abandoned a hope of a getaway from the flivver. They chugged down side streets and roads where lights shone dimly in the foggy night, descending always. The smell of salt water came to them and Jim inhaled it as a desert horse snuffs the oasis. They reached a small creek, ran along its banks and stopped at a little wharf and boat-

house, dimly seen, with a dull flare of orange showing in a window.

"Here we are," said Swenson. "Reckon the boys are on deck. All ashore, matey. You first." Jim was directly back of the silent driver who now took the last piece of candy from his bag, screwed up the sack and flipped it from him. It fell on the running board and Jim retrieved it with his fettered hands, opened it swiftly and read the printed legend upon it by the headlights as he passed in front of the flivver. Fowler's General Store, Wareham.

Now he knew where he was and his heart quickened a beat as he dropped the bag and set foot upon it while Swenson followed, unsuspecting. The driver, sucking at his peppermint, noticed nothing.

Wareham is on the Wareham River, head of Wareham County, Mass., emptying into the head of Buzzard's Bay! And Jim knew Buzzard's Bay! The light he had seen must be Wing's Neck Light off Red Brook Harbor. To starboard, as they would run down toward Long Island Sound, there would come Sippican Harbor with Bird Island Light. Mattapoiset Harbor, Ram Island, Nasketucket Bay, West Island, New Bedford Harbor, Dumpling Rock Light opposite Woods Hole, the steamer connection for Nantucket. And, last of all, the Elizabeth Islands with the Cuttyhunk Light at the tip, a fixed white light that Jim knew well from early days. He had been born at New Bedford.

He hid his exultation as, with Swenson's grip on his arm, they advanced to

the boathouse, and Swenson knocked on the door. Half a dozen men were playing cards by the light of a lantern. Bottles and glasses were on the rough table. It seemed that wherever Swenson ruled rum was still plentiful. Jim suspected him of pocketing profits on those quarts of rye that were trans-shipped from France —if Swenson had spoken the truth of the course. It was good enough whisky. The men were a sturdy lot, inclined to be secretive, if not surly. Jim knew their type, longshoremen of Nantucket Sound, seafood providers, lobstermen not averse to making a living at anything they might find afloat or upflung, smugglers at heart and by inheritance; good seamen, withal. They gazed at him with wooden faces that might have been carved out of walnut. None of them appeared to notice his handcuffs.

"Mr. Lyman. Goin' to be second mate," announced Swenson briefly. The incongruity of a fettered officer raised no comment. They were used to unusual sights, thought Jim, or else such sights were usual. "How's the tide?"

"Turned ha'f hour ago. Runnin' strong."

"Then we'll git aboard." The flivver driver had turned the car. Jim saw the lights wavering away through the mist and silently thanked the taciturn chauffeur for his candy habit. They made their way down the wharf in a ghostly procession to where a boat swung at a painter, stretching with the tug of the outgoing tide. Jim expected a launch on account of the number of men ashore. Otherwise he had anticipated a dory, but the boat was a double-ended whaleboat into which they jumped with the celerity of saltwater men. Swenson was at the tiller with Jim beside him, and the six men took to the sweeps with a powerful stroke that, aided by the current, sent the boat dancing swiftly down the bay through the fog. They passed Butter's Point unseen, but located by Bird's Island Light and swung into the entrance of Sippican Harbor, a long narrow anchorage. Swenson steered as if it had been broad daylight, occasionally hand testing the water alongside for eddies. He brought them up to a trim-looking schooner with masthead light showing, and as they pulled forward toward the bows, the reflection of her green sidelight to starboard. Jim looked for a name, but the curve of the bows prevented that. He had seen none on the whaleboat, merely the number 4. A side ladder was rigged, up which Jim preceded Swenson, the men in the boat dropping back to the quarter falls. On deck a man met them whom Swenson called Mr. Peters. There was a crispness to his manner as well as the official handle he set to the man's name that showed that Hellfire had taken up the reins of discipline. He did not introduce Jim but took him to the main cabin, showing him a stateroom.

"Here's where you bunk," he said. "All by yourself. Plenty of room aft. She was a pleasure craft, matey, but we've stripped off the fancy rigging an' made

her seaworthy. She's sweetlined as a racing yacht, but she's stiff enough for any breeze. Seventy-two footer, with a fine engine for a kicker. Dynamo, wireless, all the rigamajigs. Take the screw off 'n her an' she'll sail with any fisherman ever went out o' Gloucester."

"Sweet looking schooner," said Jim. "Far as I can see. What's her name?" Swenson looked at him quizzically.

"Didn't you see it on the boat? I don't hold in stickin' a ship's name all over the place, buoys an' boats an' everything. You'll see it in the mornin'. Not much room for cargo, but what we're after won't take up much room, eh, matey? And there's the more space for stores. I'll see you later."

He nodded and went out. A bolt slid outside the door. There was one on the inside also but it wouldn't do him much good, Jim reflected. He climbed on the bunk and gazed through the porthole at the blackness. Overhead he heard the familiar scuffle of action, short commands, the inhaul of the anchor, the grunts of men as they hauled on the halyards, swaying up the sails. There was little wind in the fog, yet they had elected to use canvas rather than the engine Swenson mentioned. It made for silence. But if this craft was going down to the South Seas she must have papers of some sort for clearance, or she would find herself in trouble at foreign ports of call. The truth probably was that Sippican Harbor was not her usual anchorage, and for some reason Swenson preferred to slide out without attracting undue attention. Jim fancied that the schooner had used such tactics more than once. Hellfire Swenson, he imagined, was peddling firewater. But his own affairs concerned him more closely. If he was kept immured in the cabin until the ship gained open water it was likely that he was booked for a trip to the Panama Canal, the first stop Colon.

Carried on the current, more than aided by the light airs, the schooner made good progress. Through the porthole Jim saw Bird Island Light. Now they were heading down Buzzard's Bay toward the entrance to Long Island Sound where they would work out to the free Atlantic. The cabin clock chimed eight bells and the ship's bell echoed the strokes of midnight. His bolt was slipped and Swenson came in. He unlocked the handcuffs.

"Fog's breakin'," he said. "Hazy yet, but I wouldn't wonder if 't was clear outside. You'll not take up your duty till tomorrow, Mr. Lyman, but if you want to stretch yourself a bit come on deck. I'm taking the watch. We'll have a little touch of grog first."

He filled glasses in the main cabin and handed one to Jim.

"Here's to a successful voyage," he toasted, and Jim drank to the toast. The whisky sent the blood surging through his veins. They went above together. Swenson kept close by Jim's side, but it was plain that he had partially accepted him as one of his own kidney, or as a tool he could successfully use.

The fog was thinning, shredding away, and there were holes in it here and there through which a star peeped. The beacon lights tore at it, rending paths for their warnings. They stood aft by the wheel. Suddenly the engine started to turn the screw and their speed increased. Jim calculated they were making a good eight knots. They had passed New Bedford Harbor with Clark's Point Light flashing almost abeam. Dumpling Rock Light was the next. Then he would keep his eyes peeled for the fixed white light at Cuttyhunk, westernmost point of the Elizabeth string of islands. There, between Gooseberry Neck and Penikese Islands, the inlet was at its narrowest, somewhere about five miles. And the main channel swung toward Penikese.

JIM meant to stay on deck until they caught sight of the light at Cuttyhunk, then to take his chance over the rail. His shoes were unlaced, the ends tucked in, seemingly tied, but ready to kick off the moment he struck water. It was going to be a long swim—how long he could not gauge beforehand—and a hard one. The tide would sweep him down. If he missed Penikese he would have to fight hard to land on Cuttyhunk or be carried out into the ocean proper.

The long odds were preferable to staying aboard the schooner, even if he had not had special reasons urging him. He could not disassociate Foster as the real master mind of Swenson's activities, and he was fired with desire to block all Foster's plans which doubtless were maturing back in Foxfield. He meant to be present at the conference set for the same night—now that midnight had sounded. He had a hundred odd dollars in his pocket. Let him get away, make a landing, and however roundabout his route, he would get to where autos might be hired, and then travel on the funds of the opposition.

Swenson did not seem to imagine that a man would dream of tackling a getaway by swimming; nevertheless he stayed closer to Jim than Jim relished. And he planned how he could avoid Hellfire's attentions and even matters up with him a bit. So far he had been the underdog; from now on he hoped things would turn out differently.

They chugged on through the dissipating mists which should lend a friendly cloak to Jim's escape. The fixed ray of Cuttyhunk shone like a misplaced star, then was eclipsed by something that must be Penikese Island. He and Swenson were pacing up and down together. Jim had started the topic of rum-running in a manner that suggested that he thought such exploits highly creditable, adventurous, and profitable. Swenson rose to the bait. With a congenial soul inclined to admiration, Hellfire was not averse to boasting.

"Good enough, when there's nothing bigger on hand," he said. "And it's sure good fun to fool the raiders. They sing loud when they happen to light on a buried cargo or board a ship with contraband once in a million times, through some rotten informer telling 'em what they'd never find out for themselves. We keep 'em guessing. It's a fine coast for hide an' seek."

He went on to tell of exploits, not attempting to veil his own personality as a principal. He hinted broadly at the existence of a national ring with ramifications spreading out north to Canada, west to the Orient, east to Europe, south to the Indies, Central and South America. And Jim, with the right word now and then, led him on. Swenson stood at the port rail, elbows on it, leaning back, puffing at his cigar. Jim purposely allowed his to go out. He looked beyond Swenson to where he fancied he could see the loom of Penikese. Fortunately it was thickening up a little. He stood within easy distance of Swenson, judging the space between them.

"Got a match?" he asked. "I'm out."

Swenson took his glowing cigar from between his lips. This Jim had counted on, though it was not vital. He offered it, butt first, in his right hand, the left swinging low. Jim stepped forward as if to take it and brought up his right first smash against the point of Swenson's jaw, with all the impetus lent by the past hours of defeat and ignominy, with all the force of the pivoting weight of his body concentrated in that blow for liberty. Hellfire saw it coming; his cigar fell from his lips, but he was too late to shout, and Jim was well inside his guard. A sudden, fiery pain shot through Jim's knuckles. He had driven them back with the impact against Swenson's adamantine jaw, but they had served their purpose. The big man's head rocked; he half swung around then dropped like a chain. There was no one near but the man at the wheel. He turned his head at the thud. Jim heard the yell as he leaped to the rail, catching at the stays to steady himself for a split-second, then diving clean into the tide, kicking off his shoes and striking out, under water at first, in the direction of Penikese.

V

REACTION

THE swift race of the tide gripped him, carrying him along parallel to the course of the schooner before he began to make transverse headway. When he was forced to come to the surface he heard confused shouts aboard and chuckled at the success of the blow that had temporarily paralyzed the brains of the boss. The weight of his clothes handicapped him so that he found he had miscalculated the power of the tide-rip and he settled down to a steady single overhand, swimming on his side, almost submerged, urging progress with powerful scissors clips of his legs, looking backward toward the ship from which he had so unceremoniously departed.

To his dismay a beam shot out from her deck. She was rigged with a searchlight that he in his limited survey had not noticed. The ray swept the waters in his direction, missed him as he promptly ducked, and when he again broke water it was swinging toward the New Bedford shore. But it came back, seeking him out. The churn of the screw had been plain to him across the water; now it stopped. A boat was being lowered. It came in his direction. Evidently they either guessed which way he had gone or they had seen him. Meanwhile the current was carrying down the schooner. As the tremulous finger of the searchlight pointed his way Jim dived for the third time. Swimming under water slowed his progress and there was the danger that when lack of air forced him up again the boat would be on

him or the beam spot him. The last risk was realized. He bobbed up in a circle of dull radiance and there was a shout from the boat, a clutter of oars turning to a steady stroke, the flash and report of a gun and the watery spat of a bullet only too well aimed.

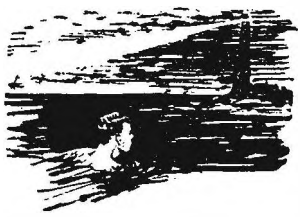
On they came, shouting in triumph. He heard the bellow of Swenson. His right hand had swollen with the blow, and now besides paining intolerably, it began to interfere with the diving power of his arm that grew numb.

"Turn on your back. Float, damn ye! Float, or I'll sink ye for keeps!" Swenson was roaring like an infuriated bull. Jim might dodge for a while, might dive a time or two, but they would wear him down. If they got him alive he could imagine what would be in store for him aboard with the humiliated Hellfire; unless——

The gods had taken pity on him at last. A bank of fog, vagrant before the uncertain breeze, bore down on him. For the fourth time he slipped under water and struck out to reach its cover, swimming until he thought his lungs must burst and his body felt like lead from lack of oxygen. Up he came to suck in moist air, to find himself enveloped in woolly vapor. He turned over on his back to float and rest. He could hear the clack of oars, muffled calls. The search ray had long since reached its limit in the mist. Swenson and his rowers were losing their bearings. And the tide was bearing Jim rapidly toward the ocean. He had no hope of making Penikese now. That lonesome rock would have been only a temporary halting place, but a necessary one. Now he must keep on to Cuttyhunk. Out of the fog panic swooped at him. Was he going in the right direction? He knew how easy it was in broad daylight to get turned about while floating. In the fog——

His heart pounded for a few beats, then steadied. He could see a halo in the mist, a rainbow spot of dull, but—to him—glorious tints. The fixed white light of Cuttyhunk, well ahead on his left! Allowing for the tide, as the ferries do trying to make a slip, Jim bucked the rip diagonally, his angle of crossing deflected backward. The light came swiftly toward him and he saw that he must make almost superhuman effort if, when it came abeam, he was to be close enough to shore to make a landing. He strove not to get into a flurry. He turned on his right side now, his left, undamaged arm driving him, while the right gave flotation, depending mostly on his legs for power.

He was almost opposite the light, and it seemed to him that he had made scant progress shorewards for all his exertions. There comes a moment to the stoutest swimmer when the call upon the blood is



too much for the over-worked lungs and heart; the limbs grow leaden, buoyancy is deflated and the overcoming of the dead centre of effort between strokes is a herculean task. To turn upon the back and float and rest is the temptation that assails irresistibly. But to float in such an ebbing tideway, even for a few seconds, meant being carried out to the ocean, or at best down Long Island Sound.

The light grew suddenly clearer. He had battled through the thick belt of mist that had temporarily saved him. He could see surf breaking on the rocks of Cuttyhunk. Past them he went, ledge after spouting ledge where a landing threatened broken ribs if not worse. Now he was past the light, all hope gone. A wave slapped him in the face as if derisively; salt water lapped into his mouth, open and gasping for breath. It was all over. He had failed!

Instinctively he tensed for one last tussle before he quit. As he lifted his head to glance despairingly at the fixed light that shone so inexorably as a mark that he had missed, he saw the ghostly loom of spray that marked a little promontory projecting like a finger to the south of a tiny inlet below the ledges of the lighthouse foundation.

Burying his head, he spent his last atoms of energy in the crawl, flailing the surges with his arms, clipping the water with his legs, plowing through the backwash from the rocks at top speed, then failing——

There was an eddy in the tiny inlet, a small space of slack water, then an opposing current that bore him, still feebly swimming, close to the ledges that were beginning to expose their beards of slippery weed. These he grasped and clung to, twining his fingers like hooks among the pods, his body aswing and horizontal. A great wave came rolling into the inlet, chafing against a hundred obstacles, its force breaking. The tail of it lifted Jim

and flung him into a crevice of the rock, scraping his flesh against mussels and barnacles that tore his feet and cut through his thin clothing, taking toll of his blood. It sucked at him as it retreated, spent, part of the general retreat of the tidal waters, but Jim remained, holding with fingers, knees, elbows and his lacerated feet, too spent to move for the moment. A rising tide must inevitably have plucked him from his refuge, borne him off to make a sport of him, half stunned as he was. But now it ebbed steadily. Off shore, the whaleboat was seeking the schooner's searchlight in the fog, Swenson himself bewildered for direction, giving up the chase; cursing and hoping that Jim had sunk; wondering whether he had been given the right position of the island; deciding that he had been tricked, and exhausting his repertory of oaths to meet the occasion. The schooner's engine could not buck the full sweep of the ebb any more than could the rowers. Both craft dropped down below the light, below where Jim crawled to the pitted top of his saving promontory; the boat caught up to the mother vessel, was towed, after the crew got aboard, and the schooner swung out around Martha's Vineyard, past Nantucket, out to the sea until the tide turned.

Jim, with naked feet, stumbled over the dripping rocks, cut and bruised, yet gathering strength in the exultation of having won through. But Nature called a halt, insisting on recuperation, his engines clamoring for fuel. A soaking meant nothing to Jim who had slept curled up on hard planks in a small cockpit many a wet night. He found a patch of sand and dropped to it, shouldering out a shallow bed, scraping a hollow for his hips, dropping asleep in the middle of the work, dreamlessly lost to all the world with the fixed white light of Cuttyhunk streaming overhead.

Gulls woke him, screaming discordantly at this intruder on their sanctuary. The mist had gone, and the morning was sharp and clear with the sun already striking at him over Nashawena Island. He sat up, smarting and aching, a sorry looking sight but refreshed, his hurts lost in his purpose —to get to Foxfield before evening. The prospects were not encouraging, but he clenched his jaws until the muscles bunched, tightened his fists and began to figure out how he could make it. The light was out.

The Elizabeth Islands string out westward from the elbow of the curved arm of Barnstaple—Cuttyhunk, Nashawena, Pasque, Naushon, Nonamesset and Uncatean, the two latter side by side and opposite Woods Hole, railroad terminal and port of call for steamers plying between New Bedford and Nantucket. The straits between the islands, smallest at low tide, are all narrow, that between Nashawena and Pasque the widest. There are a few shacks at Cuttyhunk settlement and at Tarpaulin Cove on Naushon, but they are irregularly occupied. Jim had faint hopes of hiring the use of a boat from one of these and making his way to the train. But it was all of fifteen miles, as an aeroplane might make it, from Cuttyhunk to Woods Hole. Even if he got a boat immediately, there was a long morning's work ahead of him to get to the steamer landing, chancing connections at the railroad. Whether he could hire an auto at Woods Hole to take him to Foxfield he did not know. The owner would charge him both way fare, and his money might be insufficient after all. If he could get to New Bedford——

As he stretched himself he found he had an appetite. Swenson's sandwiches had long since lost their sustaining powers. A man's engines need stoking to be effective. Jim made his way over the rocks toward the shacks at Cuttyhunk. He saw smoke coming out of a stovepipe, promise of breakfast. Better than that, he saw a launch, dirty-white with no glittering brasses—no pleasure craft, but the practical powerboat of a fisherman, engines hooded forward, and a roomy cockpit aft. It was moored to a wharf along which a man walked bearing lobster pots. Another one was in the cockpit fussing with the engines. Jim broke into a run, shouting at the men. The one with the lobster basket-traps turned to gaze at him and the one aboard clambered to the wharf where they stood spellbound, looking at the strange figure that had hailed them, and now came hobbling along on bare feet, hatless, with clothes torn and stained with sea-slime and sand, a right hand swollen into shapelessness, face streaked and caked with blood.

"Wall, I'll be scaled," said the man with the pots. "Where in time did ye come from, stranger? W'ot's the general idee?" Jim had his story ready.

"Got boomed-off last night abeam the light," he said. "Fool amateur on a yacht jibed her, running before the wind. Wish he'd sprung his stick." The fishermen appraised him with professional eyes.

"You bein' hired by him?"

"Yes. Sloop *Gypsy*. Me being sailing master, and my own fault for believing the fool knew enough to steer in a fog. What'll you take for a snack to eat and a trip to New Bedford?" The men looked at each other. Their answer was essentially that of New England bargaining.

"What'll you give? Oughter git that hand of yourn fixed up. Boom hit that?" Jim ignored the thrust. Money would talk.

"Two of you own the launch? Call your profits fifteen a day apiece. That's more than it is on an average. I'll give you thirty dollars."

"We got our customers to consider. Orders to fill."

"Tell 'em it was an off day. You don't always have luck."

"Do it for fifty dollars—cash in advance."

"Deal closed." Jim tried vainly to get his right hand at his money. It would not go into his pocket. But he worked it out and handed over twenty dollars, displaying enough to set the fishermen's minds at rest about their pay. "Thirty more when we hit New Bedford," he told them. "Now for a mug-up."

The launch was sturdy enough, but not designed for speed or grace. It wallowed into New Bedford at eleven o'clock, helped by the tide. They passed half a dozen power schooners, but Jim had not seen enough of Swenson's craft to recognize it, save by the figures instead of name on her boats. Nor would recognition have delayed him. He had evolved a theory that Foster, at back of Swenson—though he admitted even in his biased mood that such a connection between an unprincipled, almost outlawed bully and a prosperous manufacturer seemed incongruous—had planned on securing the figures together with the person of Lyman, and thus get possession of the pearls by making toothpicks of the *Golden Dolphin* if necessary to find the hiding-place of the treasure. He began to suspect Foster of having planted certain of his tools on the *Golden Dolphin* on her original voyage to plot a mutiny—a scheme upset by the tidal casting ashore of the ship.

By this time, he feared, Foster would have learned that Kitty Whiting had the diary in her possession. If Swenson communicated with him, stating that Lyman had got away, there might be an immediate attempt to get the figures from Kitty, to delay her voyage and give Swenson a start. They might even try to kidnap the girl. Men will go to great lengths for the sake of a fortune—even Foster, who, having already made one million, no longer considered it as a definite goal.

If he was correct, Swenson would wire. *And so could he!* At the first store he bought shoes, socks and a cap. Then he found a telegraph office. He had brushed up a little at the store, but the girl looked askance at his desperate looking appearance. He was forced to ask her to write out his messages—one to Kitty Whiting, another to her Cousin Lynda. He believed the latter less likely to trust in Foster, less bound by ideas of partnership. The content of both was the same save for the interchange of names.

Arriving this evening. Vital you keep information mailed you absolutely secret. Also my arrival. Trickery active.

James Lyman.

He found he could get a train shortly after noon that would take him to South Framingham a few minutes before four. That place was about eight miles from Foxfield. Further connections were bad, but he could hire a machine that should surely land him at the antique shop by eight o'clock.

If Swenson had wired, all his calculations might be upset. Foster would be prepared for his appearance and would, of course, be ready to discredit Swenson. Therefore he would proceed as planned and attend the meeting he had himself arranged.

Lyman could have spared himself a lot of worrying had he known that at that very moment, Swenson, with a broken-down engine that obstinately refused to come to life, was cursing the lack of a breeze twelve miles off-shore.

He filled in his wait with lunch and a visit to a barber's for a shave and a chance to bathe his injured hand. Then to a druggist for bandaging.

"Better show that to a doctor," advised the man. "Looks like misplaced bones, to me. Ought to have an X-ray taken of it. Delay won't help it.

"Then it can't be helped," said Jim. "I've seen worse get well at sea." The druggist shrugged his shoulders.

"Suppose the other chap is in the hospital?" he said as he rang up his money.

"I sure hope so," Jim answered fer-

vently. It was a bad hand, but it would have to get along. If only Swenson's jaw was half-way like it.

At four-thirty he was front-seated beside the driver of a good car, averaging twenty-five miles through incorporated towns and villages with their speed restrictions and wideawake traffic regulators. At seven o'clock they had a blowout and shifted to the spare. At ten minutes to eight they entered Foxfield by way of a detour for road-mending that brought them over the same bridge that Jim had crossed two nights earlier on his way to Foster's house. The car took him to the hotel. After the chauffeur was paid off Jim had fifteen dollars and sixty cents; Swenson's contribution had paid expenses.

The clerk at the desk stared at him unbelievingly as Jim asked for his key.

"That room's rented. Thought you'd skipped. Mr. Foster and his son rang up the other night, wondering why you didn't show up to their house. Then they came down together in their car. Seemed a bit upset about you. Thought you might have misunderstood their directions, but I told 'em you'd spoken to me about it. Thought you might have fallen in the river, maybe. I told 'em we'd take a look at your junk. If it was worth more than what you owed us you might come back. If not, you'd faded for reasons of your own. You ain't the only one that's done it. Mr. Foster figured I was right, but I guess I was wrong. Want another room? What happened."

"I got into an accident," said Jim. "Machine hit me, picked me up and took me along with 'em a ways. I'll take a room, I reckon. And I'd like my things."

The clerk looked at him with an expression that showed he thought Jim was lying, but said nothing. His things were brought to the new room. They had plainly been overhauled. Foster had doubtless been glad of the chance to see if the diary was there or not. And a new thought struck him. Foster might by now be a confirmed believer in his own suggestion that Jim was a fake, and that, seeing his story was to be investigated thoroughly, he had skipped. Though if Foster had seen the little diary, he could tell almost at a glance—any keen-witted person could—that its contents was authentic enough with its everyday comments and the stains upon the pages with their more or less legible entries. But—if Foster had suggested the assault and abduction, it was clever of him to have come to the hotel and shown just the right amount of concern. Foster *was* clever.

Jim changed shirt, collar, and tie, slicked up to the best of his ability, hard put to it to do much to his only suit. At twenty minutes past eight he pressed the bell between the two porches with a side glance at the ship model. He had already noticed light coming from the two windows of the dining-living room.

The gaunt maid opened the door, starting back.

"Land o' Goshen!" she exclaimed. "I——"

Jim pushed past her with an imperative gesture for silence. For a moment the woman seemed dazedly about to try and bar his way. She gasped like a stranded fish, muttering confusedly.

"For the land's sake. I wanter know. Why, I—" Jim grasped her bony wrist with his left hand.

"Shut up," he said. "Are the rest here? Mr. Foster and his son?" She nodded, gathering herself together.

"I'll tell Miss Kitty you're here."

"You needn't bother." Jim went through the hall and abruptly opened the door of the dining room. About the table were seated the four he had expected to find, rising to his entrance. He saw immediately that Kitty and her cousin had received his telegram, though they exhibited well feigned surprise. As for Stephen and Newton Foster, there was no question about their astonishment. The former especially showed some measure of alarm and consternation. They did not seem attempting to mask their emotions. Yet Jim could not construe guilt out of their appearance. Young Newton surveyed him quizzically. The elder Foster swiftly recovered himself. Jim spoke first.

"I've got to apologize for my appearance," he said. "But I've been on the jump every minute that I wasn't tied up since I saw you last."

"Tied up?" The ejaculation was unanimous. Jim could not detect any difference in expressions.

"Hand and foot, with a couple of sacks to boot," he said grimly. "Someone asked me to help them with a busted automobile on my way to your house at *your* invitation to talk things over, Mr. Foster. I stooped and somebody hit me over the head with a blackjack. The

rest sounds like a chapter in a dime novel, but I had made up my mind to keep this appointment and here I am."

"But," said Kitty Whiting, "you wrote me that you were going away. And you've been hurt. Oh—your poor hand!"

"I hurt that on someone else, a gentleman by the name of Hellfire Swenson. I met him at Wareham, Buzzard's Bay. Maybe you know the place?" He wheeled on Stephen Foster. There was the idea in the back of his head that Swenson might have been caretaker for Foster, the Wareham place the latter's summer residence. But Foster's face was absolutely blank. He was either an accomplished actor or— Jim's theories commenced to suffer from a reaction that immediately grew.

"Never heard it more than mentioned," said Foster. "How about Lyman writing to you, Kitty? You didn't tell me anything about it." Jim looked from one to the other, puzzled. Then Foster didn't know anything about the sending of the log.

"I haven't had a chance," she said. "You and Newton were out of town, to begin with, up to this afternoon. Newton phoned early yesterday morning and told me you were going before the letter came by special delivery. As you were coming tonight it hardly seemed worth while until you told me that Mr. Lyman had missed an appointment with you. That was just before you came in," she explained to Jim. And Jim, who could not suspect the girl of any connivance at his kidnapping, grew more bewildered, less and less sure of his own reasoning.

"I was telling my niece what happened—what I thought happened," said Stephen Foster frankly. "My son, against my own judgment—but I told you that over the phone. I will only say that when you did not appear we telephoned, and then ran down to the hotel in the car as soon as it was adjusted. I had a talk with the clerk, who showed me your baggage. It was, er—not of great value. He considered you had left it in lieu of payment. I must admit that I reverted to my original belief that you had in some way got hold of information concerning the *Golden Dolphin* and had arrived here with spurious information in the hope of a reward of some sort, abandoning the plan on seeing that your proofs would have to be submitted to more than casual investigation. In other words, I thought you got cold feet when I suggested an interview, not with more or less interested and credulous women influenced by sentiment, but with me.

"I apologize. It is evident you have been more or less misjudged by us. Very evident that you have been at—er—some pains to return, after rough treatment that seems to have been extended to both sides of the argument. Now will you tell us what has happened; why you wrote that you were not coming back; why you changed your mind, and, seemingly, fought your way back?"

Despite himself, Jim found his feelings changing toward Stephen Foster. There was a frankness about his regrets, a thawing of his general chilliness, a changing in his eyes, a touch of actual humanity that affected him as the difference between heat and cold. But he did not forego caution, he was unable to cast off all suspicion.

"I went," he said, "because I found myself regarded by you as a faker; because I feared that Miss Whiting was being swayed by sentimentality, and I thought the chances of finding her father on the island remote; because she offered me a share of the pearls in return for the figures which I considered belonged to her.

"Therefore I mailed her the little diary, intending to leave. I considered you had a right to such information as I might give about landings and anchorages, so I told you I would come to your house. I have changed my mind about the possibilities of the trip. At any rate I am now inclined to think the pearls are there. Others do, also, it appears. In order to get a chance to get away from my host at Wareham I had to furnish him with false figures. It was very plain he intended going to the island. I hope he'll try to go to the position I furnished him. I am afraid he won't. From my short acquaintance with him I should be surprised if he does not make another attempt to get hold of the correct figures—he, or those who may be behind him, who might have been behind the mutiny that Captain Whiting hinted at in his letters to his daughter.

"So, as soon as I could, I wired Miss Whiting, also Miss Warner for security, not to divulge the figures I had given her to anybody under any consideration. And I would advise her to hang on to them until the last necessary moment—that would be after leaving Fiji—if she makes the trip."

Jim said this almost defiantly, striving to detect some clew that father or son, or both, were what he had surmised. Stephen

Foster's face showed little but grave attention. Newton Foster displayed close interest. Nothing more.

"I consider that an excellent idea," said Foster. " I commend you, Lyman, for qualities I had not credited you with. Where is this book, Kitty? Have you shown it to anybody?"

"No. It is in my safety deposit box at the Foxfield National." Foster nodded approval, but not surprise. Jim inwardly applauded the girl's business capacities.

"Fine. Go on, Lyman."

Jim told his story, tersely enough. He was a little thrown off his guard by Foster's manner, but he was not entirely disarmed. The connection between Swenson and Foxfield, particularly with regard to his knowledge of his own whereabouts that evening on his way to the Foster house, needed explaining. But Jim felt that it could do no harm to say what had happened in front of the Foster's. If one or both was in league with Swenson they would, sooner or later, know all about it, up to the time of his escape in the fog, if they did not know it already. He was a little inclined to acquit Newton Foster. His jealousy of the son had evaporated somewhat since Kitty Whiting's exclamation of "Oh, your poor hand!" with its genuine sympathy. With both the women, Newton showed no signs of discredence of his yarn, melodramatic as it was. But he fancied that Stephen Foster's pursing mouth disclosed symptoms of doubt. The various expressions that followed his story were typical.

"What a terrible experience!" This from Kitty Whiting. "I think you showed great resourcefulness and bravery, Mr. Lyman. I think a great many men would have given the true figures under such circumstances. If you had not been able to get away, and to jump over—in the fog—with the tide running out— You have increased my indebtedness to you."

"It is just what I should have expected," said Lynda Warner. Her eyes were shining as she nodded at Jim. "I mean Mr. Lyman's share in it."

Newton Foster was ungrudging enough.

"I wish I had been along," he said. "You handled it in bully shape. I hope you broke Hellfire's jaw for him. But how he found out where you were on the road to our house, how he knew you had the figures, how he knew about the pearls, is a mystery to me."

"Quite romantic," was the start of Stephen Foster's contribution. "As to Swenson," he went on, "there has been a good deal of publicity, now and again, concerning the *Golden Dolphin,* when it sailed and when it was reported missing. Swenson may have read it long ago and retained interest. One of your men who was with you in the boat, Lyman, after he was wrecked might have got in touch with him. There are several possibilities. The local end of it is mysterious. The main factor is that Swenson has failed. He may think you drowned; he may think you were hit when he fired. If he has any idea you got clear, he will be likely to lie low. He may well be one of the rum-running community, and he and his schooner will readily disappear for a while. We could stir up the Wareham police, but that again might give notoriety that would be inadvisable. I should advise you to see a doctor about that hand, Lyman. I recommend my own, Dr. Dimmock. I will call him up if you like."

"I thank you," said Jim. "It is not uncomfortable. It seems to me there are more important things right now." Foster was the cold-eyed business man once more, his mouth tight-lipped.

"As you like," he said. "Kitty, I still think that the chances for success are extremely limited. Personally I should vote against it. However, I have already told Newton that if he is determined to join with you I withdraw opposition. My chief worry is for your ultimate disappointment concerning your father. Castles built on hopes that are largely sentimental fall with a crash too often, and you might get hurt in the ruins.

"Newton has money of his own. He has also an equal interest with me in my share of the pearls. . . ."

"I am not going after the pearls, Father. I am going because—because Kitty should not be allowed to go alone. Of course Lynda has offered—but I mean without a male relative."

"Of course. And youth is naturally adventurous. I was about to say that Newton has ample funds to bear the entire expense if he wants to make the gamble."

"I intend to. Let me do that, Kitty. If—if the thing should peter out all round, you wouldn't want to feel that you had nothing to come back to. Unless——" The word and the pause that followed it were eloquent of Newton's personal interest in his cousin, rather than the actual objects of the trip. But he saw that he had been precipitate and hurried on to

cover the slip. "It wouldn't do for you to burn all your bridges and sell this business."

"I have already sold it," said the girl. Her uncle made a muffled exclamation.

"The deal has been closed by wire. The transfer will be made tomorrow. The purchaser is coming up from Hartford. It was a good bargain on both sides. I got my price, sufficient, I hope, for expenses. Twenty-seven thousand dollars."

"You don't mean to tell me you got that price for your stock and good-will?" exclaimed Stephen Foster incredulously, seemingly annoyed, perhaps at not having been consulted, perhaps—thought Jim—at finding his niece so close to independence.

"I am afraid, uncle, you never did properly value the selling price of antiques as compared with the buying. There is a big demand for them, and I know a good piece when I see it. Most of these were bought for small sums and then restored. At retail the stock would easily bring fifty thousand dollars. It has cost me less than ten. And I had only twenty-five hundred to start with at the very beginning. And there is the good-will.

"If Newton wants to come—as he has the right to and as your representative—he can bear half the expense. Mr. Lyman has a master's certificate. I want him to have command of the expedition. It seems to me he has earned it—and the sixteenth share I offered him in the pearls if they are recovered—aside from having given us the position of the *Golden Dolphin*. Please do not protest, Mr. Lyman. It is purely business. I am sure uncle would consider such a bonus only fair. And it can come out of the Whiting share." Stephen Foster got up and walked up and down the room.

"I wash my hands of it," he declared. "I consider it folly, though I shall be more than happy if you find your father, glad also to get my returns from the original investment. Make your own plans. Newton, are you coming with me? I suppose not. You'll be wanting to start tomorrow night, I imagine." He seemed to be trying to be heavily humorous.

"The day after tomorrow," said Kitty. "There are my own things to transfer to storage. Not much to pack to take with us. We are going to San Francisco to charter a ship."

"Why San Francisco? None of my business, of course. But——"

"Mr. Lyman recommends it, uncle. It will save time and expense."

Stephen Foster shrugged.

"Then I'll be going," he said. "Send back the car for you, son?"

"I don't believe Kitty and Lynda ought to be left alone in this house, Father. There's only Ellen Martin. After Lyman's experience——"

"It might make us—me, at all events—seem safer if both of you stayed. You could share the guest room," suggested Lynda to Lyman. "I imagine I am sufficient chaperone. As for Ellen, I know she has been listening at the door. It is a trait that she regards as a privilege. She'll need protection anyway."

"If you would," said Kitty Whiting. The young men looked at each other. Whatever their thoughts, neither could well demur. "But your hand?" she said to Jim.

"I've had a worse one," he answered. "I'll see a doctor in the morning."

"Then I'll send your things over from the hotel," said Foster. "And some duds for you, Newton. See you sometime tomorrow, I suppose. Good night, you pack of adventurers."

With his exit he again achieved a degree of bluff humanity. Again Lyman was in doubt. Foster reappeared, hat in hand.

"About those figures," he said. "I'd recommend you take means to conceal them, Kitty. Even from Newton here, until the time comes. He might talk in his sleep. Lyman, you know them, too. Don't let anybody hypnotize you." His tone was ironical; it might have once more been meant for humor.

"I don't want to know them, Kit," said Newton as the door closed.

"I am going to mail that diary ahead," she said. "I suppose we make certain ports of call, Mr. Lyman, for water and provisions?"

There was a globe in the stockroom under the portrait of Kitty's grandfather. They set this on the table and sat about it. Ellen, discovered suspiciously close to the door between them and the kitchen, was sent packing without excuse for lingering.

"I packed her off for a walk," said Kitty. "She's probably heard more than is good for her. If curiosity was a fatal disease, Ellen would have died long ago. The funny part is that she appears to think herself absolutely entitled to knowledge of everything that happens, and usually offers her opinion freely."

"Taking her along?" asked Newton.

"I'll give her the chance, but I don't believe she'll go. She's got some love affair on. She's close-mouthed enough about that; but I understand he's younger than she is. She has some money saved up——"

"And the bounder is after that. Sure isn't her looks."

Lynda Warner flushed. Jim Lyman realized the sensitiveness that lay behind her plain exterior and wanted to kick Newton for his lack of tact.

Kitty Whiting broke up the awkwardness. "How about the itinerary," she asked.

"We would naturally stop at Hawaii," said Lyman. He had tacitly accepted command. Since the girl was determined to go, and since he was persuaded that there were others determined to thwart her, he had made up his mind to take the trip. The question of the share could rest. It was not an unusual offer, after all. He wanted to pick his own crew, remembering the letters of Captain Whiting.

"Two thousand and ninety-eight miles from San Francisco to Honolulu," he went on. "Call it ten days with power equal to eight knots. We must get a boat with an engine, or we may drift for weeks trying to pass the line. The run to Suva in the Fijis is about twenty-seven hundred. That would be fourteen days more, full speed. But we do not know what capacity we will have for gasolene and we want to sail when the wind favors us. We ought to get a schooner capable of making ten to twelve knots with wind abeam or astern. Fourteen and ten. Call it a month. We should fetch Suva in a month, outside of stopovers or delays from engine trouble. Hardly from storms at this time of the year. There may be headwinds, of course.

"Our real trip begins at Suva. We should take on water and supplies there, and I should like to add to the crew with native boys. They will be wanted to handle the landing boats. They'll be better for many of our purposes than whites such as we are likely to get. We'll ship a working crew at San Francisco."

"How about arms?" asked Newton. "You said there were no natives, but——"

"It is best to go prepared," said Lyman gravely. "I was only ashore a little while and at one place. That is one reason why I did not want to urge Miss Whiting to go."

"There were women in the war," she said. "I am not afraid of taking the same risks as a man. And I fancy I could shoot on occasion. We can practise on the way down."

Jim had other reasons he could have advanced, but he forebore. The pluck of the girl was wonderful. He had no doubt of her ability to hold her own outside of sheer strength. But the thought of what might happen to her if they fell among the savage tribes locked his jaws tightly and cemented his resolve.

It was midnight when they broke up. The two women got together a little supper. The car arrived with a bag for Newton and Jim's pitiful belongings. He was glad that he possessed a decent suit of pajamas. Such things did not matter, but though much of his first antagonism toward Newton Foster had disappeared, he was human enough not to want to appear at any special disadvantage.

He took a hot bath, somewhat clumsily. Newton shoved his head into their bathroom and asked if he could help.

"Jupiter, but you're banged up!" he said. "I imagine you put up a tidy scrap, Lyman. I envy you your muscles. I'm soft as a rag doll. I'd like to shake hands with you, as soon as your fin gets in shape. Over this trip, you know. Mighty glad you're going to be along. It's a pretty serious proposition when you come to think of it. For Kitty—and Lynda—I mean. It's up to you and me to look out for them. And you'll have to make a sailor out of me. So far I'm not a shining light in any profession. But I'm willing to play general utility."

It was impossible to hold much of a grudge after that speech. It began to look as if there was good stuff in Newton Foster after all. With his father Jim still reserved judgment.

"Here's my left hand on it, for the time being," he said. And they turned in together.

There was no alarm in the night. The next morning Jim went to see Dr. Dimmock, the purchaser of the antique store arrived and Ellen Martin gave notice to quit.

VI

UNDER WAY

THE trip to San Francisco established a camaraderie between the four. Lyman was the most reserved. He had much to think about and he did not possess Newton Foster's ready

knack of conversation. He envied his ready intimacy with Kitty Foster and devoted himself to squiring with Lynda Warner. His liking for her readily ripened into real friendship. She would have made a wonderful wife for some chap, he thought, but she had been handicapped. Naturally a man preferred a girl with a pretty face and good figure—such as Kitty Whiting—though Jim did not allow his thoughts to wander in that direction, consciously at least. He found in the elderly spinster a quick appreciation of affairs, discussing with her details of the voyage while Newton haled his cousin off to the observation platform. Not that they did not all have serious consultations. Newton was a partner in the enterprise and full of suggestions, but it was plain that to him the expedition was one of romance and adventure intimately connected with his pretty cousin. He was gay, impractical, good-looking and likeable, if he did attempt to monopolize Kitty. Jim acquitted him early of being a snob.

Lynda Warner appeared to weigh Newton lightly, though she made no comments. Jim believed that Lynda understood his own feelings toward the girl and sympathized with him. Naturally, he never discussed it. The gap between them was still open and unbridged, he considered. Only in the matter of his reading was he on equal terms. Her life had held a thousand things he had never come in touch with.

But every now and then Lynda Warner spoke of American democracy. Sometimes she quoted Burns.

"Every man in this country of ours may not be literally equal," she said, "but at least he has an equal start in the race of life. It is up to him to win the race. Some are bound to drop behind, but, the real man can gain the prizes. Superficial qualities do not count. They can always be acquired. And the man is lucky who has a chance to show his real manhood in the big things."

All this was pleasant talk to Jim, though he bent his mind to the task in hand, without contemplation of possible rewards. A man's first job was his duty, he believed firmly. And he privately subscribed to Lynda Warner's theories.

"There are only two classes in America," she said. "Some call them the rich and the poor; better perhaps the successful and the unsuccessful. It's grit that tells."

When it came to pedigree—which Lynda declared did not count—Jim knew his forbears to be as good as those of the Whitings and the Fosters. He had seen the selvage edge of life and Kitty and Newton the softer nap, that was all. And Kitty's life had not been without its reverses; had now its present sorrow that she hid under the bright cloak of courage. How she had taken up with business and made a success of it; what a life partner she would make! Too sterling, he could not help but feel, for the airy, ease-loving happy-go-lucky Newton.

IT WAS Jim's idea to try and get the vessel they needed from one of the yacht clubs of San Francisco Bay, rather than attempt to purchase a commercial vessel. Those of the latter type likely to be available would be old hulks moored and half rotting over in Oakland Creek. The war had taken all bottoms that were any good. The Alaska Packing Company's northern fleet consisted of sailing ships; there were scow-bottomed schooners that plied up the Sacramento River and other waterways connected with the bay, but outside these, old hulks and pleasure craft, everything was steam. But he felt sure that on the Pacific, as on the Atlantic Coast, there would be people willing to dispose of their yachts, or charter them. Fortunes had been turned topsy-turvy during the war. Those who had made money were not the kind who understood yachting or looked upon it as a pastime. Those who had lost, on the other hand, were that type of the comparatively leisured class. Moreover, a yacht of the right size and engine power, if they could find one, would be built for comfort aft, and he had the two women to consider.

Newton Foster had brought along letters from his father to business friends. These letters would undoubtedly act as an open sesame to the clubs of the city, and through them to the San Francisco and Corinthian yacht clubs, whose quarters were, as Jim knew, across the bay at Sausalito and Belvedere. But Jim relied upon the advertisements he might read or insert.

Arrived in the city, they went to the Palace Hotel where rooms were already reserved for them. It was late afternoon, too late for Newton to present his letters. He proposed a theatre and they went, but no one enjoyed much of the play. They were on the threshold of ad-

venture and eager to step across. Kitty Newton's unrest showed in her eyes, in flashes of absentmindedness. She had not been sleeping since they left Foxfield, Lynda Warner told Jim. Next morning Newton busied himself with his introductions. He was also going, he said, to get hold of all the literature he could concerning the South Seas.

"Not fiction stuff," he announced. "Travel. We'll have to read on the trip to kill time. And I wouldn't wonder if I came back with news of just the boat we want."

There were several advertisements in the papers for the sale of launches and sloops, but none that offered anything suitable. Jim saw disappointment in Kitty Whiting's face, and for a second saw them failing to get anything at all; his suggestions discredited at the outset; himself looking like a fool stripped of all pretense of knowledge.

"I'm going to put ads in the *Chronicle, Examiner* and *Bulletin*," he said. She nodded and gave him a look that fired his imagination.

"I know you'll get one," she said. "But the seconds seem like hours and the hours like weeks. Now that we have actually started—it seems to me as if dad was waiting over there eating his heart out for the sight of a sail, waiting, waiting, and growing old. He isn't a young man, my daddy, and I want—I want——"

Her lips quivered; her eyes were moist with tears; she gave a pitifully twisted, brave little smile. Right then Jim would have charged through a regiment of devils for her sake, wished he could. Something of it showed in his look for she said thank you before he answered her at all.

"I'll get you one, if I have to turn pirate. It might be a good idea if we went across to Sausalito and then over to Belvedere. There is sure to be someone round the clubhouses. The stewards or the boat-tenders would be likely to know of anything that might be available." Kitty's face brightened immediately and she dragged the willing Lynda off to dress. Within the hour they were on the Sausalito ferry, ploughing across toward the strait of the Golden Gate, the loom of Mount Tamalpais ahead of them. The steward of the San Francisco Yacht Club forgot house rules when he saw the ladies and heard Jim's question, recognizing him immediately for a man of the sea and one who knew blue water.

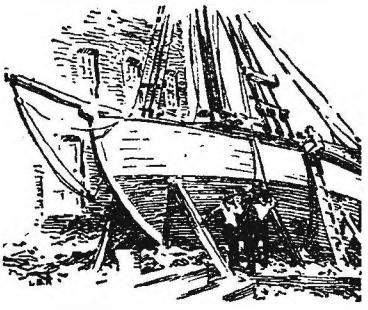
"A power schooner?" he said, a little doubtfully. "I don't know. There's one in the fleet, the *Seamew*, built in the East, Gloucester fisherman type. She can outsail anything round here if there's any sort of weather, and she's got an engine in her. Her owner was a bluewater man. Name of Rickard. Never more than mate, I understand. But he struck oil, or oil was struck for him and he came into a fortune. First thing he wanted a yacht and had this built. Sailed her round himself—plumb round the Horn, just to say it could be done these days. And they say—" the steward sank his voice to a confidential whisper—"they say he bucko'd his crew so they near mutinied. They quit, anyway, and he had to get others. He's always short-handed. He's a visiting member here—we exchange courtesies with a lot of clubs—or I wouldn't be discussing him, you understand. I don't know if he'd sell her outright, or even charter her, but I heard him say he was sick of her. Fact is, he don't get along first rate with all the members. We do most of our racing inside the bay, and he laughs at us for bein' mollycoddles. And he's got a professional crew, you see, whereas we are all amateurs—strictly.

"There's one or two rumors he's going to be married to a widow. He's willing enough, I fancy, and maybe his oil stock looks good to her—begging your pardon, ladies. The point I'm making is that he's always with her and that she hates yachting. Blows her hair about a bit too much, perhaps," said the steward with fine scorn.

"If you could arrange a charter for us," said Jim, "we should be pleased to allow you the usual agent's commission." The steward touched his cap visor.

"Thank you, sir. I'll show you the *Seamew* if you'll come through to the float. I know the caretaker pretty well. I think I could venture to take you off."

"I wouldn't want to do that," said



Kitty. "It's like walking into a stranger's house."

"I'm sure Mr. Rickard wouldn't mind,

miss. Easy enough to find out. He's got a place over here for the summer. I'll telephone him, if you like. He's proud of the boat, you see, and always showing people over it. There she lies. A beauty, all right."

They saw the *Seamew,* black of hull, with a fine gold stripe winking along her run, spoon-bowed, overhung of stern, sweet of line, a typical Gloucester fisherman model designed for speed and endurance; the type that can come smashing home with every inch of canvas set, and hold deep packed with cod through a gale that makes many a deepwater skipper shorten sail and crawl to windward for open water. All the canvas was stowed aboard the *Seamew,* but it did not take much for Jim to imagine her with topsails full, main and fore, jumbo and jib, fisherman's staysail set between the masts, the sea foaming at her entry, creaming along her run, fanning out in ivory traceries on the green jade of the sea in her wake. Here was no toy, but a ship after his own heart, capable of sailing the seven seas, not needing a large crew to handle her, but comfortable in calm or seaway for all aboard. And she had an engine, almost a necessity in the South Seas, where currents are strong and wind capricious.

Brasswork well polished blinked here and there along her deck. Even at that distance they could tell she was shipshape, controlled by a man who might be a bit of a tyrant with his crew, but knew how to treat a proper vessel.

Jim's face glowed with approval. The steward had gone to his telephone. Kitty watched Lyman's face, unconsciously reflecting its approval. Lynda Warner seemed more doubtful.

"A little small, isn't she," she asked, "for a long voyage?"

"She would be alongside a liner," said Jim. "But she's seaworthy and she's just about ideal for our purpose—if we can get her."

"Mr. Rickard's coming right over," said the steward, coming up. "I said there were two ladies in a party who were admiring his boat and he said he was coming over, anyway. I didn't say anything about a charter over the phone. Best to wait and see what humor he's in." He got them chairs and they watched the shifting panorama of the bay, with San Francisco seated in the midst of her hills; the crossing ferries, lumber steamers and freighters passing through the Gate; scow-schooners high decked with hay from up-river, the helmsman perched high on a scaffold back of the load; the gulls; a destroyer manœuvring to prove up her compasses by the government marks set on the shores. The tide was coming in from the ocean, and all the yachts in the club flotilla dipped and courtesied. The wind came with the tide bringing salty savors. A flush slowly stained the girl's cheeks deeper and deeper until Jim gazed in wonderment at this augmented beauty of one he already thought perfect.

"I love the sea," she said. "It's in my blood, I suppose. And I love the *Seamew.* I hope we get her."

Rickard turned out to be much what they had anticipated, a burly, tanned man who looked awkward in clothes that were too much in the latest mode as to cut and pattern. But he was courteous enough and indubitably pleased to have his boat admired by a party, one of whom, Jim, was an expert, another, Kitty, more than ordinarily wise concerning schooners.

"You ought to own her," he said to Kitty. "You'd sail her in a blow, you would, and not worry about your complexion or your permanent wave. All ladies aren't alike, or all men. If there were more boats like mine here we could have a real race or two—outside, around the Farallones and back, down to San Diego and back, or up to the Sound. But these baywater sailors think an annual cruise down to Santa Cruz is really sailing." Kitty took her cue, and glanced at Jim.

"I wish I did own her," she said. "I couldn't afford to buy her, but I've been wanting for ever so long to take a trip through the South Seas. And this is just the boat."

Her praise was justified, the *Seamew* was more than merely well found. The seamanship of the ex-mate had prevented him from breaking out with his ship as he had done with the unknown quantity—clothes. The fittings were good, even luxurious, but they were convenient and chosen for wear and solid comfort rather than show. There would be a cabin apiece for Kitty and Lynda, one for Newton and one for Jim, as skipper, all opening on the main cabin, besides a small stateroom amidships that would do for the officers. There was even a small bath, a well appointed galley. The engine was powerful, in good condition. There were water tanks and gasolene tanks enough for a long voyage, ample room for stores. The only scant place was the forecastle

quarters. Rickard's ideas of a crew's right of comfort were nil.

"She's got everything but wireless," Rickard boasted. "She's a beauty. Eight knots and a half on her engines, and she'll rate up to fifteen when the wind's right. She'll sail right into it and come about for the asking. She's fine lined, but she isn't over tender; you can handle her between spokes. She's a man's boat, but a child could steer her. I might let you have her, if you paid me enough and put up a sufficient bond. I'll want her back, but I don't need her any more this season. It's hard to get men and keep them in shape when you only have the boat in commission a quarter of the time they have to be paid for. I'd as lief sail round a duckpond as cruise inside the bay. To tell you the truth, Miss Whiting, I'm thinking of getting married—shortly. The future Mrs. Rickard is not over fond of the water, but I hope to win her round later on. I won't sell the *Seamew,* but I might charter her—to the right parties."

Rickard had smiled when he first mentioned price and he smiled again as he finished speaking. Without being offensive, it was plain that he found Kitty attractive, that he was the bluff type, hard enough with men, but wax before the glances of a pretty woman. In his way, and given it, a good enough sort of sea scout.

"What are your ideas on figures?" asked Jim.

"Fifteen hundred dollars for the season, whether you need her for two months or six. A bottomry bond for twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Cash?"

"Or negotiable securities acceptable to my lawyers." Kitty looked at Jim, who nodded. Five hundred a month would be cheap for the *Seamew*; the amount of the bond could not replace her since the war. Arrangement was speedily made to draw contract and make payment. Rickard agreed to meet them the next morning at the hotel.

"I have three good men who might be glad to go along," he said. "I don't know about the steward. You'll need four for crew, outside of a mate. Then there's the engineer and a cook. Steward'll wait on cabin, cook for'ard. That's how I brought her round from the other side. I take it you're sailing her?" he asked Lyman.

"Yes. You don't know of a mate? Rather take one who was recommended."

"I haven't seen one I could recommend to be mate of a brick barge. I'm my own sailing master. I've tried out half a dozen lazy lubbers as mate and I fired the last a week ago. As I say, my trouble is that I pay 'em full time and use 'em less than half. You'll find mates and men scattered all along the waterfront looking for jobs. Some of 'em turned farmers and fruit pickers. Some of 'em in the canneries. Some of 'em fishing for salmon in Puget Sound. But a lot left doin' nothing. Can I take you across to San Francisco in my launch? That doesn't go with the schooner but it's at your service."

But they had an idea that acceptance might conflict with his plans or those of the future Mrs. Rickard and they took the ferry. Now it seemed as if they were really started, with unexpected luck to begin with. The *Seamew* had no cook at present, nor steward, Rickard providing those from his house servants whenever he went cruising. The three sailors of his crew seemed adequate men, two of them Norwegians and the third a Scotch-Irishman. They were deepwater men and they knew the yacht. Jim spoke to them tentatively and they were willing to make the trip, wages to be the same as Rickard paid. He had not used his engine of late, and had no engineer.

"I'll have to hunt a mate, a steward, a cook, an engineer, and a sailor," said Jim. "I don't imagine that'll be much trouble, except about the cook. We don't want to be poisoned. I'd suggest a Chinaman; Jap for second choice. They don't mind the sea. Then there are the supplies, a few charts and—I shall need a sextant," he added after a slight pause. "You see I haven't any tools of my own," he said with a flush. "I imagine Rickard may let us take his chronometers."

"You'll need a complete outfit," said Kitty. "It was stupid of me not to think of that before. Of course you can draw ahead for as much as you need. And you must let me help with the supplies."

"Of course." Jim appreciated the fact with which she had spoken in a manner entirely businesslike of his own lack of clothes and money. He had paid out his last change for the ferry crossings and he could hardly go to sea in command with his one suit of tailor-darned readymades.

"I'll talk the bond over with Newton," she said. "I have no securities, but of course I can put up half in cash. I wish we could buy the *Seamew*."

"What would you do with her after the trip is over?" asked Lynda Warner.

"Keep on sailing. Round the world. I'd love to." She spoke with genuine enthusiasm, in high spirits. Jim wished she might have her heart's desire—and that he might be of the party as sailing master, if not in a more intimate capacity that he merely hinted at to himself.

At the hotel, the two women went straight to the elevators, Jim to the desk for a directory from which to obtain addresses of ship-chandlers. As he passed the telegraph booth he saw Newton Foster handing in a dispatch. He passed on, thoughtful, wondering why and where Newton was sending a cable. There was no mistaking the form of the message. A few minutes later Newton clapped him on the shoulder.

"Wondering where you all were. Girl's back? Good. Let's go to lunch. I'm ravenous. Say, I've got a pile of good books on the South Seas. And I met a fine fellow through one of dad's letters. Invited me up for dinner tonight at the Bohemian Club. He belongs to the San Francisco Yacht Club too. He says we'll be able to get what we want without any trouble. There's a man named Rickard who owns a schooner and who has tried to horn into the club and run things. A bit of a roughneck—used to be a mate one time and now his swollen pockets have affected his head. He thinks he's a gentleman."

"I suppose it's possible."

Newton hesitated, flushed. "I didn't mean to be offensive, Lyman. The point is that this chap doesn't fit with the crowd. And he's stuck on a widow who hates sailing."

"Owns the *Seamew?*"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"We've seen her, agreed to charter her." Newton did not take the news exactly as Jim had expected. He was interested enough, but he whistled softly rather than make the exclamation Jim expected.

"You're quick workers," he said. "That's news. I'll have to wire the old man. He's more worked up over this trip than he lets on. I wired him already that we had arrived safely. When do you figure we can get away?"

"That's hard to tell. We have men to get supplies, get our clearance, supply a satisfactory bond of cash or securities."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"I've got that in Telephone stock. I imagine he'll take that. Could we get away in a week?"

"With luck."

"And Honolulu 'll be our first port of call?"

"Yes." The questions were natural enough and now Newton was all eagerness. But Jim wondered if this supplementary message was also going on a cable form. No one had said anything of Stephen Foster's being away from the United States. It seemed a small matter as he turned it over in his mind, and young Foster had offered to take over the matter of the bond willingly enough, but Jim had not yet shaken off the idea that Newton was on the trip as his father's representative despite Stephen's assertion that he washed his hands of the affair. And he was not at all sure that the elder Foster wanted the trip to be made. Jim mentally shrugged off all complexities. The main fact was that they were going. It was up to him to see that they duly arrived. He had full confidence in himself to accomplish that.

THE eighth day saw the *Seamew* passing out of the Golden Gate under her own power, heading south and west for her first leg of twenty-one hundred miles. The call at Honolulu Jim determined upon for several varying reasons. For the first, the diary log with the position of the Golden Dolphin island had been mailed there care of the Young Hotel, a precautionary measure that, to Jim, showed the ingenious wit of Kitty. While he had the figures well in his mind, it was vital that they should somewhere be set down in case of accident. They had been posted at Foxfield, and were now waiting in the island capital, carried by the mail steamer that had left the day they arrived in San Francisco.

They would take the opportunity to get fresh meats, ice for a day or two, fruit, water, gasolene, and sundry supplies. The stopover would take about twenty-four hours and there would be scant time for sightseeing if any one wanted to do so. The important thing was to keep going, to clear up the dual mystery of Captain Whiting and his pearls as soon as possible. Probably the two women would want to do a little shopping; there would be letters

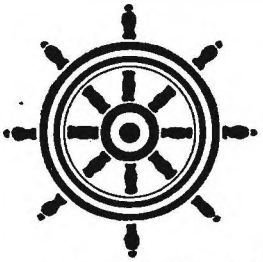
to be mailed; perhaps Newton might have another cablegram to send.

The crew of the *Seamew* was made up as follows: James Lyman, captain; Joseph Baker, mate, a capable man of middle age whose chief lack seemed imagination, anxious for the job, with a family ashore, painstaking, reliable, a good navigator and familiar with South Seas work, discharged from a sugar bark from illness and since unable to gain a footing; Jared Sanders, engineer, a sandy-haired Scot who was a queer mixture of caution and desire for adventure, taking the trip purely for the latter reason, careful as to the quality and economic as to the price of his supplies, willing to act in general capacities when the engine was not needed; Emil Wiltz, steward, once assistant on a trans-Pacific liner, ousted from his job by the war, sick of being a waiter in cheaper restaurants, unable to get into the Waiters' Union and secure a better position, a handy, willing man; Olaf Neilson, Henrik Hamsun, Carl Vogt, three Norwegian sailors, stolid men with small initiative but powerful and willing, the first two recruited from Rickard, the third picked up on the waterfront with two other sailors, out of work, out of money, out of tobacco, out of luck until Jim happened along, sized them up and offered them the job. These two were a Yankee named Henry Wood and a Britisher named William Walker, both undersized, underfed, inclined to cringe, the type that under a weak skipper and mate prove malingerers, yet seamen understanding their business, with Walker able to relieve Sanders at the engine upon occasion. These five, with the third original member of the *Seamew* crew, a redheaded Sinn Feiner, his name Douglas Moore, made up the six sailors Jim deemed necessary.

The cook proved a more difficult matter. Jim would have been content with ordinary cabin fare, but he wanted something better for the ladies. He interviewed a dozen possibilities and passed them up on the grounds of dirt, incompetence, and lack of sea-service. A seasick cook could not be contemplated. Disappointed at the last moment, he shipped a Greek who had come up from Honolulu as second cook on a steamship and was anxious to return. But he assured Jim there would be no difficulty in getting one at the latter port, and Jim, with the idea of a Chinaman in his head, was inclined to agree with him. Newton Foster, confessedly a novice, was more passenger than anything else, though avowing determination to acquire knowledge and ability.

The trade, that blows north instead of northeast down the California coast, struck them abeam as they laid their southwesterly course across the blue waters that seethed about the bows of the *Seamew*. Lyman was glad of every chance to save gasolene and the schooner justified the praise bestowed upon it by Rickard, reeling off ten knots hour after hour with a run of two hundred and twenty miles logged for the first day.

The weather was more kindly than obstructive. They used the engine less than fourteen hours on the entire trip. For two days only the wind was fitful. The twelfth morning, Jim on deck by sunrise, Baker in charge of the deck, Hamsun at the wheel, picked up the loom of Molokai. By midafternoon they had passed inspection and were anchored off Honolulu. While they were still gazing at the town, with its big modern buildings, substantial wharves, naval slips and green-lawned station, its old palace amid the palms with the chocolate colored cone of Punchbowl immediately behind, backed by the blue green splendors of Mount Tantalus, a reporter came alongside in a launch.



He got little from them save their names and the information that they were on a pleasure trip through the South Seas. Such voyages were nothing out of the ordinary these latter days; the reporter was polite but not particularly impressed and they escaped undue publicity. But a smart yawl which followed the reporter with the commodore of the Hawaii Yacht Club in the stern-sheets, his rowers two island yachtsmen, was not so easily dismissed. The commodore was intent upon doing the honors, anxious to save them trouble, eager to make things comfortable for the ladies. Almost by force the courteous Corinthian secured their promise to dinner at the Moana Hotel, promising to call for them in ample time, to take them to Waikiki in motors and to have his wife and other ladies present.

"You are making a trip we all envy you," he said. "You must allow us to give you *bon voyage*. Perhaps we can persuade you to stay over a while."

"When we come back," temporized

Kitty. "We have our schedule all laid out to reserve some of the best for the way home." Jim did not go with them. He watched Newton array himself in dinner jacket and white flannels, in silk shirt and hose, in yachting cap and buckskin shoes, and he did not care to display his own rough serge and ducks and coarser shoes—less as a matter of self-pride than from a feeling that he would be a dull patch on a bright party. A dinner at the Moana, with the hints the commodore had thrown out of a Hawaiian orchestra and dancing to follow, was not in his line. Of one-steps and fox-trots Jim knew as little as he did of small talk or playing the ukulele. But he appreciated the look in Kitty's eyes when she heard he was not going. It was distinctly a look of disappointment.

"I wouldn't have accepted if I had known our skipper was not going," she said.

"The skipper has got plenty to do aboard if we are going to get away tomorrow," answered Jim.

Then the commodore arrived, in a launch this time, with ladies aboard who mounted to the deck of the *Seamew,* chatting and laughing with Kitty and Lynda and Newton. Jim was presented—and received as a superior sort of hired man, he told himself with a touch of bitterness for which he was duly ashamed, though the matter had been aggravated by hearing the gay laugh of Kitty coming back from the launch as it sped shorewards.

He went ashore himself, later on. There was really nothing for him to do aboard. He gave general shore leave, Walker volunteering to remain as ship-keeper.

"'Onolulu mykes me sick the w'y it is now," he said. "Hused to be a live plyce. You Hamericans 'ave fair spoiled it. Wot's the good of a bloomin' seaport wivout wine, wimmen an' song? W'ot charnce 'as a pore sailor got to get any of that 'ere? The Japs 'ave chivvied the natives out; the Hamericans 'ave took orl their money aw'y from them. Prohibishun 'as bloody well finished it. I'll stay aboard an' look at old Punchbowl. Bet they'll change the nyme of that to Teacup, afore they get through."

It was not Jim's first visit to the island. He walked to a square where the band was playing, taking a seat in the shadows under the palms. The bandstand alone was illuminated; the square was dusky, save where splotches of brilliant moonlight broke through the plumy foliage and laced the turf that was thickly set with clumps of hybiscus and crotons, here and there touching with silver a gown or the white drill of an escort.

The band played jazz and dreamy waltzes and at last crashed into Hawaii

Ponoi. Jim started to stroll off, a lonely mood upon him. As he passed along a path close to the rail of the park, screened off by double hedges, broken now and then by spaces in which were seats facing toward the bandstand, he paused to light his pipe. With the burning match in his cupped hands, poised above the unlit tobacco, he forgot his smoke. Four men occupied a seat perhaps twelve feet away from him. They were talking earnestly in low tones, oblivious of the music and the crowd, intent upon their own purposes. Their backs were toward him. The arm of one lay along the back of the seat as its owner leaned forward emphasizing some point to his comrades. There was something about his bulk that was vaguely familiar to Lyman. A splash of moonlight lay along the cuff of the coat, exposing thick wrist and hand. The two last were hairy, with reddish, spidery furring. On the back of the hand was a tattoo mark of some kind, plain in the brilliant spot of the moonbeam. Jim's keen eyes were aided by sudden memory. The device, in indigo a little faded but visible enough, was a fouled anchor, with the rope continued to make a circle and frame to the design. It was the hand of Hellfire Swenson. Hellfire, whom Jim had last seen firing at him as he swam into the fog off Cuttyhunk, thousands of miles away!

It might have been the striking of his match—it all happened so swiftly—but a man's face turned toward him, the third man on the seat, not Swenson, whose arm remained in the same position. Out of the shadow Jim could see no more than an impression of a face with black moustaches and beard trimmed to a point. The blob of light on Swenson's hand was the only highlight and that vanished as the breeze swayed the long palm fronds above. But Jim, blowing out his match, realized that his own features had been clearly shown.

When the dab of moonlight returned the tattooed hand had been removed, and the four men were talking together as if Jim was of no moment. For a pulse beat or two he paused, then walked on, lighting another match. He was quite sure this was Swenson. Who the others were he did not know. It would do him no good to confront him. If Swenson thought Jim had not recognized him it was just as well. It was possible that the black-bearded chap had not known who Jim was.

Jim turned and strolled back. The quartet were gone, vanished in the crowd breaking up after the concert, leaving only romantic couples.

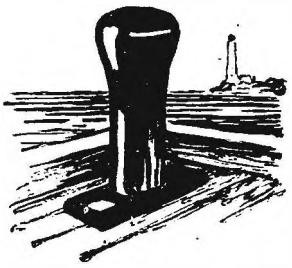
Swenson's presence meant what? That he was still after the pearls? That Jim's dive from the rail had convinced him he had been given the wrong figures? He might have been so advised. Somehow Jim connected his appearance with the cablegram sent from San Francisco. Was Swenson trailing the *Seamew* in his own schooner, foiled through Kitty Whiting's cleverness at having kept the diary in her safe and later mailing it ahead to Honolulu? There was no schooner in Honolulu Harbor that answered to Swenson's vessel.

For Jim to attempt to interfere with Swenson on account of what happened at Buzzard's Bay was, as Stephen Foster had pointed out, only provocative of unwanted publicity. The authorities of Hawaii might well excuse themselves from jurisdiction. Probably would. But Hellfire had some schemes on hand that must be blocked. That was certain. He would hardly attempt more kidnapping, or appear openly in any endeavor to obtain the figures. Back on the mainland he appeared to have affiliations and some power, wide reaching and effective, doubtless tied up with his illicit liquor enterprises. On the island of Oahu he could not carry out his plans with such ease. That Hellfire, given the opportunity, would not stop short of piracy in the hope of a fortune, Jim was very sure. Nor would piracy stop him.

At present the pearls were doubly guarded, by the position of the island and by the lack of knowledge of the secret hiding-place aboard the stranded ship. Kitty Whiting alone held that key. Jim doubted whether even Lynda Warner knew where the hiding-place was. Kitty's pretty head held wisdom and caution. So long as she was protected, all was well. After this, Jim resolved to play bodyguard no matter how awkward he might feel in certain situations.

He decided to say nothing about Swenson. He could make inquiry as to whether a power schooner had lately entered the port. He did not know the name, but it was not likely that more than one of her type would have come in within the past three weeks, though it was likely that Swenson, if appearing as her captain, would have changed his name.

As he walked back toward the waterfront Jim began to wonder if he might have been mistaken. He had seen such devices before. The ordinary tattooer at such ports as Honolulu, San Francisco or Shanghai had stock devices from which his customers chose. Duplication was frequent. Jim had not actually seen Swenson's face. Perhaps he was developing nerves—on the girl's account.



The men had orders not to spend the night ashore. Some of them were back when Jim returned to the *Seamew* at five bells. All were aboard by seven bells. Neilson and Wood had the anchor watch; the rest had turned in. Jim, smoking, pacing the deck, waited. Midnight sounded, the sharp strokes of ships' bells in a mingled chime all about the harbor. One bell at last, and then a launch put off from shore. Jim ordered Neilson and Wood to stand by the ladder and effaced himself in the shadow. He saw the figures of the two women come overside and go below after laughing good-nights. There was no sign of Newton. Jim went to the rail and saw him in the light that came from the cabin of the launch. He was in the cockpit aft with another man both smoking cigarettes. His face was flushed and boyishly eager. Jim called down to him.

"I'm not coming aboard, Skipper. Pst!" he answered, standing up while a man in the launch held on to the companion side-ladder of the *Seamew*. "Better come along. There's a native hula on out Diamond Head way. Given for a special blowout. Some old-time chief's birthday. Wouldn't miss it for worlds. Not for ladies, of course, but you don't often see one nowadays. Come along, Skipper. My bid extends to him, eh, chaps?"

One of the local yachtsmen heartily extended the invitation. The ladies of the

commodore's party were in the launch's cabin out of hearing. The affair was evidently considered notable. Jim did not feel in the mood for it, but he could understand Newton's eagerness. He'd be no use the next day for anything but sleep, but that would not affect the work aboard. As a sailor, Newton Foster was so far more of a nuisance than an aid. His main asset was spasmodic willingness.

"Don't get lost in the jungle," Jim returned. "I'm obliged, but I've got a lot on hand. Hope to get out of here close to noon. Good night."

The launch backed off, turned and sped for shore. Jim descended to find the main cabin empty, and he turned in. At five he was on deck again. Baker, the conscientious mate, was up and the men were swashing and swabbing deck. Neilson and Wood were in their bunks. The smell of early coffee was in the air. Davos, the Greek, was cooking his last meal aboard. Jim had tried the door of Newton's cabin as he passed. It was unlocked, the bunk empty. He gave an order to preserve quiet on deck. He would let the women sleep until later, though he wanted to get them ashore as early as possible to clear up their errands. He had determined on one thing during the night. To have a talk with Lynda Warner concerning his own suspicions, past and present, of the Fosters, the matter of the cablegram and of Swenson's appearance. He was sure of her commonsense and judgment and her friendly feeling toward him. He would put the question up to her as how much should be told Kitty Whiting. As the head of the enterprize, the one vitally interested, Jim felt that perhaps she should be informed of matters that he doubted whether it would be politic for him to mention.

He went aft to the galley and got a cup of coffee. The tide was flooding, the stern of the *Seamew* had swung toward the land. Jim saw a shore boat approaching, propelled by an ancient Hawaiian, gray-headed, his shoulders covered with flower *leis*. In the stern were three figures, intertwined, wearing black coats and white trousers, all jovial, friendly to all the wide world, singing a quasi-native song with more spirit than harmony. Here came Newton Foster with two of his companions of the night before! Jim called through the hollow of his hands.

"Tone down a bit there. Ladies asleep!" The trio stared at him half stupidly as the boat came alongside, but they stopped singing. Newton arose, swaying uncertainly while the others supported him none too efficiently.

"'S all ri', Skip. Trifle hilarious as effect of circum-circumventing the Eighteenth 'mendment. Yesh, sir. Native juice of the vine, squeezed from the root of the *ti* plant. Am I ri', fellers? Sounds mixed but the stuff is prime. *Maiti nui.* Thash Hawaiian for heap good, Skip! I learned a lot las' ni'. Wouldn't have missed it for worldsh. No, shir. Wonnerful hos—hos—hoshpitality. Glorioush time. Goo' ni'. I mean goo' mornin'."

He started to sing again at the top of the sideladder, but Jim grabbed him by the arm and he gathered himself together.

"Thash ri'. Mushn't wake the ladiesh. Skip', pu' me to bed an' lemme sleep."

Jim got him below, got his pajamas on him and turned him into his bunk where he promptly composed himself for sleep after insisting that his wreaths be placed about his neck.

"Emblems of love an' frenship, Skip. Everlashtin' tokens of glorioush hoshpitality. Goo' ni'! God bless you, Skip. You ought t' have been along. Goo' ni'." Jim left him snoring stertorously.

At the eight o'clock breakfast he excused Newton, stating the bald truth that he had returned late and needed sleep.

"I heard him come aboard," said Lynda Warner with a twinkle in her eyes, but no further remarks, confirming herself to Jim as a good sport. After the meal, while Kitty wrote a letter she had overlooked, Jim had his talk with Lynda Warner.

"You don't think very highly of Stephen Foster, I believe," he started.

"What makes you think so?"

He told her frankly.

"I think that he is cold-blooded and unscrupulous in business," she said. "In many things he would take great pains to do what he considered the exactly just thing. I do not think him generous. And I have known him not entirely selfish. He thinks the world of Newton. Newton himself does not strike me as a natural conspirator."

"H'm" said Jim. Lynda had not given him a wide opening. "Do you think Stephen Foster considers this trip a business matter?"

She looked at him with shrewd approval. "Absolutely so," she answered.

Then he told her his news while she listened carefully.

"I do not see any good in mentioning

this to Kitty," she answered. "Much of it is suspicion, and suspicion against people who are closely connected to her. Newton is her blood relative. It might not help your standing with her. You have nothing really definite. If that *was* Swenson it means only that we must be doubly careful. You see, Jim—" she laid her hand on his arm as she spoke his personal name for the first time, "you see, Kitty thinks of nothing but her father. Anything else is superficial, as superficial as the affair of that dinner and dance last night. To which you should have come—clothes or no clothes.

"As for the cable, I know that Stephen Foster sometimes goes to Cuba. He has heavy interests there in sugar. So that may clear Newton up. I don't see how any one is going to get those figures. We sha'n't have a chance to mail them ahead to Fiji, I understand. Swenson may be tricky and desperate in his methods, but he can hardly come aboard and take the diary by force. Just what are you most afraid of?"

"If it was Swenson, he must either hope to get hold of the figures or he will have to trail us. If he could manage to do that I have no doubt but that he would try to capture the pearls, after we had secured them from the *Golden Dolphin*. What we have got to do is to keep him from getting the position, and to shake him off if he attempts to follow. Once we get down there we are first going to try to find Captain Whiting, though I can't help but be doubtful over the outcome of that. If Swenson makes an attack, providing he discovers us, then we must hold him off. Those are risks you should not be subjected to, but I suppose there is no use trying to dissuade Miss Kitty."

"Not in the least. Nor me. We are well armed. So far we haven't practised with the weapons. Why not do it from now on? Here comes Kitty. I'm glad we had this talk. Are we all going ashore together? I don't mean Newton. As I said, I heard him come aboard."

Next to the shipping commissioner's office on the Honolulu waterfront there is—or was—an agency for the employment of sailing men. Once it was notorious for its connection with the sailors' boarding house of Lewis & Turk, a pair of thugs who made their living by shanghaiing beachcombers and others unfortunate enough to get into their clutches or within reach of their blackjacks and brass knuckles. Prohibition has done more than any law to do away with the crimping game. Liquor was the bait and the drug of waterfront victims. Nowadays the employment agency is conducted on a most respectable basis. There you may obtain names and get in touch with all available mariners; even mates registering. Captain, cook or cabin boy, steward, supercargo, sailor, engineer or boat-steerer, if there are any available Renny & Green, now occupying the abandoned premises of Lewis & Turk, will fill your needs.

When Jim stated his need of a cook, the clerk took him up, asking the length of voyage, number of passengers and crew, list of duties, wages, etc., marking them all down on a form.

"Chinaman?" he asked.

"Preferred."

"One in this morning. Good man. Been a restaurant cook. A bit of a highflier, is Li Cheng. But a good cook and I imagine it's because he has been skinned at fantan that he wants a job where he'll have to save up till he's got another stake."

"Seasick?"

"Oh, he's cooked aboard ship before this."

"You know him? Character all right? We've got ladies aboard."

"Know him ever since I've been here. They say Li Cheng was in the opium ring, but that was long ago before the U. S. took over the place and burned up all the pipes and dumped the confiscated opium into the bay."

"I've heard about that," said Jim. "Some say they dumped molasses instead of opium." The clerk grinned.

"I guess Li Cheng's character is good enough. You're not going to tempt him, are you?" Both laughed. "I'll have him in for you inside of half an hour," said the clerk. "You can look him over."

"He'll have to start in right away. We sail this afternoon. Any one else in view in case he doesn't show?"

"He'll show. Needs a job badly, he said. 'Too muchy bloke.' He'll go. And I haven't got any one nearly as good."

Jim did some marketing and saw the stuff carried down to the boat landing by Hamsun and Vogt, brought ashore for that purpose. He needed a little gasolene but took enough to fill up his tank. The water tender was already alongside the *Seamew*.

He returned to interview Li Cheng, The wisest of white men can tell but little about a yellow man until he tests him. Li Cheng was elderly. He was cueless and there were gray hairs among the black. He might have been fifty or seventy, with his comparatively unwrinkled skin and black eyes with their unfolding eyelids that seemed to open like the top of a roller desk.

"Can do," he said. "Me topside cook. Pastly, hot blead, hot biscuit. Good chow. Make up salad, number one salad, fine coffee. Suppose I catch up fifty dolla every month, fifty dolla gold, I go."

"That's pretty high."

"Maskee," answered Li Cheng indifferently. "I like go sea becos I no spend. Make um stake. *Maskee.* Suppose you no pay can catch plenty job soon. Topside cook I belong."

"Wages are up," said the clerk, to Jim's inquiring glance.

"I'll sign you," said Jim. "Come in to the commissioner's."

After signing on Li Cheng went uptown again for his kit, promising to be aboard within the hour and to have tiffin ready. Jim had one more errand. At the office of the Collector of the Port. That official's records show nothing of any vessel's entry that remotely resembled a power schooner. Jim's belief that Swenson had sailed by way of Panama to circumvent and follow them faded, to his relief.

He found the ladies aboard the *Seamew,* their shopping done, anxious to start. Newton still slept off his potations. Li Cheng came off in a shore skiff, bringing his belongings and a pet monkey.

"You no care?" he asked. "Velly fond of pets. No *pilikia* this *kekko,*" he said. "Keep him along galley. Make fun for sailor." Kitty Whiting fell in love with the monkey and made friends with it immediately, Li Cheng looking on with a broad smile.

"Plenty *akamai,* that *kekko,*" he said. "Heap smart monkey."

They made clearance, yanking the anchor from the stiff mud of the harbor bottom, out through the buoyed channel through the reef, getting a farewell wave from the old keeper of the reef-lighthouse, out past the bell-buoy and then, with the northeast trade blowing fresh and free as the *Seamew* outswung her booms, they headed straight out into the blue, sparkling sea. There was nothing ahead of them until they reached the equator, save Johnston Island, a barren lift of coral rock and sand that they most likely would not even sight.

The seas ran crisp, the wind blowing off their curling crests like powder. The water was a most intense blue. For all its action it held the apparent hardness of glass, or of a jewel with a myriad facets flinging back the brilliance of the sun. To the north sailed great billows of cloud out of which blew the breeze. In the southeast the other islands of the group swam in a luminous haze, darker blue than the sea, with a hint of green here and there, and on far off Hawaii shore the gleam of snow on Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, their summits nearly fourteen thousand feet above sea level. Behind Lanari rose the high dome of Maui's extinct crater. Sea gulls and bosun birds had escorted them out to sea. The air seemed charged with vigor; the day one of good omen. Kitty stood in the bows, cuddling Li Cheng's monkey, gazing far ahead, a little anxious frown between her eyes. It seemed to Jim that she was striving to find some hope back of that luminous horizon, as if a little dread was beginning to dilute her confidence that she would find her father.

Baker touched Jim on the arm, pointing south and east to where, on a course parallel with their own, a white fleck showed. Jim took the powerful glass and focussed it on that stiffly upstanding speck, watching it for long minutes. It was undoubtedly a schooner, well down to leeward, bound on their own course, an unusual one for vessels. It might be a South Sea trader, though not many came to the Hawaiian Group, save on some rare trip to San Francisco. The nearest group ahead was the Phoenix Islands, just below the line, nearly five hundred marine leagues away. Jim handed back the binoculars to the mate with a face he tried to make untroubled.

"Schooner. Going our way, it seems," he said. "We'll make a race of it."

"We've got a good start to wind'ard," remarked Baker. "She'll have come out of Hilo, I'm thinking, through the Alenuihana Channel, likely. Been back of Kahoolawe until just now. Current setting her down. Ah, she's tacking."

"We'll run off a bit and take a closer look at her," said Jim. Baker said nothing. The manœuvre would be a waste of time, but if the skipper wanted to get a nearer view of every stray sail, that was none of the mate's business. The sheets came in as Jim gave the order and Hamsun spun the wheel. The *Seamew* came

round like a teetotum, heeled to the breeze that sent her reaching, fast closing up the distance to the stranger, sailing now toward them on the same point, though on the opposite tack. Jim did not analyze the impulse that caused him to run out of his way, even for a few miles to leeward. He had set his mind to make all possible speed, yet he felt he could not be satisfied until he had come close enough to see the rig of the fast approaching schooner.

It was still possible that she was merely an inter-island boat making the trip from Hilo to one of the other islands. If she was bound for Kauai, northernmost of the Hawaiian group, she would not, since she had tacked as she did, be much out of her course. Somehow he believed that this was not so. Without anything definite to go on he linked up the schooner with Swenson.

Kitty came toward him, saying nothing, but sailor enough to know they had changed their course. She caught sight of the sail. The two schooners were slashing through the seas toward each other at about their best rate of speed; already on the *Seamew* they could see the lift of the other's white hull as she breasted the seas, making easy work of it. Baker came up again, glass in hand.

"There's a big launch coming like a skipjack," he said. "Either she's after us or out to meet this other chap. Wouldn't be so far off land on her own hook, not a launch."

Jim knew, without further confirmation, that Swenson was in the launch that was tearing along at a furious clip, shattering the seas she charged, half smothered in smoky spray. She was a double-ender, built for island work. As she came on she rolled like a porpoise, showing her bilge heels as she flung herself forward.

He got the glass on the advancing schooner once more. She was of the same type as the *Seamew*, a Gloucester fisherman model, unmistakeable as she was alien to those waters. There was no need to go closer, but Jim held on. He wanted to read her name, to see the transshipment from the launch. Then, if he was right, if Swenson was trailing the *Seamew*, there would be an even start to the race and he exulted in the belief that the *Seamew* was the better boat of the two, and that he, as its captain, would show Hellfire that there are more ways than one of being lost at sea. Swenson might know, or guess, that they were bound for Fiji. Jim resolved to make Suva first and get away before Swenson showed. The only thing that surprised him was Swenson's willingness to declare himself by leaving at practically the same hour. He must have ordered his schooner to weigh anchor at Hilo early that morning, using the inter-island wireless, and then waited for the *Seamew* to clear before he took the launch to meet his own boat; and he must have reckoned that the chances were all in favor of his being noticed. The manœuvring of the *Seamew* showed unmistakeably that the folks aboard her were curious, if not suspicious.

Lynda Warner joined Kitty. Jim wondered what had passed between them about Swenson, if anything. He had said nothing further to Lynda, but it was very plain that the women had a mutual understanding and that they had agreed to ask no questions. It might be feminine intuition; it might be sheer wisdom, but Jim appreciated it. He did not care for Baker or any of the crew to suppose that they were bound on any but a pleasure trip. Later they must know of the search for Captain Avery Whiting; they would be wondering at the stranded hull of the *Golden Dolphin*, but there would be no necessity for letting them know anything about the pearls. If they were in their hiding-place they could be taken out quietly and never referred to. He could understand trouble arising among men who knew they were on a ship that contained a fortune, won by comparative ease, all destined for the lucky one or two, while they got nothing but seamen's wages and seamen's work, hard and exacting. So it must have been with the *Golden Dolphin*, even if the seeds of mutiny had not been sown beforehand.

Now the two schooners were less than half a mile apart, lunging on, almost abeam, a beautiful sight as the wind drove them and the lift of the seas cushioned them on their own buoyancy. Now he could see a name on the bows, letters of metal that glistened in the sun, a short word—*Shark*. A fitting title for a ship run by Swenson.

The launch came on, buffeting the seas. Suddenly the *Shark* shot into the wind, hung there with sails shivering, peaks lowered, rising and falling until from the *Seamew* they could see all the length

of her deck with men scattered upon it. Through the glass Jim caught details that the rest could not. The launch came alongside, tossing. Bumpers were flung out. A big man, lithe and active, sprang for the schooner's rail from the lesser freeboard of the launch, caught at the main rigging, jumped down on deck.

He took off his visored cap and wiped his face with the back of his hand as if to clear off spray. Jim caught the shine of a bald dome, a tonsure of red hair. Immediately he handed the glass to Baker and shouted an order. The wheel of the *Seamew* went up; the men sprang to ease out the sheets as she came about. The sails filled and once more she ran before the wind, southwest by five points west, her wake streaming out behind. Smartly too the *Shark* came surging on. The launch turned and went lunging back toward Oahu.

With a glance aft Jim went to the head of the companionway, following Kitty and Lynda down into the main cabin.

"It was Swenson?" asked Kitty.

"Yes. Trailing us. Pretty openly. If he figures he can keep us in sight night and day from here to the island he's going to be mistaken."

"Swenson?" Newton Foster spoke. He had evidently just made his appearance. Behind him stood Cheng, with coffee on a tray. Wiltz was making up the staterooms, not supposed to bother with extra service between meals. "What about Swenson?" Jim did not answer, glancing at Cheng, whose face showed no interest as he set down the tray and left.

"Swenson has just come out in a launch and joined his schooner, the *Shark,*" said Jim briefly. "I think the schooner came out from Hilo. That would account for my not finding it entered at Honolulu. I saw Swenson in Honolulu last night. At least I thought it was he. Now I know. He hasn't been able to get hold of our figures so he's taking a try at following. We've got to shake him off. I don't quite understand his tipping his hand so early. He must know we've recognized him. We'll lose him between here and Suva. If we can't outsail him we'll dodge him some night. And we'll lose him, if he doesn't guess we're putting in at Suva. We'll be there a day or two."

"Do we *have* to call there?"

Jim nodded.

"We'll need gasolene, fresh provisions, water. We might get that at Apia. But Samoa's out of our way. I want to get some native boys. We'll need them for several reasons—bush work and landings. We can't get along without natives and Samoa is not easy to recruit from. Why?"

He had sensed a reason back of Newton's remark.

"Just wondering. I've got a horrible head on me." Newton essayed a smile of frank confession, but groaned and held his head with his hands as if to prevent it splitting. "They had some native liquor last night. Had me going in no time. That's the worst of prohibition. A chap gets all out of shape for taking a drink when he travels. Good stuff, but regular bottled lightning." He shuddered, pushed away the coffee and tackled a cigarette.

"I'll take a stroll on deck," he said. "Fresh air may help."

As he passed to the companionway he gave Jim a meaning look. Jim followed him. Newton went aft to the taffrail, gazing at the *Shark* throwing up a smother of spray as she came on, down to leeward a little, but holding up as close to the wind as the *Seamew*.

"So that's Swenson and his schooner. Gaining any?"

"I think not," said Jim. "He wouldn't want to pass us. He's doing his best, I fancy. Want to speak to me, Newton?"

"Yes." Young Foster threw his cigarette into the wake, turned and faced Jim Lyman squarely. In that moment Jim liked him better than he had done at any time. Yet he guessed that Foster had a confession to make, and that it was tied up with Swenson.

"I made a damned fool of myself last night," said Newton. "I have hit the

hooch once in a while, Lyman—rowed with the old man about it—but that native stuff got me. They had plenty of it, and at first it don't seem to affect you. There was a crowd there. Seemed as if everyone in Honolulu was invited. Lots there who didn't know each other or even the host, a fine old chap. Open house, like the old days. Must have cost a mint. Well, there was singing and dancing—poker going on—flowers for everyone, all sorts of weird things to eat. Heaps of regular grub, too. Everything informal. Everybody laughing and talking like old friends. Partly hooch, of course.

"I told 'em, some of 'em—I didn't meet everyone, of course—that we were on a

South Sea cruise. That seemed to put me in solid. I didn't say anything about what we were after—at least I don't think I did. But I talked too much; I realized that, and pulled up. I was with a bunch of chaps who seemed interested. The fellows I went with, the yachtsmen, you know, wandered off. They knew a lot of people and they saw I was having a good time. This bunch seemed to know a lot about the islands, told me a lot of yarns. There was one chap who was a bit nosey. Said he'd noticed the *Seamew*. Wanted to know about Kitty and Lynda. Just nosey, I thought. But I didn't enlighten him about them. I think it was that made me shut up. I went off hunting the chaps I'd come with. But I remember telling them we were going to Suva and then on down south to an island we knew about. Some blithering idiot, I know."

"What did the man look like?"

"Oh, it wasn't Swenson. You said he was big and red-headed where he wasn't bald. Swenson wasn't there at all, that I saw. This chap was lanky with a sharp face like a fox. Black eyes. Clipped moustache and a black beard trimmed Vandyke."

The face that he had dimly seen in the dark, turning toward him from the park bench, flashed before Jim's mind.

"Asked you where the island was, did he?"

"Yes. But of course I couldn't tell him that. But he knows we're going to Suva. Do you suppose—? You said you saw Swenson last night."

"Do I suppose this man was a pal of Swenson's? I do. If I am not very much mistaken I saw them together, long before you first came off. They probably went out to the affair later. Swenson may have stayed away. Meeting you there was a bit of luck for them."

"I'm mighty sorry, Lyman."

"It's all right. No use in saying anything about it. I don't know that there's much harm done. They'll try to trail us from Suva, that's all, and they'll make a race of it from here. They'll try and keep us in sight in case we take a notion to change our course. I'm glad you told me, Newton."

They shook hands, and with the grip Jim's suspicions of Newton Foster disappeared. His confession had been too ingenuous, too unnecessary for any attempt at acting. And no actor could have emulated Newton's expression of regret and self-contempt.

AS THE day passed it became evident that the two schooners were evenly matched. It was tested out before and on the wind. There was not a cable's length of difference per hour in the speed. They shared the same wind, they might have been built from the same design. Their footage of canvas seemed equal. With the brilliant tropic moonlight nights ahead it wasn't going to be such a simple matter for them to part company as it might seem to a layman. Of course there was always luck at sea. Jim realized that. He had seen wind in the equatorial doldrums fail for weeks at a time; or a squall thrash the sea in one area while a ship a mile away might lie becalmed. But in the present case both had engines. One must be faster than the other. Dark nights would help and they could count on them with the waning moon. Or a storm. But there was no use bothering about such matters until after Suva.

Newton, by his indiscretions, had accomplished one thing. Without doubt the chap with the pointed beard, Swenson's mate possibly, had pumped him dry, and such information would take in the personnel of the *Seamew* and the principal fact that they had plenty of arms aboard. Swenson would weigh the chances of forcible boarding and seizure, Jim was certain. The man was an unprincipled pirate. Without doubt he had already weighed them and decided that it was not worth while. So, for the time being, it resolved itself into a race to Suva.

And they raced every foot of the way, with both crews on the jump to make the constant changes called for, swaying up, hauling in, changing headsails. Jim took only catnaps. Baker was a good man but slow, content to move after he saw that he was being overhauled, lacking initiative, lacking the instinct that Lyman owned for getting the best out of the *Seamew*. For three days and three nights the schooners were never more than a sea mile apart. Both sailed wing-and-wing with booms stayed out. Jim rigged a squaresail on his foremast to offset a big ballooner spread by Swenson. For the seventy-two hours they never split tacks. Five times during the night the *Seamew* swung off on a new course, showing no lights, the *Shark*, only a dark shadow flitting over the seas, sometimes to windward, sometimes to leeward, never ahead, hanging on like a hound on scent. Five times the lookout on the *Shark* saw the manœuvre and the *Shark*

followed suit with gleam of the waning moon turning her sails to glints of mother-of-pearl.

The log of the *Seamew* registered seven hundred and twenty-four miles of sailing. Over a fourth of their distance between Honolulu and Suva. Then the wind grew fitful, the weather hazy. There were gaps when the breeze seemed to have died altogether, leaving bald spots on the sea. The schooner would come slashing along at ten knots, eleven perhaps, and slide into the becalmed area like a skater suddenly striking soft slush, all speed snatched away instantly. Or a rain squall swept down enveloping her in a downpour that vanished as suddenly as it had come, leaving her with canvas taut, stays and halyards tight as fiddle strings. Meeting with these was purely a question of chance and luck seemed with the *Seamew*. On the evening of the fourth day she had gained a full sea league on the *Shark* and the sun sank in a mist that veiled the already risen moon.

"If we get wind," said Jim, "we'll dodge her before this clears. If there's no wind we'll start the engine. Sanders has been bothering me to do it all day, but it hasn't seemed worth while. I look for uncertain weather from now on. The closer we get to the line at this time of year, when the southeast trade fights the northeast, the less likelihood there is of any wind to speak of. Ships have knocked about for weeks trying to cross the equatorial belt. We'll plug along at eight knots and trust in the engine. What wind we do strike is likely to come from any quarter. It's a toss-up for both of us."

The sun went down crimson; the moon appeared like a fire-balloon without reflecting power; the *Shark* was swallowed up in the dusk. Sanders, with his engine oiled up and overhauled, turned it over and the screw revolved steadily, the schooner pulsing to the drive of the shaft. Jim changed his course to five points more easting. Sanders' confidence in his "power" proved to be well founded. With Walker spelling him, the pistons never missed a stroke. Dawn came clear with an empty horizon. Jim went to his main spreaders with a glass to make certain, and came down exultant. They might meet the *Shark* at Suva but it had been demonstrated once that they could lose Swenson and it could be done again.

It was almost unbearably hot, with the glassy sea and the sky like a bowl of metal reflecting the heat of the fiery, intolerable sphere of the sun. The *Seamew* reeked of hot oil. The slightest movement brought on a flood of perspiration. Conversation languished; effort died. The sailors had little to do and kept the decks wetted down. This prevented the putty crumbling in the seams and cooled the cabin a trifle. All unnecessary raiment was discarded. Kitty and Lynda kept to their staterooms most of the time. There was a slight general revival at nightfall. Plans for practising with the weapons faltered, were put off. No fish broke the surface; no far-wandering seabird showed against the fleckless sky. It was a painted ocean that they crossed, but the schooner, thanks to gasolene, was not an idle, painted ship. The engine seemed to pant and labor, but the screw kept turning, every revolution lessening the period of discomfort through which they must pass.

They crossed the line at the hundred-and-seventy-first meridian. Jim Lyman announced the fact without provoking any especial interest or enthusiasm. There was no suggestion of any initiation of crossing the line. All animal spirits were at a low ebb. Even Cheng's monkey was content to hunt the shade. The sea divided at the bows in oily ripples. Some sharks made their appearance, their dorsals streaking the surface and their bodies visible as they sculled themselves along keeping pace with the schooner. Just before sunset a filmy speck showed on the eastern horizon. The *Shark* had picked them up again. But it had vanished by morning.

Still under power, the gasolene getting low in the tank, they passed to the eastward of the Pheonix Group, barely sighting Phoenix and Sidney Islands. The south equatorial current gave them westing and a clear run lay ahead past Samoa down to the Goro Sea and Fiji. Twe hundred and fifty miles south of the line they ran into the southeast trades, a steady river of wind flowing just aft the beam and speeding them along mile after mile at top speed. Every one revived. Sanders and Walker turned idlers for a well earned rest. The rifles were got out and the automatic pistols; targets were rigged at the rail or floating alongside as their marks-

manship improved. Sanders proved easily the best marksman among them, excepting Cheng, who only shot once but displayed an accuracy with an automatic that was uncanny. Three shots running pierced the bull of a stationary target, four others hit and smashed three floating bottles as they rushed past the swiftly moving boat, bobbing in the run. Kitty Whiting made good progress; Lyman showed himself a fair shot with a rifle, and a better with the pistol. Newton about equaled his performances. Lynda Warner predeclared her inability to fire without closing both eyes at once or to hit anything smaller than a barn door—and lived up to it. Moore shot well but erratically; the others gained familiarity with their weapons, if nothing more. It was not an ideal shooting gallery, a slanting deck on a plunging ship where even the fixed targets pitched unexpectedly and the floaters raced away at a baffling rate. Finally they devised a can painted white and towed.

Li Cheng appeared as a treasure of the first magnitude. Through the intensest heat he suffered least, despite his handicap of working in the galley, and he managed to devise meals that coaxed the most languid of appetites. He was a prime favorite with the men, always jovial, taking their fun in good part, coming back with quaint quips in his pidgin English, winning, not merely their respect, but their confidence. The only two who did not get along with Cheng were Walker and Wiltz. Sanders had little to do with him.

"'E 's a Chink," said Walker. "I'm palling with no bloody heathen Chinee." Wiltz's complaint was also largely racial.

"He's a yellow man and he's treacherous. They are a nation of pirates. He's a good cook and that lets him out." There was no open hostility between steward and cook, which was just as well. Cheng smiled on Wiltz as on the rest and showed no offense at the steward's attitude of tolerance. But he undoubtedly was responsible for the attitude of the crew. The three Norsemen had been apt to hang aloof, stolid if efficient. Now all hands went about as if they shared a perpetual joke that never lost its zest and they worked with a will.

"They're too good to be true," said Baker, the mate. "But Cheng is a wonder."

Three days out of Suva, Wiltz sent for Lyman, who found him groaning in his bunk with complaint of dysentery.

"It's that yellow cook," he said, his face shining with sweat on a pallid skin. "He's poisoned me. I know it. Oh, my God!" He writhed with sudden cramps. "I got a cup of coffee out of the pot, as I always do. He knows my custom, sir. The pot's on the galley stove and I help myself to a cup at six bells every morning, regular. At seven bells it took me. I'll be a dead man before night. Skipper, I want to have you write down some things for me. I——" He writhed again. Lyman had seen sick men before. He had a medicine chest aboard and he had prescribed for many sailors. He knew the propensity of a sick sailorman to believe himself fatally ill; he added to that Wiltz's prejudice against Cheng. He took the steward's temperature—not very serious—felt his pulse, consulted his Captain's Handibook. Then he interviewed Cheng.

"Wha' malla that steward?" demanded Cheng, smiling. "All time he come along my galley, take coffee. That all lightee. All same evelly steward I sabe. That coffee topside coffee. I dlink myself light after he go. His trubble he eat too much, all day long he pick-pick this an' that. He too fat, that steward. Now he got trubble in his belly."

"He's too sick to wait on the table, Cheng. Or to clean up. Got to stay in his bunk. Why don't you tell him to keep out of your galley. I'll suggest it to him myself as soon as he is better." Jim had noticed the steward's growing tendency toward a rounding port and his habit of eating almost continuously between meals—if he had regular meals at all. He was inclined to accept Cheng's diagnosis of the cause.

"Too gleedy, that man," summed up Cheng. "Suppose he stay sick I wait on table all lightee for day or two. I fixee cabin. Can do."

This he did with speed and neatness while Wiltz groaned in his bunk, refusing to believe himself better. Cheng was almost over-zealous, it appeared. Kitty came to Jim, Lynda beside her.

"Cheng tells me Wiltz is sick and he is to do his work," she said. "You didn't tell me anything about it."

"I really haven't had the chance," said Jim. "Why? Do you object?"

"No. Cheng's splendid. Better than Wiltz. But you see Lynda and I have always taken care of our own cabins. Cheng wouldn't know that. I found him in mine when I came back from Lynda's room. I have been keeping your little log beneath my mattresses since we left Hono-

lulu. Wiltz never has come into our rooms. In fact, I have always kept mine locked whenever I went out of it, even for a minute. But it seems there was a master key and Wiltz had it on his key-ring.

Cheng got his keys, and I found he had made up my bunk and straightened the room. He had done it in almost no time, and as well as any chambermaid. The log was on the stand beside the bunk. Cheng told me he had turned the mattresses with an air of just pride. 'This I find, missy,' he said. 'Maybe you lose?' Now what do you think? Did Cheng know what the log was? Did he look into it? What can we do about it? Lynda says, 'Nothing'."

"I don't know what can be done," said Lyman. "I have been plastering every incident with suspicion ever since I was knocked on the head. Sometimes I have had cause; sometimes I have been ashamed of myself."

"It would be no use to question Cheng, I suppose."

"It would make him sore if he was merely doing his best, as I am inclined to think. If there was anything underhanded about it you could never get it out of him. Besides, Wiltz, with his master key, has always had the same opportunity of search. We suspect Cheng because you found him there, and he had a perfectly legitimate excuse. Wouldn't he have put the book back? None of the crew know anything about what we are after."

"I am sure Wiltz was never in my room." Baker came below at the moment and the matter ended. Jim thought once or twice of Wiltz's charge against Cheng of poisoning, but the steward was so obviously better that he dismissed it and on the third morning Wiltz was up and about.

At Suva there was no sign of the *Shark*. No such vessel had entered, and Jim hurried to get his native addition to the crew. As he had told Newton, he wanted them for bush work. To find trace of Captain Whiting, to satisfy his daughter, they would have to search the island and one native was worth five white men at making trail. There might be landings to make where the reefs were dangerous, and for that work they were absolutely necessary. Back of all that Jim Lyman had another idea. He believed it possible, without an inordinate amount of effort, to get the *Golden Dolphin* back to deep water, first to the lagoon, then out through the reef. If the channel needed widening he had brought dynamite along, and there again the natives would be wanted for diving and placing the cartridges. He fancied his first observations were correct, now that he knew positively that in a short time—comparatively—the vessel had been ashore; and that she was not materially injured by shock or later decay. He had a quick eye for the lay of the land and he thought that the *Golden Dolphin* now lay couched on a jungle bed at no great height above the flood level of the lagoon. If it could be done—and he had his plans for an inexpensive experiment—the salvage would cover all cost of the trip and over and over again. The model had not been included in the sale of the antique shop; it was now ensconced in the cabin of the *Seamew* and Jim had often visualized the original ship back in her element. There was enough spare canvas in the stores for effective jury rigging. He had included special sized hawsers for use in the outhaul, using them meanwhile for duty aboard the schooner.

It took three days of feverish work to stir up the British officials, to get the right natives, take them before the commissioner, secure the necessary permission and put up the requisite securities. But it was done at last, the *Seamew* revictualled, and still there was no sign of the *Shark*. It looked as if they had outwitted Swenson or some good chance for them—evil for him and his schemes—had delayed him. The crew had a run ashore. Cheng lost his monkey the first day and came back late and apologetic for having skipped a meal.

"That damn *kekko* he lun away," he explained. "I have one hell of time find him. I speak him nex' time he go, by golly, I cut off his tail an' make him all same *kanaka*." As almost everyone had lunched ashore, Cheng and his *kekko* were assured of pardon. All hands were glad to see the monkey aboard again with his mischievous but generally harmless capers.

VII

162′ w. 37′ s.

SUVA behind them at last, they faced a final run of fourteen hundred miles, a feverish week of hope and uncertainty. Kitty Whiting faced the issue with glowing expectancy and confidence. It was plain that no thought of failure ever entered her head and Jim prayed, against his own convictions, that

her faith might not be betrayed. It should not if he could prevent it, he vowed. By now he was self-confessedly in love with her, and however hopeless his cause he knew that there would never be for him any other girl.

That Newton Foster was heels over head in love was also patent. Kitty would stand in the bows hour after hour, looking with yearning glances, with lips half-parted, at the far horizon. And Foster was almost invariably with her. But the girl's heart was in her eyes, searching for the lift of land where she might find her father. Thought of his safety was paramount; it possessed her utterly and not until he was found would she, or could she, think of matters concerning only her own happiness. If he was not found—— It would be long before any one might comfort her, as a man tries to console a woman, and bring about forgetfulness.

Jim saw that Newton made little headway in Kitty's affections though he was quick to say things that fitted her mood, to make suggestions at which she smiled, apt at imagining fortunate happenings for which she was grateful. Yet, as his own love grew for this girl, so plucky, so wise and yet so sweet, so brave and still so feminine, so full of grace and beauty, jealousy sometimes plucked at Jim to the quick. There were perforce many leisure moments when he had nothing to do but think and dream of the future—a future from which he could not imagine Kitty Whiting eliminated, and which often clouded as he considered the vanity of aspiring to familiarity with her.

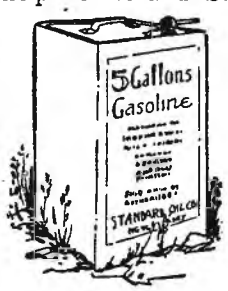
"They make a fine-looking pair," Jim said to Lynda Warner one night as they came up from below and saw Kitty and Newton at the taffrail, their figures merging into one in the stardusk, both gazing down at the wake, Newton's head turned toward hers, his talk provoking a laugh. It seemed to Jim that they were already mating. His prick of jealousy was deepened by his belief that Newton was weak, lacking in purpose and decision, inclined to be lazy, self-indulgent, a laggard in everything but love-making and conducting that with a genius that might well involve the girl before she realized it, so cleverly did young Foster submerge his own passion with sympathy.

"Heaven forbid!" said Lynda. "They are both good-looking, if that is what you mean. Being of opposite sex perhaps the one sets off the other when they are together. But Newton is not the only man in the world who would look well by the side of Kitty and she by him. They are not matched any more than opposites can be. When Kitty mates it will be because she falls in love, and when she does that it will be with a man-size lover. I suppose there are possibilities in Newton, but he has much to do to even up his shortcomings. Besides, he is her cousin. He might be willing to ignore the relationship, but I know that Kitty would never marry any one in whom her own blood ran. The trouble with you, Jim Lyman," she added, in her rich voice that was her one great outward charm, "is that you make two big mistakes."

"What are those?"

Lynda laughed. "I like you enough to tell you. It is doubtful if you would ever find them out for yourself. One is that you don't know how to appraise yourself, not knowing how a woman makes her valuations of a man; the other that you fail altogether to realize that Kitty Whiting is not either angel or fairy, but a very human being. A woman may use her head, Jim, but she has not yet progressed to the place where reason displaces sentiment. Certain types of women need certain types of men. Kitty is ninety percent feminine. She will fall in love with a ninety percent male. A man with a man's force and strength. She would rather have a man who would bully her a little than one who would worship her. I've given you enough to think about. When the right time comes, apply your digested knowledge. Good luck to you and good night." She left him gasping.

THE wind began to get capricious the second day out and they had to resort to gasolene, much against Jim's will. He had wanted to save all he could for emergencies, but there was no help for it and Sanders once more took charge of the motive power. They were now where the prevailing wind was southeast, and even if it blew steadily, they, sailing into it on a southeasterly course, could not expect to do better than eight knots, besides falling off in leeway. With the engine, despite the reek of oil, the vibration and the extra heat, all petty annoyances that loom large when the thermometer is over a hundred,



they had the satisfaction that every revolution, every turn of the screw sent them ahead, straight to their destination. It seemed to sing a chant of progress:

One foot—two feet—three feet—four!
Five feet—six feet—one fathom more!

Eight hundred and eighty fathoms to a land mile! One thousand and fourteen and a half to a nautical mile! Six thousand and eighty-seven feet divided by six. One nautical mile to a minute, sixty of them to a degree. It was possible to calculate the exact time of arrival, of the moment when they might expect to see the beckoning finger of craggy rock showing through the torn mist.

Newton and Kitty worked out the sums, and checked them off on the chart as they progressed. It was a sort of game calculated to relieve the tension and was not confined to the cabin. Jim gave a talk to the crew. They had cleared from Suva as for "island ports," but he knew that curiosity was rife as to their destination, that the men had speculated on the appearance of the *Shark,* and also on the fact that they had been given firearms practise. He wanted to know how far he could count on them. The Fijian natives were more or less carefree and adventurous. They also had a wholesome fear of the British Government and conceived themselves as lent to the *Seamew,* to be returned in good time and repair, plus satisfactory wage, providing they did their duty and behaved themselves. There were six of them, three of whom had served in the Fijian native police, all good swimmers, brave and faithful, fair shots, handy men, fine sailors; messing, sleeping, and keeping to themselves, unconcerned for the morrow, willing and strong.

Jim held consultation with Kitty and Lynda over his speech. Newton was admitted to the council out of courtesy. Even Baker knew nothing of their purposes. It was decided unwise to mention pearls.

"We've got to arm our landing party," said Jim. "We can't count on my experience as to there being no natives. If on visiting the ship we should uncover a million dollars in pearls, it might turn the heads of our crew.

"I don't want to discriminate against any of them. I think Baker's all right. I am sure of Sanders and Wood, and Douglas Moore would fight like a fiend for whichever side his temperament happened to attach itself to. He could argue himself right under any conditions and spill his blood as freely as the other chap's to prove it. Walker's game and square. I don't know that any of them are not, but I am sure the best way would be to ally them with us by taking them into our confidence to a certain extent. I'll call 'em aft at the end of the dog-watch."

"We are going down to an island where I was once wrecked," he told the listening men, all hands assembled down to Li Cheng and the monkey, the *kanakas* grinning in a rear circle of their own. "When I was there I discovered a fine ship stranded in the jungle where some big wave had flung it. That ship, men, was called the *Golden Dolphin.* Its model is below in the main cabin. It was built by the father of Miss Whiting, who has chartered this schooner to search for him, believing him to be alive.

"It is to the interest of certain people, for business reasons, to get in touch with Captain Whiting before we do, to prevent our finding him until they have secured what they want from him. We believe those men to have been following us from Honolulu, in fact from the States. We hope we have thrown them off the trail. If we have not we are not afraid of them. We look to you to stand by us."

There had been a shuffling of feet and a rolling of eyes when Jim mentioned the pursuit. Nods passed between the men.

"There may be hostile natives," Jim went on. "I am authorized to state that there will be extra pay—a substantial bonus—for all those who volunteer, but it is distinctly understood that you do volunteer, for shore duty. Nothing will be held against you if you prefer to stay aboard. But—the main factor of this trip of ours is the rescue of Miss Whiting's father, to crown with success a venture that has brought her nearly ten thousand miles by sea and land. She takes the chances that I ask you to share, not for the matter of wages or bonus, but as men for the sake of a brave woman."

It was the longest speech that Jim had ever made. He was conscious that he had injected into it much of his own feeling for Kitty Whiting's venture. It self-inspired him with fresh belief in their ultimate success as he conjured it up in words of crisp, stirring appeal. He saw her flushed face and shining eyes as he finished. The men were cheering. Strangely enough, they were led by Li Cheng, who stepped out in front in his cook's white drill apron and cap, his Oriental face a mask of approval and enthusiasm.

"Thlee chee' fo' Lilly Miss," he cried. "Hoolay!"

Jim dismissed the men, feeling that he might count upon all of them. Baker spoke to him.

"That was a good talk you made, Skipper. Good idea to make it. You know how things leak out aboard ship, and how little things roll up. The men savvied there was more than just a chance meeting with that *Shark* schooner, and there's been a heap of talk about this being a trip for buried treasure. A word of talk starts in the cabin, and by the time it drifts forward, it's a whole book. Now they know what they're after, and if there's a spice of danger to it, why it'll tie 'em up."

"How did they ever come to talk about buried treasure?"

"It's the most natural thing, I reckon, to tie up with a trip like this where it ain't given out at the start just where you're goin', an' then there's the pistol an' rifle practise. You don't look like a tradin' outfit. I've done some wonderin' myself, but my motto is to get orders, an' outside of that to be deef, dumb an' blind. You can count on me, Skipper. I hope the young lady finds her father. Looks like a long shot to me, though. I understand you've been to the island an' didn't sight him?"

"I was only ashore for a little while."

"It's derned funny he didn't show if he was there. I've bin wrecked myself, an' I spent night an' day on the highest point I c'ud find. Leastwise, I was there often enough to make sure nothin' went by me."

"He might have been ill; broken a leg?"

"He c'ud have made a smoke. Not that I'd aim to discourage Miss Whiting, Skipper."

"Of course not." But Baker's commonsense had taken a lot of the elation out of Jim. He almost dreaded the moment when they would land.

IN THE early afternoon of the eighth day, after the noon reckoning had shown them close to landfall, they sighted the distant peak. Off the starboard bow was a cone of deep blue, a thimble-shaped stain against a clear sky; to port, a crooked crag rising from a wide-spreading base.

"Clearer than when I was here," said Jim after the first tumult of discovery had died down. "No storm brewing. Fair weather ahead. A good omen, Miss Whiting."

"Do you think so, Jim?" In the moment of excitement formality dropped. Perhaps the girl spoke as she had secretly thought of him. A wild hope leaped in him, and he thrilled to the touch of her eager hand on his arm, confiding, more than merely friendly. He saw the quick frown gather on Newton's handsome features, the glance of understanding and endorsement from Lynda.

By sunset they were close up, the men gathered at the rail, discussing the landing.

The hump of highland to starboard had changed color, faded, diminished, dissolved as they headed for the island of the crag. About the latter evening mists had gathered, and the one talon-like peak, high above the forest of emerald where the shadows lay in deepest blue and violet, showed more than ever like a finger, blood red in the sunset. Along the line of the barrier reef the surf pounded and was tossed high, gold powdered, shot with rainbow glints, thundering ceaselessly in its perpetual cannonade. Jim himself mounted to the main spreaders to seek for the opening, masked by the spray. He gazed across the coral barrier to the quiet lagoon, recognizing at last the creek where the mate of the ill-fated *Whitewing* had gone for water, the spot where he and his own boat crew had landed, and the mass of jungle where the *Golden Dolphin* lay with a fortune hidden in her hold.

He searched low level, beach and bush and grassy uplands, from deep forest where the plumes of cocoa palms thrust through the mass of tangled foliage and broomed in the gentle wind, up to bare slopes, down to the beach again—looking for some thread of smoke, some flutter of signal, some sign of habitation, and found none. So far as humanity was concerned it might have been an island of the dead. Here and there birds rose and wheeled, settling for the night; the pungent scent of tropic flowers and fragrant herb and bush came to him at the masthead; he could see fish rising in the lagoon, a school flushed from the water by dolphins, a turtle floating, a giant ray hurling itself from the surface—but no sign of man, no eager figure hauling up a makeshift flag or bursting through to the beach to stretch out his arms toward the rescuing schooner. Solitude was all that met his eye.

He stayed aloft as they cruised along

toward the opening under power, calling out directions from his perch to Baker at the wheel, as they threaded their way through the jags of the channel while the rapid dusk settled fast about them. The sun was down, the colors of the island had faded, the tip of the finger-like crag tipped with pink, for a fleeting instant. Then it was night, purple night, water and air and sky and the bulk of the island against the stars. The chain went rattling down to fifteen fathoms, the links stirring up a streak of phosphorescence as they shot down; the schooner swung gently to the last of the flood, a light shining in Cheng's galley, another in the cabin. The native sailors were chanting in the bows, there was a chatter among the men. The clock in the cabin chimed eight bells and the mate gave instructions to "make it so" on the schooner's bell. The coupled chimes rang out and Kitty Whiting came on deck to Jim.

"You have brought us here," she said. "But, Jim, somehow I am afraid. It all looks so lonely. Surely he would have seen us by this time. I am still sure he is alive. I feel it here"—she pressed a hand over her heart. It looked like a tired bird, Jim thought, and he battled with an impulse to take it in his own for comfort and assurance. "But—I don't know. That island broods with mystery. It frightens me—a little." She took her hand away from her bosom and put it out in a little appealing gesture Jim could not resist. He grasped it and laid it on his arm, his palm over it.

"It'll look far more cheerful by daylight," he said. "As for your fear, that's just natural reaction at having arrived. We'll search every square yard of it, and there's the other island we sighted."

"Yes, I know. I had nerved myself not to meet him, but—somehow—I pictured him waiting on the beach."

Jim ached all over with the restraint he put upon himself not to take her in his arms and comfort her. She seemed so small, so helpless, so appealing to his manhood. He was almost grateful when Newton came up with Lynda and Kitty drew away.

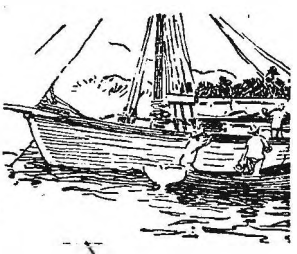
There were no sleepers an hour before daylight aboard the *Seamew*. The smell of coffee came from the galley where Cheng stood in his doorway gazing at the shore at intervals between cooking. His monkey perched on his shoulder. They were to start ashore immediately after breakfast. Cheng, Wiltz and Hamsun were to remain aboard, the rest of the outfit to go with the landing party in two boats, one covering the other, all armed. For all its silence Jim knew that the bush might hide scores of naked savages, might at any moment vomit a bloodthirsty, cannibalistic, howling horde of them. He was taking no chances. He had trade goods with which to secure peace or truce if there was any chance of it, bullets if there was not.

The night held its secrets. In the east the sky grayed, appeared to shake like a curtain, and with the shaking, the spangled stars suddenly lost luster. High up a cloud caught fire, flamed like a burning rag. Another took form and color lower down. Radiance showed beyond the rim of the sea. The finger-tip of peak glowed golden, orange, and rosy coral. Light and color swept down the crags, the forest, the grassy uplands and the bush, like the passage of a magic brush restoring life.

Parrots screamed to welcome the sun, doves cooed; a little wind blew off the land, ruffling the lagoon where fish flashed; gulls started out to sea, wheeling uncertain, to gaze at the thing that had appeared within the reef overnight, proclaiming their displeasure with raucous cries. Day had come with a leap, bringing warmth and cheer, the renewal of vitality and hope.

"Bleakfast all leady!" piped out Cheng from the galley.

Wiltz served them a rapid meal. They took their rifles, the women armed with holstered automatics. Both had donned knickers and shirts of light flannel. Jim discovered to his surprise that Lynda Warner had another treasure beside her voice; her figure was almost as youthful, almost as gracious in the revelation of the boyish costume, as Kitty's. The men had had their meal; guns and cartridges were served out, instructions given. Baker was to take charge of the covering boat. Jim steered the first. With him went Kitty and Lynda; he assigned Newton to Baker's outfit, much to the latter's protest, overruled by the statement that two passengers were enough.



Kitty, Lynda, Jim, Moore, Sanders, Neilson, Walker and two *kanakas*. Baker, Newton Foster, Vogt and the four remaining Fijians.

On board Cheng, Wiltz, Hamsun and Wood.

The boat-keels struck the water; the falls were released, oars put out. Cheng stuck his yellow face over the rail, the monkey squatting on his head like the familiar spirit of an Oriental wizard.

"Goo'-by an' goo' luck," he called. Wiltz and Wood stood at the forestay, glum but waving farewell. Hamsun was invisible.

They rowed softly along the quiet lagoon where the ripples were like opals in the dawn. Cautiously the leading boat edged in toward the white beach of powdered coral and shells where sea pinks patterned the sand. The sunrise wind had died. There was not a sound but the splash and drip of the oars. Baker kept distance, two men rowing, the rest ready with their guns. But not a leaf of the thick wall of bush back of the beach waved. No canoe shot out from the mangroves guarding the freshwater creek.

"Why are there no islanders here?" asked Kitty. "It is a beautiful place and fertile."

"They may have all been killed off in an epidemic," Jim answered. "The place may be *tabu* after some such disaster. There are islands like this that seem never to have been inhabited for many centuries. Out of the currents, you see. The big migration never reached them."

"An Eden of the Seas," suggested. Lynda.

"Minus snakes," said Jim. "Mighty few snakes in the South Seas proper."

The keel grated on the bottom; the *kanakas* sprang out and ran her up the slight slope with strong arms. Jim trusted to their sizing up of the situation more than to his own.

"No *kanaka* walk along this island," one of them pronounced. "Too much already they raise plenty hell an' bobbery suppose they here this time.

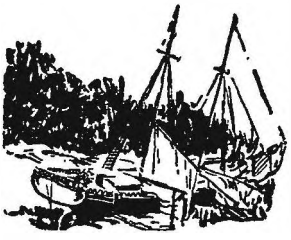
They landed, and the covering boat came up.

"Everything to ourselves," said Newton. "Now then, Lyman, where's the *Golden Dolphin?*"

Jim took his bearings and led the way into the bush. It was much thicker than when he had last penetrated it. The almost level sunrays stabbed its green mantle with long lances. They climbed through, over and about dense masses of creepers and palmetto, saw-leaved pandanus, with tree trunks grown close together as the stakes of a palisade. Here the Fijians first proved themselves, hacking a way through the tangle. Soon there were no longer any shafts of sunlight, they walked in a green twilight, as they might at the bottom of a sea with weird water-growths twining all about them. The sight of the ship vaguely showing amid a mass of verdure heightened the resemblance. It was hard to see at first even when the grinning *kanakas* pointed it out, but then their eyes traced it and they hurried forward as fast as they could, with their hearts pounding with excitement. To Kitty Whiting it was the visible confirmation of her hopes, the sight of it reinforced her belief that, having found her father's ship, she would find her father. Lynda Warner naturally shared her cousin's feelings. To Newton the ship represented a fortune of which he had been somewhat sceptical, though not so much so as he was at heart concerning the fate of Captain Avery Whiting. Jim was not unthrilled by the thought of the pearls hidden in the hulk. He found some triumph in showing what he had promised, in proving up. He wished Stephen Foster were there beside his son. Kitty Whiting's joy was his.

There was an open space above the ship where its weight had crushed the growth and prohibited any revival. So thick was the jungle that the *Golden Dolphin* seemed to lie at the bottom of a green shaft. Away up the topmost branches of the trees had caught the rising sun but it was not high enough yet to send full light to the bottom of the well. It would not be long before it did so, Jim noticed. Looking at his watch he saw that they had been four hours struggling through the bush from the beach, four hours to make half a mile of progress. It had originally taken him a quarter of the time. Another year and this ship would be utterly lost, swallowed by the jungle.

The native boys attacked the barricade with fresh vigor, their bodies, naked save for loincloths, glistening with sweat that ran off them in streams. Now they could make out the mast that lay over the side, festooned with green vines. Vines had climbed the mast-stumps and the tangle of ropes, smothering the vessel with a cloak that seemed to hide it from the shame of its disaster.



Suddenly the sun peeped over the edge of the rift in the trees. A ray came down and touched the half-hidden figurehead. Kitty gasped. Jim saw her eyes fill with tears that she winked away.

"The *Golden Dolphin*." She flashed one look at Jim, a reward that amply satisfied him. Then her eyes closed for a moment and her lips moved. She was praying.

They clambered aboard breathlessly, leaving the native boys below. They peered down through the broken skylight through the tarnished bars into the dim interior where more green things writhed. The sun, as if directed for their search, sent one beam, almost vertical, probing through the gloom, disclosing a mast, outlines of a table, chairs, a cushioned transom, a stateroom door.

"I got down through there," said Jim. "The companion doors were jammed. Maybe we can move them."

They were closed, but united effort shifted them more easily than they expected. The companion ladder was in place and unbroken.

"I'll test it," said Jim. It was sound and he called up the news. The sun, almost directly overhead now, beginning to flood the shaft with golden light, illuminated the main cabin with beams in which golden motes danced, and rendered the darkness still blacker by contrast. They had brought along electric torches and Jim turned his on the stairs as Kitty descended. She held out her hand to him naturally for assistance though she did not need any, he knew. Lynda followed, then Newton. Baker tactfully kept the rest back, telling them this was "the lady's party."

The quartet did not notice that they were not followed. Kitty stood in a ray of sunlight, her hand over her heart, leaning forward, looking, listening; listening, it seemed to Jim, as if her love was conjuring from this stranded ocean habitation of her father's some clew to his whereabouts. She spoke in a whisper that fitted the occasion. There seemed something uncanny about the place. Jim fancied he heard movements back of the passage that led from the cabin forward. He sent an exploring pencil of light down its dark tunnel, showing stateroom doors on either side, half open, a door closed at the far end.

"There may be some message," said Kitty. "We must look." They moved forward through the vines that caught at them like seaweed or like detaining hands. Jim thought of the skeleton alongside, well covered now with verdure. Their searchlights flicked through the dense patches of shadow.

"Spooky," muttered Newton, close behind him. "She'll find no message, Lyman. Wonder where the pearls are?"

Jim, sympathetically possessed by the girl's real quest, had temporarily forgotten the pearls. He half turned on Newton to bid him hush.

Suddenly there was a rush and a scuffle on the deck, a stifled cry, a shout half strangled, in Moore's voice:

"Look out, belo-o-!"

A shot sounded, distant, as if from the lagoon. Another and another. As they grasped their weapons, turning for the companionway, at the top of which they saw to their amazement, Walker, fighting viciously with Vogt and Neilson, a deep voice came from the passage leading forward.

"Up with your hands, all of you! Chuck your guns over to the port transom. Hurry, or I'll bore the lot of you. Up!"

The ray from Newton's torch as he jerked his arms aloft lit up the great figure of a man that almost filled the entrance, fell on his sardonic face, squash nose, piggy eyes and bald head with a tonsure of red hair. Over Hellfire Swenson's shoulder leered the features of a man with a close-clipped beard and moustache, mouth open, the tip of a tongue showing between white teeth, for all the world, like a wolf gloating at the survey of a victim. This in a flash; they vanished as the torch dropped from Newton's nerveless hand.

Some one called through the skylight bars. It was Sanders.

"They've got us, Skipper. They've got you covered." Then there was a thud on the deck. Other faces looked down. The sun caught the glint of rifle barrels trained on them. Swenson spoke out of the dark.

"No nonsense, now. I've come too far to monkey. Short work from now on. Lyman, throw that gun away or I'll start with you. I don't need you any longer." The bleak purpose of his voice was appalling in its menace. Sullenly Jim tossed his automatic to the port transom. A man swung down through the skylight and secured the weapons.

"You poor fool," said Swenson. "There are other harbors in the Fijis besides Suva. I got there first and put in at Levuka on Ovalau. My good friend, Cheng, whom you were good enough to hire at Honolulu,

sent me the position from Suva by wireless. I've been here forty hours waiting for you to show up. The *Shark's* on the other side of the island, snug. Your schooner is in my hands. Cheng is a good persuader, I've got five of your men in with me. The rest are damaged and your *kanakas* have chucked the job. Now then, young woman, where are those pearls?"

He switched on a torch that sought out Kitty's face and held it, pale in the circle of light but with chin up, lips compressed and eyes that shone defiantly. Jim, his useless fists clenched, furious at the trickery he had not detected, the mutiny of the five, which were, he supposed, the three Norsemen, Wiltz and Cheng, saw the girl's finely cut nostrils dilate.

"I'll not tell you," she answered and there was a ring to her voice that told of true metal. "Not if you kill me."

"Mebbe you wouldn't," said Swenson, and there was a grudging acknowledgment in his voice, "but I don't aim to kill you. You're the goose that lays the golden eggs, you see. Get back into that sunshine, all four of you, where I can get a good look at you. I don't aim to kill you, miss, but there's some things almost as bad, some worse. So you'll please get back while I'm giving you the option of doin' your own moving. Got those guns, Pete? Then you can get to hell out of here. This is a private conference.

"This is my partner, Ned Stevens, sometimes known as Slick Stevens. He was too slick for young Foster. Pumped him dry. Not that he held much. Now you're introduced, let's talk.

"There's young Foster here, miss. A good-looking lad. Mebbe you've taken a fancy to him. Or mebbe it's the skipper there. Personally I'd recommend Lyman to you. He's somewhat of a bearcat. I owe him one or two scores, though. But I'll call it all off if you come through with the pearls. If you don't, I understand you think your father's on this island or mebbe the other one. You see I happen to know all about your affairs. Everything. Sometime, if we come to terms, I'll tell you all about how I got my information. It'll open your eyes. But I ain't got time now. What I am after is a quick getaway. I want to turn those pearls into cash. Now, Miss Whiting, if you want to see your father again, and not be ashamed to meet him, you come through. That's one threat, and I mean what I say.

"First thing I'll do, if you don't, is to cut short the career of one of these two beaus of yours. I understand from Cheng, and he's a good judge of human nature, that they're both stuck on you. I think I'll take Lyman first, seeing I'm not quite even with him. I'll give you while I count ten. One—two——"

Swenson was standing himself in full light now and Jim saw his pistol go up steadily, remorselessly.

"You can put down your hands, Lyman, if you want to," he said.

"Three—four—five——"

"Stop." Swenson did not lower his gun. "Do you mean that you would kill him in cold blood?"

"It's you doin' the killing, miss, not me. As for bumping a man off, I don't make any account of that. Not when there's a fortune in sight. When a man's dead he's dead. He won't worry me any. Now, if you think he's worth the price of the pearls to you? No? *Six—seven!*"

"Stop. I'll tell you."

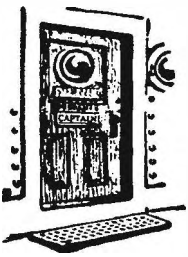
"No. Let him shoot—if he dares."

"Oh, I dare, Lyman. You first and Foster afterward if I have to. But she'll tell. You ought to thank me. You're the one she wants, it seems. Now, where are they?"

"In my father's stateroom, aft."

"We'll go there, all of us. Get on."

The captain's room was a large one, to starboard of the companionway, connected



with a similar room to port by a passage back of the ladder. It was well lighted ordinarily by two large ports, but after the jammed door had been forced back by Stevens, Swenson meanwhile keeping his gun trained on the four prisoners, the electric torches were necessary to break the gloom. The *Golden Dolphin* had been well fitted. There was a brass bedstead in place of a bunk; there were lounging chairs, a table and desk and a washstand with running-water plumbing, both hot and cold, to judge by the labels on the faucets. The place smelled musty as a grave but it was free from the encroaching vines. The bed was unmade, the sheets, spotted with discoloring, flung back above the blankets. But, though Jim had half feared it, there was no mouldering body here. Kitty's eyes roved to the desk, still hoping to find some written message. Lynda stood close to the door. Stevens, eyeing her slenderly

rounded figure, suddenly put a grossly familiar arm about her. She struggled, tore his hand loose, and as he clawed viciously at her, struck him. With an oath Stevens struck her in the face. Jim sprang across the floor. Stevens lifted his gun, but Jim struck it aside and smashed Stevens in the jaw before the latter, reeling, closed with him. He got a hand on Stevens' throat, throttling hard and swift in the darkness. A ray of light shot out and showed Stevens' face, distorted, his eyes protruding, his tongue forced out of his mouth. There came a crash on Jim's head and he collapsed, half-conscious, while he heard, as if far off, the bellow of Swenson.

"Damn you, Stevens, keep your hands off! I'll have no fooling with the women; I've told you that."

"It's her own fault. Hell, she ought to think it a compliment with a face like that."

Jim got to his feet again, blood streaming down the back of his neck. The blow had been a glancing one, and the flow of blood relieved the pressure. Stevens had his gun trained on him, finger on trigger, a look of deviltry on his face that showed that firing would be a delight. Lynda spoke close to Jim's ear.

"Don't, please. We need you. It was nothing."

"You heard me, Stevens," roared Swenson. "You obey orders or, by God, you won't be able to hear 'em! Now, about these pearls?"

"They are back of the washstand," said Kitty. "The panel moves. The hot-water pipes are not practical. One of them . . ."

Swenson rapped on the mahogany panel while Stevens, subdued, held a gun in one hand, a torch in the other. Jim contemplated a rush, a grab for the gun, but he was weak with the blow Swenson had given him. If he failed it might be the finish for all of them, for there were Swenson's men on deck, with his own traitors. Mist gathered in front of him from faintness that he fought off valiantly.

Swenson impatiently smashed in the panel after his test had shown a hollow space back of it. The plumbing was disclosed, two pipes leading to the faucets, the one to the left connected with the impractical hot-water system.

"Those joints screw up and down, then a section of the pipe comes loose," said Kitty in a hard little voice. "The pipe is plugged. If father did not take the pearls with him they will be there."

Swenson manipulated the joints. As he shifted the lower one a section of the pipe came out in his hands, an ideal hiding place. Even in systematically wrecking the vessel it would never be suspected but torn away with the other fittings. The top of the pipe was closed by a tightly fitting cork. Swenson dug this out with his knife. Cotton packing followed. Precaution had been planned to prevent a rattle of any kind. The end of the section was closed by metal. Swenson tilted the pipe, shook it, examined it by the light of the torch and flung it down with a volley of imprecations.

"Tricked, by God!" he wound up, glaring at Kitty.

"I have not tricked you," she said calmly and Jim could see conviction register on Hellfire's inflamed face as he stared at her. "That is the hiding-place. I am sure father would never have disclosed it. I am sure he would have kept it secret. If the pearls are gone it is because he himself removed them." And her voice proclaimed the joy she felt at this evidence of her belief that her father had mastered his situation and escaped from it with the gems.

"If he's on this island," said Swenson, gritting his teeth, "I'll find him, dead or alive, and I'll get those pearls if I have to go to hell after them. One thing you can be sure of," he went on, "none of you'll leave this ship until I've combed this island and the other one. If I get the pearls I may leave you a boat. Your schooner's at the bottom of the lagoon by now. Or I may not. You can stay here and play you're married. Don't try to leave this ship until I come back. I'm leaving guards. And I'll see that you get some grub. Come on, Stevens."

"She may have lied to you about the hiding-place."

"You're nothing short of a damned idiot, Stevens, at this sort of thing. You boast you know women, an' don't know that she told the truth. You haven't trailed with her kind. Would a man have two hideouts like that? You told me the truth—on your honor?"

"On my honor," said Kitty.

"That's something you may not understand, never havin' had any of your own," sneered Swenson at Stevens. "But it's good enough for me. Whiting got clear somehow. You saw that skeleton alongside. I'm saying he got clear and we'll

find what's left of him somewhere about. In a cave, likely. Where he is, the pearls are. Come on."

"I'm not going on such a fool's errand."

"Then stay behind and be damned to you! Glad you brought some *kanakas* with you from Suva, Lyman. They are goin' to come in mighty handy for me, choppin' bush. You four have got the run below of this hulk. Hatches will be guarded and so will the skylight. If you try any funny stuff it'll be boarded over."

"What about my men?" demanded Jim. "You said they were not all traitors."

"One of 'em's got a busted head. Another one, a wild Irishman, had to be choked before he quit. Your mate's thrown in with us. Your engineer was put out of business with a broken arm. The steward and the squareheads have been my men for two weeks or more. As to the other man you left aboard, Cheng was going to give him a chance, but I heard a shot or two fired; mebbe you did. I don't much imagine you'll see him again. I'll send the cripples below for you to take care of."

He stamped out of the stateroom into the main cabin with Stevens, and up the companionway to the deck. Stevens lingered to give a look malicious and evil before he disappeared.

"You're hurt badly." Kitty had come to Jim's side. There was a break in her voice that acted upon him as an elixir.

"I'm all right," he managed to say, but the girl had touched his head and found blood. She went back into the stateroom and ripped at the sheets but they shredded under her hands. With a shrug of petulance she closed the door behind her and came out in a moment with some strips of sheer linen. This she bound about Jim's head despite his protest.

"The others will need it more than I do," he said.

"I don't agree with you," Kitty answered almost sharply. "We'll attend to them as soon as they let us have them."

"Here they come now," said Newton. The companionway opened and their wounded men were delivered to them, roughly and gruffly, Neilson and Vogt acting as two of the bearers.

Sanders had a broken arm from manhandling. Walker was insensible, with a skull that seemed as if it might be fractured. Moore, too, was unconscious. He had put up a notable fight, it seemed. His clothes were torn to rags, his face a mass of contusions; his neck showed black bruises and his naked torso was smeared with blood. Jim was hard put to it to keep his hands off Neilson and Vogt, whose sullen pose was not proof against the steady look of disdain the two women bestowed upon them. Stevens lolled in the entrance, gun in hand.

"You'll get fed tonight," he said. "Sorry you've lost your cook. Treat me right and I'll reciprocate. The skipper's by way of being a woman-hater. I'm not. You may see me later. He won't have any women aboard ship. That's where I differ from him, if they're reasonably attractive. It would be a shame to leave you ladies on the island and tha's what the skipper intends to do, for his own protection. Think it over."

His eyes bulged and he pressed trigger as Jim leaped for him, stumbling backward up the ladder as he saw his shot had missed. Jim caught him by the ankle, but two of Swenson's men had flung themselves upon him, for his own safety, since Stevens dared not fire again for fear of hitting them. Instead, Stevens scuttled up the companionway through the hatch and the two flung Jim to the floor where he lay panting. The rest left, and the companion hatch was closed. The evil face of Stevens looked down through the skylight. They heard him give orders to shoot on suspicion.

"You make a move that looks phony," he shouted down, "and we'll finish you. Meantime, starve and be damned to you!"

The shifting sunlight showed that soon they would be again in comparative darkness. The ports were undoubtedly crusted tight; leaves masked them. The only light would be what filtered down through the natural shaft and the skylight. Their schooner—if they could believe Swenson and the shots they had heard—was sunk. Wood was killed. Three, aside from Jim, were badly injured. Sanders and Walker needed medical treatment. Their chief jailer was a cruel beast; the main villain, Swenson, meant to leave them stranded on the island. He had gone to seek Kitty Whiting's father. If he found him alive, Swenson and his men would indubitably possess the pearls. They were helpless, almost hopeless, prisoners. Jim went about with clenched teeth and a jut-

ting jaw trying to do something for the injured men. It was stifling in the cabin and they had no water. To beg it from Stevens would only provoke mockery. Sanders' arm had to be set. The Scot sat with his face chalky in the gloom, hanging on to himself.

"They jumped us, you see," he said huskily. "That dirty dog of a Neilson and Vogt. Cracked Walker with a blackjack or something and there were three on my back at once. I think Moore tackled half a dozen. They grabbed our arms so we couldn't shoot. They were hiding back of the deckhouses. Tried to warn—you—but . . ." He closed his eyes and set his teeth into his lips.

"Lie down," ordered Jim, himself with a blinding headache. "We'll fix you up. Newton, I want you."

They went exploring and found a cabin where the two bunks had decent mattresses that were not too badly moulded. They took their undershirts and made them into bandages, then, with the aid of the broken pieces of the panel that Swenson had smashed, Jim managed a splint, feeling fairly sure that he had the ends of the broken upper arm in place. They put Sanders in the top bunk, carried Walker to the lower.

Kitty and Lynda had vanished into the room that connected with Captain Avery's. They came back to the main cabin triumphant.

"It was stupid of me not to think of it before," said Kitty. "The ship's medicine chest! I knew where dad kept it, with the extra drugs. We broke the lock. There are bandages but they are pretty rotten. Some of the medicines, like iodine, have dried up but there is permanganate, and—" she hesitated—"some other things. We must cleanse that head-wound of Walker's and do the best we can for poor Moore."

"Without water?"

"I think I can get some water."

"Not from those brutes."

"I'll trade it. For liquor. I'm not demented. There was always a supply in the lazarette locker back of the starboard cabin where I got the medicine."

"See here, Kitty, if you tell them there is any of that stuff aboard," broke in Newton, "they'll take it all. You know what that means with beasts like Stevens. We haven't any weapons."

"I have," said Kitty. "A woman's weapons, and I am going to use them for the sake of our wounded men. I may find a way out for all of us. I want you and Jim to force the hasp on the locker. Lynda and I are not strong enough for that. But we have our wits about us."

"Lyman, you're not going to let her get that stuff?"

"I have more confidence in her weapons than you have, Newton," said Jim. "We're in a tight place and Miss Kitty realizes that as well as we do. Come along."

Newton went reluctantly with Lynda. Kitty, hanging behind, thanked Jim for his backing. "There is no necessity for the 'Miss'," she whispered. "I am calling you Jim. You'll trust me in this? Not ask me how I intend to do it? Lynda knows and approves."

"Of course." But Jim wondered. There was an almost tragic note to her talk. They broke the hasp and brought out a dozen bottles—one of brandy, three of whisky, the rest port and sherry.

"If you are figuring on making them drunk——?" started Newton.

"I am not," the girl answered. "Leave me a torch please, and go into the main cabin with Jim. Lynda will stay here with me. We've got to open these. I don't want to break them."

"Those chaps up there have got a nose for booze a mile off," said Newton. "I could do with a slug myself." Jim took his own knife and Newton's and eased out the corks before they left. Soon the two women come out with some of the bottles.

"I am to do the talking," Kitty whispered, then called up through the skylight, "Mr. Stevens."

Immediately the leering face appeared.

"Well. Seeing the light, little lady?"

"Will you let us have some water—for the wounded men?"

Stevens laughed.

"I might. What will you trade for a pint of it—say in kisses."

Kitty put out a hand to grip Jim's arm without looking at him. Instinctively she seemed to know that he was quivering with blind rage.

"I'll need more than that," she said, her voice unfaltering. "Give me a gallon of water and I'll give you a quart of brandy."

"Brandy?"

"I knew where my father kept a bottle for emergencies. I just found it."

"Pass it up." Stevens' voice was hoarse from eagerness.

"No. Send down the water first, or I'll smash the bottle."

"Don't do that. I'll bring the water."

"Let it down. Then you may come."

"If he comes into this cabin to start drinking," said Jim in a tense whisper, "I'll not answer for myself. I——"

"Sh!" He felt her fingertips on his lips. "It will not matter. Trust me."

The water came down in a demijohn, lukewarm, cloudy stuff, but water. Jim unfastened it from the cord and took it to the cabin where Sanders and Walker lay. Moore, on the transom, was slowly beginning to come back to consciousness. The companion hatch slid back, letting in more light, and Stevens came running down.

"No tricks now," he said. "I trusted you. Where——? Ah, you're a sport! This is the real stuff."

He tilted the bottle at his mouth and drank greedily.

"Just the one bottle?" he asked between gulps.

"There is some wine. I thought the men . . ." Kitty had purposely spoken loudly. Heads appeared above. "One of you can come down and get it," she said. "Only one. You'll have about a bottle apiece. Hurry."

An unshaven villain came clattering down and stacked up the wine in his arms, returning shouting to his comrades.

"You're a cunning little devil," said Stevens, and his voice sounded drowsy. "Thought you said only one? Here's to your bright eyes—to your red lips—to—to——"

He pitched forward to the floor.

On deck the men were shouting ribald toasts to each other. They heard nothing, suspected nothing.

"Drugged?" whispered Jim.

"Chloral in the brandy," she answered. "I don't know how much. I hope I've killed him," she said with a fierceness Jim had never credited her with. "The wine has morphine in it. I crushed the pellets. Quick, get his gun. Newton, here's the whisky. It is all right. Give some to the boys. Get it down Walker's throat." Newton went off with the bottle. Jim knelt to get the automatic and the belt with its holster and cartridges, buckling it about him.

"You are wonderful," he said to Kitty.

"I think you have been too," she said. And he knew that in the stress of danger and trouble all suggestions of caste and difference had been removed. Kitty and Lynda mixed water with permanganate crystals and bathed Walker's head and Moore's cuts and abrasions. The whisky had brought them back.

"Where the divvle am I? Who's singin'?" said Moore.

The men were roaring snatches of songs. The morphine had lost virtue or was slow to act. Walker, revived, was still confused.

"They busted in my nut," he said. "Oh, Gawd, it's split in 'arf."

"Buck up," said Newton. "Have another swig of this." Jim checked him.

"Not too much," he cautioned.

"Then I will." Already Newton's breath smoked with the stuff and his speech was thick.

"Take it away from him," said Kitty. "You need some yourself."

"Not in this weather."

"Lynda and I are going to have a little, to make the water drinkable. Give me the bottle, Newton."

"Where's the other? Hang it, Kitty, that stuff puts new life in you."

"You've had enough," said Jim sternly. "We don't want to pack you." His disgust showed plainly. Newton muttered and subsided. The diluted drink that Kitty mixed ran through their veins with swift reaction that cheered them. Above the singing had died down.

"I'm going on deck," said Jim. "To get their weapons. We'll tie them up."

"If they're alive. Do you suppose I've really killed them? It is murder. I was desperate. Stevens, the beast, was different. I'm not sorry for him if he *is* dead. But——"

"I'll see," said Jim. "I don't think you need reproach yourself." He saw she was shaking with revulsion. Lynda took her in her arms. "You haven't killed Stevens, anyway," Jim added. "Chloral is the same as knockout drops. He's breathing all right. He'll come out of it after a few hours. I'll get him out of here, if the rest are drugged. Newton, I'll want your help. Step quietly." Newton staggered a little, but braced himself and followed Jim up the companion ladder. On deck, in the queer twilight of the jungle they saw five men sprawled on the planks amid the wreckage and the vines, arms flung wide. One or two twitched in their stupor as they cautiously approached. They secured two pistols from the nearest with another cartridge belt. Jim had reached for a rifle leaning against the skylight when Newton gave a cry of warning, and a shot shattered the silence and a bullet sang

by Jim's head. A volley followed out of the bush through which men were crashing at top speed, aiming as they ran. Jim flung himself on deck with Newton to dodge the fusillade. Men were swarming up the bows of the ship, hidden by the screen of greenery and cordage, firing fast. The bullets whistled about them as they fled before the superior force. Swenson's bellow sounded as he forced his way aft with at least ten men back of him.

Jim and Newton heard him cursing as he surveyed his prostrate men while they slammed the hatch and returned to the alarmed women. Moore was on his feet, demanding a gun, Walker feebly struggling to get out of his bunk. Swenson's thunderous oaths continued as he swore at his fallen men. He seemed to be kicking them and the emptied bottles. The others pounded at the hatch that had jammed again. Jim shouted up.

"The first man that shows a head will be shot. We've got their guns and plenty of shells, Swenson."

There was silence then Swenson suddenly guffawed.

"Tricked again!" he shouted and seemed to take delight in the fact. "Drugged! I bet the girl thought of that, Lyman. Have you got Stevens down there?"

"What there is of him."

"The blighted fool. Damn me, but it was smartly done. Look here, I want to have a talk with you. I've a proposition to make. You've got guns. I'll come down without any. I'll trust you for a truce. What do you say? We'll make a deal."

"Shall we?" asked Kitty in an undertone.

"He can't hurt any. Come on, Swenson. You shall have a drink of whisky. We've got plenty of stuff that isn't drugged. Canned goods, too, for grub."

Kitty gave a start.

"There may be, at that," she whispered. "I know where they are stored. Right under our feet, above the bilge."

"Prepared for a siege, are you? How about water? But I'll go you, providing you sample the liquor. Pete, you take charge here. Souse those drugged fools. Walk 'em up and down. Kick sense into 'em."

"Only you," warned Jim.

"All right, my fox. Lyman, you're a wise one and you've a wiser head with you in that girl of yours. I'm coming."

They could barely see each other in the cabin as Swenson, with a great show of heartiness and good humor, took his drink without asking for a test.

"Wouldn't pay you to drug me, more ways than one," he said. "Now, then, I've come back from that wild-goose chase. It 'ud take a month to search this island. I'm going to leave that to you. Your *kanakas* gave us the slip in the bush somewhere. They may come back after we're gone.

"We're going, I reckon. I've struck a better idea than trying for the pearls. That's too big a gamble and this is a certainty." He chuckled and took a pull at the bottle. "Don't know why I didn't think of it before. I'm going to leave you all, maybe. It depends. I want to ask a question and I want the little lady here, Miss Whiting, to answer it. On her honor, again. If my information is correct, and I haven't missed much of what has happened, you gave out the figures of this island's position to no one. Lyman here advised you not to. You kept this book in a safety deposit, then mailed it to Honolulu? I haven't got much use for women, Miss Whiting, but I take my hat off to you for pluck and cleverness. What I want to know is, does any one outside of those aboard your *Seamew* know those figures? Does Stephen Foster, father of this young sprig here, know? Has he, to your knowledge, any means of learning them since you sailed?"

Jim started. Swenson and Foster were not in collusion. His suspicions of the millionaire were unfounded.

"Wait a minute, Kitty," he said. "Before you answer that, let him tell you how he got his information."

"I don't mind that, young cock of the walk," returned Swenson, setting down the bottle that he had finished, half empty as it was. "Open up another from your cellar, and I'll tell you. Damn my eyes if you haven't earned that much." The

whisky had mellowed him, that and his propensity to brag. "It's simple as A. B. C. I won't see any of you again. After I've collected my half million, I shall disappear to a freer country than the U.S.A., hidebound by prohibition and blue law cranks. I'll leave no trail. I'll be far afield by the time you are home again.

"I'm a sworn enemy to restrictions of liberty, my friends. When they tried to cut off my liquor and that of other good

men they trod on my personal rights. There were a lot of others felt the same way. We got together after a while and we became friends of liberty. Rum-running, not to put too fine a name to it. Bound together in an organization that will keep the sleuths jumping like fleas on a kerosened dog. Coast to coast. Top of Maine to bottom of Florida. Cape Cod to the Golden Gate! Over seas! And under 'em.

"I wasn't one of the smallest links in that chain. I had my own territory, savvy? All Massachusetts was mine as head of that ring. And I could call on the other bosses. I handled as good stuff as this, at a profit and at some risk, I grant you that. That's why I'm going to get out of it.

"That place you found me at, Lyman, belongs to a gent who is a good friend of mine. His only fault is that he must have his liquor regularly and often. He's got the same trouble as young Newton here. I've sold young Newton many a quart, only he don't know it. He got it through his father's chauffeur, one of our sub-agents in Foxfield, one of the lower-downs, same as I am one of the higher-ups. Now the plots thickens, eh? Gets close to home. I'm going to get closer. You next, Miss Whiting.

"You've got a maid, had one, who is a love-sick fool. She's got some money saved and that chauffeur of Foster's has been kidding her to get the handling of it. Let her talk marriage and a little home and borrowed a hundred every now and then. Savvy? She worships the ground he walks on, when he does walk. He's a good-looking devil, younger than she is, a fast worker with the girls, a persuader. She told him everything she knew. That time she went for a walk, when you thought she might have heard something, she phones him as soon as he has taken Old Man Foster home. And he, being a wise young feller, knowin' I was by way of bein' a seafaring man, phones me long-distance. It listens fine to me. I'd heard and read about the *Golden Dolphin,* you see. Later that night he phones me again that Lyman here is coming to talk things over with Foster's old man and bring the figures.

"So I tell him to get some of his pals with a car that we've used for shifting the booze. That's as far as I have to go. I got Lyman. Lyman took a long chance and went overboard. You know all that. I got the rest of your talks via the same route before I started for Panama and Honolulu. I was pretty sure then you'd call at Suva, but I wanted to make sure. I thought by that time young Newton here might have got on to the figures and Stevens pumped him. It's dry work talking. You can figure out the rest of it. Simple enough. I knew when Lyman slipped off he'd given me the wrong position. Guessed he had from the first when I meant to take him along. There you are, miss; there's my end of it. How about my answer? I don't know what you may have wired or written back."

"On my honor and to the best of my belief," said Kitty, "Mr. Foster knows nothing of the figures."

"Good. Then here's my proposition. They say a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, but I've got one bird here in the bush that is worth a whole lot more to me than a chance scramble after pearls. Young Foster's father made a small mint out of blankets and such like with his mills during the war. Now's his chance to help equalize things again. I don't know how high he values Newton here. I'm setting half a million on him as a minimum. Personally I wouldn't give a plugged nickel for him. I've got him sized up as a lightweight, but his daddy may consider him the apple of his eye and fruit's expensive in my market. He's all the old man's got and folks are foolish about their kids. Seem to figure because they are theirs they must be wonderful. I'm goin' to give Stephen Foster a chance to prove up on his love and affection. If folks was as wise as the dog-breeders they'd kill off all the runts soon as they were born. Old Man Foster has made a show dog out of his boy here. Not bad looking on points, I grant you, but a wise judge would give him the gate. Same as you have, miss.

"So—I go away and leave you on the island. Cheng scuttled your schooner an' she's at the bottom of the lagoon. I'm goin' to take your landing boats with me. Three of my men and Cheng have gone across the island to get the *Shark* an' bring her round here. Tomorrow morning we'll be off. Month or more from now, I get in communication with Stephen Foster and offer to sell him the position of this island so he can send out a relief expedition to take you all off. That won't cost him much more than a cable to Suva and your passage home. Just so he won't think I'm pulling his leg, I'll take him a note from you, young Foster, telling him

how you feel about bein' cooped up here for the rest of your natural."

Newton, sharing drinks with Swenson, growing more surly at the depreciation of his merits by the rum-running blackguard, sat sullen and silent.

"Better get busy, young feller," said Swenson. "You can use the fly leaf of one of those books, that'll be convincing evidence. If I'd thought of all this I'd have brought a camera along and taken a flashlight of the crowd of you. But the book 'll help. I'll loan you a pencil."

"What if I don't?"

"Ah!" The exclamation wiped out all the good-natured banter from Swenson's face. It grew evil, repulsive. "If you don't? For one thing you'll stay here, anyway. Maybe to rot. Maybe not. This old hulk would make a rare bonfire. Keep your hand off your gun, Lyman. I've come unarmed. Shoot me and you can imagine what would happen to you—and to the ladies. You're inside this hulk and my men are out. You haven't got any water to speak of, don't forget that. Now it's up to young Foster and I want it settled. His father bunked the government out of the money he rolled up on war contracts. Half a million don't mean any more to him than a hundred would to most men. It'll hurt him a little, like taking off a patch of skin might. But the graft 'll save his son from a life down here. Lucky it ain't you, Lyman; you'd be apt to be contented with the lady here. Regular Paradise for two. But not for the rest of you. What d'you say, Foster?"

"Give me your pencil."

Swenson chuckled and took another drink as Newton got a book from the shelves that had the name of Captain Avery and his ship on the fly leaf and began to write. Swenson finally read it aloud.

My dear father:

Swenson will tell you his story. I write this in the cabin of the *Golden Dolphin* to corroborate this much of his story. The *Seamew* is sunk; we have no boats and the trip has fizzled out. The pearls are not on board. So far there is no trace of Captain Whiting. If you do not meet Swenson's blackmail I see nothing for it but for us to stay on this damned place until we die.

One man of ours has been killed; three more are badly hurt; Lyman is injured. Otherwise, we are all well, so far. To check Swenson's figures I give them to you. For God's sake, pay the blackmail and get us out of here.

Affectionately,
Newton R. Foster.

"You write a cheerful letter, but you use better sense than I thought you had," said Swenson. "That touch about the figures is a shrewd one but you haven't put them down. Otherwise it's a grand little note."

"What are the figures, Lyman?"

Lyman gave them and Newton wrote them in long hand. Jim sat with head between his hands. His head throbbed abominably and he was weighed down by sense of failure. If the *Seamew* had not been sunk he was confident he could have got off the *Golden Dolphin*. Now . . . If only he had not been taken in by Cheng. Wood had been murdered in cold blood with Cheng, Wiltz, and Hamsun against him. And, by the irony of fate, it had been Wiltz who had warned Jim against Cheng before the wily Oriental won him over by a golden bait.

"Thanks," said Swenson dryly as he pocketed the book. "That ought to make it worth three-quarters of a million, at least. The pearls would not have brought that at a forced sale, and my men will want their shares. Also the hounds that came over from you, Lyman. Any of the rest of you like to add anything to the note? No? Nothing I can do for you?

"Eh, Lyman? You seem downhearted. Fortune of war. It's checkmate this time. No message I can deliver for you? To the widowed mother? Shall I have your engagement announced in the Foxfield *Gazette* society column?"

"Damn you," said Lyman. "I may beat you home yet!" Swenson laughed. "There are two things you could do for me. One is to get out of here before I give you another clip like the one I did off Cuttyhunk. The other is to give me two minutes with Cheng—barehanded."

"I'm going. As for Cheng, he had some idea of that sort, I think. Anyway, he elected to go with the others to fetch the *Shark*. We'll be here the rest of today and tonight, so don't try to interfere by coming on deck. You might get shot. I wish you good meals and pleasant dreams. Thanking you for the whisky."

He put the second bottle in another pocket, lifted the limp body of Stevens with infinite ease, though with utter disregard

for the man's comfort, and went up on deck where they heard him fling down the drugged body and roar out reproof and orders to his men.

THE day dragged. Walker grew delirious and Jim gave him a hypodermic of morphine. He did not think the skull was fractured but he could not be sure. Moore was swathed in makeshift bandages and adhesive plaster but full of fight. But the assurance that they would have to expose themselves to the fire of Swenson and his men bit into all of them. Newton helped to forage and they found cans of meat and even fruit, unspoiled. They roamed the hull and made many useful discoveries, including oil sufficient to fill one container, and an unbroken chimney.

Toward dark, following a glare of afterglow high above them, a mass of heavy timbers was thrown across the skylight bars, suddenly shrouding them in blackness. Swenson's voiced called down through a crack.

"You might start some monkey business, after dark, Lyman. I don't quite trust you. The hatches are battened. After we're gone tomorrow you can break your way through this. Meantime, pleasant dreams."

All through the smothering night they stayed awake, save for the sick men, who dozed off—Walker still under the merciful drug. And Lyman discussed plans.

"If the *kanakas* come back to us—and they may—" he said, "I can get them to dive to the *Seamew;* the depth is nothing for them. The hatches will be blown off. They can carry down a line and haul out the thick hawser. We'll get this old hulk to sea. We can't raise the schooner. That's beyond us."

"But you can float this?" Newton's contribution was an open sneer.

"We can try."

"How?" asked Kitty.

"Tide and sun. The lagoon's on a lower level. We'll clear away the bush—burn it if we have to. We'll secure the end of the hawser on the reef and take up the slack with the windlass aboard. At high tide most of it will be covered. We'll soak the rest by hand. As it takes in water it'll shrink. Hydraulic power that will test the breaking point of the rope. We may have to dig out, but it can be done. It'll move the *Golden Dolphin,* by inch and foot and fathom. At low tide the sun will make the hawser slacken. Then we take up the slack again. If only the hull is sound! And I believe it is."

"Oh!" said Kitty, a world of admiration in her voice. "I've seen the halyards tighten in a squall so that we had to let them up and take them up again when the sun and wind dried them. Taut as fiddle strings. Will the hawser stand the strain?"

"I think so. There was a bark dragged two miles across the sands up in Hecate Strait, British Columbia. It wasn't my idea. While we're working, and waiting on the tide, the others can search the island for your father."

"Yes. You know I'm still certain that he is alive. Sure of it. Sure."

The morning found them without water. The sufferers had used it all. Their watches gave them the time by the light of the lamp. Newton Foster had been steadily drinking.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Kitty. "When we need all your manhood."

"'F you get off this dump it'll be because my father comes through with a fortune," he answered sulkily. "Not from any schemes of Lyman's. Fine mess he's made of things, so far."

On deck a bustle began. A voice hailed from the bush and Swenson answered. Then he pounded on the skylight covering.

"*Shark's* arrived. Good-by. If you hustle you may get out in time to wave to us."

Scuff of feet and then silence. They had found the rusted carpenter's kit and two axes. Jim swung at the skylight barrier with crashing blows, standing on the cabin table. Newton, fuddled and surly, slumped on the transom. Moore tried to assist, but had no strength. Kitty seized the other axe and helped to strike and pry, Lynda relieving her. Jim wormed through the exit they achieved and Kitty handed him up the axe. With it he freed the companionway hatch, blocked by baulks of wood angled against it and across it. The two women came up.

Above the jungle shaft the sky was gray, the treetops bending in a strong wind. All the bush shivered before the myriad tiny draughts of air that were forced through its mass from the sea.

"It looks like a storm," said Lynda.

"Probably a downpour of rain," said Jim. "They've gone. The wind's onshore. They'll be aboard by this time, but they'll not have got far off the land yet, sailing

close-hauled. Let's get to the beach." Newton came on deck.

"Moore says he can look after Sanders and Walker," he said. "Going down to the beach?" Nobody answered him.

"I should have stayed off that liquor," he said. "But the stuff gets me whenever it's round. There's a tug inside of me pulling for it. I've got to apologize all round, I suppose. I'm trying to do it. Swenson wasn't far out. I'm not worth more than a plugged nickel. All I can do is to be sorry." The women did not answer. Jim did.

"I guess that's enough, Newton," he said. "We've all been strung up. Let's forget it."

"That scheme of yours about the *Golden Dolphin?* Will it work?"

"I think so, but it will take weeks."

"How about masts and sails? How about a compass?"

"There are trees that would do at a pinch. We couldn't build a seaworthy ship from them green, but they'll serve for sticks. We can weave matting for sails. I know the stars well enough to get us back to Suva before a sternwind, as it would be."

"You've got the stiffening I lack, Lyman," said Newton. "I——There they go, damn them."

They had broken through the edge of the bush to the beach and saw the *Shark,* close-hauled, beyond the tumbling breakers of the reef, clawing her way out to sea. Her canvas showed white against the slate-hued sky, where lightning was beginning to flicker. The sea was a tawny yellow. To the north a great black cloud lifted and grew, out of which javelined streaks of electric flame. The wind was strong. The sun struggled through masses of rolling vapor.

"I wish a hurricane would fling them ashore," said Newton.

"It's going to be a bad rain, nothing

worse. *Look out there, coming round the point.* See them! *War canoes.* Get back out of sight. There are hundreds of them!"

They found a hillock up which they struggled through the vines and trees, peering from their point of vantage that gave them clear view across the tumultuous reef. The sun shone on first one, then another and another—five all told—great curving sails, double peaked, lifting above catamaran craft of lashed canoes with outriggers, each carrying a platform and a small deckhouse of thatched grass. They came sliding over the ocean at incredible speed to cut off the *Shark.* Lower canoes and decks were close packed with savages, some paddling furiously in the wash of the canoes, though they could not have aided progress. Others brandished weapons that glinted in the pale sunshine at spearhead and arrowtip. The canoes were high-prowed and pooped, carved and inlaid with shell that occasionally winked in the light. The bows were decked with streamers. The wind bore a faint sound of savage yells.

"Fifty men, at least, to each canoe," said Jim. "Three more coming. Must be a whole tribe. The *Shark's* doomed."

Flashes of guns showed from the rail of the schooner as the canoes raced up, and the big sails came down while the paddlers dug in their blades. Flights of arrows answered the firing. Then came detonations. A canoe seemed to break in half in a sheet of flame. Swenson was tossing dynamite. They could see his men at the rail, flinging the explosive, firing pistols, then driven back by the horde that poured in upon them, twenty—thirty to one. Cries and shouts blended. With the helmsman clubbed, the *Shark* swung off and wallowed in the trough, the wind slanting her until it seemed she would capsize. Then the canvas flapped loose, the sheets cut, and the mainsail came down with a run. Over its folds men moved, fighting like frantic ants. The yells changed to cries of unmistakeable triumph. The canoes formed on the lee of the stricken schooner, refilling with men. Bodies in white clothing were handed down. The canoes forged off; smoke rolled out of the hatch of the *Shark,* smoke shot with flame that licked at the sails and rigging, enveloping the ill-fated ship.

The watchers had not noticed the increasing darkness in the horror of the massacre. They saw the canoes disappearing around the headland, stroked hard, the great sails still furled. The wind had suddenly ceased, and out of the swollen black cloud came down a deluge that blotted out everything and drenched them to the skin in a

moment. They struggled back to the stranded hulk as if to an ark of refuge. The barricade over the skylight was some protection and over the apertures they hung scraps of old canvas and tarpaulin before they went below, listening to the torrent battering on the deck, seeing and hearing again the sudden horrors of the massacre.

It was hard to hear speech. The lamp was a comfort.

"They may come ashore?" asked Kitty. Jim shook his head.

"I think not. Not unless they are wrecked. They came from the other island. They must have watched the schooners arrive and come over in the night."

"Then they would know there were two ships."

"They may have only noticed ours.

"They may have seen the *Seamew* sunk, and thought no one but the survivors of a white man's feud left. I believe there's a tapu of some sort on this island. Or there would be natives living here. And I'm almost certain none are."

He spoke bravely. He did think that the island must be tapued, but the dread of a visitation from the cannibal canoes would be ever with them. With Walker raving, the lamp failing, the rain pelting down like lead, the intolerable heat and the memory of the flaming ship, their souls were blanched with despair.

VIII

UDANWAGA

IT WAS long before the memory of the massacre dimmed sufficiently for them to go about without the dread of a landing overshadowing them. The cry of a parrot would seem the yell of a savage sighting them, the rustle of a wild pig in the bush the rush of a spear-flinging warrior. But time seemed to bear out Jim Lyman's theory and they came to accept the idea that the island might be tapu.

The five Fijians came back to the stranded hull the day after the rain with many protestations of fealty and proclamations that they "had been make walk-along but mighty soon make getaway and come back." Through them Jim recovered the hawser from the *Seamew*. With their aid as expert surfmen he recovered a lot of tackle from the half burned remnant of the *Shark*, impaled on the reef. They got her foremast, also, and some provisions. But her boats were burned or smashed. So the long task of clearing the way for the launching of the *Golden Dolphin* commenced and slowly progressed. The bush was burned and cleared with infinite labor after an examination had shown the planking sound. A trench was dug beneath her keel and the accumulated soil removed. At last the hawser was attached, and the trial made. With much groaning of protest the pull of the hawser, half drenched by the rising tide, half soaked by a handchain of buckets, tautened; the hull creaked, moved a stubborn prow, stopped, moved on again, almost imperceptibly, but nevertheless moving, a full two feet to one tide.

Jim delegated two kanakas to accompany Kitty, and Lynda in the untiring search over the island for some trace of habitation; some clew that her father might have lived there, and be in hiding, perhaps for fear of savages. Burnt as brown as a native, with limbs scratched and bruised from struggle through the bush, the girl preserved, and one day came back with tidings, though not of her father. She refused to think of him in the grim connection she had uncovered.

There was a stone causeway half hidden in the bush, an ancient road with some of its mighty flags upheaved but still passable. It led straight up, with steps here and there, to the summit of a flat hill where there stood a pyramid of faced stone, and on its top an altar of three stones, like those of Stonehenge. It seemed placed so as to receive the first rays of the rising sun and allow them to pass through an opening in the pillars. Beneath the flat top was a block of lava that in turn held a stone chalice. Whatever was placed in this cup must bathe in the sunbeams. The bottom of the pyramid was a charnel house of bones; ribs, pelvis, skull, leg, and arm-bones, flung pell mell. The stone cup was black with sinister stain that had splashed and dripped all about.

Some of the bones, most of them, were bleached and disarticulate. Others bore unmistakeable signs of comparative recent dumping. They were unbleached, hair clinging to the scalps, grisly details of a not too thorough cleansing of tendon and sinew. That the flesh had been stripped by man and not decay, was hinted by the ground at the back of the pyramid showing plainly the signs of fires, of firepits where sacrificial meats were wrapped in leaves, and steamed on hot stones, after the sacred portions had been offered to the gods.

Yet nowhere could they find actual signs

of very recent visitation. The land was fair, the sea full of fish, the bush of fruit and wild pigs. Here and there the girl came across crumbling stone platforms built on ledges, the foundations of grass houses long vanished; vanished long before some of those skeletons had been flung down by the priests, in Jim's opinion. A pestilence, a hurricane, a tidal wave greater than that which flung the *Golden Dolphin* ashore might well have made the place tapu. There might be an occasional pilgrimage from the other island to placate the gods.

He tried to turn the discovery into a certain sign of immunity, but it was hard to be convincing. From that day on someone stood watch on a high point that commanded the channel between their island and the next. They stored provisions in a cave where fresh water dripped, and where they might make a valiant stand, and prayed that they might get away before any canoes appeared in sight. There were days when the tortured cable threatened to break, when a sunken rock rose up beneath the keel and had to be dug away laboriously. But, foot by foot, and fathom by fathom, as Jim had predicted, the hull crept closer to the lagoon.

They made numerous repairs. They worked with increasing vigor as the sick men mended. Sanders and Walker, his cracked pate sound again with the exception of violent, but decreasing, spells of headache, sewed on jury sails made from scraps of the *Shark's* tattered canvas, or spliced ropes. The foremast was made ready for sloop rig, shears prepared to hoist it into place, the broken rudder repaired, with Jim Lyman hardest worker and foreman of them all, unceasing in vigor and determination to overcome all obstacles. He was the idol of the Fijian boys, who called him in their own language The-Quick-Thinking-Strong-Armed-White-One, a title that Kitty made him translate and kept secret for her own edification.

THE year rolled slowly round. December came and found the *Golden Dolphin* thirty yards from high tide. Jim began to talk of a launching by Christmas. Then one day Moore, whose turn it was at the lookout, came racing down with evil news. A flotilla of canoes was in the channel, winging toward the island. He had counted ten craft and figured they would arrive by noon. With one impulse they rushed to the lookout and saw the dread confirmation of all their fears, after long weeks of labor, with victory almost in sight.

To fight off the landing of so many

scores of warriors would be impossible. They had already seen how little they cared for gunfire. To retreat to the cave, to trust that the *Golden Dolphin* might be overlooked, was their only hope—and a slight one. The ship stood out on the beach, visible from the reef entrance. The sight of it surely meant a swift search all over the island, with destruction of the precious ship as the least of calamities. The best they might do was not to be taken alive.

They stayed until the canoes, profusely decorated, streaming over the quiet sea, were lost to sight behind the headland of the landing bay, then hurried with their weapons to the cave. From it they could view, through a gap in the jungle, a section of the stone causeway. In the entrance they waited with grim fortitude, resolved to give stern account of themselves, to die as white men and white women should. Kitty, of her own accord, stood close by Jim. He smiled at her and she smiled back wanly.

"At the last, Jim, you won't leave me alone?" He shook his head, not trusting himself to speak.

Suddenly they heard shouts. The canoes had landed. Then, to their surprise, a mighty chanting mingled with the beat of drums, the shrilling of flutes and the belching roar of conch shells. Whatever the reason for the visit it was stronger than the curiosity that the inevitable sight of the ship set out upon the beach must have excited. The sounds came nearer, mounting. There was a procession coming up the causeway to the hill of sacrifice. Their discovery was delayed. Some vital ceremonial was forward.

They waited breathlessly. They had brought binoculars with them on their first landing and Jim trained the glass on the strip of causeway. They could have picked off some of the savages with rifles but to commence a fight was to invite annihilation. The music, if such barbaric rhythm might be so termed, grew steadily louder. The leaders of the procession

came into view, weird, leaping fantastic figures of naked men who wore high headdresses of feathers fluttering on frames that extended five feet above their bushy hair, itself tied with strips of gaily colored fibre. They were striped and patched in red and white and yellow, their faces hideously daubed. Some had picked out in white their ribs and the bones of their arms and legs. On their necks and all their limbs were strings of shells and teeth. Each held a drum shaped like an enormous wooden stein on which they beat as they sprang and shouted.

Then came file after file of warriors, armed with spears and clubs, with bows and arrows, painted like the rest, leaping along in unison to the throbbing, screaming drum and whine and roar of the unseen orchestra.

He handed the glass to Kitty at her request.

"I wouldn't look at it, if I were you," he said.

"I'm not afraid of them," she said.

She slightly changed the focus of the glass. A litter came by, a platform borne by six enormous cannibals, so braced that it could easily be carried horizontally along the ramp. On it, beneath a canopy supported by poles, reclined a figure of commanding pose. His upper body seemed to be covered with light pigment, the lower was kilted with patterned cloth of native pounding from inner bark.

Jim heard an indrawn sigh from Kitty. The binoculars fell from her hands to the dust of the cave, and her face glowed with some strange ecstasy. Instinctively he put out his hand to restrain her but she swerved and leaped from the cave mouth to the tiny trail they had contrived. She flew down it with arms extended, sounding a glad, impossible cry of, *"Father! Father!"*

For a heart-beat Jim thought she was demented; then he raced to overtake her, gun in hand. The others followed. The procession had halted. The man in the litter was looking toward the direction of the voice that had reached him above the clamor. The music stopped at a lift of his hand. He spoke to the savages in a high, imperious voice. Kitty fled on the wings of love. For all his efforts Jim could not reach her before, light as a fawn, she broke through the mask of green that ended the trail and was out by the side of the litter, reaching up her arms, sobbing and laughing—*"Father! Father!"* And to Jim's amazement, the man stretched out his arms, and in a broken voice called back to her.

He ordered the litter carried aside and waved the astounded procession on and upward. They obeyed, casting half fearful glances at him, looks of chained hatred at the little group of whites, Lynda among

them, that gathered round the litter as the bearers set it down. Kitty was in her father's arms and they drew to one side as the files passed—rank upon rank of warriors, priests carrying a strange representation of a fish in wickerwork frame, painted red and black; then the musicians with conches and panpipes and larger drums slung between four carriers, two men beating. As they passed their white leader—for such he plainly was, if not their god—they started once more to play their savage instruments. The chant recommenced and they went on up the hill. Last of all came men bearing baskets in which was flesh, the carcases of pigs. Others carried giant yams. There was also another great wicker fish, red and black, toiling blindly along with two men inside of it, their spotted legs, red on black, showing strangely beneath the fetich.

Jim turned to Captain Avery and saw on his breast the same emblem, a fish tattoed in red and black.

I SAW my ship on the beach," said Captain Avery, "and I marveled. I thought it might have been the work of the men who were killed some months ago by the tribe—without my knowledge—though I wondered why they should have salvaged it. After the ceremonial I should have investigated, of course. But nothing is allowed to interfere with this sacrificial visit.

"This is the island of Lukuba. We came today from the island of Tudava where I am half chief, half god, the impersonation of Lono.

"The *Golden Dolphin* was flung up on Lukuba by a tidal wave from a marine earthquake. The islands are both volcanic. At intervals there are shocks; on Tudava an occasional eruption and overflow from a crater.

"I wrote you, Kitty, from Suva, that I feared trouble among my crew. It was ripe when the wave caught us up. After we were crashed down and found ourselves alive, they were still resolved to get the pearls that I had secreted in my cabin. I would not tell them where they were and they prepared to torture me after they had killed one man who tried to warn me of their coming.

"This island of Lukuba is slowly sinking into the sea. One time it sank twelve feet, with frightful landslides. Then the tribe deserted it. But, by the order of their priests, they visit it once a year to make sacrifice on their ancient altar to avert more disaster, for each shock affects both islands.

"The pilgrimage had landed just before the wave that carried us ashore. Terrified, they had seen nothing of our landing, flung through the jungle on the crest of a wild wave as we were. But returning, they heard the noise of our struggle, for my men were drunk and reckless. And they found me stripped, about to be tortured by fire. Had I not been naked they would not have seen the fish of Udangawa, the totem of their tribe, tattoed upon my chest.

"This was the totem of Mafulu, my blood-brother, part of the fraternity ceremonial. The tribes of the Pacific are far-flung. They break up and migrate, but their customs and their sanctities hold. They gazed at me almost in awe, and when I spoke to them in their own tongue, they fell down and worshipped me. The others they killed. I could not prevent that. And they sacrificed them to their gods—in their own way.

"Me they took back to Tudava, and as we crossed the channel the crater was spouting smoke and flame and a flow of lava smoked down toward their main village, firing the forests. Their priests made incantations, and at last they called upon me. It may have been coincidence or the holier manifestation of God, but when we reached the landing the flow stopped, the eruption ceased. It was attributed to my *mana,* the godlike power within me, the manifestation of Lono who wore the sacred badge of Undangawa, the fish from whom they were all descended. Had it not been prophesied that I should come?

"So I have lived with them and made laws for them and striven to make them wiser. Twice we have visited this island and I abolished the sacrifice of human flesh. I was ill with a fever when the flotilla left to take the strange craft they had sighted, or I would have forbidden it. For while they have given me all power, they are loath to loose me. I have had no chance to escape.

"When they came back that time with the corpses of white men in canoes almost swamped after two days and nights of paddling, bewildered by the rain and carried off-shore by the great waves following, I told them it was the anger of the gods against their act. And to think that ever since you must have been here!

"I have always told them I should leave them some day. They will not dispute me after this miracle of your presence. For I will threaten to bring back the volcanic fires that have not flowed since I came with them. You see my godship has been precarious. But—it ends well. And now, tell me your story."

JIM," said Captain Avery Whiting, as the *Golden Dolphin,* under a jury rig, bore sluggishly, but surely, on her way for Suva, while the peak of Lukuba—no longer beckoning—dimmed and diminished, "Lynda Warner tells me that you are in love with my daughter. She tells me also that Kitty is in love with you. I have told you what I think of your behavior. I have no son. I have often wanted one."

Jim stood silent, the two at the taffrail alone.

"Well?"

"Kitty is an heiress, sir. I——"

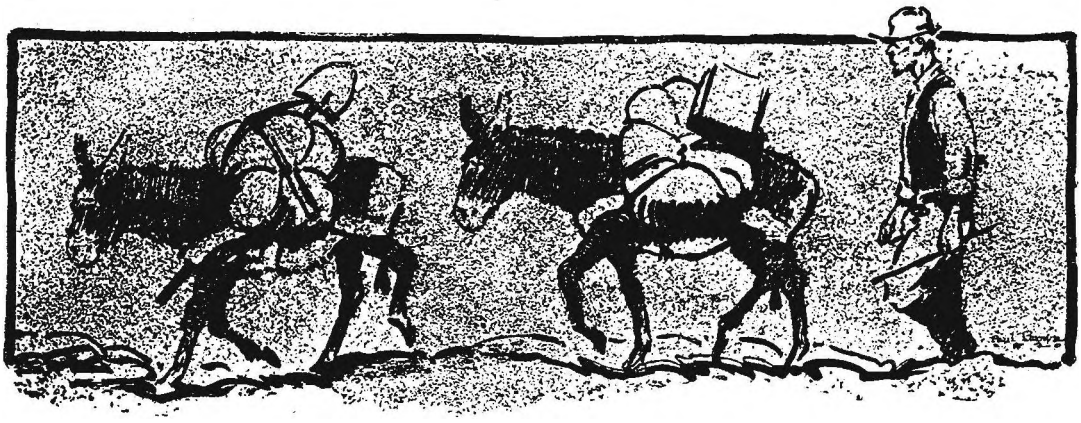
"You have a share in the pearls."

"If I must take that, it is to be divided with the others who stood by."

"Tut! You talk like a very young man sometimes, Jim. What are pearls? Would you deny Kitty for pearls? If that is what lies between you and her happiness I will fling them all overboard, and regret that I ever heard of them or brought them from the stranded *Golden Dolphin.* I am getting to be an old man, Jim. I had hoped to retire. Let me keep my pearls, or what they bring, for my old age. I may live long enough to see grandchildren. If so, I promise to let them be the inheritors. You see we are both talking foolishly and you are eaten up with a very false pride."

"Perhaps," said Jim, "I am willing to be convinced."

"Then go and talk to Kitty. She has bragged all along of your courage. Of late she must be beginning to doubt it. Wait—stay here and I will send her up to you."



A CROSS IN THE DESERT

By ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE

CONSIDER THE DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SIBILANT TONGUE OF GOSSIP. HERE IS A DESERT DRAMA OF KEENEST INTENSITY—THE BRIEF FLIGHT OF A GILA BOTTOM BUTTERFLY AND A VENGEANCE UNTHINKABLE

DOWN in the heart of the Yuma Desert—a place where no man ought to live and few do—is the most melancholy testimonial to mankind's mortality one could well conceive. It is a cross formed of round malapaise rocks laid end to end in the sand just below the lowermost water-hole of Tinajas Altas: a cross marking the grave of one who died there hideously.

My friend Sheriff Sid Smith of Yuma County showed me this cross the night we made camp at Tinajas Altas. In the smoke hour after the last flush of violet and lemon had stolen out of the west, Sheriff Sid hunkered down before the thin fire of *ocatilla* sticks and in the emotionless voice of the desert man he told me the story of Lil-lee the Mex girl, of Tootin Tuttle the old desert rat, her husband, and of that third whose sightless eyes I could feel straining to stare up at me through the thin covering of sand beneath the cross of rocks.

You must try to see this place, Tinajas Altas. A jagged crack in the great wall of the Gila Range running south through Arizona and across the line into Sonora; in this canyon the "tanks" or water-holes gouged out of the living rock by the occasional cloudbursts of eons of summers. Three of these natural cisterns, one above another and with the lowermost alone easy of approach. Tales are told of men found dead by this lowermost tank—drained dry by the sun—with their mummy hands sacrificed by their efforts to climb to the next above.

Once quit Tinajas Altas by the old Yuma-Caborca trail and you will not find water in either direction under sixty miles; no running water short of the Colorado mouth, a hundred miles to westward. At every compass point naught but a land withered in eternal sun-flare; the most parched and desolate stretch on our continent from Barren Grounds to Panama. Everywhere mountains appearing to have come fresh from the firing-oven of Creation and not yet cooled; between them stretches of incandescent sand; away down yonder a mirage dancing over the dead Gulf of California.

Before we bedded down, I say, I had the full story of that cross at Tinajas Altas. I wish the power was in me to render it to you in the sheriff's own words, with all his unconscious restraint over the high points and his inimitable trick of cramming pregnant thoughts into a dozen words. Failing that, I can only try to get over to you the feel of the drama as I caught it that night of wondrous starshine—that night when we and the man under the malapaise cross harkened to Sheriff Sid Smith.

IT is not our business to inquire into the motives which prompted Tootin Tuttle to become what Arizona folks call, with somewhat narrow prejudice, a "squawman"—to marry, that is, a Mexican or an Indian. Perhaps his years on

years roamin' round as prospector, occasional river-bottom farmer and all-round drifter had caused to grow in his weather-beaten heart some sort of void, needing affection to fill it. Perhaps, too, the ladies of his race in and round Yuma town chewed their gum with too undershot a jaw to promise domestic peace even for so simple a soul as Tootin Tuttle's.

Anyway, there he stood before the priest and there by his side was little Otilla Alvirez. A stranger pair you'd not find outside a marrying alderman's office in New York. Tootin, wizened, scraggy of neck, the skin of him burned dull copper by years under desert sun, his features like some cut-out picture puzzle with a piece or so missing. Tootin Tuttle, desert rat, forty if a day, all dressed up like a plush horse with a ral collar and all—Tootin Tuttle getting married!

If Tootin smote the eye incongrously, little Otilla certainly offered full compensation. Seventeen, slim as a boy, alert as a quail in every twist of the head, every radiant sweep of the eye over the family group behind her, Otilla was one of these flowers of a mixed race which blossom early and become a cabbage after twenty-five. Her smoke black hair under a waterfall of cheap tulle frizzed roguishly over her ears. The pale ivory of her face, innocent of rouge or powder, was a painter's background for the pomegranate ripeness of her lips. Eyes twin pools stirred by little winds.

Great pride was Otilla's and great pride abode with her family because now she was being married to a white man. For a Mexican girl of Otilla's station there is no greater honor.

So they were wedded, and the humble home of the Alvirez tribe staged a scene of much rejoicing. Papa Alvirez passed jugs of *tequila*. Grandma Alvirez, who hadn't worn shoes since she was confirmed, mumbled over the *dulces* she had cooked with her own hands. The Chihuahua hairless pup bit through the bridegroom's socks in retaliation for a surreptitious kick under the table.

Tootin suffered the agonies of the wedding feast with a frozen grin on his features. Once when he had a minute alone with his bride the daze in his eyes cleared itself. Otilla swayed toward him with her lips offered for a kiss. Instead, "I bin thinkin' somethin'," murmured Tootin. "Never did fancy your name a whole lot. Sounds like somethin' they print on a can of tomatoes. Reckon I'll call you Lily. That sounds sorta fancy."

"Lil-lee," she murmured after him with a smile, and as Lil-lee she straightway considered herself. So shall we, therefore.

If one moment of that wedding day was harder than another for Tootin Tuttle to endure it was that one which witnessed his bearing the bride from her father's house. For there were but two ways to leave Yuma town: through Chinatown, which wouldn't be fitting, and down the main street to the railroad where the desert road begins. Tootin, now made a squaw man, knew friends of his would be waiting to see him pass down the town's thoroughfare with his bride.

With a set grin he handed Lil-lee to her seat in his auto—if the shrieking abomination of tin and rust Tootin possessed may be dignified by that name. Her little blue-zinc trunk was strapped into the midget box body behind the seat. Tears, embraces, farewell waves, and calls while Tootin was coaxing a spark. Then—*Flumph!* They were off.

The loafers in front of the Border Delight pool hall were assembled even as Tootin dreaded. As the car passed they made no sign, staged no horseplay—just looked. Said one of them, he who had the gift of turning a phrase, "There goes pore ole Tootin chained to five-foot-three of Mexican lightnin'. Uster have only two speeds, did pore ole Tootin: two speeds—slow an' stop. Mostly he was in stop. But now—zingo! He'll sure have to travel in high all the time."

ALL of us, I fancy, have met some time or another the type of man represented by Sylvie Small, of Palomas, Arizona. "Small by name and small by nature" would be too obvious an aphorism to work in exposition of Sylvie's character. Too inadequate, also. If the soul of man could be put under a microscope the highest powered glass of the psycho-analyist would fail to reveal even a trace of Sylvie's; like the deadly flue germ it could pass through porcelain without detection. In the matter of soul or conscience or moral sense—tag it as you will—Sylvie Small simply was lacking.

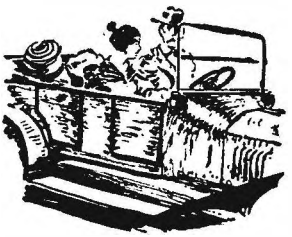
When he stood behind the counter of his general store in Palomas Sylvie's

shoulders just topped the big round cheese which always ranged alongside the wooden tub of chewing tobacco. Thin and bowed were those shoulders, ever slumped forward in a dolorous droop which cried aloud Sylvie's losing battle with life and circumstance. His head was enormous, with features all gathered in one place and the rest of it tailing off to forehead representing no intellectuality whatever. He walked with a dragging of one foot—somebody had started Sylvie wrong by dropping him in his infancy. His speech still preserved the twang of the East, though Sylvie's lungs had driven him to Arizona twenty years before the events of this narrative. Thus a rock-bound down-East habit of thought and speech had resisted the Southwest's breezy influence.

There you have Sylvie Small's exterior; exploration of his cobwebby heart is a more difficult matter. First and above all, the Palomas storekeeper had a positive genius for creating trouble. Not the Arizona way—calling a man the fighting name and then flying into him. Far from that! Sylvie's shrewd eyes and ears always were on the lookout for the fag ends and ravelings of men and women's vexations, or possible vexations; these he would garner greedily, con them over and then devise spiteful little provocations to nurse budding difficulties into man's-size disasters. Did a ranchman somewhere along the Gila River bottom make a trip to Phoenix, Sylvie dropped a word over his counter to the effect that he understood poor So-and-So had had his loans called by the bank. Let one of the girls up on the mesa ride out with one of the boys on a moonlight night and Sylvie whispered over the weighing of a keg of nails as how he heard their car broke down and the little gal didn't get home until four next morning.

All this to no purpose except the single one of a bitter man crimped in soul and body, to make trouble, to spoil the happiness of others more fortunate than himself. Folks all up and down the Gila valley feared Small even more than they hated him. If he ever had a friend it was Tootin Tuttle, the innocent. Tootin would sit up all night with a sick burro. He felt sorry for the wizened storekeeper just as his simple heart might be moved by the death throes of a poisoned coyote.

Tootin had been two weeks with his bride on a very simple honeymoon. In point of fact the honeymoon had been spent where Tootin expected many succeeding moons to find them, on Tootin's down-at-the-heels homestead ranch on the "first bench" of the Gila's bottom lands some ten miles west of Palomas. Complete happiness had been theirs. Tootin began to teach Lil-lee how to cook; he was a master with eggs and garlic and chili. Lil-lee had washed and scrubbed away the last evidences of a long bachelorhood and draped pink and gold stuff over the windows. Tootin ruminated that he sure was a lucky guy. And as for Lil-lee—well, she sang all day.



Two weeks of this, and Tootin brought his wife to the dusty speck in the immensity of the desert called Palomas. He fetched up his outrageous car in front of Sylvie's store and called the proprietor out with a conscious air.

"Meet my li'l woman, Sylvie. Lily, this is Mr. Small, an old friend of mine here in the valley."

Lil-lee giggled and put out a slim hand. Sylvie's narrow eyes squinched themselves in a quizzical survey of pretty face and boyish figure as he laid a codfish hand in Lil-lee's.

"Ain't she young!" he fawned with a sidewise lear at the proud bridegroom. "My cricky, Tootin, how'ju get such a youngster, an' you purty well advanced in life?" Unerringly Sylvie probed into the raw. Tootin reared like a skittish old cow pony.

"Me, I'm not escaped from an old men's home, Sylvie. What you got on your mind?"

"Oh, nothin'—nothin, a-tall, Tootin," the storekeeper simpered. "Down East roses often bloom right along with November—for a while. An' where there's roses look out for the lively young bees buzzin' round. Step in an' eat a snack with Miz Small an' me. We're just settin' down to dinner." The warmth of his cordiality seemed to atone for sly inuendoes. Lil-lee, who had not fully understood the storekeeper's vicious digs, nevertheless was sensible of a crawling repulsion; she slyly tugged at Tootin's coat to hold him away from acceptance of the proffered hospitality. But Tootin was too eager to accept, for to have his wife dine with the Smalls was to launch her into

Palomas society. So the squaw man fatuously reasoned.

Lil-lee, who knew the code of the Southwest full well, its harsh taboos against the Mexican blood, found that hour under the fishy eye of Mrs. Sylvie Small—a veritable vinegar pickle after the New England recipe—one to remain in memory. Not daring to trust her faulty English, which with its elisions and soft labiants sounted like muted harp notes, the miserable bride sat stiffly in her seat while Tootin tried to smooth over the strain of the situation with voluble conversation. All the time the shifty eyes of Sylvie Small were playing over the Mexican girl's flower face and diminutive figure with crafty persistence. Probing, analyzing, weighing reasonable chances for evil to be built about her.

"Miz Tuttle won't lack for comp'ny round these parts," Sylvie murmured at parting. "There's the Gonzales boys—an' their sister *of* course"—he named the most notorious rapscallions in that end of Yuma County—"an' like's not Miz Tuttle can show 'em the latest fancy danee steps from Yuma."

"I'm aimin' to provide my wife with all the company she needs," Tootin shot back at the storekeeper. "Which'll be mostly myself."

In the week following the Tuttles' visit to Palomas Jesús Gonzales, a reckless devil with the eye of a satyr, twice rode down to the Tuttle ranch; each time with some piffling message from Sylvie Small. Was Tootin thinking of buying his cotton seed yet? Did Tootin need a nice second-hand harrow which the Palomas storekeeper had just acquired? Jesús Gonzales rode down to the Tuttle ranch, I say, bearing these false gifts of friendship from Sylvie Small and on his own part gleefully stalking the retreat of new quarry. Silver clinked from his mount's bridle, a cerise silk handkerchief fluttered beneath his chin. On both these visits the Mexican got no farther than the corral bars, for Tootin intercepted him there. Nevertheless the quick eyes of the horseman caught a glimpse of a glossy black head behind new curtains, just a flash of curious eyes. Reward enough for the ride down to the Tuttle place.

Jesús Gonzales never took the woman-trail with dogs and loud hallo. He preferred the silent and persistent stalking.

A week later Sylvie Small contrived to have the new school teacher, who was boarding at the Small home, carry invitation to Lil-lee; a dance to christen the new schoolhouse at Black Water Crossing, and Lil-lee must be sure to come. Lil-lee, now a whole month in the wilderness of scrub on the Gila's first bench, with nothing to look at but the limitless vacancy of burnt mountains all about, no one to talk to but the leathery little man she called husband, broached the matter of the dance to Tootin over the evening bacon and eggs. Artfully after the manner of women.

"That wicked pain in your knees, lettle Papa—you call heem room—rooma——"

"Yep, rheumatiz. Bad's ever." Tootin passed gnarled hands tenderly over the afflicted members. Lil-lee softly set a skillet back on the stove and came to perch on the arm of her husband's chair. Her voice assumed a cooing note.

"A doctor man in Magdalena's tell my papa once for such a wicked pain my papa must make the *boile*—the dance. So makes my papa at that fiesta of San Gregorio. He dance all night an'—hola!—that wicked pain de-part from his knees."

"Your papa musta bin a poor goat!" Tootin snorted his disdain. But Lil-lee cuddled closer, undismayed. "Maybe perhaps," she urged, "if thees new lettle Papa of mine—thees ver' sweet lettle Papa—makes a dance with his Lil-lee that wicked pain de-part entire."

Tootin squinched his eyes to try to read what lay behind the limpid brown pools so close to his. Baffling innocence there.

"Say, li'l gal, where's this dance idee head in? Come clean!" Old Tootin got two bird-like pecks; one on each eyelid; then Lil-lee came clean: "That mos' nice Mees Bailey—she makes for teaching school at Black Water—that mos' nice Mees Bailey say to me today w'en you are feex the pump over by the river she say, 'Come to my dance at that nice new school'ouse——"

"Nope, by the wall-eyed dingbat!" Tootin chirped in his wrath.

"But 'e's only a so-lettle dance." Pleading put a tremble in Lil-lee's voice; her hands were smoothing old Tootin's hair with little flying gestures. "An' Lil-lee's feet they cry for the dance. 'Ere in thees place those feet they go from that stove to that well—from that well to that so-nasty washtub. Be'old!"—she kicked out two slim oxfords for his inspection

—"Be'old how those feet of Lil-lee make themselves seeck for lack of dance."

Tootin dimly realized he faced a crisis, the first in his life as a married man. At the back of his brain was the gnawing worm of jealousy, a persistent borer which always was feeding on perception of the disparity between forty sun-baked years and seventeen hotly growing summers. Sylvie Small had said——

"Nope, we don't go to no dance."

Then Lil-lee went into a fine tantrum. Forgetting her limping English, the girl poured upon him a white-hot shower of Mexican patois. Aha! Jailer—tyrant—keeper of burros! Did he believe a wife was only to cook eggs and wash clothes? Did he think for a single condemned minute a girl of spirit, of life, found herself happy buried here in a river's bottom lands with the Sonora pigeons saying "Hoo-hoo!" until one's brain was ready to crack? Would he dare treat a sick dog as he treated a loving wife?

Those slim oxfords Lil-lee had held out for Tootin's inspection now ranged the narrow confines of the combined kitchen-bedroom-living room which was about all of the Tootin ranchhouse. Those innocently lambent eyes Tootin had tried to study burned no uncertain message of fury. Lips the color of over-ripe pomegranates curled back over sharp little teeth.

Old Tootin Tuttle had a bad hour of it, but he stood his ground.

ARMED truce between the two for three days. Then a fourth day brought cloudbursts all up and down the Gila Valley. Also it was the day of the schoolhouse dance.

The tricky Gila, like all desert rivers, lurks far below the dry gravel bed of its course during torrid summer months. Men use this gravel bed for road courses when the arrowbush on either bank is too thick to drive through. But once a thunderhead up from the gulf lets loose and solid runnels of water rip down the flanks of every bounding mountain along the valley, then that stealthy underground river leaps to the surface, gathers strength each minute of the downpour and goes tearing and scouring over banks. Big trouble instantly.

With the first torrential rain at three o'clock Tootin scented big work ahead. He hopped out of the ranchhouse and down to his irrigation pump on the river bank a half mile away. With the yellow water climbing inches every hour, the pump with its rig was threatened by complete destruction. He worked in streaming water; water from the cloud-rack solidly sheeted as that of the rising Gila. Gray of the murk changed to the black of night just as the ultimate licking tide swept Tootin's rickety little gas engine from its foundation and rolled it, with its pipe, down into the scum. Tootin accepted luck of the storm without a murmur—many bludgeonings of fate had made him strangely callous to ordinary misadventures—and he plodded through the muck back to the ranchhouse.

Here that cynic genius who keeps ward over small lives dealt him another smash and one to which no amount of patient resignation could bow the head. Lil-lee was gone. Gone, too, was Tootin's little one-lunged hootin' nanny, by courtesy called an automobile.

For a long minute the dripping figure of the little man stood in a circle of lamplight gazing blankly around on familiar fripperies and feminine gew-gaws as if mutely conjuring them to tell where Lil-lee was. Then he remembered: this was the night of the schoolhouse dance at Black Water Crossing.

He made a plunge for the closet where his wife kept her pretty things. The lamp held in a hand which trembled showed him that her wedding gown—that gown which Lil-lee called her grand dress of marriage—was gone. The scanty store of little shoes on the closet floor was reduced by one pair of somewhat soiled white satin slippers.

"So—" Tootin wagged his head with a sort of dumb-animal acceptance of a blow—"so she run away from me to go to that dance. An' she didn't go alone!"

With this searching afterthought there popped into the eyes of the little fellow's mind the picture of a man with silver trimmings to his bridle, a rakish prowler among women named Jesús Gonzales. And with that vision came sudden faintness of consuming rage—heart fluttering and a quaking of the gorge. Tootin's

eye leaped to the clock on the wall. It said seven. Ten miles to Black Water Crossing, bogged roads, nothing to ride but the old mule Alsander—

He took his old six-gun down from a peg on the wall. Very painstakingly he dropped out the cylinder, oiled and wiped its spindle and filled each chamber. Then, supperless, he went out to the barn, threw a circingle around Alsander and rode sloshing out into the dark.

No more dangerous man was abroad in all Arizona that night of storm than old Tootin Tuttle, squawman.

DIFFICULT it would be for any normal-minded person to analyze the springs of Sylvie Small's actions. Because the only man in the valley he could safely call friend had found happiness tardily, Sylvie aimed to cast a blight upon that happiness. He chose the instruments of his deviltry cannily: Jesús Gonzales, who thought he knew the storekeeper's ends and heartily applauded them; Miss Bailey, the school teacher at Black Water Crossing, who loaned herself a willing, if quite unconscious, dupe.

One cannot hazard a guess how far Sylvie planned to push his spitefulness. I imagine he had no special grudge against Lil-lee aside from the fact of her pariah birth. It is safe to say that did Lil-lee once get out of hand—actually fall into the pit Sylvie had baited with the daredevil Gonzales—the storekeeper's New England conscience would prompt him to scorn her as a scarlet woman. Yet would he have her give only enough evidence of wantonness to plague the jealousy of the little man, her husband. For Small that would be a prime joke.

And Lil-lee: what of her promptings to run away to the forbidden dance? Simple enough, I imagine. Lil-lee was a butterfly with untried wings. Grown to ripe youth in the squalor of a 'dobe house with no promise ahead but that of the blowzy middle age of a Mexican drudge, she had jumped at the honor of an alliance with a white man—a white man who must have money. And the first week or so of the new life had been gorgeously different and diverting. Then lonesomeness creeping in—oppression of the desert's vacancy all about—insistent call of youth for gayety and diversion.

Something of the cloudburst's savagery must have strode into Lil-lee's brooding soul, stirring it to rebellion and an abandon to match the loosed furies outside the windows of the ranchhouse. Recklessly she seized opportunity offered by Tootin's preoccupation with the threatened pump; the little car he had taught her to operate would carry her to the dance; her grand dress of marriage and satin slippers could be protected from the wet in the little blue-zinc trunk; so——

The dance at the new schoolhouse was a hectic affair. Every arriving group and couple, come by auto from the countryside for twenty miles about, had a new tale to tell of fording streams that ran bank-full and break-downs in mudholes. Like Lil-lee, the other girls shed their hip boots and slickers and donned organdies in a tiny dressing room. The competent Miss Bailey, who was there with pins and exclamations to assist in the robing of the desert beauties, cooed ecstatically over Lil-lee's wedding gown; then, "And Mr. Tuttle—?" she finished with a circumspect rising inflection.

"Oh," rather faintly from Lil-lee, "'e's much busy with that pump. That river, you know, make a rise to flood that pump." And with that elliptic rendering of the truth the runaway felt a sudden stab of remorse. She visioned her little husband slogging back to the ranchhouse in the rain to find it deserted. But through the dressing room door came the first whine of the violin calling to the dance, and Lil-lee left conscience hanging on a peg with her dimity dress.

Sylvie Small saw her emerge, radiant, onto the well-candled floor. Slim and burning as an altar candle was she, with her lithe body tightly encased in shimmering satin, piled-up masses of dark hair suggesting smoke above the vivid flame of her face. Not in Sylvie's time had so striking a picture appeared among the young folks of the valley. He tossed a wink to Jesús Gonzales, lounging against a doorpost. The Mexican slicked back his oiled hair with hasty palms and accompanied Sylvie forward to be introduced to the beauty.

"Miz Tuttle"—in Sylvie's oiliest whinny—"meet Mr. Gonzales, the handsomest man in Gila Valley." Lil-lee eyed the bowing cavalier coldly. She had not driven ten miles through the rain to dance with a Mexican. Not she, wife of a white man! Nevertheless before Lil-lee could demur Gonzales had her in his arms and was whirling her down the floor. She was conscious of lifted eyebrows among the bevy of American girls by the dressing room door, saw sly

smiles on the ruddy faces of the young men.

"Ah, for this moment, Señora, I have waited long—and with dreams," came the breathed words in her ear. She felt the tightening of the arm about her waist. Lil-lee drew back a little and sent a warning flash of eyes up to the features bending close to hers.

"I spik only English, Señor Gonzales. Please do that same." The handsome devil grinned back at her and continued in Spanish:

"English is too cold for the language of adoration, Señora. Only our beautiful Spanish can fit itself to words of love." Again the insinuating pressure of the arm about Lil-lee. She volleyed tense reply in her own tongue:

"I need no words of adoration from you, Señor Gonzales—I, Lil-lee Tuttle, wife of a proper American."

"You mean the proper wife of an American." Gonzales chuckled as he swung her past the fiddlers. "And Señor Tuttle, I see he is not with you this evening. So beautiful a wife must have a protector in his absence. So I appoint myself to that delightful task—yes?"

LIL-LEE was furious. Had it not been for the shame of it she would have broken from his clasp before the eyes of all and run to hide her face in the dressing room. This low Mexican twitting her about her husband—her wonderful white-man husband! Mercifully the fiddling ceased and Lil-lee abruptly left her partner to go and stand by Miss Bailey's side. Gonzales followed her with smouldering eyes.

Then did the cup of Lil-lee's runaway joy turn bitter sweet. The chattering school teacher brought several young ranchers, white fellows, up to be introduced to the Mexican beauty. Reluctantly they came; clumsily they stood before her, each for a dumb moment, then sifted away to claim partners from among the fairer girls of their own blood. Lil-lee understood. Because her first dance had been with the Mexican Gonzales these American boys had allocated her with her kind. She was Mexican, white husband though she might have. Gonzales had put the brand upon her the minute she stepped onto the floor with him. She saw the smiles of triumph—and of malice—upon the faces of the fairer skinned girls about the walls.

The heart of Lil-lee, runaway wife, went to water. When her swimming eyes beheld the smiling Gonzales again standing before her bowing invitation to the dance she rose and ran to the dressing room for a haven of escape. There she hid herself behind some cloaks in the far corner of the room away from the feeble lamp. There she sat and whimpered softly. Lil-lee, truant butterfly, was thinking how nice it would be to be curled up on the knees of her little Papa—her funny little Papa who sang songs to her about mining camps and strange doings. Now never again would she hear those songs, feel a rough hand playing over her hair!

"Of all the gall!" Lil-lee in her hiding place heard a rasping feminine voice beyond the screening cloaks. "Running away from her husband to come here and dance with that Gonzales devil."

"Yes, but it's a scream," a second voice caught up the comment. "Don't you know? Haven't you heard what Sylvie Small's whisperin' round?"

"No! What?" excitedly.

"Why, Sylvie Small—an' ain't he the devil for thinkin' up things?—Sylvie went and planned the whole thing to get poor little Tootin Tuttle's goat. Sicked Miss Bailey on to askin' that hussy Mex wife of Tootin's up to the dance, an' when the girl runs away an' comes here he sicks Gonzales onto her. You know what that means?"

"O-ooo! Shootin,' I'd say, when Tootin finds it out. Say, wouldn't that be a scream now?"

The voices were cut by the slamming of the dressing room door and Lil-lee was left alone with ugly truth.

Five minutes later Lil-lee, back into a hastily buttoned dimity and with boots on her legs, had climbed through a dressing room window and was running for the shed where the auto lamps glared. She found her husband's little hootin' nanny, cranked it and scrambled into the seat. Out into the misty dark with a roar and a splutter!

A great repentance rode as silent passenger through the night with the girl at the wheel. Yes, and a great love, as great as Lil-lee the butterfly was capable of. Love for the little man she had flouted and held up to the scorn of all the valley by her folly. Oh, to get back to the ranch house which was home before—before that shooting which loose tongues had speculated upon!

Five miles from the schoolhouse and where the road dips into lowlands to meet

a confluent of the Gila, Lil-lee's hand darted for the emergency. The car bucked to a halt right where yellow flood waters covered the road. There stood a mule, dripping, ears down, bloated with much water.

"Alsander!" Lil-lee screamed in recognition of the white blaze on the muzzle. She leaped from the car and sloshed through the mud to the creature's side. She saw a boot hanging, caught by the toe in the stirrup and half-filled with water. One glance where the headlights laid a trail across the yellow flood of the ford and Lil-lee knew the full story of Alsander standing there with a water-logged boot in one stirrup.

THE dance in the schoolhouse was still in full swing when the outer door opened with a bang. The dancers, caught by surprise, paused in mid-step to gaze upon the apparition there, a girl, water soaked, muddied from cheek to bootheel, hair in dank wisps over her shoulders. And the eyes of her: they were all whites.

"Come!" she stammered. "My husband, he is lost in the waters."

Then auto headlights streaked the night down the road over which truant Lil-lee had come. Men with lanterns and ropes

quit their cars where Alsander had stood to spread out through the wilderness of arrowbush—now dank and treacherous with the flood-waters. They called. They shot lantern gleams into muddy eddies, pushed and prowled through back-water breastworks of flotsam. Gleaming serpents of the flood coiled about the legs of the searchers to trap them. No trace of Tootin Tuttle could be found, though the searchers worked until dawn.

They took Lil-lee back with them to the village of Palomas in the morning, where a kindly woman took her in to be warmed, fed and clad in dry garments. Sylvie Small, who had not been one of the party that combed the flood lands, saw them lift Lil-lee from a car into the house of the Samaritan, and he was vaguely disturbed. The icy finger of Nemesis seemed to pinch his elbow, reminding him of a debt to be paid. Later that day Sylvie remembered he had to make a little trip to Phoenix and he began to pack his bag for the twenty-mile ride cross-desert to Stanwix, the flag station.

Nobody in Palomas can tell you how it happened that the girl with the wild eyes whom they had brought back to the settlement from the night search through the flooded lands knew that Sylvie Small was leaving town. The kindly woman who took her in thought Lil-lee safely in bed and sleeping off the sedative powder Doc Hazlit had given her. Consequently she was stunned to see her patient behind the wheel of the little desert skimmer that had carried her to the dance; behind the wheel and just skidding away from the front of Sylvie Small's store. Hatless was she; her hair was flying wild; the look of a fury was on her features. Down the road that serpentines through Palomas and out onto the desert sped Tootin Tuttle's hootin' nanny with a hand of vengeance guiding. Fifteen minutes ahead of Lil-lee on the road to Stanwix Sylvie Small, alone in his gas wagon, was making for the railroad.

Just how or when it was the viperish little storekeeper learned he was being pursued by the woman who had been his tool in a nasty business one cannot know. I like to believe some sort of clairvoyance, itself an overtone of a guilty conscience, whispered to Sylvie that his time to pay had come. At any rate, when he pulled up at the Stanwix station Sylvie was white as one of his salt codfish.

"Train's an hour late?" he echoed the information imparted by the telegrapher. "Good God!"

His eyes roved the unlovely prospect of the settlement as if in quest of some asylum of refuge. Then he looked back on the white ribbon of road he had just traveled and saw a speck moving against the blue of the sky. "Good God!" whispered Sylvie once more. He leaped into his car and was off on the road leading to the south, where the Gila Range stretches like the backbone of a dinosaur mid-length of a land of death.

Away from the railroad, away from ranches and towns, the habitat of men, and down into a wilderness of thirst untouched by the cloudburst mad fear pushed Sylvie Small. Like some hunted rodent

whose hole has been stopped by the trapper and who flees blindly.

The long swell of a mesa had not long hidden Sylvie's car when Stanwix's ten or a dozen loafers were surprised to see a girl with flying hair and wearing a muddy dress drive up to the single garage. She requisitioned gas and water for the car, filled the two canteens strapped on a running board, and was off on the road the crooked little man had taken.

NOW the genius of the desert, which has a way of laying a tricky mirage before the eyes of the traveler, concealing contours beneath, blurs just the passage in this tale we would like to see clearly—what happened when those two hurrying mites in the vastness of stark mountains and blinding sand stretches were swallowed up in the oblivion.

"Some things ain't pleasant to see and a sight unpleasanter to guess about," was the way my friend Sheriff Sid bridged this hiatus in giving me the story. Perhaps I had better end the story in his own words:

"Well, sir, when we got there to Tinajas Altas, old Tootin Tuttle bein' one of the party—you can't kill off that tough rooster nohow; he'd been carried nigh three mile when the flood swept him off his mule. When we pull up there by the tanks, I say, there's the girl settin' in her car with her eyes just starin' out at nothin' at all. An' there's Sylvie Small's car, radiator dry as a bone and gas all gone, ranged 'longside her.

"An' Sylvie, he's all curled up like a sun-dried lizard right at the edge of the lower tank. Deader'n a last year's sidewinder's skin.

"The cause of death? Well, son, they's two—official an' unofficial. Official cause said he'd broken his neck an' let it go at that. Unofficial cause represented by an empty bottle of coyote poison we found in the tool box of Tootin's little car. An' before we left we writ a sign to stick up there by the tank warning folks not to drink the water until the next big cloudburst flushed out what was there."

BUCK HOOKER GOES TO SCHOOL

By ROY W. HINDS

Author of "Andy Brogan, Woodsman," "The Miser's Dollar," etc.

AS SOME ONE OR OTHER SAID, THERE'S NO GETTING AWAY FROM THE COPYBOOK MAXIMS. THEY FOLLOW ONE EVEN TO THE NORTHWOODS LUMBER CAMPS.

THE Larkey grub-driver, Buck Hooker, fell into a contemplative mood, induced perhaps by the listless creaking of his conveyance and the dull, monotonous thumping of wagon bolts. A lazy squint came to his eyes, which were trained upon the strip of corduroy road exactly half-way between the left ear of his nigh horse and the right ear of his off horse. Mr. Hooker's loosely jointed body nodded and rocked gently in such perfect rhythm with the wagon that he might have been a part of its frame.

It is quite likely that the soft, declining sunlight of a spring evening and the gentle fussing of birds seeking roost in the pine woods to the right and the left also had something to do with the preoccupation of Buck Hooker. It should be added that the spring payday was very close at hand in the Larkey logging camps, to be followed quickly by frolics in the towns along the Tittabaw River.

The winter's wages were to be handed out the very next day at Camp Number Sixteen, to which Mr. Hooker was attached, and in a large leather sack, somewhat in the form of a mail pouch, the money for the payday at Sixteen, as well as other Larkey camps, reposed in the wagon box behind.

Very close to Buck Hooker's hand lay a loaded Winchester. Upon a second seat in the wagon, facing to the rear, sat another man with a Winchester across his legs and a capable revolver slung in a holster at his side. The money sack lay between the two men, and contained something like seventeen thousand dollars in gold and bills, as well as a small amount of silver.

The preoccupation of Buck Hooker was perhaps responsible for the safety with which a lurking figure in the woods to the right moved into the shelter of tree after tree, slightly to the rear of the wagon, and managed to keep his distance from lengthening.

This man apparently had no fear of the man on the rear seat of the wagon. In fact, they occasionally exchanged covert signals.

Buck Hooker calculated that he would reach Camp Sixteen about an hour after dark. The road lay through a wild

stretch of rolling forest land. It was a short-cut between the lumber town of Midland, at the confluence of the Tittabaw and Chippewa rivers, and Camp Sixteen, on the Tittabaw, which described a wide arc. The ring of the woodsman's axe had not been heard as yet along the road, for the timber lands there were not so handy to the river, which, in the spring, was a highway of drifting logs.

The road lifted and dipped in an enchanting, winding course, and, in the languishing sunlight, its various lengths unfolded like the leaves of a book. Long shadows fell toward the east, and presently dissolved into the evening. A smart breeze which had blown from the south throughout the day vanished with the sun, and night fell like a blanket upon the forest. After a short period of heavy darkness, stars crept out overhead, and revealed, to the upturned gaze of Buck Hooker the astonishing depths of the universe.

"How far?" asked Isaac Storkey, the man at the rear of the wagon.

"Millions an' millions o' miles," Mr. Hooker replied dreamily.

Ike Storkey turned his face toward the front of the wagon. He withheld a puzzled exclamation, and regarded with satisfaction the dim form of the grub-driver. He could see that Buck Hooker's face was turned upward.

"Guess I'd better leave him be." Storkey chuckled inwardly. "I allus knowed he dreamed a good bit even in daylight—an' he couldn't pick a better time than right now!"

But Mr. Hooker's contemplation of the infinite had not removed him altogether from earthly affairs. It was but a momentary flight, and he descended to solid ground before Mr. Storkey had time for more than mere transitory rejoicing.

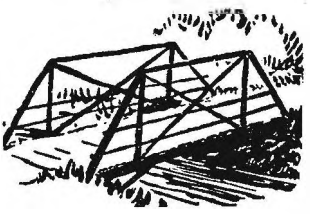
"What's that you said, Ike?" the grub-driver demanded.

"I ast how far?"

"Oh!" Buck peered into the woods at each side. "Six miles from here to Sixteen. I heard what you said first time, Ike—but my mind wasn't on it. I d'clar, them stars get more int'restin' to me ev'ry time I look up. I'd get a book about 'em, if I could read it."

Ike Storkey grunted, and gazed intently into the woods. The lurking figure was lost to view now, but Storkey had an idea that everything was all right. If they were six miles from Sixteen, they were only a mile from Snake Creek.

The road crossed Snake Creek at the bottom of a hollow, and its course from there lay up a steep hill. The creek wandered on into a tangled area of rock and brush; pathless, swampy in spots, and inexpressibly dismal even on the sunniest day.



"I calc'late I better be thinkin' about the road," Mr. Hooker resumed. "We're gettin' clost t' Snake Creek."

"I don't rec'lect that the road's bad at Snake Creek. I never went over it but the onct—comin' down to Midland with you, but it seemed——"

"It ain't the road, but that gully down there's a mighty lonesome place."

After a moment's silence Ike Storkey asked. "'Fraid o' somethin'?"

"No—not exac'ly; but I g'n'ly keep my eye peeled at Snake Creek."

"Maybe a holdup, eh?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, you look sharp up there; I'll 'tend to things back here— But you ain't never been held up."

"No; an' I ain't never died yet, but I expect I will some day. It's been seven years now since the Larkeys begun payin' off at the camps, 'stead of at Midland after the drives come down. This is the seventh spring for me to pack the pay-sack through these woods. I alluz take this road—it's shorter'n the river road; though it's sort o' wild. I ain't never had a bit o' trouble, but you can't never tell."

"Why do thy pay off in the woods—'stead of in town, like the other strings?"

"John Larkey claims the men save money by it. Time that he paid off in town, the whole pack of us fellers run straighter'n a pikepole for the s'loons. We just throwed our wages on the bar, an' told the bartender to likker 'em out. Bein' paid off in the woods is diff'rent. We ain't got no place to spend our money right off. We put it in our pockets, an' take it out ev'ry onct in awhile for to count—an' we sort o' get uset to it thataway. It gives us a chanct to think, an' maybe figger on buyin' things that ain't suitable for drinkin'. Time was when I never got more'n a pair o' shoes out o' my winter's wages. Why, last spring I bought nineteen dollars worth o' clo'es

an' got my hair cut 'fore I got drunk. It's been like that ev'ry spring that I been gettin' my money in the woods. A man that stops an' thinks 'fore he gets drunk ain't likely to be such a wild drinker while he's at it. He holds his head better, an' maybe quits 'fore he's broke. Last spring I had seven dollars when I got sober.

"Saved seven dollars, eh?"

"Yup! But I lost it next day playin' pedro in Charley Oscar's s'loon— Here's the hill down to Snake Creek. Easy, hosses!"

Buck Hooker got the first warning when his horses were about to set hoofs on the bridge across Snake Creek, at the bottom of the hollow.

"Draw up that team!" cried a shrill voice from the road behind. "I got my guns on both of you! Draw up quick!"

Buck Hooker was a peaceful man; he never really had anticipated a holdup. Such things were practically unknown in the woods. Also, perhaps, he was a bit beyond the prime of life. Whatever the cause, there was a moment of hesitation. At the outset he could have tumbled from the seat and made a fight for it, but in the flicker of an eyelash Storkey cast the die.

"My God," whispered Storkey hoarsely, "we're held up and he's got us covered. If we move we're dead men!" Automatically Buck stuck up his hands. When he realized it, it was indeed too late.

"Driver, don't turn your head, or I'll bore it," the man in the road commanded. He talked now in a piercing tone, almost a shriek. "Here you—in back there—let that Winchester roll off your knees, and don't lay a hand on it! That's right! Unloosen your belt now; don't lay a finger on that revolver! Drop belt and all into the road! That's it! Driver, pick up your Winchester by the barrel, and drop it into the road. My guns are on both of you. Out with that Winchester—that's it. And don't turn your head! Now you, in back there—that money sack, toss it out!"

Ike Storkey complied. The thud of the money sack upon the road was like a heavy weight hurled upon the heart of Buck Hooker.

"Now, driver, whip up that team!" the bandit cried. "I'll give you two minutes to get up that hill, and you'll have to drive like hell! I can see clear up the hill, and I'll pot both of you if that team lags a step! You'd better have race horses there, driver! Whip up!"

Buck Hooker's team perhaps to this day holds the record for the Snake Creek hill.

A short distance over the crown of the hill Buck Hooker stopped the team and faced Ike Storkey.

"What's the matter o' you, Ike?" the grub-driver demanded.

"I never seen him, Buck, till he spoke! He must 'a' stepped out into the road a second after the tail o' the wagon went by. I wasn't watchin' that partic'lar spot just at that minute, an' he had me covered 'fore I could lift a finger. Guess I'm to blame for it, Buck."

"No," said Buck slowly, "we're both t' blame for it. That's the way we'll take it. Did you get a good look at him?"

"Uh huh—kinda."

"You'll know him, eh—when you see him ag'in?"

"Uh huh. Leastways, I'll know his voice."

"His voice! Huh! That wasn't his reg'lar speakin' voice. That screech was all put on, so't we wouldn't know him if we ever heerd him speak again." The grub-driver mused. "I'm wond'rin' what we ought to do now."

"We ain't got a weapon o' no kind."

"That's what I'm thinkin'."

"An' we'd be foolish to tackle that feller—an' maybe a gang hid by the road."

"That's what I'm thinkin'."

"Might's well drive into Sixteen; we can't catch that feller."

"I'll catch him," said Buck Hooker quietly, "but I don't know just how or when. I ain't goin' to let him get off 's easy as all that. Guess the nearest help's at Sixteen. G'long, hosses!"

AND no one ever knew the profound depths of gloom which Buck Hooker sounded on that drive; for he was justly celebrated in that region for his fidelity to duty, and was very proud of his previous record.

Andrew Brogan, string foreman of the Larkey logging camps, whom Buck Hooker found at Sixteen, listened quietly to the grub-driver's story of the holdup and to Ike Storkey's supplementary remarks. The string foreman asked a few concise questions, and turned to Cordy West, camp boss at Sixteen.

"Send a man into Coleman," said Andy Brogan. "That's the nearest point to reach an officer. Better send him on a horse, and have him tell the officers there, and they'll telegraph the sheriff at Midland. You and Buck scrape up all the

guns there are in camp and load 'em in the grub-wagon. We'll take a half a dozen men, and go down into the Snake Creek swamps."

A thorough search of the Snake Creek swamps and tangled passes, throughout the night and the following day, availed nothing except to convince the searchers that Snake Creek was the most dismal and treacherous region in the county. They struggled through the brush and bogs from the scene of the holdup to the river in one direction and to a strip of stumpy farmlands in the other. They hunted among the rocks and among fallen, rotting trees, which had been washed out in the various rampages of Snake Creek. They found no trace of the stolen pay money nor of the man who made away with it.

The search, except for the lookout maintained by Sheriff Joe Blackmore and his deputies throughout the county, was abandoned. The important business of starting the winter cut of logs down the Tittabaw River toward Midland occupied the Larkey logging camps.

Apparently the great John Larkey looked upon the payroll robbery as a closed incident to be charged up to profit and loss, for both he and his foreman reassured old Buck that he couldn't be blamed and that the thing to do now was to turn in and make enough out of the winter cut to cover the loss. Actually, however, the grub-driver and his guard were under close observation by the lumber chiefs to see whether they might betray any guilty knowledge of the affair.

Though ignorant of this fact, Buck Hooker was a crushed man. He seemed to have aged ten years under the knowledge that he had failed at the crucial moment of his life. Besides, he fancied that his companions of the woods, now enjoying life so boisterously in the town, were shunning him. When he did enter a group it seemed to him that conversation died and that he could sense contempt in the glances of his erstwhile friends. Ike Storkey did not take it so hard. Even if he had no other reason, Ike Storkey hadn't the feelings toward the Larkeys nor the jealousy of his own trustworthiness that characterized Buck Hooker.

Ike Storkey, who formerly had been a workman in the Saginaw mills and at one time a deputy sheriff in Saginaw county, had been in the Larkey camps only one winter. He was not much of a drinking man, and his reputation as a crack shot and the standing which former deputyship brought him led to his being chosen early in the winter as a guard on the grub-wagon, whenever the wagon carried valuable property or money.

But Buck paid no attention to the attitude of the men toward Storkey, being too deep in his own gloomy meditations for aught else than self-contempt and plans to find the robber.

The immense drives of logs reached Midland, and the Larkey woodsmen got their winter's wages there. They met woodsmen from other strings. The annual season of roistering started at once, and the days and nights were filled with wild crys and flying fists. Gamblers from Detroit and Saginaw worked skilfully with the cards and dice.

The woodsmen, except for the few who would go back to the camps for "brushing" and for work on the camp buildings, would work in the mills during the summer. They got rid of their money rapidly; and the mill owners in a way were glad for that, for they needed men, and none could be drawn to a job until necessity drove them to it.

Buck Hooker didn't get very drunk that spring. Released for the time from his work as a grub-driver, he sought solace in the companionship of Sylvester Moon. Mr. Hooker and Mr. Moon had been friends about five years.

Sylvester Moon came to Midland with a show troupe, and remained there for the reason that he was getting old and walking did not agree with his constitution. The younger members of that dubious organization, which was known as the Sunrise Minstrels, departed in the general direction of Saginaw, where, it is safe to say, they got in touch with box cars.

The Sunrise Minstrels perhaps would have shone luminously in Midland had not the management sought to rebuild its dwindling fortunes all at once by a process commonly known as short-changing. They came to town in the spring, when the woodsmen were there, and money flowed freely. Tickets had been on sale only a few minutes when the report gained circulation that certain patrons had been fleeced in the matter of change;

the woodsmen joined forces, and the Sunrise Minstrels did not rise in Midland.

After the theatrical organization had been led out to the Saginaw road and assisted on its way with a series of swift kicks, it was found that one of its number lingered, for the reason perhaps that his slumbers under a table in the Blue Goose saloon rendered him oblivious to the proceedings and invisible to the vigilantes.

The table became desirable to a half dozen rough shod poker players. The first man to sit down wore calk-soled boots, and he sat down with a determination to win, planting his feet firmly. The calks aroused a violent protest under the table, and Sylvester Moon was dragged into view.

It was remembered that he belonged to the Sunrise Minstrels, but just as quickly it was remembered that he was an old man, and that he drank his whisky straight and fearlessly. Furthermore, he apparently had nothing to do with the short-changing operations. He was at once escorted to the bar, and the subsequent attentions of the woodsmen account for Mr. Moon not recalling the events of the night. He awakened in the morning in a room in the Findlater Hotel, and was mildly surprised to find himself in bed with a lumberjack and a bulldog.

Sylvester Moon, upon reappearing among his friends of the night, was treated as a man of distinction. He could hardly account for that, and concluded that his plug hat, frock coat, flowing necktie and patent-leather shoes induced respect among the red-shirted and heavily-booted brethren of the woods. Perhaps his gray hair and solemn visage had something to do with it.

Theodore Mountain, proprietor of the Blue Goose, addressed him:

"Mr. Moon, you appear to be a man of parts. I never see a man play the fiddle and speak pieces right out of his head like you did last night. And the mouth organ, too. You appear to be musical to a high degree. Now I wonder if you can play a regular organ—one of them with black and white keys, and stoppers that work in and out, and bouquets of flowers carved all over it?"

"Yes, sir," Mr. Moon replied promptly.

"And could you learn children to play it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why don't you stay right here in Midland, Mr. Moon. I got a boy and girl—boy's fourteen and the girl's twelve—and we got an organ; but they ain't never got anything out of it but 'I Took My Gal to the Circus Grounds.' You can learn 'em to play by sight. This town needs a music teacher bad. I hear the women folks talking, and you'll find plenty to do. I got a fiddle here that you can have, and maybe some of the youngsters will take lessons on that, too. This is getting to be a big town for kids, and kids have to be learnt something. That boy of mine is fourteen, and he ain't even learnt to tend bar yet—'count of his mother. But she'll want him to learn music—and the girl, too—after school."

These incidents account for the residence in Midland of Sylvester Moon.

It was the life which apparently he had long sought, for he dropped at once into a mood of serene contentment; beloved by the children, consulted by the women in matters of etiquette and education, and respected by the men as a philosopher who had roamed strange lands, who was ever ready but never forward with kindly advice, and who, for the most part, drank his whisky like a gentleman.

Among his close personal friends was Buck Hooker, and the grub-driver spent considerable time in the little house in the "Paddy Hollow" district of the town, where Mr. Moon kept bach, and where he came to be known as the "Philosopher of Paddy Hollow."

To the home of Sylvester Moon, Buck Hooker carried his troubles arising out of the Snake Creek holdup, after he had given to "Shorty" Price, compositor and editor of the *Sun*, a full account of the holdup, which Mr. Price reduced to type in his own bright and inimitable style.

"I ain't goin' t' get drunk this spring. Seems like the boys don't hanker after my society since the holdup," said Buck Hooker to Mr. Moon. "Anyhow, I brought along a few drinks for you—I calc'late there's about a gallon in that jug; but I ain't goin' to touch it just yet."

Sylvester Moon surveyed the jug. Buck Hooker was not the only man who indulged in the pastime of bearing liquor to the philosopher, and thereby inducing choice diversion in the way of recitation and song, sprinkled with precious nuggets of wisdom. It was a sport described

by Shorty Price as "getting the Moon full."

Mr. Moon sampled the jug, and found it good.

"You are not going to drink much this spring, you say?" he inquired.

"Not very much."

"That's fine. Now I suppose you can find time to learn to read and write?"

"Maybe— S'here, Sylvester, why is't you're so anxious to have me read an' write?"

"Because," said Mr. Moon solemnly, "it behooves a gentleman of your attainments to be able at least to read his own mail."

"I never get no mail."

"Suppose you should get a letter?"

"Then I'd go to college, an' learn to read it."

Mr. Moon tapped his fingers musingly on the top of his plug hat, which lay on the table. The vacuum of this immense headpiece was such that Mr. Moon's finger tips brought forth a sound not unlike the rolling of a snare drum.

"Perhaps you're right," he agreed; and turned once more to the jug.

Mr. Hooker suggested, "You mentioned my attainments. I didn't calc'late that I had any special attainments."

"Oh, yes you have," declared Mr. Moon. "You have what so many people lack—imagination. You look into the sky, and the stars set your mind to running. You see things in the woods besides trees and brush. Yes, you have imagination."

A puzzled frown gathered on the grub-driver's brow. "I alluz thought imagination was somethin' diff'rent than that. I figgered that tellin' a man he had a good imitation was just a genteel way o' callin' him a liar."

"Oh, no, my boy! Imagination is the truest thing in the world. It is the ability to see things as they are—to see the inside of a tree by looking at the bark; to tell the character of people by looking at the outside of their houses. Imagination is nothing but unusual perception, the faculty of seeing the truth no matter how densely it is buried. I look through this open door here, and what do I see? Ah! Look there! A pig coming out of Mrs. Flavey's kitchen. Do I have to go into Mrs. Flavey's kitchen to determine what sort of woman she is?"

The old gentleman again bethought himself of the jug. Buck Hooker's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Well," he suggested, "tell me somethin' about th' pig. You seen his outsides."

Sylvester Moon studied the pig gravely, and resumed:

"What do most people think about a pig? They think a pig is the most selfish creature in the world. When they wish to describe a man as selfish, they call him a pig. That is what a pig looks like on the surface—a selfish creature. But I use my imagination, and see something just the opposite in that pig, grunting so contentedly at Mrs. Flavey's kitchen door. That pig is just an ordinary house pig, in reality the most unselfish of creatures. Why does Mrs. Flavey keep that pig? To kill, of course. And when will she kill it? In the fall, when he's nice and fat. And what does that pig do? Why, he tries every minute of the day to get fatter; he eats all he can get hold of, thereby hastening the time when he shall be fit for killing, and thus provide an abundance of pork for the poor widow and her children. Can you think of anything any more unselfish than that?"

Buck Hooker grinned. "There's that jug still settin' there, lonesome like." Mr. Moon took advantage of the suggestion, while Mr. Hooker announced seriously, "Guess I will learn t' read an' write. It'll be a good way to put in the spring. But listen, Sylvester—I want to tell you about that holdup."

Next afternoon, Sylvester Moon busied himself about the town with his music pupils, and time hung heavily on the hands of Buck Hooker. The grub-driver, not wishing to drink, wandered disconsolately through the streets, hoping for the development of some miraculous circumstance which would enable him to run to earth the perpetrator of the Snake Creek holdup. In a very short time he grew lonesome, and drifted into the Oscar House barroom.

There he met Ike Storkey, his fellow victim in the holdup. Mr. Storkey was not so depressed in spirit as the grub-driver, for he had been sampling the liquor stock of the Oscar House. Buck resisted his importunities to drink.

There was quite a crowd in the barroom. Buck Hooker sauntered about, exchanging a word here and there, but managed to keep at a sober distance from the bar. A diversion occurred in the form of a short, sharp fight, but that was soon over.

Presently there entered the barroom a man who had been known to Midland for about three months as Harry Greep. Mr. Greep had no visible means of support except an engaging personality and a knack at the cards and the dice. He managed to impart to his person a sort of dandified appearance without lessening his engaging personality. He was the sort of man who could dress smartly without danger of being called a dude—which was something of a trick in those days in Midland, where, except on bridegrooms and pallbearers, a boiled shirt drew unmitigated scorn and a pair of starched cuffs aroused open indignation.

Harry Greep was not reviled for his niceties of dress. They became him too well, and at once it was seen that he was a fine fellow. He lived at the Oscar House, and plied his trade of gambling in the various barrooms.

Buck Hooker had a casual acquaintance with Harry Greep. He knew that Mr. Greep was widely known among the woodsmen, so he didn't think it at all strange that Ike Storkey and Greep should have a drink together, which they did very soon after the latter came in. They also had conversation of a serious nature, but this passed unheeded by Buck Hooker.

In time someone suggested poker. Harry Greep was willing to play, and Ike Storkey decided to take a hand. Buck Hooker also got in, for lack of anything else to do. Altogether there were six players at the table.

It soon occurred to Buck Hooker that Harry Greep exercised a sort of quiet guardianship over Ike Storkey. Mr. Storkey insisted on a drink every few minutes. Mr. Greep protested mildly, apparently as one good fellow would try to protect another; but underneath his careless demeanor, Buck Hooker thought he detected serious concern in Harry Greep. However, he paid but little heed to this.

The play finally came to a point where Harry Greep and Buck Hooker tied up on a pot, all the others having dropped out of that hand in the betting. The grub-driver possessed four queens, and he liked them very much indeed—so much, in fact, that he saw and raised every bet of his antagonist. Finally Harry Greep shoved in his stack.

"These cards of mine seem to be worth that amount," said he.

Mr. Hooker meditated, and studied his four queens gravely, peering at their edges. They looked very pretty, but of course four queens is not the best hand in a poker deck.

"Well," said the grub-driver presently, "these cards o' mine sure have took my fancy. It's awful hard t' part with 'm." He picked up his somewhat meagre supply of checks, and held the stack between his thumb and middle finger. "I calc'late these cards 're worth this much."

Still he hesitated.

"If that's the case," Harry Greep suggested, "drop your stack into the pot."

His tone had taken on a faint sharpness. Slow, deliberate players sometimes made him nervous.

Buck Hooker looked up quickly. He couldn't account for the thrill Mr. Greep's words gave him. Somehow he thought of the night at Snake Creek when an unseen man had told him to drop his Winchester "into the road."

He gazed intently into the soft blue eyes of Harry Greep, and was seized with strange ideas.

The grub-driver's chips mingled with the pot. Harry Greep displayed four kings. Buck Hooker threw his hand into the discards, and dropped out of the game.

THAT evening Buck Hooker took his first lesson in reading and writing at the home of Sylvester Moon. Mr. Moon wrote in a round hand a series of maxims designed to include every letter in the alphabet—"Honesty is the best policy," "Be supple, be quick, be spry," "Do your tasks with zest and extreme caution," "When thieves fall out, honest men get their dues," "Beware of the cup that cheers and the jug that bringeth joy," and so forth. Upon these Mr. Hooker set to work, his tongue keeping pace with his pencil.

But he was strangely preoccupied, and Sylvester Moon was not much impressed by his pupil's aptness. He forebore to mention this, however; and sought solace in the jug that broughteth joy.

The next morning, awakening in his room at the Oscar House, Buck Hooker

found that certain vague suspicions had taken firm hold of his consciousness and arranged themselves into definite form; and he proceeded to his self-appointed tasks of the day with "zest and extreme caution."

Late that afternoon he again visited the home of Sylvester Moon.

"Sylvester," the grub-driver inquired, "can you give an imitation of a drunken man?"

Mr. Moon, who was preparing his supper, studied his visitor curiously.

"After supper," said he, "if that jug holds out, I'll show you the finest imitation of a drunken man that you have ever seen."

"I'm talkin' serious," Buck Hooker remonstrated. "I've learnt a sight o' cur'ous things today, an' my head's poppin' with funny ideas. I don't hardly know how to straighten 'em out so's to tell you about 'em. But I know you uset to be on the stage, and I've seen you give some correct imitations in your house here. Thinks I, Sylvester Moon is an actor, an' he can change his voice to almost any style and pitch he likes. Maybe he can help me."

Mr. Moon perceived that his friend was singularly agitated. At once he invited the fullest confidence.

"I don't like to mention a man's name in a thing like this," Buck Hooker pursued, "'less'n I know what I'm talkin' about—and I don't know if I know what I'm talkin' about or not. That remains to be seen, as the feller says. But yesterday I got an idea that I heard that holdup man's voice again. Just two or three words sounded like it, or maybe 'twas the way the words was put together.

"I don't know. Least'ways I got suspicions, and I couldn't help thinkin' of 'em; and the more I thought of 'em, the more suspicious my suspicions looked. I'm goin' to mention some names to you, and I know you'll never breathe 'em if it turns out that I'm wrong. Sylvester, I think that Harry Greep is the man that held me up—an' I think that him and Ike Storkey was workin' in cahoots."

Sylvester Moon at once demanded particulars.

"This mornin'," the grub-driver resumed, "I set to work, thinkin' maybe I'd find out somethin'. It didn't take me long to find out that Harry Greep and Ike Storkey both live at the Oscar House, an' that their rooms is right next to each other. That don't prove nothin', I know; but durin' th' day I see that they was uncommonly thick. If anybody's a mind to watch 'em, he can see that their heads are together a good bit at odd times durin' the day. Least'ways it appeared thataway to me. Maybe I didn't see things right, bein' suspicious; but my head's set on what I'm tellin' you.

"They're both drinkin' consid'ble today, sometimes together and sometimes with other folks. They'll be loaded for bear 'fore long. Course, Greep won't get so drunk that he can't play cards—but he'll get drunk. Ike Storkey, if I don't miss my guess, will be asleep in the next two hours. It'll be my bus'ness to see that he goes to bed in his own bed. I can fix that, bein' a friend o' his. Greep, he'll play cards most o' the night, an' stay just nicely loaded. I hope so anyways. Now if I can get you to help me——"

"I'll help you," Sylvester Moon interjected quickly.

THAT night the sodden slumbers of Ike Storkey were interrupted by a commotion in the next room. It was the room of his friend, Harry Greep. Mr. Storkey, whose head was very foggy, wasn't sure that he heard a noise, and didn't care much whether he had or not. He turned over, and sought again to slumber.

He was kept from this by a repetition of the commotion in his friend's room. It sounded as though a man, perhaps two men, were stumbling in the room.

"Harry must have a load on," Ike Storkey reflected; "an' him that's alluz tearin' me inside out for tunin' up a little bit. I hope he's drunk; I hope he's drunker'n a polecat!"

A voice in the next room muttered thickly, "Where's that light?" A volley of curses was uttered upon the elusive lamp, and presently Ike Storkey heard the scratching of a match.

Storkey decided that there were two men in Greep's room. "Someone's had to fetch him to bed." He could hear the men talking, for there was a door, closed now, between the rooms.

"Don't talk so loud," a strange voice warned.

"Nev' mine him—he's drunk!" the thick voice of Harry Greep rejoined. "He's drunk, drunk, drunk—the blockhead!"

"But he may wake up!"

"Not that fellow—not's drunk's he

gets. That's why I'm cutting away from him; he gets drunk too much. I'm afraid he'll blab."

Ike Storkey was all ears now. Softly he crept out of bed. He saw a thread of light sifting under the door. He applied his eye to the keyhole, but it had been plugged up. Ike hadn't noticed the keyhole before, and didn't know how long it had been plugged.

"So he's cuttin' away from me, eh?" he asked inwardly. He was sobering fast now. "That's all right with me, providin'——"

"Tomorrow night we'll dig out, while he's drunk," went on the voice of Greep. "We'll dig fast, eh, old boy? That bum isn't entitled to anything, and he won't get anything. Tomorrow night, we'll dig out."

"Sh-h-h-h!"

"Sh-h-h-h — nothing! Tomorrow night, I said. Le's go down and have another drink."

All the protests of the strange man in the next room availed nothing. The other man insisted on a drink, and soon the two left the room.

Ike Storkey paced up and down the room, occasionally nipping at a bottle. Soon he left the room and, unobserved he thought, made his way out of the hotel.

The task of following Ike Storkey was extremely difficult. Buck Hooker and Joe Blackmore, the sheriff, found that out—but they accomplished it. He set out on foot along the corduroy road leading to Snake Creek. They crept after him, clinging to the shadows as much as possible, while Ike Storkey, with but one thought in mind, kept in the middle of the road and kept on feverishly.

With pursued and pursuers worn out, Snake Creek came into view in the middle of the next afternoon. Ike Storkey, hastening his faltering footsteps, plunged at once off the road. He disappeared under the bridge that crossed the creek—about as a safe hiding-place as the thieves could have picked.

Buck Hooker was happy. Until that moment he had an idea that they had yet to journey through the swamps and rocky defiles of Snake Creek's bottom. He and Joe Blackmore were in hiding off the road.

"I reckon he's come to it," the grub-driver whispered.

"That's a safe place," said the sheriff. "None of us ever thought of looking at the spot where the holdup was pulled off."

Ike Storkey soon crept from underneath the bridge and up to the road. He gazed in all directions, puzzled.

"He's wondering what he ought to do now," said Joe Blackmore. "He's got it under that bridge all right. Let's close in on him."

It turned out that way. The stolen pay-sack, containing all the Larkey money, was found under the bridge. Sheriff Blackmore and Buck Hooker got a full confession out of Ike Storkey, who thought himself being double-crossed by Harry Greep, and late that night Greep was arrested at Midland.

"Eddication is a wonderful thing," said Buck Hooker to Sylvester Moon. "Eddication learnt me how to catch them fellers."

"How's that?" inquired Mr. Moon.

"Well, one o' them pieces that you give me to write says, 'When thieves fall out, honest men get their dues.' I thought about that over an' over, an' got an idea of makin' them thieves fall out. That's what made me think of goin' into Harry Greep's room, an' havin' you let loose all that talk. Yes, eddication is a great thing. Get out th' pencil an' paper, Sylvester, and let's have more of it."

WHAT MAKES YOU SNEEZE?

NO LESS then thirty common plants give off pollens which are the commonest causes of "hay fever" or "rose colds," while a much larger number affect some individuals. Research at Harvard University Medical School, conducted under an endowment for the purpose of $250,000 given by members of a family of hay-fever and asthma sufferers, has disclosed many heretofore unsuspected causes of these annoying and often prostrating affections, as well as means of positive diagnosis of the cause and methods of treatment that have many permanent cures. Thus it has been found that the same principles that apply in the treatment of hay fever caused by golden-rod pollen, probably the commonest exciting cause, apply to the treatment of asthma caused by sensibility to feather-protein. Many persons who had spent their nights for years sitting up in chairs because asthmatic symptoms occurred whenever they went to bed have been cured by no other treatment than the substitution of floss or wool pillows for the common feather pillow.

GOLD IN TRUST

By VAN WINKLE ANDERSON

FROM ALL THE SEVEN SEAS AND EVERY LAND UPON THE EARTH GOLD WILL DRAW THE SONS OF MEN. AND AT THE END OF THEIR QUEST WHO CAN TELL WHICH IS GOLD AND WHICH, AFTER ALL, IS DROSS?

A DECKHAND may be an artist at skating down a slippery gangplank, but put him on a snowbridge flung between two mountains, with nothing but a mile of diluted ozone and sure death beneath him, and he will reverentially go down on all fours. It was this law of contrast that amused us as, safely aboard the ship, we watched the timorous steps of the mountain climbing prospectors as they labored across twelve feet of rain-soaked gangplank onto the *Crescent Moon*. The river was so lashed by the deluge that it seemed to be fighting back. Through the dim light of the dock lamps we saw him come to the head of the gangway. For a moment he hesitated, hunched his shoulders under his pack as if defying fate, then to our relief he made it safely aboard.

"The last of the 'forty-niners," I exclaimed, when he entered the cabin and threw his blanket roll down.

"Well, here we are, sure enough," Jeter admired, studying him approvingly. "I'll bet that old boy can smell gold a mile deep."

Jeter's short, sturdy legs were sufficient for the call of the golf course, but I noticed he was now measuring, not without envy, the long, mountain climbing reachers of the old prospector, as he stood looking for a seat in the over-crowded cabin.

Written into his weather-beaten features with indelible lines was patience and gentleness; from his clear, blue eyes shone courage and honesty.

"He will strike it, if any of us do," I prophesied—a prophesy being as much as you ever can promise in any mining venture.

We were tilting with the defiant challenge, "Come and get me," which had rung up and down the coast of the Pacific Northwest. In common with the other men who were crowding the decks of the *Crescent Moon* we were being drawn into the mountains of Washington State with a vague uncertainty as to real destination. No stories agreed about actualities of place but everybody was perfectly sure it was there.

We called it "It" because we all knew what was meant, because it was the only thing in our minds, which, to perpetrate a pun, is about the only place where it is to be found. If you were facing the end of the world you would use the same abbreviation and ask, "When is it coming?"

So it now was, only this time it was real, actual, tangible gold. Some of the men affected to spiel carelessly and called it, "The Stuff," or "The Dirt," but when any of us used that little word they all listened wistfully and more than one would elbow his way to the center of the group to ask the latest news from the front.

Fragments of their talk drifted to us where we sat.

"It's there, all right, I saw Milliken and he came out with a gunnysack full."

"Yes, they say the whole mountain is lousy with it."

"It is not a quartz proposition, man; it is in the sand of the Cowlitz. It will be dredging."

"That's what I hear, I brought my pan."

"Ah, go on, it'll be bacon for your pan, what you need is a hammer."

"Who is the wise old boy a-sitting on his pack? He don't look excited about it."

"Not him, he's been through this too many times afore. That is old Flint."

"Well, I got to talk to him and find out what he knows about it."

The inquisitive one pushed his way over to Flint, who had settled himself comfortably on his blanket roll to enjoy a restful smoke from his consoling briar.

"Going in?" asked that gentleman, squatting down for a confab.

"Yes," Flint drawled, then puffing re-

flectively he expanded, "think I will."

"They say it's there," the anxious one half asked.

"Think so?" mused Flint.

The encouragement was slight but it was eagerly seized.

"Sure it is; all the wise ones are on this boat. You can't fool them. They left Tonopah dead cold to get in on this strike. I guess I needn't tell you that. Say, I bet you strike it rich this time."

"Mebby."

"It's a cinch! I know a hunch when I feel it. Say, you don't happen to want a partner, do you?"

"Not exactly," declined Flint, as tactfully as he knew how to put it. It was said in a reminiscent kind of way as if he were speaking to himself.

"Why not; don't you believe in partners?" It was put entirely academically.

"Mostly yes, mostly no; there are partners and partners," was the evasive answer.

"Well, anyway, you'll be one of the lucky ones," he was promised.

"Young man, did you ever look for gold?" Flint shot at him.

"Not exactly," was the unwilling confession, "but I've been in mining camps, when I was a boy."

"Then let me tell you something," offered Flint. "Gold is like oil; it's where you find it. I've been hunting it for over fifty years and I've never found it yet, but I'm going to get it this time; I surely am, or you can scratch me for a burnt match."

"You bet you are," was the encouragement, as if the speaker were proud that he was talking to a rich man.

"It's my last try, and I made up my mind to that, but this time I got the hunch as never before." Then to clinch the argument he said with an all-inclusive sweep of his long arm, "Why, do you know, everybody has said since I've been on this boat, 'You're lucky; you're going to strike it, and strike it rich!'"

"Sure you are! That's what I been telling you. I wonder when this boat is going?"

There was a commotion on deck as of casting off lines, jingling bells, a taunting toot of the whistle to the left-behinds, and the *Crescent Moon* churned her way into the stream.

"Guess we're off," sighed old Flint, with contentment. Closing his eyes in sleep achieved a riddance of his would-be partner.

Down the deep flowing Willamette, into the most beautiful of waterways, the far-reaching Columbia, and up into the mountainward Cowlitz the *Crescent Moon* steamed, journeying from midnight till noon the next day. There was little sleep to be had from the cattle-like crowding so the men consoled themselves with cards, smoking, and yarns of the mining camp.

Collecting the fares the young purser managed to get in a word of cheer and encouragement to every hopeful prospector. Many of these storm-buffeted men had sold their every earthly possession to gain the blanket roll and store of provisions they carried on their bent backs. Grub-stakers! They were there, more than would admit it. Do you know what it means? It means a man will tear the sinews out of his joints, drag his lacerated body out of bone-breaking crevasses, freeze his spine, and burn his face to a blister, sharing equally everything he gains in his one chance to a thousand for a sack of flour and a side of bacon.

Children among children were they without the guiding hand of woman. Every little incident was taken as an omen of good luck. From this hour failure was cast out of these men's lives. All now were embarked on a fresh hunt for the treasure but one step farther on. The small stern-wheeler ran into an astonishing run of shimmering, silvery smelt crowding their way from the limitless ocean spaces to the confines of a mountain stream. The deckhands bailed up buckets full of the toothsome fish from the living waters. Surely this was a good sign. Where silver was so easily mined gold aplenty must be at hand. A flight of wild geese wedged their way directly toward the gold-fields. Every prospector secretly noticed the line of flight. These were signs for the knowing; for every honest soul was conscious of the rewardful largess of Providence, so good care he took to feel the virtue of piety. From now on each and every one would go right—if he could but strike it, a little condition precedent it was only fair to impose on the Almighty.

As the men became better acquainted through the tedium of close confinement they began to exhibit their treasures, a chunk of quartz from the Sierras, a nugget of gold from the Klondike, a lump of pure, soft silver from the Cœur d' Alene, a heavy, richly enameled watch looted from the palace of a mandarin in Pekin, a two century old Spanish peso

from Manila, and a silver mounted rabbit's foot deftly pinched off the broad chest of a sleeping young war lord of the gridiron in a resort beyond the ken of his proud parents. All these eventually reached old Flint for his final approval. The gold he understood and located instantly. He knew the silver tolerantly, but the watch and the rabbit's foot were none of his. They belonged to others and should be returned or no good would come of their possession. Thus spake old Flint and the reluctant owners were all but ready to throw them overboard, but the watch was surety for a night's lodging and the silver mounted rabbit's foot most certainly was a charm too potent for theft to overcome. So he bade them have it their own sinful way and withdrew to the privacy of his blanket roll where he sat and smoked and thought of the colleges he would found and the missionaries he would send forth to unexplored lands.

HIS life in California had informed him of the establishment of a great university in memory of a boy taken in the blush of manhood from his doting parents. He had seen the cool, scholastic quadrangles of yellow sandstone harmonizing gratefully under the fathomless blue of California's turquoise sky and he knew not whether it was the blending of color and form or the appeal of sentiment that made him resolve to one day establish an even greater university. For did he not know of a small, crudely marked grave high up on a rocky shoulder of the violet-gowned Sierras? And did he love his boy the less because he was deserted by a foolish, erring wife who had fled to far away Australia with his thieving, treacherous partner? So after all there were partners and partners and for the most part the word carried with it a funeral knell to his happiness.

"We could learn more from that old fellow than from any dozen prospectors on this boat," Jeter remarked, indicating the silent veteran of the trail with a glance of his eyes.

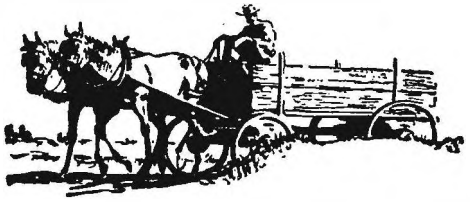
"Yes, but he don't seem to be very communicative," I replied.

"Let's keep an eye on him, anyway. He may warm up to us," said Jeter.

Under ordinary conditions that last would have seemed decidedly humorous. We both were rated successful business men. On the present venture we were engaged more by way of recreation and adventure than for profit, and to insure the success of our outing we had our fishing tackle hid away in our dunnage out of sight of the questful prospectors. If we did not find gold we would shamelessly fish. For the moment we were carried off our feet by the enthusiasm of the miners around us, so in spite of our business habits we were as eager to land and hit the trail as the youngest prospector. Little wonder we found ourselves listening anxiously for any crumbs of wisdom Flint might drop. Here everything was reversed. The closer we got to the mountains the greater was Flint's ascendancy.

OUR boat was built to navigate the dew on the grass of the meadows. Where the foaming stream was squeezed to death by the crowding hills we came to a final stop. At a town which consisted of a dock and a road on a hillside we were rushed ashore by the hurrying, strong-armed crew. We found ourselves in an excited, shouting mob that bartered eagerly for any kind of a conveyance to take them on their way, which was a hard two day's travel into the mountains. Most of the prospectors grimly shouldered their packs and patiently plodded along the upclimbing road.

Jeter and I were delayed over an hour in trying to recover a piece of lost luggage. The mishap was fortunate because it gave us time to bid in an unbreakable farm wagon manned by a friendly native



who proved as optimistic as the young purser of the boat. Like him, we might have observed he was playing at the winning end of the table. However our rods still tempered our enthusiasm. We had jolted along for a tedious two hours when Jeter called out as joyfully as if he had met a fellow townsman at the port of embarkation.

"There's old Flint," he yelled, loud enough to be heard by that mildly surprised gentleman.

"Sure enough, it is the old prospector," I said, laying a detaining hand on the reins.

"Whoa," called the willing driver, with the weight of his hobnailed boot on the brake.

"Want a lift?" offered Jeter.

"Going my way?" he asked, looking uncertainly at the rods and the rubber wading boots.

He did not unsling his pack but waited for an answer.

"Which way are we going?" I asked the driver, admitting ourselves in his power.

Presumably the young mountaineer knew where everybody was going. I had been admiring his fortitude in not abandoning the regular ways of life in order to prospect for gold with the rest of us.

"The road forks at the bridge about five miles from here. One road goes up the north side of the creek and that is shorter. Most all of 'em are going that-away, but the way along the south side takes through Mayfield and you can get a room for the night there; otherwise you'll have to camp on the road. If you've never seen Mayfield you ought to see her."

Jeter looked almost appealingly at Flint, who was resting his pack on the hind wheel of the wagon.

"If you don't mind we'll go by way of Mayfield. I've always had a hankering to see that place," he said, and that was about as big a whopper as he could tell. I felt sure Mayfield was not on the books of either of our firms that made all of the Oregon-Washington territory.

"Some town, boys, some town," our now intimate friend pronounced, with cosmopolitan ease. "Better get in, while the getting's good," he advised Flint.

"Suits me all right," Flint accepted, climbing into the back of the wagon. Not to be drawn into useless talk, he sat with his back to us and his long legs hanging restfully down, just as he always had done when he was a small boy.

"It is quite a long walk," I sympathized, aiming to penetrate his armor.

"Walking's something I'm used to," he replied and that ended the conversation.

He was distinctly unlike the man who sits on the last inch of the back seat of your automobile and talks into your ear to show his gratitude for the lift you are giving him. Somehow I felt it was more in his power for him to do for us than we for him. As he indifferently idled an observant glance over the contents of our wagon we felt that he was studying us as critically as we had him. We judged him by what he said and he us by how we looked. I am afraid our luggage appeared unprofessional and that he was resolving to take better care of us than he had on the boat.

After shaking the souls out of our bodies we trundled down the main street of Mayfield and painfully disembarked in front of the hotel. We could tell it was a hotel irrespective of its faded sign because it was the only building in the town not boarded up, so there was no mistaking its offer of hospitality. The traveling public would have carried away a much better impression of Mayfield if it also had been sealed. The place seemed worse than dead, it looked dug up.

Out of the past of the once bustling activity of the "Hotel Mayfield" leisurely strolled a hollow-chested man with the idle curiosity of a town loafer. He seemed detached as if far removed from the active affairs of the world. He did not even speak to us, but stood and looked to see what was going to happen. His frayed vest and shirt sleeves exuded the heat and fumes of the kitchen. We could almost read the menu with our noses. A look at Mr. May told the whole sad story of Mayfield. As a kind of postage stamp of the town he was introduced to us by our friendly driver with the flourish of a rural delivery carrier handing out a registered letter.

"Mr. May, shake hands with my friends Mr. Jeter, and—and—I forget your name, sir?" turning apologetically to me.

"Where are all the rest of the inhabitants?" Jeter heartlessly sang out.

"In the kitchen having their supper. You're just in time. It's luck you did not come later." He was friendly; he was forgiving. But we did not see the force of his last remark until we entered and took census of all the little Mays brought into the world in protest of the desertion of the village.

"Where are you going—prospecting for gold?"

"Yep," from Jeter.

"Well, you'd better go fishing," he warned looking enviously at our rods.

"Don't you think it is a strike?" asked Jeter, somewhat disconcerted. Old Flint was quietly unloading the wagon in payment for the lift.

"It may be; they say there's an awful sight of people going into the mountains. You're the first that has come this way."

That explained it; the old man was huffy about going off the route.

"It will make a town of this place," Jeter appraised.

"Don't think so; the same thing happened thirty years ago," croaked the old pessimist.

"The devil you say," we chorused, looking in alarm at one another.

"What do you think about it, Mr. Flint?" I asked, half determined to climb back onto the wagon.

"If it's there we will find it; I've never yet given up a good prospect," he reassured us, with the same note of pride Lawrence must have sounded when he coined his ringing phrase about his ship.

"Well, anyway, you've got a nice little town here," my friend complimented, inclined to make the most of the situation.

"Yes, it's a good town," Mr. May conceded, looking it over with a glance up and down the street.

"Do you own it all?" we asked.

"All but the mortgage, and the blamed fellow is trying to give me that," declared Mr. May, with a determined negative wag of his wise old head.

We were passing through the unfurnished front rooms into the odoriferous kitchen.

"I'll tell you," he explained in self-defense, "there is only one difference between me and Vanderbilt and Astor. I seen pictures of the Hotel Astor and this is as good a hotel for Mayfield as that is for New York. Believe me, if they'd put all their money into Mayfield instead of New York real estate they'd be right here now."

He brushed several little Mays aside and made room for us at the table. His poor, bedraggled wife scarcely gave us a welcoming glance.

"It's not much but you're welcome to it. I always got food and lodging for travelers." He sat down opposite to us and fell upon his interrupted meal.

We observed with a shudder the challenge of a pile of steaming, boiled potatoes, a resentful, sour looking loaf of bread, and a reeking pan of fried bacon on the oilcloth covered table.

Jeter mumbled something about having over-eaten on the boat. He only nibbled at his food so I had to do the proper thing. Our host seemed so glad to see

us that he kept up a constant flow of words without waiting for our replies.

"I can give you a front room, or a side one, or a whole suit of 'em, even a business block, if that don't hit you right," he said in grim jest.

He addressed his monologue entirely to us as the ones needing care and attention, leaving Flint to his own devices.

After our struggle with the unbuttered boiled potatoes and the sour bread Flint unobtrusively sidled over to the sink and wiped the dishes. The china piled and put away, the worn mother sank down to rest with a baby at her breast.

Out of respect for the feelings of our skeptical host we did not like to lead the conversation back to the subject of mining, so we watched the struggle for supremacy between the next to the youngest child and a pet baby pig, as fat and pink as a circus balloon. The child crawled into the warmest corner, behind the kitchen stove close to the wood box, and drowsed half asleep. Whereupon the pig would worm its way in and crowd the child out. Then the infant would pull the protesting pet out by the hind legs and settle down for another nap, until again made uncomfortable by the crowding of the dissatisfied animal.

The third youngest child, a sturdy, round-eyed little wretch, wandered disconsolately around the room appraising us judiciously until he made up his mind to favor Flint, which he did by confidently climbing up onto his lengthy lap, where he settled down very much at home. Flint appeared unaware of his presence until the boy sat up and gazed earnestly into his eyes for a searching quiz.

"Have you a pet pig? Have you?" he had an interesting childlike way of repeating himself.

"No, I haven't a pet pig," the old prospector admitted, with a low chuckle.

"Haven't you? Have you a little boy? Have you?"

"No, I haven't a little boy," was the regretful answer.

"Haven't you? Why haven't you?"

"I once had a little boy," the old man confided, very gently, entirely forgetful of our presence.

"Did you? Where is he? Where is he now?"

"Well, you see, that was a long time ago. He is—he is a way up high on the side of a mountain where the eagles fly, far up where no man ever goes to disturb him."

"Is he?" The child drowsed. Then he sat up with an effort. "Why?" came the pitiless question.

Flint winced and hastily filled his pipe.

"He likes it there. He was a fine little boy, like you, only a little bigger. Do you ever go into the mountains?" The evasion was pathetic.

"Yes, I like the mountains. When I am a man I am going to own a mountain an' fish an' hunt an' have a pony. Where are you going? Where are you going now?" he demanded, with childish abruptness.

Flint started slightly and smiled through the smoke of his pipe, which he held protectingly away from the child.

"Me? Oh, I'm going into the mountains. Yes, I'm going far into the mountains," he answered.

"Are you? What for? Why are you going?"

Flint shot a furtive glance at us but we were studiously watching the conflict between the pet pig and the baby.

"Why am I going? I'll tell you—to find a gold mine."

"Are you?" with charming trust.

"Yes, to find a gold mine. And when I find it—when I get it, do you know what I am going to do?"

The two heads were close together in an exchange of confidences.

"What?" breathlessly.

"I'm going to make a great big school, a place where little boys like you can go and get everything you want—fishing, hunting, and even a pony. Yes, there will be ponies there, lots of 'em."

"Will you?" The sleepy head nodded in a futile effort to support itself, then sank against the broad chest of the old prospector. His hand was gently stroking the boy's tousled hair.

The patient mother led her countless brood into the adjoining room. Tiptoeing cautiously behind her followed Flint bearing the dreaming child.

"And by God he will," Jeter exploded when we were safely alone.

From then on we were all for Flint. It mattered not that he did not formally acknowledge us as partners; most certainly he was our partner for a full third of any gain we made, and the fishing end of the trip shrank to a complete insignificance.

We left Mayfield early the next morning more determined than ever to comb the mountains for outcropping quartz. Our wagon lumbered and wrenched its tedious way as far into the mountains as the trail gave room for four wheels. There we were unloaded with an agreement for a return trip in two weeks to the day. Cheerful to the end our driver departed wishing us good luck.

Against our protests old Flint loaded himself down with the greater part of our luggage, and followed the mountain trail that dwindled away from the road as we climbed upward. We trudged behind his long, swinging stride for ten miles, making frequent excuses to stop and rest so as to spare the old man, who seemed to gain strength and hope as he climbed.

The trail ended at the lone cabin of a homesteader, in a clearing of the vast belt of timber that clothes the mountains of the Pacific Northwest. A riotous stream foamed and cascaded its way down a canyon back of the cabin, but it tempted us not for we now had more serious thoughts.

When we knocked at the cabin door we were asked in by a youngish woman with smiling lips and sad eyes. She appeared glad to see us and willingly promised us the shelter of her small but neat four room house. Without apology or needless explanations she showed us into a room, smelling sweet and clean from the fragrance of the fresh hay that filled the mattress of the one double bed. She nodded in a matter of fact way to the rest of the floor space as room for the third guest. Flint promptly dropped his blanket roll, thereby taking possession.

"Prospecting?" she asked, looking understandingly at Flint.

"Yes," we acknowledged.

"Ah, yes, there are many in this year," she informed us, and there her questions ended. "My husband will be in in a minute; he is milking."

As she spoke a young mountaineer entered singing like a grand opera tenor. He was carrying two frothy milk pails which he put down in confusion to shake hands with us. Evidently the two thought over the same wire for he asked as soon as his wife explained our desire to be put up in their cabin if we were prospecting. When we informed him that we were he made the same comment.

"Ah, yes, there are many people in the mountains this year." Then his eyes shifted uneasily toward a shelf displaying several chunks of rich looking quartz. We pretended not to see it, for we knew the western code.

That evening they studiously avoided talking about the gold rush. Early next morning the husband strode down the trail with a gunnysack under his arm, and we went forth to attack the mountains.

Flint took the upper elevation, I the next, and Jeter the lower. We were to work until noon, when we planned to meet for reports and the cold lunch we carried with us. It was exhausting work, over great fallen logs six and eight feet in diameter, with dense underbrush holding us back and vines tripping us into pitfalls. Worn out we returned in the evening to the shack in time to meet the husky young homesteader grinding his way up the trail bent under a sack full of provisions. I noticed its evident weight when he swung it down onto the ground.

"How heavy is it?" I asked, hefting it with both hands.

"Seventy-five pounds," he smilingly answered.

"And how far have you carried it?" asked Jeter.

"Ten miles," just as if he had said ten feet.

"Then you have hiked twenty miles over these hills," I admired, thinking of the five miles over which we had labored.

"It's all in being used to it, sir. One day in the city tires me," he explained.

His philosophy was consoling and made us the more determined to make a better showing for the next day. But that day ended as disastrously as the day before, without any indication of any mineral of any kind. We kept on day after day going early and returning late, always with the best wishes and sympathy of our hosts, who never made any allusion to the wonderful quartz staring us in the face. All three of us had had frequent opportunity to examine it closely when they were out doing their chores, and such quartz it was—just simply rank with wealth!

It began to get on our nerves. They knew what we were after; they knew where a priceless ledge must outcrop from the side of the mountain, and we all knew that its development would make them vulgarly rich. Why did they hold back? What did they fear? Did they suspect us? Obviously it would take capital to develop the mine. Fortunately for them we had exactly what they must have been praying for. We talked openly about our financial standing and of our association with other rich men, hoping to draw them out, but without success.

It was exhausting, muscle-wearing work for us younger men, but for Flint it was soul crushing. The old man was making his last push. Day after day we saw a furrow of care and pain deepen about his mouth, while his eyes narrowed to a despairing stare.

"We must find something or the old man will go batty," my friend complained.

"Nonsense, he is fed up on this. Still I do wish we could locate some kind of a claim," I weakly answered, for I was at the end of my tether.

"How about offering to buy them out?" nodding toward the cottage.

"It will never do; they are holding something back on us," I accused. "That little woman is getting so jumpy she can hardly stay in her skin, and her big husband is not much better."

"I noticed that, too," said Jeter. "Well, the least we can do is to ask them if they will sell an interest in their claim."

"Go ahead and do it then," I challenged.

"No, you do it; I've always been better at selling," he evaded.

Then we found ourselves looking at the same object. I stared at Jeter and saw his eyes shift from the direction of a rocky hillside far up to the left of the cabin. An eagle was sailing in slow, lazy circles above it.

"Look here, Brandt, do you realize," he was saying, with a puzzled expression, "we have grubbed and pounded every rock on all the hills around here but up there near that little fence? Every time I proposed going up there Flint voted it down. I can't make the old man out; he always makes some excuse. What do we know about him, anyway? He may be framing something on us."

That made me mad so I blurted out, "I don't care a whoop whether he is or not, but if you want to know what I think about it—I think the old man is honest and would share his last crumb with us. He knows more about this business in a minute than we ever will in a lifetime. If he thinks it's no good up there, then you had better believe it is a waste of time to shinny up."

"Maybe so, but, just the same, I think it is kind of funny. I'm getting tired of following an iron-jawed old man over the mountains." Jeter was inclined to be overfond of the comforts of life.

It was our last day of prospecting. We had come back to the cabin an hour earlier because Jeter had wrenched his leg in an ugly fall off a fallen log. We both

were worn and ill-tempered because Flint had shamed us by remaining out on the futile hunt. Not being able to persuade the old man to quit and return with us we had quarreled all the way back. I did not like to end the trip with any such unpleasantness so I threw out a feeler, thinking it would clear the atmosphere.

"We still have nearly an hour before dinner," I said, looking at my watch. "I have a half notion to fit my rod together and try a few casts."

Jeter must have been more shaken than I suspected. Threatening storm clouds darkened his usually smiling face. He poked his face so close to mine that I had to give ground as he exploded two scornful words at me.

"You fish!"

Unmistakably the accent of contempt was on the first word, I am glad to say, because I never have liked slang expressions.

"I only said 'half a notion'," I hastily corrected, and then we both laughed at our foolishness.

I could have embraced him for what followed. Jeter put his arm on my shoulder and said, "It may not be of great consequence to us, but it is as good as life and death to that old man. We must find out where they got that quartz. Tonight or never!"

"How?" I asked, eager for any suggestion.

Jeter sat down on the doorstep as if determined to lay siege to the house. He took out his pocket-knife and neatly trimmed off a piece of worn leather from the sole of his boot; it was that that probably caused his fall.

"I think we had better put it squarely up to old Flint. As I said, it means vastly more to him than to us, and, besides, they are more apt to have confidence in him than in us. You see he is more their kind." Jeter was wasted on business. He should have been a party leader.

I was perfectly willing to concede that point, so we decided to have a talk with Flint and persuade him to get down to business and make the Dickson's some kind of an offer. The old man had hinted he expected to return to the city with us. This then was to be our last night with them. Accordingly we planned to turn in early and give the old fellow a chance to draw them out.

About this time he came limping up to us, too tired to lift his eyes. He sat down beside Jeter with a collapsing sigh of exhaustion that sounded suspiciously like a sob. Then he braced himself and assumed a stoical indifference.

When we told him our plan he listened in silence and in his usual way he promised nothing. From his failure to object, however, we gathered he would make some kind of a try for an agreement.

The Dicksons appeared to enjoy our visit. As they were above the average of their kind in intelligence, with an active interest in the affairs of the outside world, it must have been exceedingly irksome to be isolated as they were in the mountains. We were amused at one little weakness they displayed. Evidently she considered herself gifted with the power and charm of verse, and, of course, he was excessively proud of this accomplishment. By the dim light of their small coal oil lamp she must have struggled long and patiently to make rhyme and meter fit, but at last she achieved a real poem of twenty stanzas in exactly the same meter as Gray's Elegy.

"Tell them about it," her husband would urge.

She would blush and all but flee from the table to hide her confusion. Her pleading eyes begged for mercy.

"No, Paul, I will not," she giggled, the nervous uncertain laugh of the country girl.

"Ah, go on, Martha, you can speak it—it's your own poetry. Didn't you make it yourself?"

"No," she denied, lowering her eyes.

Ah, those dreamy, mother eyes we first saw with such surprise and pleasure. She was as simple and charming as a trillium. He smiled at her reassuringly.

To us with a note of pride, "It's about—about——"

Here she would look frightened and strangely sad and hastily interrupt him to offer us a second helping of whatever was before her. The twenty verses were too many for us. Distrustful, we never shared the husband's enthusiasm in order to learn what it all was about. I am afraid we must have seemed unsympathetic, but please remember we were prospecting for gold, and not courting that painful ordeal, an author's reading.

When we sat wearily down to dinner that last evening this little scene was reenacted to the evident satisfaction of her

husband, because, in a gentle, affectionate way, he was something of a tease. She was uncontrollably nervous. Once she abruptly pushed her chair back and fairly ran over to the shelf on which were displayed their prized ornaments and the glittering quartz. Taking one of the rich specimens in her hand she started to say something. Her perplexed husband looked anxiously at her, then at us. Their eyes irresolutely met in questioning indecision; as hastily she replaced it and returned to the table. During the rest of the meal she laughed a great deal, which meant she wanted to cry.

"So you are going to leave us tomorrow," she repeated several times. To which her husband as often added:

"Well, well, we will miss you. I wish you would stay longer."

"Yes, if you would only stay longer. The blackberries will soon be ripe and the mountains are so beautiful in the fall."

He eagerly confirmed that. It was apparent they were as happy together as two people well could be. Evidently there was something else besides our company that strongly attracted them, making them almost desperate to hold us.

FLINT was eating in his silent, appreciative way, and only came out of his dispirited reverie when the husband began to urge his distracted wife to recite her poem. As usual they went through the childish preliminaries. Upon receiving her refusals he reached out to pet her hand. Then turning to us as if it all were for the first time he started to explain in his simple, honest way:

"It is about——"

"What is your poem about, Mrs. Dickson?" asked Flint, innocently throwing a bomb at her.

For answer she ran into her room, blinded by tears.

"She is not well; my poor little woman is not well tonight," he apologized, hastily following her.

From their room murmured his low, persuasive tones and her occasional, smothered sobs. In a few minutes she was led back to us, timid and confused like a penitent child. During the remainder of the meal I watched their effort to be calm; then turning my attention to old Flint I saw a dull red fading slowly from his furrowed face.

We were glad to have the pretext of an early start on our homeward journey to excuse ourselves from this wrought-up couple. Wishing them goodnight we left them for Flint to solve. The partition to our room was nothing but thin board and paper. It tempted us to listen; we did, and heard everything that followed.

At first there was a long awkward silence; then we heard the man's voice.

"So you really are going tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow."

"What a pity. I wish you could stay longer. They are nice gentlemen."

Needless to say that was from the woman.

"My wife likes company. Are the gentlemen rich?"

We were not so pleased with ourselves.

"Reckon they are—they are business men."

"Yes, then they must be rich." He stopped to ponder this; then he continued, "They could help us, yes, that's so—they could help us."

The husband was weakening.

"Why don't you stay a little longer—the blackberries——"

"They can't, Martha; if they are business men they've got their business to attend to."

"But this is so important, oh, it is so important, it can't be decided in a minute."

She was weakening.

We listened shamelessly.

"No use, we got to go. There is nothing here; we've looked everywhere."

Confound that stupid Flint! That is what we get for leaving a business deal to a jackass.

"Let me show you some fancy work I just did."

We heard the light, nervous tread of her feet.

"It is a centrepiece for the table, goes in the middle of the table when you've got company."

"It is pretty," Flint conceded.

"And this is our photograph when we were married."

"Why, you looked young!"

Did she feel the stab? We hoped not.

"Yes, we were both young. That was ten years ago. He was twenty-three and I was eighteen. There is the marriage certificate over the door. This is a photograph of my father and mother and one of my sisters."

"Gee, she is showing him her treasures. Pretty soon she will recite her poem and then we'll know all," whispered Jeter.

With infinite tenderness:

"Our little girl— You can hear the sea

in this shell. It is pretty, isn't it? It is funny how things in the ocean can have color."

"I guess God made the things in the sea as well as on the land, but to me there is nothing prettier than mineral."

Sly old Flint. We began to appreciate his art.

"Think so?" We heard the heavy tread of the husband crossing the room and his return. There was a closer drawing together of the three chairs. "Did you happen to notice this quartz? Almost solid gold. Feel its weight."

Our hearts stopped beating.

"It's the real stuff, isn't it?" Flint admired.

"Yes, we sent it to the city to have it assayed. I'd be afraid to tell you what it goes."

The excited voice of the woman interrupted, "We never showed it to anybody before; we never let 'em see it. Every time we see anybody coming up the trail we hide it, but there are so many people coming into the mountains this year it seems no use. There used to be only one or two a season, now they come by the hundreds and thousands. They mostly go in by the north fork. I guess it's a real gold strike."

"It is," her husband solemnly affirmed.

Her tones were soft and patient, "It will make lots of the neighbors rich. It would make us richer than we ever thought of. It is so hard! If we only knew what to do! We've been lucky all the time, but once, and now we are getting old and it's such hard work; but I don't mean to complain, we've been happier than most people."

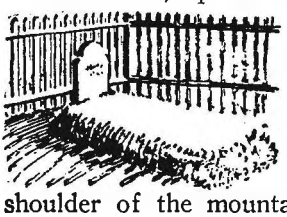
We heard her suppressed sobs and could all but feel the swaying and wracking of her shoulders.

Flint cleared his throat and moved uneasily in his chair.

"There, there, Martha, I wouldn't take on like that."

We knew the man was sheltering his wife.

"When a woman cries like that it always makes me feel kind of squeekish," apologized Flint. Then an awkward attempt at creating a diversion, "Where did it come from; up there on the hill?"



We knew he was looking in the direction of a little plot surrounded by a white picket fence on the shoulder of the mountain.

"Yes," the man all but whispered.

Comfortingly in his powerful arms he was holding his wife now bravely trying to smile.

"I thought so," said Flint.

"Oh, what shall we do? What would you do? It is from her grave—our precious little girl!" The mother was pleading with her soul for guidance.

There was a moment of silence; then the answer, slowly but with unmistakable meaning:

"Well, if you ask me, I know what I would do—to anybody that disturbed the rest of my boy."

SOME ANIMAL CENTENARIANS

HOW long do animals live? Nobody knows how many years a whale takes to grow to maturity, nor how long it lives thereafter; but that the period of life is well beyond the century mark is probable. Recently there died in New York an elephant known to be more than 100 years old; she was the first elephant ever brought to America, and was full-grown when she reached this country in 1831. A tortoise that died in a South African museum in 1920 had been there since 1834, and was then a gigantic reptile of unknown, but obviously great age. Another, still living, has been in the museum since 1843. A few years ago a toad that had made its home under the stone kitchen step of an English cottage through the lives of four generations of the family living there was killed by a stray dog. This reptile's age was estimated at 125 years.

"THE WINGS OF THE WIND"

TO FLY with the speed of the wind was once a popular metaphor that has lost its significance in the face of modern invention. Many airplane flights of 200 miles an hour or more have been recorded, while the swiftest recorded wind velocity is 186 miles an hour, registered on the summit of Mount Washington on January 11, 1878.

FAST AND SPURIOUS

By SANDY ROBERTSON

"THEY'S TWO THINGS AH WANTS, BOSS: AH AIMS TO TRAVEL AN' AH MUS' SEE MOVIELAND," SAID COCOA, OTHERWISE ASSISTANT FERRYMASTER OF THE S.O.S.R.R., AND THEREBY HANGS THIS TALE OF A BLACK CHAMPION OF THE PRIZE RING WHO AT THE LAST COULDN'T RESIST THE LURE OF BRASS BUTTONS

JES' move up a step er two, boss, so's we kin git dat las' auto on de boat, please, suh."

The speaker, a tall, loose-limbed negro, stood in the gangway of the ferryboat *Ashtabula* that lay on the Jersey side of the North River awaiting its quota of commuters from the eight-thirty trains. He wore a bright blue uniform that jingled with nickel buttons, and he almost affectionately clapped the shoulder of the tipsy truck-driver who had stubbornly refused to move his horses up to the rear of the wagon in front of him.

"Pipe down, you black ape. Where do you get off to tell me what to do? I'm from the South myself," continued the driver, who had never been fifty miles from Jersey City in his life, "and all I've got to say to you is watch your step; watch your step."

The driver hitched up his trousers at both sides with the hope of impressing the negro that he was ready for any rough stuff that might follow, and, incidentally and accidentally, disclosed a pint bottle of Jersey moonshine that protruded from his hip.

The darky pulled his blue cap an inch below the top of his ears. He was the Assistant Ferrymaster, which fact was proclaimed by the brass plate above the peak of his cap.

"If you is from de Souf, suh, I congratulates you. But my work is to 'conomize space on dis here boat an' ordahs is ordahs, an' my ordahs comes from de Superintendent er de Marine Depahtment er de S. O. S. Railroad." This was said with no trace of arrogance, but the driver snapped off his coat and zigzagged toward the darky who stood, arms folded, calmly awaiting the execution of his order. When he was within range he drove his right foot into the darky's shin with considerable force, and followed this with a left hook to the jaw.

The negro's eyes began to roll for a second, then he clinched instinctively, wrapping his arms about the driver, fully expecting that the man's head would clear and his temper subside so that he could release his hold. He then seemed to trust that the driver's sense of justice would lead him to move his team forward into place along the gangway.

But there was no justice in him, nor sense either, for that matter, for as soon as he was released with clenched fists he again plunged headlong toward the darky. As he did so the darky timed a right hook, about the size of a sickle moon, that landed fairly on the jaw. The driver went down. The negro moved the team forward a step or two, motioned for the waiting auto to cross the bridge and walked slowly in the direction of the concourse while his opponent was brought to by a bystander

who pulled the bottle of moonshine from his hip pocket and poured half of it down his capacious throat.

Mirthfully the commuters watched the scrap, and among them, eyes agape at the finish, stood George Maynard, a Marine Department clerk who had drifted out to the boat to have a smoke before his boss arrived. Later he followed the darky in the direction of the concourse.

"Say, Cocoa"—they called him Cocoanut because they said he was white inside —"you pulled the niftiest piece of work on that bum I've seen in years. After that hook of yours he curled up like a lap dog. Let me tell you, buddy," and he extended his hand to the Cocoanut Kid's shoulder, "Dempsey couldn't have done it better and quicker himself."

Cocoa stood grinning beside his office—a closet about the size of a telephone booth that was bolted to the piers.

"I sweah I didn't know I could hit like dat!" he said. "But I ain't aimin' to staht to continue settlin' mattahs dataway," he added, as the real seriousness of his little tiff dawned upon him. "It ain't fair to de Depahtment. Den, besides," he concluded wisely, "I's black an' de boss ain't gwine put up with no such doin's."

"A bird with a punch like yours, that speed, and ghostlike footwork don't have to worry about the boss, his job or anything else. Listen to me while I spill the whole matter in one little glad sentence."

"Go on, boss, I'm a-lis'nin'!"

"I've got five hundred dollars, Cocoa. And if they were spread up the road they'd reach from this concourse to the other end of Hudson Boulevard."

Maynard took this means of impressing the darky because he knew that the Kid's arithmetic was faulty. Hadn't Cocoa told him a few months back that he had quit his job in Baltimore after he had sold an old motorcycle for $100? "An' I ain't aimin' to work no more dis wintah, suh," he had told his employer. Incidentally, he had lost the whole sum at craps next day.

"Because I know this fight game from Genesis up, I'm willing to split this five hundred fifty-fifty with you, Cocoa. Why? It's a good business proposition just as sure as pussy's a cat, and you can bowl over the crew of middleweights, that's posin' as fighters 'round New York, like a frame of duck pins. Of course I don't mean to tell you what to do or deprive you——

"No depravity atall, suh; no depravity atall."

"You need just a little seasoning, Cocoa; and a knowledge of the tricks of the game. Everything else you've got. Let's both quit our jobs next Saturday."

The darky hesitated, and as he watched the smoke of an incoming ferryboat and listened to its shrill whistle as it came plowing toward the slip, he was filled with factitious reminiscences.

"You don't know, Mr. Maynard, how much I likes dis here place."

Maynard relit his cigarette, forced a grin and shook his head in mock disdain.

"Yes, suh, I tell you, I does. I plum' loves it," the Kid went on, fired by Maynard's indifference. "Ain't dis a nice, healthy, outod' job with folkses a-passin' day an' night an' all de time? Always sump'n to look at what's interes'n. An' I likes to heah de whistle tootin' an' de bell er-clangin', an' de deckhan's shoutin', 'All abo'd!' when de boats pull out."

George Maynard also could see that there was a charm and glamor about the work, but remained discreetly and diplomatically silent.

To Cocoa, constantly mixing with massed humanity, one day was never like another. He knew a great many of the commuters and often chatted gaily with them while they waited.

When the boat came in the negro jotted down the time of its arrival on a huge yellow pad; when it was ready to go out he blew his whistle, marked the time on the yellow pad; the gong clanged, gates dropped, and the ferry churned out of the slip on its way across the river to the Big Town.

He liked to watch the crowded boats arrive with passengers eager to catch their evening trains, and to hear the pilot shout down, when the boat was fastened to the bridge, "Let 'em run, Larry!" And how they did run! Like a movie mob, across the concourse, into the station and through to the train shed.

In summer a driver would topple off a melon for him, or a commuter hand him a cigar. And all this happiness—called work —was enhanced a thousandfold by the very thought of leaving it all.

"I'll holler dis much, Mr. Maynard. Ain't very 'thuselastic 'bout leavin' dis ol' Jersey City ferryhouse an' projikin' aroun' fightin'. But I wants to travel. Mostly I wants to go Wes' to Movieland."

"And I believe you're a born movie actor, Cocoa." Maynard emphasized his statement by crashing his fist into his palm and summoning all the seriousness that he possessed into his eyes. "I could get you into the screen game within a month if it wasn't for the fact that there are so few colored men in——"

"Well, I ain't so sutton about dat. Dar's big game for de black man, too, sho's you bawn. Las' night I seed the picture what dey calls 'Los' in de Desert', whar a great big black boy waz de pertecter uv a party uv swell white folkses what wuz huntin' gold down yonder in Africa. An' lemme tell you, suh, dat black baby throwed dem cannibals right an' lef' like a bunch er tarnips when dey crep' up on um. He wuz mighty nigh de whole show. I seed it myself an' I watched him close, an', boss, I tell you I kin do what he done. I kin ack his paht sho's you standin' dar. Hit's de truf I'm tellin' you."

"You whispered a jugful that time, Cocoa. In fact I've kind of noticed your movie genius for months back and often meant to speak to you about it," Maynard quickly picked up his cue, "but this job of mine keeps me so busy that I'm in a daze from morning till night.

"Kid, I'll make you the champion middleweight fighter of the world within a year. Then it'll be easy enough. With your fistic reputation, your dramatic instinct, and your name on everybody's tongue, you can walk right into the movie ranks at your own figure; and what's more, the picture men will be all set a-waitin' to greet you with open arms. Lets go right into the office now, Cocoa, and give in our notice. What do you say? Let's go!"

"Giddap," chimed the Cocoanut Kid, and he followed Maynard into the Superintendent's office.

COCOA was a rangy lad of twenty-two, built on the Fitzsimmons style of architecture, and weighed about 160 pounds. His nose was squidgy, the rest of his face as flat as a plate. A trace of close-cropped hair looped perilously close to the bridge of his nose. All in all, Cocoa was not an inspiring sight. And as for intelligence, his face was unpromising. His skull belied abnormally in the back, and this, by double detour, brings us to the village of Calvert, Md., where Henry Jackson—The Cocoanut Kid—was born.

It was common knowledge around Calvert that the bump on Cocoa's head could be traced directly to his stepmother. At the age of three she had thrown him at the landlord one June morning. The landlord ducked, and Cocoa's head struck and loosened the porch post.

Cocoa's own mother had died when he was two. Shortly after that his father, financed by the insurance money, visited the neighboring town of Laurel for the sole purpose of finding another wife to fortify himself against future loneliness. And when Lauretta Litchfield took charge of his little hut she saw to it that old man Jackson wouldn't be lonesome for one blessed minute from that day on.

Two years after his second marriage Cocoa's father died, and Lauretta's malice, ingratitude, scorn, and treachery fell upon the Kid's shoulders. She never could understand why Cocoa would return from the postoffice without any mail, and so thumped him for carelessness. And afterward he was blamed and re-pounded for having excited her into an asthmatic cough.

Cocoa was fifteen when a kind, intervening Providence stopped her cough for all time; and Cocoa drifted North.

For four years he worked at odd jobs in Baltimore, Wilmington, and Philadelphia, finally arriving in Jersey City with nothing but his Southern accent. Here he got a job as deckhand on a ferryboat.

This was work that he really liked, and he stuck. Later he was promoted to Assistant Ferrymaster, with an office of his own.

THREE days after Maynard and Cocoa quit their jobs, the manager hired a room in the rear of a Jersey City candy store, which he called Cocoa's training quarters. A few pairs of dumbbells, a punching bag, a set of second-hand boxing gloves, and a football dummy were installed in the store.

Each morning during the conditioning period Cocoa pounded the dummy, which was nailed to the wall, for a full ten-minute stretch; and when he was dog-tired from his efforts, Maynard would call time and engage him in three two-minute rounds with the gloves.

He taught Cocoa a great deal about the

fine points of the game in about two weeks' time; but because he found himself no match for Cocoa, who on one occasion had him on the verge of a knockout, he sought out a good middleweight with a punch. Him he hauled over to the queer little quarters, instructing him to pull everything he had on Cocoa.

"Just you leave that part to me," the fighter said. "If this here Cocoanut is white through and through, little Willie, here," he pounded himself lightly on the chest, "will soon find it out."

"And if he can't go the route, Bill," Maynard confided slyly, "I'm willin' to stack everything I've got on you. Let me pilot you through this pugilistic tangle."

The middleweight smiled dryly to himself at the thought of Maynard playing both ends against the middle, and consented tentatively with a gruff, "You're on!"

"Now, you Cocoanut Kid," said Bill when they were gloved and facing each other for a three-round tryout, "you just sail into me like you was in a real fight, 'cause take it from me, boy, that's just the way I'm going after you."

"Don't trouble yo'self about me. I'm all keyed up for what's comin'."

"Let's go," piped the middle.

"Giddap," cried Cocoa.

There was a flutter and a padding of gloves for a moment; then a long, bony black arm shot diagonally upward to Bill's jaw. A white form crumpled helplessly to the floor.

Maynard pounced gleefully upon Cocoa and hugged him.

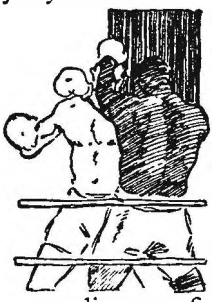
Next week he signed up the Kid for a preliminary bout at the Adolphus—a Jersey City club. His opponent, one Battling Bancroft, after a moment of hard infighting in the initial round, suddenly remembering that there was a long show on for that night and that it surely would grow wearisome to the fans if all the bouts went the limit, very considerately and ingloriously did a nose dive to the floor, and stayed there.

Later Cocoa beat three negro middles in two weeks at the same club, and this was followed by a semi-final with a $300 guarantee for a fight with the Alabama Bruiser.

The Bruiser was knocked out completely.

"I wants to travel, boss; I sho does," the Kid said to Maynard. He had been getting restless and indifferent for a week back. He didn't seem at all satisfied with his pugilistic prospects despite the fact that he was making good. Much of his spare time was spent near the terminal of the S. O. S. Railroad; and he noticed that his old job of Assistant Ferrymaster was still unfilled.

"Of course, you want to travel, Cocoa, and so do I. Meant to suggest it to you last week, but didn't know how you'd take it. But New York's packed with pugilistic plums and they're ready for pickin' now. Your rep hooked to my handling is goin' to run us fair into some juicy matches."



"I wants to go Wes'," whined the Kid, "and see de movie men."

"Oh; let's stay here awhile, Coke, and clean up first."

"Now, boss, you ain't gwine do me dataway. I's sot on de Wes' an' I jes' don' crave dis yere fight game nohow." The darky's lips were sagging and twisting unkindly, and there was a note of dissatisfaction in his eyes that was dangerously near disgust.

"To the edge of the world with you, Coke, my boy. I'm off for reservations this minute. We move to Pittsburgh in the morning."

"Now you' talkin'! Giddap!"

In Pittsburgh, Cocoa made Gunner Jones walk the plank early in the second round. Bob Davis, the Chicago Bearcat, disappointed the Windy City fans by closing up like a morning glory shortly after the ringside gang got those paralyzing panetelas started. He beat the three best middles in St. Louis within a month. Mickey Murray, the toughest of the three, began to understand what a nice, peaceful, profitable trade painting is, and succumbed in the sixth.

He dropped a dapper dinge in St. Paul, coruscating under the name of the Midnight Bullet. In Denver he was pitted against Wallace Wainwright, another dark gentleman who, the papers said, had beaten the six best middles in the West. After floating into one of Cocoa's lucky—or unlucky—punches, he was forced to discontinue.

It was after he had punched Wallace into Blunderland that Cocoa began to grieve for the homeland. This was the very thing Maynard wanted to happen; and with the suggestion came the idea of

simulating surprise and disappointment in order to sound the Kid out as to his attitude toward the movies—the remaining thorn in Maynard's side.

"And you're not goin' to make the trip clear to the Coast; to California, the land of sunshine and movies?"

Cocoa had seen so many movies since he left Jersey that he felt uncomfortable and turned strangely silent whenever the subject was discussed.

"De entitlement er de one at de Stran' today soun' grievous to me, Mr. Maynard. 'De Twice-Bawn Woman'. Good Lord-a-mussy! Cain't no such thing happen nohow. Half de time when I reads things like dat I ain't able to locate whar I'm at."

Maynard laughed and worked into an enlightening treatise on regeneration.

"No'th is whar I wants to go, boss. What's de use in us sashayin' any mo' in dis wil' lan'? Ain' I bammed Wainwright what's cleaned up de cream er de Wes'?"

As this was unanswerable and because the same idea of being with his own people again before spring thrilled him from cap to heel, Maynard immediately telegraphed Mike McMurphy, the matchmaker for a Brooklyn club, suggesting a fight for Cocoa.

The reply came the same day, saying that he would have the Kid on within three weeks. A confirmatory letter came in a few days announcing that Cocoa would be put on against a set-up. Of course, McMurphy didn't call it a set-up; but he made it very plain that the man who would be selected to oppose Cocoa would be someone whose reputation hadn't disturbed the placid surface of the pugilistic sea.

The letter explained further that it was a piece of perfectly legitimate business, and that the admission to Cocoa's metropolitan début would be reduced considerably. The fight fans themselves would know that they were simply going to see a massacre, but they wanted to be there at the finish. There would be no deception about it.

After he had beaten the set-up, Cocoa was to be matched with Bill Bailey, the New York whirlwind, for the colored middleweight championship.

Procedures of this kind are not uncommon in matchmaking. Carpentier fought Battling Levinsky before he was matched with Dempsey, in order to create interest and set the fans wondering just how far he would go.

The Western papers had given some space in their sport columns to Cocoa. Later the New York dailies spoke of him as championship timber. A Jersey City writer did some whimsical whittling in Cocoa's honor, in the form of a four-line verse.

Knocked fifteen men in mah dead-men's chest;
Got nuthin' on mah min'.
Jes' waitin' fo' de fans to set up fifteen mo',
I don' draw no color line.

Just before they took the first step of their journey north, a Denver sport said to Cocoa:

"Too bad, buddy, you don't weigh about thirty pounds more; then you could fight Dempsey."

"Mah weight ain't botherin' me, suh. Live and let live, dat's me. I'm willin' to stop right whar I'm at."

Cocoa didn't train very hard for his New York fight; it wasn't necessary. The long siege of training in the West had put him in excellent shape. He took some long stiff walks in the mornings, supplemented by a bit of light sparring and gymnasium work in the afternoons.

Four days before the fight, Maynard took his man on a trip up the Hudson as far as Albany, thence to Boston and so home by boat.

Quite accidentally, during their day in Boston, the pair stumbled over an old-fashioned building—the scene of the court-martial of Benedict Arnold. Cocoa stood gazing for a dizzy moment at the lion and unicorn.

"Who's he—dis here Benedick?"

"He was a traitor that was tried for treason."

"Traitor—treason. Dem Massachusetts woids ain't mean a thing to me, boss."

When Maynard had finished his narrative, with the aid of a lively imagination to cover up the vague, uncertain spots such as dates, names, etc., he managed to convey to Cocoa just what a traitor was. The negro frowned and shook his head over the whole story from time to time, and was bent on returning to visit the place later in the afternoon. But they were unable to find the building again in Boston's dizzy, merry-go-round of streets

The day before the fight Cocoa journeyed alone to Jersey City to visit a few old friends. But he didn't get any farther than the ferryhouse of the S. O. S. Railroad. It had been months since he had seen the old terminal. Even though the visit did cheer him up a bit, the place didn't seem quite the same. There was another negro holding down his job, garbed in the nickel-buttoned blue mantle of Assistant Ferrymaster. And the tip of a red feather peeped above the band of his hat. Cocoa spoke to a few of the commuters, and heard the pilot pipe as of old, "Let 'em run, Larry!"

This man who had Cocoa's old job seemed about his own age and build. The Kid didn't ask him any questions, but contented himself by strolling around the concourse, hands in pockets, in exactly the same way as he had done when he was Assistant Ferrymaster himself. For awhile he eyed the new assistant rather closely.

"Doggone it," he muttered to himself, "that nigger what's got my job ain't even sociable to folks. Don't believe de Marine Depahtment wants men like dat, noways."

And when the *Ashtabula* ferried him back to Manhattan he felt much like a man who was leaving home to spend the rest of his life in Tasmania.

The sport writers, as always, had done their best to make the fight a success in a financial way; but for the most part they were very anxious to create a keen, piquant interest in the battle to feed the fight-hungry fans who were eagerly waiting to gobble any kind of news about the fight fraternity.

Before the reporters got through, most of the readers were as familiar with both men as if they had been born and reared in the next block; all of which helped fill the Albion Athletic Club on the night of the fight.

When the preliminaries and semi-final were disposed of and Cocoa and his opponent sat waiting for the gong, Freddy Falmouth was the least of the Kid's worries. He had never met him and until this very minute had never given him a thought. When the referee beckoned the men to the centre of the ring for instructions, the thing happened.

The Cocoanut Kid took one long, square look at Freddy Falmouth, the set-up, and his eyes widened. The expression on Cocoa's face was a good deal like that of a man who has just discovered that he has swallowed a dose of bichloride of mercury by mistake. This gave way to a puzzled frown, which in turn, when he stepped back to his corner to shed his crimson robe, became a jubilant grin.

George Maynard hadn't noticed the changes Cocoa's physiognomy had undergone. He was too busy listening to and interpreting the referee's instructions.

"Now make it short, sweet, and snappy, old man," Maynard said shrilly as the gong rang. "Remember there ain't goin' to be no second round; and I'm awful anxious to see this fat referee bend and count ten."

But there was a second round this time, and although Cocoa had merely toyed with Freddy all through the first inning despite the raucous roar of the crowd imploring him to speed up, Maynard did see the referee perform his calisthenic-arithmetical stunt over the prone figure of his own invincible Cocoanut Kid.

There had been some luke-warm infighting in the second, and when Falmouth pulled a half-hearted uppercut on the break that scraped Cocoa's left ear, the Ferrymaster toppled to the floor like Cæsar at the base of Pompey's statue.

Some of the fans cheered but most of them booed Cocoa as he lay there simulating sleep, while Maynard ran dizzily around in circles until he came to. Then he kicked Cocoa in the thigh.

"Get up, traitor, before I put the other half of the house hep."

"Whar is I at, boss?"

When he saw the bewildered expression of childlike innocence on Cocoa's face, Maynard knew that Coke would have made a good movie actor after all.

"If it wasn't that I knew we'd get the ras'berry if I spilled the limas about your quitting tonight, I'd shout it out right now, you big, black bum." While he said this he reached down to Cocoa, and with the aid of one of his assistants, carried him rather tenderly to his chair, where he began sponging him with cold water and applying smelling salts and styptic.

After the pair had split $1000 and all previous amicable relations, Maynard said:

"That comes of managing a nut. You ought to get ten years for this, you dirty hound."

For a week after, whenever Cocoa and his last fight drifted into his mind, which was about every other minute, he cursed Cocoa and the whole pugilistic profession from Tom Sayers all the way down to Jack Dempsey. And for the better part of a month he worried over it. He tried his hand at the management of a cigar

store down near the Battery. It had cost him $1000 for a half-interest in the business, but at the end of five months he was glad enough to accept $500 from his prosperous partner and crawl out before the crash came.

ONE October morning, when Maynard ferried over to the Jersey shore to get a train for Elizabeth, he saw a familiar form clad in blue, pad in hand, strutting around the concourse at the terminal of the S. O. S. Railroad. He was whistling away like mad, and seemed at peace with the universe. When he drew nearer George saw that it was Cocoa.

Bitterness and rage surged around Maynard's heart.

"Traitor," he sneered in passing, and half of the passengers heard him say it. Without turning his head he bored straight through the squirming crowd and had just arrived at the train shed when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He felt the hand tremble for a second before he turned to face Cocoa.

"Mos' busted my heart, Mr. Maynard, when I hadda lay down fo' Freddy Falmouth dat night."

"I knew you'd admit it later on." Maynard felt a bit relieved after the confession. "Go on and shoot the whole works."

"Didn't you know dat I—I jes' can't stay away from dis ol' place? 'Twas when Falmouth comes into the ring that my idee gits me. He is de nigger what was a-holdin' my job, boss."

"But how did you know that?"

"Ain't I done seed him a-workin' here de day I visits de ol' place afore de fight? Dat coon nevah had no int'rs' in de job noway. I watched him work for half an hour. But, oh Lord, when I seed him in my ring dat night I knowed it was my chance an' I jes' let him win."

"But how did you know he'd quit his job after he won?"

"Wouldn't any ol' fool nigger get crazy wid de fight heat after he done licked me? He quits his job col' de day after. Den I comes back an' gits it—my good ol' job—back agin. With my $500 in the Muchant's Bank I's fixed fo' life. An' my life work's heah, boss, not in de prize ring."

An hour later, when Maynard had worked his way into the private office of the Marine Department chief, and had him in pretty good humor through his description of Cocoa's last fight, though the narration was searing his soul, he followed it up with:

"And if you can use a good, steady clerk, Mr. Stuart, why—I—I——"

STEEL DIRECT FROM THE ORE

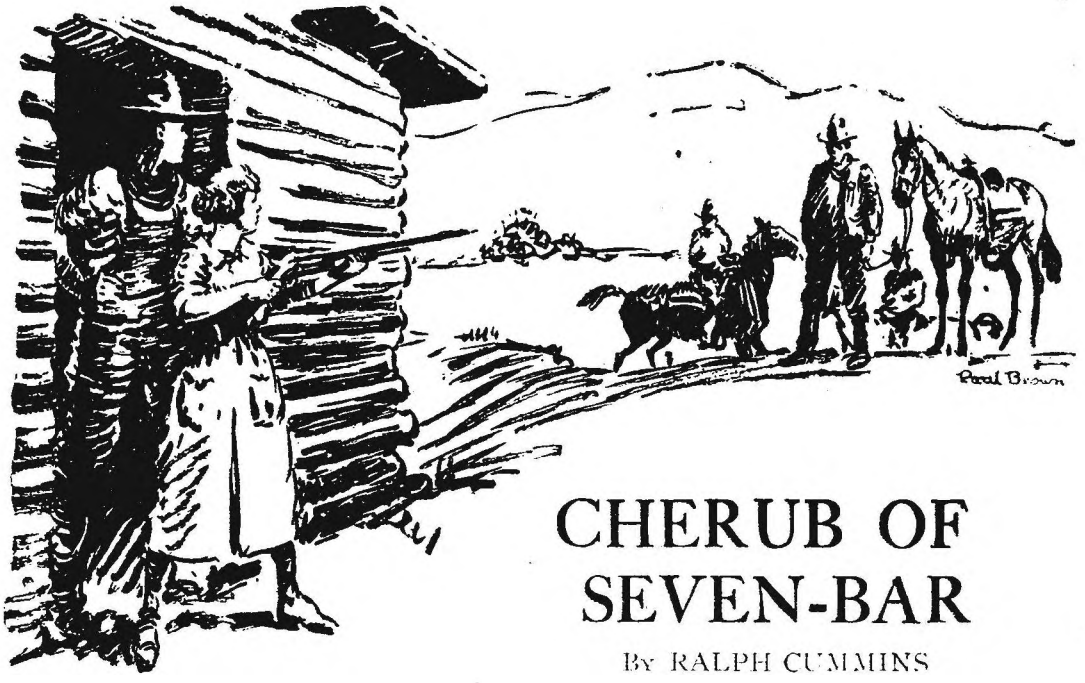
TO MAKE steel direct from the iron ore, instead of from "pigs" of iron, has long been the dream of metallurgists. Henry Ford is experimenting with a process that seems to hold promise of results, and it has recently been reported from France that a successful method has been tried out there on a small scale. What the metallurgists are after, of course, is steel properly so-called, and not the wrought iron produced by the Bessemer process which is called "steel" in the jargon of the industry; or "mild steel" or "machinery steel" in the factories. That contains even a smaller percentage of carbon than the older forms of wrought-iron, and cannot be tempered or hardened. To make a high-carbon steel direct from the ore would mean an immense saving of time, labor and money, if it could be done.

PROPHYLACTIC THERAPY APPLIED TO DOGS

INSTEAD of waiting until dogs "go mad" the humane Japanese health authorities have tried out with success, and now propose to apply to every dog in Japan, prophylactic serum treatment as a preventive of rabies.

DON'T SAY "C.C."—SAY "MIL"; IT'S MORE CLASSY

UP-TO-DATE scientists have dropped the cumbersome "cubic centimeter" or "c.c." as it is usually abbreviated, and now refer to the unit of volume thus represented as a "mil." That's a millionth of a liter.



CHERUB OF SEVEN-BAR

By RALPH CUMMINS

"THE CHERUB," WHOSE NATURE WAS FAR FROM CHERUBIC, FINDS HIS HOME RANCH THE SCENE OF A MYSTERY WHICH HE SETS OUT TO SOLVE—THEREBY LETTING HIMSELF IN FOR DIVERS COMPLICATIONS

CHAPTER I

THE RETURN OF THE CHERUB

THE CHERUB, occasionally known as Bert Lyons, slapped his bowed legs against the fat sides of his Polka-Dot cow pony, and sang lustily to an audience of gray Arizona hills. Down the boulder-strewn wash behind him lay the sun-baked water-tank town of Arroyo Bend. Just over the sage-gray ridge ahead stretched the hills and valleys of the Seven-Bar ranch.

"Home again!" sang the Cherub in his tuneless wail. "From a for-r-eign shore! Home again—from a for-r-eign shore!"

Those few words being all of that appropriate song the Cherub knew, he roared them over and over until even Polka-Dot shook his head impatiently at the monotonous repetition.

"Home again——"

The young rider broke off abruptly, lifting himself high in the stirrups to catch a first glimpse of the long anticipated view from the summit. And as he looked out across the rolling hills to the valley of Crooked Creek, and to the clump of cottonwoods that marked the home ranch of Seven-Bar, he moistened his lips with his tongue, and blinked his long lashes rapidly over his glistening eyes.

"Home again!" His voice trembled and he swallowed with a choking effort. "By Joe, the ol' ranch sure looks good to me!"

For a time he sat very erect in his saddle, his whole body rigid; then the joyous spirit of his homecoming smothered the touch of emotion. He let out a wild yip-yipping shout and waved his big hat in boyish greeting to the distant ranch.

But Polka-Dot, festive from three idle years in pasture over at Arroyo Bend on the railroad, where Lyons had left him when he went to war, rose straight up and dropped with a gentle, stiff-legged buck that cracked the Cherub's teeth together.

"Hey! Ramblin' Moses—what yuh think I am? Don't yuh know I been vacationin' in Germany where I had to ride a cayuse what had two wheels? But, doggone it, ol'-timer—she's sure good to be home!"

The Cherub eased himself over in the saddle and produced a fresh sack of Durham and a new book of brown papers. While his fingers rolled his smoke, his

eyes caressed the dry landscape with a longing tenderness.

He was an unusual-appearing cowpuncher, was the Cherub, otherwise Bert Lyons. Broad-shouldered and slim of waist, and carrying his six-feet of hair-trigger nerve and muscle with a careless grace, he was of the sort to attract favorable notice anywhere. Just now there was a striking incongruity in the Cherub's garb. His brand new two-foot Stetson and shiny high-heeled boots, seemed to jeer scornfully at the faded olive-drab shirt and trousers, and the spiral leggins that showed above the tops of the new boots. However, it was the Cherub's face that really demanded attention.

The Cherub's features would have required little make-up to have passed for the countenance of an innocent maid of sixteen. Out of an oval frame peeped smooth pink cheeks, full cupid-bow lips, hazel eyes, and brown hair that curled in tight little ringlets; the whole emphasized by a dimple that had a way of appearing unexpectedly at the corner of his mouth.

As he drew deeply from his home-made cigarette, the Cherub's eyes fell upon his remnant of army uniform and he sniffed a little bitterly. He had left his job as foreman of the Seven-Bar ranch to do his bit, which was perfectly all right, but the fortunes of war had decreed a guard-duty sojourn upon the Rhine long after the war was over. Which wasn't all right—for all that time his heart had been riding the Seven-Bar hills.

But at once the Cherub shook off his gloomy thoughts and again the sparkle of joy danced in his youthful eyes. He was back! Down in the valley ahead was a home—and a job—and a girl! For Mollie would be there; Mollie Granger, the sweet-faced, tomboy daughter of Seven-Bar. And as he thought of Mollie Granger, the Cherub straightened in his saddle and flipped the rein against Polka-Dot's neck.

But as the Cherub turned to follow a trail cornering down the slope, his eager gaze fell upon a horseman riding at break-neck speed down the opposite ridge toward the ranchhouse.

"Looks like our old Shiny horse," he mused. "Bet I'll put a stop to that kind of riding. No sense in that fool stuff at all."

That muttered thought drew his mind into a channel that had troubled him considerably, for before his departure for war he and old man Granger had seriously fallen out on the subject of his wandering proclivities, his inherent antipathy to settling down, and even his leaving on active service had not lessened the old man's anger at the conduct of his erstwhile favorite ranch hand.

"Aw, the old man will be all over his sore spots long ago. I'll just smile nice—and tell him I'm ready to settle down into a cowpunching son-of-a-gun. And he'll say to me, gruff-like, 'Well, what yuh standin' aroun' grinnin' for? Jump out an' fire that bird what thinks he's the range boss, an' git busy!'"

Breaking again into song the Cherub dropped into the wagon road and passed through the gates that gave entrance into the broad domain of Old Man Granger's Seven-Bar ranch. But at once he ceased his mournful singing. A crease appeared between his narrowed eyes, and as he rode closer to the ranchhouse, the crease became a worried frown.

"What the dickens—? Fences all falling down—the old ranchhouse a wreck—no green spots in the garden patch! Something's sure wrong with the old dump!"

He winced in hurt amazement as his eyes swept the range. Not a single head

of stock dotted the slopes covered with knee-deep yellow grass. The fences were full of holes; the road was overgrown with weeds; the house looked from a distance as though it had been smashed by a giant's fist. Even the cottonwoods drooped as if discouraged by the general decay.

With a choking lump in his throat and a growing fear in his heart, the Cherub rode down the lane to the old house which, though Old Man Granger had pretended he was anxious to leave, yet held so many tender memories. But he looked in vain for the vivid color of flowers in the door-yard, or the flash of the pink hair ribbon that he remembered so well.

And the old house really was a wreck. A great cottonwood, which still lay where it had fallen across the main part of the building, had crushed in the roof and bulged out the sides. Windows with broken glass stared gloomily. Boards were nailed across the front door opening. Only

the kitchen and dining-room seemed to have escaped the ruin.

The Cherub's eyes, almost hidden behind the drooping lashes, seemed to grow darker in color as he approached a group of cowpunchers sprawled in the cottonwood shade in front of the dining-room door. His cherubic features seemed to glow with gentle innocence.

"Well, look who's here!" grunted a lanky cowpuncher in very dirty overalls, who sat upon the sagging doorstep. "Oh, Blackie!" he called over his shoulder. "Come on out—here's our little ol' Cherub come ridin' home from war."

The Cherub slipped over in his saddle and smiled, the dimple flashing at the corner of his mouth.

"'Lo, Slim," he drawled. "Looks like worse'n war had struck th' ol' Seven-Bar. Oh, I see now how it is"—as an undersized, swarthy man, whose left shoulder was much lower than the right, shuffled sideways through the door—"Blackie Merillo is hangin' aroun'. No wonder th' Seven-Bar's all shot to hell!"

The little man's face was deeply pitted and a bright red scar cut a zigzag swath down his left cheek. He walked with a peculiar sidling limp, the result of an old injury to his leg for which he wore a specially built-up boot. Indian and Mexican blood seemed to fight among his pock-marked features for supremacy. Hate and triumph mingled expressively in his beady little eyes.

"Ha—the Cherub is back! Yo wan' something, hey?"

The Cherub smiled his slow, innocent smile, tipped his big hat upon the back of his brown curls and smoothed a damp ringlet that lay upon his forehead. His eyes, from under the long lashes, surveyed the group of men carelessly, then came back to the little half-breed.

"Seein' as how Blackie Merillo is ridin' herd on the ol' place I'm speculatin' that Old Man Granger isn't here no more. Don't reckon you gentlemen feel like tellin' me what's happened to this layout?"

The half-breed lifted his high shoulder still higher and glared with a wolfish snarl at the bantering speaker.

"Me—I am the boss of Seven-Bar," he chortled in a high-pitched, squeaky voice. "Old Man Granga—he is died—the ranch he belong to Stan Talbert in Border City. An' yo, Cherb!" Blackie hunched his shoulders forward, while his little eyes flashed with vindictive hate, "You get off this ranch—*pronto*!"

THE CHERUB'S innocent stare held the half-breed's hard eyes, and his lips curved into their flashing smile. But in his heart a millstone weight was dragging out all the joy of his homecoming. His boss, Old Man Granger, was dead! His friend, the man who had been a father to him, who had given him a home, who had scolded him for his shortcomings and had taught him to live the square, straight-shooting life of the border range land. And—the Cherub's smile broadened while the knife of dread cut deep—where was Mollie? He opened his lips to speak, just as another figure came around the corner of the house from the direction of the corral.

The newcomer was a youth not past eighteen, dressed in a light-colored, tight-fitting suit, and wearing a wide Panama draped over his right eye. When he saw the Cherub, the boy started, and stared for a moment, working a cigarette nervously between his white lips; then his eyes dropped away and he tried to dodge back around the corner of the house.

"Hello, Joe," greeted the Cherub, urging Polka-Dot forward. "How's everything?"

The boy accepted the Cherub's down-stretched hand, but his grip was weak and he did not look up.

"Hello, Bert," he responded uncertainly, flipping his cigarette butt away. "I—when did you get back?"

"Just this minute. Say—gee, you was only a kid when I left. You've growed up, Joe." Then the Cherub's glad smile dissolved into soft-eyed sadness. "But I—I just heard about your dad, Joe. I—I'm sure sorry."

The boy swallowed; his eyes shifted still farther away. He edged closer to the building and fumbled a cigarette pack from his shirt pocket. But Blackie, witnessing the meeting with a sneering frown, broke in.

"Yo git a-goin'—yo Cherb!" he snarled. "Dey ain't nothing for yo at the Seven-Bar. Yo—git!"

The Cherub chuckled and the dimple danced again in his pink cheek.

"Still sore, huh? Gosh, you hadn't oughta snuggle up to a grudge like that." He leaned upon his saddle horn and smiled gently into the dark face. "Don't reckon you'd give me a job, Blackie?" he bantered.

The little half-breed glared, his thin lips twitching, the scar upon his cheek flaming

a fiery red. Then he smashed the air with a threatening gesture.

"I'll give yo lead!" He backed toward the door as if going in after a gun. "Yo git off this *rancho!*"

The Cherub lifted his shoulders in a careless shrug and turned to Joe Granger.

"Where you living, Joe?"

"In Border City. We—I——"

"And is Mollie there, in Border City?"

"Yes, she—she's there. She—" He broke off with a frightened glance at Blackie.

The Cherub stared down at the shrinking boy for a moment; then he reined his horse around. His smile held all the innocent qualities that had given him his nickname as he waved his hand in a mocking good-by.

"Well, so long, Blackie—an' Slim—an' th' rest. See you later—I hope."

He held the impatient Polka-Dot to a walk until out of sight up the lane; then he slipped his hand down upon the reins and swayed forward. The horse leaped into an eager lope.

Upon the ridge where the wagon road dropped down to Border City, the Cherub drew up the restless Polka-Dot and turned to gaze back at the drab ruin of the Seven-Bar ranch. His lips twitched.

"The ol' home has sure gone to pot! An' something's dead wrong—when Mollie 'ud sell the ranch." Then his mind slipped from worried thoughts of the girl, to grief for the old owner of Seven-Bar. "Daddy Granger!" he murmured, his voice breaking. "An' I went off mad—an' never said good-by—an' I never wrote—an' he had troubles maybe. Gee, it's hard to come home to this!"

For a moment the clump of cottonwoods wavered before his blurred vision; then he jerked his shoulders erect and dashed his hand across his eyes.

"There's something wrong! The ol' ranch run down—an' Joe Granger ridin' close with that half-breed gunman. But Mollie——"

The straight line of his mouth curved again. Polka-Dot sprang forward. Half an hour later the Cherub rode into Border City.

Chapter II

THE CHERUB'S JOB

BORDER CITY was an important cattle town in the days before the railroad built through the next valley and doomed it to permanent isolation. Now its only claims to distinction lay in its being the county seat and the hottest spot on the border. A single, dust-smeared street of rough board and abode buildings accommodated itself to a crooked draw. A long, very old structure, with a wide, droopy porch, housed a store, hotel, postoffice, two soft drink parlors, and a garage. Across the street was a stable and corral. Farther down was the combined courthouse and jail, proudly squatting in the sweltering shade of the only tree in town. Beyond the courthouse on one side of the street, and the garage on the other, stretched two rows of adobe houses, all in more or less need of repair, dispirited and blistering in the incandescent sun.

The heat—dancing, burning, will-saping heat, of the kind that melts the lead seams of sheet-iron roofs—beat down upon Border City as the Cherub dismounted before the postoffice. In response to his soft-voiced inquiry, a skin-and-bones old man directed him to a painted cottage up the street. The Cherub's heart was behaving badly, and his manner lacked much of its customary assurance when he walked up the path to the little house, its well-kept path and tiny, trim garden in sharp contrast to its neighbors'.

The door was opened by a blue-eyed young woman, whose neat gingham apron and one rosy-red cheek were lightly touched with flour. She stared at the Cherub, her blue eyes opening wide, her red lips parting. Then the color left her cheeks with a rush.

"Bert!" she cried. "Oh, Bert—is it really you?"

"Sure enough," the Cherub managed to reply, gripping her little hand, then catching her shoulders and looking down into her oval, freckle-dotted face, with its fluffy red-gold crown. "Gee, Mollie, but it's good to see you again!"

Then both faces clouded.

"Father was so sorry after you left," murmured the girl. "He realized then that it was the adventurous spirit in you that made you so restless, and thought it was splendid of you to go. It was just because he loved you so, Bert, that he was so cross and he worried so because you didn't write. And I—I thought you were dead. It was cruel of you not to write—to me." She turned her face away biting her lip. "And then dad—was killed—and I needed you so——"

"Killed?" The Cherub's eyes narrowed. "How?"

"He was murdered! He had been fight-

ing rustlers all summer. One night he didn't come back. They found him in Green Water Canyon—shot in the back!"

"But who——?"

"I wish I knew!" The girl's blue eyes seemed to change to a dark purple and her slender hands clenched into fists. "Sometimes I've thought—that he had found out who was doing the rustling—again I wonder—if it really was rustlers—who killed him."

"And how have you been?" questioned the Cherub, noting her distress at recalling the tragedy.

"It has been hard. It was just at round-up time—and all the boys were gone to war. I had only Mexicans and old men. And after dad was gone there were debts. I had to sell nearly all the cattle to square things. Then this man Talbert offered to lease the place. I—I had to do it, but I knew nothing of that kind of business. He fixed the papers so I can't get the ranch back until the five years are up—even if he doesn't pay the rent. And he's let the place go to pieces. He doesn't run cattle on it at all; just keeps a bunch of horses and a lot of make-believe cowpunchers. By the time the five years are up the ranch won't be worth anything. And now—he's begging out of paying the rent."

"This Talbert—who is he? Where did he come from?"

"Nobody seems to know much about him. He's been here off and on for a couple of years. He has a real estate office and deals in mines and prospects.

I've heard a rumor that he has business interests below the line. He—I don't quite know what to make of him. I might feel all right about him if he hadn't taken a fancy to Joe, and——"

"Oh, yes, I was going to ask you about Joe. I saw him out at the ranch. What's he doing out there?"

"That's Talbert's doings—and I'm worried about it. It seems that Talbert thinks Blackie is crooked and has Joe watching him. Joe has worried me awfully, Bert. He buys lots of good clothes, and he gambles, and I don't know where he gets the money. And I don't like to have him riding with Blackie Merillo and that awful gang of his."

They walked into the dainty little living room, with its white curtains, and carpeted floor, and pretty tinted walls. In a homelike atmosphere that brought a lump into the Cherub's throat, they sat together upon the old-fashioned lounge and talked of many things.

Finally the Cherub remembered his horse.

"Gee, old Polka-Dot 'll think I've forgotten him. He's spoiled bad after eating pasture for three years."

"Why, if it isn't old Polka-Dot! Just think of your still having him!" cried Mollie, and ran down to greet the horse. "You must come back to dinner," she said when the Cherub prepared to ride away. "Then we'll talk some more. Oh, I'm so glad you're back, Bert!"

THOSE friendly words, and the gentle tremulousness of her sweet voice, and the glad light in her blue eyes, made the world look bright again to the returned wanderer. He started to rumble his "Home Again" song as he rode up the street, but broke off abruptly when he saw a slight figure darting out of sight behind a small adobe building.

"Gosh—was that Blackie—or was it Joe?"

Then thoughts of Mollie's tender welcome again absorbed him; he rode on down to the corral behind the Border City Stables. He was so deep in his love dreams that he scarcely noticed the lean old man sitting on the corral fence until a booming voice awakened him.

"If I wa'n't dead shore he'd been killed over in the war, I'd swear that beau-teful cuss was the Cherub. But course it can't be him. Might be his ghost, though."

The Cherub peered up into the furrowed face with its drooping gray moustache and twinkling gray eyes.

"Dad Stewart!" he yelled and gripped the old man's hand. "If it ain't ol' Dad!"

"Bet yore sweet young life! An' how's our darlin' Cherub? I'll gamble yuh're the same ol' bunch of smilin' hell!"

The Cherub stripped the saddle from Polka-Dot and climbed upon the fence beside the old man.

"What you doin' back in these parts, Dad? Thought you quit this country cold when that fat slob Purdy got the sheriff job away from you."

"Oh, I don't belong here." Stewart scrutinized the Cherub sharply. "Jes' visitin' like. Yuh see, when th' war started I went to work for the Government. Jes' for your private information—I'm a U. S. marshal."

"That's where you belong, you old man-hunter. But what's up around here?"

"Rotten doin', son. Since prohibition an' the war, this Crooked Creek country has got to be one of the worst holes on the border. Smugglin' booze, an' dope, cattle rustlin'—she's sure a fright!"

"And the old Seven-Bar seems to have gone to the bad," remarked the Cherub sadly. "I was just out there. She sure is a wreck."

"She is that." Stewart shot another of his probing glances at the man beside him. "An' there's more than shows right plain. The worst smugglin' trail in the hull country comes in from Mexico through the ol' Seven-Bar. Yuh know that little arroyo they call the 'Slot', jes' off south of the ol' sheep camp? Well, that's some Wild West camp these days. It's right on the line, in the roughest kind of country. Somebody's cut a good trail into it from this side, an' from there there's a dozen ways to cross the line through them rocks. It's one shore hell-hole!"

The Cherub nodded his understanding.

"And you're back here to clean that up. Well, you're the bird that can do it. But, say—Old Man Granger—you know anything about that killing?"

"A little." A steely glint appeared in the old marshal's eyes. "I've got a kinda line on that—an' if my hunch runs smooth—mebbe this very trip I'll git the murderin' skunk that done for the Old Man! They say aroun' here that it was rustlers got him, but I read the signs plum' different. They was wild doin's in the Slot before that—an' the Slot is on the Seven-Bar Ranch. Mebbe Granger objected; mebbe he was jes' put outa the way—so th' Slot business could work easy, right out through the ol' Seven-Bar."

The Cherub stiffened, and his manner lost much of its gentleness.

"And the ranch has been leased by a bird that don't run it," he drawled. "Does that mean anything in your hunch?"

"Yes." Stewart nodded slowly. "I won't say right now that Talbert is mixed in anythin', but that Seven-Bar deal was a mighty suspicious proposition. That real estate lad leases the place, but he don't run no cattle on it, an' keeps quite a crew of hard lookin' punchers hangin' aroun'. An' that Blackie Merillo—it don't look right to me when Talbert puts that sneakin' little gunman in as boss. Well, we'll soon have the combination picked apart to see what makes it go. I'm jes' layin' low now to see if the ranch really plays into the game, before I get a bunch of the boys over from Waldo an' raid the Slot."

The Cherub was about to question Stewart further regarding Old Man Granger's death, when the marshal gave him a warning nudge, slipped from the fence and walked away. Looking around, the Cherub saw a large, well-dressed man picking his way daintily around the corner of the stable.

AS THE big man walked toward the corral the Cherub studied him curiously. He was very large in a tubby fashion, with a round plump face, and a tiny black moustache that covered about one-fourth of his enormous upper lip. His scanty hair and his thin straight brows were black. His eyes were of a peculiar greenish color and seemed jammed up against the bridge of his very long nose.

The Cherub was noting his rather dandified garb when the stranger spoke.

"You were pointed out to me as Bert Lyons. That right?"

"That's me." replied the Cherub, smiling sweetly.

"Well, I'm Talbert. You may have heard of me. I'm in the real estate and promotion business here."

"Running the Seven-Bar, too, I hear."

"Yes." The big man nodded shortly and frowned up at the smiling Cherub. "I have the place under lease, but it has proved quite a loss to me. I've been thinking of making some changes out there and trying to do something with it. That's what I wanted to see you about."

"Yeah." The Cherub's encouraging smile betrayed nothing of his suspicious curiosity. "That was a good ranch in my time."

"And it can be made a paying ranch again. Now, I've heard a lot about you, Lyons. They seem to think around here that you're a wonder with cattle—and men. I've heard too that you have something of a reputation as a fighter."

"Who—me?" The Cherub's clear eyes widened with surprise. Then he shook his head, smiling gently. "Somebody's been stringing you, mister."

Talbert frowned with a puzzled expression; evidently he could not reconcile the smiling Cherub with the fighting cowpuncher of whose daredevil exploits he had heard.

"Well, there shouldn't be any fighting. I've decided to put on a new foreman out

there, fix up the buildings, stock the place again and try to break even on what I've lost."

The Cherub stroked his smooth chin and blinked at the big man. Behind his quiet smile, however, a trip-hammer was pounding a question over and over—"What now? What now?"

"Well, what do you say? Want to take your old job and try to bring the place back? There's two hundred a month in it to start—and a free hand. What say?"

The Cherub moistened his lips and continued to smile. Nothing of the disturbance within showed in his calm features. But he was thinking hard and fast. His rapid reasoning told him that whatever way things turned, here was his chance. If there was something crooked about that Seven-Bar deal, he would be in a position to find out about it, and to help Dad Stewart—and Mollie. Or if this man Talbert was on the square, and wanted to make a real ranch of the old Seven-Bar—well, there was no job that would give the Cherub greater satisfaction than to dig in and regenerate Mollie Granger's ranch.

"Well, I wasn't thinking about that," he said softly. "But if you're sure there won't be any fighting—" He pushed his big hat far back upon his head and smoothed the curl that lay upon his forehead.

"Oh, there'll be no fighting." Talbert assured him, but there was a questioning crease between his brows. "You'll just repair the buildings and fix up that drift fence on the south line—no, there will be no trouble. You can tell Merillo, the man I have out there, that I want to see him—then I'll discharge him myself."

"Guess we won't get together then," broke in the Cherub, shaking his head mildly. "I won't take no bossin' job 'less I can hire an' fire. Maybe it ain't just according to Hoyle, but I'll have to fire that Blackie bird, or you and me don't associate."

Talbert sniffed, but the puzzled doubt showed plainer in his plump features.

"Oh sure, fire away if you feel that way. But I suppose you know the name Blackie has—well, go ahead. Get out there as soon as you can and get lined up. I'll give you a note to Merillo, so he'll know you have the authority."

With a new exultation singing in his heart the Cherub slid down from the fence, saddled the disgusted Polka-Dot and took the note that Talbert wrote. As he rode out into the street, he smiled with a joyous satisfaction. Whichever way it broke, things were coming fine. If he could find out that Talbert was a crook, the law would not permit his holding the ranch. Then it would revert to Mollie and he would dig in to make something of it. He knew men who would stake him to a start and— But if things were on the square it would be all the better. Why, with a good job there was no reason in the world why he shouldn't ask Mollie a certain all-important question—one that had been uppermost in his mind since the days when he used to lug baby Mollie around in his arms.

HE stopped at the store and bought some clothes and the makings of a bed roll, and tied the bundle back of the reluctant Polka-Dot's saddle. Then he rode on to Mollie's cabin.

The door was open and the Cherub breezed in with a cheery whistle. Then he stumbled to a halt, his customary calm smile dissolving into an embarrassed blush. For, seated in Mollie's best chair, bland contentment written all over his plump features, was Talbert. Mollie greeted the Cherub with an uneasy smile.

"I—say—" stammered the Cherub, fumbling his hat.

Then his saving smile came, and he sauntered into the room with confident assurance. Talbert rose at once and took his leave.

"Looks like—" The Cherub began to Mollie after Talbert was gone, then dropping his bantering air. "I just stopped in to tell you that I'm going back to run the Seven-Bar. But I suppose he told you."

"Why, no!" Mollie was surprised—and startled. "Now, I wonder why he didn't mention it? We were speaking of your return. But, Bert—I wish you wouldn't!"

"Why not? Gee, I thought you'd be tickled. I'll be where I can watch your interests, and maybe I can give a hand up to Joe."

"That's so!" Mollie brightened at the mention of her brother. "But you must be careful, Bert. That's a bad gang out there. And this Talbert—I can't understand him."

"Aw, don't you worry. I'll watch 'em. And that reminds me—what became of that old trunk of mine?"

"It's here, out in the leanto. I—I brought it in. It's never been opened."

The Cherub went out to the leanto and

opened the old trunk. Then he fumbled through memory-stirring keepsakes until he found his old six-shooter, with its worn leather holster, and its cartridge-heavy belt.

When he swung upon Polka-Dot and turned toward the Seven-Bar ranch, there was the friendly feel of his old six-gun upon his hip. His eyes sparkled through the fringe of heavy lashes. The roguish dimple flashed in his cheek. Again his boyish spirits burst into song.

CHAPTER III

TRAGEDY

WHILE Bert Lyons had somewhat resented the nickname of "Cherub", he had, from his youth, taken much mischievous satisfaction in playing up the physical qualities that prompted it. He delighted in bantering speech, and soft glances, and sweet smiles, so that often the stranger, having heard of the Lyons fighting reputation, would sniff scornfully when he first sighted the Cherub's gentle eyes.

For underneath that deceptive exterior, the Cherub carried a fighting heart. Raised within a rifle shot of the Mexican border, with its continual turmoil, he had early learned to handle a six-shooter, and to battle with nature's weapons if that became necessary. Old Man Granger's herds, ranging the border hills, had always been the object of raiding bands of rustlers. Old Granger had not been of the sort to allow his cattle to be driven off without an argument; so the Cherub, from the time he was able to straddle a horse and to pack a six-gun, had taken an energetic part in the long chases that inevitably followed such forays.

Old Man Granger had loved Bert Lyons as a son, and the Cherub had often read in the hard old cattleman's matter-of-fact gruffness a deeply cherished desire for the union that would make his fighting foreman the permanent manager of Seven-Bar. But the blood of the Cherub was red, and his restlessness and reluctance to settle down led to genuine anger on the part of Old Man Granger, whose stubbornness refused to let him bid the Cherub farewell, even before the boy went to the war. The old man pretended that his going was but another folly—though in his heart he was proud of the Cherub's prompt enlistment. But the Cherub, a little sore because Mollie seemed to side with her father, for his well-being was so close to her heart, had slipped off in the night to Arroyo Bend, left Polka-Dot in pasture and his saddle in the back room of Roardy's saloon, and had gone forth to war.

IT WAS early in the afternoon when the Cherub, his six-gun bumping against his thigh, his hat far back upon his brown curls, a tenderly reminiscent smile upon his lips, rode again down the lane to the Seven-Bar ranchhouse. There was no one in sight around the house so he went on to the corral.

Roosting upon the corral fence were a dozen or more ruffians disguised as cowpunchers. The Cherub snorted as he sized up the high-hatted, overall-garbed layout, and wondered how long it would take him to get a real range crew together. Then Blackie Merillo came up with his crablike walk, an effect produced by a crippled left leg which never passed ahead of the right. The Cherub noted that he now carried a big gun upon his hip.

"Back ageen?" smirked the half-breed, lifting his thin lips from blackened snags of teeth.

"Sure." The Cherub dismounted quickly and faced the little gunman. "Thought I'd come back and run the old Seven-Bar after all. Reckon' you better pack your bed, Blackie. There's a letter of instructions from Talbert."

Blackie took the missive, broke the seals so carefully fixed by Talbert when he gave it to Lyons, and read it. At the time the Cherub had thought nothing of these seals but as Blackie proceeded he began to wonder just what was in the letter.

The half-breed shrugged his crooked shoulders as he finished reading it and distorted his pock-marked features into a sneer. The Cherub, his whole body tense to meet the expected outburst, was puzzled at the gunman's tame acceptance of the situation—until he caught a wink which Blackie threw at one of the men on the fence.

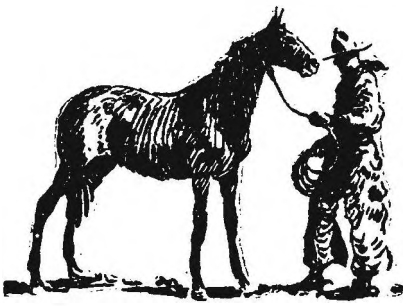
"All ri', Cherb. Take the damn no-good *rancho*." He stood, swaying forward, feet wide-spread, hands on his hips, his snaky eyes peering at the Cherub. "Hope you make a fortune—an'—" He shrugged his shoulders again and turned toward the house. "Come on up —I show yo——"

But as the Cherub started to follow him, and the blackbirds on the corral

fence began to hop down, Blackie swung toward the stable.

"Dere is two-t'ree things I show you," he muttered, and again the Cherub thought he threw a significant grin toward the mob trailing down behind them.

But the Cherub had noted that Blackie was the only one of the party packing a gun. He hooked his arm through Polka-Dot's rein, carelessly located the butt of



his own weapon, and followed. At the stable door, while he halted to toss his reins over a post, the Cherub caught a glimpse of a horseman riding down the lane toward the house. At the distance and through the screen of cottonwoods, the Cherub could not recognize the rider, although he was sure that he knew him. He might have waited for another look, but Blackie was calling.

"Come on, Cherb. Here ees the sick calf—I turn him to you. Over dere is the harness, an' the pitchfork, an' the t'ree ol' saddles—me, I turn 'em all over to you. An' in dat box is hunder an' sixteen t'ousan' oats—better you count 'em."

The Cherub's gentle smile deepened and his luminous eyes grew very wide as he surveyed the indicated objects.

"My!" he exclaimed. "My! Why, I never——"

"You come look at the truck patch," interrupted the half-breed hurriedly, shuffling with his sidewise movement out of the rear door of the stable and up to the fallen-down fence that had protected the old garden. "If you fix dat trough for to git water mebbe you raise cabbages—an' if——"

The Cherub laughed, a ringing boyish laugh, and turned his soft eyes upon the triumphant half-breed.

"We won't worry about that, Blackie. Supposing you take about five minutes to pack your bed and beat it. And you lads"—he smiled calmly at the grinning group—"I'm figuring to fire you birds just as fast as I get around to it. But if you want a job punching cows just stick around. Well, Blackie, how about moving?"

The half-breed frowned and worked his right foot farther forward; then he twisted his misshapen shoulders and shuffled toward the house.

"Come up to the shack," he mumbled. "Dere is the books of account an'——"

THE CHERUB walked on the flank of the trailing mob of hilarious cowpunchers and smiled into space. He was beginning to see things. His job wasn't going to pan out. Blackie was going to fight—but he was first going to try to make his old enemy mad. As the Cherub stepped into the dining room that he knew so well, he was sure that he saw someone darting through the connecting door into the kitchen. But just inside Blackie was waiting, his dark features twisted into a protesting scowl.

"Now, Cherb," he whined, "you oughta wipe your feet when you come in the house. It——"

"Gosh, that's right!" The Cherub brought a faint flush of embarrassment to his smooth cheeks. "I never thought of that. But then"—his eyes widened innocently—"I don't believe you washed your ears this morning, Blackie—and Slim there sure didn't man-e-cure his finger nails. Now——"

Blackie's humor evaporated in a snarling grunt. The Cherub, in his joyous satisfaction over getting the half-breed's goat, failed to note the manner in which the crowd was edging close around him. He realized that trouble was at hand, but he felt quite naturally that Blackie Merillo, notorious gunman, would be the dangerous element. The half-breed carried a six-shooter of ancient make with filed-down trigger and with which he was as quick as chained lightning. And the whole border knew the terrible soft-nosed slug it threw. The Cherub's smiling gaze held upon the claw-like fingers of Blackie's gun hand. When that hand wavered ever so slightly, his own gun would flash upward.

Blackie's hand moved. The Cherub's fingers clutched his gun butt. His hand swung upward.

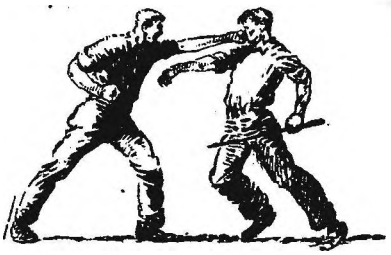
A smashing blow from the side knocked the gun from the Cherub's hand and numbed his whole arm. The gunman

gave a snarling laugh and poked his own gun back into its holster.

The long lashes drooped over the Cherub's eyes and his lips, slightly tinged with gray, curved into their habitual smile. He shot a quick glance around the room. The men of Blackie's gang were a-grin with sneers that told the Cherub that he was in for a fight. Evidently it was not to be a gun-fight, for Blackie had put up his six-shooter and was edging toward the door.

Then the Cherub heard a scuffling movement beyond the kitchen partition, and the rasp of a heavy voice. With a surge of relief, he placed the man he had seen riding down the lane. Good old Dad Stewart, the U. S. marshal. Again he looked at the men around him, then at the door into the other room. If he could fight his way across the ten feet to that door!

The Cherub's right fist caught the grining Slim on his long jaw and the lanky



cowpuncher doubled over with a wailing grunt. The Cherub, noting that Blackie had vanished, plunged toward the kitchen door, but the others closed in savagely, and it seemed as if he would fail in his objective. Then, while the Cherub, fighting with smiling seriousness, was forced back, a wilder commotion came from the other room. An instant of silence followed, then came the crashing of breaking glass—a shot—a startled cry!

At the sound of the shot the men dropped away from the Cherub and stared at each other with surprise; then they milled about uneasily, working toward the outer door. The Cherub caught a glimpse of Blackie outside, beckoning frantically. The mob broke, scrambled into the open, and as the Cherub sprang to the kitchen door, he heard the racket of a hurried retreat toward the corral.

The Cherub halted just inside the kitchen, the smile fading from his lips. Upon the floor, in a smear of blood, lay Dad Stewart. It was his voice that the Cherub had recognized through the partition. As the Cherub sprang to his side the marshal's colorless lips twitched and his eyes fluttered open.

"Quick—Bert! Down here—an' listen! I'm done—but I got the goods. You call the boys—at Waldo—an' raid the Slot! They're getting ready—to pull out—across the line."

"But the skunk that got you, Dad? Who was it? Why, he got you in the back! I'll get him—the dirty hell-houn' —I swear I'll get him, Dad! Who——?"

"Never min' that—now. Raise—your hand—Bert. I'm swearin'—you in—as deputy!"

The Cherub, with eyes strangely dull, and lips very white, repeated the huskily whispered words. Then the old officer relaxed with a moaning sigh:

"Now—git my shield—Bert. In my —shirt pocket. Put 'er on. Now—you're —deputy. Git the boys—an' clean out—the Slot. An' Talbert—he——"

A spasm of coughing convulsed him. The Cherub leaned close over the wounded man, his lips a straight line, his eyes two slits of flame.

"Tell me, Dad—who was it? Did you see him?"

Stewart shook his head and smiled faintly. Then he choked, his features writhing with pain. His eyes brightened momentarily with the fire of delirium.

"The little sneak—he was in the kitchen —hidin' behind the stove. I pulled him out—then I heard your racket—an' let him go. He plugged me—in the back. I never thought—he had the guts——"

The Cherub pressed his white lips still closer to the dying marshal's face.

"Who was it?" he whispered. "Tell me, Dad!"

The old man gasped. His eyelids fluttered open—then closed. The clutching hand of death tore loose the secret that Dad Stewart had sought to carry with him.

"It—was—Joe—Granger!" he mumbled, and his head dropped over.

After a moment of stunned silence the Cherub rose, and went slowly toward the deserted corral of the Seven-Bar.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEARING IRON OF DUTY

MOLLIE Granger sang softly as she prepared supper. Of a sudden her worry over Joe's waywardness, and her trouble over the ranch seemed insignificant. She was nearer to

being happy than she had been since she lost her father. For Bert had come home! With a catch in her breath, and with her blue eyes filmy, she listened to the voice of her heart, and she knew that she loved the soft-smiling, mischievous Cherub, still the boy she used to know, but grown to stalwart manhood. And she could admit it to herself, for she had read much of tender promise in the Cherub's eyes that day.

She leaned in the open door and blinked at the shimmering heat waves that rose from the corrugated iron roof of the court house. Well, her worries were over now. Bert was the kind of man a girl could lean upon. He would collect the last year's rent that Talbert still owed, and he would do something about getting the ranch back. Yes, it was all right now. Bert would take Joe in hand and make a man of him. And peaceful happy days were coming. Bert would run the old Seven-Bar again. He would ride into town of an evening, and they would sit together upon her little porch after the sun went down, and look out across the shadow-dark hills to the pink horizon, and plan—and maybe——

A BUCKBOARD, gray with dust, rattled down the narrow street and across her line of vision. Buckboards are much alike but she couldn't be mistaken in the horses, old Ben and Charley from the Seven-Bar. She started, winking her eyes rapidly. Upon the seat, very straight and stiff, his big hat pulled down over his eyes, sat the Cherub. Tied to the bed of the buckboard was a long form wrapped in an old quilt. Mollie caught her lower lip between her teeth and ran down to the gate.

But the Cherub did not stop, nor did he look her way. He drove on to the jail, twisted the reins around the brake-lever, and climbed down. For a moment he hesitated, looking back at his gruesome freight; then he walked toward the door to the sheriff's office.

Mollie jerked open the gate to join the crowd around the buckboard. But a low call from behind her drew her attention. Her brother Joe was standing somewhat back from the door of the cabin and beckoning. She hurried toward him.

"Why, Joe!" Then she noted his grayish pallor, and the tremble of his hands as he lighted a cigarette. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I've got to—to get away!" He thrust back his shoulders and tossed his head up with a pitiful attempt at bravado. "There was some trouble out at the ranch. Bert was there—and Dad Stewart. I was—in the kitchen—with Stewart. There was a shot—and Stewart——"

"Joe!" Mollie caught his arm. "Do you mean—that it was Dad Stewart—that Bert just brought in?" Then she caught the graver significance of the boy's words. "Oh, Joe—you didn't—y o u couldn't have done such a thing! Oh, tell me, Joe! What happened?"

The boy tried to throw back his narrow shoulders, but his bravery was rapidly dissolving into a panic. His shifting eyes found the window—and a quilt-wrapped form being carried into the jail. He sat down quickly, his cigarette dropping from his trembling lips.

"No—I didn't do it! I didn't—I didn't! I had my gun out—but I didn't fire! I could prove it, but I lost the gun. So I've got to get away, I tell you. Dad told Bert—that I did it. I heard Bert swear he'd get me! And I—I'm afraid he'll——"

"Why, Joe! You're crazy to talk that way! Bert's the one man who would stand by you!"

But the panic of deadly fear had gripped the boy. He tried to sniff scornfully, and sobbed instead.

"He swore he'd get me—I heard him! I was hiding in the pantry. But it'll be all right. I'll go down over the line till it—till it clears up. But I've got to have money."

"You know I haven't any money, Joe. I—oh, don't run away—I know Bert will help——"

"You get me some money!" cried the boy. "I'm going—I tell you! You wouldn't want to see me hung, would you? Well, they wouldn't believe me—after Stewart telling Bert! No—I've got to go! Say, you go to Talbert—he'll give you money!"

"He ought to!" retorted Mollie bitterly. "He owes me over two thousand dollars!" Strange how the amount haunted her so often she had reckoned it up.

Even in her excitement Mollie wondered a little at the sudden flush that reddened her brother's face and neck. But she had no chance to remark upon it. There was the click of the gate. The Cherub was striding up the walk.

"Quick, Joe—get into the kitchen! And wait there—I know Bert will help us!"

The boy darted into the next room and Mollie went to meet her caller.

There was nothing cherubic about the man who slumped up the walk. He had aged ten years. His lips were colorless, and his eyes were heavy with gloomy bitterness.

"Joe here?" he queried, his voice dull and lifeless.

"Why—no! What is it, Bert? What's the matter?"

"Joe just shot Dad Stewart—killed him! I've got to take Joe."

"Take Joe? Why, Bert, what do you mean?"

"He killed Stewart—shot him in the back—I——"

"No! Joe never could have done such an awful thing! And even if he did! Why, Bert—you wouldn't—you couldn't help to—to punish my brother!"

"I'm sorry, Mollie. I'd rather die—but he shot Dad in the back! I've got to do it! There was some trouble out to the old ranch and after the shooting the whole gang cleared out. I just brought Stewart in in the buckboard."

"But you can't arrest him, Bert! It's nothing to you—except that Dad was your friend—and Joe's almost your brother. But you can't do anything—you're not an officer!"

The Cherub's hand trembled as he plucked Dad Stewart's badge out of his shirt pocket and pinned it on the outside. The girl stared at the silver shield, her face growing still whiter. Then her hands clenched, and into her blue eyes burned the fighting fire of the Granger blood.

"Don't you dare do that, Bert Lyons!" she cried. "Why, he's only a boy—he's been in bad company maybe—but he isn't that bad! And—and he's 'most as much your brother as mine."

"I'm wishin' he was my brother—'stead of yours. But he killed Stewart—shot him in the back! Dad said it was him."

"I don't believe it!" Mollie was becoming hysterical. "You're lying about that! I don't know what you're trying to do—but—" She broke off, narrowed eyes darting wildly about the room. And when she could sight no weapon she sprang at the Cherub and began almost insanely to hammer his chest with her fists. "You get out of here! Get out! Get out! And I never want to see you again! You—traitor!"

She broke into frantic sobbing, stumbled across the room and threw herself upon the old couch. The Cherub stared at her, his eyes glazed and unseeing. Then he picked up his hat from where it had fallen upon the floor, smoothed his forelock with his left hand, placed his hat deliberately upon his head and went out.

Mollie sprang up. Swaying in angry exhaustion, she watched the Cherub walk up the street and shoulder his way through the crowd in front of the jail. Then she darted into the kitchen.

"Wait!" she cried in a choking whisper to the boy cowering in a corner. "You will have to go! I'll get some money!"

SHE ran out of the back door, hurried across lots to the business part of town and slipped into a tiny adobe building that bore the sign: "Stanley Talbert. Real Estate and Mines."

Talbert rose from behind an out-of-place mahogany desk and brushed his fat hands together. There was plain admiration in his greenish eyes and he stroked his very small moustache.

"Hello, Mollie! Come on in and sit down. Why, what's the matter?"

The girl shook her head sharply in an effort to steady herself. Her mind raced as she sought to read the man before her. She never had been able to figure Talbert. Toward her he had always been kindly respectful. Still, she had sometimes sensed a patronizing note in his manner, and she had found his business dealings far from satisfactory. When the second year's rent had become due he had calmly told her that owing to the failure of the ranch to bring in any returns, he would be unable to pay that rent. He had expressed regret and sorrow—and had offered to lend Mollie money if she was hard pressed.

"I—I need some money, Mr. Talbert," she began at once. "Can you let me have five hundred dollars—now?"

"As a loan, you mean?" There was that patronizing quirk to his suave smile!

"No! I can't see any need of borrowing when you owe me money. Surely you——"

"But I have explained, Mollie, that there are reasons aside from the fact that the ranch had not paid me anything since I've had it."

"Fiddlesticks!" Mollie's anger was

getting the better of her fear. "What is the difference between paying me what you owe, and lending me money? But —I don't care—let me have the five hundred."

Talbert very deliberately, and with a trace of satisfaction in his peculiar eyes, counted out the money from a bulging billfold.

"There," he said quietly, "that's five hundred you owe me—to be repaid at your convenience. I am sorry"—he fingered his fat chin with his plump fingers —"that I can't explain just now why I must treat this as a loan. However, when the matter can be explained to you, then you will understand. Do you mind telling me why you need this money?"

Mollie frowned at him for a moment, harsh bitterness rising within her. Talbert was the cause of the whole trouble. He had induced Joe to spy around the ranch—maybe he had some hold on Joe. She had suspected more than once that Talbert had lent Joe money.

"All right—I'll tell you! It's to get Joe out of the country. There was some trouble out at the ranch—and Joe is accused of killing Dad Stewart!"

Talbert jerked his great body upright. His mouth dropped open and his greenish eyes almost closed. Then he snapped his mouth shut and sat down again.

"Stewart killed!" he exclaimed. "Out at the ranch! How did it happen?"

"I don't know—it doesn't matter. If you hadn't kept Joe out there—" But what was the use of wasting precious time with reproaches? Mollie started toward the door. "If you want particulars," she snapped, "go see Bert Lyons up around the jail. He seems to be working for you. He just brought Stewart's body in."

She did not stop to say more, but slipped out of the office as quietly as she had come. Talbert stood, a satisfied grin on his face, until the sound of her light footsteps had died away.

As Mollie slipped around to the rear of Talbert's office she saw Blackie Merillo making his crablike way along the wall of the adjoining building. As she skirted the corner of the old saloon next door, she glanced back. The half-breed had disappeared.

"Going to tell the boss how it happened," she thought. Then she halted and looked back. "Now, why should he do that? He isn't working for Talbert any more; it shouldn't make any difference to him about trouble at the ranch. I shouldn't think he'd be friendly now with Talbert."

She tripped into the kitchen and turned eagerly to where she had left Joe.

But Joe was not there. While she looked round, a dull fear growing in her heart, she saw men running up the street. She sprang to the door.

Up the jail steps, closely followed by the curious crowd, the Cherub was half-carrying the shrinking Joe.

CHAPTER V

"GOO'-BY, CHERB!"

BLACKIE Merillo sidled into Talbert's office and faced a man whose countenance was anything but bland.

"What the hell happened?" Talbert rasped out, his voice tense with rage. "Didn't I tell you there was to be no shooting?"

"Aw, sure." Blackie's little eyes flashed and he hitched significantly at his heavy holster. "You say ketch Cherb an' dat marshal an' keep 'em hide in the hills two day. But damn! Dat kid Joey he was hid in the kitchen—an' fight the marshal. Den he shoot—dat's all."

"Oh, I don't suppose it's your fault, but when you told me this morning that Lyons was back—and I doped out this scheme to give him that job, and to slip Stewart the hint that he was hunting trouble out there—why, I thought you had the brains to get away with it." Talbert hunched his fat bulk across the table. "Well, that killing will just about cook our goose. Two days more and I'd have that big deal with those Nevada people cleaned up—and be down across the border. But now—with this excitement—hell!"

Blackie relaxed and let his hand drop from the butt of his gun, relieved satisfaction in his red-rimmed eyes. Calmly he produced the makings and rolled a cigarette, still watching Talbert closely. Finally he spoke:

"The sheriff—Purdy—he will do nothing. If we get dat damn Cherb—ev'rything is safe."

A gleam of interest came into Talbert's half-closed eyes.

"That might do—if you can get him. But let that go for a minute—the first thing is to move those cases of hootch we left at the ranch over to the Slot—or up to the old sheep camp. There isn't

much there compared to the big cache, but I was just keeping it for our good sheriff, Purdy, to keep him quiet. Now I can get big money for it, and I don't want any revenue officers nosin' round. And maybe Stewart put them wise already. He's been seen riding around the ranch pretty close."

"Huh!" The half-breed sniffed with triumphant scorn, and inhaled deeply from his cigarette. "Dat marshal had a very funny idea—he think mebbe he fin' the hombre dat kill Old Man Granger."

Talbert wiped the gloom from his features with a sweep of his fat hand and drew the conversation back to business.

"I don't care who killed Granger, or Stewart either. But we've got to get through before an army gets in here. So you beat it over to the Seven-Bar and get that stuff out. Be sure you clean it up good, so the officers—no; I'll tell you—burn up the damn ranchhouse—or all that's left of it.

"An' the Cherb?" questioned Blackie hopefully. "What I do wit' him?"

"Oh, get him! I don't care. I've got to have two days more; then we're through. Where are the boys?"

"I sen' 'em to the Slot."

"All right. When you take that load in have them get ready to move across the border. Those lads from Nevada will be here tomorrow—they're taking the whole consignment."

Blackie slipped crab fashion out of the door and down to where he had left his horse. As he rode toward the Seven-Bar ranch through the dead heat of early evening, his scarred face was distorted with a satisfied smirk and his black heart pounded joyously. He would get the Cherub at last. Ever since the time Bert Lyons had accused him of working over a brand on a Seven-Bar heifer, and had disgraced him before his friends by taking his gun and slapping his face, the little half-breed had cherished an insane grudge. And now he had been given free rein in dealing with his enemy. He would fix the Cherub!

THE CHERUB had gone back to Mollie's cabin in the desperate hope of squaring himself—it was during the time of Mollie's absence at Talbert's office. Finding the door open, he had walked on into the kitchen, and into the cowering presence of Joe Granger.

Joe had become hysterical when the Cherub, with white-lipped reluctance, had told the boy that he was under arrest. While they walked up the street to the jail the boy had almost raved in his wild fear, insisting over and over that he did not fire the shot that killed Dad Stewart.

Then the Cherub had an argument with Jeff Purdy, the sheriff, over the admittance of the prisoner.

"How about a warrant?" Purdy grumbled, shifting lazily in his big leather-covered chair and pulling at his great mouse-colored moustache. "I can't take no more prisoners without a warrant."

"I'll get you a warrant." The Cherub knew a whole lot about the unscrupulous Purdy, whose political pull had enabled him to beat Dad Stewart out of his job as sheriff several years before. "You just keep this boy till I look around a little; I'm not quite sure of things."

About that time Purdy caught a flash of Dad Stewart's federal badge of authority upon the Cherub's shirt pocket—and nearly swallowed his chew. The spineless sheriff had reason to worry when federal officers began to look around. By the time he recovered, the Cherub was walking back up the street.

The Cherub intended first to telephone the news of Dad Stewart's death to the customs officials at Waldo, and to transmit the old marshal's message regarding the raiding of the Slot. But he had to pass Talbert's office to reach the store where the public telephone was located. He had a feeling that an interview with the mysterious real estate man was in order. It might clear up the reason for Blackie's attack, or put him in possession of additional facts to pass on to the federal officers.

Talbert greeted the Cherub with bland warmth, indicated a chair and pushed forward a box of cigars.

"I heard you had trouble out at the ranch," he said, leaning back and peering through a fog of smoke. "How about it?"

"Don't know about it, myself," remarked the Cherub calmly. "Just between you and me and this fine cigar. I'd say that Blackie was laying for me. Howsomever, Dad Stewart was killed—and he was a United States marshal. I figure that to mean that he was getting right warm around this smuggling gang."

Talbert saw fit not to discuss the Cherub's frank suspicions.

"But I thought Joe Granger shot Stewart!"

The Cherub smiled innocently.

"Yes, I reckon; but I shouldn't wonder if there was something back of it."

"I've been worried about Joe for some time." Talbert shook his great head with too-mournful regret. "He's gambled a great deal and——"

"Where'd he get the money to gamble?"

Talbert squinted quizzically at the questioner as he pondered his reply. Finally he smiled with a bland attempt at frankness.

"I gave it to him. He got into difficulties and came to me. I have paid him all of this year's rent of the ranch. He said that Mollie never had the authority to deal with me without his consent—so I thought I'd pay him some of the rent."

"You had a helluva nerve!" drawled the Cherub, his smiling eyes very steady. "I don't reckon—" Then he pushed his hat far back upon his head, and smiled with engaging sweetness. "Say, how's chances to get off my Seven-Bar job for a few days?"

Talbert chewed his cigar, a speculative pucker around his greenish eyes.

"Going hunting men? Well, go ahead. I'm most strongly in favor of law and order. Of course I'm sorry for the Grangers, but I feel that an example in Joe's case will benefit this county greatly. Now, if you want my hunch—why, take a look in that place they call the Slot. It's on Seven-Bar territory; Old Man Granger used to use it a lot in the old days, and —well, suppose you ride in there."

The Cherub smiled with his lips, while his long lashes swept low over his deceptively innocent eyes. His manner so effectually masked his conviction that Talbert was trying to lead him into another trap, that again he saw the big man frowning his bewilderment.

"Well, I'll be going," drawled the Cherub. "Thanks for letting me off. See you later."

But outside, as he strolled down the street and cut in between two buildings, he was muttering to himself.

"Not twice in a row, old-timer! You had Blackie laying for me, but you don't get me riding into no Slot alone!"

HE back-tracked to Mollie's cabin. He must have a word with her—he must try to explain—to tell her how sorry he was about Joe. He swallowed with a painful effort. It was sure a hard job he had before him.

Mollie opened the door to his rap, but she nearly closed it in his face. The color was gone from her cheeks and her eyes were red.

"Didn't I tell you——?"

"Sure, but I needed to see you." The Cherub tried to bring back his confident smile. "I've got a hunch from something Joe said—I want to talk it over——"

"You—you traitor—with your hunches!" Mollie caught her clenched fingers across her mouth as if to hold back her outburst. But her emotion burst through the barrier. She sprang to the table, brushed a paper aside and snatched up an automatic pistol. "You—I could kill you!" Then she drooped and the gun fell from her hand. "Oh, Bert!" she moaned. "How could you hurt me so?"

The Cherub never remembered how he got out of Mollie's cabin. When he came to himself he was waiting for the gray-haired telephone operator to get a connection with the customs officials at Waldo. He was still in a daze when she informed him that the line was out of order, and that he had better write out his message for later transmission. It was not until after he had written his report of Dad Stewart's murder upon a scrap of paper, and had climbed into the waiting buckboard for the return trip to the ranch, that he roused himself sufficiently to begin to figure on the checkerboard puzzle that hedged him round.

In the first place he was now sure that Talbert had tricked him. The job had been a joke. Blackie had been expecting him at the ranch. He knew more than could possibly have been contained in Talbert's note. The half-breed must have been warned of his coming to the ranch, by the horseman that the Cherub had seen riding down the ridge. That rider had been a sentry. Yes, and Blackie had reported his return from overseas to Talbert—it had been the half-breed he had seen slinking down beside Talbert's office just after that wonderful visit with Mollie. The Cherub realized now that only that fatal shot in the kitchen had saved him from a disastrous scrimmage with Blackie's villainous gang.

The Cherub was not quite so downhearted, however, since hearing Joe Granger's hysterical protestations of innocence. There was a chance that—Joe hadn't been carrying a gun when he was arrested. What was it the boy had said about his

gun? Well, he'd take a look through the kitchen as soon as he reached the ranch. Maybe that gun was still there.

WHEN he reached the ranch—it was well before the Cherub had left Border City—Blackie tied his horse behind the house and went leisurely about his duty. While he was catching a pack mule in the corral, he grinned on sighting the Cherub's spotted pony, which had been of necessity left behind when its owner drove the buckboard with its gruesome freight to town. Blackie saw no reason why he should not fall heir to Polka-Dot. He saddled the mule and tied it to a cottonwood beside the house. Then he carried out a number of boxes and several small packages from the undamaged rooms and packed them upon the animal.

"Dat is good," he grumbled, when the pack was secured. "Now, I burn the ol' shack!"

But while pawing through the storehouse shed for a can of coal-oil with which to encourage his bonfire, the half-breed's sharp eyes fell upon a box of dynamite that had been left when the trail into the Slot had been built. At once he decided to indulge his love of the spectacular.

"I fix the damn shack!" he chortled. Hunting up fuse and caps, he carried the explosive into the house. "Up she go!"

HE placed his burden softly upon the dining-room table and started to adjust a cap upon a piece of fuse. In the act of poking a hole in the end of a stick of dynamite, he heard the rattle of wagon wheels. He sprang to the window and looked out. The Cherub, in the buckboard, was driving down the lane.

Blackie stood still for a moment, the stick of powder in one hand, his gun butt clutched in the other. Then a grimace of hate spread over his swarthy features.

"By damn!" he muttered, his little eyes beginning to sparkle with the joy of a great idea. "I fix him—I fix dat Cherb!"

But as he returned to the powder box and continued his task, his newly grasped idea blossomed with devilish swiftness. He sidled across to the kitchen door, pulled it open and peered inside. His eyes darted about, narrowing with the laborious process of his diabolical planning.

With a series of satisfied grunts, he carried the powder box into the kitchen and set it on the floor beside the table. Hurriedly he fetched one of the lids from the cook stove, placed it upon the box of powder, and spread the handful of caps upon the lid. Next he stumbled to a shelf, and came back to the table with a piece of string and a flat-iron. With one end of the string tied to the flat-iron and the other to the knob of the door that opened into the dining-room, he adjusted the flat-iron upon the edge of the table so that when the door was opened the weight would fall upon the caps.

"She is all ri'!" grunted the half-breed, standing back and surveying his trap with a hideous grin. "Now I go."

His little eyes blinked thoughtfully as they fell upon the rear door. It would not do for his victim to come in that way and discover the trap. Just as the buckboard stopped in front of the house, Blackie jammed a chair under the door knob and climbed through a sliding window which had a broken pane. Once outside he closed the window and ran to his horse. While mounting he heard the front door open and footsteps pound upon the floor.

At that Blackie felt no further need of caution. He dug his heels into his horse's flanks, flattened himself forward, and gritted his teeth in anticipation of the earthquake roar that would come.

But when he had dashed behind a knoll a hundred yards from the ranchhouse the half-breed drew up with a snort and peered back at the house through the fast-gathering dusk.

"By damn—I forget dat mule!" He blinked at the pack animal hunched over beside the house, and shrugged his crooked shoulders. "Goo'-by, mule!" Then his face fairly shone with joy. "Goo'-by, Cherb! Goo'-by, you damn ol' Cherb!"

CHAPTER VI

"A FLAT-IRON—SLIDING—"

THE CHERUB drove up in the buckboard and saw his horse, saddled and bridled, standing in front of the house. He smiled at the obvious intention of Blackie to steal the pony and entered the dining room. It was getting quite dark inside. He had it in mind to take a look at the scene of the shooting. Maybe he could find Joe's gun. He started toward the kitchen door.

It was kind of queer, he thought, that young Joe Granger should be mixed up with this gang. Why, he had always

seemed to be an easy-going youngster who hadn't the nerve to shoot a man—even in the back.

With his hand upon the knob of the kitchen door the Cherub paused, frowning deeply, his eyes searching the room. It had been Joe he had seen dodging into the kitchen. It was queer. What was that Mollie had said about Talbert hiring Joe to spy on Blackie? Talbert didn't look to be the sort of bonehead who would put a kid of Joe's caliber on a dangerous spying job. And why had Talbert hatched up that fishy excuse to pay Joe the rent money? And Joe—well, the kid needed a scare if he was playing such dirty tricks on his sister. The Cherub twisted the knob and started to pull the door open.

But with a suddenness that made him jump, there sounded just outside, a mule's wailing bray. The Cherub gave a shamed sniff when he realized the cause of the racket, and walked to the window. Just outside stood a mule with a pack of boxes. Puzzled, he went out and around the side of the house to the mule.

It took the Cherub only about twenty seconds to determine that the pack contained cases of contraband liquor. And, searching the kyacks, after he had partly removed the pack, he found a number of small packages that gave out a peculiar odor.

"Opium!" he exclaimed. "Or some other dope."

He was not sure just what value the pack load of liquor had as evidence. It would be hard to connect it with anyone. Had that mule been there at the time of the shooting? He examined the cinch of the pack saddle.

"Hasn't been packed an hour," was his decision.

Where had the liquor come from? The most logical answer was that it had been taken from some nearby cache to be moved to a safer place. If that were the case there should be some indications left. He went back to his search of the house.

The Cherub went round to the kitchen door and was surprised to find it fastened. Never in his knowledge of the place had a door of the ranchhouse been locked. Besides, he recalled that he had carried Dad Stewart's body out that way, and he certainly had not locked the door behind him.

He went back to the dining room, found a stub of candle and proceeded to search the ruined part of the house. The windows had been boarded up, as had been the front door and the door into the dining room. The Cherub crawled through the wrecked rooms for some time, but the trackless dust gave evidence that the place had not been used at all since the big cottonwood fell upon it.

He returned to the dining room, placed his candle on a shelf and sat down to look the room over. There were a number of chairs, a long table, an old cloth-covered couch, and a second smaller table standing against the living room wall.

Observing nothing that interested him, the Cherub came back to his original intention of searching the kitchen. Through his mind still pounded a hope caused by Joe's wild insistence that he had not fired a shot. If he could find that gun of Joe's! He wondered if the boy still owned the little automatic that his father had given him.

But, headed for the kitchen door, he passed the small table. Peculiar little scars upon its top caught his attention. He held his candle closer, recognized the marks as the dents made by boot nails, and glanced quickly upward. Just over the table, covered by a crude door, was a scuttle hole into the attic.

Reproving himself for not thinking of that attic before, the Cherub climbed upon the table, pushed the door aside and drew himself into the dark hole. Fifteen minutes later he slid down. He knew then that he had found the place from which the mule's load had come. But could he even now connect the matter with Talbert?

The candle stub burned out with a splutter. It was too dark now to examine the kitchen without a light. The Cherub unhitched the horses and turned them into the corral. Then he unpacked the mule and hid the cases of liquor in the oat bin.

He was about to scout through the kitchen on a hunt for supper when a thought came to him that the mule's owner might return. Maybe it would be better not to make a light. Maybe if he took it easy he could catch the man who had left the mule.

The Cherub saddled Polka-Dot and tied him to a clump of mesquite in the lane. If he caught a prisoner he wouldn't want

to be bothered with saddling his animal. He returned to the house and settled in a chair by the dining room window. By the light of the rising moon he could see the spot where the mule had been tied.

FROM behind the rock pile Blackie had watched the light flashes of the Cherub's explorations with a heart-thumping suspense that had gradually dissolved into alarm when the expected explosion failed to materialize. When he heard the Cherub riding Polka-Dot up from the corral, he jumped to the conclusion that his enemy had escaped the trap and was riding back to town.

THE CHERUB sat up with a start, realizing that the bright light of the full moon was flooding in through the window upon him. The next instant he knew that he had dozed, and that a sound outside had awakened him. Then he heard the door swing open and stealthy footsteps creak across the floor inside. A match flared and a shadowy form tiptoed to a shelf against the wall. A candle flame sprang up and revealed the pitted features of Blackie Merillo.

The Cherub rose slowly and worked his way along the wall. The half-breed moved with strangely careful steps toward the kitchen door. While he leaned over peering at the lock, the Cherub drew his gun.

"Just stick 'em up, Blackie!" he ordered softly. "I reckon you're the bird I want."

Blackie jumped, his instinctive movement taking him some distance from the kitchen door. His hands went up, trembling. When he turned the Cherub was surprised at the expression of desperate fear that showed upon his pasty face. His lower lip had fallen down; his eyes were wide and staring, and the hand that held the candle shook until the flame wavered.

"You must be seein' a ghost," chuckled the Cherub. "What the devil's the matter with you? Did somebody tell you I was dead?"

"I think I hear you ride away," mumbled Blackie. Then he began edging toward the outer door. "Let—s'posin' we go outside—mebbe so——"

"No, you don't! You mosey into th' kitchen an' we'll have a real light. Hustle! Open that door!"

Blackie's drawn features, a hideous death-mask in the flickering candle light, mirrored his desperation. His little eyes darted into the shadows, swung with shrinking reluctance to the kitchen door, then came back to the Cherub.

"Come on—what's eatin' you? Get into the kitchen! Maybe you better turn aroun' first and let me take your hardware. Come on—turn——"

The Cherub's eyes were upon Blackie's right hand—and his gun. The half-breed's strange nervousness also helped to fool him. So when the little gunman dashed the candle into the Cherub's face, he caught his captor napping.

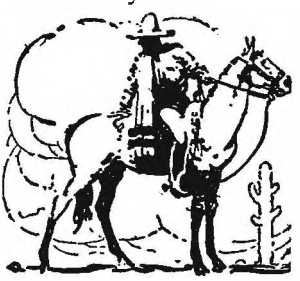
The Cherub, pawing hot candle grease from his eyes, sprang forward. Blackie threw a wild shot over his shoulder. The Cherub saw the dark form of the half-breed lunging through the moonlight streak, and hurled himself at the window. His clutching hands caught Blackie's leg. With a triumphant shout he dragged the gunman back into the room.

But Blackie was not subdued. Striking and kicking, he fought with the ferocity of a cornered wildcat. And the Cherub, striving to keep his prisoner's hands from reaching his gun, was pulling Blackie toward the outer door—and the moonlight. But the half-breed, feeling himself being forced toward that terror-inspiring kitchen, threw his whole strength into a mighty effort. With a wild scream he tore loose and dived through the window.

The Cherub leaped through the window after the half-breed, but before he could scramble to his feet, he heard Blackie swearing at his horse. An instant later came the clatter of retreating hoofbeats.

"Doggone a fool!" snapped the Cherub angrily. "I lost him! But what the devil was the matter with him? He was scared crazy!"

Evidently the shot had attracted the attention of other night riders, for scarcely had the Cherub given up his hopeless pursuit of the fleeing gunman, than he heard horses pounding down the lane. He dodged around the corner of the house just as four horsemen rode up in front and dismounted.



"That shot sounded right here," boomed Talbert's impatient voice. "And I was sure I saw a light. I can't see—I wonder if that bird Lyons came back from town. Well, let's take a look inside."

They tramped into the dining room, scratching matches. The Cherub decided that he wanted to hear more of their conversation. This might be a chance to connect Talbert with that mule load of evidence. He ran round to the rear door, remembering that it was locked, and looked for another means of entrance into the kitchen. His hurried search revealed a broken window that slid to one side at his fumbling touch. He could see light shining through the cracks of the inner door, and he could hear voices and the scraping of chairs. Maybe they were settling for a chat. As he climbed through the window he noticed that his shadow in the bright moonlight was thrown across the kitchen table. Very cautiously he crossed to the wall of the dining room.

"We got to move fast now," Talbert was saying. "I was going out to the Slot to tell you boys that I want all that stuff moved out by tomorrow night. The Nevada bunch will have a truck at the old sheep camp at noon. They'll take the whole works at one load. I'm to see the boss in town in the morning and get the dough. Glad I met you boys. Saved me a bad ride. Here—let's go out this way. Blackie says the kid lost his gun in that ruckus. If that amateur marshal should find it— Say, where the devil is Blackie anyway?"

The Cherub edged into the narrow space behind the stove. The party was going to leave through the kitchen. He pressed into the shadow, watching the door, white with the swath of moonlight that cut in through the broken window. He saw the door move as Talbert started to open it.

As he reached for his gun and crouched lower, the Cherub's hand touched a small object on the floor. He grasped it, a tingling thrill shooting through him as he realized once more the importance of the evidence of Joe's gun. But a scraping sound, and something moving upon the moonlight-flooded table top, caught his attention.

"What the dickens!" he muttered. "A flat-iron—sliding——"

His glance followed the string from flat-iron to door knob—and back. He took one quick step to where he could see the box of dynamite and the stove lid sprinkled with caps. The sinister significance of the set-up flashed to his brain.

"Holy ol' bald-headed!"

One more hurried glance he shot at the flat-iron dragging jerkily toward the edge of the table, then, still clutching the all important object he had found behind the stove, he dived wildly through the window. Scrambling to his feet, he tore madly down the draw and threw himself behind a pile of rocks.

Panting heavily, yet trying to hold his breath in momentary expectation of the crash of the explosion, the Cherub flattened himself upon the ground behind the scanty rock pile. When the looked-for roar did not come, however, he rose slowly and looked furtively about with a half-shamed grin at his panic.

Then, the confident smile again curving his lips and shining from his eyes, he looked down at his find behind the stove.

"It is Joe's gun!" he exclaimed. "The same little gun the Old Man gave him when he was fifteen."

He flipped the six cartridges into his palm, then held the little pistol up. The moonlight sparkled brightly through the barrel.

"Joe's gun—an' he never fired it!"

With a great relief crowding out all thought of danger, the Cherub replaced the cartridges in the gun and made his way toward the house. Through the window he could see the party still lingering in the dimly lighted dining room.

As the Cherub hesitated in his cautious advance, something dug sharply into his side.

"Now—you Cherb!" squeaked the snarling voice of Blackie. "I got you! Hey, Talbert! Come—I show you something!"

Chapter VII

While the Mob Gathers

MOLLIE Granger spent a sleepless night. Yet, torn by fears for Joe, and dazed by the tragedy of the Cherub's duty-driven attitude, she wondered only vaguely at the unusual activity that stirred Border City throughout the night. Even in the morning, when she noticed that the town was full of strangers, riding up and down the street, or lounging in close-pressed groups; even then she was too absorbed in her own worries to question their significance.

But finally the neighborhood gossip dropped in.

"They's talk of—them are friends of ol' Dad Stewart—they be talkin' strong——"

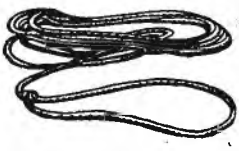
Then Mollie understood. Trembling with the horror of that new fear, she could only move about the cabin, repeating over and over, "I must do something! Oh, I must do something!"

It was quite a while before she could think connectedly, but once she did begin to reason, it was not long until she concluded that Talbert was her forlorn hope. She hurried to his office, but the big broker was deep in conference with two sleek-appearing strangers.

Half an hour later, just as Mollie was about to make another effort to see him, Talbert strode up the walk to her door.

"Well, Mollie"—he regarded her with his bland smile—"I've come to help."

"Oh—then do something! Get Joe away! There is talk of lynching—and he is innocent—I know he is! Oh, won't you do something, Mr. Talbert? Use the money you owe—and you can have that five hundred—use it to bribe somebody! I believe you could buy Purdy easily."



Talbert wrinkled his scanty brows and stroked his fat chin.

"Well," he said at last with a shrug of decision, "I believe I can do something, but you realize that aiding a federal prisoner to escape is a dangerous business. I would have to get down over the border myself for a time. And of course there would be a trail that led to you, so you would have to get away too."

"Oh, I'd go," put in Mollie hurriedly. "I'd want to go with Joe. It wouldn't be for long. I know this will be cleared up soon."

"All right, I'll get busy. I believe I can do something with Purdy. And my men from the ranch are in town. By working some sort of combination between the two—well, you get ready to go. I'll get my horse before I do anything. Have your horse saddled—we may have to make a quick start."

Mollie felt the exhilarating tingle of hope. She was sure that Talbert could effect Joe's escape. While she realized that she distrusted the big broker, and was shaken by a shivery revulsion when she felt his peculiar eyes upon her, yet she could not see how she was in any great danger through using him to help her now. He owed her money. She started to pack a small bundle of clothing.

Talbert came back, riding fast.

"I fixed it," he announced. "My men are going to rush the jail. Purdy is well bought so there will be no resistance. Dad Stewart's friends will be fooled into thinking that the rescuing party is some of their own crowd. Now——"

"But are you sure?" Mollie bit her lip to still its trembling. "Oh, I'm so afraid something may go wrong!"

"Don't you worry." Talbert smiled down at her with his most expansive manner. "Everything will work out fine. I had a few words with Joe and he thinks the plan is great."

"Oh, can any one see him? I want to see him before I go!"

"Oh, no!" A hint of alarm showed in Talbert's heavy features. "That would not do—they might suspect. No—we'll go on. Joe said for you to go—and that he would join us tonight at San Maria."

Mollie felt a chill of doubt at the matter-of-fact manner in which Talbert spoke of their flight together. Then again she looked up toward the jail to where the crowd was beginning to mill restlessly. There was no other way. She must accept Talbert's aid.

"See that bunch of men talking on the courthouse steps?" queried Talbert, evidently quite anxious to calm her fears. "Well, those are my men—the crowd that is going to do the rescue act."

Even in spite of her anxiety Mollie was quite sure that she recognized the men Talbert pointed out as cowpunchers from the Side Bar-S outfit, but then she hadn't been in touch with such things. Probably Talbert had those men now.

"We better be going," suggested Talbert.

So Mollie rode out of Border City with the man who was aiding her to save Joe. Deep down in her heart she had misgivings, but she quieted them by telling herself over and over that she was taking the chance for Joe's sake.

"I've a little business up at that old sheep camp, near the Slot," said Talbert. "Then we'll swing back and cross the line beyond the home ranch. It won't take much longer."

But Mollie knew that it would take hours longer, and her doubts grew as they made their way through the rough country to the old sheep camp. But Talbert appeared not to notice her uneasiness, nor did he show in any way that he had other plans than to escort the girl to a meeting place with her brother.

Talbert's business at the sheep camp seemed to be nothing more than to examine certain tracks in the sand. But he took his time at the inspection of the tire marks of a truck, and the tracks of horses and mules; however, Mollie noticed that he seemed greatly pleased at what he saw, and he tried to cheer her up with a swiftly-growing familiarity as he led the way down a broken gulley toward the Seven-Bar ranchhouse.

"What you say we drop over to the ranch?" he suggested. "We'll have a lunch and wait until dark. Besides"—he smiled with a too-warm sympathy—"you will have a look at the old place."

Mollie's suspicions were expanding into certainty, yet she could see no way of leaving her companion without endangering Joe's chances of escape. Talbert's men—if they were his men—were engineering the affair. If she were to break away from him, he might do something to call them off.

So the girl tried bravely to meet the big man's triumphant mood. She pretended an interest in his accounts of desert happenings, and in his rather vague plans for the immediate future. But her heart was heavy with foreboding, and her wits were sharpened for the impending conflict.

Then they rode down to the ranchhouse in which Mollie had been born.

"I'll put the horses in the corral and give them a feed," said Talbert. "Suppose you start a fire and put on the coffee pot? You'll find plenty of eatables in the kitchen."

Reluctantly, her fear growing until it was almost panic, Mollie went to the house. She was greatly surprised to find the back door locked. Never in her life had she known a door of the ranchhouse to be fastened.

She went round to the dining room door and entered. Then a nervousness seized her. There was yet time for her to escape. She would hide and wait until Talbert had gone on—then she would slip across the border alone.

Where could she hide? She started back toward the front door, saw that Talbert was in such a position that he could see her if she went out that way, and turned toward the kitchen.

But the recollection of the locked back door decided her against going that way. She might not be able to get out, and there was no place to hide in the kitchen. Better to hide in the wrecked part of the house. She tried to pry a board off the door between the dining room and the old parlor—then she remembered the scuttle hole into the attic.

She sprang upon the table, pushed the board cover aside and scrambled into the gloomy attic. She was just in time. As she slipped the little door back into place she heard Talbert rattling the back door and calling to her. Then, while she shivered with the dread suspense, she heard him tramping heavily into the front room.

"Hey, Mollie! Where the devil have you gone?"

His scraping tread creaked across the floor below her. Then came silence, followed by an explosive grunt that drove Mollie back into a corner with her hand tightening upon her mouth to stifle her scream. For Talbert was upon the table, banging the scuttle-cover aside.

"Ho—ho!" he chortled, his voice strangely hard. "I thought I heard something when I was coming around from the kitchen. What's the matter? What you doing up here?"

Mollie crouched in the darkness and did not speak. Talbert, with a surprising spryness for so large a man, pulled himself into the attic. He lighted a match, and when the flame flared up he gave out a strange grunt of triumph.

"Why, girl, what's the matter? Why—you have nothing to fear." He lumbered across the squeaking boards and lighted another match. "Come on down—don't be afraid of me."

But Mollie caught the expression in his greenish eyes, and shrank back with a cry of terror. Talbert laughed.

"Come on down, you little fool! What you afraid of?"

"Oh!" cried the girl. "You go on—I—I'm going alone!"

The match burned Talbert's fingers and he swore savagely. Into Mollie's racing thought flashed a fear that was greater than that caused by her desperate situation. Talbert may have lied to her about planning to aid Joe. Why, Joe might still be in danger from the mob!

As if he read her thought, Talbert smiled and spoke more calmly.

"Don't be a silly fool over Joe. He's no good. I used him as a plant to steer

any curious investigator away from here; but I paid him well." His thick lips twitched into a sneer. "I might as well tell you now why I wouldn't pay you that rent money—I had already paid it to Joe. He got in some kind of a mess and came whining to me for money."

"But now—you lied to me! He won't get away!" Despair was in every accent of the girl's voice.

Talbert's sneering laugh was her reply. She tried to crawl deeper into the corner. Fascinated, she could not keep her eyes off Talbert as he stood with his great head stuck out and his shoulders hunched forward. Then he moved heavily toward her. A beam of sunlight, flaming through a crack, struck upon his clutching, outstretched hands.

Terror—blind, frenzied terror—gripped the fainting girl.

"Oh, Bert!" she screamed. "Save me, Bert! Oh—Bert!"

CHAPTER VIII

OLD MAN GRANGER IS AVENGED

THE Cherub had been carried a prisoner into the Slot. Throughout the long hot morning, his hands and feet tied with a rawhide lariat, he had lain upon a pile of sharp rocks in an old saddle shed below the jumble of shacks.

The narrow arroyo of the Slot, with its few crude adobe shelters, and its stinking water-hole, and its glare of burning heat, was feverish with the hurry of moving.

In the good old days of the Granger ranch the Slot had been used as a camp by the punchers when working on that part of the range, because of the water-hole. This had been kept as pure as possible under the circumstances and the adobe shacks had been kept in repair. It was plain to the Cherub that the camp like the rest of the ranch had been allowed to fall into decay and that it was simply used by Blackie's outfit as a cache for the liquor and drugs they were smuggling across the border. Now in preparation for its abandonment mules were being packed and men were bringing in armloads of plunder from hidden caches in the rocks. Blackie Merillo, in a very good humor because of his capture of the hated Cherub, was very active in the preparations.

The lanky cowpuncher Slim rode up the arroyo and halted at the water-hole. The half-breed shuffled down to meet the newcomer.

"Hello, Slim," greeted the gunman. "How is everyt'ing? Talbert he git away all ri'?"

"Sure!" smirked Slim. "Took the Mollie girl, too—jes' like he said."

The Cherub's face went white and he snapped his teeth together. Talbert had tricked Mollie—that would be the only way she could be induced to go with him. But Slim's next words brought to the helpless prisoner another knife-thrust of fear.

"An' the gang's goin' to do the stringin' act on your friend Joe!" He gave a grunting laugh. "They was jes' waitin' for ol' Stewart's son, from over on Poison Creek. Reckon mebbe they've done the job by now."

The heart of the miserable Cherub sank with despair. White-hot iron seared his very soul. The girl he loved was in the power of a man whose heart was as black as that of the half-breed gunman. And her brother, whom the Cherub had taken to the Border City jail, might even now be dead, the innocent victim of the blood-mad friends of old Dad Stewart. For that cleaned gun, fully loaded, had proved to the Cherub's satisfaction that Joe could not have fired the shot that killed the marshal.

Blackie's squeaky laugh interrupted the Cherub's thought.

"Dat is one big joke on Joey! The marshal see Joey wit his gun—den Stewart hear the racket in the nex' room. He leave Joey—bang! Somebody shoot thro' the window——"

"Yes, you're a smart feller all right, Blackie," replied the cowpuncher. "Because, when they cool down and dig the bullet out of Dad Stewart's body, they are goin' to hunt round for the gun that killed him. Everybody on this range knows that your old blunderbuss shoots a different kind of a slug from young Joe's neat little automatic. Then they're goin' to examine Joe's gun. Wouldn't surprise me none to see that there posse comin' your way most any time, Blackie."

"Don't you worry, Slim; Joe dropped his gun and that nosey Cherub picked it up. When we got him I took the gun away from him and it's right here where nobody's goin' to see it."

The Cherub twisted over on his side, his heart racing as he recalled the broken window—and the sound of breaking glass that he had heard at the time of the shooting. The half-breed had killed Stewart;

but why had Blackie disobeyed the orders of Talbert to refrain from shooting? Slim's drawling voice answered his query.

"Well, it's none of my business, but you're kinda like the feller who keeps losin' and has to double his bets every time to break even. I reckon you didn't get old Stewart any too soon because I hear he's been snoopin' round on the trail of the man that killed Old Man Granger. A friend of mine in the sheriff's office over to Waldo whispers to me that Stewart's lookin' for a man who made tracks like he had a queer limp, same tracks havin' been found on the hill near where Old Man Granger was killed. Yuh see, Blackie, our gang wasn't the only ones that knew about how Granger smelled a rat over here to the Slot. Everybody knew that they was a heap of hooch comin' through along here somewhere, and everybody in town heard Old Man Granger swear that if the leak 'cross the border was on his property he was going to show up the crooks and turn 'em over to the U. S. marshal, if it was his last act. An' everybody natur'lly supposed that it was up to you to put the old man out of the way before *he* got *yuh*."

"Me?" screamed Blackie in an agony of hatred and fear. "Nobody is got any-t'ing on me. It might just as well be yuh or any of the rest of the gang. We all in it together, and Old Man Granger would have sent us all to the pen at once."

"Think so, do yuh, Blackie? Well, some of the rest of us happen to have a pretty good idea of what was in that package of papers you took off old Granger's body and which you carry so carefully sewed up in your vest. And you don't happen to know, do yuh, whether Stewart might not have had a pretty good idea of what was in those papers, either? Granger and Stewart were pretty good friends. If I was you, Blackie, I'd destroy those papers and jump the country quick. This little game of ours is gettin' too hot for us."

"I'm all ri'; I have one, two score pay. Then, Slim, I leave pronto."

The Cherub blinked his aching eyes. So that was how Dad Stewart came to die! The marshal had been about to fasten the murder of Granger on Blackie, and the cowardly gunman had shot him in the back—through the kitchen window.

The prisoner's teeth gritted together. His mind leaped again to Mollie's danger. If he could only get away! Again he looked up to where the preparations for flight were going rapidly forward. His faithful Polka-Dot had been seized by Blackie and now stood beside an adobe shack above the water-hole. Just behind the pony Blackie was clinching a pack saddle upon a mule.

The Cherub's frantic gaze swept his prison—the bake-oven arroyo, the cluster of filthy shacks, the greenish water-hole, the swearing jumble of villainous humanity. If he could only get the rope off his hands he would have a chance. With a horse he might still head off Talbert, who would cross the line openly on the road below the Seven-Bar ranch. But there was nothing with which to cut the tough rawhide. There was no way of getting free—let alone getting a horse.

Then his eyes fell upon the slimy rivulet that oozed down beside the shed from the springy pool of the water-hole. Cautiously he looked around; but no one was paying any attention to the prisoner. He twisted around to look again at his rawhide bonds. The crinkle of a grim smile came into his white features. He rolled over—then again. With a disgusted sniff he slid into the muddy muck of the overflow from the pool.

Hurriedly he turned over and over, pressing the rawhide down into the water, straining and pulling. Above, the mob was milling with a growing excitement as the time of departure drew near. Once a man came down to the corral and the Cherub held his breath. But the man found the halter for which he searched and did not notice the prisoner's absence from the shed.

Finally the dampened rawhide began to stretch. The Cherub slipped out one hand, then the other. It was but the effort of a moment to free his feet. He crawled back to the shed, sniffing as he pictured himself in his coating of greenish mud.

NOW, if he could get a horse there might still be a chance for him to save Mollie. If he could only get a horse——

He peered through a crack in the shed wall. He could think of no possible way of getting Polka-Dot without being discovered. And he was unarmed! Blackie had triumphantly appropriated his six-shooter, and Joe's little automatic, at the time of his capture.

The half-breed finally finished packing the mule. He mounted and turned Polka-Dot toward the saddle shed. The Cherub had no difficulty in catching the significance of his snarled oath. Then an argument arose regarding the ownership of something that Blackie had packed. The half-breed dismounted and left Polka-Dot standing. The spotted pony, holding its head to one side to avoid the dragging reins, made for the water-hole. The Cherub's heart raced with hope. If the horse would only swing down a little farther he would chance a running mount, and a race down the arroyo.

Then the pack mule followed Polka-Dot. Blackie called profanely to the two animals, but he did not follow them. And when Polka-Dot finished drinking he raised his head and looked down toward the shed.

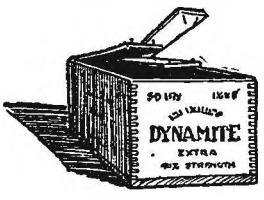
The Cherub held his breath, fearing that the pony would not recognize him in his mud disguise, or that he would nicker a welcome. But Polka-Dot merely stared for a moment, then ambled down to the shed.

And with the horse out of sight from above, the Cherub realized that he might get well away without being seen. He led Polka-Dot down the muddy slope until they were hidden behind a clump of mesquite. There he mounted and walked the animal around a turn in the trail. Then he allowed Polka-Dot to break into a lope.

A short distance below the Slot the Cherub reined the protesting Polka-Dot up the steep hillside. He had in mind a cut-off that would take him to the border road.

If he could only reach the line before Mollie and Talbert arrived!

With a grim smile the Cherub recalled the dynamite trap he had discovered in the kitchen of the ranchhouse. He would have recognized that as Blackie's handiwork, even without the corroboration of the half-breed's panic during the struggle in the dining-room. He realized that the devilish trap was still unsprung and promised himself that if he succeeded in overtaking Mollie and Talbert, he would return by way of the ranchhouse and remove that menace before it claimed some innocent victim. But the big thing was to save Mollie!



Then, with the suddenness of a rifle shot, a terrifying thought struck hammer-like into the Cherub's mind. Dead despair, mingled with blind terror, cut deep lines into his drawn face. What of Joe? He had taken Joe to jail—and to his death! Almost unconsciously he drew Polka-Dot to a halt.

Could he go on and save Mollie, leaving Joe to his fate? It was his fault that Joe was a prisoner. He should have waited—but if he rode into Border City in an effort to aid Joe, he would then be too late to overtake Talbert and his helpless victim.

But he could not help Joe. He might better go on. It was very probable that the lynchers had already acted. Anyway, what chance would he have of convincing the hot-headed mob that it was Blackie who really killed Stewart.

Blackie! If he could take the half-breed in he might be able to sway the mob's attention from Joe Granger to the real murderer. But to capture Blackie Merillo, the gunman, in the protection of the Slot, surrounded by twenty desperate ruffians! And he was unarmed!

Yet as the Cherub turned Polka-Dot carefully on the steep side of the arroyo, his smile began to grow with a deadly grimness. In his eyes glowed a determination that was like a death threat—or a forlorn hope.

While his plan was shaping up the Cherub rode back into the Slot, listening at every step for the shouts and drumming hoofbeats that would indicate the discovery of his escape. But as he dismounted behind a clump of mesquite and led his horse toward the screening shed, he realized that there probably would be no pursuit, unless Blackie persisted in his mad desire for vengeance. Talbert's orders evidently had been to hold him until they were ready to retreat across the line. And even now they were starting up the rocky gulch.

But when the Cherub reached the shed he knew that the men above were still in ignorance of his escape. The argument between Blackie and some of the men was still in progress, but even as he peeked through the crack the matter was adjusted and Blackie turned with a profane outburst to get his animals. The mule was nibbling at a weed just above the shed. Blackie sidled down and started to kick the animal, then paused to look around for Polka-Dot.

The Cherub recognized his opportunity. He scraped his foot against a rock, then

moved quickly to the end of the shed.

"Der yo be—son-of-a-gun!" grumbled Blackie, and shuffled into the shed.

The half-breed's hand flashed to his gun when his little eyes fell upon the Cherub. But he had no chance. Lyons' fingers, strong as iron bands, gripped his throat. A fist, hard as a lump of steel, crashed to his temple. He slumped straight down, and lay quietly upon the ground.

The smile upon his lips contrasting strangely with the despair in his eyes, the Cherub sprang to action. He reached around the end of the wall, caught the mule's lead rope and pulled the animal into the shed. His movements were quick and sure. Deftly he unslung the rope and dumped the pack upon the ground. Then he lifted the still senseless Blackie across the mule's back and threw the hitch. Impatiently he led the animals down the arroyo, mounted behind the screening mesquite clump and kicked the pack mule's flank.

The Cherub made what haste he could in getting away from the old camp but he was fairly sure that Blackie would not be missed for some few minutes in the confusion, and he hoped that even then pursuit might be avoided. His ride was not a hard one but he wanted time before he got into town to search Blackie and see what the papers Slim mentioned amounted to. Consequently, just before he pulled into the long dusty street, he hid behind a stunted greasewood tree and without ever removing the neckerchief, with which he had gagged Blackie, slit the man's vest from top to bottom. From it dropped an envelope, yellowed with age, addressed in Old Man Granger's familiar hand to Dad Stewart, U. S. Deputy Marshal. This the Cherub lost no time in perusing.

Dear Stewart:

I won't send this note until I am sure what I am saying is gospel truth because I feel it's a kind of disgrace on my ranch. I wish to God I'd fired that man Blackie when he and Lyons had a row, but I was sore at Lyons and when the kid went away gave Blackie the job.

The whole gang, Blackie and two or three others, have been over to the Slot and the old sheep camp a lot lately. They are there now and I am going over and catch them with the goods. Smugglin' a little booze ain't so bad, but I think it amounts to a lot, and also I have got good reason to suspect that they're smugglin' opium too. If I send this letter it means that I've made up my own mind and am ready to go with you on a raid to arrest Blackie and maybe some others. I expect to get a good look at them today, so my evidence in court will be final.

My theory is that Blackie is the leader in bringing the stuff across the border, but there's a bigger man behind him, and I suspect a feller not so far away from Border City. A feller, by the way, who has been casting sheep's eyes at this ranch of mine. I don't like his looks nor his ways, but I ain't got anythin' on him definite yet so I won't name no names. But Blackie knows I suspect him and I want to get him locked up before he gets me in the back.

From your friend,
R. Granger.

The Cherub screwed up his eyes, puckered his mouth, and whistled. "Waal, of all the crazy fools for keeping this on him It's absolute hangin' evidence. Wait a minute though; I guess he took a chance on himself in order to have something on Talbert, because that's who old Granger sure meant. Must have been some high times round the ranch after I left. Seems a shame the old man had to fight it out alone. Now, let's have a look at Joe's little automatic."

He jerked a pistol from an improvised holster under Blackie's arm. He examined it and found it still as clean as when Blackie took it away from him in their fight back at the ranchhouse.

"Pistol, pistol, who's got the pistol, Blackie?" taunted the Cherub. "This evidence will about hang you twice for two different killin's."

Into the glaring, lead-melting heat of Border City, the Cherub drove his mule-load of human evidence. Down the deserted street, into the mob behind the courthouse, up to the fainting boy under the big cottonwood—he hazed the wild-eyed, panting mule.

"If yuh're dead set on hangin' somethin'," he drawled, "jes' hang this thing! Hang him twice—once for Old Man Granger and once for U. S. Marshal Stewart. Jest take a look at this here evidence. First off, here's Joe Granger's gun clean as a whistle and with the ammunition clip all loaded, just as I picked it up where he dropped it in the kitchen of the Seven-Bar, when Blackie shot Stewart from the window. Next, take a look at this here

letter which I found sewed up in Blackie's vest. The only reason he didn't destroy it was because he wanted it to hold over the head of another man. Now, if you boys are set on a hanging, I suppose you are going to do it, but if I was you, I'd just tie this jasper up tight and let the courts put him through regular. As for Joe Granger, he's my prisoner and as a U. S. deppity marshal, I turn him loose. What yuh say, boys? As for the murder of Marshal Stewart, he was a methodical cuss and must have records in his office showing why he suspected Blackie, and what he had on him to make him come over this way."

A shout from the crowd showed the Cherub that the tide had turned. He knew that Joe would now be safe and that Blackie would be held, but cared little whether the half-breed was tried legally or lynched. Turning his spotted cow pony on a dime, the grim-faced rider, green with a coating of dried mud, dashed out of Border City headed for the line below the Seven-Bar ranch.

CHAPTER IX

THE FLAT-IRON FALLS

MOLLIE, fighting every inch of the way, was dragged down from the attic. When Talbert stumbled and fell off the table, the girl broke away and ran toward the door.

But Talbert caught her just outside and jerked her back into the room. Clutching her tightly with one great hand, he caressed a red scratch upon his fat cheek.

"I'll fix you—you damn cat! Try rough stuff with me!"

There was a snake-like glitter in his greenish eyes. Mollie screamed—and struggled desperately. A dark cloud swept before her eyes. She felt herself falling. Hope left her.

"Bert!" she moaned. "Oh, Bert!"

Then, in her daze of half-consciousness she thought her call was answered. A mud-coated, panther-like form shot into the room. But it was not Bert! That awful face! Mollie roused to shrink back from this new menace.

She saw the slim figure crash into Talbert. There were blows—and muttered grunts—and terrible oaths. Mollie found herself upon the floor, crawling, trying to avoid the fighting men.

Her senses cleared a little. Who was this terrible man who was fighting Talbert? As the struggling men swung round she glimpsed the smaller man's face again, and screamed wildly. Then she forced herself to look closer at the tight-drawn mouth, the knotted brow, the flaming, hate-filled eyes——

"Bert!" she whispered, almost delirious with sudden joy and relief. "It's Bert—he did come!"

Talbert was hurled half across the room by a terrific blow. He scrambled up and started to run toward the kitchen. Then it was that Mollie saw the first gleam of reason light the Cherub's bloodshot eyes. He caught Talbert as the big man sought to open the kitchen door and threw him back. His eyes darted for an instant to Mollie.

"Get out!" he snapped. "Get outa—the house!"

But Mollie dodged toward the kitchen wall. She tried hard to think of some way that she could help Bert. There used to be a shotgun in the kitchen—and there had been shells on the shelf.

But she heard the crash of a falling body and looked back from the kitchen door. Talbert was dragging himself up. The Cherub was springing toward her. And as she gasped her surprise, the Cherub caught her in his arms, carried her to the outer door and dumped her upon the ground.

"Run!" he called back over his shoulder, "Run like hell!"

But the fight was almost over. Mollie, crouching just outside the open door, saw Talbert go down before a lunging right. He did not move. The Cherub swayed over him for a moment; then he caught him by the shirt collar and dragged him through the door.

"Come on!" he called to Mollie. "Get away from that darn shack! She's loaded!"

MOLLIE did not understand, but she followed the Cherub and his trailing load. Down beside the corral fence the Cherub halted and wiped his bare arm across his face. Joy—dazzling, heart-racing joy—illuminated his grimy features. A triumphant smile curved his broken lips, while the devils of mischief danced from his red-rimmed

eyes. He winked with cheerful impudence at the wild-eyed girl.

"I heard yuh a-callin' me, young lady!" he laughed. "An' by golly, after that—" He reached out his arms to her, but she dodged back, a worried frown between her eyes.

"Why, Bert, how can you—now? Don't you know that Joe—that they're going to——"

"Don't know nuthin' 'cept I'm the luckiest gink that ever forked a hoss—or kissed the prettiest girl in——"

Again he made an exaggerated effort to grasp her, but again she eluded him. He made a great show of frowning his displeasure.

"All right, young lady. I'll jes' wait till yuh're plum' ready to be kissed." He swung his eyes carelessly up the lane—to a group of horsemen riding hard. "We're gettin' company," he drawled.

Mollie blinked at the crowd of horsemen—and dashed her hand across her eyes. Then she sprang to the Cherub's side and clutched his arm.

"Oh, Bert—is it really Joe? Oh, Bert, is he safe?"

"Sure. An' I reckon that bunch looks like the customs outfit. Shouldn't wonder if they'd been doing things to the Slot."

The party rode up. Joe stumbled into his sister's arms. A big man with a silver shield pinned upon his suspender stuck his hand down to the Cherub.

"I used to know you, Bert, a few years back—when you was a respectable cowpuncher—with a clean face. You sure started ructions in this part of the country. All we had to do was to follow up information given us by Dad Stewart before he was killed. We have made a clean-up and captured most all that gang at the Slot, just as they was transferrin' a scad of booze and a big consignment of opium to the innocent lookin' trucks from Nevada which claim to be haulin' minin' supplies. They's just one man in the bunch we ain't got and we aim to find him here."

"Well," drawled the Cherub, "we got one prisoner for you, anyhow, Mac. Hey—what th' dickens? Hey Mollie. what become of that big bird?"

They all seemed to sight Talbert at once. He was running along the side of the house. As one of the deputies raised his gun Talbert dodged into the dining room door. Half a dozen men started running toward the house.

"Hey—you!" cried the Cherub, springing in front of them. "Get back! He'll try to run through the kitchen an' ——"

A terrific crash. A dull, shivering roar. A sickening, earthquake tremor. The old Seven-Bar ranchhouse rose in a splintered cloud of boards and dust. A rain of debris fell upon the startled onlookers.

After the Cherub had explained impatiently, and while a score of men were poking through the scattered remains of the house, Mollie slipped up beside the young man.

"I—you might—oh, Bert!" she stammered, snuggling against his mud-smeared arm. "Joe just told me—how why—you may kiss me now."

"An' what if I don't want to kiss you now?" replied the Cherub. "I give you your chance, young lady. Now——"

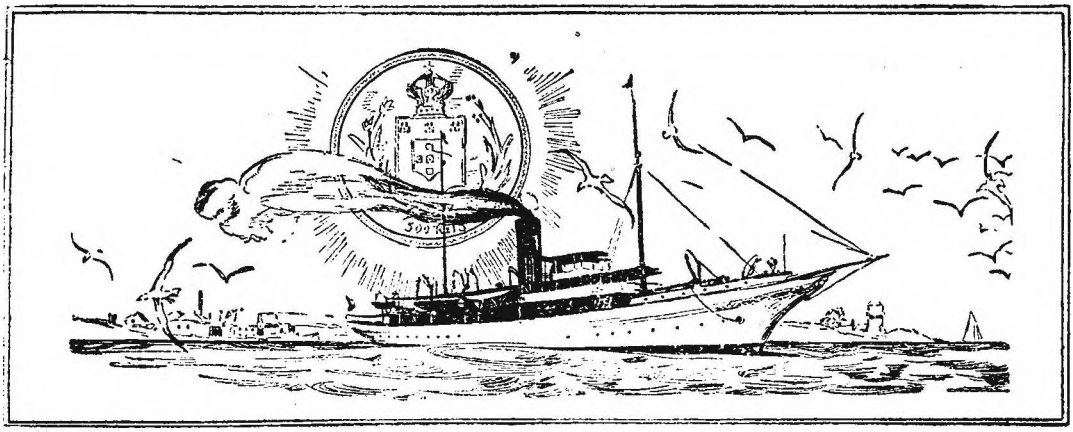
"Then I'll do this!" flashed Mollie and threw her arms around his grimy neck.

PORTUGUESE SILVER

By CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

Something about the story and what has happened in the preceding chapters

An Italian criminal of world-wide fame, for whose capture huge rewards are offered, is supposed to have sought refuge somewhere on or near Cape Cod. An apparently wealthy yachtsman, Lewis Defuniac, is cruising in those historic American waters and is much interested in Ella Shaw, a young girl who retrieved a bit of Portuguese silver he tossed into the water at a diving contest. He offered to redeem it at $50 but the girl will not give it up. Defuniac is under suspicion of being Antonio Costello, the much wanted Italian master crook, and is being shadowed by the heads of the Ajax Investigation Agency—a man and a woman. They are also suspicious of a nearby clergyman and a man at Dennisport. Defuniac makes love to Ella Shaw and is attacked by her Portuguese companion, Manuelo.



PORTUGUESE SILVER

A Mystery in Four Parts

By CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

Part II

VII

THE impact which had carried Defuniac down had come with the stunning force of a shell-burst and in the back flare of its violence Ella Shaw, too, had been sent stumbling backward—though that was unintended.

Manuelo had sought the girl at the house and followed her to the beach. He had come noiselessly in his rubber-soled sneakers and when he had peered over the lip of the sandy bluff the waning moonlight had made what he saw there plain enough to send the simmering jealousy of his blood above the boiling point and to cause his eyes to see through a red veil of madness.

A lover whose nature acknowledged more temperate restraints than his might have gone reeling into lapsed sanity at the sight of an embrace of which he saw only the woman's acquiescence—and Manuelo had not been nurtured in a school of stoic self-repression.

There had been a strangle in his throat and a fiery cramp in his heart; then the tide of murder lust had swept him and he had dived from his ten-foot elevation with all the momentum of weight-times-velocity.

The breath had gone out of Defuniac as the tackler's skull struck his chest, and he fell writhing with pain of lungs struck empty.

Now through a dazed fog of half-consciousness he fought for his wind, clinging close-locked to his assailant out of sheer instinct.

In any boxing ring or on any wrestling mat, under normal conditions, Defuniac could have mastered this man of the beaches with handy ease and cleverness, but this was neither boxing nor wrestling. It was the old lawless combat which owns no rule and resorts to every artifice and brutality of fist, skull, tooth, nail, heel and knee, and when the yachtsman realized that a fight was on it seemed already a fight half-ended.

The fingers of Manuelo's right were closing on his throat, while the left forearm hooked his neck as the two rolled. The yachtsman struggled with his own left to break that strangle while with his right he jabbed short-armed at the point of the jaw above him, but he hooked with the uncertainty of stunned senses and the sufferings of nausea.

Those choppy blows saved his life even as they grew weaker from the closing of his throat, for the Portuguese's head rocked under them until the right hand loosened its hold to ward them off.

Then Defuniac caught a long and blessed draft of the clean and reviving air and his spent strength was reborn. With a wrestler's knowledge and experience he slipped free from chancery and the two stumbled to their knee to go down again,

panting, slugging, choking; one of them also kicking and biting.

They thrashed the beach with sand gritting between their teeth and inflaming their eyes until finally, breaking away, they rose, blood-smeared and ragged, to stand for a moment rocking on their bent legs.

Then Defuniac caught a brief side-wise glimpse of the girl with tight hands clutched to her breast, eyes wide, and lips clamped between white teeth.

But there was no time to watch Ella Shaw, for at once the combatants came together again, with fists flying like flails; with no thought of guarding or covering up; no thought indeed of anything save the single, paramount resolve in the mind of each to slug the other to sleep.

Again and again Manuelo backed off to rush in with the lowered head of a charging bull, with a sound like a prolonged sob as his breath rasped and grated into a continuous broken roar. Each time he halted with a head jarred back on a squarely planted fist, until at length he went back with a recoil that had no recovery, swayed, tottered and crumpled to lie awkwardly bent and doubled in the sand.

Defuniac, so exhausted that his whole body lunged in the wake of his last blow, reeled forward and stood swaying precariously, while his breath came like hiccoughs. Suddenly a wave of nausea and giddiness overwhelmed him, and he sat helplessly down in the sand, holding his bruised face in his hands, until the sickness subsided a little and his breath ran freer.

Then he heard from Ella Shaw a low outcry of wordless warning and, looking up, saw that his antagonist was once more on his feet, and that in his hand glinted the blade of a knife.

Defuniac did not try to gain uprightness but sprang from a crouch like a football tackle, seizing the knees of the other and cerrying him down as he shot his own shoulders safely under the course of the down-flung blade.

A moment later he had caught and twisted the wrist until the knife fell from fingers that spread limp, and from Manuelo's lips escaped a stifled cry of pain.

Disarmed and defeated in his final effort, the Portuguese drew a step or two away and apathetically watched Defuniac pick up the weapon from the sand.

He shrugged his shoulders, and in the uncompromising smoulder of his eyes, both the yachtsman and the girl read his expectation of being paid in kind, and of his repentant waiting in sullen silence for the enemy's blow.

Perhaps even Ella Shaw had forgotten her generations of Cape Cod, and gone back to her Latin sources of ancestry, for once more a low, wordless outcry as if pleading against an expected penalty escaped her lips.

The yachtsman flung the knife as far into the sea as he could hurl it.

"I'm done, for the present," he announced. "That is, if our assassin friend has had enough."

Manuelo made no response, but turned heavily away. There was a bleak despair in his eyes which quenched their wrathful fires, and he went off at a slow, unsteady gait following the high tide's marking of eel-grass along the beach.

When he had doubled the turn of a sand hummock Ella Shaw sank down on her rock again, with her hands clutched over her face and her fine shoulders drooping in a dejection more eloquent of misery than hysterics would have been.

Defuniac raised her to her feet and she walked silently at his side through a patch of hog-cranberry and "poverty-grass" toward the low roof of her house, but it was not until they had neared her gate that she halted and spoke.

"You see what came of it?" she demanded dully, and when those words had broken the dam of her silence, there flashed into her tone once more that throbbing intensity which made it so electrifying, and her pupils kindled out of their lifelessness.

"I warned you—and if you won't heed my warnings on your own account, I've got the right to have them heeded on mine. Nobody was killed tonight, but the next time——"

The man stiffened his wearily sagging shoulders.

"I didn't come ashore tonight to make trouble for you," he said earnestly. "I didn't attack that ruffian. He attacked me, and though I'm ready to take orders from you in everything else, I'm not letting his murderous jealousy stampede me. I love you and from now on——"

"Don't!" she exclaimed half piteously. "You haven't the right."

"I have the right, because you love me," he declared with the elation of victory in his voice. "I said you weren't a woman of little emotions, and you've awakened big emotions in me, too. The furies of hell can't separate us now."

He stopped short and held out his arms. "Come," he ordered and she shook her head while her eyes flashed defiantly.

"Not in a thousand years," she made passionate denial, and yet less than thirty seconds later with a strangled sob of broken resolve on her lips her own arms were locked about his neck.

IT WAS with nerves painfully tensed and emotions confused that Lewis Defuniac started back across the mossy footing of poverty grass in the last of the moonlight. He had need to put some searching questions to his soul before he stood acquitted of the charge of unaccountable moon-madness. A woman whom he had met under strange circumstances had caused the needle of his conventional standards to waver and gyrate as does that of a compass when brought too near a lodestone. Yet he realized that he had no wish to repudiate any of his declarations of love. The whole situation had arisen with such a violent abruptness that no one beside himself would have credited any part of it to sanity—or have trusted its permanence. He knew better. There would be no struggle with himself as to whether he should go forward from his Rubicon. It was written, and as a fatalist he accepted it. Love had declared a dictatorship and he knew it would endure.

There were other awkward considerations, of course, which could not be blinked away; things which made a more serious call upon him than his appearance of leisure and pleasure seeking might have indicated. There was something which he called "business", and a love affair leading on to a marriage might interfere with these things.

Defuniac set his jaw stiffly as these reflections demanded recognition and strode on rapidly, as if in that way he might hope to escape them.

When he came to the beach Defuniac saw that his boat, which the receding tide had left high on the sand, had been set afloat, and that it would have drifted out to sea save that it had grounded on a half submerged rock.

The man had to wade out breast-deep and when he had done so and had floated the tender free, he found that the anchor which he had planted in the sand had been lifted and put into the boat. That, he knew, must mean that Manuelo had returned for a final bit of spite work, which had, like his more serious effort, failed.

The yachtsman could not help wondering at the character so queerly and anomalously blended. Half an hour ago this fellow had been ready to do murder. A few seconds later he had stiffened himself to accept death without a whimper for mercy, and finally he had resorted to such a petty meanness as might have occurred to a vicious tempered child.

MANUELO was conspicuously marked with the scars of his encounter when his dory, equipped with its single-cylinder motor, chugged out the next morning to the lobster pots beyond the flats which afforded him vocation and revenue, but in the afternoon he made his way to the house of Aunt Abbie Wilkins and asked for Ella Shaw.

The old lady eyed him over her baking dishes with candid hostility and demanded, "Have you been mixing in with a dog-fight? Well, I want to know!"

Receiving no enlightenment, she proceeded with tight-lipped austerity, "Ella's gone over to Solon Small's store, an' I don't look for her back inside an hour's time."

Manuelo left, but it was only to lie in wait on the sand road that twisted through the pine woods, and there he intercepted the girl.

She had known that today would inevitably bring a stormy visit from Manuelo, and the prospect had weighed heavily upon her heart, yet now she met him with high-headed independence and the ferocious brooding of his eyes encountered a response of disdain in hers.

"You've got to talk to me," he made peremptory declaration, but not in English, and his tone trembled with repressed fury.

The girl's eyes spurted jets of wrath, but her voice held a cool level as she made laconic inquiry, "Why?"

"Because I saw you in his arms last night. I can't see things like that without somebody paying the price."

"You tried to make him pay your price by murder—a sneaking murder—and you failed. You're alive now because he spared you."

Manuelo ground his teeth and swore savagely.

"You will madden me," he broke out

"I saw you in his arms. Can you deny that?"

"I was in his arms twice besides—when you didn't see me." The girl spoke deliberately, tauntingly, and her lover's face paled, while spots of feverish red burned against its high cheek-bones.

"Who's going to tell me," she imperiously demanded, "what arms I shall allow to go around me? You?"

"Yes, I," he stormed with the ember eyes of a maniac. "I protect my own. Any other arms that touch you shall be dead arms soon after."

"Your own! By what right?"

Ella Shaw laughed, and no Carmen in an Andalusian bull-ring could have expressed a more biting irony.

"Manuelo," she said, "listen. You can take what I give you—or you can take nothing. You can swallow what you don't like, or you can say good-by—and I'll cut loose from you altogether. Choose now and stick to it."

"Cut loose from me—altogether?" An appalled amazement came into the man's eyes, as though such a contingency had been unthinkable to him; as though the possibility of its suggestion had never shadowed his thought, but the girl's eyes challenged him, and made the menace real.

"Can you think of any reason why I shouldn't—if I want to?" she demanded.

As though he were weighing complicated and newly raised issues the Portuguese stood silent and apparently stunned. His features worked convulsively and at length he admitted in a new and bitter tone of surrender, as though deciding to leave unsaid many things that sought utterance. "You have that power. Yes."

"Then don't interfere with me and bully me, or I'll use it." The molten wrath in her eyes cooled a little in recognition of his submissiveness, and a new hint of consideration came into her voice. "I know you, Manuelo, and I make a good many allowances for you. I know that in your own way you're loyal to me; it's a rotten way, God knows, but it's loyal nonetheless. You'd die for me if I asked it. Once I thought I loved you, but you've come pretty near wearing out your welcome. Anyhow those are my terms. If you try to give me orders or spy on me—we are through with each other."

It was said with the flinty ring of an ultimatum, and the man standing there, drawn of feature, spread his hands despairingly. At length, with something like a sob in his voice he said, "I love you. Only the Holy God knows how much I love you!"

"I don't like the way you show it," she shot back at him with unappeased anger, and then her fingers wandered to her throat, touching the ribbon that supported Defuniac's coin. The man's fury leaped afresh like a fire that breaks beyond the control of quenching water.

"Blessed saints in heaven!" he shouted. "Take that thing off and throw it away!" His hands came up trembling with spread fingers as if to seize the ornament from her neck, but she stepped back and said with a tone of deadly quiet:

"Manuelo, take care!"

He governed the seven devils of his temper and let his arms fall again at his sides, The girl went on speculatively, as though talking to herself, "I wonder why you all get so excited over this little piece of silver. Mr. Defuniac tries to buy it back; Mr. Bidford comes and asks to see it—and now you order me to throw it away. Well, I'm interested in it too, and I mean to keep it."

"That's why I'm excited about it," he declared. "Because you're interested in it; because you treat it as a love token. Who is Mr. Bidford? Another lover?"

Ella Shaw laughed derisively. "How should I know who he is?" she questioned in turn. "He follows Mr. Defuniac like a dog without a master. I suppose he's a friend."

Suddenly Manuelo's expression changed to one of speculation, then to something like the inspiration of discovery. He, too, remembered seeing Bidford clinging close to Defuniac, who seemed irked by the persistent companionship.

"I wonder," he murmured, "if he *is* a friend. Why didn't he have Defuniac show him that coin? Why did he have to come to you?"

"That I can't tell you. You might ask him."

"I might," echoed Manuelo cryptically. "Did you let him see it when he asked?"

"No. I didn't give his curiosity much thought at the time, but afterwards I met him on the street, and he asked again. Then I wondered."

"And you still refused?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I couldn't see that it concerned him."

"Ah," suggested Manuelo sneeringly. "Perhaps it was too sacred to be desecrated."

"Perhaps."

But after Ella Shaw had left the Portuguese with a brusque farewell, the man continued to mull over the reflections which had just been born in his brain.

"Bidford's interest in Defuniac is no friendship," he told himself at length and with conviction. "He is following him for some reason—but it is not a friendly reason. I must know this Mr. Bidford. Perhaps we may even become partners of a sort."

VIII

FIRM in the faith that her keen imagination would find in New York rather than on Cape Cod the key to a solution of their problem, Julia Champert was busy with an almost trance-like preoccupation.

From this distance she felt she could bring to bear a clarifying perspective and employ wider opportunities for research, while Bidford stood guard on the ground at Clappan, ready to relay any discovery or take instant action on suggestions from her end of the telegraph wire.

Her tireless energies had led her along many experimental trails that had, each in its turn, run cold, but these failures had not yet discouraged her.

"THIRD VENDETTA VICTIM SHOT: TWO MORE TO DIE," read the words which topped an inside column, and glancing down she read the story so captioned, and found it tense with drama.

The reporter who had written that story had been gifted with a colorful vigor for the recital of fact, and it was in fact that Julia Champert was interested.

"A roll-call of death was read yesterday in some haunts where Sicilian gunmen gather," began the introduction. After it in a column set one above the other ran three names:

Angelo Salvator
Guiseppe Lagatella
Giovanni Mario

The elderly spinster read on, engrossed in that thrilling narrative of an Italian code of vengeance carrying its alien and feudal system of reprisal to fulfilment in the heart of America's largest city.

Five men, three of whom were named and two of whom remained anonymous save upon that secret scroll of death-sentence, had called down upon their heads the implacable edict of a society of which they had presumably betrayed some law. Perhaps it is best to let the reporter tell it just as Julia Champert read it in her morning paper.

"Angelo Salvator was the first to pay the penalty. He was shot down in Chrystie Street on the night of April tenth. His slayer escaped. The remaining four, always armed and always watchful, went about their affairs with the fear of death upon them. Lagatella was the next. On the morning of May twenty-first, as he stood on Forsyth Street, a man stepped from a hallway into the crowd of women and children trafficking about push-carts, and emptied an automatic pistol between his shoulder blades. The murderer dashed up a tenement stairway and was never arrested.

"Members of the Italian squad sat at the bedside of the dying man, seeking information, but the code of the Vendetta enjoins silence toward the police, and Lagatella said only one thing. 'Go to Giovanni Mario, in Macdougal Street,' he instructed, and give him this message: Giovanni, you are next'."

The news item told how Giovanni had been the next—after many weeks.

Night had been selected for his taking off and the thing had been staged in one of the small side streets off Bleecker where the shop signs read in Italian and the green, white and red coat-of-arms shows over many doorways. A sawed-off shotgun had roared. Giovanni, a prosperous grocer, had dropped heavily and the assailant had left no trace behind him except the discarded weapon which the police found near the fallen man.

But Giovanni had lingered on, mortally hurt, at St. Vincent's Hospital, and again the members of the Italian squad had vainly pleaded for facts. He was lying there now, stubbornly uncommunicative and would undoubtedly lie there until he was carried out to be buried.

The reporter closed his story, as he had

opened it, with an effective sentence. "Two more remain with the sentence upon them, and when they meet they shrug their shoulders and ask one another, 'Which of us next—and when?'"

When Julia Champert left her hotel in Twenty-ninth Street she did not take the northward turning toward the Ajax offices; but the southward way toward St. Vincent's.

Among the many hundreds who had read that same item on that same morning was a man whose interest was as great as that of Joe Bidford's woman partner. This other was a man and a member of that transient population which constantly flows through the spillway of Manhattan life, and he too set out at once from the Lafayette, where he was stopping, and struck crosstown toward the hospital.

George Crossmore was by way of being a detective himself, but his line was one with which the public is, for the most part, unfamiliar. The reason which carried him on this morning's visit was not professional but personal.

His was an arm of the crime-detection service which is little advertised, but which functions with much the same quiet resolution as that which obtains in the mounted constabulary of Pennsylvania or the Canadian Northwest.

Crossmore was a captain of the force of railroad police maintained by one of the great trunk lines of the Eastern seaboard, and just now he was resting after labors overburdened to the verge of a breakdown by the coming of prohibition and its consequent piracy in liquor shipments.

He had consulted a physician only yesterday and that physician had decreed a month of rest at some quiet place by the sea—but before he started he meant to see the dying Mario, if that were possible, because, in earlier days, their lives had touched under such circumstances as establishes a bond between men.

Years ago this same Italian, who had come now to prosperity—and tragedy—, had been a "wop" section-hand swinging a sledge on the roadbed of a branch which was being pushed into the wild tangles of the Kentucky Cumberlands. At that time George Crossmore had been a revenue agent seeking to put the fear of God and the federal government into the hearts of moonshiners who operated along the wilderness creek-beds of those same mountains.

Now as he hurried along Eighth Street with the fear that he might be too late, his mind was harking back along those trails of the past upon which his way had crossed that of the man who was dying.

There had been, in those days, a notorious dive which stood on the border of two Kentucky counties, where desperate characters gathered and lawlessness stood at bay. As the railroad work came near this place a few of the bolder spirits among the wops and Polacks ventured to accept the invitation of its signboard, which humorously read, "We sleep and eat man and beast."

Of these few Giovanni had been one.

Crossmore remembered now, with the vividness of the unforgettable, the raid which he and his posse of fellow "revenuers" had planned and carried out upon that rookery of crime; the secrecy and stealth of the preparations, the long and guarded hike through chasms and laurel hells to the stockade wall that went about the house, and the final surprise-attack through its open doors.

Even that attack might have failed of surprise had the officers not been favored with the coincidence for which Giovanni Mario had been responsible. As the posse closed in about the walls, they heard a clamor of excitement within which was abruptly followed by an inexplicable hush. When Crossmore took stock of conditions through the door, his men waiting out of sight at his back for the signal of his raised hand, he halted for a moment almost unmanned by the scene that met his gaze.

Outstretched and underfoot lay the bleeding and dying victim of a knife thrust. A revolver, fallen from limp fingers, gleamed on the puncheon floor, and back against the rude bar crouched the man who had struck him down; a blue-eyed Italian boy with the red knife still in his hand.

Half a dozen figures armed with rifles and pistols stood back in a momentary tableau of dismay that would not outlast a breathing space.

Crossmore had read aright the meaning of the thing. The boy had been browbeaten by these desperadoes until he had seen red and, forgetful of the inevitable penalty, he had lashed out his dagger with incredible Sicilian quickness and struck.

These others, who were gunmen, had met in him a new style of killer, and for an amazed moment they stood hesitant before him. In another instant they would have recovered their equilibrium and half a dozen guns would have thundered.

The Italian boy was realizing that, and in his wide blue eyes as he cowered back Crossmore had read the expectation of

death—but before the inevitable could fulfill itself the revenuer's hand had been raised and his deputies were filling the door with levelled muzzles.

Giovanni Mario had clasped the knees of his savior, swearing gratitude and fealty as enduring as his life, and Crossmore, after the most important raid of his service, had befriended this lad and aided him in establishing his plea of self-defense.

Once or twice in Mario's New York place, during recent years, the former revenue officer had reminisced with his old acquaintance over spaghetti and a bottle of Chianti, and always the Sicilian had protested his undying friendship. Now Crossmore realized that his rescue had been after all only a reprieve, and he was bent on saying good-by.

At the office of the hospital he encountered a wizened little mouse of a woman coming out. She looked thin and ill and old, and the man fancied she was some patient being dismissed, uncured. He had no way of knowing that she was as transient a visitor as himself, a fellow investigator coming without success from the bedside of Giovanni Mario.

In the white-walled room to which Crossmore was admitted he found himself one of a small group. A fleshy Italian woman sat in the lethargy which follows upon the wasting of hysterical grief, at one side of the bed, and a priest sat across from her.

An assistant from the district attorney's office and a member of the Italian squad stood somewhat apart. They had made their efforts, admitted their failure and given way to the claims of family ties and extreme unction.

But when Crossmore came forward the woman looked up and, recognizing him, revived in spirit enough to wail out, "Pappa, here is our good friend Signor Crossmore. Pappa, here is your savior. . . . If only the good God had, once more, sent him in time."

The railroad police captain took the white hand that the dying man made an unavailing effort to lift, and though Giovanni said nothing the gaze from his pallid face, on its pillow, was one of gratefulness and welcome.

The representatives of the law drew a little further back as if in final despair of the victim's breaking his long silence, and there was yet breath enough for a few words.

"Them I tell nothing," whispered Mario. "But you are my good friend."

"It's as your friend that I came, Joe," replied Crossmore gravely, using the name by which he had always addressed his old acquaintance. "Tell me just as much or just as little as you like."

The mortally hurt man lay silent for a while; then he musingly whispered two words, "Damn Costello." It was hardly so much a whisper as a shaping of the curse by lip-movement, but Crossmore caught it.

The woman gave a low and protracted moan, and then turning her swollen eyes on the visitor she wailed broken-heartedly. "And in one day more Pappa would have gone away, signor—perhaps escaped danger. He was going to take a trip for a vacation, but now it is too late."

The wife buried her face in her hands and one could see that she heard nothing further; realized nothing except her own wretchedness. Into the eyes on the pillow came a transient gleam of ferocity and baffled purpose.

"A few days more—only a few days," he whispered, "and I myself would have been the avenger, instead of his hirelings. Mamma is right. I was too late."

"Think not of vengeance now, my son," exhorted the priest. "Not of vengeance, but forgiveness."

Yet his eyes were not yet purged of earthly rancor as Giovanni stared up at the ceiling.

"Is there anything I can do, Joe?" inquired Crossmore. "Any message?"

"No," muttered Mario. "I would have avenged the others—but I have no message. If we succeed, we succeed. If we fail we hold our tongues."

Outside Crossmore was shown what things the investigators had taken into custody as evidence.

In the pockets of the victim had been a few papers—none of them significant in the opinion of the prosecutors. There were old letters, bills and receipts of business and a railroad ticket.

"His wife says he was starting on a vacation today," remarked the D. A.'s assistant. "And he had bought a ticket to Clappan, on Cape Cod. I suppose he was really running away from danger. He's bound on a longer journey now."

"He'd picked a peaceful refuge," mused Crossmore. "I should say he could hardly have selected a quieter place than Cape Cod."

But Crossmore kept undivulged the thought that flashed into his own mind; the thing which Mario had evidently held secret even from his wife. That thwarted journey had not been meant for a vacation after all, except in the sense that it was intended to appease an old hatred. It was an undertaking of reprisal, and its objective was Clappan.

The railroad policeman, too, had been ordered to a quiet place by the sea, but now the activity of his nature and training was in rebellion, and he was compromising with necessity. He would go to Clappan, and while he rested he would look for the man whom Mario had been seeking, the man he had cursed—for Crossmore knew something of what the name Costello signified. If that man proved to be the one whom the Italian Government sought and who had inspired the murder of his old acquaintance, so much the better. He could kill two birds with one stone, and now his time was his own. In justice it must be said that the promised reward meant less to him than did indignation for this assassination and the instinct of the man-hunter.

Two other Italians were doomed to death, according to the newspaper story. If that were true one of that pair might in sheer self-defense take over the unfulfilled task in which Giovanni had failed.

Who was that one?

Crossmore smiled grimly to himself. When Mario was buried, he would, of course, attend his funeral. He would print on the sensitive plate of his memory every face he saw there, and then he would go to Clappan and wait. If one of those faces appeared in the Cape Cod village, too, he might do worse than assume that it had come there following a trail, and he himself might follow the trailer.

IX

SINCE he had failed in his effort to see the Portuguese coin which Ella Shaw wore about her neck Bidford had vainly cudgelled his brain to devise some means of furthering his acquaintance with the girl. Through all his thought processes, like a burr in a horse's mane, clung the hunch that in some way or other the chance to see and handle that silver piece would promote his purposes.

Remembering what Joseph Biddle Smith had said of Manuelo's watch-dog jealousy, as well as what he had himself observed, the detective decided that it would be worth his while to cultivate the acquaintance of the Portuguese with the hope that he might thus find a sponsor, since even the swarthy lover would hardly view the middle-aged Bidford with alarm.

Thus it was that one afternoon when Mr. Bidford saw Manuelo being paid off by a party of vacationists who had chartered his sailboat and his services for some excursion, he lingered about and engaged both boat and boatman for his own use next morning.

Though the man who tended the sheet and tiller proved a morose and uncommunicative companion at first, he showed evidences of thawing as the day advanced.

Neither passenger nor skipper was too engrossed in the visual beauties of that morning's run to think of other things, so as the sail bellied, drumming, and the gulls screamed overhead and the green-edged shore line slipped astern, it was natural for them to drift out of taciturnity into talk. Yet they did not at once get beyond commonplaces, because Bidford must move warily and Manuelo seemed a silent sort.

"Why was it," asked Bidford at length when such an inquiry seemed cued by some casual reference to the recent water-carnival, "that Miss Shaw wouldn't take the money when Defuniac offered it to her? She'd fairly won it—and she was entitled to it, I should say."

Manuelo growled incoherently; then after a pause he demanded truculently, "Why should she take money from him? Ella Shaw is no beggar."

Bidford congratulated himself that he had snared the other into an outburst of

animus, yet Manuelo had been quite deliberately and voluntarily trapped.

"No, she's far from a beggar," conceded the detective, "but she'd fairly won it. Fifty dollars is a neat little sum and a man who cruises in a yacht like that could spare it well enough."

"When rich men like him," said Manuelo slowly, his brows knitting themselves into a vindictive scowl, "try to make presents like that to a poor girl—a poor girl with good looks—they're apt to want more than they give."

Bidford nodded. His role should be one of sympathy and he was bent on making it so.

"I never thought of it in that light," he admitted; then added provocatively, "And yet the girl seemed to value the coin she won, at that. She wouldn't even let me look at it."

"Why did you want to see it?"

"Oh, I don't know." Bidford's voice was careless. "Just curiosity, I guess."

Manuelo's swarthy face grew more thunderously dark, and this time his expression was not assumed.

"Ella Shaw is of Portuguese blood," he declared. "So am I. We don't let rich men play with our women." Then he caught himself up and added as if in after thought, "But I'm a fool to talk to you like that. You're his friend."

Bidford laughed reassuringly. "No more so than I'm your friend," he asserted. "We're just acquaintances, that's all. Our relations are pleasant enough, but not intimate."

Neither man spoke for a few minutes after that. Manuelo'e eyes were fixed on the buoys that marked the channel through shoal water, and his hand shifted the tiller with the lazy ease of long practise. Bidford was first to break the silence.

"I think I get your point of view," he said meditatively. "You think a good deal of this girl yourself, and you've had reason to suppose it wasn't all one-sided. Then along comes a rank outsider with lashings of money, and though she's a fine girl it naturally turns her head. Yes, I don't blame you at all, and the worst of it is, there's nothing in the world you can do about it. He holds the high cards, and all he's got to do is to play them right."

"He can play too many cards, perhaps," announced Manuelo ominously, and Joe Bidford knew with a flash of elation that this man was ready to make common cause with him against Defuniac.

Abruptly he revised his plan of campaign. He would no longer seek to use

Manuelo only as an agency of becoming acquainted with Ella Shaw, but as a watcher and informer upon his suspect. Yet before he could embark upon any such policy he must assure himself definitely that the enmity of the Portuguese for the yachtsman was authentic beyond doubt; real enough to govern him staunchly.

With a subtlety quite at variance with his pose of thick-skulled stupidity Bidford proceeded to feed Manuelo's jealous apprehensions.

"Of course, most of these rich fellows don't start out deliberately to play a crooked game," he moralized. "And yet it comes to pretty much the same thing. They go back and marry some girl of their own sort, and then they have to cut loose from attachments that they've formed along the way. But you understand all that as well as I do—and maybe better."

The boatman nodded with the morose assent of melancholy. To himself he said, "This fool seeks to use me in making war on his enemy—but no more than I seek to be used, or to use him," and the two parted at the end of the excursion with mutual satisfaction.

It now remained only for the detective to assure himself that Manuelo's animosity against Defuniac was not assumed, but genuine; not light but controling. With that point established beyond doubt he might avail himself of an ally who, in pursuing his regular business of a lobster-fisherman, could keep a watch on the goings and comings of the yachtsman; an ally who could move as freely by water as he himself could on land.

And on land he was shadowing Defuniac with a thoroughness which no one ignorant of his purpose would have suspected. Few of the young man's movements ashore were unknown to him, and this was an easy task in a small place where tourists and pleasure-seekers fol-

lowed much the same orbits.

Thus it was not by chance but by intent that later that same afternoon when Defuniac passed Manuelo on the street and laid a detaining hand on his elbow, Bidford was close enough to step behind the corner of an adjacent building and hear what passed between the two, though most of it was low of tone.

"The other night, after you and I had settled our little score there on the beach, and when I could have killed you if I'd liked," said Defuniac with a level glance of contempt, "you set my boat adrift. Now I want you to understand me. You tried to murder me, and I gave you what you deserved. Any time you want more of the same, you can get it—but I don't intend to have any slobbering mad dog snapping continuously at my heels. I don't want any more spite-work like that from a dirty beachcomber, and I don't mean to stand for it. Get that straight. This isn't Portugal, you know. I'm warning you in all fairness. When you want a fight you can get it, but if you try spite-work again, I'll turn you over to J. B. Smith, who's a justice of the peace, and have you put under a bond for good behavior."

The lobsterman's eyes, for a minute, showed a flash of fear wholly disproportionate with the mildness of the threat. One might have supposed that he feared a country magistrate more than a knife wielding enemy, but after a pause he laughed scornfully.

"Yes," he retorted. "The courts belong to rich men like you. Poor men get nothing but hell there. You know damn well I get no chance with your justice of the peace—so you want him to help you steal my girl." His voice in its excitement broke from his fairly precise English into the foreigner's dialect as he added, "Meester Defuniac, I thinka you one damn coward."

Bidford slipped back along his wall. He was satisfied that in Manuelo he dealt with a true grudge-bearer whose hatred could be trusted.

Reshaping his course upon a policy of watchful guile, Manuelo presented himself that evening at the house of Aunt Abbie Wilkins, and when Ella Shaw came out and granted him a reluctant interview, he presented before her a guise of contrition and humility.

He had been thinking over his battle with Defuniac, he said, and had seen it in the more dispassionate light of retrospect. At all events, he averred with rueful logic, the girl's own ultimatum left him no choice save to swallow his gorge, and accept his defeat on the beach with what grace he could summon. For his part he was now ready to let bygones be bygones.

Ella Shaw stood in the garden where the flower rows and borders were touched with the last of the light and gazed into the face of her lover with inquisitorial steadiness. She seemed looking through his pupils and incredulously questioning the inwardness of this profession of Christian humility. For Ella Shaw knew that to Manuelo forgiveness was neither a natural nor an easy thing.

But his eyes met her scrutiny squarely, and she gave him a noncommittal answer.

"We will wait and see, Manuelo," she slowly and judicially responded. "We will see whether this spirit lasts or not—and remember that I don't take back anything that I said to you, over there in the woods."

JOE BIDFORD, sitting in his room with a long letter from Julia Champert, admitted the discouraging fact that matters were moving slowly with his quest. "I've analyzed the circumstance of Mario's murder from every possible angle," wrote the woman, "and though I can deduce no possible connection I can't escape the overpowering conviction that somehow there is a link between this assassination and our own enterprise. Another matter has annoyed me, too. Though I have haunted the Italian Consulate here I have encountered no genuine cooperation from that source—from which we have the right to expect help. Even in the simple matter of securing copies of Costello's fingerprints I get only polite assurances that the delay lies with the mails from Italy. If we had a pretext for arresting your man Defuniac tomorrow we would lack that one definite and positive means of identifying him or discarding him as a suspect."

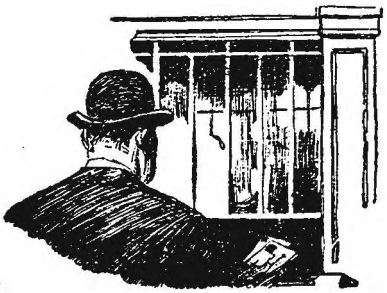
The letter touched upon collateral matters as well, though it was clear that the Mario incident had rather eclipsed in interest less dramatic side-lines. Julia reported on investigations into the record of the Reverend Mr. Skinner. It was an authentic name and its wearer had even a certain standing in his denomination. He was the author of a work which the woman confessed she had not read, entitled "Skinner on Predestination" — but, she took occasion to warn, caution must not end when a trail seems to run cold. It was

still possible though hardly probable that the Provincetown Skinner might not be the genuine evangelist, but an impostor wearing his name.

"She tells me nothing helpful," growled Bidford as he thrust his letter aside. "All she has to report is that the sledding is hard, and that is a thing I could as well tell her."

That afternoon Mr. Joseph Biddle Smith was to hold an outdoor auction of household effects on premises near the edge of the village, and Bidford meant to be present because he could not afford to miss gatherings so rich in outcroppings of human psychology and so generally attended as this promised to be.

He left the Inn early enough to go by



way of the postoffice and mail a letter, and as he arrived there the slide of the general delivery window was just being raised.

Inasmuch as the one window was serving all purposes and he needed a special delivery stamp, the knickerbockered gentleman stood back and waited for the crowd to thin.

He recognized Jake Bohannon, calling for the yacht's mail, and nearby, though with her back turned, the Portuguese girl, Ella Shaw. Following a professional instinct which had become ingrained, Bidford edged his way to a place at the elbow of the sailor from the *Ariadne* so that he might gain a cursory survey of such exposed pieces of mail as were thrust out. A sizable sheaf of envelopes and papers came through the grill, and the detective felt a spasmodic jerk at his heart—the shock and elation of a discouraged prospector who suddenly strikes gold.

On top of the pile lay a thick letter with a foreign stamp and with the word "Roma" standing out in clear legibility in the circle of its heavy postmarking.

Bidford schooled his eagerly straining eyes to carelessness.

Bohannon was buying stamps, too, and as he counted change he let his mail lie, with the engrossing envelope topping the pile upon the narrow shelf of the small, barred window.

Bidford glanced keenly at the Italian stamps and saw that the address was Signor Lewis Defuniac. Here in the mind of the man whose business was to weave finished patterns from loose threads of fabric, lay a development of paramount importance.

The sailor from the *Ariadne* had waited his turn in unhurried leisure so that now the postoffice was emptying, and when he had pocketed his change and gathered up his uninspected mail he turned on his heel and went rapidly out.

There had been a byplay which Bidford thought no one had noticed in its fulness, or understood even if he had noticed it.

The detective's sleeve had brushed several pieces of mail to the floor, and he had stooped quickly to recover them for their rightful custodian, muttering an apology for his awkwardness.

The Italian letter had fallen face down, showing only its blank side; when Bidford returned the others he palmed this in his other hand—and kept it. He made no pretense of dexterity as a slight of hand performer, yet he considered that he had managed this affair rather neatly, for the hand into which he slipped it already held the screening surface of his own envelope, meant to be mailed, and to such eyes as might have marked the circumstance it would have seemed an accidental thing.

The detective did, indeed, mean to return that letter—perhaps—after he had steamed its flap and digested its contents, but for the present he tucked it into his pocket, bought his stamp, mailed his own letter and went out.

As he passed through the door he encountered the sedate eyes of Ella Shaw and politely lifted his hat. The girl returned his greeting coolly, and with a preoccupied air. Her back had been turned, apparently, while she had occupied her time of waiting in reading a warning, posted on the wall, which adjured fruit growers to make war on the Gypsy Moth.

X

AS HE walked toward the auction, Bidford was annoyed because Jake Bohannon went on ahead of him, with a gait so slow that he himself had to shorten his stride to keep behind.

Joe Bidford, in view of unexpectedly altered circumstances, meant to abandon

the auction and spend the next half hour behind the bolted door of his room—with the treasure-trove that fate had delivered into his hands. His pulses, ordinarily attuned to phlegmatic regularity, were throbbing excitedly, and it was difficult for him to keep his pace slow and his features expressionless.

He wished to avoid any waste of time for he guessed, and this time he guessed truly, that should Defuniac receive any warning of his loss or to whom he had lost it, he would go to lengths of violence to recover that letter. Then as the detective walked along, curbing his fret of haste, a figure turned the corner, almost colliding with him, and it was the figure of Defuniac himself.

The yachtsman halted and spoke casually and Bidford had no choice but to stand there exchanging commonplaces until opportunity favored him with a means of natural escape.

Luckily Jake Bohannon had gone on, without seeing his employer, but as the two men talked Ella Shaw approached them and Bidford's heart hammered clamorously, then eased into a luxury of relief as she passed with a self-possessed nod and went on.

But that relief did not become absolute, for the girl took a few steps, then hesitated, halted—and turned back. She saw that Bidford seemed on the point of separating from Defuniac and with that level gaze of hers which was so disquieting because it was so enigmatical she said coolly, "Excuse me, but haven't you forgotten something, Mr. Bidford?"

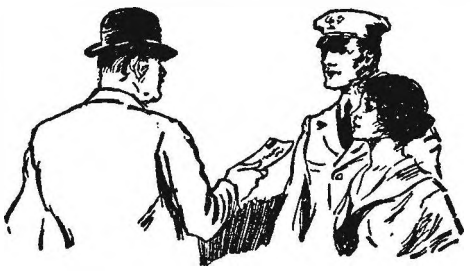
A well-feigned perplexity clouded the detective's brow as he used the momentary reprieve of the pause for a rapid marshaling of his ingenious resources.

"Forgotten something, ma'am?" he repeated in convincing bewilderment, but the girl's eyes held his own so unwaveringly that he recognized the uselessness of dissimulation.

"Yes," she explained unequivocally. "It's none of my business, I guess, but I saw you pick up a letter that Mr. Defuniac's man dropped in the postoffice. I guess you meant to give it to him, didn't you?"

Bidford stood still, hesitant, realizing defeat on the verge of victory; knowing that the appearance of innocence must be preserved, yet chained by his heaviness of reluctance.

"Oh, thank you," he exclaimed at the end of that self-struggle, with the hearty manner of one whose memory is refreshed. "So I did, and I'm obliged to you for reminding me." He turned toward Defu-



niac. "Your man let it fall out of the pile at the window. I gathered it in, and it promptly slipped my memory."

Slowly he produced the envelope and presented it, blank side up, and he felt as if, instead of taking it from his coat he were dragging it loose from nerves that bound it to his flesh. Without turning it over for a glance at the address the yachtsman put it into his own breast pocket.

Ella Shaw went on, and having now no more pressing business Bidford walked along with Defuniac to the auction—masking under the stolidity of his training a positive nausea of disappointed hope.

About the shaded yard of an old house whose shingle roof was weathered to a silver gray, gathered townsfolk admiring monstrosities of golden oak furniture and summer visitors eagerly trailing that almost extinct quarry—the coveted bargain in antiques. Among them snooped, lynx-eyed, antique dealers from near-by towns, whose more mercenary interest centred about semi-modern pieces which could be doctored into value by the wiles of the cabinet-maker and restorer. Here in short were all the types that entered into the making of the small world of the New England seaside village, and George Crossmore, who had arrived in Clappan that morning and ensconced himself in the shabbier and cheaper of the two inns, strolled through the piles of furniture and the groups of humanity nonchalantly appraising both.

He saw Defuniac talking to Gloria Wentworth, while Bidford hovered near, and he dismissed the yachtsman with a glance, as typical of the wealthier tourist class. But in Bidford the railroad policeman found his interest piqued, and not quite knowing why this was so, he kept his eye on the man in knickerbockers, until at the end of five minutes he realized that Bidford was more interested in De-

funiac than he himself had been in Bidford.

More than once Crossmore passed a Portuguese girl, pausing to make mental notes of her arresting beauty, and once he surprised her gaze on the same couple that occupied his own attention.

Then Joseph Biddle Smith ascended the kitchen table, which was to be his auction block, his straw hat thrust well back, and addressed himself to his constituency. From the lips of Mr. Smith flowed an unconstrained freshet of repartee as each article put up for eulogy and sale became the subject of a brief lecture eliciting an uproar of laughter—and sometimes a price beyond its value.

"I've got it," said Crossmore abruptly to himself at the end of his study of Mr. Bidford. "I guess it was the make-up of knickerbockers and golf stockings that threw me off so long, but you can't fool me long on that breed. The fellow is a flat-foot—a common or garden detective and nothing else."

He stood amusedly watching Mr. Bidford as he continued his musing. "Now I wonder what he's trailing the millionaire Apollo about?"

At that juncture the "millionaire Apollo" gracefully detached himself from the statuesque blonde with whom he had been talking, and strolled over to the Portuguese girl whom Crossmore had himself noticed. At the same time Bidford drifted away and beckoned to a poorly dressed fellow, evidently also a Portuguese. These two walked together a little way beyond the margin of the crowd, and halted in the shade of an apple tree.

Though Crossmore did not follow, he noticed that this conversation seemed earnest and also that Mr. Bidford took off his coat and mopped his forehead as if keenly sensible to the heat of the afternoon.

"I see Defuniac's talking to your girl, Manuelo," began Bidford, for whom the events of that afternoon had raised the need of prompt action and the coöperation of an ally. "Do you still feel sore about this fellow?"

"Sore?" The Portuguese shrugged his shoulders, but his eyes were snapping furiously. "Why should I feel sore? Let him look out, that's all."

"Now listen, Manuelo." Bidford sank his voice to a confidential note. "You're a poor man, and you can't afford to have a run-in with this bird. If you try it, he'll hale you into court and a poor man's got a mighty slim show against a rich one before the so-called bar of justice. I take it, after all, it'll satisfy you to have him put out of your way, won't it?"

The Portuguese warily refrained from committing himself by any answer, and Bidford still mopping his forehead opened his light waistcoat as against the heat and, with his back upon the crowd, let it fall aside, revealing a detective's badge pinned

to his suspenders. He did the thing with a seeming of negligence and when he saw the lobsterman's eye keenly fixed on the metal shield he hastily drew his waistcoat together again with a well simulated exclamation of annoyance.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed. "I didn't mean to let you see that badge. It was an accident, but no matter. I believe I can trust you. Now the situation is this." He made an impressive pause, so protracted that Manuelo prompted:

"Well, what?"

"I'm after this fellow, too. That is, I'm after him if he's the man I think he is. If I land him, he'll be out of your way, and you can help me land him. Is it a trade?"

"What do you want him for?" demanded Manuelo, and Bidford promptly hedged.

"I can't tell you that, but I don't object to your guessing if you like. There are men making fortunes in this day and time out of liquor violations. A few top-notchers are getting filthy rich and they're the ones the government is after. If I take this bird in tow you may be sure he won't trouble you again."

"What do you want me to do?"

"That I'll tell you when the time comes. In a general way I want you to watch him, and to keep hands off yourself for a while. If I succeed you get what you're after and run no risk. Moreover you get handsomely paid for it. If I fail, you can still hoe your own row and there won't be much time lost."

Manuelo caught the eye of Ella Shaw now standing alone, and he spoke briefly.

"All right. We'd better not stay here talking any longer."

As Ella Shaw walked home alone an hour later, her mind was occupied with thoughts that would not be quieted. The episode of the letter disturbed her in retrospect. She had acted on impulse when she had confronted Bidford, and she had not missed his reluctance to give up the envelope of which she herself had seen only the blank side. When, following upon that, she had found Bidford and Manuelo talking earnestly together, the conviction had grown definite that they were forming an alliance based on a common enmity for the yachtsman. Yet she knew nothing that would warrant a warning to him, and she could only feel an electrical imminence of peril. It was a mingling of logic and intuition and it cast a shadow of growing fear over her.

That night Manuelo came to her house, and when she greeted him with scant welcome he protested humbly that he sought only forgiveness and meant to deserve it. The girl made no mention of her suspicions but before Manuelo had been there long, indeed before it had grown fully dark, a knock sounded on the door and Joe Bidford stood at the threshold.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Shaw," he said affably. "But they told me at his house that I'd find Manuelo here."

"Yes, he's here," responded the girl. "Do you want him?"

"I'd like a few words with him. No, I won't come in, thank you, if he'll step out. It's just about getting him to take out a sailing party, but a friend is waiting for me in the road."

Manuelo went out, irritable because of the interruption, and the two talked at a distance, but the girl, now alertly keyed to an anxiety which the coming of Bidford had augmented, slipped out of another door and listened tensely at the corner of the house. There was no moon that night and the voices of the men were indistinct in the shadows; but just as Bidford was leaving they took a step or two nearer and the girl caught the tag end of their conversation.

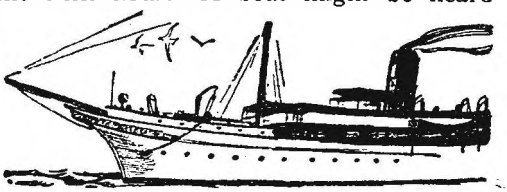
"Be ready to take me out in an hour," directed Bidford. "If I get what I'm going after, the fellow won't trouble you long."

"All right." Manuelo's acquiescence was surly, but when he came back he shortened his visit and said good night with an unaccustomed promptness.

A northeast wind had sprung up that brought from the beach the song of breakers, and the girl stood in the dark yard with her hands pressed to her breast, thinking.

She understood little of what it all meant, but her heart told her with an insistence which would not be gainsaid that her ignorance touched only the details. The essential thing she knew, or felt with a certainty as strong as knowledge, and that was that some plan was being built up which looked to the undoing of Lewis Defuniac and which must function by stealth.

A word of warning would put him on his guard, perhaps save him from whatever this mysterious disaster might be, and that warning if it were to serve him at all must be delivered on the *Ariadne* within the next hour. A boat might be heard



or seen and besides there was no boat available. A swimmer would have heavy work, and if the wind continued to stiffen, as that roar of breakers along the shore gave prophecy, the heavy work would become a hard fight and an actual peril.

Ella Shaw laughed at the danger. She had as little fear of water, smooth or turbulent, as a fish, and as she stood there in a conflict of spirit that made her hands clench themselves and the blood go out of her cheeks, it was another matter which she was debating.

This was none of her affair, or it would be none of her affair if she could think of Defuniac as separate from herself and her love for him.

What the cause might be, right or wrong, which had set Bidford against him, she could in no fashion gauge or guess, and though she had defied and threatened Manuelo, she admitted a strong bond of loyalty to him. Where the issue had been one between Manuelo fighting treacherously and Defuniac fighting fairly she had taken sides without mawkishness or hesitation. This was another matter, a matter primarily between the yachtsman and Bidford, and by every standard of ordinary logic it did not concern her.

Bred into the bone and fibre of her nature by her New England upbringing was that law, "Mind your own affairs", and meddling was wholly repugnant to her.

But there was another reason, and a more powerful reason, which made her seek, and seek vainly, to stand aside and let matters take their course. This was a reason which she acknowledged as a religion—a loyalty to Manuelo himself in affairs other than love affairs. It was based on a psychology which seemed reasonable enough to herself; founded on things in the past to which she acknowledged allegiance, an allegiance made stronger because the love that had originally inspired it was dead. If Bidford had taken Manuelo into some enterprise of his own, and that enterprise ended in violence, her warning might mean something like betraying Manuelo to his undoing. Her whole policy of life was repellent to mixing in with the affairs of others and now, as she stood there in the yard of the cottage, she was wracked by a conflict which tortured her.

But as against all that came, like the refrain of the surf, the thought of danger to Defuniac; a danger of which he seemed to have no suspicion. And finally she knew that policies, questions of expediency, even standards of right and wrong were less to her than a shadow cast by shadows as compared with her love for this man whom she had told herself could never enter her life more closely than he had already entered it. As against that nothing else counted, and the rising wind seemed to wail of peril.

Ella Shaw went to her room. With fingers that were both quick and deft she threw off her clothes and slipped into a boy's one-piece bathing suit, a thing that would hamper her little in the surf which was already running high, and mounting higher.

She let herself quietly out of the back door of the house, all doubts resolved, slipped at a swift run through the woods and across the beach, and kept moving outward until an inrolling wave swept close. Then she dived into it and began swimming, her eyes fixed on the riding lights of the *Ariadne*.

(PART III in our next number)

SAYS SUN SPOTS MEAN AN EARLY, COLD WINTER

THE Winter of 1921-22 will be very cold and will set in early, if the conclusions of a Dutch scientist are correct. He has been studying the available records of temperatures from 1760 to 1916 and comparing them with astronomical records and concludes that every time there have been extensive sun-spot disturbances, as in the early Summer of 1921, the following Winter has been early and long and unusually severe.

THE SMALLEST BIRD LIVES IN CUBA

THE smallest bird yet studied by ornithologists is a species of humming bird that lives in Cuba. It is only two and one-quarter inches long.

THE HOLY CITY HAS A NEW WATERWORKS

TWO thousand years ago Pontius Pilate built a reservoir 13 miles south of Jerusalem and an aqueduct to carry the water to the Holy City. Like other Roman works in Palestine, this long ago fell into dis-use. Under the present government of Palestine this ancient reservoir has been restored and enlarged to hold 5,000,000 gallons of water and now there is under way a compulsory cleaning out of the cisterns within the city, upon which the inhabitants have long depended for water. Some of them had not been cleaned for more than one hundred years!

BENZOL IS NOT THE BEST MOTOR FUEL

BENZOL will never displace gasolene as a motor fuel, engineers who have been experimenting with it now say, but mixed in proper proportions with gasolene it gives a fuel that leaves no carbon deposit in the cylinders and does not detonate under strain as does pure gasolene, thus enabling the motorist using it to climb hills without retarding his spark. This mixture costs more than straight gasolene.

STUNG

By MILES OVERHOLT

Author of "Pleased to Meter," "It Pays to Have Sense," etc.

THERE IS A BELIEF ~~THAT~~ THE STING OF A BEE WILL CURE RHEUMATISM. THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW JEFF HOWARD AND HIS FRIEND PUT IT TO THE TEST AND WHAT THEY FOUND OUT.

RHEUMATISM, I often figgered, would make a fine policeman—it's always raiding the joints!

I'll bet that would be a fine joke if I had time to go and polish it up and tell it a few times to kind of wear off the rough edges.

But I ain't had any too much time since a while back, which is the only reason I'm mentioning it now—I just got over the rheumatism.

It wasn't me that had it, though, but I ain't feeling any too funny about it even yet.

The whole trouble about me is that I take people's word for things too spontaneously and with too much verbatim. I don't go and demand the certificates and the affidavits. I'm too darn trusting.

Still if you can't believe the newspapers that come to your door from time to time—these here moulders of public opinions—I don't know whose word you're going to take in a crisis like mine was.

Jeff Howard hasn't got any more sense than I have, though, because he believed the item, too, and it caused the suffering of two innocents all in one fell swoop.

Jeff, he ain't so terrible innocent in most things, though, to hear him tell about a couple of trips he made to San Berdoo last summer, and once when he went to Kansas City with a load of steers.

But I am. Of course, there was that time with the school teacher from over on the Big Muddy—but she didn't tell me she was married and that her husband was coming to town that evening. Anyway, the story about me running nine miles afoot was just made up. It was only eight.

Besides, we had only just got to the dance and I hadn't said but six or seven words to her in all, she having six or seven million saved up to say.

But that ain't the kind of innocent I mean. Innocent about lies in the papers and them that folks tell—that's what I refer to.

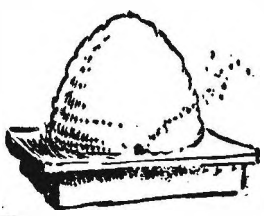
The whole thing started one Sunday morning when Jeff Howard and I were sunning ourselves out back of the bunkhouse at the Bar-C ranch, Jeff and I being kind of tillicums, which is Injun for buddies, and Jeff, he pulled a weekly newspaper from his pocket and read me an item.

This here item referred in a kind of an interesting manner to rheumatism. It went ahead and told how the darn ailment attacked the high and the lowbrow, the rich and the poor, and that it wasn't in any sense a pastime that a guy would go out looking for on a Saturday afternoon off.

No, sir, this here piece of information was filled full of anguish touching on the subject of rheumatism and it said that up to the hour of going to press there wasn't a cure for the trouble in the knowledge of the doctors roundabout. But, this here darn item said, there was one sure cure that the doctors didn't advertise none—and that sure cure was the sting of a flock of honey bees.

Jeff, he wanted me to argue with him about it on one side or the other, but I wasn't in no position to take sides—I never had the rheumatism and I hadn't ever been stung by any bees. That's how innocent I was up to that period of time.

"I'm reading you this here slice of knowledge for a purpose," Jeff said. "I got a fine scheme for you and me to gather us some dough together from the rich rheumatismed folks of the land."



"But where we going to get a bee?" I asked Jeff.

"It takes more than one bee," Jeff answered. "It takes a whole family of 'em—and mebbe several hives."

"Jackson's baby has got the hives," I told him. "We can get them cheap."

Which remark disgusted Jeff a lot and he didn't answer me for mebbe ten minutes. Then he said:

"Bee hives, you damfool."

"But, gosh!" I said. "You might have to hunt all over the U. S. before you could find a bee with the hives."

And that was the point in the conversation where Jeff jumped up and tore the newspaper into small pieces and then threw it in my face.

It wasn't until the next day that Jeff felt like speaking to me for some reason or another, he being a kind of a peculiar guy. Then he said:

"Eliminating any further pro-and-con remarks about the bee, suppose we get down to business and talk sense—which will leave me to do the talking and you the listening."

"So far there's no sense to the conversation," I told him, "but you go ahead and see how far you get."

"I happen to know where there is a couple of billion wild honey bees," Jeff went onward. "They are making their permanent residence in a kind of a cave down in that gulch that runs into Kane Creek. They get their honey from the larkspur."

"Larkspur drives cows and horses loco," I told Jeff.

"Yeh; I know it—I'm talking about bees," he answered, sore-like.

"Well, go on and talk about 'em," I said. "I'm talking about other kinds of stock—that's all."

"Well, shut up awhile, will ya!" he yiped.

"Sure; as long as you don't say 'bee-have'," I said.

"Well, then, listen: That gulch is government property," said Jeff, in almost a whisper.

"No! Is it?" I whispered back. "Well, I won't tell anybody if you don't!"

"We can take it up as a dry farm," went on Jeff. "And then we will own the bees."

"And get stung twice," I said.

"We can spend a couple of thousand dollars——"

"I mean three times," I amended my former complaint.

"For two thousand dollars we can fix up a swell place," went on Jeff, "and advertise to cure rheumatism and get rich."

"My idea would be to get rich before we spend the two thousand dollars," I said. "Where would we get two thousand dollars?"

"We will borrow it from your Uncle Lon," answered Jeff.

Which remark showed me just as plain as if he had said it that all it was going to cost me to cure rheumatism was two thousand dollars.

"You know he promised to start you into business whenever you made up your mind what you wanted to do," went on Jeff.

"Yeh, but he expected me to make up my own mind," I told Jeff. "He ain't going to give me no two thousand dollars for a couple of second-hand ideas that way."

"Well, gosh! Can't you tell him you thought of it?" Jeff wondered.

And I said I could. And I did, which I guess mebbe is the reason he wouldn't let me have the money.

"You might as well say the braying of a jackass will cure warts," Uncle Lon said when I explained to him how we expected to cure folks of the rheumatism by the laying on of bees.

"Why don't you go into some legitimate business like raising blind pigs or smuggling orphans or something?" my Uncle Lon wanted to know.

"Will you let me take a couple of thousand to improve me a fine ranch I expect to take up?" I asked him, and he said mebbe he would if I sure meant it.

So that is how I finally snagged him for two thousand dollars. I showed him my papers which the county gave me and a photograft of a shack which Jeff found in his warbag, explaining to my uncle that that was my ranchhouse. He, not knowing Jeff Howard, why, I proved everything by him and the ranch was in my name, anyway—the one that took in the bee gulch.

And then as soon as we did get the shack built, why, Jeff, he sent an advertisement to a lot of newspapers, saying that we would cure rheumatism for a nominal sum by nature's only method and we quit our jobs at the Bar-C ranch and sat down in a warm place and waited for our patients to come and get stung.

I was for telling folks straight out what our cure was, but Jeff, he argued that we wouldn't get no business that way. He said the idea would scare people plumb to death. We would have to get 'em there first, he said, and sting 'em afterward.

Well, sir, we pretty nearly starved to death before we received our first nibble. It was a letter from a man back East somewheres and his name was John P. Dibley. He said he had tried mud baths and sixty seven doctors, and so far his rheumatism was three laps in the lead. He said he thought he had tried every kind of a cure

for his ailment there was, but if we had a new one, far be it from him to overlook it. And could we give him an idea what ours was all about.

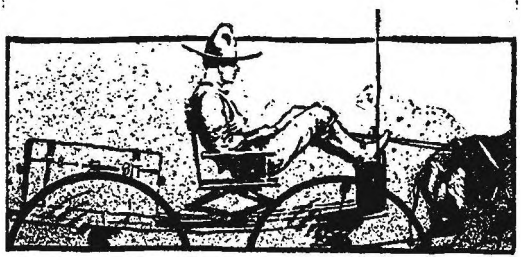
Jeff, he decomposed a fine letter in answer to Mr. Dibley's of the 21st inst. in which he said that it was a secret process, but gosh-awful certain. He said if we told it our competitors would get hold of it and run us plumb out of business.

It was a fine letter, and it did the work, because we got a return-mail answer saying that John P. would be out *muy pronto* and howinell would he get there, the name of the post-office not being on any known map.

So we sent a letter telling our first and only patient how to reach our bee-stinging wickiup, and in a few days he sent word to meet him at the station and the chances were we would find him there.

Jeff, he drove over in the buckboard and I went and put on my Sunday pants and new handkerchief and best boots and waited for whatever was going to happen to come and get it over with. Me, I was nervous, if you ask me. I wasn't ever cut out for no doctor of medicine.

Well, sir, this here John P. Dibley went



and fooled us. He made a mess of things the very first thing by bringing his daughter along with him, and when I saw a woman with Jeff and his patient, why, I went out and hid in the sagebrush till things kind of blowed over.

But Jeff, he wasn't nervous, or anything, it looked like. I heard him tell the passengers that the doctor, meaning me, was probably out gathering some herbs, and that as soon as I returned he would have me look Mr. Dibley over.

I can't at this moment of time think of a dirtier trick than the way Jeff Howard made me out a doctor that way without informing me about it so I could get out my M. J. B., or whatever it is doctors hang up on the walls of our best doctor shops, and to give me time to think up a few words of more than one syllable.

But when it began to get dark, why, I had to come in to find out where was I going to sleep, because John P. Dibley had one room, and the daughter on her father's side, she had the other one, and, besides the kitchen, them was all the rooms we had to our names.

Jeff came out looking for me, anyway, and I had to sneak up to him and make the inquiries about bedding down, and he told me that the reason he made me the physician in charge was because the girl, her name being Madeline, she said she wouldn't let her father take no kind of a cure unless there was a doctor present. So there wasn't no other way out of it.

Anyway, I had to help cook supper, Jeff not knowing much about how to build biscuits, or anything, and after I had met up with this here Madeline Dibley, why, it wasn't any trouble at all for me to be a doctor. I'll say that if she had had the rheumatism I would have worn off her wrist watch feeling of her pulse.

I'll bet there ain't a moving picture actress in the known world that is one-eighth as pretty as Madeline Dibley. She had personality, too—if making you glad your eyes are working is personality. Yes, and making you happy to be within fifteen or twenty feet of her—to hear her gurgle and to listen to her voice. I never knew anybody like her—except, mebbe, two or three other girls which I've met since.

Old Man Dibley, he was quite a grouch, but he tried his best to act more or less human whenever Madeline was around. But as soon as she was out of sight somewheres, why, he would start cussing, and he was good at it, too, for a guy that never punched cows any.

This here rheumatism, he told me, had drug him down from manhood's high estate to a wreck of his former self. He said he hadn't been able to walk like a man for six years—only on crutches, and they hurt him all the time. He said sometimes even his crutches seemed to have the darn disease, and that he could feel 'em hurting.

"Yes, Doc," he said, "even my clothes get the rheumatism if I wear 'em very long. My collar buttons," he went on, "sometimes fall out and shrivel up with pain, and the pockets of my vest almost cry out in anguish. That's how full of the darn ailment I am."

"Well, tonight I'm going to have you take a spoonful of herbs," I told him, taking a tip from Jeff. "Then tomorrow, if you are ready, we will apply our famous nature remedy—the only cure in the world that cures."

"But don't you have to kind of diet me, or something—can I eat anything I want?" Old Man Dibley wanted to know.

"No," I said. "You can eat only what we got—not what you want."

Which brought a chuckle from the old man and he seemed to feel better.

"I don't care what it costs me," he said after a while. "You cure my rheumatism and then name a price."

So I went out and boiled up some sage leaves and gave the old man a dose, which nearly choked him, it was that bitter, and when he went to bed that night he said if our nature cure was any worse than that he hoped it could be applied externally.

"That's just exactly how it's applied," I told him. "It is the most external cure devised by man or beast," I said, forgetting for the moment that a bee was an insect.

After Old Man Dibley and Madeline had gone to bed Jeff and I were trying to kid ourselves to sleep under a couple of horse blankets, why, we went and began to worry about how to apply them bees without letting the old man in on what was about to befall him.

"You go and sic a herd of man-eating bees onto a person when he is looking and he'll die of fear before the cure gets in its noble work," said Jeff. "What we got to do is to kind of back him into the bees, or maybe chloroform the patient first."

"We ain't got anything to put him to sleep with but the axe," I said. "It seems to me that the best way would be to empty a hive of 'em into his bedroom."

And that is what we decided to do, but Jeff thought maybe we'd better not sting him right away or he would think he hadn't got his money's worth. So we went and basked in Madeline Dibley's smile and told the old man that after considering the seriousness of his case we had decided that he would have to kind of get acclimated before we started the main or active cure.

Old Man Dibley was the crippledest man I ever saw that wasn't begging on some street or other. He couldn't walk two feet, four inches, without his wooden crutches, and when he did you could see he wasn't having any fun.

But he was a pretty good old sport at that, because he didn't swear more than half the time, I guess, and he didn't kick about our conveniences or anything. What that old man wanted was a cure for rheumatism, and the more I looked at Madeline, which was a lot, the more I hated to make a bee target out of her father.

Jeff, he seemed to have quite a bit of faith in that bee cure, but it didn't excite me much. It didn't seem anyways possible, but I didn't dare say so. I had two thousand dollars invested in the enterprise.

But I was afraid Madeline wouldn't take the idea in the proper spirit. Which is why I said to her, I said:

"Is your father addicted in any way to honey?"

"It wouldn't surprise me much," said Madeline.

"I mean, is he fond of sweets?" I went on, trying to make the thing easier for the Dibley family to understand after it was all over.

"He likes me pretty well," said Madeline.

"He never professed a hankering to be kicked in the neck by a bumble bee, did he?" I asked her.

"Not to my knowledge," answered Madeline. "But then that wouldn't surprise me, either. Why are you so curious about my father's likes and dislikes relative to the bee industry?" she wondered.

I didn't answer her, not having gotten anywhere with the original subject, and besides, I hadn't told her much about myself yet. But before the conversation was ended I found out that she would just as soon live on a ranch as not for a few months out of the year, and from other words that she let drop from time to time, it looked like I had a pretty good chance to get me a fine wife.

Jeff, he hollered at me before I was half done talking to her, and I had to go and read another letter from a man that wanted to know about our cure. It was from another rich guy named H. Thatcher Winfield, and he was kind of anxious to know all about how we performed miracles, and he asked us did we bless handkerchiefs or any articles, and could he take our cure by mail.

So we had to sit up half the night answering the letter and stalling the old guy off so he wouldn't come and clutter up the place while we were curing Old Man Dibley.

But Jeff, he was for going ahead and

turning a mess of bees loose in our first patient's room that night.

"We are losing thousands of dollars every day we don't cure," said he. "I'll bet we can ask as high as $5000 from Old Man Dibley as soon as he is well, and he'll pay it. If I wasn't going to marry Madeline we would make it $10,000," he said.

"Who told you you was going to marry this here Madeline?" I asked him, indignant.

"Nobody yet," answered Jeff. "But she just the same as said it would be O. K. with her. She said she wouldn't mind living on the ranch here a part of the time, and she told me other things that showed how she felt toward me."

Which was the time for me not to say anything till I went and had a talk with Madeline. She was just kidding him, I figgered, and I didn't want to make Jeff feel bad.

Pretty soon Jeff said:

"I kind of hate to sting Old Man Dibley with them bees, he being Madeline's father and all."

"So do I," I answered. "I hate to hurt any of her family any, but how we going to cure him if we don't?"

It was a serious question and I'll bet brainier men than us have tried to figger such problems out and didn't get anywhere.

Still, there wasn't anything else to do —we just naturally had to turn them bees loose among Old Man Dibley if we expected to make any money out of him.

Jeff argued that mebbe it would be better if we just kept them there for a few weeks and fed the old man some sage tea —we might fool around long enough for him to marry Madeline and he would then borrow $2500 and give it to me for my share.

But I, knowing Madeline was going to marry me instead of Jeff, told him that mebbe he couldn't get the money that soon, and, besides, we had to start on somebody.

So by daylight we had decided more or less unanimously that we would go and get the bees and cure Old Man Dibley right then.

We had already corraled a hive full of 'em, having hired a bee hound from over on the Big Muddy to come and do it, so all we had to do was to carry the house up the hill and pour the bees out onto the floor. Which we did.

The old man was snoring in a kind of personal manner and didn't hear us when we set the hive down and poked the bees out through a knothole in the door. Yes, sir, we closed the door and fixed it so we would be safe, neither one of us having any rheumatism to speak of, and we could hear the busy bees getting busier than ever in there. Then we locked the door from the outside and went and hid behind the barn.

Well, sir, there was a sound of revelry by night in a couple of minutes, and if a cyclone had come up and kicked on our bedroom door, which Old Man Dibley had forgot to lock—if an earthquake had backed a cyclone up against that door and was choking it to death—there couldn't been no greater racket.

We could hear one of the largest commotions it had ever been our lot to partake of, and if you would have told us that one crippled human being could make that much fuss without the aid of an iron foundry we wouldn't have believed it.

Our house quivered and trembled all over like it had the ague and you could hear boards busting off, and chimneys falling and walls caving in and it wasn't more than six or eight minutes till the door fell out and the object of them bees' wrath, which was Old Man Dibley, went tearing out across the sand hills like the Battle of the Marne.

No, sir, without crutches or any other visible means of support, the old man fled that there scene clad in nothing but half a pajama and a look of great anguish, and behind him were more bees than you could count in a normal lifetime, each one trying his best to see if he wouldn't be the next to sit down upon the old man in some rheumatic spot or other.

Out acrost the landscape the old man went without nothing on his mind but how to get away from our rheumatism cure. He ran so fast it wasn't long till he had come to Mt. Baldy, which nobody can climb, and he had to turn and come back toward the house.

Which was about the time that Jeff and I finally began to kind of realize that mebbe something or other was wrong. But at that we couldn't exactly tell what it was—whether it was us, Old Man Dibley or the bees.

"Head 'im off!" yelled Jeff, and I took in after the old man. But, shucks! It didn't do no good. He went past me so fast he looked like a lead pencil mark and, besides, one or two of them bees began to linger back a little, so I stopped and surveyed the scene.

But by this time Jeff had throwed a saddle on Pinto Ben and went tearing off after the old man, swinging his rope and cussing frequent.

I reckon he would have caught him, too, if the old man hadn't run against another obstacle in his path of progress, which was a large bed of cactus that rose up and stung him almost as extemporaneously as the bees. So once more he headed back to the home plate.

When he came rearing past me like an attack of neuralgia, why, I yelled at him to look out for the gulch below the barn, but it didn't do a bit of good, because that's exactly where he went—right into the mouth of our cave of wild bees.

Yes, sir, the old man saw that opening in the earth and he inserted himself in its mouth—but only for what you would call a brief instant. When he came out he had acquired another following of interested bees, several of which came out and leaned against him in a heart-rending manner.

So once more the old man came streaking past me and the house. This time, though, he started in the only direction there was left to travel in, and it looked like he was going to have his morbid craving for getting away fully satisfied when he went and got tangled in the barb wire fencing which we hadn't yet nailed on the posts and which was lying there in a more or less tangled condition.

Which place is where Jeff found our patient. He was tied up in that barb wire so tight that Jeff had to chop him out of it with a hack saw.

I guess it was about ten minutes before I noticed Madeline screaming and running up and down in her father's wake and crying for somebody to come and bring somebody with 'em. She had only stopped long enough to throw on a kind of a kimona and a pair of slippers, and the cactus hadn't been any too kind to her, either.

When she finally ran up to where Jeff was sawing the old man loose betw.en bee stings, why, she went and fainted. Which was a fine thing, because the old man was using language of the most depressing character and it wouldn't have sounded at all well in mixed company.

It was while I was running along at a fast gallop, trying to catch Madeline, that I went and had a moment's tussle with an able-bodied bee that stepped among my eye, and I got such a pain in my window that I didn't see her until I had fallen over her form about a quarter of a mile from where the old man was making his remarks that needed no answer. He was saying all there was to say.

I could hear him, too, while I was dragging Madeline back to safety behind the firing line.

He alleged that any man, or two men for that matter, who would keep such vicious bees around 'em without muzzles was guilty of a crime which should be punishable only by death, and by golly, he would see to it that we were prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, if it took a million dollars.

So I gathered from that much of the one-sided conversation which he was indulging himself with in the early hours of the morning that he hadn't yet learned that he was being cured for rheumatism.

Madeline came out of it by the time we had reached the shack and she wanted to know who killed her father, and if the robbers expected to hold him for ransom, or what.

I told her that her father wasn't at all dead, and if he was as strong as his language he would live forever.

I had quite a time getting her kind of quieted down till Jeff came in leading Pinto Ben with the old man riding and cussing.

We managed to get our patient to shut up long enough to get him into the house, the bees having all followed him out, and we could hear him telling Madeline through the partition that he was going home and that he was going to sue us for damages, and it was none of her dambusiness what it was that bit him.

We went and knocked on the door and asked him could we fix up them bee stings with some horse liniment, or something, but he only cussed us more than ever and said all we could do was to take them to the train, and we were lucky that he didn't kill us both in cold blood, which is no way to kill two rheumatism doctors.

"Now, you went and done it!" Jeff said to me. "You've gone and run off our patient and got us into a damage suit that will ruin us for the next hundred years."

"Who—me?" I said. "Why me?"

"It was your scheme, wasn't it?" he yelled. "It was your money, wasn't it? Well—then!"

Now, how are you going to argue with a guy like that!

"The chances are that I've lost a wife through your idiocy!" Jeff shrieked on. "A darn good wife, too," he said.

"Wife? How could you lose a wife when you didn't ever have any?" I asked him, timid-like.

"Well, how about Madeline?" he yiped. "She would have married me if this hadn't happened. That's who I mean."

But we went ahead and hitched up the horses. Everybody was so darn mad that I couldn't do any more thinking that morning. And before he left with Old Man Dibley and Madeline he had me believing that I was the guy that put the bees in the old man's room while Jeff was asleep. Yes, sir, I was plumb dazed.

"Old Man Dibley is going to sue us for $10,000 damages," said Jeff. "He said there was thirteen laws he could sue us under. How we going to pay it? That's what I want to know!"

"He can take the ranch," I said, scared. "My Uncle Lon—mebbe I can get him to pay it," I said.

"Here, I'm through," Jeff yelled. "Fix up a bill of sale. You can have everything. I quit."

"Huh! It's all in my name, anyway," I said. "Don't you want a setting of bees, or anything?"

But he didn't answer me, which was just as well. I wouldn't have known what to say to him, anyway, I was that scared of everything.

Jeff, he drove away and Old Man Dibley walked out without his crutches and climbed into the buckboard, still swearing, he having thought of six or eight more words that he hadn't used, and Madeline didn't even wave me good-by. I never saw such a grouchful party.

Me, I went wandering around from place to place, trying to figger things out, not knowing whether to up and run away to Mexico, or Honduras, or somewhere, or stay there and get sued all over the place.

But I sneaked back to the house in the evening and got me something to eat and tried to sleep in a decent bed, but I kept worrying so much about that there damage suit that I couldn't get no slumber.

I took the old man's crutches and tied a black ribbon around 'em and hung 'em on the wall, and just stayed around from day to day waiting for the sheriff to come and take me to jail. But he never came.

IT WAS a month or two later that I heard from Jeff. He had got him a job over in Idaho and had taken another name so he wouldn't be arrested for stinging Old Man Dibley.

I would have gone and got me a job somewheres, too, if I hadn't met up with a guy that wanted to buy the honey which them wild bees had been storing in that cave for twenty years. The darn crazy honey hound went and paid me $13,000 for the honey, and I was satisfied with that, because now I could pay the damage suit and give my uncle back his $2,000, and I would have done it, too, but then I got a letter which made me change my mind.

This here letter was from Old Man Dibley and there was a check in it for $5,000. Yes, sir, the old man said he wasn't mad at us at all, and that he hadn't had a bit of rheumatism since that early morning chase of his. He said he didn't know whether the bees had done it, or the cactus, or the bitters I gave him—but here was the check.

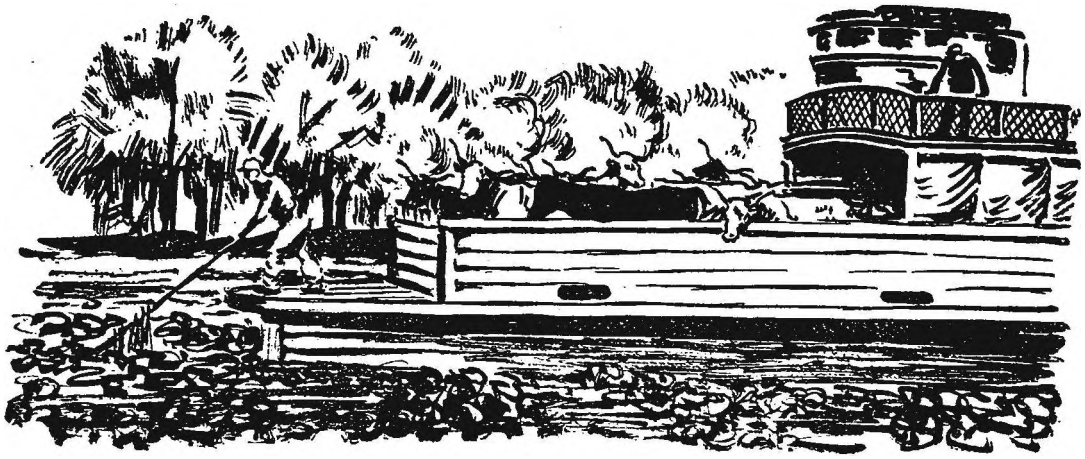
My wife, Madeline, likes to spend a few months on the ranch every year, so I kind of fixed up the place and went into the bee business.

Yes, sir, I married Madeline Rooney, the red-headed waitress over at Elko, and she read me a piece out of the paper the other day which said that the bite of a rattlesnake will cure epileptic fits.

But you don't see me running no rattlesnake ranch, do you? No, sir; they got to show me affidavits nowadays. I ain't so innocent as I look!

A PORTABLE LAWN

DESIRING to give the ground about his home a finished appearance on the occasion of a "house-warming" a wealthy Californian hit upon the bright idea of having a portable lawn laid down. Widths of burlap were stretched over the ground and thickly sprinkled with grass seed. The surface was then sprinkled and kept well watered for five days. The seeds sprouted quickly, the course fibres of the burlap held sufficient moisture to keep the tiny rootlets constantly supplied with water, and in an incredibly short time the effect of a beautiful green lawn, perfect for every ornamental purpose but hardly fit for tennis, was achieved.



THE MAN WHO CURSED THE LILIES

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

IT WAS TEDGE OF THE EVIL EYE AND THE WICKED HEART WHO CURSED THEM. WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM AFTERWARD MAKES ONE OF THE FINEST STORIES WE HAVE EVER PUBLISHED.

TEDGE looked from the pilot-house at the sweating deckhand who stood on the stubby bow of the *Marie Louise* heaving vainly on the pole thrust into the barrier of crushed water hyacinths across the channel.

Crump, the engineer, shot a sullen look at the master ere he turned back to the crude oil motor whose mad pounding rattled the old bayou stern-wheeler from keel to hogchains.

"She's full ahead now!" grunted Crump. And then, with a covert glance at the single passenger sitting on the fore-deck cattle pens, the engineman repeated his warning, "Yeh'll lose the cows, Tedge, if you keep on fightin' the flowers. They're bad f'r feed and water—they can't stand another day o' sun!"

Tedge knew it. But he continued to shake his hairy fist at the deckhand and roar his anathemas upon the flower-choked bayou. He knew his crew was grinning evilly, for they remembered Bill Tedge's year-long feud with the lilies. Crump had bluntly told the skipper he was a fool for trying to push up this little-frequented bayou from Cote Blanche Bay to the higher land of the west Louisiana coast, where he had planned to unload his cattle.

Tedge had bought the cargo himself near Beaumont from a beggared ranchman whose stock had to go on the market because, for seven months, there had been no rain in eastern Texas, and the short-grass range was gone.

Tedge knew where there was feed for the starving animals, and the *Marie Louise* was coming back light. By the Inter-coastal Canal and the shallow string of bays along the Texas-Louisiana line, the bayou boat could crawl safely back to the grassy swamp lands that fringe the sugar plantations of Bayou Teche. Tedge had bought his living cargo so ridiculously cheap that if half of them stood the journey he would profit. And they would cost him nothing for winter ranging up in the swamp lands. In the spring he would round up what steers had lived and sell them, grass-fat, in New Orleans. He'd land them there with his flap-paddle bayou boat, too, for the *Marie Louise* ranged up and down the Inter-coastal Canal and the

uncharted swamp lakes and bays adjoining, trading and thieving and serving the skipper's obscure ends.

Only now, when he turned up Cote Blanche Bay, some hundred miles west of the Mississippi passes, to make the last twenty miles of swamp channel to his landing, he faced his old problem. Summer-long the water-hyacinths were a pest to navigation on the coastal bayous, but this June they were worse than Tedge had ever seen. He knew the reason; the mighty Mississippi was at high flood, and as always then, a third of its yellow waters were sweeping down the Atchafalaya River on a "short cut" to the Mexican Gulf. And somewhere above, on its west bank, the Atchafalaya levees had broken and the flood waters were all through the coastal swamp channels.

Tedge grimly knew what it meant. He'd have to go farther inland to find his free range, but now, worst of all, the floating gardens of the coast swamps were coming out of the numberless channels on the *crevasse* water.

He expected to fight them as he had done for twenty years with his dirty bayou boat. He'd fight and curse and struggle through the *isles flotantes*, and denounce the Federal Government, because it did not destroy the lilies in the obscure bayous where he traded, as it did on Bayou Teche and Terrebonne, with its pump-boats which sprayed the hyacinths with a mixture of oil and soda until the tops shriveled and the trailing roots then dragged the flowers to the bottom.

"Yeh'll not see open water till the river cleans the swamps of lilies," growled Crump. "I never seen the beat of 'em! The high water's liftin' 'em from ponds where they never been touched by a boat's wheel and they're out in the channels now. If yeh make the plantations yeh'll have to keep east'ard and then up the Atchafalaya and buck the main flood water, Tedge!"

Tedge knew that, too. But he suddenly broke into curses upon his engineer, his boat, the sea and sky and man. But mostly the lilies. He could see a mile up the bayou between cypress-grown banks, and not a foot of water showed. A solid field of green, waxy leaves and upright purple spikes, jammed tight and moving. That was what made the master rage. They were moving—a flower glacier slipping imperceptibly to the gulf bays. They were moving slowly but inexorably, and his dirty cattle boat, frantically driving into the blockade, was moving backward—stern first!

He hated them with the implacable fury of a man whose fists had lorded his world. A water-hyacinth—what was it? He could stamp one to a smear on his deck, but a river of them no man could fight. He swore the lilies had ruined his whisky-running years ago to the Atchafalaya lumber camps; they blocked Grand River when he went to log-towing; they had cost him thousands of dollars for repairs and lost time in his swamp ventures.

Bareheaded under the semi-tropic sun, he glowered at the lily-drift. Then he snarled at Crump to reverse the motor. Tedge would retreat again!

"I'll drive the boat clean around Southwest Pass to get shut of 'em! No feed, huh, for these cows? They'll feed sharks, they will! Huh, Mr. Cowman, the blisterin' lilies cost me five hundred dollars already!"

The lone passenger smoked idly and watched the gaunt cattle staggering, penned in the flat, dead heat of the foredeck. Tedge cursed him, too, under his breath. Milt Rogers had asked to make the coast run from Beaumont on Tedge's boat. Tedge remembered what Rogers said—he was going to see a girl who lived up Bayou Bœuf above Tedge's destination. Tedge remembered that girl—a Cajan girl whom he once heard singing in the floating gardens while Tedge was battling and cursing to pass the blockade.

He hated her for loving the lilies, and the man for loving her. He burst out again with his volcanic fury at the green and purple horde.

"They're a fine sight to see," mused the other, "after a man's eyes been burned out ridin' the dry range; no rain in nine months up there—nothin' green or pretty in——"

"Pretty!" Tedge seemed to menace with his little shifty eyes. "I wish all them lilies had one neck and I could twist it! Jest one head, and me stompin' it! Yeh! —and all the damned flowers in the world with it! Yeh! And me watchin' 'em die!"

The man from the dry lands smoked idly under the awning. His serenity evoked all the savagery of Tedge's feud with the lilies. Pretty! A man who dealt with cows seeing beauty in anything! Well, the girl did it—that swamp angel this Rogers was going to visit. That Aurelie Frenet who sang in the flower-starred river—that was it! Tedge glowered on

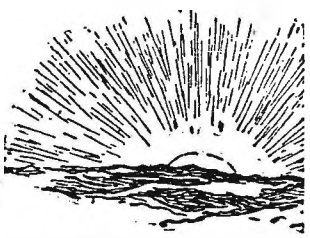
the Texan—he hated him, too, because this loveliness gave him peace, while the master of the *Marie Louise* must fume about his wheelhouse, a perspiring madman.

It took an hour for the *Marie* even to retreat and find steerage-way easterly off across a shallow lake, mirroring the marsh shores in the sunset. Across it the bayou boat wheezed and thumped drearily, drowning the bellowing of the dying steers. Once the deckhand stirred and pointed.

"Lilies, Cap'n—pourin' from all the swamps, and dead ahead there, now!"

Scowling, Tedge held to the starboard. Yes, there they were—a phalanx of flowers in the dusk. He broke into wild curses at them, his boat, the staggering cattle.

"I'll drive to the open gulf to get rid of 'em! Outside, to sea! Yeh! Stranger, yeh'll see salt water, and lilies drownin' in it! I'll show yeh 'em dead and dried on



the sands like dead men's dried bones! Yeh'll see yer pretty flowers a-dyin'!"

The lone cowman ignored the sneer. "You better get the animals to feed and water. Another mornin' of heat and crowdin'——"

"Let 'em rot! Yer pretty flowers done it—pretty flowers—spit o' Hell! I knowed 'em—I fought 'em—I'll fight 'em to the death of 'em!"

His little red-rimmed eyes hardly veiled his contempt for Milt Rogers. A cowman, sailing this dusky, purple bay to see a girl! A girl who sang in the lily drift—a-sailing on this dirty, reeking bumboat, with cattle dying jammed in the pens! Suddenly Tedge realized a vast malevolent pleasure—he couldn't hope to gain from his perishing cargo; and he began to gloat at the agony spread below his wheelhouse window, and the cattleman's futile pity for them.

"They'll rot on Point Au Fer! We'll heave the stink of them, dead and alive, to the sharks of Au Fer Pass! Drownin' cows in dyin' lilies——"

And the small craft of his brain suddenly awakened coolly above his heat—Why, yes? Why hadn't he thought of it? He swung the stubby nose of the *Marie* more easterly in the hot, windless dusk. After a while the black deckhand looked questioningly up at the master.

"We're takin' round," Tedge grunted, "outside Au Fer!"

The black stretched on the cattle pen frame. Tedge was a master-hand among the reefs and shoals, even if the flap-paddle *Marie* had no business outside. But the sea was nothing but a star-set, velvet ribbon on which she crawled like a dirty insect. And no man questioned Tedge's will.

Only, an hour later, the engineman came up and forward to stare into the faster-flowing water. Even now he pointed to a hyacinth clump.

"Yeh!" the master growled. "I'll show yeh, Rogers! Worlds o' flowers! Out o' the swamps and the tide'll send 'em back again on the reefs. I'll show yeh 'em—dead, dried white like men's bones." Then he began to whisper huskily to his engineer: "It's time fer it. Five hundred fer yeh, Crump—a hundred fer the nigger, or I knock his head in. She brushes the bar, and yer oil tank goes—yeh understand?" He watched a red star in the south.

Crump looked about. No sail or light or coast guard about Au Fer—at low tide not even a skiff could find the passages. He nodded cunningly:

"She's old and fire-fitten. Tedge, I knowed yer mind—I was always waitin' fer the word. It's a place fer it—and yeh say yeh carry seven hundred on them cows? Boat an' cargo—three thousand seven hundred——"

"They'll be that singed and washed in the sands off Au Fer that nobody'll know what they died of!" retorted Tedge thickly. "Yeh, go down, Crump, and lay yer waste and oil right. I trust yeh, Crump—the nigger'll get his, too. She'll ride high and burn flat, hoggin' in the sand——"

"She's soaked with oil plumb for'ard to the pens now," grunted Crump. "She's fitten to go like a match all along when she bumps——"

He vanished, and the master cunningly watched the ember star southeasterly.

He was holding above it now, to port and landward. The white, hard sands must be shoaling fast under the cattle-freighted *Marie*. It little mattered about the course now; she would grind her nose in the quiet reef shortly.

Tedge merely stared, expectantly awaiting the blow. And when it came he was malevolently disappointed. A mere slithering along over the sand, a creak, a slight

jar, and she lay dead in the flat, calm sea —it was ridiculous that that smooth beaching would break an oil tank, that the engine spark would flare the machine waste, leap to the greasy beams and floors.

The wheezy exhaust coughed on; the belt flapped as the paddle wheel kept on its dead shove of the *Marie's* keel into the sand. Hogjaw had shouted and run forward. He was staring into the phosphorescent water circling about the bow, when Crump raised his cry:

"Fire—amidships!"

Tedge ran down the after-stairs. Sulphurously he began cursing at the trickle of smoke under the motor frame. It was nothing—a child could have put it out with a bucket of sand. But upon it fell Tedge and the engineer, stamping, shouting, shoving oil-soaked waste upon it, and covertly blocking off the astounded black deckman when he rushed to aid.

"Water, Hogjaw!" roared the master. "She's gainin' on us—she's under the bilge floor now!" He hurled a bucket viciously at his helper. And as they pretended to fight the fire, Crump suddenly began laughing and stood up. The deckman was grinning also. The master watched him narrowly.

"Kick the stuff into the waste under the stairs," he grunted. "Hogjaw, this here boat's goin'—yeh understand? We take the skiff and pull to the shrimp camps, and she hogs down and burns——"

The black man was laughing. Then he stopped curiously. "The cows——"

"Damn the cows! I'll git my money back on 'em! Yeh go lower away on the skiff davits. Yeh don't ask me nothin' —yeh don't know nothin'!"

"Sho', boss! I don't know nothin', or see nothin'!"

He swung out of the smoke already drifting greasily up from the foul waist of the *Marie Louise*. A little glare of red was beginning to reflect from the mirrored sea. The ripples of the beaching had vanished; obscurely, undramatically as she had lived, the *Marie Louise* sat on the bar to choke in her own fetid fumes.

Tedge clambered to the upper deck and hurried to his bunk in the wheelhouse. There were papers there he must save—The master's license, the insurance policy, and a few other things. The smell of burning wood and grease was thickening; and suddenly now, through it, he saw the quiet, questioning face of the stranger.

He had forgotten him completely. Tedge's small brain had room but for one idea at a time: first his rage at the lilies, and then the wrecking of the *Marie*. And this man knew. He had been staring down the after-companionway. He had seen and heard. He had seen the master and crew laughing while the fire mounted.

Tedge came to him. "We're quittin' ship," he growled.

"Yes, but the cattle—" The other looked stupefiedly at him.

"We got to pull inside afore the sea comes up——"

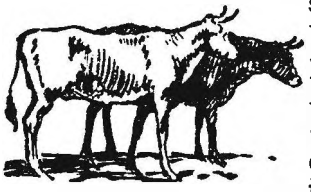
"Well, break the pens, can't you? Give 'em a chance to swim for a bar. I'm a cowman myself—I cain't let dumb brutes burn and not lift a hand——"

The fire in the waist was beginning to roar. A plume of smoke streamed straight up in the starlight. The glare showed the younger man's startled eyes. He shifted them to look over the foredeck rail down to the cattle. Sparks were falling among them, the fire veered slightly forward; and the survivors were crowding uneasily over the fallen ones, catching that curious sense of danger which forewarns creatures of the wild before the Northers, a burning forest, or creeping flood, to move on.

"You cain't leave 'em so," muttered the stranger. "No; I seen you——"

He did not finish. Tedge had been setting himself for what he knew he should do. The smaller man had his jaw turned as he stared at the suffering brutes. And Tedge's mighty fist struck him full on the temple. The master leaned over the low rail to watch quietly.

The man who wished to save the cattle was there among them. A little flurry of sparks drove over the spot he fell upon, and then a maddened surge of gaunt steers. Tedge wondered if he should go finish the job. No; there was little use. He had crashed his fist into the face of a shrimp-seine hauler once, and the fellow's neck had shifted on his spine—and once he had maced a woman up-river in a shantyboat drinking bout—Tedge had got away both times. Now and then, boasting about the shrimp camps, he hinted mysteriously at his two killings, and showed his freckled, hairy, right hand.



"If they find anything of him—he got hurt in the wreck," the master grinned. He couldn't see the body, for a black

longhorn had fallen upon his victim, it appeared. Anyhow the cattle were milling desperately around in the pen; the stranger who said his name was Milt Rogers would be a lacerated lump of flesh in that mad stampede long ere the fire reached him. Tedge got his tin document box and went aft.

Crump and Hogjaw were already in the flat-bottomed bayou skiff, holding it off the *Marie Louise's* port runway, and the master stepped into it. The heat was singeing their faces by now.

"Pull off," grunted the skipper, "around east'ard. This bar sticks clean out o' water off there, and you lay around it, Hogjaw. They won't be no sea 'til the breeze lifts at sunup."

The big black heaved on the short oars. The skiff was a hundred yards out on the glassy sea, when Crump spoke cunningly, "I knowed something——"

"Yeh?" Tedge turned from his bow seat to look past the oarsman's head at the engineman. "Yeh knowed——"

"This Rogers, he was tryin' to get off the burnin' wreck and he fell, somehow or——"

"The oil tank blew, and a piece o' pipe took him," grunted Tedge. "I tried to drag him out o' the fire—Gawd knows I did, didn't I, Crump?"

Crump nodded scaredly. The black oarsman's eyes narrowed and he crouched dumbly as he rowed. Tedge was behind him—Tedge of the *Marie Louise* who could kill with his fists. No, Hogjaw knew nothing—he never would know anything.

"I jest took him on out o' kindness," mumbled Tedge. "I got no license fer passenger business. Jest a bum I took on to go and see his swamp girl up Des Amoureaux. Well, it ain't no use sayin' anything, is it, now?"

A mile away the wreck of the *Marie Louise* appeared as a yellow-red rent in the curtain of night. Red, too, was the flat, calm sea, save northerly where a sand ridge gleamed. Tedge turned to search for its outlying point. There was a pass here, beyond which the reefs began once more and stretched on, a barrier to the shoal inside waters. When the skiff had drawn about the sand spit, the reflecting waters around the *Marie* had vanished, and the fire appeared as a fallen meteor burning on the flat, black belt of encircling reef.

Tedge's murderous little eyes watched easterly. They must find the other side of the tidal pass and go up it to strike off for the distant shrimp camps with their story of the end of the *Marie Louise*—boat and cargo a total loss on Au Fer sands.

Upon the utter sea silence there came a sound—a faint bawling of dying cattle, of trampled, choked cattle in the fume and flames. It was very far off now; and tomorrow's tide and wind would find nothing but a blackened timber, a swollen, floating carcass or two—nothing more.

But the black man could see the funeral pyre; the distant glare of it was showing the whites of his eyes faintly to the master, when suddenly he stopped rowing. A drag, the soft sibilance of a moving thing, was on his oar blade. He jerked it free, staring.

"Lilies, boss—makin' out dis pass, too, lilies——"

"I see 'em—drop below 'em!" Tedge felt the glow of an unappeasible anger mount to his temples. "Damn 'em—I see 'em!"

There they were, upright, tranquil, immense hyacinths—their spear-points three feet above the water, their feathery streamers drifting six feet below; the broad, waxy leaves floating above their bulbous surface mats—they came on silently under the stars; they vanished under the stars seaward to their death.

"Yeh!" roared Tedge. "Sun and sea tomorry—they'll be back on Au Fer like dried bones o' dead men in the sand! Bear east'ard off of 'em!"

THE oarsman struggled in the deeper pass water. The skiff bow suddenly plunged into a wall of green and purple bloom. The points brushed Tedge's cheek. He cursed and smote them, tore them from the low bow and flung them. But the engine-man stood up and peered into the starlight.

"Yeh'll not make it. Better keep up the port shore. I cain't see nothin' but lilies east'ard—worlds o' flowers comin' with the *crevasse* water behind 'em." He dipped a finger to the water, tasted of it, and grumbled on: "It ain't hardly salt, the big rivers are pourin' such a flood out o' the swamps. Worlds o' flowers comin' out the passes——"

"Damn the flowers!" Tedge arose, shaking his fist at them. "Back out o' 'em! Pull up the Au Fer side, and we'll break through 'em in the bay!"

Against the ebb-tide close along Au Fer

reef, the oarsman toiled until Crump, the lookout, grumbled again.

"The shoal's blocked wi' 'em! They're stranded on the ebb. Tedge, yeh'll have to wait for more water to pass this bar inside 'em. Yeh try to cross the pass, and the lilies'll have us all to sea in this crazy skiff when the wind lifts wi' the sun."

"I'm clean wore out," the black man muttered. "Yeh can wait fer day and tide on the sand, boss."

"Well, drive her in, then!" raged the skipper. "The in-tide'll set before daylight. We'll take it up the bay."

He rolled over the bow, knee-deep in the warm inlet water, and dragged the skiff through the shoals. Crump jammed an oar in the sand; and warping the headline to this, the three trudged on to the white dry ridge. Tedge flung himself by the first stubby grass clump.

"Clean beat—" he muttered. "By day we'll pass 'em. Damn 'em—and I'll see 'em dyin' in the sun—lilies like dried, dead weeds on the sand—that's what they'll be in a couple o' days—he said they was pretty, that fello' back there—" Lying with his head on his arm, he lifted a thumb to point over his shoulder. He couldn't see the distant blotch of fire against the low stars—he didn't want to. He couldn't mark the silent drift of the sea gardens in the pass, but he gloated in the thought that they were riding to their death. The pitiless sun, the salt tides drunk up to their spongy bulbs, and their glory passed—they would be matted refuse on the shores and a man could trample them. Yes, the sea was with Tedge, and the rivers, too; the flood waters were lifting the lilies from their immemorable strongholds and forcing them out to their last pageant of death.

The three castaways slept in the warm sand. It was an hour later that some other living thing stirred at the far end of Au Fer reef. A scorched and weakened steer came on through salt pools to stagger and fall. Presently another, and then a slow line of them. They crossed the higher ridge to huddle about a sink that might have made them remember the dry drinking holes of their arid home plains. Tired, gaunt cattle mooing lonesomely, when the man came about them to dig with his bloody fingers in the sand.

He tried another place, and another—he didn't know—he was a man of the short-grass country, not a coaster; perhaps a sandy sink might mean fresh water. But after each effort the damp feeling on his hands was from his gashed and battered head and not life-giving water. He wiped the blood from his eyes and stood up in the starlight.

"Twenty-one of 'em—alive—and me," he muttered. "I got 'em off—they trampled me and beat me down, but I got their pens open. Twenty-one livin'—and me on the sands!"

He wondered stupidly how he had done it. The stern of the *Marie Louise* had burned off and sogged down in deep water, but her bow hung to the reef, and in smoke and flame he had fought the cattle over it. They clustered now in the false water-hole, silent, listless, as if they knew the uselessness of the urge of life on Au Fer reef.

And after a while the man went on eastward. Where and how far the sand ridge stretched he did not know. Vaguely he knew of the tides and sun tomorrow. From the highest point he looked back. The wreck was a dull red glow, the stars above it cleared now of smoke. The sea, too, seemed to have gone back to its infinite peace, as if it had washed itself daintily after this greasy morsel it must hide in its depths.

A half hour the man walked wearily, and then before him stretched water again. He turned up past the tide flowing down the pass—perhaps that was all of Au Fer. A narrow spit of white sand at high tide, and even over that, the sea breeze freshening, the surf would curl?

"Ships never come in close, they said," he mused tiredly, "and miles o' shoals to the land—and then just swamp for miles. Dumb brutes o' cows, and me on this—and no water nor feed, nor shade from the sun."

He stumbled on through the shallows, noticing apathetically that the water was running here. Nearly to his waist he waded, peering into the starlight. He was a cowman and he couldn't swim; he had never seen anything but the dry ranges until he said he would go find the girl he had met once on the upper Brazos—a girl who told him of sea and sunken forests, of islands of flowers drifting in lonely swamp lakes—he had wanted to see that land, but mostly the Cajan girl of Bayou Des Amoureaux.

He wouldn't see her now; he would die among dying cattle, but maybe it was fit for a cattleman to go that way—a Texas man and Texas cows.

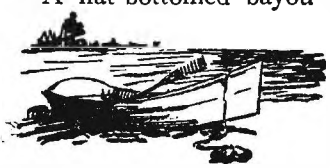
Then he saw a moving thing. It rode

out of the dark and brushed him. It touched him with soft fingers and he drew them to him. A water-hyacinth, and its purple spike topped his head as he stood waist-deep. So cool its leaves, and the dripping bulbs that he pressed them to his bloody cheek. He sank his teeth into them for that coolness on his parched tongue. The spongy bulb was sweet; it exhaled odorous moisture. He seized it ravenously. It carried sweet water, redolent of green forest swamps!

He dragged at another floating lily, sought under the leaves for the buoyant bulb. A drop or two of fresh water a man could press from each!

Like a starving animal he moved in the shoals, seeing more drifting garden clumps. And then a dark object that did not drift. He felt for it slowly, and then straightened up, staring about.

A flat-bottomed bayou skiff, and in it



the oars, a riverman's blanket-roll of greasy clothes, and a tin box! He knew the box. On one end, in faded gilt, was the name "B. Tedge." Rogers had seen it on the grimy shelf in the pilot-house of the *Marie Louise*. He felt for the rope; the skiff was barely scraping bottom. Yes, they had moored it here—they must be camped on the sands of Au Fer, awaiting the dawn.

A boat? He didn't know what a Texas cowman could do with a boat on an alien and unknown shore, but he slipped into it, raised an oar and shoved back from the sandy spit. At least he could drift off Au Fer's waterless desolation. Tedge would kill him tomorrow when he found him there; because he knew Tedge had fired the *Marie* for the insurance.

So he poled slowly off. The skiff drifted now. Rogers tried to turn to the oar athwart, and awkwardly he stumbled. The oar seemed like a roll of thunder when it struck the gunwale.

And instantly a hoarse shout arose behind him. Tedge's voice—Tedge had not slept well. The gaunt cattle burning or choking in the salt tide, or perhaps the lilies of Bayou Bœuff—anyhow, he was up with a cry and dashing for the skiff. In a moment Rogers saw him.

The Texas man began driving desperately on the oars. He heard the heavy rush of the skipper's feet in the deepening water. Tedge's voice became a bull-like roar as the depth began to check him. To his waist, and the slow skiff was but ten yards away; to his great shoulders, and the clumsy oarsman was but five.

And with a yell of triumph Tedge lunged out swimming. Whoever the fugitive, he was hopeless with the oars. The skiff swung this way and that, and a strong man at its stern could hurl it and its occupant bottom-side up in Au Fer Pass. Tedge, swimming in Au Fer Pass, his fingers to the throat of this unknown marauder! There'd be another one go—and nothing but his hands—Bill Tedge's hands that the shrimp camps feared.

Just hold him under—that was all. Tread water, and hold the throat beneath until its throbbing ceased. Tedge could; he feared no man. Another overhand stroke, and he just missed the wobbling stern of the light skiff.

He saw the man start up and raise an oar as if to strike. Tedge laughed triumphantly. Another plunge and his fingers touched the gunwale. And then he dived; he would bring his back up against the flat bottom and twist his enemy's footing from under him. Then, in the deep water Tedge lunged up for the flat keel, and slowly across his brow an invisible hand seemed to caress him.

He opened his eyes to see a necklace of opalescent jewels gathering about his neck; he tore at it and the phosphorescent water gleamed all about him with feathery pendants. And when his head thrust above water, the moment's respite had allowed the skiff to straggle beyond his reach.

Tedge shouted savagely and lunged again—and about his legs came the soft clasp of the drifting hyacinth roots. Higher, firmer; and he turned to kick free of them. He saw the man in the boat poling uncertainly in the tide not six feet beyond him. And now, in open water, Tedge plunged on in fierce exultance. One stroke—and the stars beyond the boatman became obscured; the swimmer struck the soft, yielding barrier of the floating islands. This time he did not lose time in drawing from them; he raised his mighty arms and strove to beat them down, flailing the broad leaves, until the spiked blossoms fell about him. A circlet of them caressed his cheek. He lowered his head and swam bull-like into the drift; and when he knew the pressure ahead was tightening slowly to rubbery bands, forcing him gently from his victim, Tedge raised his voice in wild curses.

He fought and threshed the lilies, and

they gave him cool, velvety kisses in return. He dived and came up through them; and then, staring upward, he saw the tall, purple spikes against the stars. And they were drifting—they were sailing seaward to their death. He couldn't see the boat now for the shadowy hosts; and for the first time fear glutted his heart. It came as a paroxysm of new sensation—Tedge of the *Marie Louise* who had never feared.

But this was different, this soft and moving web of silence. No, not quite silence, for past his ear the splendid hyacinths drifted with a musical creaking, leaf on leaf, the buoyant bulbs brushing each other. The islets joined and parted; once he saw open water and plunged for it—and over his shoulders there surged a soft coverlet. He turned and beat it; he churned his bed into a furious welter, and the silken curtain lowered.

He shrank from it now, staring. The feathery roots matted across his chest, the mass of them felt slimy like the hide of a drowned brute.

"Drownin' cows—" he muttered thickly —"comin' on a man driftin' and drownin' —no, no! Lilies, jest lilies—damn 'em!"

The tall spiked flowers seemed nodding —yes, just lilies, drifting and singing elfin music to the sea tide. Tedge roared once again his hatred of them; he raised and battered his huge fists into their beauty, and they seemed to smile in the starlight. Then, with a howl, he dived.

He would beat them—deep water was here in the pass, and he would swim mightily far beneath the trailing roots—he would find the man with the boat yet and hurl him to die in the hyacinth bloom.

He opened his eyes in the deep, clear water and exulted. He, Tedge, had outwitted the bannered argosies. With bursting lungs he charged off across the current, thinking swiftly, coolly, now of the escape. And as he neared the surface he twisted to glance upward. It was light there—a light brighter than the stars, but softer, evanescent. Mullet and squib were darting about or clinging to a feathery forest that hung straight down upon him. Far and near there came little darts of pale fire, gleaming and expiring with each stir in the phosphorescent water.

And he had to rise; a man could not hold the torturing air in his lungs forever. Yes, he would tear a path to the stars again and breath. His arms flailed into the first tenuous streamers, which parted in pearly lace before his eyes. He breasted higher, and they were all about him now; his struggles evoked glowing bubble-jewels which drifted upward to expire. He grasped the soft roots and twisted and sought to raise himself. He had a hand to the surface bulbs, but a silken mesh seemed tightening about him.

And it was drifting—everything was drifting in the deep pass of Au Fer. He tried to howl in the hyacinth web, and choked—and then he merely fought in his close-pressing cocoon, thrusting one hard fist to grasp the broad leaves. He clung to them dumbly, his face so close to the surface that the tall spiked flowers smiled down—but they drifted inexorably with a faint, creaking music, leaf on leaf.

Tedge opened his eyes to a flicker of myriad lights. The sound was a roaring, now—like the surf on the reefs in the hurricane month; or the thunder of maddened steers above him across this flowery sea meadow. Perhaps the man he had killed rode with this stampede? Tedge shrank under the lilies—perhaps they could protect him now? Even the last stroke of his hands made luminous beauty of the under-running tide.

AN outward-bound shrimp lugger saw the figures on Au Fer reef and came to anchor beyond the shoals. The Cajan crew rode up to where Milt Rogers and Crump and the black deckhand were watching by a pool. The shrimpers listened to the cowman, who had tied the sleeve of his shirt about his bloody head.

"You can get a barge down from Morgan City and take the cows off before the sea comes high," said Rogers quietly. "They're eating the lilies—and they find sweet water in 'em. Worlds o' lilies driftin' to sea with sweet water in the bulbs!" And he added, watching Crump and the black man who seemed in terror of him: "I want to get off, too. I want to see the swamp country where worlds o' flowers come from!"

He said no more. He did not even look in the pool where Crump pointed. He was thinking of that girl of the swamps who had bid him come to her. But all along the white surf line he could see the green and purple plumes of the hyacinth warriors tossing in the breeze—legion upon legion, coming to die gloriously on Au Fer's sands.

But first they sent a herald; for in Tedge's hand, as he lay in the pool, one waxen-leafed banner with a purple spearpoint glittered in the sun.

THE BROOD CALL

By T. VON ZIEKURSCH

Author of "A King of the Northern Barrens," etc.

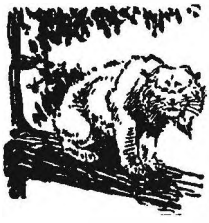
A HUNGRY MOTHER LYNX FIGHTING FOR HER YOUNG AND A FRENCH-CANADIAN TRAPPER HUNTING THROUGH THE BIG WOODS—THESE ARE THE OPPOSING FORCES WHICH MAKE THIS TELLING STORY.

DOWN through Nictau's reaches swept a violent blast, roaring among the leafless branches like a grim breath of some deity of the North. The vast unbroken stretches of white and the icy sheeting of each trunk told their tale of the long overhang of winter.

Looming high over the forest the naked crest of Stillhouse Ridge jutted almost into the low flying clouds, a somber, ominous outpost of the broken country north of the pond region. Through the drab forest that thinned slightly near the top the gray patches of rock were revealed, wind-swept and raw.

At the edge of a bare cliff, a hundred feet and more above the brush-covered base, three pines pointed their naked trunks skyward at grotesquely divergent angles, their roots growing among the granite rocks piled about by the erosion of untold centuries.

Far away in the reaches sounded the booming call of a bull moose. At the sound, something stirred beneath the roots of the three pines and a great round head appeared, turning as if on a pivot to survey the mountainside. The sharp, tufted ears and keen, yellowish eyes reflected the watchful attitude of the old she lynx as she investigated thoroughly before her short, thick body came into sight. Then she leaped up out of the cave formed by the rocks. Near her haunches the barely discernible spots appeared through the soft grayish fur as she crouched and peered down the slope. Her body was wide and heavy, yet about her neck and shoulders were evidences of the drain of sustaining herself through the prolonged winter.



Each night she had hunted desperately, driven even to hanging on the scent of stray caribou cows in the hope of finding an early calf. Once a fierce battle with a *carcajou* had furnished her meat for several days; but the crusted surface of the snow had made it extremely difficult to obtain food. To add to the woes of the forest folk it was the "year of no rabbits," as the Chippewyans say, the season which comes about every seven years when a pestilence sweeps the forest and the long-eared kind virtually disappear. Occasionally she had caught one; but as a rule they were rare and lean, instead of the plentiful, tender things she had subsisted on through other winters.

Of late she had taken to hunting during the day, driven by the impelling demand within her body for rich, nourishing food. Now she arose and stalked down the slope, circling along the edge of the cliff where it descended into the thickets. Then she sought the bottoms and worked silently forward, grim, ready to match those curving claws with the razor-like hoofs of a cow moose should chance so ordain. But the forest was silent, seemingly devoid of life. Yet hunger gnawed cruelly and she stalked deeper into the leafless coverts, eagerly following old game trails. At last she halted and her head darted from side to side, close to the snow. Here a narrow path wound through the forest, and quite recently a caribou had wandered down it. She advanced at a slinking trot, and then her ears completed the story. A turn in the path brought her in full view of the tiny stream that flowed down to the chain of lakes below. Cautiously she advanced, but there was no sign of life other than where the ice had been broken through by sharp hoofs. From the hole in the ice where the caribou had drunk came the low gurgle of the water. Already a scum was beginning to form over the hole, but the lynx examined it carefully. There were evidences that it had been broken before. She drew off to one side where, a few yards from the stream, a clump of birch shaded the path. A leap carried her halfway up one of the trunks and her sharp claws served to draw her higher until she settled in a crotch where the largest

branch emerged, her gray fur blending with the hue of the bark.

Then the hours passed, slowly, seemingly endless as she waited, stilling that demand for food which grew ever more intense. At last came a sound, faint, different from the usual forest noises. She drew her front paws farther back while the muscles of her haunches worked in serpentine fashion as she balanced, ready, and her head sank lower. The sound was repeated and her claws unsheathed only to disappear again immediately, leaving the points sticking out, indicative of the menace they represented.

Now the sound was plainer; something was coming down that game trail, trod by many generations of caribou and moose. The eyes of the lynx peered back whence the thing must come, and around the bend in the path appeared a man, mackinaw-clad. At each stride the rifle swung ahead and backward in his hand with a motion of easy familiarity, while his high larrigans and general appearance disclosed his occupation. Peter Chadeayne had no secrets; the forest owed him a living and he took it ruthlessly. His French-Canadian father had so taken it before him, as for centuries had his Chippewyan mother's people. He came and went through the forest depths, silent and evasive, merely an animal gifted with exceptional intelligence.

The lynx huddled closer into the crotch, prepared to spring, yet hesitant, and the man passed serenely unaware of the huge cat crouched above. A lithe jump carried Peter Chadeayne across the hole in the ice. As he disappeared down the forest path on the other side the lynx leaped from the branch and her nose sought his footprints. Then she, too, crossed the stream and followed, slinking cautiously along.

At last she came to the clearing in which was the cabin of the man. Another and smaller building stood some distance apart, and from it came occasional rustlings and grunts. The lynx worked about to all sides, her eyes flaming with a greenish light which reflected the hunger lust—yet she waited. At last dusk began to clothe the clearing with dim shadows. The door of the cabin opened and Peter Chadeayne bore a crude bark pail full of dried fodder from the shack to the pen at the rear. Three half grown shoats, hairy and ugly, fed eagerly, while the man returned to the house, leaving them in the walled pen to finish the fodder before returning to lock them in for the night.

At the edge of the clearing the lynx waited, torn between the impulse for a mad rush and the caution that commanded delay until complete darkness ruled. Slowly she edged closer, drawn irresistibly, fighting down the awful hunger that was conquering every instinct, every lesson of the wild. The urge became stronger, more insistent. A rush, a wild leap and the lynx balanced atop the wall of logs and stone that surrounded the pen. The forest aisles echoed the fierce screech of the killer as she launched out with every claw unsheathed and landed on one of the terrified shoats.

Inside the cabin Peter Chadeayne heard that screech and reached for his rifle. Even before he reached the door the lynx had scrambled up the side of the pen, dragging her kill after her, and was disappearing into the forest.

Furious, Chadeayne followed the great cat's trail in the snow, easily marked by the bright red daubs where the life blood of the shoat had spurted. But the growing darkness made it correspondingly difficult, and at last Peter Chadeayne gave it up and worked about like a hound, bending low to peer at the marks.

"Sartain, she ver' hoongry, damn! Breeding season!" he muttered. "Steal Peter Chadeayne's pig, mus' pay, damn!"

His jaw set grimly as he carefully locked the other shoats in the pen; while in the forest the lynx gorged on the delicious thing that had dragged so heavily on her waning strength. Then she rested before resuming her way upward to the cave at the base of the pines. Occasionally she halted as the remains of the carcass of the shoat tired her, and all her caution returned when she neared the rocks. Deliberately she avoided the snow-covered patches where the wind had not cleared away all that might hold some mark of her passing. Carefully she detoured, working slowly higher, and finally disappeared into the hollow, the entrance to which curved inside to keep out the blasts of the wind.

The next morning Peter Chadeayne fed the other two pigs and locked them in carefully, determined that no marauder from the forest should duplicate the feat of the she lynx. Then he sought her trail. It was comparatively clear and he followed fast until it led up the slope of Stillhouse, where the rocky ridge loomed dark and austere far above. For hours he worked among the rocks with rifle con-

stantly ready, and in the cave the lynx heard him and waited with lips drawn back. He examined every patch of snow within the radius of half a mile of the last clear mark and sought every place that appeared to bear the faintest semblance of a trail among the rocks and boulders. At last he gave it up and started back for the cabin, while in the cave the lynx devoured almost the entire remaining part of the shoat. That night faint squeals came from the cave and three tiny bodies nestled close to the side of the mother lynx, writhing about as she patiently curled close to warm them.

Two days later the last of the shoat was gone in the cave and the drain on the lynx, in the form of three insistent mouths that tugged constantly, called for strengthening food. At dusk she crept cautiously

forth and bounded away from rock to rock, balancing nicely and avoiding contact with the ground; for the secret must be kept inviolate from prying nostrils. Now she wasted no time on the hunt. In that pen were other shoats as delicious and tender as had been the first one, and as easy to kill. Down the slope she sped, circling the edge of the cliff, halting to spit at the great owl that swished low through the trees; along the path and over the stream.

She reached the clearing and halted, circling to all sides to test the air. All was quiet, and she stole to the base of the wall about the pen, clambered over and approached the fastened door. From inside came the rank odor of living pig. Her claws caught in the crack of the opening as she scratched vainly, and the pigs inside snorted in fright. Again she tore at the opening, and the snorts became louder, mingling with squeals of fright.

She heard a noise from the direction of the cabin. Those squeals had reached Peter Chadeayne's ears and brought him to the door with the rifle thrown forward. She heard him coming and leaped to the top of the wall. In the dim light from the early moon he saw her tense body poising there a moment, crouching to leap off into the shadows. The rifle's din reechoed through the reaches, mingling with the screech of pain from the lynx as the bullet clipped a bit of hide off one foreleg near the shoulder. She raced away into the night, homeward toward the den at the base of the pines.

The leg stiffened and became sore as she sprawled in the cave, licking at the wound and willingly giving her all to the three tiny things that drained her vitality to the utmost. Her whole body fairly ached with the intense hunger that drove her forth the next night to limp down the slope once more in search of the food that Nature demanded. For hours she hunted, slipping through the brush like a silent demon, one thought alone ruling her instinct—to kill. But it was a vain quest. Once she started a fox, but her attempt at the powerful leap that usually served her purpose was a stumbling thing, and the fox escaped.

As the shadows began to recede from the top of Stillhouse Ridge toward the heavily forested bottoms, she turned and retraced her way to the cave to warm and feed the offspring for the nourishment of which she was giving up her very life.

Outside the shadows gave way to a dull, grayish day. Then the overcast sky opened and down came the first flakes of the storm, driving and curling over the ridge. Late that afternoon the white fall ceased and the wind died down. The mother lynx peered out, and hesitated. It was sheer, desperate hunger that drove her forth at last. Her great leap left the telltale marks as far as possible from the entrance to the cave, and throughout the long hours of darkness she padded silently among the depths.

Over the ridges toward the east the sky began to reveal a lighter hue as she came out at the clearing in which stood Peter Chadeayne's cabin, and that tempting shack in which was the food she craved. Closer and closer she crept to the base of the wall, dropping more of her caution at each step. Her eyes glowed cruelly and the long, hooked claws worked forth from the sheathing between the toes. Her haunches gathered and she gained the top of the wall like a projectile fired from a mortar. There she crouched an instant and leaped toward the door, unmindful of the heap of brush before it.

As her forefeet landed on that brush there came a wild swirl of branches, a clash of metal and the jaws of the trap caught one of her paws. A sharp pain shot up her leg and she hissed at the thing that had her fast. Tearing and pulling she drew back, tugging wildly in spite

of the fresh agony where her toes were clutched by the sharp steel. Back and forth she fought madly, but the staple that held the chain of the trap was driven

deep in the pine post at the edge of the door. A bedlam of squeals and grunts came from the frightened shoats in the pen, and desperation was in the heart of the lynx when she heard the grim oath of Peter Chadeayne from the direction of the cabin. Backward she lunged, dragging the trap until the chain was taut. The pain of it was maddening but she struggled on, and at last the flesh gave way. She tumbled in a heap as the toes tore loose, leaving a bit of bloody fur in the grip of the steel trap, but she cleared the wall at a bound, speeding away toward the base of Stillhouse.

Peter Chadeayne regarded the trap with its grim relic of her triumph and cursed eloquently. Then he smiled and returned to the cabin. As soon as the shadows gave way to daylight in the bottoms he returned to the pen and took up the trail in the snow, the rifle swinging eagerly in his hand.

It was plain enough now, where she had stumbled along, limping slowly. Climbing up along the crest of the cliff he followed, emerging at the open spot he had searched before where the rocks now jutted through the snow. And the lynx, forced to halt frequently by the pain, heard him coming.

At the entrance to the cave she stopped and her wonderfully keen eyes saw him far below. But she did not enter. Instead she slunk around the base of the biggest pine and clambered laboriously up, wearily fighting her way to a mass of matted boughs that bent under her weight, but concealed her. There she waited as Peter Chadeayne came closer, picking his way slowly in the dangerous, snow-covered footing.

She had attempted to cross the rocky space without leaving tracks, but her efforts to leap from rock to rock had resulted in a series of floundering tumbles, and all was pathetically plain. Peter Chadeayne's jaws were set grimly as he followed. While he was still some distance from the cave the muscles of the lynx tensed, her claws came out and her lips wreathed back in a silent snarl of hate. At last the man stopped and raised his eyes, looking ahead. Unmistakably there were the marks of her last leap, right in the entrance to the cave. He advanced with the rifle ready and halted, looming above the cavity that wound under the rocks. A smile that was partly sneer crossed his features and he leaned over, grasping the flat edge of one of the top stones. As he pulled it back the soft fur along the spine of the mother lynx in the tree twitched, and her tufted ears flattened.

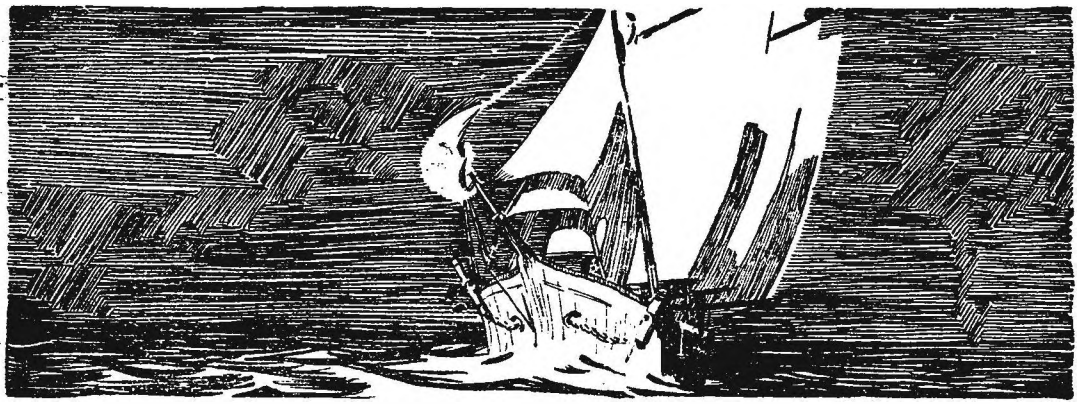
Even as the man straightened, half bent to one side with the rifle thrust upward, she hurtled through the air, a fighting, clawing, terrible forty pounds of the very essence of fury.

The bullet sped harmlessly heavenward while the rifle clattered on the stones, and Peter Chadeayne clutched frantically at the base of the smallest pine as he lunged toward the edge of the cliff, overbalanced and thrown backward by the terrific impact of that leap. A fraction of an instant he hung, his arms threshing wildly; then he disappeared over the edge and a cry of terror came back up the side of the cliff.

The mother lynx crouched on the rocks, waiting, then straightened to her full height and surveyed the slope above which old Stillhouse Ridge loomed sombre and forbidding. Again her head went back and the defiant battle challenge of her motherhood echoed shrilly down the reaches. In the forest nothing stirred and she dropped from the rocks into the entrance of the cave. A whimpering cry reached her ears and she disappeared within, while from in back of the eastern clouds the sun's warm rays came with their message of the belated spring's impending arrival.

IN THE WHOLLY UNEXPLORED REGIONS?

ACCORDING to Captain A. W. Monckton, F.R.G.S., in his book of reminiscences of his term as a resident magistrate in New Guinea, the rats native to that still incompletely explored island catch crabs by dropping their tails into the water and pulling the crab out when he "bites."



IN THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

TRIMMED EDGES

WE SEEM to have started something in the discussion of trimmed edges. We are literally overwhelmed with letters from readers discussing the point pro and con. Obviously it will take some little time for the majority to make their wishes known because, numerous as the letters are, they are the merest scratch on the total circulation of the magazine. Taking the poll as an indicative cross-section of our public, we seem to be in a fairly advantageous position in bringing out the magazine with trimmed edges on the 25th of the month and untrimmed on the 10th, because some like it better one way and some like it better the other! Space permits the quotation of only three very brief letters.

William D. Payne of Washington, replies with homely metaphor "Corn-cob stopper don't hurt de lasses in de jug. In answer to trimmed edges, let them come rough"; whereas W. S. of New York says, "As you have trimmed every other magazine published—why not trim your own?"; while another friend who asks that his name be not given, says, "I carry the magazine on my hip and the thin paper, trimmed, does not *look suspicious*." If there is any advantage in the vote, those favoring trimmed edges seem to be in the lead now. As we said before, we want to hear from as many of our readers as possible, because trimmed edges for both issues means a considerable change in the machinery at this great printing plant.

Of course there is no difference in the amount of reading matter, but in trimming, the heavy paper-cutter smashes the paper together and compresses the whole magazine until it does actually look smaller.

Every issue of SHORT STORIES has in it about as much reading matter as you get in one and one-half or two full-sized $2.00 novels. In other words, if you put the reading matter in SHORT STORIES into the form of a novel, it would make up one and one-half to two full books. The variation comes in the length of the books, not in the length of SHORT STORIES because we always have the same number of words in every issue.

THE GOLDEN DOLPHIN'S SAILING MASTER

WE DON'T want to talk too much about ourselves, although we have some points of interesting news to bring out at the CIRCLE. Before we do, however, let's hear from that seasoned adventurer who is responsible for the leading story in this issue—J. Allan Dunn. This name atop a story is always a guarantee of color and action—be it in the South Seas or the cattle country; far north or far south. As a writer, of course, he is well known to SHORT STORIES readers, but you will be interested in reading this letter from him about the background for "The Golden Dolphin," and chuckle at the casual way he mentions skipping about the islands of the Southern Seas:

I was never wrecked aboard the *Golden Dolphin*, but have had many an experience happen to me. I lived in the Hawaiian Islands for three years in the good old days "before the cable came." I have visited practically all the island groups; I was in Honolulu when Fred O'Brien first breezed in there as city editor of the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. I have been to Samoa, Tahiti, the Paumotus, Fijis, New Hebrides and Solomons, with side trips to many atolls and islands; also to New Guinea, Easter Island, Guam, Midway. I have been supercargo, mate, part owner and master of trading schooners and sailed many hundreds of leagues in a thirty-eight-foot sloop. I have traded in copra, pearl and turtle shell; have been wrecked on the coral reefs and have had to swim for it; have had to stand off unfriendly bushmen.

I know something of the island dialects and have closely studied Polynesian and Melanesian customs, beliefs, magic, and folklore—and know enough not to try to go up into the bush. Not but that I did not do it once. And I saw the skull of a white man with a gold tooth displayed as a prize trophy in a New Hebrides clubhouse where there were several hundred other skulls used as mural decorations together with mummies. Oh yes, and I have been offered human flesh for my boat's crew.

To sum up, I can reef and steer and work out a position or set a course. I am rounding out half a century of more or less constant adventuring and excitement in one way or another. The last few years have been comparatively tame, but the germs of go-fever are still strong within me and—who knows?

In the South Seas I write of things that I have seen and heard with my own eyes and ears or listened to at first hand and proved up by my own experience.

J. ALLAN DUNN.

FIFTY MILES FOR A COPY OF SHORT STORIES

BELIEVE it or not, the following is a fact, even though we withhold the name of the man responsible.

The *Aquitania* was due to sail for Europe at noon October 25th. Among the passengers was a big New York business man. He had been reading Charles Alden Seltzer's great serial "West!" which he knew concluded in the November 10th issue. As he stepped aboard the ship he ordered his chauffeur to go to the nearest newsstand and get him a copy of the issue in question. The man went from one newsstand to the other until he finally came to realize that it couldn't be had, for the magazine was not published (out the day it's dated, you know.) That chauffeur is a man after our own heart, because instead of going back to the ship and reporting failure, he threaded his way through the traffic of New York and Long Island City and then stepped on the gas for the twenty-five miles to Garden City. Dashing into the office, he demanded a copy of the November 10th number containing the conclusion of "West!" It was just off the press and the first few issues were coming through the bindery. Did the chauffeur get one? He did. A cover was hastily bound on and in ten minutes he was on his way back to the *Aquitania*. It was then nearly eleven o'clock. He had about fifty minutes to make it and, considering traffic conditions in New York, we'll say he was some driver, because he dashed up the gangplank with a copy of the magazine just as his employer had about given him up. We congratulate that business man on his chauffeur; we congratulate ourselves that we could give him the pleasure of finishing "West!" and we nominate his driver for a raise in salary.

OUR MAIL BAG

OUTSIDE of the discussion of trimmed edges, readers by the hundred are writing us interesting letters these days on various subjects. Walt Mason for instance, the famous writer and poet, wrote us the other day that he had been reading SHORT STORIES for "a hundred years or more" and registered a kick against the prevalence of Western stories. He favored tales of mystery. Incidentally, he passed a few bouquets to "The Three Oak Mystery" by Edgar Wallace in the last number, and to L. Patrick Greene whose last story "Royal Game" he said was "a gem." We wrote Mr. Mason that we appreciated his letter, but the fact is that most people seem to prefer Western stories so we will continue them.

Then there are the letters on sea stories. The following are typical of a great folder too numerous to print.

Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Dear Sir:

I see where you ask if we like sea stories. Altogether, yes. I have made two trips by auto through Death Valley and while it is fascinating to read of, I prefer a good sea story. It is something I'm not used to, so therefore is doubly attractive, if you get what I mean. "Their name was Legion," "Man Size," "Isle of Traitors," and last but *not* least, "West!" are, I think, some of your *very best*. Please *never omit* the sea stories.

Yours most sincerely,
MRS. ALENE SAVELL,
Hotel Travelers, Houston, Tex.

Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Dear Sir:

You asked in your issue of October 10th our opinion of sea stories. Those are the best kind of stories, I think, in any magazine. I like coast guard stories also, as I have just been recently discharged from that branch of service. In one of your recent issues, I enjoyed reading a coast guard story about bootlegging. That was a clever idea in moving the buoy a hundred yards back of the regular three mile limit. I have been reading SHORT STORIES for several years now, and don't like to miss a single copy of it. Please have some more sea, coast guard, and revenue cutter stories.

With the best of luck to SHORT STORIES in the future, I am

Sincerely,
FARIS L. KING,
West Flagler St., Miami, Fla.

Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Dear Sir:

The average man is singularly inarticulate when it comes to putting his thoughts on paper, but we can accept as a basic truth that when the average man is in the mood to sink himself into a comfortable chair and peruse a work of fiction, he casts off the garment of care and petty convention and desires to be entertained with a stirring narrative.

The man is father to the boy. He wants to relax and get away from the learned treatise and experts who want to solve the world's problems—adventure is the answer.

About sea stories, let us have the old windjammers rounding the Horn—the South Seas and buried treasure, and, of course, the West and cattle rustlers—two-gunmen and road agents. That's the type that quickens the blood.

Very truly,
J. L. Burns,
5527 Maryland Ave, Chicago, Ill.

Here's a letter that warmed our hearts, from an adventurer who knows the life a great many of the stories in the magazine depict.

Editor, SHORT STORIES MAGAZINE:
Dear Sir:

I fully believe what your readers swear by is the matter *between* the covers, which I have found *always* of *exceptional* interest. Have read this magazine for years and I expect to read it as long as I live. Am now 52 years old and have been a soldier of fortune and world traveler since 18—. Served under six different flags—"all war service," last with the Second Division, Canadian Infantry in Belgium and France, yet never fail to find plenty to intrigue my interest in your most excellent magazine. I do not believe that I have ever missed a single number, as when out of the U. S. they were saved up and finally sent me by friends. Once I remember receiving 14 months copies in one package. For the good Lord's sake, never worry about edges of pages, rough or cut smooth just keep up the class of fiction you always carry and we will have no kick coming.

Yours in thankful appreciation,
W. D. ADDISON, D. C. M.,
C de G. M. M., C de G. de Belge.

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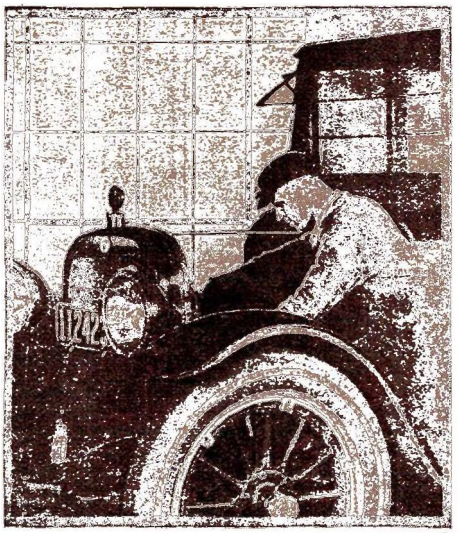

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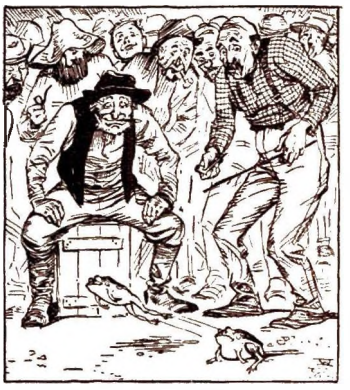
JIM SMILEY was "the dangdest feller for bettin'." He'd bet on anything—even offered to bet the Parson that his wife wouldn't get well. And it was through his love of "bettin'" that he came to catch "Dan'l Webster" and educate him. "Dan'l" was a mighty good frog and could outjump any frog in Calaveras County. But once he fell down and his fall was enough to make angels weep.

"One—Two—Three—GIT!" said Jim—but something was the matter with "Dan'l." He didn't *"git."* And then—but to really enjoy the history of this "notorious frog" you must read it in Mark Twain's own words.



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