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By RALPH R. PERRY



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# Short Stories

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July 25th, 1931

R. de S. HORN  
*Editor*

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*Associate Editor*

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Vol. CXXXVI, No. 2

Whole No. 614

**N E X T  
I S S U E**



*The  
Dark  
Passage*

*a swift-moving complete  
novel about the French  
Foreign Legion*

*by*

**J. D. NEWSOM**

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*A Corporal Downey Novelette*

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*and others*

**N E X T I S S U E**

## THE KING OF BEASTS—1931

SINCE the earliest days of history, man has regarded the lion with a mixture of awe and admiration. He has been the symbol of courage and nobility; and although man sought to protect himself from this fearless animal, he watched the beast in fascination and tried to imitate his ruthless, dauntless spirit, his proud bearing and his aloofness. For hundreds of years the lion has epitomized strength and bravery in pictures and sculptures, in story and fable and song. Savage warriors have dressed themselves in lion skins, have used the tails and manes and claws of lions as head-dresses or as charms to ward off evil. Even civilized nations and the houses of modern day princes have used the animal on their crests and coats-of-arms.

Imagine the shock it was to us, then, when we learned the other day that the lion has a definitely gentle and friendly side to his nature. And we're not speaking of caged lions or tame lions, either; we're referring to the beast as he is in his native state of wildness. There is a spot in the heart of the African lion country where the native black hunters can actually put the fear of death into the average lion, so that he will slink rapidly off through the grasses. But let a white man come chugging along in a motor truck, and perhaps the man will be startled to see ten or a dozen friendly lions come ambling out to meet him, expecting that the truck will hold a big feed for them. It was Charles Cottar, Jr., and his brother Mike who, by hauling the carcasses of other animals out

in trucks, tamed the lions in this manner; and the Cottars have some strange tales to tell about the unpredictable way in which this particular group of lions acted.

The Cottar family has lived in Nairobi ever since 1914, and during that time Charles and Mike have had ample opportunity to observe the way in which lions act when they are at home. The Cottars even taught Martin Johnson a few things; and undoubtedly they know many of the subtler traits of lions which would surprise people who think that the lion is only cruel and savage. For instance, that this mob of lions had certain little phobias. The animals were never afraid of the truck so long as it was running. Upon hot days two or three of them would even venture to walk up and lie down in the shade of the car, so long as the engine continued to purr.—But let someone shut the motor off, and immediately the whole pack would streak off into hiding!

Now this sort of thing, we feel, is not the proper conduct for a respectable lion. We had never thought to hear of lions who would be afraid of anything; we were brought up to think of lions quite otherwise, and we still find it hard to believe that the King of Beasts would one day feel himself so much a part of the Machine Age that a silent motor would frighten him.—But it all goes to show that lions are really timid though sometimes definitely friendly. Maybe they are becoming civilized.

THE EDITOR.





# THE RAJA'S RUBIES

## CHAPTER I

### THE TURN OF THE WHEEL

**T**O FIGHT for the under dog is an expensive pastime everywhere. East of Suez, in particular, where Occidental notions of square dealing become distorted, the canny man will look after Number One—and Number One only.

It is not wise for a chief mate of an

American freighter, an unknown stranger seven thousand long sea miles from home, to battle against a dirty deal merely because its victims are innocent and helpless. Such a battle is a luxury—pleasant, but costly to the man who attempts it single handed.

So Knuckles Boyne discovered. He had had his fun. He had slugged a crooked skipper in the jaw and chained him while still unconscious to his own bed with his

*Luck and Lost Treasure in  
the Jungles of Malaysia!*



*By the Author of  
"Fathoms Under," etc.*

**By RALPH R. PERRY**

own handcuffs. He had kept a ship afloat which otherwise would have been at the bottom of the Straits of Malacca. He had refused a bribe, thereby making an active enemy of the ship charterer who had planned the barratry—a bilious-faced Eurasian named Chalmondsley who was as influential as unscrupulous.

In consequence, there were forty-odd brown and yellow natives, both men and women, eating their rice in Penang in

cheerful ignorance of the fact they themselves had been destined for shark food, and a seventy-five year old ship owner babbling in delirium on his way back across the Pacific to health and home in the United States who still possessed the savings of a lifetime, instead of being penniless.

The cost, to Knuckles Boyne, formerly chief mate of the *Lafayette*, was to be stranded in Penang, blacklisted, almost

penniless when he needed large amounts of cash, discredited in reputation when his personal honesty needed to be unquestioned and hardest to endure of all, to know that he had only blocked the Eurasian's scheme for about a month. Then another—and a successful—attempt to scuttle the *Lafayette* would be made. Other natives would be drowned, the old ship owner beggared.

Boyne could have given up the struggle and been sent home as a distressed seaman. Instead, when ordinary measures only resulted in a delay that was equivalent to defeat, the sailor left the European quarter of Penang soon after sundown and picked his way through a maze of dark and unpaved native alleys to the waterfront.

To his right Boyne could hear the tide lapping beneath ramshackle structures built over the sea. He smelled the mingled odors of decay, filth, incense, salt water, and drying mud. The Malays and Chinese using the alley slipped along close to the walls, furtive as rats. On Boyne's left was a large building which resembled a Chinese temple in its curving roof lines and eaves. From a pole over the doorway hung a single Chinese lantern, blood red in color, with an ideograph painted upon it in black.

The ruddy glow hardly relieved the gloom of the alley. The building was sinister, yet it was the place he sought—the largest native gambling house of Penang. Here a player need not have a club membership or be introduced in order to lay a bet. The translation of the ideograph was "The House of Celestial Fortune." The door beneath the red lantern looked more like the gate to the Nether Pit, yet the last road by which he could save the old sea captain and balk the Eurasian led through it. Boyne flung the barrier of carved teak open and paused, eyes narrowed against the harsh glare of kerosene lamps.

He was a small man, swarthy, and tanned to bronze, conspicuous in starched white ducks. The coat fitted tightly across a chest of unusual depth, hinting at the

knobbed hard muscle. Though Boyne was no taller than the Cantonese door keeper and scarcely heavier, the Chinaman involuntarily recoiled a step as their eyes met.

The sailor's glance pierced to the backbone, judged in a flash, and discarded the door keeper as of no consequence. The black eyes, deep set under straight black brows, darted from table to table. Mah jong, fan-tan. No white man's games—except, in a far corner, a roulette layout, deserted save for a yawning Chinese croupier in a greasy black silk coat and a dirty, gray-haired white man.

**B**OYNE would have preferred poker or craps, but roulette would do. He reached for his money, conscious that his entrance had created a stir. He was used to it. Men that he looked at squarely usually watched him for a moment. Those black eyes of his snapped with the restless aggressive energy that had enabled a lightweight to fight his way from the foc'sle to the three stripes of a chief mate at the age of twenty-nine. The habits of the House of Celestial Fortune, judging him from his personality and the quality of his clothing, were braced for the sight of fast, high play.

He grinned. He was fingering the sum of exactly four pounds.

Still grinning, he piled every penny of the sum on number eighteen.

"Roll the ball, Chink," he said. "Long shots and quick action, *that's me!*"

The croupier shook his head and spoke in Malay.

"What's the matter? That money's good!"

"Yer over the limit, matey," explained the old white man at Boyne's elbow. "The 'ouse won't play more than a quid on a number. Yer must be a bloody millionaire!"

The old man shoved a shilling bet onto four numbers with a forefinger that shook with gambling fever. Sweat, not the result of the heat, stood on his forehead. His

gaunt face, white with the unnatural pallor of hospital or jail, was hard, savage and strong willed.

"I needs the big money myself, but I can't lose," he whispered fiercely. "More than the bloody sovereigns depends on this fer me."

"Yeah?" said Boyne. With him also. The old man no longer seemed a stranger. The two of them were in the same boat. The croupier started the ball and the wheel. The little white pellet gyrated round and round. Good luck, bad luck—stakes of one pound, and one shilling. The pound represented a ship that would sink or float, life and death, a comfortable old age or penury for a fellow countryman.

The other, the wasted, wolfish old white man, held his breath. The pallid, sweat-beaded forehead dropped lower and lower above the wheel. To judge from his tensity, that shilling might represent as much as the pound.

Knuckles Boyne had more self control; moreover, luck was the foundation of his creed. He believed that something is always turning up for every man—trifles, seemingly, but trifles that are new, so that each is a new opportunity. His idea was to seize the opportunity and dare the risks, recklessly and cheerfully.

He had joined the *Lafayette* at San Francisco for a voyage to Singapore. The ship was war built and barely fit for sea, and her owner was a match for her. He had been pensioned by the firm for which he had sailed more than fifty years, but instead of permitting himself to be scrapped he had bought the *Lafayette* with his last dollar of cash and credit—to prove that both he and the old ship had life and good work in them yet. He was a game old rooster. Boyne liked him.

But the strain of keeping the old vessel going, plus the financial worries that are an owner's lot, was too great a load for a man of seventy-five to bear. Half way to Singapore the owner collapsed, took to his bunk, and fretted himself into a slow fever. It was Boyne who brought the ship

to harbor and accepted an offer to charter the vessel for the East Indies inter-island trade.

Though the price was very low, the owner was enabled to return to the United States. The charterer, of course, hired another captain and crew, but Boyne stayed aboard to look after the owner's interests.

What a fool he had been! The bilious-faced Eurasian charterer had tried to sink the ship for the insurance on the cargo that had been loaded aboard at Singapore, and though Boyne's quick fists had won him the victory at sea, once ashore in Penang the Eurasian had turned the tables upon him very neatly.

To the officials Mr. Chalmondsley testified that *he* had prevented *Boyne* from scuttling the vessel! The lie was shrewd and audacious; the shore officials were bewildered. It was one man's word against another's. The skipper and Mr. Chalmondsley were known to them. Boyne was not. Since no crime had been committed, the officials took no action, yet Boyne could see that in their eyes he was the guilty person.

His funds were running low, and only in one way could he break through the wall of intrigue, red tape, and suspicion that frustrated him. That was to hire the best firm of marine lawyers in Malaya—lawyers who would be listened to because of their position in the community, and who could obtain the ears of the highest authorities in the land. Such lawyers cannot be retained by a penniless stranger.

Even in the hands of a stranger, however, money talks. If he could go to his lawyers with a big retaining fee, they would act. A successful night in the House of Celestial Fortune would give the sailor a stake for a renewed struggle in which he could fight the Eurasian with hired



brains and influence instead of his own bare hands.

Far flung events, past and future, life and death, honesty and chicanery, all dependent on a little white marble rolling in a wheel painted red and black.

The ball clicked against the turning wheel and bounded into a slot.

Imperturbably the croupier swept up the shilling and the pound.

"Twenty-nine, black, odd, and over," he droned. "Tuans, make your play!"

"Gor' bli' me! The next number to yours," gasped the old white man. "The ball was rolling for yer number when it 'it the slot. Nobody never missed closer—not even me!"

"Yeah? Not even you?" said Boyne—and instantly regretted the sarcasm. In excitement the dirty, wasted old Cockney had forgotten that his own shilling had been lost, too. "Well, buddy, the wheel's honest, anyhow," the sailor added. "Let's work together and give this Chink a shellacking. What's your name, old-timer?"

"Otis—Sakai Otis." The pallid, sweat-streaked face grew eager. "Yer on, Yank! Shillin' bets?"

"Nix! Why spin the game out all night and get all sweated up? The limit, on the numbers. It'll take a wad of jack to do what I want."

"'N' me, too," Otis croaked. "I bloody well got to win, Yank. My son's dying, leaving two grand children. They'll 'ave to go to a bloody asylum unless I get to a place I knows up in Kedah, near the Siam border. It's my first chance to 'elp 'em, 'n' my larst. I've been in jail, Yank. Fer twenty years. Got just two bob left of my release money."

"Yeah?" Boyne placed another pound bet, glancing at the old man, briefly, but with keener interest. The British did not hand out such long sentences for trifling crimes. Otis' paleness was explained, but not the grisly pride with which he had mentioned his confinement, nor the fact that a man who was wasted to skin and bone, and sixty-five if a day, released, to all appearances, that he might die in free-

dom, should nevertheless gamble away his last pennies in order to finance a trip to the most uncivilized section left in the Malay Peninsula. Even thought he must provide for a son and two grand children quickly, the project was desperate.

Otis, however, had been a tough customer before long confinement sapped his strength. That was clear from the wolfish face. Game he still was. He slapped down his shilling on a number, with a grim recklessness that made Boyne almost regret his advice. After all, he had no right to horn into the old-timer's business affairs with advice.

Particularly when the advice was bad. The little white ball rolled by the numbers they chose. Three spins of the wheel broke them.

Otis wiped his face dry. "Missed again. 'N' that's that, Yank," he remarked and started for the door. Boyne hurried after.

"Buddy, I gave you a bum steer," he said. "I'm broke, but I got some clothes to pawn. The price of a meal and a flop——"

Otis pushed through the door of the House of Celestial Fortune and turned in the dark street outside.

"Wot good will that do my son's kids?" he refused savagely. Though his knees were shaking with weakness, his face was vicious in the dull red light of the lantern, snarling like that of a cornered wolf. "Sakai Otis ain't asking favors yet. 'E's rotted in jail to myke 'is son 'n' 'is son's kids rich!"

"All right. Get hard if you like," Boyne shrugged, yet he waited as the old man walked away, disturbed because Otis was heading for the sea front. A Malay who emerged from the gambling house at their heels and turned in the same direction relieved the sailor's mind. There must be some alley or shelter beyond the rickety dock that overhung the water. Otis slouched along, head sunk on chest. The Malay followed, lithe and stealthy as a cat, swiftly closing the gap between.

In the pursuit the sailor saw nothing sinister. Otis was just out of jail, and the

Malay, coming from the gambling house, must be aware that the old man had lost his last shilling. The flash of steel in the dark took Boyne so by surprise that he failed to even cry out, yet Otis whirled. For an instant the two figures grappled. Then steel flashed again. Over the edge of the dock Otis dropped into the water. The Malay plunged after him.

With a shout for help—not that he expected any in such a district—Boyne sprinted to the dockside. Sakai's white clothing made a gray blur in the dark water. On the run the sailor dove, high and far out, hoping to land on the back of the Malay, who already had the old man by the throat.

By five feet or less the dive was short. Boyne knew there had been time for a final thrust, but swam under water, groping for an arm or a leg. His fingers touched cloth. He grappled and rose to the surface—but with a body he knew to be that of Otis, by its limpness and its clothes. The Malay was waiting. The knife darted towards Boyne's throat.

He struck the thrust aside, his fingers slipping from a skinny forearm, and kicked with all his strength. His heel struck the Malay's stomach. The turbaned head was driven under water by the blow, to reappear a few yards away. Boyne trod water, expecting another attack, but the Malay had had enough. Choking and gagging, he swam slowly to the dock, up which he climbed agilely and crouched, waiting for Boyne to follow. The faint light gleamed dully on the knife.

## CHAPTER II

### LONG MEMORIES

OTIS was unconscious and easy to handle. Boyne held the old man's head out of water, and felt for the heart. Finding it beating, he shouted for help again. The Malay moved away from the edge of the pier, but it did not seem to Boyne that he had gone very far. The sailor was of no mind to climb up a pile,

particularly hampered by an unconscious man.

Instead, he swam parallel with the docks, shouting for help whenever he caught a glimmer of light through the closely shuttered windows of the native houses. More and more the attack on Sakai puzzled him. Equally puzzling was the fact that the Malay had not killed the old man in the water. The only explanation Boyne could find was that a thug hired by the bilious faced Eurasian had attacked the wrong white man, and discovered the mistake. If so, the thug was now in a fair way to get the right victim. Boyne was sure that the Malay was following along the docks, and the waterside dwellers minded their own business, shout as he would. He swam fully a hundred yards before a turbaned head was thrust out of a dimly lighted window.

"Ahoy! Get a rope! Two white men here!" Boyne hailed, and added enough good deep water profanity to prove his race.

"I come, Sahib!" the turbaned head whined ingratiatingly, but the native rescuer was maddeningly deliberate. When he did appear, however, he carried a tiny peanut oil lamp and a rope. Boyne tied the rope about Otis, looking keenly into the shadows.

The rescuer was a lean, tall Bengali, not a Malay; and the thug evidently felt that the odds were too great. Otis was hoisted to the dock. The Bengali took his feet and helped Boyne carry him inside to a tiny room furnished with a cord bed, a chest of unpainted wood and a water pipe. The place was surprisingly clean.

"Whisky?" Boyne inquired. He was searching Otis' wasted body from head to foot for a knife wound, but found no injury save a bruise on the forehead. The old man, however, was barely breathing.

"Yas, sahib," whined the Bengali, and passed the sailor a bottle of arrack. Boyne poured a drink through Otis' teeth. Color flowed into the pallid face. The old man coughed, choked, and sat up. The raw

spirits would have revived anything except a corpse.

"'E—'e tried to drown me!" he spluttered.

"He wanted one of us, all right," contradicted Boyne cheerfully. "If you are just out of jail, you got an enemy with a damn long memory. Or else, that guy was after me."

"Oo'd give a damn for a sailor?" said Otis contemptuously. The gaunt face was haggard. "I weren't lyin'. 'E was after me. I knows things, I do!" Grisly pride was in that statement.

"Yeah?" Boyne was indifferent. "What of it? Here you are, fit to hold liquor."

"Yer doing, that. 'E'll 'ave other chances," said Otis dully. "I caught 'is knife hand. Twenty years ago I'd have busted his arm, but 'e twisted out of my fingers and knocked me over like a bloody baby. Twenty



years! What's twenty years to that sly, wrinkled devil? I know 'im, Yank! Chamar, the 'eadman of Kedong. 'E ain't forgot, no more than me." Otis glanced up at the Bengali, who was all eyes and ears. "Get rid of 'im," he whispered.

Boyne stripped off his jacket. "Sell this and bring us arrack," he commanded. When the native left he turned back toward Otis.

"Yank, I've missed my charnce," the old man whispered. "By as little as the ball missed yer number tonight. There was thousands of pounds within three yards of me, but I 'adn't the time to find them. The lieutenant came up and caught me—red 'anded, as you might say.

"Twenty years, I got. But the thousands of pounds 'as been waitin', too. I can see the place—the mud, and the leeches reared up quivering on the leaves. The raja lyin' dead and Mat Singh tumbled across him,

with 'is forehead on the raja's knees and the blood spreadin' in 'is khaki jacket between the shoulders.

"Thousands of pounds! I've paid for them, rottin' in that bloody jail, waitin' till I could go for them. They kept tryin' to pump me, Yank. Officers in their uniforms, and this Chamar, the sly, wrinkled devil, pretendin' to be my friend while I was in jail, chewing betel nut and spittin' and askin' old Sakaí Otis what Mat Singh was doin' when I shot him. That's why I know the rubies is still where Mat Singh hid them. I know that spot—within three yards." Though the voice was a whisper, the old man's faded eyes glared.

"Chamar ain't goin' to 'ave them, nor the bloody officers that stuck me in jail, neither. Yer've kep' me goin', Yank. Will you keep on goin' wiv' me? I—I knows now I can't go it alone—and—my son can't live long, and there's 'is kids, Yank."

"You shot this Mat Singh in the back?" said Boyne dubiously.

"Yus. It was 'im or me. We was all after the loot," grunted Otis without apology. "In 1909 it was, when the Government took over Kedah from Siam. Some of the local rajas knew an English advisor would stop their pickings. They went on a raid. Months we was after them, sweat-in' through the black jungle, all swamps and 'ills, or polin' up rivers where the 'eat fair cracked."

"Who's 'we'?"

"Lieut. Pukka Dick Yardson, damn 'is stiffnecked soul, and B company of the 307th. Halso a company of Sikhs. I was a corporal. There was a bit of fighting at first. Then we were bucketin' through the jungle after a band that got smaller and smaller. A 'ell of a detail, but we didn't care. We'd 'eard about the raja's rubies by that time.

"Eight of them, the villagers told us, none smaller than the tip of yer little finger, and the big one, that 'e wore in 'is turban, bigger than the end of yer thumb. 'E was in the jungle ahead of us and we

was wearin' 'im down like a pack of 'ounds wears down a rabbit.

"Pukka Dick kept 'im away from the villages. In the jungle 'e couldn't get no proper food. The end of a jungle chase is always the same. A man gets starved and worn out till 'e sleeps in the ashes of 'is fire hafter dawn. The patrol catches up, and 'e 'as to 'op it with them right on his 'eels. I was leadin' the squad that found the raja. I can see the ashes of the fire and the four asleep in it yet. Yus—and all that 'appened hafter.

"Four Malays scatterin' through the jungle with the dawn mist still thick, and hus scatterin' hafter them, each 'opin' it was the raja with the rubies 'e was chasin'. The captain blowin' 'is whistle at the camp for hus to pursue by squads." Otis laughed in a wolfish whisper. "Them rubies were worth thousands, and how could the captain know wot 'appened in the jungle? The raja might 'ave traded those rubies to the villagers. Only, 'e 'adn't. I'd seen 'is rings flash and 'e jumped up, and outrun my squad. They was thrashin' in the jungle behind me, but Mat Singh, the Sikh, 'e caught up and passed me. He was tall, even for a Sikh, and 'is legs was longer than mine. I tried to trip 'im as 'e passed, and 'e grinned at me, 'is teeth white in 'is black beard.

"In a minute 'is rifle cracked ahead.

"'E's scuppered the raja,' I thinks to myself, 'but I'll myke 'im give me 'arf.' I ran up, rifle at the ready. 'E was standing, never mind just where. That's the secret I've kep' twenty years, but it was near a split boulder in the bed of a stream called Kuala Tanum, about two miles above a native village called Kedong. That locates it within a dozen feet. 'E was facing me. It ain't true I murdered 'im. I stepped out of the jungle and seen in his eyes 'e was going to shoot. So I let 'im 'ave it. Clean through the backbone and the chest. 'E never spoke, which was my 'ard luck.

"'Where are they?' I says, my bayonet against 'is throat. 'E tried to spit in my face. I dragged 'im over against the raja.

The raja's turban was tore, and his fingers cut where the rings had been dragged off. Mat Singh had 'ad the rubies. He could 'ave moved a dozen feet—'e 'adn't a minute to 'ide 'em, but me, I'd only the two minutes before my squad came up to find them.

"A bloody fortune under my 'ands, no time, and no second charnce. Pukka Dick saw Mat Singh 'ad been shot wiv' a service rifle." Otis shrugged.

"But I could find the rubies now in two minutes if you go wiv' me to give me a charnce to look," he went on vehemently. "Only, Chamar, 'e rules 'is village like an old-time raja. 'E won't give me no charnce. If 'e dares to come 'ere to get me under 'is thumb, wot'll 'e do where any of 'is men will cut my throat at a nod? The district commissioner and the perlice would never know nothink about it. I need a mate."

"Humph!" said Boyne. "This Pukka Dick Yardson court martialled you, yeah?"

"I testified Mat Singh was shot when I came up. The court didn't believe me, but they couldn't prove different. I got jail instead of the rope."

"Who really does own the rubies?"

"'Oo cares? The raja cut some trader's throat for 'em. 'E was a dirty blackguard," said Otis with unconscious humor.

"What makes you think you can find them?"

"I've 'ad twenty years to remember the 'ang of every leaf and the turn of every grass blade."

"Meanwhile this Chamar guy's had twenty years to hunt around that split boulder?"

"But 'e ain't found the rubies, or why would 'e want me under 'is thumb?" cried Otis. "If you want to turn the rubies of Mat Singh over to a wrinkled, brown old devil, why all right! Walk out of that door, and pawn your clothes for the price of a meal and a flop, as you call it, and be damned to you! I ain't as strong as I was. I got more enemies than I thought, and I need a mate, but I ain't beggin' yer! I'll

go to Kedong alone. Those rubies are festerin' where Mat Singh stuck them, with harf the country huntin' and scheming to get them. Go on! Walk hout! I'll get them—fer the niffers!"

"Steady!" said Boyne. "I'm thinking of a game old ship owner, and a gang of niffless passengers, myself. You wouldn't get a hundred yards alone. I can't turn you loose. How were you planning to go?"

"Ide out on a boat that goes up the rivers close to Kedong. Then through the jungle overland. Wot's it to yer?"

"Steady! You've told all the truth and nothing but." Boyne was convinced. The best actor could not have counterfeited such passion and despair. "Stowing away is a sailor's job. You better have a sailor to show you how."

"Yer'll go?"

"Why not? You rate a break, and I've an account to square with a Eurasian, too. Only fair to tell you, though, that the Malay who bumped you followed us."

Grim as an old wolf, Otis nodded. "Chamar's a devil."

"You might tell me where Mat Singh was standing."

"No telling 'oo's got an ear to the thatch. That nigger's been gone a long time," Otis refused cunningly. "Besides, I want yer to take bloody good care of me. I show yer where the boats tie up. I meant to buy a passage, if my luck was good."

He rose, but Boyne moved first to the door. "Better keep behind me," he said.

On tiptoe, dark eyes probing every shadow, the sailor led the way along the squalid waterfront. Otis stumbled at his heels, his wasted six feet of height towering behind the smaller man. Well behind, concealed by the dark, Chamar followed on bare, noiseless feet.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE TIP OF A KRIS

**T**HE average Malay deckhand is the worst of night watchmen. Boyne expected no difficulty in boarding any vessel

Otis might point out. The problem of stowing away would be to remain concealed, since the boats plying between the island of Penang and the mainland were small, of shallow draft, and presumably would have their small holds crammed with cargo.

But out of half a dozen the old man indicated one from the companionway of which light streamed. Still worse, as they drew near a bullet head rose from the interior.

"Pawang! You limping brown ape!" it challenged. The voice began with a growl and rose in pitch to a snarl when there was no immediate answer. Huge shoulders and a torso matted with thick reddish hair damp with the heat followed the head.

Though the skipper of the boat was naked to the waist he seemed furred rather than unclad. The bulk and hairiness of the heavily muscled body was that of a bear. The bullet head seemed to rise from the shoulders without a neck. Reddish hair was clipped close to the skull. Reddish whiskers sprouted from the cheeks, and bristling reddish eyebrows drew into a scowl. He lifted an empty gin bottle by the neck, like a club. Every movement was deliberate, considered, brutally authoritative.

"Pawang!" he growled.

There was a stir on deck. Into the light that beat upward from the cabin limped an emaciated Malay, gray of hair, who stopped, watchfully, just beyond the swing of the bottle.

"Yes, Roush *tuan*," he answered.

"Closer, you ape!" growled the skipper. He made a feint at a blow, only to hurl the bottle with all his strength within a foot of the Malay's head. The miss was premeditated, but the margin was so slight that Pawang leaped frantically aside. Roush growled with laughter.

"Yes, *tuan*!" he mocked. "You were asleep, you ape! Single up the lines. We're getting underway! To hell with that wrinkled old Malay fox. We can't wait any longer!" Deliberately the bristling red head and hirsute shoulders lowered themselves

out of sight. The Malay limped forward to cast off the mooring lines.

"Nice cheerful gorilla," Boyne whispered to Otis. "Pick another ship. We're too late."

"That's the only one going our way. I asked this hafternoon."

"Yeah? Then take my shoulder. We'll have to swim for it." Boyne shrugged. "I don't like that hard guy. Time he did a favor. Be a novelty."

The sailor slipped over the edge of the pier into the water, Otis following, and swam toward the lighted vessel. Forward a rope trailed over the side. Boyne lifted himself out of the water, caught the low



rail, and while the Malay was busy aft, swung aboard. He reached a hand down to Otis, and tensed. Another swimmer was in the water, moving from

the pier they had just left.

"Quick!" Boyne said, no more. He drew Otis aboard, crawled toward the forward hatch, and pushed the old man below. For himself he waited. He found a hatch batten, and poised it to throw the instant a head rose above the rail. The persistence with which the Malay dogged Otis annoyed him, but if he made a noise that resulted in the discovery of the extra passenger, the hairy tough guy in the cabin would get rid of the pursuer. The idea appealed to Boyne's sense of humor.

The thug, however did not climb aboard instantly. Aft, Roush lumbered deliberately up the companionway. The lame Malay serang started forward to hoist the jib, and Boyne was compelled to duck into the hatch, where there was an eighteen-inch space between the deck beams and the bagged rice that formed the cargo. He pushed Otis over toward the side of the ship and lay down himself between the old man and the hatchway.

"You lie doggo here, whatever happens," he whispered. "Chamar followed us. I'll crawl out and settle with him once we're clear of the harbor," Boyne promised. "No use getting the three of us kicked off together."

By the tacking of the boat and the orders growled by Roush he could tell what progress was being made, but they were hardly out of the harbor when Roush hove to. Puzzled by this maneuver, Boyne stuck his head out of the hatch. The lights in the cabin had been extinguished. The deck was black dark, and toward them another boat was drifting, even the running lights dark.

The two came alongside, and immediately a crowd of Chinese coolies were herded aboard. There were not less than two dozen. Following them came a white man—Boyne could make out the blur of white ducks—and a Malay.

Not a word was spoken. The darkened vessel drew away and headed back toward the harbor. Roush trimmed his sheet and set a course in the opposite direction. The strange white man walked among the coolies, and with cuffs and kicks forced some to lie down by the rails, driving the rest toward the open hatch. A coolie leaped onto the bagged rice, crouched to crawl under the deck and came face with face with Boyne. He recoiled with a shrill squeal of terror.

Boyne rose instantly. To be hauled out of his hiding place would put him at a disadvantage. Darkened ships do not meet by prearrangement and transfer coolies at sea for a legal purpose. Boyne wanted no misunderstanding as to his own status.

"Hello, sailor!" he called. "I'm a white man down on his luck—taking passage with you to the mainland."

"Roush!" yelled the man who had come with the coolies.

The half naked skipper pushed through the ring.

"Evening, Captain. I'm a sailor, borrowing a passage," said Boyne coolly. "My eyes and mouth are shut, savvy?"

"Bring a lantern!" Roush growled.

"Don't be hasty, Roush—he's spoke you fair!" whined his confederate.

"Don't be chicken livered, Al!" the skipper retorted. He thrust the lantern into Boyne's face. "You ain't a policeman. That's lucky for you," he threatened. "I don't carry passengers. Dive over the side."

"Be reasonable, Skipper," said Boyne good humoredly. "That wouldn't be much of a swim for me, but I've a pardner aboard who's too old for it."

"He's a bloody Yank!" cried the man called Al with obvious relief.

"Partner? Where?" growled Roush.

Boyne called for Otis to come out. The red headed skipper swung his lantern upward for a better view—and the movement checked abruptly as though the hairy arm had turned suddenly to stone. Deliberately Roush stared at Sakai's face, white with prison pallor, and drawn with exhaustion. The big man seemed to be comparing the features with a description which he had memorized, for his lips moved, and then he stared again. Slowly a bullying smile twisted his lips.

"By—by hell! *Him!*" Roush whispered, and turned toward Boyne. "You get over the side," he commanded. "Your pardner can stay. By—by *hell!* His name's Otis, ain't it?"

"Nothing doing, skipper," retorted the American. "You see, there's also a Malay aboard that don't like this partner of mine. I'm looking after him, right to the end. Get that?"

The big, red headed skipper's mind worked slowly. He stared at Boyne. "A Malay?" he repeated, voice hoarse with what seemed an emotion close to awe. "Not a little, wrinkled Malay? By hell, there can't be that much luck! Pawang! Al! Here's Otis, that we've been waiting for, and by hell! Maybe Chamar's aboard, too!"

The circle of men stirred and was thrust apart. Into the circle of lantern light stepped a small Malay whose clothes were dripping wet. By that fact Boyne knew

that this must be Chamar, yet despite the attack and the persistent pursuit of Otis and himself it was hard for him to reconcile what he saw with the reputation for deviltry and cunning that Sakai had given to the headman of Kedong.

CHAMAR was an old man, withered and wizened and wrinkled like a small gray ape. All his front teeth were gone, and he was chewing betel with a sidelong motion of his jaws. Yet his eyes were steady and cold as a snake's, and he faced Roush with a malevolent defiance that made Boyne's first impression change swiftly. Chamar was sinister. Though age had enfeebled his muscles a cold and vicious intelligence lay behind that wrinkled brown forehead.

"I will take the white man, Tuan Roush," he said. "Bind his arms and your pay will be the same as though you had delivered him to me at Kedong." The voice of the headman was sharp and commanding, but Roush only blinked and wagged his great red head deliberately.

"Pay? To hell with the few lousy quid you've given me!" he growled. "I know about the rubies. Who don't? I can make Sakai talk as quick as you! Why, you wrinkled brown fool, do you think I took your money expecting to turn him over? Not much!" Roush threw back his head and laughed. "You guessed that, you wrinkled devil, or you'd never come to Penang after him yourself! And you had the gall to stow away on my boat!"

With a speed that was amazing in view of Roush's size and the usual deliberation of his movements his huge red hand shot out and closed around the headman's throat. The Malay reached for his kris, but his face twisted in pain as the skipper's thumbs sank into his windpipe, and his hands dropped limply to his sides. Only his beady black eyes never wavered.

"Hold him—tight!" Roush growled, maintaining his own grip until Pawang and Al had taken the headman by the elbows. Then he stepped back.

"I have trusted a snake, and paid a snake!" Chamar spat.

"Names don't hurt," Roush grinned. "You'll have a week lying tied in the hold of his boat to think up better ones while me and Otis go up to Kedong." Brutally the red headed skipper jabbed a thumb into the Malay's ribs. "Eh, you brown devil!" he growled exultantly, and turned to face Boyne. "Jump!" he commanded.

"Nix," said Boyne pleasantly.

"Swim or fight!" growled the big red headed man.

"Suits me!" Boyne snapped, but Al yelped a protest.

"He's seen too much!"

"Shut up! One man to tie up is enough," contradicted Roush. "I'll give this little Yankee what-for, and particular, black both his eyes. Who'll listen to what a man with a pair of black eyes says about the man that gave them to him. Stand back and give us light. This hatch is just about big enough."

Smiling, with brutally complacent confidence, Roush hooked a ponderous left fist at Boyne's jaw. The American side-stepped, slipped inside the clumsy guard and tore in with both hands—short, jolting punches that ripped into a red-furred belly, the muscles of which were hard as iron.

Roush grunted, but stood flat footed and took his punishment. He swung heavily. Boyne caught the blow on his hunched shoulder, yet the weight of it knocked him down. Instantly Roush kicked him. He leaped up, sickened by the foul and furious with anger, dodged two slow blows, and began infighting.

A punch to the back of the neck dropped him again. He was kicked twice before he could rise. He was sick. His speed was gone, and the snap from his punches. Boyne had inflicted enough punishment on this hairy giant to drop an ordinary man. Muscles like iron armored Roush's stomach and wind. The brutal, bullying smile was on his face. He waited, flat

footed, for Boyne to recover from the kicks.

"I'll give you what-for, Yank," he gloated.

Boyne set his teeth. He was in for a licking. In a ring he could have avoided these ponderous blows forever, on the footing of uneven sacks he could not keep away. Roush's tactics were brutal, foul—and effective. He took what Boyne sent until he could beat the smaller man down with punches barred in any decent ring, then punished him with his boots. He would give Boyne what-for—whatever that was—but the sailor resolved that all the marks of the fight would not be his.

He forgot the body, ducked a left lead, feinted on uppercut, then whipped in a right hook.

The punch caught Roush in the eye. The big man staggered. Boyne shot for the other eye, felt the nose mash under his fist. He was licked, but he was grinning.

Roush bellowed and hurled himself upon the smaller man, bringing him down by sheer weight. His huge paws pinned Boyne's shoulders to the sacking, his knee drove into Boyne's groin. In agony and nausea the American went limp. A hairy hand caught his throat, he saw a fist drawn back for slow, brutal punishment, but before it could descend there was a shrill, blood-chilling yell that pierced even Boyne's dull consciousness.

The excitement of the fight had made Al and Pawang relax their hold on Chamar. The yell was the *sorak* the Malay uttered as he broke from their grip. He whipped out his kris and struck—not at them, but at Sakai, who stood next him. For an instant the old man stood on the edge of the hatch, head thrown back and body rigid. The reddened tip of a kris driven beneath the right shoulder blade clear through the wasted body protruded an inch beyond his chest. Then he pitched forward upon Roush and Boyne.

Chamar squirmed past the hands flung out to hold him and leaped on the rail.

"Ask Mat Singh's secret of the dead, Tuan Roush—thou snake!" he screamed shrilly and dove overboard.

Roush let go of Boyne and scrambled to his feet, shouting to put the helm hard down, to launch a boat, to catch that Malay—three orders at once, and none executed, for the overcrowded boat became a pandemonium in which any effective action was impossible.

Chinamen terrified by the murder ran to and fro, frustrating the efforts of the two Malays who formed the crew. Roush knocked men right and left as he ran aft to take the helm, but in the light breeze the boat was slow to come about. No one remembered, until too late, to watch Chamar. The result was that in the darkness they lost him, and the yells of the Chinamen, so close to the harbor and its police, threw Al into a panic. At the top of his lungs he pleaded with Roush to let the headman go, and make sail.

Boyne, meanwhile, fought back his nausea and lifted Otis in his arms. Bloody froth was bubbling from the old man's lips. A film was gathering on his eyes, but on the pale face was a command and a desire awful in its intensity. Otis' lips moved, but Boyne could not distinguish the words—only a mumble. A stimulant was all important.

Carrying Otis, Boyne worked his way aft toward the cabin. He had to cross in front of Roush at the wheel. That could not be helped. Roush saw him, turned the wheel over to Al, and followed Boyne down into the cabin. That could not be helped, either. Roush passed him a bottle, and for the second time, Boyne let raw spirits trickle between Otis' lips. Roush leaned over his shoulder.

"He's done for," the skipper grunted.

Boyne was of the same opinion. Only the will power derived from an obsession of twenty years had kept the old man alive so long. His eyes were closed. He was oblivious of his surroundings, and though Boyne would have preferred privacy very greatly, there was no such thing to be had.

"Yank!" Otis murmured.

"Aye, aye, buddy."

"'E was standing in the stream—by the split boulder—facin' it—bent down—'E'd just stepped back—I figures he dropped the rubies in the crack— It was narrer—and deep. Mind Chamar—'e's sly—"

"Aye, that's okay. Easy, buddy."

"Yer'll—go?"

"Sure, I'll go."

"The kids—at Limehouse Settlement—London. . . You'll send—them half?"

"Okay," Boyne promised. Rest easy, old-timer."

Otis sighed like one very weary, but content. The pale, wasted face rolled sideways on the dirty deck. He had already gone.

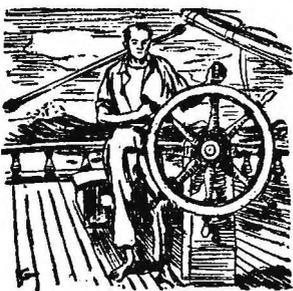
Roush's shadow fell on Boyne. Looking upward, the sailor saw the thick red brows drawn together, and the unshaven face intent.

"Delirious," he remarked indifferently.

"Delirious my eye!" Roush growled. "Fever don't hit so quick. He was giving you his last will and testament, he was. You're quick, Yank. I'm slow—but sure *and* thorough. In the crack of the boulder, eh? Well, by hell! If I only had Chamar still, too!"

With one of his sudden movements Roush flung open a drawer and slipped a Webley revolver into the waistband of his trousers before he seated himself, very deliberately, on the edge of the bunk between Boyne and the cabin stairs.

"Too bad you didn't go overboard, Yank. You're in the way," he said. "I know what rubies he was talking about, of course." The red headed skipper nudged Otis' body with his toe. "Fact is, Chamar came to me—since I run the only boat



that goes near his village—and paid me to be on the lookout for him. He described Otis, but I knew what was up. I took his money meaning to give him the double-cross.

"He don't bother me, even now. He'll get back to Kedong first, because I've got to get rid of these damn Chinks, but a man that knows where to look can snatch those rubies in two minutes, and be gone. Chamar ain't found them in twenty years. It'll have to be quick work. There's a rubber plantation right near that boulder, run by an Englishman and his niece. Old soldier. One of those Bah Jove, high hat coves, hand in glove with the deputy commissioner, of course, who ain't far away either. Chamar wouldn't dare kill a white man, unless there was nothing else to be done. He's a cunning old devil."

Roush sat silent, frowning. Boyne, who could watch the slow wits at work behind the brutal face, could guess what was coming. His keen black eyes flashed around the tiny cabin for a weapon, and found none. He moved closer to the red headed skipper, gaging the distance between them to an inch.

"But you, now," Roush growled. "You're smart, and a fighter. Al's yellow. He ain't man enough to keep you tied up aboard while I was gone. He'd be afraid you'd tip the police off about these dirty Chinks. They're his game, really. They're indentured coolies that owe the comprador the cost of their passage from China. Al persuades them to give their boss the slip. Tells them they'll be *lau keh*, or free coolies, owing nobody nothing." Roush grinned evilly. "When we get them aboard, we run them up into the jungles of Kedah, and sell them over again to the tin mines. What with the costs of this passage, they never get out of debt."

"Nice business. You work like you fight. Dirty," said Boyne crisply.

"Thorough, and sure. That's Billy Roush," the red haired skipper grunted. "Now, Al knows about Mat Singh's rubies, too. I can't leave you alone together. You'd

outsmart him, and one of you might get to Kedong, too, knowing as much as me. Maybe as quick as me. No, there's just one thing to do. For two to know where the rubies are hid is one too many."

Boyne sat perfectly still, though every muscle was taut as a sprinter's on the mark. Roush wanted to kill him—but few men, even men as brutal as the skipper, can shoot in cold blood. Roush, however, never hesitated. Without haste or scruple he reached for his revolver.

Still Boyne sat as though he were content to die game, but as the barrel swung into line with his chest his foot flashed upward. Distance and time were judged perfectly. His toe struck Roush's wrist. The gun flew into the air. Roush leaped to retrieve it, but Boyne, quicker of wit, bolted up the stairs, almost flinging himself into the arms of Al and the two Malays, who were grouped at the wheel.

"My pardner told where the rubies of Mat Singh are hid!" he said in a ringing whisper. "He saw Mat Singh drop them in the crack of the split boulder in the brook called Kuala Tanum, two miles above the native village called Kedong! They're still there. Me and my pardner were after them!"

Gun in hand, Roush came plunging up the companionway. Boyne caught Al by the shoulders, and flung the white man between himself and the weapon. Everything depended upon how well the stories of Mat Singh's rubies were known. The sharp hiss with which Pawang the Malay drew in his breath was a reprieve.

"In the crack of the rock. I've seen that!" yelled Al, too excited to care how Boyne handled him. "And all the dirt for yards around has been passed through sieves! Hi! But Mat Singh was a sharp 'un!"

"Step aside, Al!" growled Roush.

Boyne tightened his grip on the Englishman.

"Think fast for once, you red-headed gorilla!" he challenged. "Do you trust Al enough to do a killing that will let him

land you in jail by a word to the first cop, while he goes off to crack that boulder? Shoot—and the first of the four that turns Crown Witness slips a noose around your neck!”

Roush thought. As the suspense lengthened Al commenced to tremble in Boyne's grip. The possibility of a double murder was in both their minds, as it was in the mind of the big skipper, but at last, very deliberately, the latter slipped the revolver into his trousers.

“You're quick, Yank,” he growled. “Damned quick, and game. But you and I ain't finished yet. We'll get rid of the Chinks and go overland together. Pawang, you limping ape! Tie a weight to the dead man and toss him overboard. That's one out of the way, anyhow!”

#### CHAPTER IV

##### MEN MUST SLEEP

**B**OYNE passed the remainder of the night handcuffed in the cabin, while the boat crossed to the mainland and began to work its way up the Kedah River toward the interior. For the moment the sailor felt that he was in no danger of physical violence, and he welcomed the opportunity to snatch a little rest. Much had happened since he pushed open the doors of the House of Celestial Fortune, and he needed a breathing space to plan the part he was to play in the affair of the rubies of Mat Singh.

Evidently they were no ordinary treasure trove. Rather, as he reviewed the events of the night, he decided that Chamar, at least, had organized a conspiracy with wide ramifications and was fighting shrewdly and determinedly to get possession of the jewels. While old Sekai Otis had been in jail, keeping the secret of the treasure, the shrewd, wrinkled headman had attempted to curry favor. But the Malay had also hired Roush, on whose boat Sakai would be likely to take passage to the back country, and, not trusting his red headed agent, had come to Penang

himself at the time of Sakai's release and nearly succeeded in kidnapping the old man single-handed.

What Chamar was doing now Boyne could only guess, but he was positive that he had not seen the last of the Malay. Probably the headman was making all speed to Kedong, there to lay new plans and organize his village against the time that the treasure seekers arrived. For to Kedong the adventurers must come. The rubies would draw them like steel filings to a magnet. Five men—Roush, Al, himself and the two Malay servants—now possessed old Sakai's secret, and some of the five would meet Chamar on the headman's own ground.

Tight lipped in the dark cabin, Boyne made up his mind that he would be one of the number. If he could have slipped his handcuffs and escaped that night, he would have turned toward Kedong and not back to Penang. Sakai Otis had won his admiration and respect. The old man had been tough, but he had possessed something more than average manhood.

For the sake of a son, who must have been an infant at the time of the killing of Mat Singh, Sakai had gone to jail rather than reveal what he knew. Grandchildren had been born to that son while he lay in jail, and for their sake the old man had dared an adventure in which he must have known the odds were heavily against him. Boyne was not going to let “the kids” down.

He was sorry for Sakai. Not because the old Cockney was dead. He had had but little more time to live at best, and had never shrunk from risk. But because luck had mocked the Cockney from the start, bringing him to the verge of success, and then slipping, by the narrowest margin, into complete failure. The old man's life had been worse than the first turn of the wheel at roulette. Only a thin partition divides the number eighteen from twenty-nine, yet when the bet is on eighteen, the thickness of a hair causes the loss of every wager. Even the even

chances lose, as they would lose for Sakai in real life unless Boyne could succeed in carrying on.

Though at the moment the sailor was a helpless prisoner, he trusted his own good luck and the shifting play of trifling circumstance to change that. Despite the brutality and slow thoroughness of Roush, the red headed skipper was a less formidable adversary than Chamar. Roush had not planned—he had simply seized the chance to work the double-cross, and was now pressing greedily after the rubies for the sake of their cash value. He was dangerous, for he would not recoil from cold blooded murder, but Boyne felt that the skipper was confronted with an impossible task. To get rid of the Chinese, and bring four other men through fifty odd miles of country that was half civilized, yet nevertheless policed, required talents beyond bullheaded courage and callous brutality.

In this opinion, however, Boyne underestimated both the big man's qualifications for leadership and the fear he inspired in his subordinates. At dawn, Roush herded Al and Al's Malay servant into the cabin at the muzzle of a revolver, and to Boyne's surprise, handcuffed them all together. That done, Roush shut the companionway slide and left the three all day long in the stifling heat, while he and Pawang—who was lame and unable to make a dash for freedom—worked the boat up the river.

From Al Boyne was able to learn only two facts; first, that the progress up-river would be slow, much slower than the speed Chamar could make overland, since a road ran from the sea coast to a village near the headquarters of the deputy commissioner nearest Kedong, over which a flivver made trips when there were any passengers. Second, that an agent for the tin mines awaited the Chinese up-river, and debarkation was always accomplished in secret, quickly, and at dark.

The long day dragged on. At dusk Roush appeared with Pawang, whom he ironed with the others. Then the skipper gagged

all four. Soon afterward, the boat nosed into the bank. Boyne could hear the noise of the Chinese debarking, then the voice of the labor agent on deck.



When payment for the laborers had been made, Roush remarked that he was going to run the boat up the river a short distance and tie

it up for a few days. The agent commented that the local Malays would steal everything movable unless a watchman were kept aboard. Roush growled, very sourly, that he knew that; he'd thank the agent to send a watchman.

Boyne could understand the red headed skipper's sourness. The country was too well settled, and too many unseen eyes would be on the boat, to permit him to dispose of his prisoners. Roush, whose slow mind had been deliberating all day, had evidently taken that fact into account. By the time he had gone further up-river and moored his boat to the bank night had fallen.

He entered the cabin, removed the gags, and gave his prisoners water. A bullying smile was on his face.

"Hot, was it? Hot on deck, too," he grunted. "Listen, Al, you were getting the wind up, and you'd have blatted something to that agent. That's why I ironed you. No hard feelings. We been mates a long time, ain't we?"

"Y-yes," whined Al—very dubiously, for which Boyne could not blame him. Roush's speech was so obviously rehearsed.

"Well," went on the red headed skipper as though everything were settled. "We got to get away from here. We'll stop to-night at the next village, and we can walk to Kedong by tomorrow night. You and me, Al, will say we're carrying back three criminals for trial. The two Malays, and him." Roush touched Boyne. "That story

will stand, won't it, with a bunch of brown Malay farmers?"

Al nodded, still more dubiously.

"I'll handcuff the Malays together," said Roush, "and hitch you to the sailor here."

"Leaving you free with a gun?" Al gasped. "Not much! I won't move! You don't dare hurt me here!"

"You chicken livered fool!" growled the big red headed man. "Ain't we mates?"

"You'd double-cross your own mother for a sixpence!" cried Al. "I won't move, I tell you. Not unless you give me my revolver and—and handcuff the sailor to yourself! How's *that*?"

"Anyway you like," growled Roush promptly—too promptly, Boyne thought. He exchanged a glance with the two Malays, and saw sullen despair writ large on the brown faces. However the contest of wits and will between Roush and Al come out, there was little hope for the three of them. Pawang wet his lips, and his eyes narrowed cunningly.

"*Tuan*—we sleep at Rangul tonight?"

"That's the nearest village," said Roush. "Got friends there, you brown ape? Just let me see you talk to them! You can sleep if you like! *I* won't!"

With a shrug he unlocked Boyne's handcuffs and snapped it on his own left wrist, jerking the sailor to his feet. "Come and get your revolver, Al!" he mocked. "Don't get the wind up! We're mates, ain't we?" But the bullying smirk was on his lips, and it seemed to Boyne that the big red headed man was too self-satisfied.

In the dark the five walked to the next village, and told their story. It was believed—at least, the Malays, who hovered around the party in spite of all that Roush could do to keep them away from his servants, did not contradict the tale openly. He succeeded in getting his party a room for themselves, in which they lay down, side by side, still manacled, with Al lying next to Roush's right hand. Lay down—but not to sleep. Boyne could not. He was alert to every movement of his companions. He waited, wide eyed, for Roush or

Al to breathe deeply, hoping that he might reach out and lay hand on a gun. The Malays, lying rigid, had the same idea, and knowing it, the two other white men were wakeful as any. From time to time Roush chuckled in the darkness.

He was the first to rise, red eyed, as they all were, but less affected by the all night vigil. They gulped a scanty breakfast, bought a little rice and a cooking pot to provide themselves with food later, and set out at sunrise—five men tramping the same road, but not five who would reach Kedong. That certainty marched with them step by step. It was manifest in Roush's bullying smile, in the sweat that streamed from Al's face, in the sullen faces of the Malays and the sidelong glances that Pawang shot at the red headed skipper when he thought himself unobserved.

Boyne saw, because he could afford to miss nothing. They followed a faint trail that wound between huge trees, where the ground was damp and the leeches troublesome. As the route became lonely Boyne expected Roush to turn on Al at every moment. With his "mate" out of the way, it would be simple to shoot the others. Al, however, marched with his hand near his pistol, and as the day drew on Boyne began to worry lest he should attempt to draw the weapon out of sheer panic.

**E**VEN Roush, despite his bullheadedness and lack of imagination, felt the strain. He was the strongest, the most dangerous. By instinct the others were banding against him. To Boyne's keener perceptions it was apparent that the two Malays had in some way reached an understanding. He even felt that Pawang was trying to communicate with Al, and failing because Roush never let the other get a yard from his side.

With eyes on each other, instead of the path, the pace was slow. The quick tropical sunset overtook them in the jungle, with Kedong, by Roush's estimate, still

five miles away. The camping place was damp from an overflowing brook, and brush grown beneath huge camphor trees. By day such a place would swarm with leeches, but these pests cease their blood seeking in darkness. Wood and water were to be had without wandering, which was important in view of the mood of the party. Pawang kindled a fire and put the rice to boil. The others waited hungrily, each with his back against the buttressed root of the camphor tree.

Despite damp ground and the rough bark of the tree that gouged his back an overpowering desire to sleep rose in Boyne like a tide. Involuntarily his eyelids dropped, only to jerk open from a sense of peril. Pawang's thin shoulders stooped over the rice pot, tense and furtive. His body concealed the movements of his hands. Of that Boyne took note, but it was not that which had aroused him.

Opposite, six feet away in the V shaped cleft in the roots, Al's Malay servant lay on the ground, deep in slumber. Al himself, at Boyne's left, was glassy eyed, staring straight, before him, seeing nothing. None of them was dangerous. The sailor glanced at Roush.

*The huge red-headed man was wide awake.* Though his head lolled back against the bark, his eyes burned through narrowed lids and on the unshaven face was an expression of cruel and patient self-satisfaction, like that of a cat which has cornered four mice in a *cul de sac*.

And now Boyne understood. Roush, confident in his strength, accustomed to long night watches, had chosen sleep to be his ally. Slow and sure indeed! Not only was Al armed, but at the first hostile move Boyne and the Malays would grapple with him. The outcome of such a struggle could not be foreseen, whereas if he waited till all save himself were asleep, he could aim his first shots. That might be slow. It would be very, very sure.

"Ahoy! Rise and shine! Hit the deck, sailors!" Boyne shouted. Three heads snapped up.

"Do that again and I'll plug you," growled Roush deep in his chest.

"Don't need to do it again. They savvy, big boy," Boyne replied. "Duel with sleep if you want to. From now on it's fair play."

That the others did understand was obvious. Al stretched.

"Think I'll walk around a bit," he yawned.

"You'll sit down—or start something now!" Roush threatened.

The freckled white man hesitated.

"The rice, *tuans!*" Pawang whined. The crisis passed. Al reached for the bowl, scooped a double handful of rice onto a leaf, and wolfed down the food, squeezing the grain into compact balls with his fingers in the Malay fashion. Boyne, recalling the furtive attitude of the cook, waved his portion aside. Roush was almost as cautious. He waited until both the Malays had eaten, then, with a self-satisfied grunt at his own cleverness in making the cook prove that the rice was unpoisoned, gulped down his own share and Boyne's besides.

To the American both Malays looked complacent, which was some compensation for the loss of his dinner. He could not guess what Pawang could have done to the food, however, for though there are abundant poisonous plants in the Malay jungle, both the natives had eaten without hesitation, if sparingly.

That they could last the night through without falling asleep he never believed. Even Malay war parties sleep at night. The native has not the mental discipline needed in a long vigil, and the two hours which followed were the longest Boyne had ever lived through, despite all his experience at sea. He wished he had matches to prop open his eyelids. Even Roush was nodding, breathing deeply and regularly.

Of the five, Al was the first to succumb. Suddenly he toppled to the ground and lay breathing heavily. Across the embers of the fire Pawang's eyes gleamed;

the other Malay crouched tensely.

"Wake him!" muttered Roush drowsily.

"Huh?"

"Wake him! My head's heavier than lead."

Boyne shook the Englishman by the shoulder.

Once—and again, more vigorously.

"I can't!" he exclaimed.

With manifest effort the big skipper roused himself.

"Can't, huh? Thought so, because I was going, too. Damn Pawang—and me for being slow. The trick's old. Pawang mixed opium in the rice. Malays are more used to it than we, and eat less, d'ye see? Duel of sleep, huh? Well—here's luck!"

Slowly, though he did not will the motion to be slow, Roush reached for his revolver. The Malays leaped together across the fire—Pawang, straight at Roush, his companion, at Al. The revolver cracked. Pawang's flying body hurtled into Boyne. With his left arm the sailor gripped the skinny torso, falling on his back and holding the kicking Malay close. The Webley spat again, once and twice, its muzzle against bare, sweating flesh. Two rapid shots from Al's gun answered. Roush cried out, and fired for the fourth time. Pawang's struggles ceased. Boyne felt a hot trickle of blood, and jerked his handcuffed wrist.

"Livin'?" Roush growled. "So'm I! By Hell, that was quick! The other Malay got Al's gun. Shot him—and me."



The skipper's voice was thick. Desperately Boyne strove to throw off the dead weight that pinned him down, but before he could squirm free

Roush rolled Pawang aside. The first thing Boyne saw was the revolver, dull red in the firelight. Over the sights Roush's red head wobbled.

"I'm hurt. In the back, and the opium's getting to me," he growled. "If I feel myself going, sailor, I'll plug you sure as hell. I can't bandage it. If I drop here the leeches will get me in the morning." Roush shuddered, more in disgust than fear.

"Unlock the irons and I'll fix you up," Boyne promised.

"Unlock hell! You'll fix me up and keep me awake, or I'll plug you if it's the last thing I do. I got Pawang through the chest as he jumped," the big man boasted, "but I wasted a shot plugging him again. Poor Al never knew what hit him. The other shot plowed across my back.

"Poor Al, hell!" Boyne snorted. "You'd have killed him yourself!"

"Not unless I had to," growled Roush. "With you it's different. If I fall I'll bring you down with me, little man, and I'll put the gun against your belly and let go."

Boyne thought to himself that once the back wound was bandaged Roush would shoot anyhow.

"G'wan, turn me loose," he snapped.

"Ain't—going to have you run off—leave me for leeches," mumbled Roush thickly. Even the pain of his wound did not overcome the effects of the drug he had taken. He swayed where he sat. "Plug you—'f I feel myself going—"

His head drooped, but only to snap erect. He pointed the gun behind him.

"Steady!" snapped Boyne, abandoning any idea of snatching the weapon. "I'll fix you up, but I'll have to jab you with thorns or something to keep you awake." "Don't care!"

The red headed skipper slouched forward, gun in his lap. Boyne tore off the shirt, revealing a long, shallow gash across the hairy back that bled profusely but which was, he could see, nothing more than a flesh wound. It would not incapacitate the skipper, and when the opium wore off, then what? A bullet for Knuckles Boyne. He must get free of the handcuffs, but how? He doubted if he could knock Roush out with one punch, even now.

"We may have to walk quite a way," he said.

"Don't give a damn!"

Boyne commenced to bandage the wound with strips of Roush's shirt. He knew of the location of but one person in the jungle, and that was Chamar, who was, presumably, in the village of Kedong, five miles away. To be between Roush and Chamar was to be penned between the devil and the deep sea, but of the two, he preferred the deep sea. Chamar hated Roush, and would free him from the skipper. Afterward—

The sailor shrugged. There might not be an afterward. He had five miles to cover, at night, over an unknown trail, five miles through which he must keep Roush on his feet, and in motion. He must not go too fast, nor too slow, nor must Roush suspect the destination.

"Come on, big boy," Boyne said, half lifting the skipper upright.

At the first thicket he broke off a thorny branch to use as a whip, though he never struck unless Roush stumbled. He followed the path with his feet, slowly. The journey was a nightmare. How long they stumbled through the dark like drunken men Boyne could not guess. He was surprised to hear a rooster crow ahead. He had been stumbling, stumbling. He had not realized the time was so near dawn, or he so near the village.

"Keep going, big boy!" he commanded for the hundredth time. Roush slouched forward. They came from beneath the trees. Faintly against the gray sky ahead, Boyne saw the long grass thatched roof of a Malay kampong.

"Ahoy! Ahoy! Chamar!" he shouted—and grappled with Roush to prevent a shot at the last minute.

The big man, however, made little resistance. Drugged though he was, he also could see the thatched roof against the sky.

"Damn you, Yank!" he mumbled. "I've still—got to sleep!"

Slowly he sank to the ground, thrusting

his revolver into his waistband, and fumbling in a pocket for the key to the handcuffs, which he passed Boyne. "Throw them away, Yank, or the Malays'll use them on us," he muttered thickly. "Thank God—there's some law—in this country. Remember—rubber plantation—nearby—and district commissioner—not far. Chamar—doesn't know—secret."

"That's our ace in the hole," snapped Boyne cheerfully, but his heart sank as the first man to appear on the kampong veranda was the little, withered headman, whose toothless jaws moved with a side-long motion as he advanced cautiously toward the two white men.

## CHAPTER V

### THE HEADMAN

CHAMAR was followed by half a dozen of his villagers. Boyne scarcely noticed them, though they were armed with spears and parangs—the broad bladed Malay wood knives. He was watching Chamar's face. The black eyes were bitter and angry, but the wrinkled countenance was shrewd, self-controlled. Chamar squatted and deliberately spat blood red betel juice on Roush's unconscious form.

The *tuan* is hurt, *tuan*," he said.

"Yes."

Chamar motioned to one of his young men, pointed to Roush, and spoke in Malay. The youth hurried away, taking the trail by which Boyne had come.

"I will know why, soon," said Chamar grimly. "Thou are no friend of this *tuan*?"

"No."

"That is well," said the shrewd headman, nodding and spitting. "Maybe thou art a friend of the *tuan* Yardson?"

Boyne gave an involuntary start. *Yardson!* No common name, that.

"Aye! Tuan Yardson that is called Pukka Dick," he lied, pressing the advantage. "I go to him, and then to the district commissioner."

The wrinkled headman's beady black eyes searched Boyne to the back bone,

but the sailor had not played poker for nothing. He bore the scrutiny unmoved.

"You are tired," said Chamar softly, though his eyes were bitter. "I am a friend of Tuan Yardson, though his rubber trees do much harm, and his laborers take the food from the mouths of my young men. First you must rest, and the wound of this *tuan—tuan* Snake!"—again Chamar spat—"be washed. Thou wilt break thy journey, little Tuan whose eyes are like a kris?"

"My name's Boyne." Though the sailor desired nothing less than to rest at the kampong, he was wise enough to read the headman's face. Chamar was resolved that he should stay, either by free will or force, and Boyne could not see that he would lose much by delay. Chamar might be holding him until the youth returned with a report of what had happened up the trail, but the truth of that fight could do Boyne no harm. Gravely he nodded.

"I will stay," he said.

Chamar rose, and led him to the kampong like an honored guest.

Inside the big thatched communal dwelling which housed, as near as Boyne could guess, nearly a score of families, the headman treated him with a hospitality that was suspicious. Fresh water was brought, and the best food. Clean sleeping mats were laid out. Women were sent to dress Roush's wound, which they did skilfully.

Not a word was spoken of the rubies. Boyne observed that Chamar did not eat with him. The headman was a Mohammedan, with a Moslem's idea of the sacredness of sharing bread and salt. That was the only incident which gave grounds for suspicion. In other respects Chamar might have been ignorant of the nature of Boyne's errand, and the sailor could not convince himself that the headman feared the district commissioner's police, or this *tuan* Yardson, to any such extent. There is law in the back jungles, but nevertheless the rule of the English is not so strict as that.

No, the explanation of Chamar's mildness must be that he had perfected his

plans. Boyne and Roush had arrived, but someone had to come. The rubies were the bait of a trap, not less powerful or dull of tooth because its springing had been postponed for decades.

ORIGINALLY, on the one side, there was Chamar, poised above the hiding place like a cat over a mouse hole. On the other, Otis, equally patient, waiting for the opportunity to dare the cat's claws. Otis was dead, but he, Knuckles Boyne, had taken the old man's place. Whether that were luck, or Fate, the game went on to the end, drawing human pawns onto the board and casting them aside, whichever the need was. This *tuan* Yardson must have a place in the pattern.

Boyne had not lost his faith in luck, nor his belief that small opportunities were continually presenting themselves, to be utilized if a man were sufficiently keen and able. What he saw was the need of some purpose more steadfast than chance. A smart guy should understand where he was bound, should steer with or against one of the tides.

The presentiment that he must match wits and plans with Chamar in order to succeed was intensified when Boyne awoke late that afternoon after a refreshing sleep. The kampong was drowsing in the heat. Few men were about, and Chamar, for whom he asked at once, was gone!

At first Boyne thought he must have misunderstood the Malay woman who gave him this information. He roused Roush, who spoke Malay fluently, only to have the news confirmed. Chamar was gone, leaving the two white men free to wander into the jungle as they pleased! To Roush this seemed a colossal bit of luck, but Boyne, though he allowed the red headed skipper to hurry him away from the kampong and up the trail that led to the juncture of the brooks, could not trust such good fortune.

Yet for two miles the two walked alone through the hot, drowsy forest. With their objective so close Roush lengthened his

stride. He turned, scowling impatiently, his face flushed with greed, when Boyne stopped abruptly.

"Roush, we're close to the place. Inside ten minutes we may be fingering those rubies," said the sailor. "Let's decide what we do next if everything is jake."

"Come on!" scowled Roush.

"Now, I hate your insides," retorted Boyne tranquilly. "I wouldn't turn over half those rubies to you, and you wouldn't be satisfied with half if I did. That's that—and it suits me fine. Between us it's all or nothing, Big Boy. But—and here's a hell of a big but—Chamar is up to something."

"What if he is?"

"Why, the least he can do is make getting back to the coast a two-man job. We'll have a lot of jungle to travel, and we've just the one revolver. Let's work it so whatever happens that wrinkled old devil *don't* get the rubies. When he's licked—when we've made our get-away clean—why then, you and I will—settle. Until then, let's be pardners."

The big man's red-rimmed eyes narrowed. He leered, and nodded.

"You mean you'll let me help you, and double-cross me if you get a chance," said Boyne. "Don't pull that too much—but even at that, what I've offered goes."

"Here's where the brooks join," Roush grunted. "Kuala Tanum!" He spat. "The real Kuala Tanum's where the Tanum River meets the Jelei. There's a boulder, too. But I don't see a split in it."

"Water might be high," snapped Boyne, running forward.

The rock was at the meeting point of the two streams—a rounded, triangular stone, that rose a foot or two above the water. Directly behind it grew a gigantic tree, the low branches of which stretched for yards on every side. Dense foliage cast a dark green twilight around the stone, and the great branches arched and twisted overhead like the bars of a gigantic cage.

Roush was on his knees by the boulder. His face flamed. He lifted a thumb and

forefinger full of mud, rubbed it on the palm of his hand. What he had found was a pebble. He threw it aside with a curse.

"The crack's a yard long. But not so narrow or deep," he panted. "Lend me your knife. Maybe there's a crevice in it." Mud stained the flowing water. Roush picked with the knife blade, gave a grunt of triumph, and pried loose something upon which his red-furred fist clamped shut before lifting it from the water.

Boyne gripped his shoulder. "Wait!" the sailor commanded. Suspicious and watchful, he had seen a branch stir, though not a breath of wind moved under the dome of limbs that arched close over his head. He

pointed at the spot. Roush jerked out his revolver.

"'Don't shoot, you thick-headed fool,'" Boyne snapped, but

the threatening gesture caused the branch to sway violently. A voice spat out a command in Malay. Instantly there was a commotion in the bushes caused by the movements of a dozen men, to right, left, and behind, and from the branches of the great tree Chamar dropped like a malevolent gray ape.

"My young men are on all sides, *tuans*," he said swiftly, dodging none the less so that the thickness of the tree trunk was between his body and the gun. The wrinkled face peered around the barrier with a cunning, malevolent grin. "You have slain three men, *tuans*. Otis killed but one, yet the English put him in their jail. Shall I send for the commissioner and his Sikhs, *tuans*?"

"Are we mates, Yank?" Roush growled under his breath. "I got something in my fist!"

"Right! But there's too many to fight!"

"Let me see what you have found," commanded Chamar. "If you give me what



you hold, I will order my young men to forget that they have knives and spears, and what their eyes have seen. Your knife point has reached where our fingers did not."

"This way, big boy," said Boyne briskly. "No police for mine!"

The Malays who had been ambushed around the junction of the brooks were closing in swiftly, but the sailor led the way at a run toward the least guarded quadrant of the circle. That was straight toward the headman, but the Chamar only dodged behind the tree yelling orders in Malay.

In a moment the cause of his discretion was explained. The damp earth changed to swamp. Roush plowed knee deep in a muck of rotten leaves and earth, tripped, and fell. The noise of the pursuit was all behind the two white men. Boyne stepped from the muck to a tree root, twisted and slippery as the back of a snake, caught a hanging vine, and half jumped, half swung to the next root.

"This way, guy!" he called.

Roush, heavy and awkward, tried to follow his example, but slipped, wasted a precious thirty seconds crawling from the soft slime onto the roots, jumped, and then slipped again. Boyne, five yards ahead, was forced to wait. By the yells of the Malays he perceived that they were also skipping from root to root on both flanks, and that, barefooted and more accustomed to the jungle, they were making three feet to his one. Directly behind a muzzle loader exploded, and a shower of slugs cut through the leaves. Cursing, Roush answered the shot and scrambled in the buttressed roots of the biggest tree nearby.

"Go on, Yank. I'm too slow to run," he snarled.

Boyne jumped back beside the big man. "Ain't you the big hearted pardner?" he grinned. "To hell with you, on two counts! Show me what you got in your fist."

Roush snarled, and fired a second shot.

"Better save your lead, bozo," the sailor remarked.

"Got a pocketful of shells."

"And you'll need them. We're cornered right."

The Malays who surrounded them, however, were farmers, not soldiers. They proved to have no stomach for a frontal attack. When the white men were surrounded Chamar yelled commands for silence, and from behind a tree commenced a harangue. He could keep the white men in the swamp till they died of fever and the bites of leeches. He could turn them over to the English. On the other hand, he would be willing to divide the rubies.

"Yeah—he will not!" Boyne grunted sarcastically. "Stride fast, big boy. That commissioner and the Sikhs are on the old devil's mind!"

The sailor remembered the mention of a rubber plantation nearby. That argued the presence of several white men and a large force of coolies. Prompt investigation of the revolver shots was probable, and therefore he persuaded Roush not to answer Chamar at all. What worried the sailor was that the secret of the rubies had been revealed. Chamar would seize the first opportunity to rifle the cache.

On that account Boyne heard the voice of a white man commanding Chamar to withdraw his Malays and behave himself with decidedly mixed emotions. Chamar's prompt—almost humble obedience—was natural under the circumstances, but when the cordon of Malays was withdrawn and the white man shouted for Boyne himself to come out of his hiding place the sailor hesitated. Yardson was no common name, and an Englishman who might be an ex-army officer, who would be in close touch with the authorities, was a more formidable adversary than any Malay whatsoever.

"Let's cut through the swamp and tackle that rock," growled Roush, voicing the sailor's thought.

"Let's see that ruby first," Boyne retorted. Roush hesitated, but in this contest of wills the smaller man triumphed. Slowly the skipper opened his fist, revealing—a sharp-edged pebble.

The two men stared, open mouthed. All this, for a pebble?"

"Yank, you lied to me," Roush snarled.

"Did I?" said Boyne grimly, choking back the bitter pang of disappointment. "What are you going to do about it?"

Recklessly he turned his back on Roush, disregarding the will to murder that conorted the unshaven face, and began to jump from root to root out of the swamp.

Had Otis lied, keeping his secret even at the point of death? Boyne could not believe that. Otis had never claimed to see the rubies hidden, but only the attitude in which Mat Singh had stood the moment after they were concealed.

## CHAPTER VI

### MOONLIGHT

AT THE edge of the swamp Yardson waited, a man of fifty, spotless in white linen, tall, and holding himself erect as a lance. His right arm had been amputated between shoulder and elbow, and his face was a weal of scars from an old wound. He wore the regulation mustache of the British Army, gray and clipped short, and the weapon he had carried against the Malays was nothing more than a malacca swagger stick. An English gentleman, an ex-officer who had done his bit on the Western Front, obviously.

"Find the rubies, what?" he demanded.

"That's our business, governor," scowled Roush. Yardson stiffened.

"No," Boyne answered before the storm broke. "You are Pukka Dick Yardson, sir?"

Though muck covered the sailor from head to foot, the piercing black eyes were those of a commander of men, and Yardson recognized the fact.

"The same, sir," he replied formally. "And you?"

"I am Sakai Otis' partner," said Boyne. "Otis has been killed. Roush, here, overheard his last instructions to me, and—joined me."

"Humph!" The exclamation was ex-

pressive. Yardson understood. "Your partner was a dashed blackguard, and your present associate worse, sir," he commented. "Sakai's partner, what, and still you find nothing?"

"Chamar was prompt, sir."

"Chamar's been makin' a dashed nuisance of himself for twenty-four hours. Ran all my coolies off the plantation yesterday. Expecting you, what? Knows better, though, than to face *me*. However, as to the rubies, it's my opinion, sir—and I was at the spot not five minutes later than Sakai, and have had ten years to verify the belief—that there is nothing to be found here. My theory is that Mat Singh killed the raja and hid the gems at some place other than the point where the brooks meet. He carried the body there as a blind. A dashed successful trick, what?"

"Possibly," Boyne demurred. He still believed in the accuracy of Otis' observation.

"I have given up the search long ago. When I was invalided out of the army I came here on my half pay to grow rubber. It is a dashed poor place for a plantation. Coolies hear of the rubies. Go treasure hunting. Chamar stops them. Always trouble here."

"Yet out of all Malaya *you* located *here*," said Boyne drily.

If possible Yardson drew himself more erect, and then his eyes twinkled.

"Dashed fascination, you know. No doubt the raja's rubies were real and very valuable. Besides, whole thing's my fault. Lost control of my men, what? Couldn't be satisfied anywhere else while the consequences of that are still operatin'. But rubber's the thing, sir. Your coming has stirred up a hornet's nest that will be dashed bad for my plantation."

"Well?" Boyne queried.

"Dashed if I know, sir! Can't leave whites in the mud. Need a bath and your—ah—confederate wants a razor and a bit of beef for his eye, what? Be my guests tonight. Tomorrow——"

"No bloody interference, governor," growled Roush.

Yardson froze. The absence of reply and the way he turned on his heel and led the way up a well trodden path which brought them, in less than half a mile, to a sheet-iron roofed bungalow, was more emphatic than an answer in words. Roush's threat was beneath contempt. Pukka Dick was treating Boyne as a guest wholly as a duty.

The sailor did not care. At the bungalow a Chinese servant conducted him to a bathroom and brought clean clothing. The luke-warm water which he splashed over his sweaty body seemed to cleanse the mental sweat also. After forty-eight hours of strain he was content to postpone the battle for the rubies until the morrow. Tonight there would be peace, and in Yardson he would have an honorable and a clean antagonist.

When Boyne was presentable he walked from the bathroom out onto the veranda, screened and warm, dimly lighted by an oil lamp, around which were long cane chairs, three bearing each a tall glass of whisky and soda on the arm rests. Yardson rose. So did another figure in white—a girl.

Her presence was the final touch to the feeling of peace and well regulated security. She was as tall as the sailor himself, and as dark of eye and hair. Her eyebrows were level and black, and her mouth firm and wide—features that were forceful and handsome, lacking the weak pink and whiteness that is called "pretty." This girl was not out of place deep in the jungle. She had brought civilization along with her.

"My niece, Miss Yardson. Mr.—ah—"

"Boyne. John Boyne, sir."

"Why, you're an American," exclaimed the girl.

"And so are you!"

"Only geographically and in what Uncle calls my 'accent'," Vi Yardson smiled. "My father married an American girl, and I

was born and brought up in Brooklyn. When the war broke out we went back to England. My mother died the first year, and my father—later. So uncle brought me out here. I do feel you're a fellow countryman, though, Mr. Boyne, and"—she glanced at her uncle mischievously—"—I hope you find the rubies."

"Bally nonsense, Vi. I told you he hadn't," said Yardson, a trifle sharply. "A guest won't want to discuss—"

"But I do!" Vi turned to Boyne. "Of course the rubies are famous here. The whole district likes to think of nothing else," she explained. "It's a problem to us. Chamar fights us in every way he dares. Lately he's outdone himself. We've only one house servant left."

"Too bad," Boyne said sympathetically.

"Nothing but an incident. We're quite used to it. The point is uncle and I don't see the problem alike at all. I'm thrilled by the rubies. So is he, but he won't admit it. Will you, Uncle?"

"Scattered in the jungle, and a curse to the whole district even so," said Yardson crisply.

"You see, Mr. Boyne, Uncle helped to win this jungle, and he still feels responsible for it. He thinks the future of the country is in rubber, and the sooner the rubies are forgotten the better. *I* say, they will never be forgotten—until they are *found*."

"So do I," said Boyne.

"Well, Uncle, let's be pretty frank," continued the girl impulsively. "You seem to be the right sort, Mr. Boyne, and I hope you are. But you'll understand we know nothing about you, and neither Sakai Otis nor your present associate are recommendations."

At the thought of Roush as an associate the sailor smiled in spite of himself. So did the girl.

"Uncle thinks you are a danger to the district, and even to me. I disagree. We're quite able to protect ourselves. Whether you are the right sort or not, you are doing the right thing. You'll free us of a blight

that has blocked progress for twenty years, and therefore I hope you'll succeed."

"Thank you," said Boyne. "I'm certainly no danger to you. I'm no adventurer, even if I look like one. To me those rubies represent the future of two children and an old man."

"Please don't bother to tell us. It's none of our affair. I spoke because when one can't treat strangers as welcome guests, it is only fair to explain why."

Roush slouched onto the veranda and drained his whisky at a gulp. Yardson



introduced his niece, who instantly leaned back in her chair—practically out of the red-headed man's sight. Roush leered, shrugged and forgot her.

"I suppose you want a share, gov'nor," Roush growled.

"You can suppose what you please. I'll inform you what I propose to do tomorrow," retorted Yardson crisply. "Now that you are here, dinner is served."

Yardson led the way into the bungalow with a rigid politeness that closed Roush's mouth more effectively than a gag, though his eyes were ugly. The meal was silent—so silent that the sound of excited voices in the jungle was audible when the Malays responsible for the noise were still a quarter of a mile away. Yardson continued to eat tranquilly, even when the murmur increased to a shout, and the flicker of torches became visible in the compound in front of the bungalow. When the Chinese house servant entered and announced in a scared whisper that "hab got ten—fifteen piecee Malay come chop chop. Bling tlorchee!" the old soldier excused himself.

"The hornet's buzz, sir," he said to Boyne. "That's Chamar. I trust the old scoundrel will forget himself and go a step too far. Be dashed useful. Keep out of sight and away from the windows, please."

Vi coolly reached up and turned out the lamp. That made Boyne start. He strode to the window, where he could watch Yardson standing at the top of the veranda steps. The other joined him.

"If you think there may be shooting, please give me a rifle," Boyne whispered. "I can cover your uncle perfectly."

"Not necessary. Malays are such rotten marksmen," Vi refused. "Chamar has done everything but shoot. I think Uncle hopes he will. Then he can be dealt with. He's much braver than his villagers." Her hand touched his sleeve. "I like the excitement," she whispered. "Do you really think you can find the rubies?"

"Given time," said Boyne. Torches appeared in the yard. Malays armed with *parangs* and spears swarmed at the veranda steps. More were circling to surround the bungalow. Chamar stepped from his followers.

"Tuan Yardson, the men you took from me are bad men!" he screamed.

"Art thou judge or policeman?" Yardson's retort snapped like a lash.

"They have slain three men!"

"Thy men?"

"Nay, but——"

"Then come to me alone, without these farmers who seek to bear arms like soldiers. If you speak the truth I shall take them to the commissioner. Begone!"

Chamar stood his ground. In the firelight the wrinkled face worked as he wrought himself to a pitch of daring.

"Thou carest for nothing but thy trees!" he cried familiarly. "Give me these men, or the trees fall—tonight!"

"Then thy village will have a new headman, and thou wilt pick oakum till thy finger nails bleed," said Yardson sternly. "Nay, the *tuans* are my guests. Begone!"

As though the issue were settled he turned his back and walked into the bungalow—but went straight to another room and joined his guests with a revolver in his left hand. Outside the Malays jabbered. Chamar called "Tuan! Tuan Yardson!" in a voice cracked with rage.

"He's in a frame of mind to go *amok*. I'll lose a few trees," said Yardson crisply. "Getting rid of him will be dashed cheap at the price."

"Going to shoot?" asked Boyne.

"Can't be killing Malays over a bit of rubber. No, the revolver's in case he attacks the house. Chamar's an old-timer, and when that sort get the *sakit hati*—sickness of the liver, as they call it—there's no tellin' where they'll stop. What's this about your killing three men?"

"It was in self-defence, in a way," Boyne began, but Roush cut in roughly.

"I won't be turned over to no commissioner," he threatened.

"No? You see a commissioner, and that tomorrow. There are too many dead men behind you," said Yardson. "Come into the next room, my man. Time you and I had an understanding." With a growl Roush obeyed. Vi caught Boyne's arm as he prepared to follow.

"Uncle can handle a dozen thugs like that," she exclaimed swiftly. "About these men—did you—"

"I was handcuffed at the time. By him."

"Oh!" Vi hesitated. "I know it's wrong of me, but—Uncle never changes his mind—I *can't* bear to let this end in a mere arrest for disturbing the peace. Mr. Boyne, it's now or never! Can you find those rubies? I'll guide you. I know every foot of the ground—every spot that's been searched for the last ten years."

"Now? In the dark? With you?"

"I've a flashlight. Please be sensible. I run no risk whatever. Only a Malay *amok* would harm a white woman. For an hour Chamar will be busy slashing our trees. It won't take us half that!"

In the next room Yardson was inflicting an orderly room dressing down on Roush, as though the skipper were a mutinous private. An occasional growl was the only response.

"If the rubies aren't found I think your uncle will have trouble tomorrow," said Boyne hesitantly. "But to involve you —"

"Then you *will* go!" Vi snatched a flashlight from a drawer, caught him by the arm, and on tiptoe, guided him out of the bungalow onto the path that led to Kuala Tanum. Torches were moving among the rubber trees. The chop chop of *parangs* showed that the Malays were indeed occupied. The path was black dark, but Vi walked swiftly, confidently. Boyne's old trust in luck, chance, and the snatching at the fruits of emergency came uppermost. This chance might be the last. But—it was a good one, a break.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SECRET OF MAT SINGH

**I**N SPITE of the failure that afternoon, Boyne had Vi lead him to the boulder. She stood on the bank, her flashlight focused on the rock. Boyne stepped into the stream and probed the crevice with his finger tips, feeling for some orifice that Roush might have overlooked. His theory was that the hiding place of the rubies had become filled with densely packed silt or mud in the course of years, that the opening would be almost indistinguishable from the gritty, muddy surface of the stone.

"You're wasting time there. I searched *that* long ago," Vi whispered.

"Did you?" Boyne answered, confidently enough, yet the flat, hollow sensation of failure gathered at the pit of his stomach. The shouts of the Malays near the plantation were audible all at once. They must be yelling at the top of their lungs, working themselves to a frenzy of excitement. Boyne's exploring finger tips encountered stone, nothing but stone. Wet, and cold.

"Otis said Mat Singh was standing here. In a way that indicated he'd just hidden the rubies." Boyne spoke more to reassure himself than to inform the girl. "That's all I *know*. Be a kind of grim joke if old Sakai were wrong. Cost a lot of lives."

Boyne paused, shook his head wearily.

"But—I *won't* believe Otis was wrong

altogether. That whole scene was etched on his brain clear as print. Why, just because he told it to me I can see it, and him." Boyne was not exaggerating. He could hear the Cockney accents again, fiercely excited despite weakness: "*E grinned at me—is rifle cracked ahead—bent down—'e'd first stepped back—*"

"Well, he was wrong and it's a joke then," said Vi flatly. "Those rubies aren't in the rock or in the ground for many yards around. That I know. Uncle is right. They were hidden in another place." She snapped the flashlight out. The *click*, the sudden inrush of dark, thick as ink beneath the overhanging boughs was final, like the fall of a curtain. Yet the dark made the mental pictures recalled by Boyne's memory more vivid.

Otis had outrun the other soldiers, yet Mat Singh had outsprinted him. A taller, longer legged, black bearded man—

"Mat Singh had two alternatives," Boyne insisted. "He could put the rubies in the ground, or he could hide them in the hollow of a tree. We know he didn't do the first. That gives us a big advantage over other searchers, for I'm sure the hiding was done at this spot. Look here! Mat Singh knew Otis was on his heels. He knew your uncle and every man jack of the company would suspect him of hiding the rubies, and watch every move he made later. That big black bearded man was thinking like a lightning flash, Miss Yardson! How could he hide the rubies anywhere he'd have to paw around for them? He'd have to be able to get them as quickly as he hid them, and as casually."

"There's so many trees!"

"No! He hid them standing here. He reached *up*, and the searchers looked *down*! That's his secret."

With a click the beam of the flashlight shot upward into the arched branches of the great tree. Directly over the boulder stretched a huge limb, thick as Boyne's leg.

Vi caught her breath. Begun as an excited gasp, the exclamation ended as a sob. "You make it sound so logical," she sighed,

"and it's so impossible now we've looked! That limb's ten feet above the water if it's an inch. No man could reach so high!"

"Seems impossible to little guys like me, or runts of Malays," said Boyne stubbornly. "But Otis was over six feet, and he said Mat Singh was taller. How high can a man six feet six reach—standing on a rock? I'm a sailor, but I know this: the limbs of a tree thicken, but their height above the ground doesn't change as the tree grows. Climb on my shoulders, Miss Yardson, and look for a knot hole."

He braced his hands against his knee. Vi swung to his shoulders like an acrobat, caught the hand he raised to steady her, and, rising, seized the limb. The sailor handed up the light.

"There's a seam in the bark here, but the wood's grown over it," she whispered. The sailor passed up his jackknife.

"Can you hold me—so long?"

"All night!"

"The shouting's getting nearer. Maybe—before I cut—should we wait till tomorrow?"

"Let the chance slip? No! Hurry!" Boyne said firmly.

A sliver of bark dropped by his face, a chip of white wood. More chips. The yelling of the Malays was close, but the bits of wood were becoming brownish, rotten. "I'm into a kind of pocket," Vi whispered. A dark brown powder of rotten wood showered down. Vi gasped. "Mr. Boyne! They're *here*! How many? Take the flash!" He did so. "One, two, three—eight! And one of them! Like an egg, almost!"

Vi gave a repressed squeal of sheer excitement and delight.

"Come down and hand those rubies to me!" barked Boyne, quick and hard. His voice was all command. He snapped the light off, and snatched the gems from her fingers.

"I—I thought you were the right sort!" Vi protested.

Boyne had no time to tell the girl he was not robbing her, nor worried by the

Malays. The emergency that confronted him was too unexpected and too immediate. Half seconds counted. Trusting to Vi's courage and presence of mind, he snapped on the light, waving the beam up the path toward the bungalow that she might see clearly what he had glimpsed—Roush, striding toward them, with a revolver in hand.

"Get home! See how he got away from your uncle!" Boyne snapped, pushing the girl away from him. Though he knew he was making a target of himself, he turned the light on the jewels he held—a handful



of dull gold flashing with scintillant, blood red fire.

Roush would follow the one who had the gems. No fear of his bothering

Miss Yardson while the prize was in Boyne's grip. The light snapped off. Boyne leaped aside as the revolver flamed. Though the bullet missed the sailor shouted to draw Roush's fire, lest in the dark one white clad figure be mistaken for another, and the girl be hurt by an unmeant bullet.

The trick succeeded. Roush fired again, and plunged toward Boyne like a charging bull. The latter ran toward the swamp, hoping to outdistance the heavier, slower man in the deep muck.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SWAMP

**B**OYNE dared not use his flash. Once in the soft ground his flight was less a race than a grim game of blind man's buff. With one hand stretched before him to fend off the trunks of trees he scrambled from root mass to root mass—floundering, falling, but keeping ahead.

Bad as the going was for him, it was as bad for Roush. The skipper swore and fell, and when he fell he was not so quick

in recovering his feet, not so reckless in pushing ahead. Boyne had to take the chances. The noises he made guided his enemy along passable ground.

He tripped upon an inclined mass of roots. Knowing there was a big tree in front he climbed upon them, feeling for the trunk. Both feet slipped simultaneously. He plunged waist deep into muck that closed upon him like thick warm glue. There was a root at his back, another within arms length of the chest. He was annoyed rather than alarmed. He lunged forward. The muck gave a thick, sucking sound. He sank more deeply.

Boyne caught the root behind him and pushed upward with all his strength. He raised himself an inch or two, not more. He was finished. He could extricate himself, given time. Not quickly enough to continue his escape.

For a moment in which he struggled, kicked and pushed Boyne experienced the blind and unreasoning rage of a trapped animal. The mud and the dark that had betrayed him seemed alive and malign. That emotion passed. Quickly. From his fall to his acceptance of it was, perhaps, five seconds. He was caught. Very well. He thought—hard. Roush was stumbling along doggedly not twenty feet away.

Boyne lit his flash for a mere flicker of light that came and was gone instantly—just enough for him to see that he had fallen in a pocket of the great roots. The tree trunk was scarcely beyond reach of his hand, and partially shielded him from Roush. The root from which he had slipped was almost as high as his head. He squirmed lower in the muck. Roush couldn't see the full extent of the predicament he was in. That was something—the trivial opportunity to be seized.

"Come closer and I'll chuck the rubies into the swamp. The flashlight after them," Boyne called. He was not bluffing. The steadiness of his voice stopped Roush.

"That shooting you did will bring Chamar," Boyne went on. "You'll never find the rubies before he gets here."

"Damn you, Yank." The bitter sincerity of the oath made the sailor's heart leap. Roush had not been too slow witted to get the point. Given time he would appreciate that a revolver did not make him master of this situation. Boyne waited, listening to the heavy breathing of the red-headed man.

"Well, and what then?" Roush growled.

"Why, we tried getting out of here once today and didn't get so far," Boyne answered. "I told you I'd be a square pardner to you if I could. All right, listen. I'll swap half the rubies for your gun. Afterward, each to get away as he can."

Roush made a step forward. He meant the movement to be noiseless, but Boyne's ears, strained for just that sound, heard the big foot squelch in the muck.

"Stand still or you get nothing!" he snapped.

"You'll plug me once you get the revolver."

"You would, you fool, but I won't, and we both know it!" snapped Boyne heatedly. "Anyway, think fast! I'll snap on the light. You toss that gun within reach of my hand. Don't throw it too far away, either, or I'll beat it. Then you can crawl up behind the tree while I keep the light burning. You'll be a hard mark to hit even if I meant to shoot, which I don't. Make up your mind! I ain't letting you within arm's length—armed."

"Them Malays——"

"Them Malays will see the chips and rotten wood on the bank of the stream and they'll come a-helling!" snapped Boyne. He really expected that was what would happen. He doubted if Roush would give up the gun, and the capture of both of them by Chamar was the best he really expected. In that event Yardson might effect their release. "How'd you get away from the bungalow, anyway?" he demanded.

"He gave me lip and I swung on him," Roush growled. "He was for riding after the police. When I found you was gone, I knew where. I left him lying."

*If Yardson had been knocked out, what had become of his revolver?*

Had Roush taken it, or not? No way to find out. "Well?" snapped Boyne, and switched on his light, holding it well below the root.

A revolver sailed through the air and dropped in the mud beside him. It was a Webley, and loaded. Boyne had feared that Roush would remove the shells. On the butt plate were engraved the initials "R. Y."

"You tossed me the wrong gat, buddy," the sailor called grimly. "I'm wise that you got another, but crawl along. Only I'll plug you if I see your head." Boyne laid the flashlight on the root, illuminating the bit of swamp his enemy must cross, and leaving himself in shadow.

In consequence Roush was more than cautious. At last his hand projected around the tree trunk, palm upward and fingers curled. Boyne divided the rubies, but to his surprise Roush let the four finger rings and the earring piece lie in his hand, and emitted a grunt that was more than half a chuckle.

"Take them back and give me the others," Roush commanded. "Who's quick now, Yank? I want the big 'un."

"Yeah, you're smart," said Boyne sarcastically, thinking of his mud-bound feet. He was glad to carry out the orders, even though he had kept back the largest ruby. He handed over a clasp, an earring, and a gem roughly cut indeed, but as large as the end of his thumb. It was mounted on a heavy gold pin.

"You've outraded me. Now beat it," he ordered, and snapped his light out. He held his breath until he heard Roush retreating in the direction of the split boulder, for he feared that even then greed might goad Roush into shooting it out in the dark.

The great ruby, however, was loot enough for any man. Boyne began to heave at the roots. He had sunk deeper in the muck, and his efforts to free himself were pitifully slow.

Much too slow. As he heaved and strug-

gled, raising himself inch by inch, a torch glimmered at the juncture of the streams. A high pitched yell summoned other torches. There was a babble of shouts and screams, and then Chamar's voice, maddened and falsetto with excitement and rage, pierced through the rest. The torches moved into the swamp on the trail of the two white men, clear to be followed in the soft ground.

Roush's pistol exploded and a Malay *sorak* was stopped half uttered. The flickering lights wavered and came on, driven forward by the frenzied commands of their chief. Panting and stumbling before them came Roush. He passed Boyne within a few yards, but the sailor did not call out. Roush would never stand by him; indeed, the big man's own escape was problematical.

Boyne prepared for capture by wrapping his half of the rubies in a handkerchief and thrust them down into the muck beside his body, as deeply as he could. There was no other practical hiding place, and when he was extricated the jewels would be buried too deep for immediate recovery. If they sank in the mud, they sank. Ten to one he would be knocked on the head by the first Malay who stumbled over him.

In that moment the sailor underestimated Chamar and the discipline the headman enforced. A Malay youth white eyed with excitement, waving a torch and a *parang*, found Boyne, but the line of torches of which the youth was one did not pause because of the shrill yelp which announced the discovery. As in the afternoon, the pursuit began to assume a semi-circular formation. The more agile men on the wings outdistanced Roush, while those directly behind held back from fear of his revolver.

Chamar came scrambling over the roots like a gray ape and held a torch close to Boyne's face. The wrinkled face jerked with passion. Blood red saliva dyed the corners of the toothless lips. In the Malay phrase the headman was possessed by a

demon, but the devil who gripped him was cold. Methodically, silently, he searched the ground around Boyne, the roots, the tree trunk, swinging the torch so close that the sailor flinched. Aided by the youth, Chamar dragged him from the mud and searched his pockets, flinging jackknife and pipe aside in vehement impatience. Finally Chamar asked one question—in Malay, but Boyne needed no interpreter.

"When I fell I gave them to the other *tuan*," he replied.

"You lie," said Chamar, this time in English. Eyes clashed, and Boyne's fell. The lie was poor, useless since the old Malay guessed the kind of partnership that existed between the two adventurers.

"Then find them!" Boyne challenged.

"Aye, *tuan*! You will find them," Chamar said. He gave a command in Malay, and the youth touched the sailor's neck

with the edge of the *parang*, urging him forward. Boyne walked out of the swamp. Prompted by prods from the heavy blade, at the split boulder Boyne flung himself on the ground, face downward.



He lay there for a long time. In the swamp the yells of the Malays were continuous. Twice the noise was punctuated by revolver shots, but the pitch of the shouts was unaltered. The capture of Roush would have been announced by louder, shriller yells; his escape by shouts lower in tone and with intervals of silence. This was like the yelping of a pack of hounds that have treed game. After a time Chamar emerged from the swamp. He was alone. The yelling continued.

Again Boyne was prodded to his feet and goaded forward. The torch light flickered redly on the ground. They walked half a mile, a mile. Boyne could not understand. The pace was not fast. Chamar was chewing betel nut and spitting. He

seemed grimly self-satisfied, like one to whom time is of no value.

Another mile at the same leisurely pace brought Boyne to the kampong. Prods from the wood knife guided him up the veranda ladder and into a large room floored with matting. Involuntarily Boyne stopped. Here was the explanation of Chamar's aplomb, and the last thing the sailor desired to see.

Yardson lay on the floor, his ankles lashed with green rattan, and his arm bound to his body. He twisted himself to face Boyne, white to the eyes with anger, his eyes frosty with hate.

"I say! Didn't bring it off quite, what? You bounder!" he said and added more bitterly. "If you've hurt my niece, you blackguard——"

"Easy now! I'd nothing to do with your getting hit. Your niece came with me of her own free will, and I sent her back to the bungalow, safe."

Very bitterly the old soldier smiled.

"Safe? Chamar dared to enter my house and carry me off, sir! She was not there then. I would have heard her scream if I had been four times unconscious."

Boyne's expression at this bit of news was marked enough to show Yardson his mistake. Some of the anger in his eyes died. "Naturally assumed you and your blackguard associate were working together. Wrong. Sorry. Apologize. But my niece, sir! Did you find the rubies?"

"Yes."

Yardson drew a deep breath of relief.

"Then bargain if you can!" he commanded. "To the devil with the rubies, sir! Do you understand? To the devil with them!"

Two Malays gripped Boyne. Rattan that cut like wire was twisted around his wrists, and he was pushed toward another room.

"I savvy," he called over his shoulder, and shaking away from his captors, walked through a low doorway with what dignity he could to confront Chamar.

The wrinkled headman was squatting on the matting. He held a three foot

length of heavy cord, in which he was tying knot after knot—taking care to make the knots large, and to place them about an inch apart. He was grimly complacent. Boyne was forced onto a low stool, and tied there. Chamar, without a word, continued his task. Five minutes passed before the cord was knotted to his satisfaction. Then he wrapped it twice around Boyne's forehead and temples and tied the ends securely, as though it were a fillet.

The sailor squirmed uneasily. Already the pressure of the knots against his skull was painful. Chamar smiled. From the waist of his sarong he drew a short stick, which he inserted in the cord and twisted—one, two three turns.

Boyne set his teeth. At every turn the knots dug into his flesh. There seemed to be a circle of fire around his head; the pressure of the knotted cord seemed to split his skull.

"The rubies are—where, *tuan*?" mocked Chamar. "You tell, soon?"

The knotted cord tightened. Only clenched teeth kept the sailor from crying out. Bargain, Yardson had suggested. Bargain—how?

Toothlessly the wrinkled headman grinned at him, and strolled from the room, leaving the sailor to fight against the pain. Chamar was cunning. In time steady, unremitting torture will sap the strongest will. To tighten the cord too fast would kill Boyne where he sat.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHAMAR PLAYS HIS ACE

**D**ULLY through the pain the sailor overheard Chamar and Yardson wrangling in Malay. The end came with an oath of despair from the Englishman, and the sound of another Malay's voice. A new arrival, who chattered shrill and excitedly to Chamar as he reported some new development. Chamar uttered a satisfied grunt and returned to Boyne.

The sailor's last faint hope of rescue from outside vanished. He had, until that

moment, some expectation that the authorities might be summoned by Vi Yardson. Now he saw how the motives of the whites had played into the old Malay's hand.

Chamar carried a mud caked shoe—Roush's. He laid this on the matting beside Boyne, and then, with a wrinkled grin, drew from his sarong a long tress of dark hair. Vi Yardson's hair, so long and so thick that it must have been cut off close to her head. She also must be a prisoner then, and Roush, at best, could not run well with one bare foot.

"You tell, *tuan?*" he leered. "Got lady, got *tuan!*"

"Careful! The blighter's gone too far to back out!" warned Yardson through the grass partition.

Boyne set his teeth. "A shoe and a lock of hair are not heads," he answered, dismissing the exhibit.

"You want heads?" leered the Malay.

"No!" Boyne was emphatic. Moreover, there was no reason to withstand torture any longer. Nothing was to be gained by delay. It was equally true that to tell where the rubies were would also accomplish nothing. Chamar would merely send and find them, leaving him tied up on this damned stool. With all the whites in his power the Malay had no need to bargain. Torture would turn the trick for him. That knowledge gleamed in his eyes.

"I will show you the rubies. I cannot tell you where to find them," the sailor went on. "I tell you, I *can't*," he added. "Split my head with this damn thing if you like! The *tuan* of the red hair was shooting at me. I hid them on the run, in the dark. Can I go in the dark, and find what was hidden in the dark?"

"Torches," said Chamar.

Boyne scowled. Torches would serve the Malay. As for himself, with no plan beyond making a dash for freedom if the opportunity arose, daylight was preferable. A headlong dash through the darkness would mean another stumble, and with bound hands, a slight fall might result in his recapture.

"Maybe," he answered. "I will try. You will divide the rubies among the village?" Chamar's eyes gleamed. Evidently that was not his intention, and Boyne experienced a slight, a very slight sense of hope.

Despite threats, he stuck to the lie he had chosen. He could not tell where the rubies were. He would help to find them.

In the end he was freed from the stool and started along the trail back to the swamp, with Chamar and the young Malay walking behind, both with torches. The long walk gave him a respite in which to throw off the numbness of mind and body induced by pain. By the time he was brought to the spot where he had been captured he was himself again.

He gazed around, eyes narrowed, as though he were trying to identify landmarks. There was not a great deal of undergrowth in the swamp. Great tree trunks rose like black columns in the torch light. From the lower branches hung a profusion of vines and parasitic plants.

Along the moist ground he could see the light of many torches, clustered perhaps a hundred yards further ahead. Chamar's men were no longer yelling. The steady *chop-chop* of *parangs* on wood echoed through the swamp. A Malay dripping with sweat came back to report to the headman. Chamar grunted, grinned, ordered the man to return.

Though the noise of chopping puzzled Boyne, it was clear that Roush was not captured yet, and Chamar desired only one of his men at hand when the rubies were uncovered. The sailor recalled the thrill he had experienced at the first sight of the red stones.

"Dig there," he said, pointing to the half liquid earth from which he had been dragged. With hands and *parangs* the Malay youth began to dig. Chamar set the point of a kris against the sailor's back. He might thrust the steel home when the rubies were found. He would have little further use for the white man.

"The raja whose jewels these were killed a white man," said Boyne quietly. "The

English chased him for many weeks through the jungle. He could not eat the stones. He died like a dog. So will you, if one of us is harmed."

The headman understood, for he grunted—an exceedingly noncommittal grunt. Keenly Boyne watched the moist earth being flung from the hole. He was first to see the handkerchief. "There are thy rubies!" he snapped pointing with his foot. The youth caught the earth-stained cloth. The rings rolled out on the mud. He snatched for them.

Chamar flung his underling aside, leaped into the hole, pawing like a dog. Momentarily he had forgotten Boyne.

The sailor stepped back, kicked the stooping headman with all his strength. Chamar was thrown against the youth. Both fell. Boyne leaped over them, and he trotted rather than ran toward the split boulder. In that direction much movement to and fro had formed a pathway through the muck. Boyne was cool; anxious chiefly not to slip. He had counted on obtaining a few yards head start when the gems were found. Neither Malay had a gun. Boyne glanced back. Chamar was still pawing for the rubies, careless of the escape of a prisoner for whom there was no more use. He gave an order—but the desire to keep the rubies for himself kept his voice to a whisper.

Reluctantly the young Malay picked up his torch and *parang* and started after Boyne. The headman, without even looking over his shoulder, stuffed the jewels into his sarong.

Boyne picked his footing with care. The torch his pursuer carried lighted his way. He kept at the outer edge of the circle of light, intent on his footing, judging his lead by the intensity of the torch glare. He reached the split boulder, crashed through the brush on the bank of the stream, and found his feet on the path over which Vi had guided him. Again he ventured to look back.

The young Malay was ten feet behind, swinging the heavy *parang* to cut the white

man down, but Chamar was nowhere in sight. The cunning old Malay was content to let his subordinates do the killing.

Boyne ran, panting, seeming to do his best, but letting the youth gain. Out of the corner of his eye he watched the wood knife. His life depended on an old trick, but one that rarely fails. As the *parang* whirled upward he dropped to his knees, his body across the Malay's feet. With hands bound, he took a heavy fall himself, but the Malay tripped and plunged headlong over him, dropping knife and torch to avoid hitting the ground face first.

Before he could lay hands on either Boyne was up. He kicked the Malay into insensibility. With the *parang* he managed to cut his hands loose. By tearing the youth's *sarong* into strips he bound and gagged him. The lad wasn't badly hurt. He would be found long before dawn.



Boyne caught up the *parang* and ran on toward Yardson's bungalow.

Notwithstanding the need of haste and anxiety over Vi's fate the sailor was level headed enough to approach the buildings cautiously. There was a lamp burning in the dining room. Boyne caught the edge of the veranda and raised himself noiselessly until he could look over the window sill. Under the lamp two Malays were squatting on the floor. They were elderly men both; the larger, whose flat face was pocked with smallpox, held a shotgun across his knees. Of Vi Yardson there was no sign.

Every other room was dark. Boyne dared not make a sound to attract the girl's attention, for however unaccustomed the Malay might be to firearms, a miss with both barrels of a shotgun is impossible at body to body ranges. Miss Yardson must be in the bungalow, or why the guard?

On tiptoe the sailor circled the house,

and then retreated toward the coolie lines. As he expected, every shed was empty. He went to the stable.

"Lee Chan!" he whispered, on the off chance that the Chinese servant might have hidden in the hay. A horse stamped, and Boyne retreated before it should whinny.

The *parang* was useless. He would be shot if he entered the bungalow carrying bare steel. Boyne laid the wood knife aside in favor of the handle of a brush hoe—which was like the handle of a pick. He might overpower the Malays if he got within arm's reach. He would try it, if need be. At any risk, he must locate the girl.

He returned to the house, standing well back in the darkness out of sight.

"Ahoy! Vi!" he called clearly.

Both Malays ran to the window, but from the darkened part of the house the girl cried out.

"Mr. Boyne!"

"Are you hurt?"

"No, but be careful. Uncle——"

"I know! He's all right."

"Then take the pony and follow the road to your right! Get help!"

The pock-marked Malay leveled the shotgun awkwardly and gave some command. Though the meaning was plain enough, Boyne hobbled toward the veranda, supporting himself on his club, and acting as though his ankle were sprained. He couldn't ride a horse. To go for help, in the dark, didn't appeal to him.

"Tell that Malay I'm hurt—that I don't understand Malay," he called out. "I've got to close in."

"No, don't!" Vi cried.

Boyne was already at the steps, dragging himself upward with every appearance of pain. Vi broke into a torrent of Malay, but the pock-marked man ran out onto the veranda, leveling his gun within a foot of Boyne's chest.

The sailor stopped, leaning lightly on the hoe handle.

"Put it away, big boy," he groaned. "Can't you see I'm all in?"

Slowly he raised his left arm—a long, sweeping gesture that motioned the gun to be turned aside, but that ended in a flash of arm and wrist that knocked the muzzle upward. Both barrels exploded. With his club Boyne smashed at the Malay's shins. The man screamed and fell backward. Two quick blows stretched him senseless before the second Malay leaped through the door. Boyne side-stepped the slash of a knife, but the impact of the Malay's body knocked him down the stairs. They fell together.

Boyne gripped a naked torso, hugging close to prevent a knife thrust. Over and over the two rolled until he locked legs around the Malay's waist, and slipped both arms upward into a full Nelson. The knife was jabbing near Boyne's head, but the Malay's chin was in Boyne's palms. He pushed the head back till the knife dropped to the grass. Desperately the Malay fought the punishing hold with stiffened neck muscles, only to be bent backward.

When the turban touched the earth Boyne shifted his fingers to the brown throat. A minute of strangling, and the Malay lost consciousness. The sailor ran up the veranda steps.

A door was quivering before Vi's efforts to escape. It was locked. No key was in sight.

"The key?" he called.

"Chamar's got it! Quick, I'm half suffocated." Boyne caught up a chair and smashed the door down. Vi staggered past him and ran out onto the veranda where she leaned against the railing, breathing deeply. "There's no window there," she gasped. "Some air came in through the ceiling cloth, or I would have suffocated. Where's Uncle?"

"Tied up at the kampong. All right, for a while. Chamar's busy elsewhere. Wait till I tie up these Malays."

Vi was better when he returned to the veranda. He brought her a glass of water. "What happened to you?" he demanded. "Chamar had a lock of your hair."

"I came running back for uncle. Every-

thing seemed all right here," she answered. "It was quiet, but I expected that. I heard the shots from the swamp, and I guessed that Uncle must have been hurt to let Roush get away, but nothing more. When I ran into the door Chamar caught me. Two Malays held my arms while he cut off my hair. Then he stepped back and grinned. I think he'd have cut my throat, if he dared."

"You don't seem much frightened."

"I was! Frightened numb! I think Chamar's own men stopped him. They've learned better than to harm a white person. Though when I heard *you* on the veranda, I held my breath expecting Mohammed to shoot."

"Belay that. So'd I. Few men will pull trigger on a guy that isn't taking the aggressive," said Boyne. "But where's this 'help' and how long will it take to bring it? I've got to get you away, first of all. I can't get your uncle out of the kampong. Not alone. Nothing's more helpless than a man backing through a door."

"The district commissioner is about eight miles away. Charley Higgins has plenty of horses and two Sikh policemen. We can be back with him by dawn."

Boyne hesitated. "If you're certain the road's safe I'd rather you'd ride for this Higgins alone," he answered. "For one thing, if Chamar's kept busy in the swamp he won't give any orders about your uncle. For another, I'll be damned if I'll let that grinning old ape have Mat Singh's rubies. I gave my word to Sakai Otis, and—damn it, Miss Yardson, I hate to confess I'm licked! But tell the truth about the road please."

"It's safe," Vi answered steadily. "Still I don't believe the villagers would dare to harm Uncle. Chamar's amok, but even he—if he realizes he's being beaten—that Sikhs are on the way—"

"Don't tell me what that wrinkled devil will do," said Boyne, fingering the cuts left by the knotted cord. "I'm trying to be sensible, but I want a chance to fight. A fair chance."

Vi argued no further. "Please do be sensible," she answered steadily.

"I—I think you're very stubborn—and very reckless, Mr. Boyne, Uncle and I are deeply in your debt. Please don't rob us of our chance to repay you. You can count on Higgins and the Sikhs by dawn—and I wish you luck!"

"I believe in luck—and crowd it," said the sailor gravely.

## CHAPTER X

### ROUSH DECIDES

VI SADDLED her pony, shook Boyne's hand warmly, and started her ride. The sailor returned to the bungalow for better weapons. The gunroom of a retired army officer living in the jungle is apt to house an extensive collection, including at least one high powered rifle for tiger hunting. The fact that Yardson was one armed, however, made him the exception to a rule almost universal.

There were revolver shells in abundance, but no other revolver, three shotguns—light, beautifully balanced pieces for Vi's use, but no cartridge loaded with anything heavier than duck shot. Boyne selected a sixteen-gauge, hammerless gun choke bored in one barrel and filled his pockets with shells, whistling softly and by no means cheerfully. A shotgun does make a terrifying *bang*, and up to fifteen feet or so a choked load is deadly. But he would have preferred a repeater.

He walked down the path to the swamp swiftly, circling around the young Malay he had bound. Once in the swamp he dropped to hands and knees and crept up to the blazing torches and the sound of chopping with the best woodcraft he could muster. From behind a bush within thirty feet of the brightest light he halted, and when he understood what was going on he could not help grinning.

Roush was treed like a coon—or rather, since the red-headed man clung to his revolver, like a large and dangerous leopard. The battle here had become a siege. There

was little wonder that Chamar had been willing to leave the scene, without haste, to concentrate upon the more accessible loot once possessed by Boyne.

The torches ringed around a tree fully five feet in diameter, which rose more than fifty feet before there was a branch. One vine, thick as Boyne's wrist, still bridged the gap. All others had been cut away from above, and lay on the ground. Evidently when Roush had been cornered he had climbed like a sailor taking refuge in the rigging. At least one Malay had dared to follow, for a dead body lay in the torchlight, with Chamar squatting beside it.

Since then the Malays had been cautious. They were keeping well away from the big tree, but they were busy hacking down the smaller trees that rose high enough for an active man to jump from one branch to another. Roush, however, was too heavy to be a man-monkey. Boyne surmised that the vine by which he had ascended afforded his only means of descent. He could merely hold the fort until he was starved out or rescued.

Since he could neither aid nor interfere, Boyne forgot him. How many Malays surrounded the tree he could only guess. Their morale was also problematical. Those he could see looked tired. He had a hunch that without Chamar they were in a mood to withdraw. The Malay is an impetuous fighter. When the first charge fails his instinct is to retreat, and these were normally peaceful peasants, afraid of the anger of the district commissioner, and only held to their siege because they feared their headman more.

Chamar was a mad dog leading a timid pack. Toward him Boyne felt neither compunction nor mercy. Dawn was hours off, and there was no telling to what lengths the headman might go. Balked by Roush, he was capable of revenging himself upon Yardson. The Malay must be disposed of, the quicker the better. The only problem was the best means of doing so.

The sailor would have liked to be certain

of the morale of his enemies, but at this moment Chamar was separated from his followers—an opportunity that might never come again. Resolutely Boyne rose from concealment and advanced swiftly across the firelit space, dropping his shotgun into line five feet from Chamar's chest while the wrinkled headman leaped up and jerked out a kris.

"Come along, guy," Boyne ordered. Reddish foam flecked Chamar's lips. Chamar gave a shrill, mad yell and charged. Boyne pulled trigger. A black spot appeared on the headman's coat. The impact of the shot stopped him in his tracks. He fell on his back, blood gushing from a huge wound under the heart.

Boyne snapped the breech open, reloaded. Malays were running toward him, but he knelt by Chamar and snatched the earth soiled handkerchief from the dead



chief's sarong before he swung his shotgun on the foremost Malay. That man, armed only with a *parang*, halted, but one braver rushed in, screaming the *sorak*. At ten feet Boyne gave him both barrels. The man went down.

The sailor backed toward the bushes. He was out of the torchlight while the Malays wavered. He felt branches touch his back, and snapped two more shells into the breech with an audible click. For a moment he halted, menacing a crowd that had increased to a dozen, then he twisted into the bushes and disappeared.

He retreated only far enough to get his back against a tree. If these Malays were in the mood to fight to a finish, he wanted the light at their backs when they rushed. But to follow a *tuan* so terribly armed into the dark was too much. A muzzle loader roared. Slugs ripped through the

leaves, but of the dozen men none wished to lead the charge.

"Ahoy!" bellowed Roush.

"Give them half a dozen shots from behind!" Boyne yelled. As the revolver boomed the crowd scattered, though none were hit. They flung themselves down, every man for himself, but as yet there was no rush to retreat. Frightened and shocked by the death of Chamar, they were caught between two fires.

Boyne sensed that incipient panic was stiffening into desperation. He ran to his left, in the opposite direction to the village, and worked through the brush back into the ring of torchlight. He fired at the first glimpse of a sarong. Stung by the shot, a Malay leaped upward, yelling. Fast as the breech could be opened and closed Boyne let go at random. The shot whipped through the bushes where the Malays lay, stung them with wounds trifling but painful. They ran, leaving the torches where they were.

Boyne was too wise to step into the light at once. He waited until he was positive that no Malay had lingered to stalk him as he had stalked them, but after ten minutes he was satisfied that the Malays would not stop until they had reached their kampong and their women.

"They're gone. Come on down, big boy," he called quietly.

"Where you're waiting?" Roush laughed.

"Do you think I'm *that* slow, Yank? Wouldn't you like to see me swinging on that vine? Just like a bit of fruit! Put that shotgun at the foot of the tree——"

"Yeah?" snapped the sailor. "I worked that one, big boy. Well, suit yourself. I wasn't going to plug you, but I'd hate to see you get away with what you got. That girl might have been killed."

"She gave me the glassy eye," Roush growled. "I can't go to no jail, and I had to get mine, didn't I? Now it's different. I knew when I got chased up here some one would get me out sooner or later, and with what I've got in my pocket, there won't be too much trouble over Al and

those Malays. You said it yourself, Yank—that was self-defense."

Boyne hesitated. He was in a position to get away with his half of the rubies, too. He could get a long start on Roush, be first back to Penang, and there was little chance that he would be arrested. Certainly not for the killing of Chamar, and for the rest, the Yardsons would be on his side.

Meanwhile there was Yardson. Malays who were thoroughly frightened were unreliable. To leave now would be to desert the old soldier. Boyne really wanted Roush with him when he went to the kampong, but a second's thought showed him how futile it was to expect the red-headed skipper to think of any one save himself. Boyne looked the torches over. Some of them were new. There would be light at the base of the tree for quite a while.

"Long time before dawn," he said. "Well, I'm going to beat it."

Walking away from the tree Boyne made a great deal of noise. When he had gone a hundred yards he came back—making just enough disturbance so that Roush would be sure that he had returned. Then, inch by inch, crawling from root to root he retreated noiselessly until he was out of earshot. If the trick worked, all right. By walking rapidly he could reach the kampong soon after the Malays. At worst, they would be sure to discuss Yardson's fate before killing him.

As events turned out, however, Boyne might have spared himself a four-mile walk. Close to the kampong he encountered Yardson, half running in haste to return to his bungalow. The death of Chamar and the headman's lieutenant had been too powerful an object lesson of the power and ferocity of the *tuans*. Once the Malays ran, every yard of retreat made them more abject. When they reached the kampong, they had become a leaderless trembling mob of *ulus*, eager to make their peace with the whites and absolve themselves from guilt. They had struggled for the honor of unbinding Yardson. They had

called him their chief, their grand father. Chamar, they had pleaded, had been a bad man. The *tuan* would not punish them because they had feared a bad man.

In anxiety to find his niece the Englishman had forgiven the peasants readily enough, but when he learned the events of the night from Boyne he insisted that they return to the swamp.

Against Roush Yardson was coldly, bitterly furious. He blamed the "untubbed blackguard" for all the danger his niece had run. The way Yardson said "untubbed" made the word an oath, and the lack of a daily bath the most heinous of crimes. He promised to run the skipper out of Malaya. "An old soldier, sir, has influence—yes, with the Adviser himself, by gad!"

Toward Boyne his manner was crisp, but friendly. The brief account of the rescue of Vi drew one comment, "Very good, sir." The rest of Yardson's breath went into his walking. In spite of his single arm, his legs set a pace that made Boyne trot.

The torches were barely flicking when they arrived. Yardson advanced in the half light.

"Roush!" he hailed.

"'Ello?" came the surly answer.

"Hah!" whispered the old soldier under his breath. "You'll stay where you are, my man. I have—ah—promised you an accounting!"

And Yardson settled himself comfortably beside Chamar's body. He insisted that Boyne give him the shotgun, and sat with the butt against his hip, and the muzzle covering the tree.

Roush was still in the branches when dawn broke, cold and uncomfortable, as always in Malaya. He was still there two hours later, when a white man came plowing through the swamp—a tall young man with high cheek bones bright with the red flush of fever. He carried a riding crop and answered Yardson's greeting of "Good morning, Higgins!" by beating angrily at his muddy boots.

"Nice to-do in my district," he exploded. "This one of them, sir?"

"This is Mr. John Boyne, to whom I owe the safety of my niece, sir," said Yardson crisply.

"Humph! Heard the story from her. While I was gulping quinine so I could ride with this beastly fever. Head's ringing like a bell. Found the kampong quiet enough."

"I talked to them, sir," said Yardson.

"Thought best to leave my two Sikhs there," retorted the commissioner. "Your ah—debt to this Boyne blinds you to his real status. Nothing but an adventurer. Brave one, to be sure, but we—ah—knew brave scoundrels in the war. This Boyne initiated the whole beastly mess, sir! Who killed the headman?"

"I did," Boyne said.

"Unnecessary that. Knew I was coming. He had some of the rubies, didn't he? Humph! Where are they?"

"I have half. He's got the rest." Boyne pointed toward the tree. Even making allowances for fever, Higgins was unnecessarily nasty, beside taking the worst possible view of everything he had done.

"Eh, what!" the commissioner snapped eagerly. "Then we'll have him down!" He walked under the tree and commanded Roush to descend. The big man did so. While the skipper still clung to the vine Higgins snatched the revolver from his belt—neatly, as Boyne had to admit.

"And now, hand over those rubies!" the commissioner barked. As Roush scowled he jabbed the revolver against his stomach, and again neatly, whipped out a pair of handcuffs and snapped one on Roush's wrist. "You next!" he barked to Boyne.

"Since I've vouched for Mr. Boyne, you're dashed high handed, sir!" Yardson remonstrated.

"Duty. Murdered our subjects. Set the district in a beastly uproar," the commissioner retorted. He snapped the handcuff shut on Boyne, and almost fiercely, searched both prisoners for the rubies. Yardson stiffened. He became more polite, which meant that he was becoming more angry.

"Habit of life time not to interfere with

civil authorities," he said, his voice very clipped and brittle. "Nevertheless, must protest. Rubies their property, sir!"

The commissioner cleared his throat importantly, and shook his head.

"Not at all!" he contradicted, Amazed a former officer should fall into such an error. "The rubies are forfeit to Crown. His Majesty's property, which I take into custody for safekeeping. You should know well, sir, that when Raja Mat Purba rebelled twenty years ago his estate and property were declared forfeit. Usual step, sir. These rubies are his property. Hence forfeit."

Boyne felt tired and a little sick, and then, very angry. Had all he had done been for nothing? To be tricked by a twenty-year-old legal paper was not fair.

"Steady, sir!" warned Yardson, who noted the quick pallor of the sailor's face. "Your facts are correct, Commissioner," the soldier admitted stiffly. "Yet I feel that your reasoning is specious. I shall interest myself in Mr. Boyne's case. I am not unknown. Old comrades in arms, and all that, what?"

"Very well," barked the commissioner. "I am placing these men in jail pending your investigation, and my own, sir!"

"Do you wish to stay in jail, Mr. Boyne?" asked Yardson. "I can have you bailed under my guarantee as a favor, what? To settle the case, however, I think I shall go to Penang. With my niece."

"Don't ask any favors of him on my account," snapped Boyne angrily. "Jail don't bother me, but to be cheated by the law—after getting the damn things!"

He glared at the fever-flushed countenance of the commissioner, who stared back stonily.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CAGE

THE eight miles to the commissioner's headquarters were long and dreary ones for the sailor. Jail did bother him, in spite of his sympathy and Yardson's

reassurances. When he was locked in with Roush, when the Yardsons had departed to the next village, there to take a flivver to Penang, when Higgins had returned to his hammock to fight fever, the sailor paced from wall to wall like a black leopard in a cage—which Higgins' place of confinement greatly resembled.

For the sake of coolness it was a detached structure, built of six-inch logs set two inches apart, and ceiled in the same way. The space inside was about twenty feet square, with a clay fireplace at one corner, and a thatched roof over all.

Boyne tested the fastening of the logs, shook the padlocked gate. Roush, on the contrary, settled down near the gate, his back against the logs, kicked off his shoes, loosened his collar and belt, and dozed.

"You ought to worry about being locked up!" Boyne ejaculated.

The red-rimmed eyes gleamed for an instant. "I do, Yank," said Roush grimly. "That commissioner will never let go of those rubies. We'll be lucky to get out of here with the clothes we stand in, and if I'm cross-examined without a quid to pay a lawyer, things will come out, d'ye see? Not murder, but Chink running and all that. I can't be in clink, and that's flat!"

"You're cool enough about it!"

"Slow and sure!" growled Roush. "The Sikhs are in Kedong, Yank, and Higgins is sick. Mind that, and stop whirlingiging!"

But while the larger man seemed to doze, Boyne walked on. He did not pause in his endless tramp even when Higgins appeared with breakfast for the prisoners—two pans of rice and a jug of water, which were thrust through the gate. He was desperate, without hope or plan.

With the red-headed skipper matters were otherwise; a jail was no novelty. As the commissioner reached inside, Roush seized his wrist.

Higgins jerked back, fumbling for a revolver, but Roush held him. A heave of the broad shoulders drew Higgins' head against the logs, and with his right hand Roush slipped the loop of his belt over

the commissioner's head. Dropping Higgins' wrist, he caught the strap in both hands and pulled with all his strength, setting his knee against the logs for greater power. As that



improvised garrote tightened on Higgins' throat the revolver dropped from his fingers. His eyes stared from the sockets. Roush gave a satisfied grunt and pulled the harder.

"You'll kill him! Slack off!" Boyne yelled.

"Got to. Rubies—in bungalow. Hour for getaway," Roush grunted. "Pull on my waist. Minute'll—do it."

The same minute would make Boyne a murderer and a thief. He measured the big man and swung with all his strength for the point of the jaw. He hoped to knock Roush out. He failed, but the skipper swayed. The belt slipped through his fingers, and outside the bars Higgins collapsed into a shapeless heap. The belt was still tight around his neck, his face was purple, and he lay well within arm's length of either prisoner. Roush crouched, on the defensive till his head cleared.

"Think you can lick me, Yank?" he snarled. "Nothing will stop us, this time."

"Aim to try," Boyne snapped. "Rubies won't do *me* any good—hunted through the jungle with a murder to answer for."

Lightly the sailor circled, alive to Roush's fighting tactics, careful to keep beyond the grip of those reddish furred hands, knowing that everything depended upon keeping his feet. The fight would not be quick. Boyne had not the weight to knock Roush out; he doubted if he could wear the other down by body blows. He fainted, and as Roush guarded clumsily, his left flicked out against the skipper's blackened eye. It was not a hard punch, but the discolored flesh puffed under the impact of Boyne's knuckles.

Round and round the cage, Roush rushing, wide open, swinging with both hands; Boyne matching his footwork against the other's strength, slipping under heavy swings to avoid being penned in the corners, sidestepping punches that would have ended the fight, and always jabbing with the left at the face.

Roush's bad eye was shut in the first half minute. Thereafter the big man sank his head deep in his shoulder. His nose was bleeding. The cheek was gashed. Boyne opened a cut over the good eye, but he could not shoot straight to the mark. As they paused sparring he heard the commissioner groan.

"I could blind you and knock you kicking, you big stiff," said Boyne through his teeth.

"Fight!" Roush snarled. "There's thousands that'll get away from us both. You yellow Yankee coward!"

Behind a one-two punch that smacked on the point of the unshaven jaw Boyne came in. He whipped two solid upper cuts to the solar plexus, felt Roush sag, and then was knocked down himself by a hairy arm that swung like a club. Roush kicked him. He twisted aside, crawled swiftly on hand and knees, leaped up under the other's guard, whipped an uppercut to the face, and broke clear. The instinct to fight fair died hard.

"Everything goes now!" he snapped. Unnecessarily. He knew it. Roush only grunted, and Boyne danced back, fists low, wide open himself, jaw outthrust, tempting for a right lead. Roush punched. Instead of knocking the blow aside, Boyne side-stepped. His right hand caught Roush's right wrist, bringing the arm across his chest. Boyne's left caught Roush's shoulder, a quick heave snapped Roush's arm at the elbow. As he dropped to his knees, Boyne swung three times to the point of the unguarded jaw. Roush toppled over, out.

The sailor ran to the gate and dragged the commissioner close enough to get the keys to the padlock. With the gate open,

he hesitated. He was tempted to put Higgins inside, too, but on second thought, he relocked the jail upon Roush alone, picked up the commissioner, and brought him back to the bungalow. Cold water revived him, but the shock, added to the fever, left him very weak.

"Steady," said the sailor. "You might be worse off. Where are the rubies? If there's any credit to be had from turning them over to the government, I've got to have it."

The commissioner shook his head obstinately and tried to get out of the hammock. A good deal of Boyne's anger against him vanished. Higgins was trying to fight him! The sick man was short tempered, bureaucratic, but fearless.

Boyne stepped to the official desk and unlocked it with Higgins' keys. In the drawer were the rubies, still wrapped in the muck-caked handkerchief. He stuffed the gems in his pocket.

"I'm not stealing these," he said quietly. "You'll find your other prisoner in the cage. He was so anxious not to be brought to trial that about the worst you can do for him is to try him. You'll be all right until your servants get back with the horses, and so'll he. He's too tough to mind a broken arm much."

"As for me, I'm going to Penang. Yes, to Penang!" Boyne repeated as the commissioner stared. "In the car with the Yardsons, if I can overtake them. I'm going to cut your telegraph wire along the road, so you won't be able to have me arrested for a little while. After that, I don't care."

"You won't understand, hardly," Boyne resumed after a pause. "I'm too involved with these rubies to be pushed out of the way, as you tried to do to me. They carry men along, as a stone rolling down a mountain brings other stones after it. Or they're like a roulette ball, rolling around, with half a dozen of us betting. The ball has dropped in my number, and now I've got to see about the pay-off myself.

"I used to believe in luck. I still do,

but not in the same way. Even in roulette there's no chance. Everything depends on the push given the ball, and the speed of the wheel. A man, now, makes his own speed. If he pushes ahead and holds back at the right times, he'll click into the money."

"Arrest——" whispered the commissioner.

"Yeah, I know," said Boyne tranquilly. "Tomorrow you'll think all this was part of your fever. Go on and do your duty."

He tiptoed from the room, and marched down the road, cutting the telegraph wire when he had gone about three miles.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PAY-OFF

BOYNE trusted that he would overtake the Yardsons, and he did. Perspiring from his rapid tramp, he found the old soldier and his niece waiting patiently in the guest-house of a native village while a ramshackle old Ford was being overhauled for the run to the coast. Vi was glad to see him. Yardson demanded an explanation, which Boyne gave frankly. He was, he explained, a fugitive from justice, yet he hoped that Yardson would go to any friend among the officials at Penang and settle the question of the ownership of the rubies—with the rubies themselves.

"You seem dashed anxious for money," he exclaimed.

"Uncle!" Vi protested.

"I am, but I promise you there's nothing dishonorable about it," he replied. "I just hope you haven't overestimated your influence."

"That's not my habit," said Yardson crisply—nor did it prove to be.



The ancient automobile made short work

of the fifty miles to the coast, and an hour before sunset he ushered Boyne into the presence of no less a personage than the lieutenant governor of the Straits Settlement, an old schoolmate of Yardson's.

He fingered the rubies in their barbaric settings as Yardson told the story.

"Broke the big man's arm and cleared out of Higgins' jail," he chuckled when the narrative was done. "Higgins will be ragged over that. He's very conscientious. By gad, Mr. Boyne, I envy you, sir! That must be a very deadly hold. What is it, a form of jiu jitsu?"

"Plain barroom tactics, I'm afraid. I'm not proud of it, sir," said Boyne. "The point is, are those my rubies, or yours?"

"The King's, you mean." The governor sighed and shook his head. "I'm sorry to say, Mr. Boyne, that although Higgins was over-zealous, he was correct. These are unquestionably part of the raja's property, and hence forfeit to the Crown."

"Oh!" wailed Vi under her breath.

Boyne shrugged. Poor Sakai Otis, always beaten by the last turn of the wheel! "In that case," he replied steadily, "would you consider, since I brought the rubies to you and all that, that I would accuse any one of a serious crime falsely?"

"Not at all, sir!"

"Yet I reported an attempt at barratry, and the upshot was I was almost openly accused of trying to sink the ship myself. At the beginning of this ruby hunt, my idea was to get enough money to hire a lawyer. But I'm willing to leave the case in your hands. The ship is the *Lafayette*, and the charterer's name is Chalmondsley, sir. An Eurasian."

"I'll see that the case is reopened," the governor promised. "However, Mr. Boyne, you're deuced impatient, like all Americans. You didn't let me finish what I was saying. Though these rubies belong to the Crown, it is the custom where treasure has been lost so long to give the finder a reward of twenty per cent. Somewhat, one might say, as in treasure-trove."

Boyne leaped up. "What are they worth?

Can I have a check now!" he cried.

"I've heard of American speed," smiled the governor, pressing a button on his desk. "However, we'll have in the appraiser. I'm curious and impatient myself. You'll understand, sir, that I'm acting extra-officially, since these rubies were found in Kedah. But I am positive, my opinion is correct."

The sailor nodded. Otis had won a bet at last! Boyne sat tensely while the case was explained to the appraiser.

The appraiser was cautious. The smaller rubies he valued quickly, though at sums which made Vi gasp and Boyne's eyes glow. With the largest gem he hesitated. It was too large, too valuable to be disposed of easily. Only an important jeweler, with a select list of very rich clients, could dispose of it. It was pigeon's blood, practically unflawed. His fingers caressed the surface lovingly.

"But what's it worth!" cried Boyne.

"Fifteen thousand pounds at least. It is a very famous stone. With a history," said the appraiser.

"And the whole lot?"

"Thirty thousand pounds, of which your percentage is six," chuckled the governor.

"Thirty thousand dollars!" snapped Boyne excitedly. "Could I have a check, today!"

The governor smiled at the sailor's dark face, flushed and eager.

"Impossible, sir. Most irregular," he murmured regretfully. "Yet I hate to spoil sport. If I might make you a loan—and see what you do with the money. I feel, Mr. Boyne, that you've something in mind."

"As much as thirty thousand?"

"My investments are very profitable," said the governor, almost apologetically. "Yes, as much as that, if you will give me a note. Why, damn it, sir, I've been tied to my desk till I've forgotten what the deep jungle is like, and this is more sport than a Derby, sir!"

"Half goes to the grandchildren of Sakai Otis, at the Limehouse Settlement

House in London. They'll need it quickly, for their father is dying," explained the sailor. "With the rest, I'd like to call on a yellow-faced Eurasian, right now! If you want real sport—may I have two checks, signed in blank?"

"He's perfectly reliable," said Yardson crisply.

"Oh, quite—!" chuckled the governor, reaching for a pen.

Penang is a comparatively small place. A short walk took them all to the Eurasian's office, into which Boyne strode like a conqueror while the rest waited outside. The yellow face turned green again at the sight of him. Chalmondsley jumped up to close the door, only to be thrust back.

"I'm buying that *Lafayette* charter from you on the same terms you paid the ship owner," said Boyne. He slapped the blank check on the desk. "Just to save argument, notice the signature on that. Are you going to sell?"

"Yes, sar!" whined the Eurasian.

"Furthermore, you're about to send a wireless to the ship, at sea. Write as I dictate.

"Sold *Lafayette's* charter. Captain John Boyne will assume command your next port of call. Highly important ship be turned over in perfect condition.'

"And I don't mean maybe," said Boyne aggressively. Captain Boyne! He had spoken his own future title without realizing all that it implied. He was the master of a ship at twenty-nine. He—

"Take another wireless," he said impulsively. "To Captain William F. Clark in San Francisco. He's the owner of the *Lafayette*:"

"Have assumed charter. Party I recommended proved unreliable and was forced to take command myself to prevent loss. Can also forward several thousand dollars for share in ship. Use money yourself to get well. I can make the *Lafayette* pay her way.'

"And that'll be that!" Boyne ended. Captain, and ship owner, too.

"Yes, sar," whined the Eurasian. His pen scratched. A clerk came for the two messages, and the endorsed charter was handed to Boyne. He bent over the desk, and the Eurasian shrank back.

"I'm not going to slug you," Boyne snapped, and lowered his voice. "Only—don't try to drown women any more, or lie about a Yankee sailorman."

Charter in pocket, Boyne walked out of the office. He colored with embarrassment as the governor and Yardson shook hands in congratulation.

"I—rather forgot, sir," the new captain stammered to the latter. "Chamar cut down a lot of your trees. I ought to have shared some of this with you."

"Pukka Dick's old friends can look after him," boomed the governor. "I know he'll have no more trouble with his labor, or with raising rubber. You did quite rightly, sir, but my word! What speed! You'll—ah—run your ship in the Islands, Captain?"

"Yes, sir," said Boyne briskly.

"Then when you're in port you must ride to Kedong and stay with us," said Vi.

Boyne flushed. "I—I'd like to," he hesitated. Even though to be the commander and part owner of a ship is the height of a sailor's ambition, it is not a very high place in the world.

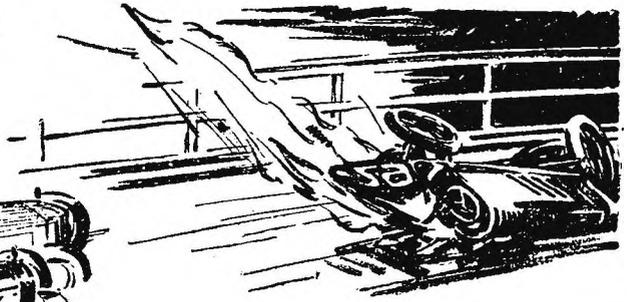
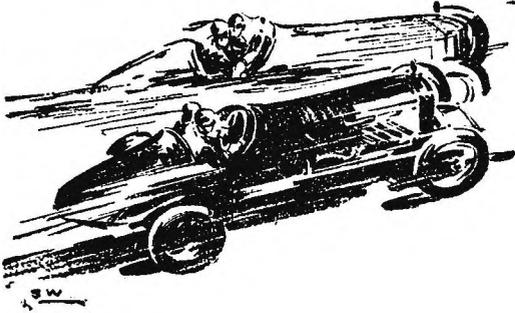
"Why, of course," said Vi quietly. "We're only rubber planters, to be sure, almost frontiersmen. You must come, or I'll think you're afraid—and mistrustful of your luck."

To the other men the speech had no double meaning; to Boyne the words of his parting with Vi before she rode to summon the commissioner flashed back. He had said he believed in his luck, and crowded it. The influence of the rubies of Mat Singh upon his fate was not finished, as he had supposed. New vistas were opening; another prize, more valuable than the rubies themselves.

His eyes met the girl's.

"I will," he said.

*Hayseed They Called  
Him, but He Was a  
Driving Fool!*



*The Author of  
"Big Time," "Checkered Flag," etc.  
Has Written Another Fast One!*

## NO BRAKES

By CLIFF FARRELL

**H**IS name was Hayward Cedars so they called him Hayseed. That was a natural, though Gig Rawlinson, crack driver for the Jupiter team, claimed full credit for the appellation.

Gig had taken one look at the new arrival and then hurried to the office under the grandstand to read Cedars' entry blank and release slip. The entry card entitled the new arrival to attempt to qualify for and compete in the one hundred mile flat track race at Detroit, for which the speed contingent were now practicing. The release slip relieved the speedway management and all its stockholders from any responsibility in what happened to the hayseed after he entered that event. And it is a well-known fact that many things can happen to a contestant in an automobile race.

If it had been anyone but Gig Rawlinson who "discovered" Hayseed, that lanky young man's lot would perhaps have been a happier one.

"My gawd, look at that scow," Gig said after returning to the pits as he again surveyed Cedars' racing steed. "Ain't it a nightmare. Ten to one it's held together

with baling wire and glue. A hayseed driver and a tin can car. What's this racket coming to when arks like that are even allowed on a track?"

Cedars' machine, a battered, somewhat misshapen affair, painted a violent yellow, was patterned on lines popular ten years ago, its high hood, stubby radiator and humpbacked tail sitting awkwardly high on the chassis. Its cockpit was a deep well in which a driver of ordinary height would have needed a periscope. But Cedars stood two inches over six feet. The machine fitted him and he fitted it.

"It's not the looks, it's what's under the hood," Cedars was assuring himself as he inspected his wheels and steering arms. He had towed this racing creation two hundred miles from deep down in Ohio. And if Gig, who was now approaching with a derisive grin on his face, could have looked under the old-fashioned, rounded hood he perhaps might have gone a trifle slow. For an immaculate straight eight of a design as modern as the one in Gig's own mount, reposed there. The purchase of that motor had so reduced Cedars' financial rating that he had been forced to cover it with this old shell salvaged

from the yard of an auto wrecking plant.

"How many miles will she go without rewinding?" Gig asked, winking aside to Bandy Brooks, his mechanic and yes-man. Bandy was a bow-legged, loose-lipped, slovenly dressed individual who perpetually served as Gig's shadow.

Cedars turned and smiled. He was young, about twenty-six, his face lean and angular, firm-jawed and dominated by big, gray eyes that were disconcertingly alive and keen. Aside from his long arms and legs there was nothing especially rural about his neatly jumpered, lithe shouldered figure. He towered above Gig who was a powerfully-founded, beefy individual, somewhat florid of face from over-eating, dark-haired, heavily browed with black eyes set deep above puffy cheeks.

"She doesn't look very neat," Cedars admitted. "But I'm hoping she'll run fast enough to keep out of the way."

"Say, rube," Gig guffawed sarcastically. "You don't really believe you've got a chance to qualify for this race, do you? Why, you'll be lucky if that tub doesn't fall to pieces before you get off the home-stretch. Take a tip from me, feller, and go back to home and mother. This ain't a racket for boys from the farm. Have you ever driven on a speedway?"

"Not against Class A competition," Cedars said. "But I've been driving on small, dirt tracks for two years."

"Monkey tracks," sneered Gig. "Well, this ain't a monkey track, see."

"But it's still only an auto race," Cedars said quietly, turning away.

Gig's tender vanity was injured by this rebuff. He had expected this novice to fawn upon him, for the name of Gig Rawlinson was one well known in recent speed history. Gig had been national champion the previous season, as evidenced by the Number One on his car, and was well up in the running to repeat this year.

"I'll show that clod-buster," he told Bandy Brooks as they returned to his pit. "Wait until he goes out on the track. I'll roll my car too an' give him a few chills."

"Atta boy," said Bandy, true to form.

Single seaters were being used for this event, though normally and particularly on the big saucer tracks and at Indianapolis, the rules required that every car carry a driver and mechanic. This formality was waived for unbanked tracks where the peril was great.

Gig lolled about his low-slung, bullet-shaped little Jupiter Special, keeping an eye on the hayseed. Finally he saw Cedars conferring with the starter. Then Cedars, being his own mechanic, cranked his car and the motor picked up. Gig raised his brows in some surprise when he heard the tone of the motor in the nondescript car. It spoke with the even, powerful voice of authority.

"Sounds like he's got eight barrels," he remarked carelessly to Bandy, climbing into his own car and snapping on the ignition. "So much the better. He'll knock a bigger hole in the fence."

CEDARS adjusted his goggles and watched the starter. Jimmy Dance, in his Comet, was roaring around the track in a practice spin, and the starter waited until Dance came in before flagging the novice out.

"They don't trust me," the hayseed grinned thinly to himself. "They all think I'm a hick. They're giving me a clear track to crack up."

He moved down the apron in second, listening to the motor as it warmed. It seemed to function normally despite its long trip at the end of a towbar behind his personal flivver. He did not know that Gig Rawlinson's maroon speedster, slim and rakish as a pirate craft, was slipping along behind him.

On the second circuit he began to step up the motor. His speed rose to a mile a minute. This track was a mile oval with long stretches and sharp turns. He rode the north curve easily and then really began to pour fuel to the two carburetors that fed the ravenous cylinders.

Gig had been correct in one surmise.

Cedars had never handled a motor of this power before. Four cylinders had been his equipment in the past. But the hayseed was reveling in this new sensation. He thrilled as his mount picked up velocity and flashed down the homestretch. His velocity leaped to ninety per.

He held his foot down as the lower curve flowed to meet him. Then he cut out, snapped on the brake, hurled the ungainly yellow machine into the turn, skidding nearly sideways, skillfully brought it back into line and yanked it onto the backstretch. He had ridden the flat turn at seventy-five miles an hour, leaving a floating cloud of dust to mark his passage. Back in the pits the watching drivers and mechanics looked at each other in surprise.

Gig himself was realizing that he had made an error in his calculations. He was stepping on his maroon speedster but that yellow phantom seemed to travel ever faster with each lap.

"He's trying to show me up," he muttered furiously.

Then Gig began to drive. He had to, for he had advertised his intention of frightening the greenhorn. But he found his task no easy one. He gained on the yellow car but he had to work for every inch. Furthermore he was punishing his maroon car. Gig was not a natural flat track pilot. His specialty was the high-speed saucers where the curves were banked high and steep.

It took five laps to move up within striking distance of Cedars. And with every lap Gig's fury increased.

Cedars, engrossed in studying the track and his car, was still unaware that Gig was on the track. The first intimation of Gig's presence came when they were sweeping down the backstretch. Gig poured every inch of throttle to his motor and pulled alongside the misshapen, yellow mount. Cedars glanced in surprise at the driver who had appeared so suddenly beside him. For an instant their eyes, masked by their goggles met and held. And a challenge was hurled.

Gig was recognizing the man he dubbed a hayseed as an opponent to be feared. Gig was no fool. He knew ability when he saw it. Hayward Cedars, hayseed, rube, clod buster or whatever, was a natural driver. He could handle a fast wheel and Gig knew it. Only one thing remained to be tested. His nerve.

Gig was on the outside. The younger driver had eased farther down toward the inner fence to give his opponent plenty of room to pass. The lower curve was swirling up to meet them and their speed hovered perilously close to one hundred miles an hour, far too fast to be safe on a sharp bend like this.

Cedars eased on the brake, intending to fall behind Gig and swing out to the center of the track from which position he could cut low into the curve and have steering room for the inevitable drift when he emerged into the other stretch. But Gig also cut down, just enough to stay abreast of the yellow car. That placed the young driver in a precarious position. He was down near the inside fence where the curvature would naturally be greater.

Furthermore it was too late to cut his speed by sudden use of the brakes. Suddenly applied brakes at this velocity with the entrance to the curve already under their wheels would have a tendency to whirl him into a spin that might turn his topheavy car over.

Gig tensely watched as he began jockeying the wheel to hold his own car up for he was sliding somewhat because their speed was almost beyond the capacity of the curve. He expected Cedars to go into a spin. A driver caught in that position would do so nine times out of ten. The least Cedars might reasonably do would be to chance jamming on full brake leverage.

Cedars did the unexpected. He violated all the laws of centrifugal force by suddenly stepping on the throttle. The yellow car, already beginning to swing out of line as the rear wheels fought to take control, picked up speed with a bound. For an in-

stant the machine headed for the inside fence. Then Cedars lifted his foot, snapped on the brake momentarily and strong-armed the car away from the fence. He applied full power at the same time and swung up into the center of the track, ahead of and in front of Gig. The perfect timing and sheer daring of the maneuver had saved him.

Even then he was not out of danger. His car was still swinging wildly. With a grunt of fear Gig lifted his foot and eased on the brake as hard as he dared. For if Cedars cracked up now the chances were excellent that he would take Gig with him through the fence.

But Cedars did not crack up. His car was still swaying a trifle as it whizzed down the stretch at ninety miles an hour and a hundred yards ahead of Gig's mount, but he had it under control.

The crisis had come and gone in only a few seconds but it left bitter wounds that were not to be healed quickly. For Gig knew that fellow drivers, watching from the pits, had seen the novice take him into camp at his own game, road hogging. And Gig changed from a derisive bully to a bitter enemy.

"I'll get Mr. Hayseed," he told Bandy Brooks after he came in.

Further fuel was added to the flames during the qualification trials the following day. There were twenty entries but only the fourteen fastest would start, lining up in accordance to their qualification speed.

Gig turned his official lap at an average of a few points over eighty miles an hour. That was practically record speed on this track and he watched with self-satisfaction as pilot after pilot shot at it and failed.

"You've got pole cinched," Bandy said as the afternoon wore on and none of the crack drivers had beaten Gig's time. "Only the shoestring boys are left."

Hayward Cedars was one of the "shoestring pilots." And he was the last of the list to be called out. Strangely enough not a driver had left the speedway, though the sun was low in the sky. They were await-

ing the hayseed's appearance.

He did not disappoint them. After two winding up laps he brought his ungainly mount onto the stretch with its exhaust whining shrilly. He held his arm aloft as a signal and the timers snapped him as the car crossed the white line. Then he vanished into the first turn, reappeared in the backstretch which he ate up at a gulp, sideslipped around the upper turn and was



back across the line again with a crescendo roar. There was a moment of silence and then the official timer in the booth, his voice displaying some excitement, shouted:

"Forty-one and one tenth. Average eighty-four and three tenths. That is pole for this race."

Gig stood up, his hands clenching viciously at his sides. Then he sank down as a buzz of comment arose around him, his brows down over his eyes which were smouldering wickedly.

"Heck," said Cedars when he came in and learned of his feat. "I'm not going to take pole. I'll start at the end. I'm a greenhorn."

And that was where he started in the race. By the rules he was entitled to the powerful pole position which would have given him a tremendous advantage at the start. The position he chose placed him behind thirteen fast cars, the most perilous spot in the line-up. But he felt that it was only right. He realized that he had not as yet proved himself. That brush with Gig did not necessarily mean that he was competent to dice with the lives of thirteen other men.

But Gig interpreted it in another way. "He's yellow, just like his car," Gig was telling Johnson Trueblood, the factory manager of the Jupiter Motor Company, who was on hand to watch the race. "He's

yellow or he wouldn't have backed down to the end of the procession."

"Perhaps," Trueblood said, chewing at his cigar and plucking nervously at his necktie. "But if he shows anything in the race I'm going to sign him with the team for the board track circuit. We need strength this year. You did all right for us last season but Gaines and Devlin weren't worth the money we spent on 'em. We've got to have consistent winners. We need something to talk about in our stock car advertising. The public wants speed with their stock cars. This fellow, Cedars, looks to me like a great driving prospect."

So Gig now had an added incentive for squelching this newcomer. Gig was the star of the Jupiter team. Gaines and Devlin, the other two pilots under that banner, were producing only mediocre results. Gaines, a veteran, was ready to retire. Devlin had not regained his confidence since figuring in a two-mile-a-minute smash at Ocean City the previous season. That had left Gig without competition in his own organization. But the addition of this young, ambitious pilot, might change this.

"Give me the office if this hayseed ever gets on my tail this afternoon," Gig whispered to Bandy before the field rolled away.

Cedars was nervous as the cars smoked up. He had never appeared before a crowd of the size that swarmed about this track and he had never competed against such a galaxy of noted talent.

Gig had fallen heir to the pole position and he brought the field down the stretch at seventy-five miles an hour. The seven rows of multi-colored cars, aligned two by two, broke formation with a blast from suddenly crowded motors as the green starting flag snapped down.

The race was on! Gig seized the lead on the first curve and opened up a ten yard advantage before the lap was ended on Harry Jackson who had jockeyed up from the fourth row. Jackson endeavored to pick up the tow from Gig's careening speedster but Gig, having a clear track in

front of him, knocked off the laps at top speed and Jackson could not gain on him.

The field began to string out. But a yellow shape was moving up. Hayward Cedars, his nervousness gone, had shot into ninth position on the third lap. This was after all only an auto race, faster and more dangerous, but fundamentally no different from the monkey tracks.

Ten laps later his mount was humming along in fourth place. Fifteen circuits more and he was third and bearing down on Jackson. Jackson held him off for twenty miles of fierce driving on the turns that had the crowd on its feet. Then the hayseed took Jackson into camp with a burst of speed in the backstretch that not only put him safely in second place but brought him within a dozen yards of Gig.

"I knew it, I knew it," Johnson Trueblood was muttering as he watched the yellow car. "He's a natural. A wonder! A champion!"

But Bandy Brooks was holding a blackboard aloft with a big arrow, pointing to Number Forty-eight inscribed on it. That was the number of Cedars' car. Gig read the signal as he flashed by on his next lap. He knew then that the young driver was tailing him.

Gig bided his time. He continued to turn the track at top speed but as he occasionally glanced back he could see the ugly nose of the yellow car drawing steadily nearer. Now it was within a length of him. Now it was nosing up alongside his elbow.

The chance he had been waiting for came. They were bearing down upon a blue machine which a young driver was having trouble handling. This machine was a board track job, its wheelbase too long for this flat surface with its fierce turns.

Gig deliberately stayed behind the blue car, apparently seeking a safe chance to go by. This also blocked off Cedars, who still hung grimly to Gig's tow. Gig, in reality, was waiting for the blue car to go into its inevitable spin. That car was bound to go out of control sooner or later.

Gig hastened matters somewhat after a lap of waiting. The blue mount was swaying wildly in the upper turn, its desperate pilot juggling the wheel to hold it down. Gig pulled up alongside it and apparently momentarily lost control of his own car. It sideslipped toward the outside fence and then Gig wrenched it down, directly at the weaker machine. That pilot, fearing a collision, threw his wheel over. That was too much. The rear wheels of the blue car whipped around, the tires tearing up furrows in the packed surface.

Gig stepped on his throttle and sped clear. He glanced back in time to see the smashup that followed a second later. Cedars, riding at eighty miles an hour, did not have a chance. He was in the upper lane with the fence to his right and the spinning blue machine blocking him from dodging below. A collision might mean death to them both. The tall driver did not hesitate. He twirled the steering wheel and shot directly at the upper fence. There were no spectators within range of him.

A scream of horror arose from the grandstand as the yellow car, toy-like in the distance, smashed through the iron guard railing, hurling splinters and uprights high in the air. Wheels flew off and then the yellow body could be seen rolling over and over in the rough field beyond the track.

They found the hayseed sitting up, dazed and shaken, but not badly hurt. That old, deep seated shell had shielded him.

"How is the other fellow?" he asked.

"He's all right," someone assured him. "He's back in the race again. He spun a couple of times and then kept going."

Cedars inspected the mass of wreckage that had been his automobile a few seconds before. His heart was sick.

"That ends my racing career," he was thinking. "But I didn't kill anybody."

**G**IG RAWLINSON won the race. He held the lead to the end, completing the distance within a few seconds of record time. He was jubilant when he came in

but his elation vanished when he saw who was in the Jupiter pit talking to Johnson Trueblood. It was the hayseed.

"I've just signed Cedars with our team," Trueblood said when Gig came rushing up, glowering. "He did a nervy thing back there in taking the fence rather than ramming another car. He's the type of driver we want."

"Well, it's your funeral, Mr. Trueblood," Gig growled. "It's my opinion this fellow lost control. A real driver would have missed that wreck."

"Well, see to it that Cedars is fitted out with a competent pit crew and a good mechanic for the Altoona race," Trueblood snapped with some asperity.

"Sure, sure," Gig said. "I'll loan him Bandy Brooks so that he'll have expert help. I'll do everything I can."

And as Gig turned away he winked at Bandy. Out of force of habit Bandy nodded agreement. Cedars did not see that. He was still somewhat dazed by his fortune. He was not only still in motor racing but he was now a member of a powerful team, equipped with a fast car, a riding mechanic and a pit crew and entered in one of the biggest championship events.

"If I wash out another car maybe they'll award me first prize for doing it," he grinned to himself.

Cedars avoided Gig as much as possible after they arrived at Altoona for the two hundred and fifty mile roll on the big saucer. The Altoona bowl is a mile and a quarter in length and its sloping turns and long, level stretches are capable of retaining velocities upwards of one-hundred and forty miles an hour. Cedars had never driven a banked bowl before but, after a few days' practice, he began to turn the oval with the same grace and natural skill that had characterized his work on flat surfaces. The technique was fundamentally different but the higher speed required no greater amount of nerve.

Bandy Brooks rode with him now for the two-man shells were being used. This bothered Cedars somewhat at first for he

had the safety of another man to think about now. He found Bandy to be a silent, sour-faced individual who spoke only when spoken to and who did no more work than necessary. But Cedars had always been in the habit of doing his own motor work and he found that he could tune the motor more expertly than Bandy.

At times the hayseed sensed that there was some understanding between Gig and Bandy Brooks. They occasionally exchanged glances of some secret meaning. Cedars sometimes wondered where Bandy stood. Was he loyal to his driver or was he secretly in league with Gig?

Race day came. Cedars had qualified at a speed of one-hundred and twenty-nine miles an hour for tenth position among the eighteen starters. That was satisfactory to him. It also had seemed satisfactory to Johnson Trueblood who was on hand for the race.

"Win if you can," Trueblood told him at a conference before starting time. "But let Gig carry the load at first. If Gig blows up I want you or Devlin to step up and try to win."

"I reckon we better depend on Devlin," Gig sneered with so evident a slur that Cedars flushed. "Bandy tells me that our slim friend here isn't getting the speed of which the car is capable. He's been afraid to open it up."

"You'll have to drive mighty fast today, Cedars," Trueblood warned, turning on him doubtfully. "I expect you to place in the money or win. The car is fast enough. I know that. Step on it."

"I'll do my best," Cedars said, boring Gig's cynical face with eyes that had once again grown cold and hard.

"Don't lose your nerve again," Gig smiled.

Something told the hayseed that he had been framed. He walked slowly to his car which was sitting on the course in the midst of the long-line of waiting machines. The starter was waving the crews into the cars. The mighty hum of voices from the grandstand quieted. Overhead a bomb

cracked, breaking the tense hush. A band somewhere in the infield broke into a lively march that somehow only seemed thinly sad in this zero hour when thirty-six humans were to pit their frail strength and bodies against the demons of speed.

Bandy Brooks was down at the line, whispering to Gig Rawlinson, who was grinning. Cedars noted that and his suspicions suddenly crystalized. He strode purposefully to his machine, knelt down and crawled under it, a pocket wrench in his hand. He worked there a moment and then emerged, dusting off his white jumper.

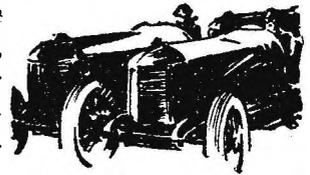
Bandy came running up, eyeing him curiously but Cedars said nothing as they climbed into their seats and adjusted their goggles.

In a moment the field was in motion. Joe Hooper, of the Apollo team, had the pole by right of his sensational qualifying lap at one-

hundred and forty-two miles an hour. Gig Rawlinson was on the inside, second row.

Hooper brought the field across the starting line at one-hundred and ten miles an hour. That would be the slowest pace any car could hope to travel for the next two hours if it expected to finish among the first ten. From past records it was estimated that the winning average would be at least one-hundred and twenty-five miles an hour. That average meant that, in reality, a car must move along for the greater part of the time at at least five miles faster, in order to care for inevitable slow laps because of heavy traffic. And it also meant that on the stretches velocities of around one-hundred and forty miles an hour must be reached to overcome the speed loss on the curves. It was a mathematical proposition.

The crowd arose to enjoy the thrill of speed as eighteen machines, their wheels turning ever faster, squeezed together in a



compact mass, hub to hub, on the first turn. Cedars found himself jammed in between a green Meteor Special, driven by a reckless, tow-headed youth, on one side, and a yellow Apollo with the famous Peter DePalford sitting calmly behind the wheel, on the other.

Ahead squirmed more cars, their drivers frantically jockeying for driving room and position. Then the field reached the backstretch. Cedars had the throttle down to the limit for he wanted to wind his car up as rapidly as possible. In practice and in qualifying he had opened it up to the limit for a few short bursts and knew that the car's capacity was limited only by the capabilities of the track.

Therefore he was amazed and dumbfounded a moment later when other machines began flowing past him on either side. He was merely an obstacle in this rushing, roaring stream of steel and rubber. He glanced at the tachometer. The instrument registered little more than four-thousand revolutions. That meant that his speed barely reached two miles a minute. He jiggled the throttle. It would open no farther. He was feeding it all the fuel at his command.

The lower curve tilted beneath their wheels and Bandy, watching with a quiet smirk on his face, expected Cedars to reach for the handbrake for even that pace was perilously fast for a curve. But the hayseed ignored the brake. Instead they careened around the turn, Cedars' foot jamming the throttle down, repassing the machines that had just moved by them, for those drivers had their brakes in action. It was dizzy speed and Bandy gasped and slid down in his seat in preparation for a crackup if Cedars failed to hold the car up.

"Use your brake, man," he shouted when they safely emerged into the home-stretch. "You can't hold the curves at that pace."

"I haven't any speed in the stretches so I've gotta make up for it on the turns." Cedars replied. "Besides I haven't any brakes. I disconnected 'em."

It took Bandy quite a few seconds to assimilate this horrible statement. He stared at Cedars, in the hope that the pilot was joking. But the hayseed's lean countenance was grim and foreboding. Cedars knew that his suspicions had been confirmed. The car had been tampered with. And Bandy was the guilty party.

"Are you crazy?" Bandy shrieked. "Slow down. Cut that motor. You can't drive without brakes. What if there's a wreck in front of us? What if the track is blocked? We'll be killed."

"No speed, no brakes," Cedars shouted.

He confirmed Bandy's fears on the next curve by riding it without easing up.

"Stop it," Bandy screamed for he had felt the car hang on its right wheels so great was their pace. "You're foolin' me."

For answer Cedars reached out and worked the handbrake with which the car was equipped for the sake of space economy in the tiny cockpit. The brake action had no effect on the car's speed. Bandy groaned, now really fear stricken.

The crowd was being attracted by the erratic action of the maroon Jupiter and officials were conferring excitedly in the pits, for the hayseed was demoralizing the race. There seemed to be no rule by which he operated. On the stretches he was slow in comparison to the acceleration of the three or four machines who were desperately trying to shake him off. They always passed Cedars there, only to be mowed down by terrific speed on the curves. It was evident that Cedars was riding the turns as they had never been before.

"We'll crack up sooner or later," Bandy pleaded.

"I imagine so," Cedars shouted back. "But what did you do to this car? It had plenty of zip yesterday."

"I'll tell you," Bandy shouted in desperation as they narrowly escaped running down Peter DePalford's car which was braking into the north turn. "I'll tell you if you'll fix that brake."

"I'll fix that brake if it's possible to get

some speed out of this bus," Cedars said. "Otherwise we keep going."

"I can fix it in a second," Bandy yelled. "It's the throttle. I jammed a little pad of rubber, that I cut from a tire casing, into the notch at the base of the pedal. The pad prevents the throttle from opening all the way. It takes half an inch of fuel from you. All I have to do is reach under the hood and pull it out."

"O. K.," Cedars said with relief for the strain of such driving was telling on him. He lifted his foot. It required three laps for the brakeless car to lose its momentum and stop on the backstretch.

Cedars alighted and dove under the car and tightened the nut that had thrown the brake beam out of commission while Bandy, still shaking with fright, extracted the object that had cut their speed. He gave it to Cedars as proof of good faith.

In a moment they were off, but that stop had cost them three laps. The field had roared past them time and again while they were drifting along.

"You rat," Cedars said. "The rules call for two men in a car. Otherwise I'd throw you out. Now sit there and keep your mouth shut. Gig framed this thing and you carried it out. I haven't any nerve, eh? We'll see."

Johnson Trueblood, who had been stamping furiously about the Jupiter pit during the weird antics of his new pilot, frantically waved commanding arms as Cedars roared by, winding up his car again.

"Call that fellow in," he roared. "He's crazy. Where has he been? Missing for three laps. Call him in."

Thirty-three seconds later a blurred maroon streak bearing the hayseed's number went past again like a bullet, its exhaust rising to a high-pitched crescendo and dying away abruptly as it disappeared down the stretch, its reciprocating motor parts sending forth that ringing sound peculiar only to high speed machinery working at capacity.

The call blackboard was up but Cedars did not even glance into the pit. Trueblood

leaped onto the pit wall and watched the car ride the lower curve prettily. Cedars was using his brake now to control his terrific velocity. Trueblood became silent, an amazed light in his eyes.

"Never mind," he presently told the pit captain with the blackboard. "Let him roll. Grab his time."

A stopwatch clicked and the lap they caught showed Cedars to be turning the bowl at one-hundred and forty-four miles an hour.

"We'd better cut him down a few reps," the pit captain suggested. "That's above the track record, even without competition. He's picked up half a lap on the leaders already."

"No," shouted Trueblood. "You're watching a real driver in action now."

Cedars chopped one lap from the advantage a few minutes later. He passed Gig Rawlinson at a speed that appalled that worthy. Gig had only a glimpse of Bandy's white face staring back appealingly at him. Then Cedars' car was ahead and passing more machines. Gig himself was in second place with Joe Hooper only a hundred yards ahead. And Hooper's car showed signs of burning out. Gig was already counting the race as won though it was not half over.

**F**IFTY miles later Cedars once more flew past Gig, rubbing off another lap advantage. Gig held the lead now for Hooper was in the pits with a ruined motor. Gig was half a lap ahead of his nearest rival now and two full circuits ahead of the flying car in which the hayseed sat.

At two hundred miles, Cedars, still driving at that same terrible clip, once more squirmed and clawed his way past Gig.

"Cedars is in the same lap with Gig," the pit captain said in an awed voice, turning to Trueblood. "He's gone wild."

Cedars had not even glanced into his pit for a signal. His only purpose in this race was to pass and repass Gig Rawlinson. He drove with fearful skill. His velocity in the

peak of the stretches touched one-hundred and fifty miles an hour and he still rode the sloping turns at a pace that had Bandy Brooks cowering and whimpering.

With twenty laps—twenty-five miles—to go, it became evident that the two Jupiter cars were going to battle it out neck and neck. Cedars was now riding only a quarter of a lap behind Gig's roaring mount. Gig had taken alarm and was turning the bowl at top speed too. But his relentless pursuer continued to gain.

With two laps to go Cedars seared along only three lengths behind. As they tore beneath the blue flag denoting their last lap the two maroon cars were running with no space showing between the tail of the leader's mount and the shiny radiator frame of the pursuer.

The crowd's attention, fixed on this last lap battle for victory, was suddenly focused on a new and more grim event that occurred with dramatic suddenness in front of the home grandstand.

A green Meteor Special, far back in the running but still plugging along, threw its right front wheel as it came out of the north turn. The pilot began gamely fighting to control it but no human skill could hold it up now. It swerved into a sickening skid that carried it nearly to the finish line. Then it shot directly to the top of the track, glanced off the guardrail and turned over and over, coming to a stop on the course.

For an instant there was silence. Then hundreds of voices arose together

"Look out! Slow them down! Warn them! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

For, speeding around the last curve side by side, their throttles wide open, unaware of the menace that lay in their path just beyond the finish line, were the hayseed and Gig. And the youth was in the upper lane. Inch by inch he was creeping up. They were wheel to wheel now. The curve disappeared dizzily beneath them and they careened into the last stretch.

"Look out," screeched Bandy in horror.

"Wreck. Cut down low. Go beneath it."

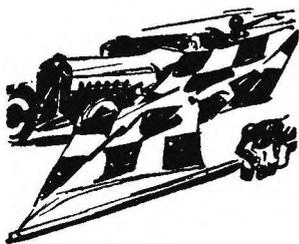
Cedars had already seen and measured the menace. The wreck lay a hundred feet beyond the finish line, about six feet from the upper railing, leaving a narrow, appallingly narrow, path between.

Below was sure safety. He still had time to lift his foot and fall into line behind Gig. But that meant the loss of the race. And Gig, who could have edged down lower and given Cedars room to also pass beneath the wrecked car, held his course, a grim smile on his face. He expected Cedars to pursue the safe course and fall behind.

But Cedars held his foot down. It was over almost before the blanching, fear-frozen Bandy realized it. Cedars aimed his mount *high*. There was a rush and a roar and the hayseed's car had sped through that narrow opening above the wreck without so much as grazing either the damaged car or the fence. His judgment had been perfect.

And furthermore in that last swoop down the stretch he had edged a full length ahead of Gig and won the race.

Gig, his nerve also shaken, for he had expected a terrible smash, came to the pits in the wake of the hayseed. Cedars climbed out and approached him. Trueblood also rushed up.



"My nerve is still good, Gig," Cedars said. "But this team isn't big enough to hold both of us. And neither

is auto racing. One of us has driven his last race."

Gig opened his mouth and then closed it for the hayseed had in his hand that little piece of rubber that had been the innocent cause of his gamble with death.

"And you can take Bandy Brooks with you," Cedars said as he saw the light of defeat in Gig's eyes. "Neither of you have nerve enough for this racket anyway."

*A Doctor Outfigures  
Gangster Bullets*



## OFFICE CALL

By DEAN L. HEFFERNAN

**T**HE last belated patient had long since gone home through the spring-scented night, and young Dr. William Gordan, having spent a half hour over the brutal tragedy which stalked across the whole front page of the *Post's* extra, had just risen from his desk to close up his little office and go, too, when the creak of a loose board behind him caught his ear. He wheeled around—and found himself looking straight into the mouth of a large, steady automatic.

Over the weapon two blue eyes, narrowed to little more than slits and emanat-

ing a hard, cold glint strongly suggestive of midwinter ice, stared at him out of a sallow countenance whose every sharp feature was circumscribed with bitter, drooping, wolf-like lines. The stranger was about forty years of age, moderately tall and dressed in an expensive, even tasteful, blue suit. Just behind him stood a second man, equally unprepossessing of expression, but younger and more flashily clothed in brown. Coarse of face and stocky of body, this one impressed himself indelibly upon the memory because of an old shiny scar diagonally across his right cheek. His skin was the dead, sickly gray of putty,

and his left hand was clenched in a curious way about his right arm.

Even as Gordan noted the last detail, a drop of blood gathered on a finger-tip, clung for a moment and dropped to the carpet.

The first man spoke now in a drawling, raspy voice that carried an indefinable suggestion of education.

"Reading that extra of the *Post*, eh, doc?"

"Why—er—yes," replied Gordan uncertainly.

The man's mouth smiled in a curling, tight-lipped way; but his eyes did not. They seemed to narrow yet further.

"Interesting little piece, isn't it? Never mind, though. We didn't come here to talk. We've got a job here that needs some attention."

"I see."

"Do you? Bright boy! Well, listen, then! His voice grew even more harsh and he spaced his words significantly well apart. "Listen, doc—the fewer fool questions you ask the better! Got that straight? Good! Now get busy right away."

For an interval that seemed throbbingly endless, but was actually a matter of seconds, Billy Gordan's trim, athletic figure was as a statue in stone while panic sapped the color from his clean-cut face and drove his heart smotheringly against his ribs. For there in plain sight where he had tossed it aside on his desk was the extra with its huge black headline screaming at him the latest addition to the city's long list of crimes of violence—

ALEXANDER K. VANDEMAN, SENATOR-ELECT, MURDERED IN HOME

And from where he was standing, Billy could have even re-read, if he had been so-minded, those square-lettered sub-heads:

MILLIONAIRE PHILANTHROPIST SURPRISES  
ROBBERS BURNING HOLE IN STEEL DOOR  
OF FAMOUS JEWEL ROOM

CHAUFFEUR, EX-SERVICE MAN, FIRES ON  
FLEEING KILLERS. WOUNDS ONE IN  
RIGHT ARM OR SHOULDER, HE  
THINKS . . .

This was staggering enough, but it was not all. With a flash of that amazingly vivid and accurate recollection which often lights up every corner of the human mind in moments of danger, another newspaper page lying in a pigeon-hole of his desk was conjured up before Billy's eye. It was an account he had cut from a morning paper the day after the body of Dr. Mayberry, a kindly old friend and preceptor, had been taken from a roadside ditch in the county, bullet-riddled and with its distinguished silver hair clotted with red. One paragraph in particular burned now in Billy's memory.

Close friends declare that Dr. Mayberry did not have an enemy in the world. From this and the condition of the elderly physician's isolated office, the police have come to the conclusion that the murder was committed by gangsters who stopped in for treatment of some wound, and then fearing identification and exposure, ruthlessly decided to "take him for a ride" to silence him.

But, after a demoralized first moment, Gordan rapidly pulled himself together. With exterior calmness and that rapid inward analysis of the situation which he had always been able to summon at critical moments, he led the way into his white-enameled room at the back. He drew off the scarred man's coat, exposing a blood-soaked shirt-sleeve, and pointed to his shiny new chair.

"Sit down, please."

The injured man, cursing in a husky, pain-dulled voice, climbed into the chair while the other watchfully seated himself on a white stool between Billy and the door.

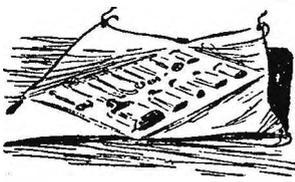
**B**ILLY got a number of sponges ready and set to work to prepare a bichloride solution. Conscious, however, that those slitted blue eyes never left him and

that the muzzle of that blunt automatic followed his every movement like a needle swinging to a magnet, he had to fight down a feverish tendency to hurry matters.

"Keep your head, now, keep your head!" he kept telling himself. "You're not licked yet. And *kill time!* That's your only chance! You've got to kill time till something turns up. Darn lucky that you had sense enough, after those savages got poor old Doc Mayberry, to arrange with Pat Hogan to look in the back-area window on his ten-thirty round! You've got to hold them at least till then—twenty minutes!"

"Just a second," he said in his best professional manner to the injured man, "and I'll be ready to fix you up."

But at the same time—"Pat is no fool," he was grimly assuring himself. "If he sees that sneering brute with the gun, he'll shoot first and do his asking afterward—provided he doesn't indulge in his little habit of forgetting to come around in the first place. You mustn't be 'taken for a ride' before he gets here, that's all! Keep your head, old boy, if you ever did—



and hold 'em! Hold 'em!"

Billy artfully used up at least a full minute pottering over his shelves of medicines before making a selection. He wasted the best part of two more rinsing out a shallow basin and pretending to wait till the water at the washstand was of satisfactory warmth. He got rid of another couple setting out his gauze and bandage rolls. He was just considering the advisability of deftly upsetting the pan of antiseptic solution in order to begin over again when a vicious curse burst through the room.

"Come on! Come on, you poke!" the growling, thick voice of the man in the chair followed. "What's the delay?"

Billy's pleasant gray eyes expressed astonishment. "Delay?"

"Yeah, delay! Are you trying to pull a fast one on us, or are you just another of

these sap doctors? If you're layin' down on me, I'll take you apart and——"

"Steady, steady!" Billy answered, his voice light of tone, but his pulse a little heavy. "You wouldn't care for a case of lockjaw from hasty or careless work, would you?"

"No, and if you wouldn't care for a case of punctured head from slow work, show some speed!"

Further temporizing along that line being liable to precipitate the very thing he was striving to avoid, Billy crossed over and using as much time as possible, carefully cut away the ensanguined sleeve. He took care to place it squarely in the center of his immaculate table where Pat could not help noticing it if he looked through the window.

He saw then an angry, blood-smeared furrow that ran from the elbow all the way to the fleshy part of the shoulder and terminated there in a ragged hole. There was another hole, round and red, at the back.

"Hm-m, that's a pretty bad—scratch," Billy said thoughtfully. "I'm afraid I'll have to——"

The wounded man's laugh was heavily sardonic. "Scratch, yeh! Well, just stand and jaw about it, sappy! It feels great, and I got all night!"

"I was about to say that I'm afraid I'll have to hurt you a good deal. Perhaps I'd better give you something to dull the pain till it's dressed."

The man's features disclosed relief, then a hint of deepening suspicion. "What you got that'll do it?"

"A shot of cocaine ought to do the business," responded Billy, his voice casual, but his heart giving a bound of hope at the thought of the loaded revolver he had been keeping in a handy drawer of one of his instrument cases ever since Dr. Mayberry's death. "I'll get my hypodermic needle and——"

"The hell you will!"

"Why not?"

"How do I know what kind of double-

crossin' dope you may slip into one of them needles—or what else you may be up to, for that matter? Just get goin' and get this over with. I guess I can stand it."

Billy gazed at him speculatively and hesitated.

"But—you're white as a ghost from loss of blood, man! You need something to buck you up. How about a little whisky?"

A responsive spark appeared in the dark eyes. "That's more like it. Got some good stuff?"

"The best ever made," Gordan replied calmly. "Old Plantation." He turned and started to pass behind the lean-faced man with the gun. "It's over there in the cabinet, the one—er—beside the instrument case. Just a second and I'll——"

"Wait a minute, buddy, *wa-a-ait* a minute!" grated the man with the weapon, instantly on the alert. "You get back where you were!"

"But how can I——"

"I said get back where you were! And don't make any more breaks like that, either, unless you want a tunnel through your brain. I'll dig out the whisky, myself."

Waving the flushed but level-eyed young physician back with threatening motions of the automatic, he rose, opened the cabinet and took down a nearly full pint bottle with the familiar cotton-picking scene on the label. Still keeping Billy covered, he opened it, snifted it and nodded with grudging approval.

"Smells like the real stuff, all right."

He carried it to his companion. The wounded man gulped off a good third of it, sighed. A better color began to flow into his face.

When he had finished and set the bottle down, the man in blue coolly raised it and treated himself to three or four swallows, after which he smacked his lips with satisfaction.

"Not the best in the world, but—not bad. A little too sharp for my educated taste. Not bad at all, though. Eh, Sam?"

"Not so bad but what we'll put it where

it'll do the most good," responded Billy's patient, with a sort of surly humor. "These saw-bones can always get more easy. Here, gimme another shot."

"Doc," observed the first one, his mouth twisting into the tight-lipped smile that rendered his features even more wolf-like, "as long as you've been so free and easy with the stuff, it would only be right for us to send you a bottle of some of our own he-man brand to square things. We'd do it, too, if it wasn't that after tonight you won't——" He broke off, glanced at the other, and gave vent to a short laugh that seemed scarcely to force its way between his teeth.

Billy's face paled, but his voice was steady.

"Won't what?"

"You'll find out later. Get busy now! More speed and less talk all around."

**B**ILLY began to bathe the wound with elaborate attention to detail. Over the patient's shoulder, he could see a tiny chromium clock on a shelf. Ten nineteen! Eleven minutes, approximately. He'd have to take it more easily. Pat would probably be down in the next block now. But Pat—confound his amiable soul—rambled along these May nights like a freight train on a grade. And as soon as they had gotten the service they wanted, these two would be off without a moment's delay. Gosh, what gluttons! They were nearly finished with the whisky already—guzzling his fine old pre-war stuff like pigs swilling at a trough.

The man in the chair yawned and emitted a volley of querulous, savage oaths.

"And you call yourself a doctor, huh?" he finished. "Doctor! Clown would be nearer to it! Are you ever gonna get through sloppin' around there, or do I hafta put a dose of lead into you to wake you up?"

Nevertheless, the young surgeon held himself to his studied routine. Never was any wound washed and dressed and bandaged with such meticulous exactness, such

painstaking solicitude. When it was nearly finished, he paused, studied it a moment, muttered disgustedly, unwound the bandage and, breathing a silent prayer that the rather thin sham would not be seen through, started all over again. He had a moment of chilling fear when the tall man's eyes fastened on him sharply, but somehow the play seemed to get across.

After that Billy proceeded with more deliberation than ever, for this was the last subterfuge he dared attempt. His fingers, becoming astonishingly clumsy, repeatedly got in one another's way. His gauze refused to stay in the proper position. His rubber wrapping seemed to hitch itself perversely out of place. Twice the bandage roll eluded his grasp, dropped, and wound itself up into awkward curls. Each time he had to open another. A strip of surgical tape he had found a rather obscure use for, kept twisting maliciously, sticking together in troublesome places. That meant tedious pulling apart and straightening.

"If old Dr. Mayberry had lived to see this," he was reflecting half-grimly, "he'd have insisted on me giving up medicine for a job as an auto mechanic."

Just as he was reaching the end, and his patient, cursing him again for a clown and a half-wit, was glowering at him with a look full of weary but dangerous comprehension, Billy received two hard, piercing blows on the back of the head. Partially dazed, he did not realize at first what had occurred. His hand shot up to the injured place. When it came away it bore a smear of blood.

Then Billy whirled around—to meet the cold, lid-drooping eyes of the other man. Having just administered an excellent sample of that type of punishment known to gangland as "pistol-whipping" that worthy was now standing directly behind Billy.

He answered Billy's movement by jamming the muzzle of the automatic into Billy's ribs as if they were made of iron, and his words, more lazily drawling now

than ever, came through lips compressed so as to seem like parchment.

"You're not such a boob as I thought, Willie! You've been putting over that stall-



ing pretty cute, but enough is sufficient! If that bandage comes loose again, or you're not finished with that job in just one minute more, you're going to get a chance to look at

a lot of lilies from the bottom. Got that? Well, don't let it get away from you. Not for a second!"

Billy was almost goaded into crashing his right fist squarely into that pair of cruel eyes, but discretion wisely throttled valor just in time.

Even then, however, he did not entirely give up his attempt. But in spite of every cautious artifice, the job finally got itself finished. And as the last knot was tied—*ting ting ting ting—ting ting ting ting!*

That was the electric clock in the ante-room. Ten thirty! Pat! Where in the name of heaven was the man? He ought to be here now, or very close; and if he was, there was a chance. Billy, rising upright from his completed work, stole a glance at that little back-area window. But the broad, smiling map of Ireland that was the frontispiece of strapping Patrick Hogan was not there.

And then, with a shock like the stab of an ice-cold dagger, recollection thrust home the terrible truth—*there would be no Pat tonight!* This was Thursday, the one night in the week when the watchman, by agreement of his various employers, was excused from his regular rounds in order to spend an evening with his family!

A mist of perspiration burst out upon Billy's brow, and his hands, giving a sudden spasmodic tremble as he was carrying the basin to the lavatory, slopped out part of the reddened antiseptic solution. He had counted on Pat being there—at least when

things came to a head. And they were coming to a head now! In the eyes of these two he could plainly read—Yes, he must think up some plan to kill a little more time, keep on stalling along somehow!

Again Gordan struggled to recover himself. He started to put away his instruments, clean up the muss he had made. If he could just prevent them taking him away.

"Through, Lightning?" the file-like voice of the tall man, who had gone back to his stool and was now sitting there yawning impatiently, cut through his hot medley of thought. "Well, well, you're lucky. You just about get under the wire!"

"No, not quite finished yet," answered Billy, striving to keep his voice casual. "I'd better give him a shot of anti-tetanus serum. A bullet wou—er—an injury like that, you know, is liable to develop——"

"Serium your eye!" growled the bandaged man, rising heavily from the chair. "You keep your serium for somebody that asks you for it! Come on, Jake, l-let's get outa here."

The other nodded. "We're leaving right away. But first——"

"Come on! This bozo's just stallin' for time! Besides, the place is gettin' hot as hell, and the smell of that s-stuff's got me feelin' dizzy."

"Put on the brakes a minute, Sam. Hadn't we better——"

He broke off and gazed at his comrade with peculiar significance. A short, wordless message passed between the two, after which the taller one turned to Billy.

"Get your hat and coat on!" he ordered shortly.

Billy's expression disclosed mild surprise. "My hat and coat? What for?"

"For a little ride," leered the other. "You've been working pretty hard, doc, and a trip in the night air will do you a lot of good."

"Thanks," replied Billy quietly, "but I'm feeling well enough, and I've got my own car outside."

"Ye-eh? Well, you'll like ours much

better. Lots of fellows who thought at first that they didn't care for a jaunt have taken trips in it, and they always—stayed out a long while. Now"—he motioned with the automatic, and his eyes suddenly became more menacing—"get that coat on without any more chatter, or we'll take you along as you are!"

**B**ILLY stood motionless. Outwardly he was entirely unperturbed, but inwardly his thoughts were racing like a cloud-wrack before a September hurricane.

"Listen," he temporized, speaking slowly and evenly, "you two have had pretty good service here. You've taken up my time, and you've got a bad wound dressed, and you've drunk the best bottle of liquor I had. Suppose you go your way now, and I go mine, and we both forget——"

"Wouldn't that be fine—and simple-minded!" sneered the tall man, stifling another yawn. "And the minute we had our backs turned you'd be at the 'phone shooting off your mouth a mile a minute to the bulls."

Billy proved extraordinarily ignorant of the argot of gangland. "The what? Bulls?"

"The flats! The cops. It wouldn't be five minutes till the whole bunch would know you'd been fixing up a bullet wound in the shoulder for a man with a scar on his cheek—a scar that every lousy one of them knows as well as he knows his name!"

"But why should I want to 'phone—anybody?"

"Why should you want to 'phone anybody? Why should—Sam, did you get that? Why should the dear, innocent, little doctor want to 'phone anybody!"

Again that clipped, bitten-off laugh.

"Look here!" he ground out to Billy. "Don't try to pull that s-stuff on me! I saw you reading that piece about Vandeman when I came in. Between that and this visit, you know too much now to be left around loose. What's more, you're keeping me out of a good bed. Come on!"

"Wait!" Billy, watching the fellow's eyes, but experiencing the sensation of a cold hand closing about his heart, searched his mind for anything that would prolong the argument. "Wait a minute. Suppose I shouldn't report this?"

"I don't have to suppose. I know! You won't report anything from now on."

"Of course, there's a law that covers these cases," Billy struggled on with a desperate, and rather transparent, effort at further procrastination, "but, on the other hand, you know a man has to——"

"Damn your 'buts'!" snapped the other, waving the automatic again. "You've done all the s-stalling you're going to! You get going, or I'll splash what little b-brains you've got all over your own shop! March!"

He moved towards Billy, watchfully, softly, like a panther approaching its prey. The young doctor, instinctively backing away, knew a moment of poignant agony as, somehow, he saw a vision of his wife. But his tortured mind, wandering for but a second, was wrenched back. The evil figure in blue was almost upon him——

A curious thing here occurred. The gunman hesitated, stopped. He seemed to stumble, and he placed his free hand on a chair.

"What the devil!" he snarled thickly. "This stinking dump is getting me s-sick. Now start, you!" He took another step or two. "You've got just about——about half a second b-before——before I pull th'this ——"

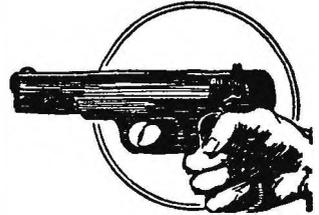
He faltered again. His chin seemed to slump oddly, and as he reached out for support a second time, an expression of startled horror widened his cold eyes. They lifted to Billy's, stared and——

"Why, you dir-dirty, mealy-mouthed —s-sneak!" he cried in a furious, muddled way. "You double-crossed us s-s-somehow after all, didn't you? You're going to get y-yours right now!"

With murder naked in his eyes, he raised his weapon, leveled it waveringly.

The hammering roar of the forty-five caliber cartridge, hurled itself from wall to wall, and back again!

But the deadly, steel-armored bullet that was intended to tear the young doctor's soul from his body merely grazed his brown hair and tore the glass knob from a chest of instruments, instead. With cat-like agility Billy had managed to fling himself to the floor under the unsteady barrel.



A split second of silence followed, during which the would-be murderer swayed, his knees weaving queerly under him, his eyes peering around in a vague way for his victim. Belatedly he seemed to realize what had happened. Emitting a snarling, throaty sound he turned the weapon downward for the death-shot. Simultaneously, his quarry's hard-knotted fist, flashing all the way from the tiles in a tremendous upper-cut, crunched against the point of his chin.

The fellow's legs, collapsing on the spot like the wobbly columns of a child's house of blocks, pitched him thuddingly to the floor.

The man with the bandaged arm rubbed his palm across his drooping eyes. He gazed at his prostrate companion in a queer, incredulous manner. Next moment, gasping out a hoarse curse and reeling noticeably, he reached into a hip pocket with his good hand. But as the hand emerged, clumsily dragging with it a second automatic, Billy's right lashed out again. It went home like a battering ram on the angle of the jaw. There was a sharp, ugly crack as of breaking bone.

The gunman, spun halfway around by the blow and thrown against the table, seemed for an instant to hang there suspended. Then he went down like a stricken ox. Thereafter he lay still, with his left foot resting snugly on the back of his confederate's neck.

**D**OC," declared red-haired Sergeant Keeley, twirling a dented bullet in his stubby fingers the while he and a couple of patrolmen gazed down complacently at two deep-breathing figures neatly trussed up with surgical tape, "you sure done a good job here. That thick feller on top is Sam the Scar, and the other's Toledo Jake, a real gang leader if there ever was one. They're both killers. You're lucky you ain't on your way to the morgue."

Dr. Billy Gordan, standing beside his wash-basin, was bathing a very sore lump on the back of his head. Apparently he was as steady as Gibraltar, but as he smiled faintly his lips seemed a bit white.

"I was thinking pretty much the same thing myself, Sergeant."

"Yeah. We ain't ever been able to pin a thing on either of these two, but I got a hunch it'll be different now—thanks to you, doc. You see, we got a machine at headquarters for identifyin' bullets, and an inspector that's a bear at it. If any of the ones that's still in poor Vandeman's body matches up with this one, or either of these rods here—it's the hemp for both these beauties. Yeah, doc, you done one sweet job. But how in the name of the seven saints did you ever get out of the clutches of a pair like this?"

"That was—er—due to one of my rare cases of foresight, Sergeant."

"Foresight?"

"Exactly. You see, after my old friend, Dr. Mayberry, was assassinated, it occurred to me that I might have visitors myself some night. So I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to be prepared to welcome them. By the way, be sure to test the bullets that were taken from the good old doctor, will you, and see if they match up with the weapons of these two. I hope," he added, grimly snapping his jaws shut, "they do!"

"Oh, we'll put 'em through the mill, all right," the sergeant assured him. "But, doc, what do you mean, you prepared to welcome them?"

"Why, I was pretty sure that 'red hots' like these might accept good whisky when they wouldn't trust anything else," Billy replied a little wearily, "so among other things, I kept that pint of 'Old Plantation' ready and waiting. When they guzzled it so cheerfully they were guzzling two grains of morphine between them. Sergeant, would you—er—mind getting down that other bottle in the back of the second shelf there? I feel like I could stand a drink, myself."

## *"In Answer to Summons"*

a tremendous story of the West by

# **ERNEST HAYCOX**



**NEXT  
ISSUE**





*A Famous Western Writer  
Gives You Another Fine Tale*

## SMOKE TALK

By ERNEST HAYCOX

**I**T WAS at a time of day when shadows ran well behind any sun-bound traveler that the man with the soldierly carriage and drill-straight eyes rode into the ill-famed town of Santa Rosa and put up at the stable. He had come far, this much the alert citizens of the town immediately saw. Desert dust lay like gray gunpowder on his clothes and the horse was badly jaded, as well it might be after crossing the interminable reaches of treeless, waterless land that sweltered under a copper sky. When the stranger dismounted there was a perceptible stiffness to his step.

Yet other than that, the man showed no fatigue. He lifted the saddle bags, removed the gear and led the animal out to a sparing drink. To the hostler he issued a request in a level, softly courteous voice.

"Be pleased to have you water him to his belly's full in another half hour, and give him an extra half measure of oats."

Picking up the saddle bags, he walked along the sultry street to the hotel, with a full dozen pairs of eyes watching him from odd coverts of the town. If he was aware of the scrutiny, and if he was aware of Santa Rosa's reputation for sucking a man dry before spewing him back upon

*As This U. S. Marshal Put It, No Western Town  
Is ABLE to Be as Black as It Is Painted, and He  
Never Judged One on Its Published Reputation*



the desert, he gave no sign. He walked with a straight spine and square shoulders, his gait neither hurried nor slow, a certain quiet confidence and dignity about him. He was distinctly a man at ease in a man's world. A broad, pearl colored Stetson sat down upon a fine head; ruddy and weather-swept features were fixed to the front, seemingly interested in nothing to either side.

Yet as he turned through the hotel door, the street with its flimsy and parched buildings and its narrow alleys was indelibly printed in his mind. Crossing a gaunt lobby, he dropped his saddle bags on the

counter and confronted Santa Rosa's official host—the fleshless, laconic Lafayette Lane.

Lafayette Lane had seen them come and go for twenty years. He knew men, as hotel keepers have a way of knowing men, and out of his knowledge he had built up a rough and ready classification. If his guests were dignitaries, great ranch owners, grave elders with vanity, or men he wished to flatter, he bestowed upon them the title of "colonel." Those of lesser degree, Easterners or gentlemen upon whom he liked to press his hospitality, became under his roof "majors." But when a trav-

eler arrested Lafayette Lane's attention and instant respect, which was not often, he drew forth the prefix of "captain." To Lane a captain meant a man of action, of tough hide and sound nerves, and above all of courage.

He weighed this new stranger with a casual glance, noting the fine suit of black, the white shirt and tie, the heavy watch chain; noting also the even pressure of the stranger's lips and the peculiar light blue of the eyes which, he guessed, might easily hold threats under the pressure of emotion. Having caught these things in the space of a finger's snap, he swung the register and offered the pen.

"Pleased to have you under my roof, Captain."

The stranger bowed slightly and wrote "William Yount" in steady, bold strokes. Lane blotted the signature and left the counter, Yount following with his saddle bags.

Up a flight of squealing stairs and down the length of a shaded hall, the hotel man threw open a door and stepped aside, murmuring, "You'll find it the coolest room in my establishm'nt, Captain Yount. Supper's in the dinin' room at six.— Trust you will refresh yo'self!"

"Obliged," said Yount and dropped his saddlebags on the bed. Lafayette Lane retreated to the lobby, each step marked by the faint protest of warping boards. Closing the door half way, Yount took off his coat, shook out the dust and hung it carefully on the back of a chair. The action exposed a shoulder harness and gun, which he removed and also hung on the chair. Then he proceeded to pour himself a bowl of water and to wash with all the relish of a travel-stained man. At the same time, he kept one ear cocked on the hall; and when presently he caught the echo of footfalls in the lobby below he stood up, sharply attentive. Somebody spoke a quick, insistent phrase that was not answered, but save for an uneasy scuffing of boots and the scrape of a chair, there was nothing else. Yount toweled himself, replaced the

shoulder holster, and slid into his coat. Lighting a stogie, he unstrapped the saddle bags and spilled a part of their contents out upon the bed. Among the articles was a letter that he took to a chair, and after settling comfortably down, began to read. He knew the message by heart, but being a man of infinite patience with details, he studied it again:

*Will: Try to get a thousand head of twos, threes and some knotty fours on the trail by the end of the month. We got to stock up this range or let good grass wither. Make certain you come close to the Colorado line for Kansas is talkin quarantine pritty strong and the damn nesters are stringing bob wire hell for breakfast.*

*Now legal beef is plumb good beef, Will, but rustled beef is considerable cheaper—especially such as comes wet acrost the Rio Grande. I ain't askin' you to go over personal and steal Mexican cattle, which would be downright dishonest. But in case you run into any local talent which has experience thataway and could deliver you wet stock on the hoof, no questions asked—just use your judgment. You recollect the Lord says he will take care of them as shuffles for themselves.*  
Ned Burd.

William Yount's level eyes glimmered with a trace of humor; he chuckled as he folded the letter back into its envelope. But the chuckle and the humor alike vanished when he drew from one pocket a smaller piece of paper with the following penciled notation:

*About six feet, hundred and seventy-five pounds. Black as a greaser and palavers that language good as English. Thin face, bad knife slash along left side of neck. Treacherous, scary and can't be drawn into a trap. Said to be quickest draw on the Border. Has a known record of eleven notches. Santa Rosa is the town where*

*he hangs out. Called the Lizard. None other known.*

The cigar had ceased to draw. Lighting the second notice, he used it as a torch to get his smoke drawing well, and watched the paper slowly char. For perhaps twenty minutes he sat thus and smoked, staring at the blank wall with a remote, speculative absorption in the blue eyes. One of his hands closed with a curious gesture of finality, and he rose and crossed to the bed, replacing the letter inside a saddle bag.

Then he did a curious thing. With a pencil he made extremely light marks on the bedspread, where the corners of the saddle bags rested, arranged the straps on the buckles carefully and stepped back to study the effect. It seemed to satisfy him, for he put on his hat and went downstairs, crossing the lobby without appearing to see the wasp-like figure of a man sitting very still in a far corner of the room.

But he was no sooner beyond the hotel porch before this man sprang out of his chair and started for the stairs. Upon his shrunken face, which was marked and pocked with the full stamp of evil, was a nervous half-grin that drew up the corners of his pale lips and put a beady malevolence in his yellow eyes. Poised on the bottom step, he turned to sweep the door by way of reassurance and then threw an impudent grunt at the silent Lafayette Lane.

"You watch fer him," he said. Then he was out of sight.

Lafayette Lane sat on a stool behind the counter, with his hands folded across his stomach, and scowled into space. If he disliked this sort of prying into the affairs of his guests he kept his peace.

The barren lobby droned with the clustered flies and already the patch of harsh sunlight coming through the door and begun to shorten and slide away. The little man who had gone upstairs worked swiftly, and in five minutes hurried down.

"Clean socks, clean shirt, razor, a Bible and some extry cattridges. Some other junk—and a letter." The thin and weasel-faced snooper pursed his lips in a way that gave him an air of shrewdness. "Either he's cute, or he's simple to leave it layin' around. It tells on him. He's a cattle buyer. Or so it makes out."

Lafayette Lane broke his taciturn silence. "Some day, Wink, yo're a-goin' to get that ferret-face burned offen you."

"Yeah? Don't you like it? A-cause if yuh don't"—and he sized the hotel man up and down belligerently—"go tell Jake about it and see what fur!" He hitched up his pants and swaggered across the lobby; yet his nerves were not of the steadiest, and behind him the silence of Lafayette seemed threatening. Wink's pace accelerated. He jumped across the door sill, stared swiftly behind, and hurried off the porch.

Lafayette relapsed to a gloomy perusal of the register. "Yes sir," he soliloquized, "Wink'll get the hell burnt outa him someday. And I dunno's *I'd* send any flowers, either.—Yount—that's a good name. Plumb too good for Santa Rosa!"

YOUNT passed casually along the street, with the westering sun burning against his face. Santa Rosa had not yet stirred from its afternoon siesta, but Yount knew that the emptiness of the walks and the dull, lethargic silence was only a mask—like the sleepy countenance of a poker player. Crossing the mouth of this alley and that door, he felt the glances of hidden men; from a dozen dark angles they were watching him. Being a bone-and-blood Westerner, he knew the habit of cattle towns. Most of them were reserved and suspicious of strangers. But there was more than reserve in this sweltering row of buildings; more than average hostility, too.

When he turned in at the door of a huddled brick structure labeled "Santa Rosa State Bank" he had the feeling that this inspection stalked him to the very threshold and then dropped reluctantly

away as he stepped inside. Bullet marks high on the wall of the bank's single room arrested his attention. Below them and behind a stretch of grille work stood a lean old fellow in a seersucker suit who lifted a taut, measuring glance that somehow seemed to contain the anxious expectancy of disaster and the hope that it might not come. Pity swept Yount as he reached into his pocket.

"Good day," said the banker, quickly.

"Good day," was Yount's courteously soft reply. "I have here a draft for ten thousand dollars on Austin. I propose to do some business in this section, if conditions are favorable, and I'd duly appreciate your establishin' my account."

The banker accepted the draft and scanned it line by line, letter by letter. Presently he murmured, "Agreeable."

"Thank you kindly. How long will it take for the account to be open?"

"Three days."

Yount nodded, turned and thought of something else. "I suggest that you ask for considerable gold. It's my habit to pay in specie."

His attention shifted to the small table in the center of the room, upon which sat a small iron savings bank fashioned to resemble a donkey. Thrift in the shape of a child's toy.

Something loosened inside Yount; he chuckled and hefted the donkey. "I reckon," he called back, "a dollar would get one of these things?"

"That's what they're for," agreed the banker in a tired voice. "But when folks get a dollar around here, which is seldom, they bury it under the kitchen floor!"

Yount chuckled again and sauntered out. "Teachin' youngsters thrift is a sound idea," he mused. Then the blue of his remarkably level eyes was filled with a sober pensiveness. "But who is to teach the thrift of time to an old fool like me? Days come and go, and I ride on alone, siftin' into this town and out of that one. When I die, out on the desert with a bullet in my back, or maybe peacefully

in a hotel bed, who will be the sadder for it? The lone trail was never meant for man. Even the animals know better."

He looked at his watch, finding the time to be past four o'clock. Habit made him turn abruptly into the saloon for his before supper drink, and when he pushed the doors aside and faced the stale, semi-darkness of the place he at last saw the brand of men who were responsible for Santa Rosa's far flung reputation of evil. The little fellow with the weasel face sat teetering in a chair over by the wall, his eyes averted and he seemed to be trying to hunch himself out of sight, like a rabbit. There were perhaps a dozen men scattered through the long room, lounging idly in the corners or seated at the tables, and upon the cheeks of every last one of them was a covert expression, as though they were waiting for some event to happen. Three or four Mexicans lay full length on the floor, their skins glistening even in this unrelieved atmosphere. Only one man, an oafish creature with a derby hat and a hang-dog air, ventured a direct glance at Yount. His vacant giggle sounded queerly through the silence. At a table a well-dressed man with slim fingers kept piling and unpling a stack of chips. All this Yount observed as he swung to the bar, then his quick gaze was suddenly diverted by the individual who stood behind it. An apron shielded a great paunch, chubby fists lay awkwardly on the mahogany bar top, and a grotesque, beer-red visage hovered behind a screen of heavy cigar smoke. A pair of little red eyes, pale-centered and completely lacking in any appearance of kindness, dropped upon Yount and remained there.

"Kentucky—straight," said Yount.

The bottle and glass came to him. He poured, drank and paid, feeling about him this uneasy, hostile silence. The bartender's paw swept in the piece of silver, and with a gesture that might have been habit or deliberate purpose, sent it ringing against the wood. Then he pushed it back. "On the house," said he in an abrupt, husky

voice. "On Jake Wallen—which is me. You will find Santa Rosa a *peculiar* town, friend."

"So I've been informed," replied Yount, quietly. "But I never judge a town on its published reputation."

"Got to see fer yo'self, uh?" muttered Jake Wallen.

"A habit of mine that I learned long ago."

"And whut," grunted the bartender in the same asthmatic rumble, "do yuh expect to find here?"

Yount turned his cigar thoughtfully. The gambler had ceased clacking his chips, the half-wit no longer giggled. Absolute silence held the place as the crowd waited for an answer. Yount's glance, as direct as a bullet, struck Jake Wallen with a cold, impersonal levelness. "Some towns are worse than their reputation, but not often. Usually I find that no town is able to be as black as it is painted."

"Depends some, I'd judge, on whether a man minded his own business or not," stated Wallen, pushing the words out beside the clenched cigar.

"I make it a habit of minding mine," drawled William Yount, and wheeled from the place. On the street he added an unspoken phrase, "I mind my own business, not statin' what that business might be."

Then he swung into a barber shop and settled down to the luxury of a "boughten" shave.

He left behind him a suddenly roused saloon. Talk—swift, suppressed and calculating—crossed the smoky gloom. Wink, the snoop, had sprung out of his chair and hung his elbows over the bar.

"What you think, Jake?" he whispered.

Jake Wallen looked down on the small man with an unmoved silence, but Wink did not mind. He was too long accustomed

to being bullied, kicked aside and cursed at. He muttered on. "The letter showed him as a cattle buyer."

"Mebbe—mebbe not."

Another man slid into the saloon and came straight for the counter. "He left a ten-thousand-dollar draft on Austin at the bank. Means to open an account here. What fer if not to buy beef?"

"Mebbe," grunted Jake Wallen, and his doubt seemed to soften.

"Where's he kerry his gun?" Wink wanted to know. "In his hip pocket?"

The gambler's fingers ceased playing with the chips and he broke in quickly. "Left shoulder."

"What fer a shoulder holster?" insisted Wink. "It don't sound straight."

Wallen's finger beckoned. A pair of loungers rose immediately and walked forward. "You," said the saloonkeeper, pointing to one, "never leave yore eyes offen him while he's here. Get the room next to him in the hotel. They's a nail hole run through the center of a flower in the wall paper. See what he does tonight. If he writes anything, I want to know what it is. If he talks to himself I want to know that. See if he oils his gun and spins the cylinder like he might have need of it. Git out now.—And you," swinging on the other, "hustle over to the stable and look at his hawss and gear. I want to know where that saddle was made."

"Want me to ride to the Lizard?" queried Wink.

"That can wait," was Wallen's grunted answer. "Mebbe he buys beef—mebbe."

**T**HE barber was a small man, stooped of chest and in need of one of his own haircuts. He wore glasses and peered over the top of them, giving out the air of having to stand on his toes to do so. He was mild, talkative, professionally agreeable; but Yount, always a hand to study people, occasionally caught him looking out of the window with a look of infinite weariness.

"A mite of hot weather," suggested the



barber, pulling the chair upright. "Come fur?"

"A distance," assented Yount.

"Fambly man, mebbe?"

"The privilege has not been mine so far, I regret to say," answered the man in the chair.

"We-ell," reflected the barber, "some say marriage is a state o' blessedness, and some hold that it's Adam's affliction. It's all accordin' to how a feller looks at it. A married man loses some things and he gains some. But, shucks, that's the way it is with anything he does, he loses and he gains."

He put away his razor, and struck with the felicity of his own phrase, repeated it again. "Yep, he loses and he gains—which is the way o' the world."

"A man must expect his losses," gravely mused Yount. "If he gains anything at all, he should consider himself lucky."

"A downright cute way o' puttin' it," said the barber. "My first wife died young. My second was considerable high sperrited and left fer greener grass. I hold nothin' agin her, and I hope she found what she was lookin' fer. My present wife——" the barber cleared his throat and went gruffly on "——has stood a lot o' tough luck with me. That picture on the shelf—mebbe you have noticed it?"

Yount eyed the tintype and nodded.

"Well," went on the barber, "you won't mebbe believe it, lookin' at a cuss like me, but that's *my* boy!" The phrase rolled out, round and robust and for a short interval the man's mild countenance glowed with unsuspected strength. "He's two years old. Say, the things he can spiel off with his chatterin' tongue—and the grip he's got with his hands! He's a-goin' to be a full-sized man. He's goin' to be a moose, not no runt like his dad. I shore waited a long time for that younker, but he's worth it!"

"Yo're proud of him I guess," applauded Yount.

"Me?" exclaimed the barber, and sighed vastly. "Why, say——"

Yount stood up and put on his coat. "That boy's your gain, my friend, and

nothin' in the world can take it away from you."

He paid the man, strolled out, and started for the hotel. An impulse stopped him, turned him, and sent him quickly back to the bank, with a gleam of open pleasure in the direct eyes.

"That donkey is mine," said he to the banker, sliding a dollar under the grille work. "Open an account for the barber's tike."

Taking the toy bank from the table he went back to the barber shop, chuckling softly.

"My compliments to your son," said Yount, and slipped the donkey into the barber's unsuspecting palm. "And tell him a lone-travelin' old codger hopes he'll like this toy and hopes that someday he'll stand head and shoulders above a crooked, sorrowful old world."



Somet h i n g happened to the barber's face. "W h y—n o w ——" he stammered. But Yount was out of the door and striding toward the hotel, the light of pleasure already subsiding from his face.

"A long trail and a lonely one," he muttered. "And nobody the sadder when I come to the end of it."

The barber was still holding the toy, all trace of weariness gone from his cheeks, when one of Jake Wallen's henchmen, walked suddenly through the door. The barber started and gripped the donkey with both hands. Fear sprang into his eyes.

"Whut'd he have to say?" growled the henchman.

"Him?" Nothin' much. Said he'd come a passable distance, was a single man, and liked kids. Mighty close-mouthed, that fellow. But mighty fine—mighty fine."

"What you got there?" challenged the henchman. "Let me see that thing."

"Now hold on," protested the barber. "He give it to me for the kid. Jest a toy bank."

"Lemme see it! That gent don't make no moves around here without Jake Wallen wantin' to know why. Pass it over."

"I tell yuh, it's for the kid!" said the barber sharply, knuckles turning white as they pressed harder around the toy. He shifted abruptly to pleading. "Now you wouldn't want to take away that little fun from my tike, would yuh? Hell, he ain't had nothin' like this——"

The henchman's arm swept around, knocked the barber back and seized the bank. No talk outen you! Shut up! If they's anything atween you two buzzards——"

"You got no right to take that!" shouted the barber desperately. "By God, yuh ain't! Gimme it back!" But the other man, grinning sourly, had departed for the saloon.

For a time the barber's clenched fists struck spasmodically against space, and rebellion flared in his faded, ordinary features. Then it died away, leaving him sagged and weary and beaten. He passed a hand across his eyes and looked out over the housetops to the free sky.

"The boy shore would of liked that trinket," he muttered dully. "First store toy he ever woulda had. He'll never git it now though. They'll bust it up and throw it away."

Which was exactly what happened. Wallen smashed the donkey with one blow from a bungstarter, and found nothing inside. Turning the pieces over and over in his hands he shook his head at the assembled group. "Don't figger he meant anything by that. Soft hearted, I reckon. To hear that dam' barber brag yuh might think he had the only kid in the world." The wreck of the toy donkey went sailing across the room and scattered in the sawdust. "What did yuh find about the hawss?"

"Cheyenne saddle," reported the messenger who had been despatched to the

stable. "Cheyenne maker's name tooled in the skirt."

Jake Wallen's swollen cheeks twitched. "Looks like he might be a cattle buyer, all right. Money in the bank, good clothes, northern rig, and a letter indicatin' he's after beef. Looks straight enough."

"How old you figger he is?" asked one of the loiterers.

"Not a day over thirty," put in the gambler whose dead eyes had studied a thousand men. "He looks older, but he isn't. Also, my judgment is that he's fast. Got to be to carry that shoulder outfit."

"Want I should ride to the Lizard?" Wink asked the saloon keeper.

"I'll tell you when I want yuh to ride! Now shut up!" snapped Wallen brutally. "Mebbe he's a cattle buyer. It looks reasonable. And by God, he'd better be! If I find anything to prove he ain't, I'll riddle him right here in the street. Did Flash put up that reward notice on the hotel wall like I told him?"

"Ahuh."

"Good enough. I want to know if Yount reads it, and how he looks at it."

**W**ILLIAM YOUNT was at that particular moment reading the notice. Coming up the hotel porch he had observed it tacked right beside the door. It hadn't been there a half hour previously! so much he was certain of, and as he tarried before it he was also certain that it had some hidden meaning for him—a meaning in some manner linked up with the slouching citizen who at this moment walked slowly down the far side of the street with an aimlessness that was only too apparent. Yount's mind raced swiftly along the situation. To read the notice meant to display interest; not to read it might display a deliberate and unnatural lack of interest. So he came closer and scanned the flaring type:

\$1000 REWARD

(Paid by the Cattlemen's Association)  
For the capture alive or the witnessed proof of the killing of "The Lizard," known rustler,

leader of an organized and desperate ring of thieves and cut-throats, and also indicted by five coroners' juries as a killer.

About six feet tall, and a hundred and seventy-five pounds. Black as a greaser and talks Mex fluently. Thin face, bad scar on neck. Treacherous, fast on draw.

WARNING: This reward is not meant to induce inexperienced men to go on his trail. All parties are notified that he will kill on suspicion, offering no quarter, and that he seldom allows a fair draw. He is heavily protected in the Santa Rosa district by powerful influences. Take care.

Yount's features were gravely noncommittal. The ambling pedestrian had crossed the street and now stood on a corner of the porch, deliberately watching Yount.

A girl in a crisp gingham apron stepped out and struck a triangle vigorously, the clanging echoes beating flat and definite into the oven-like heat. Yount turned, to find her black head and her frank, clear face turned toward him with open curiosity. She was an alert, vital girl who pounded on that triangle as if she took a perverse pleasure in rousing the somnolent citizenry. Her red lips were pursed with energy as she struck a last time, but she smiled on Yount in a manner that brought the dimples to each corner of her mouth.

"Supper's ready and I hope you're hungry," she said briskly.

Yount smiled in return, attracted by this first vigorous and honest impulse he had seen in the town. But the girl's attention had shifted away toward a rider just reining in by the porch—dusty, brick-red young chap with a lean body and a fighter's face.

"H'lo Bill," said the girl, and tipped her chin. "Hurry and scrub up, and I'll have your meal waitin'." Then she retreated across the lobby and into the dining room, Yount following behind.

He took a seat midway down a long table, and helped himself from the filled platters and dishes strung along its length. Apparently this Bill had something special in the line of supper, for the girl brought out an extra dish as he hauled his long

body across the room and sat down a few places away from Yount.

"They're fresh," said the girl, nodding at the plate, "and I knew you'd like them."

"Thinkin' about me now and then?" drawled the young fellow and looked up. That flashing exchange of glances told Yount all he needed to know about them. Man and woman—the old story of primitive hunger working its way with these two.

"How do you like riding for Crosskeys?"

"As good as any," muttered Bill, "and as poor as most." He said something else to her, half under his breath, and there was a short parrying of phrases that heightened the color of her face.

"Well," said she with a quick intake of breath, "at least it's honest work."

"Yeah.—And what's honesty worth around these parts, Helena? Thirty dollars a month."

"Still, it's honest," she repeated. "What else matters? We can wait."

"While others drag their loops and live high," he answered with a rising bitterness. Both of them seemed oblivious of Yount's being in the room. "It hurts," went on Bill, "it hurts like the devil. You and me—waitin'. A long time we been waitin'. At thirty a month, it looks like we'll wait forever. It ain't right. When I stop to figger how some of these ranch owners got their start——"

"You're tired and discouraged," said she, and her arm fell with a gentle grace on his shoulder. "The day's been hot. You don't mean that."

"How about you, swelterin' in that kitchen all day long?" retorted Bill. "Don't you suppose I think of that and——" Once again their voices dropped to a murmuring.

"You don't mean it," said she more vigorously. "Don't say that, Bill. You're not that kind. You're honest."

"I wish I was sure of it," he grunted and shook his head.

She started to say something more, but

checked herself and turned away. Jake Wallen came swinging into the dining room, with six or seven others trailing behind. The saloon keeper's wary eyes flitted across Yount and passed on. He stood beside Bill and dropped a heavy

arm about the boy, speaking with a heavy friendliness.

"Long time no see, Bill. Where yuh been the last few days?" he questioned.



"A man's got to labor to make money, Jake," replied Bill.

"Mebbe—mebbe not," said the saloon man, and settled cautiously into a chair. He tucked a napkin into his collar so that it draped the broad chest like an apron, then he reached stolidly for food. "How yuh like workin' for Crosskeys?"

"Plenty to do."

"I judge," grunted Wallen. "Plenty to do, plenty of sweat, plenty of dust. Never cared much for that m'self."

Then he fell to eating with a silent voraciousness. The great jaws bulged and a greater flush spread over the beef-red cheeks. Other men dropped in, saying nothing, reaching for the platters without ceremony; a meal was something to be attacked and gotten over with quickly in Santa Rosa. Five minutes sufficed for some, ten minutes was as long as any of them took. Yount, dallying soberly with his food, watched them come and go until the room was almost empty. Wallen washed the coffee around his cup and downed it like a slug of whisky, stripped the napkin away and rose.

Once again that immense paw fell on Bill's shoulder. "Come around and pay my place a visit. Man's got to have a mite o' pleasure in this world." And he passed out, not appearing to notice Yount.

Yount had finished. Lighting a cigar he left the table as the girl came in from the

kitchen, and he heard her talking to Bill with a strange tenseness in her voice.

"Not that, Bill. Nothing's worth it. Once you get in with Wallen and——" The rest of it was indistinct to Yount as he passed out to the lobby, but he caught the name of the Lizard, whispered with perceptible dread.

Lafayette Lane was sitting on the porch, solemnly watching beyond the housetops, and Yount took the adjoining chair. The sun was down now, marked by a long, burning flare on the western horizon. Faint shadows flowed down Santa Rosa's street; a breath of air came off the desert.

"A long day and a warm one," mused Yount. "There ain't many pleasures to be had in this world, but one of the best is to sit and watch the cool of the evenin' come."

"I've passed most of my life watchin' said evenin's come," was Lafayette Lane's laconic response. "Come and go. Soon gone—and another day jest like all the rest."

"Just so," agreed Yount, and lapsed into complete silence. Twilight arrived, deepened. A light broke through the foggy panes of the saloon windows, soon followed by others. But for the most part, Santa Rosa's street lay obscure and mysterious in the thickening pools of night. Water guttered softly somewhere, and soft speech rose from doorways. A guitar's pleasant chords announced the beginning of the evening's pleasure at Jake Wallen's.

"The boys seem to be driftin' yonder for a little fun," observed Yount casually.

"They'll pay for it," muttered Lane, hardly above his breath; and then, as if regretting the remark, he rose and went inside.

As he did so Bill came out, turned uncertainly on the porch and walked toward the saloon. Yount had a moment's view of the young fellow's face, tight and bitter and puzzled. He had just disappeared inside of Wallen's when the girl hurried across the lobby, almost running, and

stared toward the saloon after him. Her white hands moved up toward her throat and a sharp catch of breath, almost like a cry, escaped her. Yount thought for a moment that she meant to follow the man; but instead she went back, walking very slowly.

YOUNT inspected the glowing tip of his cigar, his mouth pressed tight. This Bill was a fine chap, born straight, and a fighter. But he was being pinched between the jaws of fortune as many another good man had been pinched.

"Ordinarily," reflected Yount to himself, "he'd stick to his convictions and play an honest hand. But there's his girl. He wants to marry her, wants to take her away from that kitchen. It hurts him to see her there. Bein' crooked looks like an easy way of fixin' everything up.—And there's Wallen, dangling bait right in front of the lad's nose. Easy money, no harm done except to a few rich ranchers or to the Mexicans who don't count—that's what Wallen's tellin' him."

He rose on impulse and went for the saloon, feeling himself flanked on the far side by a watcher.

"It's simple business to be honest when there ain't any reason to be otherwise," he added, grimly, "but the boy's got a hard problem. He's hurt, he's desperate; and Wallen's bait looks good. Damn that man!"

The saloon was filling, the poker games were in full tilt, and over by a roulette table a man called out a number. Bill was standing there, watching the racing ball and Yount closed idly in. Perhaps it was impulse again, perhaps not, that caused Yount to buy a stack of chips; but he had seen a faint glance of wistfulness on the face of the



hard-pressed youth, and as Yount placed a nibbling bet here and there on the board, he debated over an idea that came into his head.

"I sure feel in the humor to bust that contraption tonight," drawled Bill to the group in general. "I got a hunch it's my meat."

"Try it," boomed Wallen, who had come up from the bar.

"No," said Bill with sudden stubbornness. "I need my money for other things."

Yount had lost three bets in a row. Suddenly he shoved the whole of his stack in front of Bill. "I can't catch that ball tonight," he said affably, "but I believe in backin' a man with a hunch. Here's your grubstake. Play it."

Young Bill turned a straight and sober glance toward Yount. "That's kindly," he observed, "but I may be talkin' through my hat and lose your pile."

"When I gamble I always expect to lose," replied Yount, grinning. "You got the fever, so hop to."

"Here goes," grunted Bill and took the stack. Yount rolled his cigar around and turned to the bar for a drink.

Jake Wallen was beside him, the pale-centered eyes boring in. "Santy Claus, ain't you?" he said.

"I do things that please me," observed Yount and drank his slug. "Any objections to that?"

"None—so far." Wallen lifted a finger to the bar man. A box of cigars came across. "Fill yore pocket," he invited Yount. "On the house—on Jake Wallen, which is me."

"Thanks, kindly."

"Santa Rosa," opined Wallen, "is a peculiar town, friend. Santa Rosa likes to stew in its own juice. Santa Rosa tends to its own affairs and tolerates no outside interference. Mebbe," and the saloon man's gross cheeks stiffened, "it will interest yuh to know there ain't ever been a law officer inside Santa Rosa for five years."

"I would say," mused Yount, "the law officers was discreet."

"Some have tried to get in," droned Wallen. "Them fellows never repeated the same fatal mistake. Santa Rosa takes care of itself."

"Santa Rosa—which is Jake Wallen," said Yount.

"I see you are a man o' judgment. Have another drink."

Yount bowed and tossed down the liquor. Very gravely he wiped his lips and turned for the door. "Believe I'll turn in." And then, as an apparent and casual after-thought, he added, "I expect to ride out and see the country tomorrow."

He went back to his room and settled down in a chair. From his pocket he drew a pair of steel-rimmed glasses; out of the saddlebags he took a Bible scarred with travel and usage. And for a half hour this quiet man with the carriage of a cavalry officer bowed his head over the fine print. Then he went to bed.

Five minutes later, Wallen's henchman left the adjoining room and hurried back to the saloon to make his report. "He didn't talk to himself, didn't write and didn't make but one funny play," said the man to Wallen.

"What was that?" demanded Wallen.

"He read a Bible fer half an hour."

Wallen chewed at the end of his cigar a long while. "He's a mite soft that-away. He staked Bill at roulette an' he give the barber a toy donkey fer his kid. I reckon he buys beef. Tomorrow he aims to ride out and have a look. He give me notice, which means he's nobody's fool, and that he knows dam' well who can put him in touch with said beef.—Wink!"

The snooper hurried over.

"Ride to the Lizard," grunted Wallen. "Say a man'll be along the road tomorra."

## II

**I**T WAS after breakfast, and Yount was in the stable saddling when young Bill walked through the wide driveway with a

small and cheerful grin on his lean cheeks. He punched back the brim of his hat and brought a roll of bills from his pocket.

"I was lookin' for you," he drawled. "I busted that outfit last night. Won a hundred dollars. Here's your stake and the extra fifty. I'm han'somely obliged, and if there's anything I can ever do for you, Bill Bent's my name; and I'll be around Santa Rosa durin' the next few days."

Yount accepted the money. "Bein' flush, you figger Crosskeys don't need your services any more, uh?"

"No-o," reflected Bill, "I guess I'll tag along with the outfit for a spell. Leastwise, until I find a place where money grows on bushes."

Yount swung to the saddle. "There may be more profit left for you in that roulette rig," he suggested.

"Not for me," stated Bill bluntly. "I ain't foolish and I'm hangin' on to every doggone nickel. Say, I'd cut a man's throat for a dollar!—But I'm under obligation to you, friend."

"None whatsoever," said Yount. "I always like to back a good man." And with that he rode out of Santa Rosa, eastward into the fresh glare of the morning's sun.

The town was dead, and excepting young Bill, who strolled toward the hotel, nobody appeared on the street. But Yount knew that his departure was observed and he also knew, before he had gone far, that Wallen still kept him covered. Yonder to the left a mile or more, a horseman cut out of an arroyo and jogged parallel to the trail. In time this individual veered away, and presently he dipped from sight. Yount's blue eyes narrowed.

"Crookedness," he murmured. "Deception, evil, lust and violence. Wallen's been teachin' 'em that for ten years. Warpin' everybody to his own uses. Them that don't warp either die or depart. And now, needin' fresh hands, he works on this Bill Bent, caterin' to him, danglin' bait, lettin' him win a hundred dollars from a crooked

rig just to make the lad feel good. It's like a plague on the land."

Off to the southwest lay a puff of dust against the horizon, low and travelling. Yount studied it for a half hour and nodded slowly.

"Two can dangle bait. I dangled mine in front of Wallen and over there comes an answer. My bet is that it's the Lizard. Another cat'spaw. Maybe this Lizard thinks he's the big noise around Santa Rosa, maybe he thinks he runs the district. But he don't. Wallen does. It's Wallen we've got to buck before the sun goes down this night."

Momentarily, the rider off to the left popped up to view, cantered a few hundred yards and again vanished. Yount rode straight along the trail, waiting for his patient plans to mature. Santa Rosa was a dim outline behind, huddling miserably beneath the fury of a brazen, pitiless sun. Ahead of him many miles stretched a barrier of low hills, promising a shelter that didn't exist in their barren slopes; and to the right the dust ball gathered and grew. It passed rapidly from south to east and then was directly to Yount's front, completely subsiding. Three men, standing across the trail and waiting for him. In time he was near enough to see that the center figure rose considerably above the others and over the narrowing interval he had his first sight of the Lizard.

**H**E NEW the man immediately from the broadcast description. A floppy hat, held by a chin strap, shaded features that were almost olive; and the first detail Yount picked up was the jagged angry scar that cut a half circle around the base of the man's throat. He was an impatient creature, this Lizard, moving continually in the saddle, and the horse fiddling beneath him. There was a cruel cast to lip

and flaring nostril, and when Yount reined in a few yards distant he saw dull and muddy eyes lowering at him. The Lizard was a purely animal type, without imagination and without the capacity to feel remorse. Undoubtedly a terror, a vicious, unbridled killer. But only that. The Lizard possessed but a fragment of Jake Wallen's brain.

"Good day," said Yount, forgetting the two others after one glance.

"I hear you got business in the country," grunted the Lizard, too impatient to dally.

"Some," admitted Yount.

"Beef's what you want?" pressed the Lizard.

"That's my business."

"No questions asked. Beef on the hoof. Delivered any place within twenty miles o' Santa Rosa. Cash paid over Wallen's bar, right after yore riders take the stuff."

"No questions asked," assented Yount, "providin' it's beef from across the river. Any animal from the American side has got to have a vent brand and a bill of sale. I'm not takin' rustled Texas cattle. Don't want any trouble from the authorities. Square deal. Immaterial to me how you get it. If it's rustled from Mexico, all right. If it comes from this side it's got to be legal."

"I'll take care o' that," was the Lizard's surly retort. "What price?"

"Depends on the stuff you bring me. When I see it, I'll dicker."

"Fair enough. Three nights from now, three miles north of this exact spot."

"Four nights," qualified Yount. "I've got to collect a trail crew. And not around here. I'll take over your stuff twenty miles north of the point where this trail hits the base of those mountains yonder."

"By God, yo're particular!" exclaimed the Lizard.

"You bet I am. This mess of cattle goes on a long drive, and I don't propose to start too close to the border line. Mexicans have a habit of strikin' back, you know."

"I agree to it," said the Lizard, and seemed to consider the interview finished.

His grip on the reins tightened, and he was about to swing off, when Yount suddenly stopped him.

"Wait a minute, friend. I don't know you."

"The hell yuh don't!" growled the Lizard. "Yuh know exactly who I am. Everybody knows who I am!"

"Oh, I've heard about you, and I've read a general description of you; but I don't propose to go off half cocked on this deal. There's tricks to all trades. You may be only the livin' image of the Lizard for all I know. Maybe fram'in' me for a fine trap."

"So? Now what you want, my birth certificate? I'd flash that for yuh if I knowed where I was born an' who my paw was—which I don't. I'm gettin' some aggravated with this palaver."

"Nevertheless," Yount insisted, "I'm a cautious man. I know Wallen, but I don't know you. Wallen's word is ample with me. If he says you're the man I'm lookin' for, well and good."

He felt the flare and impact of the outlaw's eyes. This moment held danger. Suspicion raced across the man's face, and his thin lips pressed to a mere line. The animal was cropping out in him, the predatory instinct to draw away and strike without asking further questions. Yount held himself absolutely still, hands folded across the pommel, meeting the Lizard's half-lidded stare evenly. Of a sudden, the outlaw shrugged his shoulders.

"All right. I'll tend to that. Be in Santa Rosa sometime this afternoon." And grunting at the other two, he whirled and galloped back to the southeast.

Yount reined around and walked his pony homeward, drawing a great sigh.

"So far, so good. Cards are fallin' right. All a man can do in a case like this is use the best of his judgment. Right up to the showdown. And when the showdown comes and the time for judgment is done with, there's nothing left but luck and the help of God. Which I will need before shadows fall tonight!"

Between his position and the distant Santa Rosa, there was the abrupt appearance of a moving object. Yount looked at his watch, fine lines of thought springing up at the corners of his eyes.

"That's the eleven o'clock stage, which I figured on," he said to himself. "It'll be in Irique at one—just time enough. And now, if things fall right——"

He threw away the half smoked portion of his cigar and took another. When the stage had become visible he pulled from his pocket an inch-long section of white chalk and adjusted it between thumb and forefinger of his right hand. A flash of excitement crossed the steady cheeks.

"If there's passengers, this is going to be difficult——" Then he drew slightly off the road, waited until the rapidly travelling team was well down upon him, and lifted an arm in signal. The driver, sitting alone on the seat, hauled back and stepped on the brake block, and the light carry-all skewed across the shifting sand.

"What the hell?" challenged the driver, reaching for his plug tobacco.



"Never like to stop a stage," apologized Yount affably. He drew beside the outfit and rested his right hand against the seat panel, in the manner of a man wishing to ease his weight. "A gent's motives might get misjudged and start the lead a-flyin'. But I ain't got a match to my name, and it's a long ride without a smoke."

"Uhuh," grunted the driver and searched himself. "Yeah, here's a couple. Hardly need a match on a day sech as this be. Could scorch asbestos up here where I'm a-sittin'."

Yount accepted the matches politely, and started to say something else; but the driver had gathered up the ribbons and kicked off the brake. "Got no time to

palaver," said he. "I'm due at Irique in one hour and thirty minutes."

The stage careened away, bearing upon one seat panel the lightly written "Y" that Yount had inscribed while his hand rested there. He tossed the chalk behind a clump of sage and proceeded at the same idle gait.

"That's done, and there ain't much left now but to wait—which is the hardest of all."

**D**INNER was over when he reached Santa Rosa and put up his horse. The hotel man, breaking a rule, offered to put something on the table for him, but Yount declined.

"A man's got to work to eat, and I'm a little too heated for provender. What I need is somethin' cold out of a bottle."

"Ridin' in the full o' the sun would natcherly incline a man to heat," murmured Lafayette Lane. "Folks around here most usually do their ridin' at night."

"Might be a wise idea," drawled Yount.

"That's accordin'," was the hotel man's cryptic answer, and then he busied himself at the key rack, once more giving the impression that he thought he had spoken too freely.

Yount went up to wash, and then headed for the saloon. There, Jack Wallen, playing solitaire at a table, rose and circled the bar.

"Inclined to be warm," he suggested.

"May turn out that way."

"Have a drink on the house—on old Jake Wallen." And the saloon man's meaty face bent forward while Yount took his portion and downed it.

"For a mature man," reflected Wallen, "you drink like a sparrow. Have another."

"Thanks, no. Fatal for a Northern fellow to drink heavy down here in the south."

All at once Wallen was aflame with renewed suspicion. "Northern, huh? Since when has northern folks took to drawlin' their words like you do?"

"The North," said Yount calmly, "was

settled by gentlemen from the South. I was born in Louisiana, myself. But when we fellers from the south winter five-six seasons up there, we call ourselves Northerners. I'm proud to know my drawl remains. I'd hate to lose it."

Wallen poured himself a jot and grimly drank. "By God, man, you had me ready to call the dogs jest then! I'm a man that believes nothin'. Not even if it's so. I mistrust you, and I have ever since yuh set foot in this town. And I'll continue to do same after yo're gone. But I'll play yore game—until I change my mind."

"I don't blame you," reflected Yount, lighting another cigar. The blue eyes fixed themselves critically on the fingers holding the match, as if watching for a sign of unsteadiness. "Not at all. I'm a hard fellow to satisfy myself. For instance—I met a gentleman on the trail this mornin'."

"Thought you might," rumbled Wallen. "It was wise of yuh to mention yore little pasear to me."

"I know who runs this district," agreed Yount.

"You bet. Me—old Jake Wallen. But that fella you was speaking of?"

"He asked some questions concernin' beef," drawled Yount. "Seemed interested. But maybe he's a gent known as the Lizard, and maybe he ain't. I am taking no chances."

"What about it?" demanded Wallen, openly puzzled.

"We made a dicker, as far as beef's concerned," proceeded Yount idly. "But I'm not dealin' with him until you point him out to me and personally name him. It's not my habit to throw money on strangers. I have cut my eye teeth on skin games."

"Meanin' I got to introduce you to the Lizard?"

"Just so," approved Yount. "And I believe I will go seat myself somewhere and wait for a breath of air."

He turned, deliberately presenting his back to the saloon man, and strolled over the room. Passing through the doors, he

had a moment's side glance of Wallen's face set toward him, still a little puzzled; for all the creature's fleshiness he was strangely cat-like, forever waiting and ready to spring. In the street, Yount found sweat beading up on his forehead, not from heat but from the highly keyed situation he had just passed through. On the hotel porch he took to a chair, tilting it against the wall and sighing vastly.

"And *that's* done," he told himself. "Had to stir his suspicions again, which was bad but couldn't be helped. Let him try to think it out. He can't find a flimsy point where he might poke his pryin' finger through and nail me. He wants the money I can throw him for that beef, and it'll sway his ordinary judgment, which would be to stop debatin' and let the hounds loose. He'll play my game, the Lord willin', until sundown. After that —"

Sundown. To this calm, grave man who sat so quietly on the porch it seemed an eternity removed. Waiting was always the hardest. The heat streamed through Santa Rosa in thickening waves; there was a shimmering cushion of it along the tops of the buildings, and occasionally some board or joint of the hotel cracked like a whip. One hour, and then another, the bake-oven temperature intensifying as the porous earth was at last saturated with the bombarding rays of sun and began sending them back. Two o'clock. Three; and then four. After that time seemed to halt, and all things were held in a droning suspense. It appeared to Yount that even the town's sullen vigilance had been smothered. Nobody moved in the open.

He rose and went in to draw himself a drink of flat and tepid water from the lobby jar. Lafayette Lane was stretched full length on a bench, in a comatose state that was neither sleeping nor waking. Go-

ing on back into the dining room, he found the girl sitting at the long table, head pillowed forward on her arms. She lifted it swiftly and Yount saw that she had been recently crying, a fact that both embarrassed and saddened him.

"I wonder, ma'm, if you can get me a lemon so I can strip it into that water out front?"

"I'll make you a lemonade in the kitchen. Sit down."

"Now don't bother about that——"

"No bother," said she cheerfully, and disappeared.

Yount took a seat. If anything, it was a degree cooler in here, and for that he was grateful.

"But it's hard work for her," he told himself. "All day long, workin' like a beaver. Can't blame this Bill for bein' upset. It's easy to talk about honesty—sometimes it's hard to practise it."

The girl returned with his lemonade and watched him drink.

"Bill told me about your grubstaking him last night," said she, presently. "I want to thank you—for being kind. People around here are not always kind."

"Hope he uses the money profitably."

"He—he gave it to me to save," she murmured.

"Level head on him, that boy," applauded Yount.

"Yes." There was a sharp intake of breath. "When they leave him alone!"

She said something else, but suddenly Yount's ears were tuned to a sound on the street. He sat as still as carved marble, hearing men pass into town. That would be the Lizard and his followers arriving. Very carefully, he deposited the glass on the table.

"I wish we were in any other town in the world but this one!" she was saying. "I know what—what they are trying to get Bill to do. He wouldn't listen to them if it wasn't for thinking of me."

"Folks have got to fight it out," mused Yount, and a grave, fatherly tone came into his words. "The world is full of fight-



in' and sorrow. We can't help that. But don't you worry. This will wash out. What's right is right and will prevail, though it takes a thousand years. Don't you worry."

"A thousand years won't help Bill, Mr. Yount!"

He had risen and turned to the lobby. "Maybe sooner," was his soft murmur.

Instead of going to the porch, he sat in the lobby, a dry cigar clenched between his teeth. Through a side window he saw three horses nosed against the saloon hitching rack, and three men at that moment going into the place. A perceptible line of worry creased Yount's brow.

"Where's the rest of his bunch?" he asked himself. "Waitin' outside o' town, or left behind?"

If the others were waiting somewhere beyond the end of the straggling street, he knew his chances were desperately slim. In any event, the showdown was not far off; and at the thought of it the pressure of his jaws settled more harshly against the cigar and there was a flare of deeper blue in the drill-straight eyes. Showdown, and the swirling smash and violence of guns aflame!

He saw Wink, the snooper, pop out of the saloon and come rapidly toward the hotel. Presently the man stood in the doorway and puckered his face significantly.

"Yuh will find somethin' o' interest at Wallen's," he muttered and veered away. Lafayette Lane rose up from the bench.

"What the hell was that?" he grunted.

"Messenger from the powers that be," drawled Yount.

Lane walked to the water jar, drank, and went behind the counter. When Yount finally rose and aimed for the street, Lane's curiously metallic reply followed him.

"Don't take no wooden money!"

### III

WHEN Yount arrived at the saloon, a sort of sluggish liveliness animated the stale atmosphere. Wallen was behind

the bar, draped against it. The Lizard and his two followers were drinking as though possessed with an unquenchable thirst. The same slack and sullen characters sat at the tables, doing nothing, saying nothing. It was as though they had never moved from their places since Yount had ridden into town. He walked forward.

"This the man?" asked Wallen, stabbing a thumb at the Lizard.

"That's him."

"Then he's the fellow you want," stated Wallen heavily.

"Damnation," growled the Lizard. "Here I makes the blisterin' trip acrost country jest for this piece of foolishness. Who in the hell did you think I was?—I'm the Lizard!"

"Then it's settled," drawled Yount. "My mind's satisfied. Sorry for the extra trip, but there's considerable money in it for all of us."

"Make your arrangements now," ordered Wallen.

"Already made," broke in the Lizard. "The boys are headed south this minute. I sent 'em ahead, and I'll catch up in the cool of the evenin'."

"Better get on the trail," said Wallen, scowling.

"I'm eatin' a hotel meal tonight. I'm tired of beans and canned tomatoes. It ain't you, Wallen, that has to go out and eat dust. Let me do this my own way. I——"

There was a sudden clatter out in the street.

"What's that?" snapped Wallen, and threw his big body around the end of the bar with an astonishing speed. His move roused the whole place to an electric tensity. Men followed him through the doors, Yount idling after, as grave as a priest at prayer. A flat bed wagon with a platform built upon it, came rattling through the street, two men in it. The driver was young and sad-faced, and worthy of no particular notice. But the other, draped head and foot in a flowing linen dust coat, made a striking figure. He

wore a thirty dollar hat edged with snake skin, and diamonds flashed on his fingers. Beneath the shade of the hat were features thin and haughty, a Buffalo Bill goatee, and raking, glittering eyes. The stamp of his profession was all over him, and if it had not been, the lettering along the wagon box would have soon established it:

YELLOWSTONE JACK—WORLD'S GREATEST NATURAL HEALER AND BANJO ARTIST. ORIGINAL DISCOVERER OF THE INDIAN SAGA HERB, RESTORER OF THE HUMAN RACE, BOON TO SUFFERING MANKIND, INFALLIBLE CURE FOR EVERY ORGANIC AILMENT KNOWN. HERE TONIGHT—TONIGHT—TONIGHT!!!

The wagon veered in until it stood before the saloon; the driver halted with a slash of his whip, looking neither to right nor left. Yellowstone Jack rose in his seat and bowed with a wide sweep of his hat.

"Gentlemen, I bid you good day," he said in a loud voice. "I have come to entertain your town, to heal it and to leave it rejoicing. Tonight, the gallant little city of Santa Rosa shall be given a full and continuous program, educational, entertaining, diverting and valuable. Tonight—at seven, at seven, at seven!"

Then, having finished his lecture, he turned to the driver. "Get those horses into the stable and be careful about watering them. Don't sit there and dream."

The driver obeyed meekly. Yellowstone Jack dropped from the seat, and went around to the back end of the wagon where two doors, padlocked, let into the compartment between wagon bed and platform top. Evidently it was the medicine man's supply chest and catch-all, for after unlocking it he drew out a banjo, a valise, a torch stand and a box of cigars. Snapping the padlock again, he laid all these things down upon the platform and turned to the group.

"By gad, I never toured this circuit in such hot weather before! Gentlemen, join me in a drink."

Wallen had not moved an inch from his

position against the outer saloon wall. His pale, probing eyes kept striking at Yellowstone Jack, at the driver, at the wagon and its details; and he had his head canted as if better to catch some betraying sound in the medicine man's extravagant speech. Yount, apparently interested in the new arrival, saw how the saloonman's great body stiffened and his repulsive jaws ground together. Yount felt that morosely suspicious inspection turned on him and as he felt it, he chuckled and spoke to the Lizard.

"It's been some time since I last saw the old low pitch game. Guess it is one way of makin' a living, but this sun's pretty hot to be standin' under. Believe I'll hunt shade."

Yellowstone Jack entered the saloon, drawing the crowd with him. Wallen ducked his head at Wink, saying, "You git behind the bar and serve up. I'm goin' for a shave."

YOUNT'S ever tightening nerves relaxed a trifle as he saw the saloon man swing into the barber shop. The game was being played out, the cards falling in due turn. It would only be a few minutes now, but the weight of the world seemed to press down upon them. He strolled toward the hotel again, catching sight of Wallen sinking into the barber's chair as he passed by. On the porch he hesitated, seeming to debate with himself. The sun had tipped well to the west, and according to his watch it was five-thirty.

Lafayette Lane appeared on the porch to look at the medicine man's wagon, and he suddenly grew rigid at sight of Yount's expression. The grave stranger was staring at him, jowls like iron and a deep blue flame burning out of his eyes. The hotel man had seen that expression before in his long life and he knew what it meant. It was the mark and signal of death—it warned of an instinct to kill, rising up like a storm, beating back every doubt, every cautious hope for life, every weakness. Whatever Lafayette Lane's original

ideas had been concerning his guest, he comprehended the truth now. It could not be mistaken; and so, being wise, he let his hands stay beside him and half in a whisper declared himself.

"I'm out o' this, captain. Neither fer yuh nor against yuh. Consider this door empty and consider that nobody will shoot yuh from this direction. God be with yuh, but I'm afraid yo're lost!"

Yount nodded and slowly pivoted on his heels, all muscles like woven wire and a cold stream pouring down his spine, blocking his nerves. The street stretched in front of him. Alley mouth, door and window all met his questing eyes. Santa Rosa was before him and nothing but the hotel and the open desert behind. That way he was safe, unless some unsuspected henchman of Wallen's lay hidden in the vacant house across the street. But he was as safe as he ever would be, as safe as any man could be who in another swing of the pendulum would be looking at death. All action would be along the narrow strip bounded by the stores, the stable, the saloon, the bank.

A man on a horse turned around the bank at the far end of the street, for an instant upsetting all Yount's fixed ideas. Young Bill Bent's lean face looked down the interval, then horse and man cut diagonally across to the stable and disappeared inside.

"Keep out of this, you young fool!" thought Yount, and then took two steps forward on the porch.

The driver of the medicine wagon came from the stable and stopped to roll a cigarette. Yount's arm rose a trifle and the palm of his hand made a slight pushing gesture. The driver casually turned until he had his back to the stable wall and commanded the distant angle of the street.



He licked his cigarette thoughtfully, head bobbing. The hotel keeper, still posted in the doorway, breathed with difficulty.

Light steps tapped across the lobby, and the girl's voice rose, to be cut gruffly short by Lane's muttered, "Stay back!—Hell's goin' to open up!"

Then Yount had gone down the porch steps and was standing there; the Lizard was coming from the saloon alone, coming in the direction of the hotel.

Yellowstone Jack stepped out directly after and strode to his wagon. He paused by the rear of the vehicle, removing the linen duster and rolling it into a bundle. The goatee lifted, and in that single instant he stared directly at Yount. Something passed between. Yellowstone Jack unlocked the doors of the wagon compartment and held them half open, still dallying. He seemed to be waiting for something; and the driver by the stable tossed away his cigarette with a short, nervous gesture.

The Lizard had paused to look into the barber shop, and Lafayette Lane gripped the sill of the hotel door and groaned, "Good God!" Yount wheeled deliberately, like a soldier on the parade ground, and left the board walk, placing himself nearer the center of the dusty thoroughfare. The Lizard started on, and then, seeing Yount in the full of the sun, stopped again with a sudden jerk of his black cheeks.

At that moment Yount's level tones cut across the arid drone of Santa Rosa; laconic, without emotion.

"In the name of Texas, I want you!"

In the long hours of reflection by trail fire and lamp light, Yount had pictured this scene as it now came to pass. There was no doubt in his mind as to what answer either Santa Rosa or the Lizard would make to him. Compromise or surrender—never. Yet even now, with no hope of peace, he was poised motionless, both palms gripping the coat lapels and pulling them away from his chest. By the saloon front Yellowstone Jack flung open the little doors of the wagon's end and whirled aside, sweeping a gun from his pocket at

the very moment a pair of men slid from the wagon compartment, ranged beside him, and lifted their weapons against the entrance to Wallen's place.

The Lizard felt, rather than saw, what happened behind. His swart face shifted grotesquely, the mark of the beast was upon him; he swayed, cursed with all the pent up and accumulated savagery of an unbridled career, and he sent his arm streaking for the gun at his hip. Yount, standing like a statue in the shifting sand, slid his palm across his chest and down to his left armpit. The blast of bullets shuddered through Santa Rosa; the Lizard rocked on his bootheels, his muddy orbs opening wide in that devastating fright which comes to a man who suddenly realizes that his life is pulsing away. He looked down at the gun, desperately trying to lift the sagging muzzle, trying to force the numbing fingers to move again; and thus for an interval he remained stupidly quiescent. The high scream of a woman came knife-like out of the hotel; and in instant response, it seemed, young Bill Bent threw himself from the mouth of the stable, to be stopped in his tracks by the sad-eyed driver of the medicine wagon. Then the Lizard, trembling at every joint, fell to the sidewalk. He turned his head to obey a last primitive instinct; and so, staring at Yount, he died there in the sullen heat.

**T**HE saloon was a-riot with trampling men. Yellowstone Jack and his partners opened up, the triple roar rocketing madly into the oppressive afternoon, slugs crackling through the tinder dry boards, shattering the windows, ripping along the saloon floor. Inside the saloon a man shrilled his agony; doors slammed at the back, and Yount, watching and listening for every shift of this mad tide, pivoted again and faced an alley at exactly the moment when a Wallen partisan came into it, headlong and awkward. The fellow saw Yount, clawed at his waist, and stumbled to a stop, never even lifting his revolver.

Yount's bullet sent him down squirming. Others behind him flinched away from the alley; one man crossed its rear mouth in a single hurdle and gained the protection of the hotel. Immediately, Yount retreated to protect his back, at the same time sending a sharp command over to the sad-eyed driver by the stable.

"Dewey, never mind that boy! He's all right! Watch the far end of the street—by the bank! They're comin' around." Swinging, he waited for the fellow who had gone behind the hotel. A question kept drumming on his mind: what had happened to Wallen—what was going on in the barbershop just now? Wallen was the heart and brains and soul of this evil town, a shifty enemy, a man of unexpected action. —Yount threw himself forward and raked the corner of the hotel, ran on and came upon Wink, the snooper, whose frame sagged against the side wall of the building, blood filling one sleeve.

"Done—done," gasped Wink. "I done shot my bolt. Lemme alone!"

Yount seized the fellow's gun and galloped back to the center of the street.

"What's happened to Wallen?" he muttered. But he checked the impulse to close in and find out. This was his proper place for a few more heavy moments—his point of observation. The outlaw crew was splitting into fragments, and he dared not leave this flank unprotected while his three partners blocked the saloon.

Dewey, the sad-eyed driver, sprang into rapid action, shaving the bank corners with a fast fire. Just behind and above him a second story window pane shattered and a rifle barrel bore down.

Yount cried, "Watch out!" and lifted his revolver, but at this juncture young Bill Bent ran behind Dewey and poured the window full of lead. The rifle fell on through the sash and struck the ground. Bill Bent emitted a high rebel yell and ran straight for the bank, Dewey breaking into a pumping stride and following. The focus of this hot battle had abruptly shifted to the far end of town. Yount, feeling the

encounter slacken, jumped forward and motioned to Yellowstone Jack.

"Come with me!" he yelled. "You two boys stay planted."

He threw his body into the saloon's riddled doors, spending the last shot out of his original revolver as he did so. But Wallen's was the tenement of only two people now, one silent figure under a poker table and a cowering Mexican whose arms stretched above him. Yellowstone Jack ran over to search the Mexican, while Yount bent down and retrieved a fallen gun. He snapped the cylinder open, found four cartridges left in it, and hurried straight on to an open back door. Yellowstone Jack warned him crisply.

"Watch out there, Bill! Yo're takin' too damn many chances! Wait for me!"

Yount made a broad jump through the door. To the left was nothing. To right—in the direction of the bank—a group huddled against a wall and fired spasmodically through an alley, replying to the fire of young Bill Bent and Dewey the ex-driver. Evidently these henchmen of Wallen's had figured to cut around the bank and enfilade the street, but the raking lead from beyond had halted their advance.

"Now we've got them!" said Yount very softly. "I'll offer them a chance." And he lifted a sharp, chilling command. "Pitch up—hands high! You're boxed! Flatten out right where you stand, or we'll riddle you! Pitch up!"

Bill Bent's rebel yell sailed over the bank exultantly. The Santa Rosa adherent started to swing back, but there was confusion among them. The will to fight had been pinched out by the swiftness and competence of Yount's attack. Hands rose tentatively, and then the cool, tuneless voice of Wallen's gambler, carried down to Yount.



"You win, friend. We're layin' down our cards."

"Drop all guns where you stand," ordered Yount, together with Yellowstone Jack, closing in upon them. "Good enough. Crooked face, don't get married to that weapon—drop it!—Now file through the alley to the street and meet those boys that want to see you so bad. Dewey—hold your shots, they're comin'!"

He pushed the party into the street, and swung them on until they reached the front of the saloon. There, under the survey of all Yount's men, Wallen's motley band stood morosely.

"There's more of you some place," challenged Yount. "I don't propose to go look for 'em, and I don't propose to be potted from any windows. I want a roundup. You there, card player, sing out and call 'em in! Where's Wallen?"

The barber's voice issued thinly from his shop. "Come here and git him! I'm about to cut his dam' throat."

Yount ran over and ducked into the place, to find a scene such as Santa Rosa had never before witnessed and probably never would again. Wallen was stretched full length in the barber's chair, his face half lathered and half shaven. His eyes were closed, and the meaty cheeks drained of ordinary color. The barber stood over him, with the edge of his razor resting like a feather against Wallen's throat.

"Take him offen me," whispered Wallen, not daring to move a muscle.

The barber's nerves were about ready to jangle on him. He had made his great effort, had summoned all the doubtful courage in him to do this one chore. And now, shaking like a leaf, he pulled the razor away and let Yount marshal Wallen out of the chair. The barber tried to close the razor but he came so near cutting himself with it that he dropped it to the floor and steadied his body against the chair.

"When I heard you challenge the Lizard," he murmured weakly, "I knowed then what was up. I figgered yuh didn't

have a Chinaman's chance, and I said to myself, 'he's a dead man unless he gets help.' So I jest dropped the edge o' my blade on Wallen's neck and kept him out of the play."

"I draw the line on steel," said Wallen, rubbing his Adam's apple. "Yuh dam' near sliced my head off. This is one bad day for you! I'll hunt you down like a rabbit!"

"I had oughta done it," said the barber as though talking to himself. "I had oughta cut him, after he took that toy bank away from me. That was fer my kid."

Yount motioned for Wallen to turn. He slipped the saloon keeper's gun free and threw it on the floor.

"Go out and join the prayer circle," he ordered. In the street again, he found the crowd increased. Lining them all against the saloon front, he called for young Bill Bent to help him. "I am taking Wallen and all men associated with Wallen back to Irique with me. There's warrants for most of 'em waiting there. You pick the sheep from the goats—and if there's anybody that ought to be here that you don't see, tell me and I'll rip this town apart with a crowbar."

"You're leavin' it to me to pass judgment?" asked young Bill doubtfully.

"I am. You took a hand, now play it."

"All right," agreed Bill and pointed his fingers along the line. "You—and you—get back to your chores. You——"

**Y**OUNT went down to the bank. The gentleman of the seersucker suit stood behind his grille with a sawed-off shotgun pointed on the door and a haggard look on his gray face.

"Put it aside," said Yount, and saw the sweep of relief come over the man's countenance. "About that ten-thousand-dollar draft on Austin. Forget it. It was a part of my plan to convince Wallen that I was a cattle buyer."

"You forged the draft?" challenged the banker.

"No," drawled Yount. "The Cattlemen's Association furnished that money to the Austin bank for my purpose; but the draft, now that the shootin's over, won't be honored. So forget it. And here's another dollar. I want a new toy bank.—Here's a twenty-dollar bill, too. Give me four five-dollar gold pieces."

The banker consummated the transactions and watched Yount slip the gold pieces one by one into the iron donkey. "Must think a lot of the barber's kid," he remarked.

"The barber's younker," mused Yount, "made a man out of the barber."

"Well, you sure put the skids under Santa Rosa."

"Better to say," reflected Yount, "that I removed some of the skids which were sendin' Santa Rosa down the greased chute to hell. I will bid you good-by!"

He went back to the crowd. The sun was dipping over the western rim, and a kind of desolate solitude invaded Santa Rosa. Bill Bent had cut out the members of the wild bunch and herded them apart where they huddled, jaded and somber, around the massive figure of Jake Wallen.

"Get your horses," said Yount. "We ride." And then he walked over to where the barber stood. "This may or may not be a safe place for you from now on, my friend. You have done me a service, and I won't leave you behind if it's in your mind to pull stakes. Tell me what you want to do."

"I'm stayin'," muttered the barber. "I ain't afraid of anything that comes along—now. But there's one favor I'd like to ask."

"Name it."

The barber shifted, a little embarrassed. "I'd like to have Wallen's gun to hang up in my shop. You see, when my kid grows up, I sorta want him to know that his dad did somethin' he could be proud of. My kid's goin' to be a great man."

Yount's blue eyes gleamed with strange emotion. "Take it and God bless you!" he

murmured. "And here's a present for that boy of yours. Here's another bank. And when I get to Irique I shall take all my men and walk into the saloon there and lift a glass—to your boy. May he stand head and shoulders to this crooked weary world, my friend!"

He pivoted sharply, not wishing to see the barber's face just then. The horses were out and men swinging up. Yellowstone Jack was tying the reins of the prisoners and running a lariat through each stirrup.

"When that stage got to Irique I had my eyes peeled," he said to Yount. "For a minute I couldn't tell whether that chalk mark was a Y or an N, but I judged it to mean 'yes' and so I started. The boys in that compartment dam' near died o' suffocation. And I'll be mighty pleased to shave off these whiskers and have my hair trimmed after four months. My wife don't like whiskers. Well, we're ready. How about the dead ones?"

"Santa Rosa," replied Yount, repeating an old, grim phrase, "buries its own dead. We'll let it stand like that. Well, catch up, and lead off. It's a long way to go."

The column moved sluggishly eastward down the street. But Yount tarried a moment longer, lost in his own thoughts. Young Bill Bent was by the hotel porch with the girl, and she had one white hand gripped around his arm and was looking up with a hungry pride. He led his horse over and stopped.

"Shooting's done, Bill, and the job's over. But what made you horn in when you didn't have to?"

"We-ell, I was sorta under an obligation to you," muttered Bill.

"Not that much of an obligation."

"Maybe not." Young Bill drew a great breath. "I had to take some sort of a stand, didn't I? When the shootin' started I couldn't stay on the sidelines. It was one side or another. Maybe I have been a blamed fool, but somethin' sort of snapped when the bullets began to plow your way. Maybe I'm crazy, but I just pitched in. Didn't exactly make any decision—just started shootin'."

"Good boy," mused Yount. "If a man is straight, he can't go crooked. Now what?"

"We're going to get married and go out to the Crosskeys," said the girl. "There's an extra house we can use."

Suddenly she ran off the walk and came up to Yount. Her sturdy little arms swept around his neck and she kissed him, the hint of a sob in her throat.

"Thank you—thank you! There will never be a day when we won't think of you!" she whispered.

Yount turned his head and stared long at the golden blaze on the western line. When he looked back, the blue of his eyes had deepened and there were lines around his mouth.

"Right will prevail, though it takes a thousand years," he muttered. "You are a pair of lucky young kids. Remember that. Remember as well, that for many of us the trail is long and lonely. But I've got my reward. I can travel in peace now, knowin' you have won through.—God bless you!"

Mounting then, he rode off.

The hotel man, still posted in the lobby door, lifted a broad palm and said, "So-long, Captain! You have ruined my business; but come again!—Come again and the place is yours."

Yount nodded.

Santa Rosa watched him go, a straight soldierly figure whose fine features and quiet, grave eyes were fixed ahead of him along the desert trail. Not once did he look back.



# The Last Adventure

Upon burying at sea, Lat. 55-42 S., Long. 73-15, W., Hjalmer Bjornsen, Sailmaker of the three-masted barque "Queen of Scots". Dec. 30, 1908.

by  
Captain L. D.  
Williams

OLD SAILS is dead—nigh on to sixty year  
He's roved God's boundless flood;  
Sixty year as boy and man;  
With the salt o' the sea in his blood.

But now he lies in a canvas sheath  
On a plank by the mizzen shrouds,  
While overhead in the wintry sky  
Scud sable funeral clouds.

The Old Man orders the heads'l's backed,  
The Mate fires the signal gun;  
The foremast hands bare shaggy heads,  
And salute him, one by one.

The Skipper then from the poop descends,  
And quotes from the Holy Screed;  
The plank is tipped—and Sails is gone  
To the fate the Sea decreed.

## L'Envoi

Oh, our Father who art in Heaven,  
Grant us all when the soul wins free:  
A resting place like Old Sails got,  
On the bosom of his first love—the Sea.



*It Was Like That in the  
Legion — Blood and  
Sand and Arabs  
— Then More  
of the Same*



## C'EST LA LÉGION

By WALTER LINDSAY STEWART

THE sun beat down upon the desert with the power of a blowtorch, sending waves of heat marching across the sands in blinding array. It was the fierce sun of Africa, pitiless and consuming. The only sound that broke the awful stillness was the muffled tramp of heavy boots, as a column composed of two companies of the French Foreign Legion dragged its weary length from the top of one sand hill to the top of the next. Now and then a curse broke from a parched throat, and here and there a plodding figure went to its knees. But always it staggered up and reeled on again, for when the Legion marches in hostile territory there are no stragglers.

It is not pleasant to die impaled upon the sharpened stump of a palm while the sun beats down upon eyes from which the lids have been skilfully torn. In every barrack room from Tonquin to Morocco are pictures that cheerfully display the dismembered corpses of Legionnaires who have strayed. The foes of *Madame La République* are sportsmen in whom the milk of human kindness has permanently soured,

and the men of the Legion march compactly.

Legionnaire Colin MacNair, late of the Black Watch, leaned into the straps of his hundred pound pack, and threw one weary foot in front of the other with maddening regularity. He closed his eyes against the glaring desert, and cursed the knife-thrust into the belly of Color-Sergeant Campbell that had sent him into headlong flight and service under the tri-color. He half opened his eyes and gazed again at the wide back of Legionnaire Hansen that swayed before him. It seemed to him that it had been swaying there throughout eternity.

The column was proceeding through rough and broken country, where ambush seemed to crouch behind every hill and gully. The scouts ranged as far afield as possible, but it was still a matter of chance.

Yet as old Le Cog, who had served in the Legion for eleven years, had muttered, "What will you have, my friend? *C'est la Légion.*"

"It's the Legion all right!" growled MacNair.

On rolled the column, picking the more

open spaces but never varying more than a couple of hundred yards from a line straight into the south. The men, in their heavy overcoats, were like huge, wet sponges, and their pack straps cut like hot wire. But on marched the Legion.

Suddenly, from behind the ridge to the left, came a scattering burst of rifle fire. An instant later the five men of the flank guard appeared against the hard blue of the sky line and headed for the column, running for their lives. Major Courbet's orders cracked like pistol shots, and the two companies, slipping from their packs with happy oaths, turned to face the hidden danger in two lines. The first line knelt, while those in the rear prepared to fire over their heads.

The running patrol had almost reached the waiting lines, when a howling wave of mounted tribesmen suddenly swept over the ridge, and thundered down upon them like a multi-colored avalanche. As they came on, they fired a scattering volley at the silent lines. Major Courbet, with the composure of a man who watches as the sea rolls in, watched the distance lessen between attackers and attacked.

Legionaire MacNair's eye gleamed along the barrel of his rifle. This was the only game that he loved, the game of war; and he almost smiled, despite his cracked lips, as he looked into the face of a white-burnoused Arab as it appeared over the front sight.

It was at this moment that the major made his move. The Lebel rifles crashed almost as one, and a sheet of bullets crashed into the forefront of the charge. MacNair's Arab disappeared from the saddle as if by magic, and the Scot shifted his sights to drive a bit of lead through the head of a huge negro with a shovel-bladed spear grasped tightly in his hand.

Horses crashed down, and riders spun from the saddles like stones from a sling. Wounded animals reared and screamed beneath cursing tribesmen who called shrilly upon the Prophet for aid and protection. Then a second volley ripped into the dis-

ordered ranks, and the rout was complete. The remnants of the attackers spurred away, drummed on by the steady independent fire of the Legion.

As they swept toward the skyline, MacNair brought down a gray stallion, and sent a bullet through the rider as that unfortunate rolled along the sand. In an instant every able bodied Arab had vanished, leaving only the dead, and those who groaned and screamed, and crawled in slow circles. The Legion paused to bury its few casualties, and then it moved off again into the south.

**I**T WAS not until the sun had dipped its lower edge beneath the horizon, that the head of the column broke from the range of low hills, and entered the plain in the center of which Fort Ras-el-Zorak sat glowering beneath a few discouraged palms. That night the two companies slept in the tiny oasis beneath the walls, and in the morning watched with snarling envy while the men they were relieving marched gaily off to the gilded pleasures of Sidi-bel-Abbes, where they might squander their earnings of a half-penny a day.

The relief entered the fort, and settled down to the mad monotony of a desert station. Days of burning heat, and nights of suffocation; the nameless and awful depression of the desert. Cooped within the furnace-like walls of Fort Ras-el-Zorak, the Legion sweltered. They cursed the heat in a dozen tongues, but not with the mad ferocity with which they vilified the soul of Sergeant-Major Lopez, if indeed that worthy had such a thing as a soul.

Lopez was undoubtedly the tip end of the tail of hell's most accursed dog, as old Le Cog had stated. Legionaire Ivan Rovinski objected violently to this, however, on the grounds that he had once owned a dog; and the argument as to the merits of the sergeant-major, when compared even to a most evil dog, grew so hot that Ivan made a frontal assault upon the veteran, who disposed of the Russian with

a neat kick that drove a good many of his teeth down his throat.

The feeling against the Spanish sergeant grew steadily, and the Englishman, Blake, formed a conspiracy which he called the Association for the Extermination of Ser-



geant-Major Lopez. The association was broken up one morning when Blake was placed against the south wall of the parade ground and shot. Thus went the only subject that had occupied the minds

of the men, and *le cafard*, the madness of the Legion, now became rampant.

One afternoon the Legionnaires lay panting on their beds in the oven-like barrack room. Private MacNair turned on his side, took a last puff on his vile Algerian cigarette, and snapped it toward an open window, in direct violation of rule and regulation. The butt struck the edge of the window, caromed off, and landed squarely on the naked belly of Legionnaire Koltz. The red hot tip nestled against his bare hide, and the German came to his feet with a startled yell, clawing frantically at his mid-section. A roar of laughter crashed through the room, for to the monotony-ridden men the incident was tremendously funny.

With a snarl Koltz rushed at the Scot, and tossed in a wild swing in the general direction of his head, but MacNair had spent the early part of his life on the Glasgow water-front, where life was far from gentle, and he was a past master at rough-and-tumble.

He slipped beneath Koltz's huge fist, ripped a sizzling left hook to the body, then smashed the same hand to the jaw. The German staggered back, and MacNair drove his right to the chin, with everything he had behind it. The blow did not land squarely, but Koltz reeled back over a cot,

and disappeared behind it. MacNair stepped around the foot of the bed to apply the finishing touches, but Koltz gathered his feet beneath him, and launched a terrific butt at his foe's stomach.

The Scotchman was taken completely by surprise, for his last blow should have ended all active resistance. He was just able to swerve his body from the path of the close-cropped head that came at him like a battering ram; but the German's shoulder smashed against his ribs and spun him to the floor with most of his wind out of him. He came to his feet in an instant, however, and Koltz bore down on him again. The German flung himself forward, like a lance, with his head as the point; but this time MacNair did not swerve aside. His hands, which were the size of small hams, were clasped together and raised high above his head, but they were not raised in supplication.

For an instant he stood poised, and then as the onrushing Koltz hurtled into range, the clenched hands flashed down with every ounce of power in the Scot's massive, six-foot frame. They caught the German squarely on his thick and sweat-drenched neck. It was like being kicked by a mule, and Koltz's face smashed into the hard floor. His nose was broken, and both eyes were closed. He was placed on his bed, where for thirty minutes he lay with no apparent signs of life. By the time that *soupe* was brought around, however, he was up and able to take nourishment.

The encounter aided MacNair no little, for there was now an interest in life other than the eternal heat and sand. Legionnaire Koltz was a vindictive soul, and the Scotchman knew that the first unguarded moment in his company would result in a thoroughly knifed MacNair. The danger was the one bright spot in an otherwise colorless existence, and he welcomed it joyously. But *le cafard* overtook Koltz, and he cut a sentry's throat, slipped over the wall, and went "on the pump," as the Legionnaires called desertion. He was overtaken by a patrol that went in search of

him; but the Arabs had found him first, and when the patrol reached him he was neatly tethered to a stake by his entrails. This affair blotted out MacNair's newest interest in life, and the heat and boredom settled down for another siege.

**I**N A month the Scot felt that he was going mad; at the end of two months he began to sense the beetles of *le cafard* stirring in his brain; a month later he struck Sergeant-Major Lopez upon the mouth and began his own flight into the desert.

It came about in this manner. He was pacing along the outer wall in the gathering dusk, with his rifle sloped across his shoulder at the easiest possible angle. A flush of purple was creeping up the eastern sky. The sergeant-major approached and stopped in front of him, his feet spread apart, a sneer on his scarred face.

"Spawn of a noseless gutter rat and a pariah dog," snarled Lopez by way of greeting. "Your thrice-cursed overcoat is buttoned up the wrong side. Because of this, and because you happen to be a Scottish pig with the heart of a hairless yellow goat, I shall give you another taste of the *salle de police*, also the *cellules*—and if I have my way, *la planche*." The sergeant-major spat in frank disgust.

Something seemed to snap in the breast of Colin MacNair, and he whipped a terrific right to the sneering mouth before him. Lopez's teeth rattled on the planking like hail, and blood spurted from his nose and ears. He staggered back on his haunches, and clawed at his holster. MacNair kicked him neatly in the stomach, and took the heavy automatic from him. As he stood there, balancing the pistol in his hand, the mists cleared from his fogged brain, and he saw himself in his true position, and shuddered.

This meant a firing squad before an open grave, and, like any other healthy animal, Colin MacNair had no desire to die. Lopez lay groaning feebly; but in a very few moments his roars would bring

the guard on the run, and the bed of Legionaire MacNair would remain empty for many a hot night. Suddenly the Scot made his decision. He glanced to the right and



left. No one had seen him, and as he thrust the automatic into his waistband, he looked hungrily at Lopez. The guard would be changed soon,

however, and MacNair had no intention of being caught inside the fort.

He dropped his rifle softly over the wall; and after a last look about, he followed it, landing without a sound upon the sand below. A shallow waddi, or ravine, ran onto the wall at this point, and MacNair slipped along the depression like a big lizard. He had not covered more than a hundred yards when he heard a wild roar from the wall behind him. He turned, and peered back through the branches of a withered shrub that crouched forlornly at the bottom of the waddi. Despite the effects of MacNair's blow the noble Lopez was leaning far over the wall, and bellowing like a mad bull.

For an instant MacNair was at a loss; but before he could make a move the play was taken out of his hands. From a point about seventy-five yards to his right, a rifle cracked flatly. Sergeant-Major Lopez flopped forward over the wall like a beheaded chicken, and a motley mass of Arabs leaped from the edge of the palm grove, and rushed yelling upon the gate of the fortress. MacNair was not interested in the outcome of the attack, however, for he knew that the Arabs had seen his escape from the fort, and that one or two of their number had most certainly been detailed to dispatch him.

He crouched lower behind his brush, for to move was to give away his position. He had not long to wait. There was a

movement at the edge of the waddi about fifty feet from him, and an instant later four tribesmen slid down the slope to the bottom of the depression. They had hardly reached it when MacNair raised his rifle, and shot the first one squarely through the head. As the other three whirled toward him, he sent a bullet crashing through the neck of another. The remaining two sprang toward him like hounds from the leash, shooting as they came.

Their aim was wild, however, and the Scot threw a slug into the face of the leader. The other was upon him before he could fire again. The Arab had dropped his rifle, but a long knife gleamed in his hand. As the fellow lunged at him, the soldier leaped back. He was too late by half a heart beat, and the steel laid open his face from the corner of his eye to the point of his chin. The movement was the Arabs' undoing, however, for the force of the blow carried him forward off balance, and before he could recover, a Lebel rifle, with two hundred ten pounds of fighting Highlander behind it, descended upon the back of the native's head. His skull cracked like a ripe melon, and he plunged limply into the sand.

MacNair tied his sash tightly around his wound, jammed his képi down to hold the improvised bandage in place, and headed for the low hills to the north. Before leaving, however, he added the long knife to his armament. Behind him the fight still raged noisily; but he knew that if the gate was not forced at the first rush, the attack would settle down into a siege, and he had no desire to be caught by the besiegers. He felt sure that his own shots had not been heard in the general din, and he hoped that the bodies of the Arabs he had killed would not be discovered before he had put plenty of space between himself and the remainder of the bloodthirsty tribesmen.

**H**E REACHED the hills, and marched along through the falling night. The rifle fire behind him had dwindled to a

few scattered shots, and he guessed that the tribesmen had settled down to the siege. By now they had thrown a cordon about the fort, through which no one could break. As he knew, they would sit down on their haunches and try sharpshooting their way to victory.

But the fate of the fort sat lightly upon the wide shoulders of Colin MacNair.

"What will you have, my friend?" he muttered, grinning, "*C'est la Légion.*"

Private MacNair was definitely through with the Legion. If he might only have been a sergeant, he reflected as he trudged along, it wouldn't have been so bad.—Ha! That was the life for one: your own batman, private quarters and mess; a life for a soldier. He'd treat the men well, like human beings; why he'd be the most popular sergeant in the Legion.

He snapped suddenly out of his idle dreaming, and halted in midstride. The Arabs were crafty fighters, and MacNair knew that they'd take no chances of being surprised from the rear. Most certainly there would be a widely thrown circle of lookouts in the hills to watch for the coming of a possible relief for the besieged. As the thought struck him, he slipped aside and crouched between two small hummocks to plan out a course of action. It was fairly obvious that he must have food, and drink, and some means of transportation. He was already thirsty, and his feet, somewhat softened by the life of the garrison, were beginning to burn.

The watch parties would have all that he desired, but he could hardly afford to shoot anyone, for that would bring the tribesmen swarming upon his neck like bees. He arose at last, no nearer the solution of his problem. It would have to solve itself.

He proceeded cautiously, and glided along in almost perfect silence. Suddenly he threw himself on his face, for against the side of a hill to his left firelight flickered softly. Slowly, and with infinite caution, he began to creep toward the hidden fire. He had not proceeded far when the

sound of voices reached him. He knew but little Arabic, but he easily recognized the conversation as coming from Arabian tongues, and even caught a word here and there.

**A**T LENGTH he thrust his bandaged face between two big rocks, and looked down into the fire-lit hollow beneath him. Three tribesmen sprawled about a small fire. They had evidently just finished a meal of figs and dried goat's flesh, and MacNair greedily eyed the big water bag that lay in the circle of fire light. His eyes searched the hollow narrowly, and at length he grunted with satisfaction, for just beyond the glow of the fire stood four camels; and these men, being scouts, would have only the best and fleetest animals. Before he dealt with the men in the hollow, MacNair knew that he must eliminate the lookout who was probably stationed somewhere close by.

He slipped quietly down from his point of vantage, pausing for a moment, so that the fire glow might fade from his eyes and leave them able to pierce the night. There was no moon, but the stars shed enough light to satisfy the soldier. It was apparent that great difficulty would be encountered in removing the lookout, for there was no fire to guide in this task, and the Arab had the advantage of being able to sit still, while the Legionaire must be on the move. If MacNair was spotted, the game was up.

"*C'est la Légion,*" he muttered, as he began his hunt.

MacNair knew that the scout would be somewhere to the north, for the danger—if any—would come from that point. He would also be near the fire, and on the highest point of ground. The soldier decided that the most logical spot was a rather high hill that lifted itself upward about a hundred yards north of the camp. He hid his rifle because of the noise that it might make against stones, and crept toward the hill like a stalking lynx. It seemed probable that the watcher would

be somewhere on the northern side of the skyline, and on this MacNair staked his life.

As he approached the crest, the Scot moved with more care, and his progress became slower as he glided softly from rock to rock. At last he reached the skyline, and with infinite caution thrust his head around a big boulder. On the north side, the hill dropped sharply away for about ten feet; and at the bottom, sprawled on a rug, lay the man that MacNair sought. He was on his stomach, his chin propped upon his hands, and he gazed out into the night.

The Scot studied the situation carefully. The lookout lay about six yards to his right, and his rifle was within easy reach of his hand. It was not MacNair's intention, however, to allow the rifle to play any part in the events which were about to transpire.

With the stealth of a cat, the Legionaire moved along the crest until he was directly above the scout. He had removed his heavy boots, and his bare feet gripped the rock as he balanced himself on the edge of the wall. The Arab lay blissfully unaware of the broad shouldered doom that hovered above him. Like a falling turret, the mercenary dropped into the night. Two iron knees crushed into the watcher's back, driving the breath from his body in one agonized gasp. A hand like a grappling hook caught him beneath the chin, and another bit into the back of his neck. A savage twist, a dull crack, and MacNair arose from the limp figure with a grunt of satisfaction.

**H**E ASSURED himself that the lookout was dead, and then he made his way to his former position above the fire. Again he studied the situation, and again he shook his head in doubt. It was absolutely necessary that he keep the Arabs away from the rifles, for one shot from them would probably seal his doom. The guns lay about ten feet from the fire, one of the tribesmen beside them. The other

two men, however, were across the fire and well out of reach of the weapons.

The man beside the rifles lay back against a camel saddle. His hands were clasped behind his neck, and the firelight threw his cruel, bearded face into bold relief, as he dozed in the warmth of the flickering coals. The other two were talking in a desultory manner.

The time had come to make his move, and MacNair drew the knife that he had taken from the Arab before the fort. Slowly he rose to his feet; and swinging back his right arm, he threw the knife with all his strength. The bright blade twinkled through the firelight like a sunbeam, and struck the man by the rifles squarely in the throat. He coughed and rolled on his face, writhing horribly. The blade had scarcely found its mark, when MacNair came bounding down the slope like a tiger, to place himself between the remaining two Arabs and the rifles. His automatic he dared not fire; and though it gleamed in his hand, it did not intimidate the Arabs. They whipped out their knives and came for him on the jump.

Here luck undoubtedly saved the Scot's life, for the larger of the two tribesmen tripped in his long robe, and crashed to the ground, cursing like a fiend. The other lunged at the Legionaire, his knife making blue circles in the fire glow. The soldier stepped aside, and sent in a vicious kick that landed squarely in the pit of the Arab's belly. The man bent forward in agony, and MacNair brought the butt of the automatic crashing down on the back of his head. The stricken man went down on his face with a shattered skull, but the force of the blow twisted the gun from the soldier's hand. Before he could snatch it up again, the other Arab was upon him.

As his knife swept down in a gleaming arc, MacNair struck savagely at the descending arm. The knifeman's aim was spoiled, but the blade ripped down the Scot's ribs like a hot iron. MacNair's left hand found the knife wrist of his foe; and

turning like a cat, he buried his teeth in it. Frantic fingers clawed at his eyes, so



that he was forced to free the other's arm, but even as he did so he drove his elbow into the snarling brown face, and the Arab staggered back, stunned for the moment. MacNair's

hand sought desperately for the gun that lay in the sand behind him. Then his searching fingers found a heavy rock, and closed about it.

THE tribesman was coming for him again, his face diabolic, the long blade of his weapon agleam. The soldier straightened up suddenly, and sent the rock hurtling at his foe with all the power of his iron arm. It struck the Arab squarely in the face, and he did not move again.

Gasping, MacNair drank deeply from the water-skin, then sank to the ground, breathing heavily. Hurriedly, he tore the clothing from his side, and examined his wound critically. It was a long slash, but it had not penetrated deeply, and the Legionaire, whose body was seamed with scars collected from Russia to Sidney, washed it carelessly with a little water from the water-skin, and turned his attention to more important affairs.

He saddled the camels with practiced hands, for he had once served in the camel corps of the sultan. He packed two of them with all of the food and water of the scouts, and left the other two free of burdens, so that he might change mounts frequently. He kicked sand over the fire, mounted the best of the beasts, and headed into the north, leading the other three animals behind him. All that

night he fled, guiding himself by the North Star, and when day flushed the sky to his right with silver, he found himself in another low range of hills.

Despite the weariness of the camels, he pressed on in the cool of the morning. He was making good time when he swung suddenly around a sharp bluff, and found himself within fifty yards of a column of the Foreign Legion that was rolling along into the south. It was too late to run now. He cursed his luck savagely as his foot-sore beast brought him nearer and nearer to the men who would most certainly shoot him for desertion in the face of the enemy.

He had almost reached them when a brilliant idea burst upon him, and he had to suppress a smile as he slid stiffly from his camel and saluted the commanding officer.

"*Mon Commandant,*" he cried, "Fort Ras-el-Zorak is attacked by a large number of Arabs. How many there are I do not know, for Sergeant-Major Lopez and I were standing on the wall when we saw them, and the good sergeant sent me for aid while he went to arouse the garrison."

"Well done, *mon enfant,*" said the officer, as he turned to order the *pas gymnastique*, the double time of the Legion. "How did you get those wounds?" he continued, as the column swayed forward at the increased pace.

"I had to wipe out one of their patrols," replied MacNair. "And they butchered me up a bit. We can surprise them if we slip through the place where the lookouts were stationed."

"You shall be well rewarded, my good one," promised the officer.

It was not until the dawn of the next day that the weary column slipped out of its packstraps behind the low ridge that rose near the fort's tiny oasis. A blast from the bugle brought the Arabs boiling from their beds, and a withering volley sent many of them down again. The attackers sent in another volley, and then charged home with the bayonet, a pleasure that the Legionaire rarely got against his shifty foe. For a moment the tribesmen stood their ground, but the garrison of the fort suddenly issued forth and came thundering down upon their rear. In an instant the face of the desert was dotted with fleeing Arabs who dropped in swaths before the steady fire of the mercenaries.

SERGEANT-MAJOR COLIN MACNAIR now wears the *médaille militaire*, as he swaggers across the barrack yard. Lurid curses muttered in twenty different tongues follow him, for none is so deeply hated as that thrice-cursed offspring of a mangy red monkey, Sergeant-Major MacNair.—But what will you have my friend? "*C'est la Légion!*"

## FOSTER-HARRIS

writes another fast story  
of the roaring oil country

"The Law Blood"



NEXT  
ISSUE



# BROTHER TO DRAGONS

By DAVID REDSTONE

**O**F THE four men in the car only Denny Hackett seemed afraid. He kept his teeth tightly shut to prevent their chattering until the muscles of his young face bunched up at the jaw-joints. He was sitting at the right of Piccolo, who was driving the big sedan stolen earlier in the morning. In the rear seat were Freeze Carver and Jim Knox.

Denny watched Piccolo furtively. They were bent on desperate work. He did not think it possible that he alone should be conscious of the enormity of their act. But the half-sized, wiry driver displayed an absolute calm. Every sign of concern was expended into the flow of fuel that sent

the big machine onward like a steel Niagara.

He heard Freeze Carver growl out from the back seat. To Denny the voice was commanding, clear-headed, courageous, although the words came from the left side of his face habitually. Freeze was the boss.

"Hey, it's only ha' past," said he. "If we get stopped to show a license you'll be sorry you was born. And skid off'n Dale Avenue, cripes!"

Knox, next to Freeze Carver, was almost nonchalant. He was a silver-templed bandit, distinguished of features. Somewhere, none of them knew where, he had picked up a cultured manner. Some said he had been a doctor, others said a divine.

*The Author of "The Death  
Wagon" Spins Another  
Great Yarn about Gangsters*



*The Story of  
a Scared Kid—  
With Guts!*

Freeze vowed he had taught mathematics at a university. No one really knew, and Knox never told. At the moment he might be taken for the vice-president of the bank which they were about to rob. He placed four fingers lightly to his mouth and yawned carelessly.

"I say, do slow up, Piccolo," he said mildly.

In the face of what was due to happen in the next half hour, Denny thought him superb.

He took a grip on himself. He must be equally fearless. He wanted to deserve such comradeship.

To comply with the cautionary admonitions of Freeze and Knox, Piccolo flung

a brittle, contemptuous laugh into the convex mirror at his left. He seemed to delight in giving these bulkier, brawnier ones a touch of his own power.

"I'll swing around Maple Street," said he. "Me and this heap has to get acquainted. We got to make a getaway, don't we? Just you give lil' Piccolo a chance to tune this baby in!"

Freeze inquired, "Everybody got their gat ready?"

Piccolo slapped at his arm-pit. Knox let his hand slide into his coat pocket. Denny Hackett began to fumble clumsily down at his hip.

"Say, kid," Piccolo snarled, "why don't you carry it in a sewing basket? Gosh almighty, you're gonna be usin' it, don't you know that? Keep it where you can shake hands with it." He pleaded to the men behind with an upward thrust of his chin. "Wise up this kid, you guys. This ain't a weddin' breakfast we're goin' to."

From the first Piccolo had been against the acceptance of Denny Hackett into the gang. It was his opinion that the boy had soft spots all over him, and that he would steer them all into a rap. "The kid's a squealer," he had said, with no foundation at all for his verdict.

Denny's hand trembled as he drew the automatic from his hip pocket and placed it in a more convenient one. How mightily he wished for the evident courage of his fellows. He wasn't sorry. No, he wasn't sorry he had joined this expedition. It was his notion of life and high adventure. It thrilled. It hurt way down at the pit of his vitals. It would tingle, when it was over, in the way he had always imagined. Still, he wished it was over and done. He *was* afraid—he knew that now. No going back! He wished for some elixir to quicken the movement of his limbs, something to freshen the dryness of his mouth, in

which his tongue seemed to have become a flap of leather, refusing to fold up to the palate. If only he were like Freeze, or Knox—or even the obstreperous Piccolo!

Denny might have considered their brave demeanor in a different light had he known that Freeze Carver took regular transfusions of courage through a vein in his wrist, or that Knox had had a sniff of white powder a little while back. Piccolo got his through that sort of auto-hypnosis which is common in many undersized types.

**I**T WAS Freeze Carver who had given Denny this, his first big chance. The young fellow's bravado had amused the boss-robber. It was just after they had made a gander on the Dale Avenue branch of the Exchange Trust. They needed another man and were forced to reckon without the help of the twin giants—Mike and his brother—who were finishing a deuce in stir.

Denny had been hanging around wistfully. The reputed daring of criminals drew his youthful admiration. He soon made himself a satellite and a familiar to many of them, adopting their mannerisms and speech, and pretending to have accomplished deeds both criminal and brilliant.

Freeze sought him out in a gin-cellar among a crowd of assorted shady characters.

"Do you think you're really tough?" The tone of the robber's words was significant, and Denny leaped to the chance.

"I'm chromium steel, mister."

Piccolo was there. And he was there with a sneer to put a fresh youngster in his place. "Chromium banana peel," said he.

Denny knew his name and had heard whispers of his reputation as a gunman.

"I don't happen to be going on a fishing trip, Piccolo," the boy said, "or I'd put you on my hook for a worm."

Piccolo hated reference to his runty sta-

ture. Worse, the jibe brought a delighted response from the half dozen standing near. Before Piccolo could think of a stinging come-back, however, Freeze had taken Denny aside from the others.

"Done time?"

"No. Too smart."

"*Oho!* What's your line?"

"What's yours?" demanded Denny.

"Banks," said Freeze crisply. "Now open up, kid. I got stiff work, and I need a gunman. A gunman with plenty of nerve. If you haven't got what it takes, better say so right now."

Truthfully Denny had hardly imagined he would ever participate in crime. He might have refused flatly the offer of Freeze Carver, had the bank-robber not challenged him. But it was in Denny's nature to pick up a gauntlet, to knock a chip from anyone's shoulder.

Denny's last and only theft had to do with a melon out of a huckster's wagon when the huckster's back was turned. Nevertheless he drew a month-old news clipping out of his pocket. "Lone Bandit Holds Seven at Bay," it read, and went on with the account of a highway robbery of unusual audacity.

He had kept it and treasured it as an example of the sort of boldness he held in respect. This Denny handed to the bank-robber with a mysterious smile, as if he would have him believe that, here, in his very presence, stood the "Lone Bandit." "Read it between the lines," said Denny, and thrust a thumb into the sleeve of his vest, a modest grin on his firm young lips.

Freeze fixed him with a long probing squint, then scanned the clipping. "Dirty little liar!" he said after a moment.

"Thanks," said Denny coldly. "On your way out, break a leg, mister."

So, bearing the name, not the game, of a "daring lone bandit," Denny gained a place in the ring of plotters whose plans were now being translated into action. They had stolen a powerful car, filled its tank full of gas, given it a short test, and now, at five minutes to nine stopped

with a low humming sound two blocks from the Exchange Trust Bank, where Freeze and Knox were dropped off. Denny got out a block farther on.

**T**O AVERT suspicion the men sauntered up one at a time before the white, domed building—all but Piccolo, who had charge of the machine which he halted a hundred feet from the bank.

A shop-keeper and a woman were at the door, waiting until the bank opened. Denny came up first, with a pass-book in his hand, and became third in line. Soon there was a fourth. Then Knox, jaunty, prosperous looking, whistling ironically a few bars of "Dawn" by Grieg. Numbers Six, Seven, and Eight extended the line. Freeze Carver became Number Nine. He frowned at the thought of the number of persons in addition to the bank's personnel with whom they would have to contend.

Piccolo was priming the engine and the sound was reassuring to the three.

Promptly on the hour the great doors were swung inward. A special officer in mail-carrier blue, with a badge on his broad chest, admitted the early customers. As in the floor plans which the gang had studied a dozen times over, Denny got the impression of a U, inverted, in the way the tellers' cages lined the three sides of the bank. The officers' cubicle was at



the extremity of the left shank.

Denny proceeded like an automaton, hardly believing this was himself, taking part in a rôle of crime. He stopped at the sloped marble desk in the center of the floor, and prepared to toy

to his face to stifle a well bred cough. It was an effective mask.

"Right up this way, sir," the man obliged him, turning his face to the arc of the U and expecting Knox to follow. This Knox did—for two strides. Out of his sleeve, it seemed, a black object fell into his hand. It flashed up like the tongue of a bell. Like a bolt it fell to the guard's skull.

There sounded from the guard a groan as if his lungs had collapsed and forced the last breath from his throat. He fell in a heap.

Knox then leaped to the right, Denny to the left, each commanding a shank of the U.

"Stand back!" Knox's voice cracked out to the occupants of the bank who were in his compass.

"Back!" Denny heard himself strangely barking. If Piccolo had seen how his gun hand shook he would have spat with scorn.

"Face about!" Knox's second command echoed to the high dome. "You"—fixing the teller with his eye—"touch that bug, there, and I'll kill you." He meant it. The teller retreated from the proximity of the button with which he might have actuated the huge alarm bell above the bank's entrance.

Denny covered the operations of his Chief, Freeze Carver, who was lifting stacks of bills with one hand and stuffing them into a specially made sack pocket that reached to the hem of the lining of his top-coat. He made a swift inner circuit of the U and in two minutes impoverished every teller's slab.

The speed with which the robbery progressed was amazing, but to Denny the seconds dragged like tons of granite up a hill. He was in a plain, white, chattering fear, with gun out-thrust. Yet, at a menace, he would shoot. He knew he would shoot. It was just one of those things. It would have to be done. He would be deathly afraid, he would rather be shot than do it, but he would shoot the first one who made a single inimical move. He felt his

nerves sputtering like fuses leading to his brain.

Two people entered the bank unknowingly. They were inside and faced up against the wall before they could gather their wits about them. Knox told them to behave.

Still another. Denny yelled, more for the purpose of relieving the desperate condition of his nerves. "Come ahead! Now—against that wall. Don't move!"

With what color the scare-head papers would deck the story of the robbery! He would be described as a young, murderous gunman, reckless, audacious. If only people knew the truth! If Denny's own partners knew—that his heart was thumping at his ribs and ready to burst through. His face must be a shade whiter that paste, now. His mouth was arid of spittle. He knew because his tongue did not relieve the dryness of his lips.

When once or twice he summoned speech for a command his voice was a hoarse croak. He was glued stiff to the spot where he stood. Yet not fear alone held him. His mates were counting upon him to play his part. Right of wrong—he had gone thus far and must stick it through.

The guard was moving on the floor! A mere three minutes had passed since he had been stretched out there. Now Freeze was on his way out, his sack pocket sagging. Knox backed his way after him.

The knowledge that he was to be left alone to face the terror-traced countenances of those in the bank caused a panic in the novice bank-robber. This too, was part of the schedule. Denny was playing the game to the last trick. Retreating warily after Knox he kept his gun for once steady.

The guard was rising. He was fumbling at his belt. There would be gunplay in a moment, Denny told himself. He was already at the door when the weapon appeared in the guard's hand—a big, black one-eyed death dealer, wavering up to the level of Denny's head.

*Crack!*

But Denny was outside in that flash,

streaking after the others toward Piccolo and the murmuring car. At his back the guard loomed, long, heavy legs stamping the pavement.

*Crack!*

Denny, to make certain their escape, was in duty bound to the others to have shot the guard when he saw the pistol appear. It still was his responsibility to destroy the menace. Knox and Freeze were climbing into the sedan, and were not timed nor posed for an answering shot. Piccolo, though his gun was out, had another duty—the machine, which was set to let pounce from its place in an instant.

The job was up to Denny. To him the task of pulling the first trigger, which before he had managed to evade. He turned and aimed the bore. The guard, at fifty feet, stumbled and lost poise. All luck was with Denny. His advantage was magnificent.

"Plug him!" shouted Piccolo.

But the stumbling pursuer called up in Denny's breast an insane chivalry. He held his fire. From the corner of the street, a fleet blue-coat with gun-filled hand, was flinging his feet toward the fray.

Denny couldn't shoot. He knew it now. This was no business for him. In him was a yellow streak—he was convinced of it. He made the best of it at the moment and sprinted for a place in the car.

The guard recovered balance then, took careful aim, as Denny found a perch on the running board.

"Plug him!" Piccolo yelled, crazy with rage at Denny. The car jerked from the spot like a dog unleashed.

*Crack!* The third slug burst from the guard's gun.

Denny dropped his pistol, he couldn't understand why. Some one had pinched his arm, and he was trying to hold on to the race-bent car.

"Let go my arm!" he cried out, and was pulled suddenly inside the sedan by the strong grip of Knox's hand.

A fusillade chased the spinning rear tires as Piccolo let gas sop up the thirsty motor.

Forty, fifty, sixty—seventy—seventy—  
At seventy miles an hour the big car sus-  
tained its fearful speed.

LATER on in the day some one discov-  
ered the abandoned, bullet-dented  
sedan near the outskirts of town. The  
upholstery was smeared, and traces of  
blood were also on the door. The robbers,  
however, were far away and safe in Jim  
Knox's Burgoyne Street apartment.

They were reviewing the adventure  
which had earned for them an unworthy  
twenty-eight thousand dollars in negoti-  
able bills. It wasn't satisfactory. Freeze  
had wanted a good stake so that he could  
play the wheel at Tia Juana.

Piccolo, who had ached to buy a share  
in a New Jersey brewery, called upon  
seventy-seven devils to curse his luck.

Knox smoked a cigar and tried to ab-  
stract himself from the post-mortems. He  
was used to reverses—and it might have  
been worse. Freeze had tempted him with  
the promised likelihood of a hundred  
grand haul. Ah, well. One could only keep  
on trying.

Denny Hackett kept water running from  
a faucet upon his bleeding wound. Pain  
rose in a sob to his throat. The bone of  
his right fore-arm was pierced, the flesh  
torn ragged.

"Belly-aching," grumbled Piccolo. "If  
Mike and his brother had of been out of  
stir we wouldn't've needed to ring in this  
dumb punk."

Freeze growled at the speaker. "You  
never took a hot chunk in the arm, so you  
don't know. See the heft of the cannon  
that guard had? One of those Army serv-  
ice guns. Sweet. Pass through a guy's  
skull and then knock a street car off'n the  
tracks."

"Yeah, well, I notice he still got the  
bullet in him. Crying about it ain't going  
to heal it. Imagine! Here we blow a bank  
and one of the bunch starts in a-shedding  
tears. In the first place he should've shot  
that——"

"He's just a youngster," Knox put in

gently. "There's stuff in him. Give him a  
chance. Why, Freeze, you yourself told  
me the boy stood up against seven, all  
alone——"

"I never believed that one, see?" Pic-  
colo said derisively. "I'll bet he never——"

"Oh, cut it, cut it," Knox said impa-  
tiently. Then, raising his voice so that  
Denny could hear him from the wash-  
room: "How's the wing, Denny?"

Silence; then, stifled: "It won't kill me,  
I guess."

"I've got the gauze and stuff ready.  
Come in and we'll wrap it up."

"Okey."

Denny came in tight-lipped and blanched.  
Knox took a look at the bared flesh and  
involuntarily an exclamation of compas-  
sion came to his lips. Freeze and Piccolo  
stared in silence.

"Steady, boy," said Knox. "Pour out a  
finger of that whisky, Freeze. Here, drink  
it down, you need it. That's right. Now,  
hold up the arm. You ought to have a  
doctor, and that's no fooling."

"A doctor!" snapped Piccolo. "Are you  
screwy? You'd steer the bunch of us up  
the first route to the Big House. Good we  
ain't all dumb. Listen, kid"—he went on  
viciously, his ratty teeth showing to the  
gums—"you take that to a doctor and I'll  
take the rest of you to the morgue! Get  
me? There'll be one thousand and one dicks  
on the trail of a saw-bones who treated  
a crippled flipper. 'M I right, Freeze?"  
he said.

"It's a jinx, kid," Freeze conceded. "Lay  
low with it."

"Don't worry," said Denny. For a mo-  
ment he forgot the pain caused by Knox's  
manipulation with the wound. "Listen, Pic-  
colo," said he. "You're free and easy on  
the morgue stuff, aren't you?"

"Cradle, maybe, is what I should've  
said," the little robber sneered.

"Well, don't," said Denny quietly, "make  
any threats you wouldn't be ready to carry  
out."

"If it wasn't that you're a cripple I'd

smash you over the mouth, you cocky brat. You ought to be runnin' errands instead of buttin' into a man's game."

Denny half rose out of the chair. "Why, you bug, you—if I spit in your eye you'd drown——"

"E-nough!" Freeze Carver rapped out.



"What do you guys think this is—a congressional session?"

Any thing Freeze said had the effect of subduing the bellicose Piccolo. Nevertheless, he had his harp-string to play on.

"Why couldn't we waited till Mike and his brother got out? Me, I'm in this for money, and none o' the penny-bank stuff."

"Shut up, or fall dead—one o' the two," snapped Freeze.

"Both," suggested Knox leisurely. "Kid"—addressing Denny—"this is no good for a fever. You'll find a cot in the bedroom. Get a bit of sleep; it'll do you good."

Denny obeyed. He felt terribly weak. He had lost blood, and the excitement of the morning had left his nerves frayed. Limply he fell upon the cot, and despite his pain, sleep came upon him like a balm.

Knox riffled cards with long, agile fingers. He dealt a round of stud, and though three-handed makes a dull game the men forgot all else for a time. Some hours later Knox went out to get what each was impatient to see—a newspaper.

Authors of a crime, they were as eager as any for the first critical reviews. And, aside from an egotistical interest, there were reasons for a careful analysis of the news.

The robbery rated headings in large, black type. The details carried down the column to page two, with a camera shot of the scene. However, concealed in the

drama of the account, they found the news value which many would have missed.

This much was clear: The police were reticent of information. Descriptions of the bank-robbers were general, vague, purposely sketchy; and these the skillful reporter had smoothly glossed over. As for example: "——It is believed one of the robbers was wounded, though to what extent could not be learned."

"Get that?" said Freeze, scowling. "They found the car. But does it say anything about the bloody seat? It does not! Somebody's wise, see? That guard knew he'd hit Denny, all right. The bulls are playing this shut-gab game. When they do that, they know something. That means lay low for us."

"We'd better all stay right here," said Knox grimly.

Piccolo bit his lip. "I'm for giving this kid the bump-off and then lam it."

"None o' that. But I'll tell you something," said Freeze. "Every station is salted with dicks. There's hawks' eyes on every road. If ever they spot any one of us——"

"Especially the kid," said Piccolo.

"He don't take a step outside—get that!"

Three pairs of eyes exchanged glances. Knox nodded slowly. Piccolo's lip curled back over an eye-tooth.

"The belly-achin' young gutter bum," he said fiercely, "he won't get me into no rap. Damn it, Freeze, why didn't we wait for Mike and his brother? This punk with a scratched arm—he'll drive me nuts cooped up with him here. If he wasn't so yellow he'd've corked that guard first, and there'd be no bloody trail. He'll crab it yet!"

"Oh, stop squawking," Knox told him.

**T**HOUGH Knox could be a gentle nurse to one sick and sorely wounded, he was nevertheless an ignorant one. It became clear before the end of a week that he knew little about doctoring. The wound should have been dressed every day, at least. To give him credit for the honesty

of his care he truly believed the arm was healing.

At the end of the second week, his face tight with pain, and suspiciously afraid of a faint but characteristic odor of dead flesh about him, Denny tore away his bandages. At the sight disclosed he went gray to the lips.

He showed it to the men. They gazed with fascinated eyes upon the wound.

"I've got to have a doctor," Denny decided. A silence. "I've got to have a doctor!" he repeated, hysteria rising in him. "Am I going to rot in this dump? Say something, for God's sake! What shall I do?"

Piccolo spoke first. "What's the matter, you dyin'?"

Denny rushed for the door. "I'm going out!"

Freeze caught him in time. He dragged him back, not without a fury of resistance, and thrust him into a chair. His lips barely moved as he said, "Oh, no you're not."

"Who'll stop me?" Denny gasped.

"I stopped you, didn't I?"

"You'll have to keep on stopping me, then."

"That so? Next time you put me to the trouble will be the last."

Denny retorted with a harsh laugh.

"Gosh, how scared you make me!" he said. "What'll you do—point a gun at me? I ain't that soft."

"I'll kill you, you little rat!"

"You haven't got the guts. What—let a gun sound off? In this apartment? You'd be crazy!"

"By gosh—"

"I'll chance a clean plug, anyway, Freeze Carver. It's better than rot outside a coffin."

Piccolo nudged his chief. "Say the word, Freeze, I'll crack his head in. Let's have that billy, Knox."

With a whip's speed Denny was up, his left fist driving sideways like the point of a scythe at the venomous face of the little gunman.

"I've had enough from you," said Denny

as the other crashed dazed against a table.

For a moment Piccolo lay motionless. Then, when he scrambled to his feet again, a pistol was in his hand.

Knox spoke: "Put that down!"

"To hell with you! Now——"

"Put that gun down," insisted Knox, and it was then that Piccolo saw the slim strong hand full of a similar weapon.

Piccolo's gun descended.

"In your pocket, chump. Now let me tell you something. The boy's right, you know. He's got to have a doctor. That's reasonable—and simple, too."

"Say, are you——"

"Not at all. Good lord, you'd think doctors weren't as thick as weeds in a back lot, the way you carry on. Wait till dark, and I'll find one."

"What are *you* handin' us?" demanded Freeze.

"I'm not joking. The boy needs medical attention and he'll get it. Wait till dark."

"Why not go over to the nearest police station and give yourself up?" asked Piccolo sarcastically. "But not for me, see? I'm ditchin' this lousy bunch!"

"You wouldn't last a week," Knox said witheringly. "Yours is the sort of courage that needs a mob's backing. On the lone you'd be like a candle on a hot stove. I know you."

"You can't talk, Knox," Freeze put in. "You're useless without a sniff every once in a while."

"I suppose you're better off hitting the needle," Knox recriminated. "Well—it's so, I guess. The racket does it. Without dope we wouldn't be—what we are. I'll hand it to Denny, though. He went into action scared stiff—and he did his job. That's the test of courage."

"Test!" exclaimed Piccolo. "He'll live to squeal like a pig in a slaughter-house."

"I'm no squealer," Denny defended himself hotly.

"Anyway, Knoxy," Freeze said, "unless you've got somethin' smart up your sleeve, a sawbones will queer us. I don't have to tell you that."

"Don't worry. I'll take care of it. It'll cost a little greasing, that's all."

"If that's all, spill it," Freeze said impatiently. "What's the scheme?"

Piccolo refused to listen at first. Freeze, however, was willing, and he brought Piccolo around in time. Besides, what Knox had in mind was entirely feasible.

**I**T WAS night, and late, when Knox led Denny into a quiet neighborhood in town. They were not long in finding the residence of a doctor. First they tampered at the back of the house, then wandered to the front porch and boldly rang the bell.

Dr. Wells, a surgeon young in practice and comparatively little known despite his skill in the operating room, was still happy to receive patients at any hour.

He adopted a paternal attitude toward Denny that did not quite suit the appearance of either of them. Deftly removing the gauze from the wound, he examined the festering flesh intently.

"Gangrene," he said finally. "How did it happen?"

Knox answered for Denny, laconically, "Dog bite. Got infected."

"When was that?"

"Oh—yesterday. Day before. Huh, kid?"

"Yes."

"Rest here a moment," said the doctor, coughing nervously. "I'll—I'll get some instruments out of the sterilizer."

Knox nodded. No sooner had the doctor left the room and shut the door carefully behind him than Knox leaped up and clapped his ear to the door. He listened intently but could hear no sound.

There was a glass tumbler standing on a tile slab. It caught Knox's attention and gave him an inspiration for its use. Reaching it, he placed its open end against the wall and glued his ear to the bottom. This sample telephonic expedient effectively transmitted the salient noises in the adjoining room.

But all he heard was: "Operator—oper-

ator—operator——" An insistent clicking. That was all.

Knox met Denny's inquiring glance and nodded grimly, which was to say, "He knows." Stepping across the room to Denny's side he replaced the tumbler and collected himself to deal adequately with the doctor when he reentered. Dr. Wells looked uneasily at his visitors.

"Well?" Knox challenged him quietly.

Dr. Wells started. "Pardon?"

"You were trying to put through a connection a minute ago. Was it to Police Headquarters?"

"I didn't get anybody," the doctor replied nervously.

"That's because the wires have been cut," Knox calmly informed him. His hand played in his pocket with an object of suspicious bulk. The doctor noticed the movement and began to breathe uneasily.

"It's true, isn't it," Knox continued, "that the police have sent instructions to all doctors in town to inform them of a patient with a gun-shot wound? I suspected as much. Now, Doctor, you're not making any such report; understand?"

Dr. Wells shrugged, and answered hesitatingly. "It seems I'd better not."

"Right! But I'm playing it square with you, Doc, if you'll play square with us. There's five hundred dollars in it for you if you do a proper job on the boy's arm."

"Lord! I don't often get that much for a major operation!"

"Is it a bargain? Cash in advance."

"If this is ever found out——"

"No one will know but the three of us here. There's the money. Hop to it."

"Better strip, young fellow," said the doctor. "It'll hurt. Better have anesthesia, eh?"

Denny glanced toward Knox. He resented the doctor's solicitous manner. Everybody



seemed to take it for granted that he could be easily hurt. Before he thought a second time he said, "No thanks. I'll take it without."

"Don't be foolish, boy!"

"You heard me," said Denny.

It was bravado, a false courage, but courage nevertheless. The doctor hesitated a moment.

"All right, then," he said. "Stead-dy."

Torture. Dead flesh falling away under the knife. Splinters of bone loosening at the touch of forceps. Diseased veins flushing a viscid substance of blood.

Denny's lip was bleeding where he had bitten it almost through. Years of it—and in reality only ten minutes had passed. Dr. Wells paused, his brow in a sweat.

"I can't get it," he murmured. "The bullet must have ricocheted up inside the bone somewhere. Without an X-ray this is only guesswork."

"Well, give him the X-ray," said Knox.

"I haven't the apparatus. I do all my X-ray work at the hospital. We'll just have to wait until morning."

"That's out," said Knox. "Let's go up to the hospital now."

"We could—but it would arouse suspicion at this hour of the night. Aren't you aware all hospitals have been warned? You would be taking an awful chance."

"Dig some more, Doc." Denny spoke up. "If—if you can't hook it, why— Try it again, anyway."

"Stout fella!" Knox exclaimed.

Another quarter of an hour of probing. There was no need of anesthesia now. Nature had supplied her own, for the pain was too much for consciousness to bear.

But it was no use.

"If the bullet was just clanking loose in there I ought to have got it. But it must be lodged in, buried in the bone. I can't do a thing. We'll have to wait, that's all," Dr. Wells ended.

Knox advanced. "Listen, you're not pulling any funny stuff, understand?"

"Word of honor! Why should I? I'd be a fool to double-deal you. My health is

too valuable to me to risk it for bringing information to the police. And you're paying me, which is fair. You can trust me. Mr.——"

"Just 'mister' is good enough," said Knox. "What time tomorrow?"

"I'd like to do it early. I want to save that arm if I can. But six P. M. would be best under the circumstances. Two of the hospital attendants go out to supper at about that time. The fewer persons around the better. Don't go into the reception room. I'll meet you by the fountain in front of the hospital. Remember—the Deaconess Hospital."

NEXT morning Knox and Denny awoke to discover that the other two were up and out of the apartment. Contrary to their usual habit of caution they stayed out all day and did not return until Knox and Denny were ready to leave for the hospital.

They listened to Knox's recital of last night's adventure and Piccolo was particularly derisive.

"Yah, you chumps! Go ahead. They're waitin' for you with bells on. A swell trap you're fallin' into. Freeze, you and me better scam. This town's too hot."

"Fair thee well," Knox returned grandly. "Be careful you don't fall into a sewer-grid. Hold him by the hand, won't you, Freeze?"

Denny was in the bedroom trying to adjust a tie with one hand.

Piccolo lowered his voice and said meaningly: "We'll be rooting soon. We got a swell caper on."

"What's the hurry? You know Denny's in no condition."

"Didn't you tell him, Freeze? Listen, Knoxy. Mike and his brother blew into town. Parole came through a few weeks earlier than they expected."

"Well?"

"Well. The five of us can work."

"What about Denny?"

"We don't want a squealer. He's through."

"Squealer?" Knox was puzzled.

"Sure!"

"Sure?" Knox's tone was grim.

"Well, it's my hunch. He's the belly-aching kind. D'you need more proof? First thing he'll get into a jam and these parts won't be safe for the sight of us."

"He's a good kid," said Knox.

Freeze Carver joined into the low-toned talk. "Piccolo's right. Last night—I was kept awake for hours. The kid was sniffing like a brat who'd been sent to bed without supper. Can you beat it? Supposin' a dick said 'booh' to him! He's out."

"You don't know what he went through last night," Knox argued. "Give him a chance. You don't really *know* he'd squawk. He hasn't—yet."

Freeze and Piccolo found this unanswerable, but they stubbornly held to their convictions.

Denny entered in time to hear Piccolo grumble to himself: "Give him a chance—huh!"

Knox led Denny out of the apartment. Just as the door closed behind them they heard Piccolo exclaim: "It's the rod for him, and no two ways about it!"

"Pipe down," Freeze Carver's words came. "You got to give a guy a fair test."

The rest of the colloquy was in whispers, as if they knew they might be heard.

Knox shrugged and beckoned Denny to the street.

"What's up?" Denny demanded.

"I wish I knew," said Knox. "All I can say is that you're traveling in dangerous company."

He knew the cunning, the vengefulness, the cruelty of Piccolo, and that knowledge was enough for Knox to draw his inferences.

**I**T WAS dark when they reached the hospital. And this time, Dr. Wells aided by the marvelous eye of the Roentgen ray, managed at last to retrieve the troublesome bullet. The arm would heal, he said.

It was late when they came out of the

hospital. Denny was a few paces in the lead and walking toward the curb where a taxi rolled up. Knox had stopped to light a cigarette behind the fountain.

"Cab's here," called Denny as the door was opened for him. He got in just as Knox looked up.

Denny seemed to have jumped in rather suddenly, thought Knox. As if he had been dragged forcibly from within. Just as Knox strode up the door of the cab slammed shut and the vehicle, in a burst of power, roared off.

All Knox had had time to observe was that the shades had been drawn down at the sides and back. Swearing softly he hailed a cruising taxi and gave chase. But the car in which Denny rode was now far in the lead, trickily zigzagging into side-streets, where it soon lost itself.

It was a blind chase, now—hopeless. Knox gave a thought to Dr. Wells. Had he double-crossed them? It wasn't likely, or he also would have been made a captive with Denny. The person, or persons who had snatched Denny away may have had but one aim in mind: to pick up a youth with a wounded arm.

This apparently had restricted their ability to reason that their quarry might be in company. Knox felt he ought to thank the kind fates that he was spared capture. Strangely, he was not.

Well, if Freeze and Piccolo were really afraid of a snitch, now was their chance to make a break for distant parts. Knox would do his duty by them, and warn them, at least. Personally, he was not afraid of a rap through the boy's default.

"Burgoyne Street," Knox called to the driver.

**T**WO men were with Denny in the rear seat of the car. Each outstripped him in weight by fifty pounds, easily. Six-footers, at a casual glance, and of a heft well favored in the police precincts.

"Better frisk him, Sarge," said one gruffly.

The man addressed as "Sarge" relieved

Denny's pockets of all the money they contained, and divvied scrupulously with his partner. It seemed they had lost interest in all else, for they said nothing until the car halted twenty minutes later.

When they alighted Denny got a glimpse of the squalid neighborhood and series of docks reaching out to a bay. But the men pushed him briskly down a basement staircase and then into a nearly empty room in the cellar. They bolted the door, after switching on a single gloomy light. Within the room another door stood an inch ajar, and this led into either a bedroom or a closet of the apartment.

"Give him the works, Lieutenant," said Sarge.

"A couple of ranking officers, eh?" Denny asked sarcastically. "What's the idea—treating me as if I was a crook!"

"Thought you'd get away with it, didn't you?" Sarge began.

"With what?"

"Innocent, hey? Take that"—the man's fist shot out—"and begin all over again." A second blow sent Denny reeling against the wall.

"You're name's Hackett, isn't it?"

"It is not," Denny panted. "My name's—Johnson. Harry Johnson. You guys are making some kind of a mistake."

"Huh? Say your name again—I mean your *right* name, or by God I'll hammer your teeth in." The man advanced.

"Well—it is—Hackett. What of it?"

"And aren't you one of the four men who took part in the robbery of the Exchange Trust Bank?"

"I am not. You've got me wrong."

Sarge disregarded this answer. "Who were the others?"

"How could I tell you if I wasn't there? I'm no bank robber. What the hell ever gave you that idea?"

"Wasn't one of them Freeze Carver?" the other persisted.

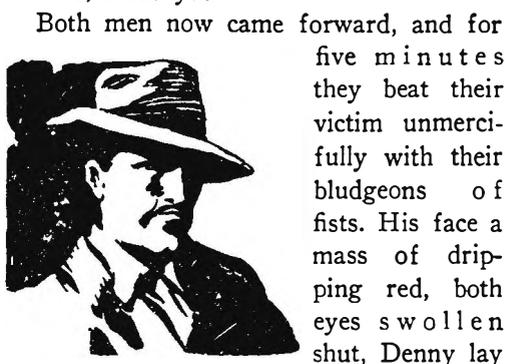
"No."

"And another, Piccolo, a small chap, sort of?"

"Let me out of here!"

"And Jim Knox?"

"No, I tell you!"



Both men now came forward, and for five minutes they beat their victim unmercifully with their bludgeons of fists. His face a mass of dripping red, both eyes swollen shut, Denny lay

huddled, almost insensible, while the men renewed their line of examination.

"Now you'd better talk true, kid. This is only a sample. You helped rob the bank; that right?"

Weakly, painfully: "No."

Sarge gripped Denny's arm—the wounded arm, and prepared to twist it.

"Say that again——"

"Lay off, Sarge," the other advised.

"Want him to pass out? Keep him conscious, that's the trick. Now listen, fella," he went on, stooping over the boy's form.

"We ain't gonna hurt you if you come clean. Don't think we don't know all about that job; see?"

"Then why all the slaughter?"

"Because you're gonna sign a statement, that's why. Once that's done, and you tell us where we can find your partners, we'll let up on you."

"What I said before goes. I don't know anything."

Sarge found a pliers somewhere in the room, took Denny by the left wrist and caught the joint of the thumb in the steel nippers. He did not press them at first. But he insinuated strongly that he would.

"Isn't it a fact that your bunch hangs out in a Burgoyne Street apartment?" he asked.

"No," said Denny.

"And the number is seventy-five? Say it!"

"No!"

"Let him have it."

Sarge squeezed. The nippers bit like

savage jaws. With a yell of pain Denny tried to tear his hand away; then, as Sarge took a firmer bite, Denny arose writhing, giving in to the torturing hold as if to appease it somehow. His right foot lashed out and caught one of the grinning faces squarely. Sarge spat red and doubled his pressure.

Like a mad thing the tortured boy screamed and cursed and twisted, flailing with his feet.

The man who was disengaged aimed a kick at Denny which caught him in the groin. Denny doubled. Sarge relinquished his hold and threw the instrument in a corner. Together the men watched their victim gasp for breath. The thumb was raw and bleeding. Thus they took a minute's rest and then bent to their work again.

The pliers were adjusted.

"No—no, I tell you." Denny gabbled even before they began. But, at the first pressure, "I can't stand it!" he shouted, his voice broken.

"One was Piccolo?"

"My God—yes!"

"And Freeze Carver?"

"Yes. Yes. Let go!"

"And—Jim Knox, hey?"

"Yes." The last was a gasp, a hiss—spent, with no life behind it. Denny closed his eyes.

"That's all," said Sarge.

And then an amazing thing happened. Denny thought he was dreaming, or that the vision that stalked before him was some illusion out of hell. From the adjoining room two figures came forth. They planted themselves grimly silent, opposite Denny in the chamber of torture.

How real they seemed! He wanted to shout a warning, but the words froze upon his lips. "Dam—I am, for God's sake!" was what he wanted to scream out to them. "Freeze—Piccolo—run, hide! They've got me. I'm done for. But you—here's your one chance——"

Piccolo walked up deliberately and kicked him. "Rat!" he said.

Freeze Carver nodded grimly. "A

squealer, after all. Mike, you and your brother sure got it out of him. Piccolo was for givin' him the rod first off, but I was willin' to give him a fair chance. Well, he's had it."

"What now?" asked Mike, erstwhile "the Sarge."

"We'll handle him. Drag him out to the cab. This kid is goin' for a nice—long—ride."

**K**NEX had found the Burgoyne Street apartment empty when he arrived. He resigned himself at first to waiting. And then, as he thought things over, he began to fit the incident of Denny's abduction with the few stray words he had heard from Freeze and Piccolo. His suspicions took definite form. "By all that's damned ——"

Snatching up his hat he hurried out into the street and caught another cab. It was his shrewd notion that he would find the entire gang in a confab at the hangout of Mike and his brother. Whatever their purpose, he would soon put a stop to their unwarranted plaguing of the kid. The damned fools!

But he was late. Just too late! Heading down to the waterfront building he saw from the distance a slight figure being shoved into a waiting car by two men. It was too dark to recognize any of them, though he would have sworn to the familiar stature of Piccolo. That their captive was Denny was certain because of the gleam of white from the new bandages on the right arm.

"Step on it!" Knox ordered.

Even as he said this the other car started at a leap, headed for the Shore Road.

"Keep that cab in sight!" Knox called to his driver, and he felt for his gun.

The driver slowed down.

"What's the matter?" Knox demanded.

"Nix. I'll let you off right here, buddy."

"Drive man! We're losing 'em—go on, I tell you!"

"Count me out. I ain't huntin' for trouble."

"I said drive," Knox repeated, and this time he prodded his gun between the shoulder blades of the driver.



The man responded on the instant. Bits of gravel from the road began to pelt the fenders with a sound like buckshot. On the radiator cap a winged mercury in nickel danced in the dust wake of the fugitive car, the shining arm outstretched, reaching out to the rushing element of speed. The headlights blazed up the skimming road. Further on the pursued car gained and dwindled toward a lurid moon.

"Faster!" Knox urged.

They were climbing up a hill road now, pursuer and pursued. Full speed soon became impossible to both, for they had struck a span of clay lane, rutted deep with wheel tracks.

Just beneath the crest of this the first car halted. A patch of wooded land flanked the right-hand side. Habitations were not to be seen. It was a well chosen spot for murder.

Knox's car drew up just as Denny was being dragged out by his two captors. They were Freeze Carver and Piccolo, and guns were in their hands. Knox flung out upon them.

"What the hell is this?" he demanded.

"We're tending to this—see?" Freeze Carver told him.

"If you're thinking of pulling a bump-off, you're a pair of damned fools!"

From somewhere behind the crest of the hill the sound of an engine churned.

"A car's comin'—from the opposite side," Freeze warned. "Let's get it over with."

"Over with—nothing," said Knox. "You're going to leave Denny alone."

Piccolo, in the meantime was dragging Denny toward a clump of trees. The boy was too weak to resist. Piccolo then flung

him to the ground. He released the safety-catch of his pistol.

"Don't shoot, Piccolo," Knox said threateningly.

Piccolo paused, turned. "Keep out o' this, Knoxy," he said. "The kid's a squeal-in' rat. He dies."

"You prove it to *me* first."

"Somebody's coming, I tell you," said Freeze angrily. "Plug him, and come on."

"Pull that trigger, Piccolo," said Knox, "and I'll drill you full of little pink holes. That goes for you, too, Freeze Carver. While you play fair and square I'm with you. But you tricked this kid."

Piccolo snorted, turned his back abruptly, and leveled his gun at Denny's head.

*Crack!*

"I gave you fair warning!" Knox shouted. But the bullet itself was merely a warning, and was meant as such. This was unfortunate, for he had not counted on Piccolo's treachery.

The little gunman wheeled, and with a snarl of fury sent his first slug at Knox. The latter coughed, stumbled. A stain spread beneath his collar. He tried to rise, to hold his pistol at level, but the automatic grew suddenly heavy in his hands.

Closing his eyes for a second, he heard the sounds of two more shots. A sudden flood of light penetrated even his eyelids. There were shouts, a thud of running feet, as a car loomed on the crest of the hill.

Motors roared—and the roaring diminished to a buzzing. The darkness, when he opened his eyes, seemed shot with fantastic streaks of phosphorescent light, dancing shapes, and blazes in brilliant green. These were the phantasms of pain, of the last taut thread of consciousness.

Awakening some time later he found his faculties peculiarly alert. He felt no pain now. He became aware at once that he was lying in an ambulance. Beside him was Denny Hackett, open-eyed.

Denny looked at his rescuer. "Is it bad?" he whispered.

"Where—did they get you?" Knox wanted to know.

"Somewhere in the chest. And one bullet skidded off my scalp. I'm done for, I guess."

"I—can't feel anything," Knox complained. "Funny, isn't it? Just weak. I must be——"

"It's on account of me," said Denny. "Say Knoxy. Gee, you tried to help me. Thanks Knoxy." He turned his head aside. "I didn't deserve your sticking up for me. I've groaned about everything like a kid—like a girl, damn it. You know—I squealed, Knoxy——"

Though the mere word "yes" had been pried from him after the most excruciating torture, and his yielding of it was far different from the act of the abject informer who spills everything he knows at a mere threat, Denny felt himself rightly branded as a squealer.

"All along I've been a belly-aching coward," he went on miserably. "I got what was coming. I—I just didn't pan out."

"Wrong," said Knox, and there was something in his throat that made his speech thick with a ghastly, bubbling sound. "Nobody—has patience with pain. Ever read the Bible? Even Job—the greatest belly-acher——"

"Job?"

"Blame him? 'My bones are pierced—I cry unto thee—I am——'"

"Rest, Knoxy. Don't try to talk any more."

"I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls—and my bones are—burnt—with—heat——"

The voice of Knox had turned to a whisper, and now that whisper faded into silence. It was a silence during which Denny felt the heart in him grow light and buoyant and free.

"Knox. Say, Knoxy. What did you used to be—before you became a—a crook?"

Knox was dead. Strange irony that a robber should die with holy words upon his lips!

Denny found himself later on in surroundings that seemed to him familiar. Then he knew, for Dr. Wells was bending over his bed in a ward of the Deaconess Hospital.

"You'll be some time recovering from these bullets, my lad," said he. "Haven't you learned by this time that they're not good for you?"

"How is it they brought me to this particular place?" Denny wondered.

"You were lucky enough to get shot up nearer to this hospital than to any other," Dr. Wells informed him. "Take it easy, now. The police are on their way to question you."

"Listen, Doc," said Denny, "if they see my arm——"

Dr. Wells smiled grimly. "I'm bound by contract—don't you remember?"

But it was more because of his liking of the miscreant patient that he exhibited to the police only the wounds that he intended them to see.

"Who took you for the ride?" a detective asked Denny.

The young patient smiled. "I don't know."

A FEW months afterward, a policeman walking his beat, saw a suspicious light in a ground-floor office. Entering by way of a side window, which was open, he interrupted a pair of gentlemen who had been absorbed with an old-fashioned safe. They made no resistance, not even when the policeman clouted them once each—just for luck.

In the line-up the pair were recognized as old offenders. A deputy-inspector approached them.

"Well, if it ain't Mike—and his brother right along with him! You'll get plenty this time."

Mike, large in bulk as the deputy-inspector himself, began to whimper. "Listen, Chief. We'll put in a plea—see? If you treat us on the level."

"Oh, we won't bother you—much."

"Wait a minute," both pleaded in ludi-

crous chorus. Mike confided, then, out of the side of his mouth and with the nasal undertone of the stoolpigeon: "We know all about that Exchange Trust Bank job—get me?"

"Bah!" the deputy-inspector said. "That's old stuff. We rounded Freeze Carver and his pal, Piccolo, when they tried to make a break aboard a lake steamer. Yes, and they confessed—a couple of hard-boiled jellyfish!"

"But you don't know this," Mike pleaded almost tearfully. "You don't know the dope on the Jim Knox killin'."



"Why, no. Do you?"  
"Will you give us a break?"

"I'll see about that. Spill it—who r o d d e d Jim Knox? The skunk'll burn that did that job."

"Well, Chief, it was Piccolo."  
"Yeah? Tell us all about it——"

**D**ENNY HACKETT was long since safe and far away at the time further evidence was being sought. He had hit the high road for a newer adventure.

He had seen men building a bridge over a silver span of water. He had witnessed

the hoisting of steel girders, and the glowing rivets flying. He had listened to the chattering of the drills, and seen men perched high. Steel men—brave men. That was the work to do—to build, to be—high up.

And then fortune favored Denny, he landed a job with a construction foreman as helper.

The words, "Report at seven in the mornin'," were music.

But Denny was hungry. In his pocket was the only nickel he had.

Coming into a thoroughfare he spied a huckster's wagon, and it reminded him of an occasion long ago, when he had taken quick advantage of another huckster—and a cantaloup.

This time apples tempted Denny. It would be so easy to reach them. The man's back was turned. Better still, a housewife called to the huckster from across the way, and thus would leave the wagon completely at a thief's mercy.

"Just a minute, mister," Denny called the man back. "How much for the apples?"

"Five-a cents. Just-a one?"

"Just one."

Biting deep into the juicy cheek of the fruit, Denny sauntered on, content.

*Corporal Downey!*

*in a novelette called*

**"Upriver Gold"**

**By JAMES B. HENDRYX**

**N E X T I S S U E**

*Corporal Downey!*

*Corporal Downey!*

*Corporal Downey!*

# HOW DOES THE UNDERWORLD TALK?

By L. VAN



## Part II

**A**S WE promised you last time, here is the final half of L. Van's article on criminal vocabulary. We've found this list of words used in the underworld exceedingly interesting—especially in connection with Vincent Starrett's thrilling serial, "Dead Man Inside."

- A knob knocker—A yegg who opens a safe by crude methods, such as knocking off combinations with a sledge hammer and then dropping the tumbler in the safe with his fingers, or with a small, strong punch.
- A keister—A safe in a business house. Any safe not built in the walls or any movable safe.
- A kite—A note or letter from one prisoner to another. Or, the emissary between thieves and fences.
- To kite—To raise a check above its written amount.
- To lam—To rush away; to leave in a hurry.
- A loser—One convicted of a crime and serving time in a penal institution.
- A look-out—A watcher, posted to warn his confederates of danger of discovery.
- Loot—The proceeds of crime.
- Leather—A purse.
- The long walk—The death walk from the "annex" to the electric chair house.
- A lay-down—A place where opium is smoked.
- A moll—A woman companion of a criminal.
- A mouthpiece—An attorney, influential friend or "fixer."
- To make—To identify. For instance, to identify participants in a crime. "On the make" is also used to express success, usually in crime.
- To be mugged—To be photographed for Bertillon records.
- A mush—An umbrella. A hidden cache of high explosives.
- The mob—The total number of participants in any particular job or crime or racket.
- A map—A face.
- The nod—Usually used to mean the pointing out of a criminal to authorities.
- The "O-O"—Called the double "O." Means to give once over, to look over, to "case."
- A one-way ticket—A sentence of death.
- A poke—Purse or pocket-book; "leather."
- A punk—An amateur criminal or beginner; one who botches a job.
- A pineapple—A bomb. May be explosive or incendiary.
- A peterman—A safe blower.
- A press—A prosecuting attorney.
- Pull—Influence.
- A pooch—A beggar. "To pooch," to beg.

Printed—Finger printed.

To pipe-off—To recommend to visiting criminals the most likely places for loot. This term is usually used in connection with information received from supposedly honest employees of an establishment who, for gain, or for a share of the proceeds, will give all necessary information as to the employer's place of business, and who will also tell when the most money is in and when is the best time to "make" the job.

Queer—Spurious or counterfeit money.

A rat—One who informs the authorities. A stool pigeon.

A rap—A charge, ending in imprisonment if convicted.

A racket—Any illegitimate enterprise.

A racketeer—One engaged in a racket.

A rod—A pistol, a revolver or a machine gun.

A rattler—A train.

The rods—The cross or brace rods beneath a railroad car.

A rubber check—One which is no good. Ask a forger what he is in for and he will answer, "One bounced back on me."

The rocks—Stolen diamonds.

A stir bug—One who has become mentally irresponsible while imprisoned. Usually caused by brooding over his case.

The show-up—The elevated brightly lighted platform over which a suspected criminal is paraded for identification. He can be seen by the police, on one side of the screen, but he cannot see anyone who is looking him over because of the screen and intense lights reflected upon him.

The skipper—The highest ranking authority in command. The chief of police, the sheriff and the warden are so classified.

A sap—A blackjack or bludgeon. Also an unskilled criminal.

A skill—A man who, in a circus or carnival, keeps pushing from behind,

ostensibly to reach the box office and spend his money. In reality he merely hurries the crowd toward the box office.

The spieler—The "talker" or "caller" who lures customers into a side-show or other attractions.

A screw—A prison guard.

Stir—Penitentiary or prison.

The shover—The passer of counterfeit or spurious money. The counterfeiter seldom shoves his own product.

A stick—Same as "jimmy."

Soup—A distillate made from cooking high percentage (usually 80 per cent) dynamite. Also nitroglycerine.

A sign—Any kind of signal—usually prearranged.

The stem—The street.

The spot—The place where a murder actually takes place. Also a figure of speech meaning to be marked or to mark for murder.

Swag—Proceeds of a crime. Loot.

To stretch hemp—To hang.

A squealer—A stool pigeon or rat. An informer.

A sheive—A knife. Also "to sheive," to cut.

To spill—To confess. To inform.

A side-door Pullman—A box car.

A shister—An attorney or lawyer.

To shadow—To follow. Also the noun "shadow," a detective or a person engaged in trailing another.

To scam—To get away in a hurry. The getaway after a crime. Probably short for "scramble."

Slum—A mulligan stew. Meat, onions and potatoes boiled together. But there are many variations.

To tip-off—Same as to "pipe-off." Can also be used to mean the traitorous act of one of a mob who informs authorities that a job is to be pulled.

A tommy—A small, compact machine-gun properly called Thompson sub-machine gun. The clip type shoots twenty-five times, and the drum type shoots fifty times without reloading.

The trigger-man—The man who actually does the shooting in a murder case.

A tail—A shadow or trailer.

The take—The gross proceeds of a crime.

The works—The "limit" or "book." It is also used to express the death in a murder; or the death, by legal method, of a condemned man.

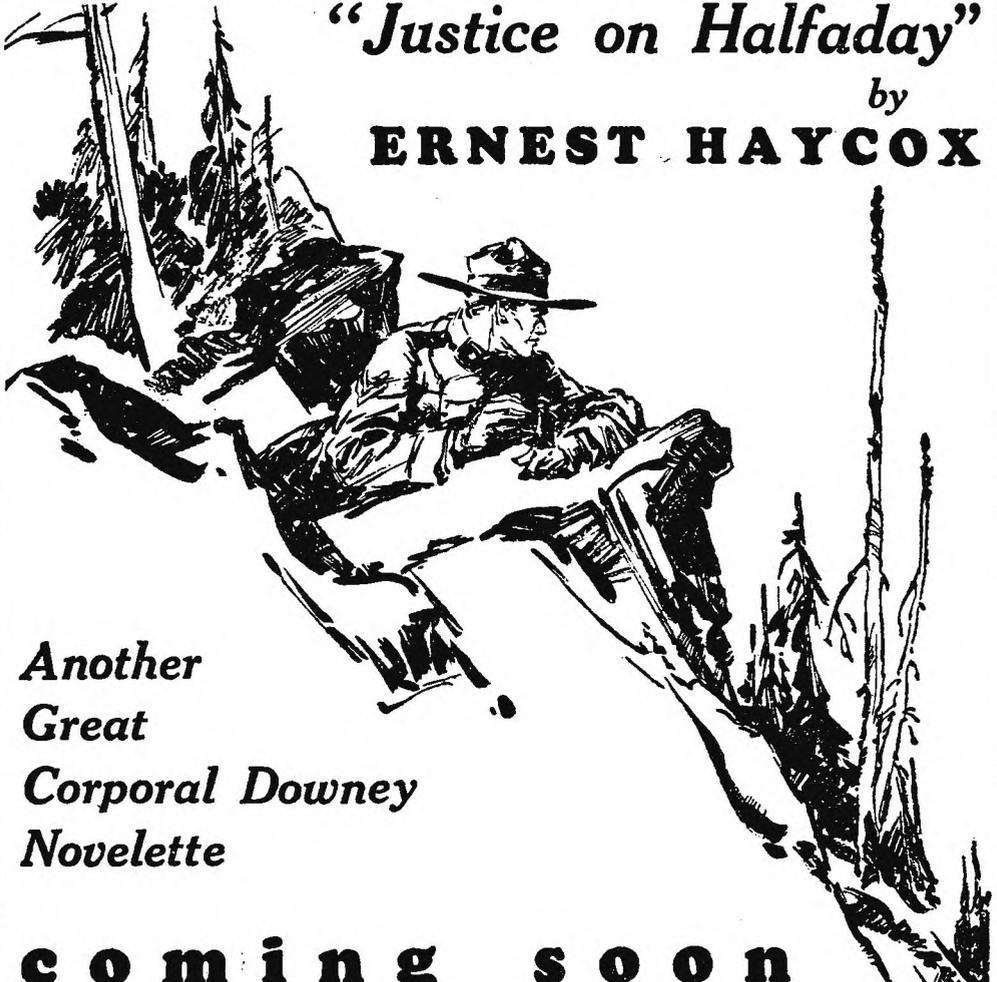
A wire—A pick-pocket. It is also sometimes used to identify the one in a mob of pick-pockets to whom the "cannon," or pick-pocket, passes the purse so that no evidence can be

found upon the actual thief, who of course is closer, and sometimes is immediately suspected. A mob of pick-pockets may consist of a "cannon," several "wires" and a "fade-away." The last-named, being farthest away, makes his escape unsuspected as soon as the loot is passed to him on the edge of the crowd, then he meets the rest of the mob at a pre-arranged place for a division of spoils.

A yegg—Any of the several branches of safe workers. Mistakenly used by laymen to mean any type of criminal using force.

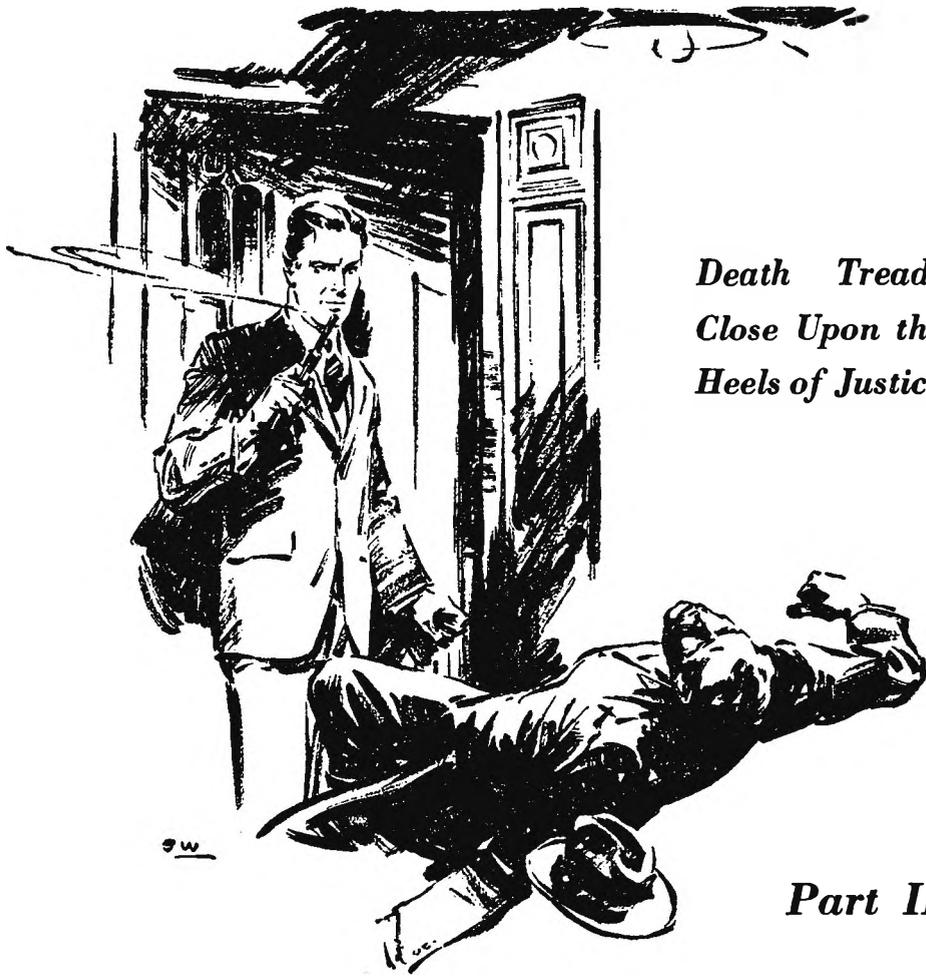
THE END

***"Justice on Halfaday"***  
by  
**ERNEST HAYCOX**



***Another  
Great  
Corporal Downey  
Novelette***

**c o m i n g   s o o n**



*Death Treads  
Close Upon the  
Heels of Justice*

*Part II*

# DEAD MAN INSIDE

By VINCENT STARRETT

*Author of the Famous Jimmy Lavender Stories*

WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

WHEN Rufus Ker came to open the store that morning, he found pasted on the front door of the Bluefield Incorporated haberdashery shop, in Chicago, a placard bearing the words:

**DEAD MAN INSIDE!**

*I am dead. This store will not open today*

In the show window of the shop, in place of the usual wax figure of a faultlessly arrayed man in evening dress, sat

the dead body of Amos Bluefield.

A couple of days later, when the equestrian statue of a Civil War general was unveiled, the dead body of Hubert Gaunt was found placed between the neck of the bronze horse and the figure of the general. On the shroud that had veiled the statue was pinned a placard with the words:

**DEAD MAN INSIDE!**

There was no clue of the cause of the deaths. There was no clue of any sort—

except one little one. The night before the killing of Amos Bluefield when Miss Holly Moment passed the Bluefield shop on her way home from the theater she had seen the curtain of the shop's show window drawn back a little at one side and had caught a vague momentary glimpse of a man's face looking out. And on the lapel of this man's coat she thought she had seen something bright. That was all. She told the police what she had seen. Meanwhile, there had come to town the pompously urbane Adrian Bluefield, to settle up Amos Bluefield's affairs in his capacity of brother to the dead Amos. He said Gaunt had owed his brother money.

Not long afterward, Doctor John Rainfall went to a matinée with his newspaper friend Howard Saxon, to see their friend Patrick Lear act in a popular play. Lear never stepped on the stage. He was found dead at his dressing table in his dressing room. On the dressing room door was a placard with the well known words:

### DEAD MAN INSIDE!

The mysterious killings intrigued one Walter Ghost, a traveler and dilettante, who had done some clever unraveling of grim mysteries before, for the pure love of it. He decided to visit for a while at the house of his friend Chandler Moment, Holly Moment's father. Holly, incidentally, had received a note in hand printed letters, saying:

*"This will be about all from you.  
One more reminiscence and we will  
change the ticket."*

At about the same time, Rainfall himself came home to his rooms to find on his threshold a placard with the words:

*"You are next, Doctor John Rainfall."*

It was Rainfall who, after a second autopsy on the body of Patrick Lear, had established the cause of Lear's death—until then unknown. Some slender steel instrument had been driven up into his brain at the base of his skull. The wound

was hardly perceptible under the hair on his neck. One other curious fact had been brought to light about Patrick. It was discovered that he had been the husband of a Miss Carvel in his company, a fact not before known. And Miss Carvel, it came out, hated Patrick Lear. But there didn't seem much significance in this fact. It certainly could throw no light on the deaths of Bluefield and Gaunt!

Walter Ghost was becoming more and more interested in this strange series of murders!

## CHAPTER XV

### MR. SAXON PAYS A CALL

**P**HILDRIPP'S case was a puzzle. He had been a sort of assistant cashier at Bluefield's. He had handled money and he had handled books. But he had done neither importantly. He was merely one of the necessary cogs. Nevertheless, he was an interesting cog, and Dawson, the clever reporter, and the police sleuths, Kelly and Sheets, paid him the dubious compliment of close attention.

First of all, Phildripp was unmarried. This was no crime—but was it not possibly significant that he was, of all the men employed in the shop, the only man who had failed to marry? Married men with wives and children to support, or even just wives, were supposed, on the face of things, to have enough to worry about without going around murdering people. Not that married men did not commit murder: they did: they murdered their wives and other men's wives. But superficially a case involving three dead men was more likely to be the work of a single gentleman, it was believed, than the work of a man charged with responsibilities remote from the very idea of murder.

Also, Phildripp, a callous individual, upon learning that his employer had been murdered, had calmly gone off to a musical comedy. That was the Friday evening

after the memorable Friday morning when Rufus Ker had opened the shop upon the tragedy. Phildrripp merely explained that he had had tickets for some days and saw no reason to waste them. He lived at home with his mother, a respectable widow, and had a sweetheart.

After the show, Phildrripp had taken his girl to her home, deposited her with her parents, or within sound of her parents, and had himself gone home alone. Presumably he had gone to bed. The plump detective assigned to Phildrripp's trail had seen the lights in the house go out, and had himself, then, returned thankfully to his station. Phildrripp, it was argued, could have left the house again, in the early morning hours, met Gaunt at some lonely tryst, lured him to the park, murdered him with neatness and precision, and even have managed to get the body of Gaunt onto the statue of General Burke.

The latter feat had not been difficult, it was thought. A rope around the body of the corpse, the other end of it around the body of the murderer, and the trick was half done. Now the murderer climbs the statue, slightly impeded by the shrouding canvas, and hauls up the body of the gambler. He unties the rope, at either end, climbs down—and there he is! It had been, no doubt, an awkward job, but not necessarily a difficult one.

Two bright young reporters, indeed, had turned the trick themselves, to prove the relative ease with which it could have been performed. The reporter who played the part of the murderer was of course, a husky youth; he had been at one time a football player. The reporter who played the part of the corpse—young Mr. Dawson—was a slight youth of no especial weight. Some admirable photographs of the feat had been taken and had entertained a great many readers of Mr. Dawson's paper.

Gaunt had been a slight man, and Phildrripp was notably a burly fellow. He, too, had once been a football player. Bluefield had been pestered by Gaunt, there was

reason to believe; conceivably, therefore, he might have murdered Gaunt. But as Gaunt's body had been found a day after Bluefield's, it was more likely that the murder had been the other way about, and that somebody then had murdered Gaunt. Why not Phildrripp?

Just why Phildrripp, if Gaunt had murdered Bluefield, should have taken it upon himself to avenge his employer was not apparent, perhaps; still, the whole argument was plausible enough in the absence of proven facts. It was also just possible that Phildrripp, for reasons best known to himself, had murdered both Bluefield and Gaunt. Supposing that Gaunt had had something "on" the haberdasher, which seemed likely enough, it was not unlikely that he (Gaunt) would have an ally in the shop. Phildrripp might have been that ally. Then supposing the allies to have quarreled, it was easy to imagine Phildrripp as taking over both murders on his own.

If then, Gaunt had murdered Bluefield and Phildrripp had murdered Gaunt, or if Phildrripp had murdered both Gaunt and Bluefield, might it not be possible, by perseverance, to link up Phildrripp with the murder of Lear!

All of which would have been the idlest of speculation but for a trivial point disclosed by the Kellian and Sheetsian investigation. That point suggested, remotely, the link with Patrick Lear. Inquiring into the earlier states of their several suspects, it had developed that Phildrripp's sweetheart, a certain Nancy Maxwell, had once been a member of a theatrical chorus.

"Aha!" said the police, in effect. "A chorus girl!"

Therefore Miss Maxwell, who was probably no great bargain, had once been associated with Doris Carvel or with the actor, Ridinghood. Why not? Even, conceivably, with Lear.

And if this were true, it would be unnecessary, while adding Phildrripp and Miss Maxwell to the list of suspects, to forget the suspicion attaching to Ridinghood and Miss Carvel. Was it not pos-

sible, indeed, that the entire group—Rid-  
inghood, Phildrripp, Miss Carvel and Miss  
Maxwell—and just possibly Gaunt—had  
been responsible for *all* the murders, and  
that the actual performance of the deeds  
had been divided?

**I**T WAS a messy sort of theory, and  
usually at about this point the police  
department, and young Mr. Dawson, its  
confidant, threw up their several hands and  
said, "My God!"

Phildrripp, at any rate, was unmolested.  
But he was carefully watched. So was  
Nancy Maxwell. The rest of the Blue-  
field working force—namely, Regan, Ja-  
cobs, Thain, Humphries, *et al*—were ten-  
tatively dismissed from calculation. *They*  
had nice wives, all of them, and some of  
them had children. *They* were not run-  
ning around to musical comedies with  
erstwhile chorus girls.

Ghost, too, meanwhile, was thinking it  
all over—and getting no place in particu-  
lar. It had become his habit to discuss the  
case with Professor Moment and the pro-  
fessor's daughter, after breakfast and at  
other appropriate hours.

The "something bright" that had at-  
tracted the eye of Holly Moment on the  
murderer's coat, still bothered the  
amateur. At length, he had  
an inspiration.

"I wonder,"  
he observed, one  
evening, and  
quite irrelevant-  
ly, "if it could  
have been a pair of eyeglasses! They often  
hang at about that point—by a cord—I  
believe."

Miss Moment jumped. She knew at once  
what was in his mind.

"Why, yes," she agreed. "Eyeglasses!  
Why not?"

"You are sure it was the *right* side?"

"It would have had to be, wouldn't it?  
He was facing me—and the glint was from

the left, as I faced the window."

"I suppose so, unless he was curiously  
twisted. Let us see now—he would prob-  
ably push the curtains aside with his right  
hand, and put his right eye to the aper-  
ture. It was my right hand you saw dur-  
ing our experiment. Or *would* he? If he  
wore his eyeglasses on the right side, as  
you think—and supposing them to have  
been eyeglasses—he would have to be left-  
handed."

"So he would," said Holly Moment.  
"Why, of course! And that reduces the  
number of the men who could have done  
it, quite a bit, doesn't it?"

Ghost smiled. "Hardly enough to get  
excited about. The world is full of left-  
handed men—and of men who wear eye-  
glasses. Anyway, we don't know that the  
thing you saw—or think you saw—was  
a pair of eyeglasses. No, I'm afraid this  
isn't getting us very far."

Miss Moment was thoughtful. "Now  
who, of the men already partly under  
suspicion, wears eyeglasses?" She looked  
at Ghost. "If he should prove also to be  
lefthanded, that fact would help materially.  
The coincidence, at any rate, in the light  
of our conversation, would be unusual."

Suddenly she was greatly embarrassed.  
Her father was staring at her, open  
mouthed.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed.  
"*Father* wears eyeglasses and is left-  
handed!"

**G**HOST laughed outright. "It was your  
father's eyeglasses that gave me the  
idea," he confessed. "Shall we agree that  
it couldn't have been your father?"

"Oh, don't, please!" begged Chandler  
W. Moment. "Can't you see me, Walter,  
standing there in that window—peeking  
out between the curtains at my own daugh-  
ter? Such a likely coincidence, too, dar-  
ling—that I should have looked out, after  
finishing off Bluefield, at the exact instant  
you and Stephen passed the shop! Really,  
I must congratulate you both. How on  
earth you deduced it, I can't imagine; but



it is quite true. I am the murderer of Amos Bluefield! I also killed Hubert Gaunt and put him across the bronze horse. *That* was rather difficult, but I managed it. I killed Bluefield because of his name: it's incongruous and silly. Who ever heard of a blue field? Gaunt I slew because he saw me murder Bluefield, and I had to protect myself."

"How about Lear?" asked Ghost, twinkling.

"Carried away by the success of my first two murders," said Chandler W. Moment, "I determined to end the careers of all whom I disliked. I disliked Lear's acting—it was abominable. That was the hardest job of all. You can't imagine the difficulty I had getting away without being seen. I used the fire escape, of course. It's just outside the dressing room window. I may as well go the whole hog, while I'm at it, and confess that I am in love with Lear's wife."

He paused for breath.

"I had not yet decided upon my next victim. That is to say, I was wavering between the curator of the Field Museum—who was to have been killed and then stuffed for the Prehistoric Group—and Frank Birmingham."

"Why Frank Birmingham?"

"I don't like his books," said Chandler W. Moment.

Then the doorbell rang. They were getting used to the doorbell.

It was not the newspapers, this time, nor the police. The call was for Walter Ghost, and at the door, somewhat agitated, Ghost discovered the wiry slenderness and eager voice of Howard Saxon.

"I live out this way, you know," explained Saxon apologetically. "Forgive me for butting in, but—I wanted to talk with you."

"Of course," smiled Ghost. "Come in."

A moment later he was saying, "Mr. Saxon, sporting editor of the *Telegram*. But don't be alarmed—he is not here on business."

Then something else happened, so

swiftly that only Howard Saxon and Holly Moment were aware of it. They discovered that they had never laid eyes upon each other in the world before, yet had known each other for years and years. Centuries perhaps!

This astonishing circumstance made it difficult for Saxon to proceed with his accustomed sprightliness. However, he talked for some time, on many subjects and not always coherently. Professor Moment wondered if the young man had been drinking.

After a time, young Mr. Saxon remembered that he had some news.

"Rainfall will take my head off, I suppose, for blabbing it," he said. "He's tickled to death about it, and wouldn't tell the police for worlds. But the fact is, he's received one of those notices!"

"No!" cried Ghost.

"Not 'Dead Man Inside,' of course—just a warning to mind his own business or he'll be the next. Something like that. He expects to bag the murderer, single-handed, when he tries it."

"More than likely he'll be killed," said Ghost sharply. "The murderer has proved himself a very competent fellow to date. Rainfall ought not to take any foolish chances. He's too valuable a man to invite that sort of attention."

SAXON shrugged his shoulders. "I know! I said something to the same effect, myself. All the good it did me! Of course, the other fellow's taking chances, too. Rainfall is no set-up."

"He's afraid, no doubt, of what Rainfall may know about Lear's affairs," continued Ghost.

"Which is pretty nearly nothing," Saxon observed.

"True, but the murderer doesn't know that. Well, it may be only another bluff—a warning intended to head off any secret plans the doctor may have. But tell him not to do anything silly, Saxon. I'll tell him, myself! Couldn't we have him up here to dinner, some evening—tomorrow

evening—Professor? Mr. Saxon, too, of course."

"Of course," agreed the professor.

"He'll take my head off about this," grinned Saxon. "I know he will."

"I'll square you when I call him up," promised Ghost.

He accompanied the newspaper man to the door, and they stood together for a moment, looking out into the street. It was beginning to get late.

Saxon drew a long breath. "Say," he remarked. "I wonder if you are here because that girl's in danger, too. Are you?"

"Perhaps," smiled Ghost. "Partly for that reason—yes! I think the danger is slight, however. She has received a threatening letter, similar I suppose to the doctor's. That, also, is something that has not been reported to the police. Say nothing about it."

"Trust me," said Saxon.

Suddenly he repassed the amazed Ghost and stalked back into the living room.

"Miss Moment," he barked, almost too dramatically, "if ever I can be of the slightest—*ah*—service to you—*er*—don't hesitate to call upon me—*ah*—at any hour of the day or night!"

Then he stalked back to the door, fell down the first three steps, finished the descent properly, and strode off with immense dignity in the wrong direction.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

A NOTABLE repast was prepared in honor of the occasion by the Moments' Alabama negress. The professor did not afford a large staff of servants, but Heliotrope was a menage in herself. She was mammoth. Her advent upon any scene had somewhat the appearance of the mountain bearing down upon



Mahomet. Her noodle rings, however, were beyond comparison or rhetoric.

By the time the larded tenderloin had run its course, the conversation was established. Rainfall, it developed, was not inclined to become excited over the warning he had received.

"As a matter of fact," he observed, "it may be sheer tomfoolery, a practical joke. I can think of seven of my colleagues who would have done it, if it had occurred to them."

"Juvenile humor," commented Saxon. "Fellows like that ought to grow up."

The physician shrugged. "Nobody ever does grow up, you know. And I'm not sure that it's such a good thing to." He laughed. "As a student, I once thought it amusing to put a set of human fingers in a bowl of oxtail soup. The resemblance to—" He interrupted himself. "I'm sorry! Do forgive me, Miss Moment."

"What a ghastly notion!" said the girl. "Whose soup was it, Dr. Rainfall?"

"Chapman's," grinned the doctor. "He was one of our lecturers. I'm afraid I didn't like him."

"Well," said Ghost, after a pause, "I don't know that I exactly blame you. In similar circumstances, I'd take my own chances, too. I'm blessed if I know what could be done to protect you, anyway. You are bound to come and go between your home and the hospital."

"Exactly," said Rainfall. "And I don't want a collection of policemen hanging around either place. It isn't good for business. Naturally, I'll be careful in the streets—but I can't call out the militia to guard every avenue I use."

HE WAS secretly of the opinion that the threat was not a joke at all, but he saw no reason to advertise his belief. He still hoped, in point of fact, that the attack would be made. His plan of defense, in such event, was carefully considered, and he was satisfied with it. There was nothing timid about Rainfall.

"Of course," continued Ghost, "your

warning may be in the same category as Miss Moment's. You are probably being warned not to meddle with what does not concern you."

"That may be it," agreed the physician. "But what have *I* done?" he complained. "I don't know what else I *could* contribute."

"A very sound idea, however, on general principles," observed Professor Moment complacently. "I have myself a magnificent passion for minding my own business. It keeps one out of a great deal of mischief."

Howard Saxon was still dubious. "What bothers me," he said, "is why the fellow took the trouble to warn you. He's been lavish enough with his murders, Heaven knows. And if Mr. Ghost's idea of a murder-sequencc has any merit, he isn't through yet. He may be planning something particularly devilish for *you*, Rainfall. Watch your step! Both you and Miss Moment, as a matter of fact, should be carefully watched. I'll do it myself, if nobody else will."

"Oh, I'll be careful," promised Rainfall lightly. "Miss Moment, happily, is already well protected."

Nevertheless, it was his own idea, also, that the new development had been oddly handled. He, too, had wondered why he had been warned instead of being promptly murdered. In view of the definite terms of the notice, the warning was a gesture incongruous and unnecessary.

He had not told the others exactly what the square of paper had said.

"Of course," he added, after a moment, "if I am attacked—and the attack fails—we've got the murderer."

"How do you mean? Why have we?" The questions came from Howard Saxon.

"If he doesn't get me first," said Rainfall, smiling, "I shall certainly get *him*."

For a little time the meal continued in silence. The physician's quietly positive assertion had shocked them all. For a chilling moment, something sinister and immediate had seemed to threaten everyone

at the board. A frown was gathering on Ghost's brow. With crisp irritation, he broke the spell.

"The police," he observed, "have been very remiss. There is an explanation of this affair, if they would only quit running in circles and look for it."

Rainfall glanced up, surprised. "You mean that you can see some sort of pattern in it?" he asked.

"Not clearly—no! But there is a pattern, and there is an explanation. These murders aren't anything casual, a scheme hatched by some ingenious madman to attract attention to himself. I have already said that it dates back to something in the lives of the men murdered. Somebody has nursed a long grudge. How he's paying it off. He waited, I think, until he could get his victims together—in the same city—at the same time. Bluefield, of course, lived here; but what of Gaunt? Lear came only occasionally. Was it coincidence that brought them here together, in the space of a few days? Possibly it was, but it furnished the opportunity the murderer had been waiting for."

THEY were all looking at him with fascinated interest.

"That's all simple enough, isn't it? And why were the three murders so sensational? There was no effort to cover them up, if we except the faint suggestion of suicide in Bluefield's case—which nobody could take seriously for a moment. Publicity is the keynote. Bluefield and Gaunt and Lear were not quietly murdered and their bodies hidden, as we might have expected them to be. The actual murders may have been quiet enough; but in every case there was an arranged blare of trumpets soon after the murder. Even Lear was killed while an audience waited for his appearance on the stage. In every case, the murderer knew that discovery of his crime would follow hard on the heels of the crime itself. He wanted it that way. He invited discovery of his deeds by the most ingenious adver-

tising methods he could imagine."

"What do you argue from that?" asked the doctor.

"That his injury—the thing that made him do all this—his grievance, whatever it may have been—was quite possibly of a similar sort. That's not very clear perhaps. I mean, his methods may very well reflect a sensational publicity attendant on the injury for which he seeks revenge."

"'An eye for an eye' quite literally, you mean?" asked Holly Moment. "That ought to make it easy to trace him, Mr. Ghost."

"One would think so. But there's no telling how far back it all goes. I thought at first that the original grievance might be something fairly recent. My feeling now is that it is not. If it were something within easy memory, the similarity of the cases would have been apparent to somebody. The newspapers of the entire country are featuring the case. But we have heard of nothing.— Well, that's part of what I had in mind. I suggest also, as I have suggested before, that there may be other men marked for murder. I won't be dogmatic about it, but I think the death notices indicate the possibility. If I'm right, then other men already are aware of their danger. In effect, every 'Dead Man Inside' has been a warning to the next man on the list."

Rainfall demurred. "If that were so," he asked, "wouldn't the others, realizing their danger, hustle off to the police?"

"Possibly they can't," said Ghost. "For reasons of their own, they may not want to. As I say, I don't insist on any of this. I do say that it's possible—the suggestion is there—and nobody *has* gone to the police for protection, although that circumstance, as evidence, is pretty negative."

"It all sounds a bit melodramatic, don't you think?" Rainfall was faintly quizzical.

GHOST laughed. "It does," he admitted. "It *is*! It's a flight of the imagination, nothing else. I might go farther

and suggest that the entire episode is a chapter of criminal history. That is, an episode in the lives of four warring crooks. What do we know, after all, about Bluefield and Gaunt? About Lear, for that matter? Nothing but what they have been willing that we should know—the surface facts of their lives. We don't even know the *surface* facts about Gaunt."

"I think it's gorgeous," said Saxon. "Follow through, Mr. Ghost. I mean, what's the rest of it?"

"Well," said Ghost, "it's a theory that fits the facts as we know them, that's all. I may be twisting facts to suit the theory. It's a habit of mine."

"But what possible grievance could such a man have?" asked Holly Moment eagerly. "Do you mean that—?"

"That somebody once killed *him* and set him in a window?" finished Ghost, smiling. "Not exactly. But I think reasons may be imagined. For instance, suppose that, years ago, these citizens who are now being murdered, one after another, were part of a conspiracy by which the father or the brother of the man now committing the murders, was done to death in similar fashion and his body posted in public for neighborhood inspection! Something like that. Suppose even a similar death notice to have been employed. That is fantastic, to be sure; but no more fantastic than the present series of murders."

Rainfall shook his head. "It won't do, Mr. Ghost," he said. "An affection for a parent, or a brother, even complicated by a scheme of vengeance, wouldn't carry over the number of years you appear to be suggesting. I mean, an affection for a *dead* parent or brother. Children grow up; they have their own lives to live, their own problems to solve, without worrying about the past. They might *threaten* vengeance, but I think the idea would fade after a few years."

"Possibly it would," agreed Ghost. "I'm not suggesting anything *too* youthful. There is a very significant circumstance, however, that has not been considered. It

fits in at this point. Do you realize that the murdered men were all of about the same age? Now what does that suggest? Surely not a crank with a grudge against men of forty!"

"What *does* it suggest?"

"The associations of a man of middle age are business associations, or golf associations, or—well, something like that. The point is, the men they meet and get to know at all intimately, are men of all ages—young and old and in-between. But when several men of the same age are apparently closely associated—so closely that some other man finds it expedient to wipe out the group—the suggestion is that the murdered men made one another's acquaintance at the time of life when men of the same age are thrown together. In other words, in youth. Not babyhood, of course, or even childhood. Adolescence!"

"Whew!" cried Rainfall, laughing.

"You don't agree?"

"I don't know! As you explain it, it's plausible; but you *could* be wrong, you know. Men of forty do foregather I suspect, even in middle age."

"No doubt they do," admitted Ghost. "My theory was intended to fit this case; and it is as likely to be right as it is to be wrong." He smiled. "Well, whatever occasioned the murders, and whenever they were planned, I think the motive was revenge."

"I should have preferred a solution involving a woman," said Rainfall. "That way, I agree, a man's vengeance might achieve a very respectable longevity. Give your murderer a sweetheart, Ghost—one who was in some way snatched away from him by these others. Even so, I should prefer your solution if the grievance were less ancient—if it went back only a few years."

**G**HOST spread his hands in good-humored disclaimer. "It isn't a solution, I know! It's a little journey in what you once called retrospective penetration. And there may very well be a woman in

the case. There usually is, I believe. But I visualize the murderer as a man of about the same age as his victims; and I think there are a number of men still in the world who, if they would, could tell us who he is."

"On that we are agreed," said Rainfall. "Your entire argument, for that matter, is fascinating—and you may be right."

"Oh!" cried Holly Moment. "If only I had had a really good look at him!"

"You saw quite enough, in my opinion," said her father; and Saxon nodded emphatically.

"Thank your stars that you didn't get a really good look at him," added Rainfall. "If you were known to be able to identify him, your life wouldn't be worth that!" He snapped his fingers. "We are in the same boat, Miss Moment!" He smiled at her. "But since neither of us knows any more than he has told, we are probably safe enough. If only Mr. Ghost, now, would appoint himself a committee of one to solve this mystery—!"

Ghost laughed heartily. "As my physician, do you recommend it? I'm supposed to be convalescent, am I not?"

"Your mental agility would seem to be unimpaired."

"It must serve," said Ghost, "such as it is."

The coffee was coming in, backgrounded by the immense bulk of the negress Heliotrope. She set the tray down carefully upon the table and moved to the buffet. Miss Moment lifted the silver urn and poured the brown coffee into blue enamel cups.

Suddenly, Ghost, who had been looking idly into the adjoining front room, stiffened in his chair.

"Excuse me," he said quietly, and rose to his feet.

Then, while the others stared in amazement, he stepped swiftly and silently to the front windows, opening upon a wide veranda, and, flinging up the center frame, looked out into the **darkness.** **An**

instant later, he had stepped through the aperture onto the porch and vanished.

Three men got quickly to their feet and followed, the professor's chair crashing behind him. But even before Saxon, the most agile, could clamber through the window, Ghost was back.

"Gone!" he said laconically. "Don't everybody come out."

He climbed inside and again stood among them. "It was a man," he continued easily.



"He was looking in at the window. I suppose he saw me as I stood up."

Saxon exploded into something resembling pas-

sion. "There!" he cried. "You see?" He looked at Ghost as if daring him to deny, ever again, that the life of Holly Moment was in hourly peril.

But Ghost only shrugged and smiled. "It's all right, old chap," he observed soothingly.

Rainfall was examining some faint spots on the window pane. "Here are his fingerprints, Ghost," he exclaimed. "By Jove, perhaps we've got him!"

"Yes," agreed Ghost, "I noticed them. We'll want to get those, while the impressions are fresh."

"Did you *see* him, Mr. Ghost? Did you see his face?" asked Holly Moment. She was standing with her father's arm around her.

"About as much of him as you did, I imagine," smiled Ghost. "Supposing him to have been the same man! It doesn't follow that he was, of course. This fellow may have no connection whatever with—with the subject of our conversation."

**S**AXON disagreed warmly. "Excuse me, Mr. Ghost," he apologized, "but I thing he has."

"So do I," said Ghost, "but we can't prove it; and certainly he chose an awkward evening, if it was murder he had in mind. He might easily have picked out a less formidable occasion. There are evenings when Miss Mount is less thoroughly surrounded."

It was puzzling. Had some new development, as yet unknown to them, he wondered, been responsible for this espionage? All things considered, the move was more likely to be directed against Rainfall than against Holly Moment—but why, at the moment, against either?

"Hadn't we better notify the police at once?" asked the professor, a bit nervously. "Maybe this fellow is still somewhere around."

Ghost hesitated. It was, of course, exactly the thing that should be done, as a matter of sensible routine.

"Look here," said Rainfall, "this is more likely to be my affair than Miss Moment's. Don't you think so, Ghost?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, then, I'm getting out of here—now. I won't involve any of the rest of you in this."

"Nonsense!" said the professor. "You'll stay here, of course. There's plenty of room." His hospitality rose triumphant over his apprehension. "We'll heat up the coffee again, and make a night of it!"

It sounded like an invitation to some sort of a debauch.

"To tell the truth," answered Rainfall, "I'm afraid that fellow may have been merely a spy for somebody already at work in my apartment. I must really get back there. There's nothing to fear; but if it will make you feel any better, I'll pick up a policeman en route."

Ghost nodded. "I think the doctor is right," he said. An idea had crossed his own mind, and he was eager to test it.

"Good," cried Rainfall. "I'll call a cab at once."

"I'll go with him," said Saxon as the physician hurried off to the telephone.

Ghost shook his head. "Let him alone,"

he advised. "He knows what he's doing." He hesitated. "I may want you to stay here, Saxon, until *I* get back. But say nothing of that, please, to anybody."

They accompanied Rainfall to the curb, when the taxicab had arrived and Ghost made a careful note of the driver's number. It was unlikely that the call had been anticipated and a ringer substituted, but at the moment no chances could be taken. Saxon watched him with fascinated interest.

"Tell your man to drive fast, Rainfall," Ghost whispered to the doctor, "and keep to the lighted thoroughfares. You're armed, I suppose?"

"Hip and thigh," grinned the physician. "I'll telephone you from the flat, as soon as I get there."

"All right—and be careful!"

The motor purred softly; there was a shifting of gears, and the cab was away. Ghost put his lips to Saxon's ear, as they walked back.

"Into the house with you, now," he said, "and close the door with a bang. I'll be after you in a minute."

Saxon stared at him, bewildered; then complied. The front door closed after him in memorable fashion.

Left alone upon the sidewalk, Ghost pushed into the deep shadows of a great bush, close to the stairpost, and waited. It was his first definite move in the case, single-handed, and a little thrill of excitement added itself to the emotions thronging inside him. In a moment it passed, and he waited coolly for whatever might occur.

Would the fellow, if he were still around, return to the house? Or was the attack, as he was inclined to suspect, directed against the physician?

Another moment passed. Then, in the next street, a hundred feet beyond, a second motor sounded, roared for an instant, and took on the smoother accents of locomotion. A dark and powerful car spun quickly around the corner and passed the house with flying wheels.

Rainfall's conveyance was crossing the intersecting avenue, two blocks away.

Forgetting that he was still convalescent, Ghost ran swiftly to the house.

"Another cab, Howard!" he said. "Call it quickly, while I'm putting on my things; then stay here with the Professor and Miss Moment until you hear from me again. Rainfall is being followed, and I'm going after him, myself."

## CHAPTER XVII

### SHOTS IN THE NIGHT

RACING toward the city, John Rainfall leaned forward in his seat and addressed his driver.

"Step on it, Francois," he ordered briskly. "Don't get yourself arrested, if you can help it—but, if you do, I think I can square it for you." He added, "There's another car coming up behind us that I want to lose."

The taxicab driver answered something that sounded like "Gotcha," and stepped on it. The cab shook itself and leaped forward. It shot down the long street as if it had been hurled from a catapult. Foot passengers turned to look after it, open-mouthed.

It was an admirable hour for speeding. The dinner at the professor's had been a long one, and had been dragged out by conversation. As a consequence, the streets were now reasonably deserted. Theater traffic long had gone its way, and it was not yet time for it to begin to return. Children were safely off the streets and, it was to be hoped, in bed.

The green signals at important intersections were "with" them, almost consistently, Rainfall noted with satisfaction. When they were not, the reckless chauffeur turned into cross streets and swung northward again with the change of lights. He was a cunning driver. His knowledge of little crescents and obscure diagonal thoroughfares was accurate and bewildering. Apparently he had done this sort of thing before. In time, they entered a long, white

boulevard whose lamps, in narrowing perspective, fused in the distance into a single blob of radiant white fire.

**R**AINFALL contrived to light a cigar. Twisted in his seat, he looked backward from time to time for the pursuing car. It was well within view, and its headlong speed identified it beyond question. Another driver apparently was breaking the speed laws with impunity. It was a miracle that no motorcycle policeman had turned up in the path.

The doctor's story was ready, however: "Sorry, Officer, but I am a physician hurrying to the bedside of a patient. A matter of life and death. Here is my card."

Rainfall smiled happily. He had experienced no such tingling excitement since the war. Would the fellow try a shot, he wondered. But of course he would do nothing of the sort. Shots attracted attention, and attention was something the intending murderer of John Rainfall would not care for.

It would be possible, of course, in the event of an upspringing policeman, to indicate the pursuing vehicle and point out that it contained a dangerous criminal. But Rainfall put that idea out of his mind as quickly as it had entered. For one thing, it might be difficult to prove in a hurry, and, for another, the man behind belonged not to the police but to him, John Rainfall. To hell with the police!

He patted the pocket of his overcoat, on the right hand side, where an automatic pistol lay ready.

With reluctance, he put aside also the alluring notion of drawing the pursuer into some darkened cul-de-sac, where they could shoot it out together. Ghost, he remembered, would be waiting for his call. Failing to receive it, Ghost would turn out the entire police department, perhaps.

The pursuing car was still within view. It seemed, however, to be losing ground. Possibly the idea was not to catch up at all, but merely to hang on. Was there a second murderer waiting at the house?

Rainfall determined upon a small experiment. The moment was propitious. There were other cars now along the boulevard, and innumerable lights. He spoke again to his driver: "Slow up a minute, Alphonse. Let's see what this fellow will do."

Their speed began to fall off until, by comparison, they seemed to be only creeping. Behind them, their pursuer still thundered on. But in a short time he had realized the situa-



tion, and his own speed fell off. Rainfall chuckled.

"All right," he said. "He doesn't want me just yet. Keep

her at about thirty-five."

"Thirty-five," echoed the obedient driver; and at that rate they loafed across the city and approached the congested areas of the Chicago Loop.

At sober speed they entered the business district and threaded the crowded traffic lanes. Occasionally they halted, stopped by the tides of opposition, but there was no longer any fear that they would be overhauled. Whatever the intentions of the man in the pursuing car, he had been left behind in the jam of downtown traffic.

Crossing the bridge, they emerged in the northern section of the city, and rapidly clicked off the remaining blocks that lay between them and the Division Street apartment.

**R**AINFALL'S money, as they approached, was in his hand. The house, he saw at once, was dark; the street deserted. He paid his fare, quickly, through the window, added a generous gratuity, and hurried up the steps.

On the doorsill he halted. The taxi that had brought him across the city was backing and turning. No second car as yet had turned out off the lighted boulevard into the darkened cross street. Twice he drew

back, his hand upon the doorknob. Then he went in, and, pistol in hand, as once before he had entered his apartment, he pushed into his own rooms and stood an instant in silence.

As before, there was no sound but the ticking of the old clock that had been his father's. He stooped in the darkness and felt cautiously for the line of slender thread that he had stretched across the hall before leaving the house that morning. His fingers encountered it. It was still intact. Still unbroken. No one had entered from the front, at least.

Treading softly, he worked rearward to the door at the back, and again felt cautiously for his second thread. It, too, was unbroken. Then, still in darkness, he walked from window to window, and tried the locks.

Nothing had been disturbed. The apartment was just as he had left it. There had been threads across the windows, too, and they were, like the rest, unbroken, unmo-  
lest.

He returned to the sitting room and, lighting a fresh cigar, seated himself to think it over. Then he remembered the call he had promised to make. The telephone was in the hall.

How absurd, he thought, the entire episode would be, if after all this excitement the pursuing force did not arrive!

He plucked the receiver from its hook and started to give a number. Then carefully he replaced the instrument upon its stand and listened to the cautious footsteps mounting the outer flight—

**A**T THE same instant, Walter Ghost leaped from a car immediately around the corner and approached the house on foot.

It had been a wearisome drive for a convalescent, and Ghost was conscious of a number of aches. His fears for Rainfall's safety, however, were high. The doctor, in an emergency, he was certain, would act with a maximum of courage and a minimum of caution.

How far behind he was, himself, he could not be sure. There had been some notable racing, but there had been also a number of irritating delays. If anything had happened to Rainfall, he decided, he would not easily forgive himself. Stubborn as the physician had been about going, it was possible that he might have been persuaded to stay the night with the Moments, if he, Ghost, had not added his authority to the situation.

A fearful fraud, this Walter Ghost, after all, he told himself! He had vowed, forever henceforward to eschew the excitements of detection; yet here he was again, a sober student and booklover, plunged into the thick of murderous contemporaneous events! He would probably be fortunate, this time, if he escaped another operation.

There were no other vehicles in sight. But he had discharged his own driver out of sight and earshot, and no doubt the other man had done the same. Why the devil, he wondered, had not Rainfall lighted his front porch?

**H**OWEVER, that must be the place. Saxon had described it well enough. Old-fashioned, four-storied, and gloomy as a penitentiary . . . And quite suddenly Ghost observed that a man was turning in at the house in question, and cautiously mounting the steps. So quiet had been the approach of both men that neither had observed the other.

For just an instant, Ghost halted, shrinking against an iron fence. When the man had reached the darkened porch, again he stole forward. A sudden emotion had tightened all his nerves . . .

What followed was like a troubled dream.

Over the head of the man upon the porch, an electric globe blossomed whitely, flooding with light the figure beneath it. In the sudden glare, Ghost clearly saw the intruder's face, and saw the man's eyes blink shut before the blinding illumina-

tion. At the same instant the door was flung violently outward and Rainfall stood framed within the aperture. His right arm was already raised, and it seemed that the reports which followed, and the flashes of flame, emanated from the tips of his fingers.

The man on the porch dropped instantly in a huddled heap. His own weapon clattered upon the boards.

Ghost ran quickly to the scene.

"Rainfall!" he called.

The physician, coolly stooped across the body of the man he had shot, lifted his head.

"Hello, Ghost!" he answered, with mild surprise. "Is that you? Well, I got him! Help me to carry him into the house."

He bent again above the figure on the porch.

"Dead?" asked Ghost in a low voice.

"Absolutely—and not a minute too soon, either. Another second, and he'd have had *me*. That's his gun, there, beside your foot."

Ghost picked it up and dropped it in his pocket. "I followed you," he explained. "I saw him take off after you, so I was bound to come along. I'm afraid I can't do much lifting."

"Damn!" said Rainfall. "I forgot your wound. Sorry! I can handle him, myself."

"Quickly, then. We'll have

the neighborhood around our ears in a minute. I'll hold the door."

Up and down the block, doors and windows were opening upon the night, and curious citizens were thrusting forth their heads. Shots, in Chicago, are not a novelty, but for every disturbance there is always a prospective audience.

Between them, they managed to get the limp body through the door. Rainfall carried it inside and placed it upon the floor. Then, for a little time, they stood above it

and looked down into the face of the man who had been slain.

It was an intelligent enough face, almost a handsome face, although marked by signs of dissipation. And somehow, about the lips, it seemed to the imaginative Ghost, there lingered the traces of a secret smile. The eyes, however, stared with a certain quaint surprise, an illusion perhaps heightened by the high sweep of the brows. To both men, for an instant, it was as if the dead man were about to speak—to utter some tremendous revelation.

They continued to look down upon him, silent and a little shaken.

The man's clothing, they saw, was well tailored and of excellent material. The coat, however, was now dabbled with blood, and a slow stream still oozed from the wound in the breast. It streaked his shirt and vest.

Flinging off his own coat, stained by contact with the corpse, Rainfall knelt and with careful fingers revealed the inner pocket of the man's jacket. He turned down the edge. With a slender flashlight from his own pocket, he illumined the interior. Ghost bent forward, and together they read the name inked on the tailor's label: *Nicholas Aye*.

"Somewhere," observed Rainfall, rising to his feet, "I have heard that name before."

"It's an unusual one," said Ghost thoughtfully. He hesitated. "I suppose we really have no right to examine him, this way, before the arrival of the police."

**R**AINFALL agreed. "I suppose not—but in the circumstances, I think I have a few privileges. The fellow tried to murder me, after all. Poor devil!"

He whistled an eerie little tune. "Well, I've killed a man. Ghost! It's not quite in my line of business. I've often wondered if I could. It's an experience—for a man whose job is keeping people alive."

"Shaken up a bit?" asked Ghost.

"Yes, I am. So much so that I'm going to have a drink."



"Well," said Ghost, "it was probably your life or his."

He continued to stare thoughtfully at the dead man on the floor, whose blood was soaking into the physician's rug. There were papers in that inner pocket, he knew. He had seen them. If only he might have a look at them!

Nicholas Aye.

Was he the long-sought murderer of Bluefield and Gaunt and Lear? There was excellent reason to believe so. But why had he come armed with a pistol? The murderer of Bluefield, *et al*, had been far more subtle.

Suddenly, in his turn, he knelt beside the body.

"It's quite unorthodox, Rainfall," he remarked, "but I'm going to have a look at this fellow's pockets." He drew out the sheaf of papers and laid them gingerly beside him on the floor. There was blood on all of them. "The police, I suppose, will be here at any minute."

"I suppose so," answered the doctor gloomily. "Some of my neighbors will have telephoned by this time, and saved us the trouble."

Again there was a creepy silence. It was broken by the physician, now slightly restored by a stiff dash of whisky.

"What's that in his side pocket, Ghost?" he asked. "There, on the left."

"More papers," said Ghost. "Well, we ought to find *something*, with all this evidence to help us."

He drew out a square of white paper, and they exclaimed together.

It was more than twice as large as any that had been used before, and the letters, too, were bigger and more staring; but it had a familiar look.

"Dead Man Inside!"

"By George," observed the doctor, raising his eyebrows, "he did mean business, didn't he!"

For some moments they looked at the sinister document, realizing its intended purpose. Then outside, on the stairs, they heard the footsteps of the police.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE MAN IN THE CAR

ALL things considered, it had been a busy evening for the police. Once more the story of the earlier murders, after a day or two of relative obscurity, was rehashed and restored to the front page.

The attack on Rainfall, it appeared, had not been the only development of the hours of darkness.

Far out on the west side of the city, near Garfield Park, another body had been discovered, seated lifelessly at the wheel of a closed car and ticketed with the now familiar placard. That is, the car was ticketed.

"Get along there, now," a patrolman had remarked, good-naturedly enough; and then, when the man did not reply, he had opened the door of the car and repeated his command.

Still the man at the wheel had not spoken. As previous to this one-sided conversation the patrolman had passed the parked car a number of times, without comment, he felt justified in his annoyance.

Then he had shaken the man's shoulder, believing him to be asleep.

Discovery of the murder had been effected about midnight, according to the morning journals, but death, the police said, had visited its victim some hours before—approximately about 9 o'clock, or about the time that Rainfall, more fortunate than the man in the car, had left the dinner at the Moments.

THERE was no difficulty about identity. The man in the car had belonged to everything worth joining, and carried membership cards in number. He was Ellis Greene, a young man of good reputation, and a bond salesman for a famous house. He had been murdered with admirable neatness, exactly as had been Bluefield, Gaunt, and Lear.

Save for the square of white paper pasted to the glass, which the patrolman had mistaken for an election poster, there

was no clue to the murderer. None, at any rate, that could at once be made useful. A number of fingerprints had been taken from the automobile, some of which were certainly Greene's own and some of which were those of a stranger. The car, however, had belonged to Greene, who was unmarried, a Republican, and a collector of postage stamps. His age had been about thirty years.

Detective-Sergeants Brandt and Noble had been placed in charge of the investigation—Kelly and Sheets being still engaged with the theater mystery—and they were reported to be following up a clue.

The sensation in Rainfall's case was the identification of the man he had killed. Nicholas Aye was well known to the police, although he had no criminal record. He was, in point of fact, a bootlegger of repute—in his own district a sort of king or overlord.

In the light of Rainfall's testimony, and that of Ghost, it was manifestly impossible that Aye could have murdered Greene, then hurried to the south side of the city to spy upon Rainfall. On the chance, however, that the elapsed time between the moment of Greene's death and the discovery of his body had been underestimated by the coroner's department, the available fingerprints were compared.

Those found on Professor Moment's window were definitely the fingerprints of Nicholas Aye; those on the panels of Greene's car were not.

There was only one possible conclusion. If the cases were related, the "Dead Man Murders" were not, as had been supposed, the work of a single hand. Rather, they were the work of a number of hands, albeit the hands might have been directed by a single brain.

Who, then, was the brain? Was he Nicholas Aye?

But what could such a man have had to do with Amos Bluefield and Patrick Lear? Yet it was certain that Aye had visited Rainfall with murder in his heart and a placard in his pocket. And Rainfall had

been Lear's friend and a prime mover in the Lear investigation.

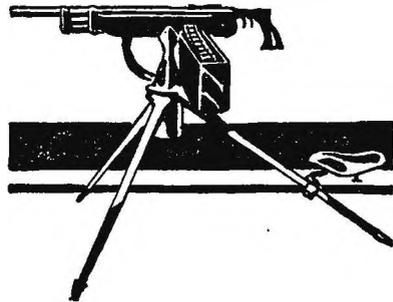
For that matter, argued the police, if alcohol were the keyword to the puzzle, there could be no guessing how many citizens, reputable and widely diversified, the situation might ultimately touch.

Aye's pistol had seemed an incongruous weapon for a murderer committed to cold steel, but it was less incongruous the morning afterward than it had seemed the night of the assault. In the bootlegger's careful garments had been discovered a slender length of tempered steel, fitted with a wooden handle, which he had found no opportunity to use. Its point was guarded by a protector of stout leather, and it appeared to have been made to order for the murders.

GHOST was dismayed. The murder of Ellis Greene did not fit his theory at all. The bond salesman was too young to have been involved in the origins of the case, as he saw it. Nor was he pleased with the revelation of Aye's identity.

"A bootlegger!" exclaimed the amateur disgustedly. "To what base depths hath this our case descended? Chandler, do you mean to tell me that a bootlegger is the brain and center of this web? That Bluefield and Lear were murdered because they had knowledge of the unlawful activities of a rumrunner?"

Professor Moment looked reproachful. "My dear Walter," he retorted, "I have said nothing of the sort. I have thought nothing of the sort. Why pick on me?"



"Because I'm annoyed, I suppose. I am merely raving aloud."

"For that matter, though," argued the professor, "why shouldn't they have been? This is Chicago, after all. Run running—bootlegging—is an established, indeed an accepted, fact. It is a profitable and recognized profession. It is perhaps our third industry. If somebody attempted to interfere with one of the systems, that somebody would be—I believe the phrase is—'bumped off.' Yes, sir, whether he were a haberdasher or an actor!"

"I'll tell you why it simply can't be," said Ghost. "Because the idea of it is comic. If Bluefield had been a policeman, and Lear a politician, then Gaunt—a gambler—would fit the scheme admirably and we would have a typical Chicago crime which would fail to interest me in the slightest degree. Greene, too, would fit, perhaps. But the early history of the case is on too high a plane. Bluefield's murder; and Gaunt's, and Lear's, was not low farce, but high fantasy. Each, or all, requires an explanation as satisfying as the murders."

"I am perhaps less sensitive to the fine points of murder," observed the professor aggravatingly. "To me, Walter, it seems reasonably obvious that this Aye—a sufficiently remarkable name, by the way, to satisfy your artistic sensibilities—is either the murderer or one of the murderer's tools."

"Granted," said Ghost, "for the sake of argument; but surely not in his capacity of bootlegger."

"What would you have him?"

"An auctioneer," said Ghost, "a country editor, a bishop of the Anglican church—a whirling dervish—a teacher of the mandolin! Anything but a bootlegger!"

"You've been reading 'Sherlock Holmes,'" accused the professor. "All right, Walter, I'll take that back! But it does seem a bit unreasonable to refuse an easy explanation because you are determined it ought to be a hard one."

Ghost shrugged. "Maybe you're right," he said. "Maybe I'm an ass. I've often suspected it. But I'm not demanding a difficult

explanation. I ask only an explanation that fits the crime."

He was silent for a moment. Then, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Chandler," he continued. "I'm going to investigate this latest murder myself—the Greene affair. Last night, I thought I had a solution—vague, nebulous, a little crazy, but artistically satisfying nonetheless. Today it's been shaken, and I'm beginning to doubt my intuitions—which is bad. I'm going to visit the morgue and have a look at young Mr. Greene, and then I'm going to talk with the detectives who are in charge of his case."

"All right," said the professor.

Ghost went away to the telephone to call a taxicab.

AT THE county morgue, a singularly cheerless place, Ghost found a bulky police sergeant in charge of the victim's garments, looking at them with listless eye, while smoking a cigar.

"Yeh," nodded the sergeant, "I'm Noble! Ghost, eh? Your name was in the papers, wasn't it? Sure, I remember. Friend of Dr. Rainfall."

Nevertheless, the sergeant looked suspicious.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Ghost? Wanta see the body?"

"Not particularly," responded Ghost. "I mean, I've seen bodies before and there are pleasanter sights." He smiled disarmingly. "Yes, I suppose I do. I should like, also, if it isn't forbidden, to see the clothing and the contents of the man's pockets."

"Nothing interesting," said the sergeant. "Couple of letters of no importance—a patent cigarette lighter, worth about a dollar—some cigarettes—and his business card. A flock of membership tickets. He was quite a joiner."

"Nothing scandalous, eh? Too bad! Well, let me see them."

The detective officer indicated a large wallet—his own—on a table beside him. "It's all there," he nodded obligingly,

"Help yourself. Sort of a amateur detective yourself, ain't you?"

"If you don't mind," smiled Ghost.

"Oh, I don't mind! The woods are full of them. We've had sixty on this case, already."

"This case?"

"Not Greene, no—all these murders."

"I see! What do my colleagues seem to think?" Ghost contrived to make his tone deprecating, and the big detective grinned.

"My God! You should hear them!"

"I'm glad I don't have to," said Ghost. As he talked he was turning over the several articles mentioned.

He produced a newspaper clipping from the wallet. "Here's something you didn't mention."

"That! Oh, yes—it doesn't amount to much."

"Still, everything found on a man's body is interesting. Bootlegger out of circulation, eh?"

"What?" cried the sergeant. He looked over Ghost's shoulder. "You've got the wrong side of it, buddy." He turned it over. "Bond sales. That was his job."

Ghost read the other side. It was as the detective had said. Under a Wisconsin date line, report was made of an issue of bonds that was shortly to be placed on sale.

He returned to the obverse, and read again a short account of the death, in a hospital, of a man who some time previously had been shot by federal agents. The man had been a miner rum runner, one Anthony Carr. What an extraordinary coincidence! thought Ghost—if it was a coincidence. For the man Green was certainly a bond salesman by profession, according to police investigation. Nothing could be more natural than to find in his pocket a clipping having to do with a prospective sale



of municipal bonds. Yet it was astonishing that the other side of the clipping should reveal the death of a rum runner. Both sides contained the notices complete.

Ghost was troubled. Again his more artistic and satisfying theory of what had occurred seemed to be going glimmering.

"These are his garments, I suppose?"

"Yep, all he had on."

"Good stuff, isn't it?"

"First rate," agreed Sergeant Noble.

Ghost turned the clothing over as idly as the sergeant had done. The shoes were singularly fresh and clean. They had just been half-soled. Suddenly his heart leaped and sank. Sank dismally.

In the right coat lapel of the man's jacket was a glittering button. Its significance to the police had been slight. It certified merely that Ellis Greene had been a member in good standing of the Chicago Lodge of the Royal Bison. But Ghost's mind carried back to the eerie scene in the Moment drawing room, and Holly Moment's puzzled inquiry—"Are you wearing something on your coat, Mr. Ghost? On the right side?"

Something bright—that glittered for a moment in the poor light!

Was it possible that the body of Bluefield's murderer lay there, only a few feet away?

Ellis Greene, bond salesman?

Many men, it was true, wore lodge buttons on their lapels; but Greene was dead in circumstances that related him in some fashion to the other murders.

And if Greene had killed Bluefield, and somebody else had killed Greene, where did it all begin, and where would it all end? It was a circle—one murderer killing another murderer—the second murderer killed perhaps by a third—

Gamblers, bootleggers, bond salesmen! Incredible!

And which side of the newspaper clipping had Ellis Greene been saving? To Ghost, it made all the difference in the world.

His theory badly shaken, the amateur

thanked the detective-sergeant for favors shown, and drove thoughtfully homeward.

## CHAPTER XIX

## WAITING

HOWARD SAXON called the following evening upon Holly Moment, who appeared pleased at his coming. The evening before he had merely telephoned, having found it necessary to attend the wedding of a pugilist. At the pugilist's wedding there had been a barrel of liquor and a dozen attractive young women, but Saxon had been bored and unhappy from the beginning. His anxiety for the professor's daughter was still high, and the attack on Rainfall had not been reassuring.

It was his hope that he might be allowed to look in on Miss Moment whenever he happened to be in the neighborhood. After all, the household must be pretty lonesome! Thinking upon the little strolls taken, in sunlight, by Ghost and Holly, his blood turned cold. What madness! What reckless madness! His imagination ran riot at the thought. He conjured swift and terrible pictures in which always he saw himself standing between Holly Moment and some fantastic peril. Somehow when he was himself upon the spot the danger that appeared to threaten seemed less immediate.

He had arranged, in point of fact, a sort of tentative schedule of appearances for himself. On one evening, with or without invitation, he would visit Ghost; who as a friend would doubtless be glad to see him, and on another evening he would frankly call upon Miss Moment herself. Between whiles, there was always the telephone, that remarkable instrument.

MISS MOMENT was happy to see him.

"How was the wedding?" she asked brightly.

Saxon shook his head. "Blonde and dismal."

"Oh, come," she laughed, "something of

interest must have occurred. I suppose it came off! Why didn't you ask me to go with you?"

"Great Scott!" cried Saxon, amazed. "You don't mean to say——! Why, if it had crossed my mind, I'd have asked you in a minute. No, I wouldn't, either! But wait until you can go places, and—say, I'll take you places that will make your hair curl! Well, maybe I will."

"You are curiously uncertain, aren't you?" asked Miss Moment. "Was the bride pretty?"

"Not a particle!" said Saxon. "Oh, I suppose Bat thought she was pretty. Blonde and—ah—puzzled. You know? Why are blondes always puzzled, Miss Moment?"

"Are they? It hadn't occurred to me. And what of brunettes?"

"Decisive," answered Saxon. "Decisive and—overwhelming!"

"Dear me," smiled the professor's daughter. "I *am* learning things about my sex, this evening."

What an ass he was, he told himself grimly. As a rule he was sane enough. Now he could think only of nonsense. God knew there were plenty of things he wanted to say to her. Her own ease was superb, he noted.

Nevertheless, she was slightly embarrassed.

"Speaking of brunettes," she contrived, cleverly, "what do you think I discovered Heliotrope doing, today?"

"What?" Saxon was relieved.

"Playing with a Ouija board!"

"Not really?" He had a swift vision of the mountainous negress bending over the little varnished board. "Something about our case?"

"I don't know. She blushed when I caught her at it, so I suppose it was a love affair. I *think* she blushed. It's hard to say when Heliotrope is blushing and when she isn't."

"So I should imagine."

"I thought it might be amusing to borrow the board and——"

"Try it ourselves? Why not!"

"Not that I have any faith in such things. Have you?"

"Not a faith," said Saxon.

"Then I'll get the board and we'll see what Little Chief Skookum has to say for himself."

"Is Little Chief Skookum her lover?"

"Her control, I think. Does one have controls when one uses a Ouija?"

"I must have forgotten," grinned Saxon.

"I think Ouija herself is the control."

"I'll get the board anyway," said Miss Moment. "Mr. Ghost will be down soon, I think, and then we'll have a—but we mustn't make puns about Mr. Ghost. He's too nice."

She departed for the kitchen in search of the negress.

"Now," she continued, reappearing after a time, "shall we hold it on our knees or put up a table?"

"Let's hold it on our knees," suggested Saxon. It was an idea that appealed to him.

A SLOW step sounded on the staircase, and in a moment Walter Ghost entered the room. He greeted Saxon warmly.

"Am I intruding?" he asked. "Hello, what are you youngsters doing with that thing? I didn't know you went in for supernaturalism, Holly."

"I don't," she said. "It's Heliotrope's. Of course, you're not intruding. Is he, Mr. Saxon?"

"Certainly not," said Saxon. "You look tired, Mr. Ghost."

"I am a bit tired," confessed Ghost. "I've been thinking too much about this absurd murder business, I suppose. It is absurd, you know. Were you about to ask the spirits for assistance or advice?"

"What *were* we going to ask?" Miss Moment laughed. "I guess we hadn't got that far, Mr. Ghost." She looked at him

with sudden doubt. "Surely *you* don't believe in such things!"



"Don't I?" Ghost was quizzical. "How do you know I don't? I believe in everything."

"You're joking, of course. Well, you may ask the first question." She seated herself and took the board upon her own and Saxon's knees.

Her fingers rested delicately upon the smaller instrument that spelled the mystic words, and Saxon's moved to join them. Ghost whipped out a pencil and a notebook.

"I'll record the revelations as they come through, shall I?"

The dark head of Holly Moment was bent seriously above the board. "Concentrate!" she said; and suddenly she was a little timid in the face of this new experience. Almost a little afraid.

What if, after all, there was something in it?

Ghost's eyes were sparkling with interest. On his own tongue a dozen questions were waiting to find utterance.

Miss Moment's voice was slightly strained, but her diction was precise and accurate. "With whom am I about to speak?" After all, she thought, it was perhaps as well to know.

There were some instants of breathless indecision. The little instrument moved faintly under their fingers, then stopped. After a time it began again. It moved slowly toward a letter—wavered—backed away—returned to the attack.

The motion was circular and crablike, and to Holly Moment it was curiously disturbing. She was not pushing the pointer a particle; of that she was certain. Was Saxon?

The guide moved forward—paused—hesitated above a letter—stopped still. There was no further movement.

"H" said Walter Ghost crisply.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Saxon. "It does work, doesn't it?"

"It's begining again," cried Holly Moment. "Concentrate!"

The weaving, circular motion was re-established. The little guide moved more rapidly now, as if it had gained confidence

in its powers. The pointer settled upon another letter.

"O" said Ghost.

"Absolutely spooky!" observed Saxon, with profound interest.

"Concentrate!" warned Holly Moment.

Under their fingers the three-legged guide was moving again. It was moving swiftly, like a skater with keen skates upon polished ice. It cut a wide swath across the board, running crazily toward the end of the alphabet.

A curious thrill passed through the skeptic soul of Holly Moment.

"W" said Ghost. He laughed suddenly.

"This won't do at all. It's spelling out your name, Howard. Let me ask it a question." Addressing the painted board, he asked, "Do you mean Howard?"

THE pointer moved affirmatively toward a corner of the board upon which was painted the word "Yes."

"Silly!" exclaimed Miss Moment chidingly.

The board made no reply.

"Well," said Ghost, "I suppose there are several Howards in the world and out of it. We've got somebody, anyway. You've established a connection. Go ahead."

"You ask a question," suggested Saxon.

"Very well! Suppose we try a shot in the dark." Ghost bent above the board. In a low voice he asked: "Who killed Amos Bluefield?"

The silence that followed was eerie. Slowly the little stool began to move—

"L—E—A—R."

Miss Moment took her fingers abruptly from the board. "It's ghastly," she observed. "Also, it's complete foolishness! We ought to be ashamed of ourselves."

"Perhaps I ought not to have let you do it," admitted Ghost. "It isn't necessarily foolishness—I mean the board's answer isn't—but it does seem an unlikely reply. Lear was playing in Milwaukee until the end of the week in which Bluefield was killed. Still," he laughed, "it would have been even more unlikely if I had asked

'Who killed Lear?' and the board had answered 'Bluefield!'"

In their interest they had forgotten everything else. With a sense of shock they heard a key turn in the outer lock.

An instant later Professor Chandler W. Moment had entered the room. He stared, speechless, from one member of the group to another.

"What under the canopy?" he began.

"A little experiment, Professor," laughed Ghost. "We were upon the point of solving the mystery of Bluefield, Lear, *et al.* Won't you take a hand? Holly and Howard are about fed up with it."

"Not I," said Saxon. "I love it!"

"Really? Then you and I will try our hands at it. Let me have your chair, Holly, and you take the notebook."

"Quite lunatic, all of you," observed the professor from the doorway. Nevertheless, he hung up his hat and stick in haste and moved to join the investigators. "Ask it what happened to my second pair of spectacles," he said. "Where did you get that thing, Walter?"

"Hush!" said Ghost. "It's Heliotrope's. We've got a ha'nt named Howard on the celestial line, giving us information."

"And a Ghost named Ha'nt supplying the information," muttered the professor, drawing up a chair. "All right, I won't say another word."

In breathless silence, the séance was resumed. The board was now supported by the knees of Ghost and Howard Saxon.

There was a moment of immobility, then a surprising thing happened. Without a question asked, the little guide began to move beneath their fingers. It moved rapidly, accurately, and without pause, from letter to letter until it had spelled out a sentence.

The professor's eyes were bulging.

"A—canary—used—to—hang—where—you—are—now—sitting."

"Good God!" exploded Chandler W. Moment. "My Aunt Eliza!" He turned reproachful eyes on Ghost. "Walter, you rascal, you're pushing that thing around."

"Am I pushing it, Howard?"

"No more than I am, I guess," answered the amazed Saxon. "And I certainly never heard of your Aunt Eliza or her canary, Professor. Did she have one?"

"She did," said the professor stiffly. "It hung there, from the chandelier, immediately above your head. Upon my word, I never heard of anything like it."

"It's odd," agreed Ghost. "Suppose you question her, Professor."

"I should feel like a fool," said Chandler W. Moment. "What under the sun would I ask her?"

NEVERTHELESS, he moved forward and bending wrathfully above the board he barked his question: "Are you the old woman they used to call 'Catty' Calthrop?"

At this insult, there was a slight movement, as of protest, on the part of the board. But the reply was sweetly complacent.

"It—made—no—difference—to—me—what—I—was—called."

"Exactly what she would have answered!" gasped the professor. "Walter, what is the meaning of this?"

"I can't imagine what your aunt knows about these murders," replied Ghost coolly, "but if there is anything she wants to tell us, I think we should give her the opportunity."

The professor nodded wildly. "Go ahead," he gulped.

Ghost bent again above the varnished board. His voice was low and melodious. "There is something I want to know," he said. "Answer me, if you can. Somewhere there is a solution to our problem. It is a solution that dates back many years. Perhaps it is in an old street in an old city, and perhaps an old woman can give it to

us. I do not ask for names—for names of people. What is the town I must seek to find my answer?"

For an instant the world appeared to stop turning.

Then for the last time the pointer started upon its wayward course. Once more, out of a child's alphabet there emerged, slowly, three meaningless syllables:

"Wal—sing—ham."

"Wal—sing—ham," repeated Ghost. "Walsingham!" He looked up. "Is that a city, Professor?"

Professor Moment was excited. "A college town, Walter! A little college town in Connecticut!"

"H'm," said Ghost.

He turned again to the board.

"Do you mean Walsingham in Connecticut?"

They grew old waiting.

"Yes," said the board.

## CHAPTER XX

### MR. GHOST GOES EAST

THERE is a compound German word—*ohrfeigen-gesicht*—which, loosely translated, means a face that invites a box on the ear. Something like that. Certainly there are such faces. They are the unenviable characteristic of at least one member of every community. Their magnetism is irresistible. The owner of such a face has only to put his head inside a door to make everybody within hurling distance yearn to heave a pot at it.

Adrian Bluefield had such a face. It had annoyed the reporters; it had annoyed the police. In time, it was destined to annoy the undertaker and embalmer. At the moment, however, there existed in the minds of the reporters and the police only the vague memory of an irritation. After the funeral of Amos Bluefield, Adrian had been half forgotten. It was tacitly assumed that he was going about his brother's business, clearing the decks, settling the estate, arranging for a return to Portland, Maine. Not even the murder of Patrick Lear had



any more than casually recalled the man.

In the excitement that followed the murder of Ellis Greene, the second Bluefield was suddenly remembered. A certain amount of stock-taking was imperative, and looking back over the long list of persons in any way touched by the several tragedies, the distracted police chief of Chicago observed to his chief of staff—not with inspiration, but almost listlessly—"Bluefield!"

He added, "By the way, whatever became of that fellow Adrian? Was that his name? Amos's brother?"

The chief of staff replied that he was damned if he knew.

**T**HIS brief exchange of words served to remind the chief of police that the credentials of Adrian Bluefield never had been questioned. There had been, indeed, as he recalled it, no credentials to question. The man had arrived in Chicago, given an interview, taken command of a situation, buried his brother, and dropped out of sight.

The chief of police thought it over. The merest routine demanded investigation. Also, it was conceivable that Adrian Bluefield, who had heard of Gaunt from his brother's letters, had heard, too, of Greene. He asked a subordinate to call up Adrian's hotel, and at the same time scribbled a telegram to the head of the police department in Portland.

The subordinate returned. "Mr. Bluefield checked out the day of the funeral."

"The deuce he did!" observed the chief. "H'm! That's funny. Call up his brother's hotel. Maybe he went *there* to live."

In a few minutes the subordinate reported again. "Not there," he said. "They don't know anything about him. Everything has been moved out. They think the stuff went to storage, but they don't know."

"Well, well," said the police chief, or words to that effect. "Well, well, and well!" Then, suddenly, with that tardy inspiration that made him, after all, a bet-

ter man for his job than nine out of ten others, he added, "Wilk, I'll bet that fellow's a crook!"

"No!" cried Wilk, scandalized.

"Yes, sir," said the chief of police, "I'll bet he's a crook."

"*Tchk, tchk, tchk!*" deprecated Wilk, humorously ironic. "Then he's the thirteenth known crook in this city. We'll be getting a reputation, first thing we know."

His superior frowned. "That will be about enough from you, Wilk," he remarked, and scribbled another telegram to the Portland police department.

In this fashion, it was discovered that no Adrian Bluefield was known in Portland, Maine, and the dark suspicion grew that the man from the East had been guilty of falsehood. If he had lied about his place of residence, it was inferred that he might also have lied about his name and business, about the letters from Amos Bluefield, about Gaunt, and about everything else.

It became apparent that the man calling himself Adrian Bluefield must be found at once and asked a number of questions.

The usual inquiries were begun. With short-sightedness, the department revealed its doubts to the press, thereby warning the man sought that he was again an object of interest. In this connection, it was the police idea that Adrian, if he were on the square, would at once come forward.

**B**UT Adrian did not come forward. Instead, the friends of Amos Bluefield belatedly expressed an earlier surprise. Their first news of the relationship, they confessed, had come to them through the newspapers. Previous to the arrival of Adrian, and the appearance of his interview in the journals, they had not known that Amos *had* a brother. He had never mentioned one. They had supposed his relations all to be dead.

"A pity they didn't mention it earlier," commented Ghost, when the doubts had found their way into print. "Typical citizens of the greatest nation under the sun! They saw it in the papers, so they believed

it. It is in such fashion that opinions are formed, important conclusions reached; and it is the same in politics and religion and in everything else. The average man, or woman, depends upon a sort of magic to determine his course as citizen or factor. He arrives at complete conviction with the slightest possible information, and that usually false, mistaken, or intentionally colored by the newspapers."

He shrugged. "I suppose I should have questioned that relationship myself, since I am such a fount of wisdom; but who could have supposed the police would not investigate?"

The case of Ellis Greene still bothered him, and the appearance of yet another suspect in the field inclined him to irritation. There were points about the Greene episode that made it difficult to dismiss, greatly as he would have liked to dismiss it. He would have liked to believe that the case of Ellis Greene had nothing to do with the earlier murders; that it was one of those predictable crimes called by criminologists "imitative." Murder as a result of suggestion. There were always several such after a murder that was really novel and different. They involved a peculiar psychological quirk in certain minds.

Once an old woman in a fairy tale had gone off to market after warning her children not to put beans up their noses. The idea had not occurred to the children, and would not have occurred to them; but as soon as her silly back was turned they stuffed their noses full of beans. Imitative murders were somewhat of that order of phenomena, Ghost thought. Anything out of the usual stupid run of things was as certain to have as many begats as a paragraph of the Old Testament.

His experiments with a Ouija board were still a topic of conversation, and he had not confessed his duplicity in the matter, although it was suspected. He had not told the professor that it was Heliotrope, herself, that admirable gossip, who had revealed the former existence of an Aunt Eliza and a canary. The incident had

been, in point of fact, merely a dramatic gesture to lend point to his proposed departure for the East. It had struck him as a good idea to mention the town of Walsingham, for which collegiate township he proposed to leave.

The earlier phases of the ghostly dialogue were, he was convinced, the sheerest nonsense. Yet it occurred to him to wonder whose subconscious—that of Saxon or that of Holly Moment—had dictated the name "Lear" in response to the question "Who killed Amos Bluefield?" Saxon's given name might have been—in response to Holly's first nervous question—an emanation from either.

There was still another possibility in the case of Greene, it occurred to Ghost, reflecting upon all things that had passed. Perhaps an intending murderer, with a grudge against the bond man, had cleverly utilized the situation as a background for his wholly personal scheme of vengeance. Saxon had once suggested the idea in connection with the case of Lear—Saxon or somebody.

Confound Ellis Greene! Remotely, the newspaper excerpt found upon his body—if it were not indeed only a notice of a sale of bonds—seemed to link the man with Nicholas Aye. The button on his coat lapel suggested the man in Bluefield's window. Each item in itself was valueless—almost childish—but taken together, in connection with the manner of the fellow's death, they had an aspect of profound significance.

**I**F, NOW, Greene also had been a member of that "forty years of age" group, would the case of Bluefield, Gaunt, Lear, *et al*, be helped or hindered?

It was similarly disturbing to realize that Adrian Bluefield might not now be Adrian Bluefield at all, but a new and sinister figure in the tale. And if he were not a Bluefield, who, in Heaven's name, might he be? Who might he *not* be! He had appeared promptly enough after the death of Amos.

"Well," Holly Moment spoke sooth-

ingly, when she had heard his several doubts on this score, "he isn't Greene, Mr. Ghost, and he isn't Nicholas Aye. That ought to be a comfort."

"It is," said Ghost, "it is, Holly! He is at least somebody to look for—somebody who has been seen by a number of persons—somebody who can be recognized, if sighted. Sooner or later, he is bound to be discovered. When he is, he will have some explaining to do."

"And what a jolly mess it will be, Mr. Ghost, if he turns up dead and labeled, like the others! I suppose that's possible."

"Jolly indeed," agreed Ghost, without enthusiasm. "Oh, it's quite possible. This whole affair is taking on a nightmarish quality in which *anything* is possible."

He was tempted to thake her into his confidence on a number of matters. The ideas he had not discussed. The letter from Connecticut that had come in answer to his own. Little things! He had been turning them in his mind for a number of days. Significant things that might have no significance whatever. Insignificant things that might take on the utmost significance. Discrepancies—odds and ends of fact and fancy. They didn't fit, it was true—but who could say what the future might disclose?

But he decided against a confidant. He would play his own hand to the end, and if he were wrong, no one would be any the wiser. If he were right . . . ?

He smiled at the eager girl. "Well, Holly, if anything like a solution of all this muddle occurs to you, don't hesitate to mention it! I am really very much interested." He laughed his whimsical little laugh.

But the afternoon papers completed his annoyance.

Up north, in the Wilson Avenue district, a shopkeeper of no importance pushed beans into his nostrils—that is, he blew out his unimportant brains, in the back room of his establishment, after placarding his window with a duplicate of the original Bluefield notice.

"I am dead," said the note dispassionately. This store will not open today."



Suicide, of course. There was no doubt of it. Everything was present to prove

it. The revolver, the powder burns, the position of the wound, all gave evidence of self-extermination. Nobody particularly cared. The man had been frankly a neurotic and a nuisance. He had been for some time near the end of his rope. Sick, broke, more or less insane, he had been following the "Dead Man Murders" with profound attention, the neighbors deposed. He took in all the papers. He discussed the case with his customers. Now he was dead by his own hand. Even the police admitted it.

But it was irritating. It confused the issues anew. It raised again and more strongly all the old doubts. Was it conceivable that every murder after the first had been merely an echo of that fantastic performance? Each unrelated to the other?

Ghost didn't believe it. The case of the Wilson Avenue shopkeeper was unrelated; but the rest—even possibly that of Greene, he was afraid—were definitely tied up one with another. There was a high significance in the warnings received by Holly Moment and John Rainfall. Holly's had grown out of the murder of Amos Bluefield; Rainfall's had been clearly connected with the murder of Lear. Aye had been a bootlegger, and there had been an odor, at least, of liquor in the case of Ellis Greene. All these things were related. They *must* be. All were full of meaning.

But "liquor" was not the keyword! The keyword had not been uttered, perhaps, but it was not "liquor."

OUT of nowhere, an idea came to Ghost, new and attractive and entirely mad. "The old pirate!" That was what Chandler Moment had called the

murdered Bluefield, in a number of his household lectures.

What if "pirate" were the missing word? The word that would unlock the puzzle! Something hot and romantic that went back, in its origins, to the murderous rovers of the Caribbean! Bluefield and Blauvelt were the same name; there could be no doubt of that. A pirate hoard—a map—a group of men, now all of them about forty (bother Ellis Greene!), who went in search of it! And perhaps quarreled?

And, of course, even bootleg liquor—some of it—came from those sea-girt islands among which, years ago, the great Colon himself had ventured.

Ghost laughed quietly to himself. The notion pleased him and he played with it for a time, finding relaxation in the exercise. But it was sheer madness, and he knew it. It didn't fit at all. The wish was

father to the thought. He was a little tired of the city on the lake. The lure of islands was upon him. But it was a picturesque notion, and it had its points.

One thing was certain. The solution—barring a sudden and unlooked-for confession—lay in another quarter. It lay, indeed, in another decade. More and more he was convinced of it.

"I must go East, tomorrow, Chandler," he told the professor, that evening. "I shall be back again shortly, I hope; at any rate, I shall be in touch with you. Yes, I am going to have a look at Walsingham."

The Twentieth Century Limited, next morning, sped him eastward on the new adventure. As the train was leaving the station, he heard a newsboy shouting his wares beneath the train shed, and thrust his head from the window.

But he was too late to learn what it was all about.

*(Part III will appear in the next issue.)*

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of the West*

**Man Hunt!**  
**Man Hunt!**  
**Man Hunt!**  
**Man Hunt!**

*By*

**ERNEST  
HAYCOX**

*A City Lad Finds River-Rats  
as Hard as Wharf-Rats*



*The Man Who  
Wrote "Foggy  
Bends," "Men of  
the Mississippi" etc.  
Gives You*

## MUSSEL WATER

By HAL DAVENPORT

**T**HICK with their lonely silence, the Arkansas Bottoms stretched away, black and vast and mucky, from the little drift-wood fire at the foot of the night-hung sandbar. The eddy water was still, here at Nigger Head Bend. The two shell-fishers sat hunched before the flames. Ol' Dad spoke, abruptly.

"Kid," he said, "I don't figure to be goin' out this year. I—I reckon I'm afraid to."

The other looked at him sharply. They were a strangely assorted pair, these two

work partners whom circumstances had thrown together on the mussel shell beds, far up the St. Francis. Ol' Dad was as gray and bent and water-drawn as the spidery drift that lined the lonesome reaches. The Clay-Head Kid, city bred, was reddish of hair, thin and keen of face; and not so long before he had been cocky, almost bantam-like in movement.

That was before Ol' Dad Travis knew him though. For the last three months the Kid had been far from his usual swaggering self. He was out of his element here, and this back-breaking labor after pearl

and "button stuff" had bred no enthusiasm in him.

Well, it was all over now, or soon would be, and the Clay-Head Kid was dam' glad of it. He hated it all, he guessed—the toilsome hours of bringing up shell, a dozen or so at a time, in the long handled grab-tongs they used in filling their boats; the rancid odor of mussels, "cooking out" in the shucking vats; the water-cracked hands, the sores, the shell cuts, which his clumsy efforts brought him. Worst of all, though, had been the perpetual silence that lay, day and night, over the bayou country. The red-headed Kid liked life to flow sharp and swift and snarly, with what he called excitement.

As far as he could see, nothing worth while ever broke the stillness here. Merely the soft drumming of some old bull perch beneath a lazy log—the quick splash of a shiny bass—the slow, creaking flight of a lone blue heron over the tops of black gum and ash and cypress.

Cripes! He couldn't have stood it, he thought to himself before replying to Ol' Dad, if this opportunity to hide away in the trackless bottoms hadn't seemed necessary for his safety.

Just who he was the Kid had never told the stooped, mild-eyed old sheller. Dad Travis knew little more of the boy's past now than he had when he'd picked the red-top up beside the Memphis road, with an ugly bullet wound in his back. The Kid had manifested a tight-lipped disinclination to say a word about that shooting.

For that matter, Ol' Dad hadn't even asked. More than one man had excellent reason for divulging little about himself, here in the Sunken Country.

Humanity had demanded that the old-timer pull the Kid through, with raw turpentine to cleanse his injury, and other simple remedies to bring him slowly back to health. Recovered but still weak, the Kid had stuck around to regain his strength. After that he'd stayed on—and had been taught shelling—simply because the red-head knew the law hadn't forgot-

ten a certain job that the Kid's tough associations had mixed him up with.

Out of the corner of his mouth now, he clipped a question at the gnarled old man still staring into the glow of fire. "What's eatin' on ya'? What ya' got to be afraid of?"

"Shell-town." Ol' Dad's answer was a grunt. "I've learned enough in the last few years to know I can't get by there."

"Huh? What d'ya' mean, Shell-town?" Aside from Nigger Head Bend, the Kid stood in total ignorance of the lay of river, the towns, and the swamp land. "Is that a dump here in the sticks or somethin'?"

Ol' Dad lifted his shaggy gray head. "It's the dam'est hell-hole in the bottoms!" he asserted fiercely. "Rot-gut and loaded dice and crooked cards, and the cut-throat riff-raff that goes with 'em! Three times I've showed up there on my way out, after a real good season like this 'un; and three times I've been cleaned of every cent I had, in 'Slick' Haley's or 'Red' Bird's or some other blamed blind tiger."

The Kid laughed easily. "Little drops of knockout in the soothin' syrup, eh? If they're that kind of joints, pop, why'n't ya' give 'em the go-by?"

"Can't," the other admitted simply. "When I see them shanty boat lights a'glimmerin' on the water, and hears that ketchy music—the banjos and the jew's harps and the fiddles—I'm jest natcherly drawn in there like a catfish on a jug-line. I knows dern well I oughtn't to go, with real money in my pocket and me havin' a place where that money's dam' bad needed. But I goes jest the same. Kid," the old man said suddenly, "way back in Indiany I got me a family."

"Yeah?" the red-head didn't appear especially interested.

"Fact," ol' Dad went on. "And I want you to do me a favor." Briefly he detailed his request.

**T**HE shell-buyer who made this part of the St. Francis each fall was due down the river any day now. Ol' Dad

Travis's clean-up of "button stuff" had run high even for him. Back up the bank lay the huge, dome-shaped pile—some fifty tons of button-stock—representing his season's gather. Twice as big as the Kid's, it was also far better sorted. Ol' Dad had thrown back all the "thins" and "smalls." He figured he had five or six tons of fancies, with the rest good ordinary. At current prices, the shell should bring him around a thousand dollars. The Kid would be lucky to get four hundred.

"Kid, I'll have a heap of money. Do you reckon you could take it out for me, and send it by postal order back to Indiany?"

The Clay-Head Kid thought swiftly. A thousand dollars! He liked his money quick and easy.—Still, he liked Ol' Dad. Cripes, the old codger had done a lot for him, as well as anybody could in this God-forsaken country!

Anyhow, the Kid had had a thousand once or twice before. There was that time he'd hit that wild streak at the East St. Louis dog races. With four hundred coming to him, he guessed the old boy's thousand might not be too much of a temptation.

Nevertheless he growled, "How d'ya' know ya' can trust me?"

"'Cause I kin tell men, jest like I kin tell pearls," Ol' Dad informed him promptly. "My eyesight may not be what she once was, Kid, but my judgment's plenty good as ever."

"Yeah? Maybe ya' just think so."

Ol' Dad shook his head. "Nope. I know. I've watched you more'n once. You pitched in at first because you thought you was helpin' me. Then, when I told you the shells you was diggin' was for yourself, you tried to make me take 'em. You're city stuff, Kid, but you're all right. You've been breathin' in good fresh air, and gettin' tough, and——"

"Tough is right. More'n you know. But I'll take the money, Pistol Pete, whenever ya' get it to shove out at me."

Ol' Dad Travis grinned. The sharp-faced youth had slapped that kidding nick-

name on him because of a huge, old bone-handled Smith & Wesson Dad kept hanging in their little wall tent. He in turn had tacked "Clay-Head" on the kid. He claimed the other's dusty red hair reminded him of the thin, bare soil of his own native hills, before the urge to go had tugged Ol' Dad away from all home moorings.

Appraisingly he regarded the kid now. "It'll be more than money," the old sheller suddenly asserted, with what seemed a quick surge of decision. "I know I'll never git past Shell-town, Kid, especially with this here in my pocket! Ol' Dad's a fool, boy.—Here, look. This is one time I jest can't take chances on my weakness!"

He reached inside his shirt and under-clothing, fumbled for a moment at a huge safetypin latched tight there, and brought forth a soiled tobacco sack. Carefully he jiggled out a little stream of objects into one cupped and calloused palm.

Wrapped tightly in tissue paper wads they were, this other and more intriguing part of the gnarled old man's fresh-water gather.

Most of them the Kid had seen when they had first been stowed away—tiny seed pearls, slugs, and other imperfect "shapes," which for reasons known only to nature had failed, as they usually did, to develop into those unpolished, yet breath-taking beauties, the pearls of price for which all shellers live in eager hope.

One such real find, if large and perfect enough, could dwarf tons of shell many times over, when it came to dollar profit. Occasionally a man discovered one, to hug that secret close until some pearl buyer had bought it at a figure near its worth. Freshwater pearls of the finer jewel type were dangerous to talk about, even in the vast and lonely sweep of the black-muck bottoms.

No man, Ol' Dad had pointed out to the Kid, ever knew when the river night gave



cover to sharp and avid ears, or hid a pair of eyes as furtive as a ripple in the shallows. The advice had come when the Kid pried loose a ragged but softly glowing lump of what looked to him like mother-of-pearl. It was jewel stuff, once it was peeled and slickened, the old-timer said; worth, he reckoned, around two hundred dollars.

As far as the Kid knew, that had been the only find—except for the seeds, the slugs, and a few clear baroques, some of these last colorful and shapely enough to bring five or ten dollars each. The others would sell for much less, and by the ounce. Both shellers had their share, such as it was; but now Ol' Dad hunched closer to the fire, and beckoned to the other.

**B**OY," he said in a voice that teetered on the verge of trembling, "I—I—I finally got her! She's nigh on to a fortune. Look, Kid, look! You won't see the likes of that in twenty year o' shellin'!"

The Clay-Head Kid peered down into that seamed and toil-worn hand. He stared. He caught his breath, with a sharply in-drawn gasp.

The Kid didn't know pearls, but even he knew rare and startling beauty when he saw it. Ol' Dad had twisted the paper from around a lump the size of a small olive. That lump, unpolished though it was, backed by no jeweler's soft black velvet strip to reveal it at its rich and wondrous best, was nevertheless a thing of glowing lights and tints, of faint, translucent gleams, of color rays and luster.

The firelight's flickering fingers touched flashes here and there. Ol' Dad's hand shook, even as he chuckled:

"Yes sir, boy, the biggest pearl that's ever been took out of the ol' St. Francis. She' worth—she must be worth—right on to——"

"Don't tell me! Dad, don't tell me!" the Kid cried hoarsely. He backed away. His eyes had lost their stare. They were narrowed now, yet the firelight showed in them redly.

His hands itched to reach out, grab that pearl, wrest it from the old man's trembling fingers.

"Eh? Why not?" Ol' Dad looked puzzled. "You're goin' to take it out. I can trust you, Kid, where I can't myself. You'll want to know what to ask fer it from the buyers."

"Like hell I'm goin' to take it!" the Kid rasped shortly. He sat down in a sweat, despite the crisp chill of early fall that tinged the river blackness.

Close up under his shoulder he could feel pressing against him the flat, blunt shape that was his automatic. With that gun——

The Kid drove the thought away. Cripes! No need for that, if the old man was going to force that pearl upon him.

No, dam'ed if he was! The Kid wouldn't touch it, wouldn't even look at it. That thing set a man on fire. The Kid, he had a conscience. He'd never double-crossed a pal. He knew he could take out Ol' Dad's button-shell money, all right.—But this thing! Gad, it must be a fortune!

"Put it up! And keep it hid!" he snarled out of the corner of his mouth. "Didn't ya' tell me a guy never knew who was watchin' him from the river?"

Ol' Dad restored the pearl. "I reckon you're right there, son. But about this other. Look here, boy, here's how the land lays. I've got two girls that must be purty close to grown now. Each year their maw writes me a letter, down to Shell-town. Wants me to go back, even if I don't do no providin'. But Ol' Dad knows better than to show up. I ain't no family man. My roots won't settle no place, except in mussel water."

"Yeah?" the Kid grunted. "Ya' don't have to go then, do ya'?"

"I can't go," the other said. "It—it jest ain't in me. But that money's got to. The girls is about through high school. They want to take a business course, up to Terre Haute, their maw says. I got the means now to put 'em through, give 'em a chance

to be real ladies. I'm goin' to do it, too, if you'll jest help me."

The Clay-Head glowered at him. "Not by givin' me no pearl ya' won't. I'll take out the money for ya', but— Looka here, if ya're so leery of this Shell-town, whyn't ya' go out by land instead of this dam' water?"

Ol' Dad explained. The fall rains had set in some weeks before, only to be broken by this brief spell of clear and tangy weather. The rains, those dismally steady downpours, would come again, and already the bayou country was a quagmire.

The mucky traces of the bottoms might be almost impassable by the time the expected shell-buyer dropped down on Nigger Head Bend from his dealings up the river.

"Why not sell that pearl to him, then?" the Kid argued fiercely. Darn, but Ol' Dad was hard-headed! "And go out with him? Let him keep the money till ya're past this Slick Haley and them other birds ya're afraid of at Shell-town."

"Clem Saunders, the buyer, ain't a pearl man, Kid," the gray haired old sheller pointed out. "He jest deals in button-stuff, sellin' to the factories. You'll find pearl men down at Shell-town, though, and two-three brokers over to Memphis. That last'd be the best place to sell it, I reckon. It'll be safer, and you can let 'em bid against each other. Don't you take less'n—"

"Shut up!" the Kid snarled at him. The red-head came to his feet with a jerk, and strode away, quick and taut and nervous.

Darn dodderin' ol' fool! Startin' to fish out that pearl again. Didn't the man know there was a limit to what a guy—even a right guy—could stand sometimes?

**S**UDDENLY the Kid stopped short and stood listening, his ears straining. He was out of the circle of firelight now, along the black edge of the sand bar.

Upstream, scant yards away in the direction he had been heading, he thought he had caught the faint sound of willows swishing softly back in place, as if re-

leased by someone who had gripped them. The almost imperceptible dip of a paddle had seemed to merge with that other tiny sound.

"Somebody spyin', huh?" The Kid quickened all his senses.

Yet he could hear nothing—see nothing—now. His eyes were like baffled gimlets as they probed the river darkness. Silent and gleamless the water slid on past; a thick curtain of mist as well as of night hovered low over this lonely bend of the Ol' St. Francis.

For long seconds the Kid stood rooted, the fingers of one hand curled tensely about the compact butt of his automatic. Then—he heard it again! This time, dropping down, on the far side of the river. Just a hollow little thump, magnified by water, as if a batteau or dugout paddle had raked some sunken log unseen in the pitchy blackness.

The Kid's gun leaped forth. "Hold it, ya'!" he snarled. "I've got ya' spotted, buddy! Just wheel over this way, while we looks ya' over!"

"What's that?" Ol' Dad came clumping over the sand, stowing away that danged hellish hunk of pearl as he shuffled through the firelight. The old sheller's voice had been the only answer to the Kid's tense cry.

"Heard somethin'," the Kid grunted. "Off across the river."

"Muskrat, maybe."

"Muskrat, hell! Dam' slinkin' river rat—that's seen the pearl ya' been wavin' around for the whole wide world to look at!"

The Kid's gun hand darted out now. "All right, buddy, ya' asked for it!" he rasped. The automatic's wicked stutter awoke quick, slapping echoes.

Once, twice, three times, bullets lashed the river's surface. There was a flurry off across the stream. Swift, powerful strokes dug into the water.

Instantly, the Kid shifted his gun to bear on the faint thrash of rapid sound. Then the weapon, a cheap Spanish imita-

tion of a reliable American make, jammed on the empty shell it had kicked, wrong end forward, into the chamber.



The Kid swore, and jerked futilely at the stubborn slide of the automatic. But his firearm was too completely spiked

agape by that rimless cartridge rammed in reverse. Time would be needed to pry it loose. The furtive visitor of the night scooted away, leaving only an invisible wake to spread and lap gently at the shore behind him.

The red-head strode back to the fire. "Dad," he clipped, "that settles it! I know I ain't takin' that pearl out now. Now that the news is out, I wouldn't touch it with the end of a ten-foot grab-tong!" Scowling, the Kid busied himself with his gun. "Ya' needn't worry about goin' to Shell-town. Shell-town will be comin' to ya'—the part ya're scared of—more'n likely."

Ol' Dad's lined face looked troubled. "Mebbeso, son, mebbe," he admitted. "Word of a thing like this spreads mighty fast. Dern, riches can shore trouble a man, can't they?"

"Yeah. More men than ya' figure on. So strap your gat about ya', and pray for that shell buyer to get here in a hurry. Then ya' better hit the swamps. Me, I'm dam' glad I ain't got nothin' but slugs and button-stuff. And a fool of a ticklish conscience!"

**T**HE rains had set in again. The shell buyer was late, very late. Forced into inactivity by the chill and constant downpour, Ol' Dad and the Kid hovered over the little oil heater in their tent by day. By night they slept uneasily, for the Kid's prediction about news of that pearl find spreading up and down the river began to bear swift signs of verification.

Once he awakened with a start, long

after midnight. Something was outside the tent, fumbling with the rusty clasps which hooked snug the stiff pair of canvas door flaps.

The Clay-Head reached for his gun. He didn't call; he simply up and blazed away.

Running footfalls went leaping off across the sandbar. A hurriedly lighted lantern showed tracks leading to the river's edge, where the bow of a Jon-boat had left its telltale indentations.

"Missed him," the Kid growled to Ol' Dad, who was out in the sheeted downpour now, barefooted, dressed only in a thin undershirt and gaping overalls which caught and spouted water like a funnel. "Throw on some clothes! I'm givin' that rat a taste of hell if I can find him!"

Downstream the Kid sped along the banks. But the rain-wrapped night was too black, too full of confusing watery sounds, for him to locate the river prowler.

He came back after an hour, mud from head to foot, to find Ol' Dad just showing up from the opposite direction. Like the Kid, the drenched old-timer hadn't waited to hurry on more clothing.

They spent the rest of the night rubbing themselves down and recovering from the chill exposure. That is, the Kid recovered. Ol' Dad, however, developed a mean, tight chest-cold which, inside of three days, wracked and tore at him fiercely.

"It's nuthin'," he insisted, yet when Saunders, the shell buyer, did show up a short time later, Ol' Dad wasn't far from down. Above his hacking cough, his face was flushed with fever.

The Kid urged him to go on out with the buyer's scow, but Ol' Dad was obdurate. "No Shell-town for me," he said. "You go, Kid, and take that pearl with you."

The two were inside the tent now. Saunders, his tripod scales having weighed out the button stuff, had paid them cash for the fairly close bargain driven. Ol' Dad's water-cracked hands held a mass of bills totaling eleven hundred and sixty-eight dollars, good money for the season.

but no more than the worth of his choice collection of fancies.

The Kid had pocketed the four hundred and twelve dollars his less choice had brought him. From outside sounded the harsh, clattering scrape of shell being shoveled into carrier-boxes and dumped into Saunders' huge barge by his negroes. The rattle and din, the singsong chant of the laborers, covered the Kid's reply to the old man before him.

"Dad, look here," he said. "Ya' don't know who I am, and I didn't mean to tell ya'. But—ya' got any idea how I come to be layin' there by the road, all shot to hell, when ya' found me?"

"Nope. That was your business, I reckon. We don't ask questions here if a man shows signs of wantin' to keep his mouth shut."

"Well, I'm talkin' now," the Kid's speech suddenly sounded clipped. "I was dumped out of a car, sometime after a copper's bullet had knocked me woozy way back in Memphis. Robbery it was—stickup of an amusement park box-office. That's the kind of a geezer I am! Ya' can't give me no pearl, ya' danged ol' trustin' thick-head."

The old sheller's mildewed blue eyes failed to show anything like the surprise the other had expected.

"Figured you must be duckin' the law," Ol' Dad answered slowly. "But a holdup, huh? Kid, I didn't think that. No, dang me if I did! That's snake stuff, boy. Blamed if I think it of you!"

"S'fact," the red-head growled. He let it go at that. No need to explain the circumstances, since his purpose was to convince Dad of the foolhardiness of trying to thrust that breath-taking pearl upon him.

Why spoil the bad impression by detailing the truth in full? he reasoned. In reality the Kid, batting around with a couple of hard guys and acting tough himself, hadn't realized that his companions meant to knock over that amusement joint until—seated outside at the wheel of the rental car they'd just left—he suddenly found

bullets humming all about him. After that, it was step on the gas when the others came tumbling in with the loot. Slugs screamed off fenders, ripped the dash beside him. The Kid had no chance to explain. No one would have believed him anyhow. So he rammed the foot feed flat to the floor boards and shot away on a wild, zigzagging course through the suburban traffic.

The getaway wasn't clean. Police tried to stop them at the huge traffic bridge that spans the Mississippi. Under gunfire from the snarling thugs beside the red-head, a harness bull pitched stiffly on his face.

The Kid took a terrific missile along the ribs, but he held the wheel for miles. Then he guessed he'd passed out a time or two. A burden to arouse suspicion, he had later been heaved callously over the side by his companions later. Low-lived rats of the underworld, they were worse than the cut-throats Dad said prowled the St. Francis!

The old-timer was regarding the Kid intently now. "Kid," he spoke suddenly, "don't lie to a man old enough to be yore daddy. You just said all that because you're afraid to carry this hyar pearl of mine? That's right, ain't it?"

"I wish to God it was!" the other answered, with a wrench of feeling that surprised him. The Kid was thinking of the look on that Memphis copper's face as the bullet-smashed policeman had toppled to the concrete beside a bridge abutment.

Well, he had said enough, he reckoned. Maybe too much—except that he knew Ol' Dad could be trusted. He was glad that a violent siege of deep, wracking coughs seized the Ol' Dad before he could answer.

The old-timer's fistful of greenbacks fell scattering to the tent floor, as weakly he sank down on a canvas cot. Picking up the bills, the red-head shoved them in his partner's pocket.

OUTSIDE, the noise of shell loading had ceased. When the Kid looked from the tent flap, the buyer's scow had swung out into the tug of the current.

Saunders called back a business-like farewell. The barge slid on down the ol' St. Francis.

The Kid rejoined Ol' Dad. "Dam'," he growled to himself, "I wish that bird had been a pearl buyer!"

Dad, the Clay-Head had decided, could stay here or not, just as he wished, but he himself wasn't taking out anything but his own jack, and the old boy's eleven hundred maybe. That is, if Ol' Dad still cared to entrust that money to him. Not that dam' insidious pearl, though!

**A**GAIN that night their camp was visited. But the Kid, who had been up and down a dozen times, didn't discover signs of the two prowlers until the following morning. He was too busy then to bother about men whom his stirrings must have frightened off. Ol' Dad's tight, rumbling chest cold had gone into pneumonia.

Here was a new experience for the Kid. Nursing was out of his line. He did his best, under what feeble directions Dad could give him, but their camp lacked all except the crudest means of treatment. Inside of two days the Kid realized that the fever-gripped old sheller required a doctor badly.

"I reckon you're right, Kid," Ol' Dad finally admitted weakly. "The nearest is at Shell-town. Sink in yore oars, boy, and hop to it."

"And leave ya' here alone with that goose-egg pearl? Not hardly! If this pneumonia didn't finish yo' before I got back with the doc, some of these skulkin' river crooks would!" The Kid swore. He saw no way out of this fresh entanglement. Ol' Dad had to have a physician, that was certain, but still——

The Clay-Head shook his head. Dad's answering grin was feeble.

"I don't aim to keep that plagued pearl," the water-gnarled old man insisted. "You got to take her now, Kid." His voice was hoarse and wheezy. "I'm in a heap worse shape than I realized. Ol' Dad may not pull through, boy. So I'm countin' on you

to get her out—sell her—send the money to my family."

The grizzled old figure had forced him-



self partly up beneath his meager covers. Now he fell back, all strength oozed from him.

"I can't trust nobody else, Kid. You'll do her for me, won't you? I know you got the right stuff in you."

"Yes and suppose I do?" the sharp-featured red-head temporized. "What becomes of ya' if them river rats slide in here while I'm gone, huh? They'll think ya' still got it. Then—a knife across your windpipe. Cripes, what I was mainly interested in was gettin' a doctor for ya'!"

"Don't worry. I don't have to stay right here," Ol' Dad pointed out. "There's an old abandoned woodcutters' shack—back up the slough and across that low ridge. Lots o' holes in the floor—for the fresh air I'll be needin'. And a one-mule tenant nigger on inland a piece. Old Hutch's wife will nurse me—a heap better'n you can, son. You jest git me to that wood camp. What say, pardner?"

The Kid came to a swift decision. "All right," he clipped. "But blast your stubborn ol' soul, don't ya' unroll that pearl again before I head down river! Shove it in my pocket all wrapped up. Otherwise, God help your family!"

Thus it was that, with arrangements made and Ol' Dad, weaker now but settled in the shack under the care of the tenant blacks, the Clay-Head Kid set out for Shell-town in a flat bottomed jon-boat some twelve hours later.

Close against his body, near an armpit, lay that soiled old tobacco sack of Dad's. It snuggled, its contents seeming to impart a warm, an almost burning glow to his skin, scant inches from the pressure of the red-head's automatic.

The mist of early dawn hung flat upon

the river when the Kid's oars took the water. Shell-town lay two days away. The blades bit in with a rhythmic swing. The oar-locks creaked and whined. The Kid was out to cut down time in that long pull for a doctor.

Day and night he traveled, the boat in the aiding grip of the current, his eyes raking both banks as, brush-hung and silent, they slid upstream behind him.

If furtive eyes followed him from the undergrowth, the red-head didn't know it. But he took no chances, the Kid. Two or three shellers' camps he passed. His arm went up in a careless hail, while he spotted every boat in sight, in case any of those craft should show up near him later.

None did, at least during daylight. He stopped but once, for a brief hour's rest, around dawn of the second day, his jon-boat hid well up the darkly twisting offshoot of a sluggish bayou. Groggy from lack of any real rest, his eyes bloodshot, face bleary, he swung into Shell-town's landing just after noon and tied up below a collection of fish craft, bannister boats, and launches.

Making his way along the front of some dozen shantyboats propped back up the bank on gaunt and spidery piling, he headed for Shell-town's mud-deep main street. River men and river skum eyed his hurried passage.

"I guess I can go," the town's one doctor, a tall and leisurely moving individual, admitted with no great amount of enthusiasm when the Kid had hunted him out. "Cash in advance, of course, though. Since this looks like a case for speed, you better hire us a gas boat."

"Sure," said the Kid. "But I won't be goin' with ya'. I got to get on—overland—to Memphis, if the roads are good down here and I can hire an auto."

That method would make for time, get him away from the constant risk of danger which lurked along the river's windings.

The physician shook his head. "You better go on down-river, until you hit Marked Tree at least. Only one jitney driver here,

and he's got a rattle-trap that's none too reliable in the best of weather. If you want to try him, though, you'll likely find him at Slick Haley's gambling boat, the *Blue Heron*. Gilson's the driver's name. Drunk two-thirds of the time. I don't recommend him."

The Kid thought swiftly. He had seen the *Blue Heron*, a long, cabin-covered barge, when he turned up from the foot of Main Street. With Ol' Dad's money and his huge, fresh-water find on him, he had no desire to put in an appearance at Haley's.

"Much obliged," he said, and paid the doc. He would pull out down-river.

AFTER seeing the physician off, the Kid, shoulders hunched to the renewed drizzle, started back toward his jon-boat. Three or four men, rough, unkempt, frowsy, lounged on the covered bow deck of the *Blue Heron*. Another—better dressed, blackly-blue of close shaven jaw, cold blue of hard, straight eye—stood within the doorway.

From chin edge down and around to the back of his neck ran a welt-like, grayish scar, lumpy and drawn and ugly. Slick Haley's loaded dice had once almost cost him his throat. His own quick gun had saved him, but Shell-town's physician hadn't been any too careful to match wound edges in his hasty stitching.

The Kid recognized Slick at once, from Ol' Dad's warning description. As the city-bred youth strode on by, the dive-keeper hailed him.

"Howdy, pardner."

Haley's voice was smooth with geniality. "You look like the weather's put the shivers on you. Better drop in for a bracer."

"Thanks," the Kid answered shortly. "I'll do my drinkin' later.— And it won't be here in Shell-town," he finished to himself.

The cold, veiled gleam in Slick Haley's eyes had reminded him, instantly of a knife blade.

"I'm sellin' the best sugar-moon in the bottoms," the river gambler urged. "If you're goin' on, a jug won't hurt you."

"The hell it wouldn't," the Kid muttered under his breath. He sloshed on past, with another curt refusal. Beneath the Clay-Head's armpit that pearl of Dad's seemed burning.



Haley's narrowing gaze didn't linger on him. Instead Slick turned back into the *Blue Heron's* long, smoky interior and motioned to a man at the bar. Together they watched the Kid from a stern deck window.

"You sure that's him, Goose-Eye?"

Goose-Eye, a squat, slant-browed individual with goiterish green orbs flanking a fractured nose, answered promptly:

"Sure thing. Didn't I see him plain at their camp up at Nigger Head Bend? The night I spotted that pearl. Can't figure how he got out by me."

"Well, he did!" Haley snapped. "Don't lose him again. When he shoves off, you be close on his tail. Take Bittner with you. I'll drop down later in the outboard. And—it'll pay you not to forget this, Goose-Eye"—Haley's words were as hard edged as his gaze now—"don't search that kid's body till I get there. You understand me?"

"Sure! Sure!" the other hastened to assert. "Yuh can count on us. But what makes yuh so certain he's packin' thet big fresh-water gleamer?"

Haley summarized briefly. "He's leary of me. Ol' Dad hasn't made a move to come out. That means they've decided on the kid to do the selling. Anyhow, that's how I figure it. And don't you and Bittner figure one bit different for a minute."

Cold and deadly, even to his liegemen, the gambler turned away. Goose-Eye remained watching the Kid's boat through the rainfall.

When the Clay-Head pulled out, under cover of a wind-lashed squall that stippled the current fiercely, the squat river-rat

waited only until the first bend downstream shoved its dim finger in behind the disappearing quarry.

"Yuh heeled, ain'tcha?" he queried as he picked up Bittner, lanky and hatchet-faced, on the bow deck of the *Heron*. "All right then. Night job on. Thet pearl."

Short moments later their skilfully muffled blades were feathering the St. Francis.

**D**OWNRIVER swept the Kid, red wrists swollen now, his slim shoulders worn and aching from his long grind at the oars. Three months of mussel-tonging had toughened him much better than he knew. But hour after hour of this ceaseless heave and dip and pull—advanced well into the second sleepless night now—was enough to out-tax even a machine. His muscles numb yet grinding, his rowing all but automatic, the weary Kid slowly piled up river mileage.

In the midnight drizzle, his red head drowsed from time to time. He fought to keep awake, for ever since a little after dusk he had had the strong belief that he was being followed. It was a feeling—a hunch—rather than facts verified; it was a presentiment. Yet the Kid, expecting to be stalked, was positive in the uneasiness of his conviction.

Again he drowsed. The demands of his fagged body were growing far too insistent to be denied much longer. Again he jerked awake, to find his jon-boat drifting.

Only the iron oar-pins had kept his blades from going afloat down the gliding current. He listened, could hear nothing but the damp slither of the rain mist in the vast silence of the bottoms.

"What the devil's the matter with me?" he muttered. "I got no business out here like this! If I can't keep my eyes propped open, I better hunt me out a hole!" Pulling into the bank, the red-head shelved one oar and began using the other as a paddle. Noiselessly he slipped on down, his gaze straining for a glimpse of some

tiny creek or slough which might afford a real chance for night hiding.

His sleepy eyes finally found a place to suit, a serpentine bayou opening out from a bottle-neck that angled into the river from behind a spit of bushes. Had the Kid not been hugging the shore, he would have missed it in the shroud of dripping blackness.

Ten minutes later, with his boat pulled up on the low bayou bank, he prepared himself for dog-tired slumber. He felt reasonably safe here in this isolated spot. Nevertheless he constructed a dummy of his coat, his hat, a small log, and underbrush, and settled it beside the jon-boat. Old stuff, he knew; but maybe effective in a pinch, there in the dismal darkness.

The earth-clogged roots of a huge down-tree, discovered some fifty feet from his landing appeared to offer him his best shelter. Curled up in the narrow clearance between trunk and ground, his hand on his automatic, the Kid dropped into heavy slumber. In a moment, his strength drained to the last weary drop, he was snoring.



HE HAD hidden his trail well, the Clay-Head Kid, except for one thing. But that one was sure betrayal. For hours on end now, the swampwise river denizens whom he had felt positive were lurking somewhere in his wake, had taken the slow, steady creak of his oarlocks for their guide. When that faint sound had ceased, they ceased their paddling also.

"Figger he's goin' tuh make camp now," the lanky form of Bittner spoke in low tones from one of the two boats drifting easily with the current.

"Well, it's about time!" Slick Haley growled from the other. He had joined

his two henchmen long before, his outboard motor eating up distance for the first few safe miles, his oars covering the rest when caution forced surrender of the easier motive power.

"Goose-Eye, you know this part of the river better'n I do. Where'd you camp hereabouts, if you were hidin'?"

"A dozen places," that slant-browed individual answered. "This looks like he knows what he's up to, after all. Country's a regular scatters here—all sloughs and creeks and backwaters. We'll wait. If he don't build him a fire, he'll take some findin'."

For an hour they remained where they were, eyes and ears avid for any evidence of the Kid's location. None came, however.

Goose-Eye grunted, "We'll have to try 'em all, I guess. What say, Slick?"

The boat-gambler's answer was short. "Get goin'. Dam' him, he'll pay me for this drenchin' when I find him!"

LONG hours later, after a search as persistent as it had been slow and methodical, the two boats silently eased noses into the crooked bottle-neck of Pin-tail Bayou. Goose-Eye knew his bottoms.

Dropping well downriver, he had worked back up through every watery nook and inlet. He was sure now that the trio had their quarry blocked off upstream, some place close by them.

A pale, wan dawn was lifting in the east as they poked on into the bayou. Guns ready, they glided through the sluggish water.

It was Bittner whose ratlike eyes first spied the slick, flat indentation made by the Kid's boat when the youth had pulled it up the bank. A moment later the three men had slipped ashore and gone stealing forward.

Slick Haley, skirting a willow clump, caught sight of the Kid's dummy. That deception was thin and palpable now, here in the dreary daylight. The river gambler's smile was cold, but his close-set eyes

were gleaming as they probed the soggy little area of brush-studded ground before him.

Through the stealthy hush a low sound, faint but strangely regular, reached out to his ears. Haley tensed. Then his hard smile grew thinner. Even here there could be no mistaking that sound, its source, or its welcome meaning. The dog-weary Kid was still asleep. Over there by that uprooted blue gum tree some place, he was snoring.

The gambler signaled to his rats, pointed out the location of his discovery. The Kid's body wasn't in sight yet, but Goose-Eye and Bittner understood. On tiptoe now, the three crept onward.

Underfoot, a dead branch snapped, clear and startling, from its grass matted cover. Haley cursed beneath his breath. From close beside the blue gum's spread of roots a shadowy form rolled swiftly. Up on the far side of the huge down-tree popped a red-thatched head. The Kid's eyes stared, but his hand gripped his leveled automatic.

"Well, Shell-town," he barked, all slumber instantly cast from him, "here I am—and ready!"

Behind drawn lids, the Kid's blue eyes burned like the hot flash and glow of that huge pearl he carried. "Start your music, brothers!"

Haley shot from the hip, in thunderous answer. Bark splintered through the red-head's hair as he plummeted downward. Three pairs of running legs—all that he could see of his foes from beneath the log—were rushing at him.

The Kid's finger curled. His cheap old automatic slapped out a stream of lead. Goose-Eye's squat right leg flew back as if an axe had struck it. The man fell in a moaning leap. Two steps behind him, Bittner wavered in his charge.

The Kid's next stuttering gunburst sent that lank, hatchet-faced rat bolting swiftly away for the boats. Bittner, like most of his kind, had no stomach for hot bullet opposition. But Slick Haley was coming

on, his blue steel thirty-eight belching slugs which ripped the trunk or showered up muddy geysers that spattered the Kid with dirty spray as he ducked back to momentary safety.

The last explosion of the red-head's automatic had kicked back the mechanism upon an empty magazine. Jerking a fresh clip from his pocket, the Kid, with Haley soon to be on him, sprang for the shelter of the upflung, earth-encrusted roots for a chance to do his re-loading. Bent low, he dived behind their bulwarks a thin second before Haley's hurried shot knocked mud chunks flying behind him. With his clip rammed home, the battling red-head crouched.

Haley whipped into view. Their weapons flamed and thundered. The Kid was jarred back on his haunches. His whole left thigh seemed numb and oozy frozen from the impact of that bullet. But his automatic had scored also. Haley had spun half around, was propped up by the roots which held him.

Cursing horribly, the man was steady-ing his gun hand to fire again. The Kid tried to beat him to the shot. And once more that cheap automatic failed him. It jammed, shell-spiked open. From his hunkered position, the Kid hurled it at the other.

**T**HEN somehow the Clay-Head was up and stumbling at Slick Haley, hands reaching for the thirty-eight he expected at any instant to blast death through his vitals.

But Haley wasn't firing. That gun wasn't even up now. It was dangling in a leaden grasp. The Shell-town dive-boat keeper was swaying among his roots, was crumpling slowly downward.

"Dang, finished him the first time," the Kid burred, "and never even knew it."

The river gambler, drilled through the chest just below the juncture of throat and collar-bone, had slid to the soggy earth now, as limp and dead as a market cat-fish.

The Clay-Head Kid, every step torture from the raking flesh wound in his thigh, scooped up Haley's revolver and limped to the edge of the root mass. Forty feet away lay the groaning Goose-Eye, his leg broken.

"Heave your rod back into the slough, bo!" the Kid, gun raised, snapped at him. Weakly the injured man obeyed. Down the bayou, Bittner was scudding away in Haley's humming outboard. The red-head whammed two-shots at him, and grinned when they kicked up water far astern. That river-rat was through here.

The Kid sat down and staunched his wound, bound it up, and did the same for Goose-Eye. There was no need to trouble further about the rat. Before dark some of his kind would come slinking in to get him.

With Ol' Dad's pearl still nestling snugly beneath his armpit, the Clay-Head Kid once more took to the St. Francis. The rest of his task was easy, he figured. Marked Tree by nightfall, an auto hired, then Memphis.

After that—the bidding of the pearl brokers, and everything would be jake.

"That is," he thought, "if no Memphis flat-foot lamps me for that fool stick-up killin' those two bozos steered me in on. Gad, I don't want that! Me, I've had enough excitement."

For once in his life, even the steady *drip-drip-drip* of the woods seemed good to the Clay-Head Kid as river current and creaking oars carried him through the bot-toms.

**H**E HAD luck, of a kind, in Memphis. But of a kind only. Long days later he bobbed up in the wood-cutter's shack in which Ol' Dad Travis lay on the mend from his pneumonia.

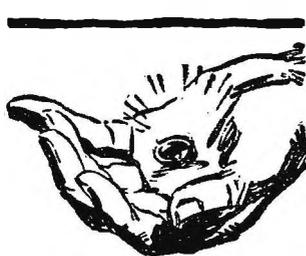
The old sheller's mildewed blue eyes stared at the Kid in surprise. Ol' Dad's words were a question.

"Why—why, son, I wasn't hardly look-in' for you back. Did you have—any trouble?"

"Plenty," the red-head answered, his summer-tanned face unusually serious. "Here's part of it, Dad."

Reaching in beneath his shirt, he brought forth an olive-sized, paper wrapped packet, and dropped it in the other's hand.

"The pearl," he said simply.



"But here, why?" The gnarled old river veteran forced himself up on his elbows. Ol' Dad's strength was growing daily.

"You couldn't get out past Shell-town? Didn't get a chance to sell it?"

"Chances enough. Every pearl buyer in Memphis made me an offer, but—" The Kid spread his hands, palm up, in an expressive gesture. "Dad, ya' remember ya' made a crack or two about your eye-sight not bein' what it once was? Well, ya' sure were right, ol' kid. That pearl had a dozen imperfections."

"S'fact," he went on, as the old-timer fumbled hastily at the tissue paper wrapping. "I could see 'em myself—little blemishes, cloudy spots, flat and dead spaces—when I looked at it through those buyers' glasses. They all said the same. Ain't no mistake. And they wouldn't offer more'n three hundred. That's why I brought it back. Ya' might think I had gyped ya'."

Ol' Dad raised his eyes from the pearl—his find that wasn't a real find after all—in quick protest.

"Kid," he said, "you knowed better than to figure I'd think that. Heck, boy, you're all right! And even to you, you danged young hardhead, this ought to prove it."

"Well, something has," the Kid admitted, behind the trace of a grin. "Here, ya' ol' trustin' mind-reader, here's somethin' to cheer ya' up a bit." Shoving the blue slip of a postal money order receipt at Ol' Dad, he turned toward the doorway.

Outside, a thin film of hoar frost spark-

led on the ground. The rains had ceased days before. The clear morning was keen and nippy.

The Kid rose on his toes, drew in a deep lungful of tangy air. Memphis had been smoke laden.

Behind him Ol' Dad was muttering, "Now ain't this a hell of a note! I must be gittin' old. Can't tell a pearl, and now I can't hardly make out these figgers. Looks like—looks like—hey, Kid, what's this? This receipt calls for more'n fifteen hundred dollars."

The Kid glanced back, his grin broader. "Sure. And why not? Ain't we pardners? Bein' as we lost out on the pearl, I just sent all the ready cash we could spare to your family. We still got about sixty dollars to carry us through the winter."

Ol' Dad stared. "You mean, you ain't goin' back to the city?"

The Kid's laugh was like his old cheerful self once again, swaggering, confident, cocky.

"Me go back? Take a tumble to yourself, bo," he derided. "I've learned things, I have. This, for instance."

Briefly he told of a wary trip he had made into the Memphis public library for a quick search through its newspaper files. That bridge copper hadn't died in that holdup after all, he'd found. The man had pulled through, testified against those two jazzed-up hopheads who'd got the Kid in that jam. Cripes, with the truth known, the Clay-Head wasn't even wanted.

"Dad," he grinned, "soon's ya're able, we'll put down those spat and crackle lines along the mussel beds ya' said would build up another good take here. We gotta look to the future, pardner! Dang," the Kid swept out an arm in a gesture that encompassed the whole vast stretch of lone and silent bottoms, "I used to think I hated this dump. But somehow it sure gets into your blood. Darn me if I don't like it!"

*a sea diver fights the monsters of the deep*

## **"The Ambush"**

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## **"The Vanishing Spot"**

by

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*there are deaths worse than by gangsters' guns!*



## A LIFE-SAVING DEER

**T**WENTY years ago, while hunting deer in the Flat Tops, as the high range of mountains back of my ranch in Middle Park, Grand County, Colorado, were called, I became both hunter and hunted.

The snow lay about three feet deep all through the timber, the cold was intense, although the effect was lessened by the dryness of the high altitude. Powdery white stuff this snow, and both animals and humans moved through it with noiseless tread.

A lucky shot of my old thirty-three accounted for the five-point buck, dressed and swung over my shoulders as I walked in the direction of the ranch-house. A little red trickle of blood dripped to the white carpet below as I walked, and suddenly I had that hunch that a hunter often gets, that I ought to look behind me. I saw nothing yet still the feeling persisted that I was being trailed.

Again I looked behind me, and as I stopped and turned this time I thought I saw a grayish shape vanish silently into the heavy timber. To make sure I dropped the buck on the snow and retraced my tracks to approximately the spot where I thought I had seen the shadow vanish. Nothing was there, but I immediately saw something that caused me to hasten back to my meat, hoist it to my shoulders,

and keep going while daylight lasted.

The sight that met my eyes and caused the hasty movements on my part, was the track of a large mountain lion. Evidently the scent of the recent kill was too much for his sharpened appetite, and had even overcome the natural cowardice that is always with this animal during the day-time.

Hurrying along to beat the approaching dusk, the hundred-and-fifty pound burden on my shoulders seemed to grow heavier with each step. Laying it down for a moment's rest, I looked over my shoulder, this time to see the big cat vanish a great deal more leisurely into the brush. Raising my rifle I took a snap shot at him, picked up the deer again and continued on my way.

Hitting a down-hill grade through the timber, I made good progress down the mountainside, coming out on a little sagebrush flat. The gurgle of a mountain stream tempted me, and again laying down the venison burden, I plunged my face into the water. As I did so, there was a rush in the air; and a big gray body flung itself at the dead body of my buck lying almost beside me. It lit snarling on the carcass, green eyes blazing, ears laid tight back against its low, flat skull. Its tail swished angrily back and forth as its great claws dug themselves into the hide on which they rested.

I don't know which was the colder, the mountain water that my face came out of, or my body. For a moment I was so scared that I may have looked more like an icicle, in these snowy surroundings, than anything else.

However, the big cat seemed to pay scant attention to me. He buried his hungry mouth into the still warm flesh of my buck. This gave me my chance. Inching slowly towards the carcass, close beside which I had laid my rifle, I reached for the stock. Up came the lion's head, blood dripping from its great jaws. He rumbled a throaty growl in my direction, and I promptly froze where I was and bided my time. Again, as the cat went tearing into his meal, my hand reached towards the stock of my gun, and this time I was

successful. The feel of the good old thirty-thirty was as good as the effect of a heater would have been upon my body at that moment, and I steadied at once.

Cuddling the stock in the crook of my arm, I pointed the barrel slowly but surely at the nearest spot, right behind the shoulder of the lion. Getting my bead, I gently squeezed the trigger. There was a god-awful screech as the big cat sailed off the deer carcass and leapt fully twenty feet into the air, to come down a snarling mass and then to lie a dark and dripping object against the snowy white blanket.

That was the first time that a deer had saved my life, and I felt pretty rotten when I thought of how many deer lives I had accounted for.

—Leon V. Almirall.

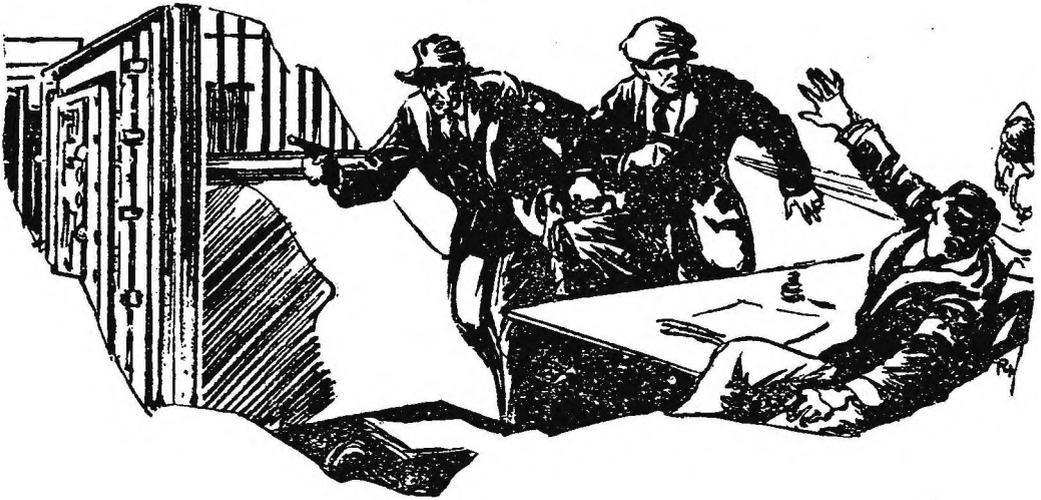
### **\$25 For True Adventures**

**U***NDER the heading Adventurers All, the editors of SHORT STORIES will print a new true adventure in every issue of the magazine. Some of them will be written by well known authors, and others by authors you have never heard of. Any reader of the magazine may submit one of these true adventures, and for every one accepted the author will be paid \$25. It must be written in the first person, must be true, and must be exciting. Do not write more than 1000 words; be sure to type your manuscript on one side of the page only; and address it to: "Adventurers All," Care of Editors of SHORT STORIES Magazine, Garden City, N. Y. Manuscripts which are not accepted will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for that purpose.*

### **GOOD MARTIN COUNTRY**

**T**HE work of a trapper begins early in the fall, for all supplies must be packed in, and winter quarters established, before the snow comes. The first task, however, is to select a region where it is likely that a trap line would be profitable. This is not as easy as it appears, and the remoteness of a region is not always a safe guide.

There is one rule, however, which trappers consider invariable. Wherever there are pine squirrels in great numbers, it is not likely that there will be any martin. And conversely, if one travels all day without seeing a pine squirrel, it is more than likely that the country is overrun with martin, and that the martin have practically exterminated the pine squirrels in that vicinity. The ripe seeds of various kinds of pine furnish food for the squirrels, but the squirrels themselves are the prey of martins, and where there are no squirrels left it is usually safe to take a chance.—J. H. H.



## The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

### *Stiff Upper Lips*

HERE'S the moral for that grand little gangster tale, "Brother to Dragons," which appears in this issue of **SHORT STORIES**. Dave Redstone, the author of the story has put it into words as follows:

"The notion that started 'Brother to Dragons' came to me long ago, when I was one among a gang of loaders on the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Our terminal was on Lake Erie, and the big lake hounds would steam in from Duluth laden with flour. For ten hours of the day we transferred cargo into the freight cars; and at the end of the day three or four of us would be assigned to the job of sealing them. Closing the box-car doors was no easy work. It took beef, ingenuity, and a short crowbar for some of those much-and ill-used doors. Besides, hopping across platforms and over tracks, we had to watch out for the locomotive that usually sneaked out of the round-house at this time to make up the east-bound train.

"I will call one of the fellows Buck. He was a favorite with the foremen, and he was always picked out for this work. Everybody liked him. He was a laughing, red-faced, oak-limbed freight hand. Some of the boys used to say he could throw

a dolly across four lines of track. He was so strong and hard that one felt nothing could hurt him.

"On one occasion four of us were assigned for the sealing. Buck prepared to jump lightly from the platform to the tracks—a distance of about four feet. His heel caught on a bent iron spike which projected from the platform. Over Buck went, like a man diving into deep water. His face struck the track. The groan he let out! I remember it, hear it, yet.

"And then came Number 404 out of the round-house, coughing up the track!— There was really no great danger from this. There were plenty of us on hand to heave Buck up to the platform. Just the same, it scared him. Dazed as he was, the locomotive seemed to him close upon his neck. His jaw had split like so much peanut brittle. His ankle was badly twisted.

"We laid him on a sack of flour. He was crying. The fright, the shock, the pain; these would have made anyone anguished. But it was disconcerting to see the hardboiled Buck in tears. Said one: 'Come on, Buck. Hold yourself together. Grin, and try an' bear it for a minufe. Then it won't hurt you so bad.'

"'Hell!' another man burst out, and followed with a remark which I still think

was inspired: 'If he's able to grin, then he wasn't hurt a-tall!'

"I thought: why *not* bawl out if something hurts you? What's the crime in it? A man isn't the less a man. There are plenty of the sort who find it easy to say: 'Keep a stiff upper lip— Laugh at your troubles——' And aren't they painful people, often? I had read the Book of Job. Job is to me one of the greatest of all heroes. But didn't he weaken, too? Consider his reward at the end of all that suffering: among other things, three daughters—Jemima, Kezia, and Kerenhappuch!

"I remembered the incident, and used it when I came to write my story. The theme is: Weeping doesn't rob a man of his strength of character."

### *Speedway Stuff*

**L**ATELY we've given you several different stories of automobile racing by Cliff Farrell. And if you're as enthusiastic about them as we are, you'll eat them up as fast as they come out in the magazine. This issue contains one called "No Brakes"—a title that tells a story in itself, but that makes you want to go on and get a thrill out of the real yarn. Farrell has been writing for *SHORT STORIES* for some time; but as far as we can remember, we haven't published anything about him, personally.

He tells us that he was born in Zanesville, Ohio, at the customary early age; and that he started newspaper work at the very bottom (in other words, working in the basement, feeding the furnace). Then he became a reporter and developed the urge to travel, after he had worked as reporter or sports writer on papers in Columbus, Canton, Indianapolis and St. Louis. He adds that when this urge struck him he woke up to find himself in California, broke, but breathing in great quantities of climate. In San Francisco, Fresno and other coast cities he reported and edited; and at last he became news editor

of the *Los Angeles Examiner*. Only to quit and become a fiction writer.

Farrell's first friend in California was Roscoe Sarles, famous racing driver who died under his burning car at Kansas City in 1922, two years after Farrell met him. Speedway racing had always fascinated this author, and he became a close student of the sport—even had ambitions as a driver. He numbers many drivers among his friends, but he says he has grieved at the graves of too many of them.

### *The Seven Mistakes of the Scorpion*

**B**ELOW appear the corrections for the seven errors which author Bedford-Jones deliberately placed in his story, "The Amber Scorpion," printed in this magazine last time. Check up on the corrections which you sent in to us, and see how near you came to getting the prize of a volume of Mr. Bedford-Jones's stories. It's too early to say who actually won that prize—for there were too many answers—but sometime within the next issue or two we hope to be able to tell you who the lucky reader is.—However, don't assume that the book is yours, even if you found all the errors and wrote to us giving all the corrections. The prize was offered to the reader who *first* sent in the correct list; and the judges are taking into consideration the post marks on the envelopes of the letters.

Here are the mistakes:

Page 47, second column, line 11—"on his bed." (Later on, the story speaks of a "bunk" in the same cabin. Beds and bunks are never found in the same cabin.)

Page 50, second column, line 12—"noon longitude sights." (Latitude sights at noon, not longitude.)

Page 50, second column, line 18—"six bells, noon." (Eight bells is noon.)

Page 50, second column, line 42—"the telltale compass on the wall." (A telltale compass is in the ceiling, inverted.)

Page 51, first column, line 47—"the port, which had been unhooked." (Should read, "undogged the port.")

Page 52, first column, lines 2 and 3—"the regulation three stripes of a master." (Masters have four stripes.)

Page 53, first column, line 14—"the electric bulb over the binnacle." (The light is generally at the side.)

**Shantyboater**

SOMETHING about Hal Davenport's little story, "Mussel Water," struck a mighty warm spot in our heart. We're right proud to give it to you, and we know you'll like it.— If you do, then you'll be glad to learn a little something about the man who wrote it. In Mr. Davenport's own words:

"There's nothing much to rave about in my life. A bit of an urge to see things, and to try my hand at a few, has kept me on the go and has made me satisfied with living. Aside from that, it's just about the usual, condensed as follows: Born in the blue grass section of Missouri, where they still raise saddle horses fit to take national honors. Usual youthful activities; baseball, football, hunting, a bit of track at college. Got the notion when I was about sixteen—through hanging around the barns of a local racing string—that

I was the regular stable door kid when it came to feed box information. Anyhow, I followed The Grand Western Circuit through the Middle West that year, and got back home with one shirt, a pair of pants, and a proudly displayed 'swipe's badge' to show for my summer's efforts.

"A few years later Villa kicked up his little rumpus along the Border, and I joined up for the trip. Got back from the Rio Grande with just enough smattering of alleged military knowledge to help train rookies for part of our World War session. Spent the rest in the air service, mainly cracking up landing gears on the old Curtiss training ships. Then I had to go to work. I really wanted to write, but I took it the newspaper route. Being a bit of a 'boomer,' your correspondent had a fling in virtually all editorial capacities, at sheets of every size, from the Big Horns to the Mississippi and the Gulf. Also managed to wedge in a couple of years shantyboating on the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, by way of relief from covering the usual headline producers—floods, prison breaks, the Herrin riots, and the newly developed activities of 'hopped-up' gangsters.

"Since then I've batted around over the West, hammering out fiction when I wasn't chasing off into cow or mountain country. And that's just about the works."

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

**Get Wise!**

**I**T WON'T do to ignore the next issue of **SHORT STORIES**—you can't afford to!—Get wise! Look over the horses named below—and place your bets. And our tip is that there isn't a bum horse in the race.

"The Dark Passage," a complete novel by J. D. Newsom is the first red-blooded young horse who starts. You've guessed it!—A Legionaire yarn, and one of the very best we've ever seen from Newsom. Somehow this great writer gets better and better as time goes on.

Next is a novelette by James B. Hendryx, a thrilling story of Corporal Downey of the Mounted called "Upriver Gold." What's better than a rousing yarn of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police? And as every S. S. reader knows, Hendryx can't be beat at this sort of fiction.

Ernest Haycox has entered a Western: "In Answer to Summons." We'll leave you to guess what the title means; enough to

say that there was no foolin' about that summons!

Foster-Harris, who hasn't been seen around these tracks for a considerable length of time, rides a little short story filly called "Law Blood." But, being about the oil country, which Foster-Harris knows perhaps better than any other writer today, this little story is a fast nag. Don't judge 'er by the size alone!

Other entries include fiction about sea diving, about the hard-boiled construction camps, more hard-boiled lumber camps, the railroads and coal mining. And of course the *dark* horse is Vincent Starrett's great mystery story, "Dead Man Inside." Part II appears in the issue you're now reading. Part III next time!— And a synopsis with every installment, if you need it.

Let's go! The starting bell rings on July 25th, but the issue is dated August 10th.



## OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.

**Coast Guards Become Nursemaids**

**T**WICE a year, once in the spring and once in the fall, the members of the Coast Guard take their small charges out for an airing and a good swim in the ocean.— No, we don't mean that these boys have become proud fathers (perhaps some of them are, but that's not what we are referring to). We're speaking of the Coast Guards out on the Pacific coast, whose job it is to convoy and protect the valuable herd of fur seals which Uncle Sam is trying to build up. In the spring

these seals go north into the Bering Sea, and in the fall, when the snows begin to blow, they return south for the winter. It is assumed that they winter somewhere along the west coast of Mexico, though no one knows for sure.

The Coast Guards' job is to pick up the seal herd as it starts north about April or May, and again in the autumn as it returns south; and under a treaty between the United States, Russia, Japan and Great Britain, by which pelagic sealing is a government monopoly, the herd is pro-

tected from poachers. Two cutters, the *Shoshone*, which is a new 250-footer, and the *McLean*, a craft about half that length, did the job this last spring.

### Among the Catapulters

THEY tell us that out in California gliding is becoming the most popular sport. It is said that there are now more than ninety gliders in use, fifty of which are licensed. This number is fully twice as many as were in use last year. Enthusiasts even hold glider meets every little while, usually at Palos Verdes; and last year the meet was attended by fifteen clubs, and over eighty flights were made. The largest glider—or so it is said—is owned by Dwight Pierce of Glendale; it has a wing spread of sixty-four and a half feet. Not long ago he took the glider apart, and with the help of twenty men transported it to the top of a twenty-five hundred foot mountain overlooking Grand Central Airport. There it was re-assembled, and with Maurice W. Collins at the controls, it was catapulted off the mountain and flew gracefully down the canyon, to land directly in front of the station at the airport. Moreover, Collins took with him

a sack containing some seven hundred letters, so that this glider flight became, so far as is known, the first *mail* glider flight anywhere.

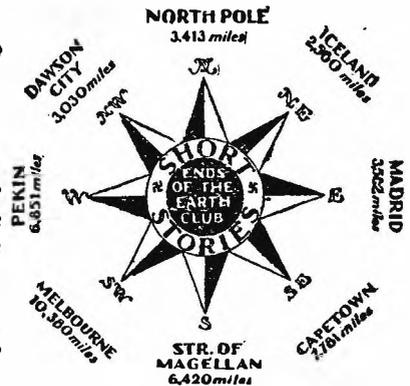
### Express Air Mail

TRANSCONTINENTAL - WESTERN AIR, INCORPORATED, has just announced a new express service over its regular mail and passenger route. At the present time, the ships on this line lay over in Kansas City for one night; but the company proposes to light the route so that the trip between Los Angeles and New York can be made in twenty-four hours. Packages under two hundred pounds will be accepted, the company has studied the needs for such a service, and now believes that it will be a profitable venture, especially for the transportation of clothing, fresh cut flowers, motion picture films, engraving plates and the like.

Thus, gardenias, which are grown in great quantities on the west coast, will reach New York not more than thirty-six hours after they have been picked; and the purchaser will thus be enabled to have flowers that are far younger and fresher than formerly.

## 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, % 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 would like to become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club. I am a regular reader of *SHORT STORIES*.

I have been in the Fiji Islands for seven

years, and I will gladly help any member who is looking for information about the Islands. I joined a motor ship in 1928, as a wiper, and went to Canada and the States. Since then I have been on ships

to Australia, New Caledonia, Samoa and Tonga. I was born in the extreme northern part of New Zealand and I left for the Islands in 1924.

Yours, with every good wish for the members.

*Ernest C. Powell.*

Nadarivatu,  
Colo North  
c/o F. K. T. 16,  
Fiji.

Dear Secretary:

I wish to ask if I may be enrolled as a member of your club. I may not have done sufficient traveling to insure membership, for I am only seventeen years old; but I will eventually travel through Australia, being a bank clerk.

This is the first time that I have read *SHORT STORIES*, and I think that it is a top-notch magazine. Will you please put me on your membership list? I will acknowledge all letters sent to me, including French correspondents, for I have a slight knowledge of that language, too.

I am, yours truly,

*C. A. L. Bauer.*

Effingham Street,  
South Launceton,  
Tasmania, Australia.

Dear Secretary:

I have been reading *SHORT STORIES* for a number of years, and find it one of the best magazines on the news-stands. May I become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club? I am down in the tropics, and I'm pretty lonely, too. I will reply to all letters received. Come on folks, write to me—pronto. Hoping to hear from you all soon, I remain,

Your lonesome,

*Arthur B. Blanche.*

Los Planis Engineering Office,  
c/o The Standard Fruit Co.,  
La Ceiba, Honduras,  
Central America.

Dear Secretary:

Having become a regular reader and member of the fellowship of adventurers in the Ends of the Earth Club, I wish to write to any girl or boy, in any part of the world. As you will see by my address below, I am at present a serving soldier; and I recently arrived at this station from Quetta in India. I am interested in all forms of sport, and I participate in many games. I am twenty years of age, am about five feet eight inches tall. I have auburn hair, and as a consequence I am dubbed "Ginger" by my friends. Hoping you will all rally around to answer this humble letter, I am

Yours very truly,

*L. Cpl. R. Jones.*

No. 4185519

"A" Coy, 1/R. W. Fusiliers,  
Gebeit, Sudan,  
N. E. Africa.

Dear Secretary:

I have just finished reading the December 25th issue of *SHORT STORIES*. The novelette called "Suicide Run," by James W. Bennett, sure was interesting. I've been on the "river" here in China for some time, and the story sure was to the point concerning the gorges. Please regard me as a member of your club. If anyone would like any information as to China and the Chinese, especially the river, I'd be glad to accommodate them. I am a radio operator on the *Panay*, a river gunboat, and have seen plenty of action.

Hoping to hear from you very soon, I remain,

Respectfully,

*Richard B. Graf, RM 2/C.*

Care of: U. S. S. *Panay*,  
Asiatic Fleet,  
Via Seattle, Wash.

Dear Secretary:

Please enroll me in your Ends of the Earth Club. I have been around quite a bit, but I haven't been everywhere, so I

would like to have some pen pals to write to me about their travels, in exchange for mine.

I have flown through all the Central American countries and have stopped off at many of them. I have been to Cuba and to Miami by plane, from way down in Panama. I can tell many unusual experiences that I have been through. Then, there is the Canal; I have been all through it several times, and I have pictures of it when it was being completed, which I will trade with pen pals.

I want pen pals, plenty of them of either sex. I am brimful of things to tell, and if I don't tell them to some one I'll burst. So hurry up and write, buddies!

Yours very truly,

*Theodore (Ted) Simons.*

Box 2286,  
Cristobal,  
Canal Zone.

### **Save These Membership Lists!**

**W**ITH hundreds of letters from members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. We do the best we can, but naturally, most readers buy **SHORT STORIES** because of the stories that it contains. However, beginning with this issue, we will print a complete list of the names and addresses of all members—from "A" to "Z." And as fast as new members are added, their names and addresses will be published too.

Therefore, if you are interested in corresponding with other members, save these lists; they will be of value to you. We believe that almost every member of the club will be glad to hear from you and will be eager to reply.

Chas. A. Abernathy, 1539 Lowell St., Houston, Texas.  
Arthur Adams, c/o Howey Gold Mines, Red Lake, Ont., Canada.  
Bruce T. Adams, Yacht *Aztec*, c/o 85 American Bldg., Boston, Mass.  
Chester E. Adams, 1109 Royal St., New Orleans, Louisiana.

Louis Adams, 1705 Roslyn Street, Fernrock, Philadelphia, Pa.

Robert Addison, 934 W. Central Ave., St. Paul, Minnesota.

Paul Adler, 990 Bronx Park South, New York City.

Tom Ahern, 704 Moultrie St., San Francisco, California.

R. O. Alander, P. O. Box 364, Pierre, S. D.

Joe Alasko, Tresckow, Pa.

Rose Alasko, Tresckow, Pa.

Stanley Alcock, 3500 Ethel St., Verdun, Que., Canada.

Vincent Alekna, 627 W. 18th St., Chicago, Ill.

Fred D. Alexander, General Delivery, Las Vegas, Nev.

James Allard, 427 Walnut St., Springfield, Mass.

Jean Allen, Pre'Emption St., N., Border City, N. Y.

Pvt. John A. Alexander, Fort Crook, Nebr.

J. R. Allen, 800 E. 11th St., Kansas City, Mo.

Keith Allen, Box 75, Aylmer East, Quebec, Canada.

Robert K. Allen, 7717 Mulford St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Eli Allenson, 7704-17th Ave., Near 77th Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

R. S. Allison, 131 N. Ridgeland Ave., Oak Park, Illinois.

Harry Alloway, 525 N. Paxson St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Joseph Alonso, 27 W. 11th St., New York City

Julian Altman, 50 W. 55th St., New York City.

Louis Altman, 795 E. 161st St., New York City

Ray Altpeter, Breese, Ill.

Al Anderson, 5414 Second Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Albert Anderson, 86 E. Pine St., Calumet, Michigan.

Hattie W. Anderson, 141 Brookdale Ave., Newark, N. J.

J. R. Anderson, Route 1, Box 173, Winton, California.

Richard H. Anderson, 832 Fidalgo St., Seattle, Washington.

W. R. Anderson, P. O. Box 488, Morris Plains, N. J.

Angus Andis, Broadus, Texas

Frank L. Andrews, Box 184, Imperial, Calif.

Julius Andrews, 1556-54th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

M. R. Angelo, Upper Watut River, Salamana, Terr. of New Guinea, Pacific.

Delmer Anholt, Box 84a, R. 2, Camas, Wash.

Jim Anyon, c/o Allan Taylor, Warsaw, Ont., Canada.

Carl Anzalone, 8106 Polk Ave., Jackson Heights, L. I.

Bernard A. Arden, Route 1, Box 399 Petaluma, California.

A. Arkon, Sunny Side Mine, Eureka, Colo.

Julius Armbruester, 644 Circle Ave., Forest Park, Illinois.

Ellwood V. Armenbaugh, 418 N. Highland Ave., East Liberty, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Frank Arnard, c/o C. C. Whitcor, Winter Hill, Massachusetts.

- Walter Arnholt, 2018-4th Ave., c/o Mrs. Francis Blix, Seattle, Wash.
- Alexander Arnold, 514 W. 142nd St., New York City.
- E. F. Arnold, P. O. Box 4, Thurston Co., Rochester, Wash.
- Mrs. Marion Arnold, 514 W. 142nd St., New York City.
- Pvt. Arnold H. Arthur, Co. B, 35th Infantry, Schofield Bks., Honolulu, T. H.
- Virgil B. Ashcraft, 568 Hudson, Newark, Ohio
- Denis James Aspill, 392, Central Islip, L. I.
- W. S. Atcheson, 55 Atlanta Ave., S. E., Atlanta, Georgia.
- F. J. Atkinson, 354 Colony St., Winnipeg, Man., Canada.
- Ernest A. Aughe, Wray, Colo.
- Peter Auksel, 3527 Main St., East Chicago, Illinois.
- A. H. Aussicker, 9021 American, Detroit, Mich.
- C. A. Austen, Caixa Postal 833, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- Virgil C. Austen, 38 Co., M. D., A. L., Pekin, China.
- Ruth Ann Austin, Auburndale, Wisc.
- Wilburn Austin, 1812 Pearson Ave., Fundal, Michigan.
- Kermit Autry, Autryville, N. C.
- Pete Aylward, 312 Lincoln Ave., Elgin, Ill.
- Kay J. Baars, 1238-6th Ave., Ford City, Pa.
- Sidney F. Babinean, General Delivery, York Village, Me.
- Alfred Bachmann, State Institute of Applied Agriculture, Farmingdale, L. I.
- Perry W. Badger, R. F. D. 1, Rising Sun, Ohio.
- William Bahrenscheer, c/o D. H. Cameron, R. F. 1, Settle Harbour, Pictou Co., Nova Scotia, Canada
- Ralph Bailey, 725 W. 14th St., Huntington, W. Virginia.
- Harry C. Bailey, 1631 N. La Brea Ave., Hollywood, Calif.
- Roy T. Bailey, Box 217, Simsbury, Conn.
- Bob Bain, Box 10, Caledonia, Ont., Canada.
- Albert O. Baker, 83 Cockmoe Ave., Babylon, N. Y.
- Doyle Baker, Box 91, Portenville, Calif.
- F. A. Baker, P. O. Box 226, Gatun, P. C. Z.
- Gail Baker, 1105 Brown St., Akron, Ohio.
- Harold Baker, 920 James St., Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Maurice M. Baker, 6028 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, Calif.
- Ralph Baker, c/o Vimy Ridge Cafe, Macleod, Alta., Canada.
- Robert Baker, 335 Antietam Ave., Dayton, Ohio.
- Craig Bakie, 5859 Kennedy Ave., Kennedy Heights, Cincinnati, Ohio.
- Jad Baldwin, 1019 W. 20th St., Los Angeles, California.
- Lee Baldwin, Box 14, Long Branch, Ont., Canada.
- Orel Balenger, 173 Worcester St., Southbridge, Massachusetts.
- M. A. Bales, Stall-Sgt., Corps of Engineers, Fort Logan, Colo.
- Miss Evelyn Ball, Box 35, Ashley Falls, Mass.
- Miss Marion Ball, Laramie, Wyo.
- N. R. Ballantine, St. Anne's Hospital, St. Anne de Bellevue, P. A., Quebec, Canada.
- Henry C. Ballvey, 3801 Woodlea Ave., Baltimore, Md.
- Pvt. Howard S. Barber, Co. A, 26th Infantry, Plattsburgh Barracks, N. Y.
- Robert C. Barcelo, 203 Hampshire St., Cambridge, Mass.
- Justus F. Bard, 202 Vine St., Lancaster, Pa.
- Aaron Barinbaum, Box 1308, Houston, Texas.
- C. A. Barnes, c/o Commonwealth Bank, Launceston, Tasmania.
- C. Richard Barnes, 1533 Tulane Ave., New Orleans, La.
- "Suitcase" Barnes, 725 N. Main St., Bentonville, Arkansas.
- Lillian M. Barnett, 7409 Melrose Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.
- W. Barney, 111 Haviland Ave., Audubon, N. J.
- Milton Baron, 64-07 Larkin Ave., Arverne, N. Y.
- Henry Barr, Spencer, S. Dak.
- Marvin O. Barrett, 39 Kimberly Ave., West Haven, Conn.
- Beryle Barry, 182 Prospect St., Union City, Connecticut.
- Ray P. Batholome, 3432 Watson Road, St. Louis, Missouri.
- L. Bassett, C Co., 1/R. W. F., White Barracks, Quetta, India.
- Arthur Bates, Bothell, Wash.
- Harold A. Bates, 391 N. Main St., Riverside, Calif.
- S. Bates, C Co., 1st Bn. R. W. F., Quetta, India
- Carl Bauer, Jr., 3801 Woodlea Ave., Baltimore, Maryland.
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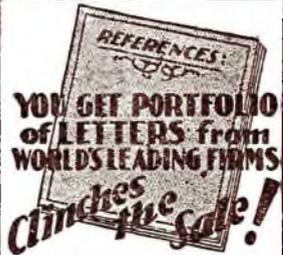


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28x4-50	2.48	1.10	81x4	2.95	1.00
28x4-75	2.43	1.10	82x4	2.95	1.00
28x4-75	2.45	1.10	82x4	2.95	1.00
28x4-95	2.60	1.25	84x4	2.95	1.00
28x4-00	2.85	1.15	82x4 1/2	3.20	1.25
30x4-00	2.85	1.15	83x4 1/2	3.25	1.25
30x4-00	2.95	1.15	84x4 1/2	3.25	1.25
30x4-00	3.10	1.25	80x5	3.55	1.25
30x4-00	3.10	1.25	82x5	3.65	1.25
30x4-00	3.00	1.15	82x5	3.65	1.25
31x4-00	3.10	1.25			
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32x4-00	3.25	1.35			
32x4-00	3.40	1.40			

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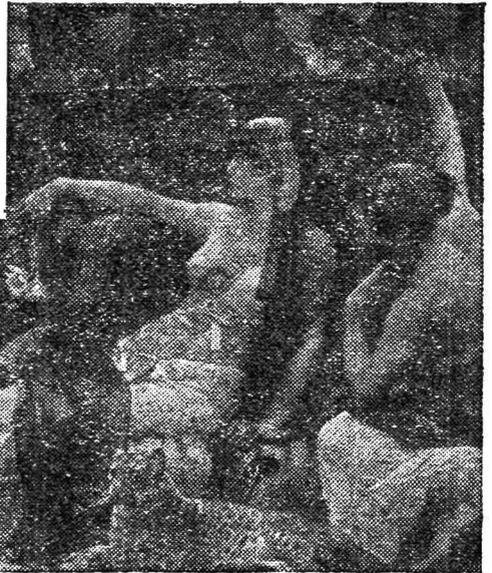
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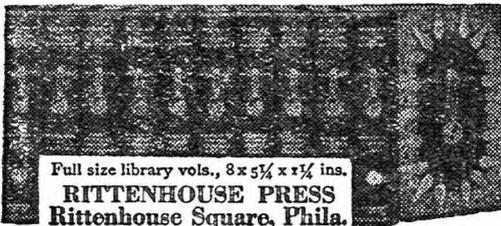
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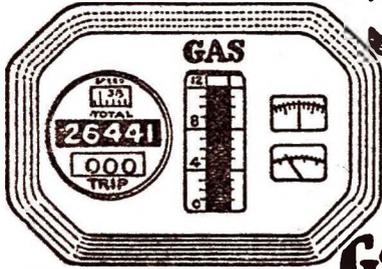
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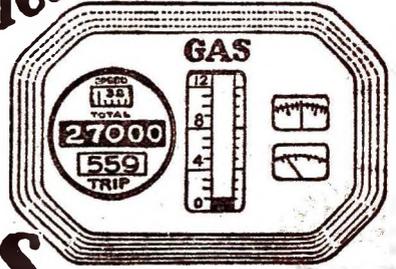
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