"There Are More to Die". A mystery novelette by PHILIP KETCHUM

A story of Stratolines trouble-shooter by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Short Stories

March 10th

Twice A Month

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Only a favored third find gold —young men of courage and of high hope

Part I

WAY OF THE NORTH

by

James B. Hendryx

Are you interested in a SHAVING CREAM

Guaranteed not to make Shaving a Pleasure?

Men, here is a product dedicated to the proposition that shaving is a nuisance and a bore!

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He has directed the training of more men for the Radio Industry than anyone else.

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I Trained These Men

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"I am engaged in spare time Radio work. I average from $5 to $10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner. All this EXTRA money sure does come in handy." THEODORE K. DuBREE, Horsham, Pa.

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"I cannot divulge any information as to my type of work but I can say that N.R.I. training is coming in mighty handy these days." RICHARD W. ANDERSON. (Address omitted for military reasons.)

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Short

Every author's finest and

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SHORT STORIES issued semi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City 20, 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. March 10, 1944. Vol. CLXXXVI, No. 5. Whole Number 917.

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LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

Stories

latest stories—no reprints

MARCH 10th, 1944

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COVER—E. Franklin Wittmack

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.

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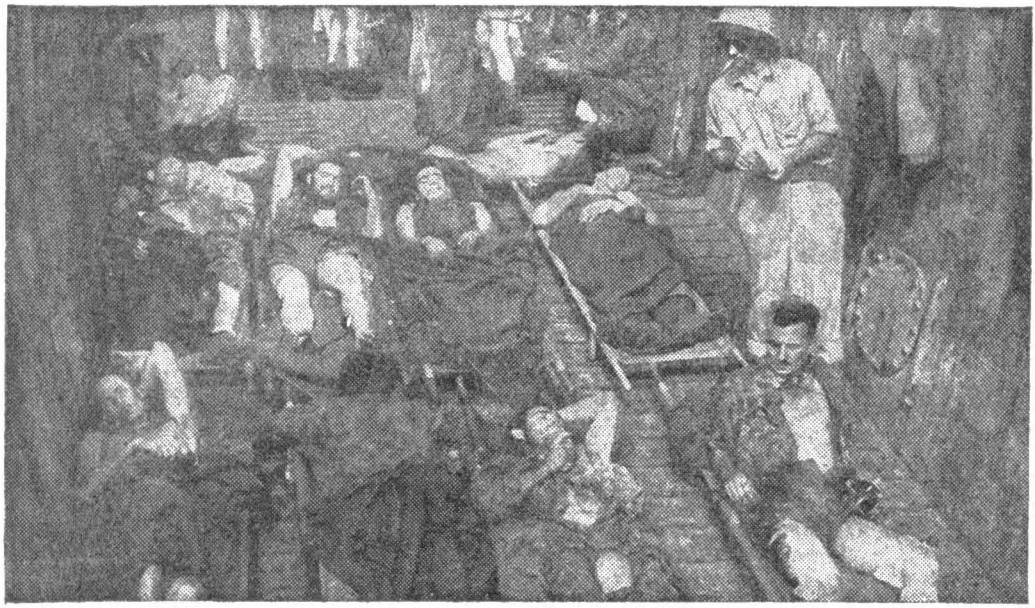

Pin-up picture for the man who "can't afford" to buy an extra War Bond!

YOU'VE HEARD PEOPLE SAY: "I can't afford to buy an extra War Bond." Perhaps you've said it yourself . . . without realizing what a ridiculous thing it is to say to men who are dying.

Yet it *is* ridiculous, when you think about it. Because today, with national income at an all-time record high . . . with people making more money than ever before . . . with less and less of things to spend money for . . . practically every one of us has extra dollars in his pocket.

The very *least* that *you* can do is to buy an *extra* $100 War Bond . . . above and beyond the Bonds you are now buying or had planned to buy. In fact, if you take stock of your resources, you will probably find that you can buy an *extra* $200 . . . or $300 . . . or even $500 worth of War Bonds.

Sounds like more than you "can afford?" Well, young soldiers can't afford to die, either . . . yet they do it when called upon. So is it too much to ask of us that we invest more of our money in War Bonds . . . the best investment in the world today? Is that too much to ask?

Let's all BACK THE ATTACK

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BY THE PUBLISHER OF THIS MAGAZINE

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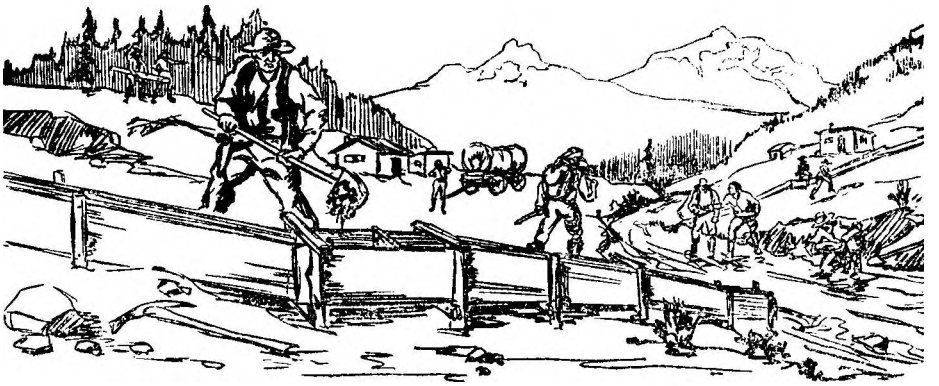


The Story Tellers' Circle

Less Paper, Just the Same Number of Stories

TO CONFORM with the Government's order concerning the conservation of paper for war purposes—our paper quota had been drastically cut—SHORT STORIES is appearing as a thinner magazine. Our printer worked out a format, however, that changes slightly our type size, widens our columns, and gives us the same number of words in each issue of the magazine as we had before. We hope this change is only for the duration, but are glad to be able to give our readers as many stories as before at the same time saving paper for the country's war effort.

The Fabulous Klondike of '98

A NEW Jim Hendryx serial starts in this issue "The Way of the North." Among the great historical stampedes for gold that of the Klondike is unique in its hardship and—in certain cases—its reward. In Canada's mighty and mystic Northwest, placer mining along the rivers and creeks flowing into the Yukon had been carried on for a number of years before Carmack, the squaw man, made his phenomenal strike at the roots of a birch tree in August, 1896, *on a creek then known as Rabbit Creek, later named Bonanza.*

The stampede popularly referred to as "the Klondike Gold Rush" was in reality three stampedes. The first following closely on the heels of Carmack's strike, was a stampede of sourdoughs, mostly from downriver —Forty Mile, Birch Creek, etc., and many of these old-timers who were wise to the placer game, and to the way of life in the subarctic, got in on the ground floor and made fortunes. The second was a stampede of hardy men mostly from the western states, who heard of the new gold field through various channels, and hit out for the new Eldorado. The third—the big stampede—followed the news of the landing of the Portland *in Seattle with some sixty miners aboard who brought eight hundred thousand dollars in gold out with them. There were many good men in this stampede—but also there were many who were entirely unfit to cope with the rigors of this far northern frontier, and there were the parasites, male and female, the off-scouring of city brothels, gambling houses, and slums, who envisioned rich pickings in the new gold camps. The population of the town of Dawson, or Dawson City, as it was called, jumped from two thousand to forty thousand during six months in 1899. Given this set-up anything might happen—and nearly everything did, in the way of romance, tragedy, and comedy. Poor men made fortunes, and rich men went broke. Men starved to death on the creeks, froze to death on the tundras, drank themselves to death in the towns, and died of scurvy in their cabins.*

In the matter of gold output the Yukon country in the placer days was not particu-

larly impressive. Other gold fields have produced more gold. It is not for the gold output that the Yukon country will be remembered by those who were fortunate enough —or unfortunate enough to have been in on it—it is for the sheer adventure of the undertaking—the friendships formed—the incidents of heart-breaking tragedy, and of side-splitting comedy that were of daily occurrence during the placer days—the days of "poor man's gold" on the Yukon. Then the big outfits came with their dredges and their steam point drills, and mining became a business instead of an adventure. Romance shifted to Nome. And the Klondike Gold Rush is but a memory—but it is a memory that none who were privileged to be there in the palmy days will ever forget. Among those was Jim Hendryx; that's one reason why "The Way of the North" is such a good story.

Ketchum Story

JUST now Philip Ketchum—whose crime novelette "There Are More to Die" is in this issue—is a phenomenally busy man in his important job of director for the Pacific Coast of the Merchant Marine Service. But a few years ago his young son was filling out a statistical card at school. Two of the questions and answers were as follows:

Father's Occupation .....Author
Place of Business .....In the basement

His teacher probably thought the last answer required some explanation so she questioned him. "Oh, no," he told her. "Ketch doesn't always work in the basement. When we were in Denver he worked in the garage. In Sierra Madre he worked on the sun-porch. In Pasadena he had an office downtown and in Minnesota he worked in the attic."

There's the story of this man's life for the last ten years. Different houses, different towns, and a typewriter anywhere it could be set up. Three years ago he thought he was settled permanently in Southern California, then the war came along so now he's in another house near San Francisco with his typewriter in semi-retirement. But two or three nights a week he dusts it off (the typewriter) and works for an hour or so and he's looking forward to the end of the war so that he can get back to it full time. He'd also like to get back to his golf game, which was always lousy, he says, and requires hours of practice to keep him from being ruled off of the course.

Where he gets his ideas for his stories he doesn't know. Some probably grow out of newspaper items and some from a mental exercise in which he puts his people in as hopeless a position as imaginable and then tries to figure a logical and reasonable escape. They're very real people to him. They're the kind of people he knows, with the weaknesses common to most folks and the strengths and loyalties that make America great. He tries to get those people down on paper and show how they act under unusual circumstances. And—as a final note —we gathered from a recent letter, he would rather write than eat, and because of that sometimes hasn't eaten.

Deers Beware

NINE was a year of significance for Jim Kjelgaard, whose "The Wild Pack" appears in this issue. For at that age, he confesses that he got his first rifle, killed his first buck and, when his father wasn't looking, smoked his first cigar.

Born some 34 years ago in New York City, Kjelgaard survived this handicap probably because his father, a doctor with a yen to hunt and fish, moved the family to the mountains of Pennsylvania where there was plenty of both.

Jim Kjelgaard tells us:

"I acquired a fine education, at the age of fourteen had a fluent vocabulary of cuss words, could chew tobacco, and get around in the woods with the hill-billies who abound in that area. For quite a few years I put in my time running trap lines, guiding deer hunters, fishing, and doing all the other things that aren't supposed to advance a man in a competitive world but that are a whale of a lot of fun. I'd like to put in the rest of my life the same way. I once traveled six hundred miles to shoot one woodcock, and sixteen hundred to shoot a buck I did not get. But nary an inch of the way am I sorry for!"

He's not fooling. Why only the other day we called up to get in touch with him and found that he was—of all things—out hunting with his agent. We expect Jim Kjelgaard will run up against our Pete Kuhlhoff one of these days on a deer hunt. We're not taking odds on the deer!

(*Concluded on page* 103)

Seems Like a Chechako Can Always Figger Out the Wrong Way to Do Things!

WAY OF THE NORTH

PART I

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "New Rivers Calling," etc.

CHAPTER I

ON DYEA BEACH

YOUNG Tom Jorden drew the collar of his mackinaw closer about his neck and surveyed, through the cold, wet fog that eddied and swirled about him, the indescribable confusion that reigned on Dyea Beach. The *Portland* from Seattle, and the *Aleucian* from Vancouver, both loaded to the guards, had almost simultaneously dumped their cargoes onto the beach that was one of the main gateways to the promised land of gold.

Men and women milled about seeking to identify their belongings among the heaps and windrows of goods that had been dumped from the landing boats upon the shore just above the tide reach. Innumerable dogs, begged, borrowed, stolen, or bought by the argonauts who had heard or read that travel in the Klondike was by dog-

team, sniffed at food-packs, fought, yelped, snarled, and barked, adding their voices to the general din of loud-mouthed disputes over the ownership of property, and loud-bawled curses of triumph or disappointment.

A pair of mild-eyed oxen ambled aimlessly about, and to add to the general confusion, half a dozen horses galloped frantically hither and thither, pursued by a dozen yapping dogs.

Tom turned from the scene to his own pile of duffel beside which the five Indian packers he had managed to hire were squatting about the inevitable tea pail hung above a little fire. Close at hand the foam-crested rollers surged against the shore with a deep, never ceasing roar, and far away—nearly a thousand miles inland, beyond the mountains and the lakes, and down a great river —was gold. Vaguely he wondered, as his gaze shifted from the milling men and women, and strove to penetrate the fog, how many of them would find gold—how many would ever reach the Klondike where the gold was reported to be.

A querulous cry reached his ears: "Hey, drop that! That's mine!" And he turned to see a little old man snatch at a heavy "piece" that a larger man had lifted from the ground.

"Who says it's yourn? Leggo, damn you, before I flatten you!"

"It's mine! There's my mark! You can see—"

"Smack the old coot down, Jack," the larger man growled, as another joined him. "Knock his damn block off, an' grab holt of one of them other pieces."

Without hesitation the man called Jack swung a huge fist that caught the oldster squarely in the face and he went down among the stones that littered the beach.

Tom Jorden leaped forward and the next instant his fist crashed against the jaw of the man who had given the order, knocking him down with the heavy piece on top of him. The other leaped in, and as Tom turned to meet the onslaught he tripped on a stone, and both went down together, punching, jabbing, gouging as each struggled to regain his feet. Out of the tail of his eye, Tom saw the first man he had hit, wriggle from beneath the piece and disappear. With a mighty heave he slipped from

under the man who pinned him down, and both gained their feet, punching and slugging, as the old man, his white beard red with blood, danced futilely about, his quavering voice raised in cries of, "Thief! Thief! Help!"

But no help was forthcoming. Men were too busy hunting their property amid the hopeless tangle of goods, to bother about a fight—with a dozen fights going on all about them.

IT WAS then that Tom was aware of the girl—the girl he had seen on the boat. Instantly into his brain flashed the memory of her as she had stood at the rail limned against the afterglow, the keen breeze whipping her skirts about her knees, as she stood looking out over the water, one hand resting on the rail, as with the other she kept brushing back a stray wisp of auburn hair that persisted in blowing across her face. He remembered that he had thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Then she turned and her eyes met his for an instant, and Tom had flushed deeply at being caught staring at her. And then she was gone. Twice after that he had seen her—but quickly avoided her for fear of again being caught staring. And now her eyes met his once more—only for an instant, as she stood there beside the old man who was wringing his hands and calling for help. But in that fleeting instant he read angry disapproval in the blue eyes. Then there was a blinding flash as the thug landed a blow that rocked him to his heels and sent him reeling backward as the shrill cries of the old man redoubled. As his opponent crowded in for the finish, Tom fought off the onslaught as best he could, guarding, warding off the flying fists with arms that seemed heavy as lead. Gradually his brain cleared, and again he was trading blow for blow, the girl forgotten as he concentrated his entire attention on the man who faced him toe to toe. Presently he realized that the other was tiring. His feet were wide apart, and the air rushed in and out of his lungs in great audible gasps between lips that curled back to expose uneven, discolored teeth.

Summoning every ounce of his own waning strength, Tom leaped in, bringing his knee crashing upward into the other's groin. The man doubled at the middle, his thick lips writhing in agony, and as he went down Tom's right crashed into his jaw with a force that closed the open mouth with an audible clashing of teeth.

The man lay very still, curled like a grub worm at his feet, and across the body Tom's eyes again met the angry eyes of the girl. Only for an instant their eyes held. Her lips twisting into a sneer of contempt, she hissed the single word "coward!" And then she was gone, and Tom stood there staring angrily after her until she was swallowed up in the crowd.

CHAPTER II

SHEEP CAMP

SUE BRANDON sat beside her father on the last lap of the twenty-seven mile trail to Sheep Camp and sipped tea from a tin cup that one of the Indian packers had filled for her from the pail that hung over the fire.

Outfits passed them — stolid-faced Indians, their bodies bent slightly forward under their two hundred pound packs, methodically placing one foot before the other with tireless regularity; and white men, most of whom had never carried anything heavier than a suitcase, sweating and panting over the trail under a half load.

"I wonder if they'll all find gold?" she mused aloud, her eyes on the grim, set faces of the men who passed in endless procession.

Sam Brandon smiled. "No. I'd say you could eliminate two-thirds of 'em on the first sorting. I've been kind of looking 'em over since we landed—and a little on the boat, too—the few times I managed to go up on deck."

The girl laughed. "You're a rotten sailor, Daddy. If you only knew the wonderful scenery you missed. And the smell of the clean sea air!"

"Yes? Well, I'll get along very well, thank you, if I never see or smell another ocean. By gosh, I couldn't eat—couldn't sleep—just lay there in my bunk wondering how sick a man had to get before he could die."

"Cheer up. There are no more oceans between here and the Klondike—only lakes

and rivers and mountains. What makes you think only a third of these men will find gold?"

"I don't think a third of 'em will find gold. What I said was that you could toss out two-thirds of 'em on the first sorting—the ones that haven't got a chance. Of the third who are left, maybe one in ten will make good—maybe not so many."

"But — why haven't these others got a chance?"

"The first third will never even try to find gold—tin-horn gamblers, thieves, crooks, grafters, parasites of all kinds—they're pouring into the country, as their kind pours into every new country to prey on the successful ones.

"The second third won't make good, for the reason they never made good where they were. They're the failures, the incompetent ones—the beaten, futile men, who are making one last play for success. Men whose one hope is that their luck will turn at last. But it won't turn—because in this world I've noticed that a man's luck is pretty much what he makes it.

"In the ranks of the last third will be found the men who will make good—the young men, ambitious, full of high hope—men willing and eager to work and to fight for what they get—and the older men who have confidence in their own ability, and who, through the spirit of adventure, or the lure of huge profits, are eager to take a fling at something new, and big, and worth while."

"But there must be luck in it, too," the girl said. "Because you just said that only about one in ten of these last would make good."

"Oh, sure—there's luck—a lot of luck. One man will dig here, and get nothing. Another will dig there, and uncover a fortune. But just remember—they're both digging, and digging like hell! They're working, and planning, and figuring every minute of the day to put themselves in line for the luck to strike. The second third, the ones who haven't a chance, are those who are too lazy or too dumb, or incompetent to give luck a chance to strike 'em. This mining is a tough game—and it's the tough men who will win. And," he added, his eyes on the girl's profile, "as I told you before we started, I'm afraid it's too tough a game for a girl. This is just the prelude. You haven't seen anything yet."

Sue smiled. "Too tough for a girl, eh? Who was it that lay in a bunk all the way up here? And who was it that suggested we stop for a rest, and a spot of tea?"

Her eyes lighted suddenly as she pointed to an old man who, with a light pack on his back, was walking at the head of a line of Indian packers. "Oh, there's the old man I was telling you about! The one who with his partner was attacked there on the beach." She raised her voice and called to him, "I'm glad you saved your belongings! And how's your partner?"

The oldster stepped to the fire. "I never saved it," he smiled. "An' I ain't got no pardner."

The girl looked puzzled. "But—your face was all bloody, and you were crying 'thief!' and 'help'—and I saw that man attacking the one who was defending you. When he knocked him down I thought he had killed him—he lay there so still, and all doubled up."

The man chuckled. "You kinda got it twisted around, sister. The one that got knocked out—he was the thief. Him an' another one. They was stealin' my stuff, an' when I tried to stop 'em, one of 'em fetched me a clout on the nose, an' the next thing I know'd, this young feller jumps in an' knocks the guy cuckoo that was makin' off with one of my pieces, an' the other one jumped him, an' they had a heck of a fight, an'—well you seen the end of it. Hadn't been fer that young feller jumpin' in, they would of had my stuff—an' I couldn't done nothin' about it. A man could yell his head off down there, an' what with everyone tryin' to locate his own stuff, no one gives a dang what's happenin' to someone else—no one but that young feller. There's some man! Run off before I got a chance to thank him. But whoever he is, I shore hope he makes a million. Well, I gotta be goin' er I'll never ketch up with them Injuns."

When the old man had passed out of sight, Sue glanced at her father. He was smiling. She frowned. "Oh, yes, I know you've always told me to be sure of my facts—and I know what you're thinking—that I jumped at a wrong conclusion—and I did—you don't have to tell me." She sipped the rest of her tea, her glance searching the

faces of the men who passed on the trail. "I ought to have known he was no thief," she said, more to herself than to Brandon. "I noticed him on the boat. He had rather nice eyes—and they sure did blaze when I called him a coward, back there. If I run across him, I'll tell him I'm sorry." Throwing out the tea leaves, she tossed the cup to an Indian. "Come on, let's get going. We want to make Sheep Camp and get the tent set up before dark."

SHEEP CAMP, the hell-hole of the Dawson Trail, located six miles from the Chilcoot Pass, was a conglomeration of tents, shacks and sheet-iron warehouses. Water from melting snow stood ankle-deep in the so-called street, flanked on either side by planks supported on kegs or boxes, behind which monte dealers and shell game grifters plied their trades, and by tent brothels sandwiched in between tent saloons and tent restaurants—all doing a thriving business. For, added to the hundreds that poured over the trail from Dyea Beach where they had been dumped by the steamships, were those unfortunates who had been turned back at the Summit by the Northwest Mounted Police because of insufficient supplies. Those with money bought the required supplies at the warehouses—and those without money, sought to make up their quota by robbery and theft. In Sheep Camp a man's goods were his own only so long as he could hold them. No semblance of law and order prevailed. Murder was of nightly occurrence, drunken men fought in the street by day, and the nights were rendered hideous by the cries and loud laughter of revellers, and the howling and fighting of innumerable starving dogs of all breeds and descriptions, abandoned by their owners when found unfit for trail work.

Tough, and sordid, and unromantic, Sheep Camp vaunted unordered humanity at its worst. Sue Brandon loved it—this splotch of blazing color on the long, long trail of gold. During the two days in which her father made the necessary purchases to bring his outfit up to police regulations for entry into the Canadian Yukon, the girl wandered about, never tiring of watching the passing show, fitting the various faces into the classifications Sam Brandon had made back there on the trail—the parasites, the incompetents, and the capable ones—the men who had a chance to make good. And always she sought a face—the face of the young man she had noticed on the boat—the face whose eyes had blazed angrily at her across the man who lay crumpled at his feet there on Dyea Beach. Already she had placed him with the favored third—with the young men full of high hope—willing to work and fight for what they got. For he was not only willing to fight for what he got, but to fight against odds for a perfect stranger because he was old and helpless and in trouble.

JUST at dusk on the evening of the second day she strolled beyong the outskirts of the camp breathing deeply of the keen spring air, wondering vaguely what adventures lay beyond the high barrier of the Chilcoot, that great white wall of rock and snow that towered grim and forbidding to the eastward. Sounds reached her ears, the incessant barking of dogs, an occasional shout, a burst of hysterical laughter, and, blending with the burble of melting snow water that cascaded among the rocks of a swollen creek, the sound of an accordion and a squeaky fiddle where the nightly dance was already getting under way. This was the North—her North. She smiled as the words of her father recurred to her—"too tough for a girl. This is only the prelude. You haven't seen anything yet." Her lips smiled. "If the main show is as good as the prelude, I'm going to love it!" she exclaimed aloud, and the smile twisted into a grimace of contempt as a fleeting panorama of her life flashed through her brain—school days, then the endless, meaningless round of social events—one day so like another that it seemed futile there should be a succession of days. "In a city you just exist," she murmured. "But up here you can *live!*"

There was a sound close behind her—the sound of heavy footsteps. She turned—and for the first time in her life she felt fear as her eyes met the leering eyes of the thick-set, bearded man who confronted her.

"What—what do you want?" she asked, striving mightily to make her voice sound casual.

Thick, lecherous lips grinned. "I guess you know what I want, sister. The ground's

good an' dry in under them trees. Come on. What's yer price?" Stark terror gripped the girl, as the man's eyes seemed to devour her —to strip her naked before their foul, loathsome gaze. Her eyes darted here and there seeking an avenue of escape—but there was no trail, and the ground beside the creek was heavily studded with boulders. Divining her intention, the man laughed. "No chanct, sister. I kin git around amongst them rocks a damn sight handier'n what you kin. I've got money—an' I'm askin' you what's yer price?"

Too tough for a girl. This is only the prelude. You haven't seen anything yet—the words of her father flashed through her brain in letters of fire. Dear God—where was her father? Why had she strayed out here alone? She summoned her voice. "Go away!" she cried, unaware that the words came from her lips in an hysterical scream.

"Oh, so that's it? Yer one of the upity ones, eh? Well, mebbe I ain't as good lookin' as some of then high-toned gamblers—but I'm a man as gits what he wants, when he wants it. I'd of played fair — I'd of paid—"

"You're damned right you'll pay!" Out of the spruce thicket almost at the man's side stepped a figure—and once again Sue Brandon was staring into the blazing eyes of the young man she had seen on the boat. The next instant she was staring wide-eyed, her fingers clutched over her heart that was pumping blood back into the face that had been drained of all blood, as the two men fought among the boulders. The fear that had gripped her gave place to a wild singing in her heart as she stared in fascination at the swinging fists, and heard the vicious spat of iron-hard knuckles on bare flesh.

The thick-set man was no mean antagonist and a sharp cry escaped her as she saw her defender go down under a rush of blows. But he was up again, and she watched the piston-like, almost rhythmatic swing of his long arms as he sent blow after telling blow crashing against the face and the torso of the thick-set man.

Then it was the other who was down, and again a sharp cry escaped her, as she saw the knife in his hand as he rose to his knees. But the next instant the knife flew into the bush as his opponent's heavy pac landed against the knife wrist—and the man pitched forward and lay still as another kick from the pac caught him squarely under the chin.

The girl found her voice. "Oh—I—I—how did you happen to be here?" The words sounded foolish to her ears. For answer the man pointed toward the thicket of spruce. "I didn't like the camp, so I pitched my tent in there," he said shortly. "I heard what went on."

"Oh, I've—I've wanted to find you—to tell you I was wrong—back there on the beach. I thought——"

"It don't make any difference what you thought."

"I—but I want to thank you. Oh—if you hadn't been here——"

"Never mind the thanks. If you had any sense you wouldn't go prowling around a place like this alone. Better get back where you belong." The man turned on his heel, and disappeared into the thicket, and Sue Brandon stood staring angrily at the spot where the spruce branches had closed behind him. For some moments she stood there. Then the anger faded from her eyes, and a peculiar little smile twisted the corners of her lips, as with one loathing glance at the inert form on the ground, she hurried in the direction of the camp.

CHAPTER III

AS THE EMBERS DIED

TOM JORDEN kindled his fire and as the little flames licked about his tea pail he sliced salt pork into his frying pan. Presently he heard sounds from beyond the edge of the spruce copse, and then the thud of heavy footsteps that gradually diminished as the man he had knocked out picked his way among the boulders in the direction of Sheep Camp.

A slow grin twisted the corners of his lips as he nested the pan, and he flexed his fingers slowly as he contemplated his bruised knuckles. "Old Doc Leroy was right when he said this was a tough country," he muttered. "He said in a new country a man would find the best as well as the worst. Guess I haven't run across any of the best ones yet, unless—" The sentence remained unspoken, the words giving place to the vision of deep blue eyes that seemed to haunt the dusk beyond the firelight—chang-

ing eyes, eyes with the far-away rapturous look that had met his stare as the girl had turned from gazing at the high-flung mountains from the rail of the boat—eyes that had flashed scorn and anger into his own there on Dyea Beach—eyes that betrayed stark terror as she faced the thick-set man among the boulders—eyes that had met his own in a hurt, reproachful look, as he rudely told her it didn't make any difference what she thought . . . eyes that had once again flashed angrily as he told her she didn't have much sense, and ought to go back where she belonged. "She hasn't got much sense, either," he muttered, in justification of his words. "Damn fool girl. What's she doing up here, anyhow? She was alone on the boat, and alone on Dyea Beach, and alone here. And if she isn't alone, why in the devil doesn't whoever she's with look after her?" He scowled as he forked over the pork in the pan and caught himself wondering whether or not she were married. "She could be, for all I care," he muttered savagely. "I'll be hitting the trail tomorrow."

Supper over, he washed his dishes, filled his pipe and propped himself against a tree, his eyes on the glowing coals. His brows drew into a frown as he realized that in the dying embers a vision kept repeating itself—the vision of a girl standing at a ship's rail, the wind tugging at her skirts, a wisp of auburn hair whipping across her cheek.

It was not that Tom Jorden hated women. He distrusted them. His own mother he had never known. Raised by an aunt whose main concern was for her own two children, young Tom had lived much within himself. And now, as he sat there staring into the slowly dying coals, he was re-living the twenty years of his life—or rather the fifteen years that had elapsed since that black day when the father he had adored had suddenly disappeared—disappeared under circumstances that had embittered the lad, driven him behind a wall of defense that had alienated him from the normal existence of the small town boy, and had created within him an air of distrust—distrust of constituted authority.

JOHN JORDEN, a partner of his brother, George, in a hardware business located in a small town in the Minnesota wheat belt, had been accused of the murder of the local banker and, despite his vehement denial of the crime and his record of sterling citizenship, was arrested. With the evidence all against him, and deciding that he hadn't a chance in the world of establishing his innocence, he had broken away from the sheriff who was taking him to the county seat for trial, and disappeared.

George Jorden, professing to believe in his brother's guilt, immediately moved from his rented house into the John Jorden home and with a show of sanctimonious rectitude, took his five-year-old nephew into his family. And never from that moment on had Tom Jorden known what it was to get a square deal. Always in the minds of George Jorden and his wife their own children were right in the petty quarrels that arose between the youngsters. His cousin Billy, a year older than he, could, and always did, lick him in a scrap—and was never reprimanded for it, no matter what the provocation. His cousin Kate, a year younger than he, would tease and plague him until a well-deserved slap would send her howling to her parents, and Tom would receive a thrashing.

The elder Jordens continually harped on John Jorden's guilt in the boy's hearing, and never let him forget that he was an object of charity, the while George Jorden calmly appropriated the entire profits from the store.

Among the townspeople only old Doctor Leroy believed in John Jorden's innocence. The others accepted the sheriff's view that he was guilty. Their reactions differed, however. Many held that Joel Stowe, the young banker, deserved killing, and they "didn't blame John Jorden a damn bit." Those were they who had lost money in the failure of the Stowe private bank. Others took the view that "murder is murder, and John Jorden ought to be hung."

And as their opinions differed, so did their attitude toward young Tom. Many pitied the lad, and realizing that he was in no wise responsible for his father's crime, leaned over backward to be kind to him. Others were openly hostile to him, yelling to their children to come away if they caught them in the lad's company—treating him as something loathsome. And young as he was, the boy despised both camps. The result was that he lived within himself—

trusting no one, making no close friends. For always he suspected any friendly advance as being inspired by pity—and he wanted no pity. He *knew* that his father was innocent. And he hated those who believed him guilty. Doctor Leroy he knew for a real friend, but no other.

SO IT was that when news of the gold strike in the Klondike reached the village, Tom, who was working for his uncle in the store, made up his mind to go. That evening, when he broached the matter, George Jorden refused to advance him a cent, pointing out that Tom was deeply indebted to him for fifteen years' board, lodging, and schooling. The boy did not know that the home he had been living in actually belonged to his father. He had often wondered as he eyed the sign JORDEN & JORDEN on the canvas awning in front of the store whether he wasn't entitled to more than the five dollars a month his uncle grudgingly doled out to him as spending money, but never having had any justice, and knowing the attitude of the authorities toward his father, he had kept silent.

The next morning he arose at six, got his own breakfast as usual, packed his meager belongings into a telescope valise, and with the twenty-six dollars that he had managed to save from his wages, walked down the street toward the depot. There was no hurry. He had three hours to kill before the ten-fifteen train was due.

The feel of spring was in the air that he drew deeply into his lungs as he walked slowly down the tree-shaded street. A robin carolled from the top-most branch of a bare maple and Tom was conscious of a strange sense of elation. For the first time in his life he felt free—free to go where he pleased—to do as he pleased. Never again would he take an order from Uncle George. He was free of the hated house, the hated store, the whole hated little town. He wondered what his uncle would say when he reached the store at nine o'clock, as was his custom, and found the door still locked. His lips tightened in a grim smile and he found himself hoping that his uncle would hurry to the depot to prevent his departure. "Get back to the store," he'll say. And I'll look him square in the eye and I'll say, "You go to hell." Yes, sir, just like that, I'll say it—"You go to hell." And anyone standing around can hear me, and Bert Rice, the bus driver, will tell it around the hotel and folks will be laughing at Uncle George behind his back, and Gene Richards and some of the others will kid him about it, and he'll be mad enough to blow up—and I hope he does.

As he walked slowly along the wooden sidewalk he glanced at the houses set back behind neat lawns—the houses of the people he had known all his life—the people who had pitied him—and the people who had loathed him because he was the son of a murderer. But his father was no murderer! To hell with 'em! To hell with 'em all! He never wanted to see the town again—nor anyone that lived in it. They all believed his father was guilty—all but Doctor Leroy. Thought of the kindly old doctor turned his feet from the main thoroughfare at the next corner. He had plenty of time, he'd walk past the doctor's house, just so he'd be sure to remember it—it was the only thing in town he cared to remember.

The doctor's horse, hitched to the red-wheeled buggy, was tied to the hitching post in front of the gate, and as the boy passed the old physician clicked the gate behind him, and crossed the sidewalk, and swung the little black medicine satchel onto the seat. He paused with his hand on the hitch-rein and eyed the boy with the canvas telescope.

"Hello, Tommy! Traveling this morning—or just going some place?"

The boy's heart warmed at the homely greeting, and he smiled into the shrewd, kindly eyes. "I'm going to the Klondike," he said.

"The Klondike!" The doctor's eyes widened as he stared at the lad in astonishment. "You mean you're going up to hunt gold?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well—dog my cats! What does old George think about that?"

"He told me I couldn't go."

THE lips beneath the neatly clipped gray mustache smiled a bit grimly. "But when you told him you were going anyway, he came through with money enough to take you there, eh?"

"No, sir. He wouldn't give me any money. He said I owed him for fifteen

years' board and lodging and schooling, and I'd have to stay on at the store and work it out."

"Did, eh? How long you been working in the store, Tommy?"

"Almost three years. Ever since I finished high school."

"George been paying you pretty good wages?"

"He gives me five dollars a month."

"How much money you got on you?"

"Twenty-six dollars."

"Twenty-six dollars! Know how far it is to the Klondike?"

"No, sir. I know it's a long ways. But I'll get there, somehow. When my money gives out, maybe I can work my way."

Tom Jorden noticed that the kindly gray eyes were not kindly now. The old man's face flushed until two red spots showed on the smooth-shaven cheeks, and there was a grim set to the thin lips. He pointed to the room at the corner of the house, above the door of which the word "OFFICE" appeared in gilt letters against a black background. "You go in there and wait till I come back," he said, the words sounding somehow hard and gritty.

"I—I want to catch the ten-fifteen for Minneapolis," the boy said.

"You've got plenty of time. It's only seven-thirty. I've got a call to make first—old Mrs. De Groat has got the belly-ache. Then I'm going to have a little talk with George Jorden."

"I didn't open the store this morning," Tom said, "and he won't get down there till nine o'clock."

"I'll catch him at home, then. Do as I say and wait till I come back. You'll find some magazines in there on the table."

IT WAS after nine o'clock when the doctor returned. He smiled a bit grimly. "Had quite a little talk with old George," he said. "At that, I'd have been here sooner if I hadn't had to wait for the bank to open." Reaching into his coat pocket he drew out a huge roll of bills which he counted out onto the table before the astonished eyes of the boy. "There you are, Tommy—five thousand dollars to go with your twenty-six."

The astounded boy stared at the pile of bills. Finally he found his voice. "But—I I can never pay it back, Doctor," he faltered. "I—I can't take it."

"You don't have to pay it back. It's yours—and it ought to be more—a lot more. But that's all the ready cash old George could scrape up—and you bet I verified that at the bank! Just sign this receipt, and take the money. And," he added with a grin, "I wouldn't worry too much if your uncle don't show up at the depot to see you off. The fact is George isn't feeling any too good, this mornin'. He seems a little peeved about something."

"You mean—Uncle George gave me this?"

"Well," the doctor replied dryly, "he didn't exactly give it to you. In fact, he refused to give you a cent, at first. So I had to sort of pry it loose from him. It's too long a story to go into now—but a few hints I dropped about the prosecuting attorney, and the State prison at Stillwater changed his mind for him."

As one in a dream Tom Jorden gathered up the bills and pocketed them. "I—I don't know how I can ever thank you, Doctor—"

"You don't have to thank me, son. Mighty glad I was able to do this for you—and for John Jorden. Good luck to you, Tommy. I believe you're wise in leaving this town. You've never got a square break here—and you never would get one. John Jorden was my friend. I've had my eye on you, Tommy, and I know how you feel about people. I don't blame you. The wonder is that you've kept a level head. You'll find folks a lot different from what you believe them to be. The common run of folks are good, Tommy. Most of the folks in this town are good people. But they haven't got sense enough to know that you didn't want their pity. You know, and I know that John Jorden didn't kill Joel Stowe. John was a scrapper when he needed to be—but he was no murderer. And if you ever run across him, tell him I said so."

"Run across him!" the boy cried. "How could I run across him? Why, I—I wouldn't even know him! He's been gone for fifteen years. He'd be changed a lot from the way I remember him. And, besides, he's prob'ly using some other name."

"That's all true, Tommy. But you'll be using your own name. Maybe he'll run across you. I've got a hunch that when John

Jorden slipped away from the sheriff, that day, he hit for Alaska, or somewhere up there in the Arctic. An old uncle of his used to sail on a whaling ship. He was wrecked one time somewhere along the Arctic coast, and in making his way inland to civilization, he found some gold nuggets on a river. Later he showed those nuggets to your father—give him some of 'em. John wanted to go back with the old sailor and find that river. But your mother wouldn't hear of it. Then you were born, and I guess John forgot the whole thing. But when he found himself on the run, I'll bet it all came back to him—and I'll bet he found some way to get up there, too."

"Gee," breathed the boy "—if I could only find my dad!"

"Stranger things have happened," the doctor said. "There prob'ly weren't many folks up there before this gold rush started. You might locate him among the old-timers. From all I hear and read that's a tough country, Tommy. And there'll be a lot of tough men piling into it. You're on your own now—you've got to look out for yourself. And from what I hear, you're pretty well able to do it. And remember, Tommy, toughness is a virtue—if it's rightly used. Be sure you're right, then be as tough as the toughest of 'em—and a little tougher. Never hunt trouble. But if you've got to fight, fight to win. Never hit a man easy, Tommy—hit him with all you've got. Remember—in a new country you'll run up against worst as well as the best. Good luck to you, boy. Jump in the buggy and I'll drive you down to the depot. The ten-fifteen's about due."

CHAPTER IV

LAKE LINDEMAN

BEYOND the Chilcoot, Lake Lindeman was still ice-locked. Ever widening patches of rock and bare ground showed on the south slopes, as innumerable freshets discharged their waters onto the snow-covered ice of the lake. A huge camp had sprung up here. In sharp contrast with the chaos that prevailed at Sheep Camp, the Lake Lindeman camp was a camp of law and order, the symbol of which was the British flag fluttering from the top of the pole that stood before the tent of Constable Burns, of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

The snow, thawed to a sudden slush in the rays of the sun, froze to the hardness of iron at night. All day long men sloshed about felling trees and whip-sawing the logs into lumber. Each night a few sled outfits pulled out onto the lake and disappeared in the darkness—the outfits of the lucky ones who had managed to buy dogs. But for the most part the men at the Lindeman camp were building boats against the time when the ice would go out.

Young Tom Jorden pitched his tent, paid off his Indian packers, and sloshed across a small ravine to watch two men, one standing on a scaffold, the other beneath him, whip-sawing a log into lumber.

"Gawd," the bottom man grinned, as the board was laboriously slabbed off, and he paused to wipe the sweat and sawdust from his face, "if I'd only know'd enough to fetch in a portable sawmill, I could clean up more money right here than all the gold I'll ever dig in the Klondike, an' be back home, come summer."

THE old man on top of the scaffold shunted the log into position for another cut, and noticing Tom for the first time, called a greeting.

"Hi there, young feller! Where the hell did you go to, down there on the beach? Knocked hell out of them two damn cusses that was stealin' my outfit, an' was gone before I could tell you how I appreciated what you done fer me."

Tom laughed. "Oh, that's all right. Glad to take a crack at 'em. It was a dirty dip that man hit you."

"Yeah—but they didn't git far. I seen the Mounted turn 'em back at the Summit. Served the damn thieves right. Got yer lumber sawed yet?"

Tom shook his head. "No, I just got here. Noticed forty or fifty of these saw outfits going, and came over to see what it's all about."

The oldster chuckled. "You'll know all about it agin you git yer lumber sawed."

"But—what do I want with lumber?"

"Lumber to build you a boat—if you ain't got no dogs an' a sled. Cripes, it's six hundred miles down through the lakes, an'

down the big river till we git to where the gold's at!"

Tom's brow drew into a frown. "This sawing is a two-man job. I have no partner—and no saw—and no nails to build a boat with if I had the lumber."

"You can prob'ly hook up with a pardner, same as I done. Lot of fellas come in single—but from here on it's a two-man job. You can buy nails fer a dollar a pound, but you can't buy no saw."

He paused and pointed with pride to a pile of newly sawed boards. "We'll finish sawin' by tonight, an' you can have this one. Hunt you up a pardner, an' you can start in tomorrow."

"Okay. I'll buy your saw. Don't sell it to anyone else."

"Be'n offered a hundred dollars fer it. I ain't sellin' it to no one. It's yourn. You can have this scaffold, too. Cripes, you couldn't buy nothin' off'n me—after what you done down there on the beach!"

As Tom turned away he was accosted by a shrewd-eyed elderly man who had paused at the edge of the ravine. The man smiled. "Looking for a partner? I couldn't help overhearing what the old man said. How will I do?"

Tom instantly liked this stranger — the humorous gleam in the shrewd eyes, the sound of his voice. He returned the smile. "Ever build a boat?" he asked.

"No. I even get seasick riding on the damn things. And I never sawed any lumber, either. How many boats have you ever built?"

"None. Maybe you better pass me up, and find someone who's had more experience."

"I'm willing to take a chance, if you are," the man replied, dryly. "You see, I overheard what the old man said about that scrap down there on the beach—heard about it from another source, too. I have a hunch you're just the man I'm looking for. And seeing you're furnishing the saw and the scaffold, I'll attend to the nails. Brandon's my name—Sam Brandon."

"Mine's Tom Jorden."

"All right, Tom—it's a deal. And I'll bet we'll turn out a damn good boat. See you here in the morning."

"Okay, Mr. Brandon — I'll be here. But—"

"You mean, okay, Sam," the other interrupted. "To hell with the Mister! It's got to be Sam and Tom, if we're going to be partners. What was it you were going to say?"

"I was going to say what's the use in waiting till morning."

"Why—these men won't be through with the saw till tonight."

"Got an axe?" Tom asked. "The trees have to be chopped down before we can saw 'em."

Brandon grinned. "I get you," he said. "Be back in half an hour."

It was well toward noon when Tom looked up from his work of chopping a trunk into suitable lengths, to find himself once again looking straight into the blue eyes of the girl with the auburn hair. Sam Brandon removed his cap and wiped the sweat from his brow on the sleeve of his shirt. "This is Tom Jorden, Sue—our partner" He turned to the younger man. "And Tom, this is my daughter, Sue."

The girl was smiling. "Oh, Mr. Jorden and I are old acquaintances. It's about time someone introduced us—isn't it, Mr. Jorden?"

Tom felt his face flushing, and Brandon hastened to explain. "She got you wrong down there on Dyea Beach, Tom. But she knows the straight of it, now. The old man told us about it on the trail. That's the reason I picked you for a partner. It took guts to tackle those two thieves, single handed."

The girl laughed. "And you don't know the half of it. I didn't tell you what happened at Sheep Camp. I figured one calling down was enough. Don't worry—we'll get along all right, won't we, Mr. Jorden—even if I haven't got any sense? And, by the way—if we're going to be partners, that's the last time I'll call you Mr. Jorden—and if you ever call me Miss Brandon I'll scream."

As Tom searched for a reply it suddenly dawned on him that here was a girl who was neither despising nor pitying him. A lump rose in his throat. This girl was friendly—even as old Doctor Leroy was friendly. And Sam Brandon was friendly—more than friendly—he had spoken words of commendation. The words of the old doctor flashed into his mind: "The common run of folks

are good, Tommy," and, "you'll find people a lot different from what you believe them to be." He swallowed the lump in his throat and nodded. "Sure," he heard himself saying, "we'll get along."

"Come on," the girl said, "dinner's ready, and you two must be hungry as wolves."

TOM turned toward his own tent, pitched on the opposite rim of the ravine. "I'll be ready when you get back," he said.

"You're coming with us!" the girl said. "When daddy came back for his axe and told me he'd found a partner, I made dinner for three. If we three are partners you bet, I'm going to do my share! And if you think I'm going to cook good food and throw part of it away, you're crazy!"

Brandon grinned. "She's right, Tom. It's a three way proposition from now on. And don't ever try to argue with a redhead.

The meal over Brandon filled and lighted his pipe, and glanced across at the girl. "What's all this that happened at Sheep Camp that you didn't tell me about?" he asked. "And who called you down? And what did you mean about not having any sense?"

Tom felt the blood mounting to his cheeks as the girl replied. "I took a walk one evening out beyond the outskirts of the camp, and a horrible creature must have followed me. Anyway, he started to—to attack me, and then I found out just how good Tom really is in fighting other people's battles for them. And when I tried to thank him he told me to go back where I belonged, and that I didn't have any sense to go prowling around alone. And he was right." She paused and glanced at the younger man. "But you were horrid when I tried to apologize for calling you a coward back there on the beach."

"Well—I—you see—I didn't know you, then. I—I thought—"

"It don't make any difference what you thought," the girl giggled, quoting his own words, "and now we're even, let's get down to business. In the first place we're going to move camp this afternoon. We'll pitch our tent there beside Tom's at the edge of the ravine. I'm not going to slosh a half a mile through this slush every time I want to call you to a meal."

"But—we haven't got any packers," Sam Brandon objected.

"Packers! If the three of us can't move a ton of stuff a half mile in an afternoon, we'd better quit and go back, right now!"

Tom nodded. "She's right," he said. "It will be much handier and it'll save a lot of time in the long run."

All during the daylight hours of the rapidly lengthening days the two men worked, adding plank by plank to their pile of lumber. After supper on the evening of the twelfth day Brandon eyed the result of their handiwork. "Guess we've got lumber enough," he said. "We can start building tomorrow."

Tom laid aside the cloth with which he had been drying the dishes as the girl washed them. "How are we going to build her?" he asked. "I've been sort of looking the boats over and, believe me, they're all shapes and sizes. Most of 'em are square-ended scows sloped up at the bow and stern, with green spruce oars that are heavy as logs. It looks like they'd be mighty hard to handle even in fair weather—and a lake this size could kick up quite a sea in a high wind."

Brandon nodded. "The hardest job will be making her water-tight with this rough lumber. There'll be seams half an inch wide to caulk—and what are we going to use for caulking?"

Sue Brandon threw out the dishwater, hung the pan on a convenient spruce stub, and seated herself between the two. "We'll build her sixteen feet long, and three feet wide at the bottom, and three feet and a half across the top. She'll have to be square-ended because we haven't got any pattern, and darn few tools. But if you plane the edges of the boards so they fit close, the seams won't be very wide."

"Plane 'em!" Brandon exclaimed. "What will we plane 'em with—the axe, or the saw?"

The girl smiled. "If I were you, I'd use the plane. I bought one, yesterday. Paid twenty dollars for it. I thought it would be worth that much to have a good tight boat. We've got three or four lakes to navigate and some pretty tough river water—what with the Box Canyon, and the White Horse and Five Fingers Rapids."

The two men eyed the girl in undisguised surprise. "What do you know about build-

ing boats—and how many rapids there are in the river?" her father asked.

"What do you think I've been doing all day for the past couple of weeks while you two've been working?"

"Why—cooking, I suppose. You've kept us well fed, anyhow."

"Thanks for the compliment. But I've been doing a darn sight more than cooking. I didn't believe either of you knew very much about boat building, and were too busy to find out, so I've been nosing around looking the boats over, watching the men build 'em. I wasn't very much impressed with most of 'em. There are lots of boats being built in this camp that'll never reach Dawson City. But finally I found two men who really seemed to know how to go at it. One of 'em's a fur trader, and the other's a prospector, and they've been in the country for years—sourdoughs is what they call the old-timers. So I watched them build their boat and asked 'em a lot of questions. They were real nice about answering me—asked me how many there were of us and how much outfit we had, and when I told 'em, they advised me what size boat to build. They said that most of the boats being built were either too small or else twice the size they needed to be—and twice as clumsy to handle. We're going to build a double bottom in her—the first one with the boards crosswise, and another one over that with the boards running lengthwise. And we're going to put a three-inch keel on her, and a rudder. We'll have oars—but we're going to depend mostly on the sail."

"Sail! Where in thunder are we going to get a sail?"

For answer the girl pointed to the two tents. "I'm going to rip one of 'em up and make a sail. One tent is enough for three people. I found a discarded blanket that I'll unravel for caulking material, and we'll cover all the seams with pitch to make 'em watertight. They showed me how to gather the pitch from spruce trees, and how to run it on the seams and iron it in with a hot stone. They finished their boat yesterday, so I bought their plane. They offered to give it to me, but I made 'em take the money, because I had heard a man offer 'em twenty dollars for it the day before."

"Well—I'll be damned!" Brandon exclaimed.

"All right, Captain," Tom said, smiling into the blue eyes. "You give the orders and we'll carry 'em out. It looks like you've got to be boss from now on."

"I don't want to be boss, Tom," the girl said, her eyes on his face. "I just want to help. After all, it's you and daddy who do the work."

That night Tom Jorden lay for a long time in his blankets staring up at the gray canvas of his tent. And that night he dreamed a dream—a wild dream of two people sailing a boat on a stormy sea—a girl stood in the bow—a girl with blue eyes and a wisp of auburn hair whipping across her cheek, and there were rocks ahead—and whitewater breakers — and the girl was shouting orders that he was vainly trying to carry out—and he knew that if he could only carry them out all would be well—but the sail was slatting wildly, and the rudder was jammed—and the boat was rushing toward the rocks with the speed of an express train. But he never knew the end of the dream—because he woke up suddenly sitting bolt upright—and the moonlight filtering through the interlacing spruce branches was throwing curious patterns on the canvas.

CHAPTER V

TOM AND SUE GO HUNTING

THE days lengthened perceptibly. The bare patches widened on the slopes, and the lake ice honeycombed and turned black under the rays of the spring sun. Finally the boat was finished to the caulking and pitching of the last seam, and the following morning, with the help of half a dozen volunteers who were waiting impatiently for the break-up, she was skidded over the frozen snow, and chocked on peeled skids ready for launching.

For a week the three had been living in the Brandon tent while the girl ripped Tom's tent to pieces and fashioned it into a sail. With the mast stepped and the sail rigged and furled, Sam Brandon eyed her with approval. "All we've got to do now is to load her, and knock the chocks out, and slide down to Dawson, slick as you please."

Sue smiled. "You always were an optimist, Daddy. From what those sourdoughs

told me there's going to be more to this 'sliding down to Dawson' than you seem to think."

"Nonsense! We've got a good boat, haven't we? And a sail to propel her down through the lakes, and after we hit the river, it's all downstream—no current to buck. All we've got to do is sit in the boat and let the wind and the current do the work."

"But there are rapids and canyons to be run, and—"

"Suppose there are rapids and canyons! Other people have run them. And if they can, you bet we can. We've got the best boat I've seen around here. Look at the rest of 'em—damn clumsy affairs—look like overgrown horse troughs, most of 'em. Bet half of 'em'll tip over or sink before they hit the Yukon. Quick as this damn ice goes out, we'll be on our way."

Followed then days of idle waiting during which Brandon curbed his impatience as best he could, playing three-handed cribbage for two cents a point with Tom and Sue, poker with a half dozen other enforced idlers. A cold wave accompanied by snow squalls gave the break-up a three-day setback, but the morning of the fourth day dawned bright and clear, and after breakfast Sue got out a .22 rifle and turned to Tom.

"Let's go hunting," Sue said. "I saw some rabbit tracks out behind the tent and I'm dying for a taste of fresh meat."

As they passed the camp of the two sourdoughs on the outskirts of the big camp one of the men called a greeting. "Hello, Sis! How you comin' with yer boat?"

"It's all finished and ready to go as soon as we load it. We've got it on skids ready to slip into the lake just like yours, there." She turned to Tom. "These are the two men who told me how to build the boat. I want you to meet them. This is Mooschide Charlie, a prospector from Dawson, and Mr. Gorman, a fur trader. And this is Tom Jorden, daddy's and my partner."

The two acknowledged the introduction. "*Jack* Gorman," the trader corrected with a grin, "not Mr. Gorman. We don't go much on handles to names in this country. Down-river there's a couple of honest-to-God lords that come into the country a year back. First off it was Sir Arthur, this, an' Sir Lionel, that—now one of 'em's 'Art,' an' the other's 'Skookum'—an' they eat it up. It don't make no difference who a man was nor where he come from, in this country. It's what he is when he gits here that counts."

"Goin' huntin'?" Mooschide asked.

Tom grinned. "Yes. I suppose it looks kind of ridiculous in this country to go hunting with a twenty-two."

"Why?"

"Why—er—this is a big game country, isn't it? I didn't suppose you fellows would bother with anything smaller than a moose or a bear."

Mooschide laughed. "Most of the chechakos comes in packin' a cannon, expectin' to find a moose er a bear settin' on every rock. Take it this time of year the bears ain't come out of their dens yet, an' the moose an' caribou are so damn pore an' stringy a man couldn't chaw the meat if he killed one. When it comes to meat gettin', except in the fall, give me a twenty-two every time. The ducks an' geese an' swan will be along pretty quick, now—an' there's rabbits an' ptarmigan in the bush. Jest edge along them slopes where the sun hits, an' you'd ort to get a mess of meat in no time."

Heading up a ravine the two threaded their way among the huge rocks and sparse growth until noon brought them out on a huge flat rock high above the lake. They had taken turns with the .22, and the girl stood the light rifle against a spruce stub and seated herself on the rock. "Whew, I'm kind of tired," she said, eyeing the two rabbits and five ptarmigan that Tom tossed to the rock beside her, "and famished, too," she added. "I wish we'd brought a lunch. I'm hungry enough to eat one of those birds raw!"

"No use eating it raw," Tom smiled. "I'm hungry, too. Why not build a fire and roast a couple of 'em? I'll bet they'd be good, even without salt."

"Fine!" the girl cried. "You rustle some wood and get the fire going, and I'll clean 'em. Then we can roast 'em over the flames on sticks!"

THE meal over, the two sat with their backs against a rock enjoying the warm sunshine. "I'm going to love this country," the girl said abruptly, her gaze fixed on the vast expanse of sun-blackened ice and towering heights beyond. "And the

people, too—the sourdoughs, I mean—like Moosehide Charlie and Jack Gorman. They are so—so genuine—so real. There's nothing put-on, or artificial about 'em. When they say something you just instinctively know they mean it."

Tom nodded, his eyes on the girl's profile. "Yes," he said, "I'm going to love it, too."

She glanced at him and he felt the blood mounting to his cheeks as it had mounted that other day on the boat when she turned and caught him staring at her. "I've lived in a city all my life," she said, "and I'm nineteen and what have I ever accomplished? Nothing—just absolutely nothing. I've existed, and that's all. I've been through high school and two years of what they call a finishing school where I learned to do fancy needle work, and dance, and play whist, and ride horseback, and which fork and spoon to use with which course, and not to say 'damn,' and—" she paused for a moment as if trying to remember what else she had learned, then said vehemently "and not one damn thing that's any good to me!"

Tom smiled. "If you've forgotten the rest of it like you've forgotten about 'damn,' I guess what you learned won't hurt you any."

The girl laughed, then her eyes became serious. "But honestly, I mean it, Tom. I haven't learned a thing that's going to be any good to me in this country!"

The smile broadened. "Well, Sue, when you come to think of it you'd hardly expect 'em to teach you to drive dogs, and carry packs, and make sails, and build boats in a girl's school."

"No. But they could have taught practical sewing and cooking and things like that. You bet I wished I'd had some lessons in sewing when I was making that sail!"

"You did a good job of it, without lessons," Tom said, "and you've done a good job with the cooking, too. You don't need to worry, Sue. Whatever you set out to do, you'll do it well. You've got it in you. We're both in the same boat. We've got to learn as we go along. We'll probably make mistakes—plenty of 'em. But we'll learn. And in the long run, we'll win."

"Sure we will! Oh, it's a grand country, Tom! And it's doing wonders for daddy, too. He and his partner owned a machine tool factory in Indianapolis. But he's been so—so kind of restless and lost ever since my mother died, a year ago. He'd always been a good business man, but he seemed to lose interest in business after her death—seemed not to care. Then this gold strike came, and when he talked of selling out and coming up here, I encouraged him. And it wasn't all on account of the business, either. There was a woman—a horrible creature. She was a grass widow, and blonde. I suppose most men would call her pretty. Daddy met her at a party, somewhere, and she'd keep calling him up, and he'd take her out to dinner, and to the theatre. Everybody could see that she was just after daddy's money—everybody but daddy. Why, she isn't much older than I am! If he'd married her and brought her home I'd—I'd have *clawed her!*" She paused for a moment, then asked abruptly, "Do you like blondes, Tom?"

"No," Tom said. "I don't like any women. That is," he hastened to add. "I never liked any women till—till—I saw you that day on the boat."

The girl laughed. "You didn't like me then, either. Why that day on the beach when I called you a coward, you were so angry your eyes fairly blazed. And there at Sheep Camp, when you wouldn't give me a chance to apologize, and told me I didn't have any sense. You certainly didn't like me, then."

"I didn't know you, then. How did you get Sam away from that woman?"

"Oh, I did some inquiring around, and one night I made daddy take me out, and we crashed a party to which he hadn't been invited. He saw plenty—and a day or so later he sold out to his partner—and here we are. And, oh, Tom, it's just the grandest adventure in the world! Just think—by this time next year we might all be millionaires!"

Tom nodded, his eyes on the little white dots that were the tents of the Lindeman camp at the head of the lake far below. "Yes," he said somberly. "And then, you'll be going back—back to your parties, and your horseback riding, and your fancy sewing. And all the things you learned at that school will seem important again. And this—" he paused and with a sweep of his arm indicated the mighty panorama of vast-

ness "—all this will be just part of your grand adventure. You won't forget it. You'll never forget it. It will be something like this—'Oh, yes, I went to the Klondike with my dad way back in '98—you remember—the time of the big gold rush. We landed on a beach somewhere and had to walk for miles and hire Indians to carry our packs, and we went in over the Chilcoot Pass, and came to the shore of a lake. And the lake was frozen and there were no dogs, so we had to build a boat and wait for the ice to go out. We met a young man—let's see—his name was—well, I can't remember, now—it don't make any difference—and we built a boat and went on down to Dawson together, and' . . ."

"Tom Jorden, I think you're horrid! I'm not going back. I'm never going back! I love this country, and I'm going to stay here always. It's big—and elemental—and—and worth while!" She paused abruptly and her eyes fixed on his with a peculiar burning intensity. "Are you going back?" she demanded. "When you've got all the money you want, are you going back where you came from? Doesn't all this mean anything to you—except just a place to dig gold?"

"I love it," he said simply. "I'm never going back. I'm going to stay here till I die."

The girl heaved a deep sigh. "We'll both stay here," she said. Then, abruptly, "Do you know, Tom, you've never told me anything about yourself — why, I don't even know where you came from!"

Tom Jorden was on the point of pouring into the girl's ears the sordid story of his life—of unburdening his very soul—when into his brain flashed a vision of the small town he had left forever—his aunt, and his brat of a cousin—the girls who had been his schoolmates—his prim schoolteachers, the women he had served over the counter of the hardware store—those who had pitied—and those who had scorned. Here on the rock beside him was the one girl in the world who treated him as an equal—who appraised him at his worth—who neither pitied nor scorned him. If she knew the truth—deep down in his heart he knew she would not scorn him—but—would she pity? He dared not risk it. "I came from Minnesota," he said almost gruffly. "Come on, we'd better be getting back. The sun will be down by the time we get there—and we've got to shoot a couple of more birds for supper."

CHAPTER VI

THE SOURDOUGHS GIVE ADVICE

THE days that followed were days of bright sunshine that rotted the ice and sent the snow water rushing down from the hills in torrents. They were days, too, during which an intangible barrier of restraint grew up between Tom Jorden and Sue Brandon. Twice Tom suggested another hunting expedition, but each time the girl made some excuse.

Sam Brandon fretted at the delay, and played poker.

Then, one morning, the whole camp sprang into feverish activity. A strong south wind had sprung up during the night, and daylight showed a slowly widening shore lead. Boats were shoved into the water, some promptly capsizing from top-heavy loads, while in others men bailed frantically to throw out the water that seeped in through ill-caulked seams. Shouts and curses filled the air—and bursts of loud laughter. Tents disappeared like magic, and pack-laden men waded belly-deep in the icy water, carrying their goods to the boats.

While Sue busied herself with breakfast the two men hurried to the shore where a hundred boats of all shapes and sizes already jammed the narrow lead as their owners worked feverishly to load them.

Tom grinned. "You'd think their lives depended on being the first to get away. I'll bet half of 'em didn't stop to eat breakfast."

"Probably not," Brandon agreed. "But they're wise in getting an early start. After all, at a time like this it's 'first come, first served.' Those who get to the Klondike first will get the pick of the locations."

The younger man glanced with pride at their own boat poised on its skids ready for launching. "Yes, but when we get going we'll pass 'em like nobody's business."

"Sure we will. But the sooner we get going, the sooner we'll get there. I'll bet we can load her right where she is, then knock out the chocks and let her slide in.

Damned if I want to wade out in that cold water carrying the stuff out to her!"

"Better not stow the whole load till we see how she floats," Tom advised. "I'd say put in about a third of the stuff and launch her, and I'll pack the rest out and trim her up. I don't mind cold water."

"Okay—but let's be getting at it. Come on. Sue must have breakfast ready by this time. If she hasn't, we can take the tent down anyway."

"I don't believe we need to be in such a hell of a hurry," Tom said as he followed Brandon to the tent where the girl was waiting.

"I thought you'd never come!" Sue cried, her eyes dancing with excitement. "Breakfast's all ready. I was just about to hunt you up. Oh, isn't it grand—the ice going out? I can hardly wait to get started!"

Brandon frowned. "Me, too," he said. "But Tom, here, seems to think there's no need to hurry."

"No need to hurry!" the girl cried, with a reproachful look at the younger man. "Do you want all these people to beat us to Dawson?"

"I don't think many of 'em will beat us. There are so many boats in the water now we couldn't pass 'em till the lead widens."

"It'll take us half a day to break camp and pack this stuff to the lake," Brandon said. "And if this wind keeps up there'll be plenty of room to pass 'em. The lead's widening every minute."

"Of course it is!" the girl seconded. "And look all around us! Nearly all the other tents are down, and the men are working like beavers packing their stuff to the boats. And we're just eating our breakfast!"

Tom grinned. "I'll bet a lot of others will wish they'd eaten theirs before night. And I'll bet a lot more of 'em'll wish they hadn't been in such a devil of a hurry."

"Nonsense!" Brandon snapped. "Here we've been waiting and waiting for God knows how long for the break-up to come so we can get started. And now it's here, you say there's no need to hurry. As I told you a few minutes ago, it's 'first come, first served.' That's an old saying—and a true one. And it certainly applies in a case like this."

" 'Haste makes waste' is another saying, and probably just as old and just as true," Tom replied stubbornly. "And it applies in this case, too. Didn't you notice the stuff those men were abandoning — leaving it there on the beach because they wouldn't take time to load their boats properly?"

Both the others scowled, and Brandon regarded him shrewdly. "What's got into you, Tom?" he asked abruptly. "It was because that old man told us there on the trail, how you sailed into those two thugs and saved his outfit for him back on the beach, that I picked you for a partner. I knew you had guts. And that first day, when I told you we'd start work the next morning, you pointed out that we could start right then—that the trees had to be felled before they could be sawed, I knew you were up and coming—right on the job. And you've been right on the job every minute since. In fact you've done a damn sight more work than I have. And now—when the time comes to cash in on this work—you hold back. What's the answer? What's the reason? You certainly must have a reason. What's your argument against getting out of here as quick as we can?"

As the two waited for him to speak, a flash of suspicion, of vague distrust, flashed into the girl's mind. What did they know of this man they had taken for a partner? Nothing—absolutely nothing beyond the fact that he was willing to fight in defense of helpless persons. That certainly was a point in his favor—but, why hadn't he told her something of himself? During all the days of their acquaintance he had never once mentioned his past. And there on the rock, that day, when she had told him something of her own life, and had reminded him that he had never told her anything about himself, he had shut her up with the gruff announcement that he came from Minnesota—and not another word had she got out of him. Why? Why was he deliberately concealing his past? Was he a criminal flying from the long arm of the law? Maybe his name wasn't Jorden. They had only his word for it. But—even if he were a criminal, what possible motive could he have in delaying the start for the Klondike? If he were trying to elude the law, the more miles he placed between himself and the scene of his crime, the better he'd be off. Could there be some deep, ulterior motive in his strange attitude?

TOM was quick to read doubt in Brandon's eyes—suspicion, distrust in the eyes of the girl. "I have a reason," he said, "but no argument." And at his next words all distrust and suspicion vanished from the girl's mind. He pointed to a little white tent on the edge of the camp. "My reason for not hurrying is that those two men, Moosehide Charlie and Jack Gorman, the men who told us how to build our boat, the only two men in the whole camp who know the country, are not hurrying. They're just as anxious to get to Dawson as anyone. But their tent is still up, and their boat is still on her skids. And they're not falling all over themselves packing their outfit to the lake. Let's go over and talk to them. I'll bet they've got an argument. And I'll bet it's a good one."

"Tom's right, Daddy!" the girl exclaimed. "I've been so excited watching the others that I never noticed what Mooschide and Jack Gorman were doing. They know more than all the rest of us put together."

"When in Rome, do as the Romans do," Tom grinned, quick to note the change in the girl's attitude.

Brandon nodded slowly, his eyes on the younger man's face. "You've got a pretty good head on you, son," he said. "Damn it! I ought to have thought of that, myself. Come on, let's go have a talk with 'em."

The three found the two sourdoughs squatting on either side of the little fire in front of their tent, sipping tea out of tin cups and regarding the frantic efforts of the swarming men with amused tolerance.

Moosehide looked up and smiled as the girl rounded the corner of the tent closely followed by the other two. "Hello, Sis! Why ain't you sloshin' around up to yer chin in the lake like all the rest of the chechakos?"

Brandon smiled. "Hoosiers—not chechakos," he corrected. "We're from Indiana, my daughter and I."

"Indiany, eh?" Gorman said. "Well, that's a damn good place to be from—a hell of a ways from, I'd claim. In this country everyone that ain't a sourdough's a chechako, no matter whether they come from Indiany, er Timbuctoo. At that, I'll bet Sis here'll be a sourdough long before most of these here folks knows what it's all about. She ain't afraid to ask questions—an' by the looks of yer boat, she savvies what you tell her. Me an' Moosehide was lookin' her over yesterday—an' believe me, she's the only boat in the hull damn camp I'd hit out for Dawson in, except ourn, here."

The girl laughed. "We've come to ask you some more questions. Daddy and I were for getting started so all these others wouldn't beat us to the Klondike. But Tom, here, noticed that you two didn't seem to be in any hurry, so we came over to find out why?"

"It seems to me," Brandon said, "that the sooner we get started, the sooner we'll get there. With the ice going out, I can't see any reason for delay."

Moosehide Charlie slanted him a glance. "Yeah?" he asked dryly. "Where's it goin' to?"

"Why—why—it's moving away from here. That looks like our only concern. It gives us water to float the boat in."

Moosehide nodded. "That's what these chechakos thinks. Ever be'n to the other end of the lake?"

"No."

"We have—an' the river that runs out of it ain't no wider 'n from here to that tree, yonder. Do you figger all this ice is goin' on down through that river an' leave the lake clear?"

"Probably not. But—it's going some place. It's going away from here."

"Yeah? Well, believe me, brother, that ice ain't goin' no place it can't come back from, onct the wind changes. She's shovin' up on the other shore—but she can't only shove so fer. Then she'll hold. That lead's damn near as wide a'ready as it's goin' to be. Then tonight, like as not, the wind'll change, an' the ice'll come back an' shove up on this shore—an' all them damn fools will be onloadin' agin, an' tryin' to get their boats out."

Gorman assented, "An' they're goin' to be in a damn sight bigger hurry gittin' 'em out than they was gittin' 'em in."

"But," cried the girl, "won't a lot of 'em be smashed up and lost?"

"Shore they will. Two, three days from now, there'll be plenty of them chechakos standin' around here with nothin' but the clothes on their back. It won't take 'em long to git outfitted, though," he added, indicating the litter of discarded supplies.

"Cripes, them damn fools throw'd away enough stuff to take a hundred men to Dawson."

"But—why don't you warn 'em."

Moosehide grinned and pointed to the boats into which men were stowing supplies. "We did warn thirty, forty of 'em—but that's all the good it done. We give it up when we seen it wasn't no use. They told us that if we was afraid, they wasn't—an' kep' right on with their loadin'."

"They'd ruther learn the hard way," Gorman added. "At that, mebbe it'll stay by 'em longer."

"But that policeman, Constable Burns—why doesn't he warn them?" the girl asked.

Moosehide grinned. "He's a chechako, too. If Corporal Downey was here it would be different."

"How long will this condition last?" Brandon asked. "With that huge field of ice drifting about the lake, shifting direction with each shift of the wind, we might be held here a month!"

"'Tain't likely," Moosehide opined. "Few days more of hot sun'll rot the ice. She's rotten a'ready, but not rotten enough. She's all in one solid chunk, yet. When she gets good an' rotten, you'll see big zig-zag leads openin' up all over. Then when a good wind hits her, she'll break all up into icicles an' sink. That's the real break-up."

"It don't sink," Gorman corrected. "It melts."

"Have it yore way," Moosehide grinned. "I shore as hell ain't goin' to dive down to the bottom an' see."

"So you think it's only a matter of days?" Brandon said.

"Yeah—barrin' a cold snap. She'd tighten up then, an' take longer."

"But—in the meantime, won't those men get an awful start on us?"

Moosehide laughed. "If a cold snap hits, that lead'll freeze an' all them boats will be worst off than ever. In this country a man learns that it ain't the start he gets that counts—it's how he finishes."

Brandon nodded thoughtfully. "That's a true saying, if ever there was one," he said. "We're mightily obliged to you men. We'll act on your advice."

"See you in Dawson," Moosehide grinned. "An' that's a damn sight more'n I could say to most of them others."

As the three reached their own tent, Brandon glanced at Tom. "Well, you got your argument, boy," he said. "How about a game of cribbage. My poker pals have gone."

CHAPTER VII

WHEN THE ICE WENT OUT

AS MOOSEHIDE CHARLIE had predicted the ice became stationary about noon, and the lead ceased to widen. The flotilla of boats strung out along the shoreline and disappeared, leaving only those whose capsizing necessitated the drying of cargoes, and those which leaked so badly as to necessitate recaulking.

All the following day it rained. The wind veered into the north during the night and the rain turned to sleet and finally to a fine flinty snow. Then the ice came back. The three were awakened by the sound of it, and at daylight hastened to the beach to stare in awed fascination as the four-foot thick ice, forced ashore by the relentless power of billions of wind-driven tons, reared high among the rocks and broke off in huge slabs that crashed and slivered with the roar of a thousand thunders.

Shielding her cheek with a mittened hand from the bite of flinty particles, the girl pointed with the other to the smashed and twisted planking of the half-dozen craft that has been drawn clear of the water for recaulking. "Just think," she said, with a shudder, "our boat might have been like those if—if——"

"If Tom hadn't had sense enough to notice that those two sourdoughs hadn't broken camp," her father interrupted. "I guess we owe everything we've got—maybe even our lives, to you, my lad," he added, turning to the younger man. "It's a thing we won't forget." The man pointed into the blinding smother that obscured the shoreline, along which the boats had disappeared. "My God, I shudder to think what is happening out there—misery, suffering—death itself!"

"And in weather like this!" Sue added, in a voice that sounded hoarse with horror. "It's terrible! Oh, isn't there something we can do?"

Tom shook his head and pointed to the crashing, grinding ice fragments, and the

steep, almost perpendicular shore. "Not a thing in the world. Most of the boats are miles away from here, and no one could travel that shoreline. Even if he could, there's nothing he could do when he got there."

"That's right," agreed a voice close behind him, and the three turned to see Moosehide Charlie and Jack Gorman. "Them damn fools know'd it all," Moosehide said. "They made their own beds—an' they've got to lay in it, fer all anyone can do."

"We told 'em what could happen, an' they laughed at us," Gorman added. "It's our turn to laugh, now—but a man can't laugh at a thing like this. Couple of days from now they'll begin stringin' back an' there's goin' to be hell to pay when they git to clawin' an' fightin' over this stuff they throw'd away," he pointed to the sleet-crusted litter of goods that lay where it had been abandoned in the wild scramble to get away.

"But—did they throw away food?" the girl asked.

"Shore they did!" Moosehide exclaimed, in disgust. "About half them boats was bigger'n what they needed to be, an' 'tother half was too small. Me an' Jack watched 'em load. They'd start packin' their stuff down to the lake an' dumpin' it in their boats, regardless of what it was, or how bad it was needed. An' when the boat would get so full it was damn near ready to sink, they'd leave the balance of their stuff—grub, clothes, tent, even blankets an' climb in on top of the load an' shove off. By God, if there's a wrong way to do a thing, you bet them chechakos will figger it out!"

BRANDON pointed to the ice barrier that had formed ten to twenty feet high along the beach. "It isn't piling up very fast, now. The wind must be letting up."

"The wind ain't let up none," Moosehide said. "The ice has shoved in about as fer as it can git."

"How in thunder are we ever going to launch our boat?" the older man asked, eyeing the ten-foot ridge of ice that lay between the craft and the lake. "Wait for that ice to melt?"

Gorman grinned. "That would be one way. But it might take quite a while. Better do like me an' Moosehide's goin' to, quick as this snow lets up, an' chop it out. 'Tain't no hell of a chore, rotten as it is. It's honeycombed more'n half ways through. You can do it easy before the ice backs away agin. When she goes out, this time, I've got a hunch it'll stay out."

The work of chopping a lane wide enough to admit passage of the boat proceeded as the survivors of the ill-fated exodus straggled back with tales of hardship, and misery, and loss—and of death. Death by drowning, death amid the grinding, crushing ice cakes, and death from exposure. And as Gorman had predicted there was hell to pay as these survivors fought among themselves for possession of the sodden abandoned goods. Constable Burns had pulled out with a pack on his back during the snowstorm to make a survey of the situation, and do what he could for the relief of the sufferers. And without the restraining presence of the Law, the Lindeman camp became Sheep Camp on a small scale as more and more of the impoverished survivors drifted back.

MANY of these survivors hit the back trail, some hoping to re-outfit at Sheep Camp, some discouraged by the catastrophe, hoping only to reach the coast and find some means of transportation back where they came from. Abandoned saws were plentiful, and a few indominable souls went to work getting out lumber for new boats. But for the most part the unfortunates milled about like a pack of wolves, ravishing the abandoned stores, salvaging anything they could lay their hands on and fighting for possession of it.

Not daring to leave Sue alone with the outfit, Tom and Brandon took turns chopping at the ice barrier, and standing guard over their goods with Tom's heavy rifle.

Out on the lake the ice got blacker as the sun beat down on it from a cloudless sky. New leads showed—long irregular lanes and wide ponds of open water. Ducks skimmed low over the ice and settled in great rafts on the water, while high overhead huge flocks of wild geese winged northward, filling the air with their honking.

The cut through the barrier was completed, and the three waited impatiently for

the change of wind that would clear the lake of ice.

Broad daylight grayed the interior of the tent when Sue Brandon awoke. The canvas was shuddering and tugging at its guy ropes, and the girl lay in her sleeping bag for several minutes drowsingly listening to the roar of wind in the spruce tops. Suddenly she sat upright. Wind! It was what they had been waiting for—the wind that would move the ice. Her father was snoring on the opposite side of the tent, and hastily slipping into her clothes she raised a corner of the square of canvas that served as a curtain that partitioned off Tom's sleeping quarters. His sleeping bag was empty, and stepping hurriedly from the tent she stood for a moment peering toward the lake. Even in the half-light of early dawn she could see it—blue water, flecked by white-capped waves stretching as far as the eye could see. The ice was gone! Wildly she raced toward the beach—then suddenly she halted and stared wide-eyed at the spot where the night before the boat had stood on her peeled skids, ready for launching. The peeled skids were there—but the boat was gone! And Tom Jorden was nowhere in sight. For long moments she stood there, her brain groping for the answer. Had Tom launched the boat and was she riding at anchor in the shallow water, waiting to be loaded? Dashing through the ice barrier, she gazed out over the lake. But she saw only the wind-riffled water of the shallows—and in the distance the white-capped waves. Suddenly her eyes focused upon a tiny speck of gray far out among the tossing waves—a boat—a boat with a sail set disappearing into the north. Whirling in her tracks she paused only to give one glance in the direction of the camp of the sourdoughs, then dashed for her own tent and fairly tore the flap aside. "Daddy!" she cried, in a voice pitched almost to a scream. "Daddy—wake up! The boat's gone! And Tom's gone! Moosehide Charlie and Jack Gorman are gone, too!"

CHAPTER VIII

PURSUIT

TOM JORDEN opened his eyes in the early dawn and, as his senses grasped the import of the dull all-pervading roar, he slipped from his sleeping bag, drew on his clothing, and passed noiselessly out into the dim half-light. As he stood for a moment peering toward the lake, vainly striving to pierce the semi-darkness, he was conscious of a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach—a strange sense of impending disaster. Slipping and stumbling among loose stones, discarded pieces of outfit, and the slash left by the whip-sawyers, he came upon the empty skidway where, the evening before, the boat had stood ready for launching. Dimly through the cut in the ice barrier, he could see the open water of the lake, and dashing through he stood at the edge and strove to pierce the gloom. But within the few yards of visibility was only the wind-riffled water.

His brain seemed numb. The boat was gone. The boat that Sue had planned, and that he and Sam Brandon had worked for weeks to build—the boat that was to carry them proudly and safely to the promised land of gold—was gone. Over and over in his numbed brain that single word repeated itself . . . gone . . . gone . . . gone . . . gone. A sense of utter futility—of utter discouragement obsessed him. Vaguely he realized that he loved that boat—loved it as he had never loved any other possession—loved it because he had helped to build it with his own hands—loved it because it was his boat—and Sue Brandon's—and it was gone. Sue loved the boat, too. She had hovered about, watching the driving of every spike—had collected the pitch and the chinking material, and with her own hands had helped to caulk her. He visualized the drooping of the sensitive lips, the bitter disappointment in the blue eyes when the girl learned of the loss. Tom's shoulders stiffened as at the thought, his sense of discouragement changed suddenly to flaming anger. He could feel the hot blood surging into his cheeks, as his blazing eyes sought to penetrate the slowly widening arc of visibility. He could see the tossing white caps, now, beyond the little riffles of the protected shallows. The boat was nowhere in sight, but he knew that somewhere out among those wildly pitching waves she was sailing sturdily northward, and that the thieves were exulting—chuckling among themselves over their easy conquest.

Tom Jorden had had fights in his life—

plenty of fights. His whole boyhood had been one long succession of fights with boys who had taunted him about his father. At first he had sailed into those tormentors, tears of anger blinding his eyes, fists flailing wildly. But as time wore on, and he realized that he was getting licked more often than he won, he methodically learned to fight. Long before he was through high school he was known as the best boxer and the toughest fighter in town, and in the gymnasium no one would put on the gloves with him. And the taunts of his tormentors diminished as his ability with the gloves increased—for he no longer sought to avenge the taunts with flailing fists and tear-dimmed eyes blazing with anger, but rather with eyes that narrowed in cold rage and blows that were driven home with calculating precision—blows that battered, and smashed, and hurt when they landed.

So now, the flaming anger of the first few moments crystallized into cold fury, and as he turned away he muttered between clenched teeth. "I'll get her back. By God, if I have to follow 'em clear through to Dawson, I'll get her back! And whoever's got her will never steal another boat."

Hurrying along the shore he saw, before he reached the spot, that the tent of the sourdoughs was nowhere in sight. Redoubling his pace he negotiated the slot in the barrier through which they had launched their boat, just in time to see Tom Gorman working at the tiller, as Moosehide Charlie hoisted the sail. The heavily laden craft was already in motion, swinging her blunt nose northward as the wind caught the sail, as without a moment's hesitation Tom dashed into the water, waded belly-deep through the shallows, grasped a gunwale, and with the two sourdoughs staring in wide-eyed surprise, drew himself aboard.

"What the hell!" cried Gorman, shoving the tiller hard around as the sail bellied out in the wind, and the boat slowly gathered speed.

Moosehide Charlie made the rope fast to a cleat, and eyeing the dripping figure that faced him across the carefully stowed duffel he grinned. "Goin' some place?" he asked. "Er jest drop in fer a call?"

"I'm going to get the damn thieves that stole our boat—if we can overtake 'em!" Tom replied.

"Stole yer boat! You mean someone got away with it in the night?"

"That's right. It's gone. I don't know how far they've got. Maybe when full daylight comes we can sight 'em. And if we can overhaul 'em, they'll wish to God they'd never tried to steal her!"

Moosehide peered lakeward over the rolling whitecaps. "She ain't nowheres in sight," he said, after a prolonged scrutiny. "But that don't spell nothin'. Cripes, they might be miles away, er they might be jest around the first p'int—'cordin' to what time they got started. The wind picked up jest about midnight, an' rotten as the ice was, it wouldn't take long to bust up."

GORMAN nodded agreement, and eyed the cargo. "We've got a pretty good load aboard," he said, "an' we can't make no fast time. Chances is them damn cusses won't have much cargo in your boat—only what they could rustle amongst that abandoned stuff."

"Hell!" Mooschide exclaimed. "There was stuff enough throw'd away to fill forty boats! It's accordin' to how much hurry they was in—er how big hogs they was, how much stuff they tuk along."

"Might be they loaded her," Gorman admitted, "but, by God, if I was stealin' a boat I'd shore as hell run her light!"

"Even if she is runnin' light we might overhaul her," Moosehide opined. "If them damn chechakos don't know no more about handlin' a boat than what they know about anythin' else, they ain't goin' to make no time."

Gorman nodded. "There's more sideslip to her if she is light," he said. "We might cut 'em off in one of the bays. Er they might pile her up on them rocks off'n Caribou P'int."

Moosehide grinned. "If they pile her up on that saw-tooth reef they'll never steal another boat, you can bet yer life on that. But the hell of it is, the boat wouldn't never do Tom no good neither."

"I sure hope they don't wreck her," Tom said. "She's our one chance to get to the Klondike."

"She's a good boat," Gorman agreed. "Ever handle a boat?"

"No, nothing but a rowboat."

"Goin' to be quite a chore, runnin' her

back, single-handed, even if we do overhaul her an' git her back," he opined.

"I'm not going to run her back single handed!" Tom retorted between clenched teeth. "Those damn cusses that stole her are going to run her back—or as many of 'em as are able to when I get through with 'em."

Moosehide approved. "That's the talk. By God, you've got guts! An' if we do overhaul 'em, me an' Jack, here, we'll step in an' take all but one of 'em off'n yer hands. You might have trouble with yer crew," he added with a grin, "if there was three er four of 'em. But you could prob'ly handle a one-man mutiny."

"How'd Sis take it—the loss of the boat?" Gorman asked.

"She don't know about it. I woke up and heard the wind just as it was breaking daylight and slipped out without waking the others. It'll break her heart to find it's gone."

"No it won't," Moosehide opined. "She's got guts, Sis has—an' she's got a good head on her, too. Her old man—he's more like the common run of chechakos—but not Sis. I ain't makin' no predictions about Sam Brandon. But you two younguns—you'll git along."

THE course held steadily northward, paralleling the eastern shore of the lake. They passed numerous camps of those unfortunates whose boats had been crushed by the ice. Also they passed many boats that had escaped destruction and had been repaired and relaunched. Toward evening, the wind rose and veered into the west. In answer to shouted questions the three received the information from the occupants of some of the boats, that a sailboat had passed them several hours before.

Then, just at dusk they sighted her. Long and intently Moosehide studied her course. "I don't think she's loaded heavy, the way she's bobbin' around," he said, "an' what with the wind hittin' her cross-ways she's got quite a side-drift. We're gainin' on her pretty fast, an' if they hold her close-hauled like she is now, we'll ketch up with her agin dark. She's driftin' sideways about as fast as she's goin' ahead."

The boat continued to gain and at length Tom, who was watching intently from the bow, called out, "There's two men in her—and one of 'em looks like the damn skunk that tried to attack Sue Brandon at Sheep Camp. By God, if it is, what I did to him back there will seem like a sweet dream to what I'll do to him this time!"

The two in the other boat were plainly visible, now. One sat at the tiller while the other seemed braced at the windward rail holding the sheet. Darkness was rapidly gathering and with the darkness the velocity of the wind increased, snatching capfuls of icy water from the crests of the white capped waves to deluge the three in the heavily laden, wallowing boat.

"By God, if she gets any higher we'll have to run fer the lee of Caribou P'int," Gorman shouted. "We can't stand no hell of a lot of water in here, with the load we've got!"

It was evident now that the two in the other boat knew they were being pursued. The man amidship seemed suddenly to become active.

"The damn fool's makin' that sheet fast!" Moosehide cried. "Cripes, it wouldn't take much more wind to tip her over!"

"Look out!" Tom called, sharply. "He's got a gun!"

Even as the words left his lips the sharp crack of a rifle sounded above the steady roar of the wind.

Moosehide laughed, and picking up his own rifle, sighted it, and pulled the trigger. "Ever sence I was in school an' read in the his'try books about John Paul Jones an' all them old sea captains, I've wanted to be in a naval battle—an' now, by heck, I'm in one!" Again the rifle cracked from the other boat, and pumping a shell into his own rifle Moosehide replied with a shot. "This ain't no dangerous pastime," he grinned, "what with the boats poppin' around like they be—an' it gives a man somethin' to do. Damn if I don't feel like old John Paul, himself—only I can't rec'lect which one of them sayin's he got off—whether it was 'don't give up the ship,' er 'damn the torpedoes,' er 'I ain't begun to fight,' er 'he ain't got only one life to give fer his country.' Seems like every time there's a naval battle the captain's got to git off some sayin' that kids has got to learn a hundred years later."

With the sound of the next shot Moosehide's cap was knocked from his head and

whipped away by the wind. "Hey!" he cried. "That one was too damn close even fer an accident! I'd like to plug that coot right between the eyes!"

Gorman chuckled. "By God, there's one sayin' they won't make no kids learn a hundred years from now! Moosehide, you've lost yer chanct fer fame!"

A few more shots were exchanged at random, the rapidly gathering darkness and pitching of the boats precluding any attempt at accurate sighting. Then a heavy cloud bank suddenly obscured even the little light of the stars, and absolute blackness engulfed them.

"We got to make a lee!" Gorman cried. "Which way's Caribou P'int?"

"How the hell do I know?" Moosehide shouted. "I ain't no owl!"

"Haul in the sheet. I'm easin' her upwind a little. The P'int's got to be upwind, an' it can't be only a few miles ahead."

As Moosehide braced himself and hauled in on the sheet there was a terrific crash that stopped the craft dead, and shivered her throughout her length. A single hoarse cry sounded above the roaring of the wind, and then silence.

Moosehide Charlie picked himself up from the foot of the mast. "Tom!" he cried. "Hey, Tom!"

But there was no answering shout; only the roaring and hissing of the elements—that, and the Stygian blackness.

(*Part II in the next* SHORT STORIES)

THERE ARE MORE TO DIE

Jim Clevenger Hadn't Counted on Coming Back from Facing the Japs to Take on the District Attorney

By PHILIP KETCHUM

I

JIM CLEVENGER stood at the window of his office looking thoughtfully down at the street. At his desk the telephone was ringing insistently but he paid no attention to it. He was a tall, wide-shouldered man of about thirty. There was a fringe of gray at his temples which made him look older. And perhaps he was older. What he had gone through in the South Pacific during the early days of the war had been enough to age anyone.

The telephone finally stopped its clamor and a moment later Marg Dayton came into the office. She took a quick glance at Jim's desk. She was a rather attractive girl with clear, blue eyes and honey-colored hair. She

had a nice smile but she wasn't wearing it this morning. She looked worried.

"It was Mr. Hughes calling you, Jim," she said slowly. "He wants to talk to you right away."

Jim Clevenger made no answer. He didn't turn around. Warren Hughes was the district attorney and Jim knew what he wanted.

"He's called three times during the past hour," Marg continued. "He says you're to call him the minute you come in."

Jim ran his fingers through his hair. "Get me an envelope, Marg," he said abruptly. "One big enough to hold that report on the desk."

"But—"

"Get me an envelope."

Marg hurried from the room and after a moment Jim turned and walked back to his desk. He picked up the report Steve McAdams had brought him early that morning and stared at it without seeing it. "Here's the story, Jim," Steve had told him. "I've telephoned the D.A. that it's ready and that you have it. You're going to find that it's damned interesting."

And Jim Clevenger had found that Steve McAdams was right. Here in his hands was the evidence to send a man to the chair. Here was proof of murder so completely established that the man the report named could never hope to escape. When Jim had first gone over the reports and the supporting depositions he hadn't been able to believe what he was reading. He still couldn't believe it, but the bluntly typed words hadn't changed with the passing hours.

Marg Dayton came back into the room with a large manila envelope. Jim took it and slipped the report inside. He sealed the flap and then folded the envelope and stuck it in his pocket. "Are you still trying to get McAdams?" he asked, looking up.

Marg nodded. "I've telephoned his hotel every fifteen minutes since you asked me to get him. He hasn't come in. I've telephoned the restaurant where you said he usually eats. I've called his office and the girl there is trying to reach him. I even asked the district attorney's secretary if he had gone over there."

Jim got his hat and coat and headed for the door. He said, "Keep trying, Marg. I've got to see him."

"Where are you going?"

"Out."

"And if Mr. Hughes calls again?"

A wry grin twisted Jim's lips. "Tell him I'll be in and see him sometime this afternoon."

JIM CLEVENGER was one of the assistants to the district attorney. He had held such an appointment before he had joined the army the day after Pearl Harbor and when he had returned, Hughes had insisted that he take his old job back. In a way, of course, the re-appointment had been more honorary than real. Jap bullets had caved in Jim's chest and though the wounds had healed, his strength had not come back. He had no stamina. A few hours at his desk was all he could stand. There was still something wrong inside, something the doctors hadn't been able to mend. He was under strict orders to take it easy.

New government offices had crowded into the City and County Building and Jim's office was in a building across the street. He stopped in the lobby, bought some stamps and fixed them on the envelope which held McAdams' report. After that, he addressed the envelope to Paul Jason Spivac, General Delivery, City. He marked it, "Hold Until Called For," and then mailed it.

"Seen the noon paper, Captain Clevenger?" asked the man back of the cigar counter. "We got five more Jap ships yesterday. We're movin' ahead. One of these days—"

"No word yet, Dad?" Jim asked.

The man shook his head. He had a boy in the Southwest Pacific. What had happened to him he didn't know. "No word yet," he said slowly. "But Eddie was quite a lad, Captain. I ain't worried—much.

Jim fished a dime from his pocket. "Give me a couple of nickels, Dad. I want to make a phone call."

The old man passed over the nickels. "You know what I wish? I wish I was thirty years younger. I can buy bonds, but damn it, I'd like to get in there with a gun in my two fists."

They had gone over this a good many times. Jim never knew what to say to Dad Thomas. He knew how Thomas felt, how desperately he had tried to get into some branch of the armed forces.

"Your day'll come, Dad," he said vaguely.

The telephone booths were across from the cigar counter. Jim headed that way. He looked up Ned Barclay's number and rang it and a moment later heard Ann Barclay's voice on the other end of the wire. The sound of Ann's voice still did things to him. A strange thickness had come into his throat. He realized, suddenly, that he had been hoping Ann would answer the phone.

"Who is it?" Ann was asking.

JIM gave his name. He could picture Ann standing at the phone. She was a tall, slender girl with warm, brown eyes and a smile that nothing could erase.

"Jim! Really!" There was something almost breathless in the answer.

"I wanted to speak to Ned," Jim said bruskly.

"He's not feeling well this morning, Jim," Ann answered slowly. "If you'll call back later—"

Jim scowled at the telephone. There had been a faint hesitation in Ann's reply and he knew what that meant. Ned wasn't sick. He was sleeping off another drunk. That was all.

"Surely," Jim promised. "I'll call him later. How have you been, Ann?"

"Just fine."

"And Punkin?"

"You wouldn't know her. She's grown so."

Jim sucked in a long breath. "Tell Ned I'll phone him this afternoon. And—take care of yourself, Ann."

He hung up and turned away from the phone, still scowling. A twinge of pain shot through his chest. It was brief but sharp and was a warning signal. There would be more pains, and heavier, if he didn't get off his feet. But he would have to face that today. With a nod to Dad Thomas he headed for the street door.

WARREN HUGHES, the district attorney was a tall, square-shouldered man in the late fifties. He had a mane of white hair which gave him a distinguished appearance. His eyes were blue and he had a friendly smile and was usually soft-spoken, but if the occasion demanded, his voice could cut like a whip and his eyes turn cold and hard.

"Hi, there, fella," he greeted as Jim came into his office. "I didn't mean that you had to come over here when I telephoned you."

Jim Clevenger shrugged. "I thought I'd better."

"Where is it, Jim?"

"Where is what?"

"The report, man. The stuff that McAdams turned over to you."

Jim leaned back in his chair. He shook his head. "I didn't bring it with me. I want to check it over first."

"Check it over?"

"Yeah."

A faint scowl had come across Hughes' face. He rubbed his hands together. The scowl grew deeper.

"McAdams telephoned me early this morning," he said slowly. "He told me he had left the report with you. He said the report named the man who killed Howard Standish and the evidence supporting it was conclusive."

"Did he give you the man's name?"

"No. He said he didn't want to mention it over the telephone. Who was it?"

Jim Clevenger got to his feet. He crossed to the window and stared out into the street. After a moment he shook his head. "I'm not going to tell you, Chief," he said slowly. "I'm not going to tell you until I've checked the evidence."

"You what!"

Jim swung around. "I'm not going to tell you."

Warren Hughes had come to his feet. A flush of color showed in his face. "I want that report," he said sharply. "I want it right now."

Jim moistened his lips. "No."

The district attorney came around his desk and moved toward the place where Jim was standing. His eyes searched the younger man's face. "I don't know what's back of this," Jim heard him saying. "I don't know what's back of it and I don't care. Steve McAdams was working for me. He had no right to turn the report over to you. If there's any checking that needs to be done, I'll do it. Jim, I want that report."

Another of those pains shot through Jim Clevenger's breast, but he rode it through without wincing. He said, "Chief, you used to trust me and you're going to have to trust me again. McAdams' report is just as con-

clusive as he said, but it's wrong. I know it. If I turned the report in you'd go ahead on it. You'd have to. And an innocent man would suffer. I'm not going to hand the report over to you."

The district attorney jerked back to his desk. He picked up his telephone and barked into it, "Get Steve McAdams for me." Then he slammed down the phone and looked back at Jim.

Jim Clevenger stood quietly at the window. He could sense the anger and the puzzlement which was riding the district attorney. He knew how stubborn Hughes could be and how blind the man was to any other consideration than his job as district attorney. He had never met a man more honest than Warren Hughes. If McAdams' report had named Hughes' brother as the murderer, Jim was satisfied that Hughes would order his brother's arrest. Hughes was that straight.

The telephone jangled and Hughes answered it. He listened for a moment, then growled, "All right. Keep trying to reach him."

"McAdams can tell you the name of the man," Jim said slowly, "but without the report he left with me you can't go very far, Chief. Give me a week. That's all I ask. A week."

"No."

"Three days, then. Give me—"

"No. I want that report and I want it now."

Jim shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the door.

"Where are you going, Clevenger?" Hughes shouted.

Jim stopped. "Why, back to my office, first."

"And then?"

"And then there are a few men I want to look up."

The district attorney sucked in a long, slow breath. He said, "Clevenger, I hate to do this. You've had a damned good record with us. You had a good record in the army, but a man can't ride on the past. Unless you have that report in my office inside of an hour I'm going to issue a warrant for your arrest. I'm going to make you produce it. Understand?"

Again Jim shrugged. "Is that all, Chief?"

Hughes took a step toward the door, "Jim, for Pete's sake, listen to reason. You are in no condition to try and check any report and you know it. Tell me what you think ought to be done and I'll do it."

There was a pleading note in the man's voice. It sounded as if he really meant what he was saying, but Jim knew him too well. Where evidence was conclusive, Warren Hughes acted.

"How about it, fella?"

Jim Clevenger shook his head. He opened the door and stepped out into the hall. As he closed it he heard the district attorney shouting into the telephone, insisting that his secretary locate Steve McAdams.

II

MARG DAYTON looked up as Jim entered his office. "Mr. McAdams just called a few minutes ago," she told him. "He said he couldn't come down here but that he'd meet you at his hotel as soon as you could get there. He said to come right to his room. It's number 552."

Jim said, "Good," and turned to leave, but Marg caught him at the door.

"Jim, what is it? What's wrong?"

The girl's hand was on his arm and she was standing very close to him. Her eyes, staring up into his face, looked troubled.

Jim Clevenger managed a grin. "Didn't we have an agreement, Marg, when you came back to work for me? Didn't we decide never to get excited about things?"

"I'm not excited, Jim. It's just that I'm —worried. Was there something wrong with McAdams' report?"

"Maybe."

"What was it?"

"That's what I'm going to ask McAdams."

Marg bit her lips. She said, "Jim, it's not your problem, is it? Shouldn't you just turn the report over to the district attorney? Mr. Hughes is honest. You've always said so. If there's something wrong with the report, he'll work on it. He'll—"

"Easy there, Marg."

The girl backed away a step and dropped her hand from Jim's arm. She was frowning. Jim kept the grin on his face. He had known Marg Dayton for a long time. She had worked for him for almost a year before he had joined the army, and had quit a

better job to come back to him when he had returned.

In a way, Marg was a rather remarkable girl. Her father had never amounted to very much. He had been mixed up in several rather shady deals. He seldom had a job. Her mother was lazy and indifferent. Jim sometimes found it hard to believe that Marg had come from such a background. She was a tireless worker, completely efficient.

"Sorry, Jim," the girl was saying. "It's none of my business of course, only—"

"Only forget it," Jim nodded. "I'll call in later. You can handle anything that comes up."

It was half a dozen blocks to Steve McAdams' hotel. A year before Jim would have walked it but today he took a cab. During the past several months he had developed a series of habits that worried him. He did everything that he could to conserve his strength, and he hated every measure that he took. He hated it that he had to watch himself. He hated it that the army had given him a disability discharge. At times he tried to glean some satisfaction from the statement his commanding officer had made to him just before his discharge, "We could shove you in a desk job, Jim," the general had said. "You could probably handle it. But if you take a rest and take care of yourself you can come back to active duty again. I'd rather see you do that."

If there had been any assurance of such a possibility, Jim Clevenger wouldn't have minded so much. But so far as he could tell, he had shown no improvement at all. Even now, and in spite of the best medical treatment available, a few hours on his feet seemed to be all that he could stand.

The cab pulled up in front of McAdams' hotel. Jim got out and paid the fare. He walked inside and crossed to the elevators and took one to the fifth floor. Room 552 was at the end of a long corridor and when Jim reached it and knocked on the door there wasn't an answer. He knocked again and then tried the knob. The door wasn't locked. Jim pushed it open and stepped inside, then he quickly closed it and stared in wide-eyed amazement at the figure on the floor.

Steve McAdams was dead. Jim Clevenger knew that immediately from the unnatural way he was lying and from the glassy look in his half-closed eyes. He stooped over and laid a hand on McAdams' forehead. The skin was still faintly warm. High on his gray vest was a dark, irregular stain. Blood had soaked into the carpet beneath his shoulders. He had been shot, Jim decided, probably while he was sitting on the edge of the bed.

Jim Clevenger had seen a good deal of death during his short stretch in the army, but in the army, death had been the order of the day and there was nothing strange or unusual about it. Here, a sudden and violent death had no place. For perhaps a minute Jim couldn't whip his mind into any sort of rational thinking, then he suddenly noticed the disordered state of the room and the open window and he found himself trying to figure out what had happened.

The bureau drawers were all pulled out and the clothing still in them was in a jumbled confusion. A suitcase had been drawn from under the bed and dumped over on the carpet. Without much question, someone had made a pretty hurried search of this place. One of McAdams' coat pockets, too, was pulled half inside out, so apparently his clothing had been searched.

JIM looked around for the gun but he couldn't find it. He searched carefully through the confusion of the room for anything that might not belong there and which might give some clue to as to who the murderer might have been, but he could find nothing.

The sudden ringing of the telephone startled him. Steve answered it.

"Mr. McAdams?" asked a woman's voice.

"No," Jim answered. "Who's calling him?"

"I'm calling for Mr. Hughes. I wonder if—"

"This is Clevenger," Jim broke in. "Will you put me through to the chief."

"Just a minute, Mr. Clevenger."

Jim stared down at the body of Steve McAdams. He had thought a good deal of McAdams. There had been a rugged honesty and a stubbornness in the man's makeup which a fellow had to admire. In some quarters, Jim knew, McAdams had been rated only a a second-class private detective,

but even those who hadn't liked him had never questioned his motives.

The district attorney's voice broke in on Jim's thoughts. "What is it, Clevenger? What do you want?"

"I just have a report to make, Chief," Jim answered. "That's all. I'm here in Steve McAdams' room. Someone got here ahead of me. McAdams is dead. He was shot."

Jim heard the district attorney's gasp of surprise. He could imagine the startled look in the man's eyes.

"What's that!" Hughes demanded. "You don't mean—"

"I mean Steve McAdams has been murdered," Jim explained. "You'd better get someone over here, Chief."

"Get someone over there!" the district attorney shouted. "You bet I will. And I'm coming along myself. You wait right where you are until we get there."

Jim shook his head at the phone. "Sorry, Chief, but I don't feel up to it."

He set the phone aside, took another look through the room and then turned to the door. At the desk downstairs he identified himself and asked what messages McAdams had received that morning. The only calls, according to the man back of the desk, had been from Steve's office and the office of the district attorney. When McAdams had left or when he had returned, the man couldn't say. Jim walked back to the elevator and questioned the girl running it. She said she was new on the job and that she didn't know Steve McAdams. There was another elevator but it wasn't running.

Jim Clevenger scowled and headed for the street. There were other things he could have done here. He might have talked to several of the men in the lobby and might have found one who had seen McAdams come in and could tell whether or not he had been alone. He might have talked to the telephone girl or the maid on the fifth floor.

Either of those women might have been able to tell him something. But after all, the district attorney's men or the police would cover those angles pretty thoroughly.

At the corner, Jim found a taxi. He climbed into it and gave Ned Barclay's address and leaning back closed his eyes. There was a dull, gnawing ache in his chest and his legs were beginning to feel tired. It was past noon. He ought to be heading home. After a few hours on his back he would be good for another two on his feet, but today he was going to have to skip that rest for awhile. It was pretty important to see Ned Barclay.

THE Barclay home was in one of the newer sections of the town. It wasn't nearly so pretentious as Barclay's money would have provided, but was just what Ann Barclay wanted. And what Ned had wanted too, at first. There was a wide expanse of lawn in front of it and fruit trees and a garden in the backyard. It was a bungalow, painted white. It had a small porch and a vine growing up over the side of it.

Jim dismissed his cab and walked up to the front door and rang the bell. It was Ann who answered it. She was a tall, dark-haired girl, still in her early twenties. Jim Clevenger couldn't have given much more of a description of her than that, yet he knew every line of her features by heart. He knew how quick her smile could come and how it changed the shape of her eyes. He knew the sudden twitch that came to her lips when she was amused. He knew how straight she always stood and how steady her eyes were. He had been in love with her for as many years as he could remember.

"Jim," Ann cried as she opened the door. "How nice of you to come out."

She took his hand and her clasp was warm and friendly. Jim Clevenger managed a grin. It always excited him to see Ann Barclay and he tried to be casual.

"You didn't exactly invite me, Ann, but I thought—"

"You have a standing invitation, and you know it."

A little girl of about five came to the doorway and looked solemnly up into Jim's face. She had her mother's hair and eyes. She said, "Hello, mans."

"Hi, Punkin," Jim nodded.

"I'm not Punkin. I'm Mary."

Ann laughed. "We really should stop calling her Punkin. Mary's such a nice name. But somehow or other Punkin seems to stick. Mary, this is Uncle Jim. Don't you remember Uncle Jim?"

"Hello, Uncle Jim," said the little girl.

She put out her hand and Jim took it.

The little girl's hand was warm and moist and a little sticky.

"Hello, Mary," Jim said seriously.

"I bet you can't lift me."

Jim chuckled. He stooped over and caught the child up in his arms and as he straightened his hat was knocked off and Punkin clutched at his hair. Ann, laughing, retrieved his hat and followed them into the front room. Jim dumped the girl on the sofa and when he sat down she started to climb up on his shoulders. Ann pulled her away. She said, "Scoot, Punkin. Call your daddy."

The little girl frowned. "I don't want to call my daddy. I won't call my daddy."

Her voice had touched a high pitch and her body had stiffened. Something closely akin to fear showed in her eyes.

"Punkin." Ann's voice was stern. "Go to your daddy's room and tell him Mr. Clevenger is here to see him."

The little girl bit her lips. She turned and hurried for the back of the house.

Jim leaned back against the sofa, frowning. He didn't say anything and for a moment Ann was silent, too. A flush of color showed in her face. She crossed to the fireplace and stared down into it, then suddenly swung around to look at Jim.

"What is it, Jim?" she asked bluntly. "Why do you want to see Ned?"

Jim shrugged. "We're old friends. Why shouldn't I want to see him."

"He's in some sort of trouble."

"No."

"Don't try to lie to me, Jim. You can't. I know you too well. Ned's in some kind of trouble."

"Nothing serious. Something's come up that I just want to ask him about."

Ann's eyes searched his face. She shook her head. "You don't have to protect me, Jim. I don't deserve a thing from you. Not even—not even the consideration you would give a casual acquaintance."

Jim Clevenger kept a smile on his lips though it wasn't easy. The old misunderstanding which had separated him and Ann at the time when Ned Barclay had come into the picture had long since been cleared up. They never talked of it any more or even of how they felt toward each other but Jim knew that Ann still loved him. And he knew that Ann was aware of his own feelings. The bond between them was so deep and strong that nothing in the past or in the future could affect it.

"Don't worry, Ann," Jim said slowly. "I just want to talk to Ned for a few minutes and I'd rather see him alone."

Ned's voice reached them from the back hall. "Hi there, Jim," he shouted. "I'll be right out."

There were tears in Ann's eyes. She tried to blink them away. "I'll be—back in the kitchen," she said a little unsteadily. "Don't hurry off, Jim. You could at least stay to lunch."

NED BARCLAY came in a few moments after Ann had gone. He was a tall, thin young man. He hadn't shaved. There were deep circles under his red-rimmed eyes and his good humor was obviously forced. He shook hands with Jim, slapped him on the shoulder and wanted to know how he was. Then he sat down rather abruptly and as though he was glad to get off his feet.

Jim had known Ned Barclay for quite a while. Ned came of a good family, a rather wealthy family. His father had been a prominent attorney and had wanted Ned to go through law school and join the firm. Ned had tried to get through the school, but the extra activities for which he found time cut too deeply into his program for study.

He had never finished.

For a while, after he had come home, he had tried a hand at selling stocks and bonds, and after that had drifted from one thing to another. A year ago his father had died and left him several hundred thousand dollars. Since then, Ned hadn't found it necessary to work at all. He ran with a rather fast crowd.

He was now lighting a cigarette and his hand wasn't very steady. Jim took a chair across from him and waited for what Ned would have to say. He supposed he should hate this man but he had never been able to bring himself to that point. In spite of his very obvious weaknesses there was something likeable about Ned Barclay. He could never get serious about things. He wasn't tight with his money. He would back a friend to the limit.

"Well, out with it, Jim," Ned said finally.

"If I've got a lecture coming I guess I've earned it."

Jim shook his head. "No lecture, Ned. Can you keep something quiet?"

"If I've got to. What is it?"

"The police never got the man who killed Ann's father."

Ned straightened. "They never looked in the right direction."

"You mean—"

"I mean Dan Garrett. I suppose Dan Garrett's just too damned big to be touched, but he's the man and some day I'll prove it."

"Some day you'll prove it?"

"You're damned right I will. I'm no detective, Jim, but I've got ways of finding things out. I'm closer to him right now than I was a week ago."

"You've been asking questions?"

"A few."

"Who knows it, Ned?"

Ned Barclay shook his head. "I don't think I'll tell you. I've said too much already."

There was a sharpness in Ned's voice that Jim had never before noticed.

"And don't tell me to stop," Ned went on, "for I won't do it."

Jim frowned. "The police haven't been exactly inactive," he said slowly. "Nor the district attorney, either. A few months back Warren Hughes called in a special investigator to work on the case. A man named Sam McAdams."

"I've met him."

"McAdams has completed his report."

"Did he—have you seen it, Jim?"

"Yes."

"Does it name Dan Garrett?"

"It names Ned Barclay."

Ned caught his breath. He came to his feet. From the look in his face Jim knew that he had never expected anything like that. "It says that — it names me?" he gasped. "Jim, you don't mean that. You can't."

"I've seen the report, Ned."

"But McAdams was on the right track. I know he was. We—sort of worked together. Jim, you're wrong. You've got to be wrong."

There was a note of panic in the man's voice. His face was almost without color.

"Sit down, Ned, and take it easy," Jim said sharply. "I've got the report. It hasn't been turned in."

"If you get in touch with McAdams—"

"McAdams is dead. He was murdered only a few hours ago."

"Then the report you have isn't his."

"He brought it to me himself, Ned. I read it over within an hour of the time he laid it on my desk."

Ned rubbed his hands together. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. The district attorney wants it but I'm not going to turn it over to him until I understand it. Maybe we'd better be pretty frank with each other, Ned. Maybe you'd better tell me how far you've gone toward Garrett and how you worked with McAdams."

Ned Barclay sucked in a long breath. He nodded his head rather vaguely. He said, "Wait here, Jim. I'll be back in a minute."

Jim leaned back in his chair after Ned had left the room. When he had read McAdams' report he had been convinced it was wrong. He was even more sure now. Word of what was in the report had been an actual shock to Ned Barclay. It wouldn't have been if he had been guilty. The sound of a car in the driveway startled him and a moment later Ann hurried into the room.

"Where has he gone?" she demanded. "Jim, what's it all about."

"Where has who gone?" Jim asked, getting to his feet.

"Ned. He just hurried out the back door, jumped into the car and drove off."

Jim moved to the window but Ned's car was already out of sight. A scowl worked its way into Jim's face and he was aware of a sudden uneasiness. Somewhere in the house the telephone was ringing and he knew vaguely that Ann had gone to answer it. His scowl deepened as he recalled the recklessness which had always seemed to govern Ned Barclay's life.

"It's for you, Jim," Ann was calling. "Some man wants to talk to you."

Jim nodded and followed Ann back to the phone.

III

"THIS is Garrett, talking. Dan Garrett," said the voice on the other end of the wire. "I'd like to see you, Clevenger."

Jim Clevenger did some pretty fast thinking. He couldn't imagine how Garrett had located him here unless the man had called his office and Marg had guessed where he could be found. But even that analysis didn't sound reasonable, for though Marg knew of his interest in Ann she couldn't possibly have guessed he would have come out here.

"Well," Garrett was insisting. "How about it?"

"Sorry," Jim answered. "I usually take it pretty easy during the afternoons. How about tomorrow morning at the office?"

"I'm afraid you won't be at your office tomorrow morning."

"Why not?"

"Hughes is pretty sore at you. I understand he's even sworn out a warrant for your arrest. How about me sending a car for you?"

Jim chuckled. "No thanks. I'd rather take a cab and I'll call it myself. Suppose we meet in an hour in the lobby of the President Hotel."

"That's pretty public, Clevenger."

"Why shouldn't it be?"

Garrett's laugh rumbled over the wires. "You're a pretty cool one. All right, Clevenger. In an hour at the President. And don't miss."

There was more than an implied threat in those last words. Jim was frowning as he hung up the phone. He lifted the receiver again and called a cab for half an hour later and then looked around at Ann. Punkin was standing near her.

"You gonna eat with us," she demanded. "'Cause maybe if you do we won't have just soup."

Jim chuckled. He picked up the girl and she snuggled against him. "I like you better'n daddy," she confided. "Daddy's mean. He hits me."

"Punkin!" Ann said sharply.

"Well, he does so."

Jim said, "Sure I'll eat with you." He looked over at Ann. Ann was biting her lips. Her hands were tightly clenched. She offered no excuses or defense for what the little girl had just said and for an instant her guard was down and Jim could see the pain deep in her eyes. Just what the relationship was now between Ann and her husband he didn't know. Even before he had joined the army he had known that they weren't getting along together but he had refused to let himself probe into their affairs.

"If you must leave in half an hour we'll have to eat in the breakfast nook," Ann said suddenly. "And I'm afraid it'll only be soup and a salad, Jim."

"Swell," Jim grinned. "Just what we love, isn't it, Punkin."

"An' cookies an' candy," Punkin answered.

IN SPITE of all that Jim could do, it wasn't a very pleasant half hour. Punkin chattered away but Jim's mind wasn't on what she said nor neither did Ann's seem to be. Of what Ann was thinking, Jim had no notion but she didn't ask him again what the trouble was.

Jim was rather relieved to climb into the taxi and head for town. He was pushing himself too hard. He knew that. A throbbing pain was building up in his chest. How much worse it would get he didn't know. One of his doctors had warned him against forcing his heart to carry too great a load. He worried about that a little on the way to town.

The President was a fairly new hotel and was the most popular one in the city. Its lobby was crowded but mostly with army officers and air cadets. Among the few civilians, Jim spotted Dan Garrett. He was seated in a big leather chair, but big though it was, the chair still wasn't large enough to hold him comfortably. Garrett was a big man. He was big all over. He stood well over six feet and must have weighed close to three hundred pounds. When he was sitting straight his stomach reached almost to his knees.

He got to his feet as Jim came up and it seemed quite an effort. He said, "Hi, Clevenger," and his lips smiled but his eyes didn't. His eyes were black and steady. He didn't offer to shake hands.

Jim nodded. He didn't know a great deal about Dan Garrett. No one of his acquaintance really knew much about him. Garrett owned a printing shop on the south side of town but he was seldom in it. He had an uptown office, but what business was transacted there, Jim could only guess. It was said that Garrett, through a dummy

name, controlled half the taverns in the city, but that had never been proven. It was rumored that he was the head of half a dozen known but unlicensed gambling rooms. It was said that he ran the city, but if so, the men who took orders from him didn't talk about it and Jim's work had never brought him into direct contact with the man.

"Hell of a place to talk," Garrett grumbled. "There's a couple of chairs over here in the corner we can use."

There were two chairs in the corner but two men were in them. The men got up, however, as Jim and Garrett approached. They didn't say anything to Garrett or even look at him, but Jim was sure they had been saving the chairs.

"Rotten weather we've been having," Garrett mentioned as he sat down. "It isn't any too good for your lungs, either, is it?"

Jim Clevenger shrugged. "I've seen a lot worse weather than this."

"Down under, huh. Wish I could have been there. I'd like to get me a few Japs. If I wasn't so fat I'd join up."

"Or if you didn't have so many irons in the fire," Jim said dryly.

"Maybe."

Jim leaned back and closed his eyes. He said, "Shoot, Garrett. What's this all about?"

Dan Garrett leaned forward. "Where's McAdams' report?"

"Why ask me?" Jim countered.

"Because McAdams gave it to you and so far, you haven't turned it over to the district attorney."

"How do you know?"

Dan Garrett made no direct answer. He fished a cigar out of his pocket and stuck it in his mouth. He didn't bother to light it. Jim opened his eyes and looked over at the man.

"I don't like double-talk," Garrett said bluntly. "I never did. What I want to know is this: Are you going to hand that report over to the district attorney?"

"Shall I?" Jim asked.

"Yes."

"Maybe you know what it says."

"Or maybe I'm just a public-spirited citizen who's interested in justice."

Jim shrugged his shoulders. He glanced casually around the lobby. The two men who had been occupying these chairs weren't far away. Both were short, stocky fellows, quietly dressed.

"Well?" Garrett demanded.

Jim crossed one leg over the other and settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "Anything more, Garrett?"

"Yes. I want an answer."

"I don't feel like making any answer. I don't know what I'm going to do with McAdams' report."

"Then maybe I'd better talk some more. You know, Clevenger, it would be too damned bad if anything happened to you. An accident, I mean. A fellow I knew the other day was riding home in a taxi and a huge truck, loaded with cement, crashed into his cab. It pretty completely flattened it. Another fellow I know was cleaning a gun. It went off and blew half of his face away."

"Yeah?"

Garrett nodded. "There's all kinds of accidents that might happen."

"But an accident wouldn't get you the report."

"I think the report would turn up. In fact, Clevenger, if it doesn't turn up by five o'clock this afternoon I'm not going to like it."

Jim looked at his watch. "Three hours, huh?"

"Three hours. Think it over, Clevenger. I never make a promise I don't keep."

"Sure," Jim agreed. "I'll think it over."

Garrett stood up. He seemed about to say something else but apparently changed his mind and with a short nod, turned away. He hesitated momentarily as he passed the two men who had occupied the corner chairs but whether or not he spoke to them Jim couldn't tell.

The two men hung around. Jim got to his feet and angled over to the desk. He registered and paid for a room and as he turned toward the elevator he almost bumped into the two men who had come up behind him. Jim looked at his key and then at the men. "It's room number 741," he announced.

The men looked quickly away but from the manner in which they had stiffened at his words, Jim knew that they were interested.

For a while, after he reached his room, Jim lay flat on the bed with his eyes closed.

He made no attempt to sleep for he knew that sleep would be impossible. Everything that had happened kept churning over and over in his mind and after a while his thoughts went back to what he knew of the death of Ann's father.

Howard Standish had been a district judge and had had a stormy career. He had been completely fearless in everything he did. Other judges had often criticized his courtroom procedure for Standish had been completely unorthodox. One of his favorite expressions had been, "To hell with precedence. I'm supposed to be presiding over a court of justice."

Jim had been in the army at the time of Standish's murder but from what he knew of the circumstances, the judge in leaving a meeting late at night, had been accosted by a man near his car. The two had talked for a minute, then there had been a shot and Standish had fallen to the sidewalk, mortally wounded. The murderer had fled in a car which had been double-parked, nearby.

Half a dozen people had seen the shooting from a distance, but the night had been dark and descriptions of the murderer differed. The man made good his escape. There had been a good deal of talk in the papers about the possibility that the man who had killed Standish was a man Standish had once sentenced to prison. A score of suspects were rounded up, but no one had ever been charged with the murder.

As Jim looked back on that now and in view of what had just happened, there was only one conclusion he could draw. Ned Barclay's accusation was right. It was Garrett who had killed the judge, or at least who had ordered him killed. Standish must have had something on Garrett and Standish had been a man who would have tackled the devil bare-handed.

To carry this line of thought a little further, Garrett must have reached McAdams and forced the framed-up charges that named Barclay as the murderer. Ned Barclay must have been chosen because he was still pushing an investigation into the case. And if all this was correct, of course Garrett wanted the McAdams report turned in.

Jim scowled. He was doing too much guessing. He was making too many assumptions. And something in his line of reasoning didn't satisfy him. He had a notion that he was skipping over some fact that was rather important.

Reaching for the telephone near his bed he called Ann Barclay and asked for Ned but Ned hadn't come home. He talked to Ann for a moment and then telephoned his office.

"Jim, where are you?" Marg demanded.

Jim chuckled. "Lying down and behaving myself, Marg. I'm at the President Hotel. Room 741. How are things at the office? Under control?"

"Not very well. There's a man hanging around in the hall. I think he's a policeman. I called your apartment and someone answered and gave your name but it wasn't your voice. Mr. Hughes telephoned me. He said he must get in touch with you immediately."

"Steady, Marg."

"I'm steady enough."

"Want to do something for me?"

"Anything, Jim."

"All right. Get an envelope like the one you got for me this morning. Put some blank paper in it, seal it and bring it to me here."

"Blank paper?"

"That's what I said. And Marg, if anyone tries to take the envelope away from you, don't argue about it. Give it up right away."

Jim put the phone back in its cradle and again closed his eyes. He got to thinking about Dan Garrett and the threat Garrett had made. The quiet of this room and the thoughts which had been passing through his mind were beginning to work on his emotions. Garrett had given him until five and after that there would be an accident. A cold, prickly feeling ran up and down Jim's back. He tried to convince himself that things like this didn't happen but he couldn't shake the tension which was building up in his body. This wasn't like it had been in the South Pacific. There, a man had a gun and could fight back and the issues were clearly drawn.

IV

MARG DAYTON knocked on the door of Jim's room a few minutes after four and Jim got up and let her in. He was

feeling stronger, or perhaps the other problems he faced had served to take his mind off of his own physical condition.

There was a large manila envelope tucked under Marg's arm. Jim reached for it. "Any trouble?" he grinned.

Marg shook her head. "Why should there have been? You mean—Jim, you still have McAdams' report."

At least I haven't turned it over to the district attorney."

"Why?"

"Because there's something wrong with it."

"Jim, you've no right—"

"We went all over this once before, didn't we, Marg? Forget it, will you?"

The girl bit her lips. She shook her head. "You're just making trouble for yourself. It isn't worth it, Jim. The stuff McAdams turned in wasn't important, anyhow."

"What do you mean, wasn't important? It named a man as the murderer of Judge Standish, that's all. And an innocent man at that."

Marg's eyes widened. "But I thought—"

Jim reached for his coat. He put it on and turned to the door. "Come on, Marg. I've got a couple of things to do. You can take a cab home, can't you?"

"Where are you going?"

Jim Clevenger looked around, puzzled. Marg had never argued with him before. She had been almost the perfect secretary. Friendly, helpful, willing to do anything for him and never asking any more questions than were necessary. He was seeing her in a suddenly new role.

"Jim, where are you going?" she asked again. "Where is the report? The real one?"

Jim didn't know whether or not he liked this Marg Dayton. He leaned toward her and whispered, "Shhh! I hid it in a secret compartment in the sole of my shoe."

Marg Dayton drew back. "This isn't anything to joke about, Jim. You don't know what you're up against."

"Do you?"

Jim had straightened and was looking steadily at the girl. Marg wouldn't meet his eyes. She was twisting her hands together nervously. Jim had started to open the door but now he closed it. He had a funny feeling in his stomach. He kept staring at the girl. He hated what he was going to have to say. He wished abruptly that he had never sent for her.

"McAdams brought that report to my office at nine o'clock this morning," he said slowly. "I started to look at it but before I had more than glanced at the first page you came in and asked me to go out to your office and open your typewriter desk. You said it had stuck. I went out and opened it and it didn't seem very stuck to me. You came out, too, but a minute or so later. I wasn't away from my office again until after I had read McAdams' report, but Marg, you could have substituted another if you had had one handy. You could have—"

"No, Jim!"

"Who had you do it?"

"I didn't. I—"

"Look at me when you say that."

Marg was biting her lips. Her shoulders were trembling. She still wouldn't look up.

"Who had you do it, Marg?" Jim asked again.

"I—I can't tell you." The girl's voice was so low Jim could hardly hear it. "I can't tell you but I didn't think—I didn't think the report I put on your desk named anyone."

"Where's the real report?"

"I don't know."

"Does Garrett have it?"

Marg made no answer. She had turned and was leaning against the wall near the door. She was crying. Jim Clevenger sucked in a long, slow breath. Things were beginning to look much clearer. He didn't have to worry, now, about those depositions accusing Ned Barclay of the murder. Yet in spite of that he had no feeling of elation. He was just beginning to realize how much he had thought of Marg Dayton and what it was like to lose a friend.

Without another word he opened the door and stepped into the hall. He thought he heard Marg calling after him but he didn't look back.

THE two men whom Jim had decided had been left here by Garrett were still in the lobby. Jim waved to them as he headed for the door. In front of the hotel he took a cab and gave the driver the address of his office building. Glancing back as he drove

away he noticed the two men climbing into another cab. It wasn't yet five. He still had fifteen minutes before he had to worry, according to Garrett. Nevertheless, several times during the trip uptown it seemed to him that his cab narrowly avoided a smash-up and on each occasion Jim could feel his stomach muscles tighten. Knowing that he was being followed didn't help matters, either.

Jim bought an evening paper from Dad Thomas and took it up to his office. The murder of Steve McAdams had made the front page but the story wasn't very complete. The fact that McAdams had been working on a case for the district attorney wasn't mentioned. Nor was Jim's name included. It was said that the police were working on several clues and that developments were expected hourly.

Jim glanced at the war news and then laid the paper aside. It was now five o'clock and his three hours of grace were over. He had a good notion that Garrett knew where he was and he wondered whether to expect a visit from the man or whether Garrett was through talking.

The ringing of the telephone bell startled him. Jim answered it and heard Ned Barclay's voice on the other end of the wire. Barclay seemed excited.

"Jim," he called. "Jim, I've got to see you. I know where he is."

"Where who is?" Jim answered.

"Chuck Walters."

The name didn't mean a thing to Jim Clevenger. He scowled at the telephone. "Who's Chuck Walters?"

"The man who knows—listen, Jim. I can't talk from here. Where can you meet me?"

"Where are you now?"

"Out on East 89th. The number's 417. Can you get out here right away?"

"Sure, Ned."

"Hurry it up. Ask for Limpy Jones."

The line clicked dead. Jim pronged the receiver and got to his feet. Some of Ned's excitement had been communicated to him over the telephone wire. He clicked off the office lights, stepped into the hall and started for the elevators. A man was heading his way, a short, heavy-set man whom Jim instantly recognized as one of the two who had followed him from the hotel.

The man came to an abrupt stop, blocking Jim's way. His hands were in his pocket and there was a scowl on his face. He spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "The boss wants to see you, Clevenger."

"Garrett?" Jim asked.

"Yeah. We'll ride down an' grab a cab. An' don't try nothin' funny, see."

Jim Clevenger shrugged his shoulders. "Where's your pal? Holding a cab?"

"Maybe."

Jim started past the man. Suddenly, and without any warning at all, he pivoted and buried his right fist in the man's stomach. The whole weight of his body was in that blow. It doubled the fellow over and a gasp of pain broke from his throat. A short jab to the side of the head twisted the man half around. Jim moved in and gave him a shove. The man lurched against the wall and seemed to fold up. A gun which he had pulled from his pocket dropped to the floor. Jim stooped over and picked it up.

A woman who had come out of an office down the hall gave a startled scream and ducked out of sight. A couple more office doors opened. Jim moved on to the elevator and pushed the button. He looked back at the figure of the man who had tried to stop him. Already, the fellow was on his knees, trying to get up.

A down elevator came to a stop and Jim got in. A confusion of noise was building up in the corridor. The elevator man took a look down the hall and then stared wide-eyed at Jim Clevenger. There weren't any other passengers in the cage.

"All the way down, Pat," Jim said bluntly. "You can get in on the excitement later."

The elevator dropped to the basement and Jim got out. A narrow passageway led to some back steps which took him to an alley entrance. He let himself through the door and headed for the street. A block away he caught a cab and rode to the station. There he took another to a corner near the address which Ned Barclay had given him.

EIGHTY-NINTH STREET was in the center of what had once been a proud section of the city. Here, years before, had been the homes of the first families, and the gaunt frame houses still remaining bore

even today a trace of ancient grandeur. They were adorned with huge bay windows and cupolas.

Halfway along the four hundred block Jim came to an abrupt stop. Just ahead and across the street a Ford coupé had pulled in to the curb. The woman who had been driving it looked very much like Ann Barclay. Jim scowled, then headed that way and as he neared the car Ann recognized him and got out.

"So he reached you?" Ann nodded.

"At the office a few minutes ago," Jim admitted. "Did he call you, too, Ann?"

"He called me and gave me this address for you if you called up. Jim, who is Limpy Jones?"

There was a shadow of fear in the girl's voice. Jim managed a smile. "I don't know, Ann, but I suppose Ned'll tell me. Suppose you wait here."

The girl shook her head. She moved past Jim and around the car and toward a house across the street. It was an old, gray, three-story house. A hand-lettered sign in one of its front windows read: "ROOMS TO RENT." Jim caught up with Ann after a few steps. He had a feeling he ought to send her back but he knew she wouldn't go.

A thick-bodied woman with stringy hair opened the door in answer to Jim's ring. She said, "No vacancies," and started to close the door again but Jim got a foot in the way.

"We're not looking for a room," he explained. "We came here to see Limpy Jones."

"No one by that name lives here," said the woman.

She again tried to close the door but Jim's foot prevented it. "We want to see Limpy Jones," he said again. "You'd better let us in."

The woman wiped a hand over her face. "If you're coppers I want you to know this is a decent house. There ain't no one—"

"We're not coppers," Jim snapped. "Where's Limpy's room? He's not going to like it if we go away without seeing him."

The woman backed up a step or two. "Maybe you mean the fellow who's got the front room on the second floor. I guess it's all right to come in if he knows you."

Jim pushed the door on open and stepped inside. Ann followed him. They crossed a wide hall to a stairway and went up to the second floor. The woman who had let them in watched them from below. The air was heavy with stale smells.

"I don't like it, Jim," Ann whispered.

For some unaccountable reason a shiver raced up and down Jim's back. He tried to shrug it off as he headed for the front room. Ann kept close beside him. The door to the room was closed. Jim knocked on it, then when there was no answer knocked again.

Ann reached out and put a hand on his arm. She said something but Jim didn't catch her words. He reached for the knob, turned it and pushed the door open. Then he quickly pulled it shut. He was standing almost in front of Ann. He didn't think she had seen what was in the room but for a moment he couldn't face her.

"Run on back to the car, Ann," he said thickly. "I'll join you as soon as I can."

Ann's hand was still on his arm. Her fingers dug in like talons. "What is it, Jim! What—"

Jim Clevenger swung around to face the girl. He put both his hands on her shoulders. Under them he could feel her body trembling. "Back to the car, Ann," he said steadily. "That's an order and you've got to follow it like a good soldier. I'll be with you in just a minute."

Ann bit her lips. Her chin started trembling. She suddenly broke away; started running for the stairs.

Jim Clevenger watched her, wondering how much she had guessed, then as she passed from his sight he turned toward the door to the front room. Beyond it, sprawled on the carpet, lay the body of Ned Barclay, the entire top of his head crushed in.

JIM CLEVENGER stepped inside the room and closed the door. It was a dingy, poorly furnished room. The covers on the iron, white-painted bed were rumpled and dirty. On a stand was a cracked wash-bowl holding an aluminum pitcher. The worn carpet on the floor looked as though it had never been cleaned.

These features of the room, however, Jim only vaguely noted. He knelt down at Ned Barclay's side. Blood was still oozing from the man's head and his eyes were wide

open. One of his arms was cramped awkwardly under his body.

"Limpy Jones," Jim said thickly. "Limpy Jones!"

He got to his feet and looked swiftly around the room. Both of his hands were tightly clenched and he was fighting back a feeling that he was going to be sick. After a minute he crossed over to the room's one window and got it open. The fresh air seemed to help. Down in the street he could see Ann's car. Ann was in it, huddled over the wheel, her head buried in her arms.

"Limpy Jones," he said again, and with that he swung back to stare once more around the room, his look so intense that he seemed to be trying by force of will to draw out into the open the figure of the murderer.

A closet door was partly open. Jim headed that way and looked inside. An old coat, several soiled shirts and a pair of trousers was all that the closet held. Jim searched the pockets but found nothing. He left the closet and started toward a chest of drawers and as he passed Ned's body he stopped and stared wide-eyed at the shoes Ned was wearing. *One of them had a built-up sole and heel.*

The meaning of that hit him with all the force of a blow. Any man, wearing a shoe like that would walk like a cripple. There wasn't any man named Limpy Jones. Ned Barclay, himself, had played that part, had taken this room here under that name. Ned Barclay was Limpy Jones.

Jim Clevenger sat down on the edge of the bed and tried to puzzle that out. He recalled all he knew of Ned Barclay. Ned had been of the play-boy type. He didn't fit into a room such as this or into such a character as Limpy Jones must have been. He had traveled with a fast crowd but not such a crowd as might have brought him to anything like this. There could be only one answer. Ned had told him that he was investigating the murder of Judge Standish. This masquerade must have been in connection with that. One more thing fitted into such an analysis. As soon as Ned had heard of the death of Steve McAdams he had hurried away. And he must have come here, which, in itself, would indicate that his investigating had been done in the character of Limpy Jones.

After a few minutes Jim went back to the window and stared down at Ann. He was thinking of her now. He couldn't know what kind of a reputation Limpy Jones had built for himself, but from this room and the circumstances of Ned's death he was afraid it wouldn't be very good. And he didn't like to think of the way the newspapers would handle it or of the way such publicity would affect Ann and Punkin.

Turning to Ned's body he again knelt down. It took only a minute to remove Ned's shoes and then put his own on Ned's feet. Afterward, he cramped his own feet into Ned's shoes. The fit was tight and the built-up sole and heel made him walk pretty unnaturally.

A thing like this might not work, of course, but the landlady's identification of Ned as Limpy Jones wouldn't be wholly complete if the orthopedic shoes were missing.

There was a wall phone. Jim turned that way and reached for the receiver. As an additional measure to kill the identification of Ned as Limpy Jones, he could call the district attorney himself and positively identify the body as Ned's. There was a note pad on a nail near the phone and on it were three numbers. Two were Jim's, his office number and his apartment. The third number had no exchange prefix. It was 2780.

Jim tore the top sheet from the pad and put it in his pocket. He dialed the office number of the district attorney. There was no answer. After a moment he looked up the district attorney's home phone and dialed that. He got no answer there, either.

Car brakes, squealing in the street, attracted his attention. He hung up the phone and hurried to the window. Two cars had pulled into the curb below and uniformed police were piling out of them and hurrying toward the house. From across the street Ann was watching them. Jim backed away from the window. He looked down at the shoes he was wearing, Limpy Jones' shoes. And for an instant he considered switching back again and putting on his own. That would be the wise thing, he knew.

This thought, however, was only one that flashed across Jim's mind. He discarded it almost at once. He was already in this thing pretty deep. He might as well go all the

way. Down below, the doorbell started ringing. Jim hurried toward the hall. He was limping heavily as he made it to the stairs and he had pulled his hat forward, half over his face, and had turned up his coat collar. The landlady, heading for the door, gave him a startled glance. Almost falling, Jim reached the foot of the stairs. He snarled a warning at the landlady and clumped at an awkward run for the back of the house.

There wasn't anyone in the kitchen. Jim made it to the back door and opened it. From the front of the house he heard the sound of men's voices and the landlady answering them. "He went back that way," she screamed. "Through the kitchen."

Jim stepped out on the back porch. He reached the yard and raced for an alley gate. As he ducked through it someone shouted at him to stop and a gun roared and then another. A chip of wood was cut from the alley gate.

There was a solid wood fence back of the house and it was almost five feet high. Jim stooped over and fled toward the street. Half way there he reached another gate, pulled it open and cut through a yard and around a house to the street. Ann was still in her car across from the house where Ned had been killed. A few people, drawn by the sound of shooting, were collecting on the street.

Jim Clevenger angled toward Ann's car. He tried to walk without limping, now. He wanted to hurry. Every impulse in his body was driving him to a run but he made himself walk. It seemed miles and miles to the car, but suddenly he was there and had opened the door and climbed in at Ann's side.

"Straight ahead, Ann," he said tensely.

The girl's eyes were red and there wasn't much color in her face. She gave him a strange look, then turned on the ignition and pressed the starter button. The motor was slow to catch. Across the street a policeman had come out on the porch of 417. Jim took a quick look that way. The policeman was watching them.

The car's motor suddenly started. Ann slipped the car in gear and pulled out from the curb. The policeman let out an abrupt yell and headed for the sidewalk. Involuntarily, Ann slowed down.

"Keep going, Ann," Jim ordered.

The girl bit her lips and stepped on the gas. She wheeled left at the corner, then turned right again. On a boulevard, two blocks away, she hit the heavy swing shift traffic from a nearby defense plant and wormed her way into it. Half a mile farther on she cut off on a side street and angled across town.

Jim Clevenger had leaned back and closed his eyes. Sharp, stabbing pains were tearing through his chest. He tried sitting up straighter but shifting his position didn't seem to help.

Ann pulled in to the curb and stopped the car. She said, "Jim, tell me."

Her voice was steadier than Jim had thought it would be. He looked at her and then looked away. He tried to frame the words necessary to tell her what had happened but he couldn't.

"You—saw him?" Ann insisted.

"Yes, I saw him."

"Was he all right?"

JIM shook his head. He said, "Ann, I've got to tell you this first. I came out to see Ned, today, because a man had brought a report to my office naming him as the one who had killed your father."

"But he couldn't have."

"Of course not. I knew that, Ann. But here's something I didn't know. Ned has been working on the case for a long time, trying to find the murderer. For some reason or other he had taken a room in that house we just left. He had taken it under the name of Limpy Jones. I think he used that room and that name to hide what he was doing. Tell me, has he been away from home a good deal recently."

Ann nodded her head. "He's been away —sometimes a week at a time. But I thought he had been going to Chicago. I—I thought he was interested in someone there. Jim, he's not—"

"Yes, Ann," Jim Clevenger said slowly. "Someone reached him before we did."

The girl's hands were clenched on the steering wheel. They were clenched so tightly that the knuckles showed white. She was staring straight ahead and while Jim watched her, tears gathered in her eyes and ran down over her cheeks. Then all at once the rigidness went out of her body and she

covered her face with her hands and started to cry.

Jim didn't know what to do. He sat there in the car staring blindly at the dashboard and wishing that he were somewhere else. After a time Ann choked back her sobs and started dabbing at her eyes with a miniature handkerchief. "I couldn't help it, Jim," she said thickly. "I've treated him so miserably. And of course I'm responsible for it, for all that's happened."

"Oh, no."

"But I am, Jim. I told him, months ago, that if he was any kind of a man he'd do something about the man who killed my father. He said he would, that he should have been a detective, anyhow. But I didn't know—"

"Steady, Ann. It's easy for a person to blame themselves if something goes wrong. It's a lot harder but a lot more practical to do something about it."

"What could I do?"

"Well, you could drive me to some shoe store that's still open. I think we can find one someplace."

"Shoe store!"

Jim nodded. "Luckily I've got my ration book with me."

The girl looked steadily at him. She said, "Jim, was Ned really doing what you said."

"Yes."

"He knew—the risk he was taking?"

"I'm sure of it."

Ann Barclay drew in a long slow breath. Her shoulders straightened a little. She said, "Jim, I didn't love him. I tried to but I couldn't. I was even ashamed of him but I'm not any more. I think I'm proud of him, Jim. Proud that I'm Mrs. Barclay."

THERE was a second-hand store still open on South Union Avenue. Jim bought a pair of shoes and in a corner drug store telephoned the district attorney. He got an answer, this time, from Hughes' home.

"Clevenger talking," he said into the phone. "I've been trying to reach you, Chief."

"Clevenger!" gasped the voice on the other end of the wire. "Clevenger! Where are you?"

"Downtown," Jim answered. "But that's not what's important. I need an answer to a couple of questions."

"And I need that McAdams report."

"Suppose we talk about what I want first, Chief. Did you ever hear of Chuck Walters?"

"Of whom? Chuck Walters?"

"That's the name."

"No."

"Or Limpy Jones?"

"No. Look here, Clevenger. I want that McAdams report. One of the newspapers has heard of it. I—"

"Keep your shirt on, Chief," Jim interrupted. "Here's something else to bother you. A little while ago Ned Barclay was murdered in a second-floor room at 417 Eighty-ninth Street. The room had been rented by Limpy Jones. Limpy Jones got away. The police got the report and hurried out there but not in time. And you know, Chief, this is what strikes me as funny. Ned Barclay was working with McAdams on the Standish case. McAdams was murdered and so was Barclay. Think it over, will you?"

Without giving the district attorney any chance to question him further, Jim hung up. He bought some stamps and put them on the package holding the shoes he had taken from Ned's feet, then addressed the package to Paul Jason Spivac, General Delivery, City. He dropped the package in a mail box in front of the drug store, and afterward joined Ann in her car.

"What now?" Ann demanded.

"Where's Punkin?" Jim asked.

"I took her to a woman who lives across the street from us. She's taken care of her before."

"Then you don't have to hurry home."

Ann shook her head. "No, and I'd rather not, Jim. I—don't want to be alone tonight."

Jim was glad of that. He didn't want Ann going home. He was pretty sure that the police had taken the number of Ann's car as she had driven away from the house on Eighty-ninth Street, and, if so, it wouldn't take them long to find out who owned the car and go after her.

From his pocket Jim drew the slip he had torn from the telephone pad in Ned's room. He looked at the numbers scrawled there. He could easily guess why his apartment and office number had been written down. Ned, anxious to reach him, had

been forced to call those numbers time and time again, and had written them down for reference. The third number, the one without an exchange prefix, must have been written later and probably as an afterthought.

"We ought to eat," Jim said slowly. "And then I've got some more telephoning to do."

Ann shook her head. "I'm not hungry, Jim. I don't think I'll ever be hungry again."

"Then you can watch me eat," Jim decided. "There's a Chinese place on Carroll Street where I sometimes go. It's just beyond 9th."

Ann started the car. She said, "Jim, why did you have to buy new shoes?"

Jim Clevenger shrugged his shoulder but made no other answer. He was turning that third number, the one without the telephone exchange prefix, over and over in his mind. *2780. 2780.* In those four figures lay the only tangible clue to Ned Barclay's murder. Or they might not mean a thing. That possibility hung over him like a cold shadow. If the answer didn't lay in those penciled numerals, Jim didn't know which way he could turn.

V

ANN hardly touched her food. Jim made several attempts at conversation but from her answers felt that she was hardly aware of his presence. Her thoughts, Jim knew, were all for Ned Barclay and what he had been trying to accomplish.

The Chinese boy who was serving them pushed open the curtains of the booth and grinned at Jim Clevenger. "Telephone for you, Mr. Clevenger," he announced. "At the cashier's desk."

"For me?" Jim frowned.

The boy nodded, still holding the curtains apart.

Jim got to his feet and asked Ann to excuse him. He wondered who in the world could have known he was here, and as he headed for the cashier's desk he felt a quickening excitement.

"Mr. Clevenger?" asked the voice on the other end of the wire.

Jim nodded at the phone. "Yes, who is it?"

Dan Garrett," came the answer. "I hope that you and Mrs. Barclay are having an enjoyable evening. She is really a very attractive woman. And quite a close friend of yours, I believe."

A flush of anger came to Jim's face. His hand tightened on the receiver. "What do you want, Garrett?" he asked harshly.

Garrett laughed. "Why I just wondered, Clevenger, if the lady knew you had killed her husband."

"I didn't."

"Oh, that's right. A man named Limpy Jones killed him, of course. But Mrs. Barclay will probably remember that you stopped to buy some new shoes right after running away from the place and the shoe man will remember the shoes you had on when you came in. Here's something else that's interesting, too. When the police finally get to your apartment to check things over they'll find a few things there which belonged to the man who was known as Limpy Jones. And I wouldn't be surprised if a few of Limpy Jones' friends didn't identify you as him."

Jim Clevenger sucked in a long breath. "Is that all, Garrett?"

"Isn't it enough in view of your very obvious interest in Mrs. Barclay? If I were you I'd think it over. Now if I had that McAdams report, why maybe none of this would ever come out but it looks as though I were going to have a hard time in getting the report. Or have you changed your mind, Clevenger."

Jim shook his head. "I haven't changed my mind."

He hung up the receiver, bought a package of gum, and stood there at the cashier's desk for a moment unaware of any of the people around him. Garrett's men hadn't followed him to that 89th Street address, he was sure, but someone must have followed Ann's car when they left and then must have notified Garrett where they had gone. He could bank on that.

And Garrett's threat was pretty real, too. He had worn Limpy Jones' shoes into a shoe shop and had bought a new pair to replace them. Garrett could have sent a man to his apartment to plant evidence which would tie him in with Limpy Jones and could get others to testify to the fact that he had played that part. On top of this it would

be easy to prove his interest in Ann Barclay.

The Chinese boy who had called him to the phone touched him on the arm. "Is everything okey doke, Mr. Clevenger?"

Jim Clevenger managed a grin. "Everything's fine."

He went back to the booth and slid into a chair across from Ann. The girl looked up. "Who was it, Jim?"

"Dan Garrett."

"Garrett!"

"Yes."

"What did he want?"

"He wants the report McAdams turned over to me. The one which named Ned as the man who murdered your father."

"You're not going to—"

"Of course not, Ann."

The girl bit her lips. She leaned forward. "Jim, he only wants that report to end any further investigation into my father's death. It names Ned and Ned's dead and can't defend himself. It was Dan Garrett who killed my father, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Jim, what are we going to do?"

"We're going to get the report McAdams really made. The one that names Garrett."

"You mean there is such a report?"

Jim Clevenger nodded. He said, "Ann, here's the story. McAdams, with Ned helping him, solved the mystery surrounding your father's death. McAdams wrote his report and turned it in to me. Before I could read it, that report was stolen and a fake report, naming Ned as the murderer, was substituted. So McAdams couldn't deny the fake report, he was killed. And because of what Ned knew, he was also murdered. Tell me this. Does 2780 mean anything to you?"

"2780?"

"Yes."

Ann shook her head.

"Try it with a telephone exchange prefix. Main 2780, Gaylord 2780, Hillcrest 2780, Exter 2780."

The girl was silent for a moment but finally again shook her head.

"What about the name Chuck Walters?" Jim asked. "Did you ever hear Ned mention Chuck Walters?"

"Chuck Walters?" Ann had stiffened. "Jim—Jim, just the other night Ned had a telephone call from someone. He mentioned that name several times. He seemed excited when he hung up and he left the house right away."

"What did he say about Walters? To whom was he talking?"

"I don't know who he was talking to. And—and he really didn't say anything important. He just said, *'Are you sure it's Chuck Walters,'* and, *'You're sure Chuck Walters is the man.'* Then he said he'd be right over and he got his hat and left the house. I didn't ask him who was calling or what the call was about. He didn't get home until almost morning."

Jim reached for the check. He said, "Come on, Ann. Let's see if we can't locate McAdams' report."

JIM looked up Marg Dayton's address before leaving the restaurant. He found a cab on the street below, helped Ann inside and gave the address to the driver. As the cab pulled out from the curb a dark green sedan swung in behind them. It followed them as they turned left at the first corner and was still close behind when they cut into the traffic on Franklin Boulevard. They left the boulevard on Westlake Drive and the green sedan turned off, too.

Jim had told Ann where they were going but he made no mention of the car which was following them. Garrett's men were in it, he was sure. There wasn't any other way he could figure things out.

"So it was your secretary who substituted the false report for the one that McAdams brought you," Ann said slowly. "I wonder why."

"Money, probably," Jim answered.

"But you once told me that Marg Dayton had quit a better job to come back to you."

Jim Clevenger shrugged his shoulders but made no other reply. He didn't want to talk about what Marg had done. He still didn't like to believe it. He would have bet his last dollar on Marg's loyalty.

Westlake Drive didn't live up to its name. It was a poorly paved and poorly lighted street in an unrestricted section of the city. Most of the houses along it were pretty old. The Dayton's lived on the corner of Westlake and Hude, half a dozen blocks from the boulevard. The taxi reached that corner and stopped.

Half a block back, the green sedan had pulled in to the curb. Jim noticed that as he got out. "Suppose you wait here for a minute," he said to the driver. "We'll not be long."

The driver nodded in agreement and Jim took a quick look toward the sedan. No one had left it and it showed no lights. It held several men, just how many Jim wasn't sure.

"Come on, Ann," he said to the girl.

They walked up to the house and knocked on the door and almost at once a short, heavy-set man who was almost bald, opened it. He didn't immediately recognize Jim Clevenger and his greeting was almost gruff.

"What do you want?"

"Is Marg here?" Jim asked.

The man blinked. "Oh, you're Mr. Clevenger. Come on in."

Jim started to enter the house. He looked over his shoulder. Several men had come up to the taxi and seemed to be talking to the driver. Ann started to look back but Jim caught her arm. "This is Mrs. Barclay," he said to Marg's father. "We just wanted to see Marg for a moment if we could."

"She ain't home," said Mr. Dayton. "She came home about six, then got a phone call an' hurried off again. I thought it was you who called her."

Jim stiffened. "Did she say so?"

"She said she had to go to the office."

"Let me use your phone," Jim suggested.

He moved on into the house. At the phone at the back end of the hall, he dialed his office number. There wasn't any reply and after a time he hung up. Ann and Mr. Dayton were watching him and Mrs. Dayton had come to the hall. She was a thin, tired looking woman. She seemed rather worried.

"You don't think—Marg isn't in any trouble, is she, Mr. Clevenger?" asked Mrs. Dayton.

Jim shook his head. "I don't think so."

"She seemed awfully upset about something," Mrs. Dayton offered. "I—she's a good girl, Mr. Clevenger."

A sudden, stabbing pain through Jim's chest made everything hazy. He reached out to the wall for support and almost at once was conscious of Ann at his side and could feel the strength of her arm around him. Someone shoved a chair against his knees and he sat down. The worst of the pain faded away but it left him weak and with his entire body covered with perspiration.

"Jim Clevenger," Ann was saying, "you ought to be home and in bed. You're going there right away."

Jim looked up and grinned. He said, "Sure, right away." Then he remembered the men he had seen talking to the taxi driver outside.

"Dayton," he asked, "will you see if our cab's still waiting?"

Dayton went to the front door and looked out. "It's still there," he called.

Jim got to his feet. The pain in his chest wasn't completely gone but he felt stronger than he had expected.

"I'll help you out to that cab," Dayton offered. "Marg has told us about that chest of yours. I reckon it's almost shot to pieces, isn't it?"

"It doesn't bother me much," Jim answered. "I'm a lot better than I was, Dayton."

They started for the cab, Dayton insisting on helping him though it really wasn't necessary. Ann opened the door.

"He's going straight home," she said to Dayton.

Jim looked down the street. The green sedan had disappeared. A scowl came over his face. There was something about this that wasn't right. The men who had followed him had come here and talked to the taxi driver. Of course they might have bribed the taxi driver to report to them later but for some reason or other, that didn't sound reasonable.

"Back to town, driver," Jim ordered.

Ann shook her head. "I said you were going home. Jim, how bad is it, that chest of yours?"

The taxi had turned east and was climbing Comstock Hill. This wasn't the most direct route to town. Jim scowled. He straightened up and tapped on the glass panel which separated them from the driver's compartment. The driver didn't look around. He stepped on the gas.

"Jim, what is it? What's wrong?" Ann demanded.

Jim was staring at the back of the driver's

head. His hand slid into his pocket and closed on the gun he had picked up in the corridor outside of his office. This man now driving the cab wasn't the same driver who had taken them to Dayton's. He was a shorter, heavier man. The cap he was wearing didn't quite fit him.

"Jim," Ann was whispering. "Jim, what's the matter?"

Jim Clevenger drew the gun from his pocket. He took a look through the back window. There was no car following them. He tapped again on the glass panel in front. The cab had reached the top of the hill and was swinging into Carson Street. Here was a steep, two block drop to Lynndale Boulevard. The driver glanced over his shoulder. He had the cab now at the top of the grade and starting down.

Jim tried the door handles but the doors were locked. The driver had shut off the motor and opened his door. He was getting out. Jim smashed his gun against the glass panel, shattering it. The cab driver swung to the street. The cab wasn't in gear. It was gathering momentum. Jim reached through and caught the wheel. He pulled himself into the driver's compartment. It seemed to him that the cab was hurtling through the air at a terrific speed. He knew, even as he jammed his foot on the brake that he could never stop it. He thought he heard Ann screaming and he caught a glimpse of the heavy truck moving into the intersection at Lynndale Boulevard.

He knew the whole story, then. This was the accident Dan Garrett had promised him. Back there at Dayton's the cab driver had been removed and one of Garrett's men substituted. The green sedan had left and the men in it had arranged to have this truck here. Garrett still didn't have the faked McAdams report but believed it would turn up after he, Jim Clevenger, had been killed.

Jim pushed down on the brake with every bit of strength he could summon. He felt the wheels lock and felt the cab go into a swinging skid. It turned completely around, tipped over. Jim heard the sound of a crash and for a moment everything went black.

VI

HE COULDN'T have been unconscious for more than a moment for he was distinctly aware of being lifted out of the wreckage of the cab and carried somewhere and he heard the murmur of voices all around him. His mind caught snatches of what was being said. Some man with a high, excited voice, was describing what had happened. "The truck drove right in front of the cab," he declared. "I tell you I saw it. The truck driver slammed on the brakes and jumped to the street and ran. It's a wonder they weren't killed."

Jim suddenly remembered Ann and he must have asked about her for a man bending over him told him that she was all right and that he must take it easy.

He was lying on the ground and was cold. He sat up and some woman cried out that he mustn't do that. "People suffering from shock," she declared, "should be made to lie perfectly still. In our Red Cross class—"

Jim got to his feet and a man nearby slipped an arm around him. Quite a crowd had already gathered. The intersection was blocked with cars and bright with headlights.

"Where is she?" Jim asked. "The lady who was with me? Is she—"

"Right over there," said the man who was supporting him. "Say, I've got a car across the street. No telling when an ambulance will get here. Suppose I run you and the lady to a hospital."

Jim nodded. "That'll be—fine."

The woman who had been talking about the Red Cross class didn't think so but the man with Jim ignored her. He led Jim to his car and then hurried away. A moment later two other men brought Ann to the car. She didn't seem badly hurt.

The man who owned the car gave his card to one of the others. "I'll drop them at the Emergency Hospital," he said crisply. "A man in this town could die from starvation before an ambulance showed up."

Jim leaned back and closed his eyes. "You are still—all in one piece, Ann?" he asked slowly.

"I think so, Jim."

"No cuts any place?"

"Not even a scratch."

"It was pretty bad. We're lucky."

Ann nodded. She stared straight ahead. "That was on purpose, wasn't it?" she said under her breath. "It wasn't an accident. The driver jumped out of the cab at the

top of the hill. The truck was driven right in front of us."

Jim reached for the girl's hand. "Try to forget it. We're still alive."

Ann's hand was like ice. It clutched his tightly. Jim opened his eyes and glanced over at the girl. Her body was rigid and there wasn't much color in her face.

Jim straightened up and looked through the back window. There were two cars in the block behind them and as they passed near a street light he saw that one of them was a green sedan. Garrett's men had taken up the chase again. They had been parked near the scene of the accident.

"Let's see you move your legs, Ann," Jim said suddenly.

The girl moved her legs one after another. Jim let loose of her hand.

"Now let's see you move your arms."

Ann raised and lowered her arms.

"No bad bruises?"

"I think I've bruises all over my body, but none of them are bad."

"Could we skip the hospital for a while?"

"No, Jim. That's where you're going."

Jim Clevenger shook his head. "Look out of the back window. You'll see a green sedan back of us. It followed us to Daytons, then came ahead and arranged the accident. We wouldn't be safe at the hospital."

Ann took a quick look through the back window. She said, "Garrett?"

Jim nodded. He leaned forward and started talking to the man driving the car and after a while the man nodded. He had been heading for town but at Columbus Avenue he turned west and angled toward the Grant Park section. Jim looked back once more. The green sedan was still trailing them.

THE district attorney grabbed the telephone when it rang. He listened to the report coming to him over the wire and the scowl on his face grew deeper as it was finished.

"Keep hunting," he barked into the phone. "Clevenger had that report when he left his office. He didn't have it when he came across the street to see me. There aren't many places he could have left it. Try that old man who keeps the cigar stand in the lobby of his building."

He hung up the telephone and started pacing back and forth across the carpet of his study. The buzzing of the door-bell startled him and he went to answer it and stared in surprise at the two people on his porch.

"You!" he gasped.

Jim Clevenger nodded. "Can we come in, Chief?"

Hughes backed away from the door and Jim and Ann Barclay came inside. Jim closed the door. He said, "You know Mrs. Barclay, don't you, Chief?"

The district attorney sucked in a long, slow breath. His nod to Ann Barclay was scarcely civil. "Where's that report?" he demanded.

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "That's what we came to talk to you about. That and a few other things."

"We'll talk about the McAdams report first," Hughes said flatly.

He led the way to the study. Jim Clevenger and Ann followed him and in the study, Jim motioned Ann to a chair. He took another near it. The old pains were shooting through his chest again and his right leg and arm were beginning to hurt, probably from bruises sustained in the accident.

The district attorney had backed up against his desk. His hair didn't look as neat as it usually did in his office and there was no trace of a smile on his face. His eyes bored straight into Jim Clevenger. "Where is it?" he barked.

Jim shook his head. "I don't know."

"You don't know!"

"If you're asking for the McAdams report, that's the answer. The report Steve McAdams delivered to me was stolen. Another was left in its place. I know where the second report is but I can't deliver the original."

"But—"

"Listen, Chief. Let me give you the whole story. McAdams was being helped by Ned Barclay in the search for the murderer of Judge Standish and they had the dope on the man they were after. This man prepared a substitute report which named Barclay as the murderer. He killed McAdams so McAdams couldn't question the substitute report, then he got Barclay, for Barclay knew the truth, too. He's promised to get me if

I don't hand in the report he had put in my hands."

Hughes wiped a hand across his face. "You expect me to believe a story as fantastic as that?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I tell you what I heard, Clevenger."

"Go ahead."

"I will. The report named Garrett as the murderer. You telephoned Garrett and tried to make a deal with him and then went to see McAdams to sell McAdams on the idea. McAdams didn't fall for it so you finished him. You met Garrett at the President Hotel and made your bargain with him."

"What about Ned Barclay?"

The district attorney glanced at Ann. "I think part of what you said about Barclay was true. He was working with McAdams and knew the truth. Maybe that's why you killed him or maybe there was another reason. His wife."

Ann came to her feet. "No! Jim wouldn't have—"

"I'm just telling you what I heard, Mrs. Barclay."

"From whom?" Jim asked bluntly.

"Does it make any difference?"

"A hell of a lot."

"God knows I don't want to believe it, Clevenger, but look at the case yourself. Look at—"

The door buzzer interrupted what the district attorney was saying. A scowl came into his face. He said, "Pardon me a minute," and left the room.

Jim stood up and crossed over to the desk. He heard the outer door open and then the murmur of voices. He wondered if the men in the green sedan were moving in. He glanced at Ann Barclay. She was staring at him as though she already half-believed the district attorney's charges. The telephone on the desk started to ring. Jim picked up the receiver and growled. "Hello."

"Fullmer talking, Chief," said a voice. "We got the Dayton girl off on the 9:43 for Chicago. The guy we talked about is riding the same train. He'll take care of her. Here's another thing, too. Chuck Walters is hanging out in a dump on 'O' Street. What do you want me to do?"

Jim Clevenger caught his breath. The meaning behind those words hit him like a blow. He heard a sound across the room and saw the district attorney coming through the door. There was a tension in Hughes' attitude that he couldn't fail to note. "Wrong number," he said flatly, and hung up.

Hughes stopped just inside the door. His eyes had narrowed and his lips made a thin, straight line across his face. "Who was it?" he demanded.

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "How should I know? Anyone named Mabel live here?"

A slight frown crept into Hughes' face but his body didn't relax. Jim knew that his answer hadn't been wholly accepted.

"Well, how do we stand, Chief?" he asked slowly.

"Where's that report you claim was faked. After all, if it isn't the one McAdams made we can surely prove it."

"How?"

"By thoroughly checking it. Where is it, Clevenger?"

"I can't get at it until tomorrow."

"You'd better tell me where it is. Suppose something happened to you."

Jim shook his head. "What could happen to me, Chief? Let's forget about the report. Here's the important thing. Do I get a chance to prove what I've told you?"

"What kind of a chance?"

"I want to find a man named Chuck Walters."

"Why? What does Walters have to do with it?"

"Ned Barclay mentioned him over the phone. I'm not sure who he is but I think he's the fellow who stepped out of a doorway not far from where Judge Standish was shot. You know several people mentioned having seen such a man shortly after the shooting, but the chap had disappeared before the police arrived."

"I never took much stock in that story."

"And I never overlook a bet, Chief. Neither would McAdams."

Hughes walked around to the chair behind his desk and sat down. Jim watched him thoughtfully. Staring at Hughes this way he couldn't believe what he had just heard over the phone. He went over it again in his mind. The man who had called

had identified himself as Fullmer and there was a fellow by that name who was always hanging around the district attorney's office. He had mentioned the Dayton girl. Marg Dayton. And had said she had been shipped off to Chicago. He had said a man riding the same train would take care of her. Jim didn't like to think of what that implied.

But the whole thing fitted in. McAdams who had made the original report was dead. Barclay, who knew what the report had contained, was dead. And now, Marg Dayton, who had stolen it and substituted another, was on the way out.

That wasn't all Fullmer had said, however. He had mentioned Chuck Walters and had told where Walters was staying. In some dump on "O" Street.

And it was the district attorney whom Fullmer had been calling.

It didn't make sense. Hughes was the man who had hired McAdams to make his investigation. Hughes was as straight as they came. It was Dan Garrett who was insisting he produce that false report. It was Garrett's men who had tried to kill him, sure that the report would turn up after his death. It was Garrett's men who had followed him here.

The telephone started ringing. Hughes answered it. He listened for a moment, then said, "When, Fullmer? Only a few minutes ago?"

Jim Clevenger stiffened. He didn't need to listen in on what was being said over the phone. He knew. Fullmer was repeating his story and explaining his previous call.

"Sure, Fullmer," said the district attorney. "Thanks."

Jim took a quick look at Ann Barclay. The girl was watching the district attorney. There was an intent look on her face. Her eyes were still a little swollen but were steady. Jim wished suddenly that he had never brought her here. He had kept her with him to keep her out of the hands of the police and the inquisition she would have had to face, but at least have been safe with the police. Here, she was in the same boat with him, the same boat that McAdams and her husband and Marg Dayton had been in. She knew too much.

The district attorney hung up the receiver. He opened the top drawer of his desk and reached inside but he didn't pull out his hand. He called, "Hey, Dan! Come on in." And then he looked at Jim Clevenger, his eyes as cold as ice.

There was a sound at the door and Dan Garrett moved into sight from the shadows beyond it.

VII

GARRETT'S body almost filled the doorway. He was wearing a topcoat and his hands were in its pockets. He looked at the district attorney, then at Ann and finally at Jim Clevenger. He nodded as his eyes came to rest on Jim. "Too bad, Clevenger," he said slowly. "I didn't want it to end this way. I keep remembering you were a soldier."

"I'll bet you buy War Bonds, too," Jim said dryly.

"As a matter of fact, yes."

"What'll you do with them, Dan?" Hughes asked.

The district attorney's voice didn't sound very good. There was a high, strained note in it. There was perspiration on his forehead.

Garrett shrugged. "Suppose you leave that to me."

"And the McAdams report?"

"It'll turn up, Hughes. Maybe in a safety deposit vault, maybe from someone Clevenger gave it to. Things like that always turn up after a fellow's death."

"Sure, Chief," Jim heard himself saying. "It'll turn up but not in the way either of you expect."

That was just an empty bluff and Jim knew it. It wasn't necessary for these men to find the report at all. They could drop the matter until the report was found or they could drop it forever. They had tried to make him produce it to jam through a solution of the Standish killing. They hadn't dared produce a duplicate of the faked report for fear of the copy he held. But if they didn't find that copy after he was dead they could imply that Ned Barclay had killed his father-in-law and go far enough to satisfy the public.

"We've located Chuck Walters," Hughes mentioned.

"Where?" Garrett asked.

"Right here in town."

"Good. We'll look after him, too."

Jim looked over to where Ann was sitting. "Sorry, Ann," he said slowly. "I didn't know it would work out like this. I thought we could count on Hughes but he's in it, too. In fact I suppose it was Hughes who killed your father. The judge must have discovered his connection with Garrett and probably meant to expose him."

"And Ned—"

"I don't know which of them killed Ned. Perhaps neither of them. It might have been one of Garrett's men. But I know the reason. Ned had the address of Chuck Walters. He was—"

"That's enough, Clevenger," Hughes said sharply.

Jim Clevenger shrugged his shoulders. He said, "Here, I've got something you'll want," and reaching into his pocket he drew out his gun.

They hadn't expected anything like that, either of them. Garrett took a step backward, then stopped as Jim's gun swung toward him. His hands were still in his pockets. Probably one of them held a gun but he made no effort to draw it. The district attorney's body was rigid. He was breathing heavily.

"Take your hand out of that drawer, Hughes," Jim said flatly. "And leave the gun in there."

Hughes pulled his hand from the drawer. He lifted both his hands shoulder high. His jaw worked up and down but he couldn't seem to get any words out of his throat.

"You haven't a chance, Clevenger," Garrett breathed. "Play it the way we want, and we'll let Mrs. Barclay off. Start something now and she'll have to go out with you."

"You wouldn't dare let her off, Garrett."

"Why not? She couldn't prove anything. All she could do is talk, and who would believe her? Besides, if she did talk we could charge her with plotting her husband's death so she could marry you."

Jim shook his head. "Ann," he ordered, "call the police. Tell them to go to 278 'O' Street and pick up a man named Chuck Walters. Tell them Walters witnessed the murder of Judge Standish and can name the murderer. Ask for Sergeant Holcomb. He's as straight a copper as ever lived and he thought a lot of the judge. Tell him—"

Jim's voice broke off. Garrett had edged a little to one side of the doorway in which he was standing and beyond him, Jim could make out another figure and the shape of a gun in a man's hand. He twisted his gun that way and fired. A man screamed. Garrett tried to get back through the door, at the same time jerking his hand from his pocket and throwing a hurried shot at Jim Clevenger. Jim fired again and Garrett jerked half around and went to his knees.

"Jim!" Ann was screaming. "Jim! Look out!"

The girl had come to her feet. She was staring toward Hughes. The district attorney had lowered his hands and had secured the gun from the drawer of his desk. Jim heard the roar of a shot. He lunged toward Hughes, swinging his gun that way and squeezing the trigger. Hughes came up out of his chair and seemed to lose all control over his body. He fell over a corner of the desk and slid to the floor.

A shot from the next room scraped across Jim's side. Jim was behind the desk, now. He caught the edge of the desk and tipped it over and crouched down behind it.

"Stay where you are, Ann," he called. "Get down on the floor."

Shots from the next room thudded into the desk. The telephone had fallen to one side. Jim reached for it and dialed police headquarters. He got Sergeant Holcomb on the phone and gave him Chuck Walters' address, the address which had been written on the telephone pad in the room where Ned had been murdered and which he had thought was a telephone number. It had been 278 "O" Street. Not 2780. He also told Holcomb what had happened here and asked him to pick up Fullmer and wire ahead and have Marg Dayton taken off of the Chicago train.

Long before he had finished the firing had stopped and after he hung up Jim got to his feet. There were no more shots. Garrett and Hughes and that first man he had hit, lay where they had fallen. The others had fled. Ann Barclay was staring at him from across the room. She called, "Jim, are you—" And then her voice choked up and she started weaving from side to side. Jim Clevenger reached her just as she fainted. He thought at first that she had been hit by

one of the shots, but she hadn't, for she opened her eyes as he was kneeling over her and said, "Sorry, Jim. I didn't mean to act like that. It's all over, isn't it?"

THERE was a conference in the Police Commissioner's office the next morning. In addition to the Police Commissioner, three of the County Commissioners, Sergeant Holcomb, Jim Clevenger and several guards, Fullmer and a fellow named Swan and Marg Dayton were present. Two reports signed by McAdams' name lay on the commissioner's desk. One, naming Warren Hughes as the murderer of Judge Standish, and offering in evidence Chuck Walters' statement as witness to the crime and a good deal of collateral evidence. This report Marg Dayton identified as the one she had taken from Jim's desk and given to Fullmer. The other report, naming Ned Barclay as the murderer was the one Jim had mailed to Paul Jason Spivac, General Delivery. He had picked it up a few hours before.

Marg Dayton's statement to the commissioner and what Fullmer and Swan added, pretty well completed an understanding of everything that had happened. Swan had been Garrett's right-hand man and was anxious to tell all he could in order to clear himself of any part in the crimes. He insisted that a fellow named Howie Keegan had killed McAdams and Barclay. Keegan was already under arrest. He was a man with a long police record. Undoubtedly he had been hired by Garrett whose interest in the matter was in keeping Hughes in office as district attorney. With Hughes as district attorney, Garrett had had things about his own way.

Toward the end of the conference Ann Barclay was brought in but the Police Commissioner asked her only a few questions and then told her she could go. Jim stopped her at the door.

"How's Punkin taking it?" he asked. "You've told her about her father?"

Ann nodded. She was wearing a black dress and was veiled. Jim couldn't see her face very clearly. "She's taking it hard, Jim, but she'll get over it. Ned and Punkin were never very close. Ned didn't care for children. In many ways he was fine but that wasn't one of them."

"What will you do, Ann?"

"Go to work. I've wanted to, anyhow. There's a war going on."

"Where will you work?"

"I don't know. Jim, I think that Punkin would like it if you came out to see us sometime. That is—"

Jim Clevenger grinned. "Sure, Ann. I'll be out. Can I make it soon? I don't have much time."

"Not much time!" Ann's voice sounded frightened.

"It's like this," Jim explained. "I didn't feel much worse last night in spite of all that had happened. So early this morning I went to a doctor for a check-up. The old chest's a lot better. I've got a notion that I'm going to get back into this show before it's over."

Ann Barclay put out her hand. Its clasp was warm and firm. "I'm glad, Jim. Make it soon."

She turned and left the room. Jim Clevenger sucked in a long breath. He would make it soon and to hell with what people thought. He and Ann belonged together.

"How about the District Attorney's job, Clevenger?" asked one of the county commissioners.

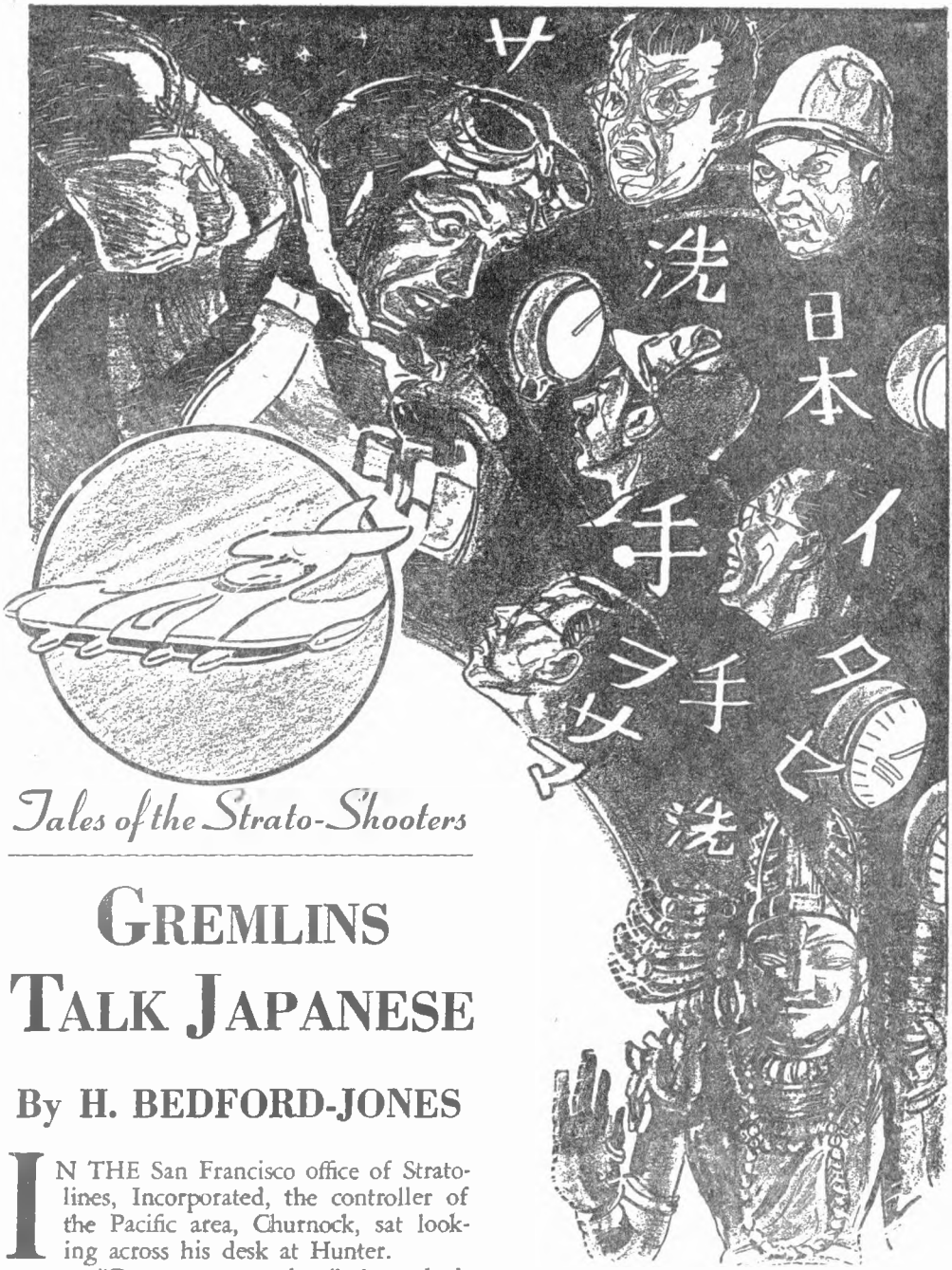
Jim shook his head. "I'm going to be too busy." He started for the door, then looked back. Marg Dayton was watching him. He knew now why she had substituted the false report. Something that Garrett had known about her father had forced her to play his game.

"Nine o'clock tomorrow morning, Marg," he said quietly.

Marg Dayton caught her breath. "You mean that, Jim?"

It was probably foolish of him, Jim realized, but he wouldn't be having an office much longer. He said, "Of course I mean it," and moved on to the door. A stabbing pain shot through his chest. It was bad but not too bad. In a month or two, the doctor had told him, those pains should be entirely gone.

It was sunny outside and the warm smell of summer was in the air. Jim started up the street. He realized, suddenly, that he was whistling. But he didn't stop. After all, it was pretty good these days to have something to whistle about.



Tales of the Strato-Shooters

GREMLINS TALK JAPANESE

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

IN THE San Francisco office of Stratolines, Incorporated, the controller of the Pacific area, Churnock, sat looking across his desk at Hunter.

"Do you remember," he asked, "that Gremlin business, back during the war? It was at first a bit of superstition, then a bit of humor—then, abruptly, it all stopped. No more was heard of it."

Tom Hunter, who had been a fighter pilot during the war, nodded.

"We were just developing the Lightnings

They Were Having Trouble on the Honolulu-Noumea-Auckland Branch of Stratolines Air Freight Service

and Thunderbolts then. Lord, it seems only yesterday! Yes, some of the pilots really believed in that Gremlin thing. I understand Authority stopped it cold, for reasons of morale. The idea of Gremlins, invisible pixies of the stratosphere who made things go wrong with a ship, started in the R.A.F. —I think with some New Zealand pilots."

Churnock assented. He was a heavy-set, practical, solid sort of man, far different from the keen-eyed, hawk-faced Tom Hunter, and seemed embarrassed by what he had to say.

"We're having trouble on the Honolulu-Noumea-Auckland branch," he said. "You know the importance of that run and of the nickel and other products of New Caledonia; but trouble has developed between Noumea and Auckland. As far as I can determine, it's—well, it's just Gremlin trouble. And I mean precisely what I say; literally, Mr. Hunter. I've relieved six of our best pilots on that run. They're in Auckland now, laid off temporarily and awaiting your arrival. I am not a superstitious man, I hope, but this—well it's got me baffled."

Certainly Churnock was not the superstitious type; Tom Hunter listened in growing incredulity, as the six pilots were listed. Two of them he knew personally. All were old hands, war veterans. As stratoshooter for Stratolines he had encountered some odd things, but this was something new.

He was a picked man himself; the trouble-shooters for this huge stratosphere freight line that girdled the globe in the air age following the war had to be exceptional men, able to turn their hands to anything from flying to handling politics. The network of nonstop freight transports known as Stratolines, Incorporated, had to face some queer problems. The air age was still new. Post-war conditions were still flexible.

Air had changed everything at the war's end. It aided the tremendous economic boom that had come to the whole world as a result of reconstruction, new inventions, new ways of life and action. Air exploration had opened up the last retreats of mystery and had given access to the hitherto unknown. Man had not yet plumbed the waters beneath or the heavens above, but he was getting there.

"I cannot go into the trouble," Churnock said hastily, as though he feared to do so. "You'll have to talk with the pilots yourself. Their written reports merely relate facts, for which the verbal reasons they assign and seem to believe, are ridiculous. Chiefly accidents to crew members, and operational blunders. The entire electronic installation on one ship refused to work. It was replaced and went into another ship on another run, and worked like a charm. The replacement has given no trouble. Things like that, with no rhyme or reason!"

"Is all the trouble between Noumea and Auckland?" Tom Hunter asked. The other grunted.

"As though I didn't ask the same question! A course over open ocean, both ways —and there's where things take place. Those pilots have evolved a theory; the craziest thing ever heard. I'll have nothing to do with it. I'll not even repeat it. Study the matter, before you talk with them and get your head filled with silly notions. I have all the reports ready for you to take along."

"When do I go?" Hunter asked.

"I hadn't thought about that. Better settle it now."

CHURNOCK went to the telaport on the wall, a replica of that in the Home office except that it covered only the Pacific area. He pressed the Honolulu-Noumea-Auckland buttons and the mechanicsm responded. The distance-ribbon flicked out and back; lights gave the exact position at the moment of all transports on this run, and the arrival and departure time of each flight showed on the schedule.

"Flight A-31 leaves in an hour, nonstop to Noumea, refueling above Honolulu," said the manager. "It'll land you in Auckland tomorrow evening. I'll have reservations for you at the Akatara airport hotel. You'll find all the pilots there except Steele. He's a New Zealander himself and is at home. He owns a place around on the southwest coast."

"These six are the only pilots affected by the delusions, if that's what they are!"

"Delusions is right," snapped Churnock. "Yes; apparently no others are affected, but if the thing spreads there'll be hell to pay. Too bad about Steele; he's our best man, a wonderful chap. He had nearly fifty Jap planes to his credit during the war. A magnetic personality, too."

"Get me a personnel report on him, will you? Thanks. I'll make the flight."

Like all stratoshooters, Hunter was of course ready for action on a moment's notice. As soon as he got the report on Steele, he was off with his ready-packed bag, and got across the bay to the Stratolines airport with time to spare. Customs and passport formalities finished, he went aboard the huge six-engined Planetoid. No passengers were carried, but the quarters of the crew were thoroughly comfortable.

HE SETTLED down to work in such concentration that he was unaware they were in the air until the stratosphere blowers went on, and he glanced up at the instruments to see that they were in their 40,000-ft. lane and heading for Honolulu. Normally he always found the silent lift of the great Planetoids, with their Brem auxiliary helicopter gear, a fascinating thing; but now he was intent on his problems. He had more than one. In laying off six of the line's oldest and best pilots, Churnock had done an unprecedented thing. One of those pilots, Thomas, Hunter knew very well indeed, and Thomas was the last person on earth to entertain any delusions, being extremely practical and efficient and level-headed.

First he broke down the reports furnished him. Of these there were eighteen —four being trivial accidents and fourteen of a serious nature. In each case the ship had been brought in safely; but this was a terrifically high accident percentage for Stratolines, and for all these to occur on one portion of a single run, except by deliberate sabotage, was simply impossible.

Of the fourteen, nine involved the electronic steering "robot," the oscillating radar apparatus developed during the war and since improved to a point of perfection. The other five involved the air supercharging of the crew's quarters. This also was electronic in control; the air being automatically oxygen-charged according to the level reached; to the pilots and crew, a deadly menace if anything went wrong. Five of the fourteen serious cases had occurred to Steele, in four different ships; four to Thomas, the others to the remaining pilots of the six.

In no case had laboratory examination shown the least thing wrong; the units had been taken out and tested in other ships and had functioned perfectly. The four minor accidents had happened to crew members—a fall, a smashed hand, two cases of injury in refueling. These could be discounted entirely; they might have happened at any time, anywhere. But—and here Hunter grunted with satisfaction—every one of the serious cases had happened on the south trip from Noumea to Auckland, though no two had occurred at any particular point of this relatively short trip.

"Now we've got something," thought Hunter, and consulted his watch. He picked up the radiophone and put in a call for Captain Thomas at the Akatara Hotel in Auckland. "Gremlins my eye! Each accident has taken place after leaving Noumea for Auckland, though plenty of such trips have been free of any accident. Hello! This you, Thomas? This is Tom Hunter, aboard Flight 31, coming to investigate your accidents. How's the old Jap-killer today?"

"For God's sake lay off that stuff, will you?" rejoined Thomas.

"Are you drunk, or what?"

"I don't like that Jap-killer talk."

"Well, this is something new!" said Hunter, astonished. "Okay, then. Churnock was vague about what you boys believe caused all these accidents, and there's nothing in the reports to indicate your beliefs. Give me a line on it, will you?"

"You wouldn't take any stock in Gremlins that talked."

"I might if you did."

"I'll meet you with a car and we'll go down to Steele's place. It's a camp-out, but interesting. He's talked to them and he knows."

Hunter assented and rang off. Gremlins that talked, and Steele had talked to them! The hell with it. And since when had Thomas got touchy over his record of killing Japs? He had bagged nearly as many Zeros and Mitsubishis during the war as Steele.

Laying business aside for the evening, Hunter got into a crap game with pilots and crew while the robot flew the ship, and enjoyed himself. They refueled during the night, by helicopter tank, above Honolulu, and were heading for Noumea when he got up and around next morning.

He got out Steele's record, which went

into minute particulars about the man. From the start, he had felt a hunch that it might afford some clue; it did not. Steele was now 29; he held no end of war honors; he had married during the war, had been divorced shortly after it. He had served with the Allied army in China, and after the war had spent a year as administrator in the Japanese occupational command. From this he had gone into service with Stratolines. His knowledge of Maori, Japanese and Chinese had frequently been of great help to the company. His record was unblemished, his vices were nil. He was the last of his family and had inherited a small property on the coast of the north island, once a health resort in pre-war days.

"The clue's there but I can't recognize it," reflected Hunter, and laid work aside.

The Pacific skies were empty that day; the few islands en route were invisible against the blue vastness below. This was always a lonely run and pilots hated it. Penny crap games—for by company rule the stakes were strictly limited—grew boring in time. Hunter fell into talk with the co-pilot, young New Zealander named Marsh, and found that he knew Steele well.

"He's always been a real sort of hero to us fellows," said Marsh in response to Hunter's probing. "He lost his *tiki* a few months ago and it's bothered him a lot."

"What d'you mean—*tiki?*"

"Maori jade good-luck charm." Marsh grinned and showed a ring set with a carved bit of greenstone. "His was an old and famous one. I guess it meant a lot to him. He's been soured on women, too, since his divorce; or so I hear. Hello! Skipper wants me. See you later."

Superstition, eh? Possibly a clue lay in that direction; but Steele was not the type of man to go over the deep end through superstition. Yet talking Gremlins did sound like it!

Calling the Stratolines agent at Auckland, Hunter asked to be supplied upon arriving with a *précis* showing the cargo that had arrived from Noumea by each transport over a period of three months—the period of this strange trouble. Also, he canceled the hotel reservations made for him, and hung up.

The landing at Noumea gave him time to walk about the unpleasant old city, which had long since recovered from its wartime occupation by American forces. Except for its air activity, it was lazy and slouchy and indifferent as ever. He drank a glass of wine and came back to the airport just in time to witness a violent altercation. A man wanted to fly to Auckland, where he had imperative business, by Flight A-31, but Stratolines could not take passengers. The man insisted; he was well known, it seemed, being manager of one of the mining companies now engaged in exploiting the incredible mineral supply of New Caledonia. Further, he was an American. His name was Dard Langley.

The manner of Langley drew Hunter's attention. He was tall, dark, about thirty, and spoke with angry vehemence that impressed the French officials but left the local Stratolines agent unmoved. Catching sight of Hunter, the agent brightened.

"Hello! Here's someone to handle this," he said. "Mr. Hunter, this is Mr. Langley. His firm ships a good deal of stuff by our line to Auckland, and he insists—"

"Yes, I heard." Hunter nodded at Langley and smiled. He opened his coat to show his Air Control badge—all stratoshooters being sworn and bonded officers. "May I ask just why, Mr. Langley, you're so set on taking this flight to Auckland?"

"There's no passenger flight for two days, and I must get there at once!" snapped the other. "I've just learned that—well, no matter. I've got to find somebody who's there."

"A lady?"

"None of your damned—I'm sorry. No. A man. It's a personal affair."

"Then I can't help you."

"Look here! We've shipped cinnabar and antimony by your line for the past two years, huge quantities of it, also of refined quicksilver; and—"

"And the law forbids Stratolines to accept passengers. That's final, Mr. Langley."

Langley blustered, and Hunter turned his back. Nobody loves an angry man. So the scene ended; Flight A-31 took the air, and Hunter thought no more of the incident.

They overtook the westering sun and beat the night into Auckland by a good hour—Auckland of the red roofs and encircling blue water and far-stretching beauty. The air age had been good to Auckland, swelling it to enormous proportions. The Strato-

line port and shops were a good three miles west of town at the new Akatara airfield, a small city in itself.

When Hunter disembarked, Thomas was awaiting him, and grabbed his bag.

"Come along! Steele's expecting us. Here's some data our local agent gave me to hand you—something you asked for. Have any trouble coming from Noumea?"

"Not a bit. In fact, I forgot to look for any," said Hunter, laughing. "How far is it to this place of Steele's?"

"Oh, a little under a hundred miles down the coast, near Te Kuity—"

Hunter stopped. "Man! Do you realize I want supper and a good night's sleep?"

"Nonsense! We'll be halfway there before dark. Steele promised us a bang-up dinner; pheasant and so forth. He's got a couple of Maoris there who take care of the joint, and they do things up scrumptious!"

Hunter shrugged and followed to the car. Thomas had a good car and drove fast; Hunter found him the same as of old, steady and placid and well-poised. They sped across rich farming country, reached Ngaruawahia by dark, and headed for the hills and the land of geysers. The latter part of the trip followed twisting little side roads, and they came down to the sea through a wild, rocky gorge. The headlights gleamed at last on boatsheds, an overgrown tennis court, and a long ramshackle structure fronted by a faded sign announcing the Punakarua Guest House.

Steele came out to meet them with hearty greetings, with a heavy-shouldered Maori in overalls to take their things.

"Welcome to Punakarua, such as it is!" cried their host. "One stinger before dinner, and then for the groaning board—I'll bet you're famished!"

The place was by no means luxurious; the old resort hotel was comfortable, however, and the drink was more than welcome. Steele was a remarkably handsome man with curly fair hair and blue eyes radiant with vitality; his abounding energy, his magnetic personality, dominated everything. Watching his two companions, Hunter reflected that never had he seen two men less liable to delusions or supernatural nonsense.

The dinner that followed was a notable feast—cooked, said Steele, in one of the steam-pots in the front yard. The two Maoris, Te Puea and his wife, were laughing, cheerful creatures. Altogether, the evening was one of convivial, lusty good-humor well calculated to banish any queer notions And yet—

"You've brought good luck," Steel said to Hunter. "I just found my *tiki*—lost it a while back. Someone found it and sent it to me by mail."

From beneath his shirt he brought out a cord, on which hung a beautiful bit of Maori carving in polished island jade—a figure some three inches high, with the conventional three-fingered hands of native art.

"Old King Tawhiao gave it to my grandfather," he went on, "and I carried it all through the war. Makes me feel good to have it back, you bet!"

"Where'd you lose it?" asked Thomas.

"Over at Noumea, apparently," Steele replied, and his eyes clouded. He dismissed the subject as Te Puea brought in the coffee. "I had special permission to carry it—there's a strict government embargo on any such objects leaving the country, you know. Well, Hunter, I'm glad you're the one on this job. You talk our language."

"I hope so," said Hunter cheerfully. "Though I wasn't in your area. Nazi flak knocked me out of the game, and by the time I was out of hospital the war was in its last stages."

"That damned Churnock!" said Steele. "I told him what I thought. He just shriveled—took me for a madman. He's a damned poor one to be running Stratolines."

"I hear he's to be shifted from operations to freight," Hunter observed. "No, he's not the man to believe in talking Gremlins. Neither are we—unless we have reason to suppose they exist. Come on, you guys. I'm open to conviction, anyhow."

Thomas and Steele exchanged a glance. The latter spoke, slowly, deliberately.

"Well, I speak a bit of Japanese, to begin with. And I had quite a bit of luck during the war knocking down Jap flyers; my squadron developed a technique that made the blighters easy for us. And the thousand-mile flight from Noumea to Auckland, or 998 miles to be exact, is a lonely stretch. That's where I began to hear the Jap voices, after leaving Noumea."

As he spoke Steele shot glances at Hunter, but the latter merely nodded, casually. He went on with more confidence.

"They were Japs I had killed. One would tell me where and when he had been shot down; then another would chip in. I suppose Japs have souls; I never thought much about it. The point was these fellows were out to get me. They said so in plain language."

"When was the first time for them?" Hunter asked.

"At the beginning of the southeast trade —the first November flight, it was. Well, before we were halfway to Auckland our whole electronic system went to hell—all the controls. We couldn't pick up the light-beam at all and the robot went haywire. I brought her in by dead-reckoning okay; but the shops declared there was nothing wrong. They took the ship up next day and everything functioned like a charm. That was the first time."

"And you told Thomas about the Jap Gremlins," said Hunter.

Thomas nodded in his serious way and took up the story.

"Yes, he did. I see what you're getting at; he put the notion in my head, eh? Maybe so. We didn't regard it too solemnly. A couple of the other chaps heard us mention it, and the notion spread. Well, I don't savvy Jap lingo. But I did hear something, I can swear to that, the day we left Noumea and went off the beam and couldn't get back!"

"Give me the date—no, I've got it in your report," said Hunter. "Okay. Sounded like Jap talk, eh?"

"Yes, it did," affirmed Thomas. Hunter turned to their host.

"And did you hear the Japs talk again?"

Steele nodded, his eyes darkening.

"I'd have laid it to a delusion, the first time, if it hadn't happened again and again. Half a dozen times; sometimes nothing went wrong, other times it did. After it became evident that a jinx of some kind was operating on this run, I came to believe in it. And why not?"

"I'll bite," said Hunter whimsically. "But instead of why not, why?"

"From a standpoint of metaphysics, it stands to reason. Jap souls must be somewhere; why not hanging around the ocean lanes? The Maoris believe this. These spiritualist chaps believe it. And it's more easily accepted than disproved."

Hunter nodded. "Looks that way, sure."

"Then you don't think I'm nuts?" asked Steele.

"No more than I am, old man," Hunter said heartily. "What say we let it rest till morning? Honestly, I'm a bit fagged, I still have some work to do tonight, and after a good sleep I can approach the subject with an open mind."

"Good!" exclaimed Steele. "And I want to show you over the place in the morning. Mud pots and all that sort of thing. We've got a blow-hole almost as good as the big fumarole at Karapiti, too."

They sat around for a bit, talking of the geysers, hot springs and other such natural freaks, then broke up.

Tired as he was, Hunter put in a solid hour's work with the accident reports and the cargo lists gained at Auckland, checking off dates and making notes. When he turned out the light and went to sleep, he had not solved the secret of the Japanese Gremlins by a long shot, but he did have a queer sort of theory. How it was to be proved or disproved he had no idea.

His problems had redoubled. It was a stratoshooter's job to keep pilots in line, among other things. And here were two pilots, with four others at Auckland, very much out of line.

"At least I've run down the talking Gremlins to Steele," he thought as he fell asleep. "He started them. But what started him, back at Noumea last November?"

Morning found him up and around betimes and sitting down to a hearty breakfast. Before seeing the sights he wanted to get in touch with Auckland. There was no radiophone at Punakarua, but there was an old-fashioned telephone, and by means of this he contacted the Stratolines agent at Auckland.

"When," he asked, "will you have another ship in from Noumea with a load of that quicksilver and antimony stuff?"

"Hard to tell, Mr. Hunter," came the reply. "One arrived early this morning. but—"

"What do you mean, one arrived this morning?" demanded Hunter. "I came in with Flight A-31 last evening, and there

wasn't another of our ships scheduled for three days!"

"This was a special charter. We had one of the old four-motored fleet at Noumea, and the mining people chartered her for the run. Their manager was anxious to get here, and under the rules we could only bring him if he had a ship under charter."

"Oh!" Hunter chuckled. "You mean a chap named Langley?"

"That's the one. He damned near never got here, too. The old ship went haywire, just as our big ones have been doing. As soon as she gets unloaded—"

"Hold her!" snapped Hunter. "Have her freight cargo replaced, just as it was."

"I don't think Mr. Langley will like that, sir. He got a car and went tearing off in a big hurry, but he wanted the freight unloaded—"

"The hell with Mr. Langley! I'm giving orders here. When I get back to the city some time today I want to make some tests with that ship. And have those four laid-off pilots on hand and waiting. I'll bring Steele and Thomas. Oh, yes—one thing more! The shops will have on hand some of those quartz crystal shavings used for grids in radar and electronic tubes; those crystals that are worked into 12-thousandths of an inch thick. Have your men mount about a dozen of them, without tubes, and put them into a closed box of some kind. Got it?"

"Got it, sir. And you want the ship precisely as she landed."

"Yes, except for Langley. Leave him out of it."

He left the telephone and running into Steele halted him.

"Hey, hold on! Tell me something. When you first heard those Gremlins last November were you making a through flight or had you laid over at Noumea?"

Steele looked surprised. "I had laid over. Found I had an abscessed tooth on the way from Honolulu, so I had it pulled, and put in three or four days at Noumea afterward."

"No drinking?"

"No. One drink a day is my limit, usually not that. That's when I lost my *tiki*, too."

"Oh. At Noumea?"

Steele hesitated. "Yes, I ran into some things—purely personal matters. Upset me a bit. I was off my feed on account of the tooth."

"I'll bet you were!" Hunter beamed. "All right, forget it. Now I'm dying to see your natural wonders, whatever they are. I suppose it's some of these things we'd make into a National Park at home, but that are just part of the landscape here, as you said last night."

That expressed it quite neatly. Thomas showed up, and Steele took them on a tour of the mud-pots and thermal springs on his own and the adjacent property.

An eternal steaming mist lay like a lost cloud; through it peered the crimson-flowering masses of *rata* along the hillsides, and the blue sea below. Te Puea and his wife did all the cooking for the place in hot pools and steam-jets close to the hotel. Beyond these, and stretching along the shore, was a weird assortment of Mother Nature's spasmodics, as Steele termed them.

Here were sulphur pools, a couple of small spouting geysers, boiling mud pots that sucked and bubbled in regular cadence, warm springs of mineral mud, and the little mound with a hole in the center that had once been a first-class geyser.

"Now it's only a steam vent that has to be tickled to make it work," Steele said, as they stood about the mound. He picked up a rusty tin can and tossed it into the central hole. "I'd hate to fall on top of that mound when it was about to let go, or into one of those boiling mud-pots either. There would not be much left to identify. Don't stray off the path, by the way; a lot of this ground is just hard-surfaced mud and a person would crack through—"

A RUMBLING roar gathered underfoot, drowning everything; it became a hissing thunder, as a column of steam burst up from the mound, shooting the can high in air and then dissipating on the morning breeze, the rumble dying away beneath their feet.

They wandered on, Steele talking about his plans to rejuvenate the old place some day and build it up as a mud-bath resort. Hunter, apparently attentive, was actually concerned with his own reflections, which centered about Steele's stop-over at Noumea last November.

During those days Steele had had an abscessed tooth removed—which meant his

body had been absorbing poisons from that tooth, previously. He had lost his *tiki* then. He had run into some personal affairs which had upset him. What? And leaving Noumea, he had for the first time encountered his talking Gremlins, which were by no means sheer imagination.

This added up to just one thing: At that time Steele had either been under some strong emotional disturbance or thrown out of focus by absorption of tooth poison, or both. An important item in the theory Hunter was evolving.

Time had passed as they explored. Steele left them watching the pop-plopping mud pots and went off to have a look at the upper fences around his property. He was out of sight when Hunter descried a figure approaching from the direction of the hotel. He peered at it in surprise.

"That's funny!" he exclaimed. "That's the chap Langley who was making such a fuss at Noumea!"

"Langley?" Thomas swung around sharply. "My lord!"

"What's the matter? Do you know him?"

"No, but I've heard plenty about him. Manager of those quicksilver mines in New Caledonia—sure, that's the joe who copped off Steele's wife just at the end of the war! That's what caused the divorce. Now there will be hell to pay."

Hunter's first thought was that unpleasant Mr. Langley had come in search of him in regard to the unloaded plane; the time element discounted this, however. Langley had got a car at Auckland and had rushed away on his imperative errand; was Punagarua the goal of his furious haste? A groan escaped Thomas.

"And here comes Steele, dammit! He'll kill this guy, sure!"

"No loss if he did," grunted Hunter.

Langley drew near. He flung an angry nod of recognition at Hunter but said nothing; he and Steele obviously knew each other.

"Hello! What's your business here?" demanded Steele, with unconcealed distaste.

"With you," snapped Langley. The two men halted on a level space, edged with the protective rail that fended visitors from the unsafe ground. Steele was quite calm, Langley was breathing hard and plainly in the grip of strong emotion.

"She's left me!" burst out Langley. "Ruth has left me!"

"She left you long ago," Steele said very quietly. His perfectly composed manner, his air almost of amused majesty, infuriated the other man. "She soon found out what type of a man you are, Langley. It doesn't take a woman long to discover when she's fooled herself."

"But she'd have come back to me, if it hadn't been for you," stormed Langley. "If you hadn't come snooping around her bungalow at Noumea—"

"I met her there quite by accident," intervened Steele.

"And you've hung around her ever since! Sneaking about, trying to win her away from me!" Langley was rapidly working himself into a passion. Steele actually smiled at him.

"A pretty despicable thing, eh?" he said tolerantly. "Even when a woman's living apart from her husband. How much worse, when the husband's merely away at war! I suppose you never thought about that, when you were sneaking around here in the old days, eh? Just another wolf on the prowl, eh? Well, I've been doing some prowling on my own hook around Noumea, lately. It's a nice game if you can play it. What are you going to do about it?"

His bitter words drove home deeply; Langley was white with fury under those mocking blue eyes.

"You're going to lay off. Stop it. Keep away from her, d'you hear?" he shouted. Steele merely looked at him, through him, and made calm response.

"And you came here to tell me that? My, my! So you're one of these guys who can't take it, eh? If your wife prefers another man, your injured honor demands blood, I presume. But Ruth isn't your wife—hasn't been for a long time. Too bad I didn't learn about it earlier. I supposed she was satisfied with you, until I ran into her at Noumea last November and discovered the truth!"

"I'm warning you!" Langley cried wildly. "I'm warning you, Steele! Leave her alone or I'll kill you!"

Steele really laughed at this, in mingled amusement and contempt.

"Try and not be a dramatic fool," he rejoined bitingly. "Did I take out after you

with a gun, when you cajoled her into leaving me? No. You're simply not worth it, Langley; I don't see myself dancing on the gallows for killing a swine like you. But," he added with a sudden change of tone, "I might come to it unless you leave *her* alone. If you molest her in the slightest, from now on, I'll cut your throat. Mind that."

"Yah! Try it!" jeered Langley. "So you lost that damned jade *tiki* of yours, didn't you? And I found it at her bungalow—that's how I knew you'd been sneaking around there. And she sent it back to you—"

Hunter woke up and intervened.

"Suppose you two guys quit acting like kids double-daring each other," he said, stepping forward. "Act like sensible men instead!"

Langley turned a contorted, wild-eyed face to him.

"She's going back to him! Do you understand? She wants to go back to him!"

"That's jolly good news," said Steele, beaming. "I've always loved her and always will—"

"And haven't I? Isn't my love as good and deep and honest as yours?" foamed Langley.

"Hardly, you dirty cur!" snapped Steele, suddenly giving away to anger. "Why, your dishonest, cowardly heart doesn't even know the meaning of love!"

As though this had been the final straw, it happened—so suddenly, so unexpectedly as to leave the watchers aghast. This dialogue, which left revealed the full story of both men's life and love, ended upon a note of sharp tragedy, as Langley whipped out a pistol and fired pointblank.

Steele was knocked backward by the bullet. He fell against the guard-rail, and the weight of his body smashed the rotten old wooden rail. He sprawled and tumbled upon the soggy danger-ground beyond, where a step would break though the flimsy crust, and directly below him lay the boiling mud-pots.

Hunter leaped as though on springs. Langley fired at him, too, and missed, then turned and legged it like a deer with Thomas after him. Hunter's whole thought was for Steele, however. Gaining his side, he stooped, caught his feet, and dragged him out of the muck back to solid ground.

He knelt and was opening the blood-drenched shirt collar when Thomas came back.

"Got away in the *rata* scrub up the slope," he panted. "Is he dead?"

Steele's blue eyes opened, in answer. Hunter, with a surge of unspeakable relief, held up the two pieces of the broken *tiki*.

"Look at this," he said. "The bullet hit it and broke it, and glanced up across the collarbone and shoulder." He worked Steele's arm. "Hurt?"

"Like hell," said Steele.

"Collarbone broken, then." Tom Hunter looked up the slope where Langley had disappeared. It was wild and rocky, overgrown by huge patches of *rata* that would shelter anything. "Where's the nearest doctor, Steele?"

"Hamilton, I think."

"Okay. Thomas, get some first-aid stuff from the hotel, and something for a sling. We can fix him up, then run him into Hamilton on our way to Auckland. And the police—"

"Forget all that," snapped Steele. "Make it the Auckland hospital, and let the police run their own business. I don't care anything about catching that skunk. Report this, and let it go. I'm the happiest man alive. This scratch is worth it, well worth it."

"As you like," said Hunter. Thomas was already on his way.

WHEN Thomas returned, Te Puea and his stalwart wife came with him, displaying dismay and alarm; they knew Langley, it seemed. Bandaged, Steele gained his feet; he could walk without trouble.

At the hotel, Steele was put into the car without delay. He shouted for Te Puea, but there was no reply. Langley's abandoned car stood at one side.

"The two of them disappeared up yonder," said Thomas. "Just melted away and were gone. Get the cart started, Hunter. I'll fetch our stuff."

In another five minutes they were off, post-haste.

Although in considerable pain, Steele talked as they drove, sketching in the details of what they already knew—how Langley had hung about here in the war days, how Ruth had fallen for his line, and so

forth. He did not blame her; he had, by his own statement, been a hell of a guy to live with whenever he got leave. He had lived only for strafing Japs in those days, and Ruth had suffered.

Hunter listened in silence. He was not surprised. More than once, in trouble-shooting for Stratolines, he had found himself plummeted into stark human emotions and real-life dramas, inextricably tangled with and reacting upon the destinies of the airlanes. His one regret now was that Steele could not share in the forthcoming tests of the chartered plane.

They got into Auckland shortly after noon, deposited Steele at the hospital in Park Road, and went on to the airport. After a bite of lunch the other four pilots showed up and Hunter conducted them to the waiting ship. The Stratolines agent showed up with the box containing the mounted crystal wafers. These were hooked up with the electronic system at Hunter's orders—useless, lifeless bits of crystal without tubes.

EVERYONE crowded aboard, Thomas took the controls, and the heavily loaded ship took the air. Almost at once, it became evident that the electronic system was off; she would not respond to the light beams, and the radio was almost useless.

"Keep her flying," said Hunter. "The engines aren't affected. As soon as any of you guys hear the Gremlins, let me know. Rev her up a bit, Thomas; we want a fifty-mile flight, maybe more."

At stratosphere level, with the automatic charges barely working, the ship soared along—until, suddenly, the watching men glanced at one another, and Thomas gave Hunter a look.

"I guess we all hear it," he said. "Louder than I ever heard it, too. No imagination about that, Hunter!"

None; the faint sound, as of chattering Jap voices, was distinct in the cabin. Hunter looked at the instruments, then opened the lid of the box for all to see. The bits of quartz crystal mounted there were oscillating in violent fluttering motion.

"There are your talking Gremlins," he said. "The grids in the tubes, getting the same current, are going it in the same way."

"By damn, you're right!" exclaimed someone. "But why? What causes it, if not—"

"If not Jap Gremlins?" Hunter grinned. "Land, Thomas, land! We'll soon see."

It was high time, for the oxygen chargers quit work just then; but they came down at the airport and taxied over to the loading sheds. Hunter got a crew to work, ordering all the freight unloaded. This was done rapidly.

"Now, Thomas, up with her again!"

Once more the ship took the air, and Hunter smiled at the exclamations of amazement. Everything was functioning like a charm. The crystals in the box showed no movement.

"Simplest thing on earth, boys," said he. "Every ship that had trouble coming from Noumea was carrying a heavy freight of quicksilver and antimony or cinnabar. That stuff is frightfully heavy but bulks small, and is stowed in balance just abaft the cabin, near the electronic tubes. Trouble developed only after a ship was an hour or more out of Noumea—sometimes less, sometimes more. You see? It took a certain length of time for the tubes to become affected by the proximity of the metal or ore."

"But how are they affected?" demanded the staring Thomas. Hunter shrugged.

"Apparently the crystal slices, the basis of all electronic oscillation, were affected; how? Don't ask me. You saw the antics of my mounted crystals. We only developed radar and such things with the war; even now we know darned little about 'em. But we have the answer to your chattering Jap Gremlins, and Stratolines has learned something about loading freight. And maybe we've got a new one for the scientists to puzzle over."

"But Steele actually understood what those voices were saying, Hunter!"

"You mean, he thought he did. He had been through violent, emotional upsets at Noumea, with his wife and all. He was full of poison from a bad tooth. And losing his *tiki* didn't help him any. It was mighty easy to imagine words in those chattering sounds."

Steele, lying in his hospital bed, admitted as much. He just looked up at them and grinned, when Hunter and Thomas visited him. A police officer, who had been taking down a statement, was called away to a telephone, and Steele spoke freely.

"Maybe you've laid the poor Gremlins for keeps, Hunter; hope so, anyhow. I had a radiophone call from Ruth in Noumea, a while ago. She's coming down on the next ship, and this time we'll try to make a go of it. The hell with Gremlins!"

They all shook hands on hopes for the future.

"But what about—er—Langley?" blurted out Thomas. The police officer had just returned, and made bold to answer the query.

"No need to worry about that bloke, gentlemen," he said. "That call was from the constable who went to investigate at your place, Mr. Steele. It seems that this poor devil Langley in trying to get away, tumbled into one of those mud-pots. Those Maori servants of yours brought in what was left of him. I take it the affair is closed, and I'll bid you good afternoon."

The officer departed. Hunter looked at Thomas, then at Steele, and whistled softly.

"That's odd! If Langley knew the place so well, he'd hardly—"

"Oh," said Steele, "if you fall into one of those mud-pots, there isn't much left for evidence of anything else. I wouldn't think of questioning Te Puea's word; he's really a gentleman, you know."

They shook hands all over again, and left it that way.

Overseas Mail

UNDER this heading in each issue of SHORT STORIES we plan to publish letters from men in our armed forces overseas. For each one we use its sender will receive a $25.00 war bond. Won't you send us one? We cannot guarantee to return unused ones, but we want representative letters showing what is happening to our young men in their greatest adventure.

Address the Editor, SHORT STORIES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Do not send original letters; have them copied.

Here's a letter from a civil engineer formerly with the Sanitary District of Chicago: you can see where his interests lie. The letter was "intended for all his former co-working engineers." He is a Lieutenant in the Marines.

I suppose I owe you all letters; it is really tough trying to keep up with correspondence, very little in the way of conveniences. We live out of a pack and it is so ungodly hot and humid here, even when one gets an opportunity to write we find that our envelopes have sealed themselves together and I don't know how many stamps I have thrown away, all stuck together in one big gob. Tried putting foot powder over the glue—maybe that will help.

We are now on "Island X." I must have seen most every part of the South Pacific, but this is really primitive; there were never any whites on this island before the war, and all roads have to be cut. Our last job was a good-sized dock, very interesting and plenty of grief. I remember how proud Walter was of that International tractor he got from Great Lakes. I wish he could see our equipment for earth moving; we really can move dirt! All told, it has been very interesting.

This is really the land of the fuzzy-wuzzies; they are quite small, only about four feet tall, the men wear loin cloths, the women grass skirts. They really aren't much for beauty and could invest in a little Lifebuoy soap. They get twelve dollars a year

and have to pay four dollars of it back in income tax. We put eighty of them in a cargo truck (when hauling our men we never exceed eighteen), and all you can see is their fuzzy tops and the heads of the ones around the outside edges of the trucks. They are great at putting up thatch buildings, climb around like monkeys (also look like the missing link), and don't seem to have a worry in the world. It's hard to believe they were cannibals only about fifteen years ago.

We all have fox holes dug just outside our tents, but luckily have only had a couple of occasions when they had to be used. Glad of that, for the bugs have decided they were built for them, every imaginable type and shape. I have a few little lizards in my tent, who have become quite tame and we find are one of our best friends; they will tackle most anything.

How is Ray getting along? I often wonder if he has returned to the States. I understand some of the battalions have returned . . . this seems to be the main topic of conversation of our men. It looks as if their hopes might come true by spring, but I suppose it all depends upon the defeat of Germany by Russia.

As ever,

Charley.

This one is from a Navy Seabee stationed in the Aleutians and was written to his nine-year-old daughter in California.

Dear Joan:

In just a few days now you'll be having another birthday, but I'm afraid there won't be a present from me because on this island there's just nothing to buy. That's a little bit of a fib. What I meant was that there's nothing to buy for a little girl. Of course, I could send you a silly-looking pillow case, or a table-cloth with a map of Alaska on it, or even a carved ivory cigarette holder, but I didn't think you'd want any of those.

You said you wanted to know more about the place I'm stationed. Well, I'd like to write more, too, but the censor would quickly change my mind. There are a few things, though, that I can tell you.

The civilians on this island can be counted on your fingers. There are no children at all and only one woman. She is an Aleut. Since we always called these islands the Al-oo-shuns, I had thought that the people would be called Al-oots, but I was wrong. You call them Alley-oots—just like Alley-oop in the funny papers.

The sevicemen up here would surely like to murder the guy who wrote "White Christmas." The music is swell, but if the composer were here he'd change his tune—or at least the words to his tune.

When I get back to California and see some green grass and flowers again—well—I just don't know what I'll do but I strongly suspect that I shall get down on my hands and knees and EAT them! And speaking of eating, I'm either going to have to go on a diet or buy a new uniform. It fits just like the skin on a sausage! The Navy may not be able to give us sunshine and flowers, but they surely give us food!

We'll be coming home on furlough soon according to the scuttlebutt. (That means rumor in Navy talk.) The boys kid and joke a lot about going home "any day now." But that's the catch! The days up here sometimes last for months and months! Anyhow, when I do come home I'll buy you a super-special birthday present. It doesn't matter if it's a few months late, does it?

Even if I can't write much to you, you'll be sure to keep on writing, won't you? We like letters better than our pay checks—honestly. And I especially like letters from you because I love you more than any woman in the whole world!

Daddy Tom.

Here's one from a former banker in Minneapolis—and now a staff sergeant in Italy with the Fifth Army.

I guess by now that you know that it takes me longer to answer a letter than any other G. I. in Uncle Sam's Army. However, I assure you that this is not due to a lack of interest in the mail which I receive, but rather due to the press of duty in what has become the world's largest business.

You perhaps already know that my outfit has been moved to what has been fondly referred to in the past by travel agencies as "Sunny Italy," but we have decided that this misnomer was invented by the ancient Romans, and that the sun disappeared when they did. From what we have seen so far,

it's another of these countries that either blows in your face or comes up to your knees.

The civilian population of this section of Italy is certainly paying the price of their government's folly in entering this war. Their homes are totally demolished, and food and clothing, with emphasis on the latter, are major problems. There's a sort of doggedness about these people that puzzles the onlooker as to whether or not it is an admirable trait or a lack of sense of their part. As the front approaches their sector, the whole family evacuates in favor of the mountain caves, lugging with them every item that can possibly be carried. A few days later, or just as soon as their homes have ceased to be a part of "No Man's Land," and before the shells have stopped screaming into the area, back they come to take up residence as before, regardless of whether the house remains standing or not. At first, the front-line American soldier is offered fruit, nuts, and wine, but after a few days they make the inevitable turn-around and drive him frantic with their demands for "caramels," "bon-bons," and cigarettes. They're not as bad, though, as the Arab who used to ask for everything, give nothing, and steal what he could.

The Italian people are strong in voicing their disapproval of the Mussolini regime, and the actions of the German troops, but then none of us expect them to denounce the Army that is in control to our faces. I did see one Italian civilian try to maim a German prisoner with a large boulder yesterday. He was forcibly restrained but not without plenty of pro and con arguments from the onlooking soldier.

Italy may have been a beautiful country once, but it's undergoing quite a few changes, and none for the better. If those people of the United States that advocate our fighting only when invaded could catch a glimpse of what the citizens of a battlefield country have to endure, I don't think that they'd continue to shout their nonsensical ideas any longer.

The men of this Division are certainly seeing the world, and I expect we'll see a lot more of it befor we have the opportunity to tramp on U. S. soil again. I suppose that we're getting what is known as a liberal education in geography, but after twenty months of roaming around in foreign countries, a person becomes obsessed with a desire to return home to see his friends and loved ones even if only for a short period of time. Of course, it's just a waste of time even thinking about it, but I guess it's only human nature to want most what you can't have.

Most of us are still amazed to read in the few U. S. newspapers that reach us about the ease with which U. S. troops maul those of the Axis. It all sounds so simple, but then I suppose the morale of the home front must also be maintained.

The terrain over which this campaign is being fought is just about as rough as it comes, and I can't for the life of me see why some people list mountain climbing as a sport. Even our "peeps," which are supposed to be able to go anywhere, can't make the grade through some of the spots we find it necessary to travel. Early tomorrow morning we are going to use some requisitioned mules in an attempt to string some wire through one of these places. Quite a chance, from transit clerk to muleskinner in just three years. Guess one never does know just what the future holds in store for him.

Yours for victory,
Herb Aitkins.

Remember!

SHORT STORIES *looks* smaller. We are saving paper for the war effort.

Remember!

SHORT STORIES has the same number of good active stories as before. Our printer managed it. You get just as much reading matter for your money as before.

PLANE FACTS

BY Jim Tilly

NAVY DIVE-BOMBER

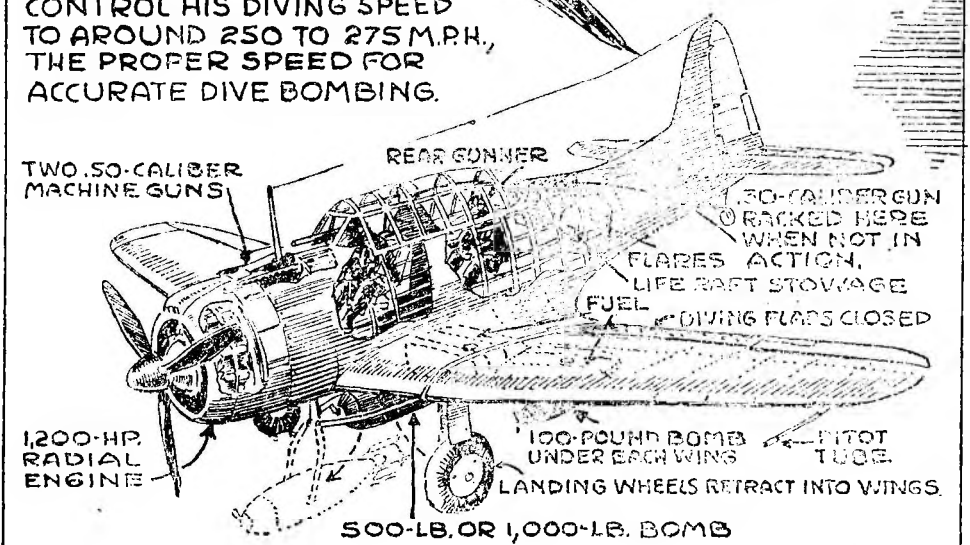
DOUGLAS "*Dauntless*" SBD

(SBD-SCOUT BOMBER DOUGLAS)

IN A DIVE THE PILOT KEEPS HIS EYE GLUED TO THE TELESCOPE SIGHT

BUILT TO STAND THE GRUELING PUNISHMENT OF WIND AND PRESSURE IN TERRIFIC DIVES, THE SBD DIVE-BOMBER IS THE BEST OF ITS TYPE IN THE WORLD. IT HAS DESTROYED MORE JAP AIRCRAFT, AIRFIELDS, SURFACE CRAFT, AND BASES THAN ANY OTHER SINGLE TYPE OF WEAPON USED IN THE PACIFIC.

THE "SWISS CHEESE" TYPE OF WING FLAPS USED ON THE SBD SPLIT AS THEY OPEN ON THE TRAILING EDGE OF THE WING, ACTING AS BRAKES THAT ENABLE THE PILOT TO CONTROL HIS DIVING SPEED TO AROUND 250 TO 275 M.P.H., THE PROPER SPEED FOR ACCURATE DIVE BOMBING.



THE BIG BOMB IS ATTACHED TO A FORKED, YOKE-LIKE GEAR THAT SWINGS IT CLEAR OF THE PLANE AS IT IS RELEASED.

WITH THE ARMY, SBD's ARE CALLED A-24'S. THEY HAVE PLAYED AN OUTSTANDING ROLE IN MEDITERRANEAN OPERATIONS.

WHITE GOLD

Yellow Gold Buys Bonds, Blondes, and Battleships. White Gold Buys Something Else as Well!

By GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL

Author of "Dawn of Treachery," etc.

THE pilot turned and looked at Johnny Cooper and shook his head as he gestured at the bleak, ice-bound coast below.

"My, my. You could be flying south, to wallow in the fleshpots of Los Angeles. But no. You pick this. I'm thinking that maybe you ain't quite right in the head, sir."

Lieut. John Cooper's lean, bronzed face lit with an easy grin that belied the consternation within him. *Maybe I am a damn fool. Wasting a leave on a wild goose chase.* Anxiously he peered through the windows of the Navy amphibion. He was used to the chill, rocky, fog-cursed beaches of the Aleutians and had thought that nothing could surpass them in loneliness and misery. But this northwest coast of Alaska looked like the meanest kind of desolation. Here the curving coast of Norton Sound consisted of rugged bluffs fronting beaches armored

with ice. Behind the bluffs, hilly barrens lifted back to mountains. And all of it was a depressing gray-white; snow on land, ice on water. Johnny Cooper sighed. It was a swell place to exile the mad dogs of the world; here the blizzards could howl down the ranting of fuhrers and the iron frost could stiffen the strut out of the Tojos. *And I choose to come here!*

After his fourteen months of piloting a Catalina bomber on the Attu-Kiska run, wise superiors had given Lieut. John Cooper thirty days leave. To rest up, and to recover the shrewd, keen-eyed zest and stubborn good humor which had made him so valuable a flying officer. On his return, promotion to Lieutenant Commander would come through. But instead of heading south for home as if each starved appetite within him was a roaring take-off rocket, he had freely and deliberately chosen to deadhead a ride in a patrol plane *north* to this frozen coast of Norton Sound. It hadn't been an easy choice. Johnny Cooper craved sunbathing on a California beach, and Johnny Cooper craved concerts in the Bowl and old-fashioneds at Terry's and girls who looked with eager interest to a lanky, easy-smiling redhead with a row of ribbons and a pair of pilot's wings on his chest. But for Ensign Bill Baker's sake, Johnny had stifled his cravings and shouldered the responsibility of this trip north.

"Okay, that looks like Cape Limbo down there."

The pilot nodded, murmured, "What did you ever do to deserve this?" and banked the big amphibian groundward.

Presently Johnny made out the tiny settlement on the Cape. Some forty-odd Eskimos and several whites lived here. He saw the rounded, snow-covered hovels of the Eskimos and several frame buildings. Where, he wondered, was the Baker mine?

The amphibian roared over the beach as the pilot studied possibilities of landing. Satisfied, then, he banked around and came in low, letting down wheels, and set the big plane down with an iron delicacy in a foot of snow. She bucked and plunged a bit as she hit obstacles under the snow, but came to a stop without damage. The hatch was opened, and Johnny climbed out of the plane and the crew handed out his luggage.

Already, he saw, the Eskimos were coming on the run. Roar of the motors had brought them out of their hovels.

"Sure you want to stay, sir?" the pilot asked him.

I'm sure I *don't* want to stay, Johnny thought; but he just grinned and said, "Thanks for the lift, Pete. Do as much for you, some day."

"God forbid!" Pete said fervently.

The crew members shook hands with him and wished him luck—as if, he thought with annoyance, they actually thought they wouldn't be seeing him again. Just the same, as he watched the amphibian roar down the beach and tuck up its wheels in flight, he did have a feeling of being marooned in an icy nowhere.

He looked around at the Eskimos. The whole village must have emptied out to meet him, he reflected. Smiling, their dark eyes bright with curiosity, whispering among themselves, they were staring at him in very friendly fashion. He looked for a tall white man among them, but did not see him.

"Where's Mr. Machamer?" he asked. "The mine caretaker?"

Nobody answered, and he thought that they grew rather quiet. Then a figure at the back of the group came forward and Johnny started in surprise. It was a girl, a tall white girl wearing a hooded parka like the others.

"I'm Grace Norton," she said. "My brother Phil is the government schoolteacher here. You asked for Mr. Machamer—but he isn't here any more."

"Why not? Where'd he go? What happened?"

THE news put a serious crimp in Johnny's hopes, and he spoke more sharply than he intended. But the girl seemed to understand this and did not take offense.

"We don't know where he went. He just up and left. Phil thinks Machamer got 'bushed.' You know—a little deranged."

Ruefully Johnny admitted, "That makes it tough for me."

"Won't you come up to the house? Possibly my brother can help you. The Eskimos will bring your luggage."

There was a heartiness in her words that made Johnny ashamed of his preoccupation with himself.

"Thanks! Good of you to ask me, con-

sidering how I've dropped in without warning, like an unwanted relative."

"But we're as anxious for company as a sheepherder."

She laughed, and he liked her laugh; and he liked the supple, easy way she walked; and he thought to himself *I'll bet she can ski, and swim, and I'll bet she can dance, and loves it. She's pretty. She's sure wasted, 'way off in this frozen end of nowhere.*

Lamplight shone in the curtained windows of the schoolhouse with a warm homeness that made the settlement seem less bleak to Johnny. The building was larger than he'd thought at first, and he realized that the Nortons had private rooms separate from a large school room.

They entered through a tiny hallway with a second door to the interior, which helped keep out weather. Phil Norton was waiting for them inside, and Grace introduced her brother.

From the moment that Johnny saw Phil Norton he felt a growing and uneasy wonder about the man. Somewhere Johnny had read that a person will betray his most secret feelings in his physical actions. A child who feels strange in a group will actually move his chair and sit apart from the others, unconsciously doing outwardly what he feels inwardly. Now Phil Norton stood at the far side of the room, back flat against bookshelves, staring, muscles corded tight about his sensitive mouth, his dark eyes wary and defiant. Back against the shelves he stood, literally back to the wall, like a man cornered, like a man who's been running from something but now must stand at bay.

That impression lasted but an instant, for then Phil Norton was smiling, was coming forward with hand outstretched. *As if he sees I'm not somebody he halfway expected,* Johnny reflected.

"My name's Cooper," Johnny said. "I'm a friend of Bill Baker's and I've come here to look over his mine for him."

"I can't tell you how welcome you are," Norton said. "We get visitors but once in a blue moon, and there never is a blue moon. Let me help you with your coat. Grace has supper almost ready."

In his words was a really and hearty welcome; and, Johnny thought, an almost breathless relief, as if Norton was almost light-headed with thankfulness. *Because I'm not somebody else whom he's been expecting?*

Grace had pulled her parka off and hung it up, and turned toward them, smiling. She was even prettier than he had thought at first. The lamplight touched golden sparkles in her light-brown hair; and she wore a brooch on her sweater that matched the vivid blue of her eyes. Johnny realized suddenly that he liked this girl; he'd met her hardly five minutes ago, but already he liked her.

"Do sit down," she urged. "I'll hustle supper."

With an effort Johnny looked away from her and sat down. He reflected that he hadn't really known how starved he was for sight of a pretty girl; and this particular girl was a rather heady dose to spring on a man unexpectedly.

"You arrived in a Navy plane," Phil Norton was saying. "I'd wondered for a moment if this was an official visit?"

"Oh, no. I'm a Navy pilot, and I just dead-headed a ride here," Johnny explained, thinking—*Good Lord, is he afraid of an official visit?*

He was a big man, this Phil Norton, broad of shoulder but lean, his features cleanly modeled, a stippling of gray in his dark hair. A man handsome and forceful, but with a nervous sensitivity about him, an underlying uncertainty that somehow robbed him of the virile power that should belong to him. He wore an expensive tweed suit and a soft shirt with a fine tie, and he carried himself with something of a manner. As if he were used to distinction. He's no ordinary government school teacher, Johnny reflected.

He asked, "How do you like teaching Eskimos?"

"Very well. To my great surprise. Frankly, I didn't expect to. But we've given the youngsters Binet tests, and I was astounded to discover that they rate as superior in ability. I was even more surprised to discover artistic ability among the older people. Grace is teaching the youngsters mostly now; and I'm developing handicraft arts among the oldsters, and making recordings of their chants and their dances."

From a shelf he brought over a number of figurines carved in walrus ivory. And as Johnny studied them, he felt a tingle of

awe. There was real artistry and power in the simple carvings.

"Why, these are swell. But your Eskimos didn't carve these without pointers from you!"

Phil Norton actually blushed with pleasure at this praise.

"Yes, I did guide them away from making claptrap. A dozen of these figures are so very good that they'd be welcomed by the Museum of Modern Art."

That's it, Johnny thought. He doesn't belong here. He belongs in New York City. He belongs in a metropolitan art school. A man like him—cultured and sensitive and sophisticated—he should be lecturing to bright young talents who have flocked to New York from all over America. He should be writing smart essays for the highbrow mags, and arguing art with a capital A and capital tea at the critics' shindigs. What sort of accident skidded him 'way out to this tag end of creation? Why, out here he's like a man exiled to Siberia!

Was *that* it? Had Phil Norton run away from something? . . .

BILL BAKER left before we arrived here," Grace said as they started eating. "His mine hasn't been worked since we've been here. Is there really any gold in it?"

"To find that out," Johnny admitted, "is exactly why I'm here. Bill put all his savings and his mother's insurance money into developing his placer diggings off the beach here. When he's feeling high, he says he's got a beach placer as bonanza rich as the Nome sands in '98. But he'd just got his workings set up and beginning to bring in pay dirt when the war came along and the gold-closing order forced him to shut down operations. He joined the Navy and became a pilot.

"In fact, he was my co-pilot when he got hurt. We were on a patrol, far beyond Attu hunting for a Jap carrier in the fog when Zeros pounced us. We crashed at sea, and Bill got a couple broken vertebrae. We were picked up by a rescue ship, all right; but for months now Bill's been in a hospital, in a plaster cast from his knees to his chest."

"How awful," the girl murmured.

"And he's been worrying. If he's permanently crippled, he sees himself spending the rest of his life in government hospitals. That is, if his mine is no good. But if he *does* own a rich placer diggings, then he and his mother will have plenty of money and can live where they want."

"So when you got leave," Phil Norton said thoughtfully, "you came here to work your friend's mine. Generous of you."

"Not at all," Johnny denied, flushing. "I'll be Bill's partner if the mine is any good. I want to stay in Alaska after the war, and this would give me a chance."

Grace said, "But you can't work the mine now, can you? Not until after the war is over?"

"Yes, I can. You see, the gold-closing law has been amended. You can mine a gold property now if you use no more than seven men who are over forty-six years of age. I figure that if I can put a crew to work here and we get out gold, it'll give Bill's morale such a lift it would zoom his recovery."

Phil Norton was frowning concernedly.

"The trouble is that the mine workings are in such—bad shape. I don't see how you can possibly start operating."

"Why? What's happened?" Johnny demanded.

Phil Norton hesitated—and Grace said, "Neglect, mostly."

"And weather," Norton added. "You'll see, tomorrow."

There was a caretaker's cabin at the mine, and Johnny decided to sleep there. He had brought a down sleeping bag with him, so did not need the bedding Grace offered to lend him.

She offered to show him the way, and this favor he did accept. He pulled on his heavy coat as she slipped her parka down over her slim shoulders; and together they walked down the beach toward the Baker diggings.

"Looks like we're going to have tough weather," he said.

"We usually do," she said ruefully. Then, and her question surprised him, she asked, "Have you a gun with you?"

"Yes. A service automatic?"

"Oh, I'm just worried. Some of these Eskimo dogs are bad, and—this shack is so far from the others." Her low voice seemed strained. She put out her hand. "I'll say good night, now. I'm counting on you to have dinner with us, evenings, while you're

here. And it's no favor—we *need* company from outside!"

Puzzled, he watched after her as she walked away. Even in the parka her lithe figure was supple and graceful. She had seemed so serene, all evening; just this one hint of worry had escaped her.

HE WALKED into the caretaker's hut. It was dirty, but weatherproof, and that's what counted. He opened his luggage.

Footsteps sounded outside, and abruptly the door opened. In spite of himself, he started violently. A man entered, and blinked in the limp light. He was an Eskimo, sturdily-built and of middle age.

"My name Tom Suchik. I work for mine."

"Come on in, sit down," Johnny urged. "Glad to talk to you. I expected to find the caretaker here, but he's gone. Do you know anything about Mr. Machamer?"

"He no come back here."

"Why not? Why'd he leave in such a hurry?"

"He no leave in big hurry."

Something in Suchik's harsh voice made Johnny stare.

"What d'you mean? Explain it, will you!"

"Next spring, when snow melt off hills behind beach," Suchik said, gesturing inland, "somewhere we find Machamer."

"Dead?"

"Yes. Dead."

"Howcome?"

"He was shot. I see it."

"Who shot him?"

"The school teacher. Mr. Norton, he shoot him with rifle. Nobody else see, but I see. I say nothing. Afraid Mr. Norton shoot me like he shoot Machamer!"

"But why?"

Tom Suchik stood up and started for the door, and Johnny saw that the man was really frightened.

"I don't know. You wait. When snow melt, we find Machamer out there—dead!"

BILL BAKER had often spoken of his methods of mining a beach placer here off Limbo Creek, and claimed that there wasn't a another placer operation in the world using the same ingenious methods. At daybreak, Johnny dressed and left the cabin, to take a looksee at the workings.

He felt heavy-headed and tired, for he had been too disturbed to sleep well. Thought of Machamer's body lying frozen under the snow in the barren hills behind the beach had been like a dull aching throb in his mind all night. *Damn it, Phil Norton is just too civilized to shoot a man!* he told himself; but immediately he realized how untenable that position was. Anybody could be goaded into murder, if the provocation was persistent enough and brutal enough. Even a man like Norton. *But what in the world could have been persistent and brutal enough to force him to shoot Machamer?*

Johnny walked eastward down the snow-covered beach toward the hundred-foot-tall spar tree lifting like a ship's mast above a mound that was the hill of ore which had been dredged out of the sea bottom. Behind this ore dump were machine sheds and a wooden flume.

The problem, here, was to mine a placer under the ice-locked waters of the sound. It was a tough nut to crack.

Here, Limbo Creek snaked out of the low hills to empty into Norton Sound—and it was the waters of the creek, draining through the back country, which washed the precious mineral into the bottom of the bay. A gold dredge could have worked the placer—but Bill hadn't had a half-million dollars to buy a dredge; and besides, for most of the long Alaskan winter the sound was ice-locked. So Bill had worked out his own daring technique.

With a Hillman Placer Special drill he'd probed the bottom of the bay until he had worked out the general location of the "pay" channel. He'd worked right out on the ice, cutting holes through it for the drill. Then he had brought in that 100-foot spar tree and set it up on shore. From that spar a cable for the bucket dredge was hung. But that drag-line had to be anchored more than a thousand feet out in the sound, and anchored so solidly that it would bear heavy loads.

It had been necessary to cut a hole through the ice. To do that, Bill Baker had worked out a steam-thawing device. With steam from a boiler ashore, he thawed a section of the ice cap on the bay into large blocks. Then, with a Caterpillar tractor,

he'd hauled the blocks up onto the ice field and shoved them out of the way. Then he'd built a timber frame, loaded it with rocks, and sunk it in the water to anchor the skyline on which an Esco slack-line bucket of two-yard capacity was to make the run out to the water and back to shore.

Next, Bill had had to open up a long channel in the ice through which to lower the dredge bucket to the bottom and then to haul it, filled with the gold-laden sands, back to shore. Cutting three-foot-thick ice into blocks and hauling the blocks away, Bill's crew had opened up a clear lane of water, some 300 yards in length, for the dredging bucket. A boiler, ashore, made steam to run his 280 horsepower hoist. And his workmen, shoving levers in a winch-room near the spar tree, ran that bucket out to the end of the pond, lowered it to the bottom of the open channel, then hauled it out full up the skyline to dump its load on the ore pile at the foot of the spar-tree.

"It was a tough problem, but Bill licked it, and got a big kick out of doing it," Johnny mused.

He walked around behind the dump, to look at the flume.

To recover the gold content of that pay dirt piled on the dump, Bill's method was to wash it through a flume by means of a powerful head of water from a "giant" nozzle. Bill had used riffles to trap the gold particles and quicksilver to amalgamate the precious mineral; and at intervals, the gold concentrates had been cleaned up from the sluices and carted away for retorting.

"Bill had brains—but no luck," Johnny reflected, ruefully. For Bill had just dredged down through top layers of debris to the pay sands, when the war came along and the gold-closing law had made him shut down operations. Just as he was beginning to take "values" out of the ore, and before he'd actually got to know just how rich, or how poor, his mine was. Maybe he had a bonanza here, and maybe he'd found just enough color to entice him into gambling all his money and hopes on a dirty trick of Lady Luck that would peter out into worthlessness.

"I've got to find out," Johnny told himself.

In the sheds stood two Diesel tractors. The dust of neglect was thick on them, but they seemed to be mechanically okay. He found drums of fuel oil for them—full drums. And the boiler and steam hoisting equipment and the dragline all seemed undamaged though rusty from neglect. A half-dozen men could soon put the machinery into productive operation.

The mine itself, however, the gold-bearing sands, were locked away under a thick layer of ice now. That open channel out into the sound had naturally frozen over again when left unworked. Opening that channel would be his first job, Johnny foresaw.

At noon, he walked to the schoolhouse.

"Hello!" Grace Norton greeted him, smiling warmly. "Phil and I are just having lunch. Eat with us."

Phil Norton, it seemed to Johnny, greeted him reservedly, and said little as they started eating.

"I've prepared something special," Grace said. "French toast, out of batter made with powdered milk and frozen eggs." She laughed. Up here, that's a luxury! I can give you caribou steaks, or walrus stew and seal oil, but I think we'll break you in gently to our Eskimo cooking. Before you leave, you'll consider whale fat a delicacy!"

HE grinned. "Yeah, the Navy puts us through a course on how to live off the country if we're forced down in the wilds. How to be fat, even if unhappy, on rock tripe and willow bark."

She laughed again, and Johnny thought to himself that she had an awfully nice laugh; but, then, she was an awfully nice girl.

Johnny said, "Norton, I'll need a crew to start working the placer. Would you help me talk to the Eskimos?"

Norton hesitated, then said, "Sorry, I'm afraid not. I'm a government official, and it would be as if I ordered them to work for you."

"Oh, Phil," Grace said impulsively, "you're being much too conscientious! Some of the Eskimo men, like Tom Suchik and Dwight Kilguk, worked for Bill Baker. John, *I'll* help you hire your crew. That'll leave Phil in the clear."

Phil Norton's sensitive face grew very concerned.

"Cooper, I hate to tell you this, but I'd

better. I'm afraid you're going to have trouble here."

"Why? What d'you mean?" Johnny asked quickly.

"Some of the older people among the Eskimos don't like the idea of a mine working here to attract white miners—who're usually troublemakers."

"I don't blame them for that," Johnny said soberly. "But I'll promise there'll be no drinking and woman-chasing."

"They've had sad experiences. Your promise won't mean anything. In fact," Phil Norton said, his tone very serious, "I've been worrying about this all night. I think I ought to tell you here and now—leave here as soon as you can. Don't make any effort to reopen the mine."

Johnny's jaw dropped in surprise.

"After coming all this way— Good Lord, no! Now that I'm here, I'm going to work the placer."

"Well, I've warned you."

"*Warned* me! Look here, there's something behind all this that you haven't told me. What is it?"

Norton nodded. His handsome face had gone white.

"Yes, that's so. I'm repeating—don't attempt to work Baker's placer. Get away from here as soon as you possibly can."

"But *why,* Phil?" Grace demanded.

"Sorry, Grace, but I can't discuss it. I'm involved in this thing, and it's simply not safe for me to tell you more."

He stood up and walked out of the room.

Johnny sat there, dumbfounded. More he thought of Norton's warning, the madder he got. Damn it, Norton would just have to explain! Abruptly Johnny realized that Grace was crying.

"Good Lord, just what trouble have I brought you people!"

She wiped her eyes impatiently, and shook her head.

"No, Johnny. You didn't bring it on us. We—make our own. Only, I'd thought that *here,* so far from everything—"

"So far from what?"

"Phil took this job to get away from the crowd he was running with, and the drinking, and—and the disappointments and regrets. You know, Johnny, Phil's a rather special kind of person. He has *so* much talent. Music, painting and modeling. But he falls just short of being truly great, and he's tried to drown a terrific sense of failure and inadequacy in whisky. And he's tried to compensate by making money, a lot of money in a hurry. His wife inherited a fortune, and he used her money. You can guess what happened. He lost it, and her sister's, too. Then, driving to Boston, he smacked his car into a bus. It killed his wife, and crippled a couple of youngsters. It was a school bus. He was almost sent to the penitentiary. For a while after that he just *had* to keep himself stupefied. There was just one thing left to do—to take him where he couldn't get a drink, and where there'd be no reminders. I had friends in the Indian Bureau who helped get him this job here."

"And you've stuck to him through it all."

"What else could I do?"

"Wish I could help you."

She put her hand on his arm and smiled tremulously.

"You *are* helping me, just by being here."

"Have you any idea of why Phil is warning me to leave?"

"Not the slightest, Johnny!"

He stood up. "I'd better get busy. I have to round up a crew to start operating the mine. I *am* going to work it."

"I don't blame you. I—I'd planned to help you any way I could, Johnny. But now—"

"Of course not. You've stuck by Phil a long time. You keep sticking by him," Johnny said earnestly.

He left the house, then, and walked down the beach toward the clustered Eskimo hovels. He asked a small boy where Tom Suchik lived and was directed to the house.

Suchik's *barabara* was like all the others —a low structure covered by snow so that it looked like a snow mound. Actually, it was a square shack made of driftwood and covered with a solid two-foot thickness of earth and sod, with a stove pipe sticking out of it, and with a single window of walrus gut for light. Outside stood a cache: a sort of storehouse built on driftwood poles nine feet high. Here food was stored, pokes of seal oil, frozen fish, hides, and everything else that had to be safeguarded from the wolfish dogs. Even the Eskimos' skin boats are tied high up on the side of the cache,

so that the dogs can't chew the walrus hides off the boat framework.

Doorway to the hovel was through a low addition to the *barabara*, with a gate that kept out the dogs. Johnny opened the gate, and stooped low and entered a tunnel-like outer room which was also used as a storeroom. Here were barrels and pans and clothing and dog harness and a frozen walrus head and harpoons and oars and mukluks—and stench. The hovel was built to keep out the cold, and that meant keeping out fresh air, and keeping in stale stinks. . . . Johnny groped through to the main room. Tom Suchik and his wife and small child were here, eating caribou meat which they dipped in seal oil and put to their mouths and there cut off each mouthful with a sharp knife. An oil lamp gave a feeble light. Furniture consisted of a wide bunk shelf built around three sides of the room, and a sheet iron stove. Here the reek of unwashed bodies and fish oil and smoke and stale breath made a combination that wrung Johnny's innards with nausea.

He fought it back, and greeted Suchik, and told him, "You mentioned working for Bill Baker. Will you work for me?"

Suchik nodded. "I work. I help you get other men."

Johnny departed, afraid he'd lose his lunch if he didn't hurry. Outside, the fresh air presently took the queasiness away; and he hurried down the beach toward the placer diggings.

An hour later, Tom Suchik turned up with five other older Eskimos—Dwight Kilguk, Tevuk, Oonalik, Mayokok, and Joe Keok.

JOHNNY set two of the men to cleaning up the tractors. He already had steam in the boiler. With the rest of the men, he took the thawing lines out onto the ice. To open a channel through the ice so that the dredge bucket could dip down to the bottom for the gold sands was the first job, and a mean one. The weather had turned sharply colder; dark clouds pressed down close upon the sound, and a wind that seemed laden with daggers was whooping out of the Bering Sea.

"I'd better get this channel open before a blizzard hits us," Johnny realized. Once it was open, they could work more or less in the proctection of the machine sheds.

With a jet of live steam as a torch, Johnny slowly cut through ice like a three-foot thickness of concrete. Big blocks he cut. Then he got one tractor to working. Slipping chains around a block of ice, he hauled the block up onto the ice field, and then shoved it far to one side.

This task he repeated until, by quitting time, he had a hole ten feet by twenty feet cut. Jubilantly he stopped work for the night. By morning, some inches of ice would have formed on the open water, of course; but that could soon be knocked away. Working at this rate, he'd have the channel clear with a few days' work.

He did not go to the Nortons for supper, but ate a hurried meal in his own shack. Then, too excited to sleep, he worked on the other tractor. By the time he had the Diesel ticking over nicely, it was late at night and he had worn himself sleepy.

He turned in, and almost instantly dozed off.

How long knuckles had been pounding on his door he did not know. But the urgent knocking was like a hand reaching deep into sleep to haul him willynilly to the surface. Half-awake, he heard for long moments before he realized, suddenly, that someone *was* knocking, and knocking on his door, to wake him.

"Coming!" he yelled, and sat up abruptly.

He switched on his flashlight, jerked a coat around his shoulders, and strode to the door and yanked it open.

But nobody stood there.

He peered outside, wondering. The wind was bitterly cold, and the night was dark—and empty. He saw no one at all.

"Hey!" he yelled. And murmured, "But I *did* hear knocking. Sure I did!"

Something whipped past his side, with a glint of metal in the beam from his flashlight—whipped past him and thudded into the back wall of the hut with a hard, slashing thump.

For a thunderstruck instant he stared at it, at the long quivering shaft of an Eskimo harpoon driven five inches into the wall. Then he switched off the light and slammed the door shut and lunged toward his bunk to snatch up his .45 automatic.

Gun in hand, he waited, tense. Nothing happened.

Is it one man out there—or more? he wondered. *Will they rush the door and ram in here?*

He wasn't going to wait for *that* to happen, like a cornered rat! He darted to the door, whipped it open and charged outside, pistol leveled in his hand.

But he saw no one, saw nothing hostile except darkness and a sharp scud of snow flying almost level before the fierce wind.

Johnny bent, then. Switched on his flashlight and looked for tracks in the snow of the man who had knocked on his door.

Cra-a-ack!

A rifle spurted fire in the distance, the report snatched away in a wild gust of wind. The slug hissed past Johnny's throat. Instantly he switched off his flashlight, and triggered a pistol bullet at the flash of the rifle, and dropped flat on the snow.

No answering bullet came. Nothing more happened.

Crouched over, he started running. The shot had come from the bank of frozen Limbo Creek. Twice he fired, to scare the other man into flight or into firing back.

But nothing happened. He saw nobody, heard nobody.

"Whoever he is, he's better at this stalking game than I am," Johnny realized. "Wandering around here, I'll just get myself knocked off. I'll wait for daylight."

He returned to the shack. As he barricaded the door, he could think of only one thing—*Phil Norton had warned him.* And it was no idle warning. Somebody meant business.

But why? What was it all about?

"Just one obvious way to figure it. Bill Baker's mine is rich. Somebody knows it's rich. And said somebody doesn't want me to discover the fact and is trying to run me off. Well, I ain't running. I'm going to work this mine!"

NOISE wakened Johnny after daybreak—shouts and barking of dogs. He had put his sleeping bag on the floor and finally dozed off. He rose, donned heavy clothing and went outside.

The Eskimo village seemed to be in commotion.

All the men, and most of the older boys, were busy harnessing dogs to sleds and loading up as if for a trip. The men all had rifles. Chattering and laughing, they seemed wildly excited.

Johnny saw neither Grace nor Phil Norton. But he did see Tom Suchik, and he stopped the Eskimo.

"What's happening?"

"We have reindeer. Big bunch come near coast, and we go have roundup and kill meat."

"But you're working for me, Suchik! You and those five other men. Where are they? You tell 'em to stay here!"

Suchik shook his head. "One or two stay, maybe, but not all. Mr. Norton say go get reindeer meat. They got go."

"What right has he got to order you all off like that!"

"Teacher is boss of reindeer company. Part of job."

This was Phil Norton's move, then. He was deliberately sending the Eskimo men off. *So I won't have a mine crew!*

"But I stay," Suchik was saying. "I work for you."

Johnny didn't answer. Angrily he had turned away, and now he stalked toward the schoolhouse.

He knocked once, and pushed open the door. Phil Norton sat at the table and Grace was bringing coffee to him. At sight of Johnny's angry face her eyes widened and she stared at him in concern and alarm.

"Norton, you sent the Eskimo men after reindeer deliberately to prevent me from getting a crew of workmen!" Johnny charged.

Phil Norton said, "I did."

"Oh, Phil!" Grace exclaimed.

"And did you," Johnny demanded furiously, leaning over the table, "send a man to my shack last night to throw a harpoon through me?"

Phil Norton's sensitive face went white.

"No," he said. "No!"

"You did!"

"No." Phil said it so vehemently that it had a ring of truth.

But out of his anger Johnny demanded, "Why do you want me murdered?"

"I do *not* want you murdered."

"You've admitted you're involved in what's going on."

"I don't want you hurt at all. That's why I've warned you to leave here."

"So you're giving me a break. Did you

give the mine caretaker a break, too?" Johnny demanded. "Or did you figure that Machamer didn't rate a warning?"

Phil Norton's lips went bloodless; he started to speak, but could not. He hadn't stirred, but somehow it was as if inwardly he reeled in shock.

Grace asked, "Johnny, what do you mean? What about Machamer?"

"He didn't get 'bushed' and wander away. He's dead."

"How do you know? You've seen him?"

"No. I—I was told. Machamer is lying back in the hills with a bullet in his body."

"You m-mean somebody shot him? But *who?*"

"I suspect it might've been the same person who tried to kill me last night."

Phil Norton stiffened in his chair.

"Nobody tried to kill you last night. These Eskimo hunters are very skillful with their harpoons. If some hunter tried to kill you, that harpoon would not have missed. It was thrown at you as a warning."

"But why, Phil?" Grace asked. "Please! You've got to tell us what the trouble is."

He looked at her, and his dark eyes were anguished.

"If I tell you, I'll put you as well as myself in danger."

"Then we'll have to face it! We've got no right to sit back and say nothing when it leaves John walking blindly into danger."

Phil shook his head. "I can't do it."

"But you can't go on like this, Phil! If you've got guilty knowledge of some crime being committed and say nothing— Why, that makes you guilty, too!"

Phil spread his fine artist's hands in a little gesture of helplessness. Low-voiced he admitted, "That's true. But I just don't know what to do, I just don't see the way ahead."

Looking at him, Johnny realized that whether the law ever caught up with Phil Norton or not, Phil had stood trial in his own conscience and stood convicted. His tragic hopelessness cooled Johnny's wrath.

He turned toward the door, saying, "Well, we're getting nowhere here. All I want to say is—I'm not leaving. I'm staying and I'm going to work the mine!"

Wearily Phil said, "All right. But I've got to tell you. Next time, that harpoon won't miss."

JOHNNY looked around his shack for tracks of the man who had knocked on his door during the night. Sleet driven inland on a hard wind had almost obliterated the imprint of mukluks before his door. He followed the sign toward Limbo Creek—and there the tracks were hopelessly lost under the mass of footprints of the Eskimo men trekking inland on their reindeer hunt. Moodily Johnny gave up and returned to the beach.

Tom Suchik was waiting for him.

Suddenly Johnny had an idea. He called Suchik to the shack.

Johnny pulled free the harpoon sticking in the back wall.

"Suchik, whose harpoon is this?"

The Eskimo turned it in his hands a moment.

"Joe Keok make it."

"So it belongs to Joe Keok!"

"No. Last summer he give it to Mr. Norton."

Phil Norton's! *Somehow, I can't believe Phil threw it at me. Maybe somebody stole it from Phil? Damn it, I just can't figure this thing!*

"Come on, let's get to work!" Johnny said.

Suchik handled the thawing lines, and Johnny drove the tractor. It was hard work for two men alone. But block after block they cut out of the ice; block after block they hauled out of the way. The open cut steadily lengthened.

"By the end of the week," Johnny said jubilantly to Suchik, "we'll have the channel clear and can start operating the dragline!"

If nothing interfered—

Johnny decided on a precaution. He asked Tom Suchik to sleep in the boiler shed and keep guard. Suchik stolidly agreed.

When Johnny quit for the day and returned to his shack, he found a hot meal of soup and reindeer stew on the table and a note from Grace: *I was afraid you'd be too tired to cook some warm food. You really need it, here.*

"That kid's an angel!" Johnny told himself.

His mood sobered as he filled his pipe after eating.

Tom Suchik had said he'd seen Phil Norton shoot the mine caretaker, Machamer.

Tom Suchik should tell his story to the nearest Deputy United States Marshal. At Nome? *Which means I've got to send word to the authorities.* Phil Norton would be taken into custody and questioned. Then, probably, this whole mess would be aired.

He started abruptly as knuckles rapped on his door.

Swiftly he blew out his lamp and snatched up his pistol.

"Johnny! It's me—Grace."

"Oh! Just a second." He couldn't quite take a shaky tremor from his voice. He relit the lamp and opened the door.

It was snowing now. Grace wore a hooded fur parka.

"Johnny, I've been worrying about you, here alone. Come up to the house and sleep."

"But—I mean, how will Phil—"

"I insisted on it. It's all right."

"You're my guardian angel!"

Grace blushed, warm color rising to her forehead.

Impulsively Johnny moved toward her, and she did not avoid him but let his arms tighten around her, and her lips were sweet to his kiss, warm and responsive.

Johnny let her go, feeling suddenly breathless.

"You're a sweet kid. I just couldn't help doing that. Guess I kind of like you."

"I like you, Johnny," she said quietly.

At the school house apartment, Phil Norton was writing in a record book. He nodded to Johnny, and closed his book.

Grace made some tea. Phil excused himself and went to his bedroom. Grace had fixed up a cot in the schoolroom for Johnny; and after a bit, she said good night and left him.

Johnny moved the cot away from the windows and over beside the wall, and moved the desk close to the door. Anybody trying to sneak in would have to force that desk back and make a noise.

The wind had risen and kicked over the schoolhouse roof with a wild shrieking and thudding.

But it was warm and cozy indoors, and Johnny dropped off to sleep.

THE first shots did not awaken him, they were so muffled by the wind off the sea. But when again a rifle exploded repeatedly, the muffled staccato reports hammered into his sleep. He sat up abruptly.

Again! A sharp *cra-ack,* then another.

"Gun shots!"

He jumped from the cot, hastily pulled on his clothes and boots and grabbed up his .45.

Darting across the room, he opened the door to Phil Norton's bedroom, and switched on his flashlight. Phil Norton lay asleep, snoring lightly. The light woke him, and he sat up, blinking.

"What is it? What's wrong?" he asked sharply.

"Don't know. I'm going to see."

Johnny ran out of the house, ran down the beach toward the placer diggings. He heard no more gun reports; and in the snowy darkness he saw nothing moving about the mine sheds.

The door of the tractor shed stood open and Johnny flashed his light within—and an oath of consternation burst from him. Somebody had taken an axe and smashed the fuel lines of the two tractors and gashed huge holes in the radiators and broken off the foot pedals and gear lever. They were useless.

Johnny ran to the boiler shed, then, and called tensely, "Suchik! Tom Suchik!"

His light showed no one inside the shed. But the light did show the damage to the boiler. It looked as if somebody had fired steel-jacketed slugs from a high-powered rifle through the boiler. A dozen holes gaped in its round side. Holes that probably tore through pipe after pipe inside it. The boiler was ruined—and without it, there would be no steam for the thawing lines, and no power for the dredge bucket. Without it, the mine workers were ruined; just so much junk.

"Damn it, where was Suchik! I put him here to stop anything like this!"

Recklessly Johnny searched with his flashlight around the sheds, too angry and shaken to use good sense. *I'm all washed up now!* Over and over in his dazed mind the words echoed. *I can't do a damn thing without new mine machinery. I'm all washed up here!*

Something lay huddled beside the flume. Soon as he noticed it, Johnny realized what it was. Heart in his throat, he turned his light on the figure, and bent down close.

Tom Suchik lay still and crumpled on his side. Blood already was a frozen blot on his parka. He had been shot through the heart, and he was dead. He had put up a fight; empty cartridge cases ejected from his gun lay on the snow. But he had lost that fight —Johnny had seen men die in the Aleutian fighting, plenty of them; but somehow, Suchik's death came closer home. Tom Suchik had been fighting for *him,* Johnny; fighting loyally and bravely. Johnny's eyes misted.

FAINT gray daylight was breaking, and Johnny searched the creek bank and the vicinity of the spar tree and ore dump and machine sheds for tracks. But the snow already was obliterating imprints with a feathery white mantel. He did find some empty cartridge cases that had been ejected from a rifle, and he put them into his pocket. These he would give to the Deputy Marshal at Nome, later, to try to trace to their owner.

Heavy of heart, Johnny wrapped Suchik's body, clothes and all, in a blanket, picked him up and trudged up the beach toward the Eskimo hovels.

Phil Norton, in boots and parka, came to meet him.

"What happened?"

"You *tell* me," Johnny raged at him. "You knew about this in advance!"

Phil's face tightened; he said nothing, just looked at Suchik, and followed as Johnny took the dead man to his own *barabara.* Tom Suchik's wife came out; and when she saw the dead man, she uttered a wail of grief. Her neighbors came running. Johnny turned away.

"Come on," he ordered Phil Norton, and turned toward the school house. Norton followed in silence.

Grace looked up from the breakfast table as they entered. Her lovely eyes were shadowed, as if she had not rested well.

"What's happened?" she asked.

Briefly, his low voice aching with grief and bewilderment, Johnny explained. And Johnny's voice harshened as he turned on Phil Norton and accused him: "You've said you were involved in all this! Then you know who shot Suchik! You even knew it was going to happen!"

"No!" Phil Norton looked shaken and sick, but his voice rang with vehemence. "I did *not* know Suchik would be shot and I had no part in it!" He looked at Grace. "You've *got* to believe me, Sis."

"Why should we?" Johnny demanded bitterly. "You're not above murder. You shot Machamer, the mine caretaker. Tom Suchik saw you do it. Maybe that's why Suchik was killed!"

"I never left the house last night."

"Then he was shot by somebody working for you! Do you know who did it?"

"I—I'm not sure."

Grace had moved to Phil's side. Her face was white with shock. She put her hand on Phil's arm and turned him toward her.

"Phil—*Phil!* You shot Machamer? Did you say that y-you shot Machamer?"

Dazedly he rubbed his hand over his face, his chest lifting to a shaky breath. Then he looked at her, and nodded.

"B-but—I can't believe it, Phil, I can't believe it!"

Johnny said, "All right, tell us about it."

Phil did not look at him but at Grace's stricken face as he answered, "I can't. Not yet. You've got to believe me, Sis."

"You'll tell the deputy marshal, then," Johnny said. His wild anger was cooling, changing to concern for Grace. She was taking is so very hard. "You realize that, don't you?"

Phil nodded, and in his voice was hopeless resignation as he said, "I know that." He was still looking at Grace, still talking to her. "But until then, I've got to keep quiet, I've got to—keep trying. That's my only hope of—saving something out of all this, and of not bringing you into —into the mess."

"Of saving *what,* Phil? What is this mess?"

"I can't tell you, yet. I'm puzzled. I don't understand it all myself."

"You've got to tell me, Phil! I've stood by you—I've got a right to know."

Obstinately Phil shook his head.

Johnny said, "A Navy patrol plane will land here when the weather clears. I'll send word for the United States deputy marshal at Nome to come for you."

Johnny turned and walked out into the weather. It was snowing hard, now, and a whooping wind drove the snow in level

whirling clouds. Johnny leaned against the blast, and swore at it, swore at the winter darkness and the ice-covered sea and the bleak frost-bound hills and the savage hard luck and tragedy which had ruined all he had attempted since coming to Baker's mine. Damn it all, he should never have come here!

JOHNNY examined the two Diesel tractors, with a wild idea of doing some makeshift repairs. But he soon realized that was impossible—and without them, it was impossible to open a channel in the ice covering the sound. He examined the boiler. It was even more hopeless.

"I've just got to face it. I *can't* work this placer. I can't work it and all the swearing and grieving in the world won't help me one tiny damn bit!"

All he could do was sit and twiddle his thumbs until the patrol landed to pick him up. All he could do was go back to Bill Baker and sing a sorry song of utter failure.

"Damn it, I can't go back to Bill with a long face! That would sure as hell take all the heart out of him."

Brooding and miserable, he walked along the beach, leaning against the wind. The snow had ceased; but swollen angry clouds had closed down upon the frozen sea in ominous promise of storm to come.

Late in afternoon Grace came to his shack with a covered basket of hot food.

"Don't tell me I'm working too hard, John," she said. "It keeps me occupied, keeps me from brooding too much."

She ate with him; and asked him what he planned to do.

"If I had money, I'd bring a new boiler in here, and new tractors—if I could get 'em!"

"You'll be able to get 'em after the war."

"Sure, but what'll I use for money? Chunks of ice?"

"But under the ice, John! There's still gold out there. Can't you get enough of it to pay for your machinery?"

Johnny's lean, haggard face tightened in sudden thought. If he could, if he just *could* bring up enough placer sands to wash out a couple thousand dollars worth of gold dust and nuggets—

The gold was out there! So damn close! Just three feet of ice and some twenty-odd feet of water between him and the placer sands. That's all. Lord a'mighty, he ought to have enough ingenuity, enough wit and resourcefulness, to lick an obstacle like that! *Damn it, beat your brains around! Think, think!*

"But three feet of ice. Like so much concrete! And a forty-below zero wind to make more ice as fast as you cut it—"

"Bill Baker made his tests living in a tent out on the ice, in forty-below weather."

"Tests aren't enough. I got to bring up *tons* of—"

Johnny stopped in mid-sentence, jolted by the impact of an idea. So simple, so obvious—but wild, risky, *crazy!*

"Good Lord!" he breathed. "Maybe that's the answer."

"What, Johnny?"

"Maybe I can make that forty-below wind work for me."

"What do you mean, Johnny?"

"If I ain't a complete half-wit—tell you later, Grace. Scared to, now. You'll think I'm the damnedest fool alive!"

Grace smiled. Suddenly she leaned toward him and kissed him full on the lips, then whispered, "I'll never think that, Johnny."

JOHNNY walked out on the ice of Norton Sound with a 5-gallon can of kerosene and an armload of driftwood. He leaned against a knife-edged wind that chilled him inside his fleece-lined flying rig. Picking a spot some 600 feet from shore, just about center of Bill Baker's dragline channel, he got busy. Here the placer sands should be average rich.

He built a roaring fire. Oddly, so intense was the cold, the flames seemed a mere picture of a blaze; a hand held close enough to feel scorched on the palm was freezing on the back. When the fire burned down, a shallow depression was melted out of the ice underneath the hot coals. Johnny scattered the ashes and attacked the depression with an axe. The blade rang against the ice, knocking flakes and shards flying.

All day Johnny worked, until he had a wide square hole almost through the ice. Almost, but not quite.

"Why don't you finish it?" Grace asked when she came out to him with a thermos of hot coffee.

"That would ruin it."

"Ruin what? What are you doing?"

"Digging a shaft down to the gold sands."

She stared at him.

"Johnny, you aren't slightly addled, are you?"

"Maybe I am, at that! I'll tell you for sure in a few days."

She quit smiling. "I'm worried about Phil."

"What now?"

"He went off into the hills this morning, and he came back looking just *awful*. Didn't say a word, and got busy carving on his walrus ivory figurines. All of a sudden he got terribly excited about one figure of an Eskimo hunter throwing a harpoon. He said it was the best piece he'd ever carved, and that he'd be remembered by it. And he said if anything happened to him, I was to give the carving to you."

Johnny thought about that a little while. An Eskimo hunter throwing a harpoon—*at a man standing in a lighted doorway,* for instance? Did Phil know, Johnny wondered, who had thrown that harpoon at him the other night?

Aloud, Johnny said, "Phil's going through hell, isn't he?"

Grace nodded, her eyes filling with tears.

Next morning, Johnny was out on the ice again, chopping at that hole he'd started. He had left a thin floor of ice to the hole. Overnight, that thin floor had thickened considerably, for the intense cold had frozen the water underneath, making additional new ice.

Johnny chopped lower, until again he had left but a thin floor of ice, just a couple inches to keep the sea water from rising up into the hole. And the hole, now, was beginning to look like a shaft.

Out of a tarpaulin he found in the boiler room, he rigged a chute, like a ship's ventilator, to lead a flow of freezing wind down into the hole in the ice.

Next morning, the ice of the lower sides and floor of his "shaft" had again thickened by additional freezing of the water next to them. Again he chopped, lowering his shaft toward the gold-bearing sands on the sea bottom.

"You see, now?" he said to Grace. "I'll keep chopping a little ways, then letting the shaft freeze down lower, until I'm all the way down to the pay dirt! Then I'll rig a makeshift windlass and haul up buckets of the gold sands—"

"And wash out enough to see just how rich the mine is?"

"And get enough gold to buy new machinery and make repairs!"

"And I thought maybe you were a mite touched!" Her laugh was tremulous. "You're really a very smart man, Johnny! Only—"

"Only what?"

Her sweet face grew very sober.

"It's dangerous."

"Why?"

"Johnny, if there's a high tide, or the wind rises, sometimes the whole ice field here will shift. Maybe only two or three feet. But do you see what that would do to your shaft?"

Dismay was a sudden choking about his heart. He saw, all right! A shift of the ice like that would crack his "shaft." Would do two things—let sea water flood it as swiftly as an evil thought, and push a roof of three-foot ice over the hole as solid as a concrete roof on a bomb shelter. And anybody in the bottom of the shaft at the time—*Talk about a rat in a trap!*

"I see," he answered. "But I got to try, Grace. Got to!"

"Then be careful. Be ever so careful."

Each morning as he climbed down to deepen the shaft, he studied the walls. He did find cracks, but the water that had seeped through had formed a thick seal of new ice over the apertures. As yet there had been no shift of the ice field great enough to damage the shaft. But one morning he woke to hear a heavier thudding of wind against his cabin. And looking out, he saw driving snow. The blizzard had whooped in off Bering Sea.

Anxiously he went to work in the shaft. But after an hour's toil, his anxiety faded in triumph. He was down to the bottom at last. Down to the placer sands.

"Here's where we start earning dividends."

His hopefulness zoomed when he climbed out of the shaft—for he heard shouts; and looking toward the Eskimo village, he saw running figures. The hunters were back from their reindeer chase. The dog sleds

were laden with frozen meat. He could hire men, now, to help him bring placer sand out of his shaft.

"If Phil don't put in his oar again, I can!"

TWO of the older Eskimo men agreed to work for him—Joe Keok, and Lewis Tungwenuk. With their aid, he moved part of Bill Baker's original flume over toward the bank of Limbo creek, and built a more compact sluice and riffle box close to the holes in the ice on the stream out of which they'd get water; and over the riffle box they built a lean-to shed.

Then Johnny started bringing pay dirt out of the shaft.

It was hard work, tough work. The digging at the bottom of the hole he did himself; if the ice moved and water poured in, he didn't want anybody else suffering on his account. He would fill a bucket, Joe Keok would haul it to the surface and put it on a sled, and Tungwenuk would drag it ashore to the sluice.

Johnny wanted three or four tons of the placer sands to wash through the sluice, to get a check on the values per ton. In spite of the whirling snow and wind, he worked until late the second day before he decided he had enough pay dirt for his purpose. Next morning, with Keok and Kungwenuk hauling water from the creek, he started "washing" the sands through his sluice.

Slowly and carefully he worked. Grace came to watch. Johnny rather expected Phil, too; but Phil did not come.

There *was* gold in the sand.

"See it, Grace? Those shining little particles? Ain't they lovely? Ever see such a gorgeous dazzle?"

She laughed lightly at his excitement.

"I do hope it's gold, darling."

"Skeptical, huh? Watch!"

The heavier particles of mineral in the shallow flow of water in the sluice settled low and were caught behind riffles. From back of one of these slats Johnny carefully picked a few pinches of material and separated the grains on the palm of his hand for Grace to see. The particles of gold gleamed with a tiny fat yellow glow. Every speck of gold dust is really a nugget, however small. Johnny separated some of the specks. He put them on a metal surface and hammered them, and the specks proved soft and malleable. He applied acid, and it did not froth up in reaction. This was gold, all right, all right!

"The real McCoy," he breathed. "The stuff that buys bonds, blondes and battleships."

He worked slowly, in his anxiety to be accurate. It took him hours to wash about a ton of placer sand. Then he stopped to "clean" the riffles and estimate amount of gold he'd got.

Grace stood taut beside him; Joe Keok and Tungwenuk watched. Johnny scooped up the catch of sand and gold dust behind the slats, then on a table separated the specks of gold from the dross.

And as Johnny worked, his heart sank in dismay that was like the stifling onslaught of a fainting spell. Grace, sensitive to his change of feeling, grew alarmed.

"But it *is* gold, Johnny? You said it was?"

"Sure. There's gold here; even some silver. But—"

"But what? What's wrong, Johnny?"

Plenty! Gold here, all right. But in more than a ton of the placer sand, he's got less than a couple dollars worth. Not enough to pay for production. Oh, if you had a half-million dollar dredge working, it would pay to wash this placer. But not under present conditions. Bill Baker didn't have a mine—he had a delusion. This diggings was just another of the back-breaking placers of the sort that had paid a dollar or two a day to unemployed miners during the depression. Mining for beans, they had called it. Beans, but no pork.

"The mine is no good, Johnny?"

"No. Not worth a damn."

He was so stricken that impulsively she put her arms around him and said, "Oh, Johnny, you just can't judge by this one sample!"

"I'll try again." It was hard to keep his voice steady, to keep from stalking out of there, to keep from breaking things. "But I know that I'm just wasting my time."

HE quit for the night before he finished running the rest of his placer sands through the sluice. Joe Keok and Tungwenuk he told to come back in the morning. Johnny went to his shack.

He had no appetite for supper, he could not ease the throbbing ache of chagrin within him enough to sit and read. He paced the floor, tight-lipped and bitter, thinking of what he must tell Bill Baker—*Sorry, Bill. The mine's just no good.* Thinking of how the eager hope would die out of Bill's face.

"Maybe I didn't dig deep enough for the pay dirt. Maybe the second sample of dirt would show better values."

Restlessly he pulled on his heavy clothes and strode out of the shack, to return to the sluice box in the shed by the creek.

The snow had quit falling and the night was dark except for the white surface of the drift-covered ground. He walked toward the creek, muscles tautening against the bite of the cold.

Abruptly he stopped in his tracks, out of sheer surprise. Was *that* a light he had glimpsed in the sluice shed? And then, behind him, plainly he heard a footstep in the snow, and another. He whirled, pulse thudding violently, and peered back the way he had come. He saw nothing; and he heard nothing more. *Say, I'm jittery! I'm sure taking this thing to heart.*

If that had been a light in the sluice shed, it was gone now. He walked on. His Navy automatic was in his coat pocket, and he took the glove off his hand and put it into the pocket.

"So help me, that *is* a light!" he realized then.

Cautiously, noiselessly, he approached the sluice shed.

A man was bent over the riffle box, examining the riffles with a lighted match.

Johnny stopped, almost holding his breath. Tensely he waited for the match to flare brighter, for the man to turn toward him. Then the match died, and the man fumbled into his pocket for another. Johnny moved closer.

And as the man struck another match, Johnny commanded sharply, "I've got you covered—turn around and hold that match up."

For a split-second the intruder stood as if frozen. And then he moved—dashed out his match and flung himself into a wild run out the far side of the shed. Johnny started to follow; but even as he took his first stride, behind him a shadow lunged forward—something struck the back of Johnny's head and Johnny sprawled senseless into the deep new snow.

SOMEBODY was flashing a light onto his face, and trying to lift him up. He came to, the back of his head throbbing with pain. He sat up, choking back a groan, and opened his eyes.

It was Phil Norton stooping over him.

"What happened to you?" Phil asked.

"Damn you, you knocked me on the head!"

"No. I just got here."

"Oh, yeah?"

"I came to look in your riffle box to see how rich your pay dirt is."

"Go ahead and look! If it's any satisfaction to you, Bill Baker's mine is too poor to pay production costs."

"Why should anybody have knocked you on the head?"

"I caught them examining the riffle box."

"Oh." Phil's handsome face knitted with deep concern. He straightened and walked over to the riffle box; and holding his light beam close, he stirred the sediment behind the riffles with a finger.

"Well, you satisfied?" Johnny demanded as he stood up. "This mine won't buy beans."

"This mine," Phil retorted, "will buy yachts."

"You're crazy!"

"Listen, John." Phil Norton's voice was profoundly earnest. "This mine *is* worthless—unless you know one very important fact. I'll tell you that fact. All I ask is that, in return, you'll look out for Grace. You see, I don't intend to let a deputy marshal come and take me to Nome for trial." He kept his low voice steady, determined. "Just no point in—prolonging the inevitable."

"Good Lord, man, give yourself every chance!"

"There's no chance at all for me. All I ask is that you see that Grace gets home safely."

"You don't have to ask me. I'm going to ask Grace to marry me."

"I'd rather hoped that was so, and—I'm glad. About this mine, now—"

"Tell it, will you! What d'you mean, calling it a bonanza?"

"It is. Come here. Come look behind the riffles—"

Then came an interruption. A harsh order was yelled at them.

"Stand where you are, both of you! Don't move your hands!"

Johnny whirled to look, thunderstruck. Two men stood at the end of the lean-to shed, and each held a rifle leveled. One of them was Joe Keok, the Eskimo. The other was a stranger Johnny had never seen before. He was a middle-aged white man, his short body very bulky in a heavy fur parka. In the light from Phil's flashlight his face was deep-lined gaunted.

Phil seemed to recognize the white man. Phil Norton caught a breath of utter, dumbfounded shock and amazement. "You! But you're dead—I m-mean, I saw you die—"

The white man uttered a brief laugh. "Huh-uh, not any."

"But I shot you. I saw you fall." Phil gasped the words out.

"Just wounded me. Look, Norton."

Johnny blurted, "Good Lord, are you *Machamer?"*

"Shut up," the white man rasped at him. "Look, Norton. I butted in because you were just about to talk too damn much. You act sensible, now, and we can go ahead with our original deal."

Phil Norton was laughing, with a wild joy that shook with hysteria. "And all this time I've called myself a murderer—"

"Okay, I'll give you a break," Machamer snapped. "We'll go through with the deal like we first planned it. But we got to get rid of this damn butt-in." He jerked a thumb at Johnny.

Phil took a step toward Machamer; Phil's handsome face was alight. "You actually think that I'd make the same mistake twice?" he said.

"Don't be a damn fool," Machamer retorted. "I'm holding a rifle on you, and you haven't got a gun. You're going to take orders. First thing you're going to do is walk over to your pal there and look through his pockets, and if he's got a gun, you toss it to me."

Phil said flatly, "No."

Machamer swore under his breath; then said, "Norton, having the official job you got here, you could cover up what we're doing. That's the only reason I'm willing to let you share in this deal. It'ud be a damn sight easier to put a slug in your carcass and hide you back in the hills. And *that* is exactly what I'm going to do if you don't play ball. Now you walk over and frisk this guy!" He lifted his rifle, cocked it.

Johnny's hand tightened on the butt of the .45 in his pocket, and Johnny yelled, "Put out your flashlight, Phil! Drop flat to the floor—*quick!"*

Phil Norton did not put out flashlight, did not drop to the floor so that Johnny could start shooting. Phil started toward Johnny.

JOHNNY had a wild impulse to pull out his .45 and start shooting; but those two rifles were leveled, ready, and at his first move, would spurt fire. He stood taut, inwardly raging, and hopeless.

Phil patted his pockets, felt the gun, reached in and drew it out.

"Good!" Machamer blurted. "Throw it to me."

And then, Phil Norton suddenly shoved Johnny—shoved him so hard that he sprawled headlong over the sluice; and Phil, in the same movement, whirled and flung himself flat to the ground—with the flashlight in his outstretched hand glaring full into the eyes of Keok and Machamer at the end of the shed.

Machamer had yelled a furious, "Hey!" and then his rifle lashed fire, and Keok fired his gun, and the flashes were lurid lightning in the shed; and Johnny heard Phil grunt; and then concussion of the .45 automatic in Phil's hand banged against the shed walls, and powdersmoke lifted blue in the flashlight beam.

Joe Keok staggered, and half-turned and fell sprawling onto his face and never moved again. Machamer stood where he was, yelling curses as he worked the bolt of his gun; and his rifle flashed a second time, a third and a fourth. And then he lurched, and slumped against the wall of the shed, his rifle starting to slip from his hands. But he caught it. With an effort, he straightened up.

Phil Norton lay still upon the floor and the pistol had slipped from his fingers. Machamer started toward him, working the bolt to put a fresh cartridge into the chamber of his rifle.

Johnny felt around him in the darkness, and his hand closed on a rock. "Machamer!"

he yelled. And Machamer whipped up the rifle and pulled trigger. The bullet creased along Johnny's ribs like the slash of a jagged sword. And then Machamer stood beside Phil Norton, and Machamer worked the bolt of his gun and put the muzzle against Phil's head. There was no report; only the snick of hammer against a spent shell.

Machamer reached into his pocket for a clip of cartridges. Johnny jumped him then. He knocked Machamer sprawling, and bent and tore the rifle from the stocky man's grasp. Machamer drew a knife from his belt. Johnny smashed the butt of the rifle into the man's face, and Machamer slumped senseless to the ground.

"Phil! You hurt?" Johnny demanded.

Phil did not answer. Those rifle bullets had hit him in the side and chest and leg. But Phil was stirring! Phil was whispering—"Johnny."

JOHNNY carried Phil to his own shack and laid him on the bunk and put hasty crude bandages on his hurts.

Grace came, then. She had heard shots, she said. She did not cry out when Johnny told her what had happened; whitefaced, but steady, she went to Phil's side. Johnny hurried back to the sluice shed, then. Machamer might get away. But the stocky man still lay on the ground beside the sluice; and, bending over him, Johnny saw that he was dead. Phil's bullets had hit him twice.

Phil was talking when Johnny returned to the shack.

Phil was weak, and in much pain, but his low voice was clear. "I was telling Grace, Johnny—when Bill Baker left to join the Navy, he arranged for his caretaker, Machamer, and a couple of Eskimo men, to continue doing exploratory work on the mine.

"Well, Machamer was an oldtimer. He'd worked in the platinum rush down on Goodnews Bay in '37. So when he found specks of what looked like silver in the pay dirt, he realized what this mine was. It wasn't a gold placer at all. Sure, there was some gold here. But you know how little it amounts to. Just a side line to the real thing.

"Machamer, who wanted to hide his footsteps, asked me to send some of the silvery stuff out to Seattle for an assay. I did. We got word that the silvery stuff was osmiridium —combinations of osmium and iridium. And the stuff is very much in demand in the defense industries, now. It's needed to make the hard alloys for war machines and instruments. And osmiridium is scarce. Yet here we had a huge supply of it. And Bill Baker didn't know what he had at all.

"Machamer said that the two of us—he and I—could take this mine over for ourselves and split a bonanza fifty-fifty. Said we'd be fools to let it slip out of our hands.

"I fell for it. I won't try to justify myself. I simply saw a chance to maybe get a tremendous fortune in a hurry. Maybe you'll see how—how tempted I was when you understand how very valuable this osmiridium is. It's more valuable than gold. What's gold worth—thirty-five dollars an ounce? Well, osmiridium is worth three times as much. Yes! It was selling for $110 an ounce, and maybe it's bringing more, now."

Phil stopped talking a moment, to rest and catch his breath. And Johnny's own throat was choked with excitement. $110 an ounce. Holy, jumpin'—

PHIL resumed. "Well, we worked out a scheme. We'd let Bill Baker know how poor his place was—in gold. Meanwhile, until the sound froze over, Machamer kept taking out placer sand and washing it for the gold and osmiridium. We built up a good stake of osmiridium, and Machamer sent it out to a friend who sold it to a fence. We got $10,000, and shared it between us. Later, when Bill Baker was discouraged enough to sell his holdings cheap, we planned to buy the mine from him.

"Well, I—I couldn't do it.

"I mean, while waiting, I couldn't help thinking. At times I've been a fool, but I'm—I'm not really a crook.

"Finally I told Machamer I wasn't going through with it. I had spent part of the cash I'd got; but just the same, I told Machamer I was going to write Bill Baker the whole truth. Machamer fired up. Said he'd shoot me if I did it. He had Joe Kcok and Apalook working for him. One night a harpoon just missed nailing me to the side of the house. Another time a bullet flew past my ear. Machamer was warning me to keep still. But I realized that the only way Machamer could be sure I wouldn't give away the secret would be for him to kill me.

Sooner or later, he was going to work himself up to the point of putting a bullet into me. I brooded about it. Then I realized, too, that he might worry about my telling Grace what I knew. He might decide he had to shut her mouth, too.

"I couldn't stand the uncertainty. I started carrying a rifle when I left the village. And one day, walking up Limbo Creek ravine, I saw Machamer. He started coming toward me. He had a rifle, but he wanted to talk. I got down on one knee, and aimed. He saw what I was going to do and whipped up his own gun—but I pressed trigger. He never shot his rifle at all. Just collapsed into the snow and lay there. I was so sick, right then, I could hardly walk myself. I didn't go to him—just turned and came home."

Johnny said, "That shooting was self-defense, in a way."

"When two thieves fall out and one kills the other?" Phil said bitterly. "No. It was murder."

"Phil," Grace pleaded, "don't talk any more. Rest—"

"I want to finish." But he did keep silent for a space, catching breath. "From that shooting until today I was sure I'd killed Machamer, and that what was left of him, after the wolves got through, was lying up Limbo Creek, covered by snow. I know now that Joe Keok or Apalook must've taken him to a hut back in the hills and cared for him until he recovered from his wound. When a Navy plane landed here and you, Johnny, arrived, at first I thought it was a law officer. That, somehow, either our robbery here, or the shooting, was known about. "That wasn't so, of course. But you did make plans to work Bill Baker's mine. I—I just didn't know what to do. If I told you the truth about the mine, I'd have to tell about killing Machamer. I tried to argue you into leaving here.

"Then things started happening to you. I knew *why*—to prevent you from operating the mine and discovering that it was a bonanza of osmiridium. But I didn't know *who* was trying to block you, since I thought Machamer was dead. I realized that it must be some of the Eskimos. I didn't do anything—I hoped they'd scare you into leaving, since I failed to bluff you into going. Now, of course, we know it was Machamer and Keok who were sabotaging your work."

"Rest now, Phil. Please," Grace begged.

"Sure, take it easy," Johnny urged. "Everything's all right. You saved Bill Baker's mine for him, and he'll be grateful. And now that you actually *have* shot Machamer—you'll get a vote of thanks!"

Grace walked outside with Johnny.

"How badly is Phil hurt, Johnny? Has he got a chance?"

"Not unless he could get real medical care in a hurry. But we've got no doctor, and no way of calling one."

He held her close as she wept.

A ROAR woke Johnny next morning. He sat upright in his sleeping bag on the floor of his shack. Was he imagining things?

And then the shack walls shook to the cannonading of the two big motors of a Navy patrol plane swooping close overhead.

When he got outside, he saw that Grace already was out, running toward the beach where the amphibian had landed the first time. Johnny caught up with her, and she grabbed his hand, her face radiant. Together they reached the beach as the amphibian touched wheels to the ground.

"We can take Phil out to a hospital!" Johnny shouted over the roar of the plane motors. "He'll get all the care he needs. He'll be all right."

"Thanks to you, Johnny."

"But how about you, Grace? Don't stay here. Come with us! *Please.*"

Grace smiled up at him. "Yes, Johnny. Whenever you go, wherever you go—"

The way she said that, there was just one thing for Johnny to do. He kissed her.

They broke apart when finally they heard the whistling and handclapping. The Navy plane was stopped opposite them, and the crew were looking on, grinning.

Johnny introduced Grace to the Navy men.

"It sure beats me," Pete Raines, the pilot, said. "When I brought Johnny here, I told him that this place was hell. But darned if he didn't go and find an angel!"

"What d'you mean, hell?" Johnny retorted. "You got it wrong. This place is paved with gold!"

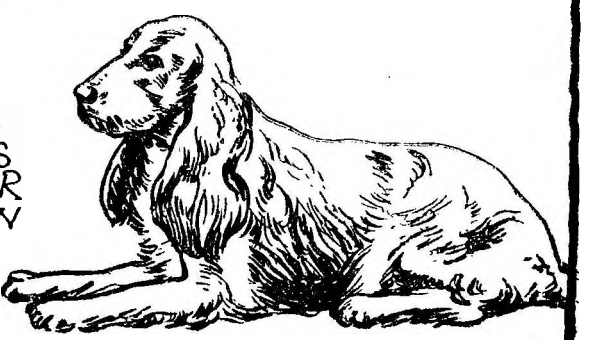
Curioddities

BY Weill

ONE OF THE LARGEST AMPHITHEATRES IN THE WORLD, THE COLOSSEUM AT ROME, HAD A SEATING CAPACITY OF *50,000 PERSONS AND STANDING ROOM FOR 20,000 MORE*. 12,000 SLAVES WERE USED IN ITS CONSTRUCTION AND ITS COST WAS ABOUT **$15,000,000**

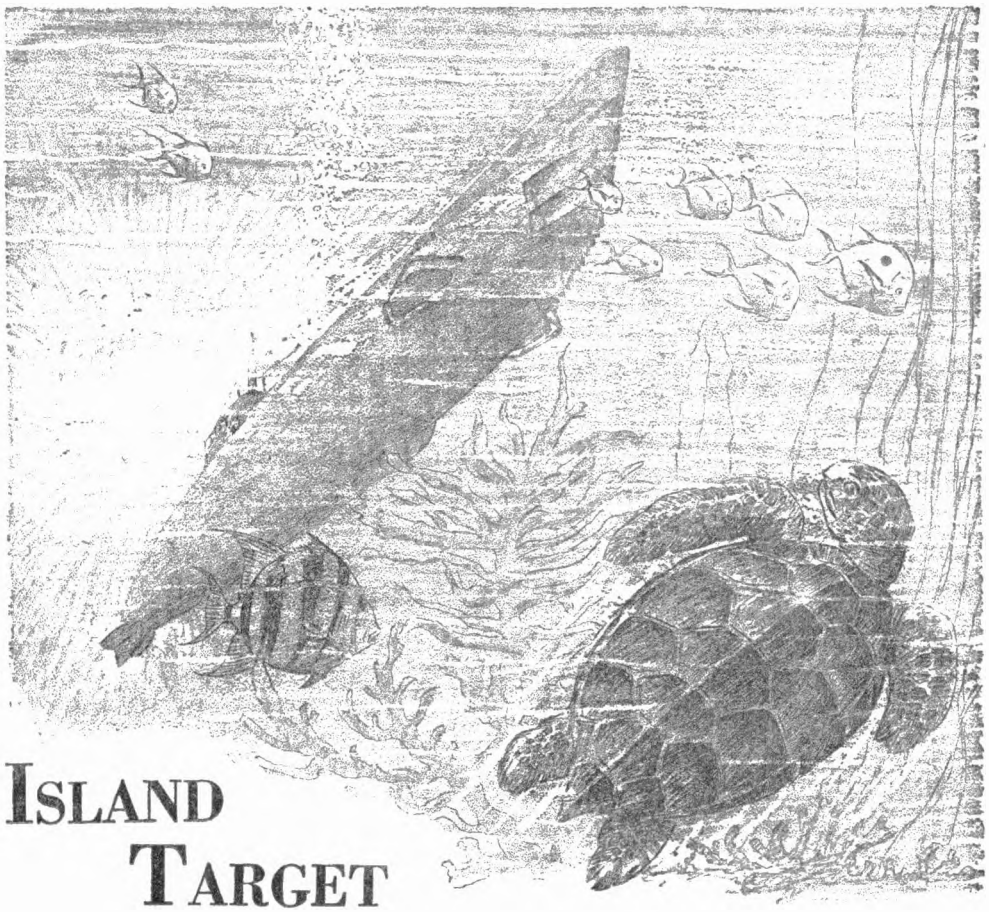
ALTHOUGH THE DEATH SENTENCE WAS FIRST PASSED ON SIR WALTER RALEIGH IN 1603, IT WAS NOT CARRIED OUT AT THAT TIME, BUT HE WAS IMPRISONED IN THE TOWER FOR **13 YEARS**! DURING HIS CONFINEMENT HE COMPILED HIS FAMOUS **"*HISTORY OF THE WORLD*"**!

THE COCKER SPANIEL, A GREAT LOVER OF THE HUMAN FAMILY, IS THE *MOST POPULAR PURE-BRED DOG IN THE UNITED STATES*.



DID USING AN "X" ALWAYS MEAN THE SIGNER COULDN'T WRITE? *See Curioddities next time.*

The Regular Dwellers of the Ocean Depths Don't Have Everything Their Own Way These Days



ISLAND TARGET

By WILLIAM MacMILLAN

THOUGH the gigantic sea turtle still tingled from the caresses of the spouse she had left behind in the Sargasso Sea she was as jumpy and jittery as a runaway box car. Being set in her ways she was deeply resentful of the happenings that had so rudely jolted her out of the familiar routine.

Heretofore her yearly cruise through the translucent waters of the South Atlantic hadn't been marked, as far as she could remember, by anything more disturbing than a brush with sharks, an encounter, perhaps, with killer whales, and the odd tangle with some dull-witted devilfish.

This time things had gone wrong from the very moment she had turned her nose southward. For no reason at all the whole world had turned upside down. It was decidedly annoying, and if her imagination had been just a trifle sharper she might have succumbed to panic, the refuge of the weak, and spent her strength, inexhaustible as it seemed, in purposeless flight.

She had expected storms, of course, stiff winds against which even her mighty thews could make little impression, and even mountainous seas that blinded and bewildered. Knife-stemmed destroyers and ponderous battleships, however, were incidents for

which she wasn't in the least prepared.

The memory of these noisy interludes imbedded in her shallow mind, she was sprawling inertly on the surface one morning, doing her best to forget them, when a pair of hunting swordfish, their back fins shearing through the water like scimitars, shifted their course, went into high gear, and drilled down on her.

The turtle, well-entrenched in her thickly armoured carapace, made no attempt to escape. And for a breathless moment a head-on collision seemed inevitable. Then suddenly discovering that the supposed tidbit was nothing but a tough old turtle of uncertain age, the Zifeas checked their rush in mid-water, so to speak, and boiled away in another direction.

Totally unaffected by the incident, the turtle snuggled down into the soft caressing arms of the sea. For the first time since turning her back on her thousand pound spouse she was as close to happiness as she could ever be. While swordfish were hardly things to trifle with they, nevertheless, were familiar and definitely less obnoxious than battleships belching fire and thunder.

Burping contentedly she was about to close her heavily lidded eyes when a plane darted out from behind a cloud and zoomed down on her with blazing guns.

This being too much for even a thick-skinned Chelonia to tolerate she thrust her head under the water, got her pile-driver legs in motion, and started for the depths.

For the first quarter of a mile or so she encountered all kinds of surface swimmers. But as she bored deeper and deeper into the solitudes she found herself in a world that few surface fish dared invade.

This was a realm of the grotesque and egregious. And when she finally hit the floor of the sea she didn't feel the slightest discomfort at the two tons per square inch pressure. If stillness and darkness were what she craved, then she had certainly come to the right place. Not a sound disturbed the tomblike silence. And while no light from the upper world penetrated this far down, the depths weren't as dark as might be expected. Various things, like minute infusoria, and the very mud itself, giving off a dim blue light that added to the ghostliness.

Her eyes round and staring, the turtle heaved herself up on her mighty legs and began a leisurely survey of the vicinity. Drawn, presently, to a patch of light slightly brighter than the rest she found herself in a thick forest of fern-like Laminaria, the blooms of which gave out a nebulous light that dimmed and brightened alternately as if they were being breathed upon by some hidden giant of the underwater world.

Turning on the power the turtle ploughed through this spooky seagrowth, almost riding down in the process of an addle-pated squid sprawling in the wide mouth of a shallow cave.

The old turtle came to an abrupt halt. She had seen some fairly large squids in her day, had bearded them, indeed, in their very dens. But this was, by far, the most gigantic one she had ever encountered. The huge, sac-like body completely filled the mouth of the cave, and its 40-foot tentacles—ten of them—shot out in every direction. The shapeless beast must have been hungry, else it would never have ventured to attack her.

Before she could turn, or back away, a long, sensitive arm, provided on the underside with feelers, whipped up out of the ooze, waved aloft for a moment, then slithered over her shell in search of an opening.

FEELING a slight depression in the ancient armour, the black eyes gleamed hopefully, and three or four additional arms clutched the turtle so eagerly she was hoisted off her feet and twisted sideways. Then as the squid sensed the hopelessness of the assault its eyes dimmed, the arms fell away and the turtle sank back into the silt.

Her bulbous eyes aglow with irritation and annoyance the Chelonian ploughed through the mud till her assaulter was far behind and she found herself looking down what appeared to be a narrow street hacked through a subterranean jungle.

Though this attenuated highway appeared to be completely deserted, she wasn't deceived for a moment. She knew only too well that gargoylish shapes lurked in the thick growth, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting victims. And, presently, deceived by the absence of movement, they began making their appearance.

First came an eel, not the ordinary kind of eel, but a gigantic thing some four or five feet in length and as supple as a length of rubber hose. Its flat limpid eyes taking

in everything, and the phosphorescence along its pale sides gleaming like silver, this amazing creature looped slowly down the fern-lined street.

Hardly had it disappeared around a bend, than a twenty-foot oarfish, with two long fins for oars, paddled into view. Even more bizarre looking than the eel this newcomer poked in and out of the alleys as it went along. Nowhere in the world but in the depths of the sea could such an unsymmetric creature have been spawned. Not only was it so thin that it threatened, every minute, to break in two, but a great mane extended the full length of its body and its eyes shone like illuminated saucers.

By this time the narrow street was crowded with all sorts of weird creatures that would have sent any surrealist into ecstasies of delight. And while no two of them looked alike they, at least, had one thing in common, portable lighting systems that permitted them to dim or brighten their lanterns at will.

The shapes and sizes of these lanterns, if they could be called that, were in keeping with their owners' eccentric outlines. Some were broad sheets of light, like illuminated signs, and some appeared to be openings along the owners' flanks, like the portholes of a ship. Most of these amazing illuminating plants generated a white light, but here and there could be seen a pale blue light, and even a lilac-tinted one.

PRESENTLY there was a slight movement in the silt and the strangest of all underwater dwellers, Lasiognathus, the angler-fish, sent floating up under the paraders' noses the most seductive looking lure imaginable. A cross between a flame and a flower, it danced and jiggled so enticingly at the end of its antenna that a snub-nosed fish with a transparent sac for a stomach dimmed its headlights and pounced on it. Quick as a flash the bobbing lure was snatched away, the bottom of the sea seemed to open, and the curious one disappeared completely from sight.

All this was old stuff to the turtle, of course. She had seen this ghostly parade of the lanterns a thousand times in her long life, but so lively and kaleidoscopic was it compared to the bleak emptiness of the upper world that she never tired of it.

Suddenly remembering that she had a destiny to meet, a duty to perform in a distant part of the sea, she pulled her ponderous feet out of the clinging mud and started down the crowded street in low gear.

The sea lilies promptly quenched their glow, the paraders dimmed their lights and scuttled for safety. When the bottom of the sea started to move it was time to go elsewhere.

THE ground dipped sharply at the end of the street. Coming to a halt the ponderous turtle peered down into the shadowy ravine. It was alive with movement and crowded with shapes even more outlandish than those that had weaved up and down the street. From a crevice in the silt-drifted floor there gleamed the single searchlight of a fearsome looking cuttlefish. And lurching through the ooze, hunting and being hunted, were blood-red crayfish, gigantic crabs, and fish that seemed to be minus the power of sight.

Her gigantic forelegs dangling over the edge of the ravine, the turtle was following the movements of a long narrow creature, either a worm or a snake, that had two enormous light-reflectors on its pallid sides, when an immense creature, the size of half a dozen whales rolled into one, came sinking into the depths.

Never having seen a submarine before, the ancient turtle didn't know what to make of it. Her eyes bulging, she stalked clumsily around the newcomer, searching the smooth sides for a head or a tail and wrinkling her nose at the smell of cold iron.

As a matter of fact so absorbed was she in the stranger that she failed, at first, to hear the muffled thunder of propeller blades churning overhead, and was caught flat-footed, so to speak, by the depth charge that, exploding directly behind her, hurled her violently against the clanging hull of the submarine.

Dimly aware that she had encountered, for the first time in her life, a force stronger than her own, she was trying to collect her scattered wits when a second explosion rocked the submarine on its keel and tumbled her over, end for end. Thoroughly alarmed now she put her walkingbeam legs in gear and started for the surface.

Ordinarily too swift a passage from the

lower depths to less oppressive pressures is accompanied by disastrous results. And had the old turtle been even slightly less well equipped she might, conceivably, have exploded into a thousand pieces.

Breaking water so violently she almost shot into the air the thick-shelled dowager, blinking in the strong light, tread water and scarched the sea for hostile signs. The Atlantic appeared to be deserted. In the distance only a tiny wisp of smoke remained of the speedy destroyer. And nearby a mass of black oil bubbled and burped to the surface.

UNIMPRESSED by all this she tucked her chin over a wave and settled down to a steady breast-stroke that ate up distance at an astonishing speed.

When she first saw the drifting lifeboat she took it for a log. As she surged towards it, however, the obnoxious man-smell that was wafted to her nostrils filled her with distrust. Arching her rubbery neck she saw that it contained two inert figures, those of a man and a boy.

All her blunt instincts warning her away, she pulled down her neck and surged off at right angles to her original course just as the man pulled himself to his knees and stared at her with bloodshot eyes. "Heh, Bud," he croaked excitedly, "we must be near shore."

The boy stirred weakly. "You have been saying that ever since that black stoker went overboard," he mumbled feverishly.

"You don't fool me again."

"But I'm sure of it this time."

The boy shook his head and passed a blackened tongue over his cracked lips.

"I saw a turtle," insisted the man.

"A turtle?" repeated the boy hysterically. Then remembering the mad ravings of the stoker before he jumped into the sea he sat up with a look of horror in his eyes.

"Yep, a sea turtle," panted the man, dragging himself to the bench and feeling for an oar."

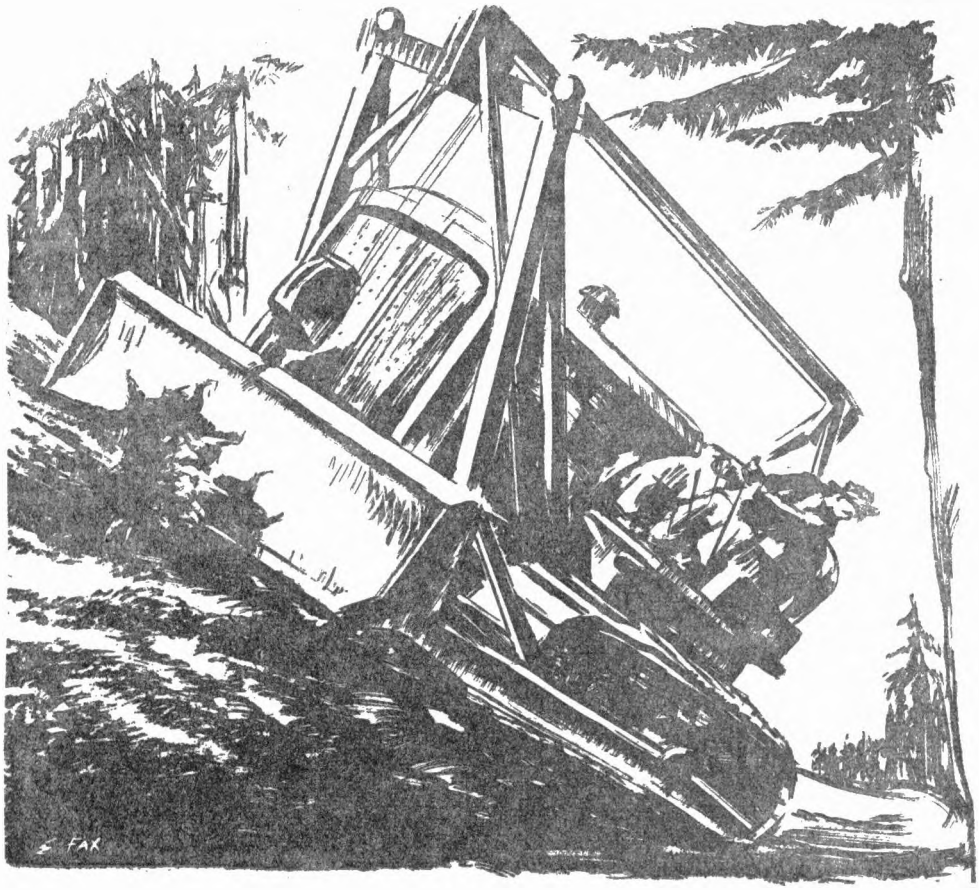
Had the gigantic turtle elected to turn on the steam and quicken her pace the lifeboat would have been left far behind. In the grip of an inertia probably induced by the great weight of eggs she was carrying she ploughed so leisurely through the sea the little craft managed to keep pace with her.

The sun was shining brightly the day the turtle, the water cascading from her corrugated carapace, floundered up the beach of a tiny island—the target of her long sweep across the Atlantic. She was tired and crusty and definitely ill at ease, but nothing mattered except to achieve her destiny and deposit her precious eggs where the sun and sand would work their magic.

Scooping out a trench was a difficult task to one so muscle-bound and unwieldy, and she resorted to brute strength rather than finesse. She was pushing a great mass of sand out of the trench with the smashing strength of a bulldozer when she looked up to see the lifeboat touch shore and spill its exhausted passengers onto the beach. Pulling down her head she laid the eggs, large delicately tinted spheres, in the excavation and covered them carefully with sand.

For a long moment she stood arched over the mound as if giving it her maternal blessing, then turning ponderously about she lurched down the beach. The sea was her home, and somewhere out there on the heaving swells of the Atlantic her lifelong mate was waiting for her.

Why, They Actually Fall in Love With Their Rolling Stock



ROAD CAT

By VAN COURT HOBSON

Author of "The Road Builders," etc.

STRANGE thing, how a person can get to thinking his machine is just about the finest thing there is. That's the way I feel about this caterpillar I'm running. I know it's crazy to get attached to any piece of machinery, especially up here, for they don't last any too long, even with the best care we can give them. But considering the grueling work we are putting our machines through and what we're expecting of them, it's really remarkable how much rolling stock we keep going. Now that I understand better how a person gets to feeling about some particular bit of metal, I'd be willing to wager my next month's pay that a lot of trucks and caterpillars are moving along, doing their job on this road construction, just because the men assigned to run them works over them whenever there is a chance.

When I was back in the States, I've seen men fussing and stewing over their cars and trucks, acting as if theirs was something extra special. When I was younger I couldn't quite understand why all the to-do. But now that I am running one of the finest pieces of machinery that ever knocked over

timber just as if it were match stems, I've changed my ideas about a lot of things.

I came up here six months ago when it was colder than all get out. I've been here ever since, helping to build this road (censored), for it's headed in the general direction where my brother is stationed. As we get nearer to his headquarters I keep wondering if any of the big bombers flying over us might be his. Of course, he's much more apt to be flying west and I know it, but everytime I hear the deep, heavy whirr of a big plane I can't help but wonder if it's Bill's plane. He doesn't know I am helping to build this road, a road that is to bring up supplies for our out-posts as well as the stuff that will be labeled "for Tokio, no rerouting." Some of these days we'll get this road through and then I intend to walk into Bill's quarters and say "Howdy," just casually. He thinks I'm two thousand miles away from here, finishing up high school. Well, I did that and came up here, too, so he's due for a big surprise.

I got one of my own a few weeks ago, a surprise, I mean, for the Major in charge of our section, army and civilians alike, told me I was to run one of the big cats. That has been my ambition ever since I saw one working, but I never expected to get the chance. I was mighty pleased when the Major said I was to drive a cat and especially so when he told me the machine I was assigned to was "Big Nell," one of the best bulldozers that ever did a full-time job, strong and sturdy and not the least bit temperamental. The big motors have been running steady for over three months now without any sign of complaint. My shift came during the day, not that it makes much difference during the summer, for it's daylight most of the time up here then. Lately, I've noticed that the days are not so long but the work goes on, just the same.

The Major and I are really good friends, we've been through a lot together but he told me straightout that my promotion to the cat was only because I'd earned it and was capable of doing the job. That made me more anxious than ever to keep the machine in good condition. After I got to thinking that Big Nell was about the finest bit of metal ever assembled, I found myself fussing over her like an old fool. I even hated to turn her over to the relief drivers. It was their machine as well as mine but sometimes that's hard to remember.

It really is something, to run one of these big cats; they are so powerful that it half scares you when you first try them out. One fellow, who was new on the job, almost wrecked the truck he was trying to push out of the mud. That big army truck seemed to crumple up just as if it were an accordion when the cat started to push it. There is a special technique for jobs like that and the new man wasn't on to it. The speed with which our caterpillars can clear a right-of-way is beyond belief unless you have really seen it done. The machine just moves forward without much to-do and mows down the spruce, jack-pine and aspen as if they didn't matter. Once in a while one of the bigger trees does a little back-firing of its own and swings around in such a way you'd think it wanted to do battle. Quite a few fellows have been hurt but usually they are quick enough to dodge the falling timber. The drivers have to move fast, under those circumstances, for all they have in the way of protection is an iron bar over their heads. Big Nell and I get along fine; I've got so used to handling her that we are usually pretty well up in front. Major kidded me a lot about her unquenchable appetite and curiosity.

IT WAS late one evening when Major came up in his jeep, to where I was working. He brought with him a head road man and two assistants, who were all het up over the way ice was forming in a river ahead. Major took me back to headquarters with him in the jeep—he often does and we have fine talks together. I heard a lot that evening about the river we had to cross that was ahead of us, and where the road men were afraid the early ice might hurt the temporary bridge. It had been constructed from the other side of the river and it had proved dangerous for everyone connected with it. Though the bridge was up, maintenance crews were having a time to keep it that way, for until the real freeze comes and makes a solid pack around those bridge piers, the men have had to blast the ice formations away, these last cold nights. Even with their eternal vigilance, the chances were about even the bridge would go out before we could get over on the other side

with some of our much needed equipment.

Just at that time there were only two cats acting as lead tractors, though we were expecting quite a few more to be in a good state of repair in the next day or so. As I have said, this country is the very dickens on machines. The Major said my job was to help clear the right-of-way and then get over the bridge while it still could carry the heavy weight of the larger machines.

"The next day and night will turn the trick, Jim. If we have that long, we will have most of the equipment we need over on the other side. From what I hear, things don't look too favorable; some of the reconnaissance flyers tell us they can see the ice-jams piling up on the high places. But they're still far enough away to give us a little more time."

I SUGGESTED that in the morning, when I took over Big Nell, that I should plan to stay on the job until we got her over the bridge. In that way the relief driver could be used to bring up some of the repaired machinery. Major was all for the idea and said he was depending on me—which sure gave me a man-sized job.

Then he started to talk on another subject, one I should not have missed for anything. You should have heard him that particular evening, for he got to telling about the way the people—not only the soldiers but the civilians, too—of other countries were defending their homes and their lands, over there on the other side of the world.

"To me, it is the most inspiring thing I have ever heard of, Jim. The way the Russians, the Chinese, the English people, the home folks themselves, are fighting and working, enduring every hardship to help their fighting men, and all without a thought of money or any other form of remuneration. They are all united in the defense of their country. The picture of a Russian woman, right up in the line of fire, bandaging a wounded soldier, helping him to a place of shelter; of the Chinese, carrying on their heads and backs the materials necessary to construct airfields, or literally moving their factories by hand to a place of safety; of the British, fighting fire, detonating bombs, clearing out their perilous wrecked homes, to me all those things are unbelievably courageous. I often wonder if our American civilians will be called upon to perform these heroic tasks."

We rode along a little while in silence. That's the way the Major likes it, and besides I was afraid to say anything that might throw him off his train of thought.

"Jim," he asked me suddenly, "have you ever stopped to realize that the people abroad who are doing all these magnificently brave things are just someone's neighbors, just the kind of neighbors you most likely have in your home town? There's the druggist, maybe someone like the one you know who fills the prescription your doctor gives you. In England that same type man may have spent the night rescuing a woman and her child from a wrecked building. In Russia, the prototype of the people you know who run a little neighborhood store, are the people who have defended their cities through months of siege and near starvation. In China, men and women like the little people who do your father's shirts so nicely and your mother's curtains, people like that have built roads much more difficult than this one we are working on and they have built them largely by hand. It takes something very fine in people's characters to give them the strength and courage to do these things. We've got to finish the fight, Jim; no more weakening at the last minute, as we did twenty years ago."

Major's words set me to pondering and that may have had something to do with what happened the next evening. I'm not saying it didn't, though it doesn't account for a lot of things.

THE next day's work was queer right from the start. In the first place, one of the caterpillars that has been working side by side with Nell decided to quit all of a sudden. It didn't take the driver very long to discover that a general overhauling was indicated. I felt sorry for him as he said there couldn't have been a worse time for a lay-off, considering the situation ahead. He had to leave his cat standing there, awfully big and helpless now that its big motors had stopped, and go back to headquarters for new parts and a few expert mechanics. I certainly congratulated Big Nell, when I started to run her again, on being such a faithful, steady old thing, for that was the third bulldozer that had fallen by the wayside and

here Nell was still plowing through the timber as greedily as ever.

I had been working alone for about three hours when the head road man and his assistants joined up with me. One of them signaled to me to stop and then asked me:

"You are Jim Humphries, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"We've some good things about you. Like your job?"

"You bet, especially since I have had the chance to run Big Nell."

"Good cat?"

"The best ever. Just keeps plugging away, and she's light on her feet, too, considering the size."

"Well, it had better be, light I mean, for I don't like the looks of the place we must clear ahead, I don't like it at all. As if we didn't have enough grief, trying to get to the bridge before matters get worse! But your cat and the one I saw yesterday may get though. Say, where is that cat I saw up here yesterday?"

"It's back there on the road, out temporarily."

"That does complicate matters. But we've got to try and get yours over, anyway. Time is of the essence."

"I've got a lot of faith in Big Nell, sir, she's worth any two machines. If anyone can get through to the bridge in record time, she can."

Fortunately just then a supply truck got up to us and we were able to fill up with enough fuel oil to last nearly twenty hours, which with any luck at all would see us over on the other side. The road men said they would hang around until they saw how things were going. The next two hours weren't too bad but after that I did run into grief. The timber wasn't hard to move—it was shallow rooted—but as the trees went over all their roots would turn over, too. Great round disks, those roots were, masses of rock and dirt, held together by the tough fibers, some as thick as my arm. They made another barricade to clear up. But Nell and I kept plugging away at it until suddenly we seemed to hit a slippery place in the road and then, without warning, we started to slide. There wasn't a chance to stop our skid, and before anyone knew what had happened, Nell was well off the right-of-way and still going.

The head man came down to look over the situation, it didn't appear very bad, for the engine was running and if we could get a little traction it wouldn't be very hard to get back to where we had started from. But even as we talked, a bad sign appeared. Muddy water began to seep up over the treads and one of the surveyors let out a yell of anguish.

"Muskeg, by all that's holy—as sure as anything, muskeg. What a hell of a break! I had hoped we wouldn't run into any more of the blasted dope."

That was bad news, certainly. We hadn't had as much of the gooey, treacherous stuff to work in as they have had on the southern end of the road but we'd had enough experience with it to know how it slows up the road crews. And we've heard plenty of tall tales about some of the tricks it plays. The story that came to my mind and gave me the shudders was the one about a bulldozer sinking clear out of sight in the bottomless muck. We knew, for sure, that a lot of trucks had been swallowed up and it might be that a cat really had disappeared, too. The thought that grand old Nell might go down into the mire that had been a trap for beast and men of other generations just made me feel sick all over. And added to this feeling of misery was the realization that the chances were mighty slim that I would be able to fulfill the major's assignment. He had told me he wanted me to get over the bridge sometime during the night and now the odds were zero that we could make it. Aside from that, Nell was such a dependable old girl and I had been counting, more than I knew, on showing her off to the fellows of the other crew ahead.

The road men decided they had better get back to headquarters and send up some tractors in a hurry, if they wanted to save Nell from becoming completely bogged down. Now it wasn't only the hope of getting her over the river—which is called a bridge-builder's nightmare with good reason—it was whether we could save her at all to clear a road another day. I insisted on staying with Nell, I wanted to keep her engines running, so it would be easier to crawl out the moment another machine came up to give her a helping hand. Even as we talked the muskeg seeped a little farther up onto the treads. Judging by appearance, help

would have to come fast, if it was to get there in time.

The men left me a warm jacket—it gets cold as blazes now at night. They also gave me an emergency food kit, so I was fixed up for the night or part of it, for they were sure they'd be back with help before it got really dark. But they weren't calculating on how much sooner night comes in the fall, and it seemed to me that it got dark especially early that evening. Later I learned it was because I was in such thick timber and undergrowth. It was only moderately cold then, so I wasn't too uncomfortable, for the driver's seat gets some benefit from the warmth of the engine. Even my emergency rations tasted good. Every few minutes I'd look over the side, to see how far Nell had settled since the last glance. Soon I realized that she was going down much too fast to suit me. I have a hunch that I now know how sailors feel when their ship is sinking.

EVERY time I have been in a jam, since coming on this road building job I have had a friend who has helped me out of any trouble I was in. He's an Indian who is taking a great interest in this road. I call him Pete, for I don't know his real name. I've never been close enough to ask him. It was he who rescued the Major when his leg was broken and who saved our camp when it was built too near an ammunition dump for safety. Every time I've needed Pete—when I was in difficulties—I've just wished for him and soon he came along. It seemed strange that this time I couldn't call on him to help me out, but I had a feeling that this was one feat he could not accomplish. No matter how willing he was and no matter what strange power helps him, getting Nell out of the muskeg would be just too much of a task for anyone person to undertake. So I was feeling pretty blue, sitting there in the dusk, watching my big cat sink deeper and deeper into the bog. To the men on this road job, a cat is a cat, valuable as such, but with me it was different. I was so darned proud to run one and I couldn't help wonder if I would ever get another chance, providing we couldn't get my Nell back on the road.

I resolutely would not let myself think of Pete, he has the habit of turning up when I do. So I started going over some of the things Major and I talked about the day before, about all the regular people who were working and fighting for their countries—all of them someone's neighbors. And that made me think of some of the folks I had known all my life and it set me to speculating how they would act if we ever had the terrible things come to us that were happening to the people in other countries. And while I was thinking of all this, I heard the strangest sounds, which made me forget all about the Major and everything he had said. I just concentrated on those sounds and wondered what they could be, for I had never heard anything like them before.

There are a lot of queer noises in the forests at dusk, the far-off wail of an animal, the nearby crackle of the breaking twig, sounding twice as loud as it really is. Sounds like that are enough to scare the wits out of anyone. You get all keyed up to meeting a bear and usually some tiny fur-bearing animal will appear, which is an awful let-down, though a welcome one. I'm used to the night noises of the forests now, but I had never heard anything like the ones that came drifting through the trees that night. At first they sounded like the far-off beat of drums and then, as it came nearer, I could have sworn there were voices singing, hundreds of voices—humming a low-pitched rhythm, unlike any music I had ever heard. The singing, if it was that, came from the left, well away from the right-of-way. By and by my curiosity overcame my fear, for I was afraid, you can count on that. But I screwed up enough courage to climb down off my cat and worked my way in the general direction of the noise, though I did an awful lot of slipping around. I hadn't gone very far when I suddenly came out into a cleared place. It was broad daylight there, a strange daylight, though but it seemed bright after the dark of the forest.

Those cleared places are found every so often in mountain country. You come onto them in the most unexpected spots; just when you think you are in deep timber there will be a place that looks for all the world like a cleared pasture, without even a tree or stump in sight. It was just such a clearing I found that evening. I'd have been glad to see it any other time, but what I saw there was enough to set my hair on end. I was even too surprised to cut and run.

That cleared place was literally crowded with people, there seemed to be hundreds of them when I first looked and still a steady stream of them were coming out of the forest that ringed the clearing. Many of the people were on horseback, while the other horses carried big packs or were dragging heavy loads of some sort. It didn't take those people very long to make camp, they must have been old hands at it. Soon there were tepees, pale gray ones, going up all over the place, while little wisps of smoke spiralled upwards. I couldn't hear any talking, but that may have been drowned out by the sing-song wail, a strange chant that made me think of the scenes in movies when you're expected to be scared. That music went on and on, while the camp was being pitched, while the horses rambled off into the forests, while the people gathered around the fires.

It was almost dark when I saw Pete stride into the clearing. I could hardly believe my eyes, but there was no mistaking him. He was a lot taller than any of the others, and you could tell at a glance that he was boss. And then I suddenly realized who they were —Pete's people—and if that was the case he had brought them to help Nell get out of the mire and over the bridge, so she could get on with the job. I felt like giving a yell, but that might have broken up the meeting or whatever it was. So I decided to stay quietly on the side lines and see what happened.

As I watched, I could see all those folks lining up to receive what appeared to be big, flat baskets. These they carried into the forest behind them, and when they appeared again the baskets were balanced on their heads. Soon there was a steady stream of people moving across the clearing, going through the trees to the spot where Nell was down, then they'd come back, swinging their baskets and always singing that queer song. It gave me the creeps. One thing I noticed especially about those people, they were hard to see, just as Pete is, when close to me.

But one thing I was sure of, Pete was on the job again and though I didn't know just how he was going to work out the problem, I knew he would—Pete gets things done. After a while I noticed that there were flares being lit all over the clearing and I realized it was night, pitch-black night, when I looked away from the flickering lights that gave the clearing and the people such a strange and dim appearance.

With the aid of my flashlight I found my way back to Nell, now down pretty deep in the muck. I felt better, though, than appearances warranted, for Pete had the matter under control, in some way or other. It was so dark in the forest that I couldn't see his people but I could hear them humming or singing or whatever you want to call it.

Suddenly, far-off, I heard the dull boom of an explosion, and I knew the men at the bridge had started to blast the ice formations away. That night was a night of sounds, all right; every so often the jarring thud of the distant blasting, then once in a while a nearby—much too nearby—cry of some timber animal and always, going on and on, that queer song Pete's people were singing. The very monotony of it made me sleepy—the last thing I remember was trying to tell Pete that I sure appreciated all he was doing for the road.

It must have been an especially loud dynamite blast that woke me up, for I came to with a sudden start and thought could it be the Japs coming over. But after that blast everything was still, too deadly quiet, and then I realized there no longer was any singing. Pete's people must have gone, so I felt it was all right to turn on the big lights, and what I saw sure gave me a thrill. Ahead of me a solid white road led back to our right-of-way, a road that seemed to start just where Nell was bogged down. And then I realized she wasn't down any longer, she was riding high and dry, sitting pretty with her motor running easily. I stepped off onto the ground, it was sandy, even a little dusty. There was some dried mud on Nell's treads and some on my boots, but that was all the signs there were of any muskeg. I was so tickled I let out a cheer which nearly scared the life out of me, for it just came out unexpected, and I found I was making as much racket as I did back in the States when our high-school team won its big game.

Nell and I got back on the right-of-way in record time and started in on our job. Major had said that minutes counted and we now had to make up time as well as do the work planned for two machines. Luckily I've worked on a lot of night shifts, so I

knew how to proceed, and all Nell needed was a chance to show her stuff.

I'VE never seen anything as grand as the forests were that night. The big, powerful headlights cut paths through the trees and made them seem like the pillars in the big churches shown in our history books. One thing led to another and I got to thinking that those churches or cathedrals were built by all the people, everybody tugging at ropes to pull the pieces of marble into place, everybody pitching in to build something grand, to make their country proud. And I knew it was just as the Major said, it was the people—fellows like the guys who drive our fuel trucks and Ling, our water boy, and those men ahead who had built a bridge under the worst circumstance possible, the regular folks at home and now Pete's people, who help to get the big jobs done.

It was early morning before I came into sight of the bridge. The men heard me coming and let out a yell when Nell pushed the last tree out of the way and came roaring down toward her objective. The bridge was still standing but I eased Nell over it, you can be sure. This was one time I wished she was a little less bulky and minus a few tons, but we make the other shore, leaving the bridge still intact, more or less to the surprise of some of the builders.

As soon as we got over safely I found I was hungrier than I had ever been in my life, so I settled down to do a little serious eating. It was while I was filling myself full of griddle cakes that we heard the first sounds of a growing racket on the other side of the river. Soon Major's jeep came into sight, followed by what could have been called a task force of proportions—angledozers, supply trucks, scrapers, most anything you want to mention needed for road construction. Major led that cavalcade over the bridge. It swayed badly at times and the bridge men only allowed just so much weight to be on it at a time, but eventually every required piece got over and then you could hardly hear yourself, with everyone blowing their horns and yelling their heads off. It was a big moment.

In the meantime, Major had joined me eating cakes and syrup. He hadn't had any breakfast, either, been up all night, hurrying matters along.

"I never was so surprised in my life," he told me, "as when we found the right-of-way cleared right down to the bridge. All the time I was on the lookout for the place where you were down in the muskeg. Just exactly what did happen, Jim? There's more here than meets the eye."

"That's right, sir, there is, and I'm not so sure I believe it myself. Could we get back in your jeep and look over the situation in the daylight. No use having anyone else along, is there?"

The Major looked at me for a moment and understood. He always knows when I'm talking about Pete or anything to do with him, for I've told him about the haunter of the forests.

"Right you are, Jim. I have to start back to camp, we're moving headquarters, too. I'll be ready to start in a few minutes.

I WENT over to see that all was well with Nell and to give the relief driver some instructions. For once, he was real deferential to me, said he still didn't see how I had been able to get the road cleared. I was standing there, admiring that sturdy old machine that had done its job so well and was ready and willing to go at another when the Major come over to say he was ready to start.

"Think a lot of that machine, don't you, Jim?" Which just goes to show how observing he is.

Major and I made good time, considering, back to the spot where Pete's people had built their road. I tried to tell him, as accurately as I could, about the whole affair but we both knew there was a lot of unfinished business to be attended to. We found the place all right, and then walked through the timber to the clearing, which was much bigger than I had realized. It looked lonely and deserted, as if no one had been there for centuries. We couldn't find a trace of a campfire, not even any spot where one might have been in the past. Even the tall grasses seemed undisturbed and if we hadn't found, almost hidden in them a large, shallow basket I might have doubted my own experiences of the night before. But the basket was there all right and it had been recently used, which the Major said presented a unique problem. It was a strong basket with a strange design

woven into it, but the interesting thing to me was the fact that it had been used to carry white sand.

We had just returned to the road bed when the head road man and his two assistants arrived. They couldn't believe their ears when we told them that Nell was safely over the bridge after making the first clearing of the right-of-way. Those men insisted on going down to the place where they had last seen the cat apparently trapped, and when they found sand instead of muskeg they decided that they must be slightly off their heads. We looked very solemn and told them we had been hearing about a lot of strange things happening to men who stayed too long in the North country, but that their case was the queerest so far. One of the assistants asked the Major if he could explain it and Major answered, very seriously, that the cold did strange things to people's imaginations. The Major and I never talk to outsiders about Pete or any of the things he does. They wouldn't understand.

We're making mileage on the road again, better going than we expected though I hear there is another river ahead that may try to stop us. Personally I have had enough from rivers but one can't pick and chose on a job like this. One thing certain, the head road man is lots easier to get along with these days, whenever he gets too bossy or overbearing we just ask him if he is noticing the cold again. That gives him something new to worry about and calms him down considerably.

Major and I have added the basket to the beads and the pictures in a cave that we are to show the archaeology fellows when they get here. That will be an interesting thing, to hear what they have to say about our finds.

I want to keep all these things for myself, after all, they are presents from Pete, who has proved about the best friend this road has. Major, who has done so much for it, insists that Pete has been our best and greatest stand-by.

Big Nell is running as well as ever and we're plowing through the timber at a great rate of speed. I often wonder just what my brother will say when I walk in on him.

The Story Tellers' Circle

(*Concluded from page 7*)

That Four-Minute Mile

ONE of the hottest arguments among track fans is whether or not some human is going to come along and kick his way to a four-minute mile soon. We remember not so long ago when the famous Glenn Cunningham, Bill Bonthorn, Gene Venzke duels were taking place a mile run in four, ten was good; one in four, ten remarkable. William Heuman's "One Mile to Glory" tells us he's been closely following the mile event for several years, watching the various runners who have been trying to lower the mark.

Says Bill:

"There has been a great deal of discussion regarding the proverbial four-minute mile. Many track coaches admit that it is now within the realm of the 'possible.' Strangely enough this was not their opinion less than six years ago when Glenn Cunningham, the Kansas Hurricane, was doing the distance in four, six and a fraction, and less. Then, we were told, the human body had reached the point where it was considered physically impossible for a man to run the 5280 feet in less time than that.

Consider the recent efforts of Gunder Hagg and his countryman, Andersson, who got down to four, two and a fraction some months ago! If these boys were able to knock off four seconds from the Cunningham world record time, why can't one of our own boys come through with those last two precious seconds? We think it can be done. This war will send men back to the States tougher than they've ever been—and it's toughness alone that will make a man dig down for those few long seconds in the final quarter when the body is weary but the heart is strong."

William Heuman.

. . . They Were Broadcasting This Mile Across the Entire Country

ONE MILE TO GLORY

By WILLIAM HEUMAN

Author of "You Dig on Last Down," etc.

AFTER awhile you get to know every man in the race. You know how much they have left and you can tell to the second when they're going to make their kick.

Ben Aldridge plodded steadily behind the sandy-haired kid from the West Side. Young Sammy Brand was opening up. They were deep in the third quarter of the mile and it was very early to put on the pressure, but the miracle kid could do it. He had iron in those short legs and a machine in the barrel chest.

The dull roar from the balconies floated down to the shining wood boards. Ben Aldridge grinned and tried to pick up speed, knowing how foolish it was. He was eight

years past the time when he could match strides with the West Side boy.

"You take guys like us," Bob Delaney had said in the dressing room. "We get coaching from the best men in the business. We know the mile from A to Z, and then a kid like Brand comes along without any previous experience and he goes below four, seven. It's a gift."

Ben Aldridge of the Colonial A.C. watched Sammy Brand move up to the front, past Bob Delaney, past Ed Smith of Tech. Delaney's statement was true. Brand had a gift; he'd been given something to begin with that put him above the average runner. Ben Aldridge was aware of the lack of this gift in himself.

They were opening up in the fourth quarter. Brand had two yards on Smith and three on Delaney. Ben moved in fourth place with the colored boy, Rufe King, directly behind him. It was time for King to make a bid. The lanky negro had plenty of power but he never got into gear till the last four hundred and forty yards.

"He runs away from us," Delaney had moaned before the race. "I break my heart to keep up with the guy and then he leaves me standing."

Ben watched the distance opening up between Brand, unattached, and the two men behind him. The kid had a natural stride which no coach in the business could improve; he ran without effort. Those first three-quarters had been plenty fast. Ben felt it in the calves of his legs; he had the pains in the chest. Brand was only getting started!

The kid had five yards on the second place Smith and he was widening the breach with each stride. He flowed around the track like a machine.

"We got as much chance of catching him," Delaney said once, "as those dogs at the track have catching the mechanical rabbit. He's not human."

Doggedly, Ben Aldridge took up the chase. A man had to be in the race no matter who won it. It had been two years since he'd grabbed a first, but still they asked him to run. He went under four, ten on occasions, and any man who could hit in the vicinity of four, ten, was a miler.

Rufe King was going past. Ben picked up, too. Smith would collapse before this last quarter was halfway through. Bob Delaney would hold on and fight any man for second place. Before the advent of Sammy Brand, Delaney had been the top mile man in the country. Three times Bob had clipped four, seven. He'd held the record at four, six and a quarter, and then Brand, in his second mile in the big time, had clipped a half second off Delaney's mark.

Ben matched the colored runner stride for stride. They passed the floundering Smith and fell in step behind Delaney. Big Bob was due to make his bid any moment. The dark-haired man with the broad shoulders usually gave his "kick" at the two hundred yard mark. Brand had eight yards on him now.

Going around a bend, Brand glanced back over his shoulder. Ben Aldridge saw the set sneer on the kid's long-nosed face. Brand had pale blue eyes and colorless eyebrows; he had a quarrel with the world. Half a dozen athletic clubs had invited him to join. Brand had turned them all down contemptuously. He trained in the public parks!

"If you ask me," Delaney had growled, "it's an inferiority complex. He was nobody all his life; now he discovers that he can run—better than any man in the country. It's gone to his head."

Brand strutted around the dressing room before the race; he posed for the photographers after the race. He made remarks in-between.

Delaney picked up two yards on the kid and then Brand opened up again and got yardage back. Ben Eldridge saw Delaney shake his head in disgust. Brand sprinted the remaining distance and broke the tape a full ten yards ahead of the second place runner.

Ben dug down and found a little extra something. He matched Rufe King down the last fifty yards and beat him out by a step for third place. They clocked him in four, eight and a half. Brand had done the distance in four minutes, six and a quarter seconds.

They had seventeen thousand in the Garden and the place resounded with noise. A swarm of photographers mobbed Brand as he trotted around the track in a tapering off run.

Ben walked up to where Delaney was waiting for him with his black and white Colonial sweat shirt and pants. His legs

were a bit shaky. He didn't have the breath to talk, Delaney just looked. The big man's face was white from the effort.

"You did good time, Bob," Ben told him. "Nobody can sneeze at a four, seven and a half mile."

Bob Delaney laughed. "I wanted to win this one," he said a little bitterly. "There was a man from Greenfield upstairs."

Ben nodded in sympathy. Like himself, Delaney was on the waiting list. He'd taken a physical education course, preparatory to landing a coaching job in one of the smaller colleges. Delaney was five years younger and he'd turned down two offers. Greenfield College needed a man for the track team and Delaney had already written to the athletic board.

"If you want to land anything these days," the miler said, "you have to be in the public eye. We have no reputations as coaches so they hire us because we're runners and we might attract kids to the school."

Ben Aldridge walked down the corridor toward the dressing room. For eight years he'd been fighting to stay in the public eye, waiting his chance. It was tough trying to keep in condition after working all day in the office. Sitting at a desk for seven hours didn't help the legs or the wind.

"If I'd taken a first today," Delaney said quietly, "Greenfield would have grabbed me. This guy Brand comes along and I'm just another mile man."

"Like me," Ben wanted to say. He went under the shower. Other boys were coming in. Most of them were young, sprinters, jumpers, hurdle men—still in college, or just out and running for one of the local athletic clubs.

Brand came in and the reporters were still with him. Bob Delaney went over to shake hands.

"Nice race, Sammy," he said. Ben watched from the shower room.

SMITH of Tech was in the shower room with Ben. He looked at the veteran and shook his head in disgust. The college runner was Ben's size—the same type of picture runner, with lean shanks, long stride, built on the lines of a greyhound. Smith didn't have the machine inside him that Brand had.

"A nice guy," Smith said. "He should be given such legs!"

Ben grinned. He slipped a towel around his waist and went out. Sammy Brand was taking off his short spiked indoor trackshoes. He had a long nose set between the pale blue eyes.

"Where'd you finish, Aldridge?" Brand asked. "I lost track of you."

"I was in the race," Ben said quietly. He'd gone under four-ten again, which meant he'd still run for the Colonial Club and he'd still get the invitations to the big mile events. Always in the background was the possibility that he'd win one of these races. When Delaney had taken the K of C mile he'd received three offers. Delaney could afford to be particular. He still waited. Ben would have grabbed up any of the three. Even a prep school job wouldn't be bad. A man could work himself in solid and be fixed the remainder of his life. At least it would be the kind of work he wanted to do.

Over near the door Delaney was talking to a gray-haired man. Ben saw the light in the big miler's eyes. After awhile they shook hands and the stranger left. Delaney threw his towel up against the ceiling.

"The Greenfield man?" Ben asked. He didn't want to envy Delaney because they didn't come any better than the crack mile man.

"It's in the bag," Delaney yelped. "We are to have a conference tomorrow. He has a contract—head coach, Ben, the whole track team!"

Ben Aldridge held out his hand. Greenfield was ideal. He'd passed through the little New England college town years ago. It would be a nice place to settle down. A man could grow old gracefully, imparting his track knowledge to younger men.

"I guess he was satisfied with that four-seven mile," Ben said. "You've been a headliner for two years, Bob. Congratulations."

"I hope you land something soon, Ben," Delaney told him. "You deserve it."

Ben Aldridge laughed. For the first time he realized that with Delaney gone he would be in a better position himself. If only Brand hadn't come along to hog the spotlight. There was always somebody else. Before Delaney there had been Leo Edwards, title-holder. He'd beaten Ben consistently. Edwards was now head coach at Littleton U.

"See you boys next week," Sammy Brand called from the shower room, "Bring your crying towels along."

"Not me," Delaney said. Next Saturday night the circus travels to Boston for the Briscom Mile. Ben had already received his invitation through the Colonial Club. Rufe King and Smith were in. Delaney and Brand completed the quintet.

The disappointment was plain in Brand's eyes. He liked to beat the big time college men. He was from a small city college himself and he'd worked his way through. It wasn't until the last year of school, and the first year running unattached, that he found himself on the track.

"You got enough?" Brand wanted to know.

"Enough of you," Delaney said quietly. "I've been offered a job and I'm taking it. I won't have time to go to Boston."

After awhile Delaney stopped Ben Aldridge at the door. "I'd give my right arm," he grated, "to see that little monkey run into the ground."

"In this country," Ben said, "you were the only man who might have been able to do it." He paused. "There's a chance they might get Hansen over here." Hansen was the Norwegian school teacher who had been cracking world records in all distances for two years running.

Delaney laughed bitterly. "If he beat Hansen he'd go up in the air like a balloon. You'd never get him down."

Marion was waiting outside for him. Ben took her arm and they moved toward the subway station.

"It was a good race," the girl said. "I don't like that Brand."

Ben laughed. "You should know him," he said. He told her about Delaney's good luck. She was tall and quiet. They understood each other. As soon as the break came, they were to get married.

"We don't have to wait, Ben," she had told him. "I can go to work for a while."

The runner shook his head at the suggestion. His job in the office didn't amount to anything. He'd trained himself to handle young men on the athletic field and he was waiting. The office job had begun as something temporary. He'd been at it for eight years now and nothing had happened. He knew he wasn't able to support a wife.

"If there's anyone else," he said, "you haven't made any commitments that you can't break, Marion."

"We'll wait," the girl told him.

Delaney was out of the Briscom Mile but Brand was still in and better than ever. He was in fine form in the dressing room before the race. Rufe King shook his head and left the room in disgust.

Out on the track before a capacity crowd, Sammy Brand strutted his stuff. It was the kid's first appearance in Boston and they'd heard of him. He moved around the hard boards in his crimson sweat suit, proud of the fact that he'd been able to turn down half a dozen athletic clubs.

They had George O'Hare from Eastern U. running in place of Delaney. O'Hare had made good time in various college meets. He was expected to set a lively pace for Brand. Ben had the inside lane at the starting mark with Brand to his right, Rufe King next to Brand and O'Hare and Smith in order.

"Marks," the starter told them.

Ben Aldridge stared down the track. The Briscom Mile was one of the big events of the year. If a man could take a first— He caught a glimpse of Sammy Brand's long nose to his right.

Delaney had sent a telegram. "Good luck, kid." He missed the big man in this event. He'd have to find another pace setter to follow.

The gun cracked and they were off. O'Hare started from a sprinter's crouch. The others were all standing up. O'Hare moved into the lead. Brand fell in behind him and Ben Eldridge dogged the miracle kid's steps.

They did the first quarter in sixty-one seconds. Smith tried to take the lead from O'Hare but soon relinquished it. The Tech runner looked at Ben Aldridge and grinned. The lead didn't mean anything at this stage of the race. Brand never put on the pressure till late in the third quarter. From then on he could make a man run his heart out.

Ben remained in third place directly behind Brand. The world's champion wasn't even aware of him. Brand realized he had no opposition in this race. Delaney was the only man in the U. S. who could extend him and Delaney was out of competition.

They spun around the rim of the saucer and O'Hare tried to increase his two-yard

lead. Brand easily kept him within striking distance. Rufe King made a bid to come up. He ran even with Ben's shoulder for some time and then dropped back again. The five men were closely bunched. Ben wondered who would crack first.

The second quarter was sixty seconds. It was much too fast. At that rate O'Hare was running a four-minute mile!

Ben watched the Eastern runner fade in the third quarter. No man in the business could keep up that pace for four quarters. Even the great Sammy Brand realized that and he slowed down with O'Hare. They were clocked in sixty-five and a quarter seconds for the first quarter.

Ben heard the roar. Brand was beginning to open up. He was but a stride behind O'Hare as they entered the fourth quarter. O'Hare tried to hold him off but he had nothing left. Brand moved past him without any effort. Ben Aldridge gritted his teeth and tried to keep up with him. It had been a long time since he'd done two sixty-one second quarters in succession.

King came up and then Smith. The Tech runner had changed his system since the last race. Smith was holding back instead of leading the pack. Every once in a while a miler tried something new. Ben Eldridge had watched them all.

Smith was moving very fast and Ben let him go by. It was too early in the quarter to challenge any one as yet. O'Hare fell back to last place. Ben saw his face as he went past the kid. The Eastern U. boy was running against the stiffest competition he'd ever met, and it was proving too much for him.

Brand had the lead by now and he was stretching out. Ben Aldridge watched the younger man's head and shoulders. He sighed. Brand wouldn't crack. The unattached runner had five yards on the second place Smith. Now Rufe King made his bid. The rangy colored boy came up fast and Ben went with him.

They passed Smith and the crowd gave them a hand. Ben Aldridge glanced at the colored runner out of the corner of his eye. He'd taken Rufe in New York. It might be a different matter tonight. The honors usually were divided between the two. A second tonight would mean something.

Brand had five yards on them and then ten. Smith and O'Hare were floundering far behind. Rufe King let go with a hundred and twenty-five yards to the finish mark. Brand easily beat off the colored boy's challenge.

There was no break in the New York runner's stride. He moved down the track, arms and legs moving like pistons, head erect, proud as a peacock.

Ben Aldridge left Rufe King run himself out and then he opened up the last fifty yards. He took King twenty yards from the tape and beat him by a full stride. Sammy Brand was first with a four-minute, five and three-quarter second mile. Sensational time.

Ben listened to his own time announced over the p.a. system. He had done it in four, eight and three-quarter seconds. It was approximately the same as the last race in New York.

"It's a good time," Rufe King grinned in the dressing room.

"Not any more," Ben said. A year ago a man who went under four, ten, was considered a top notch miler. With guys like Brand going below four, six, and Hansen in Europe hitting four, five and a fraction, and reputed to be able to go below that, a four, ten mile was only another jaunt.

Sammy Brand came in with a towel around his head. He grinned into a camera and autographed a book for a kid runner on the program. George O'Hare came over to congratulate him. The Eastern miler had never run against the New Yorker.

"You can go," O'Hare smiled. "I never thought a man could go that fast and have anything left at the finish."

Brand swelled up. "You haven't seen anything, kid," he said. "Wait'll somebody pushes me."

O'Hare's eyes widened. Rufe King slapped his towel against the locker and went into the shower room.

"When I crack the record again," Sammy Brand chuckled, "I'm retiring from the track." He said it as if he expected someone to beg him to reconsider. No one said anything. Even the reporters, who wanted copy, were a little disgusted. Joe Mann, of the *Globe*, winked at Ben and went out.

"I hope," Smith said, when Brand had gone to his locker, "that he makes the mark soon. I don't like running on the same track with the guy."

Ben went out into the hall and made a long distance call to New York. Marion had heard the race over the radio. They were broadcasting all the big meet miles now. With Sammy Brand in the United States, and Hansen in Norway, driving the time down toward the mythical four-minute mark, interest in the event was high.

"You almost caught him," the girl laughed. "I was proud of you, Bennie."

Ben Aldridge swallowed. They pretended it didn't mean anything; they acted as though the things he wanted were just around the corner. Nothing ever seemed to turn that corner.

"It's like chasing a will-o-the-wisp," Ben said. Even now, after a warm shower and a rub down, he still felt it in the legs. A man couldn't run forever. They were calling him Old Ben Aldridge in the sports columns. When a man faded from the picture, they forgot about him—especially the athletic directors at these small colleges and prep schools. They wanted a man in the limelight.

"Don't give up hope, Ben," she said. "He's only human."

"You should chase him," Ben Aldridge said.

"I'm chasing you," the answer came back.

Ben grinned. "I won't let you down, lady," he whispered. "There are two more meets. Maybe Brand will break a leg." He paused. "They might have to shoot him."

She came back quick with the answer. "You'd rather beat him, Ben," she said.

"Yes," Ben mumbled. "I'd rather beat him." Delaney couldn't do it. They said Hansen couldn't do it if the two ever met. They were both younger men, in their prime.

On Monday night at the Colonial Club he went into consultation with Coach Dip Harris. The veteran mentor had handled a great many trackmen. He kept the Colonial runners in condition.

"How do I beat Brand?" Ben asked quietly. "I mean it."

Harris grinned. He was a small wiry man with a tuft of gray hair and piercing blue eyes.

"Buy a motorcycle," Harris said. He motioned Ben to a chair in the office. Outside in the gymnasium, they could hear a man slamming the light bag.

"I got to take this guy," Ben said. "I need a first."

"Anybody beats Brand now," Harris said, "can run for president. He'll be the Number One track man in the country."

"He's a queer kid," Ben muttered. "He must have a weakness."

"He's a louse," Harris snapped, "and you know it. We all know it."

"I still have to take him," Ben Aldridge repeated.

IN two weeks the circus was in Philadelphia. Brand and King, possibly Smith, were in. Ben Aldridge already had the invitation to run. The Presidential Mile was the big winter event of the track season for the city of Brotherly Love. Brand already had stated that he would be out to crack the record in the Presidential Mile. He promised to set his own pace and run against time!

"You'd think he was the only man on the track," Dip Harris had said when he read the statement.

"Bob Delaney thought he had an inferiority complex to begin with," Ben said. "That might help."

"He doesn't have it now," Harris grated. He studied the veteran miler carefully. "You think if you can burst the bubble, Brand will crack up?"

"I don't know," Ben told him. "I'm asking you."

"I can send out a report that you've gone under four minutes in a trial run," Harris said.

Ben laughed. "It would be hard to believe, Dip," he said.

"Then the only other alternative," Harris pointed out, "is to get in the best shape of your career. Take the lead from Brand and make him break his heart to get it back. You had speed once, Ben. If you give him the kind of fight he's never had before, he might crack up. That inferiority complex might come back."

"It's worth a try," Ben murmured. "I got a week's vacation coming to me at the office. I could go away."

"Go to the mountains for a week," Harris advised. "Run cross-country. You haven't had any real training since you left college.

These nights indoors are poor substitutes for the regular outdoor work."

Ben took a bus upstate to the Catskills. He brought his running equipment with him. There was snow on the ground part of the time and plenty of mud. He sloshed through it on long jaunts through the hills.

Bob Delaney wrote him and he got the letter when he returned to New York.

"Just discovered they need a field coach at Highland Prep School," Delaney said. "It's close to Greenfield and the set-up is very good. I told the athletic board about you and they're sending a man to the Philadelphia Meet. Run 'em into the ground!"

Ben's fingers trembled as he handed the letter to Marion. A Prep School wasn't as good as a small college, but at least he would be in his own work. He could get married. Field Coach meant an all year job and they were sending a man down to see him!

"Even if you make a good showing," Marion whispered, "it might be enough. Delaney landed the Greenfield job with a second place."

Ben Eldridge nodded. He had another week of indoor training to get ready for the Presidential Mile. His legs felt good. The long runs through snow and mud had built up his wind.

Dip Harris told him that aside from Brand the field would be easy. Rufe King had gone out to the Coast. Smith hadn't received an invitation. Sammy Brand was to run against Ben Aldridge and a few collegians—none of whom had ever gone under four, ten.

"It'll be a two-man race," the Colonial coach explained. "You won't have to worry about anyone but Brand."

"Ordinarily," Ben said dryly, "he's enough."

Marion was on the train with him when he went to Philadelphia. Dip Harris sat across the aisle chatting with two of the Colonial sprint men who were entered in the meet.

"I want to be in on the kill," the girl said.

"Let's hope it's not me," Ben grinned.

Harris worked on him carefully in the locker room, kneading the leg muscles. Sammy Brand popped in with his bag and dropped it on the floor. He looked at Ben Aldridge on the rubbing table and then sat down on a nearby bench.

"You in shape," Aldridge?" he asked.

"Pretty good," Ben said quietly.

"Set me a pace," Brand chuckled. "I'm knocking over the traces tonight."

Dip Harris snorted and Brand moved down to his locker.

"I'd crawl on my hands and knees to beat that guy," the Colonial coach growled.

Ben Aldridge slipped into his sweat suit and carefully adjusted the laces of his spikes. They were due on the track in a few minutes.

"Good luck," Harris said. Ben shook his hand.

He walked down the corridor and then down to stone steps toward a doorway which opened on the arena. On the lower step his short-spiked shoe skidded. He heard Dip Harris's yell behind him and then he went down, left ankle turning awkwardly as the foot hit against the side wall.

Harris was down beside him as he sat up, white-faced and sick in the stomach. The pain was shooting through the ankle. He knew how a sprain felt.

"Can you stand up?" Harris wanted to know.

Ben grasped the railing on the short stairway and pulled himself to his feet. He took one step and almost fell. Dip Harris put an arm around his waist and helped him back to the dressing room.

"That's all," the coach said miserably. "It would have been a good race, Ben."

Ben Aldridge lay back on the table. There was nothing to say. He was in shape and he was unable to run. The sprain was not a bad one. In two weeks he would forget that he ever had it, but tonight he couldn't take two steps with it.

"I'll tell them," Harris said. He slapped Ben's shoulder and went out.

From the doorway, Ben Aldridge watched Sammy Brand run the greatest mile of his career. Brand came home with a fifty-nine second final quarter to win by thirty yards in four minutes, four and a half seconds. An official world's record had been established.

Harris taped up the ankle and got him back to the train in a cab. Ben looked at Marion. She was very quiet. The man from

Highland Prep hadn't shown up. It was another broken castle.

"You picked a hard luck man," Ben told her.

"There's always the Davis Mile," Marion said softly.

Ben nodded. He took her hand. The Davis Mile, main attraction of the big New England Meet, was the last race of the winter season. After the Davis Mile they would begin to think of outdoor work and Ben had never done much on the cinders. He ran better indoors on the hard wood. It had to be the Davis Mile. In a year from now, working in the office, he might not be in shape for another winter's running campaign. He was over thirty and he'd been running a long time.

THE morning papers came out with the news that Sammy Brand had retired from the track. Dip Harris dropped in to see Ben as he sat in his room, ankle propped on a chair.

"You see it?" Harris asked.

Ben nodded. Brand had withdrawn his acceptance of the bid to run in the Davis Mile. He was retiring as the world's mile champion—undefeated.

"It's his ego," Harris said. "Undefeated champion of the track. He had to retire because of the lack of competition."

"At any rate," Ben said, "that gives me a better chance in the Davis Mile. I'll only have King to worry about."

Harris blinked. "You see where Hansen might cross the ocean after all?"

Ben Aldridge stared. "Hansen of Norway?"

"I got it from Art Simmons on the New England Meet committee," Harris said. "They've been after Hansen all winter to accept the invitation to run in the United States. The papers will be full of it in a few days."

Ben tried to smile. With Hansen in the race he stood little chance of winning. The rangy Norwegian school teacher was reputed as good or better than Brand.

"You still have a good race in you, Ben," Harris said. "Every man runs one great one. This might be it."

"Let's hope so," Ben Aldridge said. The Davis Mile wasn't scheduled for another three weeks. In two weeks he was back on the track of the Colonial Club, getting into shape. Hansen had definitely accepted the bid to run in the Davis Mile. He was coming across in the Clipper.

"He's an antelope," Harris said after seeing the foreigner train at one of the New York clubs.

"In other words," Ben said, "he'll take a lot of catching."

"There's nobody on the track," Dip Harris observed, "that can't be beaten."

Three days before the New England Meet, Sammy Brand announced his intention of running against Hansen.

"He can't stay out of the limelight," Dip Harris growled. "We might have known it."

Ben Aldridge took the news in silence. He had to run now against the two greatest mile men of the century. They were both younger men and both record holders. His ankle was all right and he was in shape for a good race, but he'd never come near the time made by Brand and Hansen. Dip Harris said every runner ran one great race. His was still due.

Bob Delaney came down from Greenfield for the event. The former track man seemed contented.

"It was too bad about that Philadelphia business," Delaney said. "How's the ankle, Ben?"

"It'll be tough," Delaney murmured. They had Rufe King and O'Hare filling out the five-man contest. He paused. "Brand and Hansen will be running against each other, Ben. They won't watch you."

Ben Aldridge looked at the man quickly. He'd been thinking the same thing. This was the mile of the century. The man who grabbed this event could walk into any school in the country. Even big time college coaches would grab him as assistant coach if nothing else turned up.

"They'll be jockeying all the way," Delaney went on. "If you can stick around, Ben, and then let go the last two hundred—"

"I'll try to be in at the finish," Ben Aldridge said quietly.

The night of the race he took Marion down to the Garden in a cab.

"I'm not risking a fall down the subway stairs," he grinned. "This is my night."

Bob Delaney walked with him to the

dressing room. The place was crowded. Hansen had a mob around him. He was tall and slender with a sensitive thin-cheeked face. He spoke no English and the reporters plied him with questions through an interpreter.

Ben shook hands with the European. Sammy Brand came up with a slight sneer on his face, envious of the new arrival. He was a full head shorter than Hansen.

"I'll spot him ten yards the last quarter," Ben heard the American whisper. It never got to Hansen.

Bob Delaney took Ben to the corner of the room. They would have to go out in a few minutes for the warm-up.

"I wish I could help you," Delaney said. "I know what this means, Ben."

Ben Aldridge nodded. They were broadcasting the mile across the entire country. Delaney realized this was probably his last run. They'd forget him pretty quickly after tonight.

The two men shook hands and Ben went out. He moved around the track half a dozen times before he spotted Marion up in the balcony. She'd worn a red coat so he could distinguish her. It was reassuring. He had people pulling for him off the track.

Sammy Brand trotted in front of him, knees high, steel springs in his legs. Hansen moved on up ahead in a green and white sweat suit. The man was a picture runner.

Rufe King came by and grinned at Ben. He shook his head. Rufe didn't expect to do much tonight. O'Hare of Eastern trotted behind Hansen. There were dozens of other young men on the track warming up, but O'Hare had eyes only for Hansen.

The call came and they moved up to the starting line. Hansen had drawn the inside position with Brand next to him. O'Hare was in the middle with Ben Aldridge and Rufe King on the outside lanes.

"Marks," the starter said.

Ben Aldridge moistened his lips. He stared down the track. The boards were shining with reflected light. To these men it was a great race and the winner would be the mile man of the world—a distinct honor. To him it was the means toward a livelihood.

The gun cracked and they were off. There was no mad scramble for positions in the mile. O'Hare leaped to the fore and the others let him go. It had been rumored that O'Hare would probably set the pace the first three quarters.

Ben fell in step behind Hansen. Brand was in second place two yards behind O'Hare. Ben saw him turn his head slightly at the first bend to see where Hansen was. Brand was aware of Hansen and the Norwegian thought Brand was the man he had to beat.

"O'Hare ran the first quarter in sixty seconds flat. The five men were bunched in approximately the same positions. Rufe King ran a step behind Ben in fifth position. Only about eight yards separated the first place O'Hare and the last place King.

Ben listened to the rising crescendo of sound. O'Hare had promised to make the others run and he was keeping his promise. Brand suddenly slowed down and made Hansen move in front of him. The Norwegian had a small smile on his face as he moved into second place. Brand didn't like a man to run behind him. He wanted to stay behind Hansen and jump in the final quarter.

The second quarter they ran in sixty-one and a quarter seconds. Ben felt it for the first time. He looked at Dip Harris and Bob Delaney sitting on the boards inside the track. Harris shook a fist at him. They hoped he had it.

He watched Brand moving in front of him. Brand didn't know anyone ran behind him now. He wasn't afraid of Ben Aldridge or Rufe King. Ben knew this was his salvation. He had to keep up with the two leaders.

O'Hare was falling back in the third quarter. Hansen let him run for a while and then took the lead without any opposition. Brand also passed O'Hare. He was two yards behind the Norwegian.

Ben heard the roar as the time for the third quarter was announced. Hansen in first place had clocked at sixty-two seconds. It was fast for a third quarter—the "rest" quarter.

O'Hare dropped back to last place. Ben heard Rufe King gasping at his side as they turned into the fourth quarter. The pace had nearly done for the colored boy too.

Hansen was beginning to move out. The thin Norwegian ran without a trace of effort. His head was held high; he seemed to

be running easily and yet he moved ahead of Brand.

Ben caught a glimpse of Sammy Brand's face as they rounded another bend. The New York boy was worried. He'd start his "kick" very shortly now. Brand liked to lead in the fourth quarter.

With the pain in his chest, Ben Aldridge kept up with the American champion as he let loose after Hansen. The Norwegian fought off his rival step by step. The foreign runner had terriffic speed when he opened up and it was deceiving.

Two yards separated the leaders with Ben Aldridge two more yards behind Brand. Rufe King and O'Hare were out of the race entirely. Watching the two leaders, Ben had forgotten about the colored boy. King was about eight yards behind, laboring hard.

"Stay with them," Bob Delaney had said.

Ben lost another yard to Brand. Going around another bend, he saw the panic in Sammy Brand's face. The boy was cracking up. Try as he might, he could not make up those two yards on the phlegmatic Norwegian. The Brand kick had been beaten off and the kid was through!

Ben Aldridge watched him carefully. He saw Brand's head sag. The bubble had burst. He was still a great runner but his heart wasn't in it. Hansen increased his lead to three and then four yards.

They were halfway through the quarter. Sammy Brand was only finishing out the race. Ben Aldridge dug down. He found a little extra strength and pulled up alongside Brand. The West Side kid stared at him, defeat written in his thin face.

Ben heard the cheer from the balcony. He knew it didn't mean anything. They saw him go past Brand and take out after Hansen, but they knew he couldn't catch the flying Norwegian.

Dip Harris was crouching inside the track as the runners moved past him. Harris had said every man has a great mile in him. Hansen had five yards on him with about a hundred and fifty to go.

Ben Aldridge speculated the distance. It was a big space. He was tired. Every joint in his body ached. Hansen bobbed in front of him like a ghost. He would keep up that pace all the way to the finish line. If he wanted to beat the man he had to move faster. It seemed as if Hansen were a bit closer. Ben Aldridge heard the noise. He had to move faster!

Going around the bend he picked up another yard on the Norwegian. Only three yards separated the two men as they came out into the stretch.

Ben Aldridge threw back his head. He didn't look at Hansen any more. The tape was dead ahead and he had to make it before Hansen got there. He felt his legs wobble but he didn't crack. He was reaching out—pushing himself. It was thirty yards away and then twenty.

He saw the faces on the other side of the tape. Dip Harris and Bob Delaney were there. They were beckoning to him. He was aware for the first time that Hansen was running at his side and no longer in front of him!

He stumbled forward with his lungs about to break. Nobody could beat this cold-blooded Norwegian. Bob Delaney reached out to catch him as he fell. Something brushed his chest.

He lay on the boards with his face on the wood. There was no strength in his body. Dip Harris was trying to pull him to his feet and get a sweat shirt around him.

Hansen was looking down into his face, murmuring something in Norwegian. Ben came to his feet.

"What did he say?" someone asked.

"Congratulations!" a voice answered.

Ben Aldridge stared. Bob Delaney was grinning at him.

"You took the guy," Delaney yelped. "By a foot!"

Ben heard the time as they were helping him toward the dressing room. It was four minutes, four seconds—even! A world mark! He looked up into the balcony. The girl in the red coat was standing up. He couldn't see her face.

Bob Delaney came into the dressing room as Ben came out of the shower.

"A guy from Rawton College to see you, Ben," he said. "He's got a contract in his hand and the pen out."

Ben Aldridge sat down on the rubbing table. He grinned foolishly.

"What'll I do with him?" Delaney asked.

"Send him in," Ben murmured. "I've been waiting for him a long time!"

Trust a Jay to Find Easy Pickings

THE WILD PACK

By

JIM KJELGAARD

Author of "Phantom of the Beeches," etc.

THE gray light of early dawn was filtering through the thickly leaved branches of the beech trees when the blue jay awoke. For the space of two minutes he sat very still in the cluster of leaves at the end of a swinging branch that he had chosen as his night's roost. Nothing else moved in the tree, there was nothing near or about to indicate a suddenly striking hawk or owl. The blue jay hopped from the leaves on to the naked branch that bore them and started preening his feathers.

He stopped suddenly, his toilet unfinished, to listen. Then he relaxed. The big beech in which he had roosted grew almost on the rim of a steep slope that pitched into a little rock-bound valley. And, quartering up that slope, came the wild pack.

The blue jay watched them speculatively, half tempted to fly down and abuse them with his usual torrent of epithets. He had known the wild pack, as a unit, for three months. Before that he had known the individuals that composed the pack. There was the long-haired shepherd bitch whose duty it had been to see that her master's two dozen lean sheep did not stray. There was the chunky, brindle bull terrier that had raced about the farm by the big tamarack swamp. There was a gray mongrel, that had been a child's pet. Lastly, there were the wire-haired brute

whose mother had been a hound and who had been fathered by a savage airedale, and the great, tawny hound.

When their masters had left their backwoods farms to enter the armed forces or seek profitable war-time employment in distant cities, the dogs had been abandoned with the farms. They had reverted to the wild, formed themselves into a pack that was a terrible machine for destruction.

The blue jay fixed his eyes on the tawny hound. He was an enormous creature, lean and hard, with a compact chest that bespoke great endurance and long, powerful jaws. He walked a little ahead and a little to one side of the pack, his long ears almost brushing the ground as he turned to look contemptuously at the airedale. The sullen anger deep within him was evident in his bristled neck and stiff tail.

The airedale, a massive brute as heavy as the hound, stalked rigidly just ahead of the long-haired shepherd. His eyes were red and glaring. Lips were drawn back from long fangs. The blue jay hopped to a lower branch, the better to see.

The hound, the last recruit of the wild pack, had been drawn to it by loneliness. But basically his was a solitary nature. When hunting with a man—who had given him the companionship he desired—he had tolerated no other dogs. Fierce and pitiless on the trail, a wonderful hunter, he knew only contempt for the clumsy methods of the pack. Had he been able to step in as leader he would have been contented. But the airedale was unwilling to be led.

The hound had stayed with the pack hoping to win the favor of and lead away the long-haired shepherd. But that wily dog was waiting for the battle that must take place between the hound and airedale, and was ready to give her affection to the winner.

THE sun rose over the eastern hills, sprayed the tops of the beeches with its golden gleam. But the massive gray trunks were still in shadow, and the few slender weeds that grew among them waved back and forth as a light breeze played through the forest. Almost under the tree in which the blue jay perched, the bull terrier, a dull brute whose sole interest lay in pulling down and eating whatever game the wild pack brought to bay, curled up at the foot of a tree and slept. The long-haired shepherd and the gray mongrel squatted on their haunches, side by side, watching the tawny hound.

Almost sleepily the hound sat staring off through the rows of trees. He turned his massive, scarred head to look meaningly at the shepherd, and the gray mongrel rose hastily to take another position twenty feet away. The grizzled airedale snapped to his feet, walked over to stand before the shepherd. His head was down, tail stiffly erect.

The hound rose and walked softly straight toward him. Still sitting on her haunches, the long-haired shepherd whined excitedly.

A little unnerved by this silent beast that came so unswervingly, the airedale retreated one step. The hound stopped. His long ears swung as he turned his head to gaze into the forest. He faced the airedale, as though pondering the coming battle and its probable results, and again looked into the forest.

High in the beech tree the blue jay had been hopping up and down the limb in a frenzy of suppressed excitement. It mounted within him, reached the point where his volatile nature could no longer bear such suspense. A half-dozen raucous cries broke from him.

The brindle bull terrier hopped up like a bouncing rubber ball, and his choppy bark announced that he was ready for any trespasser. The gray mongrel whirled about, ready for fight or flight, and the shepherd moved a little closer to the airedale. Standing still, the tawny hound read with his keen nostrils the story of what was taking place. Finding only the usual

scents, he glanced disdainfully up at the blue jay.

But the tension was broken now. The tawny hound swerved at right angles to his former course and trotted forty feet into the forest. He stopped to look back, inviting the shepherd to follow. But the airedale was very close to her, watching her intently.

The tawny hound went his solitary way.

THE blue jay remained for half an hour in the tall beech, disappointed because he had not seen a battle and salving his disappointment by pouring down on the wild pack all the epithets in his talented vocabulary. Tiring of that he flew to forage, and roosted that night in the top of a small hemlock, two miles from the beech. All about other small hemlocks bent and sighed as the wind rustled through their needled branches, and just before dawn the blue jay was frightened into wakefulness by a stone rattling on the ground beneath the tree in which he roosted. He sat very still, straining his eyes into the blackness and trying to identify the author of the sound. He could not. But there was no repetition of the noise, and the blue jay went back to sleep. When dawn crept over the hemlock forest he awoke and saw the buck deer.

Twenty feet from the base of the hemlock the buck was lying in a bed of leaves. His head was resting against his flank. When the blue jay moved he raised it to reveal wide-beamed, craggy antlers that curled back and forward to present a base tine almost ten inches long and four smaller joints that terminated in a Y. The buck's jaws moved rhythmically, his eyes sought and found the blue jay. He lowered his head sleepily. Then, for no apparent reason, he got to his feet and stood facing into the wind.

Motionless as a rock his head was up and his graceful, powerful body was poised for whatever action seemed necessary. He stamped a restless forefoot, and lowered his head as the prevailing wind shifted to the ground. After another minute the buck whirled and leaped into the hemlocks. The blue jay followed his flight by the scraping of branches and the rattle of stones, and looked quizzically after him. Fifteen minutes later the wild pack came in sight.

They were running, following the buck's cold scent of last night. Side by side, the gray mongrel and the airedale had their noses to the ground. The shepherd followed. The brindle bull, with no nose for a trail, bounced happily beside them with tongue lolling from his frog-like mouth. For a moment, in a nest of stones below the hemlock, they lost the trail. But the mongrel picked it up again, and a squealing, drawn-out bark escaped him when he reached the bed that the buck had just vacated. It was followed by the airedale's deeper bay, and the snappish bark of the brindle bull terrier. They swept on, in the direction that the buck had taken.

The blue jay chuckled, and for a moment perched on the hemlock branch speculating whether or not it would be worth his while to follow after and revile the wild pack again. But he was hungry, and there was no food he wanted in the direction they had gone. The blue jay spread his wings and flew through the hemlocks to a small clearing. Wild blackberries grew in abundance there, and the heavy fruit with which they were laden glistened richly in the morning sun. The blue jay flew down to and lit upon a swaying bramble. He plucked and ate a blackberry, and with slow deliberation ate another. When he had had his fill he flew to a tiny mountain rill that wandered through the clearing, drank, and splashed about in the shallow water at its edge.

All morning he wandered about, stopping where he chose to do whatever interested him. He perched high in a huge elm and scolded a fox squirrel that frolicked through its branches. He crouched very

still in the crotch of a spreading black cherry when a goshawk drifted through the forest. At high noon, with the sun directly overhead, the blue jay was back near the hemlock grove.

It was brush country, spotted with huge boulders, and chunks of granite. The blue jay flew into a tall aspen as a great crackling of brush and rattling of stones announced the arrival of some new, unknown thing. From this elevation he gazed steadily toward the place from which the commotion was arising. Presently, for the second time that day, he saw the buck.

THE buck was running recklessly. His tongue lolled from open jaws, and his raspy panting was audible even above the other noise he made. His heaving flanks were lathered with long strips of foam. He stumbled, but regained his balance and ran desperately through the brush, up the little rib of land that rose in its center and down the other side.

The blue jay bent his head in the direction from which the buck had come. Out of the brush, apparently fresh and unwearied, came the tawny hound. He reached the buck's trail, stood over it with one forefoot curled. Then, running fast and true and making no sound he swung away on it. The blue jay chattered excitedly.

Thirty seconds later came the remainder of the wild pack, panting heavily but still running hard. Where the tawny hound's trail joined that of the laboring buck, the airedale paused for one brief second. Then he snarled warningly, and the pack drove on.

The blue jay heard them yelling, just over the ridge. The tawny hound's bay rolled deeply, sent echoes of itself rolling back through the brush. There sounded the lighter, more choppy bay of the airedale, and the yapping of the terrier. The gray mongrel gave vent to his shrill peal, and only the long-haired shepherd was silent.

The blue jay left the tree, flew up and over the ridge to where the buck had finally been brought to bay.

The buck was backed against one of the huge boulders. Two jutting wings of the rock formed protection for his flanks, and his lowered head presented a bristling array of pointed antlers. Braced against the boulder, his hind legs were spread wide apart. His right front foot was curled, and he lowered it to scrape the ground. The blue jay perched in a small aspen, and turned his crested head to look at the various members of the wild pack.

The raging airedale stalked stiff-leggedly back and forth, six feet from the embattled buck's ready antlers. He did not take his eyes from the cornered deer, but the swelling rage that flowed through him was directed solely at the tawny hound, the outcast that had dared pursue quarry marked by the wild pack as its own. But the hound sat aloof, staring at the buck as though the pack were not there. Whining eagerly, the tense little bull terrier edged forward and awaited his chance to attack.

There was a sudden scraping of pebbles and rattle of stones as the buck launched a short, savage charge. The airedale stood straight up, and flung himself sideways as the hundred and sixty-pound deer brushed past him. The tawny hound turned his head to watch, faintly amused by this fool that would put himself in danger and get nothing for it.

Mouth happily agape and eyes half-closed, the bull terrier bounced in. Heedless of danger, confident of the power in his vise-like jaws, he flung his stocky self straight at the buck's nose. The buck lifted his head, struck once with his right hoof, and the bull terrier catapaulted away from the boulder. He brought up against a clump of brush, quivered, and lay still.

The blue jay had not seen the hound move. But when the buck returned to his niche in the boulder the tawny hound was hanging to his throat, twisting his body like a rawhide whip to escape the buck's

lashing feet. The buck's eyes rolled. Saliva dripped from his tongue. A single, agonized bawl escaped him. He reared, dragging the tawny hound's fore quarters clear off the ground. Then he fell heavily. All four feet waved frantically, and he threshed insanely about.

But the tawny hound still clung tightly to his throat, grinding his wolf-like teeth deeper. Flecks of blood spattered against the boulder. Then the hound's teeth pierced the jugular, and the buck's life blood bubbled out in a red, rich flow that left a dark puddle on the ground. He lay still.

Unruffled, turning almost sleepy eyes on the airedale, the tawny hound placed both forefeet on the side of the quarry that he had slain. The gray mongrel whined uneasily, and the shepherd looked anxiously toward the airedale. His front paws on the dead buck, the hound stood motionless as the boulder itself. Then his cold eyes opened wide and he whipped squarely about to meet the airedale's furious attack.

They met shoulder to shoulder, on the pebbly ground just before the dead buck. The airedale's raking teeth snapped, and red stained the tawny hound's side. A fierce, bubbling little stream of snarls rippled continually from the fighting airedale's throat. The silent hound gave way.

He came back, opening his cavernous jaws and closing them on the airedale's front paw. High above the airedale's fighting snarls came his squeal of pain. He leaped away on three legs, and for a second a little space separated the two. But pain and hurt meant little now. The long-standing feud had at last become open battle in which one must die.

Again they met, the wiry airedale rushing in to leave a gaping wound in the hound's flank. Still fighting silently, still the rawhide and rubber thing that had escaped the slashing feet of a buck deer, the hound arched his body to escape, and almost at the same second swerved to sink his fangs into the side of the airedale's neck. The airedale tried desperately to pull away, and bent his head to slash the hound's front foot. His bubbling snarls became scarcely audible gasps as the relentless pressure of the hound's long jaws shut off his wind. He wriggled and thrashed. But when he pulled away the flesh over which the hound had closed his jaws remained within them.

The airedale reeled unsteadily, a little stream of blood spouting from his torn neck and one leg useless beneath him. But the savage heart that beat within him had mounted to a full pitch of fury. With all the strength that remained in his eighty-pound body he hurled himself straight at the tawny hound. It was a hammer blow, a lunging thud that hurled the hound back. From his perch in the aspen the blue jay saw him bring sharply up against the head of the dead buck. As though it were a live thing, or a sword in the hand of a swordsman, the ten-inch tine of the buck's antler slid into the hounds' flank and out the other side.

The airedale rose weakly, walked over to a tree and collapsed against it. For a moment the hound lay still. Then he got up and pulled himself off the antler. He did not whimper or cry out. Slowly he walked to and mounted the dead buck. For a moment he sat there, watching the gray mongrel and the long-haired shepherd sneak together off through the brush. The tawny hound lay down with his long head on his front paws.

The blue jay waited for nearly an hour. Finally, hesitantly and ready for instant flight should danger show itself, he flew down to and perched upon the bloodied tine that had pierced the tawny hound. He looked inquisitively at the drying blood and at the dead dog.

The blue jay clucked wonderingly to himself, as though pondering all the underlying forces that had brought about so much death. Hopping to the dead buck's shoulder, he gorged himself on the rich, warm venison.

In our next issue—SHORT STORIES—March 25th

A long novelette of a favorite trouble-hunter . . . . . .

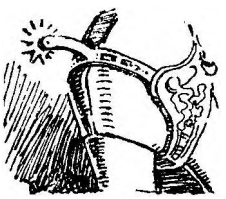
Hashknife Keeps a Faith

W. C. TUTTLE

In the flaming crucible of the South Seas . . . . . .

ALL BLOOD IS RED

Jackson V. Scholz



Revolt in Paradise

That bank clerk become bandit, "the Black Wolf," is on the trail . . . . .

SEABURY QUINN

Pulp is ammunition, too.

WAR CHUTE

Clay Perry

All action is . . . . . .

Before the Monsoon

EDWARD DALY

Fewer pages by government order to save paper for war—but the same number of stories in each issue by adjustment of type.

The Naval Intelligence Man Was Live Bait, Stonkered, Live Bait at That. It All Happened in Australia!

LIVE BAIT

By NEIL MARTIN

Author of "Headlines for Henry," etc.

AS HE shivered from the dank chill, Frisco Ed McKinney reflected gloomily that there were lots better places in which to spend one's leave than a morgue. He reflected further that he had no one but himself to blame. Having come down from the Northern Territory, prepared to dress up and go places, he had found war-time Sydney disappointing, what with rationing of everything that made life worth-while for a fellow with money in his jeans. So he had asked for an assignment. And the big fellows of Naval Intelligence could find nothing better for him to do than to stand a three-day vigil in the mortuary of Sydney Hospital, waiting for a suspect who might never come.

For the hundredth time that day he applied his right eye to a spy hole in the partition and peered over the bleak, cheerless room beyond, where an elderly attendant sat in a chair beside the outer door, his face buried in the sporting pages of the *Herald*. All day long people had been coming in to view the body on the slab, as they had been coming for the past two days. Now the stream of visitors had stopped, for the afternoon was drawing to a close.

"Business is over for the day, I reckon," McKinney remarked. He turned away from the spy hole and grinned sourly at his two

fellow watchers. "Christopher! If they keep me much longer in this dump they'll need a snow plow to get me out."

Inspector Clarke's faded blue eyes glinted humorously behind thick lenses. "Quite a change, all right, after one has been used to the tropics," he drawled, passing the tip of a forefinger over his scraggly blond mustache. "Takes the starch out of a bloke, what?"

McKinney drew his coat closer about him. "I'll say it does. Me, I didn't sign up to fight this man's war settin' around in a damned ice-box."

He resented the fact that he was, temporarily, under the orders of this bespectacled little runt, who looked like someone's bookkeeper, even though he knew that Clarke had an enviable record with the Commonwealth Police, the Australian counterpart of the American F. B. I.

He looked across the room and grinned at Inspector Quigley, of the city force, sitting vast and immovable in a corner; a regular Gibraltar of a man, with a wide, humorless face on which lay an expression of bored resignation that came from half a lifetime of pounding the hot pavements of Sydney.

Retired in the late thirties, Quigley had been recalled for the duration. McKinney liked the grim old policeman, more than ever since he had learned that Quigley was supporting three motherless grandchildren whose father had been missing since the fall of Singapore.

"I didn't hear you sayin' a thing, old-timer," McKinney remarked.

Quigley removed from between his lips a scant inch of cigar impaled upon a sharpened matchstick. His sharp, little gray eyes glinted beneath his overhanging brows, like twin lights in a cavern, as he drawled:

"What would you want me to be sayin'?"

"Quiet!" Clarke warned suddenly.

THE legs of the attendant's chair scraped on the concrete floor as he rose and folded his paper. Peering through the spy hole, McKinney saw a woman standing hesitantly in the outer doorway.

"My husband has been—been missing for several days," McKinney heard her say. "I've been wondering—" Her voice trailed off, and she fumbled in her handbag and produced a tiny square of linen with which she dabbed at her eyes.

"You wish to view the body, Madame?" the attendant suggested.

"Yes, if it is permitted," she replied in a scarcely audible whisper.

"Very well, Madame," the man said, adding, "I must warn you that it won't be nice. The face, you see, has—er—been badly mutilated. I'd suggest that you view his clothing and belongings first."

He opened a steel locker and drew forth a man's gray suit mounted on a hangar, then laid out underwear, shoes and socks.

"There was nothing in his pockets," the man declared. "Do you recognize these clothes?"

"The suit looks like the one my husband was wearing when he left home," she declared. "Still, I'm not sure."

The attendant shrugged resignedly. "I suppose I'll have to let you see the body, then. Take a good grip on yourself, now," he warned.

Stepping to the side of the slab he lifted the upper end of the sheet, revealing the mutilated face of the corpse.

"O!" The woman gasped, swayed, seemed about to collapse, until the attendant caught her and eased her gently to a chair, where she sagged limply, her face chalk-white beneath its make-up.

"I'll get you a glass of water," the attendant promised. He hurried from the room.

As he passed through the doorway, the woman jerked to her feet. Stepping to the locker, she explored the dead man's clothing in frantic haste, feeling in the lining of the coat, the waist and cuffs of the trousers. She was groping inside the shoes when the returning footfalls of the attendant sounded in the corridor. She flew back to the chair and resumed her former position.

"Thanks!" She waved aside the proffered water. "I feel better now. I was a bit shocked, naturally." She sat erect in the chair and looked fearfully toward the sheeted figure. "Tell me; has he a toe missing from his left foot—the big toe?"

The attendant lifted one end of the sheet and shook his head. "No toes missing, Madam."

The woman rose and smoothed her skirts. "Then," she declared, "it is not my husband

He lost his left big toe in the last war. I'm sorry for having troubled you. Good afternoon!"

Behind the screen, Clarke stroked his mustache and grinned triumphantly at McKinney and Quigley.

"This," he declared, "is it. You know what to do, Lieutenant?"

McKinney nodded. "I'm on my way."

THEY left the hospital by way of a side door, with McKinney in the lead. As he reached the front of the building, he saw the woman crossing Macquarie Street toward Martin Place. He hurried after her until he was about a hundred feet behind, then cut down his stride and maintained his distance while he studied the woman.

She was short and slender, well past thirty, if he was any judge. She was inconspicuously attired in neutral tones that seemed to blend with her surroundings. Only for her hat, a light straw affair with a bow of colored ribbon on the left side, the whole partly covered by a blue veil, he might easily have lost her in the crowd.

He waited until she reached the south side of Martin Place before he started across Macquarie Street. He crossed over then, looked back and saw Clarke coming a dozen feet behind him. Quigley was striding along on the east side of Macquarie Street with the ponderous dignity of an elephant in slow motion. Behind him a police car, a plain, black sedan, without any distinguishing marks, and with a plainclothes driver behind the wheel, came crawling close to the curbing.

"Just another flatfoot pounding a beat," McKinney thought as he watched Quigley pause at the edge of the sidewalk and look both ways before starting to cross toward Martin Place. He sticks out like a sore thumb." He waited for Clarke to come even with him and added, "All we need now is the police band and a couple of flags to have a parade. Christopher! That big lug, Quigley, is a dead give-away."

"Carry on, Lieutenant!" Clarke ordered curtly, falling back to let McKinney go ahead of him. "Keep your eye on the ball."

McKinney went on, feeling rather self-conscious. In his wrinkled blue serge suit, his deep-water cap and unpolished shoes, coupled with his untrimmed black hair and the three-day stubble on his cheeks and chin, he was supposed to look like a merchant seaman just ashore from a convoy drag. That had been Clarke's idea. But McKinney realized that he looked too good to be true.

He drifted west along Martin Place a dozen paces behind the woman, wishing he'd been sent with Bill Tuck and their Stevens Island blackfellow, Chappie, to the big timber country of southwest Australia, where Tuck had gone to investigate a series of mysterious bush fires that had devastated several hundred square miles of timber land. Certainly, he thought, he'd be a lot happier in the out-back, for war-time Sydney bored him, with its boarded-up shop windows, where one might inspect dwindling displays of merchandise through foot-square apertures; the big buildings barricaded with sandbags; the automobiles equipped with cumbersome charcoal-gas appliances to save vital gasoline for the fighting forces; and, worst of all, the new government "austerity eating" rule, which decreed a maximum expenditure of five shillings for a dinner.

"No, sir," he summed up, "this burg ain't what she used to be."

He trailed the woman along Martin Place, crossing Phillip Street, then Elizabeth, Castlereagh and Pitt. As she paused in front of the General Post Office and opened her handbag, Clarke brushed past and motioned to McKinney to fall behind. The little inspector was close behind the woman when she turned left and entered the post office.

McKinney relaxed. Clarke had the ball now, and the shadowing of the woman was, for the present, his particular job. McKinney was amused at the little man's trick of making himself inconspicuous. Quigley, too, for all his vast bulk, had the knack of merging with a crowd. Glancing at his own reflection in the glass panel of a revolving door, McKinney frowned, realizing that his own appearance verged on the theatrical.

"Dressin' me up like a movin' picture sailorman!" he mused angrily. "If they hung a card on my chest readin' 'Fake,' it'd be right in keepin' with this damned rig I'm wearin'. Looks to me like they want that jane to tumble to me followin' her."

AS HE studied the sprinkling of uniforms among the passing crowd, Australian, American, Dutch and a scattering of Free French, he wondered how much was known to the public of the latest enemy attempt upon the peace and security of the Commonwealth.

So far, everything was strictly hush-hush. The fact that a corvette had been blown up alongside a wharf at the Naval Depot, on Garden Island, and the wharf itself reduced to kindling, was still hidden behind the veil of censorship. Neither was anything being said or written about the mysterious explosion which had almost sunk a destroyer at the man-of-war anchorage, in Farm Cove, or the blowing up of a tugboat directly beneath the great harbor bridge.

The three explosions had thrown the harbor commissioners into a state of nervous jitters. Too well they remembered the two Jap midget submarines which had crept into the harbor one morning in June, 1942, bent on a mission of destruction. The fact that they succeeded only in sinking a decrepit ferry boat, being used as a naval depot ship, before they were themselves blasted out of existence with depth charges, didn't obscure the supposition that what had happened once could happen again, and perhaps with better success.

A few days following the destruction of the tugboat, the body of a man had been found in a clump of ornamental shrubbery in the Botanic Gardens which, together with the Domain, encloses the man-of-war anchorage of Farm Cove on the east, south and west. Because the man had been stabbed to the heart, and his face mutilated, evidently in hope of making identification impossible, the police were at first disposed to regard the crime as a revenge murder. That is, until certain documents were found sewed in the lining of the murdered man's coat.

One of these was a tracing on Japanese mulberry paper of the official chart of Port Jackson, as Sydney Harbor is known among seafarers. This suggested that the dead man might have been connected with the explosions, for a series of lines on the chart, one slanting north and south between Robertson's Point, on the north shore, and Elizabeth Point, just west of Rushcutter's Bay, on the south side of the harbor, the second drawn between Kirribilli and Macquarie points, both lines enclosing an area that included Fort Denison, on Pinchgut Island, and Garden Island, site of the Royal Australian Naval Depot.

A second paper found in the lining of the dead man's coat was covered with chemical symbols, to which were added several hundred words in some obscure code. A third paper was covered with sketches, hurriedly drawn. Likewise, the dead man's fingers were stained with certain acids used in the manufacture of explosives, while traces of coal tar were found under his fingernails. All of which convinced Intelligence that the enemy had, at last, discovered an ingenious method of striking from within.

Taken to Sydney Hospital, only a short distance from where the body was discovered, the murdered man was placed in the morgue, awaiting identification. The authorities were confident that a positive identification of the dead man would, eventually, lead to those responsible for the explosions. That was the reason for McKinney's three-day vigil in the mortuary. And now that the woman had appeared, they had been given their first lead.

McKINNEY saw Clarke emerge from the post office. A minute later the woman appeared and turned west. Crossing to the west side of George Street, she continued north and halted again outside the entrance to Wynyard Station.

Standing on the corner of Martin Place, McKinney watched the woman open her handbag, raise it to the level of her eyes and go through the motions of powdering her nose. He caught the flash of a mirror in the afternoon sunlight, and surmized that she was looking over her back trail, before taking the underground railway.

"Close up, Lieutenant," Clarke muttered at McKinney's elbow. "You're too far behind her now."

"I'm worried for fear she'll get onto me," McKinney said.

"What of it?" the little inspector retorted blandly, adding, "Hop along now, like a good fellow. She may be planning to take the underground."

McKinney started along the east side of George Street, keeping his eyes on the woman. As he came opposite the station

entrance, she snapped her handbag shut and continued north. He was sure now that she was heading for the Circular Quay, to take a ferry. But when she reached Bridge Street she stopped on the corner of Young, apparently waiting for someone.

McKinney eased around the corner of Loftus Street and waited. He saw a man emerge from a shipping office building on the south side of Bridge and cross diagonally toward the corner where the woman was standing. He looked like a clerk in one of the shipping offices, for the upper part of his face was hidden by a green eye shade, and he wore black alpaca protectors over his shirt sleeves. As he stepped up on the sidewalk, the woman dropped her handbag. The man retrieved it, returned it to her with a bow and passed on up Young Street.

The police car came crawling down Loftus Street and stopped short of the corner. Clarke alighted and came over to McKinney. The police chauffeur pulled into the curb opposite and parked.

"She's standin' on the corner above," McKinney reported. He told about the man who had recovered the woman's handbag. Clarke grinned.

"That's the ticket, young-fella-me-lad! Don't let anything escape your notice. Very often, little things like that have big results." He stepped to the corner, peered around a parked car at the woman and came back to McKinney's side. "Her name, by the way," he announced, "is Martha Herren."

McKinney stared. "How did you find that out?"

"At least," Clarke smiled, "that's the name she gave in asking for a letter in the G. P. O."

McKinney frowned. "Seems to me we're makin' a lot of motions like coppers and gettin' nowhere. Why in hell don't you just go ahead and take her in? You could sweat the rest out of her."

"But my dear fella," Clarke objected, "this isn't America. With us, a suspected person has certain rights, which must not be violated—not even to obtain a confession. Sweating? My word! It definitely isn't done, y'know."

"So we've got to keep on tailin' her to hellangone?"

"Quite so!" Clarke declared imperturbably. "For one thing, we haven't got as much as a smidgin of certainty that she's connected in any way with the person or persons responsible for those loud bangs. She might be what you Yanks call a misery chiseler—a damned appropriate name, by the way. She might have fancied the dead 'un had some money or valuables she could claim by posing as his wife."

"Nuts!" McKinney retorted. "If she wasn't huntin' the papers that dead guy had sewed in the lining of his coat, I'll eat a buzz saw."

He stepped to the corner and looked up the street. The man with the eye-shade was now standing on the corner with the woman. As McKinney watched, he handed her a slip of paper, which she thrust inside her handbag. Then he turned away and crossed to the south side of Bridge Street.

"About forty-five, I'd say," Clarke, now at McKinney's side, was checking the man's description. "Sandy hair, thin in front. Eyes, probably blue. Strong mouth and chin. High cheek-bones. Well, apparently she got what she's been waiting for. She's on her way again. Get going, me lad!"

"What if she hops a tram?" McKinney asked.

"Why," Clarke beamed, "you just hop right along behind her, what?"

"Okay!" McKinney nodded. He headed up Bridge Street half a block behind the woman. When she boarded a southbound tramcar at the corner of Phillip Street, he crowded aboard a second before the conveyance started up again.

As he past his two pence to the woman conductor, who wore a badge indicating that her husband was with the fighting forces, he looked over the interior of the tram and saw that his quarry had taken a cross seat facing forward. Evidently, he decided, she hadn't noticed him.

"And that," he told himself, "is a wonder, the way I've been crowdin' her heels ever since she left the hospital. If she wouldn't get on to me in these trick clothes, she must be nearsighted, or something."

The tram rolled south to Hunter Street and then cut over to Elizabeth. As it ran past Hyde Park, McKinney looked behind and saw the police car half a block to the rear, keeping an even distance from the tram. Glancing toward the woman, he saw

that she was again going through the motions of powdering her nose, while she studied her fellow passengers in the mirror of her handbag.

Presently the tram swung west into Eddy Avenue and stopped before the Central Railway Station. McKinney held his seat until the woman alighted. He watched her step up on the sidewalk, where she was immediately swallowed in the crowd. Fearing he would lose her, he hurried from the tram and pushed his way along the crowded sidewalk until he saw her hat bobbing through the station entrance.

He was about to follow, when Clarke brushed past him and nudged him significantly with his elbow. McKinney drew back to the edge of the sidewalk and let the little inspector go on. Glancing toward the corner, where the police car was now parked, he saw Quigley moving with the crowd toward the station entrance.

An hour passed. The daylight faded and the brown-dimmed street lights came on. Trains arrived and departed. McKinney began to wonder if the woman had left by train. He was heartily sick of the job, for shadowing a woman wasn't at all to his liking. Besides, he was ravenously hungry, as his last meal had been breakfast that morning.

Presently Clarke emerged from the station and joined him. "You can take it easy for a while," the inspector said. "She's sitting in the waiting room now, probably waiting for some one to arrive by train. She called someone over the telephone from one of the booths. Quigley's got her taped now."

"What'll I do if she manages to give me the slip?" McKinney asked.

"You'll drop the bundle," Clarke advised. "It won't matter, because we'll be carrying on."

McKinney considered the other's statement. "Dropping the bundle" meant giving up, and he began to suspect that the inspector was offering him an easy way out. He glanced toward the station entrance and started when he saw a familiar-looking hat pass through a dim rectangle of light.

"Put on your false whiskers again," he warned. "Here she comes."

Clarke stooped and pretended to busy himself with the charcoal-gas contraption mounted on the rear end of a parked car.

"Keep your eye on the ball," he warned in an undertone.

The woman passed within a dozen feet of them, stepped off the sidewalk and started across Eddy Avenue toward Belmore Park, her trim figure merging with the semi-darkness.

"Don't lose sight of her," Clarke enjoined. Straightening, he hurried toward the police car.

Fearing he would lose her in the darkness, McKinney started across the avenue. He reached the middle of the car tracks, just as a tram started from in front of the station. At the same instant a man came from behind, brushed past him and then turned. Too late, McKinney saw the blackjack in the stranger's hand. Instinctively, he recoiled and put up his fists, suddenly aware that a second man was at his back. Then he was pushed violently from behind into the arc of the descending blackjack, which thudded against the side of his head and dropped him squarely in the path of the oncoming tramcar.

MCKINNEY didn't quite lose consciousness, although the blow shook him to his heels. He was vaguely aware of a confused shouting, of the tram stopping with a grinding of brakes. He felt himself lifted, borne for a short distance and laid down again. Then someone said:

"Give him air!"

McKinney sat up, blinked dazedly at the crowd, which was being held back by a uniformed policeman. Quigley was bending over him, offering him water from a paper cup. Brushing the cup aside, McKinney felt the bump rising above his left ear and grunted:

"Hell!"

Quigley grinned, tossed the cup of water into the gutter and helped McKinney to his feet. Turning to the policeman, he said in an undertone:

"Don't bother making a report of this, Davis. We'll take care of it."

He steered McKinney along the block to the police car. As he helped the American into the back seat, Clarke growled from his place beside the driver:

"Why the devil didn't you leave him in

charge of the man on station duty?" He spoke to the chauffeur. "Get on!"

As the police car backed away from the curbing and swung left into Elizabeth Street, Quigley remarked imperturbably:

"They didn't get off in time, I see?"

"They had some trouble with their gas apparatus, Inspector," the police chauffeur volunteered. "There they go now."

Peering ahead, McKinney saw a coupé shoot out of Hay Street, bump across the railway tracks to Elizabeth, swing north and then turn east into Campbell Street. The police car followed.

"That's the same car," Bixby, the police chauffeur declared, keeping his eyes fixed on the red tail light of the coupé as they rolled along Campbell Street. "The shiela got into the car and tried to start it up, while the two blokes were runnin' through the park, after stonkerin' the lieutenant."

"And if they hadn't had some trouble getting started, we'd have lost them," Clarke declared peevishly.

No one spoke as they trailed the coupé along Campbell to Flinders Street, where their quarry turned left again, ran north to Hyde Park, west again along Liverpool Street to George. After they passed Town Hall Station and swung north again into York Street, Bixby said:

"I'll lay a deener they're headin' for the bridge."

"They're slowing," Clarke warned. "Heads down!"

He ducked below the level of the window. Quigley and McKinney followed his example. Bixby rolled the police car past the coupé, which had stopped near the corner of Margaret Street.

"Cliner's gettin' off, Inspector," he reported.

"Pull up at the next corner," Clarke ordered. "I'm getting off. You blokes keep on after the car."

As the police car slowed to a stop, he opened the door and hopped to the ground. McKinney watched him scurry to the sidewalk, turn south and saunter back to where the woman was standing on the corner, waiting, apparently, for a southbound tram.

The coupé came past and mingled with the stream of traffic moving toward the bridge approach. Bixby maneuvered the police car into place three cars behind their quarry. As they speeded up the long ramp and passed beneath the gray granite pylons at the south end of the span, McKinney found himself wondering why enemy agents hadn't so far made an attempt to wreck the bridge, which carries four lines of electric railway traffic, six vehicular traffic lanes and two footways.

Destruction of the span, he told himself, would be a body blow to the Allied cause, for the greater part of Sydney's extensive dock system lay west of the bridge, the wrecking of which would result in the impounding of uncounted tons of vital shipping in Walsh Bay, Darling Harbor and the Paramatta River wharves, forcing a re-routing of supplies for the men fighting in the Solomons and New Guinea.

This realization of what could happen made him suddenly impatient with police routine. Turning to Quigley, he said:

"Why don't you just grab those guys and run 'em in? That would save all this damned pussyfootin'."

"And have the higher-ups take warning and run to cover?" Quigley retorted blandly. "These blokes are only small fry. It's the big ones we're after."

"And it may take weeks before you catch up with 'em," McKinney argued. "In the meantime there's no tellin' how much hell they'll raise."

"That's true," Quigley admitted. "You never can be sure of anything in this police game."

McKinney craned his neck and tried to see the coupé, now four cars ahead in the traffic lane. The evening rush was at its height, and long lines of private cars, commercial vehicles, army trucks, buses and electric trams were streaming across the bridge toward North Sydney.

They passed between the pylons at the north end of the span and rolled down the long ramp into north town. The traffic began to thin out as homing cars scattered in all directions.

"Watch out you don't lose that car, Tom," Quigley warned.

"No bloody fear, Inspector," Bixby returned confidently. "I'd know that turnout anywhere."

There was now only one car between them and the coupé. Presently it turned into a side street and they were alone with

their quarry, which led the way through North Sydney, through Pymble and St. Ives into the open country. As the coupé swung off the highway into a side road, Bixby switched off the dimmed headlamps of the police car.

"This road leads to Pitwater," he declared. "It's a short cut to Broken Bay. Joins the highway again just south of Bushranger's Hill, above Palm Beach."

There was no other car in sight now, only the red tail light of the coupé winking through the darkness a few hundred yards ahead. They rounded a curve and suddenly found themselves outlined in the glaring headlights of a car coming from the opposite direction. As it roared past at an eighty-mile clip, Quigley growled:

"That bloke gave them a good dekko at us, blast him!" He swore under his breath as the tail light suddenly winked out. "There! They've taken a derry to us."

"They turned off, Inspector," Bixby reported, slowing for an intersection. "There they go!" He pointed along a tree-shaded road and swung the police car in pursuit. "What about it?"

"Reckon we'll have to take 'em in now," Quigley said resignedly. "They're onto us now, so we'd better pull 'em in before they get to their pals."

The police car shot forward in pursuit along the narrow road. The mask was off now. Foot by foot, it cut down the lead of the coupé, until only a few yards intervened between the two cars.

Suddenly the rear-view panel of the coupé crashed outward. Then the darkness was lanced with flashes of orange flame, while the staccato hammering of a machine-gun blended with the roaring exhausts of the speeding cars.

The windscreen of the police car splintered, fell inward with a tinkle of broken glass. Bixby slumped forward against the steering wheel. Quigley half rose, then toppled over on McKinney. The next instant the car swerved, crashed into a tree, turned over on its side and burst into flames, with its wheels still revolving.

FOR some minutes McKinney lay half dazed on the floor boards, crushed down by the weight of Quigley. He heard the other car accelerate and go roaring away into the night. Then his nostrils caught a whiff of burning cloth, and he pushed Quigley aside, his mind cleared by the realization that the front of the car was ablaze.

Working in a frenzy of haste, he forced open the upper door, caught Quigley by the coat collar and dragged him free. Laying him beside the road, well out of range of a possible explosion, he ran back to the car and hauled Bixby from the blazing vehicle. Pulling off his coat, he used it to beat the fire from the driver's clothing, then dragged him away from the car and laid him beside the inspector.

Examining the men's injuries in the light from the burning car, he saw that Quigley was merely stunned. Bixby had a bullet in his shoulder, his face was cut by flying glass and there was an ugly bruise on his forehead from violent contact with the steering wheel.

McKinney was using his handkerchief to bind the wound in Bixby's shoulder when Quigley sat up with a jerk, stared for a minute at the burning car and then looked helplessly at the unconscious chauffeur.

"How is he?" he asked.

"Bullet in his shoulder," McKinney told him. "We've got to get him to a doctor."

"Aye! That's right." The inspector came shakily to his feet. "I remember we passed a house about a quarter of a mile back. Maybe they'll have a telephone." He started to walk away, then paused and added, "Those blokes had a machine-gun."

McKinney nodded. "That's right. Hell, this country's gettin' plumb up-to-date. Just like home, by Christopher!"

He knelt beside Bixby and watched Quigley out of sight. Having done all he could for the wounded man, he lay down beside him and tried to relax, for he was trembling now from the reaction. Fifteen minutes later he heard Quigley's slow footfalls, and saw the inspector's big frame looming through the darkness.

"Did you find a phone?" McKinney asked.

Quigley nodded. "I did, that. Dinkum luck. I got headquarters. They'll have an ambulance out here soon." He sat down on the grassy shoulder of the road.

McKinney lay back again and closed his eyes. He felt baffled, believing he was now off the case for good. Only a few hours

before he had wished himself with Bill Tuck; but now the idea didn't appeal to him at all, for he hated to admit defeat. And defeat this certainly was, for their quarry had eluded them. To hunt them now, among the one million, three hundred thousand persons that made up Sydney's population would, he felt, be like hunting a needle in a haystack.

NEARLY three quarters of an hour passed before the ambulance arrived. McKinney helped to lift Bixby into the vehicle and then climbed in with Quigley. Then the ambulance rushed them back to the city.

Because he was unhurt, McKinney didn't go with them to Sydney Hospital, but went on to headquarters, knowing that he would be required to make a personal report of the incident. As he entered the building, the police operator called him to the telephone.

"It's Inspector Clarke," the police operator informed him. "He wanted to speak with Inspector Quigley, but he says you'll do."

McKinney took the receiver and called, "Hello!"

"I'm calling from Manly," Clarke's voice came over the wire. "What happened?"

In a few words, McKinney told him. "Bixby's really knocked out," he added. "But Quigley was just stunned. He should be in any minute now."

"I haven't time to wait," Clarke said. "I want you to take a message for him. Ready?"

McKinney picked up a pencil and drew a scratch pad to him. "Shoot!"

"The woman took a tram back to the Central Station," Clarke reported in his precise manner. "She waited there until the 7:20 train arrived from Melbourne, when she was joined by a man whom I recognized as Eric von Werner, formerly employed as a chemist by the Shell Oil Company in Sandakan, Borneo. They took a tram together from the station and rode to the Circular Quay, where they boarded a Manly ferry. They are now aboard the Palm Beach bus."

"Got it all," McKinney said. "Anything else?"

"Tell Inspector Quigley I'll leave word for him at the police station at Palm Beach."

"Want me to come over?" McKinney asked.

Clarke laughed. "Hardly! You've served your purpose. Everything worked out as I figured it would."

"As you figured—" McKinney paused, the suspicion which had been growing in the back of his mind confirmed by the little inspector's statement. "Say, are you tryin' to tell me you've been usin' me for a come-on?"

"Quite so!" Clarke confessed. "I wanted the woman to take a derry to you and get the wind up. She spotted you, telephoned her pals from the Central Station. They came along and tried to do you in—"

"Usin' me for bait!" McKinney interrupted. "I've got a damned good mind to go over there and lay you across my knees."

"Keep your hair on," Clarke advised. "I can't explain now—the bus is about to leave. Ta-ta." The click of the receiver sounded in McKinney's ear.

"Everything worked out as *you* figured it would!" McKinney growled sarcastically. "Like hell, it did!" He slammed the receiver back in place and strode resentfully into the inspector's office.

Controlling his anger, he seated himself before the desk and scribbled his report, which he placed with Clarke's message under a paper weight in the center of the blotter, where Quigley would be sure to see it. Then he leaned back in the chair and counted his money.

He had a little wad of one-pound notes, and about ten shillings in change, enough to see him through for a week, if necessary. Drawing his Webley automatic, he checked the magazine and returned the weapon to his shoulder holster. He reflected now that what he was about to do might be construed as insubordination. But, seeing that Clarke hadn't ordered him definitely to lay off, he believed that he could get by without being charged with disobedience.

HE NEVER had been quite satisfied with his present assignment, and from the first had resented Clarke's assumption of authority. It didn't seem right that a naval intelligence officer should be subordinate to a policeman. So far, his record was

good. His first assignment, earlier in the war, when he and Bill Tuck and Chappie, their Stevens Island native, had lifted the inventor, Ridgeley, right out of Japanese headquarters in Salamua, had earned them a citation, as had their success in blocking an enemy attempt to destroy the desert road. Compared with those jobs, the present one looked like peanuts; that is, it had seemed like an insignificant chore until they had blundered into the sweep of the machine-gun a while before. And now, just when his interest in the case was fully aroused, Clarke was easing him out.

"Like hell, he is!" he growled, jerking to his feet.

He walked out of the inspector's room and out of the building. He paused on the sidewalk, thinking of supper, and saw a man standing against a lamppost on the corner. As he started along the sidewalk, headed toward a restaurant, the man stepped from the shadows and peered intently into his face, as if he were trying to memorize the American's features.

"Lookin' for someone, brother?" McKinney drawled.

"My mistake, Mister!" the other said hastily. He hurried away in advance of McKinney, walking with a curious, wide-legged gait, as if his feet were too heavy for his leg muscles.

"I'll bet a cookie that guy was born and raised in some northwest European country, where they wear those big wooden shoes," McKinney mused as he watched the stranger's plodding gait. "Only a guy who's worn *klompen* as a kid would walk that way. Sailorman, I reckon."

He entered a restaurant and ordered supper. After eating, he headed toward the Circular Quay. Fifteen minutes later, when he boarded the Manly ferryboat, he saw the same man coming along the wharf. When the boat was slipping past Pinchgut Island, on its way down the harbor to Manly Cove, he saw the man coiling down a hawser in the bow.

"Deck hand," he classified him. "Figured he was a sailorman. Still, I can't figure why he'd be hangin' around police headquarters."

He put the matter from his mind, dismissing it as pure coincidence, before the ferryboat pulled alongside Manly wharf, where a Palm Beach bus was waiting. Boarding the conveyance, McKinney paid his fare to the end of the line, settled down in a rear seat and covertly studied his few fellow passengers, eventually classifying them as suburbanites returning home from the city. When the bus started on its eighty-minute run to Palm Beach, Sydney's most exclusive resort, he had forgotten all about the man with the peculiar gait.

The bus stopped at Collaroy, let off a few passengers and continued north. A late moon rising over the Pacific dappled the brush-clad hills lying inland from the coast with patches of light and shadow, lighting up the road behind, where a cyclist pedalled furiously in the rear of the conveyance, scorching along as if his very life depended upon keeping the bus in sight. When the bus stopped at Narrabeen, the cyclist was only a few yards behind. McKinney swore under his breath as he caught a glimpse of the man's face and recognized him as the fellow whom he'd encountered outside police headquarters.

THAT, McKinney reasoned, looked as if he himself were being tailed. The fellow was showing up too often for his presence to be mere coincidence. Still, he couldn't be sure, for there were several passengers on the bus, and the cyclist might be trailing one of these.

When the bus stopped at Newport, the cyclist had dropped so far behind that McKinney could no longer see him. But he surmised that the man was still pedalling in pursuit of the bus. As they continued on to Palm Beach, he speculated with amusement on the possibility of the saboteurs watching the police, while the police were trying to get a lead on them. It could be, he admitted. If they were Germans, they probably had been trained in the most efficient and ruthless training school in the world—the Gestapo. At any rate, fellows who tossed explosives around and used machine-guns to throw cops off their trail weren't likely to be panty-waists.

When the bus pulled into Palm Beach, he alighted and sought a telephone booth. He had planned to go direct to the station house and ask for Clarke's message. Now it occurred to him that the inspector might have left orders that he be given no information.

He found a telephone and put in a call for the police station. When the night man answered, McKinney gave a fair imitation of Quigley's brusque voice.

"Inspector Quigley speaking," he began. "Inspector Clarke said he'd leave a message for me. Let me have it."

"Where are you, Inspector?" the station officer quizzed.

"We're at Newport," McKinney answered. "Had a puncture. We're pushing on as soon as it's fixed. What's the message?"

"Inspector Clarke said for you to come over the road leading back from Bushranger's Hill to the city," the night man declared. "He said he'd be watching out for you. He left here on a bicycle about an hour and a half ago and promised to call in from somewhere up along the highway. But he hasn't called in so far."

"All right!" McKinney said. "When he calls in, tell him we're on our way. Ta-ta!"

Leaving the booth, McKinney hurried back to the bus stop. A bus was just pulling out for the city, by way of the north town suburbs and the bridge. He climbed aboard, paid his fare and was settling in his seat when he saw the cyclist flash past and go scorching up the road toward Bushranger's Hill.

McKinney waited impatiently for the bus to start, for he didn't want to lose contact with the cyclist now. What had begun as a hunch was now a conviction that the fellow was in some way connected with the pair who had attacked him in front of the Central Railway Station some hours before.

When, at last, the bus started on the return journey to the city, McKinney kept his face glued to the window, his eyes searching the road ahead as they passed Pitwater and climbed the winding road past Whale Beach, ignoring the impressive view of the Hawkesbury River estuary unrolling below them in the moonlight. McKinney wasn't interested in scenery; he was looking for a man on a bicycle.

Beyond Bushranger's Hill, the bus rolled for several miles through a stretch of natural bushland. Then McKinney saw the cyclist again. But he was no longer mounted on his wheel. Instead, he was lifting the bicycle over a barred gate. Ducking below the level of the window, McKinney pretended to tie one of his shoelaces until the bus was well past the spot and had rounded a curve in the highway. Then, acting on impulse, he rang for a stop.

When the conveyance slowed, he dropped to the roadway and started back to the curve. The road wound among hills clothed with scrub cassia and wedding bush, with rock lilies and tree ferns in the hollows, and with occasional clumps of yellow gum filling the night air with fragrance. The land to his right was guarded by a woven wire fence, beyond which he could see a small bungalow half hidden in a grove of cypress-pines rising at the foot of a low hill.

Working his way carefully through the brush beside the road, McKinney came in sight of the gate. The cyclist had gone on, possibly to the house, where McKinney saw a light glimmer for an instant, as if a door had been opened and quickly closed again. Emboldened, he walked toward the gate, in the center of which hung a warning sign:

PRIVATE PROPERTY—NO TRESPASSING

He paused in the shadow of a tree when he noticed that the gate was secured by a padlocked chain. He wondered what Quigley would do in such a case. Being a police officer, McKinney reasoned, the inspector would obtain a warrant before venturing further. That was police procedure. But he himself was no policeman, and because of that he gave little thought to the warning notice, assuring himself that all he wanted was a look at the bungalow and its occupants. If one of these proved to be the woman whom he and his companions had trailed over part of Sydney, it was easy to assume that among the others would be the pair who had attacked him outside the Central Railway Station. Perhaps he was following a blind lead. In either case, if he were caught inside the fence, he would find himself out on a limb. Nevertheless, he had to satisfy himself once and for all.

Looking beyond the gate, he saw a narrow, rutted lane winding among the trees toward the bungalow. The ground just inside the fence was planted closely with "wait-a-while" wattles, the hook-like thorns of which formed a protective backing to the woven wire barrier. He saw now that the

only way in which he could gain access to the grounds, without leaving half his clothing on the wattle thorns, was by climbing over the gate.

"Hope to Christopher they don't keep a dog," he prayed. He climbed over the gate, dropped to the ground on the farther side and peered toward the bungalow, listening.

He heard a faint rustling of foliage behind him. Instinctively, he turned his head and saw two men rising from the shadows below the thorn fence, one of them covering him with a revolver.

AS THEY came forward into the moonlight, McKinney recognized the pair as the men who had knocked him in front of the tram. He stiffened as the fellow with the revolver moved quickly forward and jabbed him in the stomach with the muzzle of the weapon.

"So!" the man grunted. "You come again." He jabbed again with his weapon and snarled, "Put up your hands."

McKinney's reaction was swift. His left hand flashed toward the pistol, and his fingers closed like a vise about the frame, jamming the cylinder. In the same instant he made a quarter turn on his heel, brought up his right and let go a pile-driver jab that caught the man squarely on the button.

The second man watched his companion topple to the ground, too stunned, apparently, by the sudden turning of the tables to move. Before he could collect his wits, McKinney grasped him by the coat lapels, jerked him forward and butted him in the face with his head, then kicked his feet from under him and brought him crashing to the ground, half stunned.

Searching him, McKinney relieved him of a revolver, a blackjack and a long-bladed knife. To these, he added the other man's pistol. Stowing the loot about his person, he sat down and waited for his first victim to recover.

When at last the man stirred, McKinney hauled him to his feet and ordered the pair to climb over the gate ahead of him. Once back in the road, he marched them around the curve, where he had alighted from the bus. Satisfied that he was well out of sight of the bungalow, he ordered them to sit down on the grassy shoulder of the road.

For a moment he considered the feasibility of marching them down to Palm Beach and turning them over to the police. But Palm Beach was several miles away, and in between there was a lot of natural bush land with plenty of cover for two men willing to make a sudden dash for freedom. Besides, he thought, Quigley would be along soon, probably with a detail of police. So why take the trouble to herd the prisoners down to Palm Beach when the same result could be accomplished by holding them there beside the road, where he could watch both at the same time?

The fellow whom McKinney had butted inquired with a show of indignation, "What is the meaning of this? Who are you?"

His English was good, and his intonation typically Australian, except that he sounded the "are" too far back in the throat.

"Yess!" the other said explosively. "This iss a damned outrage!"

"You're Germans, aren't you?" McKinney quizzed.

"Hollanders," the first speaker corrected. "We are refugees from Java."

"Well, whatever you are, I'm takin' you in for questioning."

"But why?" the first man argued. "We have done nothing. And you were trespassing."

"You've done plenty," McKinney declared. "For one thing, assaulting an officer. You see, I happen to be the guy you fellows slugged in front of the station. Remember?"

The taller of the pair shook his head. "It was not us. We have not been off the property for a week."

"Nuts!" McKinney snorted. "We've got lots of witnesses who'll identify you. Aside from sluggin' me, you caused us to lose the man we were waitin' for."

"So?" the shorter man showed sudden interest. "Who wass he?"

"A confidence man," McKinney evaded. "You caused us to miss him. That's interference with an officer in discharge of his duty, and adds up to a spell in Long Bay Penitentiary."

The shorter of the pair shrugged and lapsed into silence. McKinney, pistol in hand, stood over them, watching them alertly while he wished that Quigley, or even Clarke would arrive to take charge.

If the prisoners attempted to escape, he wasn't sure that he'd be justified in shooting. And Australian law was very strict about such matters.

HALF an hour passed. McKinney judged that it was well past one o'clock. His prisoners stretched out on the short grass, apparently resigned to their arrest; but he noticed that they never took their eyes off him. Looking west along the road, McKinney saw a lone figure coming around a curve, swinging a stout stick as he strode briskly along the highway.

As the newcomer came closer, McKinney saw that he was an elderly man, his cheeks and chin covered by a graying Vandyke beard. He was clad in a close-fitting cardigan jacket, knickers and heavy hiking shoes and wore on his head a battered felt hat. Coming even with McKinney, he raised his stick in a salute and boomed:

"Beautiful morning, what?"

"It sure is," McKinney conceded, adding, "Are you going anywhere near a telephone, sir?"

"Telephone, what? Why—er—do you ask?" The elderly pedestrian halted and looked curiously over McKinney and his two prisoners.

"I'm an officer of the law, sir," McKinney explained. "If you'll be so kind as to call the Palm Beach police station and tell the night man Lieutenant McKinney is waiting up here with two prisoners, I'll appreciate it very much."

"Prisoners, what?" the elderly stranger exclaimed in a suave Oxford accent. "Why, bless my soul! What have they done, pray?"

"Obstructing justice," McKinney told him.

"My word! That will never do. Obstructing justice—mustn't be allowed to get away with anything like that. Yes, I'll telephone the police station the instant I reach home, which is just half a mile down the road."

He turned as if to go, then swung suddenly about, raised his heavy stick and slashed savagely at McKinney. Caught entirely unprepared, McKinney took the blow squarely across the top of his skull and dropped inertly in the dust of the road, out cold.

ABOVE the throbbing in his head, McKinney could sense rather than hear a rhythmic tapping that was interrupted at intervals with a harsh, metallic scraping and a succession of dull thuds, like the noise made by falling clods of earth, the whole blending with an indistinct murmur of voices.

As the mists cleared from his brain, he tried to open his eyes, but found his eyelids stuck. His face, too, felt strangely wooden. When he lifted a hand to pry his eyelids apart, he discovered that his face, from crown to chin, was caked with dried blood.

His eyes opened at last, he looked about him. He was lying on his back on the earthen floor of what appeared to be a dugout, the ceiling and walls of which were lined with mallee poles. A dozen feet from where he lay a hurricane lantern swung from a stake thrust upright in a heap of freshly turned earth, revealing the head and shoulders of a man rising and falling in slow rhythm as he delved with a pick in the gravelly soil.

At first, McKinney thought he was in a mine. But he could recall no mines in the vicinity of Sydney, except coal mines—and these were north of Broken Bay, closer to Newcastle. Bit by bit the events of the past few hours came back to him, fitting together in his mind like the pieces of a picture puzzle.

Lying there, his eyes on the head and shoulders of the digger rising and falling above the mound of earth, he cursed the overconfidence that had caused him to fall before the elderly pedestrian's swinging stick. Of course, he told himself bitterly, he should have suspected the old bird as being one of the gang. Seeing his pals in a fix, he had put on an act, assuming the character of an elderly gentleman out for a stroll in the bracing midnight air.

Turning his head, McKinney saw an open doorway to his right, caught a limited view of the walls and ceiling of a larger room which, like the place in which he lay, was lined with mallee poles, its ceiling further supported by eucalyptus timbers, from one of which hung an electric light bulb. Someone was saying in a conversational tone:

"You'll understand that we couldn't afford to give up now, when our work is just beginning. For the past twelve years we

have been working toward this day, laying in supplies and establishing our identities as solid citizens of the Commonwealth. We aren't worrying about the police—you and that fellow in there who speaks like a Yankee are the only ones who have penetrated our defenses. I'm puzzled to know how you did it." After a slight pause, the speaker added, "I don't suppose you'd mind telling me, what?"

"Not at all!" Clarke's precise voice drifted to McKinney's ears. "You see, I spotted you at Central Station last evening, and recognized you as Eric von Werner. The rest came automatically."

"Just fancy!" the first speaker exclaimed in a cultured English voice. "And after I'd spent all these years perfecting the character of John Albert Sims. I considered the part—er—fool-proof—so dignified, and so, so English, you know."

"We're not as inefficient as you Nazis would like to believe," Clarke drawled.

Von Werner laughed. "We, too, are pretty efficient, what?"

"That's true," Clarke admitted. "You take care to make no big mistakes; it's the little ones that trip you up."

"Such as, for instance?"

"Why, for one thing, murdering that fellow in the Botanic Gardens and leaving him for us to find. If you'd been wise, you'd have shoved him into the harbor and let the sharks dispose of the body."

"Ah, yes!" von Werner sighed. "I suppose that was one of the little mistakes. But, then, the water in the bight of Farm Cove is very shallow. Had it been otherwise, there would have been no body found in the Botanic Gardens." After a slight pause, he asked, "By the way, did you fellows find any papers on him?"

"Oh, yes," Clarke confessed; and it occurred to McKinney now that the little inspector was keeping the conversation going in order to gain time. "There was a chart of the harbor, a chemical formula of some sort, and certain mechanical sketches. Sewed in the shoulder lining of his coat, they were."

Von Werner said nothing for several minutes. Then he sighed. "Another of those little mistakes, what? We searched him thoroughly, emptied his pockets, in fact. I realize now that we should have taken his coat."

"Mind telling me why he was murdered?" Clarke suggested.

"Not murdered—executed as a traitor," von Werner corrected. "His German name was Carl Thieme, his English alias, Charles Treherne. I had suspected him for some time, having been informed that he was weakening in his devotion to our cause. Soon after he left here last Sunday, I missed certain papers. Luckily, because of my suspicions, I was having him trailed everywhere he went. So it was easy for the execution squad to pick him up."

"And you had his face mutilated to prevent identification," Clarke prodded. "That was another of your little mistakes, because it intensified our interest in the case."

"Because of the nature of our work," von Werner said, "we are very careful to avoid contact with the police. None of us has ever been fingerprinted—that is, outside of Germany. In case one of us should lose his life in the line of duty, there must be no identification that might draw the eyes of the police toward us. We remove such things as tailors' labels and laundry marks from our clothing, the better to hide our identity."

A SHADOW moved across the doorway. Peering from between slitted eyelids, McKinney saw standing on the threshold the elderly man who had struck him down on the road. The man said something in German to the digger, stepped to the edge of the excavation and looked downward. Then he turned and walked back to the outer room.

"Well, Mr. Policeman," McKinney heard him say, "is there anything more you'd like to know before Herr Krause puts you to bed?"

"What about Mac?" Clarke inquired.

"Mac? Oh, I presume you mean that fellow in there. Why, he'll make no further trouble for us. A bit of a tartar, too; but, it seems, my stick was a good deal harder than his skull."

"You mean, he's dead?" Clarke probed.

"Almost," von Werner drawled. "Bad case of concussion. He's barely hanging on. Probably it's best that way — saves us trouble."

"You're planning to bury us alive?" Clarke exclaimed, a note of anger in his voice. "Why not shoot us—"

"Tut-tut!" von Werner interrupted. "Not with all those explosives around us. No, we plan just to knock you on the head, drop you into the hole and cover you up, nice and snug."

"That reminds me," Clarke said, with the air of a man clutching desperately at life, "we've been puzzled about the means used to cause those explosions."

Von Werner chuckled. "I rather thought you would be. It would never occur to your stolid British minds that we should be using a magnetic torpedo small enough to carry in a market bag, what?"

"Flapdoodle!" Clarke snorted. "Don't try to tell me you fellows blew up that corvette with a torpedo that small. My word! I wasn't born yesterday."

"But it's true," von Werner boasted. "You see, it is packed with concentrated T.N.T. That is, the explosive is further treated with certain acids to increase its destructive force fully one hundred per cent. My discovery, by the way."

"And you just drop your torpedo overboard from one of the ferry boats and let her rip?" Clarke prompted.

"Nothing so chancy as that, my dear chap," von Werner laughed. "First of all, our torpedo is inert until it strikes the water. The pressure of water coming through an inlet valve starts it going. But we leave nothing to chance, because we take note of the tides and check the tidal currents. So far, our only miss was the sinking of that tugboat below the bridge."

"Ah, the bridge!" Clarke echoed. "I suppose you intend to take it in your stride?"

"Our plans for that undertaking are already perfected," von Werner admitted. "Pretty soon we shall put them into execution."

"Has it occurred to you, von Werner," the inspector said, "that in stirring up all this devilment you really are helping the Nips?"

"Of course!" the other conceded. "Anything to win the war. Once we've consolidated our gains, we shall proceed to put those monkeys in their proper place." He stepped to the doorway, glanced into the trench and added, "Well, Mr. Policeman, your bed is ready."

McKINNEY watched Krause clamber out of the excavation, lay his shovel aside and draw a handkerchief from his hip pocket. As the man paused to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, McKinney recognized him as the one who had followed the bus on a bicycle from Manly to Palm Beach—the same man whom he had first seen outside police headquarters.

Thrusting his handkerchief back in his pocket, Krause stepped over to where McKinney lay, hitched up his trousers, bent over and spread the American's legs apart. Turning his back, he stooped again, grasped McKinney by the ankles and started dragging him toward the excavation. Von Werner spoke to him in German and turned back into the other room.

With a quick jerk, McKinney freed his ankles, doubled his legs at the knees, drove a piledriver kick to the seat of Krause's trousers and tumbled him head foremost into the trench. Krause landed on his shoulders, yelled a warning to von Werner and scrambled right side up. He was clambering out of the excavation when McKinney came to his knees, snatched up the shovel and smashed the flat of it down on his head, dropping him senseless in the bottom of the long hole.

Holding the shovel before him like a bayoneted rifle, McKinney stepped into the other room. His swift glance of appraisal took in the barrels of coal tar and the carboys of acid lined along the walls, in one of which was another door that led, apparently, to the outer air. In the center of the room, which was fully forty feet square, stood a large copper pan from which a thin veil of orange-hued vapor wavered upward toward a vent in the ceiling. Two men were stirring the contents of the pan, their eyes fixed intently upon a large thermometer fastened to the side of the vessel. Beside the iron framework supporting the copper pan was a large tank filled with water, and projecting from some mechanism connected with the supporting framework was a long iron lever.

That much McKinney observed before he brought his glance to Clarke, who was seated in a high-backed porch chair, to the arms

and front legs of which his wrists and ankles were fastened with turns of heavy fishing line. Von Werner stood beside him, dangling a blackjack in his hand, his mouth half open in stunned surprise. Of the pair whom McKinney had encountered inside the gate there was no sign.

"Well," von Werner found his voice at last, "I see your head isn't as soft as I thought it was." Without turning his head, he snapped an order in German. One of the men at the pan reached toward a supporting pillar and pressed a bell button. Transferring the blackjack to his left hand, von Werner drew an automatic from his hip pocket. "Just drop that shovel and raise your hands," he ordered.

"Nuts!" McKinney grunted contemptuously. Before von Werner could bring up his weapon, McKinney sprang, slapped with the shovel at the German's gun hand, knocking the weapon from his grasp, and then drove a bayonet-like jab to the stomach with the shovel that hurled von Werner across the room.

The elderly German brought up against the lever projecting from the mechanism beneath the copper pan, the impact of his body bending the iron rod almost at right angles. Then he slipped sidewise into the water tank.

"All right!" McKinney barked, scooping von Werner's pistol from the floor. "This is a pinch."

The men at the pan stopped paddling and stared at McKinney with dull, unimaginative eyes. One of them stooped, lifted von Werner to his feet. The other grunted warningly and pointed to the thermometer.

"Come over here," McKinney ordered as they resumed paddling.

"They can't stop, Mac," Clarke warned. "They've got to keep stirring that stuff."

McKinney whirled on his heel as footfalls sounded beyond the outer door. Then his two former prisoners plunged into the room, coming to a sudden halt when they say McKinney covering them with the pistol. For nearly a minute everyone stood still; even the pair at the pan ceased their rhythmic motions and stared in speechless consternation at McKinney's threatening weapon. Finally one of the men pleaded:

"Don't shoot in here, Mister, please!"

Suddenly his companion dropped his

paddle, elbowed von Werner aside and grasped the bent lever. With his eyes fixed on the thermometer on the side of the pan, he strove vainly to throw the lever forward. His companion came to his assistance, and together they strained, grunting from their exertions. But the lever refused to budge. At last, after a final glance at the mounting red column of the thermometer, they abandoned their efforts, yelled a warning to their confederates and dived through the exit, followed by von Werner and the others. In an instant McKinney and Clarke were alone.

Clarke struggled to free himself, and his efforts sent the chair toppling over backward.

"The nitrator!" he gasped from the floor. "It's overheating! Get out before it lets go."

Ignoring the warning, McKinney stooped and righted the chair. As he started to unfasten the inspector's bonds, the little Commonwealth officer yelled:

"Dammit, man! Never mind me—save yourself. That damned stuff may go up any instant and bring this bloody hill down on top of us. Get out, you bloody fool. You can't help me—there's no time."

"The hell I can't!" McKinney grunted. Grasping the top of the chair back, he tilted it on its hind legs. Then, dragging the chair behind him like a travois, he plunged after the others through the exit.

He found himself in a long tunnel, at the farther end of which the running figures of his late captors were sharply silhouetted against a square of moonlight. Fully alive to the danger now, he raced on, his progress impeded by the dragging chair. He was within fifty feet of the tunnel mouth when he heard a dull roar behind him and felt the earth quiver. Then he was lifted from his feet and shot through the passage like a projectile.

Still clinging to the chair, he soared from the mouth of the tunnel, flew through the air about fifty feet and landed running. He plunged headlong for several yards before he let go his grip on the chair. Then he stumbled, hit the ground with his right shoulder and rolled over like a shot rabbit.

For several moments the air was filled with flying debris, while the ground quivered from a succession of explosions. Shielding his head with his hands, he lay

face downward, his body peppered by a shower of falling stones and clods of earth. When at last the air cleared, he ventured to raise his head, and saw that the tunnel through which he had fled pierced the side of the hill behind the bungalow. Now the entire top of the hill was gone, and from the resulting crater a cloud of smoke, black against the moonlight, was rising.

RISING to his feet, he shook the dirt from his clothing and looked for Clarke. He saw the little inspector lying on his side, half buried by fallen debris. Righting the chair, McKinney tried to unfasten Clarke's bonds. There was no sign of their former captors. But as he glanced toward the bungalow a hundred yards away, he saw a head projecting cautiously beyond the edge of a veranda post.

The next instant they were rushing toward him, their footfalls grating harshly on the graveled walk surrounding the bungalow. First came the four men who had fled before him through the tunnel. Behind them, pistol in hand, ran von Werner, lashing the others forward with guttural invectives. Beyond the leader, a woman clad in silken pajamas came around the corner of the bungalow and paused to watch. Even at that distance, McKinney recognized her as the woman whom he and his companions had trailed from the morgue.

Wasting no more time with Clarke's bonds, he pushed the chair over. Standing protectively in front of the prostrate inspector, he drew the pistol from his belt, aimed at von Werner and pressed the trigger. He saw the leader stumble, grope blindly and then fall flat on his face.

A shrill squeal of brakes hastily applied came from the direction of the road, sounding like an echo to McKinney's shot. The oncoming Germans paused, momentarily stunned by von Werner's fall. Then one of them raised his pistol and fired. McKinney's answering shot dropped him with a bullet through the thigh.

Suddenly the woman's warning scream blended with the echoes of the two pistol shots. The Germans looked behind them, then scattered and bolted like frightened rabbits among the trees. Looking toward the road, McKinney saw several blue-uniformed figures scrambling over the gate.

The next instant a line of policemen went racing in pursuit of the fleeing Germans, led by Inspector Quigley.

"Glory be!" McKinney exclaimed thankfully. "The marines have landed."

Ignoring Clarke's struggles, he walked over to a tree stump and sat down, satisfied to let the police take over. He grinned at the inspector, enjoying the latter's frantic efforts to get free, so that he could be in at the kill. McKinney was still resentful of Clarke's using him for bait, and he was now mentally prepared for the ribbing that would come when Quigley and his policemen returned from the chase and found the little Commonwealth officer lying on his back with his feet in the air.

All at once McKinney's grin faded as he recalled that tense moment in the underground powder factory, when Clarke had advised him to flee and save himself.

"I reckon," he reflected, fumbling for his pocketknife, "that at bottom I'm just a heel."

Cutting the cords from Clarke's wrists and ankles, he righted the chair and gently pushed the inspector back to a sitting posture.

"Take the weight off your dogs, and let Quigley and his harness bulls take care of the rough stuff," he advised.

They were still sitting there when Quigley and his cops came out of the timber with the prisoners in their midst.

"Hell's bells!" the big inspector boomed. "What caused that explosion?"

"They had a powder factory in a dugout under the hill," Clarke explained. "It blew up. What kept you so long?"

"We've been cruisin' back and forth over the road between Palm Beach and Saint Ives since midnight," Quigley declared. "I reckon we'd still be rollin' back and forth if we hadn't spotted your bicycle and found your note fixed on the handlebar."

He peered at McKinney's face. "Cripes, lad, what have they been doin' to you?"

"Guy named von Werner was testin' his stick on my bean, to see which was the harder," McKinney declared. He went on to tell of his experiences from the moment he'd walked out of headquarters until he had been struck down on the road. As he concluded, Clarke said:

"Von Werner boasted they'd had a man

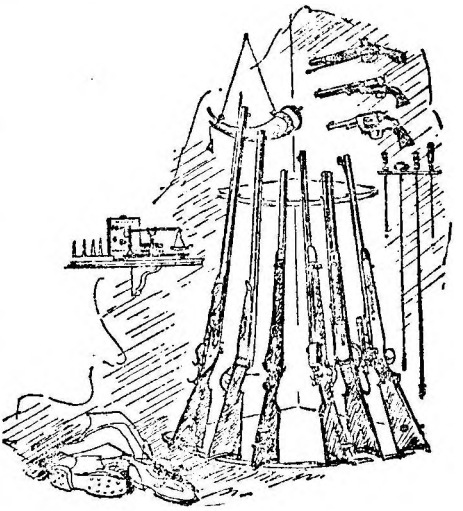
posted near headquarters, with a watch-size camera, for the past few days, taking snaps of everyone who came and went. They had us taped from the first. I figured something like that might be in the wind. That's why I had Mac dress up in his trick suit and get out in front to attract their attention, while we regulars stayed in the background.

"He also boasted that the Herren woman had Mac spotted early in the hunt, and telephoned from the Central Station for someone to come and eliminate him, so they came and tried to do him in.

"They had me spotted, too, when I rode with them on the bus to Palm Beach. They were met there by the coupé. So I borrowed a bicycle and trailed them here. When they slowed in front of the gate, I stopped around the curve, hid the bike in a clump of bushes and tied the note to the handlebar. Later, when I fancied all hands were in bed, I climbed over the gate. But when I landed on the inner side, a bloke popped up from under the thorn hedge with a Tommy-gun. He had me stoppered, so I dropped the bundle, figuring you'd find my note in time and carry on from there.

"An hour and a half later they carried Mac in, completely stonkered. Von Werner said it was skull fracture, and boasted how neatly Mac had been trapped. He ordered Krause to dig a grave, planning to bury us both. But just as von Werner was about to knock me on the head and have me tossed in the hole, Mac popped up and upset their applecart, knocking out Krause and von Werner and dragging me out of there, still tied in this bloody chair, half a tick before the nitro cooker blew up." He paused for a minute, and then added, "However, all things considered, I think we did very well; very well, indeed."

McKinney said nothing. This job was finished now, so far as he was concerned, and he was already thinking about his next one, of the big-timber country of the southwest, of the rugged Porungorups and the Stirling ranges, of clean mountain air filled with the wholesome scents of jarrah and karri blended with the heady perfume of the red-flowering gum. Yes, he decided, his next job would be one of the most pleasant he had ever tackled.



THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by
PETE KUHLHOFF

This and That

Editor: My son, now in the Navy, left with me a box of 20 6.5-mm Mannlicker-Schoenauer smokeless powder, "Lubaloy" 160-grain soft nose rifle bullets all in good condition.

If you know of anyone who can use them I will gladly send them on receipt of whatever you say they are worth plus parcel post for three pounds insured.

P. H. H., Kentucky.

Answer: I am running your letter in Shooter's Corner and will send your address to the first reader who requests it. I believe the list price for a box of 20 is $1.93. These cartridges will have to be shipped by express as ammunition cannot be delivered by mail.

Editor: I should like a copy of the miniature sample of "The American Rifleman" if

you please. I enclose some stamps, which I hope is sufficient with a little left over.

I am an inspector in the U. S. Customs Border Patrol, and among us there is always a lot of "gun talk." All of us like shooting and most of us have a healthy respect as well as affection for our tools, although we do have a few playboys.

I know at least two of the boys who follow your department regularly, and several more who are members of the Association.

I particularly like historical and technical articles on hand-guns, but realize that, as F. P. A. cracked recently "What's one man's Mede is another man's Persian" and read 'em all.

Sometime tell us the difference, if any, between the Colt Single Action Army, Frontier and Peacemaker revolvers, will you?

K. W. L., Calif.

Answer: Under separate cover I have forwarded a copy of the miniature American Rifleman.

The Colt Single Action Army Revolver was developed in 1871 and the Ordnance Department in competitive trials gave it the works during the latter part of 1872—and ordered 8,000 for cavalry use in 1873. The cavalry model had a 7½" barrel and was of .45 caliber. This gun was generally known as the "Peacemaker."

The Winchester Model of 1873 rifle was very popular all through the west during the 70's and 80's and was chambered for the .44-40 cartridge. So in order that the frontiersman could use the same ammo. in his handgun the Frontier Model revolver was produced, chambered for this cartridge. Since then the Single Action Army Revolver chambered for the .44-40 cartridge has been known as the "Frontier Model." In fact all of these .44-40 guns I have owned have been so marked on the left side of the barrel.

I was glad to hear that some of the boys in the Border Patrol read Shooter's Corner!

Editor: I guess the main reason I read SHORT STORIES *and some other magazines is the matter of guns and ammunition. I am interested in your list of gunsmiths. We have none here at present. Bill Sukalle, our best and one of the best in the country, is doing nothing but Army, Navy, and defense plant gun work.*

I would like to get in touch with a good

barrel maker. Also would be interested in learning more about the American Rifleman magazine.

This might be selfish, but would like to see Shooter's Corner enlarged. (Ed.'s note: so would I!)

Excuse the writing, but this is Christmas Eve and plenty of noise here.

C. F., Ariz.

Answer: I'm sorry to say I can't put you in touch with a barrel maker as I don't know of anyone doing civilian work.

The last time I talked with Mr. A. Hubalek he told me he had several .22 caliber barrels on hand but could not make more as he is 100% on war work—but would install what barrels he had on hand during spare time evenings. His address is 1167 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

You are right in saying that Mr. Sukalie

is one of the best barrel men in the country. I have used several of his barrels—in fact my most accurate .22 wildcat is equipped with one of his creations.

Editor: I have a Winchester .22 Special (Model 90- .22 WRF). Before I put a new barrel on it was very accurate. Can you tell me how to line up the sights as I can't hit a thing since I had a new barrel put on.

C. D. C., JR., Calif.

Answer: The Model 90 (1890) slide action was the most popular .22 Rim Fire rifle the Winchester people ever manufactured. In 1932 it was devised and is now known as the Model 62.

I would suggest that you sight in your rifle at 25 yards. First select a safe range of that distance, and if possible, have at hand a table, a chair, a small box about ten inches high, a blanket, a small piece of brass rod several inches long, a small hammer, a small file, a number of targets with a black bull's-eye about three inches in diameter, and some ammunition.

Sit down in rear of the table, placing thereon the small box with the blanket thickly folded on top. Arrange table, chair, box, and rifle so that when sitting in the chair your shoulders and chest will be in about the same upright position relative to the rifle and target as when firing offhand. Rest the forearm of the rifle on top of the blanket on the box about eight inches ahead of the breech.

Now fire a single shot at the target, using great care as to aim and trigger pull. Note where the bullet strikes. It is convenient to use a pair of field glasses or a spotting scope so you won't have to get up and go to the target after each shot.

When adjusting the sights remember this rule: "MOVE THE REAR SIGHT THE WAY YOU WISH YOUR SHOT TO GO, OR THE FRONT SIGHT IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTON." That is, if your shot has gone low, striking below the hull, you must either raise your rear sight or lower the front, (with the file).

If the shot had gone to the right of the bull (and you want it to move to the left) you must move the rear sight to the left or the front sight to the right using the brass rod and hammer.

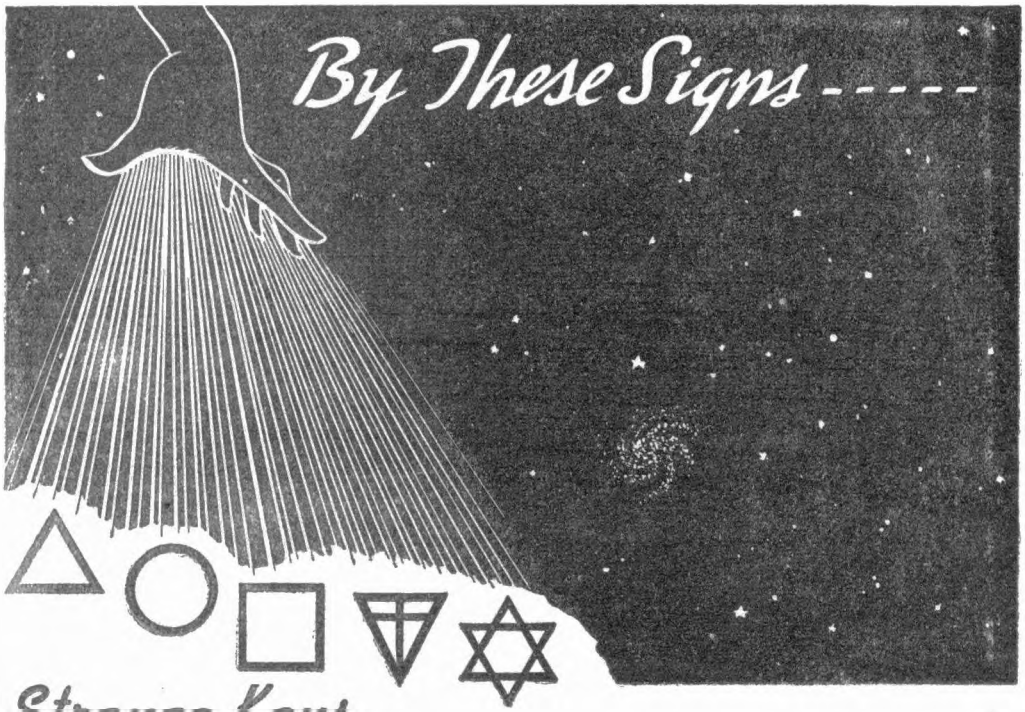
If your shot was not far off it's a good idea to shoot a group of several shots. Go slow in moving your sights, for a very slight move of the sight will change the point of impact considerably on the target.

When you think you have moved the sight far enough, shoot again for verification.

Personally, I don't care for open sights with this crude method of adjustments—but prefer the peep type sight located on the tang of the rifle.

The Lyman Gun Sight Corp. of Middlefield, Conn., have made several sights which can be fitted to your gun, namely the numbers 1, 2, 1A, 2A, and 103WS. The 103WS is by far the best as it has micrometer adjustments for both elevation and windage, but it lists at around $9. The others sell for four or five dollars.

The Lyman people have been 100% on war work for quite some time now and might not be able to supply any of these sights. If not, and you want one, try The Original Sight Exchange, Paoli, Pa., they might have used ones in stock.



Strange Keys to the Powers of the Universe

"GOD GEOMETRIZES," said an ancient sage. Within the straight line, curve, and angle—and their combinations—exist the forces of creation. These *secret symbols* contain the mysterious laws of the universe. Upon their right use—or the neglect of them—the success or failure of every *human enterprise* depends.

Have you a desire, *something you wish to accomplish* in life? Put your finger on a dot. In whatever direction you move your finger from the dot, you have made a beginning. Thus a dot is the symbol of *one*—or a beginning. Your desire then is also symbolized by *one*. If you follow the *proper method* or way to accomplish what you want, you have arrived at point *two*. Whenever these two symbols are brought together—the idea and the right way—you produce point *three*—the success of your plan. Success, therefore, is symbolized by the three equal sides of a *triangle*.

In planning your personal affairs—business, domestic, or the welfare of your family—do you use a *Cosmic formula?* Do you determine whether your acts are in accord with Divine truths eternally expressed in symbols? Why does the circle represent completion? Why is it said that a man is on the square? These symbols are used by astronomers and scientists to prove the physical laws of the universe—why don't you apply them to the problems of your everyday world? Learn what symbols, as powers and forces of nature, you can simply and intelligently use in directing the course of your life.

Let the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization), a world-wide brotherhood of learning, reveal to you *the symbolism of successful living*.

Let this GIFT BOOK Explain

If you want to prepare yourself through understanding for the greater rewards of life, write for the fascinating *free* Sealed Book. It explains how you may receive this age-old wisdom. Use the coupon below.

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How to Make YOUR Body Bring You FAME ...Instead of SHAME!

ARE YOU Skinny? Weak? Flabby?

Will You Let Me Prove I Can Make You a New Man?

I KNOW what it means to have the kind of body that people pity! Of course, you wouldn't know it to look at me now, but I was once a skinny weakling who weighed only 97 lbs.! I was ashamed to strip for sports or undress for a swim. I was such a poor specimen of physical development that I was constantly self-conscious and embarrassed. And I felt only HALF-ALIVE.

But later I discovered the secret that turned me into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now I'd like to prove to you that the same system can make a NEW MAN of YOU!

What "Dynamic Tension" Will Do For You

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!

Only 15 Minutes A Day

No "ifs," "ands" or "maybes." Just tell me where you want handsome, powerful muscles. Are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are you short-winded, pepless? Do you hold back and let others walk off with the prettiest girls, best jobs, etc.? Then write for details about *"Dynamic Tension"* and learn how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

"Dynamic Tension" is an entirely NATURAL method. Only 15 minutes of your spare time daily is enough to show amazing results—and it's actually fun. *"Dynamic Tension"* does the work.

"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. When you have learned to develop your strength through *"Dynamic Tension,"* you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own body—watch it increase and multiply 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.

Charles Atlas

Holder of title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." As he looks today, from actual untouched snapshot.

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I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

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OUTGUESS THE WEATHERMAN

AMAZING FORECASTER

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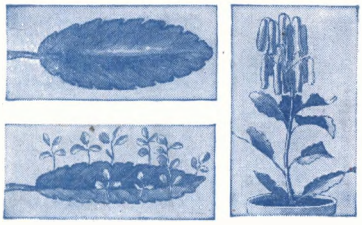
NOW YOU CAN BE YOUR OWN WEATHERMAN!

Why pay $5 or $10 for a barometer when you can predict the weather yourself, at home, 8 to 24 hours in advance, with this accurate, inexpensive Weather House forecaster? It's made like a little Swiss cottage, with a thatched green roof and small green shutters. Inside the house is an old witch and a little boy and girl. When the weather's going to be fine, the little boy and girl come out in front. But when bad weather is on the way the old witch makes an appearance. There is an easy-to-read thermometer on the front of the cottage that shows you the exact temperature . . . . **Here is positively the most amazing introductory advertising offer ever made.** But you must act quickly—prices may rise.

FREE for Prompt Action

Good Luck Leaf Lives On Air Alone

The greatest novelty plant ever discovered! Tradition is—a person owning one of these plants will have much good luck and success. When planted in earth, it grows two feet tall and blooms beautifully.



Here's What Weather House Owners Say:

"My neighbors now phone me to find out what the weather is going to be. We certainly think the Weather House is marvelous." Mrs. I. S., Amsterdam, Ohio.

"Please rush 6 more Weather Houses. I want to give them away as gifts. They are wonderful." Mrs. I. F., Booth Bay, Maine.

"I saw your Weather House at a friend's home and the way they raved about it, I decided to order one for myself." Mrs. L. R., Chicago, Illinois.

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When your Weather House arrives just deposit through your Postman $1.69 (your total cost), plus postage. Then test the Weather House for accuracy. Watch it closely, see how perfectly it predicts the weather in advance, then if you don't agree it's worth many dollars more than the small cost, simply return your Weather House within 10 days and get your money back promptly.

Almost every day of your life is affected in some way by the weather, and it's such a satisfaction to have a reliable indication of what the weather will be. With the "Swiss" Weather House made in the U. S. A. and easy-to-read thermometer you have an investment in comfort and convenience for years to come. The Weather House comes to you complete and ready to use. Ideal for gifts and bridge prizes. It will bring new pleasure to everyone in your family. The price is only $1.69 C. O. D. You must act now to secure this price.

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The Weather Man, Dept. NF
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10 DAY TRIAL OFFER

Send at once (1) "Swiss" Weather House. On arrival I will pay postman $1.69 plus postage with the understanding that the Weather House is guaranteed to work accurately. Also I can return the Weather House for any reason within 10 days and get my money back.

☐ Send C. O. D. ☐ I enclose $1.69. You Pay Postage.

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