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Short Stories

Twice A Month

July 25th

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New peril in the pearling business

DEVIL'S RENDEZVOUS

Neil Martin

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

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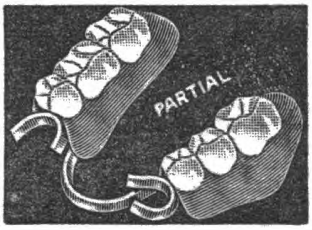

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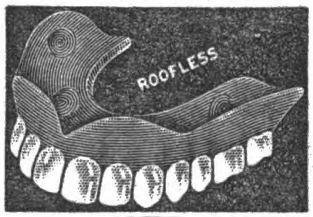

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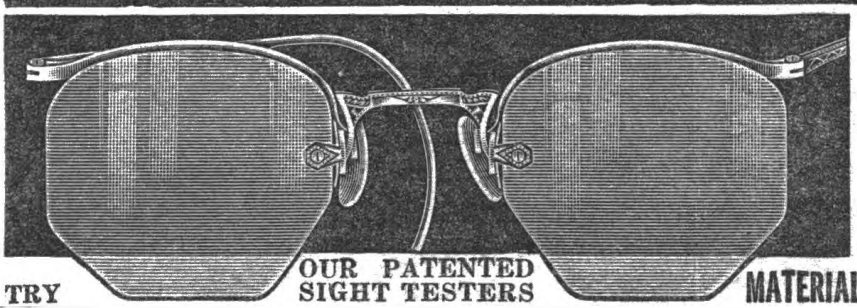

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BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

Stories

latest stories—no reprints

JULY 25th, 1942

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Down Under a Strike in Pearl Shell Is Everybody's Business— and There's No Monopoly in Danger

BEN HARVEY tilted his chair back against the bole of the casuarina tree and regarded the twelve small pearls on the table in thoughtful silence. Colorless as so many leaden bullets, they represented weeks of effort, they and the half ton of pinna shell now lying on Alec Duncan's wharf. He had needed badly to dispose of the shell, for his supplies were running short. But the trader had refused to accept the shell at any price, and had insisted upon Harvey's paying cash for the badly needed stores.

Now he was trying to figure out a reason for the trader's refusal to buy his shell, hardly aware that Alf Piper was speaking.

"Big as marbles, they were," the other was saying in his low-pitched Queensland drawl. "Rob bragged to the old man that he's picked them out o' the first basket o' shell his boys sent topside. My word! A fortune in his blooming fist, he had."

Harvey stared into the leafy canopy overhead, a skeptical smile growing on his square-chinned face. Tall and muscular, with a perennial tan, sea-gray eyes and blond hair with a sunburned wave to it, he looked pleasantly tough. Second-hand

THE DEVIL'S RENDEZVOUS

By NEIL MARTIN

Author of "The Bunyip of Opal Wells," etc.

accounts of pearl finds, he was thinking, were like fish stories. Like the fish that got away, pearls found by some other fellow always seemed to defy the laws of perspective; the farther they receded into the distance, the bigger they seemed to grow.

"Nuts!" he grunted.

He grinned across the table at Piper, who was short and broad, with a dab of a nose, a walrus mustache and an arc of thin, brown hair slicked down over his low, broad forehead. His sharp, blue eyes were alight with eagerness as they met the other's skeptical glance.

"It's true, Yank," Piper insisted. "I saw 'em with me own two eyes."

He fell silent as Alec Duncan's Eurasian clerk emerged from the galvanized store building a few yards away. The man placed a bottle and glasses on the table and discreetly withdrew.

Harvey's eyes were thoughtful as he filled the glasses. Perhaps Piper wasn't stretching the truth, after all. Certainly, he told himself, everyone couldn't possibly be as unlucky as he had been for the past month. While the rest of the Thursday Island fleet had gone west to the new strike in the Banda Sea, he had played a bum hunch and had puttered around the Trobriands. And his reward had been a scant half ton of brittle pinna shell and a dozen small pearls upon which few would be willing to take a gambling chance, for pinna pearls needed to be skinned in order to bring out what little color they possessed.

"Probably you didn't notice that sack o'

gold-lip shell back there in the store," Alf Piper ventured, as Harvey pushed a brimming glass toward him. "Rob brought it back to convince the old man he'd found a bonzer lay. Now they're tryin' to keep it in the family. My word!"

He downed his drink, set his empty glass on the table and swiped a stubby, brown hand across his thin-lipped mouth. "Made a strike in the last place anybody would have thought o' lookin' for shell. Me, I'm gettin' in on that lay even if I have to whittle out a ship for myself with me blooming jack-knife. So help me Johnson, I am!"

Harvey's interest was aroused at last. He knew now why Alec Duncan had refused to take his shell. "You mean Rob's holding back news of a strike? I've never heard of anything like that being done in the five years I've been knocking about down here."

"It ain't, Yank!" Piper declared heatedly. "It simply ain't done. A shell strike is everybody's pidgin. That's what I've been a-tryin' to tell you."

Harvey tasted his liquor and made a face. "What happened to Duncan's vessel?" he asked.

"Rob got greedy," Piper said, grinning. "Loaded up the *Clio* clear to the hatch-coamings. There's a bit of an island there, and he was plannin' to work her into the lagoon, unload his shell an' spread it out on the beach to rot, while he went out an' gathered another load. But he ran her aground on a ledge o' soft coral.

"The shock o' groundin' carried away some o' the gear, an' Ned Brewer got his arm broke. Of course, he had to have medical attention. So Rob takes him in the whaleboat, leavin' his crew o' Bugis to look after the ship, an' takes him into Port Kennedy.

"After landin' Ned, he comes on here to Bindalung to tell his old man about the strike. Straight away, they make plans to keep it dark. Rob is to go south to Cairns, where the *Lomond* is under repair. He's to bring her north here, where the old man is to have a gang o' divers waitin', an' work the lay right through the monsoon. Told Alec he'd work that reef until there wasn't enough shell left to ornament a nigger war-club."

Harvey drank his liquor and refilled the glasses. "That's rather unfair to the rest of us," he remarked.

"It's never been done before, Yank," Piper declared angrily. "I asked him for a passage south to Cairns in the whaleboat. No go— Said he hadn't room."

"Reckon he was afraid you'd spread the news," Harvey smiled.

"Oh, aye! That was it, of course. Thought he had me marooned here in Bindalung. I'd have blowed the gaff on him, right enough. My blooming oath!"

"Where is this lay, Alf?" Harvey inquired.

Piper rested both elbows on the table and regarded him with anxious eyes. "I'm a-goin' to tell you, of course," he drawled. "But first of all I want to remind you that I ain't gettin' any younger. I'd like to make a little something so I could go home to Sydney an' set meself up in a nice, cozy pub. I'm blooming-well sick o' this shell-grabbin'."

"You want to come in with me?"

"Aye!" Piper nodded. "A quarter share."

"You're on," Harvey agreed.

"Right! We're goin' to Taloba Shoal."

Harvey's sun-bleached eyebrows arched in quiet skepticism. "Why, Taloba Shoal was fished out twenty years ago."

"Aye!" Piper grinned knowingly. "But there's always a few oysters left to carry on, y'know."

"That's so," Harvey admitted. "Let's drink on it."

He lifted his glass, then set it back on the table and rose to his feet when he saw the girl standing a few yards away.

"Hello, Caroline," he greeted her. "I was hoping to see you before you started for home."

She made no answer. Short and slender, looking like a pert, handsome boy in blue polo shirt and riding breeches of Annamese silk, she stood there, her riding whip beating a tattoo against the leg of her right boot, her brown eyes regarding him from under the wide, stiff brim of her low-crowned, dove-gray Stetson in cold contempt.

"Great Grimes!" Harvey exclaimed. "You look like you're mad about something."

"I am," she confessed. "I think you're contemptible—both of you."

"Oh, here, now!" Harvey said cajolingly. "What have we done to deserve all that?"

"Enjoying my grandfather's hospitality while you plan to doublecross him and Uncle Rob," she accused.

Harvey flushed under his tan. "You've got that wrong, Caroline," he declared with forced calm. "We're not planning to double-cross anyone. As for enjoying your grandfather's hospitality, well, I've paid for this"—he indicated the half-empty bottle—"exactly four times as much as I'd pay for it in Port Kennedy. Not only that, but he refused to trade me a few stores for the shell I brought in, and made me pay cash. If that's hospitality, I'll eat my hat!"

The girl frowned dubiously. "I don't blame you so much," she admitted. Turning on Piper, she added, "You're really the one who's betraying Uncle Rob."

"Alf isn't betraying anyone, Caroline," Harvey defended the older man. "Out here, a shell strike is everybody's business. Your uncle is just holding out on the rest of us, a thing he has no right to do."

"I don't believe it," she snapped. "You're just a pair of would-be claim-jumpers. You"—she glared at Harvey—"I never want to see you again!"

Whirling on her heel, she walked quickly up the shell-paved path toward the bungalow, leaving Harvey staring after her in angry surprise.

"Well," he thought, "if that's the way you feel I reckon it'll be okay with me."

He sat down again and grinned across the table at Piper, as if dismissing the incident from his mind, while deep in his heart he realized that it would be anything but okay with him.

UNAWARE of the written law of the Inner Seas that new pearling grounds are common property, Caroline was furiously angry at Harvey for his defense of the stocky Australian. As she saw it, they were planning to chisel in on her uncle's discovery.

As she jerked open the door of the screened veranda, her grandfather looked up from his perusal of a week-old copy of the Brisbane *Mail* and cleared his throat.

"I see by the paper there's a German raider operatin' off the west coast," he announced. "Sank three ships in the past week." He pushed his steel-rimmed spectacles up on his wrinkled forehead and added, "Pairhaps 't would be best if ye postponed your return home for another month. Or at least till that damned raider is liquidated."

"Whatever you say, Granddad," she submitted dutifully. "I'm really in no hurry to go home to the States. I came in to tell you that Ben Harvey and Alf Piper are planning to go to that place where Uncle Rob found those pearl oysters."

The old trader stared at his granddaughter with shrewd, blue eyes.

"How d'ye know that, lassie?"

"I heard them discussing it just now," she told him.

"Ye did, eh?" The old man looked troubled. "Belike 't was the *Clio* they were talkin' about. An enterprisin' laddie like yon Harvey could take a fortune out o' her without the trouble o' divin' for it."

"You mean they'd steal Uncle Rob's shell?" she exclaimed.

"I do that!" he grunted. "I wouldna put it past them."

"Oh, I'm sure Ben wouldn't do any-

thing like that," she objected. "Besides, aren't Uncle Rob's men standing by?"

"Poor, spineless Bugis!" he snorted. "Harvey's Stephens Island blackfellas would make quick work o' them."

He paused and looked at the girl, a calculating light in his old eyes. For months he had been aware of the growing intimacy between Harvey and his granddaughter, and he hadn't liked it. Like Harvey, the girl was American born, being the daughter of his elder son, James, who had settled in California twenty-five years before. Old Alec supposed that their attraction for each other had sprung from their common nationality. He had nothing particular against Harvey; but he couldn't see him as a prospective grandson-in-law.

"Did ye ever hear about the scrape Harvey got into with the Dutch up north in Merauke?" he asked.

"When he beat off the Japs who'd tried to run him off a pearling ground, you mean?"

"That was his story," he grinned. "But I'm inclined to believe the other way about."

"I still refuse to believe he'd steal Uncle Rob's shell," she persisted. "Wouldn't that be piracy?"

"Oh, he'd do it under a show o' legality, I grant ye," he declared. "Them Bugis would go overboard an' take to the brush the minute he showed up wi' them tough blackfellas o' his. That'd make the *Clio* an abandoned ship, ye see." He leaned back in his rattan chair and closed his eyes. "Losh! I wish I could get word to Ned Brewer."

"What could he do?" the girl quizzed.

"He could go back to Taloba an' stand by with the Bugis," the old man explained. "A broken arm shouldna prevent him from doin' that much to save the shell. Wi' Ned in charge, the Bugis would stand fast, ye see."

Caroline considered the situation. It was, of course, impossible for her grandfather to leave the station. That left it up to her. The only means of transportation was the station work-boat, a heavy, waterlogged old tub which would need at least four men to row it. She looked through the dusty screen and saw Harvey and Piper still at the table in the shade of the casuarina tree beside the store. As her glance moved past them and out along the wharf, alongside which Harvey's schooner was moored, her brown eyes lighted in sudden resolve as she noticed the vessel's workboat swinging astern.

For a moment she thought of telling the old man what she was about to do, then decided to leave him in ignorance, knowing that he would forbid her to go. She patted his bony shoulders then pushed open the screen door and stepped off the veranda. As she hurried past the store, she kept her face averted, afraid that Harvey would see the guilt in her eyes. She liked him far more than she would be willing to admit to anyone but him. But loyalty to her own kin overrode every other consideration at that moment.

Strolling casually out along the pier, she paused beside the *Stingaree*, where Harvey's mate, a tall, mop-headed amphibian in cotton singlet and dungaree trousers leaned on the rail amidships.

"Hello, Champagne Charley," she greeted him. "Long time no see you."

Champagne Charley's black, bewhiskered face cracked in a delighted grin that revealed two rows of even, snow-white teeth. "Long time stop 'long other place, Missy," he declared, waving a muscular hand in the general direction of New Guinea.

The rest of the crew came to the rail and grinned down at her, seven tall, strapping aborigines who bore little resemblance to their scrawny, starved-looking cousins of the Australian mainland. Charley, still grinning, waited respectfully for her to speak again.

"Kapiti say you fix'm put-put 'long whaleboat," she told him.

Champagne Charley spoke to the others.

Two of the men ran aft and swung over into the whaleboat, while two others lowered to them the heavy-duty outboard motor. After the motor had been shipped over the stern of the boat and the screw clamps tightened, one of the blacks filled the fuel tank from a five gallon tin. Caroline estimated the distance, wondering if a full tank would take her to her destination. Ten miles to Cape York; fifteen miles from the cape to Port Kennedy. She decided that the tankful would get her there.

Champagne watched dubiously as she swung over into the whaleboat.

"Where missy go?" he inquired.

Caroline waited until the two blacks had climbed back to the schooner's deck. Then, as she nonchalantly cast loose the painter, she said:

"Tell kapiti I go 'long Wai-Ben—Thursday Island."

She jerked hard on the starting lanyard. As the motor roared into life, she grasped the tiller and sent the boat shooting seaward. Reaching the mouth of Bindalung Cove, she lifted her right hand in a mocking salute to Harvey and Piper, who had risen to their feet and were watching from beside the store. Then she swung the whaleboat toward the north, where the gray-green mass of Cape York bulked like a distorted pyramid against the brassy forenoon sky.

HARVEY stared in amazement after the speeding boat and muttered:

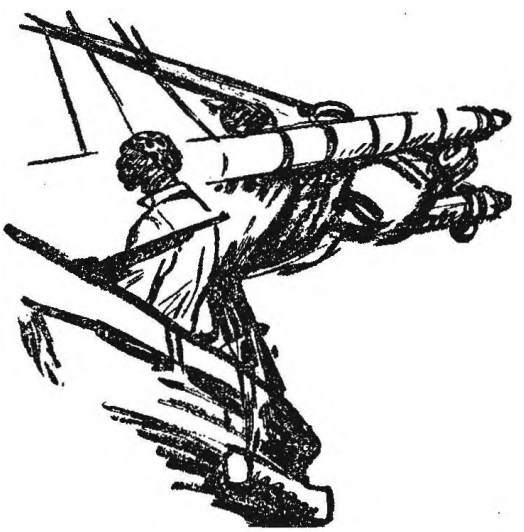
"What in blazes is she up to now?"

Piper rubbed the graying bristle on his chin. "She might be goin' to Port Kennedy, to tip off Ned Brewer about us plannin' to cut in on Rob Duncan's lay," he ventured.

"Not in my boat!" Harvey snapped. "Hell's bells! If she were to stave in that boat on a coral knob, I'd be in one helluva fix. I couldn't get another work boat at this time for love nor money. Come on!"

He ran out along the wharf, followed by Piper. He leaped on board, bellowing orders. Mooring lines were let go. The jib rattled aloft on the stay. In five minutes the *Stingaree* was moving down the cove in the wake of the whaleboat, her fore and mainsails jerking up her raking masts. Clearing the cove, she heeled to the pressure of the trade wind in her canvas, then swung slowly toward the north and went racing toward the cape.

The *Stingaree* was a hundred-ton schooner, over large for a pearler, which craft seldom exceed a displacement of fifty tons. Originally, she had been a yacht, a wealthy man's plaything. Consequently, she had been built for speed. Harvey hadn't needed speed. So he had cut down the sail plan, and had torn out the midship cabins to make cargo space. Now he wished he'd left the sails alone, for he needed speed to overtake the motor-driven whaleboat, which was making two knots for the schooner's one.



Piper watched the unequal race with a grin of amusement. This one couldn't come up with that whaleboat in a month o' Sundays, he declared. "After we round the cape, the current will be dead against us, too."

Harvey shrugged and stared to port, where the great Australian upland stretched north and south like a dusty,

green wall. They were running so close inshore that he could plainly see the piles of red earth which looked like small hills, but were in reality gigantic ant-heaps. Over the port bow rose the wooded summit of Mount Bremer, with the lesser cone of Cape York rising a few miles beyond.

Snatching his glasses from the box inside the companion, Harvey focussed them on the whaleboat, which was now running abreast of York Island, a white speck against the dusty green of the land. He knew that Caroline was well acquainted with the route, having accompanied her grandfather on his monthly excursions to Port Kennedy. But he felt that she couldn't be trusted to take his boat through the dangerous island maze north of the cape, where reefs were so numerous that they were designated merely by numbers, or the letters of the alphabet. If the boat, running at its present speed, should crash on one of these reefs, it would be split wide open. Aside from the danger to the girl, he could not afford to lose the craft now, for it was indispensable in his work. And getting another whaleboat now, with everything that would float gone west to the Banda, would be next to impossible.

Suddenly the whaleboat shot through the channel between York and Eborac Islands. Harvey swore with feeling as he saw her ruse. He couldn't take his schooner through the passage in pursuit, but would be forced to swing north to Alpha Rock, thus giving her a lead of more than five miles over what she already had gained.

"I guess that puts the finish on this race," he declared.

Piper grinned. "Supposin' you had overhauled her, what could you do?"

Harvey frowned. "Darned if I know. I reckon all I could do would be to land her in Port Kennedy and go on about our business."

He saw no more of the whaleboat for the next hour and a half. He continued to worry as the schooner bucked the tide rip off Eborac Island and bore up toward Alpha Rock at the north end of Adolphus Channel. Then, with King Point bearing on the quarter, he shaped a course for Channel Rock.

NOT until Double Hill, on Narupai, was bearing over the bow did he again sight the boat. Looking through his glasses, he saw the craft, a white speck against the high, wooded shores of Keriri as it angled away from Bruce Point and headed southeast past Kapuda.

He grinned in frank relief as he watched the whaleboat skirt the north shore of Thursday Island as she ran east toward Ellis Channel. He realized that the girl had outdistanced him by cutting north through one of those narrow channels known as boat passages, knowing that the deeper draft of the *Stingaree* would force him to stick to the regular channel, where the tidal currents, which flow from west to east with the ebb, would cut down the vessel's speed. He didn't care now; she was safe, and he would get his work-boat back.

He kept his glasses focussed upon the boat as it skimmed along the north shore of Thursday Island, keeping well clear of the coral ledge. For a moment he thought Caroline was heading across Ellis Channel for the pearling station on Narupai, to clear her uncle of any suspicion of double-crossing the fraternity by reporting the strike. But when the boat swung south off the Five-foot Bank and ran toward the White Beacon, he knew that she was bound in for Port Kennedy.

He held the schooner on Channel Rock, passed it and ran south into Ellis Channel between the Mud Flat and Hovell Bar. When the white-lettered roof of the Grand Hotel showed above the trees to starboard, he ran over toward Madge Reef, then rounded into the wind and ordered the anchor let go.

Before him the little town of Port Kennedy nestled among the trees, with the

rounded summit of Rose Hill rising beyond the last line of houses. Swinging his glasses toward Vivien Point, he saw the fair weather flag floating from the flagstaff. The harbor was almost deserted. Except for a Burns-Phillip steamer discharging at the T-head of the long government wharf, there was no activity. Of the three hundred vessels of the pearling fleet, not one remained.

Then he saw Caroline standing at the head of the landing stair halfway along the pier, where the whaleboat swung at the end of its painter. As he watched, she waved toward the schooner, then she turned and hurried shoreward. He followed her with his glasses as she passed the custom house, crossed Douglas Street and walked north on Hastings.

Ordering the dinghy over, Harvey took two of his crew to recover the whaleboat. When he reached the landing stair, he directed the men to wait for him and hurried to the custom house, where he tacked on the "Notice to Mariners" bulletin board a note which read:

"Schooner *Clio*, R. Duncan, master, aground on Taloba Shoal. Will be salvaged as soon as conditions permit. Captain Duncan reports good quality shell plentiful in vicinity."

He left the building and returned to the landing stair, grinning as he visualized Rob Duncan's chagrin at being given due credit in the report of a discovery which he had tried to keep secret. Having done his duty to the fraternity, Harvey decided that there was nothing now to hold him in Port Kennedy.

Fifteen minutes later the *Stingaree* was reaching past Vivien Point, bucking the tide rips at the head of Friday Passage as she headed west through Normanby Sound toward the Gulf of Carpentaria and Taloba Shoal.

THE breeze stayed with the *Stingaree*, working her through the dangerous island channels and out across the Gulf, bringing her up to the eastern rim of Taloba Shoal at noon the following day.

While the schooner crept along the edge of the shoal, Harvey swept his glasses over the surroundings. Far off the regular trade routes, Taloba had never been adequately surveyed. Twenty years before it had been worked by the pearlers, and the short paragraph in the pilot book descriptive of the island and its surrounding reefs had been compiled from data furnished by them. Rising from the center of the shoal, Taloba Island looked like the back of a whale humped above the translucent green water. Actually, it was an ancient volcano crater, with a gap in its northern side giving entrance to a small lagoon, which could be reached by a thirty-foot channel among the reefs.

Deciding to try his luck, Harvey ordered the anchor dropped. The whaleboat was brought alongside, and Champagne Charley took charge. Accompanied by four of his fellow islanders, the mate headed the boat across the outer rim of the shoal, pausing at intervals to study the bottom through a water-glass.

Suddenly Charley cut off the motor. As the boat lost way, one of the blacks took a header over the side. Another flung out a net-bag, which seemed no sooner to have reached bottom than it came in again, brimming full. Then two more blacks went overboard, leaving Charley and the remaining man to haul in the loaded net-bags. Harvey felt his knees trembling as through his glasses he watched the men dive, come up for a blow and dive again, whooping like schoolboys as they shot back and forth between the surface and the bottom like so many seals, while Charley and his helper worked furiously as they heaved in the loaded net-bags and dumped their contents on the bottom boards.

This went on for an hour, with the boat hovering over the spot where the first man had dived. Harvey whistled in amazement as he watched the shell come in, piling up in the boat until it seemed there would be

no room left for the men. At last Charley started the motor and headed back toward the schooner, with the divers clinging to the gunwales, laughing like schoolboys as they were dragged through the water.

As the boat came alongside, and her crew started tossing the huge oysters on deck, Champagne Charley scrambled over the rail, his bewhiskered face cracked in a delighted grin.

"Look plenty good downside," he reported. "Every place find'm plenty shell."

"How deep?" Harvey asked.

One of the blacks who answered to the name of Can o' Hash stood erect on the gunwale of the whaleboat and placed a hand on top of his bushy head. "Two time me, kapiti," he declared. "Some place jus' one time, mebbe litty bit more."

"Averaging from six to twelve feet," Harvey interpreted, turning to Piper. "Looks like we've struck it, sure enough. No need to rig diving gear for depths like this."

The boat was unloaded and departed for a second cargo. Harvey and Piper set to work, testing the huge oysters for pearls. Dipping the hinge sides of the bivalves in a bucket of hot water, which caused the shells to gape apart, the two white men worked in feverish haste, probing the clammy flesh with their fingers and dropping whatever pearls they found into a cigar box. The first load of shell was exhausted, and they tackled the second boatload. When, finally, the last oyster had been opened and tossed aside, the box was brimming full with pearls of all shapes and sizes, from tiny seeds to glistening spheres an inch or more in diameter.

"This," Piper declared, as they paused to observe the results of their three hours of work, "is a bit of all right. You believe now about them shiners Rob Duncan had. What?"

"I'll believe anything after this," Harvey agreed. He was still a bit stunned at his good fortune. Heretofore, pearling had meant hard and dangerous work, with himself and Champagne Charley taking turns at diving, sometimes in depths far below the safety line, with their very lives depending upon the men who worked the air pump. But this was something entirely beyond his experience. To gather shell in water not much deeper than a man's height seemed prosaic as harvesting potatoes.

"If it's all like this over the shoal," he said reflectively, "it won't do the market any good, with the war on and the market for shell hitting bottom. Reckon Duncan must have had the same idea."

Piper nodded toward the brimming cigar box. "With what you've got there," he drawled, "you could afford to give the blooming shell away. Besides, the war ain't goin' to last forever. It'd pay a bloke to store good gold-lip shell like this until the market took a rise. That's what Rob Duncan was plannin' to do."

"Guess we can take a leaf out of his book," Harvey nodded. He looked at the sun, which was now dropping toward the western horizon. "We'd better work from the lagoon after this. With the monsoon coming on, a sudden blow might pile us on the shoal."

The whaleboat was trailed astern and the anchor hove in. The schooner was headed westward along the edge of the shoal, then north until the channel opened before her. Harvey looked dubiously at the tortuous passage, a narrow lane of deep blue water that meandered like a cowpath through the translucent green of the water covering the shoal. Far ahead, nestling under the lee of the island, he could see the *Clio*, looking neat and ship-shape as if she were riding at anchor.

"We're towing in," he decided. "I don't want to repeat Duncan's mistake. You take the whaleboat ahead."

Piper embarked in the whaleboat and the tow-rope was passed. The work-boat went ahead, towing the schooner through the channel at a bare four knots. As the vessel came abreast of the twin points of black, volcanic rock which marked the en-

trance to the lagoon, Harvey looked toward the *Clio* a cable's length east of the pass. There was no sign of life upon the vessel's deck. He frowned, his curiosity aroused by the abandoned appearance of the grounded vessel. He had expected to find Duncan's crew of Bugis standing by. But the men were nowhere in sight.

He ordered the anchor let go and the whaleboat brought alongside. Then he embarked with Piper and headed the boat over toward the *Clio*. As they came alongside they were greeted by an overpowering stench of decaying shellfish, which Harvey knew was caused by the uncleaned oysters now rotting in the vessel's hold. Climbing to the deck, he paused in shocked surprise when he saw a black lying in the port scuppers.

He stood above the body, his slow glance following a line of small holes that slanted across the dead man's chest from below his left lower rib to his right shoulder, each hole ringed with dried blood.

"Great Grimes!" He turned to Piper, who had scrambled up behind him. "This guy's been shot up."

Piper nodded. "Machine-gun. Let's see if there are any others."

They went forward and peered into the tiny forecastle. Here was a scene of disorder. Splinters had been riven from the edge boards of the bunks and lay underfoot, and a line of small holes showed in the forward bulkhead. Lying in a ghastly huddle in a corner were the rest of Duncan's crew, each body riddled with bullets.

Piper emitted an unprintable oath and backed on deck, his face white under its tan. Harvey followed, a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach. Almost sick from the overpowering stench, they tumbled into the whaleboat and shoved off, opening up the motor to its fullest capacity to get away from that awful, brain-deadening odor.

"Cripes!" Piper gasped as he brought the whaleboat alongside the *Stingaree*. "Seems like something always pops up to take the blinking joy out o' life. What?"

"Who in heaven's name could be so rotten low-down as to kill those harmless poor devils?" Harvey exclaimed, shuddering as a picture of the pathetic huddle of bodies in the *Clio's* forecastle rose before his mind.

"It'll all come out in the wash," Piper growled. "Seems to me we're due to be asked a lot o' pointed questions."

"I reckon there'll be an investigation."

"My blooming oath! Rob Duncan will be the first to yell for one. My word! That'll be a handy way for him to get even with us for spoilin' his lay. What?"

Harvey shrugged. "In that case, the sensible thing for us to do would be to put back to Port Kennedy and make a report."

Piper glanced at the sun. "It'll be dark in an hour. Let's lay over in the lagoon till daylight. A few hours more or less ain't goin' to make any difference, y'know."

"All right," Harvey agreed. "But let's keep it from the boys, at least for the present."

He climbed on deck and went aft, while Piper lined the whaleboat ahead and again took the tow-rope. The anchor came in, and the schooner moved slowly through the pass, the inner end of which was almost blocked by a pinnacle of lava which towered threateningly above the surface, partly obscuring a view of the lagoon.

The vessel cleared the obstruction with plenty of room to spare. Harvey swept a quick glance over the lagoon as it opened out before him in a vista of mangrove-bordered shores fronting a jungle-clad slope which rose in a gradual ascent for perhaps two hundred feet, overshadowing the lagoon that lay like a disc of blue glass in the afternoon sunlight. From the inner side of the pinnacle a sandspit extended for a couple of hundred feet, part of it already bared by the falling tide. And lying at anchor a cable's length west of the sandspit was a big three-masted schooner.

"Hello!" Harvey exclaimed. "Who the devil is this fellow?"

The answer came in a sudden turmoil of sound that seemed to fill the circular space enclosed within the ridge with chattering thunder. The air above the *Stingaree's* deck was suddenly filled with crackling noises. The black helmsman jerked erect, clutched at his chest and then slipped sidewise to the deck, his left hand still clutching a spoke of the wheel. A puff of wind blew down the slope, filling the vessel's limp sails. Her head swung around and she ran hard aground on the sandspit. Suddenly the racket ceased.

"They're machine-gunning us!" Harvey yelled in sudden realization.

Piper was the first to grasp what was happening. Already he had slipped overboard from the whaleboat and was splashing through the shallows. As he plunged out of sight among the mangroves, the machine-gun opened up again. Bullets struck the mainmast, ricocheted, filled the air with splinters. Harvey felt the hot breath of a bullet fan his cheek, saw another of his crew slump inertly to the deck. Cursing helplessly, he ducked below the coaming of the cabin skylight, where Champagne Charley was already crouched, his black eyes seemingly about to pop from his head.

"Mo' better we go 'long scrub," the mate suggested. "Bimeby put-put gun make finish 'long everybody."

It seemed the only sensible thing to do. If they remained on board, the machine-gun would sooner or later cut them down. Harvey looked down at the rest of his crew huddling below the bulwarks and waved a hand toward the beach. The men went headlong overboard. Harvey and the mate followed, floundered through the shallows to the narrow beach, up which they rushed to the cover of the mangroves, with bullets beating a devil's tattoo among the rubbery branches above their heads.

Once in the cover of the jungle, they crawled halfway up the slope before they paused for breath, while below them the bullets were cutting a swath among the mangroves as the machine-gunner sought them out. Then the chatter of the gun ceased, leaving the air filled with quivering echoes.

Harvey's crew gathered about him, looking rather shamefaced. Tough as they were, they were no match for the gun that spat bullets as a hose sprays water. Harvey smiled as he interpreted their feelings.

"It's all right, boys," he assured them. "That fella put-put gun is too much for us. Maybe we'll get a break later on."

Piper came crawling toward them on hands and knees. "I say," he whispered excitedly, "that there's German Harry's vessel."

Harvey had met German Harry Kroll in Port Kennedy the year before, and the meeting hadn't added to his estimation of the man, against whom much was whispered, although nothing had been proved.

"Why should he try to rub us out?" he asked.

"You have me there," Piper admitted. "But I ain't surprised at anything that blighter would do." He grinned and then added, "Well, now we know who shot up Duncan's boys."

Harvey swore under his breath as he remembered the notice he had posted on the custom house bulletin board in Port Kennedy. Not all the crowd who had gone to the Banda strike would be lucky. Sooner or later, in twos and threes, the unlucky ones would be straggling back to Thursday Island with empty holds. Lured to Taloba by his message, they, too, would be met with a blast of machine-gun fire. And there was nothing he could do to prevent it.

WHILE the *Stingaree* was starting on her two-hundred-mile traverse for Taloba Shoal, Caroline Duncan was seated on the screened veranda of a small white bungalow on Millman Street, in Port Kennedy, facing Ned Brewer, her uncle's partner, a stocky, middle-aged man, with an unruly shock of graying hair, and mild brown eyes set well apart in a blunt-featured face which was tanned to the color of old leather.

"I don't know this Yank Harvey, although I've heard of him," he declared, after hearing the girl's story. "But if yer granddad's afraid he'll loot the *Clio,* I reckon it's up to me to get over there an' put a bit o' stiffenin' in the backs o' them Bugis."

"I can't understand why Granddad considers Ben capable of anything like that," she declared. "For my part, I'm sure he won't bother the *Clio.*"

"Better to be sure than sorry," Brewer grinned. "It would be the logical thing for any enterprisin' bloke to do. If he could scare the crew off her, why, she'd then be a wreck-free pickin's for anybody that wanted to make a fortune without divin' for it."

He rose and entered the house. Caroline heard him talking with his brother-in-law, Bill Tuck. Presently he returned, carrying a repeating shotgun and a bandolier of cartridges.

"Bill can't leave now," he told her. "So I'll have to go it alone. It'll be a bit awkward with this." He indicated his right arm, which was still in a sling.

"How are you going to get there?" she asked.

"I'm takin' the *Rosalie.* Bill's vessel. She's a thirty-foot auxiliary yawl."

"I'd like to go," she offered. "I could help with the sails."

"If you've made up yer mind to go," he shrugged, "I wouldn't be the one to stop you. Come along."

They left the house and hurried to the waterfront. As they reached the inshore end of the government pier, Caroline looked out across the channel toward the spot where she last had seen the *Stingaree.*

"He's gone," she announced.

Brewer's eyes twinkled. "He would, after he got his boat back. He could have had you arrested for stealin' her, too."

He led the way out along the pier to the landing stairs, at the foot of which a number of small boats were moored. Boarding one of the craft, he deposited his shotgun in the stern and motioned Caroline to a seat amidships. Then he slipped the painter, set an oar in the stern notch and sculled with his left hand toward a trim yawl lying at anchor between the pier and the swimming baths.

"Here she is," he announced as he brought the boat alongside the little vessel. "She's no great shakes for speed. But she'll get us to Taloba sometime tomorrow afternoon."

They climbed on board. Caroline helped him trail the rowboat astern and get the anchor in. He then went aft, started the motor and headed the yawl toward Vivien Point.

"Lucky for us Bill was all outfitted for a voyage to Merauke, in Dutch New Guinea," he declared, as Caroline seated herself beside him on the edge of the cockpit. "He was to carry two missionary blokes up there. But they backed out at the last minute an' took passage on that Jap N. Y. K. steamer that cleared yesterday."

He said no more, concentrating on his steering. Caroline watched the shore line in silence. Port Kennedy, with its polyglot population never ceased to interest her. As the hospital buildings on Vivien Point came abeam, she looked out ahead and saw the *Stingaree* reaching past Tucker Point under a cloud of canvas.

Brewer opened up the throttle to its fullest extent, waited awhile to observe results, then throttled down again.

"That jackeroo is walkin' away from us like we were standin' still," he declared.

"He's got wind an' tide with him now."

"Can't I help you make sail?" she offered.

He shook his head. "No go! Handlin' sail on a craft o' this size is a job for two able-bodied men.

"If we put sail on her, we might be caught in a squall. So we'll just jog along with the kicker. She'll get us there by tomorrow afternoon."

CAROLINE lifted the binoculars from their box and focussed them on the channel ahead. Because the Prince of Wales Channel was comparatively free of dangerous obstructions, Harvey was turning the tables on her with a vengeance. She had outdistanced him in the race from Bindalung to Port Kennedy. Now it was his turn, and he was crowding the *Stingaree* for all she was worth.

Caroline returned the glasses to their box and settled back in her seat. "Ben claimed Uncle Rob had no right to hold back news of his discovery," she said. "Is that true?"

Brewer grinned guiltily. "Well, in a way."

"You mean Ben wouldn't be guilty of claim-jumping if he gathered shell on Taloba Shoal?"

"There's really no such thing as a claim in a shell strike," Brewer admitted with evident reluctance. "A bloke discovers fresh pearling grounds, fills the hold of his vessel and heads for Port Kennedy to spread the news. That's the custom hereabouts."

"Why, then," she probed, "did Granddad try to withhold the news from Ben?"

"The fact is," Brewer declared soberly, "Rob an' me didn't know about that Banda strike until it was too late. Most o' the fleet had gone there before we learned about it, so we knew there'd be slim pickin's for us. Then we stumbled onto the Taloba lay an' saw a chance to make a clean-up before the fleet got back. Maybe we were wrong; but we figured we ought to make a killin' while we had the opportunity."

"Then Harvey is acting within his rights?"

He shrugged. "If he sticks to gatherin' shell on his own account an' leaves the *Clio* alone."

Caroline felt suddenly foolish, aware now that she had tried to make a mountain out of a molehill. It was her uncle and not Ben Harvey who had been in the wrong. It seemed to her that there was nothing further to be said, for no one could make her believe that Harvey, even under a cloak of legality, would loot her uncle's vessel.

In silence she watched the islands slip past, Pailug hunched within its encircling reef; Nelgee with its brushy, boulder-strewn hill. There were other islands, too, some of them mere specks of land too insignificant to be given names, all of them smothered in vegetation amid which she could recognize the familiar casuarina, eucalyptus and screw-pine, every beach with its fringe of dark-leaved mangroves above which tall coconut palms waved their feathery fronds in the afternoon breeze.

The day was drawing to a close as the yawl chugged past East Strait Islet, and the Gulf opened before them. Far ahead, her sails black against the red afterglow, the *Stingaree* was ghosting along, running like a racing craft over a fixed course. As the afterglow faded from the sky, and the schooner merged with the thickening darkness, Brewer chuckled:

"He ain't goin' to beat us by more than a few hours, after all. We'll be comin' up on Taloba almost on his blooming heels."

SHORTLY after three o'clock the following afternoon Brewer pointed out the island cone, vaguely blue against the western sky.

"There it is," he announced. "You'll be seein' yer Yankee friend before dark."

He grinned cheerfully, his eyes red-

rimmed from lack of sleep. Since leaving Port Kennedy he had barely moved, steering with his left hand through the night, while the girl cat-napped on the short deck abaft the cockpit. To Caroline the trip was becoming boresome. With nothing to see but sky and water, and with nothing to do except brew an occasional billy of tea or open a can of bully beef, she was finding time heavy on her hands.

Her interest quickened, when she saw a steamer heave into sight over the sea-rim to westward. Lifting the binoculars, she focussed them upon the distant vessel. It was a trim craft, with a rakish clipper bow, its hull painted a light gray, and its upper works white, topped by a squat, buff-colored funnel, with two long deck houses extending fore and aft from the bridge.

PUSHING a huge bow wave before her, the approaching vessel changed course and bore down toward the yawl. Caroline marveled at the speed with which the steamer closed the distance. She hadn't known that ships could travel so fast.

"It's queer that no smoke comes out of the funnel," she remarked to Brewer, who was watching the oncoming vessel with a puzzled frown.

"She's a motor ship," he enlightened her. "That funnel's a dummy, just put there for looks. Rich bloke's yacht, by the look of her."

It seemed as if the motor ship was bearing to cross the yawl's bows. Brewer changed the course to lay the *Rosalie* on the other's quarter.

"With all the room in the Gulf," he growled, "that blighter has to crowd us."

Suddenly two short, peremptory blasts from an air siren boomed across the intervening water. The motor ship lost way, stopped and lay rolling gently to the heave of the Gulf.

"Wants to talk to us, I reckon," Brewer mumbled, changing the course again to lay the yawl broadside to the larger vessel. As they came within hailing distance, a megaphoned command came booming across the water:

"Come alongside!"

"He's rather free with his orders, I must say!" Brewer growled. "That's the way with them rich blokes; they think their money gives 'em the right to chuck their weight around. My word!"

He held on until the yawl was within a hundred feet of the stranger. Then he swung the little vessel broadside on and shut off the motor. Standing erect in the cockpit, he shouted:

"What d'you want?"

"What ship is that?" a man called from the bridge of the motor ship.

"Auxiliary yawl, *Rosalie,* Ned Brewer, actin' master, Port Kennedy to Taloba," Brewer answered.

"Come on board," came the peremptory order.

"I say, now!" Brewer protested, glaring at the trim vessel with typical Australian dislike of side. "Who the blinkin' hell are you to give me orders. Why should I go aboard that there floatin' playbox? I've got business to attend to, me lad."

A man standing below the bridge of the motor ship laid a rifle across the rail, took careful aim and fired. Brewer swore as a bullet knocked a sliver of wood from the coaming of the cockpit.

"I'll report you for this!" he roared, shaking his fist at the man on the motor vessel's bridge. "You can't go around in these waters shootin' at honest folks, no matter how much money you've blinkin' well got. I'll have yer ticket, by cripes!"

"Come on board, or I'll run you down!" the man on the bridge threatened.

"My word!" Brewer regarded the girl with sleepy eyes. "This here's somethin' out o' the ordinary."

"Why not do as he says?" Caroline suggested. "Maybe he only wants to get some sailing directions from you."

Brewer grunted, started the motor again and eased the yawl alongside the motor vessel, from the deck of which a line was

dropped, then a Jacob's lander. Two sailors came down the ladder. They were dressed in dingy whites, with tarnished gold letters on the bands of their little round caps. They made fast the line, then looked over Caroline and Brewer, their light blue eyes moving in slow scrutiny from the girl's wide-brimmed hat to the toes of her riding boots. Then one of them hailed the bridge of the motor vessel in a jumble of strange-sounding words that brought a groan of realization from Brewer.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "These are Fritzies. It's that bloody raider we've been readin' about in the papers. Oh, Lord! I felt somethin' was about to happen."

One of the sailors motioned to the ladder and said, "Up!" Above them, the vessel's rail was topped by a long row of grinning faces.

Caroline started up the dangling ladder. Cursing under his breath, Brewer followed. As they reached the deck, a man descended from the bridge and came to meet them, a tall, slender man, with a blob of a nose, mean little gray eyes beneath bushy blond eyebrows and a mouth like a shark's. A scar stretched between his right cheekbone and his ear, dead white against the ruddy tan of his face.

He clicked his heels and bowed jerkily to the girl. "I am Korvetten-Kapitan Reinke, of the German navy," he announced in heavily accented English. "I did not expect to meet a lady out here." He drew a monocle from the breast pocket of his white uniform jacket, screwed it into his right eye and regarded her with a complacent smile.

"And I am Caroline Duncan, of the United States of America," the girl responded tartly. "As an American, I question your right to interfere with me."

Korvetten-Kapitan Reinke dropped his monocle, caught it expertly, then jerked a silk handkerchief from his sleeve and polished the glass with a preoccupied air. Presently he asked:

"You have papers?"

Caroline shook her head. "I didn't expect to have to prove my nationality when I started on this trip," she declared angrily.

The commander's thin-lipped mouth stretched in a smile of incredulity. "That iss to be regretted," he drawled. "As you have no proof of your American nationality, and as you were traveling on a ship of British registery, I have no alternative but to ignore your claim and treat you as a British national. Yess!"

"Better go slow about that, Captain," Brewer warned. "The young lady's American, right enough. You get to messin' about with the Yanks, an' you'll find yerself holdin' the dirty end of the stick. My blooming oath, you will!"

Reinke ignored the warning. "What," he asked slowly, "was your business on Taloba?"

Reluctantly, Brewer told him of the grounding of the *Clio* and of his last minute decision to guard the vessel's cargo. Reinke listened with a preoccupied air, all the time industriously polishing his monocle. As the Australian concluded, the commander said:

"There will be other vessels of the Thursday Island fleet coming here. Yess?"

"They'll be swarmin' all over the reefs inside a week," Brewer told him. "They'll be hurryin' to gather as much shell as possible before the beginnin' o' the monsoon."

Reinke smiled thinly. "That will be extremely awkward—for them."

"Oh, I say, now!" Brewer protested. "You don't mean to say you'd shoot up them poor blokes?"

"If your nation had not attempted to starve us with a blockade," Reinke said, "there would be no need for shooting anyone."

"And if your bloody nation hadn't gone barmy, there'd have been no need for the blockade!" Brewer retorted angrily.

Reinke seemed to hold his temper only

by an effort. "Let me remind you that you are a prisoner," he said coldly. "So long as you remain civil, you may move freely about the ship. But another remark like that, and I shall have you put in irons." He bowed to Caroline and returned to the bridge.

Brewer grinned at Caroline, "That was tellin' the blighter off. What?"

"I think it would be best if you held your temper with him after this," the girl advised.

THEY turned to the rail and watched a gang of sailors strip the yawl of everything of value. When the last case of tinned beef had been landed on the raider's deck, one of the men took something from a bucket and entered the little vessel's cabin. The others climbed to the deck of the raider and lined the rail. Presently the last man popped from the cabin of the yawl and scrambled up the ladder with every appearance of haste.

A bell jangled shrilly in the engine room. The raider's hull quivered from the sudden thrust of her engines. As she shot ahead, leaving the yawl rocking forlornly in her wake, Brewer clutched the rail and swore under his breath. Suddenly there was a muffled thud, like the sound of a heavy plank being dropped on soft ground. The cabin skylight of the yawl, and most of her deck, heaved skyward in advance of a column of black smoke shot through with ruddy flame. The *Rosalie* tossed her bowsprit into the air, then sank, stern first, beneath the surface.

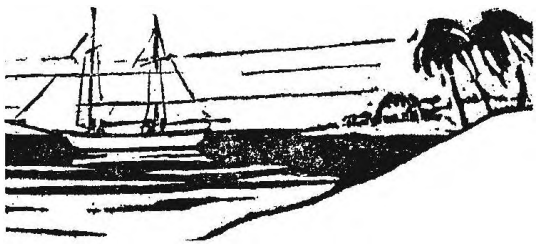
"There goes five hundred quid I'll have to make good to old Bill," Brewer growled.

Caroline stared at the vortex of whirling debris that marked the spot where the little vessel had plunged out of sight. The destruction of the yawl seemed so cold-bloodedly wanton. But sober reflection convinced her that it was necessary. The raider was in a trap, squarely between the bases guarding the Gulf of Carpentaria, Darwin on the west, the Torres base on the east. Probably, Taloba was the raider's base. If so, Reinke had chosen well, for no one would think of looking for an enemy raider in the Gulf. Consequently, he would take pains to prevent his secret being broadcast, which would have happened had he allowed the yawl to pass. For Brewer, as a matter of sea routine, would have reported meeting the vessel off Taloba.

The motor ship was making toward the island at a fast clip. Caroline watched the landfall with anxious eyes. The island had now assumed a definite shape, and the water over the surrounding shoals was a translucent green with splashes of cobalt marking the deeper spots among the reefs. She had expected to find the *Stingaree* hard at work. But the vessel was nowhere in sight.

"I thought Ben would be here ahead of us," she remarked anxiously to Brewer. "But I'm sure glad now that he isn't."

"Don't be too sure he ain't," Brewer advised. "He's probably workin' around on the north side. We'll know directly."



The raider skirted the shoal, working around its outer edge toward the channel. Coming abreast of the passage, it slowed to a mere crawl and moved landward. Caroline looked for the *Stingaree*. She saw the *Clio* lying under the lee of the land. But of Harvey's vessel there was no sign.

Then the motor ship crept through the pass into the lagoon and rounded the pinnacle. Caroline gasped when she saw the *Stingaree* lying half aground on the sandspit, with the still figure of the black

sprawled beside the wheel, and another lying face downward in the waist.

"Ned," she exclaimed excitedly, "there's Ben's vessel. Look at those two dead men —and the bullet holes in the sails! Good heavens! What can have happened to them?"

He stared down at her, understanding dawning in his mild, brown eyes. "Looks like somebody's run into hard luck," he said. "But this here is war. And we're in it—you an' me—whether we like it or not."

AT THAT moment Harvey was watching from behind the jungle screen as the raider crept up the lagoon. Seeing Ned Brewer and Caroline on the vessel's deck, he half rose, about to step into sight and wave. Piper jerked him back not an instant too soon.

"Steady, Yank!" the Australian counselled. "We don't know them blokes. If they're friends o' German Harry's, they ain't no friends o' ours."

Harvey sat down again and watched the newcomer anchor in the center of the lagoon, a mile from either shore. Signals were exchanged with the three-master. The latter vessel's anchor was hove short, and she was worked to a position alongside the motor ship.

Harvey could guess what was coming next. For the past hour the nondescript crew of the big schooner had been ferrying drums of oil ashore on a raft and rolling them back into the jungle at the bight of the lagoon. Now preparations were being made to swing the barrels on board the motor ship.

He turned to Piper and asked, "What d'you think, Alf?"

"I haven't formed an opinion yet," the Australian confessed. "But I'll have one on tap pretty soon."

On board the newcomer a gang of sailors were gathered about the forward deck house. As Harvey watched, the sides of the structure collapsed outward, as if worked by some hidden mechanism, revealing a long gun laid fore and aft.

"My word!" Piper exclaimed. "A bloody Q-ship! I have it now; she's the raider that's been raisin' billy-o over on the west coast."

"And our friend German Harry seems to be servicing her," Harvey added. "I'll bet the navy guys would be tickled to know of this."

"We've got to get away from here, if we blooming-well have to swim," Piper declared. "We can't ignore an opportunity like this to get that Fritzie's tail in a crack. What?"

"How about Caroline and Brewer?" Harvey queried pointedly.

Piper shrugged. "They'll be all right —prisoners o' war, y'know."

"Like hell, they'll be all right," Harvey snapped. "Right now there are several cruisers on that Heinie's trail. Supposing he meets up with one—with Caroline and Ned still aboard?"

Piper tugged at his walrus mustache and looked thoughtfully toward the two vessels. "My word! They'd be in a spot, right enough. In a naval engagement, shells don't care where they hit."

"That's what I've been thinking," Harvey said. "We've got to do something about it."

"Sure—but what?"

"That's the hell of it—I don't know," Harvey groaned. "We'd figured on slipping away in the whaleboat after dark. But that's out now—unless we can take Caroline and Ned with us."

Piper shook his head. "Me, I never was any good at workin' out puzzles."

Harvey watched the bustle of activity on board the two vessels. Sailors were stacking the batten-and-canvas sections of the false deckhouse against the forward part of the chartroom below the bridge. Others were rigging a cluster-light on the foremast. A cargo whip was dipping into the schooner's hold, yanking out steel oil drums in pairs and swinging them to the

deck of the motor ship. Looking for Ned Brewer and the girl, he saw them moving aft, preceded by a man in mess attendant's jacket.

"Seems to me," Piper remarked, "that Fritzie arrived when he wasn't expected. What?" Harvey looked at him questioningly.

"For half an hour or so before the Dutchman came in," the Australian added thoughtfully, "we've been watchin' Harry's crowd raftin' oil drums up there to the bight o' the lagoon an' stowin' 'em back in the scrub. If they'd been expectin' Fritzie, they'd have waited an' saved themselves a lot o' work."

"Maybe they're building up a fuel reserve for him," Harvey ventured. He paused, his eyes suddenly thoughtful, a slow grin spreading over his face.

"What's funny about it?" Piper wanted to know.

"If you were skipper of that one, and the jungle caught fire, what would you do?" Harvey asked.

"Why, I'd turn all hands to puttin' out the fire, of course."

Harvey's grin broadened. "That's exactly what I'd do. I'd think of saving my fuel reserve."

"You're plannin' to give the Fritzies a job o' fire-fightin'. All right, what comes after that?"

"They'd come ashore in the boats," Harvey pointed out. "We could swipe the boats, pull the bottom-plugs and let them sink.

"That'd keep the gang ashore, while we got Caroline and Ned off. We could take our own whaleboat and be clear of the shoal before these guys caught their breaths."

"Quite so! Of course, Fritzie would stick right here an' let us escape to spread the blooming news," Piper remarked with bland sarcasm.

"He'd be unlikely to attempt a passage through the channel in the dark," Harvey pointed out. "He'd probably pile his ship up if he tried it. Do you think he'd risk anything like that?"

"There's no tellin' what one o' them blighters would do in a pinch," Piper declared. "I still think your plan has a slightly nutty flavor. But I'm willin' to try anything once."

"We've got to do something," Harvey said. "Clearing out in the whaleboat may be one way of getting ourselves out of this mess. But that isn't going to help Caroline. I'll be jiggered if I'll clear out and leave her aboard that damned hooker."

Piper grinned knowingly. "All right, me bold Lochinvar, go ahead an' set yer blooming fire. Maybe we can go on from there."

HARVEY tried to estimate the number of oil drums stored in the jungle. For half an hour preceding the raider's arrival, he had watched the schooner's crew load the steel barrels on a makeshift raft, tow the raft astern of a motor dinghy to the bight of the lagoon, unload and roll the drums off to some place behind the screen of mangroves.

It was fully dark now, and the lights of the cargo cluster were flinging a circle of radiance over the decks of the two vessels, illuminating a scene of activity as both crews labored to unload the remaining oil. From the length of time it took the winch to lift each sling of cargo even with the hatch coamings, Harvey judged that they were now working pretty close to bottom.

"I guess we'd better make a start," he suggested. "It looks as if she's nearly unloaded. Probably they'll be starting on that lot ashore as soon as she's empty."

Piper rose to his feet. "Lead on, Horatio! I always did like to go to fires."

Harvey issued a low-voiced command to the blacks. Champagne Charley took the lead, while the others fell in behind the two white men. Like ghosts, they moved through the jungle, heading toward the bight of the lagoon.

Even with Charley breaking trail for

them, it took them more than an hour to reach their objective. Working their way through the tangled undergrowth was hard work. Harvey and Piper were dripping perspiration when finally they halted at the edge of a clearing a hundred yards back from the beach.

The undergrowth had been cleared from a space almost as large as a city block. In the center of the space, standing on end, were hundreds of steel barrels. Between the clearing and the beach the line of mangroves formed an almost impenetrable wall, except for an opening about six feet in width, where the mangroves had been cut off close to the ground. The branches of the surrounding trees arched overhead, forming a screen against possible aerial observation.

Harvey felt in his shirt pocket, to assure himself that the tightly corked vial of matches which he always carried were there, after his plunge into the lagoon to escape the hail of machine-gun bullets. Calling the blacks about him, he directed them to carry dry brush from the two piles on the edge of the clearing and heap it over the barrels. While the men were engaged in this task, he and Piper tried to loosen the bungs of a few of the containers, but discovered that the stoppers had been screwed in so tightly that it would have been impossible to remove them without aid of a wrench.

Presently the oil drums were buried beneath a great pile of tinder-dry brush. There still remained a considerable heap of dead branches, so Harvey ordered the blacks to stack these against the windward side of the phalanx of barrels. When all was in readiness, he gave his final instructions:

"Take cover to windward," he directed. "Keep well hidden. Wait until the men from the ships start work. Then rush the boats and shove off. Savvy?"

"Savvy!" They gave solemn assurance.

"Okay! Get under cover."

The blacks melted from sight among the mangroves. Harvey struck a match and touched the flame to a little heap of dry grass, which caught with a faint crackle. Then a tongue of flame shot up, licked through the tinder-like branches stacked against the windward side of the barrels, rippled up and over the pile above like sheet lightning.

"My word!" Piper muttered. "The whole blooming island is likely to go up in smoke."

"That'll make it unanimous," Harvey grinned. "For one thing, it'll plumb ruin Taloba as a base."

They moved over to the windward side of the clearing and paused to observe results. The brush piled along the side of the barrels was now blazing merrily, and the great heap on top of the containers was burning in half a dozen places. It was obvious that the fire was going to be a great success.

The whole clearing soon became a blazing inferno, and the heat drove Harvey and the others deeper among the mangroves. Pushing his way through the dense growth until he could look over the lagoon, he stared toward the two vessels. The cargo winch on board the schooner was still clanking away, and on the raider's deck men were scurrying about like ants in an empty sugar barrel. No one, apparently, had noticed the fire.

He stepped clear of the mangroves and looked backward. Not until then did he realize why the alarm hadn't sounded on board the raider. The mangroves, growing twelve feet high, their twisted branches and rubbery leaves intertwining to form an almost impenetrable screen, cut off any chance view of the blaze from the raider's deck.

Suddenly an overheated oil drum let go with a thud that sounded like a muffled cannon shot. A column of ruddy flame leaped upward, licked like a fiery tongue among the branches of the trees arching above the clearing, setting their foliage ablaze. A puff of wind leaping the ridge

swirled down the slope, stripped burning leaves from the branches and scattered them far and wide like blazing rain.

A boatswain's pipe shrilled eerily on board the raider. The clatter of the winch ceased. The schooner cut loose from the motor ship and swung wide, her jib rattling up the stay. She moved clear of the raider for about a quarter of a mile before her anchor splashed down. From the motor vessel came the clack and whine of davit falls and the smack of boats striking the water.

The jungle was now a roaring inferno. The thud of exploding oil drums sounded like a bombardment. A column of flame wavering above the trees was as yet the only sign of the fire, for the mangroves were shutting in the blaze, leaving the beach in darkness. It surprised Harvey that the jungle should burn so readily. Actually, there had seemed little to burn save the two piles of dry brush. But now the fire was sweeping up the ridge, the undergrowth, soaked in the hot sunlight of the dry months, blazing like tinder and drying out the greener growths until they, too, became a torrent of orange flame.

Four boats from the raider came hurtling up the lagoon, their crews straining at the oars until the looms bent like whipstocks. The schooner crowd launched a boat, shoved off and blundered squarely into the path of the leading boat from the motor vessel. There was a volley of guttural German curses, a snapping of oars, and then the boats swept on.

They came up to the beach at the bight of the lagoon, crowded with men. A few men from each boat sprang into the shallows and ran the craft up to the beach. The others swarmed ashore, carrying axes, shovels and brush knives. They formed in line, listened to a confused bawling of orders, then went off at the double and smashed through the screen of mangroves. A few minutes later the schooner's boat limped up to the beach and disgorged her crew, who trotted after the Germans. Harvey waited for another five minutes, expecting more boats to come from the raider. When none appeared, he whispered:

"Let's get those boats before the fire reaches the mangroves and lights up this end of the lagoon."

He led the rush to the boats, helped shove them one by one off the beach into deep water, where the craft were made fast, stern to bow, by their painters. Manning the oars of the leading boat, the blacks headed toward mid-lagoon, towing the empty boats astern. As they came to within a hundred yards of the schooner, Harvey motioned to his crew. The men rested on their oars.

"Reckon we'd better tackle the schooner first," he told Piper. "I'm worrying about that machine-gun."

"That's sound tactics," the Australian approved. "If we don't get our mauleys on that chopper, we're sunk."

"Nuts!" Harvey snorted. "A guy's never sunk as long as he can shake the water out of his ears. Just the same, I don't want to have Harry's gang flanking us with the machine-gun."

"What if he's left somebody aboard?" Piper ventured.

"Probably he has," Harvey agreed. "We'll pull right alongside, just as if we owned her. I figure a bluff will go over big with the kind of riff-raff that German Harry ships in the forecastle." He nodded to the blacks. "Washee, strong fella!"

As they pulled alongside the three-master, a man stuck his head above the cap-rail and peered down at the boats. He opened his mouth to speak, just as Champagne Charley swung up an oar and clipped him over the ear.

"Up!" Harvey snapped.

He sprang into the main channels and scrambled over the rail, followed by Piper and the blacks. Except for the man lying in the scuppers, stunned by the smack of Charley's oar blade, the deck was empty.

Snatching belaying pins from the rail,

Harvey and his crew searched the schooner from forecastle to cabin. There was no one else on board. Their search concluded, they mustered at the break of the poop, where Piper sat on the coaming of the open hatch examining an automatic pistol.

"This here is all I could find in the way of weapons," he declared, offering the gun to Harvey. "I can't find that blasted machine-gun, high nor low."

Harvey looked the pistol over. It was fully loaded, but foul with grease and dust. Probably it would jam after the first round.

"Well," he shrugged, "it's better than nothing. It'd be better still if I had some gasoline to clean it with."

Piper muttered a disappointed oath. "I wish I could find that blinking tommy—" He paused, then added, "My word! I hadn't thought o' that. Maybe that's what it was—a tommy-gun."

Harvey nodded. "That's probably what it was. A fellow could hardly lug a Maxim, or a Browning around with him. And those boys of Duncan's were shot right where they fell, remember."

"Well," Piper grunted, "whatever it was, we've missed it. Maybe Harry's aboard the Fritzie and has taken the gun with him. He wouldn't trust his crew o' rag-heads enough to leave it behind. What?"

Harvey made no reply; Piper's explanation of the missing machine-gun seemed logical enough. He stared toward the motor ship. The lights of the cargo cluster had been switched off, and the vessel's deck was now in darkness, except for a few yards fore and aft of the bridge, beneath which a single light bulb glowed above the open door of the chartroom.

FOUR men were leaning on the rail below the bridge, their faces turned toward the blaze. Farther aft a rectangle of light marked the position of another door, probably that of the engine room, before which the silhouette of a man passed at regular intervals.

"I've got five men spotted on deck," Harvey announced. "There's bound to be at least another in the engine room, looking after the lights and the circulating pump." He grinned at Piper and added, "Six to one isn't such a bad handicap, when the one has a shooting iron."

"I think you're takin' one hell of a chance, matey," Piper warned. "That blasted gun is likely to blow up in yer face."

"Well," Harvey challenged, "can you think of a better plan?"

"If yer determined to go through with it," Piper offered soberly, "I'd suggest that all hands go. You go alone in the first boat, I and the boys will close in after you. If them Fritzies notices you comin' alongside, they won't be likely to get the wind up, as they would if we came all together. Savvy?"

"That fellow aft there is probably a quartermaster on gangway watch," Harvey said, pointing toward the shadow moving to and fro before the door of the engine room. "If I can get past him, I'll locate Caroline and Ned. By that time, you and the boys will be alongside, and we'll all take it on the lam."

"That's an all-right plan, matey," Piper approved. "It'll work, too, if you don't play the bloody fool an' try to take over the ship."

"I'm not such a sap as to try anything like that," Harvey grinned. He thrust the automatic inside the waistband of his trousers, stepped to the rail and swung over into one of the boats. "We'd better

get a move on, too. If those krauts back yonder miss their boats, they'll signal the ship. If they do, we might as well throw up our hands."

As he unbent the painter connecting the boat with the one ahead, Harvey looked across the lagoon. The north end of the island was now a solid sheet of flame. So far, the blaze hadn't reached the line of mangroves, but the glare penetrated the leafy screen in places, giving an occasional glimpse of the fire-fighters as they flitted to and fro before the glowing background.

Setting an oar in the stern notch, he pushed away from the schooner and sculled toward the raider. His plan seemed to be a desperate one; but it fitted the present state of affairs. For one thing, he didn't believe that anyone on board the raider would consider a lone man in a boat as being dangerous. If they failed to recognize him as one of their own, they might believe him to be one of German Harry's crew. At least, he hoped so.

PRESENTLY the raider's topsides loomed above him, and he swung the boat toward a Jacob's ladder dangling from the rail. Laying his oar gently along the thwarts, he took a turn of the painter about one of the ladder treads. A guttural inquiry sounded from above. Looking upward, he saw a man's head and shoulders projecting above the rail.

Stepping nonchalantly on the gunwale, he set his feet upon the wooden treads of the ladder and started to climb. He was halfway to the top when the man above him spoke again. Harvey couldn't understand the words; but there was no mistaking the challenge in the fellow's tone. Realizing that a response was expected, he expended his entire German vocabulary on his reply.

He said, "Yaw!"

Keeping his face hidden, he continued to climb, uncomfortably aware of the sailor's peering scrutiny. He shot a quick glance forward, saw that the quartet below the bridge were still staring toward the fire. Then he reached the top of the ladder, gripped the rail and found himself face to face with the quartermaster, who stood on the inboard side of the rail, blocking Harvey's further progress, his eyes moving in suspicious scrutiny over the American.

The man grunted a challenge, gripped Harvey's shoulder. Harvey did the only thing possible under the circumstances. Lifting his left hand from the rail, he clenched it into a rock-hard fist and jerked a lightning jab to the quartermaster's unprotected jaw. The man's eyes rolled, and he started to fall. Harvey caught him by the front of the jumper and eased him quietly to the deck.

Scrambling over the rail, Harvey stooped above the unconscious quartermaster and stripped him of his loose white blouse. As he slipped the garment on over his head, he glanced toward the bridge. The four men leaning against the rail hadn't moved. Apparently, they were absorbed in watching the progress of the conflagration that was destroying their vessel's fuel reserve.

Setting the man's round cap on his head, Harvey waved toward the boat, which already was halfway between the schooner and the motor ship, with Piper standing erect in the stern and wielding the sculling oar with seeming nonchalance. As the boat came closer, Harvey saw that the blacks were swimming alongside, clinging with one hand to the gunwale, only their bushy heads and exposed arms visible.

Working the boat quietly alongside, Piper came scrambling up the ladder to the rail, where he paused, his head level with the deck.

"What's the good word, me lord?" he queried, grinning as his quick glance swept over Harvey's camouflage. "You look like a blinking Dutchman," he added. "Strange I never noticed that before."

"This German rig will get me by a lot better than I could get by without it,"

Harvey explained. "For one thing, I'll be less noticeable."

"Oh, quite! Gives you official standin' as it were. Well, what d'you want us to do?"

"Take this guy in the boat," Harvey instructed. "Put lashings on him. If he comes to and starts to holler, rap him on the head."

He lifted the quartermaster and slid him feet foremost over the rail. Piper eased the unconscious man down the ladder to the hands of the blacks, who had climbed noiselessly into the boat and were now waiting with outstretched arms. Laying the man on the bottom boards, they bound him hand and foot with the boat painter.

"That'll be all for the present, Alf," Harvey said. "You stand by while I take a look around."

"Listen, Yank." Piper stopped him as he started to move away from the rail. "There are some things a bloke can do, an' some things he can't—an' won't try, unless he's a bloody fool. Have you me?"

Harvey shook his head. "I don't get it."

"It's like this," Piper went on to explain, "we've come to get your girl an' Ned Brewer. That's the main object. Concentrate on it an' let the navy settle with these blokes. Savvy?"

"I see," Harvey nodded. "Well, you needn't worry. I'll not go heroic on you —not with Caroline's safety on my mind."

He stepped away from the rail and paused at the door of the engine room, his ears filled with the drowsy hum of a dynamo blending with the gurgle of a circulating pump, his nostrils assailed by the combined reek of hot oil and the sulphurous tank of bilge as he peered downward through a maze of gratings and caught a glimpse of the dungaree-clad figure of an engineer far below. Satisfied that there was one man on watch in the engine room, he moved forward.

Reaching the forward end of the engine room casing, he slipped into a narrow thwartship alleyway between it and the after end of the chartroom and paused there, listening to the voices of the four men lounging at the rail a dozen feet away. On the bridge overhead two more men were walking to and fro. Looking upward, he caught a swift glimpse of the men as they passed in front of the opening at the head of the starboard ladder. One of the men was tall and slender, his gold-braided white jacket marking him as the commander. The other was short and bow-legged, attired in rumpled whites, a greasy cap set at a careless angle on his huge, globular head.

Harvey's right hand lifted to his waist, and his fingers caressed the greasy butt of the automatic as he recognized the squat, ungainly figure of German Harry and thought of the two dead blacks on the deck of the *Stingaree*, and the pitiful huddle of bodies in the *Clio's* forecastle.

STANDING there, he reviewed all the unsavory gossip he had heard concerning the man. Harry Kroll called himself a German, a claim which doubtless would have made the German fuehrer throw one of his famous conniption fits, for Kroll was anything but the tall, blond Aryan of Herr Hitler's dreams. On the contrary, he was thick-bodied and short-legged, with greasy, black hair, features of a decidedly Negroid cast and a yellowish-green complexion suggestive of an overripe mango. He often boasted that his father had been a minor German official in Rabaul, when Northeastern New Guinea and the Admiralities were German territory. Obviously enough, he never mentioned his mother.

Harvey's hand fell away from the butt of the pistol. Right then he would have given all he possessed for the privilege of fifteen uninterrupted minutes of Harry Kroll's company. But the realization that Caroline's safety depended upon him now drove all personal considerations from his mind. He must find the girl and Brewer,

get them safely off the raider and across the lagoon to his motor-driven whaleboat. The craft would be deeply laden; but even so, it could cross the shoal without touching bottom, while the raider, if it started in pursuit, would be forced to keep to the tortuous channel, in momentary danger of piling up. He didn't believe that the German skipper would endanger his command by taking her outside in the darkness.

He backed farther into the alleyway and looked through an open port into what was evidently the commander's quarters. Through an open doorway in the forward bulkhead he could see the chartroom where a small, compact submachine-gun lay on the desk.

For a moment he considered the possibility of his getting possession of the deadly weapon, holding up the commander and his officers and making them prisoners. That would give him control of the ship. Aided by Piper and the blacks, he could hold her until relief in the form of a cruiser arrived from one of the bases, for the vessel's crew, lacking boats, could not come on board.

He shrugged the thought aside, remembering his duty to the girl, and recalling Piper's admonition that there were some things a man wouldn't try to do unless he was a fool. He had promised the Australian that he would concentrate on getting Caroline and Ned Brewer off the ship, so he couldn't afford to indulge in heroics. Besides, the gun mightn't be loaded.

He crept on through the alleyway to the port side and looked forward, starting when he saw the girl and Brewer leaning on the rail, their faces highlighted by the glare of the conflagration. The fire now seemed beyond control. Oil drums were exploding like bombs, shooting gouts of flaming oil high in the air. The mangroves, dried out by the intense heat, were now a solid wall of flame against which the figures of the men stood out like tiny black mannikins against an orange backdrop as they rushed to and fro across the narrow beach. Evidently they had given up the fight and were now seeking their missing boats.

Harvey stuck his head around the corner of the chartroom and fastened his gaze intently upon the girl's back. He had heard that if you stared at a person long enough, that person would sooner or later look around. He had seen the trick worked several times, and hoped it would work now. Five minutes passed, and she remained absorbed in watching the blaze. Harvey began to grow nervous. In no time now the commander would realize what was happening ashore.

At last, in desperation, he jerked the German cap from his head and flung it, catching her squarely between the shoulders. She whirled about, her eyes wide in angry inquiry which changed to blank amazement when she saw his head and shoulders projecting beyond the corner of the alleyway.

He placed a warning finger on his lips then beckoned. She spoke in a low tone to Brewer, then came slowly aft. Reaching the corner of the chartroom, she flung a quick glance toward the pair on the bridge, then darted into the alleyway beside him.

"Ben!" she gasped, flinging her arms about him. "I thought you were dead. Oh, my dear—"

"Hush!" he warned. "Those krauts will hear you." A warm glow swept him, driving away his momentary fear that she had been heard by the pair on the bridge. Bending his head, he touched his lips to hers, then whispered:

"Listen, Alf Piper and my boys are waiting alongside in a boat. Get Brewer then both of you stroll aft along the port side. When you reach the engine room door, cross over through the top of the engine room to the starboard side. Piper'll be watching for you. Go quietly."

She squeezed his arm. "Where'll you be?"

"I'll stick here till you and Brewer are

safely in the boat. We can talk later. Go ahead." He pushed her gently out of the alleyway.

She returned to Brewer, conversed with him for a minute or so in guarded tones. Then she took his uninjured arm and they strolled casually aft and passed from Harvey's view through the port doorway of the engine room. He was about to follow when a guttural oath crackled on the bridge overhead. Looking toward the bight of the lagoon, he saw a man standing on the beach, two blazing brands making flaming circles about his head as he wig-wagged a message to the ship.

Footfalls hammered on the bridge. Darting through the alley to starboard, Harvey saw the commander starting to descend to the deck. The four men at the rail had turned inboard, and were watching the bridge ladder with anxious faces. One of them leaned over the rail, straightened up again and pointed aft. Harvey realized what had happened. The signalman ashore had warned of the loss of the boats. Now the officer had glanced over the side and had seen the two boats at the foot of the Jacob's ladder.

Before Harvey could make up his mind what to do, a club-like fist landed with stunning impact against the side of his head. Half-dazed, he stumbled, went to his knees, his pistol clattering on the deck and skidding over the smooth planking to the foot of the bridge ladder. Then, as he struggled to his feet, he was enfolded in a bear-like hug and hustled from the alleyway into the circle of light shining from the bulb above the door of the chart room.

THE commander stooped, lifted the pistol from the deck, straightened and stared in silent inquiry at Harvey and his captor. The others stepped away from the rail, amazement pictured on their faces as they looked alternately from their skipper to the American. The man behind Harvey spoke in German. As he concluded, the commander fixed his monocle in his right eye and regarded the prisoner with ill-concealed anger.

"So," he drawled in English. "I presume we have you to thank for this?" He waved his left hand toward the conflagration, while he kept the pistol trained on Harvey's middle. "What have you to say?"

Harvey grinned. "What would you like me to say?"

The commander shrugged. "I suppose that iss a confession of guilt?" He squinted through his monocle at the prisoner and resumed with ponderous gravity, "You know, of course, that it iss contrary to international law for civilians to take part in naval or military operations. Yess?"

"Since when did you krauts get to worrying about international law?" Harvey jeered.

The commander ignored the taunt. "You, a civilian, have donned German uniform and a German ship boarded with arms in your hands, which iss an act of piracy—"

"Hell!" Harvey interrupted. "Don't make me laugh—you and your talk of piracy."

"For which the penalty iss death," the skipper continued, disregarding the interruption. "Have you anything to say?"

"I have a whole lot to say," Harvey declared, "but maybe you wouldn't like to hear it." He was sparring for time now, delaying until Piper had a chance to get the boats away from the ship's side. Once they were clear, he would go overboard and take to the brush.

"Reckon you're aimin' to shoot me?" he ventured carelessly.

"*Nein!*" the commander barked. "You are wrong, my man. At daylight you shall hang. Yess."

"Says you!" Harvey snarled. With a sudden wrench he freed himself from German Harry's embrace, kicked savagely backward and sent the half-caste reeling through the alleyway. In a quick stride, he reached the commander, beat the pistol

aside with a sweep of his left hand and slammed a piledriver right to the German's face.

Korvetten-Kapitan Reinke flew backward, brought up against the rail, rebounded and crashed to the deck, the automatic clattering on the planking as he clapped his right hand to his scrambled nose.

Harvey dived toward the pistol. One of the officers kicked the weapon beyond his reach, chopped downward with his right hand at the back of the American's neck and flattened him on the deck. The others closed in. Instantly, Harvey was the focal point of four pairs of viciously stamping feet.

He caught a foot, twisted it and brought the owner toppling down on him. Then a second man slumped down on top of the first, apparently for no reason at all. Pinned down beneath the combined weight of the two husky Germans, Harvey struggled to free himself, suddenly aware that something was happening in which he was being denied a part.

As if from afar he heard Piper's defiant snarl, heard a bubbling laugh that sounded familiar, saw a grinning, bewhiskered black face hovering above his own as the weight was suddenly lifted from him.

Then Champagne Charley, still laughing, was dragging him to his feet.

"My bloody word!" Piper's voice sounded at his back. "I knew you'd have to play the fool."

Harvey swung about. The Australian was standing above the prostrate figures of two of the German officers, a greenheart belaying pin gripped in his stubby fist. The rest of the blacks, similarly armed, stood behind him like a supporting column. Caroline was leaning against the side of the chartroom, breathing fast, and beside her stood Ned Brewer looking slightly dazed, as if he were still unable to grasp what had happened.

"I distinctly told you to mind yer blinkin' step," Piper complained. "Now how are we goin' to get away?"

"You've got that wrong, Alf," Harvey explained. "I was about to follow Caroline and Ned to the boat when that fellow ashore started signaling. The skipper came off the bridge—came down the starboard ladder—while German Harry came down the port side. I thought he was still on the bridge, and was watching the skipper when Harry sneaked through the alleyway and damned near knocked my block off. I'm not quite sure about what happened after that."

"Oh, we saw it all," Piper admitted. "We didn't aim to hook it an' leave you in a mess like that. Still, the fact remains that we're in a jam. We're like the bloke what had the tiger by the tail—we can't let go."

"That's right—you can't let go," a throaty voice sounded from the chartroom.

Harvey whirled, cursing under his breath when he saw German Harry standing in the doorway, the little machine-gun in his hands swinging to cover the crowd.

IN A flash Harvey realized that Kroll had slipped through the alleyway, entered the chartroom from the port side and secured the machine-gun. Now he was standing there in the doorway, his forefinger resting upon the trigger of the vicious little weapon, a squat, negroid-looking man—a hundred and eighty pounds of inferiority complex, despising natives because of his own native blood,

hating whites for their refusal to accept him as one of themselves.

He stepped over the storm sill to the deck, his black eyes filled with menace. "Get your hands up—everybody!" he snapped. He glared triumphantly at Harvey. "The Herr Kapitan promised you a hanging. I shall enjoy seeing you dancing on air. Hah!" He ended with a short, explosive laugh.

Harvey debated his chance of beating the half-caste to the trigger pull. He looked quickly about him, noted his companions' frozen attitude of surprise. Apparently they were too stunned to obey Kroll's command. Only Caroline seemed willing to comply, for her hands were lifted level with her shoulders.

"Get them up—the hands!" Kroll snarled. He added an aside in German to Reinke, who shook his head dazedly and pushed himself away from the rail. The officer whom Harvey had pulled down scrambled to his feet, his face contorted in fury.

Harvey blinked as something whizzed past his face with the speed of a hurtling discus. It was a hat, a dove-gray Stetson hat—Caroline Duncan's hat—with a stiff, knife-like brim, which caught German Harry Kroll squarely on the bridge of the nose.

Half blinded, Kroll recoiled. His heels struck the storm sill, and he fell backward through the doorway.

Harvey stiff-armed the officer, thrust Reinke aside, bounded like a kangaroo across the deck and plunged through the doorway, to land with crushing force upon the half-caste. His balled right fist rose and fell like a hammer as he smashed at the prostrate man's exposed jaw and felt the bone splinter from the force of the blow. Then he thrust himself erect, snatched up the machine-gun and swung the muzzle to cover Reinke and his subordinate, who was reaching toward the automatic.

"Forget it!" he snapped. "Back against the rail, you bozos, or you'll never know what hit you." As they obeyed, scowling, he snatched up the weapon and tossed it overboard.

He looked at Caroline and grinned. "Lady, you certainly shy a mean hat. Thanks a lot! You saved our hides, all right." He lifted the Stetson from the deck and handed it to her.

"I'm glad to know I'm good for something," she said. "So far, I've been just so much excess baggage."

"Well," Piper spoke up, "you've blooming-well earned your passage." All of a sudden he seemed to think of something. With a purposeful expression on his hard-bitten face, he bounded up the bridge ladder, pausing on the topmost tread to fling back at Harvey:

"I don't suppose you knew wireless was just another o' me many accomplishments. Just watch me give them navy blokes the surprise o' their blooming lives." He went on the bridge and plunged through the doorway of the radio room abaft the wheelhouse.

DIRECTING the blacks to guard the prisoners, Harvey entered the chart-room and made a thorough search of it and the commander's quarters. He found three automatic pistols, all fully loaded. Satisfied that the compartment held no more weapons, he stepped out on deck and ordered the Germans herded inside. After both doors had been closed and locked from the outside, he handed one of the weapons to Ned Brewer, whose tanned face was still set in an expression of dumb surprise.

"Keep an eye on those krauts, old-timer," Harvey directed. "I'll leave Charley with you, while I go aft and round up the engineer."

"Blowed if I can figure it out, Brewer muttered.

"I haven't quite got it straight myself yet," Harvey admitted.

Accompanied by the rest of his crew,

he went aft, rounded up the engineer and continued on to the cabin, which he found to be empty. Returning to the bridge, he ordered the engineer imprisoned with the others in the chartroom. As he locked the door, Piper came off the bridge, his face stretched in a satisfied grin.

"I just talked to Thursday Island," he announced. "The operator acted at first like he thought I was barcoo. But I finally convinced him. He relayed my message to the base. We ought to have a cruiser here some time after sun-up."

Harvey felt suddenly at ease. There was still much to be done before they would be entirely safe. Three of the captured boats were still swinging alongside the schooner, and there was his own whaleboat lying on the sandbar at the entrance of the lagoon, beside the grounded *Stingaree*. He sent Charley and the crew to gather all the boats and bring them alongside. Once they were swung on deck, he and his companions would be safe as if they were on the inside of an impregnable fortress, for the distance between the ship and the bight of the lagoon, where the German crew now stood to their shoulders in the water, was too far to allow for swimming.

"Did you get 'em all?" Piper inquired, after the blacks had gone to round up the boats.

"There was no one aft but the engineer," Harvey declared, adding with a grin, "I reckon everybody went to the fire."

Piper chuckled. "My blooming word! We'll get a medal apiece for this—a D. S. O., at the very least. What?"

"I'll let you wear mine along with your own," Harvey promised, "seeing you deserve most of the credit."

He didn't feel that any of them deserved credit. The whole affair had been a trick of luck—a veritable fluke that had delivered the raider into their hands. He was still a bit dazed by the rapidity with which everything had happened, barely aware that he had, unwittingly, accomplished the very thing which Piper had feared he would attempt. He stepped to the rail and stared toward the bight of the lagoon. The German crew had given up the fight to save the fuel and had retreated into the water, driven off the beach by the heat of the conflagration.

He felt Caroline beside him, felt the warm pressure of her hand on his own. Recalling that moment in the alleyway abaft the chartroom, he reflected that in the year they had known each other no word of love had passed between them. Now it seemed as though no word were needed.

Everything, he decided, was going well. He had Caroline, and he and Piper had a fortune in pearls from their afternoon take of shell. There would be more days of shell gathering, and they would be further enriched. Of course, they would be obliged to wait until the cruiser came and took the raider away. Still, it was very satisfying to know what lay ahead.

His meditations were interrupted by the warning flutter of the girl's hand within his own, and he found himself listening to Piper's triumphant account to Ned Brewer of all that had happened since the *Stingaree* had cleared from Bindalung Cove. Now the Australian was nearing the climax.

" 'I say to him,' he was narrating to the still dumbfounded Brewer, 'Go slow' I says. 'Get yer girl off if you can. But mind you, now,' I says, 'no blooming heroics.' Well, he gives me his word he'd keep his nose clean. An' look what happened!"

"Headstrong, like," Brewer spoke uncertainly. "I know the breed. You can't do anything with a bloke like that. My word, no!"

Caroline laughed gently and looked over her shoulder. "Who'd want to do anything with him?" she asked. Then, leaning closer to Harvey, she added in a whisper, "Except to love him!"

A Warm, Very Human Tale of Baseball—And the Men Who Are Pitching for Uncle Sam

I Love You, Too

By JOEL REEVE

SUSAN MAGEE said, "If you had not been such a fast man with a dollar, Lefty—"

She did not finish, so Lefty said, "What then?"

They were in Morley's Place, sipping beer. Morley, a Sox rooter of ancient vintage and a worshiper of Lefty Condon, watched them happily from afar. Susan was Morley's cousin, and if Morley knew anything, romance was blossoming in his quiet little side street café.

Susan looked fine. She was blond and tall and once she had been in George White's Scandals; a show girl, not one of the working chorus. Time had been kind to her rangy beauty.

Lefty was not beautiful, but he was lean and tanned. He had never bothered to repair his nose, broken by a batted ball in 1930, and his right hand was crippled, but otherwise Lefty was sound enough for romance. Morley admired them as a well-matched, mature couple.

Susan said, "Well. You would have something to show."

"I've got my record. It's in the books. I've got my no-hitter." Lefty frowned and paused. When a ballplayer starts bragging about the past he is finished. He went on carefully, "I'm not through yet, baby. Follett is a once-around pitcher."

Susan said, "Once around what, Lefty?"

"The circuit," said Lefty. "They are wise to the kid. He went good until they saw him through a game or two. But you know what happened in Chi. And now it's these Bombers."

That was true. In Chi they had murdered Follett. Dykes had been the first to find that flaw in the kid's pitching. The others would know it by now. Follett was

a strong youngster, only twenty, safe from the draft, a natural hurler. He would be a big help to the Sox, but not this year. Lefty knew.

Susan said, "But you're thirty-seven, Lefty. Can you make it?"

"What do you care?" asked Lefty. He gulped and said, "Or do you?"

There—it was out. He managed to keep his eyes steady upon her. He waited for her answer, his breath bated. He had postponed it long enough. It was time to know.

Susan said softly, "Are you kidding, Lefty?" Her eyes were mirrors of suspense.

"I'm asking you," said Lefty stubbornly. He had been a loner all his life, a misogynist, sneering at the benedicts of baseball, and it was difficult for him to speak.

Susan said, "I can't flutter, Lefty. I'll come clean with you. I think you are terrific!"

He reached for her hand and stammered, "I'll get the license tomorrow, baby. I'll—"

Susan said, "Now wait, Lefty. Love is a fine thing. Love I have got. But—I'm scared, Lefty. I'm no child. I've been here and I've been there. Right now I am working in cosmetics, first aisle on the right. I don't like it, Lefty."

He said, "I've got a bowling alley in Tampa. I've got an orange grove—"

"Both mortgaged," said Susan. "And business is not so good with either."

"We-ell," he was puzzled and beginning to hurt. She clutched at his hand and wailed.

"Lefty—I'm not asking for luxury. I'm not mercenary, Lefty! But I must have security, can you understand that? A woman like me, who has been around. . . . It's not money for money's sake, Lefty!"

HE SAID quickly, "I get it, Susan. Don't cry, baby."

"You're so quick with that dollar, Lefty. If you had the alleys paid for, maybe I could hold you down. But I can't stand debt, Lefty!"

"No," he said. "I can see it. I guess I must hang on with the club, huh, baby? This season would pay off everything."

"If you could, Lefty," she said. "If you could hang on, I'd marry you. Right away, as soon as we know you're sticking."

Lefty drew a deep breath. "We're a couple of oldies for this roses and honeysuckle stuff. But I'd do anything for you. I—" it stuck in his thick neck. He could not quite say it. "I think you're tops, baby. I'm for you."

She sighed. She said, "Buy me a beer, darling."

"Champagne!" roared Lefty. Then he remembered the mortgages and grinned foolishly and carried the empty glasses to Morley. "Two beers, Mike."

Morley said, "You gonna work against them Bombers tomorrow?"

"Yeah," said Lefty.

"You'll kill 'em," beamed Morley. "You'll whiff that Maginni four for four."

"Not this week," said Lefty. "Not Maginni."

He carried the beers back to the booth and listened to Susan make tentative little plans. He should have been very happy.

But tomorrow against the Bombers he would make or break. In fact, the Sox club would make or break in this series against the heavy-hitting champions. The Sox were fighting, and they needed two out of these three games. It would be Lefty tomorrow, big Haley the next day, and then Follett.

If Lefty lost and Follett went good, that would be it. That would be a ticket to the bushes, where Lefty would never go. That would be the end of baseball, and baseball had been all of Lefty's existence until he met Susan.

It had been born in him and his enthusiasm for the game had never flagged. That was Lefty. He had never held out, never asked for a raise, just so he could pitch. He was Mister Baseball, the great-

est left-hander of his day. That was why he had kept silent when, down in Florida, he had first noted the serious flaw in young Bob Follett's style.

Even then he had known it would be one or the other of them to go. Lefty had been pitching with his head for a long time. Follett had that fast one, not only for the clutches, but anytime he needed it. Follett was strong as a horse.

Still, come hot weather, Lefty would be in there. He needed the sun. The trouble now was that June had not turned off hot enough. Lefty was not ready, and the Bombers were in town. The deadline was very close.

He was more worried about the Bombers and Maginni than Follett. Sometimes he thought that he should have told the kid about that flaw, but he always put that aside.

He had to give Follett youth and strength and fight him for a job—why should he lend his own hard-won experience to tip the scales against himself?

If he could get by the Bombers, all would be well. But in his heart he knew that he was not ready, and it ached. He finished his beer and said, "I need the sleep, baby. Let's go."

They said good-night on the porch of her rooming-house, lingeringly, relishing this new love. The lonely years seemed far behind them. She kissed him one last time and pushed him away, whispering, "I love you, Lefty."

He tried very hard, but his tongue stuck. "I—you're the best, baby!"

He walked to the hotel, his pulse keeping time to a high tune. Susan was the most important thing in the world. Susan was sweeter than molasses.

"I love you, too!" He could say it to himself.

FOLLETT was a big, sandy-haired toughie with a huge wad of gum in his mouth. He said honestly, "I hope you get 'em, Lefty. We gotta have this series."

The dressing room was full of chatter. Joe Gannon was talking to Patlik, and both were glancing askance at Lefty. The club buzzed with it, of course. The old stuff—rookie against veteran. Follett said:

"If we cop this series, we'll go ahead. We might win the damn pennant!" He was an aggressive kid, a fighter.

Lefty said, "That's right, Bob."

The kid carefully adjusted his striped stocking over a sweat sock. "Look, Lefty. I guess it's you or me, and no fooling. No hard feelings, huh, Lefty?"

"Nope," said Lefty. "It's all in the game." He picked up his spikes and stood tall in his stockinged feet. He looked down at the rock-jawed, unafraid youngster. Maybe the boy could do the club a lot of good. In here, with the team around, girding for the fight, the old baseball bug bit hard at him. Maybe if he told the kid, and they worked it out, the Sox would go places.

He thought of the mortgages, of the bowling alleys, of Susan. The years of his baseball sped before him, the dust of the base paths was in his nostrils.

Once his arm got heated, he would do his part. Once he regained that high, hard one in the tight spots, he could win more games with his head than this youngster with his strong arm.

He said, "You'll get there, Bob. You're young."

"Yeah," said Follett. "But I want to make it now. I got reasons."

At the door, Joe Gannon stopped Lefty. "Cover up good, pal. There's no sun. We want this series, Lefty."

Joe was a swell manager, a fine, easy man. He looked more serious than ever. Joe and Steve Patlik and Lefty had come to the Sox together, five years ago, for a piece of the mint which Mr. Sharkey laid on the line to buy them.

Joe said, "Mr. Sharkey's getting impatient. He said to pitch you—then Follett."

Joe was telling him. Lefty nodded.

"It's okay, Joe. One of those things. I wish the sun would come out."

He went out and waited through the practise session, lounging in the dugout, admiring the neat ball park. It was green and brown and the white lines made a nice geometrical design, and if only the clouds would go away it would be perfect. He loved it all, and he was a part of it and had always been a part of it.

When it was time, he warmed up with Johnny Paycox. Lefty threw very quickly, trying to get the sweat started. Johnny kept saying, "You got your stuff, Lefty. You're ready, you old tramp!" Johnny was a swell little fellow, but he was an optimist.

Susan came in and sat behind third base. She was wearing a blue suit and a big hat and she looked like a homer with three on. Lefty waved circumspectly and tried not to look her way too often. The Bombers would ride him to death if they found out about Susan, and Lefty was not sure he could take that kind of jockeying.

The groundkeepers went to work and Joe took the line-up out to the umpire. Patlik buckled on the catching gear and said to Lefty, "They can't hurt us in there, Punchy."

Pat liked to pretend Lefty was punch-drunk from being in there too often. Pat was a pal, a rubber-legged guy who never seemed to wear out. Lefty wished he could swap his arm for one of Pat's legs. He said:

"They can't hurt *you*, you dumb Polack."

Pat gave him the berry, and they went to their positions. That was routine. That was swell stuff. But Pat was wise, like everyone else. Pat would never admit it, but he knew about Lefty's arm better than anyone.

Lefty took his five, looked around. Follett was on the bench, gaining wisdom between Johnny Paycox and Joe. They would be stuffing the kid every moment with information about the Bombers. That was business. Lefty's pals had to help the rookie for the good of the team. That was baseball.

It was right to help the rookie. The Sox deserved to win. Mr. Sharkey deserved a break for the gold he had poured into the club. The fans deserved reward for their patience and support. That was right.

Lefty toed the slab and faced Rachetti. For a second black depression hung over him as he thought of the flaw in Bob Follett's pitching and of the fact that only Lefty knew of it and knew how to cure it.

He shook it off, listening to the calls of the infielders, Bobby and Bill and Jimmy and the rookie, Resky. This was his club. This was his game.

Rachetti was tough. All the Bombers were valiant, but Rachetti and Maginni were the menaces to Lefty. He took a last look at Susan. She had a program in her hands and she seemed to be plucking at its corners. Every facet of this scene was etched upon Lefty's mind. He would remember this forever, he feared. A breeze bit at his arm and the sun stayed behind a cloud of glowering thickness. He pitched to Rachetti.

IT WAS no good. The rattle of bat against ball played a dirge in his ears. Pat was shouting something about first ball hitters, but Rachetti was on first. It was terrible.

There had been a time when he could master these clutches with steady nerves and a cold smile. If he could sweat, he thought, if only he could sweat.

He got one man, then lost the plate and walked one. Then there was Maginni, dead-panned, loose as ashes. There was only one thing to do for Maginni—keep them low and throw your heart in there with them.

Lefty's jaws ached. He took Pat's sign. He threw to a three and one count, then poured another strike in there. Then he had to groove one, or use the low curve.

He tried the curve, once his fanciest pitch.

It was a good ball. It went where it was meant to go. But it was not a good pitch. Maginni came around in that whipping, effortless swing. The towering liner hit high in the left field bleachers. The runners scampered in with chortles of glee.

Joe was coming reluctantly from the dugout. Lefty jerked at his cap, dropped the ball on the mound and weht to meet the manager.

Joe said, "Not so good, huh, Lefty?"

"No good, Joe."

"Take a shower," said Joe. "It's tough, pal."

Lefty went on through the dugout and up the runway. He stayed under the hot water until he was finally warmed through. The trainer hovered, but Lefty waved him away. No use to massage that arm. Might as well rub a dead fish.

He wondered if he should grab a train and go. If he went down to Tampa and worked the alleys, maybe business would pick up. He was through with baseball, that was a cinch. Through, for life. He was a dead-arm. His low curve had turned into a home run ball. He came down the steps and started from under the stands toward the exit.

Susan appeared as if by magic. She said, "Lefty! Here I am, Lefty." She was smiling. She looked fine. She said, "No good today, was it, darling?"

Lefty said, "No good."

She held his arm, tight, steering him to the line of taxicabs. She got in one and said, "You've still got a chance, darling. Suppose Follett gets beat Monday? Joe will choose you instead of that rookie."

Lefty had one foot on the running board of the cab. He held the door and said, "Don't put it that way, baby." He stared at her, his mind whirling.

Supposing Follett got beat Monday? Haley could maybe win tomorrow. But today's game was gone, he could tell by the silence of the home crowd. And if Follett blew, as he was sure to blow, there went the series.

Susan said, "It's true, isn't it? We've got to face facts, Lefty."

"That's right," said Lefty. "We do, don't we? Look, baby, you run along to Morley's and I'll meet you there. We'll have a late dinner."

She said, "You have got a chance, haven't you, Lefty?" She was pleading with him and he noted with sudden tenderness the tiny crow's feet at the corners of her deep eyes. He never loved her more than at that moment.

"Sure!" he lied. "I'm going to see Joe now. Wait for me, baby!"

"Always," she said. "Always, darling!"

The cab went away. Lefty went back into the ball park. He called Johnny and Bob Follett from the bench and took them away back under the stands. He said:

"Take this ball, Bob. Go through your motion, slow."

Follett blinked, then obliged. Lefty said, "See it?"

Johnny said, "Crackey! I can see it good!"

Lefty said, "So can the hitters. They can see his curve by the way he holds it. They set for his swift and kill it."

Follett said, "I cover with my glove!"

"Yeah," said Lefty, "but that isn't enough. You got to carry your hands behind you. Like this."

He went through his own easy motion, throwing both hands behind him, covering the pitch until the moment of releasing the ball. He said, "Try it, Bob."

There was shining hope in Follett's face now. He obeyed. Johnny offered criticism, Lefty was patient and thorough. He said, "I had the same trouble when I broke in. You can cure it overnight, practically."

After awhile Joe Gannon found them. He said, "8 to 4, they win. What goes on here?"

He was excited when they told him. He said, "We can work tonight, until dark.

And tomorrow morning. By Monday, he can be right. By Monday, Lefty, huh?"

"If Haley wins tomorrow and the kid's right by Monday, we'll be fine," said Lefty.

"Not you," said Joe. "Not you, Lefty. Not if the kid comes through."

"Awww," said Lefty. "You're nuts. You'll never get waivers on me! Someone'll take up my contract."

They both pretended to take comfort in that lie. They went up to Joe's office and had one drink on it. Joe said:

"If that kid had gotten away from us and someone else had found out his trouble—my job would be mahoola. You are a great guy, Lefty."

"Boloney," said Lefty. "I got a date. So-long, Joe."

He went off to meet Susan and her living hope. It was not good, but it was not so bad. He was out of baseball, but something was left to him. It was funny the way young Follett's delivery resembled Lefty's own, now that he was wise. Of course Follett was a strong-arm. Lefty held his head a little higher. Lefty had always been a smart pitcher, that was why he had lasted fifteen years. Almost fifteen years—

Haley won the Sunday game, 3 to 2, in twelve innings.

SUSAN took Monday afternoon off. She would probably lose her job, but she had to be there, Lefty agreed. They sat together, as there seemed no use in pretending any longer that Lefty was useful to the club. He said:

"Like I told you, the kid's got stuff. He's got zip on his swift and he can control the jug-handle."

Susan said, "Yes, dear."

"If he wins twenty games, the Sox might crawl in," Lefty said. "They ought to have it. Joe's a good one. Pat, Jimmy, they're all my pals."

"You don't have to keep telling me," said Susan. "I know you had to do it."

"Maybe my arm is dead," said Lefty. "Maybe I am all through pitching. You've got to think of those things. But if it takes a lifetime, I'll make it up to you."

She held tight to his gnarled right hand. "That's all I want to hear you say. I hope the kid wins. I hope he makes good."

Follett was facing Rachetti, and he was young and strong and confident. He wound up, pivoting perfectly, and threw. Rachetti, alert for that missing tipoff, was

flatfooted. A good strike thumped into Pat's mitt.

The kid poured it past Rachetti. He got the next two hitters with ease. Oh, it was fine, the way the kid worked!

In the third, Jimmy hit one over the wall and it was 1 to 0 for the Sox. Not a Bomber reached first base until the sixth. Susan said:

"He's making it! He's a great pitcher, Lefty!"

"Terrific!" said Lefty. It hurt, deep down, to know he had fixed it, finished himself. But there was a compensating glow. He kept his eyes glued on Follett. Rickey was leading off the sixth. It seemed to Lefty that Follett was straining a little. These strong-arm kids bore down all the time.

The kid walked Rickey, then stepped off the mound and stretched both arms skyward, as though to loosen a cramped muscle.

Lefty said, "Omigawd!" He almost stepped on Susan, getting out of his seat. He knew, in a blinding flash, what had happened. "I gotta go, Susan. This is awful!"

He fled down the stairs, into the dressing room. His brain was seething, he fumbled at zippers. He went into the dugout with laces trailing and squatted beside Joe, talking breathlessly. "I forgot about muscle strain. He bears down too much and he's not used to that pivot. It takes something out of a fast-baller."

"I thought he was tiring," said Joe tensely.

"I'll be in the bull pen," said Lefty. "It's my wagon. I should have known—warned him. Let me pull it out, Joe."

Joe said, "We-ell—"

"Hagney's dead from relieving me," said Lefty. "The sun is out. Let me do this, Joe. It's important to me."

"If I want you, I'll buzz three times," said Joe.

In the bull pen Johnny came to warm him up. Johnny had caught on quick and was all sympathy. Lefty put the sun on his back and worked like a horse, trying to get the sweat started. It would not come, but he stayed stubbornly at it.

Johnny said, "Lincoln hit into a double! There—Bob got Rachetti on a liner!"

The inning was over. But Lefty did not rest. He kept throwing that ball at Johnny's glove, seeking control. If he only had that fast one—just for a couple of innings."

The minutes passed. Johnny said, "We just can't hit that Lincoln. They're up again."

Lefty worked on. There was the sound of ball on bat. It did something to Lefty's throat which choked him and filmed his eyes. It was all his fault. He should have coached the kid to save himself. This game was important.

There was another hit. Then silence blanketed the park and Lefty knew it was coming. He stared at Johnny, waiting.

The buzzer sounded, once—twice—three times. Joe had made up his mind. Lefty threw the ball gently to Johnny. The little catcher said, "Luck, pal. Make it good in there."

It was a long walk from the bull pen. The crowd saw Lefty, roared recognition. Follett had waited, his face pale. He said, "What's the matter with me, Lefty? I'm bushed."

"My fault, kid," said Lefty. "Go sit down. This is for me."

Pat came out and said, "Hello, Punchy. I thought you were washed up, you bum."

Lefty said, "Got any gum?"

"Yeah," said Pat. "What you got today?"

"I got my glove," said Lefty grimly. "And a prayer."

Maginni was up, of course. Men on first and second and the Sox only one run to the good. Lefty looked at the base runners and wished Maginni was more anxious. The lean Bomber was almost placid, waiting.

Up in the stands, Susan was really ripping the program to pieces, now. This was worse than pitching for his job. This was for the finale, for baseball. This was a swan-song.

This was because a kid had started like a whirlwind and faltered through no fault of his own. This was a game for Follett, for the ball club, for anyone but Lefty. This was the most significant game Lefty had ever pitched.

Lefty cradled the ball, jerked at his cap. He threw to Maginni. He went right after that same, low spot, around the knees, inside, where Mr. Maginni did not prefer them.

Maginni let it go by. It was a strike. Pat bawled like a maniac and asked for it again. Maginni was ready, now. He slashed viciously. The ball skipped down to Bob. It went from Bob, to Resky, to Jimmy on first. It was a lightning double play and the glow somewheres inside Lefty was roseate.

He could laugh at Heller. He fed slow stuff to the muscular Bomber, ignoring Rachetti on third. Heller put up a spinning foul. Pat smothered it. The side was out.

THE stands rose as one to cheer Lefty. He gave them the ballplayers' salute and crawled to the bench. He spoke earnestly to Follett while the Sox made three outs. The kid said, "I'd be all right in a little while, then?"

"Joe knows it," comforted Lefty. "You're safe."

He went back to the field and pitched. It was amazing the way he pitched. He got two men with ease. He lost a couple as his control slipped, walking them. But the inevitable pinch hitter could not solve the slider. That was the eighth.

Again the Sox made three emphatic outs. Rachetti came up to lead off the Bombers' last raps. Lefty girded his loins and managed two strikes on the canny Bomber. Then Rachetti picked on a bad ball and lucked a blooper into right field for a single. That was bad.

Lefty chewed Pat's gum and bore down. He out-smarted the next two hitters. He took a long breath and wished Maginni was dead.

Maginni was probably a very nice fellow, good to his mother and all that, but to Lefty he was villainous beyond belief.

Pat begged for the low ones. Lefty got his courage and strength together and threw them in there. He was clipping the corner, at that. He worked to a three and two count.

Again Pat asked for the low curve. Lefty shook it off. Lefty remembered too well what had happened once before in this series. He gave Pat his own signal. He took almost his full windup, knowing Rachetti would be gone with his arm anyway. He came over, down and through with the pitch.

The sun was bright and hot. Moisture ran suddenly down Lefty's back. His muscles were magically oiled with the product of his tremendous effort. He let go with the high, hard one, the old money pitch, straight across the letters on Maginni's chest.

The startled bat came around as Maginni swung in amazement. It smote the ozone with terrific futility. Maginni's dead pan flushed, for once, and the ball game ended.

The roar of the crowd was sweet. Pat ran out and handed the ball to Lefty. Pat said, "You can put it under glass. That was a money pitch, Punchy! Like a champ, like old times!"

It was awful good for Lefty. It made his going easy as pie. It took away all the bad taste of yesterday.

IN MORLEY'S it was quiet and Mike was so happy he kept drawing beers they could not drink. Susan kept tight hold of Lefty's hand and Joe Gannon squeezed in with Bob Follett to fill the booth.

Follett said, "It's all right. Joe says when I come back I'll be all right."

"Come back from where?" demanded Lefty.

"I dunno," said the kid. "I joined the Marines this morning."

"You did not!"

"My brother is A-1, see? He has got a good job in the munitions plant. Superintendent. Well, Mom needs one of us. So I decided I should go into Service and let Willy do his bit in the plant, see? I had to make good first, so I would have a job to come back to, though. You get it, Lefty?"

Joe said, "The kid is right. It's one of those things. He had to go—and you've got to pitch for us. The sun will be hot from now on."

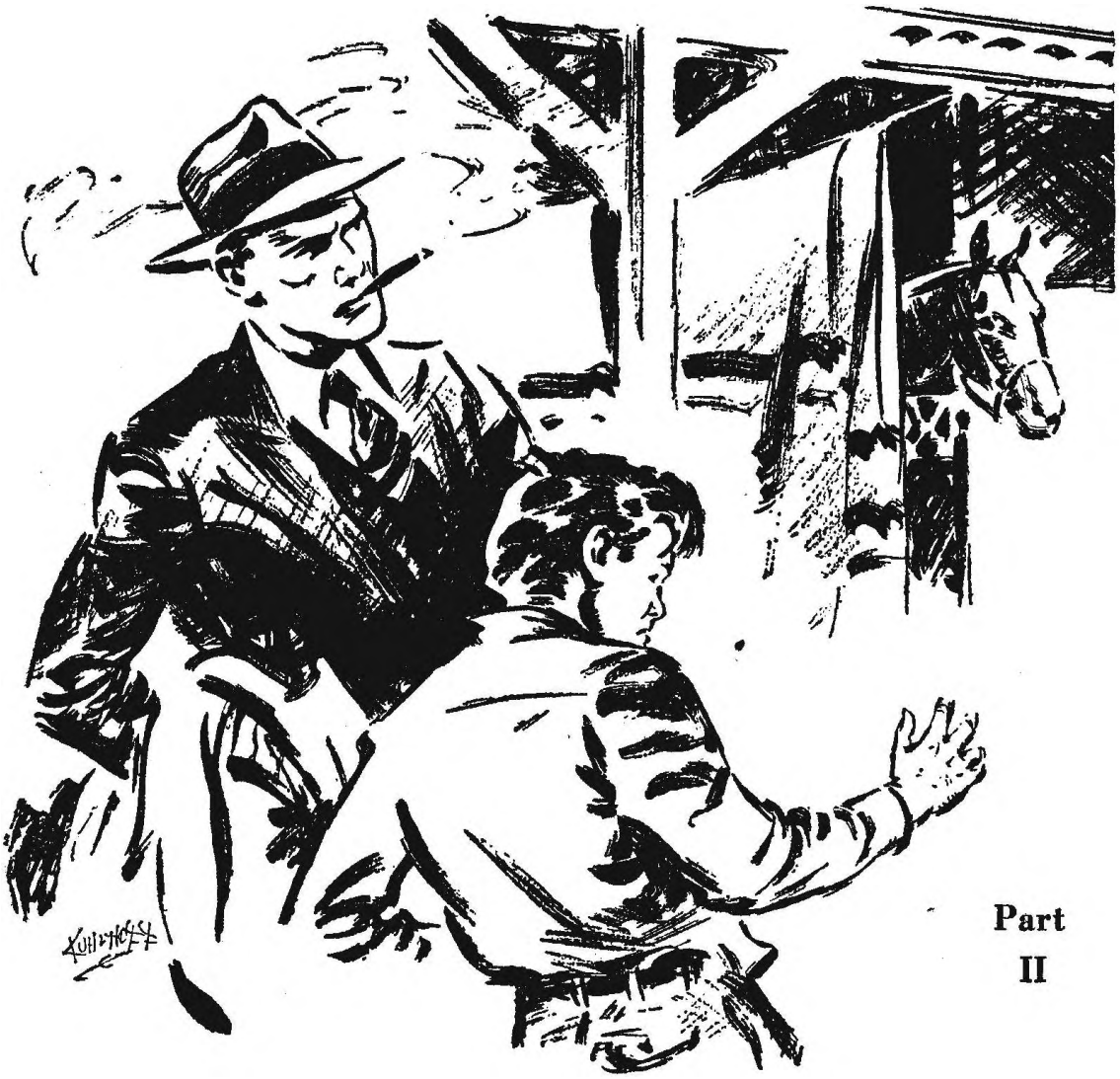
Lefty stared at his bum hand and was very quiet. Joe said sharply. "The President said to play ball, didn't he? You've got a job to do!"

After awhile Follett left. Joe left. Lefty looked at Susan. He said, "I guess Joe is right. It's one of those things, huh, baby?"

Susan said only, "I love you, Lefty!"

"Yeah!" said Lefty. "Yeah." He said loudly, "I love you, too!"

The Gift Horse



Part II

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS GONE ON BEFORE

SHORT STORIES readers have followed Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg through many adventures, triumphs and vicissitudes. They have seen them mixed up with fox farms and dog kennels; with comic strips and historic guns—but never before have the two partners had to go in for horse racing in such desperate fashion.

For Johnny—through the will of an eccentric Long Islander—has been made the guardian of Ulysses—race horse de luxe who never won a race. Ulysses' money is in trust; Johnny must race him or he can't collect. Joe Sibley, owner of Ulysses, who made this strange "bequest," was thought to have no relatives, but once news of his death and this strange will gets about, it doesn't take long for a brother and also a niece to materialize and prepare to dispute the will.

Moreover, Sibley did not die a natural death and Sam Cragg groans at the thought that Johnny's detective instincts will be aroused—to add to their troubles. True enough, Johnny says there's a man named Ed or Ted or Ned who may be the guy who knocked off Sibley. His address was left on a partly burned letter; it is the Jordan Building. To find him in a huge

By FRANK GRUBER

Author of "The Mighty Blockhead" and other Johnny Fletcher mystery stories

Anything Can Happen in a Horse Race. You Said It, Cousin!

office building of that nature will be a tough job.

CHAPTER VII

JOHNNY FLETCHER parked the station wagon in the parking lot on Sixth Avenue and Forty-fourth Street and led Sam Cragg up Sixth Avenue to a shooting gallery. Just inside the arcade entrance he stopped before a tiny booth in which a man with ink on his face and fingers was operating a small printing press.

"How soon can you print me up some calling cards?" Johnny asked the printer.

"Ten, thirty-five for fifty," was the glib response.

"Ten cents for fifty?" said Johnny. "All right, but I want them sooner than thirty-five minutes."

"A character," the printer retorted. "Thirty-five cents for fifty cards and it'll take ten minutes."

Johnny took a pencil from his pocket and reached for a pad of paper on the counter. He wrote:

SIBLEY STABLES
"Monarch of the Turf"
Manhasset, Long Island
Col. Jonathan Fletcher, Owner
Samuel C. Cragg, Trainer

He turned the pad to the printer, who glanced at it and said: "You've got four lines. That'll cost you fifty cents for fifty."

"Make it twenty-five cents for twenty-five."

The printer sniffed. "Thirty cents, big shot."

Johnny grinned. "Start your presses."

He strolled into the shooting gallery

where Sam Cragg promptly began playing a penny pinball game. Johnny stepped to the target range and bought a gunload. He knocked down three ducks and resisted the attempt of the attendant to sell him another load.

He joined Sam at the pinball game until the printer signaled that the cards were ready. "What's good at Jamaica today?" the man asked, grinning sarcastically.

"I'll give you a tip," said Johnny. "A good one. Stay home and save your money."

"Thanks, pal. I'll tell my friends."

Johnny paid for the cards. As they left the shooting gallery Sam asked, "What do we want with cards?"

"Oh, I thought maybe you liked to see your name in print. Here, have a few."

Sam took the cards. "So I'm a horse trainer now. What am I supposed to do? Teach Ulysses tricks?"

Johnny took hold of Sam's arm and pulled him into a big camera and photographic supply store. "I don't think a candid camera will be quite suitable," he said loudly to Sam. "What we want is a graflex."

"We have the largest stock in the city," said an eager clerk.

"Let me see one with a wide lens," Johnny went on. "Something that'll take a picture big enough to show up the fine points of a horse."

"You can always enlarge the pictures," the clerk said.

"I know, but you lose something in an enlargement. The boys in this syndicate know horse flesh and if I can show them what Ulysses really looks like, I think they'll be glad to send us their mares."

Johnny took a card from his pocket and dropped it casually on the counter, face up. The clerk picked it up. "Ah, yes," he said, musingly. "Mmmm, didn't Ulysses run yesterday at Jamaica?"

Johnny placed a finger to his lips. "That's why I want these pictures. So the syndicate will discount yesterday's race. Look—" He leaned across the counter and whispered confidentially. "Son, hock your watch and lay it on Ulysses the next time he runs. He'll pay a price. Catch on?"

The clerk's eyes sparkled. "I appreciate that, Colonel Fletcher, and I give you my word it won't go one step farther. Now, here's a camera that I'm sure will be exactly what you want. The price is only $225."

Johnny took the big box camera and put it up to his eyes. He clicked the shutter a couple of times and nodded thoughtfully. "It might be at that, but I don't know. I've had trouble with cameras before—"

"You won't have any with this outfit. We guarantee it, absolutely. The finest camera for the price. I give you my personal assurance."

"Is that so? Well, suppose I take it on approval for a day or two? If I like it, I'll send you my check, and if it doesn't work out well enough I'll return it and perhaps take another. What do you say?"

The clerk hesitated, then looked again at Johnny's card. "I think that will be satisfactory, Colonel Fletcher. Shall I put it in a box?"

"No, we're going out to the track right now and I thought I'd like to get a couple of snaps with my jockey aboard. You have my address on the card."

"Very well, sir. Thank you, sir. But what about films?"

"Films?" Johnny frowned, then winked and laughed. "The press boys are continually forcing films on me. They've got good stuff. I think I'll just let them give me a few packs. Remember what I told you about Ulysses, the next time out!"

Johnny nudged Sam, who had turned red in the face. The moment they hit the sidewalk the latter burst out, "Johnny, you had those cards printed up just to gyp this place out of a camera!"

"I'm not going to gyp them. I said I'd return it if I didn't like it, and naturally I'm not going to like any camera that costs

two hundred and twenty-five dollars. I just want to use the camera for a little while. I'm not going to hurt it."

"But how're you going to use it without any film? That bunk about the press boys——"

Johnny laughed. "The way we're going to use this camera we won't need any film."

"What're you talking about? You can't use a camera without any film in it."

"Oh, no? Watch and see. Here's Fifth Avenue and up there in the next block is the Jordan Building."

Sam Cragg blinked a couple of times, then gasped. "The Jordan Building! Say, that's the address of—"

"The person who may be the murderer of Joe Sibley."

"But you don't know the guy's name. You didn't even get a decent description of him."

"He's about my size, more or less. And his name's either Ted, Ned or Ed."

"But we can't go into every office and ask if there's a Ted or Ned in the place."

"I thought of that, which is why I got the camera. Sammy, we're about to become inquiring reporters. Let's see, what's a good topic of the day?"

Sam screwed up his face. "You mean like that column in the morning paper?"

"That's right. Every day they ask people a question and print the person's picture along with his reply. How's this: 'Do you think a working woman should turn her pay envelope over to her husband?' "

"Sure," replied Sam. "The man turns his pay over to his wife, so why shouldn't she turn over hers to him?"

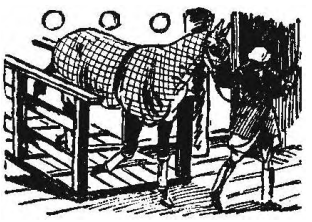
Johnny coughed. "Maybe that's not such a good question. Come to think of it, we want something that touches on the subject we're interested in."

"Murder?"

"No, horses. I've got it. 'Do you prefer the parimutuels to the old-fashioned bookmaker?' "

"I can get along without either."

"I wasn't asking you. Now, here's the way we work it." Johnny took an old envelope from his pocket and searched until he found a stub of pencil. "I do the talking and you go through the motions of snapping the picture."



"Without film?"

"Without film."

"All right, but something tells me this is going to blow up."

JOHNNY handed the camera to Sam Cragg and stepped to the entrance of the building. As a man turned in to enter, Johnny blocked his passage.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but I'm the Asking Reporter. We'd like to get your opinion on a topic of the day—"

"About what?"

"The question is, 'Do you prefer the parimutuels to the old-fashioned bookmaker?' "

"Eh? What's a parimutuel?"

"A ticket you buy on a horse."

"Sorry," said the man, "I don't bet on horses." He brushed past Johnny and went into the building.

Sam regarded Johnny with a strange expression. Annoyed, Johnny reached out and took hold of another man's arm. "I'm the Asking Reporter, Mister," he said curtly. "Do you prefer a bookie or a parimutuel?"

The subject tried to pull away from Johnny. "Sorry, but I don't want any."

"I'm not selling anything," Johnny said doggedly. "I just want to ask you a question, for our newspaper. Which do you prefer, parimutuels or bookies?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

The man tried again to pull his arm from Johnny's grip. "That's a heluva question to ask."

"Why? We ask people questions every day. A different subject every day. We'll snap your picture—"

"No, you won't," cried the man and broke away from Johnny."

Sam was snickering openly by this time. "Nice going, Johnny."

Someone tapped Johnny's shoulder and a harsh voice spoke into his ear: "What's buzzin', cousin?"

JOHNNY whirled and looked into the face of Lefty, Willie Pipett's gun-toter.

"Bingo!" said Sam Cragg.

Lefty shook his head. "That just goes to show that you never can tell. I thought after last night you'd be in Indiana by now and here you are, sticking your nose right into the trough."

"The trough?" Johnny asked quickly.

Lefty grimaced quickly. "You know what I mean."

"I think I do," said Johnny. "Willie's office is in this building."

Lefty frowned. "Let's go talk this over."

"In Willie's office?"

"Inside."

"What's the room number?"

"You'll see when we get upstairs."

"You'll tell me first."

"You think I'm crazy?" Lefty asked.

"You must be if you think I'd walk into Willie Pipett's web without telling at least three different cops where I'm going."

"Cops," said Lefty. "That's what I thought. Now, I don't want any trouble. You come along, or——"

Sam stepped up and crowded Lefty against Johnny. "Or what, punk?"

Lefty tried to get out of the sandwich, but Sam reached past him and placed a big hand against the building, effectively blocking not only Lefty's escape, but movement.

"You're big stuff with a roscoe, punk," Sam said. "Try reachin' for one now and I'll slap you silly."

"Cut it out," Lefty snarled in a low tone. "You're attracting attention."

"The traffic cop's looking over," Johnny said. "Give out with the room number or I'll really attract attention."

"I'll get you for this," Lefty said.

"Hey!" Johnny said loudly. "Hey, officer—"

"Ten twenty-three," Lefty cried.

"Okay, Sam," Johnny chuckled.

Sam raised his arm and Lefty ducked his head and scurried into the building.

Johnny started after Lefty and was in time to catch the backswing of the glass door that was released by Lefty. He pushed through with Sam crowding at his heels.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ELEVATOR discharged a load of passengers and Johnny saw Lefty dart into the emptied car. Johnny quickened his step and then suddenly skidded to a halt.

Sam Cragg collided with Johnny and exclaimed, "Wilbur!"

Wilbur Ganz saw them and stopped. "Hello," he said.

"Surprise," Johnny murmured. "I thought you were out on Long Island."

"I hadda come in town," Wilbur said.

"Did you bring Ulysses with you?"

Wilbur scowled. "What's a matter with you? I took him to the track."

"What for?"

"What for? He's running tomorrow."

Johnny cocked his head to one side. "Oh, he's running tomorrow? I'm only the horse's guardian, you know—"

"The boss entered him in this race last week. I wouldda told you about it, naturally, but I didn't get a chance. You ain't been out to the place."

"You've got me there, Wilbur. But I did telephone. Or didn't I?"

"Yeah, sure, and I ordered the stuff. Wait'll the judge gets the bill for it."

"Did they deliver it?"

"They hadn't when I left. I took Ulysses to the track—"

"Who's looking after him?"

"Oh, we got a stall there. I give a exercise boy a buck to keep his eye on the stall."

"Then you came to town?"

"Any law against that?" Wilbur Ganz asked truculently.

"I haven't heard of any, but how come you're here in this building?"

"I was seein' a guy."

"Who?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"I was just curious. The man's name wouldn't be Pipett?"

"Willie Pipett? What're you talking about?"

"You didn't know that his office was here?"

"Is it?"

"Uh-huh. Well, if you weren't up to see Willie, who did you see?"

"I told you that was none of your business. It was a personal matter. I don't have to tell you all about my personal affairs."

"Tough squirt," Sam Cragg muttered.

"Who asked you?" Wilbur snapped. "You get gay with me and you're liable to get a punch in the nose, see."

Sam Cragg blinked, then chuckled. "You mean you'd take a poke at me?"

"Any time you want to step a couple of rounds, just lemme know. Any time, any time."

"That'll hold you, Sam," Johnny laughed.

Wilbur fixed Johnny with a glare. "And that goes for you, pal. I took orders from Joe, but I don't have to take any from you, see. You ain't my boss."

"You mean you're quitting your job?"

"I ain't quittin'. And you can't fire me. The judge says so."

"Now wait a minute, Small Fry," Johnny said. "Accordin' to the will—"

"I heard what it said. Nobody can fire me from my job. As long as I do my work no one's got any beef."

"You're doing your work right now?"

"As much as you are, smart guy. Well, I'll be seein' you around."

Wilbur flicked his nose with his thumb in the manner of a prizefighter and trotted out of the building. Johnny shook his head.

"The little bantam rooster!"

"He was going to climb my frame," Sam chuckled.

"I think you're going to have to spank him. He may give us some trouble otherwise. So Ulysses is running again tomorrow."

"Yeah, and ain't it a lucky thing we haven't got any money to bet on him?"

"Oh, I don't know. Ulysses has to win a race some time, doesn't he? Otherwise he wouldn't be a race horse."

"Who says he is?"

"Joe Sibley had confidence in him." Johnny turned away from the elevators. "Well, come on."

Sam groaned. "You going to keep on with the phony Asking Reporter stuff?"

"Not now. I thought we might drop over and have a dish of tea with Helen Rosser."

"Tea, huh?"

"Tea."

OUTSIDE they cut across Fifth Avenue to Forty-fifth Street and walked to Eighth Avenue. There they turned right to the El Camino Apartments, which turned out to be in a dingy five-story walk-up building that had been stuccoed on the outside and therefore justified the Spanish name.

There was a series of mailboxes in the foyer and the inner door should have been operated by an electrical locking system, but the thing was out of order and all that was necessary to obtain egress was to push open the door. Johnny did that, after discovering from the mailboxes that Helen Rosser resided in Apartment 4C.

As they started toiling up the stairs Sam Cragg remarked, "Funny she'd live in a dump like this when she owns a big car like the one you nicked yesterday."

"Sam, you took the words right out of my mouth," exclaimed Johnny. "That's one of the questions I'm going to ask her."

Someone was cooking broccoli on the second floor, judging from the pungent odor. On the third floor the smell of onions predominated. Disinfectants prevailed on the fourth and some insect life scurried underfoot.

There was a door buzzer beside the door of Apartment 4C but a card informed Johnny that it was out of order. He used his knuckles on the panel and discovered that there was a metal sheathe under the cracked paint.

There was no response from inside the apartment and Johnny belabored the door vigorously. After several moments of this, Helen Rosser's voice from inside exclaimed sharply, "For Pete's sake, what is it?"

"It's Fletcher!"

"Fletcher! You have a nerve coming here."

"I want to have a talk with you, Miss Rosser."

"I have nothing to discuss with you."

"I think you have. Open up."

"If I open up, it'll only be to throw scalding water in your face. Now, go away."

Johnny thumped the door with the heel of his palm. "That's me, sitting down to wait until you open up."

"You won't have long to wait. I'm telephoning the police."

"You call the cops and you'll never share in your uncle's estate, Miss Rosser. I assure you of that. I have something important to tell you."

Helen Rosser opened the door the width of a door-chain. "That won't do," Johnny said. "Let me in."

"Who's that with you, your St. Bernard?"

"I resent that, lady," Sam Cragg said huffily.

Helen unhooked the chain and held open the door. Johnny and Sam entered what appeared to be a one-room kitchenette apartment.

"All right, now what's so important?"

"It's about Joe Sibley. He wasn't killed by his horse. He was murdered."

Helen Rosser regarded Johnny without emotion. "I knew that yesterday."

"How could you know it? The police don't know it even now."

"I knew that Uncle Joe was worried. He told me so himself."

"When? At the race track?"

"Yes."

"How come he confided in you? At that time he wasn't sure that you were his niece."

Helen made an impatient gesture. "Mr. Fletcher, if you've come here to cross-examine me, you're wasting your time. I suggest that you see my attorney."

"Charles Conger? Where'll I find him?"

"At his office, naturally."

"Where's that?"

"You'll find him listed in the phone directory. Attorneys usually have telephones."

"I thought maybe I'd find him here."

"What?"

Johnny reached into an ash tray and picked up a cigarette stub. It was still warm. He looked at it, then at Helen Rosser.

"I smoke," she said, here eyes glinting.

"This hasn't got any lipstick on it," said Johnny. "And it's warm."

Helen Rosser exclaimed angrily. "Mr. Fletcher, my first impression of you was decidedly bad, and that opinion has deteriorated since. If you have nothing more to say—good afternoon."

Johnny seated himself abruptly in a worn morris chair. He grinned at the girl. "I wonder if I could have a glass of water."

A man stepped out of the bathroom. He wore an unpressed gray flannel suit, a soiled shirt and had a dirty panama on his head. He was in his middle fifties.

"Get the hell out of here," he said, scarcely moving his lips.

"Don't tell me," said Johnny Fletcher, snapping his fingers, "your name is Rosser."

Helen Rosser gasped in astonishment. "How—?"

"Uncle Albert spilled it this morning. Remember, he mentioned papa who walked out on mama."

Rosser reached into the sagging pocket

of his flannel coat and brought out a leather blackjack. "I carry this for smart guys like you," he said.

Sam moved between Johnny and Rosser. Helen Rosser screamed, "Don't, Father!"

Rosser raised the hand holding the blackjack and brought it down. Sam Cragg chopped up at the downcoming forearm and the blackjack flew from Rosser's hand and hit the radiator across the room with a dull clang.

Rosser cried out and grabbed his injured forearm with his other hand. "You—" he began.

"Naughty," chided Johnny Fletcher. "Mustn't swear in front of your children."

"Get out of here," Rosser cried hoarsely. "Get out of here before I kill you."

"You got some more blackjacks?" Sam Cragg asked. "Break 'em out."

"Please leave," Helen Rosser pleaded.

"All right," said Johnny. "Tell me just one thing and we'll go. What's your father's first name?"

"I don't see— All right, it's Edward."

"Ed," said Johnny, nodding. He got up and went to the door. Ed Rosser sent a parting shot after them.

"You got my name. Remember it, because I'll be seeing you some time."

"Why not?" Johnny retorted and went out.

In the corridor Sam clutched at Johnny's arm. "Ed! That's the name of the guy who called on Joe Sibley."

"If we can believe Wilbur. I'm kinda disappointed in Wilbur, however."

Sam sniffed. "I'll slap him silly."

"Maybe I'll let you, Sam. I underestimated the boy. I had him sized up as a simple but faithful ex-jockey. Now I'm beginning to think he isn't so simple and not very faithful."

"And he's the guy who squawked about Pat Shea not giving Ulysses a good ride. Say! Didn't he say something about Willie Pipett having gotten to Shea?"

"He did mention something like that. I hadn't overlooked it, Sam. That we caught Wilbur coming out of the building in which Pipett makes his headquarters. Damn, I wish Willie and his crowd weren't so anti-social."

By this time Johnny and Sam had descended to the street. They crossed Forty-fifth Street and turned east. At Times Square Johnny looked at the big clock in the tower of the Paramount Building and saw that it was after four.

"Too late to go out to Jamaica. Well, we'll run out in the morning."

Sam looked at Johnny suspiciously. "You're not planning any stunts for tonight, are you?"

"I haven't got over the one from last night."

"Me neither," said Sam heartily.

CHAPTER IX

THEY reached the Forty-fifth Street Hotel and turned in. The door of their room was locked, so Johnny was completely offguard when he put his key in the lock and pushed open the door.

Lefty was seated in the one easy chair in the room. On the bed nearby was one of the men who had been in the poker game the evening before.

Johnny started to back away but realized that he could not dodge a bullet in the confined quarters.

"Hello, boys," he said, uneasily.

Sam Cragg pushed past Johnny. "How'd you birds get in here?"

"With a skeleton key," said Lefty. "You can buy 'em anywhere for two-bits."

The other man sat up on the bed. "We been waitin' almost an hour. Willie sent us over with the dough."

Johnny grinned weakly. "You should have told me you were coming. I—I took our roll to the bank this afternoon."

"A bank's a good place to keep money," Lefty said. "Show them the roll, Arnie."

Arnie reached into his inside pocket and brought out a thin packet of bills. "Thirteen-eighty, wasn't it, that you won?"

Johnny looked thoughtfully at the money. "What's the catch?"

"No catch," said Arnie. "Willie never welshed on a deal in his life. You won the money fair and square. Here it is."

Sam Cragg reached out a big hand, but Arnie drew back.

"I thought so," said Johnny.

Arnie laughed. "Willie's willing to pass up the nine hundred he said you had to show. He said to give you the money."

"All right, give it to me and I will take it," said Johnny.

Arnie moistened the ball of his thumb and riffled the sheaf of bills. "Sounds good, eh?"

"That isn't cheese," said Johnny, "and I'm not a mouse and you certainly don't look like a cat. Spill it."

"Willie's looked you up. You own a horse."

"Some people might call it a horse."

"We'll call it a horse. You know what Willie's business is?"

"Trimming suckers."

"No," said Arnie, seriously. "Willie's a business man. He makes book. Bookmaking's a legitimate business."

"With or without cops?"

Arnie shrugged. "It's big business, cousin. You know how business is; you got to take chances but you try to insure yourself against possible losses. A movie star insures her legs for a million—"

"Get to the point, Arnie," Lefty cut in.

Arnie shot an annoyed glance at his partner. "Do I tell you how to shoot a rod, Lefty? You handle your end and I'll hold up my own."

"You talk too much, Arnie. Willie's told you that himself."

"I like to talk," Arnie snapped.

"So do I," said Johnny. "But I'm a poor listener. I own a horse and Willie's a bookie; go on from there."

"That's it! Your horse is running tomorrow."

"So they tell me."

"Sure and he's going to pay a big price —if he wins."

"He paid a hundred to one the other day," said Johnny. "I mean he would have paid that much if he'd won. Unfortunately, he didn't win."

"Mister, this money's pracitcally yours. Ulysses is running in the third tomorrow. Do you know how many horses there are in the third?"

"No, do you?"

"Of course. Eight horses were entered, but three've been scratched. That leaves only five, Ulysses and four others."

"Mmm, what are the other horses?"

"Brownie, Lester Leech, Blue Silver and Matilda M. Brownie and Lester Leech are the favorites. They'll get to the post at around 2 to 1 or 8 to 5. Blue Silver ought to show for about four dollars and

the boys have Matilda M. pegged at about eight to one."

"And Ulysses?"

Arnie chuckled. "Fifty to one and no money bet on him. Boy, is this a sweet race! Everybody and his uncle on the favorites and nobody but a few chumps who always bet long shots on Ulysses. Two-dollar show bet."

"I've got two bucks," said Johnny. "And I always like to back my horse. Will you take my bet?"

Arnie slapped his knee with the thirteen hundred dollars. "A card, Lefty, a card."

"I'll play these, Arnie, old boy," said Johnny.

"Great!" It's all fixed then?"

"Sure," said Johnny. "What?"

"The race. Everybody bets on Brownie and Lester Leech. They win, we lose. Ulysses wins, phooey, a coupla two-dollar bets."

"You can count on Ulysses," said Johnny. "He's always in there, trying to win. Of course he hasn't won yet, but some day he's going to."

"To-morrow."

"Swell! You'll take my two-dollar bet? To show."

ARNIE shook his head. "To win, cousin. Here's thirteen hundred and eighty bucks. Put it on the nose. At the parimutuels, of course. At the last minute. You'll make ten g's."

"How come? You said Ulysses is fifty to one."

"On paper. You put thirteen hundred in the mutuels and the price'll drop. Down to about ten."

"That's screwy," Sam cut in.

"Ain't it the truth? That's parimutuels for you. In the old days the bookies made the odds and they stuck to them. So the customers squawked that the bookies wasn't honest and they got the parimutuels and now the track takes its ten per cent and the breakage before they split up the pool."

"Stop, you're making me cry," said Johnny. "Get to the point. There are four horses in the race besides Ulysses. What makes you think that Ulysses can beat the other four?"

Arnie snorted. "What's a-matter, ain't you got confidence in your own horse?"

"Anything can happen in a horse race."

"You said it, cousin. They have seven and eight races a day and the meeting lasts about four weeks, pretty close to two hundred races. You know the racing game. It's honest. It's got to be the way the Jockey Club checks on everything. They watch the jockeys like everything. They weigh 'em before and after a race and when they catch one pulling something they kick him off the track. Why, a jock can't even bet on a race."

"Tough," said Johnny with a face that showed little sympathy.

"You said it. There they are, the lads who do their best, day in and day out, to give the customers their money's worth. And what do they get? Peanuts."

"You're getting somewhere, I suppose," Johnny offered, sarcastically, "but I'm going to be sound asleep by the time you get there. What's the point?"

"The race is fixed," cut in Lefty.

Arnie said, "Tch, tch, Lefty. You shouldn't say such a thing. The jocks are as honest lads as you'll find anywhere. But the meet's over this week and the boys need get-away money. So they make an agreement among themselves, see? After all, they've rid a hundred and ninety-nine honest races. You show me any one who's honest one hundred and ninety-nine times out of two hundred like these boys are."

Johnny Fletcher held up his hand. "And this race tomorrow is the *one* race the boys have fixed! They picked Ulysses to win? I think that's very handsome of them. But why tell me, Arnie? I don't get that. I still think—"

"As a matter of fact," said Arnie, "somebody's tryin' to throw a monkey-wrench into the business. That's why the

boss sent me over to tell you about the race and give you a chance to lay down this lettuce and win yourself some big stuff." Arnie coughed modestly. "You gotta let Pat Shea ride Ulysses."

Johnny shrugged. "He's ridden him before."

"Sure, Sibley always hired him. And the boys was countin' on Shea being on Ulysses tomorrow. Then this punk says he's going to ride Ulysses."

"Who's that?"

"Wilbur Ganz."

"He's going to ride Ulysses?"

"Huh? Didn't you——?"

"No. This is the first I knew about it."

Arnie exclaimed. "But the boss figured *you* were putting Ganz on the horse."

"I didn't know a thing about it."

Arnie's face screwed up for a moment. "But you know now. And you'll pull Wilbur." Arnie riffled the packet of bills once more and held them out to Johnny. "Here's the dough you won in the game; catch on?"

Johnny took the money. "My winnings—from the poker game."

"Yeah."

"And I can tell the boss that Shea'll ride Ulysses?"

"You can tell Willie Pipett that Ulysses will be running to win."

Arnie started to nod, but stopped. "That ain't the same thing. We want Shea on the horse."

"Shea'll be on."

"Swell."

Arnie started for the door. Johnny looked at Lefty, who remained in the chair by the window. He called to Arnie, "Hey, you're forgetting something. "Lefty."

"Naw, the boss said he's to stick with you until after the race. Just in case you change your mind."

Lefty grinned. "Surprise!"

"Surprise, hell. Get out of here, Lefty."

"Willie said to stick with you. I work for Willie."

"But I don't."

"Yes, you do."

"No," said Johnny. "Arnie, you take Lefty with you or Wilbur rides Ulysses tomorrow."

Arnie's mouth twitched. "Now, look, Fletcher, we just went through all that business—"

"Take Lefty with you!"

Arnie hesitated a moment, then sighed. "Come on, Lefty."

Lefty got up and strolled leisurely to the door. There he turned. "I got a notion about you, Fletcher. That we're going to have fun together—one of these times." He went out, slamming the door behind him.

Across the room, Sam Cragg shivered. "I don't like those guys, Johnny."

"Neither do I, Sam. But they're paying off."

"You mean you're going through with a fixed race?"

Johnny laughed shortly. "What fixed race, Sam?"

"The one he was just telling about."

"Look, Sibley entered Ulysses to win. When a horse is entered in a race he's supposed to do his best to win. That's honest, isn't it? Well, Ulysses is going to win this race, isn't he?"

"Yeah, but——"

THE telephone rang and Johnny Fletcher stepped to the stand beside the bed and scooped it up. "Hello."

"Mr. Fletcher," boomed a voice. "This is Ben Krieger. What I was afraid of has happened. They have filed suit against the estate. I must talk to you about it."

"All right. I'll run out in the morning."

"That won't be necessary. I'm downstairs in the lobby. What room are you in?"

"Eight twenty-one."

"I'll be right up."

Johnny replaced the receiver on the hook. "That was the judge, Sam. He's coming up. We're being sued."

"Well, that's a new one. We've been pinched. We've been jugged and mugged.

But never anything as high-class as being sued."

"That shows we're getting up in the world. . . . Come in, Judge!"

Judge Krieger came into the room and grimaced in distaste as he surveyed the shabby furnishings. "The papers were served just as I was coming into town."

"Who's suing us?"

"They got together."

"All the relatives?"

"Yes. The girl who claims to be Sibley's niece and Albert Sibley."

"What about Ed Rosser?"

"Eh?"

"Isn't he suing, too? Or didn't you know that he was around?"

Judge Krieger snorted. "I never even heard of the girl and Albert Sibley until today.

"Joe led me to believe that he didn't have any relatives. After all, the purpose in drawing up the, ah, rather peculiar will, was the fact that he had no relatives. Rather, he thought he had no relatives."

"What about Ganz? Isn't he suing?"

"Why should he?"

"No reason. I just asked. I got the impression that he wasn't satisfied with the will, either."

"Ganz has no reason to complain. A broken-down, ex-jockey—"

"The ex doesn't apply any more, Judge. Wilbur's making a comeback as a jockey. At least he thinks he is. Which reminds me, there's a question or two I want to ask you about Wilbur."

"Of course, but first about this suit. At the same time they served the papers, they got an injunction against the estate. You know what that means."

"Do I?"

"It means that the estate is enjoined from spending any money, pending the outcome of the suit."

"Hey!" cried Johnny. "That's bad."

"Oh, not so very. It really won't affect you at all."

"The hell it won't. Ulysses was supposed to run in a race tomorrow."

"He'll run. The entry fee was paid last week, as was the one for next Friday's race."

"You mean Ulysses is running again Friday?"

"Yes, didn't Ganz tell you?"

"That punk doesn't tell me anything. Which reminds me that I wanted to ask you about him. You told me at the beginning that I was Joe Sibley's heir. Then it turned out that I was only appointed guardian of a horse. Now, it looks like I haven't even got anything to say about the horse."

"Oh, but you have. Ulysses is entirely in your charge."

"And I give Wilbur Ganz the orders?"

"Certainly."

"Does Wilbur know that I'm his boss?"

"He should."

"Let's get that a little clearer. Suppose Wilbur got a foolish notion that he wanted to ride Ulysses in a race and I thought that it would be better to use another jockey. Whose decision counts?"

"Yours."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Sam Cragg. "Wait'll I see that squirt."

"You've had some difficulty with Ganz?" the judge asked.

"Not at all," Johnny said, blithely. "Everything's fine. Ulysses runs tomorrow and if he wins I get the purse, eh?"

"That's right. But about these other matters—you understand that you are enjoined from committing the estate to any expenses. Nor can you dispose of any of

the assets, er, for example the station wagon."

"Oh, Wilbur told you that I took it. You mean I can't even use it?"

"Use it, yes, but you can't sell it. And of course the feed store will have to take back those deliveries they made today. You were a little, ah, overzealous about Ulysses. There's plenty of feed on hand for him and his expenses at the track have been paid for the next two weeks."

"Okay, Judge, we'll get by. And look, Ulysses is running tomorrow. He's going to win. Put down a couple of bucks on him."

"Oh, I never bet on horses. I don't believe in gambling."

"This is a sure thing. There's no gamble to it."

Chapter X

THE ringing of the telephone broke Johnny Fletcher's heavy sleep and he brought an arm out from under the covers and took down the receiver. "Yeah?"

"It's four o'clock," said a voice in his ear.

"So what? Do *I* call up people in the middle of the night to tell them the time?"

"You left a call for four o'clock."

Johnny blinked. "I did? Well, thanks."

He hung up and looked toward the open window. It was pitch dark outside and the room was damp and chilly. He shivered and threw back the covers. He stepped around to the other bed and slapped the mound that was Sam Cragg.

"Wake up!"

"G'way," Sam mumbled, sleepily.

Johnny moved to the window to close it. Suddenly he was shocked wide awake. "Sam!" he cried. "Fog! So thick you could cut it."

Sam sat up with the bedcovers twisted around his thick body. "I've seen fog before."

"But never like this. And today's the day Ulysses is running."

"Let him run."

"We're going to let him run, and what's more we're going out there this morning to see him work out."

Sam groaned. "All right, wake me up in the morning."

"This is morning."

"You're crazy. It's as dark as a hole outside."

"It's four o'clock. They always work out horses around four or five in the morning."

"What a business. Why couldn't we get into something where we could sleep until about noon."

"Ha! Never look a gift horse in the mouth, Sammy."

Fifteen minutes later, Johnny and Sam went down to the hotel lobby. The night clerk looked at them in surprise. "Couldn't you sleep?"

"Certainly," said Johnny. "But we're horsemen; we've got to go out to the track and supervise the morning workout of our stable. Will you phone the garage and have my station wagon brought around?"

THE car came a few minutes later and Johnny and Sam got in and started off. The consistency of the fog was not fully discernible until they got to the East River Drive and looked upon the river. Along the Drive, the powerful street lights pierced the fog to a degree, but the river was a solid wall of mist.

Sam shivered as they crossed the Triborough Bridge. "They won't be able to run horses in this soup."

"The sun'll be up in a little while, Sam. It'll make short work of this stuff."

"I wonder."

Johnny began to wonder, too, when he pulled into the parking lot outside the Jamaica Race Track. It was five-thirty and the fog was so thick Johnny couldn't see his own feet. He approached the club house by memory and sense of touch rather than sight.

THE place was locked up, of course, but they followed the walls to the right until they came into a fence, which they climbed. Inside, they found themselves at the stables and heard the stamping of horses, and here and there the voice of a trainer or exercise boy.

They worked along slowly until they came to Stall 13. The upper half of the door was open and there was a light inside.

Wilbur Ganz was rubbing down the smooth flank of Ulysses.

" 'Morning, boy," Johnny said. "Getting him ready for his workout?"

Wilbur whirled, his face twisting into a scowl. "What are you doing here?"

Sam exclaimed but Johnny nudged him. "Oh, am I in the wrong stall? I'm looking for a horse named Ulysses. *My* horse."

"What's the idea?"

"No idea, boy. Only I was talking to the trustee last night and he assured me once again that Ulysses is my horse. Catch on?"

"So?"

"So I thought we'd have Ulysses show us what he can do this fine morning."

"You can't run him in this fog."

"Why not?"

"Too risky. He might stumble."

Johnny cocked his head to one side. "Am I wrong or is that pounding I hear the beating of my heart? It sounds like someone working out a horse."

A thin voice behind Johnny spoke up: "I'll ride Ulysses, Mister."

Johnny turned and regarded a boy of about fourteen or fifteen, a thin-faced, eager-eyed youth. "You're a jockey?"

"Apprentice."

Wilbur Ganz came up and looked over the stall door. "Beat it, Sonny."

"Wait a minute," Johnny said. "How many races have you ridden?"

The boy blushed. "Well, you see, Mister, I haven't, uh, exactly——"

"He's just an exercise boy," Wilbur cut in.

"I'm an apprentice jockey!" Sonny cried. "I can ride as good as anyone. It's only that no one will give me a chance. I know Ulysses, Mr. Fletcher. Joe Sibley let me ride him around lots of times. Only now——"

"All right, Sonny. What's your name?"

"Sonny Wilcox. Uh, my name's not Sonny, but everybody calls me that. You know, like Sonny Bastrop."

"You may turn out as good as Bastrop," Johnny said. "I'm going to give you a chance. Give Ulysses a ride—a good one."

"No!" cried Wilbur.

"Over your dead body?" Sam Cragg asked.

WILBUR began swearing but broke off in the middle of a word as Sam opened the stall door. "All right," he snarled. "Ride him and if he breaks his leg—I'll swear that you did it on purpose, to——"

"To what?" Johnny snapped.

Wilbur backed away. "You know what I mean."

"No, I don't."

"The will. I heard what the judge said about it."

Johnny moistened his lips with his tongue. "That's my affair, Wilbur. You mind your business and I'll mind mine, eh?"

"That's my business, too. You think I don't know. I asked a mouthpiece and he said my job's good only as long as the horse lasts. You think I want him to break a leg and be shot?"

"No, I don't think you do. But the responsibility's mine. I have a right to know what Ulysses can do. It's customary to work out horses in the morning."

"Okay, Mr. Fletcher?" Sonny Wilcox asked eagerly.

"Yes, Sonny. Give him a good ride and I'll clock you. Uh, that reminds me, I haven't got a stop watch. Is there one around here, Wilbur?"

Wilbur Ganz went to a box and, raising

the lid, rummaged about for a moment. He came up with a stop watch which he tossed to Johnny.

A few minutes later Johnny and Sam went to the rail at the track, where they were joined by Sonny Wilcox, astride Ulysses.

The fog had lifted a bit by this time or perhaps it was the dawn breaking through. At any rate, the gloom was not as deep as it had been earlier.

"I'll yell 'off,'" Sonny said. "That's when you press the watch. When I come around to this spot you click it again. Okay?"

"Okay, Sonny."

Sonny rode Ulysses into the fog until he was practically out of sight. Johnny gripped the stop watch with his thumb on the stem.

"Off!" yelled Sonny Wilcox.

Johnny clicked the stem of the stop watch. Behind him a gruff voice said: "I got him!"

Johnny whirled. Willie Pipett, flanked by Lefty and Arnie, all holding stop watches, had come up. On the track Ulysses' hoofs thudded the dirt.

"Who've you got on him?" Willie Pipett asked.

"Just an exercise boy."

"Why didn't you get Pat Shea to give him a workout?"

"I don't even know Pat Shea."

"No? Arnie, get Shea."

Arnie went off into the fog. Johnny stepped uneasily to the rail. Ulysses was in the back stretch but he could still hear faintly the steady pounding.

"You're putting Shea on him this afternoon," Pipett said, rather than asked.

"I guess he's as good as anyone else."

"It's not a question of how good he is," Pipett said sharply. "You got your orders."

"What do you mean, orders?" Sam growled.

"You heard me. The boys gave you the money, didn't they?"

"The money I won in the poker game, yeah," Johnny said.

Willie Pipett grunted. "Here he comes!"

The drumming of the hoofbeats came louder and suddenly Ulysses hurtled out of the fog bank and pounded past Johnny and the others. Johnny clicked his stop watch and looked at it.

"One forty-four and a fifth," he said.

"One forty-three an' two," Willie snapped. "An exercise boy, eh?"

"Yeah. Is that good?"

"Don't you know?"

"Uh, yeah, but I don't know this track. How long is it?"

"From where Ulysses started a mile and a sixteenth. That's what he's going to run this afternoon."

Sonny Wilcox had turned Ulysses and was trotting back to the rail. "Did we do all right?"

"Great, Sonny."

"Thanks, Mr. Fletcher. I think Ulysses has a good chance of winning this afternoon. Gosh, I'd like to be riding him."

"I wish you could," Johnny said, then caught himself. "But it's too bad. I've already arranged for a jockey."

"I know," said Sonny, wistfully. "Well, I'll take Ulysses in and rub him down."

He rode through the gate.

Arnie came up with a surly-looking midget in riding breeches and boots. Willie Pipett exclaimed, "Pat, shake hands with Johnny Fletcher."

Pat Shea gave Johnny a limp hand. "Hi yah. Why don't you shoot Ulysses? He's a dog."

"What?" cried Johnny. "I thought you were—I mean, aren't you going to ride him this afternoon?"

"What of it?"

"We just clocked him."

"And he made one forty-two? The plug always works out well. And he always folds up in a race. He ain't worth his oats."

Willie Pipett cleared his throat. "Easy, Pat. Mr. Fletcher inherited Ulysses."

"I know, but he didn't inherit much. Joe Sibley was soft in the head. The dough he spent on this nag! He couldda bought himself two-three platers and won a race once in awhile."

"Or he could have hired a good jockey," Sam Cragg cut in angrily.

Pat Shea jerked his head to one side. "Who's the Great Dane?"

SAM CRAGG'S big fist shot out. He caught Pat Shea by the throat and raised him a foot off the ground. "I'll teach you how to talk to grown-up people," he snapped.

It took the combined efforts of Johnny, Willie Pipett and Lefty to make Sam release the jockey. Pat Shea fell to the

ground, coughing and choking. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet. "I'll fix you for that, you gorilla. I'll—"

"Shut up, Pat!" Willie Pipett lashed out.

The jockey looked at Willie Pipett, then whirled and ran into the fog.

"Ha-ha," laughed Johnny Fletcher, without humor.

Pipett shook his head. "I don't blame you, Cragg. I want to slap the snoddy punk in the face every time I have to listen to him talk. But we need him, so lay off until after the race."

"Keep him away from me, then."

"You going back to town now, Fletcher?" Pipett asked.

Johnny nodded. "We've nothing else to do here until this afternoon."

"That's right, but I want to clock some other horses. Mind giving the boys a lift back to town?"

Johnny did mind, but saw no reason to be unnecessarily discourteous. "No, I don't mind."

Arnie and Lefty followed Johnny and Sam to the station wagon and effectively killed all conversation during the drive back to the city.

At the Forty-fifth Street Hotel they all got out. "Mind if we have a bite with you?" Arnie asked them.

Johnny looked at him suspiciously. "We are not going to eat."

"Well, you don't mind if we sorta keep you company," Arnie grinned. "Orders from the boss."

"I thought so!" Johnny cried. "This seemed just a little too pat."

"Ahrr!" Sam Cragg said and got one hand on Lefty before the latter got his hand under the lapel of his coat.

CHAPTER XI

THE sun did not come out that day and the fog, instead of lessening, seemed to thicken toward noon. You could tell that it was day because you could see your hands and now and then you could see a few yards as puffs of wind swirled the fog and cleared pockets in the mist.

Even Lefty and Arnie were dubious that the horses would run at Jamaica that afternoon, but a telephone call informed them that the races were held, "rain or shine." Since the sun most certainly was not shining, the fog evidently came into the rain classification.

Shortly before one the quartette, consisting of Johnny and Sam and their bodyguards, set out for the track. It was Arnie who got Johnny his owner's badge which entitled him to free admission to the track. Inside, they moved to the stables.

The first person Johnny saw was the boy, Sonny Wilcox. His face was dirty and streaked, as if he had cried and wiped

away tears. "Mr. Fletcher," he exclaimed when he saw Johnny. "Gosh, I was wishing I could see you. I—I'd like to talk to you."

"Fire away, Sonny."

"It's private," Sonny said. "Could I talk to you alone?"

"Ixnay, amscray," Lefty said. "Beat it, kid."

"You beat it, Lefty," Johnny retorted.

"Phooey!"

Johnny looked at Arnie. "I mean it, fellows. There are too many people around here for you to try anything, and I'm fed up with you birds stepping on my heels."

"That goes for me, too," Sam Cragg growled. "And I'm looking at you, Lefty. When I count three— One—two—!"

Lefty sprang past Sam toward the club house. Arnie followed more leisurely. At the end of the row of stables both men stopped, but since that was more than fifty feet from Johnny, the latter didn't mind.

"All right, Sonny," Johnny said.

Sonny looked at Sam Cragg and Johnny nodded.

"It's Pat Shea," Sonny blurted out. "I overheard him talking to Billy Brett. They are betting a lot of money on Ulysses. I didn't get it all, but they're doing something to Ulysses. He's being fixed to win. It must be dope, but they dassn't do that, Mr. Fletcher; they take a saliva test of every winner and Ulysses will be barred from the track."

"Oh," said Johnny. "I don't think they're going to dope Ulysses. You worked him out this morning. Darned good time. Don't you think Ulysses can win this race without dope?"

"Yeah, sure, but the race is fixed. I heard Pat Shea say that. Some gamblers are going to clean up."

Johnny took a five-dollar bill from his pocket and handed it to Sonny. "Sure the race is fixed, Sonny. For Ulysses to win. Put this on his nose and it'll make you a hatful of money."

"You're kidding, Mr. Fletcher!" cried Sonny. "You wouldn't fix a race, would you? Gosh, I thought—"

"What?"

"That you was honest. I thought—" he stopped as Pat Shea suddenly stepped out of a nearby stall. The jockey bore down on the group, his beady little eyes fixed on Sonny Wilcox.

"There you are, you little sneak," he said, through clenched teeth. "I've had just about enough of your blabbing and I'm going to—"

"Fah!" said Sam Cragg, stepping in front of the young apprentice.

Pat Shea stopped. "The Great Dane! I've been—" His right hand suddenly came up from his side. There was a riding crop in it. The crop whipped across Sam's face, bringing an exclamation of pain from the big fellow.

It also brought up his fist which exploded on Pat's jaw with far too much force.

The jockey turned a complete backward somersault on the ground and brought up a couple of feet from a stall, with his booted feet against the wall, two feet above his head. He lay still.

Johnny leaped forward and dropped to his knees by the jockey. Shea was out cold.

Johnny groaned. "For the love of Mike, Sam couldn't you have waited until after the race?"

"He didn't wait," Sam retorted sullenly. "Maybe you think that whip was a daisy chain."

"I know, but he's out like a herring. Even if he wakes up in time he won't be able to ride Ulysses. And I wouldn't be surprised if you broke his jaw."

"Nah, I only slapped him a little."

"All right, then pick him up and take him to our stall. Maybe we can bring him around."

"He oughtta be in the jockey room by now," Sonny Wilcox exclaimed. "He didn't have any business being out here this late in the first place. And what was

he doing in Stall 8? That belongs to Lester Leech."

SAM CRAGG stooped and picked up the unconscious jockey as easily as if he had been a hundred-pound sack of flour. He carried him to Stall 13. Kicking open the door he said, "Surprise!"

Wilbur Ganz, wearing silks, leaped forward. "What the hell!" he cried.

"What the hell," said Johnny. "Douse this guy with a bucket of water."

"He's crocked!"

"No, sleeping."

"You're crazy."

"So're you, Wilbur. If you think you're going to ride Ulysses."

Wilbur licked his lips with his tongue. "I got ready, just in case. Just in case you didn't want me to tell the club stewards that you and Willie Pipett were in cahoots. That you'd fixed this race."

"Wilbur," said Johnny Fletcher, "I'm getting awfully tired of hearing you play that same record over and over. I'm thinking seriously of letting you take some of the same medicine that Pat Shea just took, the back of Sam's hand."

"Willie Pipett came and told me that you were riding Shea on Ulysses. Joe Sibley told me after the last race that Shea was a crook. You had no right—"

"Now, Johnny?" asked Sam Cragg as he placed Pat Shea on the straw-covered stall floor.

"No—not yet." Johnny sighed. "I'll make you a bet, Wilbur, and I'll lay you big odds, too. Ulysses has never won a race, but I'll bet you that he wins this one. I'll bet on that. If he wins, you're to keep your mouth shut from now on; take orders from me on anything pertaining to Ulysses, his training, racing and everything. And if he loses, the same goes for me. I won't even talk to you about Ulysses. You're the boss."

Wilbur's rat face twisted. "You'll put that in writing?"

"No," said Johnny coldly. "But I'll give you my word. I wouldn't go back on my word for anything."

"For hardly anything," Sam amended.

Wilbur looked down at the limp body of Pat Shea. "It's a bet. But who rides Ulysses? Pat ain't in no shape."

"Sonny'll ride him."

"Me?" cried Sonny Wilcox.

Johnny nodded. "Peel off the silks, Wilbur."

"You made a bet, Fletcher," said Wilbur. "I'm going to hold you to it. Let the kid ride."

"You'll have to tell them at the steward's office," Sonny said. "There goes the first race now. You'll have to hurry—"

Johnny turned and trotted out of the stall, with Sam at his heels. From the general direction of the track came the yells of thousands of throats and the oddly muffled thud-thud of many hoofs as they beat the dirt.

An attendant directed them to the steward's office and there Johnny introduced himself. "I want to put Sonny Wilcox on Ulysses, in place of Pat Shea."

THE club steward frowned. "Rather late for such an important change, Mr. Fletcher. I'll make the substitution, but, ah, well, it's none of my affair, but do you think it wise, Mr. Fletcher? After all, Shea is an experienced jockey and this Wilcox boy——"

"I'm playing a hunch," said Johnny. "I'm new at this racket and the kid's new and I thought—well, you know, a hunch is a hunch."

"Hunches are over-rated, Mr. Fletcher," said the steward. "But it's your funeral. Mmm, I don't think it'll really make much difference. Your horse is running in a hard race."

"That's the way Ulysses likes them. If it wasn't for the fog—"

"Yes, of course. Beastly. You can't even see the horses on the track."

Leaving the steward's office, Johnny and Sam descended to the parimutuel room.

There Sam made his great stand. "Johnny, I won't let you bet all that money on Ulysses."

"What do you mean, you won't *let* me?"

"Just that. Thirteen hundred bucks is a lot of dough to us. Anything can happen."

"What? It's too late to change things. The money's down on the nags and Willie isn't going to let anything happen."

"But the kid, he's green."

"In this race I could ride Ulysses and win. Oh-oh!"

Willie Pipett, flanked by his two boys, stepped out from behind a knot of racing enthusiasts. "Ah, Mr. Fletcher. And Mr. Cragg!" Pipett said smoothly. "What brings you gentlemen to the races?"

Lefty leered at Johnny. Arnie smirked. Willie Pipett stepped up close and slapped Johnny on the shoulder. "That's a great horse of yours, Mr. Fletcher. He's quoted at fifty to one right this moment. I suppose you were just about to bet some money on him."

"Yeah, sure," said Johnny. "I always bet on my horse. Not much, you know. Just a little."

"Thirteen hundred," Pipett said in a whisper, then raising his voice, "a small bet just to make it interesting." Then in an undertone, "Get that money down, Fletcher, or you'll be sorry. I know what you did to Shea." Loudly, "Ah, they're coming out now with the horses."

Pipett placed his hand, which contained two rings, on Johnny's shoulder and then pushed him lightly in the general direction of the windows. Arnie and Lefty crowded close and before he realized it, Johnny was at the $100 window.

"Ulysses," he said to the seller.

"How many?"

"Thirteen," Pipett whispered.

"Thirteen," said Johnny and pulled out his entire roll of bills. He counted off the money and noted that there was less than eighty dollars left.

"Thirteen hundred to win," said the ticket seller and rolled his eyes. "On Ulysses, No. 5."

Gripping the parimutuel tickets in his fist, Johnny turned away. He was promptly flanked by Arnie and Lefty, while Pipett fell in behind with Sam Cragg.

In formation they marched to the rail on the club house veranda. Johnny looked in the direction of the track and let out a gasp of astonishment. Save for a strip directly ahead, the track was invisible!

Not even the stretch would have been visible if a huge searchlight from the upper floor of the club house had not been turned directly on the track. The beam of light cut the fog to a width of about forty feet and was just strong enough to show up the "tote" board in the infield. The odds were posted in electric lights and were therefore visible.

Johnny looked at them. Lester Leech was quoted at 2 to 1, Brownie at 8 to 5, Matilda M. 8 to 1, and Blue Silver 5 to 1. At the bottom, represented by No. 5, Ulysses was rated at 45 to 1. And then, even as Johnny was looking, the lights on the board flickered out and new odds went up. They read:

Lester Leech	12/5
Brownie	2
Blue Silver	6
Matilda M.	12
Ulysses	16

"Not bad," Willie Pipett remarked. "The play on the favorites is pretty heavy. I thought Ulysses might go lower, but that's good. You stand to make a lot of money, Fletcher."

"Swell," murmured Johnny.

"The horses are at the post," a voice blared over the loudspeaker system.

"Where?" asked Sam.

"Screwiest race I even saw," muttered Arnie. "We'll be able to see the finish and that's all. Gee, what could happen in that fog!"

"Nothing could happen, Arnie," Willie Pipett said, calmly. "That Sonny is a good rider. He got more out of Ulysses this morning than Pat Shea ever got out of him."

"They're off!" cried the loudspeaker, in conjunction with the clanging of a bell.

"They're off!" repeated several thousand throats.

DESPITE his apprehension, Johnny Fletcher gripped the rail and leaned forward.

The bedlam of the spectators immediately around them muffled the hoofbeats of the horses, but suddenly the animals burst into the forty-foot strip of visibility.

Ulysses was a full length ahead of the field!

"Ulysses by a length," droned the announcer on the loudspeaker. "Lester Leech second by a head. Matilda M. close, Blue Silver and Brownie a half length in the rear."

That was all.

The horses thundered into the fog and were invisible. For a moment, a stunned silence fell upon the thousands in the grandstands. They had witnessed the phenomenon in the first race but the novelty had not yet worn off.

Somewhere a woman laughed hysterically. An unseen male voice cursed roundly and then yells and catcalls went up all around. Individual voices called loudly for their favorite horses, and in a moment or two the din went on full blast. "Come on, Lester Leech. Brownie! Lester Leech! Brownie!"

And no one could see the horses.

But all sensed the rising tension. By now the horses were in the back stretch, now they were in the turn, now they were in the home stretch. They must be. Lester Leech, Brownie, Matilda M., Lester Leech, Brownie, Les—

Four horses hurtled out of the fog into the stretch of light. Four horses, no five —four with jockeys and one riderless.

Ulysses was the riderless horse.

"Holy St. Patrick," whispered Willie Pipett. "Holy St. Patrick of Ireland—"

Screams, yells, cries of anguish.

4

2

1

The lights flashed on the tote board in that order. Translated, they indicated that Matilda M. had won, with Brownie placing and Lester Leech third.

Ulysses had finished the race but lost his jockey.

Trembling, Johnny turned and touched Sam Cragg. "Something's happened to Sonny. Let's——"

Sam whirled. "We gotta find out!"

He slammed Arnie into Lefty, upsetting the latter against Willie Pipett. Before the unholy trio recovered, Johnny was taking the stairs going down and Sam was bringing up the rear.

They didn't stop until they had reached the ground level. Diving into the throng of racing fans, they forced their way to the runway leading to the track. They scaled a fence and at that moment, Sonny Wilcox came staggering into the lighted area.

His face was bleeding from a cut on his forehead, and he carried a small horseshoe in his hand.

He saw Johnny Fletcher at once. "Mr. Fletcher," he cried, tearfully. "Ulysses threw a shoe. I was two lengths ahead coming into the stretch, and he threw a shoe. He stumbled and I—I couldn't help it. I fell off."

The boy's anguish was too much for Johnny. He had been thinking of mayhem. But now he reached out and patted Sonny on the back. "It's all right, Sonny. Couldn't be helped, I suppose."

"But I can't understand it," sobbed the boy. "Why should Ulysses throw a shoe now?"

"Eh?"

"Wilbur's supposed to go over Ulysses before a race."

"Yeah," said Johnny, thoughtfully. "That's right."

A hostler came out of the mist, riding one horse and leading Ulysses. "Here's your mount, Sonny," he called.

"Take him in, said Johnny. "No—wait a minute."

He stepped up to Ulysses but backed away as the horse shied. Sonny caught him and then Johnny ventured closer. But he did not quite dare to stoop to examine the hoofs.

Sam Cragg was breathing over Johnny's shoulders. "The right front foot," he said.

"Pick it up, Sam."

Sam started forward, then backed into Johnny. "Me monkey with a horse's foot? Don't be silly."

"He isn't going to kick you."

"If you're so sure, you pick it up."

JOHNNY compromised. He took the reins from Sonny and the apprentice-jockey stooped and touched Ulysses' fetlock. The animal raised his foot.

"Nail's torn right out," Sonny exclaimed. "One bent over and still stuck in. Lucky he didn't step it down into the soft part. It looks like the shoe was loose."

"Let me see it."

Johnny took the shoe from Sonny's hand. A bent nail clung to it. He shook his head.

"Well, that's the breaks of the game."

Sonny Wilcox sniffled again. "My first race. Now, I'll never get another mount."

"Oh, yes you will."

"You mean you'd let me ride Ulysses again?"

"Why not?"

"Gosh! I'll win the next time, I promise you, Mr. Fletcher. I'll win with Ulysses. He's a great horse. We were running away from the field all the time. Of course, I couldn't see them very well, but I could hear them and whenever they'd come too close I'd just let Ulysses out a little more and he'd walk away from them. He's the greatest horse I ever rode."

And the only one, Johnny thought. He patted Sonny on the shoulder again. Then Sam struck Johnny with his palm.

"Johnny!"

Johnny turned and stared at the advancing trio. Only for a moment. The set of Willie Pipett's face, the sneer on Lefty's, caused Johnny to shiver.

"Let's go, Sam!"

"Wait a minute, you!" cried Willie Pipett.

But Johnny and Sam were not the sort to wait for certain death. They leaped into the fog bank and ran at headlong speed to the tunnel leading to the stables. There, they made a right turn into the grandstand, raced through it, and left the club house.

Johnny was tempted to head for the station wagon on the parking lot but did not quite dare.

Lefty and Arnie knew where he had parked it.

They headed for the street.

(*Part III in the Next* SHORT STORIES)

THE MAN WITH THE COWL

By GEORGE BRUCE MARQUIS

Author of "The Crook of an Eyebrow" and Other Bat Jennison Stories

"THAT widow woman is sure roosting out on the end of a mighty thin limb."

"That's surely a very undignified pose for a lady."

"Who said she was a lady?"

Three cryptic sentences came floating out of the shadows to the ears of Bat Jennison, eavesdropper without interest and without intent. Nor did the rustling passage of feet near at hand stir him beyond the minor exertion of turning his head a few degrees. Out of the darkness that swathed him about, two men materialized, crossed the dusty street and entered the saloon. Limned so, he noted idly that one was tall, the other short and that the short man was wider than the tall. This observation recorded, Jennison returned at ease.

For a month past he had competed languidly with the wind "that bloweth where it listeth." Without plan and unabashed by its absence, he had drifted as purposeless as a chip on a meandering, unhurried stream and as carefree. So it

Anyone Who Works for a Buzzard Oughta Get Treated Hard

chanced that his pony had paced him near sundown into a tiny cattle town called Lilac. Doubtless some facetious roisterer had dubbed it Lilac or some mild-mannered madman. Certain it was that the only bushes here were wild rose, if sagebrush be held a contradiction in terms.

As the soft night fell, he had found a seat on a velvety bed of yard grass, where kindly chance had made of a boulder a natural Morris chair. So with his back to the rock and his pipe drawing well, he had continued his pleasing task of nothing doing. At his back, across the narrow street lay the little town, just now as peaceful as the starlit sky. By times a light breeze pranked with his hair, or passed on to whisper airy nothings to the drowsy rose bushes. And then his Eden was invaded by three mystic sentences and two intruding men. The men passed, but the words remained to vex him. He had reached the end of his month-long siesta.

Presently he arose and followed the pair into the saloon. The room was small with a ten-foot bar at one side. At the inner end of the bar, elbows parked on its splintery top were two men holding a tight-lipped conversation with the owner of the saloon. A glance their way showed them tall and short, wide and wider and so identifying them to Jennison as the two recent disturbers of his peace. Cowmen they were by every sign, both well past the cream puff stage, too. When the thin sallow faced saloonman had served him, Jennison crossed the untidy floor and sat down on a bench whose back slanted to touch the side wall.

He had a companion on that bench with a dead pipe clamped in his thick jaws, a frosty-eyed oldster whose inspection was coldly critical rather than unfriendly. But when Jennison drew out a flinty plug of smoking tobacco and began to shave off tiny flakes for his own brier, the ancient relaxed with the flat statement,

"Men who smoke Randall's Plug Cuts are usually genuine he men."

"True fur yours, dad," Bat Jennison chuckled. "I notice your pipe's out. Here, try a thimbleful of this."

"Sure will," the other accepted. "I came off without my tobacco. A hell of a way for a storekeeper to act."

"Town's kinda quiet tonight," Jennison made the obvious remark as the other tamped his charge home and lighted it.

"T'ain't always so," gray beard countered. "Freighters pulling through to and from the mines camp here a lot and we're on the through stage road. Also I've seen the town cluttered up one time or another with pack trains and miners with jackasses till you couldn't rest for their braying. Of course I mean the jackasses."

"And cowboys," this with a nod toward the bar.

"Kinda," said the other with a curl of the upper lip. After a moment he continued. "The tall redhead, Judas Pepper's his name, bought a cattle ranch out here a few miles, a couple of months ago. He ain't a natural cowman. He's new at *that* game. The sawed-off is Hasp McBibb, his foreman. The saloonman who came at the same time is Webb Sands and I'm Sam Brown."

"And whilst it don't make no particular diffrunce," Jennison obliged, "I'm Bat Jennison. I gather you don't kelter much to Mr. Pepper and Company."

Brown did not answer in words. Instead he picked up three burned matches from the floor, laid them side by side on his big palm, then dropped them to the floor and ground them beneath his heel.

"I git it," Jennison nodded. "All alike, all *kultus* (no good) and should oughta be scrunched. Well, I hope somebody so does."

"Well, I ain't going to stop that blessed deed," Brown said grimly.

HOW far Brown would have gone in his exposition of Pepper's negative values, Jennison was not to learn for that possible item of interest was sidetracked

by the entry of another man. Though young to boyishness, his springy step gave evidence of supple strength, his uptilted chin of aggressive resolution and courage. Yet when he had stepped inside and his eyes had taken in the trio hovered over the inner end of the bar, he had halted. Momentarily only, as Jennison had noted with satisfaction. Then he had walked on resolutely till his hand rested on the bar. And while the sallow bartender made pretense that he did not see the prospective customer, Jennison knew otherwise and his annoyance grew with the palpable slight. His resentment was on tiptoe toward a tangible expression but the youngster forestalled it. White with rage, he smacked his fist down on the counter.

"Damn't, Webb," he called out sharply, "I want a drink!"

The three consultants turned amused eyes on the stripling. Then the tall redhead committed a major error, for sweeping off his Stetson with a grand flourish, he bowed profoundly toward the boy.

"Well if it ain't little Herby," he sneered, "squawking for a sarsaparilla! Webb, why don't you take care of the children?"

Now Pepper's error did not lie in the bow nor in the insolent words. It was in displaying what the hat had concealed. From upper rim of left ear to upper rim of right, Pepper's forehead was banded with red, a solid crimson smear revealed now by the doffing of his Stetson. A birthmark of loathsome proportions, it covered the entire skull, a skin cowl of fiery red. Once seen, it would not be forgotten. Among abnormalities, it would hold high rank. For the moment, however, Jennison merely stowed it among other mental curios warehoused in his capacious memory, for Brown had whispered tersely, "McBibb's the gunman. He's the larky to watch."

And it was McBibb who continued the baiting. Stepping away from the bar so that his holstered guns swung freely, he drawled, "Herby, it's a sugar tit you need. You're not weaned yet. Webb will fix you up one."

"I sure will," the saloonman whooped. "Tear me off a piece of his shirt tail while I get the sugar."

"Hold up onto that said tearin' till further orders! Also, Herb, don't you make no fool moves." Jennison had intervened.

He moved swiftly without giving the impression at all of haste. He had just stood up when he uttered the first sentence, he was two paces in advance of the boy as he ended his sage advice. Not very formidable at a first glance was Bat Jennison. But the second might prove more educative, a certainty if the observer were versed in gunman lore. Yes. That cold level glance, the cat-like poise, the two Colt's .45s, with tie strings now floating loose, carried a volume of instruction to the initiated.

"Damned cowardly bullies, I hates," he stated dispassionately, almost reflectively. "You three buzzards would have a lot of fun teasin' a chipmunk caught in a steel trap. You'd laugh yourselves sick abusin' a four-year-old youngen, 'specially so if he was lost and blind and crippled. Well, I ain't lost, nor blind nor crippled. S'pose you hector *me* for a change."

There they had it, square in their teeth. He had impugned their courage, their ethics, their social code. He had relegated them to the category of obscene birds, carrion minded. There were three of them, all intrepid, bold and seasoned men and yet they hesitated to accept this lone man's challenge. Perhaps if it had been boisterous, their reactions would have been different. But that low voiced, uninflected way of marshaling their delinquencies was far more repressive to belligerent retort than blustering threats could ever be. Conceivably there was still another, more cogent reason. So when Pepper spoke, it was with a semi-olive branch in his hand, but not a white flag.

"That's hard talk, stranger," he smiled faintly, "but maybe we earned it. Being

an outsider, you read the wrong meaning into what we figger as joking. We didn't mean the boy any harm. That's the facts, stranger and you'll have to take it or leave it, I reckon."

There was dignity in the explanation and plausibility, too. The rough ways of many men were not Jennison's ways and yet no man had more charity for the viewpoint of others than had he. Jokes he appreciated hugely, but they must not be tainted with cruelty, nor predicated upon physical weakness, nor use for their butts, the mentally dwarfed. So he did not press the status of the explanation, though he qualified his acceptance.

"Should the facts tally up as you've set 'em out, consider my words as unsaid."

The case was closed, the three renewed their conference while Jennison turned about to find that the nub of the contest was gone. Yet at his apparent desertion, Jennison registered no criticism. He was after all but a boy, plainly not a gunman and the odds had been heavy until Jennison intervened. So excusing the boy, Jennison returned to the bench and the admiring storekeeper.

"Neatest call down I ever heard," Brown beamed, "and I've seen a lot."

"Well," Jennison grinned, "sometimes a bluff does work."

"Bluff hell!" Brown derided. "That wasn't a bluff. You tied a knot in their tails at the jump off. And, of course, what Pepper said was a damned lie."

"I figgered it so," Jennison told him. "But I'd got the boy off a kinda hot spot and that was the main thing. Should I a-shouldered in any further, I'd a looked like a bully myself."

"Not a doubt there," Brown agreed, though he added regretfully, "I'm sorry just the same that they didn't back their play."

"Mebby they didn't have their fightin' clothes on tonight," Jennison speculated idly.

"They had 'em on all right," Brown maintained, "but not with you. They're a tough thieving bunch. Anybody that will rob a widow is just stable trash, nothing else. That was her boy they were baiting. Don't think hard of him for pulling out. He's a fine lad."

"I sure ain't holdin' it agin him," Jennison said generously. "He probable had something to do that took him off. He didn't act scared and I bet he wasn't."

Brown looked at his watch, then got up from the bench.

"Stage pulled in from Shannon a few minutes back," he announced, "and they were to bring me a caddy of smoking tobacco. Guess I'd better run up and see if they forgot it again. Want to come along?"

"Reckon I had," Jennison chuckled. "Might git hurt if I stuck around here."

The stage stand was a few doors up the street, a semi-hotel just beyond. Lilac was, strictly speaking, a road buttressed by buildings on one side only. The through stage was swinging away on its all night run as the two men reached the stand. The caddy of smoking tobacco had arrived this time and Brown prepared to lug it on to his store. He had even invited Jennison to go along and Jennison had accepted when the youngster of the saloon incident appeared.

"The reason I beat it out of the saloon," he explained in an eager embarrassed way, "was because the stage pulled in just then and I knew my mother was on it. You see now how it was, don't you?"

"Sure I do," Jennison told him. "We knowed you wasn't scared and jest skedaddled."

"That's sure white of you," the boy said warmly. "I appreciate what you did and I'd be proud to shake hands with you. My name's Herbert Mortimer."

"Mine's Bat Jennison. Glad to know you, Herbert."

Brown, the burden bearer, eased the caddy to the ground as he asked:

"You say your ma came in on the stage, Herb? Where's she now?"

"At the hotel," the boy answered. "I've got the buckboard over at the hitchrack. We're pulling out for the ranch right away."

"Herb," Brown suggested suddenly, "take me and Mr. Jennison over to see her. I've a notion she needs to talk to a man like him."

"I'd be tickled to death if Mr. Jennison will do it," the boy said quickly.

"I ain't no shucks with women," Jennison shied away hastily. "Mebby you'd best excuse me."

"You never met a finer," was Brown's earnest reply. "Nor one who needed help more. These damned crooks are stealing that widow's ranch I tell you. Let's you and me team up against 'em."

"All right," Jennison capitulated. "But what are you goin' to do with that caddy of smoking tobacco? You've hoisted it up and down a half dozen times in so many minutes."

"I'm leaving the damned thing set," Brown chuckled. "It's only worth forty dollars anlyway."

MRS. MORTIMER set off the dingy hotel office like a queen in a long neglected throne room. Even by the light of the untrimmed lamp it was clear that she had been beautiful. Now gray haired, with lines of care and trouble yet there was iron in the set of her firm chin and courage in her brown eyes.

Her boy said, "Mother, this is Mr. Jennison, the man I told you about."

Jennison fumbled off his hat as Mrs. Mortimer held out a firm brown hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Jennison," she said simply. "You probably saved my boy's life."

"Ma'am," Jennison put it by lightly, "they probable were just funnin'. But I figgered they'd piled it on a might too heavy."

"They weren't funning," Brown disputed flatly. "They're out to get her cows and ranch, foul or fair. For days now they've been moving heaven and earth to force Mrs. Mortimer to sell her cows for a third of their worth right when cattle are bound to double in price. You see the government is opening up a new Injun reservation that will take all the spare beef in this country."

"That's not all," Mrs. Mortimer added when Brown had ground out his grist of wrath. "Herbert tells me that they've shut off my water."

"The hell you say!" Brown swore angrily. Then he stopped. "Excuse me, Mrs. Mortimer for the cuss words. But just what do you mean?"

"You know where my creek branches off from that main stream up on Pepper's

range. They've put a dam in there. It leaves my range without water."

"I reckon then," Jennison said briskly, "we've gotta remove that said dam. Got any powder out your way?"

"Sure have," the boy nodded. "We planned once to blow out a bigger basin for our spring, but never got around to it."

"Lucky you didn't," Jennison declared. "Any fuse and caps?"

"Fifty feet of fuse," the boy informed him, "and plenty of caps."

"Finer than frog whiskers," Bat Jennison asseretd. "Well, I figger we'd best be movin'. How fur is it to your ranch?"

"About twelve miles," Mrs. Mortimer answered. "And I don't know how to thank you."

"Ma'am," Jennison said quaintly, "hold onto them said thanks till we've finished up and completed. I'll ramble up and git my pony and dunnage frum the feed corral, then we'll start."

Jennison and Brown left together. Before the deserted stage stand the storekeeper again picked up the caddy of to-

bacco and brought it without further desertions to his store. Here the two parted with the assurance that Brown would be out in the morning. Getting his pony and baggage was a matter of but a few minutes and now reins in hand, Jennison led Sunflower back toward the hotel.

He had gone only a few yards from the feed barn when the serenity of his reflections was violently shattered. From across the tiny creek had come three shots whose low blossoming origin proved that the gunners lay flat on the ground to limn him against the faint sky glow. His reaction was instant and in the groove of long experience. Drawing both pistols he sowed the immediate vicinity of the pistoleers with lead seed, not planted without design, but painstakingly after the manner of a careful husbandman. A muffled yell rewarded his good deed, then there was the scurrying of retreat and a moment later the drum of hoof beats. The enemy had departed.

Prudent man that he was, Jennison had not emptied his pistols, yet he reloaded the empty chambers before he stirred from the spot. Then Brown came charging out from his store, a rifle in his hands volleying questions as he ran.

"I heard shooting," he puffed. "Did you get hit?"

"Nope," Jennison assured him, "though one slug rannied by close enough fur me to smell it. Three men bushwhacked me, then tooled away."

"Three," Brown computed candidates for the dubious honor. "They'd be Pepper and McBibb, of course—"

Jennison pointed down the street.

"The saloon's dark, Mr. Brown. Let's jest add Sands to complete the count. Well, I reckon we'd best mosey on. Also I figger we'd best fudge a little with the widder about this. Tell her fur instance that we was jest tryin' out our guns or some such similar trifle. And there's one other thing I want to ask you before we git to the hotel. I gather that Pepper's ranch and the widder's are both in a genrul east direction frum here. Do they both travel the same road out of town?

"Only for a mile or so," Brown explained. "Then Pepper takes off on a left fork up a cut-in canyon. The widow's road runs straight ahead. I see what you're driving at. But my guess is they've learned enough about you to do them tonight."

"They mebby have," Jennison conceded, "but then they mebby hain't. Anyway, I'll keep an eye out."

THE buckboard with passenger list complete waited before the door of the hotel. Jennison unfolded his limber tale which the widow doubted in silence and the twelve-mile trip was begun by the light of the moon that had just topped the distant mountain wall. Jennison rode well in advance until they had by-passed the fork in the road which debouched toward Pepper's ranch. And he had traveled with his Winchester across the pommel of his saddle. This handy place of ambush passed, he slid the rifle back into its scabbard and waited for the buckboard to overtake him.

Now pacing the front wheel at the driver's side, his tongue kept tally with the whirling spokes. He knew his West and was a master teller of tales. So now from a treasury stored by a faultless memory he marshaled his stories. Chronicles of big adventure, deeds of superb daring, sagas of heroic sacrifice, sidesplitting anecdotes spiked with many a jest and quip. And they were at the ranch.

"Mr. Jennison," the widow declared when she had climbed down from the buckboard, "I feel ten years younger than when I left town. I don't believe I ever had any troubles. You must tell me again about Sandy McLoon and old man Peddy. That's the best story I've ever heard in all my life. And those other men, your partners, Doctor Levitt and Whispering Thompson! What men they were."

She was on holy ground.

"Ma'am," Jennison said gently, "when The Almighty made some humans, he throwed away the molds."

Near the house was a fine stretch of grass, feed for the horse and mattress for the master. With Sunflower staked out and his blankets unrolled, Jennison lay down with his saddle for a pillow. The busy croppings of his beloved pony were telegraphed along the ground, messages of contentment and good will. Jennison smiled, yet he did not linger on the thought. The widow's troubles were far too pressing for that. The odds were great, but he had a genius for making odds even. To this task he set his able mind.

They could blow up the dam and release water for her cattle. They would in fact, but that was but a temporary relief. The creek ran through his land and the dam would be rebuilt. She had but her son and one other man, while Pepper mustered a dozen, all hard tough men according to Brown. No. Temporary expedients must be replaced by permanent. And now the way was made apparent, a double-barreled remedy that quirked Jennison's lips into a happy grin. For out of the past had come prancing a certain fact, garnered and stored against this hour of need by his card-indexing memory. Five minutes later he was asleep.

Early risers were these frontiersmen without need of presidential decree to push the clock in reverse. Breakfast was on the kitchen table long before sunup, a substantial meal more than equivalent to present citified formal dinners. Here Bat Jennison met the other member of the Mortimer crew, a long solemn chap named Bob, who had been with them for several years. With Jennison it was one thing at a time and he gave himself with unbending seriousness to the food. But with this pleasure ended, he pushed back from the table.

"Ma'am," he announced modestly, "I believe I've figgered out the proper medicine fur this Pepper man and also the way of dosage. Now if I'm wrong onto the facts, put me right. Fust then. Your deceased husband was the earliest cattleman in this country?"

"Yes," Mrs. Mortimer said with pride. "He drove a few head in here over ten years ago. A year later a man named Bowles followed. Judge Pepper bought him out less than three months ago."

"So your husband had the water frum this crick a year before Bowles arrived here. And whilst Bowles squatted on land that took in the place where your crick splits off, he never tried to hog the water! Nor ever set up a claim to it?"

"Never," she declared with spirit. "Mr. Bowles and my husband were the best of friends and after my husband died, he helped me in many ways."

"Well then," Jennison deduced triumphantly, "we've got that Pepper buzzard where the hair's shortest. I'll tell you how. On account of the undoubted fact that your husband had that water outen dispute or hindrance fur ten years, give him and you now a solid right to it furever more. Now I ain't no lawyer, but I don't hafta be to know that. Matter of fact, if I don't disremember, it only takes *seven* years so you've got three years over. Nope. Pepper can't hold that water."

"But he's got it," the widow reminded him practically. "Even if he's no right to it, the dam's in and he's guarding it. How can we make him tear out the dam?"

"We're goin' to do it fur him presently," Jennison said comfortably. "But as fur stoppin' him frum repeatin', that's up to the law. You've gotta go to Lewiston and see Judge Travis, the federal judge thar. He'll send the federal marshal, Hill Beechey, out with a paper called mandamn-us which 'ill put a solid quietus onto Pepper."

"But I just came back from Lewiston," she said in dismay. "It's a two day and night trip from Lilac."

"Notwithstandin' and in spite of that, Ma'am," Jennison insisted firmly, "you've

gotta repeat. Thar 'ill be papers and so forth to sign and nobody can do it but you. And I figger you oughta back trail fur Lewiston this very morning. We're goin' to git your cows water, but we cain't be blowin' up dams frum now on till kingdom come. Yep, I misdoubt but you're done bound to so do."

"All right," she capitulated, "of course I'll go."

"I knew you would," Jennison nodded. "And I figger you'd best have Bob drive you to Lilac. I want Herb to show me the lay of things here. Also I want a pencil and a piece of most any kind of paper. I want to send a letter to Hill Beechey, the marshal."

The buckboard had scarcely gone before Brown arrived from Lilac, bulging with news. Just before leaving town, he had run into the saloonkeeper, Webb Sands.

"And," he added impressively, "Sands lost a strip of hide from the side of his face and that recent. Damned near half as wide as your finger."

"Musta bit himself recent," Jennison commented.

"That's what he said," Brown relayed. "No, I mean snagged himself on a nail. But if I don't miss my guess, that snag was a *bullet!*"

"Well," Jennison said dryly, "that barkeep oughta stay in his saloon. Night walkin' sometimes is highly dangrus. And now since you're here, I reckon Herb and me had best git our hosses, then we'll all shy 'round a bit."

They followed up the little creek which ran between the house and barnlot. Except at flood time, it would scarcely average three feet wide and six inches deep. The banks were generally uniform, rather over than under four feet high. Soil here was shallow and the bed of the stream in the main was solid rock. Though the stream had been blocked by the dam for two days now, some water still stood in the lower portions of the bed. But already it was growing fetid and the cattle crowding down to these shallow pools, sniffed at it doubtfully. The largest of the pools was scarcely a hundred yards from the house. Here a solid barrier of basalt, a foot high had impounded the water, backing it a dozen yards or so upstream. On either side of this natural dam, projected up elbows of solid rock. Anchorage for a man-made dam was there almost at their doorstep. Jennison stopped and pointed it out.

"We can build a little dam of our own," he explained, "and catch ourselves some water when we run out Pepper's dam. That'll take care of the cow brutes fur a few days and after that we won't be needin' it."

An hour of leisurely traveling brought them to the boundary of the Mortimer range. Upstream half a mile or so was a clump of willows hugging the bank of the creek. Herb jerked an angry thumb toward the clump.

"There's where Pepper's men are camped," he exploded. "The crick forks just beyond that brush and there's where the dam is."

Jennison studied the lay of the land with care, then renewed the scrutiny with the aid of his field glasses. At length he returned them to his *cantinas.*

"I reckon," he remarked, "we'd best git back to *our* dam."

THE construction of the dam was simple. Two logs were laid crosswise the stream, wedged in at the ends against the basalt buttresses. Other shorter sections of logs were braced from the bed of the stream and supported at the top against the two restraining logs. The body of the dam was completed with hay ballasted in place by rock and dirt. And all was finished by the time Bob had returned from Lilac. A trained engineer might have queried the co-efficient of safety, but then these men were not trained engineers.

They did one other thing before night. The canister of black powder was brought

out and inspected, then the roll of fuse. A detonating cap was crimped solidly over one end of the fuse and the cap embedded firmly in the powder. Barring exigencies beyond human forethought, they were ready for the night's venture.

Well before moonrise, the four men were within a guessable distance of two hundred yards of the Pepper camp. Here they all dismounted, for Jennison and Brown would now proceed on foot, leaving the disgruntled Herb and Bob to guard the horses. Surprise was the very essence of success and a mistimed whinny might well betray them. The willows grew in a flattened ellipse with a camp fire in the center. It was a lusty fire proved by a steady upward parade of sparks. As they stood there by their horses, some one at the camp fire raised his voice in an alleged song. Jennison smiled grimly at the melody punishing sound. There were reputed to be one hundred verses in that lachrymose lay. Jennison doubted that the wailer would finish it.

Despite the raucous clamor, they approached the camp with care. In slow-footed time they were very near, close enough that once when the volunteer songster paused for breath, Jennison heard distinctly the plop of an overcharge of spittle. Now he signaled Brown to halt while he moved silently up to the rim of the tree clump. Seeing without being seen, he made his critical survey and mapped out his final plans. The setting was better than he could have hoped and for his purposes perfect. The four men formed a semi-circle on the opposite side of the fire and they sat at ease. Drawing both his pistols, he inched on to a natural break in the brush utilized by them as a pathway. So it came about that when they first glimpsed him, he faced them over the camp fire his pistols appearing to each man to be covering him with unpleasant individual directness. His crisp commands seemed all but superfluous.

They were brave men, but they were not that brave. Four pairs of hands shot skyward. And now he proceeded to disarm them in that thoroughly orthodox way devised and patented by experienced Western peace officers.

"Boys," he advised without bluster, "don't make no mistakes fur they'll be costly. Listen close to what I say and do it as said. You on the end thar," and that very personal gun seemed to take on new personality, "drop your hands slow and unhook your gun-belt. Kerrect. Now toss it gently but firmly outen temptation. Jest right. Now relax, but don't try no spurious moves. I'm watchin'."

One by one he disarmed them, then Brown who had appeared, gathered up the discarded pistols and added their rifles to form a considerable arsenal. Cached well beyond the possibility of reaching, Jennison proceeded as by rote.

"You boys," he remarked, "probable is just average men, no better and no worse. But you work fur a buzzard and I've gotta treat you harder than I want to. I ain't aimin' you should carry the word to Pepper too soon. I know you ain't got no hosses here and I know, also, it's five miles to his place. You'll walk that said five miles and you'll walk it sock footed. Be draggin' off of them there boots!"

"Hell!" one of them protested violently, "there's rocks and bull nettles and cockle burrs, to say nothing of rattlers. I wouldn't make a dog do it."

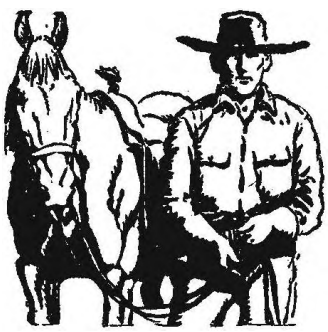
"I wouldn't neither," Jennison concurred, "but then a dog wouldn't be workin' fur Jude Pepper. Off with them boots! The moon's jest peepin' up and she'll give you plenty of light to run round them said bull nettles et celery, if you ain't in too much of a hurry."

Still bitterly lamenting, the four obeyed and presently were plodding gingerly away.

Jennison hallooed Bob and Herb forward, then turned to the inspection of the dam. It was not particularly formidable, but at that did its work well. At the place where the creek forked, it was not over

ten feet wide, yet it shallowed and pronged into two branches each of about the same width. The point of division was furnished by a low short bench of basalt. The inner end of the dam was anchored to this basalt apron, the other end buttressed by some boulders and a handy thorn tree. To blow out the dam was a simple job, but Jennison decided to do better than that. By the time he had matured his plans, the other two men had arrived with their horses.

The canister of black powder with its well embedded fuse was placed solidly against the base of the fin of basalt that formed the division wier and weighed down well with boulders and loose rock. Next the fuse was strung along the top of the dam and out upon dry ground. With his pocket knife, Jennison sawed through



the fuse, leaving a short twenty feet attached to their home-made bomb. Little now remained but to touch a match to the fuse. However, that pleasure must wait briefly.

First the sequestered weapons must be slung to his companion's saddles and the horses led away to a safe distance. That distance was problematical, but Jennison guessed a couple of hundred yards would answer. That done, he scratched a match along his boot leg and set the robust flame to the fuse. It hung fire for a half dozen heart-beats then took brisk hold of the powder train. When the steadily jetting sparks proved that the tunneling was proceeding according to schedule, he trotted to his horse, climbed quickly into the saddle and galloped toward his anxious companions.

Time that was in reality brief, seemed very long. Then a geyser of flame and smoke erupted starward, bearing fragments of boulders, gravel and sand and the shredded detritus that had been the dam. A split second later came a roaring crash, followed presently by a rain of debris, then the air cleared and they hurried back to exult over their work.

It was something of which to be proud. The dam had been blown into oblivion and the water already was gurgling down its deserted channel. It was even better than that. The barrier reef itself had been ripped half away. Jennison noted it with huge satisfaction.

"The widder is gittin' moren her share of the water right now," he nodded. "But then she didn't git none fur four days. That makes it even, I figger."

"What do we do next?" Brown asked the practical question.

"We'll go back home," Jennison answered. "I'd figgered diffrunt, anyway fur myself, but this blowout has changed it. She's about three miles and the way this crick's humpin' of itself, the lead water will be ticklin' our dam inside an hour. And because we've tapped Pepper's crick, also, we'll have water and to spare by daylight. Let's mosy homewards. We'll likely run into something down thar comes morning."

"Don't you think that they'll go to work on the dam the first thing?" Bob asked.

"I've gotta hunch they won't," Jennison answered. "When them dam guarders limp into camp, I figger Pepper'll have a swift rise in temperature. He'll likely go straight to Headquarters, which means us. He's a dangrus man, a killer and a top notch gunner and not short on nerve. Yep, we'll be seein' him."

"How can you say he's a killer and so forth," Brown demanded.

"Hell!" Jennison hurdled the flat question. "His eyes, his crooked grin, his easy

way, tells me that jest as sure as if I'd knowed him fur a lifetime."

Like a general born, Jennison laid out his plans and like a general born, he found unquestioning cooperation. His was a natural gift, raised to a completed art through years of grueling experience with the west in her most turbulent moods. So these men back now at the Mortimer ranchhouse, listened and acquiesced in his judgment as he outlined the future probabilities and set out a course for them to follow.

"As I've done told you," he said earnestly, "we're dealin' with a hard, cold-blooded thug, who's also smart as he's dangrus. My guess is he won't know about the blowin' of the dam in time to make any moves till daylight. But we can't know that fur sure, so we've gotta keep a watch out. She's now crowdin' twelve o'clock. I want Bob to stand guard till two, then he's to call me. By three I'll call Herb so as he can rally us up some grub. Full daylight comes by four and by then we've gotta eat and be ready fur visitors. Should they not come, well and good, if they do, we'll be ready to welcome 'em proper. Let's hit our blankets."

By four o'clock, the men were ready. A substantial breakfast had been eaten with the usual pioneer haste, their arms, including the miniature arsenal contributed by Pepper's men, had been inspected and placed in handiest reaching distance. The dam had been looked over and found without fault. The impounded water had backed up for several hundred yards and the overflow had already found an outlet over a natural spillway of bedrock some distance upstream from the dam. The creek was lined with cattle, sucking up greedily the sweet, fresh water. Yes, things were looking up at the Mortimer cattle ranch.

To the north and so toward Pepper's ranch, the ground sloped up gently from the creek, showing a skyline a good quarter of a mile from the Mortimer doorstep. On this skyline Jennison kept his eye and presently his watch bore fruit. A clump of horsemen had come into view, moving in a compact group toward the creek. Not racing at headlong speed, but deliberately, purposefully, as if they had but to complete at their leisure plans long and well matured. A squint through his glasses told Jennison that they were Pepper riders, seven in number with Pepper and his foreman a length in the lead. Jennison turned to his three men to announce quietly:

"Boys, Pepper and his men have jest topped the rise beyond the barn. Keep out of sight and don't make no moves 'less I tell you. You can watch 'em I reckon, outen bein' seen."

WINCHESTER in hand he watched that ominous advance until but twice the length of a football field intervened between him and the horsemen. It was close enough for conversation out there on the unvexed range and he craved conversation. Tossing his rifle to his shoulder he fired, levered in another shell and fired again so swiftly that the sound of the second shot tripped hard on the heels of the first. And he fired according to plan, just above the heads respectively of the leader and his lieutenant, near enough to warn by the hissing sound, yet far enough away to inform them that this time the nearby air had been his deliberate target. It was a message that needed no amplification to be understood. The men as one pulled their horses to a stop. Into the silence that fell, Jennison intruded his voice.

"You're close enough as a bunch," he informed them. "If you come any nigher, you're runnin' into war. But if your boss wants to ride down alone to talk, I'll give him safe passport so long anyway, as the rest of you stay put where you're at. That's my final word and you can take it or leave it."

He had opened, conducted and closed negotiations in this unilateral manner and Pepper, at any rate, recognized its finality. Of course they could resort to open hostili-

ties, but for that, the time was not yet in his opinion. He informed his men of his decision, adding a cautionary word.

"Don't make any fool moves while I'm down there," he warned sternly. "Any man who can shoot that far and that fast and as accurately as he did is *not* to be trifled with. I don't know who he is nor where he came from but gunners like him don't grow on many bushes. Later we'll see, but first I'll go down and trade some talk with him."

He detached himself from his men and still without haste rode down to keep his tryst. Jennison on his part left the doorstep and crossed the footbridge that spanned the little creek. Here he leaned his Winchester against a post within easy reach while he waited for Pepper to approach. Ten feet separated them when Pepper drew up his horse. There followed a clash of appraising eyes, then the visitor spoke.

"You're the man who threatened me night before last in the saloon at Lilac," he accused flatly.

"And the same man you and your thugs tried later to murder," Jennison countered.

"That's news to me," Pepper dismissed the charge summarily.

"Well it ain't to Webb Sands," Jennison retorted.

"You're talking in the dark to me," Pepper insisted. "Why did you shoot at us just now?"

"I figgered you outlaws was close enough," Jennison said decisively. "When a fight at odds is in the makin', I pick my distance."

"Fight?" And Pepper laughed at the implied charge. "Why I just rode over to make my final offer to the widow for her cows. I'd like to talk with her."

"She's gotta bad headache," Jennison told him, "and consequent ain't seein' nobody. As to buyin' her cattle. You're too late. I done bought 'em myself fur thirty dollars per head. She figgered that was better than the ten dollars per head you offered. Yep, Mr. Pepper, you're lookin' at the owner of this said ranch right now, cows, range, water, everything. And how's your boys' feet today? Get the burrs and snake fangs pried out as per yit?"

The verbal fencing was ended, the thin veneer of pretense rasped off to the bone. Pepper knew it and when he spoke, there was venom in his harsh words.

"All right," he sneered, "I'll see you later if you don't shoot me in the back. If so, my men will see you."

With that he would have turned away, But Jennison delayed him. Flashing out a pistol he covered his man.

"You shouldn't oughta judge other men by yourself," Jennison said frigidly. "I wouldn't shoot even a skunk like you in the back. But I'd be histed to shoot it out with you face to face. Climb down and git set. I'll let you say when."

He reholstered his pistol and waited patiently while Pepper studied him with the eye of experience. And made an admirable decision.

"Not now," he stated finally, "though I hope the pleasure will be mine later. So long."

When Pepper and his men had ridden away the three came out of the house to join Jennison. They were in a happy mood.

"Well," Brown said gleefully, "he took a bluff like a major."

Jennison shook his head.

"He's the kind of man," he analyzed carefully, "who takes a bluff when it suits him. He wasn't down here fur a battle, but to look things over. Which he sure did. His eyes were pryin' round and he didn't miss anything that was in sight, includin' the dam. He's smart and he's cool. Them kind are double dangrus. We'll hear frum Mr. Pepper agin and at a time of his own pickin'."

"Have a guess as to what he'll do first?" The question was young Mortimer's. "Try to tear out our dam?"

"Nope," Jennison hazarded, "that 'ill

be the second thing. The first will be to rebuild his own dam. And *this* time it 'ill be guarded. To rip it out a second time will mean a fight first. *Then* my guess is he'll have a try at our dam. Of course he might do some other thing like runnin' off the cattle, but I doubt it. If he can shut the water off permanent, this ranch is ruined. Even if we moved the cows off, he could gobble the range up."

"You think then we're due for a mixup here in a day or so?" Bob wanted to know.

"That's the way she plans out to me," Jennison assured him.

LATE that afternoon Bob returned from a scouting trip that had carried him to the extreme limits of the Mortimer range. The creekbed there was without a trickle of water, proving that Pepper had already reset his dam. And was guarding it well, as Bob had ascertained at the cost of narrowly missing a half dozen bullets. Jennison's conjecture as to Pepper's first move had justified itself.

But to Brown's insistence that their own dam would be put in jeopardy that same night, Jennison interposed a strong doubt. From Pepper's point of view, so Jennison argued, there was no need of haste. Besides, he and his men had already put in a long day at the dam. Finally Jennison reasoned that that astute man would expect them to look for a raid that night and accordingly would disappoint them. If he made no immediate moves, he might throw them off guard, and lull them by his inaction into false security. Nevertheless, they would take no chances, for their wily antagonist might easily do the unexpected. Of one thing, however, Jennison was very sure. When the attack came, it would be featured by stealth and, consequently, would not be staged by moonlight.

Following Bob's return, Jennison accompanied by Herb rode out on an inspection tour in the direction from which an attack would most probably come. They mounted the ridge behind the barn and continued on over the rolling prairie to the limits of the Mortimer range. From this point they could see the Pepper ranch buildings nested about the water course where three small ravines flattened out. Herb told him it was some two miles away, though in the rarified air, it looked nearer. They returned without sight of Pepper or his men though his cattle were plentifully evident.

As Jennison had predicted, the night passed without incident, as well as the following day, but as dusk fell, he gathered his men about him.

"Boys," he said gravely, "tonight they'll make a try. My hunch tells me that and it never tells me wrong. Knowin' that, we'll make our plans accordin'. Fust, Bob, you and Herb will take our saddle hosses outen the corral and snuggle 'em in the dry wash beyond the house. They'll be safe thar and wouldn't be in the corral or sheds, I figger."

When the boys had returned, he went on with his instructions.

"My guess is, they'll split their crowd and hit us frum anyway two directions. Natural thing would be to set fire to the hay in the sheds. Brown, you and the boys will hole up thar. Keep your eyes peeled and your ears flared open like a two-leaved gate. No diffrunce how careful they move, men in the dark will make some noise. Shoot at them noises. Keep close to the ground and move after every shot. Figger them as doin' the same, so sow your bullets to the sides of their flashes. Also, and this is important. *Don't turn no bullets loose toward the dam.* I'll be roostin' thar and that'll be my fight. I'll do likewise toward the corral. And now let's take our posts. We've got plenty of guns and we want 'em where we can reach 'em. Place yourselves accordin' to your own fancy, but once placed stay put. No talkin', no smokin' and above all, *no sleepin'*. Good luck."

It was dark by nine o'clock and the

moon would not rise until about twelve. In those three hours then would come the attack, unless Jennison was a feeble prophet and his hunch a delusion and a snare. The night was cloudless and very still. The zooming bull bats had retired, though the semi-occasional lament of a melancholy coyote, distance and direction unguessable, intruded into the slumberous calm. Whispers of sounds were wonderously magnified. Even the soft chaffering of the tasseled rye grass at the caress of the lightest of light breezes was audible. So the three at the corral waited, as waited Jennison, guardian of the dam.

Jennison felt, rather than heard, those first faint footfalls. As his uncatalogued hunch had revealed that tonight was the *time of attack*, so *instinct* had instructed him of the progress of the marauders. When indeed he heard it, there was for him nothing of surprise. And as he had surmised, at least one group was approaching the dam, skirting the creek in its cautious advance. If his conjecture held true, there would be another group pointed for the corrals and sheds. To put his companions on the alert, he gave the prearranged signal, the burring call of a night owl, a gild-edged counterfeit, for he was a master artist. If his companions were awake, if they were listening, he had warned them. If not, any further mending must wait. Plainly he would be busy at the dam.

His inordinately acute ears presently detailed to him that there were three knots of men converging on his position. One had crossed the creek, one had remained on the corral side, a third was proceeding cautiously straight down the hill. Without as yet any confirmatory evidence, he still clung stubbornly to the opinion that another would materialize near the corrals. As a gunman, he had an ironclad code, the despair of his friends and a potential aid to his enemies. He would not fire the first shot! Preposterous or no, he would follow it now as always. Bending low, finger grapped round the trigger of his cocked Winchester, he hurled his sharp challenge!

"Hold up, you damned crooks, I've got you covered!"

A rifle shot halved that nine-word sentence, but it came from Brown up at the corrals. The fourth contingent had arrived according to Jennison's schedule.

For a dozen heartbeats, the silence held about the dam, then Pepper roared a command that soared above the crash of the brisk battle that had flamed into life around the corrals.

"He's at the dam, boys. Mow him down!"

Too dark to see but dimly, yet they knew the relative position of the dam and had fixed in their minds the approximate spot from which Jennison had called. He stood in fact at the hub of a wheel, from which angled outward three spokes terminating at the rim in the groups of the enemy. Training their guns along these mythical spokes developed a criss-cross fire that in all probability would have marked him down. If Jennison had remained put. But that wily man had flown the perch the moment he had issued his challenge. Not for nothing had he studied the lay of the land with so much care and rechecked his painstaking plans. That wide plank, for instance, that topped the dam, was now the handy causeway over which he flitted and then on a dozen feet to where he had cached that auxiliary rifle. And he was tensed and ready when the three-pronged storm unleashed its triple fury.

THE two venturers on the house side of the creek were blotted from the attack almost before the other groups realized that Jennison had answered the attack. And when they shifted their fire, the elusive Jennison was not there to receive their compliments. The men who learned it first were the three who followed down the creek on the corral side. In his Win-

chester had been seventeen shells and with the seventeen he had eliminated two of the attacking parties. Not that five corpses lay stretched out under the stars, the clatter of footsteps in enthusiastic retreat denied the slain. Not that. It was largely the panic of surprise turned back on itself. Yet some men had stopped bullets.

Sweeping up the second rifle, Jennison plastered the hillside around the third group and vastly encouraged them to join their comrades in wild stampede. At the same time the battle around the corrals ended and a qualified silence replaced the din of battle.

Yes, it was a qualified silence. A man moaned up there along the creek, another somewhere over on the slope was alternating between self-pitying groans and searing curses directed at his recreant companions. Jennison concluded that a man equipped with his rich vocabulary was in little danger of immediate dissolution, so he turned his attention to the one nearer at hand. Fully conscious that his act of mercy might mark him out as a handy target, nevertheless he did not hesitate. Yet with his charity Jennison mingled caution. A cocked pistol was in his left hand when with his right he scratched the match.

It was a needless precaution. There came no shot out of the darkness and the man was not shamming. A bullet had plowed through his upper chest just beneath the collar bone. He had bled much. Still Jennison had seen a good many men survive such wounds and worse. Blood poisoning was rare and these hardy men seemed immune to injuries that spell disaster to more pampered souls.

Off on the hill Jennison heard voices and he straightened up to listen. It was, he judged, an altercation between Pepper and his panicky men, though the leader's vitriolic observations alone were becoming clearly audible. Mentally measuring the silences, Jennison filled in the unheard rebuttal of Pepper's men.

"You're nothing but a pack of damned cowards," Pepper blared. "You ran like scared coyotes." An empty space in the atmosphere, then Pepper again, louder, angrier and a deal profaner. "*Yes, you would.* Like hell! You wouldn't tackle a sick jackrabbit now, you thus and soers—" Unprintable words here that seemed to hiss and crackle and emit fire and brimstone. To no avail. These men had had enough for tonight. It might be oral pyrotechnics for Jennison's observation, yet he doubted it. The authentic note that ran its red thread through Pepper's harangue could not have its genesis in duplicity. His men were through, that was all. No more charging on the foe for them this night.

And it became equally apparent that Pepper was preparing callously to desert his wounded followers, a monstrous act that did not surprise Jennison.

Certain at last that they were gone, Jennison called to his men at the corrals. Brown answered. They had come through in tolerable shape, he announced without details. Could Bob come over to help him, Jennison queried. Herb had better come, Brown substituted without explanation. With the superfluous suggestion that Brown and Bob keep an eye open, Jennison checked off the conversation.

When Herb arrived he amplified Brown's guarded report. Brown had stopped a bullet with the calf of his leg, a through and through shot, Bob had a broken left arm. He himself had escaped without a scratch. Oh sure, the two were coming along fine at that. Superficially at least, it would seem that Herb was in the way of becoming an optimist.

An old moon had just tilted its rim over the canyon wall and by its indifferent light, Jennison and Herb carried the wounded man to the house. Herb's bed soon cradled his enemy. As if he were his own son, Jennison worked over the unconscious man.

Leaving Herb at the house, Jennison hurried over to the corral. Brown limped, but derided his injury. Bob's arm was soaked with blood, he was a bit pale, but he cracked a joke with a genuine snapper attached.

"Anyway," he chuckled pridefully, "we ain't been hollering like Polk has."

"Let's go over an' fetch him," Jennison said sympathetically. "He sounded bad hurt."

Polk had yelled himself into a whisper, but a whisper in which there was still plenty of venom.

"Wouldn't I like to look at that dirty boar over my gun!" he wheezed bitterly. "Run off an' leave me here with my leg busted."

It was a splendid text from which to shovel out a sermon, but Jennison judged time and pulpit slightly awry. Instead he knelt down, studied that dangling leg and made a sober judgment.

"Both bones is broke halfway above the ankle," he assessed the damage. Then after a moment's consideration, he concluded, "I'll hafta tote you pig-a-back. Here, Brown, you help him up. Easy. We-el, here we go."

For a hundred thirty-five-pound man to carry a hundred and seventy pounds of healthy flesh is no mean task, even by daylight. To do what Jennison now did by deceptive moonlight was simply prodigious, yet he managed.

An hour later he emerged from the house and sat down heavily upon the doorstep. Inside the house, mended somewhat by his home-made surgery, were the four wounded men and Herb. Adversity made strange company. Bob and the outlaw, Paul, lay side by side in Mrs. Mortimer's once immaculate bed. Brown grunted gamely from his blankets on the floor. By him, Herb, whose bed was preempted by the other man from Peppers beaten army.

Out there in the moonlight, Jennison watched and reflected. A reasonable fatalist, life to him was an enigma past unraveling. Why had he been in Lilac, why was he here? Dimly he seemed to divine that he was not just a valueless pawn, moved without purpose by capricious fate. Not quite that and yet——

HE AWOKE Herb at daylight, then he crossed the creek to review at short range the scene of battle. In the course of the tour, he picked up two more rifles. Out here, too, he found evidence that several more in the attacking party had carried away lively souvenirs of the stubborn defense. Dried gouts, with straggling caked trails of blood, testified to that.

He carried the rifles back to the house, then proceeded on to where their horses were caged up in the dry wash. Pulling out the picket pins, he watered the thirsty animals, then restaked the four near the front of the house. The plume of smoke ornamenting the stovepipe was a harbinger that put gallop into his tired legs. He arrived in time to space the tin plates on the table, bottoms up, according to custom.

The Mortimer crew were able to reach the table, but not the two unbidden guests. Paul, with his brutally swollen leg propped up on a box was able to hold a plate in his lap, but the other man was too weak to raise his head unaided. Jennison fed him judiciously from a spoon, black sweetened coffee, spiced with whiskey. Just what a modern trained nurse would have said to such an unholy brew, must be left to an imagination more vivid than this chronicler's.

Jennison slept the major part of that day and stood watch through the night. But nothing disturbed their calm. Plainly the wolf pack that ran at Pepper's call were licking their wounds in their den. Morn-

ing found the wounded improved. The man shot through the chest was able to add some potato soup to his whiskey diluted with coffee. As Jennison pushed back from the breakfast table he smiled happily. This very night, Mrs. Mortimer would arrive in Lilac unless their calculations went askew. And if Jennison knew Judge Travis, Pepper would be hogtied so far as the water went. Yet Jennison's smile derived most of its width from the fact that Hill Beechey was the federal marshal, and that Hill Beechey would serve the order from Judge Travis on Jude Pepper.

For Hill Beechey was an institution in his own right, one of those peerless forelopers who made the conquest of the West possible. Jennison knew him intimately and trusted him like a brother. And unless he had read all signs in reverse, Beechey would be here tonight, at the latest. Pepper in blissful ignorance of this approaching Nemesis seemed well on the way of overstaying his fore-shortening time limit. So musing, Jennison sat down on the door step and lighted his pipe.

He smoked one pipe, knocked out the dottle on his boot heel, stowed the well-seasoned brier in a side pocket and got up. Just in case, he swept the foreground for signs of the enemy, then in leisurely way walked round the house toward the front. The road to Lilac stretched its narrow ribbon away across the prairie to dip down over a rise a few hundred yards away. Casually his eye rested on this point of disappearance. Instantly his interest stepped up in tempo. A single horseman had at the moment topped the divide. Speculation idled briefly, then he knew. Hill Beechey had arrived. Jennison met him at the gate.

"Hill," he declared, "I'm as tickled to see you as I was to git my first pair of red-topped boots. And that's spreadin' the joy molasses purty thick. Climb down and we'll rustle you up some breakfast."

"That's a sound like pealing bells," Beechey grinned as he swung down from the saddle. "And I'm sure glad to see you, Bat."

The other three men had now come outside and Jennison introduced them.

"Your mother'll be in on the night stage," Beechey told young Mortimer. "I started some hours before she did and I took a short cut. Sure, Judge Travis signed the papers. You won't have any more water rights trouble, I can tell you. Bat and I'll go over and serve them on Mr. Pepper, but not till I get a look at that breakfast Bat just threatened me with."

Less than an hour later they pulled up their horses at a spot from which the Pepper house and out buildings were clearly visible. Now Beechey fished out a worn badge from his pocket and passed it over to his companion.

"I nearly forgot you're my deputy," he remarked. "Pin it on."

While Jennison fumbled with the rusted pin, Beechey added, "They're a hard bunch and may act up ugly."

"Which don't make no diffrunce to us, Hill," Jennison stated the exact truth. "Should they show fight, we know what to do and how to do it."

"Exactly," Beechey nodded. "Well, let's ramble. And we won't take too much chance."

"You sure snorted a nosebag full," Jennison agreed. "Bein'a ossifer don't mean you hafta stand round with your hands in your pockets whilst some damned crook spots your hide with bullets."

"But," Beechey chuckled, "I believe you and I will get along together all right."

There was a considerable front yard enclosed with an unpainted picket fence, a yard with a scattering of trees and some grass. This yard was the bunkhouse, if the nests of frowsy blankets scattered about in fine disarray were acceptable evidence. Some even now supported their indolent owners. At a greasy table just clear of the porch four men were playing cards. Jennison noted that they were Pepper, McBibb, his foreman, Sands the saloon keeper and

a fourth to him nameless. He would learn his identity soon.

He and Beechey dismounted at the sagging gate, anchored their horses by the simple expedient of dropping their reins to the ground and stepped into the yard. Scowls greeted their entry, but no words. Nor nods. Beechey was unknown, but not Jennison. His presence marked the marshal as an enemy even before they caught the glint of his badge. No one flashed a gun, though most of the men were now on their feet. Ten feet from Pepper, Beechey halted, with Jennison two steps in the rear and to one side. Without shifting, he held every man in the yard under his vigilant eye. Supremely confident in his rear guard, Beechey addressed the owner of the ranch.

"You're Mr. Pepper?" he began in his quiet way.

"I'm Pepper," the other answered shortly. "Who are you?"

"I'm Hill Beechey," Pepper was informed in detail, "U. S. marshal from Lewiston. And this is Mr. Jennison, my deputy. I've an order issued by the Federal Judge directed to you. I'll read it."

At the end he looked hard at Pepper.

"In plain words," he compacted the legal phraseology, "the judge orders you to tear out your dam and keep it out. That water belongs to Mrs. Mortimer."

He tossed the document onto the table. Nor did his method of serving the court order pass unnoticed. Nor his reason. He did not intend to place himself within reaching distance, that was all.

Pepper picked up the court order, with insolent deliberation tore it into fragments and tossed it disdainfully to the breeze.

"When you toddled in," he detailed, "I'd just drawed three aces which I figger big enough to rake in the jackpot there on the table. If you've sung your tune I'm going after that said jackpot."

"This tune's got a second verse," Beechey informed him frostily. "I'll sing it. A year ago four men held up the stage close to Antelope and killed the driver and the guard. The robbery netted them about twenty-five thousand dollars in dust and bullion. They made a clean getaway and being masked might never have been caught but fof one thing. Pepper, I'm arresting you and Sands and McBibb and Spot Lucas for that robbery. Put up your hands!"

Possibly because he was a little too brave to be cannily cautious, possibly because of the presence of Bat Jennison, Beechey had neglected an imperative rule that all but spelled disaster. This fundamental of fundaments was simply this. In dealing with desperate men, get your gun into action first. With the superlative artist like Jennison, it was a rule subject to amendments, but then there was only one Bat Jennison.

And Jennison retrieved Beechey from his error. He knew McBibb for the gunman par excellence of the four and he had watched McBibb with greatest care. For McBibb had not risen. Still lounging at the table, *his hands hidden*, his pose was too easy, too careless. His nonchalance a bit too elaborate. But when he moved, Jennison made the split second reflection that McBibb was the fastest gunman he had seen in many a moon. His hand jerked sidewise, his gun flaming. Yet not quite quick enough.

Jennison's bullet tilted McBibb's slug inches to the right. Instead of plowing the marshal squarely through the navel, it sheared through his gunbelt just above the swell of his hip leaving him disarmed. Desperately Beechey threw himself sidewise, scrambling madly to pick up his guns, though after all there was no need of haste. Webb Sands alone of the four was on his feet, for he had scrupulously refrained from drawing a gun.

"I'm a little too smart," he explained with a cold shrug, "to get tangled up a second time in a gun fight with this man. I learned my lesson that first night at Lilac. If Jude had listened to me we'd have skedaddled when we found he'd put in with

the Mortimers. But you never could tell that damned fool anything. I reckon where he's gone now it don't make no difference."

Beechey brushed the dust from his clothes, for he was a tidy man, then he looked at the men left masterless by Pepper's death.

"Boys," he said finally, "I'm only guessing, but I figger the court will have to take over this ranch while they look for an owner. That owner I think is the Express Company who furninshed the money to buy it. I mean the money stole in the stage robbery which they had to make good. So it looks to me like it would be proper for you to stick here and take care of the cows. Somebody's bound to pay you."

"That sounds sense," one of the men said. "And I suppose the first thing to do is to rip out that dam."

"And then behave yourselves," Beechey warned.

"And behave ourselves," the man echoed dutifully. "Which I reckon won't be hard to do if that lightning gunner sticks round the Mortimer ranch."

Sands had been mulling over a question and now he asked it.

"What was it that gave us away in that stage coach shindy?"

"Why," Beechey grinned, "Pepper got his hat knocked off by a limb and you know what an Injun sign he wears on his head. And the first night Mr. Jennison here was in your saloon, Pepper showed that red splotch to him. Now Mr. Jennison had heard about that robbery and he remembered the description of the man. Naturally he dropped me a line at Lewiston and here I am."

Back once more at the Mortimer ranchhouse Beechey spoke to his prisoner.

"Ride on a few yards, Sands, I want to say a word to Mr. Jennison."

When Sands had obliged, Beechey turned and looked long at his companion.

"Bat," he said simply, "you saved my life."

In answer Jennison made the imperial gesture. He held out his hand. Their fingers met, gripped, fell apart. No need for further words now. Each had spoken.

BOMBARDIER OUT OF JAVA

By GORDON KEYNE
Author of "Crocodile Tears," etc.

The Orient Was in Flames. But They Succeeded in Salvaging the Makings of a Better World!

I

PAJITAN, tragic name, unknown to the world before the coming of the Jap horde! Bill Kelty had never heard it before this day, either.

He looked back at the town as the lugger pelted away southward, her engine going full. Flames were spouting where docks and buildings had been. The whole night was lurid, back there. All the south coast of Java was a reeking torrent of blood and fire.

He looked at the schooner, at the deck around him; how had he got aboard? He had no idea; his brain was not working at all, and small wonder. He had been brought into close contact with the terrific tide of destruction which was engulfing the world, and it had left him stunned—although, to a bombardier, destruction was nothing new.

He knew how the flying fortress had gone down; he remembered this vividly. Shells from that big flight of Jap pursuit planes had ripped her to pieces. He and the others of the crew had parachuted, landing just outside this city of Pajitan. That had been long before dark; now it was full night.

They had all been swallowed up in the

shrieking waves of refugees; half Java had come rushing to the south coast before the push of the barbarians. Swallowed up and separated in five minutes, borne away upon those mad waves making into the city and through it, for the waterfront. The rest was struggle, falling bombs, utter madness everywhere, and a frantic surge toward the sea amid rain-squalls that drenched everything except the flames.

Now Kelty peered around, wondering that he was alive—not even sure if he were alive or not. The decks were crowded, as the streets and docks behind had been crowded, with swarming humanity. Dutch and Aussie uniforms, Chinese, Javanese, whites and browns and yellows, heaped anywhere. Yet there must be a guiding hand amid this horror, thought Kelty, because the lugger was heading out, with steady engine-beat, through the night toward the empty sea—

Empty? Good God, no! An explosion ripped the darkness out there. Seven or eight vessels, large or small, were in flight for safety; another explosion, another! Down the packed decks rippled the word of fear—submarines!

But, before it could be comprehended, spasmed terror seized everyone, as the sky vomited a dread roar of planes. In the lurid glare, the schooner and the other craft made fair marks. Shrieks rippled down the decks, and convulsive frantic movement; there was a rush in blind panic to find some shelter, to cram down below; but there was no shelter.

The trading lugger was small, dirty, unkempt. She and the other vessels, so desperately heading away from the fury, were being strafed mercilessly. Another craft to the left was torpedoed; crowded with refugees, she went up in a roar of flame and thunder.

Kelty sat motionless, cursing the Japs as the dark shapes swooped above; he could see the spitting fire of machine-guns. The bullets were hitting all around; they raked the decks. Men and women were falling, blood was flowing in streams, the screaming was horrible; but this was old stuff to Bill Kelty. He had seen the best of Java go down in bloody ruin. He sat and cursed mechanically. He was wearing a tin hat he had picked up somewhere ashore, a Dutch helmet. Something crashed it, and he went to sleep.

Such was the nightmare dream behind him, when he waked to full daylight.

His first impression was space; no more crowds around him. He sat up, rubbed a sore and aching head, looked at his dented helmet, and remembered. People were moving about the deck, which was heeled over a bit, and dirty canvas was pulling overhead. The engine was now silent. Kelty looked at the horizon.

Northward a cloud of smoke mounted the distant sky; that would be Java in agony. The rest of the horizon was clear, all clear and empty and beautiful.

"Hello, Yank!" said a voice. "Thought you'd come around. You've missed a nice job, a bloody nice job; wish I'd missed it. There was another Yank aboard, but he got his; gone now, with the rest. Lucky devil! A bit good-o to go quick, these days. Have a smoke, chum."

The other sat down beside Kelty, producing cigarettes and matches. He wore shorts and tunic; an Aussie. He was splashed with blood, chiefly on boots and legs—not his own blood. Kelty accepted the smoke and puffed gratefully.

"It's like old books," he said, still dazed, "about the end of the world or a second deluge, where no one knows what to do or where to seek safety. Only animal barbarism left. And back home, baseball talk, golf playing—I guess I'm crazy."

"You'll snap out of it," said the Aussie understandingly. He had a hard, shrewd brown face with weather-wrinkles, and alert dark eyes. Kelty frowned.

"Where's everybody?" he asked. "This ship was crowded when I got aboard."

The Aussie nodded. "Mostly gone. Strafed. Machine-gunned. Beastly mess,

getting rid of the bodies; wounded had bled to death, too. About a dozen of us left. I'd be bloody glad if you could lend a hand. Need you badly, Yank."

Kelty sat up. "Oh, sure!" he exclaimed. The chance to be of service, the appeal to him for aid, straightened out his brain-kinks. "I'm all right. What can I do?"

"Good-o! My name's Wimple. I've taken charge. What women are left, are below; five or six. And I'm bloody done up. No sleep for three days. Give me an hour or so, like a good chap. Take over, chum; take over—"

Wimple sighed and dropped his cigarette and pitched forward on the deck, peacefully.

This jerked Kelty to his feet as nothing else could have done. He felt fresh enough now. The sun was hot; he whipped off his tunic and laid it over Wimple to shield him, and looked around. He was on the fore-deck, so he started aft toward the others.

The dozen figures aft came clear as he approached them; a motley crowd they were. Three Chinese, two elderly Dutchmen, six golden-skinned Javanese, were grouped around the man who stood at the spokes of the helm and steered; another white man, this, hollow-eyed, naked to the waist, his hairy chest blood-caked. Impossible to say who or what he was. All of them stared at Kelty with drawn, quivering faces of hopeless despair. Several were crying. The man at the helm spoke out.

"Do something, Yank! We're out of the mess anyhow. Nobody knows where we're heading to nor why. Do you?"

"No," said Kelty. He looked at the ring of faces, calmly. He was not large, but his eyes were quiet; sanity spelled mastery here. "I want three of you who can cook. Speak up!"

Several jabbered at him, one of the Chinese, two of the brown men. He beckoned them, and had picked up enough Dutch during his six weeks in Java to make himself understood.

"Go below, find what there is to cook, and get it ready. Enough for all. The rest of you—who got this canvas up? You?" he asked the man at the helm.

"No. Wimple managed it, with us."

"The rest of you go sleep for an hour, till we get something to eat. You, mynheer!" His finger stabbed at one of the Dutchmen, a man of forceful, strong features. "Do you speak English?"

"Ja, a leetle bit."

"Then you look up the supply of food and water with these other three. Make 'em understand water may be precious. Report back to me as soon as you find out."

THE group broke up, some making for the companionway, others dropping down on the deck. The man at the wheel snarled suddenly.

"You, Yank! Who's to spell me? I never sailed a ruddy ship before."

"Neither did I." Kelty went to him and shoved his hands off the spokes. "I'll take over. Get some sleep. Englishman?"

"No, blast you! Is Macartney an English name? I was manager of a bank—"

"Never mind what you were, Scotty. Curl up and sleep."

The other obeyed, staggering away.

A mad situation! Kelty tried to adjust himself to it, thankful that he had not been alive to the bloody scene on these decks; they were dull brown with the fluid that had run along the puttied seams. He kept the lugger going as she was, heading south and east; he knew nothing about ships of the sea, but the breeze was steady and not strong.

Everything faced him like a blow. The world had fallen to pieces. There must be other such craft as this, escaping from the weltering horror behind; they would be in the same fix. A few people, lost on the wide sea. Australia must lie somewhere ahead; but the Japs would be there next, might be there now. Back to the primitive instincts of keeping alive, all of them, people who had lost everything they

knew and faced what none could know.

The Dutchman, a man of fifty, came to him after a time.

"We have rice, plenty," he said in his heavily accented English. "And some fruit and other things. There is much food, and water in barrels. It is good."

"Thanks. Go to sleep. I'll wake you when grub's ready."

The overpowering shock of it all gradually dimmed upon the sunlight and reality took hold, as he stood swaying to the lurch of the schooner and holding her steady. He forgot time and hunger and hurt; he himself slowly emerged again into importance, his own life gained in worth once more, as one comes from dream back into reality.

This was his world now, this little space of puttied deck. After all, these others must have suffered yet more; their losses were direct and terrible. He resolved that salvation for everyone must lie in quenching any thought and talk of what was past; it must be put out of mind, if sanity were to be retained. That the sea horizon was so empty struck him as odd. Surely others must have escaped from that stricken coast of Java!

The Chinese who had gone below with the other two came into sight and nodded to him.

"Tea, rice, bread," he said, intimating that a meal was ready.

"Good!" said Kelty, and motioned to the figures on deck. "Go wake 'em up."

"Eat here?"

"Yes."

The limp figures were stirred alive. Wimple showed up, and Kelty was glad to get his tunic back; despite the hot sun, the sea wind was chill on bare pelts. It was a sad and silent assemblage of stunned souls. Kelty found himself staring at the women who came straggling from the forepeak where they had been hastily crammed. Six of them. Three native women, two Chinese and—

Kelty flung himself at her. "Julie! Madame de St. Marie! You remember me, Bill Kelty? I was one of the American flyers at your house in Bandoeng! It's grand to know you're safe!"

She looked dully at him, a slight, spare young woman in bedraggled clothes. All the sparkle had gone out of her delicate oval features; her eyes were large, wide and lifeless from the things she had witnessed. A faint grimace twisted her lips.

"Safe?" she echoed. "Who cares?"

She went on and joined the others around the open after-hatch, where the three cooks were distributing food; but she looked back at him, once. Wimple, who had taken over the helm from Kelty, beckoned.

"Fetch me a mug of tea, chum. We need to chin a bit, you and I. You've done a good-o job here—"

He went on with down-under slang that was lost on Kelty.

Think of finding Julie de St. Marie here! That lovely house of hers on the Bandoeng slopes had been a rare memory; the eager, laughing young woman who had entertained the American flyers among her precious and beautiful things had lingered in his thoughts. An island girl, she had been married to a young Frenchman killed early in the war, she had been the very essence of beauty and vitality, a young widow whose appeal was all to youth; everyone had been crazy about her. Now she was changed, almost overnight, into another person.

The Chinese produced tea and rice and shrimps, miraculously cooked, and huge loaves of bread. Kelty brought double portions to the helm, faced Wimple across the spokes, and laughed as they pitched in. It was a hard laugh, without mirth.

"Where'd all this grub come from? Plenty of it aboard. I don't even remember how I got on this craft."

"It was a sticky mess," said Wimple. "There was a crew and a skipper trying to save the women; some island chap. I imagine he had just fitted out for home when

the Japs hit. Every last one of them went over the side this morning—"

"Arrgh! Let's forget all that!" Kelty broke in distastefully. "Made up my mind to do so, but slipped. The past is wiped out for everybody, right now."

"Good-o!" chirped the other. "Wise head. I take it you're no sailor?"

"Lord, no! I was a bombardier; flying fortress. We hit about fifty Japs and were shot down outside Pajitan, on our way to Port Darwin. Everything was gone to hell and we had been ordered out."

Wimple grinned faintly. "I was a barrister in Brisbane before I joined up; lawyer, you call it. Well, looks like we've found something to do. I suppose there's a reason for this many of us being left to carry on, what? Give me your name."

"Bill Kelty."

The other gulped his tea. All right, let's go at it. You back me."

Loops were slipped over the spokes and they left the wheel. Going over to the group, Wimple sounded off with brisk efficiency.

"I'm taking command; anyone else wants it, speak up. Good-o? I take it everyone is willing to pitch in. Somebody translate."

The big Dutchman complied. Macartney stared at Wimple and said nothing. Kelty stared at Julie de St. Marie, who looked at nothing.

"We're all one, no distinctions," went on Wimple, and asked the Dutchman his name. "Wynkoop? All right. You come with me to have a look down below. Kelty, go forward and have a look-see. We'll arrange accommodations first. Anyone know anything about the sea?"

ONE of the Javanese did, a strapping brown man named Ati. Wimple sent him to take the helm, and led Wynkoop down the companionway.

Kelty went forward, descended into the forepeak, and came up again, quickly; a dead woman was down there. She had bled to death. He sang out for Macartney, who joined him, and together they carried her up.

"Over the side and no nonsense," said the Scot dourly. "Same as the others."

They did it, and came aft. Kelty addressed the listless young woman on the after hatch, and she jumped at his voice.

"Julie! Take charge of the other women; you can make 'em understand. Get that mess cleaned up in the forecastle, then take on the cabins below here, aft. At once, please! It'll do you good to keep busy. Well, Wimple?"

The Aussie was just coming up the companion ladder.

"All good-o down here," he rejoined. "Room enough for the women to bunk. The rest of us can take the deck or forecastle. Pick watches. I'll take Ati."

"Wynkoop!" Kelty grabbed at the translator's services. The three Chinese gladly undertook the cooking; one had been a wealthy restaurateur in Batavia. When two watches were formed, the question of whither bound arose.

JULIE DE ST. MARIE was on her feet; the women obeyed her voice with listless compliance. Three accompanied her forward, the others went down the ladder, uncertainly.

"Head southeast," said Macartney, "and you're bound to hit the Aussie coast."

Ati spoke up, at some length, and Wynkoop, who had more energy than the other Dutchmen, translated.

"He says there is an island eastward. He has been there with fishing vessels. A small island with reefs; we might reach it before night. He can steer for it, he says."

"No safety there," said Wimple.

Ati spoke again. No safety, granted; but a few whites were there. Dutch, who worked the reefs for turtle and trepang. Its name? He did not know; it had no name. Those men would know where to go, what to do. More sail should be got on the lugger, too.

"Something to that," said Macartney. "Why not make for there, first?"

Wimple glanced at Bill Kelty, who shrugged. "All right," said he. "My watch is in charge. You chums lend a hand."

Presently the lugger, which proved to be named the *Goodspeed,* was bowling along eastward, her deck listing, her dirty canvas bellied to the wind, and Ati at the helm.

II

MID-AFTERNOON. Kelty wakened from sleep to find his watch called, and took over the deck. There was nothing to be done, except for one man at the wheel. Wynkoop asked for the job; he wanted to be doing something. Kelty acceded, tried to make work for the others, found little.

There were two small boats chocked up on the deck amidships. A canvas had been spread between them for sun-shade. Kelty dropped down beside Julie de St. Marie, who sat staring at the sea; others were stretched out around her, asleep.

"You're coming out of it," he said. "You look more alive."

She glanced at him and nodded. "Yes. The terrible apathy! One wants only to find some far place where there is nobody, and stay forever. I've nothing left. None of us has."

"Wrong," said Kelty cheerfully. "We have the future. The worse hit we are, the more we must rebuild. Can't afford to give up and sink, you know. Why, you're the last person I'd have thought would talk like that!"

She shivered, but eyed him curiously.

"You, an American! Did you leave a wife and children?"

"No, thank heaven!" said Kelty. "What have you lost, that's hit you so hard?"

"Oh, nothing! I was alone. Money and home, of course; they don't matter." She shivered again. "The bombs, the killing, the destruction—no, not myself. I am glad that you escaped. You seem to be so sane. But you've lost plenty; your comrades, your country on the other side of the world, everything!"

"Pull out of it; never mind what's back of us," Kelty observed. Cheroots had been located below, boxes of them. He was puffing at one. "There's a reason for us being safe. What? I dunno, yet. Fifty or sixty packed aboard here, and only us left."

"Where are we going?" she asked listlessly.

"I don't know. An island Ati knows about; says he can find it. Then Australia. The island isn't much; somewhere eastward. A little place with reefs."

She frowned lightly. "An island? Strange! There are no islands off the coast—oh! He must mean Opdekam's Island!"

"Search me. You know it?"

"No. Jacob Opdekam was a rich planter. He left this island to be an orphanage; some French sisters have it. I have given money to it, like everybody has; that's why I know of it." She eyed him again. "We are all thinking about ourselves; not you. Why?"

"Too many other people to think about, just now. You, for one." A flame-tree hit by frost, he thought; she was like that. Under his gaze, color struggled in her cheeks. "I'd like to see you again as you were back at Bandoeng."

"You never will. Why are we here? What are we good for?" she said wearily. "Why are we living, when so many better people are dead?"

"That's queer." Kelty tossed his frazzled cheroot high over the leeward rail. "Wimple was thinking we're here for some purpose. All nonsense, I expect. Are you women going to be all right down below? If there's anything you want, sing out."

"We'll do, thanks. Yesterday was—Java. Today, we're all one skin, one color." Her fingers plucked at the torn, bedraggled skirt over her knees. They were nice

fingers, thought Kelty; slender but strong, well shaped. Only a single plain gold ring on them, not a wedding-ring, but bearing letters carved in relief.

"What's on that ring?" he asked. She stirred her hand, looked at it.

"Oh, a word—Mizpah. From the Bible. I don't know what it is; the ring was my mother's."

"Well, I'd better get to work."

He took a turn about the deck, saw that the lugger was holding the course Ati had set, and glanced below. Things were in good shape there. In the galley, the three Chinese were volubly at work. Everyone, Javanese and white and yellow, was hopeless in the eyes, struck by apathy and loss and futility.

Up forward, he found Wimple stirring. Macartney joined them. The Scot was dour and bitter and blunt. He was gradually coming to himself, and it was not a pleasant self.

"I don't like this going nowhere?" he announced, aggressively.

"Step over the side, then," said Kelty. Wimple chuckled.

"Easy does it, chums! What don't you like, Scotty?"

"My name's Macartney, if you please," snapped the banker. "We've food and water; why not head for Australia? This monsoon, with the wind fair, we'd make it and no trouble."

"Maybe," said Kelty. "What if we don't? No loss at all, Mac. If we make the island we're presumably heading for, we might find a job awaiting us. You said to head for it, too."

"A job? What kind?" Macartney quite ignored what he might have said previously.

Kelty shrugged. "Who knows? Wait and see. Doing something for somebody else, not just for ourselves. Why d'you suppose we're alive? Not for our precious pelts."

"You're a fool," said Macartney. He rose and walked off. Wimple looked at the American, his eyes wrinkling up amusedly.

"A fool, with the right idea!" said he. "That makes two of us, anyhow. Or four; you, I, Ati and Wynkoop. The other chaps aren't up to much. That other old Dutchman has gone mad, by the way. Stark, staring mad. Not Wynkoop, but the other one."

"Eh?" Kelty was startled. "Why, he acts sane enough—"

"He's not. Ask Wynkoop. I was prowling down in the cabin and struck an odd thing," went on the Aussie, reflectively. "This craft belongs to some religious outfit, to judge by things here and there; crucifixes in the cabins, too. It may be some island missioner's ship."

Kelty told him what Julie de St. Marie had said. Wimple scowled.

"Funny thing! Well, add her to the sane list. And look out for that other Dutchman; his name's Jan Philp, and—"

A wild, brazen voice bellowed something aft. A chorus of cries, shouts, screams, broke forth. Both men were on their feet instantly.

KELTY darted down the deck, and saw a frightful thing. Old Philp, gray hair flying, was whirling a meat-cleaver amid a group of the men; he had gone violently insane. One of the Javanese lay dead, another was grappling Philp, only to have his skull split like an apple. Macartney was there; he made a wild dive and brought the madman down, but Philp kicked loose, sprang to the rail, and then jumped. He was gone from sight at once.

There lay horror upon horror. The women were shrieking frantically, but Julie de St. Marie calmed them, one by one; they gathered around her. Kelty found the Scot unhurt, and they put the two dead Javanese over the rail.

The *Goodspeed*, heeling to the wind, ran on eastward.

With the sun well westering, watches were changed again. Ati stood to the helm, his eyes rolling. Everyone was a

bundle of jangled nerves once more, slow to quiet. This last happening had left a searing touch on all.

Bill Kelty was glad to scramble into the crowded, odorous quarters forward and get another snatch of sleep, which meant forgetfulness. Scarcely had his eyes closed, it seemed, when someone was shaking him awake, amid a clatter of voices. He climbed out on deck and saw their goal, not two miles away. He stared at it in the sunset, incredulous.

It was a little island in the midst of the deep. Reefs showed to right and left; the island itself was low, small, tree-clad. Oddly enough, sight of the place had restored everyone to sanity; here was a tranquil bit of earth untouched by horrors.

"It is like paradise!" The slim Julie was standing at his elbow. Kelty found her face transfigured as she gazed at the scene ahead; her eyes held a vibrant glow, color and life had returned to her. "The sisters have showed me pictures of it; that is their island, yes. Jacob Opdekam's Island, where they take care of the orphans."

The lugger was heading in for the channel, which was marked by black can buoys, Dutch fashion, to show the reef entrance. There was a strip of beach, with a number of praus and canoes drawn high. Wimple's voice rose.

"We'll have to get the sails off her and the engine going. I'll see to the engine. Kelty! Get the canvas down, will you?"

The Aussie disappeared, and Kelty sprang into action. The way that canvas came in would have driven any seaman to roars of mirth; it was hauled fluttering down any way at all by ignorant hands. Immediately the engine came to life with a sputter and grind, and the lugger forged along at slow speed.

Macartney came to Kelty with a rasping grumble.

"I don't like it, ye hear? We've no business putting in here!"

"Why, you big sap! You're the one who voted to make for this place!"

"No matter. I don't like it; there's an evil look about it!"

Kelty laughed. Unshaven, touseled, he had an air of efficient vigor that marked him apart from these others. It lay in the steadiness of his eyes, perhaps, or the pleasant strength of his bony features; his bronzed cheeks were etched in wiry lines. He was himself again, and showed it.

"Stop grousing, Mac," he replied. "Windy talk and black growls do no good. Keep your chin up."

"No chin left," snapped the other. "We ought to head for the coast—"

"Quit it! Go growl to the Dutchmen if you've got to growl!"

Mac started to say something, met the look in Kelty's eyes, and turned away muttering to himself. Ati sang out loudly to Wimple, down in the hold, and the engine fell silent. The lugger was quietly gliding toward a long wharf that showed to the left.

Then Kelty saw Julie de St. Marie turn and look at him, a queer expression in her face. She caught his glance and pointed to the sky. He looked up and nodded.

Everything up there was a sea of flame, sunset fire reddening the high clouds. Kelty thought he could guess her mind; blood and fire by land and sea, mirrored in the heavens. A war of barbaric destruction, where lives counted for nothing; savages sweeping over the ancient cultures and ideals, bringing death and animal fury into lands of gentleness and peace—

Her face struck out at him again, all white and stricken. Something jumped within him. The sky hummed. One of the Javanese women uttered a wailing, mournful cry. A steadily reverberant drone came from the invisible spaces beyond the golden-scarlet clouds—then Kelty saw them, five, six of them, circling and screaming down in a dive, glinting things against the fiery depths of heaven.

He simply could not believe it; for an instant he doubted his own senses. But

now they were roaring overhead, dipping sharply down and sweeping upward from the dive, one by one. Two of them hurtled straight at the schooner.

And now came the shattering crump-crump of bombs, with a hell of bullets once more raking those riven, bloody decks, while men swore and screamed and women shricked high.

Kelty found himself holding Julie de St. Marie, his arms about her slim body while she shivered and shrank against him.

Ashore, black smoke gushed up among the trees; the godowns on the wharf-end blew apart and the black blossoms bloomed everywhere; water flew high to the explosions.

A bomb struck almost alongside the schooner; she rocked and reeled like a mad thing, throwing Kelty from his feet, hurling him into the scuppers with Julie still locked in his arms. The after-mast crashed and splintered down across the deck where bullets hailed.

And now, suddenly as they had appeared, they were gone — droning away northward, high flecks in the golden-red sunset light, leaving silence behind them.

Leaving more than silence; wreckage and ruin and death. Macartney lying across the forehatch with all his grumbles stilled forever, other still shapes crumpled in the scuppers. Ati, unhurt and still at the wheel, shook a fist at the sky and cursed the killers.

The vessel struck something; she had come smack up against the long wharf. Kelty got to his feet and pulled the young woman erect. Neither of them were harmed, but a sudden gasp broke from her.

He turned her away from the shambles of the deck and together they looked at the white beach and things moving there, breaking out from among the trees.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Bill Kelty, amazed and shocked into profanity by the sight of flower-decked children.

III

SUNSET flamed and died into gray twilight, and the cold moon leaned down the sky to finger earth and sea.

Through it all Kelty found himself once more laboring at the grim task now becoming so familiar. The Chinese, men and women, had fled below at the first sound of the bombers, and they were alive. Of the Javanese, only Ati and three women were living. Wynkoop, though, stunned by the falling mast, was on his feet and good as ever. The Aussie, Wimple, had also been knocked about by the spars but was unhurt. Kelty found it cruel work to summon up energy and clear away the bodies, but he stuck to it.

The *Goodspeed* lay fast to the wharf. Julie had taken the women and vanished ashore, gathering up the scattered screaming children, and getting them back among the trees. Kelty followed, with the Dutchman beside him, and paused at the edge of the white sand.

"Children!" said old Wynkoop, shaking his gray head. "Too bad. Children have no place in the world, any more. It is better for them to be dead. Here! What is this?"

A boy of twelve or thirteen emerged into a patch of moonlight that fell across the path, and halted them with shrill speech. He was clad in a sarong and a wreath of white flowers now much torn and stained with red.

"She says not to come," he said. Wynkoop translated. "She will meet you. The school and houses are gone. The two sisters are dead."

They questioned him. Two weeks ago, the lugger had gone to Pajitan, crewed by the men who worked here, with two of the Catholic sisters; the other pair had remained. Seeing her coming back, the children had been decked with flowers to greet the returning nuns; then the bombs had dropped.

Julie de St. Marie came and joined them.

She was breathing hard and was threatened with hysteria. Wynkoop had a bottle of squareface he had found aboard, and produced it. She gulped some of the schnapps and sank down in the sand.

"It's—it's pretty bad," she said. "Don't interfere. Those women are wonderful! I didn't know native women could be like that. They've got the children in hand. Three are hurt. I bandaged them. There's no fire, thank heaven. The children are well trained."

"How many?" demanded Kelty.

"Nineteen, and this boy," she said, indicating the youth. "Twenty in all. From five to twelve years. Some are dead. Three hurt. The buildings are all in ruins. We'll have to carry the hurt ones aboard."

"Aboard?" Kelty repeated stupidly.

"Of course. It is their ship, you know. We must take them with us. Oh, the senseless cruelty of it all!" She nearly broke down, then stiffened. Kelty, who still had cigarettes, produced one, and a light; she puffed gratefully. Wynkoop clucked with his tongue, as an old man does. Julie looked up at them.

"The ship? Is it ready? Can it go?"

"Sure." Kelty woke up. "One mast's gone, but the engine will push her. We've got things in shape. You mean, take the kids off?"

"Of course. We must get them away to safety. That is all we're good for; that is why we were brought here. You'll believe that, won't you?"

"Cheer up; we'll do it, sure."

"I have talked with the women; the two Chinese are going with us, but the three native women refuse to face the sea again.

"They want to stay here. Let them; there's no lack of food. And it is queer," she went on, "but these nuns expected some such thing to happen. They had a wireless set and know all about the war."

"And," put in the boy abruptly, "there was the Avion that crashed on the shore only yesterday."

Kelty caught at the word. "An airplane? What's this?"

The boy chattered eagerly, and Wynkoop translated.

"Yes, two miles around the shore. It was a Japanese airplane. I went there and looked at it. Two Japanese were in it; they did not have any heads left."

Kelty turned to the Dutchman. "Tell the boy to guide me to the place, will you? I must have a look at that airplane. And you'd better get Julie aboard, and tell Wimple about the kids. We can pile them all into the schooner and shove off, sure."

Leaving them, Kelty swung away with the boy, who was proud and delighted to guide him, but could make little or nothing of Kelty's scanty Dutch.

As he accompanied the boy along the sparkling firm sand—the tide was at ebb—the bombardier was conscious of an almost superstitious thrill at memory of Wimple's remarks. There might well be a meaning to what had happened, a destiny involved.

Of all the crowded mass that had got away from Pajitan in the lugger, here a bare handful of them remained; and they had come to this tiny place, an unseen dot in the wide seas, to meet tragedy and the bitter need of these lost children. Getting them safe across to Australia might be an insuperable task, or it might be simple.

"Looks utterly hopeless from one angle, but sane and practical from another," he reflected. "With the Chinese women to help, why not? It's the northwest monsoon this season, steady prevalent winds; just let them push us along. We'll gamble on it, anyhow! Twenty kids out of poor smashed Java—doesn't seem like Providence would be so careful for these few, out of the millions dying there!"

The moonlight was clear, the white beach sand untrodden. The surf and the long reefs were all of a luminous smother of phosphorescence, sparkling under the moon; the smell of kelp hung richly in the

air on this leeward side of the island.

The boy led the way at a brisk pace, and the two miles rapidly dwindled. This Jap had undoubtedly been raiding over Port Darwin; it was hit and unable to get back to its base on Java, going down here. No pity to be wasted on those pilots, thought Kelty; almost too bad they had not burned!

His guide pointed. On ahead showed a mass of wreckage well above high-water mark. It was no nice picture to any flyer's eye. The twin-engined bomber had been strewn afar over the sand. Here was a wing torn off and riddled with bullet-holes; Jap, all right. The pilots lay together, almost clear of the wreck.

In the clear moonlight Kelty pitched into the mess, the boy lending him an eager hand. He was after one thing; papers. Upon searching the two bodies, he found what he sought. Also a belted pistol, which with some difficulty he removed and appropriated. He felt a thrill of exultation. If he ever got anywhere, those papers would be of vital interest to Army Intelligence, perhaps.

He was still poking around the bodies, when the boy uttered a cry and held up something round. It was a hand grenade. There were others of them, a dozen or so broken loose from the interior of the plane. Kelty hastily checked the boy's curiosity, explaining what they were. Getting the tunic off one of the dead pilots, he spread it out and heaped the deadly but impotent things into it. Might come in handy sometime, he vaguely reflected.

WITH this bulky and weighty burden, he headed back, the boy trotting alongside and playing with a knife he had found. Long before he came back to the beach and wharf, however, Kelty was cursing his heavy load. A clamor of voices was going up from the lugger, and Wimple came out to meet the two.

"Hello, Yank! Thought it must be you. Well, we're getting them aboard—hello, what's that you've found?"

Grenades from a smashed Jap plane. Got some papers from the dead pilots, too."

"Good-o! But pineapples—what on earth for?"

"Dunno. Might be useful somehow." Kelty set down his burden and rested his aching muscles. "Anyhow, I felt like looting something. Getting away with the kids, are we?"

"In no time; the engine will take us out neatly. I say, those Chinese with us are a bit of all right! And that woman, Julie—she's a different person. Most amazing! Handling the little blighters like a veteran, she is. We've got the tangle cleared away and Ati's rigging a sail on the stump of the mainmast."

"Why not use the engine?"

"A few tins of petrol won't last forever, Yank; we'll have to save it against some emergency. Well, eight of the crowd are boys, and can lend a hand with the ropes. Bright lads, too."

"When are we shoving off?"

"As soon as you're aboard. May be a hell of a thing to say," added Wimple apologetically, "but we're better organized now than we were before. I think we'll get along nicely. Hey, listen to that!"

A chorus of shrill piping voices dithered on the moonlight, the tune vaguely familiar. A hymn of some kind, said Wimple; the kids had struck it up by themselves. Kelty, hearing the thin, childish voices, felt a queer shiver strike through him.

"Damned Japs!" he said, and stooped to his load again. "All right. Let's go. I'll stow these things somewhere safe. How are the kids? Jittery?"

"Good-o," said Wimple with enthusiasm. "Didn't I tell you we'd been spared for a purpose? I had the feeling all along."

"Rats," said Kelty gruffly. The other chuckled.

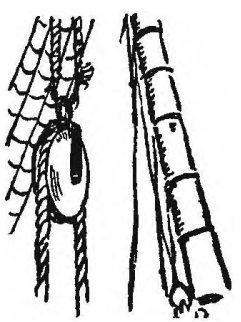
"No use, Yank; you know it as well as I do. There was an old blackfellow up

in the sheep country the other side of Mogoorawalla, used to say everything had a reason; he could do no end of fancy tricks and could find the reason for anything you asked him, too. There's a reason here, for us. Twenty reasons, three of them wounded."

"More likely," said Kelty, "the reason's in my pocket; those Jap papers. May give all sorts of information—"

He paused as Wimple touched his arm. The children's song was rising again, meaningless native words, like an elfin chorus across the moonlight; there was something fresh and unhurt and virginal in those voices, so much so that Kelty was aware of tears in his throat.

"There's your answer," Wimple said. "We've quit being fighting-men; we're



bloody nurses for a pack of young 'uns who'll see a different world than we've seen. That's our job. One of those kids may be president of the new Congress of Nations, some day!"

"You're a hell of a lawyer," snapped Kelty, to disguise his own agreement. "Blasted softie, that's what you are. Let's get to work. We must be about on the course of planes returning from raiding Darwin. I'd like to get as far away from here as possible before the day comes up."

"Same here. You, me, Wynkoop, Ati and the Chinese and lads—lucky we've got good steady monsoon winds. Rare plucked 'uns, those lads; good chums. They've a first-aid squad and know their business."

A brisk little man, Wimple, and Kelty warmed to him.

They reached the wharf. The tide was coming in, but that was of no consequence with the engine to kick the lugger out. The children were being packed aboard; Julie and the two Chinese women had them well in hand. The three wounded were in bunks below. Twelve little girls and the three women had all the available space, fore and aft. The boys and the four men and the three Chinese cooks could sleep on deck beneath the sun-shelter, or where they would.

The orphans were white and brown and yellow. They had been trained with precision; as the lugger headed out into the moon-silvered sea, with the engine kicking over purringly, they assembled on the afterdeck, plumped down on their knees and chirped out prayers in unison.

Kelty, who had stowed the pistol and bombs safely below, stared at the scene. The rattled-off words were meaningless to him, but he saw old Wynkoop beaming and nodding, and the brown man Ati repeated the words while he stood at the spokes, conning the channel. It was all strange and impossible and yet tinged with a ghastly reality, in contrast to what had gone before.

"It makes me ashamed," said a soft voice at Kelty's elbow, "to think how little I gave them when I only gave them money!"

He turned to her, smiled, and slipped his arm about her shoulders.

"You know, Julie, you said something there!" he observed. "Yes, sir, you hit the nail on the head. Folks back home griping about blackouts and tires and damned silly nonsense, and us pitched into realities here. No Red Cross in the ocean; just us. It does sort of melt a fellow up, darn it! We'll see those kids through, you bet."

"And it makes one forget all the rest, to be doing something," she said softly.

"Yes. Feels worth while, eh? I expect this is queer talk for a guy in uniform—"

"Nice talk," she broke in, with a little

laugh. The laugh startled him; he had never expected to hear her laugh again. He turned his head and looked down at her. She was looking up at him. She reached up suddenly and kissed his cheek.

"Thank you," she said. "Now we must get them to bed."

Kelty stood alone, rubbing his cheek and hoping no one had seen. It was an impersonal sort of kiss, come to think of it; he was not so sure he liked that.

IV

ATI turned over the helm to one of the boys, once they were away from the reefs, and Wimple came up from the engine, and everyone pitched in getting the canvas up. It was a task, with one of the two masts a mere stump, but presently the lugger was slipping through the water steadily.

Wimple stretched out on the deck beside Kelty.

"We've got a job, Yank," he said, sighing with weary relaxation. "Slow speed, days and days before we can reach the coast; it's a thousand miles, roughly. We're doing four or five knots an hour, Ati says—say a hundred miles a day. We'll not need the engine so we'd better get this after-hatch fastened down. Plenty of water-casks stored down there but not too much petrol."

"Wish I had a razor," said Kelty, rubbing his cheek thoughtfully.

"There's a safety in the mess-cabin, below."

"Thanks. I'll look in the morning."

"You and I, watch and watch, with Ati and Wynkoop; leave the rest out of it. Suit you?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I'll wake you at midnight. We'll have to start in feeding all hands with the morning, too. There's dry bread and rice now, if you want it."

Kelty did not; he curled up and slept again. He was insatiable for sleep.

Midnight came, and the stars, and the thin white moon hanging afar. A lucky thing they had the monsoon, which meant steady unchanging airs and no need of a crew hauling on the lines all the while.

He and Wynkoop saw out the night. The old Dutchman had scarcely said two words the whole time, except to translate; he had the air of a man totally crushed by destiny. But, in the morning hours when the stars were sharpening before the dawn, he lit a cheroot and began to talk of his wife and sisters and daughters in Surabaya, and the horrible fate that women of other races were meeting in Hongkong and China and Malaya and the Insulinde from the Jap hordes. He did not speak bitterly or even with grief, but with a more awful placidity.

"It is worse than Huns and Mongols," he said, quite calmly. "These vermin, swollen during long years by an inferiority complex, have unleashed a war of annihilation upon the world. They will pass—but what of us, meantime? No wonder Philip went mad; his family was all in Jokjakarta when the hordes broke in."

"The Japs will pay when Uncle Sam turns loose on 'em," said Kelty.

"That will do us no good, my young friend. We cannot stop to think about ourselves. What happened tonight, with these children coming aboard; it is a symbol! A tiny thing in the vast world, but a symbol. Now we have something to live for, we who are left. We do a touch of good for something, for someone, for the helpless—it is the answer to our frantic grief. Ja! It helps us meet our own fate. The Chinese women tell me those two nuns at the school were blown to bits, with many of the children. Why should good women like them be killed while we remain? Not for our own sakes; we deserve nothing. It is easier to die than to live, in these times; that is why."

"You'll see plenty of Japs go west when they get into Australia," said Kelty. The other shook his head.

"You do not understand. There is a wisdom in everything, and much that we think is evil, is not evil at all. When we get to the other side of death, we shall see more clearly. But," he added with a sigh, "there is much that is hard to endure."

"Let me get my grip on a bomb-sight again," said Kelty, "and I'll be satisfied."

He was pretty much himself by this time; the sea and the night stars will do that to one, no matter how shattered.

The east went gray, then rosy. The shrill treble of children's voices lifted to the deck; they were at their morning prayers. The boys who were here joined in. And so the day came, and laughter went scurrying across those bloodstained decks.

The orphans had brought bundles of all sorts aboard; there was romping and shouting while the lugger winded on toward the east and south. Julie de St. Marie directed the two Chinese women and mothered the gang, scrubbing and dressing and helping; then came food, and all hands were ravenous.

Kelty spoke to Wimple about the afterhatch, which was off.

"Changed my mind," said the Aussie, shaking his head. "May be dangerous to leave it off, but there's no wind coming up; and may be best as it is today. Y' know, if we don't meet anyone today, we should be in the clear."

"Meet anyone?" asked Kelty, frowning.

"Aye, chum. The brown devils are on the sea as well as on land and in air."

"Not a chance. We're well beyond them."

"Hope so. But—"

Wimple pointed. Kelty saw a patch of smoke trailing the horizon, to eastward, and then another. It came no nearer, but blew out and was gone. An ominous indication, perhaps.

Sparkling sun and sea wind, and Julie with half a dozen tots crowded about her; Kelty watched her and listened to the stories she told in Javanese, while they yelped with delight. She was bright-eyed, laughing, flushed, and as beautiful as the sunlight. He told her so, and she laughed again, delightedly.

"I've found something and I like it!" she declared gaily. "Go and make friends with the boys. Give them some work to do."

KELTY nodded and obeyed. White and brown, the eight boys were an eager, lively lot, and with Wynkoop to translate, he got them working about the schooner, which they already knew far better than he did. Seasickness began to take its toll, and soon the deck was cleared except for the five older lads.

"If there's any alarm," Kelty told them, "get all you can down that big hatchway, by the ladder that goes to the hold. It's safer down there. But I trust we'll have no more trouble now. Better help with the young ones; the sea's kicking up."

Wimple called him; it was his trick at the helm. The wind had freshened a bit and it took strength to hold the lugger steady, but toward noon the breeze became light, the sea a smooth glitter, and they got up another sail forward.

"Everything looks good-o," said the Aussie contentedly. He, too, had cast off the oppressive cloud. "Did you see that little tyke with the crossed eyes? He's a bit of all right. They don't seem to think much of your Dutch; makes 'em scream with laughter. I'll try out my lingo on them."

The sun flamed westward, the afternoon waned, and nothing broke the horizon. This sensation of safety, of absolute security, of being lost between sky and sea, was grateful to the nerves. The worst had happened, there was no more peril. Those of the orphans not seasick, romped and shrieked with laughter about the deck and rigging; the older boys assumed an air of steady devotion to duty. They were well headed by the lad who had guided Kelty to the airplane; his name was Lungi, and he was a half-caste of great intelligence.

THE sun was in the west when Kelty was brought up all standing by a sudden chorus of cries—one of the smaller boys, scrambling along the rail, had pitched over. Kelty saw the little head bob up alongside; and, stripping off tunic and shirt, was gone in a flash. He dove, came up beside the boy, and found him to be the crosseyed youngster who had so appealed to Wimple; the boy could swim like a fish. He was laughing as Kelty reached him—and then, suddenly, Kelty realized it was no joke.

Getting the lugger around, even bringing her into the wind, was a supreme task for those makeshift hands. Indeed, she was half a mile away before she luffed, and one of the two small boats was put over the side.

Except for moral encouragement, Kelty could do the boy no good; they struck out together for the boat, which did not make any rapid headway. The thought of sharks was not a pleasant one, but aside from this the adventure was no more than a lark. When the boat came within reach, the boy squealed happily at his companions manning the oars; Ati, who had the tiller, showed white teeth in a wide grin and helped the two swimmers in beside him.

So all ended in laughter, and even Wynkoop smiled and beamed when they came aboard and the lugger fell away on her course in the sunset light. Kelty felt rather like a fool until he met the eyes of Julie, and their eager glow warmed him.

That night while he stood at the helm she came to him with a quiet word.

"I was afraid we'd never get you picked up, today; I'm glad you did it. It was like you, somehow."

"Making a fool of myself?"

"Yes—that way," she said, laughing. "That little boy is Lungi's brother, and Lungi thinks you are great."

"Don't be absurd," grunted Kelty. "Where are you going when you get to Australia?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," she replied. "If we reach the northwest coast, we'll find only small coast towns there; no railroads or roads. Mynheer Wynkoop thinks the Japs may be ahead of us; they'll attack Australia and India, both, now that they have Java."

"Never mind. The sun will still rise tomorrow, Julie. Have you friends or relatives?"

"Not any more. Who cares?"

Kelty slid his arm around her and held her against him, tightly. As he felt her yield to his touch, his heart leaped and stifled him; they stood silently for a moment.

"I care a lot," he found words at last. "So do you—now. We'll make Darwin together, somehow; the other boys will be there, some of them, anyhow. Even if the world's flat on its back, Julie, everything isn't lost. Shall we face forward together?"

"Why?" she asked, honestly. "Just because we like each other?"

"No," he rejoined. We've got a lot to meet ahead, everyone has these days; no end of readjustments and new conditions. Some will cringe at it; we won't. It's going to take real folks to do it, and we're real. We'll get something from each other, I think. Caste and race and creed are all in the discard; we've got to accept and plan and fight ahead. It'll be fun if the right people are together, and we're two of the right ones. That's why. Tomorrow can mean a lot to us, and not just selfishly either."

"Where did you pick up such thoughts?"

"I didn't. They just came—out of the welter behind. Not thoughts, but realization of what's coming, in this new tomorrow. If we're blind to it, we'll be lost. I don't intend to be lost and astray in the new world we're walking into!"

Her hand found his, and pressed it.

"You say everything I feel and can't find words for," she said softly. "I like best what you just said—the sun will still rise tomorrow! A little, simple, childish

were called up and dismissed for the day; Julie and the two Chinese women were politely bowed to the awning shelter, Wynkoop and brawny Ati were settled on the hatch with cheroots, and the gang took over.

To everyone's delight, they took over efficiently. Scarcely heeling in the water with the light monsoon breeze, the lugger glided onward, a boy tall enough to see the binnacle holding the spokes. The cooking was handled superbly, the little tots were taken care of, the idle elders were served and waited on. The Chinese were deeply gratified by all this, and Wimple was tickled pink.

"So that's why they've been prying and askin' questions!" he chortled. "Seeing how everything's done! I'll have to start the engine later, though; with this northeast monsoon we may have flat calms, and we'd best keep moving. It's a lark for them, what?"

"More'n that," agreed Kelty. "Appreciation, that's what. Hello, who's this?"

Two of the oldest girls approached with a little speech. Julie translated; they were begging for mending and sewing to do, indicating Julie's ragged skirt and, amid roars of laughter, Wynkoop's split trousers. They had been taught sewing, they had brought most of their little effects along, and they wanted to do something. So the big Dutchman retired and his trousers were solemnly taken in hand and sewed up; everyone found a trifle for the deft and tiny fingers to repair.

Noon came hot and brassy, the sea nearly flat, the wind failing. Lungi proudly led a procession from the galley, serving a rijstaafel that provoked admiring exclamations—rice and fish and tinned meat, pickled eggs and a dozen other things.

"Ha! It is better than Grimm's in Surabaya!" exclaimed Wynkoop, balling up rice in his fingers and popping it into his mouth. "And that is the finest eating in Java—or was."

Attention centered upon Kelty, who had attacked his rice with a spoon. Lungi respectfully taught him otherwise, and Wynkoop explained that to eat rice with the fingers, pressing out the air, permitted one to eat ten times as much. Then the Aussie got his lesson, amid new merriment.

The canvas flapped. Lungi exchanged a few words with Wimple, gave an order, and the boys went to work; the sails were brought down and stowed. The wounded tots below were fed, and the youngest were led away for their daily nap. Wimple got a cheroot alight and came to his feet.

"Well, must get the engine going," he said. "Not a speck of a breeze—" He fell silent abruptly. His voice changed. "Oh, my good lord!" he said, and sat down suddenly. His face looked gray and drawn and old.

"What's the matter?" demanded Kelty in alarm. Wimple tried to speak, failed, and pointed with his cheroot. Kelty rose and looked.

"Lungi!" he barked. "All hands! Get the kids into the forward hold!"

A whistle, shrill treble voices, and Lungi was at work. Kelty stared at the sea, the others rushing to the rail. Upon them all fell momentary silence, as they saw the long black shape breaking the glassy water, not a mile distant.

"Nobody on watch, blast it!" said Wimple, finding voice. "What is she? Native craft?"

He knew better; his tone said as much. Wynkoop began to curse in a low, monotonous way as he stared, tragedy in his eyes. Kelty gulped.

"Well, it's a blow; by damn, we might as well face it! Julie, get your Chinese gals below—it's a sub, all right. Wimple! Maybe it's not a Jap! Might be one of ours!"

There was a momentary upsurge of hope. Only a little above the water, her conning tower standing higher than the rest, the submarine was heading for the

fact that holds the greatest things in its span! And finding you this way is like the sunburst itself. Kiss me—just once."

Kelty stooped his lips to hers, and a joyous little laugh came from her.

"Now tell me all I don't know about you, flying man! Little things from the yesterday that lies dead across the world! And I'll whisper to you and the starry sea all that does not matter about me and my yesterday—"

The hours passed like a song, and the long sea-surges slipped underfoot and slid astern in foamy phosphorescence; between the two at the helm arose a wonder and an understanding such as Bill Kelty had never known. Strange, deep things were drawn out of them both; together they came upon blazing truths born in the days of blood and fire behind them. The stars and the whisperings of the night wind opened all things to their eyes.

She voiced one thought that could never have been uttered by daylight, somehow, for it was new and strange and awkward, yet deadly true.

"This tomorrow—it's not a little thing! Cruel as it may sound, all the earth is washing out its mistakes in tears today. And tomorrow the people of your land and mine will dry those tears in the vision of a new brotherhood, a new love and help of each other—why, my dear, we've seen it here in this little ship! This is a sample of it! The prophets and teachers and social workers have fumbled at the edges of it these long years; but now it's the only salvation for us all who live!"

"I get you," said Kelty. "If you'd said that a fortnight ago, I'd have laughed at the notion as rank socialism. Now I see it better; the sea and the wind give the mind a sort of detachment. We should be thinking and talking about us—and we're not."

"But we are!" she said, and laughed. "That's the wonder of it—we are! All these things once so far away are in tomorrow now, my dear!"

He forgot much of what she had told him of herself and her life; it fell away from his memory, rather. They were still standing together, talking, when the dawn began to gray the sky, and Wynkoop came to take the helm, unsummoned.

"You will pardon me," he said gently, and they knew he was smiling as he spoke, "but even an old man can manage the wheel now, or the wind has gone down a good deal."

So they stepped away, and stood in the bow watching the stars grow thin and wan in the greenish sky, and parted with a kiss upon the first finger-tip of day.

V

IN THE sunrise, Lungi came and bowed before Wimple and Kelty, very primly. He fetched Wynkoop along to translate; he requested that for this day the others aboard should do nothing at all except rest and loaf, permitting the orphans to do everything—run the ship, cook, take care of themselves and their elders.

Kelty looked at the shining, intelligent face of the boy, and grinned.

"Go ahead, and more power to you!" said he. "Wimple, they're a grand bunch! Let 'em have their lark."

"Also, the wind's pretty light; maybe going to have a calm," said Wimple practically. "Good-o, I say!"

Lungi no sooner got the required permission, than he and the others leaped into action; everything had been organized beforehand, apparently. The Chinese cooks

lugger, but not fast. She must have been coming on for some time, unseen, since her length was black with men who had emerged from the tower. They were grouped about a gun aft and another forward.

Then a puff of wind billowed out her listless flag, and Kelty felt a freezing sensation at recognition of the Rising Sun. She stood on, barely creating a ripple in the water, toward the motionless lugger.

"She'll not bother with us—she can't!" exclaimed Wimple. "Here, get rid of that tunic and get up forward to talk with her!"

The others were scattering hastily. "Do it yourself," retorted Kelty, and dashed at the three women. "Down in the hold—not the after cabins! Down below! Look after the kids!"

Julie comprehended, and waved a hand in assent.

Wynkoop and Ati stood by the helm, staring, thunderstruck and dismayed. Wimple took place in the foreshrouds, above the rail. Lungi came up to Kelty and said something; with a gesture or two and a few Dutch words, Kelty made him understand.

He sent all the boys below, but he himself remained beside Kelty, evidently considering himself too much of a man now to take shelter with the others.

The submarine came on. She was a big one, Kelty saw, but she had suffered; the large gun in her conning tower was all skewgee and part of the high rail was blown away. Evidently she had been in battle. The officer standing in the round tower lifted a speaking trumpet and hailed in English.

"Put out your boats and leave!"

Wimple waved his arms.

"Vat you say? No compree! No savvy!" he shouted back. Then, over his shoulder and more softly: "Yank! He says to abandon ship What the hell can we do?"

"Nothing," responded Kelty. "Tell him we've nobody to man the boats. Get Wynkoop to talk with him; Dutch refugees and so on. Kill time."

THE Jap officer spoke Dutch, it appeared, and spoke it fluently. Wynkoop mounted to the rail, and as the distance lessened, the exchange of words became more distinct. There was a heavy conversation. Wynkoop turned.

"He says the sub is damaged. They want to occupy this ship and take her in tow. They tell us to go away in the boats. I tell him refugees, children; he says to go anyhow, his men will launch the boats."

"But the kids couldn't stand it!" exclaimed Kelty. "Like hell we will! Here, Aussie, you tell Wynkoop to keep on talking. Tell him to come alongside, tell him any damn thing! Have Ati throw him a rope—I'll be back in a minute—"

He beckoned Lungi and dove down below, in a flame of fury! The boats? With those kids, three of them wounded, that meant slow death and certain. More wildly in his brain beat the flame—risk all, risk all!

The boy at his heels, he came upon that bundle of round things he had lugged back from the crashed plane, and the belted pistol. He strapped on the weapon. Then, for a moment, hesitation hit him hard; he was afraid, actually afraid, with a deathly fear.

He realized what it would mean. Those Jap machine-guns, fore and aft, were manned and ready. The sub might be disabled in part, but she was taking no chances, she wanted this lugger and to hell with anybody aboard! Well, that settled it; he realized what this would mean to the orphans, too. He had to choose and do it fast—

Stooping, he lifted the bundle and then lugged it up the ladder, Lungi giving a hand with the weight. Here on the deck, he was beyond immediate sight of those aboard the sub; he had to stand erect to see her now. More men had come out all

along her slim length. Ati was heaving a coil of line to them, Wynkoop was bawling away desperately. Kelty heard a choking exclamation as Wimple joined him and Lungi.

"My God, Yank, you can't do this!" cried the Aussie, aghast. "You don't know if they'll work! And those guns will get us sure as fate!"

"You be damned," barked Kelty. "Risk all, risk all! Here, show Lungi how to work the pin and chuck the thing—move fast!"

Between them, they made the quick-witted young fellow comprehend; he nodded eagerly. Desperation seized upon Kelty; there was no time to say a word to Julie, no time for anything — Ati had thrown the coil of line and it was made fast, the imposing length of the sub was drawing in under the side of the lugger. Kelty stood up and eyed her and spoke quickly.

"Take what you can carry, Wimple," he said. "Jump forward and you'll be about even with her after-deck; get the men there around the gun. Ready?"

"Aye," blurted Wimple. He stooped, gathered up three or four of the grenades, and started forward.

Kelty seized the bundle and dragged it to the rail, Lungi with him. He stood up; almost at his side, almost level with him, was the conning tower, with brown faces squinting up, and the forward gun, more Japs crowding around it. Two officers were there. The men had rifles and pistols.

With an effort of his will, Kelty stooped, picked up one of the grenades, drew the pin, and tossed it. He picked up another. There was a cry from the men below—a medley of commands, shouts, frantic voices. The second grenade was in the air before the first exploded. Wimple was at work, Lungi was jerking out a pin and hurling his pineapple—

A shattering blast of fire leaped up. Kelty was knocked backward on Lungi; both went rolling, then scrambled up. Another explosion, another, almost in their faces. One of the bombs went straight down the conning-tower hatch. The sub was reeling back and forth; the insane clatter of her machine-guns burst out, drowning the din of yells.

Kelty scooped up another bomb and hurled it; this one burst among the men on the forward deck. He saw old Wynkoop spin around, both hands to his head, and collapse. Wimple had silenced the after gun. The conning tower was a bloody shambles.

Men were screaming, cursing, firing away with their rifles and pistols. More came pouring up the hatchway, shrieking something shrilly. Kelty picked up a grenade, reached for the pin, and blood poured over it; he felt nothing, but his left wrist and hand were hidden by blood. He rested it on the rail, pulled the pin with his right hand, caught the grenade and hurled it—the explosion blasted the entire foredeck of the sub. Luckily, he went to his knees behind the rail.

He could not get up from them; he stayed there, clinging with one hand, looking over at the scene below, too dizzy and weak to rise. Something clutched at him frantically. It was Lungi, trying to get the belted pistol. It came clear and the boy darted away with it.

Things fogged for a moment, then they cleared again. The sub's decks were awash, were under—that grenade down the hatch had done the business! As Kelty looked, he gasped—the conning tower was low in the water, the hatch still wide open—he heard Wimple yelling at Ati to throw off the hawser. Then a huge bubble of air and water burst upward, the lugger rocked and reeled, he lost his grip and was flung half across the deck.

Kelty tried to get his balance; no use. As he sprawled, he had a vision of the boy Lungi standing on the rail and shooting straight down with the pistol—at the men swimming there, of course. A laugh shook

him at the sight, and blood choked him with the laugh, and that was all he remembered.

VI

HE CAME awake to a creaking all around him, and dim light, and fiery jabs of pain, and smelly confinement.

"What the hell!" he tried to say, but the words burned him. Something moved; here was Wimple, sitting beside him. He was in the lower berth in a cabin, and the lugger was in motion. He had never realized before how she creaked, down below.

"Good-o!" exclaimed Wimple. "Here, let me hold your head up. Drink this. Tea."

Kelty swallowed some of it, lukewarm. He tried to speak, but Wimple checked him.

"Chuck it. I'll talk. You're in a hell of a shape. Jolly old Wynkoop got it; I don't expect he cared a lot, though. I'm a bit pooped up—splinters from the rail. Thank God the gun shot low!"

Wimple was a mass of bandages from throat to waist. Kelty could see.

"Sunset," went on the Aussie, pointing to the porthole. "And a spanking fair breeze and the old girl's bowling along. Not a word, blast you! Yes, she went down like a plummet. Two of her men nearly got aboard, but the lad knocked 'em off. The rest can swim, for all I care! Y' know, that was a jolly big sub! Some of her bullets went clear through us, too. We must get the pumps to work in the morning. The lads are certainly doing wonders."

Kelty made a vague gesture, touching himself; he, too, was all bandages.

Wimple started to speak, then rose stiffly as the door opened. Someone else came in; it was Julie. A word or two passed, she took the stool and leaned forward, clasping Kelty's hand in hers, looking at him earnestly. Her drawn features shocked him.

"All well now, all well but—you," she said, and choked on the word. "Don't talk. Mynheer Wynkoop is happy, I think; there was a smile on his face. Ati is all right, the children are safe. But we've had a hard fight with you, my dear. I—I have to be honest about it—"

Her voice failed. Kelty pressed her hand reassuringly and managed a faint grin.

"I don't know if you can pull through," she said brokenly. "All we could do was apply dressings and hope for the best; no bullets to get out. Three of them struck you. And a big splinter from the rail hit you across the throat and must have broken a blood vessel—oh, please, please live!"

Kelty nodded and tried anew to smile. Live? Hell! A bombardier out of Java had the world by the tail! And after all that had happened, he had no intention of dying.

He glanced down at his hand. There was a ring on the little finger. It was her ring, the one with the raised letters carven in the gold. A dim memory came back to him from childhood and Bible class—about this word, *Mizpah*. Something about watching over "between thee and me."

"Julie!" He whispered the name slowly, regardless of her protest. "Okay—nothing can—kill me now!"

He felt it, he was sure of it, as he met the glow of her tear-filled eyes. And, for once, he was right.

The Anglo-American Good Will Delegation Meets the Devil in Person

THE GOOD WILLERS

By ROBERT R. MILL

Author of "The Zombie Chasers," etc.

BACK in more peaceful days, cash customers aboard cruise ships cheerfully arose before daylight in order to watch the soft pink and blue tints of sunrise spread over the green islands in the blue waters of the Gulf of Paria as their vessels neared Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, in the British West Indies.

As a member of the crew of the U.S.S. *Fitch*, a flush-deck destroyer of first World War vintage, Mr. Richard Howard now had a ringside seat at this spectacle. There were added attractions in the form of warships, transports and supply vessels, all of which constituted tangible proof of the importance of the base the United States has established in Trinidad. Nevertheless, the beauty and impressiveness of the scene brought no glow of pleasure to the plump, owlish-looking face that had caused Mr. Porter to be known as "Prof."

Early in his youth, while his mother was incapacitated by an extended illness, Mr. Porter had been turned over to a nurse, who had happened to be English. At the end of the period of exposure—she later said that it had been a race between the

mother's recovery and the loss of her own sanity—the nurse returned to her native land with a violent antipathy for all things American. She left behind her a young gentleman with a firmly planted dislike for all things English.

Trinidad, of course, is a British possession. Therefore Mr. Porter was prepared to dislike the place, its people, its customs and everything even remotely connected with it. Those people who cite elephants for feats of memory have never had benefit of contact with Mr. Porter.

His first-sight aversion to Trinidad gained throughout the day. The tropical heat, which he was thoroughly used to, and in which he thrived, drew scathing comments. Even the belated arrival of the U.S.S. *Gilpin*, a sister ship of the *Fitch*, whose crew included one Thomas Porter, a tall, rangy youth with a mop of fiery red hair, who was Mr. Howard's favorite partner in crime, failed to lighten the gloom.

The English also figured, although indirectly, in a problem that confronted the youthful two and one-half striper, who was Mr. Howard's skipper, and who was checking over the names of a liberty party. He, too, had noted the arrival of the *Gilpin*, and his pen remained motionless beside Mr. Howard's name. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"What with Lend-Lease, and one thing and another," he mused, "we have been pretty good to the English. There won't be a better chance to test their friendship, even at the peace table."

The pen moved on, leaving the typewritten page unsullied.

Aboard the *Gilpin*, another Lieutenant-commander arrived at a like decision by a somewhat different route.

"Sooner or later," he decided, "somebody is going to do the world a service by killing them. Flowers are dirt cheap in Trinidad."

That was why, along toward the cool of evening, Messrs. Porter and Howard met in the Pig and Harp, which is about the best imitation of a dreary English pub that can be found in Port-of-Spain.

MR. HOWARD came to the meeting at a decided disadvantage. To borrow from the cigarette advertisements, something new had been added. The sleeve of his jumper now bore the insignia of a coxswain, and this new and unwanted elevation drew immediate fire from Mr. Porter.

"Did you sew 'em on?"

"Sure." Mr. Howard attempted to create a diversion, and at the same time to pay an installment on an old score. "This beer is flat."

"Why didn't you use a zipper?" demanded Mr. Porter. "Be easier to get 'em off when they break you. And pipe down about the beer. Didn't your skipper shoot the breeze about remembering that the English are our gallant allies, and treating 'em as such?"

Mr. Howard welcomed a topic he could deal with in a whole-hearted manner.

"The Old Man didn't say that I had to drink flat beer, even to please Limeys." He raised his voice. "This beer is flat!"

The cockney barman discarded a dirty rag in favor of a bungstarter. Three English sailors left their table, and took places before the bar. An elderly Englishman decided this was no place for a civil servant, and left the establishment. A United States Marine sipped thoughtfully at his gin and bitters.

Then fate picked a pink-cheeked young Englishman to contribute, all unwittingly, to international discord. He was a mild, inoffensive youth, who had quit the halls of learning to become a very junior officer in His Majesty's Navy. He had a genuine liking for Americans, all of whom he found jolly interesting. His entrance, however, was marred by another rendition of what Mr. Howard had adopted as his theme song.

"This beer is flat. It is as flat as Chur-

chill's excuses for not invading the continent."

"Pipe down!" Mr. Porter ordered. "You can't read, so you wouldn't know, but we are at war with Hitler—not Churchill."

The English lieutenant, junior grade, decided this was no time to weld another link in the chain of Anglo-American relations, and beat a prudent retreat. Whereupon Mr. Howard seized upon his departure for his own purposes.

"Did you see that?" he demanded.

"The only thing I see," declared Mr. Porter, whose patience was reaching the breaking point, "is that you are crying for somebody to give you a push in the puss, and when the line forms on the right I'll be in it."

Mr. Howard brushed this aside with another question:

"Why did that Limey j. g. drag his anchor out of here? I'll tell you! More caste system. More old-school-tie stuff. Won't drink at the same bar with enlisted men. Is that democracy? Is that what we are fighting for? Why are we fighting this war?"

From behind a protecting screen of the three English sailors, the cockney barman went into action. The affront to the product he dispensed rankled far more than the slur upon national honor, but he shrewdly decided to make the latter the issue.

"If you arsk me," he remarked, "Hi 'aven't seen you Yanks do any fighting, hekcepting with your bloody mouths!"

A look of peace and contentment crossed the face of the American Marine. He had neither started, nor contributed to this fight. It had been wished on him. He glanced hopefully at Mr. Porter.

That gentleman, however, met the situation with only a rather vague declaration:

"There are only two kinds of Englishmen." A long pause followed. "Some of them are sons of lords."

During the next pause the English sailors went into executive conference, and one of them approached the table occupied by Messrs. Porter and Howard. He was a husky individual, and his face wore a sneer that did not endear him to Mr. Porter.

"What does that make me, Yank!" he demanded.

Mr. Howard attacked the problem with relish.

"Is your father a lord?"

"Not on your bloomin' life. He's a fishmonger."

"In that case," Mr. Howard ruled, "you are not a son of a lord."

The English sailor braced himself, and his fist headed for Mr. Howard's jaw. Mr. Howard's fist winged its way towards the jaw of the English sailor. The fists met, their owners grappled, and the floor had two customers.

The English sailors at the bar headed for the disturbance. Mr. Porter and the marine headed for the English sailors. The resulting collision increased the size of the twisting, squirming mass on the floor.

The cockney barman, bungstarter in hand, moved about the edges of that struggling mass, delivering effective blows from a prudent distance. This, naturally, was annoying to Messrs. Howard and Porter and the marine. Their annoyance, much to their surprise, was shared by the English sailor who was making life very full for Mr. Porter.

"Keep out of it, you foul blighter!" he gasped. "That isn't cricket!"

Mr. Porter, who was unable to credit his ears, disentangled himself from the mass and lunged at the barman. The English sailor also lunged at the barman. Both lunges were successful. Mr. Porter grinned. The English sailor also grinned.

"More sporting with even numbers and fists," he explained.

Mr. Porter's speeding fist was halted as its owner experienced the same glow that had marked the beginning of many a beautiful fist-and-barroom friendship.

"What are we fighting about?" he demanded.

The Englishman chuckled. "I really don't know," he admitted. "Seemed like a jolly idea at the time, but we better break it off, because the constabulary will be here any minute. That will mean five pounds for each of us, and one pound for each of you, as visitors."

Mr. Porter found the suggestion sound. They parted the other contestants by pulling them apart, and dragging them from the floor to places around a large table. The barman had lost all interest in the proceedings, so Mr. Porter's erstwhile adversary took over his apron and his duties.

Hostility vanished as suddenly as a tropical storm. Only Mr. Howard retained certain reservations.

"When I was a kid," he explained, "I had an—"

Mr. Porter's former enemy approached with a collection of bottles and glasses.

"We'll give these a whirl," he explained. "You were right about the beer. It's frightfully flat."

Mr. Howard returned to his theme song:

"I had an English nurse."

The volunteer bartender was all interest.

"My word. So did I. Mine was a foul creature."

Mr. Howard waved a plump hand expansively.

"Mine wasn't so bad. And I was no tonic to her."

Into this atmosphere of international good will came three belated policemen, who had cafe-au-lait skins, Oxford accents, and Chesterfieldian manners.

"Has there been a disturbance here, gentlemen?"

The volunteer bartender registered surprise.

"Disturbance? I wouldn't tolerate that here, gentlemen."

The policemen hesitated. The cockney barman, who was stretched out on the floor, chose that moment to emit a hollow groan.

"That gentleman?" A policeman took a step forward.

"Epilepsy." Mr. Porter's erstwhile opponent supplied the explanation. "Very sad case." He stepped in front of the policeman, and stood over the victim. "Not a thing to do but make him comfortable and see that he doesn't bite the jolly old tongue." He produced a handkerchief, and stuffed it into the cockney's mouth. "That will do it." He led the policeman away from the victim. "Won't you gentlemen join us in a spot of something?"

The gentlemen courteously pointed out that only the regretful fact that they were on duty made it necessary for them to decline the kind invitation, and took their departure.

Mr. Porter was aglow with admiration for a fellow craftsman.

"My name is Porter. They call me Brick. What's your name, sailor?"

The sailor whose sneer had hastened the festivities, chuckled.

"Arsk him what is guv'nor does," he directed.

The amateur barman blushed a rosy red.

"My name is Cedric," he insisted.

"That's only harf of it," persisted the informant. "He's bloody well in the clars you mentioned. He's a real toff. Some day they'll be calling him Sir Cedric."

The heir-apparent of one of England's oldest families squirmed uncomfortably as he mopped the table with a dirty towel.

"What is your pleasure, gentlemen?"

With this auspicious start, the success of the good-will session was assured. Mr. Howard, who never did things by halves, searched his memory and discovered various credit items in the account of his English nurse, all of which he proceeded to place on the record:

"Her last name was Barnes," he explained, "so I called her Barnes. She was a patient soul. Always let me pull her hair three times before she let me have it on the fingers. Always took my part. Put up a

real battle when my dad said that he was going to skin me alive. Said that wasn't a proper punishment for a lad with my—"

"Did she suggest having you walk on live coals?" asked Mr. Porter, who was growing a bit fed up with Mr. Howard and his nurse.

"My nurse," declared Mr. Howard, with great dignity, "was an English gentlewoman in reduced circumstances.'

"They all are, laddie," declared Cedric, who returned to the table with additional supplies. "And in addition to that, most of them are foul creatures. Mine certainly was."

Mr. Howard was properly resentful.

"Don't think that the American ones are any better!" His defiant glance included the English delegates to the conference. "I think a lot of Barnes. Won't hear a word against her!"

The awkward pause that followed was bridged by the cockney barman, who displayed the first signs of life since colliding with Cedric and Mr. Porter.

"The blighter is choking," was Cedric's impersonal comment.

"We can't leave him on the floor," said the practical Mr. Howard. "He'll get pneumonia—I hope."

"Roll him over on the other side," directed Mr. Porter. "Then he'll get double-pneumonia."

The barman solved the problem by removing the handkerchief, climbing weakly to his feet, and using the bar to maintain himself in that position.

"I'll ave the lahr on yer for this," he declared, "this ole bloody lot of yer!" He spat expressively. "Yanks and Henglish! Bah! Birds of a feather, sez Hi!"

"Shove a chair under him," Mr. Porter ordered, "and let him rest his brains."

The willing marine supplied the chair, and the force necessary to seat the cockney.

"Let the old mouth cruise along under closed hatches," Cedric advised the victim. "You are licensed to dispense liquids, not solids. Any magistrate would call a bung-starter a solid. Matter of simple assault, you know. And plenty of stout witnesses."

THE tempo of the celebration increased. The marine, drawing upon a vast store of experience, pronounced this to be his favorite drinking place. A British sailor, not to be outdone, went on record to the effect that he had never encountered more congenial drinking companions.

Mr. Howard, meanwhile, had worked along from incidents illustrating his devotion to his English nurse to anecdotes of his childhood.

"I'll never forget the day that I was promoted to the third grade," he declared. "I was so—"

"So excited that he cut himself shaving," Mr. Porter finished.

"You must have started shaving when you—" Cedric caught himself. "My word. I jolly well muffed that one."

Sounds of revelry carried in from the street, where the coming of night had been marked by the closest approach to carnival spirit possible in a British crown colony. Dusky natives, masked, and in outlandish costumes, threw confetti, squirted cheap perfume, and took advantage of this one day of license to shout good-natured insults at British colonials, who, every other day of the year, they respectfully regarded as their betters.

Mr. Porter cocked an attentive ear.

"What gives?" he demanded.

The marine explained.

"Carnival, eh?" Cedric was all enthusiasm. "Be a jolly idea if we attend in a body. Sort of an Anglo-American delegation. What do you chaps say?"

The voice vote was unanimous, and Mr. Howard even added a touch of sentiment:

"Always glad to give a kick—I mean a helping hand to American-English relations." His plump face had reached a startling shade of red. "Barnes would like

that. Good old Barnes. Go to hell—go to carnival in her memory."

Mr. Porter delivered an ultimatum:

"If we are going to have that nurse with us all evening, I stay right here. We don't need her. You're old enough to change your own rompers—or are you?"

This moot question was tabled in favor of the barman, who demanded an accounting.

Cedric adorned the mahogany with a banknote, the denomination of which caused the barman to gasp.

"That should cover everything," declared the English sailor. "If not, take it up with my solicitor."

"Or with his nurse," said Mr. Porter, who jerked a thumb at Mr. Howard.

Their departure was halted by Mr. Howard, who discovered a serious omission.

"No badges. American-English delegation. Got to have badges."

Mr. Porter stepped into the breach. He stripped the labels from various bottles, and held one against Mr. Howard's head.

"Just the thing," he declared. "Who has a thumbtack?"

The barman supplied pins. Then, properly identified by the labels of assorted brands of liquid goods, and cloaked in the aroma from the same, they ventured forth into the night.

There was a slight delay, while Mr. Porter conversed with a sepia-colored lady, whose gaiety had a certain professional quality.

"I'll be busy the first part of the evening," he explained. "I promised my aunt that I would murder my uncle."

"Haven't you attended to that yet?" Cedric demanded.

"No," Mr. Porter admitted, "and Aunt Cynthia is getting very impatient."

The lady stood her ground.

"We could meet later, no? Anywhere you say, baby."

Mr. Porter gave the problem grave thought.

"Do you know his nurse?" His thumb identified Mr. Howard, and he ignored the votes the lady cast for the negative. "Everybody in Trinidad should by this time. Meet me at her house."

"That," declared Cedric, "comes under the heading of mayhem."

The marine took charge of the expedition.

"There's a big brawl down the street. Dancing and calypso singers. Native stuff, but a lot of American and English dames with government jobs will hide behind a mask and do some high-grade slumming."

"What's wrong with that?" demanded Mr. Howard. "Me, I'm broadminded. I'm—"

"He's so broadminded he doesn't know right from wrong," declared Mr. Porter. "Let's shove off."

THE flotilla moved on, and after brief stops at each of the many thirst parlors along the route, cast anchor before the main objective. This was a large, shedlike building, the open doors of which revealed a huge dance floor, which was crowded with masked, costumed people, dancing to the strains of a samba orchestra.

Cedric opened negotiations with the dusky gentlemen of the floor committee, who guarded the entrance.

"Good evening, gentlemen. This is the Anglo-American Good Will delegation."

The gentlemen looked doubtful.

"Secretary Knox made the reservations," Mr. Porter explained.

"We know nothing of such a reservation, sir," came the courteous reply.

"Deucedly strange," Cedric mused. "Maybe Frank turned it over to Winnie. Have you anything in Mr. Churchill's name?"

The gentleman on the door was very positive.

"There has been no communication from the prime minister."

"Careless staff work," was Cedric's verdict. "But no harm done. We will purchase tickets. How many of us are there?

Stand still, you chaps, so the gentleman can make sure how many there are of each of us."

The doorman, however, did not begin the count. He flashed a signal, and waited until a good-sized delegation from the constabulary had joined him before he began his explanation:

"I am sorry, gentlemen. Admission is not permitted unless the person admitted is masked, and in costume."

"Why try to improve on nature?" demanded Mr. Porter, who jerked his thumb at Mr. Howard. "Isn't his face funny enough?"

The doorman stood firm. Mr. Howard, who was straining forward over the barrier, registered a violent protest:

"That's bunk! Look at those brass hats!" He pointed at a group of American Army officers, who were seated on a raised platform. "Look at those ornaments of the dry goods trade!" He indicated a group of civilians seated nearby. "They aren't any funnier looking than we are."

The doorman hastened to explain:

"Those gentlemen are visiting American officials, in transit. They have been invited to judge the costumes."

Support came from the marine:

"That's on the level. Those brass hats and technicians blew in on three Pan-American Clippers just before sundown." He lowered his voice. "They hop off for Brazil tomorrow. The next day they are off for Liberia. From there they go to the Middle East. It's hush-hush stuff, but these babies carry plenty of rank in their own lines, and they are the boys to grease the skids for the next big offensive."

The good-will delegation yielded to unanswerable logic, and the doorman stepped forward with a suggestion:

"I would be glad to commend a costumer to the attention of you gentlemen."

"Commend," Mr. Porter ordered.

The marine, who knew the place suggested, led the way to a dingy shop, where a very English "clark" went to work. One English sailor became a clown. The marine blossomed forth as a Roman senator. A second English sailor was transformed into a cannibal. Mr. Howard, amid considerable pushing and shoving, and even more urging, was poured into a little Lord Fauntleroy outfit, complete with curls.

Then the clerk turned expert eyes upon Mr. Porter and Cedric.

"You two gentlemen are about of a size. That makes the problem a bit more difficult."

"Would an adding machine help you?" asked Mr. Porter.

The clerk ignored the suggestion.

"We have only one costume left in the establishment."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Porter, who was eyeing Mr. Howard's curls.

"Cupid."

Mr. Porter at once yielded in favor of Cedric, who, in turn, offered to sign a quit-claim in favor of Mr. Porter. They settled by matching for it. Cedric lost, and donned the costume.

"Alone," Mr. Porter admitted, "it would be bad. But it's a relief after looking at that guy in the fright-wig."

The return voyage began. At each pause for refreshments, Mr. Porter insisted that his one desire was to see his dear friends happy, and that he would gladly remain on the sidelines, acting as a one-man cheering section. Each of these manifestations of generous self-sacrifice called for additional libations.

MR. HOWARD, who had been weakened by the strain of being converted from the anti to the pro side of the English question, sobbed audibly. His tears, they gathered, were a tribute to Mr. Porter's nobility of character.

"Be dancing on light hearts—I mean feet, while good old Brick stands out in the snow—" He used a yellow curl to mop his eyes. "Ishn't right. Member good old Barnsey saying, 'Share your toys with

other boys, you little so-and-so!' Gran old girl, Barnsey. Jus like Brick. Big feet—I mean heart."

A small crowd was gathering, so the marine decided in favor of a detour, which took them through a park, which was fragrant with tropical flowers. Mr. Howard, who was supported on either side by an erstwhile enemy, responded to fresh air and motion. The tears ceased, and the hangers-on dispersed. They were quite alone in the center of the park when Mr. Porter let out an exclamation.

"That settles it! Tomorrow I go on the wagon!"

Coming toward them, and plainly visible in the blow from an arc light was—the devil!

He wore red tights, from the rear of which there emerged a forked tail. His head was covered by a hood, which supported horns.

"Steady, all hands!" Cedric rallied his forces. "There must be an explanation for this. To be sure! Another masquerader. Probably a member of the Peruvian delegation." He raised his voice. "What ho, my lad! How are things in the old home town?"

The devil made no reply, but as he drew nearer they could hear him muttering angrily.

"Rude devil, isn't he?" Cedric turned to Mr. Porter, the light of inspiration glowing in his eyes. "You know, old son, he is jolly well your size."

Quick and enthusiastic assent was forthcoming from Mr. Howard.

"Solves everything. Gets Brick in out of the snow. This bird's in no frame of mind to go to a party. Gets him—"

The marine was a man of action. He, quite literally, took the devil by the horns. He had enthusiastic helpers. The devil was overpowered. He was stripped, none too gently, of his costume. He was bound with stout vines, which the resourceful marine tore from the trunk of a nearby tree.

His protests were stilled by a gag, courtesy of Cedric.

Mr. Porter slipped out of his uniform, and into the clothes of the devil.

"Stow him under this bush," ordered the marine. The erstwhile devil got service.

"I'll heave my kit in beside him," said Mr. Porter, "and pick it up on the return trip."

"Nicely done," Cedric murmured. "And strictly according to Holy Writ. 'Smite the devil!' We jolly well did."

This time there was no trouble at the gate.

But once inside the hall, Mr. Howard proceeded to gratify an ambition of several years' standing. Hiding behind the camouflage of a black velvet suit, a lace collar and yellow curls, plus a mask, he advanced on mincing steps until he stood facing the ranking officer on the platform. His voice was a shrill falsetto as he asked:

"Would you like to waltz?"

The general took one look at the nightmare.

"Good God, no! I knew I shouldn't have eaten that damned lobster!"

A Roman senator and a cannibal arrived ahead of the floor committee, and removed the offending vision.

Meanwhile, off in one corner, Mr. Porter and Cedric took stock of the situation.

"My word," murmured the English sailor. "Look at the dream in the pink ballet costume."

Mr. Porter obeyed instructions.

"Sailor," he declared, "I am willing to do more than look!"

The dream danced nearer, held in the embrace of a monk. She spoke to her escort, who shrugged his shoulders, released her, and walked away.

"How would you like to go to the devil?" Mr. Porter asked.

"How about a turn around the floor with Cupid?" Cedric demanded.

The girl's teeth gleamed beneath her mask.

"I renounced the church," she declared. "I might as well go to the devil."

Mr. Porter and the girl joined the crowd on the floor.

"Where have you been all evening?" she asked.

"Hither and yon," said Mr. Porter. "Mostly yon. But it would have been only hither if I had known I could find a pink ballet dress. Pink is my favorite color."

She lowered her voice.

"You talk like an American."

"Why not?" he demanded. "Believe it or not, I went to school there!"

She nodded assent.

"I see." Her lips were close to his ear. "The Clippers will leave tomorrow at dawn. They plan to make Brazil before dark. They will take-off at four the next morning for the Pan-American base in Liberia."

Mr. Porter's alcoholic glow, which had been fanned by the quick and easy conquest, subsided abruptly. This was dangerous stuff she was issuing. And that crack about him talking like an American had meant more than that he had no British accent.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Keep dancing, you fool!" Her fingers brushed the top of her daringly low dress, and emerged with a crumpled bit of paper, which she pressed into his hand. "That's the passenger list. I had a sweet time getting it, but that young fool in the Pan-American office finally came across."

Mr. Porter drew her closer.

"Nice going!" He tried a random shot. "I wasn't sure you were the one, at first."

"Why not?" she whispered. "Didn't Mandell tell you that I would make that crack about going to the devil? We had to work it this way. The fools know there is a leak somewhere, and they are watching everybody. It wasn't safe for Mandell to come to the city again. They probably are following me. But everybody comes here, and this looks like just another pick-up."

A band descended upon Mr. Porter's shoulder. They turned to face a startled Cupid.

"Sorry to break in on love's young dream, old son," said Cedric, "but there seems to be a spot of trouble."

AT THE far end of the hall, two dusky policemen held the erstwhile devil, who now wore the uniform that had been shed by Mr. Porter. Other policemen had rounded up an assortment that included a clown, a Roman senator, a cannibal and a hybrid with yellow curls. Still more policemen were charging down upon Cupid and the devil.

"Let me go, you fool!"

The girl struggled in the grasp of Mr. Porter, who disregarded clawing fingernails, and held her fast. The law descended upon the trio, and did its stuff.

The samba orchestra halted in the middle of a note. Excited cries went up from the crowd. Down from the platform stalked the general, he who had been favored by the invitation from Mr. Howard.

"What's this?" he demanded.

A policeman explained:

"We found this gentleman"—he indicated the erstwhile devil, "under a bush in the park, sir, in an unclad condition. His uniform was nearby, but he told a story of being dressed as the devil and being attacked by thugs, who stole his costume. We weren't satisfied with his story, sir, but he described the costumes of his assailants, so we made him dress and accompany us here. These gentlemen"—his finger indicated the entire cast—"answer the description, sir. But he made no mention of a young lady."

The general's eyes left a pair of pink legs and came to rest upon bedraggled yellow curls.

"That one," he declared, "looks capable of anything."

"Quite so, sir," the policeman agreed.

Mr. Porter decided that a diversion was in order.

"If it please the general, is his name on this list?"

The general accepted the crumpled bit of paper and examined it.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"From the dame in the pink tights the general admires so much, sir," declared Mr. Porter. "I think she thought I was the other devil, the one wearing my uniform, sir. He's no American sailor, sir. It's my guess that he starts the day with 'Heil Hitler!' "

"The individual does have a bit of an accent, sir," the policeman admitted, "but one never knows—with Americans."

"Oh, yeah!" Mr. Howard reverted to his original status on the English question.

"Somebody step on that," the general ordered, "and then we'll take this whole outfit some place where we can get at the bottom of this mixup."

"Very good, sir," said the policeman.

CUPID, a clown, a Roman senator, a cannibal and a nightmare in a lace collar were sitting in an outer room of the Port-of-Spain police station, reconciled to the worst, when a door opened, and Mr. Porter entered. He had shifted back to his uniform, and his manner was a trifle cocky.

"Hello, old son," said Cupid. "How much penal service is in store for us?"

Mr. Porter waved a hand airily.

"That's out. We're the white-haired boys."

"How come?" demanded Mr. Howard.

"Well, the dame turned out to be the not very private secretary of an American civilian contractor, who is working on the American base. She has a card in the Fifth Column Union. The lad came ashore from a U-boat down the coast. He met pals who gave him the devil's suit so he could come to the city and meet the dame at the carnival. After he got the dope from her, he was to go back to the sub and get busy on the radio. Kraut planes would leave Dakar and knock off those Clippers, which would be carrying a good part of the brains of the United States Army. We scuttled all that."

"That's just ducky, old son," said Cedric, "but there are some little items such as felonious assault, mopery and ungodly conduct. How did old Four-Stars react to that?"

"The General," declared Mr. Porter, "is a scholar, a gentleman and a judge of good whiskey. He said we did this job in the best Navy style." Mr. Porter turned to Mr. Howard. "He said he had forgotten about your asking him to waltz, but that it would be months before he could get those curls and the face under them out of his mind. Then I asked him if he would waive rank, and let me wish him luck in the Middle East."

"My word!" said Cedric. "What happened?"

"He damned near shook my hand off," Mr. Porter asserted. "He said that he would need plenty of luck, and that we were the lads who could give it to him, because he would be sunk if we didn't get supplies to him. You guys can guess what I told him."

"Rather," Cedric murmured. "One doesn't let a chap like that down. He's—" he groped about for suitable praise—"he's a real American."

Mr. Howard snapped out of the coma that had overtaken him.

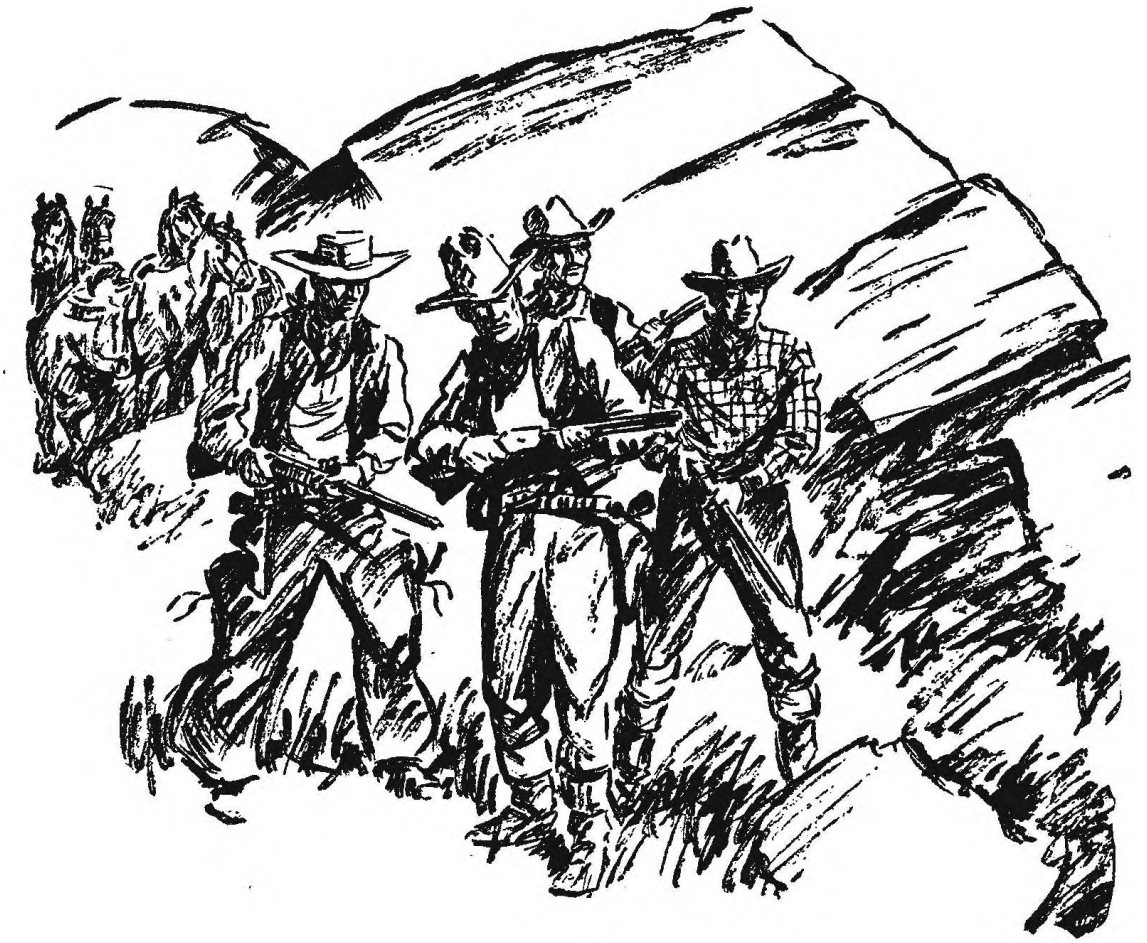
"So what?" he demanded. "He's an American, but if you go back far enough you'll find that his family were English. Good old English stock. That's what made—"

"Pipe down!" ordered Mr. Porter. "One more crack out of you about that dear old English nurse of yours, and I'll pass down a growl to your skipper about you asking the general to waltz."

Mr. Howard shuddered violently.

"Let's go drink to the general," he suggested.

"Very sound idea," declared Cedric.



SADDLE BUMS

By KERRY O'NEIL

THERE was a sharp, shocking sound, followed by a long whine. The shock awoke Talk Tanner. He opened one eye and lay in his blanket, listening to the echoes repeating themselves against the rocky walls; but it was the smack of the bullet that told him it was a rifle shot. He reached under his saddle for his six-gun, and with the same motion began to roll toward a sheltering rock.

He saw his pal, "Bulge" McCoy, behind another, fingering his gun with expectation.

"What kind of trouble is it?" asked Talk.

"They ain't said," Bulge replied. "But it's somebody that don't seem to like us."

They waited, their artillery ready, but there was no more firing; instead a big voice roared at them from the side of a boulder-strewn hill.

"Hey, you couple of saddle bums! What you doing on this ranch?"

"He says it's a ranch," said Talk from behind his breastworks.

"I'd never guessed it," said Bulge. "Not if he'd given me a dozen tries."

Talk lifted his voice.

"What's the idea of throwing lead around like that podner? Especially when there's peaceful, law-abiding citizens that might be in front of some of it."

"Drop your shooters," commanded the voice. "I'm coming down there to take a look at you."

"He says drop our shooters," said Bulge, looking at Talk.

Trouble and Buried Treasure Down Texas Way

"We'll do it," said Talk. "But we'll drop them where we can pick them up right quick if we need them."

So down went the six-guns; then they heard a horse slithering downhill somewhere outside their limited range. Then a short, thickset man, riding a powerful black horse, appeared, drew up and sat looking at them with hard and hostile eyes.

"There are four rifles covering you," he told them. "So, no funny business. What are you doing here?"

"We're a couple of young feilahs trying to get to Gant City on hossback," said Talk.

"Where are you from?" asked the man.

"We're from Wyomin'. Couple of steer busters, Mister, and out of jobs."

The man examined them narrowly. Disbelief was in every movement he made.

"Ranchers in these parts are losing a lot of cattle," he said, "and we keep an eye on every stranger that drifts through the hills. You going to Gant City?" he asked.

"We aim to stop there," said Talk Tanner. "But it ain't the end of the trail. We're going as fur as Texas. Maybe along into Mexico if things don't break right."

"What I ought to do," said the thickset man, "is to get word to the sheriff. He'd slap you into the calaboza until he got some kind of line on you."

"Now, listen," said Talk, "that'd be gitting terrible rough, wouldn't it, podner?"

"This is a rough part of the country," said the man. "But as I ain't ever seen you in these parts before, I guess I'll give you a chance. So saddle your horses, and git.

If you ain't out of these mountains by nightfall, I'll come after you. And I'll come a-shootin'."

TALK and Bulge got their dunnage together, threw the shabby saddles on the backs of their jaded-looking horses and started on their way.

"I didn't like that party," said Bulge McCoy some time later, twisting his bulky body around so as to examine the trail behind them. "Do you reckon he's watching us from somewhere?"

"Like as not," said Talk. "Him and them other fellahs he said was carryin' the smoke poles. People who claim to own cattle get mighty touchy sometimes."

"For me," stated Bulge, "I don't believe that fat-necked so and so ever had a brand on a cow in his life."

"Me neither," said Talk. "Not unless he stole it."

Talk Tanner and Bulge McCoy were what is known, on all the ranges from the Canadian line to the Rio Grande, as saddle bums. They had shabby old hats, worn boots, patched bridles, bony old nags; neither of them had been shaved for days. Talk was slim and quick and, as his nickname told, had the gift of swift speech. Bulge was fat and looked soft, but really had the strength of a steer. In an important spot he said little, leaving the conversation to his pal. But through all Wyoming and Montana there wasn't a horse rider who drew faster or shot straighter. Both were free souls who liked to loaf along over the plains or through the hills, who enjoyed sleeping under the stars, and cooking their bacon and camp bread and their bitter coffee in the cool of the early morning, or in some sheltered place when night was coming on.

"None of them has showed any hospitality, as far as we've seen," complained Talk as they proceeded along, later in the day. "Everybody we've met has asked about money before they'd pass anything out. Looks like they don't trust us."

"I've noticed that, too. Taking a good look at everything, and considering it," said Bulge, "I wish my uncle Abner hadn't ever wrote me that letter."

"It's a long ride," agreed Talk. "From Wyomin' to a town called Steerhead in El Paso County, Texas."

"The only thing that encourages me," said Bulge, "is that we can't be fur from it. These here are the foothills of the Guadalupes, and when we're out of them we're in El Paso County. And Steerhead can't be but near at hand."

Talk was nodding his head at this; their unshod horses were picking their way gingerly among the stones when there came the wide-ranged bark of a rifle, the frightening whine and the splash of the bullet against a rock. In a flash the pals had slipped from their saddles, their rifles were out of their slings and thrown across the backs of the horses.

"No hospitality whatsoever," said Talk Tanner, scanning the steep hillsides. "Not even a kind word any place we go."

"This time we ought to talk back," said Bulge.

There was a movement among the rocks and he snapped a shot at the spot; there was a yelp of pain, and then a silence.

"That time you burnt somebody," said Talk with satisfaction.

"Not much so," said Bulge. "When they holler that way it means they ain't hardly touched at all. Like as not I cut his suspenders, and his pants fell down."

THEY waited for a space; but there was no further action. Then they mounted and proceeded along the rocky trail.

"It's kind of in my mind," said Talk, "we ain't much wanted around here."

"Yeah; and they're kind of hintin' that the best thing we can do is get along out and not make any stops."

They rode on in silence for a time, and then Talk said:

"When a place is like this, and everybody gets upset and nervous at the sight of

a couple of strangers, my say is that something's wrong."

"Now, look," said Bulge, hastily, "I know what it means when you get talking like that. You're aimin' to stick around and find out what's going on. But, we can't do it. We gotta get to Steerhead and see my Uncle Abner. The old boy might be in some kind of trouble, and needing help."

"How long's it been since he wrote you before this time?"

"He never did write. This is the first sight I've ever had of his writing. It ain't bad for an old-timer like him that runs a junk place."

"Is that what he does?"

"He buys and sells all kinds of things.

Old hosses, and riding gear; old clothes, real estate, six-guns and rifles, mortgages and such things."

"Must have a sight of money."

"That's what my old man supposed. He said he reckoned the old boy must own a good sight of El Paso County."

"He didn't mention what he wanted of you?"

"He said there was money in it."

"For you, or for him?"

"That," grinned Bulge, "he didn't say."

"Sounds like he'd be an old bird with all his wits about him," said Talk. "But we shall see."

GANT CITY, in Lincoln County, had been one of the roosting places of Billy the Kid and his fellow mustangers in days gone by. It had a reputation then, and it had held onto it since.

"Looks like a tough burg," said Talk as they rode along the single street.

"There's a place where we might get a little to eat," remarked Bulge as they approached a saloon, the rail of which had a dozen or more horses hitched in a line.

"The Roscoe," said Talk as he read the name of the place over the door. "What money have we got?"

"One silver dollar is all's left. That much won't go fur here."

"We'll give it a swing, anyhow," said Talk.

THEY hitched their horses at the far end of the line, and went into the place. It was a single, long room with a bar at one side, and tables and chairs at the other. There was a barkeeper supplying beverages to the groups along the bar; also, near the door, was a burly young man in his shirt sleeves who had "bouncer" written all over him. He eyed the pals as they entered; their shabby appearances did not impress him.

"What's wanted?" he suggested, stepping alertly toward them.

"A little liquid refreshment, brother," said Talk. "Maybe a little eats, also. Everything depends."

"No moochin'," commanded the muscular young man, scowling threateningly. "We got rules against it."

"Don't worry," said Talk. "We're parties that never travel without the ready cash."

They arranged themselves at the bar.

"What'll you have?" asked the dispenser, with an unfavorable stare.

"Just a second," said Talk. "I see a friend over there. I'll ask him to join us." He whispered to Bulge. "Take a gaze at the corner table."

Bulge looked. He saw a long, thin man in an old-fashioned frock coat, polished shoes and a ministerial collar and tie.

"Toledo Jones!" said Bulge. "And with

the cards on the table, all ready for business."

"Gimme that dollar," said Talk.

Bulge produced the coin, with a grin.

"Seeing as you're going to use it against the crookedest old rooster in a half dozen states," he said, "here it is."

Talk approached the long-faced sharper.

"I see you're open for a little business, podner," he said. "What about cutting the cards at two bits each?"

"Small change, brother," said Toledo Jones in a solemn voice. "Quite small. But as the game isn't brisk at the moment, I'll go you."

He broke the cards and riffled them with sharp precision; his long fingers were like serpents as they went about their task. As he put down the deck, Talk picked it up; the cards snapped crisply in his hands. He put them down. Toledo cut and showed a ten spot, and Talk followed with a king.

THE gambler pushed a quarter across the table as Talk riffled the cards once more; Toledo followed and cut to an ace. Talk showed a deuce. The riffling and cutting went on for a time with no show of profit for either, and Toledo showed signs of being bored.

"What say to ten dollars a cut?" he asked Talk.

That gentleman considered.

"All right, if you'd like it," he said at length. "But I don't much like this getting into big money." The cut was made. Toledo showed a king; Talk had an ace. Toledo pushed a bill across the table; Talk put it into his pocket and displayed all the signs of being through. Toledo frowned at this and got to his feet.

"Oh, no!" he stated loudly. "Nothing like that, brother!"

His voice attracted the attention of the bouncer. He pressed forward eagerly.

"What's going on, professor?" he asked.

"This man made a play with me and showed no money," proclaimed the sharper, even more loudly than before. "He has swindled me."

"I thought you were some kind of a beat," said the bouncer to Talk. "Shell out! Let's see your money!"

"I want ten bucks," said Toledo with fervor. "He is a cheap swindler."

"When it comes to swindlin'," said Bulge, now at Talk's side, "and you want to see a real one, all you got to do"—to Toledo—"is look in any mirror."

"You keep out of this," advised the bouncer, "or I'll throw you through the door."

Talk caught Bulge's eye, and winked.

"Ten bucks, even, my friend'll throw you through it before you throw him," he offered, holding up the bill he'd taken from the gambler.

THE athletic bouncer measured Bulge with a practiced eye. He saw the rolls of fat, and all the other indications of softness. And he grinned.

"Al," he called to the attentive barkeeper, "put a ten on the bar for me," The man did so. "You cover it," said the bouncer to Talk.

Talk did so. Almost instantly the man rushed at Bulge and gripped him. With nonchalant ease, the fat youth bent his leg and drove the knee into the bouncer's abdomen. As the man gasped and released his hold, Bulge roared into action; he whirled the athletic one around, seized him by the scruff of the neck and the slack of the pants and crashed him against the doors.

As these opened outward, they burst apart and the man pitched out into the street.

Talk, whose eyes had never left Toledo Jones during this swift proceeding, now picked up the twenty dollars and stowed them carefully away. The discomfited bouncer re-entered; he brushed himself off and looked at Bulge with appraising eyes.

"That fat you got, fellah, don't take away any of your steam, does it?"

"Never has yet," said Bulge. "But I've been warned about it."

"People have tried to throw him out of places all the way down here from Wyomin'," said Talk. "And none of them have done it yet. So don't be downhearted," he said, "you've got lots of company."

With this welcome increase in the treasury the two took a secluded table and ordered a meal. They were about finishing this when Talk said in a low tone:

"Toledo ain't forgive me for out-quicking him with them cards. He don't take his eyes off us. And look who he's got helping him."

Bulge looked. He saw Toledo at the bar, and with him a thickset, hard-faced man who he at once recognized as the horseman who'd awakened them that morning with a rifle shot.

"Oh, him!" said the fat youth. "You know, I had an idea we'd run across him again some place."

"He, too," said Talk. "And I think there's some kind of a thing cooking."

"Maybe it's Toledo going to try to get his ten-spot back."

"He never will, I give you my word," said Talk. "I had too much trouble rigging that deck on him. I never saw anybody that could do so many things with his fingers."

AFTER a short space, Toledo approached and with him the thickset man.

"This is a friend of mine, Mr. Biggers," said Toledo, indicating him.

"We met Mr. Biggers before," stated Talk. "A piece back in the hills. And he sasses us plenty. Also, he took shots at us with a rifle."

"All by way of a joke," explained Biggers. "We always go through motions with strangers. Just to make sure nothing's wrong."

"Being shot at," said Bulge, "is a joke I never laugh at."

"Suppose," said Toledo, "we let bygones be bygones. Mr. Biggers is offering you a job."

"Hoss-backin' an' cows?" asked Talk.

"No; another kind of a thing. Not much to do, and it'll net you a joint sum."

"What fixed sum?"

"Fifty dollars," said Biggers.

Talk looked at Bulge.

"Not bad," said Bulge in reply. "Somehow, I'd like to have half of that in my pants pocket, just to see how it feels."

"We'll take it," said Talk. "What's the job, and where is it?"

"It's across the Texas line," Biggers told them. "It might take some fast riding. And there might be a little shootin'. But I'm not sure of either."

"Would we be buckin' the law any?" asked Bulge.

"Not a bit," said Toledo. "The fact that I'm in it ought to tell you that."

BULGE looked at Talk for his opinion of this; but Talk had his head turned. His idea was that there were times for laughing—but this wasn't one of them.

"Which way you boys heading?" asked Biggers. "Didn't you say Texas this morning?"

"Yes," Talk told him.

"Then this thing'll be on your way. We start early in the morning. Be up and around."

"Right," said Talk.

After the two men had gone, the pals put their elbows on the table and conferred.

"He didn't say who'd pay the money," said Bulge.

"He'll say it in the morning, and it'll have the right kind of a sound, or they'll go on their way alone," Talk told him. "A shootin' and ridin' job ought to have advance pay attached to it."

"You going to ask for forehanded money?"

"You be around and keep a-listening, and you'll hear me."

They slept at the Roscoe that night.

Next morning, after breakfast, they were saddling up when Toledo and Biggers rode up.

"Okay, boys," said Biggers. "Climb up, and we'll get started."

But Talk stood at his horses head and didn't seem too willing.

"Who's a-paying for this work?" he inquired.

"Lawyer Smathers, over at San Fernandez," said Biggers.

"That's a long way to go to collect fifty dollars," said Talk. "What about paying now?" But Biggers shook his head. "All right," said Talk; "that being so, we're not riding."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Toledo, "you're a-going back on your word?"

"What I mean is that we want to see the money. Keeping the word," Talk told him, "comes after that."

The two men talked the matter over at one side; and then Biggers, very unwillingly, paid over the money. After that the pals got into their saddles, and the four headed along the trail south.

Talk and Bulge rode along in the rear of Toledo Jones and Biggers.

"Fast ridin' and shootin'," said Talk. "I wonder what else."

"Something's cooking," said Bulge. "When anybody shies away from telling a thing the way these two are doing, the way's open to do some suspecting. You can bet that to earn these fifty smackers we've got to get our hands into something right up to the elbows."

Some half score miles from Gant City they struck a sort of tableland, and there was a herd of fine cattle grazing on the rich grass. Biggers gazed at these for a while; and then he said to the pals.

"I don't think I'll let these out here any longer. I'm afraid of rustlers."

"I see a couple of cowhands over there," said Talk, pointing. "Didn't they signal you a while ago?"

"Yes, they did," admitted Biggers. "And that signal meant they were having trouble over on the other side of the mountain. I got about two thousand head over there with no one riding on them. These boys want to get over before night comes on."

"And leave this herd to shift for itself?" asked Toledo.

"I had an idea that these two boys here would take this bunch down the mountain to Basco's camp."

He told the pals that Basco was at a place maybe a dozen miles away. When they'd finished this job they were to ride back along the trail to this present one. And they were to follow on to the Corregio ranch, which they should reach at a safe time after nightfall.

While the two men looked on, Talk and Bulge got the herd moving; and when they'd rounded the bulge of the hill and had the cattle well on their way, Bulge said:

"Does anything look funny to you in this?"

"It all looks funny. I've been trying to think about what makes it that way, but I can't."

"There's about three hundred fat steers in this bunch; all Herefords, that'd pull something on the scales. Making them worth a nice price."

"Yeah." Talk Tanner looked at the cattle moving steadily along the trail. "Did you notice the brand?"

"An arrow under a C."

"Wonder what Biggers is doing with a C in his brand?"

"Search me."

However, they drove the herd along un-

til they came to a camp in a hollow between two hills. There were some rough shanties, a half dozen men and a score or so of horses.

"What name?" asked Talk of a man who came forward.

"Basco. Who are you?"

"What you'd be interested in most is that this stock was sent along by Biggers."

The man looked at the cattle.

"Yeah. I've been expecting them." Then he looked at the pals. "You boys working for Biggers?"

"We're not working cattle for him," said Talk. "This is just a little side job. What say for a receipt?"

"We never give receipts at this shop," said the man. "Tell Biggers you delivered. That ought to satisfy him."

THE pals, after getting the cattle off their hands, turned their horses back over the trail.

"Looks still funnier," said Talk.

"He said he was expecting that bunch," said Bulge. "But he wasn't. He was surprised."

They made good time; it was a full half hour before dusk when they sighted what they felt sure was the Corregio ranch. There was a herd of Herefords grazing in a pasture adjoining the trail as they passed. Talk pulled up his horse, and, pointing, said:

"Look!"

"At which?" asked Bulge.

"At the brand these cows are wearing."

Bulge looked. The brand was distinctly an arrow under the letter C.

"My gosh!" said the fat youth. "Maybe that Biggers ain't a robber, though!"

"Sure is," said Talk.

The Corregio ranch people were Mexican. Corregio himself was well up to eighty; he had a granddaughter named Carmen, a beautiful, lithesome miss with flashing black eyes, and a good deal of spirit.

"A couple of boys I hired for some work," said Biggers, introducing the pals to the rancher and his granddaughter.

"Sit down and eat," said Corregio to them. "Jacinto, some wine for Mr. Biggers' hands." And when he saw them well established at the table at one end of the huge room, he went on with his talk with Biggers and Toledo. "I am land poor and cattle poor," he said. "I have large herds and wide pastures. But no money. Nobody is buying cattle here; it is far away from the market; I am too old to drive thousands of steers to Kansas and places where there are railroads. And there is no one I can trust to take my place."

"All of them rob him!" said Carmen, her dark eyes hot with indignation. "If I were a man, I would have them under my horse's feet."

There was a rush of hoofs in the darkness of the ranch yard; the shouting of men. Both Talk and Bulge leaped up from the table as a couple of excited cowhands threw open the door.

"Senor!" one of them yelled to Corregio. "The cattle on the upper pasture are gone! The rustlers have stolen them!"

Old Corregio stamped and swore; the girl, white with anger, began calling for the hands.

"Saddle up!" she cried. "We'll find them. Pablo, catch my mare and put a saddle on her."

"No, Carmen, no," said the old man. "It is not good. You are a girl. You cannot ride in the night after such people."

"Jacinto, my rifle!" She turned on her grandfather. "I shall go!" she cried. "No more shall they steal your stock!"

But there are only a few men on the place; the others are miles away with the scattered herds."

"It is nothing," said Carmen. "I shall go anyhow. One, two, three, men. It is enough."

Here Biggers lifted his voice.

"Get right after them. That's the idea. And my two boys here will help you."

"Thank you, Senor Biggers," said Carmen Corregio. "With five men, I shall bring the cattle back before morning."

While things in the ranchhouse and yard were in a turmoil of hurry, and voices were shouting directions and questions, Biggers took Talk Tanner and Bulge McCoy aside.

"You're to go with her. Do you hear? There's a nice bit of money in it for you if you get her off on the wrong trail. If you can't do that, see that these hands that ride with you don't do any harm."

"What you mean is shoot them?" said Bulge.

"You're a quick thinker," said Biggers sarcastically.

"What'd you call a nice bit of money?" inquired Talk.

"You're quite a businessman, ain't you?" said Biggers, and stared at Talk with his hard eyes.

"You bet," returned Talk. "When business seems to be going on all around me, why not?"

"You've got fifty dollars, ain't you?"

"Yeah. But that's for a job to be done down in Texas. This here is something else again."

"What do you say to twenty-five more?"

"Not so!" Talk was very prompt in this. "This is a piece of work where we shoot a couple or so of boys that are riding with us. Work like that's worth more. Let's see two hundred dollars, and we're doing it."

"All right," said Biggers. "I'll pay off in the morning."

"Right now, or we don't ride," said Talk.

Cursing under his breath, Biggers drew out a roll of bills and counted off two hundred dollars.

"There you are," he said venomously. "And I expect a job."

"There'll be a job, all right," said Talk.

"Plenty shootin' is what I like," spoke Bulge, hitching his gun to a handier place. "And getting paid for it makes it all gravy."

WITHIN five minutes the disorder of the ranch yard was cleared up and the five cowhands, led by the spirited Carmen Corregio, dashed away into the night.

"I wonder," said Talk to Bulge, who rode at his side, "if you noticed these three we got with us."

"Not much," answered Bulge. "Hired hands of Corregio, ain't they?"

"Yeah. And they're the ones who were riding that herd we drove down the trail to Basco's camp."

"The ones that gave the signal?"

"Yeah. And them signals were to tell Biggers it was all right to slip away with the stock, and that they'd not be looking."

"My gosh!" breathed Bulge. "You don't say! But if they're podners of his, what's he want them gunned for?"

"People like Biggers never want anyone around after they've used them a while."

"Right. I've noticed that a few times myself." Bulge began to laugh. "I liked the way you squeezed the two hundred out of that polecat."

"He thought he'd made suckers out of us, doing his dirty work for him with the cattle. Well, we did it. But now we're going to undo it. And he's paying us for it."

"Holy smoke!" Bulge reached over and shook hands with his pal. "That's a joke, Talk. Any time from now on when I ain't feeling so good I'll remember that and get a good laugh out of it."

About a half hour later the party drew up. One of the Corregio hands got down and was examining the trail by a light he'd kindled.

"No sign," he said. "These thieves they go another way."

He was about to stamp out the fire when Talk, who had also dismounted, stopped him.

"Hold it!" said Talk. He was a young man gifted with an excellent sense of direction and location. And even in the dimness of the starlight he knew that he and Bulge had passed this spot with the stolen

cattle only a few hours before. He tramped about, searching the ground.

"Here you are," he said after a space. "Fresh tracks. A herd passed here, heading south, only a little while ago."

The Corregio hands protested. But Carmen slipped from her saddle and examined the trail.

"It is true," she said. "Many cows passed here in a short time since. We will follow this trail."

They were galloping along through the dimness, Talk holding them to the trail that led to Basco's camp, when one of the Corregio hands pressed his mount close to the young man.

"You are lying," he said bitterly. "You are taking us a wrong way. You are maybe a rustler yourself."

"Keep a distance, podner!" It was Bulge McCoy who spoke, and, in the darkness, he poked the nose of a .45 against the man's ribs. "You might start something you'll not like if you don't."

The man drew away, muttering, and rejoined his comrades.

"They don't like it," said Talk. "Keep close to them, and have your gun handy, while I pick out the way ahead. No telling what skunks like them'll be up to."

In the course of what might have been an hour's riding, Talk Tanner began to sense what he took to be familiar ground. He pulled up his mount. Carmen rode up to him, and he said:

"I think I spot cattle over there to the left."

"Also," said the girl, "straight ahead in a hollow, I can see what must be a campfire."

Talk had also seen this, but thought it might be best not to mention it. The others rode up; when they heard the idea of cattle being off the trail to the left they were disposed to argue against it. But the girl cut them short.

"Make no noise," she said. "We shall see."

A few minutes told of a large bunch of Herefords resting under the stars. A flickering light from a catch showed the Corregio brand on the flank of one of them. But the light caught the eye of a watching herder. He shouted; the hoofs of his horse came pounding in their direction. There was a shot. One of the Corregio hands had

fired at Talk. And missed. But the next instant saw him drop from his saddle under the six-gun fire of Bulge McCoy. The approaching baquero began to fire, but he went down with a well directed shot from Talk's rifle. Then both the pals turned to face the remaining Corregio cowhands, but they had wheeled their horses and were bolting away through the night in the direction of Basco's camp.

BY THIS time the herd was on its feet and milling in growing fright.

"Hold them!" said Talk. They circled about the cattle, speaking and singing. In this Carmen helped with all the verve of a practiced herder.

"The rustlers," she said, passing Talk in a circle, "they will be here in a little while."

"We're going to try not to be here when they arrive," Talk told her.

They got the herd straightened out without much difficulty and started them in the direction of the ranch.

"Keep them going," said Talk. "On the run. I'll hang back a little and see what's going to happen."

His tough old nag, which had more speed and savvy than would be given it by most observers who saw it in its times at a hitching rail, carried Talk Tanner here and there in the rear of the swiftly moving herd. But after a half hour it was plainly evident that Basco, for one reason or another, did not mean to make a struggle for the cattle. Finally, making up his mind to this, Talk

speeded ahead until he caught up with them.

"Where's the girl?" he asked of Bulge.

"Over on the other side," said the fat boy. "You know, fellah, she works like a regular puncher."

"Like as not she's been working steers all her life," said Talk.

He rode around the rear of the bunch and saw Carmen urging the animals on with voice and whip; she cried out at sight of Talk riding toward her, and he saw her rifle whipped out of its sling.

"All right!" he called to her. "I just wanted to tell you that like as not we'll make it without any trouble. The rustlers don't seem to like the idea of following us."

She seemed to be greatly relieved by this.

"I will not forget," she said. "My grandfather will not forget that you have helped us. There are so many people, so many things that are against us," she said, "that my grandfather, who is quite old, has lost his nerve. He sometimes does not know what to do."

"Cattle thieves and land thieves are plenty all through the West," said Talk.

"Great pressure has been put on us," Carmen told him; "most of it has been for our land, but not our grazing land. There is a mine on our holding. An ancient Spanish copper mine. But no one knows just what part of the place it is on. Many attempts have been made to get the place away from us. They steal our cattle and kill our people to discourage us. They think this will make my grandfather sell."

"Got any names?" asked Talk. "Do you know anybody who's working against the ranch?"

"There are so many!" The girl's voice was hopeless now. "We do not know who to suspect. Only one do we know by name. He is a lawyer at San Fernandez. His name is Smathers."

"Oh, yes," said Talk. "I've heard him mentioned."

This was something! Smathers was the San Fernandez man Biggers had spoken of. The man who was to pay them the fifty dollars for the job to be done in Texas. As he turned this over in his mind, riding along behind the recovered herd, Talk felt that light had suddenly begun to shine on something. However, just what that something might be he did not know.

The return of the three with the cattle caused much excitement at the Corregio ranch. Old Corregio embraced Carmen and shook hands with Talk and Bulge. When he heard of the death of one of his vaqueros, and the desertion of the other two to the enemy, his rage was tremendous. While the old man was raging, Biggers took the pals aside.

"What happened?" he asked, and his hard eyes searched their faces.

"Just what she said," Talk told him. "As soon as we sighted the cattle, them fellahs went off the handle. They shot at me and Bulge. When one of them went down, the other two loped off into the night. After that the only thing to do was bring the cattle back."

Biggers stared at them unbelievingly for a few moments. But finally he turned away, saying nothing.

"He's going to start something cooking," said Bulge to Talk. "Looks as if he liked us less than ever."

BUT whatever Biggers thought he kept to himself. Next morning he gave orders to saddle up, and they left the Corregio ranch amidst the thanks of the old man and Carmen. They crossed the Texas border later that afternoon; sometime afterwards they went into camp. And after they'd cooked and eaten their bacon and bread and drank their coffee, Biggers gave the pals the first word he'd spoken to them all day.

"Ever been in a place down this way called Steerhead?" he asked.

Bulge as usual was silent; Talk made his face as blank as possible, and said:

"I've heard of it, but I ain't ever visited it."

"It's an old cattle town," said Toledo Jones. "Lots of going on."

"That'll suit me," Talk told him.

"There's a man there who keeps a kind of used-goods place," said Toledo, who seemed to be the party who knew most about this particular thing. "The job we want you to do is drop in and talk to him. We'd do it ourselves, but he knows us and we couldn't do any kind of business with him."

"After we talk to him, then what?"

"Get him interested in some kind of a buy. Maybe you'll want a saddle. Maybe a blanket or a tarpaulin. What you got to do," said Toledo, "is get him in the little back room where he has his office. Then put a gun on him."

Bulge now spoke.

"That sounds like a dangerous lot of stuff to do for fifty dollars," he said.

"You made a bargain," said Biggers, eyeing them steadily. "We expect you to live up to it."

"It wasn't stated what we was to do," said Talk. "Puttin' guns on people is bad stuff in Texas. They ram you into the jailhouse for it. If I take a shootin' iron out on this job it'll cost you fifty dollars more."

"And that'll be cheap," stated Bulge.

Biggers looked at Toledo, who nodded with no good will.

"All right," said Toledo. "It's not right, but we'll give it."

"As previously," said Talk, "it'll be in advance."

Biggers took out his roll of money.

"It seems to me I've done considerable digging since we began to talk business," he said. He handed two twenties and a ten to Talk. "And so fur it's not got me much."

"Time will tell," Talk said, as he put the bills away. "Everything in its place."

"After you get this party with the gun on him," said Toledo Jones, "talk hard to him. In that back office he's got a chest; and in that there's a map. It's rolled up, with a string tied around it. Open the chest and take the map out. Unroll it and look to see if it has a man's name and a date at the top of it. The date is 1568. And the man's name is Manuel Galvex. When you make sure of that, tie the old bird up and stick him under the counter or some place. Then mount your horses and get away fast."

"Get away, where?" asked Talk.

"You'll ride back on the trail we go into town on; we'll meet you a few miles out. Then you turn over the map."

"And after that we're on our own?"

"You'll have plenty of money," said Biggers, bitterly. "You'll get along."

"You were going down Texas way anyhow," Toledo added. "What more do you want?"

"Nothing more," said Talk. "What say, Bulge?"

"Suits me," said Bulge.

THE four rode toward Steerhead next day; and the pals trailed along in the dust kicked up by the others' horses.

"Steerhead," ruminated Talk. "Cattle town. Old guy who keeps a junk shop. Did I mention them three things before, Bulge?"

"You ain't talked about anything else since Biggers and Toledo said what was to be done. You woke me twice last night to mention it."

"They didn't give the old party a name," said Talk. "But I'd bet my part of the money we've took in that it's your Uncle Abner."

"Seems like it to me, too," agreed Bulge.

"You say you never heard of him having a map like this one Toledo talked about?"

"I ain't heard of him having anything, special," said Bulge. "Remember, I ain't ever seen him; and this letter's the first he's wrote me."

They rode into Steerhead about mid

day. And Toledo fell back until he was abreast of the pals, and said:

"The place is straight on down the street. You'll see a sign 'Abner Styles, General Merchandise.' That's the place. Get yourselves some grub, and then get the map. Take this trail when you ride out of town. We'll be waiting for you a little piece out."

Toledo and Biggers then left them; the pals hunted up an eating place and each ordered a meal. While they were eating, Talk said:

"Well, it's old Unkey Ab, ain't it?"

"Sure enough," said Bulge. "But, listen: we don't put no gun on him, do you hear?"

"Never thought of such a thing," said Talk. "I've got respect for your relative, old top, even if he is a stranger to you."

When they'd finished their meal they strolled along the street until they came to the shop of Abner Styles. It contained a mass of used goods that was bewildering in variety.

A dried-up old man, tall and stoop-shouldered, stood behind a littered counter and greeted them with a foxy look.

"Well, gentlemen, what's your need?" he asked. "I'm ready to supply you with 'most anything you'd put a name to."

"Name's McCoy," said Bulge. "I got a letter from you some time ago back in Wyomin'."

"McCoy, eh?" The old fox looked at Bulge narrowly.

"My mother was your sister," said Bulge. "And as you said you'd like to have me run down here on some business, here I am. What's going on?"

"You look just like Andy McCoy looked when I saw him last, in Dodge City," said Abner, his head at one side. "Remarkable resemblance."

"Andy was my old man," Bulge told Talk Tanner. "Everybody said he was a fine looking guy."

"Who's your friend?" asked Abner, looking at Talk with no great favor.

"Old pal of mine," Bulge told him. "We've rode the range together for five, six years."

Bulge showed the old storekeeper some evidences of his identity which he'd brought, and Abner was satisfied.

"Come into my office," he said. "We can sit down there, and talk."

They sat in amidst the heaps of stuff which he bought and sold; and while he went into matters, Talk, looking around, saw the chest Toledo Jones had mentioned.

"Seems to be something," was Talk's opinion. "I'll maybe find out more as things go on." He listened to Abner Styles, and watched him. There was something grasping in the junk dealer's manner; he had a crafty look, he seemed to weigh each word as he uttered it; his big nose was like that of a hawk; he had a way of rubbing the palms of his hands together that Talk didn't care for. "An old skinflint," was the young man's judgment. "He wouldn't trust anyone; and I wouldn't trust him."

After quite a preamble, Abner got down to business.

"You don't look very prosperous," he told Bulge, "and maybe this business'll do you some good. You look like as if making a little money wouldn't hurt you."

"I can't say as I've heard of it ever hurting anybody," said Bulge.

"I've got a piece of tradin'," the old man said, "that I don't like to trust to a stranger. Strangers," he said, and his suspicious old eyes were on Talk, "are apt to try and get the best of a person. I know neither your father and mother were over bright, but I thought," and he was speaking to Bulge, "you might be a little different."

"Let's hear what the business is," said the fat young man. "Then we can talk about the rest of it."

"ONE time, a few years ago," said Abner, "a man came in. He wanted a saddle, but he had no money to pay. I

knew as soon as he begun to talk he was a hoss thief with, like as not, a posse after him. Down the leg of his overalls he had a rolled-up map. I looked at it; and I traded a saddle, a bridle and a box of .45 cartridges for it."

"A map, eh?" said Bulge. "Well, maps can be mighty interesting pieces of property."

"Later on," said Abner, "I found it was a map of a big passel of land belonging to a Mexican named Corregio. It turned out that it was a map that was worth something in a money way; and maybe in a land way, too. Because I mentioned it to a lawyer over San Fernandez way; and he got two fellahs, name of Biggers and Jones, to come here, try to hold me up and steal it."

"You don't say!" said Bulge. He looked at Talk, who winked at him. "Smathers done that, did he?"

"He'd do anything!" declared Abner. "He's just that kind. But I was too smart for them," he chuckled, rubbing his hands together. "I fooled them. They come a-ransackin'; and all they got was a roll of blank paper."

"Fooled them, did you?" said Bulge. "Well, that was fine. But after that what did Smathers do?"

"He came here himself, and tried to make a deal with me. I didn't say anything. I just sat here in this chair and let him talk. I thought he might tell me something."

"Did he?"

"He didn't more'n hint. And he didn't mean to do that. I caught it just because I was listening close. There's something on that Corregio range. Something Corregio'd mighty like to know."

"You didn't make any deal with Smathers then?"

"No. I was afraid of him. He meant to job me if he could. I knowed that, and I told him I'd not do any business with him. I made up my mind I'd deal direct with Corregio; but I found Corregio had a grudge against me because of some money transaction I had with him some time back. So that," to Bulge, "is why I sent for you. I want you to take this thing up for me. Find out how much he'll give for the map?"

"What do you think you ought to get?"

"Half of Corregio's place. Not an acre less." Abner lowered his voice. "I understand he's been searching for this map for years. It's worth a fortune."

"Suppose, seeing you want me to handle the matter for you, you give me the map to plumb down in front of him," said Bulge. "Take him kind of by surprise. And see what he says."

The old skinflint stared at Bulge with frozen eyes. Talk expected to hear him say no. But he didn't; he said yes. Not only that, he got out some keys, unlocked the chest and took out a rolled section of what looked like cured sheepskin. On it, when opened up, the young man saw a carefully done map of what resembled a considerable section of country. And at the top of it Talk Tanner saw the name and date Toledo had told him to look for: Manuel Galvez, 1568.

"Now," said Abner as he rolled and tied the map and handed it to Bulge, "there it is. What are you going to do first?"

"First thing I do is head for the Corregio ranch, and talk to the old man. Tomorrow he'll have your proposition, if he shows interest. He'll get the map for half his business and land."

Abner grinned at that. And he stood at the door, waving his skinny hand at them as they rode away.

"What do you think?" asked Bulge after they'd gone some little distance.

"I think two things," said Talk. "And the first one is that we get off this trail. Because we don't want to run into Biggers and Toledo Jones and have to give them the map."

"Right enough." With that they cut back a little space where they marked a trail running at an angle around the bulge of some hills, and somewhat toward the east.

Well established on this route, Talk Tanner said:

"The second thing I think is that either Uncle Abner ain't the old hawk he looks, or he's putting some kind of a game up on you."

Bulge looked troubled.

"Do you think the old bird'd play tricks?"

"He might. Nobody's got an eye like his, nor a nose like his, for nothing. If he's as wise as I think he is, how come he gave that map to you so easy?"

"By golly," said Bulge, "I was thinking of that myself."

"Anyway, we've got the map; and we'll see Corregio. I think he'll make a deal with Abner; but I don't think he'll hand over half of what he's got."

They rode on in silence for a little, and then Bulge said:

"Hey, fellah, I feel like something's going to happen."

TALK looked at his pal narrowly.

"When?" he asked.

"Soon. I think somebody's going to meet us and take this here map."

Talk Tanner had not been without experiences with Bulge. He knew Bulge was slow in some ways. But he'd come to know that Bulge had his moments of keen intuition.

He was the kind of a party that smelled danger while it was still some distance away, and Talk knew it was the safest play to do something about it. So he pulled up his horse, got down, and said:

"Let's have the map."

Bulge gave it to him. Talk went some dozen paces back from the trail, kicked up some of the soft soil until he had a sort of trench; he put the rolled up map in this, covered it and put a stone on it.

"Take a good look around," he told Bulge, "so's we'll know the place when we come back."

They marked a number of things with their eyes; then Talk mounted once more and they rode on. At a place where the trail led through a narrow gulch they suddenly heard a voice:

"Pull up and climb down, podners! We'd like a little talk with you two!"

There were four men with rifles at the side of the trail, their horses hitched at some little distance.

"What's gone wrong?" asked Talk, as they slid from their saddles.

"What names?" asked the man who had already spoken.

"Tanner and McCoy."

"All right. You're the gents we want. Get their guns, boys."

The rifles and six-guns were taken from the pals; then they were directed to remount. The four men did likewise and they all headed away along a narrow track leading west from the trail. After a half hour they arrived at a spot where there was another group of men. And among them were Biggers and Toledo Jones.

"Heading out of town by the side way, eh?" said a big man riding forward. "Take a look, Mr. Smathers. Are these the people you are making charges against?"

A rickety looking man, mounted on a mule, rode forward.

"That's them!" he squeaked. "That's the two that held me up and robbed me on the trail near Gant City a couple of days ago. They took valuable papers. Search them, Sheriff. Like as not they have them on them."

The pals were pulled from their horses and searched. Their money was taken; then, as the map was not found, their saddles were cut open and also searched.

"No papers, Mr. Smathers," said the sheriff.

The rickety man shook his bony finger at the pair.

"Where is it?" he piped wickedly. "What have you done with my property?"

"We ain't got nothing that belongs to you," said Bulge. "We never held you up. For me, I ain't ever seen you before."

Here Toledo Jones and Biggers, who

had kept in the background, now came forward.

"There must be some kind of a mistake, Sheriff," Toledo said.

"We told you, Mr. Smathers," said Biggers, "that these two couldn't be the men. And that they ain't got the papers kind of proves it."

Talk saw the look the man gave the lawyer. And almost at once Smathers began to back away.

"Maybe I'm wrong," he said to the sheriff. "I don't want to be too hasty. Suppose you lock them up in the town jail until we can make sure about them."

"That," said Toledo Jones, "will not be necessary. Mr. Biggers and myself know these boys. They can be put in our custody; we'll be responsible for them."

The sheriff, Smathers, Biggers and Toledo drew together to discuss this. And Talk said in an undertone to Bulge, who had begun to talk.

"This is a stall. Keep still. Biggers and Toledo want to operate on us, on the side."

The result of the conference was that the pals were released in the custody of Toledo Jones. Their weapons and money were given back to them, and they took the trail back to Steerhead, Toledo and Biggers riding with them.

"Now," said Biggers as they went along, "what happened? How come you were on the wrong trail? And also how come you ain't got the map?"

"The old boy at the store was hard to handle," said Talk. "He got away from us and started to yell. All we could do was climb on our nags and run. And in our hurry we took the wrong trail."

It was plain from the silence that followed that Biggers and Toledo doubted this. But they did not say so. They rode on ahead and talked in whispers.

"They're cooking something," said Talk. "We got to be careful."

"Do you think they'll want the fifty bucks back?" asked Bulge.

"It'll be worse than that," Talk told him. "This business of them covering both trails shows they didn't trust us. If we'd had the map, we'd not only had all the money taken from us, but we'd been slapped in a calaboza for holding up Smathers. They had it all fixed, and the sheriff was in it with them."

THEY slept at the town hotel that night; and early next morning Talk awakened Bulge. They had their horses saddled and slipped out of Steerhead by the same trail they'd taken the day before. When they came to the spot where the map had been hidden, both sat their horses and stared. The stone they'd put over the hiding place had been moved, the earth had been kicked up. The map was gone.

"Someone saw us put it there," said Bulge.

But Talk shook his head. He pointed to tracks in the dirt of the trail.

"See those hoof prints? A mule. Old Smathers was riding a mule yesterday. Remember? Well, he looked like a sharp old buzzard, just like Uncle Abner. He got thinking. And he followed our trail out of town. Our tracks must have shown him we'd stopped here, and he got nosing around."

They returned to the hotel and had breakfast; then they went to Abner Styles' place and astonished that ancient fox by walking in on him. Talk told him a carefully edited version of what had taken place. The old man evidently was impressed only by the fact that Smathers had the map. He stormed and walked up and down, clamping his jaws.

Talk Tanner showed little interest in what the old man said. He moved about the place, seeming to give his attention to the shabby merchandise with which it was filled. The old man raved and spluttered for the best part of an hour, Bulge listening, but Talk still paying no attention. Finally he did pause in his moving about, and said:

"Anyhow, Smathers has got you licked unless you do something. Like as not he's heading for Corregio's ranch at this minute to make some kind of a deal with him."

"He'll not do it! I'll have him arrested for robbery. I can prove the map's mine."

"What say if we all ride up the trail to Corregio's and have a few words to say?"

"I'll do it!" chattered Abner Styles. "I'll do it! He'll not get the best of me."

He had one of his old horses fitted out with one of his old saddles. The place was carefully locked, with a hired man to watch it. And then they started.

The sheriff and a couple of his deputies were sitting outside the jail when the three were passing.

"That cursed Jim Flood!" breathed the old man as he sighted the group; "he's the crookedest man in this county. He's a friend of Smathers'. He's paid money for doing people's dirty work."

"Hello, Abner!" called Sheriff Flood. "Where you headin'? I ain't seen you atop a hoss for years."

"I'm a-goin' to spoil some of the arrangements of your friend Smathers," clacked Abner. "I'll show him he can't rob me!"

As they passed, Talk Tanner saw a look that passed between the men in front of the jail. And he didn't like it.

"That was a mistake, telling him that," he said to the old man. "What he didn't know'd never have hurt him."

"Let him know it!" said Abner angrily. "What do I care what he knows!"

"It's plain that Biggers and Toledo are not in town," said Talk. "If they were, the sheriff'd said something about us bein' in their custody."

"I guess they've give that thing up, anyway," said Bulge. "Seeing it wasn't going to get them anything."

As they were about to turn a bend in the trail, Talk glanced back. Some of the chairs in front of the jail were now empty. And as they rode on, he said in an undertone to Bulge:

"Keep your eyes open. And have your rifle ready. I think there's going to be happenings along the way."

"Me, too," Bulge informed him. "It's in my mind uncle's got it pretty right about that sheriff."

Dusk found them in a canyon where they prepared to make camp. Talk glanced up at the steep sides of the defile; it was much like the one he and Bulge had been passing through when they'd been fired upon on their way to Gant City.

"I don't like it, either," said Bulge, noting his friend's look. "Lots of rocks to hide behind up on them hillsides; and they make grand places to fire from if somebody's got an idea to plug you."

"Who'd want to do that to us?" asked old Abner.

"I don't know," answered Talk. "Nobody ever does in cases like them. But I don't like Smathers, nor Biggers, nor Toledo Jones. And them sheriff's deputies at Steerhead don't look too lily-handed to me, either."

WHILE he spoke, he took the roll from his horse and was opening it to get out the camp kit. And he was thus engaged when there came the ugly whine of a rifle bullet. All three were instantly be-

hind shelter. Bulge was handling his rifle and watching the hillside opposite. Talk measured out some coffee from a canvas bag and began to gather what material there was within reach for a fire.

"Uncle," he said, "do you hear that water over there among the stones? Sup-

pose you crawl over and get some of it for the coffee."

"I ain't a-goin' to stir," protested the old man. "Not for any amount of money."

"All right," said Talk. "I'll do it myself."

He was crawling away among the rocks toward the water when Bulge said:

"I think I've located that skunk. I'm going to move around a little to the right. Don't show yourself, but keep something moving to catch his attention while I'm getting set."

When Talk got the water he built a small fire at the rear of a boulder; he set the coffee cooking, and safe in this shelter, permitted a little curl of smoke to lift above the rock. Instantly the whine of bullets and the distant shocks of rifles began. Old Abner grumbled.

"That's the durndest thing I ever saw. You might of knowed that smoke—"

Here Bulge McCoy's rifle spoke. There was an instant's delay.

"Got him!" came Bulge's voice. "But there's two more."

Talk heard Bulge crawling from place to place; he took the coffee tin from the fire and put on the bacon and the flat dabs of wet flour that was to be the bread. These cooked while an intermittent fire went on from the high walls of the canyon. Bulge's rifle spoke a few times, but with no success. Then night fell; and with the fire banked, they ate their supper. As the canyon was no place for dawn to find them, they later saddled up and made their way through the defile to more open country.

"Doggone them," said old Abner, "they wanted to stop me from seeing Corregio. But I'll show them. Abner Styles ain't nobody's fool!"

They slept for a few hours; the sun was a quarter way across the sky when they started again. About three or four hours later they began to see cattle; and finally they came upon a couple of Corregio's vaqueros. And they learned from these that Smathers, Toledo Jones and Biggers had passed up the trail some hours before.

As they neared the ranch buildings they were fortunate enough to see a girl loping along on a pony some distance away.

"That's Carmen!" said Talk.

"So it is," agreed Bulge, and at once took off his hat and began to wave it. The girl drew up; it was evident she didn't recognize them at once. But finally she did, and came galloping toward them. They told her they'd learned the three men were at the ranch, and Carmen said it was true. She was indignant and her voice was high-pitched as she spoke.

"They have the map I told you of," she said. "They have offered to trade it to my grandfather for the best part of his land."

"But he'll not agree to that," protested Talk.

"He must do something. He owes a great deal to Smathers who will foreclose on him at the end of the year. If he agrees to trade, Smathers will extend the time for another year. By then they say he'll have the mine operating and will be able to pay."

"What say if you go back, tell your grandfather we are here, and we are going to do something. But don't let the others hear you."

"You know something?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"Yes."

With that Carmen wheeled her horse and dashed off toward home. Old Abner Styles, who had listened, saying nothing, now spoke.

"That Smathers is a danged crook! The idee he's using is the one we were going to work together."

"But then you got the notion you'd squeeze him and get his share besides your own."

"It was my map, wasn't it? Can't a man do what he likes with his own?"

"You got it from a horse thief," said Talk. "Where'd he get it?"

"Now, look here," clacked Abner. "I'll have none of your talk, young man! I don't mind sayin' I've been suspicious of

you since I saw you first yesterday. You're the kind a person can't depend on."

"All right, but let's settle that another time. We ought to be starting over to Corregio's before he signs any papers, or whatever it is they'll want him to do."

THEY rode to the ranchhouse, and hitched their horses. Carmen opened the door for them, and they entered the big, low-ceilinged room. Corregio, pale and broken looking, sat at the table. Smathers was opposite him, and Biggers and Toledo Jones stood beside him.

"You scoundrel!" stormed Abner, shaking his withered fist at Smathers. "That map you stole is my property!"

"Prove it!" jeered Smathers. "Let's see you do it."

Biggers was glowering at the pals; he switched his holster around; and Bulge, who had an intent eye for such proceedings, manifested interest.

"What do you want here?" asked Biggers of Talk.

"Why, as Uncle Abner thought he'd like to drop around and see what Smathers was up to, we figured it'd be nice to ride with him."

"Neither of you are wanted here. And that goes for you, too," said Biggers to Abner.

The old man shook a bony finger at him.

"I could have you in jail for burglary," he told him. "You and that gamblin' fellah there. You broke into my place in the night."

"We will have no petty squabbling," said Smathers. "So keep quiet. Mr. Corregio and I have business to transact."

Corregio had been looking at Talk, and now that young man nodded, as though bidding him go on with the matter he'd been discussing with Smathers.

"I have heard talk of this map—drawn in 1568 by Manuel Galvez," said Corregio to the lawyer. "For years I have heard of it. But I have never seen it. You say you have it. Suppose you show it to me."

"That," said Smathers, with an air of much satisfaction, "I can readily do."

He opened a canvas sack and produced the roll of sheepskin which Talk had buried at the trailside the day before.

"Here we are," Smathers said, as he unrolled the map and placed it upon the table. "See, here is the signature of Manuel Galvez. And there is the date, plainly set down."

"But," protested Corregio, "I see less than half of the drawing. The other half is covered with heavy paper."

Smathers sniggered.

"I must safeguard my interests, my dear sir. I must cover that section where the location of the mine is plainly marked. Otherwise, once you learned the location you'd have no reason to buy."

"This map was stolen from my grandfather years ago," said Corregio.

"If you took the matter into court, you'd have difficulty, just as Mr. Styles would," with a mocking look at Abner. "You'd need proof; and where would you get it?"

"I have proof it was stolen from me," said old Abner. "And these two young men," indicating Talk and Bulge, "will go into court and swear that I put it in their hands yesterday." Smathers sneered at the pals.

"Who'd believe a couple of tramps?" he asked. "And, more than that, I have witnesses that they held me up on the road near Gant City some days ago and robbed me. And this map was one of the things they stole."

Talk grinned at the shyster.

"Yeah, you said that yesterday," he said. "But before you start proceedings, I'd like to say a few words."

"You'll not have anything to say," Biggers told him, starting forward.

"Keep back, fellah," said Bulge McCoy, his hand on his gun. "And shut up."

"The date on the map," said Talk, "is 1568. That makes it pretty near four hundred years ago that the drawing was

made. Take a look at that sheepskin. Was that cured as many years ago as that?"

"No!" cried Carmen, excitedly.

"It is no more than a few years old," said Corregio, staring at the scroll.

"Right. And made by some Navajo woman somewhere in these mountains."

SMATHERS looked aghast. A startled expression was on the faces of Biggers and Toledo Jones. But old Abner Styles was tittering.

"It's a lie!" cried the shyster. "This map is genuine!"

"The map made by Manuel Galvez must have been drawn on Spanish parchment. And being now almost four hundred years old it would be hard and cracked. This skin is smooth and with no sign of age. The writing on it was not made with the ink the Spaniards used in the sixteenth century; it was done with the ink the Indians use in the pictures they make today."

"A lie!" shrieked Smathers. "It can't be proved. No court would permit such a fabrication to be introduced."

"He's got you, Smathers," chuckled old Abner. "He's got you, by gosh! A made-up cheat, Smathers! And you brought it here to swindle Corregio."

"If it's a fake," stormed Smathers, desperately, "who made it? Whose idea was it, in the first place, to try and palm it off as genuine?"

"I made it," said Abner, greatly amused, "because I didn't ever dare to let you see the genuine."

"There is no genuine," declared Smathers. "If there is, produce it."

Old Abner merely grinned and was silent. And Talk Tanner said:

"The real map can be produced. I know it can, because I've got it right here."

The grin disappeared from Abner's face. He put a hand on Talk's arm.

"What?" he said. "What's that you say, young man?"

Talk pulled a scroll of ancient parchment from the leg of his overalls, and opened it on the table. It was beautifully drawn in colored inks, decorated on the margins with fabulous monsters as was the old custom; the lettering was in finely done Gothic characters.

There was dead silence. And then Talk continued.

"I found this yesterday in Mr. Styles' place at Steerhead. While he was talking with his nephew, I got looking around."

"What!" gasped Abner. "What!"

"Mr. Styles," said Talk to Corregio, "had told me he'd got it in payment of some stuff he sold a horse thief who was on the run; and as I was sure he wouldn't want to be sent to the Texas penitentiary for receiving stolen goods, I thought I'd bring it along, Senor Corregio, and turn it over to you, the rightful owner."

Both Biggers and Toledo Jones now interfered. Both lifted their voices. Both came threateningly to the table where the map lay. But Bulge McCoy's six-gun was in his hand.

"Look," said Bulge, "a while ago I told you parties to keep back. Now I'm telling you to pull your freight. No talk," as they began to protest. "Out you go; and take this old swindling skunk"—indicating Smathers—"with you."

Bulge watched at a window while the three mounted their nags and rode away. And when he turned, old Abner was beside him. Talk, with Corregio and Carmen, were at the table, bent over the old Spanish scroll.

"Clarence," he said to Bulge in a low voice, "are you going to let this friend of yours—"

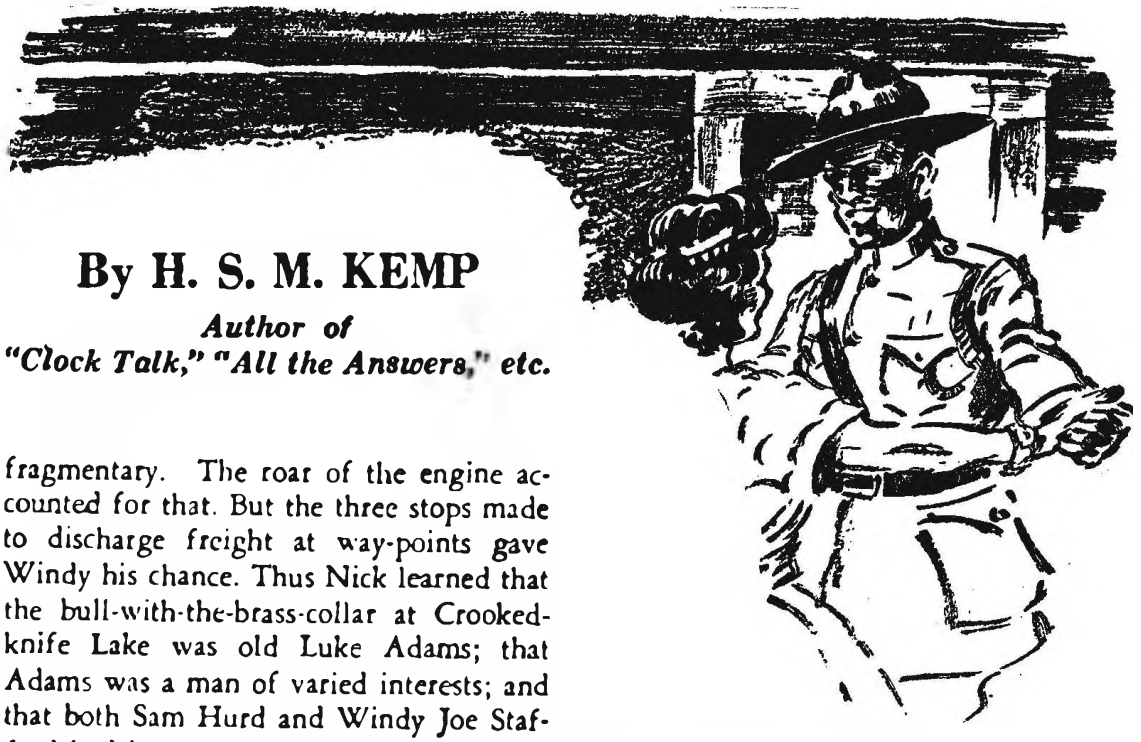
"No," Bulge interrupted. "It's nothing like that. Talk Tanner's not that kind. He wouldn't take a cent from them. What he wants to do is get you out of the scrape you're in. And listen," in a lowered voice, "don't ever let him hear you call me Clarence. Do you hear? Me and him are pals; but if he knowed that was my name I'd never be able to square it with him."

Handy To Have Around

THE mounted police detachment at Crooked-knife Lake had been closed for three years; but with a sudden splurge of mining activity in the country, Ottawa decided it would be a good idea to open the place again with Corporal "Nick" Nicholson in charge. The corporal headed north on the first plane, and, by a stroke of luck, had as traveling-companions, "Windy Joe" Stafford and Sam Hurd. Sam Hurd was a middle-aged, rawboned man with little to say, but Windy, who was short and chunky and amiable-looking, made up for both of them. As Windy loved to gossip and the corporal was good at listening, Nick Nicholson figured that by the time they reached Crooked-knife Lake he would know pretty much all there was to know about his prospective customers.

Conversation in the plane was naturally

The Police Post at Crooked-Knife Lake Was Suddenly Opened Up Again



By H. S. M. KEMP

Author of "Clock Talk," "All the Answers," etc.

fragmentary. The roar of the engine accounted for that. But the three stops made to discharge freight at way-points gave Windy his chance. Thus Nick learned that the bull-with-the-brass-collar at Crooked-knife Lake was old Luke Adams; that Adams was a man of varied interests; and that both Sam Hurd and Windy Joe Stafford had been prospecting the country for Adams on a grubstake-percentage basis.

This information was divulged at High Portage. Nick sat in the shade afforded by a wing of the plane and watched a couple of Indians pack cases of supplies up the hill to a trading-post. At the same time he spared an ear for all that Windy had to say.

"Prospectors," he noted. "Struck anything worthwhile?"

"Not yet; but we will," promised Windy.

Sam Hurd said, "Not enough to pay for the grub."

The policeman gave a grin. "I said 'prospectors.' Maybe I should have said 'rainbow-chasers'."

"Don't kid yourself!" corrected Windy. "The stuff's there—if a feller has the time to look for it."

"And is given a chance," added Sam Hurd. "But old Luke figures a guy should bring in a gold-mine every time he turns round."

"It's his stummick," explained Windy. "I mean old Luke's. He's a cranky ol' pelican; but if a feller's guts is always naggin' him, what kin you expect? Anyways, once we do hit a strike, he'll get back all he ever lashed out in grubstakes."

These two men, so contrasted in looks and outlooks, intrigued the corporal. He asked, "You two work together? Partners?"

"With *him?*" Sam Hurd scornfully indicated Windy Joe. "And get talked silly?"

Windy Joe showed no displeasure at the other man's thrust. He merely grinned.

"Sam's bin workin' the Otter Lake country, northwest. My stampin' grounds is 'way east."

Further information on the subject had to be postponed, for the unloading of the High Portage freight was completed and Pilot Al Johnson signified his readiness to depart. But at the next stop—Grassy River — Nick Nicholson learned more about old Luke Adams. Apparently old Luke's present interest was in his fur-farm, an undertaking he ran with the assistance of his son, Jack. Earlier, it seemed, old Luke had been in the trading-game but

had gone out of it, leaving the field clear for one George McBeth. And at the final way-point—Pine House—Windy Joe Stafford was down to general gossip.

"Dunno, though, what'll happen now young Jack wants to get married. Looks like trouble in the old home town." As the corporal's eyebrows lifted in silent questioning, he went on to explain. "Yeah; 'count of this gal Jack wants to marry: A halfbreed gal named Mary Jones. Her old man, Hank Jones, chores around the fur-farm. Hank's a Newfoundlander, orig'nally; married to a squaw, Mary's mother." Windy chuckled. "Old Luke won't hear of no marriage like that. He told the kid so—the place for a squaw was on a trapline or in a teepee. And I guess Jack knew what he meant."

"And what's going to be the outcome of it all?" asked the policeman.

"Dunno," admitted Windy. He turned to Sam Hurd. "What d'you think, Sam?"

"What do *I* think?" Sam Hurd scowled disapproval of the whole business. I think you shoot yer mouth too much." He pulled a bottle from his hip pocket and shoved it at Windy. "Swill her out, and you'll feel better."

Windy didn't bother taking the bottle. "Gin? I kin buy better stuff than that in a varnish-can."

"How 'bout you, Corp?" suggested Sam Hurd.

"Never got used to it," grinned the corporal. "I'll stay with beer."

"Sure," agreed Windy. "I got a case aboard; and we'll tap her when we get home."

IT WAS sundown when they reached their destination. Nick Nicholson had served at a half-dozen northern detachments and had visited a score of others; and from what he could see, Crooked-knife Lake was one with the rest of them. A mile-long clearing, green grass and the blue of the spruce. A straggly village with a trading-post in its center. On the outskirts of the village was the church and mission buildings; and in clearings of their own, a whitewashed cabin or two that might be the abode of a white man.

Disembarked on the wharf in front of the trading-store, the corporal asked. "Where's that hangout of mine?"

Windy Joe pointed to a cabin that was half-concealed by the trees. "There. See the flag-pole? That's her." He added, "But she needs plasterin' and doin' up generally. You'd best camp with me and Sam till you get her in shape." And to the pilot, "I guess, Al, you'll stay with McBeth?"

The pilot nodded. "Yeah. It's kind of handy."

Half a dozen Indians came down the slope, and in butchered Cree, Windy ordered them to grab the baggage and follow along.

Windy's house was better than what the corporal had expected. It was a low, two-room structure, spartan in its simplicity but quite clean. There was a double and a single bunk, and Windy told Nick to claim the single bunk for his own.

As well as the baggage, the Indians brought up a case of supplies and Windy's case of beer. Sam Hurd cooked supper; and with the later washing of the dishes, full darkness fell. Nick Nicholson sat down for a smoke, and Windy went on with his ceaseless chatter. The corporal was beginning to agree with Sam Hurd's remark of being "talked silly" with it, when an interruption came. A visitor dropped in—Luke Adams.

Introduced to him, Nick found the local bigwig to be a grizzled man of about sixty, with a hard, square jaw, clipped mustache and bushy-browed eyes.

"The Law, eh?" Luke Adams observed. "Well, we've got along without you so far, but you're always handy to have around." He turned to the other two. "And you buzzards—get caught up with your drinking?"

Sam Hurd gave a growl. "On what I

had to spend?" He produced the bottle of gin from his suitcase. "That's the only crock I bought all the time I was out."

Luke Adams took a slug but refused a chaser out of sympathy for his finnicky stomach. As Hurd replaced the bottle in his suitcase, he spoke to the corporal.

"What're you doing in this bull-pen? You could have stayed with me. Anyway, till you get that place of yours fixed up."

Nick thanked him for the offer but said he would be quite comfortable with the boys.

"And they'll be pulling out any day now," said Adams. "But before you go, Sam," he said to Hurd, "I got a job for you first."

Sam Hurd wanted to know what the job was.

Luke Adams gave a grin. "Fact is, I'm going back into trading. Oh, I know," he said; "I got plenty to do with the foxes and stuff, and mebbe I have. But I was a trader first, and I got to get into the thing again."

"Going to build?" asked Windy.

"Not right away. That big warehouse of mine ain't used very much, and if it was fixed up with shelves and counters it'd do for awhile. I got lumber—out of that bunch hauled in on the last ice—and that's what I meant, Sam, about giving you a job. Fix me up them shelves."

Sam Hurd nodded. Then he asked, "But what about George McBeth?"

Luke Adams chuckled grimly. "I told him, today. He didn't seem too happy about it, but he wished me luck."

"Wished you luck?"

"Yeah. Then told me I'd need it."

CORPORAL NICHOLSON remembered that George McBeth was the local trader. Old Luke going back into that line of business would mean that McBeth would have some pretty stiff opposition.

But Windy was speaking. "You're crazy," he told Luke Adams. "Nowadays tradin's all grief—all grief and worry. Worry ain't good for a man. It's worry that put your guts on the bum."

"An extra dose of bicarbonate 'll fix all that," grinned Luke Adams. "Two spoons at bedtime instead of one."

For some time the three discussed Luke Adams' new enterprise, with the corporal being merely an interested listener. Then Adams turned to go.

"If you boys want some fun tonight, there's a dance on. Nellie Redleaf got married today to Jim Makwa. They're hoeing her down at the old man's house as I came by."

"Yeah?" Windy's face lit with anticipation. "Let's go!" He turned to Nick Nicholson. "Care to look on for awhile?"

"Look on?" The policeman grinned. "If it's any good, I want to get into it."

So after Nick changed his breeches and boots for lighter shoes and slacks, the four men walked out.

The night was brilliant with stars. There was the faint murmur of the wind in the pines, the lapping of the waves on shore and the tangy smell of juniper and balsam. Heading for the dance, Nick felt young again—young, if thirty-five years was old.

The house where the wedding-dance was taking place was one of the largest in the village. Approaching it, the corporal heard the ringing of fiddles to the tune of "The Crooked Stovepipe," the rhythmic pounding of feet, the voice of the Indian "caller"—"Jig 'er down two and jig 'er down four; step around pretty on the old pine floor!" It was more than likely the Indian didn't understand a word of what he was saying, but that didn't cramp his style. And just as they reached the house, the breakdown ended. There was a swirl of skirts, a rush for the outside, whoops and yells and the mopping of heated brows.

It was a typical Indian wedding-dance, Nick could see that. The men were there in brand-new suits and gay silk handkerchiefs, the girls with combs in their hair

and more silk handkerchiefs than the men. Four hanging lanterns shed light, and over in a corner two halfbreeds were tuning their fiddles for further action.

Almost at once another set got under way. Four men took the center of the floor. Three were young Indians; the fourth was a tall blond white of about twenty-two. Windy, who was standing by Nick's side in the doorway, suddenly nudged him. "Jack Adams." Then he added, "Now watch for the gal!"

Four girls got up, taking their places beside the men. Three were purely Indians, comely, but still definitely native; the fourth Nick took to be white. That is, till she looked his way. Then he noticed her high cheekbones, her deep coloring. She was tall, slim, striking-looking in comparison with the others. Nick was not impressionable, but something about her hit him with a wallop. A squaw, old Luke had called her; fitted only for a trapline or a teepee.

"What a honey!" Nick whistled. "Boy!"

He turned. Old Luke Adams was behind him. Old Luke was watching young Jack and the girl. A bleak frown was on his face. He suddenly stirred. "Guess I'll drift," he muttered.

Again Windy nudged the corporal. With a grin he called out, "And don't forget your bakin' soda!"

Old Luke growled back at him, "Like McBeth told me today—I'll need it!"

But Windy's voice had drawn attention to himself. From inside came an uproar of yelling. "Hear that?" grinned Windy. "They want me to call-off for 'em. Let's go!"

They walked inside, Sam Hurd following. Three of the intending dancers gave up their places to the white men. Nick protested, so Windy ordered a six-hander.

There was a good deal of squealing and giggling, then three native maidens ranged themselves beside Windy, Nick and Sam Hurd. Windy nodded to the orchestra, the fiddles rang out, and the dance was on.

There were two changes and the inevitable breakdown. At Windy's last whoop, Nick made for the coolness of the outside air. Windy and Sam Hurd followed him.

"Wow!" yelped Windy. "Kin them dames dance!"

Immediately behind Windy came Jack Adams. Windy introduced him to Nick. The two shook hands, and for a mere second Nick caught a hostile look in the younger man's eyes. Nick smiled to himself. Incipient jealousy. The kid sensed a rival.

But the look passed. "Hot in there," remarked young Adams. "Makes a man dry."

"And you ain't the only one," added Sam Hurd. He pulled out his gin bottle, grinned suggestively at the corporal. "A guy *could* look the other way—" and he passed the flask to young Adams. After taking a drink himself, he returned the gin to his pocket.

Nick decided he would have a word with Sam Hurd in season; then young Adams was speaking to him and asking how long he intended to stay at Crooked-knife Lake. Conversation ran along for some minutes, then the fiddles were being tuned and once more there were demands for Windy.

Windy looked at the other men. "How about it?"

"Okay," said Nick, "if it kills me!"

This time young Jack Adams and Sam Hurd weren't dancing. They took chairs against the far wall.

The dance was a four-hander—Nick, Windy and two strapping and handsome young halfbreeds. Four girls took their places beside them; and when Nick turned to his companion he was somewhat startled to find her to be Jack Adams' light-o-love, the beauteous Mary Jones.

She was smiling at Nick. "You don't mind?"

Her voice was low, pleasant, with the North Country accent.

"Mind?" grinned Nick. "I love it!"

He said that, then doubted the truth of what he had said. The girl was wonderfully easy on the eyes and she had a very definite charm; but coming right on top of that queer look from Jack Adams, Nick felt that things were stepping along too smoothly.

But the dance started, and things had to take their course. Nick forgot Jack Adams in the intricacies of the quadrille. *"Birdie in the cage,"* yelled Windy; *"and the three hands round!"* Now, dancing with a girl like this, Nick didn't feel his thirty-five years at all. She was laughing, bright-eyed, light on her feet as a chickadee. *"Half right'n left and up to the next!"* Nick got a glance from Jack Adams, scowling, sooty-eyed; then with abruptness the set came to an end.

The girl smoothed the raven-black hair from her forehead, dazzled Nick with another smile. "This isn't your first dance," she said.

"And if I'm going to be here long," Nick promised, "it won't be the last!"

THERE was no Indian shyness about Mary Jones. She was open, natural, and her laugh warmed Nick's heart. By golly, he told himself, no wonder Jack Adams had gone for her as he had. And it wouldn't be propinquity either.

But the dance concluded; and feeling a mite heady, Nick made for the door. As well as heady, he felt a trifle guilty; till he noticed with a good deal of relief that the girl was over beside Jack Adams, smiling into his scowling face, rumpling his unruly blond hair.

Then—then by tragic contrast—a fat, hysterical squaw ran blubbering in out of the night. The music quit on a wailing note. Everyone in the place seemed startled. Half-incoherently the woman began to speak.

"The old man—he's ill! *N'kooshan*—I'm frightened!" She brushed a straggle of hair from her forehead and gave a moaning—*"A-eee!"*

Jack Adams sprang up. "Dad?" he barked in English. In Cree he added, "Where is he—up in the house?"

The woman nodded, and Adams ran toward the door.

Windy Stafford spoke, to Sam Hurd, then to the corporal. "We'd better go along, too."

Outside, the night seemed extra dark; but Windy led up a trail that skirted the lake-shore. A few hundred yards, and a light shone through the trees. It came from a house, long, sprawling. They entered by way of a fence-gate, into a kitchen.

A lamp was burning on the table. Windy seemed to know his way around, for he struck through a parlor into a bedroom to the right. Jack Adams was there, working over his father, in bed.

One look at the man, and Nick Nicholson's breath came sharply. By what he could see, Luke Adams was having a fit. His teeth were set and bloody froth bubbled from his mouth. As a convulsion seized him, the corporal pushed forward to Jack Adams' side. Windy Stafford looked helpless. Sam Hurd wheeled for the kitchen and a glass of water.

The convulsion blended into another, more violent than the one that had preceded it. Luke Adams' muscles tightened rigidly; then as suddenly he collapsed. His

breath came in a gargling exhalation, his head rolled sideways on the pillow.

Nick frowned, reached over and felt for the pulse. He waited, nodded at last to Jack Adams.

"It's all over, kid," he murmured. "He's gone."

"Gone?" Jack Adams blinked, as though he failed to understand. "You mean—he's—he's *dead?*"

"Yes."

It had all happened so suddenly. One moment, the dance, music, laughter; the next, death in its most hideous form.

Nick spoke to young Adams. "Did he have these fits very often?"

"Fits?" Adams blinked again. "He never had a fit in his life!"

The corporal glanced around. Windy Stafford was standing at the foot of the bed. Sam Hurd still held the tumbler of water. It was Windy who spoke. "Looks to me like poison."

Jack Adams stiffened. "Poison?" He glanced down at the still form of his father. "Who'd want to poison him?"

There was a shuffling at the outside door. The four men moved to the kitchen as hesitantingly, fearfully, the Indian woman stepped in.

The corporal faced her. In Cree he asked, "did the old man eat before he went to bed tonight?"

The squaw's brows lifted. "He is better?"

"I asked you a question," emphasized Nick. "What did he eat?"

"The old man? He ate nothing. He never does."

"Nor drink anything?"

The woman appeared puzzled. But she answered. "Only his medicine."

"She means soda, baking-soda," put in Jack Adams. "Dad took a spoonful every night for years. His stomach," he explained.

In front of where they were standing was a cupboard with drawn-back curtains. Amongst the cartons of food, Nick recognized a package of bicarbonate of soda. He stepped over, lifted it down. "This?"

The woman nodded.

Taking it to the lighted lamp on the table, Nick shook some of the soda into the palm of his hand. He set the package down, scratched the soda around with his finger. "Powder and crystals," he muttered. "I never saw crystallized soda before." Suddenly he turned to the woman. "Where's the glass he drank it from?"

"The glass? I washed it."

Nick gave a snort of impatience; then he extended his open palm to Windy and Sam Hurd. "What d'you make of that—the crystals?"

Windy lost no time. "Strychnine," he declared. Cautiously, Sam Hurd admitted the crystals bore a strychnine-like appearance. He added, "If it ain't strychnine, I dunno what else it could be."

Once more Nick gave the woman rapid questioning. Her answers came freely. The package of soda was almost new, for Luke Adams had bought it from George McBeth that afternoon. Yes, she had been in the house continually from the time the old man brought his purchase home. Others who had been in the kitchen were old Hank Jones and Jack Adams. Nick recalled that Hank Jones worked at the fur-farm and was the father of the handsome Mary.

"But the old man?" put in the squaw. "Is he better?"

Nick told her bluntly, "He's dead."

The woman moaned, sank into a chair, covered her face with her apron. After a critical look at her, Nick turned to Jack Adams.

"About your father. Where are you going to leave him? Here?"

"Sure. It's his own house, isn't it?" was the retort.

Nick let it pass; and for the next few minutes he examined the shelves and the kitchen generally. He didn't know just what he was looking for, so he finally wrapped the soda-package in a piece of

paper and gave the nod to Windy and Sam Hurd.

Outside, Windy spoke. "That kills the dance. For me, anyways. And you, Corp; what're you goin' to do?"

"I'm wondering," replied Nick. "And mostly about poison in the soda. The stuff will have to be analyzed, and that takes time."

By unspoken agreement they made for Windy's cabin. They went in, lit the lamp. Nick spoke, going on where he had left off.

"Guess the only thing to do is to send the soda out on the plane in the morning. Takes time, all right, but it can't be helped."

WINDY broke open his case of beer; and they sat around, each with a bottle. In the silence they heard a slight rustling sound. It came from a corner of the room and proved to be a weasel sniffing at a piece of wrapping-paper. Windy grunted.

"Is he still here? I was goin' to set a trap for that sonovagun before I went to town. He's into everything."

Sam Hurd looked across at the corporal. "How about him for an analyst? Try *him* with the soda."

"By gosh, yes!" exclaimed Windy. He sprang up, and the weasel scurried into a crack in the floor.

Nick understood. He gave Windy the package of soda and watched the man prepare a bait. This was a piece of fat pork, with the crystals found in the soda smeared on. With the bait placed on the floor a foot or so from the crack, the three sat still and awaited events.

Within a few minutes the weasel reappeared. His beady eyes glittered suspiciously; then in quick, jerky movements he worked over to the piece of pork. He sniffed, dove into it, tried to haul it away. With the three men motionless, he decided to finish his meal on the spot.

A minute went by, two. The weasel lifted its head, seemed to cough, went over in kicking convulsions. Before Sam Hurd could grab a billet of wood to put it out of its misery, it had stretched out, dead.

"My gosh!" breathed Windy. "Quick as that!" He turned to the corporal. "You don't need no analysis now."

"No," said Nick thoughtfully. "I guess I don't."

After awhile Sam Hurd said, "Looks like you got a cut-and-dried job."

"Cut and dried enough," admitted the corporal. "But where do I begin?" He pondered for a moment. "There's no argument about Luke being poisoned, and the way I see it, he was poisoned by somebody well acquainted with his ways." He explained, "This afternoon, just before we got here, or while we were eating, or while we were down at the dance, this somebody doped the old man's soda. But who? The squaw housekeeper says only two people were in the house and had the opportunity—old Hank and young Jack. Which do I nab?"

No one said anything for a moment, then, as was to be expected, Windy did the talking. "What's the matter with the squaw herself—old Nancy? She's Mary Jones' aunt and thinks a lot of her. Why shouldn't she have done it—never mind her act over the old man bein' sick?"

"She do it?" frowned the corporal. "Why?"

"Because she's Mary aunt. She's all for the marriage, and the old man was all ag'inst it."

"I see." Then Nick went on. "What about old Hank, then? He was the girl's father. And he was in the kitchen this afternoon."

"And if it wasn't either of them two," summed up Windy, "it was Jack."

"With Jack killing his own father."

Sam Hurd broke in. "But Luke wasn't his father. Not his real one. Jack was adopted, when he was ten years old."

The statement caused Nick to frown. He pulled out papers and tobacco, started

to roll a cigarette. "If Jack did marry the girl—" Then he broke off, for from outside came the scraping of footsteps.

"Visitors," announced Sam Hurd. And when a knock came, he yelled, "C'min!"

THREE men entered. One was Al Johnson, the pilot; another was Jack Adams. The third was a man the corporal was meeting for the first time.

This third man, a chap of around thirty or so, heavy-featured with sandy hair and an aggressive chin, was introduced as George McBeth. Nick recalled at once that McBeth was the local trader, and he eyed him with interest. "McBeth. I've heard of you from the boys."

The newcomers found themselves seats, and McBeth spoke of the death of Luke Adams. "Tough, all right. Especially on Jack," he concluded.

The corporal nodded. "Did Jack tell you how he came to die?"

"Said you thought it was poison."

"It was poison all right," Nick agreed. He thumbed in the direction of the dead weasel. "That's our guinea-pig. We tried it on him."

McBeth's face drew into a frown. "Jack claims the poison was put in the old man's baking-soda."

"In the baking-soda," said Nick, "that you sold him today."

McBeth's frown seemed to grow. He showed his teeth. "That sounds like a dirty crack. At me."

"I can assure it wasn't," Nick said smoothly. "But it's an idea."

McBeth waited. Levelly he looked at the policeman. "Well?" he suggested. "Why not put it in words?"

Nick was by nature easy-going, but when someone deliberately looked for trouble, he always endeavored to oblige. His own face hardened.

"Words, eh? Tell me, then; was that carton of soda unbroken when you sold it?"

"Sure."

"The carton was a flap-top affair. You are sure the flaps hadn't been opened, then pasted down again?"

"Sure."

"And you're just as sure you've no poison on your premises?"

McBeth hesitated. Then, "None at all," he said.

Nick knew he was lying, but he let it pass. "Never had any?"

Again there was a hesitation. "I did have some," admitted McBeth. "Handed out a bit here and there to the white trappers. But when the police got tough about it, I chucked it away." Then, as though

an afterthought had struck him, he added, "But what proof you got that it was strychnine that killed the old man? Because it looked like strychnine and because it killed that weasel, you can't say it *was* strychnine."

Nick looked innocent. "*I* say it was strychnine? I haven't mentioned strychnine at all. But for that matter, the soda will be analyzed properly and a post-mortem will have to be made. If strychnine is found to be definitely present in the soda and in the old man's stomach, well, we'll know what to do."

Looking at the man, Nick knew McBeth was thinking. But McBeth gave a grunt at last. "What other suspects you got beside me?"

Nick tipped back in his chair, hooked his thumbs in his tunic-flaps and smiled. "You don't expect me to tell you, do you? I pick 'em up as I go along. Like I picked you up when you started to get chesty just now. As a matter of fact, my friend, if you hadn't shot off as you did, you might never have entered the picture at all."

So far, Al Johnson had said nothing. Neither had young Jack Adams. Adams looked white and drawn, far different to his appearance at the dance. But now he spoke. "I'm not sleeping in the house tonight."

Nick turned to him. "Well, can't say I blame you."

"Old Nancy cleared out, so I'm staying at the Mission with Mr. Young." Adams added, "If you want me, that's where I'll be."

He left. Al Johnson said, "Where do you and I stand, Nick? D'you want me or the ship tomorrow? I'm due back in town, y'know."

"When'll you be in again?"

"Two days time."

Nick nodded. "Let it go at that."

McBeth, who looked distinctly ill-at-ease, spoke to the pilot.

"Guess I'll run along. Comin'?"

"Yeah," said Johnson. "It's been a long day; and I want an early start in the morning."

NICK waited a few minutes after the door had closed, then he took down his hat. Windy looked at him wonderingly. "Going to have a few words with old Nancy," Nick explained. "Want to show me where she lives?"

Windy said, "All right," and they walked out together.

There, the corporal cocked an eye at the Big Dipper behind the spruce and remarked that it must be after midnight. "Wonder will she be awake?"

"Old Nancy?" Windy chuckled. "With all she's got to talk about, she won't go to bed!"

"And that'll make two of us," pointed out Nick. "I'll have to sit up and watch old Luke Adams."

"Watch old Luke?" repeated Windy. "Why—in case someone pinches him for a souvenir?"

"If anyone did," said Nick grimly, "it'd be too bad for me. But it's regulations; and I should have had someone up there before this." He was silent a moment, then lowered his voice and went on. "I jarred McBeth tonight when I mentioned an autopsy—a post-mortem. He's afraid an autopsy will produce strychnine in old Luke's gizzard. That's why I say a guard should have been up there now."

Windy made an offer. "If that's the way you feel about it, I'll shove off up there and hold things till you come along. Mind you," he added hastily, "I wouldn't go inside the place in the dark for all the pigs in Ireland; but I'll hang around outside and keep my eyes open."

"Do that," said the corporal. "Show me where old Nancy lives, then get up there as quick as you can."

The house they were looking for was well within the village. Windy took the corporal as far as the door, saw that a light burned, and mentioned that the place belonged to Nancy's brother-in-law, Hank Jones.

"I'm off for old Luke's," he said in parting; "but don't lose no time in gettin' up there yourself."

"I won't," promised Nick, and gave a rap on the door.

A stringy, weazened man of fifty opened it for him. Nick said, "Good night!" and stepped inside. There he spoke to the man again. "I want a word or two with you, and with—old Nancy."

"Sure." The man frowned, but trotted off to a room in the rear.

Nick looked around him. Three or four women—Indian or halfbreed—were present, and a couple of kids. One of the women was Mary Jones. The girl offered Nick a chair, but this time there was no smile on her face as the women departed, taking the kids with them.

Mary Jones seemed nervous; there was anxiety in her lustrous eyes.

"It's terrible about Mr. Adams," she began. "I've seen Jack. He looks ill."

Nick nodded. "Jarred him, I guess. Death is bad, but murder is worse."

The girl seemed to flinch. "Are you sure it's murder?"

"I'm sure. But it will have to be proved."

Footsteps sounded. The girl made to leave. Nick stopped her.

"Stay," he suggested. "If my Cree lets me down, you can help me out." He suddenly felt that he had put his foot in it. "That is, if you can speak the language," he added quickly.

She smiled at his embarrassment. "Of course. It's my mother's language. But Aunt Nancy can talk English quite well."

Now the housekeeper and the white man came in. "My father," she said, and introduced him to Nick. Nick turned to the woman.

In English he said to her, "I want you to think about that baking-soda—*muskeke,* you called it. Was it open when Mr. Adams took his dose from it tonight?"

The woman understood English, but preferred to answer in Cree.

"I opened it myself. I placed it with a cup and spoon all ready for the *Ookemow* when he should want it."

"On the shelves?"

"Yes; to hand, in its place."

"Tell me," went on Nick. "Did the package open easily—as though the flaps had been opened before and stuck down again?"

The woman frowned. *"Nemowetha n'kiskisin."* She didn't remember. "I opened it. That's all I know."

Nick went back to the other angle: who beside herself had had access to the package?

"Nobody who would have put poison in it," she averred. "The only ones in the kitchen today were the *Ookemow* himself, my brother-in-law here, and Jack."

"And Jack," emphasized the corporal.

He caught a sharp intake of breath. Mary Jones was staring at him. Nick smiled. "Fond of Jack, aren't you?"

The girl seemed surprised. "Of course I am."

"But old Luke was opposed to the marriage, I suppose," suggested Nick, "that if Jack married you anyway, the old man would have put the skids under him."

She nodded. "Jack said he would get a job somewhere else. Or trap."

"And how would that have suited you?"

"It wouldn't have suited me. I wouldn't have married him."

"You don't care for the trapline?"

The girl was very still for a moment. Then she said simply, "I'm thinking of Jack. Not myself."

"I'm sorry," said Nick—and he meant it. "But I didn't mean it just that way." With a quick switch, he asked her, "D'you like George McBeth?"

The girl frowned. "George McBeth? Yes. He's nice."

"As nice as Jack?"

The girl seemed bewildered. Nick went on, "Is he married?"

"No."

"Would he like to marry you?"

Color came to the girl's cheeks. "I—I—well, he asked me to."

Suddenly Nick turned to the girl's father.

"How's fur around here? Wild fur, I mean?"

It was the old man's turn to look puzzled. "Fur? Not bad, I guess."

"Enough to keep two concerns operating?"

HANK JONES shrugged. "Last season, mebbe. But now it looks like we've reached the peak-year fer rabbits. If we have, it'll be slim pickin's fer anyone from now on."

For ten minutes or so Nick drew the old man on regarding Luke Adams' business, his possible enemies and Jack Adams' feelings toward his father-by-adoption. Then he switched back to the baking-soda again.

But along this line he turned up nothing new. Old Hank was positive that nobody save himself, old Nancy and Jack

Adams had had the opportunity to tamper with it.

"Even though," put in Nick, "it makes things tougher for you?"

Old Hank shook his head doggedly. "Even in spite of that."

Nick decided there was little more information to be picked up here. Moreover, Windy Stafford was keeping his lonely vigil up at old Luke's. He bade the family good night, hoped that Windy hadn't developed cold feet and struck off for the fur-ranch at a brisk pace.

He left the village behind, made up the spruce-lined trail, then the brisk pace turned into a hard run. Through the trees and in the direction of Luke Adams' house, he had seen the reflection of fire.

It looked ominous. When he got to it, it seemed to be coming from the side of the building nearest the bush. That would be in the direction of the old man's bedroom. He raced around, tripped, fell. The thing that had tripped him was soft and yielding. Instinctively he knew it to be the body of a man. He struck a match, his jaw clicked hard and something rose in his throat.

The man was Windy Stafford.

He looked around him. He didn't know whether Windy was alive or dead. On the point of investigating, another thought came.

He ran to Luke Adams' window. There was a jagged hole in the glass, and flames were licking up from the floor-boards and against the far wall. He saw, too, the dead figure of Luke Adams on the bed and smelt the acrid fumes of gasoline. Smashing the rest of the window, he got inside.

It was a gruesome business but it had to be done. Shielding his face, he dragged Adams to the window, crawled through it, hauled the dead man after him.

But on the point of leaving him there, another thought came. More than a thought, this was inspiration. He skidded Adams' body fifty feet into the bush and left it there, behind a thick-boled tree.

HE HURRIED back to where he had left Windy Stafford. Flames had now eaten through the lumber-and-rubberoid roof and sparks were falling in a red shower. He carried Windy to a place of safety outside the fire-zone, ripped open his shirt and felt for his heart.

Windy was alive. A muffled groan broke through his lips. Nick ran a hand over his head and the corporal's fingers came away with a smear of blood on them.

"Clubbed," Nick grunted. "Lucky they didn't kill him."

Suddenly there came the sound of running footsteps and a moment later McBeth, the trader, appeared. He was hatless but otherwise fully clothed. Coming to where Nick was kneeling, he stared at Windy, then blurted, "What's this? Another killing?"

"No," growled Nick. "But the next thing to it."

McBeth frowned at the blazing house, took another look at Windy Stafford. "How come Windy up here?" he wanted to know.

"How come you're here?" countered Nick. "Thought you were going to bed?"

"So I was," answered McBeth. "But I had a few chores to do. Then I saw the fire through the trees, hollered to Al Johnson and lit out."

The pilot suddenly appeared. His hair was rumpled and he was still tucking his shirt-tails into his breeches. Al Johnson had apparently been awakened from his beauty-sleep. Then came old Hank Jones, Sam Hurd, Mary Jones and a score of natives. Sam Hurd, after one swift glance from the burning building to Windy, glowered at McBeth. "Well, what's it all about?" he demanded ominously.

McBeth shrugged. "Ask Nicholson. Mebbe he can tell us."

Nick said nothing, for just then Windy opened his eyes. The man blinked, looked queerly around the group and wetted his lips. He seemed to recognize the corporal and grinned faintly at Sam Hurd.

"Somebody—" he began. "Somebody hit me—" He broke off to stare at the roaring flames. "What happened, you guys?" he asked them both.

"That's what everybody wants to know," answered the corporal. "How much can you remember?"

Windy did his best. "I was up here—yeah, what for?" Then he seemed to recollect. "Sure, to keep an eye on things. Then this bird grabbed me—" He suddenly saw McBeth, frowned at him, shook his head. "Then I can't tell you nothin'."

Sam Hurd gave a grunt. "Somethin' new fer you! But if it's only yer head, you'll get along!"

The rough joshing brought a grin to Windy's face. He sat up. Then; as though suddenly remembering, shot a swift glance at Nick.

"Old Luke, in the house there—did you get him out?"

NICK clamped his jaw and was glad his face was shielded by the wide brim of his Stetson. Before he could answer, the roof fell in and flames roared skyward. "Out of a hell like that?" he jeered. "Go ahead and try it!"

He wanted to look at McBeth but wouldn't take the chance. Instead he said sharply, "The wind's springing up! Those other buildings'll go. Get some pails till we start a bucket-brigade!"

McBeth nodded. "Sure," he said. "C'mon!"

Running, they struck off for his store. Nick managed to draw the pilot away without being observed.

"Let 'em go," he ordered. "Got something to tell you." Clear of the others he said to Johnson, "They all think old Luke is in the house, Al. He isn't; I dragged him out before they came along. The autopsy has to go through. So if you'll give me a hand, we'll load him into your plane and you can skip for town without anyone being the wiser."

The darkness favored them; and in the rush of the bucket-brigade they were not missed. Blunderingly, they managed to carry the body of Luke Adams down to the plane, but they had to wait a chance to smuggle it aboard.

Soon, streaks of light showed in the east. The logs of the building still burned fiercely; and Nick knew that even after they burned themselves out, it would be many hours before the ashes would be cool enough for poking into. In the meantime there was work for him to do.

"How soon can you take off, Al?" he asked. "Meaning, I'll be going along."

The pilot quirked an eyebrow. "In a hurry?"

"Plenty hurry. Breakfast when we get there."

"In that case, say half an hour."

Nick turned then to the white-men of the bucket-brigade. They had wetted down the neighboring out-buildings, and they stood there, pails filled, ready for emergency.

Nick said, "Jack Adams didn't show up?"

"Prob'ly poundin' his ear down at the Mission and don't know nothin' about it," ventured Sam Hurd.

"When he does show up," said Nick, "tell him what happened and that I've gone to town. Al's pulling soon, and I'm pulling with him."

"Town?" echoed the trader, McBeth. "What for?"

"I've still got the soda, haven't I?"

"What's the good of the soda if you haven't got the body?"

Nick looked at the flames that were eating their way into stout spruce logs. "The body, yeah. But it's too late to worry about that now."

Windy Stafford sat on an upturned pail, and even in the ruddy glare from the flames his face still looked peaky.

"But what about me?" he yelped. "And the guy that laid me out?"

"He probably won't do it again," said

Nick consolingly. "But I'll tell you all this," he said with a hardening of the voice. "Who the guy is, I don't know; but if there's anyone of the bunch missing when I come back, I'll sure know who to take after!"

NICK returned sooner than he would dared have hoped. In fact, it was that very evening. As the plane cramped into the wharf in front of George McBeth's store, a larger-than-usual crowd was on hand to greet it. Amongst the crowd Nick spotted Jack Adams, Sam Hurd, a man in parson's garb, Hank Jones, Mary Jones, and even old Nancy. George McBeth stood on the platform in front of his store.

Nick was grinning. He walked up to the store, grabbed an Indian and sent him off for Windy Stafford. "The big showdown," Nick told McBeth. "Windy may still be groggy, but he should be in on it."

He led the way into the store and suggested to the others who had been interested in the affair to come in also. These lined the counters that circled the place, and when Windy Stafford and Pilot Alf Johnson came in, the store was pretty well full.

Windy looked at Nick anxiously. "Howja make out?"

"Swell!" answered Nick. "Everything hunky-dory." He leaned against a counter, thumbs hooked in his Sam Browne and his Stetson on the back of his head. "And that soda," he told his audience, "has been carefully analyzed. It contained enough strychnine to kill a bull."

There was a bit of a stir, although no man present expected anything less. "Yup," said Nick; "strychnine." And he looked at George McBeth.

McBeth seemed nervous. His breath came in sharply.

"I don't know nothin' about it!" he declared.

"Nothing?" asked Nick. "You told me you threw away all you had on hand. But I know you didn't." This was mostly bluff on Nick's part; or at least a very shrewd guess.

McBeth's eyes wavered. "I tell you, I never had nothin' to do with old Luke's murder. My gosh, I wouldn't kill nobody!"

Nick smiled. "Who said you killed him? Not me. In fact, again I know you didn't."

McBeth stared, wide-eyed. "I didn't? Then—then who did?"

Nick looked around. Jack Adams began to shuffle. Abruptly Nick pulled a fragment of rock from his tunic pocket and handed it to Windy Stafford. He asked, "What's that, Windy?"

Windy scowled at it, twisted it this way and that. He passed it to Sam Hurd. "What you make of it, Sam?"

Sam couldn't tell, either, though he shot a quick look at Nick.

"Then I'll tell you," Nick said. "It's a piece of tungsten ore; and it came from 'way up on Otter Lake."

"Otter Lake?" exclaimed Windy. He looked sharply at Sam Hurd. "Why, that's up in your neck-o'-the-woods, Sam."

"Sure," agreed the corporal. "Sam took it out to town and had it examined by an expert. The expert, feller by the name of Nichols, recognized Sam as the man who showed it to him from an old photograph we dug up. Newspaper photograph; taken the time Sam drove his dogs out to town and back."

SAM HURD stirred uneasily. "Somebody's bin kiddin' you," he growled.

"But you didn't try kidding old Luke," Nick told him. "If Luke had seen that piece of ore, your share of the claim wouldn't have been so big. But with Luke out of the way, you could stake it any time and hog the whole kaboodle."

Sam Hurd looked at Nick quizzically. "What're you tryin' to pull off?"

"I'm trying to get it through your thick head that we know who poisoned old

Luke Adams," Nick told him pointedly. "And the man who did it is you."

"Me?" Sam Hurd gave a laugh that was harsh and grating. "You're crazier'n a woodchuck! How could I ha' poisoned him? I wasn't near his place from the time I went to town till after he was dead! I never doped his soda!"

Nick waited. "Didn't you?"

"No!"

"Oh yes you did. And you know when you did it." Nick paused then. The crowd in the store was as motionless as though turned to stone.

"Any time a feller lies," Nick went on, "he wants to make sure his lying can't be checked. You took care to tell old Luke that you only bought one crock of gin. You were very careful to let me see you and Jack taking a slug from the crock at the dance. But you should have fixed it with the guy who runs the Government liquor-store in town. I saw the order you wrote out and your signature for what you received—two forty-ounce bottles of Durham's Gin."

NOW Sam Hurd was watching him narrowly. He stood midway down the room, opposite Nick, and against the other counter.

"Sure," said Nick. "One bottle you laced with oil of mirbane—stuff that would be hardly noticeable in gin and that takes an hour or so to kill. This was the bottle you handed old Luke and put back in your suitcase again. But it wasn't the same crock that you took to the dance. As for the soda, that was the slickest thing yet. It fooled me badly. And if you can't remember when you doped it with strychnine, let me tell you. It was when old Luke lay dying, long after you'd poisoned him with mirbane. In fact, it was when you went out in the kitchen to fetch that drink of water."

Nick paused fractionally, then hurried on.

"You kept in my sight all day; you stuck with me at the dance. That was your alibi. But you hadn't been with old Luke in his house for a minute but you skipped out for the water. But there's one thing worrying me, and I think I have the answer to that. You'd been around old Luke enough to know he always took a slug of soda before he went to bed, but what would you have done if you hadn't located the soda in its usual place? Tell me, didn't you have another doped package in your pocket—just as an ace-in-the-hole?"

Sam Hurd seemed to sag. Nick knew the signs. The man was getting ready to go berserk. But he tried one more gamble.

"Hooey!" he snarled. "How kin you ever prove that it wasn't strychnine killed the old feller? The fire wouldn't leave nothin' of him!"

"It wouldn't have done," agreed Nick. "That is, if you'd had your way. But you didn't have your way. After you slugged Windy, set the fire and lit out, you thought luck would be kind to you. She wasn't. I rescued Luke's body, Al and I flew it to town, and the autopsy went through. No strychnine was found in old Luke's stomach, because he hadn't taken any; but there was plenty of the other—enough, as I said, to kill a bull."

Sam Hurd blew up then; but Nick had arranged things so that too strenuous a part in the subsequent proceedings would not fall on him alone. With Hurd shackled, willing hands shoved him through the door.

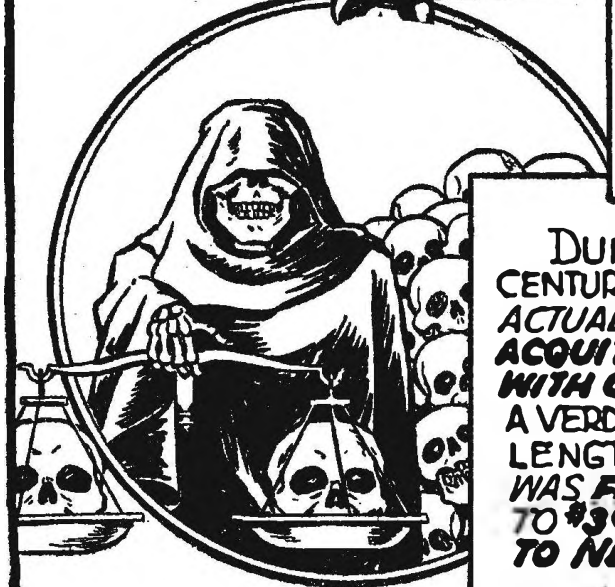
Near the doorway, Mary Jones was standing. She looked at Nick, with something odd in her eyes. There was a touch of awe, a touch of admiration, something that Nick thought might be gratitude. He grinned, and she smiled briefly back at him. Going out he spoke to her, so that nobody else might hear.

"Good luck, Mary. Your troubles are over. And when the wedding comes off—well, save a dance for me."

Curioddities By Weill

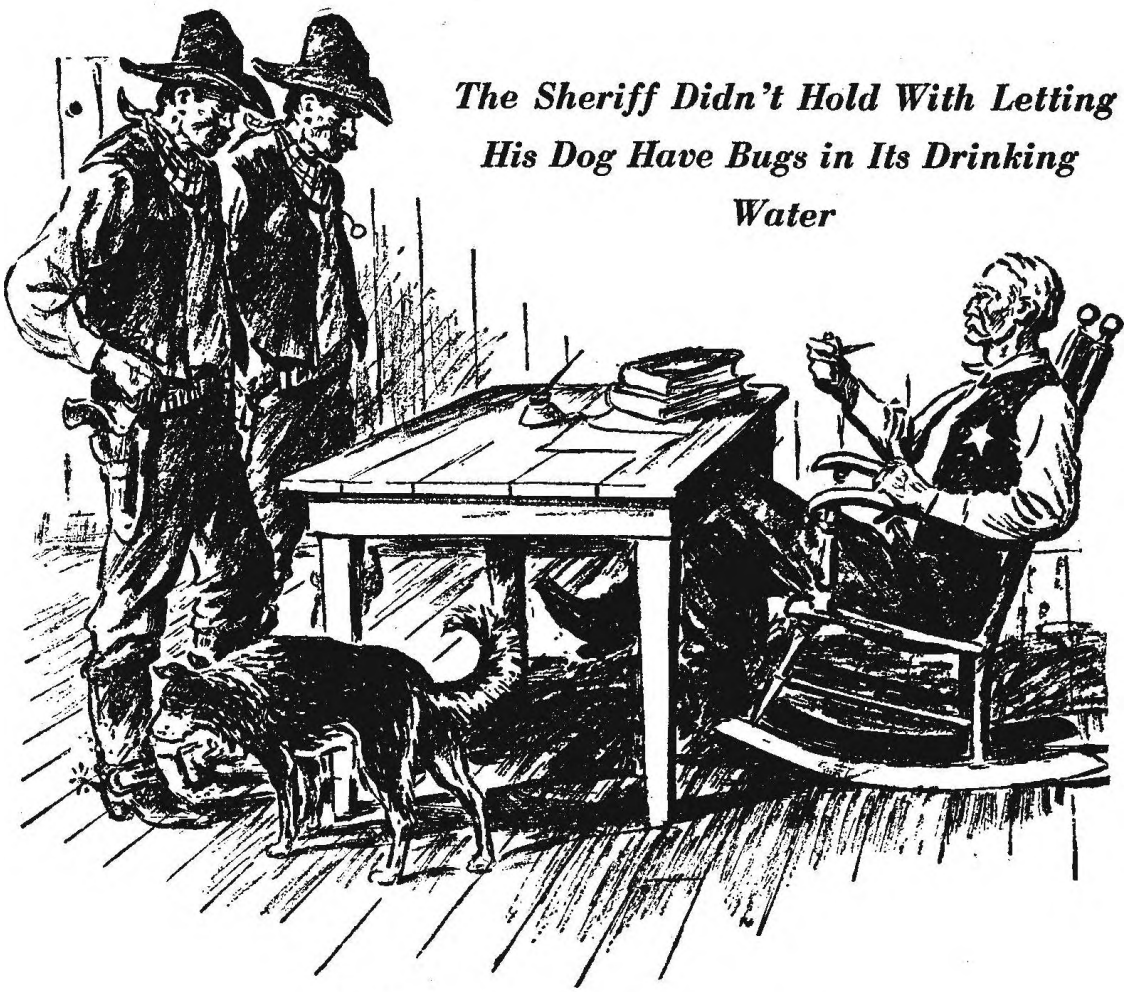
TYRANT KING OF THE **DINOSAURS, *TYRANNOSAURUS REX,*** WAS THE LARGEST LAND-LIVING, FLESH-EATING CREATURE THAT EVER LIVED! EXTINCTION OF THE DINOSAUR RACE OCCURRED **60 MILLION YEARS AGO** AND IT IS A CURIOUS FACT THAT THEY PERISHED ALL OVER THE WORLD ***AT APPROXIMATELY THE SAME TIME!***

THE OLDEST **"STEEL"** WEAPON KNOWN, THE MITANNIAN AXE FROM UGARIT, DATES FROM ABOUT THE ***FOURTEENTH CENTURY B.C.!*** THE HEAD OF THE AXE WAS *VERY INGENIOUSLY SHRUNK ON TO THE BLADE, THUS OBVIATING THE USE OF RIVETS!*



DURING THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, ENGLISH JURIES *WERE ACTUALLY* ***PUNISHED*** *FOR* ***ACQUITTING ANYONE CHARGED WITH CRIME!*** FOR RETURNING A VERDICT OF ACQUITTAL AFTER A LENGTHY TRIAL IN 1554 A JURY *WAS* ***FINED*** *AN AMOUNT EQUAL TO* ***$39,000*** *AND* ***SENTENCED TO NEWGATE PRISON!***

WHO TOOK A SACRED CATIT WITH HIS HAND OUT IN ONION? *See Curioddities next time.*



The Sheriff Didn't Hold With Letting His Dog Have Bugs in Its Drinking Water

NOSED OUT

By S. OMAR BARKER

Author of "Born to Battle," etc.

SHERIFF HUNCH McELROY'S diminutive figure leaned comfortably back in a rocking chair that must have seen service in the Ark. The sock-footed terminus of one of his stringy, saddle-bowed legs rested on the pine plank table that served him for a desk. With the other he gently stroked the dusty back of a solemn-eyed black and white dog of possible shepherd ancestry.

"Bug-Eye," the sheriff addressed the bristle-jawed, frog-eyed young deputy who was cleaning and oiling a six-gun across the table from him. "I wish you'd run down an' fetch Oliver a fresh pan of water. There's a bug in this 'un."

"S'posin' there is?" Bug-Eye's answer was fired with rebellion. "I ain't no better'n a dam-goozled dog, an' I've drunk water out of a cow-track so full o' bugs I had to chaw to swaller it. What am I around here, a deppity sheriff or flunky to a flea-trap?"

Nevertheless he got up, picked up the battered washpan half full of water and started out with it.

"An' while you're down there," added his banty boss, "fetch up a curry comb an' brush from the stable. Long as we got us

a dog, we might as well keep him neat."

"You mean you're actually aimin' to keep that mutt permanent? Jest because a stray hound follers you across the street you fergit today's the day fer—"

"An' you might bring up a saddle blanket for him to lay on, too. Then you can run down to the butcher shop an'—"

"An' in the meantime—" this time Bug-Eye's outburst was a full-toned snort as he backed toward the door—"John Storey slips past us back to Texas! Whyn't we go out patrollin' the passes instid of pamperin' a pup? Why ain't we ketchin' a cow-thief instid of curryin' a cur? Whyn't—"

A questioning but not unfriendly woof from the dog interrupted him.

"Yuh see?" The banty sheriff reproached his deputy mildly. "Already Oliver's provin' his value. I got a hunch he heard somebody comin' up the steps.

"Yeah? If he's so smart, whyn't you ask him who it is?"

"While you're whyn'tin', whyn't you open the door yourownself an' see? I got a hunch it might be John Storey come to give hisself up."

"In a pig's eye!" said Bug-Eye and swung open the door.

Two men walked in and advanced, keeping close step with each other, to the side of the pine plank table opposite the sheriff.

One of them was a tall, dish-faced man of about thirty, with a brown, docked hoss-tail mustache, more lower lip than his mouth seemed to have room for, a turkey-buzzard neck and a meaty but not corpulent middle. The brim of his black sombrero had the slightly swaggerish up-roll characteristic of cowhand headgear; he wore no coat; the unbuttoned vest over his hickory shirt was mulberry brown, with the disk of a Bull Durham tag dangling from a pocket; his pants were hickory jeans, with both legs stuffed into middling expensive looking black boots.

The other was a tall, dish-faced man of about thirty, with a brown, docked hoss-tail mustache, more lower lip than his mouth seemed to have room for, a turkey-buzzard neck and a meaty but not corpulent middle. The brim of his black sombrero—

But why go on? As old Hunch's pale eyes perceived in one glance, the two men not only looked as much alike as two drips from the same coffee cup, but were garbed alike—except that the style of stitching on their black boot tops may have varied a little.

Bug-Eye stared unbelievingly, but if old Hunch was in any way astonished, the weathered lines of his dried-apple face failed to show it.

"Well, Storey," he twanged, "cowthief or not, I had a hunch you'd be back—an' here you be! Set down!"

"Thanks." Both men spoke the word in unison, and sat down the same way.

"Judge Williams has set your trial to open at 2 P. M. this afternoon." Sheriff McElroy eyed the black and white dog sniffing with friendly interest at one of the man's boots. "You got you a lawyer, Storey?"

Silently both men nodded. Thoughtfully Hunch scratched one sock foot with the other.

"It's a good act, boys," he grinned finally. "But it won't git you nowheres. Storey, come on, I'm goin' to lock you up till time for the trial."

Without a word both men followed him.

"Bug-Eye," said the sheriff, when he came back into the office, "you was with me when we found them stolen cattle in John Storey's herd. You seen me arrest him, heard him promise to come back an' stand trial if I'd only let him deliver his herd first. You're young. You got better eyes—anyways bigger 'uns—than I have. Can you go into court this afternoon an' swear which one of these fellers is the one I arrested."

"Who, me? Why, shore I can, Hunch. That is—I mean—all you got to do is show

me which 'un he is, an' I'll shore swear to him!"

"I was afeerd o' that," Hunch broke in dryly. "Well, go fetch him his dinner, anyways."

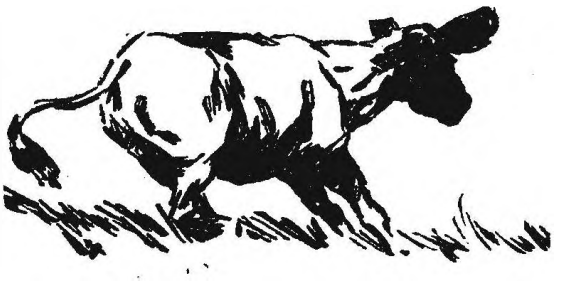
"*His* dinner? Yuh mean—"

"One prisoner's all I got a record of. One dinner, Bug-Eye."

As for Hunch himself, that day he went without his dinner entirely, for in the short hour and a half before time for court to open he had some urgent and important errands to do. At least he hoped they'd prove important. The first was to hustle down to the telegraph office and send a wire. The next was to saddle up and ride the outskirts of Pintada in search of a wagon camp that might belong to John Storey.

AT TWO that afternoon Judge Williams called the case of the People vs. John Storey for larceny of cattle. A jury was quickly impaneled, for Mr. Safford, the suave attorney for the defense, offered no challenges, and District Attorney Tom Lowden only a couple.

The first witness called was old Charlie Dunlap, the dry-farmer whose cattle had been found in John Storey's trail herd as it passed through Pintada County. His testimony was brief and to the point. Soon after the herd had passed his place, he said, he had checked his little bunch and found eight head missing. On suspicion he had sent for the sheriff. Together they had followed the herd. In it they had found his eight head of cattle—among them three short yearlings that he had neglected to brand, which now bore the trail brand of John Storey. Storey had readily acknowledged that the other five were strays he had intended to cut out of the herd as soon as he hit a good place to turn them back. But the yearlings, he claimed were his. Having come only some two hundred miles, all the trail herd bore fresh trail brands, but the brands on these three, Dunlap swore, were fresher. Besides, he reckoned he knew his own calves, brand or no brand. Against his (Dunlap's) protest, he said, Sheriff McElroy had let John Storey proceed with the herd solely on his promise to return and stand trial.



"Now, Mr. Dunlap," said the District Attorney, "is the trail boss in whose herd your cattle were found now in this courtroom?"

"Yessir, he shore is!"

"Mr. Dunlap, will you please point out this man to the jury?"

"Shore will," said Mr. Dunlap, raising a work-gnarled finger. "It's one of them two fellers settin' right thar at that thar table.

"*Which* one?"

The witness hesitated.

"I declare," he said finally, "y'know I never seen him but that once. 'Course I never knowed he had a twin or I'd of took a heap closer notice of him. Lemme see, now—shucks, y'know I declare—"

"May it please the court," broke in the suave looking attorney for the defense, "the witness was asked to identify a certain John Storey against whom he has sworn a complaint for the larceny of cattle. May I ask the court to insist that he do so?"

"Charlie," Judge Williams addressed the witness, "can you point him out or can't you?"

"I declare, Judge, I—I jest ain't sure. But ol' Hunch—I mean Sheriff McElroy an' Bug-Eye was there. They'll—"

"That'll do," broke in the D. A. a little

sharply. "Mr. Sheriff will you please take the stand?"

"Mr. Sheriff," he went on, when Hunch had been sworn, "you made the arrest in this case?"

"Yep. That is, me an' Bug-Eye. But you jest as well to save your wind, Tom. I'd heard tell of them Storey brothers, kinder newcomers over in the Panhandle, heard they was twins, even, but I hadn't never seen 'em. If I'd had any idee any two-legged critters could favor like they do, I never would of let John Storey go on with his herd. O' course, as sheriff of this here county, I allus try to do my duty, an' in most cases—"

"Your Honor," broke in Attorney Safford, "I object to the witness using the stand from which to make a speech!"

"Object an' be damned!" snorted old Hunch. "I'm jest—"

"Hold your 'tater, Hunch," broke in the judge. "One more crack like that out of you and I'll jail you for contempt of court. Answer the District Attorney's question!"

"Hell, he ain't asked me none yet, Judge. But if he's goin' to ask me to p'int out which one of them droopy-lipped kiotes is John Storey, he jest as well save his wind, for I cain't do it. But if the court'll jest wait—"

The irate bang of Judge William's gavel silenced him.

"Mr. Sheriff," he said severely, "this is a court of law, not a barroom debating society. Mr. District Attorney, have you any other witness by whom to identify the defendant?"

"I'll call one more, your Honor," said the D. A. wearily. He nodded toward Bug-Eye.

"Deputy Sheriff Johnson," he continued when Bug-Eye had been sworn, "can you identify the defendant, John Storey?"

"Who, me? Why, shore!" Bug-Eye pointed, "It's that 'un."

But the direction of his pointing was rather vague.

"Please come over here, Deputy Johnson," said the D. A., "and indicate the proper defendant by touching him."

"Why, shore," said Bug-Eye. He came down off the stand with a swagger. "It's this 'un—no, wait a minute! I believe it's that 'un! Nossir, by golly it's—"

"You may sit down," groaned the D. A.

"Judge," began Hunch, "if you fellers will jest wait, I'll—"

"If the court please," broke in Attorney Safford for the defense. "I move that the case against John Storey for larceny of cattle be dismissed for lack of evidence!"

"Not so fast," broke in the D. A. "If the court please, there are other ways of naming a dog besides pointing at him. May I request the court to require the defendant, John Storey, to stand up."

"Prisoner at the bar," ordered the Judge, "stand up!"

Two men stood up.

"John Storey," thundered the Judge. "Sit down!"

Both men, as if they did not even hear him, continued to stand.

"Prisoner at the bar," Bellowed the Judge. "Sit down!"

Both men sat down.

"John Storey, stand up!"

Two slightly bald, dish-faced men with dark, well-trimmed mustaches and pendulous lower lips, stood up, side by side.

"Which one of you two is John Storey?"

Two men turned turkey-buzzard necks a little to look at their lawyer.

"May it please the court," said Attorney Safford smoothly. "The question here is not merely who is John Storey. The question at issue is the identification of *the man apprehended by Sheriff McElroy and charged by the complainant with larceny of cattle.* It is my contention, supported I believe by the principles of law, that the obligation to identify John Storey rests upon the prosecution, else they have no case."

"Your point, Mr. Safford," said Judge

Williams stiffly, "is well taken. Prisoner at the bar, sit down."

AGAIN both men sat down.

"Mr. District Attorney," continued the judge, "what do you propose, therefore, to do with this case?"

"If it was me," began Bug-Eye, "I'd sock 'em both. I'd—"

"Silence! Mr. District Attorney, *proceed!*"

"May it please the court," said the D. A. with a disgusted shrug, "in view of the fact that this county seems to be afflicted with a sheriff more given to hunches than to an accurate memory, and since he had no legal right to permit an accused criminal to go free merely upon his own promise to return, in the first place—in view of such fact, I say, and—"

"Fact my eye!" broke in old Hunch, bristling like a terrier at a dog-fight. "I promised John Storey I'd hunt him from hell to Havana, jest like I would a wolf, if he didn't show up here fer trial—a' here he is! Judge, if you fellers will jest hold your damn hosses awhile, I got a hunch that—"

"Mr. Sheriff, I'll jail you for contempt of court if you continue to interrupt! Proceed, Mr. District Attorney."

"May it please the court, then, in view of our hunch-bound sheriff's inability to identify the defendant, I have no alternative but to move that the case of the People vs. John Storey be dismissed."

"But dang it, Tom—I'm expectin'—"

Once more the pound of the judge's gavel cut off old Hunch's twangy drawl.

"I warned you, Mr. Sheriff! This court now finds you in contempt, and—"

"Wup! Yonder he comes now!"

With the spryness of a June grasshopper on a sunny hillside, old Hunch vaulted the low railing and bowlegged it to meet a tow-headed youngster with a yellow envelope in his hand.

"Huh-how'd you know it wuz fer you?" stammered the kid.

Without heeding him, Hunch tore open the telegram, read it in a glance and ran, waving it in the air, toward the bench.

"Jest read that, Judge!" he cried. "An' —an' hold ever'thing! I'll be back in a minute!"

Vaulting the railing again, he dashed out of the courtroom, sped like a banty rooster down the corridor, and rattled the knob of a locked door.

"Bring him out, Rusty!" he panted.

Back in the courtroom, Judge Williams frowned over the telegram Hunch had handed him, then passed it to Tom Lowden.

"What do you make of it, Tom—er—Mr. District Attorney?"

The D. A. also scowled as he read the laconic ten words:

SHERIFF HUNCH MC ELROY
PINTADA N M
YALLER DOG BELONGS JAMES STOP
BOBTAILED HOPING YOU ARE SAME
TUTTLE
SHERIFF CASTRO COUNTY TEXAS

Something about old Hunch's sudden flurry must have made the unnamed twin defendants uneasy. At least his absence made them bold. Or else they thought the D. A.'s motion to dismiss, meant the trial was over, for, in the midst of all this confusion, they rose and started with considerable swiftness for the door. But they had failed to reckon with Bug-Eye. Identifying the defendant may have been too much for his somewhat unintellectual faculties, but "indentifying" the heads of both of them with a six-gun barrel wasn't. Woozy on their feet, he dragged them both back before the judge just as Hunch and his other deputy, Rusty Paulsen, came busting in through the courtroom crowd, dragging a big yellowish brown dog, obviously so scared that even his stump of a tail was trying to duck down between his hind legs. Then suddenly both the dog's tail and his head came up. He looked, he

sniffed, he whined, and when Hunch slackened the leash, ran eagerly to jump up on the leg of one of Bug-Eye's groggy prisoners.

Instantly old Hunch dobbed two fingers in a nearby inkwell and smeared a blue-black cross on the forehead of the other one. "Jest labelin' him, Judge," he drawled twangily, "so we won't git mixed up on 'em agin. If the court please—or if it don't, Judge—this here 'un is John Storey, cowthief an' defendant in this here case!"

"Your honor, I object!" howled Attorney Stafford, no longer suave. "This procedure is most irregular! The sheriff is not under oath!"

"I can git thataway mighty quick, Mister Lawyer," grinned Hunch. "Then jest ask me!"

A hesitant look lingered a moment on Judge Williams' ruddy face. True, the procedure was irregular. True, the dignity of his court seemed to be all shot to hell. But true also that in the many years he had known old Hunch, rarely if ever had he found him barking up an empty tree.

"Order in the court!" he boomed. "Sheriff McElroy, take the stand."

Batting his pale eyes to modify his obvious look of triumph, Hunch obeyed.

"Yuh see," he explained in answer to the D. A.'s questioning, "quick as them two come in an' give theirselves up I got a hunch they was campin' somewheres around instid of stayin' at the hotel, because I could ketch the smell of a cookin' fire on 'em. I knowed that might mean that they had brung along a gun crew, figgerin' on a jail break if this twin business didn't work out right. So, after sendin' a wire to their home sheriff to find out which one of 'em owned a dog, if either, I kinder percolated around an' found their camp. Nobody there, though, but a camp flunky—an' this big yaller houn'-dog. It ain't my policy to browbeat no hired hand into tattlin' on his boss, so natcherly I couldn't learn nothing about which was which from the flunky. So I figgered to try the dog. Jest told the coosie that Mister Storey had ask me to fetch in his dog to keep him company, an' he let me have him.

"Now there's mighty few dogs has got two different masters, so I had a hunch this 'un either belonged to John Storey or it didn't, an' no matter how much alike these fellers might look, the dog would know which from'tother, same as all dogs do, by the smell. So, quick as this wire come revealin' that *James* Storey was the one owned the pooch, I brung him in—an' you seen what happened yourownself, Judge—he run an' jumped on his master, *James* Storey, provin' the other 'un must be John—to wit an' namely, the feller we caught stealin' ol' Charlie's yearlin's. Yuh see—"

"I object! Your Honor, this line of testimony is not—"

"Objection overruled, Mr. Safford," broke in Judge Williams. "We will let the jury be the judge of Sheriff McElroy's rather unusual method of identification, and proceed to the trial of this case on its merits. You, John Storey—" he pointed a plump finger suddenly and accusingly—"sit down!"

With a dazed look on his face, before Attorney Safford's protest could stop him, the man with Hunch's ink-smear on his forehead sat down.

"Mr. Sheriff," the judge continued, a twinkle in his eyes that not even his spectacles could hide, "the matter of contempt will be—er—held in abeyance pending your future behavior in this court. Mr. District Attorney, proceed to trial!"

BACK in his office that evening, apparently oblivious of the argument his two young deputies over which should make the trip to Santa Fé to deliver John Storey to the penitentiary to begin his two-year sentence for larceny of cattle, Sheriff Hunch McElroy pulled off his boots and leaned back in his ancient rocker. The sock-footed terminus of one saddle-bowed leg reached out to stroke the back of a

black and white dog whose brown solemn eyes regarded him worshipfully.

"Bug-Eye," he twanged out presently, "I wish you'd fetch Oliver a fresh pan of water. This 'un's got a bug in it."

"Sposin' it has?" Bug-Eye's answer was fired with rebellion. "I ain't no better'n a dam-goozled dog, an' I've drunk—"

"Yeah, I know—but if it wasn't for Oliver you wouldn't be gittin' that trip to Santa Fé to deliver John Storey, neither."

"Huh? Ain't you got your mongrels mixed, Hunch? It was that yaller pooch of Jim Storey's that—"

"Sure," grinned the banty sheriff. "But —did either of you boys notice *when* I sent that wire askin' Tuttle which of them two twins was a dog man?"

"Why—why—shore, you sent it—dam-goozle it, Hunch, you sent it *before* you went out to their camp! Before you even knowed either of 'em had such a thing as a dog!"

"But not before I hunched it, boys. Didn't you notice what an interest Oliver taken in sniffin' the boots an' pants legs of the one that had lots of dog smell on him —an' *not* the other one?"

IT ALL seemed routine enough—a business trip to Havana.

BUT Hugh MacLean suddenly found himself all set to fight a duel; and how could he have been in Cuba a year when he only sailed from New York a week ago?

IT WAS all fantastic adventure, and very odd and exciting. . . . . . .

ADVENTURE IN HAVANA

By JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS

In the next SHORT STORIES

AUGUST 10th Issue

Who Remembers the State Called Franklin? Yet It, Too, Played a Part for Unity

THE SPANISH TRADER

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Mile after mile we won it, from Eaton's to Nickajack,
Held it through blood and terror and sweat, losing and winning back;
Was it worth our tears and strife and toil, this country of Tennessee?
"Ask yourselves this, my people—what is it worth to be free?"

"I'M RETURNING to Fayetteville by the noon stagecoach, Your Excellency," said Barnes. "May I have your answer before my departure?"

John Sevier nodded. He was erect, tall, fair, with eyes of blue fire.

"I am making up my mind, Mr. Barnes," he said. "Will you come for a half-hour's ride with me? I'll give you my decision when we return here."

Barnes assented. The two men stepped out of the Jonesboro tavern where Governor Sevier of the State of Franklin had his temporary headquarters. They mounted in silence, rode out of town in silence, but Barnes noted the greetings flung from every side at his soldierly companion, greetings of affection. Nolichucky Jack he was, to settler and trapper; even to the Cherokee or Creek redskins, he was 'Chucky Jack—he, the governor of this state!

Sevier was frowning and thoughtful. At length he waved his hand.

"Look, Mr. Barnes; look at this country of ours!" he said. "Every inch of it won with blood, from Eaton's in the northeast to Nickajack in the south. Not a mile of it but is baptized with the blood of men and women and children; all of it won from the Cherokee nation."

"Truly a marvelous country," agreed Barnes. "That, may be, is why North Carolina wants it back. Your secession and formation of a new state irks us, naturally. And the Congress has not acted as yet on your petition to be incorporated in the Union."

"No," said Sevier. "Not yet."

It was both admission and threat. During three years he and the westerners had been moving heaven and earth to make the dilatory Congress act on that petition. But as yet Congress did nothing. As yet the Federal constitution still hung fire, and the year was 1786.

Of all these western settlements, even beyond the Cumberland, John Sevier was the great popular hero; in North Carolina he was a traitor. It was he who had led the western riflemen to victory at King's Mountain, a victory that largely turned the tide of the Revolution and won freedom for the south.

It was he who, year after year, had battled the redskins by trail and river and valley, in pitched battles and distant forays—thirty-odd campaigns of blood and fire, by the Cherokee towns, by Lookout Mountain, by the western settlements. And, when all this rich and hard-won land seceded from North Carolina and formed the State of Franklin, it was he who had been elected governor.

"Remember," said Barnes, "I am empowered to offer you much. Your title of Brigadier General will be restored. Grants of land will be yours—"

"I am negotiating now with Georgia," broke in Sevier. "We're arranging that the big bend country of the Tennessee shall be incorporated within the State of Franklin, provided we can take it from the Indians. I'm sending my brother to head an expedition."

Barnes bit his lip. The mountains, the corn-fat valleys, the deep rivers—a lovely land, this! A land of rugged fighters who had won freedom, too.

"Yes," he replied. "And I hear you've been making treaties with the Indians."

"Franklin is a sovereign State, Mr. Barnes," said the governor proudly. "As much so as any of the other States. We do as we please."

"So I understand. It might be wiser to return within the fold; North Carolina offers amnesty to all who do so. The offer may be withdrawn."

Sevier caught the ominous hint—the threat. He was an impetuous man, a fighter hard as nails, who could turn out on five minutes notice with rifle and powder-horn to take a hundred-mile Indian trail. A curt laugh escaped him, but he repressed his anger.

"You'd tempt me to betray my friends and neighbors, would you?" he asked calmly.

"No, Your Excellency; to lead them. You are the State of Franklin. The men of these seceded counties follow your advice, your leading."

This was true, Sevier made no response. His gaze settled on a man and horse jog-

ging along the road toward them, toward town. A trim rider wearing buckskin, carrying a rifle, a man of square shoulders and high head, a stranger. Sevier wondered who the man might be, for he knew everyone in these parts. A traveler, not a hunter or settler. The man spoke to them and jogged on with a flash of his dark eyes. Sevier drew rein.

"Mr. Barnes, my answer is No!" he said quietly. His decision was evident.

"I am sorry, sir," said Barnes. The matter was ended.

So Mr. Barnes went back to North Carolina, and John Sevier sat in his room at the tavern, facing realities. They were unpleasant. He had lost his rank of brigadier-general when Franklin seceded; now he would be not only traitor, but outlaw, a price upon his head. Not that anyone would try to scalp the hero of King's Mountain—but he felt the disgrace keenly.

AND things were not going too well with Franklin. The Indian land to the west and south was being opened up and settled, yet there was always the nebulous question of what authority ran in the west—whether American, British or Spanish. Since Spain had taken over Louisiana, her flag was being pushed hard. Sevier was ambitious for Franklin to take in the western territories, but money lacked, taxes were hard to collect, and unless the Philadelphia Congress put the seal of approval on this fourteenth state, she might be in difficulties.

More, Indian raids were continuous and savage; fighting was going on all the time. The bloody border was darker than ever.

A knock. Sevier looked up and spoke. A slave entered.

"Massa Jack, there's a ge'man allows he'd like to see you."

"Bring him here," said Sevier.

A light, quick step and a man entered the room. Sevier recognized the face instantly; it was that of the stranger he had met on the road. But the man was different. Gone was the frontier garb. Now he was quietly but carefully attired in fitted broadcloth and fine linen; and he bowed to Sevier with polished grace. A dark face, a flashing, aggressive face with thin lips and masterful lines. A man who did things; a dangerous man, thought Sevier.

"Governor Sevier, your servant! I'm Jonas Trigg of New Orleans, a merchant there," said the visitor. "If you have leisure, I have brought you letters from the Spanish governor of Louisiana."

"By all means," said Sevier. "I'm leaving in the morning for the settlements on the French Broad, where I shall be for some time."

Trigg's face fell, as he produced a sealed packet. "I am sorry for that," he said frankly. "There are certain matters I hoped to discuss with you, which can't be settled in a moment or a day."

Sevier took the packet. "There's nothing to prevent you riding with me," he said. "Did you come by the Natchez Trace?"

"Yes. And I was amazed at the number of new settlements by the way! Of course, the Natchez road is the favored artery of commerce into Louisiana—"

"Now that the Spanish have placed prohibitive duties on the Mississippi traffic, yes," said Sevier curtly, and ripped open the seals.

He was wary of this visitor, disliking the man and distrusting his errand. It was so secret that Spanish agents were in the country, that the Indian tribes were being tampered with, that Spain wanted to add all the vast country west of the Alleghanies to Louisiana. The river traffic had been largely closed to American commerce, yet the Spanish had encouraged the settlement of Natchez by Americans.

Sevier eyed the floridly written document. Trigg was empowered to discuss with him certain matters of mutual benefit; the Governor of Franklin was heaped with compliments, and the friendship of Spain was assured the State of Franklin. All very

fine, thought Sevier. Don Miro had ruled Louisiana with a hard hand and a shrewd head—what was he after now?

"Are you a Spaniard or an American?" he asked abruptly.

Trigg smiled. "A trader of New Orleans, Your Excellency; citizenship goes with the city, eh? So at the moment I am Spanish. I came out from Philadelphia after the Revolution."

"You've done well," said Sevier, not without irony. "Now let's have it in a word—what's your business with me? We can have the compliments and arguments later."

"Good," said Trigg. "I'm all for business myself, sir. The kite's short but the tail is long, so let's at the kite first. My friend Don Miro has of late conceived a vision which I must admit is very promising. In his mind's eye the State of Franklin appears vastly enlarged, reaching down to Mobile and west to the Mississippi, and embracing the Kentucky settlements and those west of here on the Cumberland."

Sevier laughed harshly.

"An ambitious prospect, Mr. Trigg! However, there are two big stumbling-blocks to such a vision. First, the Cumberland settlements are hopeful of being incorporated with those on the Kentucky in a separate government. Second, Franklin hopes to be incorporated with the United States and has a petition to that effect before Congress."

The Spanish trader caressed his thin, silky mustache, and smiled cheerfully.

"But General Wilkinson in Kentucky, sir, assures us that such a hope is vain. He is completely with us, and so are many gentlemen in high places along the Cumberland. Alliance with strong, rich, powerful Louisiana is far preferable to alliance with the feeble Congress in Philadelphia, and with its disunited states."

"Franklin prefers Congress, none the less," said Sevier.

"But Congress does not care for Franklin. Your petition has been laid aside; it will never be granted. Our information comes direct from the best sources in Philadelphia. North Carolina has won the game of intrigue there, and will ruin the State of Franklin unless your state will rejoin her. We, on the other hand, offer to preserve your state, enlarge it vastly, stand behind you as governor, join you in a firm policy toward the Indian nations, secure your finances, and enter into alliance with you."

Sevier gave no outward sign of the pulse-leap these words provoked. This information was agonizing to him, yet it opened a tremendous horizon of prosperity and power.

"Your information from Philadelphia can't be true!" he said.

"But it is, sir. I'm ready to lay the reports before you; my names, facts, data are absolutely exact. But I'll not trouble you with them now. I'll follow you to the French Broad, since you suggest that I do so, and lay before you our detailed proposals. I think you'll find them of great advantage to you and to your state. Permit me to withdraw now and spare you further inconvenience. Your servant, sir."

Trigg bowed himself out and the door closed.

"Damn you!" said Sevier under his breath. "Too clever by half!"

True. The shock had been delivered bluntly, the remedy had been stated; Trigg was shrewd in departing at once. Sevier sat stunned by this intelligence. He had corresponded before this with New Orleans in a desultory way, but here he saw the crisis at hand and decision forcing itself upon him. And forcing itself by the hand of an unscrupulous, able man.

He headed south next morning for the frontier settlements along the French Broad with haggard worry gnawing at his heart. Not for himself, but for this State of Franklin which he had built up with his hopes and energies and ambitions, his friends and neighbors, his followers in many a campaign.

Everything had been wagered, lands and future and position, on acceptance by Congress of the petition from Franklin—particularly as North Carolina had not yet accepted the Federal constitution. And now this would fail. No doubt the politicians in Philadelphia were bartering and trading and arranging things among themselves. Franklin was lost; rather, the settlers who had won their lands from the redskins by rifle and scalp, men like Nolichucky Jack Sevier himself.

They were still winning those lands. The Cherokee towns in the south and east, the Chickamauga towns in the south and west, were rabid with enmity. Everywhere along the frontier raids were numerous, blood was shed wholesale, the red warriors penetrated deeply, struck savage blows, and were gone. The whites repaid them in the same coin. The errand on which Sevier was riding now was to arrange with the French Broad settlers some means of repelling threatened raids by Bloody Fellow and other Cherokee chiefs.

This terror of blood by day and night could be dealt with by Franklin men, were their state secure. Now it meant ruin. Now Sevier perceived the unuttered reasons behind the visit of Barnes and the effort to win him over. The politicians were sure of their grip; Franklin faced defeat and ruin in Philadelphia. The next step would be outlawry of Sevier and all his party.

To a casual eye, the Spanish offer was a godsend. Only John Sevier knew better, because he alone could see farther. It meant that, allied with Louisiana and Spain, he must take up arms against his own people east of the mountains.

HE PONDERED these things as he rode from farm to farm, from settlement to settlement, along the pleasant reaches of the French Broad. Many of his old King's Mountain veterans were settled here. In an hour he could raise fifty men who would follow him into hell. He raised twenty to ride and scout with him, sent others to keep an eye on the fords and trails, watching for any sign of Bloody Fellow's threatened irruption. He was planning to raise more, an army, to march into the Cherokee lands, burn the towns and fields, wipe out the red warriors—and then the Spanish trader, Trigg, caught up with him.

He was stopping with a farmer named Dibble, not far from Gillespie's settlement, when Trigg came along, with his courteous ways and insolent, slippery smile.

Sevier listened, in the days that followed. He had to await word from his scouts, for news from the Cherokee country was bad; anything might happen, any time. Bloody Fellow deserved his name, and his co-chief, Watts, was a bit of a strategist. So John Sevier set his tight lips and listened, and what he heard was worth the hearing.

"What could Franklin do, if it only had good financing?" said the Spanish trader. "You can have funds for the asking, and free trade with Louisiana. Think what that would mean! All a continent's trade pouring through Franklin, from Natchez to Philadelphia! There's riches for you."

And Franklin needed it bitterly.

"What could you not do, a proven general, with men and supplies?" said Trigg. "Here you scout with a handful of riflemen against the Cherokees. With our forces behind you, the Creeks and Cherokees and Chickamaugas could all be wiped out in one campaign! Franklin would be the bulwark of your whole nation. Instead of three little counties, it would comprise a territory as large as all your other states put together, with you for its governor! There's fame for you."

Fame meant nothing to John Sevier, but a strong Franklin meant everything. And the state was tottering. Up along the Watauga people were beginning to go over to North Carolina again, deserters. And Franklin itself, as he now knew for a certainty, was doomed unless he made a pact with the Spanish. For Trigg laid bare his detailed reports from Philadelphia. The

Congress meant to ignore the pitiful petition from Franklin.

The strong, hard features of Sevier became furrowed in those days.

"What do you want?" he demanded, over and over. Always came the same answer:

"A treaty between you and us. Alliance!"

"It's the same as allegiance. I'll never give allegiance to the King of Spain!"

"No such thing, Your Excellency," said the trader. "If you return to your allegiance to North Carolina, as you must, you'll get nothing out of it except handcuffs; you'll be declared an outlaw, your settlements will be occupied by force. A treaty with us will save you from that fate."

"You mean allegiance, all the same," said Sevier. "Once we're bound to you, we can never be Americans again."

"You're not now," said Trigg, laughing. "Congress wants none of you. When Franklin seceded, you cut yourselves off from the other states. Join with us, remain independent, crush the Indians for ever!

"We'll send you supplies, arms and powder, men by the hundred, take the Indian lands clear to the Mississippi! Instead of little farms, every one of your men will have broad estates. I've talked with many of your friends. They're for it."

Trigg had talked, this was true. One of John Sevier's sons came to him with word that Trigg had done a lot of talking. The Spanish alliance had taken hold of men's minds. They were for it, if John Sevier was not. Trigg had cast a magic spell over them.

Then, to his own sorrow, the New Orleans trader spoke of gold, and this confirmed Sevier's suspicions.

"Gold!" said he, twirling a broad doubloon on the table. The two of them were alone in the farmhouse. "A payment now, Your Excellency; another when the treaty is signed, others at stipulated periods throughout your life!"

"That's bribery, and you're a treacherous rogue," spoke out Sevier in his impulsive way.

The other shrugged lightly. "Harsh words, sir, undeserved words!"

"True words," said Sevier. "Your talk of alliance is a mere blind. Now I begin to see your game clearly, Mr. Trigg. Your promises are empty and shallow. Once allied with you, we'd be lost. All this western country would become yours, instead of belonging to our own people. That's the stake at issue—not the future of Franklin!"

"Alliance with your own people, as you call them, offers you nothing."

"Perhaps not. But, by God, we've won our freedom and we'll keep it! Better to be poor and ragged and landless men without a home or a dollar, and still belong to our own free country and Congress, than be rich and strong in treachery! The easy way never pays; rather, it pays only rascals and opportunists and scoundrels like yourself."

TRIGG lost his smile, but his voice remained suave and soft.

"I still have another card, Mr. Sevier," he said quietly. "You're the governor, but your term of office soon expires. If you refuse us, others will gladly join with us, General Wilkinson in Kentucky would ask nothing better than to become governor of this territory and be allied with us—he can answer for most of the Ohio country, in fact! Or your own people at Natchez, Tennessee people; or gentlemen in the west, at Nashville, who answer for the Cumberland district; or certain of your own friends. I've talked with them all, I know their minds. Any one of them will gladly say yes."

"Is that a threat?" demanded Sevier.

"God forbid! Merely an attempt to open your eyes to the consequence of refusal. If you are not re-elected Governor of Franklin, another man will be elected. I have seen to that," added Trigg significantly. "If you refuse the golden future, another man will take it. Everything has been ar-

ranged. So, I beg of you, do not refuse. It would be suicide."

John Sevier flushed, paled, then smiled slowly.

"Nothing is farther from my intention than suicide, Mr. Trigg," he said, with obvious effort at self-control. "Let me assure you of that. So you've arranged everything, eh? That implies much. Suppose, sir, that I give you my definite answer tomorrow."

"Excellent," said the Spanish trader amiably.

All arranged—a chill struck up Sevier's spine, though not for himself.

Everything had been arranged; only too true, too evident! Misguided men were plentiful in the western settlements; struggling men, ground down by poverty, men who had not seen hard money in years, officers, soldiers, gentlemen like himself.

And this man Trigg was a past master, a genius, at such work. The talk of gold had opened Sevier's eyes; now he saw what others could not see, and it was bitterly clear. His term of office would expire and another man, any one of a dozen whom he knew, would become Governor of Franklin, thanks to Mr. Trigg.

Then the alliance with Louisiana—and Franklin was lost to the other states, and all the western regions with her. Lost beyond hope. A country not worth fighting for, Congress would say; all those smug politicians were alike, these days. But John Sevier knew what this western country was, what it might be, what it would some day be; he knew its trails and rivers, its untapped wealth of every kind.

"It'd be selling our birthright for a mess of pottage," he said to himself, as the chill in him deepened to a shiver. "And if I refuse, that won't stop it. The plan will go through. It is arranged. This man Trigg has done it all. But I must stop it! I must, though it land me in handcuffs and ruin all Franklin!"

As it must. The visitor from North Carolina had hinted as much.

SUPPER by tallow-dips, Farmer Dibble and deep-bosomed wife and husky children about the board, Sevier and the Spanish trader as guests. But John Sevier was not governor here, he was Nolichucky Jack, hero of Indian wars and King's Mountain, and the settler had served under him, and there was high talk of old times.

Sevier stepped outside to knock on his pipe. Trigg followed him, for a word.

"I neglected to say," he observed, "that a commission as general goes to the next Governor of Franklin, with full military powers—"

Sevier was about to answer with biting words, when his head jerked up. He caught the rapid drumming of hooves on the trail that led to Gillespie's; a horse was coming full tilt. A yell drifted on the night—the Cherokee yell that Sevier had adopted for the use of his own men, later to become the Rebel yell in another war.

"Hi! Is 'Chucky Jack here?" shouted the horseman, pulling up his steed.

"Aye," responded Sevier, as settler and family came pouring out. "What's up?"

"Bloody Fellow's struck," panted the rider. "Joe Painter's cabin on the Little Elm trace is afire. A score of Injuns, maybe more."

"Good!" cried Sevier. "Ride on two miles—the men are camped on the creek there. Tell 'em to saddle and ride quick, meet me in two hours at the place appointed on Hauser's Trace. I'll be there. They'll have to gather some of the men who've scattered."

The horseman rode on. Sevier turned to the settler.

"Dibble! You're with us? Good man.

Get out the horses. Trigg! Can you use a gun?"

"I can use pistols, which may be better," said the Spanish trader. "I'm with you. Must have your answer tomorrow, you know. Time's short."

"You'll have it tomorrow," said John Sevier.

Now there was a rush and scramble for rifles, grub, powder, saddles. The horses were readied, packets of food prepared; Dibble kissed his wife and children, and the three were off into the night. They did not follow the trail, but cut across country by the stars.

"Why go by way of Hauser's Trace, Cap'n?" demanded Dibble. "That's not the best way to reach the Little Elm."

"No use going to Painter's place at all," said Sevier. "We can't help Jim Painter or his family now. My job is to get Bloody Fellow. From Hauser's Trace we'll hit west to the old lick and then south, and come into the war trail far ahead of Bloody Fellow. He'll run for home with his scalps —and we'll have him where we want him."

"Glory!" exclaimed Dibble, delightedly. "Ain't you the old fox, Jack!"

"Besides," added Sevier, "any scouts will report at the rendezvous on Hauser's Trace before coming to your place. We're sure to meet 'em."

Dark though the starry night, imperative the crisis, he took note now and again that the Spanish trader, who carried himself like a soldier, rode with feline grace and gave numerous hints of knowing what he was about. A man accustomed to trails, surprises, hostile action, a man dangerous, ever more dangerous!

But John Sevier was not thinking of danger to himself.

They rode for an hour, two hours, nearly three. Then, just this side of Hauser's Trace and the rendezvous, two leather-stockinged scouts materialized out of the night. These brought definite information.

Bloody Fellow, sure enough, was on the warpath. He had with him only a small party of warriors—between ten and twenty, a difficult matter to judge closely. They had killed a man and a boy on Lander's Run, then had struck at the Painter place. Job Painter was dead and scalped, his wife tomahawked, their son killed fighting. The cabin had been fired after, as a symbol of defiance.

A hastily summoned dozen or so of men were already hotfoot in pursuit of the redskins, with no earthly chance of trailing and overtaking them. Sevier, stretched out before a fire, snatched time for slumber, Trigg and Dibble nearby, the two scouts on guard.

He had been quite composed, quite sure of himself. If anyone had a chance to get the raiders, it would be himself, but not by following them.

Within an hour he was up again, as his men arrived, full twenty in number—twenty-five, all inclusive. Pipes alight, they crowded around in a serried mass, while he spoke.

"Boys, my sayso is that Bloody Fellow will take the quickest way back to the Nation's towns. That'll be by hitting into the war trail the Cherokees have used for a hundred years past. We'll have to march and march hard. I aim to reach the old lick where Bent's place is, then make south; that'll bring us into the war trail by sunup, and ahead of the Injuns. If we can kill enough of 'em so there's no profit in this raid, we'll have peace for a spell."

Eager and fierce assent arose. Five minutes later, they were on the way.

DURING that march before the dawn, a little thing happened. There was no need of silence; the men talked freely. One of them had just received a letter from his brother, who was west in the Cumberland country, and he told the others of some statements in the letter.

"Looks like we might be friends with Spain," he said. "Bill allows that Jim Robertson is all for it, and says Gen'ral Joe Martin's for it likewise. Outside

Nolichucky Jack, Jim Robertson's the biggest man in the west."

John Sevier made no comment, but his heart froze a little. True about Robertson, who had opened up the Cumberland region, toward Kentucky; an old friend of his, too. Now he knew what Trigg had meant. No doubt Trigg had visited Robertson first and made sure of him.

He heard the man talking, as the dawn stole grayly down. Trigg was telling of New Orleans, its greatness and wealth, and of Louisiana generally, and what could be done were Franklin to be allied to the Spaniards. The men listened eagerly. Trigg certainly had a way with him. His bold, fluent, aggressive speech delighted the rough frontiersmen.

None the less, they hung upon what Nolichucky Jack thought about it, appealed to him, asked his mind. It was clear that he could sway them, and hundreds like them, by a word.

"Haven't made up my mind yet, boys," he said. "Tell you when I do."

Then came the dawn and harder, faster marching, and grim silence. Full daylight had come and the sun was gilding the hilltops in the east, when they struck into the old war trail of the Cherokees.

The men scattered instantly, and made joyful report; none had passed southward by this route, though moccasins pointing northward marked the trail. Sure of his prey now, Sevier gave crisp, quiet orders. The horses were led far beyond smell or sound and the party scattered out among the trees cloaking the trail. Every man there was an old hand at Indian fighting, and Sevier kept Trigg with him, lest some inadvertant act give warning to the foe.

No sight, no movement; but, half an hour later, one of the men appeared suddenly at the side of Sevier.

"Bad news, Jack," he announced under his breath. "Jim Scott just come along after us. Says the fellers who followed Bloody's gang stepped into an ambush. Watts and a crowd more was waiting—had figured out some would come after the scalpers. We got about forty or fifty of the red devils ag'in us."

"All right," said Sevier. "Pass the word to reload quicker, that's all."

The man laughed and wormed away through the brush. Sevier glanced at Trigg, who was coolly priming his pistols afresh, and primed his own rifle; he had pistols, too. The time passed; bird-voices trilled greeting to the sun, whose warming glow was over the hills now—

SUDDENLY, without warning, redskins were there in plain sight, loping along the trail—naked painted bronze figures, warily intent, sure of themselves yet taking no chance on surety. Sevier waited, under iron control. He meant to wait longer, but something went wrong. The Indians began to dissipate, to melt into the trees.

Sevier's rifle banged out Smoke whitened the forest as the ready irons followed suit. Yells leaped and echoed. Half a dozen Indians were down, others squirming. Cherokee rifles added to the smoke that drifted on the still morning air. The redskins attempted a stand, but the frontiersmen went at them savagely; resistance melted, and afar through the trees swept the tide of ferocity. A few men paused to scalp fallen Indians, and rushed on.

Sevier touched the arm of the Spanish trader.

"Come. This way."

Trigg, excitedly reloading his pistols, followed. The two had been left alone by the receding pursuit. Sevier laid aside his rifle, and among the trees came to a halt, facing the man of flashing eyes.

"Time to get your answer," he said. "The fight's over."

"Oh!" Trigg showed white teeth in a laugh, glanced around, and relaxed. "Good!"

"First," said Sevier, tall and grave and a chill in his blue eyes, "the answer to all your proposals is a flat refusal, Mr. Trigg. But there's more."

That at such an instant Sevier could be so cool, was extraordinary.

"More?" repeated Trigg.

"Much more. Perhaps you don't understand the meaning of your own work, here in these parts. Ever since 1775, Mr. Trigg, my people have fought to achieve unity. It's been slow in coming; it hasn't come yet; but unity, for my people, means strength."

"It'll never come," said Trigg, half mockingly. "Didn't Franklin secede?"

"Yes; and wrongly, as I now perceive. Your work here," went on Sevier, "has been to disrupt this unity, to split off the western settlements and add them to Louisiana. You've worked among us to gain men here, men there—misguided men."

"Like General Wilkinson, General Martin, James Robertson?" the mocking voice replied.

"Precisely, sir. I comprehend your threats. If I refuse your proposals, others will accept them; Martin, perhaps, or Robertson, will be elected governor of Franklin State, and will join with Louisiana."

"Precisely, sir," said Trigg in open mockery now, his dark eyes glinting. "And you can't stop it."

"So I myself thought," said Sevier. "But I shall stop it. You, Mr. Trigg, are a man of great abilities. You can, I grant, succeed in splitting my people, in turning them against one another, in disrupting the unity which they are struggling to effect. I don't know of any other who could do it so well. No other man could serve the cause of Spain so well."

Trigg bowed and laughed.

"Thank you, sir! I appreciate the compliment."

"It is not a compliment. It is an accusation," said Sevier, blue eyes more chill than ever. "You, apparently one of us, an American, are in reality a Spaniard as you yourself have admitted."

"By adopted citizenship only," said Trigg lightly.

"So much the worse for you." The chill eyes, the carven features, were severe and unsmiling, almost sad in their indomitable gravity. "We have bought this country of ours with blood, sir, against King's man, Indian, renegade and traitor. It represents freedom. And you, with specious promises and cunning wits, threaten its unity. You threaten it, this country, as a country. That is the sum and substance of your errand."

Trigg had taken warning. He was alert now, narrow-eyed, defiant.

"Is this the moment to prate of patriotism and rascality?" he demanded.

"I have waited until this moment," said Sevier, "because this is the most fitting moment of all, for my purpose. You have come into the State of Franklin as a spy. As Governor of Franklin, my duty is to preserve my people, their ideals, their freedom, from such falseness and treachery as you represent. In ordering you hung to the nearest tree, I would be no more than doing my duty."

"Try it," said Trigg, suddenly venomous. "Try it, if you dare!"

"I've no intention of doing any such thing, sir." Sevier turned and walked across to the nearest tree, twenty feet distant. "But I intend to stop your work, and stop it now, in the only possible manner. I shall not kill you as you deserve, without giving you a chance. You have pistols; so have I." As he spoke, Sevier produced his own long brass-mounted pistol. "At the count of five, Mr. Trigg, I shall kill you. You have until then to use your own weapons as you please—one!"

TRIGG'S jaw fell. At the count of two, he pulled himself together, began to speak. He was astonished, furious, incredulous.

"Three!" said Sevier coldly.

Trigg's eyes darted around; they were alone. He reached for one of his pistols.

"Four!" said Sevier, and lifted his weapon.

Incredibly swift, Trigg threw up his own pistol and fired. Amid the burst of smoke, he leaped sideways, throwing up his second pistol. From it, too, belched white smoke. The explosion was muffled here among the trees.

"Five!" said Sevier, and pulled trigger. Neither bullet had touched him.

The eddying billows of powder-smoke hung thickly, cloaking everything. Gradually bit by bit, they lessened and thinned and drifted off. Trigg was on one knee, huddled over, his hand resting on the ground; he was coughing feebly.

"I—I've got it!" he said. Blood was seeping down from midway of his jacket. "You've done for me!"

"I'm sorry, Trigg," said Sevier, walking over to him, looking down at him with compassionate eyes. "Truly sorry; but it was necessary."

"You—damn you, you're the only man who—who could have done it!"

"No; not the only man by far. I merely happen to be the man who had to do it."

Trigg looked up at him, laughed a ghostly laugh, swayed, and collapsed with a rush of blood from his lips. Sevier leaned over him, touched his wrist, then rose and shook his head and turned away.

He came back into the brush above the war-trail. One of his men sighted him and set up a yell; two or three of the men were drifting back. Dibble was one, and came to him with panting eagerness, waving a dripping scalp-lock.

"Good work, Jack! We got a dozen of the varmint, maybe more! Got back Joe Painter's scalp, too—he had red hair, y'know. Bill Hicks has a ball through his middle, and I hear two more are dead—"

"Will you boys look after Jonas Trigg?" said Sevier, pointing. "I'm afraid he's got it, too. Yonder, among those trees."

The dead Trigg was brought out.

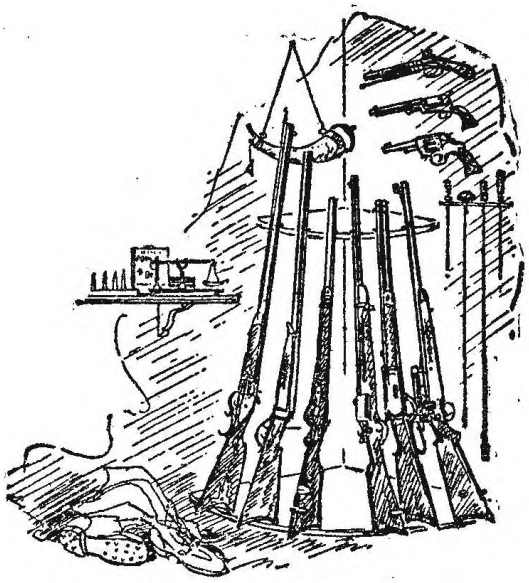
Laughing, yelling, singing, the men came straggling back to where Sevier and the others awaited them. The horses were brought up. Four limp forms were lashed in place.

The redskins had drifted away into the forest like the powder-smoke.

"Too bad about this feller Trigg," said Dibble. "He was a right likeable man. Must have been a wild bullet got him, Jack."

"I think not," said Sevier, his face like stone. "Ready, everybody? Let's go."

He led the way, looking up at the blue distant mountains of his country, now more than ever his—even if the State of Franklin were destined to be ruined and forgotten.



THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by

PETE KUHLHOFF

Muzzle Loading Rifles

"THE GENUINE KILLBUCK MUZZLE LOADER. Owing to the popularity of breech-loading rifles the call for muzzle loaders is very small, and these have come into our hands at half what they cost to make. The locks are front action or bar; the barrels octagon, and the stocks are simply elegant in finish and shape; mountings all brass; set triggers and elegant shooters. We will warrant that every one in the hands of a competent marksman will put 10 balls in succession inside an ordinary playing card at 75 yards, offhand, and 4 out of 5 at 100 yards. We will sell them for $10.00 each, mould included. Satisfaction guaranteed."

THIS is from a gun catalogue issued in 1880. Oh, boy, how I'd like to pick up a "Genuine Killbuck" in new condition for 10 bucks! Who the heck wants an old weak muzzle loader? Did you say weak? Let's see what we can find out about these old jobs.

The first rifled military gun was the U. S. Model of 1800. This model is very scarce. One of the earliest in existence is dated 1803 and is in the collection of Mr. Edwin Pugsley, vice-president and general superintendent of Winchester Repeating Firearms Company.

Mr. Pugsley very kindly permitted me to examine this gun and gave me what dope he had about it. He discovered the gun in an old lighthouse off the coast of Maine, and, strange as it may seem, it is in pretty good condition.

Considering the individuality which is necessarily expressed in the output of various workmen following a model merely by sight and rough measurements, and permitted latitude according to their abilities, the 1803 specimen, and others of succeeding years, are pretty much alike. I wouldn't say that all the parts are interchangeable—but they are all the same model. The caliber at least remained the same to the extent of using a half-ounce ball. The styles of boring and grooving seem to have been left to the choice of the individual barrel maker. One specimen has an heptagonal instead of a circular bore; and among many others, no two have lands and grooves exactly alike, but are found of almost every imaginable shape, depth and pitch. The barrel lengths also differed, varying from 32 to 36 inches. Some were equipped with set triggers, while nearly all of them were made with plain triggers.

All in our next issue

SHORT STORIES, August 10th

"CARRIER BASED HELL"

A novelette of a mighty experiment taking to the air

by **A. A. Caffrey**

JAMES B. HENDRYX

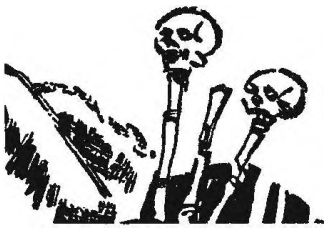
The outlaws of Halfaday Creek are always strong on ethics

"Black John Gives a Tip"

H. BEDFORD-JONES

A story in the outstanding series, "This Country of Ours"

"Johnny Gantt Heads Home"



JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS

A long novelette of astonishing doings on what seemed an ordinary business trip

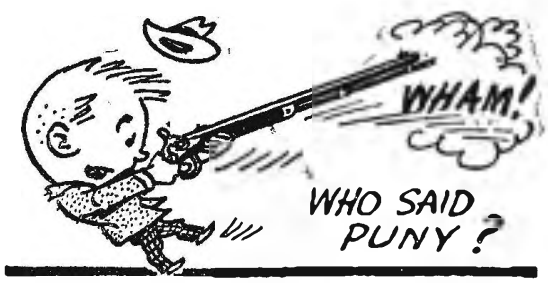
"Adventure in Havana"

EDWARD DALY — FRANK GRUBER — GENE VAN

The official powder charge for the Model 1800 rifle was 90 to 100 grains of fine-grained rifle powder and a half-ounce pure lead ball loaded with a greased patch of either linen or buckskin. The muzzle velocity was in the neighborhood of 2,000 feet per second.

When we stop and remember that the United States army rifle in use from 1892 till about 1906, burning smokeless powder propelled a 220-grain ball, which is a little over one-half ounce at about 2,200 feet per second, or the present U. S. army Garand which pushes a 150-grain bullet at 2,700 feet per second, we are amazed at the speed and shocking power of the early flintlock.

Or if we move on from 1800 to the 1860 Civil War period, we find many powerful and very accurate muzzle-loading guns of the cap-lock variety.



Take the Regulation Model 1855 rifled musket. This was the first issue of an all-new rifle of musket size and with a long, thin barrel. It began the total superseding in the United States of the smooth bore with the rifle for all branches of the service, no smooth bores being made after 1856.

It was of .58 caliber and the charge for this rifle was 60 grains of black powder and 500 grains of lead. There were three grooves.

The accuracy was sufficient to hit the size of a man on horseback at 600 yards, and the power sufficient to penetrate 4 inches of soft pine at 1,000 yards. At lesser ranges the rifle musket was expected to put 10 consecutive shots in a

4	inch	bull's-eye	at 100	yards
9	"	"	" 200	"
11	"	"	" 333	"
18½	"	"	" 400	"
27	"	"	" 500	"

Not bad at that!

Or take the Regulation 1863 Rifle as made by Remington. Marked "Remington's Ilion, N. Y. 1863," and a U. S. eagle. Length, 4 feet 1 inch. Barrel, 2 feet 9 inches long. Caliber, .58. Three grooves. The charge was the service one of 60 grains of powder with a 500-grain hollow base bullet (Minnie Ball). The civilian charge was generally 75 grains of powder.

In my collection I have one of these guns in new condition. It is an admirably made rifle with more pleasing appearance than common.

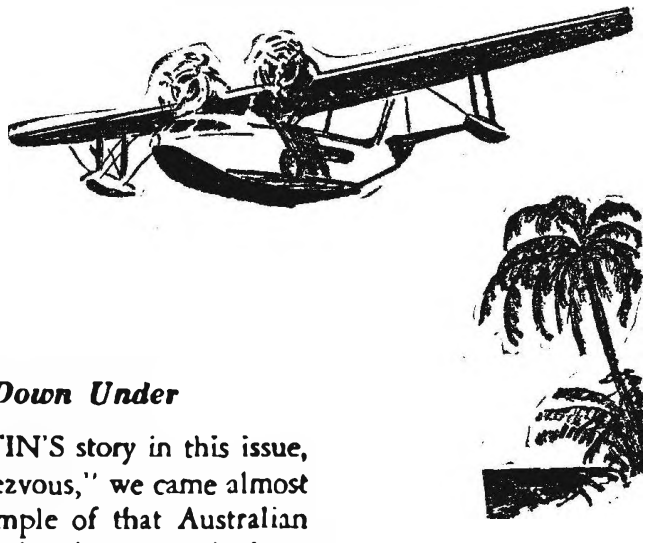
The black walnut stock was filled, linseed oil coated, allowed to dry, and then rubbed to a polish. To keep it in fine condition, about once a year I give it a good hand rubbing, using a small amount of linseed oil.

The lockplate and the hammer is case hardened in mottled colors. The barrel is blue-black, and the trigger, band springs and all screws are polished and heat-blued. The rest of the furniture (bands, trigger guard and patch box) is of brass, polished to brilliancy.

The standardization of sizes and shapes, giving interchangeability of parts, was carried to a perfection not since surpassed, and the workmanship within was as good as that on the outside.

Next issue, still speaking of muzzle-loading rifles, I will tell of the most amazing coincidence in the history of firearms —see you then!

The Story Tellers' Circle



Slang Down Under

IN NEIL MARTIN'S story in this issue, "Devil's Rendezvous," we came almost at once to an example of that Australian slang we have been hearing so much about lately. And in slang at least it can hardly be said that Americans and Australians are alike—as has been remarked about some of their fighting characteristics. In the story you'll note that Piper remarks that Rob brought back a sack of gold lip shell to prove that he'd found a "bonzer lay."

Bonzer, as you'll probably have guessed, means great, excellent—super, we might say. Deriving from the French *bon* by way of the Scottish *bonny*, the word has trickled into the American language as *bonanza*.

As frequently as they hear *bonzer* the A. E. F. down under will probably hear *dinkum*—meaning the real McCoy, the genuine article. When an Aussie calls you a *dinkum bloke* he's saying, "You're a real guy—a swell egg!" In the good old pre-oil days—when the only use for oil was to pour it boiling hot on your enemies' heads, *dinkum* simply meant hard work—and later, anything honest or straight. Now, oil has seeped plentifully into the metaphors of Australia—and *dinkum oil* means the lowdown, the real thing. And *Yakka*, borrowed from the aborigines, is the current word for hard work.

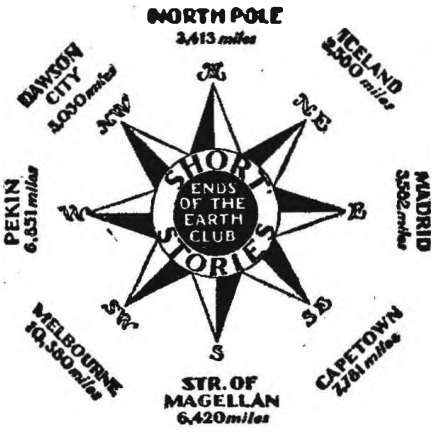
Where we say *buddy*, the Australian says *cobber*—from the old English—meaning a side-kick or boon companion; for in the Suffolk dialect of old England, to *cob* is to make friends.

On the other side of the slate is the mean and meaningful *wowser*. It's a killjoy—a stuffed shirt! Down under, when you play the horses you put your shirt on the *gee-gees*. If you're a cowboy, you'll call your bronco a *brumby*.

Billy comes from the brush country or hinterland. And *billy* and *Matilda* aren't a boy and girl; they are, respectively, a can in which you boil your tea, and your bundle of personal belongings. The great Australian war song of "Waltzing Matilda" comes in there somewhere. As in England, *ta* means thank you; it also means "so long."

America and Australia are comrades-in-arms. We're rapidly becoming comrades in slang—so you'd better start getting that dictionary up to date!

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, c/o Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

From a Globe Trotter

Dear Secretary:

As a continuous reader of SHORT STORIES over a number of years, may I ask to become a member of your club.

Having served 28 years in the United States Navy, have circumnavigated the Globe 3 times and visited *every* port in China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, North and South America, also Honolulu 8 times, through the Panama Canal 14 times, made 18 round trips to France and way ports on the U. S. S. *Leviathan* during the First World War Troop Transport.

Also had duty with the Asiatic Fleet during 1925 until 1927, visited Singapore 2 times, Batavia, Zamboango, Iloilo, Cebu, Jolo, Manila and Cavite.

Was a member of the crew of U. S. S. *Illinois* from 1905 to 1909, made the trip around the world from Dec. 16, 1908, to Feb., 1909, when Teddy Roosevelt was our President.

When 14 was cabin boy on the British freighter *Queen Helena.* Left Brooklyn, N. Y., on Sept. 3, 1903, took 68 days to arrive at Melbourne, Australia, stopped at Table Bay for 2 days, then on to Austraila.

On the trip from Newcastle, New South Wales, passed close to Borneo, where many canoes came out as we passed. We made 12 knots going through those straits and got a close view of the cannibal villages through binoculars.

My hobby is the making and collecting of scrap books, and have 4 all Wild West clippings from old SHORT STORIES magabines. Every time I cut up a SHORT STORIES magazine, I feel guilty, as I could pass these entertaining stories on, *but,* in my scrap books they are a permanent record of many very interesting stories well read.

At present am Adjutant of Post No. 6, American Legion, and have sent *hundreds* of books and magazines to the U. S. Navy Training Station, Camp Callen and Camp Elliot here, near San Diego, in the last year and among them were hundreds of SHORT STORIES magazines, so I guess I haven't done so badly.

Have three sons, one on the U.S. *Honolulu* in Hawaiian waters, one at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and one in Officers Training Camp at Plattsburg.

With all good wishes and success to SHORT STORIES.

Sincerely,

James P. Slamon.

2026 E. Street,
San Diego, California.

Ends of the Earth Club

United Services Department

Wants Stamps from Australia or Africa

Dear Secretary:

Only recently I have begun reading SHORT STORIES, but would like to enroll in your Ends of the Earth Club.

I would be interested in exchanging stamps with someone who lives in Australia or Africa.

Thank you,

N. T. McClellan, (Ord. Seaman).
Mess 72, H. M. C. S. Naden,
c/o Fleet Mail Office,
Esquimalt, B. C., Canada.

Welcome!

Dear Secretary:

I am one of the many soldiers that enjoy reading your magazine. I think it is one of the best publications on the market. All of the stories are very interesting. Particularly Day Keene's. I wish you would accept my application for the Ends of the Earth Club.

Robert K. Hendricks.

Weapon Troop,
3rd Cavalry Brigade,
Camp Papago, Phoenix, Ariz.

From Police Dept. to War Dept.

Dear Secretary:

Please enter my name on the rolls of the Ends of the Earth Club.

As my interests are wide and varied, I would like to correspond with everybody and anybody. Before entering the Army, I spent several years in a police finger-printing and photographic bureau and eighteen months with an air-conditioning firm. I hold a private pilot's license and have become very enthusiastic about aviation and its future. I am now attached to a bombardment squadron where I serve as a radio operator and technician and gunner.

The physiological specifications are: reddish blond hair and mustache; a slim six feet three inches tall; blue eyes and good will toward my fellow man.

Yours truly,
Bill Wallace.

Corp. Wilmott E. Wallace,
Student Detachment 42-16,
Air Corps Gunnery School,
Las Vegas, Nevada.

Welcome

Dear Secretary:

I wish to apply for membership in the Ends of the Earth Club. I have done four hitches in the Army and have been to the Philippines, Hawaii and Panama. I have been reading your magazine nigh on to seven years and think it about the best magazine I have ever read.

Sincerely,
Pvt. John Hayder.

Hq. Co. 706th M. P. Bat.,
Camp Edwards, Mass.

From the Medical Corps

Dear Secretary:

I am a member of the U. S. Medical Corps. Before coming here I saw service in Hawaii. Have traveled considerable and especially liked going through the Panama Canal. Sincerely hope I rate a membership in the Ends of the Earth Club.

Sincerely,
Pvt. Walter White, Jr.

160 Station Hospital,
Fort Story, Va.

A Marine Paging the Girls

Dear Secretary:

SHORT STORIES has been my favorite magazine for a good many years. I like it because it has so many different types of stories, and all of them good.

May I have a membership card in the Ends of the Earth Club?

Have had 16½ years in marine aviation, then was transferred to the inactive reserve by request. Have just been recalled to active service and am awaiting transfer back to aviation. Have had two years service in Haiti and Santo Domingo, been through the canal several times and to Pearl Harbor, Honolulu. Spent 32 months in Guam. Would like to hear from some of the girls who have a soft spot in their hearts for a good marine. We have to stay on the station every other day, and have plenty of time to write, so come on girls.

Sgt. James C. W. Pearson.
1st Casual Co. Bldg. No. 26,
San Diego, Calif.

An English Soldier Joins Our Ranks

Dear Secretary:

Will you please enter my name on the rolls of the Ends of the Earth Club? I have been in Norway, France, Belgium, U. S. A., and I live in, or rather my home is in England. I have been in the British Army and am now serving with the R.A.F.

Yours sincerely,
Robert Bullock.

1078893,
31 G.R.S., R.A.F.,
Charlottetown, P. E. I.

Proud to be in the Army

Dear Secretary:

I am an ardent admirer of SHORT STORIES and have been since I picked up the first copy some eight months ago. There is no magazine published that can replace it. However, this is my opinion.

I am at present in the Army of the

U. S. A. and proud to know I am physically and mentally fit to be a member of it. Due to military secrecy I am sorry I cannot tell you where I am located. I have read of some of my fellow soldiers belonging to your club and I too would like to become a member. I am an ardent stamp and snapshot collector and would like very much to hear from girls between 18 and 23 years of age. I am 23, five feet, eleven and a half inches tall and weigh 152. Have dark hair.

I promise to answer all letters if they do not contain any information pertaining to any government doings.

Sincerely,
Pvt. Harold R. Ginsberg.
19028699—Btry A, 423rd C. A.,
A. P. O. 856,
c/o Postmaster, N. Y. City.

ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB MEMBERS

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Note these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.*

Edward O. Edu, P. O. Box 24, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, W. Africa

Pvt. Orv. Dingua, Btry. D, 9th F. A. Bn. (A.T.), Fort Lewis, Wash.

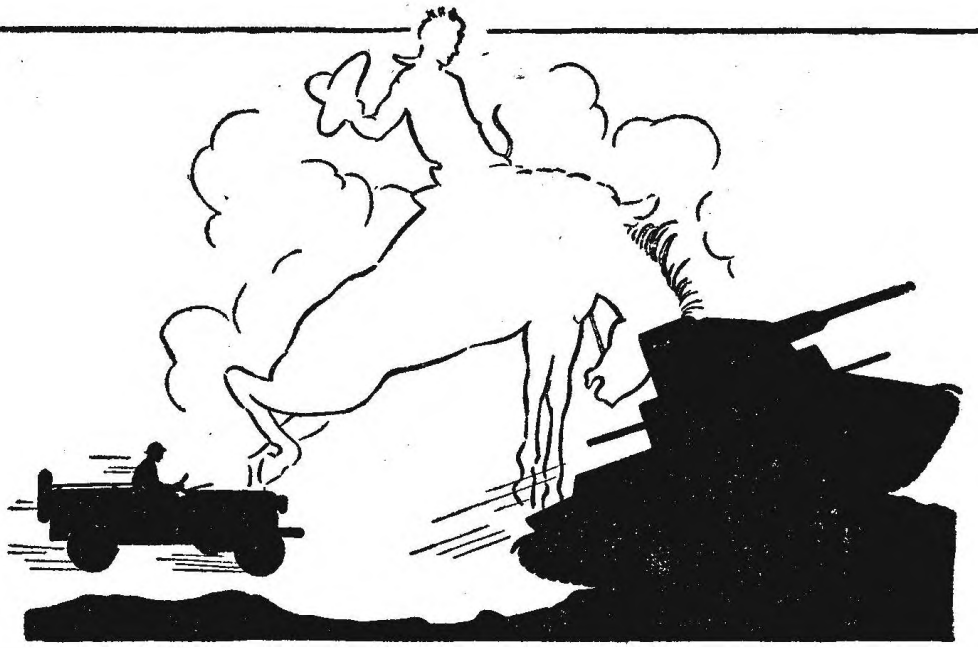
James Ellis, R. F. D. No. 7, Meadville, Pa.

K. Evanoff, 1019 Gary State Bank Bldg., 504 Broadway, Gary, Indiana

Jack Faver, Gen. Del., Nocona, Texas

Accacio Ferreira, Rua Benjamin Constant 60, Rio de Janeiro, S. A.

Martin Fox, 830 LaSchall St., Pittsburgh, Pa.
Jack Frank, Box 34, Fetters Springs, Calif.
Mack Foster, Box 685, Gallup, New Mexico
John George, Camp 50, Andy Lake, Kenora, Ont., Canada
Joseph Gorman, 313 Walnut St., Bristol, Pa.
Chas. E. Gormley, Vets Hospital, Wood, Wisconsin
Robert Gossett, Fredericktown, Pa.
Henry Gottschlich, Box 490, Vancouver, B. D., Canada
William F. Hall, Box 2451, University, Alabama
Herve Halle, 300 St. Alfirouse St., Thetford Mines, P2, Que., Canada
Eugene Harrison, Rosedale, Indiana
Charles Honings, 106 E. 120th St., New York, N. Y.
Thomas Jackett, 566 N. Main St., Pittston, Pa.
Wesley Jorgensen, 669 Union St., Phila, Penna.
Pvt. Robert M. Journey, 47th School Squadron, Randolph Field, Texas
Howard Kasmussen, 6414 Emerald Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Cpt. Sydney C. Kerksis, Company C, I. S. S. C., Fort Benning, Ga.
Bob Kerr, 1227 Boulevard, Lake Charles, La.
Joseph Kingmaroo, 9147 Jasper Ave., Edmonton, Alb., Canada
Everett M. La Follette, Box 46, Glen Ellen, Calif.
Ray Lamberth, Beverly Y. M. C. A., 11055 S. Homewood Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Jean McArthur, 1938 East 7th Ave., Vancouver, B. C., Canada
Tom McCue, Box 166, Worth, Ill.
I. T. Macairnta, Numancia, Capiz, P. I.
Ian MacDonald, 232 Bernard St., New Glasgow, N. S., Canada
Stella J. Marsden, Murphys, Calif.
M. Mathews, Route 1, Box 575, Tucson, Arizona
Chalmer Meeks, 900 Chaffee, Ft. Sam Houston, Texas
Sgt. Ed Millson, Btry. F, 146th F. A., A.P.O., No. 41, Tacoma, Wash.
T. T. Morris, U. S. S. Seadragon, Manila, P. I.
National Philatelic Clubs, Unit No. 1B, 51 Real St., Tacloban, Leyte, P. I.
Gunner Vernon Nichols, H. Q. 2nd C. D. Battery, T. A. V., Trinidad, B. W. I.
Vanildo Guedes Pinheiro, Fabrica do Gaz, Caixa Postal 571, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Curtis S. Puckett, Co. F, 118th Inf., Fort Jackson, S. C.
Richard Rae, 1055 N. Mozart St., Chicago, Ill.
Wm. J. Roach, 2438 E. Hoffman St., Baltimore, Md.
Howard Roberts, 572 N. Main St., Pittston, Pa.
Frances Roedner, 424 S. Bell Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Stuart Seidel, 137 Temple Ave., Hackensack, N. J.
Harry Senefeld, 3246 Bishop St., Cincinnati, Ohio
Nathan Smith, Sunny Acres, Warrensville, Ohio
James R. Stevenson, S.5. Ponce de Leon, Waterman S. S. Co., New Orleans, La.
R. G. Somis, Tacloban, Leyte, P. I.
Fidencia C. Talacay, 5 Jaro, Leyte, P. I.
Robert Morris Treadwell, 217 E. 19th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Pfc. J. S. Truit, Co. C, 41st Inf., Fort Benning, Ga.
Jimmie Tullock, Route 4, Claremore, Oklahoma
Edwin Turner, 646 34th Ave., San Francisco, Calif.
Helen Tretter, 6024 Michigan Ave., St. Louis, Mo.
Caius Udo, Bellona M. M. School, 32 Creek Rd., Port Harcourt, Nigeria, W. Africa
I. C. Vanderbilt, 8424 77th St., Woodhaven, N. Y.
Celso Vasconcelos, Rus Santa Luiza, 98, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Olga Vasconcelos, Rua Santa Luiza, 98, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Anthony F. Veiller, 65, Mendes de Aquiar, Cacsdura, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Rudy Vopat, 40-22 28th St., Long Island City, N. Y.
J. N. Wells, 457 Central Parkway, S. E., Warren, Ohio
Charles B. Willis, Chincha, Peru, S. A.
Gordon Wiltfang, 901 S. Edmunds, Mitchell, South Dakota
Laurin Wood, 2090 Temple, Long Beach, Calif.
L. J. Woolslager, 993 N. Randolph St., Phila., Pa.
John Yalch, Mocanaqua, Pa.
Pauline Yalch Mocanaqua, Pa.
Edw. R. Young, Pfc., U.S.A.C., 18th Air Base Sq., Wheeler Field, Honolulu, T. H.
Keith Young, P. O. Box 586, Lunenburg, N. S., Canada



The Spirit of Our West Shall Win!

The indomitable fighting spirit of the American cowboy shines bright in the day-to-day reports from our fighting forces. In the air engagements, at Bataan, and on the sea, there is news of many a lad who hails from the range. And in the hearts of all these men is that same fearless strength that has conquered a continent and will defend it!

RANCH ROMANCES goes to camps and outposts all over the country. Just last week we received a twenty-copy subscription from an Army recreation center in Hawaii. RANCH ROMANCES rates high in surveys on reading matter popularity among service men because it brings these men the thrilling fiction they want. Every issue contains seven or more clean, virile stories of swift action and color, gunplay and lawless dealing in which are woven highly intriguing love stories.

Get a copy today from any good newsstand and you, too, will find hours of keen enjoyment ahead — just the sort of thing you need to keep in trim these days when we are all putting in long, hard hours.

RANCH ROMANCES

AMERICA'S FAVORITE WESTERN LOVE STORY MAGAZINE

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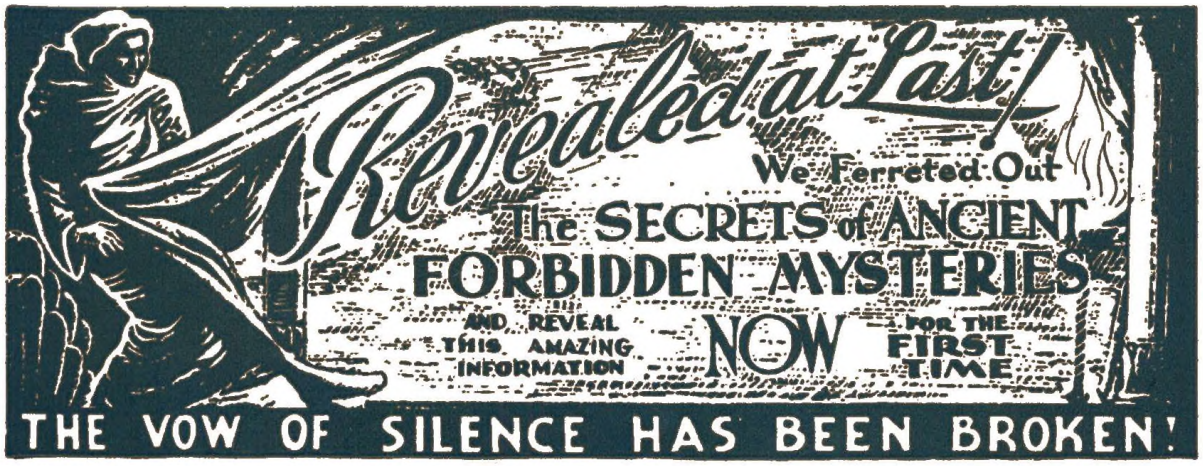


THE VOW OF SILENCE HAS BEEN BROKEN!

"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

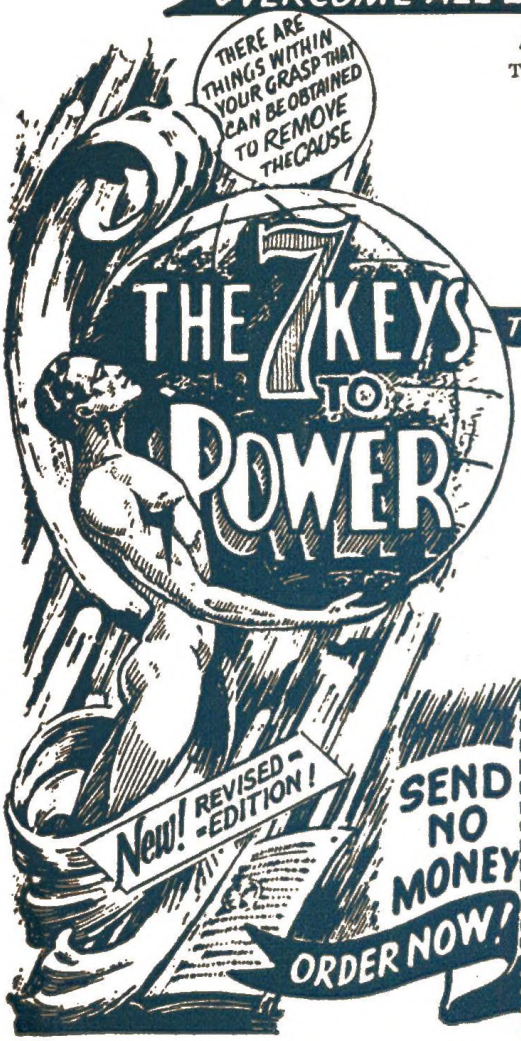
He claims, "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic, Priests, Egyptians, Babylonians, and Sumerians used is at our disposal today."

He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Forces are used without knowing about this book, but with it you can mold anyone to your will."

From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book," Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

OVERCOME ALL ENEMIES, OBSTACLES & HIDDEN FEARS



ARE YOU CROSSED IN ANY WAY?

The Seven Keys to Power, Lewis de Claremont says, shows you how to remove and cast it back.

The Book Purports to Tell You How to—

- Gain the love of the opposite sex.
- Unite people for marriages.
- Obtain property.
- Make people do your bidding.
- Make any person love you.
- Make people bring back stolen goods.
- Make anyone lucky in any games.
- Cure any kind of sickness without medicine.
- Get any job you want.
- Cast a spell on anyone, no matter where they are.
- Get people out of law suits, courts, or prison.
- Banish all misery.
- Gain the mastery of all things.
- Regain your youth and vigor.
- Choose words according to ancient, holy methods.

THE ONLY TRUE BOOK OF SUPREME MASTERSHIP!

This is the Power, He says, from which the old masters gained their knowledge and from which they sold limitless portions to certain favored Kings, Priests, and others at high prices, but never to be revealed under a vow, the violation of which entailed severe punishment.

THE VOW HAS NOW BEEN BROKEN

This book, he claims, shows you the secrets of old which when properly applied makes you able to control the will of all without their knowing it. If you have a problem and you wish to solve it, he says, don't hesitate. Advertisements cannot describe nor do this wonderful book justice. You must read it and digest its meaning, to really appreciate its worth.

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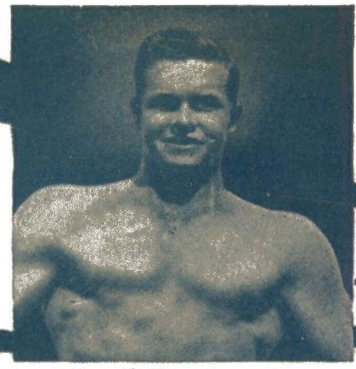
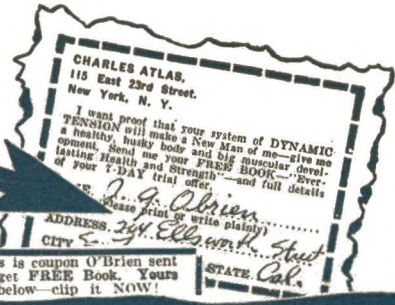


J. G. O'BRIEN
Atlas Champion Cup Winner

This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' Californian pupils.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115 East 23rd Street,
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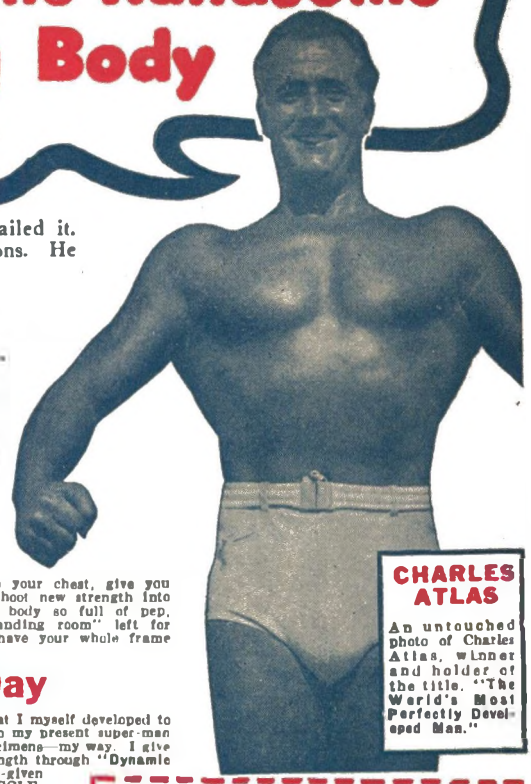
I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE; I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!



CHARLES ATLAS
An untouched photo of Charles Atlas, winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

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