

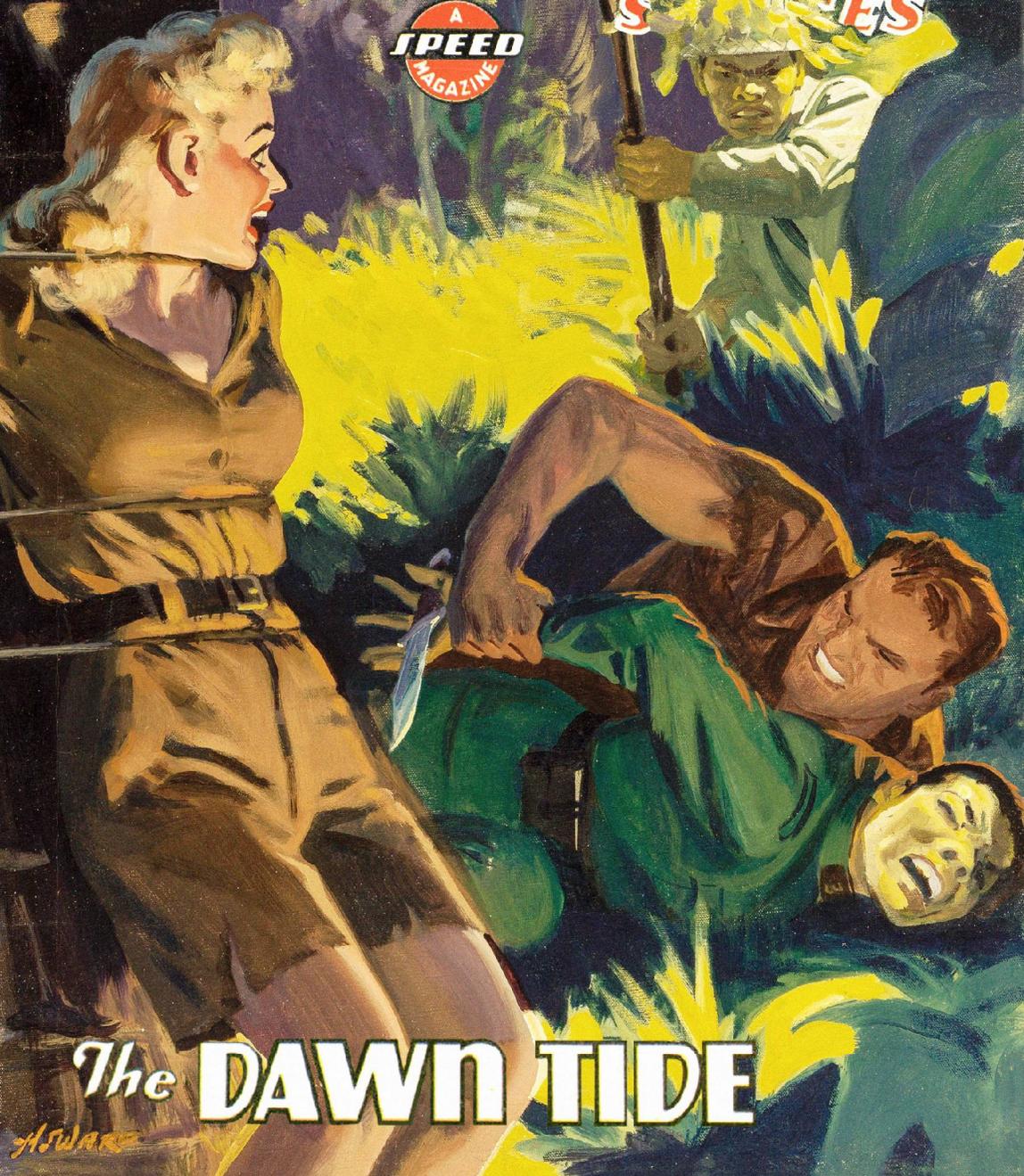
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SPEED ADVENTURE STORIES



MAY, 1944

Vol. 2, No. 4

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COCONUT CARGO

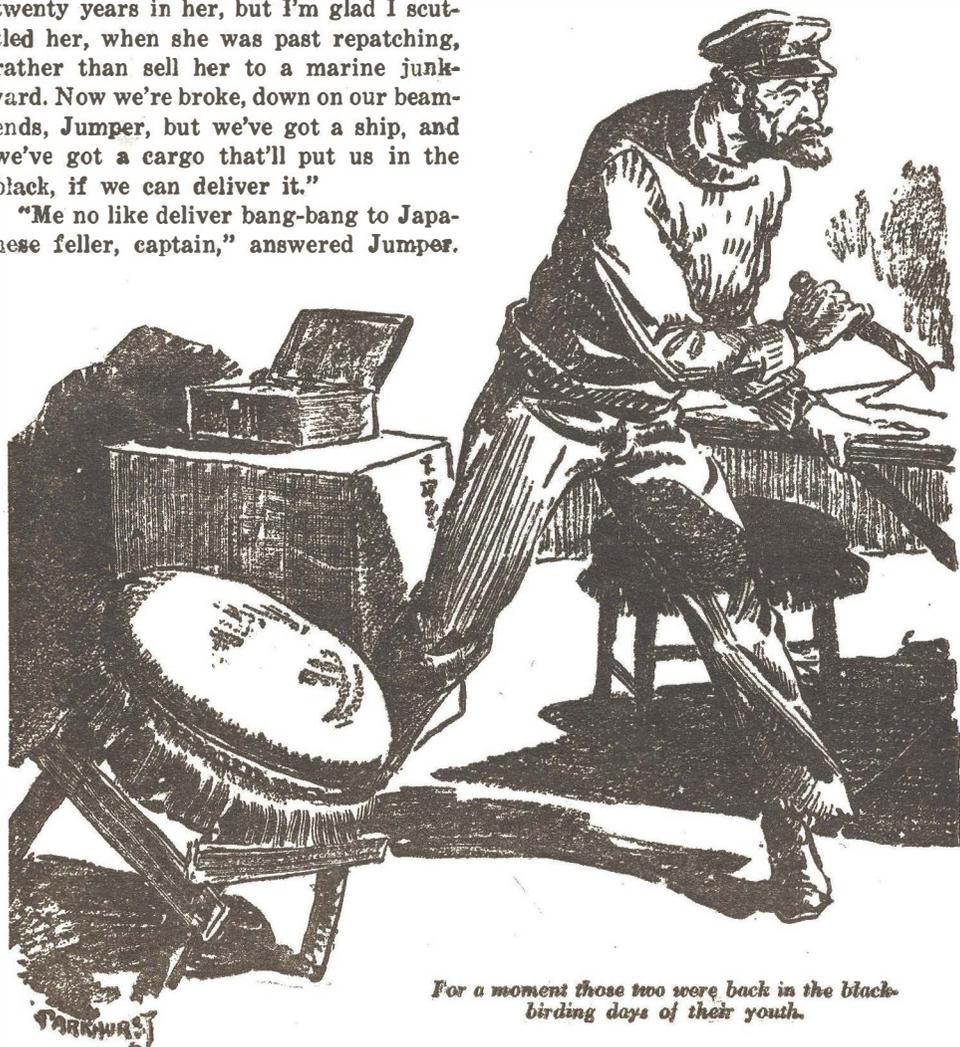
"JUMPER, she sails pretty," said Captain James M'Shane to his Kanaka boy, who was mate, steward, bo's'n, and able seaman in one. "A new ship is like a new woman's face: it takes time to get used to it. But this *Albatross* is a handy schooner, and I've got to hand it her.

"I'll miss the old girl, after three-and-twenty years in her, but I'm glad I scuttled her, when she was past repatching, rather than sell her to a marine junkyard. Now we're broke, down on our beam-ends, Jumper, but we've got a ship, and we've got a cargo that'll put us in the black, if we can deliver it."

"Me no like deliver bang-bang to Japanese feller, captain," answered Jumper.

"Me British subject like yourself."

"Don't like delivering ammunition to the Japs?" retorted M'Shane, tugging at his red beard. "Why, Jumper, you're crazy! Those Japs at Bongo Bongo are fighting Americans and Australians, not England. They're desperate for ammunition, and, unless we can run this block-

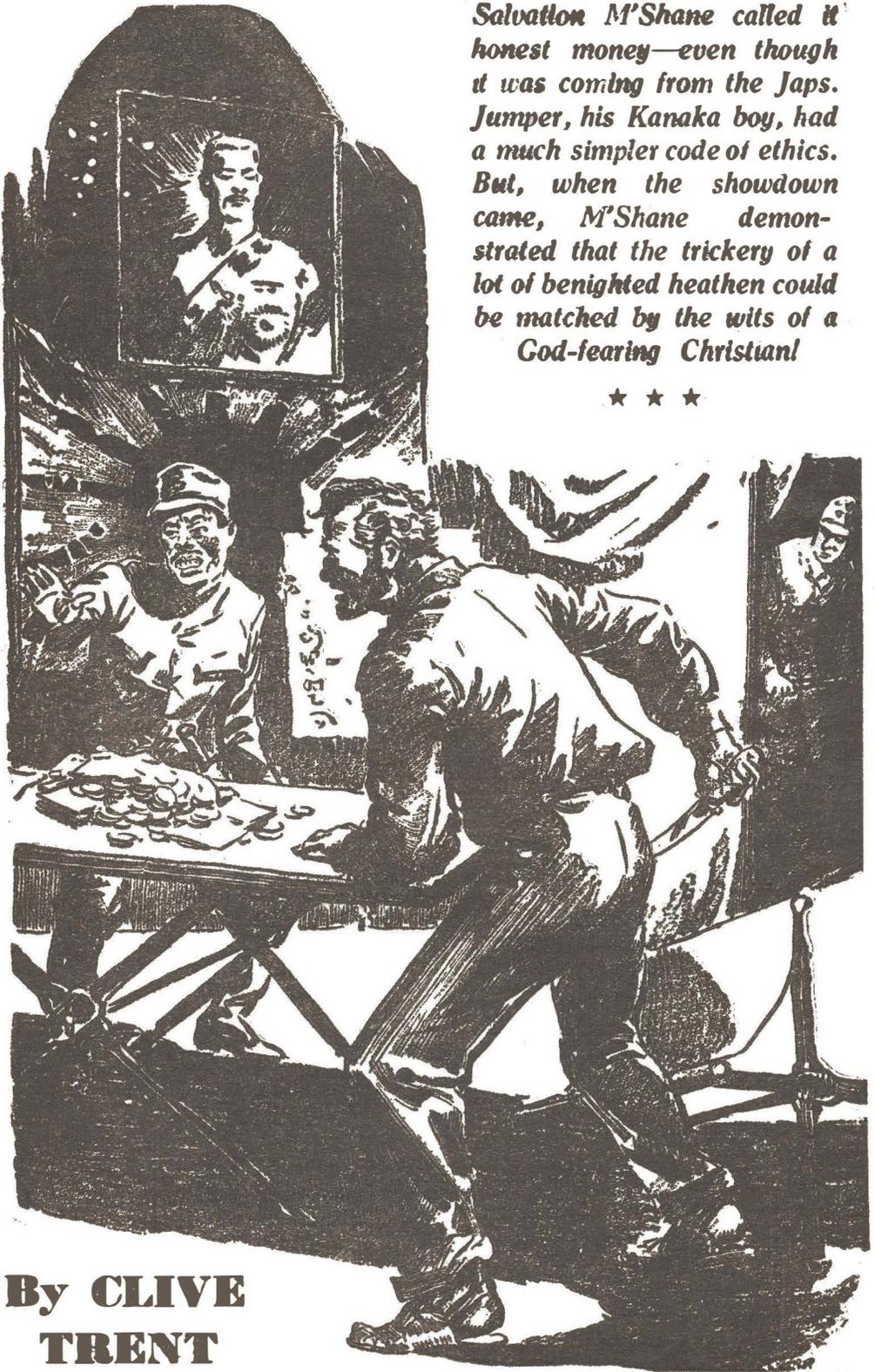


For a moment those two were back in the black-birding days of their youth.

★ ★ ★

Salvation M'Shane called it honest money—even though it was coming from the Japs. Jumper, his Kanaka boy, had a much simpler code of ethics. But, when the showdown came, M'Shane demonstrated that the trickery of a lot of benighted heathen could be matched by the wits of a God-fearing Christian!

★ ★ ★



**By CLIVE
TRENT**

ade, they'll have to give up. I tell you there's a fortune in this, if we can get through the sea-patrols.

"You're talking nonsense, boy. Remember that Yank Marine whose face I broke my hand on, in Sydney? And remember that Aussie lieutenant who boarded me at Whatyoucallum, and sent a plane to help Lord get away, when he had him cornered? I've got no love for either of them, and, if Lord can make a fortune in this business, I reckon we're due for a few pickings, too."

"You work with Lord?" asked Jumper.

"Work with Lord? Why, Lord's waiting for us at Bongo Bongo, with the Japs there, and he's got bags full of gold to pay us with. Just because we split up years ago, when I saw the light and quit blackbirding, and just because we've crossed each other's trail a few times since, ain't any reason why we should throw honest money away."

"Let them fight their own wars. I'm fighting mine, for the right to live, Jumper. The right to earn enough to retire to a little farm in England, in sight of the sea and, grow turnips and marigolds, and watch the ships sail up and down the coast, and—and provide properly for the little woman who's waiting for me so patient, Jumper.

"But you wouldn't understand a man being true to his lawful wife. You're still a heathen, Jumper, melad, and I've never been able to whale those heathen notions out of you."

"But, captain, you are an officer in Australia navy. You make sign papers."

"Well, what about it?" snarled M'Shane. "Ain't it been the izumemorial custom of the Navy to sail under false

colors for the purpose of deceiving the enemy? You watch that wheel, while I go below and inspect the cargo."

JUMPER was an expert seaman. He had sailed with M'Shane for years, but always, just when he thought he understood him, some queer quirk had shown him that there were depths in the white man's mind that he would never master.

He was M'Shane's closest confidant. They had faced many perils together

since the days when his master got religion, and quit blackbirding with Lord. He loved the fiery little man with the bright red forked beard, that thrust itself out at an aggressive angle from his chin. But he had never understood him.

Jumper knew that the Japanese were savages who had come down from the north and overrun the islands and that the Australians and the Americans were fighting them.

So he couldn't understand how M'Shane could be taking ammunition to them, when he was in the service of the Australian Government.

Down in the hold were cases and cases of the tiny Japanese small-arms ammunition—enough to keep Bongo Bongo, their toehold on New Guinea, supplied for weeks.

Down in the hold of the schooner, which was packed so heavily that the *Albatross* was loaded far beyond any imaginary Plimsoll line, were all those cases, together with shells, the whole covered two feet deep with coconuts. To all appearance, the *Albatross* was an innocent coastal trading ship, engaged in the copra business.

Jumper didn't like the situation at all, but nothing M'Shane did could be wrong.

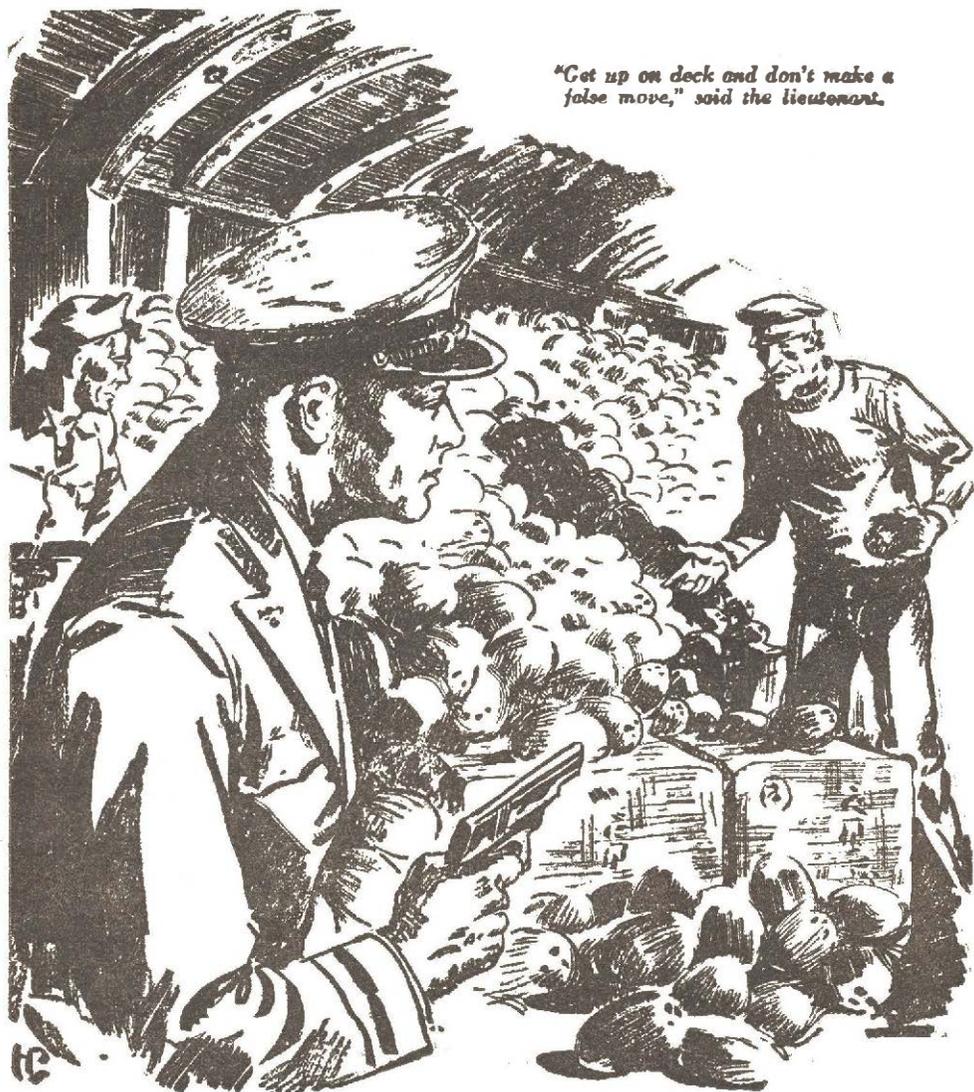
PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

The use of paper in book and magazine publishing has been curtailed sharply by the War Production Board.

In line with the Board's rulings to conserve materials and manpower, we are cooperating by:

1. Using lighter weight paper to reduce the bulk of our magazines.
2. Printing magazines with narrower margins, permitting fewer pages in each magazine, but without curtailing the total number of words or stories.

These measures will save paper and plate metal and labor and shipping space. We are sure you will understand our desire to cooperate with the objectives of the War Production Board and our government.



"Get up on deck and don't make a false move," said the lieutenant.

And M'Shane had made a Christian out of him, and Jumper had sent away all but one of his wives—the prettiest. That had been harder than running contraband into Bongo Bongo.

M'Shane walked through the hold, inspecting his cargo. He picked up an occasional coconut, examined it, and then laid it gently down. He was thinking hard. He had to make Bongo Bongo within four days, or he'd lose more of that gold than he wanted to. There was a premium on time.

A shout from Jumper brought him back to the deck. About a mile away, between the *Albatross* and the New Guinea coast-

line, which showed like a murky thread upon the silver water, an Australian patrol-boat was scudding.

Flags were going up: "Heave to for examination!"

"Run up that damn' jib!" roared M'Shane. "Maybe we can best her, if we can make Dead Man's Reef!"

THERE wasn't a chance of making Dead Man's Reef, and the blue ensign of Australia, with the Jack in the fly, and the six stars that M'Shane flew, didn't make the least difference to the pursuing cutter. An ominous boom, and a splash a hundred yards abaft, forced the

captain to let down his fore and main sails. Resignedly he ordered Jumper to drop the anchor, and the cutter came alongside.

A spruce young officer in white called through a megaphone, with a Sydney accent: "I'm coming aboard to look over your cargo. Let down a ladder!"

In a minute or two he had climbed up to the deck. "Who the devil are you?" he asked.

That was a question that cut M'Shane to the soul. M'Shane, of the red beard and proselytizing tendencies, was known from Tonga to Auckland, from Sydney to Malacca. The young man was a novice at the business, but that fact didn't ease the captain's sense of outrage.

"Captain M'Shane, sir, out of Port Moresby, with a cargo of nuts for Sydney," he answered meekly.

"I'll see your papers, and then I'll see your cargo."

"You'll have a drink, sir?"

"Do what I told you!" snapped the stripling.

It was almost more than the fiery little captain could bear, but he had to keep that red-hot temper of his under control, and he led the way to his cabin. An inspection of his papers showed that they were in perfect order, and the young officer went down the hatch into the gloom of the hold. Here nothing was visible but the piles of coconuts in their racks.

"You're riding pretty low for a cargo of coconuts," said the young officer.

"Port Moresby coconuts are well known for their specific gravity," returned M'Shane. "For heaven's sake be careful, sir! Don't throw them about like that. You'll bust them!"

But already the ammunition cases had come into plain view, and, though it was too dark to read, nobody could mistake the Japanese characters on them. M'Shane saw the muzzle of an automatic pointed at his midriff.

"Get up on deck, and don't make a false move," said the lieutenant. "We know all about you."

On deck the captain found Jumper facing the carbines of two Australian sailors.

"Shoot this man if he makes a break,"

said the young officer. He beckoned to two men in the cutter, which was riding not twenty feet away. "We're taking the *Albatross* in tow into Lowela," he called. "Make fast!"

LOWELA was the dirtiest and meanest post on the New Guinea shore. Five years before, it had been an unexplored jungle, inhabited by wild pigs, kangaroos, dingoes and a few natives, perched in huts on stilts that rose above the stagnant marches. Now it had a police commissioner, a dozen native soldiers, a government hut, and a jail hut, and a tiny wharf afforded a tie-up place for the cutter.

After the war was over, it would almost certainly be evacuated, but for the present it was useful as a radio station and observation post. The radio happened to be out of commission, but young Lieutenant Chambers, of the cutter, and his four seamen, were mightily alert.

At the entrance to the jail hut M'Shane said, "If you'll put me on your wireless, I think I can clear up this trouble. I tell you I've to get on my way."

"That's your way," snapped Mr. Chambers, pointing inside.

M'Shane stepped into a dirty hut, under the menace of two Papuans armed with carbines. He shrugged his shoulders. He'd been in worse jams before. It was only that, if they didn't let him out quick, something quite unexpected was booked to happen.

He meditated for about twenty minutes, and then a ferocious-looking Papuan appeared, with a towel over his shoulder, a basin of water in his hand, and something else, and Lieutenant Chambers behind him.

"Sit down, M'Shane," said Chambers, indicating the rickety army cot.

"You going to cut my throat?" gulped the captain, trying not to recognize the fatal situation in which he was engulfed.

"You're going to be shaved," said Lieutenant Chambers.

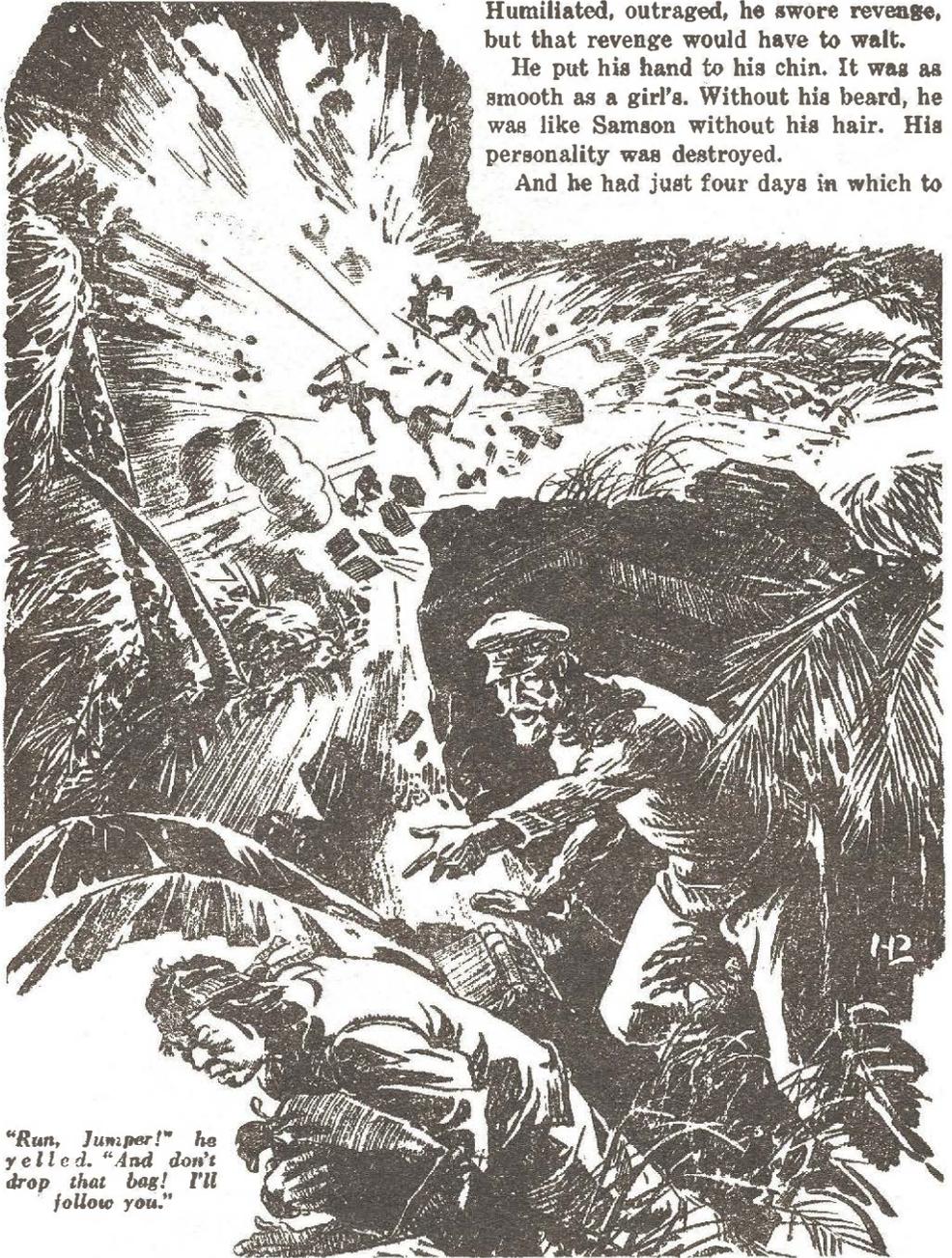
"Great guns of glory!" shouted M'Shane. "You can't do that to me!"

"The regulations state that all prison-

Humiliated, outraged, he swore revenge, but that revenge would have to wait.

He put his hand to his chin. It was as smooth as a girl's. Without his beard, he was like Samson without his hair. His personality was destroyed.

And he had just four days in which to



"Run, Jumper!" he yelled. "And don't drop that bag! I'll follow you."

ers must have shaves and haircuts," replied Chambers coldly. "I advise you to sit still, M'Shane. Sour Herring is an enthusiastic barber."

IT was a licked, but not entirely hopeless M'Shane who sat on his cot, with the moonlight streaming into the hut, looking at the tufts of red hair on the ground.

deliver his cargo at Bongo Bongo. If he didn't deliver it by then, all hell would break loose. There were matters at stake which he might explain to Chambers, but he was damned if he would.

Lieutenant Chambers came to the door of the hut. "Well, M'Shane, and what decision have you come to?" he asked.

"I ain't been asked for any decision,

whipper-snapper," snarled the little captain.

"Vulgarity will get you nowhere, M'Shane," responded Chambers. "I've been looking through our official files. There is some reference to a M'Shane, in association with one Captain Lord, a notorious blackbird and smuggler. I presume you are that man.

"Your papers, showing you to be a representative of the Australian Government, are a neat forgery, but not impressive. As for your beard, about which you made such an outcry, it is customary to shave all condemned prisoners. The beard is apt to interfere with the smooth running of the rope. Yes, M'Shane, your life isn't worth a single one of those coconuts that you used to cover that shipment of Jap ammunition."

M'Shane chuckled. Chambers didn't know those coconuts. He waited.

"I have reason to believe that you are the agent for an important ring of gun-runners. If you choose to make a complete confession, naming your associates, I'll submit a recommendation for mercy when I send you to headquarters."

M'Shane arose. He drew himself up to his full height of five feet six. "You can go to hell, me lad," he said, with icy dignity. "I and my friends, Hirohito and Tojo, are going to settle your hash when the illustrious Sons of Heaven really get going. There's going to be some first-class belly-cutting, Chambers, and you'll have first-hand information."

"Impudent," sneered Chambers. "The yelp of a trapped fox, M'Shane. I've got your measure now. I hope we'll give you a good, tight neck-ift, M'Shane. Our ropes don't shrink in the laundry."

He stalked out, leaving M'Shane to his own meditations.

FOUR days—three days now, in which to deliver that cargo. M'Shane groaned in his agony of spirit. He wondered what had happened to Jumper. The boy had helped him out of many difficult situations in the past, but what could he do now, with two armed native Papuan soldiers parading in front of the jail-hut, and looking in now and again, to make

sure that he hadn't taken wings and flown through the roof?

The night was wearing away. Outside M'Shane could hear the noises of the night, the yelp of a dingo, the rustling of the palms. In the morning he knew he would be taken to headquarters, whatever that was, for summary trial. M'Shane couldn't afford to face a trial. He had to get free.

In the end, he must have fallen into a doze, for he was awakened by hearing his name whispered. He started up. In the moonlight he saw Jumper standing before him, and he started to his feet in amazement.

"You come along me, captain. All soldiers gone," whispered the Kanaka.

Unable to believe it, M'Shane followed Jumper from the hut. It was true. The hut was unguarded. In a moment they were moving through the jungle in the direction of the tiny wharf.

Moored to the wharf on either side were the Government cutter and the *Albatross*. There was no sign of a watchman.

"Me kill Government engine," explained Jumper. "Me bust him carburettor. He no can go catch us now."

"Jumper, me lad, you're a jewel," said M'Shane. "But how did you get rid of the guards? You know. Soldier men who make watch me and *Albatross*."

Jumper grinned. "*Lubras* see you beard, captain," he answered. "All *lubras* in Lewels want to say how-do to you. They love you beard, Captain. Me tell them to take guards talkee-talkee in bush, and then maybe I show them you beard."

"You discolite heathen, you mean you got the girls to lure the guards away with the promise that they'd get the chance to make up to me?" demanded M'Shane. "Those poor black wenches who know nothing of the Word? Jumper, I'll whale the Truth into you if it's the last act of my life."

"It get light soon," said Jumper. "We push off now, captain, before they see us and start fire bang-bang."

BY dawn, Lewels was a mere speck on the horizon. Under a freshening wind, the *Albatross* careened through the

waves, with her cargo of ammunition. It was only three days to Bongo Bongo, and now there was no likelihood of interception. Lord would be waiting at Bongo Bongo, with his gold. M'Shane rubbed his stubbly chin with satisfaction. Of course, Lord might double-cross him about the money. But M'Shane didn't really care about the money.

He was getting to be an old fellow now. He was forty, and he had been twenty years in Pacific waters. It was twenty years since he had seen his wife, though he had sent her money scrupulously, and had heard from her a few times. There had been ten years of blackbirding and outlawry, with Lord, before he had seen the light. There had been two years as an official of the Australian Government. Now, with the prospect of five thousand pounds in English gold, and retirement, he knew he didn't want to see Jessie again.

She was something out of his past, something he hated to go back to. Her letters were bitter, always demanding money, and more money. He hated women anyway, cluttering up a man's life. He liked his ship, and Jumper, and the free adventure of the South Seas. He half hoped Lord would double-cross him, so that he wouldn't have to retire.

He brooded during the two days that followed. On the second evening Jumper, who was an expert seaman, came to him as he stood his trick at the wheel.

"Tomorrow we come to Bongo Bongo," he said.

"Well, what about it?"

"Me no like work with Lord. Me no like sell bang-bang to Japanese feller. We turn back, captain, yes?"

"I've told you no!" roared M'Shane. "What's the matter with you, Jumper?"

"Me British subject. Me no like sell to Jap feller."

"Jumper, I've tried to overcome your scruples the best I know how. I told you we're getting at those damned Yanks and Aussies. I've told you there'll be more money than you've ever seen in your life."

"But you Christian feller, captain. Me no understand," wailed Jumper.

"Melad, is this mutiny?"

"No mutiny, captain. Only me no understand," Jumper lamented.

"Maybe you'll understand when you see that gold," snarled M'Shane. "Get over to this wheel, and stop muddling up your black head with things that's too deep for you."

THERE was plenty of evidence of the presence of the Japanese at Bongo Bongo. M'Shane could hear the roar of artillery fire before he came in sight of the little bay. Then he saw a line of smoke along the ridge of the hills behind the little settlement, where the Australian shells were bursting.

The Japs were answering. They still had ammunition enough for that. But they were waiting anxiously for M'Shane. That was shown by the joyous wavings from the deck of the destroyer, that escorted the *Albatross* into the harbor, and stood by while she was made fast to the little dock by half-a-score of Jap soldiers.

Jap troops swarmed in the settlement. A company was marching up the heights along a dirt road. Everywhere was bustle and activity. The rim of sunken barges along the shore, and the burned out storehouses along the sea-front paid tribute to visits of the Australian air force, and showed that M'Shane had arrived at a crucial moment.

A Japanese officer was waiting, with his staff, and with him was Lord, his black beard tinged with gray now, his eyes as shifty and his face as villainous as ever.

"Howdy, M'Shane. I reckoned you'd get through. Meet Captain Minami."

The little Jap officer hissed through his teeth, and gave M'Shane his hand. "I am glad you have come," he said. "We are in need of your cargo. You had no trouble?"

"Held up at Lowela," M'Shane grunted. "Little fool of an Aussie officer. Never mind that. Here I am. Where's my money?"

"You shall have him," answered Minami. "I give you much thanks in the name of my Emperor. I shall look at the cargo."

"Go ahead," answered M'Shane. "I'll show you my bill of lading. Had a devil of a time. I'm shipping coconuts."

(Continued on page 66)



Piledriver George Good was a miracle of healthy sanity! Shipwrecks, enemy attacks, sunburn, near starvation—But when the little yellow-belly thumbed his nose at the horizon . . . That was carrying things too far!

BRACING himself against the surf, Able Seaman Abe Lenos waded ashore. Behind him, he heard the landlubber panting and blowing and muttering to himself, in his eternal landlubber's dissatisfaction with the sea.

"Water in my nose again!" the landlubber grumbled. "Pshaw! Su-u-ure be

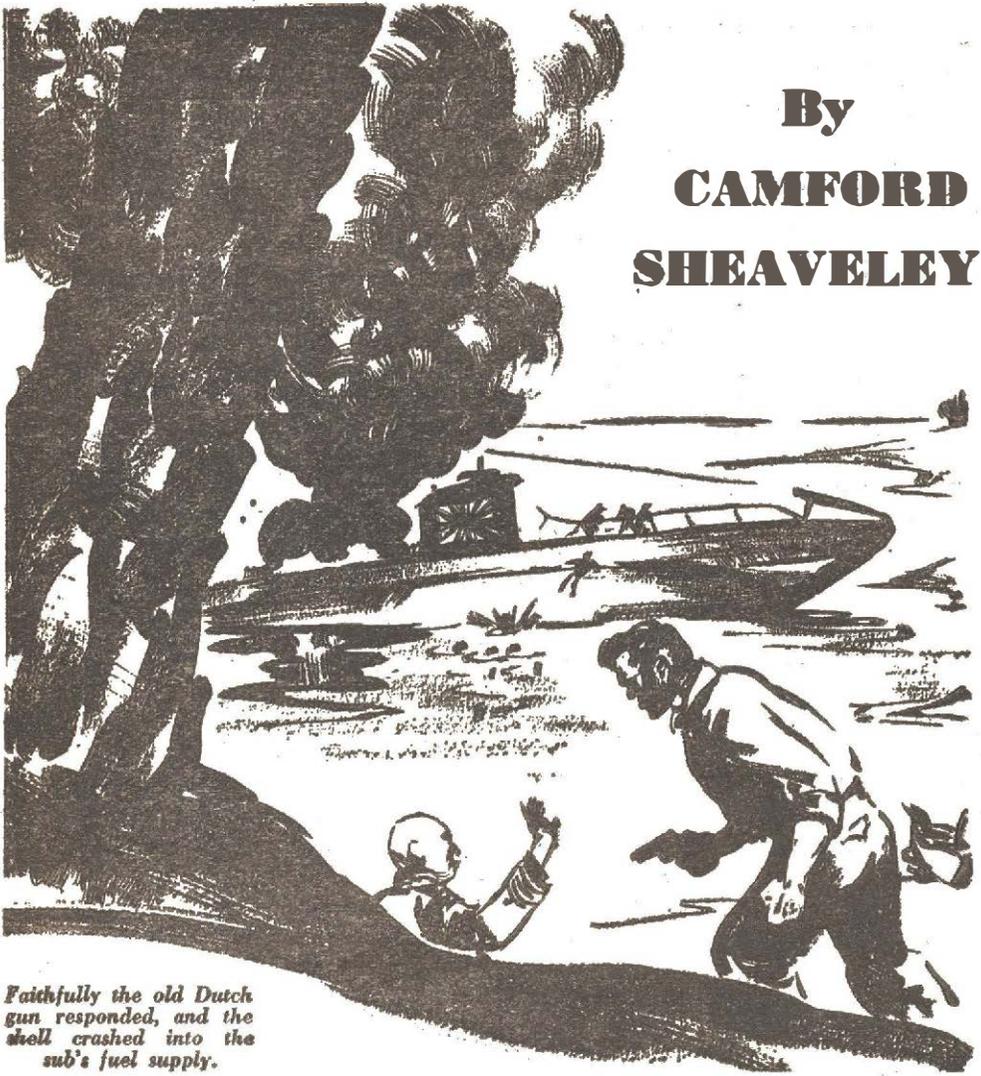
glad to get shet of this here ocean."

Reaching dry land, Abe threw himself down on the sand, sobbing in exhaustion and relief. The landlubber did likewise. Because he had faithfully imitated everything Abe Lenos did in the last five days, Piledriver Foreman George Good still lived. Yet he grumbled—grumbled at torpedoes and shipwreck and sunburn and near-starvation—complained in his landlubber's way as though these things were minor irritations that should have been corrected before he set sail.

Abe's first thought at reaching safety was that the man was a marvel. No awe, no panic, no superstition. Just a good, healthy discontent at being shipwrecked. Saints, what sublime sanity!

His second thought was to look back

By
**CAMFORD
SHEAVELEY**



*Faithfully the old Dutch
gun responded, and the
shell crashed into the
sub's fuel supply.*

Never Thumb Your Nose at the Foreman

and see if the ghastly, ghostly broken bow of the *Hetty Mons* still followed them.

It did.

The seaman heard George Good swear mildly; but as for himself, he was so overcome that he buried his face in his arms and said a prayer. Oh Holy Mary, what does the old rip of a wreck want—?

Yet not even prayer could relieve him of the unease he felt at the thing he saw. With his own eyes he had witnessed the sinking of the ship, yet here was half of her come back to life.

"It's—darn funny," George Good panted.

Abe smiled his dark smile. Funny!

He thought back over the past five days.

She had been an old ship at the start of the war. They were southbound through Macassar Straits with a load of construction equipment and a building crew aboard, when news of Pearl Harbor came to them. The crew had warmed up the old Dutch three-incher on the fore-castle head, and doubled the watches.

He remembered the strain of that desperate run southward. The *Hetty* had needed speed most of all, and she had no speed. A cracked cylinder head held her in Adang Bay until the advance guard of the Jap conquest caught up with them.

They had not even the distinction of going down under the attack of a first-class man of war. A crippled Jap sub, running for cover itself, came upon the crippled ship at sundown. Abe remembered the cruelly hopeless feeling of sweating over the rickety old Dutch gun, while the sub measured her for the kill.

It was probably a training vessel, a pretreaty hulk dragged out of retirement to do its bit in spreading the glory of the Rising Sun. A ship had no honor from such a death. It was murder, it was execution, it was shameful beyond description to have to wallow there without power while the Jap made ready his last torpedo.

An angry British destroyer came tearing in, too late, and picked up most of the survivors. The Jap had already submerged. The *Hetty* had broken across the beam as the torpedo tore into her vener-

able guts, and both halves pitched under the waves.

THEY had saved themselves, those two, by clinging to a piling which bobbed up after she sank. They saw the Britisher steam off at last, strafed by a flight of gleeful Zeroes. They looked at each other across the piling, and knew themselves for dead men.

The sub came up again. Its skipper, a squat, parrichy Jap with a shaved head, came out on deck and thumbed his nose at the horizon into which the British destroyer had fled. Abe remembered the landlubber's howl of rage: "You potbellied freak, use your own insults. That's American!"

How he had grumbled at the Jap's brass in appropriating the traditional American gesture of contempt! Such a divine sanity!

Sometime during the night, the Jap sub vanished. The triangular black bulk which met their eyes when the sun rose again was no Jap. It was the *Hetty* come to life again—or half of her. Caught in the same current, it came near enough for them to make positive identification.

Through thirst, and sun, and heat, and sickness; through delirium and madness and pain the risen wreck had dogged them. On the fifth day they had spied white water, and it had taken all their strength to cling to the piling as it plunged through the reef and hurled itself upon the tiny beach. There was no looking back then, but Abe thought surely the old *Hetty's* pitiful broken bow would founder at the first blow. That it could actually follow them through was incredible.

Yet—there she was.

"I'll know how to talk to that baby again if I ever meet him," George Good panted at last, lifting his head from the warm sand. "He didn't learn that in Tokio. If he wants to insult people, let him do it in his own monkey language."

He had driven piling all his life, from Lake Ponchartrain to Fort Peck, and he had hired out on this foreign job for seven hundred and twenty dollars a month. He was a good foreman, and just

the sort of man to worry, in the face of death at sea, because a Jap had thumbed his nose at an English-speaking ally.

Abe Lenos smiled his dark smile and said nothing. A man had his fancies and his prejudices, imprinted upon him by the land and crowds, but one would think a shipwreck would knock some of them out of him.

All of Abe's Greek and French ancestors had been sailors, and nine years in the Long Beach schools had not weaned the seaman's fatalistic superstition out of him. Therefore he smiled at the pile-driver man's indignation. Wars came and went, men killed each other and stole whole continents from one another, but the old green ocean had her way at the end.

"It's a sign," he whispered at last, raising himself from the sand. "Bad or good, I can't tell, but it's a sign."

"How do you mean, sign?" George answered. "Why, near as I can tell, she came up again, and that's all there is to it. If it's a sign, it ought to be a good one. Half a ship is better than no ship."

"For what purpose?" Abe said darkly. "It looks bad to me. If we were meant to be saved, the destroyed would have saved us. The ship is a ghost."

"What's bad about it?"

"The shape is bad."

"What's wrong with the shape?"

"That pile-driver of yours. It's slid forward onto the fo'c'sle head. It's got a look to it like an old woman stooping—"

He shivered.

"Aw!" George exclaimed. "My top lofts are down, kid, but if you knew pile-drivers like I do, you'd know there was nothing funny about it. Why, I could rig her in forty minutes! And say—there's one of the cat tractors, I swear. See that yellow thing?"

He pointed. He tried to say more, but his swollen tongue clove to his teeth. Somehow, in their jubilation at reaching land, they had acquired a fresh supply of saliva. It suddenly ran dry.

They helped each other to their feet for a look around, turning their backs on the stranded wreck of the *Hetty*. They had landed on an island—a tiny one, they

saw at first glance. "Ain't hardly a patch," George grumbled, through wooden lips.

To the west there was a gentle rise of bare, sparkling-white sand, perhaps a quarter of a mile in length. At its end was a windblown knoll upon which stood a few shabby palms, their knees buried in rank vegetation of some kind. Beyond that, the ocean gleamed again.

At no point was the island more than a few hundred yards wide. It was barely a sliver of sand, an unsubstantial spine projecting out of the encroaching ocean, ringed by coral and blown lengthwise by the endless, monotonous wind.

"Come on," George urged. "Green stuff—waffer, waffer up 'fere."

Hand in hand, they stumbled up the slope to the palms, and there found a spring of brackish water. So desperate was their thirst that it did not seem strange to see a drinking-can on a twig beside it. They drank, and felt better at once. They sat down then, waiting for the spring to fill again.

Suddenly their saliva came back.

"Somebody's been here before us," George said, tapping the can. "Navy party, probably. I'd say Dutch or British. It was the British we were going to build that seaplane base for."

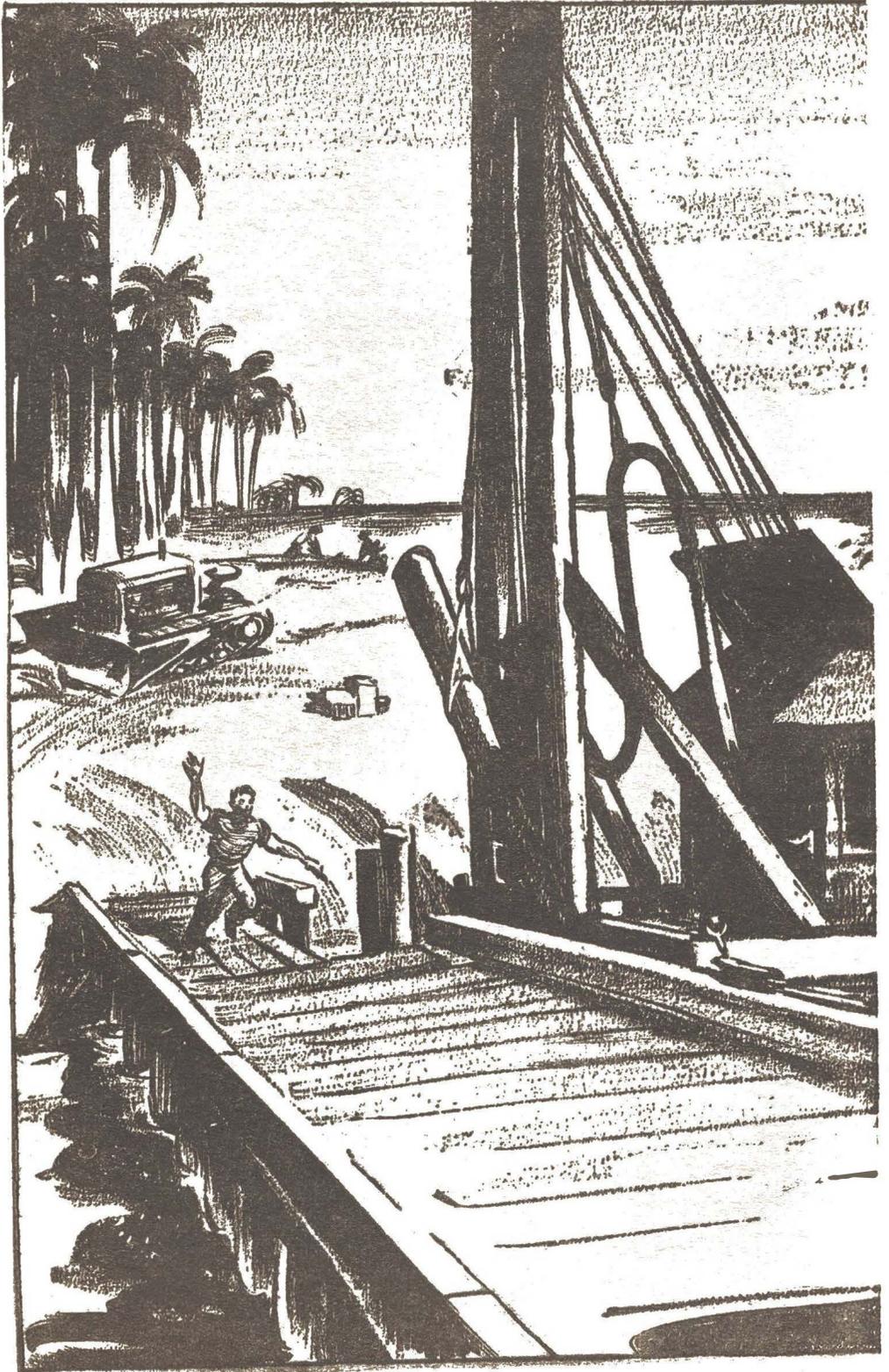
Abe took the can.

"Not Dutch. Not British," he said bitterly. "Look at the hen-tracks stamped into the bottom of that can. Jap!"

"Aw, hell!" said George. "Oh well—let's have a look around. Maybe they left a few canned fish heads."

THEY went to the westward edge of the palm clump and looked out. Here there was no gentle incline. The wind had blown out a cavity, the bottom of which was a flat, hard bed of packed sand some twenty or thirty feet below them. It was not more than two or three hundred yards across, and beyond it there was only the thin sickle of a sandbar—the end of dry land.

To the north, the knoll curved around this little pocket in a protective, curved dune, creating the effect of a tiny harbor. Here, then, was where the Japs had come ashore. Certain it was that no small



Incredulously the American commander viewed the scene before him.



boat could live in the surf where they had washed ashore. Still, when he raised his eyes he saw higher reefs, whiter water, a short way beyond the cove.

"Kid!" he heard George Good shout, as palms, dunes, and sky reeled.

Then all was dark. The last thing he recalled was the horrible nausea as his empty stomach toiled over the spring water, and the grim, whiskery, worried face of the piledriver foreman bending over him.

When he awoke it was dark, and George had a little fire going merrily between them. The foreman was sitting with his arms around his knees, his jaws working on a splinter. He seemed pleased to see Abe awake.

"Too much for you, I guess. Well, here's a bite to eat, if your guts can stand it. I swam to the shipwreck and brought in some groceries while you were asleep. And here's a little snort of sweet wine. I remembered seeing the cook hide it in the firebox of my piledriver. A swig of this will make a hairy ape of you. Open up!"

The hot, sweetish wine trickled down his throat, fired him with a new strength. He sat up. George leaned over and stirred a can on the fire.

"It's not much, but it's strengthenin'," he said cheerfully. "Salmon and corned beef, cooked in spring water and wine. I tried some, and it's like eating stewed dragon, as Pappy used to say. Dip in—I whittled you out a spoon while you slept."

They ate, and Abe felt better. He heard George prattling contentedly about signs, and he wondered that his own apprehension had lighted. He looked up.

There was a half moon, newly risen. By its light, Abe saw the bow of the *Hetty Moss*, still firmly grounded. The tide lapped at her gently. She seemed firm and solid and comforting.

"I know why the old heifer came up again," George said. "She dived off her sacked cement and machinery but the piling were cabled tight, and they buoyed her up. How long do you reckon we'll be here?"

"No way of telling," Abe answered. "I don't know where we are. In peace times,

I'd say they'd be out after us in a week. But in war—"

"I was just wondering if we wouldn't be able to save some of that stuff out there," George said slowly. "I looked it over—the cat and the driver are in good shape, and there's lots of interestin' stuff we could haul ashore. It—it would be something to do, and I'd like to save some of that high-priced equipment."

"For the Japs?"

"Not necessarily. It'd be something to do," George said doggedly. "We'll feel better, busy."

"All right."

It was too cold to sleep, and having decided to salvage they set at it. They spent the rest of the night rolling piling up the beach, out of tide's reach. As George had said, it passed the time. It seemed foolish to a man who knew the ocean, to strive so for a few chunks of wood. But at dawn, Abe looked out at the ship, and there came over him a feeling that the night had not been wasted. Perhaps the landlubber had read the sign right after all.

They swam out when the sun was high, and went aboard. The cat tractor was marvelously whole. It had broken its restraining cables and started off, but had fouled its bulldozer blade on the sad old Dutch gun, halting its plunge. So far as they could determine, it was none the worse for its soaking. They sat down and ate again, and Abe found himself warming to the piledriver man's enthusiasm.

"She'd run, all right. These Diesels are tough. If I only had a little fuel for her, I'd pop her, just to hear the clatter."

"There's two or three drums," Abe said, pointing to where they had wedged into the prone upper frame of the piledriver.

"Sure, but she needs gasoline for her starting motor, to warm up." George raised his head and stopped chewing. "Say!" he added, thoughtfully. "If there were Japs here, they didn't come in canoes. Maybe there's gas buried down there someplace. Let's have a look."

THEY swam ashore. The tracks of the Jap party had long since weathered out, but by probing the sand with sticks they uncovered an unexpected wealth.

They grew warm and excited, they shouted almost hysterically at each other.

The sand was a veritable treasure trove! They dragged out ten bags of brown rice, wrapped in waterproof roofing paper of an American make, and hidden under a bare six inches of sand. Next came a set of delicate surveying instruments. Swiss made, but stowed in a quaint, hand-carved Oriental case. Not far from them was a light-caliber Jap machine gun with a dozen heavy cases of ammunition.

In the same hole was something else—something that stirred them more to anger than the guns. It was a pile of short-handled railroad shovels, still wired together in bunches of six—still bearing the shipping tags of the American Naval base at Guam. They looked at each other bleakly, and Abe felt some of the landlubber's hot wrath.

"They moved fast," he whispered.

"Maybe too fast," George growled. "We'll repossess this stuff like a finance company. Maybe we can mess things up for them a little, anyway. Any dirty son of a gun that steals American shovels, and then thumbs his ape nose like an American right out in the middle of the ocean—"

He fell silent, and took up one of the shovels. Abe took another, and they set grimly to work.

It was noon before they found the precious gasoline dump, halfway up the dune. It was poor stuff, probably intended for old-fashioned, low-compression marine motors—but it was gasoline. They perspired for another hour moving the store of five-gallon cans to the other side of the island, just in case! As they trudged out of the pit with the last can, they suddenly fell through the sand, uncovering still another cache of similar cans.

"Diesel fuel," said George, sniffing at one. "Those babies had plans for this place. Diesels mean heavy equipment."

He squinted around professionally. "What a sweetheart of a base! Level off a runway for land planes, run a row of piling out to tie seaplanes to, and you've got it."

Abe nodded.

"They used to say the Japs had lots of little bootleg bases here," he said. He went on, to tell that whole crews were said to have been landed from Jap subs at night, to construct, under the very noses of the Dutch and British navies, a chain of makeshift repair and refueling depots. "But nobody could ever prove anything," he finished.

"We can now," George said, soberly. "Come on. We've got work to do. If they can do it, we can too."

Neither man dared to voice the audacious plan that had suggested itself. They returned to the wreck, carrying gasoline, and worked silently on the tractor. Toward evening they got it started. With George at the controls, it pulled itself free from the gun. The silence that fell again when the motor died was heavy.

Together, they examined the gun. It had crumpled on its three legs, and its muzzle mourned down toward the deck. There was one shell in the breech.

"It looks plumb stove up," George said, dubiously. "Let's pitch it over the side."

"I learned to handle it," Abe answered. "The carriage is shot and she won't traverse, but the breech and bore are sound. She's a good gun at short range. You'll need artillery to defend your airbase," he added slyly.

George grinned.

"Okay," he agreed, turning pink. "Take your gun, kid. Me—I'm going to have a look at my pet pilot-driver."

The big landlubber whistled as he worked over the driver. By dark he had it cut loose and ready to move ashore, its boiler cleaned and its fuel jets working. Abe had dismounted the gun, and had it lashed to a short length of piling near the rail. But as the cool night breeze sprang up, they discovered that they were unutterably weary.

They agreed to sleep aboard that night. They took shelter under a damp tarpaulin, and shivered themselves asleep. George Good's last recollection was of the seaman's mane of black hair playing in the wind that whipped over the deck . . .

(Continued on page 74)

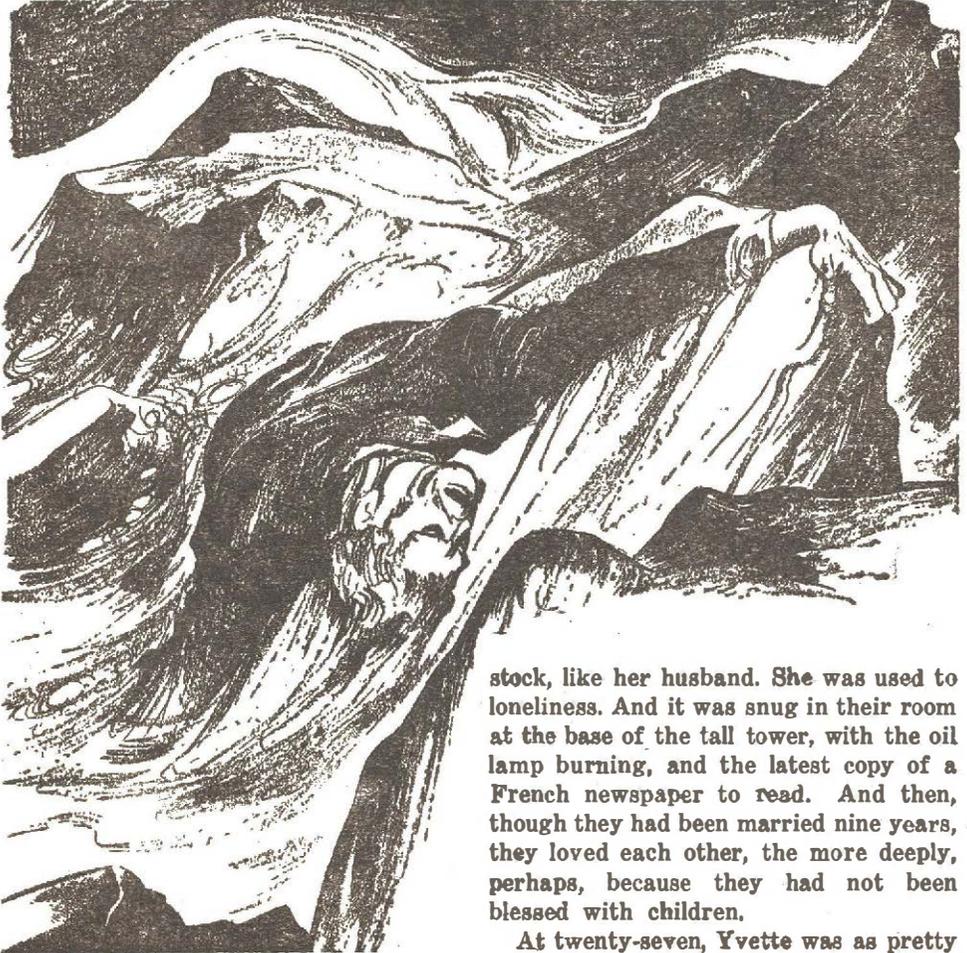
The Dawn Tide

By LEW MERRILL

IT was not the loneliness of the lighthouse that Yvette dreaded, for in calm weather it was an easy row to the village on the north shore of the St. Lawrence, and the light was well cared for by her crippled husband, Armand. He had lost the use of his leg in the last war, and the Government had made him lighthouse keeper. He could hobble quite easily up the long, winding stairway, with the aid of his stout crutch, though usually it was Yvette who tended the light atop the towering structure.

It was not the loneliness. It was the constant flight of the sea-birds against the light that distressed Yvette. Great gulls, and many other kinds whose names she did not know, would beat themselves to death against the glass, and fall to the rocks below. Sometimes the sea, which always smashed upon the rocks, would sweep them away, and sometimes it would pile them up on the big, flat rock at the base of the tower, where Yvette would find them in the morning.

She was of hardy French Canadian



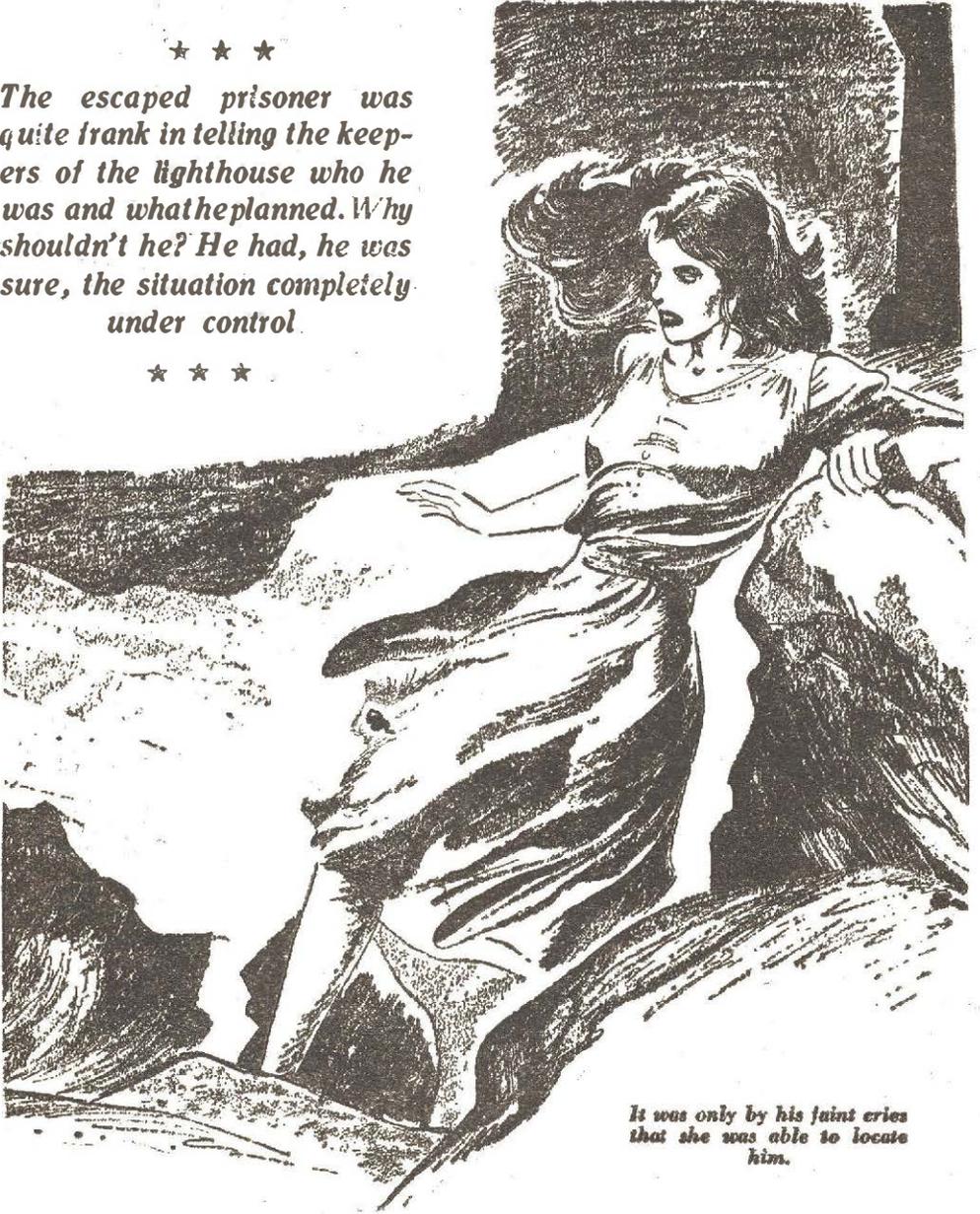
stock, like her husband. She was used to loneliness. And it was snug in their room at the base of the tall tower, with the oil lamp burning, and the latest copy of a French newspaper to read. And then, though they had been married nine years, they loved each other, the more deeply, perhaps, because they had not been blessed with children.

At twenty-seven, Yvette was as pretty a girl as you could have found anywhere

★ ★ ★

The escaped prisoner was quite frank in telling the keepers of the lighthouse who he was and what he planned. Why shouldn't he? He had, he was sure, the situation completely under control.

★ ★ ★



It was only by his faint cries that she was able to locate him.

along the North Shore, with her gray eyes, and hair black as the raven, that she wore coiled up on her head in great waves, or sometimes let hang far down below her waist. Armand adored her hair, and for his sake she had never cut it.

Life was uneventful, and therefore happy. Sometimes Yvette felt proud, when she saw the great liners and troopships sweep majestically up and down the St. Lawrence, on their way to and from Quebec. She would think of the boys in uni-

form, and the nurses, going overseas. That was when she felt proud to think that she and her husband had charge of the lives of those young people.

Every day now the ships were coming and going. The returning ones carried many prisoners of war, but still Yvette felt it her duty to guard their lives. It was on account of the sea-birds that she suffered.

The lighthouse stood at the edge of a treacherous sunken ledge on which many

a ship had piled up in the old days. As its lens revolved, it shot forth its insistent message. One long flash, then two shorter ones. A pause—then long, short, short. When the incoming ships sighted those flashes, rounding Pointe à Pic, they veered into the safe mid-channel.

“SO more prisoners are coming,” said Yvette, looking over her husband’s shoulder, as he read *La Soleil*. “Poor boys! They may be Germans, but still it must be terrible for them in this strange land, as prisoners.”

“Oh, they are better off here than if they had to give their lives on the battlefields,” answered Armand. “And there will probably be many more of them tomorrow, for I heard in the village that the *Princess Elizabeth* is on her way to Quebec.”

“The *Princess Elizabeth*?” exclaimed Yvette.

“They call her Queen of the Seas. She is one of the largest vessels afloat. Yes, they say that she must be bringing prisoners from Europe by the thousand, for I hear that fresh camps are being constructed for them. I got this from La-Rue, whose brother-in-law is engaged in construction work. Of course it is a secret, even though the vessel is safe, once she is in the Gulf.”

“How I should love to see her!” said Yvette. “If she passes, and I am asleep, you must wake me, Armand. It is wonderful to think that we are responsible for those great ships, and for so many lives.”

Armand went on reading his paper. He was a slow-spoken man, and his imagination was not easily aroused. But Yvette had loved the sea and the ships from childhood. Her friends had pitied her, marrying a lighthouse-keeper, but Yvette had never known a moment of regret. Now, her imagination stirred, she began to pace the floor, and at last opened the door and stood outside.

It was a clear night. The only sound was the dashing of the surf against the rocks. From the mainland the lights of the village twinkled, but between the village and the lighthouse was that little strip of treacherous sea.

Their boat lay on the flat rock. If it was calm tomorrow, Yvette was thinking she would row across to the mainland, to buy herself that new frock that old Legrand was offering at a tempting reduction.

Suddenly, above the lash of the waves, she thought she heard the groan of a man.

SHE started, and listened. It came again. A man was lying on the rocks beneath her. She heard a faint call for help.

Frightened as she was, she kept her head, and, kicking off her shoes, she began clambering down the rocks. In the darkness, it was only by the faint cries that she was able to locate the man’s position, and at last she came upon him, lying at the water’s edge, with the spray of the waves dashing over him.

She stooped down, and tried to raise him. He was heavy, but with an effort she succeeded in dislodging one of his knees from a rock in which it had been caught. He managed to get up on his feet. He did not seem to be badly hurt, but he was evidently exhausted, for his breath came in short, gasping sobs, and he leaned heavily upon her for support.

“*Gott sei dank*,” he muttered.

Yvette didn’t know what language that was, but she knew it was neither French nor English.

“You are safe now,” she said. “Try to walk, with my help. See, it is not far.”

Then the light of the oil lamp inside the living-room flashed upon them as Armand opened the door. He had discovered Yvette’s absence, and had gone to look for her. That habit of hers, of going out on the rocks at night, was a dangerous one. He was going to scold her, in his mild way. But his eyes widened when he saw her laboring up the rocks, with the man leaning upon her shoulder.

In the flash of the lamp, Yvette saw the man’s face. It was that of a youth, but it was an evil face, sullen and masklike, and the swift, appreciative glance of his eyes, as he looked at her, made her shudder.

In another moment Armand was beside them, and together they got the man inside the lighthouse.

WRAPPED in blankets, in the bedroom above the living-room and kitchen, and aided by liberal potions of the brandy that the lighthouse-keeper kept for emergencies, the rescued man soon showed signs of recovery from his exposure. Armand had ascertained that neither limbs nor ribs were broken.

Now he had fallen into a doze, and, in the room below, the lighthouse-keeper and his wife were conferring together.

"He is not a Canaven, that is sure," said Armand. "His hair is the color of coarse flax. He might be an Englishman—but how would an Englishman come to be lying on the rocks? He must have swum the channel in the darkness. It is a wonder he is alive."

"He is not an Englishman," answered Yvette. "I heard him speak some words in a language that I have never heard before. Do you think," she queried, "that he might be one of the German war prisoners, escaped from the camp? He might have traveled through the bush."

"I have thought that from the beginning," answered Armand.

"But what shall we do?" queried his wife.

"I have not thought about that. If he is a war prisoner, it is our duty to surrender him to the Government."

"Poor boy," said Yvette, sighing. "It would be hard for him to have to go back. Perhaps he has a mother in his own country."

"He is better off here than back in the war again. Besides, that is not for us to judge."

"But how could you hand him over to the Government, Armand? Besides, he has come to us for help and shelter. No, Armand, we could not do that. It may be," she went on sagely, "that, if we do not question him, he will tell us nothing, and then we shall have no responsibility in the matter."

Armand, slow-spoken and deliberate, said nothing. Yvette looked into his face, and tried to read his thoughts. At last, feeling her scrutiny, he turned his eyes toward hers.

"If he is a prisoner of war, we must give him up," he said. "How it could be

done, I don't know. But I am a servant of the Government, and my duty is clear."

Silence fell again. They were so absorbed in their thoughts that they were unaware of the presence of the stranger, until they looked up, to see him standing before them.

He was dressed in Armand's Sunday suit, and he held the bottle of brandy, which was half full. He made them a mocking bow.

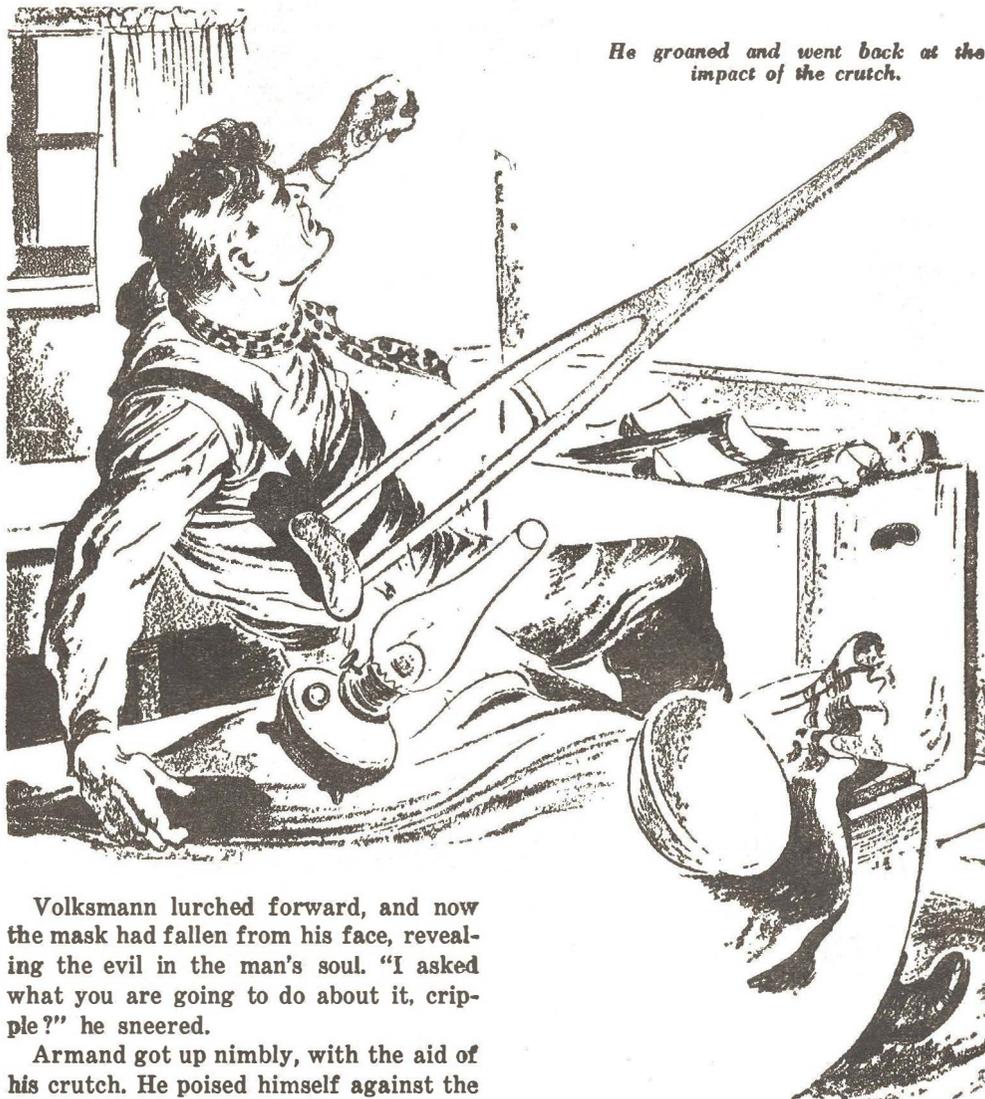
"**M**Y name is Volksmann," he said, in guttural French. "I overheard the discussion. Yes, it is quite true. I was a prisoner of war. I escaped from the camp three days ago, and made my way to the coast through the bush. I was a good swimmer in Germany, and it was easy for me to swim that little strip of water. I obtained a good meal from a housewife, who was, I think, a little alarmed at my appearance. I admit all this because—what are you going to do about it?"

Armand shrugged his shoulders. "It is my duty to hand you over to the Government," he answered. "But I am neither a soldier nor a guard. I am a lighthouse-keeper. If you choose to disappear the way you came, you can solve your own problem, my friend."

"Why, that is an excellent solution," answered Volksmann. "You have a fine large boat, which will take me across the Gulf. On the south shore, I can make my way to the United States. There was difficulty in obtaining a boat in that dirty little village on the mainland. In fact, a pack of your mangy French Canadians chased me, after the housewife screamed.

"But I knew there must be a boat at the lighthouse, and so I swam here. Doubtless those French idiots think I drowned. So there is the solution. But I am not going to risk my life among those rocks at night, nor chance capture by day. So tomorrow night, after sundown, you shall row me across. Meanwhile I shall remain your guest."

"But I cannot take you in the lighthouse boat," said Armand. "That is Government property. Besides, I may not leave my post—"



He groaned and went back at the impact of the crutch.

Volksmann lurched forward, and now the mask had fallen from his face, revealing the evil in the man's soul. "I asked what you are going to do about it, cripple?" he sneered.

Armand got up nimbly, with the aid of his crutch. He poised himself against the table, and held the crutch slantwise. There was no need of an answer.

His menacing attitude seemed to cow the bully, who drew back.

"I am an officer in the Nazy army," he said. "I do not listen to threats. But there is no reason why we should not talk this over amicably." He tilted the bottle to his lips, and took a long gulp. "Poor stuff," he said, "but one can't expect good German liquor here."

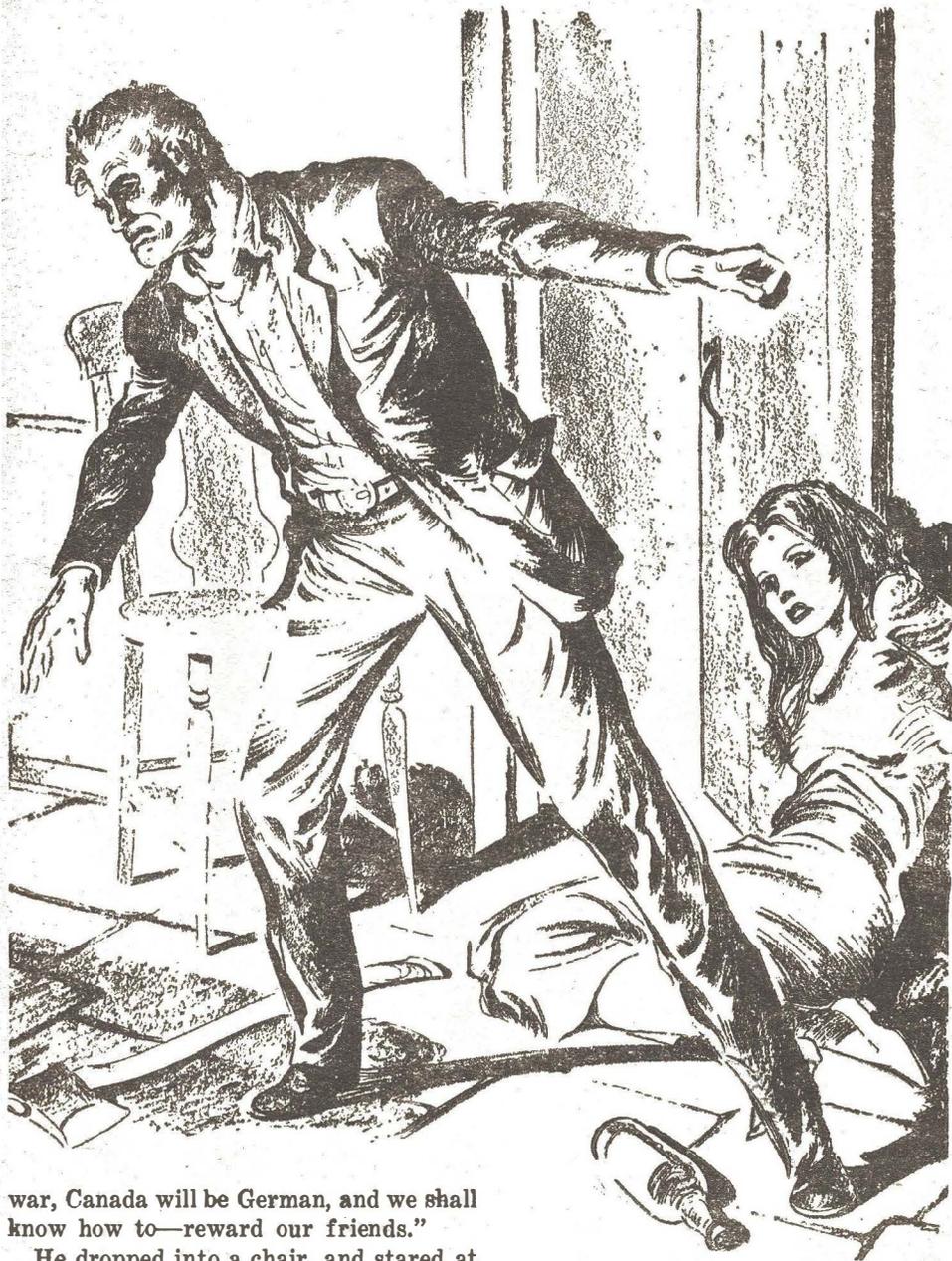
Armand and Yvette had drawn close together at the end of the table near the door. Volksmann laughed boisterously.

"You good people have no cause to be afraid of me," he said. "I am a kindly man. Moreover, listen to this: there is an

organization in New York that pays good money to all who assist soldiers of the Fatherland to escape. What would you good folks think of a thousand dollars? More money than you have ever seen in your lives, I'll bet. I can promise you that—one thousand dollars in American money.

"And, as for the boat, why I will chance the voyage alone, if you will direct me where the reefs are. But the boat I must have."

Volksmann laughed again, and drained the bottle. "Yes, you will be richly rewarded," he hiccoughed, "for, after the



war, Canada will be German, and we shall know how to—reward our friends.”

He dropped into a chair, and stared at them with a vacuous leer. “How about it?” he asked thickly.

Armand said nothing, and Volksmann’s eyes closed. He opened them again. “How about it?” he repeated. “You take me—in boat—much money for you—soon as I get—New York—”

Volksmann began to snore, and still Yvette and Armand faced him in silence, she with her hand upon her husband’s arm. The snores stopped, Volksmann mut-

tered disjointedly, and then began to snore again.

“What are we going to do?” whispered Yvette. “He is a devil. I am so frightened.”

“I cannot leave my post to summon aid, particularly since the *Princess Elizabeth* might pass up the channel tonight. And I cannot let you row to the mainland alone, among the rocks—”

"But I know every rock between here and the shore, Armand," said Yvette.

"But not at night. No, that is impossible."

"Yes," she agreed, "it is impossible. I will not leave you here alone with that devil."

Volksmann's eyes opened once more, and the look in them was so malevolent that the girl could hardly suppress a cry. Her grip tightened on her husband's arm.

THE light in the room seemed to have dimmed. There was an emanation of evil from the hunched up, snoring form in the chair. The shadows of Yvette and Armand, on the walls, looked like motionless black giants, waiting tensely. And the lighthouse beams shot out incessantly, throwing their reflections into the little room—long, short, short; long, short short.

Yvette crept from her husband's side and went into the little kitchen. In the dark she found what she was looking for—the meat-knife, sharp as a razor, which she had used to prepare the meal that night. Her hand closed upon it, and she went back. She held it out to Armand, and her eyes were black pools in the lamp-light.

"Yvette, you are mad!" he whispered. "We cannot kill a sleeping man."

"It has got to be done," Yvette whispered back. "We cannot be punished for protecting our lives, and the property of the Government. Take it, if you are a man, Armand."

A stertorous snore from Volksmann resounded through the room. Armand shook his head. "No," he said, "that is impossible."

"Then I shall do it!" She clutched at the handle of the knife. Never, in the nine years of their married life, had there been any physical combat between them, but now she wrestled desperately with him for possession of the implement. Armand was struggling to keep Yvette from cutting her fingers. She didn't know that one of his was cut to the bone. . . . At last he succeeded in wrenching the knife away. Her hands dropped limply to her sides.

"That is not the answer," said Armand. "Still, it would be well to remove temptation from us—and him."

He opened the door and sent the knife clattering upon the rocks. He closed it again. Yvette had uttered a faint cry, but now she relapsed into silence, and they both watched the sleeper, whose face looked still more vicious as he snored in the chair. After a while, Yvette said: "I'll go up and look at the light."

THE mantle of the light, on the railed platform at the top of the tower, was lit by incandescent kerosene oil vapor, fed by a pipe that ran down to the storage tank in the basement. The float containing the rotating apparatus was immersed in an annular trough of mercury. There was also a diaphone siren working by means of compressed air which could be started instantly. Thus everything functioned automatically, but the rules required inspection at regular periods, night and day.

On this night the Gulf was singularly clear. Standing on the wind-whipped platform, Yvette uttered a prayer that God would protect them in their extremity. She was too dazed with terror to be able to form any plan. She was afraid that Armand, in his stubbornness, would refuse to let the German have the boat. She looked forward with terror to the man's presence in the tower all the next day. What could she do? She almost regretted that Armand had not used the knife.

From the platform she could see lights twinkling far across the Gulf, on the south shore. In front of her was the gray stretch of the great river. And overhead the sea-birds were wheeling constantly, and crying, as they always did when the light was lit. Always, in the end, one of the creatures would dash itself against the glass, and fall to its death upon the rocks below. The superstitious said that they were the souls of mariners lost at sea, but Yvette knew this was not true; nevertheless there was something almost human in the pathos of the gulls, flying around and around the light, as if they sought its warmth and illumination.

He went over the rail as if flung from a catapult.



But here was peace, and the irruption of the German into the tower was something not to be borne. Yvette was making her decision now. She could not tolerate him in the lighthouse any more. He had swum from the mainland; the night was calm, and he could swim back again. She was going to get that knife. Her terror increased her resolution, and she went slowly down the steps again.

But when she heard voices, on reaching the bedroom, on the second story, she paused for an instant to gather courage. Then she went down the last flight.

"I HAVE no more brandy," Armand was saying. "You had the only bottle that is here."

"You're lying," shouted the other. "You've got plenty more hidden away. Trust a Frenchman for that. Bring out another bottle, and then we'll talk business."

"I have no more brandy," repeated Armand stubbornly.

And then Yvette saw them. Armand was leaning against the door, his crutch in his hand, and Volksmann was standing in the middle of the room. He turned quickly at the sound of her light step on the stone floor.

His laugh was bestial. "I want brandy," he shouted. "If you had given me no brandy, maybe I could do without it now. But I have what you call the overhang. I must have brandy. Come, you know where it is kept."

"But my husband speaks the truth—there is no more brandy," said Yvette. "We had only one bottle, for emergencies. You have drunk it all. Now go and lie down, and I will make you some coffee."

Volksmann roared. "Well, then, there is no brandy," he cried. "But there are other things. You are lovely, madame, too lovely for that miserable cripple."

He ambled drunkenly toward her and snatched at her arm. Yvette screamed, and darted past him into the little kitchen. Into her mind had come the thought of the long-handled axe, which she and Armand used to cut up the driftwood which they burned in the stove. She found it

and snatched it up, just as Volksmann was upon her.

He drew back, snarling at her—snarling like a wild cat, like the lynx that Armand had trapped the winter before. Stained yellow teeth showed between his lips. He was crouching for a spring. Yvette swung the axe frantically.

He ducked, and the blow spent itself in the air, the force of it twisting the axe out of the girl's hands. Next instant the cripple's crutch had dropped upon the German's shoulder, and with a yell of fury Volksmann turned upon Armand, and dealt him a blow that sent him stumbling to the floor.

Volksmann snatched the crutch out of the lighthouse-keeper's hand, and struck him with the heavy armpiece. Armand groaned and collapsed. A little trickle of blood began to thread his temple.

THE axe! The axe! Yvette stooped and grasped at it. It was in her hand again when Volksmann turned on her. She wrestled with him for it, but all her desperate strength was puny in comparison to his. He had it now, poised it to swing. Yvette stood stock-still, bending her head to receive the blow. Nothing mattered any more.

But Volksmann was laughing. "No, no, I am no executioner. I don't behead pretty women," he shouted. "You and me will have a good time together. Only bring out the brandy," he added, in a wheedling voice.

She knew the man was insane now. He stood there, grinning at her, while Armand lay dying at his feet. She broke past him, and bent over her husband. Armand was still alive. He was stunned and partly unconscious, but his lips were moving. Volksmann caught the girl by the arm and swung her around.

"Brandy, I said!" he shouted.

"There is no more," she screamed. "What harm have we done to you, except to take you in and help you, when you were freezing to death out on the rocks?"

"Madame, I mean no harm," said Volksmann, almost in a whine. "If you say there is no more brandy, I must do without it. Your husband attacked me, and I

had to defend myself. You do not understand us Germans. We are a peaceful and affectionate people. Now let us come to an understanding. This fellow will recover by morning, and meanwhile you and I will have the lighthouse to ourselves. And tomorrow we shall arrange about the boat. Maybe, if you are nice to me, I take you with me to New York. So?"

He caught her in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers. A wave of nausea ran through her; she shivered, and for a moment felt helpless. Then, with a supreme effort, she tore herself from his grasp, and began to run up the winding steps of the lighthouse tower.

She didn't know what impulse possessed her; she knew that there was no escape that way. There was neither key nor lock to the bedroom. Somehow that beacon of light, streaming out across the black Gulf seemed in some manner a refuge for her.

She heard Volksmann shouting, and blundering up the steps behind her. Always behind her, through the eternity of a nightmare, stumbling, shouting, cursing as he followed in pursuit of her.

NOW Yvette was upon the railed platform at the top, with the sea-birds swooping around her, crouching, desperate, at bay. And then she almost forgot her own terrors as she saw the lights of a vessel out in the Gulf.

A white light, and a green one, lower down. That green light was a starboard light, and meant that the vessel was inward-bound toward Quebec. It had seen the flashes from the lighthouse, of course, but in a few minutes it would be behind the headland of Pointe à Pic, where they would no longer be visible.

And then, emerging from behind the cape, it would see the flashes again, and veer away from the treacherous ledges into mid-channel. Even the most experienced pilots had driven their ships ashore in the old days, before the lighthouse was established.

And now already the vessel was approaching Pointe à Pic. The white and green lights seemed to draw closer to each other, the green dropped and the white climbed; through the clear night

Yvette could see the huge great mass of the headland, jutting out into the Gulf.

And then Volksmann emerged upon the platform, and in his hand was the axe. He came reeling toward her, bellowing, with arms extended:

"Yvette, my little one, I love you. You are too beautiful to live in this place. You shall show me the way across the reef, and I row you to the south shore, from where we go to New York together. *Gott*, little one, how I love you!"

She ran from him, around and around the platform, while he stumbled after her. She screamed in terror of him, and the wild cries of the sea-birds seemed to answer her. It was like a grotesque fantastic dream: fleet of foot than the gross German, she could evade him as long as she kept on running, but she would have to run for ever, like a tortured soul in the pit. There was no escape, save over the railing, onto the rocks beneath.

Volksmann was bellowing with laughter. Once he all but tripped her, with a sudden reversal of movement, and an out-thrust foot. Dexterously she managed to evade him. At last he came to a stop, and she faced him, panting, on the other side of the light. Volksmann was panting, too; at first a bubbling sound came from his throat, in place of words.

THEN his eyes strayed from her face out to the Gulf. The incoming vessel was still visible, but in another minute or two she would be swallowed up behind the cape. Volksmann extended the axe, and shrilled like a hyena.

He looked back at the light, and it was impossible for Yvette to mistake the significance of that expression. He was evidently a seaman, for he seemed to take in the whole mechanism of the light in a single comprehensive glance.

"So," he said, "if the light goes out, she destroys herself on these rocks. Yes, my father was a pilot in the Baltic, and I know all about it. So many of your brave English soldiers, who are returning with slight wounds, and the pretty nurses, all will drown."

"There are prisoners on board—Ger-

(Continued on page 71)

By **JUSTIN CASE**



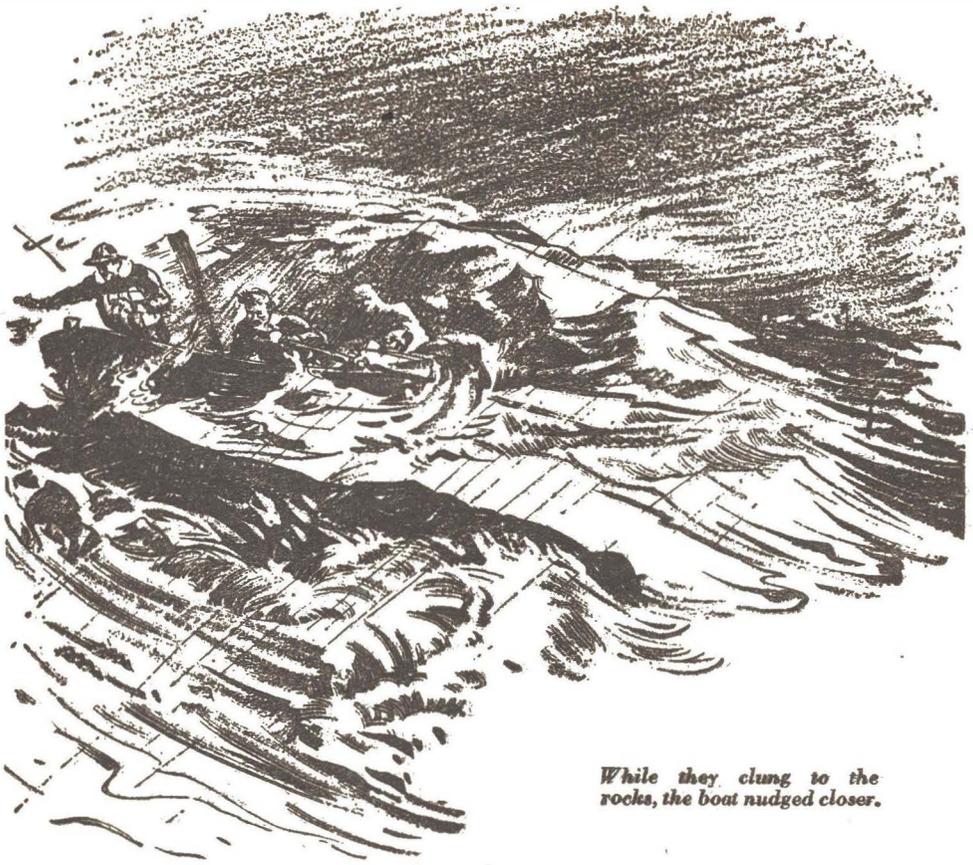
SO LONG,

THE storm howled out of the Arctic icebox, south over the Bering Sea to the backbone of tiny islands bent west from Unalaska. You watched for storms in that restless region of fog and rain. The weather boys on their tight little islands flashed ceaseless warning of the wind-dragons. But sometimes mere knowing was insufficient.

Steve Cannon clearly remembered the frantic few minutes preceding the crack-up: the utter, blasting obliteration of visibility, the screaming jets of wind and rain

that kept his PBM dancing. He clearly recalled the face of Jim Waite, dim and taut in the panel's glow, still handsome but washed of its grin as the plane spun like a cork in a waterspout.

His recollection of the ensuing rush of events was less lucid. There were mountains of sea mixed up in it. There was the fluttering, upstuck wing of his ship, swirling like a shark-fin as it slipped under the sea's surface. Sorry end for an honored bird with two Jap subs to its credit, and the last only four hours cold!



While they clung to the rocks, the boat nudged closer.

It didn't matter so much to Steve Cannon what happened to him. His thoughts were chiefly of Jim Waite. Of Waite and Joan, the kid from Hollywood, who had been like a time bomb, all ready to explode!

SISTER

He had a moment of bleak satisfaction, sharp as the sting of a surgeon's needle, at sight of Jim Waite shouting for help on the crest of a monstrous wave—beyond reach of aid even if help had been handy. Then came the rain and the cramps, the waiting and the interminable hours of darkness. And thoughts of Joan.

QUEER that he should have thought of her, wondered where she was and what she was doing, at such a time. Perhaps it was part of the business of living

life over again while awaiting the curtain. He hadn't thought of her that way in months—not since the first bitterness had dimmed, the first dogged hopes dried up.

But her face floated before him in the storm, her copper hair amazingly not disturbed by the screaming wind-dragons. Her blue eyes glowed with their old gaiety and her red lips laughed with him, not at him as in the days after Jim Waite's intrusion.

She was with him quite a while. They

had lobster together at that inn on the Maine coast where the juke box uncannily played Chopin and Debussy, and she said, "Oh dear, clams and classics!" (Remember that one, Steve? You sprung it proudly on a dozen dazzled hearers until Happy Wilton recalled the book she'd cribbed it from.) They danced in an open-air ballroom where the walls were mirrors, where at every turn he saw twenty of her drifting along in his arms, slim and tantalizing, almost too young to be knowing all she knew of a man's wants and weaknesses.

He was back with Cooperative and she was the grown-up little girl from Hollywood. And he should have known, he supposed. Should have realized, when she first turned up to do the inside stuff for *Woman With Wings*, that a kid of her age, pursued and pedestaled, would be an emotional bomb ready to explode when least expected. With Hollywood males fawning for her attention, she was ready and ripe to tumble for a man-sized test pilot like Stephen Joseph Cannon. He should have known.

Well, she'd fallen. Fast and hard. But, like a kitten, without hurting herself.

He lived the night of their marriage again and wondered whatever had become of Mike and Madge, the pair who had fled from Andy Macklin's party with them and got married with them, just to make it complete. Had Mike, too, made the mistake of bringing home a Jim Waite for his wife to adopt at first meeting?

To hell with them. Marriage for them had been only a lark anyway. But not for Cannon. And not for Joan, he'd thought. But he'd forgotten the chute on that one.

THE night grayed and the mountains of waves rolled him along, half drowned and more than half indifferent. He was not aware of the cold any more. You could be cold only when some part of you remained warm for comparison, and no part of him had escaped the water's numbing bite. He wondered how so fragile a lifebelt could hold him afloat so long. He thought, inevitably, of the day he'd bumped into Jim Waite. The fateful day.

The kid had been a stunter—two long

legs and a grin smeared with freckles, and no more sense than to want, more than anything else in creation, to be a test pilot. At their first meeting, in Sanderson's office, he had gripped Cannon's hand and said, with his grin at full moon, "Cannon, hey? Steve Cannon! Boy, have I come upstairs fast!"

And you couldn't know whether he meant it or was ribbing. You couldn't dissect the grin to get behind it.

"So I fell for him," Cannon thought. "I put him in my pocket."

More than that, he'd put Jim Waite within reach of Joan. Or was it the other way 'round? Anyway, the kid had moved in with them, in the house they'd rented on the side of the mountain, with sky for a yard and lumps of cloud for shade-trees. It was nice to have him around. Cannon liked his chatter, his wild tales of circus stunting and South American flying. If you believed it, the kid had been everywhere. Little brown gals on the Amazon, Eskimo cuties in the Arctic. Fishing, hunting, girling from Thule to Magallanes. All with that grin.

The grin was there in the grayness as the night waned. It faded and Cannon's tension eased with its going. He shook the soaked hair out of his eyes and felt as he had felt the night he dropped the kid's bulging suitcase at his feet, out there on the porch in front of Joan, and said, "Enough's plenty, fella. There are hotels."

He remembered Joan's face, her blue eyes concrete-gray as she watched Jim Waite step into his car. He saw again the kid's insolent wave and refelt his own relief as the car slipped from sight around the bend of the down-trail. Joan would get over Jim Waite; sure she would. With the kid out of the way, everything would fall in line again. (You really believed it, Steve; remember?)

The sea lulled him. Each endless swell caught him up, embraced him, passed him on to the next. He lay in bed, in a white, warm bed, watching his wife. He watched the slim, bright-nailed fingers tucking the copper hair into place, and grinned at the powdery patter of her slippers as she

rose from the dressing-table and came toward him.

He put out the lamp, called softly, "Over here, honey, right over here."

The wind screamed derisively and he watched her melt into Jim Waite's arms instead, as if she'd been waiting all her life for that moment. As if nothing else had ever mattered or ever would.

She did not come back after that. He



The sea rolled in to smother them, but still they clung together.

was alone with the sea and the rain, the cramps and the cold. And finally the fear, the numbing fear that all the world must be ocean. Even Jim Waite was better off than he.

"Damn him, he always wins!"

Then he thought of The Plan.

IT was hazy at first. Just something to work on, to keep alive the fading hope he might not die. He liked his thoughts and played around with them. There'd

been so little time for this slow, easy sort of thinking since his jump from civilian flying to a job with the Navy's air arm.

He let his mind go on it, back and forth, patiently. Like sanding nicks from an oak plank. He was going to be rescued. He was going to go on living, with Jim Waite permanently out of the picture. Half the score would then be settled, half the hurt rubbed out.

There was still Joan's half. Waite's death wouldn't jolt her enough to tie the

score. Ah, no. She'd gloat on the glory of his going. Her mind was the type to seize on that and mold it into moonlight and kisses. She'd eat it, sleep with it, subsist on it.

Cannon pondered the possibilities. His mind tinkered with the stray ends of the Big Idea, and it seemed less crazy. Waite was dead. Long live Waite.

"That's it," he thought. "That's all there is to it. Simple."

He was tired after that. He wanted sleep, and as the wind died and the sea lost some of its drive, his mind slipped off into shadows. The waves rolled him through assorted smooth rocks to a patch of beach and he lay there, dimly sensing the stillness, the lack of motion. The rain stopped and the sun baked his upturned face, and a cloud of noisy, white-winged birds discovered him. And later, though unaware of it, he was discovered by something else.

He waked under layers of blankets and gazed at a wooden ceiling, at bare board walls. A shelf above the end of the cot on which he lay was littered with pipes, tobacco tins, shaving tools, and there was a vacant cot against the opposite wall. An oil-stove sent out warmth.

From an adjoining room came a spatter of whistling, a quick little run of melody that fluttered in space, thinned like a stretched rubber band and was gone.

Well, he was alive. He'd made it. And Jim Waite hadn't.

"Your luck changed, kid," he thought with satisfaction.

He could have called out to let the whistler know he was awake, but preferred to lie still. He felt strong enough, well enough, but was drowsy. And the Big Idea occupied his thoughts.

A bearded man stepped from the adjoining room, glanced toward Cannon's cot, and went out. Cannon looked into the room he had come from. Instruments on a table there told him where he was. Their gleaming bright-work winked at his thoughts, reminding him he must be precise, as attentive to detail as they were, or his scheme would collapse from shapelessness. His mind rushed along, sorting out details.

It was a cinch. He'd be taken to Dutch Harbor or Kodiak and would be given at least a brief leave to recuperate. A chance to go home. Home by navy plane or Alaska Clipper, to Seattle. After that, oblivion.

Only one thing worried him. There were men at this end of the one-way road who knew him. Not many, but a few. He'd fished Alaskan waters, gunned for Alaskan big game, before the war. If he encountered any of those men—outfitters and guides—between now and Seattle, there was danger of recognition. A chance he had to take.

The door opened. The bearded man entered with a companion, and they came to Cannon's cot. "Feel better, do you?" the bearded one asked.

"I don't know how I feel. Where am I?"

"On an island," the fellow said, pulling up a chair. "Dutch Harbor isn't too far off." He thrust his long legs out, grinning. "I'm Daniels. This is the rest of the community—Fred Carleton."

They were young, both of them. Cannon held his hand out from the cot and they shook it.

"The two of us," Daniels explained, "run a meteorological station here." He had an easy smile that the growth of whiskers could not hide. "Weather shack to you, lieutenant."

"You mean you live here?"

"That's a delicate word. Let's say we occupy the place."

CANNON regarded them with respect. It took a special kind of fortitude to live on a warty knob of land in this fog and rain, week in, week out, just to dope the weather for guys like Steve Cannon. It took guts.

He was going to miss all this, and there was no use pretending he liked it. Flying was in his blood. Jap hunting was a job he enjoyed.

He told of his crack-up, his hours in the lifebelt. His lips delivered all that while his mind reached beyond to shape the last few details of The Idea. When Daniels asked him his name, he was ready.

"Waite," he said. "Jim Waite." The ease of it frightened him a little. But he knew what he was doing.

The irony of the situation tickled him. But why wasn't Joan here?



It made sense, didn't it? What better way could he square matters? When Joan heard that her beloved Jim had been rescued—and she'd hear it soon, Cannon resolved—she would live for the day of reunion. Her Jim, her darling Jim, on his way back to her arms!

The hurt would come when the kid failed to show up, when the waiting dragged on and on with no further word from him, no sign that he gave a damn. The days would pass, bringing her nothing. Then at last she would get the idea he wasn't interested. At last she would suffer as Cannon had suffered. It was all good. It was perfect.

"How soon can I get out of here?"

Daniels rubbed a hand over his stubble. "I've talked to Dutch Harbor. They may send a boat for you right away."

"Good."

"If we don't get that storm back on our necks. It's been playing around."

"Let it play," Cannon said.

He went out later for a look at the weather and the island. It was a bleak little place. From the spire of volcanic rock in its center he could see the sea in every direction almost as clearly as from a ship's masthead. Very nasty sea, black as the island's jumble of rocks and restless as Cannon's thoughts. The sky was a moving gray mass, all alive and all ugly,

riding the swells like a blimp unable to pull clear.

He watched the swarms of birds shrilling in the wind above him and nursed a bitterness for the luck which had crossed his path with Jim Waite's again. Was the war so small that two men who hated each other as they did had to be glued together like Siamese twins? Or was it so big that such personal hates were overlooked in the rush of it?

For weeks he had waited grimly for the kid to make some remark, some crack that would instigate a private little war of their own. He'd been ready to win that one. But the kid had disappointed him. The kid's mouth had stayed buttoned; his talk was confined strictly to business. There'd been a change in him, a quieting, all for the good. Cannon had wondered about it.

The island was a good place for wondering. He was moody at the thought of leaving it. Departure meant the end of a job, the beginning of nothing. He hated the need for quitting.

The weather piled up. It scattered briefly to let the sun through, then massed again in a weighty, rolling sky that kept Daniels and Carleton glumly shaking their heads. "If she hits us," Carleton said, "you'll think you're riding that lifebelt again, with big scale Hollywood sound effects." He sighed, perhaps thinking of crack-up victims or survivors of broken ships who might be doing that very thing. But they were wrong about the boat. It came.

IT wallowed in at a weary crawl, towing a mountain of fog behind it, with the sea and the sky restlessly poised for a final cataclysm. From the roof of the weather shack, where he clung like a bug while reinforcing an antenna mast, Daniels saw it and shouted. Carleton and Steve Cannon climbed the lookout of rocks behind the station to have a look.

"She'll never make it past Coffin Rock," Carleton predicted. He hurried to the shack for signal flags and Cannon helped run them up the mast to warn the boat off. But the wind screamed over the island and plucked the bits of bunting loose

before they reached the mast tip. Carleton didn't try to shake out others. "She couldn't see 'em anyway," he said helplessly.

There was nothing a man could do. The wind shrieked on the sea, flattening the giant waves by the simple process of slicing the crowns off them, and would have leveled trees with the same carnival spirit had there been any to work on.

The world was for the moment all wind and spray, and the boat out there, though reachable with a good casting rig, was as far from contact as Japan or Australia, or the River Styx Ferry.

She was not a cutter, Cannon observed, though for a while he could not make out just what she was. A fisherman, apparently. One of the odd-job tubs, called Yippies, whose owners had been commissioned by the Navy. Diesel powered, probably. But in this blow she would need the power of a herd of humpback whales to make safety.

With the spray in his face and his hair straight back in the wind, Cannon watched the homely little tub slug back. She was a veteran of such slugfests; she could take it. But she couldn't duck the rocks.

The sea was all rocks out there. The ocean's bottom was a range of round black knobs that rolled into view and were gone again, like the backs of swimming turtles or the humps of an incredibly humpbacked sea-serpent. The little boat wallowed among them and was helpless.

"She'll pile in a minute," the man at Cannon's side said, shouting to be heard. And Cannon nodded. He saw men on her deck—not running, apparently not even moving. Just standing, staring, waiting for the inevitable.

She struck. There was no sound through the sea-roar and the wind-shriek, but Cannon saw the impact and felt it, or seemed to, in his bones. The gray boat swung and cracked, and the dim shapes on her shuddering deck were snapped into the sea when she rolled.

She was over in an instant, her keel an upthrust fin that blocked the following waves with a series of reports loud as thunderclaps. Men clung to the rocks; strange, twisted barnacles of men that

waved feebly and probably were shouting.

Cannon shouted, too, as he ran to the inadequate small-boat at the island's strip of beach. He was not sure what he was doing. The urge to do something was irresistible; that was all. When he reached the boat and found no oars in it, he stumbled about and started back again, but stopped. Daniels, with a pair of oars under each arm, was weaving toward him against the wind.

"We're crazy," the bearded boy shouted, "but hell!" He dropped the oars and held the boat while Cannon clambered into it. In the weather shack doorway Carleton was watching, woodenly motionless. Someone, of course, had to stay behind to run the place.

Cannon made fast the oarlock chains and filled his chest so full of air that it hurt. He hadn't looked at the battered Yippy again. He hauled on the oars to hold the boat steady while Daniels jumped into it.

For what happened then Cannon was not to blame. The boat's nose bucked a wave and fell from its crest with a crash that jarred every plank. The bearded boy, off balance, stumbled and pitched forward in a tangle of arms, legs and twisted neck.

Cannon leaned to him, but it was too late. His hands were needed on the oars. He shouted and saw Daniels' eyes come dazedly open, but they closed again and the bearded boy was out. Out cold. A gray and bottomless sea whirled the boat heavenward. The strip of beach was incredibly far down, not quite real. Cannon groaned and fought the oars.

It was no job for one man, one pair of straining sticks, but after the first frantic moments he liked it. The need for action and effort was stormy enough to keep him from thinking of other things. Or had he stopped thinking, if his mind still recognized the need for reprieve?

To hell with it! He was using the best of himself, the strength in his arms and legs, the spring in his back. He was fighting and he liked to fight. He'd been born to fight.

This Bering Sea was the coldest drink on earth, yet despite the wind's icy bite

and the drenching slap of ice-water waves, Cannon sweated. With stolen looks over his shoulder to line up the men on the rocks, he pulled the pitching boat into a kind of defiant subservience and softly cursed every exploding wave that smothered his unconscious boat-mate. Then came the rain.

Horizontally it advanced in a howling wall, flattening the sea's humps and completing the sodden blend of sea and sky. It roared on past him, obliterating the island. He felt naked in its penetrating wetness, and the feeling strengthened him as it would fortify a man to shed shirt and shoes for a job demanding pure brute strength.

He was at home in that sea. The boat was sturdy under him and the oar-handles were fiant in his grip. And he was almost there.

He turned for a look. The broken fishing boat loomed in the rain and he saw her clearly for the first time. He saw the name of her white against the heaving gray of her hull. He looked again, frozen at the oars. His lips flattened on his teeth and he whispered her name as though afraid of it.

It *couldn't* be she. Of all the craft in Alaska, it couldn't be! But it was.

His Plan loomed before him and fell apart in the wind's derisive howl. This boat. *This* one. He had fished from her half a score of times. He had shared food and whiskey and bedding with salty Link Annerman, her skipper, on more cruises than he could remember. There was no ghost of a chance Annerman would fail to recognize him, and with recognition would go his Plan, his revenge. He swore bitterly and long at the boat and all it stood for.

He could have turned back. Daniels was unconscious and would never know, and if he slipped an oar before reaching the beach, Carleton would ask no questions. Any man might lose an oar in such a sea. The thought occurred to him, but he swore at that, too, and was rid of it. There were huddled shapes on the knobs of rock between him and the fishermen. He saw them waving and headed for them, the

(Continued on page 77)

Button's philosophy was simple. All that he had in the world and all that he cared for was his hippopotami. And now the Nazis were planning to deprive him of even that simple consolation



Peace Comes to Bongo . . .

By HUGH SPEER

"Fall to, boys," Vorstmann called.
"Take what you want. Everything's
yours."



THE first signs anyone had of the presence of enemy invasion forces in that part of West Africa were the dull detonations that denoted the destruction of the small British post, forty-seven miles away. It wasn't until fifteen days later that *Herr Kapitän Vorstmann* arrived at Bongo, with his crew of a dozen submarine men, his radio equipment and enough explosives to wreak havoc among the isolated British garrisons that

dotted that vast country.

It was a daring raid, for which Captain Vorstmann should be given full credit. From this point in the jungle, conveniently near the sea, he expected to control and direct certain submarine operations in the South Atlantic.

Of course his radio direction would be spotted quickly enough. But forty-seven miles separated him from the nearest landing point—forty-seven miles of jungle bush that made his radio outfit like a needle in a haystack of wood. And this was the rainy season.

The only approach to Bongo was along the tortuous creeks. That was the way Vorstmann had come, after submerging his boat conveniently off the coast. He had found his way to Bongo, thanks to some excellent maps made by the German Hydrographic Department years before the first World War. He didn't believe the English had those maps. Anyway, he was secure for long enough to direct important operations in the Atlantic, which would result in the paralyzing of all seaborne Atlantic commerce south of the Equator. After that, he meant to move leisurely inland, and demolish certain posts along the Allied route of communications.

In blowing up the nearest British station, Vorstmann had secured a valuable period during which he would be immune against attack. He had brought a number of prisoners with him to Bongo—the English captain of the demolished fort, a gentleman named Spry; a young lieutenant, Winters; and fifteen members of the West African Police, coal-black Fantis, who wore British khaki with nothing under it, and fezzes, and went bare-footed, because shoes hurt their feet.

Captain Vorstmann's first act on reaching Bongo, which he had selected as his headquarters, was to call on Papa Button, who was the only white inhabitant. All the rest of the population was watching from the jungle, but Papa Button was sitting on the verandah of his guest-house and trading-store, an enormous hulk of a man, reclining in an enormous chair. On either side of him was a vast bulk of animal flesh, lolling, mouth open, in the sunlight.

"What are those things?" shouted the captain, surprised out of the good manners he had intended to assume.

"Pygmy hippopotami," responded Papa Button.

"Pygmy? *Mein Gott!*" cried Captain Vorstmann.

PAAPA BUTTON'S philosophy of life was a simple and sincere one. Something over fifty years before, an American sailor, who rejoiced in the name of Button, had been stranded on those shores, and had won the heart of the daughter of a local official who was definitely and unmistakably French. Since the marriage had not lasted long, the net result was, that, a few months later, young Button found himself staring at an unfamiliar world from a crib in the home of a foundling orphanage.

He grew up with the simple philosophy of taking life easy. There had been one crisis in his life, and that was when he confronted his French grandfather—now returned, as Governor of the Colony—with the demand for money enough to set up a trading-store. Inasmuch as the Governor's daughter was present, with an aristocratic husband, and several cousins of Button's, Button carried his point without much difficulty, and settled at Bongo, where he had lived for about thirty years.

Life just rolled on at Bongo. Sometimes there were tribal wars, but nobody ever disturbed Papa Button, who was more or less a legend in West Africa. If you wanted anything—go to Papa Button. If the English Government was contemplating a punitive expedition, ten to one Papa Button could bring the recalcitrant chief to terms after a palaver. But Captain Vorstmann hadn't heard of Button, because he had never been in West Africa before.

He stared at the mound of human flesh, lying between the two great mounds of hippopotamus flesh, and then introduced himself, and explained his mission.

"You speak the native language?" he inquired.

"I cut my teeth on it," said Button, with a toothless grin.

"Fine! I'll need you for my interpreter. I expect to be here some time. By the way, you're a British subject?"

"I dunno," said Button, grinning. There was a slight French accent to his speech, due to his upbringing. "Nobody ever told me what I am, but I ain't got any black blood in me."

"And what are you doing with these?" Vorstmann indicated the hippopotami. "Fattening them for the table?"

"For the table?" Button looked his horror. "A native speared the mother when they was tiny tots, no bigger than pigs. I bring them home for pets. They are the pygmy hippo, they do not grow much larger."

"And what do they eat?"

"Anything — everything," answered Button, leaning over to scratch a tiny ear. "This one is Churchill and this one is Stalin. Haw, haw."

Button's vast bulk undulated in his chair.

"L E DINER est servi, monsieur!" Vorstmann stared at the pretty, demure young girl who, after sizing him up, had decided to appear from within the house. Suzette couldn't have been more than seventeen, and was as slim as Button was gross. There was no mistaking the colored blood in her, and yet she might have passed for a southern French girl.

Vorstmann emitted a horse laugh and stalked inside. But Suzette ran past him and assisted Button out of his chair. With a surprising exhibition of strength, she hoisted the great body onto its feet. The hippos yawned, ambled to their feet, too, and moved away along a trail into the jungle.

Inside was a dinner fit for a king, in Vorstmann's estimation. It was true everything had come out of cans, of which Button had a considerable stock, lining his shelves, but Vorstmann and his sailors had had a hard time negotiating those creeks on their inland journey, and had arrived in a famished condition.

A bottle of chartreuse—the yellow kind—completed the meal. Vorstmann leaned back in his chair with an expression of

immense satisfaction. He beckoned to Suzette, and drew her upon his knee.

There was something so gross in the act that only a clod like Button could have taken it without protest. The act was not so much interest in Suzette as the desire to show dominance. There was a cruel streak in Vorstmann, as in most of his kind.

Button, breathing heavily after his meal, watched through half-closed eyelids, apparently uninterested. Vorstmann presently thrust the girl away and got up.

"I'm requisitioning your stock of supplies, Button," he announced. "My men are hungry. You will be paid in paper marks, of which I have a good supply—a very large supply. Where are the inhabitants of this place?"

Button lurched to the door, and whistled twice. In a moment the natives of Bongo began to emerge from the jungle, men, women and children, staring at Vorstmann and his sailors.

"Fall to, boys," Vorstmann called to his men in German. "Take what you want. Everything's yours."

LAST to be fed were the two English prisoners and the Fanti soldiers. The afternoon was spent in preparing quarters for the invaders and their captives. Some of the native huts were requisitioned for Vorstmann and his sailors; about others, which were for the prisoners, bales of barbed wire, which had lain for years in Button's store, were stretched, to form a corral.

Periodically—that is to say, at intervals of three-quarters of an hour—a drenching storm of rain drove the workers into the huts. At such times Vorstmann would seek shelter in Button's store.

Button, extended in his enormous chair, with a hippo mouthing grass on either side of him, watched the world sleepily, while Vorstmann amused himself in conversation with Suzette.

Vorstmann was getting drunk. He had sampled Button's store of liquors, his choice brandy, thirty years old, and once the property of his French grandfather, the Governor. He was swaying slightly

as he came back from his last interview with Suzette. It had been unsuccessful—in fact, the girl had slapped his face.

He booted Churchill in his fat stomach. It would have been difficult to boot him anywhere else, for both the hippos were little more than stomach—huge, cavernous bellies which they distended with grass and bark and reeds all day.

The hippo rolled over a little further, and blinked two tiny, furtive eyes at Vorstmann.

"Those fellows will make good eating. Just like pork," said Vorstmann.

"No, no," protested Button, straightening his great bulk in his chair. "They are my pets. You see—all I have in the world, Captain Vorstmann."

Tears rolled down his cheeks, for Button, too, had been sampling his grandfather's precious brandy, knowing that it was almost his last chance to take a swig at it.

Vorstmann grabbed the fat man by the shoulder. "Don't you talk back to me!" he roared. "I'm in command here, and what I say goes! From now on, you do as I say. And it's 'Yes, Captain Vorstmann,' when I give you an order. Understand?"

BECAUSE there were no means of escape from Bongo, in the rainy season, the prisoners were not too scrupulously guarded. Vorstmann had set up his wireless outfit in one of the huts, and was busy at certain hours of the day. Meanwhile Button was free to roam about the camp and exchange greetings with Captain Spry and Lieutenant Winters, although the strands of barbed wire separated them.

Button's stock of liquors, although acquired over twenty years, was the greatest part of his stock in trade. The Nazis drank prodigiously, but the supply was still good for some time, and Vorstmann, whose brutal streak didn't altogether conceal a certain good nature, even permitted his prisoners to partake of it.

"Button," said Captain Spry, through the barbed wire, "you say you don't know what nationality you are. If your father was an American, that makes you an American, and America's in this war. I

don't mind telling you that we're in a fix, and the British Government has got a very liberal way of repaying those who have been of service to it.

"Button, it's up to you—it's very strictly up to you to help us out of this mess. You see, it's not just Winters and me, and those poor devils of Fantis. That Nazi fiend is playing hob with our shipping in the South Pacific. And he's got to be stopped."

"What you want me to do?" asked Button.

"It's this way," said Captain Spry through the wire. "I know they've looted your store, and taken almost everything. But you must have a lot of junk stuff left. You must have knives, or pieces of steel that can be made into knives. You get the point, old man? Being an American, I'm sure you get the point.

"We want seventeen good strong knives, for Winters and me and our Fantis. That's all we want. Anything that will stab or slash. We'll clean up that dirty Nazi devil, and all his crew. Will you do it, Button?"

"I ain't got seventeen knives," said Button. "You're talking crazy, captain. Suppose he is troubling your shipping—you're not on any ship, are you? I'd say let well alone, and everything will be peaceful. That's what a fellow wants out of life—peacefulness."

"You're no help, Button—no help at all," said Captain Spry crossly.

VORSTMANN kicked Churchill in the belly again. "We're going to eat that fellow," he said. "And very tasty, if I'm any judge. Look at the fat on him!"

Button straightened himself in his chair. "You can't do that," he babbled. "He is my pet. Nobody ever heard of eating a hippopotamus."

"We're going to have fresh meat!" shouted Vorstmann. "And that fellow is going to go." He kicked Churchill again. "I'll turn him over to the slaughterer in the morning," he said.

Suzette came out, to see the fat man blubbering softly as he scratched Churchill's ear. "*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*" she demanded.



Too sluggish to continue the unequal struggle, Button subsided by the murdered Churchill.

"Vorstmann is going to kill Churchill and eat him," said Button.

"Well, and good riddance to him! You are a fool, Button, to make pets of those hippopotami. Great useless pigs, always stuffing themselves. They are nothing but big bellies, Button. Let Vorstmann eat both of them. Good riddance, say I!"

"You have no heart, *amie*," sobbed the flabby fat man.

"No heart? *Mon dieu*, and is it not for love of you that I serve you all these years, and wait on you, and lift you out of the chair because you are too fat to raise yourself? Do you see in yourself the hero for Suzette? I leave you now, Button. I am tired of you. I hate you."

"Where you going Suzette?"

"To a man who is a man, and knows how to take care of a woman," Suzette responded. "*Ah mon dieu*, your store is empty. You have nothing—nothing at all, not even a drink. You have to go to Captain Vorstmann when you want to eat or drink. No more for me, Button."

Button, sprawled in his gigantic chair, in which his carcass flowed and found its level, watched Suzette step smartly across the rain-soaked terrain toward Vorstmann's hut. He watched her through his half-closed eyelids. Button's theory of life was working. Nothing mattered, not even Suzette. Not even the loss of his store.

Yes, one thing mattered. If Vorstmann really meant to kill Churchill, that would be too much for Button's philosophy. Those hippopotami were the only things he had ever loved. They had been motherless waifs that he had befriended. They were not responsive creatures, but they liked to squat, one on either side of him, and have their tiny ears tickled.

Perhaps there was some recognition of kinship between the gross man who sat all day in the chair, and the gross bodies of the hippopotami, which were mere cylinders charged with the job of digesting grass and other succulent commodities. Nothing came amiss to the hippopotami.

THE fat man's gifts of liquor to the sailors had made him their friend. Despite Vorstmann's confiscation of his stock, Button had managed to secrete a

few cases of choice liquors. Vorstmann, of course, suspected this, but he took it amiably enough. His cruelty chiefly vented itself in kicking the hippopotami. He seemed to find some pleasure in the contact of his toe with those gross bellies, which always elicited grunts of pain, and a shifting of the huge bodies.

Whatever work Vorstmann was engaged on, it appeared to be going on quite successfully. A radio system had been established in one of the huts, and antennae had been erected overhead.

Captain Spry, who had been cool toward Button after his refusal to supply him with steel for making knives, soon became friendly again.

"You know," he said, "Vorstmann has enough of that new explosive, torpex, to blow up every British post in West Africa. It's deadly stuff, and, as soon as he's finished his preliminaries here, he's going on the rampage inland. If you could sneak out enough of it to blow this blasted post to hell, with Vorstmann and the rest of them—

"Look, old man. Winters and I have got hold of a pair of wire-cutters. We'll liberate the Fantis and sneak out of here some dark and squally night, and then touch off a keg of that explosive. Only we've got to have co-ordination. You're on the inside with Vorstmann. You can get hold of some of it. It's perfectly harmless, unless it's jarred or detonated. He keeps it loose, like a grocer's sugar."

Button shrugged his shoulders. "You want to make another mess around here, like Vorstmann made at Hlawenui?" he asked. "I believe in peacefulness. You're happy, ain't you? And I'm happy, and everybody's happy. What's the use of starting trouble you don't have to start?"

"The man's a fool," said Winters. "It's no use parleying with him, Spry. We'll have to look out for ourselves. I should think you'd have cause enough to come in with us, Button," he added viciously. "Vorstmann's taken your store and taken your girl, and made you a laughing-stock among the natives."

That wasn't of course, news to Button. Suzette showed him all the animosity of



Under the lick, the hippo grunted and rolled on its side, while Button chewed his bitter out of contemplation.

which a woman is capable, when she transfers her allegiance from one master to the next. She would stand in the entrance of Vorstmann's hut and stick out her tongue at Button. She would indulge in the pantomimicry in which all Africans are proficient, indicating, with expressive gestures, how glad she was to have transferred her allegiance from Button to the Nazi.

As for the inhabitants of Bongo, their contempt for Button was now limitless. They had all come back out of the forest, and built themselves new shelters of daub and wattle. They were working for the invaders, and getting paid in food and paper marks. They were also getting occasional drinks from Button's confiscated supplies.

Button brooded sometimes. Vorstmann had taken his store and his woman, and he was living on Kaffir corn and ground maize. Fortunately he had the little quantity of liquor that he had secreted, and it was this that made life bearable—this and Stalin and Churchill.

The two pygmy hippopotami had reached almost their full growth. They were about as big as very large pigs, great cylinders into which they tucked the profuse herbage of the rainy season. Although they were herbivorous, no kind of diet seemed to come amiss to them. Those gross paunches had to be stuffed, and kept stuffed.

Lolling in his chair, with Stalin on one side of him and Churchill on the other, Button still kept up his affectation of taking life easily. But the remarks of the English officers about the torpex had given Button food for reflection.

If it were really possible to touch off a pound or two of the explosive, and make an end of Vorstmann and his captives at once, Button would have been perfectly willing to do so.

But, with his chair to loll in, and his two animal companions, and his little hidden stock of liquor, Button was reasonably content with life. Some day Vorstmann and his men would vanish, the prisoners would disappear, and Suzette would come crawling back to him.

THE compound that housed the prisoners was lush with grass. The incredible fertility of the tropics put half a foot of growth on it after each daily deluge. The natives had been hacking at it with their knives, or grubbing it up with their hands. Vorstmann had an idea. He slapped his thigh and roared:

"Turn your great pigs inside the wire, Button! They'll do the work of twenty men!"

Before the rains came, the hippopotami had made lengthening trails into the bush in search of provender. After the rains converted the sandy bed of the river into a torrent, they would meander down to it, and lie all day, submerged, save for eyes, ears and snouts, pasturing on the rank vegetation. Now Vorstmann's sailors prodded them inside the wire, where the lush growth was flourishing over about an acre.

That acre supplied a daily ration for the two sleek pigs, and each day it was renewed. Vorstmann was again becoming interested in the gross creatures. He would kick them, to see them squirm, and run his hand over their sleek hides.

"This Churchill we shall eat for Christmas," he declared to Button. Christmas had no significance at Bongo. Button hadn't thought about Christmas for years. He didn't even know the day of the calendar.

The hippos, nosing into everything, were the delight of the sailors, who kicked them freely, but also flung all the refuse of the camp to them. With their great incisors, they would rip flour sacks to ribbons, and tear away the staves of kegs.

Hearing an outcry, Button, who had just awakened from a drunken slumber, ambled into the compound. The two beasts were greedily devouring a quantity of grayish powder that was piled up in front of a heap of matchwood that had once been a keg.

"Himmel!" shouted a sailor, "don't put a match near them, or they blow up. They have eaten enough to destroy a whole English fort!"

They drove the beasts out of the compound with kicks and curses. But in a day or two they were back again.

BUTTON awoke to discover that it was noon. It was Suzette who had awakened him. She was standing in front of him, mincing and mouthing, and she held a plate, on which were two enormous chops.

"Wake up, old drunken fool!" she bawled. "Vorstmann sends you these."

"What's this?" Button mumbled.

"It's Christmas Day, and this is all that's left of your pretty boy, Churchill," the girl sniggered.

Button heaved his gross bulk to his feet. There was Stalin on his left, but there was no Churchill at his right. He ambled into the compound, past the two grinning sentries, past Captain Spry and Winters, who shouted "Merry Christmas."

Button returned no answer. There was an uproar in the large hut occupied by the sailors. Inside, Button saw all the men assembled, squatting on the floor, with palm leaf dishes on their knees. At the head of this festive board was Vorstmann. And, occupying the center of the hut was an enormous and unstable carcass, recognizable only by the head—by the huge, gaping jaws, that were propped open with a stick, by the tiny ears and hairless cranium.

Vorstmann roared at the sight of Button: "Haw, haw, so we have eaten your Churchill, and he tastes very good. Just like roast suckling-pig. For New Year's we shall have your Stalin!"

Whatever of love and unselfishness there had been in Button had been wrapped up in the two ungainly monsters. Too stupid for companionship, at least they had come to recognize him. They had stretched out their ungainly heads to have him tickle their ears. And Button had felt a sort of intimate relationship to the two creatures. He, too, was huge, ungainly, sluggish; he had understood just what motives actuated them, how they rejoiced in the cool water against their gross bodies at nightfall, how their enormous bellies had to be filled and kept filled.

And he stood looking down into the glassy eyes of the murdered Churchill.

A cry broke from his lips. He rushed at Vorstmann. The sailors caught him and

flung him down. For a few moments Button struggled wildly, and then subsided, too sluggish to keep up the struggle.

Vorstmann, who was drunk, was laughing. "Haw, haw, a good joke on you, Button!" he shouted. "We eat Stalin for New Year!"

"**L**ISTEN, old man," said Captain Spry. "There's no moon on New Year's Eve, and those damn' Nazis will be drunk. That's the time to make our break. Ye get us a keg of that explosive, torpex. We'll do the rest."

"And why do you suppose I care if you escape?" demanded Button, with unusual warmth. "What do I care? I am a citizen of no country. I want peace. I live here, and I have peace. And now those Nazis kill my Churchill and they say they will kill my Stalin. What do I care for anything?"

"You're a fool, Button," said Captain Spry. "He's robbed you of all you had, and he's taken that girl of yours, and, if you had the guts of a man, you'd get even with him. You get us a keg of that explosive, and I'll guarantee the British Government won't be ungrateful."

"You go to hell!" said Button.

The Fantis, in the compound, were not having too bad a time. Vorstmann was a Nazi and a brute, but in Africa, in that vast continent where all nature seems to be in a conspiracy against the human race, political animosities are relaxed. One senses the humanity of one's enemy. The Fantis had had their share of the hippopotamus, and had enjoyed it hugely, for, under the two inches of hide and the several inches of fat, there is delectable meat on a hippo.

Big Button lolled in his chair. That great chair, which just accommodated his enormous body, had once been the property of a chief, who was almost as gross as he was. It had been a present from some Commissioner. The stuffing was bursting from the seams of it, but it would be good for some time yet. And, lolled in that chair, Button reviewed his situation.

He thought of his French grandfather,

(Continued on page 79)

By FELIX WEBB

*Suddenly the whole isthmus was alive
with Japs.*



It was after the Japanese collapse that the story of Gogo was first told. Though it sounded like the romance of a fiction writer, Top-Sergeant Brunner swore to it



OUT OF THE DEEP

SOME stories of the war are censored because it is believed they may be of assistance to the enemy. This one was omitted by universal consensus of opinion, because it didn't sound real.

It sounded like the romance of a fiction writer. As time went on, it became still less credible. Some day the authorities meant to release it. But there was always

some reason for postponing the date of release, and so this matter hung fire, and was finally buried in the archives of the War Department—only then Top-Sergeant Brunner came my way, and he told me about it.

Perhaps you remember Sergeant Brunner, the man they couldn't kill. A tough old Regular—not a Marine. The Marines get all the credit, and they deserve still

more, but we mustn't forget that there were Regulars out on those Pacific Islands, too. Sergeant Brunner's war history went back to the Nicaraguan invasion, in the days before the Four Freedoms gave little nations the right to independence. He'd been wounded at Pearl Harbor, too. He had half a dozen wounds, and he had no medical justification for going on living, but there he was, somewhere between the Solomons and the Marshalls, not more than forty years old, and a fine-looking man, of the perennial bachelor type. He had broken in more colonels and general officers than any top-sergeant in the service.

It was some time after that I met the sergeant in San Francisco. It was after the sudden Jap collapse. The little Sons of Heaven had held out so much longer than anyone had credited them with being able to do, and then they folded so unexpectedly that they embarrassed us.

"They ought to have known, at Washington," said Brunner. "They ought to have known, after what happened at Gogo Island."

I pricked up my ears at that. Gogo Island was a mystery among us war correspondents. We knew there had been a defeat there—never given publicity. Also a victory there—equally suppressed. We had been trying to get the facts out of the Government for more than a year. Nothing doing. That story was not going to be released.

"So you were at Gogo?" I asked, trying to make my voice sound casual. I felt that at last I was on the trail of something big.

"The only member—the only male member of the U. S. military forces," said Brunner. And I thought, maybe the sergeant doesn't know that story was suppressed. Soldiers on active service don't follow the U. S. press.

"Have another beer, sergeant," I said.

“YOU see, those Japs don't react to things the way us civilized and enlightened peoples do, because they're living in the childhood of the human race. The childhood of the human race," re-

peated Brunner, obviously proud of his phrase. "What I mean is, to them life's all of a fairy story of gods and devils. That's their strength and that's their weakness. The Government certainly ought to have found that out. I knew they'd crack just the way they did, at the end.

"It started with their actions on one of them Solomons Islands. All of them Polynesians have got more or less the same religion, and one of their gods is Ra, the Sun-god. Now the Japs, as you probably know, believe their Emperor is descended from the Sun-god. So, when they conquered that particular island, they made a great play with the natives about their Emperor being a descendant of their Sun-god.

"It didn't work. The boys of the Solomons drew a clear distinction between their own Sun-god and the Jap Emperor. The Japs got madder and madder. Finally, they called the chiefs of the island into a conference, together with their Ra. The chiefs brought him, expecting him to receive high honor. The Japs had set up a machine-gun, and they riddled him to shreds. Then they burned what was left of the idol, by drenching it with gasoline.

"That's your Sun-god," they told them. 'Now maybe you'll understand that we've got the real Sun-god in the Palace at Tokyo.'

"It didn't work. One of those chiefs got up and made a threat against the Jap Sun-god, whom they declined to recognize. He told them that their Ra would exact vengeance for the desecration. Of course they shot him down, and a dozen others who hadn't time to escape into the jungle, but that warning rankled.

"The Japs being in the childhood of the human race, felt that the sanctity of their Emperor had been challenged. They brooded over it. And that brings me to what happened at Gogo Island."

"Have another beer, sergeant," I said.

THE full extent of our defeat at Gogo never got into the press. Of course, certain things had to be suppressed.

We were never quite as stupid as the Japs in our suppressions, because we weren't in the childhood of the human race, as Brunner phrased it. Where they lied, we remained silent. Nevertheless, Gogo was a bad setback, and even now I can't give a total numbers of cruisers and destroyers that we lost under that concentrated hail of bombs.

What happened in effect was like this: We had landed on the south tip of the island, and set up our advanced units, our hospital and our mechanical services. Maybe it was a bit premature, but there was only a small Jap post at the northern tip, and a big push was under way, designed to clear the enemy out of the archipelago. We were certain we were going to wipe out Gogo, and nobody knew that those devils had an airfield on the island, and had concentrated a huge force of planes.

Just as the push was about to be staged, the discovery was made that we were up against an ambush. To go forward, with our present means, seemed a desperate venture. On the other hand, it would be worse to be caught flat-footed, trying to evacuate our base and hospital on the south tip.

There were three nurses there, who refused flatly to leave the wounded. They were Lieutenants Mary, Kitty and Dorothy, and the five wounded men were operational cases, and to try to evacuate them would mean death. Defiant messages were being flashed to and fro between the naval authorities and Lieutenant Mary Sheed, in charge. Intervening hourly, came fresh instructions from Melbourne, or else from Washington.

It was a mess all right. Here was that nurse refusing to obey orders from the skipper of the cruiser *Morristown*, who was himself being bedeviled with contrary orders. He had his men, his landing barges, everything taut and ready to evacuate Gogo, and Lieutenant Sheed would just have to obey orders, because he wasn't going to leave her and the two other girls behind.

That was when Sergeant Brunner came into the picture.

OUR latest orders were (Brunner told me) that we were going to evacuate the post on Gogo, and the old man sent me with a handful of Regulars to bring the girls away.

"Bring the girls and the wounded. Bring everything human. Leave everything that's not human," the old man told me. "Unless it might be a pooch or a cat—I wouldn't let any dumb animal fall into the hands of those devils. Go and evacuate them, and bring them back. Tie those women up if they resist you."

I started off in a barge with a platoon of fellows. With me was old Texas. He was the leader of those chiefs who had escaped into the jungle, after the Japs destroyed Ra, their Sun-god.

The old boy wouldn't quit me. It appeared they'd machine-gunned all his relatives to death, and he'd lost his god, and he was crazy for vengeance. He spent most of the night howling to Ra and praying for the destruction of the Nips. In the daytime he made a pretty good mess-attendant. We were all fond of the old boy. There was just a handful of Regulars at our post on Bongo, but only the three girls had commissioned rank. The rest were boys from various units who had gone astray in the shuffling. There wasn't even a doctor. But there was a smart sentry. He plugged one of our boys through the hand before we got him to understand we weren't a raiding party of Ishoto's.

Ishoto was the Jap admiral who had shot up the Sun-god. We'd found what was left of some of our prisoners, after he got through with them, and there wasn't a thing our boys wouldn't have done to him, if they'd caught him.

We knocked some sense into that sentry's head, and we filed up softly through the pitchy darkness to our camp on Gogo. Somebody snapped on a shaded light and I found myself confronting Lieutenant Mary Sheed, commanding.

"Well, sergeant?" she snaps at me.

She was the prettiest thing, a little brunette, with a soft Arkansas voice, and, though I'd known she was the senior officer on Gogo, I was quite taken aback. Then I saw another of them, pausing in





"Four of these boys will surely die if they're moved," she said.

the hospital entrance. She was a brunette, too, and I guessed she was Lieutenant Kitty. And then from the opposite door in came a blonde, and that was Lieutenant Dorothy, from Massachusetts.

"Well, sergeant!" snaps Lieutenant Mary at me again.

"Order from Captain Hemple," I said. "All officers and wounded are to evacuate immediately. I'm sending an escort."

"I'm damned if we will," says Lieutenant Mary. "Tell Captain Hemple that."

"Well, now, lieutenant, we don't give that sort of message to them navy captains. You know, they're tough birds," I said. "They ain't got the milk of human kindness like us old Regulars."

"Suppose I refuse, what are your orders, sergeant?" she demands.

"Orders was to bring you all away," I answered.

"Do you propose to force us, sergeant?" she asks, kind of bristly-like.

"Why—why, of course not, lady—I mean, lieutenant," I answered, shocked that she could have been thinking of what I had been thinking of.

"Come here!" she says, taking me by the arm. And she pulled me inside the little one-room hospital, where Lieutenants Kitty and Dorothy were already gathered.

There were five wounded boys there. One of them was sitting back in a chair, and he had no legs. Another was lying on his back, his eyes wide open, staring up at the circle of electric light on the roof as if he didn't see it. His head was a mass of bandages. The third was bandaged up worse, and his head was in a sort of sling, and swaying gently backward and forward. The fourth was lying quiet, working his hands as if pulling taffy. And the fifth still smelled of chloroform.

"He's a hernia case," said Lieutenant Mary. "I operated on him this morning, because he'd have died. And I'm not a doctor. I took the chance, and he's going to pull through. Now do you understand what I meant when I said I'm damned if we'll evacuate?"

"Sure, lieutenant," I gulped. "Only, if them Nips come, you see, you'd all be better off aboard the *Morristown*."

"Four of those boys will die if they're moved," said Lieutenant Mary.

The two other lieutenants said, as if you'd pulled a string, "We're staying here."

SUDDENLY star lights of all sorts and colors were lighting up the sky. I said to Lieutenant Mary: "Where's your transmitter?"

"It doesn't work," she answered. "Too much humidity. Why?"

"I don't know what those signals mean," I told her. "But it looks as if the authorities have changed their minds again."

I said that when I heard a shell scream somewhere. I wasn't able to say anything more, because all hell was suddenly let loose. There was a barrage of big guns, and a barrage of little guns, and it meant only one thing to my ears. The big shots had decided not to evacuate after all, but to go ahead with the capture of the rest of Gogo Island.

The night was brighter than day by now, and I could see the invasion barges pushing in toward shore, and underneath the roar of the guns I could hear the murderous rattle of machine-gun fire.

Well, there's one rule that's been in existence since the childhood of the human race. When an old soldier gets caught unexpected in the middle of a battle, he doesn't go to anybody for orders: he just plugs in.

"Okay," I yelled to my platoon, who'd been standing around kind of sheepish. "We're attacking. Maybe those Nips have got down our way. Anyway, there's plenty of fighting going on, and we've got a barge and guns. We're landing on that beach across the bay."

And I pointed to where the barges were riding in front of a line of foaming breakers.

"All orders seem to be canceled," I said to Lieutenant Mary. "You stay in charge of your boys. We'll take care of the Nips for you."

She looked at me gratefully. Gosh, she was so swell, with those dark eyes of hers, I almost forgot my military discipline for an instant. Then I saluted her, and

got my boys into formation, and marched them down to the sea.

(I realized I was getting Sergeant Brunner's description of that mysterious battle of Gogo Island. But the sergeant hadn't seen the fight as a newspaper man might have seen it. He knew only what had happened to his own tiny outfit. He drove his barge toward the shore, where a brisk engagement was already happening, showing that the Japs were there to welcome us. All hell had broken loose, according to Brunner. And overhead swarms of Nip bombers were loosing destruction upon our ships.)

OLD TEXAS was gibbering beside me in the sheets. He'd managed to come with us, and he'd been praying to his Sun-god most of the time; but I'd always felt, so long as he was smart in serving up the chow by day, he'd got the right to follow his avocation after night-fall.

We pulled like the devil, and I quickly saw we were in an even worse mess than I'd expected. The Nip planes were everywhere, and, wherever our fighters were, they were not there that night.

Some of our boys seemed to have got ashore, and a long line of fire ran back and forward along the beaches. And suddenly—it was like a great red and yellow dent opening in the sea, almost down to the bottom of it. And where there had been a big cruiser, spouting fire from her eight-inch guns, there was no longer anything at all.

I saw two other burning ships. It didn't seem to me that anybody could be alive in them. I thought of our boys burning up there. I yelled and cursed, and the barge shot forward over the waves.

Right ahead of us, between us and the shore, was the *Morristown*, with old Captain Hemple, the senior naval officer, and in charge of the whole operation. The old ship was whanging away at the Nips ashore. That was a cheering sight, seeing those great shells landing like redhot stars, and sending the fire crackling along the lines of palm-trees. We cheered without stopping rowing. We were passing

We were spewed like a brood of flying ants from the overturned barge.



close along the *Morristown's* starboard side when it happened.

I didn't see the particular *MP* that

loosed that bomb. There were too many of them overhead, and the whole sea was a churning nightmare.

But I saw the cruiser suddenly outlined in hellish fire, like that other ship I'd seen that caught it.

One minute she was a great, dark bulk upon the waves, spitting fire from her

starboard guns. The next, every single detail of her stood out clearly.

I saw the whole crew, some at the guns, some lying on the deck, I saw the bridge, and the old man standing there, directing the firing. And all about them that infernal fire was playing. . . .

Then the great ship plunged vertically into the depths of the sea.

AN instant later the swamp hit us. It caught our barge, lifted it high into the air, and spewed us out like a brood of flying ants. I hit the water and went down, and a thousand tons seemed to be pressing on me. I was glad of that pressure of water. I wanted to get away from the hellish screeching and roaring, and from the memory of the old man standing on the bridge of the sinking *Morristown*.

I knew that our attack had failed. I'd realized that the Nips had pulled a quick one on us. But even as I was trying to find unconsciousness, because I was sick at heart, I was thinking of those boys in the little hospital at the top of Gogo, and of Lieutenants Mary, Kitty and Dorothy.

I didn't want to go on living any more, and I didn't care if they died, but I didn't want those girls, and those boys to fall into the hands of that bloody scoundrel, Ishoto.

And I suppose it was that feeling gave me the power to fight off the pressing force of the tons of water that were on top of me. And yet I lost consciousness for awhile. I don't know for how long. I regained it suddenly, to find myself in the water, and a hand was under my chin, holding it up.

"You ori' now! You ori' now!" a voice was saying.

It was a little while longer before I understood. It was old Texas who was supporting me in the water. He was floating on his back, and guiding me.

The moon was bright on the eastern horizon. The sounds of the firing had ceased. Here and there, on the broad bay, I could see the burned out hulks of our ships, drifting on the water. No sound came from ashore, where the burning jungle growth was dully etched against

the night. The whole fury of the battle had died away.

And I guessed that we had lost. That last-hour decision to continue with the attack hadn't been so profitable. But now I saw that I was quite close to the south tip of Gogo. The current had carried me back to where I had started from with the landing-barge.

"You ori' now," said Texas.

The current was driving us ashore, and there was nothing to do but to relinquish ourselves to it. I began thinking of the five sick boys and the three lieutenants again. I wondered whether they were still in the hospital, or whether the Nips had got them.

So I let old Texas guide me until I felt sand under my feet, and then I half waded and half crawled ashore.

THE sounds of the firing had ceased, and an awful silence lay everywhere over the bay and land. I didn't know how long the fighting had lasted, and it wasn't possible for Texas to explain to me. I knew the moon had come up, and risen in the sky. There we two stood, Texas and me, and then suddenly he was down, flopping about on the ground, and making his invocations to the Sun-god, Ra, again.

I called to him, but he paid no attention. And I couldn't stop to think about Texas, because an awful thought was growing in my mind: had the Japs taken that base of ours at the tip of Gogo?

I began seeing Lieutenant Mary Sheed, and Lieutenants Kitty and Dorothy in the power of those yellow devils, and I started running up the slope toward the camp through the moonlight, and I hardly knew where I was until a slug whizzed past my head, and I realized it was the same dumb sentry who had plugged one of my boys before.

He understood my curses quick enough not to fire again, and we stood looking at each other, me cursing and him kind of sullen. "Where are the girls?" I snarled at him.

"They're okay. We're all okay. How many of you is there this time?"

"Just two," I answered. "The other

one's coming along. How many of you are there?"

"Five or six of us. What luck did you have with the Nips?"

That's what I'd like to know. I guess you saw what happened to our ships. I'm taking charge, under Lieutenant Sheed. Stay on your job. And, by the way, when that Solomons Islands guy comes along, don't blow his head off like you tried to do mine, but let him through."

I pushed my way past him into the fort. Lieutenant Mary met me at the entrance of the hospital, and she choked down a little sob, and stood staring at me, dripping sea-water.

"I guess those Nips have chalked up one," I said. "Our only chance is to get the cases onto a boat, and slip out to sea before it grows light. That's our only chance of escaping them."

"I've told my boys they can do as they like," she answered. "We women are staying with our cases, whatever happens."

"Okay," I said. "You've got one more to handle a gun. I think it's crazy myself, but you're giving orders. I'm Sergeant Brunner—Jeremy Brunner."

THERE were just six other dogfaces in the camp, and none of them was a One-A class. Two of them had been in charge of medical stores aboard a transport, two had swum there, after escaping from a small island nearby, where they'd been forgotten and two hardly knew how they got there at all, except that they'd landed in a barge which had gone off without them.

The tip of Gogo Island had never been meant for a military camp, and yet, as it began to grow light, I saw that it was an excellent military position. It was a flat rock, with some fertile land around it, and a few cocoanut palms, and from there the land fell away abruptly to a sandy, flat isthmus, devoid of covering. Beyond that isthmus was the jungle growth that swept around the curve of the bay, where we'd suffered our disaster, but between us and the jungle was a clean stretch of several hundred yards of sand and mud, with tufts of grass rising out of it.

They'd have to cross that stretch to take us, and we had two machine-guns and plenty of cartridges. It would require at least a battalion to rush that strip of ground, and I didn't believe the Japs had a battalion to spare just yet. And of course help would soon be along.

From the air we were badly off. There was no shelter on the flat rock, but there were rock gullies at the sides that offered fairly good shelter. I told Lieutenant Mary that she'd have to take the wounded out of the hospital and dispose of them down there.

I had Lieutenant Kitty and Lieutenant Dorothy on my side this time, and finally she gave way. We carried those boys out of the house and down into those rock-foxholes, and did what we could to make them comfortable. Then we began carrying out the supplies, and food. There was plenty of water; it rains every day and most of the night on Gogo.

We'd just finished the main part of our work when there came a yell from one of the lookouts. I ran back up to the top, and saw the Japs beginning to deploy at the edge of the jungle.

I called the boys back, and we lay down among the rocks, waiting for them to attack. I don't know why they didn't shell us first, or send over planes to reconnoitre; probably they didn't suppose that there were any of us left on Gogo Island.

We let them get half-way across the sandy isthmus before letting rip. Boy, that was like sending the ball down for a ten-strike. That line of Japs just disappeared into splotches of black against the yellow surface of the sand. A few little figures turned and ran back into the jungle, and that was that.

I TURNED, and saw Lieutenant Mary at my side. "Good work, sergeant," she said. "You've stopped them cold. And we ought to have help any moment now. Do you understand how to work a transmitting set?"

"That's out of my line lieutenant," I told her.

"There's nobody here knows, except the boy I operated on, and he—he mustn't

(Continued on page 84)

FOOL OF FLORENCE

OF all the things that bring most harm upon this earth I place first the letter-writing woman. Of Madonna Maddalena's amours, I have nothing to say, seeing she was a young and comely woman, and His Magnificence,

Duke Lorenzo, was an old and tedious man. Nevertheless, she should never have written letters.

To me, for instance—to me, the court fool, since I had served her in a few matters, pages and pages of letters, when I



"Let the fellow go!" shouted the Count. "I shall deal with him anon."

was in Rome with His Magnificence: "Come back, my Tito, for without your wisdom I am lost. I need your guidance in a maze of perplexities." And so forth, almost every day.

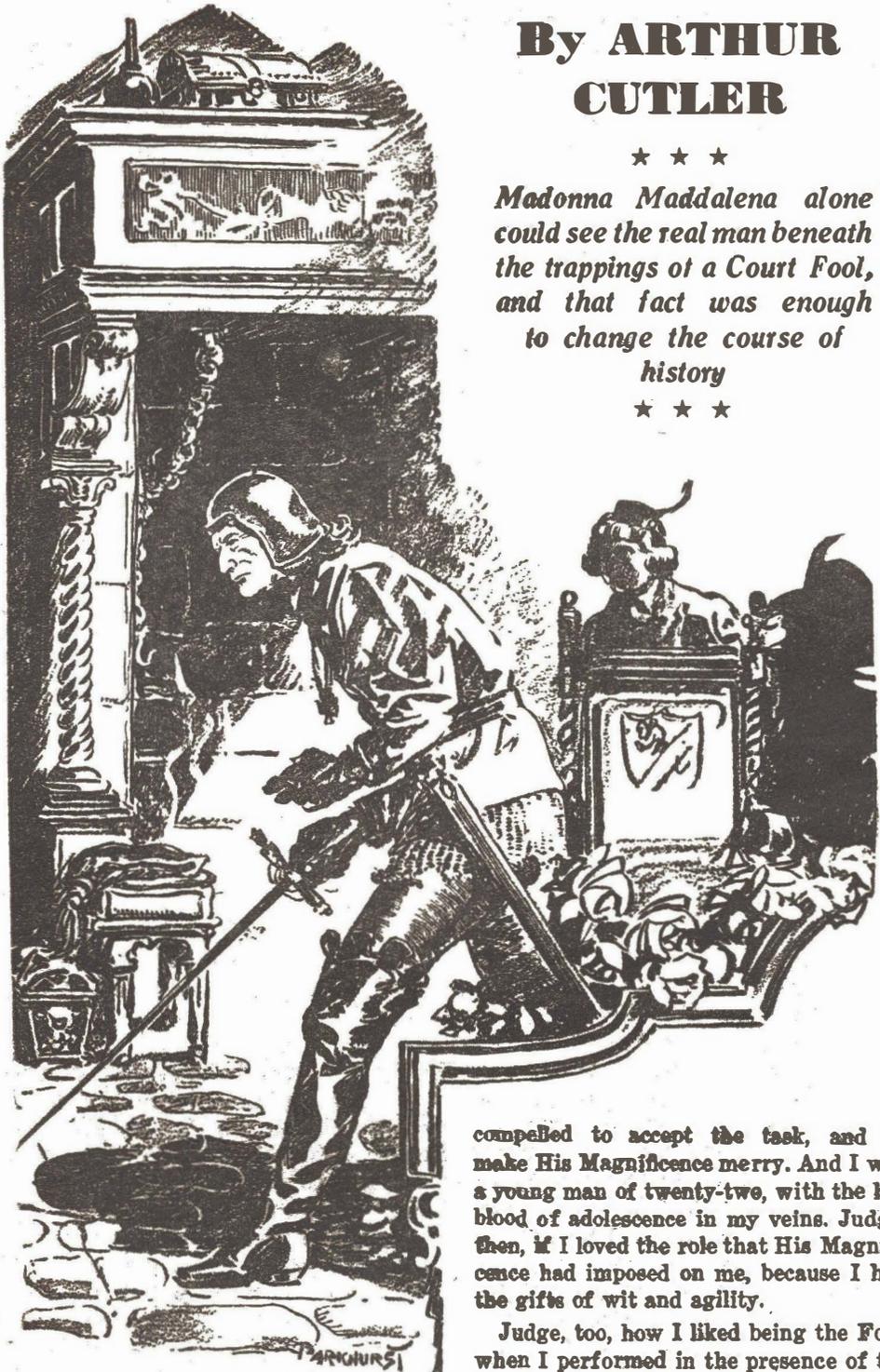
Now, about my duties: it is true that

By ARTHUR CUTLER

★ ★ ★

*Madonna Maddalena alone
could see the real man beneath
the trappings of a Court Fool,
and that fact was enough
to change the course of
history*

★ ★ ★



His Magnificence had made me his Court Fool, and given me a parti-colored robe of red and yellow. And, because my aging mother had been left destitute, I was

compelled to accept the task, and to make His Magnificence merry. And I was a young man of twenty-two, with the hot blood of adolescence in my veins. Judge, then, if I loved the role that His Magnificence had imposed on me, because I had the gifts of wit and agility.

Judge, too, how I liked being the Fool, when I performed in the presence of the nobility. It was only at night, when I laid aside my parti-colored clothes, that I felt myself a man again.

And what sustained me was the friendship of Madonna Maddalena, who saw the

man through the fool's trappings, and bestowed on me her confidence.

"This is how it stands, then, Tito," she said to me. "I have written foolish letters to the son of the Duke of Mantua. And the Papal Ambassador has obtained possession of them, and threatens to tell my lord Lorenzo. How can you help me, my dearest friend, Tito?"

"You were a foolish woman to have written foolish letters," I said. "And this son of the Duke of Mantua—you no longer love him?"

"I hate him," she cried. "I wish he were dead. Nevertheless, he has been robbed of those letters, and the Papal Ambassador holds them, and threatens to show them to Lorenzo. What can I do?"

NOW this is how the matter was: My master, Duke Lorenzo, of Florence, was sought by two parties—by Pope Julius and by the Duke of Mantua. Whichever of these two he favored with his alliance would have predominance over Italy. My master was an old man, and difficult to move, but the Mantuan alliance would present a solid block of the Italian States against Pope Julius, who would have swallowed us, each in turn.

And Count Forzi, the ambassador of Pope Julius, had obtained those letters that Madonna Maddalena had written to the Duke of Mantua's son, in the hot flush of their love, two years before, and threatened to use them for political purposes.

Now, as I said, I hold no brief for Madonna, save that she was my friend, and had deluged me with her letters, and old Duke Lorenzo, of Florence, was tedious, and no fit mate for so comely a young woman. Nevertheless, if this Count Forzi displayed those letters of his wife's to Duke Lorenzo, it would mean the end of the Mantuan alliance. Pope Julius would have Florence behind him in his schemes for the dominance of Italy. And Florence, in her turn, would become a puppet state of Rome.

It was therefore essential, for our very existence, that Count Forzi should not show those letters to my master, Duke Lorenzo, of Florence.

"Dear Tito, how can I get those letters back?" Madonna Maddalena asked me. She was so beautiful, with her flaxen hair and blue, innocent eyes. Few would have dreamed of the recklessness with which she had given her love here and there, and especially to the son of the Duke of Mantua. "Dear Tito, my only friend," she pleaded, gripping my arm.

"You are a little fool, Madonna," I answered her. For a court fool has one privilege, that of free speech. "I don't know that I would help you if I could."

"You will help me, Tito," she sobbed, and kissed me on the cheek. "You'll help me, dear Tito."

Well, what could I do? I knew that if Duke Lorenzo even suspected her falsehood he would have her put to death, like as not. And then, Madonna Maddalena was young, and beautiful, and foolish, and I was a man, despite my motley and my foolscap.

"What do you want me to do, Madonna?" I asked her.

"Get back those letters from Count Forzi. I do not know how he obtained them, but, if he shows them to my husband, it means ruin, perhaps death for me. Ruin for Florence, too. Lorenzo will accept the terms of Pope Julius for an alliance."

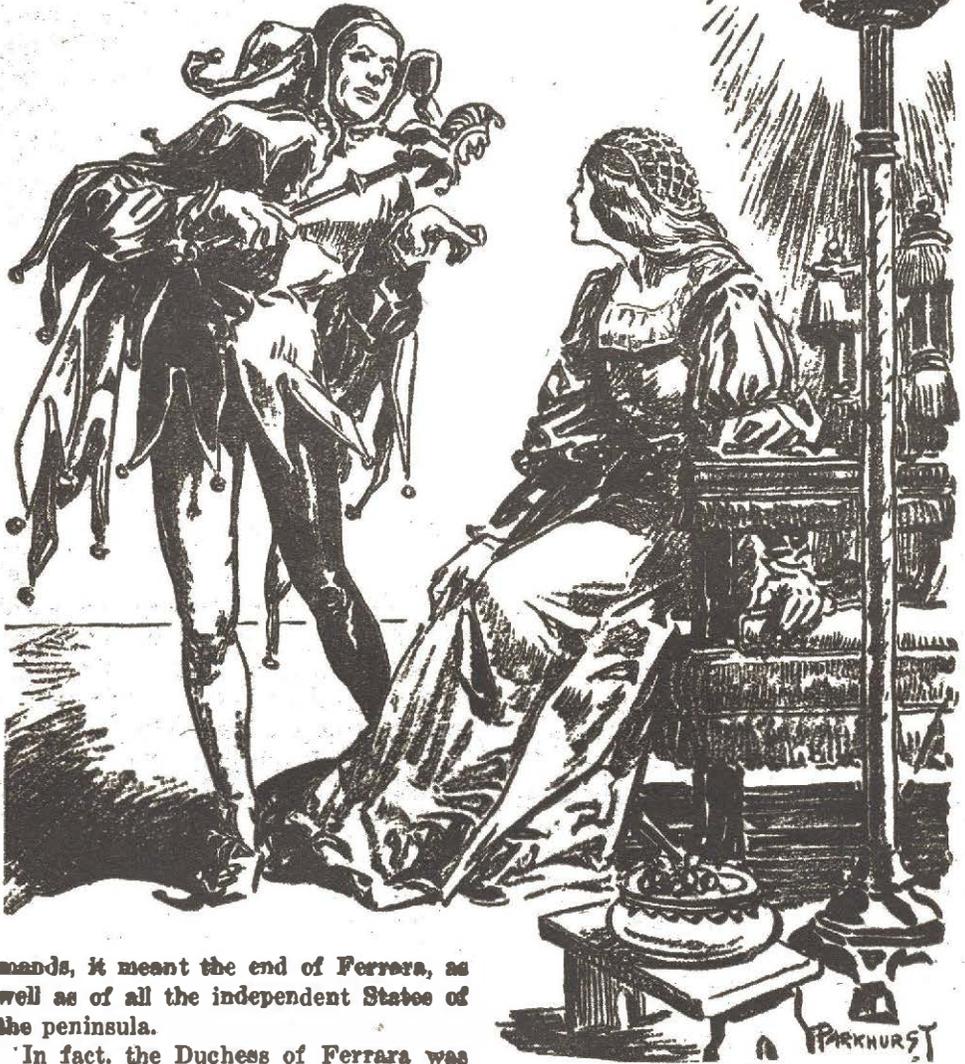
"I think you are more interested in yourself than in our city—State of Florence," I answered. "Nevertheless, I'll do what I can."

NOW among the illustrious guests whom His Magnificence had gathered at the Palace was Madonna Lucrezia Borgia, the Duchess of Ferrara. Her name has been aspersed somewhat, I think, both on account of her charms, and of the sudden death that has befallen many of those who crossed her path.

That Madonna Lucrezia had inherited some secrets of deadly brews, and preferred them—being a woman—to the dagger, I shall not gainsay. That she possessed a deadly power over my own sex I must acknowledge. But what turned my thoughts in her direction was that Madonna Lucrezia was a deadly enemy of Pope Julius.

In fact, all the Borgia influence had been directed to the prevention of his election. As for the duchy of Ferrara itself, its only hope of perpetuation lay in the alliance of Florence and Mantua. Florence yielded to Pope Julius's de-

"You'll help me, Tito?" she begged.



mands, it meant the end of Ferrara, as well as of all the independent States of the peninsula.

In fact, the Duchess of Ferrara was at that moment in Florence in order to dissuade His Magnificence, Lorenzo, from this act of policy. And the issue hung, not upon policy, but upon that package of love-letters that was hidden inside the tunic of Count Forzi, the papal emissary. I knew that, trusting nobody, he kept them about his person night and day.

Well, then, like any woman, Madonna Maddalena, my mistress, was for hasty means. "My Tito, it means no more than

the thrust of a knife on some dark night," she pleaded. "You can arrange it for me. Three or four sgherri—gangsters from the slums of Florence—a handsome payment, which I can afford, the package of letters restored to me, and my eternal gratitude."

"And you would have it said," I chided her, "that the city of Florence could not protect the ambassador of His Holiness

against her own gangsters. You are mad, Madonna Maddalena. Leave it to me."

"If you fail me, Tito," she wept, "my head will fall beneath the axe of the executioner. Lorenzo grows more jealous daily."

"I shall save that beautiful little neck of yours," I told her. "At least, I'll try. And, if I succeed, I hope you'll be more prudent in your affairs in future."

I KNEW she had been confiding in Lucrezia Borgia, the Duchess of Ferrara. The two women had been putting their heads together. I was opposed to this. A change of policy, and Lucrezia, who now smiled and basked in the graces of His Magnificence, my master, might become a very viper toward us.

I leaned toward simpler measures. I had been studying the life of this young gallant, Count Forzi, who held the future of all Italy in a package of letters hidden in the folds of his well-padded doublet.

He trusted no one. Yet a doublet of blue or crimson satin must be cleaned, and it was the daughter of the tailor in the Calimala who came to clean it.

She was a pretty little thing of no more than sixteen years, and in her eyes I, the Fool, was a great personage, because of my connection with the court.

I, who tumbled and jested, in my parti-garb, with shame in my heart, and mockery upon my lips, was a hero in the eyes of this one person alone, this little maid of sixteen years, the daughter of the tailor of Calimala.

I scraped acquaintance with her, and I discovered that she was enamored of this Count Forzi, in an innocent way. He was the greatest person who had ever crossed her horizon. He was her fairy prince—and I suppose he had hardly exchanged a dozen words with her.

He had thrown her his doublet, after removing its contents—a bag of money, a package of documents—

"Are you sure that there were documents, Tessa?" I asked her.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "He carries all his confidential papers on his doublet,

for fear of thieves."

That was enough for me. I set to work to woo her. That was not too difficult a task, for despite her day-dreams about Count Forzi, she was shrewd enough to know that the love of the Court Fool was not to be despised.

Thus, then, I was making my plans, while that foolish woman, Madonna Maddalena, was putting her head together with the head of Lucrezia Borgia, despite my warnings. I saw little harm in their schemes, but it seemed to be that the key to the situation was little Tessa, the daughter of the Calimala tailor and cleaner, who took away Count Forzi's doublet.

HE was her fairy prince, I said. The thought of any close association with him never entered Tessa's innocent little head, I am sure. But he was all she might ever have dreamed of in a sweet-heart. And I, who had wooed her deliberately, was a very commonplace but still desirable Court Fool, and not to be despised by the daughter of a Calimala tailor.

I said: "I shall accompany you to Count Forzi's apartment next time you bring back his doublet. I shall be the presser, who is solicitous of the Count's further patronage. Do not betray me."

She was troubled. "But why?" she asked me.

"Because," I told her, "the fate of Florence may hang upon the cut of the Count's doublet. If he follows the new Roman fashion of slashed sleeves, that means he is antagonistic to our policy of state. All this is too difficult for that pretty little head of yours, Tessa. Nevertheless, you can be of service to Florence in this matter."

"The Count has slashed sleeves," she said. "But they are tiny slashes. I have seen wider ones."

"We must investigate," I answered her. "So much may hang upon so little."

I convinced her. I accompanied her to Count Forzi's apartment in the Palace two days later. I was sure he would not recognize the motleyed Fool, in my shabby clothes, and so it proved. His valet ad-



Even for a fool, I'd done a dangerous thing, so I feared what would happen next.

mitted us to the ante-room, and soon the Count came in. I knew of course, that it was to see Tessa that he had come, for a noble does not seek personal contact with his tailor.

"You are a day ahead of time," he addressed Tessa.

Now I had coached her carefully about this and other matters, and I answered:

"Nobility, the day after tomorrow is the festival of Saint Ambrose, when our workmen will be picnicking on the banks of Arno. My master did not wish that you should wear a soiled doublet at the grand reception of His Magnificence."

"Santiddio," he exploded, "I wish I had

so considerate a tailor in Rome! Here, then!"

He peeled off his doublet, and removed his papers and his wallet of money. He threw them on the bed, and held out the soiled doublet to me. I took it, and waited respectfully for his further orders. But Count Forzi was making compliments to little Tessa.

He had drawn her aside into the window embrasure. That gave me my opportunity. Now the package, which, I was sure, contained the letters of Madonna Maddalena, was exactly as I had expected, those wide sheets of hers, with the broken seals, fastened together in a covering of green paper.

I picked up the soiled doublet, leaving the wallet and letters and the papers, and went out with Tessa. She looked at me dubiously; I saw that she was thrilled by the Count's compliments and attentions. In her simple little head she was weighing the different advantages of the Count's love, and of myself as a husband.

NOW it was well understood that at the grand reception of my master, His Magnificence, the Duke Lorenzo, the respective propositions of Rome and Mantua would be set forth, weighed, and debated. It was essential for my purpose that the doublet which I had taken away should be restored before that date. I bade Tessa's father clean it and have it in readiness.

"But surely his nobility will not have soiled the doublet I have already cleaned by the time of the Duke's reception," he protested. "To do the job properly, I must give up Saint Ambrose Day, and the festival I have been looking forward to, and the picnic, and the good wine. My wife will hardly forgive me for a long time."

"And are you so afraid of your wife that you would sacrifice the court custom that I have brought you?" I demanded.

"Per Baccho, no, Messer Tito," he answered. "If you say so, it shall be done. But I shall have to work all day. Those Romans are fastidious about their clothes."

"So long as the doublet is ready by the next morning, and the Count can have the choice of it for the Duke's reception that afternoon, all will be well. Tessa," I addressed the little maid, "in the morning after the festival you will meet me at the kitchen entrance of the Palace, and we shall go together to the Count's apartment again."

I assumed a scowl of jealousy, which, I could see, mightily pleased both Tessa and her father. "Santiddio, I do not choose to permit so fair a maid as you to go alone to Count Forzi. His reputation is not of the best," I cried.

And I stalked out, and went to my own room, on the top floor of the Palace, where I spent most of the day practising my new tumbling act, which I had had from a traveling acrobat whom I had befriended and given court patronage.

But all the time my heart was heavy for Madonna Maddalena, with her sweet face and pleading manner. I knew that Count Forzi would not hesitate to show the letters to Duke Lorenzo. They had

been intercepted from the post, and one of the riders had been slain in the fray. Still, I believed that my scheme might be accomplished.

A fool has to think fast, and have his wits about him at all times. But I had set my trap; it remained to be seen whether Count Forzi would step into it.

NOW, next to the letter-writing woman, I think I most detest the one who interferes with a man's plans. Cunning I grant women, and even sagacity, but never prudence, or that far-sighted judgment that belongs to my own sex.

And at this point I discovered how those two foolish women, Lucrezia Borgia, Duchess of Ferrara, and Madonna Maddalena, had been putting their heads together, and formulating a scheme of their own, which did not happen to tally with mine.

It was Lucrezia sent for me to her apartment that night, and I found her and Madonna Maddalena with the air of conspirators, and quite alone, and the door to the maids' apartment closed.

"Ecco, giovanne, I am pleased to see you," said Madonna Lucrezia. "He is really a taking youth, my dear Maddalena. I should like to beg him from His Magnificence. Do you think you would like the Ferrara air, my Tito?"

I looked so woebegone at this that both the ladies burst out laughing. My devotion to Madonna Maddalena was well known at court, and His Magnificence, the Duke of Florence, had more than once commented upon it with amusement. For one of the privileges of a fool is that of friendship with and devotion toward a lady who stands far above him as a saint.

Not that I would attribute the qualities of sainthood to Madonna, you understand, but she had always shown me friendship, and the Duke had never taken it amiss.

"Now to the point," said Lucrezia. "I understand that the Duchess has given you her full confidence, touching on certain letters."

"That is my understanding, Magnificence," I answered.

"Well, and what have you done about it?" she demanded brusquely.

Now I was not prepared to answer that question. My plan might very well miscarry, and then I like to keep my plans under my own hat, as they say in France.

"I have been thinking—" I began.

"Bah, thinking! What is the use of only thinking, when the sands are running out? While you have been thinking, we women have been planning. Now attend to me, Tito. How are you getting on with your new tumbling act?"

"Fairly well, Magnificence," I said.

"Good. Since the Duke adores tumbling acts, you shall put him in a good humor at tonight's reception, and that will pave the way. Afterward I shall entrust you with the more difficult part of the task."

"Tell him now, Lucrezia," said Maddalena breathlessly.

NOW here I must interpose, to make things plainer. This night was the eve of Saint Ambrose day, and the Duke of Florence would hold his customary reception. The next day, that of Saint Ambrose, would be given up to revelry. And on the third evening would come the Duke's great reception, when matters of policy would be discussed, and the great decision made.

"Tell him now," repeated Madonna Maddalena, and I saw the desperation in her heart. My own heart grew chill. I was sure that those two foolish women had some plan that was going to destroy all mine.

"Briefly, then," said Lucrezia, "how good are you with the sword, Tito? And would you dare use it on behalf of a lady—perhaps two ladies, who love you, and wish you well?"

"I am not unversed in the use of it," I answered. For in Florence even a fool had to know how to take his own part upon occasion.

"And would you dare use it upon nobility, or even on an ambassador?" Lucrezia queried.

I saw her point now. Since her one way out of trouble was the use of the sword, the dagger, or the poison cup, she and Ma-

donna Maddalena had been concocting the murder of Count Forzi.

"You will be protected. I swear no harm shall come to you," said Lucrezia. She jumped up and took me by the arm. Half-laughing and half-crying, she said: "Will you be the only man in the world who has had the hardihood to refuse a request of Lucrezia Borgia?" she demanded.

But it was the look on Maddalena's face that brought the response to my lips. "I shall do it if you ladies insist upon it," I said. "But I would rather continue thinking, and as like as not an idea will come to me."

Maddalena put her hand on mine. "No, dear Tito, enough of that thinking of yours," she said. "Now listen to the idea that has been worked out by us two women."

HERE was their scheme: Count Forzi, being a young man, had been taking his pleasure rather recklessly in Florence, and the spies of the court had, of course, kept track of all his movements, and of his companions.

Although these spies had no knowledge or suspicion of the letters, it had been noticed that Count Forzi suffered no one to approach his person closely, from which they inferred that he was carrying either papers of importance or wearing most valuable jewelry.

Naturally his rooms had been ransacked thoroughly, but this was a standard procedure at all courts. Obviously, too, Count Forzi knew that the only safe hiding-place for the letters was inside his doublet.

On Saint Ambrose night it was almost certain that the Count and his companions would be roistering in Florence. They would return, most probably, a little before daylight, and it could be guessed that they would all be heavy with wine. There should be three or four of them to bid the Count good-night at the palace postern. And there the ambush was to be set.

There was to be no hiring of Florentine bravos. Lucrezia had brought three gentlemen from Ferrara in her train, all
(Continued on page 87)

Coconut Cargo

(Continued from page 11)

"Coconuts?" asked Minami.

"Yeah, two feet of them above the ammunition. That little ass at Lowela got wise, but I gave him the slip. I'll help with the unloading. You've got to be careful with them coconuts. They're ripe, and there's good copra in them. Maybe I'll pick up a market for them before I get back to Sydney."

THE little Japs uttered cries of delight at the discovery of the ammunition under the nuts. M'Shane was here, there and everywhere, superintending. He seemed to value his coconuts, though there would be only a very minor load of them, after the ammunition cases and shells had been removed.

"Our ammunition is almost gone," said Minami gratefully. "You have saved the day for us. You must have dinner with me."

"I'll see the staff off first," answered M'Shane. "Where's your dump?"

Minami pointed up the hill. "Below the top," he said. "We have only one day's supplies left. Again, I do not know how to thank you enough."

"Gimme a gang," said M'Shane.

He toiled like any laborer until toward sundown, by which time the bulk of the ammunition had been transferred. The shells had been distributed among the guns. Some of the cases of small arms ammunition had been broken up for the troops, and the rest piled high on the dump. Here and there the husk of a coconut protruded out of the masses of cartridges. By sundown there was a heap fifty yards in length, and of considerable height and thickness, under the shelter of an outcrop of rock, where no Aussie shell could reach it, save by a miracle.

Now and again an enemy shell would explode on the crest, but the soldiers, working under cover, sustained no injuries.

M'Shane stopped at last, and wiped

the sweat from his forehead. "Well, that's that," he said. "And now I could eat an ox."

Lord came up, leering. "Minami has dinner ready for us, M'Shane," he said.

That dinner was good. The steak was probably water-buffalo, but it was as good as any M'Shane had ever tasted. It was dark when M'Shane laid down his knife and fork and pushed back his chair.

"Good grub," he said. "And now I guess I'll take advantage of the night and get out of the harbor. I'm ready to settle up with you, Captain Minami."

"Oh yes," grinned the Jap officer. "What is it your book says? 'The laborer is worthy of his hire.'"

He rose and unlocked a large safe in the tent. From it he extracted a canvas bag. He laid it on the table, and sat down again. He produced a document in Japanese and a fountain-pen. "Sign here, Captain M'Shane," he said.

"I'll see the money first," answered M'Shane.

THE little officer opened the bag and poured the contents upon the table. These consisted of shining English gold pounds. M'Shane divided them into little heaps of tens. He saw at once that there was nothing like five thousand pounds there.

"Five hundred pounds," he said, when he had finished.

"That was the agreement, was it not?" inquired Minami. "Five hundred pounds upon delivery of the cargo at Bongo Bongo."

"I'm damned if it was," roared the irascible little captain. "The agreement was for five thousand, and I'm calling you to witness, Lord."

"No, no," said Lord, shaking his finger at M'Shane, as if he were a naughty child. "I told you five hundred, M'Shane. And good money today, with all this paper stuff floating around. Don't let your

imagination run away with you, M'Shane."

"You dir y crook!" roared M'Shane. "For two pins, I'd twist that grinning head of yours around, so that your beard ran down your back."

"Violence will do no good, M'Shane," leered Lord, whipping a long and large knife out of a sheath. "I'd advise you to sign and take the money, M'Shane."

"I'm damned if I will!" shouted M'Shane. "You don't double-cross me, Lord. You've tried it plenty times before, and found it doesn't pay—hey, Lord?"

"But what is the trouble?" inquired the Japanese. "Five hundred pounds, according to the agreement."

"And you're lucky to get it," grinned Lord.

"And how much are you paying this crook?" asked M'Shane of Minami. "I'll have that five thousand, as agreed, or I'll take that blooming cargo back again!"

Lord thrust his bearded face into M'Shane's. "Looky," he said, "you bargained for five hundred, and, as I said before, you're lucky to get it. You'd sell your soul for five hundred pounds, Salvation, you canting old humbug, and well you know it! If you'd stood in with me, you'd have found it paid you better, old Bible-thump! Now, if you're looking for trouble, you'll get plenty."

The snarl that came from M'Shane's lips was like that of a cornered cat. Instantly he had his knife in his hand, and he and Lord went into crouches, waiting for the chance to strike. They were back again in the days of their youth, those days of blackbirding in the South Pacific, when men knifed upon a word.

But little Minami came between them, and pointed upward. "No fighting in the presence of His Majesty," he said, indicating Hirohito's portrait overhead.

"Okay," said M'Shane. "That goes with me. I'm taking that cargo back again. Jumper!" he yelled.

The faithful Jumper, who was never far away, appeared promptly at the entrance of the tent, between two staring Japanese sentries.

"We're reshipping that cargo," said M'Shane. "We're transferring that dump

back into the hold of the *Albatross*, if it takes us all night and all day and another night to do it. Just you and me. You get me, Jumper?"

"Me get you," answered Jumper.

"But that you cannot do," protested Minami. "That ammunition is now the property of his sacred Majesty. And I have no more gold, and no authority to pay more. You should be reasonable, Captain M'Shane. It is possible that I might obtain for you a very high decoration—"

"To hell with your decorations!" roared the fiery little captain, sticking out his stubbly chin. "You've had my ultimatum, Minami. Five thousand pounds, or I take back that load, except for the shells, which you can keep, with my blessing."

HE drew a gold watch out of his hip pocket. This was one of Captain M'Shane's most treasured possessions. Circular, and of considerable thickness, it resembled not so much a turnip as a well-rounded beet or onion.

"Five minutes past nine," he said. "I'm giving you till exactly eleven o'clock, P. M., to make up your mind. If you don't change it by then and produce that four thousand five hundred you're trying to gyp me out of, I'll take that dump away!"

"It does not occur to you," said Minami suavely, "that you are in my power and that you have no status, except that of a man vairy much wanted by your own Government."

"Bah!" snorted M'Shane, replacing the onion in his pocket. He leaned across the table and began scooping up the gold, and replacing it in the bag. He retied the string about the neck, and heaved the bag to Jumper.

"Hold on to that, melad," he said. "I'm taking this on account of payment, Minami. And it'll be four thousand five hundred more by the stroke of eleven tonight, or good-bye to that dump of yours. You'd best set your watch by mine. Show it me!"

The little officer, dumbfounded, held out his wrist. The illuminated dial showed that his watch was four minutes behind M'Shane's.

"Thirteen minutes past nine to the

dot," said the little captain. "Correct that timepiece of yours, Minami. I'm used to precision."

And he stalked out of the tent, leaving Minami gaping after him in astonished confusion.

LORD'S chuckle, which reached his ears, as he plunged into the night, evoked only a grin upon M'Shane's stubble-coated face. He turned to Jumper, plodding at his side with the bag of gold.

"You hold onto that, melad," he said, "and don't let nobody take it away from you. It's all we're going to get, but there'll be a—what's that Yankee word? A payoff. Yep, there's going to be a payoff at exactly twenty seconds after eleven o'clock. And when I yell, you make for the *Albatross*, melad, running like hell, and get the jib up in record time, and then the mains'l. And don't stop to ask no questions."

"Me get you, captain," answered Jumper.

"You've asked me questions which was too deep for you, you being a besotted heathen. You'll find the answer later. Just remember, when you hear me screech, you make for the *Albatross* with that gold I gave you."

"We go holiday?" asked Jumper. "Plenty drink, plenty *lubras*?"

"You heathen, how many times have I got to tell you I'm a family man, and I won't have truck with *lubras*! You get that into your thick skull, Jumper. And that'll be all except you stay by me, and look out for that bag of gold."

"Me get you, Captain," answered Jumper.

The night was very dark. Strolling up the hill, in the direction of the dump, M'Shane knew perfectly well that scores of eyes were watching him. He knew Minami's threat was quite substantial: he was in the power of the little Japanese. If Minami was holding off arresting him, it was because he wanted to know what M'Shane was going to do.

Manifestly, it was impossible for M'Shane and Jumper to remove the dump wholesale, and transfer it to the hold of the *Albatross*. Little Minami suspected

that M'Shane had an ace up his sleeve, perhaps that he was a spy for the Aussies, and was maneuvering to spring some trap upon Bongo Bongo.

And this was exactly what M'Shane wanted Minami to believe. M'Shane figured that, out of sheer curiosity, and Japanese stupidity, Minami would give him grace till the hour of eleven that night. And that was all that the little captain wanted.

Strolling up the hill with Jumper, M'Shane was increasingly aware of watchers in the darkness. Presently he became conscious of forms slinking along on either side of him. And now he was aware of the ammunition dump in front of him.

IT was beneath a jutting crag, about two hundred feet under the brow of the hill. That crag was an outcrop which shielded it from the possibility of a shell hit. And above it moved the figures of the Jap outposts. Now and again a rifle cracked somewhere along the ridge, but apart from that there was utter silence, and utter watchfulness.

But now, reaching the dump, M'Shane perceived the sentries marching to and fro in front of it. And behind him a troop of Jap soldiers came into view. They took up their positions in a line in front of the dump. It was as if they anticipated some attempt on the part of M'Shane to remove the dump bodily.

With the fear of the occidental common to the Japanese, for all their imitation of him, they were watching every movement of the little captain, as he promenaded to and fro before the great pile of ammunition cases. M'Shane, apparently oblivious of the escort on his heels, examined the dump with careful scrutiny.

Here was a broken case, topping upon another, and he raised it and set it squarely on the top of a sound one. Here was a coconut in the midst of a pile of ammunition—and M'Shane picked it up gravely, and deposited it in position under the spreading pile. And behind him trooped the soldiers, their eyes bulging with wonder.

They had their orders, that at precisely eleven o'clock, the pink-skinned madman and his Kanaka were to be placed under arrest. But they didn't know what it was all about, nor why M'Shane was making this solemn peregrination to and fro along those fifty yards.

M'Shane looked at his onion in the light of the moon. It was half-past ten. He was then on the upper side of the dump, immediately beneath the jutting crag, which formed a sort of cave.

"Half an hour, Jumper," he said. "We'll have a prayer-meeting for the benefit of these heathen." M'Shane's voice was stentorian as he called:

"I'm giving you the Word! You've got a half-hour to approach the Mercy-Seat. Line up, you slant-eyed sons of sin!"

From the other hip-pocket than the one that held his watch, M'Shane produced a bottle.

"Line up!" he shouted, drawing back under cover of the crag. "I'm leading you to salvation, as many as get the grace. We shall read Psalm Number One Hundred Forty."

AND now from all sides the Jap soldiers were collecting, attracted by the sight of the pink-skinned madman, standing under the crag.

"Back, ye Mongolian monkey-faces! Get back! Get on that dump!" shouted M'Shane, waving his arms.

The Japs, realizing that something in the line of entertainment was being offered, scrambled up on top of the dump, until it was topped with a crowd of eager auditors. M'Shane drew back a little further under the shelter of the crag:

Lord's voice rang out: "M'Shane, you old hypocrite, this won't bring you what you're looking for. M'Shane, you and me were messmates once. You quit this fooling and take your five hundred, and be damned glad of it. M'Shane, you was a good fellow once, before you split up with me. Maybe we might get together again, if you'd quit this foolishness."

"Lord, I've had hopes of your soul, even when I've seen you at your worst. Lord, I'd hate to have you pass unrepentant

into the presence of the Mercy-Seat—"

"You slimy son of a sea-slug!" roared Lord. "You've overplayed your hand, you prickly-pear-faced nine-day wonder! You Bible-spouting bile-bladder of bluff and barratry, I'm giving you your last chance—"

"Lord," said M'Shane, with simple dignity, "I'm warning you, because, as you said, we once was shipmates. I want to save your soul alive, to bring it to the Mercy-Seat. Lord, something's going to break. Lord, if you know James M'Shane, you'll make tracks quick, before the vengeance of the Lord overtakes these heathen."

M'Shane pulled out his onion, and held it up to the light of the moon. "Twelve minutes, Jumper," he said, "and remember what I told you, when you hear me screech."

He looked at where Lord had been sitting on the dump. But Lord was gone. After all, Lord and M'Shane knew each other pretty well from of old.

"We shall now," said M'Shane again, "read Psalm One Hundred Forty."

The Japanese soldiers watched, thrilled by the antics of the pink-cheeked fanatic. There was not a man there who understood a word of English, but all of them knew that something was going to break at eleven o'clock, and almost all of them had wrist-watches.

"Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man," said M'Shane. "Preserve me from the violent man.

"They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.

"The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they spread a net by the way-side; they have set gins for me. Selah."

The Japs were staring, goggle-eyed, at M'Shane, as he shouted the words. The dump was packed from end to end with soldiers. M'Shane paused, and consulted his watch in the light of the moon again.

"Two minutes, Jumper," he said. "And there's only three-tenths of a second leeway. Prepare, Jumper. Get ready when I screech."

"Me understand," said Jumper.

"As for the head of them that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. Let burning coals fall upon them; let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again—"

M'Shane paused. He looked expectantly at the Japs. He waited.

And a deep sound, a mumble that became a stuttering response answered him. Then suddenly a roar. And then all hell loosed, as the dump exploded with a hundred thousand detonations. Into the moonlight flew five hundred thousand cartridges, and the bodies of five hundred Japs caught in the demolition.

M'Shane pulled Jumper back under the shelter of the crag, while the air was filled with flying débris. Then a wild whoop burst from his lips.

"Run like hell, Jumper," he shouted. "And hold that bag. Get up the jib and mains'l. I'll be with you!"

As the flying débris subsided, M'Shane made his way down the hill toward the dock.

"YOU see, Jumper," explained M'Shane, as the *Albatross* threaded her way out to sea, "it was something you, being a benighted heathen, couldn't understand. But judging from those sounds, that's the end of those Japs on Bongo Bongo."

And, though the settlement was only a blob on the night, they could hear the crackle of small-arms, and the roar of artillery, and knew that the Aussies were making a clean-up.

"There was time-bombs in those coconuts, Jumper," said M'Shane. "And only three-tenths of a second leeway. They had to go off at eleven sharp. We done the trick, Jumper, and the Australian Government will be well pleased, I reckon. Now we'll have a lay-off, and take it easy."

"Plenty drink? Plenty *lubra*?" asked Jumper hopefully.

M'Shane sighed hopelessly. "I'll have to knock morality into that thick, black head of yours, Jumper," he answered. "I don't seem able to get it through that I'm a family man."

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The Dawn Tide

(Continued from page 29)

man prisoners," screamed Yvette. "You'd send them to their death, too."

"Bah, what do I care for them? Cowards who surrendered instead of giving their lives for their country. If I had not been wounded, I should never have been taken. Come now, be sensible. Let us be friends, you and me, and tomorrow we shall cross the Gulf together—"

"No! No! Never, never!" she screamed. "You can't be such a coward as to send innocent men and women to their death. And your own countrymen. You are mad. Listen to me! I will take you across the Gulf at daybreak, if you will cease to be a madman, if you will stay quietly in the bedroom, while I attend to my husband—"

Volksmann raised his axe. "They shall all drown," he roared. "The time for friendship is past. And you shall be mine!"

She leaped at him, but he had already swung with unerring accuracy—not at the light, but at the slender feed-pipe that conveyed the kerosene oil vapor from the storage tank in the basement of the tower.

He dropped the axe and turned on Yvette as she stood beside him, transfixed with horror. He caught her in his arms. This time there was no escaping him.

She fought with all her strength, fought madly, battering his face with her clenched fists. The vessel had already disappeared from sight; it was only a matter of minutes now before those lights would appear again behind Pointe à Pic. Yvette tried to free one hand, to start the foghorn, but Volksmann understood, and grabbed her arm again.

"No, no, they shall all die," he shouted triumphantly. "And so you will be punished—you and that fool will be sent to jail for life, for your negligence. Nobody will believe your story that it was me. So you will come with me, to escape your punishment!"

She was still fighting him, as he tried to drag her from the platform toward the stairs. And now the beams of light had lost their power. Only three little flickers came from the lens—long, short, short—long, short, short—then nothing at all. The lightless mechanism revolved in the trough of mercury.

OVERHEAD the sea-birds were whirling, and uttering wilder cries. It was as if the extinction of the light had dazed them. The great feathered forms were swooping within a foot of Yvette's face as she fought her desperate battle with the madman.

He was trying to drag her down the stairs, and she clung with all her might to the low, waist-high railing. She had ceased to scream, in that tense, silent struggle. But the sky was whirling around her, and the circling sea-birds seemed a single enormous loop about her head.

And then, over Volksmann's shoulder, she saw the figure of her husband, standing at the head of the stairway, with his crutch under his arm, as always, and she screamed:

"Armand! Armand! Help me!"

Volksmann half released her, swung about, and saw the lighthouse-keeper.

"So you've come back from the dead, old fellow?" he bellowed, half-releasing Yvette. And for an instant he stood there undecided.

Armand shuffled a step forward, swinging upon his crutch. His purpose was plain. If he could gain stance against the pillar of the light, he could bring his crutch to bear upon Volksmann.

Yvette tore herself free from Volksmann's grip and started toward her husband. Volksmann swayed under the recoil—and then a swooping mass of feathers and flesh and bone, hurled at a speed of fifty miles an hour, caught the German in the face.

He reeled, toppled, ~~clutched~~ at the air,

and went over the low railing as if flung from a catapult. His last cry of terror mingled with the wails of the gulls.

YVETTE ran to the railing and looked over. Nothing was visible below but the splashing of the waves. She ran to the stairs, and began hurrying down, hearing the tapping of her husband's crutch behind her.

He was as agile as she; they reached the ground floor together, and ran out into the night. Nothing was visible; the lights of the south shore were shrouded in a thin night mist that had begun to drift along the river. Yvette ran out on the flat rock, but Volksmann's body was not there.

She kicked off her shoes and plunged forward over the slippery ledge. It was at the edge of the waves she found what she was looking for—and it was as if the events of the night had only been a dream, and now, for the first time, she was finding Volksmann—not alive, but dead.

The body was hideously battered and mangled by the fall, but the face—that leering face that Yvette dreaded—was mercifully hidden by the waves. The body of Volksmann hung with head and shoulders submerged, at the extreme edge of the reef.

Yvette heard the tap of Armand's crutch on the flat rock. That was as far as he could go in safety, in the night.

"He's here," she called. "His head's under the waves. Armand, you must help me. We can't leave his body here. We've got to get him inside."

"Not inside," said Armand—and Yvette was silent.

"We can't leave him here. His shoulders are wedged between two rocks."

Armand leaned forward, planting his crutch firmly on the edge of the flat rock. He stretched out his hand, and Yvette went toward him and grasped it.

"It never happened," said Armand. "If there is anything down there, the tide will carry it away."

A white star gleamed around Pointe à Pic, and Yvette uttered a cry:

"The ship, Armand, the ship! Perhaps

it's the *Princess Elisabeth*! We've got to start the foghorn. It may warn her!"

THEY ran into the lighthouse, and raced up the stairs again. Yvette felt her heart beating madly as she gasped and struggled upward in advance of her husband. She darted to the foghorn and started the diaphone. A blast rang out, startling the sea-birds that were still thronging around the pillar where the light should have blazed. Another blast—and now they followed one another in steady rhythm. But now, around Pointe à Pic, Yvette could see the great ship outlined against the deep gray of the night.

And the green light seemed almost directly beneath the white. That meant that the ship was heading inward. She was steering straight toward the sunken ledges, not knowing that Pointe à Pic was cleared, and expecting every moment to see the light flash out again, to signal her to change her course.

Armand came limping onto the platform, and Yvette ran to him and grasped his arm, and pointed. She tried to speak, but no words would come.

She had never seen so great a ship in the St. Lawrence. Silhouetted against the vast gray pall of the heavens, she seemed larger than she was—an enormous, graceful mass of metal, crowded with men and women, almost at their journey's end, and moving straight to doom.

She didn't change her course for the foghorn, whose booming sound, diffused by the air currents, gave little indication of her course. Now, on the port side, the red light came for one instant into view. The *Princess Elisabeth* was heading straight for the ledges. She had perhaps three minutes in which to change her course or perish.

Yvette clung to her husband in mute, desperate appeal. Her masses of coiled hair, which had come unpinned in the struggle with the German, tumbled below her waist, and quivered in the sharp sea breeze that was beginning to spring up. Suddenly Armand seized her in his arms. He propped himself against the unlit pillar, and drew a clasp-knife from his pocket.

"What is it?" cried Yvette, startled by the action.

"Your hair, Yvette! Your hair for a light!"

She thought he had gone mad, and cried out in terror as Armand caught her by the throat, and proceeded to hack through the heavy strands. And then she understood and ceased to resist him.

HE had it in his hands, a great mass of black hair, that wove itself about him as if it were a living thing. He caught it up in his hands and began hastily plaiting it into a thick rope, while Yvette watched, not daring to speak. But she could see the oncoming vessel, looming up more and more plainly through the night, with her white and green lights casting two rippling tracks across the waves.

Those tracks were extending. Now they had reached the edge of the rocks, two tracks of death. . . .

Armand had the rope in his hands, thick as a ship's cable, and as long as the reach of his extended arms. He looked about him, saw the axe that Volkmann had dropped, lying beside the severed pipe, and snatching it up, began weaving strands of hair about the metal head.

Then he held the axe up and shouted, and the wind whipped the hair into a long streamer that floated out on the breeze. Overhead the sea-gulls mewed, and circled about the dark pillar.

"Quick! Oh, be quick!" screamed Yvette. "Look at her! *Mon dieu*, in another minute she will be on the rocks!"

Armand pulled out his matchbox and struck a light. It flared, and went out instantly. Another, between his cupped hands, and another, and still another—

The great hulk of the oncoming vessel seemed to tower out of the grayness, as if it meant to ram the lighthouse. Yvette, cowering and shuddering, hid her face in her hands. And then suddenly the hair rope caught fire.

There was a fizz and a splutter, a line of fire ran along it, and was ablaze from end to end. Armand, holding the axe at arm's length, swung the blazing beacon about his head in a wide circle, then right and left, left and right, trying to spell out "Danger" in the International Code.

And still the ship was coming on. The fiery rope parted. One half of it flew in a shower of blazing shreds among the sea-gulls; the other, now only a dull-red remnant, dropped from the axe.

Armand stood still and helpless, watching.

But suddenly the green and white lights drew apart. A surge of water lashed the rocks. Armand shouted, then bent and gripped Yvette, and pulled her to her feet.

"She is turning!" he shouted. "See, she is turning!"

Breathlessly, they watched. The ship was very near the ledge. It seemed touch and go whether she could make the passage into deep water.

And, after she had made that passage and was only a white star far up the Gulf, they two stood still, with locked hands. The foghorn was still droning, and overhead the gulls still flew.

"Come," said Armand. "I must row to the mainland to send word about the light. You will not be afraid alone?"

"No," said Yvette, "not with the dawn tide—which carries everything away."

Give to the RED CROSS
That Our Boys May Live!

Never Thumb Your Nose at the Foreman

(Continued from page 19)

SOMETIME later, he sprang suddenly awake, aware that Abe was no longer beside him. Almost at once, he made out the seaman's slight form crouched by the rail. Abe turned, hearing the landlubber stir, and made a gesture for silence.

"Listen!" he hissed.

Out of the darkness, and seemingly near at hand, came a cackle of arrogant laughter, a splash, and a choked yell of terror. The laughter broke off suddenly, as if in burst of temper, and the same voice rattled a string of commands—in Japanese! George shot out of the tarpaulin and crept to Abe's side.

"It's that sub that got us," Abe whispered. "Cruising on the surface, and heading for that repair and supply dump in the cove. One of the crew either fell in or got kicked in. I wish I could make them out."

Suddenly the Jap skipper shouted again. Distant motors drummed—a signal tinkled. A small searchlight flashed on and probed the water briefly, and they were astonished to see how far out the craft was. The sound had carried deceptively.

"He's outside the reef," Abe decided. "Listen! There's only one passage in—the way we came. I get it now—they come inside the reef and skirt the island, to make the cove. If I've judged the tides right, he's two or three hours behind schedule. And crippled."

"Which means—?"

"He'll make anchorage too late to get out the 'same tide, even if he can get shipshape for it. Tomorrow morning he'll be stranded there, high and dry. The whole pack of rats will be ashore with us. We've got about four hours, say."

"Four hours for what?"

"To get our gun ashore!" Abe whis-

pered hotly. "To get her mounted, and get ready to make a stand."

"With one shell?"

"It's better than none!"

"Kid," George muttered, roughly, shaking the sailor's thin arm, "I'm just as tired of life as you are. Let's get this cannon ashore, before we come to our senses. There's another shot of dago red left in that bottle, and I'd like to wet my whistle once more before we declare war."

"I told you it was a bad sign!" Abe answered bleakly.

It was almost daylight by the time they got the gun ashore. By this time, all sound from the Jap had ceased, and they knew it had rounded the island and was only waiting for daylight to head into the cove. As they reached the palms, panting along with the heavy Dutch gun between them, they saw the sub lolling in still, receding water not three hundred yards offshore.

On deck was the burly officer who had thumbed his nose at the British destroyer. With him were five seamen, in shorts. They shivered in the morning breeze. They were a decidedly wilted crew, and by their attitude, Abe knew that their pigboat was seriously damaged. No external hurts were visible, but she looked small and old and decrepit, and almost unseaworthy. The Japanese had overlooked nothing that would float, apparently.

Keeping their heads down below the rank vegetation, so as to hide themselves from the Japs, they mounted the gun. A half-rotten palm trunk served as a rest for the barrel, and they heaped sand around the twisted carriage, packing it tightly. When at last it was set, George peered down the barrel.

"Pshaw!" he whispered. "You're not on her."

"I will be, in a minute. She's heeling to port a little. He'll take water in his starboard trimming tanks to right her, now. See—what did I tell you? In five minutes she'll be dead in my sights. The tide's going out, and she'll be beached for sure."

They watched tensely. Slowly, the sub squared herself and settled into the sand. Abe squatted by the gun, fingering the short lanyard and breathing unevenly.

But just as she leveled, the Jap commander barked an unexpected order, and two of the seamen with him slid suddenly into the water. Taking the end of a light line which was fed to them by their mates on deck, they swam ashore. The maneuver was so startling that the two had reached dry land before Abe could recover himself.

They watched as the two Japs dug into the sand and uncovered a light metal skiff, to which they attached the line. Then, as Abe prepared to fire, the sub heeled slightly, falling back out of range.

They cursed under their breath, and adjusted the gun. While they did so, the seamen on the sub pulled the skiff up to them. The officer, with a final, angry order, stepped into it and began rowing ashore.

BY the time the gun was on its target again, the officer was ashore. As he stepped onto dry land, there came the sound of a plane, flying high overhead. He looked up anxiously, as did the men with him.

It did not pass directly over them, however. He listened until it was out of hearing—until his belligerent American Wasp motors had taken it safely away—and then he elevated his thumb to his nose in the now-familiar, insulting gesture. Some of his old arrogance came back as he strutted up the beach.

"Thinks he's pretty smart," Abe whispered. "There probably won't be another patrol today."

"He may not be so dumb, at that," said George. "He's got an automatic with him, and he's between us and that machine gun we found. Kid—what good is it going to do us to blow up that sub, if we leave

him running around armed? I don't go much on this dead hero business."

"It's too late for—" Abe began; but George had dropped to his belly and was creeping northward out of the palm covert. Almost instantly he was out of sight.

In a moment, there came the billowing sound of a distant steam whistle, a hoarse sound like a ship coming into a friendly port. It was so eerie that Abe half rose to his feet, and then sank down again. Realistic as the sound was, he had been able to distinguish George Good's hoarse tones in it.

The Jap officer heard it, too, and ran up the sickle-shaped dune for a look to the northward. The three seamen on the beach froze in their tracks, bereft of leadership and helpless as young quail.

Abe saw George Good stand under the Jap officer's very nose. He saw the pile-driver foreman swing his hairy, pile-driver fist in a murderous blow, and the Jap went over and rolled leadenly down the bank. George snatched the automatic as he fell, and charged down the dune toward the frightened Jap sailors, roaring a mad and wordless rage.

At that moment, Abe yanked the lanyard. He thought he, too, was yelling—a wild, desperate exultation welled up out of him, and it was his own voice that made his ears ring with the chant: "*Kill—kill—kill—*"

The sand seemed to erupt under him. There was a flash, a blow on both inner ears, a monstrous spitting and hissing, a flash of searing flame. Then he was down on his hands and knees, with the bent carriage of the faithful old Dutch gun pressing on a great pain in his ribs, his feet and legs buried in sand. Over the clanging in his head he could still hear George's battle cry, and the frisky rattle of the automatic.

He peered incredulously over the log, ignoring the pain in his ribs. The shell had struck the sub's fuel supply under the engine room aft of the conning tower, gutting her. The conning tower itself was a huge chimney from which a tower of dark, oily flame roared. The tilted hatch was already cherry-red.

The men who had clustered on deck had disappeared completely. Through the roar and hiss of flames he heard the screams of many voices. The smoke lifted suddenly, and he saw figures on the water. Some were inert and lifeless, but some swam madly toward shore through a sea of oil which, miraculously, had not yet caught fire.

A few made it to the beach almost at once. Abe tore himself free and ran down to meet them. George tossed him the automatic.

"Take this. I'm going after the machine gun. But I think they'll be good boys now."

That the Jap fighter was not a creature who surrendered, as they had heard, was wrong—all wrong. They were as human as anyone, and not saffron supermen at all. The burned and tattered junior officer who had managed to swim ashore was waving a dirty white handkerchief in surrender, and shouting: "We quit—we quit—we quit—" like a parrot who does not understand the words he speaks, but knows their general tenor.

Behind him, his numbed crew shivered; and behind them, the submarine burned fiercely. And behind it, the green sea smirked and sighed and savored of its little joke. It was for this, Abe thought, that the sea had gone to all the trouble of saving half of the *Hetty Mons*.

COMMANDER STOVER, U. S. N., set the big Navy flying boat down in the placid water just inside the reef, and taxied her up to the line of piling that jutted out from the white beach. The motors eased to a purr, and he turned her over to his copilot, and climbed out on the end piling.

It was an American flag that had lured him in, an American SOS spelled out on the sand that had attracted the patrol. Their glasses showed them an American tractor working on the beach, an American piledriver at high tide's edge, waiting its chance to work again when the water receded.

But the half-naked laborers who trudged out of the palms with shovels on their shoulders were Japanese! Com-

mander Stover ducked back into his ship, and the tail gunner swiveled his gun around hastily. The copilot teased the motors.

Then—

"Hey, there, you guys!" an American voice bellowed.

A burly man with an automatic at his side appeared behind the file of Japanese. His clothing was in tatters, and he had a month's growth of brindle beard. He turned and beckoned, and out of the palms came a younger man, in equally sad state of repair, yawning and rubbing his eyes.

Stover watched in amazement as the two ragged men walked out on the dike toward him. Behind them, the Japanese workers—he counted fifteen—bent dutifully to their digging.

"Hello, there. The kid here was asleep," George Good greeted Stover, putting out his hand. "He's been working the swing shift. We've been on twelve-hour shifts. Those guys are good workers if you keep an eye on them, but somebody's got to stand watch every minute of the day and night. We're plumb glad you dropped in."

"Who—what kind of a nightmare is this?" Stover gasped.

George introduced himself and Abe, who blushed self-consciously. Between them, they managed to tell what had been accomplished. In two more days, said George, medium bombers could land safely.

"Tain't much of a base," he apologized, "but we didn't have much to work with, you understand. We thought we'd call it Just Fair Island."

The commander came ashore and looked about. The cat tractor had burned up all its fuel, and stood idle. Now it was up to the Japs and their shovels. A few pilings remained to be driven—if the oil held out.

A stockade had been built from materials off the *Hetty* and the submarine. In this, the twenty Japanese prisoners, including two officers, slept while not on duty on the business end of a shovel.

The commander was incredulous at

first, and then impressed. He said little, until they had relaxed in the shade of the palms. A gunner from the seaplane was in charge of the Jap crew, and both Abe and George were able to rest.

"The only thing wrong, that I can see," said Stover, "is that you can't compel prisoners to work on military installations, under the rules of war. And you've got to give enemy officers certain—er—courtesies. In other words, it might be just as well to be prepared for a light, official slap on the wrist. We can't, of course, acknowledge that any of this actually happened."

Abe smiled inwardly. Rules of war? He looked out at the unperturbed ocean, which had its own sense of humor. But George Good got to his feet and pulled the navy man after him.

"Come here."

They went to the edge of the clearing, and George motioned to a burly Jap whose shaved head had grown out perhaps an inch. The man threw down his shovel and trotted over.

"Lieutenant Izuki, recently skipper of that so-called sub," George introduced him. "We call him Stinky, for short. Make like a lod're brother, Stinky."

The Japanese officer made certain cabalistic motions with his right index finger and his nose, and then shook hands with himself.

"Chicamauga!" he said.

"Bull Run," George answered. "All right, you can go back to work."

He turned to Stover.

"Abe brought up that question of the rules of war, commander," he said earnestly, "and I figured the fairest thing to do was take 'em into the Union. Then they've got no squawk. If it's good enough for us, it's good enough for them.

"That rigamarole you just saw," he went on, "is the secret handshake and password and countersign of the International Brotherhood of Airbase, Seaplane Base and Submarine Base Workers of the South Pacific Ocean and Adjacent Waters, Local Number One. And, chum, it's a closed shop job."

So Long, Sister

(Continued from page 37)

shivers of the oars racing through his arms to his shoulders. But he swore bitterly with every stroke.

The boat nudged the crusted side of the first rock and a man came forward on hands and knees to cling to it. "Room for all of you!" Cannon shouted. "Careful of the injured man here!" He steadied the boat and they wriggled into it, and he searched their faces for the salty face of Link Annerman.

It wasn't there. When the last of them crawled in, clearing the rock of its load, Cannon caught briefly at his arm.

"That's Annerman's boat, isn't it? Where's Link?"

"Kodiak, friend. In the Navy six months now."

"Ah," Cannon said.

The fellow put cold lips to Cannon's ear and pointed. "There's two more of our boys on that other rock. Can we get 'em, you think?"

"Hell, yes!" Cannon shouted back. He was in fine spirits. His Plan was whole again. "We'll get 'em!"

IT wasn't easy though, even with the other pair of oars adding their pull. The sea was bad there. The rocks warped the shape of the waves and the peaks of water came from a dozen directions at once, rolling the little boat mercilessly. The rock itself was a threat.

It was shaped like a floating coffin, one end high, the other hidden in the spray of pounding waves. Two men on it, one kneeling, the other sprawled face down,

unmoving. The laden boat swung close. Numbed hands in the stern were torn loose as they reached for a hold. A pull on the oars closed the gap again—a wave hiked the boat skyward—the fingers regained their grip and clung fast.

"One of 'em's hurt," a man at Cannon's back shouted. "We fished him out of the drink on the way here. Be careful—" His voice went wailing.

Cannon shipped his oars and leaped, thrusting his head into the wind. On hands and knees he crawled through the wind and spray. He caught the first man's shoulders and found him dazed, half frozen. "All right," Cannon said. "All right. Hang onto me."

Then he looked at the other one, the prone one, and paused. There was something about the shape of the man, or the look of his clothes, his uniform, that momentarily robbed Cannon of his strength to breathe against the wind's blast. He reached swiftly for the limp arms and pulled them away from the face, saw the white, wet features and heard in the shriek of the wind a howl of derisive mirth.

He paused a moment. Then his mind functioned. "This man's hurt!" he yelled. "Hurt bad. No room in the boat for him in this condition. Come back for me, you guys!" He shoved the hurt man's companion toward the boat and bellowed, "Unload and come back for me! I'll stay here with him. Beat it! Hurry!"

The wind screamed, but they heard him.

Cannon watched the boat go. He watched it soar high on a speeding comb-er, its nose pointed to the island. Then he turned to scowl again at the bleak face of the man he was marooned with.

Marooned. That was a word with possibilities. There was every chance the sea would wash them off this coffin of rock before the boat returned for them. Every chance. One of them, anyway.

The thought did not surprise him. Or shock him, either. Lately he had learned to think not in shapeless lumps, emotionally, but of small, separate details. His mind automatically reached out with a net to encompass all the angles. Now his mind saw the rock and the sea and the returning

boat. One man on the rock, waiting. One man alone. He looked again into the white face of the kid who had stolen his wife, and then he reached for Jim Waite's limp shoulders.

A wave smashed the submerged end of the rock and buried them. It spilled away, hissing and snarling, and Cannon shook salt from his eyes. The kid's fingers had come to life and were clutching him. The kid was conscious and moaning.

Cannon leaned closer, catching the words.

"Damned subs!" Jim Waite muttered. "Damn' dirty Jap subs! That's two of 'em we got, fellas, two we got. And we'll get more!"

The sea rolled in to smother them. White foam gurgled about the kid's face. When it receded, the pale lips were still moving, the voice still came. "More of 'em, fellas. We'll get 'em all, every last one of 'em. Got a big job to do . . . big job . . . Japs to kill . . ."

"Sure," Cannon snorted. "Oh, sure. You're a big shot. You can do anything." He lay flat and pulled the kid close with one arm, wrapped his legs around the kid's legs and scissored them. It gave him a queer feeling to be that close. It troubled him. He could feel the kid's pulse throbbing against his arm.

"All snug and cozy," Cannon said. He could grin now. The irony of the situation tickled him. "She ought to be here with us. That would make it complete."

Jim Waite didn't answer. But when the boat returned, there were still two men on the rock. The sea had not budged them.

TOWARD morning the storm died down and there was sunlight shining feebly through the mist. There was the fiddle scream of the birds above the bassoon rumble of the surf on the island's shore, and in the weather shack a sound of exhausted men snoring.

Cannon rubbed the crusted salt from his eyes and got them open, and nodded to the man standing over him. He was lame and sore. He was on a blanket on the floor, and from that position the scowl on young Daniels' face seemed to hang from the

ceiling. A bruise on the boy's forehead bulged in a glorious blend of yellows under a smear of salve.

"You all right?" Cannon asked.

"I'm all right." Daniels came closer. "Never mind me; it's you. You said your name was Waite, didn't you? Jim Waite?"

"Me?" Cannon replied warily. "Did I?"

"You did, and I don't get it. Neither does Carleton." The weather-man held a hand over Cannon and let a sheet of paper fall from it. "If you're Jim Waite, what does this mean? It was in the pocket of that fellow you stayed with on Coffin Rock—the one the Yippy fished out of the sea on the way here."

Cannon held the letter up to read it, and it blocked his view of the bearded boy's scowl. Queer, his reluctance to read it. He had thought his scruples were dried up long ago. But his eyes followed the dainty lines of type, sorting the words out of the crazy-quilt blur of water-smearred ink. He read it half through and looked back for the date—a month old!—and went on to read the rest of it, hanging dazedly over the last two lines.

"So you see, Jim, I simply must consider my career first and foremost, naturally, and with Mr. Pluber feeling the way he does about me, and him the most talented director in the entire profession,

I simply haven't any other choice but to say goodbye to you. I really love Mr. Pluber very much, and I am sure you will understand."

Cannon lowered the letter and looked up into the scowl again and said at last, "Is the kid awake?"

"You mean Jim Waite? He's been asking for you."

"Do me a favor," Cannon said, "and rustle me up a bottle of something and two glasses. Two glasses you don't care much about. We'll likely bust 'em. Hurry it, will you?"

The bearded boy stopped scowling. "Waite was one of your crew, wasn't he? I guess you want to drink to the rest of your boys," he said.

"We could do that," Cannon admitted. "Sure. And to the future." His mind had stopped reaching for details and was content now with bigger things, and he was smiling. Jap-hunting was a job he enjoyed. He and Jim Waite—hell—a lot of Japs would regret that combination. Two subs was but a beginning.

"I'll get some Scotch," Daniels said. "Is Scotch all right?"

"Wonderful," Cannon said. "That'll wipe it really clean. She never could stand the taste or smell of Scotch—it always made her sick."

Peace Comes to Bongo

(Continued from page 47)

the Governor, who had long since left for France, and of his mother, who had never acknowledged him. He thought of his father, Button, the mythical American sailor, who had won the French girl's heart. He thought of him with complete detachment, and with a kind of hostility, as the man who was responsible for his appearance upon the uneasy scene of life.

If it hadn't been for the American, Button, he could have slumbered peacefully, unconscious of incarnation. He wouldn't have had to be bothered with all the

things that brought him waddling out of his chair.

He thought of Vorstmann, and a dull animal rage ran through him. Button was not capable of resentment; when he was angered, it was like a physical thing, like a blow that required an automatic response. Vorstmann, to Button, was merely a disturbing element in the great void of peacefulness. But he had killed Churchill, and he was going to kill Stalin.

Here was Stalin, squatting beside him, half on his belly, half on his side, a great

black and pink mound of flesh, with the tiny ears that Button loved to scratch. And the tiny eyes that looked back into Button's innocent and unresponsive. There was no return of the love that Button lavished on the hippo. There was only the recognition of comfort that a cat might have shown.

Seven days from Christmas to New Year's! The greater part of those days had passed. Button must have been lolling, drunk in his chair, day after day. His stock of liquor was getting perilously low.

Vorstmann had robbed him of his store, and taken Suzette, and killed Churchill; and now he was going to kill Stalin, and Button would have nothing left but his chair.

Button had to get rid of Vorstmann if he was to find that peace he wanted.

Stalin was roaming the compound daily. Without his companion, he found that there was a very good square meal in the daily growth of grass within the compound.

He rooted there, bearing the kicks of the sailors with equanimity. He received a certain respect, however, as one who was destined to die to make a festival for the invaders within a day or two.

Stalin was to be sacrificed on the last day of December. The rainy season was now at its height; the water dropped in torrents several times a day. Sometimes Button, caught in the downfall, sought refuge in the Nazi storehouse.

The tusks of the hippopotami had made a mess of the contents. Vorstmann had brought a considerable quantity of staples from the submarine, but the damp had played havoc with much of it, and the terpex was oozing in piles all over the floor. The tusks of the hippos had spared very little of the containers.

SUZETTE stood before Button in his chair. "Hey, great fat pig, what are you doing there?" she bawled. "Tomorrow they kill Stalin, and then you will be all alone; you will have nobody. Me, what a fool I was to put up with you for so long!"

Button opened an eye. "Get me a drink, Suzette, there's a good girl," he said.

"Me? And why should I get you a drink? I am not your servant any more. I am Vorstmann's."

"Vorstmann's moving on. He's going to blow up all the posts between here and the Niger. You don't think he'll take you with him, do you?"

"For what do I care?" Suzette snapped her fingers. "He is a man, not a great pig sleeping all day in a chair, like you!"

Nevertheless, being a woman, Suzette felt the instinctive urge to wait upon a man. She went into the store, and brought back a bottle of brandy from the almost depleted secret cache, together with two glasses. She poured out two drinks.

"Puis, I drink with you, Button. You are not so bad," said Suzette. "So you think Vorstmann will not take me with him when he goes?"

"He ain't that kind of a fool," said Button, opening the other eye, and squinting at his brandy. He raised the glass to his lips, and drank. He smacked his lips. Vitality raced back through the old man's etiolated body.

Suzette drank reflectively. "So you think Vorstmann will not take me with him?" she asked again. "All men are the same. Some are fat pigs, and some are thin ones, but they are all pigs. I am sick of them."

"Listen, Suzette, can't you stop Vorstmann killing Stalin? If he wants meat, he can shoot pigs in the bush. He's only doing it because he's my pet."

"You old fool," said Suzette. "If you had not loved those big pigs so much, maybe I might have loved you more." She poured out two more drinks. This time Button sipped his instead of draining it at a gulp. An idea was creeping through his brain, and, because all his physical processes were slow, Button was mentally ruminating, like a cow.

Through the wire of the compound, Button saw the hippo rooting in the heap of garbage that had collected during Vorstmann's occupancy. Vorstmann, who was passing, turned and kicked it in the belly. The hippo grunted and rolled on its side. Vorstmann kicked it again.

And now the ruminative cud of Button's contemplations swelled into a men-

tal bolus. Button knew what he was going to do.

Suzette planted a kiss on Button's forehead, and ran away. Button, accustomed to the vagaries of women, hardly noticed it. He was forcing his slow brain into action.

THE rains were increasing; every hour the heavens discharged their load in pailsful, followed by a brief break of sun and tropic heat. All that afternoon Button lolled in his chair, and watched the deluge hammering on the tin roof of his store, and on the huts, and sending rivers of water gushing down into the bush.

Toward nightfall, which occurs instantaneously in the tropics, he hoisted himself with difficulty to his feet, and went into his store. He looked at his looted shelves, at the piles of debris that had accumulated since Vorstmann's arrival. Then he went down into his cache and looked at his supply of liquor.

There were still half a dozen bottles of brandy left, and Button gathered them up in his arms. He proceeded toward the compound. By now it was utterly dark. There was not a visible star in the overcast sky, but it was an intermission of the rains; the next downpour was due in about half an hour.

Button handed one of the bottles to the sentry at the entrance to the wire. "For New Year," he said, and passed through. There were no guards in the enclosure, because no prisoner in his senses would attempt to make a break into that rain-drenched jungle. Button stopped at the hut of the two British officers, and called.

"Hello, who's that?" came back the voice of Captain Spry.

"A New Year's present," said Button, handing out two more of the bottles.

"I say, old man, this is kind of you," said Spry, lounging forward in the darkness.

"Yes, and I have something to say to you. You have that pair of wire-cutters. You fellows cut the wire and walk into the jungle. Walk as far and as fast as you can."

"What, now?" asked Winters.

"Quite, quick, yes," answered Button.

"But, I say, it's going to rain in a few minutes," Spry protested.

"You do what I say," answered Button. "I have lived here nearly all my life. I was peaceable before Vorstmann came. Now I think that Vorstmann is going away. Soon—very soon. You do what I say."

"We might as well take the old blighter's tip, Spry," said Lieutenant Winters. "All right—much obliged to you for your advice, Mr. Button."

BUTTON ambled on across the compound. The sound of laughing came from Vorstmann's hut. Vorstmann was celebrating with his officers. Button passed on to the storehouse. The sentry challenged him, then recognized the gross bulk of the man, and gave him a polite good-evening. Button produced his three remaining bottles.

"For you and your friends," he said. "And a happy New Year's Eve."

"*Danke schoen*, Herr Button," said the soldier, greatly gratified. "Tomorrow we kill that other big pig of yours for New Year's dinner. Come, I will show you."

Button accompanied the man out into the middle of the compound. In the faint light that was reflected from the huts he could see two posts. He put up his hand and felt a rope hanging between them.

"The last pig," said the soldier, "we did not bleed him proper, as should have been done. This pig, we cut his throat and hang him up to bleed, like the proper way to bleed the pig."

A surge of rage raced through Button's body. And then he heard Suzette's tinkling laugh coming from Vorstmann's hut.

"You have a good time with the brandy," he said to the soldier, and moved aside into the darkness. He stood there for a long time, listening to all the noises of the night. He heard the faint clang of the wire as the prisoners, cut it, and seemed to see the procession of them, the two Englishmen and the Fanti soldiers, filing away into the forest. He heard the voices of the sailors, thick and guttural,

and guessed that they were getting outside his bottles of brandy.

And, standing there, the fat man summed up his philosophy of life. Peace at all cost, and no more of this foolishness. He had been disturbed too long. He had lost his goods, he had lost Suzette, he had lost Churchill, and now Stalin was to be hung from a rope between two posts. It wasn't peaceable, and when Stalin was dead, he'd have no friend left in the world.

He whistled softly. He waited and whistled again. He heard an exclamation from the sentry at the compound entrance, and then a heavy shape lumbered through the dark and brushed against him.

Button threw his arms about the hippo's head, and the tears rolled down his cheeks. The cavernous mouth was already busy on the grass inside the compound. There was the sound of crunching. Button urged the creature forward, by prodding it in the abdomen with his knee. He urged it toward the storehouse.

The sentry was not there. He was getting outside the brandy with his comrades in a nearby hut. Between the dump and the storehouse was a trail of garbage. The hippo began rooting in it greedily. Unexpected gustatory treasures often came to light for hippopotami in those trails of discarded human food.

BUTTON went into the storehouse. The hippos had smashed several of the kegs of explosive, and their contents had oozed out in little heaps of gray powder. Button felt about him in the darkness and tore out the staves of two more of the containers. Now he was standing calf-deep in the flood of powder, so innocuous when handled, so terrific if compressed and jarred. He heard Stalin rooting near him; then the omnivorous beast had found the explosive, and was greedily devouring it.

Sensing everything in the darkness, presently Button felt the flood receding from his calves to his ankles. He groped along the storehouse, and came to another keg. The hippos had staved this in, too, with their glancing canines, and Button pulled it apart, and let another flood of

powder ooze out onto the floor. The hippo snorted past him, and Button sat down, listening to the suction of the mandibles.

He heard Suzette laugh again, and then a roar of laughter from Vorstmann's hut. He heard the drunken shouts of the sailors. After a while one of them came stumbling toward the storehouse.

"Himmel!" he ejaculated, as he fell over the bulk of the monster. "What you do with him here, Mr. Button?"

"He came in," said Button. "I guess he suspects that he'll be wanted in the morning."

The sailor roared with laughter. "You said something there," he chuckled. "Me, I am the butcher. We string him up with the pulley, and then I slice his throat."

"Good eating," said Button, and the sailor drifted back toward the hut. The hippo had ceased munching, though Button could still feel the soft powder about his ankles. It was lying on its side, and Button ran his hand around the inside of the wide-open chops. For almost the first time in its life, the hippo had had as much to eat as it wanted.

Button ran his fingers around the little ears, and the hippo grunted. He laid his head against the folds of hide about the neck, and pursed his clumsy lips in a kiss.

Then he stepped carefully over the massive body, and crossed the compound in the direction of his store. At the gap in the wire the sentry was seated, fast asleep, his head against a post, the empty brandy-bottle beside him.

Suzette was curled up in Button's chair. She started up. "Vorstmann wants some more brandy," she said. "Where have you been, fool?"

"There is no more brandy," answered Button, "and you stay here tonight."

"Let me go. Are you going to beat me? Are you going to be a man at last, fat pig?"

Button cuffed her soundly, and kicked her inside the store. He camped outside, listening to her noisy sniffing. It was very difficult, not being peaceable, but one had to pay for the right to have peace. . . .

IT was Vorstmann who discovered all his sentries snoring drunk. Discipline had certainly been relaxed since he had come to Bongo, but he had fulfilled his mission; he had directed the activities of the welf-pack in the South Atlantic, and now it was getting time to move on and blow up the rest of the British posts in that section of Africa.

Besides, this was New Year's Day, and one couldn't be too hard on the men on such a day.

He was in a fairly good temper when he awoke at dawn, but he had consumed a vast quantity of liquor the night before, and then he had sent Suzette for more, and she hadn't come back. That began to irritate him. And then he saw the great bulk of Stalin lying in the middle of the compound, and remembered that the hippo was to be slaughtered for the New Year's dinner.

The creature was lying on its belly almost directly below the line on which the carcass was to be suspended. It had evidently been rooting in the garbage heap, started for home and decided to lie down. There were evidences of distress about the hippo. It was breathing in short pants, and only the whites of the little eyes were visible. But Vorstmann didn't notice that.

The cavernous red mouth was distend-

ed as usual. Vorstmann thrust his foot into it and kicked the inside of the upper jaw. The hippo showed evidence of pain.

"You—!" said Vorstmann, and kicked the creature in the ribs with all his force. The hippo shifted its posture slightly.

With an outburst of sudden anger, Vorstmann kicked it in the belly, twice—three—four times—

And all those explosives are so tricky. A jar will send them off when least expected. . . .

SUZETTE came stumbling out of the store as it collapsed about her ears. Button was lying across the threshold, trying to be peaceable. He dragged the girl down beside him, and stifled her screams.

Lengths of wattle from the demolished huts were raining down on them, and a great column of smoke, interspersed with fire, occupied the place where the compound had been.

"What is it?" screamed Suzette.

"Help me into my chair. And then make breakfast. Shut up, or I'll beat you again. I'm going to be peaceable once more."

And, lolling in his big chair, Button closed his eyes upon the red, eruptive world.

Back the Attack — BUY WAR BONDS!



Out of the Deep

(Continued from page 57)

be told we can't work it, or he'd be on his feet in a jiffy, and that would kill him. We can't receive any messages either. I think our tubes are gone."

"We've got plenty cartridges," I reassured her. "And we ought to get help at any minute now."

Of course I didn't believe a word of what I'd told her. Our nearest airfield wasn't too far away, but no planes had shown up during the battle the night before. Planes ain't like grasshoppers, that just have to jump into the air; they're dependent upon gas, principally, and if a shipload or two of gas had gone to the bottom, that made all the difference in the world.

I spent the day trying to make the wounded safe, and removing stores and supplies, and going back and forward between the lieutenants and our post. I knew the Nips would be flying over us pretty soon. And all we could do would be to hold out. I had thought, at the worst, it might be necessary to use force to get the women and the wounded away, but the barges that had brought them to Gogo were piled up on the coral, and none of them were seaworthy. Anyway, there wasn't time to do anything about it.

Our chances looked slimmer and slimmer. I wondered why the Jap planes didn't start operations. They didn't have to wait for dark. They must have known there was no anti-aircraft outfit on our tip of Gogo.

As a matter of fact, they weren't using up any bombers on our little rock. They had need for them elsewhere. They were bringing up their artillery, preparing to soften us up for the final rush.

The first shells started dropping about an hour before sundown. They had the buildings ablaze in a few minutes, but we were all down at the bottom of our rock foxholes, and I'd pulled back the machine-guns to behind a bank of earth, which commanded the approach. If they

were knocked out by direct hits, we'd still have our rifles.

The women were wonderful. Only Lieutenant Dorothy was a bit jittery. I found out the cause of that when she came to me and said: "You won't let us be taken alive, will you, sergeant? Promise me that."

So I promised her.

IN those black hours before the rising of the moon, the half-dozen of us lay on our bellies, watching and listening to every sound ahead of us. The shelling had stopped, and nobody had been hit. I was praying with all my soul that God would send us light before the moon rose, and then it came. The Nips started sending up star-shells, which lit up the whole ground for us.

Then I began to understand. They didn't know how many of us there were on the tip of Gogo. They might even suppose that a considerable force had been landed the night before. They were scared, and very cautious.

And then suddenly a voice came blaring out of a loudspeaker. It was a Jap voice, but the English was very good. It was what they call "mission English" out in the Orient:

"Hello, Yanks! Hello, Yanks! This is for Admiral Ishoto, commanding armies of Japan. You are in a bad fix, Yanks. You had best surrender and be treated according to honorable code of Bushido."

"The —s!" mumbled the boy beside me. "Shall I give them a burst, sarge?"

"Leave that gun alone," I whispered. "Where's that loudspeaker?"

"Over there, I think."

Those idiots sent up two more star-shells. They never had much sense of coordination. Now I saw the little group in the darkness, huddling about what must have been the loudspeaker. But I saw something more. I saw another line of Nips getting into position to rush us.

"Hold your fire," I said to the boys. "They're going to start shelling us in a few minutes, and then they'll rush us again. This is going to be the end. So hold your fire."

He was right there. The shells came over again, at first by twos and threes, then a barrage of them.

We six were lying up there in a cleft of the rock, with the women and sick men below. The bursting of the shells, the patter of the flying fragments on the rocks, the frightful concussion left us nauseated and shaken. In the back of our minds was just the one idea: when they come charging in, we must get the machine-guns working.

NOW the shelling had ceased. Now they were coming. "Hold them!" I yelled, and I was just in time, because the whole sandy isthmus was alive with Nips, line after line of them. And those damned fools behind them were still sending up star-shells.

That was what made it easy. They could have sneaked in on us in the dark, and cleaned us up. But they didn't know how many of us there were. We might have been a battalion strong, with artillery, holding our fire. These were just suicide squads, trying us out.

Our two guns sprayed them all along the line. It wilted and disappeared. Another line came on, and broke as well. Then two or three lines united in a wild, surging charge across that strip of sand. The Japs were yelling like lost souls. Little bunches of them came almost up to the muzzles of our guns, and were blotted out. Three Japs came leaping right up to me, and I shot one, and stuck the second with my bayonet. One of my boys bashed in the skull of the third.

That had been touch and go. The Japs were running back, in the light of the star-shells that those fools kept sending up. There were still a lot of them left, for they were reforming somewhere about the middle of the isthmus. And, if they chose to keep it up all night, they'd wear us down in the end. There were only six of us.

"How's it going, sergeant?" That was

Lieutenant Mary. I felt her soft hand on my shoulder. I turned and looked at her, and saw those two eyes of hers like stars.

"We're holding them. How's your folks?"

"We're all right, sergeant. Do you think we can hold them?" she asked me.

"Sure we'll hold them," I answered. "Go back to your boys and leave this job to us."

She went away. The star-shells were still going up. I could see now that the Nips were reforming, at the neck of the isthmus. They'd send over another barrage of shells, and then the rush would come.

"How's the ammunition?" I asked.

"We've got some left."

I squatted there, waiting. The shelling hadn't started yet. I was thinking of my promise to Lieutenant Dorothy. The sudden silence was awful. I couldn't stand that silence. I wanted all bell loose again.

Then that silence was broken. There came an outburst of eerie wailing from that No Man's Land in front of us, that was littered with the bodies of the dead. It was a terrible sound, like the earth mourning over all this destruction. I felt my hair rising up, like a dog's.

And then I knew what it was. It was old Texas, wandering out there, and sending up his prayers to Ra, his Sun-god, to punish the Nips for killing all his folks, and destroying his god.

I yelled: "Come in here, you damned old fool!" It was like a miracle, how he had escaped through all that shelling and machine-gun firing.

THE shells broke on us again, the hottest barrage of all. I sweated in my hole, waiting for the final charge. It started after a few minutes that seemed like an eternity. When I popped my head out of my fox-hole, the first thing I saw was two of my boys, blown to pieces. I grabbed the gun and started feeding cartridges. The star-shells had stopped now; maybe the Nips had got wise. Anyway, they were coming on.

"You got that gun working?" I called to the other crew.

"Okay, sarge," came the answer. We were all set and ready now. What was troubling me most was how I was going to carry out my promise to Lieutenant Dorothy.

They were coming on, with a racket that would have raised the dead. It seemed about a hundred years before I realized that they weren't coming any nearer. Just that rumpus out there, those wild yells that seemed to stay put. . . .

A silver thread rose out of the east. It was the edge of the moon. It was throwing a faint light over the isthmus. Now the scene was slowly coming into view. I stared at it for a long while without understanding what happening.

I could see, very faintly, that the whole neck of the isthmus was filled with Nip soldiers, and I knew that this meant the end for us. But they weren't coming on. They were floundering about as if they had all gone crazy.

The moon began to rise above the horizon. The isthmus was fairly well lighted now. And now I saw that the whole neck was bubbling and boiling, and the little yellow bodies were trapped in it, and trying to struggle out of a sea of waist-deep mud.

(Sergeant Brunner turned to me: "The OWI ain't given out that piece of information yet," he said. "You see, it was one of them volcanic islands. And just that time had been chosen for an eruption. And maybe it was Ra, the Sun-god, who was getting on the job, on account of old Taxas howling to him out there.")

The moon was up above the horizon. All hell seemed to be let loose on the isthmus. The earth had stopped boiling and bubbling. It was all water now, instead of earth. It was a million spouting geysers, and only the rock on which we had our camp stood up above the flood.

It had begun to rain, too. It was raining with the moon still brilliant. It must have been like the time when Noah went into his Ark and battened down the hatches.

The Japs were underneath now. They had stopped howling, because they were

all drowned. But that wasn't the end. Somewhere in the middle of the isthmus something was rising out of the water. It rose higher and higher. Then I let go a scream.

IT was a ship. It was the shape of a ship, clogged with mud, and slowly shaking herself free of the mud and water, until she stood up out of the mixture. It was an American cruiser, trim and snug, with all her guns ready for action.

It was the *Morristown*, that had been bombed to death the night before, and that same volcanic working had drawn her up out of her grave. She was afloat again, with her crew around her guns. And I'll swear, half-dark though it was, that I saw Captain Hemple still standing on the bridge of her.

Then suddenly the rain-clouds covered the moon, and everything went black. But I knew that Ra, the Sun-god, was on our side, and had pulled that trick to prove that there wasn't any bigger Sun-god in Nippon.

"Gosh, sarge, did you see that?" asked one of my boys.

"Yeah, I saw it. Just stay at your gun. I guess we won't have no more trouble tonight," I said. "You go down and tell them lady lieutenants that we've held them. And you don't have to tell them anything about the old *Morristown*."

Brunner was silent for so long that I said, "Have another beer, sergeant."

"Thanks," he said.

"What happened next?"

"Well, in the morning our bombers were flying all over Gogo Island. And there were about fifty destroyers and transports riding off Gogo. Before noon they'd started building up our base again. And all our wounded were doing fine. After that, the Nips just evaporated from the northern part of the island. Nobody had been killed, and old Taxas came back, chattering about Ra. . . . Nobody put much stock in what he was trying to tell them.

"Gogo Island had turned into two islands, and the middle part was a waste of water, with soundings of fifty fathoms.

But there wasn't any *Morristown* afloat. I guess she'd done her job and gone back home again."

"How about another beer, sergeant?" I asked.

"I don't think Sergeant Brunner wants any more beer," said a feminine voice beside me.

She was a lovely little WAC, with dark hair and black, snapping eyes.

"I think the sergeant's had enough beer," she said. "We're going home, Jeremy."

Sergeant Brunner rose out of his chair. "Well, we saved all those boys," he said. "I'd like to tell you some more—"

But I guessed there wouldn't be any more, because Lieutenant Mary was already guiding the sergeant toward the door.

Fool of Florence

(Continued from page 65)

expert swordsmen, and it might be guessed that they had worked in her service on more than a few occasions. These three, then, would hold up and put to flight the Count's companions. The Count himself would be disarmed and held, while I went quickly through his doublet.

"You see, Tito," said my mistress, "there will be no blood-letting, and especially we cannot permit the Roman ambassador to suffer harm. He will be considered the victim of a night brawl. And everybody will be masked. You, too, Tito. Come let me see how you look in a mask."

She took one, of black satin, from a drawer, and fitted it over my face. Then the two ladies burst out laughing.

"He looks like an accomplished cavalier, does he not, Maddalena?" smiled Lucrezia. She turned to me. "Come, then, it is a bargain, Tito," she said. "Your reward will be great, in gold or a post at the Ferrara court. You will make two women eternally your debtors. And you will be given instruction on Saint Ambrose night."

She extended her hand, which I took and kissed. Then *Madonna Maddalena's*. And so I left them, cursing their stupidity, and half-resolved to abandon my own plans.

THE reception on Saint Ambrose Eve was as brilliant as ever. On his throne, tired old Duke Lorenzo received his guests. It was an informal gathering,

on which nothing political was supposed to be discussed. But the Roman embassy, who were flushed with the anticipation of victory, could not forebear to show their triumph, least of all Count Forzi.

After the usual congratulations, he observed: "I speak now as the ambassador of a friendly State, Magnificence, but at our next meeting I shall address you as His Holiness's brother, and close ally, as well as son."

It was an impudent remark, but Forzi had already drunk too much. I was standing in a recess, awaiting my own summons. I watched the old Duke's troubled face, and the grave Mantuan ambassador, in black, standing beside him. I knew that only under hard urging would His Magnificence, Duke Lorenzo, consent to the papal alliance. For Florence was at the cross-roads of her history, and must either unite with Mantua against Rome, or be swallowed up in due course.

Nothing but the production of those letters would change the old duke's determination.

The Mantuan ambassador answered: "I think your excellency is a little premature—unless, of course, you are able to produce very cogent arguments, of which I know nothing."

"Oh, I have the arguments, and you know nothing of them," retorted Forzi. "There is but one other person in this hall, I believe, who is acquainted with them. I shall produce them in due course."

And he stared boldly into the face of Madonna Maddalena, seated at the Duke's side.

I have said that she was a foolish woman, but I could only admire the way in which she returned his stare without flinching, or reddening, or showing the least sign that she understood. There was a long tension, and then the Duke called to his musicians in the gallery.

And now it was my time to play my part as Fool. I came into the room, tumbling head over heels, in a way that brought shouts of astonished laughter from all those in the hall. The old Duke rose on his throne, clapping his hands and crying out his approval.

"Good, my fool, good!" he called, as I halted breathless. "Ask me a favor, fool, and, if it be not too foolish, I shall do my best to grant it."

"I pulled a long face. "Grant, then, Magnificence, that my cap of state may rest where it belongs," I answered. And I took off my foolscap, tumbled up to Count Forzi, and placed it upon his head.

HE tore it off with an oath. It was a daring thing for even a fool to have done. I trembled a moment, fearing he would recognize me as the tailor's lout. But he hardly looked at me. He was at the point of explosion, but, since all the hall was rocketing with laughter, he decided to laugh too. Only the Duke looked grim. It was a serious affront, and I feared that I had lost the favor of His Magnificence.

He waved me away, and I took to flight, and from a distance watched the departure of the guests. In a little while the Palace was quiet as usual. And then, as I had expected, one of the little pages from Ferrara found me, and beckoned me into a room in one of the gentlemen's apartments. There I found a good-looking man examining the point of a sword.

"You know the part you are to play tonight?" he asked, in his heavy Ferrarese accent, which I could hardly understand.

"I have been told," I replied.

"Good! I am in charge of the little welcoming party. There should be no blood-

letting. Nevertheless, it will be needful for you to wear the dress of a cavalier, also a mask and sword. Be careful with that sword. I do not wish to be pricked by it, nor my companions."

"You need have no fears from me," I said.

"Good again. This sword is yours. You will find dress and mask in this closet. I shall not be with you for some hours. You will wait here until the summons comes. Do you require entertainment?"

"Oh, I shall practise my tumbling. The hours will go by very pleasantly," I answered.

He frowned at that, and left me. It must have been a long time afterward that three masked men came into the room and stood looking at me. I had donned dress and mask, and I took up my sword.

"He'll do," said the one who had talked with me. "Come; now, through these apartments."

We went through several rooms, until we reached the narrow hall that faces the postern. Ordinarily there were two guards on duty there, but now there was nobody. Inside the guardroom, however, I saw one of them lying on his side, snoring drunk.

"Saint Ambrose Eve," said my Ferrarese, "Now play the man, Messer Fool. I do not think we shall have long to wait."

While they paced the floor, I remained seated by the drunken guard, growing more and more nervous, and cursing the folly that had made me yield to the mad scheme of the two women. In the streets crowds were still parading, though it was near the dawn; all the city seemed to be still revelling.

Suddenly my man tapped me on the shoulder. We moved out through the postern and took up our stations flat against the alley wall, in the shadow of the plane trees. The night was pitch dark all about us. I guessed a scout had brought news that our man was on the way.

THEY came, four abreast, crowding the alley, roaring out a song, which, nevertheless ceased as they turned up toward the Palace, for an ambassador

Prayer That Works

SCIENTIFIC PRAYER is both useful and effective. And consecrated prayer is a sign, not of a weak, fearful mind, but of a strong, sound, intelligent, confident mind. Praying is an art requiring skill, practice and careful application, the same as needed for the successful achievement of any other undertaking. The requirements are easy and simple but these requirements must be met earnestly and sincerely.

We cannot blame God if our prayers go unanswered. God is willing to give us whatever we need but we must be receptive and do our part. A Bible statement reads: *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss."*

In cases where your own prayers may not have been favorably answered, you can usually trace the difficulty either to lack of faith or a wrong motive. Whatever the trouble is, it can be corrected. Faith can be developed. Wrong motives can be dis-

carded and replaced with right motives.

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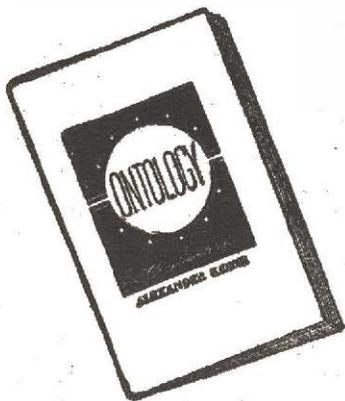
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does not come home, to a ducal residence, shouting like a drunken sailor. They were nearly abreast of us when one of them shouted warning; and at the same moment the three Ferrarese leaped out of the shadows.

Of course my heart was not in this business. I had disliked it from the first, and my principal anxiety was that Count Forzi would be killed, and so all the work I had been doing would go for nothing. The whole affair was of very brief duration. The Count's companions leaped forward to protect him, there was a brief clashing of swords, and one of them reeled back, dropping his weapon, then turned and took to his heels, screaming footpads and murder.

The second slipped in the muddy road, and went sprawling. The third went down, unwounded, but thrown by the weight of two of our men. And that left Count Forzi, who stood alone in the middle of the alley, with his sword in his hand, waiting.

As our leader engaged him, I sprang forward and flung my arms about him. Next moment the four of us were engaging him, seeking, not to injure him, but to get his doublet off.

I say it was all a matter of moments, for already shouts were coming from the Palace, and there was a flashing of lights inside. And that doublet seemed to stick to the Count like glue. At last it ripped; I had it over his head, nearly choking him—and then it was in my hands, and the four of us were racing for the postern gate.

Count Forzi made no attempt to retrieve his clothing. He stood in the alley, in his shirt, roaring with laughter, while we made our escape in the nick of time, through the gate and into the apartments of the Ferrarese, where we stood panting a moment.

Then they snatched the doublet from my hands, and we all saw that it contained nothing. It was the cheap doublet of some shopman or laboring man, which Count Forzi had assumed for his disguise, while he went roystering on Saint Ambrose Eve. No wonder he had stood laughing in the alley.

The three Ferrarese were infuriated. They turned upon me. "It must have fallen out in the street, lout!" they cried. And finally, after much coming and going, they thrust me into the room in which I had donned mask and sword, and standing there were Madonna and Lucrezia.

"SO you have failed me, Tito," said Madonna Maddalena, and her face was the picture of woe. "And I believed you were my friend."

"Madonna," I answered boldly, "I have served you well in other matters, but always on one condition, that you should give me leave to think. Now, since the affair was taken out of my hands, will you hold me responsible?"

"There is nothing now, Maddalena, but to flee from Florence before your absence can be discovered," said Lucrezia. All her assumed gentleness of two days before had vanished; she looked like the tigress she really was. "I told you, Maddalena, that you were unwise to place your fate in the hands of this fool," she continued. "Now, I shall ride with you, and my three gentlemen shall see you safe to Ferrara, before the storm breaks."

"No," answered Maddalena, "I shall stay here and meet my fate. It shall rather be said that I was indiscreet, and stayed, than that I ran away. Besides, we have not yet given Tito a chance to explain why he failed me."

"Madonna Magnificence," I protested warmly, "you will acknowledge that this plan was not of my brewing. If the Count guessed that some such scheme might be afoot and chose to disguise himself in an old workman's doublet, how can I be blamed for it? If your magnificence had given me leave to think, the upshot might have been different. As it is, I am still not hopeless."

"What? You have another plan?" she cried. "But how can such a plan be put into effect, when tonight brings the reception and the decision?"

"And yet, Madonna, I don't think I have ever failed you," I responded.

"Come, Maddalena, it is almost day," interposed Lucrezia harshly. "My advice

to you is to leave Florence with me within an hour, before the Duke is astir."

"No," answered Madonna. "I have already made up my mind not to flee. That would only bring greater shame upon me. And then I am not wholly assured but that Tito may have some scheme for me—when he has finished his thinking."

And the look Madonna gave me restored me to both hope and confidence.

I HAD no time for sleep or breakfast. I donned my clothing of a tailor's laborer, or apprentice, and met little Tessa by the kitchen door. "Come, there is no time to lose," I said, taking the doublet from her. "Thank your father for his work, and tell him he can always count on me as his friend. So you did not go to the picnic yesterday?"

She dropped her eyes. "I went," she answered.

"With a party of young girls and men from the city?"

"Messer Tito, please do not ask me," she blurted out. "You have not the right, and I do not think I shall give you the right. And it may please you to take this doublet to the Count's room, for that is not my business."

I gripped her by the shoulders and looked into her face. "Per Baccho, but that explains it. So it was with Count Forzi that you spent the afternoon and far into the night!"

"Let me go, Messer Tito!"

"You have betrayed me," I said. "And as for your father, were he to know—"

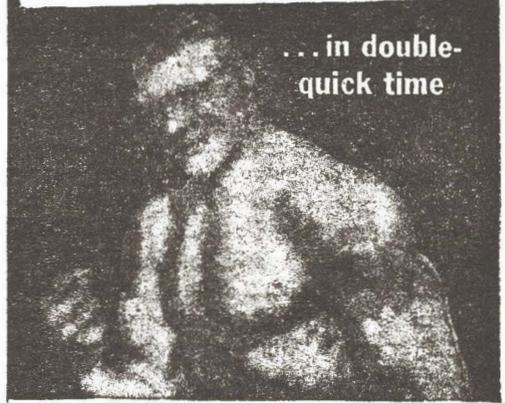
"Ah, Messer Tito, I thought you were my friend. You will not tell him—and you will forgive me!"

"Well, Tessa, my heart is tender toward you. But you must accompany me to the Count's apartment, and there—well, I must see whether his feeling for you is sincere. Santiddio, I thought you were a modest girl. Now I am not sure whether I shall take you back, when the hot fit is past, or tell your father the reason. Get along!" I addressed her roughly. "And if you let drop a word as to who I am, nothing will save you from the Bargello!"

She was trembling with fright when the page ushered us into the apartment.

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He went into the next room to call the Count, who presently appeared in a gold-broidered Turkish robe, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Why, it is the tailor's workman and little Tessa!" he exclaimed. "And my doublet back! Ah, what a day yesterday, and footpads to end it all."

He turned back and began emptying the pockets of his doublet. There was the green-wrapped package on the bed again, his wallet and his money. I went up to him.

"Nobility, your actions of yesterday displease me," I said boldly.

He swung about. "Eh?" he asked in amazement. His eyes fell upon Tessa in the doorway. "Oh, I understand. Here is a piece of gold."

"I prefer to save my honor this way," I answered, and felled him with a blow between the eyes.

HE lay half-stunned for a moment; Tessa screamed, and ran to him; then he was on his feet, groping for his sword. I anticipated him. I seized it and held it at his breast, and he recoiled, shouting.

The page was bawling at the door. A chamber guard of his suite came running in, saw me with the sword, and snatched his own from its scabbard. I grasped the shrieking girl, and backed between the two men.

"Let the fellow go!" shouted Count Forzi. "I shall deal with him anon, after I have seen the Gonfaloniere. No bloodshed here!"

It may have been the Count's words, or the menace of my sword, but the attendant and the page fell back, and I quickly regained the backstairs, and thence the kitchen. Tessa was trembling, and weeping her heart out.

"Go home, my dear," I said, "and tell your father nothing. I have avenged you, and taught these foreigners that they cannot play with the affections of our Florentine maidens. Go, I say!"

She went, turning around to stare at me as if I had suddenly taken the Count's place in her heart. I drew in a long

breath. If Forzi had recognized me, it would have gone very ill with me.

OLD DUKE LORENZO rose in the reception hall. "Excellency," he addressed Count Forzi, "we have considered the propositions of your master, His Holiness, and likewise those that have been made to us from other quarters. You will tell His Holiness that we greatly appreciate his offer, but that we prefer being his son to becoming his brother."

"Your Magnificence has fully considered this matter, no doubt," returned Count Forzi, sneering. "And yet I spoke of certain arguments that might convince Your Magnificence that an alliance between Florence and Mantua might prove unwise."

"You have already advanced them, Excellency," replied Duke Lorenzo.

"Not all of them, Magnificence." From his doublet he produced the packet of letters, in the green paper. As he unwrapped them, the writing of Madonna Maddalena, which was square, and bold, in contrast to our flowing hand of Florence, was discernible by everybody who stood near.

"Will your Magnificence deign to cast your eyes over a few of these, and then say whether I have advanced new arguments?" asked Forzi blandly.

By this time almost everybody in the hall realized that something was amiss. The Duke, who was a keen judge of events, saw it too, and his hand trembled as Forzi, on one knee, handed him the packet.

I saw the face of Maddalena as she sat by the Duke's side, and again she neither reddened nor blanched, but sat perfectly still, staring in front of her.

Duke Lorenzo opened a letter and began to read. He read another, another, and another. Ten minutes went by, and nobody spoke or stirred.

Then the Duke handed the package to his Chamberlain. "I thank you, Excellency, for having found these letters," he said. "I shall not ask you how you came into possession of them. But what about this argument that you intended to present to us?"

"Those love-letters are my argument," cried Count Forzi, losing all self-control.

Duke Lorenzo went into a peal of laughter, whether all genuine or only in part so, I could not determine. "Love letters?" he shouted. "Say rather letters of gratitude from my wife. Her Magnificence, to my fool Tito, who has my full confidence, and the right to pay his addresses to her as he pleases!"

For, as I said, that foolish and beloved lady, my protectress, had written me pages upon pages of gratitude for the way I had served her. And, after I had discovered the package in Count Forzi's apartment, it had not been difficult for me to exchange it for a similar packet of letters addressed to me. A fool needs sleight-of-hand, if he is to make a success of his profession.

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Sea-Going Smoke-Eaters

WITH every improvement in torpedo and shell adding to its capacity to cause damage and destruction, the United States Navy has now in operation a series of fire-fighting schools whose purpose is to train officers and sailors in the principles and technique of combatting blazes in Navy vessels.

The move, designed to prevent a repetition of such disastrous fires as those aboard the *Normandie*, the ill-starred *Lexington*, and other vessels, followed reports from the fleets emphasizing the immediate need for coping with flame hazards.

While each vessel customarily carries fire-fighters aboard, it is felt that the new plan, based upon day by day experiences will enable trainees to fight fires faster and more efficiently. When struck by a shell, bomb, or torpedo, a warship is almost certain to fall prey to fire that usually causes damage in inverse ratio to the speed and efficiency with which the ship's fire-fighters go to work. These officers and sailors usually have the fate of their ship and shipmates in their hands, and sometimes the fate of a fleet.

Two of the fire-fighters' schools are on the Atlantic Coast at Norfolk and Boston, and two on the Pacific Coast, at Mare Island, California, and Bremerton, Washington, and one is at Pearl Harbor. When a Navy vessel drops anchor in the vicinity of one of these schools, arrangements are made for the fire-fighters aboard to attend classes for from one to ten days.

There, under the guidance of officers who have served as high-ranking fire officials in big city fire departments, the Navy fire-fighter is shown every new wrinkle. The schools are the proving grounds. After practical experiments in the schools, and official tests, the Navy accepts, and sends out to the fleet, improved equipment, discarding old equipment as rapidly as possible. In consequence, there is an ever-increasing demand for men trained in the new fire-fighting techniques.

Actual conditions of fires are simulated in a land-based "mock-up" of three compartments of a Navy vessel. Models of forecandle, boiler room, and engine room of a destroyer, in actual size, except for the machinery, are used. In addition to the simulated destroyer compartments, the schools have inclosures for practice in extinguishing oil fires, and one for putting out gasoline fires. A water tank is used for practice with equipment for shallow diving. The tank also serves as a source of water supply when a portable pump, the hand-billy, is demonstrated.

THEORY is secondary to actual practice. Although students see motion pictures of fires and fire-fighting, attend lectures, they get opportunities to watch and to extinguish real fires, manning hoses, and all-purpose fog nozzles, utilizing low-velocity fog streams to put out burning oil, and spreading foam on oil fires. They are taught to release carbon dioxide on electric switchboard fires, and to turn steam in compartments. Asbestos-suited and using breathing apparatus, the pupils climb down hatches to apply water on fires in waste materials.

Shipboard fires fall into three classes, namely:

A. The forecandle. Here, for demonstration purposes, waste material such as old mattresses and bags are piled in one end of the forecandle compartment. Saturated with oil, the pile is set off. The students detailed to quell the blaze, know, from their instruction, that water is the indicated agent, that they must carry a hose line right into the compartment, and must wear asbestos suits and breathing apparatus. They must be prepared, if necessary, to remain below for an hour.

B. A boiler room compartment flooded with ignited fuel oil. One of the most difficult of fires, and one of the most likely to be encountered at sea, this type of fire ordinarily is not to be attacked with water, because of the likelihood of flames spreading. The students cannot descend

into the compartment because the entire floor space is ablaze. One student applies fog through the hatch with an applicator to put a cover over the fire and keep down the heat so that another student can work at the hatch applying a smothering blanket of foam. In a few seconds a sufficient depth of foam has been spread and the burning oil is extinguished.

C. To demonstrate this type of fire, gasoline is ignited in a trough below an electric switchboard in the engine room compartment. Using an extinguishing agent that is a non-conductor of electricity—carbon dioxide from fifteen-pound containers—the fighters extinguish the blaze. Low velocity fog is usually a second choice for this type of blaze. Water is never poured on fires in electrical equipment unless it can be used in some way that will remove the danger of electrical shock.

These measures to combat fires at sea are but part of the work performed by the damage control division of the Navy's Bureau of Ships. Damage such as once would have forced a warship out of action, or sent it home for repairs, is now brought under control at sea. Gargantuan feats are performed under the battle conditions—gaping holes in hulls closed, weakened bulkheads shored, decks repaired, trim and list corrected, stability restored, and fires extinguished.

Damage control is only twenty-five years old, yet so thorough has been the training of men taught it that the Navy now has a higher recovery rate in battle than anyone could have dreamed possible. Uncle Sam's officers and gobs, trained in fire-fighting technique, are out to rout the mariner's or the warrior's formerly invincible foe, "Fire at Sea." And they're doing a good job now!

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To Die Is Divine

THEY are the measured words of an old, weather-beaten career soldier, and they are spoken without emotion, as if the business of war were a casual, every day affair. "Gentlemen," he begins, addressing five or six junior officers, his voice a drumming monotone, "by the latest count, there are about eleven or twelve hundred of us. Our job is to remove every Jap from this island. Unfortunately, it won't be easy, because Japs would rather die than be taken prisoner. So there is just one bit of advice I can give you before we really start moving. Don't waste too much time on trying to take the enemy prisoner. Your best bet is to kill first and to ask questions later."

It is the start of another campaign for the men who go under the title of United States Marine. In about thirty days, they will have driven every Jap from the island, which is some forgotten fragment of jungle growth in the vast lonely reaches of Oceania. But first, they will meet up with every known oriental trick of the Japanese.

There will be many nights when high pitched screams will float over their fox-holes, pleading, in almost perfect English, "Joe, help me. The Japs have got me." Such screams will be designed to lure our men from the safety of their cover into the arms of waiting Japs. Soon however, they will learn to disregard such screams, although their nerves will take quite a beating in the process. It will be just another costly lesson to the Japs that marines cannot be licked by psychology, alone.

The Japanese army is supposed to follow the code of the Sumari, those feudal warriors who kept Japan in slavery until Admiral Peary opened their ports to the commerce of the western world in

1863. Under this code, capture by the enemy is the greatest national disgrace. Rather than permit capture Jap soldiers are instructed to take their own lives by their own hands. Suicide instead of capture, saves face, prevents loss of prestige. The result has been that when a Jap soldier is faced with inevitable defeat, his first thought is of hara kari. Since the Japs will often feel that odds against them are too great, the aftermath of a battle will usually be a field littered with the bodies of soldiers of the emperor who were brave enough to take their own lives, but were not brave enough to face the marines.

The Japs delight in forming suicide squads of snipers. Tiny Japs are expertly camouflaged, armed with long-range regulation .22 caliber rifles, and are tied to the tops of trees. Their job is to kill as many Americans as they can before they are found out and themselves killed. For these Japs there is no possible chance of survival, for they have been tied to their posts. Death for them is inevitable.

The actions of the Jap army private, who doesn't know any better, are not to be taken as those of the Jap officers as well. It seems that the well-educated Jap officer, regardless of loss of face, fails to see much point in committing hara kari when the odds are against him. He reasons that a live Jap is better than a dead one, especially when he is a prisoner of the Americans and well treated. So, although his emperor will doubtless feel offended, he gracefully surrenders to our men on occasion. But before he does, he generally gives orders to the men under him to commit hara kari. At least, he may reason, some Japs have voluntarily died for the emperor, even if he has chosen not to.

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