

J. Allan Dunn—Joel Rogers—Barry Scobee

# Short Stories

Twice A Month

25c

APRIL 25th

30c. in Canada

## GUNPOWDER LIGHTNING

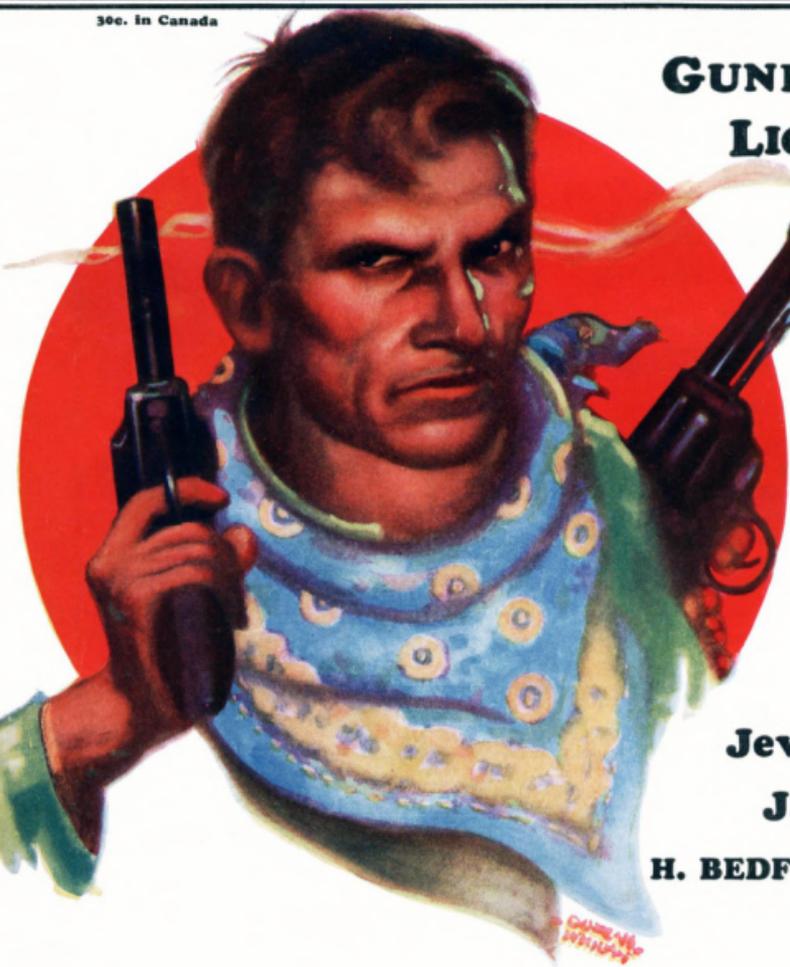
By

**Bertrand  
W.  
Sinclair**



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Java by**

**H. BEDFORD-JONES**



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Issue Dated  
April 30th



*The  
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Ranch Steal*

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*a complete novel by*

**RALPH  
CUMMINS**

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*A Story of Oil-Town Law*

**by FOSTER-HARRIS**

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Stories By:*

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CHAS. OLUF OLSEN  
GEO. C. FRANKLIN**

*And Others*

**WEST**

*There's No Better Western Magazine Today!*

# The Man I Pity Most

**POOR OLD JONES.** I see him now, standing there, dejected, cringing, afraid of the world. No one had any use for him. No one respected him. Across his face I read one harsh word—**FAILURE.** He just lived on. A poor, worn-out imitation of a man doing his sorry best to get on in the world. If he had realized just one thing, he could have made good. He might have been a brilliant success.

There are thousands and thousands of men like Jones. They, too, could be happy, successful, respected and loved. But they can't seem to realize the one big fact—that practically everything worth while living for depends upon **STRENGTH**—upon live, red-blooded, He-Man muscle.

Everything you do depends upon strength. No matter what your occupation, you need the health, vitality and clear thinking only big, strong, virile muscles can give you. When you are ill, the strength in those big muscles pulls you through. At the office, in the farm fields or on the tennis courts, you'll find your success generally depends upon your muscular development.

## Here's a Short-cut to Strength and Success

But you say, "It takes years to build my body up to the point where it will equal those of athletic champions." It does if you go about it without any system, but there's a scientific short-cut. And that's where I come in.

### 30 Days is All I Need

People call me the Muscle-Builders. In just 30 days I can do things with your body you never thought possible. With just a few minutes' work every morning, I will add one full inch of real, live muscle to each of your arms, and two whole inches across your chest. Many of my pupils have gained more than that, but I **GUARANTEE** to do at least that much for you in one short month. Your neck will grow shapely, your shoulders begin to broaden. Before you know it, you'll find people turning around when you pass. Women will want to know you. Your boss will treat you with a new respect. Your friends will wonder what has come over you. You'll look ten years younger, and you'll feel like it, too. Work will be easy. As for play, why, you'll realize that you don't know what play really means.

### I Strengthen Those Inner Organs Too

But I'm not through with you. I want thirty days in all to do the job right, and then all I ask is that you stand in front of your mirror and look yourself over.

What a marvelous change! Those great, squared shoulders! That pair of buns, like arms! Those firm, shapely legs! Yes, sir, they are yours, and they are there to stay. You'll be just as fit inside as you are out, too, because I work on your heart, your liver—all of your inner organs, strengthening and exercising them. Yes, indeed, life can give you a greater thrill than you ever dreamed. But remember, the only sure road to health, strength and happiness always demands action. Put out the coupon below and mail it today. Write now!

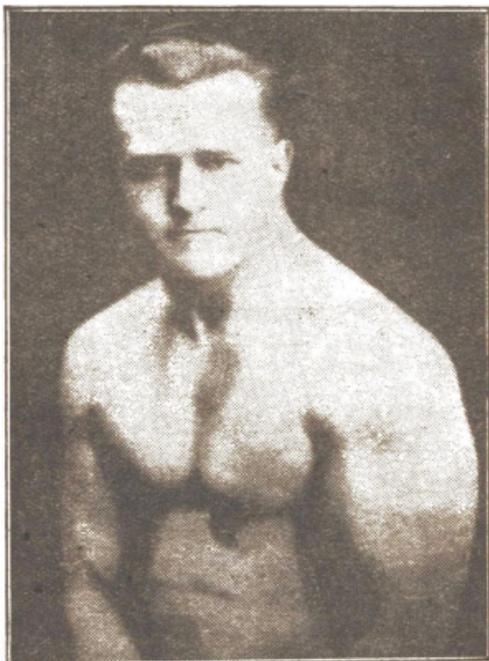
SEND FOR MY NEW 64 PAGE-BOOK

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**EARLE LIEDERMAN, The Muscle Builder**  
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City  State

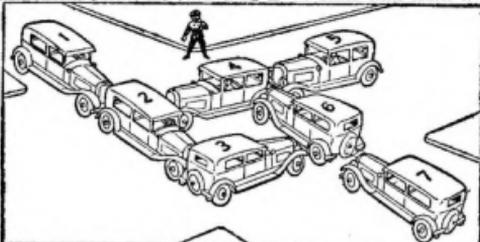
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# Win Nash and \$500 or \$1,845 Cash

## Seven Brand New 6-Cylinder Cars Given

For advertising purposes I am going to give absolutely free a brand new six-cylinder "Special Six" Nash four-door Sedan, an Oldsmobile two-door Sedan, a De Soto two-door Sedan, a Pontiac two-door Sedan, an Essex two-door Sedan, a Whipper two-door Sedan, and a Chevrolet two-door Sedan, all six-cylinder latest model Sedans; also 4 splendid new console type radios, a Victor Orthophonic Victrola and other valuable prizes. Any person living in the United States outside of Chicago may enter an answer to this contest.

**Solve  
This  
Traffic  
Puzzle**



In the picture there are 7 cars in a bad traffic jam. None of them can move forward, for each car is blocked by the one in front of it. One of these cars will have to be backed out. Which one? The traffic policeman seems to be stumped. Can you straighten up this tangle for him? Only one car may be moved backward, and if you pick out the right one, you will see that it is not necessary to back up any of the others. Send the number of the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tie-up, and if your answer is correct you will be qualified for this opportunity.

### \$500.00 for Promptness

We are not only giving the Sedans, radios and so forth in our big prize list amounting to over \$6,800.00, but are also giving an additional \$500.00 in cash for promptness to the winner of first prize if he or she has been prompt. Thus, the first prize winner will receive the Nash Sedan and \$500.00 in cash, or \$1,845.00. Find the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tie-up, and send it to me. Be sure to write or print your name and address plainly. All who answer correctly can share in the prizes or cash. Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties.

ANSWER TODAY. FREE PRIZE JUDGE, Dept. 520, 510 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

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Your physician will tell you that hernia (rupture) is a muscular weakness in the abdominal wall.—Do not be satisfied with merely bracing these weakened muscles, with your condition probably growing worse every day!—Strike at the real cause of the trouble, and

**WHEN—**

The weakened muscles recover their strength and elasticity, and—  
The unsightly, unnatural protrusion disappears, and—  
You recover your vim, vigor and vitality,—your strength and energy,—and you look and feel better in every way,—and your friends notice the difference,—

**THEN—**

You'll know your rupture is gone, and  
You'll know why for almost a quarter of a century numerous sworn statements report complete recovery and freedom from uncomfortable mechanical supports, without delay from work.

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A Test of the scientific self-treatment mentioned in coupon below is now available to you, whether you are young or old—man or woman. It costs you nothing to make this test.—For your own good mail the coupon NOW—TODAY.

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Send me a Free 10-day test supply of the remedial factor Plapao and 48-page illustrated book on Rupture; no charge for this now or later.

Name   
Address

# They dared Officer Kane to play



*and his music held them spellbound*

ETHEL'S house party was at its height—when suddenly there came an ominous knocking at the door. Ethel ran to open it and—there stood Police Officer Kane. "I want to see the man of the house," thundered Kane. "I'm sorry," stammered Ethel nervously, "but my father is not at home."

"Well, what's going on in here anyway?" continued the officer sternly. "Every one on the block is complainin' of the noise. I've a good mind to arrest the lot of you."

Ethel was mortified—what a disgrace! "Oh, please," pleaded Ethel, "please don't do anything like that."

Then Kane burst out laughing. "Don't worry, lassie—you were all havin' such a fine time I couldn't help droppin' in," he explained.

"Oh," sighed Ethel, "how you frightened me. Won't you join us?"

first rollicking notes of the famous "Song of the Vagabonds." "More—more," "That's great—play another," they all shouted as the last notes of that snappy march song died away. Kane then started that stirring old soldier song, "On the Road to Mandalay," following it with song hits from the latest shows.



of learnin' to play. I didn't believe it myself but I sent for their Free Demonstration Lesson that showed me how easy it was, so I wrote for the whole course.

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To prove how practical this course is, the U. S. School of Music has arranged a typical demonstration lesson and explanatory booklet which you may have free. They show how any one can learn to play his favorite instrument by note in less than half the time and at a fraction of the cost of old slow methods. The Booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new Automatic Finger Control.

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U. S. School of Music  
863 Brunswick Bldg., New York City

Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with Introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

..... Here You  
..... Instrument! .....

Name .....

Address .....

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

## Kane Joins the Party

"Ha," laughed Kane, as the Victrola started again, "why must you play that canned music—can't any of you play this beautiful piano? Sure, I'd like to give you a tune myself."

"I dare you to play for us," shouted Ted Strong.

"I'm afraid I'll have to be goin'," stammered Kane, embarrassed.

"Mr. Kane, I think you might play for me after the fright you gave me," smiled Ethel.

"Well, b'gorry, maybe I will," agreed the officer. And as he sat down at the piano everyone laughed. But the noise stopped when he struck the

"Well," he laughed, as they finally let him get up from the piano, "I'll have to be on my way now."

"Thank you for your lovely music," said Ethel. "You must be playing a good many years?"

"Sure and I haven't been playin' long at all." Then the questions came thick and fast,

"How did you ever learn so quickly?"

"When do you find time to practice?"

"Who was your teacher?"

## Kane Tells His Story

"Well, to tell you the truth I had no teacher. I've always loved music but I couldn't take regular lessons on account of my duties as a policeman. Then one summer I saw a U. S. School of Music advertisement, tellin' of a new way

### PICK YOUR INSTRUMENT

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| Piano                               | Violin     |
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| Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor) |            |





there clawing frantically  
was ... "the THING!"

ONLY a moment before, in the dead of night, she had been awakened by a strange scraping noise. Her heart thumping wildly she looked fearfully around the room, but at first could see nothing. Suddenly her heart stopped beating—for there at the window was the THING—awful, inhuman, its two hands clawing frantically at the glass.

She shook in terror—for she knew only too well what had happened to others! Now she was at its mercy!

What, indeed, was this weird thing of evil? What was its uncanny power? What awful fate lay ahead of this beautiful girl, alone and unprotected?

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In  
3 Days'  
Time!

On Any Part of Your Face, Neck,  
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It is all explained in a new treatise called

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Get a 17 Inch Bicep  
Complete Course on Arm Building  
**ONLY 25c**

Get an arm of might with the power and grip to obey your physical desires. Within 30 days you can now build your arm from a scrawny piece of skin and bone to one of huge muscular size. I don't mean just a 17-inch bicep but a 15-inch forearm and an 8-inch wrist. This specially prepared course will build every muscle in the arm because it has been scientifically worked out for that purpose. You can develop a pair of triceps shaped like a horseshoe and just as strong, and a pair of biceps that will show their double head formation. The sinewy cables between the biceps and elbow will be deep and thick with wire cable ligaments. In that arm of yours, the forearm will belly with bulk, and the great supinator lifting muscle you can make into a column of power, while your wrist will grow alive and writhe with cordy sinew. All this you can get for 25 cents—send for this course today and within 30 days' time you can have a be-man's arm built to be as beautiful, brawny and magnificent as the village blacksmith's. You can't make a mistake. The guarantee of the strongest armed man in the world stands behind this course. I give you all the secrets of strength illustrated and explained as you like it. 30 days will give you an unbreakable grip of steel and a Herculean arm. Mail your order now while you can still get this course at my introductory price of only 25c.

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flexible bracelet to  
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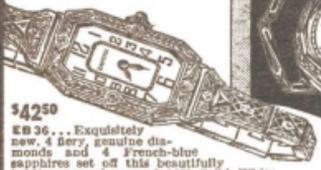
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# Short Stories

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April 25, 1930

R. de S. HORN  
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Associate Editor

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COVER—Duncan McMillan

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In the next **SHORT STORIES**—May 10th.



# The Quitter

A novel of the Foreign Legion

by

**J. D. Newsom**

West

**Runt  
Size**

by

**Hugh  
Pendexter**

Sea

**Championship  
Style**

by

**Captain Frank  
H. Shaw**

Border

**Yellow  
Contraband**

by

**J. Allan  
Dunn**

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of SHORT STORIES, published semi-monthly at Garden City, New York, for April 1, 1930, State of New York, County of Nassau.

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By Russell Doubleday, Secretary.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 7th day of February, 1930.

[SEAL]

(Signed) Frank O'Sullivan,  
Notary Public Queens County No. 1501  
Certificate filed in Nassau County  
Term expires March 30, 1930

## LIVIN' LIKE KINGS



EVERY now an' then, looks like, some sour-faced guy sets up on a soap-box somewhere an' lets out a wild wail about the world goin' to the dogs—livin's too high, an' an hon-

est workin' man can't get along nohow.

But come to think of it, ain't that fellow kinder exaggeratin' things a bit? Ain't he kinder lookin' doleful at things in general an' forgettin' how much better off we are nowadays than our granddads and their granddad's granddads ever were. F'r instance:

Take this business of catin'. A long while back a gent named Nero gave some dinners that was a nine-days wonder in Rome, the place where he lived. All on one table he had fresh oysters, trout, apricots an' some bird's eggs that grew only in North Spain. He'd sent a regiment of messengers who took snow from the Alps packed in boxes, then collected oysters from the coast of France and trout from Germany, along with the apricots and bird's eggs, and by packin' them in that snow they managed to keep them fresh until they got 'em to Rome. It musta cost Mister Nero some forty-fifty thousand dollars to give that blow-out.

Today there isn't a one of us can't go down town and buy fresh fish from Cape Cod, fresh beef from Chicago, bananas from Honduras and oranges from California, at a total cost of some two or three bucks for a full meal. Fact; for our two-three dollars we can have more and fresher food than Nero got for his fifty thousand.

Take news. Darius, an old king of Persia,

kept a thousand or two couriers and fast horses spaced along all his highroads. If he wanted to hear how the boys in the back districts were getting along he'd write one of 'em a letter, and set his two thousand couriers ridin'. A month or two later he'd get a short letter back, tellin' him what had been happenin' mebbe a couple weeks back.

Today for two cents we can pick up a newspaper and read what happened in Europe, Asia and Africa just last night. For that same two cents we can send a letter further and faster than the King of Persia could do with all his two thousand horsemen. An' if letters ain't fast enough we telegraph or telephone an' get the answer back before Darius could more'n saddle his horse.

Take reading. Five six hundred years ago, if a man wanted to do a little reading—provided he could read, which most of 'em couldn't—he'd borrow a lot of money an' buy himself a two-three weeks' trip by horse or stage to some big city where there was an abbey, or mebbe the King had his big library of two-three hundred books. Then if the readin' gent had good letters of introduction, they'd open the doors an' he could read in a handwritten volume all about the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius or the sermons of some old saint.

Today you can put your twenty-five cents down on any newsstand an' get a magazine like SHORT STORIES with interesting reading enough to last you a whole week o' nights. An' no week's ridin' to git to the newsstand unless you live near the North Pole, mebbe.

Nope—it ain't high livin' that's the trouble with us. The trouble is that all us common folks is livin' like kings all the time, only we don't know it, an' it's just human nature to have to have somethin' to kick about. Ain't it so!

THE EDITOR.

# GUNPOWDER LIGHTNING

*A Splendid Novel of the Trail Herd Days  
on an Embattled Range of the Far West*

## CHAPTER I

### BULLS MINUS

**T**HE Starks were three generations Texas born when the Civil War broke out. A Stark died in the Alamo. Another rode to its relief. One Corrigan Stark had a home and ranch and cattle on the Brazos River before Texas came into the Union. He begat a son, Eugene, who eventually went off to fight in the Civil War. He was wounded and discharged from active service in '64; and the following year his only daughter, Louise, was born in Fort Worth. Prior to his war experience Eugene Stark already had six sons.

At about the time this Eugene Stark, the only son of Corrigan, was big enough to gallop a pony back and forth between his father's ranch and school, a lanky youth named Bill Parsons came out of the hot lowlands bordering the Mississippi by Memphis, Tennessee.

Parsons was restless, ambitious. He wandered into the cattle country, into Kansas, cut his eyeteeth in the dust of longhorn herds. He ended up eventually on the Nueces River in southern Texas riding for a cattleman who had no sons and only one daughter. Parsons married this daughter. In ten years his father-in-law retired to Houston with ample funds to give him all he wanted for the rest of his days. Even so early the cattle business in the Southwest was a gold mine. This man left his son-in-law, Bill Parsons, in charge of a good ranch on the Nueces, nearly twenty thousand longhorns and innumerable horses.

In another decade the retired cattleman was dead, Bill Parsons and his wife inherited the entire estate. During that decade, under Parsons' management the original brand somehow got transformed into a WP, and WP stock increased and multiplied on the Nueces until it seemed as if they would overrun the earth.



# by BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

*Famed for His Stirring Stories of the West*

## Part I

Five years before the outbreak of the Civil War Eugene Stark, on the Trinity River, was a lesser cattleman by far than Bill Parsons away south on the Nueces. Each was successful to such degree as success comes to able, energetic men. The chief difference lay in that Parsons married the foundation of his fortune and Eugene

Stark built his up bit by bit from nothing with his own hands. Neither knew the other, at that time. Parsons had never heard of the Long S on the Trinity. The Starks knew the WP on the Nueces, as all big cow outfits are known far beyond their own range.

There would have been no affinity between them if they had known each other. That much is certain. Parsons was physically a big man, beefy, heavy handed, determined, arrogant. He took what he wanted wherever he could, without compunction, without mercy. He was tolerably good natured until he encountered opposition to his will or his plans, or his ambitions. Then he brushed away such opposition as a housewife brushes away dust.

Bill Parsons had the acquisitive instinct powerfully developed along two lines—land and cattle. That became a passion with him. He wanted more and more. He aspired, dimly at first, definitely at last, to be the greatest individual cattle owner in North America.

Eugene Stark, on the other hand, was apparently a mild, openhanded man, an amiable citizen who did well enough in the cow business, who was more proud of his numerous sons than of his material possessions. His ranch-house on the Trinity was comfortable to the point of luxury. He had never taken issue with a man in his life unless it was forced upon him. With experience of both actual and private war he preferred peace. Yet it was an accepted fact in the Trinity country that neither Eugene Stark nor any of his sons would step aside an inch in the face of a



declared enemy. It was both their code and their nature to be considerate, kindly, easy-going until they were aware of some deliberate transgression of their rights, privileges, or possessions. In other words the Starks were easy men to get on with and bad men to stir up.

Eugene Stark married young. His oldest son was a full grown man when his father returned from the Union-Confederate clash.

Bill Parsons also married young. His wife presented him with an heir the first year. Thereafter for a long time she was childless. Four years before the war she gave birth to a second son and straight-away became a semi-invalid. Confined to her couch, she had vague, grandiose dreams of culture and gentility.

Bill Parsons had very little education. He had horse sense, though; a native shrewdness, breath of vision as applied to certain potential phases of the cattle business. But of the niceties of living he knew little and cared less. Education to him meant ability to read, write, and reckon figures. He bred his oldest son, Matt, to the saddle, a second edition of himself in physique, speech and action.

**B**UT with the second boy, born late in life, his wife's craving for culture, her slowly accumulated dreams of something approaching gentility, focused on the younger offspring. She made an issue of his upbringing. He should be a gentleman. He must have schooling that would fit him for something more than hard riding, hard drinking, roundup camps and cowtowns. He might, she secretly hoped, be a doctor or a lawyer; something learned, something of a higher quality than the common run. He must go to such institutions as rich men's sons frequented.

She had her way. A half sick woman, persistent in her clamors, can wear down the strongest man. And Bill Parsons was fond of his wife, in his own fashion, so he conceded the point. "Oh, all right," he said. "Matt's been raised the way a cowman oughta be, an' he's some punkins. It's agreeable to me for you to make a gentleman out of the baby if you can. But watch out you don't make him just another blamed dude!"

So the youngest Parsons began life with cultural prospects that his father and brother alike regarded as of small value.

Coincident with these prospects and the close of the Civil War, Bill Parsons began to outgrow the Nueces country. His herds increased. He bought out neighboring outfits. Eventually, by one means and another, he dominated all that immediate region. Unable to expand farther he began to look abroad. And the chance meeting in Dallas with a cattleman who was shifting most of his cattle off the Trinity River and had a ranch with tremendous acreage to sell, brought the Parsons interests into direct contact with the Starks.

This purchase, consummated in the year of our Lord 1882, made Parsons owner of a rich area of bottomland along the Trinity, thirty miles above the home ranch of the Stark family. That particular range would easily carry twenty thousand cattle. As a starter Parsons sent three big herds, ten thousand cattle, up from the Nueces with a hustling, aggressive range boss named Polk Munce in charge of the new layout.

Polk was a smart cowman. He looked over the Trinity and outlined his ideas. Parsons agreed that they were sound. The Nueces was stocked to the limit. So the cattle he sent to the new range were all breeding stock, dry cows, cows with calves at foot. Out of the three herds there were five thousand two-year-old heifers.

"In five years," said Polk Munce, "we'll have so damned many cattle on the Trinity some of these little fellers will have to move out."

Parsons nodded. He, himself, was already preparing to move, along far-seeing lines. The Northwest was opening up. Breed in the south, fatten his steers on Northern grass. If Wyoming and Montana were half as good as reported, Parsons could see himself realizing his ambition—the biggest, wealthiest cattle owner north of the Rio Grande.

With a stranglehold on the Nueces, increasing scope on the Trinity, his beef steers shifted north year by year to fatten on buffalo grass, up there where ten thousand square miles of virgin pasture scarcely vacated by the vanishing bison could be

had for the taking—well, Parsons could visualize tremendous pastoral operations with the assurance that he could carry them out.

So Polk Munce hit the Trinity River with his ten thousand cows. The first two herds arrived according to Hoyle. But with the succeeding two, composed of the five thousand heifers, either Bill Parsons or Polk Munce, both experienced cattlemen, made a curious mistake.

They neglected to send along a quota of bulls.

## CHAPTER II

### BUSHWHACKED!

**I**F AN isolated town with a normally balanced population of men, women and children were to suffer a sudden invasion from overwhelming numbers of young and attractive women the result may be imagined. The result of these five thousand



heifers turned loose on the Long S range doesn't need to be imagined. It is a matter of record, written first in gun smoke and blood, later set down in black and white in the county court records of Oxbow.

In every land under the sun men have clashed because of slights real or fancied, over possession of desired objects, over the mere matter of disliking the shape of each other's faces. The cattle country had its collisions over range rights, over trespass by sheep, over water, which is always precious in a dry land. The Trinity country beheld a ruction over a scarcity of long-horned bulls.

The WP herds arrived on the Trinity in the height of the breeding season. A week later Eugene Stark and his son, Dave, rode into the newly acquired Parsons ranch. Polk Munce sat sunning himself on the porch. A cowpuncher pointed him out when

the two Stark men asked for the foreman.

They didn't immediately dismount at Polk's invitation. They sat sidewise in their saddles looking down.

"I understand," old Gene said, "that you have right lately turned loose about five thousand heifers on the edge of my range—without ary a bull among 'em."

"We overlooked the bulls," Polk drawled, "for the time bein'."

"Here's hopin' you don't overlook 'em too long," old man Stark observed politely. "It was kinda careless of you. Them young cows are wanderin' all over my range. I been to quite a lot of trouble an' expense improvin' the grade of my stock with Hereford bulls from Ioway. It ain't hardly the thing for Bill Parsons to expect me to supply him with free bulls for breedin' purposes. That's about what it amounts to, as she stands. I'd like for to have you attend to this here bull business right away."

"Oh sure, we will," Polk declared. "We'll have a herd of bulls up here right off."

The Starks had dinner with Polk Munce and the WP riders, parted from them affably enough.

A couple of weeks later Clay Stark with a trace of irritation said to his father:

"Dad, them tarnation WP heifers is everywhere. We'll have less'n half a calf crop next spring. I'd put a bug in Bill Parsons' ear about it."

His father nodded agreement. Once more he took his son Dave and rode to the Parsons ranch, half a day's jaunt up the Trinity, on the opposite side of the river. Polk Munce had gone to Oxbow, they learned. Stark would not discuss such a matter with anyone but the boss of the WP. So he rode home. The following morning he hitched a buggy and drove into Oxbow.

Polk was still there. Polk wasn't a drinking man, but for once he happened to be well primed, as a result of a big winning at poker. Polk had a mean, arrogant streak in him, that seldom appeared when he had himself in hand. Furthermore he was on pleasure bent. He resented an elderly cattleman calling him to account in a hotel lobby over this matter of bulls.

If Polk Munce hadn't been well lubricated he would have noted that Eugene

Stark drew him aside, and though he was very peevish, his complaint was couched politely. Polk simply didn't want to be bothered about bulls. In addition he may have been influenced unconsciously by a long sojourn in the atmosphere of the Nueces. There the WP was monarch of all its riders surveyed, and WP bosses were never called to account for anything by lesser cattlemen. Polk was used to having the right of way both on the range and in any argument concerning the rights and privileges of the outfit he represented. A king's emissary is immune from many disadvantages that go with ordinary citizenship.

"Hell," he snarled at Stark. "Quit roarin' about that. We'll 'tend to it when we get around to it. What difference does a few bulls make?"

"Make a difference of maybe two thousand calves to me next spring," old Eugene said quietly. "You're handin' the Long S a raw deal, I want you to know, whether its through carelessness or ignorance. I want you to get your share of bulls on that range an' get 'em there quick. The WP had no license in the first place to throw all them heifers on my side of the river. Since there's plenty of room if you all shoot square, I'm not makin' an argument about that. But I'm certainly tellin' you about these bulls."

"You can't tell me nothin'," Polk replied haughtily. "The WP'll run any range it takes hold of to suit itself. Roll your hoop, old-timer. The powwow's over."

"You're drinkin' an' your tongue's run away with you, Mister Polk Munce," the old man answered tartly. "If you want to make an issue of this, it's up to you. But you can put this in your pipe to smoke: I'll take means to protect my stock—if you ain't got a matter of two-three hundred bulls loose on that range in ten days."

He turned his back on Polk, disregarding certain rumbings which made his eyes glint a little. A man with liquor in him sometimes spoke out of his turn. So old Gene walked steadily away. There was another hotel in Oxbow. He went to that.

**B**EFORE he turned homeward he amplified these remarks in a letter to Bill Parsons on the Nueces River, and

posted it forthwith. Then he drove home to wait out the ten days.

He got no reply to his letter. No bulls appeared, so far as his sons, daily abroad on the range, could discern.

"Darn 'em," old Gene growled at last. "They asked for it an' they'll get it. I aim to be neighborly. But I aim to protect myself also. This high-handed outfit from the Nueces can't get away with nothin' like that."

Whereupon the Long S roundup wagon went out with a crew, began to gather and throw south of the Trinity River all those WP heifers that were illicitly engaging the attention of the Long S bulls. The Stark feelings in this matter were not soothed by gossip that went drifting around. Texas appreciated a joke along broad lines. The WP on the Trinity regarded this bull business as something of a joke on the Starks. The WP riders said so. What they said was repeated.

But it ceased to be a joke one afternoon when old man Stark, Ed, Clay, Dave, and young Con, with three hired hands were shoving several hundred WP heifers out of the shallows of the Trinity onto the south bank.

Polk Munce rode down to meet them with a dozen riders at his back. He was sober, cool, but annoyed. They faced each other, eight riders in one group, thirteen in the other, all armed.

"Stark," Polk Munce said. "You got no business punchin' WP cattle around on the range, an' you know it."

"You got no business havin' five thousand WP heifers on my range without no bulls among 'em an' you know it," old Gene returned calmly. "I give you plenty of time to remedy that. You didn't, so I'm goin' to remedy it m'self."

"If you throw another hoof of our stuff across the Trinity there'll be trouble," Munce warned.

"Then there'll have to be trouble, I reckon," Stark replied firmly. "Because they're all goin' south of the river an' they're goin' to stay there till Bill Parsons supplies his share of bulls."

There was nothing Polk could do in the face of that plain defiance. So he contented himself by repeating stubbornly that the

Long S had no right to shove WP cattle around on a public range, on free government land—and he would see about it if they did. With that he rode away with his men.

The Starks splashed back through the river, loped to their camp, ate, mounted fresh horses, made another roundup. Ten miles farther up the Trinity, in the blaze of a Texas sunset they shoved another three or four hundred WP heifers into the stream.

On the opposite bank a crackle of gunfire arose. Clay Stark's horse collapsed under him. A hired cowpuncher put his hand to his side, looked with curious, pained wonder at the blood that stained his fingers and slid slowly sidewise out of his saddle. Ed Stark cursed as his mount spun in a circle, stung by a bullet.

These hostile guns continued to speak with thin, whip cracking voices. Dust flew in spurts under their horses' bellies. Another Stark rider went down. Dave Stark felt a burning streak across his chest.

"Get into the bush," old Gene barked.

A post oak clump gave them cover—five men mounted, one afoot. Two others lay still in the grass back of a gravelly strip of shore. Bullets whistled over them. The Starks didn't shoot. They could see nothing to shoot at.

"The damn dirty bushwhackers!" Clay ground his teeth. He was brown skinned, dark like an Indian; the only dark man among the Stark sons, who ran to light brown hair and gray eyes. Clay had something like aboriginal ferocity in him. His face was pale with rage.

"Hurt bad, Dave?" he demanded.

"Nothin' to speak of," Dave grunted.

"Don't cripple me none."

"Let's go for 'em, dad," Clay pleaded.

"Come on. We're not goin' to stand this, not from nobody."

OLD Gene gestured for silence. He scanned the farther bank, the river, the flat bottoms that lined the opposite side.

"Over there's a draw with scrub an' chaparral," he said. "If we hit the river on the run, an' keep dodgin' through cover, we can make that draw an' get up through it to the top of the bank, where they are."

They all carried forty-four Winchester carbines, short-barreled saddle guns. With-



out having discussed is as a probability they had half expected trouble—but not from ambush. That stirred them to fury. To retaliate was as natural

as breathing. The Texan quite literally accepted the old Hebraic dictum of an eye for an eye.

"Wait for me a minute," Clay said. He was afoot. He had run a few yards to that timber. Now he went crawling back through the grass until he reached one horse whose rider would never mount again.

He swung up and darted back and his movement brought two or three shots. The shooting light was none too good in that river bottom. Long shadows slanted down, black bars bisecting the last of the sun-glow.

"You-all ready?" Stark senior inquired. "Keep abreast of me, but spread out considerable."

They nodded. Bending forward in their saddles they hit the river on the run, breasted it where the current rose to their saddle-skirts, pounded through and up the opposite bank, where they galloped, weaving behind clumps of brush, leafy scrub oaks, until they surged into the mouth of that draw which came down like a trough from the upper levels. Polk Munce's gunmen—presumably—kept up a scattered fire with no hits on such fast moving targets. The Starks reckoned on that. Their casualties had come as they sat still on the opposite shore watching the WP cattle take the stream. They knew how hard it was to hit a rider on the run three hundred yards away.

So they plunged up that draw without fear, spurred by anger and excitement, until they reached a point where it was an easy climb to the top. They took that slope with blood in their eye.

The plains ran away level as a floor, cut at great intervals by arroyos, by an occasional pot-hole. They could see cattle and

horses, but WP riders, riders of any sort, there were none. They charged like cavalry to the crest whence the shots had come. Hoofmarks in a little bunch where horses had stood together. Flattened places in the grass on the rim of the valley where men had lain prone to take aim. Scattered empty cartridges bright in the grass where they had been levered out.

"They dropped into the river bottom an' streaked for home when they seen us take into that draw to get behind 'em," Clay declared. "There's their dust. See?"

They saw.

"There were five of 'em layin' here, one holdin' the horses back outa sight," Clay continued bitterly. "They didn't have the guts to stand an' make a fight for it. It's only ten miles to the WP, dad. Let's follow up an' give 'em a taste of their own medicine!"

### CHAPTER III

#### REPRISAL

THE moon sent long shadows slanting away behind each rider when Eugene Stark and his sons, hours later, jogged slowly on tired horses back to the point of attack. Clay's horse lay where he fell, silver conchos on saddle and bridle gleaming against the carcass. One riderless beast stood patiently on drooping reins. And the two Stark riders who had fallen under the first shots were stiff in the grass.

They lashed both bodies across one horse and climbed out of the valley. On the rim they halted to look back. A faint glow tinged the horizon up the river, on the south side.

"I reckon that'll hold 'em for a while," Clay said harshly.

Giving the WP a taste of their own medicine had been a considerable success. Hotly determined, the Stark men had chased the other six into their own dooryard and dismounting on a rise above the ranch had fired on everything that moved until the light failed. In the dusk, Clay, unknown to the others, had stolen down and fired a haystack. The flames spread to buildings, to the dry grass, and licked out on the open range. That was the glow on the skyline, miles of WP grass turning into a blackish-ash waste.

They were not particularly pleased with that stroke. Yet neither his father nor brothers could criticize Clay—not in the face of two men shot from ambush, not when Dave could scarcely sit in his saddle from pain in his torn side. And they knew Clay Stark. Once started on the warpath he was a wolf. He would have fought the WP singlehanded.

"Dirty murderers," he broke the silence again. "We'd oughta hung around an' picked 'em off to the last bushwhackin' hound—all but one, an' left him to go back to the Nueces to tell Bill Parsons this is a white man's range."

"We done enough," his father said. "They'll think twice before they jump us again."

They buried the two cowpunchers. Dave went into Oxbow to have his wound attended to and report the affray to the authorities. The rest of the Starks went on gathering WP heifers and shoving them across the Trinity, and watching to see that none crossed back.

Nor did the Long S work shorthanded. Certain lusty youths began to ride up to the Stark roundup shortly after Dave reached Oxbow. The dead riders had friends, eager to take their places. Old Gene told these cowpunchers there might be trouble. They merely frowned and shrugged their shoulders.

So the Long S had a full complement of riders and for over a week they put Parsons cattle by the hundred over the Trinity until their range was all but clear of these long-horns from the Nueces. And neither Polk Munce nor any WP riders ever loomed on the horizon.

Then the sheriff of Oxbow County drove out to the Stark roundup in a sidebar buggy. He was a middle aged, rotund person well qualified for his office and he had known the Starks all his life.

"I got a warrant for you-all, Gene," said he. "You an' the boys—the whole kit an' boilin' of you. 'Tain't no more agreeable to me than it is to you, but Parsons has sworn to complaints chargin' you-all with murder, arson an' such. Most every crime on the calendar it seems like. You better appear for a preliminary hearin' an' arrange bail. Hope it don't put you out much."

"So that's how they're goin' to make the next play, is it?" old Gene smiled. "Well, seein' we're all under arrest, Walter, we won't embarrass you none by resistin'."

**O**XBOW beheld the spectacle next day, of a reputable citizen with six sons and five other cowpunchers like a bodyguard around Sheriff Walter Hoag's side-bar buggy. They made an imposing cavalcade. The cook tooled the chuck wagon far in the rear, to make camp in the outskirts of town with the remuda grazing on scanty grass.

Oxbow citizens walked with a wary eye that afternoon and evening. Bill Parsons, Polk Munce, and a dozen WP riders—all Nueces men—were in town. Oxbow had seen feuds come to a climax more than once in its dusty streets. A scowl, a tart word, could easily touch off an explosion.

Yet both sides stepped softly. They kept each to their own side of the street. Parsons had appealed to the law, and the Starks were content to let it go at that. Old Gene cautioned his sons and his men.

"We got the best of it, as it stands," he declared. "Nothin' we can do will bring them two boys back to life. If the WP wants to be showed up in court let 'em have it thataway. Keep your mouths shut an' your guns in your holsters."

"I will bet you a dollar to a plugged nickel," Clay said, "that this Parsons outfit aims to have one good crack at us right here in this town before we get out of it. This bringin' us to trial is a joke—or a bluff to get us bunched here. They can't prove a thing only what we admit. They can't get away from the fact that they ambushed us, killed two of our boys, and nicked Dave."

"Just the same, you hold that temper of yours down, young feller," his father said sternly.

"I will," Clay promised. "But you'll see."

Yet it was Clay himself who started the gunpowder lightning flashing across Oxbow's sky. No one, not even his father, ever blamed him. It was inevitable and loyalty in the Stark family had no reservations.

Clay said nothing more. He kept with his father and brothers. They walked in a body to the office of the local justice of the peace,

an old 'dobe building, between a hardware store and a hotel.

The Starks lined one side of the room. The WP contingent sat or stood along the other. The justice of the peace humped behind a desk, a trifle annoyed because cattlemen's difficulties took him from a hardware business that required his individual attention. It was hot and stuffy in that room.



Sheriff Walter Hoag had quietly sworn in four more deputies to reenforce his regular staff of two. As much of Oxbow's population as could crowd in was there to look and listen. Two dozen armed men, who had already been at each other's throats, didn't help to make the atmosphere less electric.

Parsons had a Fort Worth lawyer sitting by, although the proceedings were in the hands of the Oxbow prosecuting attorney. A little buzz ran around the room when it transpired that each member of the Stark family had an individual charge against him. Old Gene and six sons—seven separate trials.

Stark's lawyer protested.

"These offenses as charged," he declared, "if any, which we do not admit, could only be the result of these men acting in a body. To commit each separately for trial is an unwarranted proceeding, as well as an entirely unnecessary expense, both to my clients and the county. I object. I demand that the complaints be thrown out or amended."

"My learned friend," the county attorney admitted with a frown, "is probably correct. But objections cannot be sustained. There are the individual charges, duly sworn to by the complainant."

**T**HE Starks pleaded not guilty as a matter of form. The J. P. listened to evidence from both sides. Polk Munce and his men denied flatly the ambush from the

river bank. The Starks didn't deny the raid on the WP ranch. They went outside the questioning of the J. P. and the county attorney to demand who shot at them. They cited what proof they had that the WP men fired on them. Out of it all stood the salient fact that two Stark riders and one WP man had been killed, and three more WP men carried bullet marks. Property to the value of many thousands of dollars had been destroyed by fire. Ten square miles of good grass had gone up in smoke.

It was no duty of the justice of the peace to determine guilt. His business was simply to decide if the evidence warranted committal for trial in the county court.

So presently Eugene Stark and his six sons were bound over in the sum of three thousand dollars each to appear for trial when the fall term of court began. Before the words were out of the court's mouth bondsmen stepped forward. Old Gene had reckoned on that necessity.

And the justice of the peace would thereupon have dismissed court. But Stark's lawyer checked the words on his lips.

"I ask for the arrest of Polk Munce on a charge of murder and of William Parsons as accessory after the fact," said he sharply. "We wish to swear to a complaint embodying these charges. I ask that these men be apprehended before they leave the jurisdiction of this court."

"Arrest *me*," Bill Parsons rose to his feet. "Charge *me* with murder. I'd like to see you get away with that."

His lawyer pulled him down by his coat-tails. They whispered together. Old Walter Hoag, stood by, stroking his sandy mustache while the complaints were duly sworn. Then he stepped over to Polk Munce and Parsons.

"You're under arrest, both of you," said he. "As a matter of formality these here two deputies uh mine'll stand by you. You can't either of you leave this courtroom. I expect Judge Simmons'll give you a hearin' right away."

"Hell, this is ridiculous," Parsons fumed. "Far as I'm personally concerned I was four hundred miles away on the Nueces when this fuss come off."

"Sorry. Law's law," Hoag replied laconically.

"I ain't no judge. I'm an officer of Oxbow County, doin' my duty."

They were duly committed for trial, the justice of the peace hurrying through the formalities. Parsons and Munce were allowed bail, which they proceeded to arrange. Everybody filed out.

A dozen steps from the door a WP man stopped to glare at Clay Stark. And Clay stopped to glare back.

"Think you'll know me again?" he inquired coldly.

"Run along with poppa," the WP man sneered, "before you git spanked."

"Try spankin' me, will you," Clay's dark eyes blazed. "You'll find it a man's job."

"Oh, I dunno," the fellow drawled. "I've spanked bigger boys'n you."

Men stepped quickly aside from behind both of them, not so much at the words, as the tone. Both stood still, like antagonists left staring at each other in a cleared circle.

The WP man was hunched forward a little. Clay stood with his feet a little apart, as if he were braced. Neither spoke again. Nor did any man on either side move or speak. The Starks looked on in silence and so did the Parsons men. These two would stare at each other a minute and walk away. Or they would reach for their guns.

The WP rider made a mistake. Clay Stark was thinking of his father and brothers, the promise he had made to keep his temper. He knew that if one gun cracked a dozen would be smoking before the first echo died. And the WP man thought Clay was afraid to force the issue. He smiled, a taunting, lip curling grimace, as eloquent as words.

"Yellow!" he said under his breath. "Go crawl into your kennel."

"If you're thinkin' of checkers, I'm in the king row," Clay answered softly. "An' it's your move."

The WP man's right hand closed on his pistol grip. But he miscalculated. Of all the Starks, Clay was fastest on the draw. His gun hand came forward and up in one motion.

With Clay's shot and the bullet which the Parsons man let aimlessly go as he slumped to the sidewalk, the battle of the missing bulls opened in the streets of Oxbow.

## CHAPTER IV

## BLOODY DUST

**E**XCEPT for Clay and the WP man the rest of the two groups were thirty, forty, some fifty yards apart. Bill Parsons, flanked by his lawyer and Polk Munce, had turned in one direction. Stark was marshaling his sons the opposite way. Older, more cautious, each in his own way, for entirely different reasons, had sought to get the match and the powder keg farther apart. But the flame had touched the powder and one man was dying on the plank sidewalk and half a dozen WP guns snapped at Clay—missing him by a miracle. A miracle that was partly due to Oxbow citizens in Clay's vicinity.

Parsons' crew were all from the Nueces. This was a Stark town, Stark country. One or two bystanders wounded and the WP would have all Oxbow to fight. They knew that. Eager as they were to clash with the Starks, they did not relish shooting it out with a hundred angry citizens.

Bill Parsons shouted at his men too late. Their guns were smoking. They were firing and dodging for cover at the same time. So were the Starks and the townspeople. Clay himself had flung in behind the corner of the nearest building. Thence, going instinctively to the heart of the trouble, he tilted Bill Parsons' hat askew on his gray-haired hair with a bullet, thus by a scant inch failing to put a full stop to the pivotal center of the feud.

And a minute after Clay had missed Parsons so narrowly, a wild shot struck through the frame corner of a saloon and hit Con Stark above one eyebrow. He collapsed spilling his blood and brains on his father's boots. After that—a man dead on each side—nothing mattered but more killing. Make their point or die. Wipe out the enemy. Blood for blood. Both sides alike. Both cast in the same mold of fierce determination. Both groups stung to complete disregard of consequences by anger, excitement, that strange sanguinary lust that sometimes turns even rabbitlike men into something deadly while the mood lasts.

The street emptied. The townspeople took to their houses, to their cellars, anywhere to be safe from those forty-five slugs that

whistled like angry bees whenever a head or an arm showed. Business stood still. It had to. Twenty-four armed men intent upon destroying each other could and did suspend the normal activities of a hundred citizens who had no part in the clash. It was death to move in that street now. Stark and Parsons men alike would fire on anything that moved. They were shifting here and there, cognizant of each other's general location, stalking each other like Indians. The first general fusillade had ceased. A shot here. A burst of sharp reports there. Casualties unseen. Whisps of powder smoke drifting from this corner and that. No outcry. Silence, except where two men muttered as they stood within speaking distance of each other, straining their eyes for a living mark to aim on.

Walter Hoag, his two regular deputies, his four temporary ones, were powerless to cope with that situation. Left to their own



preferences, if any one of the seven had mixed in that firing it would have been to lend the Starks a hand. The Long S was their neighbor, their familiar friend. The WP was an interloper with a reputation for high-handed aggression.

Still, law and order meant something in Oxbow, where both were being set at naught that still, hot afternoon. Hoag kept his deputies together, gathered in the rear of a log-walled hotel, out of the firing line.

"After they've wasted some more lead an' one or two more on each side get ventilated, they'll cool off," he said. "Then we got to step in. This sort of thing can't go on."

"I dunno," one replied. "Clay Stark killed a Parsons man first rattle outa the box. Con Stark's killed. I see him go out right at the old man's feet. Them boys'll clean up on each other, I'm afraid."

"It's got to stop somehow, sometime," Hoag murmured. "I certainly wish this damned Parsons outfit had stayed on the Nueces."

"Parsons is expandin'," another deputy observed. "An' I expect he aims to run Oxbow County to suit hisself like he does the Nueces."

"I don't reckon he will," Hoag said shortly.

Nor did Bill Parsons greatly cherish that ambition in the next hour or so. He was fearless enough, nowise backward about a fight. But he had a great deal more at stake than any of his men. Once embroiled they would fight for fun, for loyalty to their salt, out of sheer distaste for backing down an inch before anything or any man. Parsons used his gun as well as his men. But he used his brains also. He didn't control Oxbow County. He could beat the Starks in a street scrimmage and still win nothing. Their home town was no place to smoke them up. The open range was the place to carry on a range war. He had elected to fight them in court in preference to raids and counter raids, because after that first clash on the Trinity he had shrewdly calculated that he could fight the Long S better with writs and injunctions than with powder and lead.

Nor was the WP winning this particular fight. Three Parsons men were down. Two or three more were nursing slight wounds. Parsons didn't know the Stark casualties. He didn't care. He was intent on something vastly more important than killing a hot-head or two.

SO PRESENTLY, between his own calculations and the advice of his Fort Worth attorney, he decided it was to his interest to stop this futile gunfighting. The WP he reckoned had shown the Starks and Oxbow that it had teeth and could use them if pressed, that it could not be bluffed over a gun barrel. Now, to get these fighting cowpunchers out of town and begin the process of legal attrition. Bill Parsons would hardly have comprehended that phrase. But it was what he had in mind when he began swearing out warrants and bringing civil suits. Trials cost money. He had ten times the resources of the Starks.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Parsons sent his attorney forth with a white handkerchief fluttering on a stick, knowing that the lawyer would be recognized as a noncombatant, safe under this flag of truce. For some such sign from either side Walter Hoag was waiting. He was in the street with his six deputies before a Stark head showed. He knew the Fort Worth lawyer, and he grinned sardonically at the man's first words.

"We call on you to keep the peace, Sheriff," he said.

"A hell of a lot your crowd cares about the peace," Hoag growled, with all the contempt the man who enforces the law at frequent physical danger to himself has for those who discuss law ponderously and profit most by its infraction. "What's Parsons' proposition?"

"No proposition, except that while his outfit intends to defend itself there is nothing to be gained for either side by any amount of bloodshed. If these hotheaded Starks will put up their guns, we'll draw off. Personally, if I were you, I'd arrest and disarm both factions."

"You try that job once," Hoag flung at him. "See how far you get. You can reckon how Bill Parsons' crowd would take to bein' disarmed. An' you know blamed well Eugene Stark an' his sons would have to be shot first an' shot plenty before any man could take their guns. Talk sense, Howell. I'm not deputizin' citizens to kill men that elected me to office, just to oblige Bill Parsons."

Well, it seems as if something ought to be done," Parsons' attorney suggested.

"It does. I'll do it," Hoag replied. "If you'll guarantee your side mounts their horses an' rides back to their ranch an' stays south of the river till court sits, I'll see if I can get Gene Stark an' his boys to let it drop. I don't know that they will. I wouldn't blame 'em if they figured they might as well have it out with the WP right here an' now. If they do, I can't stop 'em. An' you can tell Bill Parsons I said so if you want."

"Well, talk to the Stark bunch if you can," Howell said. "The place to settle this dispute is in court. This sort of fighting is sheer lunacy."

Hoag moved up along the street. He knew no Stark would fire on him. There would, in fact, be no shot fired on either side so long as that white flag waved from the lawyer's stick. And presently old Gene beckoned him in behind a pile of lumber in a vacant lot. His face was hard as flint. His boy lay stretched on the ground, a bloodstained hat over his face to keep off the buzzing flies. He listened in stony silence to the sheriff. Clay edged up from cover, his shirt front a red smear where a bullet had raked his flesh.

"I'd call off the boys, Gene, an' let Parsons get his outfit out of Oxbow," Hoag advised. "I don't blame you for this fuss. I don't criticize you nohow. As a private citizen I'm with you both ways from the ace. But as an officer I got to stop this lawlessness as soon as I can. Parsons is willin' to quit an' draw off. I don't know how bad they're hurt but I expect they've had their bellyful. If you insist on forcin' this thing after he wants to stop it, the best you'll get'll be the worst of it, Gene. Because I'll have to call on Federal troops to restore order. I won't deputize Oxbow citizens to shoot up one another. There's been one or two townspeople hit already in this ruckus."

"Tell Bill Parsons to walk into the street an' shoot it out with me singlehanded," Clay broke in fiercely. "I started this row today. I didn't mean to, but there's some things I won't take off anybody—whether he's a cattle king or a hired hand. I started it an' I'll finish it with nobody involved but me an' Parsons himself if he's game to settle it thataway. You see Con layin' there, Walter? I'd a heap rather it was me."

"Hush up, Clay," his father said slowly. "If it was to be settled that way, it would be my job. I'm the head of this family. But it won't be like that. Parsons hires his fightin' done. There is no sense in turmin' this town upside down, nohow. If Parsons wants to call off his hands, 'tain't right we should persist in shootin' Oxbow all to hell to satisfy our own personal grudges. Clay, you tell all the boys not to fire another shot until I say so—unless they are fired on by this Parsons crowd."

Clay turned away obediently.

**EUGENE STARK** said to his friend, the sheriff:

"I want to talk to this man Parsons, Walter, before he leaves town. Get him into the Oak Leaf Hotel. I ain't got much to say but I want to say it to his face."

"Is it just a matter of sayin', Gene?" Hoag said. "Or a matter of shootin'?"

"That depends on him," Stark replied. "All I aim to do is say a few words. If he wants to shoot, I'll accommodate him."

"That's good enough," Hoag replied. "Because chances are I'll have to guarantee him protection before he'll meet you personally. Will you send these boys of yours out to camp as soon as these WP men pull their freight?"

Stark nodded. Hoag went back to Parsons' lawyer. The sheriff left his six deputies standing in the street. If either faction opened fire now they must fire directly upon the collective authority of Oxbow County and Hoag gambled that neither side would risk that. He himself sauntered up to where he could speak to Bill Parsons in the cover where the WP men stood on their guns.

Parsons had courage to back his arrogance. He hadn't got to be a power in Texas without that quality. He issued orders and his men obeyed. In ten minutes the WP riders were mounted and riding, taking their dead and wounded with them. When they were a quarter of a mile distant the Starks swung into their saddles and jogged



out to their camp. And they too, bore two dead men with them, bodies limp across the saddles they had swaggered in that morning. Old Gene stood in the street to watch them go, until with a sigh he turned to the hotel which Hoag, Parsons and the Fort Worth attorney had already entered, escorted by the six deputy sheriffs.

For a few seconds the two cattlemen eyed

each other, feelings masked behind weather-beaten faces.

"Hoag said you wanted to talk this over," Parsons broke the silence first.

"No. I just wanted to ask you somethin'—an' tell you somethin', too. Do you reckon bulls is worth more to you than men's lives?"

Bill Parsons flushed. He made an impatient gesture.

"No use discussin' bulls now," said he. "They were turned loose on the range yesterday—five hundred of 'em, grade Herefords. You started this fuss too soon, Stark, an' you're goin' to pay for it. You an' your hotheaded boys."

"You lie when you say we started it," Stark said calmly. "This Polk Munce, your range boss, started it by firing on us from ambush to try an' stop us from doin' somethin' we had a right to do in self-protection. Your men started it, Parsons, an' you stand back of your men. You've set out to walk over people on the Trinity like you've done on the Nueces. It'll be rough goin', Parsons. You've killed three of my hands so far, decent young fellows that just happened to be workin' for me. You've wounded three of my sons an' killed one, the mildest, kindest boy outa my family of eight. If you was a white man with any sense of fair dealin' none of this woulda happened. But you ain't. You're a inbred hill-billy an' success has gone to your head."

Parsons' great florid face burned.

"It's safe for you to insult me with a crowd of your own county officers to protect you," he growled. "No man can talk to me like that, Stark. Some day, I'll ram them words down your throat."

"An' some day," Eugene Stark told him savagely, "you'll look at one of your sons layin' dead at your feet an' your feelin's will choke you. I want to tell you this, Parsons. It goes just as I say it. If the WP fires another shot on this range at me, at my sons, at a single rider in my outfit, I'll take a leaf outa *your* book. I'll hire me a swarm of gunfighters an' carry this war to the Nueces, into your own home, where *your* sons are."

With that he turned on his heel, walked out to his horse, mounted and rode away

to his own camp to sit and stare at nothing over a canvas sheet that covered the dead body of his son.

## CHAPTER V

### UPROOTED

THE dead were buried. The wounded sat idle till their torn flesh healed. Oxbow went about its business, dating events from that battle in its dusty streets. The Long S attended to its affairs. The Stark riders presently verified Bill Parsons' statement that a quota of bulls was loose on the range. They spoke of it with irony. A belated gesture which, made three weeks sooner, would have saved all that useless bloodshed. But neither WP heifers nor bulls ate grass north of the Trinity. The Starks saw to that. That was their business, their firm determination, as they went forth on spring roundup with a carpet of new grass pushing up through the gray, winter bleached mat that covered the plains.

It didn't matter really whether one thousand or five thousand WP cattle strayed across the Long S range. There was plenty of room, grass and water. Only Eugene Stark knew that if WP cattle in any number moved north of the Trinity a WP roundup crew would come to gather them in season. And Parsons men trafficking there meant another fight. He couldn't hold his sons. From fourteen-year-old Eugene Junior to Dave who had half grown sons of his own, they were a unit in their hatred. They seldom spoke of that ambush on the Trinity, that raid on the WP, the fight in Oxbow. But they mourned Con.

If the lightning had killed one of that strangely united group of brothers the rest would have cursed the sky for its wanton bolt. So they looked south and cursed the Parsons outfit. Parsons, himself, his kin, his riders—it was immaterial. For the Stark boys, everything connected with the WP was lumped in one category. A Parsons rider would fight for his outfit with the single minded loyalty of a feudal retainer. Hence he was an enemy. And they went armed at all times, Winchesters under their stirrup leathers, six-shooters holstered on belts full of ammunition. Old Gene Stark didn't have to be told what was in their

minds, what each and all would do in a pinch. He knew his own brood.

So the Long S kept its range clear of WPs. As drifting Parsons cattle crossed they shoved them back. There were no more ambushades. Old Gene Stark knew there wouldn't be. Parsons had adopted tactics less direct—likely to be in the end more effective in the way of material injury than powder and lead. He was shooting holes into the resources of the Stark family from behind a legal barricade. It was safer, surer than gunfire. He was a shrewd and remorseless man. He moved craftily. He removed one source of friction. He took back with him, to the Nueces, Polk Munce and every WP man who had engaged in that Trinity war. He sent a new range boss and a new crew to the Trinity.

Ostensibly he moved for peace on the range. Actually every man he sent up was a picked gunfighter, under a foreman with a reputation that ran from the Brazos to the Panamints in Arizona. And coincident with that he launched one civil suit after another against the Starks. Suits for personal injury. Suits for property damage. Suits on behalf of the families of his slain cowpunchers. Suits in the name of every man in his outfit so much as scratched by a Stark bullet. His activities turned the sheriff of Oxbow County into a process server who wore out the road to the Stark ranch.

"Ain't there no way of stoppin' this bombardment of blue papers?" old Gene asked his lawyers.

In all his years as a cattleman he had never been involved in litigation over money or property. His Oxbow attorney, growing appalled at the number and variety of actions Bill Parsons brought as claims, insisted on Stark engaging counsel from the capital. They sat in Mark Hohne's office in Oxbow—two lawyers and a troubled cowman. And even two lawyers could scarcely handle the job. It required a corps.

"No. All you can do is defend these suits. If you win you can plaster him with costs in the civil cases," both Hohne and the assisting lawyer declared. "You can't stop a man bringing action against you. You can counterclaim. All this is just meant to harass you. The only real ground he has against

you is that raid on the WP ranch after they ambushed you on the river. You shouldn't have admitted responsibility for that. He'll win that likely. No valid defense—in law. The rest will probably fail, or be thrown out of court."

**I**T'S goin' to cost us a powerful lot of money, all this damned law business," old Gene said to Dave as they rode home. "No matter if we win out. Lawyers fees, fees for this an' that an' the other thing. Hell, he can pile expense on us till we're snowed under."

"Be expense on him too," Dave replied. "Parsons loves a dollar better'n we do."

"He's got twenty to our one, that's the trouble," his father said soberly. "He can spend dollar for dollar with us an' still be a rich man when we're broke."

"If he breaks us thataway, stingin' like a bloodsucker through the courts," Dave said soberly, "the Stark boys will break him on the open range if they have to turn outlaw to do it. But he won't, dad. He don't own Oxbow County."

"His attorneys are movin' to have all them cases taken out of Oxbow County," old Gene cited a new angle. "Askin' a change of venue for all these trials, both civil an' criminal. Claims he can't get an unprejudiced hearin' in Oxbow. I reckon he'll get the civil suits transferred. He's got smart attorneys. They can drive a four-horse team through the law. It don't look rosy for the Long S, Dave. I don't want my family took down to poverty to satisfy a overbearin' man's grudge an' fatten lawyers' pocketbooks."

"Law ain't everythin'," Dave said curtly.

"It's what we got to live by mostly," his father answered. "Times when you could settle any argument with a gun an' know it was settled permanent, is gone. Texas is civilized, my son. That's what the old-timers worked an' fought for, civilization an' law an' security. It's better'n fightin' Injuns an' livin' like savages. Even if it has its disadvantages, when skullduggery like this Parsons business can tie a man's hands an' bleed him to death."

"Texas may be civilized," Dave Stark said, "but Bill Parsons ain't. Still, the Stark

family has never took a whippin' yet, dad. No use borrowin' trouble."

They didn't have to. It came to them freely, as a gift, bestowed whether they would have it or no. At various times through that summer every Stark man who had been involved in that fracas spent as much time coming and going, cooling his heels in court corridors, as he spent in legitimate range work. Bill Parsons got his change of venue to another county where Starks and Parsons alike were viewed impartially. But there, as elsewhere, the weight of tremendous resources used without scruple counted heavily.

Eugene Stark's funds flowed out and vanished like water spilled on parched earth, were dissipated like dust in a whirlwind.

He drew on his bankers. His cattle and land were ample security. But there seemed no end to the drain. Legal fees, bonds, charges for this and that,

appeals, ate up money insatiably. And the end was never in sight. From every angle that clever legal minds could devise, Parsons attacked Stark, willing to spend a thousand dollars any time if it could inflict expense on the Long S.

By fall, two or three salient facts stared the Starks in the face. The criminal cases on both sides brought acquittal, after floods of expensive oratory and conflicting testimony. No Texas jury would convict for killing done in an open fight. Justifiable homicide remained more than a legal phrase. A fight was a fight still.

The damage suits for personal injuries Parsons lost one by one, yet every case thrown out of court cost Eugene Stark more money than he liked to think about. But the civil suit for property destroyed in that retaliatory night raid on the WP was a different matter. The torch to haystacks and buildings, miles and miles of range grass gone up in smoke, couldn't be gainsaid. A verdict for Parsons was assured on the Starks' admission. They wouldn't perjure themselves to deny that—

although Clay Stark swore truthfully that no soul in his outfit knew his intention when he stole down and put a match to the WP ranch.

He was a man grown, responsible for his own acts. Nevertheless, his act was tied up with his family, with the Long S. If life is cheap, property holds a high value in the eyes of mankind. A jury gave a verdict that made the Starks gasp—fifty thousand dollars and costs! Against which the Long S could appeal to one supreme court after another if they chose—with the legal certainty that every superior court would uphold the judgment.

Lastly, by the time fall roundup was over, the last beef gone to market, the Starks knew that Bill Parsons had massed fully thirty thousand cattle from the Nueces along the south bank of the Trinity. There wasn't pasture for them there. They would cross. Nothing would stop them. By spring the Stark range would carry two WPs for every hoof bearing the Long S. And then Parsons' range crews would cross in the spring to sweep the Long S range from end to end. Eugene Stark knew that under such conditions it was only a matter of time till some rider pulled a gun and the ball would open again.

**G**ENE STARK wasn't an old man in spirit. Yet fifty-eight years had left their mark on him. He had lived all his life in Texas, as his father had done before him. He had always taken it for granted that he would end his days on the Trinity in the comfortable home he had created, and leave his sons in possession to carry on.

But he cared a great deal more for his sons than he did for his own ease, his land or his cattle. He had been a hard fighter but he knew the value of peace. To stand pat on the Trinity with seven sons and half a dozen hired riders, fight the WP tooth and toenail, meant certain bloodshed and ultimate poverty for them all. Hence he looked for a way out before disaster took its final toll. So long as Bill Parsons lived and commanded power, he would harass the Long S. He had so declared himself. His acts proved his assertion. He was a big fish who had always eaten little fish.



If he had blunted a few teeth on the Long S, it had, Eugene Stark knew by all the signs and tokens, only made him more determined to swallow them.

No man likes to take a whipping. The Starks didn't. Yet, except in a blind burst of fury, no man dashes his brains out against a solid wall. There was a way out. Stark and his sons discussed it pro and con. They didn't agree, but they considered.

Sixteen hundred miles northwest, a virgin country was opening up. Once reckoned fit for nothing but the buffalo, the Indian and the wolf, it was proving a cattleman's country, providing an outlet for the Southwestern ranges, now filled to overflowing.

The Texas longhorn was already moving in on that northern grass, laying the foundation of a new pastoral empire. The longhorn had been king of the South and he was extending his dominion as the Romans reached out for the barbarian provinces. Gene Stark found himself lending ear to Uncle Bill Sayre of Fort Worth when that worthy banker and lifelong friend counseled him:

"It'd be the wisest move you could make, Gene. You ain't whipped. You've done your damndest. You're just up against something that you got to sidestep for your family's sake. If another range fight starts, it'll only mean more killin' and nothing settled in the end. You'll lose more of your sons. No, you'll lose nobody's respect if you put the width of three States between you and Bill Parsons and his hired gunmen. The North's a good country. I'm sending cattle up there myself. In ten years the Trinity will be grazed to death anyway, and everything you'd run there would have to be under fence. Get in on the cream of the new grazin' territory while you got something to go on. If you stay with the Trinity, even if there's never another shot fired, Parsons will buck you till you're broke."

Stark mulled that over until he accepted it as a way out. And so did his sons. Not with too good a grace; but old Gene for all his affection and kindness and indulgence, still exercised a patriarchal authority over his numerous brood.

Neither the Starks nor Uncle Bill Sayre

knew that already Bill Parsons, far-seeing, hewing to the line of his ambition to be the biggest individual cattle owner in North America, had that very season reached into the Northwest with three herds and taken a prime location.

It might not have made any difference if they had known. By spring Eugene Stark knew he had little choice. When his obligations were all met his fortune had shrunk to a point that appalled him. He could take the road with one herd and just about enough cash to carry the outfit until it had beef to market again. And above that he had his ranch on the Trinity. He could sell or mortgage to raise more operating capital. And he elected to sell, cut every tie, tear up the last root, and like the Israelites, march with his hoofed and horned beasts, his sons and his sons' sons, his gear and his household goods, out of a land that offered nothing now but bondage to a festering grudge.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DUDE

**B**ROCK PARSONS leaned back in his chair. The forefinger of one hand traced an invisible pattern on the tablecloth. The younger, dude-raised son of Bill Parsons looked out a wide window on green grass and shrubbery, plummy tufts of pampas grass, a rose garden coming to bud, beds of tulips and narcissus, lying between the ranch-house and the hurrying Nueces. His invalid mother had feasted her eyes on that for years, from a couch in an upper front room. Brock's mind was divided between recurrent pity for her, and a consideration of the matter his father and Matt had been discussing, and a curious sort of indignation stirred in him. No man likes to have himself, his code, his opinions, held in contempt. He turned his head to look across at his father's heavy, scowling face and say:

"You're bearing down heavy on a rotten deal. It's small—and I always thought you were a big man."

For a second Bill Parsons opened his mouth in sheer astonishment. Not so much at his youngest son's words, because Brock had said the same thing in more diplomatic

terms earlier in the discussion, as at the direct challenge to himself.

"I'm not gaugin' either myself or my range policy by the opinions of a blamed dude that knows a lot about books an' less than nothin' about cows—or men," he blared finally in his big voice. "Time you've spent a few years in the cow business you'll cut your eyeteeth maybe. Meantime keep your damn criticisms till I ask for 'em. If you'd been raised the way you'd oughta been, you'd know enough to keep your mouth shut. Some professor tell you that when somebody walks on your toes it's polite to step aside an' apologize for bein' in the way? Ever strike you that your expensive education wasn't paid for by lily fingered methods of doin' business?"

Brock flushed.

"I didn't ask you to educate me," he answered. "I didn't even ask to be born. Whatever I am, I'm pretty much what you've made me. And a man doesn't have to have the expensive education you're all the time flinging in my face to have ideas about fair play. I'm not the only one that criticizes your tactics. Maybe it just happens that I'm the only one that's fool enough to say things to your face. This Stark business has got to be a stink in Texas. And you're still figuring how you can carry it farther."

"Them Starks happen to be friends of yours?" Bill Parsons leaned back in his chair. For a moment his eyes swept over



all he could see from the three windowed sides of the dining room. From the broad porch that faced on the Nueces, Bill Parsons could look over a territory

he controlled as absolutely as he controlled the motions of his hands. Twenty miles from his front door to the boundary of his own land. A stranglehold on every waterhole and creek within a fifty mile radius. And this bald faced kid telling him his methods were wrong! He glanced at Matt with a different expression. Here was a man after his own heart, he thought.

Matt rolled a cigarette, apparently unmoved at the passage between his father and younger brother. He was a Parsons. He knew the cow business inside out. He had no university degrees and rather scorned them. Matt had taken his degree on the plains, in the dust of herds, the smoke of branding fires. He was six foot two of rough recklessness. And he had never spoken to his father in his life as Brock dared to speak now—never on any subject.

Matt knew that to speak of the Starks, the Long S, the Trinity, almost made Parsons senior foam at the mouth. That fight had already cost him a lot of money. It wasn't finished. It never would be finished as long as Bill Parsons could get any satisfaction in carrying it on. Matt would have dropped that feud himself. His father never would. That apparently was what stirred Brock. Matt sat back, interested, waiting to see how far this would go. He didn't quite share his father's opinion of Brock. This kid brother had nerve and persistence. Matt never opposed his father on any grounds.

"You settin' yourself up for a friend of this Stark outfit, I say?" Parsons almost bellowed.

"I never laid eyes on any one of the family so far as I know," Brock answered quietly. "Only I have had this row brought to my attention in so many different ways that I'm sick of hearing about it. Neither the beginning of it, nor the fighting, nor the litigation is any credit to the WP. What's the use of hating people and piling trouble on them just because they object to being walked on?"

"That'll be all from you," Parsons snarled. "Don't you never talk to me again like that. You'll go up the trail an' you'll make a hand till you get sense enough to know your business and mind it. By the Lord, I've a mind to kick you plumb upstairs an' down again! If I'd had the raisin' of you you wouldn't 'a' been a useless, butter fingered dude. If your mother—"

"Leave mother out of this," Brock flashed. "I don't care a damn what you say to me, what you think of me, but don't blame her for anything I do or say. Mother has nothing to do with what I think of your rough-and-tumble way of shoving

everybody off the map the minute they refuse to dance to your tune."

PARSONS looked at his son. Matt knew that he was nearly speechless with anger, as he always became when anyone crossed or defied him. Then his hard, beefy face cracked in a wolfish grin.

"All right, me brave buck," he grunted. "You've called the turn. I *do* make 'em dance to my music. So will you, or I'll shove you off the WP map."

"Until last summer," Brock said, looking steadily at his angry father, "I never was on the WP map except as something for you to sneer at when you happened to feel that way."

"All college has done for you is to swell you outa shape," Parsons senior declared. "You was supposed to be made a gentleman to humor a sick woman's whim. You ain't nothin'. You don't know law, medicine, business. You don't know beans. You don't know nothin' you ain't read in a book. Except to be gabby outa your turn. You can be as windy as a politician about things that don't concern you, that you don't *sabe*."

"Oh Lord," Brock laughed in his father's face. "I have no monopoly on being windy, paterfamilias. There are none so blind as those who will not see. I held up my end on a trail herd last summer. I brought back a *remuda* from Nebraska when your trail boss wanted to take the easy way home. You might as well quit depreciating my personal stock. I have learned more about the cow business in twelve months than some of your valuable employees have learned in a lifetime."

"You got a lot to learn yet," his father assured him grimly. "An' you'll learn it or I'll know the reason why. You'll go up the trail again. You'll go as a hand under Polk Munce, an' what Polk says will go for you till I say otherwise."

Brock shifted uneasily in his chair.

"If you send me north under Polk Munce," he stated after a brief silence, "the chances are you will be shy one of your pet foremen or one of your sons before we cross the Platte."

Parsons thrust his head forward aggressively.

"Just what you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Just what I said," Brock replied. "I don't like Polk Munce. He doesn't like me. I not only don't like him, but I despise his type. If you figure it's part of my range education to work as a trail hand, I don't mind. But you have three other trail herds going north. Why should I have to rub elbows with a man like Polk Munce when it isn't really necessary? If you want to find out what I'm made of, give me a trail herd to take to Montana myself."

"Polk," said his father sourly, "is a smart cowman. He's made money for me. All you've ever done is spend it. Polk knows his business an' you don't. You're goin' as one of his trail crew day after tomorrow. I'll find somethin' for you to do at that Judith ranch when you get there. A couple of seasons in Montana'll make you or break you. You'll learn somethin'. Polk Munce is the man to learn you."

"He may learn something himself that'll complete his education," Brock replied tartly. "Why do I have to cut my teeth in the cattle business under a man who'll go out of his way to make it hot for me every chance he gets?"

"Because I say so," Parsons growled.

Brock's blue eyes flamed for an instant. Then he smiled with deceptive sweetness.

"All right," said he, "if Polk Munce can stand it, I reckon I can. If anything happened to Polk en route would I be supposed to take charge of the herd?"

His father and brother stared at him.

"Ain't nothin' goin' to happen to Polk," Bill Parsons said slowly.

"Something *will* happen to him," Brock drawled. "If he tramps on my toes more than once. You may have confidence in him and like him. But I like him just the way I like skunks and rattlesnakes."

With which Brock arose and left the room. They heard his feet pad lightly on the stairs leading to his invalid mother's room. Bill Parsons frowned blackly as he lit a cigar. Matt looked thoughtful.

DAD," he said with the frankness of a favorite son, "do you reckon it's a good idea to send Brock up the trail under Polk. He seems to have considerable feelin'

about Polk Munce 'cause of somepin'."

"Do him good. Polk'll show him where to head in at," his father muttered. "Damn spoiled brat!"

"The brat," Matt observed, "stands about six feet in his sox an' weighs around a hundred an' eight-five, an' appears to have considerable temper. Also, he has plumb vigorous notions about things. If Polk should get uppity with him—well, I dunno. An' Polk is mean, dad. You know it. He's meaner'n ever since that fuss on the Trinity. He pulled a bonehead play there an' he's aware that a lot of people in Texas don't think much of him for it. If the play comes up Brock'll talk to him about this Stark business plainer than he did to you. Brock may be a dude, but he don't seem to be afraid of anything much."

"He ain't got sense enough," Parsons growled. "I've said he's to go an' he's goin'. He'll never be worth a damn to me unless he changes his tune. If he'd been raised the way you was he might be some account. All he knows is to sling a lot of high-falutin' language an' criticize things that don't concern him. If that's what colleges do for young fellers, I'd turn 'em into livery stables."

Matt said nothing more. He knew his father's moods, his stubborn way of facing an issue. Matt had his own methods of coping with that. But he didn't feel called upon to make an issue of Brock. Matt was keen witted enough to realize that Bill Parsons resented his college bred son. Matt didn't. He could perceive certain advantages in Brock's manner, his language, his cool assurance in any sort of situation—things that simply exasperated his father.

"What he should do," Matt thought to himself, "is to give the kid a herd an' start him north as a trail boss. Give him a real chance to show what he can do. Him an' Polk Munce is liable to tangle over nothin' at all. Bullheaded as he is the old man would feel pretty sick if his oldest range boss killed his youngest son. But, hell, it's no use talkin' to him. It ain't my funeral anyway. Maybe he won't go."

But Brock did go. Four days later he left the Nueces punching the drag of a WP herd under Polk Munce, eating dust like any other forty-dollar trail hand.

And it never occurred to Brock that his father's last words to Polk had reference to himself.

"That boy of mine don't have to be handled with gloves, Polk. He's got a lot to learn. You don't have to be eternally recollectin' he's the owner's son."

"He'll get along all right, I reckon," Polk drawled. "All he's got to do is make a hand. If he don't, he'll go down the road talkin' to hisself, Bill. He's just a stock hand, as far as I'm concerned. I don't play no favorites."

"That's the ticket," Parsons nodded. "Don't baby him none."

It might have surprised even Bill Parsons to know just how Polk Munce interpreted that conversation.

THE route of the WP herd took them across the Trinity halfway between the new WP range in that territory and the old Long S ranch. For a trail crew Munce had almost the same personnel that he led in the battle of the bulls—which, as Brock knew, was how Texans generally spoke of that bloody clash. They crossed the river, as a matter of fact, within gunshot of where Polk made that first ambushade. Polk had some hard pills in his trail crew. But they were not all of that stripe. A Kansas youngster about Brock's own age reined up beside him as they climbed in the wake of the herd up the north bank. He spoke about that trouble.

"Polk bit off a trifle more'n he could chew that time," the boy grinned. "I figured it was kinda raw, but when you're workin' for a cow outfit you don't argue with the boss about things like that."

"It was so damned unnecessary," Brock commented. "Those people were only protecting their own stock on their own range."

"Yeah, but you know how it is," Slater replied. "The WP has always had everything its own way on the Nueces. It made Polk sore to have them Starks shove our cattle off an open range. I guess nobody reckoned they was such an all-fightin' bunch. Anyway, the WP come out on top. They've got this range in their sack now. I hear the Stark outfit sold their ranch this spring an' pulled for Montana. They were sure a fightin' family, I'll say that for

'em. I reckon they figured if they fought it to a finish they'd be broke in the end. The WP is too all-fired big an outfit to monkey with."

Brock let that pass. He knew the history of that feud better than anyone surmised.



It ran in his mind, filled him with an uncomfortable distaste for the hatred he knew these people must feel. Coupled with that was a touch of shame because Brock knew what a good many Texans thought of Bill Parsons for all he had heaped on the Long S.

After supper Brock was free until he went on middle guard. He caught out another mount besides his night horse, saddled and loped down the river. He had a curious impulse to see the home these Starks had abandoned to strangers, because of the spoke his father insisted on thrusting in their wheel at every turn.

He sat his horse before the Long S ranch-house in the pearly translucence of a southern evening. The new owners had not yet taken possession. It ran in Brock's mind that it would be just like his father to move heaven and earth to acquire that ranch, simply to make his triumph complete. It was profoundly silent about that place. The Starks had occupied this spot thirty-odd years and they had made it beautiful, even more beautiful than the grounds his mother had striven for around the WP.

"They must have had several thousand acres of good bottom land," Brock mused, marking the long lines of fence. "And eventually I suppose dad'll manage to buy it in and make it a private pasture for himself. Funny, people can't get along in as big a country as this without reaching out to cut some other fellow's throat."

When he turned his sweaty mount loose and stood cinching his saddle on his night horse, Polk Munce sauntered by and said to him:

"Young feller, it ain't exactly the custom for a hand on a trail crew to amble off from his outfit thataway."

Brock looked at the trail boss over his shoulder for a second, then continued to do up his latigo. He didn't even trouble to answer.

Polk watched him stroll over to where his bed lay flattened in the grass by the wagon.

"Some of these days," he whispered with a rancor out of all proportion to the offense, "I'll make you talk outa the wrong side of your face, you swelled-up pup!"

## CHAPTER VII

### ONE OF THESE PERSONAL MATTERS

FROM that crossing the WP herd shoved up the Trinity keeping the river close on the left until the roofs of Forth Worth appeared. At their noon halt that day a buggy came rolling out from town to stop at the chuck wagon. Brock on herd, saw that the driver was a woman. When he was relieved to eat and change horses he perceived further that the woman was Esther Munce, whom he hadn't seen for three years. Once, long ago, he and Esther had played together through a memorable vacation on the Nueces. Old man Munce's only girl. She knew Brock as soon as he dismounted. She left her seat on a roll of bedding beside Polk to come over and talk to Brock when he filled his plate with food.

Nature has a strange way of fashioning people of infinite variety from the same materials. Polk Munce and his younger brother Tuck were hard looking men, indeed ugly featured men. They had thin lips and mean small eyes. Polk especially resembled a badly weathered gargoyle. His long nose drooped in a predatory curve. Wind and sun and bad temper had graven deep lines in his face. Tuck had better features and a more saturnine expression—if that were possible. Brock dimly recalled Old Man Munce as very like his sons. He had been a cattleman in a small way on the Nueces until his holdings were absorbed by the everspreading WP, which had likewise absorbed both his sons into its service.

Yet this Munce girl was almost beautiful. Nothing about her offended the most critical eye. Her hair was fluffy gold, her

skin like that of a healthy child. Her blue eyes sparkled as if some joke eternally lurked behind them. Her voice was a low, soft drawl from between lips that parted in an enticing curve.

"It's been a long time since I saw you, Brock," she greeted.

"It surely has," Brock smiled. Hat in hand he looked down on her five foot three with a smile to match her own.

"Sit down and eat your dinner," Esther said. She moved into the shade of the chuck wagon beside Brock when he squatted on the grass, plate in lap. "You all through school? And going up the trail with the longhorns to Montana?"

Brock nodded.

"I'd trade places with you," Esther said. "I'd sort of like to go north. I'll never be through with school, I reckon."

"Why? How's that?" Brock asked.

"Oh, I'm teaching. Schoolma'am. Fully ordained," she laughed. "Be an old maid with cats and a parrot, by and by."

"No chance," Brock grinned. "Some of these days a man will come along and then—good-by classrooms forever."

"Oh, I don't know," she cocked her head on one side to look at him quizzically. "I like teaching better than keeping house. Are you coming back this way in the fall?"

"That I can't say," Brock replied. "I'm subject to orders, being a mere private in the WP army. The big chief has gone on record that a course of sprouts on the northern range may make something of me. I'm liable to be up there a couple of years taking a postgraduate course in the cattle business."

"What does your mother think of that?" Brock frowned.

"Like myself, she hasn't much say. W. J. Parsons runs this show to suit himself."

**B**ROCK finished his dinner, rolled a cigarette to smoke with his coffee. He liked Esther Munce. It was a pity, he reflected, that some of this girl's kindness and sunny nature hadn't been bestowed on Polk. He could see Polk scowling, his eyes on them. And presently he walked over past their seat by a wagon wheel.

"You're due on herd."

"You deal in the obvious," Brock answered.

"What's that?" Polk growled, unable to interpret the unfamiliar phrase. His tone was just a trifle more ill natured than usual—and it was never genial when he addressed Brock.

"I know I am," Brock translated. He wouldn't have troubled to make his meaning clear if he had been alone. The hardest task he found on trail was being civil to Polk Munce.

"Oh, forget being a trail boss for a little while and try being a human being, Polk," Esther admonished with a smile. "I haven't seen Brock for ages. I want to talk to him a minute."

Polk walked on. Brock rose.

"You shouldn't be a trail hand under him," Esther said. "What's the big idea?"

"My father's," Brock shrugged his shoulders. "It's a sort of punishment for talking out of my turn. Talking big and doing little—according to him."

"How?"

"Well, you see," Brock lingered to explain, "I've been expensively educated. Like some vaccinations it didn't take. I know a great deal about a lot of things that dad has very hazy notions about, but I don't seem to know anything that he considers worth a hoot. I don't know what he expected me to be, but he's powerfully disappointed and rather contemptuous with what I am. So he's taking the roughest, toughest way of making a cowpuncher of me. Of course I'll never, in his eyes, be the cowman Matt is, but if I knuckle down I may eventually become useful to the WP."

He grinned cheerfully at this picture of his own painting.

Polk doesn't like you," Esther said thoughtfully. "And anybody Polk doesn't like gets a rough deal where he has any say-so."

"How do you know he doesn't like me?"

Brock inquired.

"I know Polk," she said. "The way he spoke to you just now is enough. Besides he never did like you."

"Right both ways," Brock nodded. "It's mutual, Esther, sad to say. Still, I don't think your worthy elder brother will hand

me any raw deal. Not so you could notice. I'm something of a diplomat."

"You'll need to be," Esther frowned. "For goodness sake, Brock, don't quarrel with Polk. He was always bad, and now he's worse. Something has got under his skin terribly the last couple of years."

"I know," Brock nodded. "It was that Stark business on the Trinity. It has affected Parsons senior something the same way. They know it's a black mark against them. Well, I'm due to eat dust with that herd. Like old times to see you again. You ought to go north and grow up with the country. It's really a peach of a territory. I was up there last summer."

"I might at that," Esther said. "I had the offer of a school in a settlement just out of Fort Benton last summer."

"You wouldn't teach school long up there," Brock eyed her admiringly. "There's ten men to every woman. Those northern boys swing a wide loop when anything as good-looking as you heaves in sight. Blondes are fatal."

Esther laughed.

"All the nice Texas boys are going up the trail," she said. "Maybe I'll have to go too, or be an old maid."

"If it gets serious let me know," Brock joked. "I might come to the rescue. So long."

They shook hands.

**I**T MUST, Brock decided, be pretty obvious when Esther could size up the situation at such short notice. Polk must either have said something or inadvertently let slip some of his rancor. Otherwise Esther would hardly have warned him so bluntly. Only Brock needed no warning. The Nueces was barely two weeks behind and the atmosphere was electric already. Nothing much said. Nothing done. Just atmosphere, a look, a tone. Brock grinned as he joined the other riders on the flank of that grazing herd. Dude! He laughed to himself. As if a few years in an Eastern

school weakened a man's arm, made his eye less sure, his brain less alert. Brock felt that Polk Munce was always eyeing him slantwise, looking for an opening to flick the whip of authority, to make him look and feel cheap if he could. Just once, the bushwhacking killer! Brock had very definite ideas, very positive feelings about Polk. He knew various things about himself, about his own capacity, which Polk Munce couldn't possibly know. Let him learn!

Meantime he held up his end without any particular effort or coaching, somewhat, he secretly observed, to the surprise of the others in that trail crew. Among themselves they had started out by christening him the "dude cowboy." Polk had started that. Brock smiled and let it pass. So long as he made a hand with the herd, Polk could do nothing except eye him sourly. If he went beyond that he was looking for trouble. Considering which Brock merely shrugged his shoulders. Polk and everybody else seemed to have forgotten that Brock Parsons had been born on a Texas ranch, that he had done for play or sport ever since he was small, the very things the range rider did for a living.

Rivers to cross! In the path of a trail herd from Texas to Montana there was always one more river to cross. The Nueces, the Colorado, the Brazos, the Trinity, the Red River of the South. Swirly water, Swimming water. Bogs. Quicksands. Hissing currents and sluggish streams of brackish water. The WP longhorns breasted them all, passed on triumphant, gaining in flesh and spirit as they crossed each degree of latitude. It was not a drive so much as a sixteen hundred mile graze, expertly managed to bring the cattle to a northern range that fall in good shape to face the rigors of winter. Adventure, hardship, good, bad and indifferent going, were incidental to that purpose. Industry, like an army, drives at its objective undeterred by minor casualties.

And so in the fullness of time Polk Munce's chuck wagon encamped on the Canadian River, which is a long way from Canada. Various things occurred to Polk that particular day. A twenty-eight mile drive over a waterless plateau under a sun



that fairly scorched. A fall that jarred the bones of his ancestors when his horse put a forefoot in a badger hole. An irritating touch of indigestion. Polk had a weakness for fried steak, hot biscuits and strong coffee. He was like an angry bee by night, ready to sting anything that moved within his ken.

It happened that Brock Parsons chose that evening to be gay and facetious, to talk continuously while the crew ate supper.

"For God's sake," Polk snarled at last. "Close your trap an' give our ears a rest."

It was not so much what he said as his tone. Tired men make allowances for other tired men. And Polk was boss. Within reason he had a right to demand quietness—if he could enforce it without making it a personal issue. But he flung that at Brock like a calculated insult and a hush fell on the men scooping food off their tin plates. They had no way of gauging Brock. But they all knew Polk Munce.

Brock knew that the expected crisis had arisen. He had seen it coming for days. If he let that slide Polk would make it stronger next time. Not only as a matter of policy, but as a matter of instinct, Brock took the bull by the horns like a flash.

"Are you ambitious to cut another notch on your gun, Polk," he asked, "that you speak to me in that tone of voice? Don't do it. It's my privilege—any man's privilege—to talk when and where and as much as he likes."

"Not around me," Polk hunched himself forward. "I don't give a damn if you was the apple of Bill Parson's eye. When I tell a man to shut up he shuts up."

"Try shutting me up," Brock said calmly, "and see how it works."

CONSIDERING the time, the place and the men, Brock's open challenge left Polk only one thing to do. He had overreached himself and he had to go through, according to his own light upon such matters. As a backing to his statement he reached for his gun—and halted his hooking fingers half way.

Because in some mysterious fashion Brock had a white handled Colt's in his right hand trained steadily on Polk's midriff. At a distance of ten feet even a dude

could hardly miss. Polk Munce hadn't survived a variety of personal encounters without using his brains as well as his gun. There was something deadly about the unexpected speed of that draw. A green college dude shouldn't be able to get the drop on him like that; nor be cool enough to hold a six-shooter in one hand and balance a dinner plate in the other without a tremor. Nor did Polk misinterpret the glint in Brock's blue eyes.

"Hell," he said with a forced grin. "Why the lightnin' gunplay? You don't reckon I'm goin' to stage a fight with any of the Parsons family do you? I was just tryin' you out, kid."

"Oh, were you?" Brock said mockingly. "How sweet of you, Polk. Well, since you've tried me out, kindly remember that I've been tried and not found wanting. Likewise, try to remember—when you speak to me, hereafter—that a little common politeness is expected even from a tarantula like you."

Polk stepped over to a pot simmering on the fire by the Dutch oven. He poured himself a cup of coffee.

"Go ahead," he said with simulated indifference. "Talk all you want to. I won't stop you."

"You couldn't, if you did want to," Brock snapped at him. "And I'll show you why."

He had been squatting on his haunches. He hadn't even altered his position except for that one swift movement of his right hand. Now he rose, thrusting the gun back in the holster belted around his lean hips. He emptied the scraps off his plate, took the ten-inch disc of tin and tossed it high in the air. As it spun, flashing, thirty feet above his head he whipped the forty-five out and let go three shots. The last made the plate leap like a rabbit as it touched the earth. Picketed horses surged on their ropes. Polk, cattleman in spite of his anger, his mortification, glanced uneasily to see if the snuffy herd had been startled by those shots. Then he looked at Brock and at the plate which Tommy Slater ran to pick up.

There were two holes in the middle of it and a long gouge where the third bullet had struck it edgewise as it hit the ground.

"That's shootin'," Slater held it up for them to see.

Brock helped himself to another cup of coffee. The others drifted away to uncoil reatas, for the horsewrangler was bunching the remuda to catch fresh mounts. Polk Munce squatted on his heels, brooding. Brock, walking by him, halted to say in a tone that didn't carry beyond Polk's ears:

"I staged that for *your* benefit, Polk. As a trail boss you have a right to fire me for any reason that strikes your fancy. But you can't make breaks at me and get away with it, Mister Munce. Next time you make a play at me and I have to pull a gun on you it'll be smoking when it comes in sight."

**B**ROCK went on middle guard that night with Tommy Slater. There was a round bright moon. The cattle lay on a



broad flat, a dark blot washed by silver. They would have slept through those midnight hours with no rider near. An all day march meant an all night sleep

for longhorns on trail, unless something frightened them. All Brock and Slater had to do was put in the time. They ambled around the sleeping herd side by side through their watch.

"Where'd you learn to be lightnin' with a gun thataway?" Slater asked finally.

"College course in small arms," Brock chuckled.

"You don't say," Slater commented. "Hell, I thought all them colleges did was to learn you things outa books."

Brock laughed.

"Shucks," he said, "you fellows ought to get rid of the idea that going to college makes a man plumb useless. Even my father sort of nurses that idea. It's a mistake. The fact is, Tom, I was always crazy about horses and guns. Even in civilization there's plenty of chance to learn the use of fire-arms if you crave to. A man doesn't have to be born and raised in the shade of a chuck wagon to learn a quick draw. If I'd paid more attention to books and not so much to fooling around I'd be better off. I was practically kicked out of Yale in

my junior year. That's why the old man is so sore on me. I'm not either one thing nor the other, according to him. But it hasn't ruined me altogether. I think I can hold my own most places."

"You're sure a humdinger with a Colt. You ride good enough. You sabe cows almost like you'd been raised with 'em," Slater mused. "I don't see nothin' wrong with you, nohow. Seems like old Polk does, though. You keep your eye peeled for Polk. He turned that off pretty smooth. He's foxy. But he won't forget you took the play away from him. He knows you made him look like a sucker. He holds a grudge worse'n any man I ever saw. He'll be figurin' ways to jump you whenever he thinks the sign's right."

"I expect he will," Brock said lightly. "In which case I might have to promote myself to be trail boss and take this herd through to its destination."

Tom Slater sat sidewise in his saddle and blew a puff of smoke at the fat, silver moon overhead.

"Well," he said. "Far as I'm concerned he wouldn't be missed."

## CHAPTER VIII

### FIRST BLOOD TO POLK

**T**HE longhorn-Texas steer has the spirit of his Spanish ancestry, the fighting bulls of Andulasia. He has in his long legs the speed of a horse. In certain respects he has less brains than a sheep. Generations on the plains shifting for himself, running from wolves and whooping riders made the longhorn brother to the antelope when it came to taking quick alarm and departing hastily from the scene of said alarm.

The WP herd under Polk Munce was made up of twenty-eight hundred two-year-old steers. In ordinary flesh when they left the Nueces that spring, successive degrees of northern latitude saw them wax fat, sleek, high spirited. They grew "snuffy" as the cowpunchers say. Their bellies were eternally crammed with rich grass. Their blood pressure began to run uncommonly high. They became as skittish as colts.

So that they had to be handled as a trained nurse handles a nervous patient, with tact and finesse. Every trail hand knew

that if those longhorns ran once off the bedground, they would run again at their own shadow in the moonlight, at a cough or a sneeze, for no reason at all, except the mysterious contagion of fear. Life would become a burden as soon as night fell. Twenty-eight hundred brutes at a gallop in the dark is a sight and a sound never to be forgotten. It is the bovine equivalent of a theater crowd trampling each other underfoot in a mad rush for exits at the cry of fire.

Polk Munce was a cattleman from his thin hair to the ornate boots on his feet. He could think like a cow—only faster. He moved that herd day by day, bedded them at night in a spot of his own choosing, with an eye single to delivering them in Montana for the WP profit and his own prestige. His men patterned their behavior after him, being practically as competent as Polk himself. No rider ever went on guard without having in mind the contingency of that herd leaping to its feet with a clatter of dew-claws, a clashing of horns and the thunder of a blind rush that would shake the earth for a radius of two miles.

On an unnamed fork of the Republican River, Brock and Tom Slater took the middle guard one muggy, sultry night. It wasn't particularly dark. Scattered clouds partly obscured the stars. Once properly bedded a trail herd normally lay in a compact mass till dawn, the sound of its collective breathing like a vast intermittent sigh. Except to turn back an odd straggler suffering from some form of bovine insomnia men on night guard had only to amble around the fringes of the herd, to keep awake and moving, to be there if something happened.

Middle guard began at eleven. At one-thirty they would call the relief. Brock and Slater circled the herd in opposite directions, meeting and passing twice in the round. Occasionally they pulled up to exchange a word. Mostly they rode that unending circle at a slow walk, crooning interminable chants, not because they desired to sing, merely to keep the cattle aware of their presence so that a vague bulk looming suddenly with a jingle of spurs and a clink of bit chains would not startle them.

At twelve or thereabouts Brock and Slater drew side by side. Before either had opened his mouth a rumble like a growl of thunder began at the far end of the herd.

"They're off," Slater cried. "Keep to one side, Brock. Oh, this is goin' to be plumb wicked."

It was. An avalanche of flesh and blood, hoofs, horns and glistening eyeballs swept across that plateau as if all hell clamored at their tails.

No need to warn the outfit sleeping around the chuck wagon. Slater knew and so did Brock. The earth tremors, the pound of ten thousand hooves on the dry turf would rouse them like a pistol shot over their beds. They would be running for their picketed horses now. Presently Polk and ten riders would be on the flank of that herd forging up to the leaders.

Swing the lead, once the stampede strung out, back on its own tail, let it run itself down in a circle, mill until weariness or that strange working of the longhorn brain settled them down again, to lie still and chew their cuds. And the rest of the night lost to sleep for saddle weary men who seldom got sleep enough.

**I**N THEORY the method of coping with a stampede was simple, in practice difficult. First turn your leaders. A Texas two-year-old sound in wind and limb can run like an antelope and run a long time, and, when flying in panic from some obscure night terror has a tendency to forge straight on regardless of obstacles.

Brock and Slater lay up against the lead of the run. If a horse put foot in a hole or stumbled to his knees! A cowpuncher who began to think of things like that in the face of a stampede soon quit punching cows. Neither Brock nor Slater reckoned that chance. Slater had seen plenty of runs. Brock had experienced one or two the season before. They knew what to do and they were feverishly intent on the doing.

Away back they could see the drag of the herd, the less fleetfooted. They heard the other riders yell to show they were coming. Slater called to Brock. Both drew their guns and began to fire across the face of

the leaders to frighten them into swerving aside.

They didn't turn easily. Brock couldn't tell how long they ran, how far they ran, but they kept on running. He had used half the forty-fives in his belt. For a change he unlimbered his slicker and pressed close in, yelling lusty lunged, waving the oilskin like a banner. It seemed to him the tongue like point of the herd began to bend back upon itself. A glow of satisfaction shot through him. He had turned the stampede by himself. Not so bad for a dude. He wondered where Tom Slater was. Probably his horse had slowed down.

Then he became aware of a shape like pale gold thundering behind him, a rider on a buckskin horse, Polk Munce himself, cursing like a mule skinner, like a drill sergeant, roaring blasphemous obscenities. Brock knew Polk's night horse even if he hadn't heard those shouted oaths.

"That you Slater?"

"No. Parsons." Brock yelled above the hoof thunder.

Polk ranged alongside. His profanity ceased. The buckskin horse lay about at Brock's stirrup leather. And the herd was certainly swinging. Polk hung right at his flank. Brock found time to wonder why, to wonder at that sudden silence on Polk's part.

A six-shooter cracked so close to him that he could smell the powder. Farther back other guns were popping to frighten the cattle into the turn that would end the run. But that was a secondary matter to Brock, a sort of subconscious perception. Because he had felt the wind of that bullet across his neck.

"Watch where you're shooting, you crazy

fool!" he shouted at Polk. "I'm not a steer."

"No. But you're my meat, you damned dude!" Polk snarled, and his gun cracked again. This time Brock felt the lead sear him under one arm. Polk's buckskin was almost alongside. Brock's hand came up and turned to shoot back. Polk struck the gun out of his grasp with a venomous blow of his own heavy weapon. Brock could hear the sharp intake of his breath. He whirled his horse. Death was galloping beside him and he knew it—a fraction of a second too late. He hadn't imagined such a possibility, such form of attack. Weaponless, now, Polk could finish him unless he got back to the other riders. Polk headed him off. He was making quick motions with his right hand. Brock heard the whistling swish of a rope. The yellow shape of Polk's buckskin shot off sideways. Brock felt his own horse go out from under him, almost as if some unseen hand had snatched the saddle from between his legs. He sailed through the air like a diver from a springboard.

In the parabolic curve before he struck the earth, Brock's brain apprehended that Polk had roped his horse by the feet and jerked him down. He got a quick, clear, terrifying picture of that herd pounding over him, trampling his helpless body into a shapeless mess with their hoofs. Then he smashed on the baked earth so hard that he ceased to think, to see or feel.

THE sun on his face stirred him to consciousness. He sat up, puzzled at first, bewildered, shot through with pain. For a few seconds he couldn't understand why he was there alone in that grassy emptiness. Then he remembered.



He took stock of himself. Left arm broken midway between wrist and elbow, badly swollen. A raking bullet wound under one armpit. A lesser rip across one thigh. A variety of scratches and contusions. A splitting headache. Agonies of pain from his broken arm shooting through all that side of his body. A thirst that made his throat and mouth feel like sand paper.

He stood up on unsteady legs, to look about, to peer off, turning slowly on his heels, at the unending horizon, a vacuity of flatness that ran out to the edges of a blue bowl decorated with a ball of fire. Sun, sky, grassy plain. Nothing else.

"Man overboard," he muttered. "And no lifeboat."

Between pain and shock, a probable touch of fever, it was difficult for him to think straight. Plains-bred for all practical purposes, Brock's instincts and his intelligence still served him. Afoot, unarmed, injured, his first thought was for his gun. He didn't know how far he had galloped trying to dodge Polk after that fuming murderer had knocked the six-shooter out of his hand. He looked for tracks, and found a confusion of them, sod torn by shod hoofs. Close by, the track of the running cattle was like a harrowed swath across a field. Everywhere else the grass stood six inches high. Hopeless to find anything that didn't bulk large.

He gave it up. He had to get to water soon or go mad. He felt nauseated, dizzy from the few rods he had traversed looking for his lost weapon. Sitting down for a minute to rest he tried to reconstruct the lay of the land.

The herd had been bedded on the south side of a nameless creek that flowed easterly, known to debouch into the Republican River farther on. So far as Brock could recall the trend of the stampede had been southeast. Therefore if he held straight north he must eventually reach that creek again. That was a certainty. Anything else was a chance. It wasn't the sort of country to nourish springs. The western Nebraska plains were too hotly ironed by an unremitting sun for surface water to lie in pools or sloughs so late in the summer.

He turned north. His head ached over the problem. Polk must have nursed a

deeper grudge than Brock realized, or he would never have grasped that opportunity to kill him. And no one in the outfit would know that. Probably they wouldn't credit such a thing, even to Polk, a known killer. Brock would simply be missing when the outfit counted noses at daybreak. And Polk wouldn't just shrug his shoulders and move on. He wouldn't dare. The WP cowpunchers wouldn't let him. They knew how such things happened. They would take it for granted his horse had gone down in front of the stampede. They would find his mount with an empty saddle and reins trailing. Polk was too foxy to fail sending a search party to find and at least bury the remains.

Brock was a mile and a half on his way spurred by that terrible craving for water when he got it all straight in his mind. He reflected that he was acting stupidly. Naturally the WP riders would backtrack that stampede to find him dead or crippled. They wouldn't look for him to be anywhere except where the herd had plowed with its sharp hoofs. All he had to do was sit by those cattle tracks and wait. They should be in sight now. The sun was swinging high.

Nevertheless, Brock was suffering more for water than for anything under high heaven. Presently it would be unbearable. He knew. He hesitated between turning back, and moving on toward where that creek must certainly be. He reflected that a man walking could be seen at a mile or two.

He had halted on a barely perceptible rise. And as he pondered, finding his wits slow, and a decision difficult, he saw, unless the mirage was in his brain as well as on the plains, a line of trees to the north that must mark a watercourse. And to the south he saw a cluster of dots taking form. Dots that must be riders.

Brock watched these closely. Riders spread out. The WP looking for what was left of him. They came up fast following the plain trail of the running cattle until they were parallel with him a mile and a half or thereabouts to the south. Brock got to his feet. He started for them eagerly.

In the reaction he hurried too much for a man wounded and weakened as he was. In the center of a low swale, where the

grass stood knee high, as rank a growth as clothes a farmer's hay meadow, he stumbled and fell. Fell heavily on that broken arm. Pain shot through him like molten fire, sickened him, sapped his waning strength. He lay still, shuddering, setting his teeth against that agony.

**W**HEN it eased at last he lifted his head. His body was almost buried in the tall grass. He looked through a fringe of coarse blades before his face.

And what he saw was Polk Munce sitting on a sorrel horse, sitting there alone, half turned in his saddle, looking down into that swale.

The shallow saucer shape of that dip in the plains cut off everything else. Brock lay flat. If the other WP riders were far enough away—and Polk spotted him—he would ride down and finish the job. And ride on. Brock felt sure of that. He was helpless. He didn't dare show himself to that killer sitting on his horse so near that Brock could see the expression on his ugly face. If another rider joined Polk he would rise and yell. If not, he didn't dare expose himself to Polk Munce alone.

For a minute or so Polk surveyed that grassy hollow. Then he swung his mount. Brock crawled to where the long grass thinned, went on all fours from there to the crest of the low slope beyond.

Polk was loping swiftly to join his riders. Brock could see them off in the distance, one or two pairs coming back to join the main group, now bunched, sitting still. Brock stood up. He had no coat. He had no hat. Painfully he eased off his shirt with the one good arm and waved it like a flag.

But the riders had turned as soon as Polk joined them. They were riding slowly back along the path of that stampede. They had covered the outermost limit of the run and were working back. Either he couldn't be seen or no one happened to look that way. He watched them ride until they faded to specks, into nothing, as if the plains had swallowed them.

Out of nine riders looking for him this would-be murderer to whom Brock didn't dare show himself had to be the only one

to come within hail. If he had only been armed!

He turned north again. He had to rest frequently. Also he had to reach water while strength and sanity lasted, or perish. Brock recalled afterward that he talked to himself a lot on the way, as he trudged and rested, licking his lips with a tongue that felt salty, like a rasp, wooden. It was a long way and he was very weak. The sun reached mid-heaven beating on his bare head as if to further addle his brain. His broken arm swelled and swelled in the neckscarf he tied about it for a sling. The two bullet scores felt as if redhot poker were being drawn across his flesh.

Still he kept going. Sometimes things were hazy, sometimes he knew precisely what he was doing and why—and the only question in his mind was whether he could make that dark line which spelled water. After eons of time he staggered down a little bank of willows fringing a lukewarm stream. Gnarly limbed cottonwoods stood like sentinels on guard in that immense silence. Brock lay on his belly and drank, bathed his throbbing head. A meadow lark lit on a willow over his head and burst into throaty song. Bees hummed over a clump of lupins in late bloom. He tugged off his boots and soaked his blistered feet in the water.

Then he felt himself getting faint and ill. The sky and the willows and the valley of that stream began to spin with slow gyrations. He drew back from the creek, crawled twenty feet into the shade of an enormous cottonwood and stretched himself there.

Afternoon waned, dusk fell, dark closed in. Brock roused once or twice to mark stars twinkling in the velvet night. But it was all very inconsequential to him. Even when day broke and the sunbeams slanted in under his cottonwood tree, he still lay in that stupor of pain and weakness. Once he crawled to the creek, drank and crept back to the shade, to lie with his head pillowed on his good arm while the sun wheeled to its zenith.



(To be continued in the next issue of *SHORT STORIES.*)

# JEWELS of JAVA

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of  
"Ivory," "Colonel Flea," etc.



*You Can Get Away  
with Everything but Murder,  
in the Dutch East Indies*

**T**HE man at the bar-end, sipping his gin and ginger beer in a leisurely manner, somehow repaid scrutiny; he himself was scrutinizing the roaring room quietly, closely, thoughtfully.

Around him he saw all the queer fish possible in this place and nowhere else—in this new oilfield on the Celebes coast, where the Dutch were putting in wells. Down in the harbor, tankers and tramps and cargo boats held on to their crews by main force, and with reason; here on the higher ground, Port Schlack presented all the combined variety of a California gold

diggings and an Oklahoma oil field set down in nether Asia.

Americans, Dutch, Japanese, men of every race under heaven; gambling tables, mechanical orchestras, white and yellow and brown dancing partners, tobacco smoke, the odors of beer and sweat. Inland, this civilization endured ten miles at most, before the jungle and the Dyak trails swallowed it up. The river was not deep enough for Dutch boats to go far.

In the crowd which eddied through the bar, no one paid the golden man any attention. This phrase described him—sun-bleached hair, tanned, golden-brown skin,

garments of pongee faded and stained. He was apparently a stranger; none spoke to him, he gave no nods of recognition as the groups passed from tables or dance hall to bar, and back again. He looked at them all, and sipped his gin and ginger beer, and held his peace.

Until, abruptly, a man came out of the throng, stepped up to the bar at his side and ordered whisky. An oil driller, this man, apparently an American, wide shouldered, lusty.

"All set," he said under his breath, without looking at the golden man. "Risley, of the *Anna Harper*. He'll have a boat at the Royal Dutch landing in half an hour. Cash deal."

The golden man seemed not to hear, but a moment later he turned and started from the bar toward the side entrance. As he approached the door, he pulled a battered seaman's cap over his head.

Suddenly the entrance before him was filled with men, a group of them crowding in, so that he was forced to stand aside momentarily. Two of the men were wrangling about something; they halted, talking furiously, so that the doorway was blocked. The calm, unconcerned eyes of the golden man leaped swiftly alert; he turned his head, and the light of the lamps and flares struck upon his long-jawed profile—a face clean and thin and nervous as a rapier.

His eyes seemed to dart around the place. Men were at the main entrance also, and at the rear of the hall, where a corridor went out to private booths and rooms, lounged half a dozen brown men in slatternly uniform—Dutch colonials from the garrison.

"So they've sold me out!" he muttered. "Good thing I anticipated it. . . ."

He paused to light a cheroot, and moved negligently toward the nearest window. The windows were open, but screened, and being large as doors, came down to the very floor. When he came to the window, he found a man there ahead of him—a man who looked him in the eyes as he came up, and who spoke quietly.

"The game's up, Curtin." As he spoke, the man put hand in pocket, significantly. "Your photo came in from Sandakan, and that Dutchman upriver gave your plan

away. A lot of us have been sworn in to nab you. Take it quietly, old chap."

Curtin nodded composedly.

"Right," he said, as though his life did not depend upon the next five minutes. "Tell me one thing," he went on. "About three weeks ago a man named Hartmetz, a trader, came downriver. Do you know anything about him?"

"Sure. He's well known. I hear he went to Banjermassin, or was going."

Curtin nodded and moved away. The other, who was there merely to guard the window, relaxed, and in undisguised relief watched Curtin stroll over to the nearest roulette table, where he halted, apparently interested in the game. Others in the place were now regarding him, however; the roaring noise had quieted somewhat, and more and more eyes were turned toward that slim, erect figure, as the word spread.

"Curtin? Is that Curtin?" went the rumor. "Is that the chap who murdered Meyers and his wife upriver? Don't look it."

"Fact, though," came the reply. "They've got the goods on him. It was him shot up that Dutch inspector and boat load o' soldiers when they arrested him for it. The nerve of him, comin' down here! Better lay low. They're ready to grab him, and you'll see something hot."

At this moment an officer and a number of native soldiers appeared in the main entrance.

Curtin turned from the roulette table and went to a poker table near by, close to one of the long windows. The table was surrounded by players and chips were stacked high. Without hesitation Curtin stooped, caught hold of the table's rim and heaved it up and over; two of the players went down with it.

Almost upon the crash, there rose a wild din and confusion. One of the players—the same man who had come beside Curtin at the bar—hurled himself at another. Oaths resounded, blows were struck, chairs were smashed; fighting men, most of them American oil men, reeled across the floor, collided with other tables, spread chaos. All that part of the hall leaped instantly into turmoil. Lamps were extinguished, tables upset and angry men joined in the fray so that it threatened to become a riot.

Above this uproar sounded a shot, then another.

From two sides, efficient brown soldiers descended upon the scene, whistles shrilled, rifle butts swung; some of those struggling men were knocked aside, others were arrested. The tumult was suddenly quieted and brought to nothing, but when all looked about for the man who had caused it, he was not to be seen. Officers and soldiers and company men together searched the place frantically, but all they found was a window screen burst open.

And upon this there befell great talk, but the officers and native soldiers departed to search the town and the waterfront, which as yet was chiefly wharves and mangrove roots.

**F**AR ahead of these searchers was Curtin. His figure passed among the flaring lights and the dark depths of the half formed port, the boom town of the tropic seas, as yet in the building where work by derrick and drill went on night and day, where oil rigs elbowed faded flame trees, where shops of Chinese traders nestled beside rising oil tanks. His lithe, quick step took him to the harbor front, where huge flares showed one or two ships unloading even at night and where a police launch was darting about. Here were half built structures, customs and barracks and government buildings, godowns, shops.

And through this he, the accused murderer, threaded his way calmly but swiftly. Rumor spoke truth of him; Curtin was not unknown in the land. Upcountry he had murdered old Meyers and his native wife, for the law said so; he had murdered them for the gold and diamonds they had won from the Dyaks. Everyone knew he had done it. He had come one day, and he was gone the next, leaving blood behind him. And when a police boat, finding him camped carelessly by the river, had crept up and opened fire upon him, Curtin had fired mercilessly and with terrible effect upon those men, only two of them living.

And here in Port Schlack the Dutchman who held his goods had betrayed him for the sake of those goods, and he was being hunted down as a wild beast.

Curtin came to the wharf he sought;

it was dark and empty, deserted. Opposite, upon the water inside the reef, a small cargo tramp was moving out, very slowly, her searchlight playing upon the entrance, where the river bar should be passable now with the tide. In front of Curtin two figures appeared, and the starlight glittered on crossed rifle barrels.

"Halt!" came the order in Dutch.

Curtin staggered, pulled the cap over his eyes, laughed vacuously and did not halt.

"All ri, gotta make my boat, boys," he said in maudlin accents. "Here she is—come along!"

With another laugh he swept the two brown soldiers into his arms, hugged them, drew them along with him. They, uncertain, struggled to get free until they saw the boat below, waiting; then they comprehended that this man was going aboard. They stepped away, and Curtin came to the pier edge.

"Risley's boat," he demanded.

"Aye," came a growl. "Hop aboard."

Curtin laughed softly and went down the ladder, and the two native soldiers looked after him, still uncertainly. But, being Colonials, and not sure of their dealings with white men, they did nothing.

**C**APTAIN RISLEY was a very dour, precise and serious man, the more dangerous in that he was entirely lacking in any sense of humor. His long jaw, heavy features, the suspicious eyes set very high above the mouth, were like those of a horse; his hair was wiry and curly, betokening abundant energy. He came into the cabin, after seeing the *Anna Harper* safely past the bar, and dropped into a chair with a nod to the waiting Curtin.

"We're off," he said in a dry, metallic voice. "Out o' pure charity, and for a price, I agreed to take off a man who wanted to get elsewhere. I ha' no doubt ye're a scoundrel with the law after ye, but I don't want to know who ye are or more about it, for I'll have no lies on my conscience. As you can well appreciate, we'll handle the matter in a business fashion, all shipshape. The price was five hundred gold dollars, not Straits money."

He bent a sourly inquiring gaze upon Curtin, with the air of a man who intends

to take bitter payment if he has been fooled. Curtin nodded quietly. The skipper rubbed him the wrong way, but this was all in the game.

"Correct," he said, and reached under his coat. "A hundred pounds in Bank of England notes will fill the bill, I imagine."

He produced a moneybelt, unbuckled one compartment, and brought out a tightly wadded bundle of notes. From this he removed five twenties, which were instantly absorbed by the hairy hand of the skipper.

"So far, correct," said Captain Risley, his eyes on the remaining wad of notes and on the belt. "But the bargain said nothing o' passage. This hooker has no passenger license, my man. It'll be risking my ticket, no less, to be carrying you aft. It means a split wi' the other officers. Still, I'll do it if ye say the word, or I'll sign you on wi' the lascars for'ard. It's up to you."

Curtin did not hesitate, though contempt flashed in his eyes.

"How much?"

"A matter o' fifty quid."

"Where to?"

"Singapore, if ye like. We're makin' Sabong and Banjermassin en route with a bit o' freight, where I misdoubt ye'll want to hide your head."

"Very well," Curtin counted out the money. "You'll have to sign me on as supercargo, I suppose?"

"That job's taken," said the skipper, clutching at the notes. "It's amazing how many men want to get away from this blasted port. You'll sign as 'Sparks'—we're under the thousand ton limit so we don't carry a wireless. All shipshape, mister; we'll have a drink on it and sign the articles."

Captain Risley produced the papers, a bottle and glasses, and showed Curtin where to sign. Curtin looked over the signatures. A name caught his eye. According to these articles the supercargo of the *Anna Harper* was one Jan Hartmetz. A touch of color came into the face of Curtin; then, stooping, he signed the name of Alfred Smith and laid down the pen.

"How!" said the skipper, and the two men touched glasses. There was a knock at the door, and at Captain Risley's word

a man entered—a tall, spare man with stubby hair and soiled clothes, a man whose face was harsh, long nosed, surly.

"Ah, it's you!" and the skipper laughed. He produced another glass. "Have a drink. Mynheer Hartmetz, meet another officer who's just come aboard—Mister Smith."

Supercargo and wireless man shook hands gravely. Then Hartmetz spoke.

"You are an American, Mister Smith?"

"You hit it," and Curtin smiled whimsically.

"Wore out my welcome in Port Schlack, lost most of my money, and I'm getting out while I have enough left to get me to Singapore. You're



not in the oil game?"

Hartmetz shook his head. Sipping his drink, he eyed Curtin and warmed a trifle.

"I know nothing about that," he said.

"I am a trader. Cap'n Risley is an old friend, so I travel with him. I have been upcountry, and after a touch of fever the sea is very good. So you're one of those oil men, eh?"

Curtin broke into a laugh.

"Not a bit of it!" he exclaimed. "Like a fool, I came here because I heard there were stones to be bought—uncut. There weren't any."

The gaze of Hartmetz narrowed. Captain Risley spoke in his grave way.

"Bad business, Smith. Any uncut diamonds you found would be smuggled; to deal in them or take them out of the country is a penal offense. I am glad that you were unlucky; if you had any such things, I could not carry you aboard here. I cannot countenance any illegal dealings. I cannot afford it. By the way, you have no luggage?"

"Not a scrap," said Curtin.

"Well, you'll find the second cabin to the right empty; make yourself at home," said the skipper in obvious dismissal. "I expect the steward can fix you up with anything you may need, but we don't go in for luxuries aboard here."

"Thanks," said Curtin, and exchanging a nod with Hartmetz, left the cabin.

AFTER his departure, the two men looked at each other for a moment. The skipper silently refilled their glasses; Hartmetz produced a whitish cheroot and bit at it reflectively, then struck a light and puffed.

"Ever see him before?" queried Captain Risley.

"No. Police after him?"

The skipper shrugged.

"I dunno. An oil man arranged with me about him."

"Not hard to explain, after what he said, observed Hartmetz. "He probably came along thinking diamonds were picked up all over, like a lot of these fools. He talked too much, and the police advised him to leave for his health. I understand orders are out to close down on some of these places. Too much crime going on."

"Hm!" The skipper grunted, and fingered his glass. "He may ha' lost some money, but he ain't broke. Looked to me like his belt was well stuffed."

He was silent again. Over the table the eyes of the two men met again in a mute interchange of ideas. Hartmetz, his eyes rather grim, shook his head.

"We know each other pretty well, Cap'n," he said. "But in the first place, he looks to me like the wrong kind to fool with. Second place, I want to keep clear—for reasons of my own. I'd advise you to leave him alone, *tuan capitan*."

He fell into Malay, and Risley made answer in the same tongue.

"When the bullocks are in the paddy, one needs water underfoot; and that's the truth. I could use a bit of ready silver very well. With your help——"

"No," said Hartmetz flatly. "Count me out of it entirely. I have a lawsuit coming next month in Macassar, and I must have absolutely clean hands. But you're no fool, and you don't need help from me. How!"

"Hm!" grunted the skipper again, and lifted his glass. "Well, we'll think it over. Here's your health!"

And they drank, with a slow smile at each other, as men who comprehend one another perfectly.

WITH morning Curtin was wakened by the steward, a Chinaman named Li, who had procured him passable shaving materials. As he shaved and dressed, the steady roll of the ship telling him of the sea and safety, he smiled into his mirror.

"To think of it—finding Hartmetz here!" he muttered. "And the man doesn't know me by sight, either. Looks as though the luck had changed."

At breakfast he met the chief, a stolid Hollander, and the other officers off watch. The supercargo greeted him almost warmly, fell into talk, and Curtin held back no details of Alfred Smith's life. Smith, had, it appeared, been in the diamond business for several years, and his manner inferred that he did not shrink from slight illegalities in the matter of opium or other such products. He knew a chap Hartmetz knew, in Manila—a halfcaste who was something of a genius in managing shady deals.

They went on deck together and the skipper joined them beneath the tattered awning spread abaft the bridge. The *Anna Harper* was a shabby little lady in all respects, for she was elderly and distinctly down at heel and made no pretensions to gentility. Ants and cockroaches rioted all through her, and her upper works and cabins were shabby for want of paint, while the less said about her officers, the better. Still, she made a small profit for her owners.

To north and south rose green peaks, for they were heading through Buton Strait, and presently Captain Risley, who could not trust his mate too well, went himself to con the course. Hartmetz turned to Curtin with negligent mien.

"If you're after rough stones," he said, sucking at his cheroot, "you might pick up something aboard here. I know one of the officers has quite a few—such things come their way at times, you know. I fancy he'd want a bit of cash for his collection, though."

"I'm not broke," said Curtin, significantly. He knew very well that such things did *not* come the way of such ship's officers, even once in a lifetime; let alone a casual picking up of rough diamonds and a gradual collection of them. "I've a bit of brass yet—more than enough to swing any deal that comes up. Who has the stones?"

"The chief engineer," said Hartmetz. "But keep quiet, now; I'll send him to you. Here's Risley back. Don't trust him for a minute; he'd prate religion and rob you in the next breath."

Risley was returning. The skipper dropped into his chair again and held dour silence until, presently, Hartmetz rose and sauntered away. Then Risley produced cheroots and gave Curtin the ghost of a grin.

"Clever rascal, that Hartmetz," he observed. "Lucky for you that you ain't in any deal with him, mister! He'd take the skin off your teeth, you bet! Wonder if you know a chap named Flickinger over at Zamboanga—at least he was there last I heard of him. . . ."

With this, Captain Risley launched into a surprisingly amiable discourse. He conversed with Alfred Smith about persons and places and experiences; he made himself most agreeable; he even sent the steward for drinks and toasted his passenger's health. And Mr. Smith, urbane and quiet, soaked up this geniality as a sponge soaks up water, and himself launched out into one or two tales of his experiences. Not in Celebes, however; he said quite frankly that this was his first visit, and he hoped his last as well.

Hartmetz came back and the skipper at once relapsed into his dour self, as though not willing that Hartmetz should find him in amiable mood.

"Hear anything about that Curtin chap?" asked the skipper suddenly. Hartmetz shook his head.

"Nothing new. Just what do you mean? I heard he'd done some murdering. Never ran into him, as it happened."

"Harbor master was telling me about it," said Risley. "He's some sort o' trader up-country. Murdered an old chap and his wife who are well known hereabouts. Myers."

"Oh, yes, I knew them very well," said Hartmetz. "I understood this Curtin was nabbed in town last night."

"I expect they got him," said Risley. "They knew where he was to be and all about him. Seems to me there was some talk o' you in it. You brought the news, didn't you?"

The trader nodded, with a slight grimace. "It's not nice to think of," he said. "On my way out I reached Myers' place one morning, found the two old people dead—shot. The place had been looted. A Tamil boy was the only one left on the place. He said Curtin had arrived the previous night; there had been some shooting about midnight or later, and most of the boys ran into the brush. This one came on with me and gave his evidence. They tried to get Curtin; he shot up a boatload of soldiers, and then was bold enough to slip out—or try to. He's nabbed now, and no mistake. I hear they cabled Sandakan and got a picture of him, to avoid any mistakes. Didn't see it, myself."

Curtin had listened to all this with much interest.

"That chap must be a bad one!" he exclaimed, wide eyed. "But why would he commit those murders; what object?"

"Robbery," said Hartmetz. "Old Myers was said to have a lot of valuable stuff on the place; no one ever knew for sure. The old man was a miser. Oh, well, what's the good of hashing it over? Plenty of pleasant things in the world. I think I'll go have a gam with the chief. See you later!"

"And I'll join those chaps on the forward deck and get a bath," said Curtin, also rising.

He saw Hartmetz head for the engine room, and he himself went to his cabin; but he did not undress and bathe. Instead, he passed to another officer's room, across the passage, found the door unlocked and stepped inside. This was the cabin occupied by Hartmetz.

The only article of luggage in the room was a large grip, and this was supplied with ingenious French locks. Curtin examined it swiftly, found himself powerless to open it, and slipped out of the cabin without further delay. Behind his own door again he filled and lighted his pipe, frowning.

"Blocked, eh?" he muttered. "Of course, I'm certain he's got the stones and means to plant 'em with the chief to sell to me; but I can't take chances. Hm! Sabong—we'll be there tonight. The resident knows me very well by sight, too. So does the *controleur*. That means I can't show my

face, without getting pinched. Hm! It'll have to be a gamble, and now's the wrong time. Tonight I can make certain—won't stand to lose so much if I'm wrong. . . ."

He heard steps and voices in the passage, and opened his door a trifle. The chief engineer and Hartmetz were just entering the latter's cabin.

**S**ABONG was little more than a residency at a river mouth—a trading point for upcountry, with half a dozen white officials, brown native soldiers, a native village, and godowns. The *Anna Harper* worked up the intricate channel to the anchorage off the river bar, and dropped her hook an hour before sundown. She could not hope to leave before morning, as the channel had to be passed by daylight.

Officials came off, lighters came out, the steam winches pounded and groaned, and



what cargo was destined for Sabong was cleared and the hatches replaced and the booms stowed again. Curtin, meanwhile, had kept to his own

cabin, until the steward summoned him to mess. Much to his surprise, he found only the skipper and the chief on hand.

"All hands gone ashore," said the skipper. "Me, I got a touch o' fever, and the chief ain't feeling too good, neither. We'll have a quiet evening, anyhow. Hartmetz will be back after a bit, I expect. Might have a card game, huh?"

Captain Risley did not look feverish in the least, but Curtin made no comment. He himself had a splitting headache, he declared, and would lie down for a bit after mess.

He went to his own cabin. The miasmatic land breeze, bearing the scent of jungle and river, was oppressive; a queer and unwonted sense of confusion had come upon him. There was a menace in the very presence of Hartmetz; in the eyes of the skipper, of the chief engineer, he read a greedy anticipation. Aboard this dingy ship, at anchor off the quiet river, he had the feeling of

a trapped animal, as though they were coming at him from all sides.

He found the safety-razor blade that he had noted lying in the frame of the port—a rusty little blade. He stepped into the passage, went straight into the cabin of Hartmetz, and without turning on the light, went to the large grip. Locked, of course. He needed no lights here. The thin steel sheared through the leather like paper—a cut low down, the entire length of the grip on one side.

Curtin's hand groped carefully. He was fairly certain of what he wanted, for he had previously noted that Hartmetz wore no moneybelt; one could detect such things through the thin clothing. And the chief had come here to get the diamonds, too. If it were here, it would be no child's toy.

His hand came upon a pistol, a small automatic; he drew this out and pocketed it. Other things: clothing, packets, odds and ends. He crouched there, sweat running down his face, as his hand groped after weight. He was gambling everything now; it was either win the cast, or slip overboard and make his way upcountry, a fugitive, empty handed. After all, he might have been entirely wrong about Hartmetz. . . .

An involuntary grunt came from his lips, as his fingers touched leather. Yes, a long, wide belt, folded once, of extraordinary weight. Exultation throbbed in his pulses as he dragged it out. Then he moved the grip about, slit side against the wall, and came out of the cabin. He was across the passage swiftly, in his own cabin, unseen. There he locked the door and laid out the moneybelt on the bed; its pockets were bulging.

He explored the thing rapidly. One of the pockets was empty; the diamonds had been in this, of course. The others were stuffed. One yielded gold pieces, which Curtin replaced. The rest were all filled to overflowing with quills—large quills, cut to fit, stuffed with yellow gold dust and plugged at each end.

On certain of these quills was writing in ink.

There was a low, insistent rapping at the door. Curtin moved like a flash, returning the quills to the belt, closing the pocket

flaps, thrusting the belt itself under his blanket. Then he unlocked the door and swung it open. The chief engineer entered.

The stolid, impassive Dutchman nodded solemnly, closed the door, and looked at Curtin.

"You like to do a little business, perhaps?" he inquired.

"Might," said Curtin. "Let's see 'em. Hartmetz told me you'd be along."

Silently, the chief took a handkerchief from his pocket and opened it. There was a heap, a small handful, of dull, rough pebbles. Found in the hill streams, perhaps, or brought in from queer sources, hoarded, finally reaching the white man's hands; there was no fortune in this heap of stones, but they were worth money. Curtin examined them superficially, then looked up.

"How much?"

"Five hundred English pounds."

Curtin shook his head and handed back the stones.

"They're not diamonds," he said.

Amazement leaped on the broad, heavy features of the chief engineer.

"What? But, mynheer, you are mistaken

—"

"No," said Curtin incisively. "No mistake about it. They're Dyak magic stones; absolutely worthless commercially, and not diamonds at all. Anyone who knew diamonds could see that."

The Dutchman was stupefied; he remained staring at Curtin for a moment, then looked down at the pebbles and slowly wrapped them up again. A gradual tide of color rose in his phlegmatic features, and his dull eyes began to sparkle.

"All right," he said. "I am sorry, mynheer, if I have been fooled. I thought they were diamonds." \*

"Hope you didn't pay much for them," said Curtin. "They might fool some people, at that, but anyone who knows anything about rough diamonds could see they're worthless. Suppose you ask Hartmetz about them; he's a trader and he knows."

"Ja, pa," said the chief, anger in his eyes. "He knows, right enough."

the room; then he reached under the blanket, caught up the belt he had secreted and examined it closely. Upon the inside of the belt was a name, written in old but heavily inked letters. Curtin buckled it about his waist, buttoned his jacket over it, and chuckled slightly.

"Not so bad, after all," he murmured. "He who sets a trap always has the privilege of falling into it himself! I'm curious, however, about Cap'n Risley. He wouldn't know anything about this belt having been in Hartmetz's grip, of course—that's the last thing Hartmetz would want him to know! Yes, I expect the skipper would buy it. We'll see."

He left the cabin, slamming his door hard. As he came to the end of the passage he heard his name called, and turned. Captain Risley was standing in the doorway of his own cabin, and beckoned him genially.

"What about a drink, Smith. Damned cloud o' mosquitoes from the river has clamped down; no use going on deck until the night wind comes up."

"A drink always suits me, Cap'n." And Curtin returned to the cabin and entered. Risley closed the door and hauled a chair around to the desk, with an astonishingly cordial invitation to make himself at home. Curtin did so. The skipper laid out cheroots, Borneo cigarettes, and a bottle of schnapps with glasses, and plunged into the discussion of what "Mister Smith" usually did in the way of making a living by his unusual methods.

"Don't see where there's any money in it," said Risley. "Buyin' diamonds and such things, and maybe pullin' a deal now and then otherwise. Can't see much money in contraband."

Curtin chuckled and unbuttoned his jacket.

"Oh, there's always money to be made," he said, and fingered a flap of the money belt while Risley's sharp eyes followed his movement carefully. "Odds and ends, you know. Like this, now."

He opened the pocket containing the gold pieces, drew out several, placed them back with a grunt, and from one of the other pouches produced some the heavy quills laden with gold. He laid one or two of

WITH this, the Dutchman rumbled out, muttering to himself. Curtin grinned to himself and swept a look around

these on the table, making certain they were not marked ones, and laughed softly as the skipper's eager fingers seized them.

"Not bad, eh?" he commented, as he emptied his glass and watched greed flame in the dour features opposite. "I've a lot like those; the belt's stuffed with them. Dyak gold, and safe to turn in at any bank. Didn't cost me much, either."

"Huh!" exclaimed the skipper, rolling the quills on the table, his eyes avid. "What're they worth?"

Curtin shrugged, picked up the quills and replaced them in a pocket of the belt.

"Haven't weighed them," he rejoined carelessly, and helped himself to a cigarette.

"Well, you're a lucky beggar," said Captain Risley. "And here me thinking all the time you'd got off with the skin o' your teeth a jump ahead of the police! Should ha' charged you double rates, eh? The joke's on me, and the drinks likewise. Here, want you to try something—see if you like it."

Risley jumped from his chair, impulsively, and opened a locker from which he took a small bottle of orange bitters.

"Here's something pretty good as a mixture with your schnapps," he declared, setting it down on the table. "Me, I have to drink mine straight. Stomach is none too good. But this usually makes a hit. A finger of it in half a glass o' schnapps—try it on."

Curtin inspected the bottle and mixed the drink according to prescription. He took a sip, and a smile broke on his lean features.

"Good, Cap'n, good! I'll bear this in mind in future. Excellent!"

The skipper beamed.

"Make yourself comfortable, Smith; must run up on deck and make sure that dashed steward or someone is actin' as lookout. First thing we know we'll have a gang o' natives stealing all the gadgets on deck. Back in half a minute."

Captain Risley left the cabin hurriedly and made his way on deck. The yellow steward was sitting on the forward hatch, smoking a tiny sleeve pipe, and the chief engineer was striding back and forth at the break of the bridge, muttering to him-

self. Risley caught the chief's arm and drew him into the pilothouse.

"Do me a favor, my friend," he said quietly. "I want to get a note ashore to the inspector and have him come out here with a squad of men—a little private business. I had the mate leave the small skiff at the gangway in case the need arose. Will you row ashore and do this errand for me?"

Now, aboard the *Anna Harper*, captain and chief were the best of friends; and as it so chanced, the chief had his own urgent reasons for wanting to go ashore, but had known nothing of the small boat swinging below.

"Yes," he said, scowling. "I will, my friend, I will. At once."

"Good." Captain Risley had paper and pencil in his pocket, and he hastily scrawled a note, then folded it and pressed it into the chief's hand. "There you are. Don't say a word to the other officers or to Mynheer Hartmetz about it."

The chief uttered a grunt, stuffed the note into his pocket and departed.

**CAPTAIN RISLEY** made his way back to his own cabin, upon his dour lips a thin smile of anticipation. When he came into the cabin, he saw Curtin just emptying the glass, and Curtin waved a hand at him gaily.

"Well, skipper, all set? A good drink, a good drink, but a bit heavy. I think I'll stick to straight schnapps. Blast it, I feel sleepy! Let's have a nightcap and I'll turn in. This river mouth air is damnable; I hate the land smell hereabouts. Any chance of a breeze?"

"Coming up now." Risley refilled the glasses, and they clinked across the table. "No hurry about turning in; it'll be cool in half an hour. Here's luck all around!"

"All around," said Curtin, his voice a trifle thick, and he gulped at the liquor.

Within another five minutes, a curious change appeared in the features and bearing of Curtin. The usually lean, hard face was relaxed, loose lipped; his crisp voice became heavy and slurred; he unbuttoned and flung back his jacket, slouching in his chair.

"Don't like it," he mumbled, his eyes

closing and jerking open again with an effort. "Blast this swampy coast! Brings on fever all the time. Got a touch of it now, I tell you. Feel dizzy. Gimme a hand, Cap'n. Think I'll turn in—get some sleep."

He came unsteadily to his feet. Captain Risley, with sympathetic words, caught his arm and steadied him as he lurched toward the door. The two men passed across to Curtin's cabin and entered.

Two minutes afterward, Risley emerged, carrying in his hand the wide, heavy belt



of leather which had been around the waist of his passenger. He strode swiftly into his own cabin and flung the belt on the table. Then he sat down to examine it, his eyes

burning, his fingers greedy. As he picked it up, he saw the name inscribed on the inside of the belt. He stared at it slack jawed, his eyes wide.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, and wet his lips. "Good Lord! So that's who he is! And I never dreamed it, damme if I did! It's a caution how things work out, ain't it? Good Lord, just to think of it. . . . And what I'll have to tell the inspector now, eh?"

With a queerly exultant laugh, he flung the belt over on his bunk and reached for the bottle and glass before him.

**T**HE chief engineer got ashore safely, and in somewhat savage temper located the bungalow of the inspector, to whom he delivered the skipper's note. There was a good deal of uproar in the native village along the river bank, and the chief had some difficulty in securing two men to row him back to the ship; so he yanked two of his black gang from their revelry, then went to the house of the local trader and asked to speak with Hartmetz. He refused to enter, and after a moment Hartmetz came out.

"Well?" queried Hartmetz in mellowed accents. "It worked?"

"Listen to me, mynheer," said the chief engineer. "It did not work. Your little game in giving me Dyak stones to pass off as diamonds did not fool that man. He knew they were not diamonds—"

"Are you crazy?" ejaculated Hartmetz sharply.

"No, and I am not to be made a fool of," snapped the chief. He shoved the handkerchief, whose corners were knotted together, into Hartmetz's hand. "Here are your pretended diamonds, and here is what I think of you."

His fist knocked Hartmetz halfway across the veranda, and when the trader recovered, the chief was striding toward the boatlanding, nor would he pay any heed to the angry voice of Mynheer Hartmetz. Upon reaching his boat, however, he decided that, having spent his rage, he might as well enjoy himself, so he summoned his two men and all three headed up the river bank again.

Hartmetz, meantime, consulted hurriedly with his host, and was then supplied with a native craft and several rowers. As he departed, he observed signs of activity around the barracks of the native soldiery, but paid no attention to it. He was taken rapidly out to where the *Anna Harper* swung listlessly at her moorings outside the bar, and there dismissed his craft and ascended the ladder hurriedly. No one was in sight except the steward, who was listlessly smoking his tiny sleeve pipe on the forward hatch. Hartmetz looked rapidly around, then turned toward the officers' cabins. A moment later he stood in the doorway of the captain's cabin.

Captain Risley was seated at the table, examining something.

"Where's that man Smith?" demanded Hartmetz. The skipper looked up.

"Hullo! When did you come aboard? Smith? Look here!" Risley's dour features brightened in sudden glee. "I've found out—"

"You damned blasted crook!" exploded Hartmetz in wrathful astonishment. On the table before Risley he saw a wide leather belt, a little heap of gold coins, a pile of the heavy quills. Passion darkened his face. "You thief—got that out of my bag, did you?"

Passion—and something more. Hartmetz' eyes distended, and across his features fitted a swift upsurge of emotions; alarm, terror, wild rage. His hand went to his pocket.

Captain Risley was no fool. He read the murderous look in that face, and he wasted no time in talk or expostulation; he saw that Hartmetz was dragging out a revolver, and he was out of his chair like a flash. The hammer of the weapon caught in the cloth of the pocket; before Hartmetz could free it, Risley's fist crashed into his stomach and doubled him up, and another blow in the face sent him backward.

The revolver exploded, the bullet going wild. Risley flung himself upon Hartmetz, knocked him to the deck, and landed a savage kick. The revolver exploded again, deafeningly; as though struck by an invisible hand, Risley staggered backward. Hartmetz came to his knee and flung up his weapon, and shot deliberately.

Captain Risley stood motionless an instant, until his knees buckled and he plunged to the deck and lay quiet.

Hartmetz, panting, wiping blood from his cut mouth, rose and looked at the dead man. His contorted features relaxed; he passed a hand across his eyes, threw his revolver into a corner, then stepped forward to the table. He broke into suddenly feverish activity, seizing on the wide leather belt and stuffing the coins and quills back into its pockets. He drew out the knotted handkerchief and swiftly replaced the diamonds in their own pocket of the belt. Then, buttoning down the flaps, he opened his jacket and girdled the belt around his waist.

**A**LOW, amused chuckle sounded from the doorway. Hartmetz whirled.

Curtin was standing there, leaning negligently against the doorframe, a pistol dangling in his fingers, a smile on his lips.

"Hello!" he observed. "You seem to have been busy."

"Eh?" Hartmetz was for an instant staggered. "You? Look here—did you see him go for me? Did you?"

"I hoped he would," said Curtin

amusedly. "So you tried to pass off fake diamonds on me, did you? Dirty trick, Hartmetz; the poor old chief was all broken up over it."

Hartmetz took warning, pulled himself together.

"What's the meaning of all this, Smith?" he rasped sharply. "You know damned well those stones were genuine. Why did you tell the chief that wild story?"

"To get you back here," and Curtin smiled. "You were trying to get my money through those stones. The skipper thought he had drugged me; he was cruder in his methods. You'd have liked to convert those stones into ready cash, eh? You had probably planned to turn me in as a man wanted by the police. The skipper had the same idea; I rather think he had even summoned the police. We'll soon know; sounds like a launch alongside now."

"The—police?" exclaimed Hartmetz. "See here—you saw Risley attack me, didn't you?"

"No," said Curtin, looking at him calmly. "And I didn't see old man Meyers attack you either, or his wife."

At this name, the features of Hartmetz went livid.

"Meyers!" he repeated. "What do you mean? What Meyers?"

"The man whom you murdered upriver from Port Schlack, the man whose money-belt is around your waist now, with his name on it; the man whose loot is now in your possession, whose death you blamed on an innocent person." Curtin's voice had become a thing of slow, terrible steel driving through the soul of Hartmetz. "You nearly got away with it, too. Except for luck and for Cap'n Risley's greed."

Hartmetz stiffened, staring at Curtin from a face now ghastly, blood streaked.

"How—how do you know that?" he cried out in a terrible voice. "Who are you?"

Curtin glanced down the passage, and waved a beckoning hand.

"I'm Curtin," he said, and smiled again at Hartmetz. "And here are the police."

Hartmetz leaped forward, like a madman; but the police were indeed there.



*"Nobody Can Pick 'Em in the Mud"  
Is True of All Horses—Generally*



## THE SKIN GAME

By HERMANN B. DEUTSCH

**N**IX, Cap. Don't be no bookies' good fairy *all* your life. Lookit that track, like somethin' 't's been spilled out of a glass of chocklit sody. Nobody can't pick 'em in the mud. If you don't believe me, grab an eyeful out the Racing Record where it says less'n seventeen per cent of the favorights wins in the mud, and then figure if that's the kind of odds you want to go up—

Oh well, if all you're after is the fun of havin' somethin' on the race, pick out any horse what's got "x" in his name, on the "x marks the spot" idea, or say eeny-meeny-miny-moe backwards or bet on whatever's got the most green in its colors or somethin' like that. But don't try to pick nothing on form, because the guys that could keep wise to form in the mud all dies before they gets to be two weeks old, no foolin'.

Except once. Once they was a race run in the slop that was oil in the can, and I don't mean light sugar. And Cap, that was a skin game. But straight. Old Man E. B.

don't fool with nothin' that ain't, even if him and me is parted company temporary. We had words, a few days back. We'll kiss and make up about next week, when he gets tired of the dinge that's doing the cooking over to the Busy Bee barn since I quit.

Well, all right. Only let's get in under the Palm Garden where it's anyways dry, and if you got the kind of dough that'll stand your bettin' 'em in the mud, I guess you can spring the jitney-satchel for a cup cawfee and a roas' beef sangwish even at the murder they stick you for in this— Thanks, Cap. A shape like mine needs food in more'n drugstore doses. When I go back to work for Old Man E. B., you come on over to that big red and white barn across from the stretch turn, and I'll toss some steak and French fried at you like nobody's business.

That skin game thing? Well, it was long ago, and—y'ain't got a tailor-made cigarette on you, have you, Cap? Any kind. I ain't p'tickler, long as they burn. Thanks.

Yes, sir, I'll say it was long ago. Why



I was ridin' in them days Cap, and lookin' at me now, wasted clean away to a shadow of a grain elevator or something, you know I don't mean no day before yesterday. Just such a chocklit soddy track as this was the one they run the—well, call it the Gookus purse. It happened right here in the N'Yawlins Fair Grounds, and I ain't aimin' to spill nothin' nobody might rec'nize as beans.

Old Man E. B. didn't have no use for a money baler, them days, like he has now. He had the little Busy Bee farm near



Lexington, and about half a dozen of what they call "useful" horses, and it took real scratchin', what I mean, to rake enough of the old dough-dough together to keep the farm and the brood mares going, and pay stud fees in the spring. They was a time, though, way long before that, when he was a young buck, that he was supposed to 'a' had important jack, but that was before I ever got to know him.

**I** WAS ridin' for him. Yes, sir, me that's about as broad as he is long today. I was a slim, little, wiry kid, then, Cap, no foolin' and tough any way you took me. You see I run up against Old Man E. B. in the Fryin' Pan circuit, where I'm apprenticed to "Holy Joe" Trimble, and when it came to kicking 'em home in front, I was the guy that wrote the book. If you didn't believe it, all you had to do was ask me.

The Fryin' Pan circuit wasn't no Sunday school. Not by any two sermons and a golden text. So I was tough, what I mean. Old Man E. B. come mooning up there with a filly called Honeycomb—her that later was the dam of Bee Wise—and him and Holy Joe tangled up. You'd think a sharpshooter like Holy Joe would of took a innocent like the Old Man for everything except only the amalgam fillings, but, when the dust got settled, Holy Joe was rubbing the burnt place and E. B. had my contract.

You know, Cap, I cottoned to the Old

Man, no foolin'. He was straight. What I mean, he was straight without preachin' about it, and he never went around shovin' his nose into nobody else's business to see was they livin' up to his own brand of goin' along.

So Old Man E. B. was something new to me. Course, I kind of pitied him, because I was a wise guy and he wasn't. You know, here I was, crack rider on the Fryin' Pan circuit, and all that worried me was now that I had learned everything they was to be known, how was I gonna put in the long winter evenings with nothin' in the world left for me to find out. The Old Man, now, he looked like Hiram Hayseed from Punkin Center, and most times he acted like it, so why wouldn't I feel sorry for him?

Anyway, here I was, getting a big kick out of re'lizing they was some folks that was straight because they liked to be that way, and not because they liked to sing hymn songs through their nose. You get how I mean, Cap? And I was all bustin' out with this new discovery which I had made all by my ownself—see?—and hopin' somebody would up and proposition me to put on the works crooked some way, so's I could Rollo 'em right off their feet and maybe give 'em a swift poke—*soonk!* right where they smell the roses—for thinkin' I was that kind of a egg.

**I** SUPPOSE if we'd a stuck to the Fryin' Pan circuit, I'd of got my chance to Heroic Hector in the Third Act, all right, because even the tracks up there is a sort of flattened down spiral, and the babies that hangs around them would make a hunchback look like one of these marble statues of a athalete. But no sooner was we a-drawin' on to the end of the fall campaign, when the Old Man decides he will come down to N'Yawlins for the Fair Grounds season.

"Lissen," I says to him, "I am strong for you, even if they do say them Frenchmen down there in N'Yawlins eats crawfish for breakfast. But where do you figure to rate on a big track like that? Of course, the purses up here ain't so big, but neither the nut ain't so big, and besides, the beauty about these purses is we can

cop every once in a w'ile, with my ridin' and all, because I can sure take these punks up here that calls theirself jockeys."

The Old Man nods his head in that slow, dreamin' way of his.

"You are certainly right, son," says he, "and I think your advice is excellent. So we will leave day after tomorrow, because I think you can—heh—outride those boys down in New Orleans, and only the people that want to eat crawfish for breakfast have to do it, because I have been there, and it isn't like Boston where you have to eat cold beans on Saddy mornings or pay a fine."

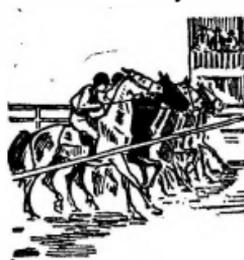
See, Cap? Most of it goofy, even if he could be serious, like when he was talkin' about my ridin'. And what with having him agree with all which I had said, and re'lizing what a star rider I was and all, I didn't wake up to it that we were still and all headin' South, till we was on the car and rattlin' to'rds this here little ball of fire. By that time I was all woofed up about how I was gonna show 'em my stuff on the big time. I swelled easy, them days, Cap, even if I didn't wear this here kind of a shape.

Talk about your Sunny South, Cap! Lissen! The Fair Grounds season started on New Year's day, like it always does, and when we lit an' begun swimmin' from the switch to the barn, they tell us it's been rainin' since before Thanksgivin', and I don't think they meant Thanksgivin' that year.

Mud? Cap, I'm tellin' you somethin'—you ain't never seen no mud. They didn't have no special electric draining pumps like they got now, and any'time you'd see a cap floatin' on top the track, them days, you'd want to hurry and investigate, because the chances was they'd be a boy and a horse underneath of it.

Believe me, Cap, it wasn't no treat ridin' under no such conditions as them, and besides, the saps that does the bettin' always figures they can pick out the good mudders, and like I tell you, they can't nobody do that. So they blames the jockeys for the form flops, and that bunch of blind hoot-owls up in the press box that guesses at the stuff they puts in their chart, they get 'o pannin' everybody too.

AT THAT, I was pretty lucky. The Old Man, he was taking it easy with our horses, especially with this Bee Bold which was our hot shot, but I get a chance at a few outside mounts. The first one they put me in the coop on, I beat the barrier about a squeenth of an inch, and in a real sloppy track that's a good chance to come home, if your goat ain't a hopeless cripple, because the slop from the front horses flies around so thick that the other boys gets their eyes and their ears and their nose and their mouth so full of gooley they can't tell for sure are they ridin' a race or would it be a good thing to have movies closed on Sunday. So I came down in



front on about three-four winners, and I begin gettin' plenty mounts and pullin' down what looked like long sweet'nin' and that didn't surprise me none to speak of, be-

cause, like I tell you, I re'lized how good I was. And when the Everbay Stable's top jock got sick, one Friday night, it didn't surprise me neither when they picked me out to ride their Clonmet in the Saddy handicap.

This Clonmet was a heavy favoright, and mud or no mud, it looked like they could of put the judge's stand in the saddle along with me and he should still of win without drawing a long breath. The minute the tape goes up—whango!—we was out in front, and say, we was just breezin' *chlop-chlop-chlop* in the chocklit sody mess they called a track, with the nearest horse so far back he'd 'a' had to pay a toll charge to telephone us.

Naturally I am feelin' pretty good, this bein' my first important race on the big time, and me figurin', as we turn into the stretch, that we're in already. And then, right at the eighth pole it happens. One second I'm ratin' Clonmet along like nobody's business. The next second they ain't no Clonmet under me Cap, and I'm sailin' through the air like I'm the Spirit of St. Vitus, clean over the top of the rail; and

the next second after that I land in the ditch—only it's more like a canal—and the hole I knocked in that water was the size of a subdivision.

**H**URT? No such luck. Yeah, I mean luck, Cap, because had I busted a leg or a shoulder or a mess of ribs I wouldn't of had to walk back to the jocks' room, past the grand stand. Not that I ever give a damn what the crowd said about me, though they was sayin' plenty, and I don't mean three cheers. They was hollerin' how much did I get paid to fall off the sure thing and lose the race for the favoright, and what long shot did I have a bet on, and all like that. But what I have to hear from the other jocks was a heap worse.

"Give him one these no-piece bathin' suits."

"Nix, nix. Mistuh Millionaire only made a mistake and thought he was on the beach down to Atlantic City."

"How was the rest of the tadpoles in that ditch?"

"Whatcha tryin' to do—burn up Annette Kellerman?"

That's the way it went and all I could do was take it in, because I could not figure it out nowadays. Here was me, the best jock in the world—you didn't have to prove that. I'd admit it—fallin' off a horse. They just wasn't no answer to that.

Tell you, though, Cap, I didn't have to pull in my neck for too long. Right that same afternoon the same thing happened to somebody else in the same place. "Peedo" Bell, ridin' Zingo in the sixth, is out in front by hisself, like I was, when, right at the eighth pole where I got mine, Zingo turns a tumbleset and Peedo slaps the track with the seat of his britches. He was cryin' when he came back to the jocks' room.

"The dog just goes out from underneath me I don't know why," Peedo is blubberin'. "An' Mr. Sullivan has a five spot ridin' on his parrot nose for me. Lissen, we was coppin' at about a million to one and I would of been nigger rich to-night if that—" only no horse could of had a pedigree like Peedo tried to hang on him then—"had not of thought he was the three Tumblin' Toms on the flyin' trapeze."

**O**F COURSE the rest of us give him the hot razz just the same, and I told him some of the things they told me the time before. But the next day, when Johnny Coran's mount went out from under him at exactly the same spot, the razzin' stopped an' everybody begin to ask questions. We didn't have long to wait till Judge Connell come in out the pagoda and tells us that what with the heavy rains and all, a hole had washed out of the track at the eighth pole, and any horse which stepped in that hole was gonna come down, and he give us all orders to bear out away from the rail, turnin' into the stretch till they got the track fixed.

After we had finished our gallopin' and schoolin' the two-year-olds, the next morning, a gang of us walked across the infield to shove poles down where this hole was, and I'm tellin' you, Cap, it just didn't have no bottom. All of the track was mush, but you'd strike solid sooner or later. This place by the eighth pole, though, any time your horse stepped in it, the first solid thing you would hit would be some Chineyman's shoes.

Now it sounds easy to tell you to bear out away from the rail when you're turnin' into the stretch in a race, but when all your life you been used to tryin' to snooch up alongside the rail on a turn, you don't break off the habit by sayin' kind words to the poor dumb animals. You know, them horses knows something theirself about racing. Any time they's a wide open place at the rail, they been headed for it like a shot; and what I mean, it took some pullin' to keep 'em from goin' on doin' the same thing. Why I've seen where I'd neck-rein my mount and then club him on the left side of his head with the heavy end of my bat to keep him from pilin' me up alongside the rail.

Well, the old rainmaker fin'ly got tired spreadin' the top half of the ocean on the Fair Grounds and the track begin to dry out. Soon as it got anyways workable, they dug up this soft spot and filled it in with fresh dirt, and tamped her down so she was safe again. Leastaways, Cap, she looked safe, and they kept the dogs around it all morning so's nobody could gallop over the place and cut it up. But that very

afternoon, in the third heat, blooey! I was ridin' a dog called F.I.P., which the Bergamot stable had put in there hopin' he'd get claimed, and nach'y I was far enough back so's I could see what come off.

**L**ITTLE PEEDO BELL was layin' third in the race, waitin' to make his move with the favoright. Whisker Broom and Joe Talley was ridin' the first two horses. Out of habit, more'n anything else, they bore out at the turn into the stretch, and quick as nobody's business, Peedo shoots his oats tank through on the rail, takin' the lead. Right down onto that rebuilt place he's haulin' hips all he knows how, with the others bunched in back of him, and when he hits it—well say, Cap, it looks like a explosion or something, when three of 'em piled up on top of Peedo.

I was far enough behind with this sick kitten I was riding so I could pull out and go around, and the rest of us trailers could do the same thing. But the leaders had been bunched, and by the time they sort out all the stray pieces of horse and boy and put 'em together, Peedo has a busted collar bone, and Whisker maybe a bum kidney where something steps in his back, and Jetsam Joe, one of the horses, has snapped a foreleg and has to be destroyed. One sweet mess, and I don't mean maple syrup.

Well, they was a big stink raised about it the next day. All the newspapers give the Fair Grounds a hot razzberry for endangerin' lives, and the Fair Grounds G.M. give the track super hell for givin' out that the bad place in the track was all fixed, and the track super fired his foreman.

Me and Old Man E. B. walk over to this place next mornin' after the work-outs, and we hear the G. M. tell the track super that either he would get that place fixed or the new track super would, and he could take his pick which. Believe me, Cap, he wasn't funnin' none when he said it, and the super had the old tomato ketchup up his neck when he puts his gang to work,

diggin' up that place clean down to the foundation, to put in cedar branches before they dumped in new dirt.

Old Man E. B., he ain't payin' much attention. He's amblin' up and down the side of what they calls the drainage ditch, though it looks a heap more like a canal, that's runnin' along the inside of the whole track. To look at him you'd reckon he was thinking maybe about knitted pulsewarmers like they used to wear winter times up North, the way he's walkin' up and down, munchin' on a apple. Once he stops, lettin' his jaws go crunch, crunch, crunch on his bite of apple and stares down at the mud, where they's a lot of lines runnin' together, like some long thin things has been drug there, and he drops the core of his apple and stoops down like he's lookin' at it, where it's fell plop in the mud in a place where the cat-tails or bullrushers or whatever you call 'em, is broke off jagged-like.

**T**HEN he gets up, sort of dusting his hands, and lookin' around him like he was surprised to find out it was this week, or something, and he smiles at the gang that's tearin' up the track where they're goin' to rebuild her. He don't say nothin', though, till we gets back to the barn, and then he turns to me.

"Son," he draws in that slow, half-asleep way he's got, "d'you reckon you could find me out the address of a first-class sporting goods store in this here town—some place where they sell guns and fishin' poles and all things like that?"

Well, of course I could, and as soon as I'm through slicin' up the carrots for our three horses, I rustles around and gets the address of a big place down on Chartres street; but when I tells the Old Man about it he don't look no ways interested. He don't look like he's even a-listenin' to me.

"I'm kind of figgering," he moons along, "that we'll start Bee Bold Saddy a week."

"In the Gookus purse?" says I, real quick. Like I'm telling you, we'll call it the Gookus, Cap. It was a pretty hefty stake for the old boy to be shooting at; there'd be a real classy field puttin' their nose up to the tape for that canter.

"Exactly," says the old Man. "You aren't opposed to it, are you, son?"



HE WAS just kidding me along. Leastways he thought he was, and me likin' him, I figured that if he got a kick out of thinkin' he could kid a wise guy like me, why let him have his fun.

"Well, I wouldn't say opposed," I tells him, "but we have kept Bee Bold's form under cover pretty good, so far, and what is the use to take chances on giving it away where he might not win? I mean, why not drop him in a soft spot and clean up a couple nice bets first? Because if he should just barely not cop in the Gookus, where he'll be up against some hot comp'ny, you have give away his form and you wouldn't get no odds at all for him in a cheap race, like you could now."

He looks at me like he's studying whether it is this year or last year or what.

"Do you know," he says, "you have hit the nail on the head. But you must remember, I will have you in the saddle, and think what a advantage that'll be to my little horse."

"That's right, too," I says. "And talkin' about odds, of course there will be juicy odds for Bee Bold because while they might be careful about him in a cheap heat, they will not figure him in the Gookus class at all. I only thought—"

"Oh of course, if you really feel we should hold him out for a cheap race first, why I will not enter him."

"Hell, no! Le's shoot, and I will pass those other punks like they was dragging nine plows apiece, because they will give me a break in the weights and I still got my bug allowance."

"But think of the odds I will not get if you should finish just barely out of it, and they see how fast Bee Bold really is. Maybe we better wait for a real soft spot where you won't be up against such stiff competition."

"Nix, boss, nix. I ain't scared of no stiff competition, and if I do not show up this here gang that calls theirself jockeys, you can give me a stiff competition in the eye when it is all over."

"But the chances are—"

"There won't be no chances at all. I will just walk him away from them other dogs, and the judges can hang up our number and go back to sleep, and that is all

the chances there is going to be."

"Well, just's you say, then," says he and goes moonin' off to hisself, leavin' me all cocked up to think I have talked him into somethin' when all the time he has already got Bee Bold entered for the Gookus and is just workin' it around so's to make it look like he was doin' me a favor, and gettin' me all het up about winnin' this race.

NOT that I would ever of give him a sloppy ride, what I mean. Like I tell you, the way I felt about the Old Man was kind of funny, even more'n if he had been my own folks or something, because it was him that picked me up in the Fryin' Pan circuit and give me the slant that bein' straight was a good break and not



only just a sucker game. And he never did preach at me, neither.

I t was—well, you know how it is with a kid.

They all got to have somebody

that means somethin' to them. Take a youngster that is just growin' up, and thinks he is hot, and he has got to be hangin' around the corner in the evenin' with the gang. Well, his folks could tell him that is bum stuff, but will he pay 'em any attention? No, he will just think they are back numbers. Then you let somebody like this Babe Ruth or this Jack Dempsey or somebody that is a sure enough hero to him tell the kid the same thing, and he'd stay away from that corner like it was poison.

That is the way it was with me and the Old Man, because in spite of all his innocent, moony stuff he was pullin', he was a heavy shot in my own racket. Honest, Cap, if anybody had of propositioned me to slop a ride once me and the Old Man got to understand each other, I would of give them a hot earful and I don't mean what the hell.

So maybe you could imagine how the thing that come off would make me feel, rememberin' I was just a kid. It must of been about the Tuesday evenin' before the Gookus, and I had win a heat that after-

noon and when I come back from the hash foundry where I and the Old Man pack in the bed-time eats, I was feelin' pretty good. So I says I guess I will turn in early, and goes to the stall in our barn that was floored and where we have set up our cots. Them days the Old Man did not have the kind of a horse hotel like he's got now, with special rooms for the hired help, and electric lights, and carpets on the floor and all. So he says he will sit outside and smoke his pipe and then he will turn in too. Gettin' ready to go dodo never did take me long, but, even so, I have not yet peeled my tack when I hear this "Greaseball" Durgin come up. I guess I could of told who it was even if I did not reco'nize the notice.

Cap, they never was a thing around a racetrack that Greaseball wasn't plenty halitosis to, and I don't mean cough drops. You wouldn't know him, because he's been ruled off for life and they don't even let him pay his way in. But you've heard 'em say somebody or other was the life of the party, ain't you? Well, Greaseball was the death of the party, if you get me. I don't know's I could put it no plainer'n that.

**H**E WOULD of had to get in a airyo-plane to reach the vest buttons on a garter snake, and his voice is a croakin' sort of whisper that sounds like a dull saw goin' through your own leg bone. The minute I hear that voice talkin' to the Old Man outside, I knowed who it was, and here is what come off.

"Good evenin', E. B., says Greaseball. "Can I talk to you a couple minutes?"

"Well," answers the Old Man, "I don't hold with all this pers'nal violence and folks takin' the law into their own hands, so while I don't mind admittin' I'd a heap rather listen to a rusty nail scratchin on a slate, I don't see's I can stop you from talkin'."

"Heh-heh-heh," laughs Greaseball as cheerful as cracked ice rattlin' down on a marble slab in the morgue. "You are a funny old duck, but you can't fool me, because I have got you doped out for a wise one. Ain't I right?"

By that time, Cap, I have got my eye

parked to a knot hole and I see the Old Man reach down in his pants pocket and pull out his roll, which was not so big, them days, and mostly aces. But he counts it real slow and careful in front of Greaseball and then shoves it in the side of his shoe as far as it will go, and curls his leg around so's that foot is back of the box he is sitting on.

"I reckon that ought to show you I am wise," he says.

It was too dark for me to see good, but had it of been light, I will bet Greaseball turned enough colors so you would of swore he had a rainbow round his shoulders like the song says.

"Pretty slim roll, and Canadian at that," is all he tells the Old Man though, "and if you will listen to me you can have one that you could not get in your shoe even when your foot wasn't in it."

"Maybe as how," admits the Old Man, "but this here is the kind of money you can spend and get change for."

"You will think different after you hear what I got to suggest," says Greaseball. "It is about Bee Bold, which is how I got it doped you are a wise one."

"What about Bee Bold?" asks the Old Man.

"I have been watching him and I think he is a whole lot better than the rest of these railbirds give him credit for. And speakin' about fish, not only is Bee Bold entered in the Gookus, but so is Creoleg from the Drull Brothers stable."

The Old Man chuckles.

"Creoleg is not enough horse to give Bee Bold even a good workout," says he.

"That is what you think and that is what a whole lot of others think," Greaseball comes back, "but Johnny Drull has been keeping Creoleg so dark there ain't but three people knows about it, and I am one of them."

"Just the same I shall place my money on Bee Bold," says the Old Man. "There are not many that knows how good he is either, and even you are only guessing."

**G**REASEBALL drops his voice confidential like. "I know that," he creaks, "but what is the use for two of them from the same pickle vat to be fight-

ing for the gravy? If people was to get hep to Bee Bold's real form, they would pretty near make him the favoright, and then the odds against Creoleg, which is a unknown, would be too high for the cow to jump over, and look what we could drag down off the gravy train for a short ride."

"What good is all the fancy odds if Bee Bold beats him anyway?"

"That is the point," says Greaseball, laughin' his cracked ice giggle. "Bee Bold would have to not beat him, but that is all right because it would be his first race, and he could afford to get nosed out and nobody would say nothing. You see, he would not have no past performance to run consistent to, but only workouts and everybody knows what a workout is."

"Do you mean my horse would have to be pulled?"

"All I mean is he does not have to stick his nose under there first."

Well, I looked for the Old Man to climb Greaseball's frame at that, and I gets ready to clear the door and take a hand in the mix-up myself because in the first place the Old Man ain't no yearlin' and in the

second place this was the chance I have been waiting for to be Honest Hobart and show the Old Man I am just as much a square shooter as he wants me to be. But instead of

doing nothing like that, the Old Man begins to laugh and chuckle.

"You are a slick one, Durgin, I must admit," he says fin'ly. "But I will suggest a improvement on that scheme. If Bee Bold was pulled, somebody might catch on, and then they would be trouble. I got a better idea than that."

"All right, and what is your idea?"

"Bee Bold is heavy headed and hard mouthed. Now you know this hole by the eighth pole? The one they been tryin' to fix?"

"Tryin' is right. They tested it out this evenin' after the last race. The old hole is fixed up where they put in the cedar

branches, but the place right next to it is washed out instead."

"How did they come to find it out?"

"They run one of the big trucks over it, and the wheel went across where the old hole was all right, but when it got just the other side, honest, if that truck had not of had a heavy axle, the wheel would of gone down till she struck oil!"

"So I hear so I hear," says the Old Man, "and that is my idea, because when we are in the paddock saddlin' up just before the race next Saddy I can tell my jockey to take Bee Bold right on the rail 'stead of bearin' out with him. Everybody knows Bee Bold is heavy headed and hard mouthed and so I can say afterwards the boy could not make him bear out and nobody can say my horse has been pulled."

**E**VERYTHING is quiet for a second, and then they is a noise like a kid with the croup chokin' over a fishbone, and that is Greaseball tryin' to laugh quiet.

"You are a hot tamale," Greaseball tells the Old Man, "and when Bee Bold steps in this hole they will not be no need to pull him, but it will all be over. The only thing I got to worry about is will they be a bank in this town big enough to hold all the jack we will take away from the bookmakers with Creoleg, so you better let 'em see tomorrow morning how fast your Bee Bold is and give them railbirds plenty of time to tout him up before the race. Well, I will run along now," and he starts to go.

"By the way," the Old Man calls after him, "did you know that Louisiana perduces more furs in a year than all of Canada?"

"Git out!" says Greaseball.

"Yes, sir, that is the truth," answers the Old Man.

"Well what am I supposed to do about it," creaks Greaseball. "Yell for somebody to pass me the biscuits or what?"

"Oh, nothing," the Old Man comes back, his voice all moony again like he would try to have the butter melt in his mouth but couldn't make no promises to guarantee results. "It's foolish not to take account of little scraps of information though. You



can't never tell when they might come in right handy."

So that is all, and I dive back on my cot, Cap, feelin' like somebody had busted out all the props from underneath of me. Here was the Old Man, keepin' me kidded on this goin' straight racket, and teamin' up with Greaseball Durgin to grab one right off the bottom of the deck. Pickin' out a louse like this Greaseball for a partner, too! No foolin', I bawled for a minute till I got wise to myself.

"What a fine sucker you turned out to be," I tells myself, "and why shouldn't the Old Man grab his while the grabbin' is good? Ain't that what everybody else is doin'? Wouldn't he be a sap if he didn't dunk out some for hisself? And I won't be no sap neither, because from now on I will grab anything what can't get away."

AND with that I must of fell asleep, because I did not hear the Old Man come in. The next morning, before daylight, when we have just got our cawfee, I was still not wide awake enough to remember about Greaseball till we come to work out Bee Bold, after the other horses had their gallop.

"This mornin' I want you to do something different with Bee Bold," the Old Man tells me. "I want you to walk him as far as the half and then gallop him easy till you get to the judges' stand, and then——"

"I bet I can say the rest of it for you," I busts in. "And then you want me to set him down as hard as he will burn, even if every railbird that ain't in jail or got his tick-tock in hock is hangin' around under the pagoda clockin' the mornin' works for the bookies and for the form sheets."

For once, Cap, the Old Man looses his woozy ways, snappin' out of it and givin' me a look so hard and sharp it got me kind of squirmin' like I had ants down my pants leg.

"Eh? What's that?" he raps out.

"You heard me," I tell him, "and I am going to have you make a bet on Creoleg for me too, Saddy afternoon, because why should I not have a ticket on the gravy train when it will be me that is putting on the works?"

"So you wasn't asleep last night when Durgin was talkin' to me behind the barn?" asks the Old Man.

"I have been asleep plenty," I answers, "but I am Wide Awake Willie now, and remember I was a wise article before you ever come up to the Fryin' Pan, so don't try to kid me no more about this or about that or about the other thing."

And with that I swung up on Bee Bold and ducked under the shed-roof over the cooling-ring, and canters out to the track, but I was not feelin' so awful good and brash like I sounded. All the same I perduced the goods like the Old Man wanted, and when I had galloped Bee Bold easy



for a half, I set him down right in front of the pagoda, like I was tryin' to make a get-away from a hot town where I had just stole the chief of police's slobber.

Did we step? Did we? Cap, all they was talkin' about that afternoon in the hotel lobbies and back of the barns and on the lawn and in the rest'raunts and every place else was, "Say, d'ja hear about Bee Bold workin' a mile in forty-three over a heavy track?" Nach'ly everybody tucks away the info, and gets set to make a bet on Bee Bold the first time out, and they is plenty of 'em that says what a sucker this old E. B. is to give away the form on his horse, and spoil his chances for a hog-killin' at the kind of odds even a Chineyman would grab.

IT WAS a heavy track we worked over, all right, because it had come on to rain again, and I don't mean none of these gentle dews they talk about. I mean rain. And of course that made it all the better for the pig-stickin', because while the hole might accident'ly of stood up with everything dust-dry, the onliest way to of got Bee Bold across it in the slop would be to load him on a ferry boat, and that was what the track was like the Saddy afternoon of the Gookus.

When we are saddlin' up in the paddock, after I have weighed in for the race, the Old Man turns to me.

"Now about your orders in ridin' this race, son," he begins.

"Maybe I better not hear no orders about how I am goin' to ride this heat," I busts in, "because if anybody was to ask me did I have orders to put Bee Bold on the rail, I can tell them I did not have no such orders, but that I could not help myself."

"That is not what I mean," says the Old Man. "What I mean is that on a track like this it is easy to have some mud fly up in your eye so's you can't see how to go."

"I know all about that," I tells him. "I am wise to plenty stuff."

"All right then," says the Old Man, "but why do you not want to have to tell nobody you got orders to go in on the rail?"

So I couldn't answer with nothing, and further and more, if anybody had of suggested it was because I did not want to take chances on the Old Man getting in Dutch, I would of called them a cock-eyed liar, because I did not feel that way about the Old Man no more. So I switch over.

"Did you get good odds for my jack? That is what I want to know," I asks.

He chuckles some.

"Do you know they have made Bee Bold the odds-on favoright?" he says. "They sure must of plenty people been talking about them fast workouts because you got to put up five to win four, and by this time I guess they have cut Bee Bold's odds to more than that."

"I don't care about no odds on Bee Bold," I says. "Why wouldn't he be the favoright when his works shows him to be faster'n any the rest of these pigs, and all the suckers is talkin' about nothing else only what a cinch he is to win? What I want to know is how long is the odds on Creoleg, because that is where my jack is coming from and if it was not for the jack I would not have nothing to do with this."

"So it is the money you are after, is it?" moons the Old Man, soundin' like he is distressed to think it, and it gets me sore.

"Yes, that is it," I tells him "because I have found out anybody will do anything if you show them a big enough piece of money, so why would I not want to get

mine? Did you get two yards put up for me like I said?"

"I have bet two hundred dollars of your money for you and the ticket is right here," he answers.

SO THEN the buzzer to mount rings in the paddock, and the Old Man tosses me up, and we goes single-filin' out in the rain and the slop behind the p'rade leader. Rain, Cap? It was comin' down like nobody's business when we lines up at the barrier, and I could see Creoleg was full of the old foo-foo because of the way he is acting up in spite of the rain and all, but the starter springs the tape and off we go in a cloud of gooeey!

I re'lized, of course, that I did not have to save nothing in Bee Bold for that last furlong, because so far as I and him was concerned, the race was goin' to be over at the eighth pole, and so, up till we rounded the turn into the stretch I let Bee Bold burn those babies up, and I don't mean ash cans. I keep Bee Bold right on the rail, turnin' in for home, and we are still burnin' them up when we head for the place where I and him is due to do our dive, and I am all set for the spill, when—well, sir, before I know what is coming off we have passed this place like it was a concrete cement and we are pounding for the plate, and by the time I re'lize it we are so close to the pagoda that I can't try no funny business, not even lookin' back to see how far are we ahead of Creoleg, which must of been plenty because I reckon his jock, knowin' what was to come off, was savin' his mount for the grand smash.

Well, I'm tellin' you, Cap, I feel damn funny while they is takin' our picture for the paper and puttin' the collar of roses on Bee Bold and all, because my two hundred smacks that I had told the Old Man to bet on Creoleg was gone, and still and all I was not sore like you'd figure I would of been by rights. The Old Man was up in the pagoda all this time,



talkin' to the stewards. I figure he was ketchin' hell for me huggin' the rail when the stewards had give orders we was to bear out.

**N**OT havin' no more mounts, that afternoon, I go to the barn and am cleanin' up when the Old Man comes over and hands me a wrapped up package and sixty bucks. I didn't get the idea and I must of looked kinda goofy because the Old Man chuckles.

"There is sixty dollars for you to riot away like you please," he says. "You have earned it even if you don't— Say, son, that was a right good sporting goods store you give me the address of. And did you know Louisiana perduces more fur than all of Canada?"

"I heard you tell Greaseball so, but I don't care if they do," I comes back. "What I want to know is about this sixty bucks? So far as I know I lose the whole two hundred, because I thought you would play Creoleg on the beezar and not in the deuce-hole."

"Creoleg? You was not serious when you asked me to bet on Creoleg, was you?" he says like he was surprised. "I thought you was jokin', because you must of known better'n anybody else how fast Bee Bold was on a heavy track, so I bet on the horse you was ridin'. Of course, the odds was awful short; put up five to win four, and all you get back is your two hundred and a hundred and sixty more, out of which I am keeping three hundred for you and giving you the rest, because if you have got to buy a suit of loud clothes you have got to and no use to try to hinder."

"But I thought you wanted Bee Bold to lose," I says. "Wasn't that what you told Greaseball?"

"No indeedy," says he real serious. "If you'll trouble to remember, all in this world I ever told Durgin was I would run my horse by the rail. I never promised for my horse to lose."

"But ain't that where the big hole is?" I ask him.

"That is where the hole was," he chuckles. "I just been tellin' the stewards they don't have to worry about it no more. You ought not to pass up information about the fur perduction in this state, son. It's right interestin'. The reason they get more furs here than in Canada is account of the mushrats, which Louisiana is just lousy with them. So when I saw them lines drawn through the mud, by that big ditch, I re-lized right off that was where a muskrat had drug somethin', and when I saw the rushes gnawed off jagged-like I was clean certain. So I went down to that sporting goods store you give me the address of, and got a couple of steel traps, and the other night after Durgin left here I set them traps and baited them with pieces of apple because muskrats is sure crazy about apples. And I caught the two rats that had been digging in the bank of that drainage ditch and tunnellin' down underneath of the track, and as soon as the mushrats was gone the tunnel filled itself right up and they will not be no hole there no more. That is what I was a-tellin' the stewards, seeing as how I could afford to do so, havin' give out the real form of my horse, so that he was the popular favoright. Of course, if my horse had of been a long shot and had of win with a trick like that, it would be different and they would be hollerin' about sharp practices, but the way it come off, why the public's choice win, and so the stewards is satisfied and . . . and in that box you will find two mushrat skins that ain't worth only about forty cents apiece, even if they did cost Durgin a whole lot more than that. Maybe you could have 'em made into a pair of gloves with part of that sixty dollars I give you, because I hear tell that people will do anything if you show 'em a big enough piece of money."

He ducks away before I can say boo or boh or nothing, but I make up for it the next time I see Greaseball Durgin. What I tell that baby ain't nobody's business. And I ask you, Cap, was that a skin game, or was it? But straight. Old Man E. B. never did fool with nothing that wasn't.

**A Crackerjack Baseball Yarn by SEABURN BROWN  
in the Next Issue.**

# THE MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

*When Gangdom Comes to Grips with the Smartest Flatfoot on the Force, Bullets Fly Fast and Plenty*

## CHAPTER I

### THE ALLEY OF DOOM

**A**SH CAN ALLEY is on the lower East Side, not far from the river. It splits a rookery of sour smelling, old fashioned houses. A crookery. The alley is foul. Garbage containers encumber it. Cats and curs prowl through it and spit and snarl over the unsavory scraps.

Strange things have been found in those ash cans on occasion. Phony jewelry, guns, knives, emptied "leathers," bloodstained bandages. The regular collectors are discreetly silent. Patrolmen did not generally bother to investigate. A cop does not like to take days off in court that he knows beforehand will lead to nothing.

Men had died in Ash Can Alley, plenty of them. Died—and disappeared. Once a woman had been found strangled, a stranger, so the whole neighborhood swore.

Before the War there were two saloons at the north end of the Alley. Inevitably one was run by a "Mick" and the other by a "Dutchy." The Irishman survived. The signs of the brewery that had backed him had disappeared. Now Dave Sheehan sold, ostensibly, only soft drinks. But there was still a free lunch counter in the dimly lit saloon. A pool room in the rear. Behind that, two small rooms with a closet between them. One room was a lavatory, the other a card room. The closet hid a ladder stair



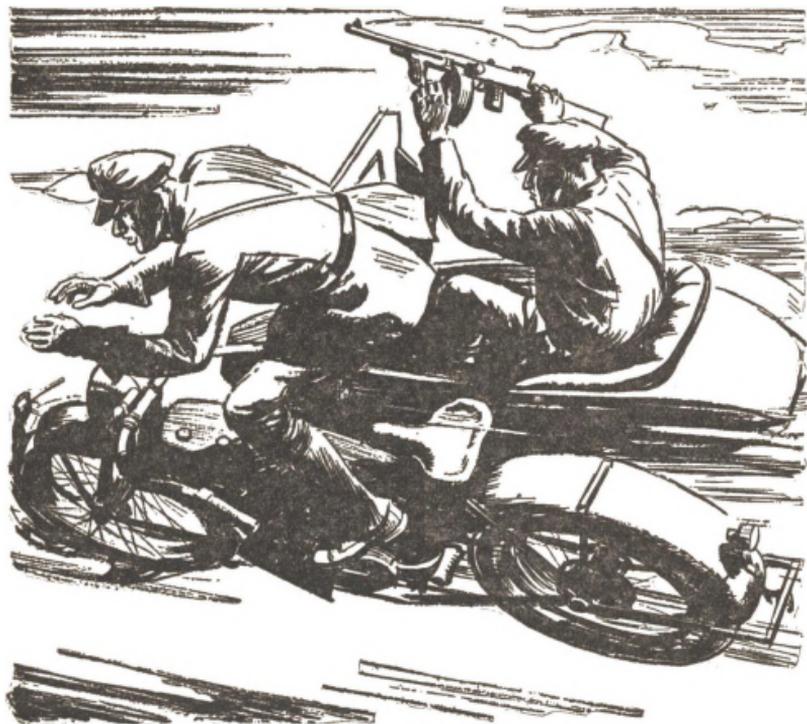
to a chamber above, known as the Lodge Room, a chamber without visible doors, with windows always shuttered.

It hid also the entry to a tunnel that ran beneath the alley and came up in the cellar of what had been "Dutchy" Vogel's Place, now an undertaking establishment with an Italian proprietor, familiarly known as "Spaghetti." This tunnel was modern, part of "Lug" Lafferty's scheme of things.

Lug had lost most of his left ear, shot away, which gave him his monicker. He was the Master of the Lodge, the mokker of the Cobras; the Big Shot of Ash Can Alley and its immediate locality. Chief of a Crooked Clan. His followers were gangsters who had all served their time in stir. Stick-ups, roll

# BY J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Fight That Failed," "The Chandu Club," etc.



lifters, bumpers, cracks and educators. And lesser lights who were not members of the Lodge—boosters, chisellers, sab-cats, snakes.

His horsemen collected regular revenue—protection-money from night clubs and speakeasies, from contractors, strikers. He provided hijackers. You could get anything you wanted from Lafferty, if you were in right and had the price. A house burned, a jane carried away, a man bumped off—anything.

He had brains, a genius of organization and details that it was a pity could not have been diverted into legitimate channels. His chief lieutenant was Pete Rossano, famous as a Tommy Man, a "grind-organ expert." He could take a baby machine gun to pieces

and reassemble it in the dark. Theirs was the law of the pack. For fang and claw they had steel and lead, but the law was the same.

Back of Lafferty were the High Spots, unknown, unnamed save to the selected few. Lafferty would get you bail, provide your mouthpiece with funds, but, behind all that were those who could whisper a word and indictments would fail, witnesses prove unsatisfactory to the prosecution. Whispers that reached to bench and bar.

The police had their stoolies. The gangsters had their bribed police and also their own spies. A man with a wife in need of an operation, a growing family clamoring more and more for money, a man with a

note at the bank to meet, is vulnerable. And there are his superiors who like to live high.

**D**ETEKTIVE DAN McNAMARA was, first and last, a policeman. He hated a crook as a terrier hates a rat. It was bred and born in him. He hated their ways, for Dan was decent. To him they were rats. Sewer rats!

His father and his brother had been killed by racketeers in the pursuit of their duty, in the protection of decency, the upholding of law and order.

It was the Cobras who had done-in Michael McNamara—ambushed him. And Pat had been riddled by sprayed lead from the door of a car. But Dan had not been able to pin it on them. The D. A. could make no case that would glue them. One of the gangsters "bought a pair of new shoes"—beat his bail bond. Another, who might have weakened, was found, a floater, in the East River.

Whispers passed and Dan was transferred to squads whose activities were far removed from Ash Can Alley. He charged Lafferty with the orders, Rossano with the killing. But his charges never materialized. They had not stuck.

Now, things were different. There was a new chief commissioner, backed by powerful reform influence, not a politician. His appointment came from the reaction of a city aroused to the fact that there were thirty thousand known criminals at large in New York and stirred by the press statistics showing that there were fifty robberies in America to one in England, in proportion to population, and twenty times as many killings.

In due course McNamara came before him. His talk was brief and to the point. McNamara liked him.

On the wall was a chart of the city. A crime map. It was blocked off, colored by washes that were curiously superimposed. It was an intricate map, even with its key which was locked in the chief's private safe. Not even the draughtsman who had prepared it understood the significance of its divisions and gradings. They were partly political. Pins with heads of various vivid colors, representing recently committed

major crimes were stuck plentifully in the map.

"You have a good record, McNamara," said the chief. "I don't think of late you have been given the best opportunities to develop it. We are going to try and clean up the city. I am going after the racket leaders. We'll bring them in, but when we do we'll stick things on them that will glue them down. The idea is to increase convictions, even if we have to reduce arrests. You're going back on your old beat. As a prowler. The squads will back you. I will back you. To the limit. Now——"

The chief saw the light that flashed into the detective's eyes and knew his man. They stood before the map and the chief traced, with the rubber end of a pencil for pointer, the district in which McNamara was to prowl.

"Lafferty's the Big Spot," he said. "You know that as well as I do, or better. Get him. He'll pull a play sooner or later that won't be covered, that'll be outside of his protection racket. Get him and get him right. We're in a fight for civic decency."

They looked each other fairly in the eyes.

"There is corruption, I grant you," the chief went on. "There always will be when a crook can flash a roll of grands and an honest man has hard work to make a living. I know what I'm up against. But you bring me the goods on Lafferty and, if it's coming to him, he'll get a oneway ride on the Midnight Special!"

**T**HERE is a certain grim humor in the slang talk of the underworld, where it is the vogue to show bravado in the grinning face of death. The life of the racketeer is short and he tries to make it a merry one. But there are times when the mirth sounds hollow. It is the same sardonic jesting, that calls the morgue the "ice box," the electric chair the "hot squat"; that has named the "Midnight Special."

The man walking to the electric chair bids farewell in mock-heroics to those who must inevitably follow him from the "dance hall"—the cell block in the death house. Dancing on the air is out of fashion but the old name clings. He passes through the "little green door." The lights go down as the power is turned on, a shuddering

moan passes through the place they call a penitentiary. The shocked body leaps against the confining straps, a stiff-lipped surgeon makes declaration to white-faced, nauseated witnesses, the pallid parson turns away, and inert clay that once was vibrant flesh is wheeled out for autopsy. Such is the Midnight Special, where a phantom conductor takes up the one-way tickets.

## CHAPTER II

## THE SNAKES' DEN

**D**URING his absence from it, McNamara had not lost all touch with the doings of Ash Can Alley. And, like the chief, he felt certain that some crook would come to Lafferty, sooner or later, with a promising proposition. It was up to McNamara to get inside information.

He thought over various leads. Camarinos, the Greek, who ran the Golden Bough night club. Lafferty furnished Camarinos with protection for that and his liquor running. The Cobras frequented the Golden Bough with their broads and, incidentally, gave back Camarinos a good chunk of the money he paid out to them. A tip might be got from Camarinos. But Camarinos was a double-crosser. If he tipped off McNamara under stress, he would also tip off the gangsters.

The stoolies, as ever, were the Department's best bet in a case like this. Forced informers, with few exceptions. It was a perilous job giving tip-offs. The canaries who chirped at headquarters were always men sitting on two stools, between two fires. The police gave them a measure of protection, holding over them the threat of suspended prosecutions. The gangs to which they belonged gave them a share of loot as long as they were unsuspected, but a suspected stoolie was as good as a dead man.

McNamara meant to pick up his stoolie more or less casually. He knew the one he wanted—Charley Lane. First he assured himself that Lane was still a member of Lafferty's mob, then he went to the identification bureau and refreshed his memory concerning Lane's record.

Three convictions. Evidence enough against him to send him up again. Not quite enough perhaps, less than Lane thought they

had, but Lane had a wholesome fear of being railroaded. With his record that would not be hard. Under the Baumes Law, it meant life. And Lane would rather be dead than spend the rest of his days in the "Big House."

**L**ANE'S job was lookout. He was not a rodman. He packed a gat, but he was not considered one of the mob's gunners. He had held off dope. He was not naturally a killer. Sometimes he drove a getaway car, or one for guards. Physically, he was something of a runt. Not



a bad sort. Not innately vicious. Environment had started him in the racket. His education had been given him, such as it was, in a reformatory, where he came out wise in more matters than were contained in books or

set down on blackboards.

He was a swell dresser, a good dancer, could sing a bit. And he had a girl. A swell skirt. Cigarette girl at the Golden Bough. Pretty as a peach. Lafferty himself pronounced her o. k. That was one thing that bothered Lane. Lafferty had looked and talked with the kid too often to suit his own girl. She was a wise little jane. Environment had molded her, but she had a clean streak in her. She was in love with Charley Lane, and she wanted Lane to get out of the racket. Lane and Sue—she called herself Suzette at the night club—had talked it over.

"The next big thing that goes across, kid," he said, "I'll take my whack and we'll blow, out to California. We could have swell times out there. With a garage, maybe. The climate's great."

They spoke of a bungalow, with roses, they visioned themselves living in a songwriter's paradise. They talked of kiddies of their own.

**L**ANE came out of the Fourteenth Street subway and started across to Broadway, heading east and south for Ash Can

Alley, bound for Sheehan's. It was two in the afternoon and he had just breakfasted with Sue, uptown. He was a bit jumpy. There was a hen on, and he had been told to report. That meant he was in on something big, that he would get a cut. It might be a couple of grand, enough to take the cushions west, with the kid.

Then he saw McNamara. Knew him, as McNamara wanted him to. The gangsters had the dicks all spotted. They saw them in court. Lane had the instant hunch that McNamara wanted him.

He looked round. If any of the gang saw him—and saw McNamara lounging in the cigar store entrance—it wasn't going to be nice at all. At best, it was odds they'd let him out of the job. At the worst—He felt as if someone had dropped a chunk of ice down his spine! One thing he was glad of, he wasn't packing his rod. Under the Sullivan Act they could rap a man hard for that.

He started to stroll past McNamara and caught the dick's steely look and the almost imperceptible backward jerk of his head that ordered him inside. There was no help for it. They passed the busy row of telephone booths and went out the side door, heading east.

"There's a tip out that Lug is cooking something, Charley," said McNamara. "Come clean."

Lane's face stiffened, his eyes narrowed as he took a long drag on his cigarette. Did the dick know anything or not? A tough break!

"You got the best of *me*," he said.

"Yeah? You better come on down town and talk it over. And, listen, Lane, you know what'll be coming to *you*, if this job is pulled and you stay dumb. You won't have any board to pay where you'll land."

It was a jam. If he told the cops he wanted to quit the racket, to get away and go straight, they wouldn't believe him, they wouldn't let him go. He was too useful to them. Lane didn't know the phrase, but he sensed, in his own way, that he was reaping the whirlwind.

"You can take me down," he said, "but I tellya I don't know a thing."

"That's too bad, just *too* bad. Where you headed for? The hangout?"

THE last words came like bullets. McNamara was human enough, but, to him, Lane was only a dirty crook, with a rotten record. He despised him because he had squawked, the first time caught, to save his skin. Turned on the phonograph to save himself the rap. A weakling! He could hold some sort of respect for a man who stood the gaff. And he had to use Lane. The only tool at hand. He gripped Lane's forearm, swung him round, saw his shifty gaze.

"You go on down there," he said. "Get the dope. Meet me tomorrow. Four o'clock. Times Square station. Take the shuttle from Grand Central. And I don't want any stalling. Now beat it!"

He swung off, leaving Lane on the sidewalk. Lane's hopes had crashed. If he didn't come through, if the thing had been tipped-off, if it crashed, he was cooked. They'd *make* him come through. The new chief had approved strong-arm methods for known crooks. They would give him the torture of the Light, pound him with questioning under its glaring heat, deny him the water they would put in sight of him, beat him up with "goldfish," lengths of hose that would leave no bruise; and there was always the trip up the river facing him. Life—thousands of days and nights in a cell that, except for height, would not be considered a decent-sized kennel for a dog.

If he came through the jig was up. He'd get no cut from the gang. They'd pinch him with the rest and they might send him up with the rest. If they didn't, if he stayed free while the others took it, there would be more of the mob to see he got his.

He dared not beat it out of town. He had less than twenty dollars. They'd pick him up.

He tried to appear at ease when he reached Sheehan's, walked through, up to the Lodge Room. Lafferty was there, with Rossano. He thought Lafferty looked at him closely. There was a man present he did not know. An Argentine, olive skinned, sleek, well groomed. The gigolo type. They called him "Spig"—short for Spigotty—Cabreza. Lane took his bull by the horns, not knowing if he could hold it.

"Listen, Lug," he said. "That dummy McNamara's prowling on the East Side. I run into him."

"You *did*?" Lafferty's voice was cold, it held a threat. "What did he do? Kiss you?"

"He tried to run a bluff on me, the four-flusher!" lied Lane. "Said he was going to take me in for that El job pulled last week. I told him to hop to it—if he thought he could pin that on me, he ought to be chief commissioner. Maybe the lookout guy looked like me, but last Thursday I was down to Coney since three in the afternoon and didn't come back till one. Plenty to prove it!"

"McNamara!" said Lafferty. "I thought he was planted out where he belongs—Flat-bush."

"He's back." Lane saw Lug Lafferty's eyes gleaming evilly. He knew something of the private grudge that McNamara held. But he had no sense of equity in such matters. He was cornered. If Lafferty bumped McNamara off—he was sure that thought was in the leader's mind—that would leave him in the clear.

"O. K., Charley," said Lafferty. "I'll attend to that dummy. All right, Spig, we're all here. Spill your stuff."

LANE breathed more easily. If any of them had seen him with the dick he had fixed that. He might have fixed McNamara. The mob certainly did not suspect Lane now.

"Never mind names or the address," said Lafferty. "I've got that dope. The point is, did you fix it with the dame?"

Cabreza twirled his mustachios, settled back complacently in his chair. He was at home with these crooks. His methods were less rough, personally, but he needed them, and he was one of them. He would show them how smart he was.

"I feex eet all," he said as he took a small *cigarro* from a gold case and lit it from a gold lighter with a watch set into its side. "These she geev' me," he said. "She ees craze about me. *Dios!* She want to marree me! An' I am a busy man. She would have me mad een a month. I should have to keel her. To keel, that ees all right, but not as her husban', her young husban'. Not for me.

"So, tomorrow night I take her to dance. I keep her late. I tell her how young she look, how beautiful she ees an' she—what you say—eat it up. *Si*. I beseech her to wear

the orcheed color gown in wheech she look like hell. *Si*? But I tell her that she look like Carmen in eet. So she weel wear eet, because I ask her, also her amethysts; the necklace, the brooch, the bracelet, the reeng, the tiara. She weel wear orcheeds. Those amethyst make a flash, she pay plenty for them, but they are no good for us. An' she leave behind all the rest, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, pearls, een her seelly wall-safe that she show me, that she theenks ees so secure, hid behin' the portrait of her husban' who was so kind to die an' leave her so much. For that safe!" Spig Cabreza snapped contemptuous fingers. "You just take along a can-opener."

"I feex also the maid. She meet my good fren', Pedro. She thenk he ees my valet. He ees like me, busy weeth the ladies. He know how to handle that maid. He take her out for a good time because her *señora* weel be out late weeth me.

"So, the coast is clear, *amigos*. When I return weeth the *señora* I am desolate to find she has been rob. I have been weeth her. I cannot be suspect. It weel perhaps be hard for the maid to explain, but Pedro, if they find heem, has onlee ask her out. All ees feex. That I do.

"About the other theengs you say you weel arrange. I leave eet weeth you. That ees your end of eet. *Si*. One half, I get. *Señors*, there ees plenty. Those *diamon'*. *Muy precioso*. Those jewel' cost half a meelion. They should be worth two hundred grand over the fence. Then I return to Argentina. *Si*."

HE LOOKED like a sleek lizard as he rose, nodded, brushed off a fleck of dust from his coat sleeve, well satisfied with himself. He had found the victim, spotted the gems. It had been slightly boring, but inexpensive. Mrs. Henry Gilcrist Martin, widow of the man who had made a fortune out of cutlery, had fallen hard for Señor Cabreza, who told her of her fading charms as if she was a bud just coming out, who whispered of the delights of South American capitals, who bowed and sighed and gasped and made love in a manner that would have made the stolid Gilcrist Martin turn over in his grave.

Cabreza had taken no money from her

except in exchange for certain bonds that were gilt-edged securities only as far as printing was concerned. Not too many of those. His play was for the gems. But she had given him valuable presents, she insisted upon his being her guest, since he admitted frankly that his own finances were somewhat tangled though very soon they would be straightened out and then—ah then? And Mrs. Martin would hear more about Buenos Aires.

Cabreza and Lafferty were in startling contrast, but they understood each other. Cabreza brought in the job, Lafferty perfected the plan for getting them, provided the men.

"Right," said Lafferty. "How about a drink? You like grape, Spig? Let's go downstairs. It's all set, or will be. You're taking her out. Keep her out, if you have to dope her. We'll be through by two at the latest. Boys, be on hand tomorrow at six, and I'll give you all the dope. There's a nice split and it looks like a cinch. Charley, don't go before I see you for a minute."

Lane nodded. He had to see McNamara at four. That was a date that must be kept. So must the one at six. McNamara would see that. Lane had something to tell the dick anyway, though he lacked details. Cabreza's name. That was a prime lead.

**H**E HUNG around, watching Rossano and Cabreza playing pool for a dollar a ball, evenly matched. Lafferty finished his drink, came across to Lane took him



by the elbow in what might appear a friendly grip, though it was viced like that of McNamara, and led him into the darkened card room. Lane didn't like it. He felt as if he was going into a trap. He wished he had his rod with him, though he was no match for Lug.

"Lane," said Lafferty, his voice harsh as a rasp on steel, "I gotta special job for you. There's extra oughday in it for you, over an' above your cut in Spig's. I'm glad you run into McNamara. I don't like that bird.

I never did like any of his family. Snoopin' round here, is he? Back on the old beat. That spiel of his to you about the El job was just a stall. You call him up, see? Tell him you've had a run-in with the gang, tell him any damn thing you want, but let him know you can wise him up to a big blow off and you gotta see him right away because it's goin' to be pulled quick.

"Tell him to meet you tonight, corner Seventh and Twenty-Sixth. Ten o'clock. It's nice and quiet round there that time. And it's on the other side of the Avenue. Northwest corner, see. Soon's you see him you throw away your cigarette. Rossano'll attend to the rest. That baby McNamara is getting too hot. He'll be on ice by midnight."

"You goin' to put him on the spot?" Lane felt relieved, but he was not entirely reassured. To have McNamara put out of the way certainly suited his book. The dick was hounding him when all he asked for was one more chance at a play and then to get in the clear. He had seen others spotted. Perhaps it was the cold-blooded ferocity in Lafferty's tones that kept him nervous.

"No," jeered Lafferty. "We're just goin' to present him with a lovin' cup. Tomorrow we'll send flowers."

"He knows I ain't a stool." Lane felt he must make the protest.

"All canaries have to break in. You're sore at me, see. We left you out of this cut. Let him think you're a stoolie. It won't hurt you. You'll never get on the list. Not when Rossano winds up that chopper of his. More jack for you. You and the kid. How is Sue? Treatin' you right? If she ain't, let me know and I'll talk to her."

Lafferty laughed, tightened his grip for a moment until Lane's circulation stopped, then released him. Why did he have to bring Sue into it? Damn him and damn McNamara!

### CHAPTER III

#### THE DEATH CAR

**R**OSSANO was in the death car, parked by the curb near the corner, the powerful engine purring under the long hood. In the dark interior Rossano cuddled his Thompson gun.

Lane was on the far corner, in sight, smoking a cigarette. It was close to ten o'clock. When Lane chucked away the fiery tipped butt, the car would glide up, gathering speed in easy, swift transition and, while Lane talked with the dick, they would get it.

Both of them!

"I want McNamara," Lafferty had said to Rossano. "If that cluck Lane gets in the way, that's his lookout."

Rossano grinned. He knew about Sue. He might have made a play for her himself, but he wasn't going to muscle in on Lafferty's preserves. He could aim that chopper, resting on the door, so as to send its bullets tearing through a bullseye, or he could spray it enough to clean up two men at once, three, four! Rossano did not know if Lafferty thought Lane's story about meeting the dick was phony or if it was on account of the girl alone. He didn't care. He was nicely coked. He felt prime. In his perverted mind he was proud of his skill. He had no more compunction than if he was waiting for a rabbit drive.

It was dirty work. Even Lane, unsuspecting of his own immediate peril, dimly realized that. Not the sort of stuff he wanted to talk over with Sue, but it had to be done. The dick was hounding him, would never stop hounding him.

Here he came, down Seventh, alone, sauntering. Lane tossed away the fag-end. He would light a new cigarette when McNamara reached him, take a little time over it.

**R**OSSANO'S driver let in the clutch, shifted from first to second. There were four forward speeds. Under his skilled manipulation the power seemed elastic as steam. A car came up from behind, drove even with them, forged ahead. There were four men in it. Rossano, with both windows down, watched them. They seemed to take no notice of the gangster's machine. Their windows were down, too.

Rossano, alert above normal under the urge of cocaine, heard a voice whose pitch did not seem natural. He saw the brief flicker of a snaky line of blue light.

"Get out of this, Jimmy," he whispered as he leaned forward. "They got a radio. It's a Pee-car!"

"Nuther car comin' west," said the driver. "Hang tight, Pete."

Suddenly they had become the hunted. The new commissioner had just installed his radio fleet, lighter cars for roving, bigger cruisers for business, all in constant touch with headquarters, and so with each other. There would be a cordon cutting them off in a minute.

The driver slowed, listening to his engine. He slid into reverse, stepped on the gas and they shot backwards, made a lightning quarter turn that headed them south and rocketed down Eighth Avenue, dodging, going at tremendous speed. Rossano hugged his chopper, snarling. He didn't know whether this was McNamara's natural precaution or if Lane had double-crossed them. It didn't seem likely. But they had both got away. That dick was too damned smart. He knew when his number went up.

The police car kept on, under orders, to where McNamara stood with Lane. The other one, taking a signal from the detective went on down the block, returned. Rossano's car was not followed or cut off. Headquarters Station got the message that McNamara was safe and called off pursuit. McNamara did not want to get his geese until they nested their golden eggs. It was Lafferty he was after.

He had hunched this meeting as a spot. He was not sure if Lane was in on it. Lane might have been tailed. Someone might have seen him, McNamara talking to Lane and reported it to Lafferty.

"Hop in," McNamara said curtly. Two of the men got out and they took their places.

"I reckon your pal Rossano was in that car that slid out on its ear," said McNamara.

"He's no pal of mine. Honest to God, Mac, I didn't know a thing about it."

"You're a dirty liar," McNamara barked at him. "I traced your call. You rang me up from Sheehan's."

"What of it. They got two booths. They're both fixed special soundproof."

"Fool proof into the bargain," snapped McNamara. "How do you know Lafferty ain't got an extension to those phones? How do you know he wasn't listening in on you?"

"The gang was all gone. And that's all applesauce about extensions."

IF LANE did not speak with utter conviction, he at least registered the fact that he had never even thought of the phone booths having tapped wires. The idea seemed to worry him a little. Nothing more was said until they got to headquarters. Then McNamara ushered him into the private office of a deputy commissioner, a hard-boiled old-timer, straight as a weighted string. They sat Lane down on a hard chair beneath the dreaded "light," but they did not turn it on. Not yet. As a stoolie who had performed properly on previous occasions they gave him leeway. Both were adepts at judging whether a man was holding out.

McNamara doubted whether Lane was very deep in Lafferty's confidence. He was only one of the lesser tools. And, if his talk was true, as McNamara gauged most of it was, Lafferty evidently had a knack of not revealing his plans in full to anybody.

"So that's all you know?" said the deputy to the nervous Lane. "The guy's name is Spig Cabreza, but you've never seen him before? Not at the Golden Bough or any of the dumps the gang goes to? You don't know the name of the jane he's making a bazoo of? Seems to me there's a hell of a lot more you *don't* know than what you do. I suppose you didn't know McNamara was being put on the spot, you rat! I suppose you didn't know Rossano was in that car with his grind-organ?"

"No," Lane managed desperately. "I didn't."

It was hard to tell if he was lying or not. He was in a funk. Sweat dripped from his forehead, he wiped it out of his eyes. It might be fear or deceit that made their pupils dilate and contract.

"Just one way for you to square yourself," said the deputy. "You meet Mac tomorrow night after that meeting and come through clean. If you don't, we'll have another talk with you."

"Don't make me do that," said Lane. "They'll know you copped me. They'll figure you made me come through with what I knew, or else let me go to get what you want. They don't take chances. They'll give me a red hat."

"That's your lookout," said the deputy. "What do you expect us to do? You think this is a sanitarium? Any time we take you

in, you stay in, Lane, don't forget that."

Lane licked dry lips. He was in a nasty position. He believed his own number was up, or as good as up.

"Listen," he said. "I suppose you hard-boiled cops won't believe me, but I want to quit the racket. I've got a girl who knows all about me but who wants me to quit, to get away and go straight. Gimme a chance, willya? I've tipped off this Cabreza to you. You can turn him up. Get the gang. Hold me over tomorrow night an' then turn me loose, after you've got them. I'll beat it. I'm broke, but I'll ride the beams with my nose west, and keep traveling. I wanted to take her with me, but I'll send for her instead. I'm a good mechanic. I'll get a job."

"Yeah? Who's the girl?"

McNAMARA was letting the deputy do the quizzing, himself watching Lane. He was not certain that Lane had known of



the death car. He was not even absolutely certain Rossano was in it. The car had backed up before he could tell who was in it. The way the car had acted pronounced it on an unlawful mission.

The only thing to do at the time was to let it go, to try and lull the gang to a false security by not following the thing up. And there was a certain sincerity in Lane's voice when he talked of his girl that struck McNamara as the real thing. He knew that men like Lane were not like Lafferty—entirely lacking in sentiment. Lane might make an effort to go straight, might even make good with the right sort of woman. He could be led. Lafferty never would. Women in his life were playthings and, if they got broken, that was their lookout.

If Lane had helped to place McNamara on "the spot," as the detective believed he had, he might have done it in self-protection or he might have been forced to it. McNamara came close to guessing what had happened. He knew the moves of the grim game.

Lane was a tool. Now they had him and must use him to the utmost. They could not afford to consider him.

The deputy laughed when Lane told about his girl.

"Selling cigarettes and souvenirs at the Golden Bough! And she wants you to go straight? You want me to fall for a spiel like that. A little grafting tart."

"She's no tart!" cried Lane. "You and no one else can call her that and get away with it."

For a moment he was forceful, dangerous, though the deputy still laughed. McNamara gripped him by the elbows from behind, held him helpless, sputtering. He had some guts in him, after all. The girl might be decent. McNamara knew some of her kind who wanted to be.

"You get *this* chance, Lane," the deputy said, wagging a menacing finger at him across the desk. "You'll go to this meeting. You'll meet McNamara later on and spill the dope. It's up to you how we treat you. Now get out of here."

"Meet me at ten," said McNamara. "Same place. Times Square station."

"If I don't," said Lane, "you'll know what happened."

**H**E SLUNK out, in fear of his life, with a double meaning to the word. He might lose life from the gang, or get "life" from the police. The way of the transgressor was hard for Charley Lane. He knew it would be no use to try and get out of town. He wouldn't get far. It took money for a getaway. Yet for a moment he considered stealing a car and beating it. Gave up the idea. He must bluff it out with the gang. It wasn't his fault the radio fleet showed up. He knew well enough he was in a tight place. It screwed up his courage.

"There goes a triple-crossing weasel," said the deputy. "I hope he comes across. They're a slippery outfit."

McNamara nodded, accepted one of the deputy's cigars. They went over the ground together. Spig Cabreza might not be so easy to turn up. There were plenty of his sort in the city, plenty of foolish women who fell for them. But the net was put out. A hundred dicks and their spies were looking

for him. McNamara himself would take a hand later.

They were looking also for a woman who sometimes wore an orchid dress.

They could watch Ash Can Alley, try to tail Lafferty and his gang after the meeting. That also was not simple. Lafferty was foxy. That hangout at Sheehan's was, McNamara suspected, a place of many devices for secret exit. The mob would have their own lookouts on the job.

McNamara wanted to get them with the goods, in the act. He believed that if they were caught so that they could not beat the rap, so that even the High Spots would recognize they must pay the penalty, one or more of them would squawk and convict Lafferty as the man who had ordered the killings of McNamara's kin, send him and Rossano to ride the Midnight Special.

The search for Cabreza went on through the night. They found other Argentines, but not the man they wanted. He was holed up somewhere. At least he was not escorting the woman to any night resorts.

McNamara got a few hours sleep. Not much good looking for Spig by daylight. Like other predatory creatures, his day commenced with dusk.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### PUT ON THE SPOT

**T**HERE were few casual customers ever came to Sheehan's. Strangers did not often choose Ash Can Alley. If they did not know the evil reputation of the place, its looks were forbidding enough. Those who strayed into the saloon felt an alien and a hostile atmosphere.

On this night the place was closed in front. The blinds were down, the door locked. The approach was covered by hard faced lookouts. None but a member of the mob could get in.

These passed Lane through with a nod. He took some heart from their usual greeting, but he knew Lafferty's ways. He did not advertise his moves to his rank and file.

There were a dozen men at the bar, among them two young colored fellows, recruits for the occasion. All were drinking in the dimly lighted place. Lane saw his own face in the murky mirror, lacking now

its array of bottles and pyramided glassware. He saw the faces of the gang, all looking at him, their hands still about their glasses. They looked like ghosts; so did he. He saw the vague reflection of the two telephone booths in the corner and he shivered.

He remembered what McNamara had said about them. Suppose—?

"Have a drink, Charley?" asked Lafferty. Lane tried to convince himself the leader's voice was casual, but he saw his eyes, gleaming like a wolf's. Rossano was standing, with his drink set down now, his long arms loose, his face mocking. It was always that way. Lane took the drink. He needed it. He would have to bluff.

"Here's how?" he said. The rest watched him, immobile, silent. As quiet, as tense, as men might be who saw a condemned prisoner at his last meal. Lane put down the empty glass, took hold of his coat lapels. He had his rod with him. And, while he faced Lafferty, he did not let Rossano out of the angle of his vision.

"Here's now," said Lafferty. "Got that record, Eddy?"

Eddy, the "apron" for Sheehan, brought up from back of the bar a reproducing phonograph with a wax cylinder and a sound horn, the type of machine used in busy offices for dictation.

"Ever seen one of these, Charley?" asked Lafferty. "They use 'em in the big offices, see? A guy talks into the mouthpiece, it registers on the wax. Then the skirt who writes the letters listens to it. Edison stuff. Well, Lane, I don't like leaks. I like to know what's going on if I'm not here. So, when anybody gets a connection in one of those booths, it clicks with the machine that's all set up in Eddy's office back of the booths. When the guy hangs up, the machine stops. It'll hold several talks. Listen to this one."

**T**HE jaws of the two colored youths sagged. Their eyes rolled as if they were looking on at a conjuration. The cylinder started to travel. The voice came out clear in the silence, a little thin, but the voice of Lane.

*That you, Mac? Lane talking. Listen. I want to see you at the corner of Seventh and Twenty-Sixth, tonight, at ten. I'll be wait-*

*ing. I've got all I could give you anyway by four tomorrow. Something to work on. The real dope won't be spilled till six—but I got plenty—*

"So have we," said Lafferty. "An earful! How about it Lane?" Lane licked dry lips.

"You told me to get him, didn't you? Said you didn't care what I said. It fetched him, didn't it? I didn't tip him off to bring those radio cars."

"You had a date with him at four today."

"Aw, he told me I had to see him. I'd have strung him along—"

"But you didn't tell me about that date. You got a clean shirt on, Charley?"

Lane knew what that meant. He wondered if he could beat Rossano to it. Make the side entrance, pass the lookouts? A forlorn chance, a rat's chance!

"What's the idea? You figuring on taking me for a ride?"

"You ain't worth the gas," snarled Lafferty. "Pete!"

Rossano slid into action. His gun was out while Lane's hand was still fumbling for his own. Lane threw his hands over his face. Rossano shifted his aim, squeezed trigger.

It sounded as if Eddy had opened a bottle of soda pop. The bullet struck Lane just over the heart. He crumpled, fell on his face.

"Dump him in the booth," said Lafferty. "We've got no time to waste on him. I'll call Spaghetti."

They dragged him into the telltale booth. With sinister humor, Rossano hung up a sign—OUT OF ORDER—and locked the door with a hidden bolt. Lane's body was huddled on the floor.

"Any blood?" asked Lafferty. "Mop it up, Eddy. We'll go upstairs. Eddy, you come, too. Lock that side door. Douse the gim. Come on, fellas."

They filed up the secret stairway to the Lodge Room.

"How about McNamara?" asked Rossano. "Why didn't you dig out of him where he was going to meet him?"

"You want to run this?" asked Lafferty softly. "You nearly got yours last night. Think that dick would give you another chance? He don't know enough to hurt. Spig's been under cover. Will be till tonight."

And Spig ain't the name he goes by, outside of us. Now, sit in and listen, you guys."

THEY listened, with admiration, to Lafferty's plan. He gave its details concisely. It was perfect. It held dramatic touches that appealed to them. They were used to killings, but the manner of Charley Lane's taking-off had been a striking object lesson, even to those hardened racketeers. Lafferty had staged it, as he staged everything.

Downstairs, in the booth, Lane, reacting from the first supreme shock of Rossano's slug, flung by its powerful charge, struggled feebly. He felt himself dying, there was no strength in his legs, his arms, as he strove to kneel, to drag himself up to where he could get at the telephone. He wanted to call Sue, get her at the place where she lived decently in a house run by a Scotch-Irish landlady. He wanted to—

It seemed they had turned out all the lights. At least it was dark to him as he tried to claw a feeble way to a stand, clutching at the shelf, half erect, wabbling, without strength of any sort, save in his flickering will that he tried to organize.

That devil Lafferty! That machine! It would register what he said. But it was still behind the bar. Was it? It did not matter. The last words he could ever—

His nerveless hand caught at the receiver. It slid through them. He could not even lift it from the hook. He was done in—a crook by circumstance—done in.

Presently, while the conference still went on in the Lodge Room, two men came through the secret subway bearing a long basket. Lafferty had called Spaghetti. The undertaker's helpers thrust the limp body into the carrier. They packed it awkwardly down the stairs. There was no better place to park a stiff than a funeral parlor. It would not be there long.



Soon Lafferty and his men came through the passage to the basement below Spaghetti's. They left it by various ways. Some

went through two cellars, then up to the roof and down again, winding up in a greasy restaurant close to the end of the block. Others diverted their course and, at intervals, emerged on the street. Lafferty and Rossano arrived, through a seeming closet, in the small room back of the mortuary. There Spaghetti met them. The Italian's swarthy face was puckered with anxiety.

"I not like thees," he said. "That man, he ees not yet dead."

"He will be, time we come back," said Lafferty. "You'll like it, Spaghetti. Order up one of your dead wagons; me and Pete are going out in her. You got a call, see?"

STILL muttering, Spaghetti obeyed. There was money in this illicit connection and he couldn't quit it, now. But it was risky. He wished he'd stayed distilling alky, instead of going into embalming.

A dead man was one thing. One not yet dead another. *Corpo di Baccho*, it was corpses he handled! This man would probably die, but—

He made the offset sign to ill luck behind Lafferty's back, the first and little fingers extended like horns. Lafferty wheeled, saw it, grinned.

"Aw, croak him yourself!" he said, "if that's what worries you? You wops are always seeing things."

"I do not keel," said Spaghetti. "His ghost, it ees still in heem."

"Put a wet cloth over his mush. Pete, you did a bum job. Finish it."

A buzzer sounded. It was worked from the alley. A tip from lookouts. Police prowling. A man came from the front. Spaghetti's wagon that he used to transfer bodies from homes to the mortuary was in front. The garage, a private one, was close by.

"We'll slide," said Lafferty. "He can't live long. Come on, Pete."

The shadows from headquarters suspected nothing when two men carrying an empty body basket stepped out of Spaghetti's to the waiting car. They heard a direction, or what they supposed was a direction, and instructions, given in voluble Italian by Spaghetti. The basket was set in the back of the wagon. It started off, uptown. One of them strolled to where Spaghetti stood, watching it.

"Business good?" he asked casually.

"There is always someone dying," said Spaghetti.

The man laughed.

"Ain't that the truth?"

#### CHAPTER V

##### THE WOMAN WITH ORCHIDS

CABREZA lolled in the sitting room of Mrs. Gilchrist Martin's apartment in the new and select apartment house on Fifth Avenue, facing Central Park. Once it had been the house of a Manhattan millionaire, the site of it. Now it was the latest thing in expensive nests. Luxurious enough, one might think, to suit even Cabreza.

He knew it could be his, to share, but he had no notion of such a partnership. The infatuated woman had means, ample enough, outside of her jewels. If he played his cards well, he might control them, but Cabreza, known to the plain dealing racket as Spig, but known as "the Don" in other circles, was tired of the game. To endure the lady was like a perpetual diet of rich but indigestible food. She cloyed his appetites. There were times when she so annoyed him he almost threw off the mask.

What he wanted was his own country, his own women, his own pleasures. The life of the Argentine Capital, Buenos Aires. Not a fat fool like this one. Fat in brain, if not yet so fat in body.

He sent out wreaths expertly from his cigarette set in an amber holder ringed with gold, monogrammed, her gift. Tonight would see his big play go across, without risk to him. Lafferty made no mistakes. Lafferty was his own kind. Cabreza did not fear treachery. If there was little honor among thieves there was a certain commercial sense of equity. It paid Lafferty to play fair.

The maid looked out from an inner room, coquettish.

"Mrs. Martin is sorry to keep you waiting. She will be ready in a few minutes. Is there anything you want?"

"A glass of the Napoleon brandy," suggested Cabreza. Napoleon brandy, 1812, brought from Canada, was good. He admired the maid as she served him. A little thick of ankle, but a pretty face. But he made no overtures. His friend would take

care of her, keep her out until two. Cabreza would not bring Mrs. Martin back until well after that—to view the ravaged safe. It would be interesting to hear the maid's explanations. She would probably lie and say she had been asleep. He sipped the potent cognac.

Tomorrow! He drank to tomorrow! He did not care if he got money or the jewels. He had enough cash for his voyage. The gems could be sold well in Buenos Aires.

WHEN his victim came rustling out, he rose and gave her the flattery she obviously expected. Orchid gown, amethysts flinging out orchid gleams. Pretty stones, but not valuable.

"Perfect!" he cried. "Carmen! You need but the one touch."

He gave her the orchids he had brought, watched her arrange them.

"There ees no one like you, *querida!* None. An' I have good news. My business arrangements go *bueno*. In a week, I can talk to you as I have long weesh."

He put on her cloak with caressing action, noting the signs of age beneath her elaborate make-up, wrinkling his nose at her abundance of perfume.

"Come," he said. "We go to the Chateau La Rose. I have there what you like, *cane-ton oranges*, those leetle duckleengs steam' in orange. Also a salad of *avocado* an' *granadilla*. First, a *soupe suprême*. Last, a *bombe* weeth *marrons*, wheeped *crème*, *pistaches*. *Si. Tambien, pompano*. Weeth the right theengs to dreenk."

She tapped him with her fan.

"You are a naughty boy," she said coquettishly. "But, if you let me pay for it?"

"Not tonight. Notheeng ees too good for you, tonight, when you are so beautiful, when I have the good news. What can repay me for when I take you een to the Chateau an' all weesper, 'Regard the beautiful lady! Who ees the lucky man?'"

She simpered at him, and his face became a mask to conceal his feelings. It was like a play in which he admired himself as villain. But she got on his nerves. The blend of Spanish and Indian was in him. It was hard sometimes to control himself. The savage in him surged against the veneer of civilization. Later, in his beloved Buenos

Aires, he could tell the boasting tale of how the *gringo mujer* fell for him, enriched him.

But now? He escorted her with the air of an Hidalgo to the car she owned, got in with her, gave the address to the chauffeur, who hated him. Cabreza knew that and enjoyed patronizing the man.

THE Chateau La Rose was not a night club but an ultra exclusive and expensive dining place. One had to have the entrée, to be passed by the doorman, and then a headwaiter or Louis himself, through the tiny foyer. Mrs. Gilcrist Martin was the one who passed inspection. Cabreza was merely her escort. They knew just how to rate him.

There was an excellent orchestra and floor. Each meal was separately cooked, the courses brought in with a flourish on a dining wagon, with two men to serve and a maitre d'hotel hovering around. It had an atmosphere of Paris. One dined leisurely there. Cabreza expected to remain until it was time to go on to a night club.

The doorman saw the orchid-colored dress, the amethysts. The Chateau La Rose was well protected. The police left it alone. The proprietor, Louis Malchon, late of Paris, esteemed that immunity. He was typically French in such relations.

The doorman asked to see him. Louis supposed it was some question of identity and went forward.

"The headquarters dicks were asking about a man called Cabreza, some sort of a wop, who's playing a woman in an orchid colored dress. Going to pull off some sort of racket on her, I suppose. It's Mrs. Gilcrist Martin. What do we do about it?"

Louis reflected rapidly. As long as nothing came off in the Chateau La Rose it might be very well to do the Department a favor. It was little of his business what this lizard might do to the woman, except that she was a client of his, spending good money.

"I will call up myself," he said.

At last the net had brought in the fish McNamara had been dragging for. He was in touch with headquarters constantly. He had felt sure that the two would be found out, as the hours dragged on, he began to fear it would be too late.

He had to find out where the woman lived

by midnight. It would be sometime between that and two o'clock that Lafferty would pull off his coup. Meantime he knew that the shadows at Ash Can Alley had failed to tail their men. He had their reports and he suspected that exit from the funeral parlor. Spaghetti had not the clear reputation he flattered himself with. McNamara meant, sooner or later, to pay him a visit.

If all else fell through he hoped to get the gang when they returned to their hang-out. Sheehan's was doing a desultory business tonight. If necessary, it could be quietly raided, held. McNamara was not too pleased with that alternative. Lafferty was too wise a bird to have salt put on his tail. He would be too likely to have a system of tip-offs that the police might not be able to uncover.

But now, when he got word, as he called headquarters, the light of the hunt came into his eyes. The name of Mrs. Gilcrist Martin was not in the directory, but it was a simple matter to get address and telephone number with police headquarters making the inquiry.

Next he called up the Chateau La Rose and asked for Louis.

"A call-back from the party he was talking to just now," he told the discreet attendant.

"I'll be up there presently," he said to Louis when the latter came to the phone. "Detective McNamara speaking. We won't pull anything in your place, but hold them, if necessary. Drag out the dinner. I'll change my clothes before I come up."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DOUBLECROSS

A MAN in plain clothes would cause comment at the Chateau La Rose. But McNamara in his dinner things would pass muster there. He did not look like a dick.

Louis assured him that the couple would not be leaving for a while, that he could delay the final courses.

It was not quite eleven o'clock. There was time to spare. The Picardy Apartments, the address of Mrs. Gilcrist Martin, were only a few blocks from the Chateau La Rose. McNamara dressed swiftly but carefully in his own rooms. His face was a trifle grim

as he looked at the result of his tie. Grim with the knowledge that he was on a real trail at last. He would not only rid the city of a murderous gang, but revenge his own.

His service thirty-eight lay flat and snug in its holster beneath the trim dinner jacket.



He was going to the Chateau La Rose to get a good look at Cabreza, to find out where he took the woman while the job was pulled. He wanted to be sure it was the right man and he once more called the restaurant. His own telephone was a blind number. The telephone company would give it out to no one. They had their instructions direct from headquarters.

He got Louis on the line again. He had purposely let a little time elapse between the calls.

Louis deferentially approached the table where the meal was still in progress. One danced between courses.

"Is this Señor Cabreza?" he asked. "You are asked for on the telephone."

The woman looked up, interested. Cabreza fingered his mustache. He could not conceive who was calling him, unless it was Lafferty. He had told him where he'd be.

"Spig? This is Benny. You know, I was at Sheehan's with Lug. Everything K. O. with you?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Lug told me to. He likes to check up on things. Keep the dame away from the joint. Lug says it'll be all right any time after one-thirty."

Cabreza returned to the table jauntily. He did not quite like Lafferty checking him up, but it didn't matter.

"My broker," he told Mrs. Martin. "He said he might have news for me."

"Everything all right?"

"All is *muy bueno*. Sí."

FIFTEEN minutes later McNamara came in. He had put a question or two to the doorman, found out where the Gilcrist

Martin car was parked. His own taxi waited. Louis, on a nod from the doorman, greeted him with the exact amount of hospitality that gave him standing as a welcome and not unknown guest, showing him to a corner table.

He appraised Cabreza, registered him in his memory. It was on the cards that he might not be on hand when Cabreza returned with the woman. He might have Cabreza picked up by someone else, as he was leaving. There would probably be a shrill squawk from her if she found her jewels gone. And McNamara meant to let the safe be opened, in any event.

The woman was not ungraceful and Cabreza danced like a professional. It grew on towards midnight. McNamara would have to be going soon. He had other men posted near the Picardy, selected shadows, the best on the force. Lafferty must not see them. McNamara meant to get Lafferty himself.

All seemed going smoothly. And then Fate took a hand. Not all of Lafferty's cunning, not all McNamara's counter calculations, could have foreseen this event.

It might have been the *pompano en pilote*. One can never be sure when exotic dishes are ordered, especially when they consist of fish. Expense is not necessarily security. It was a quarter of twelve when Mrs. Gilcrist Martin complained.

"Don José," she said. "I am ill. It is something I have eaten. Take me home."

She was evidently in pain, her face twisted, pallid under her rouge. Cabreza saw his coup failing, falling like a house of cards when a window opens to the breeze. Louis, ever watchful, hurried to the table.

"*Carajo!*" She could not be allowed to go home. Lafferty would be there soon. Cabreza suggested a cordial.

"No. I am ill. Take me home. At once."

"You are sick, madame?" asked Louis. There was real concern in his voice. He had been a little doubtful of the *pompano*. But, if she was to be ill, this was no place for her. What if the Chateau La Rose got publicity for serving dishes that caused ptomaine.

"I want my car," she said. "At once."

"Have you not a private room?" asked Cabreza. "We can get a doctor."

"Home. I want to go home. I will get my own doctor. José, take me there."

HE COULD have wrung her neck. His face was like that of a thwarted devil. The turn of the wheel was against him. Already the car was ordered, Louis and a captain were bringing her wraps, Cabreza's things.

"You can settle later," said Louis. "It is best for madame to go home, at once. We have no room."

The chauffeur looked at Cabreza as if he had poisoned his mistress. Cabreza wished, almost, he had. During the ride he marshaled desperate wits. Lafferty would go through with the deal, he knew. And he, Cabreza, had meant to be out of it. Curse the woman!

"Want me to get a doctor?" asked the chauffeur as they arrived and he opened the door.

"No. I'll attend to that. Help me get her in, you fool! We'll get her upstairs. The maid will put her to bed. I'll telephone."

The chauffeur did not dream the maid was out. He assisted Cabreza to get her to the elevator.

It was two minutes after twelve. The night force of the Picardy had just gone on watch, until eight in the morning. A colored elevator pilot, a colored telephone operator, who plugged in from a small room off the entrance hall. There was no porter after twelve. Those who lived there had their own keys. For those who mislaid them, or for visitors, the elevator operator answered the door bell.

Cabreza opened the outer door of the apartment with the key he took from her bag. Lafferty had a duplicate of it. So did Cabreza, though she did not know it.

Mrs. Gilchrist Martin got to the lounge, faintly asking for her maid.

"She's not in," Cabreza reported after he made an apparent search.

"Call a doctor. Doctor Friedman! In the desk drawer. In the book—the number."

"I'll go and fetch heem. He may not want to come. He may not be home. I'll get one, somewhere."

"No. He'll be home. Quick. Don't leave me. You can't leave me, José."

She was too ill to see the look he gave her.

Her eyes were closed. He would have to meet Lafferty, tell him what had happened. Perhaps they could put it off. But, if she was going to be ill? For days?

Her eyes were open again. Her voice, weak and querulous, rose almost to a scream.

"José. In the drawer. Do you want to see me die?"

He could stall her. Pretend to get the doctor, report no answer, get out. He pulled open the drawer in the fake antique Louis Seize desk. It was littered with letters, with scraps of paper that had notes scrawled on them, recipes, names of preparations for beautifying and reducing. He pawed through them, looking for the address book.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed. A square of orchid colored paper with numbers on it! Over the figures, in her sprawling chirography, was written:

*Combination of wall safe.*

"Dios!" That was just like her. She never could trust her memory. Why hadn't he thought to look for it before? With his key, there would have been no need for a split with Lafferty. No need now, perhaps.

He glided into the other room, took down the portrait, started to spin the dial. He heard her calling him, loudly, too loudly. There was not much time to get through and away before Lafferty showed.

He wheeled and went back, glancing at the wrist watch she had given him.

## CHAPTER VII

### WOLVES OF THE NIGHT

AT TWELVE-FIFTEEN the front doorbell rang at the Picardy. The elevator pilot saw two men in evening dress standing at the door. He had just come down from taking a doctor up to Mrs. Gilchrist Martin.

He opened the door. The next second an automatic gun, its muzzle enlarged by a silencer, was thrust into his belly and his hands went up.

"You talk—and you croak!" said the man. The second one went swiftly past to the little telephone recess. Two others drifted in. These were both colored. Curiously enough, they were much the same size and build as the two the Picardy employed. Lafferty was careful about details.

Both of the Picardy men were herded into the elevator. It shot swiftly upwards to the top floor, run by one of the two Lafferty had brought to take their places. It came down again leaving them stripped of their uniforms, bound, gagged, thrust into a service closet which was locked on them. Both had been deftly slugged with a sap back of their ears.

The elevator stopped on the fourth floor. The Gilcrist Martin apartment was there. To anyone coming in below it would be explained that the regular elevator pilot was ill, that his brother had taken his place. The superintendent was long since gone home. Lafferty was running the Picardy. The telephone was being expertly handled by a man whose voice was distinctly Afro-American, who would answer to the name of Sam, if necessary, though it was not his own. Nobody bothered with the telephone operator, so long as he gave service; and there was a list of the lessees by the board.

The other white man was also an expert. A peterman. Cabreza had spoken contemptuously of the safe, but Lafferty had brought along one of his men who would waste no time.

Outside, around the corner, and close by, the getaway car waited. Rossano was in it. The whole thing was a cinch, but it was well to be careful.

Lafferty opened the apartment with the key Cabreza had given him. He went in as silently as a shadow, the peterman following. Shaded lights were throwing faint roseate illuminations in the sitting room. On the lounge, where Cabreza had waited for the infatuated woman, she now lay in the tumbled disarray of her orchid colored dress. She looked like some enormous doll flung down there by the disdainful daughter of a giantess. Arms were flung wide, her silk encased legs drawn up awkwardly, her face distorted.

The broken strands of an amethyst necklace had slid to the floor. The orchid blooms on her breast were crushed. There were cruel marks of strangling fingers on her throat, still round and fair, though her face was haggard, old, a travesty against that background of luxuriance. The congested blood had drained from the features, leaving them like chalk beneath the paint. Her

eyes stared, fixed and vacant, her mouth was open, showing teeth and tongue in a hideous grimace. The rosy light could not soften the fearful signs of a horrible death.

Lafferty paused, from caution and alarm, not from any shock at the actual sight. He was like a wild beast, intent upon a kill, that suddenly scents danger. There was more to



it than that. Rage surged through him as he stood there, alert, his gun out, his eyes flaming like tawny globes of fire while, with his other hand, he gestured the other to a halt.

Tense as a panther, he stole softly forward, without a sound.

Cabreza had doublecrossed him, after all. Changed his mind for some reason. Seen a chance to get away with all. It was not quite explicable, yet it was evident enough.

He beckoned and the peterman followed, catfooted as Lug himself. The door to the next room was open. It was a dressing room. There was no light in it save reflections in the triple mirrors. An arch led to the bedroom, curtained. Beyond that lay dining room, pantry, kitchen, reached by a narrow hall. Maid's quarters back of that. Lafferty knew the whole layout. Cabreza had mapped it. And now Cabreza had made a chump out of him, Lafferty.

The curtains were waving slightly and Lafferty stiffened, crouched.

**W**AS it possible that Cabreza had not yet made his getaway? He might, of course, have had a quarrel with the woman, have been unable to persuade her to go out; he might be waiting for Lafferty. He would not have heard Lafferty come in. He might still be looting the safe, or trying to open it. Lafferty's red rage cooled down. He knew nothing of the doctor who had told the bona-fide elevator pilot he had been summoned. He had not expected to find the woman here, nor Cabreza. Now there was murder mixed up in the play. It complicated

matters. Spig would have to tell a good story, to show no surprise or consternation. Lafferty mistrusted him.

If he had played a trick, Lafferty would get him.

The peterman came up beside Lug. They almost touched shoulders. The bedroom was lit by a ceiling dome, draped with rose colored silk. A breeze blew through from some open window. That was why the curtains waved. Still they halted, listening, like jungle beasts. Inch by inch they moved forward.

They could see the bed, canopied at the head, the silken coverlet. There was a picture lying on it, the gleam of jewels, scintillating, sending out coruscations of fire, though they were motionless as the dead body in the sitting room. Inanimate bits of carbon and alumina, yet they seemed alive.

The safe had been opened, but the loot was still there. What was Cabreza up to?

Still, Lug Lafferty, master of his profession, hesitated, taking in the room. On their side, beside the bed, was a table with a night lamp on it, unlit, and a hoop-skirted doll hooding a telephone. Two closed doors. One would be a closet, the other a bathroom.

A furtive step more and he saw the gaping circle of the wall safe. He did not care how it had been opened. He saw only the gems and meant to have his share of them. He was not going to be involved in the killing. He had killings enough of his own to account for, had Lafferty. Men he had shot down himself or ordered to be knocked off. The father and brother of that slick dick, McNamara, among them, and more than one moll bumped because she might not keep her mouth shut. But this was Cabreza's job and, if the wop tried to top Lafferty he would pay the penalty.

Cabreza might be in the bathroom. The woman might have struggled, scratched and bitten, and the strangler was repairing damages before he left. But it was funny there was no sound.

Lafferty was suspicious. He sensed some sort of a trap. On the one hand, the dead woman in plain sight was too clear a warning; on the other, the glittering lure of the jewels spilled upon the bed was tempting bait, irresistible.

Side by side the two stealthily passed

through the curtains, looking about, their guns swinging in little arcs from left to right. Lafferty and Bill Slade, the peterman. They had worked together before. Slade needed no prompting. His reflexes were almost as fast as those of Lug Lafferty.

Nothing in sight to cause the alarm that was silently sounding in each of them. Their nerves were tingling, not from jumpiness but because they were like aerial wires receiving vibrations not yet tuned-in to the brain. Lafferty noted the position of the lighting switch. That was part of his technique, to observe such matters almost automatically. He motioned Slade with a nod to go to the bathroom door, to open it. Cabreza must be somewhere in the apartment. He would not go far away and leave those jewels exposed on the bed beside the portrait and the velvet covered cases that had held the gems.

Bait! That was what they were, right enough. Lafferty silently cursed himself for a fool. The head of the bed, framed by the canopy drapes, was little else but a long, oval mirror. In it he saw an oriental screen swiftly folded, the instant apparition of a man in dinner clothes.

McNamara!

## CHAPTER VIII

### CORNERED RATS

**S**TICK them up, the pair of you!" snapped McNamara. "Chuck your rods on the bed. Your Argentine pal's not in the bathroom, he's in the closet, handcuffed. The key's in my pocket. He wasn't so much of a pal of yours. He was going to beat it, but I met him making his getaway. He wasn't waiting for you, but I was."

McNamara watched them. They might pull something.

He had met Cabreza coming out of the apartment. He had determined to go there as a doctor. He could say the chauffeur of the woman had summoned him. If Cabreza had called another physician, it would be so much the better. McNamara could declare his own identity, wait for Lafferty to arrive, holding the Argentine.

There had been no signs of Lafferty when he went into the Picardy. He had taken a little time to look carefully for them. Only

a few minutes, in which time murder had been done, and he had captured the murderer. And here was Lafferty and one of his mob. Others near by, undoubtedly, but McNamara had taken his own precautions.

Lafferty knew Cabreza for a traitor now. There was a split between them. Cabreza would crack with all he knew. It looked like the final crash of the racket.

Lafferty's gun fell on the soft coverlet. As it dropped things happened. Slade's arms were slowly going up, his eyes glittering. Lafferty was lifting his, his body in a crouch, as it had been when he first saw McNamara and wheeled. His left arm shot out swiftly as the strike of a cat, caught the nearest of the pile of cushions and pillows, jerked one at McNamara, another following, and another.

McNamara's first bullet went through the soft cushion with a plop as Lafferty, out of the detective's vision for a split second, ducked and slung the others, spinning and whirling, disconcerting McNamara's aim.

Lafferty reached for the little table. The telephone fell out of its fancy cover, the receiver off the hook. Its connection, without a speaker, gave warning down below in the telephone room that all was not well, to stand by.

Simultaneously Slade's gun, not yet relinquished, belched fire, its roar muffled by the silencer. McNamara's answering shot, from the service thirty-eight, spoke with the honest roar of a watchdog. Then the lights went out in the ceiling dome. Lafferty had got to the switch. He lugged out the powerful electric torch that was part of his equipment, swung the blinding white ray full on McNamara, who was crouching by the foot of the bed.

McNamara flipped lead at that glaring, dazzling eye. It went out with a crash of glass, an oath from Lafferty. McNamara was hit. He felt the scalding stab of a bullet in his left shoulder. He had got Slade. He had seen him slump, pitch forward, face downwards, dragging the coverlet and its precious burden from bed to floor, the portrait clattering down while Slade scrambled at a rug with nerveless, empty fingers, his gun gone, his life going, wheezing with a perforated lung, red bubbles choking him.

Lafferty did not know McNamara was

wounded. His left arm was numbed. As he had swung the ray he had caught sight of Slade falling. This damned dick wouldn't be alone. The game was up. It was time for a getaway. He snarled with fury and felt the hot wind of a bullet sear his cheek. He shot back and the lead hit the foot of the bed behind which McNamara was barricaded. The harsh bark of the latter's gun would rouse the place. The bedroom reeked with powder gas, in the darkness the two guns spewed javelins of flame.

Lafferty bolted through the dressing room, outlined for a moment against the rose glow of the room where the woman lay dead. A slug caught him in the side as he leaped. It did not stop him. He made the door and slammed it shut as McNamara's last bullet split the panel.

The elevator was coming up. The face of the colored gangster was gray with apprehension. He flung open the gate and Lafferty lurched in, his hand to his side, blood welling through the fingers.

"That phone ringin' like all mischief," said the other. "Gus, he don't know what to do."

"To hell with Gus! Let him beat it," snapped Lafferty. "We go straight through to the basement!"

AS THEY shot past the ground floor, the pilot yelled to Gus to make his getaway. They reached the bottom of the shaft, raced through the basement, unbolted a door and mounted stone steps to the community court that served the Picardy and a group of apartment houses. It was set with shrubs and flowers and lawn. There was an ornamental gateway leading to the street where the getaway car waited, its engine running, Rossano in the rear seat ready to discourage pursuit.

McNamara reloaded as he raced down the stairs. He sent a bullet crashing through the hall window on the second floor. That would bring his men leaping from their shadows, summon the nearest cruisers of the radio fleet. They should be close by. He had telephoned from a patrol box before he went in as a doctor.

He was dripping blood as he went. His white shirt was crimson with it. Guests, peering timidly from their doors as he went

down, shrank back again at the sight. He surged into the front hall just as Gus, struggling into his own coat, ran from the telephone room to the front door and opened it to be met by a rush of officers. They grabbed him, paused at seeing McNamara's ghastly appearance. There was nothing weak about his will, or his voice, as he rapped out orders.

One police car was already at the curb, another one was coming. A motorcycle with a sidecar, armored, armed with a baby machine gun, was roaring up.

"Get up to Suite Four-One-Three," commanded McNamara. "There's a dead woman in the front room and the man who killed her in the bedroom closet. Cabreza. Here's the key. He's unarmed and handcuffed. There's another man there who's likely dead by now. And look out for the jewels. You'll find them scattered about. One of you get the surgeon and in touch with Deputy Richards."

They stared at him for a second. Even to their accustomed ears the tale, and the bloodstained narrator, seemed incredible. Then he was through them, out through the door. He told the man beside the driver of the police car at the curb to get out, waved the second car and the motorcycle to a halt.

His face was hard set. Lafferty was making his getaway. There would be a car waiting, close by. He heard the blowout of a muffler, the roar of a high powered engine.

"To the left! After them. They're fast. They'll have a chopper. You'll have the



best chance in the cycle there. Blow his rears. Get going."

He leaped into the vacated seat.

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"You ought to go to Bellevue," said the driver. "You're sopped with blood."

"I can lose more than that—to get Lafferty. Jump to it."

The fast motorcycle passed them, tore round the corner, careening, its guns commencing to spit through the slot in the armored shield.

Lafferty was aboard his car. The colored man clambered into the back; Rossano shoved him out of the way, getting ready to grind his organ from the rear.

"What happened? What went wrong? Did you get the stuff?" the driver asked as he shifted gears.

"How in hell do I know what went wrong? Cabreza cracked it somehow. I got nothing but lead. McNamara was there, waiting. He got Slade. Step on it. I've got to get fixed up."

They raced down the street, the motorcycle gaining a little at the start. The police cars were outclassed, but there were others coming in. Rossano and the cycle oop were trading streams of lead. The roar of the quick-firers was like light thunder. Windows were flung up, slammed down again.

Suddenly the cycle veered, pitched on one side, spilling its occupants, its front tire ribbons. The gangster's car leaped ahead. They had the speed, but there were always breaks in traffic and the theater and supper crowds were still moving. The police cars, dodging the wrecked cycle, were losing. To sound their sirens would only clear the way for Lafferty.

Rossano refed the drum of his chopper. Its metal was hot with the spewing out of frictioning lead and burning gas. The back of the car was pitted, the fenders ripped, but their tires were still good. He had beaten the dummies. They were out of effective range already. The driver knew his business. Once down at Sheehan's, they would be safe.

McNamara, chafing at their lack of speed, was thinking the same thing. He knew Lafferty needed attention for his wound. It was worse than McNamara's, of which the detective was barely conscious. Lafferty would get an undercover doctor, lie low somewhere in those twin warrens of ramshackle blocks that bordered Ash Can Alley.

He wished now he had sought to kill

Lafferty in the apartment house, instead of winging him purposely. But he was going to clear up the Alley. Among other things, to find out what had happened to Charley Lane, to investigate the undertaking parlors. Even if he had to griff the block without warrants. He had to get goods enough on Lafferty to send him to the chair. If Lafferty was caught and could not beat the rap, it would not satisfy McNamara. He wanted to see the gangster moked—and Rossano—pay the supreme penalty. Rossano had been the killer of McNamara's kin, without question. It must be proven. Not going to be easy. They might get the driver of the getaway car, make him squeal. He would know many things. They could raid Sheehan's. Make prisoners. But there was no certainty.

**T**HE coup he had brought off, capturing Cabreza, the murderer, the killing of Slade, he reckoned nothing.

Radio cars were all right. In the tonneau an officer was sending now. Messages were coming in through the loudspeaker installed there. The radio fleet was assembling, closing in. But why didn't they get cars equal to the ones the gangsters used, stolen probably, but capable of making a hundred miles an hour. More, in the open.

They were crossing one of the main arteries. The traffic officers were off duty. A string of cars, moving as the lights changed, started north and south. Many of their drivers were amateurs at the wheels of private cars.

The gangsters' car dared not slow up. It nosed to the right, found itself blocked, darted across through a gap, grazing the bonnet of a light sedan, hurling it aside, rushing ahead while the bewildered drivers braked, stepped on the gas, shouted as their women screamed.

A heavy truck rolled on. It was making a night trip, using streets it would not have dared use in daylight. It was an open truck and it carried two lengths of cement tubing specially cast, of huge diameter, a maximum load. The driver and his helper were turning aside for no one, bestowing no favors. The heavy vehicle, with its chained-on load, was like a juggernaut, none too easy to handle.

Lafferty's car rammed it just back of the cab. The impact was terrific. The truck shuddered, moved broadside, lifting, settling down again. The lighter car collapsed like an accordion. It reared with crash of metal and glass, it toppled shapeless, its passengers senseless, imprisoned. Then it burst into spouting, spreading flame that burned like a great blowtorch as the other cars sought to get clear. The truck moved on and the police cars spouted men.

Lafferty and Rossano had furnished their own Midnight Special. A third, the driver, went with them. There was no chance of rescue. They were pinned in, broken, inhaling flame, charred to a crisp.

## CHAPTER IX

### OUT OF THE ASHES

**I**T WAS weeks later when a girl sat twisting nervous fingers in the office of the deputy commissioner. McNamara had brought her there. She was pretty but pale, tired looking, anxious. Little like the Suzette who had sold souvenirs and cigarettes in the Golden Bough.

"What is it you want?" asked the deputy, gruffly.

"It's about Charley, sir. Charley Lane. You know he nearly died after Rossano shot him. He would have if that undertaker hadn't looked out for him. Then Mr. McNamara found him and sent him to the hospital. He'll be out in a little while. He ain't strong yet, but—"

"We know all that," said the deputy. "What have you been doing?"

"I got a job when they closed out the night club. I can make good money at millinery. I've saved most of it. I can get a job most anywhere. So can Charley, when he gets strong. He's a good mechanic. I've got enough to take us West, sir. Charley's going straight. He's afraid that you and Mister McNamara won't let him go out of town. Lafferty made him do things he wouldn't have done. He meant to see Mister McNamara the night they shot him down. They just missed his heart. Even then, he tried to call me up to tell you he couldn't make it."

The deputy raised a heavy eyebrow at McNamara. The girl was "padding" her plea. It was natural enough.

"How about it, Mac?"

McNamara nodded.

"All right, kid," said the deputy. "Take your boy friend out of town. And stay out."

The eyes belied the harshness of the tone. A flush came into the girl's face. Her eyes shone.

"Oh, thank you. Thank you! We won't ever come back." The light in her eyes dimmed behind grateful tears she could not quite control. But she walked out with head erect.

"We've got no more use for him now the Cobras are cleaned out," said McNamara. "If he stayed here, some of the mob 'ud probably bump him off. She's not a bad kid. Might keep him straight."

"Well, it's their gamble," said the deputy. "We did well on that job. Cabreza's booked for the Hot Seat. And you got your wish. Lafferty and Rossano burned, after all."

McNamara nodded again. He was seeing the flaming car once more. His kin had been avenged. A foolish woman had been killed. Her murderer sentenced. Others would stand their trial. The Cobras were gone, their racket crashed.

**B**UT the Identification Bureau records showed fifty-seven thousand known criminals living in and about New York. It was a hard life and a dangerous one. He had chosen it, loved it, but it hardened a man. Even if Lane had tried to trap him, forced by Lafferty, he had suffered for it. McNamara was glad to let him go, him and the kid.

He walked to the window. It was open. The day was warm. The Tombs lay across the street, well named. But a lad was whistling a new song hit:

*In a land where skies are blue,  
Roses bloom for me and you.  
There we'll roam, to make a home  
Where seabirds skim along the foam,  
In the land where dreams come true.*

"I hope they make it," said McNamara—hardboiled McNamara. He did not know he had spoken aloud until he heard the deputy.

"What was that, Mac?"

"I asked what's next on the docket?" said McNamara.

## Next Issue

# **A Border Novelette**

**by**

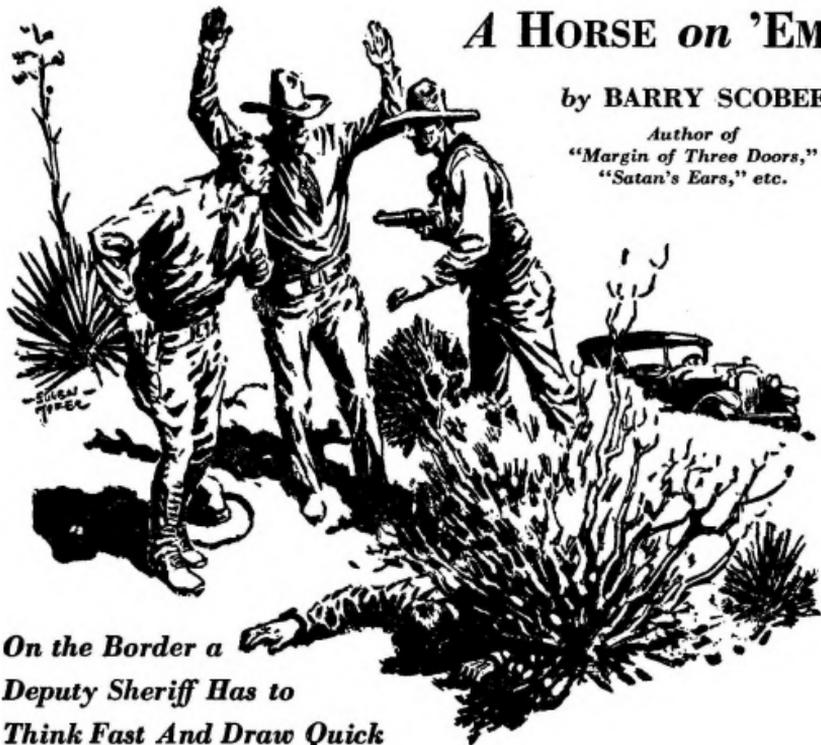
# **J. ALLAN DUNN**

# *Yellow Contraband*

# A HORSE on 'EM

by BARRY SCOBEE

Author of  
"Margin of Three Doors,"  
"Satan's Ears," etc.



## *On the Border a Deputy Sheriff Has to Think Fast And Draw Quick*

**A** GATE is a nuisance for a lone man in a car. Bixby climbed out of his ragged old flivver to open the wire barrier across the ranch road, got back in and drove through, and got out again to close it.

And as he turned from dropping the wire loop over the pole his roving eye caught sight of an empty brass cartridge lying on a tuft of grass beside the wheel rut.

Bixby—called "Bix" by friends, enemies and kids—wanted to be the next sheriff. But he wasn't campaigning. Not in the usual way. He wasn't passing out five cent cigars. Nor knocking the other prospective candidates. He was merely concentrating on his present job as deputy.

Bix liked that word, concentration. A few years before, when he was a gawky cowhand, he knew a fellow who set out to be a billiard shark. The fellow gave all his time to it. He almost quit eating. When he wasn't playing a game with somebody, he was

shooting the balls around by himself, or mulling over books on the subject, or laying out angles on the green cloth with white chalk, training his hands, training his eyes.

And later Bix saw in the paper how the man had become a Southwestern billiard champ, giving demonstrations and lessons and making good money.

When Bix got to be a deputy sheriff he decided to concentrate on the job instead of just wearing a star.

He made it a point to get acquainted with all the citizens of the county, and meet newcomers, and cast an unobtrusive eye on transient strangers. He made himself really look at people when he was introduced, and remember their names, and learn how to spell them correctly when he could, and remember their faces.

He would sit in front of the jail and practice catching the license plate numbers on cars, and would jot them down, and go around later, when possible, to see if he had

got them correctly. It became so that he could give a workable description of all the occupants of a passing automobile, and the camp bedding and the like on the machine, it any. And a momentary stare at a horse and man became sufficient for him to take in every detail from the rider's hat to the animal's hoofs.

With this observing, remembering and classifying, Bix naturally fell into the habit of analyzing men and situations. So that by now it was all second nature to him, and automatic. And with it all he had developed into a level-eyed man, not hard, but with a humorous slant on his tight mouth that could easily slide into a cheerful grin.

**B**IX picked up the empty brass cartridge from the tuft of grass and sniffed it. It had been fired quite recently. It was a .45 Colt's, not the straight sided shell of an automatic, but with a rim around the butt that showed it had come from a cylinder gun. He conned the ground for more like it.

The usual spoor was there that is to be found at a remote ranch gate on a fifth class road—the cloven hoof prints of cattle, marks of automobile tires, the sun-stained butt of a tailor-made cigarette and sharp cut horse-shoe marks. These last were fresh, made apparently by three horses, and were in a compact little bunch, as if the horses had crowded together. Oddly enough, they did not go through the gate but either turned back or off on to the hard brown grassland not yet softened or made green by summer rains. But he saw no more shells.

Only casually interested, Bix did not pursue the tracks, but wondered as he dropped the cartridge into his shirt pocket why the person who fired it had taken the trouble to reload one empty chamber.

"A cow-aleck taking a crack at a hawk on a post wouldn't have bothered to put in one fresh shell," he reflected idly as he got back into his fivver.

As he trundled along, his keen slitted eyes scanned the land near and far—which was no more than the habit of any range-reared man. No houses were in sight. He was in empty country, save for a few lean cows and calves here and there. His errand was not to these spreading, sunlit hills, but on beyond down on the Rio Grande, where a pair of

strangers had been hanging out a week or so in the old Fletcher shack half a mile back from the river. He had convinced his boss, the old and easygoing sheriff who was ready to retire, that it was a pretty good idea to amble down there and introduce the strangers to himself, see if the river was still flowing downhill, and so forth. Just one of Bix's volunteer sashays that made his job work instead of a rest and that got him many a derisive grin from a certain element back in town.

Crossing a stretch of sand on the road a mile or so from the gate, he observed the three sets of fresh horse tracks again, all going toward the gate but one in the reverse direction.

Then a moment later he caught sight of half a dozen buzzards circling low, a mile or more from the road and off toward a mean little canyon that cut through the hills.

The scavenger birds circling low and short always interested Bix. It might mean nothing more than the remains of a jackrabbit left by a hawk. Or it might mean a calf slaughtered unlawfully for a quarter of fresh veal, or a cow killed by a lobo, or a colt struck down by a depredating cougar. Whatever, it was a friendly act to find out, note the brand, if it were horse or cow stuff, and report to the owner. Which was good, useful political campaigning of an all-year-round sort that counted with ranchmen.

So Bix found a place where he could turn out of the ruts, and he went meandering off across the brown range. When he came to rocky ground that could not be traversed on wheels, he left the car and proceeded on foot.

As he approached the buzzards they flapped to higher atmosphere, with such lightness that he knew they had not gorged. At the same time Bix's interest picked up sharply at sight of a fresh white scratch on a patch of flat rock—just such an etching as a shod horse would make. Had those three horsemen been here? And if so, Why?

The question was answered, at least by suggestion, a moment later when Bix prowled along the brink of the scarp, for his searching gaze abruptly lighted upon the body of a man lying a few yards down the steep slope.

The body of a Chinaman, Bix saw by the

upturned face. A Chinaman better dressed than the average kitchen or laundry Chinese, with Oxford shoes that had been shined not long before, and striped socks, pressed trousers, and a white shirt with a bow tie.

But what caught Bix's attention more than these things was that the man was wrapped about the torso with a gray coat, that matched the trousers, the coat bound around and around tightly with the strands of a saddle rope.

**B**IXBY was painstaking, and the fact cost him a trip back to his car through the hot noontime sun to get his cameras. For he had added amateur photography to his work, having found that pictures were effective with juries. Back at the scarp, he took a general picture of the scene with his postcard-size machine, that had a pretty fair lens; and then a close-up of the body with a much smaller camera that he could almost hide in his hand, and that had an expensive lens which made pictures full of telltale sharpness.

Not until he had made three or four exposures did he proceed with a close examination. The rope that bound the coat about the torso, he found, had been tied at the ends with a common granny knot, a knot, he reflected, that an experienced ranch worker would scarcely have used. A cowboy would have been more likely to run the rope-end through the hondo and bend a couple of half-hitches.

The wadded coat removed, Bix thought he understood why it had been bound around the body—to keep blood from spilling. For a heavy bullet had crashed through the man's chest and back. Bix remembered those close-clustered hoof prints at the gate, and his constructive imagination swiftly concocted a scene of what, possibly, might have occurred.

A sudden shot—two riders supporting a third in the saddle while their hands plucked the coat from where it was tied behind the cantle—the binding of the coat around the body—little or no telltale blood spilt. Then a hasty, furtive trip to the brink of this canyon.

But why had they left the body here in the open for the buzzards to spy out? A plausible answer came swiftly: They weren't

aware that they had made such a mistake. They had dropped it over in the early, dense darkness of the previous night. There had been such a period of darkness before the big moon rose. And that was about when the man had been killed, judging by his appearance. The killers, rolling their burden off the brink in the thick blackness at a prearranged point, had supposed that it rolled down into the thicket of rocks and trees that littered the slope a little farther below. Had been so certain that they had not clambered down to make sure.

Or, as another explanation, they had not cared. Perhaps they were victims of the great and empty land—had thought that a body carried a mile from the road and dumped into a lonely canyon was disposed of forever. Victims of their imaginations and exaggerated opinions about this vast and empty land.

That would mean that they had not thought of the buzzards. Which in turn meant that they were tenderfeet in the matter of plainscraft. For it was unthinkable that any man halfway familiar with the out-of-doors Southwest could forget the keen-eyed birds that were forever on the lookout up there against the frosty ceiling of the sky.

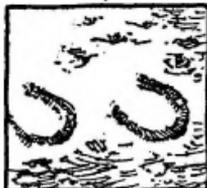
These speculations ambled through Bix's thoughts as he examined the slain man's pockets. They yielded matches and cigarettes, a few coins, a knife—nothing of significance unless it was a little patch of pin-pricks at the mouth of the inside coat pocket, as if the owner had been accustomed to fasten it shut with a safety-pin against the possibility of losing his wallet.

Bix finished his examination at last, not much wiser. He gathered up his cameras and the loose paraphernalia of the crime, coat, hat and rope. He felt that he should get the body away, unpleasant as the task might be, so he swung it across his shoulder, worked his way up over the brink, and headed for his car.

Bix was sixty miles from the little railroad town that was the county seat, but he had no intention of returning there at once. He was twelve miles from Fletcher's shack on the river, where a report said the two strangers were staying, and he fairly itched now to see them. Which itch was

translated into action by putting the body in the back of the car and heading on south again.

Now and then as Bix traveled down the steep-pitching mean road to the river level he saw horse tracks at infrequent intervals, visible only here and there on the rocky



trail. Once he got out and examined them—three sets of hoof prints going north, the same three going back southward. Then

when within a mile of his destination he saw three bony horses on the scanty grazing among the creosote bushes and lechuguilla. One was lying down and another had a little bell tied to its tail, as if to disclose its whereabouts to men unaccustomed to hunting for their mounts in brush and boulders.

The horses showed no saddle marks of recent riding. But then, Bix reflected, it would be like greenhorns to remember to rub down their mounts—remember to do that but forget buzzards and overlook horse tracks on the trail because they themselves would not readily note hoof signs.

Abruptly, with a slanting grin across his tightly humorous mouth—Eastern folk unfamiliar with the breed would have thought him sardonically evil and dangerous—Bix stopped his car, dragged out the body, and laid it in the creosote brush. It would not do to drive in on the men at the shack, if they were there and were the killers, and introduce them to their victim. Said killers, Bix told himself whimsically, might not approve of such social conduct. In other words, it wasn't done in Border circles. And besides, he might be able to use the body as an ace in the hole. You never could tell.

With this gesture of caution, Bix became doubly cautious. He drove on a half mile farther and left the car out of sight behind the ridge-crest just before the road dropped down into the short draw where the one-room, unpainted shack stood. It might be wise to take a peep at signs in general before bargaining in, he thought.

In a half hour of keeping out of sight in the bushes and ditches he collected several exhibits in his mind: he found a few scat-

tered naked human footprints in the sand, pointing away from the river toward the shack. He found a little square of soiled pink paper bearing a Chinese character or two. And he saw a big, high-powered automobile in the shade of the low bluff behind the brown shanty.

The footprints might have been made by barefoot Mexican goat herders, Bix argued. But hardly. The latest common *pelado* arrivals on this side would likely be wearing sandals. If they had been herding hereabouts long enough to have drawn some pay, they would probably have adorned their calloused feet with American-made brogans. Still, the barefoot tracks could have been made by the herders. Goat tracks were more than plentiful. And up there against the hillside above the shack and the water spring was a bunch of a thousand or so white angoras. But the human footprints here in the sand had been mostly mused up by the goats browsing over. Herders loitering behind their flocks would have left unmarred tracks.

Bix did not have to tax his mind much to arrive at a tentative explanation in two words:

"Chink runners."

He would like to have headed up the river at once and tell the Federal immigration boys at Mariposa about it. He liked to be, and was, friendly with the U. S. men. Illegal yellow-skinned importations were their business. But murder was his business. And these two strangers in the shack might be ready to pull out at any moment. It was a hundred to one shot that they were here temporarily, in for quick money and a quick getaway. They'd be fools to linger long.

So Bix circled back to his waiting flivver and drove on to his professional call.

**B**IX left the car in the rocky ditch sixty yards from the ugly board shack because the ancient vehicle did not have the vim, vigor and vitality to climb the steep bank and go on, as that big and arrogant machine up there had done. He went on afoot and was about to bawl out a lusty hello in front of the shanty when a man's voice checked him.

"That's a horse on me."

A pause, then the rattle of dice on boards. Bix surmised that it came from the back

porch. He started around with as light steps as possible, and the voice sounded again.

"Ha, that's a horse on you! Shake 'em out."

The strangers, it appeared, were passing the time at high dice. The cubes rattled again. Bix stopped just short of the corner of the house. And after a brief period the same heavy voice growled again.

"Gawd, but you're a lucky fool, Orcutt. You've crumbled three centuries offa my wad today."

"Shoot 'em out," said another voice, high and thin.

"Not on your old bald pate. I want a little whang left for honest and legitimate purposes."

The second man chuckled mirthlessly.

"You better get over your mania for dice then," he said.

"But we've got to do something to while away the time."

Nothing shady about that talk, Bix perceived. He moved around the corner and took two men sitting sidewise on the edge of the porch completely by surprise, or a good imitation of it. They came to their feet too swiftly for men with unclouded consciences—one a big fellow and the other smaller and bareheaded and partly bald. The little man shot a glance at a belt and gun on the porch beyond easy reach, while the big one spoke.

"What you doing—slipping up on us?" he demanded angrily, as a startled man will.

"Didn't set out to," Bix drawled, flashing a slanting, not unfriendly grin.

"We didn't hear your car—or horse."

"Don't blame my poor old fliv for that," said Bix. "It couldn't climb up the bank of your crick. It's getting right feeble."

The pair bored at Bix with hard, slitted eyes, while their surprise melted. They were dressed like cow country men, boots and big hats, but their faces were the faces of men indigenous to city streets and hotel lobbies. The big man bore out this estimate by his quick recovery and by the mannerish way in which he extended his hand, introducing himself.

"My name's Johnson," he said, rollingly suave. "Don't remember seeing you around here—my loss, I'm sure. And this is Mr. Orcutt."

Bix shook hands with both and told them his name.

"Heard you were down here," he said. "Thought I'd come past and make your acquaintance."

"You talk like a census enumerator," said Johnson lightly, giving Bix an opening to explain himself.

Bix thrust thumb and finger into the match pocket of his vest and pulled out his deputy sheriff's star, exhibiting it momentarily on his palm.

"I do like to know my population," he said.

"We're not difficult men to classify, Mr. Bixby," Orcutt spoke up, in a voice thin and precise. "Plain stockmen from the Plains, so to speak. The oil field came our way and we're down here to invest some of our surplus in ten or twelve thousand goats, if we can buy them and get pasture leases. Goats are on an uppish market right now, you know."

"Sit down, Mr. Bixby, sit down," Johnson invited pleasantly. "You look like a man who would shoot a little high dice to kill time that hangs heavy."

"Looks are deceptive," replied Bix, equally pleasant.

"Excuse me." Johnson chuckled his mellow, rolling chuckle. "My mistake—a horse on me. But sit down, anyhow. Share our shade."

Bix nodded acceptance, and noted that the two men hastily seated themselves first to be sure to get the places nearest the belts and guns lying on the porch.

**I**N THE next few minutes while the three talked of the heat, country and goat prices, Bix collected a few more mentally tangible exhibits.

First, the men did not ask him if he had had dinner, which he hadn't. Few men who had been ranchmen long enough to have their cheeks and the backs of their hands burned deep with the sun—as these did not have—would have overlooked that gesture of hospitality.

Then there were the revolvers, .45 Colt's all right and cylinder guns, such as could have fired the cartridge in Bix's shirt pocket. The ground around the porch was littered with such cartridges, where some one had

been doing target practice against the rock bluff yonder.

But neither belt, lying there on the porch boards, had an empty place where a shell had been removed to reload a gun back there at the wire gate.

A negative exhibit, this; but to offset it the man Orcutt wore a ring of silver dragons holding a marvelous green stone with a Chinese character carved on its surface. And as Bix was telling himself it was as pretty a thing as he had ever seen he was wondering if it might be a connecting link with the slain Chinaman.

"Lordy," spoke Johnson abruptly out of a pause, "but you've got a big country here, Mr. Bixby, and as empty as heaven."

The big man's eyes rolled up to the measureless sky, and off across the vast spaces, and a fine mist broke out on his forehead. Half scared, he seemed.

"It is a big country," Bix allowed.

"And full of nothing," said Johnson, mopping his forehead. "And still. Still as a bunch of sleuths laying in wait. Which," he added hastily, "is just a comparison I thought of."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Johnson, forget it," Orcutt cut in, and added with apology to Bix, "We're used to more neighbors up around our Plains ranches."

"Plenty of neighbors here," said Bix.

"Eh?" ejaculated Johnson.

"Buzzards, for instance," said Bix.

He thrust a thumb toward several of the strong winged birds that were already making high circles over there where the Chinaman lay in the creosote bushes. And he watched the two men sharply.

But nothing registered with them.

ONE thing seemed certain to Bix. This big Johnson wasn't the man of the pair to have fired cold-bloodedly into the Chinaman.

Johnson was soft. He lacked the glinting hardness of Orcutt. Johnson was given to slick talk. He would be dangerous only when cornered. Orcutt was coldly and calculatingly dangerous. Johnson would be the "contact man" in confidence games, making acquaintances and lulling them and leading them to the trough. Orcutt would make them drink of bitter waters.

Orcutt was spick and span, freshly shaven, hands washed, nails clean. But Johnson had let down, here in the wilderness. He had not shaved today. His hands were soiled. His mouth was loose in its present momentary repose. And Bix's presence worried him subtly.

Orcutt was an exquisite, icy, dainty. He wore small and pretty boots that were meticulously dusted. In imagination Bix could see him at a white and gleaming table in a fine hotel, eating sparingly of fine foods with precise and elegant gestures. Bix had been at places like that a time or two, to blow himself and see how the upper financial crust performed. He could not vision Orcutt on a ranch at all. But he could see him holding a gun close and pressing the trigger.

Orcutt was a man of steel. But Bix had learned that even a man of steel has his weaknesses. Jewelry might be Orcutt's weakness. The man wore a watchfob that glinted with a nest of tiny diamond points. He had a diamond in his shirt front. He had a diamond on his finger, neighbor to the green Chinese ring. And now and then there appeared on his palm a flattish, flaming fire opal, which he would stare at in abstracted pleasure.

To break one of these spells of silence, Bix took up the three big dice from the porch floor and rolled them out.

"Ah, what did you make?" asked Johnson eagerly.

Bix had turned two sixes and a five.

"Seventeen," he said.

Johnson swooped up the bones and tumbled them out. Two twos and a one.

"Five!" he scorned disgustedly. "You're a horse on me. Roll 'em for a dollar, and see if you can do it again."

Bix pointedly eyed Orcutt's hand.

"I'll roll Mr. Orcutt for that Chink ring he's wearing," Bix said.

"Why?" asked Orcutt coolly.

"It's right purty."

Orcutt shook his head.

"No," he declined. "It's an old keepsake."

And he held out his hand and gazed at the ornament while his cold, gray eyes lighted with a worshipful fire.



Johnson rolled the dice coaxingly to Bix.

"Orcutt and I shoot a lot just for company," he said.

"I think you'd have plenty of company," Bix observed.

"Who?" Orcutt asked sharply.

"Oh, folks from across the Rio, slipping through."

"I thought the immigration men at Mariposa looked out for such as that."

"Well, anyhow," said Bix, "there's plenty of company in the shape of rock rats, road runners and rattlesnakes—and buzzards."

"When I got up this morning," Johnson made comment, "about fifty of those red faced birds were on the bluff above our spring there, picking at their feathers and clucking like a bunch of old dames."

"Noisy," said Orcutt. "I took my gun and fired among them."

"They're fine scavengers," said Bix.

"I've heard of that, of course."

"They circle around like those out there now," Bix continued. "At this time of year, with young calves all over the range, ranchmen often go out to see what the buzzards have located. Maybe a cow has been killed and left a calf that has to be looked after. The birds," Bix added slowly, "never miss anything that is lying still on the ground."

This time it registered.

Both men shot looks at Bix with slitted glances.

**T**HE reaction of the two to this revelation of bird life was different, but equally pregnant. Orcutt said precisely and thinly, "Interesting." Johnson hid his face by reaching for his belt and gun. He twirled the cylinder in apparent idleness, keenly making certain however that the chambers were loaded.

Then in a moment Orcutt put a question that was not as casual as he tried to make it.

"How did you come in, Mr. Bixby—from Mariposa or by the ranch road through the hills?"

"Ranch road," Bix replied, and waited for the statement to soak in. Then, "I saw your horse tracks."

"Why do you say *our* horse tracks, Sheriff?" Johnson's voice was laden with curiosity.

"Well," answered Bix, "I saw three

horses on the other side of the hill, there where the buzzards are ring-around-the-rosy. Didn't know anybody else hereabouts that might be riding."

"They were *our* horse tracks," Orcutt stated frankly. "We took a little look-see ride over that part of the ranch country yesterday."

"Who was the third man?" asked Bix.

"The third man?" Johnson was almost startled. "By gad, you must be clairvoyant."

"It was a Mexican," snapped Orcutt. He nodded toward the white goats far up the slopes above them. "We took one of the local herders along to show us the region."

"He didn't come back with you," Bix remarked.

Again the two men thrust their glances at him.

"Now I'm curious," said Orcutt. "Why do you think he didn't come back with us?"

"Because the tracks showed that one of the horses was led, on the back trip."

"Oh, to be sure!" Orcutt seemed annoyed at himself. "Any ranchman would have noted that. I'm dull today. No, you're right, the fellow didn't return with us. A few miles back he saw a handful of goats up in the hills. He thought he could get them better on foot and let us lead his horse in for him."

A neat answer! Bix suspected that it could be disproved by interviewing the few herders in the neighborhood. But that would take time, and while Bix would be at it this pair could pull out in their swift car, or slip across into Mexico.

"How much longer do you gents figure to be here?" Bix inquired casually.

Johnson started to answer, but abruptly deferred to Orcutt. Orcutt's steely, slitting eyes were on the circling buzzards off there beyond the ridge.

"Till tomorrow," he murmured.

But Bix, seeing that intent, calculating look, knew that it would not be tomorrow, but tonight, as soon as the moonless darkness came on, when the pair would flit away to that canyon brink to hide the body of their victim securely against the prying eyes of the sky-floaters.

**B**IX was in a quandry. He did not want to let these men get away, but he had no grounds for arrest. Not an iota of evi-

dence that would stand up in a habeas corpus proceeding that they would be pretty certain to bring to secure their release, or that would be acceptable to jury and a judge. On the other hand, if he let them go, he would be culpable in his own mind, for undoubtedly they were guilty.

Bix came to a workable decision. He wouldn't let them go, couldn't do that; but he'd get them over where the body lay and see if something wouldn't turn up, like a confession from the uneasy Johnson.

"I notice you're watching the birds over there," he began, as an opener.

"Yes?" Orcutt was on guard in his precise, icy way.

"You inter-rested in 'em?" Bix's inquiry was merely off-handed.

"No. Why should I be?"

"Maybe they've found something."

"What?" Orcutt's startled glance darted to the birds and back again.

"One of your horses, for instance."

"You said you saw three horses as you came by. That's all we have."

"One was lying down."

"Well, horses do lie down."

"Yours are bony and half starved on this creosote-lechuguilla goat pasture. Maybe this one has laid down for keeps."

"They're rented horses. I can pay for it if anything has happened."

"It's probably a goat," Johnson hazarded.

"Or a man," said Bix.

"Why do you say that?" Orcutt demanded.

"Well," Bix was bland, "lots of criminals up and down this old river. On both sides, crossing back and forth. Rum runners. Illegal immigrants. Chink runners, and of course Chinks. One of 'em might have been killed."

"Why do you think that?"

"Didn't say I do. But low browsing buzzards always sorta fascinate me. You never can tell. Maybe we ought to meander over there and take one o' your look-sees."

Orcutt regarded Bix for a full ten seconds with the eyes of a fiercely contemplative puma.

"Yes, you're right," he said at last, softly.

"We'd better go and see."

And deliberately he took up his belt and gun and buckled them on.

THEY went in Bix's old flivver. Bix drove. He had no fear that the men would try to wipe him out—yet. They would see first what was beyond the ridge.

As they topped the hill the winging buzzards flapped away. The bay horse, lying broadside in the hot sun, got up when the car approached. Though the hillslope and valley was a sea of bushes, Bix knew exactly where to find the body, the coat, rope and hat. He had carefully marked the spot in his mind.

He turned off the road and stopped the machine within forty feet of the well dressed Chinaman. The three of them got out. Orcutt and Johnson were watching Bix like hawks and scanning the dark green bushes at the same time.

The two waited, tautly alert, for Bix to show them whatever it was he had come to show. But Bix had no intention of walking up and revealing the body with them behind him. Orcutt was a man who could shoot in the back! Bix wanted them to go first. And he knew there was no use in further fencing.

"All right," he said, business-like, "it's over there behind the biggest bunch of creosote."

"What?" asked both men together.

"The secret the little birds showed me."

"What do you mean?" Orcutt was getting peremptory.

"Go see."

"What's this fool game, Bixby?"

"Look on the other side of that clump."

Bix's steady insistence was like the drive of a padded whip. Reluctantly the two men moved toward the indicated bushes, almost on tiptoe, alert as dogs, ready for any emergency.

Bix did not know what to expect when they should see the slain man—swift gun action by Orcutt, a breakdown by the loose Johnson, bland denials. But he was as taut and ready as they.

And the result was not what he had foreseen. They stared down at the body momentarily, then turned to regard Bix coolly.

"Well?" Orcutt sang out.

"You ever see him before?" Bix asked.

"No."

"Did you think we did, Bixby?" Johnson inquired with an easy smile.

A flash of admiration went through Bix for Johnson. The big loose man whose mor-

ale had been disintegrating under the strain of the vast and empty wilderness had got himself together instantly in the pinch. He was every whit as cool as the icy Orcutt. Not a man, evidently, to break down and confess.

But Bix knew the effect that a silent and uncommunicative officer could have on guilty minds, and he waited, saying nothing, a thin slantwise smile across his mouth that might mean anything.

"Are you thinking of arresting us for this, Bixby?" Orcutt asked sharply. "Why, man, you haven't a shred of evidence to connect us up."

Bix realized that this was only too true, so he continued to smile and say nothing.

"By God!" cried Orcutt. "You try pinching us, and this country'll lose one dumb and meddlesome deputy. I'll jerk you higher than a kite. I'll sue you and this county for false arrest. I've got the money to do it with!"

They stood there at an impasse, the men with their glittering, boring eyes; Bix with his slanting, thin smile.



"You haven't a shred of evidence," Orcutt repeated.

"Circumstances," said Bix.

"What circumstances? What circumstances, Bixby?"

Bix had no intention of telling. In his heart he knew he didn't have much. Orcutt, desperately keened and sensitized by his dilemma, must have sensed the doubt that was in Bix, for he drove in with triumphant scorn.

"The mere circumstance of our presence in the country! Nothing more. A sweet thing to tell a jury. But fine grounds for a damage suit against you. Two honest ranchmen falsely arrested. Snap out of it, fellow, before you commit political suicide."

That was a punch below the belt for Bix, hoping as he was that he would be elected the next sheriff. But he stood pat, outwardly.

"See here," Orcutt flung on, pressing the advantage he sensed. "Get a picture of how it would go in court." He turned to Johnson. "Dick, did we kill this Chink?"

"Ab-so-lutely not!"

"Did we ever see him before?"

"No, absolutely!"

Orcutt thrust again at Bix.

"See what you're up against, Bixby? Two to one. See?"

**B**IX did see, only too well. He was in the position that many an officer has faced—feeling that he had the murderers in his hands, yet without a particle of evidence that would stand alone, without even enough proof to justify arrest. These men might be what they claimed, honest ranchmen—*might* be. Damn the possibility! It had him on their hips for a throw. His elaborate trap had refused to spring. It only seemed foolish now.

But in his heart Bix knew—*almost* knew—that they were guilty. He half resolved to arrest them, anyhow, and throw his chances to be sheriff to the winds if he were making a mistake. Duty was duty. But on the other hand, if they were innocent, he would be laying a taint on them that would endure for the rest of their lives, would be doing innocent men a tremendous injustice.

Bix was in a sweat. And momentarily he temporized.

"Well," he asked, "do you mind helping me get the body into my flivver? I'll have to take it to town."

The men loosened in a surge of relief, became graciously obliging, with full toned words bubbling with triumph.

"Why certainly, Mr. Bixby. Surely."

"You bet we'll lend a hand, Sheriff. Always like to oblige an officer."

Orcutt and Johnson had been standing close beside the Chinaman, with Bix across the black-green bushes from them. Bix now walked around the clump and faced them across the body.

Orcutt and Johnson bent down to take hold, full of their victory.

And in that instant Bix saw something that he had not seen before.

"Wait!" he cried hoarsely, and whipped out his gun. "Up with your hands, men! Put 'em up!"

The men straightened, gave back in consternation. Johnson's hands went up. But Orcutt's did not. They were twitching at his sides, ready to dart to the scabbard that swung from his belt.

"Touch that gun and it'll be an invitation for a forty-five slug from my slug thrower!" said Bix between a rasp and a drawl.

He spraddled over the body and yanked out Johnson's gun and hurled it behind him. As he did so, Orcutt's hand flicked to his revolver, brought it half out, paused uncertainly. For an instant, a second or two, Bix and Orcutt stood there with silence crackling between them. Orcutt was a game man, but not quite game enough for the big try. His hand dropped away, and Bix reached and jerked out the gun and sent it sailing after Johnson's.

Bix backed off two or three steps from the astounded, truculent men. He knew the pair had no other guns on them. He had made certain of that by common eye-sight. He reholstered his own weapon, and one hand went to a vest pocket. Bix wore a vest, not for looks or warmth, but for the pockets. His hand came away with his fine little camera. He drew it open.

"Now what?" demanded Orcutt. "You going to mug us?"

"He won't mug me," said Johnson, and put his hands over his face, peering between his fingers childishly.

"You can keep me from getting your faces in a picture by stooping down and getting hold of the body to move it," said Bix. "Snap out of it! Get it to the car."

"What are you trying to do—what's your fool game?" Orcutt croaked in his high, thin voice.

"Hop to it," Bix reiterated. "Handle your victim."

Reluctant, glaring, puzzled, the two men moved close to the body again, squatted tentatively. Bix began to focus the camera, that made such marvellously clear-cut and tell-tale pictures at six feet.

Seeing Bix's thumb go to the shutter release, Orcutt and Johnson bent their heads to hide their faces.

The shutter clicked.

Bix laughed, a single jerk of exultant mirth. And—

"It's a horse on you!" he said.

Orcutt was no fool. He realized that some

convincing piece of evidence against him had been photographed. Nor was he blind. Squatting there close to the body, his eyes squatted back and forth over it. And then he saw.

The Chinaman's hands lay across his stomach. Orcutt's left forearm extended across his knee, his hand dangling close to the Chinaman's hands. And Orcutt stared at his hand and the Chinaman's with protruding eyes.

For one of the Chinaman's fingers had a whitish, sharp-marked circle around it, and an odd-shaped blotch, where the skin was not tanned by the sun. And that odd-shaped blotch exactly matched, in size and shape, the silver and green ring that Orcutt had on his finger.

In sudden panic-stricken fury, and in unwitting confession, Orcutt came to his feet, slipping the ring off. And before Bix could move to interfere, Orcutt had flung the ring high over Bix's head and behind him, out into the waving sea of creosote bushes. Bix did not dare to turn to see where it fell, lest Orcutt spring upon him.

"No matter," said Bix aloud, and steady. "Let it be lost. The whole story, Orcutt, is right here in this."

Bix tapped the folded camera. And dropped it back into his vest pocket.

"Now get to the car," he ordered. "I'll handle the body. Both of you! I'm going to handcuff you, and tie you, too."

Then Johnson, comprehending more slowly than Orcutt, but yet comprehending that whitish tinge on the Chinaman's finger where the ring had been, broke, went to pieces. His lips jerked loosely, and he laughed a loose and frightened laugh that was a kind of sob.

"Gawd!" he cried. "Why'n hell did I ever come down to this damn country to run Chinks? A horse on us? I'll say it's a horse on us! Orcutt—" He turned savagely to the smaller man. "You damn little jewelry loving popinjay! You shot the Chink, for money, but mostly for that damn ring!"

"Take it easy, Johnson," Bix cautioned. He felt sorry for the big loose man.

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**BARRY SCOBEE** appears in **SHORT STORIES** regularly.



*"Ivory" Is a Fighting  
Word in West Africa*

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*gives us*

## **CANNIBAL TEETH**

**T**HE flame of the solitary candle on the table streamed as straight into the air as though it had been at the bottom of a well. Outside, the disheartening downpour of the West African rainy season, sounded like a vast distant waterfall. Two men sat hunched close together by the candle. One, baldish, over fifty, dressed in the white habit of a Holy Rood monk, suggested by his build and mannerisms an agitated sparrow.

And his sallow, burned face marked a man who had been long on the Coast.

The other was a young giant. He had shoulders like a gorilla, smoldering gray eyes, and a down-East accent that would have cried aloud "Yankee!" in any port in the world. His dungarees were ragged; he needed a haircut; but he was clean shaven.

In the attitude of the men was an obvious fear of eavesdropping. Their voices were guarded, tense, low. There were certain

words, like "ivory" and "Hendry," that they barely whispered. There was some secret between them.

A native slushed by outside, in the mud wallow that passed for a street, and the flickering torch he carried outlined, in a puff of light, a silhouetted head in the corner of a window. With a leopardlike flash of his hand, the young man swept a drinking coconut from the table and dashed it at the face of the spy. It crashed off the corner of the casement, bounced into the mud. The monk had jumped to his feet. He could hear the missile land. The young man was only a second or two behind it. He cursed volubly, and slammed in through the door, shaking himself like a wet dog.

"El Fouhat, Padre, or I'm a bush nigger! I spotted his turban against that torch."

"You think he heard?"

"Do you think he needed to hear?"

The little monk shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows expressively.

"I think he has long suspected I know how to get at the ivory."

The young man's face was grim.

"He probably *knows*—now."

The monk, with the look of one who has not often trusted in Providence in vain, said hopefully, "Since he got out of jail, El Fouhat has but little power. It is even rumored his own gang has cast him out."

"Maybe," responded the other, "But I don't like the idea of going after that ivory with an efficient cutthroat like him in my rear. For a hundred thousand dollars I'll risk a mob of cannibals, but a scoundrel like that makes the odds too heavy. I want him where I can keep my eye on him."

"The only place you can do that," replied the old man, "is in jail."

"Unless we take him with us."

"What!"

The young man's voice dropped to a whisper.

"We need a man to handle our carriers. There isn't a better nigger driver on the West Coast, than El Fouhat. If he thinks we'll show him the way to the ivory mine, he'll go with us. As soon as we start back, we'll tie him up—and keep him tied until we get to the coast. We'll give him double wages, so he won't have any kick coming."

There was something childish in the de-

light with which the monk heard the proposal. He rubbed his hands gleefully.

"A capital idea, Jed! Capital! Only—" he stopped, and his voice was grave—"maybe the blacks won't work for him any more."

"But they won't be working for him, Padre! They'll be working for you!"

"So they will! Capital! Capital . . . Sokoto!"

A doleful looking black face appeared around the edge of the door.

"Catchum Masta El Fouhat—one time."

"Berra good, daddy." The face vanished.

SO QUICKLY did El Fouhat appear after the black messenger, that he might have been expecting the summons. Jed watched him narrowly as he bowed low in the doorway.

"*Salaam aleikem*—Meestaire Murchison, Father Cappel. I can be of sairvice to your honorables?"

He was lean, of medium height, and as dirty as the rain soaked robes and turban that covered him. And, for all his fawning, as proud as his forebears who had once conquered the ancestors of these palefaces.

Neither of the men at the table answered him for a moment. Father Cappel was only too willing to turn worldly affairs over to Jed Murchison. And Jed was measuring his man. At last he spoke, skeptically.

"You are very wet. You have no home since leaving the government—rest house?"

"*Ai*, master," came the quick response, "I am a poor man who must live with the pigs. And this season the pigs are wet and muddy!" Expressively he drew attention to himself.

"Liar!" muttered Jed under his breath. He knew where El Fouhat had been, to soak up the rain, but he let the story pass. He and the priest were bound upcountry, he told the Berber, Father Cappel on a religious mission, himself trading. They would need a hundred porters, and a safari master they could depend upon. They were poor men and could pay little. But if El Fouhat would accept the place, he should not be the loser.

El Fouhat demanded four times the customary wage. They offered him half of what men usually took; then compromised on double pay. The Berber's eyes glinted as he

heard their terms. He did not know he was to return from the expedition in chains.

When all arrangements had been made for him to meet them, with a hundred men, at the mouth of the Hendry River three weeks thence, El Fouhat backed, bowing, from the room.

"Don't like that beggar," said Jed, shortly, when the Berber had disappeared. "But now, at least, we'll know where he is."

Without knocking or apologies, El Fouhat pulled open the door again and stepped through with his teeth shining.

"Honorables!" he exclaimed, after the customary salaam, "I am severe master of porters. Maybe they no want work for me." He had been imprisoned for beating a black with the heavy *kasangaru* whip until the poor fellow had had to go to the hospital.

Father Cappel drew off his ring, handed it to the Berber.

"Take this," he said. "Every black on the Coast will recognize it, and serve you. But don't let me hear of your whipping any men this trip—or you won't have a cent out of us, not a farthing."

"But, master, I never strike a black. They are best handled by kindness."

"Except when you've been sopping up trade gin," grunted the older man. But he spoke to a shadow. The Berber had faded into the rain.

There was no sleep for them that night. Now that the question of porters had been settled they could leave in the morning. They worked silently and swiftly, each busy with his own thoughts. From time to time Jed could see the monk's lips move in prayer.

"There are many, many guns here, my boy," he said once. "I trust we shall not have to use them."

Jed grunted.

"You're darn right, Padre. We'd have a hell of a time, the two of us, if we were attacked. But I'm hanged if I'd come down the Niger with all that ivory unless I did have an arsenal!"

AS HE sorted and packed duffel, checked medicines, and did the thousand and one things necessary to a successful jungle trip, Jed Murchison could not help wondering if he would ever see the States again.

Penniless, he had jumped ship, deter-

mined to see something of the Ivory Coast. All he saw were odd jobs and the waterfront, until he encountered the monk, Father Cappel, likewise an American. The old man had immediately given him the privilege of living in the diminutive Holy Rood mission. Their friendship had grown until, one night, the monk had sat down by Jed, tapped him on the knee, and demanded, quizzically:

"Jed, could you use a hundred thousand dollars?"

"I think I might, Padre."

"Would you risk your life for it?"

"If I didn't do something like that, Father, I'd think I had no right to it."

"Listen to me then, son. Did you ever hear of the Teeth of the Mountain?"

"N-n-no, don't believe I did."

"Well!" He stopped as if he could hardly believe it. "Well! I thought everybody knew about that!" He chuckled. "Ever see an ivory mine?"

"No—nor a diamond tree, Padre."

The old man's face became very serious.

"But I mean it, Jed. There's an ivory mine, upcountry. It shines all yellow in the sunlight—it's so old—and dozens of white men have lost their lives trying to get at it. It's surrounded by one of the worst swamps in Africa."

"Doesn't do me much good to know about it then, does it, Padre?"

"Ah, but I know how to get through the swamp."

"What!" Jed straightened up.

Father Cappel chuckled again.

"There's one path, Jed. And at the far end it's guarded night and day by cannibals. The ivory mine is the teeth in the mouth of their idol. Think you'd like to pull them?"

Murchison knew there was more to the story.

"Might, Padre, might—if I could administer a little gas, first."

Father Cappel leaned forward, eagerly tapped the young man on the chest.

"I have been in there frequently. I'm the only white man alive who knows how to get through those swamps. In fact, those cannibals are among my most enthusiastic converts. Of course," he added hastily, "the Christians have given up cannibalism."

"Now, here's where you come in. There must be nearly a quarter of a million dollars

worth of ivory in the mouth of that idol. It's a huge cave in the side of the mountain. A good many of the young men have given up cannibalism. They find farming much more profitable. If I can get the teeth from that idol—me, a Christian—with no falling heavens to punish me, it will be the end of cannibalism. There'll be no more faith in their black gods. The old men will fight me to the end, but I *think* we can beat them in the game of bluff.

"Mind you, I don't promise they won't eat us. I sometimes think that if I weren't so old and stringy, I'd have been spitted long ago. But if you'll take this chance, you may come out a rich man, and happy in the confidence you have helped God's work. We'll sell the tusks. Half the money you keep. The other half I'll put into farm implements, medicines and sandals for those poor savages up there. Are you with me, Jed?"

"You're darn right I'm with you, Padre. When do we start?"

LESS than two months after his conversation with the monk, Jed Murchison lay on his back at the mouth of the Hendry River, waiting for the morning call of Bampu, their personal "boy." The interminable rain roared down outside. Although the dawn had



come, there was still silence in the little camp.

"Wonder if that Berber devil will show up today?" Jed muttered to himself. El Fouhat was nearly a week overdue. They were ready to break into the swamp; but they could not move before the arrival of their porters.

Until the carriers came up, there was little to do about the camp. There was no particular point in moving from the dry shelter to the drenched jungle outside. Bampu would call him in good time.

Then he heard a distant rumble.

"Funny," he said aloud. "Wouldn't expect a thunder storm this time of day." Again came the noise, rolling, low threat-

ening. "Doesn't sound like the padre's snore."

He disentangled himself from his mosquito netting, sat up, and scratched his tousled yellow head. He looked out of the hut. There was not a black in sight, no smoke visible. And that was very queer, for the natives seldom allowed the fires, that protected them from prowling leopards, to go out. Jed pulled on a pair of boots.

The noise, rolling about the horizon, was slightly louder now. Jed realized it was the beating of the signal drums whose messages can span Africa in a single day. But he could not read the code. He strolled over toward the native camp. Not a man remained. Every solitary black had deserted—vanished into the jungle!

"Phew!" he whistled. "Something's up, an' I sure hope cannibals ain't at the bottom of it." He examined the ashes of the fires. Every little heap of cinders was a sodden pile. The blacks had been gone for hours.

"Padre!" called Jed. "Father Cappel!" There was no answer from the sleeping shack. "Hope to hell they didn't take the old boy with 'em." He ran back to the hut. No, Father Cappel was there.

"Padre! Padre!" he cried, shaking the sleeper.

The old man rolled over, grunted, and automatically repeated the prayer with which he regularly greeted the day:

"Thanks be to God!"

"What for?" snapped Jed. "All the men have deserted!"

"Wh-wh-what-t-t!" Glowing brightly in his long red flannels, the monk sat bolt upright. He rubbed his eyes. "Gone? The men are gone, you say?"

"Yes, an' drums are boomin' from here to the Congo an' back. There's hell to pay, somewhere!"

As agile as a spider monkey, and his morning prayers forgotten for the moment, Father Cappel scrambled from the hammock, yanked on his white habit and jumped out into the rain. The booming had grown, now, until it ringed the unseen horizon in a low, threatening wall of sound. The monk's brow wrinkled, his face grew grim. Then he shook his head.

"No, Jed," he said at last, "I can't make out what they're saying. But I'm afraid it

means trouble. The whole jungle's up."

Much of the day Father Cappel spent in solitary prayer. Jed chafed at the inactivity in camp; but he did not want to wander off into the brush, leaving the inattentive old man alone.

Shortly after noon, one of the "boys" came back. He had been the last to join their expedition at the coast, and now he trembled with fear. The white men could get from him no story of why the paddlers had left. He merely stood by, with a scared expression on his face, the whites of his eyes glaring in the dimness of the forest floor, and reiterated, "No sabby. No sabby." Jed gave up in disgust, and told him if he didn't know more about cooking than he did about the departing men, they'd tie him out in the woods for the leopards. Fortunately he was an accomplished chef!

The wall of sound, pounding off wildly beaten wooden drums, had mounted higher and higher into the sky as nearer tribes began to signal. The white men sat discussing their problem in the undertone they had unconsciously adopted, when suddenly Father Cappel's face grew white and drawn. He raised his hand for silence.

From the unbroken background of sound had emerged a wooden voice that spoke like a death knell. "The Voice of the Mountain," the monk muttered, in response to Jed's look of inquiry.

THE booming grew into a vast roar, as if the huge gong were being beaten by a thousand clubs. Then, with a burst of silence that was almost deafening, it stopped. There were three quick beats; then two; then one; then, in a galloping, insane tattoo, a complicated rhythm that, beating upon the monk's ears, made him sag forward as though he had aged twenty years. "'Bring out the spear, bring out the knife, I the God of the mountain, am thirsty in my teeth,'" he translated the signals. "That means—long pig—Jed!"

Again he commanded silence. Jed stood there, tense, anxious. He noticed that, through the thunder that made them raise their voices to be heard, he could catch the steady dripping of the rain.

Father Cappel fell back. There were tears in his eyes as he spoke.

"Blackbirding, Jed."

"What!"

The old man nodded his head in mute affirmation.

"Then that means—El Fouhat."

"Used my ring to recruit blacks, and has probably shipped 'em off to the slave marts at Timbuktu."

This, to Jed, spelled the end of their venture. These simple people would believe only one thing: that, after winning their confidence with years of kindness, the monk had betrayed them to slavers. To go ahead would be suicide. To go back might be almost the same thing—if they fell in with natives; but at least in that direction lay some chance of safety.

"I reckon we'd better be makin' tracks," the young man said at last, in a low tone.

The sorrow vanished from the old man's face like smoke before a gale. He caught Jed's arm in an excited grasp.

"Then you'll go on with me, Jed!" he cried.

Murchison was aghast.

"Go on with you, Padre? Why, you can't go on! You'd just be walking into their cooking pots."

Father Cappel's smile was blotted out.

"You didn't mean—go back!"

"But, father, to go on will mean certain death! They'll blame this whole thing on you, and you'd have a spear through you before you started to climb their mountain."

"I'm afraid you're right, my boy." The monk let his hands fall between his knees. His face was serene. Once more he looked almost happy. "Jed," he said at last, "I've got to go on."

"But, Padre, what's the good——"

The monk interrupted him.

"For over twenty years I have served these people. Not only have I tried to show them the way to God, but I have fed them, nursed their sick. I have brought goats, cattle and hens all the way up this river to improve their scrawny breeds. I have studied scientific farming, and helped them increase their harvests. Some of the finest kola nuts on the Coast are grown beyond that swamp.

"Beyond everything else, I have tried to show them there is more happiness in peace than in war. I have induced most of them to give up cannibalism. If I could have per-

sueded these—by far the majority of the tribe—to sell me the Teeth of the Mountain, it would have ended their cannibalism for all time. They have come to trust me, to love my religion. And now, unless I go back and win them again, they will think I have betrayed them. They will lose all their faith in me, and in my God. Worst of all, cannibalism will come back faster than the arrows from their bows.

"I am told," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "that there is really no cut comparable to a good ham off a young white man. You see, they have an excellent basis for the practice." Then he was serious again. "No, Jed, I am afraid I must go on. Of course I wouldn't ask you to go with me; it's really none of your affair."

Jed said nothing, for a long time. He gazed deep into the dark jungle, whence came the thundering of the drums. His face was a clay mask. Then he spoke.

"Padre, I guess I'm a damned fool of the first water. I don't give a hoot in Hades whether these niggers become Christians or stick to their mumbo-jumbo. One means about as much to me as the other. I don't even particularly care if they eat a white man now and then; in fact, I often think we've got a hell of a lot of nerve buttin' in here an' tellin' 'em how to live. As for their eatin' one another—that's their business.

"But you've been doggone white to me. If I've lost out on the best break of my life, it's not your fault. Furthermore, I like the way you treat these blacks; you don't give a damn whether they've got a rag around their middle or not. So I guess I'm with you—whether the destination is heaven or hell."

Again the old man smiled.

"You seem to have little faith in my influence with the next world," was all he said. But he clasped Jed's hand with an eloquence that surpassed all speech.

**T**WO hours later, burdened only with arms and ammunition, they were nearly across the swamp. Their lone boy followed them. They had tried to drive him back, but he stubbornly refused to leave. Finally they had loaded him with extra arms and let him tag along. Straight toward the thundering Voice of the Mountain they walked. At times they waded through water to their

knees. But, along the secret path, there was always solid earth beneath their feet.

Suddenly, through an opening, the mountain burst into view, towering high over their heads. It was shaped like the skull of a man, and across its face grinned a wide low cavern like a gaping mouth. Out of this mouth roared the thundering drum and suddenly, through a break in the rain, Jed caught the stark gleam of many teeth. This mountain on which the blacks lived was their idol. In its mouth these cannibals had planted scores of great ivory teeth. This was the first glimpse of the ivory mine!



A few yards more and they were on dry ground—in the enemy's country! They peered cautiously ahead. The huts might have been deserted; there was no sign of life, save from the great drum above.

"Well, Padre," Jeff laughed, "this looks like a lousy place to die. But let's go!"

The old monk did not answer; with his eyes cast down he was praying again. Around his waist, beneath his spotless white habit, was a slight bulge. Jed grinned. Concealed there were four automatics, with extra clips of ammunition.

"Pistols and prayer," thought the young man. "That ought to be a pretty good combination."

There was a sudden clatter behind them. The white men wheeled. Where their black follower had stood was the pile of guns he had carried. He had disappeared into the swamp, on the back trail.

"Well, he's off our consciences, anyway," said Father Cappel with a sigh. "On we go, Jed. Let's each of us take some of these extra guns. And remember—no shooting until I give the word!"

They divided up the armament the black man had been carrying and proceeded.

Straight through the village street, between the thatched huts, the two white men climbed. No one was in sight. They surmised that the whole population had gathered near the holy place, below the big drum. Not a woman, not a baby, showed itself. Puffing under the load of arms, they clambered up the steep hillside. The noise

was like a boiler factory, now. They could converse only in signs. The rhythm was a pulsing quick-time beat that might have guided a war dance.

Suddenly it stopped. The silence was more deafening than the noise. There was a brief series of staccato taps that must have come from two clubs. Then silence again.

Father Cappel's face was drawn. There were hard white lines about his mouth.

"That said," he interpreted, "White man approaches."

Then, as though his words had burst a dam, a long wave of shouting, furious blacks, dancing high into the air, waving short bows, and long, shiny tipped spears, surged down the mountain toward them.

Suddenly that host of black men stopped, silent, as though they were surprised. Two scrawny yellow dogs raced on before them, and leaped about Father Cappel, licking his hands, soiling his white garment.

"Hail, brethren!" the old monk cried aloud in the native tongue. "Why do you stop? Are you less happy to see me than the dogs that run about your huts?"

Pandemonium broke loose. The black wave rushed on, surrounded the white men, engulfed them. Weapons were poised for their instant death.

But again, with a commanding crash, the drum spoke. Father Cappel turned to Jed.

"We're going—to be saved—for a more—ceremonious—end," he panted.

Then scores of black hands reached out for them. A giant negro cuffed the old monk, nearly felled him. Jed saw red, swung around a light shotgun and smashed the stock on the brute's head. He was pulled to the ground, drowned in sweating, stinking bodies. The four guns he carried were wrenched away from him. He lashed out with feet and hands. They pinned him down. He heaved himself over, pushed to his knees, gouged, swung, knocked heads together, put three of his assailants out of the mêlée. Then something crashed down on his head, and he dropped a thousand miles into limitless blackness. . . .

WHEN Jed came to, his eyes opened on a twilight dimness and for an instant the earth seemed to toss in the throes of an earthquake. Then he realized that the

monk was shaking him, desperately, frantically.

"Jed—Jed," he whispered. "Come to, old fellow. They're coming for us now. We've got to fight for it."

Jed gripped his head, tried to quiet the racking pains that shot through it, and sat up. He grinned. Then he laughed aloud. The old priest had hung the four automatics outside his habit; stuck slantwise through his wide belt was a long native knife.

"Well, Padre, I've often heard of the Church Militant," he cried, "but this is the first time I've seen it. We'll have a good time dying, at any rate."

"I still have hopes I shall not have to use them, my son," said Father Cappel seriously. "Back here we can probably stand them off for a little while."

Jed stood up, looked about him. His eyes started from his head. He thought, with a grimace at the melancholy comparison, that it was like looking outward from the belly of a leviathan shark. The entrance to the cave was a hundred yards away. Against the sky there stood, serried row on serried row, hundreds of hundreds of upstanding, shining teeth. Every one of them was a massive and perfect elephant's tusk. Every tusk was a lovely yellow, from ages of polishing with native hands. This was the ivory for which they had come! It must have taken the lives of thousands of great tuskers, to collect all these perfect teeth—thousands of tuskers and hundreds of years!

"What's the smell?" whispered Jed.

"Bats!" Father Cappel wrinkled his nose disgustedly. "There are thousands of 'em up there under the roof. It's their droppings that make the blacks polish the tusks all the time. They can't get rid of them. There's a pile of guano outside that, alone, would be worth fifty thousand at the coast. I've been using it as fertilizer for five years—and you can't see the dent."

The white men lay, in comparative freedom, behind the ivory palisades. There was no escape save by the front, and the guards at the mouth of the cavern had apparently not detected the Webleys concealed under the monk's robes. They were lolling easily, waiting and forgetful.

Jed looked back of him. High on the face of the wall was a ledge. Up there a small

fire, probably an offering to the gods, was burning. Its smoke hung around the bats, which seemed oblivious to it. The ceiling was as black and boundless as a lake of pitch. An aromatic scent, from the burning wood, filled the air.

"If you need anything to make you fight better," said the old man grimly, "that ledge up there is the altar. They throw down their sacrifices onto the teeth. Then they drag them off and stuff them into their cooking pots—in cold water."

Jed felt a little sick. He would never endure that. Not while he had an automatic in his reach. Furthermore, he would never let the old man suffer the tortures devised by these blacks. The monk would never commit suicide; Jed knew that. So, before going out himself, he would have to shoot his good friend in the back. He winced, and turned again to the front of the cave, where the monk could not see his face.

Outside, tomtoms were beating. There might have been dozens of them, or scores, or hundreds. It was impossible to tell. They blanketed the mouth of the cavern with their *thud-thud-thud-thud, thud-thud-thud-thud*, until the very rocks they were standing on seemed to vibrate with the pulsations.

"What's that mean, Father?"

"It means something's going to happen!" said the monk, through clenched teeth.

Two men climbed into the front of the cave. Upon their heads were huge grinning masks, with long shining fangs dripping from the red-lipped mouths. They faced each other, danced a little pantomime that was meaningless to Jed, and then suddenly dashed to the far side of the opening. They vaulted onto a high platform. Jed caught his breath. The platform leaned against a huge elephant! "Padre! Look!" he exclaimed. The old man did not answer him. He was breathing heavily, his eyes fixed on the front of the cave.

THE savages on the platform raised the clubs they carried, drew them back to the full sweep of their arms, and slammed them against the elephant's side. There was a crash like a bolt of thunder through the cavern, from side to side, from roof to floor. It was the gong!

At the first vibration of the drum, Jed ducked, almost fell flat.

"Think the roof was falling, Jed?" Father Cappel chuckled.

Jed grinned sheepishly. A few moments later, still peering into the dingy distances of the roof, he jumped again as an automatic exploded alongside his head. He whirled about. The gun was in the monk's hand. Jed followed the direction of the barrel, with his eyes. Bedlam had burst loose at the mouth of the cave. With the sure ease of an old frontiersman, Father Cappel had winged the first of an approaching band of cannibal priests.

Jed grabbed one of the guns. Father Cappel caught his wrist. With an appalling silence the great drum ceased beating, and over the noise of the cannibals' shouts, Jed heard the monk yell, "That'll hold 'em for a while!"

And he was right. The whole mob of blacks had whipped about and disappeared over the outer ledge of the cavern. Father Cappel was pale as he turned to his companion.

"There is a law," he said triumphantly, "that they can kill, in the temple, only by throwing their victims down onto the teeth. Let's see how they crack that nut!"

The two white men heaved relieved sighs. There might be a rush, but the blacks could not know anything about the strength of their armament. Such an attack could only overwhelm them at terrific cost to the cannibals. It probably meant a breathing spell; perhaps until the onset of darkness should



make shooting useless. They watched warily. Looking through the forest of tusks was like peering through a hundred picket fences. Not a head showed. The men at the great gong had vanished with the rest. The tomtoms outside were silent.

With the retreat of the guards, it seemed as if all life had died. The downpour outside ceased. Every drum was silenced. Not even an insect could be heard, far back in the cave. Jed stood up.

"Don't like it, Padre," he said, uneasily. "It's too much like the quiet before a typhoon. There's something behind it."

"Of course there's something behind it, Jed, but not anything more than there has been all along. Don't let this darkness get you!"

Jed shook his head.

"Maybe. But I feel uneasy. Sure you're right about that killing business?"

The monk nodded vigorously.

"They can't kill a thing here, any other way. Somehow it offends their gods; they want first blood, I suppose. Why, they can't even kill the bats. They make the place filthy. Every day some of the priests go over all of the tusks to clean off the droppings and polish the ivory. That's how it got such a beautiful tone. And I can assure you, Jed, that these priests don't like work any better than a good many others I have known!" A smile wrinkled the corners of his eyes.

But the smile was blanked out. Into the cave ripped the snarling voices of rifles!

The two men looked at one another.

"Who can that be" asked Father Cappel mildly.

Jed did not answer. He seemed not to hear the monk. His eyes gazed far off, over the trees that framed the mouth of the cave. There were frightened cries. The firing increased.

"You don't suppose," the old man continued, "that the blacks—"

"Wait!" Jed's face was grim. He pressed the heel of his hand against his forehead. He was trying to justify the idea. Then: "I've got it!" he cried. "It's El Fouhat! The black boy who ran away from us was his spy—sent to find the secret way through the swamp. That bloody Berber's after the ivory!"

Father Cappel's face went gray.

"Then," he said, slowly, as though he had never hurried in his life, as though there were no need for speed, "we've got one chance. And that's to get away *now*! If the blacks ever get their hands on us, they'll rend us limb from limb. For, of course they'll think El Fouhat has come to rescue us." He girded up his loins and ran, a gun in each hand. Jed loped along at his heels.

A wave of terrified cannibals swarmed over the edge of the cavern.

"Don't shoot!" yelled the monk over his shoulder.

The warning came barely in time. Jed's arm was up, the Webley ready. He flipped up the muzzle, and the bullet whipped over the cannibals' heads. The mob halted. But they did not give. There was no sign of breaking.

FOR a flash they were as silent as death, and twice as ominous. Then a savage war cry wrenched from their throats and, shoved by the panic-stricken hordes behind, they began to move forward. They were terrified, but relentless. In front were but two; in back, how many?

The white men hesitated. They did not dare come within arm's reach of that desperate pack.

"Back, Jed, back!" called the monk in an undertone. "And don't turn around—if you want to go on living!"

As the prisoners backed away from them, the cannibals became as silent as stalking leopards. They came on slowly, watchfully. Their bare feet made no sound on the dusty floor.

The mob without pressed forward. The mob inside was big enough to hold them. But the spell, the rigid front line, was broken. Half a dozen hands flew up, short tubes went to wide mouths.

"Run!" shouted the monk. "Run—like the devil!"

They spun about, darted forward. They were barely in time. The sudden dash scarcely saved them from the storm of small spears that sped from the cannibal's hands.

The war cries had broken out again. The bloodthirsty pack was close on the heels of the white men. Warriors in the van tried to stop, to aim their spear throws better. Those behind stumbled over them. The spears all went awry. The crowd piled up. The white men increased their lead.

Jed was at the monk's side. Suddenly the back of the cave loomed up in front of him. He whipped about.

"I—guess—we shoot!" he gasped.

"No!" snapped the monk. "This way!"

He turned to the right. Fifty feet along the face of the sheer cliff they came to a narrow, precipitous flight of steps cut into the black rock. Father Cappel scrambled up

ahead of the young man. It was hot up there, and the stench from the bats became stronger. Finally the steps ended. A little fire burned at their feet. They were on the altar of the cannibals' god!

When the blacks saw the white men clambering into the holy of holies, they screamed furiously. Half a dozen hurled themselves up the steps. Jed was waiting. His fist crashed against a heavy jaw. The savage groaned, pitched off into black space. There was a sudden explosion from Father Cappel's gun. The cannibals stopped, shrank back, and then turned and scrambled down the stairs.

"We're all right for a little while!" panted the old man. "But duck those spears!"

The two men flopped on the shelf, where they were fairly safe, and peered down. The cave was thronged with blacks. They crouched among the elephant tusks. Some of them made half-hearted attempts to hurl spears up at the white men. Most were obviously clutched by a terror that broke out in a weakening sweat. On one side the murderous rifles; on the other, two impregnable foes under the protection of the gods!

Jed and the monk, from their high vantage point, could look over the edge into the village below the cave. The cannibals were making desperate and despairing resistance against odds far too great for them.

**S**UDDENLY Jed caught a glimpse of white cloth. He raised an automatic, braced it carefully upon the ledge and squeezed the trigger. A white clad old Berber toppled out from behind his shelter and lay still.

Instantly the shot was answered, from outside, by a volley. Jed and the monk, knowing they were safe from flying lead, stretched out upon the shelf, and placed their bullets. Ammunition was limited. The range was long. They had to make every missile tell.

The Berbers withdrew their fire from the cannibal warriors, and centered on the new attackers. They were evidently armed only with flintlocks, and they could not shoot fast. But their bullets began to ricochet from the walls and roof of the cave. Some of them struck the closely packed blacks below. A yell of rage went up.

"If this keeps up until dark," muttered Jed, "we're goners!"

"Maybe by that time these poor fellows will get it through their thick heads that we are on their side—and not on El Fouhat's," said Father Cappel hopefully, as he plugged another Berber.

Again his pistol exploded.

"I must be getting old," he mourned. "I missed that one. And he was in plain sight!"

He pulled the trigger again. Nothing happened. He yanked out the clip. A quick dive into his pocket revealed the appalling fact that he had no more ammunition!

"Jed! Jed!" he cried. "Save your shells. I've exhausted mine!"

Jed turned to him, his face grim. He pulled out his magazine.

"We're out of luck," he said through gritted teeth. "I thought you had still more. That was my last clip."

The two men, intent on their sudden discovery, did not notice the strange din that had begun to drip down from the roof. There were squeakings and grunts, and strange little rustling noises that at times swelled almost to a roar. The cannibals were looking anxiously upward. They knew what they might expect—and they feared it, feared it worse than the bullets of the Berbers outside.

Then the storm broke. Bullets had been crashing into the roof. They had ripped out splinters of stone, had killed a couple of dozen clinging bats. They could not have done much damage to those upside-down dwellers, but panic began like a little flame, and spread until it was a blaze, then roared through the thousands upon thousands of hanging bats like a prairie fire. As they



dropped away from the roof, their wings thundered like surf upon the shore. In some

places they hung twenty feet thick. It was as if whole sections of the roof had caved in.

In one vast flock they swept toward the mouth of the cave. With their strange sixth sense, flying in a tight cloud, they somehow managed to avoid locking wings. They darkened the opening until Jed, looking at Father Cappel in amazement, could not distinguish his face. The animals flew to the opening. But there was the one thing they feared worse than bullets—sunlight.

In a deep curling billow, they swept back again, sought their niches under the roof. But still the bullets came! The squeaking became louder. The cannibals stirred uneasily among the tusks. The doorway of the cave was open again, and the watching white men could see hundreds of upturned eyes gleaming like fireflies.

The bats had caught the movement. They could not escape the bullets. They could not fly out of the cave into that glare that blinded them. They could see only one enemy—the men beneath them. And with the fury of mad dogs, they dropped.

"Flat on your face!" yelled Jed. "Cover your head. And don't move!" The white men might have been mummies, lying there so motionless.

But the cannibals shrank back before those sharp teeth. There were vampires in that flock. There were hundreds of thousands of little fangs, ready to defend their home, their young. Once more, they darkened the air. Once more they filled the cave with the roaring of their wings.

But the noise from the bats was soon lost. Shrieks from the savages, caught in a panicky, close packed crowd, sounded like a slaughter house. If they had dropped to the floor, feigned death, they would have been safe. But they were more frightened than the animals.

Those near the opening, more willing to take a chance on the Berbers' guns than on those gnashing incisors, those beating wings, began to crowd toward the ladder. But only a few could hope to reach it. The others, crowded by the crazy mob behind, shrieked desperately, clung an instant to the ledge, and then were shoved over. Broken bodies piled up on the mountainside beneath, until they cushioned the fall of the last hundreds who dashed from the cave,

THE white men, as still as the stone on which they lay, escaped with a few buffetings from leathery wings, with a few tentative gashes from needle teeth. The yells died away, and Jed took a chance on raising his head. The cave was almost empty.

"Padre!" he yelled, "they're almost gone! Let's make a run for it!"

The two jumped to their feet, found the stairs in the darkness, and slithered and slipped downward. Their movements attracted hundreds of the avengers, and they were bitten in scores of places.

But, running blindly, their arms before their eyes, the pair soon found the ladder. They recklessly grabbed hold of it, scuttled downward. At the bottom they found a bulwark of dead natives, men, women and children, who had been thrown from the edge of the cave.

The Berbers seemed to have forgotten the white men. Perhaps they had reasoned nobody in the cave could survive the attack of the infuriated animals. They had leaped out into the open and were trying to round up the natives—future slaves—without killing any more of them than they had to. The blacks were completely demoralized. The warriors had thrown away their spears, were taking to the jungle, or fawning before El Fouhat or his minions. Those who ran were cold-bloodedly shot down.

"Oh, my gosh," groaned Jed. "If we only had two full clips; we'd wipe out those devils!" He watched, across the bodies. Then his muscles tensed. There were several dead Berbers, out there. If he could jump out, grab half a dozen guns, and get back—

"Padre! Padre!" he whispered. The old man did not answer. His eyes were closed, in prayer.

Jed raised up, surveyed the mêlée. The Berbers were fairly well centered. If he could slip around on one side, he might even be able to tackle them from the rear.

Then he swore aloud. Creeping on his belly, snake fashion, one of the cannibals was making his way toward them with all the speed at his command. The blacks had begun to come to their senses. Hanging all about him were the weapons that had been taken away from the two white men!

"Padre!" Jed was shaking him, now. "Here's the answer to your prayer!" The old

man jumped, uttered a reverent word of thanks, and before Jed could stop him, leaped from the shelter. He grabbed the guns, tumbled back, and handed Jed an automatic. "This is what you want for short range!" he said.

With grimaces of disgust, they rested their arms on the ramparts of bodies, divided the Berbers—Jed picked El Fouhat for himself—and cut loose.

At the outburst of shots, the Berbers wheeled. Some were in the act of reloading the long flintlocks. Others were firing. Three bullets thudded into dead cannibals. One clipped the old monk, and he went down with a moan.

"Damn your souls!" screamed Jed. And he took deliberate aim at El Fouhat's shoulder. The bullet, crashing into its target, smashed the bone. El Fouhat dropped his gun, tumbled to the ground, cursing and writhing.

Jed looked about. There had been fourteen Berbers. Only four remained on their feet. And they were running toward the swamp.

Jed hurdled the human trench, dashed off after them. El Fouhat raised up on his elbow, aimed awkwardly with his left hand. Jed hurled his empty automatic into the Berber's face. The bullet from the musket flew over his head, and El Fouhat dropped.

Jed raced on toward the swamp. All the attackers had disappeared. From the center of the tangle he heard the roar of a bull crocodile—and then a scream.

He swiftly circled the huts, to mop up. Every Berber who could move had vanished. A few yards to one side of the secret trail, he came on the hundred missing porters, chained together by their necks. El Fouhat had brought them, to help carry out the ivory!

"Guess I'd better get back—see if the padre's pulled through," muttered Jed. Thank the Lord, they wouldn't have to handle the cannibals, now!

**H**E FOUND the old man, on his feet again, seriously preaching to the sullen, wounded El Fouhat on the evil of his ways!

"I'm afraid you'll have to be punished for

this," he heard the monk say, sorrow in his voice.

Jed ran up to him.

"You shouldn't be standing about," he cried. "Your head——"

"But I'm all right," interrupted Father Cappel, calmly. "I'm only scratched."

"Let me look at it, anyway," insisted the young man.

"I felt of it," answered the monk, stubbornly. "It's only a scalp wound that stunned me for a second. What about yourself?"

"All right—except for the bats. I guess we'd both better have lockjaw serum."

"Fix it up. And let's get right out and see if we can't find those porters. If El Fouhat will guide us——"

"The porters are found! They're chained together, down by the swamp!"

"Thanks be to God!" said the old fellow reverently. "And now, I suppose," he went on, in his old childish way, "we can have all the ivory we want. Dear, dear, what a day it has been, what a day! I hope the good Lord will forgive us."

All of the inhabitants of the mountain vil-



lage were sitting around them in a circle, worshipping expressions on their faces, waiting for forgiveness and to have their wounds dressed.

"Isn't it extraordinary," the monk added.

Jed looked at him, in amazement. Was this the little man who, a short while ago, had been handling a pair of pistols like a Marine? He shook his head.

"If you want to carry out your part of the plan, Padre," Jed said. "To do away with cannibalism—well, I think we'd better have a mighty quick funeral for El Fouhat's friends. Some of those poor devils certainly look as if their mouths were watering."



The

## SEA RAIDER

By JOEL ROGERS

### CHAPTER I

#### HOUNDS OF THE SEA

**I**N LATE twilight, forty sea miles off the Hornsmouth submarine patrol station, between Harwich and the Wash, Lieutenant Keno J. Donnerkind of the Royal Naval Air Service cut the switch of his boiling motor and nosed his three-ton flying boat over in a flat glide.

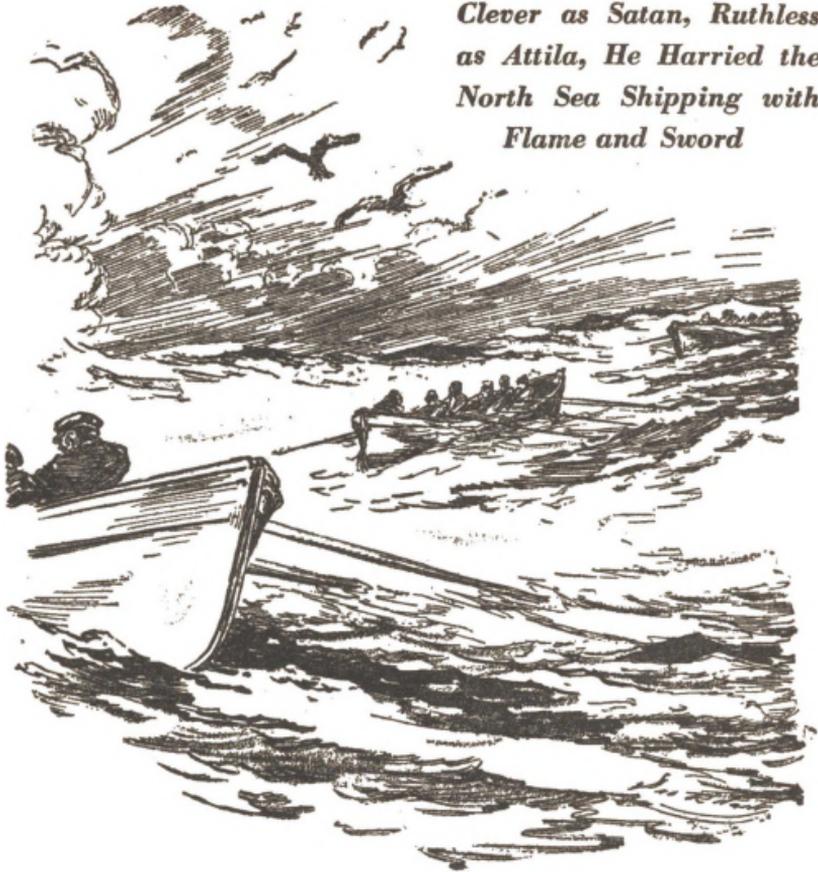
"You need a drag on the weed, big boy," he told himself. "Your brain is woolly and full of moths."

He slid with an easy humming sound toward the dark ocean which lay a thousand feet below, reaching in his dungarees for cigarette makings and matches as he went

down. Out in the bow cockpit "Dinty" Doone, the little redheaded gunner and observer, lowered his chimpanzee face beneath the cockpit coaming to shield himself from the wind of the long glide.

Keno Donnerkind was very tired. All day he had been in the air. Fourteen hours of hunting subs over the smooth and shimmering July ocean. Hunting them from the Dogger Bank off Flamboro Head to the Channel in the south, and as far east as the Dutch coast. And hunting most particularly the unseen German raider which, in the dawn of that long day, below the Wash, had slammed a torpedo into the guts of the great battle-cruiser *Relentless*, sending her down to the bottom of the North Sea with

*Clever as Satan, Ruthless  
as Attila, He Harried the  
North Sea Shipping with  
Flame and Sword*



eleven hundred men, only a handful of whom survived—picked up by the boats of an American windjammer lying becalmed nearby.

Keno could not understand how a sub had been able to get within range of the powerful warship, steaming as the warship was through mine guarded waters within the protection of the nets—a corner of the sea where, for the last seven months, no German undersea raider had been able to penetrate without destruction.

The *Relentless* had been steaming down from Hull, convoyed by two destroyers. On a flat sea at dawn, glaring like a sheet of endless ice as the sun rose up, a white torpedo streak had come porpoising along the

top of the water at her starboard beam. The torpedo took a dive, as pretty as a dolphin, ten yards from the doomed warship's side, and slammed its warhead into her below the water line, plowing through into her main battery ammunition room. She blew up like a firecracker in a tin can.

And that was all there was to it. The destroyers dashed about like ants, slammed depth bombs overside pellmell. They wire-lessly the frantic warning—to Harwich, Hornsmouth, Yarmouth, to every ship on the sea and every plane that could take the air.

News of the catastrophe had been caught by the Hornsmouth seaplane station almost before the *Relentless* had hit the ocean floor.

Keno Donnerkind and every other pilot on the station had taken immediately to the air, loaded with Mark IV bombs and wild as hornets. Fourteen hours—almost solid hours, blind and watchful hours—for Keno now. And that's all the good it had done him.

Someone was going to be named as sacrificial goat for the disaster, he knew quite well, unless the sub was found. And that someone would be himself. There were plenty of desk-going admirals in London who didn't like his name.

He had been slated for dawn patrol, as it happened, that morning over the sector where the *Relentless* had gone down. A half hour more, and he might have been booming above that very spot—near enough to have caught the shadow of any sub running below the surface, and slam it before it rose to periscope depth. But he had been late in hopping off. An all night poker session, spent in instructing a class of six optimistic British pilots the game of seven-card stud as played in the Texas Panhandle, had detained him from reporting to the beach. That lost half hour had been one of the malignant and unpredictable jokes of Fate—for Keno, since he had no excuse, it might mean disgrace.

In spite of his wiry, plains bred strength and his enduring heart, a feeling of heavy weariness had descended on him.

"What I crave now is a nice big daisy field ten miles wide," he thought, "where I could lie on my back with nothing to do but blow smoke rings for the next eighteen thousand years."

His lean, mahogany colored face creased in a hard laugh. He flexed his stiff back muscles. He broke into song:

*"Down on the fa-harm  
They all ask for you,  
The chickens ask for you,  
The cows ask for you,  
They all ask for you,  
The PIGS ask for you,  
The HORSES ask for you,  
Down on the fa-harm!"*

Above, the sky was still tinged with sunset red from the direction of the Suffolk coast, below the dip of the horizon. On the

surface, however, darkness had already begun to gather.

The water looked smooth as tar. There were no craft on it, nor beneath it, either, so far as Keno's watchful eyes could see, except a square-rigged brig under full sail, jamming the wind south, and a destroyer foaming over from the west.

Sliding down the long air trail toward the sea, he threw back his head and burst into song again, a habit of old range-riding days, with a bass voice like the roll of thunder. Out in the nose of the big gray flying boat Dinty Doone looked back with an inquiring grin. His outstanding ears twitched faintly like the ears of a ruminative mule. He locked the swivel mount of his Lewis gun, lashed a tarpaulin over it, and dived down out of sight.

In a moment he came crawling aft through the hatch door from the bow. He wriggled up beneath the starboard control wheel into the seat beside Keno.

"Engine poop, sir-r?" he screeched.

Keno shook his head. "But she's boiling," he roared. "We'll take a smoke and let her cool off."

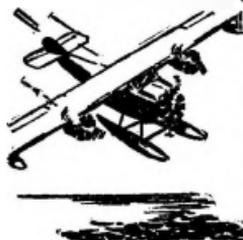
**H**E GAVE the controls over to the little redheaded Irishman, and stretched his cramped legs. Staring overside, he watched the water for the lean cross-wave streaks that show the direction of the wind. The air was set from the north-by-east, filling the dirty sails of the old square-rigger that was underway from the north. The destroyer out of the west had come on, eating through the foaming water with her high knife-bow at fifty feet a second, racing to speak the shadowy brig.

"That's the life!" Keno shouted to Dinty, nodding toward the windjammer. "Nothing to do but park your beam end on a good solid deck, and let the wind push the old brig whichever way she's going. Nothing to worry about—unless some cockeyed sub blows the bottom out of you."

The rushing destroyer had swung about and lay alongside the creeping windjammer. They were both like toy ships on the dark and unstirring water.

When the altimeter had sunk to two hundred feet Keno took the controls again, and snapped the switch on. The motor responded

tardily, with a coughing sound, after another hundred feet. Easing the throttle half-



way open, he settled the ponderous boat with dragging tail to a power-stall landing on the dark water. All the speed gone out of her, her pusher propeller, stopped spinning. The motor had died.

"Knew that was coming, Dinty," said Keno grimly. "Nothing to do but let the old girl cool off her heat. I'm all choked up for a whiff of alfalfa, myself. Want me to roll you one, you Scandinavian?"

The radiator of the overworked motor was still steaming and bubbling. Dinty Doone turned his freckled face and looked up anxiously at it. Immediately he uncorked a loud screech, diving headlong out of the cockpit onto the bow as a splatter of rust-colored water showered down on him.

"Sinn fein and Erin go bragh!" he shrieked, or something that sounded like it. "The bloody water's scalded all the skin off me snout!"

He did a wild jig on the bow, grabbing hold of his nose with both hands.

"I've been getting a boiling bath down my own sweet neck for the past half hour, Dinty," said Keno with a grin. He rolled a cigarette with big, dextrous fingers. "Lick that," he said, "and stick it in the middle of your little freckled face."

"I have me dudeen," said Dinty. "But I'll be thankful for your 'baccy."

He filled his clay pipe from Keno's pouch. The dark-faced pilot glued his cigarette together with his tongue, staring at the water with a peaceful glance.

"They're going to get me, Dinty," he said reflectively. "I wasn't where I ought to have been this morning when the warship got slammed, and there's no alibi. And I'm a Yank with a German name. I have a feeling that you may be on your last hop with me, Dinty."

"It would not make me happy to think that, sir-r," said Dinty.

THE night was dropping swiftly. It fell on the ocean like a blanket. The heavy flying boat lay in the water as motionless as a scow.

"Got a match?" Keno asked the little Irishman hopefully. "I can't seem to find one."

"Lord love me, that I haven't," said Dinty regretfully.

Keno sighed, searching his pockets again vainly for a match.

"I'd go to hell for a light," he said.

"So would I," Dinty said. "If I had a couple of bits of sticks, I could make a fire, maybe, if I was a Boy Scout."

"Yes," said Keno. "And if you were a longhorn, you could give milk if you were a cow. Button up your chin, and swing the stick over. We'll see if we can taxi up to that old windjammer."

Dinty scrambled up behind, and heaved at the pusher propeller with repeated jerks. The motor did not even snort once.

"Still hot," said Keno. "It looks like we'll make an hour of it."

In the thickening darkness the dirty sails of the brig, six miles or so to the north, had become almost totally merged with the darkness of sky and water. She seemed motionless like a great cobweb, showing no running lights except one masthead beam.

The destroyer had hove to alongside her for a space of a quarter hour. Now the fast and powerful little warship was underway again, heading in the direction of the flying boat.

Her tall, lean bow came cleaving through the black night between two towers of foam. Her mainmast searchlight dotted and dashed against the curved roof of the sky, sending rapid blinker signals to some invisible consort miles away. The rumble and suck of her swift going became audible presently across the creeping water, and she was heading down at half a knot a minute.

"She looks like she's aiming to slice us clean down the keel," said Keno, licking his cigarette. "Boy, I sure know how a piece of cheese feels when the big knife's whistling at it."

He stood up on his seat, watching the oncoming destroyer with narrowed eyes which looked pale in his dark face. Those sub-hunters on the prowl were beautiful ships

to see, speedy and trim as wild horses—the mustangs of the ocean. One moment, the destroyer's rushing prow seemed still a comfortable distance off. The next, it seemed on top of him.

"Great God a'mighty! Aboard there! Keep your eyes open!" roared Keno.

A HUNDRED feet ahead the destroyer keeled over, zigzagging. She had not seen the flying boat, low-lying in the black water. Yet as she passed to starboard her restless searchlight, arcing down to play across the water, caught one wing of Keno's boat in its white ray.

Immediately the searchlight centered on him, and he was blinded by the glare. He heard the signal, "Battle stations!" They'd mistaken him for a sub.

"Slam me, you cock-eyed geese, and I'll poke your faces in!" roared Keno wrathfully.

The destroyer was merely on the alert. She hauled around, with her screws rumbly, and laid alongside. The watchful crews at her secondary batteries relaxed.

Keno recognized her, the *Bimini*, out of Harwich, where the scouting fleet was lying. From the bridge he was hailed by name. Leaning over the rail, with a tired grin on his face and his fat legs crossed, was her skipper, Lieutenant "Stumpy" Coningsby, R. N., an old friend of Keno's.

"Get a horse," advised the destroyer man.

"Go to the head," said Keno.

"Once," said the destroyer man reminiscingly, "I saw an aviator aviating. He must have been crazy. All the rest of you war eagles I've ever seen divide your time between lying around barracks, kissing the pictures of your girl friends, and stalling out on the big water forty knots from hell's back door. I've got the admiral aboard, incidentally, and I'm not taking on any trailers in tow, thanks. Do you want me to report you down?"

"A good man may be out," said Keno, "but he's never down. I just dropped to the bosom of your own private ocean for a smoke, and to cool off. Throw me a box of wooden-headed Swedes, will you?"

"Right-o."

The destroyer man felt around in his pockets, then spoke to a seaman behind him.

"He'll fetch you some matches in a jiffy," he told Keno. "I seem to've left mine in the Yankee windjammer's cabin, along with my cigarettes. The Yank is welcome to the latter if he finds 'em. Six weeks out from the Roads, with a cargo of cotton, hides and tobacco. And not a cigarette to smoke in the last ten days. How's that for a rum show, what?"

"The windjammer up the line a Yank?" said Keno.

"The *Gulf Weed*, out of Norfolk for Harwich, by the Pentland Firth," said the destroyer man. "Had a rough passage, and her supplies are down at the bottom of the bin. Spent the last of her onions and smokes before she raised the Hebrides."

"Tough luck," said Keno. "But why's she starving for smokes?" he said. "If she's an honest-to-God, hell bent American windjammer, she ought to know how to chew. If your windjammer drifts my way, I'll hail the skipper and tell him how to knead some of his cargo into a twist of Cowboy's Delight. When I wasn't more than seven years old, myself, I used to go out and eat it off the racks in the drying shed. But maybe this bird comes from Boston. He's not what you call a real Yank then, but a Damnyank. Those are the same birds we beat the pie out of fifty years ago. Only they were so dumb, they didn't know it."

"I'm not up on American history," said the destroyer man. "That's what you call the War of the Revolution, what, when General Washington fought Isaac Lincoln?"

"Give me air!" said Keno.

"Bently, the windjamming skipper, was discussing some of your native history with the admiral and me," said the destroyer man. "Sorry I wasn't paying much attention. The feller had some really extraordinary corn whisky, you know, which touched us a bit on the sunny side of the liver, what?"

"Seems to've," said Keno.

"A nice feller," said the destroyer man, "and keen as a knife. Has the smartest looking crew I've ever seen on a merchantman. He was lying becalmed up off the Wash this morning when the big crash happened, and was the only one to see the sub that did it. She poked up her asparagus right beneath his port quarter, not forty feet from his

taffrail, and the streak of her torpedo went under his stern. He gave us a lot of keen information. Bently himself used to be a navy man in one of your wars, the Spanish or Mexican—a veteran of the Battle of the Alamo, I think he said."

Keno glanced slantwise up at the destroyer man's fat, beaming countenance.

"And I'll bet he told you the story of how he was once captured by Sitting Bull, the great Tammany chief, and was about to have his scalp carved off when Pocahantas saved him," said Keno. "Am I right?"

"Bently did have some jolly old experience like that, for a fact," said the destroyer man. "You must know him."

"No," said Keno gloomily. "But I know you destroyer men."

"A cool head—this Bently skipper," the destroyer man went on, "like all you Yanks. The torpedo that slammed the *Relentless* didn't miss him by five feet. After it had shot its bolt the sub began to rise, to get its guns in action. And what does your windjamming Yank do but grab a rifle, and pot out the blasted U-boat's blinking eyes? Old man sub went scuttling down then to a place where the temperature wasn't quite so hot. But it had lifted enough of its superstructure for the whole crew of the windjammer to get its number. It was the U-101."

"Von Hexemund's?" said Keno.

"The Shark of the North Sea," said the destroyer man impressively. "The Hun who



sank the *Sister of Mercy* and shelled her boats. Even the windjamming Yanks had heard of Von Hexemund. They were sure of the number. Now we know the fish we've got to catch. We've got our cordon around his whole possible underwater cruising range, pulled as tight as a corset. The rum beggar can't lie on the bottom or run blind

much longer. He's got to get his bearings, charge his batteries, and clean his air. And then we slam him, what? We know——"

HE BROKE off, then suddenly stiffened. On the bridge somebody had bawled, "Attention!" A gold-braided cap appeared over his head, shadowing the bristling beard and bulbous purple nose of Rear-Admiral Horselle, commanding officer of the destroyer flotilla at Harwich.

Keno stood erect on the seat of his boat, his wiry legs somewhat bowed, his dark, shrewd face somewhat thrust forward, saluting. The admiral came striding like an ostrich to the rail beside the destroyer captain, and thrust his long neck far over. He took a deep hissing breath, sucking in his whiskers, then exploded with a shriek.

"What in the blank-blank-blank are you doing on the blank-blank-blank water with that blank-blank flying boat?" he inquired of Keno.

"Sir?" said Keno.

Admiral Horselle took another hissing breath.

"I said, what in the blank-blank are you doing on the blank-blank water with that blank-blank-blank flying boat?" he said heartily. "Don't you blank-blank-blank-blank fliers ever fly in the blank-blank air?"

"Well, sir," said Keno, "I came down for a smoke."

"A smoke!" said the admiral.

And that was all he said. Only the way he said it, it sounded like fire and brimstone. He blew his whiskers out from his face. He sucked in another deep breath.

"What," he said, "is your name?"

"Donnerkind, sir," said Keno.

The admiral lifted his fists.

"Don't use your blasted oaths at me!" he shrieked. "I want to know your blank-blank name! And I'll have a civil answer from you, sir! *What is your name?*"

"*Donnerkind!*" said Keno.

The admiral stepped back a foot from the rail, for Keno's voice, when he unloosed it at full volume, was a big voice.

"That's his name, sir," said Stumpy Coningsby.

"What," yelled the admiral, "is the infernal feller doing here?"

"He wanted a smoke, sir," said the de-

stroyer skipper, "and asked me for a light."

"A light!" howled the admiral. "Are we a bloody tobacconist's? Is that how the blasted air service fights the bloody war? Mister Donnerkind, you will be reported for gross neglect of duty! And I'll thank you to get your ship underway, Captain!"

The engines of the *Bimini* were rumbling. "Hey!" yelled Keno. "Those matches!"

Stumpy Coningsby leaned over the bridge rail with a placating grin, and tossed a box of safeties down at Keno's boat. It fell short of the cockpit, the fast and wicked sub-hunter being already in motion, but dropped on the upper portside wing.

"Cheerio!" yelled the destroyer man.

## CHAPTER II

### MISSING LIGHTS

**K**ENO scrambled out on the plane's wing, swinging rapidly from struts and flying wires, while the camouflage-spotted sheer plates of the destroyer flashed past—engines humming a low, giant song, gun crews at their stations, searchlights winnowing the water, shining torpedo tubes on her decks slanted fore and aft—a streak of gleaming brass and glistening gray steel.

Clinging to his plane's outboard strut, Keno felt cautiously over the upper wing for the precious matchbox, which had lodged against the skid-fin, while the stern of the destroyer went by. The Y-gun crew on her port quarterdeck gave him an ironic cheer, to which he responded with a thumb salute. Immediately the destroyer keeled hard to starboard, bearing west, rolling almost beams under, as fast as a motorcycle on a turn. Her boiling wake frothed around the sluggish flying boat, and the boat's bow rose up and her wings wallowed over like the beginning of a barrel roll.

"Hold her rudder, Dinty!" Keno yelled, making one last grab for the matches as he felt his feet slipping away beneath him.

Salt water filled his mouth. He was in the ocean, looking at the surface from underneath. He struck up, numb with shock and cold, and grabbed the wing pontoon. In the cockpit Dinty Doone was laughing and shrieking like a monkey in a tree. But Keno

had the match-box crushed in his fist.

He hauled himself over the edge of the wing, and lay a moment shivering. The North Sea even in midsummer was cold as melted ice.

"Got 'em!" he said between clacking teeth. "Is my cigarette still there?"

"Yez had it in your mug when yez went down," said Dinty. "Ha, ha, ha! Yez bit it right in two and swallied it like an oyster!"

Keno crawled back along the leading edge and slid head foremost into the cockpit. He crouched on the floor beneath the wheel, shivering steadily. The wind had hardly been perceptible before, but now it seemed sharp and keen. He dried his numb hands on a piece of waste, and rolled a cigarette painstakingly, with fingers that jiggled from cold.

"When you've gug-gug-got to have it, you've gug-gug-got to have it," he chattered. "B-r-r! I'd go to hell for a smoke right now. Get out your old dudeen and smoke up, you Skuh-Skuh-Scandinavian."

He scratched a match unsteadily. And scratched another, with a numb, thick stroke. And another. Then he sat back on his hams, and looked at the sodden box. They were war matches, never much good to begin with, anyway. And now, of course, all brine-soaked. Somehow, in the excitement of his sudden bath, Keno hadn't realized that the matches also were getting wet.

**H**E CROUCHED under the cowling, stripping the clothes off his shivering flesh. And while he disrobed himself, he talked. He talked to Dinty, and he just talked to himself. He recited a catalog of the various species, families and genders of rattlesnakes, of which there are twenty-nine, and mentioned skunks. He expressed his convictions on the subject of destroyer men and admirals, more in anger than in sorrow.

He pounded and flayed his hard brown hide with his fists, getting the numbing ache out of his bones. Presently he was shivering less violently, and his teeth would stay together without rattling like a dice box. He sat crosslegged beneath the wheel, rolling his cigarette around between his lips.

"I'm going to get a smoke!" he said emphatically.

Crouching topside, Dinty Doone worked feverishly on the magnetos of the big Rolls motor. His freckled face looked pale as a white faced baboon. In all his life the little Irish quartermaster had never heard such wild and fluent language. If the blood hunger of this wild man was arousing, Dinty would a great deal sooner be in a cage with a raw Bengal tiger.

"Would it do yez any good, sir-r, to suck the stem of the dudeen?" he suggested placatingly. "There's a deal of comfort in the feel of it between your teeth, even if no fire's in the bowl. Sure, but yez just rest aisy. I'll have us moting in a jiffy. It's the timer that's after being off, I'm thinking. Or I'm thinking maybe it's the spark plugs fouled."

"Your head isn't shaped right for thinking, Dinty," said Keno gloomily.

He had wrung out his clothes, and draped them over the inter-wing flying wires. He wrapped the engine tarpaulin around his shoulders like a shawl, and climbed up beside Dinty. The engine metal was still hot. The trouble was a short in the wiring, he thought. He bent himself to discover the difficulty, absorbed in the task, glancing up only once or twice at the vast dark water around him.

The *Bimini* stood ten knots away to the west. She seemed to have altered course again, bearing north, like a hound without a scent and nosing in great circles. Her searchlight for the moment was again shooting blinker code against the sky.

From north and east two other destroyers were bearing down, steaming fast and crookedly on their zigzag courses. The sub-killers were out thick tonight, combing every yard of the black water, listening with their detectors for faint sounds below the water.

The night was moonless and without stars. The roof was filled with high, invisible cloud, moving down on the current of the north wind.

Keno began to shiver again.

"Forty miles to home and a smoke," he said. "If we don't get this infernal ice wagon to rev-ing up before long, by Glory, I'll swim!"

ONE of the destroyers, she from the east, came swiftly rumbling down. Her Number 3 searchlight picked up the

flying boat. Keno scrambled to the top wing, and stood a-straddle on it, semaphoring.

"G-i-v-e m-e l-i-g-h-t."

The destroyer slid past him at half speed a hundred yards to starboard, just the blind gleam of her searchlight focusing on him for a long moment. If the sight of a lean, naked brown man standing on the top wing



of a flying boat forty miles off-shore, signaling for a light, seemed anything unusual to her, she showed no indication of it. She was British,

and the British are never surprised. Her searchlight passed over Keno's gesticulating figure, and slid onward down the water.

"G-i-v-e m-e l-i-g-h-t y-o-u—"

"How do you make a 'b'?" Keno asked Dinty.

The destroyer's light was blotted out. She picked up speed, and slid away.

"Who wins the war?" said Keno. "The destroyers! You'd better run, you bug! I'm liable to do an Australian crawl after you, and bite off one of your smoke-stacks!"

Over to northwest there was a sharp red flash like sheet lightning low on the sea. Again a flash. Three of them. The near destroyer keeled about, and went foaming toward that distant gunfire. The crack of the rapid cannonading came down the wind to Keno long after the flashes had faded.

Perhaps they'd nailed Von Hexemund. But more likely a floating spar. The gunfire was not renewed.

Again the silent night was around the flying boat. While Dinty Doone handled the switch and spark control, Keno swung the club again. Twice it snapped and kicked back, with the dexterity of a mean-eyed mule. Keno swore at it in a low voice. His nerves were shot. He was chattering with cold.

And all this time, with the slowness of a cobweb on the wind, and more obscurely, the windjammer out of Norfolk had been drifting down.

## CHAPTER III

## SINISTER CRAFT

THE square-rigged brig had not visibly been in motion at any time since the *Bimini* spoke her. She had appeared to be standing still against the north, with her single masthead light like a motionless horizon star upon the meridian. Yet steadily all the time she had held her course down the dark water.

An hour ago she had been six sea-miles off. Now she was hard by.

"If you wait long enough, something always happens in this old world," muttered Keno, "even if it's nothing more exciting than your own funeral."

"Lord love a duck!" Dinty gasped. "But she startled me out of me wits! Would yez look at her bearing down with all her sails spread, as big as a banshee! She's going to bump us in a minute. And it was meself that had forgot her entirely."

Keno bent his face and licked the seam of the dilapidated cigarette which he had been nursing for so long. He watched the windjammer creeping down the breeze with a narrow stare, beneath lowered brows.

"Somehow," he said softly, "it seems to me that I've been kind of expecting her, all along."

"Yez had better sing out to her," said Dinty.

"I'm not going to give this one a chance to sheer away," said Keno. "I'm going to get a light from her if I have to lift the lid of hell."

He swung himself down and stood on the flying boat's nose, curling his toes over the rim of the bow cockpit well. Half crouching, he waited the shadowy ship's approach.

He saw the bent white line of her cut-water riffling before her stem. The outline of her hull was vague—a shape a little gloomier, merely, than the general obscurity of the sea and sky. She moved down heavily loaded, beneath her cobweb sails. Her cordage creaked, and the water rustled about her, and there was a low mumbling of voices from her port gallery deck, where a group of her crew had gathered about some machine, working on it by the light of a well shielded electric torch that gave a narrow gleam.

And suddenly, before a hail had been given or the windjammer had tried to put about her helm, the flying boat's left wing had touched her bowsprit. Swinging around on the pivot of the wing, the seaplane's nose bumped against the brig on her port bow.

KENO was swung forward by the easy impact. He grasped the windjammer's scupper, and then tightened his hold on a hawser chock, snagging his toes under his own boat's cockpit at the same time to prevent its drifting away from under. For an instant he was stretched out over the water, pulling the seaplane in with his feet, while the sailing vessel pushed on with way still on her.

No man on the windjammer had seen the low-lying flying boat, it was sure, before they came together. She had been on the alert for swift, rumbling destroyers, not for drifters.

A guttural voice grunted one startled word at the moment of the impact. The hooded light on her gallery deck was snapped out. From the crow's nest beneath her masthead beacon, a lookout sang out sharp and clear, "British seaplane!" and there was a soft whirring sound aloft like the flight of birds.

Immediately the electric torch stabbed out of the darkness on her decks again, thrusting at Keno's face and playing over the seaplane from nose to tail. A thin, youngish man with a high forehead and kinky yellow hair knelt by the rail, staring through horn rimmed spectacles while he played the light. The faint gleam, reflecting on his glasses, gave him the eyes of an owl. He was holding the torch in his left hand, with his right hand tucked carelessly inside the breast of his merchant officer's blues. His gaze burned down at Keno for a silent instant. And Keno clung hard to the hawser chock, feeling his heart pounding.

The man on the deck wet his lips, and spoke in a precise, well polished voice, very quiet.

"Ahoy," he said. "You gave us a bit of surprise, what? I'm Captain Bently, the *Gulf Weed*, American brig, six weeks out of Norfolk for Harwich, by the Pentland Firth—cotton, hides and tobacco. We've been examined and cleared, old chap. I'm not going

to have to go through all that bally rot again, what?"

He spoke very smoothly, and in the best Oxford English. Or maybe it was Piccadilly English. Whatever brand it was, it never came from Norfolk on the Virginia Roads.

"Bently," the man on deck repeated, without a break in his quiet voice. "A citizen of the States, you know, and sailing under the star sprinkled banner, as we call it. Glad to have you look over my papers, if you must. You British beggars are keen. Nothing gets by you, what? But I've been cleared a dozen times, old chap."

**A**BOVE his gleaming lenses, his big pale forehead was corrugated with wrinkles of inquiry. His mouth was a tight line, curved into a one-sided grin like a bent nail. He expressed no surprise, asked no questions. Instead, he made haste to roll forth his own smooth alibi and identification, before they had been demanded. Yet while he spoke his blazing look was probing Keno's face, shooting questions as clear as words, and a great deal more penetrating:

*What are you doing here?*

*What have you seen or heard?*

*What do you suspect, you damned lean-eyed flying man, bumping into us so silently and without a hail?*

Keno felt the surging of his heart, and he was tensed like a tiger. He hardly heard the smooth voice of the man on the brig. It might be true she was the *Gulf Weed* out of Norfolk. It probably was, since no unregistered ship with forged clearance papers could ever have penetrated so far past the patrols. And it might be true that she was carrying cotton, hides and tobacco, since she stank of hides and the aroma of the weed. But she was also carrying other cargo, not listed on her manifest. Keno had been aware of it the instant that he struck her.

It was not "Captain Bently's" precise English voice that had warned him. And it was not that right hand tucked carelessly beneath the coat. Not that alone—though Keno knew and had respect for a killer when he saw one. But he had been warned already by the startled voice which grunted out the German caution, "Achtung!" at the moment of collision; and by that whirring sound aloft, which he had rightly understood to be

the reeling in of radio antennae; and by a glimpse he had had of the machine under repair on her gallery deck, before the light went out—a *German war torpedo!*

He held to the scupper with hands like iron. He wore his poker face. He had pulled the flying boat up to the brig again. Under his feet he felt the swivel-arm of the bow Lewis gun—the gun cased over and lashed down. He would have given half his life then to have had it in his hands. But it was as far out of his reach as if it lay at the bottom of the sea.

"I'm not asking you for your papers," he said levelly. "I don't doubt they're in good order. I'm looking for a light."

The man upon the brig probed him with unwinking eyes.

"A light?" he said.

"Yes," said Keno. "I'm down without any matches, and I'd go to hell for one good smoke."

And still those great owl eyes stared at him, and the high, pale forehead was wrinkled like a washboard. Very quickly "Captain Bently's" hand tightened beneath his coat.

"You can go there for your smoke," he said. "I see you're no ass of an Englishman."

"*Hun raider, Dinty!*" Keno roared.

Shouting, he plunged sidewise off the boat. "Captain Bently's" Mauser cracked at the place where his head had been. And cracked, cracked, cracked at Dinty Doone, shrieking and whimpering like a little lost monkey behind the shelter of the big Rolls motor.

Keno was below the surface then, half breathless, wallowing down through the black and freezing currents that drifted about the *Gulf Weed's* hull.

**R**OARING thoughts filled his mind in that black instant. A German raider—the damned cold nerve of them! No quarter to be asked or given. They were pirates, beyond the law, and they were not taking prisoners.

There had been little time for Keno to assemble his ideas, from the moment he recognized the windjammer's true status to the moment of recognition by "Captain Bently" that the *Gulf Weed's* disguise had

been penetrated. The brig was out on some great and deadly business, that was all Keno had been given time to understand. What-



ever her ultimate goal, the life of any man who stood to betray her was not worth a jellyfish.

Along the windjammer's greasy bottom he struck toward the stern, hoping to clear her and

recapture his own boat again while the brig slid on. It was a long chance, but the only one. If the flying boat had been cast adrift, and was far enough astern, he might have time to get her moting before the Huns slammed him.

He was a strong natural swimmer, but he had plunged with empty lungs. His warning shout to Dinty Doone had exhausted the breath which might otherwise have carried him beyond the brig—whatever good that might have done him in this vast, dark sea. Three strokes, and his head was roaring. A half dozen more, and he was sick and weak for lack of oxygen. He was strangling. Lights blazed before his eyes. Moving his arms was like moving blocks of stone.

He was still beneath the windjammer's shadow, and he could hold out no longer. Inertly he drifted up along the slippery, newly scraped hull, desiring only one thing in that suffocating moment—a breath of air, though it cost him his life. He fended the hull away with his left hand as he came up toward the dimly glimmering darkness of the surface, trying to keep clear of underwater entanglements. Yet before he had reached the open air his head struck with a blinding crack on some sharp metal projection, and he caved in.

It was the scoop edge of a torpedo tube which had gashed against his skull. Stunned, and with water in his throat, he wallowed to the surface, breathing like a whale.

The windjammer had taken in canvas, and hove to. The crack of small-arms fire was sounding near him. The German raiders were slamming lead through the bottom of his big gray flying boat. The rifle repercus-

sion alone had prevented them from hearing his noisy emergence. For the moment he was not seen.

There was no ship within miles upon that black, freezing sea.

THE raiders had put over a trim little cutter, paddling around to rip the sea-plane's fuselage and wing linen, speeding her sinking. They whammed at her main bolts with axes, and smashed her wing pontoons. The sea was over her hull and lower wings now. It rose above her engine, and she went down with a bubble.

The crew of the cutter raised a cheer.

"Hoch! hoch!"

It is sure that they couldn't have cheered fifteen hours before, when, at dawn, and lying on the glassy, blinding waters off the Wash, they had shot their iron fish into the hull of the mighty *Relentless*, in the very teeth of her destroyers. They hadn't dared to risk the whisper of a cheer then, it is likely, with those swift and revengeful destroyers scurrying around so near, but had watched with solemn faces, laughing up their sleeves. So their boisterous roaring now might have been merely bottled enthusiasm, which, like champagne, makes the bigger noise the longer it is kept.

The cutter was cruising around to destroy any bits of flotsam now. Keno was still half blind from the blow on his head, and paddling like a dog while he swallowed air. Stiff with cold, he worked his way aft along the shadow of the hull while they came toward him, digging the water with strong oars.

From the deck directly above him a flashlight's beam shot down and swept about over the black, crinkly sea. Keno caught a glimpse of "Captain Bently's" big wrinkled forehead and spectacled eyes, peering far overside.

"Make sure of that man," said the captain's quiet voice in German. "He had a damned dangerous look. And I don't think I finished him."

"He went down, Captain," said the coxswain of the cutter.

"Ach ja! But what goes down sometimes comes up again," said the captain. "It may be that our friend with the sharp eyes is that kind of an oyster. Catch my torch,

Mister Lieutenant, and look about you sharp."

"*Jawohl, Kapitän von Hexemund!*"

Von Hexemund, the Shark of the North Sea!

And Admiral Horselle, with Stumpy Coningsby, had sat in the pirate's cabin drinking corn liquor with him, swallowing his tall fish stories. What a cold iron nerve he had!

Keno's stiff blue lips cracked in a grin.

He trod water beneath the stern, in a blackness like ink. The chunking oarlocks worked around under the taffrail. The slicing oar blades flicked his face. His head was still rocking and buzzing. He had to clench his jaws to keep his teeth from clattering. The beam of the flashlight swept toward him, probing the blackness of the water line. He went down.

THEY were still on the hunt, very thorough and patient. You had to hand it to those babies, they never quit till they'd licked the platter clean. They took the gravy, as fighters and as bloodhounds. They hadn't located him yet, but they must inevitably, unless he let go completely and sank down in those numbing waters. And he didn't care for that sort of a curtain. He'd rather take a bucketful of lead in the chest, and blink out beneath open sky.

His legs, and now his shoulders, ached with cold, as if he was being squeezed in a vice. Again the cutter came around on the prow, and he had to submerge again—though only at the last instant this time, and after hesitation.

Above the stink of seaweed and salt which is the breath of the ocean, there came to him a faint aroma of baled Virginia leaf from the windjammer's hold. He breathed deep. Oddly, by one of those tricks of memory which are most apt to pop up in situations of extreme peril, the ripe tobacco fragrance brought into Keno's jumbled thoughts the image of a totally unrelated scene, which had occurred in a hot spot years ago and half the world away—the execution of a greaser herder who had cut a girl's throat, down near the Rio Grande. Then Keno had been on the other end of the rope, and for that reason the memory was more endurable than thought of his present situation.

This Mexican killer, of whom he was thinking, had slipped the pursuit, hiding for three days in a spring-fed well which was rumored to be a breeding den of rattlesnakes, near the ruins of a burned ranch-house. He might have got clear away in time, since the trail had grown cold and no one suspected him of being within miles of the spot, if two of the posse men had not happened to sit down on the well rim for a quiet smoke. The killer had come out then, shivering like a spider, but grinning, and begging for a cigarette.

The Mexican had had guts enough to endure three days without food or sleep, crouching up to his chin in the icy waters of that rattler-haunted well, but he couldn't fight the tobacco hunger any longer. The posse men set him on a horse beneath a black oak limb, with a rope around his neck and a cigarette between his lips. And when he had inhaled the cigarette down to the last ash he raked his spurs, and the brute leaped out from beneath him.

That was much better than to choke to death in a cold watery blackness. Keno rather admired the greaser killer. He also was going to grab himself one drag on the weed, and then, if he had to, go out grinning.

On the poop above him a German suddenly spoke, in a meditative voice, the words drifting down to Keno startingly near and clear on the quiet air.

"*Ach!* What would I not give now for a good puff on the pipe! You can talk about your herrings and beer, Karl, but a pinch of good mild Turkish in a sweetened meerschaum for mine, any day! Do you remember how the first whiff tastes, when you've put the match to the bowl and the sweet smoke comes curling up against the roof of your mouth, and you roll it around your tongue a little before taking a deep breath of it? *Gott im Himmel!* Was ever a woman's kiss like that, warming your whole insides for you and giving you such a feeling of peacefulness? If I had matches and my old *Rauch-stinker* in my pea-jacket right now, and if the *herr kapitän* had not such a sharp nose, I would be tempted to take one whiff!"

"*Ja!* And blow this powder can that is called a ship up beneath mine feet!" growled

another voice. "Maybe you would smoke a stick of dynamite yet."

Keno worked his way up the starboard of the brig, wrapped a hawser around his forearms, and swarmed overside into the waist.

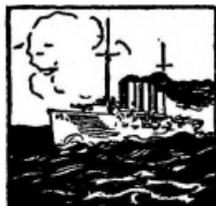
#### CHAPTER IV

##### BEHIND THE SCENES

TWO hundred open sea-miles easterly from the waters where the *Gulf Weed* was sailing, at the great German naval base of Heligoland off the mouths of the Elbe and Weser, two gentlemen of highest rank in the German war machine were conferring in the admiral's cabin of the scouting cruiser *Barbarossa*, over a bottle of English whisky and a box of American cigars.

The hour was the long, glistening twilight of the middle Fifties. At about that same hour Keno Donnerkind was dropping to the sea for a quiet smoke, and on the *Gulf Weed* "Captain Bently" was entertaining—and being entertained by—his British destroyer guests. The Bight of Heligoland, in the twilight, presented a livelier aspect. Seaplanes were whining down to the water. Two submarines, returning from cruise off the Orkneys, were standing up the harbor, with pennons fluttering on halyards from their wireless masts to represent the number of merchantmen they had sunk. Destroyers whipped about like gar-pikes.

Around the *Barbarossa* were grouped eight great mottled battle cruisers and nine scout cruisers of the 10,000 and 13,000 ton classes, stripped for action and with steam



up, ready for the sea. The two gentlemen in the cabin of the flagship could watch those ships through the portholes from where they sat, and it was a matter of satisfaction.

One of those high ranking Hun gentlemen had a head as bald as an ostrich egg and a white curly beard that lay spread over his bosom like an infant's bib. The other, in field marshal's uniform, had a spiked mustache and high-lidded, flashing eyes. Though they

were both men of world-shaking importance in their day, they are no longer. It will be sufficient to designate them here by those simple titles they used with each other, which were "*Excellenz*" and "*Höchster*"—Excellency and Highest. They are of interest in this narrative briefly, because at the hour they were following the reports of the *Gulf Weed's* progress on her audacious mission of destruction.

"Here," said the white bearded, bald-headed Excellency, putting his pencil lightly on a North Sea chart spread out over his working desk, "is the *Weed*, Highest, according to her latest wireless transmitted. And here, steaming out of Harwich east northeast one hour before dawn, is the British main scouting fleet, eleven battle cruisers and fifteen cruisers. Give me half of those twenty-six *verdammte* ships wiped off the board, and here——"

Again Excellency made a faint mark with his pencil.

"Here I'll engage! With my eighteen German terriers, standing off from Texel! At fifty-two forty-five north, two forty-five east, or within ten knots of there, at five A. M. tomorrow the British scouting fleet will be *zerrissen! Spurlos versunken!* That, Highest, is a matter of mathematics."

EXCELLENCY dipped the chewed end of his cigar in his whisky glass. He sucked it for a moment with satisfaction, dropping ashes on his beard.

"Visualize the picture, Highest," he resumed, in a voice of deepening excitement. "Here is the great British scouting fleet, wallowing around helpless and demoralized! The battle line broken! Half the fleet torpedoed and sinking, or already sunk! The rest in panic! Confusion of orders. Ships ramming into their own comrades, over a sea covered with dead men and the flotsam of sunken hulls! Do you see the picture? Then I attack, in the midst of that panic. My eighteen terriers, steaming at twenty-seven knots. From fifteen miles away I begin throwing in my 420's. I smash them. They go down beneath my steel. Not one is left."

The Highest made no reply at the moment. He twisted the horns of his mustaches.

He had got out a pocket glass, and was examining the chart.

"The sea will be ours," said Excellency with satisfaction.

"With the proviso, if Von Hexemund succeeds in sinking his twelve or thirteen Britishers for you before you come up," commented the Highest glumly. "If not, you are outnumbered and outgunned. That would not be pretty."

"Highest, you do not know Von Hexemund!"

"Ach ja," said the Highest. "I know him. I know the English have named him 'The Shark,' and every rotten little ship of theirs on deep water steams in terror of him. A tremendously skilful and audacious fellow, with the cunning of the devil. But to expect him to account for half their scouting fleet—it is asking too much of *der Herr Gott*."

"He sank the *Relentless*," said Excellency.

"Standing against the sun on a glass sea, I understand," said the Highest. "An amazingly bold stroke, yes. But conditions favored him."

"Conditions," said Excellency sententiously, "favor those who make them. Here is a situation that has been coordinated to the quarter mile and quarter hour, with German thoroughness. The enemy fleet, steaming out in eight hours to cruise along the Frisians, must pass in line within close torpedo range of Von Hexemund, in the low visibility of predawn. Twenty-six ships in a line—*guter Gott!* It is something you dream about. Von Hexemund will knock them down like bottles from a fence. I've asked him to account for half the fleet before I engage. He may do more—he may account for twenty. If so, there is not a battle, there is only target practice for my quick terriers."

**H**E SLAPPED a fly on his big bald head, and examined the corpse in his palm with curiosity.

"If Von Hexemund fails——!" said the Highest.

"He will not fail," put in Excellency.

The Highest's eyes flashed. He drummed his fingers on the chart. He poured himself a steep drink, lifting his spiked mustaches from his lip while he drank.

"With the enemy main cruiser fleet at

the bottom of the sea, between Von Hexemund and my terriers," Excellency resumed, "we can snap our fingers at their damned wallowing pack of dreadnoughts, still licking their wounds from Jutland. Our fast liners will be again on the ocean, our cruisers will hammer their seaports from Halifax to Sydney, and Frau Britannia will have to hide her head beneath the feather bed. Germania will be mistress of the sea!"

In the Highest's eyes brooded a proud dream. The whisky had set him up. He reflected a moment.

"Is Von Hexemund's armament sufficient to do the trick?" he asked.

"Six torpedo batteries of three tubes each," said Excellency with a contented smile, "and six torpedos to each tube—a total of one hundred and eight twin-screw Hesselmanns, Model K. Or a hundred and five now, to be exact. One was expended on the Canadian coastal schooner *Friendship* off Cape Cod—a salutary lesson to the Americans. Another fish was slipped into the gunboat *Madras* off the Kyle of Tongue six days ago, and a third in the *Relentless* today. Enough to do the trick? A hundred and five Model K's? Highest, they would be enough to blow up every warship that flies the white ensign. The British scouting fleet is the same as in your pocket."

The Highest arose and paced over the thick cabin carpet with his left hand on his sword. He twisted his mustaches till they stuck up like clotheshooks on either side of his nose. There was more than a flash in his eyes now—there was a steady gleam.

"It will break the blockade, at least," he said.

"It will break England," said Excellency. "It will win the war."

The Highest breathed deeply. The medals that glittered on his pigeon-breasted tunic, some of them studded with diamonds, were no brighter than his eyes at the moment. He stood springily on tiptoe, staring out a porthole at the great mottled warships that lay around the *Barbarossa* on the waters of the Bight, with the proud and burning gaze of a hawk.

"I have already," said Excellency, "had a medal struck in commemoration of tomorrow's victory. I trust that it meets with your approval, Highest."

He curled the fringes of his white beard around his index finger.

"On one side," Excellency continued, "a bust of Your Exalted Highness in bold relief, holding the trident of Neptune, and with two mermaids in the background. On the reverse, a warship being blown to bits, with an inscription 'Historic Victory of Harwich, 17 July, 1916 A. D. Destruction of Albion's sea power.' Simple, you see? Nothing ornate or bombastic. Yet to the antiquarian of the future who digs it up, it will tell the story of a sea fight which, in its consequences, will rank with Salamis and Actium."

"You should have submitted it to me before casting," grumbled the Highest. "I'm not sure I like the idea of the mermaids."

**T**HE proud and dangerous gleam died out of his eyes after a moment. He had been standing on his toes, but he came to earth again. He sagged down into a chair, and his shoulders were drooping.

"Perhaps, Excellency," he said, "you have been a little premature?"

"At this hour tomorrow, Highest," said Excellency, "there will be no units left of the British cruiser fleet—not one. I promise you."

"I've been promised things before," the Highest muttered. "Damn me, two years

ago didn't they promise me Paris by August 15th? I had my dinner ordered at the Majestic."

He jingled some five-pen-

ning coins in his breeches.

"And last year," he continued in a voice of intensifying bitterness, "didn't they promise me London on her knees, and suing for a separate peace by Christmas, as a result of our night bombing? And this spring wasn't it Verdun that was to fall by April first? Promises! Sometimes I'm beginning to think that the gentlemen of my great war staff may not be quite all the supermen they claim to be, but only a pack of promising fools."

"Highest?" said Excellency.

"Oh, very well, very well," said the Highest crossly. "Show me that medal when you get a copy. Myself with the trident, you say? The idea is not bad. How about an inscription underneath—'Imperator of the World?'"

"Splendid," said Excellency. "That will put the fear of God into America."

**A** JUNIOR officer had appeared at the cabin door with a jubilant face, standing stiff as a fence post at salute. He caught the eye of Excellency and came forward, palpitating.

"We've reestablished communication with Von Hexemund, Excellency," he stammered. "An enemy destroyer was lying alongside him for a quarter hour, and he had to reel in. But he fooled the English swine again. He's too smart for them."

"Give me the message!" said Excellency.

He read the typewritten transcript, and passed it over to the Highest. It read:

Received SKMK *Barbarossa*, hour 19:39 Greenwich, 16 July '16. From SKMK *Gulf Weed*, long. 2° 45' E., lat. 52° 49' N. Relayed by SKMK U-101, lat. 53° 50' N, long. 4° 30' E. DECODED. To Commanding Officer High Seas Scouting Fleet, Seinen Kaiserlichen Majestäts Kriegsflotte, Heligoland Bight. Admiral Horselle, RN, aboard with destroyer captain HMS *Bimini*. Found my papers in good order. Horselle's desultory talk confirmed sailing enemy scouting fleet Harwich, hour 3:30 Greenwich, 17 July, course 75 true, objective Frisians, in accordance with reports from our Intelligence. I am within four minutes of position. First salvo of nine fish at hour 4:50 Greenwich. Von Hexemund.

"Damn the cocksure beggar!" grumbled Excellency. "He'll have slammed them all before I get in a single gun."

The Highest threw his cape about his shoulders. He shook hands with Excellency.

"Good luck," he said.

Anchors were being weighed on all the powerful warships lying in the Bight when the Highest was piped overside. Bands played "Dutchland, Dutchland over everything!" The decks were manned, speed cones were hoisted, and from the flagship the signal was passed, "We're steaming out!"

In half an hour the fast cruiser flagship was leading her fleet in battle line across the open sea. Black in the starless night which had fallen suddenly. Cutting sharp through

the crinkling water. Eighteen great terriers of the ocean, convoyed by their quick destroyers, with seaplanes lashed on their decks, gun stoppers out of their 16-inchers, crews in their turret stations, steaming down to battle in the dawn.

And fifteen thousand men aboard those ships, as good seamen and as courageous fighting men as ever plowed salt water—there is no question of it.

"*Hoch! hoch! hoch!*" they were yelling. "*Der Tod oder der Sieg!*"

Death or victory!

There's no alternative in a sea fight. A man-o'-war's man gets one or the other. And sometimes both.

Three hundred thousand tons of fighting ships and fifteen thousand men, all staked on the dice of battle in one giant toss. But the dice were loaded with Von Hexemund. The Shark of the North Sea, unwatched and unsuspected, was standing athwart the British sea lane to break and tear apart the British battle line. The victory could be already counted and the medals distributed, with Von Hexemund's bristling ship of death standing there.

"*Hoch! hoch! hoch! Nieder England! Lebe Deutschland!*"

Eighteen great gray-brindled terriers foaming toward the west. All through the black and starless night. With the black German eagle and the black cross on the war flags at their peaks. Rushing down from Heligoland to Harwich to deal the knockout blow to the ruptured British cruiser fleet.

"*Hoch! hoch! hoch! Lebe Deutschland! Lebe Hochster! Lebe Exzellenz!*"

And two hundred knots away from that swift fleet as it set out—in another hour a hundred and seventy knots, and by midnight little more than a hundred—lay Von Hexemund, as bold and smart as hell, with TNT enough in his hundred "warheads" to blow a small corner of the ocean halfway to the moon. Von Hexemund, who had slammed the great *Relentless* beneath the very eyes of her destroyers, and would do the trick again!

After midnight, halfway on his course, Excellency launched a seaplane overside to get in touch with Von Hexemund, who had ceased communicating.

## CHAPTER V

## OUT OF THE SEA

KENO DONNERKIND was numb with cold, and he wanted to be warm and dry again for at least a few moments before he was pushed through the Big Door. His brain was foggy, from immersion and fatigue and the blow that had slammed him on the skull, and it was getting foggier. But he still remembered that he had come down to get a smoke, and he still wanted it like hell.

"I've sure got to hand it to that Mex killer who came up out of the well," he thought. "That baby knew what he wanted, and he got it."

He might have succeeded in holding out another quarter or half hour longer, immersed in the freezing water by the wind-jammer's stern. Or he might have struck clear from the brig's shadow, unobserved in a lucky moment, and wallowed away for a few miles through the gloomy, endless sea.

If he'd stayed, they'd have got him in the end, exhausted from repeated submersions and stiff with cold. The cutter's crew, the last time around, had been plumbing the water with their oar blades, striking straight down, blindly but with savage force, as if they knew he was there. One of those bashing strokes had driven down his arm, six inches to one side, and it would have brained him. Those babies were out to get him, and they'd do it. They'd nail him like a gasping, drowning dog, beating him over the head with their oars, plugging him with enough Mauser slugs through the head to send him down like a sinker to the crabs.

There wouldn't have been any more percentage either, in pushing off than in sticking around to take it. Suppose he did slip clear? Suppose he swam a mile, or ten? The rabid sub-hunters of the destroyer fleet, running like mad dogs over the water at thirty knots and more, weren't on the lookout for drowning men. The best break he could hope for from one of them would be to have its thousand tons of plowing steel run him down so quick he never knew what hit him. Otherwise, trying to swim for it, he would only wallow on till he was breathing brine, and the last big water had rolled over him.

"Between the devil and the deep—grab the devil by the tail," he had thought. "Maybe you can still give it a tweak, big boy, that'll raise a screech through hell."

And so he had swarmed up the starboard side of the windjammer when the searching cutter was around by the bow. A moment he had hung, listening for the sound of voices, or footfalls, and then, with a hook of knee and elbow, had rolled overside in one single swift motion.

Firm deck beneath him. He gathered his strength. Whatever happened, he'd die with his boots on now—if he had the boots.

THE main deck was filled with shadows, cast by the masts and yards. The crew of the raider seemed to be gathering at the port side, silent, and watchful, with eyes upon the northeast.

Keno didn't know what had absorbed their attention—it was a destroyer bearing down. The British ship was out of his sight and out of his calculations at the moment. He was on his own, alone on this murderous windjammer with her pack of picked fighting Huns and her big brained captain, and was no better off no matter how many destroyers plowed the sea.

And yet the approach of the destroyer helped him. It had given him that brief moment to come aboard unobserved. Even Von Hexemund had moved over to the port rail. Keno could make out the Shark's tall figure on the poop, standing tensely, staring forth at the sea—a bent shape, seeming distorted in the obscurity, with his back arched and his great scheming head stretched forward on his neck, like the shadow of a man.

Von Hexemund! A man as brave as death, and wise as the hereafter.

Keno's eyes were on the after companionway, leading to the captain's cabin. Down there, if he could ever make it, he ought to find some weapon that would make his life worth more than a two-bit poker chip. A gun, with luck. If not, then a handspike or a bosun's knife. At least, below decks he might find a temporary refuge, some kind of clothing and a drink, a cigarette to sharpen and steady his mind while he thought his way out.

A smoke and a drink, and a gun in his fist

—well, it was a little too much to hope for. But he could try.

He began to work his way aft against the rail, along the black shadows of the waist.

Back in history three of Keno Donnerkind's four great grandfathers had been eminent and respected men—one a Prussian privy councillor under Bismarck; and one a bishop; and a third an Irish baronet who had commanded a cavalry regiment under Stonewall Jackson, then gone on to fight and die with the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. But the only great grandfather whom Keno remembered, or in whom he took much pride, was an old Arapahoe horse-thief, a full-blooded aborigine who had



fought in the Black Hawk War, who had fought the Spaniards and the Mexicans and Sam Houston's Texans, and at the age of seventy had led his yelling braves at the Little Big

Horn, with Crazy Horse's Ogallalas and Two Moon's fierce Cheyennes, in the day when Yellow Hair and all his pale-face troops went down.

Keno remembered the old warrior very well, who had lived to be nearly a hundred, weathered and ripe in wickedness, no rope tough enough to hang him. Though only one-eighth Indian himself, Keno had imbibed from the old man's teaching a full store of savage warcraft. He knew how to fight—to the finish, so long as the heart was beating and the hand could grip. And he knew also how to stalk and lie in wait, to pretend to be a shadow.

But even so, an open deck is not an open prairie.

IT WAS the oncoming destroyer which for the moment allowed him to escape observation. Upon all Von Hexemund's watching men a tense silence had fallen, not broken by a whisper.

Creeping along the shadows, Keno measured the distance to the companionway with his eye. Ten feet to go across the open deck—an unlighted stretch, it was true, and no moon to be shining on it this night, but still a pale clear gray beneath the open sky,

and no place for shadows to be creeping. It was a little too far. A little too far, with that keen-eyed man on the poop.

Von Hexemund shifted his position against the taffrail. He half glanced around, instinctively. He was keen, he felt things. He had removed his horn rimmed spectacles, which were only a bit of American camouflage. His eyes looked small and hard. In a moment he turned his head again, staring out at the sea.

"In wireless, Mister Lieutenant!" he said quietly. "Man battery four. Damned snooping Britisher! I'd like to give it to him, if it wouldn't blow this ship to the same hell."

He leaned over and spoke the cutter, moving about below the port quarter.

"Up oars!" he said. "Stand by your falls."

"What are we going to do about the *verdammte* British flying man, if he's still alive and kicking, and tries to hail?" growled the officer in charge of the boat.

"Give him lead," said the Hun captain coolly, "before he has time to open his throat twice."

The searchlights of the destroyer leaped from bridge and bow, slipping deftly through and about the *Gulf Weed's* rigging, fingering her airy spars as a woman fingers lace. But the wireless was reeled in. The netted tangle aloft was only her topsail shrouds.

"Have your men carry on, Mister Lieutenant," said Von Hexemund between his teeth. "Don't let them stand around like gawks and booby birds."

The glaring searchlights moved down and flooded the bridge's decks with a great clean gleam. They washed over her from stem to mizzen, and mizzen to stern, like the sweep of a fire hose. And there was nothing hidden on her pale planks. All shadows were wiped out.

In that white flush of light, stabbing out of the sea darkness as blinding as the sun, Keno stood up. He forced himself to walk three steady strides.

He was tensed for the crash immediately of a bullet in his back. He knew how it would come—a smash of soft-nosed lead that would tear his breast apart before he heard the gun roar! His ears were thundering. He imagined a hundred furious shouts, all howling at him together.

Yet there was neither shot nor challenge. The windjammer's crew were blinded, too. If there had been anyone to turn and glance his way, he was only an upright figure walking without haste, and then no longer to be seen. He flung himself flat in the darkness beneath the poop rail as the searchlights' flood swept on. He had been on his feet one second and a half, yet he was breathless as if he had run a terrific mile.

HE HAD made use of the same profound law of concealment which was shielding the *Gulf Weed* itself—the law that a slow-moving and upright object may escape suspicious notice, while the swift scuttling of an object that tries to hide is caught by every watchful eye. The trick had succeeded for the cool-thinking Hun pirate, and at the moment it had succeeded for Keno.

The destroyer slid past at one-third speed.

"Trouble, Captain Bently?" she hailed.

"Fouled rudder," said Von Hexemund.

The destroyer picked up speed and boiled past, with the raider's crew lining the port rail and swinging their caps in a healthy cheer. She ate the water southwest.

"Good old English beef," said Von Hexemund, "and scrambled calves' brains."

He leaned overside and again spoke the cutter.

"That damned naked flying man?" he said.

"Well, sir, I don't know," growled the officer in the boat. "Last time around one of my men remembers noticing something lodged hard against the stern. Looked like a bit of kelp caught in the rudder post, with just a bit of it afloat. But it's not there now, and there's no current to be moving weed or flotsam. It was the top of that sneaking devil's head in the water, I'm thinking, playing he's a human U-boat. I'm glad enough, myself, to be on the other end of the game for a change."

"I'd like to make sure of him," said Von Hexemund softly. "The other one, the little redheaded Irishman, says he's Donner-kind, the man who captured the 59. I've hoped for a long time to meet him—preferably alive rather than dead. But either way, he must be got."

"I'll get him, sir," came up the voice of

the man in the boat, "if I have to dredge sea bottom for him!"

"I have an idea that won't be necessary," said the Hun captain.

With one swift sliding rush Keno was into the companionway then. Crouching warily, and on his toes, he slipped through the main cabin door.

CHAPTER VI  
BELOW DECKS

**T**HE cabin was alight—and occupied. He had just time to take in one flashing glimpse of it, before he was in action.

It was a large room, extending the width of the stern. A twelve-foot square of plain linoleum covered the center of the floor. Around the walls were a double bunk, a chart table, small melodeon, bookcases, built-in chests of drawers, and three or four deep-cushioned leather arm chairs, with a small tabouret stand between them adorned with an empty bottle, siphon and three glasses—relics, plainly, of Von Hexemund's ironic hospitality to the two British destroyer men an hour or two ago.

All the furnishings, in fact, were what an American windjammer captain who had a taste for books and comfortable living might be expected to possess; and this atmosphere of homeliness and naturalness was intensified by the bits of bric-a-brac and pictures which adorned furniture or walls—a dried sea porcupine, a Chinese lacquered box, a carved breadfruit decorated with Guatemalan designs, a small silk American flag in a glassed frame, a steel engraving of the *Monitor-Merrimac* fight, a giant horseshoe crab, a Malay kris, and so on. Plant a brisk, efficient young "Yankee" windjammer skipper such as "Captain Bently" down in such a cabin, and who could think everything wasn't as nice as apple pie?

Certainly not Rear-Admiral Horselle and Lieutenant Stumpy Coningsby of the destroyers, sitting drinking Von Hexemund's genuine Blue Ridge stump whiskey and listening to Von Hexemund's cultured Oxford voice with admiration and contentment.

And a hundred thousand pounds of TNT nestling, ready to be sprung, in the hold beneath their feet!

In the general appearance of the cabin there was just one item that might have been remarked, though unimportant in itself—the unusual extent of porthole and fan-light area. If the tightly clamped down shutters were removed, almost the complete sea horizon would be visible from the cabin, and every ship upon it at one time—a visibility area far more than would be needed or desired by any merchant skipper, who, if he wanted to look around him, could do his looking from the deck. The large windowage suggested not a merchantman's cabin, but the fire-control room of a battleship.

**K**ENO had only an instant to take in the look of the room, with one swift sweep of his cool gray glance. He was not alone. Moving about near the group of chairs was a huge blond German seaman in dirty white pants and an undershirt, out of which his rolling fat body seemed on the point of bursting.

The fat man was evidently a cook or messman. He was engaged in draining the



glasses on the tabouret when Keno came sliding in, locking the door behind him.

Even with the soft click of the lock the fat man was not at once aware of the intrusion. He hoisted the bottle, bottoms up, and sucked on it like a baby hippopotamus. He smacked his lips and stuck a finger into the bottle neck, wiping out a drop. His shoulders glistened oily with sweat. Grunting, he turned toward Keno, with his colorless eyebrows lifted above his round eyes.

There was a flash of silence while the German stared with eyeballs that were popping like marbles out of his head. His thick tongue worked. The bottle dropped from his hand.

"*Ach, du lieber Gott!*" he whispered, in a small hoarse voice that sounded queer out of his huge chest.

"Don't yell, you sauerkraut barrel," said Keno, advancing quickly and coolly. "You're

not in pickle yet. I want your gun and your pack of butts—that's all."

The fat Hun's glistening eyes protruded. His jaw sagged, and his breath came in, gathering strength to scream. Keno stepped up close and launched a jolt from the hip that banged the fat man on the button.

"I asked you for a smoke, yuh tub!" he said.

The Hun's eyes rolled up in his head and he went down like a circus tent. He was too bulky to fall flat—he merely sat on the floor with his chin on his breast and his belly on his knees, breathing with a gurgle. But he was out of the picture, clear off the map, and listening to the singing of mocking birds far away. Quickly Keno bent over him, searching him for weapon and cigarettes.

There was no weapon, not even a jack-knife. A gun, of course, was too much to have hoped for. But a knife would have helped. Keno knew how to make hot lightning out of cold steel in a close-in fight. His hope of that went glimmering instantly. It took him longer to accept the equally disappointing fact that the fat Hun snortling at his feet had no tobacco, either, and no matches. He wasted priceless and irretrievable seconds in searching the man's pockets, swearing softly beneath his breath. He could not find so much as one brown flake of Turkish or Virginia, nor one broken match-head.

"You're one sweet sister of a fighting man," he muttered wrathfully. "It's a wonder your mother even lets you lather your own chin."

ON THE bunk a suit of Von Hexemund's merchant mariner blues had been laid out. Keno slipped on the slacks and jerked the belt taut about his hard brown muscles. A man can fight better with leather tightened at his waist. The seconds he now had remaining to him were few—he knew it.

He wanted a smoke, to clear his head and let his thoughts move coolly. He wanted a gun in his hand, with which he would face hell. He wanted both, but which he wanted more he would have found it hard to say.

He was trapped, any way he took it. He had no plan of action. He needed something to steady him, that was the big thing. It was

only a question now of how he could make the biggest bang, and fog out with the biggest heat.

At any moment now——

The big tub sitting on the floor sighed and let out a great ungodly moan while Keno was plunging through the pockets of Von Hexemund's coat in a vain hunt for cigarettes. Someone tried the knob of the locked door then, and tapped sharply.

"*Herr Steuermann! Wer hat die Tür mit Schloss geschlossen?*" said a voice beyond the door—quiet, but quick with inquiry.

"Who has locked the door, Herr Steuermann?"

The voice of Von Hexemund!

The dazed Hun at Keno's feet groaned again, before he could be silenced. Keno banged him with a rabbit punch, and two hundred and fifty pounds of wienerwurst-fattened meat lay down on the floor with one arm wrapped about its ear and its knees bent languidly like a statue of Venus sleeping.

Again the knock, angrier, at the door. Again the voice, more deadly.

"Open the door! I want in!"

In that tense moment a cry resounded from aloft on the *Gulf Weed's* fore. It was taken up and repeated with a thunderous shout on the main deck and on the poop over Keno's head.

"*Zerstörer!*"

Which was to say, "Destroyer!"

Well, Von Hexemund still had some respect for the fierce little sub-hunters of the British fleet.

"Where away?" he cried.

"Two points abaft the starboard bow! And bearing down!"

Von Hexemund left the door. His quick light tread echoed up the companionway. He was snapping his swift commands on the run. Keno heard him on the deck above when the lookout sang out, with a voice of relief.

"False alarm! She's bearing off!"

Von Hexemund did not return at once. That moment had passed for Keno. But the clock would tick again, very soon.

KENO'S brown face was creased in a grin. It was the look with which he expected to face the Old Man with the Big

Scythe, when the moment for that should come, not to be avoided.

His nerves were on the jump. Who was Herr Steuermann—the "Mr. Quartermaster" that Von Hexemund had expected to answer from the cabin? It couldn't be the limp tub of guts on the floor, who was neither a Steuermann nor a Herr. And there was no place in the whole wide cabin large enough to be concealing another man, except possibly a narrow wardrobe with closed doors which stood by the bunk head, screwed fast to the wall.

Yet a feeling had risen in Keno that he was not entirely alone with the unconscious messcook any longer. He lifted down the Malay kris that hung above the melodeon on the wall. He swung at the wardrobe like a terrier.

"If there's anything alive in there, God have mercy on him or it!" he thought. "The same mercy I hope to get myself when I stand before the Big Judge tonight."

The wardrobe was stoutly locked, and no key in sight. He drove the crooked steel through the basswood door panel with one thrust that carried it to the hilt, feeling the blade cut into some yielding substance. There was no cry. He ripped and tore apart the paper-thin wood.

There was only clothing in the wardrobe. His nerves were hopping on him, that was the trouble. He breathed again, and grinned. He had stabbed Von Hexemund's winter greatcoat, hanging on a hook. A pile of crumpled linen was heaped up on the wardrobe floor, all of it reeking and greasy with kerosene, as if an oil-can had been accidentally spilled over it. Except for the greatcoat and a black leather jacket, the wardrobe seemed empty. However, when he had jerked the greatcoat from its hanger, he did find a complete and glittering new service uniform of a *Kapitän-Lieutenant* of the Imperial German Navy, with all its gold sleeve stripes, brass buttons, medals and service ribbons complete, and the white hilted, ruby crested sword of Von Hexemund hanging under it.

THE tinsel dress sword was worse than useless as a weapon in the desperate last stand fight which Keno saw coming. It was even more valueless than the crooked

Malay kris, which he had already abandoned. Not that a kris is not a flash of lightning and a grisly sickle of death in the hands of a little brown man making *juramentado*, but Keno did not know the trick of the weapon. A man must fight with the tools he knows. The kind of steel Keno knew how to handle advantageously was of the pattern designed by Colonel Bowie, which can be launched from the heel of the palm and find its mark in a man's heart ten yards off. Rather than hampering himself with Von Hexemund's beautifully chased but silly sword—a "white-man's-sticker-of-holes-in-the-air," that wicked old Arapahoe greatgrandfather of his would have called it—he would rather fight with a bottle in his fist.

He searched the wardrobe in ten seconds, perhaps less. Every pocket of every garment. And then the pile of oily linen on the floor. The condition of the latter was explained. From the floor a short pipe end projected, brimming to the top with kerosene. Someone had left the pipe uncapped, so that Von Hexemund's soiled linen, tossed on top of it, had sopped the volatile oil up.

"Pretty damned careless with his laundry, and also his tank connections," muttered Keno.

He squatted on his hams, fingering the pipe projection an instant and scowling.

"A Hun smarter than a batful of owls," he thought. "Looks like a baby who'd keep each screw locked tight, including those in his head. Yet he seems to have slipped up here. If some bird happened to flip a hot match into this pile, boy, what a heat there'd be!"

No gun in the wardrobe. Nor cigarettes nor matches. It was matches he wanted now.

A stray Mauser, loaded, had been too much to expect, even with blind hope. The *Gulf Weed*, in her rôle of merchantman, probably carried only a few small arms for her officers. The way the flying boat had been sunk indicated as much. The Hun raiders hadn't had enough artillery on board to sink her, but had needed to break her up with axes. The fewer guns on board, the less chance that any of them would be lying around loose. Keno wasn't counting on a gun till he felt one kicking in his fist.

But not so with cigarettes and matches. Some of each are ordinarily to be found in

one or more pockets of the average man's wardrobe. Not so here. If Von Hexemund was careless with his kerosene, he was almighty careful with his lights. And that was little to be wondered at, with a packed cargo of high explosive in the old wooden ship.

"I'd go to hell for a light," thought Keno. "And I'm damned near there. But still I haven't got it."

HE RECALLED the words about the *Gulf Weed* he had exchanged with Stumpy Coningsby while he was still adrift—acquiring subconsciously then, perhaps, his first creeping doubt and mistrust of the "Yankee windjammer." He remembered the plump destroyer man's sympathy for the windjammer's crew—"two weeks without cigarettes and wild for a smoke," as Coningsby had described it—and



and how he himself had laughed, because it seemed queer and absurd to him that a ship carrying tobacco in her cargo should suffer for

lack of the weed. It wasn't because she didn't have it, he realized now, but because she didn't dare to burn it—without running the danger of burning her own hell-loaded self, at the same time.

"If I strong-armed every Hun of the whole blasted crew," he thought, "it's a sure bet I wouldn't be able to scare up a single butt, or a light for my own makings if I had 'em. Here's the only ship on salt water without the stuff for one honest sailorman's smoke. That's the sort of a cock-eyed tub I've picked out to bump and board. Might as well have busted into the boudoir of the lady president of the Anti-Nicotine League."

He sprang up, glancing swiftly around the room again, with keen, narrowed eyes.

"I know one wild Arapahoe," he thought, "who's going to snake himself a heap big drag on the weed yet. Before this gang of sauerkraut-guzzlers shoves him off for the happy hunting ground, he'll light himself a war pipe that'll send smoke rings up to Mars. He's going to fog out with a grin on

his map and nicotine in his tonsils. Come on, think tank, do your stuff! Which shell has the little pea? Where was Stumpy Coningsby sitting while he was drinking corn dynamite with the Shark?"

He turned toward the three leather arm-chairs that were grouped by the opposite wall. The deck rose quietly up beneath him then, and he fell headlong.

## CHAPTER VII

### DEATH IN A CABIN

THE door was the only apparent entrance to the cabin—a fact of which Keno had taken care to assure himself as he entered. Therefore it was the point of danger he had been watching. In spite of that, he had been taken with the feeling that someone besides the huge blond mess cook was in the cabin with him.

He had not been wrong.

The destroyer whose threatened approach had alarmed Von Hexemund away from the door had passed without hail, standing well off. The fat man on the floor showed as yet no sign of regaining consciousness. The flesh of his neck was still red, the muscles of Keno's hand still sore, from the wallop that had sent him into slumberland. Though it seemed to Keno that hours had filtered by since he had come in the cabin, from the condition of affairs he knew that the time could not have been above ten minutes.

Absorbed in his quick hunt, and aware of only one point of immediate danger, the rise of the deck beneath his feet caught him without warning.

The twelve-foot square of plain linoleum in the center of the cabin floor was rising like the roof of an elevator—which was precisely what it was. He was caught with one foot on the edge of it, and flung on his face. The center square of deck continued to rise above him with the precision of well-oiled machinery, supported on four pillars. Up over the edge of the cavity thus formed the floor of the elevator came into view, till it was flush with the deck proper.

It contained a gyroscopic compass for precision sailing, a range-finder of the latest German battle pattern, a dial resembling an engine-room signal, and a small table stacked with code books, copies of

radiograms, naval orders, and the other business papers of a warship in active service. With German precision the range-finder was marked, in thick black Gothic letters, "*Abstand-Finder—Hand Los!*" The dial-signal was likewise marked, "*Torpedo-Feuer-Kontrolle-Signal—Hand Los!*" Even a ten-year-old Hottentot could have guessed that to be, "*Torpedo Fire Control Signal—Hands Off!*" And Keno was neither ten years old nor a Hottentot. He had fallen into the middle of Von Hexemund's battle station. Or rather, it had risen up beside him.

WHATEVER possibilities might reside in the appearance of the secret control room could not be seized by Keno. Nor had he time to think one instant about them. Two men were seated facing each other across the table, and one of them was addressing the other as the elevator came up.

"Again," he said. "Did Donnerkind run into us by accident, or because of suspicion?"

This man who had been talking had his back partially turned to Keno. That is, Keno had been tripped to the deck at a point somewhat behind the German's right shoulder, so that immediately the German did not catch sight of him sprawling. Which was just as well, since the big Prussian had a gun and knew how to use it, as he soon proved. He was a shaven-headed petty officer with red bristles on his gleaming skull, a powerful fellow with a hook nose and a jutting jaw—his sleeve markings those of a quartermaster, warrant rank. "Herr Steuermann," no doubt, the same "Mr. Quartermaster" whom Von Hexemund had been calling. He was holding a fountain pen poised in the air, in a big corded fist like the swab of a twelve-inch gun, above an opened ledger book in which he had been making entries.

"Since you refuse to talk," he said in hard, precise English, "I regret to inform you that the penalty is death. I require your name, next of kin, education, and civil or military honors. As a matter of record for the log."

"I," said the man opposite, "am Brian Boru, the Duke o' Car-rik. And if yez will

but bend your misshapen mug a bit nearer me, Hun dear, I will honor yez with a royal spit in the eye."

Little Dinty Doone was roped hand and foot to his chair, with his pale face swaying. He was a very sick man. Blood was trickling down from a bullet crease across his forehead, and the freckles stood out as brown as tobacco stains on the cotton whiteness of his skin. He shook his head, trying to clear away the drops that were creeping down into his eyes. His glance fastened on Keno and his eyes grew large as Keno sprang upright from the floor. He was too sick to think or be warned, and he cried out immediately.

"Yez lied!" he shrieked. "I knew all the pack of yez had not killed him!"

The Hun swung about before Keno had got to grips. His poised fountain pen stabbed the air interrogatively. But the hand at his belt was closed about the polished butt of his revolver.

THE pen began to shake. Drops of ink splattered down on the opened log book. They rained on his red hairy chest, naked except for his unbuttoned coat, oily with sweat and corded with great ropes of muscles. The inky pen dropped on the log book, rolling back and forth and leaving tracks. And the big German quartermaster was on his feet with his gun up.

Keno struck him with a panther spring. The gun was jammed against his heart. He caught his thumb beneath the hammer as it slammed. The impact had knocked breath out of him. The red German was heavy and strong. He had shoulders like iron. He wrenched the gun—wrenched Keno's thumb away. Keno leaped and caught the barrel in his fist as it came at him again, forcing it aside, beneath his left arm.

Little Dinty Doone was moaning in his throat, but they said no words nor uttered any sound. It was life they were fighting for, and they both knew it.

The arms of the strong man locked about Keno, he braced his legs, he bent his knees and heaved in a rib-cracking pressure. The breath went out of Keno. But his naked torso was slippery with sweat now, and he slipped clear, still holding hard to the blue steel barrel of the gun.

In the midst of that an electric buzzer

sounded, a pointer on the fire-control dial jerked to "Torpedo Battery 6 Ready," a red bulb flashed on the desk table, and the platform slid down beneath the floor again.

They were in a tight place now, a tomb in the bowels of the ship. The elevator platform itself was still brightly lighted by an overhead electric cluster, but as shut in as a grave. Around it on four sides were walls of baled cotton and tobacco, solidly pressed, letting in no light nor air. Keno breathed heavily. The heat was steaming. It took the sap from a man's strength, when he was fighting with straining muscles for his life.

Little Dinty Doone was gasping and whimpering. There was no other sound.

Slowly, with a terrible pressure, the giant hand forced the gun toward Keno's heart. He bent himself against it. It was a tussle of wrist and forearm strength. The weight was behind the great German, but on the barrel Keno had a better leverage than on the butt. He held the twisting of the gun, while the sweat rolled into his eyes. Slowly as it had been turned toward him, he forced it back toward the giant quartermaster's own breast.

"Ach Gott!" the enemy said between his teeth.

The Hun was stronger, but Keno was wirier. It was the strength of ponderous and splendidly corded gymnasium muscles against the lithe toughness of the mountains and the desert. The Hun could bear down, but Keno could endure. The Hun could crush, but Keno could writhe free.

**T**HE gun was between them, pointed athwart their breasts. They strained against it, and for it, tugging and pushing, breathing through the teeth.

And suddenly Keno gave in the direction of the red giant's forcing, very quick. The German staggered forward, and the gun swept around in a sharp half circle, farther than he willed. Again they were locked hard on it, struggling. But it was the German quartermaster's breast at which the muzzle pointed now, and his thumb which jammed the hammer from the pin.

Little Dinty Doone's head swayed back and forth, back and forth. He bowed his face, trying to wipe his bloody forehead on his shoulder.

"Oh, Mother Machree! Ochone! Oh, wurra, wurra!" he moaned.



A sweep of the red giant's left arm, and Keno's head was caught. The ponderous elbow cracked about the American's neck.

His face was clamped against the German's breast, and he could not breathe. His head felt to be pulling from his shoulders.

His grip on the gun relaxed, though he did not lose it. The powerful Hun was able to jerk the butt at him, hammering him on the face.

"Rat! Rat! Your brains I will smash out!" he gasped, hoarse with triumph.

His thumbs reached for Keno's eyes—thick and hard, with dirty nails like horn. Beads of sweat were over the red stubble on his shaven skull and jaw. His nostrils flared. His lips twisted in a grin, his tightly locked teeth gleamed. One thumb, reaching around Keno's cheekbone, caught at the corner of Keno's eyelid, digging, trying to tear, trying to reach the eye itself.

Keno gave him the knee then. Gave it to him with a swinging crack, his thigh muscles tightened like rubber bands. The giant German groaned, and his grip relaxed.

"Schweinhund!" he sobbed.

"And so's your old man," said Keno.

He had breath now to spare for a word. He felt the steel in those giant thews bending.

The table went over with a crash—it alone wasn't bolted to the floor. Reports and orders spilled like a drift of leaves. The log book crashed down at Keno's feet. The great *Geheimschriftsbuch*, the secret code book of the Imperial German Navy, was torn underneath their trampling feet.

The giant quartermaster's face was white and set. He breathed now with a hissing that was audible. The weight was still in his muscles, but the strong spring of them had weakened.

Keno himself was quivering with fatigue. But he had fought the Hun's strength down. He had the tougher heart.

HE HOOKED his heel behind the strong man's knee, and the Hun crashed backward like a great oak to the floor, pulling Keno down on top of him, and both wrestling for the gun. The German quartermaster's face and skull were lathered with sweat. His teeth brushed together like the teeth of a chattering bat.

The gun was pointed over the Hun's head now, at arm's length away. He could not bring it down to bear. Nor could Keno wrench it out of that solid and desperate grip.

Again the electric buzzer sounded quietly. On the overturned desk a yellow bulb glowed. The fire-control pointer jerked with a clacking sound, pointing to "All clear." The elevator rose again to be a part of the cabin.

"Give me the gun," said Keno breathlessly, "and I'll give you your life. By God, you fought for it!"

"*Teufelshund!*" the German choked.

He twisted his face, opening his mouth to shout for help. He had changed his mind about winning immortal glory and a rise in rank through smashing this fierce English fighting man unaided. He wanted help now, and all of it he could get.

Keno slammed the beaten German's jaw shut with a crack of his elbow, before the bellow had escaped. He caught the throbbing red-bristled throat in his left hand, his right still clinging to the gun barrel at arm's length above their heads. The giant quartermaster threshed about like a sea lion, flailing his free left hand against Keno's ribs with heavy blows. But Keno held the grip. A cry for help would bring the whole pack in, and was the same as a quick death warrant. It must be prevented, at the cost of any effort.

He could choke the Hun's mouth shut, but he could not also choke shut the long-barreled revolver pointed at arm's length away. The grip he held was about the barrel—he dared not shift hold to reach the hammer, lest he lose the gun altogether.

"Bang that, and I'll tear your throat out, as God lives!" he said.

Unutterable hate was in the German's eyes.

"*Schund!*" he choked.

His hand tightened about the trigger.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CLOSING NETS

ABOUT three bells that night—that is, half-past nine—Lieutenant Stumpy Coningsby, skipper of H. M. S. *Bimini*, had thought that he heard the cracking of distant small-arms fire from somewhere on that quiet, dark water, being then about five knots away from the *Gulf Weed's* position.

The plump destroyer man had good hearing, and an even more remarkable imagination. The month before at Harwich he had been able to catch the detonations, so he claimed, of Scheer's and Jellicoe's great clamoring guns at the Skager Rak, when two hundred thousand tons of slamming steel went down to the floor of Old Man Ocean. Perhaps Stumpy Coningsby had actually caught the reverberation of that tremendous thunder, though it seems impossible. He was an officer, a gentleman, and a salt water sailorman, and such men never lie, as is well known, though sometimes perhaps they are mistaken. All the world was filled with roarings in those days, anyway, with bellowings and boomings and bangings and the howls of pandemonium. There had been, for instance, blasts in France which had broken London windows. And there had been birds three miles in the air which had fallen stunned to earth from all that damned commotion. And there had been fishes from unknown depths of the sea, strange horrible beasts, which had floated to the surface dead and bellies up, knocked brainless out of their profound waters by the banging that filled the world. Certainly a man with a liberal imagination beneath his hat and plenty of good corn liquor beneath his belt could believe he was hearing almost anything, at any hour, during those thunderous days and years.

Whether or not Coningsby really caught the repercussion of small arms fire that night, the fact is that he believed he did, and he heeled his ship over immediately, plowing fast in the direction of the imagined spot.

PERHAPS, rather than a distant and inaudible sound, it had been an intuition which had stung his senses. There was a feeling of tremendous tension in the wind

that night, of great and hidden danger, which might very well have registered an active impression on even such a calm, beef-eating man as the skipper of the *Bimini*. Even a milk cow will grow restless, will nuzzle around and switch her tail, during a lull before a hurricane.

"I made that racket out to be about five knots off," he told Admiral Horselle. "You know, sir, it's possible our windjamming Yank, Bently, may have spotted the U-boat's periscope again—Von Hexemund's, I mean—and is pecking away at it with his blooming rifle, what? That's fighting nerve for you. That feller has it. A bit of a fighting beggar, what?"

"If you heard any blank-blank firing, then I'm a bloody marine," said the admiral.

"And again," said Coningsby, "there's an off chance it might have been Donnerkind, signaling with his balmy machine gun. He might be in trouble, strange as it may seem. I mean, you generally expect these flying birds to take care of their own jolly hides, what? Especially a wild west Yank like that chap. Yet his hull may have sprung a bit of a leak, and he may be in a bit of difficulty, don't you think?"

"I don't think," said Admiral Horselle grimly.

"Yet we might scout around, what?"

"I wouldn't muss up any feathers over Donnerkind. The feller had the look of a blank-blank thug to me. 'What is your name, sir, if you will be so kind?' I ask him, as gently and courteously as I am able, with a cordial, well-wishing inflection in my voice. 'Donnerkind, you blank-blank old whiskered ostrich!' he shouts at me."

"I think he just told you his name, sir," ventured Coningsby. "I don't think he said anything else, sir."

"Well, by God, but he looked it!" said the admiral.

The *Gulf Weed* had taken in canvas and was hove to when the *Bimini* came boiling down on her. The destroyer unloosed a full searchlight flood from a furlong off, drenching the windjammer's rigging and then her decks with light.

Nothing up aloft except her naked masts and shrouds. And nothing on her decks, either, except bales of Georgia cotton under

taraulins, and her crew lining the port rail curiously. It was all very innocent and peaceful. Stump Coningsby felt embarrassed because of the vague and incoherent anxiety which had assailed him.

HE SIGNALLED the engines one-third speed, and passed slowly alongside. "Captain Bently" leaned over his poop rail, eyeing the sharp destroyer fixedly through his gleaming horn rims, Coningsby hailed him in passing, asking the trouble.

"Fouled rudder," answered the windjammer captain laconically, and the *Bimini* slid on.

"Nice spirit," said Coningsby to the admiral. "Did you hear those beggars cheering?"

Admiral Horselle was rubbing his eyes. "Damn me!" he said. "But that was infernal queer."

"What, sir?" said Coningsby.

"Why," said the admiral, "I had the hallucination for a second that a blank-blank



naked man, as bare as the day he was born, had popped up out of nowhere and was walking slowly along the star-

board rail. I looked again, and the blasted shadow was gone."

"Well, why not?" said Coningsby.

"I don't know," said the admiral.

The *Bimini* cruised about within a radius of five miles or so from the windjammer for the next half hour, causing the raider's watchful captain some annoyance whenever she approached within a sea mile. Ten minutes or so after briefly speaking, the destroyer did stand in swiftly toward the brig once more, abaft the starboard beam; and once more the wireless had to be reeled in, the torpedo stations manned. The British ship, however, was merely on a loose prow. She made away again, a half mile off.

Stumpy Coningsby was still hunting Von Hexemund's mythical submarine with his searchlights and sound amplifiers, but now on the lookout also for the flying boat of Lieutenant Keno Donnerkind and Flight Quartermaster Doone. A morbid uneasi-

ness about that boat continued to trouble the plump destroyer man. His nature was bluff and warm hearted, and he had a genuine sense of liking for the impudent young Yank flying man.

He sent in a call to the Hornsmouth naval air station speedily, sorry now that he had not communicated before, at the time he had spoken Keno.

"RNAS HS-631, Lieutenant Donnerkind commanding, spoken about hour and half ago," he flashed the code, "down forty knots off shore. Has she reported in?"

"Still out," Hornsmouth replied. "Please all details."

"Hour 20:30, within ten minutes," Coningsby reported. "Fifty-two forty, two forty, each within five minutes. Hull tight, and sea calm. Intending to make shore under own power. Down to cool motor and smoke up, Donnerkind reported. Have not spoken since."

"Please keep eyes open," Hornsmouth replied.

"Try a shilling's worth of eyewash yourselves," Coningsby flashed, "with the compliments of the destroyers."

"The eyes of the fleet to the toenails of the fleet, fond greetings," Hornsmouth replied. "Will send seaplanes at earliest surface visibility, hour 4:00, about. Donnerkind has probably made himself fast to your stern, riding tow. He's a smooth Yank. Look astern, and see."

"Impudent beggars!" growled Coningsby.

"Blank-blank court-martial!" said Admiral Horselle when he had read the radiogram.

FOR half an hour Coningsby cruised about, piling his ship on her crooked courses as restless as a water spider. There was no trace of the flying boat, wing or wreckage, though he winnowed the sea clean.

"It's obvious Donnerkind must have got her off and at least a good way toward shore, before being forced down again," he grumbled to the admiral. "The Yank's probably lying adrift now a hundred yards off the Hornsmouth runways. But the so-called eyes of the fleet couldn't see him with a stellar projector."

"The boat's not within ten knots of us, at any rate," said the admiral.

In that statement he was, however, wrong. The three ton flying boat, a crashed and shattered wreck, was probably within a quarter mile of him—straight down. Wallowing slowly and heavily down through the pressure of deep waters toward the bottom slime. And deep sea fishes with curious headlamp eyes were no doubt now nosing luminously around her, drinking with faces of disgust the oil from her sump bed.

"And yet," said Coningsby, "I can't get it out of my balmy head that I heard firing. And from the approximate position where Donnerkind ought to have been. Bently might have heard it, too. He's a chap that looks keen."

So, after half an hour of it, Coningsby laid his course toward the *Gulf Weed* again, this time to question her. He was seven knots off when he came about, and he plowed the course in an inch under twelve minutes.

Again the crew lining her rails. Coningsby described an arc and laid alongside. Over the taffrail Von Hexemund, irritated to the point of cold fury now, greeted him with gleaming eyes.

"Aho?" said the Shark coolly. "Would you gentlemen like another little bracer?"

"I heard firing from near your position," said Coningsby bluntly.

"When?" said Von Hexemund.

"About three bells," said the destroyer man. "Small arms. And I'm damned sure I heard it."

"Well, so did I," said Von Hexemund, after an instant.

"My first notion was that you might have run foul of Von Hexemund again," said the destroyer man.

"Sorry I can't do anything for you," said the Hun coolly. "I fancy you'll have to go a long way from here to find him. Instead of wasting your time and oil running around these parts like a headless chicken, why don't you concentrate up on the Wash?"

"We're concentrating, all right, Yank," exclaimed the destroyer man kindly. "But not quite so far away, thank you. The Hun's not up by the Wash, don't fool yourself. We've planted our cordon about six

hundred square miles of sea, and slowly but surely we're closing it up. We know Von Hexemund's somewhere inside our ring. We've been picking up his code. He's no farther off than twenty knots from here, at the outside, on any bearing."

"You Britishers are jolly clever," said Von Hexemund.

"We try to keep on our toes," said the destroyer man modestly.

"Tracking him down by wireless," said Von Hexemund. "Just fancy!"

"Oh, we have plenty of tricks he's never heard about," said the destroyer man with a fat grin. "We'll outsmart him, what? But all the same, we haven't got him yet. Not quite. I'd keep my eyes open, if I were you, skipper."

VON HEXEMUND glanced thoughtfully over the gray six-inch guns of the main after battery, which were swung around and sloping at his decks—himself standing slam in the muzzle of one gun. His big forehead was wrinkled. There were little beads of moisture collected around the scalp line of his kinky yellow hair. He took off his glasses and wiped them, and his eyes were a small round blue.

He smiled.

"Thank you, Captain," he said. "I'll keep my eyes open."

"Where away was that blank-blank firing you heard?" broke in the admiral.

Von Hexemund made a dubious gesture.

"Off to port."

"A fight? That is, an exchange of shots?" said the admiral. "Or did it sound like just one boat's armament, such as a machine gun, banging off a blasted fusillade?"

"That was more like it," said Von Hexemund steadily.

"H'm!" said the admiral, turning to Stumpy Coningsby. "Your Yank flying man may have got into trouble, after all. It would be about here. Uncorking a few rounds of his bloody Lewis gun as a distress signal, it would look like. Mister Bently," he said to Von Hexemund, "did you see anything of a flying boat adrift in the offing? It looks like one of our air force units may have foundered, and we'll have to stand by till daylight to look for wreckage."

Von Hexemund had polished his horn rimmed spectacles and returned them to his eyes. His look was blank, but thoughtful. He corrugated his brow. The sweat collecting at the edge of his crinkly yellow hair slid down into the creases of his forehead.

It was, however, a moisture of warm thoughts, and not of fear. The Shark wasn't much afraid of anything, except possibly of the mountainous explosives lying beneath his feet. Even the coolest man, of course, might find his nerves tensioned to the snapping point, in time, living above a death like that. And Von Hexemund had lived with his fifty tons of TNT for six long weeks.

He was in a cold fury. Damned flying boat! Why had she needed to run foul of him? And why had her damned pilot needed to be so quick of eye? The Shark didn't care to have the *Bimini* standing by. He'd have to blow her out of the water then, which would spoil bigger game. He was lying in ambush for a herd of big bull elephants. If he frightened the elephants away by shooting one silly sparrow, it would be a disgrace.

THE confident men on the bridge of the fierce little destroyer never knew the thoughts that passed so swiftly behind the windows of Von Hexemund's eyes.

"It was the seaplane firing, I'm fairly sure," he said. "Just as you gentlemen were smart enough to guess. However, she soon appeared all right. She arose with a roar, and went flying low over my bow."

"Did you get the number?" said the admiral.

"The HS-631," said Von Hexemund. "I have it entered in my log."

Which was no lie.

"That was Donnerkind's boat, and none other," said Stumpy Coningsby, with a sigh of relief. "Queer, though, she hasn't reported in."

"Which way headed?" said the admiral keenly.

"East," said Von Hexemund. "Toward the Dutch coast."

Stumpy Coningsby's plump face went white at that.

"The boy lost his bearings," he said.

"A navy man?" shouted the admiral.

"You know better! The blasted Yank's deserted with his ship!"

He drew in a deep hissing breath. His bristly beard quivered. He banged the bridge rail with his fist. It was a moment before he could control himself. After all, for all his bellowing and his blasphemy, a thing like



desertion hit him hard. It was a black blow to the whole navy, even if committed by a Yank with a German name, against whom certain high admirals in London had plenty of suspicion.

"Forget about that," he said after a moment. "You may have been mistaken. Spread your canvas and get under way. We're clearing up the forties."

"In preparation for a fleet movement?" said Von Hexemund.

"None of your blank-blank business, sir," said the admiral. "Stand in ten knots to shore. There are twenty-six big and God-almighty ships coming through your present position, my man, as straight as a plumb line. We don't want to crash a bow into any blank-blank Yankee windjammer."

Behind his glasses Von Hexemund's eyes sparkled.

"My rudder's still fouled, admiral," he said. "I'm standing by while I clear it. It may mean an all night job."

"Speed it up!" said the admiral. "Pipe both watches, and set all hands to it! Be sure you're ten knots well inshore by the end of the second watch. The cruiser fleet is coming through, and it stops for nothing."

"I'll make away as best I can, sir," said Von Hexemund coolly, "soon as my helm will answer. But I can't say when. You know these square-riggers yourself, Admiral. They're not steam. You can't always lay them down upon the minute. There's little enough push in the wind tonight, sailing it straight down. And if I'm forced to lay it on my starboard beam, standing in, or if I don't clear my rudder, you needn't be surprised when you see me still hard by, come daylight."

"I don't care how the hell you get away,"

said the admiral. "But get away! Clear out of this sea lane before dawn. If you don't you'll get slammed."

"Thanks for the warning, sir," said Von Hexemund.

"It's not a warning," said the admiral. "It's a blank-blank command."

The *Bimini's* screws bit the water. She rumbled off and keeled southwest, for Harwich. Running miles and miles away. Miles and miles away.

The water was deserted.

ONLY after a long moment did Von Hexemund relax from his studied air of nonchalance. He gripped the rail against which he had been leaning, and drew himself up to his thin, inflexible height. With his mouth like a bent nail, he laughed.

"We'll stand here, Mister Lieutenant," he said coolly to his second in command. "Haul up the American flag to your peak. Let's see them try to slam that down."

"Shall I break out the wireless again, sir?" said the lieutenant. "We've been out of communication for some time."

"Flash, 'All clear, no further communication,'" said Von Hexemund. "I see we must cease transmission. These jackasses have long ears, and I'm obliged to them for warning me. I'm not going to have their destroyer cordon converge on top of me, tracking my code down. Even they might see me if they bumped me—then."

The first officer grinned and saluted. He vanished down the main hatchway to the hold, where, carefully concealed among tightly stowed bales of cotton, hides and tobacco, the wireless room was tucked away, above false decks which formed the great torpedo magazine and the loading platform for the tube batteries.

Von Hexemund paced up and down his quarterdeck with the quick, light tread of a nervous wolf, walking softly. The midsummer air seemed motionless now, the small north wind had died, a suffocating hush lay over the nocturnal water. The sweat gathered into drops on Von Hexemund's high, creased forehead.

Presently the first officer had returned.

"Communication received from the *Barbarossa*," he reported.

Von Hexemund read the radiogram:

"Received hour 21:21 Greenwich. From Commanding Officer Imperial German High Seas Scouting Fleet, SKMK *Barbarossa*, lat. 53° 50' N., long. 6° 10' E. To Von Hexemund. DECODED. Steaming twenty-seven knots. Course 255. Norderney astern. Off Texel 0:45 Greenwich. In position to engage 4:55 Greenwich. Danger proceed further without communication. Absolutely imperative you guarantee minimum forty per cent of enemy metal and tonnage wiped out before I come in range. If you cannot do it, warn. If you cannot do it, warn. If you cannot do it, warn.

Excellency."

The bent nail of Von Hexemund's mouth became a hook. He crumpled the message in his fist.

"A desk-going admiral has stepped into salt water, and found he's got cold feet," he said.

HE PAUSED at the entrance to the after companionway, shaking the crumpled radiogram in his strong, bony fist a moment. He hurled it to the deck and scuffed it underfoot. He was tense with fury and contempt.

"What do I need with the bald old fool?" he said. "It is I who slaughter the lion and cure its pelt—so that his most exalted Excellency may rush down as hot as brass and as bold as buttons to claim the dead beast's mane."

The first officer grinned, but was discreetly silent. The Shark had those moments of raving against the gold-braids and the brass hats who, safe ashore, stole the glory of his victories. All fighting men have such moments. And when they have shot their mouths off, they go on and fight some more.

"Is there an answer, sir, for Excellency?"

Von Hexemund's tight lips twisted.

"Assure his nibs, Mister Lieutenant, by all means! Oh, don't let the dear old lady lose her beer through anxiety! Answer, 'I am Von Hexemund!' That is enough."

He stooped to pick up the radiogram, for it must be filed among his records and copied into the log. In midst of the casual gesture he paused, half crouched, and his fingertips resting on the deck, like a man turned to stone. He stared at the deck beside his hand, at the head of the companionway.

Upon the white, holystoned planks he saw the imprint, still wet, of a naked foot.

## CHAPTER IX

### CORNERED

THE Shark's hand darted very quickly inside his coat, to the gun strapped across his breast.

"*Feind an Bord!*" he shouted.

His cry was swallowed up by the shattering racket of pistol fire, bursting out with sudden fury from his cabin aft down the companionway. *Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!* Six shots, emptying out a gun, as rapidly as a man in mortal terror could fan and pull the trigger. Von Hexemund's subconscious mind counted them, clicking them off in the machinery of his brain, while for a split instant he stood dazed and swaying.

The repercussions slammed, and silenced. The gun was emptied. It could not fire again. Von Hexemund's quick and powerful mind took command of itself. He guessed the situation.

"We've got our damned flying man at last," he said, "as sure as immortal hell!"

Running from waist and forecabin, or swarming like wild cats down the rigging, his crew of roaring fighting men gathered on swift padding feet. With a shout they rushed the door, a human battering ram that filled the companionway and heaved in a swirl of locked muscles, driving against the door with one terrific push. But the door was steel and the lock was good, it had been built to stand off just such brute assaults.

VON HEXEMUND himself led that wild and murderous rush. But he did not waste much effort on it, after his first fury had boiled away in sweat. He set himself back on his heels to cool, calling off his men.

He surveyed the door—and the situation.

"Are you all right, Herr Steuermann?" he asked quietly. "Jonas, all right?"

His men were swarming like ratters over the poop, prying at porthole and fanlight shutters. But the shutters had all been tightly battened down from the inside, to prevent the letting out of light. And like the door, they were plate steel.

"Herr Steuermann?" said Von Hexemund softly. "Did he get your gun?"

An instant's pause.

"I did," said Keno through the door.

"But empty!" said Von Hexemund.

"I'm afraid you called it, Jerry," said Keno regretfully. "I couldn't stop the big tough baby. He was all set to bang for help from you birds. So he banged."

"Let him answer for himself," said Von Hexemund quietly. "Jonas, how goes it?"

"Afraid you'll have to go below if you want to parley with your big, bruising quartermaster," said Keno in a voice as quiet. "I couldn't get the rod clean away

from him. But I wrassled him for it, you see.

And he was banging away so wild and careless that he poked the last

big noise clean through his ear."

Von Hexemund's eyes grew hard.

"Gone?" he said.

"In one ear and out the other," said Keno.

"I see," said Von Hexemund.

The Shark's nostrils quivered. He repressed his fury. The giant quartermaster had been his crack torpedo-man, the man who had sped the iron fish at the *Relentless*.

And yet, no great price to have paid for Donnerkind.

The Shark was thinking swiftly, with that big, sagacious brain of his which made his forehead wrinkle and his eyes gleam. He analyzed the situation, like a problem in chess.

The lunatical Britisher had come aboard naked and unarmed. The cabin contained no weapon for use in a suiciding sortie or a last stand defense. It would have been better for the Britisher to have gone down in the sea.

**N**OR, except for the instruments on the elevator control platform, was there anything vital which the enemy intruder was in position to damage, however long he remained master of the cabin. Oh, he could rip a few books to pieces, smash the melodeon, break Von Hexemund's sword, and so on—like a junkman making war. But such petty sabotage, unless the flying man was a greater fool than Von Hexemund took him for, would hardly seem worth doing.

The lean-eyed Britisher was bold and shrewd. Von Hexemund had gauged him in that brief moment when they first met face to face.

But he need not cost the life of one more German now. He was trapped.

Von Hexemund motioned his first officer to set in operation the gear for lowering the cabin control platform, which could be manipulated from the poop.

"Hey, sing out before you do that next time!" shouted Keno. "You nearly caught my little Irish sidekick."

The instruments were safe beneath the cabin floor.

"Detail a man to each porthole, armed with handspikes," Von Hexemund ordered his lieutenant. "Two first-class marksmen, with sidearms, at the head of the companionway, covering the door. The remainder of the crew, to their stations. There is no situation here that needs disturb the routine of the ship."

He turned to the door again and examined it a moment, with bent brows.

"You in there!" he said. "Let me tell you you're a cool fellow. And with plenty of courage—or audacity. But I fancy you're intelligent enough to know your jig's up. You haven't any weapons in there, except a couple of tin swords. And the only chance you'll have to use them is to commit *hari-kari*, if you've got a taste for that. I can blow this door down in half an hour, if I give the order—though, frankly, I'd rather not have the trouble and the mess. Your position is hopeless from any angle, as you can see. You are cornered. You can't hold out any time. You can do me no damage except a temporary inconvenience. When a sensible man can no longer fight, he strikes his colors. I advise you to look over your situation coolly, and to reflect on its futility."

"Few what?" said Keno.

"Futility," said Von Hexemund sharply. "That's what you're up against."

"Yes," said Keno after a moment, and in a slow voice, "I'm cornered, all right. I figured that much out all by myself. I'm pretty good at figures."

"Very well," said Von Hexemund. "Open this door, and surrender."

"I've thought about that," said Keno. "But somehow it doesn't appeal. I'm warn



and comfortable, as is. I've got a soft bunk to lie on, and plenty of books to read. I don't know that you have anything better to offer me outside. Would your mind telling me where you keep your white mule—Virginia whisky? I don't seem to be able to locate it."

"The drink is drunk," said Von Hexemund shortly.

"Now, ain't that hell!" said Keno.

"I advise you to open this door!" said Von Hexemund.

**JERRY,**" said Keno, "my old man taught me there are three things never to argue about. One is politics, and another is religion, and the third is the delicate subject of opening a bedroom door. If the parties present are all agreed on the same idea, fine and dandy. But if they've got their own different viewpoints, you'll only waste a lot of breath trying to change 'em. You've got your own notions, and I've got mine. Let's leave it that way."

"Doubtless," said Von Hexemund, "you are hugging the hope that one of your damned destroyers will board me again for examination. Let me assure you that such is hardly likely to happen. My papers have been examined by every flea-brain on the water, from the Hebrides east and the Orkneys south. Do not count on your destroyers. In the unlikely contingency that one boards, I torpedoed."

"I'm not counting on any destroyers," said Keno. "I'm a flying man, and I stand on my own."

"You are Donnerkind?" said Von Hexemund. "I've heard of you."

"I'm more famous than I thought," said Keno.

Von Hexemund's mouth was twisted with a savage look. He was filled with hate of flying men, and of this man Donnerkind. He controlled his voice.

"Fine work you did in the capture of the U-69," he said levelly. "My professional congratulations, even on the other side of the fence. I've often wished to meet you."

"Shake!" said Keno. "I've heard of you, too, and your work on the *Sister of Mercy*. I've hoped we'd become acquainted."

"Fancy our bumping into each other this way!" said Von Hexemund, letting a note of geniality, like a drop of oil glittering in

water, creep into his flat voice. "By God, if you're Donnerkind of the flying boats, I'm going to think of you as my guest rather than my prisoner. Open up the door, old chap, and I'll see if I can scout you up a drink. We'll have a few things to talk over, what? Just turn the top latch, it draws a three-way bolt. You'll find it operates quite easily."

"You didn't understand me, Von Hexemund," said Keno quietly. "I said I've heard of you."

**A** WILD screech of laughter, more simian than human, burst forth from the cabin immediately Keno had spoken. The hilarious yells, hoots, gibberings and squawkings of Dinty Doone filled Von Hexemund's fastidious ears with a medley of unpleasant sounds. The little Irishman was apparently, by the commotion he was making, throwing himself around the cabin in a jubilant swirl of cartwheels, somersaults and grasshopper leaps, to the accompaniment of a wild shrieking and jabbering that was one part English, two parts Ersk, and ninety-seven parts plain howling monkey talk.

"Ochone! Urrah! Erin go bragh and down with the Dutch!" Dinty screeched like a treeful of baboons. "Yez want to come in, do yez? Wee-how! Just draw the bolt, yez says? Mother Machree! Come in, and I'll crack yez with a bottle on the nut that'll slam your teeth clean down into your appeny-cutis. Urrah! ee-yow! boola-boola! Yez fish-hearted murderer, did yez not order me shot like a rat after yez had pumped me dry? Try and do it! Whooray! whoopsy-doops! yaw-haw! urrah! urrah! ochone! fitz-meow! whoops!"

Von Hexemund drew his stiff body back, with his neck and claws tensed like an angry cat. His tight lips opened at one corner, showing his locked teeth.

"Prepare to blow the door from its hinges, Mister Lieutenant, with a series of small charges," he said coolly. "Do not try to rush it, but go at it with care. It can be quite safely done by localizing the force of the explosions. You will take, of course, extreme precautions."

"*Jawohl, Herr Kapitän!*" said the first officer with a grim chuckle. "I'm not taking

any chances with the cargo below, you don't need to fear."

Von Hexemund's eyebrows lifted.

"I do not fear," he said. "But I think."

He heeled, and mounted to his quarter-deck, walking stiffly. The strains of the melodeon rose up presently through the shuttered fanlights, accompanying Keno's roaring bass and Dinty Doone's cracked treble in "The Wearing of the Green."

**H**E KNEW war, did Von Hexemund. He was very adept at it. He knew ships, campaign strategy and battle tactics; he knew, with a fine mechanical brain, the devices of death, all of the latest pattern which were the tools of his profession or trade. But also, with a knowledge as scientific and exact, he knew the workings of men's minds. A trained psychologist. Honors graduate, Doctor of Philosophy degree, majoring in psychiatry, of the University of Jena.

"They're singing high," he thought coolly.

"But they'll be singing low before very long. The Irish quartermaster—hystericomaniac type—he'll wilt first. That damned U-boat killing Donnerkind is tougher. Almighty tough in his way. A heart of leather. But still, he's nobody's

optimistic fool. He belongs to the breed that'll fight with tooth and claw so long as fighting gives them one slim chance. But when he's met his death, with no way out, he'll stand up with a grin and accept it. Fryat was that sort when he faced the firing squad. And Cavell."

And, when the midnight had passed, down in the cabin Keno was humming old cotton-field darky spirituals, those wailing croons of death, in a deep, reverberant voice that had in it a quality of fatality. Dinty Doone had stopped singing.

## CHAPTER X

### HIDDEN HELL

**T**HE forcing in of the cabin door required more time than Von Hexemund had estimated, as a result of the extreme

precautions deemed advisable on a ship herself no more than a floating ammunition-dump. A hand drill was the only tool available for boring charge-holes in the joints of the door casement. A tedious and blister-raising job. It didn't tend to make the grim crew, grunting and sweating at the work, feel any more merciful towards Keno.

Yet the setting of the charges, though tardy, moved along. Von Hexemund stepped down and inspected progress at intervals. Not till dawn would he need access to his fire-control platform. And the cabin would be emptied of its two tenacious rats long before then.

He paced up and down. His work, the anxiety of it, the preparation and the toil, was finished. The game would soon begin. His small, hard eyes had a bright gleam.

**S**TANDING, as he did, athwart the dead center of the British fleet's seaway, he could count with assurance on the result. It was his intention to wait till the first six battle-cruisers and eight cruisers of the line had steamed eastward past him, and stood off upon his port. The *Courageous*, *Angry* and *Indomitable* would probably be leading the line, the *Furious*, sister to the lost *Relentless*, would bring up as flagship of the second squadron. Lying then in the midst of the great fleet, with targets on all bearings, he would unloose his salvo of eighteen giant torpedoes, port and starboard, bow, beam and stern. With that first salvo he counted, mathematically, on sinking not less than six major ships—a hundred and fifty thousand tonnage, say. And as much again, immediately, piling his second salvo into a bewildered and disrupted line.

Six salvos—well, he'd never need them. After the second, let Excellency step in and lick the edges of the platter like a dog with greasy meat.

In the tumult and confusion of the attack, the ships swerving, the ships colliding, the ships wallowing out of line, the thunderous death of stricken hulls lifted by the explosion of their own magazines keel-deep out of the sea—in all that terror there was little likelihood, thought Von Hexemund, that his own tall brig, with her starry banner at her peak, would be detected as the focal point from which the rushing shoals of red-



and-nickel warheads were emanating. His torpedos were ruddered to break surface not nearer than two hundred yards off. Only at such a distance from him, or more, would their white streaks begin to foam, and they leaping to their marks across the flat dawn water.

Von Hexemund, with cool arithmetic, rated his chances of being detected as not greater than fifteen in a thousand. However, if he was detected—which meant, suspected—by one of the convoying destroyers of the cruiser fleet, and approached with intent to board and search down to the bottom hold, he was prepared for that, too. The *Gulf Weed* would never be captured.

She carried secrets of the German Great Naval War Staff, in the way of mechanical inventions, torpedo release gear, torpedo propulsive and detonating mechanism, wireless directional finder, and the new high explosive, Hesselmann 6, the latest horrendous product of the German chemical genius; as well as her great code books, log, and battle orders—secrets which she would never yield. In the last act, if suspected, boarded, made prisoner and searched, Von Hexemund had mined his priceless wind-jamming raider to blow her to the roof of hell—even though himself taken by surprise, and under close, watchful guard.

AND the way of it was this—a heap of oily rags, tossed with seeming carelessness upon his wardrobe floor. A short pipe, brimming with kerosene, leading down to a fuse end six inches below his cabin floor. The fuse leading to a thousand pounds of Hesselmann 6 and TNT in the *Gulf Weed's* great torpedo magazine at the bottom of her hold, primed to bang the warheads of a hundred giant torpedos at one slam. A casual gesture in the face of his close, watchful guard—"Gentlemen, a cigarette?" A lighted match to the weed's tip. A careless flick of the burning stem onto the heap of dirty linen lying on his wardrobe floor. A slow flame creeping down the fuse through the bowels of the ship, timed to fifteen minutes by the clock. And when the fuse had burned down to its end—!

Von Hexemund had timed the fuse for fifteen minutes, to the dot. That would give him just time to lay a sea mile behind him in

his boats. And he wanted all of a mile away. He knew how that thing would hit.

Smoking was forbidden on the *Gulf Weed*. And the man of her crew who lit a pipe on her, or who was so much as found with a match in his possession, would be hoisted with a running bowline around his neck to the peak of the mizzenmast. There had been one off the Hebrides, a boatswain's mate, a big, jolly fellow, and off Von Hexemund's own U-101, at that, a fellow who had made many a cruise with Von Hexemund, and had been pointer and gun captain of the submarine's bow 5-inch on the day when she shelled the lifeboats of the *Sister of Mercy* with their loads of women and wounded men; there had been this boatswain's mate, who had not been able to keep away from his beloved *Rauch-stinker*, but had craftily smuggled it aboard at Norfolk, along with a tobacco pouch and a carton of matches, in defiance of strict orders. Von Hexemund had caught the culprit red-handed in a rainy night off the Hebrides, stealing a whiff of the weed while standing topside watch; and had sent him up to the peak ten minutes later with a rope knot bent beneath his ear, squealing like a pig as his feet were jerked from deck.

Von Hexemund was thinking of that harsh disciplinary act, perhaps, and of other things, and of many things—of ships he had cruised on and shipmates he had known, of ships he had sunk and ships that had tried to sink him, of men he hated and women who loved him, of glory and the roar of war and battle to be met presently in the dawn—of these things, or a multitude of others, he was thinking with the smooth machinery of his great bulging brain, while he paced up and down his decks beneath the starless sky.

His mouth was a straight nail.

THE nocturnal sea was deserted. Since he had ceased wireless transmission, he observed with satisfaction, the restless destroyers had drawn away from him on their erratic courses. They were concentrating about the waters to the south and east, below the rim of the invisible sky. Only infrequently did the faint reflection of a searchlight at the edge of that heavenly bowl—glimmering no brighter than a glow-worm and fading out at once—tell Von Hexemund

of where the destroyers were working.

He bent his mouth.

"Ah!" he said to his first officer. "Apparently they are converging on me."

"They'll have you cornered at the South Pole before you know it," said the first officer with a grin.

The Shark had not slipped from the cordon. But the cordon had slipped away from around him. The destroyers, in fact, had caught the signals of a lone-cruising U-boat around Fifty-two, and had confused them with the *Gulf Weed's* signals which they were picking up no longer. Von Hexemund guessed the situation. He was alone upon his corner of the sea. And it was his till the sea should crack apart.

Till the sea should crack apart, and the roof of hell lift up, and the keel of the *Gulf Weed* be blown to the mountains of the moon!

"A hot night, sir," said the first officer to Von Hexemund.

"Yes, Mister Lieutenant," said Von Hexemund, wiping the sweat from the rim of his crinkly hair. "There is an oppressive feeling in the air. And I fancy that it will be growing hotter."

At one of the morning, between two and three hours after the audacious enemy in the cabin had been discovered, the first officer was able to report to Von Hexemund with satisfaction that the door stood ready to be blown down.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE TORCH OF DEATH

**K**ENO DONNERKIND lay on his back in Von Hexemund's bunk, with his feet comfortably elevated on the footpiece while he smoked a cigarette.

"I had a tough time getting hold of them, Dinty," he said. "But they're all the sweeter for the wait."

"Yez said a lungful, Leftenant, dear," said Dinty, letting ripples of smoke seep slowly from his round, hairy nostrils. "Yez said a mouthful and a noseful, me darling boy. 'Tis not the weed, but the lack of it, that's sweet, after yez gets to thinking how much yez might be wanting it if yez did not have it, though now yez have it yez wish not, so yez could be wanting it again."

"Is that what's called an Irish cow?" said Keno.

"Bull's the word, me boy," said Dinty.

"And a good word," said Keno. "An Irish bull. But I get your drift, Dinty. The weed



is like a woman.

When you haven't got it and are chasing it, you think you'd be in heaven if you had it. But when you've finally landed it, after going through whatever hells are necessary, you sort of wish you wanted it half as bad as when you didn't have it. It's the wanting and the chasing that are pleasant, maybe, more than the having."

"Yea," said Dinty, "maybe."

"I located right off the bat which chair Stumpy Coningsby had been sitting in while he and the admiral were chewing soap with our Hun host," said Keno. "It was easy enough to tell—the beam end of Stumpy's pants had pressed a hollow in the chair cushion that'll never have the same sweet girlish curve again. But Stumpy's pack of butts and matches had got wedged down so deep between the cushion and the arm that I missed 'em complete the first time I looked. Scouted around every other possible place, before I went back to the old chair again. And then I nearly had to pull the stuffing out to find the butts. All Stumpy had mentioned, anyway, you remember, was that he had left 'em somewhere in the cabin. Guess it's lucky they happened to have slid down that way out of sight, or Stumpy'd have remembered to carry 'em off with him."

"And you and me," said Dinty, "would be smoking naught better than our own breath for comfort now."

"We wouldn't be smoking that," said Keno. "If it hadn't been for thinking of Stumpy's butts, and wanting 'em so bad, I don't reckon I'd ever have come up out of the water. How many left now?"

"Two," said Dinty with a sober face.

Keno nodded grimly.

"Well, we've dragged 'em out for the better part of three sweet hours," he said. "We can remember that in hell."

"We best put these two aside for morning," said Dinty, "when our throats'll be

aching for another drag on the weed. Never forget, tomorrow's always another day, as the Good Book says."

"Not for us, you little Scandinavian," said Keno with a grin. "They're all set to bump the door down in the next ten minutes. Take it, Dinty. Drag it long and sweet. Here, light your butt on mine. I'm saving matches."

THEY bent their faces together, Keno's dark brown face, with pale narrowed eyes, and Dinty's little freckled monkey face, with the bloody furrow above his scarlet eyebrows. They looked at each other a moment understandingly, eye to eye. The smoke of their last cigarettes went up between them.

"A hot box I got you into, boy," said Keno, "by coming down to bump this damned windjammer."

"Ah, sir-r, 'twas not your fault," said Dinty. "And if 'twas, ye've saved the fleet. And maybe England. 'T would make me turn in me grave to see the bloody Dutch come up and beat the English—'tis the private job of an Irishman."

"You take it gamely, boy," said Keno.

"And yez, sir-r?" said Dinty.

"I never had a yen to live forever," said Keno. "But you're a married man, Dinty. Got wife and kids. That ought to make a difference. You must be thinking of 'em a little bit."

"Oh, aye," said Dinty. "And it is fair worrying me who they will be supporting in me old age, with me now down below the sea in the bellies of a quillion fishes. They'll miss the sight of the old man sitting on the doorstep with the pig, drinking his poteen and usquebaugh. Who'll they have to stumble over now and kick out of the way? And who'll the missus have to chase off the stoop with the handle of her broom?"

"The pig," said Keno.

"Oh, aye, they'll never know I'm gone," said Dinty. "But the pig'll miss me. A fair, fond creature. He wears a green ribbon round his neck, and his tail is as trim as a corkscrew. Have yez saved plenty of matches, sir-r?"

"Plenty!" said Keno. "Though I think one will do the trick."

They dragged their cigarettes down.

And Von Hexemund was at the door. He rapped on it with the muzzle of his gun. Keno watched and listened, with an iron grin. He and Von Hexemund were going to see a lot more of each other in the next eighteen million years.

"In there!" said Von Hexemund.

"Out there!" said Keno.

"This door," said Von Hexemund, with quiet precision, with a voice that was steady as the driving of small nails. "This door is coming down in the next three minutes."

"Let it come," said Keno.

"The cracking of it is going to cause me some local damage to my galley and poop," said Von Hexemund. "With the most mathematical care, that can't quite be avoided. I'd prefer to omit the damage—I'm telling you without reservation. If that is any damned consolation to you, I overestimate you. You're hardly a man to care to sell your life at the cost of a wrecked galley stove and a few broken deck planks, what?"

"That would be rather cheap, wouldn't it, Jerry?" asked Keno softly. "You're right—you haven't overestimated me. I'm not a two-bit guy."

"Open up!" said Von Hexemund.

"Still," said Keno, "I don't know that I hear any sweet angelic voice calling me to save your ship from damage, Jerry."

HE WINKED at Dinty Doone. The little Irishman, though tense and shivering now, responded with a gold-toothed grin that split his freckled face.

"There is such a thing as a code of courtesy in war, Lieutenant Donnerkind," said the cool, drilling voice beyond the door, "to which it is advisable to conform. Queer beggars are honored with commissioned rank these days, I grant. But the rank still implies the conduct of a gentleman. You've shown fighting courage, proper in a British officer. You've shown yourself a bit shrewder than your ilk. You've shown endurance, what? But there is little virtue in those qualities if, in addition, you do not show also a decent sportsmanship and acceptance of defeat. Do not forget this is my ship, and you are an intruder on it. If you claim the protection of the courtesies of war, as a prisoner, remember that those courtesies must be reciprocally extended to be valid."

"I'm not claiming anything," said Keno. "Would it do me any good?"

"You can claim what you please, provided you surrender," said Von Hexemund, in a voice more smooth, if anything. "I advise you to do so, for your own good. If I rush you, I cannot answer for my men. There'll be a bloody mess."

"Here's one fighting Arapahoe who's not a cripple yet," said Keno. "I've got your tinsel sword, Jerry, don't forget. And my little Irish sidekick is making some mean passes with your crooked Igorrote meat-chopper. There'll be a mess, all right, I reckon. But maybe some German stew'll be served up among the victuals."

"*Sprengen Sie die Tür auf, Herr Lieutenant!*" said Von Hexemund.

"Wait!" said Keno.

He looked at the burning end of his cigarette. He was set for the last big crash, he told himself, but he could feel his heart tighten, nevertheless.

"If I come out," he said, "what terms?"

"No longer quite so much on the high horse, what?" said Von Hexemund, as smooth as velvet. "The shine has worn a little thin on the brass courage, what? The defiance to the death has wet its powder, Lieutenant Donnerkind? The sinking ship strikes colors?"

"I inquired about terms," said Keno coolly.

"You will be treated as a prisoner of war, if you conduct yourself as such, naturally," said Von Hexemund.

"And my little sidekick?" said Keno. "I'm not bothering about myself. But my conscience is kind of hot and stinging me about him, you see."

"He," said Von Hexemund levelly, "will get the same as you."

Keno chuckled.

"And how about a bottle of your white mule, and some cigarettes?" he said. "I climbed aboard your lousy tub for smokes, don't forget. And I'm a kind of bird that's pretty set on getting what he goes after, as you'd know if you knew me better."

"You will be abundantly served," said Von Hexemund.

Again Keno chuckled.

"Sounds promising," he said. "Sounds mighty promising. And what is my guaran-

tee that your promise will be lived up to?"

"My word of honor," said Von Hexemund contemptuously.

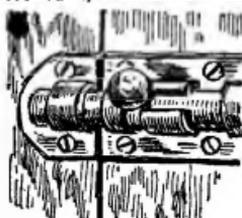
"Oh, yeah?" said Keno. "I've heard of that."

THERE was a strangled silence for a moment. Beyond the door Keno thought he heard some man grunt a natural laugh, broken off by a curt reprimand. When Von Hexemund spoke again, it was as if he had not heard. But Keno could feel, beneath the velvet flow of Von Hexemund's precise Oxford accent, the beat of Von Hexemund's hate, like the undertone of a deep drum in the music of violins.

"What is your decision?" said Von Hexemund.

"Oh," said Keno quietly, "I'll come out. I'd rather take lead in the face than have your whole damned pack bust in and club me to death. The game is up, and I'm ready to cash in my chips."

He walked steadily to the door, and unlocked it, with little Dinty Doone creeping



and shivering behind him. He stood at the end of the passage-way, erect and lean eyed, his left hand cupped on his hip and his chin thrust somewhat out, with the lighted doorway behind him and the dark night before. He had donned Von Hexemund's dress uniform, coat and slacks. He stood barefooted, with the coat open on his breast. Over his right arm he had draped a folded Imperial German war flag, white, with its black cross and eagle; and in his right hand he held Von Hexemund's sword by the scabbard.

A boathook, hurled expertly from around the corner of the galley door, slithered along the deck past his feet and over the threshold of the cabin, effectually preventing him from leaping back and slamming the door shut again, had he been so impelled.

He saw the black mass of men gathered at the head of the companionway. He blinked his eyes, and grinned. A Mauser rifle, moving down from his head to his breast, threw a brief dull glint along its

barrel. There were other guns. Von Hexemund, with those guns to back him up, walked down and stood three feet away, a tall, slow figure, inflexible as steel.

The Shark's face was half shadowed over by his great bulging brow. His nostrils flared. He looked at Keno with a hard, bent smile, drawing his right hand slowly from beneath his coat.

Keno extended the sword and the flag.

"The sword," he said, "because I didn't win it. I don't grab any honors not due me in fair fight. Take it, Von Hexemund, and be damned."

But Von Hexemund was wary about coming within reach of the extended hand. The weapon clattered to the deck.

"The flag," said Keno, "to run up at your peak, in place of an honest flag that has no business there. Hoist it quick, and hoist it high. And go to hell beneath it—you, and your whole ship!"

HE LET the flag slide from his extended arm to the deck, for again Von Hexemund would not come within reach. He took a half step forward, so that they were both beneath his feet—Von Hexemund's sword and Von Hexemund's battle banner. He stood on them, with his hands doubled loosely on his hips, staring at Von Hexemund with a stern, pale glance.

"Perhaps," he said, "you think I've won them both. And that may be. In that case, I'll accept them—spoils of war."

He forced the steady smile on his face, but he had begun to shiver. He was waiting—he was waiting! And behind him little Dinty Doone was whimpering steadily, with a sound half between a laugh and a sob.

"You are afraid, Donnerkind!" said Von Hexemund, with a curl of his tight lips.

"Yes," said Keno quietly. "I'll admit it. I didn't think I would be, but I am. I think I wouldn't have minded crashing out through the Big Door with a grin and a fighting yell. I've always been set for that. But it's kind of tough counting the seconds till it slams up and hits you in the face."

Von Hexemund surveyed Keno with his intelligent eyes.

"I am satisfied," he said.

His nostrils were distended. He seemed to tower in height. He had his Mauser out.

Very slowly he brought it to bear, pointing it blank at Keno's breast.

"A man who is not afraid," he said with a flicker of his lips, "does not taste the full gall of death. But you, Donnerkind, and that whimpering poltroon behind you, have filled your bellies with its bitterness. I am satisfied."

Keno pushed the coat away from his bare breast with his right hand.

"No need spoiling a good tailor's job," he said. "I'll take it clean. But I'd like a cigarette to steady me, Von Hexemund, if you don't mind."

Again the flicker of that tight, bent mouth. "That," said Von Hexemund, "is a civility I couldn't extend to you, even if I were so inclined. No man plays with fire aboard this ship. There is death enough beneath your feet to blow the bottom from the sea—and a touch of the match to set it off. You may ask God in heaven for a smoke. But don't ask me."

"So I guessed," said Keno. "And if I hadn't guessed, you were kind enough to have the diagram of it among your papers to inform me."

THE edges of Von Hexemund's nostrils quivered. Perhaps, subconsciously, he smelt it then. Perhaps, subconsciously, he was warned. But he was too deep with hate, too intent on driving the last ounce of fear home to Keno, to take heed of the message of that hot, sweet reek that came oozing from the cabin.

"You are afraid, Donnerkind," he said. "And you will die an everlasting coward."

"I hope to God you make it quick," said Keno with his lean smile, but shivering. "Because I can't stand the damned waiting for it much longer, without going howling mad. I can't stand the damned waiting, myself—I hope you have more guts. This ship is going up beneath your feet, Von Hexemund."

He lifted his cupped left hand from his hip. And there was a last half inch of his last cigarette still glowing in it, pinched between finger and thumb. He sucked it deep, till it glowed scarlet, and flipped the butt into Von Hexemund's face.

"Give it to me, for God's sake!" he said.

Von Hexemund's choked cry could not be heard amidst the muffled thunder of an

explosion below which shook the timbers of the dying ship.

Von Hexemund gave it to Keno then—but not with the gun muzzle. Strangled with fear, he swung the Mauser butt at Keno's jaw, too quick and desperate for Keno to avoid fully the terrific fury of the blow. It crashed down the side of his skull, and his knees went like water from beneath him.

"You black-hearted murderer!" the Shark screamed, kicking Keno as he toppled.

## CHAPTER XII

### SHARK'S END

**I**T WAS the first mine, beneath the control room, which had exploded with that staggering blow, bursting up and shattering the cabin deck.

The crash was echoed almost simultaneously by a louder and heavier detonation, deeper down, booming from the wireless room in the center of the hold. The fire was eating rapidly down the hull toward the main torpedo magazine. The next crash—no man would hear it!

"Five minutes from the wireless room to magazine! Abandon ship! Man boats!" Von Hexemund's shout rose above the howl of wild voices. "Lower away, and for your lives!"

He ran about, with murder in his blazing glance, shouting his quick orders, fighting the frenzy with fists and gun. A cool man, a man of steel—to the last his great brain was sharp and swift to function.

The decks were filled with a struggling, howling mob, some running clumsily toward the bow, as if there were any safety there, or any within a wide sea mile of that floating inferno. Some too stiff with terror to run or cry. A giant sailor, demented from pain and with clothing in bloody rags, all smoking, came sprawling from the hold up into the center of that pack, hurling men aside as he rushed for Von Hexemund.

"You gave us no warning!" he screamed, waving the crimson stump of a hand. "No warning, you black fiend! Swallow that, and see if you like the taste of it!"

Von Hexemund met the insane giant with flaming pistol, and the man ran on past with the momentum of his charge, and overside into the sea.

Again the Mauser stabbed the night deck into the center of the milling pack, answered by shrieks and yells. The Shark was driving his men with the fury of despair, leaping and lashing about like a man with ten devils in him. His own life was extremely valuable to him, if nothing else.

"Swine!"

**I**T WAS not many seconds before the panic was under his partial control. His men were disciplined machines, picked fighting men from the U-boat fleet, and answering to the call of command. The first cutter went overside, pulled away by glassy eyed men with strokes that bent the oar looms and whipped the water white.

Keno staggered to his feet, lifted by Dinty Doone, before sixty seconds had passed. He ran heavily up the companionway, and to the rail.

A cutter and a whaleboat, the latter carrying thirty men or more, had got clear, and a second cutter, the last boat, stood on the water below the portside davits of the poop, with Von Hexemund in the stern sheets, watch in hand, shouting to his men as they hacked away at the falls.

That scene was one that Keno would never forget—the vast rippling water, no ship upon it, no star above it, the glazed and leaden faces of the men in the boat below, and two other boats standing away with oars that were digging swift and deep in the hands of their frenzied men. Such scenes of hurried ship abandonment, and many of them, it is probable, the Shark of the North Sea had witnessed from the conning tower of his murderous undersea boat, standing unmoved with his bent mouth and great wrinkled head at the sight of terror and despair. And women often in the boats which made off from his torpedoed ships, with crews far less strong and carefully trained than the raider's well drilled fighting men. Yet even so, with the odds in some ways on him, Von Hexemund's hard eyes were looking now a little too closely at a terrible death. And he did not like it. His face was white. His hands were none too steady on the rudder.

There was a great and dolorous cry out there in the darkness of the water. A hundred yards offside the whaleboat, carrying

more than half the raider's complement, had swamped under too frenzied handling, and turned turtle.

"Three minutes, fifteen seconds!" said Von Hexemund, as the falls were cleared and the strong oars dug the water.

He looked up then at Keno, leaning over the taffrail above. His face was filled with hate. He half raised his gun, then lowered it again, and tucked it away with a contemptuous gesture. His mouth twisted.

"Take it, you black-hearted mass assassin!" he said with a bent grin. "There may be no hell and no hereafter. But you will have three million years of eternity in the next three minutes, flying man, before you go up for your last big hop——"

His voice trailed away over the water, drowned in the fierce chunking of the oarlocks.

**K**ENO could feel even then, it seemed to him, the deck heaving up under him. He was deaf with waiting for the expected crash. Yet he leaned against the rail and grinned.

"Assassin!" he said. "Did you heard that hot one, Dinty? And they say the devil has no sense of humor!"

"Overside, sir-r!" gasped Dinty. "We may get someplace before it hits!"

"Smash you in the water," said Keno coolly, "even if you were a fish—or a damned Shark. The only thing that'd get you far enough away now would be a flying boat or an angel with a big wing span. I've had my bellyful of freezing and salt water for tonight. I'm going out of this picture dry and hot. Grin, Dinty! Damn it, you've helped

save a fleet and send the Shark to smash. And I—I've had a cigarette. But I wish I had one more."

And suddenly he struck Dinty a blow on the shoulders that knocked the terrified little man down.

"Dinty!" he screamed. "Do you hear it?" "Oh, God, not yet!" sobbed Dinty. "Not yet!"

"Not beneath you, you Scandinavian! Up above!" roared Keno. "Do you hear that motor roaring? It's a ship! It's a ship! It's a ship! And she's cut the gun! She's coming down!"

"How much time?" whimpered Dinty, wringing his hands. "How much time? How much time?"

"Say that a hundred and fifty times more," said Keno grimly. "And pray that Von Hexemund may have guessed his time wrong by fourteen seconds."

He strained his gaze up at the sky. The very presence of a seaplane in the air, even if it were merely passing over, would have given him a hope that he had voluntarily put aside from him long ago, it seemed. And this was more than a seaplane in the air—it was a seaplane coming down, straight for the black waters in which the fizzing mine of a ship was lying.

A parachute flare blazed and swam down from three hundred feet in the next breath, lighting the water for a quarter mile about with its sun-bright blaze. And, swooping swiftly into the light, leveling off for a landing hard along the *Gulf Weed's* beam, a twin-pontooned seaplane with Mercedes engine-head flashing fire came down toward the water.



WELL, there was no miracle in it, though there may have been prayer behind it—little Dinty Doone's good Irish prayers. But it seemed like a miracle to Keno, or else an apparition. It was, however, the seaplane which Excellency had sent down an hour ago to make contact with the raider, and it had been beating through the night for a hundred long miles.

"Hun!" screamed Dinty.

He never finished the word in open air. Keno had got him by the scruff and pushed him upside headlong into the sea. They struck out together. Ten seconds more, or more likely five—Keno had lost all conception of time in those terrible minutes, those unendurable seconds of black waiting for the hell within the hold to say its say—ten seconds more, or a mere five, and the seaplane was in their hands. They were swimming twenty yards off the doomed brig's port when the Iron Cross seaplane came skimming over the water toward them, still on her pontoons steps, and Keno leaped up, and caught the right wing pontoon, dragging the ship around on the pivot of the wing, and clambering overside faster than a tarantula on a griddle. Faster, and a little more dangerous. Dinty was crawling over the left wing then, and Keno rushed for the cockpit.

A dual seater, and one Hun only in the forward cockpit, no observer aft. The Hun stared out of bewildered goggles, shouting a question. Keno left no instant to hear the word or give a reply. He dived his arm into the cockpit and jammed the throttle wide open, getting way on the ship before she had fairly settled from her steps, tail-down in the water.

"*Herr Kapitän Von Hexemund, was ist los? Was ist los?*" the pilot screamed.

"Mutiny!" roared Keno, above the thunderous motor howl. "Mutiny! Away, son! That brig is going to the top roof tree of hell in thirty seconds!"

Little Dinty had scrambled into the rear cockpit. Keno crouched on the wing beside the pilot. The roaring engine shot oil into his face. Sea spume from her beating propellers whipped his skin, lashing his eyeballs with stinging darts.

Yet a few moments, and the spume was in his face no longer. The ocean had dropped

below, and the great roaring wind of the free upper sky beat against his sight and hearing.

"*Herr Kapitän!*" screamed the pilot. "His Excellency has been trying——"

"Never mind, son!" roared Keno. "You'll sleep in a nice warm bed on solid land tonight, and tomorrow I'll tell you all about it. Have you got wireless on your ship? Rear cockpit. Unreel it!"

HE WATCHED the altimeter, his head stuck inside the cockpit. Three hundred meters. The brig a mile away. And suddenly he clutched the cockpit rim, holding for his life, for the seaplane had taken a wild wing slip that shot her down in a left slip four hundred feet and more, and up again three times as high, as quick as powder blasts. He sucked his breath.

Behind there was that great and godless roar, booming down the wind, hot enough and loud enough to bring all the destroyers on the sea from twenty miles away. Behind there was a boiling white sea in which Von Hexemund's two cutters were tossing up and down, and one of them keel up now, whirling like a chip in a washbasin. The shattered hulk of the pirate brig rose slowly up from the water like a cow arising from a meadow.

Then there was nothing.

"*Ach Gott! Ach, Gott!*"

The pilot's hands slipped from the stick, and Keno grabbed it, steadying it. In the rear cockpit Dinty Doone, observer extraordinary, had already unreeled the wireless antennae and found the transmission key.

"From the fleet?" yelled Keno at the pilot. Keno knew as much about Von Hexemund's affairs as Von Hexemund, having read all the Shark's papers during those two long hours in the cabin. "Did Excellency send you down to contact? Yes, I know all about it. Climb out—I'll take the stick. Give my gunner the fleet call code. A message for his Excellency; '*Everything beautiful. The enemy already practically annihilated. Hurry down, you fat old tub, if you want any of the gravy and the bacon!*' Sign it 'Von Hexemund.'"

"Yes, gladly, Herr Kapitän!" howled the frightened Hun pilot. "But——"

He looked at Keno's salt-drenched dress uniform of a Captain-lieutenant of the U-

boat fleet. A mere Fleet Lieutenant did not argue with that much gold braid. He looked then at Keno's grim fighting face, and Keno's dangerous eyes. Even less did a mere Fleet Lieutenant argue with a man like that. He crouched by the after cockpit, screaming the code to Dinty, and waiting while the message was flashed.

At a thousand feet Keno keeled the German airplane over in a steep vertical bank. The Hun pilot, on the up wing, was thrown down hard against the fuselage, hanging tight. His face was pale. He had begun to scream questions at Dinty. But Dinty, knowing no word of German except "Schweinhund!" diplomatically kept silent. Perhaps the poor lone German youngster—he wasn't more than eighteen, like many of the best War pilots—was beginning to smell dirty weather and suspect that all was not well with the state of the sky. However, there was nothing he could do about it except crouch, and hang, and shiver.

KENO nosed down and went toward the sea, with engine roaring wide, leaning far overside to search the black creeping flatness for the spot where the pirate windjammer had been. Of it he saw no trace, not even a broken spar. She was one with the *Lusitania*, and the ships that went down at Actium, and the ships that went down fifty thousand years ago when Atlantis sank below the sea.

He stood up against the rudder bar, turning around to speak to Dinty. The little Irishman stretched one big freckled ear forward to get the message.

"Code Harwich!" Keno roared. "German High Seas scouting fleet on loose prow! Eighteen fighting terriers under *Barbarossa* standing down from Texel, course 255, and steaming 27! Come on, you lions, and eat them up!"

"Aye, aye!" screamed Dinty.

"And, oh, yes, Dinty, one thing more," said Keno. "Postscript to Stumpy Coningsby of the *Bimini*. Much obliged for the matches, Stumpy. They made the biggest, sweetest light that ever lit a weed!"

He cut his motor, and came about in a flat spiral above those waters where the German raider had been lying. He put over a para-

chute flare. And, as the silk umbrella filled, he turned again with a grim face to Dinty.

"What sort of poison have we got," he said, "in the bomb racks below the wings?"

In the white blaze of light the inky sea stood cleanwashed as a slate four hundred feet below, except for one small boat upon it, that stood without way upon her.

Her oarsmen lay slumped over their oars, like men who have pulled a great and terrific race that has pulled the heart out of them; and only two or three of them lifted their heads heavily as the calcium flare blazed down upon them, and the shadow of the seaplane passed.



There were a few splashing forms in the water around the cutter, reaching for her gunwales—survivors, Keno thought, of the two boats that had swamped. And in the stern sheets was the figure of a man who, like his oarsmen, sat with his head bowed between his knees, not looking up at all. Whether the surviving cutter was the second, that in which Von Hexemund had embarked, Keno could not make out from that height. And the parachute flare failed him as he went down toward the surface. Nor did he have another.

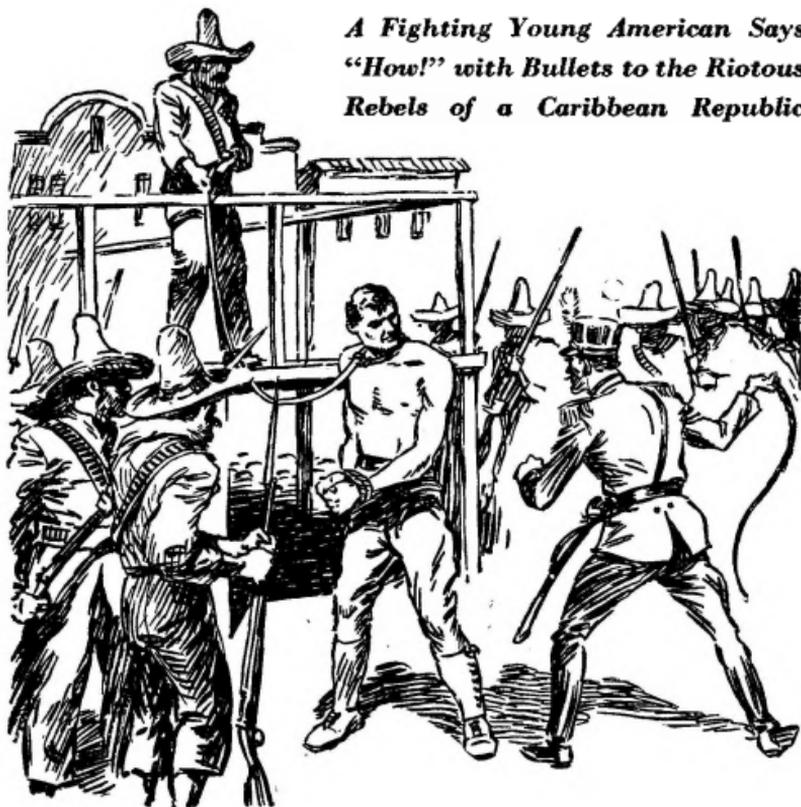
Whether it was Von Hexemund whom he briefly glimpsed sitting there at the cutter's helm, he did not know. It would be better for him, perhaps, if he was in the sea. For the wicked little destroyers would soon be boiling up from south and east and west, and this time they would not fail to recognize the Shark.

Already on the south horizon, one small triangle of foam was cutting through the night—the sharp prow of a destroyer. And another from the southeast. And three—no, five—of them in a flock from 225.

Oh, they were coming very quick and eager. They had heard that hell-hot blast. But none of them would drink Virginia corn with Von Hexemund any more.

Keno turned his bow due west for Hornsmouth.

*A Fighting Young American Says  
"How!" with Bullets to the Riotous  
Rebels of a Caribbean Republic*



## THE BATTLE CRATE

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

*Author of "Duke's Mixture," "Long and Short," etc.*

**R**OWDY FRAZIER came up the single sleepy street of Salinas, and when he saw the sign of the American Consular Agent on a low, white-plastered building, he whistled "The Star-Spangled Banner" very melodiously—and went straight on past. He was thoroughly tired of the fatherly advice with which consuls and ministers were so free. They had been hounding him ever since he had crossed the Rio Grande.

"Now, that is something like a sign!" he said enthusiastically to himself, aloud.

What he referred to was no less than the white side of a building just ahead, liberally decorated with announcements of cold beer, tobacco, cigars, *tequila*, meals and imported liquors. And, in some sort of invitation to the Navy vessels which frequently put into the port on patrol-duty, there was a large blue line remarking:

SALYURS OF AMURRECAN NAVY EXCESSIVE  
WELLCOM

But someone had added in new, bright blue paint a ragged remark which should

have burned a hole in the plaster; one of those Spanish words which cannot be translated.

"Oh-ho!" said Rowdy Frazier to himself, with a sort of battle-glint in his blue eyes. "The rebels don't seem fond of Uncle Samuel's little Boys Blue, judging from that comment. Goodness me! Suppose they should heave me out upon my classic star-board ear, when I go in. Think o' that!"

So, being well named, he marched in through the scattering of ragged rebels and went up to the nearest table, where he sat himself down, a lean, well shouldered young man of curling auburn hair, a match-thickness under six feet. He dropped his Baden Powell Stetson on the floor and looked around.

There were some khaki-clad men in rusty puttees with pistols belted on; quite a sprinkling of civilian-clad *hombres de Salinas*, also. They looked at him without friendliness—the Powers that Were in Washington had refused to accept the revolutionists as Main Squeezes in Guarterica—and he looked with frank curiosity at them.

A lanky, exceedingly black man came slouching over to Rowdy and asked in indifferent mumble what he wanted. Rowdy transfixd him with a blue eye suddenly glittering.

"George!" he remarked grimly. "When you speak to me, you stand up and you say 'Sir,' before I get up and chase you half-way across the lovely reaches of the serene blue Caribbean. *Do* you understand me?"

"Yas-suh!" cried George—and beamed. "I do! Yassuh! It shore is fine to see a gen'tmuns come in, suh, after all des-yere cullud trash I got to wait on."

He brought a bottle of tepid beer, which was destined never to be drunk. For a yellow faced and piggy civilian came to Rowdy's table and stood staring down at him insolently.

"Am-er-ican peeg!" he remarked in a sort of impersonal voice. "Who geeve to you per-mis-sion for come in here!"

Rowdy looked up at him sidelong. Then he slid his right foot a little sideway and lifted the heel, so that his hundred eighty pounds were borne on the toe. His right

shoulder sagged six inches. Then, somewhat as dynamite explodes, he was up and a large, tanned and exceedingly hard fist came up from hip-level in a long arc that ended in the geographical center of that yellow face.

The *smack!* of that right landing was like the sound of an open-handed slap. The yellow faced man turned almost heels-over-head with the terrific impact, then, four feet off the floor, his soft, fat body straightened almost to the horizontal and down he came to the floor—stone cold.

AS ROWDY stood eyeing him, there was the rush of many feet across the bar-room's width. He turned and it seemed that the entire forces of God, Liberty, Equality, Revolution, were bearing down upon him with angry noises. Mechanically, he picked up the heavy homemade chair upon which he had been sitting and moved it a little to one side. The table was a bulky piece of unpainted mahogany. It weighed a good hundred pounds.

Rowdy scooped it up with a hand at each end. Up it rose; forward it shot. Those in the front rank of the attackers were carried down by it like so many ten pins. And before they had recovered, Rowdy had picked up his chair and with a battle grin was charging them.

"There is no defense like attack!" he quoted to himself.

He swung that chair upon them until it disintegrated in his big hands. It was a noble battle, for they circled to get at his back and he had to skip around most lively. But when he held nothing but a foot-long bit of leg, and was getting winded, their numbers began to tell. And through the front door came ragged tatterdemalions, rifle-armed, privates in the Army of Right, of Revolution.

"All right! All right!" Rowdy said good humoredly to these. "Don't poke those rifle barrels so close. It isn't polite, in the first place. Secondly, even condemned German ammunition might go off if you monkeyed with it long enough."

A smallish man, very like the yellow insolent who had been the first casualty, came crowding like a ruffled bantam up to Rowdy. He had a too large khaki tunic on, with

the stars of three major-generals decorating the collar.

"You heet my brother!" he snarled at Rowdy.

"That so? I'm really sorry—that I had to do it!"

A gaunt, weary faced American now came pushing into the forefront of the argument. He looked with no pleasure whatever upon the battered but unrepentant Rowdy.

"What ye hit Sanchez about?" he asked, as if he really didn't care whether Rowdy answered or not.

"Well, when one of those hairpins calls me an American pig and otherwise interferes between my beer and me, he's due for my gentle remonstrances. Sanchez did and he was!"

"I weell have you tried!" cried Sanchez of the uniform. "Take him to the *carcel!*" he snapped at the soldiers.

"Ye always get somethin' like this in these countries—rows that interferes with business," the gaunt American said disgustedly. "I'm Truax, the cons'lar agent. I'll see what I can do about it."

SO ROWDY was marched downstreet to the little 'dobe *juzgado* and pushed into a cell with a half dozen malodorous native prisoners. They tried to gang him and see what of value might be in his pockets. Within three minutes, the lot of them were crowded together in a corner, listening to a lecture in Rowdy's best book Spanish.

"Words fail me," said Rowdy severely, as they nursed their bruises and spat out broken teeth. "Your manners are awful, terrible. If I had not lost my little red Spanish phrase book, in the Cantina of the Sun, the Moon, the Stars and Guillermo Villarreal, I could go into details. As it is, be so kind as to keep your smelly carcasses away from me."

The afternoon wore away. Rowdy half dozed where he sat in the cleanest place on the dirty floor, with back to wall. The other prisoners slept peacefully. At dusk, a guard came in and gestured to Rowdy to precede him out of the cell.

He was taken to the private house commandeered by General Sanchez, whom the guard said aweafy was the commander-in-

chief of the revolutionary forces on this coast. Sanchez sat at table, gnawing chicken bones.

Ominously, he looked at Rowdy, who had a half dozen of the soldiers about him, now, their rifle muzzles almost against his back and sides. Suddenly, he exploded into speech.

"*Chuchos!*" he shouted at the soldiers. "I said bring him before me with hands tied. Thou yellow scavenging curs of the filthiest alleys! Tie him at once!"

Rowdy stiffened to resist. But he saw a big Mausehammer go back and he knew that a hammered wire slug would tear a cup-sized snag in his anatomy, if he raised a row. So he submitted to having hands pinioned in front of him, with rawhide line, the rawhide encircling his waist to hold his hands down.

"Now!" grinned Sanchez, waving a drumstick. "Gringo, you have been tried. You have insult the forces of the revolution. You have heet my brother. I would have you shot, but—"

"But a Navy vessel'd be in here and you'd be hitting for the Tall and Uncut, if you tried that," Rowdy nodded contemptuously. "I know what you thought, all right!"

"What care Rafael Escobar Sanchez for the peeg of an American sheep!" snarled the general furiously. "But the Truax what I like so mooch, he have ask not to shoot you. So—twenty lash you will get in the plaza!"

"Fellow!" said Rowdy Frazier very grimly, with blue eyes deadly cold and hard. "Fellow, you try that and, so help me, you'll buy yourself a shroud! I'll make it my life's business to kill you, if it takes a century!"

SANCHEZ flinched despite himself, before the chill fury of the American's set face. Then sight of the soldiers; of the bonds on Rowdy's wrists, seemed to give him courage.

"Bah! Bah!" he said scornfully. "Me,



what I care for peeg talk! *Nada!* Nothings! . . . To the plaza!" he added to the soldiers. "My brother will swing the whip. He now awaits you! Away with him!"

With the crown of his red head, Rowdy Frazier butted into nausea one of the guards. A kick sent still another hopping agonizedly. But the others ganged him, buffeting him until he was dizzy and half blind. In this condition he was half pushed, half dragged, outside of the house. General Sanchez wiped greasy fingers on his pants and followed with chest and stomach magnificently outthrust.

All of Salinas—and in normal times it was Guaterica's principal port—was gathered in the plaza, in this pleasant hour of dusk. They waited with grins and nudges for the American to be beaten. But Mr. Truax of the consular agent's office was not in evidence. Evidently, so Rowdy thought, the consular agent considered that he had done enough, toward having the general's action mitigated.

There, in the center of the plaza by the bandstand, lit by a sickly electric arc, stood the yellow man whom Rowdy had knocked cold in the Cantina of the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. He had a heavy rawhide whip such as muleteers use. He grinned through swollen lips at sight of Rowdy and swung the whip over his head until it whistled.

Up against the bandstand they shoved Rowdy. Two soldiers dived for each ankle and held on. A noose was dropped over his head. It was hauled loosely taut and a soldier took the end up into the bandstand where he could hold it and choke by a pull, if Rowdy moved.

"I'm going to kill you, Yellow Boy!" Rowdy promised the general's brother with grim sincerity. "You remember that! I'm going to kill you as sure as little green apples have specks in 'em! You can't go far enough or fast enough to get away from me!"

FOR an instant, Sanchez hesitated. Then his brother, the general, urged him on with a shout of vengeance. The whip whistled and cut across Rowdy's back. He stood grimly moveless. Again it whistled and the crowd made a low, many-voiced

groaning sound—of wonder, not of sympathy. They could see the red stain creeping out on the white cotton shirt. Rowdy only guessed that it was there.

Again and again Sanchez whirled the whip. Not twenty, but twenty-five or thirty, blows were struck. For all his lean strength, Rowdy was staggering, at the end. Only Sanchez' inexperience had saved him from more killing pain. But the lash had lost much of its force through striking the bandstand at his side.

The noose was taken from his neck. The soldiers let go his ankles. But they did not take the bonds from his wrists. They let him lean against the bandstand while first General Sanchez, then his brother, made speeches to the crowd, growing brave with the rattle of their own voices. General Sanchez whirled upon Rowdy.

"So, peeg of an American," he cried, "you weell see how the Army of the Revolution punish insult. You—*Nombre de dios!* He is free! Seize him! Kill him!"

For Rowdy had begun to work at his bonds and the rawhide had slipped from his wrists. There was a soldier beside him, but the fellow had been gaping at Sanchez. The old Mauser was twitched from his hands, and, when he snatched at the machete which swung unscabbarded at his belt, he got the butt in the face and died with a fractured skull.

Rowdy was raging. He jerked the Mauser to his shoulder, the muzzle covering Sanchez the civilian, he who had swung the whip. It snapped hollowly, the old reloaded ammunition, as usual, failing to explode. Sanchez made a thin, dying-pig sort of sound and tried to dive into the crowd. Then the fourth or fifth blow of the firing pin brought fire from the primer. Sanchez sprawled and the squealing noise died away.

THROUGH his red haze Rowdy Frazier looked for General Sanchez. But the general had utilized to the uttermost the precedence due his rank. He had plunged through the crowd. Rowdy gave up thought of pursuing and put the bandstand between him and the soldiers who were jerking up their rifles. He was around it before they were clear of the impeding crowd. There was an empty space, over here.

He ran behind a clump of shrubbery and raced away to the far side of the plaza. A splendid little tiger-striped *mula* stood saddled before a house across the street. Rowdy streaked it across and jerked the reins loose from the post to which they had been secured. He swung into the saddle and drummed with his heels upon its ribs. The *mula* broke into a swift singlefoot and Rowdy sagged limply over the pommel of the flat native saddle as they went up-street.

Soldiers reached the plaza rim and fired frantically after him. The *mula* jumped forward with an almost-human grunt. Rowdy straightened, jerked from his weakness by the fear that his mount was wounded gravely. But it was only a nip on the haunch. Bullets were kicking up splashes in the street's white dust which looked like white-caps on the Bay. Others whined past him, the ragged slugs making queer musical hummings.

The *mula* stumbled slightly and Rowdy swayed in the saddle. Something stung his ear lobe. He knew that but for the little change in position, that one would have taken the back out of his head. He whirled the *mula* down a crossway. Soldiers jumped up ahead. They closed the road before him, rifles up. Looked like curtain! Then:

"Federals! Federals!" yelled Rowdy Frazier at the top of his voice. "*Much' soldados! Run for your lives!*"

They scattered like quail and he was past and out of Salinas. On went the *mula* while the dusk grew thicker. On for an hour. Then voices ahead cried out a sharp command to halt. He was of a mind to try breaking through, but he saw many fires ahead. Then he knew—this was the federal force, kept out of Salinas by the rebel gunboat which lay in that harbor covering it with three-inch guns.

"*Amigo!*" he cried, and hauled in the panting animal.

THE picket took him to a thatched house of the little village. A keen faced young man with colonel's eagles on his khaki tunic looked sharply at Rowdy.

"American?" he asked. "From Salinas? I'm Colonel Ramos. What are the rebels

doing? Are they—*Madre de Cristo!* What happened to you, man? You're all blood! Here, have a drink!"

He handed over a flask and Rowdy half emptied it, while the colonel watched narrow eyed. Rowdy sat down and sighed.

"I had a run-in with that Sanchez combination."



Briefly, he told his tale. The colonel scowled and swore in English as accentless and as torrid as Rowdy could have used.

"Two scoundrels! Cheap crooks!" the colonel snapped. "They were both in government service, but kicked out for grafting. We don't mind an official stealing a certain amount, you know, but when he steals all the revenues— Well, the Sanchez brothers stole everything and sold the cash drawer.

"And here I'm stuck, because of that damn rebel gunboat. She's captained by a good scrapper, too. He was a gunner's mate in the U. S. Navy and later skipper of a coasting tramp down here. If I try to recapture Salinas, he'll murder my column with his three-inch. The water's deep, you know, and he can walk almost up to the beach, where even his six-pounders will land on us. And I've nothing but one old three-inch field piece which is outranged by his guns."

THE colonel made Rowdy his guest for the night. The next morning, Rowdy, though terrifically sore and stiff, felt almost normal. He waked and found the colonel grinning at him. And behind the colonel was a glum faced young man, obviously an American.

"Here's a countryman of yours," said the colonel. "Mr. Mick McMasters. He came to Banana Land thinking he'd like to start an auto agency and garage. But, so far, he hasn't been impressed with the possibilities."

"About nineteen mile o' auto road, altogether, between the Rio Gran' an' Goethals' ditch," McMasters said sourly. "An' they tell me that if I was to git in business an' start makin' money, some native son'd have

me run so's he could cop my graft! Hell of a country!"

They had breakfast together. McMasters listened to Colonel Ramos' talk of the rebels.

"Looks to me like we're kind o' in the same boat," he grinned sourly. "Both grip-in' about how things look; nothin' either one o' us can do! Only I ain't got a rich papa that's president o' the country."

"A lot of good that's doing me!" Ramos cried humorously. "What I need is some heavy artillery, so I can get at Juan Frias and that damn pair of three-inchers on the *Democracy*!"

"Why'n't you take that airplane out there an' go drop some bombs down his smoke-stacks?" McMasters grinned.

"Plane!" cried Ramos and Rowdy Frazier together.

"Yeh. The one that's up there in that big shed behind the railroad-shop superintendant's house."

"McMasters, have you been looking upon the *tequila* when it was striped?" cried Ramos. "There's not a plane in all Guaterica—nor a man who can fly one, so far as I know! What kind of yarn is this?"

"No yarn," McMasters shrugged placidly, reaching for the hot milk pitcher. "I was snoopin' around town yesterday an', bein' a good mechanic, I went nosin' around the shops. The superintendent—Smith?—owned his house, you know. His widow still lives there. I saw somethin' funny-lookin' through a crack in the shed, so I sneaked in. It's an airplane. Got a motor in it an' ever'thing. I think the motor's a kind o' home-made assembly."

"Let's take a look at it," said Rowdy Frazier in an odd tone. Ramos stared at him.

"Smith was a very good man," he grunted. "But I'm damned if ever I heard he was an aviator. Well, that's interesting to know. But hardly helpful. Not now, anyway."

"If that bus'll navigate, it'll be most extremely helpful!" Rowdy Frazier assured him. "You now look upon a man who can do three things well—carry his liquor, handle a machine gun and fly. I date to the glider days, Oh, Son of the President. Lead me to this crate and let's see what's what, if any!"

MRS. SMITH told Ramos that her husband had built the plane himself. So far as she knew, he had never flown it after assembling it. His death had halted his plans.

"Light monoplane," said Rowdy interestedly, walking around the wasplike little craft in the improvised hangar. "Like the looks of that motor, McMasters?"

"I don't know a thing about airplane motors," shrugged the automobile man. "But it does look to me like it was put together by somebody that knew his trade. Light, but plenty powerful—Hmm—"

He walked around it, muttering to himself. Rowdy inspected the ship. There was still rigging to be done. Mechanically, he looked around, picked up pliers and went to work. McMasters scowled at him briefly, then shucked his linen coat and began tinkering with the engine.

"Boy!" said Rowdy enthusiastically, sticking his head out of the cockpit. "I like this baby! And if there's nothing wrong about her—nothing that I'm missing, I mean—I have an idea that she's going to be the answer to your prayer. McMasters, you see anything phoney about the coffee grinder?"

"No bugs, so far. Say! This is a lot like a motorcycle engine, an' motorcycles used to be my game, back in loway. I . . ." His voice trailed off in an absent mumbling.

"I have to go," said Ramos to Rowdy. "If you could fly this thing— Well, you can ask Guaterica for just about anything you want. And if you could handle Juan Frias' *Democracy*, so I could occupy Salinas and reestablish rail communication between this and the port—"

"If I was to help him—" this from McMasters, sticking his head around the prop—"would I collect one o' them gov'ment monopolies on auto business?"

"Stranger things have happened!" the president's son assured him earnestly. "What about you, Frazier?"

"Why, I've always wanted to be a gilt-edged admiral or general, or something—"

"Well, that would be easy! Now, let me know how you make out, here. And whatever you need, send for. We'll try to supply it."

THREE hours later, Rowdy came grinning up to the house which was Ramos' headquarters. He was grease streaked, for he had been checking the engine with McMasters. He was tired, too, for he had worked swiftly, with all the skill of his plane-building days, to finish the rigging of the odd little monoplane. But enthusiasm was riding him.

"Fellow!" he said to Ramos. "You had a downright genius in this guy Smith. He has features of design in that boat that I've never seen before, but which are a long ways ahead of anything I've seen. Some of his wrinkles may be visionary; may not work out in actual flying; but they do look good to me. And his motor's a blame' good mill."

"You think you can fly it?" cried Ramos eagerly.

"No reason I can see, to prevent. I want a half dozen of your most intelligent men to chock her and handle the prop'. I'm going to take her up, now, for a tryout."

He and Ramos hurried back to the shed. Mrs. Smith, a pretty young woman, was there. McMasters was explaining the motor to her. But it was obvious that her blue eyes rested on the man, rather than the mechanic.

"Government will buy this from you, whether or not it flies," Ramos told her. She nodded, still with eyes for McMasters alone.

McMasters had filled the gas tank with gas strained through a chamois. He said that the motor was checked. Rowdy drilled the sergeant and privates of infantry quickly, when the plane had been pulled out on the little savanna behind the shops. They made a chain and when he gave the word, they spun the prop and jumped back. The motor barked, sputtered coldly, then burst into an even roar that set McMasters and Rowdy grinning.

"Want to go with me?" Rowdy howled at McMasters.

Mrs. Smith seemed to understand. Her

face turned white and her lips parted. Then McMasters was in the mechanic's seat.

AT ROWDY'S preconceived gesture the soldiers pulled mightily on their chock ropes. The wasplike little ship was headed into the steady offshore breeze. To the stiffly watching little group, the plane seemed suddenly to come alive. It rolled gently forward and began to pick up speed.

They saw the tail flip up; saw the wheels begin to bounce on the savanna. Then up went the nose and she began to climb. Rowdy tried no turns. She was a trifle heavy on the left wing and he wanted plenty of distance between him and the floor. Too, this trial flight he wanted made away from the port. If he could come racing over Salinas and that gunboat without any warning of his existence, it would be all the better.

He had no altimeter; he could only guess at his altitude. But he gave himself plenty of time before banking in a turn. Then, for ten minutes, he turned and twisted, climbing and diving. He waved to McMasters to indicate that he was satisfied and going down. Even with the heavy wing, he brought the ship skilfully down, banked at a couple hundred feet, then side-slipped for his landing, with the wind shrieking in the wires. He came around into the wind and made a perfect three-point landing.

"Going to diddle her a bit!" he yelled at Ramos. "Then—we're off! You rig my bombs? Good! She's a battle baby; she's a battle crate! We'll show that Frias person and my beloved enemy, General Sanchez, a few!"

Ramos' orders to his three hundred fierce little infantrymen and the crew of his one gun were quickly made. Under his second-in-command, the column moved forward on the road to Salinas, the three-inch field piece trundling along in the column's van.

THE bombs were crude but promised to be effective enough—tin cans with dynamite sticks and fuses. They were swung under the side of the fuselage by short, heavy cords. McMasters was to release them. He took his place in the ship with razor-edged pocketknife blade open.

"I'll wait for your first shot," Rowdy

told Ramos, with a thin smile. "Think they'll have word you're attacking?"

"Afraid so. You can't tell who's a spy, around here. I'm just wondering if Sanchez has word of—this! Frias is a canny bird. I don't think his three-inch can elevate to annoy you greatly, unless you chance to come into range before reaching him. But you've got to get pretty low to place those bombs accurately. And he has a machine gun."

"Well, the old battle-crate will just have to take her chances. *Adiós*—or, rather—*hasta la vista!* I've a promise to fulfil in Salinas—I'm a vindictive soul. I always pay mine enemies and give *lagnappe*."

The soldiers at the chock ropes and the propeller waited tensely. It seemed ages—and was mid-afternoon—before from the north came a sullen, far away boom. It was followed quickly by a half dozen reports of about the same volume, but with a sharper note.

The propeller spun. The chocks were jerked from under the wheels of the *Battle Crate*—as Rowdy had christened her. Off she went across the field. The tail lifted, then Rowdy, pulling back evenly on the stick, felt the little ship climbing sweetly. He rose this time in a wide climbing turn, got elevation, and turned toward Salinas.

The town and the bay popped into sight instantly, at that height. McMasters, with glasses, roared that the *Democracy* was firing. At good height, Rowdy came over the gunboat and began to spiral downward. Lower and lower. The decks of the gunboat, with scurrying men now looking upward and gesticulating, became clear. Looked like a kid's toy with animated dolls on it. He guessed at his altitude. Came down to five hundred, about; four hundred; banked sharply and came back to cross the vessel.

SOMETHING half heard, half sensed, passed the plane. He snarled. He had evidently come inside the elevation of that fo'cas'le three-inch down there and they would never know how nearly they had gathered him in. He made his signal to McMasters, to stand by. Across the deck and Mac's knife-blade severed a cord. Leaning over the cockpit combing in the wind, as he cir-

led, Rowdy shook his head. The bomb went wide. He saw the explosion. In the water.

Then the fabric of the left wing, close to the cockpit, shredded as he looked. He remembered that machine gun of Frias', of which Ramos had spoken. He hauled back the stick frantically and zoomed up. He was over the town, in a twinkling. They were fighting down there, the federals coming in and dropping behind the shelter of buildings on the port's edge. The rebels were pretty well covered by the street-walls of houses bounding the plaza.

A house in which federals had taken position suddenly crumbled and lay down in the street as Rowdy looked down. Ah-ha! Frias was shelling them. But Rowdy, about to whirl and return to the *Democracy*, had a sudden idea. He gave Mac the standby, then swooped like a hawk on a chicken yard, down and down in a screaming dive, straight at the buildings which housed the rebel line.

He watched the bomb drop. Hit! Not only did that big one-story 'dobe go back to its original dust, but the rebels all along the line broke out and ran back across the plaza. The federals rose and rushed after them, to pass the line of houses and fire into their backs as the men of Sanchez scurried for new shelter. And so rapidly had this taken place that Frias still shelled the houses which had masked the federals.

Rowdy had a sudden fierce impulse to go rat-hunting Sanchez, the general. He wanted nothing so much as to drop one—or both—of the two remaining bombs on Sanchez. As he had told Ramos, he was a vindictive soul when he thought that he had been wronged. And to one of his temper, nothing could have roused cold, implacable hatred like that scene in the plaza. He felt that he could have no self-respect, ever, until he had killed the men responsible.

BUT there was Ramos. Couldn't let that fellow down. He was too straight a scout. And he couldn't stay in the port ten minutes, if Frias' deadly accurate fire from the *Democracy* were permitted to continue. There wouldn't be enough left of that federal outfit to make "morning colors," by the time the ex-gunner's mate was finished with him.

Nope! he thought. Machine gun fire or no, it was up to the *Battle Crate* to make good her title. She had to go out there like a *Moro juramentado*, go straight into the machine gun's fire and come crashing down to the bay, in order to land her bomb on the deck—if that crash were necessary. He shook his head and banked for a climbing turn.

High over the gunboat, so that figures were merest dots, he gave McMasters the standby. Then down he came, banking steeply in a corkscrew spiral that straightened out cannily well beyond the *Democracy's* side amid-ship. He turned the *Battle Crate* and came with screaming wires straight at the gunboat. Above the engine's roar he could hear nothing—even his own shrill, savage yelling.

But he saw the combing of his cockpit frazzle out; saw the fabric of that already frayed wing lift up in little shirs. Down he came, to masthead height and across the gunboat, barely clearing topstays, he fancied. He straightened out. Mac had not been ready.

He looked back. Mac was bending dangerously over the side, his shoulders heaving spasmodically as he seemed to wrestle with something Rowdy could not see. But there was scant time for wondering what was happening. He banked and watched the fraying fabric. Wind was getting to it. How long could he stay up with that wing beginning to drag?

Back he came across the *Democracy*, crossing aft of the smoke-pipe this time. He saw a square, black spot on the deck—an open hatchway. And something carrying a sputtering line of smoke hurtled into the hatchway as they crossed over. There was a terrific explosion and in the jumble of that detonation the *Battle Crate* went crazily rocking and bucking.

**S**TICK and rudder Rowdy fought desperately, yet delicately, leveling the ship out. The *Democracy* was sinking by the

stern behind and under him. He tried to climb, but the ship began to stall. He dived for the shore. There was going to be the devil to pay if he had to make a forced landing right among the rebels. But it was all he could do, now, with the shredding fabric pulling up and pulling up, to keep anything like level. It took all that he had ever learned of flying, from the days of his gliders.

But he was over the town and still had air speed. He looked down mechanically. Rebels were running. Far ahead of the scurrying figures were men on horses or mules, going northward—officers running. Well, that was the way of it—the leaders would escape to fight some more. The privates would be killed by their pursuers.

"Wonder if Sanchez is with that bunch?" he yelled savagely into the roar of his engine.

But he had to come back to his diddling of controls to maintain even a ragged level. And it was time he hunted a landing place, too. But that knot of galloping figures beyond the port's edge fascinated him. He forgot McMasters. The welts on his back seemed to wake to fresh stinging. What was the difference what happened, if that yellow pig out there got away, to boast of how he had beaten an American like an old-time slave!

He handled his controls delicately; dropped his right wing a little; managed to climb. The motor was doing nobly. And it was getting the gun clear back to the hind-sight! The horsemen seemed to see the ship for the first time. It was almost amusing, the way they whirled off the road and toward a low, dingy white house of red roof, fifty yards away.

They flung themselves off their mounts and went like prairie dogs into the doors. Rowdy banked and came over it. Gave Mac the standby. Could he keep the *Battle Crate* in the air two minutes longer— It was fluttering, staggering, now— The stick was kicking.

Over the hacienda's house he came. Low. You could see that it was a deserted place. Air of desolation about it. And inside was—Sanchez— Mac let go the last bomb. Smack into that faded, red-tiled roof. And the *Battle Crate*—well, it went crazy. Like a

bullet struck bird. Spun into a roll.

He cut the gun mechanically. The *Battle Crate* came over to level and he gave her the gun. But she was sagging, sagging. If she side-slipped, there was nothing to it. She'd slip. He saw the green-brown field rising up toward him. Desperately he shoved his rudder-bar; shoved his stick. The ship straightened out, then the wing sagged again. There was a crash! He felt his head snap forward. It struck something—something very hard, just as he snapped ignition switch!

**T**HERE was a blinking light in his eyes, when next he became conscious of anything. He stared and understood at last that it was the sun in the west, obscured and revealed again by men who moved back and forth, around him. He tried to sit up and someone slipped an arm under him and supported him. The welts on his back burned at the touch—then he remembered that last bomb—the house which had gone to pieces. And he grinned. For magically the sting went out of the whip scars.

"You look—in the wreckage?" he muttered.

"Surely," nodded Ramos. "Didn't find Sanchez, though. I suppose he was ahead even of his sub-officers."

"Huh?" cried Rowdy Frazier. His back began to burn again. He tried to stagger to his feet.

"Oh, we'll get him, eventually. We're smashing the revolution all across the country. I had word from my father just as we were mopping up in Salinas."

"*We* isn't the word!" Rowdy said thickly. "No use to me if I don't get him! I thought he was there."

"How d'you feel, boy?" McMasters inquired, coming up. "That was a pretty stunt you pulled—never thought you'd handle the old *Battle Crate*, with one wing like you did."

"What was the trouble—out over the gunboat with that last bomb?" Rowdy demanded. The thought had popped to mind.

"Trouble?" roared Mac. "That High Private that helped hang those bombs run out o' cord an' he wired that one. I lit the fuse an' tried to cut the cord an'—well, sir, I got some gray to snow-white hairs while I jiggled that wire, tryin' to bust it! But she dropped into that stairway on the boat like she was pulled down by a string!"

He looked suddenly at Ramos.

"What you said about that monopoly go?"

"All the way!" Ramos grinned. "And, Frazier—if you'll accept the command of the Army Air Force of Guaterica, rank of colonel, we'll buy you whatever planes you want."

"I'm worrying about Sanchez—I made him a promise—I'm not open to any offers until that's settled!"

"Colonel Ramos," said a noncom, coming up, "we have found three more bodies in the wrecked house. One is General Sanchez."

"Well?" Ramos said to Rowdy Frazier. "What about it?"

"Your offer," Rowdy grinned weakly, "is done took!"

"If you'll lend me a horse," McMasters said quickly, "I want to go back to Flores. You see, I— Well, Mrs. Smith—"

"In other words, we both take on new bosses," said Rowdy.

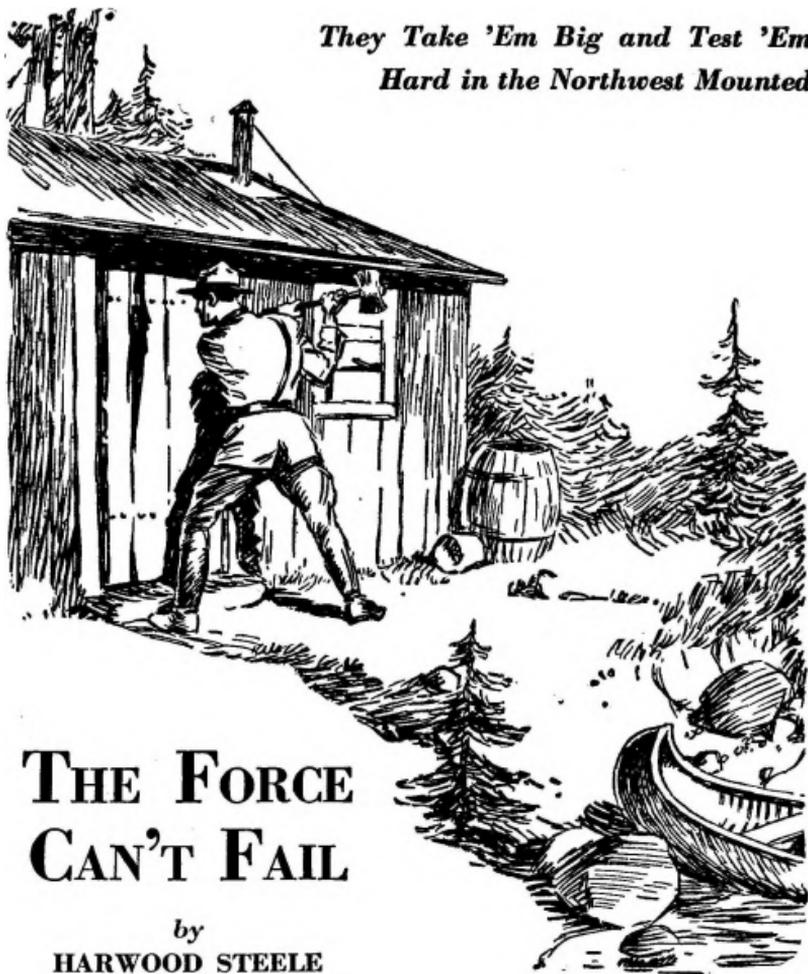
## A Novelette of Border Smuggling

by J. Allan Dunn

Next Time

"Yellow Contraband"

*They Take 'Em Big and Test 'Em  
Hard in the Northwest Mounted*



## THE FORCE CAN'T FAIL

by  
HARWOOD STEELE

**W**E TEST a fellow pretty hard, in the Mounted Police, before we call him a *good* man. He's got to prove beyond any sort of doubt that he'll carry out his enlistment oath, to do his duty without fear or favor in spite of hell and high water, before we trust him."

These are the words of Sergeant Mercer, so they mean a great deal. For Sergeant Mercer is as hard, as efficient, as his own steel handcuffs; and he has, himself, tested many a man. Take, for example, Constable

Wynn Siddeley, in the affair concerning Tom Wallis, Spike Malone, Arthur Sales and the murder of Siwash Pratt.

**E**VEN Wynn's friends—of whom he had approximately one thousand and one—would admit that he was in line for testing at that time.

To look at he was the perfect Mounted Policeman. Six feet four in his Strathcona boots—and without his Stetson—forty-nine inches round the chest in his scarlet serge, two hundred and some odd pounds in noth-

ing at all, the whole set off by eyes so brightly, engagingly blue that they were like two dancing little flames in his brick-red face and he had the most disarming grin ever seen outside a minstrel show. In addition he was keen.

But despite this build, this grin, this indescribable keenness, Wynn was only twenty-one, had only two years' service and had never taken part in a serious dustup. Which is to say that as a Mounted Policeman he was green.

When first Wynn came to share Sergeant Mercer's two by four cabin on the Yukon, a few miles from White Horse nothing happened. The sergeant, humping his burly shoulders, watched Wynn from under frowning iron gray eyebrows and rode him unmercifully. For days on end he said not one kindly word, made Wynn do all the dirtiest chores, frequently drilled him three solid hours, sent him on a patrol through dense brush in fly-time. But nothing happened. No job truly difficult by the Sergeant's standard cropped up. And Wynn continued to wear what Mercer called "that crazy grin."

Till one day Sergeant Mercer read over a bulky memorandum from the Chief at Dawson, studied certain specimens of fingerprints and handwriting and called Wynn.

"Fellow called Siwash Pratt's been murdered on Lonesome Creek. We've got the murderer too. Chief wants a few odd facts from White Horse to complete the case. Wants us to get 'em. These are the murderer's fingerprints. That's his writing."

He tossed the specimens to Wynn, across the table, watching him all the time.

"I'll handle the case. You're too green. In the meantime, you—Well, tomorrow you can make the Echo Lake patrol."

"What's the murderer's name?" Wynn asked.

His voice was perfectly steady but the light in his eyes had suddenly gone dead out, as though someone had pressed a button. Observing this, the sergeant smiled grimly, though with a certain deference, before he answered:

"Tom Wallis. Know him?"

Having seen the handwriting about ninety times, on letters Wynn received, he was sur-

prised only by the candor of Wynn's quiet reply.

"Tom Wallis is the best friend I ever had."

NEXT morning Wynn set out with a birchbark canoe and an Indian, for Echo Lake. His route lay through territory far removed from Lonesome Creek, White Horse and Dawson. The round trip occupied three weeks. Hence, during that time he continued in ignorance of all the details of the crime involving Tom Wallis, the best friend he'd ever had. He did the work required, called on isolated miners and prospectors to see that they were all right; but he did it without any of that indescribable keenness. "That crazy grin" was no longer in evidence, for his heart was in Tom Wallis' Dawson cell.

Wynn had been warned by other fellows in the Force about Sergeant Mercer. Everyone acknowledged that obedience to orders was the sun around which he faithfully revolved, and that he had amply demonstrated that he was possessed of indomitable determination and impassive courage. But they had qualified their admiration by adding that the thing which kept him going was not a heart but a machine.

Mercer could not be expected to know just what Tom Wallis meant to Wynn, even though Wynn had described him as his best friend. He could not be expected to know, for instance, that these two had been chums at school or that Wynn had applied for Yukon service with the express idea of being near Tom. Nor could he be expected to know that Wynn would have staked his connection with the Force on his conviction that Tom was incapable of anything small or unclean, let alone murder.

The sergeant was under no obligation, officially or otherwise, to tell Wynn the facts concerning the case. Wynn passionately desired the facts, and he might have asked for them. But in the Mounted Police young constables do not ask senior sergeants for information the latter do not choose to volunteer.

As for the sergeant's expressing sympathy—well, after all, why should he?

Such were the allowances Wynn made for Mercer. Wynn was the kind that is always making allowances. All the same, dur-

ing those terrible weeks of suspense, he suffered—silently, as becomes a Mounted Policeman.

**T**HEN on his return, he accused himself of unfairness to Mercer, when that grayhaired old clam opened up to let him in on the latest dope.

They sat in the cabin after dinner, the sergeant in shirt sleeves, puffing away at his beloved old pipe and never so much as glancing at Wynn, also in shirt sleeves, who listened in a dumb sort of way, watching the curling smoke.

"We've got all the evidence now, in the Siwash Pratt case. That is, we've practically got it; and it'll settle things for Wallis, all right, all right. The murderer will swing, just as I said, sure as God made the Yukon—and then forgot about it.

"You know, this Pratt was a sourdough—one of the boys of Ninety-eight. Up here ever since. But getting old—thought it about time to quit. So he came in to Dawson, a little while before the murder, with all his dust and nuggets, and cashed 'em at the bank, before clearing out. Talked a lot about it, too—showed the color of his money, treating the boys and so on—Wallis among them. Then he went back to Lonesome Creek—said he'd still some odds and ends to fix up there. Wallis went along a bit later to start a new trapline that way.

"When Pratt didn't show up at White Horse, where he should have dropped in on his way outside, the boys there got worried and reported to the Chief. And the Chief sent Dickenson over to Lonesome Creek. Dick found every damn thing in a hell of a state—Pratt shot dead with a thirty-two rifle and buried in a fresh-made grave, the whole place upside down, a lot of his outfit missing and all the money he'd got in Dawson. Wallis was camped in a new cabin close by, with most of Pratt's stuff and a thirty-two rifle, everything, in fact, but the money. Said he'd bought the stuff from Pratt and the caliber of the rifle was only a coincidence. Said he'd been away till the day before Dick arrived and knew less about the murder than he did.

"Plain case against Wallis—no sign of anyone else ever having been near Pratt's, no one and nothing to support his statement

that he'd been away. Circumstantial evidence—but that's the strongest, when strong enough. Dick brought him in.

"Just one point left: Where was the money? Chief got the numbers of the bills from the bank, circulated enquiries—that's why he sent me to White Horse. Found one of the bills there—fingerprint on it, too—man who had it didn't know what it was—I knew: blood! Murderer's fingerprint: verified that, in Dawson. Fellow who paid over that bill's a trapper, Arthur Sales, up on Borealis River now—came in for some grub, went back again. Big bill—so big it made the bird who took it ask Sales where he'd got it. Sales hedged. See the point? Of course he got it from the fellow that killed Pratt—probably hush-money—probably knows all about it. Bring in Sales, to testify, and the case is all sewed up. See?"

Wynn, blue eyes dead out, nodded; and Mercer finished—with a few sentences utterly destroying Wynn's self-accusing notion that he had been, in his judgment of the sergeant, unfair.

"Now, the Chief wants us to do the bringing in. Hell of a hard place to get at, Borealis River. Hell of a hard man to land too—Sales—dangerous—know him of old. Guess no one'd blame us if we failed—but the Force can't fail. Understand? Very good then. Go right away—and get Sales!"

**W**YNN overhauled his outfit, loaded his canoe, summoned Johnny Walker, the Indian, and set out—to bring in the man



whose evidence was to hang Tom Wallis, best friend he ever had. He said not one word in protest. That is why the Force is called the Silent Service. That is

Mounted Police discipline.

Under any other circumstances, he must have been delighted. Had not Mercer—whose adjectives meant something—described Borealis River as a "hell of a hard place to get at," Sales as "dangerous"? It was a chance—a great chance—for distinc-

tion. But—to bring in the man whose evidence was to hang Tom Wallis!

Could the sergeant have forgotten that Tom was his best friend? Or was Mercer paying him the superlative compliment of trusting him to do his duty without fear or favor, come what may? Wynn could not tell; but he went on trying to make allowances.

"That crazy grin" was still absent, the blue flames were still dead out, his heart was still in Tom's cell in Dawson.

What else had Mercer said? "Guess no one'd blame us if we failed—but the Force can't fail!"

Wynn, the Mounted Policeman, prayed for victory. Wynn, Tom Wallis's best friend, prayed that, this once, the obstacles might prove so many, so gigantic, that, this once, the Force might fail.

The first stage to Borealis lay up Howling River to the Great Divide. Sourdoughs call this stage "climbing Jacob's Ladder with a piano on your back," because there are fifteen portages on Howling River, every portage stiffer than the last. Feet swollen, blistered and blue, hands torn and bleeding, forehead intolerably galled by the tumpline, Wynn crawled and staggered and stumbled over them all, carrying his load, nobly supported by the taciturn Johnny Walker. Many and gigantic were the obstacles. But the Force can't fail.

Across the Great Divide, the second stage lay before them—down Breakneck Creek to the Little Moose. Sourdoughs call this stage "tobogganing down a ninety-mile flume to the basement of Hell." There are seven portages on Breakneck Creek. There might as well be seventy; for it is all rapids. However, a man cannot portage at every whirlpool—and hope to reach the Little Moose in a single lifetime. Only the seven big fellows, lurking in wait, one after another, like the robber knights in old legends, drive him ashore; he shoots the rest.

Still nobly supported by the taciturn Johnny Walker, Wynn went down Breakneck Creek. In White Rapids the canoe upset and both men nearly went under. In Spitfire Rapids the canoe began suddenly to sink—sharp rocks had punched into it a string of holes the size of soup plates—and they grounded in a shallow just in time. Several

long days and incredible quantities of patience and ingenuity were required to make good this damage. In the Furies, Johnny lost one paddle. The spare then snapped like a stick of macaroni and they were tossed breathlessly from hand to hand down a long line of the angels of Death playing catch. Other obstacles beset them. But the Force can't fail.

**B**YOND Breakneck Creek lay the third stage—the descent of the Little Moose to its junction with the Redbank. Sourdoughs call this stage something impossible to print. The Little Moose is but one of a thousand small, swampy rivers, all snarled and tangled among billions of gaunt firs and spruce.

The Little Moose country is entirely uninhabited. On this third stage, then, Wynn, still nobly supported by Johnny, stood quite a good chance of being not only lost but starved. He came commendably near both.

For fifteen days and a half—the half day is important—they wandered the watery bypaths with only the haziest idea of their whereabouts. Traveling light, as men must on these pleasure trips, they ran so short of grub that bits of the more edible barks and certain fat beetles came to be regarded as essential to a four-square meal. On the half day, when Johnny had begun to see a rainbow colored horse, and a snake with frills, they held a powwow.

Taciturn Johnny said "No good. Turn back." Sergeant Mercer—present in Wynn's mind—said "Guess no one'd blame us if we failed." Tom Wallis, also present in Wynn's mind, said nothing but looked volumes. Wynn? He said nothing either, but he made one last frantic effort. And at last he found a moose, because the Force can't fail. He killed it. They went on.

Beyond lay the fourth stage—down the Redbank to the Borealis. Sourdoughs speak of this stage quite nicely. There is plenty of game, the water is quieter, the portages are easier, there is no excuse to quit. . . . All was over with Tom Wallis, if a miracle did not intervene. Miracles no longer happen. Accidents still do. Taciturn Johnny fell down a steep, slippery rock, breaking a leg.

"Guess no one'd blame us if we failed—now," said Sergeant Mercer. "Can't go on

—you must fix Johnny up and go back for help," said Tom Wallis, from his cell in Dawson. "Don't leave me," said Johnny. Wynn? Set the broken leg, gave Johnny all the grub and most of the gear, said, "I won't be long," went on—

A hero? No; the word has been cheapened.

THE shack stood alone on the banks of the Borealis, looking at Wynn in silence. Wynn stood alone on the banks of the Borealis, looking at the shack. He was there at last—in spite of all the obstacles—to bring in the man whose evidence was to hang Tom Wallis, best friend he ever had.

"Dangerous"—thus Sergeant Mercer, whose adjectives meant something, had described Sales. His shack described Sales as dangerous too. In its complete immobility, its utter stillness, it was like a beast of prey, watching its victim, ready to pounce. And Sales, waiting inside . . .

Wynn had put on his scarlet serge, to show the wanted man the badge of his authority. In the gloom of the long sub-Arctic summer day, that bright coat blazed, a flame. It challenged Sales, inviting him to strike.

Wynn loosed his revolver, strode straight at the shack. He could see Tom on the gallows. But he strode straight on.

Not even a dog barked. What was Sales up to in there? Wynn had closed with the cabin, was now so near that he was able to give it a smack on that small, black, closed door.

"Sales! Let me in."

Still strange, deadly silence . . . Wynn knocked again.

"Sales! Do you hear? Let me in!"

Death continued to watch Wynn.

"Sales! Open the door!"

Suddenly crash on crash tore the stillness—bullets cracked and zipped from a chink in a small, black, boarded window. "Dangerous?" Somewhat.

"No one'd blame us if we failed." Wynn charged the door like a young bull, charged again and again. It held fast.

Then he remembered his ax—down in the canoe. The shack continued to spit fire. Wynn turned and walked to the shore. Superb folly of that sort makes the Mounted

Police invincible. The astonished wilderness roared, every time the hidden rifle crashed. "Run!" The eager bullets chased him—fruitlessly. Sales must have been unable to take a proper sight.

Ax on shoulder, Wynn strolled back. The bullets flew to meet him. One flicked his Stetson, cutting a piece out of the brim, a second struck the ax blade a blow that sent a shock clean up his arm.

Blow on blow with the ax made the door quiver and answered Sales's furious firing, shot for shot. A duel, now—a duel between the ax and the rifle! Could Wynn chop Sales out of the shack before Sales shot the soul out of Wynn?

*Smash!* A bullet hit Wynn at last, in the left arm. He dropped the ax, under the influence of that astounding agony. Blood burst out of the hole, like water from a punctured hose—an artery gone. It was a strange sight. At the same time, Wynn's face was drained of color—like a bottle of red wine when the cork comes out. He had just time to get on the tourniquet before—well, before the results became very serious. The tourniquet was made out of a handkerchief with a pencil twisted in it. Crouched flat against the door, Wynn tied it on with his right hand and his teeth, while Sales peppered the air but could no longer reach him.

"Guess no one'd blame us if we failed—" now anyway. What remained? He couldn't use the ax any more—if he did, the blood would burst out again. He couldn't bring his revolver into action, because he might kill Sales—and the Law had no use for a dead witness. He could do nothing but retreat, counting himself lucky were he to reach the shore alive.

Great waves of happiness surged up in him at this sweet thought. After all, he had done his best. Even Sergeant Mercer couldn't have done more.

COULDN'T he? Years ago, Sergeant Mercer had been checked by a bandit penned in a wooden house—like this. It had seemed impossible to get the bandit out. The bandit was taken. Mercer drove him out of the house by setting it on fire.

The memory of this expedient flashed upon Wynn's rejoicing. Tom Wallis on the gallows looked at Wynn with terrible eyes.

But the Force can't fail. Wynn's face was gray as the shack itself. His legs were doubling up under him. He slid around the corner of the little building, piled a few dead branches around it, with his good hand, set



a match to them, drew his revolver, sat down on a stump facing the door but outside the zone of fire and waited.

A haze gathered. The fusillade from Sales'

rifle had ceased, so for a space there was renewed silence. Then sharp cracklings and whistlings, thin streams of smoke, came from the heaped brush. There was a muffled explosion and the shack burst into flames.

Dry and old, it burned fiercely. Terribly suggestive, dull noises thudded through the hollow roar enveloping it. Sales, afraid to come out, was concentrating on an effort to extinguish the fire. He might as well have tried to plug Vestuvius.

Wynn, face growing steadily grayer, remained motionless—so motionless that he seemed to have merged with the stump on which he sat. The poundings in the shack ceased. Sales had failed, of course; but still he was not coming out. Well, in that case, let him burn there! It was Tom's life or his; and who could deny that Wynn had done everything?

Everything?—Not quite! No, not quite everything. The Law has no use for a dead witness. And the Force can't fail. The door of the shack fell in. So there was no longer any reason why Wynn should not enter the shack and bring Sales out himself. True, the shack was one great flame, from floor to roof-tree. Wynn put away his revolver, staggered to his feet . . .

What seemed to Wynn like hours later, he regained the open air, dragging the unconscious Sales by the collar with his good hand, he saw the figure of Tom on the gallops blot out the whole world.

**S**ERGEANT MERCER, incredible vision, was bending over him, beside the smoking ruins of the shack; and the sergeant was saying incredible things.

"Wake up, Wynn, boy!"—Never had he used that name before.—"You're O. K. now. It's me—Mercer. Brought Johnny along with me—and a couple of other Indians. Followed you up—in case you quit—tough job I gave you. But the Force can't fail! We've got Sales O. K.—thanks to you. And the murderer will swing, all right—now. Spike Malone, an old offender—traced him by the fingerprint on that bill—duplicates in our records at Dawson. Sales? His accomplice. Wallis? Free.

"Didn't tell you before. Thought I'd try you out—learn what you were made of—You're a good man, Wynn. . . ."

Yes, they test a fellow pretty hard in the Mounted Police before they call him that.

## *A Novelette of the Northwoods Loggers*

*Next Issue*

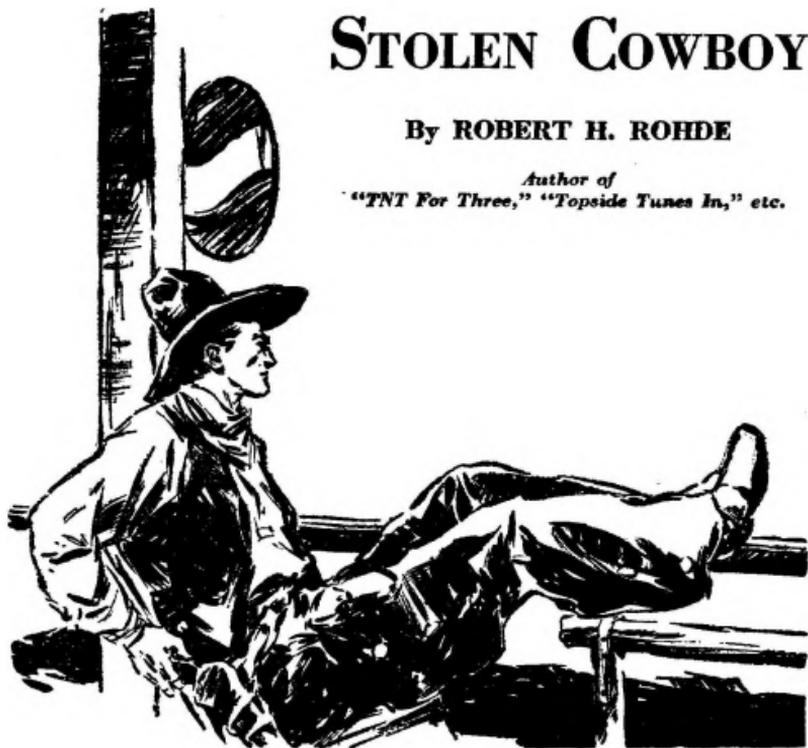
# **Boiled Shirts and Wool**

**by Robert E. Pinkerton**

# STOLEN COWBOY

By ROBERT H. ROHDE

Author of  
"TNT For Three," "Topside Tunes In," etc.



## *A Troubled Waddy Ropes Himself a Bunch of Banknotes*

**T**HE man in the trick vest had been as wrong as wrong. He'd played crooked cards, and he'd made a dirty reach for the gun he carried in a shoulder-belt; but the city policemen who came swarming into that smoked-up room back of the K. C. stockyards grabbed onto that hundred per cent cowboy, Billy Dodd, just as if it had been he who'd done something downright criminal.

It didn't seem to count with them that Billy had acted as was no more than right and proper in the interest of good, clean sport and the paramount cause of self-preservation. Off they dragged him, disarmed and manacled to jail.

For a couple of days Billy Dodd reckoned himself plumb out of luck, alone and abandoned in a camp of enemies. But old

Webb Carlew, his boss, owner of the X L outfit, wasn't the abandoning kind.

In no time at all, considering the distance east and north that he had to travel, and the fact that the news found him just out of a sickbed, Carlew's boot heels were tapping in the jailhouse corridor.

Billy Dodd could have wept in his relief then, for they'd had him clean panicked. Deaf to his ingenuous story of how it had all happened, they had chalked up a charge of felonious assault against him; and a cold-eyed official had stopped by the night before to assure him that if the man with the sensational vest and the shoulder-slung gun died, as probably he would, the score would be changed to murder.

So, matters standing as they did, Billy was glad enough to see that floppy Stetson and weathered face beyond the grating.

Webb, as his jugged foreman promptly discovered, was hopping mad.

"You seventy-two samples of simple-minded jackass!" was the general effect of his greeting to Billy.

With embarrassed thumbs wriggling in the waistband of the blue-serge store pants he had acquired especially for this epic journey, Billy Dodd launched plaintively into his own defense.

"Word of honor, Mistuh Carlew, I kep' still until I'd been watchin' that crook the longest kinda time. Until I was dead certain he was dealin' cyards off a lotta places besides the top of the deck! If—

"Hell! I know you wouldn't pull a gun-play 'less it was forced on yuh. It's yore mixin' in with strangers to play poker that floors me."

"I reckon, Mistuh Carlew," said Billy abjectly, "that I ain't worth wasting yore time on. Just you leave me to——"

"Dodd," snapped Carlew, "you shut yore haid. I never did believe in swappin' foremen every few minutes. When I've got a good man, I don't let go of him easy."

Webb Carlew was like that. Having spoken his piece, he didn't rub it in.

Then, lingering only long enough to start a T-bone steak with vegetable trimmings and a can of peaches on their way to Billy Dodd, he fared forth on the trail of a lawyer whose name he recollected having seen pretty often in the news columns of the *Kansas City Star*.

**T**HE lawyer listened, folded away a thousand-dollar cash retainer, and did a few tricks with the telephone.

"This fellow Hoster, that your man shot," he said after the telephoning, "seems to have about a fifty-fifty chance of pulling through. In the meantime, the simplest thing is to let Dodd stay where he is."

"Nope!" Carlew said. "Billy's the outdoors kind. I want him out—and hell with what it costs!"

The lawyer brought his fingertips together under his chin.

"Best bargain I could make is twenty thousand dollars," he said. "And that's a lot of money."

"Right now," Carlew ruefully admitted, "it sure is. Tell you the truth, brother, I

didn't reckon yore fee would be takin' such a jump all at once."

The lawyer laughed.

"Trust me to get what's coming to me—but I'm not as brutal as that," he said. "I've got my retainer, and that does me for the present. I don't want any twenty thousand for myself. But that's the lowest bail I could get the prosecutor's office to agree to when I called up."

Webb Carlew released a gusty sigh.

"Billy ain't goin' to run away," he said; "and I sorta guess the X L ranch is worth twenty thousand of anybody's money over and above the mortgage."

"It ought to be, Carlew. But the law's sort of funny in some ways. Especially where State lines cut in. Fact is, your range in Texas wouldn't be worth a nickel on a Missouri bail bond. If you're going to get your foreman out, you'll have to put up cash."

Again Webb Carlew gulped.

"Seems to me," he said slowly, "I've heard of people makin' a business of puttin' up bail. Ain't there any such in Kansas City?"

There were such people, any number of them. But the premiums they demanded, considering what Hoster's condition was and that Dodd would be going out of the State, were sky-high. Even the lawyer balked, and it was at his suggestion that Carlew started back that night for Texas.

Visiting Billy Dodd once more before he left, old Webb evasively told him:

"You're on yore way out, son, and that's somethin' you can sure depend on. But there's a couple a' leetle hitches, and I'm a-goin' to run down home while they're bein' untangled. I've fixed it up so you'll get just as good grub as ever came off the X L chuck wagon an' all the cigarettas you can smoke."

"One grand old man, one white old man!" Billy Dodd whispered when he had gone.

But Billy didn't know "the half of it" then.

**T**WENTY thousand dollars was going to be a big stake to raise on short notice, and long before he'd made his last change of trains down at Harlingen, Webb Carlew

was wishing mightily that old Hep Blackman was still running the State Bank at Maverick.

Hep was the kind of banker that a man could talk to free and easy—a banker who'd listen to any good neighbor's proposition with a cigar in his face and a twinkle in his eye and his feet up on his desk.

As like as not, Hep Blackman would have put out the twenty thousand on Webb's plain note without getting technical on the subject of security. But Hep had moved on up to San Antone as big chief of a city bank, and the easy boss of the X L decided it would be too much like an imposition to appeal to him there.

Even though he wasn't on the most cordial terms with young Steele Armbruster, Hep's successor at Maverick, it seemed to Webb that the home bank was the logical place to raise the money.

Armbruster, while minus the cigar and particular about keeping his feet on the floor, did begin to generate something of a twinkle when Carlew was in the middle



of his story. He was proving a lot better audience than Webb had expected to find him; and it struck Webb that Steele, even if he did have his father's bulldog jaw and close-set icy eyes, was a considerably pleasanter hombre to do business with than his tight-fisted and unsocial sire, the X L's neighbor to the east.

When Carlew had finished, Armbruster shook his thick shoulders.

"Now, Mister Carlew," he said softly, "we'll look at this business from a banker's point of view.

"This institution holds a first mortgage on your ranch for fifty thousand dollars. It has four years to run, and I don't deny it represents a sound investment of bank funds. But I'm afraid we would not be justified in raising the first mortgage to seventy thousand."

Webb Carlew rubbed his chin. "We've sure had a couple of tough years," he admitted. "But looking back over close onto half a century, I can remember tougher ones that us cattle men have recovered

from. Personally, I wouldn't sell the X L for three times what she's mortgaged for."

"I'm sorry," said Armbruster, "but, nevertheless, conditions being what they are, we're not raising any first mortgages. And the law forbids us to lend on second mortgages."

"You mean," said Carlew, "that I don't get the money?" His face had fallen.

"Didn't say we *wouldn't!*" Steele Armbruster protested quickly. "We're all for accommodating a customer. But this is something, Carlew, that will take working out. Suppose you drop back this afternoon?"

Armbruster climbed into his flashy roadster after the X L buckboard had taken Webb away. Down below the Bon Ton Hotel, he stopped and held conference with a red nosed and puffy eyed individual whose office sign proclaimed him to be Judge Zephas Tyler, counselor-at-law and justice of the peace, and then burned dust for his father's ranch, the Cross I.

An hour later one pair of gimlet Armbruster eyes glinted elatedly into another.

"Pop," said the Maverick State Bank's new president, "how're you feeling today about Webb Carlew and the X L?"

Old man Armbruster—wide, like his son, in all proportions but the distance between his eyes—cursed with fluency and heat.

"That," he observed, "is exactly how I feel *all* the time. Get it fixed in yore mind, Steele, and yuh won't never need to ask me again."

His son looked off into the heat shimmer.

"What would you say," he asked, "if I could get you the X L herd and all, for twenty thousand dollars above the first mortgage?"

"I'd say, son," his father replied, "that you was due for a good, thorough physical examination from the neck up."

"Just sit back, pop, and let me tell you about the fine Christmas present I'm rigging up for you this afternoon!"

WHEN the X L buckboard brought Webb Carlew back to the Maverick State Bank, young Steele Armbruster was on hand to greet him with a toothy smile.

"I've found a way, Carlew," he said, "of helping you out. The bank'll let you

have the twenty thousand dollars in the form of a Kansas City draft. Like it, would you, in time to get away east on Number Eighteen?"

Old Webb's face lighted.

"Can you do it as quick as that?"

"As quick," Armbruster told him, "as Judge Tyler gets through drawing up the memorandum with the terms of the loan. He ought to be in any minute, and you've got a whole hour before Number Eighteen pulls out."

"A leetle short of an hour," Carlew remarked, looking at his watch, "I reckon, though, that you could be tellin' me ahead of time what kinda deal we're a-makin'."

Armbruster leaned back.

"It happens, Carlew," he said, "that the only deal I have license to make is the very best sort of one for you. I'm going to let you have the twenty thousand on call."

Armbruster talked smoothly and rapidly on.

"In the first place," he said, "when you borrow call money you don't have to pay any bonus, but just the straight interest. The loan isn't set to run any particular length of time; you can pay it off whenever you please. Usually," he went on, "it's people speculating in the stock market who borrow on call, and the money they borrow goes direct into the stock they buy. The stocks are the lender's security, do you see? In this case the money is going into a bond. It's to stay in one piece and in one place. Being held by a court of law, I calculate it'll be just as safe as it'd be here in the vault."

It was a grimly ironic smile that Armbruster hid from Webb Carlew as he turned to rummage through a desk drawer; his tone was modest and deprecating. "I'll just get the draft ready now, so that when the judge comes. . . ."

Carlew twisted a brown-paper cigarette and stared at the clock as the pen scratched. Down the dusty street, collar off and neck-band open, fat Judge Zephas Tyler sat back and stirred a breeze with a palm fan.

He had completed the fair copy of his verbose and tightly drawn loan agreement an hour since, but the hoot of Number Eighteen's whistle was already agitating

the lifeless, sun drugged air when he pulled on his baggy coat and waddled up to the bank.

Webb Carlew had been up and pacing the floor for some time then, sweating with anxiety, comparing the clock with his watch.

He grabbed up a pen when Tyler came in, reached eagerly for the papers that the lawyer had dropped before Steele Armbruster.

"Hold on!" cried Tyler, "Ain't you going to read what you're signin'?"

"Hell, no!" Carlew grunted. "It's all been explained to me, and the rattler's pullin' in this minute."

He signed, snatched up the draft in one paw and Armbruster's limp hand in the other, and thumped hurriedly out. At his back, as his boots spurned the sidewalk planking, Banker Steele Armbruster and Lawyer Zephas Tyler exchanged grins of mutual congratulation. Solemnly they shook hands.

"Didn't I tell you?" demanded Armbruster. "People like Carlew—you can figure out to a dot how they'll act."

Tyler mopped his perspiring face with a vast and gaudy handkerchief of silk.

"Steele," he said earnestly, "if only you don't miss your guess any further in the case of that scatter-brained Billy Dodd, you and your pap are goin' to have one of the finest properties in the whole Southwest!"

UP IN K. C. there wasn't any more red tape to it, so far as Webb Carlew could see, than there'd be to buying a sack of flour over a store counter. The State of Missouri just rang up twenty thousand dollars and delivered William Dodd.

It wasn't Carlew's way, though, even to hint to Billy what his freedom had cost.

"You're out, son, and the law end is all taken care of," was as much as Carlew vouchsafed. "Now we're headin' home, and you're goin' to make yoreself useful around a few cows while that feller in the hospital is makin' up his mind whether he's goin' to kick off or not."

They were halfway to Maverick before Billy Dodd could frame what sounded anything like an adequate speech of thanks.

Webb stopped him brusksly.

"Billy," he said, "I'm *expectin'* you to

do somethin' for me. Two things. First off, you'll oblige me by stayin' out of c y a r d games where you a i n ' t s e e n Board o' Health certificates for all the o t h e r players. Second-ly, I'd be thankful if yuh'd confine yore target practice to empty peach cans."



**B**ILLY DODD found a hero's reception awaiting him at the X L. They didn't take it at all seriously around the X L bunkhouse. They knew that with Webb Carlew standing by, nothing serious could happen when the case came to trial. He drew water, Webb did!

Billy Dodd was beginning to be pretty easy in his mind when, a week after his return, he ran into big "Ham" Larson in the course of an evening's canter into Maverick.

Ham was the Cross I foreman, some kind of distant relative of the Armbrusters, a hulking and saturnine individual comparatively new to the country and one for whom Billy had never had a lot of time.

Ordinarily they would have met and passed with the scantiest of nods; but now Larson, leathering down along the Cross I trail, signaled the neighbor foreman with a halting wave of one of those great freckle-backed hands that had been the inspiration of his nickname.

"Hi, Dodd!" he hailed. "Wait up. Might as well ride in together, hey?"

"Why not?" queried Billy.

"When you goin' back to K. C., Dodd?" asked Ham. "Heard yet?"

"Dunno. Maybe never."

"Maybe never, hey?" Larson repeated as they jogged on side by side in the purpling twilight. He turned in his saddle to stare at Billy. "Say, how the hell," he asked, "do yuh get that way?"

Dodd shrugged.

"Mistuh Webb Carlew," he answered tolerantly, "is in charge of all my legal int'rests down this way, and he's got a fine lawyer that wears patent-leather shoes with

extra socks on the outside of 'em lookin' after the Kansas City end."

Larson's grin bared an uneven row of tobacco smirched teeth.

"Uh-huh," said he. "An' when Carlew and the lawyer are done with yuh, you're in hock to the X L for the rest a' yore life! Ain't that pretty? If I was in yore boots, Dodd, I wouldn't be settin' around waitin' for the lightnin' to strike. Not me! I'd sure blow."

**O**UT of the corners of his blue eyes Billy Dodd studied the Armbruster foreman with chill disapproval.

"Mistuh Larson," he said stiffly, "let me tell yuh a couple o' things. That city lawyer ain't chargin' nothin'. He's an ol' buddy o' Mistuh Carlew's—Webb told me so himself. What he's doin' is just for friendship. Furthermore, Webb Carlew never took advantage of a man, friend or foe, in the whole of his square-shootin' life."

"Just the same," Ham said doggedly, "you ain't showin' good sense, Dodd."

And then, through the rest of the ride to Maverick, the Cross I foreman talked on in a pessimistic monotone concerning the disadvantages and restrictions of prison life.

Just once Billy Dodd interrupted him.

"You seem," he remarked pointedly, "to know a hell of a lot about it, Larson."

"Happen to know people," said Amos Armbruster's range boss, "who've been there. No, it ain't any place for a white man, the penitentiary ain't." He kneeed closer over to Billy as the two horses emerged from the mesquite and pricked their ears at sight of the town lights twinkling ahead. "Not that you're any partic-lar sidekick o' mine, Dodd," he proffered in a lower voice, "but it might be that I could help yuh."

"As how?" inquired Billy.

"Well, there's an outfit over in Chihuahua that I could fix you up with a letter to."

They were at the head of Maverick's single street, and, in the light of the bulbs strung magnificently along the front of the Boa Ton, Billy Dodd's eyes showed an angry glint. The purpose he saw dawning in them choked the Cross I foreman off.

"Well," he finished lamely, "I've said all I'm a'goin' to, *amigo*."

Dodd smiled unpleasantly.

"Yeah?" he murmured. "And far as I'm concerned, Larson, you can go somewheres a lot further south than the State o' Chihuahua!"

Then he chirped up the pinto and made the home stretch to the Bon Ton hitching rail in silence and alone. A door opened to emit a flood of light and laughter and take in Billy Dodd. When it had closed, the baffled Ham Larson walked the roan to the very edge of a veranda where a fat man sat in darkness and plied a palm-leaf fan.

"He ain't felt yet, Judge," reported Larson in a whisper. "But I sure got him thinkin', and it won't be long now!"

**I**N A few days a reassuring letter came down from Kansas City to Webb Carlew at the X L. It had been written by the extravagantly besocked barrister whom Webb had avowed to be his personal and intimate friend; and it reported that Hoster, the short-card gambler, was mending nicely.

"Therefore," the lawyer concluded, "the matter will not be put before this present Grand Jury, and I see a hope that there may be no eventual indictment."

But directly on the head of the good news came bad—the latter benevolently relayed to Billy himself by no less an authority than Judge Zephas Tyler.

Riding into town on the day following receipt of the Kansas City letter, Billy Dodd was halted by a shout through the open door of the honorable Tyler's Main Street office. The judge's face was grave. Billy stepped into his office.

"What," asked Tyler, "do you hear from above, Dodd?" Then he cut in before Billy had concluded the glad tidings—cut in with a somber deep note in his voice that sent a shiver along Billy's spine, "Sorry, son, but I hear different! Fact of the matter is, Dodd," said he, "this man you shot up is in bad shape. I've got important connections up Missouri way, and that comes straight. Also, the Kansas City authorities are dead set on makin' an example of you."

Billy's jaw dropped.

"But that lawyer pal of Webb's——" he protested weakly.

"Hell!" exploded Tyler. "What does *he* know? Do you s'pose the prosecutor is tip-pin' off his hand to the defense?" The judge scratched his bulbous nose with the frayed edge of his palm-leaf and cleared his throat. "It's a sorta ticklish thing for a man in my position," he said, "to give advice in a case like this; but if you were client or kin of mine, Dodd, I'd sure tell you to get below the Border and stay there until it blows over."

Billy Dodd was as pale then as it was possible for a man to get who had ridden so many years under the Texas sun.

"Is it as bad as that, Judge—honest?"

Zephas Tyler's several moist chins rippled and telescoped to his slow nod.

"Don't whisper a word of where this came from," he said. "You promise? Well, then, they'll be comin' down for you any day, now—any hour. Best thing you can do is keep right on goin'. Don't go back to the X L and don't stay in Maverick. Shove right along south on the Rio Grande road—and don't let the river stop you. Get into Mexico and lay low."

Billy Dodd moistened his dry lips.

"But—but I can't go without tellin' Webb."

"Use your judgment," Tyler invited. "Number Twenty-six will be here in less'n ten minutes, and like as not it'll have some Kansas City officers aboard it. The river road's open now, and if you want you can leave a note for Carlew with me. Think fast, Dodd."

He pushed Billy into a chair beside his desk, put paper before him, shoved a pencil into his shaking hand.

A whistle sounded in the distance, shrill with menace, and the pencil began to wriggle uncertainly over the surface of the foolscap. Billy Dodd, two minutes later,

was galloping down the long, hot road to the Rio Grande.

Judge Zephas Tyler, whistling happily between his teeth, lifted down his coat from its hook and moved with measured pace toward the bank. His face shone with triumph



when he poked it into young Steele Armbruster's private office.

"Pleased to report," said he, "that Mister William Dodd has removed his twenty-thousand-dollar carcass from our midst. Now you may proceed, Steele, to add the best ranch in the country to the old ancestral range!"

WHEN Billy Dodd's pinto arrived at the Cruzes ford of the Rio Grande a white band of moonlight lay across the water. It had been a ride of hours.

The pinto shook an ear and took to the water mincingly. Through a clump of mesquite on the Mexican side light showed in the unglazed window of a 'dobe *jacal*; and Billy dismounted at the *jacal's* door and made a sweeping bow before an aged pair who had come timidly forth.

*Si, si!* Señor Gringo was welcome to their humble best, the householders assured him in chorus when he had spoken his wishes in Spanish. So at the cost of a silver dollar, he dined heartily if not elaborately on *tortillas* and *frijoles*, and so retired to a bed under the stars.

Long before even his usual early hour for turning out, Señor Billy Dodd was up and on his way.

Not on his way south, but on his way north, heading home. He'd had a dream, and old Webb Carlew had been in it—Webb, shaking his head sorrowfully and muttering over and over, "He wouldn't do me thataway. You don't know Billy Dodd!"

And Billy, even if prison doors were yawning for him, couldn't stand that.

Noon found them, stiff-legged horse and saddle-sore man, parting company at the X L corral. On the ranch-house veranda Webb Carlew rubbed his ancient eyes and gave forth a mighty shout.

"Billy! Billy Dodd!"

The errant foreman limped over to him in ground-shy boots.

"Did you get a little note from me, Webb?" he asked anxiously.

Carlew nodded slowly.

"Yeah," he said. "But I didn't believe what it told me. Was certain, somehow, that yuh'd have a change a' mind an' come back. The one thing worryin' me was that you mightn't get back in time." He threw

an arm over Billy's shoulder, and burst into inexplicable laughter. "But yuh are, yuh darn hoptoad, and we'll play turn about on them lowdown, swindlin' Armbrusters so fast it'll make their heads swim!"

That was all Greek to Billy Dodd. He passed a weary hand over bewildered eyes. "What the hell," he demanded, "have the Armbrusters got to do with anything?"

"They thought," replied Carlew, to his foreman's further mystification, "that they were going to walk clean away with the X L on their doggone 'call money' game."

Billy Dodd stared.

"Somethin'," he deduced quite accurately, "has been goin' on that I don't know anything about. He added two and two and produced a devastating total. 'The Armbrusters!' he cried. 'An' Judge Tyler in with 'em thickern' limburger cheese! Say, listen, Webb, it was Tyler that threw the runaway scare into me—stampeded me!"

Carlew nodded.

"I thought so," said he, "when he slipped me that farewell billy-doo signed 'William Dodd.' And right at the same time Steele Armbruster sent word out from the bank that his call money was done called, and that I had to raise twenty thousand dollars in real money inside forty-eight hours. So if you'd kep' on movin' south, Billy, I could just a' whistled for the twenty thousand, and the Armbruster gang would 'a' grabbed the X L, lock, stock an' corral."

Billy Dodd regarded him dizzily.

"Me?" he mumbled. "Twenty thousand dollars? Where's the connection, Mistuh Carlew?"

"That's just the amount yore worth, Billy, on the hoof." Carlew grinned. "I mean it. I had to put up that much cash bail to get yuh outta jail in Kansas City. I wasn't aimin' to let yuh know, for fear it'd bother yuh, but now they got me in a jam an' I got to come clean. I had to sign a trick agreement, Billy, to get the coin. Signed it in such a hurry that I never stopped to read it. I——"

Dodd blanched.

"Hell, Webb! You didn't go puttin' no more mortgage on the ranch?"

"Worse'n that, Billy. I just plain gave the X L away. Or like to have. Zefe Tyler showed me where I agreed to the whole

business in black an' white. The signed understandin' was that I could pay the twenty thousand back to the bank any time I was a-mind to. An' the bank could call the loan just the same way. If they did, an' I didn't make good the whole twenty thousand inside forty-eight clocked hours, the bank snapped over my equity in th' X L—gave me back the first mortgage an' the bail note, an' calmly took the ranch."

Billy Dodd's fists were clenched.

"The dirty skunks!" he gritted. "By jinks, Webb, I'd never let you done it if I knew!"

"Maybe I thought o' that," smiled Carlew. "Anyhow, their game is sure spoiled now. I went to Maverick with Zefe, after he come out this mornin', an' got my ol' lawyer buddy on the long distance. He said he'd try an' fix it so that if you went to K. C. an' released the bail, they'd up an' turn you loose, regardless."

Billy Dodd's brown face cleared.

"Don't care if they do or not!" he ejaculated. "There's plenty time for me to grab Number Eighteen this afternoon—an' even if they're going to make me guest a' honor at a necktie party, it's K. C. for me. Just tell me, what do I do when I get there?"

"You go to the lawyer. He'll look after the money, an' look after you. My time on Armbruster's call is up at 11 A. M., day after tomorrow. But you'll be surrendered at nine, right after yore train gets in, and it won't take only a few minutes before the bail money is banked in Kansas City an' wired to Maverick for me to draw on."

Dodd put out a calloused hand.

"Webb," he vowed, "if that money ain't here on the dot it won't be any fault a' mine. And I won't be totin' my six-gun this time, neither!"

A FEW miles eastward, at that moment, a big rawboned roan was kicking dust in a mad gallop for the Cross I hacienda. The rider was Ham Larson, and his face was livid when he roused Amos Armbruster from his siesta.

"Here's a pretty hoydy-do, Ame!" he cried. "Dodd's back at the XL!"

Blinking the sleep out of his eyes, Armbruster sat bolt upright.

"Hell yuh say!" he snorted. "How could

he be when we know he crossed the river and bedded down in Mexico last night?"

"Facts is facts, Ame. Young Garcia and a couple others seen him breezin' in off the river road a good hour ago."

The lord of the Cross I brought a thick fist crashing down on the table.

"The damn chicken livered reptile!" he roared. "Lost his nerve, did he? Figgered he'd be better off under Carlew's wing than on the loose!"

He looked at his watch and cursed sulphurously.

"An hour ago they saw him? That'd put him at the X L this minute, if he wasn't loafin'. Which means that Carlew will start him off for Kansas City this afternoon an' beat the barrier." Armbruster looked hard at his beetling foreman. "Dodd mustn't be let to catch that train, Larson!" he snapped.

Ham Larson rested his vast hands on his hips.

"It's a long way in from the X L," he suggested coolly, "an' the mesquite's thick along the road. If it should be that Dodd rode to Maverick alone, 'most anything could happen." He shifted his cud, his small eyes unwinkingly on Armbruster's. "If someone was shootin' proniscuous-like in the mesquite, Dodd might even have the hard luck to get in the way of a piece o' lead."

"No; it'd be neater *this way*. 'Specially if he's all by himself. Now, s'posin' . . ."

Quickly and pithily he summarized his own plan for settling the Dodd problem, and, five minutes after he had finished, a grim and purposeful little cavalcade was trotting toward the fork where the X L and the Cross I trails joined on their townward way.

Jogging into Maverick, spurless and gun-

less, with store pants hung outside his boots, Billy Dodd found himself suddenly beset from all sides by armed and masked men. One of them, riding close, held a



gun on him in a great freckled hand. Although he looked in vain for a con-

firming brand on the mounts crowding in on him, Dodd was sure he knew that freckled fist.

"Clear the road!" he roared; and without further preliminaries, he swung savagely for the bandanna masked nose of the fist's owner.

The swing connected. As the gang leader rocked in his saddle, flame spewed from the muzzle of his revolver. But Dodd, knocked cold by the blow of a gun butt crashing down on him from behind, was out of the way of the bullet, pitching into the road.

Ungentle hands lifted him and threw him back into his saddle. When he had his first flash of consciousness, daylight was going and his captors were on the march. They had roped his feet together and bound his wrists behind his back, and his aching head was bobbing on his chest.

The pain was too much; he drifted off again.

He came to, hours later, in utter darkness. He was lying on a hard plank bunk, but his hands and feet were still tied. Somewhere near him someone else was sleeping profoundly and noisily.

Dodd strained at his bonds, but they only drew tighter.

Nothing mattered now. Webb Carlew had been ditched, the X L irrevocably lost, when he'd missed Number Eighteen out of Maverick.

The night was a thousand years long, but dawn had to come finally. A gray glimmer seeped through a window in a 'dobe wall. He was in a little, dirt-floored room, alone. A door opened into a larger room, and there the man he had heard sleeping was stirring.

THE latter came to the door presently, and, although he had been careful to mask himself, his freckled hands identified him to Billy Dodd. The blue bandanna knotted back of his ears was most satisfactorily streaked with crimson; at sight of it Billy felt for a moment that the world wasn't entirely wrong.

"Hullo!" hailed the masked man gruffly. "How's the head?"

Dodd quelled an impulse to curse him. Instead he groaned.

"It's killin' me," he said with an effort.

His captor laughed, and then vanished.

The freckled man busied himself in the other room, and presently a smell of wood smoke and a tantalizing odor of bacon and coffee drifted in to Billy Dodd. When he looked in again, his jailor chuckled.

"Breakfast," he said, "is bein' served for one. You're too free with yore fists, cowboy. And besides, invalids hadn't ought to be fed solid grub."

Billy Dodd had reason to be glad that he had stoked up heartily before he left the X L, for breakfast wasn't the only meal he missed that day. After he had eaten, the man with the telltale, freckle branded hands came in to him, inspected and tightened his bonds, and then rode away.

When he had gone, Dodd spent the rest of the morning and the whole of the afternoon in a struggle with the expertly tied ropes. As twilight came, his wrists were raw and bleeding, so sore that he had given up the struggle and was concentrating on an attempt to free his trussed feet.

The best he could do was to stretch the braided rope, and when he had gained a play of an inch or two he got up and started off on a precarious and painfully slow tour of inspection.

There were only two rooms, he discovered, in the abandoned *jacal*. In the far corner of the room in which the boss kidnaper had slept was a small, broken mirror, standing on a waist-high shelf, which suggested possibilities to Dodd. Backing to the shelf, he found he could reach the mirror with his tied hands; and when he had hobbled prayerfully back into the smaller room with it he succeeded, after a hundred heart-breaking failures, in jamming it upright between the two planks that formed his bunk.

But the rope was tough and the broken edge of the mirror not so sharp as it might have been, and when the jailor returned at nightfall there was only the frayed end of a single strand to encourage Dodd to further effort.

In his absence, the man with the freckled hands had found a new means of transportation. Somewhere he had exchanged his horse for a battered flivver; and Billy Dodd, raising up to look out the window, saw that

the license plates had thoughtfully been removed from the little car.

Except for the disappearance of the mirror, there was no evidence that Dodd had stirred, and his jailor hadn't noticed that the mirror was gone.

"Hungry?" he taunted. "Well, I've had dinner, my own self, an' I don't feel like cookin'. Better go to sleep an' forget it."

Dodd judged from the thickness of his voice that he had been drinking. Confirmation came to his ears in the swoosh of a drawn cork and the gurgling of liquid into a cup—a sound which came repeatedly in the couple of hours that elapsed before the lone reveler in the outer room called it a night and passed into thunderous slumber.

Until midnight Dodd waited; then he sat up and resumed, more cautiously, his slow sawing of the rope over the jagged side of the looking glass. As he sawed, he thought.

Webb Carlew had until eleven o'clock this coming forenoon to raise twenty thousand dollars, did he?

Well, William Dodd knew where that much money was bound to be. And for Webb's sake and the X L's, get it he would or die in the attempt!

**I**T MIGHT have been that Ham Larson had tucked away a drop too much before he turned in, but what he heard and what he saw as the rising sun tipped the mesquite with flame brought him quickly to himself.

In the next room, William Dodd was plainly not only up, but he was about. An instant later he saw that Dodd had got rid of all his bonds as well. Dodd stood in the door, bloody fists raised for attack.

Larson grabbed for his gun, lying on the floor beside his bunk. He pulled the trigger, but Billy Dodd was so close upon him then and his hand so unsteady that the bullet went wide.

Dodd snatched the revolver barrel, twisted the gun out of the Cross I foreman's grip and flung it across the room.

"You're better lookin', Larson," he gritted, "with yore face covered. But now I know yuh for certain, anyhow."

Larson cast one swift glance toward the revolver; saw it was safely beyond reach

of either of them at the moment. His eyes measured Billy Dodd and assured him that he had the weight advantage by at least twenty pounds. He jumped up with a bel-low.

"Let the iron go, Dodd! I'm the best man without it!"

A fist crashing to his chin expressed William Todd's confident doubt of that. Larson swung at vacancy, shook his head and bored in like an angry bull. With a matorador's precision, Billy sidestepped, and more fists than the Cross I foreman had believed to be in the room thudded upon him from the flank as his blind charge carried him on.

Larson wheeled and came back, but now Dodd stood firm. His right shot out, with all his muscular poundage behind him, and Amos Armbruster's groggy relative went sprawling.

Larson found wisdom in his fall. Weight, it was evident, wasn't everything. Struggling up, he cast about for a better weapon than his fists, and leaped for the table in the center of the room.

The bottle which he had brought with him in the flivver stood there, uncorked. He snatched it up.

Billy Dodd, grabbing a heavy stool, used it as a shield. The descending bottle smashed against it. Then, with most deliberate and excellent aim, Billy hurled the stool. It struck Larson's forehead, and he went down, grunting, and stayed down.

Dodd dusted his hands.

Painstakingly he tied up Larson, finishing just as his bewildered eyes were opening.

"Way it looks now," Dodd remarked cheerfully, "the late occupants a' this *jacal* musta been two other fellers. Sorry I haven't got time to fix breakfast for yuh before I go. But I've heard it said that people in pore health ought to be careful a' puttin' too much on their stomachs, anyhow."

**H**E WENT out to inspect the terrain and the flivver, and saw he had guessed his whereabouts correctly. He had seen this same deserted *jacal* before.

Patting the flivver's hood, Billy Dodd addressed it in the same soft tone he habitually

employed in unburdening his heart to the pinto, Wilbur.

"But you sure got twenty miles an' a few more left in yuh! Ain't it so, Henry?"

The flivver not being so responsive as Wilbur, Dodd walked around and found his own answer in the gas tank.

"Okay!" he cried. "It's boots an' saddles for us, Henry. Hope yuh ain't gun-shy?"

Cryptic just then, that question acquired significance at the end of an hour's chugging. Maverick lay in sight, and Billy Dodd, slamming on the brakes, proceeded calmly to hide his face behind his own bandanna. Then he put up the side curtains.

At nine o'clock, three minutes after Steele Armbruster and the youth who was his cashier, teller and bookkeeper had opened the Maverick State Bank for business, the curtained flivver wheezed into Main Street.

Only two or three citizens were abroad then, and none of them observed the flivver's passenger as he slid into the bank.

Steele Armbruster, looking up from his



desk in the railed-off space outside the cages, went white. With his ordinarily good-humored face masked, and Ham Larson's gun in his hand,

Billy Dodd didn't look like anybody's bargain then.

"Reach high!" he commanded hoarsely, the revolver muzzle swaying between Armbruster and the clerk. "If yuh make a move, or any bells sound off, the next voice yuh hear on the air'll be Saint Peter's!"

Precipitately, Steele Armbruster and his bank hand reached. And back to the open vault Billy Dodd herded them.

"Now, which o' them satchels," he demanded, with a jerk of the revolver toward the vault's interior, "has got the real mazona in it?"

Armbruster was mute, but the clerk pointed with a shaking finger.

"Th-that 'un," he stammered.

"Open it, an' we'll see," said Billy.

Blinking, he saw. The satchel held more

money than he'd ever expected to see at once. More than the twenty thousand dollars he had to have, certainly, for the thick package on top consisted of fifty-dollar notes.

"I reckon," he said, "that'll do nicely. Next question, what'm I goin' to do with the two o' yuh?"

Back of the vault, an open door offered a suggestion and he decided on the coat closet.

"Slide in there, both o' yuh!" he directed. "Slide in, an' stay in. I may stick around for a few minutes, and if a head pokes out before I fo, I'm sure goin' to shoot it off!"

He sounded as if he meant exactly what he said, and Steele Armbruster, who had an underlying strain of caution in his makeup, allowed not only a few minutes but many to elapse before he finally ventured a peep out the door.

But by that time the lone, masked bandit was well on his way; and when the clamor of the bank's alarm bells shattered the silence characteristic of Maverick in the early forenoon, the only flivver any one could remember having seen in town was Judge Zefe Tyler's. And that flivver stood docilely parked below the Bon Ton as its owner came hurriedly waddling up, palm leaf in hand and fat face sweaty with excitement, to learn what all the commotion was about.

"Insured?" he demanded of Steele Armbruster as the intelligence was curtly purveyed to him.

Armbruster nodded.

"To the last dollar. So what would have been the use of taking a chance?"

Tyler lowered his voice.

"No use, either, joinin' out with any posse. We've got to get this X L deal clinched before Carlew wakes up. The sheriff'll be here any minute, and it's up to us to steer him off the bandit chase until we get the ranch business over with. Let the insurance people worry."

**F**ASTER than his pinto pony had ever carried him, Billy Dodd traveled out of Maverick on the road that served both the X L and the Cross I haciendas. About this time, he knew, one of the X L bunch would be on his way back from town with

the mail; and just where the river road broke off Billy overtook him, a lone rider gushing melody in a voice which rose mightily above the flivver's rattle and could belong only to Peewee Baker.

"Hold up!" Dodd called. "I got a package here for Webb Carlew that you might as well tote along."

The musical waddy pivoted in his saddle and stared.

"Hell's delight!" he gasped. "I thought you was in Kansas City."

"Got delayed," Billy told him. "But don't yuh say nothin' about that. Don't mention to anybody that yuh saw me." Stooping, he made a quick selection of yellow packages from the satchel and folded them in a newspaper that Ham Larson had left in the machine. "Hand this to Mistuh Carlew," he directed. "Just tell him it's that there Armbruster call money, an' that he better pay off his note with it toot sweet. If he wants to know where it come from, say that the sun was in yore eyes, by reason o' which yuh couldn't quite make out the feller's face."

Questions spouted from Peewee Baker. Where had Billy been, and where was he bound for now? Where had he got that weird animal he was a-ridin'? Dodd just grinned and waved and swung off on the river road; and Peewee, blissfully unaware that Maverick had had a bank robbery directly after his departure and that he was carrying part of the loot, rode mellifluously on.

As well as mail, the lyrical Mr. Baker was carrying a telegram addressed to Webb Carlew. It was from his Kansas City lawyer, and Carlew groaned when he read it.

"Bad news, Boss?" Peewee asked.

"The end o' the world," muttered Carlew. "End o' the X L, anyhow."

His dim eyes incredulously spelled out the message again:

PROSECUTOR READY TO DISMISS CASE ON DODD'S APPEARANCE STOP BUT WHERE IS DODD STOP HE FAILED TO SHOW UP THIS MORNING AS PER YOUR WIRE

Carlew looked up at Peewee Baker, his eyes misty.

"I reckon you boys better start packin' yore bed-rolls," he said huskily, "unless

you're a-mind to sign on with the Armbrusters. Because in just about an hour the ol' X L is bein' sold down the river. Billy Dodd——"

A dry sob choked him off, but Peewee had had his reminder.

"Say, Mistuh Carlew," he burst out, "I got somethin' in my saddle bag that a man gave me on the road. I don't understand all this, but maybe——"

With eyes popping, Web stared at the contents of the package he brought. Money! Real money! Money in stacks!

Weakly Carlew counted the windfall, too breathless for speech. There were three bundles of fifty-dollar bills, two of twenties, one of tens, and each of the bundles held an even hundred banknotes. That made exactly twenty thousand dollars.

"Baker," he demanded solemnly, "did the man that gave you this have long white whiskers an' wear wings?"

Gasping himself, but still mindful of his foreman's orders, Peewee shook his head.

"Couldn't say, Mistuh Carlew," he replied. "I didn't get a good look at him. All I know is that he stopped me, an' said somethin' about this bein' some partic'lar kind of money you was to pay off a note with. I misrecollect *what* kind, but he sure mentioned the name o' Armbruster."

Carlew's gaze narrowed.

"What became of him then?" he asked.

"Last I saw," answered Peewee Baker quite truthfully, "he was makin' knots for the Rio Grande."

**I**N THE cluttered little room that served as his office, Carlew dazedly stacked the heaven-sent money on his desk. It was, evidently, fresh from a bank.

But who could have sent it? Who but —Billy Dodd? Absurd as it was, that was the best answer he could find. Against it, there was the Kansas City telegram and the incontrovertible fact that Billy, even if he'd got to Kansas City and somehow got his bail released without the lawyer's knowledge, couldn't possibly be back so soon. As for there being any bank within a range of seven counties where an individual so notoriously improvident as William Dodd could raise the X L's ransom on his I. O. U.—that was a laugh.

An old saying in regard to gift horses came to the rescue of Webb Carlew's tottering reason as a distant clatter informed him of the approach of visitors. With Judge Zephas Tyler at its wheel, a small automobile white with alkali dust was swinging around the corral.

In addition to the august driver, the machine carried two passengers—Steele Armbruster and a big man with a gray-shot mustache and shadowed blue eyes.

"Reckon," said Tyler, squeezing out of the fivver and nodding to this second passenger, "that you're acquainted with Sheriff Morton, Carlew."

Webb put out a gnarled hand.

"Reckon that me an' him went to school together."

"So we did," nodded the sheriff. His blue eyes, hard and resentful as his glance passed from Tyler to Armbruster, softened on Carlew. "It's as tough on me, Webb, as it is on you," he said, "that I got to do this."

There was only mild inquiry in Carlew's regard.

"Just what, Jack," he asked, "was yuh almin' to do?"

Morton's prominent Adam's apple fluttered agitatedly during the moment of his hesitation.

"I s'pose," he said finally, "that it's only legal the facts should be recited. You made a loan off'n the Maverick State Bank some time back, Webb—an' if I had any license to say it, I'd agree that yut got roped in

on a mighty heartless bargain. But I've seen the dockments, an' they're all ship-shape accordin' to law. Demand was made for payment at 11 A. M., day before yesterday. Yuh had forty-eight hours to make good; so in just ten minutes, that bein' the desire a' the lender an' his lawful right, it's goin' to be my unhappy duty to take over the X L ranch, improvements an' stock, in the name a' the bank."

"Yuh mean," Carlew gently corrected, "that'd be yore duty if I hadn't raised the money. What if I'd decided to hang on to

the X L—an' pay off the call note, too."

The sheriff's face lighted.

"Kin yuh do it, Webb?" he cried. "In that case, I reckon my duty'd be to escort these here gents off'n yore property if it was yore pleasure they shouldn't linger any longer'n it took to count the cash."

Carlew looked soberly at Armbruster and Tyler.

"The sheriff," he said, "has exac'ly stated what my pleasure is goin' to be. Be all right, won't it, if I hand yuh the principal in cash and give yuh my check on yore own bank for the int'rest?"

He walked into the house and emerged laden with the packaged yellow bills. Tyler and Armbruster stared at each other and then at him.

"Carlew!" shrilled the banker. "Where'd you get this money?"

Old Webb smiled tolerantly.

"Dunno," said he "that it's any o' yore damn business."

"It is!" insisted Armbruster. He appealed to Morton. "Sheriff! The Maverick State Bank was stuck up this morning, and notes in these exact denominations were stolen!"

Morton's gaze was shrewd as it turned upon Webb Carlew, but stolid as it met the banker's.

"Sorta funny, ain't it," he inquired, "that you didn't mention it to me before? 'Specially since I asked yuh what all the excitement was in town." He glanced back to Carlew. "Mister Armbruster has made," said he, "what might pass for an insinuation. Any remarks, Webb?"

FOR a little while Carlew stood stunned and silent. In the back of his mind a great light had flashed on. The impossible was the fact; it was Billy Dodd who had sent the money! Billy Dodd who had robbed Armbruster's bank and was skinning now for Mexico! In the same breath Webb blessed and cursed him. Aloud and evenly he said:

"If Mister Armbruster'll talk just a mite plainer, he'll need a full new set o' teeth, for I'm sure goin' to slap out his present ones. There's plenty around here to prove, Jack, that I ain't been off the home range for a couple o' days."

The color had drained from Steele



Armbruster's sallow cheeks. He stared at the bills Carlew had dumped in his arms.

"Sheriff!" he snarled. "I refuse to accept this money."

Morton pursed his lips.

"Seems," said he, "that yuh've got it. And the only proper course for me is to give Mister Carlew back his note. Here yuh are, Webb. Now I reckon that if yuh hand Mister Armbruster a check for the interest the business is over an' done with. If he's cherishin' any idea it's his own money he's gettin'—that's up to him to prove by due process o' law."

There was commotion beyond the corral; then a curtained flivver with one rear tire flat came gimpily into view. From the driver's seat William Dodd, fugitive from justice, looked humorously at the sheriff. "Dunno," he said, "if it's spring-halt, or if Henry's shed a shoe. It's sure been rough-ridin' this last mile or two, anyhow."

Judge Zephas Tyler cast a quick side glance at his staring client.

"What's this mean?" he whispered.

Steele Armbruster didn't answer him. With a wrathfully tremulous finger he was pointing at a black satchel that Dodd had just lifted out of the machine.

"Where," he cried, "did you get that?"

Billy looked at the banker and looked at the bag.

"You seen, didn't you?" he queried innocently. "It was here in this flivver—an' the flivver ain't mine. Why?"

Armbruster rushed down from the veranda.

"Arrest this man!" he shouted. "You hear me, Morton? This is the satchel that was stolen from me this morning!"

Thoughtfully, the sheriff scratched his blunt nose.

"What for," he asked, "should I be arrestin' anybody? S'pose it should be the same satchel—you've got it back, ain't you?"

That was to favor an old friend, but Morton sought in vain for some covert expression of approval on Webb Carlew's beet-red face. Clearly, Carlew didn't know what it was all about, either.

Armbruster had sprung for the bag; he wrenched it open, began a furious inventory of its contents.

He faced the sheriff with jaw set.

"When this satchel was taken from the vault," he said, "it contained fifty thousand dollars. There's only thirty thousand in it now. Doesn't that make it plain enough, Morton? Carlew had the nerve to try to pay me off with my own money!"

Tyler was beside him, plucking at his sleeve.

"Take it easy!" he advised out of the corner of his mouth. "With Dodd loose, we don't sit so pretty ourselves."

Then Billy spoke, addressing himself exclusively to the sheriff.

"I sorta gather, Mistuh Morton," he said slowly, "that there's been a crime committed. But you're sure a witness yore own self that I wasn't tryin' to get away with this here money-bag. If it belongs to Armbruster, you bet I don't want any part of it."

He eyed the banker coldly, pushed back his Stetson and twisted a finger through his wavy dark hair.

"Maybe," he continued, "there's been two crimes. I'm goin' to ask yuh, Sheriff, to set me straight on a little point o' law. If anybody was to steal a child, that'd be kidnagin'. An' kidnagin' is a crime. I know that much. Well, what'd you call it when somebody steals a full-grown man?"

"That's kidnagin' just the same," Morton replied after an amazed pause. "But what the hell—?"

Billy Dodd smiled.

"Reason I wanted to know," he said. "is that I been kidnaped and just got free. Just like a baby bein' snatched out of its cradle, I was stole out of my saddle while ridin' in to Maverick to catch the Kansas City train day before yesterday. I don't guess it was for my good looks I was stole, or for ransom. But there was certain people aimin' to trick Mistuh Carlew out o' this ranch, an' they knew they'd be licked if I got to K. C. So I reckon—"

Steel Armbruster's lips curled in a sneer.

"A likely story, Dodd!"

Billy shrugged.

"Case there might be any doubt, I brought some proof along." He opened the door of the curtained tonneau, and dragged forth an inert lump of humanity. "The eyes ain't quite natural," he drawled, "an' the face is a little out o' plumb. But if yuh

look hard enough, Armbruster, yuh ought to recognize yore kinsman, Ham Larson."

**S**TOOPING, he loosened the ropes that secured Larson's wrists and feet and jerked him upright.

"Now, yuh big tub," he gritted, "are yuh goin' to tell the truth, like yuh promised? Or am I goin' to do some more persuadin'?"

The battered Cross I foreman quailed before an efficient fist.

"I—I'll keep the promise," he answered.

Tyler moved forward.

"This is duress, Sheriff!" he thundered.

"Not," said Morton, "that I can see. Go ahead, Billy."

Dodd turned to Larson.

"Now answer this," he barked. "Did you, or didn't you, surround me with a party o' armed men when I was ridin' in to the train?"

"I—I did," breathed Larson.

Flabbergasted, the fat judge raised his voice in another protest.

"This is highly illegal."

"It's highly interestin'," said the sheriff.

"I want to hear it."

"And," pursued Billy Dodd, "you beat me unconscious and made me prisoner—didn't you, Larson?"

"Y—yeah."

"By whose order was that?"

"Don't answer!" thundered Tyler. "Not another word, Larson."

The sheriff laughed, and his laugh was hard and short.

"'Pears to me, Judge," he said, "that you're givin' away somethin' yoreself. But

I agree this is all sorta off the mark. What we come out here for was to see that a settlement was made between **M i s t u h** Webb Carlew and the State Bank of **M a v e r i c k**, all peaceable and as

per agreement. I have seen Mistuh Carlew turn over twenty thousand dollars in cash.

Ain't it so, Armbruster?"

Tyler had been whispering energetically to him, and the banker nodded.

"But I still protest—" he began.

Carlew interrupted him.

"At least," he said, "I have fulfilled the terms of the agreement. I've offered payment in cash, before witnesses. Since there's a question in Armbruster's mind about acceptin' this partic'lar cash, s'pose I make him another proposition? Billy Dodd's present, and he's goin' to make one more start for K. C. this afternoon. You understand about the bail business, don't yuh, Sheriff?"

Morton nodded.

"An' I'll guarantee," he said, "that Dodd gets his train. I'll put him safe aboard it myself."

"Fair enough." Carlew turned to Armbruster. "Comin' right down to it," he said, "the call money I borrowed off the Maverick bank wasn't cash, but a draft on Kansas City. What do yuh say if I pay yuh off the same way—with a Kansas City draft? It won't get to K. C. until Billy does, an' when Billy gets there it'll be good for the twenty thousand. Later we can sorta thresh it out among ourselves as to whether these bills I gave yuh came out o' the bank's satchel."

Sheriff Jack Morton was grinning.

"I suspicion," said he, "that there's some wrong on both sides here. But I reckon there's a powerful lot o' right on Mister Carlew's. I guarantee he'll turn over the cash if he decides it rightfully belongs to the bank."

Still Armbruster hesitated. He looked to counsel for a hint, and counsel was silent.

Over by the flivver there was a thwack of knuckles on anguished flesh.

"Now tell 'em!" cried Billy Dodd. "Who put yuh up to it, Larson?"

Judge Zephus Tyler came suddenly to life. His roar drowned Larson's whimpered response.

"Take the draft, Steele!"

On his way already to his desk, Webb Carlew wheeled.

"An' then, pronto," he snapped, "take the air!"





## The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

### *A Pitch-Pine Fire*

**B**ERTRAND W. SINCLAIR says something of the genesis of his fine yarn that begins in this issue.

"Gunpowder Lightning, like a tree, grew from a very small beginning. Once, in a year which I won't specify because I don't want to be dated too close, I was yearning around a pitch-pine fire with a crew of stockhands, on spring roundup in the Bear Paws. The talk ran on fracasos which had arisen between cow outfits anywhere between the Rio Grande and the Canada line. One Texan in the outfit, told in a slow drawling voice the moving tale of a scrap that began between two neighboring cowmen in south Texas over one's neglect to turn enough bulls loose on his range. As he told it there was a considerable row, two or three riders killed and a lot of lead thrown before these two old-timers concluded to patch up a peace.

"I was an impressionable youngster at the time, and the incident stuck in a retentive memory. I don't even know if the Texan's story was truth or fiction. The cowpuncher used to romance to his fellows upon occasion. But if not an actuality it was very possible. When I wanted a definite motive for a conflict between two diverse groups of characters engaged in the cow business that Texan's yarn revived with full force. Wherever he may be I hope he got as much fun out of that evening's talkfest as I have had in remembering it.

"And it naturally followed that recollection took me back to the original setting and consequently led me to incorporate in the latter half of 'Gunpowder Lightning' the same background against which that Texan told his little tale. The object of a story is not to be a photograph or a descriptive circular, but any story has to have a background. And all of the background, the characters, the life in general that you'll find in 'Gunpowder Lightning' has its parallel here and there all over what is known as the cow country. If it proves half as absorbing to those who read it as it was to the people who lived it in complete unconsciousness that they were part of a very dramatic phase of American life, I'll be satisfied.

"Apart from that the story will have to speak for itself.

"Sincerely,

*Bertrand W. Sinclair."*

### *Wanderer*

**W**ILLIAM DOUGHTY introduces himself with his first yarn in *SHORT STORIES*, "Cannibal Teeth."

"The gist of the story is that my experiences were experienced while I was on museum collecting-trips (I plan to leave, very soon, for Madagascar), in search of birds, reptiles and mammals. I have been in the country of the Siberian tiger, the borders of the Gobi, Malay peninsula, West Africa—I met the old priest of Cannibal Teeth,

not far from Lagos—Patagonia and the Amazon valley. In fact, I hope to send *SHORT STORIES* a manuscript based on experiences in the rain forests of the Roraima plateau. You might add the point that I avoid adventures, as they are generally due to some kind of miscalculation, and slow up the work.

"Sincerely,

*Doughty.*"

### *Spanish in Nine Days*

**S**AYS Hermann B. Deutsch, whose story, "The Skin Game," is in this issue:

"Born in what is now Czechoslovakia, but have been a part of what supplies the Americana satirists with material since the age of two. Public schools and high schools in Cincinnati. Degrees at the University of Chicago. Newspaper work in Chicago during the antemachinist gun days. Winters too cold. Started around the world with a friend. Got as far as New Orleans, with him. Recouping the wasted fortunes when war was declared: 'Grandpapa what did YOU do in the Great War?' 'I was sergeant in a Spruce Production outfit and forests, my child.' Back in New Orleans. More newspaper work. Sold some stories. Still at it. Have been at various times, stenographer, brakeman, and even a college professor in Bethany, West Virginia, but what of it?"

"All I can think of that would class as

something to brag about is that when Dr. Franz Blom (of Tulane University) unearthed the mass of original pamphlets that had a direct bearing on the history of Latin-America that formed Christmas' background, I saw at once that it would be impossible to get it all translated, and that it was up to me to learn Spanish. I acquired a reading knowledge of Spanish in nine days. Not so bad, wot?"

"Down in Honduras, where I was getting the material, I ran across news of a cave which apparently has been overlooked by the archeologists so far, and which probably has an important bearing on ancient Maya culture. Dr. Blom and I have made plans to go down and explore it this summer.

*Hermann B. Deutsch.*"

### *In the Next Issue*

**N**EXT time we get going—and how we get going—with a novel of the Foreign Legion by J. D. Newsom. It's a darned exciting story—one that leads from the sun-baked Sahara to the jungles of French Indo-China. And all this distance there's a feud between a lieutenant and a sergeant—a feud that causes battle and death to the last. "The Quitter" is the yarn's title. Then, following, is a daisy of a Western story by Hugh Pendexter about a little sheriff who was shore a wildcat—"Runt Size." Captain Frank Shaw gives a yarn, "Championship Style" of a prizefighter at

### READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, *SHORT STORIES*:  
Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 1 _____ | 3 _____ |
| 2 _____ | 4 _____ |
| 5 _____ |         |

I do not like:

\_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

sea, who can handle the toughest mate on the Western ocean. Then there's a novelette of the great north woods, and a great battle between the finest logger in the North and a syndicate of bankers—a fight of giants.

Another novelette is J. Allan Dunn's

border smuggling yarn "Yellow Contraband," a tale of mystery and action and danger that will keep your heart thumping. Add to these such names as Richard Howells Watkins, Seaburn Brown and Lee Robinson—and you see what's coming.



## OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in Yours.



### Watch the Roof

THE air pilot who never could learn his geography when a little boy at school and consequently thought he was flying over Here's How!, Connecticut, when it was actually the Bronx Zoo at the upper end of New York City, can now shoo his nightmares away. The Guggenheim Fund reports that more than eight thousand towns of from one to ten thousand population have identified themselves by proper roof markings as an aid to aerial commerce.

### Diploma

IF YOU want a "position" rather than a job, something "snap," don't go in for aviation. They don't throw the diploma at you, in that trade, for looking like a nice young man and wearing Katz & Katz nifty suits. The fact is you have to work, and work damn hard, to qualify for a flying license. The United States Department of Commerce reports, after studying the records of better than nine thousand flyers, that aviation students, normal both physically and mentally, have only one chance in three of obtaining an airplane license in less than a year.

### Caches

THE word "cache," thought by many to have come into the English language from the Mexican Indian, in reality is from

the French verb, "*cacher*" meaning to hide. Its passage to America was made with the old French voyageurs.

The early explorers, followed by the traders and trappers, and later the pioneers, often found it expedient to hide a part of their goods, particularly food and furs, in some place where such would be free from molestation either by beast or savage.

The simple method was merely a hole in the ground, into which the goods were placed, and the whole covered with dirt. Often much time, labor and ingenuity were expended in making a cache, lining it with grass, bark, or even hides.

Because of the sharp eye of the Indian—the white man also to his discredit—this work was often done at night, and because of the savage's disposition to investigate and appropriate, much care was exercised in restoring the original surface of the ground. In excavating the hole, the dirt was piled upon blankets, and what was not required for filling was removed to a considerable distance to be scattered or dumped into a stream. The back-filling required caution; the dirt must be tamped so that there might be no future settlement of the surface, which would excite curiosity.

Often where wolves and other predatory animals were numerous, the caches must need be covered with poles and heavy stones. Where horses or oxen were at hand, these

were made to track over the surface of the cache; fire, too, was often employed to obliterate any evidence that there was treasure beneath.

Frequently the pioneers, fearing for their dead, in their desire to safeguard from mutilation the body of some loved one who had succumbed to the rigors of the trail, resorted to cache methods in burial.

Undoubtedly many caches were never reclaimed by their owners, those who met death on the trail, or those perhaps who got so far away or met so many interferences that a return to goods, mostly of a perishable nature, was never attempted. Not infrequently throughout the West, in city excavations, road work, farming, or even in prospecting, the remnants of what must have been one of these unclaimed or abandoned caches, are uncovered.

Returning gold diggers on the overland trail, harried by Indians or desperadoes, quite frequently resorted to the cache to conceal their treasure. Some of these were

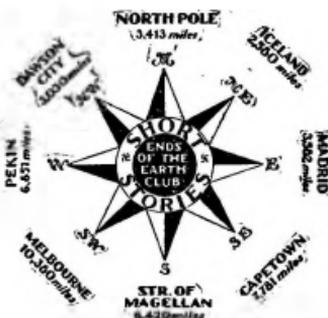
never reclaimed; others were lost because in the hurry of hiding, usually at night, the place was not definitely marked.

Tales of these latter, like those of lost mines, are common in many localities, and many have been the searchers and few the rewards. Almost any old mining district, once rich in the precious metals, has its stories of treasure "high-graded" from the rightful owners and cached away in some spot which, because of the interference of the law or death, was never again visited.

Recently, in opening up an old mine in a certain gold-silver district of Idaho, a cache of half a ton of heavy goldbearing quartz was found in what was supposedly a barren drift on a vein. Much of this work had been done by one miner, and the drift had in consequence become known as "Harrigan's Drift." It might have been Harrigan who cached away that precious ore; at any rate Harrigan never profited, for one day he drilled into a "missed hole" and shot away half of his head.

## THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

**HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, c/o Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.**



Dear Secretary:

I crave a membership card. I have traveled the sea far and near. I am a seagoing chief engineer. I want to get in touch with friends over the entire world and know I can do so through the Ends of the Earth Club. I will reply to all letters and exchange snaps. I usually pass *SHORT STORIES* along and by that medium extend its circulation.

Best wishes to the club.

*B. R. Foley*

415 6th Street, N. W.,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Secretary:

Please consider me for a member in your Ends of the Earth Club. I must admit that I am a new reader of *SHORT STORIES*, but since reading the first one, I have been looking up all the back numbers I can find and I can assure you that I won't miss many in the future.

I have had quite a bit of traveling. Perhaps some of your readers were with me when I went to England in 1914 on a mule boat and was torpedoed for my troubles. But anyway, we landed safe. Then I enlisted

in the British Army, was later transferred to the American, saw service in France, England, Belgium, Germany, Siberia, India and Russia. So if any of your gang remembers any of this, I sure would like to talk over some of those times. I will gladly answer all the letters I receive.

So with best wishes to you and **SHORT STORIES**, I am

Sincerely,

*George A. Miller*

"Guard," Federal Penitentiary Annex,  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Dear Secretary:

Please accept this epistle as a form of application for membership in your club. I have traveled in various parts of the globe and have had strange adventures. Upon my return to New York I will sail for a voyage around the world lasting approximately five months.

I wonder if you can put me in touch with a member of your club who is in some lonely, faraway spot. I should like to go somewhere where there are no women or civilization. With a climate resembling West Africa. (I was real happy there.) The truth is, I must go out as an employee, for I have old folks back home. However, we are due back in New York on or about the fourth of the month. My home address is 17, Crown Square, Liverpool, England. But I should be favored if you would post your acceptance to my application for membership to: Maurice Roberts, R. M. S. *Franconia*, Kitchen Department, c/o Cunard Line Agents, 55 Broadway, New York City.

Any information you may be able to grant regarding my requests will be eagerly accepted and with heartfelt thanks.

Yours with luck, I am

*Maurice Roberts*

Dear Secretary:

I am one of those reticent ones you mentioned in your last issue. Would like to join your E. E. C. I have been over the U. S. some. Was in Cuba in 1898. Saw Teddy go up the Hill. Have been in Mexico, in fact only got back by the skin of my teeth in 1910. Tried to follow Villa in 1916 from Columbus. Was a N. M. Ranger at the time.

If any one wishes to know about the low grade copper camps, I can tell 'em. Have been in all of them.

Have read **SHORT STORIES** since 1923. Like it pretty well. Nuff sed.

Very respectfully,

*S. M. Trask.*

Box 704,  
Hurley, N. Mex.

Dear Secretary:

I received the membership card O. K., and was surprised as the train that it was on was in a smash and came a few days after time, but now I have got it I am going to do my best to live up to it.

If there is anyone who would like to write to me, I would be glad as it is rather lonely up here. We are expecting to leave here sometime next year, and we are due home in 1932. I will let you know when we move from here.

I will close now as I am on guard.

Sincerely,

*Comrade Horton.*

"C" Corp 1st Royal Welch Fusiliers,  
White Barracks, Quetta,  
Baluchistan, India.

Dear Secretary:

Please register my name on the Ends of the Earth Club list. I have been all over the Western U. S. and coast of South America and would like to hear from seamen out of San Francisco.

I have been reading **SHORT STORIES** for two years and think it's a wonderful little magazine.

Yours truly,

*John Morrell.*

6310 Langley Avenue,  
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Secretary:

Have you got any room in your Ends of the Earth Club for a Leatherneck that is stationed at the real honest to goodness ends of the earth.

"Tejon Slim" says that he gets mail once a month; we get it here about four or five times a year; that is only when a transport happens to wander into the harbor.

I will be glad to answer any and all letters and will give any information that may

be wanted about this small rock jutting up out of the Pacific Ocean.

Respectfully,

*Jack A. Reynolds.*

Private, U. S. M. C.,

42nd Company,

Agana, Guam, M. I.

P. S. Mail day here means more to us than pay day, so we are looking forward to a full mail bag in about May or June.

Dear Secretary:

Last month I took a little trip down on the edge of the Mojave Desert. In many places it is still the same old desert with its hills and plains and sand; also scarcity of water. There still exists the gorgeous sunsets of Western story fame, and the heat.

Wonder how many of the club members have been on the desert in the winter season. If so, they will know as I do that it often gets cold enough to dress warmly. Still the cold is not so bad, as the air is dry. Seems to be a place of extremes, either it is or it isn't.

One might think that the old type of desert prospector would have passed with the changing times, but he still exists. I was lucky enough to see one come along with his string of heavily laden burros. Just picture such a sight to yourself and let the imagination run wild.

Shortly after I returned to Monterey, there was a shooting scrape in one of the desert towns that I visited. Based on the eternal triangle it was. Husband opened fire on his wife and her friend seated in an auto, wounding them both and toppling the woman to the ground. But she got up, secured another pistol and killed the husband.

This is not a good place to go in search of work for wages. But if you can finance yourself and locate near water, or strike it on your own land, there is some good territory still open for homesteading.

And to change from the subject of the desert, I wonder if any of the other members of the club have been afflicted by the chain letter fiend. Don't see how it could be stopped, but using the names of the members in anonymous chain letter is not in accordance with the spirit of the club.

If this letter of mine is too long to find a place in the magazine, I would like to see your comment, Mister Secretary, on the question of anonymous chain letters.

Here's wishing the Club and members success and health in 1930.

Yours for progress,

*David L. Ward.*

Troop E, 11th Cavalry,  
Presidio of Monterey,  
California.

Dear Secretary:

I should very much like to become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club.

Prior to attaining the age of twenty-two years I went to sea for a period of approximately four years, visiting ports in Italy, Egypt, India, Ceylon, Straits Settlements, China and Australia.

Our steamer was chartered by the Japanese during their war with China and we carried refugees between Shanghai and Nagasaki, Shimonoseki, Kobe and Yokohama for a period of about eight months and also visited Tokio.

I joined the British Army in 1895 and served for a period of about twenty-four years, rising to the rank of lieutenant.

I have been in active service three times: in West Africa, the Boer War 1900-1902, and served in France during the Great War for a period of four years.

During my army career I was stationed in Malta for two years, Bermuda two years and South Africa (second period), two years (Blöemfontein and Pretoria).

After leaving the army I worked in Ostend, Belgium, for about one year. Since then I am again going to sea, being now employed on the R. M. S. *Olympic* and have made 89 trips from Southampton to New York.

I shall be glad if you will please register my name for a Membership Identification Card of the E. E. C.

Yours faithfully,

*Lieut. G. Drovers.*

Master-at-arms,  
R. M. S. *Olympic*,  
59, Pier,  
18th Street,  
New York City.

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