"The Gift Horse"

A new *Johnny Fletcher* mystery by

FRANK GRUBER

Short Stories

Twice A Month

July 10th

25c

UNITED WE STAND

PITYROSPORUM OVALE, the strange "Bottle Bacillus" regarded by many authorities as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

It may be Infectious Dandruff!

START TODAY WITH THE TESTED LISTERINE TREATMENT THAT HAS HELPED SO MANY

TELL-TALE flakes, itching scalp and inflammation—these "ugly customers" may be a warning that you have the infectious type of dandruff, the type in which germs are active on your scalp!

They may be a danger signal that millions of germs are at work on your scalp . . . including Pityrosporum ovale, the strange "bottle bacillus" recognized by many foremost authorities as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

Don't delay. Every day you wait, your condition may get worse, and before long you may have a stubborn infection.

*Use Medical Treatment**

Your common sense tells you that for a case of infection, in which germs are active, it's wise to use an antiseptic which quickly attacks large numbers of germs. So, for infectious dandruff, use Listerine Antiseptic and massage.

Listerine Antiseptic kills millions of Pityrosporum ovale and other germs associated with infectious dandruff.

Those ugly, embarrassing flakes and scales begin to disappear. Itching and inflammation are relieved. Your scalp feels fresher, healthier, your hair looks cleaner.

76% Improved in Clinical Tests

And here's impressive scientific evidence of Listerine's effectiveness in combating dandruff symptoms: Under the exacting, severe conditions of a series of clinical tests, 76% of the dandruff sufferers who used Listerine Antiseptic and massage twice daily showed complete disappearance of or marked improvement in the symptoms, within a month.

In addition to that, countless men and women all over America report joyously that this grand, simple treatment has brought them welcome relief from dandruff's distressing symptoms.

Start tonight with the easy, delightful home treatment—Listerine Antiseptic and massage. It has helped *so many* others, it may help *you*. Buy the large, economy-size bottle today and save money.

Lambert Pharmacal Co., *St. Louis, Mo.*

*THE TREATMENT

MEN: Douse full strength Listerine on the scalp morning and night.

WOMEN: Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic.

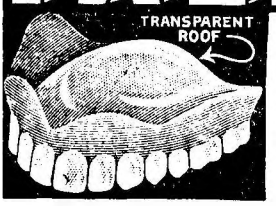
Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage. Listerine is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a gargle.

LISTERINE

the delightful treatment

WORLD'S LARGEST DENTAL PLATE MAKERS

A FALSE TEETH by MAIL



MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

MADE-TO-MEASURE DENTAL PLATES

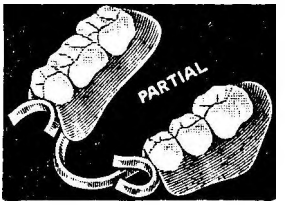
We make to measure for you INDIVIDUALLY—BY MAIL Dental Plates for men and women from an impression of your mouth taken by you at your home. Over 100,000 in this country wear teeth we made.

$7.95 TO $35

MAIL Coupon Today

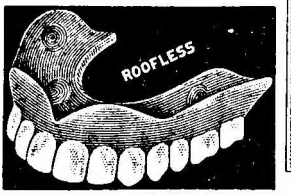
60 DAYS' TRIAL

MAKE US PROVE EVERY WORD WE SAY—Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not PERFECTLY SATISFIED, **they will not cost you a cent.** We take your word! Isn't that fair enough?



NOW AT NEW LOW PRICES

If you find what others have paid for theirs, you will be astounded when you see how little ours will cost you. By reading our catalog you can learn how to save HALF or MORE on DENTAL PLATES for yourself . . . MONTHLY PAYMENTS POSSIBLE!



Professional Model

SEND NO MONEY!

We take this risk. We guarantee that if you are not fully satisfied with teeth we make for you, then, any time within 60 days, we will gladly refund your every cent.

FREE Impression material — catalog with our new LOW prices, and information. Write TODAY! Prices may advance! Don't wait.

A LICENSED DENTIST SUPERVISES THE MAKING OF EACH DENTAL PLATE

REPAIRS 48-HOUR SERVICE

UNITED STATES DENTAL CO. Dept. 7-13, 1555, Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

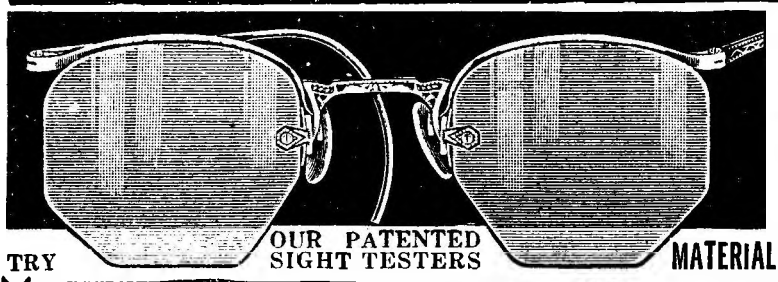
FREE U. S. DENTAL CO., Dept. 7-13
1555 Milwaukee Ave., Chicago

Send without obligation FREE Impression material catalog, and information.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....



TRY OUR PATENTED SIGHT TESTERS

EYE-GLASSES by MAIL

$2.95 & up Complete

HIGHEST QUALITY MATERIAL: EXPERT WORKMANSHIP

SEND NO MONEY 16 DAYS' TRIAL

GRACE YOUR FACE with good looking glasses! Select for yourself from the many styles in our catalog the one that looks best on you. Wear our glasses on trial as long as 16 days with a money-back guarantee of satisfaction! Then, if you are not 100% satisfied with glasses we make for you we'll refund every cent you paid us for them. We take your word. Isn't that fair?

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION

FREE CATALOG OF NEW LOW PRICES AND SCIENTIFIC TEST CHART.

REPAIRS 48 Hour Service. Lenses Replaced. Frames Mended.

U. S. EYE-GLASSES CO., Dept. 7-13, 1557 Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, Ill.

FREE U. S. Eye-Glasses Co., Dept. 7-13
1557 Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Send without obligation, your FREE catalog and scientific test chart.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

ACTION, ADVENTURE, MYSTERY

Short

Every author's finest and

CONTENTS

SHORT STORIES issued semi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City, N. Y., and entered as second class matter, November 24, 1937, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE in the United States, American Possessions, Mexico and South America, $5.00 per year; to Canada, $6.50; and to all other countries, $6.60. Price payable in advance. July 10, 1942. Vol. CLXXX, No. 1. Whole Number 877.

WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President and Treasurer.* S. A. FRAZER, *Secretary.* D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.*

BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

Stories

latest stories—no reprints

JULY 10th, 1942

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

Title registered in U. S. Patent Office

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Knock . . Knock!

If You're Knocking at the Gates Of the Strange and the Incredible—

Here's Your Key!

YES, here's your key to worlds of incredible invention and adventure—your passport to realms of darkness and of gold. . . .

WEIRD TALES, that fascinating magazine of the fantastic!

How refreshing to escape utterly from the everyday—from everyday things! How grand to travel back into ages that history has forgotten—to voyage forwards into the fabulous Future—to meet the phantoms of Today! How intoxicating to soar upon the wings of imagination—to make amazing conquests of Space and Time!

WEIRD TALES will hold you spellbound. It will fascinate you.

For the fascination of WEIRD TALES is as old as Time itself—and as timely as Tomorrow!

WEIRD TALES

15¢

"THE KEY TO THE INCREDIBLE"

World's Greatest Collection of Strange & Secret Photographs

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes, the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of The **SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND.**

600 LARGE PAGES

Here is the world's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs. Here are Exotic Photos from Europe, Primitive Photos from Africa, Torture Photos from Asia, Female Photos from Oceania and America, and hundreds of others. There are almost 600 LARGE PAGES of Strange & Secret Photographs, each page 57 square inches in size.

1,000 REVEALING PHOTOS

You see actual courtship practiced in every quarter of the world. You see magic and mystery in queer lands where the foot of a white man has rarely trod. You see Oriental modes of marriage and female slavery in China, Japan, India, etc. Through the intimacy of the cameras you witness the exotic habits of every continent and the strangest customs of life and love in America, Europe, etc. You are bewildered by these large pages of **ONE THOUSAND PHOTOGRAPHS,** including 130 full-page photos, and thrilled by the hundreds of short stories that describe them.

Contents of 5-Volume Set

VOLUME 1
The Secret Album of Africa
VOLUME 2
The Secret Album of Europe
VOLUME 3
The Secret Album of Asia
VOLUME 4
The Secret Album of America
VOLUME 5
The Secret Album of Oceania

5 PICTURE-PACKED VOLUMES

[Specimen Photos]

Dress & Undress Round the World
Various Secret Societies
Civilized Love vs. Savage
Strange Crimes, Criminals
Omens, Totems & Taboos
Mysterious Customs
1,000 Strange & Secret Photos

The SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND consists of five picture-packed volumes (solidly bound together for convenient reading). Dip into any one of these volumes, and as you turn its pages, you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Here, in story and unusual photo, is the **WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTION OF STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOGRAPHS,** containing everything from Female Beauty Round the World to the most Mysterious Cults and Customs. These hundreds and hundreds of large pages will give you days and nights of thrilling instruction.

SEND NO MONEY

Simply sign & mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 Volumes is 9¼ inches high, and, opened, over a foot wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for $10. And it is bound in expensive "life-time" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.

METRO PUBLICATIONS, 70 Fifth Ave., Dept. 1307, New York

Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 great volumes bound together). I will pay postman $1.98, plus postage on arrival. If not delighted, I will return book in 5 days for full refund of $1.98.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... **State** .....

☐ CHECK HERE if you are enclosing $1.98, thus saving mailing costs. Same Money-Back Guarantee.
Canadian Orders—$2.50 in Advance.

Spare Time Training *that helps you*

SERVE and PROSPER

in this national crisis

YOU want to serve your fullest in this Defense situation, do your utmost to help our nation. You want also to advance yourself in position and pay—win promotion and more money.

You can do both at the same time.

Our nation needs many more men for specialized and supervisory positions—to help defense production and business growth. Thousands—scores of thousands—must fit themselves quickly for these better paying jobs in offices and stores and factories. They must train as accountants, salesmen, managers, foremen, traffic managers, general foremen, office managers, inspectors, etc.

If you wish this advantage, simply mark on the coupon the field of business in which you are most interested. We will send you full information about the opportunities in that field, tell you how our complete success-building program helps you plan your future, trains you in your spare time, and works with you all through your career. Send the coupon NOW.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

Dept. 775-R **CHICAGO**

Please send me full information regarding the success-building training and service I have marked with an X below.

- ☐ **Business Management:** Training for Official, Managerial, Sales and Departmental Executive positions.
- ☐ **Modern Salesmanship:** Training for position as Sales Executive, Salesman, Trainer, Sales Promotion Manager, and all positions in retail, wholesale or specialty selling.
- ☐ **Higher Accountancy:** Training for position as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.
- ☐ **Traffic Management:** Training for position as Railroad, Truck or Industrial Traffic Manager, Rate Expert, Freight Solicitor, etc.
- ☐ **Law:** LL. B. Degree.
- ☐ **Modern Foremanship:** Training for positions in Shop Management, such as that of Superintendent, General Foreman, Foreman, Sub-Foreman, etc.
- ☐ **Industrial Management:** Training for Works Management, Production Control, Industrial Engineering, etc.
- ☐ **Modern Business Correspondence**
- ☐ **Expert Bookkeeping**
- ☐ **Commercial Law**
- ☐ **C. P. A. Coaching**
- ☐ **Stenotypy**

Your choice of these booklets Free. Ask for one.

Name..... Age.....

Present Position .....

Address .....

THE GIFT HORSE

By FRANK GRUBER

Author of "The Mighty Blockhead" and Other Johnny Fletcher Mystery Stories

CHAPTER I

IT DIDN'T take much to make Johnny Fletcher happy. A five-dollar bill in his pocket and a hot tip on a horse were enough. So he was singing as he sent the ancient flivver rolling through Jamaica.

Beside Johnny, Sam Cragg was hunched over a newspaper. "This piece here, Johnny," he said gloomily. "It says a guy named Weisinger tried to balance his books at the track and the judge gave him five years."

"But did he have a tip right from the feed box? Joe Sibley says Ulysses will leave the field before they get into the first turn."

"That's what Joe says. But he's prejudiced on account of he owns the plug. The handicappers don't like Ulysses worth a darn. Pete Fishel says Ulysses won the fourth at Empire his last time out, but the trouble was he was running in the third."

Walk Out on Two Hundred Thousand Bucks, No Matter What Sort of Strings Are Attached to Them? Not Johnny Fletcher

Part I

"Sibley was holding him back that time," Johnny retorted. "He told me only this morning to sink the bankroll on Ulysses. Would Joe give me a bum steer? After I practically saved his life once."

Sam Cragg shook his head. "Okay, Johnny, we've got a fin. It'll cost us two-twenty to get into the track. We'll put two bucks on his nose and then we'll have eighty cents left. And a bundle of books. We can sell them tomorrow."

"Sure we can. We must be getting near the track, judging from the crowd."

"Yeah, they're all turning to the left. But watch your driving. This old heap won't stand any bumping, you know."

"Did I ever wreck a car, Sam?.

Sam did not reply to that question. Johnny gave the answer himself only a few minutes later. He was turning into the wide expanse of parking lot outside the Jamaica Race Track when it happened.

A bright yellow coupé ahead of the flivver skidded to a sudden stop. There was plenty of room for Johnny to brake, but the heap didn't have any brakes. So it smacked the yellow coupé's rear bumper —and promptly fell to pieces.

"What's the idea?" Johnny howled even before he hurtled out of the wreck.

The driver of the coupé scrambled out. She seemed scarcely old enough to be driving a car but she had plenty of what it takes. She saw the crumpled left rear fender of her car and her eyes blazed.

"Why, you stupid oaf! You've smashed

my bumper. I—I'll have you arrested."

"You'll have *me* arrested?" Johnny gasped. "You've got a bent fender. But look at my *car!*"

"That junk pile never was a car. You had no right even driving it. Let me see your driver's license."

"Let me see yours."

"Here!" The girl opened her purse and drew out a wallet, which she snapped open and thrust under Johnny's face.

"Helen Rosser," Johnny read. "El Camino Apartments. Fine, I'll send you my repair bill."

"You'll *what?* Let me see *your* license."

Sam Cragg had climbed out of the ruined jaloppy and whispered in Johnny's ear. "Let it go, Johnny. Look at the crowd collecting."

Johnny shot a quick glance about. It was approaching post time and the cars were coming into the parking lot in streams. But the drivers weren't parking them, since everyone loves an argument and Johnny Fletcher and the girl were not keeping their voices down.

"All right," Johnny said to the girl. "I'll be a sport. I won't say anything about whose fault it is. You take care of your damage and I'll take care of mine and—"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," the girl said indignantly. "My fender is worth more than your entire car and you deliberately rammed me. Now please let me have your license. Or haven't you got one?"

"Would I be driving a car without one?"

"You might, but it'll be just too bad for you. Now produce the license or I'll call a policeman."

"The bumpers are locked, Johnny," Sam Cragg said suddenly. "And good!"

"Oh!" The girl darted forward. She took a good look, then whirled on Johnny and now tears of rage threatened to well from her eyes. "That's the last straw. *Police!*"

"Whoa, lady," cried Sam Cragg. "I'll lift your car free. It certainly is a cinch."

"You can't."

"Can't I? Watch."

Sam Cragg examined the bumpers for a moment, then suddenly stooped and caught hold of the battered flivver bumper. Seemingly without effort he lifted the entire front of the car, backed a foot or so and set the car down.

A murmur of awe went up in the audience that had gathered. A sudden light leaped into Johnny's eyes. "The human derrick!" he cried at the top of his voice. "Did you see that, folks? That's Young Samson, the strongest man in the world. Sam, do it again!"

"Huh?" Sam grunted in astonishment.

"I said, lift up the car again so that these people can see it wasn't an accident —or a trick." Out of the side of his mouth he snapped, "The heap's wrecked so we might as well make a buck out of it." Then, as Sam approached the front of the car:

"Watch him, folks, watch him lift that car as if it were a toy. See! Now, put it down. Yes, sir, you've seen something you'll never see again. The strongest man in the world. And would you believe that Young Samson was once a puny weakling weighing only ninety-five pounds? It's the truth, folks—"

The owner of the yellow coupé suddenly moved in front of Johnny and said through clenched teeth, "What are you trying to pull, you fool? Let me see your driver's license or—"

"Just a moment, please!" Johnny said. Then, ignoring the girl, "It's all here in this little book, folks. All the secret exercises that made Young Samson the man he is today. Complete with text and diagrams showing how every one of you—you and you and you—can become as strong as Young Samson. In a week you'll be tearing Brooklyn telephone directories in half, in a month you'll bend iron bars. Yes, sir, only $2.95. And you sir, wouldn't *you* like to be strong? Of course you

would. And you, Miss, buy it for your boy friend. He's got a swell physique now, but let him follow these instructions a little while and—oh boy!"

"Johnny," said Sam, hoarsely. "The cops——"

"Yes, sir, and you!" Johnny cried "Hurry, because I haven't got a twenty-year lease on this spot, you know. In fact, its expiring right now. Gangway, folks!"

Zip!

Johnny, with Sam running interference, went through the crowd like the Notre Dame team through the Yonkers line. They didn't slow up until they were in front of the ticket booths.

There Johnny hurriedly bought a couple of tickets. Inside the gate, he finally turned and surveyed the parking lot. There was still a considerable commotion going on.

He shook his head. "I wish I'd had five minutes more—but I sold five books anyway. That helps."

"Yeah, but we deserted a hundred books."

"S'tough. We lost a good car, too. I hope the cops don't get discouraged trying to find us through the license plates. Mmm, I may send the girl a couple of bucks to have that fender fixed. Helen Rosser."

"They're off!" roared the loud-speaker system and some twenty thousand throats.

"They're off, "cried Johnny Fletcher. He leaped forward and bucked a solid wall of excited humanity. By the time he found a spot where he could see the track from tiptoe the horses were in the stretch and everyone was going mad.

"Jerico! Mary Maude! Hoboken. Come on—come on!"

"Jerico wins!"

Johnny rocked back to his heels. "And the board says he pays $32.80. Say, how long has this been going on?"

"That was the first place," Sam said. "Ulysses is in the second. Better buy our ticket now."

"Right! Where'll I get it?"

"Back here in the parimutuel room. But look, don't you think we ought to play safe and bet the two bucks to show?"

"How much would we win?"

"It might pay six dollars. Four bucks profit."

"Four bucks? Did we come out here for that? Why, it cost us two-twenty to get into the place."

Sam Cragg sighed in surrender. "Okay, go ahead, but I got a feeling that Ulysses isn't going to do so well."

Johnny Fletcher headed for the parimutuel room. In his haste he collided with a short, slight man and almost knocked him off his feet. "Excuse me, Mister," he began, then exclaimed, "Joe Sibley! Just the man I'm looking for."

"Johnny Fletcher! Well, well!" the little man cried. "I'm certainly glad to see you. Don't leave the track without seeing me again. I've got to run now. Ulysses is going to the post."

"You're telling me. I'm just buying a ticket on him. Uh, you're sure he's going to win?"

"Sink your roll on him, Johnny. He's right and this race was made just for him."

"Well, okay Joe, I will."

Johnny left the horse owner and headed for the $2.00 Show window. "One ticket on Ulysses," he said to the seller.

The man pressed a button on the parimutuel machine and a pink ticket was flipped into Johnny's eager hand. "Luck," said the ticket seller cheerfully. "That nag'll pay a good price. That's only the second ticket I've sold on him."

"Eh?" Johnny scowled. "What do you think he'll pay?"

The man shrugged. "Depends on the total. It's a cinch to pay seventy or eighty. Maybe more."

Johnny gasped. "How many horses are there in the race?"

"Only eight."

"Only eight? Then, I got one chance in eight of winning?"

"Well, that's one way of looking at it."

Johnny moved away from the window, shaking his head. Then he suddenly wheeled and advanced upon the $5.00 Win window. "Three tickets on Ulysses," he said firmly, and received the pasteboard slips a moment later.

He had sold five books outside the track, at two ninety-five each. He'd had five dollars originally and had spent two-twenty to get himself and Sam into the track. Now he had bet $17.00 on Ulysses, $15.00 to win and $2.00 to show. That left Johnny with fifty-five cents.

But if Ulysses won and paid a hundred to one—Johnny shuddered at the very thought of it.

He rejoined Sam Cragg in the grandstand as the horses were parading. Sam wrinkled his nose in disgust. "There's your oat-burner, Number 8. He doesn't look like much."

"Number eight? Why, I think he looks elegant. I always liked black horses and he's plenty big. Not like some of those runts."

"That runt there, Number 2, is Hiawatha. He's my favorite in this race. And that little filly there, that's Mimoy. She's going to win the place."

"Maybe so, maybe so, but I just ran into Joe Sibley and he assured me again that Ulysses couldn't lose. He was betting a big roll on him. Say—" Johnny's eyes had caught sight of the big tote board on the other side of the track. The lights had flickered momentarily, then come on with new figures. "Number Eight," Johnny read, "sixty. Cripes, the odds have dropped away down! Only sixty to two now. I was hoping for a hundred to one."

Sam groaned. "I can't stand it. Slip me a couple of bucks, Johnny, and I'll put them on Hiawatha. Maybe we can get our money back."

"Oh, I wouldn't bet on more than one horse in a race."

"You don't have to. I'll bet this one. Come on, slip me."

"Can't, Sam. I haven't got it."

"Huh? You sold five books, didn't you?"

"Yeah, and I put every dollar on Ulysses."

Sam Cragg reeled. "No! You didn't—?"

"Sibley was so sure that Ulysses was right."

"I can't watch it," Sam moaned. "Let me know when the race is over so we can go home. Let me——"

"They're off!"

"Yowee!" screamed Johnny Fletcher. "Look at Ulysses. He's left the pack. Look at him go!"

STARTLED, yet unbelieving, Sam Cragg raised himself on his toes. "That's Number 3, Johnny," he wailed. "Hiawatha. Number 8 is bringing up the rear."

The breath came out of Johnny's lungs like steam from a calliope. Ulysses was two lengths behind the seventh horse. At the turn he was three and a half lengths in the rear.

"Come on, you dog," Johnny cried. "Pick them up!"

Well, to draw a curtain over Johnny Fletcher's agony, Ulysses came in last by

eight lengths. Johnny tore up his parimutuel tickets and in a fine rage set out to seek Joe Sibley. He missed him as the horses filed back into the paddock, but finally forced his way past a guard and bore down upon the stables.

"Where's Joe Sibley?" he asked a colored exercise boy.

The boy grinned. "Mistuh Sibley ain't feelin' so good, I think. You find him in the lucky stable, numbah thirteen."

"Thirteen, bah!"

With Sam Cragg trailing, Johnny stalked down to Stable Number 13. But he didn't enter, for Joe Sibley was just coming out. With him was the girl whose car Johnny's flivver had bumped in the parking lot.

She recognized Johnny instantly and her eyes blazed. "You! So here you are! I'm glad to see you again. Where's a policeman?"

Johnny held up his hand. "Miss, I've been punished enough. I put my roll on Ulysses."

"I'm sorry, Johnny," cut in Joe Sibley. "I want to tell you about that. Come out to my place this evening. Come for dinner, because there's something important I want to talk to you about. I'll make it worth your while."

SOMETHING in the horseman's tone caused Johnny to withhold the blast he had intended to hurl at Sibley. He nodded.

"Okay, Joe, I'll be there."

"And so will I—with a policeman," Helen Rosser snapped.

Johnny grinned at her. Then he looked sharply at Sibley, for the latter still made no attempt to introduce the girl. Johnny shrugged and touching Sam's arm, turned away.

The moment they were out of earshot, Sam said, "Something funny about Joe. Never saw him look so serious. And he knows the girl."

"Yeah. Maybe she's a relative. Although I never heard Joe talk about any. Well, we'll see him tonight."

"How? Joe lives away out on the Island. We haven't even got the fare back to the city, much less out to the country. And if you think I'm going to walk, you're crazy."

II

IT WASN'T necessary to walk out to Joe Sibley's place. Not all the way. Johnny Fletcher did some careful questioning outside the track and learned that he and Sam could get to Flushing for ten cents apiece. There they caught another bus that ran out on Northern Boulevard and they were finally set down near Manhasset with fifteen cents still remaining in Johnny's pocket.

From Manhasset it was only about two and a half miles out to Joe Sibley's estate. The estate consisted of four acres, off a winding road. Trees concealed the house and stables.

There were six cars parked at the side of the road. Johnny regarded the license plates. "Cops."

"The girl—" exclaimed Sam. "She knew we were coming."

A state trooper appeared at the gate leading into the estate. "Lookin' for somebody?" he asked.

"Joe Sibley," said Johnny.

"Friends of his?"

"Yes—why? Something wrong?"

"I didn't say so."

Johnny made an impatient gesture toward the police cars. "I suppose the entire highway patrol came out for dinner? Something wrong with Sibley?"

The trooper screwed up his mouth. "I think you'd better come in and talk to the sergeant."

Sam was making warning signals to Johnny, but the latter disregarded them. "Come on." He stepped through the gate and started up a graveled drive that ran around a one-story, rambling California style house, to a long white building in the rear.

There was a policeman on the veranda of the house and several more in the rear, in front of the combination garage-stable.

"Sergeant," called the trooper who had escorted Johnny and Sam. "These fellows say they're friends of Sibley's."

A heavy-set trooper with a military mustache turned and looked sharply at Johnny and Sam. "Is this a coincidence, your coming here?"

"No," said Johnny. "Joe invited us out. What's happened?"

"Sibley's dead," the trooper said bluntly. "Had an accident." He nodded to the stable.

Johnny inhaled softly. "What kind of accident?"

"His horse killed him."

"Ulysses?"

"I don't know the horse's name, but he's certainly a killer. Broke every bone in Sibley's body, just about."

Sam Cragg exclaimed in horror. "What a way to die!"

A slender, weazen-faced man came out of the stable. "T'ain't so. Ulysses never killed him. Not the boss."

"Wilbur," exclaimed Johnny Fletcher.

The little man exclaimed in relief. "Mr. Fletcher! Gee, I'm glad you're here. The boss thought a lot of you, he did. He was sayin' only this mornin'—" He stopped suddenly and the sergeant in charge of the troopers prodded him.

"What did he say, Ganz?"

Wilbur Ganz scowled. "I forget. The boss and Mr. Fletcher were pals. Mr. Sibley trusted Mr. Fletcher, which is more'n he did anyone else, unless it was the judge."

"The judge?"

"Judge Krieger, his lawyer."

The eagerness went out of the sergeant's eyes. "Ben Krieger was his attorney? Mmm, Luke, phone Krieger. Ask him to run over right away. He lives over at Great Neck."

Johnny Fletcher edged over to Wilbur Ganz. "Did you ride Ulysses today?" he asked out of the side of his mouth.

"Me? No, Pat Shea was on him, the dirty rat."

"You mean Pat didn't give Ulysses a good ride?"

Ganz spat viciously. "Ulysses could've walked away from that field. That's what the boss wanted to talk to you about. Willie Pipett got to Shea—"

The sergeant suddenly whirled on Fletcher and Ganz. "I heard that; what's Willie Pipett got to do with this?"

"Who's Willie Pipett?" Johnny asked innocently.

"You were just talking about him."

"Not me," said Johnny. "I'm a stranger here."

The sergeant gestured impatiently. "You, Ganz, you were talking about Pipett."

"Me? Naw, I was tellin' Mr. Fletcher that I had a ticket on Ulysses. See? Pipett —ticket."

"Me, too," Johnny said. "Sibley tipped me off that Ulysses was going to win today and I bought a ticket on him."

"And did he win?"

"Don't you know?"

"I don't go to the races."

"I wish we didn't either," Sam Cragg offered.

"Ulysses lost," said Wilbur Ganz. "He shouldda won, but the lousy jockey the boss had on him musta pulled him."

"Who was the jockey?"

"A crook named Pat Shea."

"And why would he pull the horse?"

GANZ sniffed. "Why would any jockey pull a mount? Because someone paid him. Get hold of Shea."

"What for? The race track is at Jamaica, which is out of my jurisdiction—if I were interested in finding out why a jockey pulled a horse. Which I'm not."

There was a commotion in the yard and a man with an unruly shock of black hair came striding up. He was about fifty, but so vigorous and athletic that he could easily have passed for ten years less.

"Where is he?" he cried. "Where is Joe?"

The sergeant bobbed his head. "He's dead, Judge. His horse killed him."

Judge Krieger clapped his hand to his

forehead. "Ulysses killed poor Joe? What irony? Joe thought more of that horse than of anything in this world. He raised him from a foal. He thought he was the greatest horse in the world. And you say the horse killed him?"

"He kicked the stuffings out of him," the sergeant said, laconically. "Reminds me of the case we had up at Melville a few years ago. Only that was a dog—"

"Yes, yes," Judge Krieger interrupted impatiently. "I know all about that. But Joe Sibley was my friend. Just about the only friend in the world, except a man named Fletcher."

"That's me," said Johnny.

Judge Krieger jerked as if someone had prodded him with a bayonet. "Your name is Fletcher? John Fletcher?"

Johnny nodded. "And this is my sidekick, Sam Cragg."

"Cragg, ah yes." Judge Krieger surveyed Johnny for a moment, then thrust out his hand. "Did Joe tell you—that he was making you his heir?"

"No," said Johnny. Then, *"What?"*

"You're Sibley's heir."

"Heir," said Johnny thickly.

"Gee," said Sam Cragg in awe.

"Of course there are certain conditions," Judge Krieger said. "Sibley had no relatives, you know, and he was grateful to you for saving his life. Said you were the only unselfish man he's ever known."

"I'll tell a world," said Sam Cragg. "We sunk our whole bankroll on Sibley's oatburner; that proves how unselfish we are."

"Shut up, Sam." Johnny shook his head. "I still can't believe that Joe Sibley left me his dough."

The state trooper sergeant cleared his throat. "If you don't mind, gentlemen, there are certain formalities—"

"Certainly, Sergeant Britt," said Judge Krieger. "But you won't need us. Mr. Fletcher, suppose we step into the house. Uh, Wilbur, you might come along, too."

In a living room that could have been furnished by a woman instead of a bachelor, Judge Krieger cleared his throat. "Of course, I don't have the will with me, but since I drew it up just a few days ago I can tell you the terms quite clearly."

"There's no hurry," said Johnny. Joe's still out there."

"I know," winced Judge Krieger. "But since the terms of the will are so peculiar, I think you should know them right away. So you can be governed accordingly. Mr. Fletcher, when I said you were poor Joe's heir, I didn't mean that quite literally. In a manner of speaking, you are the chief legatee, but there are certain, ah, stipulations. I mean—well, to put it bluntly, the heir is really, ah, Ulysses."

Johnny gasped and Sam Cragg cried out. "The nag?"

Judge Krieger took out a handkerchief and blew his nose.

"I mentioned that Mr. Sibley was greatly attached to the horse and also that he, ah, had no relatives whatsoever. Wilbur—well, he's left you a thousand dollars in cash and a stipulation that you're to stay with Ulysses as long as he lives, drawing your regular salary."

Wilbur cleared his throat. "That's okay by me."

The attorney nodded. "And you, Mr. Fletcher, are appointed the custodian, or shall we say, guardian of Ulysses."

"Swell," said Johnny. "I live in a furnished room in the city. They won't mind if I bring in a horse or two."

"You're joking, Mr. Fletcher! As I was saying, Mr. Sibley left the bulk of his estate to his horse. After the animal's death it passes to you, Mr. Fletcher."

"How old is the horse?" Sam Cragg asked.

"Three years," said Wilbur Ganz.

Judge Krieger shook his head firmly. "No, Mr. Fletcher. The terms of the will are very rigid. You can't sell the horse and you can't give him away. And you can't, ah, cause him to—"

"Me?" said Johnny. "Heck, I love horses."

"I'm sure you do. And Joe Sibley was extremely fond of Ulysses. That's why he appointed me executor to see that the terms of the will are carried out."

"Oh," said Johnny.

"Yes, Mr. Fletcher. The estate consists of this place here and some two hundred thousand dollars in stocks and bonds. And cash."

"Two hundred thousand!" Johnny cried. "But—but the horse can't spend the cash. And I'll bet he doesn't know a stock from a bond."

"But *I* do, Mr. Fletcher. Hear me through. You can live here on the estate. Whatever expenses are incurred—for Ulysses—I pay—hay, grain, Wilbur's salary—"

"What about the groceries?" Sam asked.

THE judge turned up the palms of his hands. "I'm afraid Joe neglected that. At least there's no provision—"

"Wait a minute," said Johnny. "You mean we can buy all the hay and oats for Ulysses, but no pork chops for me and Sam?"

"The will states specifically that no expense is to be spared to provide food, veterinary care and the comfort of Ulysses. That means you can buy him the best food and equipment that can be had, but—"

"But no groceries?" Sam repeated.

Judge Krieger smiled. "No groceries."

"Well," said Johnny. "Joe Sibley was okay. A nice guy. But he's gone. So—so long, Judge."

"Wait a minute! You're refusing the legacy?"

"What legacy?"

"You didn't hear me all the way through. As I said before, Joe Sibley thought Ulysses the greatest race horse that ever lived. He thought that Ulysses' purpose in life was to run races and he made provision for that in the will. Whatever entry fees were necessary to enter Ulysses in a race, I am to pay. And the purses, well, they're to go to you."

Johnny looked blank for a moment, then exclaimed, "You mean you pay whatever's necessary to enter Ulysses in a race and if he wins, I get the purse?"

"That's right. I believe Sibley wanted to encourage you to race Ulysses as often as possible."

"And you pay entry and jockey fees?"

"Yes."

"Wait a minute," said Sam Cragg. "How many races has Ulysses won?"

Wilbur Ganz cleared his throat. "Well, he's only three years old and he didn't run his first race until last summer—"

"How many races has he been in?" Johnny asked sharply, following up Sam's question.

"I dunno, twenty-two or twenty-three. Maybe twenty-five."

"And how many of those has he won?"

Ganz scowled. "He came in third at Havre de Grace about four months ago."

"And that's all."

"Like I said before, Ulysses never got a good ride."

Johnny Fletcher turned back to Judge Krieger. "Who gets the dough if I turn it down?"

"What money? I pay all the bills."

"All right, Ulysses. Who gets him if I walk out of here?"

"Why, I'm afraid *I* receive it."

"You're afraid?"

Judge Krieger scowled. "Young man, I don't believe that I care for your attitude."

"Forget it. I accept."

"Hey!" protested Sam. "You can't—"

"Shut up, Sam. I accept, Judge."

"You understand that all the bills have to be sent to me?"

"Sure. Why should I be bothered with the bookkeeping?"

Judge Krieger nodded. "Very well, if you'll come to my office tomorrow morning at ten, I'll have the necessary papers ready to sign. By the way, there's a clause

in the will that states if Ulysses should, ah, come to an untimely end because of—"

"Whoa, Judge! You don't think I'd poison Ulysses just to get a couple of hundred thousand bucks?"

"I just thought I'd point it out, that's all. A veterinarian will make regular examinations and——" Judge Krieger smiled thinly. "You know what I mean."

"Sure," said Johnny Fletcher. "Now, let me add it up. The only way I can make any profit on this deal is to race Ulysses. I keep the dough he earns."

"That's about the size of it, Mr. Fletcher. Of course the estate goes to you, after Ulysses has died a natural death."

"Sure," said Johnny. "But he's practically a baby. He's good for maybe twenty-five, thirty years. Of course, I'm not even thinking of that. I'm a horse-lover and——"

III

SERGEANT BRITT came into the living room without knocking. "We're about finished outside. There's a girl here, who——"

"A girl?" Johnny asked. "Is she, I mean, does she look sore about anything?"

"She's bawling."

"I am not," Helen Rosser declared, coming into the room. But her face was tearstained and even now she had to bite her lip. Sergeant Britt backed hurriedly out of the living room.

"Miss Rosser," said Johnny Fletcher. "Judge Krieger."

The judge bowed. "You were a friend of Mr. Sibley?"

"No," replied Helen Rosser. "I never met him until today, but — he was my uncle."

Judge Krieger got that before Johnny Fletcher. "I wasn't aware that Joe had any living relatives. 'Pon my word!"

Johnny Fletcher looked at the judge suspiciously. "Say, does this mean that—?"

The judge whipped out his big handkerchief and blew his nose. He did it with a flourish. "No, no, of course not. Not at all; the will is specific. Ah, yes, drew it up myself. Only—" He cleared his throat rapidly, three times. "Miss—Miss, ah yes, Miss Rosser, did Mr. Sibley know, I mean was he aware that you were his niece?"

"Not until today."

"That's funny," said Johnny Fletcher.

The girl looked sharply at Johnny Fletcher. "What's funny about it?"

"Nothing. Only——"

"Everything's funny to you, isn't it, Mr.—Fletcher? That was quite an act you put on this afternoon, outside the track. Which reminds me—" She looked around, for the uniform of Sergeant Britt, no doubt.

Johnny said, "No use. This is Nassau County. The other stuff happened in Queens, which is part of New York City." He grinned at Judge Krieger, whose face bore a puzzled expression. "Miss Rosser is referring to a minor traffic incident. It seems that she bumped my car—"

"Why, you—!" Helen Rosser began indignantly.

Johnny shook his index finger chidingly. "Your uncle, Miss Rosser—"

The reminder had the effect on Helen Rosser of a pail of water thrown into her face. She gasped and stepped back. "What kind of a man are you?" she cried.

Johnny made no reply to that, but his face became thoughtful. Judge Krieger used his handkerchief on his nose and stepped up to Johnny for a last confidential bellow. "Ten in the morning, Mr. Fletcher. My office."

Johnny added, but addressed Helen Rosser. "I'm sorry, Miss Rosser."

She suddenly inhaled and, giving him a scornful glance, whirled and headed for the door. Judge Krieger, who had already been going toward it, stopped as if to talk to Johnny once more, but shrugged his big shoulders and continued out.

Then Wilbur Ganz popped forward. "Don't believe it, pal. Not a damn word of it."

"What?"

"Everything! Joe, the judge and the doll. It's a game, see. The dame ain't Joe's niece and the judge is a damn crook. An' Joe wasn't killed by Ulysses."

"How do you know he wasn't?"

Ganz snorted. "Wasn't I here?"

"You saw it?"

"Not exactly. But I knew Ulysses, see."

"I don't see. Begin at the beginning."

"There ain't no beginning. I brung Ulysses home from the track, see. The boss was already here with that rat."

"There are a lot of rats, Wilbur. Give them names."

"I don't know the guy's name. But I knew him. He was here yesterday."

"What'd he look like?"

"Like a guy, see. A lousy rat."

"Did he have a tail?"

"Huh? Oh, I get it. You want to know what he looked like. Sure. 'Bout your size—"

"Five feet eleven," said Johnny. "One seventy and, ah, good looking." He grinned wryly.

"Not exactly. Maybe he was a couple of inches shorter. And maybe heavier. Mmm, maybe not. But I'd know him if I saw him again. His name was Ned or Ted or something like that?"

"Maybe even Ed?"

"Yeah, I didn't quite get it. Naturally, the boss didn't introduce me."

"Why not?"

Wilbur shrugged. "The boss and me was pals, see. I'd been with him a long time—"

"How long?"

"Eight-ten years. We was pals, see. I did the work around here and never a word between us. We was—"

"Pals! Go on from that Wilbur."

"Sure. We was—okay, okay. I just wanted to make it clear that he was a swell boss. Naturally, I wouldn't take advantage when he had company. So when this louse comes around, Joe takes him out to the stable—"

"Yesterday?"

"No, today. Yesterday the guy came to the house and Joe practically run him off the place. When I brung Ulysses home today they was here already and I could see somethin' was cookin'. Joe sent me uptown for some liniment. That was his excuse, see. He wanted to have it out with this guy. So when I came back, well, there he was—"

"At last," Johnny said. "You found the body. And this Ed or Ned or Ted was gone."

"That's what I was tellin' you."

"Did you tell Sergeant Britt?"

"The cop? Naw. I tried to tell him what was what, but he was too thick-headed. Like all cops. He knew everything there was. Just because Joe was in the stall and there was some blood on Ulysses' shoe, naturally the horse killed him. That's a cop for you."

"You don't like policemen, Wilbur?"

Wilbur screwed up his face, and made a raucous sound with his mouth. "That's what I think of cops."

"All right, Wilbur. Now tell me what makes you think Judge Krieger is a crook?"

"You saw him, didn't you? A big stuffed shirt. He got the boss to make up

that phoney will. Joe always said that he'd see I was taken care of."

"He did take care of you, Wilbur."

"Yah!" said Wilbur. "And look what he did to you."

"Joe Sibley didn't owe me anything."

"You saved his life, didn't you?"

JOHNNY FLETCHER looked at Sam Cragg. "We were standing in the subway station at Fiftieth and Broadway, a couple of weeks ago. It was right around five o'clock and there was a mob on the platform.

"The train was pulling in and the mob started shoving around. Joe got pushed off the platform."

"And you jumped down to save him. Joe told me all about it."

Joe Sibley had believed it. Johnny sometimes wondered about it himself. Had he actually jumped off the platform, or had he too been jostled by the crowd and shoved off and since his own life was already jeopardized, had he merely exerted himself a trifle more and rescued Sibley along with himself? Johnny Fletcher had no illusions about himself.

He nodded to Wilbur. "What about the girl?"

"Joe never said anything about having relatives. If you ask me, it's damn funny she should pop up right after he's been knocked off."

"She was at the track earlier this afternoon."

"I didn't see her."

"I saw her, Wilbur. And she was talking to Joe, right after Ulysses lost his race. By the way, who is this Willie Pipett you said he got to the jockey?"

"You don't know Willie Pipett?"

"I'm a stranger here."

"Yeah, but you ain't in New York. Pipett's the biggest crook in the game."

"How so? Does he fix races?"

"There're tracks where he's been kicked off of. He's the biggest bookie in this neck of the woods."

"How could he be a bookie? They have parimutuels at Jamaica."

"Yeah, sure, and Willie does a bigger business than ever."

"I don't see how he can, Willie. They certainly wouldn't let him make book at the track."

"Naw? Maybe they don't, but he's a bookie just the same. Take my word for it."

"I will, for the moment. But I don't think—"

Sergeant Britt stuck his head in at the door. "All right, we're leaving now."

"Thanks, Sergeant."

Britt withdrew and Johnny turned to Sam Cragg. "What time is it, Sam?"

"How would I know? You know where my watch is."

"Ah yes, have you got the time, Wilbur?"

Wilbur pulled out a dollar watch. "Almost six-thirty. I gotta do my chores."

Wilbur left the room and Sam Cragg, who had been very unhappy throughout the whole affair, finally exploded.

"Johnny, me and you been in some screwy situations, but this takes the cake. Let's get the hell out of it."

"You mean walk out on two hundred thousand dollars?"

"What two hundred thousand bucks?"

Johnny grimaced. "The money's here and there ought to be some way of tapping it."

"With that judge watching over it? Forget it, Johnny. And if you're thinking of making any money from racing that bundle of bones and hoofs, forget that, too. You saw him run today, if you want to call that running. I could run faster myself."

"And carry a jockey?"

SAM glowered. "All right, then I'll tell you what's eating you. You think I don't know. I got the picture when you started questioning that stumblebum; you want to play detective again."

"Who, me?"

"Yes, you."

Johnny pursed up his lips. "Well, there are some interesting possibilities. Dating back a couple of weeks. I wonder if Joe was shoved off that subway platform accidentally—"

Sam groaned. "Here we go again!"

Johnny shook his head and looked around the room. It was a rather small living room, but furnished tastefully, even down to doilies on a couple of end tables. There was a fireplace which Johnny approached.

He got down on his knees and began poking at the ashes.

"What do you expect to find in there, Johnny?" Sam Cragg asked, impatiently.

"I don't know, but somebody's been burning paper— Ah!"

His fingers brushed aside ashes and fished out a tiny scrap of scorched paper. He blew gently on it, then lowered his face until it was but a few inches from the scrap.

"Jordan Building, New York City," he read. "That's all that's left on it."

"No name?"

"It's been burned off. It's part of an envelope. Damn, why couldn't just a little more of it have been left."

He poked in the ashes some more but finally got to his feet and brushed off his knees. He sighed regretfully. "That's all in here."

He took another glance around the living room, then went to the adjoining kitchen, which had a breakfast nook at one side. He pulled open a few drawers and looked into a cupboard, then moved on to a tiny bedroom, furnished with a single bed, a couple of chairs and a chest of drawers. A couple of spicy art magazines were on top of the chest of drawers.

"Wilbur's room," he murmured.

"S'pose he does the housework?"

Johnny nodded. "Wilbur's the maid. He's also the stable boy and valet to Ulysses. This must be Joe Sibley's room." He stepped into the adjoining bedroom, more than twice the size of Wilbur's and well furnished, although almost as effeminately as the living room. The bed had silk sheets.

Johnny moved directly to an oaken desk and began pulling out drawers. They were surprisingly empty of personal objects, although well filled with stationery and writing materials. Some of the stationery bore the monogram "JS," but other sheets carried the imprint of the Sibley Stables.

"One barn and one horse," Sam Cragg commented caustically. "Damn funny, with all his dough, the small house he's got."

"It was big enough for him," Johnny said. "Joe wasn't used to luxury. He told me he was broke all his life until about ten years ago, when they struck oil on his old farm down in Oklahoma. He lived in a one-room shack and the only running water was when it rained and the water came in through the roof. Well, come on."

"Where?"

"Home."

"Aren't you staying here?"

"Not just yet. Until I find out a little more about things I'd rather sleep in a bedroom that isn't so close to the ground."

IN THE backyard they found Wilbur Ganz coming from the stables. "Did you tuck in Ulysses for the night, Wilbur?" Johnny asked.

There was a worried expression on Wilbur's face. "Yeah, the poor fella's as nervous as a kitten. Horses don't like the smell of blood. That's why I know Ulysses didn't—"

"Sure, sure," said Johnny hurriedly. "Look, Wilbur, we've got to run into town tonight. But we'll be out the first thing in the morning. You can handle things all right by yourself, can't you?"

"I always have."

"Fine, but, ah, you see, I had a little bad luck this afternoon. You know, I went overboard on Ulysses and now I dis-

covered that we haven't even got carfare back to town. You haven't got a buck you can slip me until tomorrow?"

"Just a buck? Sure." Wilbur reached into his pocket and drew out a roll of bills that made Johnny's eyes pop. "You're sure a buck's enough?"

"Well, since you're so well heeled—a tenner will do nicely, Wilbur."

Wilbur peeled off the note and Johnny saw that there were many more tens in the roll. "Thanks, Wilbur. We'll see you tomorrow then."

"You want me to run you down to the depot in the station wagon?"

"There's a station wagon?"

"Oh sure; also a horse trailer that we use to take Ulysses to the tracks."

"Well!" exclaimed Johnny. "Then why don't I just take the station wagon and drive to town in it?"

Wilbur looked dubious for a moment, then shrugged. "I guess what the judge says makes you the boss, doesn't it? Actually, the wagon belongs to Ulysses, but—"

"And I'm Ulysses' guardian. Break out the station wagon, Wilbur!"

A couple of minutes later, Johnny turned the station wagon into the paved road. As he straightened the car he suddenly chuckled. "This thing gets more interesting right along."

"How do you figure?" Sam asked.

"This station wagon. Who pays for the gas?"

"You do."

"Why? Who's to say whether I'm driving it in Ulysses' interests or not?"

"The judge says so."

"But the judge lives over in Great Neck."

Sam shook his head gloomily.

IV

JOHNNY FLETCHER parked the station wagon in front of the 45th Street Hotel and stepped to the sidewalk. Mr. Peabody, the manager of the hotel, was standing in the doorway, issuing an order to the doorman. When he saw Johnny and Sam get out of the station wagon he exclaimed and stepped forward.

"Send it to the garage, my good man," Johnny said loftily.

"Where'd you get that?" Mr. Peabody cried.

"I beg your pardon?" Johnny asked, arching his eyebrows. "Do I ask you where *you* get your things?"

Mr. Peabody winked in confusion. "But how could you trade in that antique you had on this?"

"People do trade in their old cars on new ones, don't they?"

"You know what I mean."

"I don't believe I do. If you're insinuating that I'm broke—tut-tut! I've been to the races."

Mr. Peabody struck his forehead with his open palm. "You're the luckiest man, Fletcher!"

"I live right, Mr. Peabody. You, too, could be lucky if you lived right."

"I could live a lot better if guests paid their rent promptly whenever it's due," Peabody snapped.

"That's a dirty crack," Johnny said. "But I didn't hear it. On account of my rent's paid until the day after tomorrow. I always pay my rent ahead when I'm staying at a cheap hotel."

Mr. Peabody made a wry face and then trotted into the hotel. Johnny and Sam followed more leisurely. They rode up to the eighth floor and entered Room 821.

"Eight-thirty," Johnny said, cheerfully. "A wash-up, a little dinner and then—what, Sam?"

"A good night's sleep," grunted Sam.

"All right, if you want to, Sam. However, since we've been sleeping so much lately I thought we might go out and have a spot of fun tonight. A good movie—or something."

"Dorothy Lamour's at the Paramount."

"Oh, is she? Well!"

IT WAS shortly after nine-thirty when they came out of the Automat. Sam turned instinctively south toward 42nd, but at the corner of 46th, Johnny stopped at a newsstand.

"Where's the game tonight, Jack?" he asked.

"What game?" the newsie asked.

"Willie's."

"How should I know?"

Johnny nodded and started across the street. Sam hurried to catch up with him. "I thought we were going to see Dotty Lamour!"

"Sure, but the stage show is on now and I never like the stage shows. There's plenty of time to catch the last picture."

"What game were you talking about?"

"Oh, a little game I used to know about. A small stud game. I thought we might kibitz a half hour."

"But we only got nine bucks left, Johnny."

"This used to be a two-bit game." They had crossed the street and turned north on Seventh. At another newsstand Johnny repeated his question as to the whereabouts of Willie's game.

"Why ask me?" the newsie demanded. "Do I get a cut on it?"

"Maybe you ought to."

"Yeah, but I don't. Why don't you go ask Moxie?"

"Where'll I find him this time of evening?"

"Where you always find him, at the Bascom."

"Thanks, cousin."

They recrossed the street and proceeded to the Bascom Hotel. There Johnny accosted the doorman. "Where'll I find Moxie?"

The doorman put a warning finger to his lips. "In the lobby, of course."

They entered the hotel and Johnny approached a bell boy. "Where's Moxie?"

"Over by the desk."

Johnny looked toward the desk and saw two uniformed men. "Which one is he?"

"The captain."

Johnny crossed the lobby leisurely and caught the bell captain's eyes. He winked and Moxie came over to him. "Yes, sir?"

"Where's the game tonight, Moxie?"

The bell captain regarded Johnny for a moment, then turned his glance deliberately at Sam Cragg. He shook his head slightly. "What game?"

"Willie's game; whose did you think?"

"Willie who?"

"Cut it out, Moxie. Willie Pipett."

Moxie laughed shortly. "Who's Willie Pipett?"

Johnny groaned in disgust. "Do *I* look like a dick?"

"I've seen worse looking dicks. Your sidekick, f'rinstance."

"Sam can't help his looks," Johnny retorted. "I'm Johnny Fletcher, the book agent. Uh, maybe you know Eddie Miller over at the Forty-fifth Street Hotel."

"I know him," said Moxie. "A chiseler."

"All right. So where's the game tonight? I've got a roll and I'd like to sit in for awhile."

"I get it now," exclaimed Moxie. "You think I'm a steerer, for a gambling game. Ha-ha! That's funny. Me, a steerer. Somebody gave *you* a wrong steer, copper."

"I'm a pal of Joe Sibley's," Johnny said in a last attempt.

The name registered. Moxie's innocent forehead creased a little. "Yeah? Then you ought to know how to get in touch with Willie."

"But I don't. I'm from out-of-town. I saw Joe at Jamaica this afternoon—"

"What's his horse's name?"

"Ulysses. He came in last."

"If I gave you a telephone number," said Moxie, "that wouldn't prove a darn thing. I could say that you wanted the number of a good florist and I gave it to you. Maybe you misunderstood and got the wrong number."

"Sure. Anybody can make a mistake. What's the number?"

"Manhattan 1-3644. If a woman answers, hang up."

Johnny handed Moxie a quarter. The bell captain looked at the coin in disgust. "That'll teach me a lesson."

Johnny pretended he didn't hear. He started toward the telephone booths, with Sam at his heels. "Just a small game," Sam growled. "Willie Pipett's game."

"We're not there yet."

Johnny stepped into a booth and closed the door in Sam's face. He dropped a nickel into the slot and dialed Manhattan 3644.

A gruff voice said, "Hello."

"Where's Willie tonight?" Johnny asked.

"What number are you calling?"

"The number Moxie gave me."

"Oh," said the gruff voice. "Room 414. The Lake." The connection was broken.

JOHNNY stepped out of the booth. "The Lake Hotel," he said to Sam Cragg.

Sam groaned. "I don't like these hush-hush places. There's always a bunch of tough guys."

Johnny grinned. "Since when are you afraid of tough guys?"

"I'm not, when they haven't got rooty-toots in their pockets. These birds always have."

"You been going to the movies, Sam," Johnny said.

The Lake Hotel was on a side street, near Eighth Avenue. It was known as a fairly respectable hostelry. It advertised extensively in rural publications and drew a good tourist business. The management wasn't responsible, however, for what went on in the rooms.

Johnny and Sam rode up to the fourth floor in the elevator and located Room 414. Johnny tapped lightly on the door and it was opened a crack by a pimply-faced boy of nineteen or twenty.

"Moxie sent me," Johnny said brightly.

The door was opened, revealing a tiny sitting room. The pimply-faced youth was the only occupant. He nodded to a door at the right. Johnny heard the low murmur of voices as he touched the door knob. He inhaled softly and opened the door.

The room was thick with smoke, but through the fog Johnny could see a half dozen men seated around a table. All eyes went to Johnny and Sam.

"Who're you?" a heavy-set man barked.

"Moxie sent me."

"What's your name?"

"Johnny Fletcher. This is Sam Cragg."

The heavy-set man put a cigar stub in his mouth. He examined Johnny and Sam for a moment, then suddenly called, "Ben!"

The pimply-faced boy came up behind Johnny. "Yeah, Willie?"

"Telephone Moxie. Ask him if he sent a couple of chumps."

"Who's a chump?" Sam Cragg growled.

Willie waved a fat hand on which there were a couple of rings. "Save it, pal."

Johnny stepped closer to the table. The players were using chips, but there was a cigar box on the bed, handy to Willie Pipett's reach.

"Stud, eh?" he remarked pleasantly. "My favorite game."

Willie Pipett ignored Johnny. "It's your deal, Lefty."

A lean, swarthy man gathered up the cards and began to shuffle them with a dexterity that caught Johnny's attention. Just as he put out the pack for a cut, Ben, the lookout, returned. "He says they're pals of Joe Sibley's."

Willie Pipett jerked. "Joe Sibley—!"

"I know," said Johnny easily. "Tough on Joe. Not so tough on me. I'm his heir."

Willie Pipett's hard eyes fixed themselves on Johnny's face. "Joe didn't have any relatives."

"You heard about Joe getting shoved in front of a subway?" Johnny asked. "Couple weeks ago. I grabbed him up. So—"

Willie nodded thoughtfully. "All right, sit down. Abe, eight's too many."

ONE of the players got up from his chair. Johnny took the seat and the retiring player got another chair for Sam.

Johnny folded his hands on the table. "What're you playing, boys?"

"Whites are five, reds ten and the blues twenty-five. You start with these." Willie Pipett had lined up a stack of ten whites, ten reds and ten blues. He shoved them across the table to Johnny, then stacked up a similar number for Sam Cragg.

"Deal, Lefty," he said then.

Lefty threw out the cards with quiet precision, one face down and one up for every player. Shielding his hole card, Johnny turned up a corner. It was a four-spot.

"King is high," said Willie. "I open for five." He tossed a white chip to the center of the table.

Sam Cragg, next, put in a white chip. Two other players followed suit. It was up to Johnny then. With the eight of hearts showing he picked up a white and a red and shoved them out. "I raise it ten."

The two players after Johnny promptly turned down their hands. That brought it up to Willie Pipett. "A gambler, eh?" he grunted and looked at his hole card again. He tossed in a red and a blue. "And a blue."

The man at his elbow turned down his cards, but the next one, at Sam's right, with a queen showing put up the chips. Sam, with a two-spot turned up, made a great show of peeking at his hole card, then toyed with the chips a moment before throwing in a red and blue.

Willie Pipett clamped his jaws over his cigar stub and grinned frostily at Johnny. "Up to you, Sport. Do you raise?"

"Why not?" Johnny asked and threw in three blue chips.

That brought a grunt from Willie Pipett, but he put up the raise of two blue chips. The player with the queen scowled but also stayed. Sam called and then Lefty dealt out another card all around.

WILLIE PIPETT caught an ace and the cigar butt went up a fraction of an inch. The next man caught a deuce and swore softly. Sam got a king and Johnny drew the five of hearts.

"I ought to check you," said Pipett, "but it's against my principles since I've got the best hand. Three blues."

The man with the queen and deuce swore again but remained. Sam flipped in his own chips, and Johnny followed. "Next time, boys. Next time."

Lefty dealt a ten to Willie, another queen to the next man, a seven to Sam Cragg and the four of hearts to Johnny.

"All hearts," Willie Pipett mused. "From four to eight."

"I'll settle for a black," Johnny replied cheerfully.

"Yeah, but I've got mine now. So it's costing you four blues."

The man with the pair of queens now revealed his strength. "I kick that up four blues."

"Three queens," growled Sam Cragg. "That beats my deuces backed up." He turned down his hand.

"I've only got four blues left," said Johnny. "But I'll make it up with reds and whites." He shoved in the balance of his red chips and added two whites.

"You're just calling?" Pipett asked.

"Against the three queens?"

Pipett nodded. "Happy never bets 'em unless he's got them. But I'm in this

deep, I'll stick." He pushed in four blue chips.

Lefty dealt out the last cards and as he tossed a king to Willie, Johnny saw a puff of smoke issue from the cigar butt.

That gave Willie a pair of aces showing, and since he had been betting strong right from the start, he must have had another king grace in the hole. If the latter, he now had three aces. If the former, he had two big pairs—not enough to beat Happy's possible three queens.

Happy got a trey and swore his disappointment. Then the card flipped across the table to Johnny. The six of clubs. His straight flush possibility was shattered, but there remained the chance of a straight. Or so it appeared to the others. Johnny knew that he had a mere pair of fours. Against him were aces and queens.

"You get 'em, boys," he said, cheerfully.

Willie Pipett rolled the cigar to the other side of his mouth. "I won't say a word," he said. "Except—five blues!"

A sob was torn from Happy's throat. "Three aces!" He turned down his hand.

Johnny laughed. "Competition. Gimme another stack, Willie."

"How many?"

"Five dollars' worth."

"What?"

An icy shudder suddenly shook Johnny. He laughed again, hollowly. "Five hundred—naturally." He did not look at Sam Cragg.

Willie Pipett began to count out chips. Halfway through he shot a quick glance at Johnny. The latter smiled pleasantly.

Willie pushed across twenty blue chips. "So—?"

Johnny pushed them all into the pot. "Poker's gone up, Willie, old boy!"

Willie Pipett turned down his hand. "You win, Mr. Fletcher. "

Johnny began raking in the pot. His eyes were on the table for a few moments, but when he got the chips all in front of him he was caught by the silence around the table and looked up quickly. He met a ring of eyes.

"You play a nice game, Mr. Fletcher," said Willie Pipett. "I know it's against the rules, but—did you really have it?"

Johnny waggled his index finger chidingly. "You didn't pay to see it."

Willie sighed. "No, I didn't. Well—I'm a little short of chips, so if you'll—"

"Sure," said Johnny. He began picking out the blue chips.

"No, no," said Willie Pipett. "We have a rule. You pay cash for the chips. Then I buy them all in at the end of the game."

V

THE chill that had descended upon Johnny when he had learned that the blue chips were worth twenty-five dollars instead of twenty-five cents, swept through his entire body. He cleared his throat.

"What's the diff? I've got too many chips. You need them." He began shoving a stack across the table.

"No," said Willie Pipett. "Cash."

"That's the rule," added Happy unnecessarily.

"Rules are made to be broken," Johnny said with forced heartiness.

"Not this one, Mr. Fletcher," said Willie Pipett.

Johnny tapped the table lightly. "Oh, come now, fellows, if you're going to act like that—"

"To put it plainly, Mr. Fletcher," Pipett went on, "we'd like to see the color of your money. You bought nine hundred dollars' worth of chips. And your friend got four hundred worth."

"What the hell!" growled Sam Cragg.

"That's what I was going to say," said Johnny. "I hate to quit a game when I'm winning, but since you boys feel that way about us, all right, we'll cash in—and no hard feelings."

"No hard feelings, no," said Pipett. "You can cash in, but I still want to see your money."

"Why? If I'm cashing in."

Pipett laughed harshly. "You know what happened to me once? A long time ago. Fella got in my game without any dough. He was hard up, desperate, you might say. He figured if he won, fine, and if he lost—well, what could we do when he didn't have it?"

Sam Cragg pushed back his chair but did not get up. Johnny whistled a couple of notes. "What did you do?"

"Nothing," said Willie Pipett. "The cops couldn't prove a thing. Naturally."

"Naturally," said Johnny Fletcher.

"Tsch! Tsch! A guy'd have to be pretty desperate to pull a stunt like that."

"Yeah, wouldn't he?"

Johnny grinned and made a show of reaching into his inside breast pocket for his wallet. He brought it out and slapped it on the table. Willie Pipett's eyes sized up the wallet.

Johnny waited for a moment but Pipett's eyes remained on the wallet. Johnny had to go through with it. He opened the wallet and cried out in consternation.

"Am I embarrassed!"

"You haven't got the ough-day?" Pipett asked in a monotone.

"Sam!" exclaimed Johnny. "Did I leave the money you got from the bank in the escritoire?"

"You're good," said Willie Pipett, "but not good enough."

"So what's the difference? Deduct the amount I owe for the chips and—"

"Yah!" sneered one of the poker players.

"Wait a minute," Johnny said hotly. "You know that I inherited Joe Sibley's estate."

"*You* may know it, Fletcher," Pipett said. "I don't."

"But you know that Joe was killed this afternoon—killed by his horse?"

"The papers didn't say anything about his heirs."

"Didn't they? I guess that wasn't important enough for the city papers. But if you doubt my word, why don't you telephone the executor—Judge Krieger of Great Neck?"

"That's a long distance call."

"Fifteen cents," said Johnny scornfully. He flicked a white chip. "Take it out of that."

"The hell with this, Johnny," Sam Cragg cried, kicking back his chair. "Let's get out of here."

"With or without?" Pipett asked.

Johnny swallowed hard. "Willie Pipett wouldn't welsh."

Pipett glowered. "I said, with or without a couple of broken arms or legs."

Sam Cragg banged the table with his fist so that all of Johnny's chips as well as those of the other players skittered around. "I can lick any two men here. I can do it for money, marbles or chips."

The player named Lefty took out an automatic from a shoulder holster. "Sit down, punk!"

"Put down the roscoe," Sam said, "and I'll take you along with the other two."

"This's gone far enough," Willie Pipett said, losing his temper. "You won thirteen hundred and eighty dollars, Fletcher. All right, show me nine hundred and you can have your winnings."

"Since you're asking for it, Willie—where were you at four-thirty this afternoon?"

"Eh?"

"At four-thirty this afternoon?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"You know, Willie. Were you around—Manhasset?"

PIPETT took the cigar stub from his mouth. "So you're a dick, after all?"

Johnny waited a full second, then said, "No."

"I was at Jamaica," Pipett said.

"So was I, but I left after the second race. That was about two-thirty. It only takes twenty minutes to drive to Manhasset."

"I thought you said the horse killed Sibley?"

Johnny shrugged. "D'you know Pat Shea, the jockey?"

"Yes, I know him. So do several thousand other people. What's that got to do with this?"

"There was talk of Ulysses being pulled."

Pipett laughed harshly. "If you shot every other horse in the race, Ulysses still couldn't win."

"Thanks. I own Ulysses."

"Sell him for glue."

"I resent that," said Johnny. He drew a deep breath and judged that the moment was ripe. "All right, Pipett, you owe me thirteen hundred and eighty dollars. You don't have to pay me now. Tomorrow—"

"Lefty," said Pipett. "You go home with them. If he's got nine hundred in that escri—escreetwar——"

"Why don't you come along, Willie?" Johnny challenged.

"Because I've got other business."

Lefty got up and put the automatic back in his shoulder holster. It was under his right arm, suitable for a man with the nickname of Lefty.

"And if they haven't got it, Willie?"

"Give me a jingle."

"All right," said Johnny. "Let's go." He turned away from the table, then reached back. "Look, Willie!" He flipped up his hole card, then as exclamations of astonishment went up, headed for the door.

Sam Cragg crowded at his heels and behind him, Lefty, the gunman. They passed through the little sitting room and out to the corridor. Lefty stood a few feet away, as they waited for the elevator and as they got in he crowded to the rear, so that he was behind them when they left at the lobby floor.

Outside the hotel Lefty looked inquiringly at Johnny. "Cab?"

"Might as well."

They got in the machine that pulled up to the canopy. Lefty climbed in first and took the place at the left. He crossed his arms, with his left hand under his coat lapel.

Johnny seated himself in the center and Sam on the far side.

"Forty-fifth Street Hotel," Johnny said to the cabby.

Lefty sniffed. "The dump!"

"The manager's my uncle," said Johnny. "He won't let me stay anywhere else when I'm in town."

"If you don't like the hotel, you don't have to come," Sam said belligerently.

"I'm just going for the ride. You guys may take a ride later on."

That killed the conversation for the short trip across Times Square. In front of the Forty-fifth Street Hotel, Johnny clambered out and let Lefty pay the taxi fare.

As they passed through the lobby, Johnny saw Eddie Miller, the bell captain, standing near the elevators. "Did they deliver that package, Eddie?" he asked.

"Package?" the bell captain asked. Then, "I'll have to check in the package room."

"Wise guy," Lefty snarled in Johnny's ear as they stepped into the elevator.

At the eighth floor they all got out and Lefty again kept behind a few feet. Johnny unlocked the door and put on the light inside. He stepped into the room and Sam followed.

Lefty came to the doorway and looked into the small, dingily furnished room. "If there's nine hundred bucks in here I'll eat it."

Johnny pointed to the battered writing

desk at the far side of the room. "Look in there."

LEFTY drew his automatic with his left hand and closed the door with his right. Then stepping carefully past Sam Cragg he walked to the desk. He never took his eyes off Sam. Not until he had jerked open the single drawer of the desk. Then he risked a quick glance down.

His eyes came back to Sam quickly, but already Sam was moving forward.

"Hold it!" Lefty snapped.

Sam stopped. "Put down the roscoe!"

"I'll put it down on your head," Lefty said.

He gestured to Johnny to get away from the bed and moved beside Sam. "I want to make a telephone call."

Johnny moved away reluctantly. "Come to think of it, I forgot to get that money from the bank."

Eddie Miller's knuckles rapped lustily on the thin door panels. "Mr. Fletcher," he called.

Lefty's face twisted angrily. He shoved the automatic back into its holster, but kept his hand under the lapel. "A word from you, Fletcher, and I'll blast you just the same."

"Come in, Eddie," Johnny called.

Eddie Miller pushed open the door. His wise young eyes seemed to size up the situation. "About that package, Mr. Fletcher—"

"Yes, Eddie?"

"Why, it was delivered all right, but that new kid took it to the wrong room. Uh, the house dick's gone to get it. He'll bring it down—right away."

"Moynahan," said Johnny. "Ah, yes." He grinned at Lefty. "Well, Lefty, old boy, it was swell seeing you again. You must give me a ring soon and we'll have lunch together." He yawned. "Boy, am I sleepy."

Lefty's swarthy face was so dark with anger that Johnny would not have been surprised if the gunman had had a stroke.

"Okay," Lefty said, thickly. "Okay. I'll tell Willie."

"You do that, Lefty, old pal."

Lefty kept his hand under his coat as he marched to the door, past Eddie Miller. Johnny gave Eddie a signal and the latter kicked the door shut. Then Johnny padded to it and shot the bolt.

When he came away from the door he closed his eyes and exhaled heavily.

"Did I say the wrong thing?" Eddie Miller asked, tongue in cheek.

Johnny put a finger to his lips. He waited a moment, then returned to the door. He put his ear against it, then unlatched and opened it cautiously. He peeked out into the hall, then turned back to the room.

"Eddie, my boy, here's a quarter for you," he said.

"Two bits," said Eddie Miller. "Did I save your life."

"What makes you think that?"

"That was Lefty Lenski."

"So?"

"And that wasn't a ham sandwich he was holding under his coat. He's one of Willie Pipett's boys."

"Who's Willie Pipett, Eddie?"

"You don't know who Willie Pipett is? Gee, just about the biggest bookie in this town."

"Where does he operate?"

Eddie Miller took a little red notebook from his pocket. He riffled the pages. "You call Dakota 1-7171."

"Just like that? How'll he know who you are?"

"You give him your initials, after the first time. Of course, you got to be recommended first."

"Who do you get to recommend you?"

"Mmm," said Eddie. "Anyone of about five hundred guys. Every hotel in this neighborhood has someone taking bets for Willie Pipett."

"Yeah? Who takes them in this hotel?"

"Me."

Johnny Fletcher winced. "For the love

of Mike, Eddie, how many angles have you got?"

"Do you suppose I'm paying for my Caddy with the tips I make here? Besides, I only get 5 percent. But I get it hot or cold."

"What do you mean, hot or cold?"

"Some guys only get it when the sucker loses. If Pipett has to pay off, the bookie doesn't get the 5 percent. I get it hot or cold. You want to lay some bets, you tell me up to ten minutes of post time."

"I may take you up on that, Eddie. What do you think of a horse named Ulysses?"

"That's the name of a goat, not a horse."

"You don't think he's any good?"

"I got a cousin works for the Sheffield Dairy. They've got a hundred horses can beat Ulysses."

"I'm glad to hear that, Eddie. You see, I own Ulysses."

Eddie Miller whistled. "How'd you ever—I mean, when did you buy him?"

"I didn't buy him. I inherited him."

"That's different. In that case I'll talk to my cousin. They're always looking for good horses at the milk company and if he puts in a word he can get the company to buy this Ulysses."

"Get us an offer, Eddie," put in Sam Cragg.

EDDIE MILLER grinned. "The plug got anything to do with that nifty station wagon you drove up this evening?"

"Yeah, I inherited that, too. And about two hundred grand."

"You're kidding!"

"Well, practically."

"Yes or no?"

"Practically, Eddie. The horse inherited the dough, but I'm the horse's guardian."

Eddie laughed. "That's what I like about you, Mr. Fletcher. You tell the damdest stories and you always make them sound convincing. Like the time you borrowed the five bucks from me."

"Ha-ha," said Johnny, without laughing.

Eddie took the cue. "Better lock your door tonight." He went out and Johnny promptly followed the bell captain's advice.

"All right, Johnny," said Sam, gloomily. "You got rid of the guy tonight. But something tells me we ain't heard the last of this."

Johnny yawned. "This time I *am* sleepy. Got to get up early tomorrow."

VI

AT PRECISELY ten o'clock, Johnny pulled up the station wagon in front of a two-story brick building on Middle Neck Road, in Greak Neck. He climbed out and waited for Sam Cragg to join him on the sidewalk.

"Deever, McClintock, Deever & Krieger," he read on the windows of the second floor. "You'd think they'd put a judge's name first."

A flight of stairs ran up the side of the building. Johnny and Sam climbed them and entered a large room in which an immensely fat woman sat behind a roll-top desk.

"Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Cragg," Johnny said. "We have an appointment with the judge."

"Which judge?"

"You've got more than one here?"

The woman shook layers of fat in a shrug. "The title is an honorary one. Although Judge Krieger *was* a judge—"

"That's him."

At that moment Judge Krieger opened a door. "Ah, Mr. Fletcher, I was wondering if you'd showed up. Come in, sir!"

Johnny started forward with Sam Cragg following. The judge shook his head. "Just Mr. Fletcher."

"Me and Sam wear each other's shirts," Johnny said. "Come along, Sam."

Judge Krieger frowned but offered no further protest. In his big private office a man sat in a leather-covered chair. He was an incredibly thin man. Although he remained seated, Johnny judged his height to be over six feet; yet he weighed no more than a hundred and ten pounds.

"Mr. Fletcher," said Judge Krieger. "This is Mr. Sibley. Albert Sibley."

"Oh-oh," said Johnny.

Sibley held out a withered hand, but Johnny pretended not to see it. "Any relation to Joe Sibley?"

"That," said Judge Krieger, "is the point. Mr. Sibley claims that he is Joe's brother."

"Phooey," said Sam Cragg.

The judge fixed Sam with a scowl. "Mr. Sibley," he announced sonorously, "believes that he has a claim against his brother's estate."

"You said it, Judge," Albert Sibley said. "Joe was my brother and naturally, me being his only surviving relative—"

"What about Helen Rosser?" Johnny asked.

"Helen—" Sibley's eyes darted to Judge Krieger's face, "Helen is here?"

"Do you know her?" the judge asked.

Sibley bobbed his head. "She's my niece."

"But she hasn't got your name," said Johnny. "Don't tell me there's a sister, too."

"She's dead. Annie. Married a no-good named Rosser. He walked out on her when Helen was just a kid."

Johnny Fletcher laughed. "The line forms on the right."

"Eh?"

"The relatives. Joe said he didn't have any and now they're popping up like grasshoppers."

Sibley looked up at the judge. "Is that your idea, too?"

"No, no, Mr. Fletcher loves a joke. In matters like this we have to be careful."

"I get it," said Sibley. He got up—and up—until he reached a height of six feet five. "I came here first, just to give you a chance. I see now that I'll have to get me a lawyer."

"You'll have a difficult case, Mr. Sibley," said the judge. "I drew up the will myself."

"Sure, but it's screwy. Let a jury hear it and they'll know that poor Joe had gone balmy. Leaving his dough to a horse!"

"Mr. Sibley was in full possession of his mental faculties," Judge Krieger said, stiffly. "I can assure you of that."

"Can you assure a jury?"

The fat receptionist came to the door. "Miss Rosser."

"Ah," said Johnny.

"Show her in," said the judge.

Helen Rosser came in, accompanied by a lean young man of about thirty, who could have spotted Robert Taylor a few points and beaten him in a beauty contest.

She looked around the room and hesitated just inside the door. "I—am I intruding?"

"Not at all, Miss Rosser," the judge said, silkily. "One of the gentlemen is unexpected, but—you don't know your Uncle Albert?"

"Helen, my dear!" murmured Albert Sibley.

Helen regarded Sibley steadily. "You're Uncle Albert—Sibley?"

"You haven't seen me since you were ten—no, six. Yes, my dear, I'm your Uncle Albert. The brother of poor Joseph."

"Mr. Sibley," said the judge, "believes that he—and you—have claims against the deceased Joseph Sibley's estate. As the attorney who drew up the will—and the

executor of the estate—I do not concede such claims, but naturally, we'd prefer to avoid expensive lawsuits, so I had in mind offering you both reasonable sums in exchange for quitclaims."

"Wait a minute," said Johnny Fletcher. "I talked that over with the heir and he said neigh."

Sam Cragg was the only one who caught the pun and he suddenly guffawed. Judge Krieger got very red in the face. "Mr. Fletcher, if you please—"

"If *you* please," said Johnny. "I'm the chief heir around here."

"Mr. Fletcher," cried the judge. "I'm trying to save the estate money."

"I'm trying to save Ulysses money," said Johnny. "Remember, he's a young, growing horse and he needs plenty of hay and oats."

Judge Krieger threatened to choke. Johnny, grinning, looked at Helen Rosser. She was regarding him contemptuously. Her handsome escort stepped forward and whispered in her ear. She shook her head.

"What's your proposition, Mr. Krieger?" she asked.

The judge frowned at Johnny. "I had in mind offering each of you, well, say five thousand—"

"From a half million?" cried Albert Sibley.

"The estate isn't that large. It's less than a quarter million. But as I pointed out, you have no claims that will stand up in court—"

"That remains to be seen!"

"Yes, but I can assure you——" The judge jerked out his handkerchief and blew his nose. "What we're offering you is a nuisance settlement."

"Nuisance," snapped Albert Sibley. "That settles it. I'm getting me a lawyer. And you, Helen, if you're smart—"

"I'll accept your offer, Mr. Krieger," Helen Rosser said. Instantly the handsome man whispered into her ear. Helen continued to shake her head and the young man became more insistent.

"Cousin Cecil?" Johnny asked.

HELEN'S escort straightened with a jerk. "I beg your pardon?"

"I asked if you were a cousin."

"The name's Conger. And the first name is Charles."

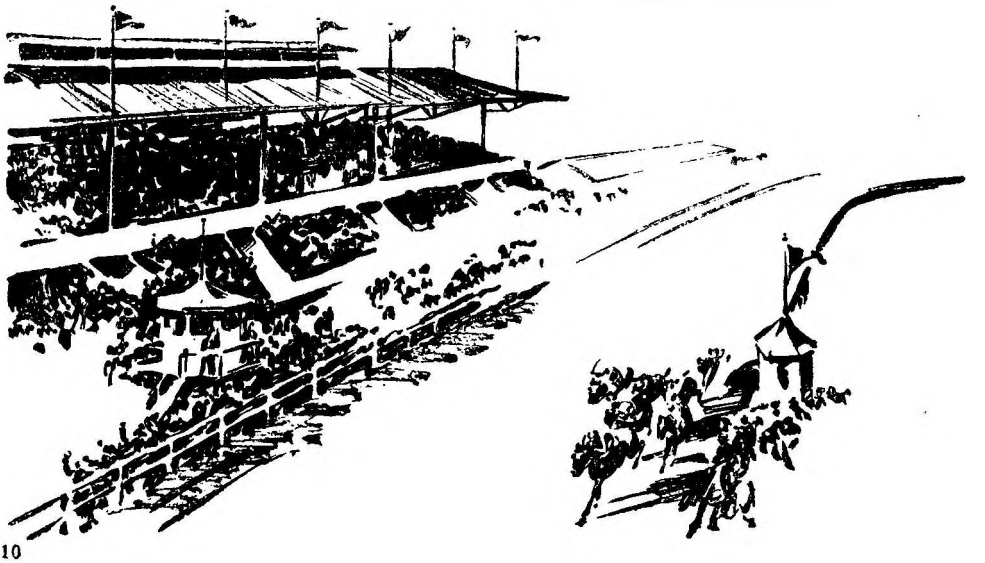
"Howdy," said Johnny.

"You're very wise, Miss Rosser," said Judge Krieger. "I'll draw up a stipulation and—"

"She won't sign it," Charles Conger said, bluntly.

"You're speaking for her?"

"I'm acting as her attorney—yes. I can



break that will, Counsellor, and you know it."

"I know nothing of the sort. As a jurist—"

"Former," Conger said.

"Former," Judge Krieger assented. "Still, I heard many will cases and I've practiced law for twenty-five years."

"I'll break it," said Conger.

Judge Krieger brought up both hands, palms upward. "We have a difference of opinion, it seems. That's what makes a lawsuit."

"You said it," Albert Sibley exclaimed.

"Does anyone want to make *me* a proposition?" Johnny asked.

"Mr. Fletcher!" cried Judge Krieger.

"Well, you can't blame me for trying, can you?"

It was eleven o'clock before Johnny and Sam got away from Great Neck. Instead of going to the estate of the late Joe Sibley, Johnny turned the station wagon toward New York.

When they got on the parkway, Johnny pulled into a gas station. "Put in two gallons of regular," he said to the attendant and headed for the station, where there was a telephone.

He looked up Joe Sibley's telephone number in the book and called it. After a long wait during which the phone rang and rang, Wilbur Ganz answered.

"Sibley Stables."

"Wilbur, this is Johnny Fletcher—"

"Aren't you coming out here?" Wilbur cried.

"I can't right now, but listen, how're we fixed for feed for Ulysses?"

"Okay, boss; we've got enough for a few days."

"We can't take a chance of running out. Order a ton of the best hay."

"A ton! Ulysses won't eat that much in six months. He's out on pasture—"

"Order the hay and make it No. 1 quality. Then buy five hundred pounds of the best oats and what else do horses eat?"

"Bran, boss, but what the—"

"Don't ask questions, Wilbur. Get the best of everything. Everything you can think of—hay, oats, bran. And plenty of liniment. Get it at the regular place where you always get the stuff and have them send the bills to Judge Krieger."

Johnny hung up and turned to find that Sam Cragg had followed him into the station. Sam looked at him accusingly.

Johnny grinned. "The judge said the best, didn't he?"

"You're figuring on selling the stuff!"

"Naturally. Being green at horse raising, I wouldn't know about the right quantities to buy and if there's danger of the hay spoiling—"

"You don't have to explain to *me*, Johnny. After all, who's to know how much a horse eats? Maybe Ulysses is a hungry horse."

"You catch on quick, Sammy. Well, now for New York."

"Aren't you afraid of Willie Pipett's boys getting on our trail?"

"We'll have to risk that. There's a man I've got to find. A man named Ed or Ted or Ned."

"The guy who knocked off Joe?"

"Maybe he did and maybe he didn't. But someone burned up a letter he wrote Sibley."

"Hey, that reminds me; how the devil do you think you can find him?"

"Why, his address was on that scrap of paper."

"It only said Jordan Building. That building's got eighteen or twenty floors. How can you find a guy named Ned—?"

"Or Ted or Ed. If he's in that building, I'll find him."

(*Part II in the next* SHORT STORIES)

Curioddities BY Weill

THE GREATER PART OF THE HALF A MILLION MEN OF THE GRAND ARMY OF NAPOLEON THAT MARCHED ON MOSCOW *NEVER REACHED THERE—OR RETURNED HOME!* OF THE 100,000 THAT RETREATED FROM FIRE-GUTTED MOSCOW AFTER ABOUT ONE MONTH'S OCCUPATION, GREAT NUMBERS FROZE TO DEATH—WERE OVERCOME BY STARVATION, OR KILLED BY THE PURSUING RUSSIAN COSSACKS, UNTIL THE ORGANIZED ARMY THAT FINALLY REACHED KÖNIGSBERG ***NUMBERED ONLY ABOUT 1,000 MEN!***

DURING THE REIGN OF KING EDWARD III OF ENGLAND, **IRON POTS** AND **FRYING PANS** IN THE KING'S PALACE *WERE CLASSED AMONG THE* ***ROYAL JEWELS!***

POWHATAN INDIAN MOTHERS WASHED THEIR NEW BORN BABIES ***IN ICY COLD STREAMS*** *TO HELP ACCUSTOM THEM TO THE RIGORS OF OUTDOOR LIFE!*

WHEN WERE JURIES PUNISHED FOR ACQUITTING ANYONE CHARGED WITH CRIME?

See Curioddities next time.

THE BITE OF THE SWIMMING PIG

By ALFRED BATSON

Author of "Murder at Sweet Heaven," etc.

CHARLESTON CHARLEY PROWELL hit as an acrobat hits, rolled, leaped erect and spilled the air from his parachute by pulling the trip cord. With quick, deft motions he unbuckled his harness and felt over himself for broken bones. Finding none, he breathed easier. Burying the telltale parachute in the loose earth was a minor detail. Meanwhile he peered anxiously into the tense night. After a few minutes the sharp bark of a fox came from somewhere on his left.

With a final glance behind to see that his tracks were covered he started toward it, carefully picking his way through the rubble of small rock and bush. The bark repeated. He altered his course, reached a small clearing. The moon slid between clouds—and Woo, San-fat emerged from the shadows.

Charley smiled. Trust Woo to drop out of the sky as unruffled as if he'd stepped off a Shanghai curb, "Where's the evidence?"

Woo wasted little time on non-essentials. "In grave. Lee will be this way. Let's go."

They went, as strange a pair as the wild interior of Hainak Island had ever seen. And that they had arrived by plane as harbingers of the new day in matters military was in keeping with the weird picture they presented.

The diminutive Chinese of the bland, childish face and frail hands was a poverty-stricken Taoist priest in the cheap gray long-gown of his calling, complete from

filthy bare feet to the lacquered *tan-fou* hat rigidly upright on his black knob of a head. Or so he appeared to a casual appraisal. Yet more truly his companion knew him as a sometime *bong piau,* counterfeiter and racketeer, but the alltime head of Shanghai's powerful Coolie-Loafer's Guild. As such he wielded more power than the top dozen American gangsters, and it followed that his police dossier in any city from Yoko to Singapore would have made those gangsters rank amateurs.

For himself, Charleston Charley Prowell was a far call from the once impeccably dressed, blue-eyed, square-jawed foreigner who had ruled over a tempestuous decade as the most renowned confidence man west of Honolulu. Instead, now he wore brown riding breeches soiled as if with long usage, the high boots of an outdoorsman and a flannel shirt of violet red and yellow checks. A heavy pack hung between his broad shoulders; he was deeply tanned under his stubble of beard and totally, carefully unarmed.

They Played Safe, and They Played Deadly. Charleston Charley Thought They Were Swell

These two had been frequent competitors in the past, but now their interests were pooled in the common cause of sinking the rising sun of Tokyo.

Woo reached a trail after a quarter hour and cautioned for silence. They listened but could hear nothing, save for a wonk that howled somewhere far off, the eerie wail quivering on the abysmal quiet with an ominous foreboding. Charley's spine iced. Woo spat, went on. Several hundred yards farther they came to a straw-roofed hut inside a compound of thorn bush and stick palings.

"This my friend Lee, Bong-tai," Woo whispered. "Smuggler king; him know everything what happen this side."

Charley's nerves calmed. The first part of their mission, the hardest part, was accomplished with their landing and burying of their parachutes. The next stop was to enlist the man around whom their entire strategy revolved. His tentacles were as widespread on primeval Hainak as were Woo's on the mainland. After that contact was established they'd strike a blow for Uncle Sam that would snatch thirty-odd young American lives from the borderline of death or worse at the hands of Japan.

Woo pushed open a gate in the thorn bush, advanced cautiously up the path. A dim light glowed from inside the shack and a wisp of white smoke floated ghostlike over the crude chimney. He rapped. Getting no response he rapped again. Finally he edged the door open with his foot.

"Lee—!" Then with an agility strange for a living saint seemingly bowed with the cares of the world, he shot into the room. "Is dead," came over his shoulder in a hissing whisper. "Is murder!"

Murder was only too evident, Charley saw when he had plunged on Woo's

heels, the most dastardly murder he had ever stumbled upon. The interior was a maelstrom of overturned chairs and tables, household effects and junk fittings. On the floor, his throat slashed from ear to ear, the body of a gnarled Chinese lay in a welter of blood, eyes staring, fists clenched. Charley dropped beside him, forced open a locked hand already cold in death and found a remnant of cotton pukai.

"Natives did the job," he whispered grimly. "The pukai is proof."

Woo hid his disappointment. "Smugglers always fighting."

"We'd better skip," Charley summed it up. "We can't be embroiled in a gang fight, on either side. It'd ruin us before we got started."

Woo nodded again. "We skip, chop, chop."

They left as stealthily as they had arrived, circled the shack and headed for a hilltop in the rear. Out from them, when they reached it, stretched the South China Sea bathed in a silver sheen. Behind them the dun-colored terrain of Hainak rose to valleyed uplands straggling far in the distance, and along the shoreline was a maze of small islands. Immediately underfoot was a straw-roofed village of a score or more of huts flanking a crude pier and a falling-apart fish shed, the whole deserted and somber in the moon's radiance.

Charley realized then why the late Lee made his headquarters in a decrepit hovel, because from this nearby lookout he got a broad survey across the straits and on exceptional days he might even see the China Coast itself. Meanwhile the thickly wooded islands below afforded the best possible cover for a smuggling fleet.

But Charley also knew something else—that Lee's death was a serious setback to the scheme which had brought him to Hainak. He sat with his head in his hands now and reviewed that scheme from its inception.

He and Woo were resting at a Chinese airfield after a foray against the Jap lines outside Shanghai when a radio message had been picked up from a U. S. submarine cut off from Manila and in trouble. Her approximate position was in the close vicinity of Hainak. The "trouble" was not explained before the message had garbled out.

To the Chungking high command with its scorched earth policy the solution was simple; dynamite the sub and spirit her men overland to the Burma Road, from whence they could live to fight anew. Finding her would be a minor detail for a fleet of ferry sampans.

But the two crooks turned patriot quickly spotted flaws in that idea. In the first place they didn't think a U. S. Navy crew supinely would stand by and see their ship destroyed. In the second, the tail-less monkeys from Nippon wouldn't allow any ferry sampans to hunt casually off the coast. Monkeys were too curious.

Their alternative was to have themselves deposited on Hainak by plane, locate the sub through Woo's old smuggling pal, Lee, and pilot her to the nearby Chinese-held port of Fungtai, a few miles up the Wei river.

There she could be repaired and put to sea again. That the mouth of the Wei was blocked by a Jap minefield was of as small concern as that they were anything but parachute experts. Hadn't the mine laying been charted by alert-eyed natives seemingly fishing at the river's mouth? Ah yah and oh yoh! No sooner was the sub's plea received than Charley and Woo were cramming over that chart. An hour later they were getting their first lessons in bailing out.

Add one and one and here they were on Hainak—but the cornerstone of their scheme was slashed from under them and there was no retreat—had they been the retreating kind.

"One good piece joss," came a soft whisper, "Japs not arrive yet. If sub near she not molest."

Charley leaped to his feet and glanced at the brooding village. Woo had hit on

the single bright spot in the whole panorama. The Japs hadn't occupied Hainak as they had occupied so much of the China coast, the silence down there told him, wherefore they would have a clear field to locate their quarry.

"Thank the devil for that," he replied. "With no Japs here I can throw this heavy pack away."

Woo grunted. "What next?"

"Sleep," Charley said in an attempt at humor. "Unless that stiff back there in the shack—?"

"Only stiff ever bother me will be my own," Woo answered blandly.

He sprawled on the ground, reached as if to remove his lacquered hat, then reconsidered and let it remain. Similarly Charleston Charley Prowell did not heave his pack over the cliff as he had planned on doing.

THEY were up before the sun had pierced the morning haze on the eastern horizon.

A cloud of smoke lazed over the village; the pier and fish sheds retained their forlorn air of desertion. In the vale behind, the murder scene was deathly still. Woo lost no time in looking to his disguise, then leading the way over the path down the cliff face.

"The natives will help us once they see we take no part in a gang fight," he grinned.

Charley wasn't so sure. These wouldn't be the more nationalistic natives they had been accustomed to on the mainland, but like most island Chinese would be tribal descendants of the Hakkas, China's great pirates, whose women had always gone to sea with their men. They of all the sons of Han had triumphed over wars and pestilences and invasions, and it had mattered little to them whether they were overrun by Japs or Marco Polo for their secret of survival and rebirth was absorption. They accepted whatever came along, and after a century the result was an infusion of new blood, and a more virulent Hakka. Yet Charley decided to keep his own counsel and let the situation develop.

They went along the beach and found a wide road leading to the cluster of huts. Eventually they met a group of village elders, seamed of face and hard of eye. Woo was greeted with reverently bent knee, but Charley was ignored. Again they passed a withered crone mending nets. Woo was given a few coppers but the foreigner was shunned as though he'd been a leper.

"What's got their wind up?" Charley whispered when he could. "That murder—?"

Woo's brain clicked on the instant. "Where lives Lee, Bong-tai who was always generous to me and my brethren?" he asked a lodah.

"Lee will be down soon from his home on the hill."

Woo blessed the lodah and plodded on. "Then they don't know about the murder," the con man commented. "Unless they're playing dumb."

"Mebbe not gang fight. Mebbe cheap thief."

"We skipped too quick to figure," Charley said. "Whatever, they don't like me, that's plain. We'll have to wait to discover the reason. Meanwhile here's the pier."

No junks or sampans were moored to the pier, which for a fishing village struck the newcomers as being curious. Charley's heart quickened as Woo led the way toward the shed on the inner end. The phoney priest was glancing in the door, when Charley saw him stiffen. A hand crept around and he began scratching the back of his neck, his fingers inching toward that lacquered hat. Then the fingers came down.

Charley quickened his stride, stepped over the threshold of the shed—and had a pistol stuck in his face. Above it was the dull brown visage of a uniformed Jap soldier. Behind him were a dozen others, grinning.

YET IN that split second Charleston Charley Prowell saw enough to make his pulse pound. The shed was crammed with oil drums and torpedoes, the latter resting in racks against the walls. The nimble brain of the late confidence king was equal to the swift turn of events.

"Ah," he beamed, his composure returning, "fancy finding you here."

"Shut up," the Jap snarled. "You talk Captain Tonno."

"Tonno. Who is he?"

"Supreme officer."

"Delighted," Charley exulted. "Delighted."

But he wasn't delighted, inside. The realization that the Japs *had* taken Hainak struck him like a blow. Not only taken it but laid a trap into which he and Woo had strolled like the most stupid bunglers.

He was glad, suddenly, that he hadn't thrown his pack away as he'd wanted to the night previous.

Captain Ugishino Tonno saw them drawing near, the bent priest shuffling ahead and the imperious foreigner gawking at his heels. Tonno smiled, his first smile in days. Perhaps good luck was rushing his way at long last. His assignment to quiet Hainak, when his friends in the Jap army and navy had gone off to immortal glory before Manila and Singapore, now had a boomerang attached which would rebound to his fame. These two were obviously spies—the first fruits of his 'keep my soldiers out of sight' trap—and he'd torture the admission out of them in short order.

Following that he wouldn't detail a shooting party to obliterate them before a bleak wall. He was too clever. It would be much more advantageous to send them back to Tokyo alive and have them paraded in chains as the pigs of Wake Island had been paraded. *"Genori!"* There she was. Display them as public examples of the white race's inferiority. And whose name would resound amid the cheers of the Japanese onlookers? Ugishino Tonno's. Could such a brave hero be kept a mere captain after that? Tonno didn't think so.

Stepping on the porch of the native house he'd taken over, he beamed on the group coming up the path.

"Ah, Captain Tonno," the foreigner surprised him. "How nice to meet you. I'm Elmer Rain." The captain felt his hand pumped in a strong grip.

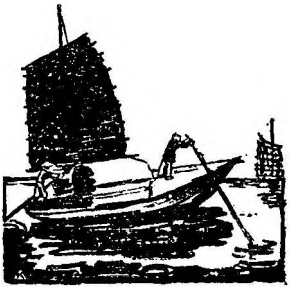
"So why you here in wartime?"

Rain's smile widened. His eyes glinted and he laughed. "But it isn't my war."

"What's this?"

"I'm an American. Japan and China may be at war, but the United States is neutral."

Tonno's tongue stuck in his throat. "Oh," was all he could get out. This Rain was either a clever crook of the first magnitude, or a fool who hadn't heard of Pearl Harbor. Ah, that was it. He hadn't heard. And he wouldn't be told—yet!



"Where you been?"

"Back in the interior after tea saplings," Rain went on eagerly. "It's rough country back there. I got lost and was found by this priest who kindly offered to lead me out. Now if I can have a junk take me across—"

Tonno glanced at the priest, filthy and droopy-eyed and as stupid appearing as anyone who was not in uniform. His feet wore callouses an inch thick and his clothes showed hard usage. For that matter the foreigner himself didn't look like any spy Tonno had ever read about—and every son of the son of heaven had read for years of foreign spies. They'd even seen plenty of

them in American movies, in frock coats and silk hats. This one's clothes looked like something that Gene Autry might wear. He wasn't shaved, his shoes were badly scuffed and his tanned face proved he'd been under the sun a long time.

"Why you come for tea?"

"Because Hainak grows the best. I wanted some sprouts we can raise on the mainland, then my company's transportation problem will be solved. *Sang-pei* and *Chung-pei.* Sharp *Loong-jau,* and *Hwa-hui* which has that delicious tang of mustiness. Here—"

Rain cut the lecture short, opened his pack and brought out various cuttings. At the same time Tonno's avid eyes saw a map with a red circle around the remote fastnesses of the island's deep interior, letters addressed to Elmer Rain and a compass engraved "E. R." No gun was in evidence.

The ambitious captain felt disappointed. This swine *was* a tea cultivator, and wandering priests were seen everywhere. So the espionage hope would prove hollow and Japan would never ring with the Tonno name—*unless he turned Rain into a spy!* There was the means of achieving his dream. Frame him into being an espionage agent, or enough of one to have him received as such by the spy-hungry civilians back home.

"I knew I was a genius," Tonno mused, his gimlet eyes alert and his nostrils dilating rapidly as his lungs thumped. "I'll say I found plans on him whereby he intended to slay the sacred Mikado. Banzai —I'll describe how he tried to knife me. Oh, I'll build it up.

"I exceedingly regret," he broke in on himself aloud, "that though the United States is neutral in my nation's brave defense against the cruel assault by the wild hordes of China I cannot put you on the mainland because the goats who dwell here have sunk their water craft. My heart aches, but you will be forced to wait."

"A wait will give me a chance to regain my health," Rain sighed. "Japanese army officers are noted as generous hosts. I am indeed lucky. A warship will come soon—?"

"Any moment," Tonno lied. "The first to appear will give you a free ride in the quarters reserved for distinguished foreign guests, since your country and mine are at peace and our special envoy is in Washington."

"Perhaps 'somewhere in America' would be more proper," Tonno gloomily amended to himself, "because those Yankee double-crossers doubtless have imprisoned him after he stalled them so we could prepare the Pearl Harbor attack."

Tonno had repeated that "at peace" touch because he found it vastly amusing. This donkey before him had yet to learn that at peace might describe every nation in the world but Japan, for she had never been at peace in her history. When others were indulging in blissful fancies she was readying for war.

"Come inside," he purred. "I will have food brought." Then he caught the wide, childish eyes of the dreamy priest. "You too."

The dreamy priest got to his feet. "Before I leave, dear capatin," he fawned, "I will bestow on you the blessing of a Taoist holy man—personally."

As he spoke he was scratching the back of his neck, his fingers inching toward the *tan-fou* hat. Tonno saw nothing unusual in that gesture; roving priests generally carried much to scratch. But Charleston Charley Prowell—alias Elmer Rain—saw it and his veins chilled. For he'd bet that when the blessing came it would be stained crimson with Tonno's own blood. The con man could guess what lurked under that lacquered hat. He'd seen it before.

LATER that morning Charley was warned away from the fish shed by the scraggling mustached, bandy-legged corporal of the warriors on guard. But in the afternoon he was conducted there by Tonno

himself. "It is a newly-established base for our destroyers," the wily captain glowed. "Visit much. Look around."

"He's swallowed my 'I didn't know a war was raging' invention," Charley thought. "But why shouldn't he—I've been on Hainak a considerable time, according to my front, and Pearl Harbor seems only yesterday. Thank goodness for my foresight in preparing that pack."

Tonno bustled off to observe the priest, and found him preaching the ancient Taoist analects. More Japanese soldiers were in his audience than was seemly, considering he was an enemy, until Tonno recalled that Taoism was centuries old before Nippon's Shintoism was born. Thus the priest had great face among all Orientals.

"Perhaps," Tonno wrestled with himself, "I might lend an ear to Taoism, as well as not forgetting the Shintoism on which I was raised. Then in the event of death I will have two factions pulling for me in the serene higher regions where the streams are filled with fat ducks and one's shotgun never lacks for shells. And after the war I will learn something of Christianity, whereby I will have three aces in the hole. Mohammedism would give me a fourth—" He burst into a happy laugh at the brilliance of his ability to play safe. Such a brain was not fated to blush unseen in the lowly uniform of an army captain.

Meanwhile Charley had been looking around the fish shed, following Tonno's instructions. He saw the oil drums and felt a galling pang, for they bore the brands of well known American refiners. And he knew how they had fallen into Jap hands; they'd been part of that huge dump of munitions the U. S. had sent to Saigon in French Indo-China for transport to Chungking—only to have Vichy France treacherously present them to the Mikado's forces instead.

Then he went out on the pier-head and found a half dozen sandbagged machine-gun posts pointing seaward. But the only targets on the broad expanse of glistening water were the masts of sunken junks that dotted the small islands nearby. The mustached guard hung on his heels like a leech. The one time the corporal's narrow eyes were distracted was when a soldier tossed a dried fish in the coral clear water. Instantly there was a swirl of spume, a gray-brown mass flashed out of the nowhere and Charley caught the gaping maw of a shark as it turned on its side and the fish disappeared. The corporal grinned ominously.

"What nice teeth you have, grandma," Charley mused. "Both of you."

But his humor vanished when natives ran shouting into the small village square where Woo was speaking. As the con man reached the spot he heard the news that Lee, Bong-tai's murdered body had been found in his shack.

Tonno heard it at the same time, and expressed his grief to a group of elders.

"My troops were in their barracks all night. I cannot understand." He wheeled suddenly and confronted Charley. "How did you come from the uplands, Mr. Rain?"

"Through that vale back there as I told you," Charley said. "But I never saw this Lee in his life," he added in all honesty.

The elders seemed satisfied—but the ex-crook wasn't.

He felt a tinge of suspicion when he realized that the Islanders had been "goats" a few hours before, yet now Tonno was brushing a tear over the death of one of them.

Charley regarded his host at close range for the first time, and saw a rotund body on bandy legs. A sword hung from his belt and his face was a circle of bland innocence, out of which peered big, wondering eyes. His hands were soft and fat and if he was acting in his concern for Lee it was one of the best acts Charley had ever witnessed.

But his aides, Lieutenants Keno, Oni and Awazi were everything their superior was not, tall, scowling, muscled. Keno had a broken nose and Oni an old cadet duel-

ling scar along his chin. Awazi sported a bravery medal from Manchukuo.

These three were typical of the Japanese Army Officer Corp, the heroic breed who would boast of "wetting their swords" on Chinese prisoners staked out alive. Charley determined to keep his eyes on them, for they resembled spring steel tightly coiled —but fat Tonno was laughable, a spring run down.

Then why was such a misfit in charge of this small garrison of 100 men? Because it was a temporary base on an island, and the nearest Chinese troops were a good 300 miles away. China had little or no air force, absolutely no navy—thus Japan needed no brilliant military brain to hold Hainak.

When the group broke up Charley got Woo aside. "The natives are still hostile toward me, but bother that. We're set solid here and this fool captain goes out of his way to play into our hands. Yet we can't let the Yank sub crew think they've been deserted. We've got to find an excuse to get along the shoreline and look for them. I'll hit on something." He sighed. "If we'd only brought some means whereby we could contact the mainland."

"We thought crafts would be on top of water not below, and they could run to mainland for us."

"That's what hurts. We slipped up despite all our precautions. And now we're cut off. Unless a fleet of sunken junks can help," Charley groused.

Actually he knew the junks were beyond helping, for he'd noticed seaweed beginning to cluster around the masts, and in that warm coral water lurked marine growths that already would have rendered those masts useless.

Yet Charley was to get his means of communicating with the mainland, as if to bear out his favorite axiom applicable to himself— "Virtue always triumphs."

He and Woo had passed the night in the headquarters shack and shortly after breakfast were confronted by a glum-faced Tonno.

"My radio is broken," he wailed. "It is an exact duplicate of the ones used by American forces. Do you think you could fix her?"

"I'd certainly be an ungrateful guest if I wouldn't make an attempt," Charley ventured from behind a dead pan as his pulse pounded. "We have a saying in America—'If at first you don't succeed try, try again.' You can rest assured I'll try, but good."

Woo was oblivious to the talk, apparently hunting for something in his hair. Tonno didn't pay much attention, but took them to a clearing behind the shack where stood a portable two-way radio of the Japanese Army. Charley had trouble controlling himself when he saw it, for he'd heard many a soap drama over the radio belonging to the Fourth Marines in Shanghai and this, as Tonno had admitted, was an exact duplicate.

He also saw that the repairs needed were simple in the extreme, a reconnecting of several wires, doubtless bungled by amateurs. When he declared the job would require a couple of hours, Tonno's relief was manifest in his limpid eyes. "My record would suffer in Japan if they knew I was inefficient," the captain whispered. "Doctor her, dear neutral friend, and the sooner this cruel war will be over."

"Those words are wiser than you realize," the doctor replied.

Suddenly the con man shot both hands to his eyes. "It will be a delicate operation at close quarters, and the sun is too bright here." He glanced up and saw a clump of trees a short distance away.

Tonno walked into the trap. "Wheel her over to the shadows and I will give orders you are not to be molested."

THE set was quickly wheeled to the shadows—by Captain Tonno. Woo stretched on the ground nearby and outwardly took no interest in the proceedings, but the chase continued under his hat. When the garrison commander had

waddled down the path to headquarters Charley set to work and had the wires right with a few simple adjustments. Then he turned on the juice and bent into the mouthpiece.

This seemed too good to be true. Nevertheless it was true; his voice would not carry for a long radius, but would carry far enough.

"Rain on Hainak," he said, his heart thumping. "Rain on Hainak. Please advise where I am needed next. Answer with exact location. Waiting—"

THE infection of the moment was too much for the late gang leader. He jumped erect, grabbed a headpiece and pressed it against an ear.

But there was no reply through an agonizing wait. Charley repeated the message. Then Woo made a try in Ningpo dialect, which no Islander would have understood had a Quisling been listening on another Jap set. The result was the same.

Elmer Rain was probing again through the ether at greater length, when a sharp *click* behind him cut the tense air. He swung around and saw Tonno and Oni, the former straightening above a camera, the latter glinting through narrowed lids, first at Charley, then at his superior.

"A couple more adjustments and I think I'll have it," Charley purred. "Our testing hasn't produced anything yet."

"You are indeed a friend, and this picture is for my scrapbook," Tonno purred in rebuttal, tapping his camera.

But inwardly his brain was moiling. "How easily the fool falls into my spy trap. This picture will be the crowning glory of my astute scheme. Yet I must watch that this cheap thief Oni does not rob me of it and try the same game I am playing. He is an ambitious pig."

Then with an agility surprising for a man of his hitherto lethargic movements, Tonno grabbed the headpiece, turned a dial and listened. Abruptly his eyes seemed to harden. Charley's heart hung suspended. Woo edged in closer between Oni and the captain.

But after a tight moment Tonno beamed on the mall. "The force at Canton is talking to Canton. The repairs work."

He put the headpiece down and was profuse in his thanks to the con man. Charley grinned with relief—for a split second he'd thought the sub or the Chinese High Command had answered, and Tonno had caught that answer.

The radio was wheeled back beside the headquarters shack and after a suitable wait Charley ventured that he was going for a stroll.

"What is ours is yours, neutral lover of peace between the United States and Nippon," Tonno exulted. "Go anywhere. Go on the pier if you wish."

Charley was so busy thinking what was exactly where he was planning to go that he did not notice Oni's gimlet eyes sweeping in an all-inclusive survey from Tonno to the radio to himself. So he started indolently for the pier. Oni let him get well ahead then looked to his pistol, and hastened on the foreigner's heels.

Lieutenant Fojo Oni was troubled, truth to tell. As a good soldier of the Mikado anxious for promotion, he failed to fathom the fat brain of a fatter captain who would let known enemies pry into military establishments under the Rising Sun flag. He didn't like it. But he knew a way to stop it and so help his country.

"That Tonno beast," he mused, "is slipping for the first time in his life. I never saw him so well disposed toward whiteskins before."

THE gimlet-eyed corporal who had barred Charley's entry to the pier on his first visit attempted to bar it again. But when the con man mentioned Tonno's name and brushed past him the corporal was momentarily forced to relent, though he was not forgetting the American's brusque manners in holding lightly the Mikado's uniform.

He mulled that over behind a grim scowl as the American disappeared in the welter of torpedoes and oil drums. The more he mulled it over the more he saw his only course of action, if he was to be true to his tradition.

"Who knows," he thought, "I may be on the verge of a promotion for myself. Perhaps Tonno has listened to Yankee gold, the way he lets this minnow see our strength."

Whereupon he set out hot on Charley's trail, his brain a tangled conflict between his orders and doing his duty. The suspect was standing on the end of the pier staring at the numerous islands offshore. The corporal found a cover behind a machine-gun nest and watched him.

Charley saw a forest of junk spars thrusting above the ominously still water, some careened far over and others slightly aslant. But none were perpendicular—until far out he spotted one which seemed thinner than the others. What was more, a maze of seaweed surrounded its base. And seaweed was the gathering place of the marine growths which had drilled every other mast in the harbor. This one formed a miniature island in itself. The slim shaft that was its hub was rigidly upright.

That was odd, until he reasoned it might be a wood different from the others and so impervious to algae. Then his attention centered on a crowd of natives apparently drying nets on the shore—yet on closer inspection more interested in him than in their work. That, he concluded, was not odd, for the residents of Hainak had given him a wide berth but a minute scrutiny since he had first arrived.

He knew why, now. Woo had told him. Some months before a party of checker-shirted, hill-climbing foreigners had arrived, combed the island and gone away. That combing included soundings in the harbor, mineral samples and a study of the defense prospects. They had been strength-through-joy Germans—and the Japs had come in before the wake of their departing steamer had subsided. The Chinese wanted no part of foreigners after that, not even of white-skins who claimed to be Americans. How could a Hainak native tell an American from a Nazi? Charley understood their suspicions, primitive as they were.

He shrugged, swung from them to the upright mast again. Suddenly it seemed different. He shaded his eyes with a hand and when he peered closer his blood flooded into his temples. It couldn't be—yet it might be, for with American ingenuity at stake no ruse was too fantastic. Charley's heart roared to high speed. He was used to surprises over a long career—but he was not used to islands that *drifted with the tide.*

His senses galvanized in a twinkling. He knew what he had to do, tip off Woo and find a way to investigate that moving area of spar and clinging parasites. But Woo was again spouting in the village square. Charley look around, found no means whereby he might undertake the dangerous journey into the harbor, no junks, no sampans, no punts. There was nothing nearby but sandbags, a couple of machine guns —sans operators, for they were at the head of the pier listening to the wonders of Taoism—and a box of dried fish resting on a stringpiece.

Yet he must get out there, for if that island was actually what he thought it was, it could be floating serenely into a trap. The people under it had no way of knowing the pier was occupied by Nippon. Then his blood chilled—those thirty-odd young Americans were coming in to get him, for he had summoned them by his radio mes-

sage. Summoned them, he began to fear, to certain death.

Why didn't they surface? Perhaps because of the "trouble" they had originally reported to the Chinese air field from whence he and Woo had embarked to save them.

Of a sudden he was done with words, with thoughts. It was time for action and he saw his course—get around to the natives and convince them somehow he was no Nazi.

But hardly had he taken a step than he was confronted by the scraggly mustached, pig-eyed corporal. "What you stare at long time?"

Charley's brain clicked on the instant. "The coast of China."

"Can't see today for clouds. Look."

The con man looked and in that split second the corporal sprang, the bayonet on his rifle thrust out, venom in his snarling curse. He hated all foreigners and this one in particular, for he had been much too observant inside the shed. Yet the corporal had a plan to erase what he had observed and at the same time aid the Mikado, regardless of orders from the traitorous or blind Tonno.

It was inherent in his race that he should do it the way Pearl Harbor had been attacked—by trickery under the guise of peace.

But surprisingly the unenlightened one was not spitted on his bayonet as the army textbooks said they always would be when you had fooled them into turning their heads. This white scum did not conform to pattern and the corporal was infuriated to desperation. Instead of being pinned on the steel point this foreigner was pivoting on his toes, typical of the soft playboys cousin Adolph claimed all Americans were.

More surprisingly the corporal felt an ironlike fist crash against his temple. For a moment his senses reeled. But he retained sufficient command of himself to carry out act two of his plan despite that act one had been slightly delayed—he kicked the box of dried fish overboard.

Then he whirled. "I shoot," he hissed. Actually he had no intention of shooting; he sought no witness to his private murder. Instead he grasped the rifle by the barrel, swung it clublike.

The foreigner was caught on a shoulder, knocked off balance, though he was not yet in the right position for the *coup de grace*. Quickly the rifle was reversed and the corporal lunged in with a downward thrust.

Again the Yankee dregs of a thousand gutters was not prone on the pier. Instead he was on his feet, the rifle caught in the soft wood. As the corporal strained to lever it free he felt a crushing impact that flooded his mouth with teeth.

Bad, but also good, for the foreigner's back was to the harbor. The corporal knew now he had him, in a way he'd never suspect. He let the gun go, charged forward like a crazed bull. It was over. Banzai and genori!

That was Corporal Hamomoto's last conscious thought—for with the speed of a diving cormorant he saw the stringpiece flash behind when his feet were tripped. The warm water swallowed him with an engulfing splash. Then a gray shape that had been feeding on dried fish nearby slithered in like an express train without sound. Corporal Hamomoto was rudely surprised. He shouldn't have been for he had arranged for that gray shape to be there.

"By jove," Charley said to nobody in particular, "the bounder jumped me. What a frightful way to treat a neutral."

He broke off when the rifle attracted him, quivering upended in the soft flooring of the pier. He pulled it loose and looked at it. Somehow it was vaguely familiar. Then he knew.

It was a copy of the U. S. Army Garand and it was made of far better steel than were most pre-war Japanese arms.

"But why shouldn't it be?" he mused.

"We've been selling them steel since the China war started; it's a hell of a thing that American boys will be shot by the street car tracks of Seattle and the Sixth Avenue elevated of New York!"

A BOARD creaked somewhere inside the shed and the con man looked wildly about him. He wasn't throwing any valuable automatic rifle overboard. Yet he wasn't having it found in his hands either, because he must do nothing which might arouse suspicion—until he was sure of the sub's whereabouts.

The step sounded again.

Simultaneously Charleston Charley Prowell's eyes ranged shoreward. He caught the Chinese spreading nets, yet not losing sight of him in the process. There was his salvation! He'd kill two birds with one stone, dispose of the rifle and at the same time prove he was no strength-through-joy Nazi.

His means of doing it was via the box which had contained the dried fish. Kneeling over the stringpiece he prodded it to him, laid the Garand inside, closed the lid with a foot and shoved toward the shore. The natives saw his maneuver and one of them wandered knee deep with a net casually held for throwing.

Charley straightened. A slight wind had come up and that box would reach its destination. The Garand, though dripping water, would not be impaired for he recalled the trials it had passed before its acceptance by the U. S. Army: buried in mud, heated, frozen—Uncle Sam approved only the best.

Then he heard a step at his elbow and on turning was confronted by a scowling Lieutenant Fojo Oni.

"What happen, Rain? You upset, yes."

The one-time smoothest working snatch thief liked to believe that he had never told a lie in his life. And he hadn't—when there was a possibility he might suffer thereby. He didn't tell one now.

"The corporal," he said, his voice shaking, "upset me plenty. He was feeding the sharks and, well, he fed the sharks."

"Fell over? I heard splash, yes."

"Yes," Charley said, pointing.

Oni rushed to the side and looked down. There was no corporal, for the maneater had dragged him away. Then Oni glanced cautiously around the pier.

Suddenly Charley spotted the cut of the bayonet in the wood flooring. Instantly he closed in, stood on it as Oni completed his frowning scrutiny.

"Too bads," the Jap said finally. His thick lips pursed and his face was a yellow mask of dejection. "I reports to Captain Tonno. Mebbe he asks you for reports also, yes."

"Gladly," Charley said, inwardly more glad than he let show. "I'll give the captain a full report."

Oni started gloomily off the pier and Charley followed. But abruptly he was as dejected as the Nipponese—for he'd caught sight of that upright mast again and it hadn't moved an inch. As if to add insult to injury a gull was preening itself on the topmost point. Charley's heart sank. What he'd thought was a periscope wasn't the lodestone he sought.

"But whatever happens," he mused, brightening slightly, "there's one less Jap in the world. I got away with it."

LIEUTENANT FOJO ONI walked in the headquarters shack, saluted smartly and waited for his superior to speak.

Tonno eventually lay down his writing brush, glanced up and after another wait said, "Well?" It was indeed well, he thought, never to let these underlings forget they were underlings. "Well? Well? Out with your bleating."

"Corporal Hamomoto who was in charge of the guard detail on the pier is dead. He fell overboard."

"Drunk, probably," Tonno snarled. "You should hold a firmer hand over your men. I shall be forced to report—"

"He was not drunk," Oni went on

sharply. "The American pig you welcome here was with him."

Tonno ran a fat hand up the side of his face. "So you blame the American for your slackness. In addition you question my brain cell of strategy. I am saving the American for my own ends." He broke off abruptly when he saw the hard eyes of the man across the desk begin to narrow in a manner that suggested trouble. "Yes, go on."

"Rain showed me where he fell. A shark got him."

TONNO interrupted again. He knew the story now and he could foresee the game behind it. The lieutenant wanted to confine Rain under guard. That must be prevented, for sharing glory was the hallmark of a fool, and Tonno prided himself that he was no fool. He wasn't making Rain a spy to aid Oni.

"Sharks doubtless eat many natives. What is strange about eating a more tasty son of Nippon?"

Oni threw it at him then. "This shark must also have eaten his rifle, for I could not see it on the clear coral bottom where he fell. Sharks do not eat rifles."

Tonno caught himself up short. Yet a warm grin broke over his snaggled teeth. "Good work," he remarked. "You are worthy of the Intelligence Section, to which I am soon expecting to be elevated. What is your next brilliant gesture?"

"Report to Tokyo direct," Oni said angrily. "I suspect Rain is a spy."

"You see in me a broad-minded man," Tonno glowed, "ever anxious to help my juniors. And to help with your report I will provide the proper forms. Wait." He pulled open a drawer in his desk, thrust in a hand. "If you would betray your superiors to seek promotion—I promote you now!"

The hand flashed out. A pistol roared. Oni clutched at his middle with a startled cry, slumped forward. Tonno gave him another slug straight through the skull at point blank range. The body slid to the floor, quivered and lay still.

Tonno replaced the pistol and arose, still smiling, still unruffled. He kicked Oni inside a closet, toed a rug over a pool of blood, lighted a cigarette and took a deep breath. "The civilians in Manchukuo do not recall me as 'Tonno the Beast' without reason," he muttered proudly. Then he glanced at the closet door. "My unfortunate underling is another proof of Rain's activities. I will claim Oni as his victim. My scheme builds each moment, and the day is young." Sitting down he beamed on the world.

Then suddenly his face went livid and his heart smashed like a trip-hammer. For a sickening thought had come to him: "Suppose Oni was right? Instead of waiting to be made a spy—*suppose Rain already was one?* There was a boomerang too close for comfort.

The twist sent a shiver down Tonno's broad back. Perspiration broke out all over. "It is little to seize a spy who is a spy," he thought, "but to arrest one who is not one is pure genius. Yet I must play safe."

WADDLING to the window he got a clear view into the village square. The Taoist priest was holding forth to a large group of soldiers. On the outskirts of the crowd stood Rain and Lieutenant Keno.

The captain called Keno, then ran down the path to meet him halfway.

"I have reason to believe this Rain might not be what he appears," he said when they were together. "But I do not want to accuse him yet. He cliams he has been here a long time hunting for tea, but my astute brain whispers he may have flown here, recently. Take a large company of men into that vale back there. Search for a parachute. Find it and I will recommend you for promotion, as I am recommending Oni without any thought of myself."

Keno's small eyes glistened. A promotion meant money, and money meant women on his leave. He lost no time in calling

the major part of Woo's audience away.

"As far as I am concerned," Tonno pondered when he saw them go, "I hope they find nothing. For if they do, this Keno swine might want to share some fame with me. However, there are ways of preventing that," he finished with a smile.

He was turning from the path when his eyes chanced to rest on the portable radio. Idly he sat down and fitted on a headpiece. Idly he turned various dials. Suddenly he was almost shot out of his seat.

He gulped hard and his eyes popped. His fists clenched and his veins ran ice. Straining the earphones closer he listened with incredulity. When he could hear no more he paced nervously up and down. Finally he sat again, turned different dials and soon was in surprising contact with a Jap destroyer squadron. What especially delighted him was that it stood only a few miles off the far side of the island.

When he arose this time he felt better. Here was the first break in what had appeared for several tense moments to be a gathering bank of clouds. He returned to his office, opened the window and took up his vigil from there. He could not see Elmer Rain, which led him to reload his pistol, though he was not discouraged. He had two aces in the hole now and the payoff would not long be delayed.

An hour later Lieutenant Keno slipped in the back door of headquarters with a parachute harness thrust under his uniform coat. Tonno greeted him with a glum smile.

"Buried," Keno said briefly. "But not enough."

"It is enough for me," the captain managed to chortle. Where are your men?"

"In the bushes outside. I am not returning them to the village lest someone talk."

"Good. From here on I do the talking. I knew all along this dirty Rain was a spy. What treachery when I have given him haven and let him roam at will. What a sense of American honor." Tonno glanced up coldly. "You wouldn't have found the parachute if I hadn't detailed you, wherefore the honor belongs to me. But I will give you leave, soon."

Keno rubbed his broken nose. "You said promotion."

"Can we have two captains here? Be wise and leave things in my hands. I'll find a way to settle your troubles."

MEANWHILE Charleston Charley Prowell had been listening to Woo and the wonders of Taoism. But he had heard little for he'd been backtracking over his association with the dimwitted Tonno.

"The ass let me see everything," he mused with a dour smile. "Certainly my pack and my story were good for it never seemed to enter his head that I might be a spy. He let me see so much I'm almost tempted to believe he wanted to make me—"

Charley broke off short. The imagination that had carried him through a hundred brushes with death began probing now and questioning along a score of fronts. The inevitable summary of it all was to the effect that that was exactly what Tonno had been attempting to do—make him into a spy. He could fathom the reason when he thought of the spy-hungry populace in Japan. "So I was to be his guinea pig," he growled inwardly. "Charleston Charley Prowell was to be the stupid means of a promotion for him and slow torture or worse for me."

Charley spat viciously. His sense of his own importance was outraged. It was almost as though a cheap snatch thieving coolie had planted a poke in a copper's pocket and accused him of theft. "The nerve," he thought. "The nerve."

More than all that it was a challenge, with but one obstacle. *He hadn't yet located the sub!* Yet he had a clue.

He glanced over the harbor and finally located the island he first had thought was floating. He peered at it a long time and suddenly knew it had changed. A longer time was needed before he knew why—

the mast was shorter, though it was still rigidly upright! Now he had it! He'd had it all along, only to be thrown off by the preening gull. The mast was shorter because it wasn't a mast at all. It was a periscope. And around its base was a thin slick of oil—of which the people inside knew nothing.

That spurred him to quick action—especially when he watched a large part of Woo's soldier audience head into the hills behind Keno. He guessed that they were bound on maneuvers, but the greater menace was that when they gained altitude they might look back and spot the oil slick. Islands might go unnoticed, but not a telltale shimmer of blue-green iridescence.

CHARLEY spoke to Woo in Ningpo dialect and told him to keep preaching, to hold in a compact body the soldiers that were remaining. Woo abruptly switched into the attractions of the women awaiting Taoist converts in the hereafter. The soldiers remained. This was better than dry religion.

Charley slipped from the crowd and headed for the beach. The Chinese watched him coming through narrowed eyes.

"Have got gun I sent?" he whispered.

An elder nodded.

"Do you know where a submarine is hiding nearby?"

"Sub—?" The elder couldn't pronounce it.

The con man put it more simply. "Swimming pig."

Oh, yes. The elder knew what a swimming pig was. But he hadn't seen one. He asked the others and they hadn't seen one. Charley took it that they were stalling, but he had the answer. Lay all his cards on the table and trust them, primitive as they were.

"That island out there," he said nodding, "is really a swimming pig. You know it and I know it. It's an American pig and is a friend of China. Get a rope out to it, pull it into the pier while those soldiers are in the hills. The Americans on board had guns and will be enough to destroy the pier. At the same time I and the priest will go aboard and guide the pig to the mainland. You will be doing something for which all China will be grateful."

He interrupted himself when the elder grimaced at him and scratched his head. Then his lips pursed and he turned to his followers. Finally they all burst out laughing.

"You clazy," the elder said. "You smoke opium."

Charley could feel his face go white. He had laid his cards on the table—only he began to suspect with a hint of imminent danger that they all belonged to another deck. These Chinese patently were still suspicious of him. Worse, they might be friends of the Japanese.

Now he'd done it—tipped his play on where the sub was, if they hadn't known before. There was a menace he could hardly believe—but he believed it when Lieutenant Awazi rushed up with a file of heavily armed troopers and said he was wanted at once by Captain Tonno. The Chinese turned away still laughing, still shaking their heads. Charley grasped at the straw that they didn't tell Awazi what he had told them. But there was no proof they wouldn't, eventually.

He caught the crusher to his hopes when the soldiers closed around him and as he was marched off he saw the butt of the Garand protruding from under a pile of driftwood nearby.

The natives had spurned it.

AT THE precise moment Charleston Charley Prowell was shoved like a convicted man into the headquarters office, Tonno was noticing that the twin smudges of smoke on the horizon were growing more dense. That meant they were closer. White water broke under them and within a quarter hour they'd be off the harbor. He left the window, tightened his sword belt and shoved his pistol into its holster around his waist, the flap unbuttoned. He wouldn't look out the window again, he didn't need to. He knew the Mikado's navy and its record of ruthlessness.

When Elmer Rain came through the door Tonno greeted him from behind his desk with a bland, big-eyed smile.

Charley took his cue from that. "What's all this interest in me?" he glowed. "Am I being sent to the mainland? Have you located a junk?"

"Better for you," Tonno beamed. "We have located a submarine."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Submarine. What the native goats call 'swimming pigs'." When the foreigner took that in his stride Tonno began to get riled. He liked to think he could put up a front with any man, but this Elmer Rain was the coolest cucumber he'd ever met. "What is worse," he continued, "the swimming pig is American, but it has no bite because it is in trouble."

Charley's brain began hitting on all cylinders. So Tonno had it—but the con man didn't know how much he had, and he wasn't telling. It was to be a battle of wits until he could stall his way out of the noose that was closing about him.

"Indeed," he purred back across the desk, "where is it?"

"That's what I don't know," Tonno snapped, "The radio you fixed for us did not tell me. But I think with a little Nipponese prodding, a lighted cigarette, a few fingernails drawn out, one or two more refinements *you* will tell me."

Charley looked into the puffy face across from him and realized Tonno was capable of exactly what he said. Yet there still remained a chance that he might squirm his way free.

"If you kill me," he said, "you will learn nothing. How can I talk about something I don't know?"

Tonno took the bit in his teeth. "Perhaps you haven't heard of my record in Manchukuo where I induced many Chinese to talk. In truth I had them singing in Japanese before I was done with them. I'll have you babbling Arabian within the hour. How did you get to this island, Rain?"

"By junk as I told you," Charley said. "I don't know your game, but it's not my idea of humor. What am I supposed to be —a spy?"

"Oh, no. Let me begin at the beginning —tea planter. In the first place, I killed Lee. He was the leader of the Chinese and when they would not coöperate with us—though they have since—I went to his shack one night in native pukai and gave him the Tonno trademark. I was never suspected because of that pukai, a small bit of which I left in his hand."

Charley sensed the drift. He would not be tortured until Tonno had rehashed his successes and strutted before his victim. The rehashing included his early army training, his family, his hobbies and his victories for the Mikado in North China and at Canton.

What thrilled him most at the moment was the promotion he was carving for himself on Hainak.

Meanwhile Charley had done a lot of thinking, but had gotten nowhere. With the grim-faced Awazi sitting across from him and the fat-faced Tonno rambling from behind the desk there was nowhere he could get. And the statement that the Chinese were now coöperating with the Japs, and his cup of woe was full. He was trapped, save for the innate pride which had never let him consider himself trapped. Call it ego, call it anything, Charleston Charley Prowell looked upon himself as

the one adventurer in the world fated to die with his boots on.

He'd still have them on—for he'd make them shoot him while on his feet. And he knew how to do it—start a roughhouse. Woo was somewhere in the village and these two were desperate men, but Keno was still in the hills with the majority of the soldiers—.

It built up to the place where Charley got to his feet for a running start when he should spring. He'd take a chance on knocking them out and evading the party on maneuvers. Flee to the uplands and trust to luck. How long he could hold out on an island the Jap's Chinese cohorts knew by heart was a question to be faced when it arose—and the con man king of the Coast from Yoko to Singapore never asked unnecessary questions beforehand.

"I tell you," he said, pacing the room, "I'm a planter and I came by junk. Do you think I swam?"

Suddenly his eyes chanced to stray out of the window and in that split second his hopes shot up into the stratosphere. Woo was continuing to hold forth to a circle of Nipponese warriors—but a small, green-covered island was drifting to the pier. He held himself in with an effort and looked again. It was being drawn by a group of Chinese who seemingly were pulling a net from far out in the harbor.

"—then how do you explain this?" Tonno's voice cut the abysmal stillness.

Charley turned and saw the harness of the parachute Woo had used in his descent. He saw it with a chilling finality, yet his brain was geared to a high pitch in the kind of a game he liked, all or nothing. He appreciated it would be all if he could keep Tonno and Awazi away from the window —until that island got near enough in for him to break from the house and leap aboard.

—"how," Tonno baited, "do you explain—?"

Charley's voice dripped gloom. "I guess you've got me. I *am* a spy. But that's not the one I wore. That belongs to the colonel. It won't fit me. It's too small."

"Colonel," Tonno screamed, his pistol suddenly out. "What colonel?"

"Colonel White of the U. S. Marines. Four hundred of us were landed two nights ago in the hills by parachute. I came ahead to scout your defense. And I might add, Tonno, if you try any lighted cigarettes on me there won't be enough of you left in an hour when those boys strike—"

Tonno slumped in his chair. His face was pasty gray, his hands trembling. Awazi swallowed hard. Rain stood grinning like a cat.

But Tonno had a second ace in the hole and when his initial surprise was over he flipped it. He didn't believe there were any Yankees in the hills waiting to strike, yet he had a healthy respect for the 4th U. S. M. C. crowd he'd met in Shanghai and he wanted no part of their companions. To play safe he raised his voice in a bellowing roar.

"Keno! Keno!" Lieutenant Keno rushed in through a back door. "Take your men out of hiding to the pier. Be alert for an attack. Make speed."

Keno raced out and when a company of men tore past the window Charley stood transfixed. He'd delayed Tonno, yet the pay-off had been counterfeit. Keno and his men weren't in the hills—and when the sub docked Charleston Charley Prowell would have provided the reception committee carrying death to thirty-odd young Americans.

FOR ONCE in his career he'd outsmarted himself, and probably for the last time. He knew now what he had to do, what any man of his race would do under similar circumstances—go out fighting. No whining, no pleading. It would be a no quarter brawl with them heavily armed and him depending on his fists. He was cornered, but he'd give two Japs something to remember him by.

Yet in a wild hope for a last-minute

break he glanced out the window again. The island was close in, almost touching the pier. An idling crowd of Chinese were gathered around Woo, fish nets over their shoulders, laughing and talking with the monkey men from Nippon. Charley was confused by their unconcern, and turned to the deserted pier-head.

In that split second the island touched. The con man's hopes touched bottom with it. For suddenly he discovered what had been drawing nearer all the time, but what he'd been too excited to notice—a pair of Jap destroyers were nearing the harbor entrance. He was the only one who saw them for he was on a rise of ground. The people in the village square were oblivious.

He wanted to shout, but that would tip Tonno and Awazi. And with Keno and his mob charging downhill toward the pier, plus the destroyers looming up outside—the sub was done beyond salvation. Charley couldn't look. He acted.

So swiftly did he lunge across the desk that he failed to see Woo's Chinese audience greet Keno's detail with a shower of fish nets, thrown straight and true by men who had been throwing fish nets all their lives. The result was a tangled snarl of confusion that made two score rifles useless. Then choppers flashed and all hell was loose.

Charley caught Tonno off guard, smashed a fist into his grinning face and crashed backward with him onto the floor. The desk was mixed up in the wild mêlée, the chair and Tonno's sword. Before the captain recovered from the lightning attack a second fist had smashed teeth through his upper lip, an eye was in trouble and he was short of breath.

But he was not done, not grievously hurt. With the alleged tea planter's body close to his own, Tonno writhed sideways until his pistol was free, jammed it into that brightly checkered shirt and pulled the trigger. The small room resounded with the roar and drowned out similar roars from down the path.

At this Awazi blinked, came around and drew his gun. Oddly enough the foreigner wasn't hurt. The bullet had crashed free and by an odd chance of fate splintered the door of a closet. Awazi was perplexed. He wanted to shoot the foreigner, yet he dared not for fear of hitting Tonno in that grunting, flailing shambles on the floor. Then he looked at the closet and was attracted by a pool of blood seeping into the room.

HE SWALLOWED hard, ignored the fight and leaped to the splintered door. It was Oni! His friend Oni, murdered and thrust in hiding at Tonno's elbow. That suggested Tonno—yet shortly before Tonno had spoken of what he was doing for Oni in the way of promotion. Promotion? Tonno had held out the bait of promotion to Awazi himself, then switched to leave—sometime soon.

Awazi might be big and grim but he was also slow thinking, which led to his downfall. For as he stood pondering what rôle he should play he felt a crushing weight like the kick of a mule in his midriff. He doubled. The mule kicked again on his chin and he sat on his haunches. Then a knuckled hammer slashed at his temple and he rolled over. The last he saw was a fleeting vision of red and yellow checks seemingly everywhere in the room, Tonno crawling to where his pistol had been hurled. Then the earth erupted somewhere under the brilliant sun outside.

Charley leaped for the window. A dense pall of smoke hung over the harbor entrance and the air was filled with flying débris. An American flag was flying above a periscope at the pier-head and while one crowd of white-jacketed Yankee sailors were rushing oil drums out of the shed another gang were loading torpedoes down the sub's hatch. Charley had trouble believing what he saw, they worked with such dispatch and cool assurance. He forgot his lumps, the rib he thought was caved in and the spot on his wrist where Tonno's

teeth had drawn blood. He screamed something about Pearl Harbor—and in that split second felt the cold nozzle of a pistol jam against his head.

Then something screamed past his eyes. The pistol clattered to the floor and when he swung around Tonno was on all fours, a chopper imbedded in his forehead and what had been his face was now a smear of crimson.

Charley looked out the window again—but all he saw this time was a frail Taoist priest laboring up the path over a bent stave.

Behind the priest came Keno at the head of a remnant of a detail. His destination was the headquarters shack, then doubtless, the safety of the hills beyond. Abruptly he paused and looked hard at the priest. The priest returned the close scrutiny with the bland innocence of a child. He was obviously an old man yet his face was young—and suddenly he began scratching the back of his neck, his fingers inching toward his *tan-jou* hat.

"Kill this pig," Keno shouted.

The aged priest's senility fell away in a twinkling. His figure straightened; the hat was knocked askew when a chopper glittered from under it and all but severed Keno's throat. Then a broadsword appeared from beneath his long-gown and he leaped forward swinging, hacking, flailing like a man gone beserk.

Charley saw no more, for the scene was blotted out. A chair descended on his head with crushing impact and simultaneously a hot needle seared into his shoulder. He turned in falling and saw Awazi grinning, taking a second careful aim with his pistol. Charley caught his legs, upended him with a convulsive effort and got a thick boot in his face in return.

The con man never got the straight of what followed. He had hazy recollections of himself on top, then Awazi on top. Someone was bleeding like a stuck pig and someone had teeth to spare. Tonno was on the floor dead and Oni beside him. But the hulking Jap survivor with the bravery medal on his chest was very much alive. Charley caught flashes of his snarling face and heard his grating voice. He was muscled like a bull and like a bull he threw caution overboard, charged in with his head lowered and his body providing the impetus of a battering ram.

It was in one of these rushes that he crashed head-on into the wall, rolled over and lay still. Then Elmer Rain saw the reason—a chopper down across his nose. Woo was standing in the doorway grinning, blood covered and grimy—but the chopper hadn't come from him. It was the one that had felled Tonno, and Charley never could ask himself who had used it.

WOO grasped his arm and pointed as they started down the path. Charley looked and saw a ribbon of white flashing out from the submarine. He watched it with fatal fascination that did not waver when the forward turret of the sole remaining destroyer spit out its first salvo. There was never a second for the ribbon's aim was perfect. It crashed against the gray hull under the rising sun flag of Japan and again the air was a maelstrom of dense black smoke and débris.

By the time the sea was calming they had reached the pier-head. The Yanks were still busy with the oil drums, torpedoes and a backslapping crowd of Chinese. Charley spotted the officer then, resting on his spread arms over the sub's hatch. He was young, smiling, casual.

"You Elmer Rain?" he asked. Charley nodded. "Good thing you told these Chinese we were out there. They didn't know it. We were short on lubricating oil and couldn't move without burning our bearings. But this pier had everything ready, we knew the American brands and got just the oil we needed."

"But the torpedoes?" Charley managed to get in through puffed lips. "How did they fit your tubes?"

"Hell," the Yank laughed, "the Nips

copied them from us in the first place. Just like they copied the Garand rifles. These torpedoes fit us perfectly. We're probably the only Americans living who don't resent monkey see monkey do. If the Jap's hadn't copied our torpedoes this packet'd be at the bottom of the drink. We're crowded plenty, Rain, we haven't lost a man but we'll make room for you. Come on aboard. We're putting to sea."

"Sea?" Charley spluttered. "I'm supposed to pilot you up the Wei River."

"Nuts," the officer laughed. "We're all set again. We're not quitting. I'd have a mutiny on my hands if I suggested it. This crew's just getting hot. We're going after the convoy."

"What convoy?"

"Why, the one these destroyers left to come here. My hunch is it's around the other side of the island." A petty officer shouted that the oiling was done. The sub had all she could carry, and the torpedo racks were full. The crew swarmed aboard and after a round of handshakes the hatch was made fast.

Then a deep rumble sounded from inside and she moved away from the pier.

CHARLEY glanced over his shoulder and saw that every native was armed. They could hold the harbor against any assault attempt in case the sub needed to return. Then he caught the grinning face of the elder who hadn't believed him.

"Why did you suspect me on the beach?" he asked.

"Think you German."

"But how did you know the sub crew was American."

"Not know until she come in and we see tattoo of dancing girl on sailor's arm. Germans not do that. Americans like very much."

Charley got it, or part of it. "But you only knew that after you'd pulled them in. Suppose then they proved to be Japs?"

"We think of something," the elder said casually. "We stop that trick like we stopped crowd with fish nets."

Charley shook his head. These natives might be primitive and suspicious Hakkas, but they were also possessed of plenty Chinese ingenuity. They played safe, and they played deadly. He thought they were swell.

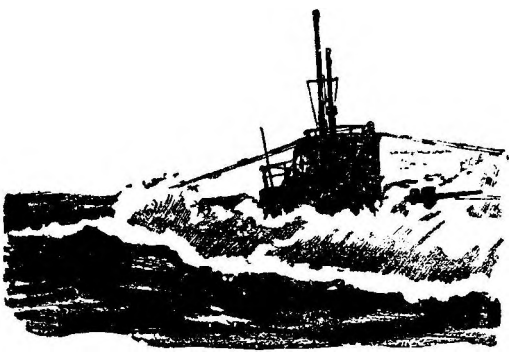
Sometime later he and Woo started for the uplands behind Lee's shack. When they reached the promontory they saw a line of four Jap ships convoyed by a big cruiser. Almost before they could estimate the number of troops being carried the cruiser shivered from stem to stern, seemed to halt dead in her course. Then she rolled over before a single gun aboard her had been fired.

A sub surfaced a short distance away and started pounding the transports with her deck gun.

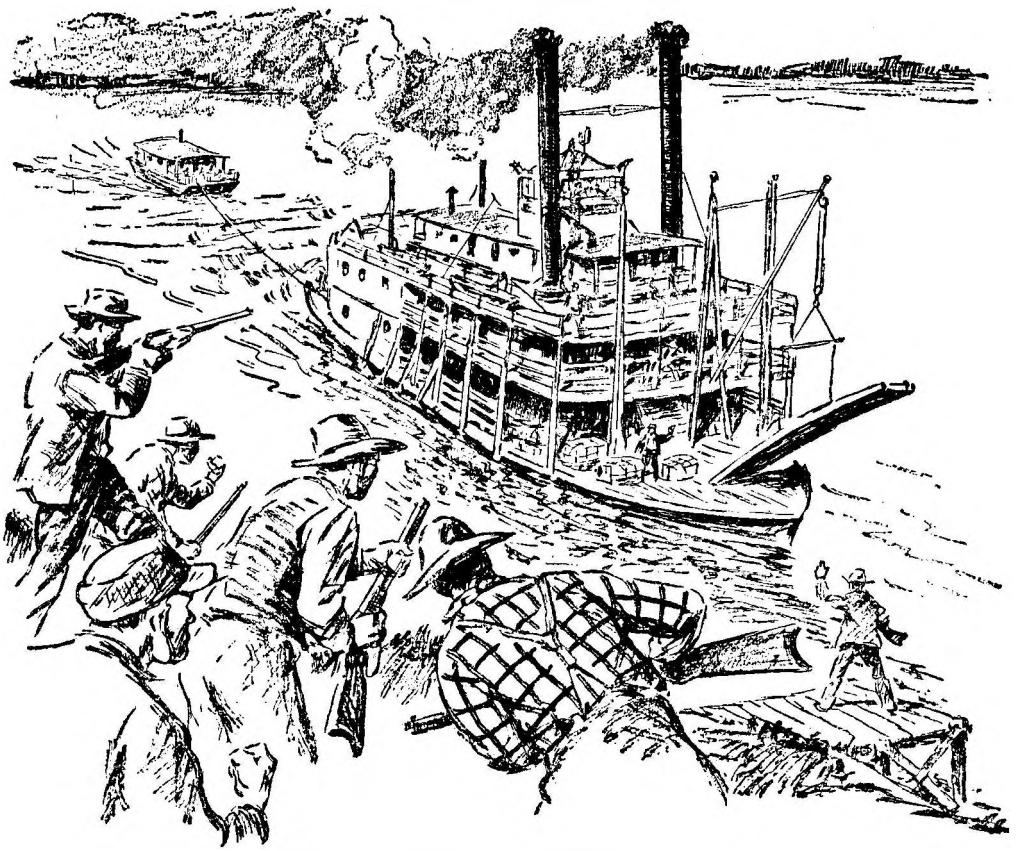
For good measure a second ribbon of white lashed out from her bow.

"Some swimming pig," Woo grunted.

"Yes," Charley laughed, "and some bite."



"Trust a Cottonmouth or the Muzzle End of a Loaded Gun, But Never a Steamboat Man"



PLAGUE BOAT

By FRANK BONHAM

I

WHISKEY CREEK

AT DUSK Ben Worden came up from the texas and took the wheel from Ord McDan'l. He scowled down at the opaque surface of the river, as thick and red as tomato soup in the sunset. Ezra Church came from his plush chair at the back of the wheelhouse. The planks creaked under his weight as he moved to stand at Ben's back. In the dusk, he loomed behind Ben like a fat, soiled ghost, his wrinkled white washable trousers and pleat-front shirt gray, in the gloom.

He cleared his throat. "As I recall it," he said, "Whiskey Creek empties into the river about a mile above that shack, yonder."

Ben said curtly, "It's less than half a mile, and the mark's a burned stump on the nigh shore. I've been up this river before. Maybe you didn't know."

Ezra Church, who owned a dozen steamboats four times the size of Ben's little packet, glowered at the back of the pilot's

head and was silent. But the promise of an early explosion was in his purpling features and the small eyes choked in fat.

At the brushy delta of Whiskey Creek, Ben rang half speed on the larboard buckets and poked the white nose of the sternwheeler into the darkling bayou. Crumbling banks overgrown with rank vegetation and guarded by a dark army of cypresses threw back the watery thunder of the paddles.

Night, sinister and full of dark portents, moved upon the river; fear came out of the bayou and walked the wheelhouse, and its hard pressure was in the face of each man, even Ben Worden, who had been at odds with danger before and had not moved one step out of its path.

But Ben and Ord McDan'l and Ezra Church all knew that the shantyboaters of the Whiskey Creek region were more dangerous than a rattlesnake, in that they gave no indication before they struck. In the last month, three pilots had dropped beside their wheels without knowing that they had come into a shantyboat man's sights, and their boats had gone hard aground before the relief man could reach the wheel.

They'd had their differences, the men who piloted the gleaming white palaces that traversed the ol' Mississipp' and the men who slept and fished and drank on their ramshackle house-boats; but there were quarrels in which no one could have foreseen a war. It was a bloodless feud which had become a habit with each group.

Shantyboaters' dinghies had been swamped by careless pilots for generations. Trotlines were forever being cut by the paddles of a packet working inshore uncommonly close. But these were hazards of the trade, which they cursed roundly and endured, like malaria and the spring shortage of good corn liquor.

But when a shantyboat full of river folk was run down at Whiskey Creek and seven men and women were drowned, the shantyboaters declared war. No matter that the raft had been in mid-river at midnight and jammed to the bull-rails with river people celebrating a wedding, all of them more or less drunk. Murder had been done.

The River Commission stewed over the sniping of steamboat pilots and did nothing, while cargoes mysteriously caught fire, and snags, moored just under the river's surface, took out the paddles of a dozen boats.

BEN'S eyes, brown as the river at flood, squinted in a face that was lean and hard with constant perusing of the river's face, the book that a pilot must learn to read without stumbling. Long, strong fingers clenched on the walnut spokes, he settled his boots in the worn pile of the carpet.

He strove for ease of mind and did not find it, for he knew that old Catfish Clemens himself was likely in this bayou, and Clemens was to the shantyboat clan what Neptune is to the deep-water man—part legend, part god, mostly devil.

To Ord McDan'l, Ben said, "Tell them rousters to chunk that torch in the river and shoot craps in the boiler room. I'm gettin' a reflection on the bright work."

McDan'l, a stocky man in a blue box coat, heavy mustaches frizzled and bald head beaded with perspiration, grimaced at Ezra Church and went below. On the *Majestic*, flagship of Church's Red Star fleet, McDan'l was chief pilot, but he was only a humble relief man today, on Ben Worden's down-at-heels little tub.

Church's glance sought the wall clock. "Six o'clock," he muttered. "Pity we couldn't have got here on schedule. We'll be crowded to get out of the bayou before sun-up. Flood'll be on us in less than twelve hours."

Ben Worden swung the wheel. The *Annabelle* pried between twin islands that rose suddenly from the gloom. "Maybe you'd like to turn back," he suggested. "Maybe the business of bein' a hero don't appeal to you so much, now that we've got

a chance to finish the trip hangin' to pieces of flotsam."

Church's pendulous jowls worked like those of a bulldog. He bit the end off a cigar and his teeth locked upon it.

"I knew what we were getting in for," he said. "The idea of personal safety is my last concern. I'm thinking of two-score men and women dying of yellow-jack at Bayou Grand. It's worth any risk if we can save as many as two or three of them. But as for being a hero—" His fat shoulders shrugged. He struck a sulphur match and twisted the cigar in the flame until it smouldered.

Ben Worden's hand shot back over his shoulder and he ripped the cigar from the boatman's mouth. He slid open a window and hurled the cheroot into the night. "If you can't do any better than that," he snapped, "go down to the saloon. Maybe your pilots have to put up with your lightin' flares in the pilot-house. I don't."

Ezra Church came sputtering out of his stunned silence. All the indignities of the last two days were loosed within him. "By God, if you ever make another pay-haul it won't be my fault! I'll see that the commission blacklists you from one end of the river to the other. You ain't a lick smarter, or less wo'thless, than when you were livin' on catfish and corn whiskey on your old man's shantyboat. And I'll see that you land right back there."

At the companionway, he glared at the lean form of the pilot, framed against the rusty skyline. "You can put a shantyboater at the wheel of the biggest boat on the Mississip', and he's still a shantyboater," he said bitterly.

"That," said Ben Worden, "ought to be good enough for anybody."

He was glad Catfish Clemens and his long-legged daughter, Jolean, hadn't heard him say that. For in a way Ben was proud of his shantyboat ancestry, though he knew that there would be no more nights when he sat on the foredeck of *Catfish,* boat with Jolean and talked and stole an occasional kiss; no more nights spent in spinning windies with other shantyboat men, while the air of the cabin thickened with smoke and the whiskey jug sat in the middle of the floor, and men's hearts warmed to each other. There would be no more summer afternoons hunting and fishing with sinful old Catfish Clemens.

All those things ended two years ago, when Ben Worden forsook his father's honored calling to pilot his own packet-boat. All Ben's kinfolk lived on the river. They said, "Trust a cottonmouth or the muzzle end of a loaded gun, but never a steamboat man."

Ben's father had died like a good shantyboat man. He was setting his trotlines after dark when the steamboat hove upon him. And because he knew he couldn't get out from under, he stood up and shook his fist and cursed the pilot until he was run down. But he was full of corn and out in mid-channel, and nothing much was said about it.

THERE was talk a-plenty, however, when Ben acquired the *Annabelle.* Her owner-captain had picked a night of hell and high water to tie up at Natchez, dismiss the crew, and get drunk. Ben found her on a sand-bar, put in his claim for ten thousand dollars salvage, and had it honored by the river commission. Her owner swore she wasn't worth it and refused to pay. So Ben Worden gave his trot-lines to Catfish Clemens and went on the river.

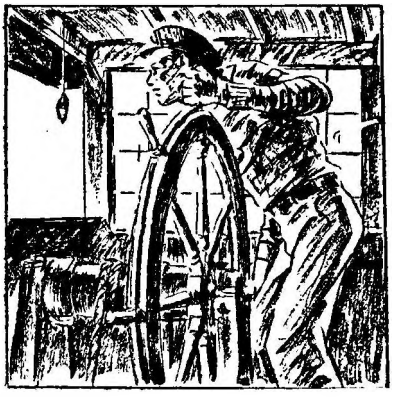
He knew the smaller tributaries as he knew the palm of his hand. He was lean and tough, the way the river makes a man who works hard and leaves whiskey alone. He was tall, his clothes were dungarees and an old striped jersey. He wore a leather-visored cap on the back of his head, and his eyes had small lines at the corners, pinched in deep through reading the river's fine print.

The *Annabelle* was the smallest boat on the lower Mississippi. Thus she got a lot of jobs the bigger boats couldn't take,

when the water was too shoal or the haul was up some small backwoods creek.

And thus the *Annabelle* was chartered by Ezra Church, heading a committee for the relief of the yellow fever victims at Bayou Grand, to make the trip to the flood-marooned village with medical supplies and equipment.

Darkness came, and an ache behind Ben's eyes sharpened. On the black, oily face of the creek he found with difficulty the lines and dimples that warned of hidden sawyers and snags. The night was warm. He flung open the windows, for swamp-damp had begun to settle on the glass. Her crowned chimneys bulging flame, the *Annabelle* shoved on through the sounds and smells of the bayou night. Ben's nose wrinkled at the fustiness of the heavy air. It seemed rank with poisonous humors.



Feud, and flood, and fever—three grim foemen to try any pilot's heart. Ben knew he was risking his boat, for if the oncoming flood took him out of the channel, he would never find it again. Sniper's bullets, or the horrible death that men called black vomit might do for him or all the members of his skeleton crew, after they reached the plague victims.

Ord McDan'l came up from dinner to stand at his shoulder, sucking his teeth. He watched Ben spoke off with apparent carelessness. And he frowned, stroking his mustaches, as the packet went plowing through snag-beset channels.

"You've got a savvyin' way about you, young feller," he said. "Man'd think you knew your job."

"Ought to," admitted Ben. "Been up this creek often enough."

"Not at flood, I'll wager. But you're doin' a lightning job. Tell you something, Ben—" The older pilot spat through the window. "You're passing up the wishbone o' this bird for the neck. Big river, big money; little river—chicken feed. Why don't you sell this tub and get a job on a good boat—say one o' Church's Red Stars? Four hundred a month and grub."

"Little ol' *Annabelle* suits me fine. Better class of people on a boat this size."

"That all depends on your tastes," McDan'l retorted. "I've seen some mighty sorry outfits crawl out of boats this size. Give me an eight-b'iler boat every time. Then nobody's going to mistake me for a shantyboater."

Ben's jaw muscles knotted. "I'm a shantyboater once removed, myself," he said.

McDan'l went back and sat by the stove. "Got the disposition of one, at any rate," he said. On that note, the conversation ended.

With the *wash-wash* of her buckets behind, the packet poked her curious nose deep into Whiskey Creek. Glutted with spring torrents, the bayou was virtually a foreign passage to Ben. The clock was bonging off eleven strokes when Ben's eyes found a curious redness in the trees some distance ahead. Hearing his grunt of surprise, McDan'l and Ezra Church came forward.

"Grand Bayou," Ben frowned. "Though what— Thunderation! The town's afire!"

II

CATFISH CLEMENS

THEY had come around the bend into full view of the town. Great piles of flame poured a redness onto the water. Up this carpet of liquid fire the packet glided

with paddles now dragging. The town's outlines were starkly silhouetted by the surging light. Tumble-down shacks crowding the river-bank, wharves leaning slanchwise to the water, a mountain of baled cotton on the dock.

"Them's sperrit fires!" McDan'l said. "Darkies build 'em to keep the sick-devils off."

As they warped in to the dock, the dismal monotone of Negroes' voices came to them from the high ground back of town. The wailing traced a cold finger down Ben's spine. He sent the steamboat's shrill whistle through these mournful sounds.

While roustabouts threw the boat's stout hawsers over the mooring bitts, the flame-soaked streets gave up the forms of men and women hurrying toward the dock. There was a medieval, plague-town malignance to the setting that made Ben's skin pimple with gooseflesh. In the noxious air he could taste horror and disease.

He raised his eyes from the wharf and let his glance wander down to where the flood-choked river had burst its banks and taken the south end of town. And there he saw Catfish Clemens' shantyboat.

He grabbed the speaking tube. His voice echoed back from the engine room. "Keep them drums a-groanin'! We put out in an hour!"

The landing stage was run out and Ben was the first man on the dock. Lumbering behind him came Ezra Church, and at his heels Ord McDan'l; behind timber and stanchion flashed the perspiring, scared faces of rousters.

Ben saw Church move busily among the piles of cotton, inspecting tags, counting bales, standing in the middle of it while he let his small eyes, quick and mercenary as adding machines, rove over the dock. Moving to the landing stage, Church cupped his hands to his mouth.

"Lay me a gangway! *Stir,* you niggers! Stow those bales aboard!"

With his words, a slow wonder grew on Ben; but movement suddenly spirited his glance to where three figures were coming onto the dock. He strove for recognition, and when it came he stood with his spine gone stiff and his face honed to a feathered sharpness. To Church, his voice coming with a quick thrust, he said:

"Catfish Clemens. Watch him. When he's drunk he's tricky as a tinhorn gambler's left hand."

CATFISH stopped within a few feet of them. He was tall and stooped and had a nose like a buzzard's beak. Malaria had yellowed his skin like an old hide and left his body a gangling rack of stringy muscle and bone.

"Of all the boats to get through," he said, "it had to be your stinking little tub. But it's any old port in a storm—"

There was corn liquor in his rusty-hinge voice and bloodshot eyes, but Ben answered coolly, "If you think I came up here to pull your damned raft to safety, you're drunker than usual. Where's those sick folks?"

"That's what Pop's saying." Jolean stood at Catfish's elbow, slim and straight in a white jersey and brown skirt, a slender, high-breasted girl with auburn hair caught back by a ribbon and eyes that were blue with flakes of gray in them. To Ben, her beauty was always as startling and as moving as the sun breaking through leaden clouds at sunset, after a day of storm. "We've got the sick 'uns in houseboats, but we can move them onto the *Annabelle* in an hour's time."

Ezra Church made a sound like that of a man strangling. "Move the plague onto my boat? Turn the thing into a pest ship? I reckon *not!*"

With Catfish and Jolean was a lean, rawboned young man in dirty white coat and trousers. He could not have been over thirty; he was tall and excessively slender, and his eyes were keen in dark pockets. A stubble of brown whiskers said that he hadn't stropped a razor in days.

"Pest ship?" he echoed, with the trace

of a smile. "I'd call it a mercy ship. By tomorrow Bayou Grand will be under three feet of water. We're evacuating the able-bodied to high ground and the sick to boats. But those dying men and women won't have a chance when the flood hits."

Church looked at him coldly. "And who are you?"

"The shanty folks call me Young Doc. I reckon that'll do. I've escorted a dozen of those same shanty people out of this world in the last three days, not to mention a score of townsmen. The rest must be taken out quickly. When the black vomit strikes, there's not much I can do without medicine."

"Medicine—" Church's thick lips suddenly smiled. "Medicine, of course! Will you come aboard, gentlemen? We came for that very purpose."

ROUSTERS were back-and-bellying the hemp-netted bales of cotton onto the boat as they ascended to the texas. Ben had said nothing yet, but his mind was busy, and he thought he had finally accounted for Ezra Church's unprecedented generosity in chartering a boat out of his own pocket to do rescue-work.

The boat man lugged a box onto the deck and set it by a water barrel. He was sweating; his silk shirt stuck to his chest like a mustard plaster.

"You said medicine. There you are! I can't take your sick folk on board, our supplies will insure that they get the best care possible."

Young Doc's knuckly fingers opened the box and removed a bottle. He read the label and nodded. "I'm grateful, Captain. But it will take more than medicine to save these people. I need clean beds, fresh food—pure water!"

Church's jaw set harder. He sopped his handkerchief in the water barrel and placed it folded across the top of his bald head. "I couldn't bring a whole hospital with me."

Ord McDan'l shifted on his stocky legs. "Reckon there'll be plenty of room, Captain, even with your cotton aboard. I don't see why—"

"Then I'll tell you why! No town on the river would let us land, with the damn' tub crawling with yellow jack! We'd be afloat for weeks, until the last man was well—or dead. What's more, my cotton would go begging after we did dock. Ten thousand dollars worth!"

"And there," said Ben Worden, "is the whole story. Cotton. I thought that halo was a size too big for you, Church. An angel of mercy grindin' a private axe under his robes. Don't you savvy, Young Doc? He bought this cotton on futures and knew he'd lose it all if he couldn't take it out before the flood hit."

Church snapped, his eyes aflame with fury and desperation, "The cotton was a secondary consideration."

"You can prove that," Young Doc suggested, "by letting us bring the patients aboard."

Ezra Church's jowls worked. "I am under no obligation to defend my motives. I'm putting out in an hour. I have a feeling you'll make out quite nicely without any further help."

He dipped a tin cup full of water and was raising it to his lips when Young Doc rapped, "Captain Church!"

"Well?"

"Take my advice and don't drink that stuff. Call me crazy, if you like—plenty have—but I have a theory that yellow fever grows in contaminated water."

"Bah!" Church noisily drank off the brimming cup, let it fall to dangle by the string. "I've drunk river water all my life and never caught a bug yet."

"I hope you can say as much a few hours from now, if you've been drinking that stuff all the way up."

There was a frowning interval of silence; then Ben Worden saying, "I'm going down with you, Doc, and we'll load 'em on."

Ord McDan'l stared hard at Church; then he seemed, with an effort, to break from the manacles of convention. "I'm with you!" he said.

Church pointed a swift finger at Ben. "Then it will be the last cargo either of you ever moves. I've got my rights. Until we hit New Orleans, I'm in command. If you men persist in mutiny, I'll see you both stripped of your licenses, and you, Worden, of your boat."

Ben was conscious of Catfish Clemens watching him with amber eyes full of poison, his lips smirking silent sarcasm. He knew Jolean was waiting to hear how an ex-shantyboater would answer Church's ultimatum.

It was McDan'l who first grunted response. "Bluff! With these witnesses you'd never touch us."

Ben's eyes were unsteady, touching in succession the faces of Jolean, Catfish, and Young Doc, and finally wandering to McDan'l.

"That's all right for you. You could apply for reinstatement if he did pull your teeth. But what about my boat? If I carry a plague cargo they'll tie her up at a bonded dock till she rots or wharf charges eat her up."

Catfish began to curse in a bitter monotone. "You yaller mud-sucker! You misbegotten offspring of a rouster pappy and a she-wolf mammy—"

"Pop!" Jolean made it a command, and while Catfish got his breath she confronted Ben. "You haven't got this far away from the river, have you, Ben? To let folks die rather than risk losing your boat? Wash Gray's down with the plague, and Jube Milton's family. Remember them?"

Ben said, "I remember 'special Wash Gray hammering a bullet under my nose last month, a mile above his shanty. Would Wash or any other cussed shanty man risk so much as a mes o' channel cat to help me out of a fix?"

"You know they would. We've taken aplenty from you high'n mighty steamboaters, but we can forget a grudge when there's the need."

"When you're a-needin' help, leastways," said Ben.

Jolean's face was tired and her shoulders were slumped under the thin sweater. She passed Ben without a word, and the heart of him turned sharply, so that he had to clench his fists to keep from reaching for her.

Catfish followed, pausing at the rail for a last thrust. "I've held 'em down as best I could, but I'm cuttin' the hawsers now. What happens from tonight on ain't on my conscience."

Young Doc went with them, carrying the box of drugs under his arm; and in his very silence Ben felt scorn that was like a lash.

Church went forward. Ord McDan'l would have gone off the guard for a smoke, but Ben drew him into the shadows.

"A shantyman's pride is a sorry thing," he said. "It kept me from saying before those two what I'm going to say to you."

McDan'l filled his pipe without looking up. "I've called many a pilot many a bitter name, but never coward."

"Don't break the record for me," Ben said, beginning to smile. "Go catch Young Doc and tell him what I say—"

The older man listened; then smiled and struck Ben between the shoulder blades. "You've a fool's pride but a riverman's heart!" he said.

III

Stowaways to Hell

IT WAS just after one o'clock when Ben Worden reached for the go-ahead bell and the *Annabelle* warped out into mid-stream. Ord McDan'l slumped in a chair in a dark corner of the wheelhouse, but Ezra Church was right there at Ben's elbow, seeing the job done right.

Sluggish under a wallowing weight of cotton, the steamboat swung a circle and

headed out. Not until Bayou Grand was well behind did Church stir from his position. He rubbed his sweaty forehead with a moist palm.

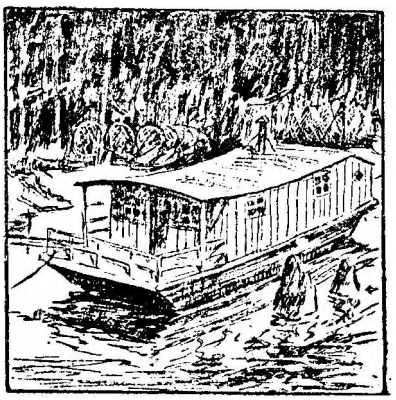
"I'll grab a few winks," he announced. "This cursed swamp air's given me a beastly headache."

At dawn the *Annabelle* shouldered heavily against the tawny flood-heads of the Mississippi. Familiar landmarks along the shores were all erased, and where those guiding snags and cut-banks had been, the pilot's tired eyes found only the suck-and-boil of a brown blanket of water that lapped deep into the fields on each side.

Ben had hardly straightened up for the down-stream haul when Ezra Church came charging into the wheelhouse like a mad water buffalo.

"Worden!" he charged. "That damned shantyboat is towing behind us!"

Ben tied the wheel and looked aft. A hundred feet astern, Catfish Clemens' shantyboat was throwing off huge bow-waves like a harrow coming through a wheat field. She was loaded to the gunwales. Beds occupied every inch of deck



space. Jolean was on her knees beside one of the victims, administering Young Doc's medicine.

It was right then that Young Doc, himself, came up from the saloon into the pilot-house, picking his teeth after a hasty breakfast. Ben gave him a quick glance.

"You know, I thought she handled mighty sluggish," he said. "I reckon Young Doc, here, must have tied on as we were leaving."

"You do, eh? It couldn't be that you thought you'd beat a mutiny charge by telling the commission they stowed away without your knowledge?"

Ben made his eyes round. "Captain Church! You don't trust me!"

The captain started for the door. "Have your little joke. But give an extra belly laugh when I cut that pest-raft loose."

Young Doc remarked quietly. "It would just about ruin a big man like you to have such a tale of cold-blooded murder bandied up and down the river."

Church halted, slowly turned around. He knew the doctor held aces. But he was not easily stumped, and he said, "Then I'll sure as heaven unload them at the first town we hit! And if the townsmen cut them loose, it isn't my fault. Stand from the wheel, pilot. I'm taking over." He thrust Ben out of the way. His face was flushed; his skin looked hot and dry, and he had ceased to perspire.

Seeing that, Young Doc stroked his chin. "Well, Church, you can't say I didn't warn you."

"About what?"

"About drinking the water. Why don't you admit you're sick? Your head's splitting with fever. Your throat aches. Your belly's tied in knots. Yellow jack!"

"Rubbish!" snorted Captain Ezra Church. "If you intend to stick with your outfit, mister, get back on the shanty. I'm cutting you off at Tobacco Point. McDan'l —send me up a bottle of brandy."

THE little town of Tobacco Point had kept the plague out, thus far, and by the looks of the committee on the dock, she meant to remain healthy. Townsmen and shantyboaters stood close-packed, hats tugged down on their faces, jaws jutting. Rifle and shotgun barrels ran red, dipped in sunrise light, as the *Annabelle* warped in.

Standing between the chimneys with

McDan'l, Ben Worden winced as he saw gun bores level off at them, and suddenly he and the other man both were sprawling on their bellies, as gunflame ran redly the width of the dock. Heavy duckload spattered the packet's windows. A rifle ball whanged off an iron chimney.

Up in the wheel-house, Ezra Church shouted curses at the townsmen, and steered back into the river. Lead continued for some time to chew into plank and stanchion, and the yells of the Tobacco Pointers was their only farewell.

Ben got on his feet. "Maybe now he savvies that he ain't going to land them that way."

"Don't you think it," said McDan'l. "He won't give up that easy and risk havin' his cotton burned at the dock."

Ben thought of that, knowing that a plague-fearful mob would not bother to take the cotton off the boat before burning it. He had thrown his boat, his livelihood, his last penny, into the fight to save a boatload of people who wouldn't give a damn what happened to him so long as they got off safely.

At Brewster, four miles south, a group of armed townspeople met them on the jetty that ran out into the river from the little red-brick and clapboard town. Their shouts rang across the water.

"Keep a-rollin', pilot! You ain't unloadin' your pest-cargo here!"

Ezra Church thrust his head out the window. Through a leather megaphone he shouted, "We've a load of flood victims, neighbors! No yellow jack aboard, you understand? Just let us drop this shanty—"

Someone bawled, *"Keep a-rollin'!"* and a bullet shivered the window beside his head.

Later, Ben looked back from the hurricane and saw something that chilled him to the marrow of his bones. Young Doc and Catfish Clemens raised a plank to the rail of the raft and let a body, wrapped in a sheet, slide into the water. It went straight down, and a trail of bubbles rose and was lost in the wake, but the remembrance of those bubbles lay long in Ben Worden's mind.

Behind the locked door of the pilothouse, Church steered a wild and perilous course. Two more towns drove the *Annabelle* off. They could see Church up there behind the wheel, sick, drunk, possessed of the blind fixation that he must unload his pest cargo at any cost.

The *Annabelle* ran full upon a dozen sawyers; Church barely missed them by climbing the wheel. Each time, the shantyboat rolled wildly, shipping waves that soaked the sick, lying on pallets on the deck. Catfish shook his fist at the pilot. Presently Ben saw him throw a line over a bitt on the packet, make it fast to the bow of his dinghy, and pull himself and Jolean forward by the rope.

He met them as they came onto the boiler deck. "Who's pilotin' this tub?" Catfish shouted. "We're like to swamp!"

"You took that chance when you stowed away."

Catfish's crooked teeth showed in a derisive grin. "Come out from behind them false whiskers. Young Doc told us this was your idea."

Ben's face colored. While he tried to frame an answer, Jolean spoke quietly.

"We're all grateful to you, Ben. Even though we know it was like pulling teeth for you to help us."

Ben looked down at the water, thick and brown and streaked. "Those fool shantyboaters don't know the meaning of the word grateful. They'll give me the horse laugh when they see the *Annabelle* burnt, and never raise a hand to pay me back a dollar of what she's worth."

"Who'd burn it?"

"I watched the *Queen City* burn ten years ago, when she carried a load of typhoid down from Hangin' Rock. It'd be the same with this boat."

Jolean and Catfish were silent, frowning, and Ben said bitterly, "They say once

a shantyman, always a shantyman. I'll be back on the river next month, loafin' and fishin' and never havin' two dollars in my jeans to rub together."

IV

A Shantyboater Makes Peace

FEAR came into the packet, like a plague itself. Fearful roustabouts bunched on the foredeck, praying, wailing, terrified by the grim raft that followed like the shadow of death. The knowledge grew that Ezra Church was half mad. Young Doc told Ben that there was no doubt but that he had yellow jack. That the full force of it would hit him before night.

Thus the day wore on, a succession of river towns approached and found hostile. There came a time when Church passed a town without making any effort to land. The significance of that put a cold weight in Ben's breast. But Ord McDan'l now seemed relieved.

"He's given up. Maybe he'll let us take over."

Ben went up with him, but he shook his head. He ain't givin' up. He's too sick, too crazy to savvy that he's licked. I got a fear for what comes next, McDan'l."

Church grunted some response to their knock and they heard the door unlocked. The boatman had tied the wheel. He stumbled to a chair. Dropping into it, he let his head fall against the back.

"Take the wheel, Worden," he muttered. "McDan'l, fetch me a pitcher of water."

Ben took the smooth spokes into his grasp. He heard the other man leave and then, oddly, the grate of the lock. But the towering chimney of a Red Star boat took his attention right then, as it moved past a near bend and into mid-river, plowing north. Only a few hundred yards behind it came a second boat, pushing a string of tow-boats before it.

Until Church spoke, Ben did not realize he had come close. Steer closer to her, pilot. Starboard to starboard."

"We'll risk the current sucking us together!"

A gun-barrel touched Ben's spine and Church croaked: "Spoke off!"

McDan'l was at the door with the ice water, pounding. The captain breathed noisily through his mouth and the pressure of the gun remained above the small of Ben's back.

"What are you trying to do?" Ben demanded.

Through the panels came Ord McDan'l's command to open the door. For a split-second the gun left Ben's back and the roar of an exploding shell pounded against his ear-drums. McDan'l could be heard falling back to safety. Again there was the urge of cold steel at his spine.

"Right close, now, pilot!" warned Ezra Church.

It was the *Henry W. Bean*, and they passed so close that their bull rails traded coats of paint. During the passage, Church lowered his gun and turned his back on the *Bean*. Ben saw the officers of the boat at the pilot-house windows; he heard the captain cursing him, and then a man saying, "It's that shantyboater—Ben Worden! Full o' corn, I'll wager!"

In an instant the passage had been made. Ben reached for the tie-down, and with his hand still groping staggered against the wall and fell. He never quite lost consciousness. Church's gun-barrel had struck him glancingly on the back of the head.

He was brought harshly back to consciousness by the sound of yells rising from below. Strongest of them was McDan'l's hoarse shout at the door. Ben, for God's sake, stop him! He's fixing to wipe the shanty off on the tow-boat!

Ben sat up, feeling the blood move dully through his head. He saw a red chimney come into the square of a window. With the shock of that, he was on his feet and starting forward.

The *Annabelle* was cutting directly across

the path of the big stern-wheeler with its string of tow-boats. The steamboat was so close that he could see the decks crowded with excited passengers, yelling and waving their arms. The forms of officers moved jerkily in the wheelhouse. The sound of the boat's whistle was a frantic, hoarse snore.

Ben staggered towards Church. "Get away from that wheel!"

Church twisted to fire, his face red and distorted, and though the muzzle blast of the gun burned Ben's cheek, the bullet passed harmlessly. He stepped in, reaching for the gun. He gripped the warm barrel and another shot ripped past him. Then Ben had torn the weapon free and with a backhand blow smashed the butt of it against Ezra Church's forehead.

With his foot, he shoved the ponderous body away and swung the wheel. He hung on the steam cord. He was acting purely by boatman's instinct, knowing that to try to swing upriver would send the shantyboat crashing broadside into a raft; to try to cross in front of the string would mean the shanty got cut in two.

Ben headed down-river, hoping the shantyboat would follow true. He came in beside the stern-wheeler so close that their loading booms crashed together. A fancy scrollwork railing was ripped from the bigger boat. He had a glimpse of the captain in the pilot-house, shaking his fist at him.

Then Ben knew why Church had made him pilot the boat past the Red Star craft. There would be witnesses to swear that Ben Worden had been piloting the *Annabelle* three minutes before the shantyboat was wiped off on a tow-boat—

At the last instant, he looked back. The shanty was wallowing into the river giant's path. He climbed on the wheel.

Ord McDan'l was yelling. "Hard a-starboard! Hard a-starboard!"

The *Annabelle* heeled far over, as if she would capsize. Bales of cotton toppled like sugar lumps into the brown river. And now the first of the tow-boats slid in beside the shanty.

Bow waves piled upon the shallow deck. Young Doc planted a boat-hook against the sheer-strake of the steamboat. The force of that contact hurled him against the wall of the cabin, and he slipped down and lay stunned, while Catfish ran past him to retrieve the boat-hook.

Then one of the heavy waves got under the raft and shoved her away, gently, so that the protruding fan-tail of the steamboat grazed by her within a foot, and a landing stage crashed against the crooked sheet-metal chimney and topped it into the water.

With clear water ahead, the *Annabelle* pulled her burden to safety and steamed on. Ben Worden tied the wheel and unlocked the door. His face was the color of a bloated channel cat.

"She's yours, he said to Ord McDan'l. Like the feller says, I feel the need of a stimulant."

SOMETIME after midnight the *Annabelle* nosed into a berth at the foot of Canal Street, in New Orleans. Ezra Church was not aboard. During the night yellow jack took him, and Ben and Catfish quietly gave him a river man's burial.

The sharp-eyed ferret of a man from the health department, who arrived in the morning, showed considerable curiosity regarding Church's death. He poked about the texas and finally came back to the wheelhouse, where Ben, McDan'l, Catfish and Jolean waited on tenterhooks.

Whichun's the room Mr. Church died in?" he demanded, and Ben thought, "Here it comes! They'll burn her before sundown."

But Catfish answered, corking his jug of corn and setting it at his feet. "Matter of fact, Church died on my boat."

"On that shantyboat! Why in heaven's name did he set foot on the thing?"

"Well, you know Mr. Church. It was everybody else first, and him last. He was

up all night, carin' for the sick. And when he knew he'd caught yeller jack himself and had to go, he said, 'Don't waste no medicine on me, Catfish. Save it for them other poor souls that has a chance.' "

CATFISH choked a sob by taking another pull at the jug. The health official gazed reflectively through a rear window at the empty shantyboat, from which all the sick had been removed.

"A pity," he murmured. "Mr. Church was a fine man. But it doesn't alter any the report I have to make."

He made a notation in a little leather book. "Mr. Worden," he said to Ben, "as your boat now floats, she is a menace to the health of the entire community. That menace must be removed. I shall send down a box of sulphur candles this afternoon, which you are to use to fumigate your boat from bull rails to whistle. After that you may obtain your free-bill."

Ben sat woodenly, not trusting his ears. The ferret-eyed man froze Catfish's grin by remarking from the door, "I'll send a tug down today to tow that raft out to sea and burn it. Good day."

Ben watched Catfish's lean features twist and saw his eyes squint shut. "I'll make up for your loss, Catfish," he said quickly. "That was a right fine thing you did for me."

"For you!" sniffed Jolean. "If they'd burned the *Annabelle,* we wouldn't have had any way to get a tow back up the river. And now we haven't even got a shanty to go back in."

"You can have better than that, if you'll take it," Ben said. "I need a good freight clerk. I'll give you good pay, good grub, and rooms with real mosquito-bar screens. We couldn't finish this feud any better than by joining forces."

Catfish swore. "If you live long enough, you may see a nigger refuse a mess o' fish-head soup or a steamboat sailing on dry land. But you'll never see Catfish Clemens working on a steamboat."

"You figure you've got to keep on feuding for the sake of your honor?"

"Didn't say so. After your bringing folks like Wash Gray and Jube Milton down the river, their ain't much we can do but admit a steamboater has his points. I'll make you a proposition; you keep an eye out for trot-line jugs and dinghies and I'll see that the boys save their bullets for 'possum."

They shook hands on it. With Ord McDan'l, Catfish went out on the hurricane deck to smoke a sad pipe over the fate of his floating home. Jolean's back was straight and uncompromising as she stood at the window. Ben came quietly behind her. He slipped his arm about her shoulders and felt the tension go out of her body.

"Let's end this feud all the way," he said. "With a shanty girl on my packet, wouldn't be a man on Whiskey Creek could say a word against the *Annabelle.* If she was good enough for the daughter of Catfish Clemens, she'd be good enough for anybody."

Jolean turned, put her hands on his shoulders, her eyes sober. "She's good enough for me, Ben. Do you reckon a shanty girl and a steamboat pilot could ever make a go of it?"

Ben kissed her. "I've still got corn-bread and catfish in my blood, and I reckon I'll never get so civilized but what folks will know I was brought up with the river for a backyard. And you'll find yourself lovin' the sound of the paddles and the songs the rousters sing down in the boilers on a cold night. We'll make out, honey. A few years from now Catfish will be showin' our kids how to set a weir and bait a fish-trap."

"And telling them how their daddy took a packet up a bayou during a flood and saved a whole parcel of shantyboaters. He's a stubborn old critter, Ben. But a lovable one when you get to know him."

"It's a failing of the whole family," Ben said.

ARTICLES OF WAR

By A. A. CAFFREY

Author of "The Raid They Stopped," etc.

I

STAFF SERGEANT BILL SMALL had been present when more than a few planes were destroyed. Truth is, Major Marying, medico in charge of Post Hospital, boasts that Small is the only airman by whom he has ever been able to set his watch—so often has the flying sergeant checked in and out the white beds of the major's iodoform-scented stronghold. But even Small was somewhat surprised when Captain O'Brien, officer in charge of flying, spoke of taking a ship over the fence and burning it on purpose.

Staff Sergeant Small turned to Lieutenant Story, officer in charge of engineering, and asked, "Did I hear right?"

Story grinned and said, "You did, Sergeant. This burning of government equipment comes under the heading Official Business, but it's still more or less *sub rosa,* off-the-record, under-the-hat."

"Dirty work," Small supplied, "Eh, Captain?"

"Something like that," Captain O'Brien agreed. "Tell the sergeant everything we know, Story."

"Which isn't a whole lot," Engineering Officer Story growled. "It's this way, Sergeant. My office has an official memo au-

thorizing the destruction of any old ship marked for salvage. We're to turn it over to the representative of the Glass-Cloth Co., an outfit that's trying to unload some fire-proof tarps on Air Forces."

"Even I can understand that part, with billions to be spent by the old uncle," Sergeant Small said. "And we sure need tarps, eh?"

"Sure," Story agreed. And this Glass-Cloth outfit managed to reach somebody who can write official memos, and, as I say, secured permission to have one old plane turned over for fire tests. Their live-wire salesmanager's name is Max Fishbein. I've met him. He's a wow. Which is putting it nicely."

"And I deliver the ship to him, eh?" Small asked. "Where, and which ship?"

"Well, as the lieutenant says," Captain O'Brien then stated, "this fire test is sort of off-the-record, Sergeant. We can't even give it the official blessing of sending a commissioned officer along. So you'll have to handle the delivery. We've chosen that old emergency clearing way over on the south bank of Rat Creek."

"And," Story added, "you can take either of those two old BT-2A's. Let's go down to salvage storage and pick one."

Sergeant Small gave Corporal Cosetti a hail. "Oh, Co'," he said, "grab yourself some helmet and goggles. You and me's going to fly one low and slow. Shake a leg, guy."

ON THE way down to salvage-storage hangar Captain O'Brien explained one more little item. "We're in a hurry about this thing, Sergeant," he said, "because Flying Office got a flash of what might be bad—or at least troublesome—news, only a few hours ago. There's a Colonel Keen due in for a school course. This Keen is from Procurement Department of the Materials Division."

"Is that bad?" Small asked.

"Could be," O'Brien said. "Colonel Keen, they say, is the one big reason why Air Forces hasn't got any too much in the line of tarps and other field equipment. I don't know just what his beef is, but Engineering was tipped off to get this Glass-Cloth Co. thing all washed out before Keen arrives. Guess maybe his is one of the heads that this Glass-Cloth Co. salesmanager went over in getting a ship for test."

"And does a thing like that hurt!" said Small.

The four men then put their weight against the storage hangar's great sliding doors, picked the most flyable of the two B-Ts and began walking it out to the starting apron. And just as they set the tail-wheel on the cement a fifth gentleman of the post hurried across the hangar-fronting road. This was Lieutenant Ganes, O'Brien's flying-office assistant.

"Sir, it's happened!" Ganes hissed. Colonel Keen just arrived on the post. Not only that, Captain, but he's been over to Flying Office already. He wants to start his course. Wants to contact you right away. He'll see the captain at headquarters. Pronto, sir"

"The hell he tells!" said O'Brien. "But," he added, "this ship better get over the fence. And I do mean now. Wow, are we making close connections!"

II

WHEN Small and Cosetti set 'er down just a few minutes later, they found Mr. Max Fishbein & Co. all set and waiting for them. And the set-up that the hot-shot salesmanager had established on the south bank of Rat Creek resembled nothing less than a major movie unit out on location. There was a sound truck—and that's big stuff. There were cameras galore—movie, still and candid. And there was a giant truck—with Glass-Cloth Company on its sides—and many ready mechanics, with the same trade name showing on their coveralls and jackets. But most of all, there was Mr. Max Fishbein. He was everywhere.

"One of the boys," Cosetti commented. "Let's don't let him sell us nothin', Sarg. Hold up till I slip me two bits in me shoe. Okey, taxi in."

Waddling through the grassless, beach-like sands of Rat Creek's clearing, the one fixed as Mr. Fishbein hurried out to meet the incoming test ship. He reached the side of Cosetti's rear pit, extended the big glad hand, and yelled, "Put it there, Major."

Corporal Cosetti passed up the mittflopping, hooked a thumb toward Small, and sang out, "Tha's the major an' he ain't no major. 'E's the pilot here but he's only a sergeant."

"Eh?" Mr. Max Fishbein questioned, bugging his eyes and stepping back. "A ser'jent! Not officer, even yet?"

"Hey! Who the hell you think ya are, Mo'?" Cosetti bawled. "Who sez you rate a major? Ain't a sergeant good enough for you?"

"Eh?" Fishbein again eh-ed. "Oh, sure. Sure. A ser'jent's all right by me, pal. But Washington tells me I'll get some officer pictures. A ser-jent ain't any officer!"

Small had chosen a spot well afront the waiting group, and killed his motor there. Then he stood in his front pit, turned and spoke to Cosetti.

"What's wrong?" Small asked.

"Mr. Big here says he rates a major—a high officer."

Small, recalling Captain O'Brien's remarks about Colonel Keen and Glass-Cloth Co., took a long-shot chance and said, "Hell, Co', the guy's right. We'll hop back to the post and get him a colonel—Colonel Keen."

"Yi!" Fishbein yelped. "Wha's 'at you say, soldier? They ain't no Colonel Keen at the post."

"No?" Small said. "One'll get you five, mister, if I'm shooting the breeze. I say Colonel Keen arrived on the post just a few minutes ago. And if you want a high-ranker, well we can——"

"Come on, come on, come on, step down, Sergeant. Let's get goin'," Mr. Fishbein urged. A sergeant's perfectly all right by me. With Keen I should be keepin' all this costly movie equipment idle while us guys chew the fat."

And forthwith—willing to settle for a sergeant—Mr. Fishbein went into action. His Glass-Cloth mechanics covered ship surfaces with certain Glass-Cloth tarps. Then they doused the tarps with high-test fuel. Then the cameras ground out footage while Mr. Fishbein set fire to the live fumes. After that, the fire was extinguished. The tarps were removed. The surfaces were undamaged. And Mr. Fishbein posed for the cameras and talked for the sound recordings.

Then they went on from test to test, more tarps, more fuel sloshing, more towers of flame, more talk and more sound recording.

Finally Mr. Fishbein came over to where Small and Cosetti were sitting on their heels, watching. Fishbein had a big idea.

"I want you in the picture, soldier," he said.

"No dice," answered Small, recalling that this thing was supposed to be more or less off-the-record.

"I want an endorsement by you, Sergeant," Fishbein stated.

"Not me," said Small. "Hell, man, I'm just an enlisted guy."

"Look," Fishbein then said, getting down on his knees. "I can manage a bit of found money for you boys. Outa Glass-Cloth Co.'s advertisin' fund. Don't be a mope, pal."

Small shook his head. Max Fishbein tore his hair, got up and high-tailed back to his tests.

"Gee, Sarg," Cosetti groused, "mebbe we guys is mopes, passin' up found money. Why t'hell don't we cash in, eh? Who's to care? Cap O'Brien'd want us to take this cheap-john outfit for a little free jack. You know the cap, Sarg."

"I don't know," Small agreed. "Well, look, Co', I don't want to turn your damper down. If you want to go over there and do

a deal with the guy, hop to it. But use your head. Don't do anything that I'll be sorry for."

Corporal Cosetti breezed over and, after the next tests were made ready, eased Max Fishbein off to one side. Small watched the pair while Max took notebook in hand and made certain notations. Then Cosetti drifted back and sat on his heels alongside Small again.

"I at leas' tell him where he can reach us with some of the found money," Cosetti said. "The guy says he'll see to it that the advertisin' department slips us a check. 'At ain't too bad, Sarg."

"Not too bad if that's all we have to do for said found money," careful Sergeant Small agreed. "You're the nuts, Co' old boy."

III

DIRECTLY after getting Small and Cosetti over the fence, Captain O'Brien had hurried to Headquarters. There he found Colonel Keen in the commandant's office; and the man from Washington, like a juggler with three or four balls in the air, was already making himself felt. The post adjutant was being told exactly what the colonel from Materials Division would expect in coöperation; and the personnel officer—Captain Massey—was listening to the list of hired hands that would be demanded of him. All the time, Colonel Keen emphasized the fact that this is war, that he was a busy man, that his flying course was only incidental, and that his own office's demands—which had followed him down from Washington—must have the green light.

The post commandant, arching the acrobatic brows as Captain O'Brien came in, introduced Mr. Big to the Flying Office mentor.

"Glad to know you, O'Brien. When do we start flying?" the colonel demanded. "Hold it! Hold it! Don't mention my official papers, the physical reports and such. We've been all over that, just a few minutes ago. O'Brien, I took care of those examinations before starting south. The papers should have arrived before me. Not my fault if they haven't!"

The post commandant said, "Colonel, O'Brien wouldn't give the Angel Gabriel a moment's official dual-control without papers."

"Aw, to hell with such a system!" Keen bellowed. "Now look here, gentlemen. I'm a busy man. I have work to do. This flying course must not hold me here forever and a day. There are exceptions to every rule. Damit to hell, Army rules were only made to be broken."

The commandant rapped long, nervous fingers on his blotter. The post adjutant was jittery. The personnel officer appeared lost.

"Well," the post's top man finally said, "I'll tell you what we might do. What say if you, Captain O'Brien, take Colonel Keen aloft in my cabin job. Sitting side-by-side, you can sort of talk a first lesson to the colonel. It won't be official time but it will help fill out till the papers have arrived—or until Major Marying finds time to put Colonel Keen through a new examination."

Colonel Keen said that was better than uncertain delay; and ten minutes later the C. O.'s own smart cabin job—with O'Brien and Mr. Big sitting side-by-side on the twin controls—was taking off for the Washington man's first air ride.

O'Brien, as he took off, studied the ship-burning spot way off there on the bank of Rat Creek. And so observing, he took good care to fly—and turn Keen's gaze—in another direction. In keeping Keen's attention thus turned, O'Brien flew a course that took them down southward across the seemingly endless wet miles of Lost Indian Swamp. And, in short order, Colonel Keen objected to that.

"Hell, O'Brien," he finally snapped, "let's see the part of this state that isn't under water. Put something under this ship that a man walk on."

So Captain O'Brien had to work around, either west or due east. And in time, as he realized, he'd have to fly north—which would, in turn, once more bring that tower of black smoke, way off there near Rat Creek, back into Keen's view. But O'Brien did cruise east by north—mostly eastward—and he talked and pointed, pointed mostly to things on the instrument board, and worked like mad to keep the colonel's eyes right there in the office.

That, though, was bad. Suddenly, Colonel Keen pointed to the clock on the instrument panel. Then he checked that clock's time with his wrist watch.

"The devil!" he called out. "Later than I thought, O'Brien. Get back to the post. There's a call I must put in to Washington."

O'Brien was in a spot. If he flew directly back to the post, his line of flight would take him almost directly across the ship that was now burning merrily down there on the Rat Creek barren.

"If I do's it," O'Brien said to himself, *"I'm a dam' fool. But if I don't do's it, I get my wittle bottom spanked. So I do's it, come hell or high water."*

Well, it had to happen. Hardly had O'Brien made his turn-around before Colonel Keen leaned forward, hard against the cabin's window, and glued his gaze to the burning pile.

"Down there, O'Brien—" he said, "is that a ship on fire?"

"Oh, damn that crazy cadet!" O'Brien sang out. And as he sang out and damned the cadet—a cadet who was really flying a ship fully a mile away—O'Brien banked steeply to the left, threw the right wing high, cut off Keen's groundward forward view, then whirled the ship in a full ninety-degree change of direction. And O'Brien carried on with the damning of cadets, crazy cadets, cadets who broke flying rules and cut in on another pilot's field approach.

"But that fire?" Keen said. "Isn't it a—"

"The dry barrens are always on fire at this time of year, sir," O'Brien cut in; "and take it from me, Colonel Keen, I'll burn that cadet. Yes, sir, I'll get his ship number."

So saying, O'Brien tailed after that distant training ship; and the Rat Creek doings never came back into the colonel's view. And so spirited and rough was O'Brien's pursuit that the man from Washington forgot all about fire and gave his whole attention to the matter of pulling leather and wondering whether or not this O'Brien fellow had suddenly gone nuts.

IV

THE TOWER of black, oily smoke and orange-red flame which had caught Colonel Keen's eye was really Mr. Max Fishbein's grand finale. Having cameraed several demonstrations in which the Glass-Cloth tarps had successfully prevented the flames from penetrating to the surfaces covered, he had called upon his mechanics to remove all those fine large and small sheets.

Then the Glass-Cloth Co. men had sloshed the high-test gasoline across the surfaces of the old salvage job.

With cameras trained and the sound-truck's boom extended close enough to catch every crackle, crack and whip of licking flames, Fishbein had them cast a match atop the doomed ship. There was a poof! a bang and whish, and it was at that exact moment that Colonel Keen had pointed and said, "Down there, O'Brien— is that a ship on fire?"

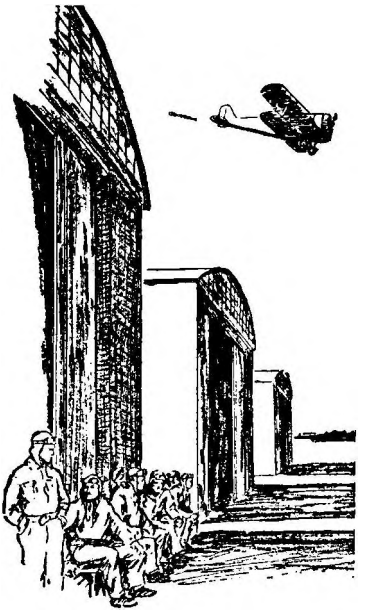
When the flames were at their highest, Glass-Cloth Co.'s mechanics had gone into action and drawn large tarps forward along the tail, inward from either end of the wingspread—and snuffed out that inferno as though the thing were child's play. It was some show.

Proud Fishbein, stooping to light a new man-size cigar from a still-smouldering wing spar, took a few button-bustin' drags, then rushed over to where Staff Sergeant

Small and Corporal Cosetti still sat on their army-issue heels.

"How 'bout that show, Sergeant?" Fishbein asked. "What say, pal, is Glass-Cloth there, or is it there! Don't tell me, mate! I know. How 'bout it, Sergeant, would you say somethin' for the product? Be a sport."

"It's the nuts," said Small. And thus having said something for the product, Small got to his feet, said, "Guess we'll



be getting back to the post, Co'," and started for the highway.

"Just a shake," Fishbein said. "I'll drop you at the post. No trouble at all. I'm leaving right now."

Mr. Fishbein was dropping them at Main Gate, when Sergeant Small, being a gent who usually took noon meal at Post Exchange—for romance's sake—invited the Glass-Cloth Co. salesmanager to come along.

"Thanks, Sergeant," Fishbein said, "but I gotta get back to town. I gotta make a deadline with this advertisin' material. But say—you wasn't givin' me a run-around about old Keen bein' down here on this post?"

"No, that's straight," Small said. "But why let that——"

"See you later, pal," Fishbein said. "Many thanks."

The choice item which usually brought Sergeant Small down to Post Exchange for noon meal for romance's sake wasn't there when he arrived. The choice item, of course, being Miss Kay Call, that important clerical lady so high in Headquarters matters. Now Small, as a rule, took care to capture a rear booth, and there await Kay's coming. But she didn't come, and she didn't come; so Small, being no dog-in-a-manger guy, relinquished that booth to others in the noon-time-crowded exchange and moved down front. He was standing off to one side, near the wall end of the long lunch counter, when in walked Headquarter's Orderly "Gabby" Gall, a nosey kid who claimed he was Sergeant Bill Small's spy down there where the post's official business was handled.

"Oh-oh, are you outa luck, Sarg?" Gabby Gall questioned.

Small reached out, collared Gabby, slapped him against the wall and snapped, "Spill it! Or I'll break you off right here! —at the neck.

"Turn me loose, Sarg," Gabby Gall gurgled and begged. "Look, Sarg," he said, when Small had loosened the grip, "Miss Call won't be in here this noon. Hell no! Know what? She's workin' for this new gink now—this Colonel Keen. An' is the new gink nuts about your gal, Sarg! I heard him tell the personnel officer that she's smart as a whip. Smarter'n any dame in his Washington office. Anyway, just now this Colonel Keen had lunch sent over from Officers' Mess, an' him an' her is eatin' it in the new office."

Small saw red, but his heart was black. This was just one more cause for him and Kay Call to have words—and a falling out, but that wouldn't be new.

Well, Small didn't see Kay that day, nor even the next. But he knew pretty well what was happening, for words was out that the new colonel was Mr. Big with Neon lighting. Also, he was getting hard

to handle, owing to the fact that Flying Office was standing in his way, owing, in turn, to the fact that those status papers had not showed up.

Then, as was his coy way, Orderly Gabby Gall put in his appearance in Small's hangar. "Sarg," he said, "you're gonna work for old Keen, too. Miss Call's gonna call for a ferry ship. Her an' you's gonna hop to town—to the Post Office—to see did the colonel's papers get in yet."

Well, that was one of Small's jobs. Kay Call, being the bonded lady in Headquarters, handled all such registered-mail items.

"An' say, Sarg," continued Gabby, a boy who carried both good and bad news, "I heard Miss Scott—that red-headed gal in the adjutant's office—kiddin' her boss about Miss Call bein' hard to find one of these days. She says Miss Call is headed for Washington. An' the adjutant tells Miss Scott that Colonel Keen has a rep for bein' a fast worker with the Army gals."

Small, seeing red again, made a reach for Gabby. But Gabby had seen the warnings and couldn't be reached. He was gone with and on the wind of his own making.

V

WHEN, just after noon mess, Kay Call hurried out to the hangar and asked, "All set for town, soldier?" Staff Sergeant Small was all primed with the wrong rejoinder.

"Set for 'town,' lady?" he repeated. "I thought maybe you'd be headed for the 'city'."

"City?" Kay Call questioned.

"Sure. Government workers' heaven—Washington."

"Oh!" said she, then reverted to ice, a solid freeze-up.

That trip to town was just a trip. Kay Call got a piece of official mail. Then the hop back to the post was just routine. And that same afternoon, Captain O'Brien took Colonel Keen aloft on his first official training hop, then handed him over to Lieutenant Siskin, and the Washington man's schooling had started.

The first real hitch with Colonel Keen developed when Flying Office advised him that he'd have to remove the shoulder eagles while schooling as a trainee. With the insignia off, even a high-ranker is just another would-be, and treated as such. And when reduced to a pair of school coveralls, minus eagles, the colonel began to have run-ins with this guy and that. First it was with Corporal Cosetti, then with Sergeant Littlejohn. And Lieutenant Siskin passed each little quarrel along to Sergeant Small; and Small stood shoulder to shoulder with his macs. So, right away, Colonel Keen decided that his non-com in charge of hangars, Small, was a guy he couldn't like.

Before the first week was down, Colonel Keen was avoiding Small, Small's hangar, and all other contacts thereabouts. That suited Small & Co. fine. And a full week of near peace went down the line.

Small was even better suited when, during the colonel's third week, Gabby Gall drifted into the hangar and said that Colonel Keen had been recalled to Washington.

"He's gotta go up there on some office business, an' he's flyin' by Air Corps Airways transport."

Sergeant Small gave Gabby Gall two-bits cash for that good news, and the kid started hot-foot for Post Exchange.

Then Captain O'Brien arrived in the hangar, and he had the other half of the story, the half that Gabby neglected to tell.

"Colonel Keen's leaving us for a bit," he said. "But that's not all. He told me to reserve two seats in the northbound transport."

"She's flying north with him," Small stated. And O'Brien just nodded.

So the lady went away. And Small was hard to get along with. Orderly Gabby Gall was even hard to find. And a week went by.

But Gabby always comes back, and when

he showed up next in Small's office, he came like a Greek with offerings.

"Hey, Sarg, want some blotters?" he asked, merely showing his nose around the door jamb. Then he came in and tossed a block of commercial blotters on Small's desk. "They're two years old—1940. But the blotter side's new, Sarg."

Small fingered the block of blotters. And his eyes fell on the reading matter thereon:

KEENNESS PRODUCTS, INC.
Jobbers
A. J. KEEN L. V. NESS

"Cracker Calwell, Colonel Keen's dog-robber, got 'em when he cleaned out some desk boxes for the colonel," Gabby said. "Get 'em out of the way, Sarg, till after Keen quits this post for good."

"Gabby," Small said, as he tossed the blotters into a desk drawer, "next time you have something to tell me, you tell me—"

"Oh, yeah, Sarg, they's hell to pay in Headquarters. An' Captain Massey's had the C.O. make the adjutant wire Miss Call to come back to this post, an' right now."

Right now, however, wasn't quick enough. At least it wasn't in time to find Sergeant Bill Small waiting with open arms. Instead, he was hundreds of miles away. With Captain O'Brien, Lieutenant Story, Major Olds and three other officers of the command, Small had flown cross-country to Alabama. There, at the spring war games, twenty-three planes had gone up in smoke, while parked on the field. O'Brien and his fellow officers were to sit with other officers, on Inquiry Board panel, and see whether they couldn't blame somebody for the loss.

Instead of finding somebody to blame, the brave board found *something* to blame —Materials Department. They held that Procurement Section of that office hadn't furnished suitable fire-proof covers for the ships left out in the open. And they put it in writing, too.

"They had these *"Keenness"*-brand covers," a Major Jack Lance admitted, "but they're no more weather- or fire-proof than just plain Kleenex. And say, O'Brien, if they ever ship any of these "Keenness" tarps down to your post just use them for kindling."

"You remember that, Story," O'Brien told his engineering officer—*"Keenness* products."

Then O'Brien informed Inquiry Board as to the merits of Glass-Cloth tarps, as per the tests observed by Sergeant Small. And the board listened. "Small knows what he sees when he sees it," he said.

"Tell you what we'll do," Major Lance suggested. "Let's put a trailer on our report. Let's recommend that Materials Department consider these Glass-Cloth tarps for immediate purchase."

"Oh-o, are we that brave?" another officer asked. "It might start a war."

"That's what Adolf told Chamberlain the last time that tall old gent reached for his umbrella and started for the door," Lance reminded all listeners.

"And we O'Briens have a good umbrella at home," O'Brien made know. "So I say —write it in, gentlemen. Write it bold."

VI

KAY CALL, back on the home post again acted like a lady who'd been cheated of big things. And she was still working—part time, at least—for Keen. When Small found opportunity to talk with her, she was full of patriotic fervor, with all the exact percentages about who was and who was not up to snuff on the war effort.

"Ye, gods," said Small. "The lady went to Washington and learned to wave a flag!" And that was the wrong thing to say. It even caused Kay to strut out of Post Exchange, once more, chin high, and leaving Sergeant Small alone to sing his blues in the booth.

Then O'Brien and Story strolled in, and they were happy. Captain O'Brien, leaving

Story near the cigar counter, came back to join Small and tell him all about it.

"You remember that report we Inquiry Board gents made—well, it was taken in good faith. Ye, gods, Sergeant, Materials sent Story a letter saying that this post gets Glass-Cloth covers. But say, how come you're sitting alone?"

"Do I have to tell you, Captain?" Small asked, almost moaned.

"Ah, that's life," O'Brien sympathized.

When Colonel Keen arrived back on the post—just a few days after Kay Call—he came with more points of contention than a well-equipped porcupine. One was the Kay Call recall. Then there was his school course that seemed bogged down. But, worst, of all, he had seen the Inquiry Board report—plus the trailer recommending Glass-Cloth Company products.

During his first morning back, the colonel almost broke up a session that gathered, as is the usual thing, on Officers' Call.

He told that staff gathering what he thought of Inquiry Board officers who jumped the traces and made irregular, non-military reports. Also, Colonel Keen told what might befall such non-military ones.

"Furthermore, *what you thought* seems to have influenced your priceless, unlimited appreciation in favor of a certain tarpaulin material. Glass-Cloth, I believe. Is it not, Mr. Story?"

Poor young Story nodded, then stuttered, "Yes, sir."

So all commissioned men at Officers' Call meeting heard him out, but Captain O'Brien was the one who strolled down to Small's hangar to hole up in the small office and laugh his head off.

"Gee-rooselham. It's that letter we sent to Washington!" he told Small. "Is Keen doing a slow burn! Oh, hell, I feel so good that I could pay back bills. Oh, o—just a shake, Sergeant. That reminds me that I never repaid that five bucks you let me have when we were out with that board. Let me have a pen."

O'Brien, sitting at Small's desk, reached for his checkbook and wrote out a check for five. Then, having written, he began looking for a blotter. Small stepped around the desk, yanked open a drawer and pulled out that block of blotters which Gabby Gall had given him. He pulled one from the pack and handed it to the captain.

O'Brien's eyes picked up the reading matter on the blotter.

"Keenness?" he questioned. "Keenness! Ye gods, Sergeant, where did these come from?"

"Orderly Gabby Gall brought them in. He says that one of the dogrobbers cleaned them out of Colonel Keen's field desk while the big boy was in Washington. Why, Captain—what have we got?"

"The first hard knot in the tiger's tail," said O'Brien. "*Keenness*, Sergeant, is the trade-mark of the no-good tarps that were on those ships that burned. And this *Keenness* outfit has unloaded much no-good material on Air Forces. Now look at this blotter, here—A. J. Keen is our colonel; and this Ness gent, no doubt, is the civilian who runs the biz while the colonel is in uniform making said business possible. The colonel was out of uniform for ten or twelve years. He came back only since the emergency started.

So everybody started back-pedaling in their effort to get Colonel Keen through his school course and off their hands. Small even warned his hangar macs to go easy; and he, in turn, even tried to be so busy that there was little time for noon-hour Post Exchange, and more friction with Miss Kay Call.

Kay, though, went right ahead with her double load of office work, doing her usual job and at the same time carrying part of Colonel Keen's from-Washington load. And she was still sure that the colonel was going to win this war. She said that Keen was for Uncle Sam.

On one of the few times when Small got a chance to argue the point, he said, "The good colonel is working for the colonel, Kay. Say, I'll bet you handle lots

of Keenness Products correspondence, eh?"

"No, Mr. Smart, we handle none of that. See! The colonel always takes care of Keenness correspondence, Mr. Smart."

"The colonel is 'Mr. Smart,' not I," laughed Small.

After a full month of training, Colonel Keen hadn't flown his first solo. Lieutenant Siskin was to blame. But O'Brien wouldn't say so. Neither would Major Olds, officer-in-charge of all air training. But Colonel Keen had axes to grind and he was going to grind them, and no school post was going to give him the brush-off.

THE colonel really went to town on the day Glass-Cloth Company's first shipment of motor- and cockpit-covers arrived in Aero Supply, the department to which Lieutenant Story's office had the tarps delivered for distribution to the many hangars. The average run-o'-camp officer would hardly notice the sudden presence of all these new covers on idle ships, so it must have been because of Colonel Keen's particular interest in such items of maintenance.

He first noticed them when he strolled out to the deadline in front of Headquarters hangar, on his way north along the field road to the spot on the apron where he usually met Siskin. Seeing the new tarps on Headquarters hangar ships, the colonel stopped to learn what he might about this.

"Where did these comes from?" the colonel asked Sergeant Pace, the non-com in charge of that important hangar.

"Aero Supply, sir," was Pace's brief explanation.

"I expected that!" the colonel snapped. "Whose product are they?"

"I wouldn't know, sir. I just draw 'em, I don't 'buy 'em, sir. Maybe there's a trademark or something on them. I'll take a look." So saying, Pace walked over and began studying the motor-cover on the nose of the C.O.'s cabin job, which happened to be resting on the between-hangars apron.

"Here it is, sir," Sergeant Pace finally said. "Says Glass-Cloth. Whatever glass cloth might be. Pretty nice looking tarps, though, eh, sir?"

"No!" said Colonel Keen, and he walked away.

Talking with one of the field inspectors, in the wide door of the next hangar, was Lieutenant Story. Lieutenant Story's back was turned in the direction of the colonel's approach—so the young officer had no chance to duck before the big boy had sneaked up on him.

"Oh, Engineering!" sang out Colonel Keen. "Just the man I want to see. What can you tell me about these Glass-Cloth motor-covers?"

"They're a fine product, sir, and——"

"Never mind that! I mean, where did they come from? How many did you get? Who sent them here? What authority—if any—and did you requisition them in person?"

"Yes, sir. No, sir. That is——"

"Get together, men!" Keen barked. "Make up your mind."

"Why, sir," young Story continued, "they were sent down here merely through regular supply channels. My office had requested some covers—for both motors and cockpits—and these came along. And, sir, we received enough for all ships on this post."

Colonel Keen went very red. Then he went quite drab around the gills. Finally, he chanced, "And, no doubt, some extras?"

"Yes, sir," Story answered. "Fifty extra sets. We should be fixed for a year, at least, sir."

"You should be fixed—is right!" said Colonel Keen; and the man's temper was getting him down for a full-length fall. "And somebody is going to be fixed or I'll know the reason why! That will be all, Engineering!"

For the time being, that was about all. But it did seem unusual that each and every ship in Small's hangar—and even out on the ready apron—was fully dressed, as

though for parade, with Glass-Cloth covers when the colonel came on the scene. And it did seem as though the macs might, at least, have removed those covers long before period time—instead of waiting till the last minute, then to remove them as though the act were a sacred ceremony. Verily, one colonel was being glass-covered to a stand-still.

VII

BUT THERE was no stand-still stuff for Colonel Keen on the day Staff Sergeant Bill Small, U. S. Air Forces, became famous. The means and cause of Small's national fame came through that non-com's smiling appearance in a double-page ad carried by a well-known, much-read weekly magazine. The ad, needless to note, was one being run by Glass-Cloth Company.

Oh, it was a brave ad. It was under that well-known, worked-to-death banner—"Keep 'em Flyin'!" It was in colors. Many fine colors. The main cut was that of an Army plane—covered by Glass-Cloth tarps—resisting the onrushing flames of a brush fire. Off to one side, under the caption: Veteran U. S. Air Forces Pilot Gives Glass-Cloth Covers O. K., was a cut of grinning

Sergeant Small. And under the brave large-type caption was the smaller print: Air Forces Pilot Small, a veteran with thousands of air-hours to his official credit, acted as Air Forces' observer during Glass-Cloth Company's exhaustive fire-and-weather tests on Glass-Cloth tarpaulins. Pilot Small was entirely satisfied with the protective qualities of Glass-Cloth fabrics, etc., etc.

"Well, I'll be damned, Captain," Small exclaimed with genuine surprise when O'Brien showed him the ad, over in Flying Office. "I might just as well have lit a Camel and said I always got a ship's lift out of them."

Captain O'Brien shook with genuine laughter. "You," he said "might just as well have tossed a short-fuse bomb into Materials Department and ran like hell. Man, the reaction would be the same.

"*Wow! Air Forces Pilot Small . . . acted as Air Forces' observer . . . entirely satisfied.* Oh, Lord, take away the day and make the night so black that Air Forces Pilot Small can escape."

And again Captain O'Brien laughed.

"Am I a card!" said Small. "Dam' that Fishbein! Did he job me? You see where he got this picture of me, don't you, Captain?"

"Yes, I saw that," laughed O'Brien. "The smart camera-print boys just lifted your face out of this large picture—here you are, you and Cosetti, way back here. Yeah, I can see that you didn't pose for this special-endorsement cut.

"But ho-ho-ho, hell, will there be the devil to pay now!"

"Gosh, Captain, I didn't even give that wise ape my name. But the dam' heel began talking about a chance for a little found money—coming out of Glass-Cloth Company's advertising fund—and Cosetti said there was no harm in taking a little of that. I'll admit that sounded pretty good to me, too, so I let Co' shoot the wind, just a bit."

"Oh, hell," O'Brien laughed some more. "Did you and the corporal ever get this found money?"

"Not yet." said Small. "The Fishbein guy's a cheap-john. Yes, sir, he's a goat-herder—and I'm it. The goat."

Lieutenant Ganes popped into the office, coming from the main company street. As he closed the door behind him, he hooked a thumb back over his shoulder, saying, "Sh-h-h, here comes the big boy."

"Which?" whispered O'Brien.

"Keen," said Ganes. "And there's fire in his eye."

"Sh-h-h," said O'Brien, in turn. "Take a quick look at this Glass-Cloth ad. Don't laugh. Now get it out of the way."

And the door opened. Colonel Keen booted his way in. Carrying it like a club, he had the present issue of the well-known national weekly rolled tightly in his right hand. He opened the issue to the beautiful Glass-Cloth ad, tossed it on the desk before Captain O'Brien, and barked, "I suppose you've seen this, O'Brien. Oh"—the big boy's eyes picked up Small for the first time —"you here, eh? You—Air Forces Pilot Small! You—the veteran of many thousand flying hours! You—the official observer who saw fit to endorse a product of a fly-by-night concern. Sit down, Small. Sit! I'll be talking to you presently."

Colonel Keen swung to Lieutenant Ganes. "Get Engineering in here," he ordered.

Ganes turned to the Flying Office clerk —Private Kipling—and said, "Run over to Lieutenant Story's office and tell him to get here as soon as possible. Tell him that Colonel Keen wishes to see him—here. And you, Kipling, make yourself scarce for a half hour," the lieutenant tagged on, lowly.

While they waited for Story to show up, Colonel Keen paced and fumed, paced, glared and fumed. Captain O'Brien sat behind his desk and studied the double-page Glass-Cloth ad as though seeing it for the first time. Ganes strolled over behind the captain and studied the magazine ad over O'Brien's shoulder. Their faces were very poker.

Captain O'Brien timed things down to a tick. The instant he heard young Story put his hand on the outside knob of that front door, he glanced up from the Glass-Cloth Company ad and asked, "What about this ad, sir? Anything wrong with it?"

Story was coming in. Keen's eyes swung in that direction, and that was the direction in which he desired most to spring—at the guardless, helpless throat of Engineering. But O'Brien's question had upset his plan. That question—"Anything wrong with it?"—was just too, too much.

"Wrong!" he wailed, taking his attack away from Story. "Is there anything *right* with it, O'Brien?"

"Why, sir," said O'Brien, "for the main part, this Glass-Cloth ad seems all right to me. They did run test on an Air Forces ship, and——"

"So they tell me! So they tell me! They told me that, just now, down in the adjutant's office.

"Story, I understand you assigned this ship for tests."

"Yes, sir," mumbled young Story. "At least, sir——"

"By what authority?"

"Chief of Engineering's, sir," said Story. "The order came through channels, upon request and recommendation of Procurement Section of Materials Department."

"That's a dam' lie!" bellowed Keen.

O'Brien was on his feet then. He was on his feet and out in the free space in front of his desk.

"Colonel Keen," he said, "Lieutenant Story states a fact. And if it's fact—it's no lie. I saw the official order. That order came through channels from your own department, over your own chief's signature. Brigadier-General Patch's signature."

"Patch's?" Keen questioned; and some of the ardent fire had suddenly gone out of the man. "S-s-s 'at so?" he hissed. "Well! . . .

"But say, Mr. O'Brien!" and he was off on another warlike tack. "When was this ship burnt—when were these tests run off?"

"Oh, let's see, I'd say some five weeks ago," O'Brien stalled.

"The exact date? Keen demanded.

O'Brien then turned to Story—the young Engineering officer seemed nailed to the door through which he had walked.

Story gave the date.

"Yes," said Colonel Keen. "That was the day I took my first air trip with you, O'Brien.

"That was the fire I saw—but you couldn't see. You remember that, Captain O'Brien?" And there was a world of superior taunting derision in the high-ranker's voice.

"Sir," O'Brien said, "for some reason Lieutenant Story had been advised not to give these tests anything resembling Air Forces' authority. We supposed that this was owing to the fact that Federal Proving Ground might object if outlying posts took it upon themselves to test materials. For that reason, I assumed that an officer of your rank would not care to know anything about that fire—and especially an officer of your rank from your particular department."

"Nothing resembling Air Forces' authority?" Colonel Keen harped.

"That, sir, was the understanding," O'Brien restated; not knowing that the colonel was baiting a trap.

"What is this man, Small, this pilot of countless air-hours? Is he, or is he not, a charge of Air Forces?"

"He is," Captain O'Brien acknowledged. "A *person* of Air."

"Yes," said Keen. "He seems to have spread himself quite broadly, and, I might say—thickly."

"Sergeant Small never spreads himself, sir," O'Brien said. "The sergeant didn't pose for the cut shown in this ad. A close study will show that this face cut of the sergeant was lifted from the larger picture."

"And the spoken endorsement, the wordy Air Forces authoritative O.K. given by Sergeant Small—how about that, O'Brien?"

The captain turned to Sergeant Small.

"I was misquoted," Small said. "I didn't speak for Air Forces at any time, however."

"But, of course, a man of your experience, a man with all your air-hours, did say something?" Keen questioned, and he piled the derision pile on pile—till it hurt. "What did you say, Sergeant?"

"Sir, I said, it's the nuts," said Small.

"You said enough!" said Colonel Keen.

"Captain O'Brien," he then continued, "since arriving at this school, many things have happened convincing me that Sergeant Small is, perhaps, a bit out of tune with an enlisted man's status. Maybe he's spoiled. No doubt, as often happens, he's been with this present command too long. Well, Captain, when an enlisted man grows too big for his boots, as you know, there's only one thing to do with him."

At that spot in a tightening situation the phone rang. And Ganes picked it up. In a moment of deadly silence the others heard him say, "Who? . . . Why, yes, he's here. . . . Yes, come right over."

"You were saying, sir—" O'Brien reminded Keen—if that gentleman needed any reminding.

"Transfer him to another post. I'll recommend this through Personnel Office, lest we have more out-of-turn talking, more Glass-Cloth ballyhoo by Air Forces Pilot Small."

"Colonel Keen," Captain O'Brien said, "I'd go slow with that recommendation for transfer, if I were you."

O'BRIEN's voice was level and hard—and his eyes were the same way. Level and hard—eye to eye—with the man of higher rank.

"Just a moment, O'Brien! Do you realize what you're saying? Have you forgotten with whom you are speaking?" Col. Keen rapped out.

"Not at all, sir!" O'Brien rapped back.

"O'Brien, are you familiar with your Articles of War? Have you ever read Article 63 of that group?"

"I have, sir."

"Let me have Article 63, O'Brien," Keen demanded.

"Article of War 63, sir, states 'Any person subject to military law who behaves himself with disrespect toward his superior officer shall be punished as a court-martial may direct,'" Captain O'Brien quoted for the higher officer's benefit.

"What does that mean to you?" asked Keen.

"Under the circumstances—nothing, sir," said O'Brien. "At present, though our nation is at war, the worst that could happen to me would be a bobtail. Well, sir, O'Briens have earned their living before. Hell, sir, they even earned their living when it was unlawful for O'Briens to even live.

"And now, today, on this post, I'll be damned if you or any other man can come in and make trouble for a particular friend of mine!"

"Oh, a friend of yours!" said Keen. "Well. Well. Well. Very nice, but Article 63 can still serve its purpose."

"Sir," O'Brien said, "there are other articles in the Blue Book, other regulations that might retard your enthusiasm for a little while. Article 94, for example, is titled: 'Frauds Against the Government.'"

"Yes?" Col. Keen stood at midfloor like a man of ice.

"There are also regulations against officers lending title or engaging in private business while serving with the armed forces of the United States."

"So?" Col. Keen was brief now, still icily cold, deadly still.

"Keenness Brand has sold inferior, fraudulent products to the government—fire-proof motor covers that burn. And the colonel is a member of Keenness Company, Inc."

The colonel, wordless for a brief few minutes, stood there and glared at O'Brien.

Then there was a knock on one of the side doors. Ganes stepped over and opened it. Miss Kay Call, official mail pouch under her right arm, stepped in.

She said, "Hello, everybody. I have a few registered letters for Col. Keen." Then, dropping the important pouch on Captain O'Brien's desk, she began unlocking the fasteners.

Keen said, "Wrong again, Captain O'Brien. I have not been a member of Keenness for the past two years."

Kay Call glanced up suddenly. Then she slid two large envelopes atop the desk. The registered mail envelopes carried the letterhead "Keenness" on their upper left-hand corner. And every eye in that office rested on those letters.

VIII

KAY CALL, having nothing to say, waited for Col. Keen to sign for the registered letters. Keen, hog-wild and wordless, stepped over to the desk, picked up a pen and signed.

Perhaps to break the tension, he snapped, "Blotter, O'Brien."

Captain O'Brien pulled the top drawer of his desk, reached in and brought out a commercial blotter. He handed it to Keen. When the colonel's eyes fell athwart the printed matter on that blotter they were resting on something with which they were entirely familiar. It was the old trade spread—Keenness Products, Inc. . . . Jobbers. . . . A. J. Keen. . . . L. V. Ness.

The colonel froze, for an instant, when he saw that. Then, for another brief snatch, those eyes came up and glared into those of Kay Call. The lady glared right back. Col. Keen glared once more, this time at the office clock, said, "I'm a busy man," turned on his heel and went away from there. Had the man been tailed, that rear appendage might not have been dragging, but, at least, it would have been tucked protectively between his legs.

When the door closed, Captain O'Brien mumbled, "You can't kick a colonel, even when his back is turned, so he gets away."

Then O'Brien swung on his heel, pulled up in the exact spot the colonel had been

filling when he signed for those registered letters, and glared into Kay Call's eyes—even as Col. Keen had glared into that lady's peepers.

"You, young lady, don't, as a rule, deliver mail, do you?" Captain O'Brien demanded.

"No, sir, Captain," Kay Call answered.

"Come, come, come!" the captain urged. "Explain yourself. Don't stand there like something out of Vogue—I like that suit, Kay—saying nothing. You had a motive."

Kay Call's eyes swung toward Sergeant Bill Small, then she said, "Well, Captain, we saw this Glass-Cloth ad—that's a swell cut they have of you, soldier—over in the office; and, also, I saw Col. Keen roll it up and start for someplace. Then Orderly Gabby Gall came in and told me that Col. Keen had just gone into Flying Office, and that Sergeant Small was already here. Gabby said he had met Private Kipling going for Lieutenant Story, and that they's hell a-poppin' in O'Brien's dump." Gabby's usually right, you know.

"So," Kay Call concluded, "I decided to deliver a few registered mail letters that just happened to come in from town by the regular mail courier. Did I do wrong, Captain?"

"Right or wrong, gal, you didn't do bad," Captain O'Brien stated. "No, sir, lady, you didn't do bad.

"Kay, listen, I'm an old married man," he then added, "and Mrs. O'Brien won't object if I give you a great big fatherly kiss. You rate it, and I don't think the sergeant will mind. Eh, Sergeant?"

"If I can't do it, then I don't know a better man for the job," Sergeant Small agreed. "Take it, Captain!"

Captain O'Brien—being an active member of a clan that found ways of living when it was even unlawful to live—took it.

Kay Call, just a bit flustered, began picking up her papers and refastening the official pouch. Then, not a bit sore, she turned to go.

"Thanks a lot, lifesaver," Small said to her back, just as she reached the door and Story swung it open.

Kay Call turned. The smile was gone. There was that old tightness around the trembling mouth, and a tear or two in the eyes and voice when she said, "It was nothing, soldier. But, if you care to know, as of this date, this hour, I'm relieving myself of any extra duties on this post. I'll be hungry at noon. I'll even feel like a movie tonight."

"Lord, what a woman!" O'Brien stood there and exclaimed, after the door had closed behind Kay's passing. Then, swinging on Sergeant Small, he barked, "Dammit! We should've tossed you to the colonel—you, a man who can find time to disagree with a girl like that! But hold it! What am I yelling about—didn't I get the kiss? Sergeant, you're all right. Yes, sir; you make 'em mad, and I'll take care of the fix-up department. Ol' Cupid O'Brien, in person."

Then the captain booted gayety aside and made a quick return to the business of that office.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think we have the situation well in hand. Disaster was averted by the narrowest of narrow margins, and, even now, we may not be entirely out of the woods. So let's all be watchful that nobody rubs it in. We'll keep the colonel's rank always in mind, treat him accordingly—and, beyond all else, try to keep Glass-Cloth covers out of his life.

"Sergeant," O'Brien concluded, "that applies in particular to you and your hangar crew."

"I understand, sir," Staff Sergeant Small agreed. "And if that's all, Captain, I'll cut the gold-bricking now and get back to my hangar. The colonel'll be coming out for his flying period, and it's best that I wise up Corporal Cosetti and the others. They don't think anybody from other branches rate anything."

"Gentlemen from the other branches,"

O'Brien said, as the sergeant passed through the door, "don't, as a rule, do anything to dispel that opinion. But see what you can do, Sergeant."

IX

COL. KEEN'S flying training went right ahead. But the feel of strained relations was on his every contact. The back-peddling and leaning-over-backward stuff was painful, but it really didn't register with or on the object in mind. That is, Col. Keen, though blocked in certain directions, wasn't entirely stopped. And many men there were on that school post who'd swear that the colonel was a heller for hell.

He'd go out of his way to raise that hell, too. There was that little matter of crash-car and ambulance attaches sleeping on the job. The attaches in question, as is their habit of any air field, were wont to snatch a bit of lost slumber while their cars waited on the deadline—out front of Tower—for something to happen in the line of accident. Those boys, of course, hope that their sleep will be long—and that no flying ship will suddenly stop flying and call for their services.

Col. Keen, however, had an idea that those soldiers should be at the alert, all the time. Chances are, he thought they should sit their seats, erect and with arms folded across chests—all same artillerymen riding the caisson.

But that isn't the way things are done in Air Forces; and it hurt Col. Keen to see ambulances, crash-cars and fire wagons all lined up, side by side, with nothing but shoe soles protruding from them. However, it was through the colonel's own carelessness that he undertook to right that condition while garbed in the insignia-less duds of a flying student. And when he slapped a pair of soles—they were sticking out the back of the ambulance—and summoned a man from his sleep, that man sat up, blinked heavy eyes, then barked, "Whadda hell you think ya doin' kaydet?"

Col. Keen, even then, didn't make known his high rank; and Medical Corps' ambulance drivers can be on an air post for months without caring to distinguish one flyer from another.

"Did it ever occur to you that you're supposed to be on duty?" Col. Keen demanded.

"Wha's-a matter with you—are ya gonna have a accident?" the driver asked. "Go way, kay-det, an' let a man get in a few minutes o' sleep. Give me a ring if ya gonna have a crash."

Well, that wasn't all there was of that. The colonel took it up with Headquarters; and Headquarters, with the whip on 'em, took it up with Major Marying. Marying, being in charge of the post hospital, had to do something. He called in Col. Keen for a recheck on his general physical condition. And insofar as Major Marying is tops with every man on that post, and also top man when it comes to whether a flyer is still able to pass physicals, it wasn't surprising when Flying Office was notified that, for the time being, Student Keen was to be taken off air-work.

Well hell! The shot heard round the world was as a mere popgun's pop as compared with the noise heard on that post—and clear to Washington and back again. Major Marying, though, made it stick; and for a full week Col. Keen was under observation. He wasn't, of course, confined to the post hospital, but he was so busy shuttling between that bone factory and Headquarters that he had absolutely no time for anything in the line of hell-raising. And they say that Major Marying warned him, in particular, to take things in stride, be calm, non-provocative—and don't get excited and throw your reflexes all skewgee. In other words, take a week off and learn to keep your long nose out of our post business.

However, Headquarters knew that something had to be done about all those regulation shoe-soles that were being sun-

burned. So Lieutenant Story warned the crash-car and fire-truck men to look alive, get off their shoulder blades and act like soldiers—for a few days, at least. Major Marying, just to keep things in line, asked his ambulance crews to do likewise—even to the extent of abolishing the crap and poker games that so often crowded the interiors of those ambulances while they stood at the ready out there on the apron below and before Tower.

Well, it was done. And, for the time being, the emergency cars' crews were off their backs and on their toes. It was painful to behold. Everybody knew it couldn't last. And the pent-up resentment of the enlisted men effected was as obvious as a red flag on any explosives dump. Compared with imposed-upon enlisted men the woman scorned is a harmless member of the human group. And idle guys, just standing by, waiting, are usually just waiting to get their chance to spill somebody's applecart. At best, they'd only hope for the worst for Col. Keen; and while they might not help Bad Luck get a hammerlock on the big boy, they, at least, wouldn't do anything to prevent such a happening.

When Major Marying finally lifted the physical ban, deciding, after all, that Col. Keen wasn't as bad off as first observations had indicated, the reinstated student came back to Flying Office with fire in his eye.

"Now, listen, O'Brien," he said—"I want to get through with this course. I want to reach solo status, and without further delay. As I understand it, instructors never allow student cadets to run through endless weeks, in the manner allowed by Siskin in my case. Now what about it? Isn't that correct?"

"It is, sir," Captain O'Brien agreed. "If a cadet can't make it in ten hours—as a general thing—he's dropped. As a general thing. As I once said to the colonel, not even Gabriel could start air-work on this post without proper physical clearance, but, sir, Lucifer might get an extension beyond the usual time required to solo a friendless, dragless, run-o'-camp cadet."

"Oh, so that's it? I'm being favored, eh?" Col. Keen asked.

"I'm just trying to be frank with the colonel," Captain O'Brien stated. "I, of course, take my off-record orders from higher up. Needless to add, I never question orders."

"Good soldier," said Col. Keen, and he was edging toward the nasty again. Truth is, he was back at the glare stage. "That's fine. Fine to know that, at my age, I'm somebody's white-haired boy.

"But now listen to me, Captain. I want to get this school course behind me. I have work to do in Washington. Hitler isn't the only man in this war with a timetable, with a schedule, and this post has upset my plans far more than I care to admit."

"Sorry, sir," O'Brien said.

"Which doesn't help one damn bit!" Keen bit off. "Now, as perhaps you know, flying status is essential to my future status with Air Forces. It's something I must have. Now I know well enough that I have progressed to a place where solo work is in order, Instructor Siskin's opinion as it may be. After all, it's my neck, not Siskin's that's in danger."

"Sir," Captain O'Brien then said, "this school is merely a maternity ward of Air Forces. We deliver new-born flyers. Lieutenant Siskin and the other instructors like to boast that each has never lost a first-solo student. A man is entitled to his professional standing. Up till now this office has never questioned an instructor's final decision."

"O'Brien, at this stage of the game, as you know, the high opinions of commanding generals are being questioned. Ancient precedents of old branches are going by the board, so why should the up-start folderol of this infant branch stand in the way of progress? Is this man Siskin so big that he can't be wrong?"

"The records of this office, sir," Captain

O'Brien answered, "furnished no data that can answer your last question. But the records of this office attest to the official fact that Lieutenant Siskin has never yet been wrong on matters appertaining to our school work."

"You're adamant, O'Brien!" Col. Keen growled, and glared. "All right! Siskin might be infallible, but you are not insurmountable. This office has placed itself in my way for the last time. Now I am going up! And, Captain O'Brien, I mean *up.*"

X

WHEN Col. Keen went up, he must have gone plenty high. And there was no question about it; he was a man who knew his way in the stratosphere of Army circles. In short order, the school post's commanding officer had been contacted. The C.O., in turn, called Major Olds in to talk things over. Major Olds, being officer in top charge of all air-training, next talked things over with his Flying Office chief—O'Brien.

Captain O'Brien said, "Well, the colonel is a man of his word, Major. He said he was going up, and by hell he did."

"It's murder on First-Solo Stage," Major Olds agreed, "but the thing is out of our hands, Captain. Over our heads and out of our otherwise able hands. Tell you what to do, you take Col. Keen up for a hop. See if, by any chance, Siskin has been overcareful."

"Boss," Captain O'Brien said to Major Olds, "you've never before asked me to cut a throat. You've never before ordered me to pile personal professional insult atop a subordinate's head. You've never before—"

"And I won't do it now," Major Olds cut in. "I'll take him up myself. No, damned if I will! It's Siskin's job.

"Well, let it ride, Captain—I'll talk with Siskin."

So Instructor Lieutenant Siskin was talked with. Of course, it wasn't regular. But it was orders, orders on their way down; and orders that came in that direction—from up to down—have to be carried out. Siskin was last stop for the buck-passing in this matter, so he had to take it on the chin, say "O.K., Major Olds," then do as the powers that be had decreed.

On the day chosen for Col. Keen's final big drive toward first solo, Lieutenant Siskin was using ship No. 44. Besides the colonel he had one other student preparing for the grand event. On the night before, over all that training area, a heavy rain had fallen. As a result, the outlying emergency fields—First-Solo Stage, Acrobatics Stage, etc.—were pretty well bogged down. They were too muddy for the first-solo hops. Therefore, contrary to usual practice, Flying Office had given Siskin permission to do his instruction hops from the home field. And, in turn, he was to solo Col. Keen and Cadet Henry from the main runway.

During the morning's work, Sergeant Small received Flying Office permission to use a training ship for a bit of joy work. Now and then—with Captain O'Brien's permission—Sergeant Small took Corporal Cosetti aloft for dual-control instruction. It was the thing for which Cosetti lived, and longed, and worked hardest. He wanted to be like Small—one swell enlisted flyer. So, when all other ships were under way, Small and Cosetti wound up No. 17's motor and got set to rise and fly.

Then, for a long time they waited there on the lead-out strip and watched the tower for taxiing clearance. But Tower, in turn, was waiting for Instructor Siskin's No. 44 ship to get off the air.

So, cussing softly now, Sergeant Small glanced overside when Sergeant Littlejohn walked in close to the fuselage. Littlejohn, speaking loudly above the roll and snap of Small's motor, yelled:

"Siskin's turned that Henry kid loose.

That's the cadet up there now—see? The kid don't look so good, eh?"

Small glanced way down to the head of the main runway. Sure enough, Instructor Siskin was standing there, one of a group of half a dozen; the others being cadet flyers—and Student Colonel Keen.

When No. 44, with First-Solo Cadet Henry, came in for its landing, Small and all his crewmen winced with mental pain —so rough was the kid's setdown. And wince the crewmen should, for there was a landing gear to be fixed on 44. Old Doctor Siskin must have winced too, for he was lucky that his good obstetric record was still intact. Cadet Henry had all but flown that ship into the ground.

Lieutenant Siskin ran down field, took one look at the landing gear, told Cadet Henry to kill his power, then waved hangarward toward the watching crewmen—*Come and get it!*

Then Siskin, with Cadet Henry waddling his chute-slapped butt close at heel, started in toward the hangars. And when Siskin reached the apron he sidled in close to Small's ship's side and asked, "Is there another ship I can use?"

"Why, er, well, this is the only one in commission. I was just going to give Corporal Cosetti a few minutes of D-C."

"Couldn't the corporal wait?" Siskin asked. "You know how it is, Sergeant. And Siskin hooked his chin in the general direction of Cadet Henry. One look told Small how things were with the cadet.

SERGEANT SMALL cast off his safety belt, then turned and kneeled on his seat.

"We'll have to pass it up, Co'," he said. "This cadet needs air, and needs it bad."

Cosetti cast off his safety belt and climbed overside to the ground.

Then, while Lieutenant Siskin was getting Cadet Henry aboard the ship, and giving him a bit of a pep talk, Colonel Keen came hurrying in from the field.

"Just a moment, Siskin!" he called out.

Siskin turned from the cadet and asked, "What is it, sir?"

"Isn't this my hop?" Keen demanded. "He's had his chance."

Siskin stepped well away from the ship —several yards removed so that Cadet Henry could not hear—then explained, "I've got to send this cadet around again, sir. He's jittery. We can't give him time to stand around and think it over. He might go up in smoke."

"But damn it to hell, man, I'm in a hurry. I, too, must not be allowed to stand around—hour after hour—lest I go up in smoke," the colonel yelled. And he was yelling!

"It's a rule we never break, sir," Siskin insisted. "You, sir, insisted that I send Cadet Henry off on the first solo hop. Now I must see to it that he goes through, without break, until he gets himself in hand."

"Damn the damn Air Forces!" damned Colonel Keen, and he fell to a wild pacing of the cement apron. Meantime, Tower had given taxiing clearance to Cadet Henry's ship. Siskin yelled to the kid to take it away. And downfield to the head of the main runway went Ship 17 with the wild-eyed cadet on the controls.

At the same time, with himself under something less than a cadet's control, Colonel Keen first glanced at his wrist-watch then began to hike down the hangar-fronting road—toward Headquarters, no doubt.

Lieutenant Siskin and the group of macs watched him go.

"Sergeant," Siskin said to Small, "I think maybe I'd better find a hole."

"And crawl in?" Small questioned.

"Then pull the hole in after me," the instructor added.

"Oh-o, Lieutenant," Corporal Cosetti oh-oed—"see who he's spotted? See who he's headin' for—the C.O."

The post commander, as Siskin could now see, had just strolled out upon the wide cement apron that fronts Headquarters hangar. Some macs were working on

the commanding officer's private cabin job. The cabin job was out on the apron, nose in toward the hangar-fronting road. And sure enough, Colonel Keen had given the C.O. a long-distance hail. The C.O. answered the hail, then started strolling northward to meet Colonel Keen. Finally the two great ones joined, stopping to talk in the heavy shade of Headquarters hangar's high fieldside wall. The C.O. started their way as Keen spoke to him.

Watching from afar, Siskin and Co. could see that Colonel Keen was very animated, completely agitated. Also, from time to time, he poked a thumb back over his shoulder toward Siskin and Co.

"We're catchin' hell, sir," Corporal Cosetti said.

"That *you* should worry!" said Siskin. "It's my funeral, men."

"Ah, nuts," said Small. "The Old Man's cooling him down. The Old Man'll take just so much, then he'll tell off this visiting fireman, or I lose my guess. But oo! oo! oo! will you take a look at your cadet, Lieutenant!"

Cadet Henry had taken the green from Tower, and No. 17 was under way. And the start was awful. Cadet Henry, plain to see, wasn't the model of flying perfection destined to keep an instructor's pilot-producing record clean and faultless.

XI

"WHAT'S wrong there, Lieutenant?" Sergeant Small asked, after their joint watching had finally got Cadet Henry's ship safely into the air—and over the south fence.

Lieutenant Siskin walked the sergeant away from the others, then said, "It's this man Keen. He's been ragging hell out of Cadet Henry. Petty dam' stuff, stuff you'd never believe. Young Henry was a swell student—up till a few weeks back. And I had him all set to do it this morning, then he learns that Keen and him are going into the finals together. I don't understand the whole setup, myself, but Keen certainly has the Indian sign on this kid."

"It isn't a case of—if drag can solo Keen, then it can solo a plain-john cadet too, is it?" Small asked; and in that he had known and worked with Lieutenant Siskin for a long time, the sergeant could ask that.

Siskin eyed the non-com, level, hard, then said, "Would I be the gent to tell you you were wrong, Sergeant?"

"I catch," Small said.

Then, maybe in hopeful self-defense, Siskin added, "But the kid will come through, Sergeant. If not today—tomorrow. Or the day after. He's got the guts. Oh, oh, hell, look at the turn he's flying now! Not two hundred feet under him! And with his nose high! I can't look—tell me when he straightens out again."

Cadet Henry's first turn, as Siskin had indicated, was terrible to watch. Small, though, watched it all the way. Finally he said, "The kid's got her out of that fluttering skid-turn. Now you can take a peek. He's heading downcountry, southwest."

Siskin then chanced another look.

"No use for altitude," he said. "Yes, sir, he's going to play around in the treetops—just like a regular bird. Aw, hell, Sergeant, I should never have left the farm."

The telephone sounded off in Small's hangar. Corporal Cosetti, being nearer than Small, sang out, "I'll catch it, Sarg," and made a run for the inner office. Half a minute later Cosetti ran out to the apron again, trotted over to where his boss still chatted with Lieutenant Siskin, and reported, "That was Lieutenant Story, Sarg. He wants to see you down at his office as soon as ya have the time."

"Well, I guess you can handle the worrying," Small said to Siskin, then he, too, began strolling southward along the hangar-fronting road, even as Colonel Keen had only a few minutes before.

Keen and the C.O. were still standing there in the shade of Headquarters hangar, talking and watching air activities beyond and above the field. For a moment, reaching a between-hangars apron that led over to the main company road, Small almost decided to duck through there—just to avoid Colonel Keen and the C.O. But hell, the C.O. and Staff Sergeant Small were old friends; and Small hadn't had a chance to say hello to the big boy during the past few days. So the devil with Keen! Small would go right ahead and give the C.O. a salute, and, maybe, take on a bit of passing kidding as he went. Be damned if this man Keen was going to put the entire command in a vise!

Two hangars south of Small's own establishment, he came on Sergeant Moore working atop the motor of a ship that was parked nose-in to the road. And while Sergeant Moore worked on that motor, the wide spread of its Glass-Cloth cover was hanging over the plane's wingtip.

Kidding his fellow non-com, Small broke his stroll toward Story's just long enough to quit the road, jerk the large Glass-Cloth tarp from the wingtip, and say, "Maybe I'd best take care of this, Moore. Weren't you told to keep these Glass-Cloth covers out of a certain colonel's hair? Now you're going to lose it. Glad, old man, that I was handy when you threw it away."

"Small," Sergeant Moore said, "if you want to live long enough to put things right with that blond baby of yours—put that tarp back where you found it." Then lowly, "And to hell with what any certain colonel thinks about the way I hang out my wash. Put it back, Small, before I step down and cram it down your throat, sidewise. Put it— What t'hell's everybody watchin', eh!"

Sergeant Moore, breaking off his own tirade, was looking in the direction that just about everybody else was looking—over and above the hangars.

Small's eyes swept the flying field behind the ship upon which Moore stood; and that glance showed him Lieutenant Siskin running down field—hands in the air — pointing wildly over the hangars. Small guessed what was wrong.

There was a maintenance crew working on the roof of the hangar just above where Small and Moore had been gassing. That crew of roofers—all four of them—had scrambled up to the roof slant's high point, and there froze. They were all-eyes, too.

"What-a-hell is it?" Moore yelled up to them.

"Ship down!" one yelled. " 'Er must be Japs in his lap."

"It ain't down—it's up!" yelled a second.

"T'hell it's up—it's down!" yelled a third.

"Will you guys make up your mind!" Moore, in turn, yelled down.

"It's Ship 17," one of the roofers yelled down. "It's over here—'bout half a mile—right down in the trees. Guy's gone nuts, I guess. He's up again!"

"Oh-o, outa the way! Low bridge!" one of the roofing crew bawled out, then they all began scrambling down toward the western, fieldside edge of the roof, and protective safety. "The dam' nut's comin' this way! Down, everybody!"

Then the noise of an oncoming, low-flying plane was on the place. It was a horrible, dribbling, blipping, unsteady noise, but a voice from hell nevertheless. And it was sure oncoming!

In that crowded moment when Sergeant Small could hear so much yet see so little, he did manage to notice the C.O. and Keen as they started moving away from the hangar wall—the C.O. craning his neck, while hurrying, and trying to win a view of what was happening, while Keen, freezing in his tracks, had started pointing toward Small. Keen's eyes were on the offensive Glass-Cloth tarp which Small still dragged behind him. Keen was trying to say something about it.

And the crash siren—on Tower—was wailing its warning of dire things to come. The things had almost arrived — Cadet Henry and 17—but it was really singular —things—for Cadet Henry was entirely out of control. Or, better, 17 was entirely beyond benefit of human hand, head and foot. And its noise was right down on 'em now!

Ship 17 tipped the high ridge of that hangar upon which the maintenance crew had been working, and now crouched in fear. When it tipped, it did so, first, with its propeller, then with the landing gear. The propeller, broken, whistled to high heaven. The landing gear—for the greater part—remained brushed off on the other side of the ridge. Then, with flying speed knocked out of it and the prop fanning air wildly, the ship slithered down the west slant of the big roof—down toward those crouching maintenance men and Colonel Keen.

THE maintenance boys had been warned, and they were fast. To a man, they managed to slip overside and hang to the drain trough. Then 17 swept above them and down into the hangar-fronting road.

Colonel Keen, only partly warned, wasn't fast. He was caught, in a spot, on a spot. And when 17 hit the road it hit nose hard-on, then, with a crashing lurch, threw itself over on its back, right down atop Colonel Keen. Keen threw up both arms, tried to give to the load, and went down. As he gave, the turtleback of the upside-down fuselage rapped him on the head. He was knocked cold, stiff.

"Fire! Fire!" Somebody yelled fire. Everybody seemed to be yelling fire. It's the thing that an airfield hates—and fights. Fights like hell, because it's quick and they must be always quicker.

This fire on 17 was quick. It first whoofed downward with the drip of gasoline that was falling from the broken fuel tank. Then it whoofed louder, lapping back and up, into the cockpits and full length of the fuselage.

Sergeant Moore, having made one wild jump from atop that motor where Small first encountered him, was even quicker than fire. Moore, from the jump, knew where he was going, and he went. He went in—through the first wall of wire that was rolling out on the cement, with the free flow of the burning fuel—and reached up into the rear cockpit. From the safety belt of that upside-down seat Cadet Henry, dazed and helpless, dangled head-down. Moore unsnapped the safety belt's master buckle, droped young Henry to his shoulder, then started out.

Sergeant Small, every bit as fast as Moore, took that Glass-Cloth tarp he'd been dragging, spread it wide before him, then made a falling, rolling dive in and past Moore's stumbling, overladen out-coming feet.

Too bad, then, that Colonel Keen could not see all those lazy lugs come off those emergency cars and rush in to lead the blinded Moore to safety. Too bad the colonel couldn't see other run-o'-camp enlisted men take their share of the hell, and crowd in to help those who were helping Moore. But as for helping Small—it was too hot.

When Small made his diving fall, he landed with Glass-Cloth tarp spread wide above Colonel Keen—with most of the hot fire above and thus walled off from the knocked-out colonel. But Small wasn't going to have a walk-away like Moore had. The colonel was not only down and out, but pinned there. When the biplane trainer had closed down on him it had done so in such a manner as to clamp the colonel's booted right foot under the center-section panel of the top-wing spread. So the entire weight of the burning pile was on that foot; and Small knew, from the first look, that there was nothing he could do about that.

But Small could crab in above the colonel—pushing the tarp ahead as he went

—then spread the Glass-Cloth covering as far as his own long arms could reach. And, twisting himself under that tarp, at the same time, he managed to accomplish that pigs-in-a-blanket result.

There was no air down there—no oxygen left. The heat was just about what a housewife would desire for a good oven roast. And Glass-Cloth cover or no Glass-Cloth cover, two men were where two men couldn't possibly last.

Small, though, found strength to slap out creepers of gasoline fire that crawled under the edges from all directions; and he slapped them out with his bare hands, too. Then he heard chemical when it first started hitting on his Glass-Cloth roof; and after that Sergeant Small wasn't hearing anything at all.

XII

THE first thing Staff Sergeant Small recognized—when he and consciousness once more got together in the white room—was the familiar voice of Captain O'Brien.

"You say he's coming out of it, Major?" O'Brien was asking.

"Yeah, he was cussin' straight, just a few minutes ago, so I thought I'd give you a ring. It won't be long now. Damnedest man I ever knew. Just give him a sheet of canvas, a fire and somebody to wrestle with and he'll make a party of his own. You'll recall that he got in here this way once before."

"How bad?" O'Brien asked.

"Just a few superficial burns and a shortage of breath," Major Marying kidded. "It's the shortage of breath that banked his fires for awhile. Man can't breathe hot like that—for minutes—and expect to keep in-town dates the same night. But he'll be good as new in a few days. You can't kill the soldier."

"And how about Sergeant Moore?" Captain O'Brien was asking.

Sergeant Small thought he heard Major Marying ask, "How about it, Moore?"

And what sounded like Moore's voice—somewhat muffled—said, "Hell, I rate this rest! I'm okay. Anyway, I never have any good in-town dates. Don't worry about me. Just get this dam' Romeo on his feet. The Call gal was in here first thing this morning—before work. And again during noon layoff. Hell, that's love. I wouldn't cut into my eatin' hour for any guy."

Major Marying said, "Sergeant Moore's eyes are going to be all right, O'Brien. And his beauty—if any—won't be marred, either. His big mistake was in trying to see too much. Same thing for Cadet Henry. He's in the other ward. When you've seen Moore, you've seen the cadet. They both look alike. Yep, they looked too much; and it will be a couple of weeks before they do any looking again."

"And what about Colonel Keen—how's he?" O'Brien then asked.

"How about Keen!" Major Marying repeated; and Small's fast-returning consciousness thought it detected some scorn in the repeat. "Would anything happen to a gent like Keen? That you should ask, O'Brien! I'm just holding him here for observation.

"Hell," Major Marying went on to tell, "the ankle wasn't even fractured. And as for shortness of breath—like Small here—well, O'Brien, a man can't practice fire-eating for years without getting dam' good at the thing. Hell again! Chances are, Keen just thought he was in his own office blowing hot on enlisted men—and low-ranking young officers."

"You're a hard gent, Major Marying," Captain O'Brien said.

"Hold it!" There was a sudden change in Major Marying's voice, and this time he was talking to Small. "Never mind trying to sit up, Sergeant. You're not going any place."

"The hell you tell!" said Small, half sitting and gazing about him in a very dopey manner. "Hello, Captain," he then mum-

bled. "Thought I could hear you talking. But about me going places, Major. Dam right, I am. Up till now I've always rated a private room in this bone factory. I must be slipping when I have to share quarters with a non-com from another squadron."

"Put him out!" said Moore. "First thing you know—if you leave me alone with him—he'll be setting my bed afire just to prove that an enlisted stiff will burn when not covered by Glass-Cloth tarps."

"Ah, do I hear it Glass-Cloth!" a new voice, out in the long corridor, exclaimed. "A firs'rate products is what you're talkin', gentlemen."

One of Major Marying's interns stood in the doorway; and just behind him was a civilian. It was the civilian whose voice had just been heard.

"Sir," the hospital intern said, speaking to Major Marying, "the commanding officer gave this civilian permission to see Sergeant Small, if and when it's okay with you. He has already seen Colonel Keen. Captain Woods"—Marying's next in command—"said that was all right."

"What is it?" Major Marying asked.

Mr. Fishbein—Glass-Cloth Company's own—stepped into the room.

Sergeant Small took one look and begged, "Take him away!"

"Now, now! Now, now, now, Sergeant!" Fishbein in turn begged. He reached into an inner pocket and brought forth a sealed envelope. Then he stepped closer to Small's white bed and shoved the envelope under the pillow.

"It was the advertising manager's fault, Sergeant," Fishbein explained. "To Canada I've been, and even England. Demonstrations for the Royal Air Force, you understand. I'm sorry, Sergeant. You'll take care of that other feller too, eh?"

"What's it all about?" Major Marying asked.

O'Brien laughed, then he said, "It's a bit of found money that Mr. Fishbein promised the sergeant and Corporal Cosetti if they'd endorse Glass-Cloth and help his company hang one on Colonel Keen."

"No, no, no!" Fishbein objected. "Everything's all right between Colonel Keen and Glass-Cloth Company, gentlemen. Only now, five minutes ago, I signed up a contract with Colonel Keen. The colonel and Mr. Ness buys in on Glass-Cloth Company. The colonel, gentlemen, is through with the Army, through with the Air Force."

Then, pain or no pain, Staff Sergeant Small really did sit up and take notice.

He stared at Captain O'Brien. O'Brien stared at Major Marying. Then, just for fun, each changed the eye position and stared at Mr. Fishbein.

"No kiddin," gentlemen," Fishbein argued. "This rescue with a Glass-Cloth tarp made all the newspapers, ya know. 'S big stuff. 'S biggest stuff ever come our way. And the colonel—he ain't no dope."

"And," tough old Major Marying asked, "you say the dope ain't no colonel any more, he? He's going to write it out and hand it in?"

"As of today, gentlemen," said Mr. Fishbein. "They's a blond lady from the Headquarters force in with the colonel now—takin' the resignation letter. So help me!"

Just then there was a sound of high heels rapping rapidly on the long central corridor's linoleum, and the sitting Small cocked an ear before he spoke.

"Don't let that blond lady from Headquarters get away," he said to the intern who still stood in the doorway, "if it's the right blond."

"It is," the intern said, glancing down corridor, "and she's headed this way."

A few moments later the intern stepped aside and that doorway framed Kay Call. She was smiling and holding forth a single sheet of folded typewriter paper.

"I've got it, boys. I've got it," she said.

Too Much Evidence Pointed to Cry-baby Smith

FROZEN HORSE TRACKS

By O. A. ROBERTSON

Author of "He Needed a Smoke," etc.

WHAT Jack Daniels should have done—but didn't—was to have sunk a slug into this brother-in-law of his, and then applied for a medal. Instead of that he just kicks Ollie off the place, and warns him that the actual fireworks will start if he ever comes back.

Everybody expects it to end right there, even though Ollie Summers is mean and no 'count, and has never earned an honest dollar in his life. Of course he's a heap discommoded when the old man pulls in the latchstring, but at the same time he won't really want for anything because his sister will see to that.

In the opinion of most people she is worse than Ollie. Old Jack Daniels, although he's along toward fifty, is still a man of considerable vigor and violence. There ain't much he can do with his wife, but he can handle Ollie.

And then a couple of months after Ollie gets the gate word comes in that Jack Daniels has been bushwhacked and killed!

As deputy sheriff it's my job to ride out and investigate. The Daniels' ranch is ten miles out, and there's already quite a crowd when I get there. The body has been brought in, and Ollie Summers is very much present. He's a kind of small fellow with a foxlike face, and there's always a cigarette dangling loose from one corner of his mouth.

If he hadn't been so little, and me so big, and an officer of the law besides, I'd have taken a sock at him long ago. He looks at me now with a sort of malicious

smirk, and don't seem to want to conceal the fact that he's a heap pleased.

I ignores him and looks around for Marge, who is Jack Daniel's only child by his first marriage. There's a couple of reasons for this. One is I figure she's the only one will tell a straight story about what happened, and the other is she's been promising for some time to one day become Mrs. Ben Morgan. At the moment she ain't in sight. But her step-mother is.

Mrs. Daniels don't look much like Ollie. She's a big, hard-faced woman with long, loose horse lips which are generally abusing somebody; preferably her husband when he's alive, or Marge. She's doing a lot of going on, but if she's grieved then I'm a rattlesnake's uncle. I can tell that she's already talking about the distribution of the property.

"I don't care if Jack did make a will leaving Marge half the property, it can be broke. She's got no more claim to it than any one of my five kids, and as the widow I'm entitled to half under the laws of this state."

She catches sight of me just then, and comes over. "Well, Ben Morgan," she says, "this case is so clear that even you shouldn't have any trouble arresting the murderer."

"That so?" I says, "I figured I could reach out and lay a hand on him."

"Now look here," she fires up, "if you're thinking it was—" She breaks off then, and looks at Ollie. He throws his dead cigarette away and comes closer.

"This is an open and shut case, Morgan," he says. "I'm takin' over here for my sister, and if you wasn't an officer I'd tell you to git to hell offa here."

"Hold your horses," I say. "If it's an open and shut case who done it?"

"Everybody else knows, but then I suppose it's natural that the law should be the last to find out," Ollie says. "Cry-baby Smith done it. He come here lookin' for Jack yesterday. They'd had trouble. If you'll take the trouble to ride out to the scene of the murder you'll see by the tracks that he followed him up and killed him. Shot him right through the back."

"I'll do that," I says, "and the sheriff is likely to raise hell with whoever brought the body in before we could see it."

JUST then I see Marge out by the corral and I ride over there. Nobody could say that Marge was a typical outdoor girl. She was as outdoor as the mountain air, but she certainly wasn't typical of anybody but herself.

She had been left motherless when she was four years old, and since that time she'd been practically raised on the back of a horse. Old Jack seldom had went anywhere on the range without her. In spite of that she had plenty of feminine charm and good manners. Even that battle-axe of a step-mother couldn't seem to disturb her tranquillity enough to start a row. But Marge was plenty disturbed now.

There didn't seem to be much I could say by way of offering sympathy, but I reckon she knew how I felt. Anyway, she wasn't crying, and it didn't look to me like she had been.

"Can you tell me what happened?" I asked.

"Father didn't come home last night, but old Rustler was standing at the corral gate this morning. I backtracked him and found the body. He was killed while riding out of Pole canyon," she answered.

"Feel able to show me the place?"

"Of course."

Her horse was already saddled and we rode away. I already knew plenty about the feud between Jack Daniels and Cry-baby Smith. Wilbur was Cry-baby's right name, but nobody but Marge ever called him that. He was given to childish, hysterical rages, but where actual violence was concerned he was as timid as a rabbit. He depended upon the fleetness of his horse. Once Jack Daniels had outrun him and given him a lacing with the ends of his bridle-reins. In retaliation Cry-baby had merely returned

the next day, mounted on a faster horse, and more vituperative than ever.

The cause of the present quarrel between the two men was over a scrub bull which Cry-baby had insisted upon turning on the range. After Daniels had warned the man several times the bull had become a steer. Cry-baby had declared that he would be paid the value of the bull or he would have Jack Daniels' hide.

He had come to the house the previous morning and demanded to see Daniels. Mrs. Daniels had taken up the quarrel, and they were abusing each other roundly when Marge interfered to tell the man her father had gone to Warm Spring mountain to see if there was grass enough to graze a herd of cattle. That was what was hurting the girl now, and yet she had no right to blame herself. She had seen Cry-baby in such rages hundreds of times before, and he had never injured anybody.

"Did Cry-baby have a gun?" I asked.

Marge nodded. "His old forty-five hog-leg. He carries it so seldom that I happened to notice it yesterday."

"That had been," she said, "around nine or ten o'clock in the morning." It was the spring of the year, and the cattle were still on the feed yards. The snow was off mostly, but the ground was still frozen, except during the middle of the day. Then for a few hours, it would thaw and turn soft. That was why the tracks of the two horses were so easily traced. Thus, although Marge had been able to backtrack her father's horse that morning, the tracks of her own horse were invisible.

"Here's the place," she said at last, and there was a catch in her voice when she looked down at the spot where she had found her father's body. "He—he was lying down there against that bush."

WE GOT off and tied our horses where their tracks wouldn't get confused with the others and looked around.

There were two sets of horse tracks, one set almost topping the other. I could see where Daniels' horse had made a tremendous spring right above where the body had been found. Daniels had fallen off the instant he was shot, and his body had rolled more than a rod below the trail. Marge informed me that she might not have seen him at all if her own horse hadn't shied violently. I could see where the other man's horse also had done some fancy shying.

"These are Rustler's tracks," Marge said dully. "I'd know them anywhere."

"And these others," I said, "were made by a horse with a crooked hind foot."

Marge nodded. "Wilbur Smith's roan has a crooked hind foot. He was riding it yesterday."

I walked back up the trail a little ways just far enough to make certain that Daniels had come up the trail first. Marge tagged along behind me.

"Well?" she asked.

"It looks like Cry-baby," I said.

We got on our horses and followed the tracks to where they forked off. It was an easy thing to follow the tracks of the horse with the crooked hind foot right to Cry-baby's fence. When we got there a half dozen men were in the yard, and Cry-baby was talking loud and hysterical.

"I didn't do it, I tell you," he shouted. "I *liked* Jack Daniels."

"Yeah, liked him well enough to shoot him in the back," I heard a rancher named Burns say. "If you liked him why did you tell his wife you were goin' to kill him?"

"By Godfrey, we oughta string him up," another man said.

"Hey, cut that out," I yelled at them. "I'll take charge here, an' there won't be any neck-tie party."

I showed my star, and the men backed off, although I reckon it was Marge's presence more than the badge that quieted 'em. Cry-baby come a running. For once he was glad to see me, and I guess he figured the inside of a jail was the safest place he could find.

I said good-by to Marge, and told her

I'd be glad to do anything for her I could. I was thinking of that hellion of a stepmother.

"I'll be all right, Ben," she said, "but I don't believe Wilbur Smith killed my father. He wasn't lying when he said he liked father. They never got together that they didn't quarrel and curse each other out, but I think they both enjoyed it. I know father did."

CRY-BABY protested his innocence all the way to town as if I was judge, jury, and prosecutor all rolled into one. But he admitted the tracks were his, admitted having made threats about what he would do, and that he had been carrying a gun. "But I'd threatened to kill him a hundred times before an' never done it," he cried.

The most damaging admission of all, though was that he had seen Jack Daniels' horse slowly making its way through the brush with the reins dragging. He hadn't done a thing about it.

"I figgered it had got away from Daniels, an' I was tickled to think he would have to walk home," he tried to explain.

After leaving the Daniels' ranch he said he had gone to Warm Spring mountain to see about the range the same as Daniels had. By that time he had cooled off some, and he said he didn't try to find Daniels nor to dodge him. They just hadn't met, but when he started home he admitted he knew by the tracks that Daniels was ahead of him.

It wasn't a good story, and because of the threats he'd made it looked a lot less plausible than it might have done otherwise.

He claimed he didn't hate Daniels, but nobody in the world, except Marge Daniels, would believe him.

Daniels was pretty well liked, and Cry-baby wasn't. That lynching talk wasn't all wind. After I got Cry-baby in jail the sheriff went out to make a little investigation of his own. He came back regretting that Cry-baby wasn't twins so he could be hanged twice—once for killing Daniels, and once for not killing Daniels' wife.

"Her an' that brother of hers are sure makin' it tough for Marge," he said, and gave me a long look.

That was Friday, and they had the funeral Sunday. I wanted to go out, but the sheriff kept me in town. Since Cry-baby was certain to hang the lynching talk had about died out, but the sheriff wanted to make sure nothing happened.

I was eating breakfast downtown Monday morning when word was brought to me that Marge was at the jail and wanted to see me.

When I got there nobody was in the office except old "Good-eye" the jailer, but Marge's horse was tied to the hitch-rack. "Good-eye" jerks his head in the direction of the cell block, and kicks a chair toward me with his foot.

"She's upstairs talkin' with Cry-baby," he says, and squirts a stream of tobacco juice that hits a cuspidor plumb center six feet away, and right between my feet.

I take the chair that's indicated. There's cuspidors all around the room, and "Good-eye" don't like to have people looking down his neck.

"Has she got a gun?" I asks.

"I guess so," "Good-eye" says, and wallops his cud around to the other side of his mouth. "I couldn't see any, so I offered to lend her mine, but she wouldn't take it."

"Good-eye" hates people about as much as Cry-baby does; especially people whom everybody else is already down on. He's already asked for the privilege of springing the trap when Cry-baby swings.

In about five minutes Marge comes down. She picks her way around among the spitoons, and we go out to the hitch-rack.

"Wilbur Smith," she says slowly, "didn't kill my father."

"I suppose," I grins, "he told you he didn't."

"Yes," she says as if that fact is a heap

important. "If he did kill father why does he keep on denying it when he knows nobody will believe him?"

"Is that the only evidence you've got?" I asked her.

"I—I'm not sure," she said. "That's why I want you to take a ride with me, back to—to the scene of the murder."

"Have you been back there?" I asked her.

"Yes, Saturday. It—It's pretty bad at home. My step-mother keeps shouting that she's going to break the will, and see that I don't get anything. I don't care to talk about it, so I took a ride. And I found out something. I came to ask Wilbur some questions, and now, if it isn't too late, I think we can prove that Wilbur wasn't anywhere near when father was killed."

"Let's go," I said.

OUR WAY led past the Daniels' ranch, and we rode hard. It wasn't anywhere near noon when we got there, but Marge wanted to change horses, and insisted upon catching one for me, too, so I'd have a fresh one to ride back to town.

While I was waiting for her to drive in the cavvy Mrs. Daniels came out to talk to me.

If she felt any grief over her husband's murder she didn't show it. She wanted to know what we were up to, and I told her we were going out to see if any evidence had been overlooked.

She gave her high, cackling laugh and said we already had plenty on the old rooster to hang him. Then she asked me if Marge had said anything about the will.

I told her no.

"I suppose you think she'll git half of it, an' you'll marry her an' come in for something," she said shrilly. "But you won't. She won't come in for any more than any one of my kids, and maybe not that. An' I won't have her around here in my way, either."

I didn't say anything, and she went back to the house. She said something to Ollie Summers who had been sitting on the porch watching us, and he sauntered over to the corral when Marge drove the horses in.

Marge caught her father's top saddle horse, Rustler, and brought it over for me. But while I was holding one end of the rope and reaching for my saddle with the other hand Ollie untied the other end from the animal's neck and turned it loose.

"I'm runnin' things here now," he said to Marge. "From now on Rustler is my horse, so you stay off him."

For a second I thought Marge was going to fly right into him, but instead she just gave him a look, turned away, and caught another horse. I rode over past the house as we left, and I said, "Mrs. Daniels, could anybody else beside Cry-baby Smith have known your husband was going to Warm Spring mountain?"

"Not unless *she* told 'em," she snapped, with an angry look toward Marge.

It's now been four days since the murder, and tracks, even when they're made in the mud, don't last always. Clear up to the place of the murder and above it they're pretty well obliterated.

We didn't linger. Marge still hadn't told me what she'd found out, or thought she'd found out; seemed to want to see if I couldn't see it for myself. Consequently, I was paying attention. After all I was an officer of the law and supposed to know something about crime.

As we got higher up the tracks got a little plainer, and there were only the two sets of tracks in the trail. Marge kept looking at me, and I kept looking at the trail. And finally I got it.

"You're right, Marge," I said. "Cry-baby didn't kill your dad, but it's going to be damned near impossible to prove it."

"But the tracks," she said.

"The tracks show that your dad was ridin' fast all the time, either at a fast trot or a lope, and he was ahead. And the top tracks, Cry-baby's, were made by a horse on a slow trot or a walk. Your dad was gaining on Cry-baby all the way, and he must

have been several miles ahead of him when he was shot."

"That's what I thought," she said eagerly. "That's what I wanted to ask Wilbur how fast he was riding. He never was a fast rider like my dad."

"If I'd only had sense enough to follow these tracks all the way, Friday, we could have proved it," I said bitterly. "Now, by the time we can get witnesses they may disappear altogether. Besides, the tracks at the scene of the murder are now so dim we can't even prove they are the same ones."

"But we can't let an innocent man hang, and *we* know he's innocent," Marge cried.

"But we don't know who did do the killing," I reminds her. "Anybody might have done it who happened to know your father would be coming this way. If he hid himself in the brush early enough, and left late enough he wouldn't have left any tracks."

We turned back, and although we searched for some evidence that there had been a bushwhacker in the brush we couldn't find a sign. Yet we both knew that Crybaby was innocent—and we knew that we couldn't prove it.

"Somebody must have shot him from across the canyon, and whoever it was must have known he would be coming back this way from Warm Spring mountain," I said. "Could Ollie have known it?"

Marge shook her head. "He hadn't been on the place since father run him off."

"But you say you left the ranch right after your father did. Ollie might have shown up, and your step-mother told him."

"Even if that might have happened it wouldn't prove anything," Marge pointed out. "Besides, father was shot with a forty-five, and the gun Ollie always carries is a thirty-eight mounted upon a forty-four frame."

"Seems to let Ollie out," I had to admit. But I kept thinking. If Ollie had known about it he could have waylaid Daniels and shot him, but if so then Mrs. Daniels had been an accomplice before and after the fact of her husband's murder.

WE WERE half a mile from the Daniels ranch when we heard a terrific roar.

"What was that?" Marge asked.

"A shot," I said. "And it sure had a powerful bang to it. Sounded like it came from your place."

Bang! it goes again.

"Maybe somebody is shooting up my stepmother," Marge says.

"In that case," I says, for we've spurred to a run, "maybe we'd better pull up an' give him time."

Marge keeps on going, although it does bring a sort of half-scared laugh out of her.

Then we see what's going on, and we ease down to a trot. It's the two oldest kids, eight and ten years old, and they seem to be having target practice. They're out quite a ways from the house, but pretty much unconcerned about which way the gun is pointed. First one and then the other wham away at a post, then they drop the rifle and rush up to see what they've hit. They see us coming and stand waiting with defiant looks on their faces. I can see that Marge is pretty white.

"Where did you kids get that gun?" she demands, and swings down to take it away from them.

"Uncle Ollie said we could take it, an' it's none of your old business," the bigger kid says, and starts backing away from her.

"You know father never allowed you to have a gun."

"Aw, pa's dead, and we don't have to mind you," the little shaver pipes up. "Ma said so."

"I don't care what your ma said, you can't have that gun," Marge says, and reaches out for it.

The bigger kid jerks the gun up and points it at her. "You stay away from me, or I'll shoot your old head off," he says.

I've ridden around behind and got off. I reach over his shoulder and grab the gun.

And then I lifts him with the toe of my boot. He lets a yowl out of him that can be heard clear to the house, then whirls around like a dog attacked from the rear, but he stops right there, I'm sorry to say.

Instead of knocking their heads together Marge tries to reason with them. "All guns are dangerous for little boys," she tells them, "but that old gun hasn't been fired for years and years. It might have exploded and killed you both."

"Aw, it shoots good," the little kid argues. "Uncle Ollie cleaned it up good for us."

"I'll clean Uncle Ollie up for you," Marge says hotly. "Where did you get the shells?"

"Ma give 'em to us. She found 'em in pa's trunk."

"She did not," Marge says angrily. "She got them out of my trunk."

I LOOK down at this old blunder-bus I'm holding, and I see that it's a relic for sure. It's an old Sharp's forty-five-ninety that I find out later belonged to Marge's grandfather. When he died Marge moved into his room, and left the rifle there because it reminded her of the old man. I know I've never seen it before. I figure it's about time for me to take over.

"Let's all go up to the house," I says, "and talk this thing over."

Mrs. Daniels meets us on the porch with a warlike look on her face. Both kids is bawling now. "She took our gun away from us," the little one bleats.

Mrs. Daniels reaches for it, but I don't hand it over. "I'll just hold this for evidence," I tells her.

"Evidence?" she says kind of weak, and then whips herself up to a lather. "You've got all the evidence you need to hang that old scoundrel, Cry-baby, if you just look for it," she shouts.

"Yes, we found plenty of evidence all right," I tells her. Plenty to prove that Cry-baby wasn't the killer. Where's Ollie?"

Her face turns white. "Ollie?" she asks. Then angrily, "He ain't here."

"Maybe not, but I think I'll have a look around," I says. "Marge, you wait here, and hang onto this gun."

The woman blocks the door. "What evidence have you got against my brother?" she demands.

I let her have it, wishing inside my soul that I could prove what I was only guessing at. "After your husband left here Thursday morning Ollie came here and found out where he'd gone. You told him. And you told him about Cry-baby Smith. Then you gave him this rifle here and the cartridges you stole out of Marge's trunk, and he went up into Pole Canyon to wait. When Daniels came along Ollie shot him. He used this gun because the slug is the same size as that fired from a forty-five revolver."

"You lie," the woman says.

"Where you and Ollie slipped up," I went on, as though I had all the evidence I need right in my pocket, "was in tryin' to blame it on Cry-baby. The tracks show that Cry-baby was behind, and a horse travelin' at a walk just can't overtake another one bein' rode at a run. But the very worst blunder Ollie made was in lettin' these two little kids use the gun as an alibi in case it was discovered that it had been shot durin' the last few days. An' now, ma'am, if you'll just step aside I'll have a look around."

She stepped back and all the life seemed to have gone out of her. But I'd only got into the middle of the sitting room when I hear Marge scream, "There he goes!"

I rush out and Ollie is just leaving the corral on Rustler, barebacked. He's undoubtedly overheard me stating my alleged case to his sister, and ducking out the back hasn't wasted any time trying to put on a saddle.

AS I START for my horse I hear Mrs. Daniels screaming, "You let him go. It wasn't his fault. I made him do it. I

hated Jack Daniels, and I hate his daughter."

She was still screaming when we got out of hearing, for Marge had grabbed her horse and was right along with me.

"He's heading for the river," Marge said. "Be careful, Ben, he's got a gun."

"You be careful," I said. "You stay back. I'm a deputy sheriff, and it's my job to get that cuss."

We kept on, side by side. Some of the time we could see Ollie, and some of the time we couldn't. Rustler was a fast horse. He bears straight toward the river, and I'm not the least bit sure he can cross it. The last time I've seen the river, and that's just a few days ago, it was pretty well full of ice. It was going out, of course, and might be cleared up by now, but I remembered there had been a lot of shelf ice still clinging to both banks, and that would be mighty hard to get a horse onto.

I didn't know what Ollie might do if I got him trapped, but I figured a coyote like he was would turn and fight.

"If he can't cross there he'll likely turn down the river," I says to Marge. "You cut across down below and try to head him off if he goes that way."

She don't see what I'm driving at, and turns off like I want her to. That leaves things between me and Ollie. He reaches the river bank and stops. I yells for him to give up, but instead he yanks out his gun and starts shooting. I'm not much afraid at that distance and I keep coming, counting the shots. When his gun's empty I figure I'll take him.

There's nothing for him to get behind, or I imagine he'd have tried to fight it out to a finish. When he sees he ain't hitting anything he gets panicky. All of a sudden he raps Rustler with the bridle-reins and the horse jumps right out on the shelf of ice on that side of the river and plunges into the water.

When I get to the bank they're almost to the other side. Rustler is swimming low and Ollie stretched along his back. But right ahead of them is another shelf of ice nearly two feet thick sticking straight out over the water. I ain't fired a shot yet, and I'm not sure that I will. I stop at the bank and wait. Rustler breasts that ice shelf, and makes a lunge. He can't quite make it. He lunges again, and this time he gets his front feet up over it. For a moment he hangs there like a cat, and it seems as if he's standing on his hind feet—only he isn't. There's nothing under his hind legs only water. Ollie has hold of the mane with both hands, and his feet are dangling in the icy water.

Then, all of a sudden, there is a crack and a roar, and a big slab of ice twenty feet long and ten feet wide gives way. It stands up on edge so quick it's hard to see what happens, but as old Rustler goes over backward with that ice on top of him I see Ollie Summers ram his head square against it.

The ice slab rights itself presently and goes floating lazily off down the river, and old Rustler comes out from under it and starts swimming back to shore. But Ollie ain't with him, and he don't come up.

I hangs my rope over Rustler's neck and takes my dallies to help him back up on the bank. He's just crawling out when Marge arrives.

"Ollie," I tells her, "he ain't comin' back."

THREE days later they fished his body out of the river with grappling hooks.

Mrs. Daniels had collapsed completely, and was sent away to an institution. That left the ranch and five tough kids on Marge's hands, but the court appointed her their joint-guardian and gave her complete control of the ranch until the last one of them was twenty-one. The other guardian is a certain young deputy sheriff. Raising kids like them, and maybe some of our own, is going to be a tough job, but also a certain amount of satisfaction. And if we ever need financial help we know who we can go to, to get it. Cry-baby Smith.

The Jersey Shore

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Ugly is the scene that tells
  How the factories hold sway;
Oily rivers, chemic smells,
  Griming smoke that dims the day;
Industry, a throttling cage
  Where men live and die in pawn—
"This, too, is your heritage,
  Part of your tomorrow's dawn!"

"DELLA, I don't know what to think!" said Charley Hart.

"You're in a safe majority with John Q. Public," replied Della Bradley, with a flick of her blond hair. "If you stopped in to see Mr. Perkins, he's gone home."

The Greatest Mistake One Can Make Is to Wait Till Intuition Is Confirmed by Overt Acts

"Be sensible, angel. I wanted to see you, and you know it."

"But I'm the secretary of a busy law firm—"

"And it's closing time. Slap on your bonnet and let's go eat. I need to get a few things out of my system."

"So I'm the Charley Hart stooge, as usual." Della gave him a thoughtful look. "Don't know what to think—about what?"

"War and politics and dirty work, and where the world's going."

Della glanced at the wall clock and rose from her desk.

"John Q. Public to the last, aren't you? All right, Charley. Beat it. Scram! I'll meet you in ten minutes at the street floor. And don't look so worried. The weight of destiny isn't on your shoulders yet."

Hart shot her a queerly intent look.

"Maybe that's your mistake, Della," he said quietly, and left the office.

Della Bradley looked after him, her eyes warm. For two years she had known Charley Hart; until the past fortnight she had been his secretary. When friends in Washington jerked the brilliant young attorney out of his law-office and appointed him New York head of the War Advisory Board, Della took a job with Perkins & Perkins.

Now Hart wished he had her back, both personally and professionally.

He needed her clear insight, he reflected, as he waited below in the lobby. She had come from a little upstate town, and her uphill struggle had tempered her innate honesty with a certain worldly sagacity which he frequently found of the greatest use.

As she came out of the elevator, prompt to the minute, Hart tucked her arm in his.

"Let's go to the Longchamps around the corner, where we can talk. Damn it, Della, there's no one I can trust these days!"

"You mean, there's no one you're close to yet, in your new job."

"I was happier in the dingy old law office on upper Broadway."

"Growing pains. Mr. Perkins says you're one of the coming men of America!"

He grunted ironically. Presently they were in the nearby restaurant and settled down at a corner table. The ordering finished, Della sipped her cocktail and eyed him appraisingly.

"Worried about your work?"

"No. My assistants are capable. I'm just a figurehead to check their reports and confirm their findings. It's what lies ahead that bears down on me. I can almost see the trend of things, and it frightens me!"

"You, a big shot, a leader?"

"Rats! I'm just another little bureaucrat." He frowned. The pleasant, clean-carven lines of his features became drawn. "You know, there are three sorts of leaders in the world, in this country—those who do not know, those who do know and who pervert their knowledge, and those who know and who serve their fellows. The first two are dead from this time henceforth, but they're damned prevalent."

"Must be your liver, she commented lightly. "Just what are you driving at?"

He leaned forward. "Whispering campaigns; and more than whispering. There are people in good places who have been reached, or have been fooled, or have alien interests. Like those men who were lately chucked out of big companies whose control is held in Germany or Switzerland. I'm afraid they're all around us. And we've not scotched all the enemy agents by a long shot. Ever hear of Gregson?"

Della looked startled. "The syndicated writer and traveler and lecturer? Why, of course! I read his column all the time! But you can't find anything wrong with him."

"Did you read him yesterday? He said that Japan jumped the gun on Hitler, that we're wrong in thinking the two so closely related, and that Japan is actually acting independently of Hitler. A plausible theory."

"Yes, and pretty comforting, too. He's an expert on the Far East, Charley. He

lived out there, and has written books about it. He's well known and honest." She paused, frowning lightly. "Come to think of it. I didn't like the one he wrote about England, just after the fall of Singapore."

"Remember it?" demanded Hart, his features sharpening.

She nodded. "In general, yes. That Britain's only good at falling back; that her empire's gone, and we'll never get back a penny of all we've lent her. That sort of thing."

"But he didn't say how Britain had bled in holding back the beast!" snapped Hart. "Yes, my dear; that's what I mean. Gregson is dangerous. But there's the waiter, so let it rest. How are you getting on with Mr. Perkins?"

She grimaced. "Not so well as he thinks. He hasn't learned to keep his mind in the right place with the wrong secretary—if you know what I mean."

Hart grinned. "Well, I'm trying to make a spot for you on the Advisory Board. If it goes through, do you want it?"

"You bet!" she cried eagerly. "Never mind the salary—you get me the job, and little Della will grab it! We always did work well together."

"And always shall," he said, nodding. "Except when it's a question of the Jersey shore."

She laughed at this, her eyes twinkling; it was a standing argument between them.

"I'd almost sooner hear you orate on that topic," she said, "than on Gregson and this new theory of yours."

"I'll tell you about it later—as we drive home," he said.

AND SO he did, as the taxicab took them uptown to her apartment near Washington Square. Hart pictured very clearly the subtle promptings that were being heard all over the country.

Cheapen Britain's efforts, make men forget how Britain had given of her best to save them all; fan the old jealousy afire until a split was created! Meantime, deny the thought of Axis unity. Make men forget the Nazi technicians and advisors in Japan, the white pilots who had strafed Honolulu's streets! Easier, then, to think of healing the breach with Germany while all-out efforts were directed against the yellow Aryans!

This was it, in brief, but there was much more in Hart's theory.

"We must hold on to the thought that all evil is inter-dependent!" he concluded. "All evil, from defense strikes to bombs, is part of the pattern. That's one way of meeting it—"

"But you haven't proved anything!" exclaimed Della. "You just believe that Gregson is a rascal! You've nothing on him. His opinions may be honest."

"They're dishonest opinions," said Hart. "Besides, I've undertaken to prove I'm right. I've sent Gregson, through a third party, a brief outline of my whole theory regarding this Axis propaganda."

She gasped, but made no comment; they had arrived. But when they stepped into her apartment, Della closed the door and faced him abruptly. She was white to the lips.

"Charley, you fool!" she broke out. "Don't you see what it means? If Gregson is what you think him, if your theories are correct — why, they'll go after you! They'll want to be rid of you at all costs!"

Hart chuckled. "That's it, sure. Put it to the test, angel!"

"Why didn't you tell the F.B.I. what you think?"

"I did. They weren't interested. Too busy rounding up Jap aliens." He took her hand. "Well, good night, angel! I'm off in the morning; going to Washington over the week-end for my reports and instructions. I'll drive down and sleep in the car—no use trying to get any hotel room, of course."

"Leaving early?"

"You bet. About six."

"Take me with you, as far as Trenton! I can get back from there in time for work. Mr. Perkins isn't coming until late—"

"Good! Good!" exclaimed Hart, delighted. "And we'll resume our Jersey shore argument on the way!"

They did so, with the rising sun struggling to appear through the dense clouds of smoke wending up from factory and mill and chemical plant. Ugly, all of it; beastly, said Della, with a shiver. The once lovely countryside was ruined. All Jersey was ruined.

"Nonsense! You just don't see it right," said Hart, laughing. "I was brought up in these parts. Della. Maybe it's not pretty; but it's a part of this country of ours, a vital portion, too! From here on past Pittsburg—a roaring war-effort just now, but always great in its very ugliness. Great, productive—"

"Why, the very air's poisoned!" she broke in, coughing. "Drab cities, shabby buildings and spoiled rivers, filthy towns —it's not worth the loss of beauty!"

Hart looked out at the smoky horizon and his eyes warmed.

"I don't get that, Della. Here's development, progress, industry; a cornerstone of our nation of the future! I'm a practical man. Any practical man sees it that way. We've put to use what our ancestors handed down to us; some things are spoiled to have a greater gain. A farmer's dungheap isn't pretty, but it holds riches. Same here. This is my country, and I can see under the surface. It's tremendous!"

"Well, the country's all right, but this part of it isn't!" she declared defiantly. Hart laughed again.

"That sounds like Gregson. Every part of it's all right, Della; the greatest land on earth—if we stick to unity; Race hatred, sectional jealousy, political feuds—can't have any of them these days. And, by the way, you're almighty good at digging up hidden stuff. Take a try at Gregson, will you? Something in his past that might prove me right."

She nodded. "I'll try. Mr. Perkins knows him and has some letters from him. But you did a terrible thing in tipping your hand to Gregson, I fear."

"That means you agree with me. And he isn't alone. Men of that type are scattered all over the country. They're centers of infection. They have wide circles of friends, men whom they steer deftly into their line of thought. If you can uncover anything on Gregson, give me a call. You know where to reach my chief's office."

She assented.

He dropped her at Trenton and drove on, thrilled whenever he sighted a factory stack. Not pretty, maybe; life was not pretty either. It had given Charley Hart no favors.

He had fought and worked every inch of his way, from factory town to law school; without help or pull, he had pushed himself through. As a lawyer, he slaved where other men relaxed. Now, with financial success around the corner, he had taken up the war work offered him.

Never had he taken time out to think of home or marriage. He had never wanted to, until he realized how deeply he was in love with Della Bradley. Here, too, unity was the watchword, but was dreadfully far from achievement — just as with many Washington affairs.

During his days in the capital, he came near to forgetting Gregson. The jam-packed city, frantic with its almost hysteric labors, buffeted him about like a puppet; but he got his chores done. Charley Hart usually did. There was a tenacity to him that overcame all difficulties. He was clear-headed, precise, efficient.

A factory man, bred of the mill towns; to him, industry meant the future, the machine age spelled everything great and promising. United effort meant everything, because it was efficiency; he saw with a machine eye, as it were. To him the sweet valleys and broad western rivers meant

only unexploited possibilities that would come in due time. Some men are like that, and the world is better off for them.

On Tuesday morning came a special delivery letter, in care of his chief. It was from Della, and told him merely to call her at home Tuesday evening for news of Gregson. She might have wired, he thought, and smiled at the thought. Della had always had a small-town girl's distrust of telegrams.

He called her at seven-thirty that evening. Her voice was excited.

"Charley, I've got it. Our man spent two years in the Far East—he was on the payroll of the German State Railroads!"

"Hearsay or proof?" demanded Hart quickly.

She laughed. "Did you train me to collect hearsay, Charley Hart? Not much! I've got the goods on him. He's lecturing just now, somewhere in Jersey. One of Mr. Perkins' letters from him mentioned that he was in Nagasaki in 1938, working for railroad interests. I photostated the letter. On a hunch I looked up German publications in the Library and came across his name in two of the State Railroad reviews. Daniel Gregson, our special agent in Japan! It ran that way each time."

"That may not be F.B.I. evidence, but it sure interests me," said Hart delightedly. "Swell work, angel, and thanks! I may be back tomorrow; Thursday certainly. Shall we make a date for Thursday night? Okay; it's a date."

He hung up, thrilled; this news was the spark he had needed. How to make use of it he did not yet see, but the way would come. So Gregson was actually a Nazi agent!

ON Wednesday morning he had one last visit to make before getting off for home. He waited for his interview in a crowded reception room; and suddenly he became aware of the two men sitting beside him in talk. A pleasant, dark-faced, aggressive man of fifty had just mentioned the name of Gregson. Hart picked up his ears.

"One of the best journalists in this country!" went on the speaker. "And he certainly knows his onions. Did you read his smashing exposé of the Axis as it really is, his denial of any actual relations between Hitler and Japan?"

"All a lie," blurted Hart impulsively, without stopping to think. The other turned to him quickly.

"What do you know about it, sir?"

"Plenty," said Hart. "Gregson has taken in a lot of people with his plausible line; it's pure enemy propaganda."

"Absurd!" exclaimed the other. "I know his record and him; he's the most honest man alive!"

Hart smiled. "You may learn otherwise before very long."

The stranger was more curious than angry, although frankly naming himself as a friend of Gregson. He was, it proved, one Barton Frome, a newspaper publisher, a dabbler in Jersey politics and a wealthy sportsman of some standing.

"I insist that you're far of the mark," said Frome. "Why, Gregson's my house guest right now; he's lecturing in our town today. I'm to get back for dinner tonight if I can get my business finished here. You don't know Gregson personally?"

"I don't need to know him," Hart said. "His published articles are pure Nazi stuff."

"You wouldn't say that to his face."

"I certainly would," said Hart. "In fact, I hope to say it publicly before long."

"Then—are you returning soon to New York?"

"Yes; in an hour or two. I'm driving."

"Good! You'll pass right through Penn's Crossing, near Princeton. Stop there and dine with us, Mr. Hart!" Frome thawed visibly. He was a friendly soul; one of Gregson's dupes, thought Hart.

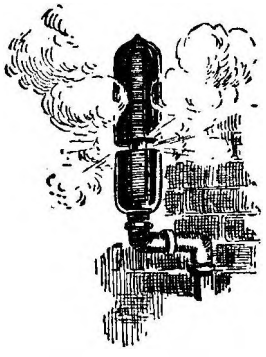
"I'd be delighted to have you as a guest," he went on cordially. "Meet Gregson, and you may revise your opinion

of him. We can put you up for the night easily; plenty of room! And if you feel like challenging his statements, go to it. I think you'll find he has excellent basis for all he says."

Barton Frome was obviously sincere and straightforward. Hart was committed almost before he knew it; but not blindly. Here, he saw, was a chance to undo some of the harm done by Gregson, in a spot well worth while; such men as Frome should be made to see things aright. This was his opportunity to offset Nazi propaganda where it would do the most good, and he seized it eagerly. Tear the mask from Gregson—why not?

So it was arranged that he would stop for dinner that evening.

Later, too late, other things occurred to him. He himself had supplied Gregson with his name and theories, in his first hope of smoking out the wolf; a mistake there, as Della had warned him. And it was probable that Barton Frome would phone word home about the new dinner guest. Gregson might well be forewarned, might evade the meeting. Too bad!



He got away from Washington in good time and drove without haste, in line with the tempo of all motoring these days; he, too, had to save his rubber.

Twilight was coming on when he passed through Trenton, following Highway No. 1. Ahead lay his destination, the town of Penn's Crossing, where Frome lived. A small place, but alive now with war industry.

Production! He smiled, as across his mind flickered a momentary vision. Production, for all the empty blasted world; there lay the future of this country, his country! Bearing the burdens of the world reborn, turning from war effort to peace effort; cornfields in the West and factories in the East alike sharing the unselfish work. Powerful to subdue the evil beast of destruction, more powerful still to repair the damage done suffering civilization. And beyond this, dimly sensed, powerful to take the lead in building anew the ancient dream of gods and men, a brotherhood of humanity untouched by greed or frantic war—

IT HAPPENED so suddenly that he had no time even to jam on his brakes. A southbound car turned without warning, circling the highway, swinging straight at him! He had one swift glimpse of the thing, saw two faces through the windshield of the other car—then it struck.

His light roadster was struck squarely amidships. One grinding crash of metal, then chaos as his car overturned and was knocked out of the road. It slammed against a concrete abutment and, on the instant, was a riven mass of junk.

Hart was unaware of what happened next, until men came running from a nearby filling station. Excited voices dinned at him. He was extricated from the wreckage and came to his feet, dazed and stunned, but miraculously unhurt, except for shock.

"Blind drunk!" cried somebody. "Anybody get his number?"

Nobody had. The other car had leaped into speed and gone away fast. Hart was conscious of more cars around, of a small crowd about him; his grip and briefcase were salvaged, he was pronounced a lucky man, offers of assistance showered upon him.

He mentioned the name of Barton Frome. It was recognized; someone knew where Frome lived, and offered a lift.

Hart accepted; he was still in a daze. A state trooper arrived. He asked no end of questions. It was dark when Hart, in untold relief, got away with the man who offered the lift.

Frome's house was large, set a little back from the street, surrounded by an iron fence, with a carriage entrance at the side. Before Hart knew it, Barton Frome was out with a cordial hand grip; his luggage was being taken inside; he himself was being led to an upstairs room, and Frome brought him a drink and heard the story.

"You're lucky, Hart!" he said. "Not a scratch, eh?"

"A few bruises; nothing of account. It's a queer way to take advantage of your proffered hospitality—"

"Nonsense! I'd have been deeply hurt if you hadn't!" Frome said cordially. "Don't bother changing for dinner, of course; no formality here. Let's hope the state police will run down the rascals who bumped you. Drunk driving, no doubt."

Hart thought so himself—for a little while.

Downstairs again, with cocktails and appetizers, a dozen people around. Frome and his wife, several couples of varying ages, and four young people, two of them in uniform—and Gregson. A couple more guests arriving, completed the party.

Gregson. A tall, bitter-faced man with a steel-trap mouth and the air of a professional cynic. He shook hands casually. Hart's name, apparently, meant nothing to him. Then the two last arrivals came in. Friends of Gregson, obviously, for he introduced them to the others; two men, Beck and Halstead by name, pleasant but hard in the eye, men of about thirty. Hart was introduced and gave no sign of the sudden freezing recognition inside him—

They were the two faces he had glimpsed behind the windshield of the other car.

Almost at once he found that this could not be so; Beck had driven over from Princeton, Halstead had just arrived by taxi from the hotel here in town. Yet the faces were the same as those registered in that one photographic flash.

It was here that Charley Hart took definite warning.

They went in to dinner, a meal impeccably served and appointed. Hart was seated between his hostess and Gregson. The discussion was general, without direct mention of the war or politics. Gregson had been lecturing this afternoon at a woman's club, and was the lion of the occasion. He was remaining for the night as Frome's guest.

Gradually Hart's whirling brain circled into its accustomed grooves; he was himself again, but now he was alert and aware of little things around. The occasional glances shot at him by Beck or Halstead, the bitterly sardonic air of Gregson, were enough. He could not accuse these two men; he had no evidence, and their tracks would be carefully covered.

He scarcely knew how the dinner passed. With the coffee and cigars, the young people departed to other activities, the ladies adjourned to the living room, and the group of men remaining about the table took on a slight tenseness, to Hart's fancy. The moment was at hand, and Barton Frome, rather jovially, announced it.

"We're to hear something interesting—and, I trust, neither personal nor bitter," he said. "I ran into Mr. Hart this morning in Washington. It seems that he doesn't agree with our friend Gregson, and I thought a discussion between them would be interesting. So I arranged a meeting, and here we are!"

No news to Gregson, thought Hart. Frome must have telephoned him. And here were Beck and Halstead on the scene. Gregson turned, pleasantly.

"Are you intolerant of opinions that differ from those of the mass, Mr. Hart?"

"Opinions? Not at all. They may be honest or dishonest," said Hart, smiling. "Only dishonest ones are criminal, or traitorous."

Gregson held a match to his cigar, the flame accentuating his harsh face-lines.

"Are you one of those men who fancy a Nazi agent behind every bush?"

"I'm probably the only man whose fancy goes even farther," Hart replied, "since it extends not only to enemy agents, but to the dupes and tools of these agents."

"Meaning us?" spoke up one of the other guests. "But, Mr. Hart, we happen to know that Gregson is doing a great job of education. He's teaching people to think. He's honestly working for the best interests of our country. That's our only aim, yours and ours alike."

"Granted," said Hart. "But suppose we get to the point of things without sparring. Let's have your argument, Gregson."

GREGSON stirred and spoke, slowly, deeply. He was wary of his words and kept away from the issue Hart most wanted him to broach. Although Hart drove him toward it, time after time he slipped away. He was a fluent talker, and impressive. It was obvious that Frome and the other men—with two exceptions—were entirely honest in letting their convictions be swayed by him. He was extremely plausible.

"Suppose we get to specific cases," said Hart at last. "Your statements about the Axis, for example. You claim that the Axis is a myth, don't you?"

"Yes, more or less," snapped Gregson, unable to evade. "So I've found it."

Halstead leaned forward and spoke aggressively.

"I'll state the case for him, Mr. Hart. He is spreading the highly sensible argument that the Axis is not what we've thought; that people have erected it into a bogey. We must rid the country of this false fear. We must estimate the German-Japan alliance at its true worth, which is very small. We must realize that the two forces are entirely separate, jealous of each other, conflicting with each other!"

"How nice!" observed Hart ironically. Gregson took up his own case again, trying to slip away from specific charges, but Hart held him to them.

"I'd be glad to set your animus at rest, Hart," he said at length. "Our group is animated by patriotic motives. Many men in Washington are associated with us, and we're in close touch with statesmen and others in key positions, like yourself."

"I don't doubt it," Hart riposted, feeling that he was at last getting the pincers on his man. "The President has publicly announced that there is an extensive Cliveden Set here in the United States. In Omaha there's a large and openly treasonable movement afoot. In Detroit we have the Inner Circle hard at work, and so on through the country. Each one concentrates on a special line of activity."

"One would think you're inferring that I'm a traitor!" said Gregson, with a curt laugh.

Charley Hart smiled, perfectly conscious that his whole play had reached the men he wanted to reach, Frome and the others.

They were intent, disturbed, uncertain about Gregson, hanging now on Hart's response. And he gave them a bombshell.

"No, I don't infer that at all," he said. "I state it as a fact. I'm in possession of a letter written by you, referring to your residence in Japan. While there you were a special agent of the Nazi State Railways, and were so named by them publicly; this was just before the war. No one so recently in Nazi pay should be spreading doctrines calculated to soften up American offense."

Frome uttered a stifled gasp. The malign expression of Gregson became positively venomous. Halstead's broad features darkened, Beck caught his breath sharply; both men regarded Hart with fixed, tense gaze.

Then Gregson broke the startled silence. "Your statements are untrue!" he said raspingly. "Absolutely untrue! Never

have I had any connection with the German Railways!"

Hart shrugged. He had put over his point; the faces of Barton Frome and others showed him that his work was done.

"Well, this is a private discussion, not an investigating committee," he observed lightly. "I've made my charges, Mr. Gregson denies them. I don't imagine, Frome, that you want to carry the matter any farther? I'm not submitting my proofs here, you know; that'll be done elsewhere."

Ill at ease, startled, Frome grasped at the chance of avoiding trouble.

"No, no, we must stop short of personal recrimination," he exclaimed. "This isn't the sort of discussion I anticipated, gentlemen. With your permission, Gregson—"

Gregson had been exchanging glances with Beck and Halstead. He waved his cigar affably.

"Quite right; this is no place for animosities," he assented. "These absurd charges can't be substantiated, of course, and shall be refuted in their proper place."

Frome rose, with unconcealed relief, and attempted to ease the strain.

"Then let us join the ladies. I know that all of us will regard what has been said here as off the record. The serious business of the evening will concern some rather good brandy, about which I'm anxious to have your opinions—"

THEY rose and drifted out into the other rooms. Frome showed himself affable, urbane, cordials, but it was evident that he was shocked by what he had heard. Hart beckoned him aside and asked if he might put in a call for New York.

"I'm not remaining the night," he went on. "I'll have a friend pick me up later in the evening."

"But you're entirely welcome; we expected you for the night!" exclaimed Frome. "However, it's as you desire. Come along to the library and phone; then I want you to join us in a bit of cognac tasting."

THE library was deserted and peaceful. Hart, left alone at the phone, put in his call to Della, and waited. He heard an almost imperceptible click that snapped alarm through his brain. A sparrow on the line!

"Might have known it," he reflected. "Gregson's not alone here, nor his two pals—oh, hello, Della! Glad to hear your voice, angel. I'm at Penn's Crossing, north of Trenton. You know the place? Had an upset with the car. Could you drive down and pick me up?"

"Absolutely," she responded. "Where?"

Hart thought fast. Gregson, Beck, Halstead, probably one or two others—no, dammit! This house was no safe place for him!

"At the hotel," he said.

"I'm practically there. Are you all right?"

"Fine, thanks."

He hung up. Unsafe here—danger all around him! His mind was made up. And he could not go openly, either.

Returning to the other rooms he found that Gregson had gone to the hotel with Halstead to meet another man; he would be back later. Beck was just taking his departure. He had to get back to Princeton this evening, he said. For the others, the night had barely begun. With the enemy out of the way, Hart breathed more freely. And yet—that bird on the line! Frome's phone was tapped. This was no safe place.

Barton Frome, who was a connoisseur of brandies, was with great ceremony decanting into huge Venetian tasting-goblets his treasures of Armagnac and Marmande, with learned dissertations on their varied firmness and bouquet.

Charley Hart, with the others, inhaled deeply and sipped slowly, but he had other things than brandy on his mind. He praised the noble distillation warmly; to himself, he was regretting the impulse that had impelled him, days since, to send Gregson the information about his theo-

ries. He had given the man long warning. Gregson had been ready for him, as that accident with the car proved; no accident at all.

"The greatest mistake one can make," he thought, "is to wait until intuition is confirmed by overt acts! I shan't make that mistake."

Intuition? Not this alone; he found himself uneasy and alarmed. The broad, aggressive visage of Halstead, the iron-hard eyes of Beck, the malign look of Gregson, worried him. Those two men had tried to kill him on the highway. Now, after he had sprung his charges on Gregson, they had redoubled motive. He sensed monstrous things at work, things of which Barton Frome could know nothing; but he wanted to get away from here at all costs, and quietly, before those others returned.

AFTER a bit he made his excuses, saying he still felt a bit of shock and was in need of repose. Frome took him upstairs. Again Hart spoke of leaving, but the hearty hospitality of Frome refused to hear of it. A sense of shame stole upon him, as his host departed. It was absurd to find sinister overtones and menacing echoes here! Hesitation smote him anew as he closed the room door. It was impossible to doubt such a man as this.

But it was not Barton Frome whom he doubted. The sensible thing, he reflected, was to insist upon leaving, call a taxicab, and be off out of here quite openly. He shrank from it. Fear obsessed him—he admitted it. Then he noticed that his briefcase was not in the position he had left it.

It was a thin but tightly packed briefcase. He opened it, and the conetnts were not as he had left them. Hesitation vanished; the spur of necessity struck in ugly rowels. He switched off the room lights and opened the door again. The corridor was empty.

Hat and briefcase in hand, grip abandoned, he left the room. He had a clear mental picture of the scene downstairs, of the reach to the front door, closed from sight of the rooms there. He descended the stairs swiftly and saw no one. At the front door he crammed hat on head, swung the door open, and stepped out.

The cool night air balanced him. He could phone back and apologize for his stealthy departure; that would make amends. He could send back for the grip he had left. He glanced at the sky; no moon, but the stars were clear—

A figure slipped out from the shadow of the stone gatepost. It was Beck. Hart knew in one intuitive flash what he faced; instinctively he threw the briefcase straight at the man, reached out, caught the upraised arm, and wrenched violently. Metal clanged on cement as a pistol fell, unfired. Beck voiced a startled oath and grappled with him.

Out of the tree-darkened street two other figures moved swiftly. They fell upon Hart, all three of them striking and lashing at him in deadly silence. He staggered, went to his knee under a storm of blows, and caught up the fallen briefcase. He came up, slashing savagely with it, straight across Beck's face; the man cried out in agony.

Here was Halstead grappling with him —Hart got his knee into the man, doubled him up, brought his knee up again slap into the cursing features, and was free of him. He turned to run for it, but Gregson had him then, rasping out a command at the others, lashing at him with a heavy cane. Hart reeled under the blows, but caught hold of Gregson, clinched with him, fighting frantically.

He had a strained glimpse of Beck, on his feet at one side, saw his arm upflung. With hot fear, Charley Hart swung his weight upon Gregson, forced the other back and around, and the two of them smashed into Beck. There was a flash, amid a bursting explosion. Gregson cried out wildly and lost his grip, and fell.

Hart, still clutching his briefcase, legged it across the street for the trees and the deep shadows there. He almost made it, when another shot split the night. He staggered, lost balance, went reeling into the darkness—

Later that night, Della Bradley stood in the back room of the police headquarters at Penn's Crossing, white and still and stricken, and looked down on the peaceful and smiling features of Charley Hart. The police chief, at her elbow, spoke quietly.

"Yes, Miss Bradley, it's a pretty terrible thing. It sure has shaken up the town, you bet! About Mr. Gregson getting killed, too—a well-known and famous man like him!"

"And you actually got the men who did it?"

"Sure did. Two guys—and found they were wanted out on the West Coast for sabotage and murder. German spies, Miss Bradley; the F.B.I. is taking over the case—"

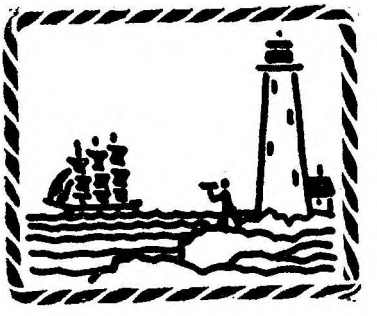
"You say Mr. Hart was alive when he was found?"

"Just passing out, Miss. The prowl car that heard the shooting and picked up the guys found him. The only thing he said was something about factory chimneys and industry, and the heritage of our country. Didn't make sense; he was wandering, I guess. Looks real happy now, don't he?"

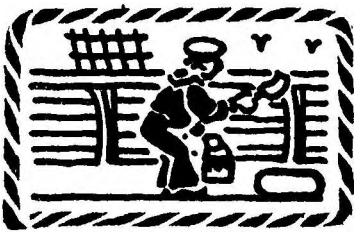
She turned away, choking. Factory chimneys—the heritage of our country—yes, Charley Hart had stuck to his argument to the last. And, she thought, he had won it. There were things far more important to Charley Hart than life or death.

Sea Silence

By CLARENCE EDWIN FLYNN

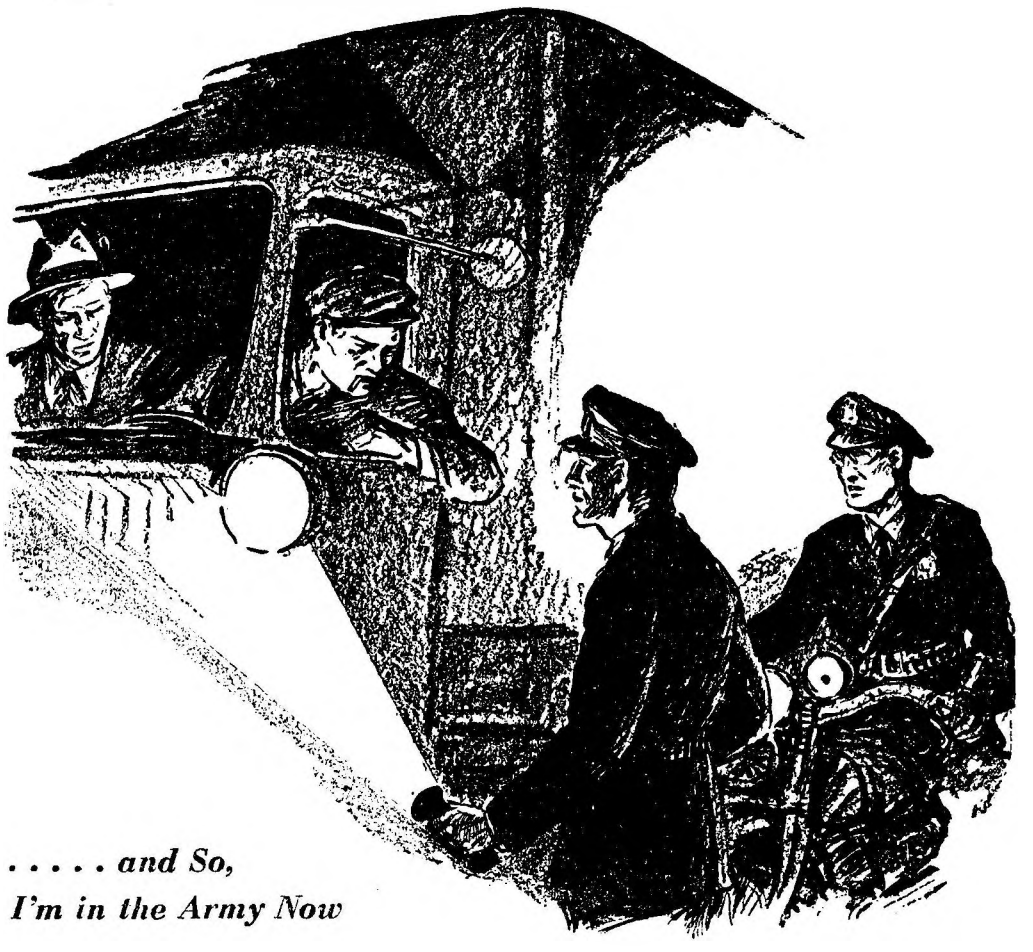


GRIM, speechless ocean, will no day unfold
When you will break the silence of the years,
And tell the stories that have not been told,
The strange, wild tales that never reach our ears?
So long have you kept hidden in your heart
The wreck, the battle, and the treasure trove
That would surpass our puny human art
With crash of action and the thrill of love.



So long have you been silent. Still we wait
To hear the annals of the mighty deep,
The bold, brave chronicles of hope and fate,
Of blood and conquest you securely keep.
As children who would hear a story, we
Wait the deferred recital of the sea.

ACCORDING TO HOYLE



. . . . . and So, I'm in the Army Now

By DANIEL MOORE

FRED MORGAN
General Trucking

THAT'S the sign on my door, and I look at it, sore as hell. It's taken me five years to build up a pretty good business and now my number is pulled out of a hat and I'm ordered to report for my year's hitch in the Army. This puts me in a bad spot for I've only got the trucking business as a front, so I can't hire some sucker to run it for me. I haul enough legitimate freight to make it look right, but my real racket is running hot stuff for anyone that will lay it on the line—and no questions asked. I've been doing all right and have enough dough stacked away to buy off any real beef they might slap on me.

I figure I have a swell set-up and now this Army hooey has to come along and wreck it. I'm due to report the next day and I've got a picture of myself peeling spuds for scissorbills at twenty-one bucks a month. The hell with that, I think. I pay that much for a pair of shoes.

It's the dough that gives me the idea to blow. I'd lay it on the line to beat a legal rap, so why not use it to beat this Army

rap, I think. And so I draw all my cash out of the bank and unload my trucking set-up on a guy named Curly Burns. Curly isn't buying a pig in a poke, so all I get is peanuts. But the money Curly pays me, gives me an even nine "G's," and as far as I'm concerned the next stop is Mexico. I know I'll be up for desertion, but they'll have to catch me to make it stick. If I could have looked ahead a few hours, peeling spuds would have seemed pretty good. By then, I'm not only a deserter, but I've got two other raps hung on me too—one for highway robbery, and one for murder!—and besides all that, I'm taking a one-way ride.

I'm in my office with Curly and he's counting out the fifteen hundred he's paying for my trucks when we hear the sirens screaming. I get the willies for a second, but they go right past my door and head out Glendale way, so we finish the business and it takes me a couple of hours to give Curly the low-down. I figure a mob has raided a bank or warehouse, and let it go at that. I tell Curly it might mean his first haul if he can find out who pulled the job.

I don't know till later that it does mean a hauling job—for me. Curly and I are just leaving when the phone rings. I tell Curly to answer it, and if it's for me, I've gone. It's for me, all right and the guy at the other end won't take "no" from Curly. A phone call is a funny thing, for a guy will answer it when he'll duck everything else.

The guy orders me to bring my big moving van to a certain address. I try to turn him down, but it's no go. He sure has me tabbed and starts telling me things about myself that I've tried to forget—and then he offers me a price for a short haul that makes me think quick. Why turn a soft touch like this over to Curly, I think? So I take the job. I make a deal with Curly to use the truck for the night and give him a hundred bucks to make it look right. I don't tell him that my end of the job is just ten times that "C" note, for it's none of his business. I roll out the truck and start for an address over in Burbank.

THE joint I'm told to drive to sits back from the road about a hundred feet and a couple of big trees screen it from the street. I go up the driveway and pull into the back to hide the truck. It's dark, and there's no sign of life. I think of the rod I always carry behind the dashboard in case of a hijack, and reach under to get it—just for instance. Then I change my mind and leave it there. I take a look around before I go in, just in case, and in the garage I find a brown car. I look it over and see a couple of bullet holes. I wonder about this, but shrug it off. Then I walk to the side door, and rap. Before I know what hits me I'm jerked inside and a guy with a tommy-gun prods me into a room. There isn't much light, but I see three other guys with tommy-guns and the way they handle them shows they mean business. They frisk me for a gat and I'm glad I left it under the dashboard, for I can see that things don't look right. The four tommy-gun guys are in Army uniforms, and two more Army guys are sitting in a corner. One of these is an officer and the other is an old-time sergeant. Another look around shows me a girl, with an old man standing beside her.

What the hell *is* this, I wonder? Then I see the prize package of the lot. He is a hard-faced hombre and seems to be the bull-of-the-woods. I open up on him about the rough stuff from the tommy-gun guys, but he just stares at me like I was a hat-rack. The guy sends the shivers up my back, for I know a killer when I see one, and old Flintface sure fit the bill. I try to place him, but he doesn't belong to any local mob.

Then I see that the Army officer and the sergeant have their hands tied behind their backs. I remember the brown car with the bullet holes and it dawns on me that it is

an Army car and this is a snatch. These guys have hijacked the Army car and are holding the officer and sergeant for some reason. This doesn't explain the girl and the old man, but I've had enough. I tell Flintface to count me out; I want nothing to do with a snatch.

THE guy gives me a cold up and down. "Morgan," he says, "from here on, you will do as you're told."

He turns to one of his stooges and orders him to pay me off. The guy counts out ten one hundred-dollar bills and hands them over.

"That is my end of the bargain," says Flintface, "and I'm sure you will carry out your end."

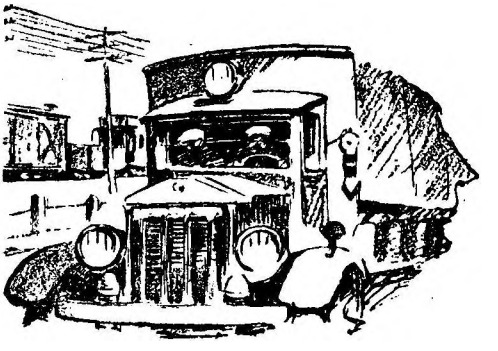
I look at the four tommy-gun guys and figure that Flintface is right. But what the hell *is* my end, I wonder.

Then Flintface turns on a portable radio, and I learn what I have stepped into. Every station on the air carries the story and the announcers are as excited as Ted Husing reporting a football game. These guys have raided a factory, snatched a Doctor Howell and his daughter, and left a little time bomb that blew hell out of the place after their getaway, killing two cops. So far, six guys have been killed, and I'm in the middle of it. I get into a cold sweat, for if the cops grab me with these mugs, I know I haven't a Chinaman's chance to clear myself.

Every cop in Los Angeles is out, but they're running in circles. Flintface has really outsmarted them. This makes him feel pretty good as he sits with his ear glued to the radio, smiling like a cat licking cream from his whiskers. He sure was a funny guy, for he got more kick out of crossing the cops than a kid stealing apples. The idea that he might get caught never seemed to enter his mind.

The cops are looking for an Army car with four guys in it, so I tumble that the four mugs with the tommy-guns pulled the job and Flintface had done the masterminding. He must have worked months on the job, for he missed no tricks. He even has a decoy car planted and the radio brings word that it has been spotted and is being chased. The decoy is finally trapped and the four guys in it are killed trying to fight their way out. This pleases hell out of Flintface and he cracks to one of his stooges that everything is going according to plan. The four guys meant nothing to him. He was as cold blooded as a shark and this was just a sample of what was to come later. He snuffed out a guy like you would a mosquito.

The decoy car only balls up the chase. There's no trace of Doc Howell and his daughter in it, so the cops figure they might have been dumped when the chase got hot. So the cops back-track and start combing the entire neighborhood, looking for the bodies. This is what Flintface is waiting for and he snaps out orders to get ready to move. The four tommy-gun guys peel off the Army uniforms and start to clean up the place.



"Nothing must be left," warns Flintface. "Not a shred of evidence. As far as the authorities are concerned, we must vanish into the blue."

"I remember the Army car in the garage and wonder how he's going to make *that* vanish.

While his stooges work, Flintface walks over to Doc Howell and his daughter. The guy changes from black to white. He gives them a big smile and from the way he talks

you'd think he's invited them to a tea party. He wants to know if they're comfortable and he's sorry to have to keep them in such a place. For a minute I think he's on the make for the girl, who's a swell looking dish, but he leaves them and goes over to the Army guys. He seems to know the officer and he calls him Captain Kelley. He apologizes for the hijack and talks about the job to Kelley like it was an Army tactic. He hopes that Kelley will appreciate the fine points and observe that nothing was left to chance.

I get burned up at Kelley right then. He's got his arms tied behind his back and it looks like his goose is cooked—but he's just as polite as Flintface and they chew the rag like old college chums. Flintface never gives the sergeant or me a tumble, and come to think of it, the last time he ever talks to me is when he pays me off for the job. Why he did that, I'll never know. I guess it was his idea of humor, for my chances of ever spending the dough were zero.

It's the screwiest mess I've ever been mixed up in, and so far, it doesn't add up. I'm trying to put the parts together, but it isn't till later that the whole thing makes sense, so I'll let you in on it now to let you catch up with me.

IT SEEMS that Doc Howell is some sort of an engineer who had a small plant out near Glendale. He had a couple of mechanics helping him and his daughter Nancy ran the office. Doc had tumbled onto something important, so the government had put a ten-foot fence around his plant, and set a couple of guards to keep everyone out. On the day the job was pulled, Doc had been told to expect a Captain Kelley from the War Department to look over his latest brainstorm, and about five o'clock, an Army car drove up.

Two officers get out of the car and go into the plant, while two other Army guys stay outside. One of the officers introduces himself as Captain Kelley and Doc takes him into the shop while the other stays in the office with Nancy. In the shop, Doc shows this guy two airplane motors, running on test blocks. Both are wide open and the roar is terrific. Then Doc shuts one motor off and leaves the other one running. It is running as fast as the first, but the only sound is a faint whir. The guy in uniform can hardly believe his eyes and ears, for Doc has licked the problem of a silent airplane, which a lot of wise guys said was impossible.

Even I am smart enough to know what it would mean to have silent airplanes right now, so you can imagine what an Army guy would think. He tries to pump Doc, but the old fellow is cagey and won't give out. Then he asks Doc to shut off the motor, for it is revving too fast to see anything. Doc shuts it off and tells the guy to go ahead and look, for he won't see anything anyway. All Doc will say is that his discovery is a brand new principle that knocks some old ideas into a cocked at. It's an engineering formula, and it isn't even written down. It's in his noggin and it's staying there till the government takes over.

They go back to the office, where the guy says that Doc's discovery will mean control of the air for the country that has it. He says he will recommend that the guard around the plant be doubled till Doc completes his experiments. As he talks, he strolls to the window and gives a signal to the guys outside. They jump out of the Army car with tommy-guns and mow down the guards without warning. Inside, the two phoney officers knock off the two mechanics, kidnap Doc and Nancy, and their car roars away like a movie holdup.

There must have been an A. D. T. alarm in the place, for at once, all hell breaks loose as the cops race to the scene. The cops are just running into the plant when the time bomb lets loose, wrecking the joint and killing two cops in the process. The job is 100 percent. Every guard and

mechanic has been killed and there are no witnesses except a guy who ducked behind a billboard when the shooting started. This guy's story sets the cops on the lookout for an Army car, and the squad cars are soon combing the streets with orders to shoot to kill.

That is the mess I get into because I couldn't turn down some easy dough. It gets worse as Flintface talks, and it's about this time that he first cracks about Dakar. I had seen the place a couple of times in the papers, but all I know is that it is some place in Africa. I soon tumble that a plane is cached at another hideout, for a getaway to Mexico. There, another plane is to take them to Brazil, where a transport will fly them to Dakar. From there, Europe is a cinch. I am in the middle of a kidnap from California to Europe—the greatest snatch ever tried I tumble that Flintface is taking Nancy along to force her dad to come across with everything he has.

I figure that all they want of me is my truck. I can see that Captain Kelley, the sergeant and me are excess baggage and will be dead ducks as soon as Flintface is finished with us. So I figure to get out from under and the hell with the others. I try to make a deal with Flintface and get him through the cordon the cops have put at all exits from the city. Flintface just looks me up and down like I was a dog, and all it does for me is to put me in Dutch with the rest of the prisoners.

I can't figure the Army guys, standing there like dummies, when they must have known what was in store for them. I even think this Captain Kelley is yellow for the way he played along with Flintface, but before it's over, I discover that the Army doesn't believe in Steve Brodies. They wait till the other guy makes a slip before they make their play.

I GUESS Kelley got tipped off when Flintface said no evidence was to be left in the place. He figured that the sergeant and him would be plenty of evidence, so wouldn't be knocked off till later. And that's the way it works out. When the house is all cleaned out, we are taken outside. The stuff from the house is loaded way up front in my truck, and loopholes have been drilled in the black lettering along the sides, for shooting. You couldn't see the loopholes three feet away. Old Flintface missed no bets, but I can't help thinking of that Army car. If that isn't evidence loaded with fingerprints, I don't know soup from Shinola.

Then Flintface fools me. Two heavy planks, cached beforehand, make a runway and the Army car is driven into the truck.

We are all forced aboard, the load hidden with moving pads, and with me at the wheel, we drive away. I had seen the cleanup job in the house, and I know that if these birds get through the cordon, the cops will die of old age still wondering just what happened.

When the L. A. cops throw a cordon, they don't fool, and this one is miles deep. As I race along with a gun in my ribs, for the first time in my life I hope I will be stopped and searched. But the cops are too busy looking for Flintface and his gang to bother with small fry like me, and it drives me nuts to be waved on by coppers who usually want to know all about my business.

Always in my noggin is that rod behind the dashboard. If I can get my mitts on that, I think, maybe I can get the drop on the guy covering me and take a powder. I don't even know if it's still there, for old Flintface has batted 1000 so far and he must have searched the truck. It was pretty tantalizing not to be able to find out if that rod was within reach, but the guy covering me was too wide awake to risk it. The gang inside the truck kept track of the chase with the radio in the Army car. The rumors flew thick and fast over the air. The gang was now tabbed as international conspirators or foreign agents, and reported racing down every

highway in California except the one we were on.

I know that Flintface will destroy all evidence before boarding that plane for Mexico. This meant curtains for me and the Army guys at some quiet spot, and it was a hell of a feeling to be driving myself to my own funeral. As we break through cordon after cordon, I figure it's up to me to do something if I wanted to live much longer. Those Army mugs seemed willing to go like sheep to slaughter and I know that the girl and the old man are worse than useless.

Then my eye falls on the gas-gauge, which shows less than a quarter. I remember Charlie's gas station and hash-house down the road, where motorcycle cops sometimes stop for coffee. As we near the joint, I point to the gauge. The guy covering me tells Flintface we need gas, and he orders the stop. I can see that luck is with me for a couple of copper's bikes are parked near the pumps.

The juke-box inside is playing and I have to blow the horn to get service. Charlie comes out to fill her up, but the cops stay inside. I think it funny that they don't come out, but all they do is glance at us and go back to kidding the waitress. I haven't a chance to tip off Charlie and it makes me sore to fork over my own dough to pay for the gas that's taking me for a one-way ride. Charlie waves me on and the guy covering me gives me a poke with his gun to get going. I am just slipping in the clutch when the cops stroll out. The guy snaps at me to step on it and I have a chance to make it look like a getaway. A cop hollers and I stop. He comes over to the running board, recognizes me and asks what the hurry is about, while his partner walks around the truck, looking it over. Then he comes around and asks me what my load is. The guy covering me says it's furniture, but the cop cracks that the springs are too flat for a load like that.

"What you got, Morgan?" he asks. "A load of hot copper?"

It looks like a sure search. Then the other cop tells his partner that if I had a hot load I wouldn't be stopping in front of a couple of police bikes. This makes sense, and besides, searching the truck looked like a tough job.

It's a hell of a world, I think. When you're ducking cops, they climb all over you, and when you'd give an arm for a search, they let you go.

The guy covering me kids with the cops.

"How many more of you guys are ahead?" he asks. "What's wrong, anyway —we've been stopped every half mile for the last three hours."

The cops then tell us we are through the cordon, and they are on regular highway patrol. This is my last chance and I know it, but the guy beside me takes no chances. I had talked loud enough to tip off the Army guys that I was talking to some cops, but they didn't take the hint. The cops are waving me on when someone inside kicks the side of the van and lets out a hell of a yell. I learned later it was old Doc Howell. The cops jump back from the running board, reaching for their guns, while I duck below the wheel. But the cops haven't a chance and they are mowed down as they draw. One of them gets the guy next to me as he crumples. I think he was shooting at me but I ducked just in time to let the other guy get it. Charlie is winged as he runs from the pumps, but the waitress makes it safely out the back door of the hash-house. It all happens like a flash—but I come up from below that wheel with a rod in my hand, and ready to blow. But I'm too late, for already two tommy-gun men are out of the truck and covering me like a blanket. Before they spot the rod, I manage to slip it into a holster under my arm. They had frisked me in the hideout, and I hope they won't go over me again.

Flintface curses as he jumps from the back of the truck and sees his wounded man on the ground. He snaps an order to a stooge to run in and rob the till.

"Make it look like a hold-up," he says.

Inside the hash-house, the guy knocks things around a bit and runs back with Charlie's day's receipts. As we get going, Flintface pulls one of the dirtiest stunts I ever heard of. His wounded man was hit bad but he might have lived if they got him to a doctor. Just as we start, Flintface pumps some bullets into the guy. Dead men tell no tales, I guess. This was the fifth he had tossed to the wolves—the four in the decoy car, and this one. There were no marks on his clothes and the cops later took him for a stick-up artist.

The hold-up gag works. Charlie or the waitress must have reached a telephone for soon word of the job comes over the radio and it isn't connected with the kidnaping set-up, which exactly suits Flintface. I am tagged as one of the hold-up gang. I'm wanted for cop killing and highway robbery, and a description of the truck is broadcast.

The truck is now red hot and we nearly tip over a couple of times as I put miles between us and Charlie's place. Then I'm ordered into a side road and we stop. The Army car is unloaded and the truck sent down an embankment. I expect the Army guys and me to follow, but Flintface figures that the bodies near the truck would connect the two jobs, so he takes us along. We ride for hours in the Army car but I never know in what direction. Kelley, the sergeant and me are on the floor of the car and can see nothing. We buzz along wide open and finally pull into a dirt road for about twenty miles. When we pull up, it is daylight.

The place is a shack away out in the desert and as we are herded into it, I see a plane hidden in a thicket nearby. The shack is all set for us. There is a wireless set, and the cupboard is stocked with canned goods. We can hear planes crisscrossing above, but the shack is so well hidden that they haven't a Chinaman's chance to spot it. Flintface gets a great kick out of this and he cracks about how dumb Americans are. He considers the job as good as done, and has only to stand by till the planes get sick of looking.

That bird knew everything—except one—that a guy named Fred Morgan had a rod in his pocket. I wouldn't have swapped it for a million bucks and I was making sure that none of the others tumbled to my luck. That rod was for me and nobody else.

WITH the pressure off, Flintface relaxes and acts like a night club host spreading himself for some big-shot guests. He apologizes for the accommodations and invites Captain Kelley to eat with Nancy, Doc and himself. He forgets about the sergeant and me, so I guess we weren't good enough. It looked funny to see the guy putting on the dog in a shack. He sure was a strange customer. Awhile back, he was a cold-blooded killer, and now he chins away like he is at the Ritz, and all he has to offer is canned beans. He talks engineering with Doc, Army stuff with Kelley, and in between, he tosses compliments at Nancy. He said that American gangster stories gave him the angles for pulling the job, and he kidded Doc for signalling the cops at the gas station. He gives the old guy credit for knowing he would never kill the goose that laid the golden eggs. He apologizes to Captain Kelley because he will have to murder him before leaving. Only he called it "execution" and talked of the fortunes of war—whatever that meant.

Kelley kids along with Flintface and says he didn't know anyone had declared war on America. This strikes Flintface as funny, and he says that declaring war is old stuff and out of date.

While all this goes on, the sergeant and me are eating out of cans in a corner while the stooges keep an eye on things. I'm surprised I'm still alive and wonder why Flintface hasn't bumped us off. I can't figure the guy, for any mobster would have plugged the Army guys and me at the first

chance. Old Flintface is sticking to rules I never heard of.

I can see that Nancy is sore as hell at Kelley for playing along with Flintface's line, for the set-up wasn't funny to the rest of us. Flintface talks of the coming trip with Doc and Nancy and says they can have anything they want where they are going.

"Where's that?" demands Doc.

Flintface smiles, but doesn't answer. He has taken a shine to Nancy and says he is looking forward to showing her the sights when they arrive, while her father is completing his experiments.

"And suppose he doesn't?" says Nancy.

Flintface smiles. "He will," he says.

The sergeant and me chin away in low tones as we eat. His name is Johnny Olsen and he is a pretty nice guy, even if he was a sucker enough to join the Army. I ask him what the hell is wrong with him and Kelley. They passed up a chance for a college try at the gas station and now Kelley is kidding along with Flintface like they belonged to the same lodge. Johnny says that Kelley knows what he is doing, but it looks to me that Kelley is looking out for himself.

The cockeyed dinner is finally over and us prisoners are put into an adjoining room. The door is shut and one look out the window shows that we are well covered. Flintface was too cagey and all through the jam, nobody had a chance to jump one of the tommy-gun guys.

Kelley tries to cheer up Nancy when the door is shut, but she gives him the freezola. I guess she thought the same about him as me. She walks over to Doc who is slumped in a chair beside the table and Kelley quits trying. Nancy was crazy about her father and all through the jam, she worried more about him than herself.

Kelley and Johnny start pow-wowing in a corner and I walk over.

"What's the idea," I ask, "playing along with Flintface?"

Kelley is leery of me and I know it.

"I have my reasons," he says.

"How do you figure the guy?" I ask. "Are we due for curtains?"

"I'm afraid so," says Kelley.

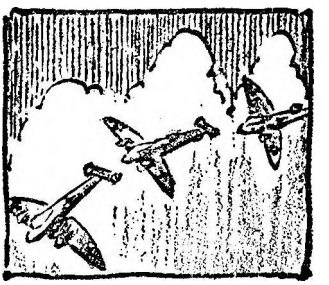
"Then why all the rigmarole?" I ask. "He's like a cat with a mouse."

"I think I understand the fellow," says Kelley. "He's a peculiar product of modern Europe, half gangster, half aristocrat. I know he is a soldier, for he considers this crime as a raid into enemy territory, and us as prisoners of war. When he decides to murder us, it will be done with apologies, and according to Hoyle."

This is all Greek to me. "And when does Hoyle time this bump-off?" I ask.

"I don't know," says Kelley, "but if I have him sized up correctly, he'll wait until the last moment."

"When's that?" I ask.



"Do you hear those planes in the air?" says Kelley. "They're Army ships. As long as they are around, he won't make a move."

I listen, and the roar of them motors sure sounds good.

Kelley asks me if I'll play along with him and Johnny Olsen if a chance comes for a break.

"Sure," I say, but I have my own ideas about that.

This guy Kelley has me guessing. I know that he and Flintface know each other, and there's a bit of boloney in Flintface's politeness to Kelley. I don't learn till later that Flintface has played Kelley for a sucker. It seems that he had made friends with Kelley and got the dope to

pull the job by going through Kelley's papers. Kelley was so easy that Flintface thinks he is dumb.

I pace the floor like a rat in a trap, racking my noggin for an "out." I think of the sock-full of jack in my pocket and how sure I had been that it could get me out of any jam. Was I wrong! The rod in my holster sure feels good and I am sorry for the other saps who are completely out of luck. I am never the guy to tip off my hand to anybody and that rod is my own business. I have the chance for a surprise drop on a tommy-gun guy in my favor, and I figure that if I can talk the others into a move, I can shoot my way out during the excitement. They had heard me try to make a deal with Flintface at the first hideout, and they know I'm in a racket. I have to play it cagey so I take my time.

HOURS seem to pass. Flintface has the radio on next door, and by now, the case has become of national importance. We are reported trying to contact a ship at sea, and reported passing through every tank town between hell and Texas. Old Flintface has made suckers out of everybody and I can see that our chances of being found are pretty slim. But I can still hear the Army planes up in the air and they sound like music to me. I think it's funny that the outfit I'm trying to duck is burning up gas looking for me. Between news reports, Flintface turns on symphony concerts and we can hear him discussing the music with his stooges. If the guy wasn't so smart, I'd a swore he was cracked.

But all this is just hogwash to me. I'm in a jam, time is running short and I have to figure an out. I'm working on an angle that makes sense. I know what Nancy thinks of Kelley for playing along with Flintface, and I also have a hunch that Kelley has fallen for Nancy. With Nancy in the bag, I figure that Kelley will be a cinch. I'd been passing remarks to Doc and Nancy as I paced and they are pretty well softened up when I sit down beside them. The radio next door gives me a chance to talk, and I have a line all readied to spill.

I qualify Nancy and find that she still thinks Kelley is a heel. I know now he isn't, but I ain't telling her. I agree with Nancy that Kelley is out for No. 1 and tell her the only way to bring him into line is to shame him into it. If she will agree to take a chance, Kelley can't turn it down without showing himself up as a yellow dog. This makes sense to Nancy and I sell her and Doc my phoney bill of goods for a break. Nancy is a swell girl, with plenty of guts and it makes me feel like a chump to play her for a sucker, but it's every man for himself in my league.

I'm soon in solid with Doc and Nancy, and I ask her to talk to Kelley along with me, for this will really put him in a spot. We go over and I tell Kelley my plan for a break. He tabs it for a phoney and turns it down flat.

"Morgan," he says, "there's a catch to this, but I can't figure it out. You're holding something back."

Nancy gives Kelley a disgusted up and down. Then she tears into him and if any dame had talked to me like that, I'd a knocked her down. Kelley takes it without batting an eye, and when Nancy runs out of breath, I start in. I know I have Kelley behind the eight ball and I make the most of it. What does he have to offer, I ask? To sit like a bump on a log till they get ready to knock us off? I call him yellow and say that if he is a sample of the Army, my dough is on the Boy Scouts. I even get patriotic about Doc and his damn motor, but Kelley never says a word till I get through.

"I know your kind, Morgan," he says, "and I don't think we can get together."

"Nuts," I say. "We're all in the same boat, ain't we?"

"But we're going different places," he cracks. "You're out to save your own skin.

I have more important things to think about."

"Let's all sing the Star Spangled Banner," I crack. "You can do what you want, but the rest of us are going through with it."

Nancy backs me up on this and I turn to Johnny Olsen.

"How about it, Johnny?" I ask.

"I take orders from Captain Kelley," he says.

"Okay, sucker," I answer, "but I'm looking out for myself before I get plugged."

"I'm in command here," says Kelley. "If you make a move without my orders, these fellows won't have to shoot you. I'll kill you myself."

THIS guy is wrecking a swell out for me, and I blow a fuse. Johnny Olsen grabs me as I swing on Kelley. I try to get away, and as Johnny takes another hold, his hand lands on the rod.

"Hey!" he snaps. "This guy's got a gun!"

I break away and back to a wall, ready for a try at jumping me.

"So that's what you were holding back," says Kelley, as he comes toward me.

"Give me that gun," he snaps. I laugh in his face, for the gall of the guy struck me funny even then. He had a better chance in demanding my right arm. Kelley comes closer, so I put my hand on the rod and warn him away. It comes so fast I don't see it, but Kelley's fist clips my chops and down I go. He has the rod away from me and in his pocket before I know how it happened.

Kelley turns to Johnny. "Frisk him," he orders.

Johnny goes through my pockets and comes up with the card ordering me to report for Army duty. He hands is to Kelley.

"Well, Morgan," says Kelley, "you're in the Army whether you like it or not, and you're going to obey my orders."

"The hell with you and your orders and the whole damn Army," I say.

Nancy is staring at me like I'm a cockroach, for she has tumbled I was trying to pull a quick one on her and her father. But I don't give a damn. All that worries me is that rod.

WITH the rod in his pocket, Kelley looks like a guy with a new lease on life. It is the gimmick he has been praying for to out-fox Flintface who has played him for a sucker. The guy grins at me.

"Thanks, Morgan," he says.

I've got to get that rod back some way, and the wheels go around in my noggin as I figure an angle.

"Well, wise guy," I say, "I've got some bad news for you. That rod is empty."

Kelley turns white. He reaches in his pocket for the rod, and for a split second he forgets that I'm around. I lunge for the rod, but Kelley is too quick for me. The guy ju-jitsues me and I hit the table. It goes over with a crash that brings a tommy-gun guy on the run, with Flintface right behind him.

"Come, come," says Flintface, "you are spoiling my symphony."

A glance tells Flintface what's happened, for Johnny has hold of me again. The smile leaves his face and I see the murderous look in his eyes that he had at the gas station. He glares at me and apologizes to Kelley for cooping him up with a hoodlum—meaning me. He says it is an insult to Kelley's military rank!

Then he turns to the tommy-gun guy. "This dog is a nuisance," he snaps. "Take him out and get rid of him."

It would have been curtains for me right then if Kelley hadn't gone to bat. He has Flintface figured out and knows how to play him. Kelley tells Flintface that he was responsible for the rumpus. Then he says that I am a soldier in the American Army, and as an officer, he demands to be treated in the same manner as any of his men. I can hardly believe my ears. Kelley is tell-

ing Flintface that if he shoots me right then, he'll have to shoot Kelley, too.

Flintface is just as surprised as I am.

"Very well, Captain," he says, "choose your own company."

Then he flashes his big grin.

"I can see that all this excitement has made you overlook an interesting happening," he says. "If you will keep this guttersnipe quiet, I am sure you will understand."

We all listen. Something is missing. It takes a couple of seconds for me to tumble. The Army planes had gone.

"We will be leaving at dawn," says Flintface. He bows to Nancy and clicks his heels at Captain Kelley.

"Good evening," he says, and leaves.

"Thanks," I say to Kelley when the door is shut.

He doesn't answer. He walks past me to the window and looks out as though sizing up the lay of the land. I know what he's thinking about, for dawn isn't very far away.

I get wondering about Kelley. I'd put him in bad with Nancy, called him yellow and took a swing at him. Then the guy turns around and sticks out his neck for me because he thinks I'm in the Army. That's funny, I think, to be saved from being knocked off by the outfit I'm running away from.

Over by the window, Kelley keeps pulling the gun from his pocket, trying to speed up his draw. He stinks, and knows it, for fishing a rod out of an Army coat is like rummaging through a trunk in the dark. Just seeing that rod gives me the willies and I'd give every cent of that nine "G's" in my pocket to get it back. With that on me, I figured I'd give Flintface a little run for his money, but I know that Kelley is too smart to be caught napping.

Time is going fast and I'm really sweating. Then Doc comes up with an out. It's so simple I wonder what's wrong with my head.

"Captain Kelley," he says, "what if I offer to reveal my secret? Do you think they'd let us all go free?"

Old Doc is okay, I think. He isn't due for curtains, and he's willing to hand over a sure million bucks just to get the rest of us out of a jam. We crowd around Kelley, waiting for his answer.

Kelley thinks a moment. "I think so," he says. "This fellow has no assurance he can force you to reveal it when he gets you to Europe."

"I'll go and make the offer," says Doc.

"I'm afraid I can't let you," says Kelley. "My job is to keep your secret from being stolen."

"But you can't stop them," says Nancy. "They'll kill you three men, and father and I will be helpless."

KELLEY doesn't answer for a second, and you can feel the wheels go around in his head as though trying to find words to express himself.

"I've got a gun," he finally says.

Doc doesn't get it, and neither do the rest of us. Then Nancy tumbles. She turns white and I think she's going to keel over. I guess nine out of ten dames would have done just that, but not Nancy. She turns like a wildcat on Kelley.

"I know what you mean," she screams. "You'd kill my father!"

Then she goes after him. She claws hell out of him and he takes it without trying to defend himself. It takes Johnny and me to pull her away. She calls Kelley a monster and threatens to tell Flintface he has a gun.

"That will stop you," she screams.

Then she starts yelling for Flintface and Kelley has to grab her and put a hand over her mouth. Doc finally calms her down and takes her to a chair.

This guy Kelley is too much for me. I know he likes Nancy, and with her listening in, the dope practically tells her father he might have to shoot him. The guy looks haggard and ten years older as he stares at Nancy, pleading like. I feel sorry

for the sap, even though I hate his guts for taking that rod away from me.

Another hour passes and we are just where we started—nowhere. I can't get that deadline out of my head for dawn is pretty close and it means curtains for all of us. To hell with the whole bunch, I think. I've got to get an angle—and fast. If I could only get that rod!

Doc is keeping Nancy in line, and Kelley is back trying to draw that gun again. He calls Johnny over and gives him a try. Johnny is as clumsy as Kelley, and I could have plugged both of them before they were half drawn. I get curious and walk over.

"I don't know the angle," I say, "but you both stink."

Kelley seems interested. "Can you do better?" he asks.

"If I couldn't, I wouldn't be here," I crack. "I'd a been dead long ago."

WITHOUT another word, Kelley tosses the gun to me.

"Let's see you draw," he says.

It comes so easy it takes me by surprise. I'm hanging onto it this time, come hell or high water. I back to the wall, covering Kelley and Johnny. Nancy gives a gasp of relief and begs me to keep it away from Kelley.

"Don't worry, sister," I say. I grin at Kelley. "Thanks, sucker," I say to him.

Johnny makes a move toward me and I wave him away with the rod.

"Stay away, Squarehead," I say, "this time I ain't fooling."

"You lousy rat," he snaps.

"That's right," I crack, "and from here on, I'm the boss rat. Now you two wise guys are doing what I say."

Kelley looks disgusted as hell. "I expected this," he says.

"Swell," I answer. "You got what you expected, and I got my rod back."

"That's right," says Kelley. He taps his coat pocket. "You've got the gun—but I've got the bullets."

I snap open the gun. It's empty. My guts seem to cave in.

"You dirty, double-crossing rat," I say.

Johnn Olsen grins. "Looks who's talking," he says.

"All right, Morgan," says Kelley. "Now that we know where we stand, let's see you draw."

I figure that if I can really show the guy something, he might kick through with the slugs, so I really pour it on when I draw for him. I slip the rod under my arm-pit, and tell Kelley to give me a signal. I have that rod out so fast, his eyes pop. He has me do it a couple more times and watches me carefully.

"If you can do that at the correct split second," he says, "we might all have a chance."

This brings Nancy and Doc over.

"What do you mean 'all of us'?" I ask. "What good is one rod against four tommy-guns? Only the guy with this rod has a chance."

"Can you get the drop on one tommy-gun?" Kelley asks.

"They're too cagey," I answer. "Besides, what will Flintface and his other stooges be doing—playing pinochle?"

"Morgan," says Kelley, "you're a skunk, but sometimes even a skunk comes in handy. I'm going to give you a chance to save yourself."

I know there's a catch to this, but I'm hooked. This guy is using me like a plumber does a monkeywrench.

"Okay," I say, "just give me those slugs."

"When I get good and ready," says Kelley. "You're not running out on this job."

"Don't worry, I'll play along," I answer, but all the time I'm figuring just how to get my hands on those slugs.

THE next hour is the worst I ever spent in my life. I bet I begged Kelley fifty times for those slugs, but the guy trusted me like a bird does a snake. I don't know

what Kelley has up his sleeve except that everything depends on whether he has Flintface sized up right so the guy will act according to Hoyle. If he does, and I came through, we have a chance. If he doesn't—it's curtains.

It isn't till the last minute I tumble to what Kelley has in mind, and I go into a cold sweat. Were you ever lined up in front of a tommy-gun? Well, don't. I ain't over it yet and I sure know how those Chicago mugs felt that St. Valentine's Day! It's dawn when we are ordered out. There were three of us, but company don't help much at a time like that. Flintface was as polite as hell to Kelley, and Kelley gave as good as he got. The guy sure had guts. I had the willies, but he was cool as hell and he was banking on me to put over the job.

I'll never forget those last few seconds in the shack. This was the spot where Kelley had to decide if he'd guessed right on Flintface, and I'll always believe that if things had gone wrong, he'd have fixed it so that Flintface would never get Doc's secret.

Nancy thought so, too, for she kept between Kelley and her dad as she went through the good-by act that let Kelley slip me the bullets.

Kelley has hung onto them so long that I'm hooked, and even as we are taken outside, he sees to it that I'm between him and Johnny Olsen. I think fast as we walk along. There's an arroyo close by, and if I put over the stunt, I'll head for it and let Kelley and Johnny hold the bag. I'll have the rod on me and they can face those other tommy-guns if they want to, but they can count me out. Flintface comes along and it looks like he has crossed Kelley at the last minute, for he had counted on only the tommy-gun guy. We are lined up in front of a clump of bushes and my knees turn to water. Flintface looks over the set-up and I guess he decides that everything is strictly correct. He shakes hands with Kelley, clicks those heels of his again, gives a military salute and heads back for the shack.

I feel like I'm paralyzed as I look at the tommy-gun in front of me, and I know I'm too jittery to put it over. I must have looked like a ghost, for Kelley gets wise that I'm on the edge.

He talks through his teeth at me. "Yellow, eh?" he says. "Like all your kind."

The guy raises his tommy-gun as Kelley speaks. Kelley's crack must have broke the spell. I don't know yet how I did it, but I draw as the gun comes up, and take it from me, Billy the Kid would have been proud of the job. I let the guy have it as fast as I can pull the trigger. Johnny Olsen dives and grabs the tommy-gun before the guy hits the ground. The job is perfect, and I spin around for my getaway.

The next second I am flat on my back, for Kelley hits me with a football block and grabs the rod.

"No soap," he says. "I expected that, too."

Then he grins. "Nice work, Morgan," he says. "We can use men like you in the Army."

That makes twice the mug has taken the rod away from me, and I'm no pushover for anybody. I could have killed the guy, but I had to hand it to him in spite of myself.

Fast as I shot, I don't fool Flintface, for the guy knew a tommy-gun when he heard one. Before Johnny can draw a bead, Flintface is flat on the ground yelling orders to his other stooges. Those guys sure had been in some man's army, for they come out and deploy like a flash. If we moved an eyelash, the air was full of lead and I was stuck whether I liked it or not.

Flintface has three tommy-guns to out one, and things look bad. They are spraying lead all around us and I feel like the duck in duck on the rock.

"Maybe we can make that arroyo," I say to Kelley. "There's good cover down there and we can do a sneak."

"Our job is to get to that shack," says Kelley. "That villain will kill Doctor Howell if he can't get him away."

"Oh yeah?" I answer. "And how are you going to get there?" The guys are between us and the shack, and Flintface is keeping it that way. He's got what he wants and he's hanging onto it. The fracas is a battle of wits between Flintface and Kelley, and both know their business. With the bullets buzzing over us like bees, Kelley talks over the situation with Johnny Olsen like it is a checker game and the shack is the King's Row. These Army guys are nuts, I think, for they haven't a chance to even come out alive if they don't lam pronto and forget Dick and the shack.

"Listen, Sergeant," says Kelley to Johnny, "this fellow knows everything in the book. Let's give him something that ain't in the book."

"What's that, sir?" asks Johnny.

"Some Indian stuff," says Kelley. "He thinks we Americans are dumb, so we'll show him an American trick or two that might change his mind."

"Okay, sir," says Johnny, "you name it."

"Head for that arroyo with the tommy-gun," says Kelley. "Fire just enough to suck them after you while I sneak around their flank and get into the shack."

"A swell idea, sir," says Johnny, and he starts to wiggle away.

"And, Sergeant," says Kelley, "we'll take that ringleader alive, if you please. There's a few questions I'd like to ask him."

"Yes, sir," says Johnny, and slips away.

What the hell is this, I think. These crazy mugs are up against three tommy-guns to one, and they talk like Flintface is already on ice.

Johnny edges backwards, following Kelley's orders. Flintface bites, and Kelley and I play possum till they pass. Kelley then starts crawling toward the shack. This leaves me all by my lonesome, without even a peashooter.

"Hey! How about me?" I yelp. "I ain't staying here like a clay pigeon."

"I'll say you're not," says Kelley, "you are coming with me."

A nice trusting guy, I think, but it's okay with me. In a jam like this, I'll always string along with the guy who has a rod in his mit, so I go with Kelley and we crawl along on our bellies.

But Flintface isn't fooled that easy. He has left one of his stooges to cover the door of the shack and keep Doc and Nancy from doing a sneak. The guy isn't moving away from there, either, and Kelley cusses his bad luck.

Kelley has the rod in his hand, and I wonder why he doesn't use it.

"Let the guy have it," I whisper.

"No," says Kelley. "We must take these fellows alive if possible."

I'm more interested in staying alive myself, but Kelley won't shoot.

"I'll cover him," says Kelley. "You sneak behind him and try for a jump."

"Not me," I say.

"I said I'd cover him," snaps Kelley. "Now pipe down and get going."

There is something funny about guys like Kelley, for I start crawling away without another beef. As I sneak around, I know that Kelley is covering me, too. This guy misses nothing. I am all set to jump when I step on a twig. It snaps and he wheels around, shooting. I flop and he misses, and Kelley lets him have it just in time to save me from the works.

This leaves Flintface and one stooge. They hear the shooting and tumble that Kelley has slipped across a quick one. They forget Johnny and open up on us. I grab the tommy-gun and I'll never know how I

reached that shack door without getting nailed for keeps. Kelley is right behind me, and he slams the door shut.

"Give me that tommy-gun," he snaps. "We've got these fellows between us now."

I grin at the guy. "Captain Kelley," I say, "I've got some bad news for you. This time that rod is really empty. I've been counting the slugs and you used the last one on that guy outside."

I have the tommy pointed at his guts, and he gives me a funny look.

"I had them counted, too," he says.

This guy is tops, I think. First he goes to bat for me, and I know he just saved my life outside. These Army mugs stick with a guy in a jam. No mobster ever did that for me.

I forget about Nancy and Doc, and I guess she thinks I'm going to let Kelley have it. She jumps between us and the dame is really a wildcat this time as she comes for me.

"Lay off," I say, as I back away from her. "I was kidding the guy."

I can see that Kelley feels pretty swell when Nancy shows her hand like that. He grins when I hand over the tommy-gun.

"Thanks," he says and runs for the door. Just as Johnny Olsen comes in.

"Quick!" says Johnny. "They're heading for the plane."

We all run out just as the plane motor starts. It is just taking off when Kelley and Johnny open up on it. It goes on like nothing has happened, then it wobbles and crashes. It bursts into flames as it hits the ground.

"You damn fool," says Kelley to me, "if you'd given me this gun at once, we'd have had them. Now we'll never know who they were, or who was behind them."

"So what?" I crack. "They're dead and we're alive, ain't we? And besides, I guess you've got a pretty good hunch who was behind them."

Kelley grins at me, and I'll always think he was glad I did pull that gag on him, because it showed him where he really stood with Nancy.

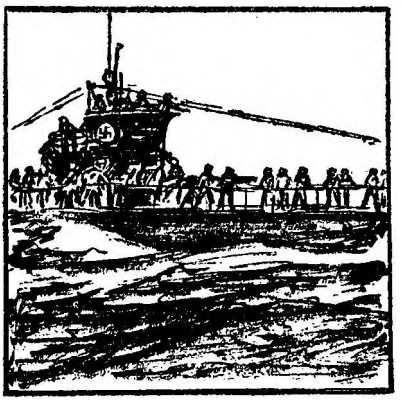
We look over the Army car and it's okay to take us back to town. Captain Kelley delivers me to the Army like I'm an express package, and I guess I'm the first guy ever to report already rating a ribbon on my coat. I ain't peeling spuds, either. Captain Kelley sees that I'm detailed to the Air Corps and I'm learning aerial gunnery under Johnny Olsen.

The nine "G's?" Doc is letting me invest it in his new plant and he expects to get going again pretty soon. I see Captain Kelley around the camp once in awhile. He's a major now, and when we swap salutes, we both grin. I notice that Nancy Howell is on his arm a lot of those times, too. They sure are a swell looking couple.

His Finest Hour

By PATRICK O'KEEFFE

Author of "Arms Cargo," etc.



Under Panama Registry—but the Skipper Had a New England Twang, and the First Mate Had Been Born British

MR. WALDRON opened his eyes with the feeling that something ominous had shocked him back to consciousness. He lay very still, staring vacantly at the deckhead above, his veined face as gray as the sparse fringe that circled his bald crown like a corona. As he slowly collected his senses, he became aware that the ship was shaking to increased speed; the paneling was creaking and the glasses in the water-bottle rack were chattering as if the cabin were bouncing on springs.

He rolled his head on the high pillows and gazed momentarily through one of the two open portholes. The sky beyond was pale blue and cloudless, and the glittering equatorial Atlantic, mirrored in the glass of the suspended port, was like a blue lagoon. By the brass clock mounted on the bulkhead, he saw that it was ten-fifteen, and he realized that he had been either asleep or unconscious for another two hours following his brief recovery from the heart attack that had stricken him down during the night.

There came a loud detonation, and he knew therefrom what had disturbed him. Hearing quick footsteps outside, he called weakly, and a hand unhooked his door. An excited young messman looked in.

"It's a sub, sir—a big one. Came to the surface 'way astern. With a bit o' luck we'll give her the slip, an' it'll be all quiet an' peaceful for you again."

The messman put the door on the hook again and hurried off. The ship's gun roared again. Mr. Waldron fixed his eyes cheerlessly on the deckhead once more. As chief mate he was needed at his post, he thought. Yet there was nothing to be gained by useless heroics. If he went out on deck and then collapsed, he'd only be making a nuisance of himself. It would be a miserable sort of death, too. Far different from the way he wanted to die.

The ship quivered at frequent intervals to the thunder of the four-inch quick-firing gun mounted on her poop. Mr. Waldron could hear what resembled faint echoes as the submarine replied.

After a while there came a blinding explosion outside his port. A fragment hurtled through and pierced the paneling above his head, dropping harmlessly as it met the steel bulkhead beyond; the acrid smell of powder filled the cabin. Mr. Waldron feared that a direct hit had been scored on the bridge, judging by the confused footsteps and dismayed shouts above his head. They were drowned out by the detonation of another shell, farther aft, in the vicinity of the radio room.

Mr. Waldron lay limp in an effort to keep calm and untensed, wishing to avoid any strain on his enfeebled heart. He likened himself to the bombed civilians of Britain, and he would prefer to be killed as they were being killed rather than be found dead of heart failure—as if he had died from fright.

Of fright! Mr. Waldron's bloodless lips twisted in ironic amusement. He who had

been through the last war, who had fought with hijackers and revenue men in his rum-running days, who had smuggled arms during the Spanish civil war and for more than one Latin-American revolt!

The next shells burst in the after part of the freighter, and Mr. Waldron began to fear for her. Presently her gun fell silent. Either it had been hit, or else had jammed; it was an old piece, provided in Suez when it became known that Panama was no longer opposed to the arming of ships under her registry.

But the ship still vibrated as though she would shake herself apart in striving to elude her pursuer. The next shot, however, crippled her. There was the roar of escaping steam. All the quivering life went out of the stricken vessel, and she became as still as a harpooned whale at the end of its death flurry.

Captain Kemp was shouting orders outside. Presently he came in, a lanky man holding a bloodied handkerchief to his cheek.

"We didn't have a chance," he said bitterly, with his New England twang. "The sub dropped back when I opened fire. Outranged us with her gun and put ours out of action. She's coming up fast—to finish us off with demolition charges, I guess."

"Did the radio operator get off a distress call?" asked Mr. Waldron.

"I don't know. A shell blasted him and his cabin before I could find out."

"You'd better get that wound dressed."

"It's only a scratch," said the captain, though the handkerchief was sodden. "The steward's busy fixing up the badly wounded. I'll help you to get dressed and into the lifeboat. There's only one left undamaged."

Mr. Waldron shook his head. "I'd better stay here. I'd only be in the way. And I wouldn't last long in a crowded open boat."

"Nonsense! You'll soon get over the heart trouble, and help may be on the way."

"My heart's worse than you think," said Mr. Waldron gloomily. "A doctor advised me to quit the sea and lead a quiet life ashore. I might have if this ship hadn't changed to the Panama flag and started running lease-lend supplies to the Red Sea. I'm finished, all right. But I don't want to die of heart failure. When I think of how men, women, and children have died in Britain—well, it would be a miserable sort of death for me, an Englishman, in these times. I'd rather be blown up with the ship. It wouldn't be a glorious ending as such go these days, but it would be a happier one for me than the other."

MR. WALDRON had trouble getting his breath, and he paused for a few moments, motioning the captain to let him finish.

"I'm not one that England can be proud of," he went on. "During most of the last twenty years, I've lived by breaking some country's laws, though I never did anything rotten, like smuggling dope. But I've still got some of the old country spirit left, and if this is her finest hour and I have to die during it, I only wish I could make it my finest too."

"Mr. Waldron," said the captain after a long pause, "you may have the chance. You are the only deck officer left alive. You're needed to take charge of the boat and get her safely to land with the survivors."

"What about you?" asked Mr. Waldron in surprise.

"When the submarine came to the surface, she ordered me to stop. I put on full speed. She opened fire. I fired back. She ordered me to stop firing or I'd be shot. I ignored that too."

"And you think she'll carry out the threat?"

"There's no telling," said the captain grimly. "It's a mixed up affair. A neutral-flag ship attempting to run a blockade. Commanded by an American with a mixed crew. Refusing to submit to the search

and seizure right, and firing on a supposedly friendly submarine. A tough U-boat commander might feel himself justified in acting on his own authority and shooting me."

"In the last war," murmured Mr. Waldron reminiscently, "I was second mate of a ship chased by a submarine. They radioed that if we didn't stop, they'd cut the captain's throat. They copped us and took the captain aboard. A patrol ship came along. The sub dived, and we never did know what happened to our captain."

There came a respectful knock, as if the normal life of the ship had not been interrupted, and the bosun's bandaged head came round the door edge.

"Submarine's nearly abreast, Cap'n. Gettin' ready to put off her boat."

The captain turned and gathered up Mr. Waldron's clothes lying on the settee.

"Come on, get into these," he said briskly.

MR. WALDRON sat up and swung his legs over the edge of his bunk. As he stood up in his pajamas, a lean man of middle height, he suddenly swayed. The captain caught him by the arm.

"Everything went black for a moment," said Mr. Waldron apologetically. He sat down in the easy chair, trying to get his breath. "I'll—I'll be all right in a minute. Give me a hooker of brandy from my locker."

The captain got the brandy and poured out half a tumblerful. Mr. Waldron drank it without pause. Presently his face gained a little color.

"I feel better now. But I don't think I'll last long in the boat. Maybe I could persuade them to shoot me instead of you."

"It's me, they want—the man who ignored the order. "And what do you take me for?" the captain went on indignantly. "Others would think—"

"You've got a wife and two kids. I've got no one, and besides—"

"Get these things on," snapped the captain, cutting him short.

Mr. Waldron studied the captain's face for a moment, and then submitted. Holding one hand to his cheek, the captain helped Mr. Waldron with his white trousers and shirt. Mr. Waldron then opened the top drawer of his desk, his back to the captain. Facing him again, he nodded at his settee, saying, "Please hand me that—"

As the captain turned, Mr. Waldron gave him a quick blow on the head. He managed to catch the captain when he slumped and to lay him down gently. Then he returned the blackjack to his drawer. During his adventurous career he had acquired the knack of using it safely but effectively.

He was sorry he'd had to use it on Captain Kemp, but this was a war in which pride had to give way to common sense, he told himself.

Presently he heard the bosun outside saying, "The cap'n is in the chief mate's cabin."

Mr. Waldron was sitting down when the door opened. A dark young officer and a blond U-boat sailor in whites and wearing sidearms strode in.

"You have come to shoot me, I suppose," said Mr. Waldron, speaking first. He glanced down at the prostrate captain, who was in shirtsleeves like himself; a small pool of blood was forming from his cheek. "I'd like you to see that this man is carried down to the boat afterwards. He's only slightly wounded, but he just passed out. Loss of blood, I suppose."

"You are to come vit me to der submarine," said the officer curtly.

Mr. Waldron rose slowly. He was relieved to find that the dizziness did not return. He walked steadily to the door. The two Germans stood aside to allow him to pass. The officer followed him out.

"You vish to get your uniform jacket and cap from your cabin?" he asked.

"I'll go as I am," replied Mr. Waldron, knowing that Captain Kemp's coat and cap

would not fit him, and might betray the deception.

HIS cabin was on the lower bridge. Glancing upward, he saw the shattered wing, and as he walked toward the ladder he took in the ruin of the radio cabin amidships, and beyond it the wrecked gun on the poop, all but screened by smoke from a blazing storeroom. The dead lay where they had fallen. A few hundred yards to starboard was the U-boat, a long sinister shape resting motionless on the shimmering sea.

He went down to the bridge deck. The undamaged boat was on that side. It was already in the water, and the bosun stood near the davits, apparently waiting for the last comers. He seemed about to ask where Captain Kemp was, but Mr. Waldron said quickly, "Go up to my cabin. You're needed up there."

Mr. Waldron continued down to the after well deck, where a pilot ladder hung over the side. He climbed down it into the submarine's collapsible boat. The officer waited for its crew, who were doubtless placing the time bombs. Mr. Waldron did not look toward the ship's lifeboat, for fear that someone might hail him as "Mister."

It was a short wait, however, and the boat was soon pulling for the submarine. Mr. Waldron's breathing was now labored, and his heart was hammering. It had taxed his strength to walk from his cabin and lower himself down the ladder into the boat. Before the distance to the submarine was half covered, he felt himself becoming weak again. He had to rest one hand on the gunwale to hold himself erect. The U-boat now seemed as if he were looking at her through a mist. He wished he'd thought to take another hooker of brandy before setting out.

By the time the boat drew alongside, everything near at hand was becoming blurred. As he stood up, he had a moment of giddiness. He fought it off. But it was like a man in a semi-stupor that he felt himself being helped aboard the submarine.

He was led abaft the conning tower and brought to a halt. With an effort he cleared his vision, and looking up, he saw the commander fixing him with angry eyes in a sallow face.

"You disobeyed my order to stop," snapped the commander in precise English. "You opened fire, and refused to cease."

"Your order was ignored," replied Mr. Waldron, struggling with his breath, "because German submarine commanders do not observe the rules of search and seize, but sink and leave crews to their fate. You fired on us. We defended ourselves."

"One of your shells killed three of my men. In Europe civilians are being shot for firing on members of the German armed forces. I warned you that you would be shot."

"You killed many on my ship. Isn't that revenge enough?"

"It will not be revenge. It will be just punishment. You are an Englander, by your accent, but you will serve as an example to the captains of all other neutral-flag ships. They will know what to expect if they disobey and attack German submarines."

Mr. Waldron shook his head and then smiled. "You Germans are slow to learn."

The commander's eyes flashed. "We shall see. You yourself are pale with fright and can scarcely speak. Walk to the stern and face this way. Let me see how you act then."

MR. WALDRON turned and started aft. He felt himself becoming giddy again. He strove desperately to keep from swaying and falling, thinking how the commander would mock if he collapsed and perhaps rolled ignominiously down the curved hull into the sea. He must show this German.

Spirit triumphed over flesh, and the gid-

diness passed. But Mr. Waldron could hardly get his breath. And he felt cold and clammy despite the fierce sun tempered only by light airs. He thought he heard the bombs explode on the ship.

He reached the tapering stern and faced about. Looking up at the conning tower, he mistily saw that three men gripping rifles now stood on the after part.

Suddenly he heard someone yelling. Glancing sidewise, he saw that the ship's lifeboat was rapidly pulling toward the submarine. A man was standing in the bow, waving madly and shouting words that as yet could not be distinguished.

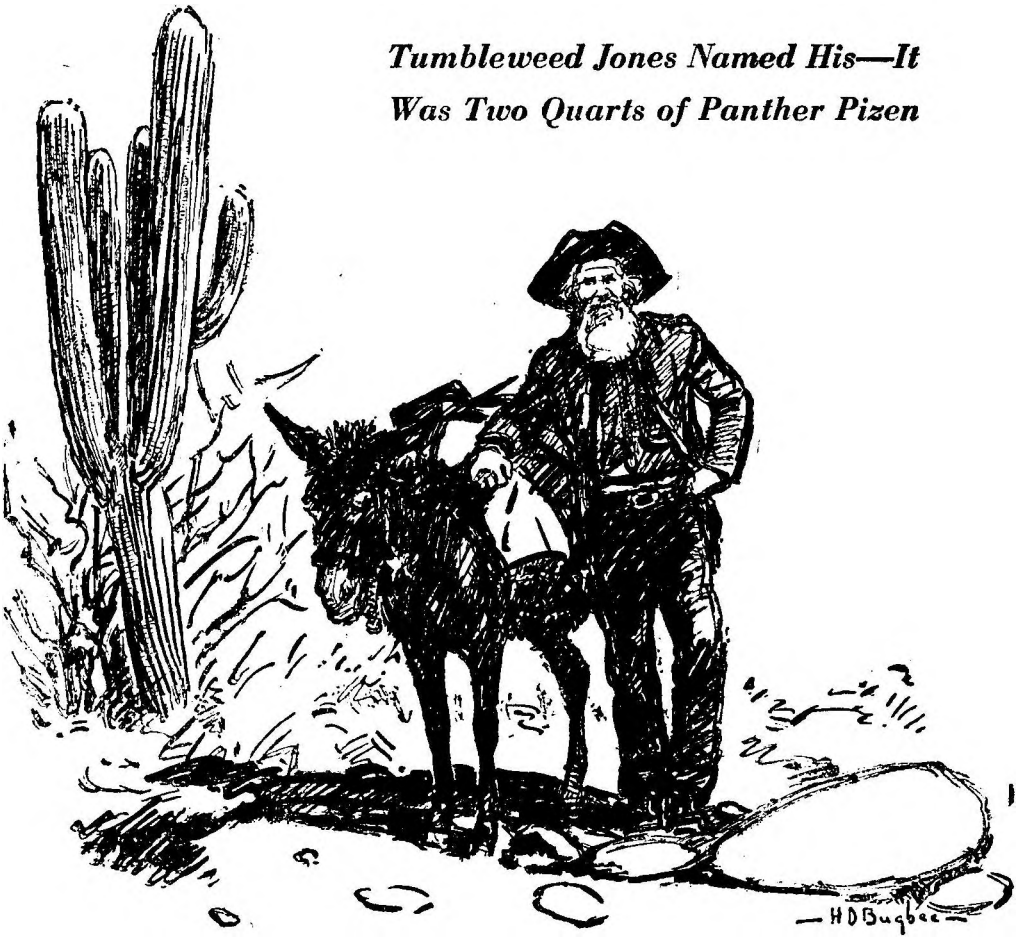
Captain Kemp, of course, he thought. He'd come round and learned what had happened.

Mr. Waldron looked back at the conning tower. The three men had brought the rifles to their shoulders, leveled at him. Then all at once the sun began to grow dark. He felt his knees sagging. He could feel his pumping heart begin to slow down.

He drew upon the last of his ebbing strength in a supreme effort to remain on his feet to the end. He had a moment of clear vision, and he saw the submarine commander, who was staring at the wildly yelling figure in the boat, turn away as if in scorn. No doubt he thought that it was merely an outraged protest against the execution, mused Mr. Waldron. He wondered how the commander would feel if he knew that another man was racing against time to be his example. He told himself that Captain Kemp, for his own safety, would have the sense to keep his mouth closed if he arrived too late.

And he would be too late. With this thought Mr. Waldron drew himself erect and smiled up at the muzzles as the order to fire was given.

Tumbleweed Jones Named His—It Was Two Quarts of Panther Pizen



DESERT INTERLUDE

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

OLD Tumbleweed Jones was in Hope Eternal Flats for supplies. After having cashed his week's yellow gleanings, he bought a week's hard rations and loaded them on his pack burro. Then he stepped into a saloon with a grin cracking open his bearded old-brass face, and a lively twinkle in his forever squinted blue eyes.

"Trot out the panther pizen, Bill," he said to the barman.

"Two quarts same as usual, eh?"

A sober voice came from the street doorway. "Just a minute, Tumbleweed. Then you can buy your two quarts of red-eye if you like."

Jones, little and shriveled, had to look upward at a steep angle when he confronted the lean, grizzled man with a nickeled star pinned to his left shirtpocket. "Howdy, Sheriff," creaked Jones. "Whut is on yer mind?"

"You," promptly answered the officer. "I'm not any lily-white reformer, but I am your friend, and as such—"

"Shore yer my *amigo,*" impatiently cut in the desert rat. "Trot out the panther pizen, Bill."

"And as your friend," pursued the Hope

Eternal sheriff, "I want to warn you—"

"Bill, trot out that panther pizen!" cried Tumbleweed, fidgeting. Doggedly his friend went on:

"You old sinner, you hit her too hard. Oh, yeah, I know! you always did, and at seventy you're still tougher than rawhide; not a man in the county can walk you down, or drink you down. But it can't last forever. I'm not unreasonable, Tumbleweed. You do get lonesome out there in your desert, and if you'd be moderate—"

"Lonesome, me?" Jones laughed a ratchety laugh. "Skassly, Sheriff! I like it out thar. Talk to myself, spit whar I please, cuss when I want to. Peaceful, y'see. I did git a speck ruffled when the new railroad comes sneakin' acrost above. But when I learnt she was so fur off I couldn't hardly hear the ingyne whistle, why, it was all absolution satisfack with me. Now trot out my bottles o' pizen, Bill."

"All right," clipped the lawman—"buy 'em! But look, *viejo.* Some day you'll be seeing snakes that's different from ordinary sidewinders. Red snakes, I mean, with purple neckties on, and derby hats!"

"Haw!" laughed the old coot. "Ef I do see 'em," he said, patting the ancient six-shooter that he carried in ancient leather under a thin hip, "I got whut's the needcessity to fix 'em!"

The sheriff shrugged and walked out. Tumbleweed paid for his weekly two quarts of redeye, stowed them inside his dusty and long unwashed shirt, went out to his burro and took up the leadrope.

A dozen hot, barren miles stretched between Hope Eternal Flats and his desert waterhole shanty. But when twilight fell he was unloading his things. He staked the burro to sparse grass below the hole.

He had a protracted pull at a bottle before he set about getting himself a supper of bacon and flapjacks on his wired-up old stove. Thinking backward, he had another such pull. He laughed.

"Red snakes with purple neckties on, and derby hats. Haw! Down with the demon rum; yeah, drink her down! Hangover in the mawnin'? Shucks, I got a cast-iron stummick, and all I hafta do is take another drink—hair o' the dawg is good fer the bite. Happy days!"

Gug-gug-gug-. Gug-gug. As a rule he didn't crowd it like this. The sheriff's warning had worked in reverse in his contrary old mind.

IN THE after part of the night he woke with an empty quart bottle in his hand. He lay on the hard-packed earthen floor of the shanty. It was light; at first, he thought day had come, then the fact that there was a full moon broke upon him. Rising unsteadily, he oriented himself and reeled over to his bunk.

"Purple snakes," he mumbled. "Haw."

He had left the door open because it was so warm. His now watery blue eyes suddenly picked out a shape high in the doorway. A snake—and bigger around than his body!

No, it wasn't. Purple snakes, hell—it was an elephant's head!

Tumbleweed Jones could feel his white hair standing up straight. There was ice along his spine. Take this lying down? Not Tumbleweed Jones. He clawed his ancient six-shooter out.

Bang! Bang!

In his ears there was a great stamping. He drew the gun-hammer back again, climbed to his feet, went staggering through the smoke and to the one window. Flooded with moonlight as with molten silver, the desert lay white and peaceful to his gaze. His breathing stopped.

Out there in the moonlight he saw another elephant, and another, and still another!

Up came the six-shooter. *Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Following the four shots he heard a thunderous stamping of great feet. He reeled to the door, closed and barred it. Turning back, reaching to his belt for

fresh cartridges, he stumbled and fell heavily.

When he opened his eyes again the sun had risen. There was a swollen bruise on his head, and one corner of the old stove was down. He lifted himself to an elbow, blinked, began remembering. Maybe he'd only dreamed it.

Then he saw the barred door, picked up his weapon and noted the six empty chambers.

"They'd ort to be tracks out thar, ef—ef I did see 'em."

Old Jones got to his feet, opened the door and went outside. Nowhere could he find any tracks!

Tumbleweed thought long thoughts, at last reached a decision.

He went back into the shanty, got the filled bottle, brought it out and broke it over a rock.

"Never no more," he told the clear blue desert sky, with his right hand up. "Never, never no more."

Four hours later, he clumped wearily into the office of the grizzled Hope Eternal sheriff.

"Amigo," he began, sinking into a chair, "you suttinly was right. Not that I seed any sarpints. But I seed wuss. I seed elephants."

THE officer swung around in his desk chair. There was a twinkle in his eye. "You did?"

"I pine blank did, plain as ever I seed anything. I'm cured, Sheriff. Know what I'm gonna do now? Write a book, that's what, tellin' how terrible licker is. I'll put some potery in it. Y'know—'From Greenland's icy mountings to India's coral strand'—that sawta stuff; jinnywine potery. I'll also go on the lecture platfawm ag'in the demon rum. I'll explain how it steals a man's honor and kicks him in the gutter, and starves little childern, and makes widders and pore orphants; how it's the great cuss of civileyezation!"

"Is it as bad as that?" asked the grizzled law dog.

"It poseyetively is." Never had Tumbleweed seemed half so sincere as now. This new thing had built a fire in him. "Abouten that book, kind friend. Trouble thar is, I can skassly read, ner nuther can I write. You reckon you could do the writin' fer me, kind friend?"

"That'd be a sizeable job, old-timer. Costs a heap of money to have a book published."

Jones stiffened further. "We'll git the money somehow. Nothin' can stop me. Nossir. I may falter. I may fall clean down in the dust. But ef I do, I'll rise and go on, and on, though my pore feet bleeds through my boots and my hind quawters drags my tracks out, to my glorious and shining reward. And, say, I jest happened to think! Fust thing, I'll do this; I'll start right now. I'll git me a axe and head fer the saloons, and I'll bust up all the bottles o' licker and chop up the kegs—"

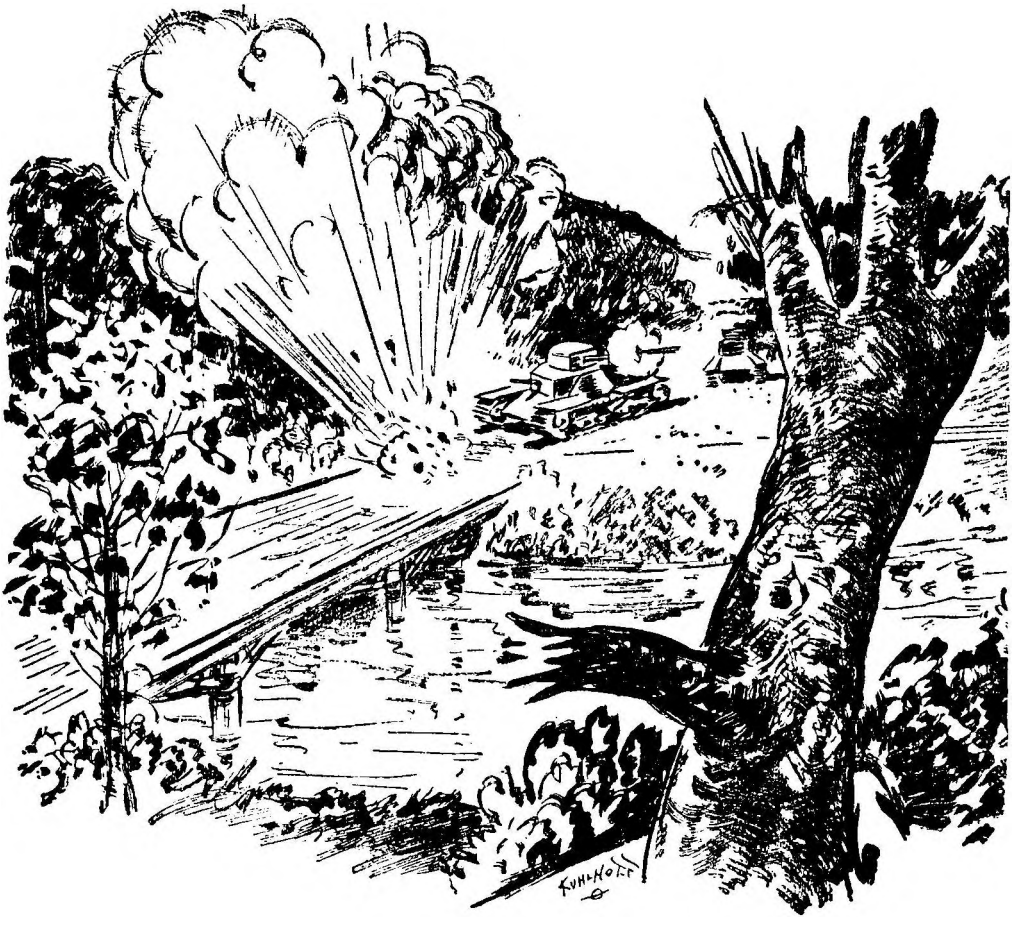
"Hold on, Tumbleweed. "Now it was the sheriff who stiffened. He saw trouble ahead. "There's something I'd better tell you. Tumbleweed. You'd find it out anyway. I had the news only an hour ago. Late yesterday a circus train jumped the track in the desert, and all four of the elephants got loose. Wind covered their tracks with sand, but—"

It was the look on the old coot's scraggly-bearded countenance that stopped the officer. The look held for half a minute. Then Tumbleweed Jones sprang from his chair and ran out. The officer rose and went to the door.

Tumbleweed's bark came from inside the nearest of the sun-blasted buildings. "You pie-eyed wampus, Bill, trot me out two quarts o' panther pizen!"

SOUTH FROM LINGAYEN

By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN



WE CAMPED at Tarlac that night, leaving the guns on their wheels but scattering them out among the trees. While we hadn't seen anything of the Japs for a couple of days, we weren't taking any chances just the same.

Yesterday noon we had been in position outside Manila when orders had come to hitch up and march north. Where the rest of the battalion was, I didn't know but I guessed that they were going some place else because, just before we rolled out, a fresh-faced shavetail came up and reported to Captain Steve McComb. He said that he was commanding a searchlight platoon and was attached to us from now on so what is he supposed to do?

"Fall your trucks in at the tail of the column, Bud," Steve McComb told him, "and see that you don't get lost. When this outfit rolls it rolls."

It was close to dark when I finished checking to see that the guns were all under cover and everything secure for the night. We had a lot of new men in the outfit who had just come out from the States in November and you had to watch them a bit. Good enough soldiers but not real anti-aircrafters yet. Well, it's a first

sergeant's job to check up on such things, anyway.

Jeff Wheeler, who was gun commander of Number Two gun, had parked his gun in a little clump of trees fifty yards off the main road. Most of the gun crew had got out their mess kits and gone on over to the kitchen, but the Burnett twins were still there, gassing up the prime mover

Just Regular Fellas, the Kind You Know and I Know—and In One Hell of a Spot In the Pacific

from a couple of ten-gallon drums.

"Where's Jeff?" I asked.

Ed Burnett, who was the blond one, straightened up and waved a hand toward the road. "He went that way about five minutes ago, Sarge. You want him?"

"No," I said. "Finish gassing up and then get your chow. Maybe we'll move on tonight."

A first sergeant isn't supposed to have any favorites in his outfit, but Ed Burnett came pretty close to being one of mine. He was one of those sort of men that everybody likes, and I had him ticketed for his corporal's stripes though he hadn't been in the service six months yet. His brother, Homer, was different. He was a dark, sulky man who kept to himself and had little to say—the only good that I had been able to see in him was that he followed Ed around like a dog giving him a dog's blind devotion.

Last pay day he and Jeff Wheeler had got into some kind of trouble in Manila. I guessed that it had been over a woman but I never got to the bottom of it because the war broke out right afterward and there were more important things to do.

"Okay, she's full," Ed said.

"Go get your mess kit," Homer told him. "I'll see to puttin' these cans back."

I WENT on toward the kitchen and Jeff Wheeler was waiting for me at the road. He fell into step with me and we went on together.

"Where do yuh figure we're headed for, Sarge?" he asked.

"North," I told him.

"Nuts," he says. "I can see that for myself. I got it through the grapevine that a batch of those yellow monkeys have landed up at Lingayen Bay an' we're goin' up there to spank 'em around a little. Anything tuh that?"

"Never mind about the grapevine," I told him. "You just see to it that that gun crew of yours bunks down around the gun tonight. If we should have to pull out in a hurry I don't want to have to comb half of Tarlac to find them—or you."

"No *senoritas?*" Jeff asks regretfully. He is a handsome man and a rascal with the ladies—not too popular in the battery for he is a lone wolf who runs his own trail without caring what anybody else thinks about it.

"You'd do well to forget about the *senoritas* for a while," I told him. "Maybe you've forgot that we've got a little war on our hands right now."

"And a hell of a war it is," he says. "No *senoritas!*"

He goes off toward the kitchen laughing and I walk on down the road a little ways to where Captain McComb is talking to an officer who has got on shiny boots and nice clean khaki. A command car is parked under the trees—I saw it come up while we were putting the guns away.

"Four guns!" this officer is saying as I come up. "What good are four guns going to do? Why didn't they send the whole battalion?"

Captain Steve McComb is standing there with his feet spraddled and his thumbs hooked in his gun-belt. He is a tall, redheaded man built on the greyhound principle and as good a battery commander as I have ever served under—and I have served under a lot of 'em.

"What do you want a battalion for?" he says. "You've only got one war, haven't you?"

This starchy major gives him a dirty look and climbs back into his command car. The smells of the night are beginning to get soft and heavy and, over in the west, the red is dying out of the piled-up clouds.

"You've got to be in position by daylight, McComb," the major says, leaning out of the command car. "I'll have a guide at the crossroads at Concepcion to show you the way in."

"Okay," Captain McComb says. "See you in Tokyo."

The major unbends a little as he pulls his head back into the command car and I can see that, in spite of his shiny boots, he is worried. "This is going to be no picnic, McComb," he says. "If I shouldn't see you again—the best of luck."

Steve grins and salutes. "Thanks," he says. "Give us a good look at them and thirty seconds of fire and we'll make our own luck, sir."

The command car rolls off in the direction of Tarlac, going slow at first because the road is full of little Filipino kids who have come out to have a look at the *soldados* and the guns. They stand around with their thumbs in their mouths and their eyes round and their little bare sterns sticking out from beneath the high water *camisas* which is all they wear. Those little kids have always tickled me, somehow.

"Mike," Captain McComb says to me, "that was Major Tregnor from Headquarters. He says that the Japs have got ashore near San Carlos *barrio* on Lingayen Bay. We're going up there tonight."

"Yes, sir," I say. "What time does the captain want to march?"

"Nine o'clock," he tells me. "The moon will be up by then and there will be good light to drive by."

I think that there will also be good light for the Jap airplanes to drop things on us but I do not say so. Steve McComb guesses what I am thinking and he spits into the dust and squints at me with the corners of his mouth tipping up.

"You're getting to be an old lady,

Mike," he tells me. "If I can't take this outfit through anything that those bandy-legged little baboons have got, I'll quit and go back to teaching school. Go on and get your chow."

Well, neither Steve McComb nor any of the rest of us knew yet just what a dive bomber could do. Later we learned.

I cut through a little grove of trees going back to the kitchen and almost fell over a man who stood there in the shadows. It is Homer Burnett.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him.

"Nothing," he said.

Well, he was lying and I knew he was lying because I saw then what it was that he was so interested in. Farther on, among the trees, somebody has built a bench and Jeff Wheeler is sitting there with his tin hat on the back of his head and his arm about a girl. I hear Jeff laugh and the two of them get up and go on off into the dusk.

"Get over to the kitchen," I tell Homer Burnett. "It's no business of yours."

HE draws his breath in quick. "That's Ed's girl," he said to me in a flat voice. "I saw her standing by the road when we pulled in. Then that damned Wheeler—"

"Get to the kitchen," I told him.

I followed him after a little bit, walking slow. I meant to take Jeff Wheeler's hide off in strips when I got him alone—I would have no outfit of mine feuding over some *mestiza* wench with war just over the hill. And feuding it would be for I had not missed the look in Homer Burnett's eyes as he had turned away.

I called for the gun commanders after chow, told them that we were pulling out at nine and that we would not stop this time until we had gone into battle positions again. Jeff Wheeler was not there and Corporal Dorsey acted for him. I would have made Dorsey gun commander on the spot was it not for the fact that Jeff Wheeler could handle a three-inch anti-aircraft cannon like a skeet shooter handles a shotgun and I could not spare him now.

He came in fifteen minutes later, whistling and not with his hat on the back of his head. I walked him away, out of earshot of the kitchen.

"What's all the shootin' about, Sarge?" he asked me.

"Where've you been?" I asked him.

"Here and there," he tells me. "Let's get this war over quick—I want to come back to Tarlac and settle down."

For some reason that made me mad. "Get this, you damned fool," I said to him. "You're not back in barracks now—this is war! The chances are good that you'll never come back to Tarlac or anywhere else! That makes no difference to me. What does make a difference is that I'm not going to have this outfit fall down on the job because some thimble-witted bum can't keep his eyes off every skirt that comes along. Remember that!"

He laughed at me under his breath. "Her name's Felicia, Sarge," he said. "When I come back we're goin' to be married in church. I'll name the first boy after you."

He went on off through the dark in the direction of Number One gun whistling "That Rolling River" between his teeth. I stood looking after him, half-mad still and wondering if I ought to yank his stripes and let Corporal Dorsey have the gun. Then I heard Captain McComb coming up through the dry grass—he had been down to Tarlac to telephone to Stotsenburg.

"Mike," he said, "we're going up to play in the big league tomorrow. They tell me that eighty Jap transports pulled into Lingayen Bay at sundown tonight."

"Well," I told him, "I played in the big league back in 1918 and I guess the game hasn't changed much."

"Not much," Steve says "I would have wished to have another couple of weeks to break the new men in—but the Japs didn't bother to ask me what I liked. Let's get going."

We went across the flat together. Blue flashlights winked like restless fireflies through the trees as the gun crews got the guns ready to roll. Men called back and forth to one another in low voices and steel clanged harshly against steel as the gun commanders hammered the dogs tight on the gun bogies.

At ten minutes to nine the moon was coming up and Lieutenant Rooney, the battery executive, eased his jeep out onto the road with Olsen driving and Kowalski handling the machine-gun. They rolled on north, showing no lights, to act as advance guard for the rest of the column. Then Captain McComb blew his whistle from up in front and the engines of the big prime movers—trucks that tow the guns—blasted into life.

I stood at the side of the road and watched them as they came out. A prime mover broke loose from the shadows and came lurching and growling across the strip of moonlight with the eight tons of Number One gun bouncing behind. She hit the ditch with all ten of her driving wheels throwing dirt and her gun crew hanging to the bows in the back of the truck.

Then she was gone down the road with the hazy moonlight swallowing her up and the roar of her engine drifting back on the wind. I waved my flashlight and Number Two came on.

Ed Burnett was in the cab behind the wheel and I caught a glimpse of his face by the light from the instrument panel as he hit the ditch and gave her the gun. Jeff Wheeler was hanging on the running board, leaning out to watch the gun as it trailed along. He waved a hand at me as they went by.

"See you in church, Sarge," he said.

Lieutenant Gorley, the shavetail who had the searchlight platoon, came up and stood beside me as the rest of the guns came out. His lights were to march at the tail of the column.

"Think they'll bother us on the way up, Sergeant?" he asked me, yelling above the noise the trucks were making.

"Maybe," I said. "They're not amateurs at this business, Lieutenant. Here comes Johnson with the instrument truck —better signal your drivers to start to move out, sir."

The tail of the column cleared Tarlac at a quarter after nine and there was a crowd there to watch us go. The little kids yelled and waved their hands, standing at attention with their little fat stomachs sticking out. I was bringing up the rear, riding the bathtub of Pete Dawson's motorcycle, and I didn't look back.

After twenty minutes the road lifted to the flat crest of a hill and I told Pete to stop for a minute while I checked to see how the column was marching. Ahead of us the valley lay flat and peaceful in the moonlight with the white road tacked to it like a ribbon. The trucks and guns were black bugs which crawled swiftly along that ribbon at quarter-mile intervals and I saw why Steve McComb had wanted the moonlight to march by.

Spread out that way the column wouldn't attract much attention from anybody who might be looking from six-eight thousand feet up. If there had been no moon we would have had to keep closed up. Then a flare or two and a stick of bombs laid across us would be all that it would take. This way if they hit us we might lose a truck or two but chances were that the rest would get through all right.

"Okay, let's go," I said.

Pete opened his motorcycle up and we dropped down the hill like a bullet—Pete was a good driver but reckless and he rode that motorcycle like a jockey riding a horse. We cut past the searchlight trucks with the wheel of the bathtub dragging in the ditch and went on up the column. Everything was rolling all right and so we dropped back to bring up the rear again.

Pete Dawson fished a package of gum out of his pocket and passed a stick over to me while he scowled at the road. We

went through a patch of woods a half a mile deep and then were out in the moonlight again.

Pete said, above the wind, "That damn cylinder is missin' again. It's the spark plug—if I've cleaned that spark plug once I bet I've cleaned it a thousand times."

"Get a new one tomorrow," I told him. "Tell Sweeny I said to let you have one."

"Okay," Pete said. "As soon as we get back this buggy ought to go into the shop anyway. It ain't been actin' right lately."

I sat there, hunched down in the bathtub, and listened to Pete growl but I was waiting for something else. At that, I was vaguely surprised when it came.

They came up on us from the rear and I caught a quick glimpse of them as they passed over low—three of them flying in a tight formation. The snarling roar of their engines ripped the moonlight apart and, through it, the hammer of their guns drifted back. I could see the tracers slamming down against the road to bounce away in a criss-crossing pattern of thin light.

A bomb—probably a hundred pounder—slammed down close to the road maybe half a mile up ahead lighting up a patch of woods and setting the echoes to rocking back and forth across the valley. I counted thirteen more come down and then the Japs were gone on off into the moonlight with the sound of their engines dying away fast. Pete Dawson was bending lower across his handlebars and scowling more than ever.

He said, like he was talking to himself, "Why the dirty yellow heels. Who the hell do they think they are, anyway?"

It took a minute for my eyes to get accustomed to the moonlight again but pretty soon I saw that the column was still rolling steady. That was good. You never know for sure how a green outfit is going to behave under shell fire—or bombs—the first time. We passed the place where the bombs had hit; the ground was plowed up considerable and still stunk of powder but they had missed the road except for one egg which had gouged a chunk out of the shoulder.

They came back a quarter of an hour later, flying lower this time. I saw one of the gun trucks stand out sharp against the flame for a second and I knew that here was trouble.

"Get up the column!" I told Pete.

Pete grunted and twisted at his throttle and we headed down the road wide open, cutting in and out past the searchlight trucks. Up ahead I saw men climbing out of the ditch and into the road and knew that it was Number Two gun that had been hit. Pete skidded his motorcycle to a stop and I climbed out of the bathtub.

IT WAS bad enough. A big hole had been blown out of the side of the road and Number Two gun was tipped over in the ditch. Twenty feet farther on, the prime mover was standing at right angles to the road, still right side up but with its nose down in a foot of mud and water and its rear wheels hanging onto the shoulder.

Jeff Wheeler was coming up the road toward the gun, shaking his head and swearing. He had blood on his face and the right sleeve of his shirt was torn off—high explosive does funny things like that.

"Those babies play rough," he said to me but his mouth was tight and his eyes were mean. "If they've busted that gun up——"

Number Three gun rolled up to where the road was broken and Kalvanovich, driving the prime mover, braked it to a stop and stuck his head out of the cab. He looked a little green about the gills but I noticed that he was handling the big truck okay just the same. I flagged him on—those ships would be back and they'd like nothing better than to catch the column bunched up here on the road.

"Keep on going!" I yelled at him. "Give her the gun when you hit that hole, kid!"

He shifted into compound low and stamped down on the throttle. For a minute I thought he was stuck as the front wheels dropped down into the bomb crater; Kalvanovich poured the power to her, though, and went across with the gun tipping and rocking to boom on down the road in moonlight. I left Pete to flag the rest of the column on by and went on up to where the wrecked prime mover was. Captain McComb, coming back from the head of the column, got there the same time that I did.

"Anybody hurt?" he asked.

"Shook up some is all, sir," Jeff Wheeler said in a tight voice. "Reedy got nicked a little with a shell fragment."

"How bad is the gun smashed up?"

"Not so bad that she can't roll. She yanked the pintle out of the truck when she went over but we can rig something up to tow her by."

"Good!" Captain McComb swung around to me. "Stay here and give them a hand, Mike. I'm taking the rest of the outfit on up to Lingayen. Follow as soon as you can and watch for the guide we'll leave you at the Concepcion crossroads."

He climbed into his jeep and waited while Number Four gun bucked its way across the hole in the road; then swung in behind it. As the jeep started to roll, he turned and yelled back.

"They'll probably be back to strafe hell out of you. Hit the dirt when you hear them coming."

Jeff Wheeler grunted. "Joe," he said to Corporal Dorsey, "you take big Burnett an' set up the machine-gun fifty yards back down the road. Keep those yellow buzzards off our neck while we straighten out this mess."

Jeff Wheeler knew his job. As soon as the last of the searchlight trucks had gone by, he ran the winch cable from the prime mover across the road and anchored it to a tree. We dug away the shoulder of the road to make a ramp and then Ed Burnett climbed into the cab again. He started the engine and it sounded all right; then shifted to the winch controls and let his clutch out. The steel cable tightened up fast and began to sing.

"Hit her!" Jeff yelled.

Ed Burnett hit her and the rear wheels of the prime mover tipped down slow until they were solid on the ramp we had dug. Ed gave the engine more gas and then the truck shuddered a little and began to inch back up the incline as the front wheels broke loose from the muck. Pretty soon she was back on the road.

"Hold it!" Jeff said. "Nice work, kid!"

Ed Burnett stuck his head out of the cab and grinned in the moonlight. "Hell," he said, "give me something to hook that cable onto an' I could pull up the China Sea by the roots with that winch."

Jeff hopped up onto the running board and they ran the truck down the road a hundred yards or so to see that she was all right; then turned her around and came jouncing back, down through the crater the bomb had made and onto where Number Two gun was laying on its side. I had a couple of the ammunition handlers digging the mud away so that we could get the cable around her.

It was slow work. Jeff put a rolling hitch on the gun and Ed winched her up until she stood on her four wheels again. Then he slacked off and ran the prime mover down the road a little ways so that he could get a straight drag on the gun. The rest of us tailed onto a rope tied to the top of the gun carriage to keep her from going over again when she hit the slanting bank.

"Take her away!" Jeff said.

THE Japs came back when we had the gun halfway up onto the road. All of a sudden I heard Dorsey's machine-gun begin to hammer and then I heard little steel bees going *whit-whack* over my head to slap into the road just back of the prime mover. The tracers hit the back of the truck and climbed over the cab

and then went on down the road bouncing off to either side like a bunch of Roman candles gone crazy. I got a quick look at the bellies of the planes as they went over and I saw them bank and zoom for a return trip.

My gang had piled into the ditch but I got a quick turn about a stump with the end of the rope and the gun didn't go over. Something was wrong with the winch, though, and I saw Jeff Wheeler running toward the cab. I yelled at him to hit the ditch as I saw the Japs straighten out maybe two miles down the road.

"You mind that rope!" he yelled back at me. "I'll be damned if I'm goin' to let this gun tip over again!"

I watched the bullets walk up the white road and I heard them rip through the metal of the truck. A fistful of them knocked splinters off my stump and down into my face. I was a little worried for fear they would cut the rope and I wondered why the Japs didn't drop their bombs.

"Slack off on your rope, damn it!" Jeff Wheeler was hollering at me and I came back to life with a jerk. The front wheels of Number Two gun were crawling steadily up onto the shoulder of the road.

The planes didn't go so far to make their turn this time and, as they banked, Corporal Dorsey got the tracer stream of his machine-gun onto the leading one. It didn't straighten up out of the bank but tipped farther over onto one wing and dived into the ground half a mile away, going up in a big splash of red flame as its bombs went off. Then the other two were on top of us, dropping their eggs, and I hunched tight behind my stump and tried to see through the flashes.

Somebody was yelling at Jeff Wheeler, "Get down, you damned fool! Get down!"

I was a little surprised all at once to find out that I was the one who was doing the yelling but I could have saved myself the trouble because Jeff stayed there on the running board, nursing the winch along with one hand and paying no attention to anything except Number Two gun which was coming back up onto the road. By all the rules he should have soaked up enough iron to start a junk yard but he didn't and then everything was quiet all of a sudden except for the drone of the two planes and that was dying away fast. This time they didn't turn but kept on to the northwest until the moonlight washed them out.

Up in front Number Two gun was standing on the road again as I got up from behind my stump. Murphy, one of the ammunition passers, came out of the ditch dripping water like a sponge. He spat out a mouthful of mud and scowled off in the direction the Japs had gone.

"Nuts!" he said. "If that's all the better they can do!" and went on up the road toward the gun. I followed him.

Jeff Wheeler was backing the prime mover down to the gun. As I came up he climbed down from the cab with a coil of rope in his hands. He looked at me with his mouth tight and then went around to the rear of the truck.

"Towing pintle's busted," he said. "We'll have to lash the tow bar to what's left. Better get Ed out of the cab, Sarge."

"He's hurt?" I asked him.

"Dead," Jeff said. "Send somebody to tell Dorsey to bring his machine-gun an' come back. We're pulling out."

It didn't come into my head to think that it was funny that Jeff was giving orders to me. He was gun commander and it was his gun—so I did as he said.

Ed Burnett was slumped forward in the cab with his head against the windshield — three machine-gun bullets had taken him between the shoulder blades. For the first time since the war started I had the feeling that this thing was personal between me and those bandy-legged little killers that we had seen riding across the sky.

Murphy helped me and we got Ed's blanket out of his roll and wrapped him

up in it and laid him off the road under a tree. There wasn't time to bury him and there wasn't any use to take him up where we were going. Corporal Dorsey and Homer Burnett came up the road, carrying the machine-gun between them.

"Mount her in the back of the prime mover," Jeff Wheeler said in a flat voice. "And if those yellow buzzards come back, see that they don't knock the gun off the road again. Speed it up—we're pullin' out."

He took a last yank at the rope and started on up toward the cab. Homer Burnett put down the machine-gun mount and stopped him. Homer's face was all twisted up in a crazy sort of a grin and his voice didn't sound right.

"Where's Ed?" he said and I knew that the news was going to hit him hard.

Jeff Wheeler turned around and looked at him for a minute, not saying anything, and then went on toward the cab. Jeff was a lot different than he had been back in Manila—or even back in Tarlac. There was a hardness to him that hadn't shown much before; you could see by their faces that the gun crew felt it but didn't quite understand. *I* did because I had seen the same thing happen to men up in the Argonne Woods a long time before and I knew that Jeff Wheeler was going to take Number Two gun up to Lingayen. Nothing else mattered; Jeff didn't even know that anything else existed.

"Ed stopped one, son," I said to Homer.

He just stood there in the moonlight looking at me and blinking his eyes as though he couldn't quite make out what it was I had said. Down the road Pete Dawson was hammering at his motorcycle and swearing.

Then Homer said, "Where is he?"

I jerked my head toward the tree. "Over there."

The gun crew was gathering around the end of the prime mover, looking curiously at the scars the machine-gun bullets had made. A line of holes, spaced even like the stitches in a seam, ran up across the back of the cab and over the top. Homer Burnett began to shake his head back and forth slow.

"You ain't goin' to leave him here," he said.

"Later we'll send back," I told him. This was all new to these kids — they would learn later.

"Load up!" Jeff Wheeler said from up in front in that flat voice of his. "We're rollin'!"

Homer Burnett turned and looked at him like a man who has just waked out of a dream. Then he started walking toward Jeff with his head hunched forward and his knees jerking.

"You did that to him, Wheeler," Homer said in a thick sort of a voice. "You blabbed to that no-good woman back in Tarlac that we were marchin' tonight so that you could get Ed killed!"

I WAS too far away to do anything but stand there. There was a rifle in the boot strapped to the front of the cab and Homer jerked it out, snapping off the safety lock as he swung it up. He was crazy—crazy clear through—and he had his finger on the trigger.

Jeff Wheeler stood there looking at him in the moonlight, his feet spraddled a little and a preoccupied scowl on his face. The muzzle of the Springfield wasn't a foot from his chest.

"You got Ed shot so I'm goin' to shoot you," Homer Burnett said in that thick voice.

"Get up in the cab," Jeff Wheeler said. "You're drivin' now. Get in, damn you! We haven't got all night!"

He reached out and took the gun away from Homer like you would take a stick away from a small boy and jammed it back into the boot. For a minute Homer stood there looking at him; then climbed slowly into the cab and started the engine. I was sweating—though the night wasn't hot—as I went back down the road to where

Pete Dawson was hammering at the sidecar of his motorcycle.

A shell fragment had smashed the wheel of the sidecar and, as I came up, Pete got the whole thing loose and kicked it over into the ditch. Pete didn't care much. He hated sidecars because they kept him from going as fast as he liked to go.

"You'll either have to ride on the prime mover or hang on behind," he said. "That thing is junk now."

"I'll ride in the prime mover," I told him. "You trail along behind. I may be wanting you."

"Maybe I ought to go up an' tell the captain what's happened," Pete said. "It wouldn't take long to go up an' back."

"The captain will learn what's happened soon enough," I said. "And the night isn't over yet."

I climbed into the cab of the prime mover with Jeff Wheeler and Homer and we started again. Lashed like it was, the gun didn't trail so well and Homer had to fight the wheel to keep the prime mover on the road. He was a good driver, though, and we kept rolling.

We went through a little *barrio*—just nipa-thatched houses stuck up on stilts on either side of the road. Some of them were still burning and the place was empty except for a couple of dogs that prowled about in the moonlight. At the far edge an old Filipino was lying on his back in the dust but we didn't stop.

"Remember this, Mike," Jeff said to me.

I nodded and we didn't talk any more. Homer Burnett was hunched forward with his forearms laid across the wheel and that dazed, sleep-walking look still on his face. Jeff watched the road and stuck his head out of the cab now and then to make sure that the gun was riding all right. Once he had Homer stop while he went back to inspect the lashings.

Pete Dawson pulled up alongside. "How about me goin' up ahead an' seein' what's doing?" he asked. "I'll be back in twenty minutes."

"You're doing fine behind us," I said to him. "When I want you I know where to find you."

He dropped on back with a sulky look on his face. Jeff came back and climbed into the cab again.

"All right," he said. "Let's go."

Homer Burnett had started to whistle between his teeth—just a half a dozen notes, not a tune. Jeff had to tell him again to get started.

A little after midnight we passed a battalion of Filipino infantry marching in twos on either side of the road. They were little men but they looked hard and tough. Most of them grinned and yelled at us as we went by with the gun slewing along crazily behind us. Farther on we passed one of the searchlight trucks which had been with the column. A bomb must have landed square on it because it was over on its side with pieces of searchlight scattered across the road and in the ditch.

I figured that we must be getting close to Concepcion crossroads because the traffic began to get heavier. We had to slow down to let a column of empty trucks pass us going back toward Tarlac—to pick up the infantry battalion we had passed, I guessed. Going down a little hill the gun yawed over into the center of the road and almost knocked a truck into the ditch. I could hear the driver swearing for a hundred yards after we had gone by.

It was three o'clock when he got bombed again.

They came up the road this time, flying so low that a man could hit them with a rock. What was left of the windshield in front of me busted in my face and I felt as though somebody had hit me in the shoulder with a sledge hammer. Then the prime mover was bucking and rolling as the bombs hit and, above the racket, I could hear the stutter of Corporal Dorsey's machine-gun.

Jeff Wheeler had kicked open the door of the cab and was hanging onto the running board. Ahead of us was a patch of

woods and I wondered if we would make it before the little yellow boys came back.

"Step on it!" Jeff said. "They're makin' their turn."

We hit the woods and heard them go over us but they didn't drop any bombs this time and then we heard them going back up the road with the sound of their engines dying away fast. They were after that truck column. Jeff Wheeler climbed back into the cab and began to roll a cigarette.

"Mike," he said, "I'm gettin' damned tired of running. I'll be glad to set Number Two down on her haunches an' do a little strafing of our own."

Homer Burnett didn't say anything—just sat there with his eyes on the road and his arms across the wheel while he whistled. All of a sudden I knew that my right shoulder was numb and that there was blood on the inside of my shirt. I fumbled around, trying to get at my first aid packet.

"Nicked yuh, did they?" Jeff said. "Here, give me that thing."

The moonlight was beginning to pale out and the clouds were crawling up crimson out of the east when we got to Concepcion crossroads. There was a store there and a few houses and a half a dozen trucks and command cars scattered under the trees. We stopped and Jeff climbed down.

"Set still," he said. "I'll take care of this—all I want tuh know is which way the outfit went."

He walked over to where a lieutenant was squatting beside a field telephone and talked with him for a couple of minutes. The lieutenant listened for a minute and then shook his head. I could see that Jeff was giving him an argument but I couldn't hear what they were saying. Then Jeff squatted down on his heels, too, and the lieutenant twisted the crank of the telephone and held the handset up to his ear.

The numbness was going out of my shoulder and it was beginning to hurt like hell. Homer Burnett stopped whistling through his teeth and looked at me.

"It's going to rain," he said. "I heard thunder up the road."

Well, I had heard what he was listening to and it wasn't thunder. There didn't seem to be any point in arguing with him, though, and anyway I was too tired to argue. The noise he heard was the sound of naval guns out of Lingayen Bay—too deep and far off to be field guns. I guessed that the Japs had started their landing.

Jeff Wheeler came back and climbed into the cab. "They don't know anything here. None of 'em saw the outfit go by. All they know is that a flock of Japs got ashore at a place called San Felipe half an hour ago."

"So what are you going to do?" I asked Jeff.

I wasn't kidding myself. I was hit bad and this was Jeff's show — not that it hadn't been his show all the way along. He jerked the cab door shut and looked across at Homer Burnett.

"Going up tuh San Felipe. Likely we'll find the outfit there. If we don't, we'll find the Japs. Kick her over, kid."

Homer stepped down on the starter and the engine caught. He looked at Jeff. "Sergeant," he said in his hoarse voice, "when we get back from this San Felipe you an' I are goin' to have it out. I promise you we are goin' to have it out."

"Get her rolling," Jeff said. He laughed but his laughter was as brittle as a broken window pane. "Don't let it worry you too much, kid. We probably ain't comin' back from San Felipe."

It got light fast as we went on down the road. There was a heavy mugginess in the early morning air which meant that it was going to be hot as soon as the sun got up. A half a mile from the crossroads we turned to the northwest on a dim track which dived into the jungle. It wasn't much of a road—soft and cut into bad ruts. It was plain, though, that heavy traffic had gone ahead of us up here.

The going got worse. We climbed slowly to the top of a little ridge and then dropped down on the other side into a stream bottom that was half swamp. We got stuck finally with the mud up to the hubs and the prime mover digging herself in deeper as Homer tried to back her out.

"No use," Jeff said. "We'll have to uncouple the gun and winch out. By God, we're gettin' up to Lingayen about as fast as a turtle can sprint!"

It took better than an hour of back breaking work. I let Pete go on up the road to see what he could find ahead and we were hitching up the gun again when I heard him coming back. He skidded his motorcycle to a stop and mopped the mud off his face.

"Well?" Jeff said.

"I run into some cavalry five-six miles up the road. A major stopped me.

" 'Where yuh goin'?' he said.

"Lookin' for Battery B of the 2d,' I told him.

" 'Well, you ain't goin' to find 'em up here,' he said. 'There ain't anything out there in front except about ten thousand Japs. You keep on up that road an' they'll shoot you off that gasoline mule of yours like you were a pipe in a shootin' gallery'."

Pete spat out a mouthful of mud and went on.

"I told him we had a gun back here. He said he was in command up in this sector an' we was to go back to Concepcion crossroads an' wait for orders there."

Jeff Wheeler swore. "If the outfit isn't up there, where the devil is it?"

"It's up there all right," Pete Dawson told him. "On the way up I passed by one of the ammunition trucks pulled off to the side of the road with a busted axle. It was Joey Farr's truck."

"You sure?"

"I'm sure all right. It's got the left front fender busted in where I an' Joey run into a pole back in Manila. He was ganderin' at a little *mestiza* that was—"

"Let it go," Jeff said to him. "Load up, you birds."

The sun was beginning to get hot and my shirt was wet across my back. I stood there, holding onto the cab door and feeling a little satisfaction that I had predicted the weather right—if it had turned cold, now, or begun to rain—I was beginning to get a little lightheaded. It was that slug in my shoulder.

"What's the use of loading up?" I asked Jeff. "You've got to winch back through that mud hole if you're going to Concepcion."

Jeff spat and jerked a thumb at the men who were standing around. They began to climb up over the sides of the prime mover without saying anything.

"We ain't goin' back to Concepcion, Mike," Jeff said to me in a soft voice. "Right now they don't need Number Two gun at Concepcion—up ahead, likely they do."

We skidded through the swampy bottom land for another half hour and then the road began to climb a little and pretty soon we were out on hard ground again. The trees thinned out some. We found the ammunition truck, like Pete Dawson had said, pushed off into the ditch where the road bent around to the right to swing down toward Lingayen Bay. Jeff stopped the prime mover.

"Maybe we'll find the outfit up ahead an' maybe we won't," he said to me. "Anyhow, from now on we're our own combat train an' it won't do no harm to load up a little more ammunition."

We loaded twenty boxes, eighty rounds, into the back of the prime mover and then went on down the flat ridge toward the sea. The trees kept thinning out and once or twice I thought I heard machine-gun fire off to our left but I couldn't be sure. Then we rounded a little bend and Homer slammed on the brakes to keep from running into a scout car which was standing in the road.

A lieutenant, who looked like he had been taking a bath in mud, was standing alongside it and talking with the radio operator. The driver had a tommy-gun lined up on what was left of our windshield and I thought he was going to let us have it but he didn't. Then Jeff Wheeler jumped down and the driver scowled and put the tommy-gun back in its boot.

The lieutenant looked at Jeff in a sort of a detached way and then climbed into the car. "Hell!" he said. "Give me those phones and let *me* talk to them!"

THE radio operator handed over the head phones and moved to make room. He was a red-headed kid, I remember, with a limp cigarette in his mouth and big freckles on his hands.

"There's nothing wrong with the set," he said, looking at Jeff. "That's as sweet a set as you could find—I tuned it up myself. It's those birds on the other end —that's all. Those Johns can't understand English."

"This is Peterson," the lieutenant said into the transmitter, jumbling his words a little. "I want to talk to Major Kalle—well, damn it, where is he? I've got a report for him."

He listened for a minute and then he yanked the head phones off and swore. "I could hear him better if he'd stand on a hill and holler at me," he complained. He stuck a muddy cigarette into his mouth and seemed to see us for the first time.

"Sir," Jeff Wheeler said, "has the lieutenant seen anything of the rest of our outfit? Battery B of the 2d?"

The lieutenant swung his legs over the side of the scout car and dropped down. He lit the drooping cigarette with his hands cupped about the match and then rubbed some of the mud off his chin.

"Yeah," he said, "we passed 'em up

north of San Felipe early this morning. Where've you birds been?"

"Comin' along, sir," Jeff Wheeler told him. "They knocked us off the road back a-ways. Well, we'll be gettin' along if the lieutenant will pull over a little so we can get by."

All of a sudden I heard what I had been listening for—machine-gun fire. A machine-gun's got a funny sort of a sound in woods; a *clap-chatter* that bats back and forth through the trees like an overgrown kid running down a picket fence and dragging a stick across the palings. I judged the gun was down the ridge about two miles—it quit suddenly and the quiet was unnatural.

The lieutenant grinned sardonically at Jeff Wheeler and sucked on his cigarette. "Get by to go where?" he asked. "That wasn't anybody celebrating the Fourth of July that you just heard."

"Lieutenant," Jeff said, "I was figurin' on takin' this gun up to where the outfit is. We haven't winched the old girl through half of the mud holes on Luzon just to turn around an' go back because we run into a little shootin'."

"Look, soldier," the lieutenant said, "we've just come through from San Felipe and the place is full of Japs with more of 'em coming. Unless that locomotive you've got there can fly you're not going to join up with your outfit for some little time."

The radio operator had been bent over in the car fiddling with his dials. Now he straightened up, shoving his head-set back so that one ear was free.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I just contacted Murphy in Number Three car. That was them that was shootin' just now—he says they just bagged three Japs on motorcycles but there were a bunch more that got away. What does he do now?"

The driver of the scout car slid over under the wheel and kicked the engine over while he looked at the officer. The machine-gun chattered spasmodically down the ridge again and, after a minute, another began to *tack-tack* off to the left. Lieutenant Peterson spat out his cigarette and started to climb into the scout car. Then he paused for a minute and looked back over his shoulder at Jeff.

"Soldier," he asked, "have you got any bullets for that cannon of yours?"

"Sure," Jeff said.

"Well, look," Peterson told him, "we've got orders to delay the Japs on the road back to Concepcion. Likely enough they have got some tanks—scout cars, anyhow. Can you hit a tank with that gun of yours?"

"Lieutenant," Jeff said, grinning that tight grin of his, "we can hit anything that has got a Jap inside it."

"Get in," Lieutenant Peterson said. "We'll go down the ridge and make a little reconnaissance. I wouldn't wonder if we couldn't cook up some trouble for honorable Rising Sun."

Jeff Wheeler yelled back at Corporal Dorsey, "Take care of things, Joe, till I get back!" and climbed into the scout car. The driver yanked her around and they went batting off down the ridge.

My shoulder was getting worse and I had Dorsey cut off my shirt and bind the arm up tight. A machine-gun bullet had busted my arm high up and I felt rotten. After Dorsey had finished tying me up I sat down in the shade with my back against a tree and, after a little bit, Homer Burnett came and squatted down beside me.

"Sergeant," he said, slow and sort of hesitating, "you're sure about—Ed, back there?"

I had never cared much for Homer Burnett; as a soldier he was a little on the sloppy side—likely to have his rifle a little dirty or his shoes not quite shined for Saturday inspection. Comparison with Ed hadn't helped any, either. As he sat there, scratching the ground with a stick, I knew that he understood that and, understanding, was even more bitter. I felt sorry for him because he was young with no ex-

perience to fall back on now and he had not been long enough in the outfit to have become aware of that thing—born of the mutual trust and *esprit* of men banded together to do a dirty and dangerous task—which lifts a soldier above personal grief and wounds and physical fatigue and keeps him going forward when all of his instincts tell him to give up and lie down.

"Yeah, kid," I had to tell him. "I'm sure about Ed. Don't let it get you down."

He didn't say anything for quite awhile; just sat there drawing little marks in the dust with the stick. Then he said finally, without looking at me, "Ed was the only friend I ever had. I'm goin' to miss him, I reckon."

"I know," I said. "It's tough—but those things happen in war. Ed was doing his job. That's what you and I and all the rest have got to do. Just keep on with the job."

HE wasn't paying any attention to me. He rubbed out the marks in the dust with the palm of his hand and talked more to himself than he did to me. I got the idea that he wasn't much used to talking to other people.

"Ed had a girl in Manila," he said in his flat voice and there was a stubborn note in it. "She was no good. She threw Ed over to take up with Sergeant Wheeler because he had more money than Ed did. That was her he seen back in Tarlac. I was standin' there in the trees when he met her an' I heard him tell her that we were comin' up here last night."

"Why not?" I said shortly.

He patted the ground with his hand again and looked at me. "It's plain enough. She got word to the Japs that we were goin' to be on the road. How else would they know to come an' bomb us?"

Well, there's no explaining the way a man's mind will work. I didn't feel like talking but it was up to me to knock those crazy ideas out of Homer Burnett's head. A soldier has got to deal in the future; he can't sit and cry about the past.

"Get this straight," I said and I put an edge into my voice. "Neither Sergeant Wheeler nor his girl had anything to do with us being bombed last night. You'll not say any more about it. Understand?"

He looked at me sullenly. "That won't stop me from thinkin'."

"Oh, heck!" I said. I felt sick and my shoulder was bothering me more. "The Japs would have bombed that road last night if every man in the battery had been a deaf mute and Tarlac a thousand miles away. They're not so dumb as not to know that troops would be moving up to Lingayen. You make me tired!"

"They wouldn't have known Ed was there."

"Kid," I snarled at him, "I saw what you pulled back there on the road. Don't try anything like that again, that's all."

Homer stood up—a loose-jointed misfit of a man. There was something about him, though, that was strange and that hadn't been there yesterday or in the days when we were in position around Manila. Mostly it was in his eyes.

"Sergeant," he said, "my old man was a Methodist an', every day, he used to make us kids listen while he read to us out of the Bible. There was one part I remember. It said that a man should have an eye for an eye an' a tooth for a tooth. I ain't goin' to forget that."

There was no use arguing with him—his thoughts were all twisted up and talking wouldn't straighten them out. I saw the scout car coming back up the ridge, cutting in and out among the trees and moving fast. Things were about to happen and I was glad.

"Get up into the cab," I said.

Jeff Wheeler dropped to the ground, waved his hand and the scout car swung away again. Everything was quiet out in front and I knew well enough what that meant. The Japs had run into those machine-guns and were getting ready to clean

them out. Jeff grinned as he came toward the cab but his grin was tight and hard.

"Load up," he said. "We're goin' to have some fun."

We rocked down the road for a couple of miles and then turned off to the left, threading our way through the trees which were thin here. Pretty soon we came out on a little knoll which was mostly free of trees but shoulder high in brush; Jeff dropped down to the ground and went ahead, picking out a route for the gun as he went.

In front of us was a shallow valley with rice paddies running along its floor and a stream winding through it. Off to the right, I could see a little strip of blue which was Lingayen Bay.

We plowed through the brush until we got to the knoll's edge where Jeff motioned where he wanted the gun to go. It was a good position. Maybe a mile away, on the other side of the valley, the road angled down in plain sight to cross the stream on a wooden bridge. The stream banks were low and marshy and the Japs would need that bridge if they were going to get across in a hurry—and, at a range of eight hundred yards a three-inch gun can be pretty unhealthy.

"Set her down," Jeff said.

The gun crew didn't waste time. They had spent the last eighteen hours taking it; now that there was a chance to give some of it back they felt better. Corporal Dorsey untied the lashings and then yelled to Homer Burnett.

"Take her away."

The prime mover pulled over to the left out of the way while four men began to pump on the lifting jacks of the gun. Jeff told Pete Dawson to get over and help Homer get the ammunition unloaded out of the truck and then squinted down at the bridge in the valley.

"We'll have to dig the gun in on a slant, Mike," he said. "If we set her level we can't get enough depression to cover the bridge—and I aim to cover the bridge."

He squinted at me and spat and went over to where Corporal Dorsey and a couple of the gun crew were rolling the front bogie off into the brush. Four other men folded down the out-riggers, tipping the carriage so that it rode free of the rear bogies. In another ten minutes Number Two was squatted down on her haunches with her slim muzzle just clearing the tops of the bushes. She looked wicked and business-like and I saw Corporal Dorsey slap her affectionately as he pulled open the breech and looked through the bore.

Over by the prime mover the ammunition handlers were kicking open boxes and carrying the yellow-snouted shells over to stack them in the shallow trenches which Johnson and Felix McCarthy were scooping out behind the gun. Pete Dawson passed me with a couple of the brass-cased rounds on his shoulders.

"Sarge," he said, "maybe I ought to get on my bronco an' go up the road a little to see if anything is goin' on."

Jeff Wheeler and Corporal Dorsey were rigging up a set of sights on the gun—all of our fire control equipment was up north of San Felipe with the rest of the outfit. It didn't matter; for the shooting that we were going to do you didn't need much except open sights and your fuses set at zero.

"You, Pete," Jeff said, "get in the prime mover with Burnett. The two of you are going back after the rest of the ammunition in Joey Farr's truck. The rest of you birds start camouflagin' the gun an' bogies with brush."

Pete went back to the prime mover, grumbling. After the gun crew had got things covered up to Jeff's satisfaction he put them to digging slit trenches and came over to where I was sitting. I passed him the notebook in which I had worked out fuse ranges to the key points in the valley.

"A three-second setting ought to give

you a burst where the road makes a bend to come down into the valley on the other side. A scant one-second setting is what you'll need when they get to the bridge."

"Good enough," Jeff said, squatting on his heels and rolling a cigarette. "I'll handle the pointing myself with Dorsey to take over if I get knocked off. You keep out here where you'll be clear of the muzzle blast an' spot for us, Mike."

Jeff stopped for a minute and listened. Across the valley a machine-gun opened up, pounding out a long burst. Then another gun took it up. They were thirty's, but it was only a minute before I heard a fifty caliber join in with its hoarser cough.

"That's us," Jeff said, licking at the flap of his cigarette. "Things ought to be gettin' warm pretty quick now."

From farther off I heard a single sharp *whack* followed by spiteful noise that a small shell makes when it explodes. A half dozen more *whacks* followed in quick succession and Jeff squinted at me with the cigarette hanging from his lip.

"Thirty-seven millimeters," he said, "or whatever the hell the Japs use for thirty-sevens. That means they have probably got tanks ashore, Mike."

I looked at my watch and it was twenty-five minutes after twelve. There wasn't any wind and the air had the dead, stuffy feel of the inside of a parlor that hasn't been opened for a long time. Clouds were beginning to pile up over Lingayen Bay off to the left and I knew that after awhile it was going to rain. Not that it mattered.

"Jeff," I said, "for awhile we'll hold them down there at the bridge but we can't hold them forever. What do you figure on doing then?"

Jeff sat there with his arms hanging down across his knees while he stared across the valley. He had thrown away his shirt and his sleeveless undershirt was soaked with sweat; a thorn bush had raked a long scratch across one shoulder. Sweat, too, had cut little gullies down through the dust and dried blood and stubble on his cheeks but his eyes were serene.

"As long as the shells hold out we'll keep shootin', Mike," he said.

"And after that?"

"Hell," he said, "I've got enough to worry about without borrowin' trouble. When the ammunition is gone we'll cook up something else to amuse them yellow bellies with."

"That's the point," I told him. "Maybe there won't be time to get the gun out, Jeff, so save out the last two rounds to blow her up with. You don't want the Japs to get her."

His mouth set stubbornly and he flipped away his cigarette. "I've treated that gun like a baby, Mike," he said, "an' I'll be damned if I'm goin' to blow her up. When we go back she goes along with us if I have to carry her on my back."

"You save out a couple of rounds just the same," I said.

A fresh burst of thirty-caliber machine-gun fire—coming from one of the scout cars, I knew—broke out and it was much nearer now. Probably just over the crest on the far side of the valley. Above the sound of the firing I caught the faint drone of an airplane engine lifting and falling in the hot air. Jeff looked up, shading his eyes with his hand.

It was an observation plane circling to the north of us at about six thousand feet. Jeff yelled at the gun crew: "Get under cover an' stay there. An', if anybody does any shootin' before I give the word, I'll tromp him into the ground!"

He crawled off through the brush toward the gun. I eased myself flat where the knoll dropped steeply down into the valley so that I had a good view of the field of fire through a thin fringe of brush. My left arm bothered me considerable and made it awkward to move about much but it couldn't be helped.

It was maybe ten minutes later when I saw one of the scout cars come through the trees on the other side of the

valley. It whipped off the road into a clump of brush; then, after a little, the *whack-whack-whack* of its fifty caliber machine-gun came drifting back through the hot afternoon. I searched the far crest and pretty soon I saw what I had been looking for.

A stubby tank, painted dirty green, nosed over the ridge. It stopped for a minute and then I saw orange flame blossom against its turret as it opened up with its cannon. It fired twice more, the shells bursting in the brush where the scout car was hidden, and then came waddling on down the slope in a clumsy zigzag. Two more tanks came over the crest and the observation plane dropped lower to continue its slow spirals over the valley.

Jeff Wheeler came crawling back to where I lay and I touched him on the shoulder and pointed. He nodded. The scout car suddenly broke loose from the brush and skidded back into the road to go rocking down toward the bridge with its machine-guns hammering back toward the crest. The three tanks had stopped again and shell bursts walked up the road toward the dodging scout car.

"It's goin' to be close," Jeff grunted in a hard voice. "Those birds will lay on the bridge with their thirty-sevens and the cavalry will have to run through the barrage."

Jeff had guessed right. The scout car was still a quarter of a mile from the bridge when the Japs lifted their fire to the river bank—adjusting the range. Four shells burst in a tight little pattern on the far approach to the bridge, kicking up little spurts of dust and smoke which drifted slowly away in the still air. The men in the scout car must have seen those shell bursts but the car came on, gathering speed as it came.

"They're going to try it," I said under my breath.

Jeff Wheeler nodded, his eyes narrow. "That's the lieutenant's car," he said. "He told me he was comin' back across the bridge when he figured he couldn't hold 'em any longer—that bridge is the only crossing between here an' San Felipe. His other two cars must of been knocked off."

I knew the answer but I couldn't help asking the question. It went across the grain to lie there watching those Japs wait to pot the running scout car like a duck on a pond.

"We could cover them a bit if we opened up now," I said. "How about giving the scum a few rounds?"

Jeff said, "Look up there on the hill now, Mike."

Six more tanks had crossed the crest in an uneven line and were nosing their way down the slope. The sound of their engines rumbled faintly across the valley and I could see the blue smoke of their exhausts trickling off through the trees.

"They don't know we're here," Jeff said, half to himself. "If we open up now they'll stay back there on the hill and pick us off with their thirty-sevens. We've got to wait until they get down to the bridge where we can hurt them the most, Mike—because we've only got one gun to sell."

The scout car was a hundred yards from the bridge now, its machine-guns still yammering. I'm not a religious man but I said a quick prayer for them—I figured they needed it and were too busy to attend to the matter themselves.

Jeff said, "That lieutenant's a tough customer. If I could holler down an' ask him what to do, he'd holler back an' tell me to hold my damn fire or he'd kick my spine in. Maybe he's got a trick of his own yet, too."

Well, he did have.

All of a sudden the scout car bucked like a horse and I saw it start to skid sideways on the road. I thought that it had been hit but then I remembered that I hadn't heard a shot and the leading tanks were close enough so that I wouldn't have missed hearing. Dust boiled up in a yellow cloud down there in front of the bridge, hanging like a curtain—then the

scout car came tearing out of the near side of it, going at full speed again as it hit the bridge.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Jeff said under his breath. "He made himself a smoke screen and he's goin' to get away with it!"

The Japs had opened up with their cannon and the little flashes of high explosive blossomed around the bridge. The dust bothered them, though—they couldn't see to aim—and then the scout car was across and running fast down the road to our left where a fold in the ground offered shelter. The car had almost reached the bend where the road began to drop when the cavalrymen's luck ran out.

"Oh, damn it!" Jeff said harshly.

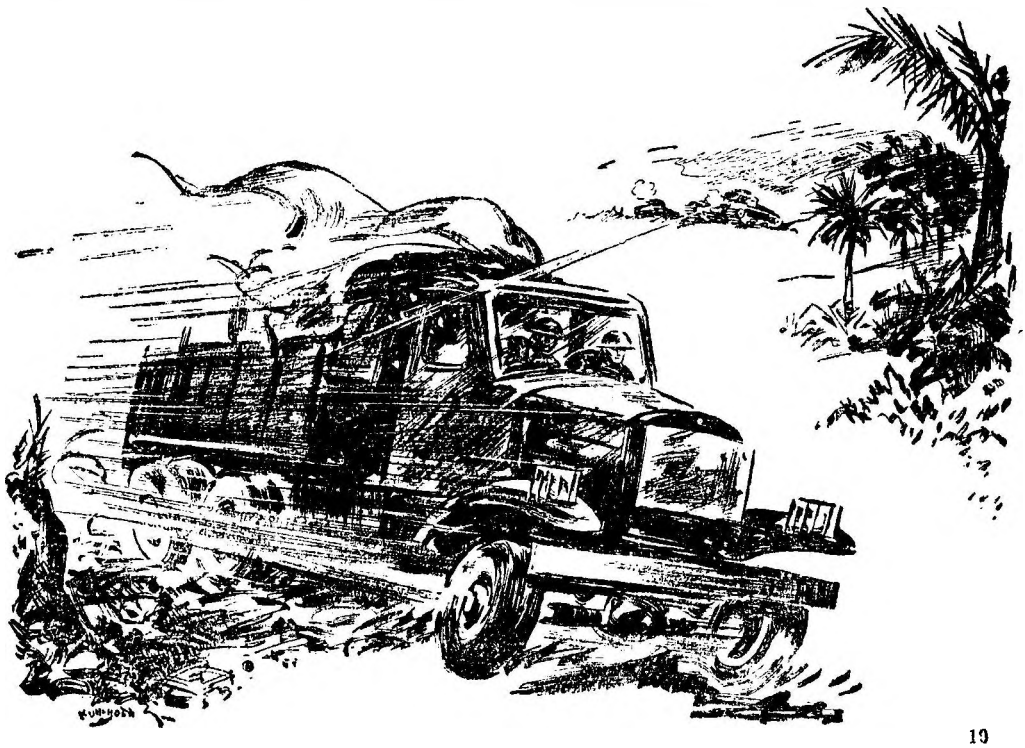
A white flash seemed to wrap itself around the scout car for a moment as one of those wicked little cannon shells tore through the thin armor and exploded. The car rocked crazily and then cut off the road in a vicious swerve. It turned over twice, bouncing through the dust, before a tree stopped it.

Jeff's face wasn't a pleasant thing to look at. "I'll pay you back for that, you yellow pups!" he said between his teeth and went crawling off through the brush toward Number Two gun.

Across the river the three leading tanks had nosed down into the flat of the valley and were coming on slow toward the bridge. The observation plane cruised over us and I guessed that it had radioed down that everything was clear because, pretty soon, the six tanks in the rear came out of the trees and rocked on up.

There was a little cluster of *nipa* shacks bunched up close to the far end of the bridge and all nine of the tanks halted there. After a minute or two I saw bandy-legged little men in baggy uniforms moving back and forth among the houses. Scavenging, like the dirty little jackals they were, I thought. More tanks were coming over the far crest and moving down toward the river.

The afternoon was quiet all of a sudden and I had a sort of a vague and detached feeling as I lay there in the bushes watching the river. There was an unreal-



ity about it—like I was watching a moving picture that I had seen some place before. Part of that was because of my shoulder and the blood I had lost; part of it was because of the hot mugginess of the afternoon. The clouds were piling up in heavy layers and the air had the feel that comes before a storm.

Over at the gun, Jeff and Corporal Dorsey worked carefully—hunched over as they moved under the camouflage. Dorsey held down on the operating lever while Jeff slid a long, brass-cased shell into the breech, pushing it in carefully so that it wouldn't make any noise. Then Dorsey eased the block closed and traversed the gun while Jeff squinted through the sights they had rigged up.

I could see the rest of the gun crew still crouched in the shallow slit trenches they had dug. They fidgeted a little but a man is always a little nervous waiting for his first fight to start. They would be all right when Jeff opened up and they had something to do.

The sound of a tank engine being started up busted the quiet of the afternoon and I went back to my knitting. One of the tanks swung about on its tracks and pulled out of the shelter of the *nipa* shacks, heading toward the bridge. The turret top was open and I could see the tank commander wave his arm for the rest to follow.

He was just going onto the bridge when Number Two whanged wickedly, slamming back against the out-riggers. I saw the shell burst almost immediately—a fat billow of black smoke shot through with red. It was in line with the bridge but short and I yelled at Jeff.

"Lengthen your fuses by a tenth of a second!"

The gun crew had come out of their holes in the ground like they had springs under them and I heard a new shell slam into the bell of the fuse setter and then the steel *snick* of the breech block sliding into place. Number Two banged again and this time the fuse range wasn't too short.

An anti-aircraft shell is a wicked thing, I saw it burst against the leading tank just in front of the turret and, as the smoke thinned a little, there was no tank left—just a smoking pile of scrap iron. The tank commander, who had been standing in the open turret, never knew what hit him.

"Traverse left a little, Ed!" I heard Jeff Wheeler yell. "That's one for the cavalrymen!"

For maybe thirty seconds the other two Jap tanks milled about a little as though they didn't know what to do next; then they spun about, throwing dust up in the hot air, and headed for the *nipa* shacks. Our third shell burst over and a little to the left of one of them; then they were out of sight.

Across the valley I saw other tanks scattering for the shelter of the trees fast and, after a minute, the observation plane came streaking up the valley toward our position. It was my guess that his squint-eyed pals in the tanks were saying some pretty unpleasant things to him right now for letting them get surprised.

Back of me and fifty yards to my left I heard the sudden spiteful *whack* of a thirty-seven millimeter shell exploding and, right after, heard the sound of the gun that fired it. The tanks across the valley were opening up on us with their little cannon and I knew that they would try to keep us down while the tanks behind the *nipa* shacks rushed the bridge.

"Down everybody!" Jeff Wheeler yelled. "Sit tight till I give you the word!"

The observation plane dropped down low—to not more than six hundred feet—and cruised back and forth between us and the river. He hadn't located us yet and so the tanks across the valley were firing blind. A shell hit a tree in front of me and I heard the fragments whine off but, so far, they weren't bothering us any.

The plane turned away from the river and came in straight toward us—it was

only two hundred yards out in front when our fifty-caliber machine-gun began to pound off to the left. I could see the tracers plain against the clouds which were piling up and I knew that they couldn't miss at that range. They arched up to curve over the wings of the plane; then dropped down and I could see them slamming into the engine.

That airplane went to pieces right there not fifty yards in front of us. One second it was there; the next second a wing was spinning down to the ground in a slow spiral and metal was showering down around Number Two gun like heavy rain. Something thudded into the ground in front of me and I saw that it was the piston out of an engine.

The Japs came on again then.

The tanks across the valley started searching for us with their little shells and then I saw one of the tanks, which had taken shelter behind the *nipa* shacks, nose out and start for the bridge with its engine wide open. The other seven came behind. They were going to rush the bridge with sheer weight of numbers because they knew, once across, they could scatter into the brush where we couldn't get at them.

"Let's go!" I heard Jeff yell and then you couldn't hear anything above the noise.

DOWN below, the bridge boiled with fire—that gun crew was laying a shell down there every two seconds—and I had to trust that the fuses were right. There was no chance to make corrections now. I lay there listening to the *whack* of the fuse setter and the slam of the gun and the infernal racket that our shells were making down there in front and I knew that Ed Burnett was being well avenged.

Well, the men and machines never were that could take the hell that Number Two was dealing out. It seemed like a long time but it couldn't have been more than a minute or so when I saw a tank tear out of the smoke and fire at the far edge of the bridge and go rocking back past the shacks. It was followed by three more and they didn't stop but went zigzagging on across the valley until they were swallowed by the brush and trees.

Jeff slammed two more shells after them and then yelled, "Cease firing!" and the afternoon was very quiet all of a sudden.

The gun crew began to straighten up. They were a tough, hard-looking lot now with their shirts ripped by the thorn bushes and their faces streaked with sweat and smoke and dirt — forty-eight hours ago they had been raw recruits just out from the States, but a man grows up fast in battle.

They could be proud enough of the job they had done down there at the bridge. The smoke was clearing away and I saw that we had knocked four of the Jap tanks out cold. Two were over on their sides, smoking, and the other two were just piles of old iron. I had a funny feeling as I lay there looking at them—I wondered if that was some of the scrap that we had sold to them in shiploads back in the days when everybody thought a Jap was just a funny little yellow man that you didn't need to take serious.

Young Whitaker, who had been working the fuse setter, jumped up on the gun platform and stuck his thumb to his nose. "How do you like it, you yellow heels?" he yelled. "We've got more if you've got the guts to come after it!"

Jeff Wheeler yelled at him but he was too late. Something hit with a wicked sounding *thuck* and, across the valley, I heard a Jap machine-gun begin to laugh. Then I heard the bullet start to walk across out front and snap away into the trees and brush behind. Young Whitaker slumped down on the gun platform and, from the way he fell, I knew that he was dead.

"Get into your holes!" Jeff Wheeler snarled hoarsely. "The next man who sticks his nose out before I tell him to gets it busted!"

I could hear the machine-gun bullets skating off Number Two gun as Jeff crawled on his hands and knees to where young Whitaker was, squatted there for a minute and then eased the boy down into the soft dirt beside the outrigger. After a minute he came crawling back with his face grim.

"How many rounds we got left, Joe?" he called to Corporal Dorsey.

"Fifty-three," Dorsey said and Jeff swore.

"And only four tanks knocked out," he said. "We've got tuh do better. Shells don't grow on trees!"

Across the valley the Jap tanks were keeping up a steady sniping at us with machine-guns and thirty-sevens. Their shooting wasn't so good, though, most of the thirty-sevens were exploding in the trees behind us. I guessed that it wouldn't be long before they would get something bigger up on that ridge across the way—even a Jap has got respect for a three-inch gun.

"You all right, Mike?" I heard Jeff say behind me and then he came snaking his way up behind me on his belly. A shell fragment had slashed him across the bridge of his nose and blood oozed down his cheek but he wore his tin hat on the back of his head and his eyes had the same cocky look that they had had back in Tarlac last night.

I had a little trouble in realizing that it was last night that we had been in Tarlac with Jeff complaining that there were no *senoritas*.

"I could do with a beer," I said. "Except for that, I'm okay."

"How's the arm?"

"Still good enough to punch a Jap's nose in," I told him. We both knew that we didn't have a snowball's chance of getting out of here, but there wasn't any use talking about it. "I've seen worse shooting than those lads of yours have been doing."

Jeff squinted down there toward the bridge. "There'll be more scrap iron down there before they finally get across, Mike."

He broke off suddenly and we both listened. There was a dull *boom* coming from across the valley; the Japs had got a field gun into position over there some place. The shell burst a hundred yards off to the left, stripping the branches from a couple of trees and sending a puff of greasy black smoke up into the quiet air.

"Lucky we knocked that damned plane out," Jeff grunted. "They're goin' to have trouble findin' us with that popgun of theirs—I hope."

"I have been looking for more planes to come up," I said. "From what I have seen of these birds they're not going to be satisfied to sit over there in the bushes and look at the bridge. They're going to want to get across."

JEFF nodded soberly. "Mike," he said, "those little yellow devils over there aren't just sittin' in their tanks wonderin' what do they do next. That field piece that just opened up is probably an accompanyin' gun that they had with them. They're usin' that to keep us busy while they send back for their dive bombers. We're in for a busy afternoon."

"Yeah," I said.

I was looking down the valley toward the little patch of blue that was Lingayen Bay and I saw them a split second before Jeff did. Six dots, miles away yet and probably ten thousand feet up, and they were heading in our direction. Jeff squinted at them and then spat.

"Well," he said sourly, "I didn't mean for them to take the words out of my mouth! Take care of yourself, Mike."

He went snaking on off toward the gun and I hunched myself maybe a dozen yards to the left to where rains had cut a shallow gully in the slope. I could still spot from there and it would serve well enough for a fox hole. I rolled over on my side so that I could watch those black dots that were coming in from the sea.

They took shape fast as they bored up the valley.

Things happened fast then.

The planes circled twice over the valley, keeping in formation and probably talking with the tanks down below. Then the field gun opened up fast. The first shell *whanged* down a hundred yards to the left of us; the second about the same distance to the right and I knew that the Japs were marking out the general area where we were located for the dive bombers.

"Keep your noses down until I tell you tuh stick 'em up!" Jeff Wheeler yelled. "Mr. Moto's comin' down to call on us."

You almost had to admire the easy, graceful way they did it. The leading plane dipped over on one wing and then came streaking down; the other two that were with him dived in echelon, one on either side, so that the three of them covered a front of maybe a hundred yards.

They came down fast and the snarl of their engines ate at your ears; then I saw the white tracers bouncing and ricocheting along the edge of the ridge off to the left and knew that they hadn't located us. They knew it, too, and held their bombs.

They went almost directly over my head as they pulled out of their dive and began to zoom. For a split second I could see the Rising Sun painted on the undersides of their wings; thought that I could see the helmeted heads of the aviators as they peered over the edge of their cockpits looking for us. A man feels damned naked lying there like that.

The second flight tipped over into a dive and began to come down now. One of the first three bombers must have spotted our position and radioed it back because I could see that they were looking down our necks on this trip.

They came down like hawks after a duck and with their wings screaming and then all hell broke loose around the gun position. Just before the bombs hit I found myself thinking that it was going to rain before long—the sky was closing in fast and the sun was gone. Then everything went up in orange-streaked smoke and I could hear the iron bees singing away wickedly over my head.

Dust and smoke covered the gun position as I hunched myself up out of the little gully. I couldn't see the gun and felt lonesome and scared all at once. Then I heard Jeff Wheeler's voice.

"The first three are coming down again! Give me a hand, Joe! The rest of you birds keep under cover!"

The smoke thinned out and I saw Jeff climbing up onto the gun platform. Corporal Dorsey came behind him with a three-inch shell cradled in his arms. The first flight of the bombers were almost overhead again and I knew what Jeff was going to do. A dive bomber isn't hard to hit when he is coming straight down your gun barrel—if you've got the guts to wait until he gets close enough.

Well, Jeff had the guts.

I watched the leading plane peel off—they were lower down this time because the rain clouds were closing down fast—then all three were in their dive. Jeff was squatted down behind the breech of Number Two gun with Dorsey at the elevating hand wheel and Pink Cunningham doing the traversing. I could hear Jeff's voice above the growing squall of the engines.

THAT leading bomber was coming down the groove for Number Two gun like he was sliding down a string. Before he dived he had given the signal to the tanks across the valley because I saw them come out of the trees like green ants and begin to streak across the valley. They were going to try a crossing while the bombers kept us busy. I went back to watching the planes.

The second flight swept back across us low, their machine-guns going and then the divers were right on top of us. The leading one couldn't have been two hun-

dred feet up when Jeff Wheeler yanked hard on the lanyard and old Number Two rocked back in her cradle.

The gloom of the afternoon opened up wide—as though the furnace doors of hell had swung out for a moment and then clanged shut again. I felt the hot blast on my face and my eyes hurt from the glare—that leading bomber never knew what hit it. The second plane had been too close. Diving at that speed nothing could stop it, but I saw its wings fold back like the petals on a flower and it drove into the ground fifty feet in front of where I lay—exploded like a giant firecracker.

Everything went up in flame as the bombs from the third ship struck and, against the fire-streaked smoke, I saw Jeff just as an invisible hand seemed to knock him across the gun platform and a dozen feet away into the churned earth. Dorsey was down, too, and I couldn't see Pink Cunningham. The world stunk of burned explosive and stones and chunks of dirt were still showering down.

Down below in the valley the leading tank was almost up to the bridge. Behind it came the rest, strung out in columns like lumbering wolves with their noses down to the trail. I got up to my feet and started to run toward the gun.

A voice bawled hoarsely, "Come on, boys! Man the gun! What the hell do you think you're drawin' thirty bucks a month for?"

It was Jeff Wheeler! He came stumbling, half-naked, through the brush with his hair singed tight to his scalp and his face black with powder smoke. I had known Jeff to be a tough man but I hadn't known that he would be that hard to kill.

The rest of the gun crew saw him and came snarling out of their holes—only there weren't many left now. Five of us, counting myself. Joe Dorsey was lying across the elevation setter's seat with his head down on the platform and I pulled him away and got hold of the handwheel. The muzzle of the gun came down slowly; the gears had been jammed by that last bomb. By hunching myself sideways I got my bad arm up so that I could use both hands.

"Down a little more, Mike!" Jeff yelled at me.

I heard the shell slam into the breech and then the platform jumped under me and the gun tube shot back. Our fire had blasted away the brush in front and, after the smoke cleared a little, I could see the bridge. Our first shell burst just at the near end.

"Up five miles!"

THE leading tank was on the bridge now; the rest—I had lost all count of how many of them there were—were converging toward that bottle-neck like they were following the sticks on a fan. The platform began to buck and rock under me like a ship in a heavy sea and the sound of our fire was a steady drum in my ears. Down there in the valley the bridge was a smother of smoke and flame.

Well, we stopped them again.

I saw them begin to pull back out of the smoke but they didn't retire to the far side of the valley this time. They scattered and zigzagged out of sight behind the cluster of *nipa* houses. By now they knew that there were only a few of us and that we had only one gun. We couldn't afford to scatter shells through the shacks just on the chance that we'd hit one of them. And they would make another try and another after that. I had seen enough of the little yellow buzzards to know that.

Jeff came around to my side of the gun, wiping the water off his face with his forearm. It had started to rain but I hadn't noticed it before. I was thankful for it, though; it might keep those bombers off our necks.

"Get back into your holes!" Jeff said in his flat voice. "They'll try shootin' us up again in a minute."

He was right. They had moved their field gun—maybe a couple of them—up

to positions close to the river bank and now we began to get a taste of what we had been dishing out. They knew exactly where we were and they plastered us with a hail of shell and machine-gun fire that pinned us down like you pin a bug to a card.

I yelled at Jeff, "We've got to try and knock them out! It's the only chance we've got!"

Jeff was hunched down in a shallow hole behind one of the out-riggers with a soggy cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth and the rain washing the dirt from his naked shoulders. The afternoon was wearing on.

"We've got five rounds left, Mike!" he yelled back at me. "We'll save 'em to cover the bridge!"

Well, he was right. As long as the gun wasn't hit and as long as we had anything left to shoot we would make that bridge hard to cross. That was the important thing. So I lay back in my fox hole and let the rain drip down cool into my face and wondered what was happening to the rest of the outfit up around San Felipe. When we joined up with them again we would sure be able to tell them about the war.

Over in the hole next to mine I heard Pink Cunningham talking excitedly about something. I didn't pay much attention —what the hell was there for a man to get excited about *now?* Then the import of Pink's words finally beat an impression into my mind.

"By God!" he was saying. "If it ain't Homer an' Pete back with the prime mover! Will you look at them crazy fools come down that hill!"

I HUNCHED myself up cautiously out of my hole because machine-gun bullets were cutting through the bushes with that *whack-whack* that sounds as though it was just inches above your ears. The rain was coming down in a gray curtain now and, through it, I saw the prime mover at the top of the hill. The Japs had seen it, too, because a shell blossomed like a red flower against the trees just behind it.

Jeff Wheeler jumped up, waving his arms. He had forgotten about those machine-gun bullets—or maybe he just didn't give a damn about them as he stopped waving and cupped his hands around his mouth.

"Get back over the hill!" he yelled.

I saw Homer Burnett stick his head out of the cab as the prime mover rocked on down the road toward the bridge. Another shell slammed into the hillside maybe thirty yards away, throwing up a soggy geyser of mud and leaves. Jeff Wheeler groaned.

"He'll never be able to get that truck turned around now — if he'd only had sense enough to stay back of the ridge we might have been able to carry the shells down by hand!"

The Japs were turning everything that they had onto the prime mover now; it made a nice target against the road and they knew well enough that it was hauling ammunition. It looked to me as though the high explosive was bursting right under its wheels but Homer Burnett kept it rolling—how he did it I'll never know.

We squatted there and watched—there wasn't anything else that we could do. Behind me I could hear Pink Cunningham mumbling to himself half under his breath.

"Look at 'im go, the damn fool! I always knew that guy was crazy! Look at 'im go!"

The road dropped down in a steep, half-mile stretch to the bridge and the big prime mover gathered speed, leaving the shell bursts a little behind. From across the river came a hell of machine-gun and thirty-seven fire all converging on the jouncing truck. And still it kept going.

It came to my mind that Homer Burnett had gone crazy and was figuring on charging the bridge alone. It didn't make sense because a man doesn't get that crazy.

Jeff Wheeler turned around to look at me with the cigarette still dangling from his lips.

"We could have done an awful lot of shootin' with those shells that are headin' for the river, Mike," he said slowly. "Well, we'll have to shoot with what we've got."

I tried to open my mouth to tell him but I was all choked up suddenly and so I just pointed.

I had been wrong about Homer Burnett. He wasn't a chump and he wasn't crazy—he was a soldier who wasn't afraid to take a chance when there was a job to be done. He had seen, when Jeff had yelled at him, that there wasn't any chance to get back up the hill without being hit and losing the shells and he knew that we needed those shells bad. So he had stepped on the gas.

The prime mover must have been doing fifty miles an hour when it struck the flat stretch which led to the bridge. Then I saw it skid, throwing mud in sheets, and head on off up the valley at right angles to the road. For a minute I thought it was going to turn over but then inside wheels settled down and it came on, running parallel to the river and not three hundred yards from where all those Jap guns sat.

Homer Burnett had not been able to bring those shells down to us the easy way. So he was going to try and bring them up the hard way. Jeff Wheeler spat out his cigarette.

"By God!" he said hoarsely. "He's going to try an' run his cock-eyed truck up here right under their yellow noses! Stand by on the gun!"

Down below us the prime mover was rocking and bucking along the valley floor like a ship riding out a heavy sea. It was slowing up and shell fire blossomed all around it. Then Homer swung left again and headed up the slope toward us. I heard the clash of gears as Homer shifted and then the deep-throated bellow of the engine as the old girl got her teeth into it.

He didn't have a chance, though. As they had fled along the valley floor the prime mover had been a hard target to hit; now it was moving straight away from the river and it would be like shooting a squirrel sitting on a limb. The Japs knew it, too, because their fire slackened off for a minute while they waited for the prime mover to straighten out and slow up as it started to climb.

"We got to give him a hand," Jeff said. "To hell with the bridge!"

I was stiff from the rain and I had trouble in crawling up onto the gun platform. Jeff gave me a hand and I squatted down on the elevation setter's seat; for some reason I was very tired and that worried me a little. It must have been because I had lost a good deal of blood, I thought.

"Elevate a little, Mike," Jeff said.

I jiggled the handwheel and sat there looking at the elevation indicator. My back was turned to the truck but I could hear her engine still growling down the slope. Then Jeff yanked at the lanyard and the platform bucked under me; the Japs were shooting at us again, I knew, because I heard a machine-gun bullet hit an outrigger and go whining off.

We fired slow because we had to make those five rounds last. It must have been getting close to dark because I couldn't see things down in the valley so very well any more. I could still hear the prime mover, though, roaring steady as it bucked at the slope and I kept pushing at the elevating handwheel as though that would help Homer bring her through.

The gun banged again and I heard the empty case clatter against the gun platform. I jiggled the handwheel some more and waited for the next round to go off but nothing happened; then I counted back in my mind and I knew that the five rounds were gone.

Jeff said, "That's all there is—there ain't any more. Get down into your holes, you guys."

Above the sound of the machine-guns across the river I thought that I could still hear the growl of the prime mover's engine but I couldn't see her. Jeff was half crouched beside the breech of the gun with the firing lanyard still in his hand and a sort of a surprised look on his face as he listened and looked down the slope toward the bottom of the valley. The fire slackened off for a minute and then I knew for sure that I could still hear the truck.

"He's pulled something somehow," Jeff mumbled, half to himself, "but I'll be damned if I know how he did it!" and he started off through the bushes to the left at a stumbling run.

The Jap machine-guns opened up on us again in full fury and I yelled at what was left of the gun crew to hit their holes. When I saw that they were down, I started off after Jeff but Pink Cunningham got me by the arm and pulled me down into the mud of one of the fox holes.

Pink had blood running down the back of his left hand and there was a crease in his tin hat where a bomb fragment had nicked him.

"Take it easy, Sarge," he said. "You ain't goin' tuh do no good runnin' around with that bum arm. When Jeff wants us he'll let us know."

Well, Pete Dawson told me about it later.

There was a deep ravine, filled with brush, which angled off from the valley floor and led back behind where we had Number Two gun in position. Homer Burnett had seen it that morning—that was the reason he had taken a chance on bringing that ammunition up the valley when he saw that he couldn't get back to the road.

It was boggy, though, where it opened out into the valley and so, for maybe the first hundred yards, he had had to take the prime mover straight up the slope with half of the Jap army shooting at him with machine-guns. The bullets started coming through the top of his cab and Pete Dawson had expected to hear those shells go up in a cloud of smoke any minute.

It was the longest hundred yards he ever hoped to see, he told me. Then they were on the lip of the ravine with the side dropping down twenty or thirty feet on a fifty degree slope in front of them.

"Hang on," Homer Burnett told Pete. "You go out over the hood an' it'll be just too bad!"

Then he yanked hard on the wheel and twenty tons of prime mover and three-inch shells tipped down into that hole in the ground. They went down with the wheels locked and Homer fighting the big truck to keep her from turning over; then, just before they hit the bottom, Homer kicked the brakes off and gave her the gun.

For a minute Pete thought that they were going to be stuck there—and then they might just as well have left those shells piled back on the road where Joey Farr's truck was wrecked. Homer broke her loose, though. It was a pretty bit of driving to watch, Pete said. The old girl squatted down on her haunches, chewing at the ground with all ten wheels and then she started to pull on up the ravine, busting through the brush and running down trees like she was a tank.

"Her mamma must have been a goat," Pete said reverently.

A bend in the ravine hid them from the river and the Jap machine-guns and Pete figured that he ought to say something. Homer Burnett didn't answer him—just hunched over the wheel and kept the prime mover climbing up the gut of the ravine. He had never been one to talk much.

Jeff Wheeler slid down into the ravine just as Homer eased the truck between a couple of trees and out into a little patch where the brush wasn't so thick. Jeff waved his arm and came clawing his way through the brush to climb up onto the running board. He slapped Homer's shoulder with his hand.

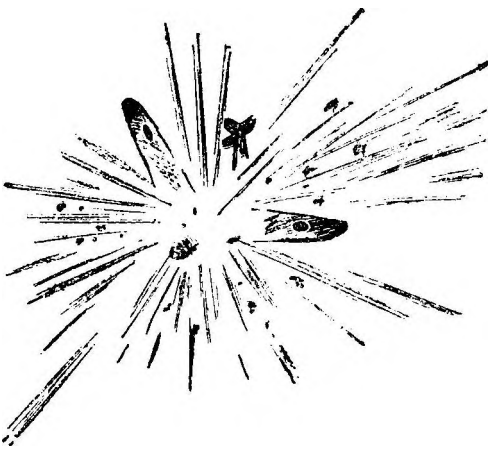
"Stop her, kid!" he said. "By God,

you've done a job of work this afternoon!"

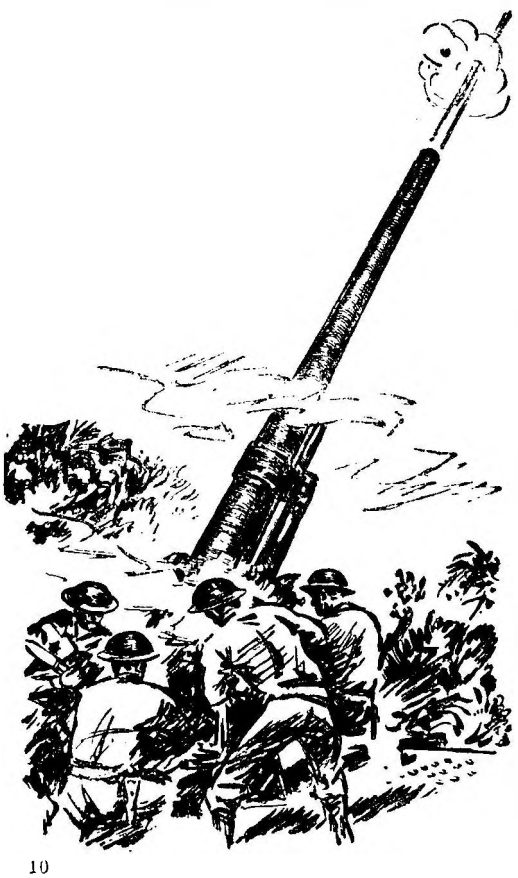
Homer Burnett stopped the truck and sat there looking at Jeff for a minute without saying anything. Pete Dawson said that he had the same funny feeling in his stomach again that he had had out there just before they tipped down into the ravine and when he was expecting a Jap bullet to bore in between his shoulder blades any minute. It was the look on Homer Burnett's face and the sound of his voice that did it, so Pete said.

"Sergeant Wheeler," Homer Burnett said finally, "I brought these here shells up because I figured that Ed would have wished me to do it. I did not do it for a favor to you an' I want you to understand that there is a matter between me an' you to be settled."

For a minute Jeff stood there with his mouth a little open. Then he blinked and laughed harshly. "Man," he said, "I'd



settle with the devil an' at his own price if he brought me a truck load of shells. Let's go—those saffron-colored buzzards are liable to get the idea that they can get across our bridge."



THE rain had stopped and the cloud blanket was beginning to break up into climbing pillars which were gold and scarlet over in the west. I didn't like that—it was liable to bring the dive bombers down on our necks again. Then Jeff Wheeler came crawling back through the brush, dragging two three-inch rounds of ammunition along with him. Homer Burnett and Pete were right behind him, each with two more. I was never so glad to see anybody in my life.

"Mike," Jeff Wheeler said to me, "you an' Pink stick with the gun in case anything starts. The rest of us will bring up the rest of the ammunition. We'll have a little fun out of this war yet."

He grinned flatly at me and went off with the others behind him. I watched them go and they were as dirty and hard-bitten an outfit as I ever saw—yet they had been recruits not a week ago. Well, a man grows up fast when he's holding a bridge.

Pink Cunningham slid a shell into the breech and then the two of us squatted down behind the outriggers, watching the valley. The machine-gun fire had died

down and the shell fire had stopped altogether. The Japs knew that we had got more ammunition, I guessed, but I didn't have any hopes that they had given up getting across. They were just thinking up a new play. We had held them up for close to five hours now and they didn't like it because it was losing face for them —a thing they couldn't stand.

So I guessed that they would make another try before dark. Well, I wasn't wrong.

Nothing happened for the next half hour but I could see them moving across the valley and I guessed that they were bringing up reinforcements — probably artillery. Overhead, the clouds had broken away into long windrows which led out over the Lingayen Gulf and I expected to see a squadron of bombers come beating up any minute.

Jeff and his crew brought in the last of the shells and then Jeff crawled up to where I was hunched down behind the outrigger. He wiped a dirty forearm across his forehead and spat.

"We've got a hundred an' three rounds, Mike," he said quietly. "That'll hold 'em for a little while."

"What do you figure to do when it's gone?" I asked him.

Jeff reached out and slapped the outrigger with his hand. "Hitch up an' run like hell, Jeff," he said. "Those birds aren't goin' to get my gun."

I thought of the road that went back to Concepcion and I thought of those bogs through which we had winched our way this morning but I didn't say anything. A man had a right to his fancies.

Pete Dawson crawled over with a couple of tins of rations and a canteen of water and the three of us ate. It tasted good. Pete tossed the empty cans out into the brush and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand—nothing much bothered Pete for long.

"Well," he said philosophically, "I don't have tuh worry about that condemned motorcycle any more. A bomb must of fell right on top of it because there ain't enough of it left to make a good paper weight now."

Pink Cunningham, who was in one of the fox holes over to the left, said, "You'll worry about it when you find that the supply sergeant has stuck it on your payroll."

"He can't do that to me," Pete said angrily. "That motorcycle was busted up in the line of duty."

"Not to no supply sergeant, it wasn't," Pink told him.

"Oh, well," Pete said, "maybe he'll get killed up at San Felipe—or wherever he is. Anyway, if he tries tuh stick me for that heap of junk he'll have an argument on his hands."

Pete went crawling on off toward where Pink Cunningham was and I could hear them arguing in the evening. Jeff Wheeler chewed on a stick and squinted at me thoughtfully.

"Mike," he said, "those are good boys."

IT CAME just before dark and it was like the others only twice as bad, this time. The Japs must have moved up three batteries over on the other bank of the river and then opened up suddenly with a hell of shell fire which swaddled us up like a blanket. Then the bombers came —they meant to soften us up right this time.

We couldn't do anything but wait.

I don't know how long it lasted. Five minutes, maybe. Maybe ten; maybe half an hour. Time doesn't mean much when the ground is rocking and swaying under you like the deck of a ship; when the roar of shell explosions and the scream of planes seems to take the top off of your head and when your eyes ache from the yellow furnace glare of bursting high explosive.

I couldn't see the river but, somehow, Jeff did. The tanks were making another bid for it and Jeff got out of his hole and

climbed on the gun platform behind the breech. The rest of us followed after him and then Number Two was spitting red flame and adding her high-pitched bark to the hell that was going on there on the hillside.

Well, we stopped them all but one. I saw it come out of the smoke on our side of the bridge and go careening toward the bend in the road where the wrecked scout car lay. Our shell bursts chased it as a dog chases a rabbit and then fire licked out from its sides suddenly and it seemed to lift a little and then squat down in the road.

"There's a couple of rickshaw pullers to ride you around hell, Cavalry!" Jeff Wheeler said between his teeth.

We swung the gun muzzle back onto the bridge and left the tank to sit there and burn. The night was coming down fast now and the far side of the valley was deep in haze—that bridge was a mess. I counted the wrecks of seven tanks piled up there, turrets and tracks ripped off and smoke curling out of them.

The firing stopped all at once and the evening was quiet with a quietness that was almost as hard on your ears as the noise had been. The only sound was the faint drone of the dive bombers which were winging off down the aisles of the clouds toward Lingayen and the stutter of a wounded tank engine behind the *nipa* houses. Like magic the valley had become empty. Nothing moved out there and, except for the piled up junk at the bridge end and the scarred ground, you wouldn't know that a fight had been going on. I almost expected to see some of those shirt-tailed little Filipino kids come out of the houses and start playing in the twilight.

Pink Cunningham said, "Pete, you got a cigarette?"

"Naw," Pete told him from across the gun. "I don't use 'em. Smokin' shortens your life."

I put a hand against the gun to get up from the elevation setter's stool and burned my hand on the hot barrel. Jeff Wheeler had limped back to the hole where we had the ammunition hid. There wasn't much of it left, I knew—we had been pouring it out too fast for that. Back behind the gun breech the brass cartridge cases were piled up in a big heap.

A man was groaning softly in the brush over on the far side of the gun position and I crawled across on my hands and knees to see who it was. Robin Dubonnet, who had been working the fuse setter, was kneeling down between the outriggers and I could see someone lying stretched out on the ground just beyond him. Robin looked at me over his shoulder as I crawled up and his face was all twisted up underneath the dirt and powder smoke.

"It's Marty, Sarge," he said. "He was passin' me a shell when that last bomb come down—it's busted him all to hell from the waist down. If I could get my hands on the filthy rat that done it, I'd—aw, what's the use!"

Marty lay there quietly while Robin and I tied him up the best we could. That wouldn't do any good, I knew, but it might make him feel better. Marty knew, though.

"I'm hurt pretty bad, ain't I, Sarge?" he asked.

"Naw," Robin said before I could answer. "You'll feel swell soon as we can get yuh back to a hospital. Think of havin' nothin' to do but lie around between clean sheets all day with a pretty nurse lookin' after yuh."

It didn't fool Marty—I reckon he could feel the black wings brushing down close over him. I held him up a little so that he could drink out of my canteen and then eased him back. When he spoke again his voice was thick and a little wheezy.

"Sarge," he said, "there's something that I'd sure be obliged if you would do for me."

"Sure," I told him. "Let's hear it, kid."

"My old man lives back in Fernsdale, Iowa—he runs the garage there. Well,

I used tuh cause him a lot of trouble that I shouldn't tuh have."

Marty stopped and was quiet for so long that I wondered if he had gone on West—but he hadn't. He started to speak again; slower this time.

"If you'd just write him a postcard sometime, Sarge, an' tell him that I was with you fellows up here I'd be obliged."

"Sure," I said. "Sure."

After awhile I crawled back to my own side of the gun. The night was closing in the fast way it does in the Philippines and it would be full dark before long. I found Jeff Wheeler over on the little knoll where I had observed from earlier. He was watching the bridge but he wouldn't be able to see it much longer.

"Hello, Mike," he said to me as I came up and his voice sounded tired. "How you holdin' out?"

"Okay," I told him. "They got Marty this last time."

Jeff didn't say anything—just lay there with his chin on his arms while he looked at the bridge. Over by the gun I could hear Pink and Pete Dawson still jawing at each other.

"We've got about forty rounds left," Jeff said to me finally. "Enough for one more show—if we get a chance to use 'em. It's close to three hours before the moon will be up an' I figure they'll try to sneak across as soon as it gets good an' dark."

"It's likely," I said.

"An' they'll swim riflemen across to work up to where they can snipe us off when the moon comes."

"That's likely, too."

"So we've got tuh pull out, Mike. That Number Two gun has done too good a job of work today to let any dirty Togo get his hands on her. I'm damned if I'm goin' to!"

"How do you figure to do it?"

Jeff scrubbed a hand across the dirty bristles on his face and looked down toward the river. A little light still glowed along the water and, farther along, the *nipa* houses bulked dimly against the night. Everything was quiet over on the other bank—too quiet.

"Mike," Jeff Wheeler said softly, "I figure I've got one card left to play an' it ain't a bad card, at that. The Japs have got some of their tanks an' maybe a field gun or two hid in the village over there. That *nipa* will burn like hell in spite of the rain this afternoon. So, when it gets good an' dark, I'm goin' across the river an' indulge in a little bit of arson for myself. Here's what I want you tuh do."

It was a crazy scheme—crazy enough to work.

JEFF would take Homer Burnett with him and the two of them would take the fifty-caliber machine-gun, which was busted up some but still would shoot, and work it down to the river where it could cover the bridge. Then Jeff would leave Homer at the gun and swim across, set fire to the nearest of the *nipa* houses, and then come back.

"The wind's comin' up," Jeff said, "an' that village will go up like a Japanese lantern. As soon as it gets to goin' good, you open up with that last forty rounds. Shoot at anything you see move an', if you don't see anything move, scatter your shells wherever it looks as though somebody might be hidin'. Then get the gun up on her wheels just as fast as God will let yuh."

"Are the bogies all right?" I asked him.

"Yeah," Jeff said. "I checked 'em. Luck has been sittin' on our shoulder today. Homer Burnett an' I will cover the bridge tuh keep any tanks they got left from gettin' across while you're gettin' into traveling position."

"It's a chance," I said, but I knew that a man going over Niagara Falls in a barrel had a better one. "If we can get back to Concepcion maybe we can join up with the rest of the outfit."

"Yeah," Jeff told me in a sort of an absent tone. "Pete Dawson will have to

handle the prime mover—Burnett is the only man who is husky enough tuh help me man-handle the fifty-caliber down to the river. Well, let's be gettin' back to the gun—there ain't nothin' to be seen out here no more."

We went on back through the bushes and Jeff called Homer Burnett over to one side. "Homer," he said, "you an' I are goin' down to the river. I figure that goin' down to the river won't bother a guy who would drive a prime mover right past the whole damned Jap army. How about it?"

Homer didn't say anything—just stood there, a hulking, bulky man in the dark. It came to me that, if I was Jeff Wheeler, I'd pick somebody else to go with me on a job like this. Pink Cunningham wasn't as big as Homer but he was plenty husky enough to help with the machine-gun. I guessed that Jeff had his own reasons, though, and said nothing.

"Where's your rifle?" Jeff said.

"In the prime mover."

"Get it," Jeff told him. "We'll start as soon as you get back. The rest of you birds work the bogies up into position—you ain't goin' tuh have all night to get the old girl up onto her rubber an' started to rollin'."

For a minute Homer Burnett just stood there; then he started off toward where the prime mover was without saying anything.

Jeff fished around in the dark until he found a rifle and then sat down on the gun platform while he wiped the mud from the breech.

Down in front of us, close to the river, a voice called out of the darkness in broken English. The sound of it carried up clearly to us and Jeff swore under his breath and slipped a shell into the chamber of the rifle.

"Better you surrender, I think," it said. "What you say? Eh? We treat you okay."

"Why the dirty buzzard!" Pink Cunningham said. "I've a good notion tuh go down there an' kick his pants up between his shoulder blades for him!"

"Shut up," Jeff told him.

The voice was silent for a moment; then it came drifting back up to us. "I tell you very good, you fella," it said. "You no scare. I work in hotel in California four year so I no make lie to you. We treat you okay."

Jeff spat and leaned the rifle against the gun platform. "You tell him, Pink," he said. "I ain't got the command of bad language that you have."

Pink told him.

"An' when you get through doin' that come on up an' get us," he ended up.

Rifle bullets clipped the bushes around us and, from the sound of it, I guessed that the Japs had got a squad across the river. Time was getting short. We swung the gun around and laid her on the place where the rifle fire had come from.

"Three rounds ought tuh do it," Jeff said between his teeth. "Let her go!"

NUMBER TWO gun banged wickedly, the muzzle blast lighting up the trees around us—banged again twice. Down by the river I saw a short, stocky figure silhouetted against the flash as the first shell burst. The next two bursts showed nothing but the swift flicker of light on the water and then the echoes rolled away and everything was quiet again.

"That bird won't tell nobody else that he's from California," Pink Cunningham said grimly.

Homer Burnett came back through the brush with his rifle slung from his shoulder. Overhead the stars were beginning to come out. Jeff put a hand on my good shoulder.

"Mike," he said, "you know what tuh do—don't let anybody keep you from gettin' the gun back. Hear?"

Funny. I was twenty years older than Jeff Wheeler but it seemed natural that he should be talking to me so—sort of in the way that a father would talk. The last

twenty-four hours had done things to Jeff Wheeler, though; they had burned out the base metal in the man and left only the stuff of which the George Custers and the Sergeant Yorks of the world are made of.

"Well, so-long, Mike," Jeff said in the dark. "Fire a rifle three times when you get the gun out onto the road an' we'll meet you there. Come on, kid."

Homer Burnett shuffled forward and then the night swallowed the two of them.

Homer told me the story afterwards.

THEY found the gun. A bomb had kicked it over on its side but they dug it out of the dirt and Jeff worked over it a minute, making sure that it would still function. Then they started off toward the river with Jeff carrying the gun and the water chest; Homer came behind with the tripod over his shoulders and a belt of cartridges looped around his neck.

It was nasty going in the dark and Homer fell down a half a dozen times with the tripod threatening to crack his neck any minute. The dangling ends of the ammunition belt hammered at his knees and tripped him up if he lifted his feet too high going through the brush. It took them a good twenty minutes to reach the bend in the road which commanded the bridge.

"Wait here," Jeff said, putting down the gun.

He padded forward silently in the soft mud of the road and the darkness reached out and swallowed him in a limitless gullet. Homer sat down and waited. He didn't think; just sat there and, after a little while, Jeff came back. Homer was glad to see him; it was lonesome sitting there in the road alone.

"The bridge is about seventy-five yards up in front," Jeff whispered. "We've busted the hell out of it but there's enough of it left to let a tank cross. The road runs straight ahead from here an' we'll be lookin' down the throat of anybody that tries to get across. Well, time's a-wastin', kid. Let's get back after the rest of the stuff before those birds take a notion to come lookin' for us."

They went back up the slope, moving cautiously in the starlight. They missed their way a little and had to hunt around before they found the old gun position.

Homer shouldered the heavy yoke of the gun mount and Jeff hung the two ammunition belts that were left around his neck and picked up one of the empty ammunition chests. A fifty-caliber machine-gun is not so likely to jam when the belt feeds from an ammunition chest—and Jeff Wheeler was making sure that his gun didn't jam when the show opened up.

The going was easier as they went back toward the river. They found the gun and worked swiftly setting up the mount and settling the gun into it. Then Jeff pulled back on the operating handle and let the bolt *snick* forward into place again.

Jeff grunted in a pleased way. "She'll work. Hand me a belt, kid."

He slid the belt end into the feed slot and pulled back twice again on the operating handle. The belt jerked forward as a cartridge fed into the chamber; then Jeff pushed the safety catch over and came around to where Homer was standing.

"I think she's okay, kid," he said in a low voice. "Anyway, we've got to take the chance that she is. I'm goin' on across the river now, leavin' you here with the gun. If things go right I'll be back here before the shootin' starts. That don't matter, though. The thing that matters is that you don't let anything with wheels on it come across that bridge until Number Two gets clear. Savvy?"

"Yes, sir," Homer told him sullenly.

FOR a minute Jeff Wheeler stood there in the moonlight, his legs spraddled a little, while he looked at Homer. Homer told me that, all of a sudden, he was able to see Jeff plain—like he had seen him when the Jap dive bombers were coming down this afternoon. Half-naked and

smeared with dirt and smoke but with something in his eyes that kept the rest of us at the gun when all hell was busting loose around us. For the first time Homer was beginning to feel that thing that I had felt when Jeff said "so-long" in the dark.

"Kid," Jeff said, "you hate me but that don't matter to either of us now. What matters is that we have got a job to do. I brought you along with me because I figured you were a man to do a job. I wasn't wrong, was I?"

Homer didn't say anything, he told me, for a long time. He wasn't a very bright man but it came to him, standing there in the dark, that he didn't hate Jeff Wheeler any more. He was scared, too; scared of that sinister huddle of *nipa* shacks across the river an the squat, yellow-skinned men who hid there. Scared of the quiet of the night and of the half-wrecked bridge; scared most of all that he might let Jeff Wheeler down because Jeff was going across there alone, taking the thousand to one chance in order that the job might be done.

"Naw," he mumbled, "you wasn't wrong, Sargint."

Homer was lonesome—lonesome as hell —after Jeff had gone.

He sat there on the water chest, straining his ears to catch the first sound of something coming across the bridge but he couldn't hear anything except the faint gurgle of the water and the rustle of the wind through the brush. Off to the right a faint glow was beginning to mark the place where the moon would come up.

The time passed slow.

A single shot *whacked* faintly far up the river and it was followed by a couple more. Homer saw the flashes and his nerves tightened up like springs. Then he looked back toward the bridge and his imagination suddenly saw a dark shape which seemed to take form down the road. Goose flesh was prickling along his spine as he jumped to the gun and pushed back the safety lock.

The gun yammered and jumped under his hands and the tracers stabbed red fingers into the night as they fled toward the bridge. By their light Homer saw that the road was empty — he was firing at shadows and he had given away the position of the gun!

The other bank of the river suddenly awoke. A single shot *banged* viciously and then a tommy-gun took up a stuttering yammer. Another joined in and after that another. Homer heard excited shouts and he was suddenly sick as he knew what he had done—that was Jeff Wheeler that they were shooting at over there!

He told me afterwards that he couldn't remember all that happened. A field gun went off across the river and the shell burst a hundred yards up the road from him—he knew that he had to get the machine-gun out of there or they would knock it out and then the bridge would be open.

More guns had joined in the chorus now. Bullets sang spitefully through the bushes and ricocheted, screaming, off the road while high explosive searched the area in methodical steps. Homer didn't notice. His mind was fixed on one thing —he had let Jeff Wheeler down; now he must do the thing that Jeff Wheeler had told him to do. He must see that nothing on wheels crossed the bridge.

He got his shoulders under the tripod and carried it, gun and all, on down the road. A shell flash showed him the bridge just ahead and he slid down into the ditch beside the road and set the gun up again with its muzzle just clearing the bank. It would be harder for the Japs to knock it out here. He went back for the rest of the ammunition belts and the water chest, plodding with his head down and the bullets snipping the leaves from the bushes on either side of him.

As he came back to the gun he saw the red glow across the river and knew that Jeff Wheeler had set fire to the shacks before they got him. That glow flamed a

rich crimson against the night and grew swiftly brighter. Then Homer heard the clatter of engines and knew that they were coming toward the bridge.

He waited until he could hear the clatter of tracks fifty yards in front of him. Then, in the growing light, he caught sight of a lumbering shape just beyond the bridge and he leaned his weight against the gun and pressed the trigger hard.

WE HEARD the firing start across the river and stood by. I felt old and tired and sick because there was no sign of the *nipa* shacks being fired and I guessed that they had got Jeff. Pink Cunningham, standing beside me, had guessed the same thing because he was swearing in a vicious, rasping voice. Then he stopped suddenly and grabbed me by the arm.

"By God, Sarge!" he said. "Look over to the right—he's done it!"

I saw the glow—it grew bigger rapidly and, in five minutes, the huddle of shacks was a bonfire. I could see bandy-legged little men running in the glare and then a tank broke free from the shifting shadows and started for the bridge. I heard the fifty-caliber begin its hoarse stutter down there somewhere near the bridge.

"Let's go!" I said. "Fire!"

Pete Dawson yanked back on the lanyard. We laid our shells against those tanks and into the burning houses and along the river bank where flashes showed where the field guns were hidden. Our high explosive did deadly work. It tossed chunks of flaming *nipa* into the marsh grass along the river bank and drove out the machine-gunners there; it sent the tanks lurching back to the shelter of the trees across the valley and it silenced the field guns at almost point-blank range. The Jap's fire died down to a trickle and then was quiet altogether.

We scattered the last seven rounds up the road from the bridge and then Pete Dawson kicked a smoking brass cartridge case free of the gun platform and spat.

"Last round," he said. "Time to go."

The moon was just beginning to come up as we tightened down the last dog, clamping the outriggers to the bogies. Pete Dawson backed the prime mover in easy and we lashed the tow bar of the gun to the broken pintle.

"Load up," I said. "Let's go."

We hit the road, crawled across a little rise and dropped down into a fold in the ground just as the moon broke free of the trees on the ridge across the valley behind us.

It had been a near thing. Pete Dawson stopped the prime mover and dropped down into the mud with his rifle in his hands. He fired three shots into the air, one after another. Then he and I went back fifty yards to where we could look back down into the valley.

It was maybe ten minutes later when we made out somebody coming up the road in the moonlight. We went down to meet him. It was Jeff and he had Homer Burnett over his shoulder.

Pete Dawson tried to take Homer but Jeff said, "I can handle him," and the three of us went on down to where the prime mover was.

We put Homer in the bed of the truck —he was shot up bad but was still alive. Jeff Wheeler looked down at him, running a dirty hand across his chin.

"You did a good job of work, kid," he said and his voice was tired. "Get him to a hospital if you can, Mike."

Jeff went on back in the truck and broke open the last two chests of fifty-caliber ammunition—looped the belts around his neck. He climbed down into the mud again and stood there for a moment, running his hand across his chin. Pete Dawson and Pink came around the gun and there was a scared look on their faces.

"Mike," Jeff Wheeler said to me, "it's up to you—an' Pete an' Pink here—to get the gun back. It ain't goin' to be easy."

I was tired and my shoulder bothered me and, all of a sudden, I knew that I

was an old man. I said finally, "What about you?"

"Mike," Jeff said, "those birds are stopped for a little bit but they'll get over their scare pretty soon. You can't out-run no tank. So I'm goin' to give you the extra time you'll need."

"I'm damned if I'm goin'!" Pink Cunningham said and he was almost crying. "I'm goin' back with you, Jeff!"

"Kid," Jeff said quietly, "it's goin' to take all of you to get that gun through. Load up—an' good luck, soldier."

We watched him go back down the road, with the ammunition belts swinging from his shoulders, until the moonlight swallowed him up. Pink Cunninghim rubbed at his nose and swore.

We were three miles up the ridge, crawling slowly through the trees, when I heard the faint stutter of Jeff's machine-gun back there at the bridge. It ticked the seconds off with a measured beat—that extra time that Jeff Wheeler was buying for us.

I'LL never know for sure how we managed to fight that gun back to Concepcion crossroads but we did it somehow. We got there an hour after daybreak and found two battalions of infantry in position on either side of the road.

An unshaven major with muddy boots came out and looked at us curiously. He hadn't heard how the fighting was going up around San Felipe, he said; his outfit had fought at Pagsan yesterday and had pulled back to the Concepcion line during the night. He told us to go back to Tarlac where he thought that maybe the rest of the regiment might be.

Well, we went on back. The outfit was there all right and also there was a field hospital set up. I took Homer Burnett over there—he was still alive though delirious and out of his head. The medico who looked at him said he ought to have a fair chance to pull through.

They were cutting Homer's shirt off when he sat up, pushing the hospital corps man away. His eyes were sort of wild as he looked at me and I knew that he didn't recognize me, thought I was Wheeler.

"Sergeant," he said, "I got scared an' started shooting too soon. I am sorry for that. But, when they did come, I did not let them get across."

"Sure," I said to him. "I know. Now you lie back and let these boys fix you up. Homer."

"Sergeant," he went on in his flat, labored voice, "there is another thing that I have got to say to you. You are a better man even than Ed was. He would have wanted me to tell you that and he would have wanted me to tell the girl that—when we get back to Tarlac."

Well, I thought as I went back to where the regiment was bivouacked, Homer didn't know yet just how good a man Jeff Wheeler really was. As it happened, I didn't know myself; didn't know, either, how hard a man Jeff Wheeler was to kill.

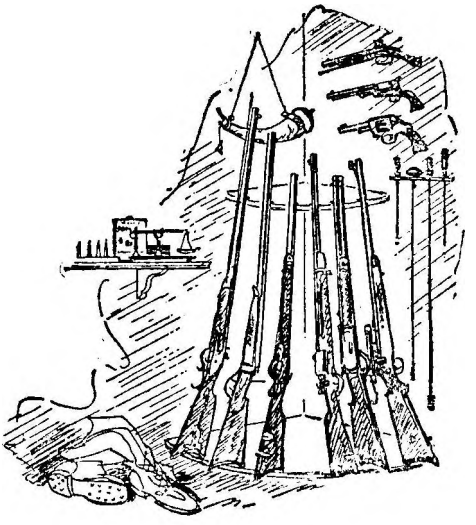
From Tarlac the regiment pulled on south and finally we went on down into Bataan. Then, one day, the adjutant told me that Captain Steve McComb and the rest of the battery was at a little *barrio* called Pilar. They had got away from San Felipe whole and we were to rejoin them with Number Two gun.

We rolled into Pilar just about sundown. I saw Captain Steve McComb's jeep parked under the trees and had Pete Dawson pull the gun off the road while I went up on foot. Steve McComb was talking to someone that I couldn't see.

I heard him say, "And I don't want to have to comb Pilar for that gun crew of yours in case I want 'em in a hurry tonight."

Then Jeff Wheeler came around the jeep, grinning. He stopped when he saw me—stood there with his feet spraddled and the sunset red across his face.

"Hello, Mike," he said. "Still no *senoritas*. Now isn't this a hell of a war?"



THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by
PETE KUHLHOFF

Invasion

COMING ashore from a submarine an enemy landing party established a beach-head and proceeded to raid a nearby town for supplies.

The local Home or State Guard problem was to destroy the beach-head and to deal swiftly with the invaders before they could return to the sub with their loot.

The action lasted about four hours and was observed by high ranking Army Officers who acted as umpires.

At the conclusion of the maneuvers the "enemy" and the Homeguard gathered in a nearby park and received the constructive criticism and decisions of the umpires. Mistakes in disposition of troops and arms were analyzed and suggestions given for taking full advantage of various elements used in guerrilla warfare."

Now this is the kind of maneuver where the civilian rifleman can really go to town—in other words, if you live as far away as an hour or so from salt water you can be of inestimable help in repelling any future enemy beach landings.

It is a fact that the most difficult maneuver of them all is the landing on hostile shores of an attacking force.

If the enemy was to attempt an invasion of the United States it is possible that he would send detached submarines, pocket battleships and other craft of all the axis nations toward various spots up and down the entire coast. For sake of argument let's say our Navy is busy elsewhere.

It's obvious that our Army couldn't be strung out the length of the entire coast, and inasmuch as it would be impossible to determine where the main attack would take place the high command wouldn't know where to send the big railroad guns, etc.

Meanwhile the advancing enemy is at liberty to strike wherever he chooses.

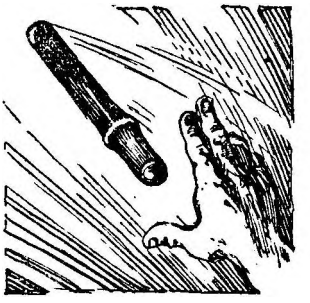
On they come headed for the beaches of Florida, Virginia, Connecticut or any place.

As they near the shore they backwater and come to a stop several thousand yards out, then promptly lower a drove of 20-foot motor launches, each mounting a machine-gun on the bow and carrying two or more squads of Marines. These boats head straight for the shore at full speed in an irregular formation resembling a line of skirmishers. As they near shore all machine-guns open up, peppering the entire landing area with bullets.

The planes from the carriers come in and give the shore hell, the big ships toss in a mess of high explosive shells to box in the landing point to keep out our

In our next issue
Short Stories
for July 25th

THEY were pearlers, so they were used to peril; they took their luck as they found it . . . but something new and sinister stole past the atolls and into the lagoons——



"THE DEVIL'S RENDEZVOUS"

by Neil Martin

A masterly novelette

GORDON KEYNE

Out of the dark hour of Java's doom came a small band of heroic men—with a deadly mission. . . .

"Bombardier Out of Java"

ROBERT R. MILL

Those two enterprising members of the U. S. Navy who featured as Zombie Chasers a few issues back now show what they can do as . . .

"The Good Willers"

KERRY O'NEIL

Free souls who like to take life easy, to loaf along over the prairie—as long as a fight is in the offing.

"Saddle Bums" *a good long novelette*

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Comes to Tennessee in his notably moving series about "This Country of Ours."

"The Spanish Trader"

FRANK GRUBER JOEL REEVE H. S. M. KEMP

All in one issue—the next SHORT STORIES

reinforcement of whatever defense we have at the landing point. Incidently, in case you've forgotten this defense outfit is composed of Home and State Guardsmen together with local riflemen. The job of these defense units is to hinder the enemy action as much as possible until our army can determine the location of the main point of attack and take the necessary steps to blast the large force off the face of the earth. The smaller and well

distributed enemy groups can be taken care of at leisure.

If we had the entire coastline of the U. S.—east, west, and south—organized in some such way, the whole country could breathe easier.

This and That

GUERRILLA WARFARE, by "Yank" Levy, and the NEW SOLDIER'S HANDBOOK are a couple of inexpensive (25 cents each) books for the civilian. They are published by Penguin Books, Inc., New York.

—o—

Many shooting clubs throughout the country are training chaps who are about to go into the Army. A fellow can help himself a great deal by learning as much as possible about marksmanship before actually entering the Army. Here is part of a letter from a young man who received training in a local shooting club:

"The next 'honor' will be more up your alley. This only happened this morning and is hot off the press. Every day we have four hours of rifle practice—two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon. After two weeks, we're still 'dry shooting.' We were practicing rifle position, sighting, bolt manipulation, etc., etc., this morning and the head man (the colonel) was floating around the Company observing how the men were coming along. I didn't know he was around until I heard a voice behind me call for the lieutenant to come over. I turned around, and there he was! I almost passed out wondering what I was doing wrong. You could have knocked me over with a feather when the colonel quoth to the lieutenant, 'Lieutenant, this is the only man who is going through the various movements with the correct form. Have him get in front of the rest of the men and show them how it should be done.' Whatta shock! As I got into the various positions, the colonel pointed out how easily and correctly I got into them, and told the men to observe me closely. 'Notice how he places his feet and hands in the correct position; see how he cants the rifle when he reloads; notice how his eye never leaves the target; how he squeezes the trigger, etc., etc.' It made me feel pretty good. Then to top it off—about a half hour before the thing was over, the lieutenant asked me if I would please get down again so the boys could again see how it was done. Then to further top it off—on the way back to our area, the lieutenant asked me to fall out of rank and walk with him. He asked me what I had shot before, when, how, and all that stuff. How high I went in school. What I did before I went in the Army, etc.

Next week we go on the range for the entire week. We haven't any windage adjustment on the rifles and we'll have to hold at 9 o'clock or 3 o'clock, depending on the wind. I'll let you know how I make out. You can also tell Denker that the instruction El and I had is surely helping us a helluva lot. As a matter of fact, the lieutenant remarked that we must have had pretty damn good instruction to do all the positions so easily."

—•—

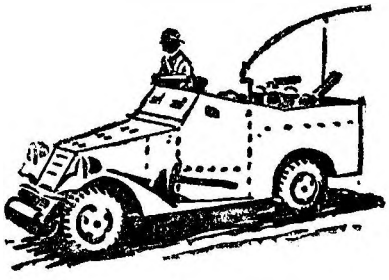
Request: "There being a shortage of ammunition in all calibers, I was wondering if I couldn't still shoot, to keep my hand in, and have some fun with a Remington Civil War cap and ball revolver, 44 caliber?

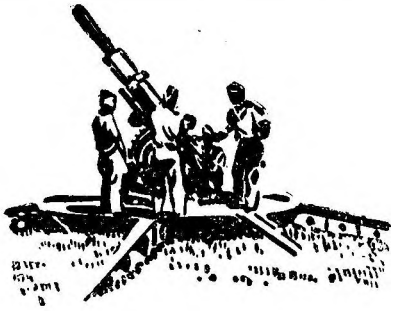
"The gun is in good condition (almost new), and I have a supply of black powder, some caps, lead and a bullet mold. Could you tell me the proper charge of powder for shooting at twenty-five yards?"

You said it — It is a lot of fun shooting the old charcoal burners. We have matches about once a month and it is surprising the accuracy the boys get with these old guns.

First of all, mold your bullets of pure lead, no tin or antimony. Seat them in front of 18 to 20 grains of black powder (never use smokeless), then fill the rest of the chamber with cup grease, push the percussion cap on the nipple and you are all ready to fire. For shooting at twenty-five yards you might have to put a higher front sight on the gun. Good shootin'.

The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE





The U. S. Army Man

FEW of us can help being thrilled by the picture William Chamberlain draws in his *South from Lingayen* in this issue; it's a great story about a great fighting army—ours. In connection with the story, the author writes:

"It is not likely that you will find Sergeant Jeff Wheeler's name or the names of his gun crew listed on the rolls of the Army. If you should do so it will be mere coincidence.

"In spite of that, *South from Lingayen* is a true story. It is a story which happened a thousand times in the withdrawals from Lingayen Bay and Legaspi, in the Bataan battles and in the seige of Corregidor. The Jeff Wheelers were not artillerymen alone—they wore the insignia of all branches and they fought with whatever came to their hands whether it was tommy guns or twelve-inch cannon; bolos or bare fists. Details differed, but the general picture was always the same—the few standing off the many, accepting impossible odds without complaint, playing out a "busted" hand when they knew that all of the chips were down.

"I remember being at a battle position on Corregidor one afternoon during the war games. Our anti-aircraft battery had been ruled out by the umpires and, having nothing to do for the moment, the first sergeant and I were having a cigarette for ourselves. The air raid sirens started.

"We saw them presently. It was close to sundown and they came in in V's against the sun flying low—scores of them. They made a wicked and impressive sight and, after they had passed over, it was not hard to imagine what would have happened to the gun position had they been Japs.

"The first sergeant poked out his cigarette and looked after them. 'I hope I ain't here the day that those babies come over looking for real business,' he said.

"'What would you have done if they had been dropping eggs instead of bags of flour?' I asked him.

"'Captain,' he said, 'I ain't sure but I think I would have run like hell.'

"The planes circled out at sea and came back, machine-gunning this time. They straffed us for a good hour and then finally headed back to the carriers. As the last of them pulled out the first sergeant shook his head thoughtfully.

"'Once I had the idea I'd like to be a school teacher,' he said. 'Now that I think of it, it ain't a bad idea, at that. Maybe, when this hitch is up, I'll go back an'——'

"He didn't, though.

"He was still on Corregidor when they came back, meaning business this time. In whatever Valhalla he and the other Jeff Wheelers have gone to, may there be nothing but bunk fatigue and every day be payday."

"William Chamberlain."

Authentic, Even if It Hurts

WITH the latest adventure of Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg beginning in this issue of SHORT STORIES, we asked Frank Gruber if his race track atmosphere was authentic. If it had been a question of shooting crap or gin rummy, we should never have even thought of asking! However, in this case our query brought forth the following interesting reply:

"What I suffer for this authenticity no one shall ever know—no one but the readers of SHORT STORIES. Let's go back to the time I wrote *The Laughing Fox.* I knew very little about silver foxes but since I was going to write about them I decided to get some data. I bought a couple of books on fox raising, read several magazines and finally wound up by taking a trip to a nearby fox farm. I talked so much about silver foxes at home that disaster overtook me; my wife insisted on a silver fox coat!

"Came the dogs for *The Hungry Dogs.* I read dog magazines, visited kennels and wound up by owning dogs of various and assorted breeds and cross-breeds which are eating me out of house and home.

"So now, horses. I've always been able to take horses or leave them alone, ever since one threw me some years ago and I broke my arm. When I lived in California I went to the Santa Anita track, or Hollywood Park, now and then. But I never became a real racing fan. Then I decided to write a book about horses. As I am now living in the East and my memory of the California tracks was not too good I thought I had better go out one afternoon to the Jamaica track on Long Island.

"We got there in time for the first race and I decided to plunge; I bought a $2 show ticket and the horse won. The next race I picked three horses and bet them all to show. They came in one-two-three. I was off now. The result was that I went home richer by some $72 for the day's 'fun.'

"That's all very well, had I let the matter rest at this point. But if money was so easy to get, while having fun, well, why shouldn't I take advantage of it. I went back to the races, not once but a number of times. I never won again.

"Yes, the atmosphere in *The Gift Horse* is authentic. It's authentic even though it hurts."

"Frank Gruber."

Our Cover This Month

WITH its cover on this issue SHORT STORIES joins with all the other major publications of the country in a salute to patriotism, to its symbol for all of us—the American Flag. The idea was conceived by the National Publishers Association, and we were proud to cooperate in the movement that is going to transform every newsstand the country over into a forest of Stars and Stripes for the Fourth of July. UNITED WE STAND.

A Newcomer Joins the Circle

WITH his novelette in this issue, *According to Hoyle,* Daniel Moore makes his first appearance in SHORT STORIES. We are glad to welcome this man, whom we think we can safely label as the tersest author ever to appear on our pages. Here's what he considers a chatty autobiographical note:

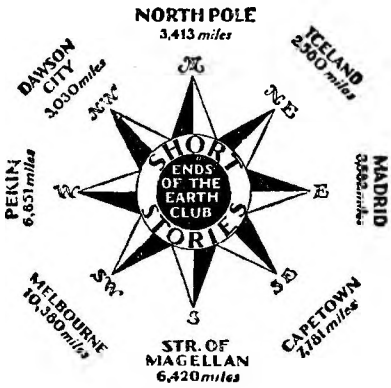
"I think one biographical paragraph will more than suffice for me.

"Born in Scotland—education haphazard. A couple of years with the

R. F. C.-R. A. F. in the last war reveals the fact that I'm no spring chicken. Since then, I've been a "hot" lineman, a salesman, a "jack-hammer" engineer and manager of a small paper mill in Connecticut. Now movie-writing in Hollywood for reasons impossible to determine from the above background.

"Daniel Moore."

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, c/o Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Your handsome membership - identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

We, Too, Think It's About Time You Joined

Dear Secretary:

I have been reading SHORT STORIES for about a year and decided it was about time I joined the Ends of the Earth Club. I have not been to the ends of the earth, but there is not a State in the U. S. that I haven't been in. Have also been to several

of the Island possessions. I've traveled continuously for three years and never stayed in one place for more than two weeks at a time until now.

Robert Reynolds.

599½ Ocean Ave.,
Revere Beach, Mass.

Intrigued with Our Club

Dear Secretary:

I was very much intrigued with the idea of your club as described in the October issue of the Rockefeller Center Magazine and should like to become a member.

My principal hobby is traveling, and talking to people who have been around more extensively than I. By train and automobile I have traveled through most of the western states and have spent several months' time in Washington and Utah and have just recently returned from a four years' stay in San Francisco. Eventually, it is my ambition to travel to South America, Hawaii and Alaska.

It would be very interesting to correspond with a young person in Rio de Janeiro, or Honolulu, or Alaska, preferably the first so that I might practice my Spanish on him (or is Portuguese the language?). It happens that my brother is at Corpus Christi in the Naval Reserve Air Corps, so my interest lies in aviation too. Do you have any Canadian or English fliers in your club?

Other hobbies include hiking, ice skating, reading, badminton, and (this a brand new one) collecting demi-tasse cups and saucers.

Yours very truly,

M. Meier.

312 McDonald Street,
Midland, Michigan.

Wants to Hear from Mexico

Dear Secretary:

Although I have been a faithful reader of SHORT STORIES for several years, this is

the first time that I have ever written in to you, as I have always felt that the editor knows how to run his magazine better than any fan does. One of my pet hates is the "gripe" letter in the editor's column, and in my opinion at least any author of such a letter belongs to the ancient and dishonorable order of Monday morning quarterbacks.

Your column, however, strikes me as being away from the beaten path in that it actually conveys useful and interesting information to the reader and does not confine itself to reader criticism.

Well, then, I will get on to the thing which prompted me to write to you. First of all, I should like to be enrolled in the Ends of the Earth Club. Secondly, I would appreciate it immensely if you would forward to me the names of several English-speaking young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty who are residents of Mexico City. It does not matter whether they are native-born Mexicans or transplanted Americans (that is, citizens of the United States). The important thing as far as I am concerned is that they live in Mexico City.

In case you are interested in what and who I am, I was born in Washington, D. C., in the year 1922, which makes me nineteen years old. I am of Irish-English descent, with assorted amounts of Danish, Scotch, German, French, Dutch and I believe Spanish blood coursing through my veins. I base my claim to American citizenship on the fact that I am part of the eighth generation of our family in America. I am in my third year of college at Fordham University in New York City, and am studying toward a Bachelor of Arts degree with accounting as my major elective course. I am just six feet tall, weigh one hundred and seventy pounds, have blonde hair and blue eyes. I collect hot records, old books, clothes, and bills on my '36 Ford convertible coupe. I live home, but make expense and luxury money pounding

out stuff on this ancient typewriter. Major part of income comes from "ghosting" themes and such in school season. Average sixty pages a week and seventy-five dollars a month. Best advertisement is that I have never flunked a customer yet (knock wood!). Speak good German, fair Spanish, lousy French, no Italian (but can understand). Play golf, tennis, the horses, hunches, and the saxophone.

Thanking you in advance, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Joseph E. Tansill.

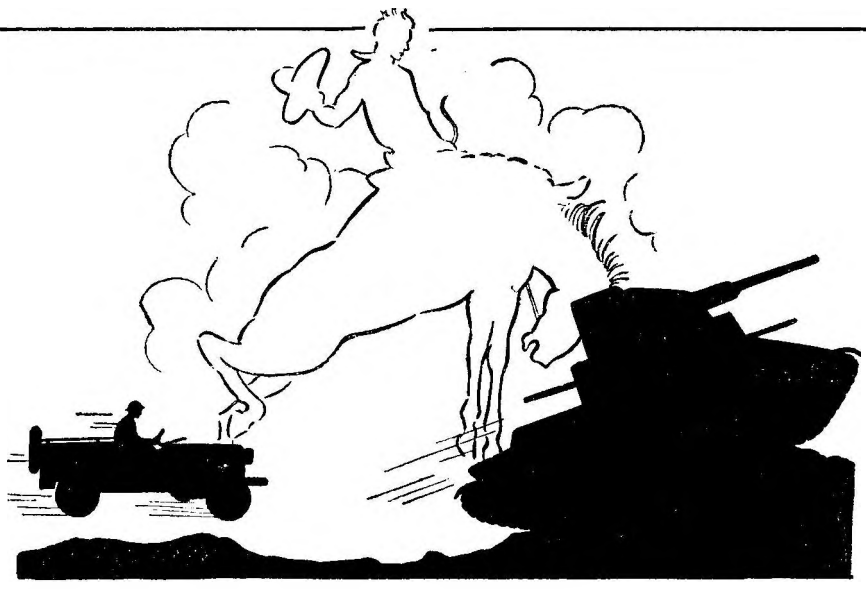
160 Cabrini Blvd.,
New York, N. Y.

ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB MEMBERS

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Note these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.*

Harry Emden, Jr., 257 Prospect Ave., East Aurora, N. Y.
Godfrey S. Enyangi, H. M. Customs, Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
D. Farnham, Box 130, N. Attleboro, Mass.
Ralph Favia, 59 West 76th St., New York, N. Y.
Edwin S. Findelson, 419 Sleight Ave., Tottenville, S. I., N. Y.
George S. Fly, V. A. Sta., Biloxi, Miss.
F. R. Garrett, *USS Yorktown V3*, c/o P. M., San Diego, Calif.
Cornelius Hart, Baptist Academy, Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
Robert A. Herman, 1726 N. Dover St., Phila., Pa.
Richard L. Hiatt, 1410½ Gallia Ave., Portsmouth, O.
Pvt. Alfred B. Hilton, P. O. Box 146, Oceanport, N. J.
A. B. Jamaica, Baptist Academy, Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
Edward Jensen, 316 52nd St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
E. Jines, 316 W. 19th St., Indianapolis, Ind.
Pvt. Fred Johnson, Hq. Btry., 1st Bn., 61st Coast Art. (A.A.), Fort Sheridan, Ill.
Robert F. Kennedy, 715 Mt. Vernon St., Camden, N. J.

M. Kraft. Evangeline Residence, Seattle, Wash.
Pvt. Henry E. LaHair, Bourne Field, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, c/o Postmaster, N. Y.
I. Laramie, 92 Leonard St., N. Attleboro, Mass.
Luis Lebron, 29 Isabel St., Ponce, P. R.
Pvt. N. S. Ludlum, Hq. Btry., 59th C. A., Fort Mills, Corregidor, P. I.
F. McEvoy, 5126a N. Broadway, St. Louis, Mo.
Otto Menge, c/o J. B. Miller, Morris, Minn.
I. M. Miles, Apt. 4H, 223 W. 21st St., New York, N. Y.
Pvt. Jos. Quimette, Service Co., 19th Inf., Schofield Barracks, Hawaii
Pvt. Frank Pizzo, 47th Pursuit Squadron, Wheeler Field, T. H.
T. J. Preeces, 122 Lower D St., Salida, Colorado
Newton Quintella, Rua Alberto de Sequeira, 46 Ap 1, Tijuca, Rio, Brazil
Ernest W. Ritter, 266 S. Michigan, Pasadena, Calif.
E. Roberts, Box 240, R. F. D., N. Attleboro, Mass.
B. Rose, 131 Broadway, N. Attleboro, Mass.
Vincente Villaneuva Sanchis, Calle del Museo n15, 3a, Valencia, Spain
Fred Schendel, Caixa Postal 424, Porto Alegre, Brazil
M. A. Seiseira, Rua Bolivar, F4, Copacabana, Rio, Brazil
L. Serviss, 2771 Jackson Ave., San Gabriel, Calif.
Clarence Shelfer, 37th S. & A. Battery, Fort Sam Houston, Texas
R. G. Somis, Tacloban, Leyte, P. I.
Frank Stephens, 421 New Jersey Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Paul Stephens, 2109 N.W. Irving St., Portland, Oregon
James W. Stockdale, B Co., 60th Signal Bn., Apo. 309, King City, Calif.
S. Thomas, Box 15, Broderick, Calif.
Roger Tibbits, Rock Falls, Iowa
A. Ungles, 125 W. Newmark Ave., San Gabriel, Calif.
Earl C. Vaupel, 5254 Riverton Ave., North Hollywood, Calif.
Olga Vasconcelos, Rua Santa Luiza, 98, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Bennie Veronko, 64 W. 100th St., New York, N. Y.
Alexandre Vient, P. O. Box 943, Jackson, Calif.
Rute E. Wallace, 1 Hazlewood Ave., Attleboro, Mass.
Joe Waranecki, Route 3, Paoli, Indiana
David L. Ward, Det. Med. Dept., Sta. Hosp., Kelley Field, Texas
Russell J. Webster, 3591 Alta., Fresno, Calif.
Max Weedin, Group 2, Class 1-42, U. & N. T. S., San Diego, Calif.
Wm. R. Weigan, 2nd Material Squadron, 3rd Air Base Group, Selfridge Field, Mich.
El. Wemyss, "The Ridge," Dora St., Lisaroul, New South Wales, Australia
Robert White, 37th S. & A. Battery, Fort Sam Houston, Texas
Arnold Wigdoowitz, 45, Joubert St., Germiston, Transvaal, South Africa
Philip Wilder, Jr., Box 855, N. Attleboro, Mass.
Roger Wilder, Box 855, N. Attleboro, Mass.
V. Wilder, Box 855, N. Attleboro, Mass.
Pfc. I. L. Wilkinson, Hq. Det., 3rd Bn., 27th Inf., Schofield Bks., Hawaii
Corp. Cy Williams, Hq. Btry., 1st Bn., 249th C. A., Fort Stevens, Oregon
Raymond C. Williams, 191 Woodland Ave., Rutherford, N. J.
D. L. Wisher, East Yorks, Regt., Rawalpindi, Punjab, India
Samuel F. Woossner, 831 S. W. 6th Ave., Portland, Ore.
Granville S. Wurobengha, 79 Ogumein's St., Oporoma, S. Nigeria, W. Africa
S. Youngman, R. R. No. 1, Box 100, Wheeling, W. Va.
M. Yurasek, Coleman, Alta., Canada
D. Zaborszky, c/o Waldruhe Farms, Lacombe, La.
Peter V. Zanetto, 108 52nd St., West New York, New Jersey
Martina Zapar, 3633 Terrace Way, Hollidays Cove, W. Va.
C. Zeis, 110-19 Jamaica Ave., Richmond Hill, N. Y.
M. Zeis, 110-19 Jamaica Ave., Richmond Hill, N. Y.
N. Zeis, 110-19 Jamaica Ave., Richmond Hill, N. Y.
Pat Zeis, 110-19 Jamaica Ave., Richmond Hill, N. Y.
Edw. M. Zegzdryn, U. S. N. R., Supply Office, U. S. Naval Sta., Guantanamo Bay, Cuba



The Spirit of Our West Shall Win!

The indomitable fighting spirit of the American cowboy shines bright in the day-to-day reports from our fighting forces. In the air engagements, at Bataan, and on the sea, there is news of many a lad who hales from the range. And in the hearts of all these men is that same fearless strength that has conquered a continent and will defend it!

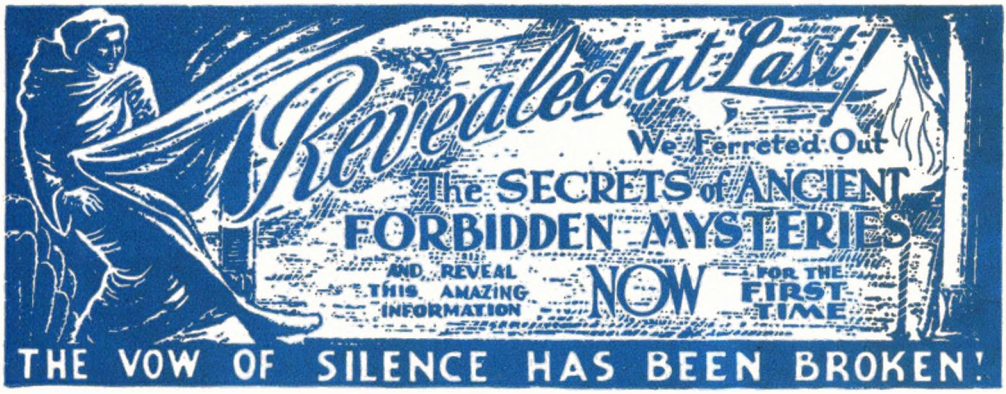
RANCH ROMANCES goes to camps and outposts all over the country. Just last week we received a twenty-copy subscription from an Army recreation center in Hawaii. **RANCH ROMANCES** rates high in surveys on reading matter popularity among service men because it brings these men the thrilling fiction they want. Every issue contains seven or more clean, virile stories of swift action and color, gunplay and lawless dealing in which are woven highly intriguing love stories.

Get a copy today from any good newsstand and you, too, will find hours of keen enjoyment ahead — just the sort of thing you need to keep in trim these days when we are all putting in long, hard hours.

RANCH ROMANCES

AMERICA'S FAVORITE WESTERN LOVE STORY MAGAZINE

15c *a Copy.* *A New Issue Every Other Friday!*



"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

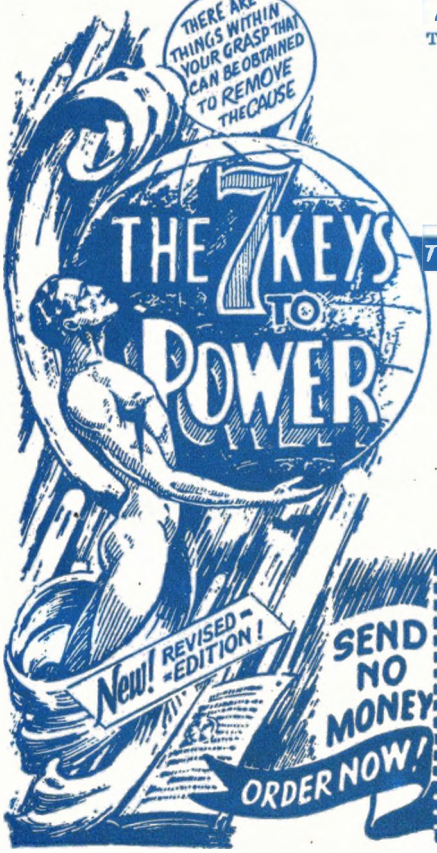
He claims, "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic, Priests, Egyptians, Babylonians, and Sumerians used is at our disposal today."

He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Forces are used without knowing about this book, but with it you can mold anyone to your will."

From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book," Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

OVERCOME ALL ENEMIES, OBSTACLES & HIDDEN FEARS



ARE YOU CROSSED IN ANY WAY?

The Seven Keys to Power, Lewis de Claremont says, shows you how to remove and cast it back.

The Book Purports to Tell You How to—

- Gain the love of the opposite sex.
- Unite people for marriages.
- Obtain property.
- Make people do your bidding.
- Make any person love you.
- Make people bring back stolen goods.
- Make anyone lucky in any games.
- Cure any kind of sickness without medicine.
- Get any job you want.
- Cast a spell on anyone, no matter where they are.
- Get people out of law suits, courts, or prison.
- Banish all misery.
- Gain the mastery of all things.
- Regain your youth and vigor.
- Choose words according to ancient, holy methods.

THE ONLY TRUE BOOK OF SUPREME MASTERSHIP!

This is the Power, He says, from which the old masters gained their knowledge and from which they sold limitless portions to certain favored Kings, Priests, and others at high prices, but never to be revealed under a vow, the violation of which entailed severe punishment.

THE VOW HAS NOW BEEN BROKEN

This book, he claims, shows you the secrets of old which when properly applied makes you able to control the will of all without their knowing it. If you have a problem and you wish to solve it, he says, don't hesitate. Advertisements cannot describe nor do this wonderful book justice. You must read it and digest its meaning, to really appreciate its worth.

GUARANTEED TO SATISFY OR YOUR MONEY REFUNDED

Only a limited number available for sale, so don't wait. It is worth many times its price. If you are wise, you will rush your order for this book NOW.

$1.

MR. LUCK'S CURIO CO., Dept. 700,
860 N. Clark Street., Dept. R.
Chicago, Illinois.

This coupon is worth $1.00 to you. Attach a Money Order for $1 to this coupon and we will send you your copy of The Seven Keys to Power—Regularly $2 for only $1.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

SEND NO MONEY!

If you wish we Trust You. . . . Pay Postman $1 on delivery plus a few pennies Postage. Check here ( ).

HE Mailed This Coupon

J. G. O'BRIEN
Atlas Champion Cup Winner

This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' Californian pupils.

CHARLES ATLAS,
115 East 23rd Street,
New York, N. Y.

I want proof that your system of DYNAMIC TENSION will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your FREE BOOK—"Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your 7-DAY trial offer.

NAME J. G. O'Brien
(Please print or write plainly)
ADDRESS 264 Ellsworth Street
CITY [illegible] STATE Cal.

This is coupon O'Brien sent to get FREE Book. Yours is below—clip it NOW!

...and Here's the Handsome Prize-Winning Body I Gave Him!

J G. O'BRIEN saw my coupon. He clipped and mailed it. He got my free book and followed my instructions. He became a New Man. NOW read what he says:

"Look at me NOW! *'Dynamic Tension'* WORKS! I'm proud of the natural, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"
J. G. O'Brien.

"I'll prove that YOU, too, can be a NEW MAN"—*Charles Atlas*

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE; I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

CHARLES ATLAS
An untouched photo of Charles Atlas, winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Only 15 Minutes a Day

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical **natural** method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. You learn to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension." You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

FREE BOOK "EVERLASTING HEALTH AND STRENGTH"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book **today**, AT ONCE.
CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9-W, 115 E. 23rd St., New York City.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9-W
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **"Dynamic Tension"** can help make me a New Man—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your **FREE** book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." No obligation.

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....