

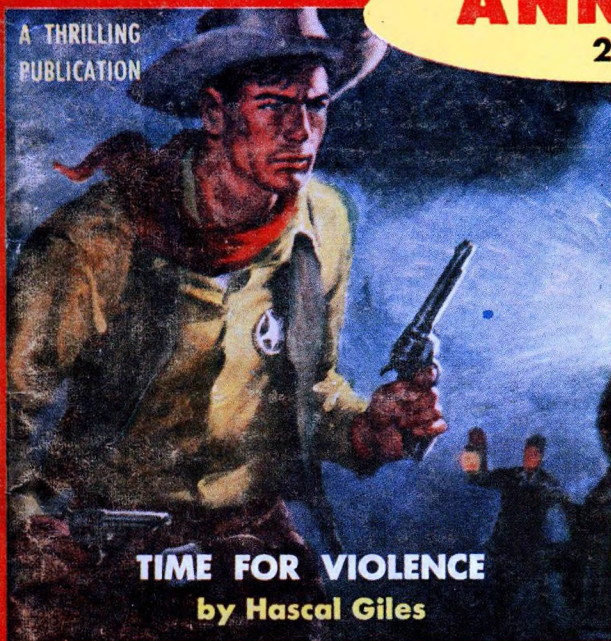
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# STORIES

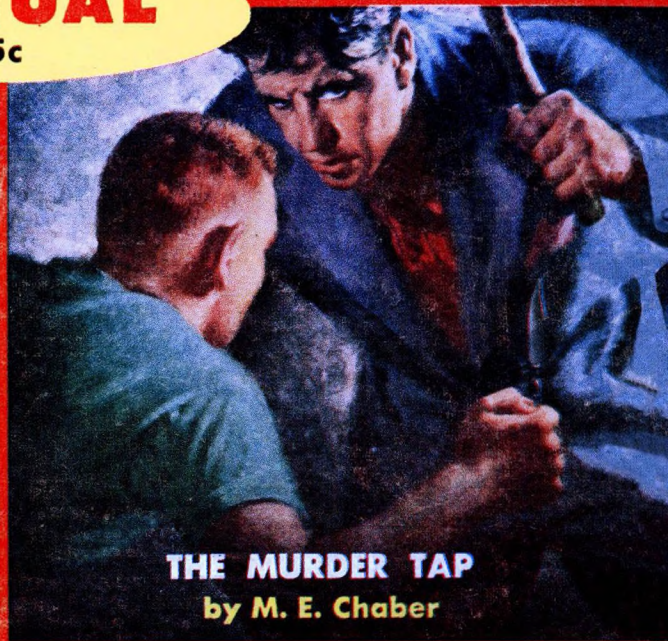
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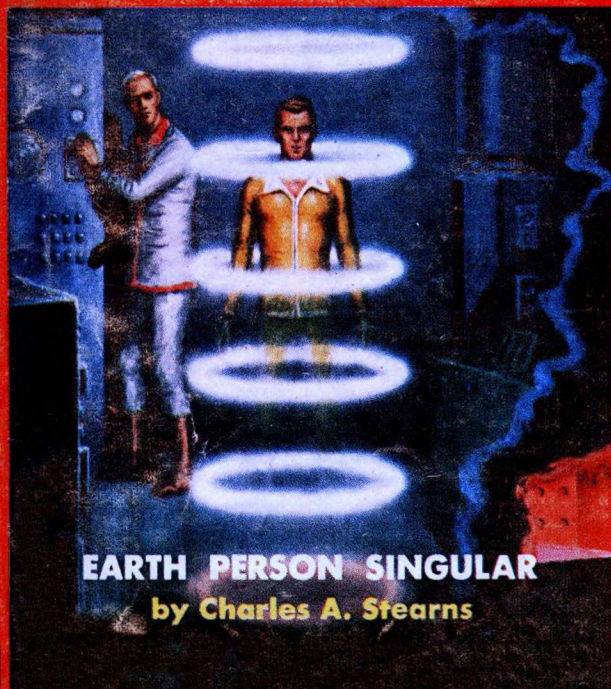
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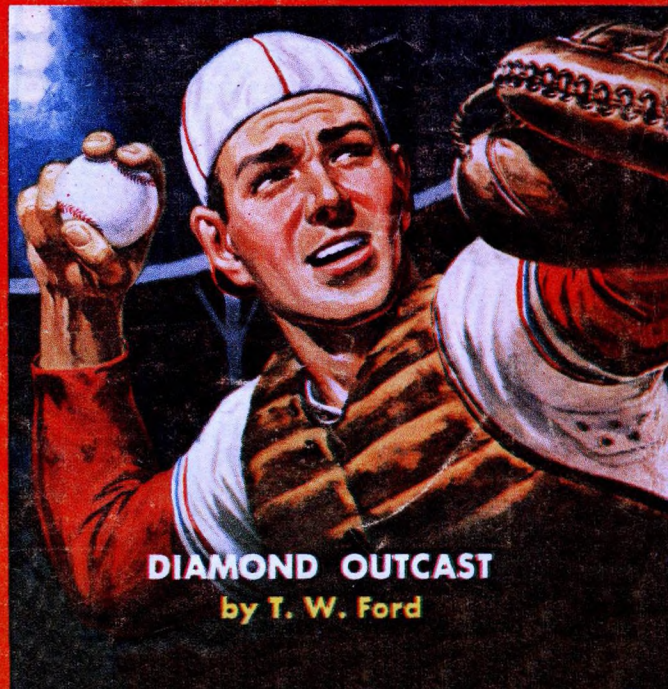
**TIME FOR VIOLENCE**  
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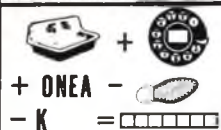
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# STORIES

**ANNUAL**

Vol. 1, No. 1

1955 Edition

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ALEXANDER SAMALMAN, Editor





# I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME FOR GOOD PAY JOBS IN RADIO-TELEVISION

J. E. SMITH has trained more men for Radio-Television than any other man. OUR 40th YEAR.

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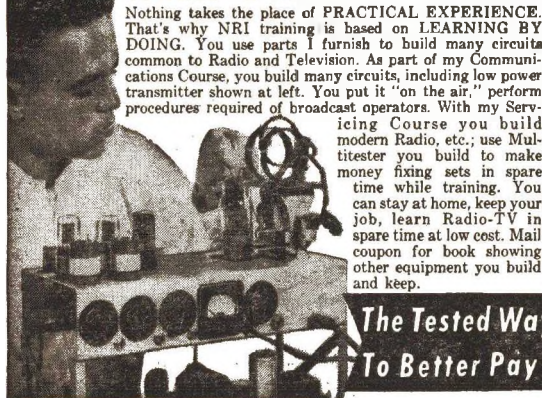
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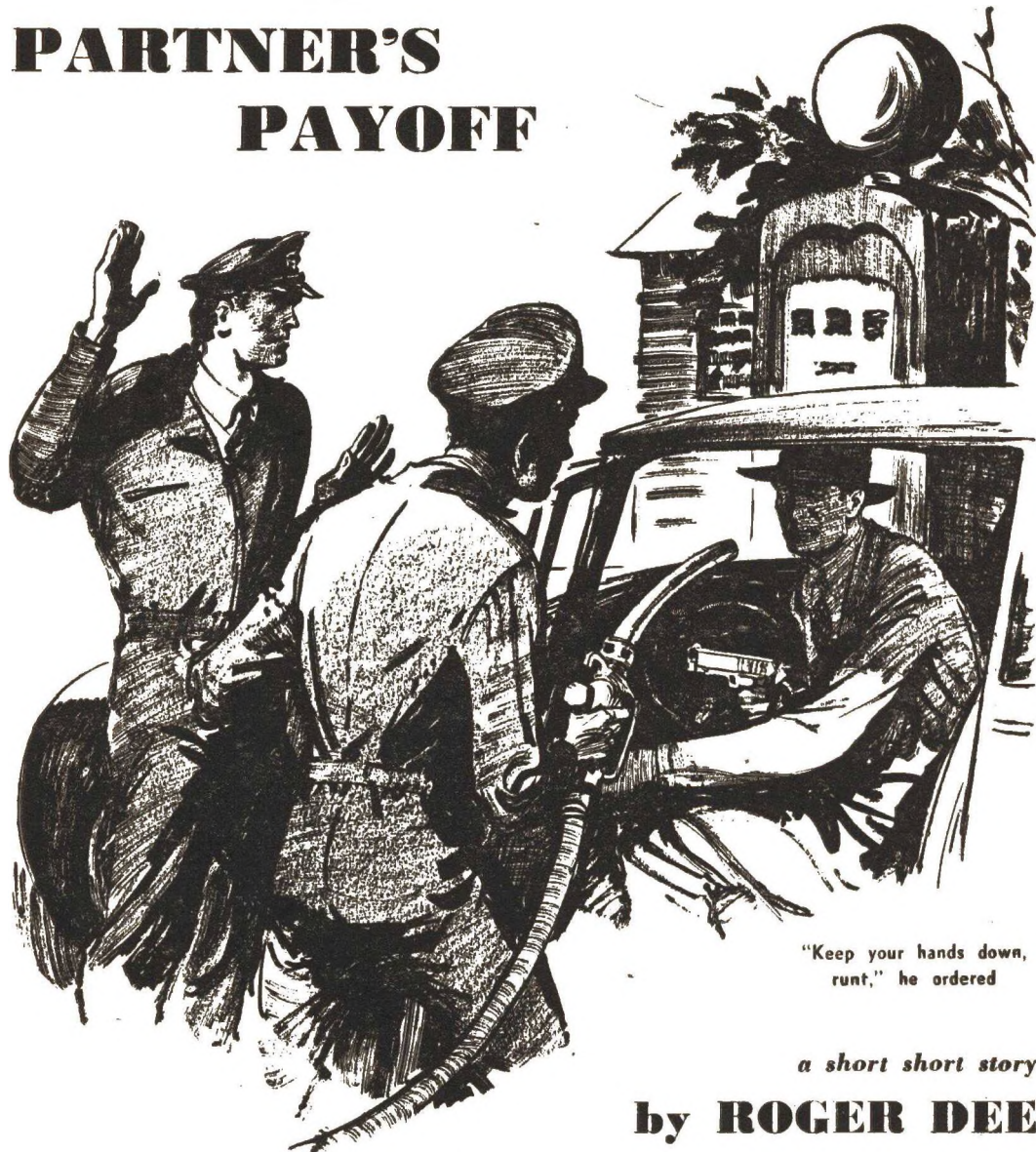
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*The guy had the gun — but Al had the guts!*

# PARTNER'S PAYOFF



"Keep your hands down, runt," he ordered

*a short short story*

by **ROGER DEE**

**I** USED to feel a cut or two above Al Wirtz, in spite of liking him well enough to go partners with him in our two-man gas station. That was partly because I'm a big guy and Al is an undersized runt with a gimpy leg, but it was mostly because I was in World War II from Bizerte to Berlin, while Al never got past his draft board. I saw plenty of

rugged action on that jaunt and I guess it gave me the feeling that I had an edge on Al all the way.

But that was before our Saturday-evening stickup. I don't feel that way any more.

Al was hosing off the drive-in apron out by the pumps when the trouble broke, and I

*(Concluded on page 8)*



# Do You Laugh Your Greatest Powers Away?

## THOSE STRANGE INNER URGES

You have heard the phrase, "Laugh, clown, laugh." Well, that fits me perfectly. I'd fret, worry and try to reason my way out of difficulties — all to no avail; then I'd have a hunch, a something within that would tell me to do a certain thing. I'd laugh it off with a shrug. I knew too much, I thought, to heed these impressions. Well, it's different now—I've learned to use this inner power and I no longer make the mistakes I did, because I do the right thing at the right time.

## This FREE BOOK Will Prove What Your Mind Can Do!

Here is how I got started right. I began to think there must be some inner intelligence with which we were born. In fact, I often heard it said there was; but how could I use it, how could I make it work for me daily? That was my problem. I wanted to learn to direct this inner voice, master it if I could. Finally, I wrote to the Rosicrucians, a world-wide frater-



nity of progressive men and women, who offered to send me, without obligation, a free book entitled *The Mastery of Life*.

That book opened a new world to me. I advise *you* to write today and ask for your copy. *It will prove to you* what your mind can demonstrate. Don't go through life laughing your mental powers away. Use the coupon below or write: Scribe L.C.L.

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San Jose, California

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**The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC) San Jose, Calif. (Not a religious organization)**

was inside the station, racking up a new line of fan belts. Our rush was over at seven-thirty, and there wasn't another car in sight when this thin-faced character drove up and honked his horn.

"Gas," he said when Al limped over. "Fill her up."

Al nodded and dunked the pump nozzle into the tank. The drifting smell of raw gasoline was heavy on the air, the way it is on a still summer evening. The driver got out, lighting a cigarette, and flipped his match away as he came toward the station.

The match didn't go out. It lay there, sputtering and smoking, almost under the humming gas hose.

Al put a foot on it quick. "Hey, watch that stuff!" he yelled. "You want to touch this heap off like an A-bomb?"

The guy ignored him and came on into the station. I put down my fan belts, figuring he was looking either for the john or the telephone.

He didn't ask for either. Instead he took an automatic out of his coat pocket, as off-hand as I'd fish out a folder of matches.

"Empty the register, friend," he said, snicking off the safety. "And don't get reckless."

I'd learned enough in the ETO to know when a guy is running a bluff. This baby wasn't.

I cleaned out the register on the double, forgetting I'd ever been a hero. I was nicked a couple of times overseas and being shot up don't feel like the books tell it. It hurts like hell—if you're lucky. This guy had all the



breaks—the street was as quiet as a church, and Mahaffey, the beat cop, was taking ten down at the corner coffee slot.

"Stuff it in this," ordered the holdup, flipping a folded paper bag at my feet. I wadded the bills into it and twisted the top shut.

"Now toss it over and walk out ahead of me. Easy does it!"

**E**VEN after a busy Saturday there wasn't more than four or five hundred dollars in the register, but it meant a lot to me and Al. We were still operating on a shoestring, and a loss like that could put us in the red for months.

But I didn't stall any. Four hundred or four thousand, it wasn't enough to risk a slug through the stomach.

This guy was an old hand at the racket and he knew his business. He even had a pair of side-cutter pliers in his pocket, which he used to snip the telephone cord. He handled the whole thing so smoothly that Al hadn't tumbled to what was happening until I was beside him at the pumps and the holdup was covering us both with his gun.

The bandit tossed his paper bag into the front seat and climbed in. Al started to put up his hands, still holding the gas hose, but the guy warned him off.

"Keep your hands down, runt," he ordered. "You two stand fast and you may get stuck up again some time. Move a foot, and you won't."

That was when Al squeezed the trip on the hose nozzle and slashed an inch-thick stream of gasoline over the bandit from his Adam's apple to his belt buckle. The auto seat was fast soaking up puddles of the stuff; the whole car smelled like a refinery.

"Now, wise guy, go ahead and shoot—if you want to," Al said, cool as you please. "You know what'll happen if you do. One muzzle flash will send your crate up like a barrel of TNT."

I could tell from the look on the holdup's face that he'd already realized that.

"You can shoot and commit suicide, Jesse James," Al said, reaching in and lifting the ignition key out of the dash. "Or you can sit tight and hand over the gun."

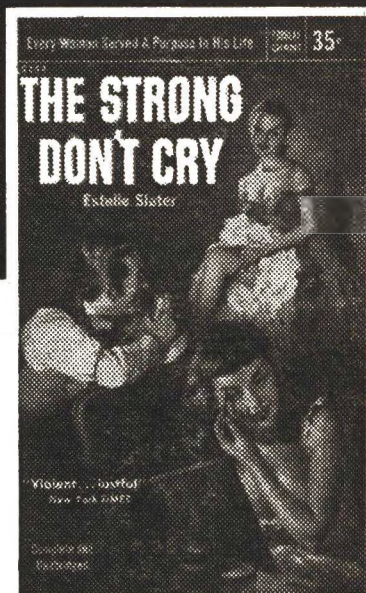
The bandit didn't shoot, of course. He passed over his gun and sat shivering like a wet dog until I got Mahaffey up from the corner coffee slot.

It's too bad more guys like Al Wirtz don't get past their draft boards. With a couple of companies like Al, the road from Bizerte to Berlin would have been a lot shorter. ● ● ●



# *"WHEN I MARRIED HIM I WAS DRAGGED TO HIS DEPTHS..."*

My husband had  
big-shot ambitions.  
But deep-inside he was only a  
cheap, small-time gambler."



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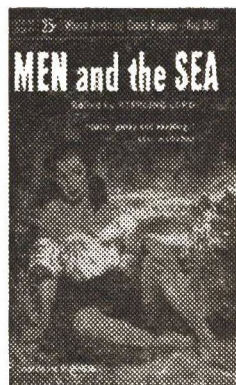
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# CHEESE CHAMP



Broken and bleeding, Cande rolled over on the canvas and lay still



*The fans called Jimmy Welter yellow — so he took on a man-killer!*

CHAPTER I

*Listless Bout*

**H**ALF-FILLED Madison Square Garden reverberated to the shouts of the blood-lusting fight thousands. One voice boomed persistently in Jimmy Welter's ears as he danced around the baffled South American, Enrico Cande.

"Come on, fight, you bums. Somebody do something up there!"

Jimmy splatted the left to Enrico's nose, and then banged it home again as Enrico left himself wide open. Jimmy felt sorry for the South American. Enrico had been the pride of his division in the Latin countries, but he was as poor as the rest of the current crop of challengers, with the exception of hard-fisted George Grady.

The bell rang, and Jimmy danced easily back to his corner.

"You slow down more each fight," chubby Max Cord, his manager, growled disgustedly. "Before you were champ you could have killed this clown in three."

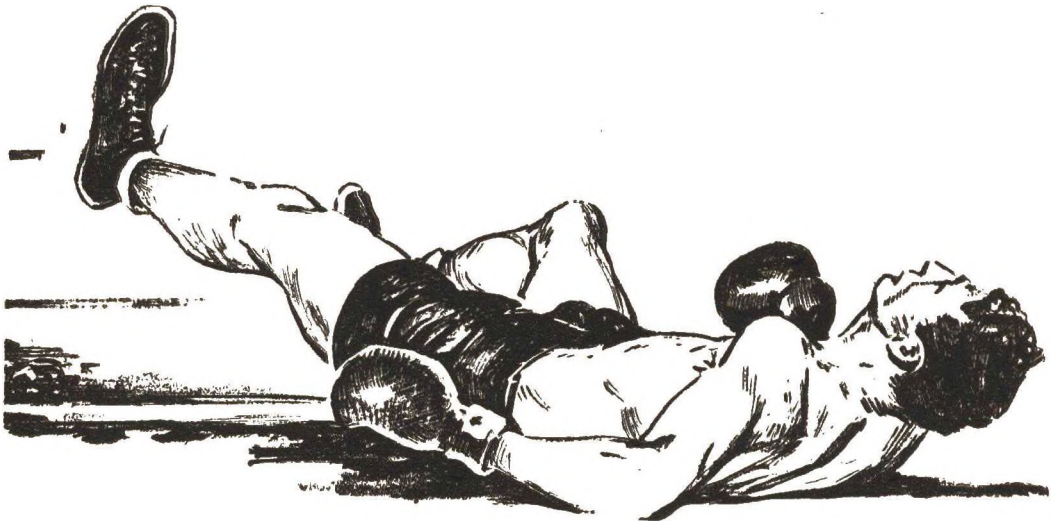
"I still could."

"Then what are you foolin' around for?" Max demanded. "All of a sudden he'll connect with one of those wild swings and they'll scrape you off the canvas like the black off burnt toast."

Jimmy shrugged. So far as Jimmy was concerned, Max was a nice guy, but had a dollars and cents complex. Kill the guy and send him home on a stretcher, that was Max's idea.

Jimmy moved out for round eight and continued to pile up his big edge in points. He slapped Enrico around for the first half of the round, and then carried the Latin through the rest.

It happened in round nine. Jimmy was coasting, not letting the jeers of the crowd get under his skin, and Enrico was sweating and trying. The right came out of nowhere like a whistling shell, and Jimmy was only able to partially duck it. It was dynamite-packed, and it knocked Jimmy off his feet. He sprawled into his own corner, half-



**a prize-ring novelet by BILL ERIN**

conscious, and heard Max screaming in his ear.

Jimmy rolled to his stomach and heard the referee count "three". He shook his head and the cobwebs were all gone. He grinned at Max's excitement.

"Get up," Max shouted with the thousands. "Get up!"

"Relax!" Jimmy said. "I might as well take my nine."

**H**E WAS up easily at nine, let the referee do the duties on the gloves, and moved around as Enrico charged furiously. Jimmy lowered the boom on Enrico. He stopped Enrico with a straight left, crossed a right to the ribs, hooked a left to the head, busted another right to the middle, then a left to the belly, and came up with a righthand hook which staggered Enrico back across the ring.

"That's the gratitude I get for carrying you so you look good to the señoritas, you bum," Jimmy grated. He followed Enrico with cocked gloves, and coldly hammered the Latin back into the ropes. Enrico was groggy and Jimmy was measuring him when the bell rang.

"That's better," Max said as he doused Jimmy with water. "That's much better. You had me worried, on the floor that way. You had me worried."

"This bum couldn't knock out his grandmother," Jimmy said disgustedly.

"But how do the people out there know it?" Max asked. "How do the guys who laid their two-twenty on the line know it? To them you look like a bum, too."

"I win," Jimmy said. "As long as I win, I'm the champ."

He felt kindly toward the South American again in the tenth round. He made sure he won the round, but he carried Enrico. He figured as long as the handsome senior had gone this far, he might as well finish. It would mean much to Enrico's prestige and pocketbook. Jimmy carried him through.

They raised Jimmy's hand, and there were some boos and not much applause. "Cheese champion!" the brass-voiced spectator belted. "Why don't you fight George Grady?"

"That's a good question," Jimmy said when he was in the dressing room.

"What?" Max asked.

"Why don't we fight George Grady?"

"Don't start that again," Max said. "After the way you looked tonight, I wouldn't dare put you in the same ring with Grady."

"Why should I murder Enrico? He's a good guy."

"Wait'll you see what Grady does to him."

"You think Grady'll fight him?"

"Grady's looking for another chance to show you up. This is it. He's made the commission look bad ever since they gave the championship to you."

"It was Grady's fault. When Buster Amoroso got tired of running away from us and resigned, the commission said Grady and I would fight for the title. Grady hollered no, he wanted it for himself."

"So you got it by default, and there's no sense in fighting Grady now."

Jimmy frowned at Max. "You don't figure I can take Grady?"

Max fidgeted. "After tonight's showing—no."

"Never mind tonight. You figure Grady's got it over me?"

"He's murder with either hand and he never stops swinging."

"He'll stop when I'm through with him."

"He's met fancy-dans before."

"Who's a fancy-dan?" Jimmy bristled. "I fight a scientific fight, I'll give you that, but did I ever quit? Did I ever turn down a good mix? You got the public figuring I'm a cheese champ because that's the way you figure."

"Now, now, calm down and get your shower before you latch onto a cold," Max said soothingly. "I've been with you from a pup; I saw from the first you could be a champ. If I don't believe in you, nobody does. Now take your shower and stop worrying about it."

He read the papers the next morning. The write-ups weren't good. It had been a dull fight according to the sports writers, and they weren't trying to kid the public. Jimmy knew they wanted a Welter-Grady fight for the championship. Jimmy also knew the commission couldn't very well force him to



fight Grady since Grady had originally refused the fight and the commission had given Jimmy the title by default. Enrico had been a logical contender off his record. But good fighters were scarce.

CURT MASTERS, a good writer who knew his boxing, came the closest to the truth. Jimmy was nettled by most of the writing, but he grinned at Curt's account.

Welter was either out of condition or bored with the whole affair. He's a better fighter than he showed against Enrico and could give Grady a battle. Whether he could withstand the powerful, two-fisted attack of Grady is a moot question at this writing, but it's certain he wasn't giving the fans his best last night. The only time he looked like the Welter we've seen previously was when Enrico bowled him over with a lucky hay-maker in the ninth. Jimmy bounced back and had Enrico on the ropes when the bell ended the round. Whether he ran out of steam, or whether he just decided it wasn't worth the effort in the tenth, only Welter and his manager know.

Jimmy had no fight in immediate prospect, no training to do, and lots of time on his hands. He went to the hotel lobby with an itch in his soul, and when he saw the beautiful girl sitting in the deep chair he decided to investigate. He looked over the situation carefully before advancing to the attack.

Jimmy walked past her with his nose apparently immersed in a paper. He caught his toe inside her slim leg and did a beautiful swan dive to the floor. His powerful forearms caught him and let him down easily, but it looked as though he hit hard.

"I'm sorry," the girl gasped, and she was on her feet immediately.

Jimmy rolled over. "What happened?"

"You tripped over my foot. Are you hurt?"

Jimmy sat up and felt over himself. "I guess nothing's broken."

"I'm sorry," she said again.

"I'm the one who should apologize," Jimmy said. "I was so busy reading the stock market, I didn't see you." He looked her over carefully. "Say I *should* apologize. How could I over-look something like you?"

She grinned. "Well, if you're not hurt, no harm done."

"Give me a hand," he said, and he held up his hand. She reached down to help him up, but he was too heavy and she lost her

balance. She sat down in his lap.

"Holy mackerel," Jimmy said, but he grinned.

She frowned at him. "If you're trying to be gay, your humor is unappreciated."

Jimmy looked at the rapidly gathering crowd, many of them grinning with him. "Oh, I don't know."

She stood up hastily. Jimmy hopped to his feet. "I'm sorry," he said.

"It's all right, your apology is accepted. Now let's forget it." She started to walk away.

Jimmy stuck with her. "You have to admit it wasn't my fault in the first place. If you hadn't had your leg out in the aisle—"

"If you had looked up from your paper just once from the elevator to where you tripped—"

Jimmy took her arm. "I'll buy you a drink." He steered her into the bar.

"I'm not sure I want a drink."

"Make believe you do. Here's a table." He pulled a chair out for her, and she sat down reluctantly.

"I was supposed to meet my uncle out there," she said. "He won't know where to find me."

"Good."

She frowned at him again. "If you will answer one question frankly, I'll stay for one drink."

"All right."

"Was your tripping over me an accident, or was it intentional?"

Jimmy grinned. "I cannot tell a lie—it was intentional."

"One drink," she said firmly.

"You're not angry?"

"Technically I am."

Jimmy ordered the drinks. "I'm Jimmy Welter," he said.

"Mary Simmons," she said. "What do you do for a living, Jimmy?"

"I'm a pug."

"A fighter?"

"That's right."

"Are you a good fighter?"

"I'm the best in my division."

"Champion?"

"Right."

Jimmy found he liked her. His liking was

heightened by the fact that she seemed to like him. She was firm about leaving after the one drink, however, although she told him where he could call her some evening.

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## CHAPTER II

### *Cheese Champ*

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GEORGE GRADY'S manager announced that his boy was going to fight Enrico Cande. Cande's manager said it was true, that Cande hadn't been hurt by the Welter fight, and that the two men would meet sometime during the next month.

Jimmy read the news with great interest. "Poor Cande," he said to Max. "He shouldn't be in the same ring with Grady. Grady doesn't know how to pull a punch if he wanted to, which he undoubtedly has no intention of doing anyway. He'll kill Cande."

"It would be better for all concerned if you couldn't pull a punch," Max said sarcastically. "Or even better, if you had no intention of doing same. I got eight offers to fight you. Every two-bit punk with a fast right hand figures he'll knock your head off and waltz away with the championship."

"Is one of those eight Mr. Grady?"

"He's temporarily out of the picture. But after he polishes off Cande he'll be number one."

"Good. We'll sit tight, let interest build up, and then we'll take Mr. Grady."

"You nuts?" Max shouted. "Now's our chance to get out from under. While Grady's training for Cande, we sign someone else. I got a good offer from Detroit to put the crown on the line against Billy Aldrich. We'll sign for six months from now, and let Grady sit around and suck his thumb."

"You're a little mixed up, Max," Jimmy said quietly. "I'm the champ, remember? I'm the best in my class. I don't have to duck anyone. Grady's the best challenger, and Grady's the next boy we meet."

Max stood angrily and, as much as his stubby frame allowed, towered over Jimmy. "It's about time someone gave it to you

straight from the shoulder. The title's gone to your head, the way it does to a lot of guys. You got inflated ego. There was a time, before the commission handed us the title, when I figured maybe you stood an outside chance with Grady if you could hold him off long enough until he tired. But I haven't seen it in you since. You ain't hungry any more, that's your trouble. You stand about as much chance in the ring with Grady as Cande does, and as long as I'm your manager, we ain't signing Grady until the commission tells us it's Grady or no title!"

Jimmy finally kidded Mary into a date. They drove out of the big city for dinner and dancing at a spot where Jimmy was sure he wouldn't be recognized. Being recognized these days might not be so good. Even the kids on the street, who usually idolized a champ, were calling him a cheese champ.

To Jimmy it looked as though he were alone in his opinion that he was as good a fighter as Grady, although perhaps a different kind of fighter, and he was beginning to wonder if Max was right. Maybe the title had gone to his head and Grady would murder him. Jimmy figured when a man's own manager was against him, it was time for a man to stop and take stock.

They ate and danced, and were getting along well until she brought up the fight business. Jimmy had steered away from this subject because it was obvious from their first meeting that she didn't know much about it.

"I've asked a few of my friends about you," Mary said.

"Checking up?"

"Out of curiosity. Since most of the girls I know are not exactly fight fans, I had to turn to the men I know, and it may be that their opinions were founded on jealousy of a sort."

Jimmy stiffened. "So?"

"So they were very much interested when I said I had met a fight champion."

"Until you mentioned it was Jimmy Welter?"

"They were still interested, but their attitude changed."

"Was this a communal gathering, or did you approach them one at a time?"



She laughed. "One at a time. I didn't believe the first one."

"Thank you."

"I still don't believe any of them. That's why I mentioned it. I'm curious to know the real story, and I thought you'd explain."

"There's nothing to explain," Jimmy said, the warmth gone out of his voice. "I'm the champ, that means I'm the best in my class until someone proves differently—that's all."

**S**HE LOOKED at him curiously. "Oh." "Let's dance."

"Certainly."

On the drive back, Jimmy realized that he was acting like a spoiled kid, and again he remembered Max's warning that the title had gone to his head. He liked this girl, and yet he was deliberately confirming what she had heard about him. He was hurting himself—and he knew it didn't make sense.

"Night-cap?" he asked when they reached the hotel.

She hesitated. "All right."

Next to each other, in a small booth in the bar-room, some of the mood returned to Jimmy. "I'm sorry I acted the way I did."

"I suppose I should apologize," she said. "I shouldn't have brought it up."

Jimmy shrugged. "You were bound to hear about it. I am generally accused of being a poor champ and yellow."

"That seemed to be the idea," she agreed. She grinned at him. "One of my friends figured he could beat you himself."

Jimmy grinned. "I have trouble with one of those kind of guys every now and then. I've had a couple take a swing at me."

"Are you really—what did they call it?"

"Ducking Grady?"

"That's it. 'Ducking' a fight?"

"Let me explain. In the boxing business you don't duck a fight necessarily because you are physically afraid, but because it's good business—it's shrewd politics."

Again she gave him that curious look. "Then you're not afraid, just a good businessman and shrewd politician?"

"Not me, my manager. He's the one who arranges my fights and my business. I can't convince him I should fight Grady next."

"You mean you want to fight Grady?"

"That's right. I think I can beat him. But whether I can beat him or not, I want to fight him. I don't care any more for the way your friends talk about me than you do." He stopped and looked at her. "Or do you care?"

A small grin twitched at the corner of her mouth. "Of course I care," she said. "I still don't believe them."

Jimmy grinned happily. "Listen, have you ever seen a fight?"

"No."

"All right, in about a month Grady is going to fight the last man I fought—Enrico Cande, South American champ. I'll get a couple of ringside seats, and I'd like to have you go with me. After you see the fight, I'll explain why people think I'm a cheese champ."

Max paced up and down the hotel room chewing his big cigar while Jimmy lay stretched on the bed. "Can you imagine those yokels?" Max asked irritably. "They want us to come all the way to Detroit and fight in Briggs Stadium this summer against this Aldrich for a measly twenty-five per cent. I wired back and told them I wanted fifty."

"Fifty?"

"Well, I'll settle for forty, but if they're going to start at twenty-five, I've got to have something to come down from."

"Maybe they figure twenty-five is all I'm worth."

"What?" Max took his cigar out of his mouth and punctuated with it. "You're the champ."

"Aren't you the guy was telling me I didn't belong in the same ring with Grady?"

Max stopped his pacing. "Look, kid, I'm sorry about that. I didn't mean to blow my stack. You're my boy, and I just want to get the best shake for you, that's all."

Jimmy rose to one elbow. "But do you figure Grady's a better fighter?"

"Aw cut it out. Can't a guy lose his temper?"

"Sure, but I want a straight answer. You figure Grady's better than I am?"

"You gotta admit the guy kicks like a wild horse with either hand, kid. He's got fifteen rounds for you to make one mistake, and it's

all over."

"Max, Grady might beat me if we meet, but I figure it might be the other way, too. Nobody's ever knocked me out, and now and then I've made more than one mistake and been hit pretty hard. I want to get in the ring with Grady just once."

**M**AX GROANED and threw his cigar into a corner. "Once will be enough. You'll get him eventually. Can't you be patient, kid, and make a little hay while the sun's shining?"

"Sure, after I meet Grady!"

Max went to the door and wrenched it open. "You're not going to fight Grady, and that's the last word." He slammed the door behind him.

Curt Masters, the sportswriter, was one of those who saw Jimmy at ringside with Mary and came over to shake hands. "How's the champ?"

"Fine. Just four pounds over."

"When are you fighting next?"

"Ask Max."

Masters turned to Mary. "That's what I like, a fighter who makes up his own mind and isn't close-mouthed. Well, if you ever decide to fight Grady, I'll write your obituary."

Jimmy was called to the center of the ring and introduced to the crowd. His name was greeted with a long, loud boo. He mitted the crowd without losing the smile on his face and went to Cande's corner to shake hands. The South American grinned and bobbed his head.

Then Jimmy crossed the ring to Grady's corner.

"Well, well, if it ain't the cheese champ," Grady sneered.

Jimmy shook hands and grinned. "Maybe, but it's better cheese than you'll ever slice."

"Get in the ring with me, you punk, I'll knock you kicking so fast you'll meet yourself on the way down."

"For you they should put out tornado warnings, you big wind!" Jimmy waved affably at the enraged fighter and trotted back to the neutral corner. He made his way to his seat, and a man sitting in back of him leaned forward.

"When you gonna quit stalling and take on a good fighter?" the man asked.

"As soon as jerks like you are willing to pay ten bucks a seat," Jimmy snapped back.

"I wouldn't pay two-bits and three old buttons to see you."

"Can I count on that? Now take your fat face out of mine so I can see this fight before I spread your nose like jam on a kid's slice of bread."

Jimmy grinned at Mary to indicate that it was one of those things, but she was staring steadfastly in front of her. Jimmy began to get the idea that maybe it had not been such a good idea to bring her to the fight.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Ring Butcher*

**A**GGRESSIVE and confident, Grady came out of his corner in a half-crouch, stalking across the ring, his head drawn down between his shoulders and his powerful mitts cocked. Cande danced lightly and moved around.

Grady cut directly across Cande's path so that the South American had to back up. Grady stepped fast and boxed Cande in a corner. Cande slapped three light lefts to Grady's face, but Grady didn't even bother to ward them off. His fists moved swiftly, like pistons, and he slashed the Latin with a two-fisted attack which rocked Cande.

Cande blocked most of the blows and clinched. The referee broke them, and Cande quickly danced out of range. Grady moved after him, stalking, and Cande back-pedaled, slapping with the left. Grady kept coming until he cornered Cande again. Once more he attacked with a vicious flurry of fists, and one right rocked Cande.

The two circled, Cande trying to stay away, and Grady stalking like a jungle killer after fresh meat. Cande couldn't hold him off. He didn't have the footwork or the power. Twice more Grady trapped the South American and hammered him. The last time he shifted to a body attack and belted a pun-



ishing one-two to the middle before Cande could tie him up.

"Howdja like that?" the man behind Jimmy chortled at the bell. "What'd happen to you in there, Welter? Think you can run any faster than that guy up there?"

What Jimmy would do was occupying Jimmy's mind at that moment. He worked furiously on the picture Grady presented, and imagined himself in the ring against those powerful and fast fists and that determined fighter. He ignored the man behind him and pretended not to notice the glance Mary threw him.

Cande foolishly carried the attack to open the second round. He bounded across the ring and drove into Grady. Grady planted his feet and met Cande with a whipping one-two to the middle, a smashing left hook to the head, and a crushing right uppercut to the jaw. Cande reeled and staggered back.

Grady methodically moved in and hammered Cande's body until the gasping fighter tied him up. The referee broke them, and Grady was back in, his iron fists hammering a tattoo on Cande's ribs. Cande bent in the middle and again hung on. The referee broke them, and Grady was back at it, his face cold and cruel, his fists unmerciful.

On the next charge, Grady switched to the head. He rocked Cande back, cut his eye with a whipping left, brought blood streaming out of his nose with a blasting right, and knocked him into the ropes with a perfect left hook.

Cande went to one knee, but pulled himself back up. Grady closed the gates of mercy as he moved in. There was the trace of a tight smile on his cold face as he hit Cande with left and right. Cande planted his feet and tried to fight back, his dazed mind no longer allowing retreat, and he was made to order for Grady.

Thirty seconds later Cande, broken and bleeding, rolled over on the canvas and lay still. His body was red and swollen and his face still bled as he lay there. The referee formally counted him out.

The fan behind Jimmy had been screaming until he was hoarse. His face red and sweaty, he leaned over and shook Jimmy's shoulder. "Did you get your belly full?" he

asked deliriously. "I'll bet you run for another year after seeing that. How would you like to be in there with him, cheese champ?"

Jimmy tried to detach himself, but the man hung on. "Lookit this guy," the fan yelled at all the fans around him. "This is Jimmy Welter, the champ, and it took him ten rounds to out-point that bum Grady just killed. Why don't you fight the real champ, you bum?"

JIMMY saw red for the first time since the man started riding him. He drew back his fist, but someone grabbed his arm. It was Curt Masters.

"Take it easy," Curt said, and he shouldered between the two of them and eased Jimmy away in the crowd. It was the usual jostling, excited mob after a knockout, and Jimmy and Mary were swept away. Her face was white and she looked a little sick.

"I shouldn't have brought you," Jimmy said.

"I asked for it."

"How'd you like it?"

"The fight or the rest of it?"

"Take your choice, it's one or the other. Either you kill a poor guy like Cande, or you're a cheese champ."

"I think I begin to understand."

"That's why I brought you."

"You mean you could have beaten that fighter that way?"

"My style's different, but it would have amounted to the same thing. At least, I think I could have done it. I seem to be the only one. Even my manager has lost faith in me."

"It seems strange."

"It's not strange at all. My only question is whether I'm right and the world is wrong, or whether I've just got an inflated ego."

"I have never seen you fight, and I don't know anything about fighting, but I don't think you have an inflated ego." She met Jimmy's gaze with her frank, blue eyes, and it gave Jimmy a thrill.

Later, when Jimmy took her home, she again brought up the subject of the fight. "It was brutal," she said with a shudder.

"I knew it would be," Jimmy said. "Grady was putting the pressure on me."

"Jim, if you really have faith in yourself,

why don't you fight Grady?"

Jimmy grinned. "It's not that easy. There's Max."

"But you certainly have something to say about who you fight. You're being maligned unfairly. Why don't you insist on fighting Grady?"

"I have. I have insisted strongly. But the only thing keeping Max from signing for a fight in Detroit against a bum by the name of Aldrich is a squabble over the percentage."

"Then it's about time you had a showdown with Max. It isn't sensible to go on this way. I don't like what it's doing to you."

"Do you care what it does to me?"

"Of course I care what it does to you."

Jimmy moved in, and he forgot about the fight business.

Max came into Jimmy's room the next morning with a big frown on his face. "I'm going to settle the Detroit fight for thirty per cent," he growled.

Jimmy was interested. "How come?"

"Because I want to have a fight signed and sealed. We'll shoot this one in August, and we won't have to worry about Grady for several months."

"Here we go again," Jimmy said. "You know how I feel about it."

"You're letting the writers panic you. Don't let them get the better of your good sense, kid. This is a business and you're out to make as much as you legitimately can, just like any business."

"What did you think of the fight last night?"

Max shrugged. "Just about what I expected. He had a set-up and he was out to show how much better he was than you are. Even so, I think the guy looked pretty good."

Jimmy nodded. "Cande may not be a champ, but he's a pretty fair country fighter. Against most of the ham-and-beaners in this division, he'd do pretty well."

"Now you're beginning to see things the right way," Max said happily. "Don't you figure I'm right in ducking Grady and taking on Aldrich for a fat purse in Detroit?"

"No. In the first place, I don't think you'll get a fat purse out of Detroit. The bad publicity we'll get out of ducking Grady again

will keep the people away by the millions. In the second place, after watching Grady, I still think I can beat him."

MAX GROANED and sat on the edge of the bed. "You have never been hit as hard as Grady can hit. It may look to you like you can out-point him, but you've never been hit that hard. When your legs won't hold you up, when you see three Gradys instead of one, when your arms are so tired you can't hit with them, then you'll wish you'd listened to old Max."

"It may be that you're right, but I've got to find out."

"Not this year," Max said stubbornly. "Not this year."

Jimmy read the papers, and they all had rave notices about Grady. According to the papers, Grady was at his peak. They wanted to see him meet Jimmy Welter, and they weren't backward about saying so. They called on the commission to force the fight, to forget that Grady himself had refused the bout as an elimination battle on the basis that Grady had been right and the commission had been wrong.

Then Jimmy read Curt Masters' column. Curt had a different approach.

"This writer came across a sure sign that Jimmy Welter may be cracking under the pressure of his own conscience," Masters wrote. "Last night a heated Grady fan sat behind Welter at ringside and bombarded the champ as unmercifully with cutting words as Grady was bombarding Cande with his blasting fists. Welter staggered under the barrage about the same time Cande did, and, when the referee counted Cande out to the rhythm of the fan's taunts, Welter couldn't take it any longer. He turned and would have hit the fan had not the jostling, excited crowd unknowingly separated them at that moment. Come on, Jimmy, give us the fight we want!"

Jimmy called the paper, and was told that Masters didn't come in until later in the day. He got Masters' home number and called him there.

"I want to see you," he told Masters.

"What's the matter, sore about the column?"



"I never get sore when someone prints the truth."

"That was the truth."

"I'm not arguing."

"Then what do you want to see me about?"

"I'll tell you when I see you. How about me buying you lunch?"

"I can't see much sense in turning down a free meal."

Masters was puzzled when they met.

"What's the story?" he asked.

"I want you to do me a little favor."

"Depends on how little it is. If you want me to lay off the story about Grady—nuts!"

"No, just the opposite."

"What?"

"Just the opposite. I want you to pour it on!"

more to this than I can see. I'm not doing you a favor by printing this."

"Max."

"What about Max?"

"He's the one ducking Grady, not me. I want to force his hand."

"Max is a smart manager."

"Sure he is. If he wasn't, I'd get rid of him. But he doesn't think I've got a chance against Grady."

"Who does?"

Jimmy's lips tightened. "I do."

"Okay, okay, don't get sore, I was just asking. So you want to force Max's hand, is that the idea?"

"That is exactly the idea. Max is about to sign me to fight a push-over in Detroit by the name of Aldrich. They'll stick it in Briggs Stadium in August."

Masters whistled. "Can I use that?"

"Say it's a strong rumor. Then let's see Max crawl out of it."

Masters shook his head. "As far as I'm concerned, you're obligated to the fight public to tackle Grady next, but I'll never know why you're so anxious to do it. It's been a long time since I've seen a fighter who can hit like Grady."

"Grady's the kind of fighter who shows up good against second-raters because he's all offense. He pushes the fight, and he can show what he's got against a humpty-dumpty. I'm a boxer and a counter-puncher. I can't look much better than the guy I'm fighting, and I don't have much desire to look better than someone like Cande."

Masters nodded. "You may have something there. On your record, you must be a better fighter than most of the boys are giving you credit for—but as far as being better than Grady, I wish you all the luck in the world, but—" Masters shook his head again.

Masters broke the story the next morning in his column, and bedlam broke loose in Jimmy's room. The phone rang constantly as rival reporters and columnists called.

"Is what Masters said in his column the truth?"

"I haven't read his column yet."

"He says you're hankering for a shot at Grady."

"That's right."

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Toughest Challenger*

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IF MASTERS had been puzzled when they met, he was now completely baffled. He leaned across the table. "Let me get this straight. You want me to pour it on about you ducking Grady?"

"That's right. I'll even give you a story to go with it. I want to fight Grady. I think I can beat him, and I'm anxious to get in the same ring with him."

"Can I quote you on that?"

"You certainly can. You can say that I'm a misunderstood boy. Grady ducked me when the commission wanted us to fight for the championship, and now he's running around building up a myth about how much better he is. All right, let's settle it."

"Have you gone off your rocker?"

"Maybe so. I'm tired of the kind of thing you saw last night. I can take a punch at all the fat, leering fans in the business by bouncing a glove off Grady's head—and that's what I'm going to do."

"You've given me a terrific story," Masters said cautiously. "But before I print it, I want to know what's behind it. There's

"What the hell? How come you give him something like that exclusive?"

"He was the only one interested enough to come around and talk to me. The rest of you just figured I didn't want to fight Grady, and that was the end of it."

"How come you want to fight Grady?"

"First because I don't like his ugly face, and second to make liars out of you gents."

Max burst into the room like Paul Revere carrying the word. He was out of breath and his face was red. "Who gave that story to Masters?"

"I cannot tell a lie," Jimmy said. "I did it with my little hatchet."

**M**AX CHOKED. He backed slowly and sat down in a chair. "You did?"

"I told Masters how I felt about going to Detroit to meet an oaf like this Aldrich you're trying to sell me."

"But everything's set for the Aldrich go. Everything."

"Have you signed any papers, yet?"

"Not yet, but—"

"Then don't. Because I'm not fighting Aldrich. Grady's my next fighter or I don't fight again—ever."

"Then you won't fight again," Max yelled as he climbed back to his feet. "Don't forget, I hold your contract and you don't fight unless you fight who I say. And I'm not saying Grady—ever!"

Jimmy grinned quietly at the slammed door.

Three days later they sat in the commissioner's office and signed papers for the Grady fight. Now that they had finally come to terms, both managers wanted the fight as soon as possible, so it was set for late June in Yankee Stadium.

Grady allowed the thin-lipped, cruel smile to come to his face. "I'm going to enjoy this fight more than any I ever fought," he said.

"Don't count on it," Jimmy said.

Grady snorted. "Commissioner, if I don't win this fight, I want you to give us both a saliva test, because there'll be something phony."

"Save it for the ring, gentlemen," the commissioner said. "There won't be any need for any policing by this office, I'm sure.

I think I can count on all concerned to handle themselves in the best interests of the sport."

The reporters were waiting outside the room, and they surrounded the fighters. "How about it, Grady?" one of them asked.

"We signed for fifteen, but we're wasting ten rounds," Grady said confidently. "I'll kill this cheese champ in five."

"Got anything to say about that?" they yelled at Jimmy.

"Not a thing," Jimmy said. "I'll do my talking in the ring."

"How do you expect to fight Grady?"

"Like I would a mad dog," Jimmy answered, and it drew a laugh.

"Think you've got a chance?"

"Not only a chance, but I'm going to win." This also drew a laugh, including a hearty one by Grady.

Jimmy called Mary the next morning. "I suppose you have read the papers?"

"I have. People seem quite excited by the fight."

"People like to see someone like Grady go into the ring because they like to see blood. They all figure Grady's going to knock out a champion."

"Good luck, Jim."

"Thanks. I'll see you after the fight."

"After the fight?"

"We're fighting the last of June, and I'm going into training right away. The way to beat Grady, I figure, is to be in top condition and out-last him."

"So you won't have any time for me?"

"That's right."

"Fighting is more important?"

"This fight is more important, because if I win this fight, I'm going to ask you to marry me."

"Why just if you win?"

"You mean you will?"

"Since you're not going to have time for me for nearly two months, I don't think I should give you an answer just now."

"What does that mean?"

"Just what it says. When you have time to see me, ask me."

"I'll see you if I win."

"See me if you win or lose, Jim."

Jimmy set up his training camp at Pompton Lakes, and he trained hard. This was



one fight he knew he had to win. This was the fight which would vindicate his championship, the fight which would put him on top of the heap, which would mean the difference between a guy who made dough at the fight racket, and a real fighter to be remembered with the great champions. He had to beat the hard-hitting, cold-blooded killer, George Grady.

CURT MASTERS came to the camp. "Since I more or less started this thing for you, how about giving me an idea of how you're fighting Grady?"

"There's no secret about it," Jimmy said. "Grady moves in all the time. He's tough, hits hard with either hand, and he's a better boxer than most guys give him credit for. All right, to beat him you've got to keep from getting hit, and you've got to do more than run, you've got to be able to hit hard enough to wear him down. I figure I'm a better boxer and hitter than he's met, and I figure to beat him."

"Sounds easy to hear you tell it."

"It won't be easy," Jimmy said, and his face set, "but I'm going to win!"

"You're not whistling in the dark?"

"I don't know how to whistle."

"Everybody quotes you saying you're going to win like it's a big joke. If he cuts you down in the first five the way he says he's going to, you're out of business."

Jimmy shrugged. "I'll give it everything I've got, and I don't think he can beat it."

Max was getting ulcers over the fight. He hovered like a mother hen and he worried constantly. "Jimmy, don't let him box you in those corners so you can't move. He's good with his feet, Jimmy."

"I know," Jimmy'd say.

The next time Max would have something new to say. "He likes to work on the body until you drop your guard, Jimmy. You gotta watch yourself all the time, because then he comes up to the head like five drinks too many."

"I'll watch it."

The papers were solidly in favor of Grady as the eventual winner by a kayo. They laughed at Curt Masters when he said that if the fight went past the seventh, Jimmy

Welter stood a chance of taking a decision. By the time the night of the fight rolled around, Jimmy was a two-to-one underdog. It was another indignity for him to face, since the champion usually rates at least an even break with the odds-makers.

The experts had watched Jimmy train, had watched how he kept moving all the time, kept snapping with a left, and came to the conclusion that it was going to be a bicycle race. "Unless Grady tires himself out chasing Welter around the ring, he should win handily," one paper summed it up.

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## CHAPTER V

### *Blow for Blow*

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CLAD IN A gaudy bathrobe, Grady was first in the ring, and Jimmy heard the ovation as he started from his dressing room. They were still yelling for Grady when Jimmy came down the aisle. Then they saw him, and the cheering changed to a heavy boo from most of the fans. Here and there a fan stood to applaud and cheer, but they were not many and could not make themselves heard in the tumult.

Jimmy reached ringside and had just started up the steps when he saw someone waving at him. He stooped to look, and saw that it was Mary! Mary, flanked on either side by a handsome, well-dressed young man. Jimmy stepped back down and slipped behind the rows of reporters to where Mary sat.

"You came to the fight," he said in surprise.

"I couldn't stay away," she said. "I'm well-protected." She indicated the two men with her.

"These the boys who put me in the cheese column?"

They grinned. "We're all for you tonight, Champ," one of them said.

"We have to be," the other one said, "or we'll have a fight of our own on our hands." He nodded at Mary.

"I'll see you after the fight?" she asked.

Jimmy's jaw set. "If I win," he said.

The photographers had gathered to snap pictures of Jimmy talking to Mary, but Jimmy shouldered through them and up into the ring.

"A fine time to be worrying about girls," Max growled.

"Don't open up another ulcer," Jimmy said. "For the next hour I'm concentrating on Herman the Vermin over there."

"Don't lay down to do it," Max said. "If you had a brain in that punchy cranium of yours, we'd be in Detroit now with a soft fight coming up instead of putting the title out here for Grady to kick around."

"That's what I like, encouragement and confidence in my corner," Jimmy said, and he went to the middle of the ring to meet with Grady and the referee. He put out his hand to shake with Grady, but the challenger ignored it.

"Let's not kid each other," Grady said tightly. "I'm no pal of yours. I'm gonna knock you kicking just as soon as I can."

"Quiet, I'm turning on the P.A." the referee said. He clutched the mike and flicked the button. "You boys know the rules," he said for the benefit of the crowd and the radio. "I want you to break when I tell you, and I don't want any hitting coming out. Keep your blows above the belt, no rabbit-punching or back-handing. Make it a good fight."

Max slipped the robe off, and gave Jimmy a hug. "Look, kid, I'm all for you, remember that. Give him everything you've got."

The bell rang, and Jimmy turned to face the man who had labeled him a cheese-champ and who had built up such a terrific following with his driving, two-fisted attack that very few in the vast throng gave Jimmy a chance to win.

Grady moved straight across the ring, in his familiar crouch, with his fists cocked. Jimmy danced lightly, slapped with a left, and then suddenly walked right into Grady. He came in belting, and his sudden attack caught Grady off-balance.

Jimmy slugged a wicked left to the side of Grady's head, banged a right into Grady's side, hooked a left to the cheek, came up with a right which rocked Grady back, and then

slammed left and right to the body before Grady could tie him up.

There was a tremendous roar of surprise from the fans. "How do you like that from a cheese-champ?" Jimmy grated in Grady's ear.

Grady came after him furiously, and Jimmy hit him hard four times with the left as he backed across the ring. He stepped quickly, moved inside Grady's fists, and tied him up. He moved out and away. He stepped around, snapped the left twice to Grady's face, putting steam behind it, and then Grady worked him into a corner. Jimmy stepped once as though driving in again, then weaved outside Grady's vicious one-two, making the challenger miss badly, and moved out into the open.

JIMMY moved smoothly, swiftly and effortlessly. Grady was out of rhythm due to Jimmy's surprise attack, and he couldn't nail Jimmy through the rest of the first. Jimmy kept hammering his left to the right side of Grady's face.

Max was excited between rounds. "You caught him flat-footed, kid. He didn't touch you. That was your round all the way."

Jimmy nodded, rinsed his mouth, breathed deeply and relaxed. He was going to need all his strength before this was over. Grady was still strong; Jimmy hadn't really hurt the challenger, just annoyed him.

In the second round, Grady kept coming, and Jimmy kept moving. Once midway through the round Grady boxed him on the ropes, but Jimmy stopped and fought his way off in a blistering exchange. He stopped Grady with a stiff left, and hit with three battering rights as he clinched. For the first time he felt Grady's power as the man got in a solid one-two to the body. They were trip-hammer blows.

Grady was moving in rhythm now, and Jimmy had to maneuver more swiftly to keep out of trouble. Grady's footwork was fast, and he knew what he wanted. Jimmy danced and sniped with the left, and now and then he stopped to put sting into the left. Grady countered with a vicious left hook twice, but Jimmy slipped them both.

Then, just before the second round ended,



Grady caught up with him. Jimmy hit with a straight left, but Grady stepped in and Jimmy had to move fast—right into a corner. Grady charged like an enraged bull. A left hook bounced off Jimmy's head, a right dug into his middle, the left almost broke a rib, and the right caught him on the jaw and rocked him. He tried to clinch, but Grady broke away nicely and belted him with a long left and right.

Jimmy hooked a left into Grady, but Grady took it and powdered Jimmy with a smashing left and right to the head which buckled Jimmy's legs as the bell rang. The crowd was screaming hysterically as Jimmy went back to his corner.

Jimmy glanced down at ringside as he went to the corner, and he saw Mary with her hands clenched, her face white and eyes wide. She looked frightened. It was the last time during the fight he was conscious of noticing her. From then on he was busy trying to survive, something which he realized had been rated impossible from the beginning.

Grady was moving faster in the third. Jimmy had to step up his own tempo, but he was still in good shape and kept moving just ahead of the killing fists. But when two men are put into a small square facing each other, Jimmy knew that sooner or later one of them was going to be hurt, and in the case of George Grady it was usually sooner.

Halfway through the third Grady again caught Jimmy. Jimmy saw it coming this time and pole-axed the left twice into Grady's face as Grady moved in for the kill. Grady blasted at the body, and Jimmy didn't try to protect himself. He went flat on his feet and hit with everything he had. He barreled left and right directly to Grady's head, and he leaned into them, feeling the crushing snap of Grady's blows to his middle as he did so.

Grady brought up a left hook which snapped Jimmy's head back, and slugged a wicked right to Jimmy's jaw. Jimmy, with his head spinning and his legs rubbery, smashed a left straight to Grady's nose, and brought blood. They clinched, and the referee separated them.

Jimmy felt a little tired as he saw Grady doggedly coming back in. He could tell he was too sluggish to move away from Grady,

and he drove in, meeting the challenger toe-to-toe. For the remaining twenty seconds of the round they stood braced, and hammered each other. Jimmy gave one for every one he took, but Grady hit like a cement track going downgrade.

They didn't hear the bell in the bedlam which had broken loose in Yankee Stadium, and the referee had to get between them and start them back to their corners.

**T**HE REFEREE came over to Jimmy's corner. "How's that cut?" he asked.

"What cut?" Jimmy asked.

"Not very deep." Max said, and then Jimmy felt it sting as Max treated it. He couldn't remember when Grady had cut him, but it must have been in the last furious exchange.

Jimmy's conditioning paid off, and he recuperated rapidly. His legs felt strong again to open the fourth, and he moved swiftly around Grady. He kept hammering with the left. Either Grady was pacing himself, or he had slowed down some, because he wasn't moving as fast. Jimmy had time to belt the left solidly. He was content to box, and the round was dull compared to the previous ones. Jimmy piled up a handy margin of points to take the round.

Grady had promised to get Jimmy by the fifth, and he was a man whose vanity impelled him to keep his promise. He moved swiftly across the ring to open the fifth, and tried to nail Jimmy before he was ready. He almost succeeded. Jimmy hit with a hard left, and moved. Grady leaped after him in a change of pace from the fourth round which Jimmy couldn't measure. He caught Jimmy along the ropes and slugged him to the point of the jaw with a right which turned out the lights for a second.

It was only a short second that Jimmy was numbed, but it was enough for Grady. He hit with a left which reopened the cut over Jimmy's right eye, and then another right smashed to Jimmy's jaw. Jimmy staggered and tried to clinch.

Grady broke out of the attempted clinch and splattered a hard right off the top of Jimmy's head. He came in with a left hook to the midsection which bent Jimmy, and

then the whacking right again slugged to Jimmy's jaw. Jimmy sagged against the ropes and started down. Grady hooked with a left which slammed him to the canvas, and Jimmy rolled over twice.

Jimmy was sprawled on his back when he was conscious of the lights hurting his eyes. "Five—Six—"

Jimmy rolled over to his stomach, drew his knees under him slowly, and came up at the count of nine. The referee wiped off his gloves, and Jimmy set himself. He threw a hard left to the right eye of Grady as Grady came in with his cast-iron fists and his blacksmith strength.

Bang-bang to the body, but Jimmy hooked another left to the head with everything he had. Crack-splat to the head with left and right, but Jimmy swung a haymaker right which rocked Grady. Grady was infuriated, and his arms pumped like the drive-rods of the Twentieth Century Limited. He blasted Jimmy back to the ropes, nailed him there, and knocked him down in a fine spray of blood.

Jimmy laboriously came back up, hand over hand up the ropes, and he leaned against them as Grady pumped back in. Jimmy bounced off the ropes with another vicious left, but Grady hit him four times with rocking, slugging blows. Jimmy planted his feet and leaned on the ropes so he couldn't fall down. He flattened Grady's nose with a hammering right.

Grady hit him with everything he had. Jimmy was bloody, weary and half out on his feet, but his mind held tenaciously to the thought that he couldn't go down again because he knew he wouldn't be able to get back up. Slowly he drew back his fists one at a time and smashed at the wild apparition in front of him. He felt his blows hitting, but the rain of fire and brimstone which pelted him never stopped.

Jimmy felt himself slipping sideways. He tried to catch himself, but Grady's murderous fists knocked him off his feet, and he felt himself hit the canvas. Then there was nothing until he felt Max and the seconds dragging him to his stool.

Max was sobbing. Jimmy shook his head, and the ring came back into focus. "Is it

over?" he asked.

"It should be," Max said. "It should be."

"Is your man going to answer the bell for the sixth?" the referee asked.

"Yes," Jimmy said in a strong voice.

The referee bent over and peered into his eyes. He put a finger upright from Jimmy's nose to his forehead and drew it back, and he watched the focus of Jimmy's eyes. "All right, but if you didn't hold the championship, I'd stop the fight."

JIMMY'S legs felt pretty good and his head was clear as he came out for the sixth. He braced himself for Grady's charge, but Grady was moving much slower than in the fifth. The right side of Grady's face was badly swollen, and when Jimmy hit him with a hard left, Grady slowed even more.

Jimmy realized that Grady was also tired and looking for a breather. Although Grady hadn't been knocked down, he had been hit hard, and he had been the one who had been punching furiously and burning up energy. He was arm-weary from his attack!

Grady was still dangerous and could still hit, but for now he was content to throw one at a time instead of the fast barrage. Jimmy felt himself growing stronger as the round went on, but he stayed away, and banged home the left when he could. Grady protected his left side well, however, and it was a dull round. But the crowd, too, seemed to want a breather, and a heavy murmur of expectancy hung over Yankee Stadium.

Grady renewed the attack in the seventh. Jimmy's condition was good, and he felt able to move with Grady. He stayed away as much as possible, whipping the left to Grady's swollen face when he could, and clinching when Grady got close. Halfway through the round Grady drove him into a corner and plunged to the attack.

Jimmy speared him with a vicious left, and it stopped Grady. Jimmy cracked a right to Grady's heart, and then hooked a left to the right side of Grady's face. Grady stepped back and swung a wild right. Jimmy went under it and came up with another left to the side of the head. Grady clinched.

Jimmy felt elation run through him. He stayed away through the rest of the seventh,

softening Grady with the wicked left, and Grady looked tired and hurt as he went back to his corner.

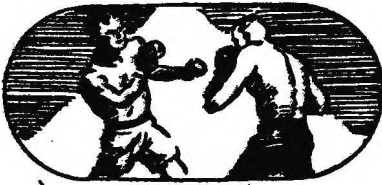
Max pounded Jimmy on the back excitedly and doused him with water. Jimmy leaned back on the stool and felt the strength flow through him again.

"You've got him," Max yiped in his ear. "You've got him!" And Jimmy couldn't help agreeing.

But they both should have remembered the viciousness of a wounded tiger.

Jimmy moved out, and Grady came plodding on in the only way he knew how to fight. Jimmy, cocky now, slammed the left to Grady's head, and easily blocked the right counter. Grady swung another right, but Jimmy beat him to the punch. Jimmy attacked, abandoning his boxing skill, and he rocked Grady.

Grady came to life. From somewhere Grady drew the last strength from a fighting heart, and Grady clawed back. Left and right hammered to Jimmy's body, and Jimmy banged a right to Grady's jaw. Grady ignored it and drove with a last, furious as-



sault. He slammed Jimmy back, hitting with a left and right which staggered Jimmy, and Jimmy knew he was once again fighting for his life.

Jimmy knew he had made a mistake, and he knew there was only one way for a champion to rectify such a mistake. He could run and perhaps coast to a decision over Grady as Masters had predicted he would if the fight went past the seventh, but Jimmy was a champion and he wouldn't retreat from something he had started against a man he figured was beaten.

They fought it out toe-to-toe, and the man who backed up first and crumbled was going to be the loser. They both realized that fact as they shot the works. Left and right, with blood spraying at every contact of soggy

glove against beaten flesh. With their heads almost touching they hammered at each other, and Jimmy kept putting his body behind the left hook to the pulpy right side of Grady's face.

Jimmy was weary, and he could think of nothing except to hook the left. He hooked it savagely. Then again, and again. His right hung almost uselessly as he blasted home the left. He hit again, and he felt Grady give.

He followed, hooking a mean left as Grady hit back with a right cross which bounced off Jimmy's head.

SAVAGELY Jimmy hooked the left again. Sand over the screaming thousands he heard the heavy sob which came out of Grady. Again he slugged the left, and Grady crumpled.

Jimmy brought his right back into play, and smashed Grady half-around. Then he hooked the left, and Grady disintegrated.

Grady collapsed to the floor and rolled over on his face. Jimmy staggered to a neutral corner and hung wearily on the ropes, gulping air into his heaving lungs, as the referee counted ten over Grady.

Max hugged him and pounded him and his seconds laughed and leaped around him. Masters got into the ring and pumped Jimmy's sodden right glove. Jimmy grinned back at them all as best he could, and kept inching for the corner. They helped him down the steps from the ring, and there at the bottom was Mary.

She suddenly threw her arms around his bloody, sweaty body and kissed his battered lips.

"Hey," he said. "Hey, you're ruining a new dress and a set of make-up."

"Who cares," she said. "This is no time for a fighter's wife to be delicate."

"You mean that?"

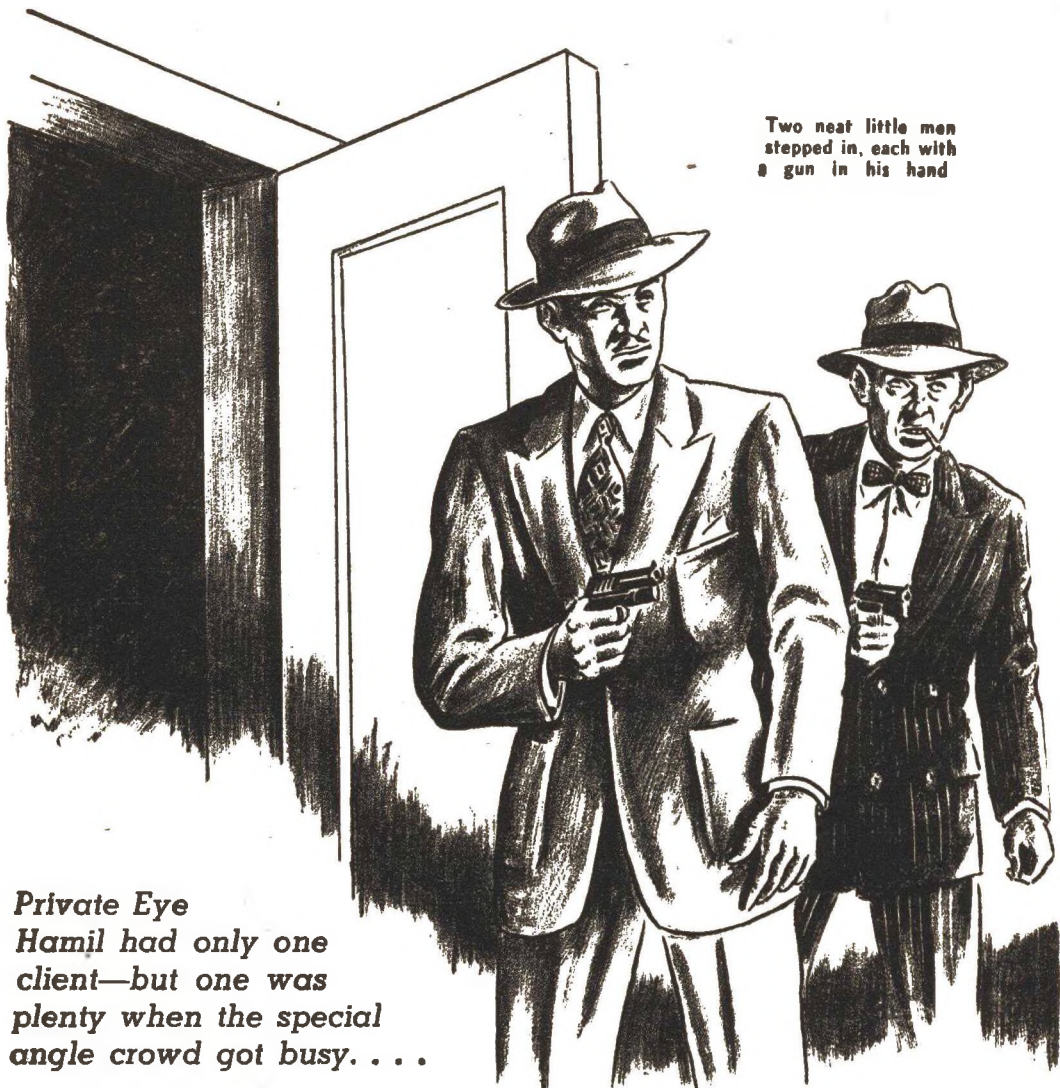
"If you have time for me now."

Then it was Jimmy who threw his arms around her and pulled her to him, completing the ruin of the dress and the make-up as he kissed her.

The photographers popped away merrily with their flash-bulbs, and this time no one tried to stop them.



# THE MURDER TAP



Two neat little men stepped in, each with a gun in his hand

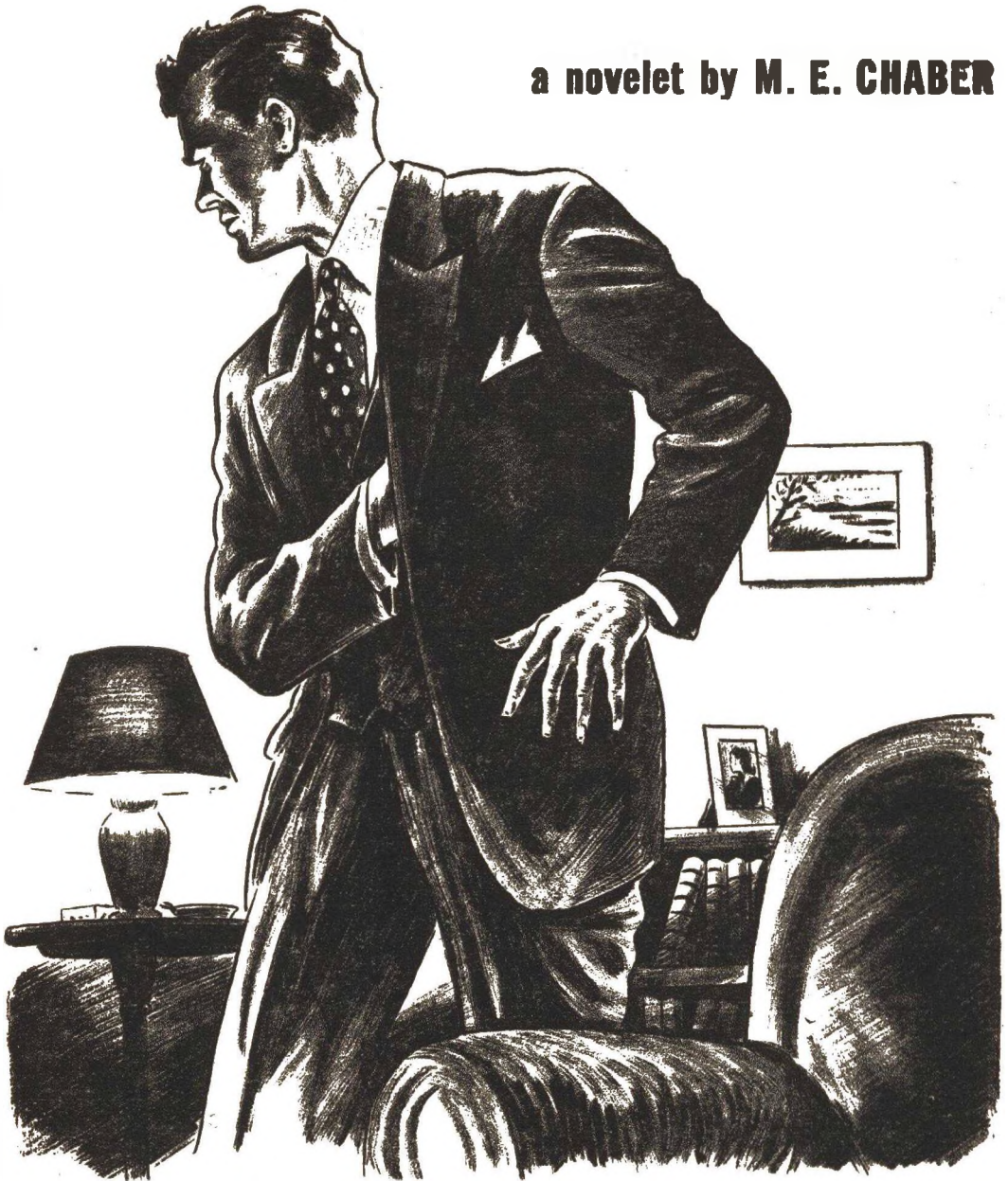
*Private Eye  
Hamil had only one client—but one was plenty when the special angle crowd got busy. . . .*

**T**HE INAUGURATION was just a memory and all the bustle of the new administration moving into Washington was over. Most of the capital had settled down to political business as usual, so I knew it was about time for excitement to begin for me. I sat in my office and waited for it.

My office isn't what might be expected

from the address. It's just big enough for a chair, a desk, a hatrack, and a small bookcase. There's a phone on the desk, but it's an unlisted number. No secretary and no filing cabinets. And the bookcase is mostly filled with mystery novels. The frosted glass door has some lettering on it, but it's smaller than you find on most Washington doors.

a novelet by M. E. CHABER



The first line says, "Harry Hamal." That's me. The second line says, "Confidential, Inc." That's me, too.

I'm a private eye. Anyway, I've got a license that says I'm one. And I've got a piece of paper that says I can carry a gun in the District of Columbia. But I've got only one client, and I don't want any more. If any-

one comes in wanting to hire me, I say I'm too busy, and give the names of two or three good agencies.

The phone rang. I picked up the receiver and said hello.

"Harry," he said, "can you come over here right away?"

"Sure," I said. "What's up?"

"I'll tell you when you get here. It's personal this time." There was a click as he hung up.

That was my client. Senator Robert Webster. A nice guy even if he is a Senator. This is his third term in the Senate. He's an Independent. He's so popular in his home state that neither Democrats nor Republicans bothered to oppose him in the last election. So far as Senator Webster is concerned, it makes little difference which party is in power. He sides with whichever one he agrees with; if he thinks both are wrong, he strikes out on his own.

Senator Webster is chairman of a special investigating committee. It looks into any bit of Government business where there is suspicion of undue influence. It's a pretty busy committee.

**T**HE SENATOR and I first got together about three years ago. I used to have a regular agency, but I didn't like it. I wouldn't have anything to do with lobbyists or special-angle boys, which means I barely got along. Then I inherited some money and decided to retire.

Before I closed up, I'd taken on a job for Senator Webster's committee. I liked the way he worked, and I guess it was mutual. We ended up making a deal. He didn't use any other investigators and I didn't take any other clients. It worked out fine. I just about made my overhead, but I was enjoying myself.

Maybe I ought to say one more thing about Washington. A lot of people thought that all the undue influence would end when the Cadillac set came into power. It didn't, and that wasn't anybody's fault. There are a lot of regulars in Washington who stay on, no matter who's in power. They don't hold any jobs, but they're in on most of the undue influence.

There's nothing melodramatic about it, like bribery or blackmail, as most people think. It's just friendship. The guys who do run the Government agencies have so much to do that a lot of the time they have to rely on what other people say. And it's natural to put more stock in what a friend says.

Then, too, Washington is a friendly town. Somebody's always giving cocktail parties. So there are a lot of guys who make a career of being friends of important people.

I got over to the Senate Office Building as fast as I could. Marge, the Senator's secretary, nodded when she saw me.

"Go on in," she said. "He's waiting for you."

When I went in he was going through some papers, but he shoved them to one side.

"What's the problem?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," he said, frowning. "We've been questioning a couple of witnesses on something that came to my attention. Haven't even got to the point of calling you to dig up more on it. But a week ago, I received a telephone call at home. It was about midnight. I was offered fifty thousand dollars to forget the investigation."

I whistled softly. Like I said, outright bribery is seldom tried—or even necessary—these days.

"Any idea who it was?" I asked.

"No. It was the voice of an obviously uneducated man. I'm afraid I didn't think of trying to find out who he was. I merely said I wasn't interested and hung up."

"You must have hold of something pretty big if they're offering that kind of money."

"That's just the point, Harry," he said. "It isn't. As you know, we've pretty well caught up on steel production since the strike, but just the same we need all the steel we can get in Korea. They still haven't the ninety-day reserve supply of steel-jacketed bullets the chiefs of staff consider necessary. As a result, civilian orders still come under a more severe scrutiny than normally. Yet in the confusion of changing administrations, someone gave a steel priority to a Sarmento Racing Corporation—to be used in the construction of a new race track out in California."

"How big an order?" I asked.

"Only seventy-five thousand dollars." He saw my expression and nodded. "As a matter of fact, Harry, we weren't paying much attention to it. We had asked a few questions, but were inclined to consider it just a blunder."



I was getting interested. Nobody puts up fifty thousand dollars to cover up on a seventy-five-thousand-dollar deal that probably wouldn't have amounted to anything in the first place.

"I might not have paid any attention even to that," the Senator went on, "if it hadn't been for what followed. My wife and children are back in our home state for a short visit. Three nights ago, a young lady showed up at my house. She insisted that I had sent for her and was rather crude in her attempts to enter when I refused to invite her in. She finally left when I threatened to call the police. The next day I happened to notice her picture in the paper. She's an entertainer in some night club. Her name is Carmencita. I don't know her last name, but Senator Greene happened to see the picture as I was looking at it, and he told me there are rumors she has been involved in—ah—a number of political deals."

THAT was putting it politely. I knew about Carmencita. She was a *flamenco* dancer in a small night club, the *El Companero*. She was a beautiful dame, with long black hair and the kind of figure that would make an invalid forsake his wheel-chair. And it was said, that if you knew the right people and were willing to do something she wanted done that she would be available for one-night stands. Favors for favors.

"You've got more willpower than I have, Senator," I said, with a grin. "Okay, I'll see what I can get."

"There's one more thing," he said. "I think my phone is tapped, and has been ever since I refused that bribe."

"You're sure?" I asked. Not that I was surprised. Phone tapping is illegal, but it's practically a national pastime in Washington.

"Reasonably certain," he said.

I picked up his phone, asked Marge to give me an outside line, and dialed my own office number, listening closely. There was a brief split-second when the volume diminished so slightly that it was hardly noticeable.

I put the receiver down. This wasn't a sure check, but it was enough to make me look further. That brief fall in volume could have been caused by faulty equipment—or it

could have been caused when the tap was cut in and before the tapper's condenser and resistor began compensating for the power drain.

"You may be right," I told the Senator. "I'll find out for sure. Anything else to tell me?"

He shook his head.

I picked up the phone and got an outside line again. I dialed the letters of the Senator's exchange, then the numbers, 9960. That would connect me with the telephone company's exchange repair clerk.

"This is Jones," I said when the clerk answered. They wouldn't know the names of all their repairmen. "I'm checking some trouble on a line and I need the pair and cable numbers."

I gave him the Senator's phone number. In a couple of minutes, he gave me the numbers I wanted. Then I dialed the cable records office of the phone company.

"This is Jones," I said again. "I need the multiples on two-twelve."

A minute later, I had an address. It was no more than half a block away.

"What was all that?" the Senator wanted to know.

"Locating the place where your phone may have been tapped," I said. "That's how easy it is."

He was still looking startled as I left.

The address turned out to be a small office building. This was the place where the phone wires from Senator Webster's office, along with the wires from other offices, would go through the basement and into an underground cable. If there was a tap, that was where it would be.

The janitor was willing to take me into the basement when he saw the card identifying me as an investigator for a Senate committee. People in Washington have a way of being more afraid of Senate committees than they are of the police.

There was a tap on the wires, all right. I ripped the connection loose and showed it to the janitor. He looked frightened.

"I didn't know anything about it," he said. "I wouldn't let anybody fool around with those wires. You've got to believe me."

"Relax, Pop," I said. "Nobody's accusing

you. When was the last time there was a telephone repairman down here?"

He thought a minute. "About a week ago."

"Had any new tenants in the last week or so?"

"One," he said. "Fellow up in three-fifteen. Said he was a writer and wanted a nice quiet place. You think—"

"I think," I said. "Don't worry about him. I'll take care of it."

## II



I WENT up to Office 315. There was nothing on the door except the number. There was a light inside, so I knew somebody was there. I tried the door. It was locked, so I rapped on it and rattled the knob.

"Who's there?" somebody asked from inside.

"Fire inspector," I said. "Open up."

"Just a minute," he said.

I could hear some activity inside. Then the door swung open.

"Sorry, Inspector," he said. "I'm a writer, and I keep the door locked so I won't be disturbed."

There was a typewriter on the desk, but he didn't look much like a writer. I'd never heard of a writer who carried a gun, and the bulge under his left arm certainly wasn't muscle.

I walked across to look at the desk. There was a sheet of paper in the typewriter, but there wasn't anything written on it.

"I ain't done much today," he said. He sounded a little nervous.

I leaned over and yanked open one of the desk drawers.

"Hey, what're you doing?" he yelled.

There were head-phones in the drawer. I reached down and jerked them loose.

"This," I said, holding them up. "Anybody ever tell you it isn't nice to eavesdrop?"

His hand seemed to be trying to decide whether to go for the gun or not. "You a

cop?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I'm just a guy who doesn't like phone-tappers. Who are you working for, Buster?"

He cursed, and did go for the gun then. But I was ready for that. I whipped the head-phones down on his wrist. They made a good healthy crack and he temporarily lost the use of that hand. But he was a tough boy. He rushed me.

I had already figured he wouldn't talk easy, and I saw no reason to waste time. I took a swinging left on the shoulder, then stepped inside and hit him hard on the point of the chin. He flopped over the desk, taking the typewriter with him, and hit the floor on the other side. He tried to get up, and made it as far as one knee. Then he folded up like an old newspaper.

I found what I was looking for in his wallet. His name was Larry Blair and he was an operator for a private detective named George Stacy. I knew Stacy, and this was his kind of work. He didn't care what he did as long as the money was right. He had the reputation of working two ways from the middle — blackmailing as many people as he billed legitimately.

I put the wallet back, and went through the desk. It held an impulse recorder, which would give the numbers called, and a tape recorder. I took what tape there was and stuck it in my pocket.

The guy on the floor was just starting to groan when the phone rang. I hesitated a minute, then picked it up.

"Yeah?" I said, hoping I sounded something like Larry Blair.

"Augie," a voice on the phone announced.

"Yeah?" I said again.

There was a long pause and I knew it had been the wrong thing to say. Larry Blair probably would have known what Augie wanted without asking.

"You're not Larry," the voice said. "Who the hell are you?" It was one of those flat voices that never change no matter what's being said.

"Larry's not feeling well," I said. "I just took his place. He said you'd call."

It didn't work. The only answer I got was the click of the connection being broken. As

I put the phone down Larry was staring at me from the floor.

I came around the desk fast in case he still decided to go for the gun. I hadn't taken it away from him.

"Who's Augie?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he said sullenly.

I REACHED down, pulled him to his feet, and cuffed him across the jaw hard enough to make his head rock.

"Who's Augie?" I asked again.

He tried to stare it out, but his toughness didn't go deep enough. "Augie is all I know," he said. "I ain't never seen him or heard his last name. Stacy told me a guy named Augie would call sometimes, and when he did I should give him what I had."

"You mean you reported to him what you'd overheard on Senator Webster's phone?"

"When he called. The rest of the time I just gave it to Stacy."

"Is Augie the guy who hired Stacy to put this tap on the Senator's phone?" I asked.

"I don't know. You think Stacy tells anybody his business?"

I decided he was telling the truth. I reached out and pulled his gun from the shoulder holster. I dropped the shells in my pocket and tossed the empty gun on the desk. Then I went downstairs and got a cab.

George Stacy's office wasn't far from mine, but it was in a high-rent building. On the sixth floor, according to the name board in the lobby. It was already past the hour when most offices closed, but I figured that Stacy would probably still be there.

I got out of the elevator on his floor and walked past a couple of darkened law offices and an empty one. The next office was Stacy's. There was a light shining through the pebbled glass of the door, so I went in.

There was subdued lighting and expensive furniture in the reception room, but no receptionist. I wasn't surprised. I'd heard that Stacy wouldn't even hire a secretary because she might start finding out what went on in the office.

On the far side of the reception room was a solid oak door. George Stacy's name was on it. Also the word "Private." I'd just

started for it when there was a gunshot from the other side of the door.

I'm not fond of violence, but I needed some conversation with Stacy. So I pulled my own gun and threw open the door. I went in fast, stepping to one side and trying to cover the whole room.

George Stacy was slumped over, with his head on the desk. A thread of blood was spreading out over the light maple. I thought he'd committed suicide. Then suddenly realized there wasn't any gun around. I wasted several minutes looking for a place someone could hide before I even saw the other door. I should have known Stacy was the kind of guy who'd have a back way out of his private office.

I ran across and opened the door. It opened into the corridor. But I was too late. There was no one in sight, although I could still hear footsteps going down the stairs.

There was no point to chasing someone who was carrying around that much lead. I turned and went back into the office.

Stacy was dead, all right. Someone had put a large-caliber bullet through the back of his head. The gun had been held close enough to scorch the hair. It must have been someone Stacy had known pretty well, to get that close to his back.

Late as it was, there wasn't much probability anyone else had heard the shot. I decided to take a chance and look around.

There was nothing in a couple of filing cabinets but some old reports on divorce cases. And divorces were a small part of George Stacy's business. To search the desk, I had to move one of his arms to get at the drawers. It was a waste of time. In one drawer was a bottle of bourbon and a carton of cigarettes. In another was a gun. The rest were empty.

There was something odd about it. Stacy wasn't the kind of guy not to have records. And the office didn't look as if it had been searched. Whoever killed him wouldn't have had time to do any searching before I barged in.

THEN I had a delayed memory. When I'd moved his arm, I had felt something inside his coat sleeve. I'd taken it for granted



that it was a cuff link. Now it seemed to me as if it had maybe been too large for that. More like a key.

I went over and explored the sleeve. It was a key. Fastened inside the sleeve with a safety pin—a gold safety pin.

I grinned when I saw that. George Stacy had been a fancy dresser, definitely not the type to be pinning keys inside his coat. So that key must have been pretty important to him. It looked like a door key. I didn't have any idea what it was for, but I tossed it in my pocket. If it had been important to him, maybe I could figure out how to use it.

As I left, I was thinking that probably hundreds of people in Washington had a reason for killing George Stacy. But I didn't believe it was coincidence that he had been murdered right after a character named Augie had discovered that someone was onto the phone tap. Killing Stacy was a pretty reliable way of keeping him from telling who had hired him.

I still had a couple of other leads. One was the Sarmiento Racing Corporation. It would have to wait until the next day. The other was Carmencita, and she wouldn't have to wait.

*El Companero* was a small, intimate club, with a five-piece Spanish orchestra. There were only a few empty tables when I got there. They always did good business, mostly because of Carmencita. Regardless of what she did when school was out, she was one hell of a dancer.

The waiter took me to a table and I ordered dinner. *Paella Valenciana*, which is one of my favorite dishes. It doesn't sound like much to describe—it's saffron rice, seafood, veal and chicken cooked in a casserole—but it's heaven to eat. With it, I had some imported *manzanilla*, a white sherry that tastes mild, but suddenly sneaks up on you.

By the time I'd finished off with coffee and a glass of *anis*, I realized that it was past the time the show usually went on. I motioned for the waiter.

"Carmencita?" I asked, when he came over.

He shrugged. "I do not know for certain," he said. He had only a slight Spanish accent. "But I think she will not dance to-

night. She is ill perhaps."

I made appropriate noises over the possibility of her illness, then the waiter and I entered into a slight negotiation. Some five minutes later, I had ten dollars less in my pocket and the waiter was scurrying away.

When he came back, he put a strip of paper in my hand. Carmencita's address was written on it. For the first time I learned her last name was Serrano.

### III



CARMENCITA'S address was a good one. Not the most expensive, but not the cheapest either. I rang the bell and somebody buzzed the door open. There was a self-service elevator.

The apartment door was open when I reached it. A girl was standing in the doorway. It wasn't Carmencita, but she looked just as good. Maybe a little better. This one had red hair and green eyes. She wore a tailored suit, but the severity only accented her figure.

"Miss Serrano?" I asked.

"She's not here now," the girl said. She hesitated; then said, "She works in a night club. You'll probably find her there."

"Not tonight," I said. I looked past her into the apartment. It looked as if there were three rooms. Nicely furnished. "Any idea where else I might find her?"

She looked me over. There was something like approval in her eyes. That was all right with me.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Harry Hamal," I said. "Miss Serrano doesn't know me, but I want to see her rather badly. On business." I emphasized that so the redhead wouldn't get the wrong idea. I didn't want her thinking I was one of Carmencita's playmates.

She smiled as if she knew what I was thinking. "I'm sorry," she said. "I haven't any idea where she is."

"You a friend of hers?" I asked.

"We share this apartment," the redhead said. Her tone seemed to indicate that the

relationship was no more than that.

I grinned. "Well, thanks, Miss—?"

"Carter," she said. "Fran Carter."

"Thanks, Miss Carter," I said. I looked her over again. "You a dancer, too?"

She laughed. "No, I work in the Defense Department."

"Oh," I said. The Sarmiento racing deal had gone through the Defense Department. "That must be interesting."

She seemed to think it was just a polite comment. "It is, sometimes. I'll tell Carmencita you were here, Mr. Hamal. If you don't find her before then, why not drop around tomorrow evening? She's usually here until about eight o'clock."

"Maybe I'll do that," I said.

I meant it, too. Partly for pleasure, but partly for business. I never could resist redheads—or coincidences.

I decided to call it a day. There wasn't much I could do before morning, so I went home to my two-room apartment in the Jefferson Arms. A nice quiet place with a good class of neighbors. There was a retired opera singer next door. One of the more respectable lobbyists lived on the floor above, and one of our more prominent bachelor Senators, a guy who keeps making the headlines by seeing subversives under somebody else's bed, lived directly below me. I didn't know about the rest of the tenants, but I imagined they were more of the same.

On the way in, I picked up a paper and a couple of cans of beer. I'd just taken off my coat when I sensed something wrong in the place. It took me another minute to realize it was a sound. From the bathroom. Running water. I hurried in, thinking I must have forgotten to turn off the faucet that morning.

It was the stall shower. The hot water was running full blast. The glass door was all fogged up and steam was gushing out at the bottom.

Wondering how I could have been so stupid, I yanked open the door. Something slammed me back against the wall, then thumped to the floor.

Well, I'd found Carmencita. Her black hair was drenched with water and steam was rising from it. She was naked and her body was still as beautiful as I remembered

it. Death had only made it look more like marble. She had been strangled. I could see the bruise marks around her throat.

**I**T WOULD be hard to tell when she had been killed. That boiling hot shower would throw the whole business of body temperature and rigor mortis.

This pretty well settled it. Two leads—two murders. Somebody didn't want any investigation of why Senator Webster was being worked on.

Carmencita hadn't been dumped in my apartment just for fun. A murder charge against me might not stick, but it would certainly finish me off as the investigator for Senator Webster's committee. After something like that, I'd be fair game for any unfriendly Senator in a committee hearing.

I'd got that far with the reasons when somebody knocked on my door.

I never moved so fast in my life. I picked up Carmencita and got her back inside the stall shower. The water was scalding hot, but it was no time to be sensitive. I propped her against the wall and shut the door. I tore off my own clothes and splashed plenty of water on myself at the sink, as if I'd been taking a shower, and grabbed a robe. The knocking came for the third time as I left the bathroom.

"I'm coming!" I yelled.

I opened the door and managed to look surprised. I knew both of them. The big, rangy guy was Lieutenant Russell Peterson of Homicide. The other one was Sergeant Gray. Also of Homicide.

"What took you so long?" the lieutenant asked.

"Long?" I said. "You knocked more than once?"

"Long enough and loud enough to wake the dead," he said. He put a special emphasis on that last word.

"You ought to go down and try it in the morgue then," I said. It didn't get a laugh. "What is this—a social call?"

"Not exactly, Hamal. You haven't told us why it took you so long."

"I was taking a shower." I let myself sound a little annoyed. "What the hell does it look like I was doing—performing high

dives into the sink?"

"You couldn't've been drowning someone in the bathtub," Sergeant Gray said, laughing. He had a high-pitched chortle. I decided I didn't like him.

"Very funny," I told him. "What's this all about, Lieutenant?"

"We got a tip there might be a woman up here. A dead woman."

"You got the wrong apartment," I said. "I like them alive. I suppose this tip was anonymous?"

He sighed heavily. "It was anonymous. But you know how it is, Harry. We still have to check. Mind if we take a look around? We haven't got a search warrant—yet."

"Go ahead," I said, trying to sound willing. "Only try to make it snappy. This anonymous tipster—named me, huh?"

"Just the address and the apartment number." He was looking in the clothes closet. "You know a dame named Carmencita?"

"The dancer?"

"That's the one."

"I don't know her," I said. "I saw her dance once, but that's all. She had what it takes. Is that who you're looking for?"

He nodded. "She's missing. We checked on that before we came over here."

"Maybe she's shacked up," I said. "From what I hear, she's a girl with broad interests."

This time I drew a laugh from the sergeant. The high-pitched chortle. I decided I wouldn't make any more jokes for him.

"Maybe," was all the lieutenant said.

It doesn't take long to search a two-room apartment, so pretty quick we were in the bathroom. The lieutenant just stood there, looking around, but Sergeant Gray wandered over to the stall shower. He reached out to touch the handle.

"You left your shower on," he said. He made it sound like an accusation.

I SAID, "Sure, I had some vague idea of finishing my shower if you two ever get through bird-dogging me. Or were you planning on hanging around and taking it with me?"

"You ain't my type," he said. He opened his mouth, all ready to laugh at his own wit.

"That's a relief," I said quickly. "You can't always tell these days."

He closed his mouth and scowled at me. "What do you mean by that crack?"

"All right," Lieutenant Peterson said before I could answer. "I guess you're clean, Harry. Sorry to have bothered you. Come on, Gray."

The sergeant looked disappointed, but followed Peterson to the door.

"If you lose any live girls," I said, "come around and I'll help you look."

"We wouldn't know what to do with them," Peterson said wearily. "See you around, Harry."

"Sure," I said.

I closed the door as they went down the hall. Then I sat down on the edge of a chair and waited for some strength to come back into my knees.

After awhile, I went back into the bathroom. I wrapped a towel around my hand and arm and managed to turn off the shower without scalding myself.

The next problem was what to do about Carmencita. As I looked down at her, I thought it was probably the first time she had ever been a problem. But then it was the first time she'd ever been dead.

I had to get her out of my apartment. But this wasn't the kind of house where you could carry out a naked corpse without arousing some curiosity. If this sort of thing was going to keep on happening to me I'd have to move to a less conventional neighborhood.

Then suddenly I had a brilliant idea. I liked it so much I even started laughing to myself. I went over and rummaged around in my dresser. I finally found what I was looking for. A set of picks that would open any lock, if you knew how to use them. I did.

I went out and down the stairs to the next floor. The bachelor Senator was away on another of his investigating trips. I knew it because he and I had the same maid and she had told me. But just to make sure, I knocked. When there was no answer, I went to work with the picks. It took only a couple of minutes. I made sure I had the door unlocked, then I left it closed and went back upstairs.

I dried her off the best I could. Then I



wrapped her in a sheet and hoisted her body over my shoulder. When I opened the door and looked out, the hall was clear. I went down the stairs, hoping that everybody on the Senator's floor would be equally busy minding his own business.

Luck was with me. I slipped inside the Senator's apartment and deposited the corpse in the nearest chair. I didn't bother to make it fancy. I just pulled the sheet free and beat it, locking the door behind me.

## IV



WHEN I got back upstairs the phone was ringing. I threw the sheet in the laundry basket and picked up the receiver. I was a little out of breath, but I managed to say hello naturally.

"Mr. Hamal?" a woman's voice asked. It was a nice voice.

"Yeah," I said.

"This is Fran Carter." It was the redhead. "Have you heard from Carmencita yet?"

"No," I said truthfully. "Why? Did you tell her I was looking for her?"

"No," she said. She sounded puzzled. "But she must have intended to get in touch with you. When I went to make a phone call awhile ago I discovered that she'd written your name and address on the cover of our phone book. I'm pretty certain it wasn't there yesterday, so she must have written it down just before she left. Are—are you sure you didn't call her earlier?"

"I wish I had," I said fervently.

"Well, I just thought I'd phone you about it." She sounded a little uncertain. "I'll tell her that you were here."

"Thanks, honey," I said. "I'll be around tomorrow evening."

I hung up and spent a little time wondering about the redhead. Then I got undressed for the second time that night. I decided against taking a shower. Instead, I took a fast bath and went to bed. When I went to sleep I dreamed the redhead and I were taking a shower together.

I was up early the next morning. While I

was having coffee, I tried to figure out where I could find myself two brand new, un-murdered leads. But nothing came until I was changing things from the pockets of the suit I had worn the day before and came across the key I'd found in Stacy's sleeve.

I sat down and gave it some thought. The problem was where would I be if I were a room to which George Stacy carried a key. And I had a bright idea—not original, but bright. It was one of the oldest dodges, but still good. In fiction it went back to *The Purloined Letter*, but in real life it probably started with a caveman who didn't want to split a tiger ham with his pals.

I went back down to the building where Stacy had his office—to the same floor, but not the same office. I stopped at the empty one next door. And the key worked. Inside there was nothing but cabinets of one kind or another. Some were regular filing cabinets; others obviously held tape recordings. I took off my coat and went to work.

It didn't take me long to find out that the place was a gold mine—if you didn't care what kind of gold you mined. He had enough stuff there to blackmail half of Washington, all of it neatly labeled. I quickly found the tapes on Senator Webster's phone conversations. I took them and started looking for something else.

The trouble was I didn't know exactly what I was looking for. There was some stuff on Carmencita, and I put that to one side with the Senator's tapes.

I had about given up and was putting tapes back when I noticed one in my hand labeled *Ferris Grenville*. He was one of those professional "friends" I mentioned before. He'd been around Washington a long time and had had a finger in a variety of things, ranging from the China lobby to cotton interests. I knew so much about him I hadn't paid much attention to the tape. Then I noticed there was something else written under his name. *Sar Race*. That could mean Sarmiento Racing Corporation. I added it to the others I had and left.

Back at the apartment, I used my own machine to erase the tapes that bore Senator Webster's name, then listened to the tapes on Carmencita. They would have been great as

a serial in *Startling Confession Stories*, but there wasn't a thing for me.

FINALLY I put on the Ferris Grenville tape. It was the record of a telephone call, long distance to New York. I listened to the operators trading chitchat, then to the number ringing. Finally a man answered.

"Polly?" the Washington voice asked.

"Yeah."

"This is Ferris. I've just been talking to Harding."

"Yeah?"

"You're crazy, Polly," said Ferris. "Asking for a steel priority on that race track. We can't do it."

"What's the matter with you guys? All I want is seventy-five grand worth of steel. You guys are yelling as if I was asking you to put a snatch on the White House."

"It's just that it's foolish, Polly," Ferris said. "A race track is hardly an essential commodity. If anyone should start looking into it, we might suddenly find the Sar being investigated. If that happens, we'll be in trouble."

"I got boys there in Washington. They can take care of any trouble that comes up."

"Not the kind of trouble I'm talking about, Polly. You can't treat the Government like—like a gang of hoodlums. Better forget about building the new track. If you wait a few months, the restrictions will probably be lifted and you can build it then."

"I want it now," the New York voice said. "And what I want I get. What the hell's with you guys? You bellyache like old women."

"I'm just trying to give you some advice," Ferris said stiffly. "After all, that's what you—what Harding retained me for."

"Like hell it is. I pay you and Harding to do what I want done, not to keep yapping at me. Now, get on it. If you run into anything you can't handle yourselves, turn it over to Augie. That's what I've got him down there for."

There was a click as the New York end hung up. I heard a heavy sigh from Ferris Grenville, then a click as he hung up.

Stacy had really hit pay dirt with this tape. Ferris Grenville had kept his skirts clean in Washington for thirty years, but this tied

him in with one of the biggest criminals in America. It wasn't hard to figure out who "Polly" was. It had to be Polvo Cocido, a New York gangster who was believed to be one of the six men who ran the Crime Syndicate. There was already a Federal move under way to strip him of citizenship and deport him.

The "Harding" of the conversation was probably Peter Harding, one of Washington's most successful attorneys. Most of his work was representing individuals and corporations before the Government, but I seemed to remember that he had been Cocido's attorney when the hood had been up before the Senate Crime Committee. "Augie" probably was the man I'd talked to on the phone. And I was willing to bet Augie had dusted George Stacy.

The motive was apparently something called "the Sar" and I'd have to dig that out. But I was beginning to see why it was so fatal to be a lead in this case. Polly Cocido usually played for keeps.

I called Senator Webster on the phone. He put up an argument, but finally agreed to fix it so I could look over new contracts let by the Defense Department. In about thirty minutes, he called back and said I could do it the following morning.

That left me with the rest of the day free. There was no point in pushing Ferris Grenville until I knew what was holding him up.

At about six-thirty, I shaved and showered. Then I went over to the apartment house where Carmencita had lived. The red-head answered the door.

"Oh, Mr. Hamal," she said. "I've been pretty worried about Carmencita. She hasn't been home since I saw you yesterday."

"This the first time she stayed out all night?" I asked.

"N-no."

"Well, there you are," I said, with a grin. "I didn't really expect her to be here. I was thinking maybe we could have dinner."

SHE looked as if she wanted to, but wasn't sure she should.

"It's all right," I told her. "I work for Senator Webster and I won't try to pry any defense secrets out of you."

She laughed, and said she'd come. I waited in the living room while she got ready. Then I took her to a small restaurant where the steaks were good and so was the music of the small band. But it was also the kind of place where the tables were arranged to give you a little privacy.

"It's funny your saying that," she said, when we were seated at a table. "I mean about prying defense secrets out of me. One of the things I don't like about Carmencita is that she's always asking me about what goes on in the office."

"You must have an important job," I said. I was just making conversation.

She shook her head. "I'm a file clerk," she said. "Carmencita always wants to know why I don't look up contracts and things like that. She says I don't have any curiosity." Suddenly she thought she got the connection between me and Carmencita. "That's why you wanted to see her, isn't it? The Senate's investigating her."

"Not exactly," I said, laughing. "Most of the Senate never even heard of her, although I'll admit there may be a few Senators who knew her. Maybe too well."

"She always has dates with important people," the redhead said. "She keeps bragging about them, even though I've told her I don't want to hear about it."

"No curiosity?" I asked.

She laughed.

"You know if she ever did any kind of work except dancing?" I asked casually.

"I don't know. She owns a lot of nice things—like a mink coat—things she couldn't buy on what the club pays her, but I don't think she got them by working." She flushed slightly. "I know I'm being catty, but I don't like Carmencita much."

"Then why do you live with her?" I asked.

She gave me a look. "Have you tried to find living quarters in Washington recently?"

She had something there.

Just then the waiter arrived and I ordered. When he left, I excused myself and went out to the phone booths. I had just about decided that Fran Carter either had nothing to do with the case or was the world's best actress. I was voting for the first.

I knew that by this time Lieutenant Peterson was on duty again. I put my handkerchief over the mouthpiece of the phone and dialed Police Headquarters, asked for Homicide. It was Gray who answered the phone.

"You cops are a bunch of dopes," I growled into the phone. "You went to the wrong apartment last night. I told you it was three-E, not four-E."

I hung up before the sergeant could even grunt. Then I went back to the table.

I didn't ask Fran any more questions and she didn't mention Carmencita again. As a matter of fact the conversation got more and more personal. I didn't mind at all.

After dinner, we had a few drinks and danced for a couple of hours, then I took her home. I maybe had other ideas, but she said good night to me at the door. So I went back to my own apartment.

I listened politely while the doorman told me of all the excitement. It seemed that the cops had discovered a dead woman up in the Senator's apartment. I clucked sympathetically and went upstairs and to bed.

## V



NEXT morning I was at the Defense Department shortly after they were at work. Some handsome young career man took me in hand, with obvious distaste, and led me back into the offices. He stopped in front of a desk occupied by a red-headed girl.

"Miss Carter," he said, "this—er—gentleman is from Senator Webster's office. He wants to look at any new contracts that have gone through in the past two months. You may give him the assistance he requires. If there's any difficulty, call me." He started to march stiffly away.

I couldn't resist the temptation. "What do you think you could do for me that she can't," I called after him.

He gave me one of the glares Government workers reserve for us civilians and marched on his way. I turned back to Fran. She looked tired.

"That was mean," she said, but she

didn't mean it. "Do—do you know about Carmencita?"

I nodded.

"The police called me right after you took me home last night," she said. "I had to go down and identify her. It—was horrible. I didn't like her much, but it was terrible—her being killed like that. I—I felt even worse when I realized she was already dead when I was talking about her last night."

"You shouldn't," I told her. "The fact that someone dies, or is killed, isn't really a reason to change your opinion. Besides, traveling in the company Carmencita kept almost carries a guarantee of trouble."

"I suppose so." Fran hesitated a moment. "The police asked me all about her. I—I didn't tell them about your asking for her or about finding your name and address on the telephone book. Did I do right?"

"You did wonderful," I told her. "Now how about looking up those contracts."

She nodded and went over to a row of filing cabinets. I followed her over.

"If you just happen to notice any where the attorney representing the contractor is Peter Harding, I'll be especially interested."

She looked up and there was a light of realization in her eyes. For a minute, I wished I hadn't mentioned him. But then she spoke and it was all right.

"Peter Harding?" she said. "That's one of the men Carmencita bragged about going out with. She said he was a very important man. Did you know he was a friend of hers?"

"No, but I'm not surprised," I said truthfully. "Honey, I'm really not as smart as I seem. I just go along picking up one thing after another and sometimes it adds up."

She went back to digging out the contracts. I had no idea there could be so many contracts signed in only a couple of months. When she'd finished, I would have had to stand on tiptoe to look over the top.

There was an empty desk next to where she sat. I dragged all the documents over there and started to go through them. A lot of them were contracts between the Government and big, reputable firms. Those I tossed aside without even reading them. Slowly, I began to weed out the little ones. Finally I came to one that caught my eye.

*The Sar Steel Products Corporation.* That was the name on the contract. And Ferris Grenville, in his phone call to Cocido, had been worried about somebody finding out the relationship between the race track and the Sar.

The Sar Steel Products Corporation had agreed to manufacture steel shell jackets for the Army. It wasn't an especially large contract. Clipped to it was a notation stating that the corporation had been given a priority of three thousand tons of steel for the first year. There was also a sheet giving a few facts on the company.

There was nothing startling about it. The corporation was ten years old and had been manufacturing souvenirs and cigarette lighters. The president and chief stockholder was a Joseph Manassin. I'd never heard of him. The contract had been okayed by some underling in the department and initialed by a couple of dozen other guys.

EVERYTHING seemed to be in order. If I were going to find a miracle it wouldn't be in the contract. I had an idea.

"Fran," I said. She looked up. "Could I see a copy of the priority given this company?" I handed her the contract.

"That's in another department," she said. She looked at me. "Is it important, Harry?"

I nodded.

"I know one of the girls there," she said. "I'll get it. You wait here. If anyone asks for me, tell them I've gone to the rest room."

She was back in about twenty minutes with a slim manilla envelope. There was a worried expression on her face.

"I've never done anything like this before," she said. "Maybe I shouldn't have."

"It's all right, honey," I said. "It only saves a little time. They'd have to show it to us if we demanded it."

I could see she still wasn't sure, but she turned it over. I took the papers from the envelope and glanced at them. I needed only one glance. This was a priority for thirty thousand tons of steel for the first year. I checked the contract again to be sure. *That* still said three thousand tons. Somebody was getting himself an extra twenty-seven thousand tons of steel.



I tucked the priority papers back in the envelope and handed them to Fran.

"Everything all right?" she asked.

"Just peachy," I said.

I turned back to look at the contract some more while she returned the envelope. I discovered one other thing in the description of the company that was curious. It had a branch office in Buenos Aires. I just couldn't imagine what a souvenir and cigarette lighter company needed with a branch office in South America. Especially a South American country that was so unfriendly to the United States.

I put the contract with the others and waited for Fran to come back.

"I'm on my way," I said. "See you tonight?"

She nodded.

"I'll be there about seven," I said.

"I'll be waiting," she answered.

I went out past the young career man. "Sorry I didn't need you, Buster," I said, "but I don't think we would have been happy together." He was still glaring as I went out to the elevator.

I took a cab over to my office. The first thing I did was put in a call to a private detective I knew in New York. I asked him to do a fast check on the Sar Steel Products Corporation and call me back. Then I sat back and did a little idle thinking. The business of the branch office in Buenos Aires still intrigued me.

I suddenly remembered that about a year before we'd had a guy in Buenos Aires do some checking on something for us. I opened a drawer in my desk and poked around among the scraps of papers that had been accumulating for too long. Finally, I found a little notebook and in it I found the guy's name, address and phone number. I picked up the receiver and put in the call.

After listening to various operators yacking at each other for a good fifteen minutes, I finally got my party. I told him who I was and after awhile he remembered me. I told him what I wanted and said I'd send him an international money order at once.

"Excellent, señor," he said. "I'll have it for you tomorrow."

"Not tomorrow," I said patiently. "Right

away. Get out there right now, then hurry back and call me. The quicker the better."

"But señor," he protested, "this is the siesta hour."

"I don't give a damn if it's the mating hour," I snapped. "Just get on it."

He argued some more, but finally gave in. His tone of voice indicated his opinion of crazy *Americanos*, but I didn't give a damn.

I MADE one more phone call. To the West Coast. I found out what I already knew from the tape recording. The Sarmiento Racing Corporation was owned by Polvo Cocido. But I got one surprise. Two minority stockholders were Peter Harding and Ferris Grenville.

After that I just sat back, chewed my fingernails and waited.

My New York friend called back at about one o'clock. I'd just finished a sandwich and coffee I'd had sent up.

"You're traveling in fast company, Harry," he said when I answered. "You know who owns the Sar Corporation?"

"I can guess," I grunted, "but I want to know."

"Up until about a year ago," he said, "it was owned by an ordinary business man. But then it was taken over by new management. The present president and chief stockholder is Joseph Manassin—sometimes better known as Little Joe Manassi, good right hand of one Polly Cocido."

So that was why the name had sounded familiar.

"Manassin is his right name," my friend continued. "But it seems when he came into the country, the immigration officer left the 'n' off and he's left it that way until now. The other stockholders are Bunny Cocido, Polly's wife, and two guys named Peter Harding and Ferris Grenville. They own two shares each."

Harding and Grenville must be slipping, I thought, actually to take stock in the companies. Unless Cocido had made them take it so they would be involved. That sounded like it, especially since they had only two shares each.

"Get anything else?" I asked him.

"Not much. The plant hasn't been oper-

ating in the last year, although they've put in a lot of new machinery. But they've got a Government contract now so I guess they'll be going soon. Funny thing about that though."

"What?"

"I talked to a guy at the plant. According to him the Government contract won't keep more than a third of the factory busy. Yet they didn't try to get a bigger contract. That's about it, Harry."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll put a check in the mail."

Thirty minutes later my other call came in. From Buenos Aires. Collect.

"There is very little to tell. Señor Hamal," he said. "The Sar Steel Products Corporation has an office in the Eva Peron Building here. They've had the office for six months, but I do not believe they have as yet transacted any business. At present, there are no employees except the manager. He has his own business which shares the same office. Would you care to know about that?"

"Yes," I said. "Who is the manager?"

"A Señor Raymond Dizzler. He is a compatriot of yours, but it is understood that he has applied for citizenship in my country."

That was another familiar name and my pulse quickened. Raymond Dizzler was well-known all over the United States, but under the name of Dizzy Raymond. He'd been mixed up in about every illegal racket you could think of and was supposed to have been a partner with Polly Cocido in the narcotics trade. About a year before, he'd skipped the country rather than face a grand jury.

"What's his company?"

"It is called the Teodulo-Sarmento Arms Syndicate."

There was the name Sarmento again.

"Arms Syndicate?" I said. "Does that mean it's a company dealing in weapons?"

"Such would seem to be its intention," he said. "Señor Dizzler's company also has not contracted any business as yet, but his official papers mention arms and ammunition. Although Señor Dizzler has not yet made any contracts, I understand he is frequently visited by the representatives of a number of countries."

"What countries?"

He hesitated a moment, then said softly, "Those which you refer to as satellite or Iron Curtain countries."

I thanked him, promised to send him his money and hung up.

## VI



**P**OLLY COCIDO had worked out a pretty set-up for himself. He had a legitimate contract with the Government giving him a steel priority. But it was rigged so he had an extra twenty-seven thousand tons of steel a year.

And that was going into arms or ammunition which he was going to sell to the Russian satellites. And he might have got away with it if he hadn't gone jumpy and tried to bribe Webster. The connection between the Sar and the track was tenuous enough to have been overlooked.

This was a deal strictly for Senator Webster's committee. But the committee could do a better job if the case wasn't cluttered up with a couple of unsolved murders. I decided to do a little more pushing.

I went home and picked up the tape and a portable player. Then I went to see Ferris Grenville.

He operated from a suite in one of our better hotels. He was sitting behind a desk when I came in. Grenville was in his early fifties and looked like a slick version of a man of distinction.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Hamal?" he asked politely.

"I want you to hear something," I said.

I set up the player and started the tape going.

"Very pretty," he said when it was finished. But something new had been added. He'd taken a gun from the desk and was pointing it at me. "I suppose you got it from George Stacy?"

"Yes," I admitted. It was going a little differently than I had expected.

"What had you intended doing with it?" he asked. The emphasis was obvious.

"I was curious about one thing," I said. "How did you jack up that steel priority?"

"You know about that, too? It was really quite simple. We merely saw to it that a slightly altered version of the contract was given over to the priority people."

"Why did you and Harding take stock in the companies?" I asked. "That was foolish of you."

"Cocido insisted," he said drily. He reached for the phone with his left hand. "I presume you haven't shared this with anyone else?"

"Not yet."

"Then I fear we must do something about disposing of you."

"Like Stacy and Carmencita?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Augie?" I asked.

He nodded and lifted the phone. "I don't like doing this, Mr. Hamal. I deeply regretted the deaths of Stacy and Carmencita. But unfortunately I'm so involved I have no choice."

"Sure," I said. "It creeps up on you. You start out with murder and the first thing you know you're chasing around with women, drinking pink ladies and generally going to hell— There's another tape. Don't you want to hear that?"

He stopped dialing and put the phone down. "Go ahead," he said, "but no tricks."

"No tricks," I said solemnly. I stepped over to the player and carefully removed the reel of tape. "Here," I said. "This is yours now." I tossed it to him.

He started to catch it before he remembered he was holding a gun. Then he tried to catch it with his left hand and bring the gun back to bear on me. He wasn't that good.

I dived head-first over the desk, came down on top of him and we went to the floor, the chair splintering beneath us. When we got up, I had the gun. Deliberately I slashed the barrel across his face. The gunsight ripped a little flesh and blood trickled down his cheek.

**I** TOLD him, "That's for trying to be a professional in something where you're an amateur. Now I'll tell you why I'm really here. I'm the only one who knows about this tape or the priority rigging, but I'm turning everything over to Senator Webster in the

morning. That gives you about eighteen hours. Maybe you and Harding can get away in that time, and maybe not. But you can make things a little easier for yourselves by tossing your friend Augie to the wolves."

"What do you mean?" he asked tightly. His face was white except for the moving streak of red.

"Turn Augie over to the cops for the murders," I said. "I'm giving you eighteen hours to do me and yourself a favor. Think it over."

I picked up my player and the tape and left.

That afternoon in my apartment was one of the longest I ever lived. I had set myself up as bait. I was sure they'd take it, but I didn't know when. There was nothing to do but sit there and wait. It was a little like sitting on a keg of dynamite and not being able to see the fuse.

At a quarter to six, the telephone rang. I picked up the receiver.

"Hello," I said. It was a major triumph to discover that my voice was steady.

There was a click on the other end, then the almost soundless hum of a dead wire. I put the receiver down.

Knowing that something was finally going to happen made it easier to wait. I relaxed in my chair, running my hand in under the cushion to check on my one precaution.

The knock came at a few minutes past six.

"Come in," I said. I had left the door unlocked.

The door opened and they came in fast. Two neat little men, both wearing clothes that were just a trifle exaggerated. Padded shoulders, wide lapels. They had tight, pinched faces with the kind of expressionless eyes that look at you as if you were a stick of furniture. Both had guns.

I stood up and made a vague gesture toward the gun in my shoulder holster.

"Hold it," one of them said. "Get it, Jack."

The other one stepped forward and lifted the gun from my holster.

"What do you know?" he said. "The guy's strictly an amateur. The gun's too small for the holster."

"Maybe he washed it and it shrunk," the other guy said.

"What the hell is this?" I demanded.

"Curious, ain't he, Jack? Just like we heard."

"You must be making a mistake," I said, trying to sound desperate. It didn't take much acting.

"No mistake, chum. You're Harry Hamal. We heard you were curious about us, so we thought we'd save you the trouble of looking us up. This is Jack Greco. I'm Augie Ciano."

"So you're Augie," I said. "You killed Stacy and Carmencita."

"Yeah," he said. He reached out and hit me with his left hand. It was an open-handed blow, but hard enough to knock me back in the chair. "You're pretty cute, Hamal. We stashed the dame on you, but the cops didn't find her here. What happened?"

Rubbing my jaw, I told him.

"You see, Jack," Augie said. "Like I said, he's cute. He tried to frame a Senator. Maybe he's one of them communists. Maybe they'll even pin a medal on us."

"What are you going to do?" I asked. As if I didn't know.

"Our patriotic duty," Augie said with a grin. This was a boy who liked his work. "Turn the radio a little higher, Jack. We don't want to disturb the neighbors."

The second one crossed around behind me. The volume started to go up on the radio. This was it.

My right hand had been lying between my leg and the chair. I pulled my regular gun out from beneath the cushion. Augie wasn't expecting it, so I had time to make it good. I shot him through the right shoulder. The slug knocked him back against the wall.

**T**HEN he surprised me. Instead of folding, he grabbed the gun with his left hand and tried to line it up. I had to waste another bullet in his left shoulder.

I knew the time was running out. I didn't try to turn around. I threw myself headlong out of the chair. I heard a shot and something helped me along. I hit rolling.

I came to a stop on my belly just as another slug dug into the carpet right beside me. This was no time to be fancy. I pulled the trigger and saw the shirt of the shooting man jump

a little just above the belt buckle. It slammed him back into the radio. He looked sort of surprised, then dropped to the floor.

My shoulder hurt like hell and I could feel something warm running down my arm. But I managed to get over to the phone and call the police. Then I sat down even though there wasn't a chair anywhere near me. The floor felt just as good. I must have passed out. . . .

I came to with somebody pounding on my door. At first I thought the sound was made by the throbbing in my shoulder. Then I realized it was the cops.

"Don't be so damned polite!" I yelled, "Walk in."

In a minute, cops were spilling all over the place. The Medical Examiner started messing with my shoulder while I started telling Lieutenant Peterson what it was all about. We both finished about the same time.

"Nothing serious," the M.E. said cheerfully. "You'll have a stiff arm for a couple of weeks, but that's all. It's a beautiful, clean furrow right across the top of your shoulder."

"You have the damndest ideas about beauty," I told him.

Then they started to clean up. The gunman named Greco was dead, but Augie Ciano would live to go to trial. I tried to get out of it, but Peterson made me go down town and tell the whole thing over again for the record. I also turned over to him the key to the office where Stacy had kept his files.

It was almost nine o'clock when I finished. Then suddenly I remembered I had a date with a redhead. Only it had been for seven. I took a cab across town, wondering if she'd waited.

She had. She stood in the doorway of the apartment, looking like a million dollars. I stepped inside and she came into my arms with a little rush. She pressed herself up against me. It jarred the hell out of my shoulder, but for once I didn't mind. Like the man said, it hurt so good.

She lifted her face and I kissed her. It started out to be a short one, but we both picked up our option.

I reached around behind me with my good arm and shut the door. We were already so late for dinner, I didn't think it would make any difference if we were a little later.





"If this is on the level," he said, "we can make a fortune!"

# Earth Person Singular

By CHARLES A.  
STEARNS

**T**HREE days Ksarl had listened to the voices of the Green Planet. The ship was dead, and they would not let him help with the repairs because he dropped wrenches, and ohmmeters, and things like that. They said that he was all thumbs. This was untrue; he had only two thumbs each on four of his lateral extremities, and none at all on the others.

But they said for him to keep out of the engine room, anyway, or they would stamp on his flippers.

So he sat and fed the voices of the

*Sometimes an alien's bark can be worse than his cardvark . . .*

Green Planet into the decodeomat, and they came out comprehensible and clear.

It's a fine thing to hear voices when one has listened so long to nothing but the empty whine of space. It made little goose-pimples of excitement rise up all over Ksarl's ridged back to think that an Index Four civilization existed only four millions of miles off the starboard bow, and that here they were, broken down, and he was not on duty. It made him rash.

He climbed into a convenient magnetocar, and after carefully tucking his tail under him, set off for the bow. Taking a square corner too fast, he struck the eighth assistant steward just aft the seventh level port galley, but luckily the magnetocar was undamaged, and in less than thirty minutes he arrived at the Captain's quarters.

He knocked his head soundly on the door four times in the custom of deferential greeting, then fell over the high sill and skidded on his ventral side along the waxed and shining ostium floor that comprised the deck of the officers' level, coming to rest at the feet of his Captain.

The high sills of the self-sealing doors were very vexing. He did not always stumble upon them; sometimes he struck his head upon the upper arch, but either method of entry was painful. Once he had written an epistle of protest to the High Committee, but it came to nothing.

**T**HE Captain's great, red-rimmed eyes burned into his own like twin suns of a dying nebula, and when he spoke it was with gentle admonition that warmed Ksarl's heart at once and emboldened him to ask of the great man what he had decided not to ask.

"You really must be more careful, Ksarl," the Captain said. "I sincerely trust that you have not injured your valuable body?"

"No indeed, sir," Ksarl said, "and thank you, sir."

"Tut!" the Captain said. "It's nothing. For what purpose are you here,

Ksarl, or do you remember?"

"I should like to borrow your gig, sir."

"My gig?"

"Yes sir. You see, sir, the ship's tender was exposed to the tail of a comet during last week's expeditionary maneuvers, and the chemical composition of the train consisted of carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen compounds."

"Indeed?"

"Yes sir. The rocket intakes of the tender are still clogged with molasses."

"Well then," the Captain said, "naturally I shall *have* to let you have the gig. *You fool! You idiot! You thing of a Merusian nightmare! What in the name of the thousand Galaxies do you want with my gig?*"

Ksarl recoiled, paling to a jaundiced yellow. He reported, with quiet humility, his extraordinary findings, and said that he would like to explore the Green Planet and bring in a specimen of the advanced race which inhabited it, for observation and study. He said that he would be very careful not to alarm or offend the people of the Green Planet, nor otherwise disturb the planetary balance, as the Kleg Rules admonished.

"No," the Captain said.

"No, sir?"

"No. Now get out of here and let me get to work, even if you have nothing better to do."

It was very disheartening, but there was nothing to be done about it. Ksarl shuffled to the door, measuring it carefully before he slithered through. He thought that he would go down into the storage holds and steal a *kansvir* to eat, and sulk for a while.

"Just a minute," the Captain said, "come back here!"

"Yes sir?"

"It would be far better for the wretches of your Green Planet that we should train the *zoot* guns upon and make a large, unhappy clinker of their world, but—"

"Yes sir?"

"I have myself to think of. You may take the gig, if you will promise me that

I shall never again see or hear of you until the ship is again underway."

"Thank you, sir!"

"And by the way, if you so much as scratch the paint on one keel fin, I'll sever your sensory stalks and boil them for lunch!"

**G**INGERLY, Ksarl set the tiny rocket down, butt first, among the vegetation. A league to the west he had spied a shining city, but he had carefully skirted it, as one can not be too careful with aboriginals.

A mile away, the cobwebbed tower of a broadcasting antenna needled the sky, and it was this that he proposed to stalk on foot, for from it the voices had emanated.

He unsnapped the stunner ray from his belt which he had thoughtfully borrowed from the locker of his cabin mate, Drigon. His own stunner was in perpetual disrepair, and since Drigon could be very selfish and unreasonable with his effects, he had neglected to ask before taking the stunner. It would only have led to bad feelings, and he hated scenes. Holding the weapon in readiness, he lay flat upon his belly and began to crawl through the tangled mat of vines and bushes.

A mile is not far, unless you are attempting to wriggle all the way. About his head the insects rejoiced, and the heat was greater than he had ever known, while the wait-a-bit shredded his tunic and his skin.

When he had crawled a quarter of a mile and met no enemy except for the mosquitoes and gnats, which could not be eluded in any position, it occurred to Ksarl that it might be safe, after all, to walk upright. This was a clever decision, for he made much better time, and it was not long before he could make out the tower itself.

Cable conduits led away from the tower into the forest. The area underneath the tower and about it was empty of life. There was not a sound or a motion for ten long minutes.

He knew at once what must have happened. The creatures of the radionic voices must have detected his noisy approach and scurried away. Or perhaps they were lurking in ambush for him. He shivered deliciously.

*A faint, rustling sound from the other side of the clearing.*

He moved softly around the open area until he caught the movement of a dirty, grayish patch of hair.

He parted the leaves slightly and had his first look at a person of the Green Planet.

He was not large, but his nose was long and prehensile, and he was so handsomely proportioned that Ksarl was instantly impressed.

Also, the native had an air of solemn dignity. Dignity was a thing which had always been denied Ksarl. All of his life he had coveted and sought the elusive substance, and yet, here was this lesser creature wearing it with the ease of complete familiarity. It filled Ksarl with admiration.

There was a large, cone-like structure. At the crown of the cone, small white things scampered in and out innumera- bly, with a great show of industry, and the aborigine, licking out his tongue swiftly, ate them, one hundred at a lick.

"I greet you, person of the Green Planet," said Ksarl in English.

The other turned and transfixed him with a wonderfully disdainful stare, in a manner such as Ksarl had often dreamed of transfixing people.

"Please come with me," Ksarl said, leveling the stunner. "You are my guest, and also my prisoner."

This seemed to infuriate the fellow. He took a step toward Ksarl and there was definite menace in his red eyes.

Ksarl discharged the stunner. The creature gave a moan of anguish and flopped over on his back, long-toed feet quivering in the air.

Dropping the stunner in the mud, Ksarl ran forward to inspect him. The return trip was both onerous and difficult. The person of the Green Planet

was heavy, and there exuded from him a pungent effluvium.

**K**SARL restored the gig quietly to its lock, scuffing only a single magnetic fender, and that slightly. He peered up and down the port passageway to make certain that all was clear. He did not want to be apprehended by the others. They always found occasion to mock.

There was no one in sight. He got the prisoner into the airlock, and taking both front limbs in a firm grip, he dragged it down the corridor on its back. It was not far to the ship's library, which was always empty, and he paused there. With an effort he lifted his burden on one of the tables and administered an anti-shock capsule.

It regained consciousness at once.

He was about to question it when he heard footsteps. It was Drigon, whom he least wanted to see. He hoped that Drigon would not notice what a mess the stunner was, with mud all over it, or observing, not recognize it for his own. He tried to keep his own body between Drigon and the native of the Green Planet, but Drigon kept circling the table, attempting to peer around him.

"What have you got there?" Drigon asked.

"It is nothing," Ksarl said. "At least, hardly anything."

"You may be sure of that," Drigon said, shoving him to one side.

"It is a native of that small, green planet," Ksarl said. "It knows of short-wave radio transmission, and it has great cities and is able to cultivate great gardens of forest and shrubbery. That is what gives its world that greenish cast. It is very intelligent, and I have memorized a part of its language."

"What interest have we in primitive civilizations?" Drigon demanded.

"I am interested," Ksarl said.

"He appears to be fairly stupid," Drigon said, leaning close. The person of the Green Planet lashed out with ten-inch claws and barely missed his proboscis.

"He wouldn't do that to me," Ksarl said. "He likes me. Speak to me, oh person of the Green Planet!"

The prisoner was noncommittal.

"The shock of capture must have impaired his faculties, such as they were," Drigon said. "You'd better dump him back where you found him."

"That's so," Ksarl said. "We might use the Phreno-development machine, and repattern his brain. Possibly the stunner—"

"So that's it!" Drigon said. "No wonder he acts stupid. Whose stunner—say, is that *my*—"

"I only borrowed it for a little while," Ksarl said quickly, wiping it off slightly and handing it to him.

"You'll pay for this," Drigon said grimly, holstering the weapon.

Ksarl changed the subject. "I mean to restore its natural intelligence," he said, "by irradiating it with the index of the speech level indicated by the short-wave transmissions. I've recorded a great many of them, you know."

"Go ahead," Drigon said. "You know we're not supposed to trifle with the inferior races of the minor solar systems. If the Captain hears, you'll wish you had never seen the Green Planet."

Ksarl paid no attention. He anesthetized the prisoner once more and tried, without success, to fit the cathode cap down over the creature's elongated head. Failing, he gave up and used a strap. Then he turned on the patterns which he wished to impress, and tip-toed softly away to allow the sleep of regeneration.

After six hours he returned and found Drigon there, skeptical, but nonetheless interested.

"I shall remove the helmet now," Ksarl said, and added, as a measure against further criticism, "If he does not communicate sensibly with me at once, I shall repatriate him to the Green Planet, and you will hear no more of it." In truth he did not intend to give up so easily, but his real plan was far too dangerous to confide in Drigon.

The prisoner, awake, stared dully.



"He is mindless," Drigon said.

"I am sure that he will perform some intelligent action, once he is thoroughly awake," Ksarl said. "He is extremely fond of me by now." He gently shook the creature into wakefulness.

The person of the Green Planet promptly performed what it considered to be an intelligent action.

It bit him.

GEORGIA SPIETH, obtaining no pleasure, as usual, from her solitary state in life, had been leaning upon the outer fence, watching the keeper rake the debris from the anteater's yard. She was one of the bored grandchildren of the Lost Generation, and seldom found anything in life of real interest.

The keeper seemed youthful, and had a broad back, and she wanted to see what the other side looked like. The anteater afforded little amusement, but she had to pretend that it did.

"He likes lettuce," Georgia said. "Look at him eat the lettuce. He's a perfect darling."

The young man in the white uniform turned around. He had a long face. Not a bad face, but much too serious. He said, "Everybody in this zoo eats lettuce. You go downtown, you'll find it's thirty cents a head. You can't afford to eat it."

"He likes lettuce," said Georgia feebly.

"It's all wrong."

"What is?"

"An anteater should have lettuce in September, when a man with a family, he is lucky to afford a soup bone."

"Do you have a family?" asked Georgia demurely, primping her lovely, blonde hair with one hand.

"Bachelor," he scowled. "I eat what I please."

The anteater—or aardvark—reared upon the fence, snuffling its audience with placid curiosity. A plump woman in gorgeous sun-glasses and hardly any shirt, squealed.

Georgia said plainly, "Why do you work here, in a zoo, if you hate the animals?"

THE long-faced young man's jaw dropped. He leaned his rake against the building and came over to where she stood. "Listen," he said, "are you trying to start an argument, lady?"

"I'm not trying to start anything," Georgia said. "Just because this poor aardvark, taken captive and brought all the way here from South America—"

"South Africa."

"—from its natural habitat, and put in a cage, happens to need lettuce to survive, while people can eat almost anything—"

The aardvark said, "*As a matter of fact, I prefer ants.*"

"Wh-what's that?" Georgia stammered.

"Ants," the aardvark said.

Georgia looked around her carefully. The plump lady without a shirt had disappeared. The nearest person was an old man sitting on a bench a dozen yards away, smoking his pipe. That left only one possibility.

"Well, Buster," she said to the keeper, "I suppose you think you're a regular riot."

"My name is not Buster. It's Wayne Thompson, and why, pray tell, am I a riot?"

"That anteater just spoke to me."

Wayne advanced upon her. "I didn't hear anything," he said. "It has never said a word to me since it arrived three months ago." And he smirked horribly.

"*Perhaps you never furnished a very sympathetic ear,*" the aardvark said.

Wayne stared. "Say, that's pretty good," he said. "Do that again!"

"I didn't," Georgia said, paling. "Didn't you?"

"Wow!" said Wayne. "If this is on the level, we can make a fortune!"

"I must warn you," the aardvark said, "that I do not intend to co-operate in any publicity schemes. Publicity is the very last thing that I want at the moment."

"Then why open your yap and get us all worked up?" asked Wayne, grumpily.

"As a matter of fact, I had hoped to

persuade you to help me hide from my enemies. I am no ordinary aardvark, you know, and it is dangerous for me to be seen until they leave the solar system. One never knows when, or in what guise they may be watching me."

"I'm afraid I don't understand at all," Georgia said.

"It is simple," the aardvark remarked. "A group of vastly superior star-beings happen to be passing through this part of the universe at present. One of them, ill-advisedly, visited this planet and tampered with a specimen of a certain sub-race, giving it an intelligence index as high as that of the dominant race, which is now known to be man."

"Is that what happened to you?" breathed Georgia. He was certainly the most erudite aardvark that she had ever seen.

The aardvark modestly lowered its eyes. "Upon learning of this error," it continued, "I am sure that they will attempt to destroy the affected individual, lest it upset the entire evolutionary process. I have reasoned this out carefully, and I have concluded that I do not wish to be destroyed, therefore I must conceal myself. Will you help me?"

"What's in it for us," Thompson said, "except a stretch for grand theft?"

**A**N EXPRESSION of inconceivable slyness flitted across the aardvark's face, and was almost instantly replaced by a mask of innocence. "Wait here," it said. It went into its cage and returned with a distended jaw. It dropped something at Wayne's feet. He picked it up, and it glinted in the sunlight with a thousand colors.

"My God," he said, "this an uncut diamond the size of a walnut! Where did you find it?"

"I brought it with me," the aardvark said ambiguously. "Does it please you? I think it is rather pretty, though I am color-blind, of course, and can not truly appreciate it, perhaps."

"It's worth a king's ransom—hey, stop that snatching!" Georgia Spieth

had suddenly reached through the fence.

"I just want to hold it," she snapped, making another effort. She got a grip on it, and they tugged this way and that, with irresistible feminine greed plying itself against immovable masculine avarice, and the diamond plunked to the ground.

The aardvark recovered it quickly. "Dear me," he said, "what a display of emotion!"

They looked at him hungrily. "Let's take it away from him," Wayne suggested.

"If you try," the aardvark said quietly, "I shall swallow the diamond and bite your hand. You will find that I am capable of inflicting quite a respectable bite. I shouldn't like to do that. You have only to help me escape and hide, and we shall all be rich."

"Goodness," said Georgia dreamily, "I could go to Paris, Rome and Constantinople, and buy a sable coat, and a Cadillac, and everything I've ever dreamed of."

"Well, I don't know," said Wayne.

"And," urged the aardvark persuasively, "think of all the white ants we could buy."

The aardvark, Georgia Spieth had privately confessed, was holding all the aces, which is to say he was holding the diamond in his mouth.

He held it in his mouth, she had discovered, even while he slept, proving that, while the spaceship story sounded pretty fishy, he was at least nobody's fool. This caused Georgia, who did not intend to have the diamond out of her sight for a moment, and therefore had gone without lunch, to be in a pettish humour when she and Thompson left the zoo at closing time. It had been necessary to wait for Wayne, since she would not have trusted him out of her sight as far as you can throw an aardvark by its tail.

He had suggested that they return that night, free the aardvark, hide it in his woodshed, collect the diamond and get it over with, but she had begged off

with a cold, and it had been agreed to wait until tomorrow night.

**N**OW that the swift September dusk had fallen, however, she had misgivings. What was to prevent Wayne from coming back to the zoo tonight, while she slept, and making off with the aardvark and the treasure himself?

Naturally, Georgia Spieth would not have dreamed of double-crossing a partner in crime herself, but Wayne Thompson was only a man, and could not be trusted.

So considering, she put on her coat and hat, went down to the corner drug-store, where she made a purchase, and caught a taxi out to the park.

There was difficulty in getting over the fence, and a nylon was slightly snagged in the process. Watchmen were about the grounds, and she felt like a veteran criminal by the time she had crept through the shadows to the aardvark's pen. The pen was in darkness except for one small patch of moonlight against the orange stucco of the building itself.

The hasp of the lock in the gate hung open. This was providence which should not be questioned; nevertheless, it made her uneasy, and when she had entered she stood quietly in the shadows listening.

There was not a sound. "Aardvark dear?" she called softly.

A Neanderthal shape, with a club in its hand, sprang across the patch of moonlight! She knew a momentary thrill of horror until the features of the midnight stalker were revealed.

"Wayne Thompson, what are you doing here, you sneak!"

"*Ssh!*" he said. "I might ask you the same question."

There was a curious snorting sound, and a small shape waddled out of the cage into the pen. "You see what you've done," Georgia hissed. "You've wakened him."

"Is it you, my friends?" the aardvark said. "I thought I heard something."

"It's very lucky for you that I happened along," Georgia said, "else you would probably have been beaten to death in a trice."

"I only brought the club in case of prowlers," Wayne defended.

"Well, now that we're here," Georgia said, "we might as well get the kidnapping over with. I certainly don't intend to leave the poor thing at your mercy another minute."

"I feel the same way about it," Wayne said, with a snarl. "We'll hide him under a blanket in the trunk of my car until we get past the gate guard. Then he can hole up at my place while we sell the diamond and make arrangements to transport him back to Africa."

"I must say," the aardvark said, "that sounds very dismal."

"Don't you want to go back to South Africa?" Georgia said. "Don't you—"

But the aardvark's little red eyes were staring at a deeper patch of shadow behind them, as though he were in a trance. "Oh dear," he said faintly.

"What's the matter?" Georgia said.

The shadow shifted slightly. An alien voice said, "*So there you are, Ksarl!*"

**G**EOORGIA grasped Wayne's arm, and Wayne shifted the club to a defensive position. "Who are you?" he said. "What do you want here?"

"He is Drigon," the aardvark said. "I am very glad to see you looking so well, Drigon."

"Thank you. Doubtless it was for reasons of health that you assumed the body of this beast when my back was turned and deserted to this primitive world, stealing a precious crystal of fuel as you left."

"The crystals are even more precious here," the aardvark said. "I took it for the purpose of barter, in lieu of wage I had coming."

"Give it here," ordered Drigon.

The aardvark spat out the diamond. An amorphous hand reached out of the darkness and picked it up.

"Just a minute," Wayne demanded,

"are we to understand that you're not really an aardvark at all—that you've been lying to us?"

"I admit nothing."

"You don't have to," growled the voice of Drigon. "We guessed at once, when we found your body wandering around the passageways with an even more vacuous expression on its face than usual."

The aardvark shuddered.

"Come back with me, Ksarl, and take your punishment."

"I will not go back," Ksarl said, his small eyes shining in the moonlight, "I like it here. You will never understand, Drigon, but for the first time in my life I am able to command the admiration of equals. They come each day to see me, and they look through the wire and almost never laugh. They remark 'how droll!' or 'isn't he a solemn, dignified fellow?' but they do not laugh. That is the quality of dignity which I recognized at once in this creature, Drigon, and so I exchanged bodies with him. I left you forever, and I am not sorry."

"That is your final decision?"

"Yes."

"We have been friends for a long time, but I must follow orders." Something glinted in the shadows. "This will be quick and painless. The carcass may survive, Ksarl, but no mind can weather the shock. It is a pity, for while it was never a very good brain, I hate to destroy it. Good-by, Ksarl."

"Good-by, Drigon."

The stunner, tuned to highest pitch, made a keening sound. The aardvark rolled over and lay quivering.

"Poor Ksarl," the voice from the shadows said, "he was always such a visionary. There was not a harmless gristle in his body, but science and empire are not built upon whimsy. I go now."

"There goes our diamond," said Georgia, after a moment. She sniffed. Her cold was growing worse.

Mistaking the sniff for a snuffle, Wayne put his arm around her. "Who the hell wanted to be rich anyway," he

said, "excepting me. Consider the aardvark."

"I am considering it," Georgia said. "You were the one that wanted to belt it over the head."

"I wouldn't have hit it very hard," Wayne said. "Don't look now, but I think it's coming out of it. It's getting up."

"I suppose it will be just an ordinary aardvark from now on," Georgia said.

"You may count on that," the aardvark said weakly.

WAYNE, he's all right!"

"Yes," Ksarl said. "Drigon's stunner was clogged with mud. Had he been less abrupt with me, I would have cleaned it for him that day, but I suppose that is providence. Naturally, when I discovered that the stunner was having no effect, I feigned shock until he was gone. Now I shall be safe forever."

"All this is way over my head," Wayne said. "Where do we go from here?"

"I don't know about you," Ksarl said, with some asperity, "but I am going to bed. This has been a trying day. I am sorry that I deceived you with the diamond, of course, and about my identity, but Drigon was right. A stone that size represents quite a bit of fissionable fuel, and they need it."

"I didn't know diamonds were fissionable," Wayne said.

"You have a great deal to learn," the aardvark said, and added more gently, "it is too bad, but we can still be friends, if you wish. If you will promise to bring me a good book to read occasionally, I give my word never to cause any trouble, nor will I speak out against either of you. I shall be content to live here and observe life as I tend my colony of white ants—"

"White ants?"

"I had really grown quite fond of them by the time your hunters captured me, so I brought several pairs along, and they are doing nicely in one corner of the pen. Within a few years there'll be

(Concluded on page 66)





*He hunted around till  
he found the shingle*

# Time for Violence

By HASCAL GILES

*They were waiting for a chance to kill the squatter*

**C**ARDWELL had wanted to kill the squatter when the man first moved into the valley, but he'd talked to Con Ainsworth about it, and Ainsworth had said to wait. The country was filling up with people more all the time, Ainsworth had said, and a man didn't have the freedom he used to have.

There was a deputy marshal in Sherman now, eighty miles away, and that was what Ainsworth had in mind. The law was moving in, a step at a time, and Ainsworth was getting cautious.

Now, as Cardwell waited in Orb Preston's cross-trails store for Ainsworth to

come in with his usual Saturday night grub list, he was ready to force the matter to a decision. Once a man had his family around him he was twice as hard to handle; it made him think he had roots and rights, and put a hard pride in him to have his wife watching. Ainsworth was overrated, in fact Cardwell began to wonder how the man had ever managed to set himself up as the valley's spokesman. He had muffed this deal by his caution, and Cardwell saw no way to settle it now without violence.

"He sent for his woman, huh?" Cardwell said. He had his elbows propped against a stack of crisp levis, staring absently out into the lavender twilight which had fallen over the clearing since he had come. He didn't get an answer right away, and he turned with annoyance in his muddy eyes, walking closer to the counter where Orb Preston stood with his bony face close to the dog-eared Bible he was forever reading.

**P**RESTON turned a page without looking up. There was an ugly twist about Cardwell's small mouth tonight, and his loose-skinned face was all bunched up like sand mounds left behind a desert storm. When evil which he could not touch was brooding under his roof, Orb Preston felt a man ought at least to hunt some answers for his own soul.

"Who do you mean? Oh, Ben Inskip, I reckon."

"The squatter up in Blackjack Flats," Cardwell said. "You know who I mean. You said he was here. When's his woman coming?"

"Inskip didn't say exactly. He said it had been too long without her, though, because he made her a promise. I was just making talk with you, Cardwell. I didn't mean to carry tales. All he said was he'd have his wife with him by the time his cabin was finished. But a man's got a lot to do when he starts with a thicket and tries to make it feed him. Maybe it'll be next spring—"

Cardwell stared out the window again. "It'll be a week," he said, almost to himself. "Maybe less."

He saw Ainsworth's buckboard bounce

over the pole bridge at the far edge of the clearing. A big man, Ainsworth, in every way. He sat in the center of the wagon seat, as though trying to cover it all, his hide vest flapping to show his barrel chest and thick waist. Ainsworth whipsawed the buckboard in at the front of the store, handling the team as he handled everything—with confidence and finality.

He had settled here when all the land was a thicket, and his voice was the first every new settler had heard. Those who had been allowed to stay—those who had chosen land far enough from Ainsworth's Circle A Ranch to show respect for his power—were still listening to that voice. But Ben Inskip had come too late.

Ainsworth gave Cardwell a nod as he came in. That was all—a faint dip of his big-brimmed black hat without any change in the bear-trap mouth or round blue eyes. His aloofness put a taste of vinegar in Cardwell's mouth as it always did. He had gone to him out of habit, but he regretted it now. Inskip was none of Ainsworth's business; the squatter was much closer to Cardwell's place, and Cardwell needed more room to grow than did Ainsworth. Ainsworth was too big already.

Cardwell waited until Ainsworth had reeled off his needs to Orb Preston. He watched disdainfully as Preston grew polite and fawning under the authority of the gruff voice, eagerly stuffing the items in Ainsworth's grass sack for him.

His business finished, Ainsworth put his back against the counter and faced Cardwell as though he had known why he was here.

"I was up to Blackjack Flats again today," Cardwell said, his eyes probing at Ainsworth's square face. "You'd be surprised what the squatter's got done. The thicket's most gone—there's good grass showing over maybe two hundred acres. Six months is a long time to dally over a thing. He's roofing his cabin, and things look real permanent. He's got a water hole grubbed out and seepage is pouring him more water than I ever knowed was there. He's got a good layout."

Ainsworth's eyes squinted to get the picture and his tight mouth smiled a little.

"That's what we want; ain't it? Nobody could run cattle in the brush that was there, and a man can't keep up with his chores and send his cowhands out to clear new land. That much work would cost a lot of dinero if a man had to hire it done hisself."

"His woman's coming," Cardwell said. "You can't scare a man off a place so easy once he starts calling it home."

Ainsworth nodded. "I know. He's got stockers coming in from Sherman, too. It's a shame about a man with Inskip's grit. But if he stayed there'd be others, and the first thing you know fellers like us could spit clean across our range. But thirty head of breed stuff must have taken the last of the stake Inskip come here with. When you can't scare a man, you've got to break his spirit, Cardwell."

"We've got a week," Cardwell said, trying to keep it from sounding like an ultimatum. Ainsworth had tried to impress him again with his far-reaching grip. He'd had his cowboys snooping and reporting to him, and he knew more of the squatter's progress than did Cardwell. But still he'd let Cardwell talk first, like a gambler who runs up the stakes before he claims a pot.

**T**HERE was no sign that Cardwell's impatient tone bothered Ainsworth. His mind seemed to be on other things. He remembered something he'd forgotten, and he looked over his shoulder at Orb Preston.

"Throw in sixteen sacks of smoking tobacco and a box of strychnine, Orb."

He watched the storekeeper complete the order, nodding approval as Orb Preston wrapped a double thickness of paper around the strychnine before he put it in the sack with the feed.

"Strychnine's moving slow as soap." The storekeeper wanted to make conversation with a man as important as Ainsworth. "Wolves ain't as thick as they once was, and some like a rifle better than poison."

Cardwell's patience was running thin. He grabbed at his own grass sack which he had filled an hour earlier. He slung it over his shoulder and pushed his sharp chin out at Ainsworth. "That roof will be on Inskip's cabin in a week. That's not much

time, Ainsworth."

"I'll handle it," Con Ainsworth said, his lips settling hard behind the words. "Let's move over to Orb's bar and drink on that."

"Some other time," Cardwell said. "I've been here too long."

Cardwell waited three days, and nothing happened. He hid in the brush on the fourth day and watched Ben Inskip at his chores, and that was when he decided he'd wait no longer. The squatter was a tall, gangling man whose shoulders were already rounded from six months of swinging axe and scythe. His flannel shirt was a mess of crude patches, and his sandy hair was faded almost white from too much sun. Most of the things he had done here were a matter of necessity if a man was to carve a future from the brush, but now he was overstepping the bounds of reason. As Cardwell watched, Ben Inskip put the finishing touches on a pole fence around the water hole he had sunk at the edge of the flats.

Where the two patches came to a point between Inskip's sharp shoulder blades would be a good place to put the bullet, Cardwell thought as he backed toward his horse.

He went to the Circle A to tell Ainsworth what had happened, but before he got there he hated himself for it. He knew why Ainsworth was hogging this show, but still he was running to him. Ainsworth didn't aim to let Cardwell use a foot of Inskip's graze. If Ainsworth ran Inskip off he'd have first claim to what the man left behind him.

It was dusk when Cardwell stopped in the cedar clump a hundred yards from the Circle A ranch house. As he pulled his claybank to a halt, his mind was already made up; but the way it happened seemed almost like impulse. Ainsworth just happened to step into the yard at that moment, shading his eyes toward the horizon as if looking for his riders to come in, and Cardwell was watching him across the sight of his rifle. A puff of dust jumped from Ainsworth's hide jacket before he spun around like a boulder teetering off a cliff and fell on his back.

**W**HEN he went back to the Flats that night Cardwell took Mark Stucky, one

of his riders, with him. A man could go after a squatter without keeping secrets from his hired hands. The death of an invader like Ben Inskip didn't have to be a mystery for folks to guess about as it was in the case of Con Ainsworth.

"He's got a fence all right, boss." Mark Stucky said when they came out of the brush and started across the squatter's cleared pasture. The cowboy rubbed a hand across his scrubby mustache and spit between the ears of his horse. "Looks like he's aimin' to make sure there'll be no water used by nobody before he brings in his own stock."

Cardwell signalled for a halt, and the horses pranced up sideways to the skinned poles which Inskip had stacked around his water. Cardwell pointed to the far side of the water hole where a gate sagged on rope hinges.

"He'd keep the fence forever. He's even got a gate to let 'em in and out, and then he'll shut it behind them in case a starving man happens past. A thirsty man opening that gate would likely get shot. That's the kind he is, Mark."

Mark took the lass' rope off his saddlehorn and ran the coils through his fingers. He made a hitch around the horn with one end of it, eyed an upthrust pole.

"You ready to pull it down, boss?"

Cardwell's eyes ran across the sweep of dark land and settled on the patch of orange light which showed in the front window of the new cabin. The squatter would hear them and come out with a gun in his hand. It would be self-defense, for the part about the fence would not have to be told to anyone—not even to a deputy marshal who might ride this way some day.

"I'm ready," Cardwell said.

Unlike most of Inskip's work, the fence was a fairly flimsy affair. With two ropes on the key poles and two wiry cowhorses tugging on them, the fence collapsed like a toadstool. Cardwell was disappointed because the fence fell so gently there was hardly a sound except the blowing of the horses.

"What now?" Mark asked.

Cardwell studied the lighted window for a moment, his muddy eyes expressionless in the moonless dark. "We'll put cattle over

here tomorrow. That ought to bring things to a head."

They started away, but Cardwell was not satisfied. He stopped, studying the fence, then he stepped to the ground.

"You want a drink of this squatter's fenced water, Mark?"

Mark wiped his mouth, understanding Cardwell's sudden thirst, but not sharing it. "I'd take you up if you had a bottle of good rotgut, boss."

Cardwell knelt at the edge of the water hole, taking off his peaked hat to fan the surface of the water. He lay on his belly and drank for a long time, catching his breath and drinking again. He started to drink some more, as though he wanted to take it all away with him, but the water left a bad taste in his mouth and he decided he'd satisfied the inner urging which had made him do it.

They were going into the brush again when the pain hit him. It was sudden and sharp, and Cardwell jerked his legs in the stirrups because of the shock of it. Hunger pangs, he thought: a man with a killing behind him and one in front of him had little appetite, and he'd skipped supper.

He groaned with the second pain, and Mark Stucky swung a sharp glance at him. "What's wrong, boss?"

Cardwell's legs were beginning to get out of control now. His stomach was a load of hot coals, and when the fire went through him it went to his toes. He pulled at the horse's reins, wondering why he couldn't see the trail ahead any more. And then he knew.

He didn't try to talk. He got the horse turned around, and beat it on the head with his fists to make it gallop. He heard Mark Stucky alongside him, but he did not try to see him. His voice was a whimper, a shameful sound, but he had to make Mark understand.

His horse shied away from the shambles of fallen poles and that was how he knew they were back at the water hole. He tried to step out of saddle, but his legs buckled under him and sent him tumbling on his face. A piece of wood rammed him under the chin, and he could feel the warmth of blood

*(Concluded on page 113)*





The crashing slide cut Wiley down, and he dropped the ball

# DIAMOND OUTCAST

By T. W. FORD

**T**HEY weren't a boisterous bunch, the Bulls, as they sat in the club car of the train that carried them westward for a two-game series with the Spiders. But they radiated confidence with the talk quick and sharp, a laugh once in a while and sometimes a hopeful boast.

"The Spiders are tough, all right. Gas-house stuff. But they can be taken. And we got the pitching now!" That was Nick Cassino, the third-sacker, talking.

"Yeah, and I hear Wiley is suffering from that old back trouble again. Without him at short, it's a different infield."

Kid Jarron was the Bull shortstop, a towheaded, baby-faced kid a year out of college. He was raw but a flash out there in the short spot.

Down the car a little way, taking no part in the barbering session, the tall, flat-bodied man sat sprawled, long legs thrust out. He watched them, his narrow, leather-hued face dead-panned behind the cigarette smoke curling before it. The cheeks were slightly hollow, the face of a man who'd come up the hard way. But the long, light blue eyes held a slight smile at the enthusiasm in the Kid's voice. Then one of the group happened

*Was it any wonder the hapless Bulls made Tuck an outcast for feeding them jeers—when they were hungry for cheers?*

to glance his way and the eyes went cold, impersonal.

"The way I see it," Moose Kenly's thin, squeaky voice rose above the rumble of the train through the night, "there are four guys in their lineup we gotta stop. Early is one." He started to check them off on his long fingers. Moose, with shoulders like barn doors, was a pitcher. "And I'll stop 'em if I have to throw my arm in after the ball, by damn!"

**T**HEY were on their last leg of a road trip, a highly successful road trip with seven wins out of nine games. There was the Spider series yet to play, and then back to the home park for a long stand. They were swinging in home after climbing to third place, right hard on the heels of the Spiders. And the Spiders were breathing on the necks of the leaders. The Bulls felt good about it, felt they were coming along.

"Trick is when you tangle with them Spiders," said Shorty Scott, "you mustn't let 'em shake you off your game." Scott was one of the veterans, a former major leaguer. "They get you sore and you try to get back at them and forget baseball—and they got you. The point is, though, we can take 'em."

"Sure we can!" chimed in the Kid. "Who the heck are they to take us, anyway?"

"Why don't you guys stop smoking that kind of joy juice?" The tall man with the poker face drawled. He rose slowly, the long blue eyes sneering at them while the mouth grinned mockingly. He stretched long arms lazily sideways.

It wasn't till he stood up that a man realized how big-boned Tuck Carlson, the Bull centerfielder, actually was. "The Spiders are poison, a hot, tough ball club. You guys—we—we've been loaded with luck on this trip. Caught the Little Bears when they were in a slump. The Maroons should have both those games we stole on flukes." He paused to shake his sleek black head.

"Wake up and cut out the rah-rah stuff!" he went on, jeering. "Grow up,

little boys! We'll be lucky to get a split with those toughies. Lucky as the devil." He turned to ease down the swaying car with a natural grace, then turned half back when his name was called.

It was the swarthy Stretch Berry, another of the veterans down from the majors, who'd swung up out of a booth. "Carlson, why don't you crawl off to a nice quiet place and drop dead? I'm fed up with your kill-joy talk! And all because you just can't understand guys fighting for a ball game!" Berry was truculent wagging his head with his words, a danger signal.

Carlson laughed harshly. "Pollyannas, you mean, don't you?" Then he swung on down the car. In the entrance was Big Bill Kirk, the skipper. Carlson gave him a curt nod and passed on. Kirk said nothing to him. Arms akimbo, Berry stood down the car, wondering at that.

"I'd give my store teeth to knock off them Spiders in both games just to show that jerk," he growled.

Nick Cassino raked his wavy black hair with an angry gesture. "Even if it was for marbles, that guy makes you sore enough to want to win, the crepe hanger!"

The next forenoon in Spidertown, the special bus to take them out to the park pulled up before the hotel. There was a tautness in the air about them. Mouths were a little grim. The few attempts at badinage had fallen pretty flat. They started to climb in. But Tuck Carlson's wide lips cracked in a sharklike grin.

"Hi ho, here we go," he half sang, "to get our brains knocked out!"

Cassino whipped around on him. "For cripes sake, why in hell didn't you stay with them doggone Spiders, anyway?" Carlson had come from the Spiders several weeks ago in a trade in which Big Bill Kirk had given up a young speedballer and a bundle of cash.

Tuck Carlson's eyes flickered coldly once. He could have told Cassino why the Spiders, aside from the fact they had plenty of picket line replacement, had been willing to part with him.

First, there was his feud with Jess

Raines, the mound star. In a pre-season practise game, he'd come in from third on a passed ball with Raines covering the plate. There had been a crash, the giant hurler coming out of it with an injured leg. It hadn't been serious. But when Raines got knocked around in the early weeks of the season, he'd blamed it on the leg and Tuck Carlson. And there was a Raines clique on the Spider club. So plenty of guys were against him. The management had been glad to unload a player causing dissension on the team.

Second, Tuck had had a weakness for breaking training, a fondness for the glass that cheers. He had been fined several times, warned. But the calibre of his play had remained high so it had been difficult to do too much to him. But it had been an angle in the deal with the Bulls and Big Bill Kirk. Kirk had protected himself on that point, though. He and Tuck were friends from class-D days. The Bull pilot, before okaying the deal, had talked to Tuck on long distance and gotten his solemn pledge to stick to the straight and narrow if he came to the Bulls. And Tuck Carlson, an outcast amongst his teammates, had kept his word.

Sitting alone amidst the buzzing chatter of the other players as the bus rolled along the parkway, Carlson's saturnine face relaxed in a little smile. He was proud of the fact that he'd kept his word and stayed on the wagon. But then, Big Bill had always been able to handle him.

**I**N THE locker room, he dressed for the field off alone. The others, in knots and pairs shunned him, chattering amongst themselves. Just once the wide mouth twisted sadly. He walked onto the field the same way, alone, chin out-thrust belligerently, black head tilted cockily. Some of the bleacher fans cheered him. But as he got nearer the visitors' dugout, he was booed and hooted. The Spiders, after his departure, hadn't minded letting out the story he was a trouble maker. He just smiled coldly at them, then rattled a couple of long drives into

the stands in batting practice.

The game got underway with his old enemy, big Raines, pouring them in for the Spiders. The left-hander was in great form, smoking the ball through there to retire the first three Bulls in order. On the bench, Tuck wondered what would happen when he, batting fifth, came up. He had a pretty good idea as he trotted to center when Moose Kenly took the hill for the Bulls.

And Moose was shaky. The Spiders had become his problem child, knocking him out in his last three starts against them. He put the first man on with a free ticket. A cool wind blew. But he kept taking off his cap and sleeving his forehead. Out in center, Tuck felt sorry for the poor devil. He knew the feeling. He had been a chucker, back in class-D days, himself. The Moose missed with two, then grooved the next. Carlson was off with the crack of the bat, going back and over toward right. In right, Tip Olsen was racing, too, but had started a split second late. He couldn't get it. Then Tuck leaped and made a one-handed snatch, wheeled and whipped the ball to Kid Jarron to hold the runner on first. He did it all with that effortless grace that made things look easier than they actually were.

Moose settled down and got the next two. But when Tuck came in, none of his teammates had anything to say. Sphinx-faced, he waited in the on-deck circle as Stretch Berry batted. Tuck knew it wasn't going to be easy to stand up to that Raines' fireball under the circumstances. He had a pretty good idea of what was coming.

But it never came. On the 1-1 count, Berry uncorked a line drive. Raines tried to duck, but the hit caught him a glancing blow on the side of the head. After the trainer had worked on him, the giant Spider tried a few heaves, then shook his head and walked off. He'd always been one of those "me-first" guys who didn't believe in punishing himself.

It was little break for the Bulls because the Spiders then brought in Michaels, the sinker ball specialist who was only

a whit less effective than Raines. He got Tuck to hit into a double play on his fourth trip to the plate.

It went along like that till the fourth when Tuck came up again with one aboard. He reached for an outside pitch with the hit-and-run on, pushed a blooper over the first-sacker's head. Tuck rounded first, saw that Wiley, the Spider shortstop, was asleep at the switch as he watched little Jarron dancing like a monkey off third, and had only started toward the keystone bag. So Tuck took off.

He and the ball and Hooks Wiley arrived at the sack about the same instant. Wiley swiped at him with the ball, but Tuck's crashing slide cut him down. And Wiley lost the horsehide. The ump reversed his decision, ruling Tuck safe, as Kid Jarron flew across the plate. It had been heads-up baseball.

"Okay, Tuck, so you want it rough," Wiley said as he rose.

Tuck raced to third on a sinker in the dirt that got by the Spider second-string backstop. He came in with the second run on Shorty Scott's long fly. But as he walked toward the dugout, he knew he could expect trouble. Wiley hadn't said much. But he was one of these soft-spoken guys who never even cursed and yet would cut your head off when roused. More, he was one of the Raines clique on the Spiders.

Moose got in trouble in the fifth when a boot by Kid Jarron, a two-base error, put a man on. He got the next hitter, but Early waited him out for a pass. A single scored one man and sent Early to third.

Then there was a sharp liner over second, a clothesline hit due to fall in there. Tuck raced in swiftly, experienced head working twice as fast as his long legs. There was a chance for a diving shoestring catch. But if he made it diving and hitting the ground, Early would waltz in from third. That runner on first would be holding up, though. Tuck knew the answer.

"Second!" he yelled as he charged. He was at the ball as it sank, a foot or so from the turf. Then he dug in his spikes

and held up to trap the ball on the first hop. He fired to Kid Jarron at the keystone for the force, Jarron whipped to first and it was an inning-closing double play, slamming the door on the Spider threat.

Shorty Scott said to Moose as they walked in, "For a danged Calamity Jim who's always jeering, he sure plays a hell of a lot of ball."

**T**UCK himself came walking in with a typical dead-pan expression. When he came up in the top of the eighth with it still a 2-1 ball game, the Spiders let loose such a flow of abuse from the bench the chief arbiter had to warn them. They knew he was responsible for these two Bull tallies. And there was that take-out at second.

"Hit him in the eye and win a big cigar, Mike!" Wiley yipped to the hurler.

"Let the busher get on base and try to come down!" sang out the second-sacker.

Michaels did blaze in a duster that made Tuck hit the dirt. The backstop guffawed. "Whatsa matter—afraid when it gets rough, bum?"

Tuck's lean jaws worked slowly but hard on his gum. He'd make them pay. He bit at a jug handle in too tight. Then Wiley, at short, stopped his nervous hopping around and called time. He was bent sideward, and a few moments later he was leaving the field, walking lopsidedly. It was his back again. And Tuck knew that would be blamed on him for the play at second. Sure enough, somebody barked from the dugout.

"All right, Carlson! You asked for it, busher!"

The pitch came in, a sinker that he timed. But the third-sacker made a great play and he was out. The Bulls could do nothing that frame. Moose went back to the mound. And the trouble started. He simply came apart at the seams, blew to pieces. By the time Kirk could get a bullpener in there, the Spiders had slammed over two tallies. They drove home another to make it a 4-2 game before the new man could get the third



out, simply reversing the tide. The Bulls came into the dugout with a dazed look.

All save Tuck Carlson. He stepped down into the dugout with a smirk. "Well, I guess that means curtains, huh? It's the ten-count. You guys can't be expected to get up off the deck after that blast."

"For gawd's sake, shut up, Carlson!" Scott said sullenly.

"Don't say I didn't tell you," Tuck went on cheerily. "The Spiders are just too tough for you guys. Might as well admit this game is as good as over, I guess, or are you still kidding yourselves that you're better than they are?"

They started to snarl along that bench. "You devil, Carlson!" Stretch Berry barked. "Shut up! You can't call us yellow and get away with it!"

The smiling Tuck looked blandly innocent. "Nobody said that. I'm just being a realist. See what I mean?" The first Bull up had already gone down swinging.

Cassino had come back to change bats. "Let's show this big-mouthed wise guy!" he bit off. And he started the fireworks by rapping out a double, then streaking to third when the sub shortstop kicked around the throw-in.

And the Bulls, embittered and riled by Tuck's needling, went to work on Michaels and got him out of there. When the smoke had cleared, it was knotted up at 4-4. Moose's reliefer proceeded to handcuff the amazed Spiders in the home half, and the game went into the tenth inning. Then the Bulls, still boiling, collected two more, Tuck himself driving in one of them with a long fly to right center. And that proved to be the ball game.

There was just one sour note in the victory. The Spiders, bitter about losing Hooks Wiley, had begun to turn on the rough stuff. And during their big three-run rally in the eighth, a runner from first had gone into second with his steel high to spike Kid Jarron badly, forcing him out of the game.

"Who the heck said these guys were

tough?" asked Scott.

"You guys were lucky, loaded with horseshoes," drawled Tuck as he shed his sliding pads. "Shucks, Raines got hurt right off. Then they lost Wiley. That sub in his place whiffed with a runner on twice. Why you practically had the game handed to you on a platter. And still you almost dropped it, right?"

They were all looking at him. There was an ugly pulsing in the silence, broken only by the splash of water from the shower room. Big Berry dropped the towel with which he had been rubbing his hair-matted body. He advanced, elbowing aside Nick Cassino who had already started toward Tuck. Berry came on, bare feet slapping on the concrete floor. And the others closed on him in a semi-circle, like a wolf pack. Berry's hands folded into big, malletlike fists.

"Look, Carlson, I've had just a little too much of your grousing, kill-joy stuff," the first-sacker said, low in his throat. "You're getting paid by this ball club, but you're always running it down. I've had all I can take of it, you—" Anger choked his throat and he leaped forward, his thick right arm cocked.

"Cut that stuff!" Big Bill stepped into the picture. "Berry, you want to get plastered with a fifty-smacker fine? Carlson, pipe down and get showered. I run a ball club, not a fight stable."

**R**EAL TENSION built in the dressing room before the next afternoon's game. They were confident. But they were tight, too. If they could cop two from the Spiders—that was the thought in every man's mind. Except one, maybe. Then, walking past Tuck Carlson, Nick Cassino broke the silence.

"Well, wise-guy crepe-hanger, what's going to happen today, huh?"

Tuck looked up, slate-blue eyes mocking. "Thompson will be back in there for 'em today. Look out!" Ching Thompson was the Spider's big first-string backstop, rated tops in the circuit, who'd been laid up with a strep throat condition for more than a week.

That was all Tuck said. But the reper-

cussion was fierce. The Spiders started Wild Will Sands, a smoke-balling kid, on the hill. And that day he had his control. The fighting Bulls had him in trouble several times, but in the clutch he had the big strikeout ball at his command. For the Bulls, it was little Knobby Rock. And the diminutive veteran with his flutterball stuff had spun a two-hitter going into the eighth, not letting a Spider get past first.

"We'll get 'em! They gotta crack. Just keep plugging away," Stretch Berry said as they went out for that frame.

With one down, Ching Thompson stepped in. Knobby worked him to a 2 and 2 count. Then he served up an outside pitch, and Thompson, a noted bad-ball hitter, reached. There was a crack like a pistol shot. When last seen, the ball was passing over the left-field fence. It was the only run of the game. As they dragged themselves into the clubhouse, Stretch Berry was cursing away. But it sounded almost like sobbing. It was a cruel one to drop. A two-hitter plus one bad pitch—and a guy didn't win it. The club felt bad about little Knobby as well as about the loss.

They were a bunch of sad sacks on the train, homeward bound that night, when Tuck Carlson strode into the club car. He surveyed them with that Pollyannaish smile. "Well, this is the first time I ever saw a morgue on wheels," he cracked.

"Aw, dry up," somebody said wearily.

"Come on, fellas," Tuck said, with a mocking chuckle. "Why, it was just another ball game."

It happened that time. Nick Cassino slung his cigarette away and came out of his chair fast. Tuck was watching him, his own hands down, prepared to duck. And it was little Kid Jarron, stepping in from the other side, who tagged him with a long haymaker. Tuck was stretched on the car floor. Not out, he lay there propped on an elbow until some of the wiser heads got things quieted down. Then he climbed up.

"How to win friends and a punch in the kisser," paraphrased Jack Manson, one of the sports writers traveling with

the team.

"I might be influencing people, too," Tuck said calmly, as he turned and walked out of the club car.

When they detrained at home in the morning, Tuck Carlson found he was the black sheep of the team. There was a good crowd of Colver City fans down there to greet this club that had caught on fire and was climbing fast. They roared enough to threaten the station roof when big, amiable Stretch Perry appeared. Kid Jarron, hobbling on his bad leg with the aid of a cane—he had been out of the lineup yesterday—had them splitting their tonsils. But when Tuck came through the gate, there was a striking silence.

When he got off alone at breakfast with the local morning papers, he found the answer. He scanned Manson's column, filed the night before from the train, first. The heading was, "Fight Follows Bull Loss to Spiders." That alone wouldn't have bothered Tuck Carlson. He knew what he was doing. But the story covered a lot more than the little outbreak on the train:

Not so many weeks ago, the Bulls consisted of a few ex-major league veterans content to go through the motions of playing ball, plus a bunch of youngsters, many of them swollen-headed enough to think they were already stars and didn't have to bear down. Now, thanks to the managerial genius of Big Bill Kirk, they have become a fighting, die-hard ball club with the once lethargic veterans showing the way and the youngsters playing their heads off. Their recent record, their rise toward the top, is ample evidence of that. But there is one exception, Tuck Carlson, the ex-Spider and centerfielder.

Carlson is no team man. He doesn't believe in the club and tells them so. He is constantly running down the team, jeering other players for going all out, and conceding defeat in advance. It was his roughneck tactics that brought on the retaliation by the Spiders that cut down Kid Jarron. Things came to a head last night on the homecoming train when Carlson taunted the team for its loss and . . .

There followed a description of the fight, greatly exaggerated. Tuck spat out an expletive, unconsciously jerking an arm to half spill his cup of coffee. The strawberry-blonde waitress hurried down behind the counter, smiling. Then she took a good look at Tuck and the

smile froze on her face.

"Oh, you're Tuck Carlson, aren't you?" She pranced away, nose in air.

"The man they love to hate, that's me," Tuck muttered. He finished his coffee and hopped a cab to the hotel.

**U**P IN HIS room, Tuck called Marion at the office where she worked. He'd met the pert little brunette before being traded to the Bulls, the season before, and had dated her whenever his former club, the Spiders, had come to town. That was one of the things that had delighted him about the deal. Playing under Big Bill Kirk suited him fine. And now he could see Marion regularly. It had become a mighty serious matter with him, with dreams of matrimony and all.

She was slightly cold when he got through to her but consented to have dinner with him that evening. When he picked her up at her apartment, he attempted to kiss her as usual. She gave him her cheek.

"I just don't—well, feel so well, Tuck," she said evasively when he asked what the trouble was.

But over dinner, he caught her big gray eyes studying him thoughtfully several times when he looked up. She pleaded a headache when he suggested a movie and asked to be taken home. In front of the apartment house, he pulled up and caught her wrist as she started to get out.

"All right, baby, come clean with papa," he said a little sharply. "Me, I don't go for mystery stories. What's wrong?"

She drew hard on her cigarette, then turned the gray eyes directly on him. "Tuck, I know you're a real ball player who gives all he's got out there all the time. But—"

"That's what they pay me a salary for, kid," he said drily. "And, incidentally, I'm sort of crazy about the game. Go ahead."

"Tuck, do you have to keep running down the team, telling the players they haven't got a chance? Do you have to

say the things they claim you do? Do you have to take that cynical attitude? Even if you don't think the Bulls can take the pennant, do you—oh, well, you know what I mean!"

He sat staring straight ahead, mouth hard and eyes narrowed as his face was caught in the headlights of a car coming down the hill. "Did you hear me say or do any of these things? Has anybody accused me of not trying to win when I'm on that field?"

"No-o," she admitted hesitatingly. "But—well, there are the newspapers."

"Don't believe everything you read, lady," he snapped.

She flushed slightly. "But it's hard not to believe what the players say. And some of them have been talking, Tuck. Ellen, in my office, is engaged to Nick Cassino, you know. She had lunch with him today. I don't know what to think, Tuck. I don't know why you take the attitude you do."

"That's all I can tell you now, Marion." His voice was cold, stiff. When she dropped a hand over his on the wheel, he repeated it. "I said that's all I can tell you now."

"That's no answer, Tuck." She swung open the door. "And I can take myself in alone, thank you."

He felt as if he had a mouthful of dirty ashes as he drove back to the hotel garage. The next forenoon, before he left for the ball park, he called Marion's office twice. Each time, after he gave his name, he was told Miss Collins was taking dictation and could not come to the phone. When he walked into the clubhouse to dress for the opening game of the series with the Arrows, his dour face reflected his depressed state of mind.

"What's the matter, Calamity?" Shorty Scott sang out. "Grieving already about the licking the Arrows are going to give us?"

Tuck half turned to snarl back, "You oughta be able to lick them if you had to play it on crutches! A last-place club with half their pitching staff on the shelf with injuries! But you never can tell."

The Arrows were a pushover, going

down 9-1 as the Bulls had a field day with the stick. But Tuck Carlson himself went hitless, getting on only once, thanks to a walk.

The next day, though, it was a different story. The desperate Arrows threw in a kid hurler they had just picked out of a semi-pro industrial league. The kid had a mean knuckler with a sweeping curve to fall back on. As Bull after Bull went to the plate and went down, beating the air at the knuckler or slapping the ball to the infield, the dugout grew more and more silent. The scoreboard showed the second-place Spiders just a notch ahead of them, winning after a two-game slump.

**I**T WAS in the last of the fifth when Tuck made his wisecrack in the dugout with the game still scoreless. With Cassino on first via a free ticket, Kid Jarron had swung late on an outside pitch, lashing it up the right-field line, just fair. And Cassino had taken off like a jack rabbit, going around second at full tilt without taking so much as a glance into right. The third-base coach had bawled frantically at him to get back. Too late, the flying Cassino wised up. The Arrow right-fielder had made a great, lunging catch. They doubled Cassino off first easily.

Tuck spat cotton over the dugout step. "Boy, that's kicking it away, all right! Why bother to try with a cluck club like this?"

The remark caught up with him in the very next inning. With two down, there were Arrow runners on first and second. Out there in center, he vaguely was aware of the crack of the bat. Then he blinked and saw it was a long drive into left center, rising. It should have been an easy catch for him, but he'd been thinking about Marion's strange attitude and was caught flat-footed mentally, so he was that all-important stride late in starting back.

He raced back and to his right, was sure he could glove it as he kicked on an extra spurt of speed. But just as he reached for it, his right foot hit a soft

spot in the turf. He lurched off balance. The ball just grazed his glove and went on through. Two runs dashed over, enough to mean the game as the handcuffed Bulls could only get one before it was over. It was very quiet in the locker room afterward.

Tuck had little appetite for his early dinner. Up in his room, he turned on the radio and had a bottle of beer. A ball player to the core, he felt bad about that skull. Still, the best of them made one occasionally. He knew it was the strain of the whole situation, not Marion alone, that was getting him. But his spirits lifted somewhat as he left to pick up Marion at eight for their movie date. When she opened the door to him, though, she was in lounging pyjamas instead of being dressed for the street.

"Hey, baby, I thought we were stepping out to a show?"

"Come in, Tuck," she said gravely. She led the way into the living room but remained standing when he dropped onto the couch. "Tuck, did you hear Jack Manson's broadcast half an hour ago?"

He shook his sleek black head. "Never listen to that pill." He knew the program, "Post Mortems with Manson." "He gives me a very large pain."

"Tuck, did you make that remark in the dugout?"

He frowned. "What remark?"

"Monson quoted you as saying in the inning before you dropped that ball, 'Why bother to try with a cluck team like this?' Did you say that, Tuck? Tell me!"

He rose slowly, realizing at once that one of his teammates must have carried the remark to the sports writer with the radio program. "Yes," he said low-voiced. "I—" Then he shook his head. He couldn't tell even Marion, yet, why he made remarks like that.

A couple of minutes later, he was seething as he walked out of the apartment house—alone. He slammed the car back downtown like a madman. At the hotel, he went immediately to Big Bill Kirk's room.



"Look, Bill," he exploded, as he burst into the room past the big pilot in a dressing gown, "I can't keep this up! It's too much!"

"What's happened now, Tuck? Sit down and let's have it."

But Tuck Carlson was in no mood to sit. "Look, Bill, it's bad enough having every man on the club hate me like poison, but its beginning to go further. Take things like Manson popping off on the radio tonight, quoting that remark of mine. After that error of mine in center, you know what this whole city is going to think!"

Big Bill nodded slowly. "That was a rough break, Tuck."

"And now this business has cost me my girl! Gosh, Bill, how much do I have to take of that, anyway? How much can a man take?"

"Tuck," Bill Kirk said harshly, "back there in the class-D days, who was it straightened you up when you began to stray from the straight and narrow? Who was it who saw you'd never be a chucker and converted you into an up-and-coming kid outfielder?"

Tuck back-handed sweat from his forehead. "Okay, Bill. I'll carry it on, but it's rough, believe me. It's awful dog-gone rough." He went out shaking his head.

When he walked onto the field the next afternoon for the opener of the all-important Spider series, a booming wave of catcalls and Bronx cheers, interspersed with other forms of verbal abuse, rolled over him. He'd never known anything like it. "Yellow" and "You dirty quitter" were only a few of the things he was called. When he reached the infield, all the Spiders were out in front of their dugout, eyes bent on him. They neither taunted him nor bawled insults.

But one loud, clear voice blared: "All right, Carlson! Today we even the score with you. Get ready for it!"

As he sat in the dugout just before the game began, he realized he probably didn't have a friend in the park. He was definitely a pariah.

Big Bill Kirk walked slowly down the

bench. "Boys, this is the big one. I know it's a three-game series, but knock 'em in this one and you'll have 'em on the run. I have the inside dope from their own baliwick that this bunch has the jitters—that they're ready to crack. *This is the one we want! Go get it!*"

As they started out of the dugout, Berry called to Tuck. "Well, Mr. Calamity, what've you got to say today?" he inquired bitingly.

"Pray that you come out of it alive!" Tuck flung back.

It was Moose Kenly hurling for the Bulls, Big Bill playing the hunch that a strong show of confidence in him might do the trick. And Jess Raines, swaggering and sneering, was working for the Spiders. The first inning was over quickly, both men retiring three hitters in order. The second got under way.

There wasn't much jockeying yet. But it was plain both teams were ready to break their necks to cop, ready to tear into the other guy at the first break. A Spider got as far as second on Moose with one down. But that was all.

Raines, pouring his stuff in there, got Stretch Berry on a swinging third strike. Then Tuck stepped in there. And the stands poured it on him. He tried to close his ears to it. But one voice reached him.

"Why try, huh, Carlson? Why try? Go ahead and whiff, you bum, and then you can drop one out there in the field! Why try, Carlson?"

Raines smirked down the alley at him. Tuck was ready for trouble. The first pitch was inside, but on the hands, for a ball. Not at the head.

"Let the bum get on, Jess!" a Spider infielder yelled. "We wanta get a close-up look at him!"

"Roll him over, Jess, and let's see the color of his underside!" yipped Hooks Wiley, who was back at the shortstop berth for the first time since the collision.

**T**HEN there was one of Raines' smokeballs through there at the knees. Tuck went around on it, but way

late. The stands cheered sarcastically. The count went to 2-2, and still no bean-ball. And then it came in, blazing fast, aimed at the head. Tuck pulled away, dropping his bat as he twisted.

"Strike three!" boomed the umpire. It had been a hook that snapped over. And Raines's laugh rattled out through the jeers for Tuck. He had been beautifully fooled by his old foe.

But he got back some of it in the top of the third when the Spiders clawed at Moose briefly. With a man on, after Cassino had booted around a soft roller, there was a sizzling liner over second that Jarron just failed to stab. The alert Tuck had the fans pop-eyed as he was already headed in on the rush, seemingly before the bat even met the ball. Closing with that ground-eating lope toward second, he reached out, nailed it, and in almost the same motion cut loose a bulleting throw that nailed the Spider runner off first by a foot. There actually were a few cheers then. It had been a terrific gambling play.

In the home half, the lower part of the Bull batting order came alive. A wild heave by the usually hot Wiley put a runner on second. The next man drove a smash deep on the right side of second. The Spider there knocked it down and automatically fired to third after seeing the runner break. Instead, Olsen doubled back to second and both runners were safe.

A long fly advanced both runners. And then the squeeze went on and the first Bull run tore across the platter on a close play. The Spiders rushed out for a terrific rhubarb. And then the game broke wide open, the fight on. A run in this game was like three in an ordinary one.

Big Wiley pushed little Jarron around as men poured from both dugouts. Tuck Carlson pulled the Kid back and stepped in there, the slate-colored eyes like rocks under icy water.

"Put a hand on another Bull, Hooks, and I'll stretch you out in that dirt with a busted jaw!" he said in a low, tight voice.

The arbiters broke it up. But the Spiders were exchanging looks, then eying Tuck as they walked away.

With that one run, Moose was superb in the top of the fourth. In the home half, Tuck stepped in there. The Spiders were boiling now, still claiming the runner had been out on the squeeze. Raines spat angrily as he chucked away the resin bag. And that first pitch was right at Tuck's noggin, sending him into the dust. The booing from the crowd that had greeted his second appearance at bat choked off suddenly.

Poker-faced but cold angry inside, Tuck bulletted the next delivery over third. But it curved foul by inches. It would, if fair, have been a double. The count went to 2 and 2 after Raines drove Tuck into the dirt again. Baring teeth in a fighting grin, Tuck gave him the needle as Raines fussed around out there.

"Come on, you big ape! Chuck one at my head again. You couldn't hit me at two feet, you beanbag champ!"

Raines wheeled and powered in a hook. It was wide and streaking into the dirt. Knowing Ching Thompson couldn't reach it, Tuck took an automatic swing for the third strike, then leaped out for first as the wild pitch went on through. He made it without even a throw.

"Don't look now, but I'm on first," he taunted Raines. "How about complaining about that sore leg now, cry baby. After all, you're in trouble."

He got what he wanted, a throw. It was high and the first-sacker just pulled it down. Tuck guffawed. "Careful now, Jess. Careful. Watch your tempah, my dear fella. Watch—out!" And he ran down a few yards.

Raines wheeled, cocked his arm, then saw that his tormentor was already sliding back to the bag. Kirk was out of the dugout like a shot, yelling. And Raines' move was ruled a balk. Tuck strolled down to second.

"Oh, merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along," he sang.

Raines went to work on Scott, obviously going for a strikeout. But at 1 and 2, he made it too fat. And Scott lashed out

a single. Tuck scooted around third and over the plate. Then he turned and bowed to Raines, sweeping off his cap.

"Thanks so much, pal!"

And Raines, burning, gave Olsen a fat one, too. That was a double, scoring Scott, to make it a 3-0 ball game. On the bench, Stretch Berry spoke to little Jar-ron.

"That Tuck is stealing this game right out from under their noses almost single-handed," he said, amazement plain in his voice. "I can't figure that guy at all."

Raines got a grip on himself and retired the side. The fifth was uneventful. But in the top of the sixth, the Spiders came slamming back. A single and a walk with an out between put two aboard. And then the one man wrecking gang, Ching Thompson, caught hold of one for a round-tripper to tie it up. It was a new ball game when Tuck came to the plate again in the home half.

"Hello, cousin," he greeted Raines. Raines missed with his fast ball. "Don't tell anybody, kid, but I own you," he said to the glaring pitcher then.

**A** WHITE streak came at his head. Tuck waited till the last moment, figuring it might be the hook. It wasn't, and he headed for China, but too late. The ball caught him a glancing blow on the side of the head. He came up slowly, swaying as they rushed from the dugout. He slung his bat away and headed for first. But then he dropped to one knee a moment as Kirk came up.

"Better come into the dugout, boy," the pilot said, starting to lift him.

"It barely nicked me, Bill," Tuck whispered. "I'm all right. Just—watch." He was exaggerating some, for his head still rang from that beanball. But he wasn't going to let those Spiders drive him out of the game.

On the next pitch, he lit out for second on a steal they never expected. He came in there head first, beating the throw by yards, the Bull fans roaring with delight. But Wiley, covering, took the late throw and dropped to put it on Tuck anyway. He brought his right knee down savage-

ly, all his weight on it, atop Tuck's head. Rocket-shot blackness like a great cloud of smoke swirled over Tuck.

He heard the shouting around him, as he was lifted, as another brannigan threatened. He was aware of catching his spikes on the dugout step. He knew the trainer was working on him, and all he could think of was that he had to get back into that ball game. The Bulls needed him.

"We can lick 'em, we can lick 'em," he muttered, half out, forgetting his former role, knowing only that they had to win. "This club can fight any of 'em down—a real fighting ball club. They'll get 'em yet."

The players, who'd been cleared from the field and were gathered around, stared at each other. "Did you guys hear what I did?" asked Stretch Berry.

"He—he called us a fighting ball club, that guy who's been sneering all these weeks!" burst out Kid Jarron.

Big Bill turned and faced them. "I might as well tell you men now, that was an act. I cooked it up with Tuck when I got him from the Spiders," he told them. Then he explained the reason—they'd had no fire, the veterans just going through the motions, the youngsters conceited. "I couldn't rouse you myself, but I figured an outsider who rode you and sneered at you might pull the trick. Tuck Carlson sacrificed himself and did it."

"Wh-what, Bill?" Nick Cassino stammered incredulously.

"Why you meatheads!" Big Bill snorted. "Why the devil do you think you're driving for first place now? Because you were so mad at Tuck you played like wild men to show him up! And now he's whipping these Spiders almost single-handedly—for you guys!"

An umpire was there, warning Kirk to get a sub runner on the field. But as Big Bill looked around, Tuck, coming out of the fog, got off the bench and pushed the trainer aside.

"I'm all right now, Bill," he said quietly. "Don't try to take me out of this ball game, dang your hide!"

And Big Bill Kirk knew better than to

try that. As teammates watched, silent with awe, Tuck Carlson walked back onto the field and out to second base.

"Hello, Raines, my pal," he even managed to chirp. "Don't forget to say good-bye to me when you leave for the showers."

And Tuck had called the shot. An enraged gang of Bulls, their eyes finally opened to the true setup, realizing they had badly misjudged the calamity guy with the kill-joy tongue, put on their hitting clothes and combed Raines' hair for him. They came near making a shambles of it. When the smoke cleared with a reliefer on the mound, it was a 7-3 ball game, and the Bull players were yelling for more as they took the field.

That was it. The Bulls even picked up another in the eighth. And Tuck, despite

his weakened condition, made a great over-the-shoulder catch in center to kill off the one desperate Spider rally. Then it was over.

Still unaware of what he had said when he'd been half out, Tuck Carlson suddenly found himself hoisted on the shoulders of his teammates and being carried from the field with the cops trying to hold off a swarming horde of delirious fans.

Over their heads, up behind the boxes, he spotted the pert brunette in a turkey-red jacket, smiling at him and clasping her hands prize-fighter fashion over her head. Marion! Tuck waved. Then his eyes blurred a bit with moisture. He looked down at his teammates, and he thought how very good it was to be accepted as one of them at last.

## EARTH PERSON SINGULAR

(Concluded from page 50)

millions of them, and I shall no longer have to eat the lettuce which the humans need. And now, if you will excuse me—" He waddled off in the darkness.

"Isn't he cute!" Georgia said. "Good-night, Ksar!" But there was no answer.

They stood together, shivering slightly, for the night had grown quite cool. "Well," Wayne said at last, "I suppose it's all over. All the dreams and the big plans we had. We're just two ordinary people again, bound to convention by economics. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"I suppose it means we may as well act conventional," Georgia said, snuggling closer.

"You mean like getting married, and having a family, and being broke every

other Monday? Say, are you nuts or something?"

"I guess so," Georgia said.

"Then we may as well get started," he said, grabbing her to him and kissing her soundly.

He was conceited enough, Georgia considered, to think that she was enjoying it, but since she *was* enjoying it, she could forgive him that. *I could forgive him everything, I suppose*, she thought, *if it would make things easier*. And while he was kissing her, she fumbled in her shoulder bag with the hand she had freed, and took out the bottle of chloroform. She gave it a quick toss, and it made a silvery arc over the fence and landed on the rocks below.

Neither of them heard the crash.

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*Henry sat in the middle of the street,  
cradling his dead son in his arms  
—and then his mind went blank!*

He said  
"I didn't".



# VENGEANCE IS NOT ENOUGH

By BRUCE ELLIOTT

**D**ESPITE the fact that the doctor had just turned off the current, the big man on the couch continued to roll and retch. His muscles convulsed so that they stood out like ropes on his thick neck. It seemed that his spine must snap from the force with which his head jerked back. From

his taut mouth there came garbled syllables like the sounds man must have made before he learned to talk. His body heaved so that the springs in the couch seemed ready to burst through the upholstery.

The small, dry looking doctor watched. His face was lined with sympathy. His eyes



were full of compassion. He said, "What day is it, Henry?"

The man on the couch lurched till he was half up, his arms moving aimlessly. The doctor pressed a gentle hand against the man's chest. It was enough. The tortured man fell back onto the couch.

"What day is it, Henry?" the doctor asked. Next to him on the cluttered desk a wire recorder spun on with mindless efficacy. "What day is it, Henry?"

The man on the couch rolled over. Thick strands of saliva drooled from his split lips. The rubber gag was out now, lying on the desk. The gentle voice asked tirelessly, "What day is it, Henry?"

What day? Why it was Saturday. *The Saturday.* The day he'd been looking forward to all summer. The day he and his son, Jimmy, were to go fishing. Sure. Saturday. Gotta get a good early start if you want to catch anything but crabs. They'd kidded a lot about who was going to catch more fish. They'd eaten a hurried breakfast, promising themselves that they'd eat again at some roadside diner. Now there was nothing to do but get the brand new sparkling tackle into the back of the battered convertible.

The sun had washed the dirty city streets with a kind of lambent magic that made them sparkle. His son had been bemused by the way the gold made even the garbage cans look like some kind of ancient treasure. Funny kid. Be peculiar if his son were a poet. Didn't know whether he'd liked that or not. Oh, well, maybe it was just a phase boys went through. Adolescence did odd things.

They had the tackle stacked fairly neatly and were standing next to each other. Jimmy had been almost bouncing with excitement as he'd said, "Gee, Dad, thanks a million. I know it's hard for you to get away from the office. 'Specially now that the mayor's been sick." Thoughtful kid, grown up in a lot of ways.

Jimmy had nudged him in the ribs. Said, "Dad, isn't that Mr. Vincent?" They'd waved, and Ben Vincent, portly, self-important, had waved back with a tired flip of the hand. They had watched him leave the back entrance of the big apartment house and

walk around the corner.

"Must be hard for Mr. Vincent, being acting mayor," Jimmy had said.

Hard? That was a question. He made it look hard, that was true. But this was no day to worry about the city, or the office or any of the people connected with it. They'd waited too long for this fishing date. He'd slapped Jimmy on the back and said, "Let's go, Son. If there's no traffic, we should be able to have our hooks wet inside of an hour." Then he'd gotten into the car. His head had been bent forward as he put the key in the ignition.

That was why he hadn't seen it, just heard it. Heard that despairing scream as his son died. Leaped from behind the wheel in time to cuddle Jimmy's broken head in his lap. Been blinded by horror so that he hadn't even seen the car that had stolen his son from him. Hadn't even been aware that there must have been one.

He had just sat there in the middle of the street with his dead son in his arms. Crying. Crying as he hadn't when his wife, the mother of his child, had died of cancer. Cried for all the things he had wanted for his son. Cried till something, somewhere inside of him let go.

**N**OW someone was saying tonelessly but insistently, "What day is this, Henry?"

He said tonelessly, "Saturday."

"Good work. Who are you?"

"Who are you?" What a question. As if anyone could ever answer it. He was a man. A hard-working man who'd loved a woman and lost her. Who'd fathered a son and lost him, too.

The black clouds swirled back.

The doctor sighed. Rapport was broken again. However— He looked at the wire recorder. The reel still looked fairly full. There was enough there for an hour's recording.

"What day is this, Henry?"

"Saturday."

"Who are you?"

Time passed. The reel of wire ran on and on. The low hum of the motor was the only sound. Outside the office darkness fell.

"Who are you?"

"Henry," thick-tongued, the heavy voice

went on, "Henry Timms."

The doctor smiled. Some of the strain fell from him. His voice was a little louder now. He asked, "What do you do?"

"I'm in politics. It's a job."

"And—" the doctor paused for a second; this was the test—"why are you here?"

"I—I think someone brought me here—or an ambulance. I—" There was great hesitation, then: "It's all muddled. I think you're a doctor and you're going to help me. You—you said something about shock therapy." The big man got panicky. "You're going to give me electric shock."

The doctor killed the building panic. He said, "Relax, Henry. It's over. You've had the treatment. This partial amnesia is the result of it. It will pass quickly, now that you know you who are."

The big man on the couch said, "I don't remember getting anything. Has it—am I—"

"It's worked. You're better than you were when you came here. In a sense, you were already in shock because of your son's death. The electric shock has helped you over that other, greater shock. But you'll be all right now. In a way, you've had the equivalent of battle fatigue. You've been overworked, and then—this other—it was too much for you. You escaped from life, from everything. You blanked out.

"But that's over now." The doctor made his voice more positive. Patients were at their most suggestible at this point. Now was the time to impress the message. "The treatment has given your brain a rest, given you time to make at least a partial adjustment."

"I see." Timms sat up, looked around the office wonderingly. As far as he was concerned, he'd never seen the room before. The books—that was the thing that you saw first. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them. He looked from the ceiling to the floor. Textbooks, books on mathematics. Books. Then the crowded desk—the wire recorder—and behind it, the little wizened, tired-looking doctor.

"Why the recorder, Doctor?"

"So that I can play it back to you. So that you can see how the treatment works. So that this partial amnesia you are under-

going will not frighten you in the future."

"I see." Things were beginning to come back. Little things. Like the nurse who had helped him untie his tie. He looked around, wondered where she was.

He swayed as he rose. The doctor leaped from his chair. "Steady, now. You shouldn't have done that, it's too soon."

The doctor almost fell, trying to keep him from falling. Their bodies spun in a grotesque waltz. They reversed their relative positions.

**I**T WAS then that the bullet crashed through the window and plowed deep into the doctor's back. Timms, faint, almost falling, tried to grab the doctor's body in time to keep it from falling. He failed.

Two more things happened almost simultaneously. There was a bigger crash of glass, and the door of the office slammed open.

Timms looked stupidly at the window. On the floor, shards of glass made a pattern around the gun that had been thrown through the broken window.

The nurse screamed. "Doctor Welles! What's he done?"

She turned on Timms, and words bubbled out like the blood that was coming from the doctor's back. "Why did he do it? Why did he insist on treating you lunatics all by himself. I tried to make him let me be in here. But no, he never would. He didn't want anyone else to hear what was said."

She fell to her knees. Instinctively she did the professional thing. She felt for his pulse. The hysteria left her. She said flatly, "So you've killed him! Killed the finest man I ever knew. Killed him. For what? Why did you do it?"

He fought off the black clouds. That was the easy way. He'd tried that, and it hadn't worked. This was no time to escape. There was no escape. He had to find out what was behind this seeming madness before it claimed him.

It was hard to get the words out. His tongue was still thick. His jaw ached. He saw the rubber gag, saw his tooth marks in it, and realized why his jaw hurt.

He said, "I didn't."

She looked at the doctor's body, at the gun, and then at him. Her hand dropped on

the phone. She said, "Oh. Of course. No. You didn't do it. Why don't you sit down on the couch? You still look pretty rocky."

That was a temptation, too. All his muscles hurt the way they had in the old days, when he'd been a fullback, after a hard game. But no. If he sat down, he might never get up. He saw the nurse pick up the phone. Her lips formed the word police before he really realized what she was doing. He lurched toward her, knocked the phone out of her hand.

"No."

She backed to the broken window. It was only then that the darkness outside made him know that night had fallen. A whole day gone. He didn't know what had happened to it, and that frightened him terribly. He shook all over. Night. The last thing he remembered, really remembered, was seeing his son die. Twelve hours ago, at least. His mind jumped around; he couldn't force it to work the way he wanted it to.

He said, "I won't hurt you. I just want to get out of here." He backed to the door. He had to go some place and sit. Think. Try to find out what had happened. For one thing, he knew—no matter how muddled he was, no matter how scrambled his brain was—he knew that the shot that had come through the window had been meant for him and not the doctor.

Whoever had fired the bullet had fired just as he lurched. He and the doctor had spun around so that their positions were reversed. That's why it was the doctor who lay on the floor and not him.

Who would benefit by his death? Not his political enemies, for he wasn't that important. Besides, it was easier to kill a man at a committee meeting with a few well chosen words, or in the newspapers with a smear campaign, than to use a gun.

He ran, almost fell, through the door and slammed it behind him. There. Let her phone the police now. But— He looked around him. The doctor's waiting room had three doors. Which one led outside?

The first opened on a closet. He didn't bother to close it but lurched to the middle door. He gasped for breath. Yes, this was the one. Out in the hallway he didn't wait for an elevator. He went down the fire

stairs. No point in taking a chance on getting bottled up in a little car. Smarter just to walk downstairs.

Or was it?

ONE flight, two, three— How high up was the doctor's office? His knees were shaking when he reached street level. There, right ahead was the door. A thought hit him like a blackjack. Suppose the door were locked as doors so often are. If it were, he might as well give up. He knew he could never go back up the stairs.

He put his hand on the knob timorously, turned it. When the door gave, the wave of relief that went through him left him as exhausted as had the stairs.

He looked through the partly open door. The elevator indicator was on nine. That showed where Dr. Welles' office was. The nurse must have sent for the elevator in an attempt to stop him. Or had she phoned down? Alerted someone to grab him?

He shook his head, tried to clear his muddled brain. Only one thing he could do. He boldly walked through the door. Out on the street he saw a cab. He was in it as fast as he could move.

Through the glass door of the building he could see activity. The nurse ran out of the elevator. A man at the desk leaped to his feet and ran toward the door.

"Get moving!"

The hackie had the car in gear and on its way before he asked, "Where to?"

A good question. A very good one indeed. Where could he go? Whom could he see? Vincent? Yes, it had to be Ben Vincent. There was no one else who could tell him what had happened since he had blanked out.

He said, "Nine-thirty Fifth Avenue." If Vincent weren't there, the butler would know where he could be found.

A butler answered his ring. He knew where his employer was, all right. but he was amazed that Timms didn't know.

"Mr. Vincent? But—" It was the first time Timms had ever seen the flat-faced servant nonplussed. "I thought you knew, sir. He's in the hospital! His wife is there with him, at his side."

"What happened? I've . . . I've been out

of town all day."

"He was in an auto accident, sir. Not too badly hurt. Cut up a bit. The doctor says he'll be all right after a rest."

Dare he go to the hospital and see Vincent? Risk being seen? Surely the police must have radioed his description all over town by now. He hoped they'd been to the doctor's office. Once they'd seen the setup, seen the broken window, they'd know that the shot must have come from outside. The hole in the window and the radiations would show that.

He felt good for having thought of that. Sure, the lab could prove that with no trouble at all. But— He deflated. The thrown gun had shattered the area where the bullet had penetrated. No, the police lab was not going to prove that he hadn't shot Dr. Welles.

He pictured the doctor's office. The body, the gun—and the broken window. It would look as if there had been a tussle which had smashed the window. That's what it would look like.

He suddenly realized that the butler was looking at him curiously. He wondered how long he had stood there, lost in thought. Aloud he said, "Too bad. I'm sorry Mr. Vincent was hurt. What hospital is he in? I'll go see him."

The butler told him and closed the door—closed the door on the warm, relaxed intimacy of Vincent's living room. The deep carpet, the comfortable chairs, the ease— If only he could just go somewhere and sit and think.

His home? The very thought of it, with its wealth of reminders of his son, made him ill again. His stomach lurched. He wondered idly, as he fought down the nausea, when he had eaten last. It must have been that snack he'd had with Jimmy.

Easy. Better not think about that.

Out on the street, he looked around him like a blind man who has regained his sight. The familiar buildings looked like a stage set. He got no warmth from them. They frightened him. This was no place for him. Even the beat cops knew him.

East. That was the way to go. To the small bars on the side streets. One of them would serve as sanctuary till he could get hold of himself.

THE heat of the summer night made the spilled beer smell good. Queasy as he felt, it was good. He almost fell through the door. The bar was lined with men. Some talking, some brooding. He worked his way down to the end of the bar, past an interminable baseball discussion, right through an embattled argument on world affairs, till he came to a booth.

He let his battered muscles go slack. He was in the seat before he saw the woman who sat across the table. Discs of rouge stood out like patches on her swollen cheeks. Her bust cascaded onto the table dangerously near a puddle of spilled liquor. Her brazen hair hurt his eyes. Fat bulged under her arms.

She manufactured a delighted tone and said, "Hello, honey."

When he failed to reply, she said, "Gonna buy little Betsy a drink? Come on, honey, you won't regret it. I know how to treat a man. 'Specially a big feller like you." She narrowed her mascaraed eyes in an attempt to look lascivious and succeeded only in looking ludicrous. She said, "The strong, silent type, huh? I like them."

The bartender, annoyed at having to leave the bar to serve the table, stood over them. He said, "We don't serve drunks, mac. Why doncha go back where you got that load?"

Timms bit his tongue, forced air deep into his lungs, grated, "I'm not drunk. I'm sick. Get me a boilermaker. And hurry about it. Get one for the lady while you're at it!"

It worked. At least, the bartender shuffled away. The blonde preened herself. She said, "That's the way to talk. Them bartenders think they're king—"

He said, "Hold it a while. Like a good girl. I just want to think."

She eyed him a little more closely. A little less invitingly than she had. She said, "You *are* sick."

He nodded. The bartender slammed the glasses down in front of them. Timms wondered frantically if there was any money in his clothes. If he could only remember these things. His hands fumbled at his pockets as though he had never used them before. There—his wallet.

He opened it, still wondering if there were

anything in it. Even if he had been blind, he would have known it was full from the way the bartender changed his attitude. He said, "Is there anything else, sir? Can I get you anything?"

"You showed him!" The blonde said. Then she was silent. She sipped at her drink as if anxious that no one guess how fast she wanted to gulp it down.

Twelve hours. Where were they? What had happened in them? The papers. Why hadn't he thought of that? He said, "When you finish your drink, would you get me the evening papers?"

"Sure, honey. Anything you want. Any little old thing." Now that she had an excuse for hurrying, she poured the drink down her throat so fast it hurt to watch her. He threw her a dollar bill.

Alone. At least, until she came back with the papers. Watching her walk down the length of the bar, watching the fat sway, he wondered if she'd just keep on going with the dollar.

It couldn't matter less.

All he knew was that Jimmy was dead, that someone had tried to kill him and had killed the doctor instead. The liquor burned as it went down. He gulped the beer to wash away the taste and feeling of the raw fire. Maybe he had better eat. Maybe some food would chase some of the rats out of his stomach, drive away the black from his brain.

The sandwich the bartender brought him was as appetizing as dead owl, but he managed to force it down. The beer helped it on its way.

**H**E WAS halfway through it when he saw the blonde coming back with the papers pressed against her bulging front. She plowed through the men at the bar like a steamship coming into harbor. Her smile dented the make-up as she plopped the papers and herself down.

She said, "Bet you're surprised, honey. Bet you thought I was never comin' back, now didn't you?"

He ordered her another drink to shut her up while he thumbed through the papers. Vircent's accident had made the front pages of the night final. Pictures showed where

his car had skidded and made contact with a lamp post.

The leader said that the mayor was flying back to resume his duties, now that his assistant was laid up. A dope ring had been broken up. Three children had been burned to death while their mother got drunk in a barroom. A sexy looking redhead named Janice George had been found strangled in her apartment. The international mess seemed even messier than usual. An actress had lost a half million dollars worth of gems. The usual news.

He pushed the papers to one side and ran his hands through his thick hair. Nothing. Not a single blasted thing to put his finger on.

She said, "You got trouble, haven't you, honey?"

He nodded.

"Wanna come to my place? . . . Oh, not for that! I mean, you wanna come and just take your shoes off and drink some beer and think?"

He nodded.

The barflies grinned when he walked out, holding onto her fat upper arm. As the door was closing, he could hear the bartender say, "Well, I'll be damned. That's the earliest Betsy ever picked anything up. Generally she can't connect till it's real drunk out."

The door closed on bawdy laughter.

Her room was as blowsy as she, but it was a place to sit. He pushed some confession magazines off an overstuffed chair and took their place. They'd brought back some beer and some food. She busied herself getting things ready. There was a sickeningly sweet calendar picture of a boy and a dog pinned haphazardly to the wall. He averted his eyes from it.

Maybe that was the reason he couldn't think clearly. Maybe the answer was hidden back there somewhere. Perhaps he *should* think about his son, instead of ducking it as he had been doing.

His fingers pressed deep into the arms of the chair as he thought back. There was no blood in his face at all. The blonde looked at him while she poured the beer and wondered if he had passed out. But his back was straight, his head was upright.

When he opened his eyes, he had a dif-



ferent look about him. She handed him a sandwich and a glass of beer. She was wise enough to keep her mouth shut.

He said, "So now I know." Ridges of muscles jutted out at the hinge of his jaw. "You can't run away. Not ever."

She nodded, not knowing what he was talking about. She refilled his glass, murmured, "Beer'll help most anything, I find."

He wolfed down a sandwich, two of them. He needed fuel. This was not going to be easy. There were lots of angles. From some ways of looking at it, it didn't make sense. But then neither did the hit-run death of Jimmy or the shot that had killed the doctor.

A mangled boy and a dead doctor. All because he had wanted to get an early start in order to be sure of getting some fish—and because a redhead had been found strangled.

He got to his feet with surety. There was no sway now. The blonde watched him. He knew what he was doing. She asked, "You feel better, don't you, honey?"

He nodded. From his wallet he took a handfull of bills. Knowing where the money would go, he still gave it to her. He said, "With this goes all my thanks."

She was silent. The door closed on him before she dared to count the windfall. . . .

**I**N A drug store phone booth his mind went back to the scene in the doctor's office. He wondered, if the nurse had not come in on the heels of the shot, if he might not have picked up the gun and blown out his brains. Perhaps that had been what the killer wanted. Considering the state he was in, coming out of shock, faced with the corpse of an unknown man, it would not have been unlikely if he had picked up the gun and finished what the murderer had started.

His unseeing eyes roved over the counters of merchandise that faced the booth he was in. How was he going to work this? He wanted to get the killer dead to rights where there could be no out, no chance of anything going wrong.

Even when the coin dropped, he wasn't quite sure he knew how he was going to set it up. It wasn't till he heard the killer's voice that he knew how it had to be done.

He ripped the handkerchief out of his breast pocket and muffled his voice with it. "Wonderful invention, wire recorders," he said.

He waited. In the receiver, he could hear a strangled gasp. He said, "Sometimes a reel of wire can be worth lots of money."

"Where can I meet you? Pay you off?"

His smile would have been frightening had there been anyone to see it. He said, "I'm the handyman in Dr. Welles' building. I been snoopin' for years. Tonight's the first time I ever found something that was worth the trouble."

"Shall I meet you in the office?"

Would the police have a stake-out there? Well, he'd worry about that at the proper time. He said, "Sure, meet me there. And you'd better come loaded with loot. I'm retirin'."

The phone clicked. He wiped the sweat off his forehead with the handkerchief. This would never do. His throat was closed with the fury of his desire. This was no time for personal vengeance. He knew that. Yet with all his heart and soul he wanted to kill the man to whom he'd just spoken.

As he walked out of the drug store, he thought wryly of what a shock the killer must have had when the bullet had missed him and hit the doctor. It was a little surprising that the killer hadn't tried again. Unless he'd figured that he had more important things to do at the moment and had meant to kill again as soon as he was able. He must have fired and then thrown the gun almost in one motion. After all, he couldn't very well have stayed put.

On the fire escape of the doctor's building, Timms waited impatiently. Through the broken window he could barely make out the wire recorder, the phone, the jumbled mass of odds and ends on the desk.

His luck must be wearing pretty thin. He'd ducked three patrol cars on the way. He wondered how the papers were handling it. He was no big time politico, but after all, his name was not unknown. Probably something about how he had run amuck after the death of his son. Then a follow-up of the nerve strain induced by modern politics. The papers liked to dwell on that.

He wondered if the killer would follow his

trail up the fire escape or if he'd brazen his way into the office.

The light clicked on. He blinked. He saw the chalk outline on the floor. The doctor's body contour. It seemed pathetic for that to be all that was left of the doctor. He'd seemed like a good man.

Then he heard the uniformed police officer, who had opened the door, say respectfully, "This is irregular, but seeing as it's you—"

"It will be perfectly all right, my good man. I know what I'm doing!"

The cop left, closing the door behind him.

The pompous, portly man looked around the office. His eyes flicked to the window. Blinded by light, he couldn't distinguish the darker shadow that Timms made. He saw the wire recorder. His hand turned the rewind lever. The machine worked noisily at first.

**F**ROM the fire escape, Timms could see the busy little arms that worked the rewind. Its function was like the moving arm of a fishing reel that forced the line to wind on the spool smoothly.

The machine stopped automatically when the reel was rewound. Ben Vincent turned on the playback. On the fire escape, Timms cringed a trifle when he heard the doctor's voice ask, "What day is this, Henry?"

This was repeated three or four times, then Timms heard himself say, "What day? Why it's Saturday. *The Saturday.*" He hadn't known he'd said all that out loud.

The machine droned on. He heard himself describing how he and Jimmy had seen Ben Vincent come out of the apartment house, how Vincent had waved to them.

In the doctor's office, Vincent's too big face grimaced. He bent over the wire recorder, looking for the button that would magically erase the wire, rearrange the molecules so that the recording wire would be blank as though it had never been used.

Only then did Timms step through the broken window and face the man who had murdered his son.

He asked, "You can clean the wire, but how can you erase what happened from my mind?"

Vincent's face blanched. He said, "But—I thought—"

"You thought I was a blackmailing handyman. Yes, I know."

"I thought you'd gone crazy, that I had nothing to fear. Why didn't you call the cops after I—"

"After you ran down Jimmy, you mean?" Timms' voice was flat.

"Henry, I didn't want to! It was such rotten luck! Why did you have to be there on the street? Why did you have to see me leave her apartment house? I had a perfect alibi all rigged. And then you saw me. You and your son! Why couldn't you have been there five minutes earlier—or five minutes later?"

Five minutes, and Jimmy would still be alive. Timms began to shake. The black— He shook his head like a wounded bull trying to clear the blood from its eyes.

"I didn't want to kill anybody," Vincent was saying. "I didn't even want to kill *her*. But I couldn't stand the stink. The papers would have— My wife would have— Janice wouldn't let me go. She threatened a scandal that would have blown me out of politics. . . . Henry, listen to me. Understand the spot I was in!"

"Sure, I know the spot you were in. You killed your mistress, and we saw you leave the house where she lived. I forgot that. It was wiped out of my mind—with blood. With my son's blood. Then not content with that, you tried to kill me before I remembered. It took me all this time to remember that you were leaving the wrong house early this morning."

Vincent whispered, "Henry, don't look at me like that. I'm not a killer. I didn't mean to— But one thing lead to another."

"Then after you ran over Jimmy, you had to cover up the blood on the car so you ran it into a lamppost, bled a little yourself so your blood would hide my son's."

"Henry, you don't know the hell I've been through! If you did, you wouldn't look like that."

"Yes, I know, it must have been terrible, sneaking out of the hospital, getting a gun, coming here, shooting at me, missing and killing the doctor. I feel for you." Timms paused, then asked, "How did you know I was here?"

Vincent looked startled. "Don't you re-

member? Why, Henry, I brought you here. I hoped the shock would wipe your mind clean so I wouldn't have to kill you. Then I went out, cracked up my car, was taken to the hospital, got out without being seen and came back here. I—I didn't shoot till I could see that you were starting to remember. Henry, believe me, I didn't want to kill you. Why, I've always been fond of you."

Timms retched. He said, "I'm glad you didn't hate me, Ben."

The sarcasm was lost. Vincent was too concerned with trying to justify his actions.

"Henry, I'm a rich man. Let me give you some money. Leave town, start over again somewhere. I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you somehow. Look, Henry, with the mayor ill, away all the time, I'm getting to be a big man here in town. I can do a lot for you."

**T**HE same old routine. The palaver they handed out in the local political clubs. Just a ward heeler at heart. It was inevitable, of course. Man works by mechanisms, and Vincent was using one that had always worked for him.

"Shut up." Timms voice was louder than he meant it to be.

Vincent was shocked into silence. Timms locked eyes with him, wondered when he would try again to kill. The tension built in the silence of the room. The waves of fury that racked Timms were held in control only because he wanted Vincent to suffer his penalty lawfully. That is, he wanted it with his mind. But his muscles ached to kill the man with his bare hands.

Timms' feet were on the chalked outline of the dead doctor's head. Vincent stood on the chalked knees. They were that close together. The blood drained out of Vincent's face.

He said, "You're a fool, Henry."

His hand went to his pocket. Timms let him get that far. Then he exploded into action. His hand clenched on Vincent's wrist.

The barrel of the gun picked up glinting highlights from the lamp. They stood chest to chest, frozen into their pose.

Vincent's muscles cracked as he tried to force the muzzle around so that it would face Timms' stomach. Suddenly Timms let go. The violence of Vincent's gesture brought the gun high in the air as the tension of his muscles was allowed too sudden release.

It was then that Timms hit him. He hit him with all the hate, all the frustration, all the futility that he felt. Vincent's lower jaw slipped sideways, broken, and the sounds that came from him were like those of an idiot child.

The door slammed open. The young cop's face was frightened. He gasped, "Did I wait too long, Mr. Timms? I could hear through the transom. It was open"

Timms let his hands hang at his sides. He said, "No, you didn't wait too long."

The reaction was too much. He couldn't even feel gratitude that the policeman had heard the whole thing. He just felt empty. Empty and useless. Vengeance was not enough. It wouldn't bring back Jimmy. Wouldn't reanimate the doctor.

All his fury, all his desire for vengeance were gone. They had vanished when he hit Vincent.

He watched while the policeman put the cuffs on Vincent, listened while the policeman phoned Homicide. He walked along quietly when Vincent was led from the building.

He said, "I'll be down later to give my story."

The cop nodded. "Anything you say, Mr. Timms."

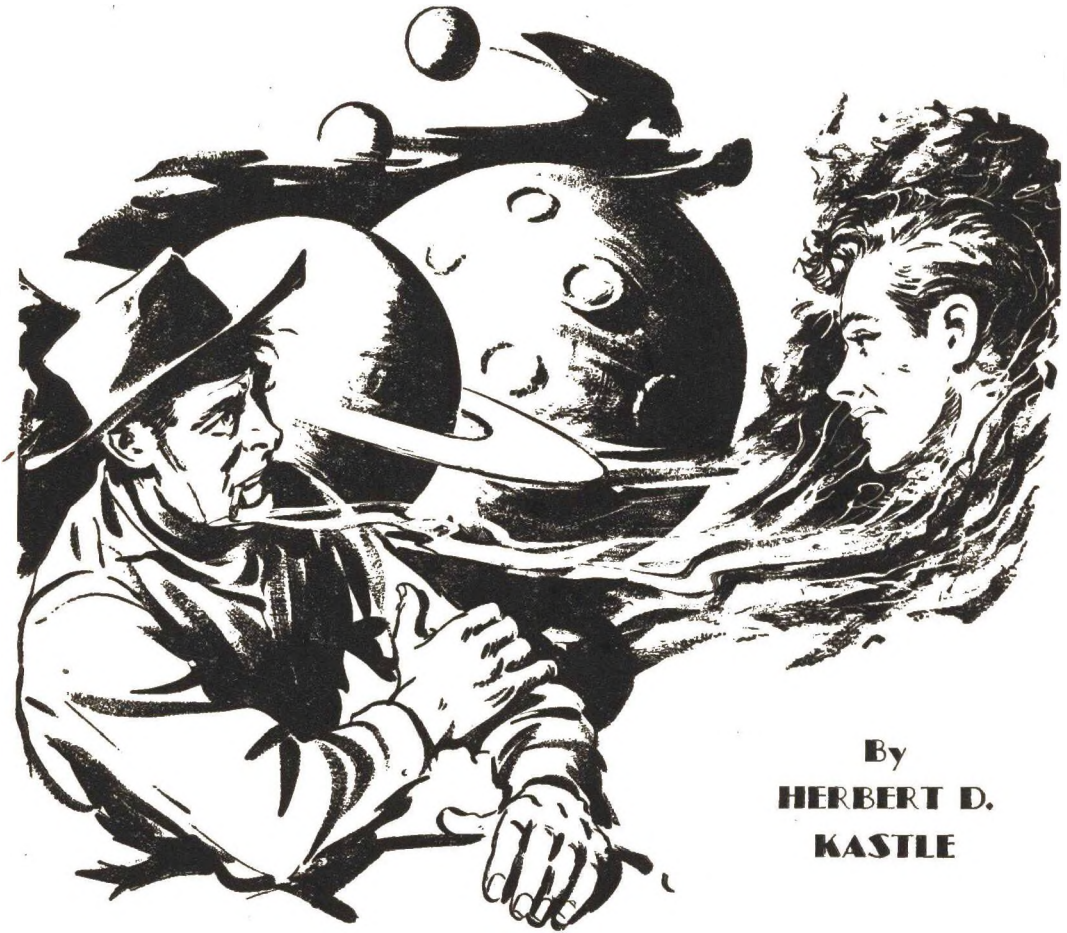
He walked off into the night. A big man, almost burly, with empty hands hanging uselessly at his sides, with bent back and heavy heart.

The cop watched him shuffle off out of sight in the darkness of the night.

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# King Lode Revisited



By  
**HERBERT D.  
KASTLE**

*The kid from the future said Tim King was his ancestor—  
but what would a time-traveler be doing in the Old West?*

**T**HAT day in June began like most any other day around the diggings, but it sure enough didn't stay that way for long. For one thing, Lon Warner got himself tanked-up by ten in the morning and went on a rampage down in town, and the next thing we knew he was being carried back to the diggings in a wheelbarrow. Not that he minded the

transportation. He was too full of holes to mind anything and he was also dead.

The sheriff came around later and built himself a smoke and squatted near the mine shaft and finally I turned around from where I was bolstering side-timber.

"Okay," I said. "So you shot my pard. That ain't no reason you had to shoot

## KING LODE REVISITED

him dead."

Sheriff Anker smoked and then he said, "I didn't come here to talk about Lon. He tried to kill half the people in the Red Devil, including the dancing girls. We ain't got enough dancing girls as is, Tim. Anyway, it weren't me who done him in."

"Weren't you?" I bellowed. "Why damnation, that means I got to strap on my iron and waste time hunting down some fool and then shoot him dead, maybe getting shot dead myself in the process!"

"Now, now, Tim," the sheriff said in his best Sunday manner. "This ain't the old days, y'know. Eighteen-Sixty-nine, and we moderns don't have no call taking the law into our own hands. Fact is, I got the man who done it. That's why I'm here. I wanted to let you know, and then tell you I gotta set him free."

"Sure," I agreed. "You set him free and I'll be waiting outside, and I'll spill his guts all over Main Street. Thanks for the favor, Sheriff." I turned to get my Colt, but he stopped me.

"That ain't it either, Tim. Not that I wouldn't set him up for you if it was right and proper. But I was in the Red Devil when the shooting took place, and I got to tell you it was a fair and square draw. Fact is, this fellow didn't even have an iron—he borrowed one. Also, he gave Lon first shot, and a clean one, too, before he even drew."

"Now that don't ring silver-true." I said. "Lon, drunk or sober, got one of the best eyes in Colorado, or any place else. If he had a clean shot at that hombre, then the hombre's dead. You sure your prisoner was breathing last time you talked to him?"

Sheriff Anker said, "Breathing, eating and complaining. Reason I'm here is that he claims he's related to you." At this point the sheriff dropped his eyes and rubbed his jaw kinda thoughtful. "I could of swore that the first time I asked him what sort of kin he was, he said he was your great-great-great grandson. Or maybe there was three or

four more greats in there."

"Related to me? Great-great-great —" I peered at him. "Why Sheriff, you surely been drinking that poison at the saloon."

Anker said nothing.

"Well," I said, not knowing which way to jump now, "did he keep saying that, or did he turn sane?"

"Turned sane. I reckon. When I asked him to repeat what he'd said, he laughed and shook his head and told me he'd been funning. 'Just tell him I'm related on his father's side,' he said. 'Tell him I'm from the East.'"

"Well," I said, "I might have cousins back there. But still, he killed my pardner."

The sheriff got up and stood his entire six feet. "Said he done you a favor, Tim. Said now you own the King Lode clear of pardners. Reckon he's right, except when did you and Lon name it the King Lode? I heard you ain't got much more'n tobacco and beans outa this hole."

"King Lode?" I said. "He's dreaming. Sure, my last name is King, and this here shaft might bring out twenty dollars' worth of silver some day, but King Lode! That sounds like I'm up there with the Comstock!"

I ran to my shack and got my Colt and hurried back to the sheriff.

"Okay," I said. "Let's go see this . . . What's his name, anyway?"

Anker scratched his jaw again and looked at me and grinned. "King Seventy-three."

"What?"

"Honest Injun, Tim. That's what he said. King Seventy-three."

I didn't do no more talking to that loco lawman and it didn't take more'n an hour for us to walk into town—no one being able to ride a horse up my mountain. We came down Main and it was quiet this early in the day, almost discomfoting quiet what with only two fist fights near the saloon and one dog fight, attended by the mayor and city council, in front of Mimi's Pleasure



Palace. I tipped my hat to Mimi, who stood with a few of her girls, and I winked at Lola, the one with the tight dress and red hair. And then the sheriff yanked my arm and I went along.

When we entered the calaboso, Sid MacIntyre, sometimes-deputy because it's only sometimes he's sober enough to pin on his star, ran up to us, his face whiter than a lime pit and with the same undertone of green.

"Lord, Lord!" he said, and grabbed each of us by the coat. "I'm glad to see you—both of you, even if I do hate your guts, Tim King. That prisoner, that King Seventy-five—"

"Seventy-three," Anker cut in.

"Yeah, Seventy-three. He's been doing things, Sheriff. Awful things! I'm about gone outa my mind! I'm so glad to see—"

"Are you going to tell us," I said, "or aren't you? Just what is it this Seventy-three's been doing?"

MacIntyre waved his hands and rolled his eyes and made motions with his lips like a fish gulping on dry land.

"Terrible things!" he finally said, and then turned slowly and went down like a corkscrew and ended up in a nice neat pile at our feet.

The sheriff picked him up and dragged him to a chair and threw him into it. He slapped his face and rubbed his hands and then gave up.

"Must've been drinking heavy again," he said, but he looked worried. "Anyway, he's cold and won't come out of it till supper-time, if I know Sid. Let's me and you go back and see your kin, or do you think maybe we shouldn't?"

I looked into Anker's gray eyes, eyes that had stared down two-gun killers and one-gun killers and plain old pig-sticker killers, and he was scared.

"Well," I said, and turned and looked at the thick plank door leading to the three cells. "Well, we'll have us a drink first—"

I never got to finish because that door came open and this tall, thin kid dressed in homespun walked into the office and

smiled at me with the biggest, shiniest teeth I ever did see.

"Great-great-great-great—" he began, and then stopped. But he came right at me and grabbed my hand and shook it like I was supposed to give milk. "Good to see you!" he catterwalled. "You're just like your portrait in the Transgalatic Art Museum." Then he stepped back a little. "However, you smell better in the museum."

That really stung me, "You young whippersnapper!" I yelled "You—you pile of numbers! I wash more'n most people! Twice a month, sometimes! Where do you get off—" And then I got some of those other things he'd been saying. "What d'you mean, my portrait in the trans-something art museum? Except for a tintype, I ain't never had—"

"Hold it." the sheriff said, his voice cold as mountain snow. He had his .44 trained on King Seventy-three's chest. "I don't care for prisoners escaping from their cells, even if I was only holding you till your kin got here. You lope right back inside and then I'll let you out all legal proper."

Seventy-three smiled and nodded agreeably and took me by the arm and strolled with me through the plank door. He stopped in front of the first cage and looked over his shoulder and said, "I'm afraid you'll have to unlock the detention room, Punitive. I didn't avail myself of your lock mechanism."

I jerked my arm free of that young maniac and jumped back. "Hey," I said. "He's saying he got out without opening the door!"

"Impossible," said Anker. He waved Seventy-three to the wall and bent over careful, ready for a side-shot, and examined the lock. His face grew kinda gray and he licked his lips and then put away his iron. "Reckon I don't have to be so pernickity," he said. "He's free. Take him home with you, Tim."

"Fine," Seventy-three said, and took my arm, making only a little wrinkle

[Turn to page 80]

# LOST IN THE AMAZON JUNGLE!

*Does Raymond Maufrais still  
live? Or was the twenty-  
three year old adventurer  
destroyed by the jungle?*



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with his nose now. "Fine. We have innumerable things to discuss, great-great—cousin. The most important of which is your deplorable addiction to games of chance. You must never play poker again, great-great-great—" He stopped and shook his head, real angry at himself, and then he muttered, "I lack self-discipline. He's my cousin, for the moment."

"You talk to yourself often, bub?" I asked.

He flushed, and then nodded. "Yes. One of the reasons I was demoted to mere tactician status in World Symbiotics. But I won't have to worry about earning a livelihood, just as soon as I make certain you hold onto the King Lode."

"What kind of talk—" I began again, but he smiled down at me. He was a hell of a tall kid, maybe six-four, and his smile was just so cock-sure it stopped me cold.

"Shall we go, cousin?" he said. "What I have to say won't take long. I've already assured you of complete ownership of the Lode by disposing of your partner. But of course, that was just a whim, a desire to take part in an actual Western gun-fight. Lon Warner was scheduled to die about the end of August, or was it early September that the texts indicated?"

I got free of his hand and ran behind the sheriff and drew my Colt.

"Keep him away from me!" I yelled. "He's nutty, and I swear I'll slug him if he comes a piddling step closer!"

With that, Anker also drew iron and stepped away so that we were siding each other.

"Same goes for me," he said, his voice cold again. "You may be a funny hombre, but you'll die like anyone else. Now get out of here and on your horse. If I ever see you in Big Strike again, you're a dead one."

"Bravo!" Seventy-three said, and slapped his thigh three-four times. "I always did like the Earth-Western thrillers. Much more viewer identifica-

tion than those Martian mysteries or Venusian romances. Who can identify with a thirteen-legged fowl or an amorphous blob of sentient vapor?"

The sheriff and I both reached the same conclusion at the same time. Our guns roared as one, and we waited for the smoke to clear, and for Seventy-three to kick his last. After all, he was a nut and he'd killed my pard.

The smoke cleared all right, but Seventy-three stood there, giving us that big-toothed grin like before.

"Energy shield," he said. "I'm not only the first time-traveler, but the first to devise a really compact atomoturbine. The ones sold by Universal Protection have to be worn strapped to the back, in plain view. I have mine right here in my pock—"

I reached the edge of town in about six minutes, which is pretty good for two miles; considerable under the world record. I heard later. But the sheriff was even better. He passed me at the crossroads of Main and Washoe. Even so, it did neither of us any good. King Seventy-three was waiting for us at my cabin, leaning casually against the door, not even breathing hard.

It was a mite too much for the sheriff, I guess, and he did just what Sid MacIntyre had done—corkscrewed like a belly dancer and fainted dead away. I was too tired to faint. I just looked at Seventy-three and waved my hands and gulped air and then said:

"All right. What is it you want of me, cousin?"

"Step inside, cousin," Seventy-three said, and led the way. He took the chair and I flopped on the dynamite crate. "Now, I'm going to tell you the truth," he said. "Don't interrupt and you'll soon understand. I'm here not only to assure my own future, but yours as well." He snickered a little to himself and said, "Though you're dead about eight hundred years, you know."

That got me boiling again. "If I'm dead eight hundred years, the world's a cockeyed oyster in a bowl of soup!"

"Very well put," he said. "And closer to the truth than you imagine, though that's neither to the point nor applicable in any way to the immediate problem. First, I am not your cousin. I am your great-great-great-great . . . Well, suffice it to say that I'm your grandson, eight hundred years removed. You are my grandfather, eight hundred years removed. Is that clear?"

"No," I said. "The only thing around here that's clear is that you escaped from some loony bin."

"You're fighting the realization that I'm telling the truth, Timothy," he said. "You know how I got out of the cell, and how I stood up to your crude weapons, and how I met you and Punitive here without running a step."

I did know those things, and I got kinda cold in my vitals. Then I looked at him hard and almost fell off the crate.

"I believe you," I whispered, and wondered if I was going to faint like Sid and the sheriff. "Now that I see your duds real close, I believe you. There ain't never been a shirt nor a pair of britches clean as your'n. Go on and tell me your story, Grandson-eight-hundred-years-removed."

He shrugged. "I haven't much credit rating—money—in my era, Timothy. In fact, I can just about manage a yearly space-cruise to Trid Four, and even then I have to go out of season, when the Mana Drops are sparse and the Tree Dances are almost over and all the desirable and wealthy females are back on Earth."

"Tch, tch," I tched, and tried to look like I understood. He went on like I wasn't allowed to talk.

"I need more credit, much more credit, to live the kind of life that I find rewarding. So, about two years ago—my era—I sat down in a solo-room and gave the problem serious thought. Having been a student of history, and having majored in Earth Secondary, I soon computed where the solution lay. I began devoting my time to the construction of a Lowshien-Caruthers amplifier, despite

the government restrictions, and made original experiments into space-time warps."

I must've looked as dizzy as I felt, because he suddenly stopped.

Then he went on:

"Suffice it to say, Timothy, that I managed to get here. I am descended from you, and am your only living descendant in my era. In mineralogical history, the King Lode was the second greatest producer of silver on the American continent. But before it became so profitable, and founded one of America's greatest family fortunes, one which exists even in my day, it passed out of the hands of one Timothy King and ended up the property of one Schyler Lorsh."

"Never heard of this Lorsh," I said, and then got excited just from thinking I was going to hit it big. This Seventy-three wasn't so bad, after all. "Now that I know how good the shaft is," I spouted, "I'll have to be torn apart by wild jackasses to give up a single square inch!"

Seventy-three stood up. "Good! I have accomplished what I set out to do! The big strike will take place in exactly"—he mumbled to himself a minute, figuring hard—"in exactly three years and two days, taking into consideration your antiquated calendar, Timothy."

My face must've fallen a little because he slapped me on the back and said, "Chin up, old man, and any man of eight hundred years is certainly old enough—"

"Don't start that again," I muttered, and then perked up. "Oh, well, I'm only forty-one. I got plenty of time. I can have some fun, too, along the way."

"There's the danger!" Seventy-three said, his voice cracking like a bull-whip. "It was in a poker game, the histories relate, that you lost the deed to the King Lode. You bet it against something called the Red Pip, which is thought to have been another mine too unimportant to have been recorded, or else it was lost in the shuffle of time and our texts merely carry the name. So re-

member, no poker until after the big strike. Then you're safe. Once you're rich, you'll just naturally get greedy and build up my fortune."

I didn't like him saying *his* fortune, but I let it pass. After all, he was like a son to me.

"Hey," I said, "can you tell me who it is I'll marry? Because I got to marry to keep the line going until you."

"The texts refer to your wife only once, and then they call her Mrs. King."

"That's a big help," I muttered.

"I'm going now, Timothy," he said. "Remember, no gambling. And watch out for anyone named Schyler Lorsh and something he owns called the Red Pip." He reached into his pocket and fumbled around there, then reached up under his right arm and did something there, and then he sort of wavered like he was off in the desert and shimmering in the heat. "Good-by," he said, his voice weak.

"Wait!" I shouted. "What was it you did to make Sid MacIntyre—"

His fading face showed a grin. And then he wasn't there, and then he was, and then he wasn't. And he kept popping in and out all over the room.

"Only this," he said from far away, and was gone.

The sheriff came to about an hour later and got back to town and packed his warbag and lit out. No one ever heard of him again. Sid MacIntyre went on the longest drunk in Colorado history, and when he died he stayed on exhibition for over a year, he was that well-preserved in alcohol. I kept working my shaft, waiting out the three years and two days, and keeping out of trouble.

But I slipped up once. Knowing I was going to make all that cash, and seeing no reason why I shouldn't spend a little of it in advance. I borrowed a hundred silver cartwheels from Emery Sparks, the gambler in back of Mimi's Pleasure Palace. I gave the shaft as security, but that was all right since the three years would be up in less than a week and I

had eight months to pay Emery back and besides, he wasn't a hard man. Also, I stayed away from the cards.

I spent a little of that hundred on a store-bought suit and a little on a new pair of boots and the rest I took to Lola, the one with the tight dress and red hair. She thought sixty dollars was fine and we had a very nice time in her private quarters and I remember passing out cold somewhere around Thursday, or was it Friday? Anyway, just before passing out I was calling her my Red Pip, and before I could remember what that meant, I was gone.

When I woke up it was dark and I was in the clink. I yelled for the sheriff. His name was Curt Davies, an ornery hombre, not at all like old Anker.

He came to the cell and looked at me and said, "All right, what would you like for your last meal? They got a special in sidemeat and hominy at the Greasy Spoon. I can even get you a pint of liquor, seeing as how you're going to hang come morning."

"Hang!" I said, and laughed. "You got it wrong, Sheriff. I can't hang. I got to get rich and get married and begat and begat for eight hundred years until I begat King Seventy-three."

He blinked his eyes and said in a real sad voice. "It'll all be over in a few hours, Tim. Good thing, too, now that you've slipped your cable. Would you care to see a visitor? That redhead from Mimi's is outside, waiting to see you. She wants to say good-by."

I must've nodded, trying to clear my head of the hangover and the crazy talk, because in rushed Lola and she flung herself at the bars and bounced back and cried like a sick coyote.

"Tim, Tim!" she squalled. "I'm so sorry. Why'd you have to shoot that damn Emery Sparks? All he did was walk in my room to ask if you wanted to join the poker game. He didn't know we was busy at the moment."

"I shot him?" I said, and then shrugged. "Okay, so I shot him while under the influence. Now, how can I



get out of here and back to the diggings?"

She wiped her eyes and nodded and said, "I got your mortgage note—the one you gave Emery Sparks. Mimi got it from Emery's trunk since he owed her three hundred dollars that he took out in trade while he used the Palace. Mimi sold it to me for ten dollars. I'll keep it as a memento of our love."

"Our love be damned!" I said. "Give me that note. The mine's going to be worth millions."

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, he's slipped his cable! That mine ain't worth my old red dress!"

That brought it back. "I called you my Red Pip," I muttered. "And you got the shaft, now that I can't ever pay back the hundred cartwheels. But how does that explain it ending up with a man named Schyler Lorsh?"

Lola stopped crying long enough to say, "Lorsh? How do you know about him? He came into town just yesterday. He's opening up a real deluxe dress shop, on Main. I gotta figure how to get some money—"

She said more, but I didn't listen. I could see it now. She'd get a dress all right, and Lorsh would get the note and the King Lode.

Seventy-three's history books were a little off. I didn't lose the shaft playing poker. And the Red Pip wasn't what he thought it was. But where those books were really off was in my begating and begating. How could I begat if I hung?

I gave Lola a long look. "Honey," I said, "would you like to marry me? We could get Reverend Holmes over here right away."

Her mouth fell open and she gaped and then said, "Why should I do a thing like that, ruin my career and all, especially since you'll be a dead man in three hours?"

I shrugged. "When you find out," I said, "don't throw fits. You'll manage to fake the papers and prove I was your husband. And Lola, take good care of him, will you?"

"Him?" she said. "Him who?"

I turned around and flopped on the cot. Pretty soon she left and I could hear her telling the sheriff how I'd slipped my cable, and he agreeing with her in the same words. I guess they liked that phrase.

Anyway, I hope there's a place where I can meet Seventy-three. I wouldn't mind waiting eight hundred years if I could only be sure I'd finally get my hands around his neck!

---

## A WORD TO OUR READERS

**W**HAT is your favorite type of story? Detective? Western? Sports? Science Fiction? We've got them all here—because we believe most readers like to mix 'em up a bit, the same as they like to vary a lobster diet with a plate of ham and eggs or a steak now and then.

Here for the first time is a new magazine with a generous spattering of the four favorite types of action stories, all under the same cover and for the same price of admission. The four-part cover painting illustrates the wide variety of the contents and also gives you an idea of what the stories have chiefly in common—exciting action.

If there's a kind of story that isn't included but which you'd like to see in the future, we'd be pleased to hear from you about it. Meantime, may you find the diversified collection we offer in this issue of **STORIES ANNUAL** a very mellow blend.

—The Editor



By **ROBERT  
STEPHENS**



# **HAWK** **in the sunlight**

**I**T WAS still dark when Billy Young heard Doc Cummings' Ford go by out on the road, heading for the Clayton ranch and going fast. Billy lay rigid in his bed, feeling a sick dread rise in his throat. It had finally come. They had been saying for days that old Jim Clayton was going to die,

but Billy hadn't really believed it till now, hearing the doctor's car race through the dawn stillness. Jim Clayton would die, and Billy would be alone.

He got up and pulled on his jeans, shivering at the cold touch of the rivets against his bare flesh, and went downstairs in his

---

*He was about to lose the best friend he'd*

*ever had, and find a new one: self respect*

stocking feet so as not to wake Cal Durham. Cal would be mad when he found Billy had gone without doing the milking. Billy could imagine him saying to Emma, "It's the Indian in him. We oughtn't to have taken him in. Should have known you can't depend on a halfbreed."

Billy went out by the kitchen door, letting it close softly behind him. He stood for a moment on the steps, watching the hard, bright stars of the high country, and breathing the still air veined with the smells of grass and pines and distant snow. Then he caught up a horse and took the short-cut across Two Sleep Creek to the Clayton ranch. He let the horse pick the familiar trail, and after a few minutes he could hear the creek, like a party of people talking in soft, excited voices. At the ford he stopped to let the horse drink, and listening to the noise of the creek he remembered that it was just here, a year ago, that he had told Jim Clayton about his trouble.

Clayton had been showing him how to shoot the old muzzle-loading Hawken rifle, and talking about maybe going up to Windy Knob some day to shoot the grizzly that lived there. It was the last grizzly in this part of the country, and the old man had wanted to hunt him before the city people came and ganged up on him with their shiny automatic rifles.

Billy hadn't cared about the grizzly. All that morning they had been calling him "Injun" at school. He had finally blurted it all out to the old man, sobbing.

"I wish I wasn't a halfbreed," he had shouted, his eyes stinging with angry tears. "Cal Durham says breeds are shiftless and mean—and yellow!" He stopped then, shaking and ashamed, and covered his face with his hands.

**J**IM CLAYTON'S voice came quiet and gentle as leaves drifting on the smoky winds of autumn. "Folks mean you no harm," Jim said. "If a halfbreed's a man, he's as good as anybody else and people know it. But he's got to grow up quicker than other boys, seems like."

Billy said, "What do I do to be a man?"

"Why, it'll come sure enough," Clayton

said, smiling. "There's been others in your fix that've made out fine."

Since then Billy had thought a lot about what it meant to be a man, and he had hoped somehow to learn it from Jim Clayton. But now Jim was dying, and Billy was alone.

He shook his head violently and urged the horse into the creek, and when it scrambled up the farther bank he saw the peaks of the Tetons dark against the violet sky and then the yellow lamplight in the windows of the log ranch house. In front of the dark mass of the house he could see cars with a light' rime of frost on their tops. The old man's relatives, come to wait for him to die.

Billy slid down from the horse and went to the door. He opened it and shivered a little in the sudden warmth, not looking at the faces that turned toward him.

Across the room near the stone fireplace the old man lay in his heavy oak bed, his sunken eyes shadowed by the heavy brows. Doc Cummings sat hunched forward on a straight chair by the bed, his hands hanging between his knees, seeming to doze. Billy was glad Cummings was there. Everybody said he was a fine doctor, and how lucky it was that he'd come back to the mountains. He walked to the foot of the bed, hearing the low hum of voices murmuring that it must be a blow to the boy . . . like a father to him . . . poor, halfbreed orphan. . . .

The doctor looked up at Billy and nodded. He was a broad-shouldered, powerful man with a hooked nose and a dark, brooding face. "It may be he won't know you," the doctor said.

Billy nodded and leaned forward over the foot of the bed. "Jim!" he called softly.

The old man turned his head slightly. The sunken eyes glowed in the yellow face made yellower by the lamplight. He began to speak, and Billy strained to catch the indistinct words. The old man was living the past, talking of beaver streams and forgotten caches along the Snake and the Siskadou. The dark suited men and women in the room coughed and shifted uncomfortably as the old man talked of the tumbling green and white water of the high country streams, and the buffalo that had been a mighty thun-

der over the land, and of the great bear, Old Ephraim, the terrible grizzly.

Clayton broke off suddenly, and Billy's hands tightened on the polished oak of the bed. Doc Cummings put his fingers lightly on the almost fleshless wrist.

The dying man roused and sighed deeply. He said, "If I had me some grizzly fat, now. . . ." His voice was clear and strong and he glanced around the room, seeming to recognize faces. "With bear fat I might make me some medicine and maybeso get well." Billy felt his heart beating slow and heavy. The old man was looking directly into his eyes.

Billy said, "Jim!" but the old eyes veiled over and Clayton was still except for the faint rising and falling of his chest under the blankets.

Billy looked at the doctor and whispered, "How long?"

"Can't tell," Cummings said. "Maybe a day. Maybe an hour."

**O**UTSIDE the sky had lightened, paling the glow of the lamps. A pan clanged in the kitchen and Billy could smell bacon frying. He left the bed and went outside.

Against the blue and silver of the east the mountains stood out sharply, hung with the mists of morning. Billy stared at the mountains, thinking. The old man had recognized him, if only for an instant. And he'd asked for grizzly fat. The old man's mind must have been wandering when he said that, for if Doc Cummings' medicines wouldn't help, bear fat wasn't likely to. But Jim had asked, and Jim was the only friend he'd ever had. The grizzly was waiting up there on Windy Knob and Billy knew what he had to do.

He thought first of going home to get Cal's thirty-thirty rifle, but he knew there'd be no use trying that. He went around the house to the barn and tried the door to Clayton's gear shed. It was unlocked, and Billy walked in.

The Hawken rifle stood in its place in the corner, in an oiled leather scabbard, and near it hung the old man's possible sack with bullets and powder and patches.

Billy took the sack and the gun and went

back around the house, ducking whenever he passed a window. He tied the rifle in its scabbard to his saddle and slung the sack over his shoulder. It would be nice to have a repeater, he thought, but anyway, maybe the old muzzle loader would be better for this job. Its long, heavy, fifty caliber slug hit pretty hard. He squinted against the first misty slantings of the sun and swung into the saddle.

The sun was out strong, glowing in the red and gold of the cottonwoods and aspens as Billy started up the steep part of the trail. The climbing was hard and steady, and every few minutes he stopped to let the horse blow. After an hour's climb the trail levelled off and Billy came out on a sage-dotted plain, swept by a cold, steady wind. In the distance he could see the silhouette of Windy Knob.

He got down from the horse and took the rifle from its scabbard. He squatted with his back against a juniper and rummaged through the buckskin sack. He measured black powder from the flask, adding a little for good measure; the old man always said this rifle would stand a right smart of powder. He felt in the bag and found a heavy slug, greasy to the touch. He fitted the patch and stood up to ram the bullet home against the charge. A cloud drifted across the sun and Billy felt the chill of the wind cut through his jacket. He looked out over the plain to the eroded butte that was Windy Knob, where the great bear lived.

"Old Ephraim," he said aloud. He thought of the tales of grizzlies that the old man had told him, and felt fear sudden and heavy, like a cold stone in his stomach. He wet his lips with his tongue. This was a crazy thing to do. Shooting a bear wouldn't help Jim Clayton, and it was crazy to hunt grizzly with an old iron-barrelled muzzle loader. The round dome of Windy Knob took on a sudden menace, and Billy swallowed against the salt-and-metal taste in his mouth. He looked at the Knob for a long time and finally turned his back on it.

He turned to face Doc Cummings. The doctor stood beside one of the Clayton saddle horses, solid and massive, watching Billy.

"Figured I'd catch you about here," Doc said.

Billy said, "You'd ought to be with Jim. What do you want here?"

Cummings said, "I've come to take you back. All bears are dangerous, and grizzlies are just plain poison. Let's be moving."

Billy looked at Windy Knob in the distance and back at Doc. "No," he said. "Jim said he wanted bear fat. I aim to get him some."

"It won't help," Doc said. "You know that. He's dying and bear fat won't help."

"I've got to do it," Billy said. "Jim wants it." He looked at the ground and said, "I'll tell you something. Jim says I'm as good as any other man, even if I am a halfbreed. Nobody but Jim ever told me that."

Doc Cummings' face went cold and harsh. "You get on your horse," he said. "We're going back." He came toward Billy.

Billy half swung the Hawken's muzzle toward Cummings.

He said, "Get back, Doc."

The doctor stood motionless, with the wind ruffling his black hair, watching Billy.

"I've got to do it," Billy said.

**D**OC CUMMINGS walked back to his horse and rested his hand on a saddlebag. "Maybe I figured that," he said. "Maybe I figured you wouldn't come back. So. . . ." He opened the bag and took out a long knife. He held it out to Billy, handle forward. "Take it. It's the best steel."

Billy took the knife and saw that the handle was worked in beads, Indian design. The figure of an Indian god was outlined in pieces of turquoise.

"Thanks," Billy said.

Cummings got on his horse and glanced out toward Windy Knob. Then he rode to the edge of the plain and disappeared with the slant of the trail. Billy put the knife in his belt and slid the loaded Hawken back into the scabbard. He mounted and rode toward Windy Knob.

Out on the plain the traveling was easy until the trail began to thread through rough country broken by ravines and ridges. The trail took all Billy's attention and he did not

notice how close he was to the Knob until he came over the last ridge and found himself almost in the shadow of the butte. Here the air was still, and after the constant rush of the wind the silence pressed against his eardrums.

Beyond the shoulder of the butte, a hundred yards away, he saw the mouth of a box canyon. It was choked with brush, but a trail of sorts led into it.

He tied his horse securely a few yards from the entrance to the canyon and took the Hawken rifle from its scabbard. A cloud of tiny flies whined in his ears and he brushed at them impatiently. He pushed forward into the canyon, parting the brush with the rifle barrel. He had gone only a few steps when his foot struck something hard. He looked down and saw a bone, the sun-whitened leg bone of some large animal. Sweat dropped from his armpits and ran cold down his sides. He struck at the flies that whined in his ears and went on, coming suddenly into a small clearing.

Then he saw the den, a black slash in the rock wall of the canyon. There were many bones scattered around the opening, in a rough semicircle, some old and bleached, others with hide and sinew still clinging to them.

Billy began to back away, licking his lips, and all the old man had ever told him about grizzlies tumbled together in his mind, stories of men disembowelled by one careless sweep of a massive paw. *Quick they are, as cats, in spite of being so big . . . once you've heard that growl you won't never forget it—Wagh! . . . and scared of nothin', nothin' at all.*

Billy stared at the black entrance of the den and felt terror grip him, terror like nothing he had ever known.

He turned and ran, letting the brush whip his face and tear at his jacket. He reached the mouth of the canyon and stopped, sobbing for breath and cluchting the rifle so hard his hand ached.

**A**S HIS breath returned the panic ebbed away, and he knew he would have to go back into the canyon. He knew surely and clearly that it was the only thing that mat-



tered. He had to go back. His fingers touched the beaded handle of the knife at his belt. Even Doc had realized he had to kill that bear. It didn't matter now whether it was crazy or not, or whether it would help Jim, or even if he himself got killed trying. He had to go back.

He clenched his teeth hard and started back for the black cave and the circle of bleached bones. He had gone only part of the way when the sound came from behind him, a thin, high, animal scream of terror, and after it a snarl like nothing he had ever imagined. Billy whirled around and began to run toward the sound, holding the rifle in front of him. When he rounded the corner of the butte he stopped, his stomach shrinking and the blood flowing away from his arms, leaving them numb. He looked at the grizzly and began to tremble, unable to move.

The bear had risen on its haunches over the carcass of a horse, the horse Doc had been riding. It was gray, almost white. Foamy blood dripped from the enormous jaws. The great head swung slowly from side to side, testing the wind.

The Hawken rifle had become almost too heavy to hold. Billy tried to lift it, forcing his muscles to obey. He saw Doc Cummings come around a big rock, on the run. The bear dropped on all fours and Doc began to back away.

It flashed through Billy's mind that Doc had no gun, not even a knife now.

The grizzly sprang over the carcass of the horse, lightly, with immense and terrible ease, and moved toward Cummings.

"Bear!" Billy screamed. "Old Grizzly Bear! Here!"

He watched, as in a dream, as the great bear slowed and swung heavily toward him. It came in a lumbering rush, huge beyond belief, fangs glistening in the bloody mouth.

Billy held the rifle against his shoulder and swung it level with the grizzly's chest. Through the roaring in his ears he could hear Doc Cummings' hoarse shouts. Then, as he tried to steady the gun he could hear his own voice, screaming, snarling, the grizzly rose on its hind legs and reached out. Billy jerked the rifle upward and pulled

the trigger. The Hawken slammed back hard against his shoulder. The bear twisted and seemed to hang for an instant in the billowing white smoke, immense against the peaks and the sky.

Billy stumbled back, raising the gun above his head with both hands. He threw it at the blood-smeared jaws, but the bear caught it with a sweep of its paw and smashed it against a rock. Billy tried to turn and run, conscious of Doc Cummings somewhere near him. A hammer blow knocked him sideways and threw him against the ground. He kicked out and threw his arms over his face as claws ripped at him. Automatically his hand moved to the knife at his belt. He saw Doc Cummings come at the bear from the side, striking with a rock clenched in his hand. He got to his feet as Doc stumbled and fell backward. The bear sank on its haunches, bellowing and reaching out for Doc.

Billy moved forward, his feet feeling light, propelled by something beyond himself, deafened by the rasping continuous roar of the bear.

Blood streamed down over his face, half blinding him as he yelled and raised the long knife. He plunged the knife into the shaggy neck and the rank smell of the grizzly came strong in his nostrils. The bear moved convulsively, knocking Billy back and wrenching the knife from his hand. It sank slowly forward, coughing, and rolled on its side.

Billy crawled to it and jerked the knife loose, his own blood spilling from his face to mingle with the great bear's blood.

"Old Grizzly Bear," Billy said, "Old Grandfather Bear."

**D**OC CUMMINGS was beside him now, gripping his shoulder and lifting him to his feet. He began to retch violently and Doc led him away from the rank, sickening smell of the bear and made him lie down.

"Doc," Billy said. "You trailed me." He raised the long knife and tried to get up. "Got to cut off some fat for Jim. Jim wants that fat."

"Jim's dead," Cummings said, his voice hard. "Died just after you left." He pushed

*(Concluded on page 101)*

# MAN FROM MARS?



*This is an actual photo of a SEE Magazine photographer taking underwater pictures of shark-hunting off the coast of Mexico.*

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Lycius paid a  
heavy price for  
tinkering with time . . .

## *Bannion's Cave*

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

**I** DON'T want to be seen talking to you," the sorcerer said. He looked nervously up and down Dragonetsa's main street. "In my political work. . . ."

"Your political work?"

Lycius replied. He raised his bushy eyebrows. "Is that what you call your being sergeant-at-arms of the Middle-Aged Communists' League?"

"I'm serious," Peter answered. "You're considered an unreliable element."

"I can't help that. The prince and I want to get to Paris."

"Don't we all?—I mean, what's that got to do with me?"

"We think you can help us."

"I tell you, I don't want to be seen talking to you," Peter said. "I'm just beginning to be politically reliable. I can't jeopardize it by being with a man who—"

"Is a werewolf?"

"Nonsense. That's got nothing to do with it. That's just superstition, an outworn relic of the dark night of ignorance and bourgeois slavery. The reason I don't want to be seen with you is that you're too thick with the prince."

Peter looked disapprovingly at Lycius for a moment longer. Then he turned and began to walk away. The older man caught at his sleeve.

"Wait," he said. He leaned forward and whispered something to Peter. The blond man blinked and chewed at his lower lip.

"You wouldn't," he said slowly. "Not a thing like that."

"I would, though," Lycius answered. "I'm desperate."

"It's blackmail. What do you want?"

"Come to my house tonight, around dusk."

Peter frowned. He looked at the shadow of the local mountain, which, as the sun westered, was beginning to spill over into the village street. Dragonetsa was located among spurs and foothills of the Transylvanian Alps. "All right," he said. "After sundown. Mind, I don't approve of this."

**L**YCIUS' preparations for the ex-sorcerer's visit were simple. He got out three bottles of the best wine he had been able to salvage from the prince's cellar, and two glasses. He also closed

the shutters and put another birch log on the fire.

Peter arrived a little before dark. He was in a bad temper. "I don't know why you insisted on this interview," he said as soon as he was inside the door. "Suppose I were to threaten to denounce you to the Central Committee? What then?"

Lycius laughed. "For being a werewolf? You'd never make it stick. Everybody knows that lycanthropy is nothing but superstition, just as you said. If they believe in it, they don't dare admit it anymore. Whereas if I told them you'd been practicing sorcery again—"

"Oh, I know," Peter answered bitterly. "Exploiting the age-old superstitions of the oppressed peasantry. Exploiting! All I ever got for all the work I did for the people was an occasional chicken, and half the time they didn't bring them when they'd promised them. I don't know what they did to those chickens to make them so tough. I had to boil them for hours and hours to get broth."

"Too bad," Lycius replied. "You're doing better now, though, aren't you? How about a drink?"

"Thanks," Peter said, accepting the glass. He sniffed appreciatively at the heavy golden stuff. "Looks like sweet Szamarodny. Long time since I've had any. Your health."

When the glass was empty, he said, "Yes, I am doing a little better. I got two acres of land in the distribution, and people say hello to me when they meet me in the street. That's why I want to be careful. I'd hate to have to go back to being a sorcerer again."

"Have a little more wine, Lycius suggested. "I like to have it drunk by someone who appreciates it." He filled the glass. "Naturally, you feel that way about sorcery. But I imagine you still have your gifts."

"Um." Peter shifted his position and stretched his long legs out to the fire. "Listen, Lycius, why are you so chummy with the prince? You can't be fond of him; nobody could. And as far as ow-

ing him any loyalty goes, he only kept you around the palace because he liked to hear the girls giggle and scream when he told them one of his retainers was a genuine werewolf.

"Why don't you ditch him? You could go to the village soviet and tell them frankly you'd had a change of heart and wanted to be a useful, productive social element. It would take a little time, but you could get to be considered reliable."

Lycius said nothing. Peter looked at him keenly. "Has he got something on you?" he asked after a minute.

Lycius' massive head inclined a fraction of an inch in what might have been assent. "Oh, I see," Peter said slowly. "Somebody you ate—is that it?"

"I'm not saying," Lycius answered. "But believe me, Peter, the prince and I want to get to Paris. All we need is money."

"Why ask me? I'm not running a printing press. Besides, what happened to the jewels the prince used to have? The Belodna jewels were famous. What became of them?"

"Well, there was a singer in Bucures-ti, and a dancer in Beograd, and an actress and a couple of entertainers in Zagrab. There aren't any family jewels any more. More wine?"

"Thanks. I don't care if I do. It's wonderful, smooth stuff."

Lycius pulled out the second bottle's cork. "We thought you could help us get away," he said when Peter had half emptied his glass.

"How? Do you think that if I had access to money I'd ever have been so poor?"

Lycius sighed. "Don't you have knowledge of buried treasure, underground hoards, that sort of stuff?"

"I'm supposed to. I never was any good at it. I can't even find water with a virgin hazel rod half the time."

**T**HERE was a silence. Lycius kept looking at his guest and then away again. He threw another birch log on the

fire. And as soon as it grew empty, he replenished Peter's glass.

The fire was beginning to die down into glowing coals when Peter said abruptly, "'Jever lose anything? I mean anything valuable?"

Lycius looked surprised. "Why, yes. Once I lost a bundle of hundred lei notes, and somebody stole my ruby stickpin a couple of years ago. What about it? Everybody's lost valuable things."

"Don' mean like that," Peter answered waspishly. The second bottle of wine was nearly gone, and he had been drinking at the rate of three glasses to Lycius' one. "Mean like—say you had a valuable glass bottle, V'netian work. It gets broke one day. All gone, all of a sudden. You can hardly believe it. I mean lost like that."

"Oh." Lycius seemed to think. As if absent-mindedly, he drew the cork out of the last bottle and poured wine into the sorcerer's glass. "There was my wolf collar," he said finally. "The prince had it made especially for me to wear when I was, you know, changed. It got burned up when the peasants set fire to the palace. I looked all through the ashes for it, but I couldn't find anything. It was an awfully hot fire."

"Val'uble?"

"Oh, yes. The prince had it made by a jeweller in Bucuresti. There were six diamonds set in a chain of flexible gold, and a clasp with an emerald. Exquisite. I suppose the gold was vaporized and the diamonds, being carbon, burned. I liked that collar a lot."

"How long ago?"

"How long ago was it burned up? Let's see, the peasants started revolting six years ago, and it was a while after that. About five years. Don't you remember the fire yourself?"

"Not ri' now," Peter said, speaking with some difficulty. "... Five years ago. Ought be still lots left."

Lycius poked up the fire. In the resultant burst of light he studied Peter's face. The sorcerer had slumped back in his armchair and was breathing through



his mouth. He opened his eyes and looked at Lycius briefly. "More wine," he demanded. He held out his glass.

Lycius poured with a cautious hand. Peter drank. He said, "You go to Bannion's Cave, unh, tomorrow—it'll be full moon—t'morrow night."

"Bannion's cave? Where's that?"

"You know. Up on hill. Outside town. Near woods."

"Near the old ruins?"

Peter laughed soundlessly. "Not so ol'," he said thickly, his face twisting. "Not so ol' you think."

"But—what's the Cave got to do with my wolf collar?"

Peter leaned forward. He poked his host in the diaphragm with an admonitory finger. "Collar in Cave," he said, laughing. "Ri' time of year. Moonlit night."

"The collar was burned up." Lycius said doubtfully.

Peter shook his head. "Things don' get lost, really. Not sudden like that. They wear out."

Lycius rubbed his hands together. "Well, tomorrow night would be a good time to go," he conceded. "Everybody in Dragonetsa will be away, having a socialist harvest competition with the people in Bela-jiu, and they'll stay late. But—" His voice was still unconvinced.

Peter picked up the bottle and slopped wine into his glass. "Collar be there," he said. He drank, and licked wine from his chin. "Thing lost, gone sudden, fall in time stream. Get wash up in cave. Word advice." His face twisted up in a giggle. "Don' cut yourself!"

Lycius got to his feet. He stood in front of the hearth, his back to the fire, warming himself. "I'll try it," he said finally. "But listen, Peter. Will it be okay?"

"Hunnnnnnh?"

"I said, will it be okay? This isn't one of those three wishes deals, is it, where no matter what I do I come out wrong?"

Peter's lips moved. Waveringly he pushed himself up by the arms of the

chair until he stood upright. He took a step forward, and fell flat on his face.

AS THEY toiled up the rocky path that led to Bannion's Cave, the thoughts of Lycius and the prince were astonishingly similar. Both of them were thinking about the wolf collar, and with very little scepticism as to its existence; both of them were thinking about weapons, the prince about the pistol under his cape. Lycius about the sheath knife in his pocket; and each had decided to dispose of the body of the other by dragging it inside Bannion's Cave.

The full moon shone in a cloudless sky.

They reached the cave somewhat winded. The prince dusted off a flat rock with a fold of his cape, and sat down on it. He said, "Don't be long. It's cold out here. You've got the flashlight?" He had a small, sullen face.

"Yes." Lycius lingered for a moment, as if he wanted his feudal lord to wish him luck, but the prince was looking the other way. He switched on the flashlight. He stooped and entered the cave.

At first it looked very much like any cave. There were fruit pits by the entrance and crusts of bread, as if someone had been having a picnic. It seemed to be a shallow cave, rather than a deep one.

Lycius moved forward cautiously, sweeping the uneven floor from side to side with the beam from his flashlight. He heard a faint squeaking, a noise which he attributed to bats. As he got farther inside the opening, he saw that there was a rift in the rear wall.

He hesitated, and then moved toward it. The cave was not quite dark; there was a generalized bluish-green luminosity coming from somewhere. Even the jagged edges of the rift were luminous.

Lycius was sweating. He rubbed his hands on his trouser legs to dry them. For a moment his physiological agitation was so great that he wondered whether he was on the brink of "changing." Then he collected himself. He even wondered why he had been so upset. He stepped

into the rift.

His first impression was that he had plunged into water. Everywhere the blue-green light quavered away from him, and his body felt the mingled buoyancy and pressure of a watery medium. He brought one hand up to his eyes, slowly, and the flesh seemed to waver along it in an uneven luminous line.

Lycius breathed deeply. His legs felt weak. Once more he wondered if he was going to change. This time he rather hoped that he would. Changing itself was a physically distressing experience, of course; but there was something refreshing about the complete obliteration of personality it gave. And if he turned into a wolf he wouldn't have to go on in and investigate the cave. The light swam confusingly around him: the only solid surface was under his feet. The missing wolf collar seemed unimportant and far away.

In the distance, the light wriggled away in fish-tail glances. Lycius hesitated. He was not so much afraid, actually, as confused and oppressed. The mocking face of the sorcerer came before him for an instant with the vividness of a hallucination. He sent the beam of the flashlight out straight in front of him. It met nothing, though the light was surprisingly yellowish and opaque. Lycius licked his lips. Then he began to walk forward. Each step was slow and effortful.

The sandy floor was as level as a beach. But it was dotted, from time to time, with lumps of corally, grayish stuff. They were of all sizes. Lycius prodded one near him with his foot. To his wonder, it disintegrated at once into a hundred small pieces that drifted gently down to the floor. He touched the next lump with his fingers. It felt dry and papery. He rubbed it lightly, and it too fell into bits.

**H**E WAS seized with sudden panic. Growling, he turned toward the direction from which he had come. To his vast relief, the rift was still visible, a

dark and jagged outline against the glowing, shifting bluish light.

But the contrast between what he had come to find and what he was finding still bothered him. There seemed to be nothing in Bannion's Cave except the lumps of grayish stuff. As he moved on, he saw that the lumps were becoming more symmetrical. Once or twice there were contours that suggested right angles—a box, a backless chair.

Was this what Peter had meant when he insisted that things didn't get lost suddenly? That they *wore* out? They came to this place, and slowly time—or was it time?—eroded them. There ought, in that case, to be still something left of his collar. But a cave where such things happened was hardly a wholesome place.

Lycius moved onward. High-strung, like all werewolves, he was growing more nervous with every wavering step. When something struck against the calf of his leg with a high *ping* he almost shrieked.

He looked around for the source of the *ping*, and found nothing. There was only the greenish light quivering between him and the floor. But something certainly had struck him; he'd felt it. If he ever got out of this cave. . . .

He raised his hand to his eyes and looked at it with feverish attention. He was hoping to find the sprinkling of coarse grayish hairs on its back that would indicate the onset of the comfortable animal oblivion of lupinity. Moaning, he put it down again. These things never happened when you wanted them to. It remained obstinately a human hand.

Lycius' nervousness grew to a peak. He was just about to turn back when he saw his wolf collar. It was lying on the sandy floor beside a half-eroded object that looked like, and probably was, the gold watch Lycius had lost when he was fifteen. (A mule had kicked him in the pocket where he was wearing it.) The gold of the collar looked a little dusty, but the diamonds and the emerald seemed to be in fine shape

Lycius grabbed at it. To his relief, it felt perfectly solid and real. He put it in his pocket. He turned and made his way back to the rift in the cave as quickly as he could. It was a slow job. When he was in the anteroom of the cave again, he rested for a moment. Then he brushed hard at his shoulders and neck. He had the feeling that he was brushing certain superfluous seconds and minutes away from them.

The prince was waiting for him outside the cave. "You certainly took your time," he said irritably. "It's cold out here. Well. Did you get it?"

"Yes," Lycius answered. "I'm all right," he added in an unsteady voice. The observation was more to reassure himself than the prince, who was paying little attention to him.

The prince held out his hand. "Let's see it," he demanded.

Lycius gave him the collar. He was feeling a profound nervous exhaustion. Let the prince go until later, he decided—when he was feeling more himself, he'd handle him. He only hoped his feudal lord wouldn't start anything.

**T**HE prince examined the collar. The diamonds glittered fretfully in the moonlight. "What's wrong with the gold?" he demanded after a moment. There was suspicion in his voice.

Lycius shook his head. "I don't know."

The prince was staring at the object. "There's some sort of insect on it," he declared slowly. He dusted at the collar with his cape.

There was a tinkle and a *ping!* Something fell on the path. The prince put out his neat little foot and made a crushing motion. When he raised his shoe, there was a momentary glitter like rock crystal against the path.

"Some sort of winged ant," the prince said, still staring. "The gold looks pitted. The diamonds seem to be all right, though. Well. . . ."

He put the collar in his pocket. He paused for a fraction of a second. Then

he pulled his pistol out from under his cape and fired point blank at Lycius.

It was here that the wisdom of the werewolf's choice of weapons became evident. A pistol, even when loaded with silver bullets, can always be unloaded and blanks substituted. A knife, on the other hand, remains a knife.

Lycius stood showing his teeth while the prince emptied the gun at him. When the prince had chucked it aside, screaming, Lycius closed in on him. With a residue of strength he had never imagined he possessed, he stuck his knife in under the prince's ribs.

Distastefully, Lycius stooped and took the collar out of his pocket. He began to push and tug the prince's body into the cave. He tried to avoid the sticky patches, but he couldn't help getting some blood on himself. He had quite forgotten Peter's warning, and if he had recalled it, he might not have seen how it was apposite. After all, he hadn't cut *himself*.

He got the body into the cave somehow, automatically avoiding the neighborhood of the rift. When he had finished he was really exhausted. He leaned against the cave wall, his knees bent, while he panted and tried to recover himself. In his concentration on breathing, he even closed his eyes.

He was recalled to reality by an insistent tickling sensation in his wrist. He brushed at it, seeing nothing, but his fingers met a hard shell. It must be one of the insects the prince had seen on the gold of the collar.

He stood upright, shakily. It was time to be leaving. As he moved toward the cave's opening, he turned for a last look at the prince. What he saw made his heart plunge and flutter. There was something wrong about the prince's face.

He had to walk quite close, on tiptoe, before he saw what it was. Most of the skin of the prince's face was gone. The white bone was gleaming up at him.

Lycius stood perfectly still for a moment. His mind was busy with summa-

tion. The eroded objects in the deep part of the cave, the winged ant on the gold, Peter's warning, the naked bone of the prince's face, the tickling in his own wrist. The blood. The tickling in his wrist.

Lycius stood motionless while his heart gave one more thud. Then he turned and ran.

**T**HE moon rose higher.

Peter, alone of the inhabitants of Dragonetsa, was in residence. The rest were still in Bela-jiu, recuperating, after the fatigues of the socialist harvest competition, with fruit punch and a lecture on "Socialist Planning In Rural Cooperatives."

Peter, intent on political reliability and social respectability, had labored manfully all day beside the others at harvesting, despite his grinding hang-over. But when dusk had come he had decided that enough was ample. Now he was asleep on his bed in Dragonetsa, snoring happily. He had not even bothered to take off his clothes.

He was awakened by Lycius shouting. The alarm in the werewolf's voice cut through Peter's vacuous dreams like a burning knife. Before Lycius had had time to yell his name twice, Peter had crammed his feet in his shoes and was at the window sill.

"What's a matter?" he asked sleepily.

Lycius held the wolf collar out toward him. He was almost too winded to speak and his face, except for the dark patches where he had smeared his hands, was ghastly white. "—After me!" he gasped. He made a gesture in the direction from which he had come.

Peter, following the motion, stuck his head out over the sill. His jaw dropped. For a second he could only stare.

Between the two men and the moon, moving very rapidly, there was advancing a great glittering cloud. It seemed to be made of thousands upon thousands of tiny individual motes, so that its edges flickered dizzily, and it glinted angrily, like frost or hail, in

the light of the full moon. A high, unmusical humming came from it.

"T-t-time t-t-termites!" Peter stammered. He clutched the window sill. "Did you cut yourself?" he demanded of Lycius.

The latter indicated the patches of blood on his clothing, his face, his hands. "Prince's," he gasped.

Peter looked at him distractedly. Then he snatched the wolf collar from Lycius' flaccid hand and dove out of the opposite window of the house.

He felt no particular compunction at his desertion of Lycius. Paris beckoned; and after all, nothing he could do would help the werewolf. He felt perfectly sure that both Lycius and the village of Dragonetsa itself had only a few seconds of temporal existence remaining to them. He saw no reason to stay and share their fate.

Lycius, left alone, was changing. After so many false alarms and baffled hopes, he was taking on the wolf shape at last. His jaw grew shallower, his snout lengthened. He dropped down on all fours, the coarse wolf pelt sprouting on him.

The time termites, in a vast glittering cloud, covered him up. . . .

Peter's prognostications had been wrong in one particular. A werewolf, when changed, is immune to anything except silver bullets. Thus it was that the moon, some three-quarters of an hour later, though it looked down upon a Dragonetsa that would have been of interest only to archaeologists, found a Lycius who was reasonably intact.

Reasonably intact. A casual observer would have said that he was all right, except for a few bald patches on his muzzle and paws. (The bald patches represented the places where the prince's blood had been smeared on him in his human form.) A closer observer would have hesitated. The shifting brilliance of the werewolf's eyes looked bad, and so did his nervous trembling. A dog in the same condition would have been on the edge of convulsions or running fits.

**L**YCIUS was a werewolf. In his narrow skull were confused memories of homicide—the prince—of danger—the time termites—and of loss—Peter's taking the wolf collar. Overriding them all was the memory of the intolerable tickling the wings of the time termites had inflicted on him.

He hesitated, cringing and trying to lick his eroded fur. The neural itch was maddening. He howled, choked, and howled again. The moon rose higher. Lycius slunk off into the shadow of the dust mound that had been the City Hall of the Soviets.

He waited. When the President of the Electrical Co-operative returned from Bela-jiu, about ten o'clock, Lycius slid out of the darkness and bit him in the leg.

He bit the Secretary-Treasurer of the Tractor Pool, a woman named Popovici-Banatseanu, and a rather mature Young Pioneer before the other villagers could come to their senses enough to drive him off with sticks and rocks. The people he bit had to have the Pasteur treatment and anti-tetanus serum, flown in from Bucuresti; between that and the total destruction of Dragonetsa, it was nearly a month before anybody had time to organize a wolf hunt.

When they did, they were efficient about it. But they hunted him for three days, and all they found was a handful of wolf tracks. One of the older men murmured "Lycius," when he saw them, but the others hushed him up. The shushee muttered, "I suppose *he* was an agent of Anglo-American imperialism,

too," (a reference to the official explanation of Dragonetsa's sudden destruction), but he was careful to mutter too softly to be heard.

They didn't catch the werewolf, then or ever. They did drive him from his usual haunts in the forest far up onto the mountain. He did no further harm, and pretty soon they were too busy rebuilding Dragonetsa to have any time for wolf hunting.

Lycius remained a slightly demented werewolf. His nerves kept itching. He drifted into Bannion's Cave one day, past the prince's skeleton, and seemed to like the dampness and the dark, though the bones appeared to bother him.

At present he is living in a sort of symbiosis with the time termites. He kills small animals on the side of the mountain, eats what he likes of them, and brings the residue to Bannion's Cave for the time termites. It looks like a ritual of propitiation.

He is not particularly unhappy. He always wanted to go to Paris; and about half the time he is convinced that Bannion's Cave, which is rather high up on the mountain, is really the Eiffel Tower and that the glittering of light on the termites' wings is the lamps of the boulevards. As such moments he rolls on the cave floor and whines with sheer pleasure.

But the symbiosis is an uneasy one. The time termites don't bother him overtly. But he has only been living in the cave for a couple of months, and his fur has already turned quite white.

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by  
**FLETCHER  
FLORA**



## THEY'RE DEAD AT COOPERSTOWN

**O**LD SOUTHSIDE DRUM was setting us down. Going into the bottom of the eighth with a 1-0 margin, he'd faced exactly twenty-one batters. The minimum. Back in the third, Jackie Shannon had coaxed our only walk and was rubbed out at second on a quick double play. In the fifth,

Dave Burns had reached first on an error and was cut down stealing. That's all. No hits. No runs.

It was funny. Because, you see, we had the highest team batting average in either league, and old Southside was supposed to be through. It was pretty generally known

*It looked like a no-hitter for good old Southside Drum!*

that this would be his last season in the majors. He was winding up his third consecutive losing year, and this time the number in the loss column was bigger than it'd ever been. He'd been around a long time. Too long, maybe. Fifteen years. He'd hit the majors when he was twenty-five.

It was a pleasure to watch the old man work. Slow and easy. Smooth as grease. He didn't have the snap, the blinding speed, that had made him the greatest in the game in his younger days. But he was hitting the spots with uncanny accuracy, and he had plenty of junk. His curve was working like a trained seal, and once in a while, when he was behind the batter, he smoked one through with something like the old speed.

As we went down in order in the bottom of the eighth, a big hush settled over the fans as they began to realize what was making. You know. The big hush that every pitcher hopes will come his way just once in his lifetime. The big hush that means there's a no-hitter just around the corner.

We were quiet on the bench too. The game didn't matter much to us. We were out in front at the tail end of the season, with the last contender mathematically eliminated. All we had to do was to coast into the pennant. But old Southside was playing for the final curtain. It was his last major league appearance. With the season so far gone, he wouldn't come up for duty again. What a dream ending! To pitch a no-hitter against the most powerful bats in the game in his last go. If he pulled it off, they'd be making room at Cooperstown tomorrow.

We always play to win, of course. Even the games that don't count. But in his heart, every player on the bench was hoping nobody got hold of one.

As for me, I was glad I didn't even have to try. Yesterday, chasing a long fly out in center field, I'd slipped and twisted an ankle. It didn't amount to anything, but Matt Flanigan had decided I'd better rest it for the games that counted. For us, at this stage, that meant the Series.

The top of the ninth was three up, three down. Two routine catches in the outfield and six to three.

**I**T LOOKED like it was all over. The weak end of our order was coming up, with Corey Munsen, the pitcher, in the hole. But no one said anything. No one even looked at old Southside when he ambled out

to the mound and stood there waiting, his jaws methodically worrying his cud of tobacco. You know the old baseball superstition. Mention a no-hitter in the making, you jinx it. No one wanted to jinx Southside today.

Dave Burns flopped beside me on the bench and stretched his legs.

"Pretty soft," he said. "Wish I could take a vacation."

"Yeah," I said. "It's a great life."

"How's the ankle?"

"Okay. I might as well be in there."

"Nuts. We do better without you."

"Yeah? It looks like it."

I bit my tongue and stopped. That was the closest I came. Dave turned quickly to the man on his right, and I shifted my eyes out to the mound.

Southside went back to work calmly. It was in his mind, all right. The no-hitter, I mean. The finish in a blaze of glory. Southside Drum going out as he'd come in, the greatest pitcher of his time. His heart must have been aching with the beauty of it. But you'd never have known it to watch him. He'd been around too long to let anything work on his nerves. He'd seen too many no-hitters slip away in the final frames. Slow and easy. Smooth as grease. He fingered the resin bag for a few seconds and let it drop. Working his cud, he stepped onto the mound.

On a 1-0 pitch, the first batter lifted a little blooper that looked for a minute as if it might drop in. At the last second it curved foul by inches, and a big sigh of relief rolled out over the diamond from the stands. We were playing at home, too. No mistake about it. This was one the fans wanted us to lose.

The batter went on to work a full count, and then the ump denied Southside the corner on a close one. That put a man on with a free ticket, and routine tactics called for a sacrifice. The next batter dumped a bunt down the third baseline. Southside, swooping off the mound, made the only play he had. Out at first. But he was in trouble now, with a man roosting on second in scoring position and only one down.

Everyone knew what the situation called for. Everyone waited to see what Matt Flanigan would do. Corey Munsen, swinging a stick, hesitated for the word. When Matt kept silent, Corey shrugged and started for the box. I took a quick look down the line at Matt's face. He was leaning forward, elbows on knees, looking quietly out across

the diamond. His face was brown and tough as leather, with dozens of little sun wrinkles fanning out from his eyes. Player and manager, Matt had looked out across baseball diamonds with those eyes for twice the years I'd been alive. I turned my head away, watching Corey amble toward the box.

"Corey!"

Old Matt was on his feet, looking down the line. His eyes caught mine and came to rest. A pinch hitter was obvious. There I was on the bench, with a season's batting record of .352. Pretty good for a first year rookie. What would any manager do? Even before Matt spoke, I knew the answer to that one.

"Okay, kid," he said. "Get s a hit."

Usually the other players give you a good word. Today no one said anything. I walked down the line and out of the dugout in silence. Bending over the pile to pick a stick, I felt Corey Munsen's hand lie for a second on my shoulder. He didn't have anything to say, either.

In the box, I dug in my cleats and put the wood on my shoulder. Behind me, the loud-speaker announced my name to heavy silence. The light crowd this afternoon had stumbled onto what the sports writers call a situation tense with drama. Bill Stern stuff. A situation new in baseball. One that would never come up again. There were no cheers. No demands for a hit. Remember Casey? With me, it was just the opposite. A whiff would put me solid.

Out behind the mound, old Southside fingered the resin bag and tossed it aside. His teeth worked in and out of his cud in lazy rhythm. Hands on hips, he studied me calmly for thirty seconds and stepped up to toe the rubber.

**H**E BROKE a beauty over the outside corner for a called strike one, and then wasted a duster, high and inside, to drive me away from the plate. A good trick. Never give the batter a chance to get set. Digging in again, I watched another one break away from me just above the knees. It might have been called either way, but the boss behind the plate saw it missing. Two and one.

The next pitch evened the count. I had my eye on it all the way, and when it got to the point where it should have broken inside, it just didn't break. The ball looked big as a basketball going over the plate. I could have knocked it out of the park with a ping pong

paddle. With the wood on my shoulder, I watched it go by.

Okay, I thought. Okay. One more does it. One more strike and one more batter and Southside goes to glory at Cooperstown.

I looked out at the old man. He was standing behind the mound with his back to the plate. As I waited, he took his cap off and stood there for a minute with his head bared, staring way off out into center field.

He knows, I thought. He knows that last pitch didn't break. He knows I should've given it a ride.

And then I began to understand clearly what I was doing. I began to understand, and I began to hate myself in proportion.

Look, rookie. Who the hell do you think you are to hand a great old competitor like Southside a phony no-hitter on a dirty platter? Why don't you walk out to the mound and call him a crummy has-been bum? Why don't you walk out and spit in his face?

Stepping out of the box, I reached down for dirt and felt it turn to mud in my sweaty palms. I rubbed my hands dry on my pants and got set again. On the mound, his face inscrutable, Southside peered down for the catcher's signal and began to wind. Right leg coming up high and jerking suddenly down. Left arm snapping over with the body behind it.

The pitch was a repeat of the one before and I had it tagged from the wind. The ball was supposed to break sharply over the inside corner, close to the hands. But it didn't break soon enough, and when it did break, it didn't break sharply enough. It came in fat across the heart, and I knew as I swung that it was a souvenir for a knot-hole fan. I'd have known even without the sudden tidal groan from the stands. Even if I hadn't glanced over from second on the circuit to see old Southside walking slowly toward the dugout from the mound.

In the dressing-room, I got a few claps on the shoulder, but no one had anything to say. No one but Matt Flanigan, that is. I was lacing my shoes when he stopped and looked down at me.

"Good work, kid. You're a ballplayer."

For Matt, that was tops. He wouldn't go farther than that with his own wife.

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks a lot."

I finished lacing my shoes and listened to Jackie Shannon and Corey Munsen argue about the pennant race in the other league. Over there, it was staying hot right down

to the wire. Jackie and Corey were still arguing when I put on my coat and left.

Southside was waiting for me by the gate. Seeing him standing there alone, I felt my heart tie itself in a sudden hard knot, and resentment against Matt Flanigan was bitter inside me. The old man took me by the arm and gave it a strong squeeze.

"Nice clout, kid. You looked good."

"I don't feel good," I said. "I feel lousy. Matt shouldn't have used me."

"No? What should he have done?"

"It wouldn't have hurt to let Corey take his turn."

His fingers dug deeper into my arm.

"Matt and I have been friends for a long time," he said quietly. "I guess he wants to keep it that way. Look, son. Maybe you've got ideas about Cooperstown immortality for the old man. Forget it. They're dead at Cooperstown. I'm not. As long as I've got

a son who plays the game the way his old man's always tried to play it, I'm alive. And I guess I'm about the only big-leaguer who ever managed to hang around until his boy got there to take over. Old Matt's not so lucky. He hasn't got any son at all. But there on the bench today, he tried to figure it the way he thought he'd want it if he were me and had a boy hitting over three hundred on the bench. He figured it right. His way and mine. Time you've been around as long as Matt and me, you'll understand."

He stopped and looked at me with quiet eyes that you wouldn't have expected in a guy who'd just been kicked by his own fat pitch out of the park and out of the majors.

"I've got to hustle for a train," he said. "I guess you'll be home after the Series?"

I didn't feel lousy now. I felt the way I'd looked at the plate. Good.

"Sure, Pop," I said. "I'll be home."

## HAWK IN THE SUNLIGHT

(Concluded from page 88)

Billy down, gently, and went to get bandages from the bag that was still strapped to the mangled carcass of his horse.

Old Jim. Billy closed his eyes. He felt Doc press a bandage against his forehead and said, "Old Jim. Jim told me it's no matter if you're a breed, just so you're a man. Half-breed's as good as anybody then."

"I know," Cummings said. "I know all about halfbreeds."

Billy opened his eyes and saw the harsh, stern face of the doctor against the open sky. He saw Cummings' face as though for the first time and said, "You?"

Billy saw the straight, dark hair, and the strong, clean angles of the cheekbones and

the hawklike nose over the hard, drawn-down mouth. He raised the knife that he still held and looked at the beaded handle with its figure of the Indian god.

"All that about breeds," Doc said, "Jim Clayton told me the same thing. Thirty years ago." He began to strip tape from a roll.

Billy Young breathed deeply and looked up past Doc's face at the sky. He watched a hawk wheel and stagger against the wind, high up, and saw its white under-wing flash in the high sunlight, and he knew now that he had done it, what the old man had wanted of him, and that what he had wanted of Jim Clayton he had already learned.



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# BRANDY on Their Minds

By PAUL RANDELL  
MORRISON



"Arrest this man!" demanded  
Sisters. "On my complaint!"

*Cruelty to  
animals meant  
one thing to  
C. Clarence Sisters  
and something else  
to the burro . . .*

**S**HERIFF DAN LINCOLN set his big white hat aslant his gray head and stood for a moment on the jail steps while he buttoned his sheepskin vest against the chill of the approaching blizzard. His wide, hard shoulders moved in a half-shrug, half-shudder, and the shudder was not because of the cold—rather because of a job he had to do which went



against his grain and against common sense. Yet he had to enforce the law.

More accurately, a law. The last legislature, composed in his opinion of nincompoops who didn't know the difference between a range and a cookstove, had passed a law providing for special agents to snoop about the country seeking evidence of the maltreatment of animals. One of those agents had arrived in Staghorn. He was most unwelcome, for the interpretation by the agent of the Organization to Stop the Maltreatment of Beasts was idiotic and unwarranted interference in the affairs of Staghorn range. Yet a law was a law and Sheriff Dan Lincoln must enforce that law and—worse luck—protect its representative when he would much rather have kicked him in the seat of the pants.

**A**CROSS the street, the door of Maw Mooney's restaurant opened and the OSMB agent, C. Clarence Sisters, stood there turning up his overcoat collar. Sheriff Lincoln turned to duck back into the jail office. Too late.

"Officer! You, there!"

Sheriff Lincoln waited, glowering and muttering. The agent crossed the street, sidling into the wind.

"I have felt," the agent said, "that you are not entirely in accord with the activities of the OSMB. I must remind you that convictions for violation of this law bring a minimum of five months in jail and local authorities are expected to cooperate to—"

"Yes, I know," the sheriff cut him off.

The agent pulled his sweat-stained derby far down on his forehead. He was a thin dyspeptic type, and his chin, nose, and cheeks were in sympathy.

"Good morning!" he said, his tone brittle, and strode authoritatively up the sidewalk in the direction of the Staghorn Hotel.

"Never did appreciate a man with shoe-button eyes," the sheriff reflected. "Or a gent sporting velvet on his overcoat collar."

He started to cross the street for a cup of coffee at Maw Mooney's place, but halted when he caught sight of Sandburr Hogan of the More-or-Less quartz mine just turn-

ing into Staghorn's only street and heading for the Staghorn Hotel. As usual, Sandburr was vigorously thwacking the rump of his burro with a pickhandle. The sheriff grinned, for he saw that Brandy—the jackass—had made up his stubborn mind to about-face and return to his snug shed in the mine tunnel. Brandy knew that every step he took away from the mine meant another going back—loaded with supplies.

Still grinning, his large gray eyes twinkling, the sheriff thumped on, watching Sandburr methodically belabor the jackass at every step. This, and only this, kept Brandy plugging along toward the general store. It was doubtful whether Brandy even felt the blows on his thick rump; they were mere reminders of what he might expect on the snout if he swung around.

Suddenly the sheriff stiffened, halted. "Uh-o!" he grunted. His gaze switched to C. Clarence Sisters, who was already bearing down on Sandburr and the recalcitrant jackass. Sheriff Lincoln began to trot in that direction.

He said aloud, "Sandburr'll crack him on the noggin with that pickhandle sure!"

He arrived in time to forestall mayhem.

"Arrest this man!" Sisters ordered, his little black eyes scintillating vengefully.

Sandburr grinned at the sheriff while he scratched his sunburnt red hair with his free hand. He wore no hat; never did. "This feller," he informed the sheriff, "says I'm mistreatin' this here jackass."

"Arrest this man!" Sisters repeated shrilly. "On my complaint. Cruelty to animals."

"Huh?" Sandburr's grin faded as he turned from a minute inspection of the OSMB agent to study the sheriff's face.

"That's the law, Sandburr," the sheriff informed him. "Any number folks around here, though, who'll prove you weren't tough on Brandy."

"Any number folks," Sisters mocked sarcastically, "who'll lay themselves open to perjury."

"Don't be too sure of that, mister," the sheriff replied, his tone lowering, as it always did when he was nettled.

In the silence that followed, several townsmen and cowpokes off the range, at-

tracted by the sheriff's presence, gathered around the group. Brandy, held firmly by one long ear in Sandburr's work-scarred left fist, ducked his head and went to sleep. He eased his weight against the old miner's body.

The sheriff jerked his head curtly at the crowd. "You folks clear out!"

"I said—" the OSMB agent began testily.

"Yes, I know," the sheriff interrupted curtly.

The agent glared, but the sheriff waited until the crowd had dispersed. He didn't want any trouble here. It was his sworn duty to uphold the law, and that he would do. There was, however, more than one way to make an arrest.

"Sandburr," he spoke quietly, "mind coming along to the office? You haven't been in town since spring—guess I'd better tell you what's happened."

**R**EMOVING a short rope from the burro's neck, Sandburr skillfully hobbled the beast's forelegs. He thrust his pickhandle into one of the jackass's pack straps and strode off beside the sheriff. The jackass woke promptly and swung around to head home. The hobble tripped him and he fell upon his knees.

The OSMB agent snapped. "Brutal!"

He ground along after the sheriff and Sandburr.

"You stay here!" the sheriff ordered shortly.

The agent stopped in mid-stride. He glowered. "Were you speaking to me?"

The sheriff ignored him, and ushered Sandburr into the jail office.

"Have a seat," he invited, and sat down himself. "Listen till I'm through, Sandburr."

He explained an act of the last legislature which created a bureau branded "The Organization to Stop the Maltreatment of Beasts." He called attention to the five-month minimum jail sentence, and pointed out his duty as a sheriff. He ended by saying that the judge would set him free the next morning.

Sandburr, busily cutting away at a loosened piece of sole on his right boot, said nothing until he had straightened up and

clicked his pocketknife shut. Tossing the worn part into the sheriff's wastebasket, he commented, "Got to have my boots fixed—fallin' off me. That foot's near through." He paused, turned his rugged, weather-beaten face upon the sheriff. "Well, if I don't get back before this blizzard breaks, I'll be kept out all winter. Drifts get powerful deep up my way."

The sheriff nodded, looked thoughtfully through the window. Already the horizon had shut down to a mile or two, and Staghorn lay submerged in a sort of blue-gray twilight, though the afternoon was scarcely half gone.

"It's the best I can do," he said finally. "Court's over for today. I'll have Maw Mooney send you a supper you won't forget—on the county."

"How 'bout my jackass?"

"Him too. Best stall down to Ed Watson's livery stable—oats, alfalfa."

"Just you make sure, Dan. Mind seein' to it yourself?"

The sheriff chuckled. "You think a lot of that jackass, don't you, Sandburr?"

"Well," Sandburr grumbled, "he's an ornery sort of cuss and—durn you, Dan, don't you forget them oats!"

"I won't," the sheriff promised, and rose. He took a ring of cell keys from a hook beside his desk.

Sandburr squinted at the blue murk through the window. "This blizzard business; Dan. Risky." He hauled himself out of his chair. "Where's my room?"

"Better take the third down the corridor to your right. Warmer there." The sheriff started to follow, changed his mind. Scowling, he tossed the keys on his desk.

"Not lockin' me in, sheriff?"

"Do I need to?" the sheriff asked.

Sandburr chuckled, "Nope, guess not."

He shuffled down the corridor to his cell, his frayed mackinaw swinging limply in the crook of his arm.

**S**HERIFF LINCOLN crossed the street to Maw Mooney's restaurant and ordered the best supper she had, giving instructions to take it over to Sandburr at six o'clock. He sat down then to his own belated noon

meal, chatted awhile with Maw, and read the semi-weekly "News" for over an hour. Thereafter, he sauntered out upon the sidewalk intending to put Sandburr's jackass in Ed Watson's livery stable before the day grew any shorter.

There he halted, jerked himself erect. The blizzard had already struck, and a howling wind blasted snow down the range. The sheriff broke into a trot.

A huddle of townsfolk and ranchers in the livery stable doorway caught his attention as he plunged past. They were discussing their utter lack of love for C. Clarence Sisters, who'd evidently broadcast his mission.

The sheriff threw over his shoulders: "It's the law, boys!"

But had taken only two or three more steps before he stopped. His chin snapped around toward the discussion group.

"Where's Brandy?" he asked.

A lanky cowpuncher pivoted about and spat into the street. He drawled, "Yore weasel-faced friend cut Brandy's hobble. Said he'd have no more brutal treatment on Staghorn range."

"But where's that jackass?" the sheriff repeated. "Did he—"

"Sure!" the puncher broke in. "Turned right around and headed back to the mine. What'd you expect?"

The sheriff wheeled toward the jail, but Ed Watson, standing in front of his livery stable three doors from the jail, said, "I already told Sandburr."

The sheriff spun around, studied Watson for a moment, then said, "Ed, saddle my horse."


He'd told the old miner he would see that Brandy was well taken care of, and Sheriff Dan Lincoln had never yet failed to keep a promise. He banged up the jail steps and into his office. Grasping a slicker from a peg on the wall, he flung it over his shoulder and stuffed a pint of whiskey into one pocket and a set of earmuffs into the other. He glanced around to see if he were forgetting anything he might need and was just turning toward the door when he noticed a piece of paper weighted with a horseshoe on his desk. Jerking it from under

[Turn page.]

## Hey You SKINNY Bag of Bones!

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the weight, he read, "Guess you should have locked that cell, Sheriff. Nobody's going to let my jackass freeze. Sandburr."

As Ed Watson led the sheriff's horse from the livery stable, C. Clarence Sisters strode up, and the little group of men on the sidewalk stopped talking. Ed Watson said, "The jackass took the trail over the east ridge, judgin' from his tracks, but Sandburr took the Indian trail up the canyon tryin' to cut him off."

"Well," said the sheriff, "if I'm going to get that jackass, I'll have to get a move on. Drifts'll be ten feet deep by midnight, or I don't know the Staghorns! A snowbound animal won't last long without food."

"I thought," snapped Sisters, "you were going after Hogan. After all, he broke jail—and that's a penitentiary offense."

"I'm going after that jackass you turned loose to die of starvation in the mountains."

Sisters glared at him. "Well, then," he snarled, "if local authority won't enforce the law, I'll go get this jail-breaker." He whirled on Watson. "Man, I told you to saddle my horse!"

Watson sat down on a bale of hay.

Nobody said anything. The sheriff studied Sisters' velvet collar, the thin face, the sweat-stained derby. Finally he said, "Saddle his horse, Ed."

A little later, with the OSMB agent trailing, Sheriff Dan Lincoln rode out of Staghorn into the teeth of the blizzard.

ONCE the sheriff picked up Sandburr's trail, he was forced to slow his horse to a walk. The old miner's tracks were already so filled with snow that following was difficult.

The horizon soon shut down to a few yards. Ahead, somewhere, across the high desert, swallowed by this swirling fury of white flakes and raw wind, reared the Staghorns. Far up the side of one of those jagged peaks was the More-Or-Less mine.

On the first high ridge east of the now-vanished town, Sisters suddenly drew rein. He said, "Don't think I'll go on. It's really going to storm."

The sheriff looked queerly at him. "Yeah?" he growled, buttoning his slicker collar se-

curely around his neck. He peered back the way they had come. The blizzard had wiped out direction. Sisters, glancing that way, showed his alarm. He stood more than a fifty-fifty chance of getting lost in the blizzard. When the sheriff rode on, he followed.

After a long stretch of painfully slow trailing, the sheriff halted. The blizzard had completely covered Sandburr's tracks. Above the roar of the wind, he shouted, "Keep close!"

Several miles farther along, Squatter's Bridge loomed suddenly ahead.

"Thought he might take this trail," the sheriff grunted, "but I didn't dare take a short cut—afraid to in this kind of weather." He pointed to Sandburr's tracks in the snow. "We've gained on him considerably, but from now on it's going to be just plain, stiff trailing Uh-o!"

He dismounted, picked something from the snow.

"Bootheel," Sisters said.

"Ever try walking without a heel?" the sheriff asked absently, climbing back on his horse. "Afraid that'll slow him up."

"Afraid?" his companion questioned. "I was under the impression you were trying to catch him."

"Did it ever occur to you," the sheriff ground out, "that Sandburr's trying to save that jackass from getting stuck in a drift in the Staghorns and freezing to death?"

He got no answer, continued, "Or breaking a leg and suffering the agonies of hell before the cold freezes the marrow of his bones?"

He kicked his horse in the ribs and leaned far out of his saddle in order to trail faster. The howling wind ripped through the drifting snow, blasted and tugged against his slicker. He saw Sisters shudder.

"Here!" he called above the roar of the blizzard, "Take this!"

He pulled a muffler from a saddle pocket and handed it to Sisters, who quickly wrapped it about his ears. One side of the man's derby was banked with snow. The sheriff fished his earmuffs from his slicker and clamped them on his own red ears.

Each blast of wind got stronger. The sheriff's horse shied at an object alongside



the trail. The sheriff got down and retrieved Sandburr's frayed old mackinaw.

"The darn fool!" he rasped out. "Threw his coat away so he could travel faster."

The sheriff mounted again, wedging the mackinaw down between him and the saddle horn. To Sisters, he added, "That's a mighty big chance to take, mister—just for a jack-ass!"

He moved along, and soon their horses floundered out on higher ground. Snow swirled from all directions. The sheriff lost the trail.

**T**HAT cost nearly a half-hour. An old fir with a broken top finally gave him his bearings. Sisters had to ride hard then to keep within sight of him.

But again their progress grew slow when a shoulder of rocks, whipped free of snow, appeared across their path. Searching for tracks, the sheriff came suddenly to a halt. Sisters rode abreast.

"Blood!" he exclaimed.

The sheriff pointed farther ahead.

Sisters looked. "Why, he fell!"

"No sole on his right boot when he left Staghorn," the sheriff told him. "And he lost the heel off the flank of the other back at the bridge."

They hugged the flank of the mountain as they rounded a dangerous ledge above a fir-choked canyon. Bearing upward then, they floundered through a thick drift, pausing once to watch a fearful snow avalanche thunder down the opposite wall of the canyon.

Sisters' face blanched; he glanced up at the high crags, looked at the sheriff. The sheriff shrugged his shoulders, rode on.


A little later, the lawman pointed to a ragged outcrop of flint, directing Sisters' gaze to Sandburr's trail. Every other track was stained with blood.

"Foot's all the way through," the sheriff observed, watching Sisters closely. He saw the OSMB agent shudder, and this time he was sure it was not from the cold.

Farther along, at the base of a dead hemlock, there were several tracks—most of them barefoot. The sheriff studied them

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for more than a minute, summed up: "Put both socks on his exposed foot. He's limping bad. Sort of running limp."

They plodded on more than a hundred yards before the sheriff halted again. Pointing, he said: "There's the jackass's tracks. Sandburr's gaining on him."

But he saw that Sisters was not looking at the animal's hoof marks. Instead, his gaze was riveted in a sort of horrible fascination upon the blood-trail Sandburr Hogan left.

"Shot of whiskey?" the sheriff offered, pulling his pint from his slicker pocket. From the expression on Sisters' face, he thought the man was going to faint.

"Thanks!" Sisters choked out, and strangled on the hot liquor.

The sheriff took the bottle from him and plugged in the cork. Carefully, he stowed the whiskey in his pocket.

They rode fast for several minutes. The burro's tracks added to those of Sandburr made a trail easy to follow. But without warning the tracks dipped down a precipitous canyon wall.

"Beats all get-out," the sheriff said, "how a jackass can travel rough country. No horse could ever go down there."

He tied their mounts to a young bull pine and began the descent. Sisters, white-faced, cautiously picked his way behind him.

Along the canyon bed a hundred yards, the trail led up again. The sheriff waited at the top until Sisters crawled over the rim and sat down against a boulder.

"Sandburr," he pointed out, "must've been awful tired by the time he dragged himself out of there—see how his boots were sweeping snow? We had horseflesh under us most of the way."

Sisters got up, his legs wobbling. The sheriff strode on. Already they had been traveling in the dim light of late evening, aided only by the whiteness of the snow, but now darkness settled down with smothering finality.

"Too dangerous to go on," the sheriff said. "If they live through the night, we may be of help in the morning."

The sheriff built a fire of fir limbs in the lee of a large boulder, and they sat there,

saying little.

But along toward midnight the high wind blew the clouds clear of the sky. First one star and then another showed, and finally, almost overhead, the moon, lopsided and very bright. The sheriff roused the dozing Sisters.

"We can see now," he told him.

**W**INDING upward around a tortuous spur to avoid the ravine at their feet, they climbed out across a boulder field, and paralleled a high ridge for a half-hour. Quite abruptly, the blood-stained trail led up that ridge.

The sheriff paused to gaze along the heights, but with a sudden jerk his head tilted back. Sisters gasped, mumbled unintelligibly. Atop a high, dangerous passage, superbly indifferent to everything except the rocks at his feet, plodded Brandy, the jackass. A hundred yards behind, dragging his right leg, Sandburr hobbled after him.

But it was not the sight of either of these that froze the sheriff rigid in his tracks.

Less than a quarter-mile ahead, part of an avalanche had plunged across the slope, but three-fourths of it still hung poised above the trail—awaiting only a touch to start it again. The least amount would do that—another boulder, more sliding snow, even a pebble.

Anything in the path of that monster would be ground to death beneath thousands of tons of debris. Even as the sheriff watched, a few tons let go, crashed across the trail. A matter of minutes now—maybe seconds—until the parent body roared down the mountain.

"That fool jackass!" the sheriff exploded. "Plugging along as if he were in a pasture full of daisies. But look! By gum, if Sandburr ain't gaining! Great guns, what that's costing him!"

He distinctly heard Sisters' teeth chattering.

The distance gradually narrowed between Sandburr and the burro. But so did the distance between the burro and the path of the avalanche. Sisters shouted, but his shout was a mere squeak. The sheriff said: "They couldn't hear you. Wind's coming from that way." A moment later, he added: "Besides,

a jackass can't understand English."

Sisters said, "Huh?"

But the sheriff had forgotten him. He watched Sandburr lunge desperately along. Sandburr stumbled, struggled to hold his balance on the ledge, kept going. It was plain that he saw what lay ahead.

How long the sheriff watched, he couldn't tell, but the minutes seemed hours. The distance between Brandy and the course of the avalanche narrowed to a hundred feet, then slowly to yards. Sandburr now lunged forward with doubled effort, his body pitching and swaying as he fought to keep erect. Suddenly he shouted, and the faint echoes of that shout drifted down the mountain.

"Look!" Sisters rasped, as if the sheriff's eyes weren't already focused there with the rigidity of marble.

Ten feet from the path of the avalanche, Brandy had halted and, turning only his head, peered back at his master.

Sandburr bobbed forward, his right arm reaching out. He swayed, got within a few feet of Brandy before that stubborn animal craned his neck around and plodded on.

Again Sandburr shouted, but the perverse little beast gave no heed whatsoever. Sisters groaned.

And at that moment, the mountain shuddered. Snow exploded from its sides. The avalanche actually seemed to take its time in getting under way, but then—the sheriff shut his eyes, and the seconds ticked away while ten thousand thunders rolled through the canyons.

He looked then, and his mouth dropped open. Sandburr was holding Brandy's head in his arms, was slowly but surely yanking him a few inches at a time away from the perilous ledge which had been loosened by the avalanche. But while they looked, Sandburr collapsed.

The sheriff shouted, "Come on!"

He plunged up the mountainside. He floundered through a deep drift, rushed on. It seemed that the night must surely have passed before he finally gained the freshly-broken trail above, but the moon still hung like a giant lantern in about the same place midway down the western sky.

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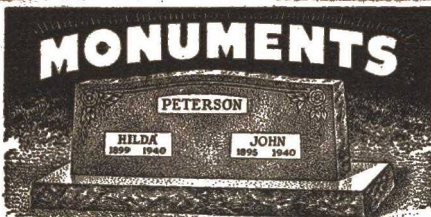
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**H**E PRIED the old miner's lips apart, forced whiskey down his throat. Even so, it was a long time before he brought him around, and several minutes more before he could persuade Sandburr to let go his fierce grip on one of Brandy's long ears.

Sandburr murmured weakly, and the sheriff bent close to hear what he was saying: "Durn you, Dan! Give Brandy some of that likker—how you suppose he got his name, anyway?"

Life poured back into the tough old quartz-chaser then, and a moment later, with the sheriff's help, he got his tortured foot over Brandy's rump and scooted aboard.

"Gimme that halter rope and I'll—" He blinked, finished, "So it's you?"

The OSMB agent had finally managed the grade. He stood there staring at the grunting, hunkering jackass.

"Yes," he panted, his voice thin and dry, "and if you didn't have that bad foot I'd see to it that you didn't pile your heavy carcass on that little animal's back."

Sandburr snorted. The sheriff swung around: "I'm taking Sandburr back to jail. That's my duty. But—" He paused, swallowed some of his sudden anger. "I want to tell you something, mister! That jackass could hold two men like Sandburr. And furthermore I'm going to testify like everybody else—that when Sandburr whacks this brute's rump he's not any more than making him feel it. A jackass is so tough that you could knock him down by banging on his rear end and never make a muscle sore."

The OSMB agent stared. Sandburr chuckled. He murmured, "No more'n a caress, mister—just a gentle little caress. This jackass wouldn't feel natural 'thout a thump from a pickhandle, and what's more, mister, he wouldn't do no navigatin' a-tall. No, sir! 'Cept in th' wrong direction."

"Let's get going!" the sheriff barked. With Sisters bringing up the rear, the party headed down the mountain.

The moon was far sunk in the west when they reached the two horses, casting long black shadows on the new snow.

"Change cars!" the sheriff ordered Sandburr, who protested violently. The sheriff growled, "Don't be so blamed cantankerous!



A horse can get you to the doctor five times as fast as a jackass, and that foot's got to have attention mighty soon. Should have forked a horse in the first place!"

"I could take care of my foot myself," Sandburr growled. "Up to my cabin."

"Couldn't reach it," the sheriff grunted. "You're snowed out till spring. And—say, you old desert rat, can't you get it through your thick head you're under arrest!"

The sheriff got him aboard a horse then, and, mounting the other, turned to Sisters. "Being an agent for the Organization to Stop the Maltreatment of Beasts, you'll see that Brandy's brought in. If he should get loose from you, you alone are responsible. He'd starve or freeze or die from attempts to cross the canyons."

"Now, listen here, Dan!" Sandburr growled. "I ain't gonna trust no velvet-colored—"

"Best we can do," the sheriff broke in, and, leading Sandburr's mount, headed on down the mountain. When they were out of earshot of Sisters, he added, "He'll bring him along all right—wait and see."

"Just th' same," Sandburr muttered, "I don't like th' idea of Brandy bein' trusted to that feller."

**S**TAGHORN. A little after sunrise.

The doctor had come and gone. Sandburr, stretched out on his cot in his cell, was worrying about Brandy. A crowd had gathered around the jail, and the sheriff stepped out to have a word with them.

"Men," he began, "law is a dignified institution. Men sworn to uphold it must—"

He got no further. The crowd swung as one to look where he looked. On the high ridge east of Staghorn, silhouetted startlingly clear against the sunrise were C. Clarence Sisters and Brandy, the jackass.

Suddenly the crowd roared with laughter, and the sheriff chuckled. Sisters was arguing with Brandy. Brandy wanted to turn around and go back. Sisters, mounted, went round and round, because Brandy went round and round. "I look at him whack that jackass!" Ed Watson shouted.

Sisters was whanging away with Sand-

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Brandy paid no more attention to the blows than if they had been smacks with three fingers.

Evidently getting dizzy from so much spinning, Brandy finally plodded on down toward Staghorn.

The crowd thinned out, taking up positions in the doorways of buildings, and a short time later C. Clarence Sisters rode along the empty street belaboring Brandy most vigorously and muttering things unfit for print.

The gist of his one-way conversation was that Brandy was a naughty, naughty little naughticums.

And then he slid, stiff as a board, off Brandy's back and knotted enough halter rope about the jackass's forefeet to have made three hobbles. Walking as if he were divided in half, he went up the jail steps, humped over like an old man with poor eyesight stroking a kitten. The crowd closed in behind.

The sheriff took him by the arm and helped him into the office. He escorted him down the corridor and into a cell, where Sisters flopped onto a cot. He groaned and said something poisonously uncomplimentary about jackasses.

The sheriff backed into the corridor and locked the cell door.

Stiff as he was, Sisters sat up with a certain amount of alertness. He snapped, "What's the meaning of this?"

The crowd ambled down the corridor.

The sheriff's voice was as mild as a spring breeze, "You're under arrest, Sisters. Cruelty to animals. That's the law."

Sisters' words didn't have much meaning for a long, long time.

Across the corridor in his own cell, Sandburr Hogan, stretched out comfortably on his cot, asked, "Brandy all right?"

"Sure!" Ed Watson's loud voice boomed through the jail. "I'll take care of him till you're out, Sandburr. Free fer nothin' and glad to do it. Judge'll hear your case soon's court opens."

"That a promise 'bout takin' care of



Brandy?" Sandburr asked, rising on an elbow. "Till I get out?"

"Positively," chirped the unsuspecting livery stable man. "You ain't guilty of breakin' no law."

"Well," Sandburr chuckled, "the reason I wanted to make sure was 'cause I'm gonna plead guilty. Seein's how I can't get into my mine till winter's over, I might as well let the county take care of me. That feller-prisoner over there says the least the judge'll give us is five months each."

## TIME FOR VIOLENCE

(Concluded from page 54)

on his neck, but not the pain. His stomach wouldn't let him feel anything but the fire it held.

Mark Stucky was beside him, pulling at him, shouting questions in his ears.

"The gate, Mark," he ground out. "Get me over to the gate Inskip built. Hurry, Mark, hurry!"

Mark didn't move. He wanted to know what had turned Cardwell's face so granite gray and what was causing his lips to turn inside out like those of a snarling wolf. For the sake of speed, Cardwell made himself listen, made himself answer.

"Strychnine, Mark. Strychnine that wasn't for wolves after all. That was Ainsworth's way, but the squatter found out before he brought his cattle in. Ainsworth meant to poison Inskip's breed stock, break him before he started. I—I'm glad I killed him. You—you can tell them that if—"

Mark Stucky eased the dead man down and stood looking at him, shaking his head. He didn't need to go to the gate now, but he went because it had seemed important to Cardwell. When you thought about it calmly, you knew why a man like Ben Inskip would fence a water hole. The fence had come down easily because it had been meant to come down when the water cleared. But he went to the gate, and hunted around amid the timbers until he found the shingle with the burned letters on it. He moved his lips over the two words, "POISON WATER," and then threw the shingle down and walked slowly back toward his horse.



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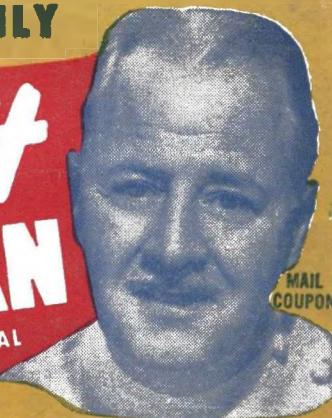


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