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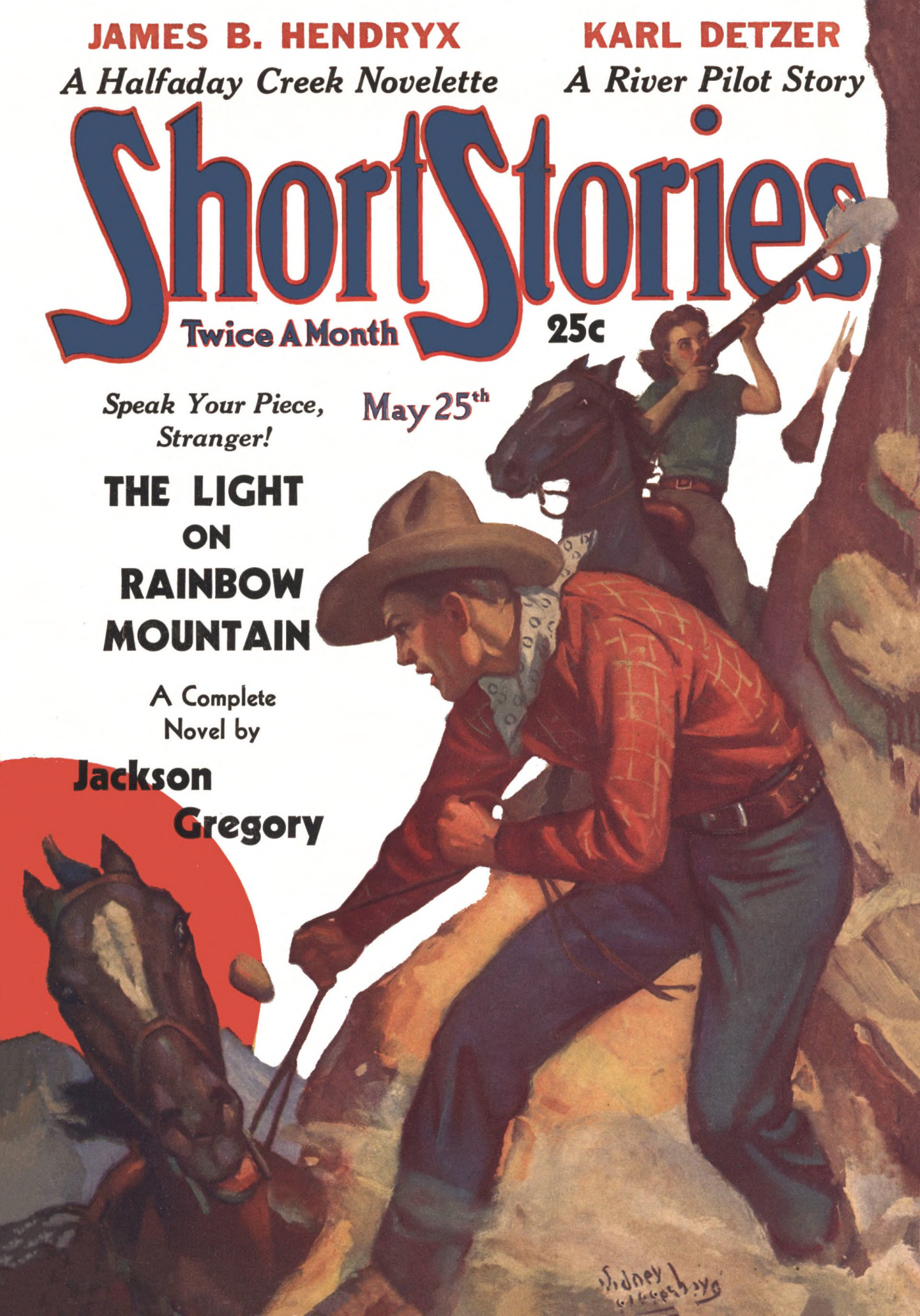

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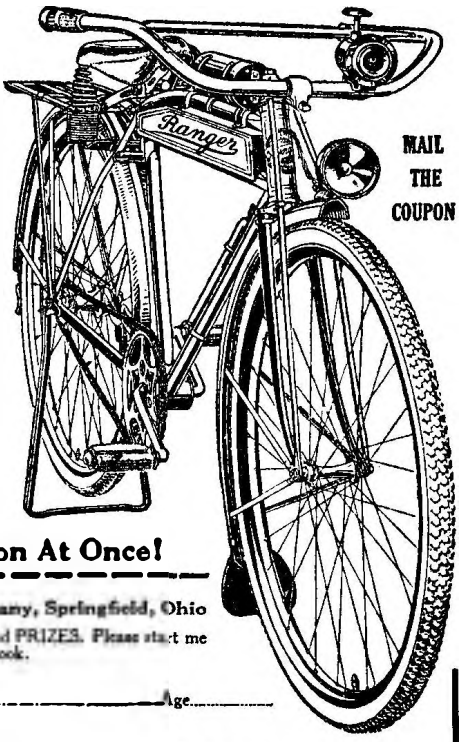

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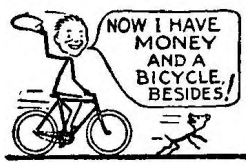

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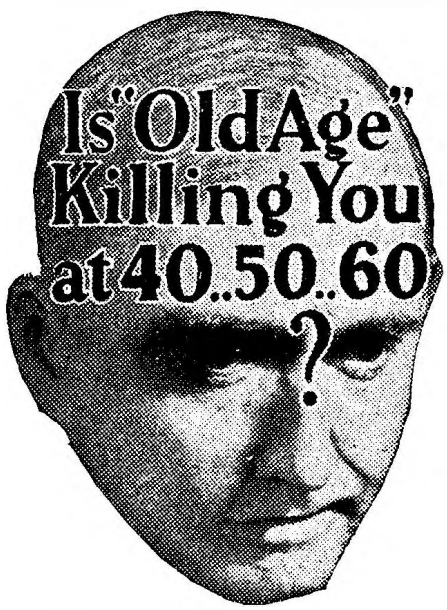

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Stories

HARRY E. MAULE, *EDITOR*

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MAY 25th, 1936

COVER—Sidney Riesenberg

Vol. CLV, No. 4 — Whole No. 730

Dan Raynor's New Stetson Is Ventilated by Two Bullet Holes; Dick Redshirt Knows the Secret of the Hidden Lode; and Evil Men by Night Ride the Rainbow Mountain Trail

THE LIGHT ON RAINBOW MOUNTAIN

By JACKSON GREGORY

Author of "The Valley of Adventure," "High Courage," etc.

CHAPTER I

MISSED!

GRATEFUL to be done with the harsh, hot desert sweep, Dan Raynor rode into the cool shadowy fragrant ravine just as it grew dusk over the Tecolote Mountains. He fully expected within the hour to find a gem of a camp site, a place for his fire by a clear stream, forage for his horse. Tomorrow would be another day.

But a man shouldn't be too sure even of another day. The brooding stillness was shattered by the crack of a rifle starting up wild echoes between the rocky sides of the ravine, a bullet split the air and two neat holes were drilled through the peak of Dan Raynor's brand new dove-colored Stetson.

As though shot through the head he slid out of the saddle and flopped over into a high growth of Jimson weed at the trail's edge. His only thought was that the fellow who had come that close to getting him the first shot would nail him dead center the next. His horse leaped forward

as though to shoot out from under the empty saddle. He dashed some fifty yards farther up into the ravine, then stepped on a trailing rein, stopped and snorted, standing there wondering what it was all about.

So, too, did Dan Raynor wonder. He lay on his side, stone-still, peering through the weeds in the general direction from which he thought the shot had come. There was a notch in the forest growth up there, and he fancied it indicated a road under the pines; it was hard to see at all definitely through the intervening tangle, but in the shadows at which he stared with such steady frowning intentness he caught the merest suggestion of a cabin wall.

He lay still, dreading another shot and the impact of lead which would end the riddle for him before he ever came to guess what it was all about, yet he was sure that his best bet right now was to give his best imitation of a man beyond interest in riddles of any sort. For one thing, his would-be murderer had the advantage of being armed with a high-powered rifle while Dan's only weapon was the old-fashioned Colt slung under his left armpit. His own was still in its scabbard, slung to the saddle. Also, dark would come swiftly, and darkness evened up the differences between rifle and smaller gun.

"That was a long shot and a good one," he muttered, "especially considering the fact that I was moving along at a good clip in a light-and-shade that makes tricky shooting. Hope he's satisfied."

There was every likelihood that his assailant, even though of no mind to waste powder and lead, would be sufficiently curious to come along presently and look over his kill. So Raynor, after five minutes without stirring, moved gradually, and then only to the extent of sliding his gun out of its holster and into the grip of a hand hidden in the weeds. "Next time it'll be my innings to shoot first." That struck him as eminently fair. And he added to the Jimsons, "And I won't keep him waiting."

But no one came down from the ridge to see him, even when it grew dark down here in the bed of the ravine. Light still lingered on the ridges but was fast waning. Relaxing none of his caution, instead of rising where he was, he began inching away from the trail while lying almost flat. Some few moments only were required to bring him to the edge of a patch of brush. He wriggled into this and stood up only when he had gone a score of yards into an aspen grove down in a hollow. On the way he had retrieved his hat, but he was content to carry it in his hand. His head

of dark close-cut hair offered but a poor target, while that dove-gray Stetson would constitute a palely glimmering one in the young starlight.

Before he quitted the shelter of the aspens he thought things over coolly. The first quickening of the bloodstream, the recoil from near death and the blazing anger which had followed, were done with now. He merely meditated that he still had a choice of two trails. He could get his horse when it grew a little darker, turn tail and ride for a healthier country, or he could go straight ahead, find out what this was all about and, no doubt, do some lively poking into further danger. Thus far no harm was done save the air-holing of a new hat that he was inclined to be proud of. There was nothing to lose by turning back; as far as he could judge there was nothing to gain by going ahead.

"So, being dark enough now," he decided, "we'll go ahead."

THOUGH the cabin under the pines was not over two hundred yards from where he stood, he found it a slow, hard business to get to it. There was no trail that he could discover leading up the steep slope, and he decided that if there were a road, it must run along the ridge and down into another canyon. When he did finally pick his way through the dark into the small clearing at the edge of which the cabin crouched, a sturdy squat thing of small logs, he saw a faint glint of light. Within there was a single candle burning, or a dim lamp, and its rays wanly illuminated a square window flimsily curtained.

He approached warily. There was no sound of voices, no sound of any sort; were it not for the light he must have supposed the place deserted. It had the look of an abandoned place. He crept closer. It was only when he was close under the window that any sound reached him. A woman or a child, he couldn't tell which, was weeping. Never in his life had he heard such anguish made audible.

He stiffened with a sudden rigidity of muscles that was next door to a shudder. He waited for some other, some explanatory sound, perhaps a torrent of words from the one who wept, or a man's voice —he felt somehow sure that a man must be responsible for this heart-rending paroxysm of emotion. Presently he was greeted by a sudden silence, a silence so heavy, so absolute that it was like the hush of death itself. The silence persisted while he might have counted a hundred, and all the while he did not stir. Then he moved just enough to try to peer in at the window. But flimsy as was the curtain, the light within was so dim that he could make out nothing but the lamp itself on a table. Its chimney was so smoke-blackened that only a pallid sort of glow penetrated it; that and a flickering circle of light on a wide, knotty board in the low ceiling.

He stepped then to the door, rapped sharply and stepped aside as he knocked, not so soon oblivious of a rifle shot which must have come from this same door or from very near by. But there came no shot now, nor was there any response to his rapping. But his alert ears did catch a faint and unmistakable sound, a metallic click as a rifle was cocked.

"Hello, inside there!" he called.

He thought, though he was not in the least certain, that he heard a gasp. He waited a moment, then called again, "Hello, I say. What's going on in there?" And as an afterthought he added, "Any trouble here? Want any help, or don't you?"

The woman's voice answered him then, and it rang weirdly in his ears, as though it broke with hysteria or were the utterance of a mad woman. He started at the thought. Madness might explain much, perhaps everything.

Her voice, coming to him gaspingly, said:

"Who are you?"

SHE seemed tremendously in earnest; it was as though everything on earth depended upon who he was. His answer told her little:

"A stranger. Happened to be passing by and saw your light."

"If you are—a stranger," was her somewhat perplexing rejoinder after a moment, "you can come in. The door is unlatched."

"You've a rifle in your hands," said Raynor.

"Yes."

"I have the peculiar feeling that when I open the door you'll take a shot at me."

She did not answer that, so he added briskly, "Suppose you open the door for me, and come outside?" Though he waited more patiently this time for a reply, none came. He fell to frowning, less in irritation than in downright mystification. Unless the woman were mad, he could hit on no explanation. If she were mad, then what? It seemed inhuman to go off and leave her, for evidently she was alone and this was a lonely country. Yet on the other hand, had it been a question of laying a bet, he would have bet the boots he stood in that

her finger was already on the trigger, the rifle muzzle covering the door.

"I'm not going to wait all night," he told her tartly. Then he heard her weeping again and the sound hurt him. Hers were the hard, dry sobs which he knew must be shaking her whole body.

"Look here," he said more gently than he had yet spoken, "you're in some sort of trouble and I want to help you if I can. Pitch your rifle out through the window—you don't need it—and I'll come in."

She tried to laugh her scorn at his suggestion, but it wasn't much of a laugh. "Lord love us, all her nerves are shot to glory," muttered Dan Raynor. "Poor devil."

She seemed to be getting some sort of a grip on herself. She spoke after a while, saying quite simply:

"You can come in safely if you are telling me the truth, if you are a stranger. And your voice does sound strange to me. But if you're someone I know—and hate!—I'll shoot to kill the minute I see you."

There was such finality in her utterance that he knew any further argument to be useless. He had his choice to open the door and take his chance, or to turn his back on her, go down to his horse where he had stopped on his way up to tether it, and to put this enigmatic country far behind him with all haste. As he had decided once before, so did he decide now.

"This is no place for me," he grunted to himself, and flung open the cabin door.

Never more alertly on guard in every taut nerve, ready to leap back and to the side or to fire at whatever he might find confronting him, he did neither. He saw a figure crouching in the middle of the room where the dim lamplight was sufficient to prick out details. He saw the rifle aimed at his chest—and he saw the thing sprawled on the floor. Also, in that first swift glimpse he saw the heavy log chain and got just enough of the answer to start up other monstrous questions. Even though the stark horror of what he saw had not fully justified his decision, another fact would have convinced him.

As he stepped into the light, the rifle clattered to the plank flooring. The one who had held it, a slender young girl, started erect, lifted her arms, and then pitched forward in a dead faint.

CHAPTER II

ESCAPE!

HE CAME in, closed the door after him and stood staring.

"God help her!" he gasped. "If she was mad all along, here's ample evidence of the fact. If she has just gone mad now, it's what any sane person would have done. You'd be crazy not to go mad!"

One end of the long chain was about her waist, padlocked there. The other end was about the middle of a man. The man was huge, tall, big-boned, not unhandsome in a devilish sort of way; a man perhaps between thirty and forty years of age. But years didn't count with him any longer. He was dead with a bullet through his brain.

"Well!" said Dan Raynor. At the moment thoughts didn't click into words; there were too many impressions. The man was dead and it was a case of murder; or anyhow it would take a lot of tall believing to believe any other explanation. And it happened that, pinned safely inside Raynor's shirt, snugly out of sight and not intended to be displayed for at least a full two weeks, was the badge of his office, that of deputy sheriff. Hence one would suppose that this affair fell properly within his province. Yet it happened that he had crossed the county line ten miles back yonder in the desert, that he was in a county where he was without jurisdiction, and on top of that that he was on vacation.

"Murder, just the same," he said, and looked at the girl.

Lying in a dead faint like that, as white as a sheet save for a long smudge on her cheek, it was hard to judge her. Even her age was a question; he only knew that she looked young. Her hair was shoulder length, bronze in hue, and tumbled about her face as she lay crumpled on her side. Her lashes looked even darker than they were, drowned in their own inky shadows on her cheeks. She was dressed in neat riding breeches and high-heeled black boots, with a little dark blouse that had almost no sleeves at all and was moderately low cut at the neck; he could see a wavering shadow marking the slow throb in her throat. She'd be pretty, he thought, if she didn't look so much like a dead girl. He wished her eyes were open.

No, he didn't! He could fancy the look in them when consciousness came surging back, the utter horror which, mad girl or sane, must fill them the instant after the first cloudiness passed from them.

He began hastily thinking of a way to get rid of that cursed chain, a way to do it quickly, to have it done and the man's body removed before she grew conscious again. His own body twitched. He said "Grr!" in revulsion as he began to perceive all that she must have gone through here. Obviously the man had been dead for hours, twelve or even twenty-four of them, and what grim hours! Like a sojourn in hell they must have been. No matter who had shot the big, devilishly good-looking chap, this business of being manacled to his body, of not being able to break away from it, of being forced to keep looking at it all the time, of sensing it right there all the time——.

HE SNAPPED his thoughts back toward a key for one or both the padlocks. Not expecting to find one, still he started a hasty search. He carried the lamp with him. As he did so he got to thinking of the girl again, how she must have hated to light it, how she must first for a little while have crouched in the dark, and how in the end the darkness must have been more hideous, with an imagination going mad, than the sight of the thing itself.

He didn't find the key, but he did find the file. It was one of the big inch-wide flat affairs that go along with men who live far from cities. It lay on the floor, one end of it pointing out like a finger from under the girl's boot. He set the lamp down on the floor and began to seek the link in the chain on which she must have been working. He found it where he looked first, where she'd naturally start, in the section of chain around her own slim waist. He said, "Poor little devil!" and set to work.

Thick and hard as the links were, she had filed one nearly through. And he knew that that must have meant hours and hours, God alone knew how many.

Before he cut through the weakened link and pried it open with a chisel he found in the tool box that protruded from under a

bench by the window, he had formed his own idea of what had happened here. The man could easily have been a lady-killer, one of the type that women run after for their big handsome bodies and their arrogant faces. And he could have been, true to his type, one with a considerable aptitude for cruelty, mostly mental. Perhaps he and the girl were married? Perhaps she had just run off with him here? At any rate, a quarrel? A revulsion on her part, some truer knowledge of him, earned through the old bitter school? She would have left him? And he chained her to him, and jeered at her—and forgot the rifle in the corner? And she killed him, she on her part forgetting something? Forgetting that, though dead, he would still be bound to her?

Dan Raynor started to take her into his arms to move her from the floor over to the bunk in the corner, then thought it better not to stimulate any return of consciousness until he had removed the man's body. He went to a rear door, saw a small room there and a room beyond, investigated with the lamp and finally half carried and half dragged the stark form to the last little room, putting it down on a bunk and covering it with a blanket. Then he returned to the front room.

"It needn't necessarily be murder after all," he was thinking. "Sheer self defence maybe? She couldn't have been the one who chained them together. He did that. Then she grabbed up the rifle and let him have it. Why not?"

She was on her feet as he came in, and the rifle was again in her hands. For an instant he thought that there could be no earthly doubt of her madness, and that she was going to kill him as already she had killed one man.

Her eyes were large and now looked enormous, almost round with dilation. Her hands were shaking terribly. But she didn't shoot. Instead she said huskily:

"You are the stranger. You didn't come to harm me. You cut me free from—from Dal Jethrow. You—you—you are the man I shot at! I thought I had killed you."

He managed a crooked sort of smile. His hat happened to be on his head; he pulled it off, twirled it on a forefinger, and said grinning at her:

"You spoiled a darned good hat, lady. But that's all. Can I come on in, or will you shoot?"

She flung the rifle from her, flung it so violently that it clattered against the wall before it lay once again on the floor.

Then she went to pieces as thoroughgoingly as any overwrought girl can go. Dan Raynor was only twenty-seven and unmarried, he had never had a sister. Altogether he was at the outset utterly at a loss. The girl wept and she laughed; at least he supposed it was laughter. She was as near the ultimate breaking point as a mortal can go and not lose grip for all time on either health or sanity.

He understood, though but vaguely at the time, that she hadn't eaten and hadn't slept and hadn't had a moment of anything but horror for many an interminable hour. He did the only thing he could think of. He stepped forward and gathered her tight, very tight, into his long arms, and held her rather as though he meant to keep her where she was. He shoved her face down against his shoulder and said roughly, "Go ahead, cry. You've got it coming, kid. Cry your darned little head off."

SHE clung to him desperately. She said incoherently, "I tried to kill you—I thought you were Rance Cardyce coming back. I thought you were dead—I was glad—Oh, God, have mercy on me! Have mercy!"

"Look here," said Raynor when he got a chance to slip a word in edgewise, and that was only after she had said a lot of other things which made no sense in his ears, "you're up against it. You've been through hell. You don't know what end you're standing on. Now leave it to me. You are going to lie down; you're going to bed and to rest and sleep and——"

"For God's sake," she screamed. "Get me away from here! Rest? Sleep?" She laughed and sobbed the words out. "Get me away. Quick. I can't stand any more of it!"

"Of course you can't," muttered Raynor. And under his breath he demanded of no one in particular: "Who the hell could?"

"I'm free!" said the girl. "There's no chain on me now, no chain tying me to—*I'm free!* Why am I here? I am going—I've got to get out into the open—under the stars—if there are any stars!"

"There are stars all right," he told her soothingly. "What's more, they're darned pretty tonight. Come ahead; let's go."

She clung to his hand like a little child.

"Yes! Let's go."

"There's nothing here you want?"

She shuddered.

"Hurry, hurry! No, nothing here. Let's go."

"I'll see that the doors and windows are all shut," said Raynor.

He made all haste. She was outside when he came out, standing erect and as stiff as a statue, her head back, her hands lifted and clasped before her, her face upturned to the clear sky with its earliest stars.

"Before we start anywhere," he said as he closed the door after him, "do you want to tell me anything? About—about him, you know?" For he could not altogether escape the fact that he was a deputy sheriff in one county or another, and what after all did county lines matter?

She answered him swiftly:

"He's Dal Jethrow. He's a brute, a fiend, a devil. And I'm glad he's dead! Glad, hear me?" she reached out and caught his hand, her own hand hugging it. "Take me away. Hurry!"

"Right you are," said Raynor. He began explaining: "I don't quite know where I'm taking you. I've a horse down in the canyon, down where you shot at me, you know. We'll go down there, shall we? We'll pick up my horse; we can then make better time whichever way you want to go."

"Yes, yes," she agreed impatiently. "Only let's hurry."

He wanted to ask: "Why did you kill him?" He wanted to urge: "We've got to arrange for somebody to take care of the body, you know." But his own inclinations were simply swept out to sea by the strong tide of her mightier emotions. He had to yield to her or to go off and leave her alone, or club her over the head and drag her back across the desert some forty miles to the nearest town. He did what any man, either wiser or less wise, would have done. He did what her urgency commanded.

They groped their way through the dark, they slid down steep declivities, they wormed through thickets and finally came down into the bed of the ravine where his horse was. He had almost to lift her bodily, no great weight in his arms, into the saddle. He carried a small roll behind the cantle, bedding and odds and ends; he fairly lifted her over that hazard.

"Which way?" asked Raynor. "This is a new country to me. Back to Tres Hermanos? It's a good forty miles across the sand."

"No. Oh, no! Not that way. That's where he is. Straight on ahead, into the mountains. I'll show you."

"That's where who is?" he asked.

"Cardyce. Ranee Cardyce. He is the one—— *Will* you hurry?"

"I certainly will!" answered Dan Raynor, as he caught the already familiar break in her voice. "We're on our way. All you've got to do is tell me where."

SHE sat very straight in the saddle. Her eyes were lifted to the sky, her hands clasped very tight on the saddle horn. Dan Raynor could not but see how shapely she was, a sweet lithe young thing of lovely curves. He said to himself, "I wonder who the devil she is. And what she is."

"Don't be so stiff; don't sit so straight," he commanded her. "Rest."

"If I didn't keep my eyes on the stars," she said faintly, "I'd crumple up and die."

"Crumple," said Dan. "You won't die.

Most likely you'll go to sleep. You haven't had any sleep for so long."

"Who are you?" she asked. This was the first time she had thought that far.

"I'm Dan Raynor, from Tres Hermanos," he told her. And asked as abruptly as she had, "You, who are you?"

"Me? My name is Wrenn."

"That's a bird of a name," said Dan.

"I'm Nancy Wrenn. And now can we hurry? Please!"

"It ought to be Jenny, you know," said Dan, and caught the bridle reins. "You just bet we'll hurry, Nancy Wrenn. But you've got to steer our course. Remember that I told you I was a stranger in these parts."

"I'm glad I didn't kill you," said Nancy.

"So am I!" said Dan, and laughed. She started laughing with him, then suddenly lost her grip on the stars, on herself, on everything in the world save his saddle horn to which she clung with both hands. She bowed her head and he heard again

that sound which penetrated him like a physical pain, the sound of her dry, body-racking sobs. And he knew then that he had to get her somewhere, anywhere, to a place of rest and sleep or have a raving wild woman on his hands.

"Snap out of it, Nancy," he commanded sharply. "None of that. You're the pilot, remember. Where do we go from here? And get this if you can: I'm tuckered out, if you're not: I want to drop anchor pretty quick. Where's the spot?"

She straightened up and pointed ahead.

"Right along this canyon trail. It's not very far to a place I know; a place no one will look for us tonight. Do you see that clearing through the pines, right under that brightest star? That way."

"Steering by a star is good luck," he sang out cheerily. "Here we go."

As she had promised, it wasn't very far. But before they covered the few miles, perhaps half a dozen, Dan Raynor trudging along at her horse's head thought more than once of the answerless conundrum: "How far is far?" And he could see by the way the girl swayed in the saddle, clutching spasmodically now and then at the horn to save herself from falling, that the few miles grew infinitely long to her. "It'll do her good," he kept telling himself. "Get her so absolutely done in physically that she's got to go to sleep. Maybe that'll save her from cracking up altogether."

Naturally he couldn't help asking within himself all the questions about her and about Dal Jethrow who lay dead back there in the cabin with a section of log chain about his middle, and about Rance Cardyce's part in all this. Of them all Rance Cardyce was the only one he had ever heard of; and it happened that he knew Cardyce not only by a reputation, none too good, but personally as one of the smoothest gamblers that had ever plied his profession in this particular part of the Southwest. But none of these questions did he put to her. He was content with silence, with noting out of the corner of a watchful eye how still her face was, lifted toward the sky, how her hands no longer trembled on the saddle horn, how even they seemed less frantic in their clutch.

"Here we are," said Nancy Wrenn.

It was all that he could do to find the trail, fumbling for it in the dark. As far as he could make out they were in a tangle of brush and young aspens and ferns, with a creek tumbling over boulders somewhere near.

"We're here all right," he muttered, "but it looks to me like the middle of nowhere. Is there a house?"

"No house," said Nancy, and he heard her sigh which sounded to him like a first

sign of relief and even relaxation. She slid down from the saddle. "I'll show you. Just follow me, Dan Raynor."

"That's what I seem to be doing, Nancy Wrenn," said Raynor.

Chapter III

THE SOLUTION

LEADING his horse, Dan Raynor kept close to the girl's heels, afraid of losing her in the darkness. She hurried on ahead, almost running, and he was hard pressed to keep her in sight; she was just a swiftly moving blur among black shadows.

"If you want to give me the slip, you can do it here easy enough," he called to her. "I don't know the trail and I can't see it, and every minute I think I've lost you."

She stopped so suddenly that he bumped into her. She put back her hand and his grasped it. "You've got to be careful here," she said.

He could make out that they were in some deep-cleft gorge, the cliffs black against the sky ahead and to the right, the tumbling water on his left. Suddenly the way seemed to open before them, still beneath the overhang of precipitous mountain sides they had entered a small clearing.

"You'll have to leave your horse here," said Nancy.

He unsaddled, tethered his horse with his thirty foot rope, slipped his rifle out of its scabbard and scooped up his pack, getting it balanced on his shoulder.

"We have to go slowly and carefully," she told him, and touched his hand again.

Soon, though he could see little, he understood why. Underfoot they had a narrow trail that was for the most part solid rock. It wound around the base of the cliff and presently he got a glimpse of the water in the gorge, very far down below, just a broken bit of dark mirror reflecting a trembling star. The sound of cascades over worn boulders was still clear and insistent in his ears but far away. A misstep here might send a man hundreds of feet straight down to his death.

"I thought you said we were there already," grunted Raynor.

"We are," said Nancy. "In only one minute now, honestly."

Close as she stood to him it was so dark there under the cliff that he could scarcely see her stoop and grope her way almost crawling into a clump of mountain laurel. But he kept close at her heels, having trouble with his pack among the branches. It was trouble however which was done within some six or eight feet, for then he came up against the rock wall.

"You've got to crawl some more," said Nancy's voice sounding faint and as though it came through the rocks. "This way."

Shoving the last of the laurels aside he found the black ragged hole into which she had crept, and followed on. "I haven't any matches," said Nancy, and he hurriedly swept one along bis thigh. It burned steadily, and in its faint light he caught the general idea of the place they were in, a high and dry cave of very considerable dimensions. There was some dry-as-tinder fuel scattered about, pine branches and knots and cones, and with a cheery, "This is fine!" he dumped his roll, gathered up a handful of the smaller stuff and started a fire.

SHE stood watching him, a dim and wavering little figure in the shifting fire glow, striking him as pitifully forlorn. Then as he stood up she sank down, sitting on his roll, her face in her hands.

"You picked the one chair you can't have," he laughed at her. "I'm going to open that pack right now. There are blankets that we'll spread out and you're going to have a big night's sleep on them. Also, there's a bit of a food pack; I'm going to cook you some high grade coffee and some bacon and flapjacks that will make you glad you know me."

"I can't sleep!" she moaned, sitting there and rocking miserably. "I can't ever eat again."

"Is that so?" asked Dan Raynor. He stepped over to her in a businesslike manner, put his arms about her and lifted her up high in them, cast about for the spot to deposit her, and set her down, very gently, just on the farther side of his fire where a gently sloping bit of rock was almost like a bench.

Opening his roll, first of all he spread out his blankets close to where she crouched. Then, going back for frying pan and coffee pot, he said cheerily to her over his shoulder:

"You can stretch out on those blankets and take a bit of rest, Nancy. Or you can sit right where you are until supper's ready, when I'll come over and pick you up and put you into your bunk no matter what you say. And now you listen to me. Dal Jethrow is dead all right, but you said he had it coming to him. So what's to worry about? Things will work out. They always do, give 'em time. Ever notice?"

Then, without awaiting an answer which he was sure enough wasn't coming, he squatted over his supper preparations, his hat pushed far back, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, his eyes squinted against the smoke, and began singing to himself a little desert song, Desert Moons.

"Desert Moons." He sang it softly. Were there ever moons like desert moons? Nancy Wrenn was very still. She listened to him, and when he grew silent he heard her sigh. The first sigh he had heard from her. She said almost under her breath:

"I love that. Sing it again."

He looked up from his cooking to laugh at her.

"Like the sketch, lady? Maybe I'll pass the hat after I've passed the coffee and bacon and flapjacks." But he sang the little song again, thinking all the while, "Poor little kid! Poor little kid." That was what she was, no matter though she had killed a man.

He fed her and she ate, not hungrily but obediently. He made the coffee, having water in his canteen, not too strong, though he believed coffee in itself could not keep her awake. Then, when she had finished, he made her lie down.

"But you?" she asked. "There are two blankets——"

"I'm squatting here on my heels by the fire for a spell," said Raynor. "After that I'm going to poke out and look at my horse. I'll bring the saddle in for a pillow; I'll bring some more wood while I'm at it. Then I'll curl up here by the fire. Good night, Nancy Wrenn."

"Good night, Dan Raynor," she answered him. "You are—you're just fine!"

SHE was so utterly wornout that despite the horrors creating such mad havoc in her overstimulated brain she went to sleep. Once asleep, she slept heavily for many hours. Twice only during the long and none too comfortable night he heard her moan softly; for the rest she slept in trancelike stillness.

At dawn he was up and about, moving silently. He looked down at her, her face placid now and very beautiful with her curly hair in a swirl across her cheek; her lips were slightly parted, color had come back into them, her breathing was slow and regular.

He tiptoed outside into the dawn light to look this country over by daylight. It proved to be a wilder land of gorge and cliff and spire-like crag than he had guessed. He could see no way to go farther into it; surely one would have to turn back here, seeking some other way.

When, having watered his horse, he returned to the cave it was to find the girl still fast asleep. He went outside to make his own breakfast and to dawdle over his cigarette. Always his ears alert for any sound, but hours passed and none came. He began to grow alarmed when, long after midday, she had not awakened. He went into the cave again on tiptoe to stand a moment over her, looking down at her through the dim cave-light.

Her eyes were open. She had awakened only now. She stretched sleepily like

any healthy young animal, curving her back, reaching her arms out. She smiled up at him.

"I didn't wake you?"

"No. You came just in time. Oh, Dan Raynor, you have been good to me! God sent you, I know. I would have died; I would have gone mad."

"And now you're all right, as fit as a fiddle."

"Uhuh," she nodded. "As fit as two fiddles. Something happened to me while I was asleep, I guess. I remember the whole horrible thing, but a lot of its horror has gone."

"Bully for Nancy Wrenn! Now I'll back out while you crawl out and pretend you're combing your hair and all that. I'll have you a breakfast in two shakes. Delicacies which maybe you've never tasted, coffee and bacon and——"

"Flapjacks—I know it! But you've eaten already?"

"Hours ago."

"What time is it?"

"After two. Nearly three."

She flung her covering blanket back and sprang up. Already both hands were at her hair.

"I know a way down to the creek," she said. "I'll run down there and use it for wash basin, mirror and drinking cup. And I'll be back in time to flip the flapjacks!"

And Dan Raynor, again squatting over a small fire, stabbed at slices of sizzling bacon and stirred his batter and sang softly about desert moons. There went a girl of whom he began to admit he approved. He hadn't had time and opportunity to judge just how pretty she might be, but whether her pulchritude rated a hundred percent or a bare ninety, he was glad to know her. He was downright glad to be off here alone with her in the wilderness.

"She went through all the seven hells," he meditated, "and she came through shining. She's real folks. A throughbred or I'm an Italian organ grinder. Nancy Wrenn—*by thunder!*"

WRENN? He began to remember. He'd heard that name. There was a fellow named Wrenn, a queer sort they said, a man who was different and——

But here she came, returning swiftly, and he thought her as radiant as any wilderness dawn. For the first time he realized how lovely she was. She was smiling; there were twin dimples; her bronzy hair curled wantonly; and her eyes were a sweet tender dawn-gray.

"Now I'll tell you," said Nancy.

"Mind you," said Raynor, "I haven't asked you. What's more, I'm a deputy sheriff, though not in this county. On top of everything else there's an old saying that whatever you say may be used against you."

"Not by you! You wouldn't say anything to hurt me, would you, Dan Raynor?"

"Damned if I would!" said Raynor. He added with his rather remarkable grin, a crooked sort of thing yet eminently human, "You'll pardon the French, won't you?"

"Mm, it smells good," said Nancy. "Next time I'll cook for you. I can, you know."

He served her and she, sitting on a rock with her plate on her knees and coffee cup at her side, ate with such fine appreciation that it made him hungry again just watching her.

"Fire away, Mr. Deputy Sheriff," said Nancy, busied on a crisp slice of bacon held between her pretty fingers. "What's question number one?"

He asked her the very last question she could have possibly anticipated and, in fact, the very last question he would have supposed, say two seconds ago, that he would put to her. But it happened that he was a young man of impulses, and he had a habit, good or bad, of obeying his impulse. He said bluntly:

"First question, Miss Nancy Wrenn: Do you think that there is any sort of possibility at all that, after you'd got used to me, you could love me?"

She gasped. But she didn't look frightened. There was nothing in the man's

whole attitude toward her to create alarm. Nor did she look shocked. Surprised? Maybe, maybe not. It's hard judging a girl's secret thought, especially when you don't know her very well, and the light is the uncertain one of a cave and a flickering fire.

Those big eyes of hers, wondrously grave at times and understanding, regarded him gravely a very long while. A newer brighter color came up into Nancy's cheeks. Before she could halfway dispose of that slim crispy slice of bacon she was blushing furiously.

She gulped, not over the bacon but over her words:

"I—I—I—" she said, and stopped, redder than a rose.

"I ought to be shot, I know it," grunted Dan Raynor, and had the grace to mean it.

"I was wondering the same thing, when you asked that question!" gasped Nancy.

He bore down upon her to sweep her up into his arms. But she stooped her

head and lifted up her shoulders and said hurriedly:

"Please! Go back on the other side of the fire and sit down, Dan. Please."

Dan went to the other side of the fire and sat down on his heels.

"How old are you, Nancy Wrenn; six or sixteen or sixty?" he demanded.

"I'm twenty-two," said Nancy.

"I refuse to believe it!"

"I'll tell you the year I was born; can you count on your fingers?"

"Look here—" he began.

"Yes, I'm looking," said Nancy. She reached for her coffee, lifting the tin cup gingerly both because it was hot and she did not want to spill a single aromatic drop. "What is it, Dan?"

He picked up a twig and broke it between his fingers, then set in doing a systematic job of breaking the fragments neatly in two.

"There are some questions, I suppose," he said after a while. "You haven't told me why—why you killed him, Nancy."

"If ever in all the world there was a man who needed to be killed," she cried out, "it was Dal Jethrow!"

"I believe you. I saw what he looked like. As handsome a man as I ever saw but cruel and hard."

"A beast! Oh, if you only knew a tenth of it!"

"He was your—— What was he to you, Nancy?"

"I've told you," said Nancy. "Just a brute beast."

"He wasn't—that is, you didn't—I mean, you weren't married to him?"

SHE looked at him aghast. Then, unexpectedly, she came close to breaking down again as she had done last night. But she got herself in hand. She bit her lips, and her eyes flashed and she just looked at him.

After a while, a long while during which he could find never a single word to say, she spoke. She said in a curiously faraway voice:

"I will have to tell you all that, won't I?"

"No, not unless you want to."

"It's not so much that I want to—it's hard talking about it, Dan—but I suppose we'd best get it over and done with, hadn't we? All right; here goes."

Dan Raynor got up and came around the fire to her; he put his hand on her arm as he said, meaning every word of it,

"Listen to me, Nancy my dear. I know a part of what you've been through and I

can sort of figure beyond that. If you'd prefer——"

"Sit down, Dan," she said, and gave his hand a quick hard squeeze. "And please keep on your side of the fire! You——you do things to me. He, I mean Dal Jethrow, m-married my mother. My father is dead, you know."

"Oh," said Raynor. And added, "No. I didn't know. I'd just heard his name, that's all."

"Mama never really loved anybody but dad," said Nancy, and for the first time Raynor discovered her chin and recognized its possibilities. "But she came to like Dal Jethrow. Everybody liked him, everybody who didn't really know him. Women especially. Oh, he was a snake! Mama married him. Poor Mom. It was mostly loneliness, I think."

She had to stop to sip at her tin coffee cup. Dan busied himself stirring a dying fire.

"Mama owns a lot of land, thousands of acres back in the Tecolotes," said Nancy. "Dad always claimed there was gold on it. Off to the east of his lands is the old Happy Day mine, and it's been running for sixty years. Off to the west are the Humdrum and the Golden Girl mines, and you know about them. Well, dad always said that on his land, right between them, was the real mother lode. He never had any money; he never seemed to care for money. Just the same he swore that my trip to Europe, my cars and dresses, were all right there, waiting for the time when I wanted them most."

Raynor felt like bristling inside. Nothing for her to see or feel, but all of a sudden it seemed definitely settled to him that if anyone bought her cars and dresses and trips to Europe, well, Dan Raynor was the man to do it. Just how, he didn't know.

"And so," said Nancy, "you see how it was. She married Dal Jethrow because—well, just because she couldn't help it, I guess. And from the first day, though she never said anything, I know she was sorry. It didn't take long to find out just what Dal Jethrow was like! He, like dad and like others, Rance Cardyce for instance, believed that some day a pay strike would be made on mother's land, and she'd be rich; it was the money he was after and he didn't make any bones about it. And then, just the other day, old Dick Redshirt found the gold."

"Dick Redshirt?"

"There are several Indians living back there in the mountains, and Dick Redshirt is a sort of head man among them. He loved my father more than anyone or anything else on earth. When dad died Dick Redshirt felt that he was left behind as a sort of watchdog over mother. He found the gold, or at least claims he did. He came straight to her with word of it. He begged her not to say anything to anyone, meaning Dal Jethrow, of course, until she had gone outside and talked with a lawyer whom she could trust. And while the two were talking, Dal Jethrow came in on them. He had been just outside the window, listening. I heard such a commotion I ran in from the yard. I thought for a minute Dick Redshirt was going to kill Dal Jethrow. But he just stalked out and went off."

"Where does Rance Cardyce come in?" he asked her.

"Everything seemed to happen that day," said Nancy. "Cardyce came out to our place that same afternoon. He and Dal Jethrow seemed to hate each other like cat and dog, but I know that Jethrow owed Cardyce a lot of money; it was some sort of gambling debt. And Cardyce was getting ugly. He hinted at having something on Jethrow. By that time Jethrow, terribly excited over Dick Redshirt's story, had started drinking. He and Cardyce had a long talk. They drove us out. I don't know what was said. But Cardyce was cold sober and Jethrow was half drunk——"

SHE shrugged. Raynor suggested:

"And no doubt Jethrow spilled the beans?"

"I only know that Cardyce left that afternoon. Early the next morning Jethrow started out of the mountains, coming down this way, headed for Tres Hermanos where he wanted a talk with a promotor and with a mining engineer he put great stock in. He hadn't been gone an hour when Dick Redshirt came looking for mother again. She had ridden up into the mountains to look at the spot where he claimed to have made his discovery, so he blurted out to me what he had in his mind. Dick Redshirt is pure fox! He maybe had managed to hear some of the talk between the two men, or maybe he knew more about them all the time than we did. Anyhow he insisted that Cardyce meant to eliminate Jethrow for good and all Dick Redshirt said that Cardyce would be waiting for him somewhere along the trail and was going to kill him. That way, somehow, muttered the old Indian, Cardyce would be the one to get the gold."

"But I don't see——"

"Neither do I. But I know Dick Redshirt. I had no love for Dal Jethrow; I tell you he was an unthinkable beast, and I would have been glad to know him dead. But I couldn't sit still, knowing that he was going full tilt to his death. I tried to make Dick Redshirt ride hard to overtake him. He only laughed at me, and he doesn't laugh often. He hoped the two would kill each other; anyhow, to have either one dead would be good."

"So you rode instead? Rode to warn Jethrow——"

"And arrived down at the cabin where you found me too late! I heard a few angry words. The door was open. I saw Cardyce shoot Dal Jethrow through the head with a rifle.

"Then Cardyce saw me. For a minute I couldn't move. He had the rifle in his hands. His face was white and his eyes glittered terribly and his mouth was half open and I knew that if I moved he would kill me too. I didn't see how he could help it, for he knew I had seen."

Dan wanted to come around the fire to her again then, but sat where he was, looking pretty grim about eyes and mouth. But of one thing he was glad.

"So it wasn't you who killed Jethrow after all! That's something for us to be glad of, Nancy."

"Rance Cardyce just stood there looking at me for a long time. Then he told me to come on into the cabin. I was afraid to turn and run. I thought he would shoot me in the back. And I was afraid to go to him. But in the end I did. He sat down and smoked a dozen cigarettes, looking at me all the time, trying to decide what to do. Then he saw the heavy log chain that happened to be there. I saw the queer look come into his eyes. He started laughing. He said, 'No one will come this way before I get back. Then I'll have some other men with me. One of them will find you two here, chained together! They'll have to figure that Dal put the chain on, to keep you from running away from him! It's just the sort of devilish thing he'd have done, if he'd thought of it. And they won't blame you at all for killing him.'

"So he chained me to the dead man. He stopped before he went out. He said, 'I won't be back in a hurry. I'll give you time to enjoy being with your little playmate. If you're as crazy as a hoot owl when they find you so much the better. And mind this, if you don't say anything about my having any hand in it, I'll get you off clear. If you do accuse me, well, it'll be just too bad for you. I'm going out right now to stack up an alibi that will stretch like good Para rubber. It'll prove I never came out this way at all. Think it over,' he laughed at me, and left in a hurry."

"Then when you saw me coming——"

SHE shuddered.

"I was expecting him. I couldn't think of anything else or see anything else but that mocking face of his. He wore a hat much like yours, too, and it was half dark in the canyon, and I was nearly crazy, Dan——"

"Someday, real soon," said Dan Raynor

softly, "I'd like to meet up with this Cardyce friend of yours."

She sprang up in sudden alarm.

"You must be careful, Dan! He is worse than Jethrow, trickier and every bit as cruel and vindictive. If you two should meet——"

"I'm going along with you, Nancy Wrenn, and don't you overlook that neat little fact. So it's at least a sporting bet, isn't it, that I'll be seeing Cardyce? Look here; where's your horse? Back down there at the cabin?"

"I had just dismounted in front of the door when Cardyce fired the shot that killed Dal Jethrow. I was riding a newly broke three-year-old. She jumped nearly out of her skin and started running. I suppose she has got all the way home long ago."

That put a puzzled frown into his eyes.

"Why hasn't someone come to look you up?"

"I don't know. I can't understand."

"Tell me about the cabin where I found you?"

"Deserted a long while. I suppose Dal Jethrow had stopped there for a drink of water; there's a good well. I suppose Cardyce counted on that, knowing he ought to be thirsty after all his whisky drinking the day before. I don't know."

"Let's go, shall we? Is there some way to get my horse up out of this canyon?" She nodded and said, "Yes, let's go. I'll show you the way." So he gathered up his belongings, roll and saddle and rifle, while she collected the cooking things, and they started. But again he said:

"I can't understand why someone hasn't come looking for you!"

"I can't either," said Nancy. "Something must have—Oh, let's hurry."

Chapter IV

DEEPER MYSTERY

SOMETIMES Nancy Wrenn rode, sometimes Dan Raynor, as they followed rough mountain trails; for the most part both walked, leading Raynor's horse. Both were tired and the sun was setting when they came into view of a green upland valley whose sheer beauty was breath-taking. A tiny gem of a lake flashed redly under the last slant rays of the sinking sun, a racing stream cut its clean winding track through the tall grass; in the far distance were black cliffs laced in a dozen places with white tumbling waterfalls; at the head of the lake, with a wide veranda overhanging the quiet water, was a rambling old house of logs.

"Home!" said Nancy, and weary as she was, brightened at the first glimpse. She explained softly, "Dad made it. He claimed it was the only spot in the world he could truly love."

"And small blame to him," said Raynor, looking down upon it from the bend in the trail. Timbered ridges shut it in, locking it away safely from the rest of the world.

So great was her eagerness that she was almost running when they came down into the valley. In fact she was running when twenty minutes later they came under the pines on the lake shore. Three collie dogs came bounding out to meet her; she stooped and patted one of them without stopping. Except for this canine welcome it struck Dan Raynor as a curiously quiet place.

"I'll take my horse around back and unsaddle," he said. "That will give you a few minutes alone with your mother first."

She flashed him a look of gratitude and ran up the wide puncheon steps. As she darted in the front doorway he lost sight of her, going around to the rear of the house. Faintly he heard her calling to her mother; he even heard the lively beat of her flying footsteps. But he didn't hear any immediate answering voice. And when he did hear one it was patently not that of Mrs. Wrenn. It was the guttural broken utterance of an Indian woman.

He found the small neat stable, built of logs like the house. He had no more than pulled the saddle and bridle off and was looking for the watering trough, when

Nancy, having sped all the way through the house, came running down the back steps. Even in the dusk he could see the look of fright in her rounded eyes.

"Mother isn't here," she gasped. "She never came back after riding out alone the other morning to see what Dick Redshirt had found! Oh, Dan! I'm afraid!"

"Who was that you were talking with? Who told you all this?"

"It was old Tula. She's the cook and she doesn't seem to know anything or to care."

"No one else here?"

She shook her head.

"There's a girl, Jenny, old Tula's granddaughter, but she's gone. Tula said that she was afraid and ran off to the Indian camp."

"Afraid of what?" he demanded.

NANCY shivered. "Jenny said she could smell blood——"

He laughed at her, telling her despite his own apprehension that everything was all right. He'd put up his horse and together they'd have a talk with old Tula.

She was a very old woman, bent and bony, yet alert, quick in her motions, with jet black, beadily bright eyes. She looked at the stranger in frank suspicion, sniffed and, whenever he asked a question, answered not him but Nancy.

Of Nancy's vanished mother they learned nothing not already told. She had ridden away, she had not come back. No, her horse never came back either.

"Did my horse come home, Tula?" asked Nancy.

"Yep, Nan," said the privileged Tula. "Come home."

"Then why on earth—?" began Raynor, but changed his question to ask a hint sharply. "Where is Dick Redshirt?"

"Gone," said Tula, staring straight at Nancy.

A few more questions elicited the information that Dick Redshirt had gone for his horse a little while after Nancy had ridden away. It was not known where he had gone, but he had ridden along what they called the Up Trail, and that trail, leading deeper into the mountains, was the one which Mrs. Wrenn had taken.

"It would look as though he rode after your mother, maybe to show her the exact spot," suggested Raynor.

Tula lighted two coal oil lamps. Nancy hurried out to the back porch again and stood there staring off into the northern wilderness that was so swiftly being gathered into the dark. Raynor came out to her presently.

"After you've rested a bit and we've had something to eat," he offered, knowing full well where all her heart must be right now, "we can ride the Up Trail ourselves—if you've the slightest idea where your mother went."

"But that's the trouble! I don't even know where to look. You see, the trail runs straight to that gap that looks like a V against the sky; that way you come

through Bright Morning Pass to the Flats. From there on there are a thousand trails, no trail in particular. One can go on north or turn anywhere either east or west."

"But you think that your mother was headed for Dick Redshirt's discovery, and you said it was on land that had belonged to your father."

"He owned thousands of acres, I don't even know how many. All his life he was acquiring land. Some of his places were only a section, others many sections, and they were scattered all through the moun-

tains. Oh, if Dick Redshirt were only here!"

He asked, speaking as casually as he could:

"No one except your mother and Redshirt knows where he found gold?"

"No one. He wouldn't have told a soul except mother, and there's no one here for her to even think of telling. No one could possibly know unless—unless somehow Rance Cardyce found that out, too."

They went back into the house and old Tula served them a hot supper of which both ate sparingly, though both should have been hungry, and strong coffee of which both took two cups. Raynor said when the dishes were being cleared away:

"I know of course how you feel; it's tough sometimes just standing still, waiting for something to happen. You stay here and keep the home fires burning; your mother may pop back in at any moment. I'll take a little ride up the trail, just on the off chance——"

She was curled up miserably on a broad window-seat, but sprang to her feet before he could finish.

"We'll both go. You're fine, Dan Raynor! At least we will be doing something, trying to do something."

"Wait a minute! We'd better watch our step a bit, don't you think, Nancy Wrenn? Can't we think our way out a step or two ahead? It wouldn't be like your mother, would it, to go off this way with no word to you? Of course not." He trailed off as she shook her head and he saw from a quiver of her mouth and a starry brightness in her eyes that she was on the verge of tears. "So we've got to take it that she has been unavoidably detained. Now that's really nothing to worry about, you know; she's all right."

"You're trying to buck me up, but——"

"Slow does it! Detained, but not harmed. Somehow in all this you think you see the fine hand of Rance Cardyce, now don't you?" She nodded miserably. "Right," said Raynor briskly. "It looks that way I'll admit; else there'd be too many coincidences in the wood pile all at once. Let's say Cardyce has a hand in it; why? He's after the money, isn't he? First, last and all the time that's what he's after."

"Yes. And that's why——"

"So he might detain your mother, even forcibly. But harm her? Not for a minute. What good would that do him? He'd want her where no one else could get her, maybe; he'd want to make some sort of deal with her himself, wouldn't he? So you can be very, very sure he'd take the best of care of her."

She took a long deep breath, staring straight into his eyes all the time.

"Yes," she said. Then she added uneasily, "But Dick Redshirt? What about old Dick?"

He could only shake his head. That was another matter; Cardyce having already killed one man to come at his golden reward might think less than nothing of killing an old Indian.

"Here's what I'm driving at," he said. "If Cardyce is in this up to his ears, if he's on the lookout, if he should happen to see me poking along a mountain trail, it wouldn't mean a thing to him. If he saw you, well, he'd know that a part of his game has gone wrong and I don't know what he might do. In a word, there's no use your riding with me. It might possibly be into danger——"

"I wish we'd meet him on the trail," she cried out hotly. "You have your rifle—I'll run and get mine. I can shoot."

"Don't I know it?" Raynor grinned into her earnest face.

He picked up his hat, twirling it slowly on a forefinger in front of her eyes, admiring the two bullet holes, proof of her skill. But she exclaimed, "Don't!" and then spun about and ran out of the room. Almost immediately she was back carrying a light sporting rifle.

THERE were several saddle horses in the pasture just beyond a grove of pines. When Nancy began talking to them

they gave over sniffing at a stranger and allowed themselves to be caught. Raynor saddled the two that the girl selected, and they rode out under the stars, following the Up Trail. But they had hardly started when Raynor said:

"You spoke of an Indian camp. If it's near by, isn't there someone there we could send back to the cabin where we left Jethrow's body? And you know the authorities here will have to be notified."

"Yes," she nodded. "The camp is only a mile away, at the foot of the cliffs, and will take us only a few hundred yards from our trail. And also, I'd like to ask there. They may know something more than Tula does of Dick Redshirt. They might even have an idea where mother went."

The Indians, old, middle-aged, young and toddling, came silently out of their little huts at the sound of hoofbeats. Most of the huts were dark, formless black blots under the pines, but in two or three small fires glowed on the hearths, and in this light the dark still figures were only fitfully and indefinitely revealed. Nancy told them hurriedly what had happened to Dal Jethrow; a few grunts accepted the news and Dan Raynor noted that if those grunts expressed any emotion whatever it might have been satisfaction, but was certainly not sorrow.

"Joe," said Nancy to a gangling youth, "will you and Jim Dancy go to the cabin, and you, January, will you ride to the Happy Day mine? Tell Mr. Bade there all about everything, and he can telephone the sheriff."

Just then the single excited utterance made by any of them was a shrill screech from the girl Jenny. She announced that she knew what she was saying when she told them she smelled blood, and she could still smell blood in the air, and there were going to be more men killed, yes and maybe women too. All heard her out in silence. There were a few guttural grunts and the three men Nancy had designated went for their ponies.

As Nancy and Raynor rode back to their trail, heading upward toward Bright Morning Pass, the girl said with a shiver:

"I don't like Jenny's talking like that! She was right once, she gives me the creeps!"

The night was already both black with darkness and scintillant with stars. In the high arch of the clear sky the little points of the light flared like diamonds, while on earth, under the pines and in the winding trail through ravines and in the high pass, it was very dark. They had known at the outset that there was scant hope of their coming upon any sort of information tonight. For a moment as they came up on the ridge their senses quickened and both alike felt that they were riding toward the truth and would find it. As they pressed along deeper into the mountainous country they realized more than ever the folly of this nocturnal adventure. Ahead of them were thousands of square miles upheaved into steep ridges and peaks, gouged and cleft into sheer chasms, and with all this under the mantle of night it was as though they played at blind man's buff with a limitless savage world.

"I had to come; I just couldn't help it," sighed Nancy as, with their horses reined in close together upon a high clearing upon the mountainside they stopped to glance in all directions over one of the wildest regions Raynor had ever seen. "We might as well go back."

"There's a shooting star," said Raynor.

They watched it as it described its brief bright beautiful arc and then vanished.

"A shooting star means good luck, you know," he said cheerily. "Well, you're right. We can't do a thing before tomorrow. By then the sheriff——"

She caught his arm excitedly.

"Look! There's a light, over there, far off."

She tried to point it out to him. He strained his eyes into the black night but could see nothing.

"It's gone," she said, almost whispering, oddly impressed.

"Oh, I see it," said Raynor then. "There's another; there are several."

"No, no," said Nancy. "I didn't mean there. That's a little village; it's about ten miles from here. What I saw was a gleam of light off to the east of Canyon City, at least four or five miles from there, over where you see those biggest mountains against the sky."

"Maybe it'll come on again," he suggested.

THEY waited a long while without seeing it. Raynor's eyes drifted back to the little town that many years ago in its hopeful youth had so proudly named itself Canyon City.

"I've just thought of something, Nancy," he said slowly. "Rather I guess I'm just beginning to think of it. If Rance Cardyce has anything to do with the disappearances of both your mother and Dick Redshirt, how come? You told me that when you left home to follow Dal Jethrow, your mother had already left the house. Then you rode all the way to the place where Cardyce killed Jethrow; and you saw Cardyce kill him; so you know Cardyce was there long after your mother started into the mountains. Cardyce gave you the impression, didn't he, that he was on his way outside?"

"He must have turned straight back instead," she answered thoughtfully.

"If he came back to the house, someone might have seen him. He didn't want to be seen, did he? And you said too that he boasted of an alibi. Now where could he have gone, the nearest place, that he might have found men whom he knew, men of his sort, men who would swear anything if he paid them?"

He could just make out her little nod.

"Yes. He would have gone to Canyon City. It's not far from the Golden Girl mine. It's a wicked little place, there's a lot of gambling going on there, and Rance Cardyce must have friends there."

"Well, then? How about his having anything to do with your mother's being missing now? Perhaps he didn't have. But there's Dick Redshirt failing to turn up, too. It's quite logical that Redshirt might have ridden after your mother."

"You mean that mother must have ridden somewhere near Canyon City? And that Cardyce happened to see her——"

He could only shrug. "If by any chance any of your father's mineral lands are in that direction—well, we might as well ride that way as any. But when morning comes——"

"Look!" she cried again. "There it is—the light."

This time he saw it. "It's right under where our star went down," he said.

"Yes; that's how I happened to see it. And I know exactly where it is, though it's ten miles away! It is on dad's land. He had a little sort of a dugout up there, high up on Rainbow Mountain, it hasn't been used for years. But that's where that light is."

"It's gone again," said Raynor.

They sat in silence a longer while this time, but the light did not shine for them again. Nancy stirred restlessly in her saddle.

"That's where mother is, Dan," she said as though she knew. "Maybe Ranee Cardyce is there too, keeping her a prisoner until he can work out whatever devil's scheme he has in mind. Maybe Dick Redshirt—Shall we, Dan?"

"You're not made of steel and concrete, young woman! Have you forgotten you've been pretty severely used already? How far is it by trail? How long would it take us?"

"It's a roundabout way; you can't help that. It will take us two hours, and a little more. In the dark—well, three." He heard her indraw a deep breath; then her words came so eagerly, "Please, Dan! I know mother is there!" that he said heartily:

"I told you a star like that was good luck. Let's go."

Chapter V

CANYON CITY IS HOSTILE

AS THEY rode on again Nancy led the way at a gallop, knowing the trail and having under her horse's feet a footing which permitted speed. But soon they dipped down into the tremendous gorge of Indian Creek, dipped into an almost inky darkness, and were forced to go at a snail's pace. Twice they dismounted, Nancy calling back warningly, where they had to inch along lest a misstep send them hurtling down the canyon side. They had already lost the faraway lights of the mountain village. If one rode straight on, or at least as straight as possible, to Canyon City he'd have no other glimpse of it until he was almost upon its one rutty street.

Half an hour later when they came up out of the gorge and into a plateau with the timber widely spaced, and they again rode abreast, Raynor asked whether their way, on to the dugout, would lead them near the hamlet.

"Yes; within a half mile of it, even if we don't want to go into the town," Nancy told him. "And I was just thinking—maybe you were thinking the same thing? If Rance Cardyce is up this way, maybe he will be keeping up his pretence of an alibi? Maybe he'll be where everyone can see him; and if he is there, well, we ought to know."

"He mustn't see you. He needn't know that you've ever got away and left the cabin where he thought you'd have to stay."

"He needn't see me. I could stop just at the edge of the village. There are some big trees there at the side of the road, and it will be too dark under them for anyone to see. You could ride on into town. There are only one or two places where he's likely to be, both saloons and gambling places. And if he did see you, he couldn't know that you had seen me."

"Yes," said Raynor, answering a question over which she had not stopped. "I was thinking like that."

"We can let our horses out here for about a mile," she said and touched her horse with the spur. "After that we'll have narrow, dark trails again almost until we get there."

Then it was that they heard hoofbeats other than those of their own horses. With the same impulse they reined in, coming to a dead halt, listening and trying to locate the new sound.

"It's someone behind us, coming up out of the gorge," said Raynor, almost whispering. "Let's pull out from the trail, under those big trees, and see who it is. It just might be——"

In the depth of the ink-black shadows of the monster pines they sat silent in their saddles, their eyes turned toward the spot where the newcomer would first appear. Whoever this newcomer was, he rode in the greatest haste. His head and shoulders and the bobbing head of his horse were for an instant, hardly more, vaguely outlined against a section of sky which seemed to have slipped down between the serried ranks of banked timber. He came with a rush, he shot by, once he was on the plateau, like a dark comet.

"It's one of the Indians," said Nancy, and sounded mystified. "I can tell by the way he rides, not like any white man."

"It's no doubt that Indian boy—what did you call him, January?—that you told to ride over to the Happy Day mine."

"No. He wouldn't come this way at all. He would have turned off to the right three miles back. And January is as slim as a young poplar, and that Indian was short and thick, more like Tom High-Tom."

"He's short and thick, so they call him High-Tom!" Raynor chuckled and then said, "Let's be going, shall we? He's one man we'll never catch up with unless we want to ride our horses to death."

"Yes. Here we go, Dan Raynor." But as they sped along once more she was still thinking of that streak through the night where a man and horse went at such urgent speed, for she said, "I don't understand. Tom High-Tom is the laziest, dirtiest, lumpiest Indian I know, and that

is saying a lot. It generally takes him a week to turn his shadow around, and now he's riding as if he were going to a fire! Oh, well——"

TWICE after that they heard the clattering hoofs where, spurring on in advance, the Indian rode a rocky, echoing bit of trail. Then they lost all sound of him, and before long forgot him. For at last they saw, at no great distance, the twinkling lights of Canyon City.

Climbing from a ravine they had come out upon a road winding along the steep slope. The lights formed a constellation with a dense grouping occupying a very

limited space, with scattered star-like points covering the mountain base beyond.

"I'll wait at the side of the road here," said Nancy as they came to the patch of big timber of which she had spoken. "We're almost in town. You're there in two minutes; it won't take you more than five or ten minutes to look in at the only two places where Rance Cardyce is at all likely to be, if he is showing himself off in public. Try the Yellow Gold first, then Johnny's Luck. And you'll be careful, Dan? And you won't say a word, if he is there——"

"Sit tight and be happy," he returned lightly. "I'll be seeing you, or life will have lost all its zip."

"He's a dear," whispered Nancy Wrenn to Maude Wrenn's daughter as she watched him ride away.

He found Canyon City just about what he expected it to be, a straggling lusty babe of a village, rough and ready and occupying itself at this time of night with its playthings along a short, crooked strip of rutty road. On the corner as he rocketed into town was the Yellow Gold Saloon. Sounds of revelry emerged through its swing doors. He heard a hum of voices with one or two strident tones as there always are to bespeak the loud voice and the empty mind, and there was a blare of good music from a radio. He swung down from the saddle, tethered his horse at the hitching rail, leaned his rifle against the wall in the dark, and dragged his spurs along inside.

It was a long bare room, floored with rough boards, dotted at the rear with small round tables, trimmed along one edge with a bar. There were in the place perhaps a dozen men, all looking to have crept out of the brush or out of hay stacks recently. Among those at the tables, drinking liquor which had nothing expensive about it until you paid, were three girls, rather dowdy professional entertainers.

As Raynor, to provide an excuse for entering, stepped to the bar, he raked the room with a glance. Though he knew Rance Cardyce only casually, he knew him well enough to pick him out of a crowd with a flick of the eye, for Ranee Cardyce had his points, and was a man both physically and mentally to stand out like a red bean in a handful of white ones.

Cardyce wasn't in the room.

Raynor drank slowly, one would have said with relish and appreciation. As a matter of fact he scarcely knew what it was that he drank. There were of course card rooms in the back; Cardyce might be back there.

So he split his drink with a cigarette, slowly rolled, dallied with, and gave his attention to the rear of the place. There were two doors, one he discovered when a boy came in bearing sandwiches, led to some sort of kitchen or serving pantry, The other stood open upon a dark room.

The bartender, thinking that here might be a good spender once you got him started,

invited, "Have another," but Raynor said, "Next time, thanks," and went out. Diagonally across the street was Johnny's Luck.

There were twice as many men in Johnny's Luck, there were five girls instead of three and they were a degree less dowdy, and there were two bartenders instead of one. In the rear wall there were three narrow doorways, and one of them was open upon a lighted room. He could catch glimpses of men in there about a table and heard a clack of poker chips. A chair scraped and Rance Cardyce stepped out into the main room.

HE WAS much the same type as Dal Jethrow, but as dark as the handsome Jethrow was fair. He wore his hat, a tall gray not unlike Dan Raynor's, at a cocky angle. There was a small but excellent diamond, the gambler's device, in the tie knotted below a soft, freshly laundered collar. He looked, as he always looked, alert. Beyond that, Rance Cardyce's expression was not to be deciphered. He didn't mind if men knew he was ready for whatever the next turn of the card might signify. He did mind if they ever knew what he was thinking about.

"Hello, Dan," he said as Dan went to the bar. "What are you doing up here? Off your beat, ain't you?"

"Hello, Cardyce," said Raynor. "Have a drink?"

"I've got a game on," said Cardyce. "Never drink when I'm already having a good time, you know. The boys have been taking me for a ride, so I just stepped out to get some more of what it takes." He had come along to the bar, and now said to the white-jacketed man facing him over the mahogany, "Let me have five hundred, Charlie."

"Sure, Mr. Cardyce," said Charlie. He shot the till open, took out an envelope, counted out ten fifty dollar bills and shoved them across the bar.

"Luck, Kid," said Cardyce over his shoulder, and returned to the card room. The door closed behind him.

"Funny that he came out just as I came in," thought Raynor. He also thought that of all men he had ever looked at, eye to eye, here was without doubt the coldest-blooded, the most mercenary and predatory—and one of the most acute.

Again, though of no mood for drinking, Dan Raynor was forced to order something, the bartender had an eye on him. But before he could make known his wishes a big burly chap who looked to be a mine mucker or timberjack, came rolling up to the bar. He clapped a familiar hand on Dan's shoulder, crying out hospitably:

"Hi, Stranger! Have one with me."

"I'm just having the one, thanks," said Raynor. "I've got to be moving along."

"In a hurry, huh? What's the hurry? Where you going?"

Raynor supposed him to be scuppers under in an alcoholic welter, so only laughed and said:

"Just moseying on, you know. Have one with me and I'll drift."

"Sure I will," cried the other, and smote the bar with a tremendous, hamlike hand. "Me'n you will drink the whole damn crowd under the tables, huh, pardner?"

Yes, he talked and acted like a man who had drunk deeply. But he didn't look it. Dan Raynor, staring at him narrowly, saw that his eyes were clear and steady and purposeful.

"Sure," he said. And to the bartender, since he meant to take no chance with strange drinks, he said, "Make it beer."

"Hell's bells," cried the man at his side, and began laughing. "He's jokin', Pete. Set us out a couple shots of the good old rye."

"Beer," said Raynor stiffly. "And I've got to be traveling."

"Me," said his new companion, "I'm George Culmer. George, for short. An' no friend o' mine drinks anything but the real stuff. Make it two whiskies, Pete."

PETE, seeming willing to oblige one and all, set out a small bottle of beer and a larger one of whisky. As Raynor reached

toward the smaller bottle George Culmer's brawny arm shot out, his big hand snatched, and he wrested the bottle out of Raynor's grasp, slamming it down behind the bar.

Raynor as a rule tried to keep a guard on a quick temper. Tonight, perhaps, he was high-strung. At any rate he had taken all from Culmer that he had any stomach for. His fist shot out, taking the burly chap square under the square chin, and knocking him flat.

In an instant the whole place was in an uproar. Culmer surged to his feet, clamoring for gore, and charged down upon Raynor like a mad bull. Dan sidestepped and brought up in a solid ring of men who had left whatever they were doing to crowd close for the fight. They shouted and they stamped and they cheered and they started offering bets even before they were quite clear who the contestants were. Then Culmer, catching himself up nimbly when Raynor stepped out of his reach, charged again. This time there was no side stepping, no giving back.

For five minutes it was a fight for men to remember and talk about. Culmer was far the bigger, heavier man, and was astonishingly light on his feet. His blows, several of which Dan Raynor avoided and several of which he took upon the upper body, were like a piston smashing; and he was cunning in sparring and parrying and getting out of the way. The one thing he lacked just then was an appreciation of the other man's desperation. For Raynor wanted above all things to be back immediately with Nancy Wrenn.

It ended in a fashion which drew a gasp from the onlookers. It was that sheer desperation of Raynor's which added just the rose leaf on top of the brimming glass. That this was no chance quarrel he knew full well. Unless he meant to let Rance Cardyce have the laugh on him for all time, he had best end things. He ended them. He feinted with his left, uncovered that burly square jaw of Culmer's, and drove home with his right like a pile-driver. The big man went down like a slaughtered beef.

Raynor started toward the door. But a ring of men were closed in about him. He could scarcely stir. Some of them, he saw readily enough, were just gawking busybodies, but there were looks on a couple of faces which he did not fancy. Also the bartender began calling at him.

"Hi, stranger! You ain't paid for this drink yet!"

Raynor flung him a crumpled dollar bill, with his left hand. His right snagged the gun out from under his armpit.

"Gangway," he commanded sharply. "I'm heading out of this right now, and I don't want anybody in my way."

They fell back then, some with alacrity, but at least a couple of men slowly as if in doubt. He watched them narrowly. Those were the two men who like George Culmer had a look of purpose in their faces.

He won by them all, whirled, walked backward watching them and thus gained the door. At a run he crossed the street to his horse. He snatched up the rifle he had stood against the wall, vaulted into the saddle, and was off down the road like a streak.

When he arrived at the spot under the pines where he had left Nancy Wrenn he didn't see her at first. He rode twenty yards farther, off the road. He stopped there and looked in all directions. Then he began calling softly, then louder. But before he called the third time he knew that she wouldn't answer, that she was no longer here. Like her mother before her, like old Dick Redshirt, she was gone.

Chapter VI

DAN FINDS A CONFEDERATE

JUST as clearly as if he had seen the short, thick Indian Tom High-Tom at Rance Cardyce's elbow, Dan Raynor knew what had happened. It would be like Cardyce, a gambler who took a gambler's chance yet never missed an opportunity to stack the deck, to have posted a spy at the Wrenn home.

"Cardyce has got her now," muttered

Raynor, and a sudden fury stormed along his bloodstream. It was not that he overlooked the fact that the gambler was still back there at Johnny's Luck, or at least had been there only a moment ago. Cardyce could not be playing a lone hand in this latest skyscraping scheme of his. He would have close to him other men like big George Culmer.

There was no use wasting time here! He turned his horse with such a vigorous hand on the reins that the animal whirled on two hind feet, pawing the air, and was off at a run. And at a run Raynor arrived again before the doors of Johnny's Luck.

This time he didn't stop to set his rifle aside. He carried it caught up under his left arm as he strode straight through the long room to the door at the back through which Cardyce had so recently stepped. He did not see big George Culmer, but he did see that every eye in the place followed him curiously, and that some eyes seemed friendly while others did not.

The card room door was closed. He opened it upon a dark empty room. He turned back to the bar.

"Where's Rance Cardyce?" he asked the bartender.

That worthy gave his bar a swipe with a damp towel and shrugged.

"Dunno, pardner. He was in there. Must of got through playin' an' gone out the back door. Ain't see him since you was here."

Seeing all too plainly that nothing was to be gained by staying longer here, Dan Raynor went out to his horse. Before he had time to swing up into the saddle a hand plucked at his sleeve. He swung about, alert to his toes. A nondescript individual, half in shadow and half in the light from Johnny's Luck, said sharply:

"That Rance Cardyce been doin' you dirt, Kid? Took somethin' from you, huh, maybe?"

"What do you know about it?" demanded Raynor. "And what do you know about Cardyce?"

The question opened sluice gates of the other's bitterness. He named Rance Cardyce everything that crawled and was poisonous under sun, moon and stars.

"I know he's been hangin' around here. I know he's got something up his sleeve, 'cause I know who he's running with. He's got not only that George Culmer that you knocked daylights out'n, but three-four like him. An' I know jest a speck before you showed up there come an Injun ridin' hell for leather, with some sort of word for Cardyce, something that put him on the jump. I seen him gang up with three-four fellers, send 'em scootin', an' then he pops back to his game o' cards. That's what I know——"

"But you don't know where Cardyce is now?"

"Couldn't say exact, Stranger. But he rode out that way." He pointed along the road. "Headed north towards the mountains."

Raynor tried to read the look in the man's face; here might be another indication of Cardyce's forethought, placing a hireling here to lie for him. On the other hand the man's voice rang true. He was an actor of parts or was in fact full of hatred for the gambler—and he didn't have the look of anything but a human worm on whom at one time or another Cardyce had happened to tread.

"Which way is Rainbow Mountain?" asked Raynor.

"I don't think he went that way."

"Never mind! Point it out to me. Which one is it, that big fellow yonder?"

"That's him all right, Stranger. That's ol' Rainbow. But there ain't nobody—"

"There's a good trail?"

"Shore. Keep right along the road for a mile, then where there's a gully an' an ol' bridge you'll see a track, you turn there."

Raynor swung up into the saddle.

"If you're a friend of Cardyce's, go tell him where I've gone," he said curtly. "If you're not, you won't tell him anything."

He dipped forward in the saddle and shot away into the night.

UTTERLY at loss for anything else to do, he thought only of pressing on to the old dugout which Nancy had told him was high up on Rainbow Mountain. Perhaps he could find it in the dark, perhaps not. All that he knew was that Cardyce must have Nancy now, and that there had been a light shining out twice on the mountain. A light which could have been caused by a man stepping out of a door from a room where a fire burned, which had suddenly been shut off when the door closed, which shone again when he reentered the cabin. She had told him it was a long-deserted place; then why occupied tonight?

He couldn't think of anything harder to locate than a strange dark dugout on a strange dark mountain. Nor could he think of anything he could do better than seek it. When he thought of what already Nancy Wrenn had suffered at Rance Cardyce's hands, when he pictured her again in the man's merciless power, his blood ran cold.

Soon, however, he was done with all speed. He found the gully and the old bridge, and what looked like a very long-disused wagon track turning sharply off through the timber to the right, down into a dark ravine, then crookedly upward along the base of the mountain. Also he began to see wisdom in proceeding with something of caution. If Nancy's captors should be bringing her in this direction—one chance in a hundred, he told himself, yet the long shots did gallop home now and again—they might be somewhere behind him. For they would not have risked riding straight through Canyon City where some eye would have seen, and so would have been forced to a roundabout course across which his own had cut like a bowstring across the arc of a bent bow. He kept watching behind as well as in front; he listened with sharply analytical ear to every sound.

Night in the wilderness is always filled with strange sounds even when the air seems hushed; faint far-away noises that are hard to catalog. But not once did Raynor hear what he harkened for so eagerly, the sound of shod hoofs or of men's voices.

Then the track he had followed dwindled away into a trail, and the trail began branching, and a branch which he followed for a while came to a dead end in a thicket where a spring was. After that he was more at a loss than ever.

"She said 'High up on Rainbow Mountain,'" he kept telling himself. "So I'll

keep on, higher and higher. But on a mountain like this I'm as apt to miss the place by two miles as not."

Then presently came the time when he found that he could make less speed mounted than on foot. He selected a spot which even in the dark he could locate again, a bit of benchland below a rocky cliff, marked by a half dozen big pines. Here he unsaddled and tethered his horse. From here he went on, straight up the mountainside.

"I suppose I'm a fool for doing this," he groaned to himself, stopping to mop a streaming brow, for chilly as the night had grown, his body was glowing, the perspiration bursting out upon him. But fool or no fool, the thought of Nancy Wrenn at the mercy of Rance Cardyce, a man who had already indicated how much mercy he had for her, goaded him.

He wandered for hours, seeking everywhere. A dugout implied some sort of bank into which its rear end had burrowed, but old Rainbow's sides were thick with gorges and gullies and such banks as he sought. He plowed through thickets, he rested at such times when he had to stop

for breath and steady muscles, he went on again. Many were the hard-going miles that he covered that night on foot, zig-zagging this way and that.

He sat with his back to a big rock, and slowly rolled and lighted a cigarette. He was trying desperately to think, to think just one step ahead of Cardyce, if he couldn't do that, then to think in step with Cardyce now. What was the gambler's next move? Granted that he had coppered his bet, granted that he had both Nancy Wrenn and her mother, Maude Wrenn, in his power. What next? Not so much what would he do, as where would he go?

He was only dimly conscious of a quiet sort of rustling in the brush. It meant nothing to him at first, and he went on smoking and thinking, trying to think, rather. He had been hearing sounds like that all night. But after a little while he grew rigid; he snuffed his cigarette out against his boot heel, listening.

SUDDENLY the night was as still as it had been at any time, not a sound. It struck him that that soft stirring in the bushes had ceased altogether too abruptly. There was someone near him, someone who lay stone still, watching him.

"He saw me kill my cigarette," thought Dan Raynor. "He knows that I heard him. He'll play dead dog for a while. And I'm double-dashed if I know where he is!"

He had stopped to rest near a trickle of water, a thin shallow overflow of some high spring. Seeking the dugout he always kept in mind that it would be somewhere near a water supply. Now that there was no other sound than its musical murmur and a sort of whispering where it ran over rocks and through tall grasses, it would have been easy to assure himself that he had heard nothing other than the brook itself. But he remained grimly positive that there had been another sound, and that it had stopped all too abruptly.

"There's someone over there, not fifty steps away, in that thicket," he told himself, staring all the while into the darkness. "When I put my smoke out he lost me. He can't see me any more than I can see him."

There followed a wearisomely long while of waiting during which he sat as motionless as the rock against which he leaned. Then at long last his patience was rewarded. He saw something moving, though he could not hear it, and the thing, whatever it was, startled him with its nearness. It was scarcely ten steps from where he crouched. It was just a shadow among shadows, but there happened to be a flat white rock in its path which glimmered ever so faintly in the starlight, and the ghostly glimmer vanished under some crawling form.

He brought his rifle up to his shoulder and called out sharply:

"Got you spotted! Got my sights lined on you. I'll give you two seconds to stand up, with your hands in the air, or I'll let you have it. Step lively!"

For answer he had a grunt. Then a voice huskily guttural, demanded:

"Who are you?"

"If it will help you any, I'm a stranger in these parts. My name happens to be Dan Raynor and I'm from Tres Hermanos. Now speak your piece, my snaky creeper, or I'll drill you, so help me!"

There was a silence, then another grunt and thereafter a shadowy figure arose, seeming to come up stiffly and slowly.

Raynor could see better now. The man's hands were up, higher than his shoulders. He came forward hesitantly, stumblingly, rather. He was limping, almost dragging a leg.

Raynor's heartbeat quickened. Poor as the light was he made out that he had to do with an Indian, one who looked as wrinkled and gnarled with age as the ancient wilderness mountain on whose flank he stood. And what old Indian should be prowling like this on Rainbow Mountain at this hour of night, except Dick Redshirt?

He asked quickly:

"And you? Who are you?"

"Me Dick Redshirt."

"Thank God!" cried Raynor. And when

the old man, slowly allowing his lifted hands to come down, stood there staring at him, he added, "I am a friend, Dick Redshirt. A friend of Miss Nancy Wrenn's."

"No frien' Rance Cardyce?"

"No," Dan assured him. "And I know you're not."

Dick Redshirt squatted down, his grunt was almost a groan.

"Leg hurt," he explained. "Cardyce shoot, purty near kill. Dam'." He spat.

"Tell me about it," said Raynor eagerly. "And about Mrs. Wrenn, Nancy's mother. You know, don't you?"

The old Indian lay flat on his back, resting a moment. Then he told what he knew. He began by saying that the morning Dal Jethrow rode away——

AND Raynor cut in, saying, "To his death, Dick. Cardyce killed him that day."

"That's good," said Dick unemotionally, and went on with his recital.

That morning Dick Redshirt discovered that Nancy's mother, all eagerness to see for herself how much truth there was in the old Indian's tale of gold discovered, had ridden off to Rainbow, and Dick Redshirt learned of the fact only a full hour or more after her departure. He went for a horse to follow her. It was his thought that there was every chance she'd fail to find the spot he had told her of, that she'd waste a day and then come back to accuse him of one more tall Indian lie.

But with an Indianesque sort of humor, he thought it would be fun to let her make a fool of herself, seeking in the wrong places at first, and so he followed leisurely, simply making sure that he came up with her before she returned. So he jogged along, riding slowly but keeping a shrewd eye upon any trail she might turn into coming home. Thus the day was well advanced when he caught the first sight of her.

From one ridge he saw her riding over the crest of another, two miles away. Well, she was headed right, so he followed along in his leisurely way, giving her ample time to realize that she should have asked Dick Redshirt to ride along with her.

When he came up with her it was here, on Rainbow Mountain. And he came only in the nick of time to see what was going on, too late to be of any further service to her than getting himself shot in the leg and, incidentally, left for dead. He saw Rance Cardyce, riding a sweat-lathered horse, emerge suddenly from the mouth of a wooded canyon and grasp her bridle reins when she would have passed hurriedly on.

And Cardyce saw him at the same moment. The gambler meant business, it would seem, and no matter what the costs was driving straight ahead to his objective. He jerked his rifle out of his scabbard and fired. Dick Redshirt took the bullet in the outer part of his thigh and promptly did a nosedive out of the saddle. Falling, he struck his head on a jagged rock, so that when Cardyce came hurriedly to make sure of him he was unconscious and the blood covering his face gave the impression he had been shot through the head. Dick Redshirt knew something of this, because when a blurred consciousness returned he was in time to see Cardyce, rifle in hand, stalking away from him, going back to the white-faced terrified woman.

"After that, no see 'em," the Indian grunted disgustedly. "Me, purty sick, damfool horse run away, walk slow, lay down." He spat. "Dam'."

Then hurriedly Raynor told of the disappearance of Nancy Wrenn, of Cardyce's recent appearance in Canyon City, of the fact that he had no doubt been warned and advised by Tom High-Tom. Dick Redshirt nodded sombrely.

"Tom High-Tom no good. All time Ranee Cardyce give 'em whisky. That why."

"Now what?" demanded Raynor sharply. "What'll we do, Dick? Where has Cardyce taken them? Where and how does he think he can hide them out? We'll have the whole country looking for them tomorrow."

"'Morrow, mebbeso too late," said Dick. "Tonight, we hurry. We go see. What your name?"

"Raynor. Dan Raynor. I'm from Tres Hermanos. A deputy sheriff down there."

Dick Redshirt got stiffly to his feet, using his rifle as a staff and a prop to get up.

"We go look see, Dan. Dugout, maybe."

"Far, Dick?" asked Raynor.

"Not far. Dam' close. We go."

CHAPTER VII

THE DUGOUT REVEALS MORE TROUBLE

THEY made their way through the purple night, moving slowly and guardedly under the star-sprinkled canopy, with the old Indian leading the way in utter silence save when occasionally he relieved himself of a little grunt of pain. Within a quarter of an hour Dick Redshirt stopped, grasped Raynor's sleeve and pointed.

"There," he whispered. "You see 'em? Big white rock one side, big white dead tree the other side, black spot in the middle? Dugout there."

It was very still there on the high mountain flank. Far off, very far off in the wilderness a timber wolf's howl sliced through the silence. Then, nearby, as though mocking the wolf, a little owl hooted. There were no other sounds, nor was there any light or any sign of life about that black spot which indicated the dugout.

"Gone, guess so," grunted the Indian. "Cardyce smart man. Sure, gone."

"It seems to be our job to find out," retorted Dan Raynor, and added. "Yes, Cardyce is smart all right, maybe just smart enough to lie still here in the dark waiting for us."

"You go see," said the old man curtly. "He kill you, I play dead dog, I kill him."

"That'll help me a lot, won't it," snorted Dan Raynor. But with rifle gripped in both hands he stepped along toward the dugout door. Dick Redshirt leaned back against a tree, raised his own rifle and watched him interestedly.

Raynor tiptoed to the closed door and stopped there, listening. There was no chink of light, no whisper of sound. He shrugged. There was no use standing outside all night, waiting. He had his choice, to keep an eye on the place until day came, to get his answer through the patient method, or to find out now.

He struck against the heavy door with his rifle butt.

"Hello inside," he sang out.

He thought that Nancy Wrenn or her mother, if either or both were imprisoned here, would surely call out to him. When no answer came he tried the door. There was a heavy wooden latch; it lifted readily under his fingers. He flung the door open. It was pitch dark inside, a dark as hushed as that of a tomb.

He was thinking, "Ranee Cardyce may be within ten feet of me now, ready to blaze away at me the first split second he sees something moving, or he may be miles away! I've got to know!" And then old Dick Redshirt crept up to him and plucked him by the sleeve.

"Think so gone," he whispered. "Find out, like this way."

He had picked up a dry, resinous pine cone. He stepped away from the door, pressed tight against the front wall, and set fire to his cone with the first match. Then, never showing his body to any that might be inside, he tossed the blazing cone in at the door. It thudded and rolled half across the floor; where it came to rest it shot up a brightly blazing light.

At first in the flare of the pitchy torch which Dick Redshirt's pine cone had become the place looked to be empty. Dan Raynor was about to take the first step forward when again the old Indian plucked at his sleeve. Dan stiffened as he saw what the keen Indian eyes had discovered, what the thin old hand was pointing out. There, close to one of the half log and half earthen walls lay a body, whether of man or woman he could not at first make out in the eerie shadows set into a sort of devil's dance by the flickering light.

"Go slow," muttered Redshirt, knowing

Cardyce and his ways well. "Mebbeso trap. Dam' smart."

So they went slowly and together, Dick's rifle muzzle nosing by Dan Raynor's side, covering the figure on the floor but ready to turn instantly in any direction.

RAYNOR'S heart was in his mouth until he saw that it was a man lying there. Assured that save for this single occupant the dugout was empty, he stepped more briskly forward. As he did so the man lying prone stirred and groaned and half turned over. His eyes opened staring first at the blazing cone so close to them, then at the newcomers.

Here was another Indian, short, stocky, with the same sort of face his primitive stock must have worn a thousand years ago.

Dick Redshirt, peering closer, made a strange sound in his withered old throat.

"Tom High-Tom," he grunted.

"He has been battered over the head," said a perplexed Raynor. "There is a blood trickle down his forehead and he's all trussed up like a turkey ready to go into the oven. Tied hand and foot——"

"Me untie," said Redshirt, and squatted down, setting to work with quick clever fingers. He began making small dry chuckling noises. It must have been his own peculiar brand of laughter. "Tie 'em good, somebody," he said. "Break his head first, tie 'em up nex', make dam' sure. Cardyce maybe."

"Rance Cardyce, dam'," said Tom High-Tom. He sat up when partly freed and clapped both hands to his head. Dick Redshirt busied himself with the rope about High Tom's legs.

"What happened?" demanded Raynor. "What about Mrs. Wrenn and her daughter? Where's Cardyce now?"

Before the man could speak Dick Redshirt finished with the ropes and sat back, rocking gently on his heels; he cut in, shooting quick sharp questions at the other. And for a while Raynor had to stand back and hear an incomprehensible gush of words in the garbled mother tongue of these two aborigines. Then Dick Redshirt got up and spat and translated, giving him curtly the gist of Tom High-Tom's sputtered tale.

High-Tom confessed lugubriously at the outset that he had been in Cardyce's pay. He had hurried to Canyon City to carry the gambler word of the news brought by Raynor and Nancy Wrenn. Then he had come straight up here to the dugout, as ordered to do, and had waited, not knowing what was next. It was not long, he said, before Cardyce appeared, bringing Nancy Wrenn with him. Tom High-Tom heard what they said. He learned for the first time that Cardyce also had Mrs. Wrenn a captive somewhere.

Now it would seem that he had not counted on this sort of thing from Cardyce; had not thought that he would ever go so far as to put his hands on either of these women. Tom High-Tom objected and grew hard to handle. Rance Cardyce was in no mood for objections or delay.

"That's all he know," said Redshirt. "Cardyce whang on the head with six gun.

Tom High-Tom wake up like this, an' purty dam' sick. Cardyce and Mrs. Maude an' Miss Nanny, they all gone. Dam'."

"But where?" Raynor cried out, angry and worried and impatient and bewildered, all rudderless at sea in a storm of emotion as he realized what it must mean to Nancy Wrenn to be again in the gambler's hands. "Damn it!" he said violently. "She saw him kill Dal Jethrow. He knows that she'll

tell all she knows, to save his own hide he'll have to go on——"

He flinched from putting the rest of it into words. He glared at his two companions as though he held them responsible. They, perfectly stolid, stared back at him. Tom High-Tom turned away and began stamping out the burning cone.

"No good too much light now," he muttered.

Dick Redshirt began asking him questions again. Tom High-Tom answered with short savage-sounding sentences.

"If we only had any idea where Cardyce would go——"

"We talk," said Dick Redshirt. "Me an' High-Tom, we talk. Think so we find 'em. High-Tom smart boy. He hear Cardyce say something' to Miss Nanny, talk about Mrs. Maude. Mebbeso we go find. High-Tom he show."

"Me," said High-Tom, "sure find. Kill Rance Cardyce now."

A first wave of high hope came flooding through Dan Raynor as he made a swift demand for more details. They were given him by the old Indian, speaking gravely and slowly. There was an old tunnel in the bank of Saddlerock Canyon where years before Nancy's father had sunk a prospect shaft. That place was close to one of the high trails from Canyon City over the mountain to Mormon's Gulch and therefore readily reached on horseback. There they would seek for the missing ones. Best of all the place was at no great distance from the dugout, a mile or a mile and a half, no more.

WITHOUT further words they started. Dan Raynor would have set the pace had he the knowledge of the terrain, but as it was kept close behind Tom High-Tom who led the way. Old Dick Redshirt came limping along behind him. Raynor could hear him stumble in the dark and mutter.

Even without a bullet-scored leg it was none too easy going, sidling along the steep slope, going down into wash-outs, climbing again more steadily than ever, plowing through brushy thickets, negotiating big boulders and jagged splinters of rock which had in some long-ago come crashing down from the rugged crest of old Rainbow. Once Raynor thought that he heard Dick fall sprawling. He wanted to call back to him but did not dare to raise his voice, not knowing how close Cardyce might be. As he hung on his heel a moment he heard the fallen man calling to him, hissing sibilantly, rather, as he too was cautious about being overheard.

Raynor turned back promptly. He heard Tom High-Tom also come to a dead halt, then return hurriedly to learn what had gone wrong. When the two stooped over Dick Redshirt where he had fallen, staring up at them he said in what sounded a thoroughly disgusted tone of voice:

"Leg no good now. No can do; bime-by die purty dam' quick. Dan, you tell me, where your horse? I go back now. I like die my place."

Dan couldn't believe he was as badly off as all that, yet he knew better than to argue with one of this breed, and besides he was eager to press on. So he told Dick Redshirt where the horse was. Dick grunted his understanding, rose awkwardly using his rifle as a lever and turned slowly.

"Luck, Dick," whispered Raynor, and tried to make a whisper sound cheery. "You'll make it back home in great shape. We'll be with you before long." He added curtly to Tom High-Tom, "Hurry! Let's get going again."

Tom High-Tom led the way again. Over his shoulder he said, "Him no good anyhow, too old," and so disposed of his tribesman, merely adding as an afterthought as he stepped along, "We go faster now."

And for a little while they did make better speed and Raynor found it all he could do to keep the vague form of his guide in sight, to keep close so not to lose him in the dark. Down in a dark hollow High-Tom waited for him, stopping to point down into a thickly wooded canyon,

then to swing his arm in a wide sweep and at the end to point to a sort of notch in the ridge slightly beyond and higher up.

"That's where you think they are?" Raynor whispered.

"Sure," whispered High-Tom. "Think so. Old mine up there."

"Let's hurry, then! It won't take us ten minutes."

"Sure. Hurry now. Ten minutes, all done. Kill Rance Cardyce."

They passed silently down into the darkest of the canyon, a narrow, steep-banked gash in the mountain overhung with interlacing branches, so dark at times that Raynor had to grope his way and lost sight entirely of the Indian only a few paces ahead. Progress now was slow and difficult, with rounded, water-worn rocks underfoot. At every step Raynor peered to right and left, hoping for a tell-tale glint of light, hoping for the sound of voices, most of all for the voice of Nancy Wrenn.

"Ss!" commanded the Indian, rigid and still as Raynor bumped into him. He had stopped in a tiny clear space the size of a room. It was a degree less dark there. Raynor could make out his bulky form quite distinctly.

"What is it?" he whispered back, as tense as the other.

Tom High-Tom lifted his arm again, pointing. This time however he pointed down the mountainside.

"Look!" he commanded. "Listen!"

Raynor pivoted, peering back the way they had come. As he stood there for scarcely more than an instant, a queer pricklish feeling stole over him, an odd sensation, that it was his back that was toward the danger, and at his back was only Tom High-Tom.

He whirled, but just too late. He saw the Indian's clubbed rifle swung up over his head. He tried to dodge. The blow descended, and all that Dan Raynor knew, as a greater, stiller blackness than ever engulfed him, was that it was Tom High-Tom who had stricken him down.

Where he fell he lay like a dead man.

CHAPTER VIII

PRISONERS

WITHIN the tunnel it was like a small room. Rance Cardyce had hung a big square of canvas over the entrance-way. He had a small fire of ripe pine blazing against one wall. Against the other, their arms tight clasped about each other, were Nancy Wrenn and her mother. Squatting on the floor, between them and the only exit, were two men. One was that hulking George Culmer with whom Dan Raynor had had trouble at Johnny's Luck, the other was a small dark wiry half-breed border ruffian who named himself José Hidalgo, and whom most men called Joe Dally.

Rance Cardyce, with all the insufferable vanity of a gambler of his type, fancying himself an aristocrat, affected to treat Mrs. Wrenn as he supposed a gentleman would comport himself toward a lady. He spoke softly, with all outward pretence at courtesy—for which Nancy Wrenn would have gloried in seeing him under a horsewhip.

"But my dear Mrs. Wrenn!" he was expostulating. "Really, don't you see that despite my dislike for the task, I'm forced in the matter? It happens that I am absolutely desperate for a large sum of money, a very very large sum; even my life itself hangs upon my getting it and getting it promptly." He shrugged elaborately as he lighted a fresh cigarette from the butt of a half-burned one. "Were it not for the fact that I am between the devil and the deep blue sea——"

"Hell," snorted big George Culmer. "Let me get her white gullet in these two hands o' mine——" He displayed them, the thick fingers wide spaced. "Cut out the soft stuff, Cardyce. We'll be in hot water if we don't get a move on."

"Keep your mouth shut, Culmer," said Cardyce coolly, but heard him out first, perhaps for the effect of such words as George Culmer would speak upon the two captives. They did cling closer. They were both fighting hard to keep the fear

out of their eyes, a fear grown desperate.

Joe Dally, squatting like a frog, gave a quick little flirt of a supple wrist. He was holding a knife and it flipped up in a small bright circle, to be caught neatly by the haft as it came down. Joe Dally grinned widely, displaying his glisteningly white teeth under a small neat black mustache.

"Sst!" he said. "Wan leetle scr-ratch, like theese, on the face—wan nother scr-ratch on the leely-white t'roat—Sst!" He laughed softly. "That's all, Señor Cardyce. Jus' queek an' no troub'."

"I don't want any killings tonight, Joe," said Cardyce, having given him also ample time for speech. "No killings at all un—" He didn't say unless.

"No keel," laughed Joe pleasantly. He explained again. Just little shallow slashes, on the face, on the throat, hardly deeper than skin-deep; perhaps a little slice off a nose——"

Nancy said in a voice which surprised her with its quality of firmness and which made her mother look at her wonderingly:

"It's a gambler's bluff, Rance Cardyce, and we know it, and so it doesn't win any jackpots. We both know that, though you caught me, you had to let Dan Raynor go free. There is Dick Redshirt, too, to count on. They know, and when the whole country knows——"

Cardyce was not so soft spoken with Nancy. He jerked her up with a jeer:

"Your Dick Redshirt won't be coming—ever. I heard just a little while ago, in town, that he had, he had met with an accident."

"You—you—you murdering devil!"

"Nancy!" whispered her mother warningly.

"No," said Cardyce coolly. "I never killed a man yet, except in self defence and fair fight."

"You killed Dal Jethrow! I saw you!"

HE RAISED his brows and mocked her with his dark eyes, eyes which glittered now in the fitful firelight yet looked as cold as death.

"No. I did not kill him. If he is dead, if you know he is dead, well then, I suppose you killed him yourself. You hated him enough, as everyone, your mother included, knows."

"And if you've killed Dick Redshirt, too——"

"Sh!" cried Cardyce sharply, and swung about toward the entrance, listening, his hand up commanding silence.

They were all so tense that none needed the command; hushed, without stirring hand or foot, scarcely breathing, every single one of them listened for some sound, listened with ears straining against the silence. Then they heard what Cardyce had heard before them, a long, peculiar whistle.

Cardyce, for once showing emotion which this time was one of elation, whirled upon George and little Joe Dally.

"That's Tom High-Tom!" he exclaimed, and seemed to have some knowledge unshared by the rest of them of the significance of the Indian's call. "You two boys hot-foot down there to meet him. I'll take care of things here. Beat it! And keep your eyes peeled."

They looked at him wonderingly, then went out together.

Nancy and her mother were standing now, rigid and alarmed, not knowing what fresh disaster threatened but judging from Rance Cardyce's air of triumph that Tom High-Tom's signal boded nothing good to them.

Then after a moment Nancy's mother spoke. She was a small pretty woman, young-looking, much like Nancy; her voice though low-pitched was steady and managed to express not only grief but some steadiness of will.

"Rance Cardyce," she said slowly, "if this is true, if you have killed poor old Dick Redshirt——"

"Didn't I say that I hadn't killed him?" jeered Cardyce.

"But—well, if he is dead——"

He laughed at her and shrugged.

"Come, my dear," he said lightly. "Sup-

pose he is dead? It's just one less Indian in the world that has plenty of them, that's glad to see the last of them. What of it?"

"Dick was the only one who knew—the only one who could have shown us where the gold is!"

He pounced on her. He caught her by the arm and shook her in a violent outburst of rage. Rance Cardyce's nerves were at violin pitch tonight.

"You lie!" he stormed at her. Forgotten was all his pose toward her. "And you can't lie to me and get away with it. Maude Wrenn! Redshirt told you; you know where the gold is. I say you know!"

"You are hurting me," cried Mrs. Wrenn.

"You know. I tell you. You do know, don't you?"

"No, I do not know. You watched me today. You spied on me. You saw that I wandered from place to place. Dick told me, but he was looking queerly at me when he did. I know Dick. It was like him to tell me wrong, to see if I'd go without him, then to follow me. And you killed him. You killed the only man who knew!"

He glared at her as though he wanted nothing else in life now but to kill her. But he got himself in hand and lighted yet another cigarette, and remained silent and thoughtful.

Presently they heard the shuffle and stumble of oncoming steps. Then the canvas door was shoved aside and three men entered bearing a fourth whom all at the moment thought dead. Big George Culmer and little Joe Dally and the Indian Tom High-Tom placed Dan Raynor's unconscious form on the floor.

"Who in hell?" demanded Cardyce. He looked close. "It's Raynor. That crazy fool Raynor. Why, here's luck! Good boy, Tom High-Tom!"

STIFLING a scream Nancy ran to where Dan Raynor lay and dropped down on her knees at his side.

"Dan!" she whispered. "Oh, Dan! You're not dead! You can't be! *Oh, Dan*——"

"But he is dead, my little dear," Cardyce snapped at her. "And there, if you please, goes the only friend you had left to call on. With Raynor out of it, with Dick Redshirt dead——"

"Dick no dead," spoke up High-Tom. "Not yet anyhow."

"What?" exclaimed the gambler. "You're crazy!"

"No crazy. We fix trap to ketch this man. He come dugout. He find me like you say, all tied up with blood on face, rabbit blood, he can't tell!" Tom High-Tom indulged in what went for a grin. "But funny thing, Dick Redshirt come-along

same time. That why I don't bump this man down there. Both got guns; no can do——"

"But Redshirt?" cried Cardyce. "Where's Redshirt? Not dead? Where, then?"

"Go back. Hurt bad. Get horse, this man's horse, ride home. Dam'."

"And now, Mr. Cardyce," said Nancy's mother quietly, "you see that your plans are all gone wrong! Dick Redshirt has ridden away; no matter how badly he is, he will tell all that he knows—there'll be forty men looking for you before daybreak!"

Nancy didn't hear a word they were saying. She had Dan Raynor's head in her lap. She put her cheek against his lips, trying to feel some faint flutter of breath. She slipped her hand down inside his shirt, desperately trying to feel the beating of his heart. And she did feel the heart beat, and

her own heart nearly burst with joy, and she kept her head down, her cheek against his lips still, lest any see the glad light in her eyes.

Cardyce stood silent a while, deep in frowning thought. Then he jerked his head up and again was his old confident self, a man to dictate and to win on to ultimate victory despite obstacles.

"Boys," he said curtly, "we're in this now up to our ears, too deep to pull out. And we don't need to pull out. It's our good luck after all that Redshirt's alive; he's the only man who knows where the gold is. But we've got to remember he's wild on the hoof, and that he'll be sending men up here as Mrs. Wrenn has so sweetly reminded us, and that we've to get out of this place in a fat hurry. We'll pile onto our horses and be at Sol Bartholomew's place within the hour. He'll take care of you boys there, and of the women, too, and I'll be on my way to gather Dick Redshirt in before he does any real damage. And I'll gouge out of him all we want to know! He knows where the yellow stuff is, and he's going to tell me!"

DAN Raynor felt himself coming up slowly out of profound purple depths. Perhaps his first thought, as his brain cleared, should have been of Tom High-Tom, the squat brute who had so treacherously struck him down. But he had been thinking so long of Nancy Wrenn, a girl who with her first uncertain smile had got among his heartstrings, and who somehow had stayed there, that his thoughts were all of her now. And the funny part of it all was that he labored under the absurd impression that he was with her, that she was close, that her arms were about him.

He lifted his hand weakly to his brow. His head seemed bursting.

Cardyce saw the movement and swung about, as quick as light.

"I thought this man was dead."

"You let him alone!" cried Nancy, and leaned even closer over him as to shield his body with her own.

Before he knew what it was all about Dan Raynor felt himself jerked up to his feet, a man at each side of him. He saw Nancy first of all. She was real then, really here, and not a dream! Her eyes and his clung together, clung like hands that meant never to let go. Then he saw another woman, a pretty little thing who looked enough like Nancy Wrenn to be her sister. Oh, her mother! And one of the men holding him was that same burly George Culmer whom he remembered, and the other was a small, wiry half breed with an animal mouth shadowed by a tiny neat mustache.

"Cardyce!" he muttered. "Look here——"

"Hammer him over the head if he makes any trouble—or better, put a bullet in his brain," commanded Cardyce, already holding the canvas aside. "Bring him along."

"You brutes!" exclaimed Nancy. "Don't you see that you're hurting him? Don't you realize that he is badly hurt? Let me help him on one side."

"Oho!" said Cardyce, and laughed, not because of any mirth within him but to mock the girl. "So that's the way the wind blows, is it? Two little playmates?"

"He has been good to me," said Nancy warmly.

"Let's step, boys," said Cardyce. "Let her cling to him if it makes her happy; she can help steer him along and that gives us one more man with both hands free. Coming, Mrs. Wrenn?"

He watched them all pass outside, Joe Dally first, then Dan Raynor staggering along between Nancy and Tom High-Tom, with Mrs. Wrenn at Nancy's side, then big George Culmer. He himself came close behind.

"We'll grab the horses and split the wind," was all he had to add.

One of Nancy's hands was on Dan Raynor's arm, supporting him. He managed, and with no great difficulty, to find her other hand. He squeezed her fingers tight, tighter as strength began flowing back into him, and his strength flowed

back all the faster from the warm pressure she returned.

"All right, Nancy?" he asked her softly.

"You?" she whispered. "All right, Dan? Not terribly hurt?"

"Just a crack over the head. I'm all right."

"Make 'em shut up, George," called Cardyce, "or pry 'em apart. We'll go quietly out of this."

"Stow the gab, you two," growled George Culmer, close behind them.

But in the dark their hands, unseen, could still clutch, hands giving each other strength, encouragement, hope.

Before they had gone a hundred yards a curt word from Cardyce stopped them.

"Look here," he said, and from his tone it was clear he addressed his three retainers, Culmer and Joe Dally and Tom High-Tom. "As soon as we get into our saddles we're going to scram, and don't forget it. You'll go one way, on to Bart's place, and I'll go after Dick Redshirt. Now get this: Bart has a place to hole you up as long as necessary, but you can count on me being back in a few hours. We've got a chance to play this out in either of two ways. If I'm in luck in opening Redshirt's mouth and then shutting it—there are lots of ways to do that—we'll still play for the whole works and there'll be millions in it. If I miss a bet, well, anyway we'll turn enough of a deal so that there'll be ten grand for each one of you boys, and that's not bad for a night's work!"

"Ten grand? How much dollars?" mumbled Tom High-Tom.

"Ten thousand, you fool. Now shut up and listen. Tell Bartholomew the whole thing. He'll know what to do. Just get this in your nuts. Either this woman signs papers giving us the whole mine, or if we're rushed, she's going to write a letter to her banker-promotor friend down in Tres Hermanos to rush up here to close a big mining deal, with a hundred thousand in cash in his jeans. Got it?"

"Let's go—queek!" cried Joe Dally.

Climbing upslope with the canyon at one side, they came presently into a hollow lying just below the crest of the ridge, a grassy half-acre with a small stream and a bit of a pool reflecting stars waveringly and overshadowed by a grove of ragged, wind blown cedars.

"Saddle up in a hurry, boys," called Cardyce.

Little Joe Dally, a happy man under certain circumstances, started singing a lilting and sentimental little southern love song, all silken caresses. Already he was spending his golden fortune, showering "geefts" on his Morena. George Culmer growled at him, "Shut up, you damn little fool!"

Joe Dally shut up quickly enough, but it was not because of George Culmer's command. It was something altogether different, a thing to stop the little cut-throat in the middle of a crooning note, to send him on a run darting among the trees, to leave him slack-jawed. He began cursing wildly, never thinking of keeping his voice down, gibbering with rage and dread.

"What the hell?" muttered big George Culmer.

But already he guessed and within two minutes all knew. The horses which they had left here, tethered so securely, were gone.

CHAPTER IX

DICK REDSHIRT TURNS THE TABLES

THERE was a moment of dead silence, a feeling of disaster in the air, utter confusion. Rance Cardyce flew into a towering rage, blaming every man of them since he did not know whom to blame. With the horses gone, what became of his smooth-running plan for the night? It would be a long hard walk to Bartholomew's, and the night wouldn't last forever! Already it seemed to him the stars were paling. And, without a horse, how was he to overtake Dick Redshirt in time?

He whirled about upon Dan Raynor.

"Damn you, Raynor! You did this for us——"

Raynor, fresh vigor pouring into him at every moment out in the fresh air, could only laugh at him—and wonder. He, like the others, was mystified. Nancy Wrenn, whose hand was still tight-clasped in his, began whispering to him, but her words were lost in the explosive sound of Cardyce's swift commands.

"Steady, boys!" he told them. "We'll make this yet; it's as good as in the bag. I've the idea and——But first, straight on up to the top of the ridge; we'll find tracks in the road up there and know which way the horses went. And then——Well, get going!"

They moved on, more swiftly now, passing through the grove and climbing steeply once more, with the mountain crest outlined against the purple heavens just above them. They proceeded much in the same order as upon leaving the old mine shaft, Joe Dally pushing on ahead. Presently they saw his silhouette definitely outlined against a starry sky.

There was a rifle shot, coming from what particular hidden spot none knew, and little Joe Dally stopped where he was, a clean cut black outline of a man, suddenly grown motionless and rigid. Then, with never a sound from him, he tossed up both arms, twisted half around and fell, a dead weight, among the broken boulders.

Where before there had been a moment of confusion and a sense of disaster, now was thunderstruck consternation that briefly rooted every man of them to his place. Of them all it was Dan Raynor who first broke free of the spell. Here was unexpected help of some sort, here the hand of a friend, here a chance to turn the tables entirely.

The man nearest him, the man gripping his arm all the time, at first by way of support and then guarding him, was Tom High-Tom. The Indian, gaping and staring in all directions, held his rifle loosely in one hand. Raynor jerked free, came upon the Indian from behind, snatched his rifle from him and swung it high, like a war club. And, even as he brought it smashing down, it flashed through his head that it was thus and with the same weapon, that the man had dealt with him. He struck with all his might, and Tom High-Tom went down without a gurgle.

Joe Dally was down. Tom High-Tom was down. There remained but big George Culmer and Rance Cardyce now!

Then the hidden rifle cracked again. There was an orange spurt of flame, right from a flat-topped boulder which was overhung and flanked by sturdy thick-leaved mountain laurels. This time they all heard the scream of the bullet, hissing like the flight of an angry hornet.

Forgotten by both Cardyce and Culmer was all thought of their captives now. Their only possible concern was to seek to save their own lives. They were in the open, their assailant cunningly concealed. The two had been standing close together, now they sprang apart, racing for cover.

That rifle spat at them again. A cry of pain broke from Culmer and he staggered and fell. But in an instant he was up again, headed for the nearby thicket of mesquite. Once again the rifle spoke, and along with the reverberating explosion, the air was split by a queer, throbbing blood-curdling yell that came from behind the big boulder among the laurels, the gloating yell of old Indian Dick Redshirt, once more on the war path. With a last wild leap Culmer plunged into his thicket, but he went into it headfirst to lie twitching a moment, then to grow still.

A part of this Dan Raynor had seen and sensed; his mind however was on Cardyce breaking for cover.

"Cardyce!" he shouted warningly. "Cardyce! Stop and fight it out, man, or I'll nail you on the run!"

Cardyce stopped and whirled and fired, all at once and yet with an accuracy which bespoke his command of a cool and steady nerve. Dan Raynor felt the shock and ugly burning gouge of lead, but now he like the gambler was himself again. As

Cardyce fired, Raynor's finger pressed the trigger of Tom High-Tom's rifle.

Raynor staggered backward under the impact of the gambler's bullet, slipped down to his knees, steadied himself and raised his rifle. Cardyce stood a moment, swaying, then crashed to the ground.

AFTER a dizzy moment Dan Raynor got to his feet and started toward the fallen man. Nancy Wrenn came running to him, her arms about him, as she helped hold him up and begged him to tell her he wasn't badly hurt.

"Stand aside, Nancy girl," he said thickly. "I've got to make sure of that snake. He may be just fooling; it would be like him. Stand aside. I don't want you hurt."

He shook her off and strode on. And when he came close he saw Cardyce make a quick, convulsive movement to rise.

"Lie still, Cardyce," he commanded sternly. "I'm taking no more chances with you. Drop that gun or, so help me, I'll let you have it square through the head!"

Cardyce groaned and flopped back, lying on his side. His hand fell away from his gun.

"Your hand tops mine, Kid," he said faintly. "Rake in the chips."

It was an exultant, gloating and altogether joyously vindictive old savage that bore down upon them when old Dick Redshirt came hobbling out of his lair.

"Me, dam' good shot by night-time," he chuckled. "Before-time, ketch 'em plenty deer like that. Tonight, got good luck!" And by way to be sure a thoroughly good job had been made of it, he demanded, "All dead now? One-two-t'ree-four?"

"Dick! God bless you, Oh, God bless you!" cried Nancy's mother and ran to him and put her arms about the old fellow, and began sobbing on his heaving chest.

"Dick," muttered Dan Raynor, "You're all the aces there are!"

Nancy would thank Dick later and no doubt would spoil him all the rest of his life. Just now however her solicitude was all for Dan Raynor. She knew that he had barely recovered from one attack on his life to be wounded by Cardyce. She saw that he had one hand pressed against his side, that he was leaning heavily now on his rifle.

"Dan," she said tremulously, "tell me——where is it? It isn't——"

"I'm all right," he told her quickly. "It's on my left side. The bullet just skated around on my ribs and bounced off. And we've got to watch what we're doing yet. There's Cardyce alive, you know, and High-Tom——"

"High-Tom no dead?" muttered Dick Redshirt, and sounded hurt. "Rance Cardyce no dead, too? What's matter, Dan? Kill 'em now, quick. Me!"

Dan shivered. The old devil meant it.

"No," he said. "No, Dick. Two of them are dead enough, Culmer and that little man. Better keep these two alive. We'll make them talk later on."

Old Dick spat in disgust. Then he shrugged and after that laughed.

"But tell me, Dick," said a still puzzled Raynor, "where'd you come from? I thought you had headed for home?"

Dick's laugh became a delighted chuckle.

"Dick Redshirt dam' smart," he answered. "All time know Tom High-Tom bad Injun an' dam' liar. When we take off ropes down at cabin, I feel ropes pretty loose. He make ropes lie, too. So I play good joke on Tom High-Tom, an' I say I go home, an' I sneak after you on snake's belly! Oh oh!"

"You old devil! You knew all the time he meant to kill me!"

"That all right, Dan," chuckled Redshirt. "You no friend long-time to me anyhow. Bime-by Tom High-Tom kill you, I kill Tom High-Tom, so that all right. An' he go 'head, I follow, I find Nanny sure an' her mamma."

"Well, it worked out all right," conceded Dan Raynor with a grunt.

They went to where Rance Cardyce lay. He had twisted over on his back and was staring straight up at the swiftly whitening stars.

"Going to let your old Indian put me out of my misery, I suppose," he said sneeringly.

"No," said Dan. "We'll get you out of this and to a doctor. We'll make a well man of you yet, Cardyce. And you are going to hang. I guess you know that."

Cardyce, with more strength than they had thought to find in him, managed a laugh of snorts.

"I'll never hang for Dal Jethrow's murder, Kid. I've got an alibi——"

"Who's your alibi?" demanded Raynor sharply.

"Why Culmer and Joe Dally. They——" He broke short off. Almost in a whisper he said, "Dead? Both of them?"

"Dead, Cardyce."

Slowly Cardyce pulled up one arm, covering his face from them, shutting out his own view of the retreating stars.

"I go get horses now," said Dick Redshirt. "Not far, I hide 'em. We go home now. Sleepy."

THEY turned Cardyce and High-Tom over to peace officers in Canyon City in the faint, early dawn. And then the four, Dick Redshirt and Mrs. Wrenn riding ahead, Nancy and Dan getting farther and farther behind them, they returned to the Wrenn home.

Dan had received first aid treatment in the little town, his wound washed and iodined and tightly bandaged. "It's nothing," he laughed into the worried faces of Nancy and her mother. But they vowed it was something; and that he was coming home with them and straight to bed. They'd send for a doctor. As for a nurse——

"I'm going to nurse you myself, Dan," said Nancy, and though her lip trembled her eyes were shining-bright.

"If you do," he warned her, "I'm going to play sick man as long as the law allows!"

Then they fell to talking about a great Mystery. How long was it that they had known each other? Was it just yesterday that he had ridden into her life?

"And got a hole shot through my hat."

"Don't, Dan!" She leaned toward him from her saddle and placed her fingers on his lips. For that, she got them kissed.

"Look at the sky, Dan. The sun's coming up soon, all pink and gold, now——"

She was so close that he could put his arm about her; their stirrups clicked together.

"You were right, Dan, about the lucky star."

"It's lucky to ride under stars like that," he said. "Luckier though to ride into a daybreak like this. Oh, Nancy——"

"Yes, Dan?" whispered Nancy Wrenn.

And "Little Alec" Nearly Sat Himself Down on Those Evil Rocks of Green Bottom Bend

THE CHASE AFTER "LITTLE ALEC"

By KARL DETZER

Author of "Tourist Rooms," "Country Boy," etc.

SOME river men are born pilots. Some learn the trade, and some, even though they try forty years, can't take a light-draft sand float through a hundred feet of water without snagging up.

There are some that have cat eyes and can steer all night without a government light to help them around a single bend, and some that use searchlights, and some that are daylight pilots and never try to be anything else.

And there are some that, should they lose the use of their hands and go blind into the bargain, would still have the gift. Turn them loose on the upper Nile in low water at midnight, five thousand miles from any daymark they ever laid eyes on, and they'll get the feel of the channel underfoot and steer as nice a course as any owner could wish for. Brad Reeder, down there in Kentucky, was one of these.

Brad had his papers on all the rivers in that middle section of the country, from the headwaters of the Mississippi to the Gulf, from Pittsburg on the Ohio down to Cairo, and on the Missouri and the Warrior and the Great Kanawha and the Tennessee.

Now anybody that's got his papers on the Tennessee, you can chalk up on the side of the barge as an A Number One pilot. For that's a river that needs knowing before you turn a man loose on it between the steering levers. It's a deceitful river, the Tennessee is, tricky as a moccasin and twice as mean.

But it never worried Brad Reeder. Why should it? He knew every bend and chute and ripple in it, every stone and snag from Owen's Island where it spills into the Ohio at Paducah, up past four states to Knoxville, Tennessee; knew the clearance of every bridge and the names of the people at every landing, and where the mussel beds lay, and what sycamore trees were safe to tie up to at night.

There wasn't anything Brad wouldn't try. One season you'd find him handling a show boat out of Baton Rouge, and the next he'd be pushing a fleet of railroad ties down from the Tennessee hills, or towing gravel from Twelve Mile Island to Louisville, or putting in his nights on the Cincinnati packet run.

YOU might see him anywhere on those rivers, standing up there in his black derby hat behind the spokes of the big wheel, and him so short that he had to lower the breast board in the pilot house so's he could look over it. Yet when you talked to him you never noticed how short he was, or how fat, either, or what small feet he had. All you could see was how capable he was.

He had no bad habits, unless you feel that way about a small pinch of snuff now and again. And he never was known to leave a silver dollar on top of a rock on the up-trip, so's to pick off a bottle of mountain dew from that same rock on the way down. And he never gambled, which is probably the reason he stayed single.

It was about twenty years ago he bought his towboat. Her name was the *Little Alec Murray*, and she wasn't much of a boat, any way you looked at her. But before he'd handled her a year, men got to talking. For Brad did things with that boat no one else would try to do.

She was only ninety-six feet from knee fenders to the back end of her pitman, and her boilers weren't all they should have been, and men that had run her said she handled cranky and, what's more, she needed red lead and paint.

But Brad Reeder took hold of the steering levers the way a smart horseman takes a hold of the reins, and that boat knew. Don't you ever think that a boat can't tell who's sitting up there in the knowledge box. This one did what Brad told her to. Why, before the first season was out, Brad Reeder could drive a row of tacks with *Little Alec Murray*.

You see, not being a marrying-sort of man, he tied up all his heart in that shabby little boat. He loved her like she was wife and child to him, petted her, talked mighty proud about her, and between trips he just used to sit there on the levee and look at her with a kind of mist across his eyes.

"Was there ever anything half as pretty as her afloat?" he'd say, and before anybody could answer, he'd go on quickly, like he didn't want an argument, "I tell you she's the sweetest towboat ever slapped the water, bar none!"

There was traffic on the Tennessee in those days. Three times a week a packet would splash up from St. Louis, stopping at any landing where there was freight, and

there were a million railroad ties a year to be towed out, and cotton and corn and peanuts. They were good pay loads, and the water was tricky, and there weren't half enough good Tennessee river pilots to handle all the fleets.

So naturally Brad Reeder put the *Little Alec* on the Tennessee run. He made money, Brad did. Plenty.

Then, all of a sudden, after fifteen years, he began to idle over longer between trips. Claimed he was having his boilers cleaned. But everybody knows the water in the Tennessee is clear. It never chokes up your flues with mud every time you run to Pittsburg Landing and back. No, it wasn't boilers that bothered Brad Reeder. It was something worse than that. It was no business.

PEOPLE said that river traffic was over, that the ties were all cut, and that it didn't pay to haul cotton any more, and that the peanuts were rotting in the ground for want of markets. Brad listened, for quite a while. Then he got mad.

"There's as much life in the old river as there ever was," he said. "I'm not goin' to let any motor trucks bother *me!*"

So he went out to beat the trucks and the railroads and the hard times, too, which was quite a proposition, even for as good a riverman as Brad. He'd stir up business for himself, he said. He had his money put away very thoughtfully in three banks, and he drew half of it and bought four barges, and put water-tight covers and hatches on two of them for perishables, and went and contracted with the planters and the tie cutters.

His plan was good enough, only it didn't work. He contracted for corn, to sell to the molasses factory at Evansville, and for peanuts to put on the open market at Paducah. Bought before the fields were harvested, and gave his word to pay. Nobody thought of agreeing on paper with him, for Brad Reeder's word of mouth was better contract than some men's first mortgages.

But when he came to sell, he couldn't sell. Not at half what he contracted for. Nobody wanted corn and peanuts, and the bottom had dropped out of the tie market. But the planters and tie cutters had trusted him, so he paid them, every cent.

It took all that he had left in the bank to do it, and he had to put a lien on his four barges and on the *Little Alec* besides. A business fellow named Jerry Hartshorne lent him the money and took the notes.

Hartshorne was a little man, too, no taller than Brad Reeder, and about half as broad. But he had a knowing kind of face, flat and plain and pale, with two small eyes, like a mussel shell that's had two buttons stamped out of it. You never did business with him if you could help it. He got the best of a man too often and you heard now and then that he'd misrepresented a thing in the telling, without a man seeing it in black and white.

Brad wouldn't listen, though.

"Y' can't be choosey, if you owe somebody money that needs it," he said, and he

took Hartshorne's check, holding it tight in his fingers so it wouldn't blow away and started up town to the bank.

Right off he paid the planters all the money he'd promised them, and then he went back to towing. He worked all season, but at last he had to admit that the river wasn't as active as it used to be.

"That will mend itself," he'd say. "Every river has its off years."

But it didn't mend. It got so's a steamboat whistle would bring the people running towards the landings, it was so unusual. Farmers gave up planting altogether and took to fishing for mussels, and they were

so poor you'd not count one pair of shoes to fifty men along the banks.

THE *Little Alec* was tied up half the time, and when she did run, she was towing only one barge or two at most, instead of a fleet of four or six like the old days. Then, a year ago, everybody heard that Jerry Hartshorne was pressing Brad Reeder to pay him the money Hartshorne had loaned. But Brad couldn't pay, so what could Hartshorne do? It never struck any of us that Hartshorne would try to take Brad's boat away from him.

To begin with, this Hartshorne wasn't a steamboat man. He was a business fellow and would deal in anything on which there was a chance of profit. He bought old barges and put a coat of paint on them and sold them at twice what he paid; he'd dicker in ties and lumber and real estate.

Once he even bought a load of sassafras logs, which shows what kind of steamboat man he was. For you can't bring sassafras down the Tennessee. It's bad luck, as everybody knows, and there isn't a riverman alive would think of working on a fleet that had a single stick of it aboard. So Hartshorne had to see his sassafras rot away on the bank and after that everybody knew he didn't belong on the river.

He came from up the Ohio somewhere, on the north bank, and he didn't have a scrap of paper that would let him touch a wheel. But he did have a son.

This son was a tall lad, twenty-one or two years old, with the same kind of a mussel-shell face that his father had. He wasn't a riverman either, but what does Jerry Hartshorne decide suddenly but that it'll help his business if this boy John becomes a pilot.

By this time Hartshorne owned a pair of small Diesel boats, little pug-nosed stern wheelers that had a lot of push in them, which he had got cheap in some trade or other. And about the same time there was great excitement up the Tennessee. The government was putting Wilson dam to work at Muscle Shoals, and was letting the first contracts for the Joe Wheeler dam, above that, and was talking about building the dam at Highland Landing.

Jerry Hartshorne had let one of his towboats out to the government, and he saw that if he had a Tennessee river pilot, he might sign up for some of the contract work, hauling machinery to the dams, and perhaps get some jobs towing material, too. So he went to Brad Reeder.

"How about your paying me the interest on my money?" Hartshorne asked. He always was a quiet spoken man, but his voice was sort of threaded, like the end of an iron pipe, so that it sank right into you and took hold.

"Why, mister," Brad told him, "I've promised to pay, you know. Give me one smart season——"

"The interest from last March is overdue," Hartshorne reminded him, "and September's coming."

"I never fell down yet," Brad answered.

"I aim to be friendly, Brad," Hartshorne said. "I'm not a man to skin a cat because it hollers nights. But if you could pay me part of it now——"

BRAD shook his head. He couldn't pay a cent now. Couldn't keep up with the wages of his mate and deckhand, and his fireman and engineer and watchman. Couldn't give the cook enough to feed them.

Hartshorne said, "Well, that's all right. Only I'm needing cash. Maybe I can throw a little business your way."

"How's that?" Brad asked, and you couldn't blame him for being suspicious.

"I got a contract to take some bridge steel up to Danville, Brad," Hartshorne told him. "It will make three or four tows. My Diesel boats are busy down at Cairo just now, and if you'll handle these tows for me—on one condition, that is——"

"Of course I will, and cheap," Brad agreed. "Anything to help pay off what I owe you."

"All right," Hartshorne said. "The condition is, my boy's to ride with you each trip. He's got his pilot papers now on the

Ohio, from West Point to Paducah. Want him to learn the Tennessee this summer."

"It can't be learnt in that short a time," Brad warned, "but he can cub with me, if that's what you want."

Jerry Hartshorne ought to have been smart enough to hear the change in Brad's voice. It would have upset any pilot's temper to hear how some boy is to learn the Tennessee *this* summer. This summer—that was the hitch. You can't learn an easy river that fast, let alone one as mean as the Tennessee. Besides, there's a funny thing about all pilots. They don't like to share their rivers, any more than Brad would want to share his boat.

A river's like a secret; either you know it or you don't, unless you have the gift and can steer all rivers like Brad can. But there isn't a pilot that I know about who'll give away his secrets, unless he takes a fancy to some cub. If he sees the cub has river sense, and is trying hard, and is like to make a steamboat man, then a pilot will tell him things. But only then. You can't buy a pilot's secrets, and that goes for every river anywhere.

But Brad let young John Hartshorne come aboard the *Little Alec* peaceful enough, and he took him up into the knowledge box and set an extra high stool for him, over to the right of the steering wheel where the young fellow could see everything he ought.

But the boy's first words sort of touched Brad off. They had pulled out of the chute above Paducah and had passed Ross Landing, and the kid was making notes sort of careless like on a pad, writing down the course and landmarks, and sitting with the chart book open on his knees. The water was high there, the way it usually is since the dam was built below Paducah, and Brad was pushing his tow of four wooden barges up the middle of the river.

"Well, this looks like an easy enough job," young Hartshorne said, kind of condescending. "Keep to the middle. Oughtn't to take anybody with any brains long to learn this."

Brad didn't answer, only helped himself to a small bit of snuff and pushed the steering levers a little to the right. But young Hartshorne was in a talky mood, and so he went on, telling Brad all about piloting. He was just that age when telling was easy for him, and besides, he had his father's big ideas.

"It took me only two trips to learn this reach of the Ohio," he boasted. "I went right up to Louisville to the examiner's office and drew my chart like the one in the book and answered the questions without a hitch. All you need to get your papers is just a little memory. Before many more years I'll have a license on all the western rivers."

"Oh?" Brad said. "You learnt the Ohio on two trips?" He squinted out across the water at a place he knew an old steamboat wreck was hidden, right on the edge of the channel and under the surface just enough to be deceitful. "It took me quite a spell to learn the Ohio, son. Fact is, I don't know it perfect yet."

"Mebbe you don't," young Hartshorne said. "You're pretty old," and he laughed, which was what you'd expect Jerry Hartshorne's son to do.

It made up Brad's mind for him. He decided if this lad found piloting so easy, let him learn his own way. I'm not saying he was right. You can decide that for yourself. I'm just saying Brad loved his boat and loved the rivers and the Hartshornes were pushing him for money.

BY THIS time they were passing the daymark at Jim Landing, fourteen miles up from the mouth of the river, and a mile below Big Chain o' Rocks. Now every riverman should know that when a place has got a name like that, it means something, and oughtn't to be passed over lightly.

But young John just looked at it on his chart and glanced at the course and at the banks, and didn't ask a question. Didn't even notice Brad shift over, so's to miss

the ledge that stuck up seventeen feet out of the bottom on the right side.

Brad could have told him all about that chain, how it starts at the Mississippi near Memphis and crosses the Tennessee and then the Cumberland and then the Green, and finally winds up on the shore of the Ohio. He could have showed him just where it was safe to put a boat through the chain and where not to try it in low water. But he didn't. He was feeling a little bit hurt over being told maybe he was too old to know very much.

So the young fellow said nothing and Brad said nothing, all the way up to Danville. They dropped their bridge steel, easy enough, and found the message waiting there for them. They were to push on to Riverton locks, where the state of Mississippi touches Tennessee, and bring down a fleet of empties.

They cast right off again and went on butting up the river. But after a while Brad's heart went soft on him.

This cub couldn't help being Jerry Hartshorne's son, he reasoned, and maybe he wasn't a bad lad, except for his mouth being too big for his size.

So Brad said, mighty pleasant, "Fellow, going back on the down trip, I'll show you a thing or two we might of missed coming up. There's a bit of nasty water around Big Chain o' Rocks."

"Needn't bother," young Hartshorne said. "I saw everything on the chart, and I've been setting it down on my notes. I'm not blind. Think I can't watch the channel? I'll remember more'n you ever forgot about it!"

Brad looked at him, sort of hurt. Then he spun the wheel far over to the left, and cut jagged across the river to the opposite shore. Young Hartshorne saw him do this, so he leaned forward on the let-down breast-board and sighted a big white sycamore with mangy bark on the left bank and made a note of it, and a log house without any roof on the right, and noted that, too.

But all the time the young squirt was writing out these landmarks, Brad Reeder was steering away from the channel, and straight across Green Bottom Bar, where he shouldn't ever go. He went right across the bar, and the gravel fill, and that wide bed of rocks, hidden by the water. Bad rocks, too. Just as bad as the Big Chain, which young Hartshorne hadn't noticed, either. They'll rip the hull out of any boat that scrapes them, and the current will sink it fast in the deep water just below.

Now, most riverman say you can't navigate Green Bottom, except you mind your channel. But remember, the Tennessee River was high at certain times last summer, while the engineers were making tests at Muscle Shoals, with all the wickets open, letting out water to capacity. The gage at Florence, Alabama, popped up from minus-two to seven feet at midnight, and thirty-two hours later, that head was passing over Green Bottom Bar, just as Brad Reeder put his boat across what usually was shallows.

Brad was a pilot, I tell you. He didn't need to look at the daily river bulletin, or read the gages on the bridge piers, either, to know how much water was flowing down the Tennessee, or what depth he had. He just glanced at the banks and got the feel of the river up through his feet, and he *knew*. A man can do that, when he has the gift.

He knew that there was plenty of depth on Green Bottom that minute to sail a boat drawing twice as much as his across the shallows. And another thing he knew; by this time tomorrow, there wouldn't be water enough where he was running now to sail a John-boat.

But he said nothing. He just crossed over the hidden reef of sharp rocks that lies abottom there, hungry to take a bite out of any hull, and he looked out the corners of his eyes to see young Hartshorne writing down more false landmarks in his notes.

So when they picked up the tow of empties at Riverton and started down toward home again, Bard Reeder held his peace. Nothing much happened, going down. The kid didn't watch very close,

since he thought he'd learned it all on the up trip.

THEY crossed Green Bottom just at dusk, and this young John fellow was at supper, so he didn't notice how the water came down across those rocks. It was scant, I tell you, not full from bank to bank the way it had been on the up trip.

Brad Reeder looked it over and steered safe, and when he got through, tried to remember how many good boats were rotting in the deep pool below the bar. There was the *Mary B.* and the *King of Cairo* and *Old Hercules*—he couldn't remember half of them. Not a fifth.

He got to wondering if he hadn't better call young Hartshorne and point everything out to him. The more he wondered the more his conscience hurt, and while he was

ruminating on it, the boy climbed up the ladder to the knowledge box.

Brad said, "Now right about here, I want to show you——"

But this boy just let go his mouth at the old man.

"Don't you fret," he interrupted. "I got it, on the up trip. I don't need anything else. I'm all ready for the examination."

"Examination?" Brad repeated.

"On the Tennessee," young Hartshorne said offhand.

Brad looked at him. Didn't say a word. There's nothing you could say to that. But he thought, "There isn't room on this river for a fellow like you. Take your examination, boy. They'll sure ask you about Green Bottom Bar. They always do. And you'll answer, smart. And the examiners will see that you don't know anything, and you'll not get your papers!"

He didn't say it, understand. Just thought it to himself, and took a bit of snuff.

Back in Paducah the next Monday afternoon, he heard young Hartshorne talking on the levee as how the Tennessee was easier than the Ohio, and making remarks about taking the examination before the month was out, so Brad just waited.

But that's what this cub did. Took the Tennessee examination, at the inspection office down to Cairo before he got to know the taste of river water. The inspectors asked him questions, and he answered them quick and smart, like a parrot that's learned the chart book. Wasn't hard, the way he could talk, I guess. Made them think he'd done the run a dozen times. But one question they didn't ask, for a change, was about Green Bottom Bar. Don't ask me why. They just didn't ask. And then he drew his map.

You know how it's done—the cub candidate just draws the course of the river on a plain piece of paper, only he doesn't have to put in all the bends, just the dayboards and the chutes and landmarks, and where the channel runs.

Well, the inspectors must have had a sleepy moment, or else they were so anxious to get pilots on the Tennessee that they didn't look close. Either that, or the map he drew was simply a copy of the chart-book, learned by memory. It's one of those things that don't happen once in a thousand times, but when it does happen, there's plenty trouble around the bend.

So young John got his papers, properly stamped and signed, to navigate the Tennessee from its mouth to Riverton.

The month was July, and once more there was plenty of traffic up the Tennessee. There were tows of steel and cement for the new dams, and barges loaded with heavy machinery, and sand suckers and gravel boats and gasoline tankers, government and contract work, and all of it in a hurry.

But not so much of a hurry as Jerry Hartshorne was. He came running to see Brad Reeder.

"Brad," he said, "I've got to have the money that I lent you. Got to have it now."

"Give me six more months, mister," Brad pleaded, but Hartshorne wouldn't hear to that.

"You used to have a good reputation, Brad," he said, and Brad swallowed hard.

"I aim to keep it good, mister," he answered very quietly.

"Then maybe we can make agreement," Hartshorne told him. He used his business voice, which was quiet and pointed, and he spoke his words slow and cautiously, as if he had to convince himself as well as Brad that he was talking honest. "You deed me a half interest in your old steamboat," he started to say, but Brad held up his hand and shook his head.

"A quarter interest," Hartshorne said. "A quarter interest in your boat. You keep on running her. I'll get the business for her. You take most of the profits."

"I don't aim to sell a quarter of her any more than you'd sell a quarter of your wife," Brad said slowly. "She's mine, every plank of her. She'll stay mine."

"I don't know about that," Hartshorne answered. "I need my money. If I put a libel on her, as I've got every right to do——"

"Oh, my!" Brad said. He was not a swearing man, so he just repeated, "Oh, my!"

HE SAW that he was beaten. He looked at Hartshorne the way a father must look at a kidnapper when he is caught, and he thought the same kind of thoughts. But there was nothing else to do. Brad was beaten before he started, if this got into the courts, so he signed over a quarter interest and went out to running tows again.

Then he took sick. The doctors told him it was his heart that ailed him, and they were right, even more so than they knew. The trouble was his heart, only it wasn't just worn out muscles. It was completely broken.

He started to decline the day he signed over the quarter interest in *Little Alec* to Jerry Hartshorne. Even his flesh began to fall away, like age had sneaked up on him unexpectedly. But he kept on steamboating.

He made three good pay trips, towing out four barges at a line, lashing in double pairs, like in the old days when steamboating was steamboating. Everybody along the waterfront hoped that this would take his mind off his troubles. But it didn't. They just bored in on him, and he got thinner and had nothing to say to anybody.

A man in such a mind is ready to catch anything that's catching, so the ague came along and put Brad down. Of course, anybody's likely to get the ague, that runs the upper river in the summer, especially if he doesn't fortify himself with quinine morning and night. But it hit Brad hard, fever one day and the shakes the next, and at last he had to give up and go to bed.

Jerry Hartshorne, meantime, had grabbed himself another boat. He had put young John to running it, up Evansville way, pushing coal on the down haul, and on the up river tow he was handling gypsum and feldspar from the river mines.

It wasn't steady, though, and there wasn't much money in it, so Jerry pulled the boy off of it, when Brad took sick, and brought him back to Paducah, and told him to ready up the *Little Alec* for a trip.

The Greater Southlands Sand Company had just got the government contract to furnish a half million yards of gravel for the approaches to the new Joe Wheeler dam, and it had sent its big digger up from New Orleans. A down-river towboat took it as far as the mouth of the Tennessee, and Jerry Hartshorne had the contract to push it the rest of the way. There was fourteen hundred dollars in it

for him, and any riverman will tell you it was worth every cent of it.

For this wasn't any ordinary sand sucker. It was a ladder-bucket digger, with fifty buckets of four and a half foot capacity, on an endless belt, and its digging ladder would let down forty feet below the surface to where the gravel beds are. The outfit weighed twelve hundred tons and drew almost five feet of water, and it was so broad that it would fit the rock channels in the chutes above Danville, without three feet to spare, either side.

So with Brad Reeder shaking in his bed, the older Hartshorne put his quarter-interest authority to work. He set young John down on the high stool in the knowledge box of the *Little Alec*, called Brad's crew together, and told them to take hold of that digger and push her up the Tennessee.

The crew kicked quite a little, of course. But young John tacked his papers, that didn't have a flyspeck on them, above the headboard, and Jerry, stretching truth a little, though of course the crew didn't know that, told 'em it was all right with Brad. They went aboard, muttering; but they went, and that's all Hartshorne cared about.

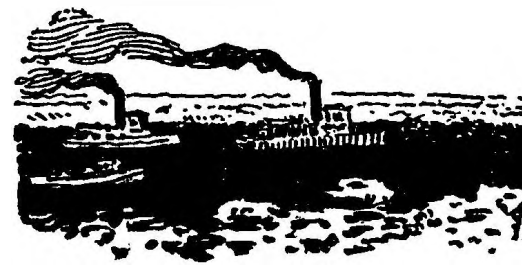
You can't have any idea how ridiculous it was to send that tow boat up river with such a cub between the levers, unless you happen to be a riverman and understand such things. That digger was worth half a million dollars, and Hartshorne got his bond to take it in tow on the understanding that Brad, and nobody else, would pilot it. The whole thing proves what everybody always said, that Jerry Hartshorne was nothing except a business fellow, and a little on the slick side.

They started out on as hot an afternoon as ever set the river to steaming where small waves wash the white paving stones on the landing at Paducah. The water looked thick as split pea soup, there where the Tennessee meets the Ohio, and its surface was scummy like a film of oil.

That's how things stood at three o'clock, when the tow passed out of sight around the bend beyond Owen's Island and headed southeast up the Tennessee.

THE day stayed hot, sticky hot without wind, and the night was no better. There was a kind of warning in the air. Old Brad Reeder felt it, even if he didn't guess that the *Little Alec* was out. It was his time at fever. Some of the rivermen went out to spend the evening with him, and first thing they see is, the heat and the fever and the warning in the air of storm had all got mixed up with his personal troubles in his thoughts.

He kept talking about the *Little Alec*, talking crazy, and they discovered that in



his fever he had forgot she was a boat and was thinking she was—well, a person, like his child, maybe, if he'd had a child.

"Hartshorne won't be good to her," Brad said, rising up on the pillows. His eyes were so dull with fever that they looked like pieces of water-worn glass. "I'll not let Jerry Hartshorne share her! He wants her for that boy of his."

Then he dropped back and lay just staring at the ceiling. Nobody said a word, only looked at one another, everybody wondering where young John Hartshorne was with Brad's boat that minute.

Of course, if anyone had known about Brad cutting across Green Bottom Bar that one time when the water was high there and young John was talking so uppety, the cub never would have been allowed to go out in the first place. But Brad hadn't told that. Not to anybody.

Next morning still was hot. But at about eight o'clock a coldish wind jumped out of the northwest. A rough wind, like sandpaper. It filled the air with bits of

trash and with the smell of dust, and chafed the brown river water till it fastened up in a million little white patches, all over, close together.

It was a storm. Sort of a small tornado. The worst of it didn't hit the town. It passed inland several miles, across the hills, and then it found the valley of the Tennessee and started up it. Not a bad tornado, just a little one. The kind that knocks down barns that should have been knocked down long ago.

But it tore up telephone lines, too, all the way from the Ohio to the Riverton canal, there where Alabama and Mississippi touch each other. There wasn't any rain up river to raise the water level, but at Paducah the rain fell hard and cold, after the wind had passed.

And about eleven o'clock, who should be standing on the wet stones of the river bank, below the foot of Broadway, but Brad Reeder. He was wrapped up in two sweaters and a coat, and shaking all over with the ague. He stood and looked at the river. Then he stepped forward a bit and looked again, as if he couldn't believe his eyes. At last he started to run, down toward the landing.

Some riverman caught up with him and was he wild!

"Where is she?" he was asking. "Where is she?"

When they told him Jerry Hartshorne had sent the *Little Alec* out, he called them liars and asked all over again. Quite a crowd gathered, of course. And who should come along then but Jerry Hartshorne.

He was smiling a small, one-sided smile, and looking up-river where a Diesel boat was grumbling around the bend. It was one of his down-river towboats, running light.

Brad began to scream at Hartshorne as soon as he saw him. The ague made his voice unsteady.

"That cub o' yours will sink my boat!" he yelled. "On Green Bottom."

"Green Bottom?" Hartshorne repeated. "He doesn't know that channel. He'll sink my boat!"

"Why don't he know the channel?" Hartshorne demanded, as if his boy could learn anything anybody could—which he could, I suppose, give him time.

At last Brad made him understand, and Hartshorne demanded, "You showed him wrong course?"

"I was willing to show him the right," Brad countered. "He wouldn't listen. But that ain't the point now. You took my boat without me in it!" He had pulled off his own coat and dropped it on the stones. Hartshorne didn't take offense at what Brad had told him, funny enough. It was probably just what he would have done himself, under like circumstances. He just started to walk fast up the bank.

"I'll telephone ahead to warn him," he said. But he was back in five minutes, looking more worried. "All telephone lines are out. Can't get Johnsonville or Danville or Savannah." He was beginning to get angry, and everybody thought he was going to hit Brad. He tightened up his fist and stepped forward quickly, but Brad just stood there shaking with ague and swallowing.

At that second the little Diesel boat sounded her air whistle, and Brad swung around and stared at her. She was one of these new boats, too short for comfort, and her name was the *Mary Gray*. Brad, still looking at her, said again, between shakings of his teeth, "Y' don't *own* my boat! Y' only got a quarter of her. It was stealing to take her out! When? When did that cub take her?"

And all this time he never asked a word about what the *Little Alec* was pushing.

"Three o'clock yesterday," Hartshorne answered, "but I didn't steal her."

"Three," Brad repeated to himself. "He can't be far. Tied up last night, that's sure. He'd of set her high and dry on the first sand bar ripple if he'd tried to run after dark." He turned on Hartshorne. "Got enough oil in that tub?" He pointed at the Diesel boat.

Hartshorne nodded. He didn't quite understand.

"We'll catch her," Brad said. "You and me. If he tries to cross Green Bottom, he'll sink."

"He will, if you showed him wrong," Hartshorne bellowed. "Damn you, Brad Reeder, that tow's worth half a million!"

You see, he wasn't thinking of the *Little Alec*. He was thinking of that half million dollar dredge, just as most men would, but with Brad, it was just the *Little Alec*. They went aboard the Diesel boat on the run, leaving its regular pilot standing on the bank, and a deckhand pulled in the stage, and Brad climbed to the knowledge box and sounded off the air whistle.

AND first thing you knew, they were swinging up the Tennessee.

Of course Brad's fever came back before the middle of the afternoon. There he sat, on the stool between the levers, his eyes so glassy you'd think he couldn't see out of them. But he could. He saw everything. Saw the banks sliding past at six miles an hour, but still he wasn't half satisfied. His right hand kept reaching overhead and yanking the cord, giving the engine room the gong.

If he gonged once that afternoon and night, he gonged a thousand times, and hollered every time he did it.

"More steam, I tell you! All you've got. Hold down that safety valve! Where *is* that lazy fireman? I want a head of steam!"

He was a steamboat man, you see, and he wasn't accustomed to oil engines. He didn't get any satisfaction out of six miles an hour there on the still water that backs up behind the dam at Mile 939.

"He'll drown her," he kept yelling. "Drown her on Green Bottom!" And still never a word about the dredge.

Jerry Hartshorne learned not to talk after the first bend. But he'd come and stand in the doorway of the knowledge box, even though Brad never seemed to see him or know that he was there. Jerry was thinking more and more of his promise to his bondsmen; his promise that Brad Reeder would pilot that dredge. Brad didn't know anything about that promise, and wouldn't have cared if he had.

That Diesel nearly shook itself to pieces. It went up past those little landings pushing white water away from its head end, with the buckets of its stern wheel spanking the river like it never got spanked in all its years.

Brad kept right on hollering all the way.

"Another mile! We've got to make it! He'll sink her! Drown my crew!"

The weather had turned hot again, which didn't help Brad's fever, and the sky clouded over and breathing was hard for everybody aboard. It was three o'clock when that Diesel boat went grumbling around Widow Reynold's bar; at five o'clock it passed Blood River.

And every bend, Brad looked ahead, fearful he'd see the *Little Alec* piled up on a bar. But this John Boy was having luck. Either luck, or the old river, knowing it was Brad's boat, was kind to it. But it wouldn't be kind at Green Bottom, no matter whose boat it was. It would be mean, plenty. It would make the boy pay on Green Bottom for taking his examination before he was ready for it. Brad knew it, and he gonged for steam till you'd thought the lanyard would wear out.

There were no government beacons on the Tennessee that summer, for sake of economy. But the empty boards, without the lanterns, stood up on the banks with their cross-arms painted white, sticking out from trees on both sides of the empty lantern shelves. At Sandy River, you could see the cross bars of the unlighted beacon on the left side, gray against the shadows of the bluff, and three miles farther up, the yellow reflection of candles in the lonesome house at Bradford Landing.

NIGHT had come early, and with it rain and thunder, but Brad paid no attention. He didn't need lights. Day and night were all the same to him. Thunder

didn't bother him, either. He was sitting forward on the high stool, short legs bent up, heels hooked into the top rung, hands on the levers, eyes straight in front, when Jerry Hartshorne came up to the knowledge box and said:

"Aren't you going to use your searchlight?" It was the first time he had spoken in sixty-eight miles.

"Get out of here!" Brad answered without looking up. "You didn't own all my boat!"

"But you can't see," Hartshorne argued, still thinking of the searchlight, and letting what Brad said about him go. "I don't want this boat piled up, too——"

"I can see right smart," Brad answered. "Oh, I can see!" He laughed then, and there was so much fever in the laugh that Jerry Hartshorne skipped backward out of sight and said nothing more. And Brad, squinting left and right at the dark banks under the rain, gonged the engine room for more speed again.

The lightning began at Leatherwood Shoals. It came only once in a while, very bright, and flooded the whole river sharper than day. It would have blinded most pilots. At least they would have tied up to the bank at the first flash. But it didn't blind Brad.

It showed him the whole river, and both banks, and between the flashes it was the gift that told him where he ought to go. And that's where he went, still watching at every flash for the wreck of the *Little Alec*.

The rain fell faster and the night grew darker except for the flashes, and Brad kept going. He held the channel by the feel of it, that soaked clear through his fever. He was crazy with fever, but that didn't take the gift away from him. He gonged the engine room every five minutes. And along about half past eight, he began to pray.

Now, Brad was not a praying sort of man, any more than a swearing sort. So when he began to pray, the deck hand and the mate, who had slipped quietly into the knowledge box behind Jerry Hartshorne, began to worry. Brad prayed louder than the rain or the grumble of the engine. You could hear his voice right through the thunder and there was something fearful in it.

He prayed for the *Little Alec* and he prayed for punishment for Hartshorne for taking his boat without him, and he prayed for speed. He knew that young John must have tied up somewhere last night, but where, and how long? Was there still time to catch him before he reached Green Bottom? He prayed and gonged and prayed and the lightning came faster.

Once, in a flash, he thought he saw his boat, below Hurricane Towhead. But the next flash showed that he was mistaken, so after that he just went back to praying. The little Diesel pounded under the bridge at Danville about half past ten. At eleven it came up to the foot of White Oak Island. And still no sign of the *Little Alec* and her tow.

Brad moaned to himself, "We must of passed her! She must be sunk, somewhere behind us!"

And then he started praying again, and prayed till midnight, when he came to Turkey Island. The current was strong there, and Green Bottom Bar lay just five miles ahead. And by this time Brad was praying for his own soul as much as for anything else, for it came over him that if his boat *had* got as far as Green Bottom, and piled up there, it was sort of his fault, in a left handed way, for crossing it, like he did that time in high water, with this Hartshorne boy watching.

THE crew had all come out in front, down on the main deck, even the engineer, and they were hanging over the knee fenders, with their eyes propped open, waiting for a lightning flash.

But the lightning had stopped. It just wouldn't flash any more. And Brad kept on, steering by the feel of the river, till he came up to the next bend.

Then he yelled. And the crew saw the

long narrow streak of white, away up ahead. It was a searchlight, no doubt of it.

Young John Hartshorne hadn't tied up. Which showed him to be all the greener on the river. He was piloting by his lights and pointing his tow straight at the middle of Green Bottom, where the rocks are worst, and pushing the digger with all the steam the plucky *Little Alec* had in her.

Brad kicked over his high stool and stood up there between the levers, and seemed to be trying to put more speed in the big pitmans, while they pounded back and forth turning the stern wheel.

Jerry Hartshorne cried, "Will we make it?" but Brad didn't answer, just hollered for steam and hollered at the *Little Alec*

to go slow. Talked to that boat of his up there ahead like it was a baby. Begged it to stop. Tried to reason with it, across two miles of water. But it kept right on going ahead, with its lights pecking first at the left bank, then at the right, and stopping now and then to make big round white spots on the housing of the digger.

Brad was four miles below Green Bottom, now, and the tow less than two miles, and it was in quieter water than Brad was, just at the minute. So he wasn't pulling up on it any too fast.

Suddenly he turned on his own searchlights and he swung them with the overhead wheel, and he blinked them, and swung them, trying to get young Hartshorne to pay attention. But young Hartshorne wouldn't. Brad sounded his air whistle, but that didn't do any good, either.

So finally Brad turned his lights full on the *Little Alec*, thinking that the boy would understand. But instead of understanding, that kid turned his own lights back on Brad, being playful, and blinded the old man.

Blinded him for a minute. And then he got the feel again and in the next ten minutes, he gained half a mile. And another half mile in ten minutes more. He was only a mile behind the *Little Alec*, and the *Little Alec* only a mile below the bar, and heading straight for it.

The engineer jumped up from the knee fenders and ran back to his engine room, to try to coax another revolution out of those old Diesels. Brad had turned off his own lights. He didn't dare take a chance on getting another shot in the eye. But still the *Little Alec* went right on. Till she was three quarters of a mile—half a mile—a third of a mile—below the bar.

And Brad coming right behind him.

Yes, he gained a little. And a little bit more. Till finally, when he turned on his searchlight again, he could see the cracks between the boards on the *Little Alec's* deckhousing and the guy wires on her stack.

He was only two boatlengths behind her. But the head end of the big digger with the *Alec* behind, pushing, wasn't two lengths free of the bar. Brad sounded his whistle again. But he knew it wouldn't do any good. That kid was too stubborn. So when the echoes quit, Brad yelled for the decker to take a loop to the side.

"Make her fast!" he yelled. "Fast to the *Alec!* Sure, that's what I mean! Quick!"

The engineer saw what he was aiming to do, although Jerry Hartshorne didn't. Brad swung his front end past the sternwheel of the *Little Alec* and over against the side of her and the deckhand jumped aboard.

He dropped the loop over a niggerhead, and the mate was ready to take up slack, and Brad rang for full speed astern. Astern, see? Not ahead.

The wheel of the Diesel began to slap the water backward. The rope between the two boats groaned, but it held. It didn't

do the *Little Alec* much good to push the tow, with the Diesel pulling back on her. The big digger went slower and slower, with its front end so close to those rocks you could spit on them.

THEN Brad knocked Jerry Hartshorne aside, and ran down the ladder, and jumped over to his own *Little Alec,* and up to his own knowledge box. He caught young John by the neck and threw him aside, and Brad stepped in between his own levers and he rang for the engines to stop.

The *Little Alec* began to back away from the bar. And Brad sent his own mate back over to the Diesel boat, to tell them to cast off their line.

"Take her to a good bank and tie her up," he said, "till morning. It's only old timers try to run this river in a storm at night."

Young John was coming up on his hands and knees from the corner where Brad had thrown him, and he seemed to want to fight for some reason or other. But before he could start, his father was standing there.

"Hold on," Jerry Hartshorne said. "I was some to blame for this myself. Captain," he said, speaking to Brad, "what you plan to do now?"

Brad looked at him a moment, and he looked at the Diesel boat pulling away, and he looked at the banks and at the water ahead.

"I'm taking her through this bad stretch," he said. And he took her through. Clean as a whistle, without scraping once. Up above the bar, he found a sycamore tree, and he tied up for the night.

Jerry Hartshorne went home on the Diesel in the morning. He was for taking his boy with him, but old Brad would have none of that.

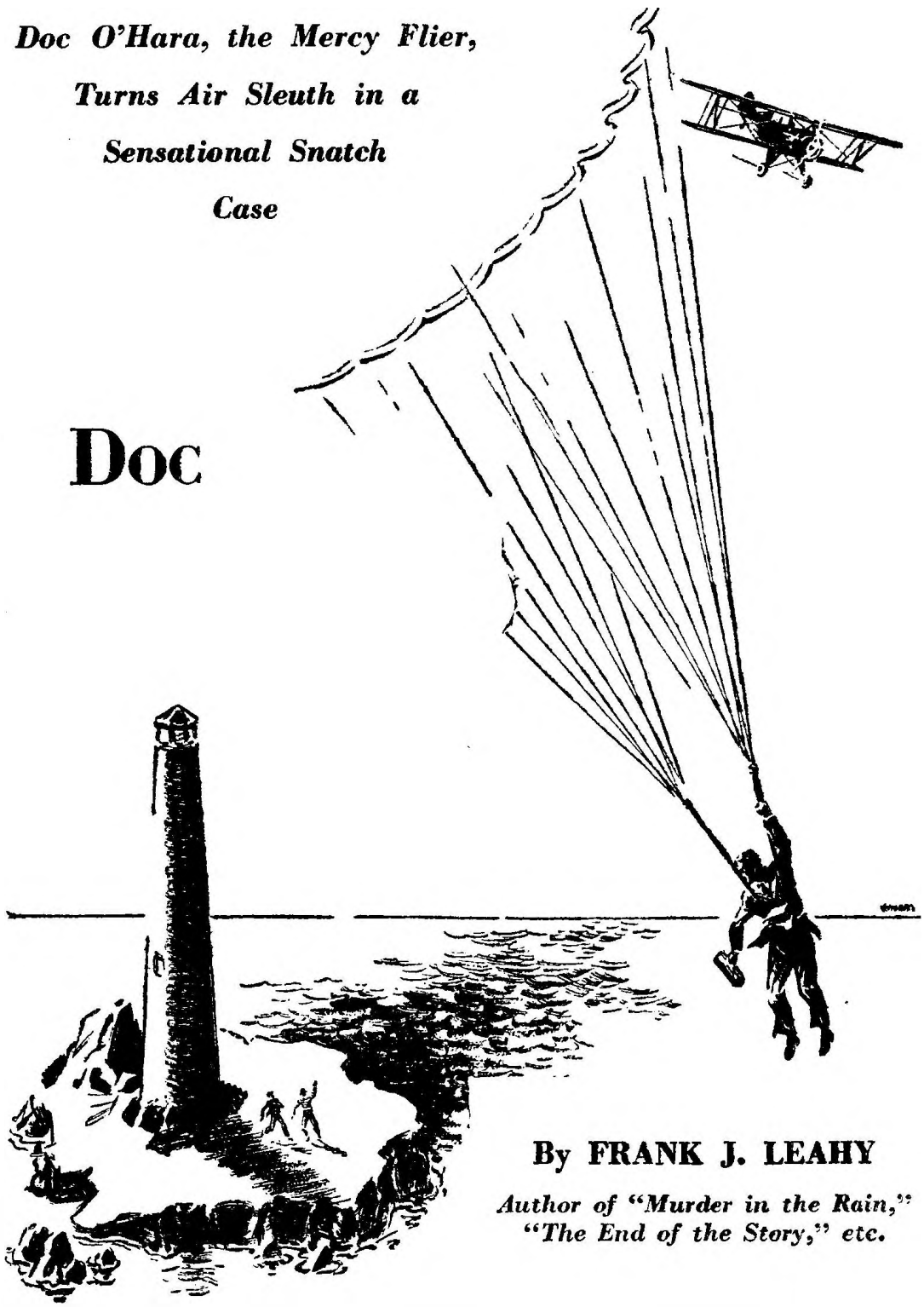
"The kid'll never learn the river," Brad said, "if he don't get showed. And I'll show him. Show him right, this time, whether he wants me to, or not. He's going along the whole way."

Brad took him, and showed him. It was the fever did it, some way. Made his conscience hurt, to think he'd lied about the river to anybody. Oh, sure, he took the digger all the way. Got his boat back, too, when the insurance company found out about Jerry Hartshorne's trick on them, sending his green boy, when they thought Brad was doing the job.

And the boy? Why, Brad signed him on as deck hand the next trip. Explained how in ten years of decking, he might make a riverman yet. And there's no telling. Maybe he will.

Doc O'Hara, the Mercy Flier, Turns Air Sleuth in a Sensational Snatch Case

Doc



By FRANK J. LEAHY

Author of "Murder in the Rain," "The End of the Story," etc.

A SMART little Boeing roared down from the layer of high cirrus. The gun was out. A quick landing was made, and it came sizzling across the airport. Shortly Robert "Doc" O'Hara, his well-worn flying leather streaked with oil, burst into the field director's office.

"Say, Bert, get that oil line o' mine taped, will you? An' gas me up. An' dig me up somebody good, to fly my crate. I gotta make a parachute jump."

He had to yell, for he could hardly hear his own words, from the outside, after the long hammering of his motor on his auditory nerves. But they carried, even above the thunder of a Waco "C" cabin biplane which was just then circling over the roof.

The field director frowned.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Somebody hurt, on Destruction Point Lighthouse rock."

"How d'you know?"

"Got a wigwag from the keeper as I passed over. I'd have made a landing——"

"On the rock? It couldn't be done."

"Don't I know it?" said Doc. "You couldn't paste a postage stamp alongside that lighthouse. That's why I got to bail out, an' have a pilot who can hang a plane in the air for a second, while I do it."

"It's suicide," protested the field director.

"Can't help that. Shake it up, will you?"

The field director hurried out and in a minute Doc saw a couple of mechanics clambering over the back of his Boeing. O. K. Now if Bert was good enough to find a pilot who could pull a stunt, and pull it right.

The field director didn't come back, so presently Doc went out. The mechanics were hard at it on his plane.

"Goin' some place, Doc?" one of them asked.

"Can't tell."

He might be going to hell; he knew he couldn't say for sure about that. A twelve-mile-long spit of land, Destruction Point was thickly timbered to its tip; and the tip itself was a group of rocks whose associations were storm, fog, pounding sea, and desolate coast. Only one of the huge blocks of granite was inhabited. On it was perched a lighthouse, and in dirty weather, as today, its keepers were isolated. To land a plane there was practically an impossibility. So the next best thing would have to be attempted; bail out and trust to luck, suicide or not. Even if he landed on the rock, and not in the sea, he might need some medical attention himself. But if he didn't land, that somebody who was hurt might die. If somebody died, when an appeal had been made, and caught, and he hadn't tried to help—well, he'd no longer consider himself worthy of the title that had been conferred upon him. All up and down the coast he was known to men on far-flung North Pacific islands and lonely points of the mainland as plain "Doc", but formally as "the mercy flier." There was a kick in it, such as he'd never got out of practicing medicine on the home lot, before turning air-minded and roughneck.

HE GAVE the work the mechanics were doing a long, careful scrutiny. Other mechanics were beginning to fuss around the little Waco C which had followed him in and landed on the macadamized runway and wheeled onto the concrete apron three hangars down. Nice ship! They were taking off the cowling and leaning it against the spatted wheels.

"Like to have that baby," Doc said. "Who's she belong to?"

One of the mechanics followed Doc's line of vision.

"Dunno. Never saw her before."

"I could make her act, I bet you."

The field director emerged from a hangar, started toward Doc's Boeing, seemed to change his mind, and in a moment he was standing at the Waco's wing-tip, talking to the ship's pilot.

Overhead, trouble was brewing in the weather line, with a low-pressure area coming on. The wind was picking up. On the horizon, somewhere out over the sea, hung an ominous bank of storm-filled cumulo-nimbus.

Doc knew his chances of landing safely on Destruction Point, today, were precisely those of a Chinaman. What he'd have to do would be what he'd made a precarious business of doing, back in stunting days, at fairs and carnivals, bailing out from a plane hanging by its prop, and landing on a marked spot. But in those days he'd had "Soapy" Sothern at the stick. And Soapy had teetered their crate on the edge of a tailspin once too often. Doc could see

again, as he'd seen a thousand and one times since, that old rebuilt Curtiss, from which he'd parachuted, hanging in mid-air. He felt again the sudden fierce gust that had brushed him and caught under the plane's wing and swept her into a disastrous spin, heard again the crash, the explosion. He had shut his eyes to the flames which had consumed Soapy; he shut them again, now, in his momentary retrospective visualization. Would the pilot Bert got—if he could possibly get one crazy enough to attempt such a stunt, in this weather—fare any better than Soapy had? Wasn't it asking too much of a guy to so risk his life, just because somebody on Destruction Point had stubbed a toe or cut a finger? He, Doc O'Hara, wouldn't be taking half the chance his pilot would take. But what else could be done? The only way out was to land a plane there; and there wasn't enough room to paste a postage stamp.

THE approach of the field director, with the Waco's pilot in tow, cut in upon the thought: "Well, if it's in the cards, we'll make it. An' if it ain't——"

"Here's your man," said Bert, and drew Doc aside for a word in private. "He's a good flier. He owes me a bunch of money, from away back, and I threatened to hold him and his Waco here unless he forked over, or flew you to Destruction Point today. He chose the latter way out—see?"

Doc nodded.

"He'll fly you in his own plane," the field director added.

"O.K."

"He's having a thrown push rod replaced. It won't take long."

"Fine."

"Then they'll gas 'er up and you can be on your suicidal way."

"Swell."

The field director turned to the Waco's pilot.

"Meet Doc O'Hara. Doc—Chuck Farley."

The man looked at Doc with eyes in which there sparkled no friendly notice or salutation. They were black eyes, with a hint of a cast in one of them. He made no move to grip the hand which Doc held out. Standing, feet wide, and his jaw grimly set, there was hostility registered in his whole bearing.

"Can't say I ever heard of you before," he said.

"Then you ought to get around more," commented the field director, and walked away.

"Ever hang a plane in the air, dead still?" asked Doc.

"No."

"Well, you can try. 'S all any man can do." Doc fetched his kit of medicines and first aid equipment from the Boeing and queried, "Ready?"

The other nodded tersely and started toward the Waco, and Doc watched the man curiously out of the corner of his eye as he fell into step with him. Bert had certainly palmed off a pleasant guy to pull the necessary "Soapy Sothern." What was eating Farley, anyhow? Sore, maybe, because he'd blundered into an airport directed by one who had him on the cuff.

The mechanics were still working on the trim little cabin ship. Doc peered inside, then obeyed a sudden impulse and climbed up into the control cockpit. He was putting

the plane through an imaginary trick maneuver when the field director poked his head in the door.

"Hey, Doc, you'd better sit tight around here. The weather bureau reports a gale working up, a nor'wester."

Doc's hand dropped from the stick and he looked around at the other, with his lip curled sardonically.

"T'hell with it! I got work to do."

"But that's just bravado, Doc. Use your head."

"I am. Long as Farley uses his——"

"All right, be nuts then." The field director turned away, with a gesture of hopelessness.

"Hurry this crate, will you, Bert?" Doc called after him.

DOWN along the apron a fuel truck was moving toward the Waco. The mechanics were replacing the cowling, Farley was watching them with his black eyes. Three planes winged in from opposite points of the sky, like storm-alarmed birds seeking shelter. A spiral of dust raced across the field.

A young man in a raincoat and a slouch hat came out from the lunch room. There was a gold-toothed grin on his face as he climbed in with Doc.

"Hi-ya, Good-lookin'?"

Doc favored the other with a terse nod of his head. One of those damned reporters again. They got on Doc's nerves, always hanging around, sniffing for headlines. What if they did have to live? With them, if a flier didn't span an ocean or find a new pole he was just a bum, and if he did do something above ordinariness they called him a hero, what the hell!

"I hear you're out for a little publicity today, Doc?"

"Yeah."

"Afraid I won't be able to do much for you," said the reporter.

"You—ha!"

"I mean my paper. Or any rag. Whatever stunt you pull won't have a chance in the big news line. Know why?"

"I don't even care," said Doc. "So what?"

"Listen. You know that Freylingham kidnapping? Well, I got it on the phone the ransom's just been paid and the kid's due to be released today. His story'll splash right over into the comics, chances are, so where do you think you'll rate for a write-up?"

"Ah, who wants any o' that bolony?"

"Y-y-yeh! As if you don't always eat it up!"

The reporter gave Doc a friendly slap on the shoulder and climbed out.

"Write-up!" Doc snorted. "I'll take strawberries."

He stepped down from the control seat and joined Farley again on the ground.

"Hangin' around like this," he growled, "drives me nuts—when there's somethin' to be done in a hurry."

The Waco's pilot nodded.

"Me, too."

"Were you goin' some place, yourself?"

"Naturally."

"Where?"

Farley burnt him with a quick, black look.

"Guess."

Doc shrugged.

"I give up. But you won't be sorry for helpin' me out this way."

The man said nothing. Doc crossed to his Boeing, returned to the Waco with his parachute and began wriggling his lithe, six-foot frame into its straps. They were still fueling the plane. In the western sky the wall of clouds had enlarged; in the east the one clear porch of the heavens was rapidly being closed. An immense peal of thunder suddenly burst upon the air.

The reporter, who was still hanging around, yelled at Doc:

"Sure gonna get your Saturday bath today, Good-lookin'."

"I can take it," replied Doc.

The field director approached him from behind, gripped his arm and again drew him aside. Farley flung them a darkly suspicious sidelong glance.

"Listen," said Bert. "I just got a call from the police."

"Yeah? They got onto you at last, eh?" said Doc, grinning.

"They're all hopped up about the delivery of the Freylingham kid today. They have a hunch he'll be set down from a plane."

"The hell! From where?"

"How should I know that? Or where he'll be landed. And that's just the point. The cops want the air kept clear as possible. Otherwise, the snatchers are liable to get dirty, hold the kid a while longer, or bump him off, if they suspect they're being watched, or watched for."

"I get it," said Doc. "You want me to sit around here an' smoke my pipe?"

"Yep."

Doc shook his head.

"Nothin' doin', Bert. Sorry, but I gotta think only about that hurt guy out on Destruction Point. I won't spoil anything, don't worry."

THE fueling of the Waco was completed at last.

"Let's go!" said Doc.

Farley climbed into the control cockpit. Doc followed, closed the door.

"Happy landings!" called the field director.

There was the angry wail of the inertia starter, the Waco's motor popped deafeningly, idled a moment, then roared into full power. The mechanics pulled the chocks out from under the wheels. The reporter flashed Doc a gold-toothed grin, the field director waved. The plane raced across the airport, squared around, and in an instant it was streaking down the long runway. It banked once, bounced, swayed dangerously, then suddenly it leaped into the gusty air.

"Nice take-off," Doc yelled in the pilot's ear.

"Like it?"

"You know where Destruction Point is?"

"Yes."

"O.K."

Farley lifted the ship skyward, gun out. Behind glass the panel instruments showed everything working perfectly.

"Sweet job," Doc commented. "Where'd you get it?"

"Santa Claus."

Doc shrugged. Grouchy, this bird. Worried, maybe, about the weather. Sissy. But he'd shown he was anxious enough to get into the air, on his own business—whatever that might be. There were plenty of phonies flying around. Anyhow, he could handle a stick, and if he could hang this plane in the air for a split second—well, maybe Soapy Sothern would smile down upon him from his heavenly height.

The motor roared thunderously in their ears. The gleaming prop ripped a hole in the gray gauze hanging from the racing clouds. They began to cross a range of demi-mountains, bad for flying. Have to hold to the ceiling, at the same time keep below the storm. Have to sharpen an eye for that kidnapper plane, too. Getting flashy in the snatch racket; no wonder, when they could knock down a couple hundred grand for a week's work, as in the Freylingham case. But if they brought their victim back from the nowhere of their hideout, really brought him back, and brought him back alive and well, all right, let the rats clutter up the air, if they figured flying made it any safer for them.

"I'd hate to queer the Freylingham kid's release," Doc said aloud, "but I'd sure like to get in a hot dog-fight with a snatcher."

Farley didn't seem to hear that. Outside, the steel giant was drumming out its thunder. The ears couldn't hold it, nor make room for idle talk. But Doc couldn't help wondering what the other was thinking. Worrying, was he, about being able to pull the stunt demanded of him? Probably not, was more likely concerned only about getting back on his own sky course. Some guys were like that, couldn't do another a favor without grumbling. And how could Farley's business be so important, when he hadn't attempted to tell Bert about it? Bert wouldn't have held him, or forced him

into this flight, if Farley'd stated a good reason why he was in such a rush.

"Nice guy, that Bert Campbell," he called into the pilot's ear.

"Yeh," sourly.

"Known him long?"

"Too long."

"He was just tellin' me about that Freylingham case."

No reply. But a tightening of Farley's thin, straight lips.

"He said the cops are wise the kid's bein' delivered by plane."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. An' I'm one hombre'd like to meet a kidnapper a few thousand feet up."

"What would you do?"

"Oh, I might say boo! to him."

"And the kidnapper," said Farley, "might say bang! to the kid, if you did."

"I guess not. What good would it do him to bump the kid at that stage o' the game?"

"It might not do that napper any good," replied Farley, "but it'd make things easier for the next one."

"Ah, nuts to that theory!" snarled Doc. "Anyhow, let's change the subject. D'you ever know Soapy Sothern?"

"No."

"He was my pal. He cracked up."

"Doing this stunt you want me to do, hah?"

Doc nodded shortly—caught in the trap of his own words.

"His number was up, is all," he said. "That's the way I figure we all get ours—when our numbers come up."

FROM there he fell into Farley's mood of strained watchfulness. They suddenly bumped into a rain squall, and ground speed was reduced by a strong headwind. The mountains ended abruptly, and there was the sea, endless miles of it, whitecapped as far as the eye could reach. Farley turned the plane slightly, to follow the coastline northward. Not a ship anywhere; the sea was deserted. So was the turbulent sky, but for their laboring Waco—altitude 1200, air speed better than ninety miles an hour.

Doc kept watching, over the pilot's shoulder. Presently he reached for the binoculars and trained them upon the rootlike spit of land extending out into the gray sea. Destruction Point. He thrust the glass into Farley's free hand and pointed off to the left of the plane's nose. Farley focused the glass to his own eyes, looked steadily for a moment.

"What about it?" he asked.

"That's the lighthouse," Doc shouted back, "where we do our stuff."

The squall ended suddenly. A break showed in the scudding cloud mass, and there was a spot of blue sky. The light-

house grew larger, more vividly white in its setting of gray. It wasn't going to be easy to make a jump for it. If he landed on the rock, O.K.—maybe. If he landed in the sea—well, his number would have been called, no doubt about that.

The break in the heavens closed. There was a blinding streak of lightning, a rumble of thunder, and a fierce gust slapped at the plane. A new outburst of the tempest began. Rain, wind, flashes, and the little Waco, alone there in the sky, trembled, oscillated, balked, and hammered on. That hammering dropped to a lower tempo as Farley, without a word of what he was toward, throttled down, pressed a foot against the rudder bar and banked.

"Where away?" demanded Doc.

"We can't buck this," Farley replied.

"Who can't?"

"I'm going back."

"Like hell! You're gonna pull that stunt for me."

"Not t'day!"

"I say yes!" Doc knotted his right hand into a fist of hard bone and muscle and shot it at the side of Farley's jaw. The man toppled heavily to the floor of the cockpit. Doc slipped quickly into the control seat and under a savage gun hammered the plane skyward, leveled, banked, and set her back on her course.

FARLEY, momentarily out cold, gathered himself up with a suddenness impelled by fright.

"Get out of that!" he snarled.

Doc elbowed him away.

"Beat it! If you're afraid to buck this I'm not."

Farley glared at him with darkly menacing eyes. Doc ignored him. Almost directly below them now was the lighthouse —the wild tip of Destruction Point. He eased up on the throttle, banked, dived and roared around above the lonely tower for a look. The waves were beating angrily against the rock, creaming around it, flinging crests of foam over it. A ship piling up there would be smashed to pieces; a man landing there in a parachute would be reduced to pulp.

"I can't make it," Doc told his watching brain. "Bert named it. It'd be suicide."

"You can't make it," the man Farley shouted in his ear.

Doc took instant offense.

"Who said so?"

He spiraled the Waco down for another look, dragged the dime-sized plateau, while a clammy hand gripped at his heart.

The roar of the plane had brought the keeper and his two assistants out into the streaming wind, each with his tiny blob of white face lifted, watching—for what? They couldn't know that he was Doc O'Hara; nor could it cheer them much if they did know it, that pin-head of a rock being what it was to any man in the air.

If the wind weren't against him. But it was. All the flying eddies of the tempest defied him to pull the stunt he'd pulled a hundred times with Soapy Sothern. If Soapy were here now, it might be different. Soapy could hang a plane in the air, at the same time measure the wind, any wind, so that the man parachuting out couldn't help but drift right smack down to the spot where he was supposed to land. But Farley——

Behind Doc, Farley shouted a challenge:

"Well, brave guy, what about it?"

"Who wants to know?"

The fact was, he himself would like to know. But fury of the storm afforded him small opportunity to gather up all the loose

ends of the intestinal fortitude necessary to pull a suicidal act—in the name of mercy.

Farley seemed to sense the thought.

"Mercy flier! I'm laughing."

"Laugh your head off."

"Your feet are cold."

"Yeah? Stick around."

"You're a hell-buster, all right, in your own estimation."

"You said it."

"Then do your stuff."

"When this blow eases up, I will."

"Hell! You think I want to stay out here all night?"

"Pipe down, pipe down!" snarled Doc.

ONCE more he came in over the lighthouse, rain rattling at the windows, motor roaring down the boom of the waves breaking against the sheer-sided block of granite. Cold feet, eh? Well—yes. But how bad off was the man who needed help? and who was he? There were the three keepers, in plain sight, and it was a known

fact they had no families on the rock. Had he read that wigwag wrong?

The question was answered when he had circled and come in again. One of the keepers was waving his arms, another wigwag. Doc throttled down, idling lower and lower against the fierce wind, almost to the stalling point.

"What d'you want—to kill us both?" Farley protested..

Doc gave the ship the gun again. The motor roared and she forged ahead again into the gale that had come within a hair of sweeping her into a tailspin. But he'd caught the message.

And Farley caught the excitement in Doc's eyes as they came around to him for a brief instant, for he asked:

"What is it?"

"Man hurt. Suffering. Help if you can," Doc interpreted the wigwag.

A minute later he straightened out from another circle.

"You know what?" he asked.

"No. What?"

"I'm gonna quit worryin' about myself and set this crate down on that rock. You with me?"

"I'm right behind you," snarled Farley.

Doc felt something hard press against the back of his head.

"What?"

"It's a gun."

"Why, you——" Doc started to turn, free hand making into a fist.

"Look out! I'll blow your head off!"

Doc faced front again, his brain working hard.

"What's the idea?" he demanded to know.

"Get out of that control seat." Farley ordered.

"I'm doin' all right."

"No, you're not. You've got a parachute jump to make."

"That's off."

"No, it's not. You bail out. I'm fed up with you. You're not going to crack up my ship, kill us both. Pile outta that seat, or I'll plug you."

The gun poked impatiently at the back of Doc's head. Lightning flashed. Caught in a screaming eddy of wind the circling plane fell off dizzily. Doc fought away from the bump, put her into a stiff climbing spiral. While his mind, on Farley, worked like the mind of a condemned man.

"Get up and bail out quick," came the command again. Farley meant business; talked and acted like it—a bad egg.

"I'm gettin' altitude, you lug," Doc snarled over his shoulder. "If I'm gonna jump——"

"I'll get all the altitude you need. C'mon. Last warning!"

Doc snatched a look at the crawling needle of the altimeter. 2200 feet. Not much room; it was a desperate chance, but something.

"Listen, Farley"—he suddenly buckled the seat strap around his waist, then closed the throttle, pulled the Waco's nose up sharply, and jerked his head sideways—"you go to hell!"

THE gun in Farley's hand roared, there was a crash of window glass. Damn him, now let him look out! Savagely, with every ounce behind it, Doc kicked his right foot forward and held the stick full back. What happened to Farley at that mad moment he didn't know, but there was a sudden dropping away of his own viscera as the plane flung round and round what seemed the edge of a mighty whirlpool. A spin!

For an instant panic surged over him, fear that he couldn't pull out of it. He fought up through his sickness, through the panic, put the rudder in neutral, pushed the stick forward. The spinning ceased, ended in a dive, with wires screaming shrilly. He eased the stick back; the ship arced into level flight, not a second too soon. He gave her a full throttle; the motor snarled, then roared, and he pulled her away from the foam-crested sea in a swift climb.

He relaxed, looked behind him. Farley lay in a heap down at the end of the cabin,

apparently out cold. How many times the lug had cracked his head in being flung around, like a spoon in a glass, while the ship was in a spin, there was no telling. Nor did Doc care if every bone in the potential killer's body was broken.

He faced forward again, circling widely to come in once more over Destruction Point. The mad excitement that had beat against his brain, and eased momentarily, began to beat again. That spin just braved was a nap in the sun compared with attempting to land on that rock. Soapy Sothern could have done it, maybe, but——

Idling down, flirting with the stalling point, he crept in against the wind. He cut the gun a hair, eased the nose up, with the creaming sea still below him. A sudden down-draft of air and the plane would be slapped into the water, there sucked against the sheer wall of granite and smashed into ten thousand nothings. But she cleared the brink, floating. He closed the throttle another hair, pulled the nose up another thought, and hung her above the tiny plateau, level with the top of the lighthouse, with the motor just holding headway against the push of the wet gale.

There was a sudden gust. The Waco started to settle, to be swept backward. Quickly he gave her the gun, instantly he closed it and dropped the nose. With the backward slip checked, he gave her another gun, another cut, another lowering of the nose, and from that last demand upon her failing equilibrium he touched the wheels to the ground. Touched them? They banged sickeningly, within a whisper of the brink over which he'd come in. Once again he gave her the gun, she shot ahead, and he applied the brakes hard. They held. The little ship stopped on the other edge of the rock, below which the hungry sea thundered angrily.

Doc breathed again. With a suffocating wave of relief and joy flooding his veins, he released himself from the seat and slipped down from the control cockpit. Farley was just coming to, climbing to his feet. Doc plucked the gun from the other's hand, opened the door and jumped to the ground. No time to be wasted on that bird.

An assistant lighthouse keeper came running.

"Nice landing, mister!" He gripped Doc's hand.

Doc grinned.

"It was easy."

"I didn't think it could be done."

"I had a pal, Soapy Sothern——" He broke off. "But where's the guy that's hurt?"

"Follow me."

Doc wriggled out of his parachute, reached back into the plane for his medical outfit. Farley was standing, feeling testily of an ugly bruise on his forehead.

"Too bad you didn't get your head knocked off," said Doc, and started away. "I'll tend to you later."

ON A bed in the keepers' house lay a man, a young man still in his teens. He appeared to be in a bad way, what with a deep scalp wound, broken collar-bone and a wrenched back.

"How'd it happen?" asked Doc. "Who is he?"

"Don't know who he is," replied the head keeper. "He was swimmin'—out from the tip of the Point—and I can't say why. We saw him comin' and thought he was goin' to make it, though it's six hundred feet, but a sea kicked under him at the last minute and tossed him onto the base rocks. He's be'n in pretty much pain since we fished him up, and he hasn't explained hisself. A plane flew over, two planes, one of them flyin' high, wheelin round and round like a watchin' gull for some time, and another which I wig-wagged——"

"That was me," said Doc, and went to work. With the keepers waiting on him, he washed and bandaged the youth's head wound, set the clavicle, and was about to administer a drug to ease the pain in the wrenched back when the patient opened his eyes.

"Listen," he breathed.

Doc put his ear close to the whitened lips.

"What is it?" he asked. "Hurt somewhere else?"

"No. I——you——" The lips went on moving, but made no further sound.

Doc gave him a hypodermic injection and straightened.

"Got to get him to a hospital," he said. "I don't know how, but——"

At that instant the Waco's motor roared.

"Hey!" Doc yelped, and sprang for the door. "What the hell!"

Farley had carried the tail of the plane around and was taxiing back across the rock. Doc broke into a run. Where Farley must again get out, for a facing of the nose into the wind, Doc leaped aboard.

"Where d'you think you're off to?"

Farley replied with a sizzling uppercut to Doc's jaw. Doc staggered, shook his head furiously and dived for Farley's legs. As the man crashed down Doc get a toe-hold on him, dragged him from the plane and flung him to the ground.

"Seize up this guy!" he shouted.

In a minute the two assistant keepers had Farley bound hand and foot. They shoved him back into the plane and, on an order from Doc, the hurt youth was brought out and placed aboard.

"O.K.," said Doc, as he carried the tail of the ship around to the edge of the rock. "Here goes for the last roundup."

"Good luck!" said the head keeper.

"I'll need it. S'long!"

UP IN the control cockpit once more, he pressed down hard on the brakes, then gave the idling motor a fierce gun. The lighthouse keepers looked worried. Doc grinned out at them, sobered, and with his heart in his throat he gave the tail a little lift and released the brakes. The Waco sprang forward. He pulled the tail higher, opened the throttle wide. He shoved the stick forward, to keep the tail from tripping, as the wheels ripped off the spray-lashed edge of the rocks; gave the ship all the flying knowledge he had in leveling off. The wheels skimmed the crest of a white-maned sea, and he pulled her up, up, well up into the sky.

For the first time, then, he noticed that the rain had ceased. The wind which had brought the storm was carrying it away. Broken clouds were flying in confusion across the evening blue. He made a smart flight of it back to the airport, but it was dusk when he set the plane down on the runway.

The field director hurried out from his office. And that inevitable reporter. And two or three fliers.

"Call an ambulance," Doc ordered. "An' the cops."

A flier started for the telephone. Two others lifted the youth out of the Waco and carried him carefully across the apron.

The reporter followed, calling back to Doc:

"I'll see if I can't get you filler space on this, Good-lookin'."

Doc curled a lip.

"Whyn't you go home? Ain't you got no home?"

The field director's puzzled frown was divided between Doc and the seized-up man inside the plane.

"What's it all about?" he demanded.

Doc grinned.

"You got your smellin' salts handy?"

"What d'you mean?"

"That hurt fella's the Freylingham kid, or I'm a monkey's uncle."

"What!" The field director wheeled and ran toward his office.

Doc stepped back into the plane.

"All right, mug," He began to release Farley's bonds.

"What's all right?" snarlingly.

"You are. Plenty guts. Gonna try to make that take-off from the rock, weren't you? I shoulda let you go. By now you might be where you belong, in hell. That's where all you rats belong. No, don't show your teeth, or try any jiu jitsu, or I'll hand you back that sock you hung on my chin. You're mixed up in the Freylingham snatch, you know you are. I think so 'cause you're the dirtiest louse of a flier I ever bumped into, an' you pack a gat, an' you tried to blow my head off. Sit still, will you, till I get this knot loose? You can't get away. I've got you an' I'm gonna keep you. There, now, get up, an' get out, an' take a last look at this peach of a little crate you smelled up with yourself. Go on. Head for Bert's office. The cops oughta be here any minute."

On the floor of the field director's office the hurt youth lay with his fevered eyes wide open.

The reporter was on the phone.

". . . . Young Freylingham, in the flesh," he was rattling into the mouthpiece. "He just told his story. He was flown down the coast—five, six hours—and landed on a sandy stretch of beach, on Destruction Point. Time he got the tape off his eyes the plane was only a speck in the sky. He could see the lighthouse from where he was, and he headed for it, but till he'd started to swim out to it he wasn't able to attract the keepers' attention. He was hurt in being thrown against the rock by a sea, but he'll pull through—thanks to Doc O'Hara. . . . What? . . . Doc O'Hara, that merciful—— Yeh, that's right. He made a landing on the lighthouse rock. . . . No, the kidnapper faded, of course. . . . That's all right now."

The reporter hung up.

"Here's your kidnapper," said Doc, shoving Farley to the forefront.

"He's crazy!" Farley protested. "I had nothing to do with it."

"That's the man!" the Freylingham boy spoke up, with his eyes focused on Farley. "I know his voice."

The reporter reached for the phone again.

"Oh, baby!" he chortled. "This *is* good!"

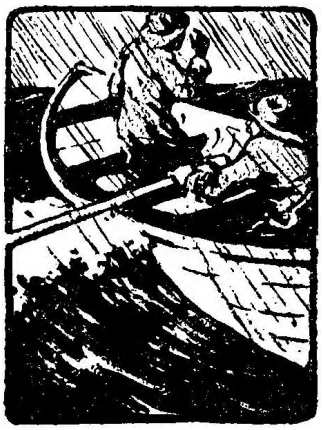
He hesitated, flashed his gold teeth at Doc.

"Say, Good-lookin', I'll sure splatter you all over my front page for this. Doc O'Hero I'll call you."

"You do." growled Doc, starting hurriedly for the door and his Boeing, "an' I'll splatter you all over this airport."

SEA-WRAITHS

By Edgar Daniel Kramer



WHEN the mists creep into Light street
From the reaches of the bay,
While the bell-buoys stir the darkness
And the fog-horns have their say,
As the tugs churn through the smother
With their throaty snorts and sneers,
There are wraith-ships softly berthing
All along the shadowed piers.

Anchors drop into the waters
With no semblance of a splash;
Though the vessels bump the piling,
There is no resounding crash;
As the hawsers sag and tauten,
Lo, on strangely silent feet
All the eager crews go faring
Out into the noisy street.

Though nobody hears their laughter,
They are jesting sailormen,
Turning from the crashing billows
To the ways of town again,
And, their pockets crammed with wages,
That they earned through many moons,
They are bent upon hell-raising
In the water-front saloons.

Roaring chanteys, as they swagger,
They are elbowing the bars,
While they wink at waiting wantons,
Who are fairer than the stars.
But the barkeeps yawn, unheeding
Ghostly sailors, ghostly gold,
While, despite their importunings,
All the girls are blind and cold.

When the mists are crowding Light street,
All their luring hopes denied,
They come cursing through the shadows
Back to where the wraith-ships ride,
And with sighing like the whisper
Of the dead leaves on a tree,
They cast off and, disappearing,
Go to find the kindly sea.

THREE BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of
"The Sourdoughs Visit Halfaday," "Black John Helps the Police," etc.

I

BLACK JOHN SMITH returned his empty glass to the bar and eyed the stranger who stood framed in the open doorway of the saloon. The man was tall and angular, smooth shaven, with a thin, sharp nose, a pair of close-set, glittering black eyes. A light pack swung by its straps from the crook of his elbow.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "I trust that I have at last arrived at Cushing's Fort."

"Such trust as yourn has been rewarded, this time," Black John replied. "Step up. The house is buyin' a drink."

The man advanced to the battered brass rail, swung the pack to the bar, and faced the two with a thin-lipped smile.

"My name is Beezely, gentlemen—J. Q. A. Beezely, attorney at law."

All the Halfaday Crickers Unite in Keeping the Ethics of Halfaday All That They Should Be

Black John regarded the man with interest. "A lawyer, eh? Well, we've had damn near every other kind of a miscreant there is show up on Halfaday, so I s'pose it was only a question of time till a lawyer would come."

The thin-lipped smile widened. "Gentlemen, my appearance on Halfaday Creek may well prove a godsend to you."

"In what way," queried Black John, "could a lawyer be a godsend to a crick?"

"In other words, I may prove a blessing in disguise."

"If the blessin' is as good as the disguise," retorted the big man, "we prob'ly won't have no kick comin'. Smith is my name—Black John, to be exact. An' the gentleman acrost the bar is Lyme Cushing, proprietor of the fort."

The man regarded the two with interest. "So you're Black John Smith, the king of Halfaday, are you? And you're Cushing? I'm glad to make your acquaintance, gentlemen. I heard about you in Whitehorse."

Black John frowned slightly.. "Me an' Cush will admit, fer the sake of veracity, that we're gentlemen without bein' reminded of it every time you open yer head. An' as fer me bein' king of Halfaday—it looks like you'd got off on the wrong foot, to start out with."

"No offense, gent—no offense, I assure you. Quite the contrary! I was merely repeating what I had gathered in Whitehorse."

"On Halfaday," replied Black John, dryly, "what a man gathers he keeps to himself—if he kin. How did you git here? An' why?"

"I hired an Indian in Whitehorse, and we made the journey in a canoe. Devilish

trip—that long upstream grind. No wonder you men feel safe from the long arm of the law. My reason for coming is simple. It seemed to be common knowledge in Whitehorse that Halfaday Creek, lying as it is reported to lie, close against the international boundary line, affords a safe haven for numerous outlaws. I was headed for the Klondike—for Dawson. You see, I realized that with thousands of people pouring into the fabulously rich gold field, innumerable disputes would be bound to arise, and the services of an attorney would be in great demand. Therefore, gen—therefore, I decided to locate there and to practice my profession." The man paused momentarily, and toyed with his glass of liquor. "But at Whitehorse I heard of Halfaday Creek, and immediately I changed my plans. You see, g—you see, I specialize in criminal law."

YEAH," observed Black John, "quite a lot of the boys along the crick, here, has took a crack at it, too—one way er another."

"I—mean—that I practice criminal law."

"Well, a little more practice wouldn't hurt several of the boys which they undoubtless bungled their job——"

"I practice at the bar——"

"Yeah, I see," interrupted the big man impatiently. "But if you've practiced enough at this one, would you mind h'istin' that drink—so we can go ahead with another? This here licker of Cush's was s'posed to have age enough onto it when it was bottled."

"I have successfully defended some of the most notorious criminals in America," boasted the man, as he rasped the raw liquor from his throat, and refilled his glass. "My fame as a mouthpiece has spread over half a continent. Crooks and super-crooks have paid me thousands, simply as retaining fees, and other thousands to free them when they became enmeshed in the toils of the law."

"Why would you throw up a good business like that, an' hit fer the Klondike?" asked Black John, his blue-gray eyes resting for a fleeting moment on the light pack sack that lay just beyond the man's elbow on the bar.

"As I told you," Beezely replied, downing his second drink, and ordering another round, "I became intrigued with the possibilities of the gold field. But at Whitehorse I heard of Halfaday, and right then I changed my plans. Mining law may be, and doubtless is, remunerative in a high degree. But when the clients are at hand, so is criminal law. And as criminal law is my specialty, why change? First, last and all the time, I am a criminal lawyer!"

"I can well believe it," admitted Black John, his eyes once more on the pack sack. "Of course, it ain't none of our business, what any man done before he come to Halfaday, but I was jest wonderin' what kind of crime it was that headed you north?"

"Let us all be frank——"

"Nope," interrupted Cush, "it won't work. Here a while back, everyone that come to Halfaday wanted to be John—John Smith—till it led to such a mix-up that me an' John invented the name can. It would amount to the same thing, if we was all to be Frank. Drink up, an' I'll buy another."

BLACK JOHN and Beezely grinned broadly, as the latter proceeded. "I mean, let's be candid. I first contemplated a change about six months ago, when I became the victim of a disbarment proceeding, the allegations being that I had negotiated for the disposal of certain stolen property—hot bonds, in the vernacular. And, also, that I had been instrumental in the harboring of certain known criminals. The matter of my departure was abruptly precipitated by the fact that, not content with my disbarment, my persecutors, an irate prosecuting attorney, aided and abetted by certain members of the legal profession—my own colleagues, mind you

—brought criminal charges against me, and preferred certain charges before the grand jury which, in some manner, they succeeded in sustaining, so that the jury indicted me on several counts—among which were harboring criminals, receiving stolen property, disposing of stolen property, accessory before the fact in several instances of robbery and burglary, subornation of perjury, and several others. Thus, you can readily see that rather than become swamped in endless litigation, I departed from there."

"Yeah," agreed Black John, "under the circumstances, it looks like it was your move, at that."

"You see," further explained the man, "my colleagues at the bar were actuated purely by motives of jealousy. They realized that I was getting, what in their opinion, was far more than my share of the criminal practice, and they took that cowardly means of putting a successful competitor out of business. The prosecuting attorney acted merely out of spite. I had beaten him so many times—won verdicts of acquittal so often against him, in cases that he had proclaimed were ironclad—that he held a personal enmity toward me. It was the malicious revenge of a small soul."

"An' you wasn't guilty of none of these allegations, I s'pose?" queried Black John.

"Well, yes—and no. I will enumerate. On the harboring of criminals count, for instance—I certainly did know where certain criminals were in hiding. In fact, in numerous instances where I had accepted a retainer, I had arranged in advance for their hide-outs. I considered it a duty that I owed to my clients. And I had to know where they could be reached for matters of conference.

"As to the receiving and disposition of stolen property—how is a criminal lawyer to be paid except from the proceeds of a crime? The fruits of crime are the only property with which the criminal can pay. And as for the disposal of such property—it is a well known fact that the sooner a man gets hot bonds off his hands, the better it is for him.

"In regard to subornation of perjury; of course it was necessary for me to instruct my clients and their various witnesses what to say on the stand—and what not to say. How else could a man establish an alibi for a client when, as a matter of fact, that client was at that particular time engaged in committing a burglary or a robbery?

"As to the matter of being an accessory before the fact; I never really plotted any crime—in its entirety. It is true that in certain instances, I did hint to clients of certain profitable jobs they could pull, and advised them as to how to go about it. I advised them as to what evidence is admissible, and what is not. And I coached them in regard to the destruction of valuable clues confusing or destroying evidence, and in fact, in numerous matters having a direct bearing upon the success of the enterprise. An attorney, my friends, who has not the best interest of his clients at heart, is sorely remiss in his duty."

"Jest a good, square-shootin' lawyer, tryin' to git along," agreed Black John. "An' this here advisory service—was it gratuitous? Er was there a fee attached?"

"Oh, no fee! No fee, at all! Of course, an attorney can not be expected to render his services for nothing. I always arrange with the client for a remuneration somewhat commensurate——"

"My God," exclaimed Cush. "What with them big words you use, you an' John ought to git along fine!"

"—commensurate to the service," continued Beezely, ignoring the interruption. "The payment to be made out of the proceeds of the venture, generally upon a percentage basis. I never could bring myself to accept a flat fee for these prearranged jobs, because if my client, or clients, were unsuccessful in the venture the poor fellows would be out of pocket."

"Looks all fair an' reasonable," admitted Black John. "It looks like if a man had a lawyer like that, he could go ahead an' pull most anything."

BEEZELY'S beady black eyes snapped appreciatively, and the thin lips smiled. "And you don't know the half of it, my friend! For after the job is pulled there is old J. Q. A. Beezely, with the hide-out all arranged, and ready to take over all the hot stuff and dispose of it to the best advantage; ready with a roll to cool the heat by certain judicious payments to policemen and politicians—sometimes, even, to prosecutors or judges. And finally, if worse comes to worst, to defend his client at the bar of justice!"

"You must of been a comfortin' thought to such as was criminally inclined," opined

Black John, tossing off his liquor, and ordering another round. "But the facts is, P. D. Q.,——"

"J. Q. A.," corrected the attorney. "Named after John Quincy Adams, one of the greatest characters in American history."

"Oh—one of them historical names, eh? I trust this here Adams was dead before you was named after him."

"Long, long before. He was one of the earlier presidents."

"As I was goin' on to say, up to now we never had no lawyer on Halfaday—never felt the need of none. We ain't got many laws on the crick, an' sech as we have got, none of em's brittle."

"Brittle?"

"Yeah, you know brittle—ones that's easy broke. Our laws is few, but tough an' durable. Not wantin' the police hornin' in on us, we keep the crick moral by the simple expedient of hangin' anyone that is found guilty of murder, larceny in any form, claim-jumpin', er general skullduggery. Our verdicks is reached by the vote of miners' meetin's, an' the meetin' ain't called till we're practically sure the culprit is guilty. There ain't no crime on Halfaday."

"But," queried Beezely, in apparent surprise, "what do you do here on Halfaday for a livelihood?"

"We're miners. Halfaday is a gold camp."

"Why, I understood, at Whitehorse, that it was a community of outlaws."

"I wouldn't know about that," replied Black John. "Of course, what any man done before he come to the crick ain't none of our business, an' it's barely possible that some of the boys might of infringed some law, somewheres, in their past."

After several moments of silence, Beezely smote the bar with his fist. "I've got it!" he cried. "What Halfaday needs is organization. Leave it to me! We've got a wonderful opportunity here—with the rich Klondike gold field within striking distance. Leave it to me—J. Q. A. Beezely will work out the details. Halfaday Creek looks like a permanent home for me."

Black John nodded, his eyes once more on the pack-sack. "Yeah," he agreed, a bit grimly, "It shore does, Beezely—it shore does."

II

OTHER drinks were had. One Armed John strolled in with a nice string of fish which Beezely, pretty well oiled by that time, purchased for a five dollar bill.

"Now," he stated, holding the string up to admire it, "if we only had some means of preparing these, we could have a good old-fashioned fish-fry."

Old Cush nodded. "I feel kind of fish-hongry, myself," he admitted, and turned to one Armed John. "Take 'em out back an' gut 'em," he ordered, "an' give 'em to the klooch. Tell her to fry 'em good an'

brown an' fetch in here along of some boiled spuds, an' some bread."

"In the meantime," suggested Black John, his thoughts on the thick roll that Beezely had returned to his pocket after peeling off One Armed John's five, "there ain' nothin' in the book that says we couldn't be passin' away the time with a little stud."

"Ah—stud—a great game—a great game, indeed!" cried Beezely, with enthusiasm. "By all means, let us play. It seems, my friends," he beamed, "that at last my peripatetic feet have borne me to a safe haven amid congenial surroundings."

"What did you say ailed 'em?" inquired Cush solicitously.

"Ailed them? Ailed what?"

"Why, yer feet. I've got some corn medicine that my third wife had. Yer welcome to try it. Her feet ailed her somethin' fierce. She claimed it done 'em good."

"There ain't nothin' the matter with Beezely's feet," explained Black John. "What he meant was that at last, he figgers he's lit in a spot he likes."

"Oh," grunted Cush. "Why in hell didn't he say so, then? Them big words you educated folks uses only leads to the confusal of them that don't understand 'em. Wait till I dig out a deck of cards."

"Yeah," said Black John, "an' you better toss me a sack of dust out of the safe; an' fetch along one of yer own too, an' the chips. This here game is liable to git good. I'll fetch the bottle an' glasses, so you won't have to be jumpin' up all the time servin' drinks."

AS CUSH swung open the door of the old fashioned iron safe, Black John noted that the beady black eyes of the attorney seemed fairly to bulge from their sockets at sight of the tiers of neatly piled gold sacks, and the thick packets of paper currency that nearly filled its interior. As a gold sack thudded onto the bar before Black John, Beezely reached out and lifted it in his hand.

"Gosh, it's heavy for the size of it!" he exclaimed. "About how much gold would you say that it contains?"

"Oh, somewheres around eighty ounces," Black Jack replied.

"And gold is valued at about twenty dollars an ounce, isn't it?"

"Twenty, sixty-seven at the mint," replied Black John. "It passes around here for sixteen."

"Nearly thirteen hundred dollars in this little sack!" the other exclaimed. "Why, there's a sizeable fortune in that safe."

"Yeah," replied Black John indifferently. "Mostly it's in bills, though. There ain't a hell of a lot of gold in there, now. It's too bulky, takes up too much room, so every little while we take a batch of it down to Dawson an' trade it off fer big bills. Must be clost to half a million in the safe, all told."

As the game proceeded the chips piled steadily up in front of Beezely as both Cush and Black John consistently lost, so that when they cashed in, as the Indian woman deposited the platter of fried fish on the bar, the lawyer was some fifteen hundred dollars to the good.

"Just a little run of luck," he smiled, as he counted up his chips, "and if it's just the same to you, I'd rather have paper money than gold. Your turn next," he added, as he wrapped the bills Cush counted out on the bar around his roll. "And now we'll attack the fish—they certainly look appetizing, fried to a golden brown. That Indian woman of yours must be a wonderful cook."

"She's all right," Cush admitted, "once I got the idee into her head. But it was a hell of a job to learn her. When she first come, her notion of makin' bread was to slop a dipperful of water into the top of the flour sack an' mix around in it with her hands, an' then lift out everythin' that stuck together an' lay it on the top of the stove to bake. But she finally ketched on, after I'd shoved her face in the mess, three er four times. You can learn a klooch, if you've got patience."

"Now in the matter of an abode," be-

gan Beezely, after the last of the fish had disappeared, and he had cleansed his fingers and lips upon a handkerchief. "I was wondering if there is an empty cabin of some sort that I could occupy until such time as I may procure a suitable habitation of my own?"

"Well," replied Black John, "there's several shacks along the crick that's been abandoned, fer one reason er another. Some of 'em's on pretty good claims, too. My cabin's right close, an' I've got an extry bunk. You better jest throw in with me till you can look around a little. Bein' as yer residence on Halfaday is liable to be more er less permenant, you don't want to make no hasty mistake. Come on over an' you can make yerself to home, an' we'll come back, later. Some of the boys'll be driftin' in this evenin', an' we can mebbe git up a game of stud."

Beezely readily accepted the invitation and, swinging his pack sack over his shoulder, he followed Black John out the door, where he paused and glanced toward the well-beaten trail that slanted steeply downward to the landing.

"The Indian who brought me turned back a few miles down the creek, as soon as we came in sight of the fort," he said. "I came on alone from there, and when I got here I was too tired to carry my pack up the bank. This sack I have here contains only a few—er—personal belongings."

"Hold on a minute, an' I'll git yer pack," said Black John, and stepping down the trail, he returned a moment later with a well filled pack sack. He then led the way to his cabin, on the bank of the creek a short distance above the fort. Swinging the door open he motioned for the other to enter, and following him in, deposited the pack sack on the floor and indicated a bunk made up with clean blankets. "That's yourn," he said. "Jest throw yer stuff in under it, an' make yerself to home." As he spoke, Black John set a bottle and a pair of glasses on the table and indicated a rude chair. "Draw up," he invited, "an' we'll have a little drink whilst you go ahead an' explain what you meant by this here organization you mentioned. I figgered it would be better to kind of talk it over here —on account of Cush.

"Mouthy, eh?" asked the lawyer as he seated himself and filled his glass.

"Well—no, I wouldn't say Cush was exactly mouthy. Fact is, he don't run off at the head no more'n the average mud turtle. But he ain't no hand to grasp new idees, unless they're set before him in words of one syllable er less. He'd be pesterin' us with questions, an' besides that, some of the boys might drift in, an' interrupt the flowin' of our thoughts."

"Quite right," agreed Beezely. "I much prefer to talk man to man. A long and varied experience at the bar has taught me the danger of a witness. Now I mean to cast no aspersions, but let us assume, man to man, that we have here on Halfaday Creek, at least the nucleus of an extremely potent mob."

"Meanin'?"

"Meaning that there are men here who would not balk at well, for instance—robbery. Provided, of course, that the venture were well planned and carried out at some point far enough away from Halfaday so that no suspicion would fall upon any resident of the creek."

"W-e-e-l-l," replied Black John, drawing the word out reflectively. "I don't know as I'd go so fer as to say that any of the boys would actually an' personally participate in no major crime. There's some, mebbe, that I might suspect would possibly wink at some minor infringement of the law. But fer the sake of argument we'll assume that the material you would be needin' could be sifted out."

"Quite so. Of course, I realize that I can make no headway in this matter without your approval and cooperation. The plan is very simple. Merely that we select a few—say a dozen or twenty men among whom would be specialists along different lines, and organize them into a mob. You would be in command at this end, while

I would go on to Dawson and look the ground over—find out where gold or currency is concentrated in quantities sufficient to interest us, and then case the job—find out all about the conditions under which it is held, and the habits and character of its custodians. This information I would relay here to you, and your part would be to select the proper men for the job and send them down to me. In the meantime, of course, I would have established myself as an attorney in good standing, so that no suspicion could possibly fall upon me, or upon anyone seen consulting me. The job would be pulled, and later the proceeds divided, all members of the mob participating in the profits. Of course, we would have to provide a fund—a fall fund—which I would have at my disposal, for fixing the police, and in the event that something should go wrong, conducting the defence. How does the idea appeal to you?"

BLACK JOHN hesitated, apparently in deep thought. "This here fall fund that you would have," he asked at length, "would want to be a fairly good jag of ready cash, wouldn't it?"

"The more, the better. A mob with cash enough behind it can pull anything."

"An' where would we raise this here fall fund?"

"Why, we would assess each member of the mob. Everyone would have to kick in with his share."

"S'pose there would be some of the boys that wouldn't have enough to kick in?"

Beezely's thin lips smiled. "I guess we won't have to worry about that. I saw enough in that old safe there in the saloon —gold and packages of bills—to finance a dozen mobs."

"Yeah," agreed Black John, "there's considerable wealth in there, but——" He paused, and regarded the other with a smile. "An' I don't aim to cast no aspersions, no more than you did. Fer all I can see yer motives is upright an' honorable as mine is, but you can see as well as I can, that if we dug the fall fund out of the safe, us Halfaday Crickers would be furnishin' all of it—an' you'd have the handlin' of it, an' share in the profits of these here ventures. What I'm drivin' at is—would you be in position to put up a part of this fund?"

The attorney's smile widened as he indicated with a jerk of his thumb, the small pack sack that lay on the bunk behind him. "No offence, I assure you. And regarding my ability to put up my share, I will tell you that in that bag I have exactly ninety-six thousand dollars in currency."

"You mean," exclaimed Black John, "that you've got that much on top of the roll yer carryin' around in yer pocket?"

"That flash roll is mere spending money —chicken feed. There's not more than six or eight thousand in it. Are you satisfied? What do you say?"

"Well," grinned Black John, "knowin' the Northwest Mounted Police like I do, an' Corporal Downey in partic'lar, I'd say that if our fall fund was twice as big as what we could make it, we couldn't even spit on the sidewalk in Dawson without gittin' pinched. In fact, Beezely, the whole scheme is cock-eyed. A mob like that wouldn't git nowheres in the Yukon. It's all right down in the States, where you can shift around amongst crooked policemen, an' politicians, an' prosecutors, an' judges —but down here it's different. There ain' no politicians, an' the Mounted is policemen, prosecutors, an' judges—an' they ain't crooked."

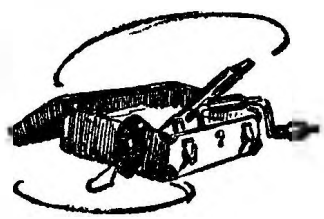
"Every man's got his price," Beezely retorted.

"Yeah?" grinned Black John, "Well, when you find Corporal Downey's price, would you mind lettin' me know what it is?"

"If you think the scheme is cock-eyed, why were you so interested in knowing whether or not I could put up my share of the fall fund?" asked the attorney.

"Merely fer yer own good," the big man replied. "An' mebbe fer our good, too. You see, when you come in to Cush's I seen that you took good care that yer small

pack, yonder, didn't git no further than arm's reach away from you at no time. Whilst we stood at the bar, it was right beside yer elbow, an' when we went over to the table to play stud, you laid it beside yer chair. So I figgered that it contained somethin' of value. I didn't like to say nothin' over there, on account of One Armed John er the klooch might of listened in, so I invited you over here. The invitation stands—you can stay here as long as you like until you find a location of yer own—but I wanted to warn you that if you had anythin' of much value in yer pack, you better deposit it in Cush's safe. You



took notice, I suppose, that the safe ain't exactly empty—there's better'n a half million in it, right now—an' that's because it's the only place on Halfaday where a man can keep his gold er his cash where it will be absolutely safe, an' where he can git it the minute he wants it. It's a damn good, four-bolt safe. There can't no one bust into it. Just between me an' you, I don't mind admittin' that there's certain characters on the crick whose morals in regard to property is open to question. An' I'd hate like hell to see one of 'em git their hands on yer ninety-six thousan', or yet on the roll you've got in yer pocket. Not only you'd lose the money, but you'd immediately an' rightly report the loss to the police, an' we'd have 'em up here on the crick, snoopin' around till they found who done it. Like I told you, we keep Halfaday moral."

"How about hiding the stuff some place?"

Black John grinned. "You could try cachin' it if you want to. But as the Good Book says, when in Rome do as the roamers do. You seen fer yerself that Cush's safe is the repository fer the wealth of Halfaday—an' there's a reason. Several has tried cachin' their stuff, but somehow no matter how careful they was, it always turned up missin'. If a man is suspected of havin' a cache, he's a marked man, an' there ain't no minute that there ain' someone's eyes on him. If they can't locate it no other way, they watch him till he goes to it. Mebbe he goes to it only once—when he's pullin' out of Halfaday—but that once is enough. Sometimes we find his body; an' sometimes we don't—but in no case do we ever find his property. Of course, if it was only me an' Cush that know'd you had the money, that would be different. But there's One Armed John, an' there's the klooch. They seen what me an' Cush seen—an' don't fergit it. An' from the time you walked out of that saloon until such time as you've deposited yer property in the safe, there'll be eyes on you every minute."

"Do you mean—now?" asked Beezely, with a swift glance about the room. "You mean that someone is watching us now?"

"Well, not here in the cabin, but you can bet on it that someone is watchin' the door, an' they'll know if you carry that small pack when you go out er not—an' I shore don't want that much wealth cached around here. My advice is to carry it back an' stick it in the safe—an' most of that pocket roll along with it. I wouldn't advise carryin' around no more than a thousan' at the outside. There wouldn't hardly no one stoop to murder a man fer a mere thousan'."

BEEZELY tossed off his drink and rose nervously. "Let's be getting back to the saloon," he said. "I'm obliged to you for giving me this tip. You think we can make it, do you? That is—there's no danger of anyone bumping us off between here and there?"

"Oh hell, no! There won't no one pull nothin' whilst I'm around. It's the stuff that's pulled while I ain't here that's got me worried. Fetch yer pack, an' we'll be goin'."

The man stepped to the bunk, loosened the straps of the two packs, and hastily slipped a package from the smaller into the larger one. Then he secured the smaller pack, and accompanied Black John to the saloon, keeping close beside him all the way, as his beady eyes darted swift glances into the bush on either side of the trail.

Old Cush set out bottle and glasses as the two entered. When the glasses were filled, the attorney loosened the straps of the sack he had set upon the bar.

"I have considerable cash here," he said, addressing Cush, "and my friend advised me to deposit it in your safe. I wish you would take it, and if there is any charge I'll be glad to pay it." As he spoke he lifted out packet after packet of bills of large denomination, and piled them on the bar.

"There ain't no charge," Cush replied, his eyes widening at sight of the ever increasing pile. "Count it, an' I'll give you a receipt."

The counting took some time, and at its conclusion, the man pulled the thick roll from his pocket and counted off seven thousand more. "There you are," he said, "one hundred and three thousand, in good cash." He paused and frowned, as his eyes lingered on the pile. "And it should be more than double that!" he snapped. "I left Chicago in a hurry with plenty of hot bonds on my hands—and hit Seattle without having made proper connections. The result was that I was forced to dispose of them to those damned coast crooks at a terrible sacrifice. I wanted to deal quickly, and the dirty thieves took advantage of me. But—I'll square the account, sometime!"

Black John shook his head solemnly. "Tch, tch, tch," he uttered, "Don't it beat hell how some folks carries on? It's almost enough to make a man lose faith in human nature."

"Sure it is," agreed Beezely indignantly. "I could have got twice that amount out of those bonds if I could have stayed on for a few days in Chicago, or had time to slip down to Frisco. It's a damn shame how they'll take advantage of a man. But of late it seems that every man's hand is against me. Why, gentlemen, I haven't even a relative in the world to turn to!"

III

WITH his money locked in Cushing's safe, Beezely shared Black John's cabin, spending his days roaming up or down the creek inspecting the abandoned claims that the big man described to him, and his evenings in playing stud in the saloon.

One morning, a week after Beezely's arrival, Cush asked Black John an abrupt question as the two stood drinking together at the bar. "How do you like yer lodger, John?"

Black John grinned. "Oh, about as well as the average man would, I s'pose. Why?"

"Nothin'—except that it looks to me like he could of found some place to suit him before this. Here, he's been pokin' around amongst all the empty shacks on the crick fer a week."

"Yeah, he went way up that feeder to look over Whiskey Bill's old shack, today. I was tellin' him about it last night."

"Olson's old cabin, down the crick, is the best of the bunch—best claim, too."

"Yeah, that's what I told him, but when I told him about Olson, an' Stamm, an' some of the others that's sojourned in it, he claimed it was too unlucky to suit him."

"Huh," grunted Cush, "with his luck, it don't look like he'd have to worry none. He ain't made a damn losin' at stud, yet. Wins every night. Just shoved ten thousan' more in the safe fer him this mornin'!"

"H-u-m, that makes a hundred an' thirteen thousan', don't it?"

"Shore it does. An' I'm jest wonderin' if he ain't crooked."

Black John's grin widened. "Why, Cush! Shorely you wouldn't suspect a lawyer that would do all he done fer his clients, of crookedness, would you?"

"Well, I don't know. About the cards,

I mean. It looks like he's got just too damn much luck fer one man to have. But we've never ketched him at nothin'. An' several of the boys has been watchin' pretty close, too. Tellin' you about me, I've never seen no man yet, which he had a couple of snake eyes set right up agin' a thin nose, that I'd trust him very fer. This here Beezely, every time he opens them hard, thin lips of his'n, I expect to see a forked tongue snick out an' in. An' another thing, I don't like the way them eyes sort of lingers on the safe, neither."

"Oh, he's just kind of interested in the safe, I guess. He's got quite a lot in it."

"Yeah," answered Cush dryly. "Well—so've we."

A form darkened the doorway, and a man stepped hurriedly into the room and advanced to the bar. Both saw that he was one Booker T. Breckenridge, a name-canner who had appeared on Halfaday some six months before, and located a claim up the creek. He was a quiet man, who minded his own business. Black John rather liked him.

"Hello, Book," he greeted. "Jest in time to j'ine us in a drink. Cush is about to buy one."

Old Cush, slid a glass toward the newcomer, and entered a round of drinks against Black John in the day book. Breckenridge downed the drink and turned to the big man.

"Can I see you a few minutes alone?" he asked. "It's important."

"Why, shore. Jest step on over to my cabin." When the two were seated Black John filled and lighted his pipe. "What's on yer mind?" he asked abruptly. "I ain't seen you around fer a couple of weeks."

"No. I been workin' pretty hard up on the claim. That stuff's gittin' better as she goes down. What I wanted to tell you—I come up out of the hole this mornin' to crank up my bucket, when who the hell was standin' there but Old Quince Beezely, the crookedest damn skunk that ever walked on his hind legs! An' what's more, he claimed he was stoppin' with you."

"Yeah," admitted the big man, "Beezely's stoppin' here till he can look him up a location."

"Location—hell! He's got his location, all right."

"Goin' into Whiskey Bill's old shack, eh? Well, that ain't such a bad proposition, if a man was to work it right."

"Goin' into Cush's safe!" exploded the other. "Old Quince never got his claws on an honest dollar in his life."

"What makes you say he's crooked?" asked Black John mildly. "He told me he was a criminal lawyer."

The other's lips twisted into a wry grin. "He is," he said. "Both. An' the reason I say he's crooked is because it's the God's truth. He's crooked, an' he's smart—so damn smart that if he hadn't been crooked, he could have cleaned up a million."

"Then he ain't smart," grinned Black John.

"That's right, too—in a way. What I mean, there wasn't a mouthpiece in the country that could keep a guy out of stir like Quince Beezely could. He knows all the tricks—an' invented new ones. He'd have a jury wipin' the sympathy out of their eyes fer some stiff that bumped off his gran'mother fer her insurance money. He'd grease everyone from the cops to the judge, an' fix the jury, to boot. He'd git a yegg out on bail so he could pull some job that would pay fer his defence. Not only that, he'd lay out the job fer him, an' case it, an' then dispose of the stuff—an' then he'd git the guy off when he come to trial. An' not only that, but he'd work on the parole board fer some guy that was already doin' a stretch. Oh, he was a lulu, Quince was—until he got to playin' both ends against the middle."

"Yeah," observed Black John, "he told me that he always had the best interests of his clients at heart."

"AN' THAT'S a damn lie, too," retorted the other. "Here's one he pulled a year ago—jest before I come away. He laid out a big mail robbery job, an' got a

mob together that was the tops. The job was pulled. The boys took that mail car like Grant took Richmond, an' made a clean git-away to a bungalow Quince had rented over on the west side. There was about twenty-thirty thousan' in cash, an' bonds that run right around a quarter of a million. Quince took over all the stuff—the cash fer the fall money, in case anything went wrong—an' the bonds to dispose of when the heat cooled.

"Well, somethin' went wrong, all right. Two nights later the cops crashed the hideout an' gathered in the whole mob. One dick got knocked off—an' that made two murders, countin' the mail clerk. What happened? Quince had tipped off the bulls—see? But up to then the mob didn't know that. They laid their hard luck to Dopey Dick Fliegle, cause he had slipped out to the corner that night to git a paper. The boys didn't worry none. They figgered they wasn't so bad off. Old Quince would sure clear 'em at the trial. But Quince didn't. He lost every one of them cases. The whole mob—there was six of 'em—got life, an' Quince got the cash an' the bonds.

"The boys tumbled, then. They squawked their heads off down in Joliet. But you know how much weight a guy's squawk carries when he's in stir fer the long stretch—an' not a friend on the outside. They laughed at 'em."

Black John's brow knitted in a frown. "Didn't they have no connections—no pals on the outside—that would sort of take care of Beezely fer double-crossin' 'em?"

Breckenridge laughed shortly. "I told you Quince was smart. He handpicked that mob. He knows every damn crook in the country. There wasn't a damn man in it that wasn't in bad fer double-crossin' some pal, er turnin' state's evidence, er somethin'. There wasn't a crook in the country that didn't laugh with the screws when they heard the squawk. They'd even laughed harder if the mob had got the rope. Most of 'em didn't believe Quince had crossed 'em up, an' them that did said it was a damn good thing—an' liked Quince all the better."

"H-u-m," Black John grunted, "but even so, what a man done before he come to Halfaday ain't none of our business. It's what he does after he gits here that interests us. You mentioned, a while back, somethin' about Cush's safe."

"Only that Quince figgers on takin' it, is all," grinned Breckenridge.

"How do you know?"

"I know because he told me." The man's voice became suddenly hard. "Git an earful of this. There's plenty on me back in the States, an' Old Quince knows it; he knows a lot more about it than even the cops do, an' they know plenty. I'm wanted on a rap that's good fer the long stretch, an' not a chance of beatin' it—see? When I hit here an' draw'd that name out of the can I figgered I'm all set. I like it here. I believe I've got a good thing up the crick, an' I want to stay with it. I'm on the up-an'-up, here on Halfaday. I ain't claimin' I always will be, nor none of that crap. Mebbe I will; an' mebbe I won't. Anyhow, it's the first time in years that I ain't be'n lookin' over my shoulder. Now Quince shows up. He lamps me the minute I lamps him—see? He figgers I'm right down his alley. He knows there ain't no box made that I can't git on the inside of. He tells me how much is in that old can of Cush's, an' how you guys all think it's the nuts. Hell, that can wouldn't stop me fifteen minutes! I could kick a hole in it anywheres, an' you can hear them damn old tumblers rattle clean acrost the room. Quince, he claims he's got the latest thing that's out in the way of a jointed can-opener."

"Yeah," agreed Black John. "I was lookin' it over. I seen him lift a package out of one sack an' stick it another the day he come, so one day when he was off down the crick, I looked it over. It seems like a useful tool. A man could git a hell of a leverage with it, when all them parts was screwed together."

"Sure, but I wouldn't need no tool to

crack that box. Hell, I could go over there right now an' git into it as quick as Cush could. Quince can case a job, all right, but when it comes down to doin' the work, he'd be jest like any other punk—thinkin' a man would need a can-opener fer a job

like that! It makes me laugh. Claimed he had a bottle of soup, too."

"Soup! You mean he's got nitro glycerine in that bottle? Cripes, I thought it was some kind of licker!"

THE other grinned. "If you take a drink of it, don't set down hard fer a while. But layin' the kiddin' aside, Quince means business. I didn't say much, jest let him go ahead an' talk. He's figgerin' on pullin' the job Sunday night. He claims that the boys will prob'ly play stud all night Saturday, an' Cush will close early on Sunday night. Claims that's what they done last week. Says we ought to be in the clear by midnight Sunday."

Black John nodded. "Yeah, he's about right, at that."

"He claimed there was enough paper in the box so we wouldn't have to bother with the gold; it would be too heavy."

"We?"

"Sure—me an' him. He's rung me in on the job, see? I told him right flat that I wouldn't have nothin' to do with it. You guys has been on the level with me. An' like I said, fer the last six months I ain't been lookin' over my shoulder. But Quince just grins when I tells him that. 'You'll begin lookin' over yer shoulder agin, damn quick,' he says, 'whether you take on this job, er not. The police in Dawson will have yer prints, an' a damn good description—an' a long record. An' I can help 'em out with more, plenty more. They'd appreciate a tip on where yer hidin' out.'" The man paused, and ran his fingers nervously through his hair. "An' the hell of it is, he's right. But I'll be damned if I'll pull that job! I come damn near killin' Quince where he stood, but I know'd what a miners' meetin' would do about that."

"Yeah," agreed Black John. "We don't encourage murder on Halfaday."

"It looks like I'm on the spot, no matter which way the cat jumps."

Black John combed at his thick beard with his fingers. "Oh, I don't know. It's only Wednesday. There's quite a bit of time to figger, between now an' Sunday night. Why not just let him go ahead an' pull the job, the way he's got it figgered out?"

"Pull the job!" exclaimed the man. "Hell, it won't be him pullin' it! It'll be me! He'll be damn good an' careful not to show up in it. You know damn well what a miners' meetin' would do to a guy caught robbin' that safe! An' Old Quince would be the first one to grab the rope. Damn if I'll git mixed up in any job on Halfaday. I'll take it on the lam, first."

The blue-gray eyes of the big man met the eyes of the other squarely. "I've got my faults," he said with seeming irrelevance. "But double-crossin' a pal ain't one of 'em. An' I'm advisin' you to go ahead."

The man's eyes held Black John's long and searchingly. "O.K.," he said. "I'll take a chance. I better be hittin' back now. Quince went on up the crick He told me I better think it over. Said he'd stop late this afternoon fer my answer. Where'll I see you before Sunday night?"

"Saturday night, like Beezely said, there'll be a stud game. Beezely'll be settin' in it. At ten o'clock I'll drop out an' go out back. You be waitin' there."

"O.K. I'll be seein' you."

A few minutes later, when Black John strolled into the saloon, Old Cush regarded

him searchingly as he set out the bottle and glasses "What did he want?" he asked.

"What did who want?"

"Why, Breckenridge, of course. Who'd you think I meant?"

"Oh—him. Cripes, I'd fergot he'd even been down here. Why, he run in amongst some rocks in his shaft an' wanted to borrow my pick."

"Borry a pick? What was so damn private about that?"

The big man shrugged. "Why, damn if I know. You know how some folks is—kind of secretive that-a-way. Hell, Cush, you don't think I'd lie to you, do you?"

IV

THE following morning Beezely took leave of Black John. "I'm obliged to you," he said, as he departed from the cabin with his pack, "fer the tip about depositing my money, and for your royal hospitality. I only hope that I may, someday, be permitted to return the favors. I rather like that place of Whiskey Bill's, and I may like mining. At least, I've decided to stay here until fall. The life in the open will do me good. In the meantime, I shall endeavor to get down to the fort at least on Saturday nights for the stud game. I shall, of course, keep in touch with you, and should you reconsider that matter of organization we can doubtless embark in a very prosperous enterprise. If not, in the fall, I think I shall move on to Dawson and open an office for the practice of law. I engaged a man I ran across up the creek—Breckenridge, he said his name was—to assist me in moving my supplies up the creek in my canoe. He will doubtless be waiting for me at the fort. Good-bye, my friend. I'll be toddling along, now. I have a long trail ahead of me—and a rough one."

"I'll say you have," muttered the big man, as the other turned from the door. "Mebbe not such a long trail, but a damn rough one."

Promptly at ten o'clock on Saturday night, Black John temporarily checked out of the stud game and stepping out the door, passed around to the rear to find Breckenridge waiting for him in the black shadow of the storeroom.

"Got yer plans all laid?" he asked.

"We did have, but we've got to change 'em, or there's sure as hell goin' to be a murder on Halfaday."

"Who," asked Black John, "would murder who?"

"Peanuts Landowski an' the Duke will murder Old Quince. Listen—did Quince give you the low-down on why he had to get out of Chicago?"

"Yeah, he claimed that he'd got disbarred, an' besides that, there was a matter of some indictments the grand jury found agin him. Spite work, he claimed it was, amongst the prosecutor an' some other lawyers."

"Disbarments an' indictments—hell!" scoffed the other. "That old fox would of beat all them raps with his eyes shut. But his eyes wasn't shut, by a damn sight, an' when he picked up his newspaper one mornin' an' seen where there'd been a jailbreak down at Joliet, an' Peanuts Landowski and the Duke was on the loose, he know'd it was either lam er croak, fer him. An' he know'd, too, that Joliet ain't no hell of a ways from Chi. So he gathers what's loose an' handy, an' fades. You see, Peanuts an' the Duke is two of that mob he double-crossed, an' take it from me, either one of 'em's plenty tough. An' no one knows that any better'n Old Quince Beezely. It was Peanuts that blasted that cop when they took the mob, an' the Duke has knifed two guys that I know of. He's a killer," added the man, with a shudder. "He kills jest fer fun—er else he's nuts, er somethin'. These guys was both knifed in their own house when the Duke was h'istin' their wife's jewelry—an' there wasn't no need of it. An' in the hang-outs the Duke bragged about it, an' laughed."

"An' you think these two characters is on Halfaday?" asked Black John. "That they followed Beezely here?"

"Think! I know damn well they're here. I talked to 'em. As fer followin' Quince—partly they did, an' partly they didn't. It's like this, when they crashes out of stir there's eight of 'em in it, an' two screws is bumped off. They scatter, an' it takes Peanuts an' the Duke two days to make Chicago, on account they got to git clothes, an' heel themselves. The heat's on, an' they see by the papers how five of the boys ain't had no luck. One is shot, an' four is back in Joliet—two in the hospital.

"Peanuts an' the Duke knows they're takin' a big chance, but they try to git to Old Quince. The Duke was tellin' me about it; an' believe me, if you could see his eyes when he told it, you would hate to be Old Quince Beezely—if he found you er not! He claimed he'd of carved Quince up if he know'd he'd walk on the trap the next minute—an' he would. But they couldn't find Quince, an' Chicago was pretty hot fer 'em—what with neither one of 'em standin' in too good with the boys, an' all. So they reads in the papers about this here Klondike, just like I done, an' decides to fade out here. They figgered if there was gold here like the papers claimed, there'd be pickin's. They finances themselves with a couple of jobs on the north shore, an' lams.

"In Seattle they run acrost Old Quince's trail. They got to git rid of some stuff from them two jobs they pulled, an' they find out how Quince had took a big loss on a lot of bonds—the bonds that they'd got on the mail car job.

"Well, if a guy is in Seattle, turnin' off his stuff at a loss, it's a cinch he's hittin' fer the Klondike—like everyone else in Seattle is, except a man would live there. So Peanuts an' the Duke takes on a new hope about Quince. But when they git to Dawson, Quince ain't there—an' no one has saw him. They hangs out at the Klondike Palace an' meets all the boys that's on the make around Dawson, but no one has saw Quince—but he might be out on some crick. So they hangs around, an' cases some jobs, but they don't pull nothin', an' some of the Dawson boys puts 'em hep to that old can of Cush's. They claimed it could be took like takin' candy from a baby. Claimed they damn near took it one time, but the job went wrong on account that a fat guy which they sent on ahead to case the job, sold 'em out, an' they was scairt they was goin' to git hung by a miners' meetin', but the miners' meetin' turned 'em loose on account of no evidence, an' they hung the fat guy themselves, on a crick back in the mountains."

Black John nodded thoughtfully. "So, that's what become of him, eh? I kind of mistrusted they would, at that. But go ahead with yer story."

"Well, there ain't much more to tell. None of them Dawson Boys wanted in on the job, but they told Peanuts an' the Duke how to git here, an' that there wasn't no cops here, nor nothin', so they decided to come up here an' take the box alone."

"How come they got in touch with you?"

"That was by accident. You see, Old Quince, he's been moseyin' up an' down the crick, casin' it, while he's pretendin' to look fer a location, an' he looks over a cabin, down the crick that used to belong to some guy named Olson, er some Swede name like that, an' he figgers that this cabin would be a good place fer him to wait in while I was pullin' the job. Then I would come down there with the stuff, an' we could pull right out fer the big river, with a good start. So today, I takes them supplies Quince bought off'n Cush—the ones I was supposed to help him up to Whiskey Bill's shack with the other day—an' who in hell do I walk into but Peanuts an' the Duke. They jest got there this mornin' an' is figgerin' on hangin' out there till they kin case this job. Well, they both know'd me the minute they lamped me, an' knowin' that a job like this is right down my alley, they votes me in. I try to duck it, but settin' there lookin' at the Duke kind of fingerin' that long bladed knife of his whilst he was tellin' about Old Quince, I didn't put up no hell of an argument—jest

kind of stalled along. I sure as hell hate a knife, an' I hate the way the Duke handles one—kind of lovin' like, while he touches the blade here an' there with a little hone. So I'm counted in an' we leaves it that we'll wait a few days an' kind of case the job, an' the git-away, an' all."

"Did you tell 'em about Beezely bein' on the crick?"

"Hell no! I know you don't favor murder on Halfaday, an' the way they feel about Quince, there's no tellin' what they'd do. They didn't even know about the supplies I took down there. When I seen someone was in the cabin, I left the supplies in the canoe, an' when I come away I shoved up the crick a ways an' cached 'em in the brush, canoe an' all, an' come on up the foot trail."

"That's good," approved Black John. "You done right."

"But it leaves me in a hell of a spot—a damn sight worse than before. If I don't throw in with Quince, he'll turn me in. If I do, I git hung by miners' meetin'. If I don't throw in with Peanuts an' the Duke, I git that long thin blade shoved between my ribs, an' if I do, there's that hangin' again."

Black John grinned. "Yeah," he agreed, "it does look kind of 'out of the fryin' pan into the fire' as the Good Book says, no matter which way you jump, don't it? In such case, if I was you, I'd pursue a middle course."

"What do you mean? Damn it!" the man suddenly exclaimed, "You know, since I been up here, workin' that claim of mine, I've felt better'n ever I felt since I was a kid. I like it—like takin' out that gold. I like to look at it, an' feel of it—an' I like to think that it's damn good an' clean. It's mine—an'—an'—oh, hell! I don't know. Seems like I've kind of got a different slant on things, I guess. I was feelin' fine till that damn old Quince showed up—an' now these two guys. I know'd 'em all before, back there in the States, an' while I never really, what you could say, liked 'em—they seemed sort of all right. But now, listenin' to 'em talk an' all, I can sort of see what a rotten lot they are. But that don't git me nothin'. 'Once a crook; always a crook' is a true sayin', I guess. No matter where a man goes, he can't git away from 'em."

"Oh, I don't know, son," Black John replied. "I guess mebbe it'll work out all right in the long run. Hell, I used to be more er less shady in my ethics, myself—an' look at me now! You jest go ahead an' do like I said—sort of let things drift. Cush will close up early Sunday night, but you won't have to rob the safe. Beezely'll be down the crick—waitin' till you git there. Jest go ahead like he planned it, an' let nature take her course."

"But he'll hit for Olson's shack to wait. An' that's where Peanuts an' the Duke are!"

"Yeah, that's what you said."

"But they'll kill him sure as hell—jest as soon as he sticks his nose in the door!"

"That," said Black John dryly, "is merely a conjecture—simply an expression of opinion on your part. To twist an' old sayin' around if better comes to best, an' they should happen to knock him off, I wouldn't know of no one that needs it more—except, mebbe, the two that killed him, would you? If they knock Beezely off, that will be their business. But in doin' so, they'd be committin' a murder—an' that would be our business. Murder ain't condoned, on Halfaday. We'd have to call a miners' meetin'. An', if they was found guilty, it looks like we might go the Good Book one better, an' kill three birds with one stone, instead of two."

V

THE stud game lasted all Saturday night, with the result that business was dull at Cushing's Fort on Sunday. At ten o'clock Cush barred the doors, and took his rifle from its accustomed place, put out the lights, and letting himself out the back door, headed for Black John's cabin, a short distance up the creek. "Wonder what in hell give John the notion of a

moonlight moose hunt tonight?" he grumbled. "Any more meat than what we got on hand would spile, weather like this. I told him that, an' he jest kind of grinned. Chances is he's got somethin' else on his mind. You can't never tell what John's thinkin' by what he says."

In the cabin were Black John, Red John, Long John, and Breckenridge. The big man glanced at his watch.

"Come on," he said, "we'll be goin'. Breckenridge says Beezely went on down the crick twenty minutes ago. We don't want to be in too much of a hurry, nor yet we don't want to be too late, neither."

"What in hell we follerin' Beezely fer?" asked Cush, falling in directly behind Black John on the narrow foot trail down the creek. "Where is he headin'?"

"That," replied the big man, "is more or less a matter of conjecture. Some theologians hold that——"

"What in hell's all them big words got to do with it?" interrupted Cush impatiently. "Why can't you come right out an' tell me where Beezely's goin'?"

"Because, I don't know myself. I ain't made up my mind, yet, whether to accept the good old Presbyterian theory of instant damnation, or the milder one put out by the Catholics—with a sort of half-way house between. Then there's the doctrine of utter annihilation; that's well thought of by some, an' would undoubtless be a comfort to many."

"You mean Beezely's dead?" exclaimed Cush. "If he is, how in hell could he be goin' down the creek?"

"Well, he could be floatin' down, if he was dead," grinned Black John. "But he ain't—not jest at this minute—unless he's travelled faster'n what I think he has."

"You mean, we're goin' to kill him?" cried Cush. "Is that why we're all fetchin' our rifles? Cripes, John, we can't do that! If he's pulled off somethin', we can call a miners' meetin'. We don't want no unlegal killin's on Halfaday!"

"Hell, you know as well as I do, I wouldn't kill no one. We're goin' to call a miners' meetin'—in case the facts warrant one. We're goin' down here a ways to arrest a couple of fellas, in case a murder should have come off."

"But what's Beezely got to do with it?"

"Well, speakin' in a dramatical way—he's cast in a roll. One might almost say, he's the protagonist——"

"Why—the damn cuss! Is that some form of skullduggery, John?"

"Yeah," replied Black John. "In his case, it seems to embrace about every form of skullduggery there is."

HARDLY were the words out of his mouth than the silence of the night was split by a long, thin scream, then another that ended abruptly—eerie, blood-curdling screams, they were—screams of mortal terror and agony. The five men stopped in their tracks, in the profound silence of the moonlit night.

Old Cush, his eyes gleaming wildly, stared into the face of Black John. "My God," he cried, "it's down there jest around the next bend—at Olson's old shack! I'm goin' back. I always know'd that shack was unlucky."

"Yeah," agreed Black John dryly, "that's what Beezely claimed. An' I've got a hunch that mebbe he was right. We'll go on down an' see."

Pushing on to the edge of the little clearing that surrounded the cabin, the five concealed themselves in the thick brush, their eyes focused on the oblong of lamplight that showed through the open door, not more than thirty feet distant from where they stood. Low voices could be

heard from the cabin, and part of a man's posterior could be seen as he evidently stooped over something on the floor.

Presently the man straightened up, and a moment later he backed out the door, closely followed by another man, walking forward. Between them they supported a limp human form—the dead body of J. Q. A. Beezely.

At a whispered word from Black John, five rifles were cocked, and five men stepped from the edge of the bush into the clearing, their guns covering the two who had stepped from the cabin.

"You can lay him down there," said Black John in a hard, brittle voice. "We'll 'tend to the buryin'. An' then you better reach high, er some of these guns is liable to go off."

"Who the hell are you?" demanded the larger of the two men, truculently. "An' what the hell you buttin' in here fer?"

"The name is Smith—Black John, fer short."

"Oh, so you're the guy that tried to hang them Dawson boys the time you claimed they was up here to crack a box, eh?"

"Yeah, I'm him—er one of 'em. I rec'lect we bungled that job, on account of Corporal Downey comin' along just at the wrong time. An' besides, them boys hadn't committed no murder—till after they'd got off the crick."

"An' this ain't no murder either. We had to bump this guy off in self defence. You've no witness that we didn't."

"That's right," grinned Black John. "What did he attack you with—his toupée?"

"He pulled a gun on us. That's what he did!"

"Tut, tut, Duke."

"Duke!"

"Well, Peanuts, then. It don't make no difference, except fer the head slabs. Mr. Beezely put up with me fer a week er so, an' I happen to know that he didn't have no gun."

"Where the hell did you git them names?" demanded the man, peering toward the five, but not glimpsing the face of Breckenridge who was purposely keeping behind Black John.

"We didn't git 'em—they're yourn," replied the big man. "Where you got 'em ain't none of our business, no more'n it's any of our business whatever you done before you come to Halfaday. After you got here, though, what you done is our business—like murderin' Beezely an' aimin' to rob our safe. You've compounded yer felonies, by addin' murder on top of skullduggery."

"It's a damn lie!" cried the man, his face contorted with rage. "You can't prove a word of it."

"Oh, yes he kin, Duke," said a voice, as Breckenridge stepped out from behind the big man. "An' he can prove that you threatened to kill old Quince Beezely on sight, too."

"Dink McQuire!" screamed the other, as with a swift movement a long blade gleamed in the moonlight as he drew back his arm. There was a loud explosion, and the man pitched forward upon his face.

Black John, standing a pace or two in front of the other, never turned his head. "Everyone throw a fresh shell in his gun," he ordered. "The miners' meetin' will have to investigate this fresh killin'. An' it would be better if we wasn't to find no empty shell in anyone's gun. Come on, now—we'll be takin' this other one along before somethin' definite happens to him."

The man, Peanuts, and the two bodies were searched, Black John deftly retaining only a small scrap of paper—which was Cush's receipt for Beezely's deposit. Magnanimously, he turned over to Long John some thousand dollars in currency.

"Just divide that up amongst you three," he said. "Me an' Cush wouldn't care to participate. There wasn't nothin' found on Beezely, these others havin' prob'ly frisked him before carryin' him out. An' there wouldn't be no use to bother the public administrator with it—on account of them names not bein' no help in huntin' out

heirs. We'll go on back, now, an' stick Peanuts in the hole. We'll call the miners' meetin' fer tomorrow afternoon."

VI

WITH the prisoner deposited in "the hole," a narrow subterranean cell beneath the storeroom floor, and a barrel of pork rolled into place on the trap, the others dispersed, leaving Black John alone with Cush.

In silence Cush set out a bottle and two glasses, and each poured a drink. Cush was the first to speak. "So it was Breckenridge put you on to this here racket, was it?" he inquired. Pausing suddenly, he lowered his chin, and peered at the other over the square rims of his steel spectacles. "So that was what he wanted to speak to you private about t'other day—when you claimed he'd come down to borry a pick?"

"A pick did I say, Cush?"

"Yeah, you claimed he'd run onto some rocks in his shaft, an' he wanted to borry a pick."

"Oh, yeah—I rec'lect of givin' you some sort of an evasive answer. But I fergot that I'd mentioned a pick."

"What difference does that make?"

"Why yeah, what difference does it?"

"What I mean—ain't that when he told you?"

"Oh, shore. I didn't want to worry you none. You see, he told me that Beezely was aimin' to rob the safe."

"Beezely! Cripes sakes, you told them other fellas it was them that was aimin' to rob it."

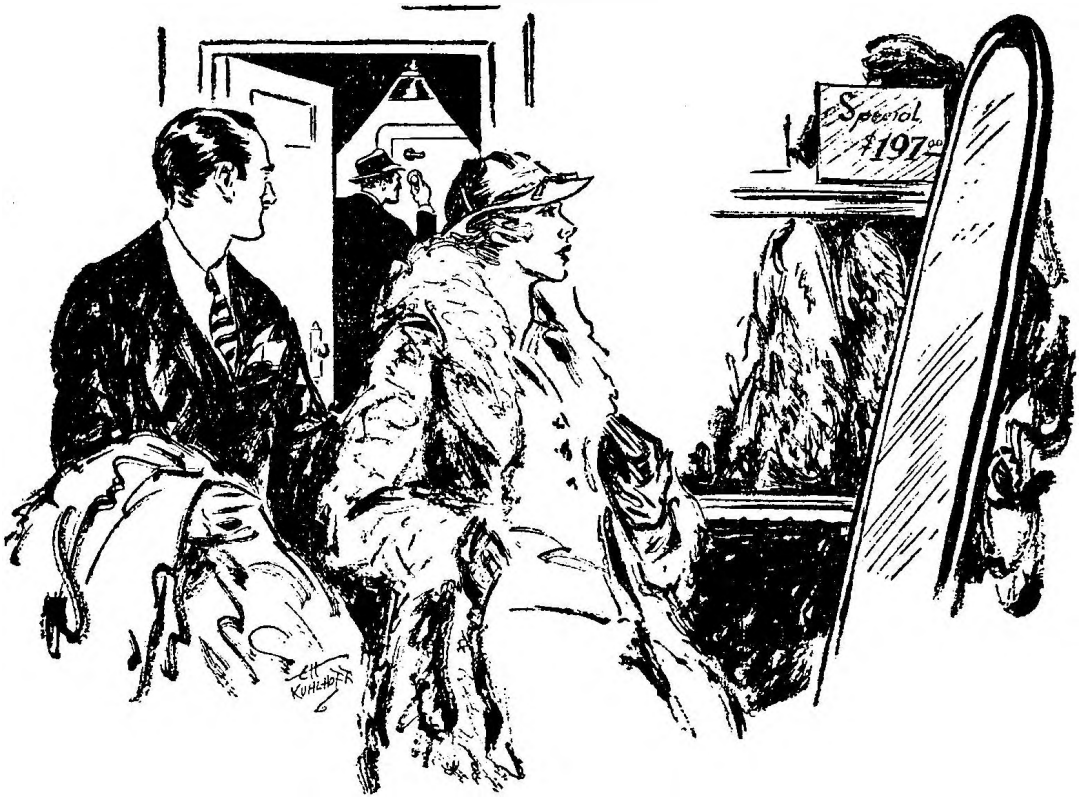
"Yeah, they was—but that was after. They wasn't even on the crick, then."

Cush shoved his spectacles to his forehead in a gesture of resignation. "It's too damn mixed up fer me," he said wearily. "I don't seem to grasp no holt of it."

Black John grinned. "Jest open the safe," he said. "An' grasp holt of that package of Beezely's, an' set it out here on the bar.

When Cush had complied, Black John lifted it, and began to remove the bands from the various packets of bills. "A hundred an' thirteen thousan' dollars in good currency," he said. "An' you rec'lect Beezely told us he didn't have a relative in the world! It's hell, ain't it, Cush, when a man ain't got no relative to leave his property to? It kind of looks like his fall-fund had fell, at last. Ah, well—it jest goes to show that honesty is the best policy in the long run. Come on, we might's well git it divided up—share an' share alike, Cush—just like we let them other three boys divide up what we found on them others. Trouble with Old Quince Beezely, he didn't have no ethics."

The Young Man Who Could Sell a Line of Rowboats in Death Valley



SALESMANSHIP

By GENE VAN

SLICK THOMAS admitted to himself that the world was not just to his liking. He sat alone at a table in a back room of a cheap speakeasy, and drew meaningless diagrams with a beer-wet fingertip on the top of the table.

Slick was well dressed. In the parlance of the street, he looked like money. But, as a matter of fact, Slick was broke. Always on the verge of pulling a big job, he never quite made the grade. Something seemed to hold Slick back from being anything but a small-time crook. He never gave a thought to the fact that it might possibly be the lack of gray matter under his fashionable derby hat.

A man came heavily down the hall and halted in the doorway. He was Butch McKee, big and burly, with the face of a gorilla. Butch had a flair for gaudy clothes and striped collars.

"You wanted to see me, eh?" he growled.

"I've a job lined up, Butch."

"You gotta job lined up? You? Listen, Slick——"

"Some easy dough, Butch."

"Easy—hell! You never——"

"Are you going to let me tell it?"

"Go ahead, you joner. If you ever got anythin' right——"

"We're both broke," stated Slick. Butch started to protest, but Slick continued. "If you wasn't broke, you wouldn't have paid

any attention to me wanting to see you."

"So you're turnin' mind-reader, eh?" snorted Butch. "Got yourself one of them crystal balls, have yuh? All right, Seventh Son, go ahead and tell me what yuh see in the future."

"It's the Weston Fur Company."

"Huh!" Butch slowly removed the frayed cigar from between his thick lips. "That dump! That's nothin' but a two-by-four attraction for moths."

"Says you," smiled Slick. "They get the best customers in the city. I've cased that place for a week. They don't carry anything, except the best stuff, Smart Guy."

"Not for mine," declared Butch. "I'm off petty larceny. Nothin' but the big stuff for Butch McKee. What do yuh think I am—a panhandler?"

"I can remember——" began Slick.

"Yeah, I know," growled Butch. "But that's all past. Everybody has damp days in their early work. Right now I don't handle anythin' that ain't big stuff."

"Big stuff! To you that's only a couple words in a dictionary. All right, Big Shot. No harm in asking. I'll get me another helper, who won't think that a ten thousand dollar take is petty larceny."

"Ten thousand? Wait a minute. Ten thousand worth of furs?"

"Who said anything about furs? I'm talking about the safe."

Butch lifted his brows and emitted a soundless "Oh-h-h-h!" He tossed aside the frayed cigar and carefully lighted a limp cigarette, the last of a package. Slick watched him curiously.

"Anyway," said Butch discouragingly, "this Weston place is a retail joint, with a lotta clerks and——"

"Wrong, as usual, Genevieve," smiled Slick. "There's only Old Man Weston and his secretary, which is also a clerk. At noon, one of 'em goes out to lunch. It's a safe bet that not a customer comes at noon. Here's what we'll do: we'll walk in, tie up the Old Man, crack that old money-can, and be out before the clerk returns from lunch."

"And find thirty cents in the safe," sneered Butch.

"All right, Crepe Hanger; that's thirty cents more than we've got right now."

"More crystal gazin'," sighed Butch, eyeing his last cigarette. "All right. We walk in there at noon, tie papa up tight, and crack the safe. That is, I crack the safe, while you look on. Soft pickin' for you."

"Another bum guess," sighed Slick. "Don't forget that there *might* be a customer. I'll be out there in the store, all slicked up, waiting on the trade, while you spring the old box."

"You?" A deep laugh rumbled in Butch's thick throat. "You wait on customers? Boy, you forget that I've got high blood pressure. You sell furs!"

"Look!" snapped Slick. "Before I got tired, I was a salesman. Why, I could sell a second-hand ice-box to an Eskimo. One time I took a line of row boats to Death Valley, and sold out in a week."

"Ice boxes and boats ain't furs, remember."

"Salesmanship is salesmanship, and don't forget it. If you can sell one thing, you can sell another. Anyway, I'm only selling long enough for you to get into that safe."

"It might work out," mused Butch aloud.

"It's the biggest cinch in this town, Butch."

"Noon hour, eh? What time is it now, Slick?"

"Eleven-thirty. And we need money—bad."

"Are yuh sure yuh got the dope right, Slick?"

"Could I be wrong, after watching the place a week?"

"*You* could be wrong, if you watched it a year."

"All right, Big Shot. But you've never known me to take a rap, have you? That's the result of being accurate."

"Spelled l u c k," declared Butch. "I'll meet you in front of the place at noon, exactly—and Gawd help you, if you ain't right."

"I never miss," declared Slick, getting to his feet.

"Wait!" exclaimed Butch. "Let me go out first, I'm superstitious; like walkin' under ladders, being crossed by black cats and—and walkin' behind a joner, like you, Slick. While this cat-skin job is kinda petty, I ain't goin' to be jinxed, if I can help it. Meet you at noon."

"Aw, I know furs," said Slick stoutly.

"So does a squirrel," retorted Butch. "But you notice they make his hide into coats."

THE Weston Fur Company occupied a small store just off the main street of business. The store front was bunched in between several other small stores. The show windows exhibited a few furs. The main salesroom was almost bare, except for a few fur coats that were hung on hooks for the customers' approval. To the rear and on the left side was the office and on the right side was the storeroom.

Right now there was a racket going on in the office. Henry Weston was going on a rampage, walking back and forth, kicking everything that got in his way.

Henry was short and fat, red-faced, with a huge nose and small eyes. There was an odor of burning hair, caused from the contact of a lighted cigar against Henry's stubby mustache. The rest of the cigar was inside Henry's left cheek. The sounds he was making were apparently unintelligible profanity.

He did not see the girl enter the office. She sat down, a half-quizzical smile on her face. Being the daughter of Henry Weston, she realized the futility of an interruption. Henry's wrath worked on a well-wound mainspring, and must unwind itself in a natural, mechanical manner.

Finally he saw her. Taking a deep breath, he nearly inhaled the cigar, and flopped in his desk-chair, panting weakly.

"You!" he grunted. "You here?"

"Why not, Father?" she asked meekly.

"Sure! Why not?" he parroted. "Why not?"

"What has gone wrong?" queried the girl.

He leaned across his desk, glaring at her for several moments.

"Who," he said heavily, and paused for breath, "who do you want to marry?"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Gale Weston. "Why—why, Tim O'Neil."

"You, too!" he almost screamed the words. "You, too!"

Gale looked at him in amazement.

"Why, I didn't know there was anybody else——"

"Else? *Else?* Damn it, he wants to marry you! That silly numbskull of an Irishman! That improvident—so!"

Henry stopped to glare at her.

"Is he silly to want to marry me, Father?" she asked.

"I—I won't have it. He has no initiative. Bum salesman! A fine, handsome lady asks him to suggest what will match her style of beauty. Bah! She is a mink type. He says, 'Skunk!' And I lose a fine sale. We argue. I say, 'Mink' and he says, 'Skunk', until we are both yelling at each other. But the customer has gone.

"I say. 'One more skunk from you, and out you go.' He says, 'One more mink from you, and I'm gone.'

"I tell him he is fired, and he says——"

"You fired him?" gasped Gale.

"Not then, but pretty soon, when he tells me that he wants to marry you. Marry you! I told him, 'I won't have it! I won't have a son-in-law what argues with me.' I won't! The blundering fool! Always an argument. Skunk! Mink! I tell you, I'm through. He don't know furs."

"But you didn't fire him, Father."

"I didn't? You don't see him, do you? If he comes here again, I'll break his neck."

"But what will you do for a salesman?"

"The world is full of salesmen. If he ever—you listen to me now. Don't never ask him up to the house. He's no good."

"Maybe the skunk would have suited her style, Father."

"You, too!" he roared. "You start arguing with me, too? What is the world

coming to, I wonder. Bah! Mink was right for her."

IT WAS five minutes past twelve, when Slick and Butch opened the front door of the store. They had waited an extra five minutes for the clerk to go out to lunch, but no one came out.

"Listen to the racket in there," whispered Butch, as they stopped near the office door.

"Sounds like a fight," said Slick nervously. "Maybe that's why the clerk never went out to eat. We've got 'em boxed up —let's go."

"I'll go first," said Butch. "Have your gat handy, but if you shoot anybody, I'll kill you myself. I don't want any hot seat from a job like this."

"Suppose you kill me—what then?" whispered Slick.

"The world ain't unappreciative, you dope; come on."

Softly they opened the door and stepped into the office, closing the door behind

them. Weston had started to give Gale some more fatherly advice, when he saw the two men.

"What do you want?" he blurted out. "This is a private office."

"And this is a private stick-up," grinned Butch, his automatic covering Weston and the girl. "Don't argue. All right, Joner; use the rope."

With some ready prepared ropes Slick bound the victims, and gagged them with wadded rags and some lengths of cloth. Butch examined the work closely, after which he walked over and looked at the safe. He turned to Slick, a sour grin on his face.

"That ain't nothin' to open with a can-opener, you dope," he said. "It'll take me thirty minutes to crack it."

"Oh, that's all right," replied Slick airily. "We've got lots of time. Go ahead and don't mind me."

They heard the front door shut. Quickly Slick stepped over and glanced through the glass. He stepped back, straightened his tie and gave his coat a tug.

"What is it?" whispered Butch.

"A customer. Get back to the safe; I'll handle this end of it."

Butch went back to the safe, but tiptoed back to the door, his gun ready. He did not trust Slick.

Slick stepped jauntily from the office, a smile on his lips, to face his first customer, a well-dressed, middle-aged man, who was looking rather vacantly around the store. A closer inspection showed that customer's linen was soiled and wrinkled, and a stubble of beard showed on his jaws.

"Stewed to the brows," was Slick's comment, to himself. To the inebriated customer he said:

"Something I can show you, sir?"

The man beamed owlishly, as he shoved his hands deep in his pockets, balancing precariously on his heels.

"Tha's a ques'ion," he replied. "Thish plash—thish plash—do you shell furs?"

"We certainly do," agreed Slick eagerly. "Something in a nice mink?"

"I don' know wha's in 'm," replied the man seriously. "I never opened one."

"Oh, you know what I mean," smiled the wily Slick. "A nice coat for the wife, eh? She'd love it."

"Tha's the idea. You shee," becoming very confidential, "I've got to take shomething home. Haven't been home for three days. Do you know who I am?"

"Your face is familiar," lied Slick, "but I can't just call your name."

"Neither can I," confided the man. "I had hopsh you'd recog—recog—know what I looked like. I'm losht, don't you know it."

"Lost?"

"Yessir. Been losht for hours. I hired a policeman to take me home—and I've losht him. Tha's a fine state of 'fairs, eh?"

"Well, I should say so," agreed the sympathetic Slick. "But let us talk about furs."

ANOTHER customer sauntered into the store, a good-looking young man, well-dressed, but without a hat. He merely glanced at Slick and his inebriated customer, and began examining a display of furs on one of the racks.

"By all means," agreed the inebriated customer. "Let us talk 'bout furs. You start it."

By that time Slick was wishing the man had never entered the place.

"Would you like to see something in squirrel?" asked Slick.

"Ain't you a funny person?" giggled the drunk. "I'm won'ering if you know anything about furs."

"I should say I do!" exclaimed Slick. "You don't suppose I would be working for Weston if I don't know furs."

"Tha's right. Shay, do you make fur coats for men?"

"Oh, absolutely. Any style, any fur."

"Can that be poshible? Well, well! Do you make fur coats, with the fur inshide, instead of outshide?"

"Why, of course. They are really wonderful, and you can't imagine how warm they are."

"Zasso? Are they warmer than if the fur was on the outshide?"

"Much warmer. Why, there is no comparison."

"Is that a fac'? What a fool the polar bear has been all these years."

Then he turned around and weaved his erratic way out of the store, chuckling to himself. Slick drew a deep breath of relief, and looked at his second customer, who had been paying no attention to the conversation.

"Something I can show you, sir?" asked Slick easily.

"Why, yes," replied the young man vaguely. "I—I'm looking for a coat—for my wife."

"I see. How about a nice mink coat. They are always good."

"Mink? No, I don't believe I want mink. What have you in Siberian squirrel?"

"Siberian squirrel is very good this season," replied Slick, wondering what on earth a Siberian squirrel looked like.

"Have you—uh—looked at any?" he ventured.

"No," the young man shook his head, "I haven't."

"They're a knockout," beamed Slick. He walked to the rack and took down a gray squirrel coat, which he spread wide. "These skins just came from Siberia. Stunning, eh?"

"Yes," agreed the customer, as he made a cursory examination.

"What is the price?" he asked.

"The price?" parroted Slick. "Oh, yes—the price."

But search as he would, there was no tag on the garment.

"The tag has been misplaced," he said thoughtfully, "but I remember the price. It was forty dollars."

"Isn't that rather expensive?"

"Oh, not at all, when you consider the distance we have to ship those skins—and there's a heavy duty, too."

"I suppose," sighed the young man, looking about. He pointed at a gorgeous seal coat.

"That is rather pretty," he said, "but I suppose it costs too much money for me to buy."

"Not at all," Slick quickly assured him. "That is a very good buy."

"Is it expensive?"

Slick took down the garment and fumbled for a price tag, but none was in evidence. He spread it out before the customer.

"That is a real bargain," he beamed. "I

can make that for you at thirty-five dollars."

The customer took the coat in his two hands, but glanced at a mink coat, which was hanging behind Slick.

"Is that the same fur?" he asked.

Slick turned his head. "No," he replied. "That is a——"

Slick's reply was broken, when his head and shoulders were muffled in the heavy seal coat, which the customer had thrown over his head. Too stunned for the moment to do anything, except paw at the heavy garment, a toe crashed against Slick's tender shin, and he went to his knees, his cry of pain muffled in the fur.

Slick managed to draw his automatic, waving it in a cramped circle, as the customer crashed down upon him. Then a strong hand clamped down on his wrist, twisting so forcibly that Slick relinquished the weapon.

All the struggle had been muffled by the fur coats, until a fold slipped off Slick's head, when a gun-barrel snapped down on his head, stunning him for the moment.

The customer, panting a little, got to his feet. Slick was huddled at the end of the counter, with the fur coat still wrapped around him.

BUTCH was having trouble with the safe, because of the fact that he was worried about Slick. He couldn't keep his mind on the job. Finally his curiosity overcame him. He dusted off his knees and came back to the window. A customer was standing against the counter, on which were piled several fur coats, but there was no sign of Slick.

With his jaws shut tightly, and affecting complete nonchalance, Butch opened the office door and came down behind the counter. His eyes darted here and there, seeking Slick.

"Where is the clerk?" asked Butch quietly.

"He is looking for something, I believe," replied the customer.

"Oh!" Butch's eyes darted toward the rear room. "You were looking for something in furs?"

"I have been looking at skunk," replied the customer.

"Oh, yes," nodded Butch. He stepped to the end of the counter, eyeing the customer closely, and nearly fell over the huddled Slick, who at that moment apparently came out of his coma, and started fighting where he had left off when the pistol barrel halted the festivities.

"What the hell!" yelled Butch, as Slick's arms encircled his legs. "Leggo! What the——"

But Slick would not be denied. He came to his feet, fairly lifting Butch off the floor, mouthing inarticulate curses, and the customer promptly kicked Slick's feet from under him. Down they both came with a crash, and Butch's head collided solidly with the edge of the counter. But Slick still clung to Butch's legs, a vacant stare in his eyes.

The door opened and a burly policeman sauntered in, stopping just inside the doorway.

"By any chance," he asked, "have ye seen anythin' of a big man, pickled to the eyebrows. I lost him in a swingin' door of a hotel, and I—I—well, now, what the divil have we here?"

His eyes had beheld Butch and Slick on the floor. He came over cautiously, looked closer at them, and his eyes widened.

"Glory be!" he exclaimed. "Slick Thomas and Butch McKee! What in the divil have these two been up to, sir?"

"I—I think it's a holdup," faltered the customer. "I'll look in the office. You keep an eye on these two, Officer."

A few minutes later Henry Weston and his daughter came from the office, followed by the customer. Weston was spitting lint, along with more unintelligible profanity. He had tried to chew up that wad of rags, it seemed. Gale was shaken, but smiled gamely.

"Thieves!" spluttered the fur merchant.

"They tied us up, Officer. I prefer charges against them."

The policeman yanked Butch up and sat him on the floor. Slick sat up, rubbing his head and gawping around.

"Wh-what happened?" whispered Slick. He saw the officer, and his jaw sagged. "Scragged!" he bleated. "Where's——?" He saw the customer, and swallowed painfully. "Oh, there you are."

"I knew it," whispered Butch. "I knew it!"

"How'd you get wise to it?" asked the officer, turning to the customer.

"Wise? When a fur salesman doesn't know anything about fur—wouldn't that make you wonder? And offers you a thousand dollar coat for thirty-five dollars."

"Lemme at him!" wailed Butch. "Oh, just lemme get one sock at Slick Thomas, Officer. He knew furs! Salesmanship!"

"I don't believe he knows skunk from mink," added the customer.

"Skunk!" exploded Henry Weston. "Can't you get skunk off your mind, Tim O'Neil? Skunk! Always skunk!"

"I'll be callin' the station," said the officer. "We've got to be carin' for these laddie-bucks, who don't know skunks."

Tim O'Neil moved over beside Gale, and they smiled at each other. Henry Weston snorted violently. He started to say something, but changed his mind.

"Skunk does become same styles of beauty," he said slowly. "It ain't always mink. You know furs, Timmie. Take Gale to lunch, will you—and be back to work."

Henry Weston, with trembling hands, slowly closed the office door.

Gale looked at Tim adoringly, her hands fingering the sleeve of his coat.

"It's wonderful, Tim," she whispered. "I knew you could win father. But did you know I was there, or did you come back to try and persuade father——?"

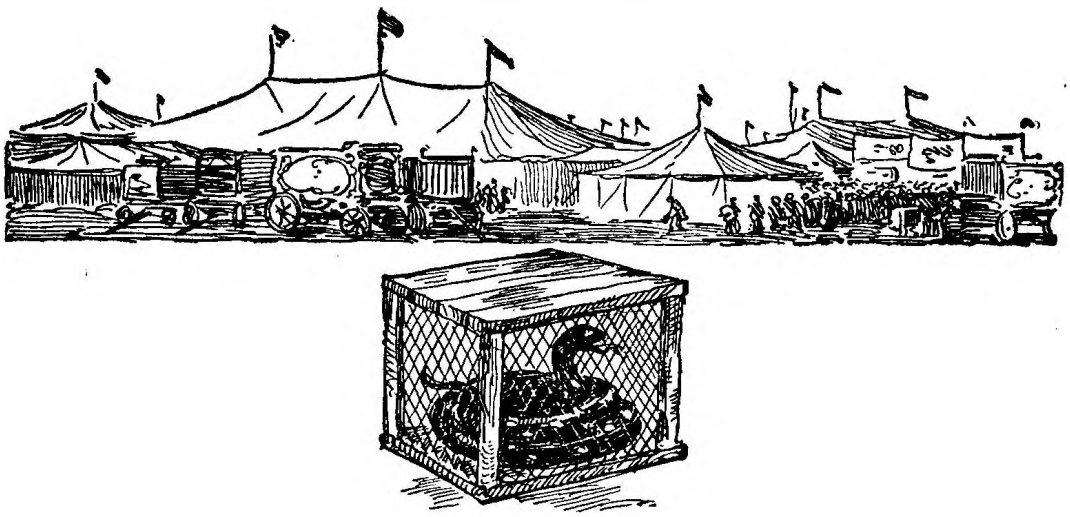
"No, darlin'," replied Tim soberly, "I came back to get my hat."

SUNLIGHT KILLS SNAKES

John H. Spicer

SNAKES like to sun themselves so it was something of a surprise to discover that a few minutes' exposure to direct sunlight will actually kill rattlesnakes, even the desert rattlers of the Southwest. Dr. Ditmars, the reptile expert, made the discovery while hunting rattlers in Connecticut. He had caught two fine specimens which he left lying in a bag in the sunlight while he chased a third one that got away. When he returned, the other two were dead. Similarly members of the Yosemite Field School in the Yosemite National Park in California placed a desert rattler in the direct sunlight. It died of convulsions in about seventeen minutes and though the snake is a cold-blooded animal, its body then felt warm to the touch instead of cool. Investigations since then have shown that sometimes as little as seven or eight minutes' exposure to the sun will kill even a rattlesnake from the burning desert of the Southwest and that these creatures can really stand very little heat.

Adventurers All



BULLDOGGING A RATTLESNAKE

SOME years ago I trouped with a circus carnival, which carried among its concessions a "geek" show; that is, a platform walk-around in which the spectator paid a dime in coin of the realm to see a wild man handle an assortment of reptiles from whip snakes to Gila monsters and rattlers.

From the midway, the show presented an air of mystery, for there was nothing to indicate the nature of the exhibition; that was left to the imagination. For a ballyhoo, a man clad in white sun helmet and leather puttees stood on the top of the frame, rattling a long chain and punctuating his harsh commands with an occasional shot from a revolver shooting blanks, giving one the impression that there was some untamable beast in the pit below. Now and again there issued from beneath the platform a muffled growl—it was produced by a razorback who rubbed a resined glove over a string that ran through a bucket over which was stretched a drum head.

The rattlesnakes in the collection were fixed; that is, the fangs were drawn and some of the venom removed. But sometimes the fixing was poorly done and enough poison remained so that their strike would provoke intense agony and even death. I saw a handler who had been struck by a fixed rattler, and within an hour his arm was the color of charred wood and swollen to twice its normal size. And but for heroic measures by the attending physician, he might have died.

As the reptiles were valuable and much time consumed in obtaining new shipments from Texas, they required considerable care. They are very susceptible to cold and during the cool autumn nights they were packed away with heated bricks, hot water bags and blankets to keep them warm.

As a member of the Wild West show, I lived in a tent on the lot and when the owner of the geek show—who was a very good friend—asked if he could store his box of reps in my tent as a protection against theft, I readily consented. I was a bit squeamish the first night or two, but as time went on and nothing happened, I became accustomed to the sounds of an occasional rattle and the slithering of writhing bodies against the sides of the well constructed box.

We were playing the New England fairs at the time of which I write and usually the owner saw to it that the reps were put away and cared for, but on this particular

night and unknown to me, he had left it to his razorback, who was afraid of them. And in his haste he neglected to fasten the hasp securely, and to put in the warmed bricks.

I am a heavy sleeper, and toward morning I partly awoke to feel something on my chest, and as I moved a little there came a sinister rattle almost in my ear! Instantly I became alert to my danger and by the early light of dawn saw the broad arrow-shaped head of a diamond back, a scant foot away from my face! The beady eyes gleamed wickedly as the forked tongue darted in and out, and I felt my scalp prickle with fear, while scarcely daring to breathe, I stared at that swaying head and waited for it to strike.

There came to my mind a foolish thought that I could dodge, or cover up my head—but I couldn't move! Again there filmed before my eyes the bloated arm of that poor fellow, and in imagination I pictured the effect the poison would have on my face—swelling, discoloration, agony, death! The rattle died down and encouraged by it, I carefully—oh, so carefully—slid my arm inch by inch up behind the swaying head—and grabbed! And I bulldogged him!

I threw him across the tent and the movement dislodged two more of the harmless variety from the foot of the bed where they had coiled to get warm, and soon the tent became alive with wriggling forms that had escaped from the loosely covered box. Most of them writhed under the tent and got away—nor did I make any attempt to stop them.

You can bet your scalplock that there were no more reps stored in that tent the rest of the season. Why didn't he strike? You can search me, unless it was because it was one that the geek handled every day.

But if you don't think that such an experience will hand you a kick—try it sometime!

Chief Henry Red Eagle

$15 For True Adventures

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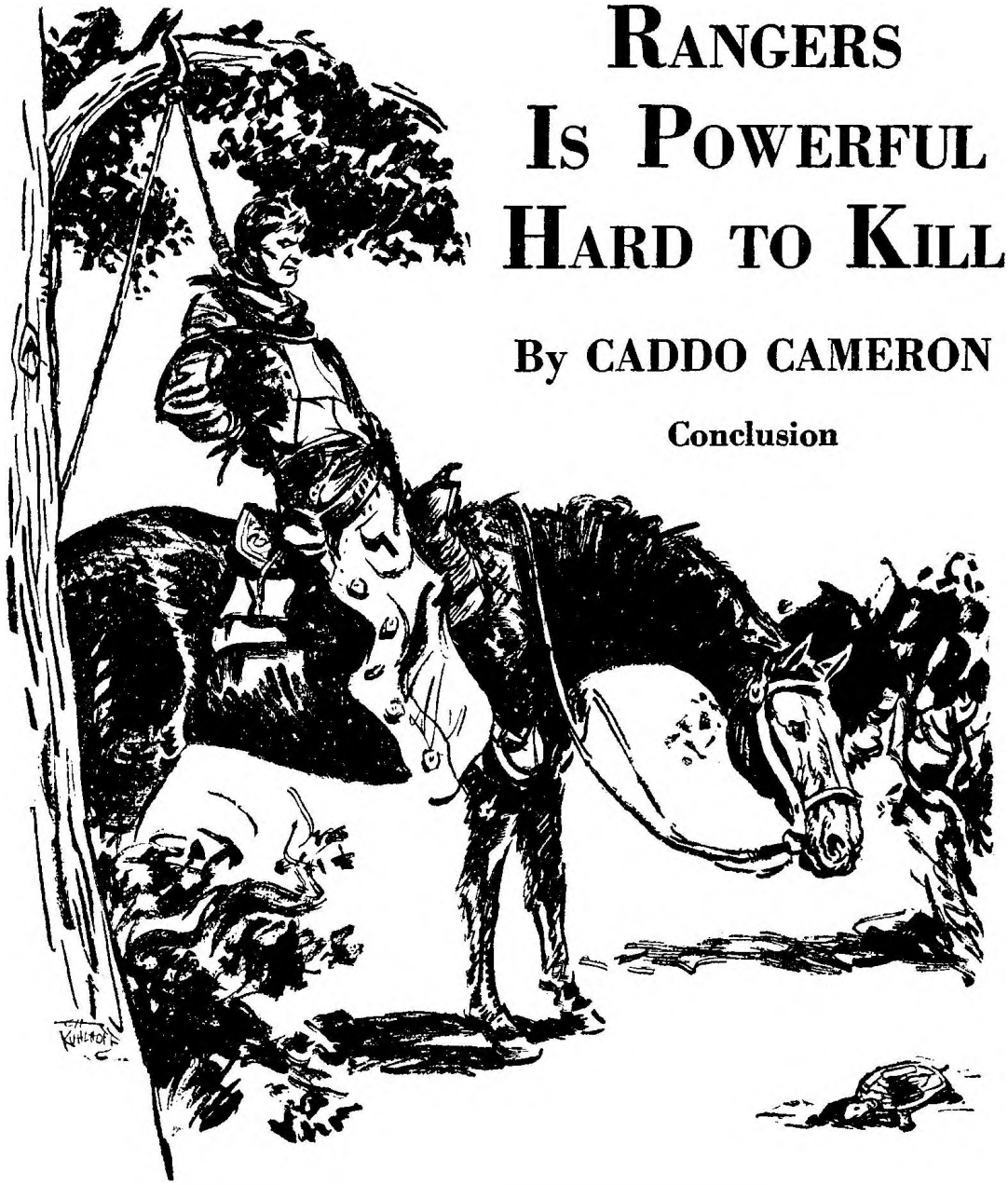


Rangers Is Powerful Hard to Kill

By CADDO CAMERON

Conclusion

CHAPTER VII

"Me and you has been in some bad fixes, Old Hoss, but I reckon this'n tops 'em all."

MURDER—pure and simple! Such was Badger's instantaneous conviction, and he saw at a glance that others shared his opinion. Lines of repugnance were scored deep in many faces, and the crowd was momentarily stunned into silence; appalled by the raw savagery with which the gambler sent bullets ripping through the bodies of helpless men, and the ruthless flippancy with which he poked fun at his victims.

Time for the show-down, thought Badger. Arrest Chase for murder—murders in the presence of many witnesses. That would hang him!

Badger Could Lower His Voice to a Bellow and Talk Well to a Crowd of Bad Men

He shot a glance at Blizzard. A scowl and a brief nod toward the street were his answer, and he muttered an oath.

At that instant Fancy's level tones broke the silence. "Ladies and gentlemen—the drinks are on me. Everybody to the bar!"

In the confusion of voices that followed the announcement, the Rangers met at the door. "Slope damned pronto," whispered Blizzard, and they left quickly.

He strode swiftly and silently across the street to the well in the center of the square where he halted and faced about, waiting for Badger who came on reluctantly.

"We're a couple of damned fine law officers!" morosely rumbled the other as he waddled up. "Murder happens right befo' our eyes and all we do is to high-tail it in a mile-high cloud of dust. Are you skeerd of Fancy Chase?"

"Nope—not overly so."

"Then why let him butcher them pore devils when they was dyin', and why in hell didn't we arrest him for murder after he'd done it? Answer that if you can!"

Blizzard replied calmly but sternly, "We got us a job of work to do and it's due to git done, regardless of who gits butchered. Now listen. Fancy Chase ain't the onliest skunk we're after. They's a whole slew of 'em a-rangin' this country in his brand, and we gotta round up as many of 'em as we can. Don't forgit that."

"I ain't forgittin' nothin'," growled Badger. "But less'n a hour ago you was honin' to wipe him out all by hisself, and we jest this minute passed up a slick chance to do it."

"Maybeso. But when Smoky let slip what he did 'bout that there Circle C money, he changed the complexion of things right sudden-like."

"How come?"

While rolling a smoke Blizzard went ahead rapidly. "Somethin' has done happened to that there herd—raided and the crew murdered more'n likely."

Badger profanely concurred.

Blizzard filled his lungs with smoke and exhaled slowly. "So if we could cut its sign and trail it, I calc'late it might take us spank into the middle of this here gang's home range. Leastwise, I figger it's wuth tryin' and that's why I didn't want to show our hands after Smoky said what he did."

"Well, what're we waitin' for? Let's go!"

Blizzard shook his head. "I reckon we'll have to kinda split up, 'cause I ain't feelin' peart enough to stand the hard ridin' it'll take to find them cows. You better rampse down to the corral and fork Belial and git gone quick as ever you can without tellin' Bud nor nobody else which way you're a-headin'."

"I'm on my way!"

"And when you find out somethin', scoot back here as fast as that there black stack of bones can fetch you."

"Shore! Which is plenty fast."

Blizzard studied his cigarette a moment. "And don't forgit to be all-fired keerful. A-scoutin' that there herd, if you make one false move you're a goner so don't take no fool chances."

"Humph!"

"Jest recollect you got you a job—mebbe a gal to boot—and they ain't neither one of 'em got a speck of use for a dead man."

Badger snorted and turned away; but he was suddenly struck by a thought and whirled quickly. "Are you dead shore you ain't the damndest liar in Texas?" he burst out. "What're you figgerin' to do while I'm gone?"

Gazing up at the moon, Blizzard caressed his angular jaw and drawled. "Oh-h-h, I'll sorta lazy 'round and git me a mite of sleep, and mebbe play a leetle poker now and then ontil you come back."

Hands on his hips, Badger growled up at him, "I'm onto you! You know damned well that hell is goin' to pop in this here town from now on, so you're gittin' shed of me while you stay here and face the music. This ain't the fust time you've played that dirty trick on me. It'll be plumb dangerous for you here alone. By dogies, we're both a-goin'!"

Yawning prodigiously, Blizzard lan-

guidly stretched his arms above his head to the limit of their great length. "Settin' in a innocent poker game ain't noways dangerous," he observed dryly. "But you make shore to take keer of yo'self."

He gazed down intently at Badger for an instant, then walked away quickly. "So long," he called over his shoulder.

THERE she is, old fella!" exclaimed Badger to Belial.

He had just caught sight of a dust cloud rolling along with the wind, away off in the east and it brought a feeling of satisfaction as well as a mild thrill of excitement. The horse reflected the sensations of his rider by tossing his head and trying to go faster, and Badger put him into an easy lope toward the highest knoll in a low range of grassy hills which formed the horizon ahead. He estimated he would intercept the herd opposite that point if the trail continued along the far side of the ridge.

He realized a more cautious man would have waited until night before venturing close to the trail, for it was then light of the moon; but he had unlimited confidence in the speed and endurance of the horse under him, and was impatient to learn whether that was the Circle C herd beyond the hills. He had reason to believe it was. Late the evening before, he met a man on the prairie who had ridden up the trail from the south and told of having spent a night with a large Circle C outfit several days previously. After leaving them he was delayed by a sick horse and thought the herd should be but a short distance behind. From this chance meeting, Badger also learned that the trail boss was his friend—Old Jeb, which served to increase his anxiety.

He hated to think of what might have happened to Old Jeb.

A short distance from the crest of the knoll Badger came upon a draw, floored by a rank growth of bluestem. Stepping out of the saddle, he told Belial, "This jest the place for you, Old Hoss. I'll slip off yo' bridle and picket you here, and I reckon I'll take a chance and onloose yo' cinches too."

His saddle-bags carried a pair of moccasins which quickly replaced his high-heeled boots, because years before, Badger learned the value of Indian footgear when scouting or fighting afoot.

He hurried up the slope, anxious to reach the top of the hill and fearful of what he might see when he got there. The dust rolled up closer and closer; and presently over the rise came an occasional shout, low bellows, clashing horns, clicking hooves, disconsolate moans, and the concerted sigh of five thousand tired and thirsty critters —the midday voice of a mighty trail herd.

Hat off, Badger wormed his way to the crest of the knoll. He was surprised to find that it fell away abruptly in an almost perpendicular thirty-foot bank, cut in to form a sort of cove with a sloping floor —dotted here and there by clumps of bushes, and a lonely cottonwood towered a hundred yards distant. Before him stretched a level valley, four or five miles in width, through which a thin line of trees meandered—no doubt marking a dry creek bed.

A rider came loping down the trail ahead of the leaders, and Badger flattened out behind some bunch grass—swearing viciously. "Cal Webb, by God! I might a-knowed it!"

About opposite where Badger lay, the outlaw stopped and waved his Stetson. Promptly the near pointers moved up and those on the off side dropped back a little, and the leaders swung away to the right. Every muscle taut, Badger strained his eyes to make out the brand. "Circle C, shore as hell!"

His blazing glance shifted to Webb. That ought to be Old Jeb—a-settin' his pony, his long hair and whiskers a-flyin' in the wind, a-signallin' to throw the herd off the trail. And he wondered whether the devils had buried Old Jeb, and how in hell Grandma Jeb would ever get along without the old fella.

The herd streamed by and spread out fan-wise on the good grass of the valley; and Badger clenched his fists as he watched the old, familiar brand drift past. If those cows could talk there would be hangings a-plenty! He felt that he had helped to raise the pappies and mammies of those steers, honest critters, and he wanted to tear them away from the murderous thieves who held them. Shorty and Buster and Windy and other friendly faces that flashed before him—they ought to be riding at point and swing and drag instead of the mangy coyotes who were shoving those cows along!

AT LAST came the chuck wagon; the same old wagon and he'd know it among a thousand—even without the brand that somebody had burned on bed and tail-board. But where was Swampfoot Moses? Swampfoot always came up the trail. He guessed they had killed Old Swampfoot too; killed the best damned range cook in the world! Of course they'd have to kill him, because Swampfoot would fight for Old Jeb and the Circle C. And the same mules—no doubt about it; fifteen year old if they were a day. Instead of the scar-faced skunk who was driving, he could see Old Swampfoot Moses a-settin' that spring-seat, his black face a-glistenin' and his white teeth a-flashin', a-cussin' those mules and the dusty riders who sometimes sidled up to beg a handful of smacks or maybe a snack of cold grub; but he'd always wind up by forkin' over the fodder—Old Swampfoot Moses would.

Badger watched the remuda go fogging out into the valley, and thought of the freckled-faced kid wrangler they used to have; a chunk of a boy who could play a jews-harp like hell and spit through his teeth a rod. He figgered that button was most likely a top-hand by now, and maybe he had come up the trail to die.

He thought of all those things, and he breathed hard, and his hand wouldn't stay away from his Colt, for Webb was close beneath him now. But he remembered in time that he had a job of work to do.

The chuck wagon creaked in near the bank where it was sheltered from the wind, and unhitched less than fifty feet away. Badger heard Cal tell the cook to wrassle some grub, as he was going to let the herd graze for a spell before pushing on to water and bed-ground six miles further up the trail.

Webb rode off, but riders drifted in until Badger counted fifteen lounging in the shade of the wagon and bushes. He realized he was taking a tremendous risk every time he pecked through the grass over the top of the bank, and knew he should get away

from there; but he was determined to hear what was said when Cal returned, so decided to stay where he was, keep his head down, and listen.

He learned nothing from the idle talk of the hands, but when at length Webb's arrogant voice cut in he perked up his ears.

"Well, fellers—barrin' another run, we'll get these cows put away by tomorrer night, and it won't be long before everybody will be talkin' about how a Circle C trail-herd and crew evaporated plumb off the earth," boasted Cal with a laugh.

Where would the cows be "put away"? Badger strained his ears to catch every word.

"D'you reckon the boss will be there when we get home?" someone asked.

THE listener held his breath.

"Shore!" replied Webb. "He's goin' to meet us and we'll have a big jamboree, 'cause a lot of fellers is comin' from different places to——"

The grass behind which Badger was prone, rustled in the wind and interfered with his hearing; so he started to slide away, cautiously stretching out a leg.

Whirrr-r-r-r-r!!

The dreadful warning of a rattlesnake, almost under his knee! Instinctively he rolled and lurched violently sidewise and forward to the very brink of the cliff.

The sandy soil crumbled and the next instant he slid head-first down the precipitous bank, crashed through a clump of bushes, and rolled onto the ground not ten feet from where Cal stood. His guns fell from their holsters, his eyes and mouth filled with sand, and he was momentarily dazed by the shock.

Webb acted instantly. Yelling for help, he leaped upon Badger before he could stagger to his feet. Cal himself was a powerful man and in a flash he was joined by several others. Badger struggled mightily, hurling first one and then another away from him like a cornered grizzly shaking off the pack; but like hungry wolves they dashed snarling back into the fight, and he was soon tied hand and foot by men with whom tying was an art.

Everybody fell to talking at once—those who didn't know Badger asking who he was, and those who did telling what they knew about him.

In the meantime he lay panting and viciously staring up at Webb, while his thoughts raced in a desperate effort to decide what he should do and say next. He wondered how long he had to live; and the breeze that crept fitfully into the cove, maliciously tossed dust in his eyes and brought him Blizzard's words with startling clarity. "Job—gal—neither one of 'em got a speck of use for a dead man."

The ragged, imperfectly healed scar on Cal's handsome face turned a bright crimson, and there was plain murder in his flashing eyes when he growled exultantly, "Well, well! Mister Badger Coe! I'm shore tickled to see you."

Badger said nothing; but beneath his torn shirt, great muscles knotted and rippled as he tested the rope around his wrists. It didn't slip a fraction.

Webb kicked him viciously in the flank. "Won't talk, huh?" he rasped with an oath. "What in hell are you doin' here?"

A burning rage didn't blind Badger to the realization that he must do everything possible to protect Blizzard by hiding his identity as a Ranger, and his mind worked rapidly while struggling to regain his breath. Presently he muttered sullenly, "'Tain't none of yo' damned business—but I don't mind sayin' that I used to ride for the Circle C, so when a fella told me my old outfit had a herd comin' up the trail, I racked over here to see did I know any of the boys."

Cal stroked the scar on his cheek. "I got suspicions of you and I reckon you're a damned liar," he rapped out; "but it don't make no difference 'cause you ain't never goin' to have a chance to talk none."

A snaky-looking man with long, straight hair suggested hungrily, "That there cottonwood shore looks lonesome, Cal, and it's got a limb about the right height."

Gazing down at Badger, Webb idly slapped a hand with his gauntlets and his forehead wrinkled in thought. "Nope—can't do it, Blackie," he answered regretfully. "For some damned reason Fancy wants to let this here skunk live a little while. But I'll figger some way of gettin' rid of him."

A scrawny little man with bony shoulders, a thin red beard, pinched face, and squinting eyes that watered and peered wickedly, sprang a surprise on everybody. Suddenly whipping out a gun, he covered Webb and drawled apologetically in thin, nasal tones, "Hate like hell to throw down on you, Cal, but you gotta listen to me."

Webb whirled on him and rapped out, "What! Are you plumb loco?"

"I know this here fella, Cal," whined the other in the same hesitant manner.

Badger swore under his breath and jerked his body around the better to study the speaker. There was something familiar

about his face, and he knew he had heard that peculiar voice before; but——

"What difference does that make?" snapped Webb. "So do I know the damned coyote!"

A bystander placed a hand on the little man's arm and cautioned him. "Better go easy, Squint."

Badger almost let an exclamation escape him. Squint! Squint Harris! In a flash he remembered. Yes—damn it, Squint Harris knew plenty!

Anybody could see that Squint was afraid. The muscles in his narrow jaws worked and his little eyes jerked about nervously; but the gun was steady, and he drawled on. "But I knowed him a long time ago, and he saved my neck once so I don't aim to let you kill him, Cal—not if I can help myself."

Badger hung on his words. How much would Squint Harris tell? No wonder he didn't know Squint; he had a beard now. Saved his neck was right. He saw the mob that wanted to hang Squint. Heard slugs whistling past his head. Saw Squint knocked out of the saddle. His nerves tingled when memory whirled his horse in the teeth of the mob and he swung Harris up in front of him. But that was a long time ago and men like Squint didn't remember such things.

Webb folded his arms and a sly gleam came into his eye when he urged Squint to go ahead and tell about it.

"They ain't nothin' to tell," whined the little man, "except that I done swore I'd pay him back if I ever had a chance."

CAL tried to speak carelessly but failed. "What was this jasper doin' then?"

Badger gritted his teeth and waited.

Squint glanced furtively at the Ranger, and back at Webb. "He was a-ridin' for the Circle C."

Badger smothered a sigh and switched his glance to Cal.

Rage flared in the outlaw's face, and he demanded harshly, "Why the devil should the likes of you figger he'd oughta pay a feller what he owes him?"

Squint shrugged his bony shoulders and dropped his eyes. "Reckon I'm a wuthless cuss shore enough," he whined plaintively; then his head came up and for a brief instant his face was lighted by a pitiful pride. "But by God, I used to be a Texas man!"

Cal stared silently at Squint for a moment, a cynical smile tugging at his cruel lips. "Well, if that's the way you feel about it," he grumbled, turning aside negligently, "I'll just let you have the polecat."

Everybody was startled, Squint most of all, and his attention wavered. In a flash Cal's hand dropped to his Colt and he fired across the front of his body without turning.

The heavy slug caught the little man high in the stomach and literally hurled him to the ground. He squirmed and twisted in agony, his poisonous eyes shot venom at Webb, and his bony fingers bravely clawed at the gun which had escaped them. An oath ended in a gurgle, and he sagged into the unmistakable posture of a dead man.

Badger groaned and rumbled a curse.

Cal spoke briefly to two of his men. They roughly picked up and walked off with all that was left of the little outlaw, and Badger wanted to call after them, "Squint Harris, mebbe you did live like a coward, a thief, and a killer, but you shore as hell died like a Texas man!"

Fired by a helpless rage, he cursed Webb with all the fluency and savagery of which he was capable; cursed him until the outlaw launched a kick at his face which grazed his temple.

"Where's your hoss?" demanded Cal.

Badger told him, having almost lost hope and wanting to be sure that Belial was cared for.

At a word from Webb, one man left to find the horse and two more dragged the Ranger away from the wagon. He lay there unnoticed while the gang ate and smoked; and from time to time he caught a word which told him they were having a lively discussion with respect to what should be done with him. Apparently Cal

settled the argument by a decision which elicited grim chuckles and profane approval. One man exclaimed loud enough for Badger to hear, "That's a slick idea and it oughta tickle Fancy. Too bad we can't be here to see the fun."

AN HOUR or so later the chuck-wagon rolled out ahead toward the predetermined bed-ground. The remuda drifted away up the valley, and under the capable guidance of the thieves—the herd dribbled into line on the north-bound trail.

The point and swing riders twisted in their saddles from time to time—to look back. No doubt for once satisfied to eat the dust of the herd, the men in the drag rode in one stirrup with chins on their shoulders—looking back. The last to leave, Cal Webb rode off with the drag; and he laughed in spite of the dust—for he too was looking back.

Belial watched them go—his great, intelligent eyes missing nothing and his sensitive little ears catching every sound; but he made no move to follow, for his reins tied him to the ground. Standing in the shade of the cottonwood, he was fully rigged for the trail; saddled and cinched tightly; rifle in its scabbard beneath a fender; riata neatly coiled and tied at the pommel; saddle-bags in place; thin bedding-roll behind the cantle; Badger's boots hanging from the horn—spurs attached; and Badger himself sitting the saddle.

Webb made an insulting farewell gesture as he passed out of sight over a rise; but it went unanswered because Badger's hands were tied behind his back: and Badger failed to dash off in flight or pursuit, because a rope hung from the limb above him—and it was looped around his neck!

Through his wide-angle vision, Belial could watch his master as well as the departing herd and he sent more than one inquiring glance backward, for the situation was strange to him. He couldn't understand the trailing reins while the rider was in the saddle, or why his master sat so silently through all the noise and movement around them.

He lifted his head slightly and his silky ears pivoted quickly, for Badger spoke to him. "Me and you has been in some bad fixes, Old Hoss, but I reckon this'n tops 'em all."

Badger's voice was calm and unruffled, and it had a whimsical flavor which made Belial feel that all was well—so he drooped a hip and listened. "And what d'you know about it? That there Webb said he wouldn't hang me, but the blasted skunk swore he'd make you do it!"

A note of anger crept into Badger's voice which caused Belial to roll an eye and flick an ear, for he was high-strung and quick to respond to the moods of his master. But the wrath was soon replaced by grim humor; so he thought everything must be all right after all and switched at an imaginary fly—listening lazily.

"Said he'd heard me a-blowin' 'bout how all-fired smart you are, and how you'll do durned nigh anything I tell you—like layin' down or standin' hitched to the ground ontil hell freezes over, come cyclone or prairie fire, so he calc'lated he'd give us a chance to prove them things. The mangy hound didn't leave us much slack to work with, so if you use it up, you big black devil, you'll shore make a corpse and a liar outa me simultaneous, and don't you forgit it!"

All this didn't mean anything to Belial, but there was nothing particularly disturbing in the tone or man-scent so he decided if his master wanted to sit there in the shade and talk, it was all right with him and he'd doze off for a short spell.

But he awoke quickly when Badger kind of sagged in the saddle and went to muttering rather pensively, "You big coward. Lawdy, kiss me again! Uh-huh. Don't do it like you're askeerd you'll pizen me. Cute leetle trick."

Something must be wrong, so Belial stayed awake to listen. "You wuthless cuss, why in hell don't you tell me to quit moonin' and git to work figgerin' a way outa this here jack-pot? Lemme see—limb's too

high up for me to take a chance standin' on the saddle and throwin' myself acrost it, 'cause if I didn't cut 'er fust jump——"

A fat terrapin came waddling and teetering through the dusty grass. Belial's ears flipped forward and his head went down a trifle when he saw it, for if there was anything he loved to do it was to stomp on terrapins; he liked the way they scrunched beneath his heavy hoof. He knew that Badger saw it too, and although the voice was steady, the horse could feel his master's anxiety. What was wrong? Badger always used to laugh when he jumped on a turtle.

"Steady, Old Hoss! Hold it! You ain't squshin' no dry-land turtles while I got this here damned rope 'round my neck 'cause—whoa-a-a boy!"

Belial had dropped his head still lower, stretched his neck, and started to lift a foot; but he understood and obeyed the voice that had controlled him for four years —the voice of the first man who rode him and the only master he ever knew. So he stuck out his muzzle and snorted and twisted a lip at the turtle, and let it teeter on its way. He felt Badger relax and heard him sigh.

"Whew-w-w! Go way, turtle! Now lemme see. Gotta work fast 'cause it ain't noways fair to expect you to stand in yo' tracks, what with turtles and such-like."

A horse-fly!

"Steady, Belial!"

How he hated 'em!

"Stop it!"

They'd buzz and buzz round and round a fella, a-dodgin' and a-laughin' and a-stabbin' wuss'n a knife, and they'd make shore to light on a spot that was hard to git at. The smart thing to do was to run like hell, or git in some bresh; they didn't like bresh, and there was some bresh over yander a piece. But the compelling force of the voice was greater than his urge to run from the fly; so he tossed his head and struck viciously with a front foot, and lashed out a short kick at the black devil, and his tail switched wildly and his skin jerked and he actually trembled when the thing lit on his neck—on the side opposite where his heavy mane flowed—but he didn't prance more than two feet either way. And he snorted —listening to Badger.

"Easy, Old Boy! Hold still, Belial! I'll—reach—him—with—my—foot—befo' he can—— Gruuh! There you are! Whew-w-w! You're the best damned hoss in all Texas! Calm down, Old Fella. I squshed him jest as he was gittin' sot to knife you."

The fly was dead, Belial knew that; but things weren't right. Badger drawled on as dryly and calmly as ever, talking about nothing as he often did when they were alone, but in some mysterious way Belial knew his master was a raw bundle of nerves, and he experienced the sensations of his rider without comprehending the cause of it all. In its ignorance of facts, his horse-mind conjured up terrible visions of

the dreadful thing that had brought fear to his master; some hidden thing that he couldn't see, hear, or smell, but could feel and knew was near.

His mighty muscles gathered like vibrant springs beneath his glossy coat and his beautiful head came up—swinging from side to side while he tested the air for sound and scent, and searched every hill and bush and draw within range of his remarkable vision—desperately trying to find the thing that lurked nearby and threatened his master and him. And he sent an appealing glance at Badger for he wanted to run frantically—to take his master and fly wildly away from there! He fought to resist the power of habit and discipline, but it held him.

"Whoa-a-a-up! Be still, Belial. Reckon it's my fault—gittin' upsot wuss'n a old woman. Cain't blame you. Steady, Old Boy! Damn it—we ain't whopped yet!"

Belial champed the bit and switched his tail and stood, tied there by the reins and the voice, but each passing moment made it harder to obey. His horse-imagination now saw danger lurking behind every bunch of grass; in the tiny whirl-winds that played around his legs; in the familiar shadows that flitted across the prairie. The whisper of the leaves above him was a terrifying sound.

He couldn't understand why Badger twisted and squirmed in the saddle, and rolled his head, and hunched his shoulders, and muttered blistering oaths. But at length he got the rope in his mouth!

His master's strange behavior magnified Belial's dread, for he was a creature of habit. He trembled while watching the man's great neck and jaw muscles knot and roll and veins try to burst through the skin. He saw sweat streaming from Badger's face, mixing with blood from lips and gums that were ripped and torn by the coarse rope fibers; and the breath that whistled from the corner of his master's mouth carried bloody saliva that splotched his own shining coat.

He watched this maddening performance —momentarily becoming more and more frantic, until sweat trickled down his legs and he thought he could stand it no longer. Then he saw Badger twist his body and head until he held the dangling rope between shoulder and cheek, and heard him gasp out while panting for breath:

"Steady there, Belial! Be still, Old Boy! Jest a leetle longer. Damned glad they didn't use a hard-twist rope. Stand still now."

The horse watched Badger fall to biting and tugging and snarling more desperately than ever; and while fighting for control of himself, Belial brought his muzzle around and sought comfort by touching his master's moccasin. But the nervous strain under which the man labored was like a malignant fever that attacked the vitals of the horse—alternately searing and chilling—and the awful dread struck him with renewed vigor.

They were not cornered. The limitless prairie swept away on all sides, and the instinct of his species told him to fly. Why didn't his master swing forward in the saddle, bend low, and tell him to run? They had fled before and never been caught. Nothing could catch him now; he knew it!

He sent a fearful glance at Badger.

Blood smeared the coarse stubble of beard on his chin and neck, and trickled onto his shirt; and with eyes closed, he ground his jaws and shook the rope like a dog might worry a snake. The very sight of him and the scent of his saturated body turned Belial's veins into icy rivulets, and lent force to the insistent voice within him that screamed, "Fly!"

Suddenly he discovered it—the danger he had known was near but couldn't find. His animal-mind had been seeking a cause or an excuse for its terror, and there it was! A thing he feared above all others with a fear inherited from his parents—foaled in Kentucky but raised on the plains.

A snake! And if one believed his master —the only thing on earth that Belial really feared.

Six feet away it slithered through the grass, its scaly hide glistening. Suddenly it stopped, lifted its head, fixed him with its unblinking eyes, and darted a forked tongue at him!

A vile thing—which he knew was going to strike him. Instantly he flung his head high and jerked his front quarters aside one step—no more. But Badger lost his balance and threw a leg around the horn for support. His moccasined foot caught one of the boots and slammed it across to the other side, and drove a spur into the horse's shoulder.

Belial sprang frantically away!

Badger's head snapped back. Twisted at an unnatural angle, he thought it would be torn from his body. His teeth clamped shut on the rope and his jaws locked with the savagery of despair. He was jerked

violently from the saddle and swung away on the line, the corded muscles of his neck standing out like cables. Pain devils roared and screeched inside his skull, and pounded the backs of his eye-balls. In the delirium of that awful moment he wondered whether his teeth would rip from their roots or break; and if not—how long a man could hang that way. He'd fight to the bitter end!

The rope slipped through his teeth, but it was chewed almost in two and a living, twisting pendulum—he swung out to the end of the arc. His jaws clamped even tighter—his heart stopped—and in that instant he lived years.

The line parted and he crashed to earth!

OVERCOME by the reaction and partially stunned by the fall, Badger never knew how long he lay there before a soft muzzle nudged his bare shoulder and a hoof pawed the ground near his head. He sat up like a man awakening out of a nightmare, spitting rope fibers and trying to pull others from his gums and lips with his tongue.

"Howdy, Old Fella," he mumbled to Belial, who stood over him. "Damn it! My mouth is wuss'n a pin cushion. Feels like I'd been chawin' cactus."

Apparently satisfied that his master was all right, the horse reached back to nip at a fly and Badger went on with a flash of mirth in his bloodshot eyes. "Well, what you waitin' for, you kittle-bellied old crow-bait? D'you 'spect me to kiss you jest 'cause you saved my neck?"

With magnificent unconcern, Belial listlessly centered his attention upon a passing jack rabbit.

Badger rested on the ground a few minutes longer before stiffly getting to his feet. "Still here, a-waitin' for me to thank you," he growled to the horse, leaning weakly against its shoulder. "I reckon you done forgot the time I snaked you outa quicksand down on the Canadian; and the time I set up all night a-nussin' yo' colic after you damned nigh ruint fo'ty acres of green cawn for Uncle Andy Furnace; and how I killed three hosses that was a heap better'n you and rode myself to skin and bones, pryin' you loose from them hoss-thieves you got yo'self tangled up with down there on the border? Huh! You don't git no thanks from me! Skeedaddle while I figger some way of gittin' my hands unloosed befo' Cal Webb comes back to see whether you done a good job of stretchin' me. Slope!"

Naturally the first thing he thought of was his bowie knife; but one of the gang had taken it when his hands were tied. Webb had left his belts and guns hanging on a bush where he could see them—just to make him feel bad, the outlaw declared—but they were of no value to him at the moment.

Badger next remembered having seen the cook opening cans, and soon found one. "Allus did like canned peaches," he chuckled, setting to work upon the difficult task of manipulating his hands and the empty can so as to saw through the rope that bit into his swollen wrists.

The sun was hanging low in the sky when Badger stood rubbing his arms and looking down at a mound of fresh earth, not far from the bank where he had fallen into the hands of the gang.

"I'm surprised they buried the poor cuss," he muttered. "Ain't got much time, but I'll shore spend some of it—" and he tramped off to search around the camp-site. At length he found a board from the top of a canned-goods box, and for several minutes thereafter he frowned and swore while printing something upon it with a bullet.

The writing completed, he drove the board into the sandy soil at the end of the mound with his picket-pin.

Stepping back, he read:

SQUINT
HARRIS
A
TEXAS
MAN

"Sorry I ain't got time to burn it on, Squint," he rumbled pensively, "but I got

business with the ornery pup that planted you here."

Badger was positive some of the gang would return to the scene of the hanging—no doubt Webb himself and as many more as were permitted to leave the herd. Curiosity if nothing else would draw them back; also, they were not men to let a valuable horse and a hundred-dollar saddle wander unclaimed on the range. So he was dying to stay there and give them a surprise when they came, but dare not; his job was to follow the herd.

A PROBLEM demanding a quick decision confronted him. Once having discovered the hanging was a failure, Webb would undertake to hunt him down like a wolf if it were known he remained in the neighborhood. Therefore the safest and most sensible thing to do was to head toward Casota for ten or fifteen miles, and circle back so as to cut the trail of the herd; but in Badger's estimation this plan had one great weakness—the fact that Belial should be watered, and in the direction of town the nearest water was forty miles away. He preferred to depend upon the animal's speed, rather than to ride him out in an effort to avoid pursuit.

Badger had ranged through this section years before, and remembered the general location of streams and the lay of the land as well. He knew that along Antelope River where Webb said the herd would bed down, there was a strip of rough country four or five miles in width called Antelope Brakes. It occurred to him that the herd might be broken up and moved in small bunches either up or down the river to the thieves' home ranch or holding ground; at least he felt that would be a smart way by which to dispose of a stolen herd of such proportions. If this were done and he undertook to follow them, undoubtedly he would ride out many a false trail—which was another excuse for him to decide upon the venturesome scheme of sticking close to the herd and taking his chances.

Keeping an eye on the main trail, he quartered off through the valley and put Belial into a long lope in the tracks of the remuda, running parallel to the dry creek bed which he assumed led to the river. Even in the path of a hundred and fifty or more horses, he knew a good trailer could follow Belial's tracks because of the length of his stride and the fact that few of the prairie cow-ponies were shod; but it would be slow work, and he trusted darkness would overtake his pursuers before they learned definitely that he had gone to the river.

However, this hope was quickly blasted. He hadn't traveled more than two miles and the sun was still above the horizon, when a dust-cloud mushroomed over the trail to the northward.

Badger brought Belial to a sliding stop and ground out an oath. "Yander they come! Reckon this ain't our lucky day."

He watched the dust and thought rapidly until it was evident the riders themselves would soon appear at the top of a rise on the trail; then he kneed Belial to the right through scattered trees, down into the creek bed and stopped behind a cut-bank higher than the horse's withers. From there he could see portions of the trail, and the cottonwood where he was left to hang.

Eight riders were fogging down the trail, and at length he distinguished Webb on a pinto in the lead. "Them fellas is shore in a lather to git back here," he told Belial. "Cal was forkin' a sorrel at noon and I reckon they all saddled fresh ponies, so if they ketch our scent, Old Fella, you're in for a race."

A little smile twisted Badger's cut and swollen lips when he saw Belial's nostrils quiver and his ears twitch as he too watched the riders. He swore the horse knew they were hiding, and hoped they'd be discovered.

Badger would have given anything to hear what was said when Webb and his men reached the tree. They milled around under the limb, soon scattering to circle the camp-site—some afoot and others walking their horses slowly. He knew they were

trying to cut his trail, and cursed the luck that brought them back before dark.

Presently one man trotted down the valley toward him, and Badger cursed with feeling. The fellow had found their tracks! At the point where they entered the path of the remuda, the outlaw stopped and waved the others on. The gang clustered around the trailer, and Badger's knuckles whitened as he gripped the saddle-horn. Would they decide to go slowly and trace out the tracks, or simply guess he followed the remuda and dash on in pursuit?

His suspense was short-lived. A moment later the riders bent low in their saddles and the ponies flattened in a run toward him!

At that instant he was faced with two alternatives; he could make Belial lie down behind the bank, trusting the horse would stay there during the excitement of the passing chase and that the gang wouldn't discover where he turned off; or he could run for it and hope to reach the brakes—a safe place when darkness came. Should he remain where he was and be discovered, there would be no escape; and if he ran they'd instantly see him because he'd have to take the side of the creek bed upon which the gang was traveling—the ground on the opposite side being badly washed and broken for a mile or more.

He decided to run; for he preferred to die in the open if need be, rather than to be shot like a trapped lobo.

Belial pranced out of the trees—head high, neck arched, and nostrils expanded—and Badger held him for an instant broadside to the close-packed bunch of riders flying down upon them. Swashbuckler that he was, he swept off his Stetson and defiantly waved them on; and his mighty voice boomed out across the prairie in the long-yell, a war-cry made famous by the reckless fighting-men of his breed.

There were no answering yells and no shots, for they were beyond effective rifle range; but the mass of grim riders came on even faster, and the pinto led the pack. Belial reared and whirled, Badger came up in his stirrups, and the giant horse stretched out in magnificent leaps that made him appear long and slender and as light on his feet as a fleeing antelope. The Ranger laughed aloud, intoxicated by the danger of the moment and exhilarated by his pride in the animal under him.

Wind whistled past his ears and tore at his hat, and he bent low, laughing into the long, black mane that whipped his face. "Git along, you old poke-easy!" he chuckled, patting the shining neck. "You been honin' for a ruckus for weeks, so let's see you ramble some."

Since he knew they didn't have far to go, he'd let Belial run to his heart's content for a while—thinking that the speed with which he left them behind might discourage the gang to the point where they'd give up the chase. He realized a tough, grass-fed cow-pony could hang on his trail day after day and recuperate quicker than his grain-fed thoroughbred; but in a four or five mile race, Belial could leave the pony as though it were dragging a calf.

After running right away from them for a mile or two, he was surprised to discover Webb's bunch was pounding leather as hard as ever. It set him to thinking, so he slowed down to a speed approximating Cal's and took stock of things.

A MOMENT later a startling realization struck him. The creek was angling off toward the northwest, drawing closer to where he assumed the main trail to be; and therefore if they were holding the herd at the river near the trail, it was evident Webb was hazing him right into camp!

He brought the disgusted horse down to an easy lope, observing grimly, "'Pears to me we're goin' to need plenty speed sudden-like befo' this here rumpus is finished."

Quick glances told Badger the situation was anything but encouraging. To go to the left was out of the question—level prairie and no water for miles. On the right was the creek bed, which had deepened until it was a gulch with rugged sand

walls and a bottom lined with willows and floored by cobbles and coarse pebbles that might cripple a running horse. Across the creek the ground was not sufficiently broken to afford a secure hiding place but too rough for speed, and on such footing the ponies could travel as fast or faster than Belial. Straight ahead a distance of about three miles, a low ridge met the sky and he knew it marked the edge of the brakes.

The sinking sun splashed red on the wall of an irregular gash through the ridge, and it seemed to open its bloody mouth to receive him.

He might run head-on into the camp of the thieves, but he had to reach the river—the sooner the better. So he gave

Belial his head, bent low, and growled, "Let 'er rip—you big devil! See can you run right outa yo' hide."

The horse enthusiastically sprang into his tremendous running stride. His thundering hooves seemed to say to Badger, "To hell with the gang behind us and the unknown dangers ahead of us!" And he smiled when he thought, "Damned if we cain't rampse smack over their blasted camp without gittin' a scratch."

Shortly he discovered something he had been looking for—a thin column of smoke rising from beyond the ridge more than a mile to the left of the gap. The evening breeze whisked it away, but it told him where to find the chuck-wagon. Were they holding the herd to right or left? If on the left, he might expect nothing worse than an encounter with the remuda or some scattered riders; if on the right—well, they'd sure as hell have a stampede on their hands!

Danger suddenly raised its head at another point.

Two riders appeared at the crest of the rise near where the smoke blossomed up—evidently the main trail. Badger rumbled an oath. They sat their ponies for more than a minute and he imagined they were arguing the situation. Even if they failed to recognize him, they'd surely know their own men and join the chase at any moment. The gang in the rear saw them and a fusillade of shots rang out, solving the problem for the men on the hill. Their ponies sprang into a run and they came tearing along the slope on a line that would intercept Badger at the gap, if he didn't get there first.

"Hell's done busted loose, let's go!" he roared at Belial, laughing with reckless abandon when the magnificent horse laid back his ears, lengthened his stride, and fairly flew.

A glance over his shoulder told him that Webb was falling behind rapidly, but he saw that unless Belial could maintain his terrific pace, the men on the slope were bound to come within easy rifle range which would compel him to lose precious time by taking to the creek-bed.

As though he recognized their danger, the horse voluntarily swung closer to the bank, disdainfully leaping gullies and draws that he should have gone around—jumps that no ordinary mount would attempt. A fall was the thing Badger feared most, for Belial was taking tremendous risks. On more than one occasion the sandy banks gave away when the great beast and his heavy rider cleared a gully, but in each case they were in the air again when the earth crumbled.

Badger swore to himself that no other horse could carry his weight at such speed; and he rode loose, clenching his teeth and letting the horse pick its own course—feeling that Belial knew his strength better than his rider. Besides, it was a partnership affair anyhow.

HIS trust wasn't misplaced. The horse never faltered and they were but a few rods from the gap when one of the riders slid to a stop and jerked his rifle from its scabbard. Badger anticipated this maneuver. Stretching low to Belial's steaming neck, he called for a final burst of speed that carried them behind the protecting bank an instant before the rifle cracked.

A bullet splashed sand in his face.

The gap was a hundred yards in length and half as wide, the dry creek running along its right wall. Directly ahead lay Antelope River—a wide expanse of white sand through which a narrow stream meandered. On the far side were the brakes—a scowling, unfriendly stretch of country comprising a confusion of gullies, canyons, sand pillars, red cliffs, and scrubby timber in which a man and his horse might lose their pursuers with comparative ease.

But to cross the river at that time meant exposure to the rifles behind him; so Badger swung to the right across the creek-bed and up a slope to a shelf not over thirty feet wide, with a ten-foot drop to the river on the left and a steep cliff on the right. The footing was good and he permitted Belial to stretch out in a run toward a point that jutted out from the cliff a short distance ahead.

Rounding the point, he cursed wholeheartedly and dropped a hand to his Colt. Less than a hundred yards ahead, fifteen or twenty ponies trotted toward him and two men were hazing them along!

Only one thing to do—go through 'em!

So Badger stood in his stirrups and went plunging into the fight with a mighty yell that echoed up and down the river, and added to the confusion of the men and horses before him.

Burning with the fever of the chase, his nerves strung to the highest tension, Belial went berserk at Badger's yell and the sight of others of his kind. He tore down upon them—a great, black destroyer, smeared with foam and dust, head thrust forward until it almost formed a line with his neck, nostrils flaming crimson, eyes flecked with red, ears laid flat, and teeth bared for battle.

The ponies went wild in their attempts to evade the black tornado that drove ruthlessly into them, sparing neither himself nor those who blocked his passage. His great bulk and strength sent some crashing to the ground and others over the bank. Teeth like the jaws of a vise that opened and closed with lightning rapidity, literally ripped an ear and the skin from the skull of one, and slashed through the hides and tore out the muscles of others; and the battle-crazed beast struck and kicked with iron-shod hooves that crushed the flesh and splintered the bones of those they found.

For an instant the riders themselves were thunderstruck, and Badger's six-shooter emptied one saddle before the other man could draw. The survivor was Blackie—the snaky individual who had had a hand in the hanging. Belial plunged through the remnants of the herd and reared above his pony at the instant he and Badger fired, causing both to miss.

BY A lightning twist in his saddle, the outlaw dodged the hoof that crashed down on his pony. He dropped his gun, but his other hand almost simultaneously swung a quirt in a vicious cut at Balial's eyes.

Those murderous teeth closed on his face! The Ranger and his horse flew along the shelf, and on the sand behind them—squirmed a hideous thing!

Badger wiped a smear from his cheek—the blood of another man. He was hard, but nevertheless muttered, "They sure ain't nothin' as hellish as a hoss's teeth!"

Belial thundered on. They covered half a mile before riders appeared on the shelf and clustered at the scene of the recent fight. Convinced that pursuit had been abandoned temporarily, he looked for a suitable place to cross the river. The shelf soon disappeared in a gradual incline down to a gravel bank, and opposite that point the stream cut in close to the far edge

of the sandy river bed. The mouth of a wide, deep canyon—lined with brush and scrubby timber—beckoned to him from the other side, and without a pause he swung to the left—sending Belial plunging across the sand.

His sudden appearance was greeted by the cracking of rifles from up stream; but he knew the range was impossible in that failing light, and let the horse forge on toward the security of the canyon.

Satisfied that Webb would have too much sense to waste men and ponies in an effort to hunt him down in the brakes at night, Badger unsaddled and treated Belial to a careful rub-down and a cautious watering. He figured they had plenty to do before morning; and since he must wait for the moon, he stretched on the ground and tore into the cold grub in his saddle-bags while the horse munched a slender feed of shelled corn from a small sack in the bedding roll.

TIME passed too swiftly. When the first moonbeam powdered the smooth skin of the water and turned the river sand to a bed of silver dust, Badger swore it came before it was due. He was tired and stiff, and Belial hadn't finished with the lush grass in the canyon.

The horse was reluctant to take the bit, and Badger apologized after his fashion. "Reckon I cain't blame you much, Old Fella. But damn yo' lazy hide, don't you know that me and you ain't never been no hands to wait for cow-critturs to show us how to go some place we want to git to in a hurry?" And while tugging at a latigo, he went on complaining, "Quit that swellin' up or I'll jab a knife in yo' paunch. Damn it! I ain't got no knife. May need one befo' long."

Staying clear of the sand and moving in the shadow of cliffs wherever possible, he rode slowly up the river until the singing of night-guards drifted in on the locoed breeze that chased itself in the canyons and played devilish tricks with sound.

He stopped and sat the saddle stiffly while straining his ears. "Wonder where in hell they're holdin' them cows, and where's the remoother, and where's the wagon, and— hell, they ain't but one way to find out, and that's to Injun that there camp!"

Going ahead cautiously and pausing to listen from time to time, he stopped when the singing appeared to come from almost directly across the river. Thoroughly on the alert and apparently ready for anything, Belial pawed the ground lightly, tossed his head, and seemed to be at the point of sounding a challenge to the unseen men and animals whose voices and scents came riding down the breeze.

Badger gave the reins a light pull and commanded softly, "Be still! Shore gotta git you away from here. Doggone it—that's what a fella gits for havin' a hoss that won't keep his durned mouth shet. If you go to shootin' off yo' face we'll land right smack in the middle of another ruckus, and I'm a man of peace."

He swung the horse around and backtracked to the entrance to a draw that was deep and dark and patched with bunches of willows.

Badger's weariness vanished at the approach of more danger and adventure, and he became his light-hearted, reckless self again. The prospect of scouting the outlaw camp and getting close enough to eavesdrop was something to have made most men think seriously; but he hummed merrily while tying Belial and changing from boots to moccasins.

Wait for them cows to show him the way? No sah! He'd bet his Sunday shirt that he'd be there when they moseyed in—jest a-waitin' for Webb.

His moccasins made no sound as he crept stealthily from bush to bush in the shadow of a narrow ledge on the side of a wide, shallow draw at the upper end of which he could see the reflection of a campfire. He paused to listen, and breathed a sigh of satisfaction at having contrived to cross the river bed and approach so close to the camp without having been discovered. Evidently Cal had no idea he would

venture near, and therefore was keeping no lookout for him.

Badger saw that the camp was surrounded on three sides by scattered trees and clumps of bushes, and it was his intention to hide somewhere among them—close enough to hear what was said. He had a quarter-mile to go. The moon was turning night into day and he knew his chances were likely to be mighty slim if one of the outlaws happened to wander in his direction, or a careless step betrayed him; for Belial was a long way off, and no doubt there were ponies under saddle at the wagon; but those were the risks that made things interesting.

And he forgot them for a moment while resting.

It was peaceful in that realm of black and silver, the only foreign color a dancing red light from the hidden camp-fire. Badger watched it and listened dreamily.

The voices of the night-guard rang clearly against the tranquil silence—singing the same mournful songs he had sung, to cows in the same brand, under the same moon and stars.

Suddenly he was jerked back from a place of dreams to a land of grave reality. A tall shadow detached itself from the undergrowth at the head of the draw and moved slowly along the shelf beneath which he crouched.

A man with a rifle!

Badger's first impulse was to dart across an open space into some heavy brush fifty feet to the left; but a quick glance assured him that would be foolish. The fellow was bound to see him and immediately sound an alarm; so he stayed there, hoping the outlaw wouldn't come that far down the draw. If he did, discovery would be inevitable, and Badger knew he'd have to silence the man without arousing the camp—or find real trouble on his hands.

He cautiously straightened up as much as he dared and flattened out against the sloping wall, close to a four-foot bush that reached almost to the ledge. From that position he watched the shadowy figure amble toward him, occasionally puffing a cigarette which glowed like a lightning-bug, and frequently pausing—evidently to sweep a glance around or to study something that caught his eye. Badger squirmed in closer to the bush and scarcely breathed. Why in hell didn't the skunk come on faster, if he was coming at all?

Hat off, neckerchief drawn up to his eyes and black hair pulled down over his forehead to hide the white of his face, Badger lurked there like a black panther poised to spring. His gaze was fixed upon the long legs and boots that brought their owner nearer and nearer. A few yards distant they stopped. He dare not move his head to look up at the face, but the careless attitude of the legs indicated the man above them was at ease.

Was the fool going to stand there all night? Damn him! Why didn't he come on or go back? No knife. Couldn't shoot. Risky to bulldoze him with a barrel; if it didn't knock him cold he'd yell. Hell of a fix!

The boots tramped on leisurely and stopped directly overhead!

Badger didn't breathe. Would the fellow yell at sight of his body, or first stoop to investigate?

The boots scuffled and a low voice exclaimed, "What the devil?"

The next instant a hand touched Badger's head, and a startled growl followed. "By God, that's——"

The exclamation ended in a grunt. Badger's long right arm darted up and around the outlaw's neck, and jerked his face down against a knotted shoulder with stunning force. He dropped the rifle and the combatants rolled down behind the bush.

Before he recovered from the shock, Badger flipped the fellow's Colt from its leather and drove a crushing left hook into his ribs—a killing blow that should have ended the fight; instead—it nearly cost him his life. Long, wiry, and tough as rawhide, the outlaw was as quick and vicious as a wildcat. His supple body gave to the

weight of the Ranger's fist, his spidery arm swept through the air, and a blade glittered in the moonlight. Badger instinctively guarded with his elbow in the nick of time, and the steel split the skin under his arm. A lightning downward blow sent the knife spinning.

A desperate situation! He knew it in a flash, and fought with the ferocity of a tiger.

Two hands against one. Regardless of the teeth that bit through clothing and buried themselves in his flesh, he dare not release his right arm. If it gave a fraction the outlaw would yell, and he employed every ounce of his strength to hold the fellow. Steely fingers clutched his hair, and he thought his scalp was ripping away. A bony knee drove into his groin, fiery lances of pain stabbed his belly, and nausea brought sweat; but his right arm tightened. Sharp knuckles cut his swollen lips, and desperate fingers with cruel nails gouged at his eyes and tore the flesh of his cheeks; but his arm was inflexible.

Badger's own guns were a menace. His antagonist clawed for them blindly, but he contrived to jerk them free. Thereafter they fought man-to-man, unarmed, with all the savagery of beasts of a lower order.

Badger recklessly took a chance. Relaxing his arm suddenly, he ripped his shoulder away from the outlaw's teeth and slid it under his chin. He glared into the distorted face of Slim—Cal Webb's right-hand man in the fight at Boot Hill!

Memory of that painful incident flashed before him, and intensified his ferocity. The great muscles of his back knotted and rolled and twisted beneath his shirt. The point of his shoulder came up, and up, relentlessly forcing Slim's head back, bending his neck across a forearm like an unyielding bar of iron.

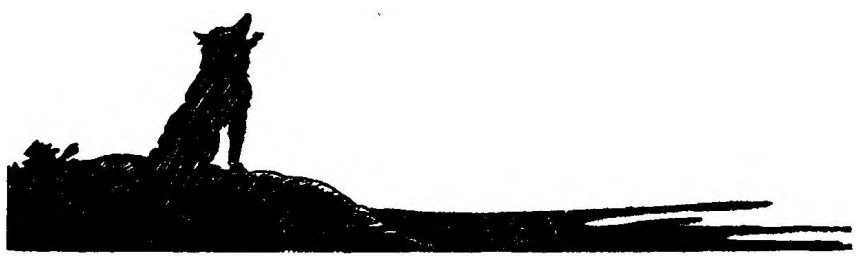
The outlaw's eyes rolled upward, his thin lips twisted—and the merciless shoulder pressed more viciously. A dull crack, a spasmodic twitching of Slim's legs—and his boots thumped against the sand, beating a tuneless death song!

Badger writhed loose and crawled away, like a wild beast leaving its kill. The peaceful moon and stars shone down upon the broken and twisted body of a dead man.

NOT long before daybreak, a tired horse and a weary but satisfied man bedded down behind a friendly screen of tall bushes in a snug little gulch, a few miles above the entrance to Whispering Springs Canyon—the site of the outlaws' home ranch. And when he measured his length on his soogan, Badger gazed up at the facing stars through heavy lids, tenderly stretched his sore muscles, and drowsily called out to Belial who grazed sleepily a short distance away:

"Reckon we done showed them cows we didn't need they help to git here. And whether you like it or not, you cantankerous old cuss, we're a-snoozin' right here all day tomorrer—er—today. If you roust me out much befo' sundown—I'll salivate you shore. Gotta git my rest so's to act up right at that there rustlers' camp-meetin' tonight."

ALTHOUGH Badger paid silent tribute to the splendor of the scene that stretched in panorama before him, marveling at the magnificent valley surrounded on three sides by low, perpendicular walls and traversed from end to end by a timbered stream—he was more thrilled by the knowledge that from the top of the knob



where he lay prone, he gazed down upon the very capitol buildings of the greatest outlaw kingdom that ever thrived in the cattle region.

What he had overheard at the outlaw camp and knowledge previously gained from other sources convinced him that this Whispering Springs Ranch—so ideally situated as to have quickened the pulse and brightened the eye of any cow-man—was in fact a giant melting pot into which were poured the products of thieves from the remotest sections of the country; and at the same time, it was no doubt the home of brands favorably known in the nation's cattle markets. In his mind's eye he saw a stolen Circle C cow going into Whispering Springs as such, and coming out a respectable cow in another brand—after she had received the attentions of artists employed for that purpose. During the time Mistress Cow wasn't presentable, she would be shunted around in the maze of secluded canyons—safely hidden from inquisitive eyes, for this remote region was not combed by the round-up.

Badger could well imagine a searcher for stolen stock coming to Whispering Springs, being courteously received, entertained, and shown around by an ostensible owner who was justly proud of his great outfit; and he was elated by the thought that it was his good fortune to discover the secret uses and purposes of the innocent-looking place.

But what shrewd mind had conceived the scheme and put it into operation? What man was clever enough to plan and direct the forays of such an organization, and at the same time strong enough to control the dangerous, untamed men who composed it?

Fancy Chase, he thought—but he wasn't certain; and it was his intention to settle the question that very night.

Therefore, while it was still light, he carefully studied the lay of the land. He took note of an easy entrance at the upper end of the valley through which some riders were then leisurely making their way, and marked the location of the owner's sprawling, U-shaped house in a heavy grove of trees some distance removed from the bunkhouse, corrals, and other headquarters buildings.

At length, satisfied that he had the layout in mind, he came down from the knob and told Belial as he stepped into the saddle, "Soon as ever it gits dark, me and you will go to work in earnest. Wouldn't be surprised if we put in a right entertainin' night; cain't never tell."

It was advisable to enter the valley before the moon came up, and accordingly he set out across the prairie toward the entrance at a slow fox-trot, keeping to the sags wherever possible.

Twilight was beating a reluctant retreat at the approach of darkness when Belial went down the sandy trail over the rim; and a light in the bunkhouse two miles distant twinkled like a wicked star—banished from its place in the heavens.

Badger tied the horse in the outer edge of the grove, more than a quarter-mile from the house and a safe distance from the trail. Making his way through the trees in almost total darkness, he stopped about a hundred yards from the northwest corner of the house. All of the long west wing and apparently one room at the northeast corner were lighted. Loud voices and laughter came from open doors and windows, leading him to believe that a meal rather than a meeting was in progress. He walked boldly along the fringe of trees around to the other side of the house, and discovered that the entire east wing was dark.

Where would the gang gather? That was the question.

Crouching low, Badger slipped across the open space toward a pile of stove-wood twenty yards back of the patio. On his way he glanced through a window into the northeast room, and cursed softly. A man in the act of sitting down at a table was Fancy Chase!

Badger hesitated but an instant, going on to the pile of wood from which he could see through the lighted inside windows of the west wing. Twenty-five or thirty men

were seated at a long table covered with dishes, and the tantalizing odor of steak and onions made his mouth water.

"One mo' day of cold vittles, and I'd shoot it out with that there bunch jest to git a belly-full," he thought hungrily.

He was still undecided where he should hide, when a man began to hang lanterns around the porch on the inside of the patio and two more brought out a table upon which a keg was planted. That settled it. He knew they'd pow-wow in the patio, and swore he'd get into that dark east wing while the bunch was eating.

The fact that the night was warm and most of the doors and windows were open made his task easier, and he shot across the remaining twenty yards to the house like a bear diving for its den. In the rear room of the east wing a door opened outside and he slipped through it like a shadow —his moccasins making no sound upon the board floor. It was evidently a storeroom with a door and window on the patio, both of which were open; and he moved quickly out of a beam of light an instant before Cal Webb walked past, less than ten feet away!

Badger resisted an impulse to plunge through the door after him.

However, there was another matter of more importance than Webb at the moment. He knew that many Mexican-type houses had connecting doors between each room, so why not work his way through the east wing to a room adjoining that in which he saw Chase? If the gambler were alone, nothing would be gained; but if he were not, there might be valuable information to be had by listening. The longer he thought about it—the more the idea attracted him, and the fact that it was a risky undertaking made it all the more interesting.

BADGER cautiously tried the inside door leading from the storeroom. It was unlocked, but apparently seldom opened, for it screeched to high heaven; so he gave it a quick jerk and slid through. Crouching against the wall and holding his breath to listen, he found himself in a sleeping-room flooded with light from the patio through a wide-open door and one window. He had to get out of there pronto! Measuring the distance, he dashed through the light toward the door on the opposite side and shot blindly through into partial darkness.

This was a bedroom, lighted only by a curtained window on the patio and a thin sheet of light that came from the door leading into the next room. It was open an inch and he heard Fancy's voice. Stealing cautiously toward it, he brushed a chair and knocked something on the floor. A pair of saddle-bags fell with a muffled crash, and the voice stopped. Badger held his breath, glancing furtively around. A black Stetson and some gauntlets were dimly visible on the white bed-covering. The voice continued, and another cautious step carried him to the door. The gambler was seated left side toward him, smiling at someone across the table. With infinite caution he opened the door an inch further to see the other party, and——

No—it couldn't be! But it was.

There, before his very eyes, smiling sweetly at Fancy Chase—sat Belle Ransom!

CHAPTER VIII

A GUNMAN'S PASSING

A CRUEL blow—it hurt. Badger shook his shaggy head like a wounded bear. He hated to trust his eyes; they were swollen, bloodshot, blackened, and he swept a hand across them.

Hopefully, almost fearfully, he stole another look. The scene was unchanged.

Belle in there alone with Chase!

Good God—his leetle gal!

His great body sagged dejectedly, magnificent vitality momentarily crushed by a weight of emotions. A plain man—Badger Coe was a stranger to finer things. Highly appreciative of the cheapest gifts from the hand of Providence, he was satisfied with the simplest creature comforts and prone to

magnify the worth of the most modest luxuries. A blanket camp and a prairie chicken broiling at the end of a stick were mighty good; a feather bed, and a table with cloth and dishes and delicacies prepared by a woman were luxuries to be boasted of and lied about for days. A rollicking fellow, he rode through life pleased with his lot, pausing from time to time to dream ambitious dreams, but resigned to the belief they could be no more than dreams and content to derive transitory pleasure from them.

Then he had found Belle Ransom.

She came tripping out of a dream, a flesh and blood reality—beautiful, educated, wealthy, dainty—in his eyes a wonderful creature. He had known such women in fancy only and never thought to touch one; but to his amazement, this one offered her lips and demanded his, and changed everything. She fired him with discontent until he scorned his humble position, and she inspired hopes and ambitions that hitherto had no place in his simple scheme of existence.

Belle meant so much to him because all his life he had had so little; and he would have cherished her as a priceless gift, worshiping her with the childlike devotion of his breed. His leetle gal!

And now—he wished to God he'd never seen the woman. Turning from the door, he let his eye wander about the room in the blank stare of one stupefied by affliction.

Her hat and gauntlets on the gambler's bed!

Bitterly he groped his way through the dim light toward him. They were Belle's! They shouldn't be there! He stopped with a jerk and a silent oath.

Instantly there boiled up within him the fumes of jealousy which attack and poison the brain of a man, and may wrench him from the depth of despair to the height of fury. Plunged into a red mist that stifled him, changed the shape of things before his very eyes, changed the values of things in his mind; in the twinkling of an eye the desolate lover was transformed into an enraged beast, a merciless killer.

A normal person, subject to all the selfish emotions by which mankind is motivated—there would be no idiotic sacrifice on his part. He wouldn't steal away and let her have the man she wanted. No! By the Eternal—he'd kill the skunk that took his gal!

Noiselessly he spun around to the door and peered through. Muscles rolled and rippled beneath the black stubble that hid his jaw, and his eyes were red slits in pouches of bruised flesh. They were talking, but for the moment he paid no attention to what was said. He could do no more than stare, and think, and feed his rage upon what he saw.

Fancy Chase—boss of the outlaws, slick gunman, pretty fellow, dude murderer, ladies' man, acting like he owned the earth, a-sparkin' his leetle——

No—to hell with women!

In just a minute he'd kill Chase. But he'd watch him for a spell, kind of doting on the fact that he was going to make a corpse out of the gunman—then he'd walk right in there and drill him; and while the dirty devil was going down, he'd plant a forty-four smack in the middle of that pretty face for him!

HIS fiery gaze swept the gambler's immaculate clothing. Black and white as usual, and with his fair skin and red hair, black couldn't look as black on any other man. Sometimes when dreaming, Badger imagined himself dressed like that—admired by women and envied by the fellas. In that land of slovenly men, the gunman was elegance itself, a man to whom the odor of tobacco and horses would not cling, and dust avoided. Badger thought of his own clothing—ripped and torn and stinking of sweat and dust and blood, his blood and the blood of other men—and his puffed lips twisted in a vicious snarl. There'd be plenty blood on them fancy duds before long! One of the gambler's hands—so soft and white and clean—

caught Belle's brown fingers when they reached for something, and tenderly caressed them. Badger gritted his teeth, remembering his own hairy paws with knuckles that were cut and bruised and marred by scars. For a brief instant the murderous glare in his eyes was dimmed by a cloud of despair.

His gaze fastened hungrily upon their two hands, and he clenched his fists and thought, "'Tain't noways fair!"

He couldn't handle eatin' hardware, or wear fancy clothes, or talk langwidge, or

put on the dog like Chase because he never had a chance to learn how; and—damn it!—nobody was to blame.

So he'd lost his leetle gal!

In the chivalrous way of his kind, he felt no malice toward Belle. She might have hurt him worse than he had ever been hurt before, made a fool of him, tricked him into telling things he shouldn't have told, and probably laughed at his homely manners; but she used the weapons nature gave her and he'd take his medicine.

But Chase was a man. He'd kill Chase!

You couldn't blame a silly woman. The little coyote had everything they liked—good looks, education, money, and probably blue blood to boot. What did a gal care if he was a thief and a murderer, just as long as he had all those things and could soft-soap her the way he did?

BADGER hated to look at her, but he had to; and for a moment his rugged and battered face reflected the torment of a man yearning for something far beyond his reach. The table was lighted by two silver candelabras, no doubt placed there in her honor, and their soft rays touched her winsome face with approving fingers. He swallowed, and choked down a sigh, and thought, "The likes of me ain't got no chance with a gal like her."

But Chase couldn't have her—damn his soul!

Belle smiled across the table at the gambler. Kind of hated to make her feel bad, but she'd be better off without that sneaking murderer.

Backing away a step, he cautiously loosened his guns in their holsters. There mustn't be any hitch; need all his speed to kill Chase. The idea of bushwhacking never entered his mind. He'd meet the gunman face to face and shoot it out according to his simple code of honor.

Crouching slightly, he started for the door but stopped abruptly a yard or so away; something he ought to hear, so he held his breath and listened.

"You're a power in this country, Henry," Belle was saying. "Are you sure you want to leave it?"

Resting his elbows on the table, Chase leaned toward her and answered tenderly, "Absolutely! Power means nothing to me, dear, compared to your happiness. I want to take you away from this dirty, windy, desolate land of savages. You don't belong here. You deserve the finest this old world has to offer, and I intend to see that you get it."

Badger cursed under his breath. Sounded like a stump-speaker; but it was good bait for gals—damn him!

Belle studied the gunman with narrowed eyes. "You said that prettily," she told him sweetly. "And Henry dear, why didn't you add that you know it isn't safe for you to stay here much longer?"

Chase laughed heartily. "I love you when you say such things! And you're right. A Ranger rode in here and died; then came two more, and when I dispose of them others will follow. But at the present time, the law has nothing on me. Although Blizzard knows who I really am,

for every witness he can find who'll testify that I'm back of all this, I can produce three who will swear I'm exactly what I pretend to be—a gambler who owns Whispering Springs Ranch and isn't any too careful about the character of the stuff he buys, if the price is right."

"Are you positive Blizzard knows so much?"

The gunman's brilliant eyes followed the smoke that curled upward from his cigarette through the gentle candle-light. "Yes, if he is still alive," he purred.

Badger caught himself in time; he nearly lunged through the door.

"What do you mean?" she demanded instantly.

Chase sent her a level glance. "The day before I came to see you, two attempts were made to kill him—both of which failed. That man is a very devil in any kind of a fight! I've no idea what has happened since then, but he's a fool to stay in Casota. He has made too many enemies."

"Thank God!" thought Badger. He'd forgotten Blizzard, and the job, and everything except Belle and Chase. He didn't give a damn about the job now, but it meant a heap to Blizzard. Maybe he'd better listen a little longer; might learn something Blizzard would like to know.

HE MISSED part of what Fancy was saying, but caught, "—and from what Cal told me a little while ago, I'm confident Badger is somewhere around here right now. He may be eavesdropping. Too bad I couldn't persuade you not to come. We're bound to have trouble tonight."

She lifted her chin a trifle. "And, Henry—again I'll allow that when the fella I love is a-ridin' into a ruckus, I want to be there with him," she drawled softly. "Not to help him fight—because he doesn't need any help—but to see that he gets an even break, if I can."

"There isn't another girl like you!"

Belle smiled queerly. "When you told me Badger had mysteriously disappeared, I could've told you that probably he was on his way here."

"You could? What made you think so?"

She gave him an oblique glance. "The fact that he knew about the Circle C herd and the possibility it would be raided."

"Why, Belle!" exclaimed Chase. "Are you sure he knew that? Did he tell you?"

The girl toyed with a fork, drawing zig-zag lines on the fine linen table-cloth. "No, Henry dear. I told him!"

Fancy stared at her in honest astonishment. "What—how did you know about it?" he stammered.

Belle sent him a droll glance out of the corner of her eye. "Because—Mr. Outlaw Range Boss, every hoof of that there remoother and every last head of them cows is mine," she murmured sweetly. "I own the Circle C, you know."

The gunman sprang to his feet. Speechless for an instant, he convulsively crushed his cigarette and its coal smoldered on the cloth. "Is that true? Do you really mean it?"

She settled back in her chair and grinned up at him. "Shore!"

Chase sat down dejectedly. "I'm sorry. Belle—do you know what I've done?"

She reached across the table and caught his hand. "Of course! You told me yourself. You stole my cows," she admitted cheerfully. Turning her face away, she breathed softly, "But if you meant what you said and if I let you have your way—it's all in the family you might say, isn't it?"

"Yes-s-ss. But the very idea of——" He broke off abruptly and chuckled mirthlessly. "And that herd was the big clean-up I was waiting for. It has saved those Rangers' lives more than once."

Belle laughed lightly. "Glad to know that. Stealing 'em didn't hurt the cows. You've got 'em. And since you said your men buffaloed the crew and set 'em afoot on the prairie without firing a shot—no harm done." She chuckled quietly. "Except maybe to the touchy tempers and ten-

der feet of some Texas men; but cowhands don't walk enough anyhow, so it'll do 'em good."

Glaring through the crack in the door, Badger breathed hard and his hand found his gun of its own accord. The dirty little pup! He'd lied to her.

The gunman's fingers beat a silent tattoo on the table, while he stared dismally through a window at the black curtain of night. "Yes, Belle, they left your men on

the prairie." He faced her suddenly and demanded, "Why didn't you tell me you had a herd on the trail?"

She dropped her eyes, then glanced up quickly. "Cal Webb knew it and I naturally assumed he'd tell you."

"Damned slick work!" grimly thought Badger. "She hates Webb and is sickin' Chase onto him." But she was wasting breath. He'd get 'em both.

The gambler's face hardened instantly. "Are you positive he knew it?" he demanded through tight lips.

She hesitated briefly. "Yes. He told me so himself."

Plunged into somber thought for a moment, the gunman watched his fingers bend and twist the blade of a table knife. "Unfortunately he didn't tell me—so it appears Cal made a costly mistake," he mused in a toneless voice.

Lightning momentarily flashed in Belle's eyes, and as suddenly disappeared.

Chase arose quickly and went behind her chair. Leaning over her, he said gently, "The boys are waiting for me in the patio, dear, so I must go now. Won't you please stay here?"

Refusing to meet his tender glance, Belle slowly shook her head. "No, Henry. You mustn't forget that yesterday morning, when you said you loved me and told me all about yourself and asked me to marry you, you agreed that I might come here tonight and actually see the kind of man you have been for the past several years. I'm holding you to that promise."

The gunman shrugged helplessly. "Very well."

Belle got up and reached for her belt and gun on a nearby chair.

The gambler's fingers gripped her arm. "Please don't!"

She glanced up in surprise. "Why not? You're expecting trouble, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I'm not thinking of my own men when I ask you to go unarmed," he answered with a little smile. "I expect Badger."

Belle impatiently picked up the gun. "Well?"

Fancy's hand dropped to his side. "I don't want you to make a fugitive of yourself by shooting a law officer in my defense."

She buckled the belt around her slender waist. "Please leave that to me," she replied calmly. "My dad was a fugitive more than once, and I'm no better than he."

Badger breathed an oath. Belle would kill him to save the hide of that slimy little rattler! God Almighty!

Pain and rage nailed him to the spot. He watched them walk to the door—the gunman's hand on her arm; saw Chase slip out of his long black coat and drape it on the back of a chair; saw his beautiful hands caress the glittering handles of his guns with an easy, graceful gesture, and his eye followed the gambler's every move when he opened the door for Belle and smiled at her affectionately.

BADGER shook himself and suddenly got a grip on his feelings. So she'd kill him? Huh! To hell with women! He wasn't a ladies' man nohow. He was a fightin' man, and he had a job of work to do. Find out all he could, then kill Chase and Webb and as many more of the

gang as he could get before they got him—if they did.

He made an instant decision. The storeroom was the place for him; it was the only room in that wing with an outside door.

Apparently everybody was in the patio. The noisy exchange of greetings with Fancy and Belle covered Badger's retreat, and he was safely back in the storeroom before their attention wavered from the new arrivals. Crouching behind some sorghum barrels, he could look through the window and see the front of the patio and the porch upon which Belle and Chase were standing; and the partly open door afforded a view of the rear portion of the enclosure.

He watched the gambler with a cynical gaze.

The smallest and most harmless looking man there hailed as Boss—Chief—Colonel! The little dandy held his head higher and stood straighter than usual, and his face glowed with pride when his eye rested upon the girl.

Showing her off—damn him!

The flickering light of lanterns danced across the faces of the men clustered around them—some reckless and open and bravely hatless, others furtive and slinking in the shadows of broad brims—depraved faces upon which were burned the brands of murder and lesser crimes.

"The scalawag bunch shore enough," thought Badger.

And he swore that any one of them would have been glad to shoot the gunman down just to gain the empty honor of being pointed out as the fellow who tamed Fancy Chase; but not a man there had the nerve to try it. Furthermore—exclusive of Fancy and Long Tom—he'd gamble that one Ranger could bluff the whole kaboodle if they weren't cornered and knew he was a Ranger. Anyhow, he'd try it pretty soon. If it worked, fine. If it didn't, well—he was paid to take such chances.

Long Tom Baker came out of the dining room and ambled around the porch toward Fancy. The exaggerated carelessness with which the lanky marshal moved indicated he had something of unusual importance on his mind, and Badger watched him like a hawk. Tom called the gambler aside with a scarcely noticeable jerk of his head and they talked cautiously for a moment; then Chase returned to the others and Baker lounged against a post a few feet to the left. He appeared as lazy and careless as ever, but not for an instant did he turn aside—his gaze remaining fixed either upon the back of the patio or the storeroom.

Badger felt a tingle in the region of his spine. Tom knew he was there!

In a flash he thought of the outside door behind him, and Belial waiting in the grove. Why not go back after Blizzard and a posse, and—— He caught sight of Belle. She never strayed far away from the gunman. "Jest one of the outlaws. His guardeen!" thought Badger. All right—she had a job on her hands. In spite of hell he'd stay there until he killed Chase and Webb!

But why didn't Fancy turn the gang loose on him? Probably the little devil was figuring on some smart shenanigan, just to show off before the girl.

FOR some reason, Webb never went near Chase, but sat on the edge of the porch immediately in front of the storeroom door. Badger glared at the outlaw's broad back thinking of all the things the fellow had tried to do to him. His fingers itched to bury themselves in Cal's throat—for he was in a killing mood—but that would have to wait.

A graceful figure in black suddenly appeared in his range of vision and stopped before Webb. The trembling light timidly touched a pair of long, green eyes and flinched away from uneven teeth that marred an otherwise beautiful face—Cherokee Lou! He might have known she'd be there. Such outfits had to have women like her in their business. The most dan-

gerous one of the bunch—damn her! She gave him the creeps.

Cherokee Lou and Belle Ransom in the same gang—damn Chase!

The gathering on the front porch broke up—Chase, Belle, and Long Tom remaining there while the others scattered at ranrom in the patio and along the side porch near the whiskey keg. Under cover of the confusion and while Fancy turned his back to place a chair for Belle, Cal Webb arose quickly and stealthily came through the storeroom door!

Badger sank behind the barrels in the nick of time. Webb stopped just outside the light from the window, and turning—stared intently through it. Going to bushwhack Chase; no doubt about it! All right—let the skunk go ahead. Badger hoped he didn't miss. One way or another both were due to die anyhow, and his job would be easier with only Cal to handle.

Fancy's voice rang out clearly, and the gang in the patio fell silent. Badger took a chance and lifted his head, craning his neck to look through the window past Webb. He was just in time to see Long Tom amble over to Chase and whisper briefly. He could imagine what was said. The marshal was telling Fancy that Webb

and he were in the storeroom together. That must have been it, for the gunman threw back his head and laughed with reckless abandon.

Without a glance toward the storeroom and still laughing to himself, he dragged over a chair and sat down slightly behind Belle—thus placing her directly between the window and him!

Badger smothered a curse.

Webb glanced furtively through the door, and carefully slid his gun from its holster. Fancy was speaking, but the Ranger didn't hear him; he was watching Cal. Slowly the Colt came up! Badger couldn't believe his eyes. Would the damned fool try to drill Chase with Belle exactly in the line of fire? He was bound to hit her!

SUDDENLY the truth struck Badger with stunning force. Webb didn't give a damn! He'd take a chance because he hated Belle Ransom. Even if his first shot got her, his second would get Chase.

Badger's thoughts raced frantically—confused, disconnected, almost incoherent. She'd tricked him—made a fool out of him—laughed at him—she'd kill him. Fancy's gal—the gang outside——!

The gun came up with deliberate care.

Belle turned to face the gambler, exposing the smooth oval of her cheek to the hidden assassin. Badger's sight blurred and his throat worked. He saw a slug tearing through that tender flesh. He'd once kissed her there!

The gun stopped, froze for an instant, and——

"Howdy, Cal!" croaked Badger, stepping from behind the barrels.

The Colt wavered, whirled through the air with lightning speed, and spat fire into Badger's very teeth. Its roar mingled with the crash of his own gun, for he anticipated the maneuver—crouching and firing simultaneously. Webb's bullet ripped through his hair—grazing his scalp, but his slug tore into the stalwart outlaw and staggered him. So rapidly as almost to make a continuous roar—the Ranger's gun spoke again, and again. Webb crumpled to the floor, choking and vainly trying to lift the Colt that his fingers refused to relinquish.

Half blinded and stifled by the smoke, Badger gazed momentarily at the twitching figure at his feet. "Hang a fella by inches, will yuh?" he remarked huskily.

And he stepped across the dead man on his way to the door.

It all happened so quickly the gang was still staring in open-mouthed astonishment when his broad body filled the door and he lurched onto the porch. His eyes were swollen to mere slits; his face was battered and bruised and powder-stained, and blood trickled down his temple; and his heavy jaw was hidden by a ragged stubble of beard; Badger was a fearsome object. The muzzles of his guns stared greedily, appearing to look every man squarely between the eyes. Exclamations and curses burst out, and the gang backed away in all directions. Only Chase and the marshal seemed to be at ease. A grin twitched at the corners of Long Tom's grim mouth, and a brilliant smile lighted Fancy's face.

Badger spoke instantly. "Steady, fellas!" he rumbled hoarsely. "I'm a Ranger, but I ain't after none of you. I come here ——"

Chase interrupted hastily. "Nice work, Badger! Did you get Cal?"

Badger growled a profane affirmative, wondering what trick the gunman was fixing to pull. This was the supreme test. He dare not take his eyes off Chase for an instant, and he couldn't watch them all at once.

"Good!" exclaimed Fancy. "You saved me the bother. Don't let him buffalo you, fellows! He's alone. He hasn't a posse, and there isn't another Ranger within a hundred miles of here. Furthermore, he's got no business over here in The Nations. Just take grandstand seats and watch me spank a famous Texas Ranger!"

From the door immediately behind the marshal, there came a sharp command. "He's a liar, Tom. Be keerful—I'd hate to hurt you."

Badger's heart jumped—Blizzard!

With the speed and ease of a cat, Chase leaped backward to the adobe wall behind him—out of range of the door; but Long Tom stood immobile—looming tall and gaunt like a thin column of brown stone.

The next instant that lifeless image became motion in a frenzy, dodging and whirling and whipping out a gun with a rapidity amazing to anyone who knew the lazy, shambling marshal.

A crash followed; a crash that was too loud for Tom's gun alone.

He lurched backward, bent at the middle; bent until his head was almost at a level with his waist. Before he staggered to the edge of the porch there came another crash, and from that black doorway an invisible force seemed to lash out and strike him and literally to hurl him through the air to the ground.

An outlaw—but a man true to his salt.

Backed against the wall, for a brief moment Chase stared incredulously at Long Tom's body. One hand nervously brushed a heavy lock of wavy red hair from his forehead.

Then his gaze sought out Badger. The Ranger saw a face from which all animation had fled; a face modeled in wax, perfect, but unbelievably cold and lifeless and devoid of all human emotion. The sparkle and fire had left his eyes; they were colorless, drab, and expressionless.

He saw the face of Chase the Killer.

And in spite of himself, hair rose on his neck. But the sensation was gone in a flash and he wanted to laugh. He'd been waiting for this. Now he'd kill the man that took his gal! She might shoot him for it, but he'd show her what he thought of her dude gun-slinger!

So he jammed his Colts back into their holsters!

BADGER met the gunman's malignant gaze calmly, insolently. Shooting a malicious glance at Belle, he stepped down from the porch and walked toward Chase. His left hand was hooked in his belt, but his right stroked the stubble on his chin!

The silence was oppressive; it magnified the tiniest sounds, and into it crept the gunman's voice—low, toneless, and as lifeless as his face.

"Tom Baker—the only man who ever stuck by me. And he's dead—damn you!"

Not another word—no further warning. A brief flicker of glittering steel, like an

angry beam of light, and their guns roared together.

Chase was tricked—tricked just enough to confuse the lightning reflexes of a trained gun-fighter. While his right hand stroked his chin, Badger drew and fired with his left!

Something ripped through his thigh and he fell to one knee; but as he went down his mighty wrist and hand jerked the Colt out of its recoil and whipped across another shot, and another.

In the act of firing his first shot, the gunman lurched back against the wall. But with legs spread wide he stayed erect—a man dying on his feet, coughing blood, thumbing his hammer, and sending his shots wild!

His head jerked backward—thudding against the adobe, and he wilted to the floor.

Smoke swirled above him like angry clouds scowling down upon their handiwork; and he lay on his back with an arm thrown up across his face, as though to shield his eyes from the leaden hail that beat him down.

Weaving on his feet, Badger sent a bitterly triumphant glance at Belle. She stood a short distance away, fingers frozen to her holstered gun, as rigid as a woman turned to stone. Her great eyes burned in a colorless face, and he knew they rested upon him rather than the dead man.

Well? Why didn't she draw? He'd have to try to dodge; all he could do.

Watching her out of the corner of his eye, he staggered toward Chase. She stared but made no move, and he hobbled onward. Bending down he lifted the dead gunman's arm. A little blue hole in his placid forehead!

Without straightening, and still holding the arm, he glanced up at Belle and down again. "A inch off'n dead center. I gotta be mo' keerful," he rumbled grimly.

In a twinkling the girl came to life. Her lips parted as though to scream, and she stared in terror—as though she saw the departing spirit of the dead man!

Badger sensed she was in the act of drawing, and ducked an instant after her gun left its leather. He would have sworn the bullet split the air where his head had been!

Behind him someone gasped and something clattered to the boards. He whirled. There stood Cherokee Lou, swaying and holding her shoulder.

At his feet lay her knife!

His head swam. He staggered. Blood oozed through his moccasin. A long way off familiar voices were gruffly issuing orders.

Through a dancing haze he saw Blizzard and heard him say, "Good shootin', Belle!"

Shore! Good shootin'. He tried to catch his spinning senses.

Blizzard went on. "I gotta take my hat off to you for the way you hawnswoggled Fancy into tellin' you how to git here and fetchin' you along. Got yo' note in plenty time to gether the boys and cut yo' trail."

And he thought she'd shoot him . . . damned fool!

It was tough—but he faced the girl.

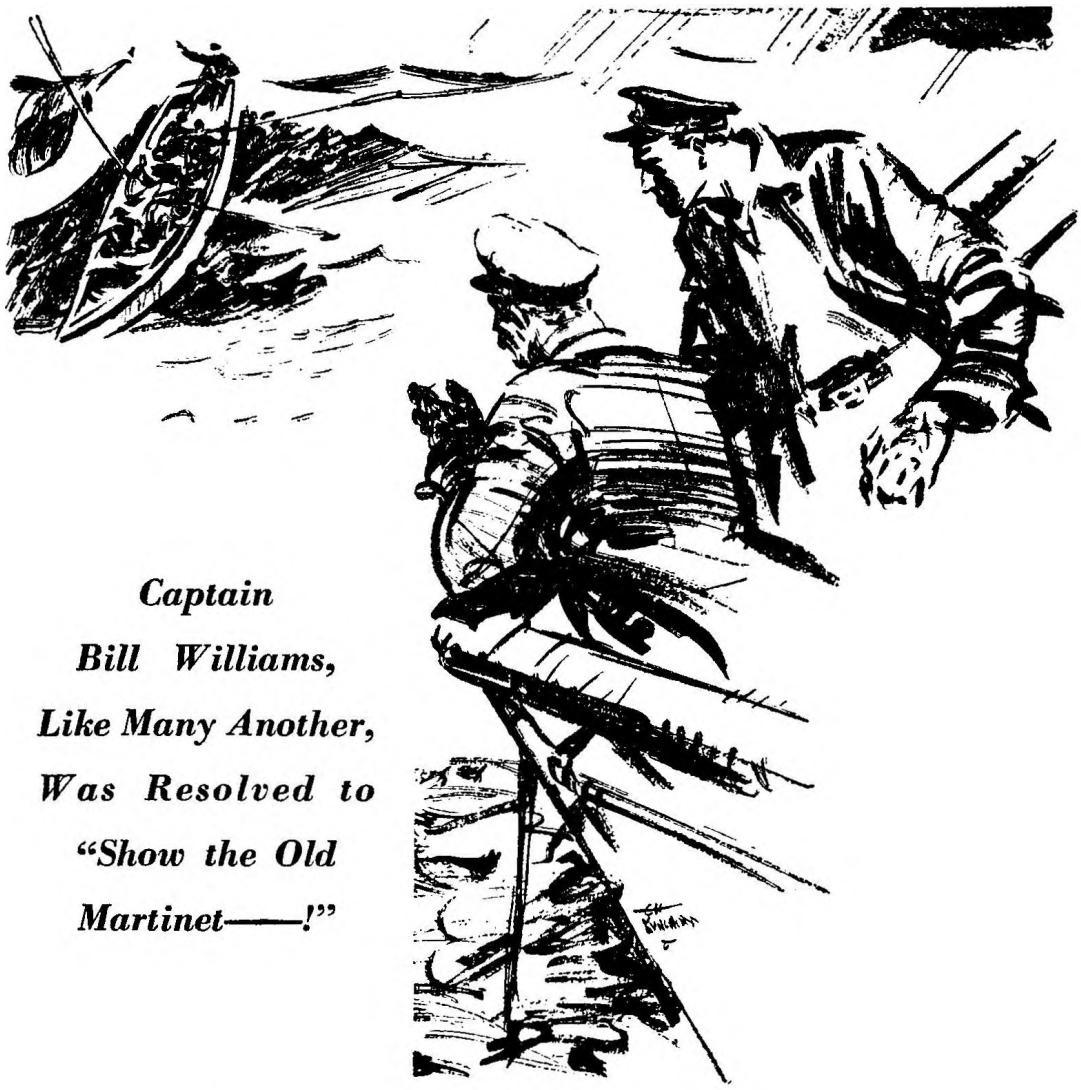
His leetle gal! A light in her misty eyes told him it was so, and the truth bit deeper than the gunman's bullet in his thigh. *It* hurt worse. He thought of the chances she took—good God!

He brushed a hand across his eyes, and ventured another glance at Belle. She smiled wistfully and came toward him.

Slowly, sheepishly, he turned to Blizzard. Whipping out his Colt, he spun it and the barrel slapped into his palm. "Here, take it! And make sartin to drill me plumb center!"

Blizzard sedately took the gun. "Shore! For quite a spell I been layin' off to do that."

THE END



Captain Bill Williams, Like Many Another, Was Resolved to "Show the Old Martinet——!"

CRUSADE OF HATE

By BERTON E. COOK

Author of "A New High for Lowe," "Cooler Than Coole," etc.

SHE is an old, gawky freighter. Been moored to a stump for years. Her sides are warped walls, her bow and stern look as though some marine Frankenstein had thumbed them down at her christening. In short, she is a war-designed, war-built Hog Islander and what on earth—or sea—the Greete Corporation could do with her is the moot question on a dozen waterfronts.

BILLY WILLIAMS was known in 1917 as the son of Captain Hubert Williams, the Greete Fleet skipper who had died peering into the standard compass of a crack liner. Billy had every inducement to success. Consider, for example, his father's grand record, a world war that hoisted youngsters by their bootstraps to command, a winning personality and a heap of faith in himself.

Billy came aboard the freighter *Lake*

Feare as Third. His skipper was Captain Grant Greenlaw, the best friend Billy's father had known. The cards certainly favored that lad. He marched aboard like the conquering lion of Judah. He tossed his dunnage into the cabin marked 3rd OFFICER and went above to report.

Captain Greenlaw swept aside his solitaire; he had been watching up the dock for the new Third. He had seen him swing aboard, and grunted at sight of his cockiness. The Old Man cleared his throat profoundly, and braced for the knock on his door. The son of his dearest friend who had died in harness was about to swagger into his sanctum.

Billy did. He was delighted to meet the man his dad had loved. He was glad to start the climb to command under him. His grin showed it. His easy swing over the coaming registered his awareness of prestige, his expectancy. Another Williams was here in the sympathetic hands of Grant Greenlaw.

Sympathetic? It was the sympathy of a rattler. Two steely optics bored him from under beetled brows. A clenched fist showed on the desk where cards had been. The Old Man of the *Lake Feare* wore an outraged expression.

"Name is Williams, you claim," he grunted. "You are third officer? What experience?"

Billy knew the skipper had forgotten. "I'm Cap'n Hubert Williams' son," he explained.

"Experience?" the Old Man barked.

Billy recounted his time put in as ordinary, as able seaman; bosun eight trips in the *Lake Lomo,* now he had his new ticket as Third.

"In plain English, you're a greenhorn Third," Captain Greenlaw exploded. "Ho-oo hum," he yawned. "Your duties here are simple. You're responsible for the bridge, the wheelhouse, and all gear up there. You stand the eight-to-twelve watches. In and out of ports, you're at the helm for me."

"Yes, s-sir." Billy scarcely got it out.

"Now that your duties are plain, go about them."

BILLY WILLIAMS went above in a daze. The Old Man must have failed to identify him. He, Hubert Williams' son. He found the wheelhouse in order, the chartroom neat, the bridge shipshape with binoculars boxed and covered from the sun. The binnacle was polished. Overhead, the standard compass was duly hooded. He went down thoughtfully; he, Cap'n Williams' son.

He sat on the settee along the after side of the wheelhouse. He stared through the spokes of the helm at the polished brass oil cylinders and considered. Aw, this was all a mistake, the Old Man of the *Lake Feare* was a good egg at heart. He'd learn somehow that a Williams was a Williams. The family had a sea record, they were a tradition. Their very name had its magic spell aboard ships, along wharves, in the Greete Corporation offices. The Old Man would come about when he realized.

The *Lake Feare's* whistle added its nasal bawl to the metropolitan babel. Her master's florid face showed in a bridge wing. Her First stood to the capstan up forward. Her Second had two sailors snubbing a slacked hawser out aft.

Again her siren bawled. The Old Man's arms went high, he yelled an order. Instantly all lines went limp out hawsepipes. The *Lake Feare* came to life, her lines inched aboard and her nose poked out by the wharf-end.

The new Third had her helm. He kept a 'mid-ship rudder until a tremendous blast directly behind him raised the hair in his new cap.

"Starb'd. Hard over. Lively!" Captain Greenlaw watched the wheel whirl, he watched, too, the tug that seemed to have just happened along.

Williams got her hard over, but she went straight on. He saw flats under shoal, green water directly over her bows and she was going straight for them. He threw

his beef onto the wheel, the telltale rang again, she heeded it not at all. He turned to meet two steely, boring eyes.

"You obeyed my first orders?"

"I came up here and—yes, sir," Billy managed.

"And worked that wheel to equalize the oil in the cylinders?"

Billy just stared at him, he could not speak. The ship was going around directly and the blame was his. What a way to broach a career up top!

Captain Greenlaw grabbed a lever on the telegraph. While the screw reversed, he bellowed to the tug through a megaphone. Thus he saved the situation. The tug bunted her bow downstream while Williams worked the wheel back and forth furiously.

Before she stood at right angle to the dock, before the red sun ahead lined over her starboard bow, he brought the oil steering mechanism to life. She shook off the tugboat and thumped her way out to sea.

"There's forty dollars you've piled onto your first trip's bills against the ship," the Old Man growled.

He went below.

The new Third had the temerity to rap on the master's door before he went on his night watch. He opened the door cautiously, this time, and said, "I'll take the rap on that towboat charge, sir. I'll pay it out of my first wages."

Captain Greenlaw dropped the ace of spades and turned an irritated face. "You —you'll what?" he snapped. He eyed the clock overhead to add: "Get to the bridge, young man, your watch begins in three and a half minutes. The ship pays her bills."

Next day, the new Third appeared in season to time the mooring shots at the sun. He moved about like a machine, he had shed the Williams grin.

ALL the way south, Billy Williams pondered over his ill luck. Off Diamond Shoal he concluded that the Old Man knew him, all right. Off Jupiter he cursed the day he'd schemed to get in his time for Second's papers under Greenlaw. In Galveston he dared not go ashore lest something go wrong in the wheelhouse. The Old Man had him on the run.

So it went for months in which the *Lake Feare's* wheelhouse and all instruments therein were faultlessly kept. So it went while a change stole over her Third mate. He had been shocked at the outset. Now he had soured to hostility. He realized that Greenlaw was out to get him. He became positive of it and fought off the evil day eternally. He was so busy at keeping up with his job that he almost forgot about studying for his coveted Second's papers.

Almost he had forgotten, but he came upon a book of the Second's. It lay on the chart locker, open to a page headed: "Examination for License as Chief Mate." So Mr. Corbet was preparing for his chief mate's ticket; Billy kept seeing that book.

It made him ugly, he grew grim. In sixteen months on the *Lake Feare*, he changed from the son of Captain Hubert Williams, deceased, to William Williams on the way up in spite of old Greenlaw.

He hated the beast who had never so much as mentioned his dad. He acquired books stealthily and studied them secretly. He took bearings, did dead reckoning on his own, learned whole tables of drift and tidal vagaries. He plowed into Bowditch and grew to comprehend the usual and unusual ways to use the stars. In ports he went below and learned stowage. He became a crusader for advancement, merited advancement despite the Old Man who

badgered him. Yes indeed, he was going to get his papers as Second and thumb his nose at the brute. He was heading for a better berth on the *Lake Crowe* or the *Lake Devitte*, or any other Greete freighter. Any except this Greenlaw's.

Bill Williams passed a splendid exam splendidly. It was so severe and the examiner knew Greenlaw so well that it had to be done splendidly or not at all. He was positive that he'd seen them talking it over. Bill got his second officer's papers, nevertheless.

He framed the new license in the wheelhouse with Corbet's and the First's. The skipper saw it and grunted. "So!" said he. "What the hell do you know about handling an open boat in a rough sea?"

"Sir?" Bill saw the wry smile on Corbet's face.

"S'posing we went to the rescue of some disabled ship while you were Second. It's Second's place to take a boat over; she scuds down wind around the other fellow's stern, y' know, contacts the lee side of 'er and is picked up farther alee. Never did see that done, eh? Well, imagine me sending you——"

"You won't. I'm not aiming for Second's berth on here, sir." This took a lot of nerve and months of accumulated resentment to say. It was the first time Bill had lashed back.

Captain Greenlaw stood at Bill's back when it came. The retort astounded Corbet. He glanced swiftly toward the Old Man and his eyes widened in sheer wonder, for it certainly looked as though the skipper winced. No, there it came, that throaty, low chuckle of his which never failed to dissolve an issue.

Nor was Bill bluffing. He applied for a second officer's berth. He named several ships and was told that mates got their advancement when openings occurred. Inferentially, wherever they occurred.

One came.

"Well, Williams, I'm taking my dunnage over onto the *Lake Devitte*," said Corbet one night just outside New York. "Wheat and ammunition to Brest, ain't that sweet? Subs, y' know."

Subs be damned, Bill would have jumped at the chance to go Second anywhere.

"I'm going First. Always remember the first ship you go First on, y' know. First Officer Corbet o' the *Lake Devitte*. The torpedo ain't made that can bust that combination," Corbet grunted.

"Say, who'll be your Second over there?" Bill asked hopefully.

Corbet shuckled. He started to reply, thought better of it, and went below to pack his bag.

Next morning an office hound met the *Lake Feare* at her New York dock. He handed Williams a slip of official stationery and Bill gulped bile.

"Me? Take Corbet's berth here?" he gasped in chagrin. He turned away to hide his emotions. As Second under the same old tartar of a skipper, his life was doomed anew. At least a year more under the martinet who had been his dad's bosom friend!

Bill Williams moved into Corbet's quarters as a prisoner moves into his cell. He recalled the Old Man's jibe about sea rescues. He secured the First's permission to do extra lifeboat drills in ports with a picked, volunteer crew. He worked them in wind, in storms. He knew it looked foolish, but it had to be done while the First had charge of the ship, while the Old Man was ashore. He was absolutely sure about that.

ONE September day, Captain Grant Greenlaw was one of several invited guests on an official launch on North River. Several lifeboats from as many ships in port at the time were racing, and the launch followed the race from start to finish. It was an annual contest for a cup.

When the winning boat was announced, Captain Greenlaw was nearly bowled over. He was beset with congratulations, his hand was pumped numb, he shed a tear. But the Old Man was not sad.

Back aboard the *Lake Feare*, his eternal

solitaire had been swept aside, in its place on his desk stood the cup, and a knock drummed on his door.

He made no sound, just gripped and stifled himself in a silent struggle. Then, when he ran afoul of Bill Williams, his victorious coxswain of the lifeboat, he gruffed out, "Damned good men you had on those oars, lad."

Bill Williams was delighted at the recognition of the feat. It had been his feat, his victory, his tireless drilling had made his boat crew supreme, that day of days. A Williams had clicked again.

Greenlaw had his peculiar way of scrutinizing a man. He had spoken for effect, now he watched the Second's face. It was beaming, triumphant; it seemed to absorb every atom of credit for the victory.

"Humph," the Old Man grunted, "the real business of a lifeboat crew is on the open sea, not in North River. Sea disasters usually happen in dirty weather."

The barb sank deep into Bill Williams. He shed pride and delight. Perhaps, too, a bit of conceit. His handsome face that beamed on front pages now became a blank space with dull eyes, slack at nostrils and mouth.

The Old Man wheeled as tyrants do when they've tallied.

Williams watched his broad back, his newly shaven neck, his grim dignity. Heretofore he had hated that back, now he despised every last pound of flesh in the entire body. After all the recognition by newspapers, newsreels, other ships' officers, and the Greete staff, after all that—this!

Bill Williams hurried out of sight to think. He nursed his rage from live coals to devastating flame until the flame mounted to a wild thirst for revenge. He went to sea in its white heat, a heat that tempered him against further punishment. He absorbed gobs of it without blinking an eyelash. He prowled and hunted his brain for one thing, revenge. Nothing else mattered.

Bill Williams became rancid. He became chief mate. He gloried in his stubborn rise, confident that old Greenlaw had tried vainly to thwart it.

He took a new sort of licking as Greenlaw's chief officer. He was now accountable for the *Lake Fearc's* condition. He was also expected to command her whenever the skipper chose to relax. And relax he did!

Greenlaw seemed to shift responsibility unmercifully. He put everything, save title, gold braid and exactions, onto this mate. He made Williams run the ship through the short route between Florida Keys for the Florida west coast. He condemned him for oiling decks on a low glass before a rain.

One night the glass kicked downward. It jerked toward the low twenty-eights alarmingly in the glum mid-watch, until Sparks shot onto the bridge with urgent warnings of hurricane. The *Lake Fearc* jostled the cotton in her hold. She fought seas that came, not in windrows, but from every conceivable direction. They clashed in an uproar, they hove their broken tops aboard. The chief engineer came up; why didn't some one call the Old Man?

Scanlon, the Third, finally did so in person. "Looks now as if we're headin' into the eye of it, sir," he reported, fully aware that he was inviting something. For what is a Third's judgment worth?

"How's your glass going?"

"Down, sir. 'Way down."

Captain Greenlaw seemed both drowsy and alert, all at the same moment. Scanlon was puzzled, until the Old Man growled, "Rouse out Mister Williams, he'll use his judgment."

Scanlon closed the door and the skipper yelled through his open porthole, "Tell the First exactly what I've said."

"Yes. sir. He's to use his judgment, you say." Under his breath in the rising wind, Scanlon added, "And God pity 'im whatever he decides to do!"

God gave Bill good sense instead of pity. Once on the bridge, Bill turned tail, headed toward Cuba and ran. He ran until the barometer started upward. It crept above

29.6. Then he telegraphed for half speed and ordered more weather reports. He had left the tumult astern.

The following noon came a report that Tampa was braced for the hurricane. It had gone west, gone from the ship's path, and the *Lake Feare* came about to resume her way north. It had been good judgment on Williams' part, he had forestalled possible disaster with despatch and precision. The old tyrant couldn't deny that.

The *Lake Feare* scarcely got back on her course in the Gulf Stream, however, when the tyrant appeared on the bridge. He surveyed the sea, the firmament, the ship. He focussed those steely eyes on his sleep-starved chief mate, gave his beetling brows a hoist and rumbled at him, "Who checked the battens around your hatches? Who lashed everything down when the first warning came?"

"Battens, sir? We ran south, we avoided the hurricane," Bill advised him with defensive, almost challenging pride.

"You've been years on this run and don't know that hurricanes have a way of backtracking without warning? And you call yourself a chief mate!"

Right he was, and Bill Williams could only turn away to hide his venom. The very rightness made worse the sting of reproval.

THAT trip's end brought grief to mix with Bill's venom. His mother had died. The financial head of the Williams family had closed her books in order, too, and Bill emerged from grief with stocks, bonds and cash. And he saw, at long last, his only way to crush old man Greenlaw. Wealth became instantly a prospective weapon.

Bill Williams took a trip off to set his affairs in order. He did more. In a market that stood like an inverted pyramid, he foresaw the great crash in time. It was a gift the Williams clan passed down the generations and Bill used his talent to the utmost. He sold, he bought. He pried loose the smothered fact that Greete Corporation had been caught in the maw of wild manipulation and he gathered in its stock! Like a wizard, he drew his cash from banks that dared not refuse it in the turmoil. Like a wizard, he put it into Greete stocks.

But it was not altogether wizardry with Williams. Months of mounting revenge had found an outlet. He took on advisers, not mere tipsters. He became a large holder in Greete paper. Then he went to the officials who had kept him chained to old Greenlaw's tutelage and demanded a command. Something dynamic about this particular Williams made its arresting impact upon the officials—or did they know?

He got his command, his first ship, without waving a single share in their faces. He took the *Lake Grande* to Cuba with passengers and cargo when the new glamor was starting an era of joy cruises to the Gulf. A handsome liner with an handsome young skipper decked in gold on her lofty bridge. Maybe his good looks had won him the honor, maybe his confidence—or conceit.

The *Lake Grande* had two commanders. One was the glorious host in his cabin with the favored guests. The other haunted the bridge with vengeance burning in his soul. Captain William Williams revelled in the sudden release from the iron rule of Greenlaw. He welcomed the new contact with nice people. None the less, he sought day and night for a chance meeting with Captain Greenlaw in the *Lake Feare*, just to beat and shame him in a trumped up race, or to cross his bows, or do anything else to cow the old martinet.

THUS went five years of glory, of pride in command. Five years of changes, too, in the Greete Fleet, during which the old *Lake Feare* retired and was moored in a cove.

Half a decade, and Miss Constance Van Fleet with proper chaperone sat in the master's luxurious cabin of the *Lake Grande*. She had been here several times. She had developed a persistent taste for the winter

Havana run and the *Lake Grande*. Or was it the *Lake Grande?*

She scarcely heard the rap on the door, scarcely noticed the cadet enter. He handed a wireless to the captain, and then it was that she came to earth. For a new Billy Williams stood not ten feet away; he was the Captain Williams bred to command and drilled to responsibility by a tyrant, the Captain Williams of the bridge outside.

He bowed. He departed soberly. Out of the high collar of his greatcoat went terse orders that sent men running. One returned from the chart room with the ship's position.

"Get radio compass bearings, not that!" barked the skipper.

Messengers brought frequent reports from a stricken liner. Now she was list-

ing, now awash in a running sea. The *Centurion* stood in dire peril, calling all ships within reach to stand by.

"She's ninety-four miles sou' southeast of us, sir," came one officer's computations.

"These cross bearings check that, sir," another added.

"Latest radio says *Centurion* almost on her beam ends, sir." This from the chief wireless operator.

And paralleling the rapid flood of facts rose another consideration in the captain's brain. The *Centurion* had been rebuilt for the pleasure cruise era. Her superstructure was heavier than her original design warranted. She was top-heavy, as many skippers knew. She would keep on rolling over until——

The *Lake Grande's* commander drove her. He ordered wide open throttles, and he got them. She shook to the vibration of wild power, she cut, slashed, hove, and slammed through seas that mounted apace. Straight as a radio bearing she swept into the storm area.

Radio calls became pleas. SOS ruled the ether. Before one was comprehended, another came. The *San Marcia* was speeding to aid the ill-fated vessel, the *Merchantman* was racing in from 111 miles to the eastward, the tanker *Goldenoil* was crowding on steam to get there, to lay an oil slick from the windward.

Then came the message that quickened Bill Williams' pulse. The *Lake Lustre* was converging on the disaster from the southeast at top speed with lifeboats ready!

Bill Williams snorted outright; old Greenlaw with lifeboats ready. Old man tyrant stealing a march on all hands, bidding everybody one better for the glory.

Williams conferred with his chief engineer, with his executive officer, with his Second. He teemed with the green bile of revenge. He saw a possible way to best that demon at his own game, to shame him. Ah yes, he would lift the *Lake Grande* into the headlines at the old martinet's expense.

Captain Williams walked his cold bridge in the biting night wind. He took brine in drenching showers, he shook himself in the cold. But he was warm inside, he was fever-hot in the flame of conquest. Vengeance at last, vengeance. This time the show was to be his. This time Greenlaw would be on another ship, too far removed to spoil it with his biting tongue. In fact, it would leave him speechless, the maneuver was to be that bold, that breath-taking.

The *Centurion* lay far over to port in the trough of a shark infested maelstrom. Dawn revealed her at the end of an oil slick blowing down to her; revealed, too, the three blots of the *Goldenoil's* superstructure in the spindrift upwind, the ghostly *San Marcia* bobbing like a gull farther east. They were standing by, unable to effect a rescue. They were waiting for a shift in the wind, a less treacherous sea.

CAPTAIN WILLIAMS moved his binoculars to survey the wallowing liner again. He counted three wretched huddles on her storm-raked top deck. He made out lifeboats, some a-swing, some battered. Then a huge sea blurred it all in spume.

The *Lake Grande's* engines eased.

Suddenly another mountain hoisted a cargo ship before Williams' eyes. She seemed so close to the *Centurion* that he shouted, "That isn't possible!"

"That, sir," said his executive officer at his elbow, "is Cap'n Greenlaw's *Lake Lustre*. Look—my God, his lifeboats are on their way!"

Williams sprang to the telegraph, whipped it over to Full Speed. He recalled Greenlaw's jibe about the race in North River and the real business of lifeboats. "Well, here's another race for old martinet to judge," he muttered, "and this time he's a lot more than a spectator in a launch." He viewed again the freighter and added, "Ramming that clumsy cargo ship in here ahead of everybody else to grab off the glory, I presume. We'll go him one better."

Williams ceased his growlings to carry out his threat. He put his *Lake Grande* as close as the *Lake Lustre*. He let go a broadside of boats. He sped the *Lake Grande* out around the hulk's bow and hauled her dangerously close into its lee before Greenlaw could possibly maneuver his freighter around there. He had life nets prepared for the work of scooping survivors from sea level to decks high above. He wirelessed the *Centurion* to get away all of her own boats she could and to send all survivors to the *Lake Grande*. He'd show Greenlaw how to steal the glory!

Boats! Greenlaw's boats came, the *Lake Grande's* followed, the *Centurion's*, the *San Marcia's*. Swamping full they came, with men who had dangled from lines, women who had been lifted and pushed to safety, stewards and cadets who had jumped fifty feet to bob out of the oily sea like corks. And more came. They brought terror and panic and exhaustion. They ferried downwind on the dangerously short, lee stretch between disaster and rescue. They were lucky, for they would have swamped and perished if the distance had been greater. They toppled into the nets and rose while others moaned and waited. It was touch and go, in a merciful lull of wind and an eerie, yellow light.

Days later, the various captains must have read with secret satisfaction the recognition of their humane triumph. Not so Captain Williams; for him, those news accounts were hemlock. Because he, of all the skippers on the scene, had dared to risk his command close enough to save the lifeboats from swamping. His had been the receiving ship, the hospital, "due to her closer position below the derelict," as the papers said. What about the skill in keeping her there without letting the hulk drift down upon her, Bill wanted to know?

The supreme blow came later, however. His chief operator sent a cadet with a missive that twisted the barb of chagrin in his vitals. It read:

"Captain William Williams:
Splendid work. My congratulations.
signed: Capt. G. Greenlaw."

VENGEANCE readily turns dictator and her recurring defeats spur her on to bigger and better triumphs. From the receipt of Captain Greenlaw's wireless, Bill Williams struck out on the high road to advancement. He would rise over the martinet, rate above him in the Greete Corporation. He would arrive where even Greenlaw would not dare to risk a last word with him.

To this end he reorganized his life. He drove ship and men relentlessly. The *Lake Grande* became famous for efficiency, speed and attention to the minutest whims of passengers. Her master dropped all social connections of his own, he concentrated his entire existence upon the ambition to climb—to surmount a veteran

skipper. A wistful and wondering Constance Van Fleete withdrew and vanished into the limbo of unimportant factors. She married somebody ashore. And Bill Williams stifled his regret, he had no more time for women.

At thirty-eight, his record scored, his record plus the Greete stock he held. They made him port captain of the Greete Fleet with the usual amenities and glory. The amenities interested him but little. He welcomed the glory. The old martinet would see it and smart to the sting of it, and stand helpless to do anything to mar it.

It was Williams, however, who proved helpless at the moment he settled into his new routine. His promotion had promoted other licensed men, and it lifted Captain Greenlaw from the cargo ships to the passenger service. Bill gritted his teeth at that news, but what could he do? He hadn't power enough. Not yet.

Another blow threatened his ego. The supreme authority over all shipping personnel came into Williams' office, one afternoon, to enthuse over the matter nearest his heart.

". . . ready in fifteen months," he was saying, "the last word in Gulf of Mexico shipping. We're naming her the *Lake Greete*. Oh yes, and we've decided upon her captain. He merits the honor. Has had thirty years on the bridges of Greete cargo boats and he's showing up splendidly in a passenger job now. He'll be ready for her with a record that's never been challenged, he'll run that new flagship like——"

Williams' eyes had narrowed slowly, his jaw had set, his body tensed. "You haven't named this heroic personage, Mr. Tyler," he reminded carefully.

"Oh. I, why I presumed that you knew Captain Greenlaw's record."

Long after the enthusiast had gone, William Williams sat still in his solitude of contemplation. The old martinet to get the *Lake Greete;* the new flagship, the finest American liner into the Gulf—going to that ugly tyrant. Williams emerged from his brown study nervously. He paced his office as he had paced bridges. He murmured aloud, he studied his calendar. He called up a broker and planned craftily to assume increasing responsibilities.

"Only fifteen months," he said slowly, "fifteen months in which to dig in deeper here, to become indispensable. Fifteen months to buy stocks, prestige, power!"

Thereafter he worked day and night. He drove himself until exhaustion commanded sleep. He retired and lay awake while bitter recollections and clever planning filled his brain. He made timely gifts, the sorts of gifts that could not be put aside and forgotten. He bought more Greete paper at depression-low prices and attended board meetings. He wormed his persistent way into officialdom.

Until there came a momentous day in which President William Williams of the Greete Corporation had the honor of selecting a new port captain to replace himself.

President Williams at the peak of his studied climb was not the former Captain Bill Williams. He moved in a strange weariness as though the very air hampered him and must be pushed aside. He thought as wearily and his thoughts turned increasingly inward.

"Rest. Got to get more rest," he murmured, "as soon as the new flagship is commissioned. I'll go away somewhere and relax, I'm at the top, now, where the business can run on without me; a president isn't so necessary to routine matters—but he has the power. Yes, the power!" As he spoke, he chanced to see himself in the long mirror that revealed visitors in advance. He saw his own face, he smiled and shrank from the grimace, it suggested something evil.

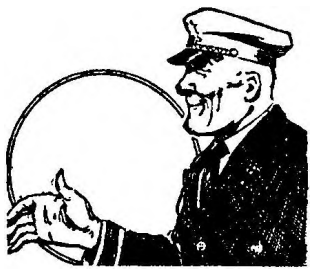
THEY launched the *Lake Greete* in style. She featured the Sunday rotogravures and started dame rumor in news columns. A Captain Greenlaw was going to command her, it was gossiped in the Greete offices, throughout the Greete Fleet.

Rumor reached the top floor sanctum and provoked a wry smile, but the president did not deny it. Indeed, by clever insinuations he seemed to verify the story. Huh, let the old martinet expect it, plan for it; the higher he rode now, the harder he'd fall later.

It was precisely at this moment that the news item at the opening of this story appeared in the papers. The old *Lake Feare* going into commission again, and the shipping world wondered what the Greete Corporation could do with an old ship that had been moored to a stump for years.

The story scored with Williams because it emphasized the *Lake Feare's* age and condition. She was rating as the meanest bottom in the whole Greete Fleet. And who was doomed to command her? Ah yes, let them keep asking, while they went on deifying old Greenlaw, while employes congratulated the old buzzard in advance.

"And what a huge laugh those same persons will give him when he gets his *real*



command. What a come-down that's going to be," mused the figure behind the president's desk.

Fog played a trick on William Williams. It made old Greenlaw late. The flagship was commissioned two days before her touted commander got it. That dulled some of Williams' delight, for he had prepared to gloat over the expectancy in Greenlaw's steely eyes.

But it gave Bill added time to set the stage for his greatest scene, for the supreme moment for which he had made himself the head of Greete. Years of his life had focussed upon this one devastating hour, years of grim purpose had driven him. To-day the long drive left him a bit shaken, in throbbing excitement.

He gripped himself anew on that day of days. He eyed his clock, he steadied his trembling hands and endeavored to ignore the constant thrum of the pulse in his throat.

Then Greenlaw came. He came calmly, with sturdy assurance. There was the hint of geniality about the man and Williams realized abruptly that he hadn't actually looked upon this personage for years. In his severe climb to power, he had conceived a Greenlaw of his own. This one in the flesh was not so old. His weathered features beamed good health, his robust bulkiness rendered the luxurious surroundings puny. In that fleeting instant, Williams' office seemed overdone.

Nevertheless he had arranged it for the meeting and he nagged himself inwardly while the captain settled easily to a chair. Williams had formed a habit of prodding himself silently lately. He did so now. "Mr. President, bestir yourself, the long anticipated event has arrived, you're about to demote the old tyrant of the *Lake Feare.*"

Meanwhile he kept Greenlaw waiting. It would fret him because captains are not given to waiting. Let him steam it out, confront the full force of these surroundings, of this sanctum on the topmost floor where edicts went unquestioned.

At that moment, Captain Greenlaw swept the room in a glance. Just as his former Mate Williams had seen him sweep sky, and sea, and ship. "Splendid cab—office, glad to see you so well heeled up here. Makes it easier for what I have to say, Bill," said Greenlaw easily.

Bill! Would he feel so familiar when the blow fell? Williams doubted it. He surprised a smile that was odd, it told him that the martinet had come to ask a favor. What a day!

"Well," he prompted in his most official tone, "what have you to say?"

Greenlaw flashed one of his all-inclusive glances. "Don't misunderstand me, Wil-

liams; for several years back I rather guess I've misunderstood you. You seemed to be all drive and ambition, seemed to forget that old Greenlaw of the *Lake Feare* days existed. But to-day—I can see you haven't forgot."

"Oh no," Williams assured him evenly, "not one day of forgetting since I got out of the *Lake Feare*."

THE menace in that tone was unmistakable. "Yes, yes. Handled you a bit rough on the *Feare*. I had to. Owners didn't want me to take another Williams. They blamed your father for losing the *Lake Cisco* on that coral reef for 'em. So I made you fight for every step of your advancement, boy. And I fought 'longside of you till they had to admit you were first class officer material. Judas, how they grudged every raise, but you're Hubert's blood and bone, boy, I knew you'd make good."

"I—you—the *Lake Feare*—" William stammered, he struggled to steady the whirling in his brain.

Up went Greenlaw's protesting hands. "That's all past and settled, we sailing masters understand each other. And I didn't come here to harp on that."

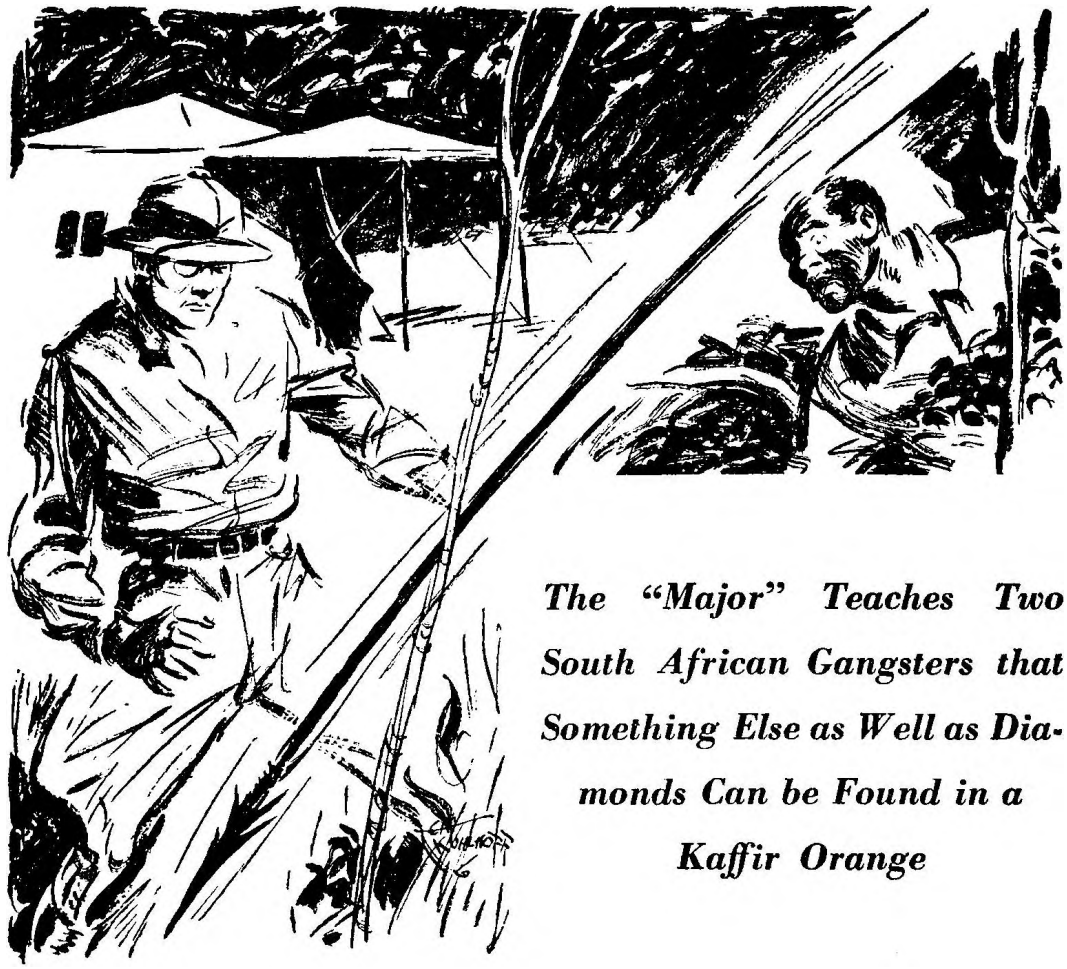
"Oh."

"No. Bill, I'm no longer young; I'm getting where I'd rather take it a bit easier. Now I heard, o' course, that you've got me slated to take out your new flagship. I appreciate the honor. But there's another ship I'd rather have. You see, I'll be retired soon and I want a few trips in my old *Lake Feare*. I hear you're recommissioning her—fine old Hog Islander, sound as ever." He paused in the spell of memories.

He came out of his reverie to lay those steely eyes on Bill and hoist his beetling brows. "Lord sake, Bill, I've made a speech and you—you're sick, you look gaunt. Say, give me the *Lake Feare* and come along as my guest!"

Bill Williams' eyes met his and held. He laughed dryly. "Work my whole life for something," he mused. "Never can have it, never. What's more, I never can tell you what it is, or was."

"Yes, Cap'n Greenlaw, I shall take a trip with you—in the same old *Lake Feare*."



The "Major" Teaches Two South African Gangsters that Something Else as Well as Diamonds Can be Found in a Kaffir Orange

KAFFIR ORANGE

By L. PATRICK GREENE

Author of "The 'Oyster's' Pearl," "The Lake of the Dead," and Other Stories of the "Major"

AMONGST the inhabitants of Vreeburg—a South African diamond town of importance second only to the diamondopolis of Kimberley—the firm of Davis and Cornish had the reputation of being decidedly *slim*. The term had nothing to do with the physique of the partners but was a back-handed tribute to the low cunning and sharp practices which governed their business calling.

They were registered diamond buyers, a perfectly legitimate business if played according to the rules, but they preferred to buy stones stolen by natives from their white employers. The profits were tremendous, the risk of being found out very small. They had their own army of spies and their manner of dealing with the native trap boys used by detectives was devastating and efficient.

Nor did they confine their operations to the buying of diamonds. They sold to the thirsty natives a poisonous concoction which they called gin, and which earned them a profit of nearly five hundred per

cent. They bought farms from gullible, back-veldt Boers. They salted abandoned claims and sold them to men who knew nothing of gold or diamonds but who had come to South Africa convinced that it was a land of wealth easily gained. The success of Davis and Cornish certainly seemed to justify that belief.

They were driving now over the veldt to the north of the town, heading for the line of low-lying kopjes close to which was the homestead of Piet du Toit.

Cornish groaned as the badly sprung cart lurched and bounced over the uneven veldt.

Davis laughed at him.

"You ought to get some fat on your bones, Corney, old boy, if you know what I mean," he said. "Yes. I know what you mean," Cornish interrupted sourly in a thin, high pitched voice. "But as my bones are *not* covered with fat and I hate the veldt, the sooner this trip is over the better I'll like it. Can't we get a move on? Traveling at this pace, it'll be a good bit after sun-under before we reach du Toit's place."

"That's when I plan to arrive," Davis chortled. "I want to get there about the time the old fool's thinking of goin' to bed. When the sleep's on him, the wit's out—not that he has much at the best of times."

"Suppose he won't sell?" Cornish said.

"He will," Davis exclaimed positively. "Once *you* get to work on him—" he nudged Cornish in the ribs with his elbow—"he'll be ready to sell his old *vrouw* if you wanted to buy her. Which you don't! Nine hundred pounds is a lot of money for a back veldt Boer to own all at once. But you'll have to do all the talking. He don't trust me. He don't like my style of dress—I talk too loud for him, too. But you, now, with your long white face an' black clothes, an' quiet voice—why he'll take to you like as if you was a *predikant* at Nachtmaal, if you know what I mean."

CORNISH smiled. He knew what his partner meant! His somber appearance was as much part of the firm's stock-in-trade as was Davis' loud voice, loud check suits and pose of general good fellowship. Between them, the partners were all things to all men and never exhibited their true characters until a deal was finished—and not always then!

Cornish's feet rested on a stout leather bag; its contents jangled musically as the buckboard bounced over the veldt.

"Be a nice thing if we were held up and robbed," he said.

"Don't be a fool," Davis replied. "This country is civilized. Some of the chaps may be a bit wild, but they're as honest as the day is long."

"Which makes things easy for us," Cornish commented dryly. "You know," he continued, "there's only one thing about this deal that worries me. Suppose it ain't worth the money we're paying for it?"

"It is." Davis said. "Didn't Hans—" Hans was a half caste in their employ—"find plenty of indications? An' even if we don't find any stones we can always parcel out the property. Sell two or three claims an' we've got our money back—with interest."

"Nine thousand pounds is a lot of money," Cornish said.

"Nine thousand *is*," Davis agreed.

Then both men chuckled as at some secret joke they shared.

The two men were silent then for quite a while until Davis turned the horse from the course they had been following and made a detour which would take in a small native kraal.

"And now what?" Cornish growled. "Haven't we dawdled long enough on the way as it is? It's all right getting to du Toit's place when the old fool's thinking about going to bed, but it's a waste of time arriving after he's turned in."

"Plenty of time," Davis said, glancing at the sun. "And I haven't paid a visit to old Tomasi for a couple of weeks. He may have some of your favorite fruit to sell, if you know what I mean."

"Thought we'd decided he wasn't safe any more? It's risky, ain't it? Hans said the 'tecs were getting suspicious of him."

"So they are, an' so I am—am giving him up, I mean. But as we're so near, we might as well see what he's got. It'll be the last time, an' I ain't sorry. The old swindler's getting to know too much. He expects to be paid in money now, instead of gin."

AS DAVIS pulled the horse to a halt at the gate in the pole stockade encircling the kraal, the children and young girls who had been playing outside ran into their huts.

"They don't seem specially glad to see you," Cornish observed with a grin.

Davis scowled.

"That's niggers all over," he said. "They don't know who're their friends. *Sauka bona,*" he continued, addressing a sly looking gray beard who came forward and squatted down on his haunches beside the cart.

Tomasi replied effusively to the greeting then held out his cupped hands, begging for a present.

"No give," Davis said impatiently. "I buy. You got kaffir oranges?"

"Plenty got," the native replied in a singsong voice.

"All right. Bring them here."

"The crop is a good one," Tomasi said. "Will you pay a good price, white man?"

"What is the price?" Davis asked, winking at Cornish. "Twelve bottle of gin?"

Tomasi shook his head.

"No. No more gin. I want money, white man. Much money. So many pounds." He held up his two hands, fingers extended.

He looked surprised when Davis nodded agreement. He had expected to spend several happy hours bargaining before finally agreeing to accept half the sum he now demanded.

"I go now and get them," he said, and he ran hastily to the kraal as if afraid the white man would change his mind. Returning almost immediately he dragged behind him a loaded sack. He lifted it onto the buckboard, placing it at the feet of

Davis, and opening the sack showed the two men that it was full of kaffir oranges —a fruit that in color and general appearance is very much like an orange, only very much larger and with a hard shell. "If I open this one, white man," Tomasi continued, carefully selecting one of the oranges—it looked not as ripe as the others —"you will see that I do not lie when I say it is a good crop. The meat of this one proves I am a true man."

DAVIS took the orange and examined it closely.

"Only this one, Tomasi?"

"Only that one, white man."

Davis nodded, returned the sack to the pile and prepared to drive on.

"Wait! The money, white man," Tomasi cried.

"I give that when I have examined the crop," Davis replied.

Tomasi's hand closed on the sack.

"Unless you pay now," he said firmly, "you do not take."

Davis was about to strike the old man's wrist with the heavy stock of his driving whip but several muscular natives had come out of the kraal and were standing close behind their headman. So he laughed, affecting good humor.

"It is but a game I played," he said boisterously. "Of course I will pay—now. But I do not carry so much money with me. Therefore I will give you five golden sovereigns as a token of good will and for the rest I will give you my 'good for.' Is it agreed?"

Tomasi consulted with his young men, then nodded, holding out his cupped hands greedily.

He carefully examined each of the five sovereigns Davis gave him—white men had been known to pass off highly polished copper coins as sovereigns—nodding with satisfaction after each trial. Then he watched Davis write out a "good for"—a form of I. O. U. often used by white men to pay their native laborers.

"Give that yourself to any white man or to the man at the police house," Davis said. "He will give you fifteen of the best. See. My name is signed to it."

TOMASI carefully stowed the paper away in a pouch which hung by a cord round his neck.

"Go smoothly, white man," he said.

Davis flourished his whip in an answering salute and drove off swinging back to his original course.

"Do you think that was wise?" Cornish asked presently.

"What? That 'good for' I gave the old fool? Yes. Why not? I tell you we've finished with him. He's of no use to us any longer."

"Yes. But he'll tell the police about our dealings with him, and——"

"And give himself away? Don't be a fool. And even if he did, what of it? They can't *prove* anything. Besides, everybody knows you're fond of kaffir oranges. I'm partial to some myself. Ones like this for example."

He took from the sack the orange Tomasi had shown him.

"You paid five pounds for it," Cornish observed as he took the fruit from his partner. "It ought to be ripe."

Cornish turned the fruit round in his hands, examining it closely, then taking out a pocket knife he ran the point of the blade around an oblong shaped crack. A moment later he had lifted out a portion of the shell exposing three shapeless lumps of unpolished glass—at least, that is what they looked like—wedged into the pulpy mass of fruit. He pried them out and wiped them on his silk handkerchief. "They're off color and flawed," he said grudgingly. "Not so good."

"And not so bad," Davis countered with a chuckle. "They only cost us a fiver an' if we'd paid a hundred they'll still show us a good profit. Put 'em away safe, Corney."

Cornish carefully wrapped each stone in a strip torn from his handkerchief. When that was done to his satisfaction, Davis handed him the butt end of the driving whip. It was ornately bound with brass rings, one of which was about two inches wide. This opened out on a hinge disclosing a slot into which Cornish stowed the silk wrapped stones. The brass ring was closed again and Davis flourished the whip with a triumphant laugh.

CORNISH smashed the rest of the orange shell with a small axe then threw the fruit away.

"Wasn't ripe enough to eat," he said taking up another. This he also broke open and picking out some of the pulp covered seeds he put them in his mouth, sucking off the fruit and finally spitting out the seeds.

"Don't see how you can eat the stuff," Davis said. "Too sweet for a man's taste, if you know what I mean."

Cornish said nothing. He couldn't have spoken for the simple reason that his mouth was again full of seeds.

The two men were silent for a long time then:

"Hey," Davis exclaimed, suddenly pulling to a halt at the crest of a rise. "Wonder what fool's camped there."

In the bottom of a basin-like depression through which ran a small spruit was an outspan—something unusual in the way of outspans, at that. There was a white bell-tent and a canvas-topped light trek wagon. A coal black horse grazed contented by with sixteen mules close by.

"Must be some dude outfit seeing the country," Cornish said contemptuously.

"An outfit like that costs money, Corney," Davis observed.

"Which means," Cornish said, rubbing his hands together, "that the men who own it have money. We ought to pay them a visit."

"That was in my mind," Davis grinned. "We ought to be able to do a deal or two with them—even if it's only cards."

"But we don't stop long, mind," Cornish warned. "Don't want to be late getting to du Toit's."

A FEW minutes later they drew up at the outspan.

"What is your name, boy?" Davis asked the squat but broad-shouldered Hottentot who greeted them with a respectful salute.

"Jim, boss."

"And what name do you give your bosses, Jim?"

"I have only one Baas. And that is what I call him—'Baas.' "

"Well," Davis said with the click of impatience, "what names do you give to the other white men who travel with him?"

"He travels alone, white man."

Davis and Cornish exchanged meaning glances.

"He is then very rich?"

The Hottentot shrugged his shoulders.

"As to that I do not know, white man. But we never go hungry."

"What name do other white men give your Baas?"

Again the Hottentot shrugged his shoulders.

"Some men this, some men that. I am Jim the Hottentot. He is my Baas."

Davis colored angrily.

"Are you playing a game with me, Hottentot?" he demanded. "If I thought you were——"

He paused and licking his thick lips struck at the Hottentot with his whip.

The native ducked and jumping forward caught hold of the whip and wrested it from Davis' hands.

"You devil!" Davis swore as he climbed down from the cart. "I'm going to kick you senseless for that."

"Don't be a fool, Davis," Cornish warned. "Get that whip back and let's go on. We'll call back here when we've seen du Toit."

"Yes. Maybe you're right," Davis agreed. "See here, nigger; later I will walk with your Baas. He will beat you——"

"If my Baas beats me, white man, what of it? He is my Baas. But *you* will not beat me."

"Damn it, Corney," Davis spluttered, "I've a good mind to give the cheeky devil what for." To the Hottentot he said, "Give me the whip."

JIM shook his head. "If I give it to you—how do I know you will not try to beat me with it? No. When you come again to see my Baas—then I will give you your whip."

He turned his back on the two men and walked slowly away.

If there had only been the whip at stake, Davis might have been content to let the matter rest, for he was a coward as well as a bully and was intimidated by the Hottentot's calm confidence, but there were the diamonds hidden in the whip stock and

he did not need the whispered reminder from Cornish.

Fists clenched, shouting curses, he rushed at the Hottentot who uttered a shrill cry—Davis thought it was one of fear—and broke into a run. Back and forth he ran, doubling, dodging, his most frantic efforts barely succeeding in keeping him out of Davis' grip.

Davis' anger grew, fed by the mocking laughter and jeering advice of his partner. He cursed continually and then, suddenly, the Hottentot made a cunning jerking movement with his hands which sent the long lash of the whip curling out behind him. It twined around Davis' ankles, tightened, and brought him heavily to the ground. As he rose, he drew his revolver with portentous deliberation.

"Don't be a fool, Davis," Cornish shouted in an alarmed voice. "A nigger ain't worth hanging for."

Davis glanced over his shoulder at his partner and grinned meaningly.

"It won't be murder," he laughed. "He attacked me, didn't he? Well then, this'll be self-defense. You can witness to that."

"But I'm afraid I should have a different story to tell."

Both men stared at the drawling, affected voice and Davis, turning again saw a tall, immaculately dressed man standing at the opening of the bell-tent.

COMING forward a few paces he continued, ignoring the derisively contemptuous stares of the two partners:

"I must apologize for making my appearance so belatedly but, I assure you, it was only because I was attempting to improve my—er—appearance. I always change for dinner, don't you know." His white teeth flashed in an engaging smile.

"Well—now you've appeared," Davis growled, "you can give that cheeky nigger of yours a good sjamboking."

"But no, really," the other protested. "Pon my word, you're a most violent man. First you want to shoot him, now you're speaking of sjamboking him. And I don't approve of either. Allow me to counsel kinder methods. You know, the soft answer that turns away wrath. That sort of thing, besides, anger heats the blood, an' that's so bad for one, don't you think? Or don't you?"

He paused and looked expectantly at Davis as if on the man's reply the fate of the universe rested.

Davis spat wrathfully.

"Look here, you—" he began wrathfully. But Cornish interrupted him.

"He's right, Davis," he said. "I've told you often enough that you lose your temper too easily. And after all, what's the nigger done save take to his heels when you tried to beat him? He was a bit cheeky, maybe, but then, he don't know who we are."

"Neither do I," the Hottentot's Baas exclaimed. "I, by the way am Aubrey St. John—spelled S-T—full stop—J-O-H-N, and not, as it sounds, Sinjun—Major. *The* Major, you know." He seemed to be disappointed that his name had called forth no comment.

"Doesn't that mean anything to you, old lads?" he asked anxiously. "Doesn't it cause an awakening flutter of recollection in your jolly old manly—er—bosoms? Ah!" he concluded sadly, "I see that it doesn't. How times have changed, I could weep."

He took out his monocle and polished it vigorously.

"We're glad to know you, Major," Cornish said. "My name's Cornish and my impetuous partner here is Davis. We're diamond dealers by profession but there's nothing too big or too small for us to handle. If there's anything you want in the way of gold or diamond claims, firearms, native labor, stores, trek-outfit—anything at all. And now, if you will tell your Hottentot to give back the whip to my partner, we will be on our way."

"But of course," the Major said. He took the whip from the Hottentot and examined it admiringly. "It's a marvelous whip," he exclaimed. "Pon my word, I've never seen one like it before, so well bal-

anced, and I like these ornamental rings round the stock. Frightfully jolly, aren't they?"

"Here," Davis interposed roughly, "give me the whip. We've got to go."

"Yes, but just a minute, old chap. I'm interested in whips, I collect them, you know. Now would you sell me this one?"

Davis held out his hand.

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "You talk like a market woman. Give me the whip."

THE Major pretended to strike him with it and Davis growled in disgusted tones:

"He'll be wanting to play Puss in the Corner next, Corney. Come on, Major, we've wasted enough time. This whip's not for sale. I collect them too."

"How interesting," the Major drawled. "We must—er—indulge in a little barter and exchange some day. This whip now, oh, I say, I believe one of the ferrules, if

that's what you call 'em, is loose." His strong fingers were playing on the brass ring which closed the hiding place of the diamonds, and Davis unable to restrain himself any longer snatched the whip from his hands, cursing volubly as he did so.

He ran back to the wagon, climbed up on the seat beside his partner and drove off at a frantic speed.

Aubrey St. John Major stared after them thoughtfully. With their departure his appearance seemed to have changed. It was as if a mask had dropped from his face; a mask that had been made by a master artist to portray a man of small intellect, the mask of an inane dude whose interest in life was confined to the cut of his clothes. With the dropping of the mask, the Major's carriage had changed too. He was the same man—and yet not the same man. He was like an actor who has removed his grease paint and stepped out of the rôle he has just been playing on the stage. It seemed as if the muscles of his face had changed, hardening the soft contours; his chin now was purposeful, his mouth firm. Even the color of his eye seemed to have undergone a transformation—from a child-like, innocent blue to a steely gray.

HE LAUGHED and sitting down in a deck chair which the Hottentot placed for him in the shade of the tent, said:

"Do you know these men, Jim?" He spoke the vernacular with a fluent ease, pronouncing the weird *clicks* of the Hottentot's dialect as if it were his native tongue.

"No, Baas. But they are evil men."

"Undoubtedly," the Major laughed. "One tried to beat you and would have shot you. But you were—" he lapsed into English—"damn cheeky."

"Oah, yes," the Hottentot echoed with a self conscious grin. "Damn cheeky, my word, yes. If I don't see——"

"Don't say it, Jim," the Major interrupted hastily cutting short the meaningless phrase which the Hottentot invariably used in order to impress natives with his knowledge of English. The Major knew the Hottentot very well indeed. They had adventured over Africa together for many years, and the understanding which existed between them was almost uncanny. But in the matter of Jim's knowledge of English, the Major was genuinely puzzled. Once, under stress of great excitement, Jim had spoken fluent English, his accents the drawlingly affected ones of his master. But the occasion having passed the gift seemed to leave him suddenly, and all the Major's attempts to trick the Hottentot into betraying a knowledge of English had failed!

The Major said now:

"You must be careful, Jim, to avoid saying or doing anything which may give offense to white men."

"Yes, Baas," Jim said humbly, "but

wo-we! we have been so long absent from this land, seeing but few white men, that it is hard to remember what gives offense and what pleases. Baas, what was there about that whip which interested you?"

"There was a secret hiding place in the stock, Jim."

"*Au-a!* For diamonds, Baas."

"For diamonds, Jim."

The Hottentot grinned.

"It is time that we played that game again, Baas." The Hottentot was referring to the fact that his Baas was reputed to be the cleverest Illicit Diamond Buyer in South Africa. But though the average Illicit Diamond Buyer is regarded as the meanest of criminals, the Major was popular with everyone except the crooks he despoiled.

No honest miner had ever suffered loss on account of the Major's activities, and though those activities were often illegal—according to the Draconian laws which protected the diamond industry—no one wished to see him punished for them; least of all, perhaps, the police, despite their earnest endeavors to trap him with incriminating diamonds in his possession.

"If the game is brought to us," he said, "we will play it. But we will not go searching for it. I am getting old, Jim. We have spent so much of our lives running to escape death. It is time that we sat in the sun."

"You old, Baas!" the Hottentot scoffed. "A warrior just blooded in his first fight is no younger than you. *Wo-we!* What man can trek as fast as you, or cover more ground between the sun's rising and its setting? Your eye is keen, your aim true. Your strength is an elephant's. Your wisdom—*Au-a!* What is there to which I can liken your wisdom and not do you an injustice? *Wo-we!* I tell you that the gray hairs which here and there lighten the blackness of your head's thatch, are no more a sign of age than is the dew which falls in the dry season a sign that the rains are upon us."

The Major laughed.

"You are a whip to scourge fears and doubts, Jim," he said. "You say I am young. So be it. I *am* young. But those two men, Jim. They did not know me!"

"Perhaps they lied, hoping to trick you, Baas. Yes. That is it. They were detectives, Baas. They had perhaps hidden diamonds in that whip hoping you would find them. Had you done so they would have taken you to prison."

The Major considered this for a moment; diamond mine detectives had, in the past, attempted to trap him in the possession of stones by similar ruses. But:

"No, Jim," he decided. "They are not detectives, and they did not hope I would find the diamonds—that was their fear. But the thing which now concerns me is this: did they lie when they said they did not know me? And if they lied, what is their purpose?"

Jim laughed as he said, "*Au-a!* Baas. They did not know you. They thought you were the fool you sometimes look. Nor is it strange that they do not know you, we have been away for a long time from the diamond towns. Men have forgotten us while we were hidden by the shadows of the jungle country. And men die or, which is all the same, go to another land. Yet again, Baas, even in the old days we did not often come to this dorp. But if you think you are forgotten, go to the men whose skins are black. You will find that they do not forget a friend or, for the matter of that, an enemy."

"That is a good thought, Jim," the Major agreed. "After skoff I will ride to the kraal of Tomasi."

The Hottentot grinned. He was satisfied that he had won the Major—his Baas who could do no wrong!—from the fit of despondency which had threatened him.

"Then now I will prepare skoff, Baas," he said, "for the sun sets and soon it will be dark."

BY THE time the Major had done justice to the expertly cooked meal Jim served to him, he was feeling at peace with the world and more than ready to post-

pone his visit to Tomasi's kraal until the morrow. He lighted a cigarette and leaning contentedly back in his chair watched Jim who was eating his own meal beside the glowing camp fire.

"Just the same, Jim," he said presently, as if continuing an interrupted conversation, "you must be more careful. You *were* impudent to the white man."

"Yes. I know, Baas," the Hottentot admitted readily, "but it is hard to give respect where it is not deserved. Those two white men! They were evil, and fools. If I had called them great chiefs and fawned on them, they would have been satisfied, not knowing that in my heart I was mocking them. Now you, Baas; your ears are not deafened to the truth by the flattery of liars. You——"

"Nor will flattery silence my voice of reproof," the Major interposed with a chuckle. "So I say, Jim, that you must pay all white men at least the outward form of respect. *Wo-we!* Have we been so long away from this country that you have forgotten? Some white men beat black men who do not treat them as great chiefs. Some kill, as the man would have killed today had I not been here."

"But you were, Baas," Jim said contentedly. "You are always at hand when death threatens me. You have never failed. You will never fail. And I think that death will never come to us in a mean way. Men will talk of the manner of *our* going. They will make a song of it for warriors, and the children of warriors, to sing. Or, perhaps, we will never die. We have defeated death so often, Baas, that I think he is now afraid of us and fights on our side."

"Steady, Jim," the Major said warningly. "The rooster crows but he never lays an egg. An elephant rules the jungle and his years are many, but a leech will reduce him to madness and death."

"True, Baas," Jim countered, "but it is also true that a man who stays always in his hut never sees the sun's rising, and the commands of a man who is dumb are never heard, or obeyed." Then as if conscious that his defence of boasting was not overstrong, Jim changed the subject. "But I will not again give you cause for anger, Baas. I will salute all white men and thank them when they beat me, and I am your dog, Baas. So now I will saddle the horse and you shall ride to the kraal of Tomasi."

HE ROSE to his feet but instead of carrying out his expressed intention he stood in an attitude of listening, one hand raised cautioning the Major to keep silent.

Then he squatted down on his haunches again.

"Men come, Baas," he said in a low voice.

"White men or black, Jim?" the Major asked.

"Black, Baas. They come, I think, with assegais in their hands and anger in their hearts."

The Major's hand dropped to his revolver holster, every sense on the alert though he relaxed still more comfortably in his chair and seemed to be concerned with nothing of greater importance than the glowing end of his cigarette. He could hear nothing. The night's silence was absolute. But he did not doubt the Hottentot's statement. Jim's sense of hearing was counted abnormal even amongst his own people.

The Hottentot now commenced to sing softly, clapping his hands to accent the rhythm of his song. The words of the song conveyed information to the Major concerning the whereabouts and probable number of the men who were creeping stealthily through the darkness, converging upon the outspan. And as he sang Jim slowly, almost imperceptibly, moved away from the fire, without changing his squatting posture, halting finally in the shadows beyond the circle of light cast by the flickering flames.

And then the Major heard the sounds which had roused the Hottentot's fears; the sounds which only a fully veldt-wise man could have picked out from the normal sounds which blend into the silence of an African night.

For a few minutes there was an atmosphere of tension at the outspan. The Major had drawn his revolver and his trigger finger was ready to send death spitting from the weapon. The Hottentot's muscles were flexed, ready for action. Even the animals seemed to be conscious that something was wrong for they huddled together and pawed the ground uneasily.

THEN the Major laughed unaffectedly. "This is folly, Jim," he said. He returned the revolver to its holster and going to the fire stood full in the flame light, stretching himself lazily.

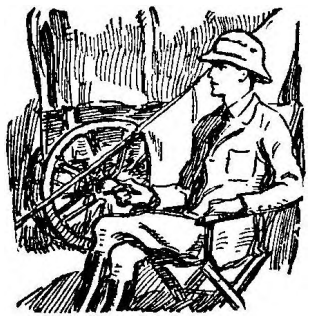
"Take care, Baas," Jim exclaimed. "They can see you."

"And why not, Jim? Here we have no enemies. We are not now in the jungle country of the Congo where death always lurks in the shadows. This is the open veldt. We are home. Here we are known. Here we are surrounded by friends."

"But if anger, or beer, has blinded our friends, Baas—what then?" Jim protested.

"We will open their eyes, Jim."

"*Au-a.* But this is indeed folly. The assegais which come out of the darkness



kill as surely as those thrown in the light of day. Nor can you make a friend of the assegai which has drunk your blood."

But in spite of his grumbling the Hottentot quickly went to the Major and by moving constantly endeavored to keep his sturdy form between the Major and whatever danger threatened them from the darkness.

"What is this dance you do?" the Major asked. "Does the ground burn your feet, Hottentot?"

"My feet are cold, Baas," Jim replied mournfully. "And—*wo-we!* Here comes death."

As he spoke an assegai hurtled from the darkness into the red glow of the fire and stuck quivering into the ground close to where the two men stood. The Major picked it up, examined it casually and remarked in a loud voice:

"If the heart of the man who threw this is no truer than his aim, he is an evil man."

He dropped the assegai and turned his back to the direction from which the assegai had come. And when Jim would have stood behind him he would not permit it.

They heard voices in the darkness, voices which questioned, accused, and finally reviled.

Finally one shouted:

"Forgive us, *inkosi.* We are your dogs, but we did not know you. Is any harm done?"

"There is no harm done," the Major replied. "Come to the fire's light."

THERE was a pause and a low voiced argument amongst the hidden men as they tried to persuade each other to take the lead. At last they came forward, huddled together, weaponless, heads bent.

"Greetings, *inkosi,*" they chorused, then giggled like bashful maidens and stood shifting their weight from one foot to the other.

"Apes, Dog-apes," Jim growled contemptuously. "Children playing at warriors."

"And since when," the Major asked, "has Tomasi sent his young men out to kill in the night?" When they did not answer he continued sarcastically, "I had not heard that his shadow had become so great that none could live in this country without his permission. *Wu!* Undoubtedly he is greater than Chaka, that Black Elephant. Does he go to war against all white men? Or has he become a thief, a very little thief, who kills and robs the stranger white man who passes by his kraal?"

"We did not know it was you, *inkosi.*

Had we known you were near we would have come to you laden with gifts, not spears."

"And your name is, I think, Mtawa, Tomasi's eldest son," the Major commented.

"Wo-we! The *inkosi* remembers that! But you, we heard that you were dead, *au-a!* If we believed all the tales that have been told since you were last amongst us, you have died many times—and the Hottentot with you."

"Yet, as you see, we live." He sat down in the chair which Jim had brought for him and placed where the fragrant wood smoke from the fire swirled about him, effectively driving away the swarms of hungry mosquitoes. "Now, son of Tomasi," he said sternly, "what is this folly?"

"It is because of the beating that was given to my father, *inkosi,*" the native replied.

"And why was he beaten?"

"Because of a 'Good For' an evil man gave to him. Listen, *inkosi.* This white man with one other came to our kraal. He wanted to buy some Kaffir Oranges. My father gave him a sack full and, because the white man had little money, he accepted a 'good for' in payment."

"WELL," the Major prompted when the native paused.

"Just before sundown another white man came to the kraal, *inkosi.* To him my father showed the 'good for.' Then the white man laughed and he beat my father with a sjambok. And when we asked him why he did so he only laughed still louder, and continued the beating. We would have killed him but my father said no and presently he departed. But not before he had caused the little death to fall upon my father. When Tomasi saw light, and found life again, he was like one gone mad and he sent us out to avenge him. Had you been other than the one you are, *inkosi,* you would now be dead.

"And now, if it is permitted, we will go. The sun must not rise before a white man's blood on our assegais washes away the shame a white man put upon Tomasi."

"Wait," the Major said. Then, sternly: "How well do you know me?"

"Au-a, inkosi. We are your dogs. We know you."

"Have I ever lied to you, by word or deed?"

"No, *inkosi.*"

"In the past I have lived at your kraal and hunted with you. Am I a man of my word?"

"Truly, *inkosi.*"

"And at the time," the Major persisted, "I advised Tomasi and all of you on many things. Was that advice wise or foolish?"

"Because we followed the advice you gave, *inkosi,* we were saved from great peril. *Wu!* Where leads this? In the past we knew you and trusted you. There is no folly and no evil in you."

"Except," the Hottentot interrupted softly, "the folly of risking his life for the welfare of worthless ones like you."

"I have not forgotten that," Mtawa said swiftly. "But we are not altogether worthless, Hottentot. And that you would be told by my assegai, which is a little sharper than my tongue, were you not this one's servant. *Au-a!* And also because, though you are only a Hottentot, you are a man." He turned again to the Major.

"But to what does this lead, *inkosi?* We must go. The night ages."

"You will stay," the Major replied crisply. "I tell you that no shame has been put upon Tomasi."

"He was beaten, *inkosi!*"

"The pain of the blows will pass. You know it. The shame is on the man who beat him. A still greater shame upon the white man whose 'good for' caused the beating. Where is that 'good for'? Perhaps it will tell me things that will help me to make an ointment to cure the pain Tomasi suffers."

"It is here, *inkosi,*" Mtawa took a piece of paper from a leather pouch which he wore about his neck. He handed it to the

Major who held it so that the fire light shone on it and read:

"This is Good for 25 hard cuts with a sjambok.

P.S. The nigger I'm giving it to is a thief. He's just tried to sell me some stones, so lay it on hard.

Signed. J. Davis."

THE Major whistled softly. Then, "And has great poverty come to the kraal of Tomasi? Or greed? If the white man had no money, could not Tomasi have *given* him the Kaffir Oranges—losing nothing thereby? What was the meal of those oranges?"

"*Inkosi,*" Tomasi's son stammered, "you are too wise."

"Then, you will tell me the truth?"

"*Inkosi,* in one of the oranges there were diamonds. My father had sold them to this white man at other times. Two or three at a time. He hid them always in a Kaffir Orange, and received trade stuff in payment."

"Gin?" the Major questioned sharply.

"Sometimes gin, *inkosi.*" Mtawa confessed. "But a little while ago wisdom came to Tomasi—*au-a*—" the native laughed —"his wives scolded that wisdom into him! —and he ordered that there should be no more drinking of the white man's *puza* at his kraal. When next the white man came buying oranges, Tomasi demanded money. The white man was angry, but he paid. Each time he paid the price my father demanded until today. And today he paid with a 'good for' which put shame and the pain of blows upon my father. And therefore Tomasi sent us out to kill the white man who had given him the 'good for,' or, if not him, any white man. And therefore——"

"And therefore," the Major interrupted, "you will presently go back to Tomasi your father and tell him that this is not a killing *indaba.* And tomorrow I will come to the kraal and maybe we will prepare an ointment to heal Tomasi's wounds. Is it understood?"

"It is understood, *inkosi.* But my father will be very angry when he hears that we have not killed."

"Then let his wives tell him. It would seem that they, at least, have wisdom. Now one thing more, the stones Tomasi sold to the white men—were they stolen from the claims of white miners?"

The native laughed.

"The evil white men think so, but you know, *inkosi,* that Tomasi has no need to deal in stolen stones."

THE Major nodded. He had good reason for knowing. He had himself discovered the diamond-bearing ground in the center of Tomasi's kraal and had shown the headman how to protect its secret from the greed of white men. The Major had felt and still felt, that his action was perfectly justified. He was robbing no one, nor keeping from the world a necessity.

The supply of diamonds already greatly exceeds the demand and if all the known fields were fully worked and the results placed on the open market the price would drop tremendously.

He said now, "That is all. You have my leave to go. Tomorrow I will be at the kraal."

Laughing, exchanging ribald jests with the Hottentot, the natives departed, obviously relieved that their headman's orders to kill had been countermanded by a man whose word, they knew, would be accepted by Tomasi. For a little while their voices came back through the darkness to the two men who stood by the fire at the outspan. Then the night's silence ruled once again.

"They at least knew us, Baas," Jim said complacently. "*Wu!* I do not think there is another white man in this country who, with voice alone, could have turned them from their purpose; nor was that voice raised in angry threats. And now what game do we play, Baas?"

"I do not know yet, Jim," the Major replied. "I think we will sleep for we trek before tomorrow's sunrise."

"Where to, Baas?" Jim asked in surprise.

"That we will know in the morning," the Major said evasively. "Sleep well, Hottentot."

"And you too, Baas."

The Major went to his tent and quickly undressed by the light of an oil lamp. A few minutes later he was in bed, around which was draped a mosquito net. His sheets were of good linen, the bed well sprung, the mattress invited sleep. Many men would have scoffed at the luxury of the Major's camp outfit, but not experienced veldt travelers. Under the best conditions veldt travel is a tax on a man's stamina, and it is a wise man who makes every possible arrangement for his bodily comfort. When forced by circumstances to do so, the Major could rough it better than most travelers, but he saw no sense in creating for himself unnecessary hardships. Jim too, had he wished, could have slept in a bed shrouded by a mosquito net, but some of the comforts of civilization would have been a hardship to him. And so, after seeing that the animals were secure for the night, he rolled up in his blankets close to the fire and before the Major put out his light, Jim was fast asleep.

IT WAS about this time that Davis and Cornish exchanged triumphant winks of congratulation. For nearly two hours they had been arguing with the ancient, white bearded Boer, in whose living *rondavel* they were now sitting, trying to persuade him to sell them his farm property. Most of the talking to the old man had been done by Cornish who answered the old man's stubbornly repeated statements that he did not wish to sell, with sonorous phrases and quotations from Holy Writ.

Davis, during this period of the negotiations, had concentrated his attentions on du Toit's good-natured, buxom wife. She was much younger than her husband and was impressed by the attention Davis was paying to her. He praised her coffee, it was muddy and bitter, and her cooking, though the ash cakes she served them were black with the ashes in which they had been baked and as heavy as lead. Davis also praised her numerous squalling and unwashed progeny, and when they had been sent off to bed in the sleeping *rondavel*, he spoke of the advantages of living in a dorp. In this connection, he did not omit to mention the stores and the fine clothes she could buy for herself.

And so, at last, she was skilfully led to add her voice to that of Cornish and she

did all she could to persuade her husband to sell the farm.

"Ach sis!" the old man exclaimed wearily. "Will nothing your tongue stop, *vrouw?* What would you do living in the dorp? The people there would laugh at you and at me."

"What do we care if they laugh at us, Oom Piet?" the woman exclaimed passionately. "Our gold they will not laugh at. And the children could to the schools go and proper shoes wear on their feet. You are old, Oom Piet, I am a little old. But the children, they are young. It is good that they should learn of the things which go on in the big world. Would you have them grow up learning nothing, with only Kaffirs to talk with?"

"No, *vrouw*. I did not say that. I will sell my farm to this Englisher. He is, I think, *oprecht*. The words flow from his mouth like as if he a preacher was, so he must be a good man. So now we will talk about the price he will give me."

AND that was the moment Davis and Cornish winked at each other. But there was still much to be done and they

had to proceed very diplomatically, for over eagerness now on their part would arouse the old man's suspicions.

Another hour elapsed before a price was agreed on. It was a price four times that Cornish had first offered and the old Boer, believing that it was because of his own sagacity and cunning bargaining, complacently listened to his wife's exclamations of admiration.

"Truly," he said, "nine thousand pounds is a lot of money. But mine is a good farm. It is worth twice as much."

"I will pay no more," Cornish said when the old man paused. "Come, Davis. Oom Piet has been playing a game with us. He does not mean to sell."

"He will sell," Vrouw du Toit exclaimed hastily. "And for no greater price than the one he said."

"Truly," Oom Piet said, cringing a little before his wife's angry glare, "I will sell and the price is as I said. Nine thousand pounds. No more, no less."

"Agreed!" Cornish cried holding out his hand. "We'll shake to seal the bargain."

THE old Boer rose gravely and took Cornish's hand, making a solemn ritual of that simple act.

"Now sign this paper, Oom Piet," Cornish said, putting a legal looking document on the table.

"I cannot write. But a cross I will make," du Toit said. "And my *vrouw*, she will make a cross too. But first mark this —I want no bits of money for paper— checks you call them, not? Nor will I make my cross on any paper until the money I have. Now let us go to bed for the hour is late and we have been talking a long time. Almighty, my eyes will hardly keep themselves awake!"

"No. First we will settle the business, Oom Piet. And you shall be paid in money; in gold."

"In the morning," Oom Piet exclaimed impatiently. "It will take long to count and I am tired."

"As you like," Cornish said casually. "But in the morning we may decide not to buy." He turned to the woman. "Perhaps, Vrouw du Toit, you would like to see so much money?"

"Truly," she said. She watched him lift the bag on to the table and exclaimed with wonder when he opened it and showed her that it was filled with gold and silver coins. "Oom Piet," she cried, "it is all the money in the world! Will you risk letting this go from you?"

Oom Piet's eyes gleamed with gold hunger.

"It shall be as you say, Englisher," he said hoarsely. "We will count it now."

The table was cleared and Cornish emptied the contents of the bag on to it then his nimble fingers raked through the mound of glistening coins and the work of counting was begun. He sorted them out and stacked them in neat piles, counting aloud as he did so, every movement he made watched by du Toit and his wife.

The light of the flaring oil lamp was poor, the clink of coins and Cornish's voice was hypnotic. The du Toits repeated his counting after him in voices which, once the first emotion of excitement had passed, were dull and void of expression. It was long past their bed time, and though their eyes were wide open their brains slept. It would have been simple for Cornish to have cheated them in this counting, but so far he played fair despite Davis' meaning looks.

At last he had stacked on the table before du Toit one hundred piles of coins, and each pile contained ten pounds.

"There you are, Oom Piet," he said. "There you have a thousand pounds. That is right, not?"

"That is right, Englisher," Oom Piet said. He looked up at his wife who stood beside him, her hand resting proudly on his shoulder. "You counted it too, *vrouw?*"

"Yes. It is as the Englisher says. One thousand pounds."

"And here," said Cornish, "is nine pounds, see?"

As he spoke he counted out nine golden sovereigns, made a little pile of them and placed them on one side, a little to the left of the other piles.

"There," he continued with a grandiloquent wave of the hands, "is the price I promised and the price you accepted. Nine pounds—" his hand rested a moment on that pile—"a thousand pounds—" his gesture included the other hundred piles. "Nine thousand pounds." His hand passed swiftly from the pile of nine to the hundred piles of tens.

"That is so," du Toit said slowly, his head moving from side to side as he looked first at the nine pile, then at the piles of tens. And he muttered over and over again in a puzzled voice, "Nine pounds—a thousand pounds. Nine thousand pounds. Yes. That is right."

"Nine thousand pounds!" his wife exclaimed shrilly. "That is a lot of money. You are a rich man, Oom Piet. They will make you an elder, it may be yet. And you shall buy me and the children——"

"You will make your cross on the paper now, Oom Piet," Cornish said.

HE PLACED the agreement on the table before the old man and indicated the place where he should make his mark. Du Toit looked up at his wife inquiringly. She nodded encouragement and with a heavy sigh he made his mark. His wife then made her mark and the two crude crosses were witnessed by Davis.

"That is all," Cornish then said briskly, folding up the document by which du Toit acknowledged receipt of nine and one thousand pounds in payment for his farm property and all mineral rights. He added with an air of generosity, "We are in no hurry to take possession, Oom Piet. You can stay here until the end of the month. That will give you time to clear up some crops and dispose of your live stock."

"We will be ready to leave in a week, no less," Vrouw du Toit exclaimed. "Just to think a proper house I will have to live in with windows of glass and wooden floors!"

"Show the Englishers to the *rondavel* where they will sleep, *vrouw*," du Toit said slowly. "Almighty, I am tired!"

She lighted a flare and escorted them to another *rondavel* near by.

"Sleep well, Englishers," she said, and hurried back to her husband.

He was still seated at the table repeating in a dull voice: "Nine pounds—a thousand pounds. Nine thousand pounds. Yes. That is right."

"Of course it is right, Oom Piet," the woman exclaimed impatiently. "Now let us put our gold away and go to bed."

They packed the money in a stout wooden chest, snapped fast the clumsy padlock and went to bed. But though they were both very weary, sleep was a long time coming to them. Plans for her children and for the ease of living which wealth would mean, kept the woman awake. But Oom Piet was troubled by regrets and doubts. He belonged to the old order. He thought the country was becoming crowded when he could see the smoke from his nearest neighbor's chimney on the horizon. He was afraid to think of life in a crowded dorp. And there was something about the counting of the money which had puzzled him, which still puzzled him. Nine pounds—a thousand pounds—nine thousand pounds. That was right. Almighty! The Englisher was an honest man and he was a fool to so concern himself. And yet, nine pounds—a thousand pounds—nine thousand pounds.

An angry discussion kept Davis and Cornish from sleep for a little while. Davis was of the opinion that Cornish had been a fool to pay as much as one thousand pounds and nine for the six thousand acre farm.

"The old man was half asleep," he said crossly. "You could have given him five hundred and called it a thousand, he would not have known the difference."

"Too risky," Cornish decided. "If he'd suspected I was trying to short change him,

the whole deal would have been off. Trouble with you is, Davis, you're too damned greedy. No. I've done right and there's no danger of him going back on the deal now. A thousand pounds is a lot of money to him. Maybe he'll never find out he's been had. If he does, it don't matter. Our receipt only reads for a thousand and nine pounds. And that ain't a bad price for farm property, as a farm. But we ain't farmers." He laughed. "The deal'll show a profit."

"A hundred per cent and then some, most like," Davis agreed. "And say, Corney, we'll have a bit of fun with that fool dude on the way back. Wouldn't be surprised if we don't manage to make a bit of money off him."

"It won't be for want of trying. And now stop gabbing. I want to sleep. God, this bed's hard!"

A HABIT of many years is not easily broken, 'specially when it is also a racial characteristic. Despite the late hour at which they retired and the fact that their sleep had been broken and dream-troubled, the du Toits were about their daily tasks as usual before sun-up. There were no idle members of that family; some were at work in the corn patches, others seeing to the cattle, and the twins, sturdy seven-year-olds, carrying their day's food with them, drove a large herd of goats before them to the grazing grounds, vanishing from sight round the base of a near-by kopje just as the sun rose above the horizon.

Vrouw du Toit came running excitedly to her husband who was inspanning a team of oxen to a cumbersome wagon.

"We are fools!" she cried. "Oom Piet —call the children home."

"Have you gone mad, *vrouw?*" he asked heavily.

"No," she said laughing hysterically, "I am not mad. But you are mad, Oom Piet. Have you forgotten? We are rich. There is no need for us or the children to work."

"The mealies must be hoed, *vrouw*," he replied heavily. "The cattle milked, the oxen cannot inspan themselves." He absently stroked the flank of his off wheel ox.

"This is a good place, *vrouw*. It will not be easy to leave it. It was all ours. Here our *kinder* were born. Here two are buried. *Ach*, no! It will not be easy to leave."

Vrouw du Toit sat down on a pile of logs.

"No," she agreed sadly, "it will not be easy to leave. Is it that I am a bad wife, Oom Piet? If I had kept silent last night, you would not have sold the farm. Perhaps," her eyes brightened, "if I asked the Englishers they would sell the farm back to us."

Piet du Toit shook his head.

"No," he said, "we will abide by our bargain."

He sat down beside her and they sat in silence, hand in hand, looking over the wide sweeping stretch of country they had sold for gold.

"Nine thousand pounds is a lot of money, Oom Piet," the woman said timidly.

"Truly," he agreed. "But it would not cover the ground on which stand my wagon

and team of oxen. It would not fill the graves we dug for the two who died."

"I will ask them to sell the farm back to us," the woman cried impetuously. She rose to her feet, but Piet du Toit pulled her down again beside him.

"No," he said again. "We must abide by our bargain."

They were silent then, Piet considering the land which stretched before him, recalling his triumphs over a stubborn earth. To many his farm would have been little more than a desolate waste, rock strewn,

arid, with here and there oases of green marking the extent of his cultivation. But Piet knew every inch of it. It was his battlefield and filled with monuments to his victories.

THE sun rose higher but the two were unconscious of its warmth; their misery froze them just as it had blinded their eyes and stopped their ears to what was going on around them. And so they did not see or hear a man mounted on a black stallion riding over the veldt towards them. They did not see him dismount and make his way to where they were sitting. Had they seen him they might have wondered why he took clever advantage of every scrap of cover that would hide him from anyone who might be watching from the *rondavels*.

They did not see him until he stood directly before them. Then they jumped to their feet and Oom Piet cried excitedly:

"Major! *Ach*, but it is good to see you again."

"And good to see you, too, Oom Piet. And you too, Vrouw du Toit. 'Pon my soul, you are younger and more beautiful than ever." The Major spoke the Taal perfectly.

"*Ach!*" She laughed. "You are as bad as ever. I know that I am old and very fat, but it does not hurt to be called beautiful. Once I was. But alas, you will think us lacking in courtesy. Come up to the *rondavel* and break your fast."

"Thank you, no," the Major said. "I have had my skoff."

"That good for nothing, Jim, still looks after you well? Yes? But even so, you can drink coffee."

"No, Oom Piet. You have guests. I don't want them to see me."

Oom Piet winked.

"Diamonds, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"Then if the Major does not wish to be seen," Vrouw du Toit said briskly, "you go with him, Oom Piet, behind the cattle kraal. There you can talk. And by and by you shall tell me all the Major says. I will go to the *rondavel* and make *skoff* for those two lazy Englishers. But I must not miscall them. They have brought us good fortune. Go now. Before they come out seeking food."

THE two men laughed and walked quickly behind the cattle kraal.

"What is it, Major?" Oom Piet asked. "You once saved my son's life at the risk of your own. You—I tell you, man, that everything I have is yours. The *vrouw* would say that too."

"There is nothing I want, Oom Piet, except your help in a little matter."

"I have always kept the law, Major," du Toit said slowly. "But for you I will break it. If you have diamonds you want me to hide for you—give them to me."

The Major laughed.

"It is not that either, Oom Piet, nor am I in danger from the police. No. I want you to help me teach a lesson to two men who have played a *slim* trick on Tomasi."

"A good Kaffir that one," Oom Piet said. "But how can I help you, Major?"

"That I will tell you presently. But first tell me what is this good fortune that has come to you?"

"I am not sure it is good fortune, man. I have sold my farm."

"To Cornish and Davis?"

"Yes. You know them?"

"A little. They are the men who tricked Tomasi."

Oom Piet looked startled.

"The one, the loud one, I did not trust," he said. "But the other—he is, I think a good man."

"And so you sold your farm, Oom Piet," the Major said.

"*Ja!* And at a good price. Nine thousand pounds, they gave me."

The Major whistled softly.

"That is a lot of money, Oom Piet. How did they pay you—with checks or good fors?"

Oom Piet laughed.

"No. I am too *slim* to be caught by

such tricks. In good gold they paid me."

"They had so much money with them?" the Major asked incredulously.

"Truly! They counted it out before my eyes. They counted it out—" a puzzled look came into du Toit's eyes. "I will tell you how they counted it out. One thousand pounds they first counted and then nine pounds. 'There is nine pounds,' they said. 'There a thousand pounds. Nine thousand pounds.' That is right, yes?"

NO, OOM PIET," the Major said. "They tricked you. They have only paid you one thousand and nine pounds." And he explained exactly how the trick had been worked.

"The thieving *skellum!*" Oom Piet exclaimed. "But I am glad now they cheated. *Ach sis!* I did not want to sell. But I was tired and so much money spilled on the table was too much for us. But they cheated, and so I will give them back the money and have my farm again."

"No. Wait, Oom Piet," the Major said. "You signed an agreement which they will take to law. They will not let you have the farm back that way. You cannot prove they tricked you."

"No. You are right. Well then, I will make them give back that paper on which I made my mark. I will sjambok them. I——" His voice broke as he concluded weakly, "I am old. Alone I cannot do this. You will help me, Major?"

"Yes. But not that way, Oom Piet. It is not enough that we make them return your farm to you. They must be taught a lesson."

"With a sjambok, I will teach them," Oom Piet exclaimed. "I am your man, Major. Tell me your plan. I will do as you say."

"First you must act as if all were well. They must not suspect that you know they have cheated you."

"That will be hard, man. Hard for me. Harder still for the *vrouw*. But it can be done, yes."

"And you must beg them to let you stay a few days in order to get in your crops ——"

"There is no need, Major," Oom Piet interposed. "I can stay, they have said, until the end of the month."

"Good!" the Major beamed. "That gives us ten days. Plenty of time. Now I must go. I do not want them to see me."

"Yes, but the plan, Major?"

"I'll tell you that next time I see you," the Major laughed as he mounted his horse. "So long, Oom Piet."

He spurred his horse and rode swiftly away, sitting in the saddle with the graceful ease of a born horseman.

There was a light of affectionate admiration in Oom Piet's eyes as he said softly:

"Ach sis! That is a man. He looks like a soft dude of an Englisher. But there is nothing he cannot do, and his hand is of steel when it stretches out to help a friend or close about an evil man."

ELATED at their successful purchase of the du Toit farm, Davis and Cornish were able to swallow their disappointment at the discovery that the dude who called himself Aubrey St. John Major had disappeared overnight.

"He must have trekked very early," Davis concluded after an examination of the place where the Major's camp had been. "The ashes of his cook fire are stone cold."

"Well, come on," Cornish said impatiently. "The sooner we get back to the dorp, the better I'll like it."

"Right you are," Davis agreed climbing into the wagon and driving on. He looked slyly at Cornish who was sucking the meat off some Kaffir Orange stones. "Do you want to call at Tomasi's for some more of your favorite fruit?" he asked.

"No, I don't," Cornish said explosively. "If he's tried to cash that good for you gave him, it won't be a healthy place for either of us."

"Oh, I can handle niggers," Davis boasted. "A taste of the sjambok now and then is good for them."

Just the same he steered a course across

the veldt back to the dorp which kept them well away from the kraal of Tomasi.

"I wonder," Cornish said presently, "where the dude's gone, and why?"

"His nigger probably persuaded him to trek. I told him I was coming back to sjambok him, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did," Cornish said dryly. "But somehow, you didn't seem to make any impression on the dude. I got the idea he wasn't as soft as he looked."

"He couldn't be," Davis laughed. "But he was soft—no doubt of that."

"Soft, yes," Cornish conceded. "But not so soft. Wonder why he expected us to know him?"

"Probably his dear old pater is somebody amongst the somebodies in England, doncherknow old chappy."

Cornish laughed at his partner's imitation of the Major's affected drawl.

"He's nobody out here, anyway," he said. "And he ain't the right sort for this country. His kind are a curse with their 'play the games' and 'it isn't done's.' They're nigger lovers, too, most of them."

"That's right," Davis agreed.

For the rest of the trip to the dorp the two partners discussed their plans for the development of the du Toit farm. It was an agreeable discussion, for from it they developed a scheme which would earn them enormous profits, even if they failed to find diamondiferous soil on the property. The only fly in the ointment at the moment was the fact that because of Cornish's unprecedented act of generosity in permitting the du Toits to remain in possession of the farm until the end of the month they were forced to wait that long before putting their plans into operation.

"I was a fool," Cornish admitted ruefully.

"You were," Davis agreed, with an oath for emphasis. "But there's no great harm done. We'll send Hans out tomorrow with a note telling them they've got to clear out by the end of the week."

"They can't read, you fool."

"We'll send 'em a note anyway, and stick a lot of red sealing wax on it to make it look impressive, and Hans can tell 'em what it says."

Cornish considered this thoughtfully.

"No," he said, "we'd best wait. We can't afford to have trouble with the du Toits over that, and we can afford to wait."

SO THE matter was left at that and for the next three days the partners occupied themselves with their more or less legitimate affairs among which is to be noted the complicated juggling of accounts which enabled them to include the diamonds they had purchased from Tomasi in a parcel of legally purchased stones. They also visited their still where they manufactured the poisonous gin, financed a labor recruiter whose methods, which were little short of a slaver's, they could so well appreciate. And lastly they put through a deal which would arm the rebellious natives of a district in the north with rifles and ammunition. It is true that most of the rifles would burst when the first shot was fired and that most of the cartridges wouldn't fit the rifles or, if they did, were so lightly charged that they would scarcely carry a bullet a hundred feet. Still these facts did not mitigate the offense of the two partners but only added to their profits.

THEY were a thoroughly rotten pair of scoundrels.

On the morning of the fourth day after their return from the du Toit farm, Hans, their half-caste spy, came to them. He was a villainous looking fellow, undersized, pockmarked, with uneven overly large yellow teeth. He was cunning and treacherous except to the men he served. Fear—they held evidence which would send him to the gallows—and admiration of their evil duplicity, kept him faithful to them.

He spoke English fluently in a queer nasal, sing-song voice. He treated them and was treated by them, as equals.

"What's doing, Hans?" Davis asked jovially.

"News, Boss Davis," Hans said. "Your healths'." He drank the glass of neat whisky which Cornish poured out for him at one gulp. He rubbed his stomach, grinning appreciatively, and continued. "There's a Hottentot in the dorp you ought to see."

"A Hottentot? And what's remarkable about a Hottentot, Hans? There are plenty of them in the dorp."

"But not like this one. He is a *slim* one." Hans laughed. "I saw him first down at the Compound." Hans meant the

guarded enclosure in which native laborers at the mines were housed in order to check them from smuggling diamonds.

"You mean he works at the mine?"

"No. He has a pass to visit his brothers—but he has no brothers! He is very cunning; he comes and goes when he pleases. He has a way of going to and from the Compound unseen by the guards, and so he is not searched when he goes in or—" Hans put special emphasis on the next four words, *"when he comes out."*

"You know that?" Cornish asked sharply.

"But yes, Boss Cornish. That must be so, else the diamonds he brings out of the Compound would have been found on him and he would now be in *trunk*. But he is not in prison. No. He is now in the Compound drinking with his brothers!" Hans laughed again. "I think he calls every man in that Compound 'brother'. He drinks a great deal and is always getting drunk, drunk, or recovering from being drunk."

"Well?" Davis snapped impatiently. "What's the good of telling us this? Do you expect us to laugh at the nigger's cunning? We don't pay you to tell us funny stories."

"Shut up, Davis," Cornish interrupted. "Hans hasn't finished. Go on, Hans. Have you found who the Hottentot's boss is?"

Hans shook his head regretfully.

"No. I told you the nigger is *slim* and even when he is very drunk he is cautious; he keeps guard over his tongue and does not betray his boss. Nor have I found out where he came from and though on three nights I followed him from the Compound hoping he would lead me to his boss, each time," Hans made a gesture of chagrin, "he gave me the slip."

"You're wasting time, Hans. Come on, out with it. What's all this to us."

"This, Boss Davis," Hans said with a triumphant grin.

HE TOOK a cotton bag of cheap Boer tobacco from his pocket and emptied its contents on to the table at which the two white men were sitting. He spread the little pile of dust-fine tobacco and from it picked up two diamonds of good size and color.

"He sold me those," Hans said with a self-satisfied smirk, "for two pounds. He said his Baas would not miss them, and *slim* as he is, he did not know the money I gave him was bad money."

"You blasted fool, Hans," Cornish exclaimed angrily. "What did you do that for? You're like Davis, here, too damned greedy."

"But, Boss Cornish——" Hans began.

"But nothing. There are more stones where they came from, ain't there? But what chance have we got of making any more deals with the nigger once he's found out you're passing counterfeit money on to him? Why you idiot," Cornish continued, his anger increasing. "Chances are he'll be arrested and sent to *trunk*, first time he tries to pass the money you gave him. And then where are we?"

"That's right," Davis bellowed, shaking his fist in Hans' face. "I've a good mind to beat the hide off you."

Hans looked crestfallen. He was more disturbed by Cornish's exposure of his lack of cunning than Davis' brutal threat.

"I didn't think of that," he admitted. "But perhaps it is not too late, Boss Cornish. The Hottentot looked on me as a friend. I will go to him at once and if he has not yet tried to pass the money, and found it bad, I'll find a way of changing it for good."

Cornish nodded.

"Go on, then. Don't stand talking here. He may be trying to pass the coins this very minute. And listen—see if you can bring him to see us tonight. We need a new houseboy." He winked. "Understand?"

Hans nodded and hurried away in an attempt to retrieve the error he had made.

"And listen to me, Davis," Cornish said. "If Hans does bring the nigger here I'm going to handle him. There's going to be no sjamboking. If this nigger's as *slim* as Hans says, he'll need handling with kid gloves."

"As long as you don't expect me to kiss him, Corney," Davis laughed. "I don't care what you do."

LATE that night the two partners were waiting in the living room of their bungalow built on the outskirts of the town, wondering if Hans would succeed in bringing the Hottentot to them. The furnishing of the room expressed the personalities of the two men; the subdued tastes of Cornish side by side with Davis' love of show. It was difficult to believe that the two could have lived together amicably. But they had at least two things in common, their love of money acquired by dishonest practises and, their taste in the obscene if one were to judge by the pictures which lined the walls and the books which filled the shelves. Another thing to be remarked about that room was the heavily shuttered and curtained windows.

In response to a series of carefully spaced knocks, Davis rose and went to the door standing so that the light from the hall lamp streamed out into the darkness upon Hans and the man who was with him.

"Well, what is it?" Davis asked in a loud genial voice.

"You said you wanted a good cook boy," Hans replied in a voice equally loud. "This boy is a good cook and wants a new master so I have brought him to you."

"All right, bring him in and we will see what he can do. But next time you come here you go round to the back door, see! That's the place for you."

Then chuckling softly, for this childish by-play was solely for the benefit of any one who might be watching the bungalow. Davis stood on one side so that Hans and his companion could enter. He closed and bolted the door behind them and followed them into the room.

"This," Hans then said triumphantly, sitting down in a chair, "is Jim, the Hottentot I told you about."

The Hottentot slowly divested himself of the ragged great coat he wore, unwound a muffler from his neck, took off his low brimmed felt hat and grinned ingratiatingly.

"I'm a good cook boy, Baas," he hiccuped. His eyes were inflamed, his breath reeked of cheap liquor and he swayed drunkenly to and fro.

Davis stared at him. Then:

"By God, Corney," he bellowed. "It's the dude's nigger. I promised him a sjamboking and——"

"Sit down you fool, and shut up," Cornish said curtly. "I told you I'd handle this. Sit down, Jim." He concluded in the *taal*.

The Hottentot dropped to the floor with a loud sigh of relief. His eyes closed. He began to snore.

"What did you make him so drunk for, Hans?" Cornish exclaimed irritably. "Can he speak English?"

"No, Boss Cornish. Only the *taal* and his own baboon talk."

"Did you change the counterfeit money you gave him for good?"

"Yes," Hans giggled. "That is why he is now so drunk."

"Have you been able to find out anything about his boss?"

"No. Except that he is tired of working for him. He says his Baas beats him if he gets drunk. I think you can make him talk, Boss Cornish."

"I can, if you can't, Corney," Davis said with a meaning look at a sjambok which hung on the wall.

"I'll make him talk," Cornish said. "Don't be a fool, Davis. The dude beats him, and he is ready to quit him. It ain't likely he'd do anything for us if we started beating him too. See if you can rouse him, Hans."

THE half-caste bent over the Hottentot and shook him vigorously. Jim grunted inarticulately but showed no signs of waking. Hans slapped his face and prodded him in the ribs—all without effect.

"He'll have to sleep it off, Boss Cornish," Hans said with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Don't want to wait that long," Cornish replied tersely. "Besides, he may wake cold sober and it'll be *impossible* to make him talk then. We'll give him a whiskey and soda."

He poured out a tumblerful of whiskey and dashed it in the Hottentot's face. At the same time Hans squirted the contents of a soda siphon into Jim's eyes.

The Hottentot gasped, blinked and sat up, licking his lips and grinning foolishly.

"*Au-a.* Baas!" he exclaimed.

Cornish poured out two fingers of whiskey and gave it to the Hottentot.

"What was it, Baas?" he asked after he had swallowed it.

"He's used to rot-gut, Corney," Davis laughed. "He don't appreciate the real stuff. It's got no kick, if you know what I mean."

"Your Baas does not give you *dop* to drink," Cornish said.

Jim looked up sullenly.

"No. He beats me if he smells it on my breath."

"Yet you work for him!"

"*Ja.* In some things he is a good Baas. And he is *slim.* Almighty how *slim* he is!"

Jim laughed.

"If you worked for us," Cornish said, "we would give you *dop* and treat you well. And we are *slim* too."

Jim shook his head and looked up at him craftily.

"But you are not as *slim* as my Baas."

"And in what way is your Baas *slim,* Hottentot?"

The Hottentot laughed and shook his five fingers at Cornish.

"He knows diamonds as no other white man knows them. The police try to trap him, but they are fools. And I am *slim* too. My Baas taught me. I go into the Compounds and buy stones from the boys. *Au-a!* I even buy stones from those I know to be trap boys. But when they search me, they cannot find them. My Baas taught me how to hide them. And that is a secret I tell no one."

"You are wise, Hottentot. I do not seek to discover your secret." Cornish poured the Hottentot yet another drink and continued casually. "And so your Baas' *slimness* is in the manner he sells his diamonds?"

The Hottentot's laughter was gargantuan.

"No," he roared, rocking back and forth, tears of mirth rolling down his wrinkled face. "His *slimness* lies in the fact that he does not sell the stones. At least, he has not sold them yet. But he will soon. He will soon. And in a manner that no one can find fault with him or say, 'These are stolen stones', and so cheat him of their proper worth."

"And how will he do this?" Cornish asked.

"All the stones he has bought—and *Au-a!* How many they are—he has buried out in the veldt in blue clay. Truly. He found this place I do not know how many years ago. Blue clay, that is the color of.

the dirt in which diamonds are found. *Ja!* I know that. But there were no diamonds in this clay until my Baas put in the diamonds I got for him. And soon—very soon, for my Baas is tired of wandering up and down the earth—my Baas will do all things that are legal. He will buy the paper which permits him to look for diamonds and he will buy another paper which says the land where he has buried the stones is his land. And then he will be

able to *find* and *sell* the stones he has buried. *Ja!* Said I not that he was *slim?*"

"Very *slim*, Hottentot. And so, soon, you will have no Baas."

"Truly. Woe is me!" Jim wept maudlin tears of self-pity. "Do you want a boy, Baas? I'm a good cook. I can drive a team of mules or oxen. I can do everything, and I know stones, Baas."

"Yes," Cornish said, "we need a cook boy. But he must come to us at once."

"What do you pay, Baas?"

"Five pounds a month, Hottentot, and all the *dop* you want."

"*Wo-we!* I am your boy."

Cornish shook his head.

"But first you must be 'signed off' by your present Baas."

"He will beat me if I go to him," Jim wailed.

"Then we will come with you. Then there will be no beating."

JIM considered this for a moment.

"That is good," he said, springing to his feet. "We will go now. Come."

"Wait. Do we go far?"

Jim frowned.

"Do you know the farm of a Boer man named du Toit."

"Yes!" both the partners exclaimed.

"It is near there. My Baas has outspanned in a *kloof* near there, where he can keep watch over his stones."

"Is it on du Toit's farm?"

"No, Baas. The Dutchman saw to that. He does not like my Baas and makes sure we do not go in his land. He will not sell us anything, either. He is a fool. But my Baas is *slim*. I too am *slim*."

Jim commenced singing again, his eyes glittered as he beat his clenched fists on the floor, keeping time to his savage song.

Cornish signed to the other men to keep silent and the three of them watched the Hottentot intently. His voice grew hoarser, his eyelids drooped. Presently he slumped over sideways and the savage words of the song he was singing were replaced with snores.

The three men laughed knowingly. Jim was not the first drunken native they had seen collapse in this way. As a matter of form, Hans bent over and shook him and slapped his face. But it was only a routine testing; he, and the two white men, were so sure that the Hottentot was out.

"Think there's anything in what he says, Corney?" Davis asked dubiously. "Sounds like a cock-and-bull story to me."

"I'm so sure there's something in it," Cornish said tersely, "that much as I hate trekking, we're going to get out there as soon as possible."

"Hey, what's the hurry?" Davis protested. "Why not wait until sun-up."

"Because the Hottentot will be sober by then and may go back on us. Because this dude Baas of his—I told you he wasn't as soft as he looked—may get the wind up and clear out with his stones. Besides, if we start now, we'll be able to pay him a surprise visit at sunrise."

"You're *slim*, Corney," Davis exclaimed admiringly. "And you're right. We'll trek at once. Come on, Hans. We'll *inspan* now!"

IT WAS bitterly cold in the east but the gray, low hanging clouds were beginning to lighten giving promise of the sun's imminent rising and of warmth to come. The two white men on the driver's seat of the light trek wagon, Davis and Cornish, were impervious to the cold. They wore heavy overcoats and had blankets tucked around their legs; they were, besides, glowing with the prospect of adding to their hoard of wealth. They even spoke of retiring after this deal was over. They intended to rob the dude, the Hottentot's Baas, secure in the knowledge that as he was dealing in stolen stones he could not bring action in law against them. As for any physical action he might take in defense of his property, they were confident that they could meet that successfully. In the first place the element of surprise was on their side and, too, of numbers.

During the trip out from the dorp they had discussed what they would do and agreed that they would permit nothing to stand in the way of bringing the deal to a successful conclusion. They called it a deal, as if that would soothe their inner consciences, though they planned robbery and would not hesitate at killing. "Of course," they told each other, "it would be in self defense and," at this they laughed, "there'll be no witnesses to say different."

Hans, too, was warm as he crouched down on the floor of the wagon, covered with blankets. But the Hottentot's teeth chattered like castanets. He was very miserable, his head ached, his legs and arms were cramped for he was trussed up like a fowl ready for the cook pot. This was the white men's response to his attempt to desert them soon after they had left the dorp. He moaned aloud in the extremity of his discomfort.

"Shut up, nigger," Davis commanded angrily, "or I will give you a taste of sjambok."

"*Au-a,* Baas," Jim wailed. "I am cold and my limbs are dead. Tell Hans to give me a blanket and free my legs and arms."

"It is your own fault, Jim," Cornish said suavely, "that you are cold and tied up. You tried to run away from us."

"I was a fool then. It was the *puza* that I had drunk that made me act that way," Jim pleaded. "Now the drink has gone from me and I remember that soon I will be your boy—as soon as my old Baas has given me my certificate. You will not let him beat me, Boss."

"He won't beat you," Cornish promised. "What do you think, Davis?" he asked. "Is it safe to trust him now?"

Davis nodded.

"Yes. It's getting lighter every minute. He can't do a bunk now even if he wanted to."

"Very well, Jim," Cornish said to the Hottentot. "We will forget your folly. Cut him loose, Hans, and give him a blanket."

"But remember, nigger," Davis warned, "if you try to trick us in any way a sjamboking will follow."

"Why should I try to trick you who will soon be my bosses?" Jim protested innocently. "You have promised to give me *puza* and not beat me when I am drunk. *Au-a!* I am thirsty now."

Davis handed a flask of whisky to him and Jim drank with unfeigned appreciation; he needed the stimulant to combat the cold which had penetrated to the marrow of his bones.

"Thank you, Boss," he said as he handed the flask back to Davis.

After that there was silence for a while save for the creak of harness, the patter of hooves and the rattle of wheels.

They were driving now along the base of the hills which bounded the du Toit farm. The eastern clouds were no longer gray but tinged with ever deepening colors —crimson, purples, lavender and gold commingling. A white ground mist spread over the veldt rising to a height of five or six feet and the hills seemed to be islands in a silver sea. And then, quite suddenly, the sun shot above the horizon and there was no more color in the sky—save a big disc of molten gold in an electric blue sky. It was no longer cold. The mist lifted,

disintegrated into wraith-like wisps, trailing like lingering, reluctant fingers up the jagged sides of the hills, finally vanishing. The white men discarded their overcoats; Hans and Jim no longer needed the blankets.

"Now, Jim," Davis said curtly, his voice as brazen as the sun. "Where's the *kloof* where your Baas is outspanned?"

"A little way further and you will see it, Baas," Jim replied. "There—there is the entrance to it."

He pointed to a narrow gap in the hills not a hundred yards away.

A FEW minutes later Davis drove the mules through the gap and along a narrow pass between two precipitous hills. Their pace was reduced to a walk and even so Davis had to drive with care: at times the wheel hubs brushed against the wall of rock on either side.

"I thought I knew all the country about here, Corney," Davis commented. "But this is new to me. Bet there ain't many white men know of it and more likely than not the niggers are superstitious about it. The dude picked a good place for his plan."

"Yes. But where's it take us to?" Corney asked, looking about him somewhat fearfully. "It isn't a place I'd select for an *outspan*. Damn it, look. The hills almost meet overhead. They look as if they might fall down on us."

Davis laughed.

"You're scared, Corney! That's good. But don't you worry. Them hills have stood a good many hundred years and they'll be there a good many more."

As he spoke there was a rumble like thunder and a small avalanche of boulders and rubble crashed down in the pass just behind them, completely blocking their exit.

"Lucky for us we weren't in the way of that," Davis said with an uneasy laugh. "As it is, we'll have to do some navvy work before we can pass that."

"Can't we go a bit faster?" Cornish asked. "The sooner we get out of this the better I'll like it. What do you suppose made them boulders fall?"

"How in hell do I know?" Davis retorted irritably. "There's nobody up in the hills trying to do us in, if that's what you're thinking of. Ah! Here we are."

As he spoke they rounded a projecting spur of rock and here the narrow pass opened into a wide and thickly wooded *kloof* running far back into the hills. Down the centre of it was a narrow, swiftly flowing rivulet which vanished under ground not far from where they emerged from the pass. For fifty feet or so back from the stream on either side the ground was comparatively level and carpeted with lush grass almost knee high. A white bell tent and a canvas topped wagon gleamed prominently against the greenness; a horse and mules grazed contentedly and not far off a white man, the Major, was digging industriously.

"We've got him, Corney," Davis exclaimed triumphantly. "This is going to be easier than we expected. We know where he's hiding the stones without having to make him tell us. And he doesn't suspect we're here."

But at that moment the digger straightened himself, his hand to the small of his back as if to ease the ache of weary muscles. And then, evidently, he saw the intruders on his solitude. His reaction was immediate. He ducked and ran swiftly toward his tent.

"Hurry, Davis," Cornish cried. "He's going for his gun."

But Davis had already acted, lashing his mules he drove them at a break neck speed toward the tent, easily beating the runner.

As he pulled the mules to a halt, Cornish covered the Major with his revolver.

"Hands up!" he said sharply.

The Major stared at them mouth agape.

"I say," he exclaimed weakly. "Just what does this bally intrusion on a chappy's privacy mean."

"You put up your hands like a good boy," Davis counselled as he slowly de-

scended from the wagon, "or you'll get more privacy than you bargain for. Corney's a good shot and if he puts a bullet through your brain—you'll never be disturbed again by anything or anybody in this world."

"Yes, but I say——" The Major's hand went to his tunic pocket.

"Hands up, I tell you," Davis growled. And now he was covering the Major while Cornish climbed down to the ground. "I'm a better shot than Corney—and I ain't half so tender hearted."

THE Major's hand came hastily from his tunic pocket.

"I was only getting my bally—er—eye—window, if you know what I mean. I'm as blind as a twittering bat without it."

He put his monocle in his eye, beamed ingratiatingly and raised his hands above his head.

"It is a most undignified position, really, and you're depriving me the pleasure of offering you hospitality. I'm sure you

must be hungry—or are you?—and I was just preparing skoff."

"Digging for it, eh?" Davis growled.

"What's that? Oh. Digging? You saw me digging?" He laughed self-consciously. "Just a little exercise I always take before breakfast, old chap. Nothing like digging to keep the jolly old tummy girth in order."

"God how he talks," Cornish exclaimed. "Hans, bring a rope and tie this chap up."

"Coming, Boss. But first let me tie up the Hottentot. I do not trust him. He——"

"What's that!" the Major exclaimed. "Have you got my servant there? Come, my dear sirs, a joke's a joke, but this is carrying it too far. I——"

"Oh hurry, Hans. This man is as full of words as an egg is of meat."

"Coming, Boss Cornish," Hans called and the half-caste, a coiled rope in his hands, jumped from the wagon and ran to the Major, taking care not to get between him and the revolvers of his employers.

"Is this necessary?" the Major protested as Hans expertly set about binding him hand and foot.

"Absolutely, old top," Davis drawled, parodying the Major's voice. Then, "Is he fast bound, Hans?"

"Yes, Boss."

"Ah! Well now we can take it a bit easier, eh, Corney."

The two partners returned the revolvers to their holsters.

"Yes but—" the Major stuttered— "I demand an explanation of this outrage. I shall write to the papers. I——"

"Shut up, or I'll tell Hans to gag you," Davis ordered. And Cornish said:

"The Hottentot says you're very *slim* but you talk and act like a damned fool. I suspect the truth is somewhere between, Major."

"I call that revoltingly insulting, 'pon my word I do. And I insist on being told why my servant is with you, and why he has been tied up. And—" he burst with a fit of boisterous laughter. "But of course he's *not* with you. This is just a bally leg-pull."

"Call him, if you don't believe us," Davis said with a grin. "He can't come to you—Hans is a fool about lots of things, but he can truss up a man—but he can answer."

"Jim!" the Major shouted. "Where are you?"

"Here in the wagon, Baas," the Hottentot wailed. "I've been a fool, Baas. These men spoke soft words to me last night and gave me *puza* to drink. And so I said I would enter their service and I told them

things I should not have told them. Be careful, Baas. They are evil men."

"Ah!" The Major said gravely. "And what did Jim tell you gentlemen?"

"That you had buried the stones he bought for you in some blue clay here."

The Major laughed softly.

"Well?"

"That's all—except that we've come for those stones," Cornish said.

"Jim must have been very drunk last night," the Major observed. "I hope you placed no credence in his tale."

"Drunks, children and fools tell the truth."

"And that original observation means, I take it, that you do believe his story. I'm afraid you are terribly gullible, gentlemen. But supposing his story were true—did he also tell you where I hid the—er—stones? After all this is a large *kloof* and one could hide many stones in a cubic yard of soil."

"No. That's something we haven't found out yet—but we will."

"By digging up all the *kloof*, I presume?"

"Not exactly. We have methods of making a man talk—and if ours don't succeed with you, Hans has a few pet methods of his own he'll be delighted to test.

"But first we'll do a little digging where you were doing your morning exercise. It may save a lot of time and trouble for all of us."

"Quite the contrary, Corney, old dear—If you will forgive the familiarity. I'll be quite candid with you, if you'll promise not to laugh, I *was* burying—planting is a better word—stones there. Kaffir Orange stones, you know. I'm very fond of them and——"

"Oh come on, Corney," Davis growled. "Bring the sieve, pick and shovels, Hans."

As the three made their way to the place where the Major had been digging, they heard him shout to Jim:

"There will be an accounting between us about this matter, Hottentot. *Wo-we!* You have played the part of a traitor."

The words filled Davis and Cornish with confidence and they set about the task of breaking up the clay soil and screening it with extraordinary zest for men whose mining operations had hitherto been confined to working the pockets of honest miners.

TWO HOURS later the enthusiasm of Davis and Cornish had completely vanished and they threw down their tools with angry curses. Two hours of hot, back-breaking toil had rewarded them with nothing more than a few dried Kaffir Orange stones. They stared at each other, then at their blistered hands, and finally at the mound of earth which they had passed through the sieve. They admitted the truth now of something Hans had been trying to tell them for some time. The soil was clay, there was no doubt about that, but it most certainly wasn't blue clay. But still no doubt of the Hottentot's tale came into their minds. Their anger was all directed toward the dude, Major, who, for the moment had fooled them.

The two partners exchanged significant glances and then went back to the Major's outspan, Hans accompanying them.

Save that the Major had managed to hitch his way into the shade of his wagon and was seated with his back resting against a wheel everything seemed to be as it had been before they had commenced digging operations.

The Major's feet were still bound and his hands were behind his back presumably bound by the ropes which also cut into his upper arms.

"See if the Hottentot's safe, Hans," Davis ordered, glowering at the Major, "then come here and give us a hand with this clown!"

"Really!" the Major exclaimed in shocked tones.

"The nigger's safe," Hans reported joining his employers after an inspection of Jim in the wagon.

"Now then, Major," Corney began, "you've had your bit of fun at our expense.

"Now we're going to have some at yours——"

"What's the matter?" the Major exclaimed. "Didn't you find the stones I planted? They are there, 'pon my word of honor—though why you should want to dig up my—er—embryo Kaffir Orange grove is beyond my comprehension."

"Hell! Stop chatting with him," Davis exclaimed angrily. "Now listen to me, Major. We're after your stones—diamonds—and we mean to get 'em. Tell us where you've hidden 'em and you'll save a lot of trouble, and yourself a lot of pain."

"Pain?" the Major questioned.

"Yes, pain," Cornish snarled. "Light a fire, Hans, and get skoff ready. And while he's doing that, Major, we'll try out a little trick a Chink showed me." As he spoke Cornish took a loop of cord from his pocket. "The idea is," he continued conversationally, "that I put this round your head and twist it——"

"Yes. I know all about that," the Major gasped. "It's a fiendish torture. You wouldn't do that to me. Why——"

"We will, unless——"

"Go on. Unless what?"

"Unless you're ready to talk," Davis said.

"But I'm always ready to talk, old horse. I——"

"Then where are the diamonds?"

"There you go again," the Major protested. "'Pon my soul—I don't know what you're talking about."

"Give it to him, Corney," Davis said.

"Just a minute, gentlemen!" There was a commanding note in the Major's voice which halted Cornish just as he was about to slip forward and fix the knotted cord around the Major's skull. The partners stared at him wonderingly for he seemed to have changed astonishingly. The monocle had dropped from his eye and they could not meet the steely gaze of eyes which they had thought to be an innocent baby blue. "I do not wish to be tortured, gentlemen," he continued, "but you appear to have me at a disadvantage. I say 'appear' deliberately. If you doubt that—look behind you!"

Cornish and Davis looked furtively over their shoulders and saw they were ringed by armed warriors from the kraal of Tomasi; and with them, carrying an ancient elephant gun was the Dutchman, du Toit. They had been hidden in the long goon.

"It's a trap, Corney," Davis raged. "But this *slim* dude will not live to crow over us."

His hand went to his revolver holster as he turned to face the Major again, but he did not draw it and his jaw dropped; for the Major's hands were free, his right one held a revolver and something told Davis that the Major was an infinitely better shot than Cornish or himself.

The Major smiled at him blandly.

"Hands up, I think is the order of the moment—how history does repeat itself even in our little lives—both of you. Oh, yes. And you too, Hans."

The three obeyed sullenly and a few minutes later they were disarmed and bound by the warriors while du Toit and the Major celebrated the victory by a mock ceremonious hand shake. Then they released Jim who after grinning triumphantly at the three prisoners set to work preparing skoff for his Baas and du Toit.

Some of the warriors lighted other cook fires and prepared food for themselves. But when Cornish, Davis and Hans begged for food, the Major took them some Kaffir Oranges.

"Your favorite fruit I believe, Corney," he said. "So this diet won't be any hardship to you—yet. And I'm sure your companions will speedily acquire the taste. I find them over-sweet and most thirst-making."

AN HOUR later, the Major ordered the prisoners to be brought before him.

"I am now going to try you," he said blandly, "and, in order to expedite matters, as well as to make sure that you do not sully my innocent ears with curses, you

are going to be gagged. Later you will be given an opportunity of speaking in your own defence. Gag them!" he concluded sharply.

His orders were quickly obeyed.

"Court is now open," he said curtly.

Du Toit the first witness, testified in a voice entirely free from rancor, the manner in which the partners had swindled him in the purchasing of the farm.

He was followed by a number of natives who told of buying rot-gut liquor from the white men and of beatings received.

Then Tomasi's son spoke of the manner in which his father had first been inveigled into selling diamonds for drink and of the way in which he had been swindled in the matter of the Good For.

"I am not permitting Jim to give evidence," the Major said when Tomasi's son had concluded, "as I wish this hearing to be without bias. But I have here," he rustled a sheaf of papers, "the testimonies, properly signed and witnessed, of ten men and three women whom you have callously robbed. I could doubtlessly have procured more. But these must serve."

He read them aloud in a cold, unemotional voice. They made a damning indictment.

"And now," he said as he put the papers on one side, "You will be given a chance to speak in your defense."

The gags were removed and the three filled the air with their curses and mutual recriminations. They had no defence.

"Gag them again," the Major ordered. And then:

"This court finds you guilty and will now pass sentence."

"You will sell back the farm to Mr. du Toit and pay two hundred pounds costs. That is my hearing fee.

"You are fined ten pounds and ten pounds costs on each of the charges of selling liquor to natives.

"With regard to Tomasi's complaint, you will pay five hundred pounds, which I will hold in trust for him, and that does not represent one quarter of the value of the stones he has sold to you. Incidentally, they were not stolen stones.

"Finally, you will make full retribution in all the other cases—plus a five hundred pounds hearing fee."

HE SMILED at them.

"I'm afraid I have hit you where it hurts most—your bank account. But really, I'm letting you both off very lightly. And if I have not directly punished Hans, it is because I am sure you will make him feel the weight of your wrath.

"Now, Mr. du Toit, have you the money these men paid for your farm?"

"Yes, man," the old Boer replied. "One thousand and nine pounds which these *skellum* called nine thousand pounds. It is in the bag in your wagon."

"Well now, my precious beauties," the Major said, the drawl back again in his voice, his eyes innocently blue, "are you prepared to sign papers giving du Toit back his farm and a series of good fors covering the other fines and repayments? All you have to do is nod your heads—I won't risk listening to your language—and we can get down to business."

But the two partners shook their heads; their eyes blazed murderously.

The Major shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please. But I think I had better make the situation very plain to you. You will be kept here, no bail allowed, until you agree, and your good fors are honored. What's more, your food will consist of Kaffir Oranges during the waiting period. Kaffir Oranges—and nothing else. That is all, save that I shall fine you one hundred pounds for each day that you keep me waiting. And that really is all. But please take your time, dear boys. This is a very pleasant spot."

Actually forty-eight hours elapsed before Cornish and Davis surrendered and signed the papers which gave du Toit back his farm and authorized their bank to pay to the Major sufficient money to meet their fines. They were given a good meal then but they blued the air with their curses

when the dessert proved to be a plate of kaffir orange seeds.

Another forty-eight hours elapsed before the Major returned from the *dorp* having successfully cashed the firm's Good Fors. And during this time the three had been very carefully guarded by Tomasi's warriors under the supervision of du Toit and Jim, the Hottentot.

The feet of the three men were then securely bound. The warriors departed, singing the praises of the Major, with orders to clear the pass of the boulders which they had rolled down from the hill after Davis and Cornish had passed by. Du Toit, almost tearfully grateful, departed happy in the knowledge that he would not have to leave his farm. And Jim packed the Major's kit and tent into the wagon and inspanned the mules.

THE Major stood over the prisoners. "I don't want to rub it in, you fellers," he drawled. "But please don't run away with the idea that you have been harshly treated. You haven't. I've dealt most leniently with you. I'm afraid you still have enough money to live in comfort. But I think you will find it impossible to resume operations in the dorp. As a matter of fact there is quite a strong feeling abroad amongst the citizens that you ought to be tarred, feathered and ridden out of the dorp on a rail. Childish, perhaps, but I think you would be advised, well advised, not to go back. However, that is your pigeon. Absolutely.

"And now I see that Jim is ready to leave and I must hence. It won't take you very long to free yourselves and I'm afraid some time will elapse before you've caught your mules and are ready to inspan. Jim tells me he's hidden the harness here and there in the long grass. I'm afraid Jim has a rather vindictive spirit. You would never think it to look at him, would you? But, as I always say, appearances are *so* deceptive. Or don't you think so? Take a kaffir orange, for instance. No one would think to look at it that its seeds contained a deadly poison. But they do. Strychnine, you know.

"Well. Toodle-oo. I must be off. Don't waste your time looking for your—er—lethal weapons. I'm keeping them as a souvenir.

"*Trek*, Jim."

He mounted his horse and galloped swiftly out of the kloof, followed by Jim who drove the mules at a gallop.

THE three men, cursing viciously, worked desperately at the *reims* which bound their feet together, hampering each other's efforts. And when they were at last free Davis drove Hans with blows and curses to the task of rounding up the mules. But Cornish, who had succeeded in gaining control of his anger, made his way stealthily to the wagon, and picking up the driving whip was about to open the hidden aperture in the stock when Davis saw him and rushed at him bellowing wrathfully.

For a little while they wrestled furiously, kicking and striking one another. Then Cornish gasped:

"All right, Davis. We're still partners."

Cornish willingly agreed.

"I suppose," he said, assailed by a sudden doubt, "that they're still here."

He opened out the hinged ring and emptied its contents on to the palm of his hands. Instead of the diamonds he had put there, there were only a few dried Kaffir Orange seeds. And a piece of paper on which was written:

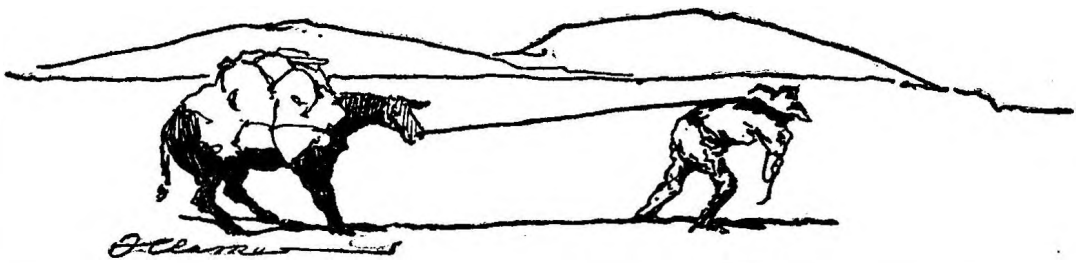
"Dear lads,

"Plant these and you'll never have to buy Kaffir Oranges again.

"Cheerio,

"THE MAJOR."

After that the air was purple—not blue.



The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

Slang Is Not as Dated as One Would Think

SUCH seemingly modern terms as 'taking it on the lam,' 'on the up-and-up,' 'taking a rap,' 'fall money,' etc., are quite in order in my story 'Three Birds With One Stone,' " writes Jim Hendryx. "Most, if not all the crook terms, now so familiar to the average reader, were in common use in the underworld long before they came to the surface—that is, to the attention of society in general. For instance, the word 'racket,' meaning an illegal or shady business, was practically unknown to the public at large until prohibition brought it out into the limelight—yet this was a common term in underworld parlance, both in this country and in England, a hundred years ago. 'Hooch,' meaning liquor of any kind, was a word in common use in the Yukon country in '98, undoubtedly derived from the Indian word 'Hutchnu,' or 'Hoochnu.'

"The boys that are 'on the make,' are many of them very clever in eluding officers, planning and pulling off jobs of various sorts—but few of them are clever in inventing terms that stick. A great many of the slang terms of crookdom are of British origin, and have been in use these many years.

"In my younger days in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, I was a frequenter of the 'jungles,' the hobo hangout near the 'stone arch bridge' in close proximity to a railway junction where, in the days before block signals, all trains had to stop and whistle, making it an ideal spot for the itinerant gentry to hop on and off the trains. There collected as fine an assortment of hoboes, bindle stiffs, boomers, and yeggs as one could hope to meet, and many's the good mulligan and can of Java I've had with 'em—meanwhile, learning about everything except women from them. I have found out in later life that this was about the only part of my early education that was worth a damn. Later knocking around, of course, added the finishing touches—I referred merely to the primary education. But as I was going to say, during the course of my matriculation in the jungles, I heard nearly every term that I have heard since—and I've played around with some pretty rough boys, too.

"Prohibition brought most of these terms to light, because prohibition, and the alleged attempt at its enforcement, brought the type of men who used them to light. When the boys found out that they could violate the prohibition laws with impunity, and financial success, they became bolder along other lines—hence the vast increase in bank hold-ups, snatch jobs, and all other forms of skullduggery.

"Jim Hendryx"

Crusade of Hate

THERE is an old saying to the effect that all sea captains point their careers toward the glorious, eventual day when they'll do something different. Away down East, every skipper seemed to aim to buy out a grocery. Behind this dream lay the same notions as those entertained about heaven—a peaceful, quiet existence.

A few of those former masters in sail lived to sell food stuffs, most of them stuck to what they knew. Well they did, because

very few mariners ever did do well in groceries. Some lived to retire; some died in seasoned harness; a few—so to speak—went to Turk's Island for salt and thence to Paradise in some living gale.

Berton Cook writes us that Captain Williams in his *Crusade of Hate*, in this issue, should not be confused with those one time masters of schooners. He is in steam, and represents the later generation. His ambition would reach beyond his job, of course. It would—but not toward groceries. His would point up above his deep-water status and—says Mr. Cook—"that's the story of William Williams, the man obsessed."

Selling's the Game

IF YOU missed the story *Salesmanship* in this issue of SHORT STORIES, turn back to it; you missed a good one. It is by a newcomer to our pages—Gene Van. But there's more to this name of Gene Van than meets the eye. Its owner writes us:

"*Salesmanship* is purely fiction, written merely from an idea that the theory, 'If you can sell one thing—you can sell another,' is not exactly true in all cases.

"I suppose my desire to write fiction came from close association with my dad, who has filled many pages of SHORT STORIES and WEST during the last sixteen years. Rather than to trade on his name reputation, I took the pen name of Gene Van. My name is Gene, and my mother's maiden name was Van; so I combined the two.

"I am twenty-one years of age, six feet, three inches tall, weigh a hundred and eighty-five, raw, and pitch baseball from the port-side. I belong to the Hollywood Baseball Club, of the Pacific Coast League. I have two ambitions; to be the best left-handed chucker in the big leagues, and to write stories good enough to click regularly in SHORT STORIES. Baseball in the summer—fiction in the winter. Where is a better combination for a tall, young man?

"Sincerely"—and the signature of this letter is Bud Tuttle. The dad to whom he refers is the creator of "Sad Sontag," "Cultus Collins," and many another SHORT STORIES favorite—W. C. Tuttle. So here's a double welcome to the Circle to Gene Van and the rising generation of Tuttles.

A Texas Tribute

H. BEDFORD-JONES, always one of SHORT STORIES' favorite writers, has just received a most imposing looking document, bearing the signature of the Governor of Texas, a replica of the Great Seal of the State of Texas, and sent from the headquarters of the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas.

The covering letter says:

Mr. H. Bedford-Jones,
c/o SHORT STORIES,
Garden City, New York
Dear Sir:

It is with real pleasure that we present you with this commission as a Texas Centennial Ranger which we feel is more than merited by your recent fine stories based on the Texan struggle for independence a hundred years ago.

We were particularly appreciative of the series *Dead Men Singing* in SHORT STORIES. Besides giving your readers some brilliantly written and sympathetic pictures of the Texan colonists' epic struggle for freedom, your stories undoubtedly have been of inestimable value in calling the attention of the English speaking world to our Texas Centennial celebration, of which the Texas Centennial Exposition, a $25,000,000 World's Fair in Dallas from June 6 to November 29 is the climactic feature.

In behalf of the Lone Star State and of the personnel of our Exposition, we thank you for your Texan stories and for your apparent personal affection for Texas; and we extend to you a most cordial and sincere invitation to visit our World's Fair during its run.

With kindest regards, we are

Very truly yours,
W. A. WEBB,
General Manager

Follow the gold trail to the Klondike

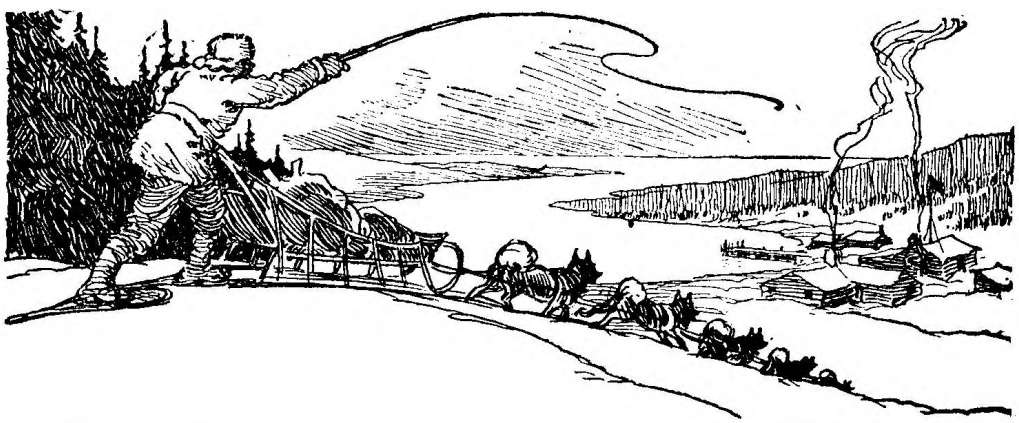
In the next issue

Part I

GRUBSTAKE GOLD

Our new stirring serial of the hell-roaringest strike in all history—by

James B. Hendryx



And

A Bat Jennison complete novel

"Half Way to Hardpan"

by **GEORGE BRUCE MARQUIS**

"Sing, You Sailors!"

by **BILL ADAMS**

BOB DU SOE, WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES,

etc., etc., etc.

The handsomely decorated commission reads as follows:

TEXAS CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION

To All To Whom These Presents Shall Come—Greeting: Know Ye, that
H. BEDFORD-JONES of Garden City, N. Y.
is hereby commissioned a

Texas Centennial Ranger

in recognition of eminence in the field of Literature and friendship for Texas.

In Testimony Whereof, I have hereunto signed my name and caused the Seal of State to be affixed at the City of
[SEAL] Austin, this the 19th day of March, A.D. 1936.

JAMES V. ALLRED
Governor of the State of Texas

The Elephants' Burying Ground

CAPTAIN LOUIS P. HORTON writes us on a subject often brought up in adventurous discussions and says: "I have quite often listened to people ask what becomes of the elephant in his old age, or when he dies from a sickness; and how is it remains are never found?

"In order that I may answer these questions beyond a possible doubt I shall take you with me to Central Africa, where the elephant makes his home. We are now sitting on a platform built on the limbs of a large mango tree, so that animals passing beneath will not be so apt to see us. In our laps we have high-powered express rifles. We have been on this platform all night awaiting the dawn of day, for it is then the beasts of the jungle go to the water holes to quench their thirsts.

"The tree on which we are perched is situated at the very edge of the only stream within miles. A few feet from the foot of our tree, and well within view, is a spot of sand about ten feet square situated right at the water's edge, making an ideal spot for the beasts of the jungle to drink. Even the king of beasts will not drink if he must do so while standing in tall grass. All wild beasts prefer a sandy approach.

"We are waiting for a female and her cubs, not caring what species; all we want is the cubs. To obtain these we must shoot the female. We have just about decided luck is against us and we had better go down and prepare some—but listen, did you hear that noise? You admit you heard it a few minutes ago, and inquire as to what it is. To the man of the jungle the answer is simple. It is just another old Tusker going to his grave. Some sixth sense has told him he is soon to die. You watch for the first sign of his approach and finally he comes into view. He is an enormous fel-

low. The massive tusks have turned a dark, dirty color, which means, the jungle man will tell you, that he is an old-timer, and if able to talk our language he could tell you plenty about tribes of Pygmy Indians and their blow guns; of the many battles he has fought for the mates that he has had.

"You watch him as he shakes his head from side to side and wonder why he makes so much noise. He shakes his head because he is mad, and the continuous trumpeting is done because he knows he is within call of his grave. He is going to pass almost directly beneath us, and you wonder if it wouldn't be possible to follow him. But this is not necessary for you will have a good view from your present position on the limb of the mango tree.

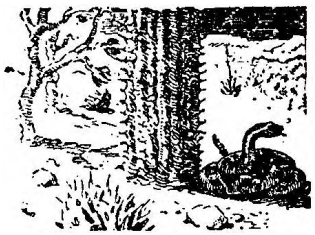
"The old elephant is running in a most peculiar manner. This is done to avoid many small pools of quicksand. Finally, to your surprise, you notice this monster has

stopped and is gradually sinking into a large pool of the quicksand. He goes deeper and deeper and now his trumpeting has ceased; he at last seems to be contented, for he makes no effort to free himself. In a very few moments he has disappeared entirely.

"The stranger to the jungle wonders why such a massive creature would go to his death without a struggle. But it is a part of the wonders of jungle life, and one which is not generally known. It accounts for the fact that no part of an elephant that has died a natural death has ever been found.

"An elephant is far from being a coward. In some way he is able to tell when he is going to die. No matter whether he is sick or is about to die of old age he always knows of his death far enough ahead to permit his reaching the burying ground—a pool of quicksand."

OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS



Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.

Flying the South Atlantic

IN JANUARY of this year Air France inaugurated scheduled weekly trips between Paris and Santiago de Chile, 9,300 miles away and across an ocean. What is more, the schedule made it possible to mail a letter in Paris on Sunday and have it delivered in Santiago the following Wednesday. South America four days from London, three days from Paris—the fastest long-distance airway in the world.

One of the most remarkable things about France's accomplishment is that she has developed five different flying boats, made by four separate manufacturers, all of which are in service across the South Atlantic. Such a varied fleet may not be conducive to efficient service, but it does show creditable work by the French designers.

And the Germans are flying to South America on a schedule almost as fast, and Germany's faith in the Zeppelin is so great that she has entered into contract with the Brazilian Government to run twenty trans-atlantic trips a year to Brazil, and to do this *for the next thirty years*. That's how sure she feels that nothing will be developed for this type of flight that will beat the Zeppelin, even in the next three decades!

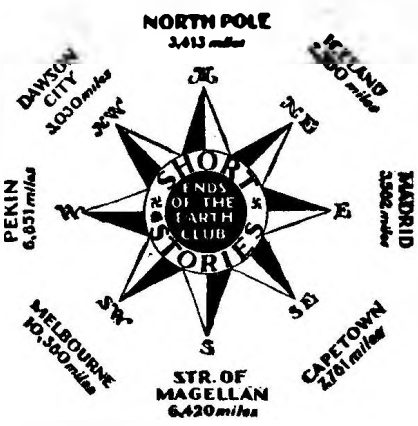
A Mammoth Tooth-Ache

THE greatest dental operation on record was performed upon an elephant in the City of Mexico recently by a small traveling circus. After Mr. Elephant had been securely fastened with chains his mouth was prized open and a quantity of cocaine applied to deaden the pain. When this was done, a hole was bored through the tooth and an iron bar inserted. Then a rope was twisted around the bar and four circus horses attached.

Measuring Distance With Smoke

THE boatmen of Holland measure distances by smoking. The distance between two named points is expressed as so many pipefuls of tobacco, meaning, of course, that one would smoke so many pipes while covering the distance mentioned.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

It's a long trail around the world, but we hope this ambitious chap makes it.

Dear Secretary:

I should like to join the Ends of the Earth Club. I came to Canada from England three years ago, and have traveled from Montreal to Vancouver, hitch-hiking and riding freight trains.

My great ambition in life is to work my way around the world at least once. At present I am trying to get a job on a ship crossing the Pacific, but have not yet had any luck.

Letters from all countries will be welcome and I shall do my best to answer them all.

Yours truly,

Jack Hood

General Delivery,
Vancouver, B. C.,
Canada

News of New York in exchange for news of Hollywood is surely worth while.

Dear Secretary:

I have decided that I would like to join the Ends of the Earth Club, so please enroll me as a member and send me a membership card.

I am a boy of sixteen who would like to have members my own age write to me and tell me all they know about Hollywood, California, and of their experiences there. I would especially like to hear from those who live in Hollywood.

I like horseback riding, ice skating, tennis, ping-pong, autographs and photographs of movie stars, ice cream cones and parties. I believe I can answer any question asked about New York City and have plenty of connections there, including some at the National Broadcasting Company. Anyone who writes to me may be readily assured of an interesting, long letter as I am fond of letter writing.

Respectfully yours,

Richard Bartlett

4617—245th Street,
Douglaston,
New York

Here's a member with a keen interest in Guatemala and a desire for information on its early postal history. Can someone help him?

Dear Secretary:

One of my New Year's resolutions was to join the Ends of the Earth Club. Wonder if I am eligible?

I have traveled in every one of the forty-eight states, have been to Canada a dozen times, Mexico once (and saw a real bull fight), and several times to Cuba. On the last visit we were held up by bandits at Matanzas.

I am especially interested in Guatemala and would be pleased to hear from anyone who has been there or knows something about the early history of the country.

I am also a stamp collector but am interested in the stamps of Guatemala only. Any information on the early postal history of this country will be deeply appreciated.

With every good wish for your continued success, I am

Cordially yours,

Henry P. Fallon

Box 16,
Cold Spring,
New York

We can't afford to have a lonesome member so far from home, so get busy and fill that mail bag.

Dear Secretary:

I am a lonely British Tommy serving in the Royal Artillery stationed in the Far East. I am twenty-two years old and am very desirous of hearing from young folk of my own age in various parts of the world. I am very fond of all outdoor sports and am also interested in photography and am willing to exchange snapshots.

Come on everybody and let's have a full mail bag.

Yours sincerely,

Lance-Bombardier Arthur F. Davis

11th A. A. Battery, R. A.,
Changi,
Singapore,
Straits Settlements

It will probably be necessary to hold classes every day in the week in order to discuss the subjects of all the letters received.

Dear Secretary:

I am an aspirant to your club and wonder if I have been around enough to beg membership. I have always been an avid reader of SHORT STORIES, in fact I believe your magazine had a great deal to do with my gypsy feet.

I have had a number of jobs, among them one that took me to Russia in 1931. I have been through the Panama Canal twice, up the Pacific coast to Port Alberni, Canada, and have sailed the lakes. At present I'm employed on the supervisory staff in a C.C.C. camp and enjoy the work exceedingly.

In conjunction with the educational program here I am holding a class once a week in discussion of current events and personal experiences. Any letters I may receive containing anything suitable for discussions of this nature will be welcomed with open arms.

Hoping I'm eligible and that I'll hear from some of the members, I am

Sincerely yours,

A. P. Jones

3627th Company, C.C.C.,
Big Bay, Michigan
U.S.A.

Unfortunately we can't all read hieroglyphics written twenty-five hundred years ago, but here's a man who not only can read them but also teaches Egyptology.

Dear Secretary:

I am a regular reader of SHORT STORIES, and am very eager to become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club.

I am nineteen years of age, and have just recently completed the translation of a series of hieroglyphic texts, heretofore undeciphered, which were inscribed some two thousand five hundred years ago on the mummy case of an Egyptian priest. I am also the instructor of an Egyptology class at the State Historical Society Museum. I should like very much to correspond with members of the club in this country and abroad who are interested in archaeological research in Asia, North Africa, and the Yucatan.

Thanking you for your kind attention, and with best regards for the unabated success of your splendid magazine, I am

Very sincerely yours,

Edwin L. Hynes

3513 McKinley Avenue,
Tacoma,
Washington

SAVE THESE LISTS!

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. Save these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.

Charles R. Gallant, 44 East Broadway Avenue, Clifton Heights, Pennsylvania
Glenn B. Giffin, 341 Franklin Street, S. W., Grand Rapids, Michigan
Anthony Giszack, 585 Main Street, Paterson, New Jersey
M. A. Goodman, Box 127, Townsend, Montana
Wally Gormly, 7 Marshall Street, Troy, New York
Robert Greenberg, 19 Monroe Avenue, Staten Island, New York
Lester R. T. Grey, 2160 Walton Avenue, Bronx, New York
Arthur C. Haley, Camp Kearney, Miramar, California
E. H. Hall, 5108 Miriam, Los Angeles, California
A. C. Hartwell, 905 Christie Avenue, Princeton, West Virginia
John H. Harvey, 314 Swan Street, Dunkirk, New York
Bernard Hept, 2222 North Front Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
George Hingston, 793 Westside Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey
Lewis L. Hirsch, c/o C. T. Derussey, Honolulu, Hawaii
Bill Hoffman, 824 South Corona Street, Denver, Colorado
Cecil L. Hotton, Gaspe, Gaspe County, Province of Quebec, Canada
Pinny Jayman, 1909 East Biddle Street, Baltimore, Maryland
Howell Jones, 1207 Elm Street, Utica, New York
Allen Kay, 2276—65th Street, Brooklyn, New York
Thomas J. Kelly, Jr., 2142 Hollins Street, Baltimore, Maryland
Robert Knox, 24 Gotham Avenue, Brooklyn, New York
Peter Kozup, Company 640, CCC, Drummond, Wisconsin
Frank Kunicky, Box 93, Route 1, Brecksville, Ohio
Bernard L. Lane, 12040 Kenmoor Avenue, Detroit, Michigan
M. H. Leonard, Box 118, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Charles McCall, 413 South 6th Street, Taft, California
Charles McGraw, CCC, Company 299, Camp 100-S, Masonville, New York
Carl MacLeod, 31 Calhoun Avenue, Everett, Massachusetts
Robert E. Mahaffey, 1021—11th Street, N. W., Washington, District of Columbia
P. R. Markey, 208 Crystal Avenue, New London, Connecticut
George Martin, 716 West Market Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma
Howard I. May, 3227 North Mississippi Drive, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Harry McKinley Meister, 142 Sip Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey
Lawrence L. Mentzer, 1302 First Street, N. W., Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Thomas Moler, M/S Nicoline-Maersk, c/o Isbrandtsen-Moller, Exq., 26 Broadway, New York City, New York
Donald Edwin Morehead, U.S.S. Black Hawk, Des Ron 5, Asiatic Fleet, c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, California
James Moriarity, Jr., 86 Burnham Street, Hartford, Connecticut
Charles E. Mowrer, 1647 CCC, Camp Black Bear, Headquarters, Idaho
Charles Murphy, 303 East 91st Street, New York City, New York
Chester M. Myers, U.S.S. Trenton, c/o Postmaster, New York City, New York
Captain Arthur E. Nicholson, Box 511, Y. M. C. A. Building, Middletown, Connecticut
J. F. Noreiko, 1125 Wolfe Street, Montreal, Canada
Victor J. Obi, St. Peter's Church, C.M.S., Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Africa
Judah M. Orkin, 64 West 192nd Street, Bronx, New York
Richard G. Pepple, Compagnie Francaise de L'Afrique Occidentale, Port Harcourt, Southern Nigeria, West Coast Africa
Albert E. Peterson, 77 Glendale Avenue, N, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
Wilbur F. H. Radeline, Fort Armstrong, Hawaiian Medical Depot, Honolulu, Oahu, Territory of Hawaii
George Reid, 30 Oak Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Arthur J. Reyman, Route 2, Box 546-B, Santa Rosa, California
Ben Rosnick, 14 Bancroft Road, Burlingame, California
Emil Sachs, 1827 Haight Avenue, Bronx, New York
Hallard Schmitt, 1673 West Liberty Avenue, South Hills, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Carl Schneider, 207 West 11th Street, Rolla, Missouri
Elvin Scott, 247 West 24th Street, New York City, New York
Steve Sgambati, Jr., 145 Saratoga Avenue, Mechanicville, New York
Private Raymond E. Shire, American Legation Guard, Peiping, China
Floyd E. Snyder, 104 West Main Street, Kelso, Washington
Michael L. Sroka, Rutledge, Minnesota
Arthur Sykes, Hotel Genosha, Oshouva, Canada
John P. Tierney, 1016 Florence Avenue, Evanston, Illinois
C. G. Tood, Jr., U. S. Veterans Hospital, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Howard Und, Company 1908, CCC, La Moine, California
Earl L. Varney, 40 Federal Street, Portland, Maine
David M. Walters, 202 Aisquitte Street, Baltimore, Maryland
Robert B. Woodside, Southwest No. 2, Mineral, California
Walter Yurkus, 222 Madison Street, New York City, New York

George J. Abrams, 286 Main Street, East Orange, New Jersey
A. Alexander, 736 Fox Street, Bronx, New York
Raymond Allan, 2140 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island
Percy J. Bates, 6 Abacus Road, Stoneycroft, Liverpool 13, England
Harold E. Braley, 3614th Company, C.C.C., Camp Chatham (F-61), Chatham, Michigan
Robert M. Brown, S/S W. H. Libby, Standard Shipping Company, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City, New York
W. Bushell, 120 Morningside Road, West Derby, Liverpool 11, England
Lloyd Byers, 949th Company, C.C.C., S.P. 9, Seven Mile Camp, Fort George Wright, Washington
Lamar Byrd, 101 Bell Street, Troy, Alabama
Patsy A. Calvachio, 4435—Third Avenue, Bronx, New York
Gustave J. Charitas, 1829 East 13th Street, Brooklyn, New York
A. A. Christensen, Koeye Linistone Company, Nanu, British Columbia, Canada
Henry Christensen, Company V, C.C.C. 1776, Ottumwa, Iowa
George D. Coleman, Jr., Company 3417, C.C.C., SCS-17, Madison, North Carolina
Beach Conger, c/o American Consulate, Lima, Peru
Robert Connelly, 32-42—34th Street, Long Island City, New York
Erl W. G. Crawford, Templeton Coal Company, Smiths Ferry, Pennsylvania
Ronald Crowley, 79 Pearl Street, Franklin, New Hampshire
E. R. Dallas, c/o Claude Neon Lights, 687 Broadway, East, Shanghai, China
William Dawson, 815 William Street, Baltimore, Maryland
Cadet Worrall Decker, Pacific Military Academy, Culver City, California
Eugene DeMent, Edward Hines Jr. Hospital, Ward G-341, Hines, Illinois
Raymond Derchin, 201 Linden Boulevard, Brooklyn, New York
Emmet H. Dunlavey, 15 Tremaine Avenue, Kenmore, New York
Harry Dyson, 227 Pershing Avenue, Collingdale, Pennsylvania
Valmore Federvitz, 5 South Stowell Street, Worcester, Massachusetts
Lawrence Feltmate, 152 Mountjoy Street, Timmins, Ontario, Canada
John Fesselmeyer, Jr., 2111 North Kildare Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
Louis Folkes, Company V, C.C.C., 1776, Ottumwa, Iowa

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Address.....

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During my 36 years of practice in functional conditions of women I developed this home method, which is described in my illustrated treatise sent FREE ON REQUEST. It discusses many subjects relating to the female organs and tells how you too may correct your troubles at home and report as well as satisfactory relief from the various female troubles amenable to correction by this home method. DR. H. WILL ELDERS, 7th & Felix Sts., Suite 1434, ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI

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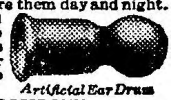

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