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Adventure

ADVENTURE

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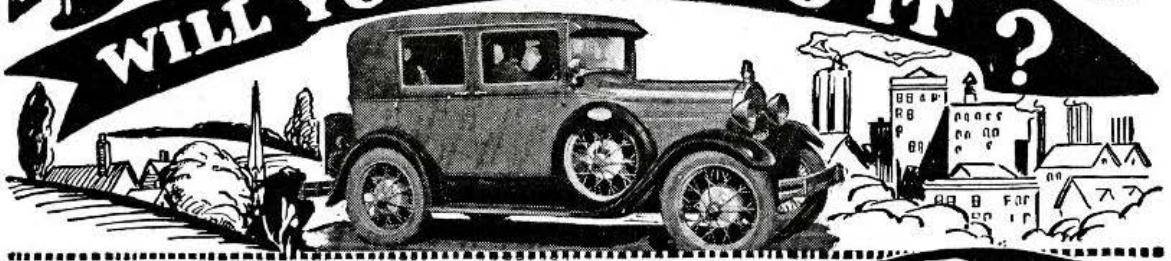

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Splashers *vs.* Lollers

A bit of quiet research among the bathers of America has revealed two rival camps of behavior—

The handsome gentleman who heads the first group believes that bathing should be in the active mood. At 7:00 a. m. he becomes unseen but *heard*. From the bathroom come the echoes of hearty splashes and noises that sound like a floor polishing machine. (Our hero is stirring up a fancy Ivory frosting with a stiff-bearded bath brush!)

The spokeswoman for group 2 shudders at the thought of such athletic goings-on! She insists that bathing should be a restful interlude in water as warm as a rippleless sea. And Ivory will float like a lily pad in this bland pool of content . . .

Frankly, the debate of *splashers vs. lollers* is too delicate a matter for us to pass upon. So we merely remind you that both leading schools of bathing have nominated Ivory! Ivory dares the splashers to duck it . . . . and it drifts into a loller's hands. Its whole-hearted foam rinses away as lightly as dandelion fluff in a breeze. And it leaves both the skin and temper as smooth as velvet. There's no debate among bath-loving Americans on the merits of Ivory —they all *agree* that it is fine, pure soap!

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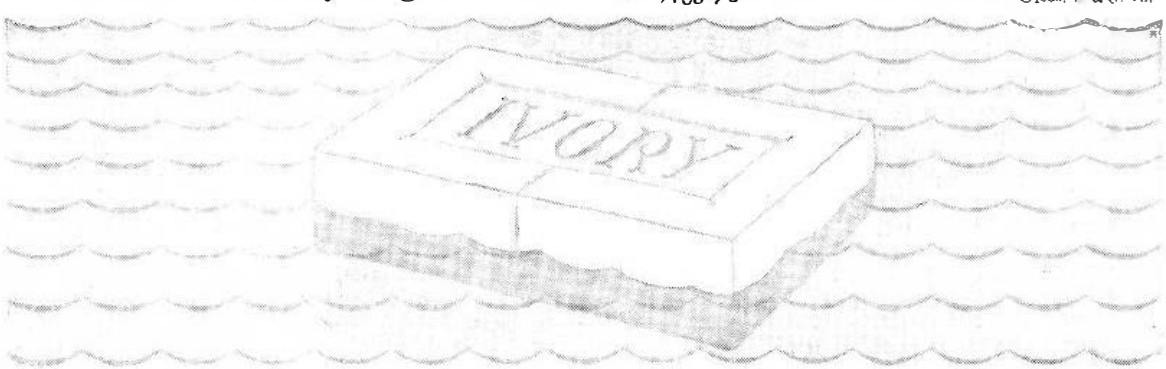

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A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

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A Powerful Story of the American Doughboys in France

CROOKED

H COMPANY won Rintoul in a dice game to begin with. That happened the night the top sergeant ran the Border at Calexico to break the bank at Mexicali. The war was a week old at the time and the old outfit was packing to join its overseas division at Camp Kearney. Sergeant Orcutt was tempted to brash adventure by an unusual bit of information that had just leaked through from Europe, the secret mathematical formula for guessing the fall of the little roulette ball from the spinning wheel.

It was simple, that formula, once you knew it. Merely stand behind the wheel looking on until the ball fell on any even number between 36 and 44. Then, after two spins had elapsed, the ball would be certain to fall upon No. 7. Whether this would happen in response to the law of gravity or due to some mysterious vagary of chance, the sergeant did not pretend to know. But he had gotten the formula from a passing medical officer who vowed it was the system that broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

Four H Company sergeants went across the Border with Orcutt, decked out in the grimy cotton cits that a soldier could rent for a dollar from a Chinese at Calexico. They sought out the largest of Mexicali's institutions of chance and stood by, waiting the turn of opportunity. When the ebony sphere presently rode No. 38, they waited two more drops and began plunging. Five silver dollars they stacked on the No. 7, and when the ball inconsiderately fell on the double-naught, they plunged again. Even if the formula held fire until the fifth turn, percentages favored them, they argued, since the bank must pay them thirty-five dollars for every dollar staked on a winning number.

But after the whole formula had flunked out thrice and a pasty faced *mestizo* croupier had raked away substantially all their collective hoard, the five turned away sheepishly, of one accord.

"Gypped again!" muttered Orcutt. "Either that medico was crazy, this game

DICE

By ARED WHITE

is crooked—or both. But maybe we can recoup at Black Jack. Anyway, we may just as well be broke as the way we are now. What you say?"

Orcutt made a leisurely reconnoisance of the gambling hall, his searching eyes finally settling upon a lone dealer in a corner of the room, who sat behind an empty table absently shuffling a deck.

"That looks like it might be the softest spot in this hell hole," said the top sergeant, after he had completed his appraisal of the fellow. "Anyhow, he's a white man with a sort of human face."

They crossed over to the empty table, Orcutt seating himself in the center, the others on his flanks in observation. The dealer cast a waggish smile at them and threw fresh energy into the shuffling of his deck. He was a small, thin young man with one of those sporting house smiles that seems to say that life is something not to be taken too seriously, no matter what happens. Not an easy face, nor a reassuring one; but soft and sympathetic when contrasted with the cold, sinister features of the average run of dealers in the place.

"What's the limit here?" demanded Orcutt.

"I'm sorry, the limit is small," said the dealer, his sophisticated smile spreading

slightly. "I'm allowed to accept bets no higher than five hundred dollars on the turn of the card. Now, of course, I might get permission—"

"Hell!" roared Orcutt. "I meant how little can you bet; not how much."

The gambler's eyes sparked a wag's satisfaction at having put over something.

"Oh, pardon," he said. "You can play as little as you wish, even to the smallest coin ever minted—a silver dollar."

Sergeant Orcutt brought out ten silver dollars, the remainder of their total wealth, returned three dollars to his pocket against going flat broke, and placed a single dollar on the betting line. The dealer riffled the cards with long, white, expert fingers, and dealt Orcutt the winning hand. The bet rode and was doubled. Three bets later the sergeant tried a bet of three dollars and drew a Black Jack, which paid one and a half for one. Alternately pinching and plunging, he ran his pile up to thirty dollars, then impulsively thrust the whole stack of silver forward. He drew a king up, a queen down, value twenty. The dealer exposed a jack and five and promptly drew. There were just four cards in the deck that could win for him, and three of those six spots already had passed into the deck. He turned the case six and nonchalantly abstracted the stack of silver dollars.

"That's all!" snarled Orcutt, getting up. He glared at the gambler. "A turn like that smells to me like a come-on game!"

"Sure," smiled the dealer fixing his level, smiling eyes on the sergeant. "A come-on game. Come on over any time you want to try your luck. But say, mister, I'd like to ask you a question if you don't mind."

"Yes?" bristled Orcutt. "I'm not taking any more wise cracks so don't try them."

"Nothing like that, mister," said the gambler. His smile had dwindled until his face was almost thoughtful. "You're soldiers from the camp over in Calexico, aren't you?"

"What's that to you?"

"Nothing, mister. I wasn't trying to start any feeling. I just wanted to know how this new war's coming along. We don't hear much news over here."

"Fine, the war's fine," averred Orcutt. "It looks like the best war we've had recently. The Army'll get so big in another six months they can't count it. Why?"

"Think we'll get in the fight over on the other side, mister?"

"Bet my last dollar on that. It's a cinch!"

"All right, I'll take that bet," said the dealer.

Orcutt leaned over the table belligerently.

"Say, young fellow, just what do you think you're driving at? Why'll you bet we don't get into it?"

The gambler blinked surprise at the sergeant's flare.

"I'm not driving at anything," he replied. "You offered to bet and I called. I'll bet you do get in if you want to bet it that way."

"Well," sneered Orcutt, "if you want to bet, I'll lay you one that'll make you look at your hole card. I'll bet you none of your breed of cats ever gets in the fight!"

The gambler's eyes hardened, but the smile did not efface itself from his face.

"All right, I'll take that bet, too, mister." He gave a lazy toss of his hand to the chair in front of the table. "Sit down, and we'll settle it on a turn of the cards."

"What you mean?" demanded Orcutt.

"I'll play you a hand to see whether I get in or don't. Put up a dollar and the game's on!"

Orcutt sat down suddenly and thrust a tense face across the table.

"You mean you'll enlist if I win the draw?"

"That's the idea, mister."

Orcutt laughed and produced a dollar.

"All right," he exclaimed, "I'll risk our last dollar just to see a professional gambler welsh if he loses the bet. But we don't play with those pet cards of yours.

Here, we'll make it a toss of the bones, fellow!"

The gambler smiled thoughtfully at the two dice that Orcutt cast across the green cloth with his taunting challenge.

"All right," he agreed calmly, "start rolling them. The one that throws a seven in the fewest rolls wins. If you win, you get two dollars, and I'll get into the scrap."

"Fair enough. But when do you get in?"

"That's up to you, mister."

"All right, gambler, if I win, you go over with me right pronto and we'll book you up yet tonight. Is that the idea?"

"Check, mister."

Orcutt rolled the dice first and got a four and a three on the first cast. The gambler took up the dice nonchalantly, shook them loosely in his two hands and cast them across the table. The ominous snake eyes of the superstitious dice player showed. He picked them up again, soberly, and gave them a quick throw across the table. The fatal seven appeared, a six and a one.

"All right, mister, you win," he announced, as coolly as if the two silver dollars had been the sole stake.

Orcutt pocketed the two silver dollars and leered across at the loser.

"Well?" he insinuated.

"Put those two silver dollars on the line and ask no questions," said the gambler very quietly. "I'll deal a few hands of Twenty-one and then I'll pay my bet, mister."

Something in the other's manner prompted Orcutt to comply. The two dollars became four, eight, sixteen. The pile multiplied with each turn of the cards, until the sergeant began retiring stacks of silver to his pockets uncounted. His pockets were bulging with money when the dealer finally spread out his deck, face upward, indication of the end of the game.

"Now head across the Border, mister, and I'll be right behind you," he announced. "If we pull out of here together with that money you won, the Greaser who owns this joint will have his wolves on our back. Meet you at the depot across in Calexico in half an hour. 'Lucky Dice' Rintoul never welshed on a bet yet!"

The five sergeants made it back across the International Border and through the lower end of the village to the railway station where they piled and counted their ill gotten wealth. There were exactly two hundred silver dollars, which gave the five of them forty dollars apiece. Orcutt was offering to bet his share against twenty that the gambler from Mexicali would never show up, when the door opened and Rintoul came in, his thin face still wearing that queer smile of his.

"Here's the rest of your winnings, mister," he smiled. "Now where's that place you book me up at for the big gamble across the pond?"

THEY enlisted Rintoul at midnight in the orderly tent of H Company on the outskirts of Calexico. Except that the regiment was straining to fill its ranks quickly to war strength, Orcutt might have called off all bets because of Rintoul's wholly unsatisfactory account of himself. Not a likely recruit at all, judging from his answers to pertinent questions. To begin with he insisted that his name was Lucky Dice Rintoul, and refused to supply any other name.

"We can't put a name like that on any enlistment record," growled the sergeant. "Out with your full name. You've got to have a John Henry or a Harry John of some sort."

Rintoul smiled down at the scowling sergeant and rubbed the back of his head thoughtfully.

"All right," he said, "if you don't want to write down my whole handle, just make it Lucky D. That's a good enough name for anybody—Lucky D. Rintoul."

"Name of your next of kin, the person or persons to be notified in case of emergency," droned the sergeant.

"Nobody," said Rintoul. "If that ever

happens to me just plant me and forget it."

"Ever been convicted of an infamous crime?"

"That's a leading question, mister." There was another slight spread of Rintoul's eternal smile. "Anyhow, you can set it down I never served time in anybody's jail."

The formalities of enlistment finally disposed of, they fixed Rintoul up with a cot in an empty squad tent until the next morning, when he was accepted by the medico, sworn by the captain, given a uniform by the supply sergeant, and turned over to a corporal to be recast from gambler to soldier. It was the hardest job he had ever tackled in his four hitches, the corporal reported at the end of three days of feverish effort.

"What makes it tough is," wailed the corporal, "I can't get under his hide. He's the awkwardest brute with a musket I ever tried to drill and he stumbles all over himself trying to do the facings. If I could only get under his skin, maybe he'd try. But the madder I get and the hotter I razz that bird, the more he grins back at me, like it was one great joke."

"Why don't you take the raw rook down behind the kitchens and give him a trouncing," demanded the top sergeant.

"Say, Sarge, just try it! I abused him like a pirate and when I told him the next thing I was going to dress him down with my knuckles, he just grinned some more and says, 'Shucks, Corporal, don't get all fussed up about nothing. Save your fighting for the Germans!' "

"Give him a few days more trial," ordered the sergeant, "and if he's hopeless chuck him down in the kitchen for permanent K.P."

"Check, Sarge. But just as well do it now and save three days time. If it's true you won that lad in a crap game, you sure got buncoed!"

Rintoul himself showed up at the first sergeant's tent hard upon the departure of the corporal of the recruit squad. Whatever defects stood in the way of a satisfactory progress at drill, at least he had something of the look of a soldier. He had taken the misshapen issue uniform to a Calexico tailor and had it trimmed to fit snugly; he was clean shaven and otherwise immaculate. Three days of regular sleep and exercise in the open air had also thinned out the black rings under his eyes, cleared the balls of his eyes and put a touch of color in his faded yellow face. But that graven banter of a smile was unchanged.

"Rintoul!" the sergeant confronted him before the other could speak. "Your corporal was just in here and said you're the dumbest excuse of a soldier he ever tried to pound sense into. I never sized you up as a dumbbell or I wouldn't have staked a whole dollar against you."

"Well, Sergeant, maybe I could do better if the corporal wouldn't rile so easy," said Rintoul complacently.

"Rile! Say, do you expect him to smile and compliment you every time you drop your rifle or stumble over yourself, or ball up his squad. That's enough to rile anybody."

"But, Sergeant, it's mighty dull around here waiting till we go over to the big game," said Rintoul. "The only fun I've had so far is watching that guff have brainstorms. I can get him so mad he wants to bite himself."

"Your idea of fun, eh?" said the sergeant through his teeth. "Well, listen to this, Rintoul. Three more days of this monkey business, and you're at the end of your rope. I'm going to put you on permanent kitchen police, where you'll spend your days scrubbing things and peeling potatoes!"

Rintoul's eyes brightened slightly and he looked at the sergeant a thoughtful moment, then reached into his pocket and brought forth a roll of bills.

"What I wanted to ask you, Sergeant," he changed the subject, "was whether you wouldn't keep this fifty bucks safe for me. There's no place in the squad tent to stow it."

Sergeant Orcutt waved the money aside.

"I'm no bank," he growled. "Look

after your own money, it's hard enough for me to look after my own. Is that the size of the pile you brought out of Mexical?"

"I still got a week's pay coming, Sergeant. Four hundred dobies, which is two hundred American."

"You don't reckon on collecting that at this late date after what's happened, do you?"

"I rather hoped I'd get it, Sergeant." Rintoul smiled.

"A wild hope, I'd say. Besides that's too much money for one lone buck to have this long after payday. You got to get used to being broke in this man's Army."

Rintoul had another lapse into whimsical thoughtfulness, after which he looked at the sergeant with a banter in his eyes.

"If I've got to learn to be broke, Sergeant," he drawled, "I'm willing to take a lesson right now."

Orcutt's eyes centered in a puzzled glare.

"What you driving at now?" he demanded.

"I'll lay my pile on yours if you're game. A flip of the coin, a toss of the dice, a cut of the deck, a cold hand—anything you say. Winner take all."

"Sergeants," said Orcutt severely, "don't gamble with privates in this outfit."

"Blue ribbon stuff, eh?" mused Rintoul, undisturbed. "Well, somebody tipped me that angle before, but I'll make it strictly between you and me, Sergeant, and no tales told. Or maybe you'd rather play it off nickel ante, or a dollar at a time?"

The sergeant's jaw snapped shut.

"If you're dying to lose your pile, I'll accommodate you!" he barked. "Pull the flap of that tent down and we'll make it one flop of the dice for the works. But we use my dice, not yours. I won you with them and I'll win your pile."

"The first one that shoots a seven, Sergeant," suggested Rintoul.

Orcutt gave a noisy laugh a moment later when he tossed a four and a three at his first throw. His mirth vanished when Rintoul tied the performance with a six and one. The sergeant required three throws to make his second seven. Rintoul made it in two and coolly gathered in the roll of bills.

"All right, double or nothing!" flared Orcutt, diving into his pocket for a roll of bills and counting out five twenties, the undivided hoard of the four sergeants.

"Check," said Rintoul, and cast a six and a one with his first toss.

Once more they played for the remaining fifty of Orcutt's pile, then Rintoul folded the sum into a compact wad and stuffed it into his pocket.

"They may call you Lucky Dice," growled Orcutt, "but I'm not so sure but they ought to have made it Crooked Dice."

"Do you think that's a very nice way to talk?" inquired Rintoul, fixing the sergeant with two very level eyes. "That's piker stuff, don't you think?"

In Orcutt's mind had been growing a detail of the game that had failed to crystallize during the brief, hot moments of play; the peculiar way in which Rintoul gathered up the dice between his long slender forefinger and his pliable thumb.

"I might think it was just luck, Rintoul," snarled the sergeant, "if I hadn't had a birds-eye view of how you treated the folks you worked for in Mexical. What you got to say about that, eh?"

Rintoul turned out of the tent with a disdainful snap of his fingers. He looked in through the flap for a last word, his serene smile back on his thin face.

"You ought to remember, Sergeant," he drawled, "I told you I was going to collect that two hundred that Greaser outfit owed me for wages. Thanks awfully for bringing it across the Line."

AT THE END of a heated conference between Sergeant Orcutt and the four duty sergeants involved in the transaction, the top sergeant sent his clerk for Corporal Hard of the fifth squad. In addition to his other duties, Hard was charged clandestinely with what the top sergeant

termed the company secret service.

"Looks like we got a dangerous *hombre* on our hands, Corporal," said the sergeant. "That fellow Rintoul who came in here and enlisted the other day is a crooked dice man, a card sharp and all around bunco man if we've got the right dope. Now that there's a war on, there'll be a lot of that kind of cattle enlisting to grab off the payroll. I want you to watch him."

The reports that came in from the rubber heeled Corporal Hard thereafter confirmed the fact that Private Rintoul was happy only when gambling. Not only was he out looking for a game every evening after drills, but when there was no game in the company row, he could be found in his squad tent playing solitaire. For hours he would sit alone rolling dice, or shuffling a deck and dealing dummy hands.

But those facts only clouded the issue in view of the corporal's further report. Private Rintoul invariably lost. The sums he lost were small, running from two to ten dollars each game. But neither at craps nor at poker did he display luck, skill, judgment, patience or any of the qualifications of a gambler, the men in the squad tents averred.

"They even got a nickname for him down in the squad tents, Sergeant," Corporal Hard reported one evening. "It's pretty much through the company."

"Yes, I know about that handle of his," said Orcutt. "Lucky Dice Rintoul. I think he wished that name on himself."

"No, sir, that ain't the name, Sarge," Hard corrected. "It's Ducksoup the men are calling him."

"Ducksoup!"

"Yeh. Because he's easy pickings."

Following payday, the gum shoe corporal's report only complicated the top sergeant's riddle. Rintoul, instead of cornering the H Company payroll, was again the star loser. He played in the company's largest poker game but was weak on the bluff and unlucky on the draw. At dice he did even worse. Sergeant Orcutt looked about from one to the other of his trusted four sergeants who heard this report.

"Maybe I was wrong," he said. "Maybe it was luck after all. Luck runs like that, doesn't it? You know as well as I do. Well, if luck's running against him, maybe now is the time to collect our money back. Anyhow, I've got a scheme of keeping the game straight. What you say?"

"Sure, if there's any chance getting our money back," averred one of the sergeants, the others assenting also.

"All right, Hard," directed Orcutt. "Herd that bird in here and see that the skipper doesn't drop in unexpected."

Rintoul responded promptly to the summons and in his best official manner.

"Private Rintoul reports to the First Sergeant," he announced, his eyes searching the five solemn faces in the orderly tent.

"How's the lucky dice, Rintoul?" inquired the top sergeant casually.

"Not so good of late." Rintoul smiled. He added, with a hardening of the glint in his eyes, "But no honest man ever expects to win all the time."

"Any propositions to make, Rintoul?" Orcutt challenged.

"Anything you like, Sarge," said Rintoul easily. "Sky's the limit, while it lasts."

"Can you cover fifty?"

"Sure. Twice that if you want."

"Fifty to start with, Rintoul." Orcutt got two dice from his pocket and took the aluminum cup from the bottom of a new model canteen. "We've clubbed in to get some of our money back, and I've got a little wrinkle that puts the game strictly on the square."

"That's the only kind of game I ever shoot," said Rintoul, leveling his eyes on Orcutt again while the smile on his face became icy. "Except in playing against a crook to beat him at his own game—or touching up some bird that uses his rank to pass out nasty remarks."

"I get that last crack, Rintoul," glowered Orcutt, "but there'll be no funny business about this toss. We'll shoot my

dice and we'll roll them out of this mess cup."

"Shoot when you are ready, Mr. Gridley!" said Rintoul.

Orcutt threw an eight and repeated it on his third cast. Rintoul promptly covered the loss with another fifty. The sergeant lost the dice on the next try and Rintoul took them, rolled them about in his hands, rubbed them on his coat, tossed them in the aluminum cup and cast a natural seven, six and one.

"Double or nothing," he baited the sergeants. "And if I don't make my point in two throws, you win!"

"Out of the cup?"

"Sure!" Rintoul threw the dice into the cup and handed it to Orcutt. "And you do my throwing for me!"

"Check!" said Orcutt.

He pushed his remaining stack of bills into the center of his field desk and threw the dice for the other. A six and an ace responded again, a natural.

"Thanks awfully," Rintoul grinned.

He picked up the dice, rolled them in his hand, threw them back on the table, and began pocketing his winnings.

"That was all, was it, Sarge?" he inquired. "No more money?"

"Nope; that cleans me up for this time."

"No more nasty remarks?"

"Nope. Not this time. All I got to say is that Lucky Dice is a damn' good name for you with your luck."

"Thanks, Sarge," said Rintoul as he turned to go. At the flap he turned back again for a parting remark, "But always remember this, Sarge, the hand is faster than the eye."

TWO WEEKS had passed. H Company had joined its regiment and the regiment its division at Camp Frémont before Sergeant Orcutt learned that there was something more than a passing twit behind that parting remark of Private Rintoul's. Corporal Hard brought in the word one night, interrupting the sergeant in the midst of a busy grind of company reports.

"I just learned something you ought to know, Sarge," said the gumshoe specialist. "That bird Rintoul is a sure thing man sure enough."

"Trimmed the gang at last, eh?" rejoined Orcutt, dropping his work and turning intently to his personal spy.

"No, they still trim him; that's what I can't get through my head. But he sure could trim 'em if he wanted to."

"Well, out with it! What you talking about?"

Corporal Hard moved close to the sergeant's ear and unburdened himself breathlessly.

"It was like this, Sarge. I was doing some prowling tonight around the mess shack when I see Rintoul in there shaking dice all by his lonesome. I eased up close to have an eye on what was doing and there I see two sets of dice out. Yessir. He'd pick up both sets and then roll out only one of them. I got that close I could touch him, and believe it or not, Sarge, one of those sets always hit seven no matter how you threw them."

"A six and an ace?"

"That's it! And the way he could palm and juggle those two sets of dice would make your eyes swim. Sarge. It would make a vaudeville palmist green with envy. Pretty soon he puts one set of dice in one pocket and one in the other, and I come on up here to report."

The top sergeant rose slowly to his feet, an ominous scowl deepening on his face.

"Send that crook up here, Hard, and I'll catch him with them loaded dice, red handed!"

"You bet, Sarge. I'll tell him you got something for him, so he'll not get suspicious and ditch 'em."

"That's the idea!"

As a further precaution, Corporal Hard, after delivering the sergeant's summons, accompanied the suspected malefactor to the first sergeant's quarters and saw him inside. Orcutt sat for some time boring into the other with cold, prying eyes, but without in the least shaking Rintoul's easy assurance.

"You wouldn't do such a thing as use

crooked dice, now would you, Rintoul?" began Orcutt in an insinuating sneer. "You're not that kind of a lowdown crook, are you?"

"Sure I'm not, Sarge," said Rintoul coolly. "Anyway, not unless I had some good reason for doing it. Why?"

"Then," snapped Orcutt, leaping to his feet and springing his trap, "I'll have a look at the dice you got in your right hand pocket and the dice you got in your left hand pocket. Out with them, or I'll take them out for you!"

The threat of a man half again his own size, with jaw thrust close to him and eyes blazing, did not shake Rintoul. His smile broadened, but without resembling a smile.

"What's in my pockets is my own," he replied. "No first sergeant or anybody else has got any right to dig around in my clothes, and you know it."

"Do you take them out, or do I?"

"Whenever I see anybody make a cold bluff, Sarge, I always calls. You're bluffing—and you're called! If you try to go into my pockets, you'll start something you'll never be able to finish. Take a good tip and don't try it!"

The clash of eyes lasted a minute. There was a cool, clear disconcerting assurance in Rintoul's face that won. Orcutt capitulated and let himself out by raising a tense finger and pointing to the door.

"Get out of here, you crook!" he roared. "And remember this. News of your specialty is going into the company, so you'll not pick up any more victims here; and the first crooked stunt you try, you'll land in the hoosegow. I got your number now, and I got it right."

"Maybe you have and maybe you haven't," drawled Rintoul from the door. "But I'm telling you this. I never took anything yet that didn't belong to me. Or if I did, it was for some good reason of my own—and it's always went to somebody that needed it worse than I did. Now you spill your story as far and as fast as you want to. Nobody likes you in this outfit, anyhow, and nobody'll believe you, anyhow. Now after this, Sarge, you confine your remarks to me to official business."

"Suits me!" roared Orcutt. "And I'll make it damned official, too!"

While usually there was more bark than bite in Sergeant Orcutt's blusterings, it was recorded of him that once he washed his hands of a soldier that man was due over the hill at no remote date. A quarrelsome ex-gob with a propensity for squabbling with every one was the last victim of the sergeant's special system of purging the ranks of undesirables. The ex-gob had held out three months before he finally deserted in the night, much to the joy of the supply sergeant who had a heavy shortage that was waiting on a desertion.

"Watch that crook, Hard," he ordered his secret service. "Watch him close. I'll run him over the hill inside a month—and you see he doesn't clean the bunch before he skips."

"I'm willing to testify about them loaded dice if you want to get quick action before a court, Sarge," suggested the corporal.

Orcutt squirmed in his chair and slowly shook his head.

"No, I'm not in any shape to go to the skipper on this," he replied. "It's all circumstantial, without involving some good sergeants in the mess. You just watch him, pass a warning down the grapevine to the gang, and I'll get rid of him in my own way."

BUT in carrying out this idea, the first sergeant ran into several obstacles with which he had not reckoned. To begin with, when the whisper sizzled down the company grapevine that Rintoul was a tinhorn, no one took the rumor very seriously. In the second place, Orcutt's worst effort seemed to have no visible effect on Rintoul's morale. Rintoul drew all the heavy work details, listened to the sergeant's bawlings-out and accepted all other petty tyrannies, including company discipline for minor military discrepan-

cies, without complaint or even the loss of his hantering smile. In fact, Rintoul's smile gradually rose to a mastery of the situation. It goaded Orcutt into impotent frenzy every time he tried to ride Rintoul, whereas Rintoul's invariable response to Orcutt's ravings was an expansion of that maddening grin.

Furthermore, Orcutt's practised technique in driving undesirables to desert was handicapped now by a rising flood of manpower. H Company grew swiftly from sixty men to two hundred, and the sergeant's energy was absorbed by the feverish activity of making them over into soldiers. Rintoul complicated the feud by doing his own stuff as a private. He lacked a soldier's setup and left a lot to be desired, but nothing that could be very definitely fastened upon. He was prompt at all formations, steady at drills, made a fair score at target practise, and was scrupulous in personal appearance and care of his equipment.

There was, too, a gradual transition in Rintoul's appearance. His chest filled out, his face grew pink, then red, and finally took on a healthy seasoned bronze. The hollows disappeared from under his eyes. But there the transition ended. Off duty he was restless, always nosing about for a game, playing for small stakes and seldom winning. The men in his squad tent liked him, though they knew nothing more about his antecedents today than on the day he enlisted. He was always agreeable, they said, and took things as they came without grumbling. And he was a generous lender between paydays when every one else was habitually broke.

"I think it's just excitement he's looking for," said Corporal Smalley, of Rintoul's squad, defending his soldier against the insinuation and interrogations of Corporal Hard. "He says he never wanted to be a soldier, and don't like it trying to be one, but he couldn't miss the big row on the other side. You couldn't make anybody here think he's a sharper, even if he is, Hard. Sharpers don't always lose, and this bird Rintoul always loses."

The first sergeant finally abandoned any hope he had of running Rintoul over the hill, but attributed the failure to the war rather than to his own technique in handling such cases.

"I won that bird in a dice game," he growled to Corporal Hard. "But losing him isn't so easy, is it? Well, maybe they can't be drove over the hill while this war is on, but watch his steps on paydays. I owe it to H Company to get shut of that crook before it's too late."

Following the payday that preceded Thanksgiving, Sergeant Orcutt's secret service reported with new and startling information. Something for a court this time. He had watched the whole thing through and had plenty of witnesses. The division was together at the port of embarkation by this time, waiting to go across; and payday had been followed by dice games for large stakes. Winners in the company games had matched dice in battalion games, the winners of those had gone to regimental sessions, then had followed a showdown among the winners in brigade games, and finally the brigade survivors had met for the grand climax. Big stakes, representing mass winnings, were up, as much as a hundred dollars on the throw of the dice.

"And that bird Rintoul was one of the big winners, Sarge," chortled Hard. "I saw him rolling his dice, and he come out with better than four hundred smacks to the good."

"But see here, Hard," said Orcutt, "we got to know it was crooked dice! Of course, you and I know it, but did anybody get wise, or did you see him doing his palming stuff with double dice?"

"Ah, we can cook that up, Sarge," rejoined Hard. "The way he tossed out the seven spots last night couldn't be nothing but crooked. When I tell that bunch of losers my story, they'll be raring to chew him up before a court for crooked gambling. Anyhow, the skipper'll be able to transfer him out of the outfit and leave him behind when we sail."

"I'll see the skipper right now!" Orcutt decided, and was on his way out of the orderly room thirsting for action, when the door opened to admit Rintoul.

"I want the first sergeant's permission to speak with the company commander," the private requested, meeting the sergeant's startled glare with his most disconcerting smile.

"What you want to see the cap'n about!" demanded Orcutt.

"Something personal, Sergeant,"

"All right, out with it! I'll decide when I've heard, whether I'll let you pester the commanding officer."

"The sergeant said all our dealings were official," replied Rintoul quietly. "My business with the captain isn't official, but it's reasonable; and if you don't want to give permission I'll go in anyhow and tell him so."

Orcutt debated this threat briefly and yielded.

"All right. Hang yourself if you want to. I was only trying to keep you out of trouble. But be damn' careful what you say."

"Oh, it isn't anything that'll interest you much, Sarge," Rintoul grinned.

Sergeant Orcutt and his secret service sat looking at each other without words for some moments after Rintoul departed.

"That crook's up to some mischief," said Orcutt finally. "Maybe he got wind of what was in the air and wants to get me in dutch by complaining how I've been riding his frame."

"More likely, Sarge," ruminated Hard, after a period of heavy thought, "that he's going to transfer out of the outfit. Maybe it don't look so good now we're starting across. I've been looking for him to go sick or A.W.O.L. about now."

"You wait here, Hard, while I find out. I'll get to the skipper the minute that rat goes out and tell him a few things."

Rintoul's visit with the company commander was of some little duration. Sergeant Orcutt shivered in the cold wind outside until he saw the gambler leave, then entered promptly, hat in hand, his humor screened by his mildest smile.

"Just dropped in for a minute, sir,' he sparred. "Everything is in fine shape in the outfit, except for one little matter I meant to take up with you earlier. That's about this man Rintoul we picked up down at Calexico. He's—"

"Yes, I know about that, Sergeant," said the captain pleasantly. "He was just in here. An odd chap, isn't he?"

"Odd? I'll say so, sir," said Orcutt in a deprecatory voice. He looked puzzled for a moment as he studied the captain's face and added nervously, "Did he say anything about making a transfer, sir?"

"Transfer?" The captain looked up sharply. "Oh, yes," he said with a smile of sudden understanding. "I tried to talk him out of the notion, but it was no use. He had his mind made up to it, so I let him have his way."

"Well, I say that's lucky for H Company, sir," rejoined Orcutt with a grin of vast relief. "The quicker the better, I'm saying."

"Yes, it's a bit of luck, Orcutt," agreed the captain. "The fact is the balance is so low in the company fund, I was afraid we'd have to pass Thanksgiving up altogether, with all these two hundred odd mouths to feed. This donation of four hundred dollars from Rintoul to buy the big feed with is a lifesaver, although I did hate to accept such a large transfer from personal funds from an enlisted man."

"Sir? What—?" Orcutt stammered impotently as he tried to digest the captain's meaning. "You mean that bird donated four hundred to the mess fund, sir?"

"I supposed you knew that, Sergeant. He said he had your permission to take the matter up with me; and I thought you asked me if—"

"Yes; yes, sir," nodded Orcutt. "I was just wondering if he really went through with it."

"He insisted, in fact. Said he didn't have any present use for that much money and no one to leave it to. Was there anything further you wanted to see me about, Sergeant?"

"No, sir. Thank you, sir. Good night, sir," replied Orcutt in his more ingratiating manner.

Back in the orderly room, the first sergeant and his secret service agent spent some time, mostly in ruminative silence, trying to analyze this development.

"Maybe he was just doing some more advertising, Sarge," suggested Hard, as a summary of his final conclusions. "Making himself solid for a big cleanup next payday when he hit the other side and money is loose."

"Maybe," reflected Orcutt. "They say good crooks have got a lot of patience waiting their chances. But mark me, Hard, I'll get my fingers on those crooked dice yet!"

THREE more paydays went by, overseas, before H Company finished up in its training area and stood ready to move into the zone of action. On each of those paydays, reports drifted in of Rintoul's dice adventures out in the division area. The first two of these merely recorded disaster. Rintoul had made his way up to the finals only to be ingloriously beaten in the throws for high stakes. But at the third monthly session he not only emerged with a hatful of francs, but sent out a challenge to play the pile against the dice champion of a neighboring division that had lately moved into the region.

A prompt acceptance of the defiance came back. Preliminaries were thereafter arranged by discreet negotiations between representatives of the two outfits. Corporal Smalley himself acted for Rintoul. The seconds agreed upon an isolated billet in a neutral French village midway between the two divisional areas, time midnight of Saturday night, ordinary dice to be used, usual rules of craps, size of bets to be determined by the two dice duelists themselves when they met for combat.

When the adversaries were brought together, both stood looking at each other, agape for several speechless moments.

"Old Lefty, himself," drawled Rintoul, his eyes lighting up. "Last man in the world I expected to meet over here. When did you get out—er—that is, when did you get into the war?"

"Lucky Dice, eh?" sneered the other. "Well, now that we meet again, let's make it snappy."

"All right, Lefty, one shot for the pile. Same old game—first seven takes all, in case of tie, shoot over. Are you on?"

"Cheek!" said Lefty. "But we'll get dice from one of these lads here and not use our own, yes?"

"Suits me, Lefty."

Twenty thousand francs in crisp bank-notes, mostly in one hundred franc notes, was deposited on the table while the onlookers held their breath and the two dice duelists cleared for action. Lefty, a thin chested, beady eyed little man with a thin, hard mouth and beakish nose, was nervous as he picked up a neutral set of dice and made several preliminary throws, rubbing his long fingers after each toss as if to work the stiffness out of them. They matched silver franc pieces for first toss, Lefty winning the dice. He picked the dice up with an expert hand, and dashed them down quickly. A five and a two resulted.

"Your lucky night, eh Lefty?" Rintoul smiled, offering no objection to Lefty's tricky technique.

He picked the dice up, rolled them in his hand, rubbed them about on his clothes for luck and chucked them across the board. A six and a one showed. Lefty swore aloud. Rintoul took off his tin helmet, rolled the dice around in them and made another throw. A six and a one. He picked the dice up, quickly, and rolled them about briefly and handed them to Lefty with a cold bow.

"Beat that, old-timer, if you can," he bantered.

Lefty picked the dice up with great precision, but his fingers were trembling now. With barely a shake of the bones he dropped them to the table. One of the dice landed with a five spot up. The other hit on its corner, gyrated uncertainly and landed trey up.

"Hell!" roared Lefty, then added with as much *sang froid* as he could muster, "That old handle of yours still holds good. Luckiest man I ever saw in my life. Well, I'll be around for revenge some day."

"Not if I see you coming you'll not," said Rintoul disgustedly, as he gathered up the pile of francs and left at once, followed by his escort of Corporal Smalley and three husky privates.

"We sure got money enough now to last the rest of the war," effused Smalley when they were outside. "Twenty thousand cold francs!"

"We're not a cent richer than when we came over to this little *soiree*," Rintoul replied in a low voice. "But our own ten thousand will buy enough chickens, fresh pork and *vin rouge* for a big feed for the gang."

"I don't get you, Lucky," said Smalley. "What you mean we're no richer!"

"I mean that that Lefty is one of the biggest crooks ever to roll a dice. I know him of old. Can handle the dice with his fingers so as to throw sevens about nine times out of ten."

"But you beat him, Lucky. We've got the coin, haven't we?"

"Yes, I beat him at his own game. I got my own little system for taking care of tinhorns and trimmers. He doesn't savvy the fine art of palming the phony set of trained dice. But I don't want that kind of money and I'm going to send it over to his outfit tomorrow to stiffen up their feeding fund."

BEFORE another payday rolled round, the frothy pastimes of a billeting area were replaced by the grim realities of front line trenches. On the night that H Company awaited the crack of dawn to send them over the top into their first red brawl, men sat huddled in trenches and dugouts, wrapped in a tense, somber silence. H Company was the right assault company of the right assault battalion, Rintoul's squad the right squad of the right assault platoon.

Up to now the sector had been quiet enough. A few grenades had come over from time to time, where the trenches ran close together, enemy artillery growled intermittently, hidden machine guns searched for hidden snipers with small results. H Company had been especially galled by a hidden machine gun on its right flank, one that the best snipers had been unable to dislodge. But the men knew this was nothing but a mild preliminary. The real storm would break with the morning when the division went over in a surprise attack, without benefit of artillery preparation, to force their cold steel to a depth of three kilometers sheer into the enemy's front. Not until H-hour-plus-one-minute would they be supported by their own artillery, and then by a rolling barrage that would take small account of machine gun nests.

Rintoul sat in a dugout with the squad, as silent as the others, but with a glint of excitement in his eyes and a high color burning in his cheeks. Beside him sat Corporal Smalley, a bundle of gloom, huddled over his rifle, nervously flicking imaginary specks of dust from the rear sights as H hour approached.

"Why the sober look, Corporal?" Rintoul asked finally in an airy voice. "Cheer up; the worst's yet to come!"

"Oh, I don't mind that, Lucky; don't worry about me," said Smalley, forcing a smile. "I was just worrying about how the folks at home would feel if—if I got in the way of something."

"Well, that's something to worry about, all right," said Rintoul, after staring soberly at Smalley for several moments. "But cheer up and don't worry, old-timer. Life's all a gamble, anyhow. It's a toss of the dice, and no way to beat this game. Enjoy it while it lasts, that's my motto."

"I know, Lucky, that's the wise way to look at it; but you haven't anybody to worry about except yourself."

"No, but even if I had—"

Sergeant Orcutt's bristling entry cut off the sentence. The sergeant's face was set in a determined glare and the raw

edge of his nerves turned his voice into a short, sharp bark.

"All right—a job for this squad!" he snapped. "You got a Boche machine gun in your front. Needn't tell you that. When the company goes over, that nest's got to be spiked and spiked damn' quick. Somebody's got to go out while it's dark and move in on that outfit. The lieutenant's got the place spotted. He'll give the instructions and see you through the wire. Who wants the job? Don't all speak at once!"

There was no response. Sergeant Orcutt looked from one to the other with biting eyes. His look rested on Rintoul. But Rintoul smiled back in silence. There were no volunteers for this certain death in a lone adventure.

"All right!" roared the sergeant. "If none of you want to volunteer, I'll send the whole outfit out. It's your job. If you ain't made up your mind by the time I come back from company reserve, over you go! Think that over and settle it among yourselves."

Rintoul broke the long silence that followed the sergeant's exit.

"All right, you lads," he exclaimed. "Somebody's got to do that job, so let's decide who. A roll of the dice! Come on, that's the fair way."

There was no response until a precious minute had ticked by, then as Rintoul got his dice and tossed them on the floor, the others turned to him in grim acceptance.

"All right, let's go!" he challenged. "Seven is the lucky number. The one that shoots a seven in the fewest throws wins the cloth lined wooden overcoat. Use Smalley's dice. Shoot!"

With stiff fingers they picked up the corporal's dice and cast them on the floor of the dugout under the flickering yellow glow of a single tallow candle. The third private made seven on his second cast and sat visibly trembling until Smalley made his throw. A four and a three, first cast.

Rintoul took the dice very deliberately. His eyes were on the ground and he held the dice inertly as if unwilling to play. Only by throwing a seven could he tie Smalley, and then there would be the tie to settle. Fate had clearly fixed upon the corporal.

"All right, Smalley, throw again," Rintoul announced suddenly. "So I'll know what I've got to beat in case of a tie. Shoot!"

The corporal complied dumbly, the dice falling from his heavy hand only twice before the fatal seven showed again, a five and a two this time.

"The devil's sure on your trail tonight, Smalley," said Rintoul. "I'll sure have to have a lot of hard luck to get stuck now!"

He jumped to his feet, rolled the dice about in his hands, rubbed them on his clothing, and dropped them to the floor. A six and a one. The fatal seven.

"A tie!" gasped every one.

They watched Rintoul breathlessly as he slowly picked up the dice, and dropped them to the ground a second time. A six and a one. A miracle. Rintoul laughed.

Orcutt's jaw dropped as Rintoul greeted his entrance, rifle in hand, ready for the desperate adventure.

"Report to the lieutenant, Rintoul," Orcutt ordered. "He'll put you through the wires!"

The sergeant's bewildered eyes followed Rintoul out of the dugout.

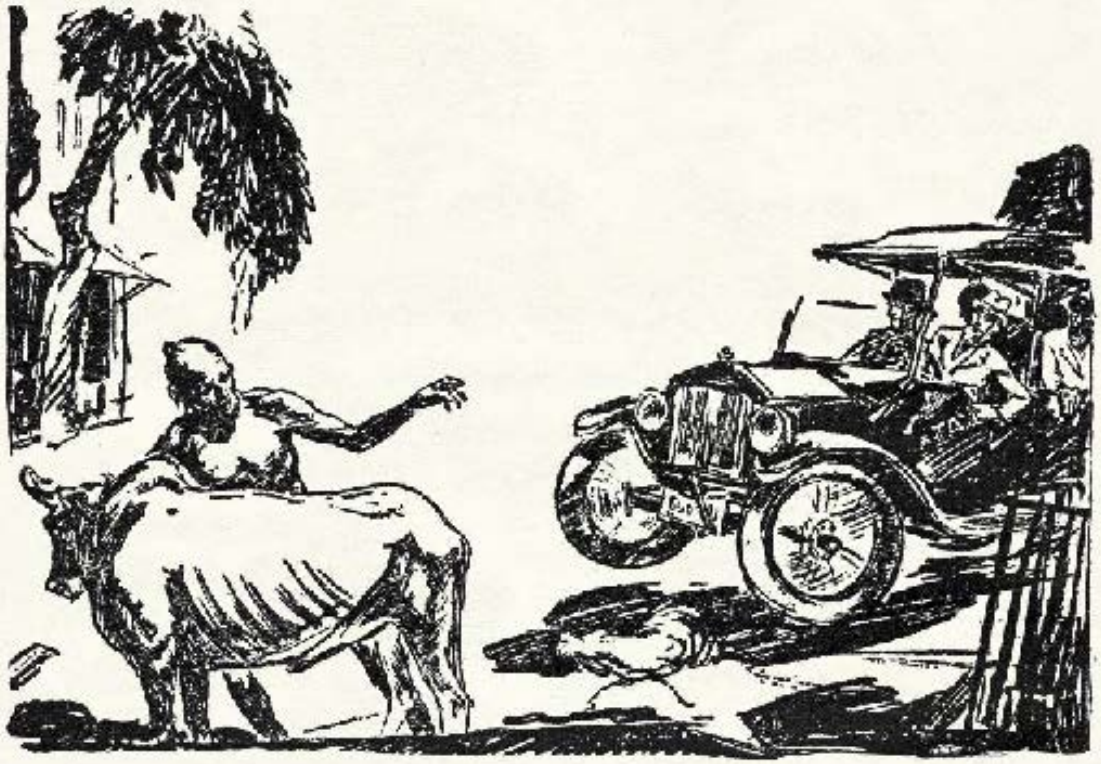
"That bird sure fooled me," he said. "He was the only man in the squad I wasn't counting on, which goes to show how bad even a first sergeant can get fooled on you noble heroes."

"Well, we all shook dice for it, Sarge," spoke up a private, goaded by a subtle imputation in Orcutt's voice. "Any of us would have gone if we won the wooden overcoat."

Orcutt's face lighted up.

"Oh that was it, eh?" he snorted. "I thought there was some catch to it. Well, I won him in a dice game, so maybe it's only even when I lose him that way." He turned back from the door of the dugout. "Anyhow, I'm glad to find out he played one game straight without ringing in any crooked dice!"

A Murder Chase from California to the Orient



The SACRED COW

By. L. G. BLOCHMAN

EVEN if Martin Cook had turned out all right and Joe Warren had actually realized his ambition to own a country newspaper, Joe would not have stuck with it for long. He did not believe it at the time, but Joe had ridden the back step of too many clanging ambulances, followed too many midnight alarms and tiptoed through the blood of too many sudden deaths to be really happy running a hick sheet.

Still, at thirty he harbored the idea that he had newspapered about long enough on a salary. He figured he had sneaked through enough back windows to snare forbidden pictures for the tabloids, invented a fine sufficiency of epigrams for the dumb celebrities he had interviewed and written his last pathetic yarn about a dog with a broken leg holding up traffic at the world's busiest corner. He thought he would soon be able to say he had

covered his last prizefight and uncovered his last love nest.

His future was in the rural field—if he ever got the money to buy a paper. And that was where Martin Cook came in, dragging a sinister net of disaster behind him.

Cook worked on newspapers too, but he could not exactly be called a newspaperman, because he was neither improvident nor impoverished. He sold advertising or circulation interchangeably, and promoted almost anything else that needed promoting. He was a go-getter who knew how to go get the cash. He had a strong handclasp, a facile tongue and a weak mouth. He was addicted to straw hats at a ralish angle. He could make friends with a conductor and ten passengers in a ten-minute trolley ride. And he was Joe Warren's friend.

Their friendship had been sealed once when Joe had mortally offended a Sacred Cow—which is newspaper parlance for an intimate friend of the boss, or a man with an advertising account so large that the public prints never allowed the elevators in his store to have accidents. Joe's offense spelled the loss of his job until Mart Cook stepped in to smooth things over. And when Cook left for the West Coast, he promised Joe that he would send for him as soon as opportunity presented itself wreathed in dollar signs for the furtherance of the rural paper project.

Cook had been gone three weeks when Joe got his wire, chucked his job and went to California.

The specific part of California was Imperial Valley, down on the Mexican Border, where Mart Cook was promoting a chamber of commerce booklet on the strength of the Boulder Dam excitement.

"I'm selling all space and you're to spread it," Cook told Joe when he met him at the train. "We can rush the job through. Then I got another little deal on that'll make us some real money."

For two weeks Joe did not hear any more about the deal that was hanging fire. He was busy writing about the All-American Canal and the waters that were going to make the desert bloom with new prosperity, more cotton and bigger cantaloups. Then, one afternoon in Holtville, Cook said they were going to Los Angeles that night.

"We're going to drive a load of cantaloups through—as a publicity stunt," he said. "Meet me in Calexico about ten o'clock."

Cook drove the truck and Joe dozed in the seat beside him as they rolled along the dark desert highway. Cook told him to catch a few winks, as they would not get to Los Angeles before morning. In case he got tired and wanted Joe to drive awhile, he would wake him.

It was not Cook that woke him, though; it was the squealing of brakes. Two flashlights were waving stop signals down the road.

Two men walked into the glare of the truck's headlights. They were the khaki uniforms of the Immigration Service.

"Where you going, fella?"

"To L. A."

"Whateha got back there?"

"Melons," offered Cook. "Prize melons for this time of year. Want some?"

"You don't look like truck drivers to me," said one officer.

"We don't belong to the union," said Cook, getting out his credentials. "We're working on a publicity stunt—press stuff."

Joe thought Cook's hand trembled a trifle as he passed a paper to one officer. And he wondered at the nervous glance that Cook cast at the second officer who walked to the rear, flashing his light on the crated cantaloups. The officer shook one of the crates perfunctorily and returned.

"I guess they're all right," he said. "Let 'em go through."

Cook threw in the clutch and stepped on the gas. When the motor was purring evenly again, he made a noise like a punctured tire.

"Jeez!" he exclaimed. "Gimme a cigaret quick! I thought sure they had us."

Joe studied Cook's face by the ruddy flare of the match.

"Had us?" was his puzzled inquiry. "What for?"

"I guess I'd better tell you," said Cook, "so you'll know what we're getting nicked for if they stop us again. There's five Hindus under those crates in back."

"Hindus?" echoed Joe incredulously. "Men?"

"Coolies."

"For the love of Pete! They'll be dead of suffocation or hardening of the arteries before we get to Los Angeles."

"They may be a little cramped," said Cook. "That's one of the hardships connected with being smuggled into this great land of ours. But they'll live. They were fed and watered before I sneaked them over the line from Mexicali."

Joe stared into the darkness for a moment.

"I don't like this," he said. "What's the big idea?"

"For the good of our country—newspaper," said Cook. "We get a thousand bucks a head for the Hindus, delivered in L. A. That makes five grand in all."

Cook explained that their responsibility ended in Los Angeles, where the Hindus would be deodorized, dressed and sent north as students. A man Cook called "the King" was paying the smuggling fee, in return for which the Hindus were bound to work as agricultural laborers in Sacramento Valley for five years. For that period they were paid nothing, but they were fed and given a place to sleep.

Joe was silent for some time after the explanation was terminated. Then he said solemnly—

"You'd better count me out, Mart."

"Afraid?"

"Hell, no. I'll ride through with you. Don't worry about that. I just don't like the idea of being mixed up in a racket like this. Too much like slavery. Give me what's coming to me for my last week in the valley and you can keep the five grand uncut."

"You're fooling, Joe."

"No, I'm not. Have you got my last week's jack on you?"

"Take it out of that," said Cook, handing over his wallet. "Are you sore at me, Joe?"

"Not in the least, Mart. We're still the best of friends. I know your heart's all right, Mart, but you made a mistake in judgment, that's all. But I'm not sore. I'll be able to get a job with some sheet in Los Angeles, all right."

The two men did not speak again for an hour. Joe did not sleep any mum. He stared ahead, watching the night fade. With the first glint of dawn came a sense of relief; their destination was not far off now.

The paved highway began to gleam dully in the colorless half light. They passed a man riding a bicycle. A village of sleeping houses opened one yellow glowing eye.

DOWN the road ahead a single headlight came flashing around a curve and expanded as it rushed toward them. A motorcycle engine rattled above the noise of their own motor.

"I wonder—" mused Martin Cook, aloud.

The motorcycle came abreast, swerved off the highway and threw up a shower of dirt from the soft shoulder as it turned, circled and pulled alongside the truck. The rider raised a gloved hand from the handlebars as a signal to stop. As Cook complied, the rider dismounted and walked toward the truck with pistol drawn. Again the khaki uniform of the Immigration Service. Joe felt Cook twitch nervously beside him.

"Where ya going?" demanded the officer.

"L. A," replied Cook.

"That's what *you* say," said the officer. "Let's see what you got hid back there."

He leaped lightly to the back of the truck and clambered over the load. Cook arose and whirled to watch him, one hand in his coat pocket.

The officer lifted a crate of cantaloups out of place and knelt beside it.

"Come outa there!" he ordered tri-

umphantly, speaking into the space vacated by the crate.

Cook quickly withdrew his hand from his pocket.

"For God's sake, Mart!"

Joe grabbed for Cook's arm, but recoiled from two thunderous spurts of flame, so close that two puffs of warm air beat upon his cheeks.

The immigration officer pitched silently off the load of melons, stood on his head on the highway for a grotesque instant, then sprawled on the pavement.

Cook dropped into the driver's seat and threw the truck in gear. As it roared away from the inert figure in the road, two crates tumbled off and scattered bouncing cantaloups. Three turbaned heads appeared among the boxes, jabbering terrified gibberish.

Joe recovered from his daze to find himself clutching Cook's arm.

"For God's sake, Mart!" he shouted. "Are you crazy? What's got into you? What have you got us into? Why did you pop that bird?"

Cook's face was the color of mutton tallow. He gripped the wheel and drove on, staring ahead. After a moment, ghosts of words came from between white lips.

"Crazy!" he muttered. "Goofy, all right. Scared. I was scared. Jeez, beat it Joe. Didn't mean to get you into a mess. Sorry as hell. Pile out, Joe. I'll slow down."

"Don't be a damn fool, Mart. I'll stick with you. You pulled a bad boner, but I'll stick."

"Don't stay with me," insisted Cook. His voice was gaining volume and composure. "I don't want you to stay. Don't you see? You're the only witness to the funny business. They'll make you take the stand. You'll be a proseeution witness."

"You're delirious."

"They'll find you and they'll make you testify. You're so damned honest that you'd probably send me to the gallows. Promise you won't testify against me, Joe. Promise."

"I won't testify," said Joe, passing his hand over his eyes. "Because they won't find me—unless you want me to stick and share the blame."

"No. No, Joe, beat it. I'll ditch the truck and make a getaway alone. It'll be better that way. I'll find the King. The King'll help me."

Joe swung out on the running board, leaned back and picked up a gun from the floor between the pedals. He slipped it into his pocket.

"Good luck, Mart!" he yelled. "I won't testify."

He dropped off and started running through an orange grove, away from the rising sun, toward the coast.

The truck sped down the road.

II

THE CREW of the *West Aragon* paid no particular attention to the ordinary seaman who signed on an hour before the ship cleared San Pedro for Manila via ports. Despite prohibition, these last minute shortages occur in the best of packets, and the man on the dock comes along.

The ordinary seaman did not pay much attention to the crew, either. He appeared to be about thirty, had blondish hair and a pug nose that turned up slightly with an inquisitive twist. He had humorous gray eyes that were sometimes crossed by a shadow of worry in rare moments of idleness, when he sat alone in the forecastle or on deck. His ears stood out slightly from the sides of his head and turned red when he was excited—sometimes merely when the boatswain snapped out his name from behind—

"Warren!"

He kept apart and worked hard. He stayed out of fights largely because he had a jaw that answered unasked questions.

The *West Aragon* put in at Kobe after a three weeks' run across the Pacific. She lay in the stream while lighters came out to take off a cargo of sewing machines.

Joe Warren was leaning against the rail, admiring the wooded mass of Mayasan, pushing itself into the sky behind the

city, when the agent came aboard. Among other things, he brought a letter addressed in a bold, round hand to Joe Warren, S. S. *West Aragon*, Kobe, Japan.

Joe looked at the American stamp on the letter with bewilderment. How could American mail reach him, when his ship had barely arrived from America itself? Whose handwriting was on the envelop? Who knew he was aboard the *West Aragon?*

The first question answered itself after a moment's thought. Mail sent over the Great Circle route from Seattle or Vancouver could leave a week after his ship, which came by the south, and still arrive first in the Orient. But who was it had traced Joe Warren to this ship? He had not even let Mart Cook know he had got on board the very day of the shooting. He did not even know what had happened to Cook. Anyhow, the writing was not Cook's.

He tore open the envelop and a newspaper clipping fluttered to the deck. His fingers searched the envelop for a letter; there was none. He picked up the clipping, glanced at the headlines. Then his ears turned red.

The clipping was from a Los Angeles paper. It was the story of the shooting of the immigration officer by supposed smugglers of coolies. Police had found the abandoned truck, but no gun. They would never find the gun; it went overboard the second day out from San Pedro. The truck had been traced back to Imperial Valley, where it was registered in the name of Joseph Warren, a newspaperman. Detectives had been unable to locate Warren, but a warrant charging murder had been issued for his arrest!

Joe crumpled the clipping and envelop and hurled them into the water. So they had pinned the murder on him, had they? That made things easier for Mart Cook. He would like to see Mart have a chance to steer clear of the mess. Mart was not really a bad fellow at heart. He did register that truck in Joe's name, but of course he could not forsee that there was going to be murder connected with the thing. And they may just as well hang the blame on Joe, since he was out of reach. The detectives could not even locate him. But —somebody knew where he was! Somebody had written to him aboard the *West Aragon!* He could not go on to Manila with this ship now. Manila was American territory. He had better keep clear . . .

NEXT morning he changed his few dollars to yen, caught a train for Shimonoseki and made connections with an express steamer for Shanghai.

Shanghai he found in the throes of international convulsions. Warships were anchored in the Whangpoo. Sailors and marines of five nationalities strutted along the Bund and fought in the cabarets of the foreign settlement. Outside the boundaries, the fighting was being done by one set of gray clad Chinese soldiers, who were trying to dispossess another set of gray clad Chinese soldiers. At the boundaries, machine guns and barricades and kilted warriors of the Shanghai Scottish were busy warning both sets of soldiers that they must be very careful to remember that the settlement was not built for Chinese to fight in.

There was a smell of death in the air, yet people mistook the scent for a new stimulus to life. So, even as before, chanting coolies slaved by day and men danced with Russian girls by night in the dives of North Szechuen Road.

Joe Warren had not been in town a day before he was caught up in the current of life and excitement, on which death was merely a vague foam. He realized that he was a man trained to watch things happen. For a moment he forgot that he was a man to whom things had been happening, and he went around to the office of the *China Press* to ask for a job. He got it.

The *China Press* is a newspaper maintained to keep Shanghai Americans informed on such essentials as the trend of the stock market, the standing of the major leagues, mail dates and exchange quotations. At the time of this story, it was also maintained to allow itinerant

American journalists the privilege of drowning their nostalgia in exercising their profession. The moon faced office boy of the editorial rooms was trained to carry copy with one hand and pour drinks with the other. A reporter had only to sign a *chit* against his pay envelop and a tall glass was set beside his typewriter.

Joe Warren found it an exceedingly pleasant place to work and would have stayed longer had not circumstances decreed otherwise.

About a month after Joe had joined the staff he received a letter addressed in a bold, round hand. The envelop was postmarked Kobe and inside was a typewritten note which read as follows:

> Dear Mr. Warren: For the good of your health and that of Mr. Martin Cook, I would suggest that you send a hundred-dollar bill to Harry Zicks, care Express Co., Kobe, Japan. Mr. Zicks, who knows quite a few things, happens to need just a hundred dollars at this time. If he doesn't get the money by return mail, he is liable to grow talkative. I'm sure you will think this is a reasonable request, in view of extradition proceedings, and the punishment the law prescribes for murder.

So he was being blackmailed, was he? Petty blackmail, at that. Well, his conscience was clear. They could never get a cent out of him. He tore up the letter and clapped his hands for the office boy, who came running with a glass and two bottles.

Joe waited until the soda had quit bubbling, drained the glass at a draught and licked his lips pensively. Then he leaned over and fished the torn pieces of letter out of his wastebasket. He fitted the scraps together on his desk, copying the name and address. After all, he had better act cautiously. Cook, apparently, was still at large. This Zicks fellow, whoever he was, appeared to have a keen insight into the whole matter. Why let Mart Cook down for a measly hundred bucks? As it was the day after payday, Joe had the hundred. He sent it to Zicks in Japan and decided to invest the rest of his roll in transportation.

He caught a P & O steamer for Hongkong, where he decided he had better travel farther and in less obvious directions. So he transhipped to a dirty little coaster which was bound for Bangkok with a passenger list composed, besides himself, of a teak miller, a red faced English woman and ninety thousand cockroaches.

What he was going to do in Bangkok, he did not know, except that his name was going to be Ward hereafter. Neither the teak miller nor the English woman had told him that Bangkok, for some reason peculiar to Siam and the East, required three English language dailies for its five hundred English reading population. The editing of any one of the three was only a fairly exacting job for one competent man with a sharp pair of shears, a pot of paste and a good exchange list. Some imagination would be useful in unscrambling the meager Reuter despatches after they had been manhandled by a few native cable operators, but this was not essential. The week after Joe landed in Bangkok and wondered how he was going to pay his bill at the Oriental Hotel, the staff of one of the three papers drank some water and died of cholera. Joe took his place.

Joe had been working for five weeks, saving money ruthlessly, nursing his new white drill suits with utmost care to keep down laundry expenses, when he received another letter addressed in the round bold hand he had seen twice before.

The letter was from the same mysterious Harry Zicks, who was at Hongkong, needing a hundred dollars. He was still on the verge of breaking out with talk about Warren and Cook and an immigration officer, the letter said, Joe marveled at Zick's success in keeping track of him—until he reflected that, after all, American newspapermen are not very plentiful in the Orient, and that they must be easy to find if they worked.

Anyhow, Joe thought of his promise to Cook and the fact that there still existed an embarrassing link between Joe Warren and a distressing affair back in California. So he sent the hundred to Hongkong as instructed. Then he sold his watch to

make up the deficit in his computed fare to Calcutta—second class by rail to Penang, then B.I. third across the Bay of Bengal. Calcutta was a big city, easier to lose yourself in. And there would be enough things to do so that he would not have to work on a newspaper. He would throw this fellow off the trail yet.

III

IT WAS April when Joe Warren got to Calcutta. There is nothing in the world more burningly disagreeable than a Calcutta April, unless it be a Calcutta May. Heat lay like a smothering prickly blanket on a glaring universe. White wives had left for the hill stations. White husbands slunk to work in darkened offices, swore at the servants because the *punkah* did not stir up air enough or because the fiber mats over the windows were not kept damp, tore off their collars and pretended to be indifferent to the disorders in purely Indian Calcutta north of Harrison Road.

White Calcuttans always pretended that nothing done by Indians really mattered. If Hindus and Moslems wanted to kill each other over some silly temple dispute or other, that was their own business—theirs and that of the military, naturally, who would see that such riots were confined to their proper quarters. Yet the fact that there had been two outbreaks within a week, that leave had been canceled for troops at Fort William, and that an armored motor car paraded through the streets in anticipation of another battle, left a feeling of unrest current among the perspiring whites. After all, there were stray mosques and temples even in those parts of Calcutta regarded as purely European.

Joe Warren sensed this feeling his second day in Calcutta, while he was drinking a *chota peg* in Spence's bar with a man who was going to give him a job on a tea plantation somewhere up-country. Up-country! That was the thing now, bury himself in some obscure spot until he had shaken off the persistent and mysteriously threatening Harry Zicks. The tea planter said Joe could leave the next day, if he were serious about wanting the job.

Joe was serious, all right, but he was also rather intrigued by the feeling of impending events, which white Calcutta was trying so hard to ignore. He was particularly intrigued by a paragraph in the morning paper, the Calcutta *Englishman*, warning Europeans not to venture north of Harrison Road. The signature of the warning by the commander-in-chief of Fort William indicated that some sort of martial law prevailed in that part of Calcutta, an insinuation which stirred something warm inside of Joe Warren, something which had remained cold and inert at the prospect of isolation in a tea garden.

Joe told the tea planter that he thought he would have a look around north Calcutta, just to see what was going on, before he left town.

"If you're going up that way," said the planter, "you can do me a favor. We have a godown toward that end of town, and I was going to send up for some things I want for the estate. You can get them for me. It won't be dangerous if you ride. But be sure to ride, because the godown is right across from a mosque, and the Indians have been rather ugly lately. Don't walk around any."

Joe did walk, though. First he walked to the office of the *Englishman*, just because—well, to pay his respects and find out if there was anything he could do for them. He was not asking for a job or anything—he was through with that. He walked into the building and asked for the editor.

"Mr. Hughes-Gentry is out," said a dark, thin faced Eurasian in the hallway. "Will you leave your name?"

"Joseph Ward," said Joe, "but he doesn't know me."

"Joseph Ward?" echoed the Eurasian. "I believe I have a letter for you. Wait a bit. No, this is for Joseph Warren. It's been here a week, and I don't know who the gentleman is."

"I—I happen to know Mr. Warren," said Joe. "We met on the boat and found

our names were similar. I'll take him the letter if you want. I know his hotel . . ."

The Eurasian was glad to get rid of the missive, and Joe hurried out again into the blazing afternoon, the envelop cold between his fingers. He could not get away from that handwriting!

There was nothing in the envelop but a newspaper clipping saying that Joe Warren, charged with the murder of an immigration officer, had been traced to the Orient and that consular officials had been ordered by United States authorities to enlist the aid of Far Eastern governments in bringing about extradition.

Joe tore up the clipping and let the bits flutter to the hot pavement. In twenty-four hours he would be safe in an obscure tea garden. Nobody would dream of looking for him there.

He forgot Harry Zicks as he walked north of Harrison Road to get a look at things. There was an undercurrent of excitement in a drowsy atmosphere, but little to see on the surface. Once a lorry loaded with British soldiers drove by, bayonets fixed. Once a red turbaned policeman with a white umbrella under his arm said something to Joe, but Joe did not know any Hindustani. The rest of the time there were only sleepy Hindus slouching on dirty sidewalks, chewing *pan* and expectorating blood red juice. Mangy dogs panted, seeking shade. Bearded Mohammedans puffed on *hookahs* in doorways, looking askance at the big hump backed bulls which strolled leisurely about the streets and sidewalks, munched things which struck their bovine fancy on the counters of native sweet shops or reclined majestically on the steps of buildings.

Joe walked as far as the Hatkhola Bazar without anything happening to him, and he was a little disappointed. He turned toward the river and made for the weather grayed minarets of a little mosque, across from which was the tea company's godown.

In front of the mosque, which was sandwiched in between odorous little shops, a solemn circle of Moslems squatted, holding hands. Joe stopped across the street to watch their animated conversation, which appeared to him as the wagging of so many beards and the bobbing of so many colored turbans and round caps.

He was about to knock on the double door of the godown when the atmosphere quivered into bits, the universe arose and turned over, and Joe Warren found himself inexplicably seated on the sidewalk, his shoulders against a wall, perspiration streaming down his face. The roar of an explosion filled his ears, and his startled eyes saw the minarets of the mosque totter, then crumble in a cloud of dust.

After a trembling moment of silence, a mingled wail mounted in quavering crescendo. Joe thought it was a wail of suffering, until he saw one member of the flattened circle of Moslems get up stiffly, select a generous half of a building stone from among the débris that littered the street, and hurl it into the partly wrecked shop of a Hindu pottery merchant next to the mosque.

OTHER members of the ring got up. People poured from houses. In a moment the street was crowded. Joe Warren saw the newcomers break into hostilities, instead of attending the wounded victims of the explosion. Steel flashed. Clubs thumped. Joe got to his feet, intent on a first aid expedition.

"*Sahib!* Help!"

A lanky black youth in cast-off European clothing was running toward Joe. A fat Hindu and a bearded Mohammedan pursued him. On general principles, Joe raised one knee into the oncoming paunch of the Hindu, and caught the Moslem a clip on the ear as he passed.

The black youth was bleeding from a cut on the cheek when Joe seized his arm and dragged him into a doorway, leaving the fat Hindu to fight the bearded Mohammedan.

"We Christians must stand together, sir," said the black youth. "Would you mind to tell me your name, sir?"

Joe's eyes were busy with the bewildering *mêlée* in the street, but his ears could

not but catch the unexpected query and comment of the boy he had just saved. He smiled.

"My name's Joe," he said.

"Then we have same name, sir. My name is Joseph. Joseph Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri. I am from French India, sir. From Pondicherry. I am Christian of Tamil blood. Have you been to Pondicherry, sir?"

Joe did not answer. He was counting the number of figures lying in the street. A half naked Hindu fell nearby and moaned as a dozen scuffling feet walked over him. Joe went out and carried him back to the shelter of his doorway.

"Napoleon," he said, "you and I are going out there and be Florence Nightingales. There are wounded men in the street who are getting kicked to death."

A burst of rifle fire interfered with his plans. A lorry of British soldiers rattled into the street. The men were firing over the heads of the crowd. The mob scattered. Two motor ambulances appeared. Another volley. Joe heard bullets thud into the wall.

Pictures, sounds and smells jostled one another in Joe Warren's brain. Phrases came unasked, words grouped themselves into headlines. His fingers itched for a typewriter. He wanted to telephone, to tell the world what he had seen. But there was nobody waiting for him to "crash through". Behind him was the godown of the tea company. He had better go in and accomplish the business he had come for—or had he come for that?

"Pondicherry, sir, is a quite nice place. However, not as fine as London, no doubt. Are you from London? I know a man—"

Joe turned abruptly and seized the black youth's arm.

"Do you know who blew up the mosque?" he demanded.

"Certainly, certainly," said the youth. "Moslems say Hindus did so. Hindus say Moslems were hiding explosive things therein, which blew off by mistake. Both think I am the other. I am Christian."

"Listen," began Joe. "Get me to the office of the Calcutta *Englishman* the quickest way possible. If it's quick enough I'll hand you a couple of rupees."

"Come," said the Tamil boy. "I know where are *ticca gharis*. We will go by carriage."

Joseph Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri found a box-like carriage with an interior reminiscent of a Turkish bath that had gone bad.

As the foul, steamy conveyance bumped its way south to the Occidental quarter of the city, he kept up a steady fire of questions regarding Joe Warren's intimate history, most of which Joe did not hear, because he was composing a news story.

"Have you a bearer or other servant in your service while in India? No? This is very important. All European gentlemen have one or more bearers to administer them in Calcutta. Would you not care to engage me as bearer, sir? I speak French, English, Tamil, Urdu, and few words of Punjabi and Hindi. I learned writing of English in mission school Pondicherry side, sir. Would you not like—?"

"I'll see, I'll see. If I stay in Calcutta on a job, I suppose I'll need a guy like you. But what the dickens is holding us up here?"

The carriage had stopped in a narrow street, blocked by a hump backed bull, who stood sidewise and meditated.

"Ah, those male cows," exclaimed Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri. "We must wait. The *ghari-walla* can not whip them because such male cows are sacred to Hindu god Shiva, and striking them causes un-Christian outbreaks."

Joe swore, had the driver back up and take another street. He stopped at his hotel first, sat at his portable typewriter, and consumed innumerable cigarets as he cast in terse sentences the story he had just been through. Color, movement, the riot following the explosion in the mosque sprang to new life under his banging keys. Pages dropped to the floor.

When he tore his last sheet from the machine, he dashed bareheaded back to the waiting *ghari*.

"To the *Englishman* office," he ordered.

"Begging your pardon, Mister Joe,

sir," apologized Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri, who was still waiting. "But you are risking sun stroke by thus appearing without topee. Likewise your clothing are somewhat disarranged in rear by recent episodes. I should advise some readjustment before making official appearance."

"Forget it. Let's go."

The uniformed *jamadar* who guarded the portals of the *Englishman* office must have had somewhat the same impression of Joe's disheveled toilette, for he was not going to allow the American to enter. Joe unceremoniously pushed the *jamadar* in the center of his brass breast plate, whereupon two barefooted *chuprassis* came to join in vociferous pursuit. Surrounded on the top step, he became profane in his best American manner, while Hindustani speech flowed around him in incomprehensible torrents.

A door then opened and William Hughes-Gentry, O.B.E., editor of the *Englishman*, appeared and demanded the cause of the disturbance in front of his office.

"I'm looking for the editor," said Joe.

"What do you want?" said the editor testily.

"Here." Joe pushed a sheaf of paper toward a man wearing a black alpaca coat and what was once a winged collar. "Here's the lead story for your next edition."

Mr. Hughes-Gentry accepted the story rather gingerly, because of the manner in which it was submitted, adjusted his pince-nez from which flowed a broad black ribbon, and said condescendingly after a moment's hesitation—

"Will you—ah—come in and sit down?"

Joe did so, and watched Mr. Hughes-Gentry solemnly read his contribution. Mr. Hughes-Gentry was often solemn, he found out later, because he was anxious to appear dignified and somehow sensed that Nature had not been at great pains to make him so naturally. Dignity, the editor of one of India's great dailies believed, was incumbent upon one who expected several more letters to be added to the O.B.E. after his name the next time the King-Emperor had a birthday. Perhaps he might even get a knighthood.

"Splendid," said the prospective knight when he had finished his expressionless reading. "You are letting me have this for—ah—the *Englishman*?"

"Sure," said Joe. "It ought to be your best local story."

"Well—ah—of course, policy might—But I take it you are a trained journalist?"

"No," said Joe. "I'm a newspaper man."

"Oh. Amerrikan, of course. Would you care to do some more of this sort of thing for us? I mean, I think our readers will rather relish descriptive writing of this kind. I mean, would you like to join the *Englishman* staff while you are in—ah—India?"

"If you're offering me a job," said Joe, "why, I accept."

"Splendid," said the editor. "Come down tomorrow. In the meantime, I'll introduce you to some of my sub-editors."

Joe found Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri waiting for him downstairs half an hour later.

"Then you will engage me as bearer, sir," said the black youth, "now that you are permanently employed in Calcutta?"

"Who told you I was employed?"

"I asked the *jamadar*, sir. He knows from the head *chuprassi* who happened to overhear your conversations with the *burra sahib*. Then you engage me, sir?"

"All right, Napoleon." Joe laughed. "And your first job is to move us out of the hotel into a place to live."

"I know some very nice *pukka*-built bungalows," said Napoleon.

It was not until an hour later that Joe realized that he was actually working on a newspaper again, despite his resolution to bury himself in some tea garden upcountry where Harry Zicks, blackmailer, would lose his trail. He had even forgotten to ask William Hughes-Gentry, O.B.E, what salary to expect.

IV

JOE WARREN did not exactly forget that he was wanted for murder and that Harry Zicks knew it, yet he began to laugh at his fears by the time he had been grinding out copy for the Calcutta *Englishman* for a month. After the first day he did not grind it out on his usual mill. The noise of his portable typewriter disturbed the other members of the staff, so except when he worked at home, he wrote laboriously in longhand like his colleagues. They sat sedately in high ceilinged rooms, one room for each European reporter and important sub-editor, and felt the gravity of producing a paper which had appeared continuously for more than a hundred years. Even the building remained little changed since the days of Warren Hastings.

Yet there was plenty of current excitement to occupy Joe, even if the atmosphere of the paper was charged with dead memories of Clive and Suraj-ud-daula and the men he smothered in the Black Hole a few hundred feet from the office. The Hindu-Moslem hostilities which had propelled Joe in spite of his better judgment back into the newspaper-racket were far from settled. The Governor of Bengal came back reluctantly from his cool retreat at Darjeeling to confer with his council in Calcutta. Messages passed between the Viceregal Lodge in Simla and the generals at Fort William.

Two battalions of the Duke of Cambridge's Own 14th Punjabis arrived by special train to demonstrate in the streets. Nightly there were minor clashes between members of the two warring religious communities, and nightly three or four Indians would be picked up with knives stuck into vital parts. Joe Warren saw and wrote and was happy.

Then one noon, when Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri brought tiffin to the office, as was Calcutta custom, he handed Joe a letter that sent a chill wind whirling from nowhere to obliterate the sticky heat of a broiling day.

The electric *punkah* turned lazily overhead. Two brown copyboys in gorgeous red tunics and dirty turbans drowsed against the copy chute, oblivious to the shouts of "*Koi hai!*" from sub-editors who droned their cry again and again in the vain hope that they might be spared the effort of getting up to kick the boys into wakefulness. A new civilization was trying desperately to be active in the sluggish stream of age-old India that dragged by, superior, indifferent . . . But Joe Warren was unconscious of it all. The bold round handwriting on the envelop just presented had jerked him half way around the world, out of the heat of India into a cool California dawn. He saw a truckload of cantaloups on a gleaming gray highway, an immigration officer, two spurts of flame--

"Tiffin is now quite ready, sir."

Joe fingered the letter without opening it. He noted idly that Napoleon had cleared papers off his desk and had spread a tablecloth, on which were set enameled bowls of food kept warm by a diminutive charcoal fire in the tiffin carrier. There was rice, curried *dahl*, pancake-like *puri*, a brick red mango and a stone jug of ginger beer.

Joe put down the letter unopened and started to eat listlessly. He had half a mind to tear up the damned thing without reading it. He had had enough of the petty blackmailers. Mart Cook was probably safe by now, anyway. Still, there was that charge against him. He sat up straight as he noted the postmark on the envelop: Calcutta!

He pushed back his plate and ripped open the letter.

Five thousand rupees! Harry Zicks had had a sudden attack of memory, in which the names of Joe Warren, Martin Cook and a certain immigration officer, now deceased, figured prominently. His unruly memory might be lulled again into a stupor by the sight of five thousand rupees, delivered to the Express office in Bankshall Street before morning. Before morning.

Where was Joe to get five thousand

rupees anywhere at any time, let alone before morning?

He crumpled the letter and dropped it into the wastebasket.

"You are feeling ill this morning time?" inquired the bearer.

"I'm all right, Nap."

"But you are eating nothing for your tiffin, sir. Knowing your quite fondness for the *dahl puri*, I instructed cook to make great quantities. However you consumed only one, and not quite completely, sir."

"Not hungry, Nap."

Joe stood up. Five thousand rupees. He had perhaps two hundred on him. There was a chance—just the barest chance—that the editor might be in good humor if he had had a good tiffin.

"Shall I bring *sahib's* hat, as usual?"

Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri had taught his master Calcutta etiquette according to which the English consider it bad form to wear a sun helmet after sundown. Every evening the bearer appeared at the office with Joe's felt hat, taking the helmet home in a large paper bag.

"As usual, Nap."

"The green hat, sir?"

"The gray one—as usual."

"The green hat is a quite fine hat, sir. Should some day *sahib* increase my salary, I shall be purchasing similar one."

Joe went out, mopping his brow. He did not see his bearer, fumbling in the wastebasket, fishing out the crumpled letter, smoothing the wrinkles that he might spell out its message.

"We — ah — don't usually advance money against salaries," said Mr. William Hughes-Gentry, O.B.E, "but we might possibly—ah—make an exception. How much was it you wanted?"

"Five thousand rupees," said Joe Warren. He did not bat an eye, but the editor of the Calcutta *Englishman* overturned an inkwell.

"Impossible," said the editor, busy restoring his dignity with a blotter. "I might arrange to let you have a hundred rupees. But five thousand is out of the question. What did you—ah—want it for?"

"A personal matter," said Joe. "I could work it out in a year or so."

"Yes. Well, I'm—ah—sorry. By the way, I meant to send for you this afternoon. I have an assignment for you. There's a countryman of yours in Calcutta by the name of K. L. Bracket. You've heard of him, of course."

"No," said Joe. "I haven't."

"He's supposed to be quite a noted—ah—engineer. My information says he's come here to build a tube under the Hooghly River. I mean, an underground passage connecting Calcutta and Howrah. Quite a splendid idea in view of the crowded condition of Howrah bridge whenever one is in a hurry to catch a train. Now, this Mr. Bracket won't see reporters. I sent a man out to see him this morning. I understand the *Statesman* reporters have been equally—ah—unsuccessful. Perhaps with your knowledge of Americans you could secure us an interview. A photo, too, if you can. I'd be willing to give you a bonus of a hundred rupees if you succeed."

"The hundred won't do me any good in my present fix," said Joe. "But the assignment will keep my mind off morbid matters. I'll get your interview for you."

IT BEGAN to look as though Joe would have a chance to see what Harry Zicks would do if hush money were not forthcoming. Probably he wanted to force a showdown, having caught up with his victim, by setting the demand high this time. He certainly knew that a newspaperman would not have five thousand rupees in a single lump. Well, let the showdown come when it would. In the meantime, there was this reticent engineer to see.

Joe took the office flivver to go to the address Hughes-Gentry had given him. A barefooted Moslem drove the ramshackle car and took childish delight in squawking the horn on slightest provocation.

The address proved to be in a mixed

neighborhood, neither completely European nor completely Indian. An Eurasian boarding house, calcimined a bright pink, flanked the house on one side. On the other was a Moslem school. Across the street and half hidden by a line of open front shops of mud and tile, were the pointed gray domes of a Hindu temple.

A large, unhygienic looking bull reposed in front of the gate of the Bracket house, chewing pensively, safe in the knowledge that he was dedicated to Shiva and therefore insured of extra privileges in the vicinity of a temple.

Joe stepped around the stern of the bull and found himself facing a square bearded Sikh *durwan* who blocked his entrance.

"*Sahib ghar-me nain hai*," said the Sikh, with gestures.

"That's too bad," said Joe, edging past the gateman. "But I really don't mind the heat, and politics bore me. I'm going to see this man Bracket."

The Sikh clung, arguing up the short path, joined at the house door by a short Mongolian faced Nepali servant.

"Everything's all right," Joe explained to the combined resistance. "The *sahib* and I are old friends. We're from the same country. Get me?"

"Not quite," said a voice with what the English call an American twang. "Say it all over again."

Standing in the doorway, Joe saw a small, pasty faced individual with molasses colored hair slicked baek. He wore horn rimmed glasses which imparted not the slightest gleam of intelligence to his fish eyes. There was the suggestion of a sneer on his thin lips.

"Are you K. L. Brackett?" asked Joe.

"No," said the pasty faced individual, eyeing the reporter closely. "I'm his secretary. What do you want?"

"I want to see the boss."

"That's your hard luck. He's busy."

"Sure, I know. But I won't keep him long. I'm from the Calcutta *Englishman*. I want him to tell me for sure that he's going to make a hole in the Hooghly River."

"He can't be bothered by you reporters," said the secretary.

The high whining tone of the secretary's voice grated on Joe. There was something about the young man he distinctly disliked. Still, he tried to be civil.

"You might tell him I'm here, anyhow. Tell him the only American reporter in India is waiting to break the news of the Hooghly tube in India's oldest paper."

"I won't tell him anything. I said he was busy, didn't I? All right, there's your answer. He's busy. That's all there is to it." Yes, there was considerable about this secretary Joe did not like. He reminded him of a disagreeable little dog who snapped at people's heels, yapping while backing up, ready to take to convenient eover.

"How about a picture?" Joe ventured. "Has he got any photos of himself?"

"He's got plenty." The secretary's thin lips twisted themselves in a crooked, greasy smile that was very close to a sneer. "If you want a picture, write to Mr. Bracket about it. He'll take the matter up at his leisure."

He backed into the house and closed the door in Joe's face.

Joe contemplated the door for a moment. His ears turned slowly red. He had had doors closed in his face before—slammed much more eloquently than K. L. Bracket's scornful secretary had done. And such procedure always strengthened his determination to get his story by any means at hand.

He would just cut out the middleman . . .

Noting that the Sikh and Nepali were squatting by the gate in earnest conference, Joe slipped around the side of the house to look for other entrances.

Providence provided him with a ground floor window wide open. He scrambled over the sill and found himself in a room that was evidently being used as an office —a desk, several chairs, a decanter of amber fluid on a small table, crazy china floor. He decided to explore farther, to find Bracket.

He went to the door of the room, but

paused with his hand on the knob. He heard voices on the other side, and recognized one of them as the nasal twang of Bracket's secretary.

Oh, well, he did not have to see Bracket. He could write an interview without seeing him. He knew what kind of interview a publicity-shy engineer would give: cautious generalities, around which could be woven the real story, which the engineer would "not be at liberty to release at this time". But while he was here, he might as well look for pictures.

Quietly he began looking over the desk. He paused to listen to voices behind the door, smiling to himself as he remembered how he had been caught helping himself to pictures in the house of a murderer near Boston and had nearly gone to jail for burglary.

In a drawer he came on a photograph. So that was K. L. Bracket, was it? He looked more like an old time magician than an engineer—narrow Mephistophelian eyes beneath heavy, ruthless eyebrows, slightly dilated nostrils, a firm, cruel mouth. At the bottom was written, "Sincerely, K. L. Bracket." Something about the man's face struck Joe as Oriental, sinister. He stared at it, fascinated, for a long minute. Suddenly he had the queer sensation that he was being watched. He looked up, glanced into a mirror hanging over the desk, and thought he saw the same Mephistophelian features disappearing in the glass.

He whirled about. The room was empty. The door was closed. He must have been dreaming.

Quickly he picked up two other photos from the drawer, different poses. He looked for something to put the pictures in, found a large envelop in another drawer. He started at the sound of a hand turning the doorknob, tossed the pictures into the envelop and leaped for the window. He was astride the sill when the door opened. Without looking behind him, he dropped to the ground and rushed for the office auto.

Back in the office, his eye caught the round bold handwriting on a torn envelop lying on the floor. He kicked the envelop out of sight, reminding himself that he would have to give Harry Zicks a serious thought when he had finished his work for the day.

RAPIDLY he wrote the interview he thought K. L. Bracket would have given. Faith in the great future of this city, meeting place of East and West . . . Rapid transportation the world's outstanding civilizing influence . . . Allusions to the Hudson tubes, the London undergrounds, the Paris Metro . . . There. And now for the photos.

As he shook the pictures from the big envelop, a smaller bulky manila envelop dropped out and slipped to the floor. Picking it up, he noticed it was sealed with great rosettes of green sealing wax. Funny. He did not mean to carry off that packet. It must have been in the larger envelop. He would return it, send it back by mail, after the story and pictures had appeared in print. He put the bulky envelop in his inside pocket.

"Did you—ah—get this interview from Mr. Bracket himself?" asked William Hughes-Gentry as he glanced at the copy Joe brought in.

Joe noticed a peculiar intonation in the editor's voice and wondered what was coming.

"Certainly," said Joe. "What's the matter? Doesn't it read all right?"

"Very interesting," said the editor, fixing Joe with an ominous stare. "Only I was wondering—ah—were you actually in Mr. Bracket's house?"

"Of course," replied Joe truthfully. "That's where I got these photos."

"I see," said Hughes-Gentry coldly. He paused a minute, studied his inkwell, then said, "I was wondering. I mean is it usual in America, when a journalist is sent to interview an eminent personage, is it usual for the journalist to enter and leave the man's house by the window?"

Joe Warren blinked.

"I've known occasions," he answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Because Mr. Bracket's secretary telephoned me ten minutes ago to say that shortly after you had been refused admission to the house, you were seen crawling through a window."

"That secretary, boss, is a snooty little rat. He wasn't even civil. I don't mind people slamming doors on me if they do it decently. But this fellow—why, a reporter owes it to the prestige of his profession to put one over on a fellow like that."

"Reporters for the *Englishman*, sir, are before everything else, gentlemen. They are not thieves."

"You wouldn't call borrowing a photograph stealing, would you? I'll see that the pictures get back all right."

"I'm not referring to the pictures."

"Then what?"

"The secretary told me that after you had left through the window, the sum of five thousand rupees was missing from Mr. Bracket's desk."

"You don't think I took the money, do you, boss?"

"I don't know. I only know that an hour ago you were standing in that very spot, asking for an impossible advance of five thousand rupees for an—ah—personal matter. Shortly afterward the same amount of money disappears from a house from which you were seen departing by the window."

Joe's ears turned red.

"I think all this can be cleared up, boss."

"Certainly it can. And it must. At once. You must return immediately to the Bracket house and give back the money."

"But if I haven't the money?"

"If you do not return the money within half an hour, I shall be forced—ah—much against my will, to notify the police and prefer charges against you. You do not seem to realize that the integrity of the *Englishman* is at stake in this matter. I mean you must remember, sir, that you have been representing a paper which reported the Afghan wars and the Sepoy Mutiny, that was an old paper when her Majesty Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India."

Joe took out a handkerchief to wipe his dripping forehead. As he did so, he became suddenly conscious of the fat manila envelop in his inside pocket. Suppose the envelop he had taken by mistake did contain currency? Perhaps the accusation was just—that he had actually taken the five thousand rupees, although unwittingly. To admit it now, however, would put him in a still worse light. He had denied taking anything but the photos. The editor would never believe a mistake yarn now. The best thing to do would be return the envelop, to try to explain things to Bracket himself.

"What do you propose to do?" inquired the editor frigidly.

"I'll square everything," replied Joe. "I didn't know this fellow Bracket was a Sacred Cow."

"A what, sir?"

"Sacred Cow. That's what American newspaper men call people that stand pretty close to the head man. But I'll fix everything, boss. Don't worry about the honor of the paper."

V

OUTSIDE the editor's office, Joe thought a moment about that envelop in his pocket. If it really did contain the five thousand missing rupees, it would enable him to keep the tongue of Harry Zicks conveniently tied a while longer. If he should open it—

Then he ran quickly downstairs, as though to clear his mind of the thought. After all, he was still honest. He called a *ghari* and rode to the Bracket house.

The pasty faced secretary opened the door when Joe knocked.

"Hello, sneakthief," said the secretary. "So you come crawling back after all?"

"I didn't come here to listen to you talk to yourself," countered Joe. "I've got business with your master. Call him."

With a mocking smile, the secretary disappeared for a moment behind a curtain. When he reappeared he was fol-

lowed by a gaunt, dark man with narrow eyes and imposing brows. The face, Joe now decided, was unquestionable Oriental—and it was cruel and dynamic. Two spikes of a small mustache and his long, straight hair were jet black. His temples were touched with gray. He sank into a chair without shaking hands.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes," said Joe. "You look like the pictures of K. L. Bracket. I want to apologize, Mr. Bracket, for carting away an envelop from your desk a short time ago. I meant only to take a photograph, but I got this by mistake."

A shadow of surprise flashed across Bracket's face as he saw the manila envelop with green seals. Then he threw back his head and uttered a peal of ironic laughter.

The secretary snatched the envelop.

"Give it to me, please," said Bracket in a sonorous voice. He took the envelop and laid it on a little table beside him. "Thank you for bringing it back, Mr. Warren."

Warren! Joe had not used that name for months. Why had this engineer called him Warren?

"My name is Ward," he said.

"Yes, of course, Ward," said Bracket. "Ward. The names are similar, though. My mistake."

Mistake. Was it a mistake? Wasn't that a leer in Bracket's Oriental eyes? And the secretary was certainly snickering to himself.

"Well," said Joe, getting up to put on his topee with forced nonchalance, "I hope that clears up the threat of arrest that your secretary phoned to my office."

"Sit down," ordered Bracket. "That's just the point I want to discuss with you."

He motioned to his secretary who locked the front door and slipped the key into his pocket. Joe pretended to ignore this move.

"What is there to discuss?" he asked. "Isn't your five grand in the envelop I grabbed by mistake?"

Bracket smiled curiously.

"That envelop," said Bracket, "contains papers extremely valuable to me. But it contains no money. As a matter of fact, I didn't know you had the envelop."

"Then I suppose you think I have the money up my sleeve?"

"Of course not." Bracket was still smiling curiously. "You haven't the money. Nobody has—because there was none taken. Five thousand rupees was just a figure that occurred to me as I saw you climbing out my window. I thought it would be a figure likely to embarrass you. By the way, I don't believe you've been formally introduced to my secretary. Joe Warren, meet Harry Zicks!"

Joe was on his feet in a split second. Harry Zicks! A wedge of ice slid down his spine. Then matters became suddenly clear. This was the showdown. A combined feeling of relief and apprehension took hold of him. Abruptly he extended his right hand.

The pasty faced Zicks recoiled instinctively, then, seeing the hand was empty, shook it with flabby inertness.

"Thank you for all your thoughtful letters and your lovely postcards, Mr. Zicks," said Joe.

"You may have heard of me," said Bracket, "by my first name—I won't say Christian name because I am not a Christian; I am an Eurasian, born in Calcutta. The K. stands for King."

Another cog slipped into place in Joe's mental machinery. Thoughts were whirling rapidly now—rapidly, but in perfect order. The showdown! The moment which was to culminate months of worried flight had come. The showdown—and he had not a card in his hand! The deck was stacked against him. He'd have to bluff through somehow.

"Yes, indeed," he said with mock politeness. "Mart Cook used to speak often of the King. You were in the—Oriental importing business, I believe."

"What do you hear from Cook?" asked Bracket, his face an expressionless mask.

"Really now, I'm a terribly poor correspondent." Joe continued in the same vein. "I think I neglected to write to Mart and give him my address. Thoughtless of me, wasn't it? So Mart Cook

doesn't know where I am, unless you've been keeping him informed as fully as you have me."

Bracket closed his narrow eyes, slowly opened them, and turned them on his secretary. Zicks smirked.

"No," said Bracket. "Cook doesn't know where you are."

Then both Bracket and Zicks looked at Joe and smiled pityingly. Neither spoke. The electric *punkah* whirling overhead made a swishing sound. Two gray headed crows hopped to the window sill, cawing furiously. Zicks, following Joe's gaze to the open window, moved into line, his hands in his pockets. Joe perspired from every pore. Bracket's insincere, menacing smile was maddening. He was toying with him, waiting—waiting—for what? What did they want with a penniless newspaperman? Well, why not find out? Joo shook his head, as though to throw off his previous attitude, then shouted:

"All right, Bracket, for God's sake shoot the works! Tell me what you want with me and get it over with. Cards on the table, Bracket. Of course the Hooghly tube racket is out. The only kind of tube you have anything to do with is a tube of toothpaste. You came to Calcutta to follow me, didn't you?"

"Sit down, please," said Bracket, with his confounded ominous calm. "Yes, we've been following you, after a fashion. We had other business, too, which we consolidated along the road. But we kept track of you and, in our own way, kept you moving toward India. We had an idea you would end here sooner or later, if we kept pushing you gently. And of course we knew that we should be able to find you because you wouldn't be able to keep away from a newspaper office. You knew, naturally, that we kept in touch with you that way. Harry made wholesale copies of all his letters and simply broadcasted them. Every paper between Peking and Colombo has been getting letters for Joe Warren." He gave a disagreeable laugh. "And once in Calcutta, I put out bait for reporters, then turned them all away, knowing that ultimately the only American reporter in town would be sent out to interview me. Are you happy in your work here?"

Joe glared at Bracket. Damn his insolence!

"Well," Bracket continued, "I hope you like your job with the Calcutta *Englishman*, because you're going to keep it for a long time. Practically permanent. Oh, don't let this little matter of the five thousand rupees bother you. I'll tell your editor it was all a mistake. It pleases me to have an Englishman going to such pains for an Eurasian, simply because he thinks him to be a distinguished American."

"What's the idea?" demanded Joe.

"Just this. You know a little about our Oriental importing business, don't you? We got fifteen hundred dollars a head for coolies smuggled into California. We had to pay up to a thousand to the men who did the dirty work. That left our share just petty larceny. We could handle only a few at a time, and weren't making any more money than a retail bootlegger, with ten times the risks. So we've decided to go into the wholesale business."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Don't get impatient. I'm coming to that. I said we were becoming a wholesale firm. That means we're going to ship Hindu coolies right from here in big batches. Fifty-coolie lots, right from factory to the consumer. Maybe a hundred, if you're clever. We've been lining up captains on our way around—nice accommodating fellows who will sign the coolies as crew and lose a few here and there along the coast of California. "Now, we'll have to have a reliable man on this end, of course. That's where you come in. You've got a nice job, a legitimate excuse to be in Calcutta, and you can work without suspicion. You'll arrange to collect *rayots* anxious to come to the great land of opportunity. Your real job will be to prepare the goods for shipment."

"And if I refuse? . . ."

"You won't refuse, because there's a murder warrant waiting for you back in the States. And because the States are a long way off and extradition works slow,

I can slap a burglary charge on you here in five minutes. That will hold you until papers are made out and you're taken back to face the gallows."

Calm. Maddeningly calm. With his tiny black mustache twitching contemptuously, Bracket continued to speak in a quiet, even voice. Joe wanted to yell at him. He did yell.

"Damn you, Bracket!" he screamed. "You know I didn't kill that immigration officer back in California. I've suffered just as though I had, though. I know how it feels to be a fugitive from justice, even though I'm innocent. I know the suspense, the dread that must be haunting Mart Cook, just as it's been haunting me. And Mart will be glad to clean up the whole business, glad to recapture his peace of mind again. I'll be damned if you can get me any deeper into your crooked racket, Bracket, because I'm going back and tell Cook how I feel. We'll tie you two birds up in it too. They'll hook you for conspiracy, at least."

BRACKET'S smile never changed. His slender olive tinted fingers with purplish nails reached for the bulky manila envelop on the table.

"You can't do that, Warren," he said, pointing the envelop at Joe. "And I'll tell you why. Do you know what's in this envelop you brought back to me today? For more than an hour you had in your pocket a signed confession by Martin Cook, clearing you of any part in the murder. I'm keeping it, in case people should ever try to connect me with the killing.

"Mart came to me in Los Angeles with an idea you thought he was a double-crosser. He felt badly about having taken my orders to register the truck in your name. They'd be accusing you of murder, he said. His conscience was hurting him, he said, and he'd decided to make a clean breast of it, and take the rap. A man of your astuteness will naturally see that I wasn't keen about Cook taking the stand with some snooping district attorney asking questions about where the Hindus were going. So I had Cook write his confession and leave everything in my hands, while he took a little holiday. I sent him tuna fishing with a couple of friends of mine. He never came back. The boys say he fell off the boat and got drowned. Wasn't that too bad, Mr. Warren, that the only man who can prove you innocent, had to die?"

"You damned—"

His ears red, Joe sprang from his chair, clutching for the envelop that contained his bill of innocence.

At the same moment, Harry Zicks thrust out one foot, and Joe went sprawling. On his feet again a second later, he found himself staring into the muzzle of a short automatic.

Bracket pressed the gun against Joe's chest and pushed him abruptly into a chair.

"Don't shout!" he commanded. "It won't get you anywhere. Are you going to accept our very fair offer?"

"No!" shouted Joe. "Go ahead and spring your fake charges. See where it gets you, when I take the stand to testify on my own behalf. I'm not going to help you smuggle slaves into America, so go ahead and phone the police!"

Bracket's heavy eyebrows moved slightly. He ran the tip of his tongue swiftly between his lips. Then he said:

"I have a better idea. Before I phone the police I'll shoot you. The editor of India's oldest paper knows I accuse you of burglary. You are wanted for murder in California. The police will find a gun in your dead hand. I will have killed you in self-defense. Well?"

Joe did not answer. The *punkah* overhead was making a clicking sound as it churned tepid currents in the cooked out air. Joe opened his mouth.

Some one knocked at the front door.

The three men started. Bracket and Zicks turned on Joe. Zicks was a shade paler, and his lips were pressed together. Bracket's features were contracted, appearing more Oriental than ever.

"Who's that?" Bracket demanded of Joe in an undertone. His long fingers

moved nervously over the blued steel of the automatic.

"I don't know."

"He does know," muttered Zicks thickly. "He's had himself followed."

The knock was repeated.

"Is that friends of yours?" demanded Bracket uneasily. "Did you tell people to come here for you?"

"No," said Joe, after a pause. "Unfortunately nobody knows that I'm with a pair of murderers—if that's any consolation to you."

Bracket handed his gun to Harry Zicks.

"Here," he said. "Stand behind Warren and cover the door at the same time. At the first blue note out of him—shoot!"

He went cautiously to the door, listened, then threw it open suddenly.

On the threshold stood a slim black Tamil youth in cast-off European clothing and a mangey Astrakhan cap. In his hand was a huge paper bag.

Before the surprised Bracket could say anything, Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri entered the house and made for Joe Warren.

Bracket seized his arm, wheeled the youth about and knocked him down with a blow to the face.

"Keep away from him!" Bracket ordered.

"I am *sahib's* bearer," explained Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri, wiping the blood from his mouth. "Every day I am in habit of bringing his *pukka* English hat in replacement of topee at this time. English *sahibs* are never wearing topee after evening time."

The black youth was sitting on the floor near Joe's helmet. He reached for the helmet and inserted it in the paper bag he still clutched. At the same time he extracted a gray felt hat, got to his feet and held the hat close to Joe's face.

"Here, *sahib*, is proper hat," he said.

Joe saw a paper stuck into the sweat band, and caught a glimpse of the laboriously cramped words, "Remember Sacred Cow." He took the hat. What the deuce did the bearer mean by that?

"All right, Nap," said Joe. "I guess that's all."

"No, it isn't!" Bracket roughly pushed the Tamil back from his white master. "Just a minute, there. How did it happen you brought your master's hat to this house? Did he tell you he was coming here?"

"Quite so," said Napoleon. "He told everybody. He said people should come after him if he did not make future reappearance."

Bracket whirled on Joe, sneering.

"So nobody knew where you were, eh?" he said. Joe, himself mystified by his bearer's actions, said nothing. "Well, we'll get out of here before any more of your friends call. We'll finish our little chat in a quieter place."

"If you are leaving this place," said Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri naïvely, "I have taxi auto outside brought for purpose of transporting my master. However, if you are desiring to make use."

"We'll take it," said Bracket, waving the bearer back from the door with the manila envelop he still held. "And you stay here until you're called."

Joe lunged for the envelop, but was immediately pushed back by an elbow jabbed into his face. Something hard bored into the small of his back as a reminder to behave.

Bracket tossed the envelop to Zicks.

"Give me the gun," he said, "and put this away. We'll have to get started. Take the black boy with us, or he'll be running around telling stories."

At the front gate the taxi was waiting, a decrepit old touring car, with only a ticking meter which marked eight annas to distinguish it as a taxi. The magnificently bearded driver, with a rag of khaki colored turban around his head, sat with his bare feet on the windshield, chewing *pan*.

Harry Zicks took Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri in the back seat with him. Bracket put Joe in front with the driver, climbing in behind and giving an address in Narkooldanga Road.

JOE felt Bracket leaning forward to press something cold and round against the back of his neck. Joe was in for something, all right. He wondered how it was going to end. Should he let things slide? Take the line of least resistance? Be Bracket's accomplice? No, that was impossible. He still had his conscience. Bracket had ordered the murder of Mart Cook, had been responsible for Cook's mistake in the first place. Joe had beeome an exile to give Cook another chance; Cook had died because he wanted to square things.

Joe would have to squirm out of this fellow Bracket's power somehow. But how? How?

The driver had thrown the car into gear and was slowly beginning to move, squawking his horn to warn the Brahmin who was rubbing the nose of a hump-backed bull directly in front of them. The Brahmin, bare to the waist, wore the double Sacred Thread of the Twice Born diagonally across his naked torso, and his head was neatly shaved except for a long strand of hair in back. He had evidently come from some ceremony at the temple across the way, and paid no attention to the auto horn. The chauffeur squawked again.

Then the significance of Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri's scribbled memo flashed upon Joe. "Remember Sacred Cow!" He thrust out his foot and stamped the accelerator to the floorboards. The car jumped ahead. The Brahmin fell back with a shout. The car crashed into the bull.

The bearded chauffeur, panic stricken at the significance of bull killing, abandoned the wheel, vaulted over the door and ran.

A brief glimpse of Bracket's face reflected in the windshield showed Joe that the Eurasian was also terrified.

Before Joe could grab the wheel, the taxi bumped over the carcass of the bull, leaped the curb, smashed into the wall at an acute angle, scraped along for a sickening second, then turned over on its side with a rending of metal and a clatter of broken glass.

"*Idhar ao, yaro!*" shrieked the Brahmin. "*Nandi margaya hai!* They have killed the Bull of Shiva!"

Joe, sprawled on the narrow sidewalk, was stunned. A thousand bells were ringing in his ears. Above the clangor he heard shouts, smelled raw gasoline. A dark mist had settled over the street. He saw shadows, running shadows.

He rubbed his eyes. There was blood on his knuckles. He could see again. The mist had cleared up. The shadows were people—Hindus to whom the Brahmin was screaming, gesticulating, pointing out the carcass of the bull.

Joe heard English words—profanity, gibberish howled in insane bursts of sound. Then he saw Bracket, his lips moving, his face pinched by pain and fear, crawling slowly—toward his gun! He had lost his gun! It lay in the street, fifteen feet away.

Joe unwound his legs, gained control of his muscles. He stood up, started.

Too late. A young Punjabi with a martial mustache, and with a pink turban piled high on his handsome head, had seen the gun first. He had it, was aiming it. Bracket cringed—

Three Hindus rushed at Joe, bowled him over. He took cover behind the wrecked auto.

An explosion. A cry—

Joe raised his head and saw that Bracket was not crawling any more. He was lying flat on his face, the way the immigration officer had been one morning in California. He did not move.

Some one seized Joe's arm.

"We Christians must stick together," said Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri, crouching beside Joe. "See what destructions these heathen religions are causing themselves."

A turbaned head appeared above the overturned taxi. A brown hand raised a club. Joe dived for the turban, took a throat hold on his assailant, grappled on the ground, released him when the corner of his eye saw a tangle of brown feet headed his way.

He had lost Napoleon in the shuffle. Impossible to find him in that seething, brawling crowd now. Hindu-Moslem hatred had come to a head in another riot.

He wanted to get back to Bracket's house, to find where Bracket had put away Mart Cook's confession. He started fighting his way along the choked street. Where had all these people come from in so short a time? The Hindu temple had emptied its worshippers, the school its Moslems. Shops, houses, passing carriages contributed. Bearded *bhisties* with their glistening black leather water bags on their backs, fat Bengali *babus*, Ooria coolies, wiry little Bengal Mohammedans, giant Pathans, half naked Brahmins thudded, crunched and cursed one another.

The question of who killed the bull was forgotten. Late comers among the Hindus took it for granted that it had been a Moslem. And the Moslems were only too glad of an excuse to break a few Hindu heads.

A few feet away Joe saw Harry Zicks, pale as death, fighting, yelling, besieged on four sides.

There was a puff of red, and a wave of flame rolled up almost at Joe's feet. Some one had set fire to the gasoline running from the tank of the wrecked taxi. The searing blast arose and swelled, sending up diaphanous wisps of black smoke.

The crowd fell back in a semicircle, withered by the heat. For a moment Joe saw the sprawling form of King Bracket, lying in a puddle of blood. Not far away he saw Harry Zicks flat on his back, staring at the sky. The hilt of a knife protruded from his breast. Perhaps after all the Hindus had not lost sight of who killed the bull. No, they had not lost sight of it. There was the Brahmin who had seen the bull killed. He was plucking a firebrand from the burning taxi. He was running with it toward Bracket's house. Other Hindus followed, carrying gas soaked rags on sticks, bits of upholstery, blazing, smoking.

Joe gasped as he realized what they were going to do. He started after them. He must save that manila envelop with the green seals. They must not burn that—his passport back home.

Again Joe was in the milling midst of a tumultuous mob. He was slugged, pushed and scratched. He struck back, using his elbows, butted through sweating, roaring men. A disheveled demon came at him, screaming, clawing. Joe pushed a straight right at the open mouth, saw the head disappear, felt teeth sink into his calf. He kicked, grunted and lunged. Convulsed brown faces, flopping beards, whirling turbans caught him up in this human kaleidescope.

He reached the compound wall, caught the top and pulled himself half up. On the other side, smoke was pouring from the door of Bracket's house. Flames flashed through the windows. The Brahmin had done his work of avenging the bull of Shiva. Joe would have to hurry to find anything in that burning house now.

Men were pulling on his legs. His fingers strained, slipped off the wall. He dropped back into the rioting mob. Knives flickered, fists thudded, clubs flew. A woman threw a brass pot of hot water from a second story window. A bullock cart stampeded. A gray buffalo tramped through the crowd in panic, a boy screaming on one of its great crescent horns.

The mob contracted, pushing away from the buffalo, suffocating and compressing Joe Warren, cracking his ribs. He stamped on bare toes and got breathing space—for half a second. The crowd surged back again like water. Again he stamped on toes. There was no relieving reaction this time. Instead, a bobbed haired Kabuli clubbed him on the head, picked him up bodily and hurled him over the crowd—an uneven sea of heads, frowsy turbaned heads, sleek heads smelling of coconut oil, shaved heads, heads in Moslem caps, Sikh heads with topknots untwisted.

He was torn, clawed, wrenched. Then he slid between two heads and fell to the ground. Bare feet kicked him, hustled

him along. Finally, like a Rugby ball, he was heeled out. He found himself in a doorway and the gate was open.

He stood up painfully and went in. He was in the compound of a Hindu temple, quite alone. All able bodied Hindus were fighting in the street. Joe Warren was alone with the stone image of Shiva, four handed Shiva holding his antelope, his trident, his noose and his drum, black with many anointings of oil and *ghi*. He was alone with a forest of *lingams*, erect rounded pillars, spattered with jasmine blossoms, symbolic of Shiva the reproducer. He was alone with Nandi, Shiva's stone bull, counterpart of the dead animal which started the riot outside, kneeling before the *lingams*. He was quite alone—free from the threat of blackmail which had been hanging over him for months. King Bracket and Harry Zicks were dead! Bracket and Zicks! Bracket and . . .

A sudden numbness came over him. Why was he rejoicing over being rid of these two men? After all, they represented his last hope of vindicating himself in the States, of proving his innocence of the murder of the immigration officer.

They knew he did not do it—and they were dead. Martin Cook would have cleared him; Mart had been murdered. And Cook's confession went up in flames in the Bracket house, fired by the Brahmin. Nothing in the world to combat circumstantial evidence except his own word—and that would not have much weight against extradition proceedings.

Well, there was not much left to do now. Move on again. It looked pretty much like the rest of his life would be a constant flight. Moving on, running away from justice which would be injustice, fleeing from punishment for a crime he did not commit, yet which he could never prove he did not commit. Well, Joe Warren, start traveling—make for the docks. There's always some ship leaving the Hooghly for far and unknown places. Go out with the tide tonight. Yet . . .

He listened. The roar of the mob, fraught with tenor dissonance, rumbling with hatred, came to his ears. Above it he heard the crackle of rifle fire and the purr of motor cars. British troops had come. The mêlée would soon be over now. Now they would count the dead and take the wounded to the hospital. Words formed in Joe Warren's mind. Phrases.

He turned, scaled the back wall of the temple compound, ran limping down an alley, veered into a broad street, then another. He hailed a *ticca ghari*.

"To the *Englishman* office," he told the *ghari-walla*.

There was no use thinking of running away now. He had been in a story. It was a big story. He had to write it. What if the boss did think he was a thief? He could not turn down a hot news story.

THE EDITOR, in fact, made no mention of their previous conversation. He met Joe on the stairs, somewhat nervous, twirling his spectacles on their wide black ribbon.

"I understand you have a corking story for us, Mr. Ward," said the editor. "But you seem a bit knocked about. I hope you're not so badly hurt you can't write. Worst riot of the lot, I understand. Two Europeans killed, eh?"

"Two American crooks," said Joe. "But who told you about it? The show's scarcely over."

"Your bearer," said William Hughes-Gentry, O.B.E. "He came in awhile ago to say you'd be along shortly. That you stopped behind to—ah—complete your notes for a more colorful report."

Joe was at his desk, taking off the remaining shreds of his white drill coat, when Napoleon appeared.

"*Sahib*," he began, "I have—"

"Later," said Joe. "I'm busy now."

"But *Sahib*, it's—"

"Shut up, Nap. I'll talk to you afterward."

Joe's finger's itched for his typewriter.

He liked to communicate the excitement of his story through the mechanical rattle of his portable. Century old traditions of the *Englishman* decreed otherwise, however. He dug his pencil into the copy paper. The sheets piled up, stirred uneasily by the *punkah* turning lazily overhead. Occasionally he droned "*Koi hai!*" and Napoleon would personally see that the copy boys shuffled over to collect the story as it grew.

At last it was finished. He had got it off his chest, now, the story he had lived. Now he could tell Hughes-Gentry he was going. Or perhaps it would be better to leave without telling any one. A fugitive should leave no trace.

"*Sahib?*"

"All right, Napoleon, what's the trouble?"

"Just this, *sahib*."

Napoleon Bonaparte Kwastri placed on Joe Warren's desk a bulky manila envelop with two large green seals on the back. It was—or was it?—Mart Cook's confession, the document that would end his wanderings over the world two jumps ahead of mistaken prosecution, the document that Joe had thought burned in the Bracket house.

Feverishly he tore at the envelop, but it was strong. The seals held. He seized a pair of scissors and ripped off one end.

Yes. There was Mart Cook's signature, all right. He was in the clear now. With a whoop that echoed strangely in the sedate editorial rooms of the *Englishman*, he cleared his desk with one bound and grasped Napoleon's hand.

"Where? How?" he stammered. "But begin at the beginning. How did you happen to bring my hat to Bracket's?"

"If master will pardon impertinence and curiosity," said the Tamil youth solemnly, "I noticed great perturbation causing lack of appetite during tiffin time. When *sahib* could not eat *dahl puri*, I knew very serious things must be preparing selves to happen. Therefore, pardon curiosity, I looked at *chit* you threw away, sir, noting grave financial problem. We Christians must stick together, sir, so I said, 'Joseph Napoleon, we must help.' Later I asked *jamadar* where you going this afternoon time. He find out by *syce* address. I repair to address with hat in bag. I peer through keyhole, seeing gun-pistol in hands of late lamented *sahib* now deceased. I think, how to escape? I see male cows resting in street. Why not should Christians cause confusion with Sacred Cows, thus offering opportunity—"

"But this envelop, Nap?"

"Ah. I remark altercation regarding envelop, thus guessing great importance. I observe hiding place, returning thereto on overhearing Brahmin planning arson. I am very sorry to see, *sahib*, that gray hat was demolished in heathen disorders. Glad, however, it was not green hat which I am greatly admiring. One day when income increases, perhaps I too may possess similar green hat. Do you think, sir, that perhaps in near future you may augment salary two rupees per month, thus enabling savings for green hat?"

Joe did not reply at once. He had picked up that morning's *Englishman* and was reading the shipping intelligence. When he put down the paper there was a faraway look in his gray eyes.

"Napoleon," said Joe, "I'm going to make you a present of that green hat. Likewise of my other pair of shoes, fifty rupees, and some more clothes that I don't want to be bothered with for the next few weeks. There's an American freighter at the Kidderpore docks, and she's clearing for the States tonight. I'm going to stow away on her."

He won to greatness on a poker stake

DOLLARS TO CLINK

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

"MAYBE that was foolish of me," Angelo Patmore murmured. "Still, I don't know. Darn the luck anyway!"

He stood at the bottom of three steps that lifted to a broad veranda running like a gallery around three sides of a rambling house. Angel had a narrow pink strip of paper that he turned absently in thin, sinewy fingers as he took that last look. He did not need to see through the door to get the picture.

He could visualize a middle aged man six inches taller than himself and fifty pounds heavier striding up and down the room uttering blasphemous words. There was a girl sitting on a couch with tears in her eyes and a mixture of fear and anger on a face that was almost plain until she smiled—when it seemed that her features grew illumined by some inner radiance that always went straight to Angel's heart.

Angel stood for perhaps ten seconds in the warmth of a spring noon. The Trinity River flowed like molten silver a stone's throw on his right. He had come galloping down the Trinity bottoms since sunrise that morning, after a hectic night in a little cow town forty miles west. Now he shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

Half an hour later he was jogging east toward Post Oak, mounted on a fresh horse, leading a fat seal brown pack-pony with his bed, his warbag, all his few belongings lashed across a sawbuck saddle.

Halfway to Post Oak a rider loped out

of a hollow. They met on a rutted wagon trail.

"'Lo, Steve."

Steve only stared. He loomed like a giant on a mount smaller than either of Angel's horses. He was a very tall man with wide, square shoulders topped off by a face like a good natured eagle's.

"Mounted an' packed on your own private stock, eh?" quoth Steve at last. "What's broke loose, Angeleno?"

"Goin' to Post Oak to cash a check and head north," Angel replied. "Or east or west or south or someplace."

"Yeah—but—" Steve Murray spluttered.

"We had words," Angel explained.

"You've had words before," Steve reminded.

"He lit on me spurrin' an' whippin' before Grace," Angel continued. "I couldn't stand it. I wasn't feelin' too good this mornin'. Dropped my bankroll in a big game in San Marco last night. He blew hell outa me. Darn it, it wasn't his money."

Murray snorted.

"He dug into you, eh?" he said. "Then what?"

"I lammed him," Angel said quite casually. "Pasted him a couple times, good."

"My Lord," Steve breathed. "An' you live to tell the tale?"

"I took his gun away from him," Angel sighed. "Had to. He'd 'a' plunked me."

Steve gazed at Angel with mingled incredulity, amazement and admiration.

"You're plumb crazy," he said. "Just like dynamite. You shouldn't 'a' took the Old Man serious. Gosh, you're the youngest man that ever ran a roundup on the Trinity. He didn't mean it, Angel."

"You bet he meant it," Angel declared. "You should 'a' heard him. Plumb worthless. A ridin', shootin', gamblin' fool. Never have two silver dollars to clink together at the same time. I'll show him!"

Angel's repressed feeling broke loose. He swore in a mixture of Spanish and English, until he shocked even Steve Murray who had listened to Angel Patmore curse bad horses, Texas northers, his luck at poker and various other exasperations over a three year period.

"How?" Angel understood the monosyllabic query.

"Don't know yet," he said more calmly, looking aside at the Trinity rippling and flashing on its way to the Gulf. "Lotsa ways. But I expect I got to get outa this country to do it. He won't overlook me makin' a monkey of him."

"What *she* think about it?" Steve inquired.

"Nobody ever knows what a woman's thinkin'," Angel observed sagely. "She says she'll wait for me to deliver the goods."

"I'll be best man at the weddin'," Steve offered.

"Sure." Angel smiled. "Well, I'll ramble."

"I've a darned good mind to go with you," Steve muttered disconsolately.

"Don't be a darned fool, old-timer," Angel advised. "I'm barred, tabooed, blacklisted as far as the LUK is concerned. Luke'll be inclined to make you range boss now I'm out. Stay with him."

"You reckon he might?" Steve asked hopefully.

"Sure," Angel encouraged. "Why not?"

They shook hands and parted. Presently Angel rode into Post Oak. April in that latitude shed a beneficent warmth. Roundup season was at hand. Trail herds were organizing for departure. Post Oak's dusty street was full of saddled horses. Beyond the rim of the valley in which the Trinity flowed a dozen herds were marshaling or taking their leave for the far, mysterious Northwest. Hunters were killing the last of the buffalo up there. U. S. cavalry ran down hostile redskins, herding them back on reservations. An unmeasured empire of virgin grass and water beckoned Southern cowmen from ranges where the longhorns crowded each other for room.

The greatest pastoral movement in the history of the world waxed to its zenith when Angel Patmore rode into that little Texas town. And for a foundation to a

desire newborn in his breast Angel had two good horses, his riding gear, blankets, a Colt on his hip and a Winchester carbine under his left stirrup leather—and a check for one hundred dollars.

That pink slip took him back to the curse Luke Karsten laid on him. He dismounted. A gambling, riding fool who would never have two silver dollars to clink together! He shoved it back in his pocket and walked into Morrow's saloon. Angel thought he needed a drink.

BUT HE did not take a drink. The bartender leaned on his polished counter watching five men at a green topped table. Half a dozen other men stood about watching the players. Angel looked awhile. His fingers itched. No matter that he had dropped twelve hundred dollars—a year's pay for a Texas roundup boss—in San Marco the night before. No matter that he knew in his soul that poker was like a fever in his blood. He looked at this game with eager eyes. Three cattlemen and two punchers. They were dealing and betting silently. Angel estimated the size of the game. At least two thousand dollars variously stacked before the five. If a man could clean that game! And Angel had cleaned many a poker game—as well as having himself gone to the cleaners in others.

He walked out, along the street to the Post Oak County Bank.

A tall, thin faced, dark man in the middle of the floor space flanked by a teller's and cashier's grilled cage glared and stormed. Colonel John Hyams stood behind the counter with his hands on the mahogany surface. The colonel's genial old face wore a mixture of annoyance and apprehension. Colonel John was, strictly speaking, the Post Oak County Bank—an institution in person as well as financially. He had been casting funds on the limited waters and boundless plains of the Post Oak country for two decades and watching it come back to him manifold, with the good will of every cattleman he dealt with.

But there was no atmosphere of good will in that room when Angel Patmore stepped through the doorway. He knew the tall, dark visaged man. He knew blind fury when he saw it written on the human countenance. And he knew Colonel John for a kindly, upright soul who would rather help than harm any man.

So Angel's eyes dwelt curiously on Jack Ratsey's right arm and hand after one glance at his flaming face. He had seen men in that same tense armed posture before, oblivious to everything except a venomous passion to destroy.

Hence Angel was quite prepared for what was an instinctive reaction on his own part. He knew that Ratsey was getting ready to go for his gun. He did not know what it was all about. He did not care. To Angel it was sheer murder, no matter what provocation, what grievance had worked Ratsey up to the killing pitch.

Thus, when the curving fingers closed on the grip of the .45 with an upward swoop, Angel, whose muscular motions were as lightning quick as his agile brain, was drawing also.

And only one shot cracked in that room with a flash and a roar magnified by the enclosing walls. Ratsey stood gripping his right hand with his left. His gun fell with a clatter halfway across the house of money.

"That'll be enough from you, Mister Jack Ratsey," Angel said. "And you two—" He frowned at a cashier and a ledger clerk who had each pulled a gun. " 'Tend to your pencil pushin'. You were both a mile behind, anyway."

Ratsey's mouth opened in a snarl. He rubbed at his numbed hand. He glared at Angel, at Colonel John. His fingers had only suffered from shock. He gave that hand a last tentative shake and stooped for his gun. With that retrieved he bent burning eyes on Angel Patmore, slim, small, watchful, unsmiling. Angel looked like a schoolboy in riding boots and Stetson—but Ratsey knew better than that.

"You can go as far as you like, Jack," Angel said softly. "But what's the use of bein' a damn' fool twice in one day?"

"I'll see you later," Ratsey muttered. "Both of you."

"I'll always see you first," Angel replied.

The man went out, head down, muttering to himself. Colonel John looked across the counter and sighed.

"That was right smart of you, Angelo," he said. "You certainly kept me from bein' meat for the undertaker."

"Maybe he was just aimin' to run a bluff of some kind," Angel suggested.

"No—" Colonel John shook his head—"he'd gone *loco*. I know killin' when I see it in a man's eye."

"Lucky I happened in to cash a check then," Angel said. "Still, 'twasn't nothin' a-tall."

"Give your check to Smith." The colonel indicated the cashier. "Come back into my office and have a drink."

Colonel John's hand shook as he poured two drinks from a decanter.

"Ratsey was terrible worked up," he explained. "He's spread himself over a lot of territory. Shootin' at a fortune. Stands to lose it all if he don't raise a hundred thousand to carry him over till fall. I never did consider him a good risk. Too much temper. Not enough judgment. I just wouldn't let him have any part of that sum. He lost his head."

"He's a darned poor specimen." Angel frowned. "Pullin' his gun on a unarmed man. Everybody in Texas knows you never packed a pistol in your life. Yes, I think he was fixin' to kill you. He shore looked wall eyed."

"I know he was," Colonel John admitted. "And now, darn it, he'll probably try to kill you on sight. I'm worried about that, Angel. 'Tisn't your war."

"Don't worry." Angel shrugged his shoulders.

"You're bound to meet, operatin' here in the same territory," old Hyams rumbled.

"Maybe. Maybe not," Angel drawled. "I won't be lingerin' long in these parts."

"Oh? How come?"

"Me'n' Luke's parted," Angel explained, a little sadly. "And we parted angry. I ain't nothin' but a gamblin', ridin' fool, Colonel John. I've run through twenty thousand dollars since I come of age. Two years. And we locked horns finally today, over Grace. He says he'd sooner see her in her grave than married to a plumb no-account like me. Says I'll never have two silver dollars to clink together."

He repeated more of old Luke Karsten's scathing phrases that burned him for all his nonchalance.

"You been a darned good roundup boss for him three years now," Colonel John reflected. "Luke Karsten never had a no-account that long on his payroll."

"I manhandled him a trifle too," Angel confessed. "He's foamin' at the mouth yet, I expect. Now Mister Jack Ratsey has a grievance against me too. I'm not goin' to be popular around these parts. Thanks."

This last to the cashier who laid five twenty-dollar gold pieces before him. Angel rose.

"So long, Colonel John," he said. "Before sundown I'll be travelin'."

"Listen, boy—" the colonel pulled at his white mustache, towering a head over Angel. "What do you aim to do?"

"Go north to a new country and make a stake," Angel voiced his resolve. "This is the last money I got, all I got. I been a poker playin' fool. You know what I'm goin' to do with this hundred? There's a good liberal game goin' in Bill Morrow's place. I'm goin' to clean it or be cleaned."

Colonel John nodded comprehension.

"If I don't see you again, Angelo," he said, after a little pause, "remember this. You done me a good turn a few minutes ago. If you got any ambition I could help you gratify, I'd stretch a point."

"A man's got to gratify his own ambitions," Angel said slowly. "He ain't much good if he needs a wet nurse."

Colonel John grinned and stuck out his hand.

"Well, you remember what I said," he concluded. "If you ever have to holler for anything you think of John Hyams in Post Oak, Texas. I've known wild,

gamblin' rip roarin' kids that was pretty good men in a pinch. You do know the cow business, Angel. Stay with that and you'll wear diamonds."

Angel went a trifle warily down the street to Morrow's. Post Oak, since he shot that gun out of Ratsey's hand, held immediate danger for him. If old Luke Karsten should get to brooding over the indignity Angel had visited on him that morning he might come riding in also. There was a matter between them that Angel hated to think about. Not that Angel worried as he made his way to that poker game. Only being, for all his years and his boyish smallness, potentially deadly in a private war, he preferred peace. In any case, regardless of enemies and gunpowder lightning, pride would not have him dodge out of Post Oak until he chose to go. Meantime, that poker game lured him. The time to gamble, he told himself, was when a man had nothing to lose. Possessing resources, it was better to be conservative. So—

Angel joined the watching crowd, with his back to a wall just in case Ratsey came looking for trouble. Card sense told him in five minutes that one cowpuncher in that game was outclassed. Angel's hunch was right. Within twenty minutes there was a vacant chair. He slipped into it and slid his five twenties across to the man banking the game. Small capital. Starting on a shoestring, Angel reflected. He could go broke in one hand.

A FOOL for luck, he said to himself within ten minutes. The first hole card dealt him was a king. The second a king. Kings back to back in a Texas stud game. Angel wore his poker face and bet his hand like a drunken sailor. He tapped himself when the last card fell.

"Angelcno, you always were hell to bluff with high cards in sight," one cowman said, and called the bet.

Angel more than doubled his money on that first play. On his own deal he got every chip before him in the pot and was called in two places. He could not go wrong. A queer glow began to light him up inside. He was six hundred strong now. And he could not be sitting in a better game.

Homer Stultz across the table had forty thousand cattle, owned half a county. Stultz loved stud poker for itself. Money was nothing to him. Paul Stratton had three trail herds bound north. Stratton had once bet a trail herd on the last card to his hand in a stud game at Abilene.

At the end of an hour's play Angel Patmore had half the chips on the table piled under his chin. Paul Stratton was signing I. O. U's. Stultz humped in his chair. This was the sort of game he liked. He was winning. So was Angel. The other three were outclassed or outlucked.

And in the middle of a hand Jack Ratsey clanked in from the rear. Absorbed in the game, Angel was not aware of him until he saw Ratsey's mean eyes bent on him over a player's shoulder. Ratsey did not say anything. His look was enough. Angel knew the signs. It annoyed him. But there was nothing he could do now. He did know that something was going to be forced—because Ratsey stood waiting until the remaining cowpuncher decided it was too stiff a game for him and cashed what chips he had left. Ratsey took his chair. And Ratsey was a notoriously poor stud player. He seldom played, and never in that stiff a game. The ante was ten dollars now, and the sky the limit. Angel knew that Ratsey was getting in that game to ride him, to start something.

It came before long. Angel had the deal. Ratsey sat on his right. Angel had raised him out of a pot by sheer weight of money the hand before. It was Ratsey's cut now. When Angel picked up the deck to deal Ratsey snarled—

"Set them cards down, you pie faced rat!"

Angel looked at him.

"Don't call names, Ratsey," he murmured. "I'll ram 'em down your throat if you do."

"You slipped that cut," Ratsey growled. "I seen you."

"If you're lookin' for trouble," Angel replied deliberately, "it ain't necessary to have an excuse. Nor is it necessary to break up this game. Have some sense."

For answer Ratsey slapped him across the mouth. Paul Stratton clamped him with one powerful arm and stopped his draw. Angel sat, white faced, shaking, with sheer anger at the stupid vindictiveness of the man. Then he got up.

"Let him go," he said.

"No," both Stratton and Stultz declared. "It's a good game, and no damn' fool like him is goin' to break it up that way. Get to hell outa this saloon, Ratsey, and stay out till this stud game is ended. Then if you wanta shoot it out with this Patmore kid, go to it. It'll be your own funeral."

Ratsey tore himself loose, his face livid.

"You blamed runt!" he shouted. "If you're in Post Oak more'n another hour I'll drop you in your tracks."

They watched him out the door, and dealt again. No one commented on the incident. Angel shook it out of his mind. He would not get out of Post Oak without burning powder now. But it did not crimp his play. In another hour Stratton and the strange cowman grimaced uncomfortably, cashed in their few remaining chips. Stratton made out a check to bearer and gave it to Stultz who was banker.

"We resign," he said. "You'n' Angelo are too many for us. Besides, I got business to attend to. Bet 'em high, boys, an' sleep in the street."

It narrowed to Angel and Stultz. They played four hands. Angel won three pots. Then he laid down his last hand.

"I don't like single handed stud for one thing," he said. "For another I got Ratsey on my mind. You're winner a little, Stultz. I'm winner a lot and it means something to me. Do you mind if we close the game?"

"Hell, no," Stultz grinned. "I'm just playin' for pastime."

Angel cashed in, filled his pockets with gold and silver, and banknotes—to say nothing of Paul Stratton's check. He loosened his gun in its scabbard and turned to the door.

"Hey, kid!" Stultz's voice was like a hiss in his ear.

Angel whirled. Ratsey had come in from the rear. His gun was flashing to a level. Angel felt his hat whirl off his head.

If Ratsey's speed and accuracy had been equal to his ferocious intent Angel Patmore would have been an added unit to the small company on Post Oak's Boot Hill. He left Angel no choice. Being earnest in his desire to live his allotted span, Angel did his best. Left to himself he would no more have tried to kill Jack Ratsey than he had tried to kill him in Colonel John's bank. But this was a case of kill or be killed. And so it was Ratsey who went down in the bluish haze from two spitting guns.

Angel knew he would have a feud on his hands later. Ratsey had relatives. Right or wrong, any Texan's kin could be depended upon for reprisal. So Angel, standing gun in hand, resentfully concluded that the climax had been reached and his immediate exit from Post Oak ordered both by destiny and prudence.

So he hurried to the livery stable, repacked and saddled.

"Well," he said to himself, "if I head north and keep going I'll live longer."

Abreast of the County Bank he halted. An impulse partly born of Luke Karsten's contemptuous summary of his nature and deeds, and partly from that poker fund heavy in his pocket, gave birth in his brain to an idea. He strode through the doorway. Colonel John peered cautiously from his private office, and came out to meet Angel.

"I got Ratsey," Angel explained. "He jumped me roughshod. All I could do was defend myself. So I'm splittin' the breeze for foreign parts."

"Stand pat," Colonel John advised. "Stand your trial. You'll come clear."

"Only mean more gunplay later," Angel said. "I know the Ratsey tribe. No, I'm on my way. I was goin' anyhow. I beat

that poker game, Colonel John. Bank my money for me, will you."

"H-m." Colonel Hyams grunted as Angel disgorged his winnings. "You sure did."

"Six thousand, three hundred and thirty," Angel finished counting. "I'll take the three hundred and thirty with me. I'm a gamblin' fool, Colonel John. Luke was right."

"I wouldn't say a fool, son," the old man murmured.

"Fool or not," Angel said seriously, "I have played my last poker, touched my last card for money. That ain't a promise to nobody. It's a plain statement of fact. I'll show that old highbinder sittin' on the Trinity River I'm good for somethin' besides gamblin' and ridin'. Never have two silver dollars to clink together! I'll show him. If I can see an openin' in the cow business somewhere, Colonel John, would you consider lendin' me as much capital as I got on deposit?"

"I have backed poorer risks in the cow business than you'll ever be, Angelo," Hyams said with hesitation. "You can draw on me through any bank."

"You sure mean that?" Angel asked a trifle incredulously.

Colonel John nodded.

"I'll remember that," Angel replied. "Maybe I'll call your bluff. I'm headed for Montana. But don't tell nobody where I'm gone. I don't want no more fire eatin' Ratseys on my trail."

And he was gone with a deposit slip for six thousand dollars in his pocket, and the colonel's last shout was to the effect that it was no bluff.

IN A MONTH Angel was skirting the fringe of Colorado. On a fork of the Republican River he fell in with a trail herd—two thousand longhorns. Short handed, with an unruly crew, a feeble, ineffective trail boss welcomed Angel like a long lost brother. He went to work as a hand. In a week he was virtually in charge. By sheer energy and one brief display of force he whipped a dozen snarling, shirking disgruntled riders into an orderly, efficient crew long before they turned the eastern fork of the Bighorns and marched down to the Yellowstone. Twelve hundred miles in an airline from Post Oak. Sixteen hundred as a herd traveled. A distance from his goal not to be measured in miles.

To those penned in a city, to all such as spend their days in toilsome routine the march of that herd across twenty degrees of latitude would have been a breath taking adventure. They swam rivers, struggled with mud and quicksand. They burned in midsummer heat. Summer storms lashed them with whips of hail and rain. They moved alone across tremendous wastes of grassland, yet now and then they saw far off the camp smoke of other herds, as seamen descry the distant skysails of a full rigged ship hull down on a watery horizon. Scalp hunting parties of Ogallallas, Crows, Shoshones flitted sometimes like painted wraiths beyond rifle shot. The red brother still harried the white man—but a dozen Texans with a trail herd was a hard nut to crack.

And it was all one to Angel Patmore. He took it as it came. It was the day's work, the season's job. He did the work for which he drew his wage. Sometimes he would look at the little picture of Grace Karsten he carried in his watch case. Then he would hear old Luke's contemptuous epithets. Never have two silver dollars to clink together! Plumb worthless except to ride and shoot and play the fool! A man that had had a small fortune handed to him on his twenty-first birthday ought to have something and be somebody! Damned gamblin' pup!

Angel's face would burn a little. Funny he had never thought of himself as being measured by what he had—by what he could acquire in material possessions. Where would he be any different if he had ten thousand cattle and a hundred thousand dollars in the bank? He would still be Angelo Patmore, no better, no worse.

Well, it was not that; Angel conceded so much to old Luke's estimate. It was a game. You beat it if you were up and coming. If you weren't—

"Gosh, she's a big country," Angel would say then, staring over a thousand square miles of unfenced pasture from a little rise on the rolling plains.

Not a rider in sight. Not a house. No life but wolf and jackrabbit and bands of antelope. The buffalo were gone and the longhorns were moving in. Empty from dawn to sundown for a hundred miles in every direction. Twinges of homesickness would seize him. Then he would square his shoulders.

When the herd rose dripping out of the Yellowstone within sight of Miles City the little, fussy trail boss rode for town. He did not come back that night. Angel grazed the herd ten miles north to a night camp. In the morning he galloped into Miles. Found his boss in a hotel room with a broken leg. His horse had fallen on him. A military surgeon had set the fracture.

"I'm here for two months, darn the luck," the trail boss complained. "You take the herd on, Angelo. You been same as runnin' the layout anyway. I'd never 'a' got that herd this far with that crew. I was expectin' to meet Sleeman here, but he ain't showed up. Cross the Missouri at Fort Benton an' get further orders there. So long."

Angel was two days north of Miles when a big, red faced man rode into his noon camp and handed him a note. It ran:

> This here is George Sleeman of Fort Worth. He owns this herd of XP two-year-olds you're handling.
>
> Yourstruly,
>
> —D. AYRES

"Well," Angel said, "there they are in good flesh an' movin' north, Mr. Sleeman. What's your pleasure?"

"There's darned little pleasure for me in the cow business these days," Sleeman said morosely. "I just come out to see if you was any improvement on that poor stick that's layin' in Miles with a busted leg."

Angel said nothing to that. He knew men and their moods. He perceived that Sleeman had something on his mind that did not sit well. It was not Angel's business to make talk—only to take orders.

"Who'd you ride for down south?" Sleeman asked abruptly.

"I'd as soon not tell you," Angel said frankly. "I was forced to down a man, and I don't want his kinfolk gunnin' for me up here. But I was a roundup boss three years in Texas."

"If you was a range boss in Texas I reckon you can handle a trail herd for me?" Sleeman conceded.

"I can handle a trail herd for anybody," Angel replied coolly, "if they tell me what they want done an' leave me do it."

"Trail 'em to Fort Benton 'n' hold 'em around there till you hear from me; that's all. I got seven herds strung between Southern Wyoming an' the Missouri River right now. I'm cattle poor. I kinda miscalculated the strength of my hand. I've got to try an' turn one of these herds into cash."

Angel watched a hundred sleek two-year-olds string past.

"I wouldn't mind ownin' this bunch myself," he said a bit wistfully. "You could keep the other six herds an' welcome."

"I'll sell 'em to you dirt cheap." Sleeman bent an inquiring eye on him. "You got any money, kid?"

Now the conjunction of money and cattle revived in Angel's mind instantly the very look and tone of Colonel John Hyams. And Angel thought fast, letting his imagination play.

"I don't carry the price of two thousand cattle in my jeans," said he. "Maybe I could raise it in a few days. What'll you take for the outfit, herd, saddle stock an' wagons?"

Sleeman chewed his under lip for a second.

"For cash down I'll make you a gift," he said at last. "Twenty thousand dollars."

Nobody knew better than Angel Patmore just how much of a gift those two thousand XP's were at that price. He sat a little straighter in his saddle.

"I'd have to go back to Miles with you

where there's a telegraph line," he said. "I can raise that much, I think. Not sure, but I'll try."

"If you could raise twenty thousand cash to take this herd off my hands I'd pay your railroad fare to Texas an' back," Sleeman said feelingly. "I need hard cash, young feller, and I need it bad."

From Miles City Angel wired Colonel John Hyams briefly:

> Can buy two thousand two-year-olds of George Sleeman at snap price. Unlimited range up here for taking. Need twenty thousand deposited in Miles City, Montana, bank to close deal. Give you note and mortgage on brand as security, or operate on shares if you like. Will wire details if interested.
>
> —ANGELO PATMORE

Twelve hours. Twenty-four hours. Colonel John might be out of town. Maybe it was out of sight out of mind. And it was good business. The kind the Post Oak County Bank dealt in as a matter of course. Angel could see that investment doubled, perhaps trebled, in three years off that herd. But it was a long way to Post Oak. Angel went to bed the second night with gloom for company.

But as he sat eating breakfast the cashier of a newly opened bank in Miles City sought him out.

"You Mr. Angelo Patmore?" he inquired.

Angel nodded.

"Expect any important communications from anybody, anywhere?" the man asked guardedly.

Angel looked at him a moment and took a chance.

"I'm expectin' twenty thousand dollars to my credit from Colonel John Hyams of the Post Oak County Bank in Texas," he said calmly. "Has she arrived?"

"She has arrove." The cashier smiled. "You can draw on us for twenty thousand. Providing you can identify yourself."

Angel could and did. He rode out of Miles that afternoon with a bill of sale in his pocket, the owner of two thousand mixed two-year-olds, a hundred saddle ponies and a chuck wagon—and a cash balance of six thousand in Texas to run on.

"I'm in up to my neck," Angel said over and over. "It's sink or swim, because I've got the colonel's money runnin' on four legs. I got to make a go of this."

It was not so easy. Two men in the crew had been up the trail to Miles the previous season. None had ever been north of the Yellowstone. For three hundred miles Angel had to grope his way. He knew that Fort Benton lay on the Missouri River. Sleeman told him that north of Benton, especially along the Marias, unoccupied grazing land, well watered, spread for two hundred miles.

Free grass. Free land. Free water. No taxes. No wonder the Southwest was moving north. There was more gold in the grass roots, Angel knew, than the placer miners ever sluiced out of Last Chance and Virginia City. So he moved on with his herd, looking for a prime location.

WHEN he swam them over the Big Muddy half a mile below Benton an elderly man sat his horse on the bank to watch the crossing. He nodded to Angel when that young man punched out the last of the drag.

"You're quite a kid to be runnin' a trail herd for Sleeman," he commented when he found out who was trail boss.

"Me?" Angel's amusement at the tricks his boyish face and diminutive stature played on strangers rippled his face in a smile. "I'm runnin' this herd for myself."

"Sleeman's road brand," the stranger pointed out.

"Was," Angel corrected. "I bought this outfit off Sleeman at Miles."

"Oh!" The cowman grinned. "Time you're growed up you'll have plenty cattle."

"What I lack in size," Angel retorted, "I make up in speed. Ask them that know me."

"I will when I know who to ask about," the old man replied. "My name's Gray. I range the Diamond G on the Marias."

"Mine's Patmore," Angel returned.

"And where I'll range this bunch I don't know yet."

"There's plenty of room on the Marias," Gray said genially. "Neighbors is darned scarce. Patmore, eh? You by any chance the kid that was range boss for Luke Karsten?"

"Yes," Angel admitted. "But I am not advertisin'. I was in a fuss on the Trinity before I left. There's folks would camp on my trail, maybe, with their guns out."

"I know." Gray nodded. "The Ratsey family is clannish. I knowed you right off. Happens I was in Post Oak that day. Started two trail herds south from there. I watched that poker game awhile. Won't advertise you, kid. Old Luke talked to me about you, after that."

"He would." Angel's bitterness was not so keen, but it still lingered. "I know about what he'd say. Plumb worthless. Never have two dollars to clink together."

Gray looked him over thoroughly before he replied.

"You got two thousand head of cattle, accordin' to your own say-so," he observed.

"I'll have more by'n'by." Angel frowned. "I'll show that old Trinity River hardshell a man don't have to grow a beard an' look sour to make money in the cow business."

Gray laughed.

"Well, don't forget the Diamond G ranch at Boulder Crossing," he said. "It's a lonesome country. A neighbor or two would be welcome."

Angel did not forget. He loaded fresh supplies in Fort Benton, crossed the Teton, drew north to the Marias with the hump of the Goosebill a landmark on the western skyline, and threw his herd in on a broad river bottom when the first nip of autumn frosts was in the air of nights.

No surveyor had as yet squinted through a transit in that region. It was public domain, free for the taking. Angel rode miles up and down the Marias, picked a spot where crooked limbed cottonwoods and compact groves of poplar gave him both shade and building material—hard by a natural meadow where with a mower and rake he slashed down and stacked a hundred tons of hay while the rest of his crew labored with ax and hammer and saw. In an incredibly short time he had a house of sorts, a stable, a set of corrals created by that magic which the frontiersman carries in his hands and brain.

Then with no more to do, for his cattle must care for themselves till spring, he paid off his Texan crew, gave them railroad fare home and let them go when they began to shiver in the first winter winds. Two men elected to stay. The others were sick for the South and departed gladly.

After which Angel sat down to compose a letter to Colonel John Hyams.

> Any time you want your money out of this stock proposition, let me know. I can turn 'em over at a profit anytime. Unless a hard winter hits me, I aim very soon to get myself crowned as a cattle king. This is one grand cow country. I had an idea it was like the North Pole, but barring colder winters it's got Texas backed off the map for grass, water and timber . . .

And a great deal more, because Angel was truly in love with Montana. When he wrote to Grace Karsten he talked more of himself and less of the country. He told her that if his mind and body was in Montana, his heart was still on the Trinity River.

Having dispatched those letters, Angel somehow felt blue and forlorn. The Marias seemed suddenly a most Godforsaken wilderness, in which he was doomed to struggle with bad weather, straying cattle, all the contingencies of a desperate undertaking, merely to prove to himself and a stubborn old fool in Texas that he was a man and not a wayward child.

So Angel saddled his best horse and went visiting.

He was used to women. There were sisters in his family. Also there was Grace Karsten. So that Angel was pleased and surprised, rather than embarrassed, to find every man of the Diamond G absent, except the cook, and a slim, imperious looking wisp of a girl asking him to stable his horse and make himself at home after the custom of the cow country.

"You're Angelo Patmore, aren't you?" She sat across the table whereon she had placed beefsteak and cornbread and coffee hot from the cook's range. "I'm Molly Gray."

"Why, yes, that's me," Angel replied. "You're a good guesser."

"I saw the brand on your horse," said Molly. "Besides, Grace Karsten told me quite a lot about you in Fort Worth just after you quit the LUK."

"I didn't quit," Angel corrected. "Luke fired me."

"Well, you quit the country," Molly returned. "Like a fool."

"Like a no-account fool," Angel intoned. He had the impression that Molly Gray did not know about his run-in with Jack Ratsey, or she would not have said that. "That's what old Luke said I was. He'd be glad to know somebody agrees with him. I don't."

Molly cupped her hands over her chin and stared at him. She had dark gray eyes and black hair and a mouth like a slash of carmine.

"Come to think of it, now that I see you personally, perhaps Grace was the fool," she said, after a minute's contemplation that almost made Angel uncomfortable.

But she did not say why. And Angel deftly changed the subject. But he wondered what the devil she meant, just the same.

At dusk Gray came in with half a dozen riders. They yarned around the fireplace till midnight. When Angel left next day Molly said to him—

"Don't forget where we live."

Nor did Angel forget. His horse's hoofs made many a track to the Diamond G through the snows of that winter. Going and coming, he would turn aside here and there to look at little bunches of XP cattle making shift against the wolf and the blizzard, nosing for grass in loose snow, wild cattle in a wild country.

"A gamblin' fool," he said once scornfully. "Why, every cowman from here to the Rio Grande is gamblin' from season to season on weather and water and grass. The winds and the rains can make him or break him. What's the difference between cattle and cards?"

And once he snapped the case of his watch to look at Grace Karsten's face.

"No, old girl, I'm not forgettin'," he muttered to himself.

Spring brought blue windflowers and green grass and the muster of roundup. Angel joined forces with the Diamond G. Gray led his roundup crew for a month. He had fifteen thousand cattle north of the Big Muddy; as many more in the South. He was past sixty and weary of saddle work. He said to Angel Patmore:

"You're younger and swifter than I am. Run this outfit for me."

And Angel ran it at a bank manager's salary and took care of his own stock besides. That season and the next.

WHEN beef gathering closed at the end of the third summer and the last returns came in from the Chicago dealers Angel took stock. His original herd had been made up of one thousand two-year-old steers, one thousand heifers. His thousand heifers had bred so that he now owned twenty-six hundred head of stock cattle. His thousand steers, less a few winter killed, had netted him thirty-five thousand dollars in the market. He could repay Colonel John Hyams with interest at seven per cent. and still have a comfortable balance in the bank, and more cattle under his individual brand than he started with.

"Luke Karsten said I would be no-account," he told Molly Gray. "Never would have two silver dollars to clink together. Well, I've proved him plumb mistaken. I'm goin' south and make the old *hombre* eat crow."

Molly looked at him gravely.

"There'll be a lot of satisfaction in that, I suppose," she said.

"Satisfaction? Say, what you think I've sweated in summer and froze my fingers and cheeks in winter in this darned north pole country for?" Angel demanded. "For the fun of the thing? I know pleasanter countries to make a livin' in. I

was raised in Texas. I'm goin' back."

"To stay?" Molly asked.

"Well, that depends," Angel said thoughtfully. "I got a good start here. I wouldn't like to close out. I guess I'll be back in the spring."

"Don't go, Angel," Molly said slowly. "I was in Forth Worth last winter—in Post Oak, too. Jack Ratsey has two brothers there. They have made their talk. They haven't forgotten that killing."

"I got to go," Angel murmured. "I promised."

"You've been up here three years," Molly told him. "It won't be the same. A woman isn't like a tree. You don't plant her and go back long after to find her with her roots in the same spot."

Angel's cattle were bunched pretty close around his own ranch. His original meadow had grown to several hundred acres of irrigated hayland. He had five hundred tons of winter feed stacked for a hard weather emergency. He had four riders hand picked for the job. There was nothing to hold him.

Eventually he landed in San Marco, the nearest point to the Trinity he could reach by train. From there he headed for the LUK and Post Oak very much as he had left it, on the back of a horse. In San Marco he met men he knew, riders with whom he had worked the range. They passed him without recognition.

"What's the matter with me?" Angel asked himself fretfully. "Folks don't know me any more."

Angel pondered as he rode down into the Trinity valley. Of course people changed. He could feel change in himself. But not in most things. Tenaciously he had clung to a determination to show Luke Karsten that he could laugh lightly, ride like a fool and still be a man in a man's world. The invisible thread that linked him to Grace was like a chain for strength—had been for three years. Only for *that*—Molly Gray—he recalled her last words. A man could interpret them in various ways. Angel thrust that out of his mind. The feeling that he was about to prove himself set his shoulders back and his head up as he rode into the LUK dooryard.

Change here. Yes. Angel's keen eyes noted sagging barn doors, broken fence panels. The LUK sat on a bald flat. The dry fall wind blew Texas dust in little swirls from under his horse's feet. The Trinity looked gray, shrunken, where he remembered it as sparkling like molten silver. A man, a tall, thin faced man with a face like a good natured eagle stood in the door of a bunkhouse—Steve Murray. He said:

"Howdy stranger. Put up your horse. It's nigh noon."

Steve did not know him. Something in Angel tightened up.

"Luke Karsten home?" he asked.

"Yeah, over in the house."

"Gosh," Angel breathed, and rode the fifty yards to the old ranch-house.

He swung down by the same three steps. He doffed his hat in the doorway. Old Luke stood with his back to the fireplace where a yellow flame flickered in a sooty cavern. The old man's bearded chin was sunk on his broad chest.

"Hello, Luke," Angel greeted.

"I dunno's I can place you." Karsten stared at him a few seconds. "You look familiar, too."

"Lord, Lord!" Angel cried. "Have I slipped a few years like Rip Van Winkle, or what? I'm Angel Patmore, Luke."

Karsten walked around him into a better light.

"Why, so it is," said he. "Damed if it ain't."

"Last time you and me talked, right here in this room," Angel reminded, "you give me hell, Luke. You said I was nothin' but a gamblin' fool. That I'd never have two silver dollars to clink together. And I told you I'd show you."

"I remember." Old Luke nodded.

"You still sore at me because I got mad an' tore into you?" Angel asked diffidently.

Karsten shook his head. A ghost of a smile flitted across his face.

"Well, I'm back." Angel issued his ultimatum. "I come back for Grace.

Where is she? I sent her a wire from Chicago."

"Yeah, she got it," old Luke rumbled. "So you got cows of your own now?"

"A couple of thousand heads," Angel told him casually. "A ranch in Montana. And cash in the bank. I ain't braggin', Luke. I'm just tellin' you to show you you were wrong about me."

Karsten stared at the floor.

"I reckon I was," he said at last. And only Angel knew what a concession that was from that stubborn old cattleman who had known him since he was knee high to a grasshopper.

"You've done all right," old Luke continued. "I haven't done so good since you left here. Used poor judgment. Itch got among the LUK's an' raised old Ned. I'm closin' out here on the Trinity. Thinkin' about makin' a fresh start up North in the spring."

"Anywhere north of the Yellowstone is made to order for cattlemen," Angel said. "She's a gold mine. Where's Grace?"

Karsten shifted uneasily.

"You don't want to see Grace," he muttered.

"The hell I don't!" Angel exploded. "You still got somethin' stickin' in your crop? She's past twenty-one now."

"Yes. And married three months ago," old Luke blurted out. "Married to Bob Ratsey. Brother to the feller you downed in Post Oak the day you quit the country. I'm plumb sorry, Angel."

Angel Patmore stood for ten seconds as if he had frozen in his tracks. His body was taut, immobile, but his mind was not. He could see the whole sequence like pictures flashing before his eyes. Out of sight, out of mind. All his struggle, his self-discipline, his achievement, gone by the board. Once more he had gambled and lost. Yet he did not feel the pangs of a loser. That puzzled him.

"Why," he thought to himself, "I ought to be as mad as a hatter, or plumb broken hearted. Gosh darn it, what kind of a feller am I, anyhow?"

Aloud he said:

"Well, it's a free country. But she might have told me. I reckon I'll travel."

"Have a drink before you go," old Luke offered.

They lifted glasses by a sideboard. Angel looked at the red liquor, at Luke Karsten, at the room which had once seemed the most homelike place on earth and which he now perceived to be shabby, uncared for, less attractive by far than his own log house on the Marias. He looked out the window at miles of brown flatness, at a dust banner streaming where a rider fogged a bunch of horses toward the LUK corrals. It was all over. There was not any shouting. He had come two thousand miles to draw a blank.

"Here's lookin' at you, Angel!" Karsten gulped his drink.

"Here's how, Luke!" Angel drained his glass, put on his hat, turned to the door. "So long."

Two miles along the trail to Post Oak Angel stopped to look back. A whimsical notion made him laugh aloud. He took two silver dollars out of his trousers pocket and jingled them in the palm of his hand.

"Nothin' but a gamblin' fool! Never have two silver dollars to clink together," he said thoughtfully. "Well, he was wrong. I proved him wrong. But it don't mean nothin' to anybody—only to me, I reckon."

Only to himself! Angel suddenly felt a vast sense of relief, a profound gratitude, as if some weight had rolled off him. He did not quite know why. It took him some time to get that figured out. It was a simple conclusion he ultimately reached. Certain things that happened to a man were just growing pains.

"She said a woman ain't like a tree. You don't plant her and go back long after to find her roots in the same spot," Angel murmured. "Now I wonder was she referrin' to Grace—or to herself?"

He swung his horse about and pointed straight for San Marco, the nearest railroad point, all at once impetuously eager to get back to the Marias. Angel wanted to prove one thing more to himself—and this time he was not going to take three years to reach the point.

TAKING NO

THE REST HOUSE on the Nawami road, which intrudes into the Kukuruku country of Nigeria, was hardly a thing of beauty. Its wattle roof leaked generously in the rainy season and its sun baked mud walls, pock marked with bullet holes and scarred with the indiscriminate hackings of machetes, gave the decided impression that the tropical tornado was not the only kind of storm it had been asked to weather.

Bellingham, however, had no illusions about the place, and when he had halted his carriers there twenty-four hours before, he had not expected to be kept waiting twenty-four minutes. Now, upon the evening of the second day, he lounged in the low doorway, looked along the bush path that was called a road and wagered another hundred that Grayson would show up around the curve before the sun went down.

He was a big man, powerful of arm and thigh, and his florid, rather heavily jowled face belied the fact that the past fifteen years of his life had been spent in the fever ridden swamps of the Lower Niger. The blue in his eyes, too, was a clear blue that gave little or no hint of his failing for several brandies before breakfast, and his white silk shirt, neatly pressed gray flannel trousers and brown buckskin shoes spotlessly evidenced his liking for presenting a cleanly appearance under any and every circumstance.

Even the gun he carried had something of a tailored and dandified air about it; this, though no one in the Nigerias questioned Bellingham's ability to use it with unusually accurate results. However, he was still more at home with a hippo hide thong, and when the occasion demanded it Bellingham liked to trifle with the idea that he was writing his name on his victim's back.

This present occasion, according to

Do you remember "The Gray Charteris" and "Calvert of Allobar"? The author of these great novels comes back to us with a masterful story of Nigeria

By ROBERT SIMPSON

CHANCES

Bellingham, was written in the stars, and the rest house on the Nawami road was the logical scenic setting for such a climax as he had in mind; particularly since Grayson was due in Sifuko, on the way home, inlessthan a week.

In the Lower Niger swamps men may ask when and where certain things have happened, but they rarely ask why. And in quite a number of cases of the sort there really isn't any answer that matters. Bellingham, for instance, hummed a bar or two of "Down South", absently watched his lamp boy fill up the hurricane lanterns and thought he was waiting for Grayson because Grayson—

Bellingham won his hundred and straightened slowly. His scattered carriers, lolling about in drowsy evening idleness, suddenly broke the stillness with excited gesticulating chatter that rasped upon Bellingham's ears like the discordantjangling of bells.

"Shut up!" he growled at no one in particular, and paid no attention to the fact that he was instantly obeyed because he was too intently interested in the man who was coming slowly around the bend in the path.

This man was of a different mold from Bellingham. He was a quiet, slow moving, grizzled kind of man of medium height and girth, with a rather pale, thin face and a haunting, feverish glint in his

eyes. Although he walked straightly and steadily enough, Grayson always gave something of the impression that he was walking away from disaster and was trying not to seem to be in too much of a hurry about it.

He was garbed in khaki shirt and trousers, and his heavy walking boots seemed to be just a trifle too heavy as he approached Bellingham and the rest house, with the dragging steps of a man who had been on the move throughout the sweltering hours of the West African day.

Bellingham saw all this, of course, in an instant and, just as a matter of habit, looked beyond Grayson to see how many carriers the other man had. What he saw—or rather, what he did not see—made Bellingham's sharp blue eyes cloud in wonder.

Grayson had no carriers. Neither did he carry a gun.

He had come there, to the rest house on the Nawami road, unarmed and alone.

Grayson had done this! Grayson!

Bellingham bit his underlip nervously. Had Grayson shown up with a company of Yoruba soldiers and two machine guns Bellingham would have been less surprised.

Although Grayson's pace was slow there was nothing hesitant about it. Obviously, too, he knew Bellingham was waiting for him. Bellingham had no doubt about this. He knew perfectly well, however casually he might greet Grayson, the other man would know just exactly why he, Bellingham, had chosen to throw himself across his path in this place and at this time.

Grayson was going home on next week's boat, and unless Grayson was all kinds of a fool, he was bound to know before that happened.

"I'm sorry I'm late," Grayson said, when he had approached near enough to open conversation, and fumbled undecidedly with an unfastened button of his shirt as if he were trying to make up his mind whether he should fasten it or not. "My carriers decided to desert at noon yesterday, and I couldn't get any others."

"Where's your stuff?" Bellingham grunted automatically from force of habit.

"Back in Tomi-town. Chief Tomi didn't have any boys last night, but said he might have a few this morning. They didn't show up by ten o'clock, and as I didn't want to keep you waiting—" A dry and dusty smile parted Grayson's lips. "Got anything to drink?"

BELLINGHAM did not like this. He knew Grayson too well. And when he glanced about him uneasily he found that his carriers were just as suspicious of Grayson's solitariness as he was. White men did not travel through the bush alone except under exceptional circumstances, and Grayson—

"Why did your carriers desert?" Bellingham's voice had a jumpy note of nervousness in it. "You usually pick 'em better than that."

Grayson nodded.

"Let's go inside and have a drink."

Bellingham hesitated, growled an order to his house boy, who had sidled within hearing, then slouched into the rest house. Grayson followed and went directly to the nearest chair, which happened to be a green canvas deck chair—Bellingham's property exclusively.

"This always was a good chair," Grayson said as he stretched his legs luxuriously on the leg rest. "The canvas is slung loosely enough without being too loose, and the headrest is—"

"All right," Bellingham grunted shortly. "I know how good a chair it is." A sullen searching pause. "What's your game, Grayson? You knew I'd be here. You knew damned well I'd be here. What's your game?"

Grayson did not say, and in the shadowed half light of the musty little rest house where the smell of mud and thatch mingled with the odor of kerosene, stale liquor and tobacco smoke, his silence was not easy to interpret.

"You knew I'd be here, didn't you?" Bellingham demanded. "Didn't you know that?"

"Certainly—" quietly, and still fumbling with the refractory shirt button.

"Hunh."

Bellingham backed away mentally and physically. Something had happened to Grayson; something mighty queer, or else the damned old fox—

Bellingham's house boy intruded with the drinks, served both men in his practised, sphinx-like way, then shuffled out leaving the bottle of Scotch on the rough deal table that was the only permanent piece of furniture the rest house boasted. Grayson's feverish looking eyes followed the boy's exit with a remote sort of interest, then with a murmured "Chin chin" in the general direction of Bellingham, he half emptied his glass of Scotch and soda at a gulp.

Bellingham did not drink. His narrowed eyes were studying Grayson with a relentless suspicion that was prepared to read an ulterior motive into every move the other man made, and the steady droning chatter of native voices beyond the doorway did not help to quiet Bellingham's suspicions in the least. Most of his boys knew that there was bad blood between Grayson and himself, and they also knew that Grayson was not the kind of man to walk into a situation of the sort without ample protection of one kind or another. As a general thing Grayson's "bodyguard" was believed to be a matter of grave concern to Grayson, who had something of a reputation for never taking a chance, and the story of the deserting carriers was a bit thick.

"Why did your carriers desert?" Bellingham asked again.

"My headman left a woman back in Sapeli, and while I was waiting in Benin City for some supplies he heard that this woman of his had cracked somebody's head open with a machete in broad daylight, and is in some danger of hanging if the victim dies. If he had deserted me then it would have been all right because I could have scrambled another gang together while I was still in Benin City. But he either tried not to believe the story or tried to do his duty as a headman should until yesterday at noon, when the suspense apparently became too much for him." Grayson shook his head slowly. "I suppose, since he took his whole gang with him, he has some wild notion in his crazy head about destroying the whole Sapeli police force and rescuing the woman from the rope; or perhaps he and his gang just used the story as an excuse for avoiding trouble with you. You have a formidable reputation, Bellingham, for cordially resenting interference when you have an account to square."

"I have, eh?" Bellingham took a sudden step forward, paused, then even more suddenly laughed; a nasty rasping sound that spoke of nerves more easily set on edge than one would have supposed less than ten minutes before. "Who was this headman of yours? Gola? He has a spitfire of a woman who—"

"What difference does it make?" Grayson interrupted mildly, and regarded the glass in his hand as if he expected it to answer him. "He isn't here now, and I am." He emptied the glass and put it down on the floor beside his chair. "What's it to be? Guns, knives, cards, dice or just plain money? I suppose you know what we are going to fight or gamble or pay for?"

"Damn you! Do you think you can buy me off?"

Bellingham towered above Grayson and for a moment it seemed as if hostilities were surely going to start without a further syllable of preliminary. The bigger man's florid face had lost most of its color, his eyes had a wildly savage light in them and the hand that held his glass shook so that some of the liquor spilled upon Grayson's shirt.

"All the odds are on your side," Grayson said mildly, dabbing the wet spots with a handkerchief. "There isn't a white man within seventy-five miles of us and the nearest police commissioner is farther away than that. No need for you to hurry things. You can take all the time you want."

Bellingham paused and drew back, his glance shifting quickly to the doorway as

if he expected the solution to this most unexpected situation to come from there at any moment. Then he regarded Grayson again with a sullen, wondering look of suspicion.

Grayson had never been called a coward, but Bellingham had not realized that until this moment. Grayson had always had the reputation of being a fox—shrewd, cautious, dissembling; a solitary man who rarely got into any kind of diffieulty principally because of his practise of so carefully protecting himself at all angles. This had not made Grayson's name synonymous with courage exactly, but Bellingham had to think hard to realize that this grizzled looking campaigner of the fever haunted Niger swamps had never been said to be afraid of any one or anything in particular.

"I SUPPOSE you know what we are going to fight or gamble or pay for?" Grayson asked again, as if he doubted very much whether Bellingham did.

"Know!" Bellingham bellowed. "Don't be a damned fool! And do you think I believe your story about Gola deserting you to drag that woman of his out of trouble? I know him and I know her. She has too much *savez* to open anybody's head in broad daylight; and if she did do anything like that, Gola would buy the police commissioner a new rope to be sure the job was done right. He's had enough of that hell cat." Bellingham laughed shortly and derisively, drank and put his glass down on the table. "And she's had enough of him. I know her. She got stuck on a halfcaste overseer of mine—you know who I mean—" Bellingham's smile was oily and twisted—"and she'd like to put ground glass in my palm oil chop because I spoiled the beauty of his yellow back. I'll wager a hundred she's trailed you up here because she knows I'd be waiting for you."

"All right. I'll take you."

"Eh?" Bellingham gaped rather foolishly.

He was accustomed to wagering hundreds upon all sorts of hazards, but he was not accustomed to be taken up so promptly.

"If Gola's girl," Grayson said more specifically, "and I assume you mean Moya, doesn't show up while we are here, you'll owe me a hundred pounds."

"Hunh. Damned sure of yourself, aren't you?" Bellingham paused to scrutinize the other man more closely. "What chance do you think you would have with me with a gun?"

"It will be dark in less than fifteen minutes," Grayson suggested simply, "and that should even things up a bit."

"What do you mean? What's your game? Where is Gola or that woman of his?"

"As I am the challenged party," Grayson persisted quietly, "and have the choice of weapons, I thought we might leave this place by different exits and thereafter shoot on sight. Is that agreeable?"

Bellingham frankly stared, then laughed deep in his throat—a thick gurgle of derision.

"So you've sent your carriers round by the Little Rawyafa and when you've given me the slip in the dark, you'll meet them again at Botomi. That wasn't very clever of you, Grayson, even if you did fool me at first."

Bellingham suddenly put down his glass and did it so violently that it toppled over and spilled the remainder of its contents across the table.

"You lying thief! You white livered rat! Why should I give you the chance to get away from me? What chance did you give me? Eh? What chance did you give me?"

Bellingham's voice had lifted almost to a screech. His powerful left hand took a lunging grip of Grayson's shoulder and his clenched right fist seemed likely to crash into Grayson's face at any instant. The sudden wildness of his rage and the unreasoning light in his eyes was familiar to every carrier from Siluko to Sapeli, and the only thing that was missing from the picture was a hippo hide thong.

Grayson did not resist; made scarcely any move of any sort to protect himself, even when Bellingham yanked him out of the deck chair and dragged him after him in the direction of a small steel cabin trunk that occupied a place on the rest house floor beside Bellingham's mosquito curtained camp bed.

"I'm going to write my name on your back! I'll give you a receipt and sign it, you ruddy thief!"

There was nothing missing from the picture now. A hippo hide thong that had been lying on top of the little cabin trunk was gripped tightly in Bellingham's right hand, and Bellingham's blazing blue eyes had the fires of an all too familiar madness in them.

The shiny black face of his house boy showed in the doorway and was joined immediately by the splotched black and tan countenance of his headman. Grayson caught sight of them beyond the menace of Bellingham's upraised right arm.

"Your headman wants you," he told Bellingham in a voice that was uncannily quiet. "I think he wants to know if you need any help."

"Help!" Bellingham's head twisted sharply and resentfully toward the doorway and his grip on Grayson's shoulder relaxed just a little. "Get out!" he roared, and his rage mounted a few notches higher at the impertinence of the intrusion. "Edge, you swine! Edge, or I'll—hell!"

The final expletive was a hoarse and throaty roar that was followed by thick and grunting monosyllables, profane and otherwise, as Grayson, having literally flung himself at Bellingham's gun, hung close in to his powerful opponent and tried to wrench the revolver from its holster.

BOTH of Bellingham's hands were occupied in that first moment of surprise. His left held a fistful of Grayson's shirt and shoulder, his right the hippo hide thong, and instinctively, in his surprise, he held on to what he had. When he realized what Grayson was after, it was his right hand that moved most naturally to prevent Grayson depriving him of his gun, but the hippo hide thong, still gripped in his clenched fist, had become a hindrance instead of a threat.

And in those fumbling seconds of indecision Bellingham's blazing eyes suddenly stopped blazing and stared sharply in fear. Then, even more suddenly, the inarticulate mutterings died in his throat, and an instant later the formidable bulk of him seemed to become enveloped in a church-like quiet in which he hesitated even to draw a breath.

His left hand dropped slowly from Grayson's shoulder, his right, still holding the hippo hide thong, hung limply at his side.

Grayson backed silently away, drawing the muzzle of Bellingham's gun out of Bellingham's mid-section with a lingering slowness that indicated his complete command of himself and the situation.

"I know you have another gun," he said, and it was noticeable, even to the gaping blacks in the doorway, that his breathing was as sure as the steadiness of his right hand. "But before I leave by that window—" Grayson indicated it in the rear of the rest house with a jerk of his head—"I'd like to be quite sure. Drop that hippo hide and find yourself a gun. And don't waste any time. It'll be dark in about three minutes."

Bellingham paused, breathing deeply. He knew now that he had underestimated Grayson. He also knew that Grayson meant business, and that in about three minutes and a half would come the showdown.

He glanced sharply toward the doorway.

"Never mind giving any orders," Grayson said, and Bellingham's open mouth closed like the jaws of a trap. "Drop that hippo hide and get yourself a gun." Then to the gaping blacks in the doorway, "Get out! *Vamos!* One time!"

The black faces vanished and at once there followed a bedlam of chatter beyond the doorway. Bellingham, however, knew better than to pay any heed to this, or to

look for any immediate aid from that direction. Obediently, he dropped the hippo hide and, with Grayson swinging into a position of advantage behind him, the big man stooped over the little cabin trunk, opened it and produced a revolver that was a duplicate of the weapon in Grayson's altogether too steady right hand.

"Break it!" Grayson ordered crisply. "And no tricks."

So Bellingham, kneeling beside the little trunk, broke the gun and emptied the charges on the rest house floor. His expression now was that of a poker player who is trying to bluff four aces with a pair of deuces.

"All right," Grayson said when he was sure all six charges had been emptied from Bellingham's gun. "Pick up those pellets and stick them in your pocket."

"But, hell, I—"

"Pick them up and stand over there—on the other side of that table. You'll have lots of time to load up after the sun goes down."

Bellingham apparently considered it advisable to do as he was told and Grayson, upon the opposite side of the old deal table, added definitely:

"Put your gun down on the table—farther over; thanks." Grayson picked up the empty revolver with his left hand. "You have boys and lamps enough to help you find this when I chuck it through that door. And you'll go after it. I'll wait here till I'm sure you do, then I'll go out by the back window. After that we shoot on sight. *Savez?*"

Bellingham understood perfectly. "But—but what if I don't find the damned gun or load up fast enough? It won't take you more than a minute to go out that window and come around to the front of the house!"

The dry and dusty smile that broke on Grayson's lips had the swiftly closing shadows of night already upon it. Darkness, in the jungles of the Lower Niger, falls with suddenness and dispatch as the sun drops plummet-like beyond the horizon of bush and pahn.

"You havelegs, haven'tyou?" Grayson suggested mildly. "And there are lots of trees around to give you cover. My advice would be to grab the gun and run. Are you ready?"

Bellingham moistened his lips and his eyes avoided Grayson's. Once outside the door with a loaded gun in his hand, he would square accounts all right.

"All right," he mumbled gruffly. "Any time you say."

Grayson moved until he stood directly in line with the doorway and held Bellingham's empty gun in position for a simple underhand throw. The broad light of day had assumed a sudden dusky pallor, and the lamp boy, having already lighted at least one of the hurricane lanterns, this feeble, flickering flame was momentarily gathering strength and importance in the scheme of things.

"Ready," Grayson said quietly, and his left hand drew back as the hurricane lantern beyond the doorway seemed to assume the proportions of a beacon. "Get going—and good luck to you."

THE EMPTY gun shot through the doorway, past the invisible lamp boy and his lantern, into the dark beyond, and the bulky shadow of Bellingham followed it with rather amazing speed for a man of his size. The slighter and more elusive figure of Grayson wheeled wraith-like toward the rear window.

"Where's that gun?" Bellingham demanded hoarsely and hurriedly of his carriers in general. "You look um which place he go? Bring lantern! Bring um! You ruddy, so-so bushman, you no *savez*—"

Bellingham pounced like a huge cat upon a thing that glittered dully on the outer fringe of the lamplight; pounced and plunged into the black dark of the bush beyond like a creature possessed of many devils. He did not pause to issue any orders, and his boys, puzzled by his unorthodox actions, huddled together in a knot around the lamp boy and gaped in the general direction of Bellingham's

exit, wondering what kind of *ju-ju* Grayson had put upon him to make him act so strangely.

Bellingham did not enlighten them. Crouching behind the ample trunk of a mango tree, and trying to look two ways at once, he feverishly proceeded to load his empty gun. One, two, three, four, five —five— His hand fumbled hurriedly in his pocket for the sixth charge; fumbled in every corner of it, then began to paw around on the damp earth about the roots of the mango tree.

That sixth bullet might cost him his—

Something fuzzy and long and clammy touched his hand and began to crawl across the back of it. An oath escaped him as he flung the thing from him and, wondering if it might have been a centipede, he realized that the sound of his voice had probably betrayed his whereabouts to Grayson who was doubtless lurking somewhere in the black shadows to the right or left of the rest house, waiting for him to declare himself.

Bellingham pulled his head in, held his breath a second or two and waited, hugging the shadows of the mango tree as closely as his bulk would allow.

What had he done with that sixth bullet? And why had— Damn those niggers! Chattering like that when he wanted to listen. And those confounded lanterns! They seemed to be throwing all their light his way and making blacker shadows for Grayson to hide in.

The sharp staccato report of a revolver shot was followed by the splintering of glass and the sudden patter of many naked feet scattering in all directions. The shrill babble of excited native voices seemed to depart to all points of the compass, and the lanterns Bellingham had damned so heartily went with them.

At the sound of the shot, Bellingham had instinctively flattened himself against the trunk of the tree, then, crouching low, he peered into the darkness toward the rest house.

His boys and his lamps were gone and the shadow-like outline of the rest house was just a vague sort of reality that was smothered in a shroud of darkness and quiet that, to Bellingham at least, was like a threat.

Bellingham had not seen the direction from which the solitary shot had come, but that it had smashed a hurricane lantern and had been fired with the deliberate design to encourage a panic among his carriers, he had no doubt whatever. The successful results of Grayson's strategy were too obvious, and Bellingham felt suddenly and startlingly alone; alone and inadequate; unnaturally weak and futile, as if he were suddenly in the grip of a force that laughed at his superior brawn and toyed with his admitted superiority with a gun just as if these things had suddenly become of no importance whatever.

There was doubt in Bellingham's eyes now; doubt and a shifting glint of nervousness and fear. And as it was quite possible that Grayson had taken advantage of the stampede of the carriers to dart across the path to his, Bellingham's, side of it, Bellingham was no longer sure that his mango tree afforded him protection from any angle.

Perhaps Grayson, even then, was lurking somewhere to right or left of him.

The cracking of a twig and the slight, rustling motion of an unseen body on Bellingham's right made him wheel sharply in that direction even as he hugged the trunk of the mango tree still tighter and sidled around it to put its bulk between him and this new hint of danger.

A cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead and the odd sense of loneliness that was so foreign to him, gripped him just a little tighter while he waited for a further demonstration from the invisible menace on his right.

The familiar night voices of the bush seemed to whisper to him in a jumbled foreign jargon so that nothing was very distinct, because above them all was an insistent, jangling voice that made all other voices weak and muttering by comparison.

This voice was Grayson's.

Actually it was a quiet voice, a sure

voice, a voice that carried conviction in spite of Grayson's fever haunted eyes and his reputation for never taking a chance.

Bellingham heard this voice quite distinctly, and in his mind's eye again saw Grayson coming up the path to the rest house, all alone and without a gun.

Grayson had done this! Grayson!

BELLINGHAM peered into the dark all about him; listened and peered again. Somewhere in the branches overhead an infant monkey whimpered in peevish, spasmodic restlessness and suddenly, off to the left, a frightened bush dog yelped and broke across the path in the bush beyond in a scurrying race for safety—perhaps for its life. Nothing followed it; nothing that Bellingham could see or hear. The quiet and the dark closed in about him and he held his breath longer than he knew, while he waited and listened; waited and listened with his heart in his throat and a cold and most unaccustomed shiver racing up and down his spine.

What the devil was the matter with him? What was he afraid of? He knew the bush between Sapeli and Siluko like an open book, and with a gun in his hand—

What had he done with that sixth bullet? He fumbled in his pocket again to no purpose; fumbled and thought and glanced all about him, listening and waiting for a sign that would betray Grayson's whereabouts.

Grayson! Who in hell was Grayson that he could—rubbish! The whole stupid business was a joke; a laugh; a silly case of nerves. Grayson had taken his breath away by showing up alone without a gun and, like a ruddy fool, he had walked into Grayson's trap by losing his temper and his head at the same time. And Grayson's subtle reference to Gola and that hell-cat Moya had rattled him just as Grayson knew it would.

They knew all about the logs Grayson had appropriated so blandly and had shipped for his own account. Gola had been Grayson's headman at the time, and he had doubtless been well paid for the part he had played in the affair after he had been careless enough to allow Grayson's own shipment of mahogany to be swept to hell and gone on the racing current of the tricky and treacherous Benin River.

Shipping marks? It wasn't any trick to change those if you got the other fellow's half caste overseer drunk enough on rotgut gin to let you get away with it. Bellingham knew. He had—hunh! That was different; another matter entirely. Sanderson had promised to go shares with him and—oh, damn Sanderson! Sanderson had nothing to do with this. That account was squared, done with. And this thing was different; strictly between Grayson and himself.

Grayson had stolen his mahogany and then, with all the nerve of a shop thief, he had ordered him off the Laramee veranda like a ruddy negro policeman lording it over a so-so bushman; and had put that hell cat Moya up to telling Mrs. Laramee some stories about him—the kind of stuff that a white woman—

Bellingham straightened sharply and caught his breath as a sinuous shadow emerged from behind a scraggy wine palm off on his right and darted swiftly down the path in the general direction of Sapeli. A moment later, from the opposite side of the path, this figure was followed by another and then by a third.

After this came silence; a deeper silence that clung to Bellingham like a cold wet sheet, while he waited for Grayson to declare himself or for more of his skulking carriers to break into the open and make a bolt for home.

None of this was as Bellingham had planned. He had planned to write his name on Grayson's back with a hippo hide thong, and send him home to England to the beautiful and widowed Mrs. Laramee with a signed receipt he would be likely to remember.

A shooting match had never entered Bellingham's head for a moment, and this business of skulking behind a tree, with cold shivers running up and down his spine— A good drink would stop that

and brace him up. Not that he was afraid. It wasn't that. Not that at all. His mouth and throat were dry as an empty water cooler simply because he needed a drink. A good long one. And there was a bottle of Scotch on the rest house table. If he could take a chance and get hold of that, he'd be all right. Grayson couldn't shoot worth a damn anyway and— Bellingham paused.

Grayson had shot well enough to smash that hurricane lantern and a hurricane lantern was much harder to hit than he, Bellingham, would be. So Bellingham, his eyes furtive and wide, took thought and waited a little longer.

Again he peered all about him, listening with ragged nerves on edge, cursing Grayson and his own stupidity under his breath in no uncertain terms. Minutes dragged like hours, breathless, nerve wracking and dry until his finger trembled on the trigger and he was no longer sure even of his ability to outshoot the man who had, as yet, given not the slightest hint of his whereabouts. Not a hint.

Again Bellingham paused. And again his eyes widened sharply, but this time neither furtively nor in fear.

Perhaps Grayson had gone, sneaked off as he, Bellingham, had earlier suspected, to join his supposedly deserting carriers at Botomi!

Nothing could have been more simple as things had turned out. Nothing at all. There had been nothing to stop Grayson once he had scattered Bellingham's carriers; and by this time—

BELLINGHAM felt the need of that drink worse than ever. A sudden choking rage seized him; a passion more unreasoning and wild than the fit of temper that had proved his undoing.

Grayson *had* gone—fooled him and tricked him all along the line, and had left him to skulk and shiver behind a tree like a ruddy paddle boy tied up for a flogging.

He'd mark Grayson's hide—write his name on his back—break his ruddy neck—

Scarcely without a thought of the possible consequences he broke cover, leaped across the path toward the rest house door and dived inside.

Black as the night had been behind the mango tree, it was still blacker inside the rest house; musty and choking and drier than ever. But Bellingham's mind's eye located the bottle of Scotch without much pawing around and he did not bother to search for a glass. His left hand closed about the bottle and tilted it to his lips.

"Drop that gun!"

A few drops of liquor spilled upon Bellingham's chin as the start he gave made the neck of the bottle miss his mouth.

"Drop it or I'll shoot!"

Bellingham dropped it. He almost dropped the bottle, too. The voice behind him was so quiet and sure and so utterly free from any suggestion of nerves.

"Kick it under the table."

Bellingham fumbled around with his boot and did as he was told. He was not thinking; just functioning; and the shaking fear that gripped him now was not of the body. Physically he was cold even to his finger tips, but mentally he was whimpering like a child in the dark.

"Thanks," the voice said politely. "I thought it would be safer to remain in the rest house until you had a chance to think things over. Are you still quite as sure as you were before the sun went down that you know what this is all about?"

Bellingham was not sure of anything except the fact that Grayson was somewhere behind him and had never left the rest house! While he had been shivering behind a tree, Grayson had been comfortably waiting in the house.

"In case you are interested," the voice went on, "Moya did not tell Mrs. Laramee anything about you. Mrs. Laramee would not have listened if she had. She would not have had to listen. Her brother, the district commissioner, kept her pretty well informed on the subject of the kind of company she should keep.

Bellingham had nothing to say. He was not accustomed to the sensation of feeling as foolish as he did then, particu-

larly with a gun—his own gun—pointed at the middle of his broad and capable back.

"And when I escorted you off the Laramee veranda that very warm afternoon," the voice informed him, "I'm quite sure I saved you from a damned good licking. You were too drunk and too—er—feverish in your attentions to Mrs. Laramee to see that her brother had entered the bungalow by the side door. And you know he never did believe your story of what had happened to poor Sanderson's mahogany."

"Sanderson promised to go shares with me!"

Bellingham's voice sounded husky and unreal and far off even to himself.

"Not on that shipment. And because you thought he was going out with blackwater fever—"

"It's a lie!"

"You thought you'd better collect."

"I—I tell you Sanderson promised—"

"You thought you'd better collect before a dead man's concession got tied up in the courts."

Bellingham shakily put the bottle of Scotch down on the table. He wanted his hands free. Not that he could do anything with them at the moment except loosen his collar and the neckband of his shirt which had become chokingly tight. But when he had done this he tried to think that he felt better.

"And because I am a friend of Sanderson's you probably thought I was squaring his account with you when your own shipment of mahogany went astray." The voice was as steady as the ticking of a clock. "Isn't that what you thought?"

"I know my own logs when I see them."

"And you are sure those logs of mine were yours? You are sure of that?"

Bellingham paused and his hand went up to his throat because it seemed as if he had forgotten to unfasten the neckband of his shirt.

"I know my own logs, damn you! Do you think—"

"I don't think about things like that, Bellingham — I know. A supposedly drunken overseer of yours made a pretence of allowing your shipment of mahogany to get away from him. He made a rather clever job of it, too, as you know. But he made a few rash promises to Moya on the strength of it—promises he hasn't been able to keep because he hasn't been able to ship the logs as yet."

BELLINGHAM spun toward the voice without any thought of the consequences, and his eyes having become accustomed to the mustily smelling darkness of the rest house, he had no difficulty in discovering Grayson seated calmly in his favorite green canvas deck chair.

"What do you mean?" Bellingham demanded, forgetting that he had no right to demand anything.

"Moya knows where your logs are," Grayson said simply. "Perhaps if you were to do something about getting her out of jail for trying to make a dent in that overseer's head—"

"I'll mark him! I'll cut my ruddy name in his back! I'll—"

"She might tell you where the logs are waiting for a chance to be shipped."

Bellingham straightened sharply. He seemed suddenly to tower gigantically above Grayson, who continued to sit in the deck chair just as quietly as if the gun in his right hand were a tea cup.

"Damn his yellow hide! I'll mark him! I'll—"

"Meantime," Grayson interrupted simply, "your own hide belongs to me. *Savez?*"

"What—"

"Doesn't it?"

"But—but, hell, Grayson! You can't shoot a man in cold blood!"

"Can't I? You don't know me at all."

"But, good God! That would be murder!"

"Not so very long ago, Bellingham," Grayson said and his voice held a sharper, harder, colder note, "you were going to write your name on *my* back. Just as if I were that yellow overseer of yours or

a thieving carrier. And you thought there would be a kind of poetic justice in doing it in this rest house because it was here, the first time I met you, that I spoiled an evening's entertainment for you by releasing a perfectly good house boy who had been tied up to wait for the flogging you were going to get a lot of fun out of giving him." Grayson paused. "And you thought, this evening, you would give me the flogging that house boy escaped." Another pause, and still no rebuttal from Bellingham. "How much, in round figures, is your hide worth to you?"

"Eh?" Bellingham gaped. "What—what do you mean?"

"How much," Grayson asked slowly, "would you be willing to pay to be released from just such a flogging as that house boy and I managed to escape? You know the kind I mean? Till your arm got tired and you needed a long brandy to brace you up."

Bellingham did not answer at once, and when he did he seemed to have lost several inches in height and his hand fumbled with the neckband of his shirt in a mechanical, useless sort of way.

"What—what do you want?"

Grayson's smile was drier than ever. "Sanderson is still a very sick man and he needs money. The money for those logs of his would come in mighty handy and I'd like to be able to cable it to him when I—"

"Damn you! So that's your game! You think you can trick me into paying—"

A sharp, vicious spit of flame, a report that filled the rest house with a deafening thunder, and the ugly biting chug of a bullet burying its nose into the scarred deal table brought Bellingham up as smartly and as unpleasantly as if he had been lassoed from behind. He cowered sideways against the table and, even in the dark, the frightened glint in his eyes was plain enough.

"Good God!" His voice was thick and strained. "Are you crazy?"

"The next one," Grayson said calmly, "won't lose itself in the table. It will permanently disturb your digestion. Missing you, in this light, is much harder than hitting you, Bellingham, and my advice to you would be to pay up, shut up and get out. *Savez?*"

With the acrid smell of powder in his nostrils, Bellingham understood perfectly. Also, a sick and sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach coupled with a suddenly uncontrollable trembling in his knees advised him that Grayson was quite right about it being easier to hit him than to miss him under the circumstances.

Consequently, in the succeeding few minutes—surprisingly few minutes considering the lack of light—the rest house on the Nawami road furnished the scenic setting for such a climax Bellingham had never dreamed of.

SEATED at the old deal table, burning the fingers of his left hand with successive torches of matches, while he wrote out two cheeks with his right; feeling the muzzle of his own gun pressing into his spine and always hearing the same quiet voice jangling in his ears above all the other night voices of the bush, Bellingham bought his hide free from the lash and paid a bet.

Then, minus his carriers, his belongings and his guns, he was led to the door and out into the open and compelled to turn his face toward Sapeli.

"Better get back and have a talk with Moya," Grayson told him. "You can sleep at Tomi-town tonight. I told Chief Tomi he might expect you, and he'll have a gang of carriers ready for you in the morning."

Bellingham shivered; not because he had any fear of Chief Tomi or of the lonely tramp in the dark that lay ahead of him, but simply because of the appalling sureness that was in every word Grayson spoke.

"If any of your carriers show up before I leave for Botomi," Grayson added, "I'll send them after you."

"Botomi!" Bellingham repeated the

name in a thick hoarse whisper. "Then you did send your carriers round by the Little Rawyafa!"

"Surely. I never take any chances, Bellingham."

"No chances! Hell! Don't you think you took a chance coming here alone without a gun!"

Bellingham did not see Grayson smile, but he did hear him say very simply:

"The only chance I took was that you wouldn't lose your temper—and that wasn't any chance at all. Get going, and good luck to you."

"But—but—"

"*Vamos!*"

Bellingham choked an expletive and moved, slowly at first, then faster and faster, as if he had decided that the sooner and the farther he got away from there the better.

Grayson stood watching the shadow-like figure until it disappeared from sight, then re-entered the rest house and, finding Bellingham's other gun, removed the charges from both weapons and left them lying on the table.

This done, his right hand moved as if to fasten the still unfastened button of his shirt, but instead, slipped inside; and as he leisurely and somewhat absently left the rest house, his hand came forth again bearing a stubby black automatic which he transferred to his hip pocket.

Then he turned along the path toward Botomi.

Seeing Things

By CLEM YORE

A BLADE of grass can hide a hill.
A tumbleweed foretells the storm.
Rushing waters soon are still.
Under snow the wheat grows warm.

Wise men understand a glance.
Only fools see dirt as sod.
Sunbeams dart in endless dance.
Pine trees always point to God.

Part IV

BELOW ZERO

By

HAROLD TITUS

A Novel of the Great North Woods

YOUNG John Steele Belknap said that Paul Gorbel was a crook; Old Tom Belknap said that the man was straight. So Paul Gorbel got the job managing the Kampfest logging camp, to which young John had been pointing for years. When John was at last ready to take over the job, his father knew his boy had been correct in his estimate of Paul Gorbel; but the Old Man wanted to clean up the mess himself before his boy went on the job.

John, in a rage, flung out of his father's office when he was told he wasn't ready for Kampfest. And a week later he was working for the rival concern of Richards, as superintendent under pretty Ellen Richards.

John dropped his last name altogether and was plain John Steele. And as such, the unfair advantages the larger company of Belknap & Gorbel was taking of the Richards Lumber Company enraged him. He knew that Paul Gorbel was the

one behind the game; but his father was getting the blame. And it was to clear his father's name that John worked.

After a series of mishaps which John was sure Paul Gorbel promoted, which almost put the Richards Company on the rocks, John at last got a definite clue on which to work. In the barns which had been destroyed by fire of an unknown origin, he discovered the body of a stranger, by whose side was a jug which had contained gasoline. And the sheriff reported that the man had been in the employ of Gorbel at Kampfest.

Things were going altogether too well on the Richards job to suit Paul Gorbel, who wanted to force Ellen Richards out in order to get her and her property; so he conceived the idea of revealing the identity of John Steele to his employer, knowing that the girl hated the name of Belknap. Accordingly a letter was sent to Ellen, and she, horrified, called John in to deny that he was a Belknap.

John was proud and he would not—could not lie to the girl he loved; so he was fired from the Richards job. He moved on to his father's property at Kampfest. And there he went to work at the very bottom, not relinquishing his determination to stand by Ellen Richards and bring Paul Gorbel to justice.

But it was a woman Paul Gorbel had tricked who set the machinery for Gorbel's downfall. While John Belknap slaved, Marie, Gorbel's stenographer, accused Gorbel of attentions to Ellen Richards.

"I've been strung along just about enough," Marie screamed at Gorbel. "I'm about through—and when I talk, you'll be through too!"

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN KEEPS A DATE

JOHN BELKNAP did not go townward with the rest of the crew. He turned in the other direction and followed the road past the last lighted habitation. The sheriff was there, driving his team slowly up and down, waiting.

"Get in," he said gruffly, and lifted the robe.

Settled there beside the hulking figure, John listened attentively while the sheriff told what he had to tell.

"It ain't so much," he said, "but he admitted he was out by their gasoline drum with this feller. Cases have hung on smaller things than that. I've got the pieces of the jug down to one of two makes; both of 'em are used by vinegar makers but, even so, it'd be a chore to prove it was filled with gasoline if they'd make a point of it. Cases have been lost on points like that.

"When we get the stomach analysis we'll know whether he's lyin' about the man's bein' boozed up or not. We should have that back here in a few days, now."

"And what about the old job?" John asked, when he had finished.

"Smooth as silk! Saw Saunders this forenoon and he's tickled pink! Says that Gorbel has pulled off a lot of saws and that it ain't any chore at all, now, to keep Ellen in logs. It's all sweet as shortcake in the neighborhood!"

John nodded.

"Which makes it look worse for me."

"How come?"

"As quick as I land there, hell starts to pop. When I'm discovered and sent up the road, trouble subsides! He's smart—Gorbel!"

"Smart in some ways." The sheriff chuckled. "Was over in our town the other night; tried to see Ellen at her house. She wouldn't have it an' her housekeeper told how he hammered on the door and begged."

John moved uneasily.

"He used to be sweet on her, all right, and it looked for a time, before her daddy died, like she was goin' to reciprocate, or whatever you call it. But it's different now.

"Yeah, smart in some ways! He's made it look bad for you for a time but, Johnny, Saunders is for you, all ways; so are the rest of Ellen's boys. They don't understand it all, no more than you and I do,

but they'd go to hell for you, every last one of 'em!"

"They would—" warmly. "Bless 'em all, they would! It's fine to have a crowd of men like they are for you. But—but Miss Richards, she'll be thinking just what we've agreed is the logical thing to think—that I caused the trouble and when she let me go trouble went with me."

The sheriff nodded.

"Tough!" He turned to stare at John in the darkness. "I get you, son. Women's ways are hard for a man to follow. But I notice we keep tryin' and tryin' and, sometimes, we get the luang of 'em!"

A world of understanding and sympathy and encouragement came with the tone and John left the sheriff with spirits higher than they had been in days.

He was restless after his supper that night. This was Saturday and the whole town was gathering at the recreation hall for the weekly dance, but John had no desire for that sort of relaxation. The attitude of the men was hurting him more than he cared to admit. Things bore too heavily upon his mind. But he was lonely as well as restless. He sat in his room an hour; he walked the streets for as long and the more he tried to attain peace of mind, the more disturbed he became.

HE FOUND himself, despite his indifference, strolling up the steps of the recreation hall. He stood looking into the big room through the glass. The music was fair, the place filled with young and old, reveling in the fun which his father had provided. They thought that they owed Paul Gorbel for such advantages; but old Tom had done that! Old Tom would have grinned had he been there, watching. He would have said something about a good waste of shoe leather and all damn' foolishness—but he would have been planning, even as he spoke, some other form of fun for the men and women who depended on him for their livelihood.

Young, he was, and lonely. And he stepped inside—just for a moment.

Couples swirled past. Girls and women looked at him significantly. He saw one whisper to her partner and the man looked at John and oodled and chuckled. He was marked.

The dance ended. A man spoke to him. He came up, shaved, red of face, all dolled up in his celluloid collar.

"Yohn, how goes?" he asked and the plump woman with the little earrings beside him grinned. "Yohn, dis my old woman!"

He, anyhow, liked him. John shook hands with the woman and talked to her a moment.

He was conscious while he talked with the blushing Scandinavian of other eyes on him and when the two passed on he turned his face to see a girl watching from a seat near the door.

She smiled and he bowed, though he did not remember ever having seen her. She rose quickly and came toward him, short skirt swaying gracefully about her thighs.

"I guess you don't remember me, Mr. Belknap," she said. "I'm Marie Varnell. I used to be in the Chicago office."

"Oh!" he said, taken aback. "I guess it's one on me. In a place where there are so many good looking girls, though, you can't blame a poor boy from the woods if he gets confused, can you?"

She laughed.

"Good line! I didn't expect you to remember me, though."

A specimen of a definite city type—her clothing, her makeup, her bold manner.

"And how long have you been here?" he asked.

"Fourteen months, now."

"In the office, I suppose."

"Yes."

He was not greatly interested in this young woman's affairs. He was a bit embarrassed at her manner, which was of one who expects more than a casual response to her approach.

The orchestra struck up. Marie looked about and stood on one foot.

"Well," she said finally, "I guess I better get back to the girls."

"Oh—can't we dance, then?"

Her smile flashed. She had worked it!

He left his coat and cap on a chair and whirled away with her. Since leaving the university he had danced little, but from the first few steps he realized that this stenographer was an exceptional partner. Light, responsive, supple, graceful, they threaded the swirl of less adroit couples in silence.

She turned her face toward him, very close.

"I'm glad you came," she said, and he did not catch the peculiar quality of her tone.

"So am I. This is the first time I've danced—"

"I don't mean that. Ordinarily I'd have a comeback for you, Mr. Belknap. But I don't feel like wisecracking tonight. I came here hoping I'd see you. I did what I don't usually do and was a little bold, I guess, getting you to talk to me. I've got something to tell you."

"Yes?"

"A lot." He felt her tremble against him. "A lot you should know; a lot your father should know." Her voice was swift, and he could see that she was blushing as if angered.

"So? That's interesting."

"It will be, but I can't talk here; and we can't go out together. I've got to see you alone."

John was not so good at interpreting women. He was just a trifle wary, now, and evidently she understood.

"It's all right. I'm shooting square. I'll tell you this much—I'm responsible for getting you out of Shoestring."

"I don't quite understand," he said cautiously.

"I wrote a letter to Miss Richards, on dictation. Does that mean anything?"

Her eyes, as he studied them, seemed to be honest enough, though anger was close to the surface.

"Yes," he admitted.

"And if I hadn't written that letter I might have gone for a ride—or whatever they do up here in the woods! If that isn't enough, I'll say this. Somebody in Kampfest has been scared stiff since you came here. Things that had been going on before have stopped, since you came into the picture. Now are you interested?"

"Very much."

The music stopped. They both applauded vigorously. When the encore started she put her cheek close to his.

"I'll leave after the next dance. I'm here with other girls from the office. I live in the third house after you turn right at the postoffice. You walk past a half hour after I leave and I'll be waiting in the storm house. When I see you, and if the street's empty, I'll open the door."

After a moment he said—

"Fair enough!"

He did not like this matter of clandestine meetings, of skulking to a rendezvous with a girl of this type. But she knew something that solved one problem, evidently. What he had to learn must be learned.

He waited through lagging minutes, heedless of the music and laughter and talk about him, sitting against the wall, heart thumping.

He went out and strolled down the street, which was empty of people. At the dark postoffice he turned, swung rapidly along the sidewalk with its high piles of snow on either side, scanning the house fronts.

THE THIRD was painted white; it set back thirty feet from the street. As he came abreast of it the door of the storm house, which, during the winter, protected the tiny front porch from weather, opened inward. He saw her standing there and she beckoned.

"Come in," she said, looking down the street, and closed the door, shutting them into the little cubicle. "All right, now—" speaking in a normal tone. "Old lady Vogle—this is her house—is deaf as a post. She sleeps like a log, too. If anybody comes up the walk, here, you go straight through to the kitchen and out the back door."

"Why—well, who would come?" he asked, suspicious now.

"Paul Gorbel might come," she said, tensely.

"Oh, Gorbel, eh?"

"Yes. And if he found you here with me he'd—he might kill me! He'd be afraid of you, but he'd never let me get away, knowing that I know all I do and after he'd seen us together. That's why—" more easily—"I can't take you up to my room. If he trapped us there—"

"In the habit of coming to your room, is he?"

She looked down and plucked at a glove finger.

"Yes," she said softly. Then she lifted her face quickly. "I'm not going to try to put anything over on you, Mr. Belknap. I couldn't, even if I wanted to, and I don't want to."

"That's generous, I'm sure. But—"

"I know, this is a wild sounding sort of thing, but I want you to believe that everything I say is God's truth! It's a long story, Mr. Belknap. It's the kind of a story with a moral, far as I'm concerned, I guess."

She laughed, a trifle bitterly. She stood close to him, shrouded in her fur coat, her face a small oval in the darkness.

"I'm coming clean. I've got to, to show you how I know these things and to make you understand why I tell 'em to you. A girl's got to shoot square as long as the other party does. I've done my part up here. I've been given a dirty deal from the beginning!"

And now her voice was coarse, unpleasant, filled with anger and the yearning for vengeance. Her hand grasped his arm and shook it a trifle.

"Don't misjudge me, Mr. Belknap! Please don't do that! I was only a kid when Paul Gorbel commenced coming into the Chicago office. I was a typist there and he—well, he's good looking, you know, and he had money and he's got a line. It all started then and he was the first one, so help me!"

John drew back. This recital was repugnant. The story sounded so old, so trite, such a shoddy sham. But as though she sensed this her hand tightened on his arm and she cried softly:

"Hear me through, now! Hear all I've got to say! Please—you don't know what it costs a girl to say—what I've got to say!"

Her voice caught and he felt a measure of sympathy for her.

"He propositioned me while he was in and out of Chicago, seeing your father about building the new plant, here. He took me out and made his promises and—well, by that time I had to believe him, if I was going to have any self-respect left.

"I was to come up here as his secretary. As soon as we could make good with the town, so there wouldn't be any gossip, he said, we'd be married. Well, we made good with the town. He's smart; I've been awful careful. We've gotten by. But, until now, I haven't heard any wedding bells!

"First it was the excuse of heading off gossip, because he's awful particular about his standing. Then it was something else again—you see, everything had been between Paul and your father. None of the others in the Chicago office had anything to do with it. This plant isn't supervised and audited like the Belknap Company plants are. I never knew why.

"But a year ago Paul came back all in a huff. The old—I mean, your father, wasn't just satisfied with the way things were going. He had grounds for suspicion, but we'll come to that later. He'd commenced to ask questions about the plant and the bank that were hard for Paul to answer. He came up himself, just as snow came, and there was a lot of tall scratching, I'm here to tell the world! But he never found out anything.

"Now, Paul commenced to figure that he was about through with your father. He'd gone as far as he could in getting stock in this company. He was going a good deal further in other ways that I'll explain after awhile.

"All along I'd had a feeling that he wasn't shooting straight with me. I hadn't been here a month before I was sure of it. Then I commenced to find out.

It seems that he'd been trying to make this Ellen Richards for a—

"Surprise you?" She laughed as she felt John start violently. "Well, he had! He'd been gone on her since before her father died, but the old man didn't like him and I guess whatever he knew he handed on to this girl, because she didn't fall.

"It got under my skin, of course. A girl can't help it if she gets jealous, Mr. Belknap. I've never seen this girl, but I hate the ground she walks on."

John grimaced. He felt like closing her mouth with his hand.

"Never mind, Miss Richards," he said quietly. "Let's get on."

"Well, as I say, she didn't think be was so hot. She didn't have time for anything but her job, anyhow, after her father died. You see, the bank here had a lot of their notes and Paul knew all about her affairs. He got his big idea about that property last fall. I remember the day he hit on it. He had a lot of bank reports in his office and I came in to find him rubbing his hands and grinning the way he will when he's got what you might call an inspiration.

"I'm not dumb! Not exactly! I watched and listened and put two and two together and found out his scheme. He figured that the Richards Company was in such a bad way that he could close it up in a few weeks if he could crowd it a little harder. He wanted to do that but he didn't dare until he heard your father was going to Europe. He counted the days until he thought he was safe and then opened up."

SHE LAUGHED a bit nervously.

"I guess you know what happened. Well, he did it, all on his own, and timed it so your father wouldn't get wind of what was going on before he sailed. He started gumming up her railroad; he brought in this Baxter to clean up on her men. He did a lot of other things that I don't know about, probably thinking he could force her to the wall, buy at his own price and then he could go over there as sole owner, leaving his stock in this company in this bank as security for the loan it would take to swing the deal. Get it? He'd be free of old Tom—excuse me, of your father, then.

"Now I happen to know how he worked it. He let the story out—as he's a way of doing—that your father was responsible for all this. He's smart, Paul! He spread that story pretty cute, I'll say! He kept himself as clean as any man could and still be the works. But you, Mr. Belknap, sort of upset his buggy."

She giggled and the manner betrayed her tension.

"Then he found out who this John Steele was and you'd ought to've heard him rave! He dictated that letter and I had to write it to Ellen Richards. When you showed up here and went to work it knocked him for a loop. He was scared stiff. He laid off the Richards job and started in, tryin' to shine up to her again—" darkly. "The dirty doublecrosser!"

She fumbled for a handkerchief and blew her nose with vigor.

"Well," said John, with his heart rapping his ribs. "Well, and it's about as I had it figured out. He's played his own game, using my father's cards and my father's name!"

"That's it! But that ain't the half of it, John!" Again her hand was on his arm; she stood a bit closer; her face was just beneath his.

"The thing that got your father suspicious was how the lumber was grading. It showed up an awful lot of low grade stuff. The more we cut, the worse it seemed to be. Well, that's easy, if you're inside. Every week, car after car of good No. 2 common and better rolls out of Kampfest, billed to the North Star Lumber Company in St. Paul as cull! Yes, sir! You can check on that." Her voice was a bit hoarse, now. "And that North Star Company is Paul Gorbel. I don't know where or how. But he owns it. I know that and he doesn't know how I found out. Oh, he'd kill me if he knew this! But it's true. It's true, John. He's

doublecrossing your father every day in the week and when your father tried to check up on it by an inspection at the other end, Gorbel fixed that, too, some way. I think he switched cars in St. Paul on the inspector.

"There's things in the bank, too. How much I don't know. I do know that he's accepting a lot of North Star notes in payment for that good lumber at cull prices. In other words, he's stealing Belknap & Gorbel blind!"

She ended, breathing rapidly and John stood there, close to her, triumphant emotions surging in his heart.

"Do you think I'm a doublecrosser, John?" she asked.

"No. A crook deserves nothing else."

"Oh, I'm glad you think that way!" Again her hand on his arm, in a gentler, provocative touch this time.

"And about me— You don't think — can you understand how a girl will trust a man?"

A wave of sympathy for her swept him.

"I do," he said, and meant it. He looked down at her face, so close to his. "I'm sorry," he said, and meant that. Poor, lightheaded kid, he thought. A gold digger, yes; coarse, vindictive, cruel, selfish. She wanted him to kiss her, now. She had been calling him by his first name for minutes. She was swaying closer to him, her delectable body touching his.

He put his hands on her shoulders gently.

"Thank you, Marie," he said. "Maybe there are things I'll be asking of you, later!"

"But if he found out he'd kill me!" she sobbed, putting her face against his chest.

"Don't worry about what he'll do. He's too smart—"

She straightened, the half genuine, half counterfeit sobbing stilled.

"Don't you believe that, John Belknap!" she whispered, and he knew that she spoke with honest conviction. "I've seen him mad! Few folks have. I want to tell you that he's got a temper that's hell itself! He's dangerous!"

"Then don't try to see me again. Don't let him think you're jealous or angry or after revenge. Just do your job and wait. If I have to see you, I'll write a note and let you plan the meeting. I'm awfully obliged. Good night!"

He went, leaving her in the doorway. She watched him go and finally turned into the house with a sigh.

"Gosh!" she said. "Gosh! As hard to make as a million dollars!" But as she climbed the stairs her disappointment, a casual sort of emotion, gave way to a hard joy. She lighted her room and took off her coat with quick, angry movements.

"You got gay with the wrong party, you doublecrosser!" she muttered and her weak, pretty little face was unlovely to behold. Woman scorned!

In his room at the boarding house John wrote a letter before he turned in. It was to Bradshaw, brief and to the point. And the concluding paragraph read:

> And so send the following message to T. A. Walcott, St. Anthony's Trust Co., Minneapolis. He is an old friend; open his reply and follow any leads he may give you:
>
> PLEASE FIND OUT AT ONCE ALL YOU CAN ABOUT INVESTORS IN AND OFFICERS OF NORTH STAR LUMBER CO. ST. PAUL ALSO ADVISE ME OF ITS LOCAL STANDING STOP SEND REPLY TO NAT BRADSHAW THIS ADDRESS.
>
> —JOHN BELKNAP

CHAPTER XV

THE CHALLENGE

PAUL GORBEL had not attended the dance. He had had other matters to occupy him. Neither had Baxter been in the recreation hall, though on other Saturday nights he had occupied his place by the fire and made his uncouth observations of women for the benefit of boys and low grade men.

Tonight he stood in the shadow of a lumber pile with Gorbel and took his orders. Big as Gorbel was, the other was larger, but he took those orders, snapped at him coldly, with grace.

"But s'pose it kills him!" the man muttered.

"So much the better!"

"Good Lord, Gorbel, I don't want to kill any of old Tom Belknap's!"

"I'm giving you your orders. If you don't go through with it, remember I know who has your thumb prints and your pictures!"

"That crowds me, Gorbel. If anything goes wrong, I'll drag you down, too!"

"And I'm, in a way, putting myself in your hands. Isn't that fair?"

Baxter hesitated.

"I don't think for a minute you're in my hands," he said. "You're too smart a party for that. But I s'pose I'll have to do it. You've got me in a hole."

"Good guess. This week, remember. You've every chance in the world to get away with it."

And so while John Belknap toiled at the hot pond, in a fever of suspense and excitement, death stalked him. Stalked him in the early portion of his shift and through its late hours, when darkness lay over the land and electric lights about the mill yard cast their deep shadows.

Death stalked, waiting, skulking in those shadows. But this morning he was on the far side of the pond; that evening he worked close to another man of the crew. This day, one man alone could not handle the stake trips on the tilted, heavily laden cars; the next, the pond was full and no loads had been set in. So on until Thursday.

Thursday afternoon, then, with the yard engine setting in more cars; pulling out, leaving the loads on the canted track beside the pond to throw dark shadows beyond them. A prowler could come through the lumber yard then and stand well screened to watch. He could stoop and look beneath the car and see the pond men working. He could slip forward silently in the snow, squatting on the dark side of the trucks—waiting, watching . . .

Lazy snowflakes were falling. The band saw sang; the planer racketed; the edger and trimmer yelped sharply. Lazy snowflakes . . .

Across the pond was Ole, tooling a log slowly toward the slide where other workers were busy. And now around the end of the pond came John Belknap, walking swiftly, pike pole over his shoulder. He was watching Ole; he called out to him. He was abreast the car, now, and the man, hands on the trips, bent low to look beneath, saw his legs.

A hiss of breath, a jerk with great hands and logs were careening down upon that man beneath them!

On the first stir John looked sharply. He had a glimpse of stakes leaping from their seats, of a smooth beech log bursting from the chains that had held it, hurtling at him through the air, outrider of a score of others, rolling, bouncing, leaping toward him.

No place to go—he was squarely in the middle of that deck. Eight feet ahead would put him in the clear; eight feet backward, and he would be safe. But eight feet are two strides. It takes a man time to get under way. Two strides, with that first log already in the air!

One other place, then; one other chance. The place, the pond; the chance, quick enough movement to cheat that avalanche!

He was leaping, whirling. Before the pike pole which had been on his shoulder hit the ground, he dived. He dived from far back on the skids. The calks of his river boots took good hold. He flung himself outward, hurtling for a gap between two logs in the pond. To strike them, to have that rolling timber come on him, would crush life out. He had to make it!

Eyes open, hands extended, he cut the water. His hip brushed one log and as he went under, swimming mightily, he felt the first of the down-rolling deck touch his leg. Touch it—that was all. He had found an opening. He had missed catastrophe by inches. And he was under the logs, swimming, groping for a way out.

Ole had seen. With a cry he saw John disappear. With a shrill yelp he leaped to a maple, danced along a hemlock, skipped over a trio of small birches. Close together, the logs lay in the pond; scarcely room for a man to slip between them any-

where there. He gaged the distance. He swung his pike pole. He brought his weight to bear on a high riding log and shoved it with all his strength, crowding it away with the pole, shoving the one on which he stood in the opposite direction with his feet.

Above him, a bright electric light glowed from its pole. The opening water was sable velvet, stippled with eddies.

"Hi!" he yelled. "Hi, Yohn!"

A BULGING, a swirling. An arm shot through; a face showed, and John Belknap, grasping a log, was choking and gagging for breath.

The excited Swede tried to drag him out.

"All right! Let me breathe!" he gasped, and Ole stood up as others came running.

"What happened?" "Anybody hurt?" "Who was it?" . . . And John, still panting, shaking with cold, dragged himself out.

"All right!" he gasped; then to Ole, "Much obliged— Seemed to swim—an hour looking for—a hole!"

"Py gosh, Yohn, you come by a fire now!" said Ole as, water streaming from his woolen clothing, John made his way to shore across the logs.

He was shivering, hunching his shoulders with cold, but he shook his head.

Others protested but he gave them no attention except to growl—

"Got something to do, first."

His manner excluded them but as he trotted around the pond, under the slide and made for the car from which four thousand feet of logs had rumbled down to menace him, Ole put down his pike pole and followed.

As the Swede rounded the half emptied car he saw John squatted low to the snow.

"Careful, Ole," the boy cautioned, teeth chattering. "Don't step in his tracks. Got a match?"

"He came in from yonder," John said, pointing to lumber piles. "He stood there, behind that truck awhile; squatted down, see? Here's where his weight rocked up on the balls of his feet. Came over here and afterward went out that way. See where he ran?"

"Who, Yohn?" Ole asked, puzzled.

"Whoever tripped the stakes to let the load down on me!" John Belknap laughed harshly. "You didn't think they just let go, did you, Ole? Hustle with the light."

Together they bent low over the tracks.

"New rubbers, see, Ole? See that star brand in the heel? Old ones wouldn't leave a clean mark like that; looks like the work of a die. Heavy, big man." Quickly he spanned the foot prints with spread fingers to gage the dimensions of the foot-marks. "Long stepper, too. See how far he stepped when he lit out for cover? Tall as I am, Ole."

The Swede was speechless until John, staring off into the shadows of the lumber yard, involuntarily moaned with the cold.

"Py gosh, Yonny, you come by a fire!"

The fighting light in John's eyes was something to behold and as he later changed from his half dried clothing in his room, rubbing his great body briskly to drive out the last of the chill, his movements were quick and sharp, possessing a distinctly vindictive quality.

He did not eat. He went, instead, from store to store where footgear was sold in Kampfest. In the third and last place where he might find a clue the proprietor advised one to bet his life he had rubbers.

"New stock. Just opened 'em this week," he said. "They're the best buy for the money I've found and—"

John did not listen as the man extolled the virtues of his wares. He held a rubber in his hand, gazing at the raised star in the heel with its constellation of little stars about it, at the heavy, crepe sole like the surface of a spring mushroom.

"Sold many?"

"Well, not many. Only two pairs, yet. You ask the boys, though. They'll tell you they fit fine around the foot! Try one on and—"

"Not now. Who bought?"

The merchant scratched his head and told him the names of his purchasers. The last man mentioned crystallized the

suspicion that had been in John's mind.

The recreation hall was accommodating its usual evening throng when John entered. He did not come as a pleasure seeker, as one relaxed. He closed the door quickly and his eyes ran the room, searching. He passed among tables where smear and checkers engaged attention, went past the fireplace toward the pool tables with their shaded green lights.

Baxter was sitting against the wall, a pimply faced lad grinning at him from one side; another loafer sitting bent far forward, elbows on his knees: sycophants. He looked up, perhaps a trifle warily, as John approached. His hands were in his pockets, one foot crossed over the other knee.

"Put up your foot, Baxter!" John said sharply, coming to a halt before him.

The man started.

"Huh?" he asked, as if surprise jolted the words from him.

"Put up your foot!"

The toe of the dangling foot depressed itself; the leg stopped swinging.

"Who says so?" he asked, truculently.

"I do. Put it up!"

"What for?"

"The chances are that you can guess. Put it up!"

The man laughed.

"If you want my foot up," he growled, drawing his hands from his pockets, "you go down and git it and—"

JOHN did as he was bidden. He went down with a swoop and a crouch, a swing of his one hand, fastening on the man's ankle, a backward sway, dragging Baxter from his chairwith a thud, a crash, an oath.

One leg in the air, held there by that hand, seated on the floor for a split second, the man gaped while his face flooded with ugliness. Other chairs scraped, feet thudded; men looked and came scurrying.

John stared down at the sole—big star; little stars, crepe rubber on the sole.

"Thought so!" he said with a sharp nod and let the resisting leg go.

Baxter had started to turn over with a mighty heave of his great body as John relinquished his grip. His foot dropped and upset him again, but he came up with an agile scramble, cursing, clenching his fists, swinging in for the fight he knew would come now.

But a man, even a fighting man, a bullying fighting man, does not wade in and crush a man who stands before him, mind on something other than fighting so completely that he pays no attention to your stance, your crouch, the drawing back of your fist.

Baxter remained poised, there, ready to strike, but not striking; ready to spring, but firmly on balance, facing the torrent of words from young John Belknap, who stepped closer, one hand, palm upward, extended in a sidewise gesture.

"If you'd put it up, it'd saved you being set down on your tail, Baxter! I wanted to see the bottom of your new rubber because I found a track in the snow a couple of hours ago and, put alongside of other things I found out, I figured your rubber made that print! You've got a reputation to uphold, I suppose, but hereafter when I tell you to do a thing I want you to do it."

No fear, not even consideration of the man confronting him, was in the boy's manner and though Baxter swayed backward as if to drive that poised fist full into his mouth, he did not.

"Don't get ready to fight, yet!" John said, as he might have talked to an enraged child. "Maybe there'll be some fighting between us, but not until you've had your chance to get out of it."

"Chance!" Baxter relaxed, hands going to his hips, face thrusting close to John's as he sidled forward. "Chance? Say, you got a lot of guts, talkin' of givin' me a chance to get out of fighting you!"

John nodded.

"Yes, I have. Enough guts so you don't scare me very much, Baxter. And plenty to tell you what I've come to tell!"

Baxter's eyes swept a segment of the circle about them; he swallowed quickly. This was something new in the way of an encounter.

"Tell? What you got to tell me?" he demanded.

"This: a little history, first. Probably you've heard the boys saying that I came pretty near getting mine this evening out at the mill. A load let go and I had to take to the pond. I'd trusted those stakes, Baxter. They're the best patent stakes made. I didn't think they'd let go.

"My guess seems to 've been pretty good. In the fresh snow behind that car were a man's tracks. He'd come from between lumber piles where nobody else has been for weeks. He stood for quite a time in the shadow of the trucks; he stooped down there, to see what was going on on the other side of the pond. When the thing happened that he'd waited and watched for, he tiptoed to the trips and let 'em go. Then he ran . . ."

John paused a moment and his eyes for the first time smoldered.

"He didn't get me, Baxter. I got out. I found his tracks in the snow. I measured his foot; I saw the print of stars and the heel and a crepe sole.

"They were new rubbers. So are yours. Yours have the stars and the sole. I haven't measured yours yet, because I want to give you a run for your money.

"I've got this proposition to make—if you weren't the man in those rubbers, stay right here in Kampfest. If you are certain you weren't, I've got to be satisfied. If you're here tomorrow night at this time I'm coming in here and take your rubber off and measure it and if it's the same size as that worn by the man who tried to make pulp of me with saw logs out there tonight, I'm going to make pulp of you with the only things I know how to fight with—these!"

He extended his hands and smiled—a hard, unpleasant smile—as he watched Baxter.

"Get it? I don't want to clean up a man without warning. You've got a reputation, I understand, for being a hard bird. Baxter, you don't know what a hard bird is! You've gotten by in some of your fracases because people were afraid of you. A man who's afraid is licked before he makes his first punch. I'm no more afraid of you than I am of the sweet west wind. I don't like your kind. I'd get a lot of satisfaction out of knocking your block off and using it as a football. That's all I've got to say. Good night!"

John turned in silence and made his way toward the door.

"Say!" Baxter's hail was a croak but John did not stop. "Say, you!" The man took a half dozen paces forward and then John raised his arm and, without turning, called out—

"Tomorrow night if you're still in town; if the rubber fits!"

"If I'm still in town!" the man muttered scornfully.

He hitched at his pants and turned, looking into the faces about him. But now he read there not the sniveling admiration of the admittedly inferior, not the apprehensive glances of men who feared him. He saw only contempt and rising smiles.

"I'll be here!" he boasted. "I'll be waitin'!"

"Whydidn'tyousoakhim?" the pimply faced boy asked.

"Hell! He's the push's son, ain't he?"

But the man, even while he made the feeble excuse, appeared to be wondering, himself, why he had not crushed John Belknap then and there.

He mumbled and glared at men who came and went. He knew well enough what they were thinking—that at last he had encountered fear by finding a man who had no fear. He fell into a morose silence from which he roused now and again to mutter threats of what would happen if John so much as stuck his face inside that door tomorrow night. But he was afraid, caught between two fires. On one side Gorbel, with a club over his head, goading; on the other a youth who dismissed his threats as casually as he would brush at a buzzing fly! Something new, that was; something strange, something to be feared.

And when the way freight went through Kampfest at two the next morning a heavy man with a grain sack over his shoulder boarded the caboose.

"Where you want to go, Jack?" the conductor asked.

"Any place out of this dump!" Baxter growled.

CHAPTER XVI

THE OUTLAW

IT WAS at noon the next day that McWethy, the mill foreman, hailed John as he returned from dinner.

"Got a new job for you," he said gruffly.

"So?"

"Yeah. Barn boss."

"Barn boss!" John laughed. The other eyed him closely.

"Don't it strike your fancy?"

"Why, anything's all right with me."

"Our man's took sick; seems like you're nominated to fill the hole. Ever run a barn before?"

"Never."

McWethy whittled off a chew of plug before he spoke again.

"Well," he said dryly, "I guess you're barn boss, anyhow." He stared through the dusty window a moment and then turned searching, troubled eyes on the boy. "You 'most got yours last night, son. I heard you lay out Baxter. He hauled between days, but—I got just this to say: watch your step!"

"Is that a threat or a warning?"

McWethy's heavy mustache twitched.

"I don't know anybody around this shebang who'd make threats against you, Johnny. I don't know anybody who would but—I don't like the smell of some things lately."

"Then you're trying to warn me?"

"Mebbe I'm goin' off half-cocked, but I didn't like the way things was arranged to make it look like this shiftin' you to the barn was my idea. It ain't. Mebbe it's for your safety, but lightnin' don't strike the same place twice. Until lately I've figured I was workin' for a white man, but things change, seem to. Or else wolves are slippin' off their sheepskins."

"And you don't want to talk because you're just playing a hunch. That's fine, Mac. I'll watch my step."

"Hell of a job for you!" McWethy said. "Chambermaid to horses!" He spat disgustedly.

John laughed.

"Once upon a time," he said, "there lived a very strong man and one of the hardest chores he had to tackle was cleaning out a stable that had needed it for thirty years. He probably hated the job, but he had it to do!"

As McWethy pulled on his jacket to lead the way to the barn he mumbled:

"Mebbe some folks' buildings besides barns, and not so damn' far from here, either, could stand a little cleanin' out. Yes, sir, mebbe they could stand a lot of it!"

That night a letter was waiting for John, postmarked Shoestring. Within was a single sheet of paper and written on it the words:

Meet me in the same place—N. B.

The sheriff was there before him, driving his team to keep them from cooling too rapidly.

"News," he whispered, with as near to excitement as he apparently ever came. "Here—here's telegrams and a flashlight."

John took the messages and the torch from him, spread the sheets on his knees and snapped on the beam.

"Yeah. That come first," Bradshaw muttered, leaning forward to see.

NORTH STAR LUMBER CO. SUBSIDIARY TO MID WEST FOREST PRODUCTS STOP LATTER INCORPORATED YEAR AGO IN MICHIGAN STOP NORTH STAR STATEMENT EXCELLENT AND CARRIES COMFORTABLE CASH BALANCE LOCALLY

"Now when I got that," Nat said, "I telegraphed right down to Lansing. Read what they say!"

MID WEST FOREST PRODUCTS ARTICLES INCORPORATED SHOW DEMAN HILL PRES PAUL GORBEL VICE PRES AGNES HILL SECY AND TREAS

The paper shook in John's hand.

"Now Hill," said Nat, "is Gorbel's brother-in-law. This North Star Com-

pany seems to be all in the family. What's the lowdown, if it's any of my business?"

John recounted briefly what Marie had told him, and the sheriff whistled.

"Rimmin' your father all ways from the jack! If he ain't a crook!"

"Poor old Tom," John muttered. "This'll hurt! If there has been anything he prided himself on, it was picking men. This is the first time I know of that he'd gone wrong. Finding it out 'll be like poison to him."

"It looks, son, like you were doin' a whole lot to drain that poison out. I swear, you been thinkin' twice to my once all the way through!

"What's happened here since you had your talk with this stenographer?"

The boy related yesterday's happening and his change of work, and the sheriff grumbled in a rage.

"He's out to get you, Johnny," he warned. "You do as McWethy says and watch your step. Dang me if I don't feel like I ought to take you out of here."

"Now?" John laughed. "Hell, Nat, we're just getting ready to spring the trap. No, sir! My job's here; right here. And I can take care of myself; don't worry about that. Have you heard anything from the university?"

"Ain't time yet, I reckon. They say it takes about a week to get a stomach analysis and the mail, with that stomach in it, was just about timed to hit a two-day blizzard they had below that tied everything up."

"Do you think there's a chance he might get scared and jump?" John asked.

The sheriff pondered a moment.

"Not much chance," he replied. "He's got too much at stake to jump before he's sure trouble is on his heels. No, he won't jump."

JOHN itched to be at the bank records, to show what they might reveal, but he could make no move in that direction without exposing his entire hand. So he waited, performing his duties about the barn, spending his evenings in the recreation hall. Since his encounter with Baxter the men had ceased their nudging, ceased gloating at sight of a rich man's son taking life as they took it. He was as much one of them as the son of the push ever could be. They respected him.

It was Saturday night; another week was down. He was buying some necessary things when he met McWethy.

"Say, Gorbel phoned he'd bargained for another team to be delivered tonight or tomorrow," McWethy said. "You'd gone when I come past the barn."

"All right; there are empty stalls. They can stand 'em in."

"Watchin' your step?"

"Every move!" And John grinned as the other jerked his head in grim approval.

He went to sleep dreaming of Ellen Richards and woke, with an empty feeling. Hang on, he told himself. Hang on and keep going and you'll be able to show her how much of her trouble could be laid at old Tom's door.

He was out at four o'clock, wading through new drifts toward the barn to feed and water. This was Sunday. The teamsters would show up late and spend an hour or so giving their horses a good going-over. He would have little to do throughout the day; might even take to the swamp on snowshoes for a few hours to be alone with his problem, with his regrets and fears and hopes . . . He felt particularly lonely as he walked.

The barn was silent; no one was about. He opened the door and reached for the lantern that hung inside and lighted it. The warm smell of the stable was strong. A blaze faced sorrel turned his head toward the light and nickered. Low munching sounds came from the horses that stood in a row, tails to him.

He swung his lantern and looked to the left.

"Hullo!" he muttered.

A strange, black horse was standing there, halter rope dangling, eyeing him with head up. Coal black, night black, he was; a handsome creature, though the eye looked defiant.

One of the new horses, delivered last night, probably, and insecurely tied.

"Well, boy, enjoying liberty?" John asked and slipping the lantern bail over one arm, advanced, hand extended to catch the rope as he neared the animal.

He should have been warned now, had the light been better. He could not see the devilish tensing of the big animal's frame as he approached. He was wholly unprepared for the charge when it came.

With a squeal that stopped John's heart, with his lip flickering back over the long, yellow teeth, with a greenish glitter springing to life in its eyes, the animal rushed him!

It reared to its hind legs, shaking its head, tossing the great forelock and mane, popping its teeth, muttering, and curled in its front legs to crush and maim with those sharp shod hoofs!

So quickly did it happen, so close the quarters, that John could not turn and run. To the left, the outer wall blocked him, without niche or corner within reach to use as sanctuary. To the right stood other horses and, as the black squealed, the one nearest danced nervously.

All in a flash! In a split second! John swayed backward, not daring to turn, and used the only weapon he had—the lantern.

He swung it as the horse reared. Swung it the whole length of his arm and let it go full in the creature's face as he poised for the downward pitch that would mean broken bones and torn flesh.

The animal cried out as the lantern struck his nose. The glass broke with a crash and a tinkling; the light went out. John had a vague impression of the horse going sidewise over against a stall partition as he turned and fled.

He did not go far. Feet thudded behind him. The killer squealed again and as John caught a stanchion in one hand and swung himself in beside another horse the black thundered on his heels.

"Whoa!" he cried, as the horse which gave him protection kicked. "Whoa, you!"

Against the faint glow from mill yard lights that penetrated the dusty windows he could see the black there, stamping, crowding to get into the stall. The tied horse kicked again and squealed and lunged forward as the black's teeth nipped its hip.

John was up in the manger by then, trying to quiet the one horse as the outlaw backed away, stamping, muttering at being cheated of his prey.

He stood, a bit shaky, stroking the snuffing muzzle in the darkness.

"Good of you, old fellow, to take me in!" he said, and twined his fingers in the coarse mane.

The black was standing there, waiting for him, he thought, waiting as a surly bear might wait for his quarry to emerge, snuffling, stamping now and again. The other horses were restless from the disturbance.

John slipped through into the feed alley, found a pitch fork, walked along to the far end of the building and crawled through the hay window into a box stall, used to care for sick horses when occasion demanded.

HE STOOD against the door which gave into the stall row, listening. Then slowly, careful to make little sound, he slid it open. That done, he retreated to the feed alley again and moved along, trying to locate the strange horse. He found that the animal was now standing behind a vacant stall, head down, listening.

Cautiously John crawled through to the manger, standing erect, dragging the fork with him. Then he stepped down and with a quick stride, fork held before him, was in the litter way, confronting the black.

"You!" he cried and leaped forward.

The animal squealed again. His great hoofs beat the straw padded floor as he gathered himself for another charge. And then he cried out in pain as the fork tines raked his face, as they prodded his chest mercilessly, as the fork crashed down on his skull.

"Back, you! Get back!"

John heard the savage teeth grinding in the darkness, felt a forefoot strike out viciously at the torturing fork. But the animal gave ground.

"Get back! Get back, you! I'll rip you to ribbons!"

John was excited. He felt more or less safe now. He could hold the animal off for a second, giving him time to slip into another stall should his own attack lose its effectiveness.

They were at the door of the box stall and John swung the fork at the animal's head to turn him. The horse bit and struck, and made a stand, defying the man to herd him farther. John got the tine points against the neck and shoved—shoved! The creature resisted, tried to surge forward. John put his weight on the fork handle and with a scream the black yielded, turned into the box stall and thundered to a far corner.

John had the door closed in a second, set the hasp in place and drew a deep breath . . .

"Now—something else to figure out," he muttered.

The first of the teamsters trailed in as daylight drove back the shadows.

"Here, Tim; take a look at this pony, will you?" John said.

The man came down behind the horses and John let down a window in the door of the box stall.

"How 'n hell 'd he get here?" the man asked sharply.

"I found him loose, yonder."

"How'd you get him here?"

The man had that economy of words characteristic of amazed curiosity.

"Drove him in with a pitch fork."

"My Lord!" the man said. "That's old DeForest's renegade! What's he doin' here?"

John explained, noncommittally, that the horse had been sold to Gorbel and had been delivered after quitting time last night.

"Gorbel bought him?" the man demanded. "Lord, that horse's been in this country for five years and DeForest's the only man who walks who can get near him and come away whole. You mean, Gorbel was thinking of buyin' him?"

John shrugged.

"That's the way I took it. Where does this DeForest live?"

"Three mile west and a half mile south."

"I guess, so long as I'm running this barn, we'll try to do without him. What say?"

"If you want me around here; or anybody else who knows that horse, you will! Why, it's a wonder he ain't killed a dozen men. And you handled him alone?"

Three miles west and half a mile south over sleigh roads, and an hour with DeForest; a long, haggling hour that got John nowhere. The horse trader, shrewd, truculent, was a hard nut to crack and his defiant story of an attempt at a sharp sale of undesirable property seemed to hold water.

Gorbel was spreading out dangerously, but he strengthened his defenses as he went and it would be difficult to prove that he was even remotely implicated in either of these attempts on John's well being.

As John went slowly back toward town he saw two people on skis a quarter of a mile away. He watched them for a time and made up his mind that it was Gorbel with Marie. They seemed to be watching him, though in the glare of an early March sun on the snow John could not be sure.

ON MONDAY morning he stood for the second time in Paul Gorbel's office. The man turned on him a face that was lined; hollows showed beneath eyes that roved a bit; eyes that had been so well controlled a fortnight before, so steady, so bland. But they would not obey the remnant of self-control that tried to direct the light in them this day. They were uneasy eyes, and the man's voice was slightly husky.

"You sent word by Mac Saturday night that'd you bought a new team," John said.

"Yes, DeForest came in and offered a bargain. I thought I'd let you have 'em tried out."

"Well—" dryly—"he just came in to take 'em back."

"So soon? You—you tried them?"

"One tried me."

"I don't understand."

"A horse was loose in the barn when I went in yesterday. He'd never been tied up."

John spoke evenly, almost dispassionately, and he watched for change in the face before him; but Gorbel held steady now, except for the caution showing deep in the harried eyes.

"Well, I don't— He should have tied him, yes. But—I don't get you. Did you send the team back because the man was careless on a detail?"

"Don't stall, Gorbel!" John cried, and the other straightened, as color whipped into his face. "Don't stall another syllable! I'm here because good luck was with me."

The man shoved back his chair.

"What's the idea?" he asked thickly, rising. "I don't like this, Belknap, whatever it may be."

"No, you back-biting devil, you don't like it!" Rage possessed young John—his eyes, his voice, his gestures. "You tried to frame me with a man once, and with a horse next. You—"

"Frame you!" Gorbel's voice was a snarl.

"You have known for years, likely, about DeForest's outlaw black. If you haven't, it's the one thing you haven't known about this country! Shut up, now, and let me talk! I found him loose in the barn. He tried to get me and didn't. My teamsters all knew about him; every man-jack of them knew that no sane man would buy the horse.

"I called on De Forest. You'd schooled him well, Gorbel. You'd probably schooled Baxter well, too, but I didn't bother trying to break him down!"

"Man, you're crazy! What the devil are you driving at?"

The rigidity went from John Belknap's posture and he laughed helplessly.

"You're good!" he said. "You're good, you toad! Why don't you try to fight like a man? You've guts enough to try murder, why won't you try it in the open? Why won't you let—"

"Look here! I'm damned if I'll let any addled kid talk to me like this! I'm damned if— Somebody trying to harm you and you're trying to hand the blame on me? That it? Now why in the name of heaven should I want to harm you?"

A quick warning flickered through John's anger. Roused as he was, shaken, frightened, Gorbel's craft had not deserted him. He was prying, using the fertile field of high rage, when bars of caution are down, to discover what and how much John Belknap knew, and the boy drove back his temper and his contempt, striving to match cunning with cunning.

"I haven't the slightest idea," he said. "Not an idea to my back! But you don't want me here; you're trying to drive me out."

He thought a shadow of relief appeared in that face before him.

Gorbel let out a short breath of disgust.

"Drive you out," he muttered, as though such an idea were the depth of absurdity. "Why, I haven't even remembered you were around the job a dozen times since you came in. But if you're not drunk, you're insane and there's room here for neither booze fighters nor madmen."

"I'm fired, then?"

"Right now!"

John shrugged.

"Your privilege," he said.

"And you'll get out of the company boarding house today."

"Also your right."

"And out of Kampfest, too!"

"Steady, neighbor!" John's rage was passing; he was noting the anxiety in the other's tone now, as of one who presses rashly into an unexpected opening. "Little too far, that. I'm staying in town, Gorbel. Things have been quiet in Shoestring since I came here. That was my principal reason in coming. I'll be in Kampfest, watching my step. If you try me again—in person, please!"

He went out without another word,

closing the door firmly, and Paul Gorbel, standing there, eyes on the door, let a hand lift slowly to his chin, fingers fumbling.

He stood so for a long interval. Then swiftly, a bit unsteadily, he crossed the room and locked the door. Gnawing a lip, fists rammed into pockets, he paced the room while moisture pricked out in tiny pearls on his face.

Fear was riding the man, fear and desperation. Not fear of the possibility that John Belknap might be able to prove a case against him through either Baxter or DeForest. When a man comes to another as young John had come today, the difference between them is a personal one and he could count the boy's charges out as serious affairs. Nor was he greatly alarmed by knowing that his warfare against Ellen Richard's property was well guessed at and that, within weeks, he might be forced to answer to old Tom for what he had done in that veteran's name.

Another fear gnawed at him, had been grinding him for days, and something about John Belknap's attitude made him feel that the lad was not thinking wholly of his own safety nor of Ellen Richard's safety. He had had the *manner* of one who knows more than he tells, of one who is waiting, with all confidence, for a tremendous moment . . .

And Nat Bradshaw had been a bit too casual the last time he came. His eyes had betrayed a flicker of guile when he talked of the fire in the Richards barn; and another time he had come and had gone from this office to the hot pond where John Belknap worked. These combined in a circumstance for any man so situated to fear.

An individual can lose the respect of others through discovery of despicable activity and stand it; he can see the prospect of ruthlessly obtained gain slipping through his fingers and survive. But few men can face with composure the prospect of being called by law to answer for a major crime.

For years Paul Gorbel's conscience had not troubled him; he took what he could take, by fair means or foul, escaping detection from society but piling up in his own heart a cumulative burden of fear. He had not admitted that fear even to himself until lately and then, like a festering wound, it had commenced to swell and throb. It would not let him sleep, would not let him keep his mind on his affairs during daylight. He struggled to maintain his front while he seethed inwardly.

The law was preparing to reach out for him. His craftily laid plans were going to pot; his dreams of wealth were being dissipated. Society was about to step in and demand its toll. They were closing in, planning to arrest him, to drag him from his present respectable and comfortable estate to a filthy jail somewhere and then on to a prison—one of a file of marchers.

He halted in the middle of the room and looked about like one trapped. Then he went to his desk, opened a locked drawer and slipped the pistol that lay there into his pocket. After a time he unlocked the door and went through the motions of functioning as a managing partner.

CHAPTER XVII

GORBEL BEATS THE LAW

OVER in Shoestring Ellen Richards was going through the motions of performing her daily tasks.

Evidence of strain was heavy upon her, a different sort of strain than that which had racked her when the man she now knew to be John Belknap came to her employ. Matters had eased up in the woods; the Belknap & Gorbel operation on her railroad had slowed down on log production; her transportation facilities had been able to take care of both jobs handily; a reserve of logs was growing in her yard; the dark clouds which had hovered over her business affairs were seeming to lift.

But things had happened to her which robbed this turn of events of any joy in achievement; things which wakened her from sound sleep, with heart racing, with a

feeling of having called out in her dreams appealingly, affectionately to the man who had come into her life so dramatically and gone out of it again, leaving the job in order but her life in chaos.

During waking hours she knew that she thought of John Belknap only with hot contempt, but at night, as she slept, he came to her in dreams, laughter mingling with the determination in his eyes, and she lived again those moments in the office at camp when she yielded impulsively to his arms, when she raised her face hungrily for his lips.

The dream was sweet. But she shuddered on wakening. To surrender her heart to a man who had deceived her, who had sworn allegiance only to undermine her worldly possessions was unthinkable. And yet that heart remained untractable. Her mind persuaded, argued, badgered, even stormed, in certain moments, but when the mind dropped into deep rest that heart went its vagrant, forbidden way.

It wore her down, made her fight sleep at times; drove her to tears now and again. She could not stifle that longing, reason and struggle as she would, and on this Monday she sat at her desk with thoughts that would not hold to affairs before her, which insisted in straying, truant-like, to this inner conflict.

Yesterday the woman who kept her house had declared her ill. This morning the old bookkeeper had eyed her over the rims of his spectacles and said one word—

"Peaked!"

Walls seemed closing in about her; air, even the fresh, sharp March air from outside left her lungs a-thirst. A breaking point was near and suddenly she wanted to run away.

To run away—when there was no place to run. She found herself on her feet in the middle of the office, rising so quickly that others looked sharply. Her hands were clenched and she looked about a trifle wildly. Then she laughed, dryly and briefly and passed a hand across her eyes.

The bookkeeper left his high stool and drew his spectacles down low on his nose again.

"Ellen, you're comin' down with something," he declared. "Sakes, but you do look peaked! You better go home an' rest."

Home? To lie there in the room where she dreamed tenderly at night of a man who was her worst enemy? To live again and again those moments which once had been sweet but which now, even in memory, whipped the heat of humiliation to her cheeks? Not home!

"Tell the barn to hitch up the drivers," she said. "I'll have them drive me out toward the Mad Woman. A day or two at Wolf's is what I need, I guess."

She laughed, again dryly and without mirth. A day or two anywhere, under any conditions, a specific for her trouble? She knew that that was without truth, but a day or two in the snug cabin of old Wolf Richards, her uncle, might give her strength and fortitude to withstand this assault of heart upon mind.

And so she went, driving briskly out of town, north and eastward, along a deeply rutted road, dressed for the woods, a light packsack and snowshoes stowed behind her, eager to be afoot and trudging the dozen miles that lay between the end of this road and the trapper's camp. Bodily exertion might ease the tension in her; she could walk until she dropped and, perhaps exhausted, she could sleep without dreams.

A BAD day for Paul Gorbel was drawing to its close, with light snow falling outside.

He had changed to his woods clothing at noon, intending to drive to one of the camps. But fear held him in town, that fear which grew with the hours. He prowled the mill and the yards, going through empty motions of watching progress; he was in and out of his office a dozen times, curt to his aids, savage to Marie when she came in.

The girl tried to elicit an explanation of his mood but he would not talk and she left him in a huff.

Dusk came and the approach of closing time. He sat brooding, planning how he could flee the country if flight became

necessary, torn between the fear of having to face a State's law if he remained and the fear of adding to suspicion if he left. That suspicion might still be a figment of his own imagination, a product of conscience; he could not know.

A cruiser came in, dropping his pack in the hallway. He had been to the northward for a fortnight and Gorbel appeared to listen while the man made a brief report of his activity and his findings.

"Didn't expect you back so soon," Paul said.

"Nor would I've made it but for findin' Wolf Richards' cabin empty. Run on to him headed east with his outfit after wolves that are raiding the Caribou deer herd—so he said. The old devil! I knew he'd camp over there until he'd got the wolves or used up all his tricks, so I moved my stuff down into his camp." The man chuckled. "He wouldn't take anybody in when he's at home, but it's all right with him if folks use his camp when he's away. He don't even lock up; regular old-timer that way. It was closer to those descriptions, you see. I didn't have to spend most of my time goin' from camp to timber."

The mill whistle blew then; in the back office chairs scraped and feet sounded.

"Another day," Gorbel said. "Come in tomorrow and we'll go over this matter again."

The woodsman left.

Clerks passed his door and went down the steps; companies of men from the mills passed his windows. He sat there, with the light turned out, stomach aching from nervous tension, breath sharp but at slow intervals.

And as the street emptied itself of pedestrians, bound for their evening meals, a team came briskly into town, horses at a trot. They pulled to halt before the office and the big man on the seat of the light sleigh kicked robes from about his feet and rose. Inside, Gorbel grabbed the corner of the desk as if to rise but he did not; just sat there, strained forward, moving no farther, listening.

A tie strap went about a pole, feet sounded on the steps, in the corridor.

They paused outside the door. Then knuckles fell on the panel. Gorbel wet his lips but did not speak; again the rap.

"Come in!" he said, trying to put snap and curtness into the words, hut they emerged hoarsely, unsteadily.

The knob turned and Nat Bradshaw's big hulk showed in the gloom.

"Oh!" he said. "You, Gorbel?"

A question, but he was certain of the identity of the one sitting there, starting to rise on legs weakened because of the other's tone. It was not the casual, easy-going voice of the man he had known. It was crisp, short, cold—as cold as the thrills racing Paul Gorbel's spine.

"Hello," he said, fighting for his self-control, telling himself that he was showing misgiving, that nothing could have happened, that he had planned every move too well; telling himself this while a part of his mind retained the bluff ring of Nat Bradshaw's brief words. "Hello, Nat! Just leaving . . ."

He was on his feet, now, waiting as the other closed the door behind him. The sheriff did not advance, but stood there, saying nothing, sliding his hands into his pants pockets, feet spread, back against that door — an ominously blockading figure.

"Then I'm just in time," he said dryly.

Those eyes were studying him through the darkness, Gorbel knew; they were cold, as cold as the voice; chill, appraising, official eyes.

"What's up, Nat?" he asked, and his voice was unnatural. "What—what 've you come for—this time?"

Guilt had his strength, his self-possession, his courage, now. Guilt, which he had carried for weeks; guilt, strengthened by panic. He was giving himself away by his faltering speech, betraying his fear.

"I've come for you, Gorbel!"

"Me?" The word crackled shrilly.

"Yeah. You—finally!" The word fell heavily.

No fancied corner, now! No trap made up of the fabrics of guilty imaginings was

closing on Paul Gorbel. This was real and it broke through to his last reserve of strength.

"Why—why, what the devil are you driving at?" he demanded, rallying a show of bluster.

"Turn on your light and I'll read why."

Light! Light, with the sheriff standing there against the door, suspicious, ready for any emergency.

"They're burned out," he lied. "Fuse blew just before you drove up. What do you mean, you'll read why?"

He could feel the other's eyes staring at him, watching every move of his silhouette against lights from across the way.

"I've got a warrant for you, Gorbel," the sheriff said slowly as though to let each word have time to sink into full understanding. "It's for arson." He paused.

"Arson!" Gorbel's voice crackled.

"Yeah. Ain't a pleasant word, is it? Ain't a pleasant crime, neither. Bad as murder, Gorbel. You overstepped yourself in your story. The university says the lad you put in the way of bein' killed hadn't been drinkin' for long. Put on your hat and coat; we've got a drive to make."

"Look here, Nat! Why, there's some mistake! There's some devilish mistake behind this! Arson? Good Lord, Nat, you don't—"

"I don't aim to visit with you, Gorbel. Put on your coat!"

The sheriff was advancing slowly, heavily, hands still in his pockets, coming toward him, an indistinct hulk in the darkness, a mountain of doom moving down to smother and bury him. Bitterness was rising in the sheriff's heart, a contempt that must be voiced.

"I don't aim to visit with you. I've got you cold, Gorbel! For a long time you've fooled us all, but that's over now. I'm glad I'm sheriff of this county tonight to take back to my jail a firebug, a skunk!"

Lights danced before Paul Gorbel's eyes, though there were no lights. A roaring sounded in his ears. The mountain of doom was moving toward him to overwhelm him, to blot him out, to crush his cupidity, his lovet, his ambitions.

He turned, as if to tear open a window and jump, and a great hand caught his arm.

"No, you don't! If I have to, I'll—"

The man shrank in the sheriff's clutch, tried to tear away. He made strange sounds in his throat as his trembling hand tugged at a hip pocket.

"Let me go!" he screamed. "Let me go, you fool!"

"No—you've come to the end of your rope, and if—"

The pistol came out. The stream of fire was short, barely the span of a man's hand, so closely was it held to the sheriff's breast. The report filled the room, and then, as Gorbel felt those stout fingers loosen on his arm, the sheriff drew a long, retching breath.

"Shot!" he muttered. "Shot—and—and . . ."

He threw out a hand awkwardly for support and dragged a chair over with him as he fell against the desk.

Paul Gorbel was at the door, springing the lock. He threw it shut behind him. He went along the corridor and down the steps with breath sputtering through set lips. Inside, the man on the floor breathed heavily, trying to speak, to call out, fighting against the pain, struggling to rise; then slumping backward to lie and pant. But his eyes were open and through the low window he watched the lighted stores across the way.

TO BE CONCLUDED

BY APPOINTMENT AT THE GLORY HOLE

A Tale of the Chinese Port of Amoy

By JAMES W. BENNETT

ON THE South China coast, drowsing in the sun and dreaming of past glories, lies the once great tea port of Amoy. Today China tea is no longer on the world's breakfast table and clipper ships no longer sweep up the roadstead to a triumphant anchorage.

But on a spring morning of last year, Amoy awoke to a sense of its own importance. Two passenger carrying steamers were to stop, that day; actually two of them. One, of course, was the familiar biweekly Douglas boat from Hongkong, but the other was a large German liner, Europe bound from Shanghai, that had never before deigned to put in at the port.

There was a further undercurrent of exitement, for a sly and subtle rumor had it that Riccardo Mendez was abroad one of these steamers, planning to disembark at Amoy. Mendez was a fugitive from justice.

As the morning wore on the tension was evident at the Glory Hole. A step from

the passenger jetty on the mainland, this was a building far less grand than the moldering palaces of the old tea *taipans* on the foreign concession, Kulangsu Island, yet it was equally a relic of clipper ship days. The Glory Hole had become enshrined in the hearts of ten thousand thirsty sailors and by them had been given its name. Built to simulate the interior of a sailing ship, the walls were paneled with Santo Domingo mahogany, brought around the Horn. It was lighted by ships' lanterns.

The interior had been divided into a lower and an upper "deck", with a bar below and, up a rope railed stairway, round tables and swivel chairs. On the walls hung steel cut engravings of the *Star of the East*, the *Grand Turk* and other clippers that had patronized the Glory Hole in the past.

Its present proprietor was the busiest man in Amoy this morning. He was preparing for an influx of trade. In addition to the task of putting his establishment in spotless order, he was breaking in a new assistant bartender, a fellow with the slit eyes of a Chinese but otherwise bearing vaguely the marks of a halfcaste. The assistant seemed to be singularly awkward at his tasks. More than once the owner swore roundly at him, and the new bartender—after the amiable custom of the East—swore back.

The proprietor was a huge man, grizzled of hair, his face the color of his wall panels, a rich mahogany. He was known by the title of Macao Charlie. Realizing that this was an excellent trademark, he had refused ever to divulge his last name.

His preparations finished, Charlie went to the door and trained a telescope up and down the roadstead. The liners were not yet in sight. With a sigh of fatigue, he sat down at a newspaper littered table to wait and read.

He was soon immersed in the Mendez affair, that *crime passionel* which seemed to be sending Shanghai into hysterics. The papers agreed that it was a beautiful example of a triangle.

At the peak was Riccardo Mendez, aged thirty-five, one time professional lightweight boxing champion of the Far East, actor of sorts and cabaret singer. He was described as dark and thin, of medium height. Although for purposes of professional billing he proclaimed himself pure Spanish, the reporters were inclined to the opinion that he was a Mecanese, that is, a native of Portugal's colony in China, Macao, and, because of centuries of intermarriage, of mixed Chinese and Portuguese blood. In his pictures the cheekbones were Mongoloid, but the eyes were far wider than an Oriental's.

At one base of the triangle was Lolita Ferrara—name on her marriage certificate, Laura Olsen. She was a dancer of Spanish steps, beautiful and alarmingly blond. At the other base was her husband, Olaf Olsen, of Herculean build, orchestra leader of the Crillon Cabaret where she danced and where Mendez sang.

When the curtain had risen—at least for the public gaze—Mendez was in hiding, Olsen was in the hospital with a fractured skull, his mind a complete blank concerning the events just transpiring, and Lolita was reaping but not reading her final press notices. The pony ballet of the Crillon, hearing a pistol shot, had seen Mendez loping, wild eyed, down the corridor from the dancer's dressing room. Entering that compartment, they found her dead, shot through the heart by a pistol that was indentificd as her husband's. Across the room lay Olsen, also apparently dead.

At the coroner's inquest, the chorus girls testified that for some time Olsen had been treating his wife brutally, and that more than once they had heard her beg Mendez to help her. They had, however, seen no evidence of intimacy between Mendez and her. The orchestra leader was insanely jealous and had frequently been heard to threaten the smaller Mendez. The ex-pugilist had appeared in no wise alarmed for his own safety.

Pushing back the last paper, Macao Charlie swore softly to himself. The newspapers were mad to accuse Mendez! Olsen had shot his own wife. In his

mind's eye, Charlie could recreate the scene—the burly Olsen drawing a pistol, Mendez countering with a looping overhand right to the jaw, a natural K. O. Olsen falling and that pistol going off wildly yet by that hundredth chance finding a billet; Olsen striking his head on the cement flooring. Macao Charlie shook his head. No, he might be able to visualize the crime in this fashion, but it would be a hard thing to persuade a jury to see eye to eye with him.

That Charlie should reach this conclusion was inevitable. He had a weakness for the underdog. He had entertained absconding bank clerks from Tientsin or Dairen, or shady gentlemen riders ruled off the Shanghai Race Club Turf. If he became convinced that a fugitive was due to be unfairly treated by the law, Charlie was ready to offer advice, money and sanctuary.

A whistle blew in the outer harbor. Charlie turned for a last admonition to his assistant:

"That's the German liner. She's due in first. We may be swamped, so keep your head. Don't pass out your best whisky, unless you're sure the customer is English. Also, save your best beer to give to the Germans. I don't know why it is," he chuckled, "when there's a large, well equipped bar aboard ship, that passengers always come ashore looking for drinks. Now in the old days, the ships weren't stocked up."

"It's to be able to say that they've drunk a round in the Glory Hole," remarked the slit eyed assistant somewhat dourly. "That's fame."

"Well, fame's a dangerous thing—" Charlie broke off, then fired the command, "Get ready! There's a boat load coming off the ship. It's headed our way."

ONE of the first passengers to arrive from the *Baden* was a dark, wiry man of medium height who took a seat at a table near the edge of the "upper deck" where he could look down upon the crowd that had begun to line up before the bar. When the multiple orders had been given and were being consumed, the visitor beckoned Charlie and ordered a drink for the proprietor. After a short preliminary, the stranger asked if Charlie had heard yet of the Mendez shooting.

"Yes," Charlie answered. "My weekly batch of papers came down from Shanghai yesterday by a small China Merchants' freighter. Shanghai seems to be thinking of nothing else. What's your version?"

The stranger looked around carefully, then he lowered his voice.

"I'll tell you; Mendez is innocent. He was just unlucky enough to be in the room while the husband was in the act of killing his wife."

"But why should Mendez have gone bolting away?" Charlie asked doubtfully.

"Because he lost his head. The whole thing happened so quickly."

"I imagine that's true," agreed Charlie. "Then you think him innocent, do you?"

"Yes," solemnly answered the stranger. "I've just said so, and I'll always think so." He paused and stared fixedly at the corpulent proprietor. "By the way, you have the reputation of helping a man when he's down and out. And of keeping your mouth shut. Will you promise to shut it now?"

"Yes, I promise," answered Charlie, still smiling, but his eyes level and searching.

"Then I'll tell you something. I'm Mendez. And I'm in a tight box. There's a detective coming up from Hongkong on the Douglas boat. It's just my rotten luck that the two liners should meet here today. I heard that this detective plans to transship aboard the *Baden* and nab me. It means that I've got to leave the boat and lie low here. Will you help me?"

"Sure I will!" Charlie answered promptly. "If a man says he's innocent, that's all I need to know."

"Good!" said the man with a note of jubilance in his voice. "Good! I'd like to be able to spot that Hongkong detective if I could. Don't any of those panels slide back, where I could go inside and still peep out."

Charlie gave a chuckle.

"I've never heard of any panels sliding. The Glory Hole has never been a crimps' joint. I'm afraid I can't help you that way."

The stranger's face fell.

"Well, what do you suggest?" he demanded curtly.

"Let's see," Charlie deliberated. "Why not stay in this corner? You can watch whoever comes in. The interior's pretty dark. When any one first arrives from the outside, his eyes are blinded for several moments. If you recognize your man, give me a sign. I'll try to maneuver it so that he doesn't catch sight of you. And then—"

Charlie stopped abruptly, for the air was shivered with a whistle, higher in pitch than the *Baden's*.

"There's the Douglas boat in the outer harbor. She'll be in any moment now, sir."

Charlie glanced down with an expression of sorrow at the clients who had swirled away from the bar and out the door to watch the new liner swinging into its anchorage. Many of them did not return and for those who did, the novelty of the Glory Hole was wearing off. One by one they departed. At last the place was empty except for Macao Charlie, his assistant who was polishing glasses, his slit eyes absorbedly bent upon his work, and the man who had confessed himself to be Mendez.

The Douglas ship from Hongkong, its trim lines dwarfed by the giant German steamer, dropped anchor and put over only one boat. This, Charlie saw, was heading for the mainland. It held but three passengers. As they landed, he recognized two American tea buyers; the third was a stranger to him. The man was of medium height and dark to the point of swarthiness. That particular swarthiness Charlie recognized as the mark of his own race, the Mecanese.

The three men entered the Glory Hole, the tea buyers laughing and joking with Charlie, whose repartee was as crude and as effective as their own. After he had mixed their drinks, the proprietor moved unobtrusively away from the bar and up the steps to the lone man at the table. Leaning over, Charlie whispered:

"Two of 'em I recognize; they're tea merchants. Is the third the one you're looking for? If so, you'd better move farther back in the shadows; I'll try to keep him occupied, down below."

"Yes," answered the guest, "I think that's the man. But I've changed my mind about wanting to avoid him. If I put on a bold front, it will fool him. Steer him up here, if you can."

Charlie shrugged his massive shoulders.

"Isn't that a bit risky?"

"No!" countered the man, his voice queerly clipped, almost authoritative. "Do what I say!"

And Charlie did. Unobtrusively yet firmly, he directed the newcomer to the "upper deck". It was, Charlie told him, cleaner and fresher. He managed to seat the passenger from the Douglas boat a couple of tables away, facing the one who had called himself Mendez.

THE FIRST man nodded genially.

"We seem to be alone in the place. Won't you join me here at the railing?"

The swarthy man from the Douglas boat grunted but moved to the corner table.

The other went on:

"I don't fancy it here when it's so quiet. I like crowds and gayety and life. Just as I like night time instead of day."

The swarthy man's eyes narrowed.

"You must be a cabaret hound!"

The one who had confessed himself to be Mendez gave a short laugh.

"You've hit it. I've put in a lot of time in such places, what with one thing or another. By the way, weren't you in that show the Raffles Hotel in Singapore put on last summer?"

The man from the Douglas boat was silent a moment.

"I—well, I don't know why I need to beat around the bush. That's my racket.

I'm billed as—as Devore. I do tango dancing and—" he hesitated an instant—"and fill in with an occasional song."

Again the first man laughed. He seemed in high good humor.

"Now *that* is what I call a coincidence. I'm in the same game. Imagine us meeting and palling up this way in Amoy where there isn't a bright light within five hundred miles! Jazz singing's *my* line. Although I don't suppose I should be saying so, what with all this fuss being made about that Mendez fellow. I suppose you've heard, even down in Hongkong, about the trouble he got into? By the way, did you ever see Mendez work?"

"No, I've never seen him," answered the passenger from the Douglas boat. "I've never been as far north as Shanghai. I don't think he's ever had any engagements in South China, has he?"

"Has he?" asked the first man, a peculiar singing note in his voice. He half rose in his seat and a hand darted to his armpit, under his coat. "Has he?"

"Why, what do you mean?" The man from the Douglas boat leaned back in his chair. His hands were stretched on the table before him and suddenly the tips of the dark fingers pressed into the green baize.

"Don't try tipping over the table! I know that dodge. Besides, it's screwed to the floor—this place is built to resemble a ship." Before the first man had finished speaking, he had drawn a pistol from an arm holster, an ugly looking automatic. "What do I mean? I mean, Riccardo Mendez, that I arrest you for the murder of Lolita Ferrara. Put up your hands! Put 'em high!" His eyes flicked to Macao Charlie who was standing on the stairs leading to the "upper deck", mouth agape. "And you, Charlie, you keep out of this!"

The swarthy man from the Douglas boat gave a loud, unpleasant laugh.

"Oh, drop that pistol. The joke's on you. I'm Detective Sergeant Loreñas, formerly of the Macao, now of the Hongkong Police. I, too, am on the Mendez case."

"What?"

"Will you let me put one hand in my coat? I'll show you my papers."

The first man scowled.

"All right, but be careful. One funny move on your part!" He punctuated the remark with a flourish of his pistol.

Gingerly the swarthy man lowered an arm. He drew from the coat pocket a Crown Colony warrant for the arrest of Mendez, and a silver badge showing his rank.

The first man thoughtfully examined the evidence.

"Sunk again!" he said with a slightly humorous cocking of his eyebrows. "I told Charlie a cock-and-bull story about a detective being on the Douglas boat—and there was! I had definite word that Mendez was on his way up here from Hongkong by your liner. That he was planning to hide himself at the Glory Hole. Well, there's no more use for this little toy." He put the pistol back in the arm holster. "Sergeant Loreñas, I apologize. Let's have a drink."

Loreñas carefully placed the warrant and badge back in his pocket, fumbled there an instant, then his hand came out and forward with the speed of a snake striking. Two metallic clicks were audible in the quiet room. He said nastily:

"You thought you were proving an alibi, didn't you, Mendez! Trying to make out that you were a detective and pulling an automatic! That's where you got out of character. If you had known anything about detectives, you would have realized that we don't flourish a pistol if we can avoid it. Manacles are so much more effective."

The first man gaped aghast at his handcuffed wrists. He said softly, half to himself—

"For fifteen years I've been engaged in an honorable profession and now I'm told I'm 'out of character!' " Then he roused. "Take off those dirty bracelets! Take 'em off, I tell you! My name's Durban. I'm on the Shanghai Municipal Police."

"The less you say, Mendez, the better—"

"Don't you Mendez me! Look in my

pocket. Inside my coat. You'll find my credentials. And while we're sitting here, trying to arrest each other, Mendez has probably come and gone. He's been an actor. He knows how to disguise himself."

Loreñas examined Durban's papers, then he muttered an oath in Portuguese and unsnapped the manacles.

"Well, we might as well get back to our ships. Mendez wouldn't dare set foot on Kulangsu Island; that's a foreign concession and he'll want to avoid it. No place there to hide anyway. As for those who've come ashore here, I take it you've checked them over."

"From the German steamer? Yes," muttered Durban, "I've checked every man of them. I staked it all on this Glory Hole producing him. I received information which was pretty definite, I tell you, that Mendez was going to come to this pub. What's that?"

"That" was Macao Charlie dropping a glass. He thrust a ham-like hand under his white apron to hide fingers that were suddenly shaking.

"Sorry, gentlemen!" he said, looking up at them with his broad, genial smile. "I've had too many customers today; I'm not used to such a crowd at once; I'm getting old, I'm afraid."

Both men eyed him for a moment in silence, then they turned, preoccupied, back to their problem.

Durban repeated wearily—

"I tell you I had the straightest kind of a tip that Mendez would be in the Glory Hole today."

"Well, then, let's take a look around," answered Loreñas. "Although in my opinion he's been here and has sneaked back to one of the ships. If we're going to search this place, we'd better hurry, for my steamer leaves in less than an hour. And, speaking of searching, when I get back aboard I'm going over that ship from stem to stern. If he continues to stowaway, he's a good one. You'd better do the same, Mr. Durban, for that German boat you came down on. You'll have plenty of time before it reaches Hongkong."

Both rose. For several moments they thumped their knuckles in workmanlike fashion along the walls of the "upper deck", tapping for concealed closets behind the paneling. Then they ran down the stairs to the "lower deck".

"Stand aside, Charlie!" ordered Loreñas. "And you, too!" waving toward the slit eyed assistant who was staring at the two with calm curiosity.

The two men next examined the neat little room with its sign—"Cook's Galley"—rousing from a nap an ancient, toothless Chinese chef who scolded sleepily at them. They penetrated two bedrooms also neatly placarded as "Captain's Cabin" and "Crew's Quarters".

"Well, we've drawn a blank," said Durban. "I'll follow your advice and go back to my liner."

The two left the Glory Hole, walked out to the jetty and hailed *sampans* to carry them shipward. Macao Charlie stood at the door, watching the Chinese *sampan* men scull them out to their respective liners.

At the bar, the slit eyed assistant methodically polished glasses, blowing on the surface then vigorously rubbing them. He said softly:

"You'll never get another bartender who'll put the polish on your glasses that I have done. But that's one of the rules of the stage; if an actor's inclined to be nervous give him something to do with his hands."

Charlie turned; he was grinning broadly.

"Speaking of rules, Riccardo, there have been three that I've asked you to follow: first, to steer clear of the boxing game; next, to avoid mixups with women; third, that if you ever got into trouble, leave it to your cagy old father to get you out. The last named seems to be the only one that you've heeded. By the by, if that glue hurts your eyelids, you're safe to take it off now. The two men are aboard their ships by now. The way you've gotten those eyes of yours slitted up certainly makes you look like one of your distant Chinese ancestors!"

The assistant worked deftly with his eyelids. As he did so, he drawled:

"As a matter of fact, I've followed your advice on all three of those points you name. I left the fight racket long before I had to. As for the Olsen woman, I was doing my best to steer clear of her. All she wanted of me, anyway, was to make her husband a little more jealous than he had been. She tricked me into coming to her dressing room. I had no more than gotten past the door when her husband followed me and pulled his gun. I knocked him out just as he was trying to draw a bead on me, the gun went off and you know the rest. I knew I couldn't prove my innocence, though. There's where your third rule comes in. I worked my passage down here on that China Merchant's freighter that brought your papers, yesterday. I knew that if I once got here, you would do the rest!"

Amicably Macao Charlie Mendez and his son Riccardo sat themselves down at the little corner table on the "upper deck".

Charlie poured forth two precious drinks from a precious bottle of 1862 cognac, a bottle that had been saved for just such an occasion.

NEBO

By T. S. STRIBLING

NEBO was such a liar that he never spoke the truth even mentally, in the private recesses of his own thoughts. As he stole away from the plantation and moved along the mucky lane toward Modoc, Arkansas, he mumbled internally: "Guv'nah call me dem hard names once too often. I takes jes' so much off'n anybody, black or white, 'n'en I quits. I quits when I gits ready. I don't b'long to nobody 'cep' myse'f. I's muh own niggah."

Now the Governor had called Nebo a trifling, lubber lipped, bullet headed nigger hundreds of times and it had no more to do with the flight of Nebo than it had with the flight of the prophet to Medina.

And fairly soon Nebo's thoughts veered around to the real, unacknowledged reason for his going.

"Puttin' that yaller skinned, slew footed, cock eyed Crawfish in my place as chauffuh—jes' when de Guv'nah start 'lectioneerin' all ovah Arkansas an' havin' a good time. Put that lowdown, spinlin' Crawfish in my place as chauffuh and set me to pickin' cotton. Huh, I don' 'low no man, black o' white, Guv'nah o' constable, stan' me aroun' lak I b'longed to 'em. No, suh, I's muh own boss. I goes an' comes. I wucks an' loafs—"

In the midst of this declaration of rights, Nebo became aware of a white man about a hundred yards down the lane. The white man waited for Nebo with the inquisitorial silence which all white men adopt toward strange negroes in the black lands of Arkansas.

Apprehension trickled through Nebo. He was moved to pretend that he had forgot something and turn back, but a second look told him that would not do. The white man was darkly sunburned and wore a drooping black mustache; and in

Rippling with humor is this tale of the Governor's Big Black Boy

Arkansas, when a man wears a black drooping mustache, he also totes a pistol. The rationale of such a connection, between mustache and pistol, Nebo did not know; but experience had taught him the two went together.

So now he mooched forward with glum face and protruding lips, apparently brooding over personal troubles as remote from the white man as Sirius; but in reality Nebo was thinking intently what he was going to say when the man with the pistol and mustache began to ask him questions.

The cracker said nothing at all until the black man drew his rag of a hat off his knot of a head and mumbled out—

"Good day, suh."

When the big black had performed this spiritual kow-tow of respect, the white man lighted into him.

"Look here, nigger—where you goin'?"

"Modoc, suh," grumbled Nebo defensively.

"Well, stop walkin' and talk to me. Where'd you come from?"

"Fugguson."

"Say 'sir.'"

"Fugguson, suh."

"What you goin' down to Modoc for right in the middle of cotton pickin' time?"

This was exactly the sort of question which Nebo had anticipated and for which he had been unable to frame an answer. So now he mumbled out as indefinitely as possible—

"Goin' down on a erran', suh."

"Who you goin' down on a errand for, nigger?"

"Fuh—fuh—" and the only name Nebo could possibly call to mind was the Governor's, so perforce he had to grumble out, "Fuh Guv'nah Clegg, suh."

At this the man with the mustache and the hypothetical pistol opened his eyes and changed his tone slightly,

"Oh—you work on Governor Clegg's plantation?"

"Yes, suh."

"Are you—" the white man eyed him uncertainly— "are you—Nebo?"

Nebo pondered whether or not it was safe to admit that he was Nebo. Just then the white man added—

"Are you the Governor's nigger that can lift a bale o' cotton?"

And Nebo nodded and said promptly—

"Yes, suh, I's Nebo."

At this the mustached and bepistoled man was impressed. He looked Nebo up and down as if the black were not another human being but some remarkable animal of which he had heard reports. He finally shook his head regretfully and observed to himself—

"I swear I wish I had a cotton bale."

He glanced up and down the lane as if by chance he might see one lying about somewhere. But the lane was empty except for a bright yellow chaffinch in a candelabrum of sumac. The cracker gave up hope of the spectacular, recalled himself and said dryly—

"Well, you ain't said what you was goin' to Modoc for?"

Uncertainty rushed over Nebo again.

"Well, I—I's gwine on a li'l erran' fuh de Guv'nah."

"What kind of a erran'—hell, spit it out, nigger. You can tell me. I ain't goin' to give nothin' away. Why Governor Clegg app'inted me to my office."

Perspiration broke out on Nebo when he discovered the man really was an officer. He perceived now that he had underestimated the man's fighting complement. He really mounted two six-inch guns aft. The bright certainty of this fact made all other mental operations hazy and unsure for Nebo. He stammered around trying to hit on some possible errand on which the Governor could have sent him so far from home as Modoc. He wet his lips, drew a long breath and launched into the truth, hoping to veer from it later:

"Well suh, de—de Guv'nah gwi' to start 'lectioneerin' right away. So he—he sont me down to Modoc tuh—tuh—git some whisky."

Nebo drew out his bandanna and wiped his inch of forehead. He had to let it go at that. That was the best he could do.

The arsenal with the mustache pondered this invention for several moments and finally said gravely and judicially:

"Well, that's reasonable. The Governor's makin' his run for reelection on a strict prohibition enforcement platform. So nachelly he'd buy his liquor a long way from home. Look here, nigger, who did the Governor tell you to git his liquor from in Modoc?"

The barometer of Nebo's hope dropped abruptly once more to storms and high winds.

"Why—no, suh, he d-didn't tell me jess who to go to. He tole me to—to ax the—sheriff—or—or the constable. Said they'd know whar a—a gen'l'man could git some good whisky."

The man with the mustache cleared his throat and nodded. He was as flattered in his way as Nebo had been at the report that he could lift a bale of cotton.

"I'm glad you found me, nigger," he said. "Now when you get to Modoc inquire for Mr. Al Simmons—Al Simmons, don't you forgit that now."

"No, suh; no, suh, I won't," cried Nebo gratefully with an immense easement flooding his breast.

"Tell him I sent you."

"Yes, su-u-uh, boss."

"Al Simmons."

"I got it; I got it, boss," cried the huge black in the warm, appreciative gaiety of a negro. "When I gits home ag'in, I gwi' express to de Guv'nah de appreciation of yo information."

And he took off his torn hat, bobbed sidewise toward the white man and moved off briskly down the country lane toward Modoc.

WHEN Nebo reached a safe distance from the white man, pleasure dropped from his face like a mask and he went striding along mumbling:

"Good Lawd, what has I done? Tol' a offisah who I was an' wha' I was gwine, when I could jest as easy swore I was gwine wha' I wasn't gwine; an' I wasn't who I was."

These diplomatic slips Nebo determined to correct the best he could by not stopping in Modoc. He would walk on down the river to the next town below Modoc, or, to make matters completely safe, the town below that.

Because, as a matter of fact, Nebo owed the Governor some money. He did not know how much. He had been working for the Governor for four years and gradually he owed him more and more. Now if the officers caught him and took him back to the Governor to work out what he already owed, the extra time and labor would throw him so much deeper in debt that he would never get away in all the rest of his born days. As long as he had been the Governor's chauffeur he did not mind this accumulating obligation, but to get out and sweat picking cotton while his debt mounted up, that was too much.

A termination of the sticky lane in favor of a full fledged mudhole in which wallowed a half-dozen hogs told Nebo that he had entered the purlieus of Modoc, Arkansas.

The black man gazed about the unfamiliar scene, then got across the mudhole by sticking his feet in the fence cracks and slithering along sidewise. He dropped off on the other bank, took a left turn down toward the levee and presently entered the smelly eczema of negro shanties such as break out along the margins of all southern towns.

At the end of Nigger Row, dwarfing the shanties, arose the huge rampart of the levee. The stir of black life in front of him lifted Nebo's heart. There were negro pop stands, dingy negro grocery stores, barber shops run by negroes for negroes, a pool room, even a negro doctor's office. Outside of circus day Nebo had never seen so many black folk together in all his life. They drifted about or sunned themselves amid an atmosphere of palpable and universal leisure. At one end of the Row some one was picking a banjo and out of some shop grated the overpowering static of a radio in which, deeply buried, one might discern the rhythm of a jazz orchestra.

Nebo wanted to stay here. He wished he were not a fugitive debtor. He wished he could cast his lot in this haven where the righteous ceased from troubling and the wicked were at rest. He doubted, down the length of the Father of Waters, if he would find another such Nigger Row as this.

A small, dried up, humpbacked old black woman, guarding a basket sitting on a goods box, caught Nebo's attention. As he passed her she cackled out in a voice as wrinkled as her face:

"Feesh—fecsh—catfeesh—dime! Catfeesh—cawn bread—cawfee—dime."

And Nebo remembered that he had left the Governor's plantation that morning without any breakfast. He ran his hand into his pocket not so much expecting a dime as to reassure himself that he did not have one.

He found a knife, a hame string, a bent horseshoe nail which he used for picking out hickory nuts, three sets of dice of varying degrees of reliability when it came to throwing predetermined points, a shriveled rabbit's foot and an old and frayed day book. A merchant had given Nebo this day book long ago. He had kept it, always intending to mark down in it the number of sacks of cotton he picked in the Governor's fields. He always had a notion that this was the way to check up on the weigher and see if he got credit for all the cotton he picked. But nothing had ever come of it.

He had no dime.

Nebo stopped in front of the old woman.

"Aunty," he began experimentally, "how about a li'l credick today on a li'l piece o' catfish?"

The old woman instantly broke into vituperation:

"Go 'long there, you triflin' nigger! Whyn't you wuck fo' yo' money same as I does?"

"I do wuck," cried Nebo defensively. "I wuck fo' de Guv'nah fo' yeahs an' all I got to show fo' it is muh debt an' muh appetipe."

"You fool niggah," derided the crone. "Whyn't you stick to yo' color. Git in business fo' yo'se'f down heah 'mongst the niggahs lak I done; 'n'en if you happen to git a hold of anything, it's yo's."

Nebo perceived that the old woman was one of those persons who gave away nothing but advice. He said—

"Whut you dealin' in, aunty?" He stuck a big forefinger into her basket.

The old woman cried:

"Keep out o' dat basket!" She slapped at his hand, then screeched, "Put dat feesh back! Put hit back I tell you, you lowdown, triflin', black niggah come roun' heah—"

"How kin I tell if I likes yo' catfish 'fo' I tas'es it?" inquired Nebo philosophically.

"You fool, what yo' likin' my feesh amount to if you ain't got no money to pay. Put dat down, I tells you!"

"How much you take fo' dis piece of fish?" asked Nebo, taking a bite.

"Dime. I tol' ju' a dime. Now niggah, you got to pay me fo' dat feesh."

"Dime yo' lowes' price?"

"Co'se it is; you heard me say a dime."

"Sho, I hea'd you say a dime—" Nebo finished the piece, rolled his tongue around his mouth and added— "but I thought maybe you lak a Jew, sta't away up yander wid yo' price an' 'en fall."

"What would I fall to f'um a dime?" inquired the crone ironically.

"Well, I don't know. Dis piece I et, you fell f'um a dime to nothin', 'less you want to give me a li'l credick."

The fish vender leaned over her box with a flood of abuse:

"You stinkin' black thief! Git on de lebee an' roll cotton fo' yo' grub. Don' come around stealin' it off'n me."

"Now, aunty, I jess jokin'," soothed Nebo, moving self-consciously off toward the levee.

"Youca'n't tell no diff'unce 'twixt jokin' an' stealin', you lowdown country niggah. Fust thing you know, you cain't tell diff'unce 'tween loafin' an' layin' in jail!"

To this threat Nebo returned no answer. He felt hurt at the reception of his jest.

"Town niggahs," he mumbled to himself, "walk out in de country, eat up evahthing an' don' say nothin' 'bout pay. Country niggah come to town, eat one li'l piece o' fish—'gin to talk about jail."

He walked on, sucking his teeth and feeling himself badly treated.

Nebo turned down the levee and increased his speed with the necessity of getting out of town quickly, when he heard ahead of him the yodeling of negroes at work. He looked up and saw above the rim of the levee the torsos of black men heaving at something, the head and shoulders of a mate cursing them, and beyond this stir of industry arose the great lotus petaled stacks of a steamboat.

NEBO paused and looked as an amazing idea entered his head.

"If I gits on dat boat," he muttered to himself, "an' stahts downstream, the Guv'nah won't nevah know what went wid me no mo' than if I done met de fool killah."

And with the queer feeling of a man about to drop out of the known world, Nebo climbed the levee.

On top of the great mole Nebo sidled along and finally sat down on one of the cotton bales. He did not know how to go about getting work on the boat. He watched the line of half naked black men roll the bales down the levee and on to the gangplank of the steamer. They moved in regular order, a regiment of black grotesques; some squat, some tall, some bandy legged, but all of them with corded and rolling thews and muscles, as if God had fallen into a sculpturesque mood and sought in how many fantastic

ways strength could be modeled.

A short negro as broad as he was tall came up to Nebo's bale and said—

"Git off there, niggah, an' let a man git holt uh that bale what kin han'l it."

Nebo slid off and moved over toward the red faced mate. He hardly knew what to say to a man who was using such verbal fireworks as the mate was using. He moistened his lips, made one or two false starts and finally mumbled out—

"Uh—uh—say, boss, how 'bout gittin' a l'l job on dis boat?"

Nebo expected to be cursed black and blue for venturing to speak to the mate, but the white man merely asked, without turning his head—

"Ever roust any before?"

"N-no, suh."

"Cain't use you."

And having said this with perfect consideration to Nebo, he broke out furiously at one of the men up the slope:

"Damn you, Slickerback, cain't you hol' that cotton in line? Hold it, you damn' nigger! Jump in front of it."

The mate himself backed precipitately out of the way of the descending bale. Slickerback dashed after it, swung his cotton hook full arm into the end of the whirling bale to slew it around. Unfortunately the iron caught the end off-center. The next moment the force of rotation jerked Slickerback on top of the dashing bale. He scrambled there for a flash, next instant shot over on to the levee below and the bale bounded over Slickerback and came straight at the mate and Nebo.

The boat's officer bundled to one side, howling:

"Stop the damn' thing! Damn it, shove another bale in its path! Stop it!" There was no telling which way the thing would bounce when it went past him.

Nebo crouched to one side like a wrestler. As it bounded by, he dived in, grabbed its end and surged upward. It twisted past him, almost taking his huge arms out of the sockets. He made a wild leap, caught on his feet and scotched again. This time the bale slewed around, was about to roll down again, when Nebo bucked it, tucking aside his knot of a head and striking it with the black wall of his shoulders. The bale stopped. Nebo got his arms around it, worked his knees under the downhill side; then, heaving back, he lifted the other edge clear of the ground. With every muscle trembling he went shuffling in a half sitting posture toward the gangplank with the bale held clear in his lap.

The whole regiment of roustabouts stopped to gaze. The white passengers on the cabin deck began calling—

"Look! Looky yonder at that nigger!"

At the stir he was making, renewed power flowed into the giant. Instead of dropping the vast weight at the end of the gangplank he shuffled along with it in his lap, leaning backward at a perilous angle.

Even the white passengers realized there was something prodigious about this. They shouted—"Hold it up, big boy! Hold it up, big nigger!"

Suddenly a windfall of dimes, quarters, dollars clinked down on the boiler deck, the ancient homage of wealth and soft living to strength.

Nebo strained to the end of the stage plank and dropped the bale off his knees on the main deck. He straightened and drew a vast breath into his cavern of a chest. The mate strode to the end of the gangplank.

"Stevedo'!" he bellowed. "Stevedo'! Damn it, where in the hell is the stevedo'!"

A middle aged black man came running forward.

"Yas, suh, Mistah Anduhson? What you want, Mistah Anduhson?"

"Give that black rhinocerous there a cotton hook and put him on the payroll. And next time I call you, be on han'."

"Yas, sub, Mistah Anduhson, be rat on han'."

Out in front, on the boiler deck, while he waited for his cotton hook, Nebo gathered up the quarters and half dollars and a scattering of bills with the practised circular sweeps of a crap shooter.

When the cotton was loaded the roustabouts trickled off the boat and over inside the levee. Nebo followed them with his pockets full of money and his head full of uncertainty. He was uneasy about two things: how soon the steamboat, the *Robert Rhea*, would pull out from the levee, and how far he could, with safety, use certain dice which he had in his pocket.

He studied the backs of the peaked and kinky heads in front of him. How wise were these steamboat boys? How long would they stand for an exceptional run of luck? What would happen if they grabbed up and inspected his sort of dice? Would they shoot and cut or maul with their fists or just cuss. He wished he knew. Incertitude of the ways of river niggers surrounded him like a beleaguring army. He could not very well ask anybody about the results of loaded and false dice, but he did ask Slickerback when the boat would leave Modoc.

"Why, who you runnin' from, niggah?" asked Slickerback, looking up at the giant.

"Nobody," grumbled Nebo. "I don't haf to ast nobody when I gwi, or where I gwi. I b'longs to muhse'f. I's muh own niggah."

"Well, you ain't got enough niggah to brag about," grumbled Slickerback who was envious of the money the white passengers had thrown down to the giant.

On the inside of the levee the roustabouts chose a level place, brushed it clean with their caps and squatted around it. A thick negro drew out a pair of dice. He rolled them out with a snap and a grunt. Six pips came up. All around the circle bets were made. Quarters, half dollars and bills were tossed on the ground. It rode there for awhile, ownerless money, while the player rolled for his point. After awhile the player crapped out and the dice passed to the next man.

Nebo watched the play with a gradually growing excitement. He placed bets with varying fortune, but what he really wanted were the dice. As he watched their progress around the ring, his heart beat, his palm tingled to get hold of them. He felt keyed up to the moment with a kind of crap shooting virtuosity. Already in drawing out money for his stakes Nebo had concealed two more sets of dice in the interstices of his big fingers. He squatted there on his heels, watching the dice come to him, a kind of black insurance policy against the hazards of loss. He wanted so badly for the man next to him to lose the dice that he bet a dollar he would win. Then he would be pleased no matter what happened. The fellow came out with a six, and lost the dice the next roll. Laughter went around the circle.

NEBO swept up the cubes with a pass of his paw and began shaking them. They jostled automatically into the pinch of his little finger; another pair was released from between his first and middle finger. With a great "huh" and even a finger snap, he spun them out. The two ivories danced like miniature tops. When they stopped spinning seven pips showed for half a second. Nebo swept them into his palm again. He had expected a win. It was, in fact, not possible for those particular dice to show anything but seven pips.

A chorus of mumbling went around the ring.

"Nachel, fust crack!"

"At niggah gits a good hol' on 'em babies. Watch him rock 'em an' sing to 'em."

Nebo left his winnings on the ground for a new stake.

"Fade me, brothahs, fade me," he crooned, nodding at the men beside him; then he began weaving around, shaking his big fist again.

One of the roustabouts raked Nebo's pile with a stick, separating a two dollar bill which he covered with another bill. The next man put up the rest of the wager.

A thrill went through Nebo to think he was squatting here inside the levee shooting for five dollars a shot. He wished Crawfish was there to see him. He would like to see Crawfish's eyes bug out. In

the midst of this inner glorification, he was thinking intently what to shoot next. He had a pair of dice between his ring and the middle finger due to shoot eights. He loosed these in the hollow cavern of his fist and spun them out with a snap.

"Big Kate f'um Natchez," lilted the giant. "Come uhlong Katie to yo' papa! Don' fall down on yo' daddy!"

He rattled them again, thinking swiftly which pair to loose now. He mustn't throw eights again so quickly. So he imprisoned his eights and loosed his original dice again. He was taking a chance. He might possibly crap out. But it was only a single chance; the next shot he would switch back to his eights. He snapped and spun. To his own amazement a pair of fours turned up.

Nebo was overjoyed.

"Oh babies, kiss yo' daddy, you cain't fall down!"

And he raked in his ten dollars as a new stake.

"Look heah," growled a black man across the circle. "Lemme see them bones, niggah."

This was an extraordinary break of luck; to have his dice inspected at the very throw on which they could be shown. The giant brushed the cubes across the ring with his fingertips.

"Look at 'em, black boy, see whar yo' money went," crooned Nebo.

The squat man inspected them but was not satisfied.

"Look heah," he growled. "You's a big niggah, but you kin be whittled down, black man, t'well you is a little bitty niggah," and he tossed the ivories back.

Nebo looked at him.

"What you talkin' to me like dat fuh?" he asked gloomily.

"Jes' tellin' you whut kin be done."

At this threat Nebo didn't know what to do. He had a twenty dollar stake. So much money he had never seen before outside of the Governor's pocketbook. But he was afraid to play his loaded dice again. Some negro might grab them up.

He left off this thought and began shaking the true cubes. But to risk twenty dollars, really to risk it, wrung at the giant's viscera. He glanced around at three negroes who had divided his wager among them. As he glanced he saw two men from him a small, yellow, hatchet faced man with a tow sack on the ground beside him.

Nebo stared at the yellow man, stricken. The strength seemed to ooze out of his body.

"Fuh Gawd's sake, Crawfish," he gasped, "how come you heah, niggah?"

"How came anybody heah," retorted Crawfish belligerently. "Comin' to the boat, I saw this crap game and dropped by."

"But I—uh—thought you was wid de Guv'nah," gasped Nebo blankly.

"Shoot, niggah," hurried two or three voices. "Roll dem bones!"

"I am wid de Guv'nah," said Crawfish.

"Wha' is he?"

"Comin' to de boat in a minute."

"Fuh Gawd's sake. Guv'nah comin' to de boat?" gasped Nebo.

"Niggah—*shoot* dem dice!" pleaded the players, out of patience.

"Shuah he is," said Crawfish. "He telephomed the cap'n to hol' the boat fo' him. They been holdin' it about two hours."

Nebo broke into a sweat. The Governor had found out where he was—from the officer, no doubt—and had wanted him badly enough to hold a steamboat. He must owe the Governor a mint of money.

The black man half rose from his haunches.

"I got to go!" he cried.

"Not befo' you roll dem dice!" bawled half a dozen voices.

Nebo rolled excitedly. He shot a couple of dice. He was not sure what two. They turned up a seven. He grabbed his winnings and backed out of the ring. As he did so somebody seized the dice. There came a howl:

"Looky heah! Phony dice! Ain't got nothin' but fo's an' three's on 'em!"

"Grab him!"

"Stop him!"

"Don't let him git away wid dat money!"

"Cut him down, you damn—"

The whole circle fell into violent action. Every man was leaping toward Nebo, trying to stop him.

The giant sidestepped the man in front of him, twisted past another, next instant was dashing down the inside of the levee toward Nigger Row with the whole pack yelling and cursing behind him.

Nebo bolted on legs keyed to fear. The earth hurtled beneath him, a gale beat against his face. The whole levee, Nigger Row, fences, shops, whatnot, flashed toward him at tremendous speed.

Behind him came the howling, cursing roustabouts. Sticks and old bottles flew past his head. Nebo ran harder. He had to get out of range . . . a beer bottle in the back of the head . . . Amid the uproar behind him he heard the sudden hard chatter of an automatic. A bullet grazed Nebo's calf. They were shooting at his legs.

The big black flung a terrified glance over his shoulder. What he saw was more terrible than what he had imagined. The whole gang of roustabouts were scattering in every direction, while close behind them, shouting for them to stop, dashed the white man with the drooping mustache and the pistol.

The barking of the firearm lent Nebo wings. He veered off at an angle to make a hit difficult, and dashed into Nigger Row. If he could make Nigger Row—if he could lose himself in Nigger Row.

He shot around the corner and went in on a wide angle. He straightened out for a hard run before the officer came in range again, when somebody yelled out—

"Stop, there, Nebo, an' give me my five dollars."

He looked up and saw the hatchet faced Crawfish in the middle of the alley. He had the tow sack in one hand and an open knife in the other.

"Gimme my five, Nebo!" the yellow negro shouted again.

"Offisahcomin'!" warned Nebo. "Run, niggah; white man aftah us!"

"You big liar," yelled Crawfish, "it's them rousters after you! Gimme my five, Nebo, or I'll hold you and let 'em catch you."

Nebo realized that Crawfish had cut through a short way and knew nothing of the constable attempting the arrest. He gasped out in a desperate voice—

"Run yo'se'f, Crawfish, you damn' fool!"

But Crawfish dropped his sack, went suddenly on his toes and lunged at the speeding giant with his knife.

Nebo dashed full tilt into Crawfish. He flung out a hand, caught the knife arm about the elbow, grabbed the yellow man's shoulder with the other. He made a heave, whirled Crawfish's body around like a sixteen pound hammer, and loosed him in a terrific flyaway. He glimpsed Crawfish crashing into a rail fence. He wheezed out, "Guess that'll hol' je!" and the next moment Nebo was hurtling on up Nigger Row.

THE ALLEY itself looked interminable. He knew he would never reach the turn before the officer rounded the corner and opened fire. Midway up the street he saw the shriveled old catfish vender with her basket on her box. Nebo slewed in, hunkered down on the safe side of the box.

"Aunty, fuh Gawd's sake, he'p me!" he gasped.

"What's matter, you big thief!" cried the old woman, staring with yellowish eyes.

"Offisah!" gasped Nebo through wet lips.

The old black woman jerked aside the dirty red curtain that formed the back of her box.

"Git in thah, you lowdown, feesh-stealin' country hunk!"

Nebo crouched and compressed himself inside. The old woman shook the curtains smooth again. Nebo panted through his open mouth to prevent a sound. The side of the pine box pressed his flat nose.

Footsteps came running up the alley. They stopped at the fish stand.

"Aunt Rose," panted the twanging voice of a hillman, "did a big nigger—did a strange nigger run past here?"

"Ya-as, suh, yas, suh, Mistuh Constable—same lowdown niggah whut stole some feesh f'um me dis mawnin'—oncivilized country niggah come uhlong heah dis mawnin', says to me, 'Whut yo' catfeesh wuth—'"

"Damn it, shut up. Which way did he go?"

"Rat up dat way!" cried Aunt Rose in a high key. "In betwixt Mistuh Brackus's pool room and Eph Tiljo's ba'bah shop." She was leaning over her box, her knees pressing Nebo's arm as she pointed out the spot.

Nebo heard the constable dash off again, his feet drumming in diminuendo through the dust of Nigger Row. The black man remained absolutely motionless. Presently his curtain was pulled back and the old crone looked in.

"You lowdown, black, thievin' niggah! I ort to 'a' turned you ovah to dat white man forty times. I ort to 'a' sont you to jail fuh stealin' my feesh, you dirty ondependable—git out o' heah, niggah, an take de back track 'fo' dat white man comes back lookin' fuh you ag'in!"

Nebo squeezed out of the box, straightened, then strode back toward the levee. He would go on down past the steamboat, clear through the village and out of town. He ran to the corner, turned and slowed down to a quick walk when he was in sight of possible white eyes. A running nigger would not do before a white man.

But his swing was the equivalent of a round trot in a short man when Nebo came to an astonished halt in the middle of the road. He stated, amazed:

"Crawfish," he cried out, "you doggone fool niggah, whut you stan'in' tha in that road fuh? You know doggone well dat po' white constable be back in a minute!"

Crawfish looked at Nebo with dazed eyes.

"I fell down. Which way is the *Robert Rhea*? Is—is that you, Nebo?"

"Fuh Gawd's sake," gasped Nebo, beginning to be frightened at what he had done. "Is you addled Crawfish? Heah, heah—" he shook him by the shoulder—"unaddle yo'se'f, niggah, an' make tracks out o' dis town, 'cause that there po' white constable— What's in that sack? Hurry up—step uhlong—" and he began propelling Crawfish down the levee, looking over his shoulder for a reappearance of the constable.

Crawfish shuffled along, remonstrating:

"Look heah, Nebo, where is the boat? What direction is the—"

"Come uhlong, I's gwi' put you on it as we go by." He hurried his man on, still with a weather eye to the rear, when out from behind a shack just ahead of them stepped the constable.

The man with the drooping black mustache had his pistol leveled in the loose way a fast shot holds his gun.

"Now you run ag'in, you black elephant," he advised in his hill country whang, "an' I'll fill you so damn' full o' holes—"

Nebo stared at the white man.

"Why, why Mistuh Constable, Ah—Ah wasn't runnin' f'um you—"

"The hell you wasn't!"

"No, suh, I wasn't," protested Nebo emptily, thinking wildly for some other reason for his haste.

The white man took the sack out of Crawfish's hand, shook it, opened it and drew out a two gallon jug.

"Uh-huh—here it is." He nodded.

He caught Crawfish by the arm and began walking him toward town.

"Somebody told me they was a nigger down here on the levee bootleggin' licker, and now I gotche!"

A weakness came over Nebo at this crevasse into which Crawfish had fallen.

"S-s-say—looky heah, Mist' Constable, d-dat ain't Crawfish's licker. He didn't have nothin' to do wid dat licker."

"Well, whose licker was it?"

Nebo wet his lips, then brightened, nodded significantly.

"Why Mist' Constable—don'—don't you 'member who dat licker b'longed to?"

This really irritated the officer.

"You black gorilla," he whanged. "Have me run my legs off ketchin' a damn' moonshiner, then ask me if I don't remember who his licker belonged to!"

"Well looky heah, white man," cried Nebo in surprise, "you know good an' well 'tain't his'n, when you tole me yo'se'f this mawnin' where to go git hit."

"I tol' je!"

"Yes, suh, you tol' me to go to Mistuh Al Simmons an' git hit, an' I done that. Don' you 'member. You said it was goin' to be good whisky a gem'man could drink, so I done that."

The man with the drooping mustache stood looking at Nebo and then at the befuddled Crawfish.

"So it's the Governor's whisky?"

"Why o' co'se," said Nebo.

The custodian of the law uncorked the jug, sniffed it, tasted the bottom of the stopper.

"I—that is Al's whisky," he ejaculated in surprise.

"'Cose it is. I went an' done jes' lak you tole me."

"Look here, what's this yeller nigger doing with the stuff?"

Once started on a prosperous invention, Nebo followed the cue automatically.

"Why, I was stan'in there lookin' at them rivah niggahs shootin' craps an' 'long comes this here Crawfish an' picks up my sack and lights out wid it. Cose I takes out aftah him to git hit back fuh de Guv'nah—that's whut you see me runnin' so ha'd about—tryin' to git back de Guv'nah's licker."

The man with the drooping black mustache replaced his pistol in his pocket dubiously.

"Where is the Governor?"

"C'mon, c'mon," cried the giant, seizing the jug and turning off down the levee. Guv'nah's rat down heah on de *Bobby Rhea* holdin' de boat t'will I gits dah."

Crawfish reached after the jug.

"Here, gimme that jug, Nebo, I got to take hit—"

Nebo gave him a casual shove that sent him across the alley and sitting flat in the dust.

"He's addled," explained the black man genially. "I flaung him into the fence an' he thinks this jug is his'n." He strode down the great dyke toward the distant lotus tops of the smokestacks.

"Not so fast there," growled the constable, hurrying after him. "You try to git away and I'll—"

At that moment the men heard the ringing of a bell. Nebo increased his stride to a trot.

"Careful there, nigger. I'll shoot."

"But Mistuh Offisah!" cried Nebo. "Dat's de bell. De Guv'nah's on dat boat an' he's boun' to have dis jug."

The desperate certitude of the black man caused even the constable to break into a run behind Nebo. The two mounted the high rampart and ran toward the boat. Nebo waved the jug and yodeled at the top of his lungs:

"Guv'nah! O-Oh, Guv'nah Clegg! Dis is Nebo! Dis heah is Nebo wid yo' jug!"

The packet was drawing away from the levee with a soft hissing of steam. Officer and black man ran faster. The white man shouted in his nasal voice:

"Is Governor Clegg aboard? Governor Clegg!"

In the interim of silence after the engines had stopped backing and before they started forward a voice sang out—

"What do you want with Governor Clegg?"

"Is this his nigger?" howled the officer, showing Nebo on the levee as best he could.

And Nebo yodeled desperately:

"Oh Guv'nah—dis is Nebo! I been chasin' you all day long, hopin' I might he'p wid de ca' if'n it got stuck up in de mud!"

A distinguished looking man, in the dapper yet countrified garb a politician affects when he is canvassing the rural districts, came out on the main deck.

"What is it?" he called in the round carrying tones of a public speaker.

"Is this yo' nigger?" bawled the constable again.

A moment's pause.

"Yes, that's my nigger, Nebo. Why?"

"Did you send him to git—"

"Hush! Hush, white man!" cried Nebo. "Don' yell out licker 'fo' all de passengehs. 'Member de Guv'nah's makin' a strong pro-hition race!"

The constable hesitated, then whanged in an aside to Nebo--

"All right, then--you ast him so I'll un'erstan'."

Nebo drew a long breath, licked his lips, then held the jug up on his finger.

"Guv'nah—ah--ah's briugin' you dis. Yo'—yo' molasses. Crawfish was--was tryin' to run away wid yo' molasses, but I cotch him an' brung hit back."

The man aboard the packet seemed surprised, but he evidently gathered the implication of molasses.

"You don't mean to say that Crawfish betrayed a—well—that's all right. Grab the gangplank there and come aboard with it."

The *Robert Rhea* was swinging her complicated landing gear toward the levee again. Nebo ran toward it with the demijohn on his finger. The constable followed slowly and uncertainly.

"Looky here, nigger," he growled from the rear, "The Governor—what he says don't sound to me lak you tol' jest exactly a straight tale."

Nebo heaved himself up on the end of the plank. The nigger-engine chattered and he swung high in air and out over the river.

"I 'clar', Mist' Constable," he called down from his airy platform, "you is the mos' 'spicious man I evuh saw. You know I got mo' sense 'n try to tell a lie to a sma't man lak you . . ."

A Story of the Big Town Racketeers

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

THE RETURN OF FLASH McGUIRE

THERE was lacking in Jim McGuire's arrival home this evening the usual cheer that pervaded all he did these recent months. Claire, his wife, watched him as she served the well cooked evening meal, and was moved within her to utter the prayer that had been unspoken on her lips for a long time. He was somber, quiet, and there was on him more than the weariness that came of driving a cab through city streets all the long day.

As he finished eating, Jim McGuire leaned back and glanced oddly at his wife.

"I saw Hoby Hamilton today," he announced.

Her eyelids flickered; that was all.

"I thought so," she said quietly.

He lighted his after supper cigaret.

"I was first out on the Hotel Amherson line and had to take him." Jim continued. "He rode on the folding seat and talked to me through the cab window all the way. He was advertising plenty of ready money in the clothes he wore and there was a diamond in his tie. He's traveled far since the old days."

"Did he invite you along?"

"He did."

She refrained from asking the next question. There was no need.

"I told him nothing doing, now or any time," Jim said, "and I didn't talk in riddles. He grinned and showed his gold tooth and flashed a wad of heavy dough at me, and told me he always enjoyed my line of humor. I said I wasn't being funny. That went over even bigger. He went off saying that there was no hurry, I could think it over and he'd be looking for me."

Claire got up, stood a moment in thought, then walked around beside Jim. She ran a hand over his hair and suddenly drew his head to her with a certain repressed fierceness. She was young, pretty and not a year married, and she knew something already of what it was to lose her man.

Jim held back the rest of his tale. He wished her to know that much, but the rest would not help. And the rest was important, too.

He had also met Joe Lombardo.

This had occurred immediately after he discharged Hoby Hamilton at a busy corner on the upper East Side, and while the departing Hamilton was still in sight. Lombardo had strolled up, hands in pockets, eyes following the nattily tailored back of the other, and a smile of faint amusement on his face. Lombardo dressed his compact, feline figure well, but quietly; his gaze was shrewd and his swarthy, slight smile ever present.

"Hanging out with the old buddy again, Flash?"

Jim McGuire had once been secretly proud of the name Flash. It had connotations which are regarded as virtues in certain circles. He did not welcome it now. He met Lombardo's gaze and smiled a bit ruefully, a bit wryly.

"A hackman takes them as they come, Joe. I'm a hackman now."

"On the straight and narrow, eh?"

"I am."

Joe smiled tolerantly, understandingly.

"A year up the river and a brand new wife can do things to a guy that no cop ever will do. What did Hamilton have to say?"

"He wants me to get back in the racket with him."

"He would!" Something of respect then appeared in Joe's tone. "He could use you, Flash. I could myself. You've got a head on you and plenty of nerve. You can be counted on in a tight corner. Why not come around and see me sometime?"

Jim laughed.

"Ask Hoby what I said when he asked that."

"No, I won't." Joe rocked easily on his heels. "I ask Hoby nothing, boy. If I have to talk to him any time, I'm going to be *telling* him!"

"I see," said Jim. "It's like that, is it?"

"Hoby Hamilton's gotten too ambitious, much too ambitious to be popular with Joe Lombardo. His hats are three sizes larger than when you knew him. He's Moses on the mountain these days. I'd keep as far away from him as possible if I were you, Flash."

"I will!" Jim, preparing to return to the wheel, was grimly emphatic.

"And listen," added Lombardo. "If you meet Hoby again and he becomes a problem of any kind, you can look me up and maybe I can do you a favor, boy. Without obligations."

"Thanks, Joe. I guess I can handle him."

"Have it your way. But keep that in mind. I know him."

And Jim McGuire had gone his way with a complex and unwelcome situation looming ever larger before him.

He had felt certain at first that he was competent to handle Hoby Hamilton. Hoby had presented no large problem in other and more gaudy days. And that is exactly why Jim, after some reflection, was not so sure of his ability to handle the man now. Hoby had a simple, direct mind; he took what he wanted and confused luck with shrewdness. Hoby had risen in his dubious world; Jim had been licked. To Hoby the inference was obvious—Jim was a valuable tool, not quite bright enough to be trusted any more as an ally. Hoby desired Jim's services and patronizingly declined to take seriously his refusal.

That year in the penitentiary had tempered Jim without breaking him. That, and the influence of Claire. At first indulgent of her ideals and her unswerving loyalty, he had later come to regard them with a little awe and a passionate urge to be worthy. He had quit the old ways on an impulse of something more powerful than fear, and fear would not deter him from his new path.

The McGuires lived in a small flat on First Avenue. The quarters were humble, but Claire saw to it that they were comfortable. They had married immediately after his release. Hacking, Jim had decided, afforded a quick means of gaining a living. Within six months he had not only achieved a steady if modest income, but had opened a savings account for some future opportunity.

A WEEK passed, and then one evening the door bell rang and Hoby Hamilton walked in. He wore an air of radiant prosperity, and the same thing was in his loud greetings. He had seen Claire before, but Jim had never permitted an extension of the acquaintance. Hoby took a chair in the little living room; he crossed his legs and lighted a cigar. He talked heartily and in high good humor, and he addressed himself chiefly to Claire. In his manner there was both calculated diplomacy and unexpected interest.

"Nice little place you got here," he volunteered. "A pretty setup. I'd like to show you my suite of rooms at the Amberson. It's a knockout. The Third Avenue furnished rooms is a long ways back, all right, ain't they, Flash?"

He was discreet enough, but no hypocrisy veiled his income or its source. Pride in them ruled him; that and pride of his power and cunning.

"It's a long ways back to a lot of things! You got a tough break, but I was luckier, Flash. We were both kind of reckless in those days, I guess. I got wise to myself in time, and figured out a few ways to bring in the jack without the risk. Guns hire cheap, them and the mutts behind them. Brains is what collects these days!"

"I suppose so," agreed Jim.

His tone indicated that he withheld certain reservations.

"Now, you're an odd lad, Flash. Working your head off on the toughest racket in town—hacking. I hacked once a couple of months and I know." He leaned forward and included Claire in his proposal. "How'd you like to clean up a bit of the soft money yourself? How about a nice fur coat for the little lady—say a mink or a sable?"

"Come in handy on cold days occasionally," Jim admitted dryly.

"It must be nice," Claire hastened to add, quite self-assured now that she had something familiar to cope with, "but we never let such things worry us. Some day maybe we'll have them, but there's no hurry. I have something now I couldn't have a year ago." And her glance went toward Jim.

Hamilton abandoned the subject and presently began to make his farewells. He lingered over Claire's hand and assured her of his friendship. He was bluffly cordial with Jim, as though an early encounter was understood between them. And then he was gone.

A couple of days went by in which Jim and Claire made no mention of Hoby. Each could most earnestly have talked, but neither wanted to distress the other by bringing up a subject better forgotten.

Jim felt that he could estimate pretty accurately the extent of Hoby's zeal. Hoby would make another effort, and while Jim awaited it with no great dread, he disliked the suspense. Urgently he desired the affair ended, simply to put it out of mind.

Then, one evening while returning from work, Jim learned of Hoby's move.

He stood outside his own door, talking to the cop on the beat. The officer had been strolling by as Jim walked up the street, and he paused to pass the time of day. He knew Jim's history and gave him casual surveillance, but it was more in the spirit of friendly tolerance than of enmity.

"I hear you been taking up with Hoby Hamilton again, Flash," he remarked dryly.

Jim shot a glance at the officer, but could read nothing from his face.

"No," he said, "I have not. I've seen him, but he and I do no business together."

"That so? He must be a friendly cuss then."

"How so?"

The cop swung his stick indifferently.

"Oh, coming around calling during the daytime like an old pal."

"*What?*"

The word was shot at the cop. The officer grinned.

"Is that news to you? I saw him coming out of the house yesterday afternoon."

Jim paused no longer, but raced upstairs.

There was a moment of panic in Claire's eyes when he spoke to her, but it passed. She had spent hours of dread and indecision, not knowing what Jim might do if she told him. Now she must tell him, and she held back nothing.

Hoby had dropped in unannounced early the previous afternoon. Claire had no choice but to entertain him. He remained an hour. He sought, with what he considered much subtlety, to sound out Claire's potentialities. To Claire he was grossly obvious. He had a manner of flattery which might have appealed to shallower women; to her it was cloying and insincere.

His prime motive was the winning of Jim's service through an appeal to her feminine ambition. He departed, disgruntled, without the least manner of satisfaction.

Jim was able to set her mind at ease about his intentions. His wrath was quickly in hand. He proposed to do but one thing, and he did it promptly. He called the Hotel Amberson on the telephone, was connected with Hoby Hamilton and he told off that individual in a stretch of invective as brief as it was scorching. He hung up without waiting for a reply.

Hoby Hamilton would now have no further reason to doubt the word of Jim McGuire.

Two mornings later when Jim reported at the garage to get his car, there was a message for him on the floor. He was wanted in the office. He reported at the superintendent's desk and the latter handed him a pay envelop. The sum was marked on the face of the envelop, and Jim recognized it quickly as the amount due him to date on the payroll.

"How come?" he asked.

"Sorry, McGuire. Letting you go."

"Letting me go! On what account?"

The man shrugged.

"Take a good guess and you'll be right."

"I see," said Jim slowly. "On my bad record, eh? But that's not news to you. I told you."

"Company orders, McGuire. Sorry. Nothing to be done."

And the superintendent, evidently embarrassed, turned to a pile of papers on his desk, closing the interview. Jim laughed shortly with contemptuous understanding and walked out of the office.

It was all very clear to Jim. Hoby, stung to vicious retaliation by disappointment, had made confidential disclosures about Jim to some one in the taxi company; and the company, sensitive about the reputation of its force, had acted in self-defense.

Before saying a word to Claire about it, Jim drew his savings from the bank and traveled across town to Automobile Row on upper Broadway. Several manufacturers of taxicabs maintained showrooms there, marketing their products on liberal terms of payment. By nightfall Jim was an independent taxi operator, grimly content with the transaction.

Some days were occupied securing the necessary taximeter, garage space and the various licenses. When all was ready, Jim drove the cab to his home to show it off to Claire. She raced downstairs to view it with exclamations of delight and to be taken for a ride as its first passenger. Their dismay at Hoby's mean revenge was turned almost to gratitude.

"If's he's satisfied," said Jim, "that makes it mutual. He can go take a running jump off the Battery now with my cheerful consent."

But Hoby Hamilton learned of Jim's new venture and was not yet satisfied at all. Jim had left the cab at its garage a few

evenings later, well content with its earnings, and was about to enter his house when a hail from the curb stopped him. A car was parked there, a swift, dark sedan containing two men.

"You Flash McGuire?" one asked.

Jim failed to recognize either.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Jump in," the fellow instructed, opening the rear door. "We want to talk to you."

Jim did nothing of the sort. He was instantly on guard.

"Why?" he asked. "Who are you?"

The other smiled with a twist of the lips and pulled from his pocket a gold detective's badge. It spoke volumes. Jim stepped into the car.

The ride was short. They drove in silence to East End Avenue, and there, parked alongside Carl Schurz Park, they settled down to an unhurried, amiable talk. It consisted chiefly of questions by the officers and short, wary responses by Jim.

THE DETECTIVES did not immediately reveal the purpose of this informal examination. They inquired in detail into Jim's activities during the past months. And they seemed to know a great deal about him already. What had he done? Where had he gone? Whom had he seen?

"What the hell's up?" Jim demanded. "What are you after? I'm in the clear and you know it."

"Maybe!" was the reply. "We'll just make certain."

Jim brooded, his eyes now blue and flinty, his lean jaw hard.

"You're holding out," he said. "Maybe we better have a showdown. If this is a pinch, take me to the station house and let me get a lawyer. If it's not, turn me loose right now."

"Oh-ho!" uttered one, with unpleasantly elevated eyebrows. "You want action, eh? Well, we'll give it to you." Then he snapped, "What do you know about the Latham Laundry safe job?"

For a moment Jim did not answer. His heart was faintly sick.

"The one where they killed the watchman?"

"Yes."

"What's the use?" said Jim. "The answer is no, but if you think I was in on the job, pull me in quick and let me alone. There's no confession, and you'll waste your time trying to get one."

Another question was shot at him, and another. They came from both sides, shrewd traps for the unwary or the slow of mind. Jim was neither, and his answers told them nothing—except that Jim was at home all the night of the tragic affair, and learned of it only from the morning papers.

Finally the questions ceased. The detectives looked at each other. One shrugged, the other uttered a disappointed oath. They lighted cigars. They drove Jim home and left him with a noncommittal warning to be on hand if wanted again.

Hoby Hamilton at this point bore Jim McGuire but one feeling—an enduring grudge. He could not abide the idea of Jim's defiance. Further, any man in his position might well fear an ancient ally who has rebelled. And for such a man as Hoby, to fear is to strike out, instantly and viciously.

Jim knew, without learning anything more, that the cops had been stirred up about him through the subtle channels of information maintained by the underworld, and that the tip had for its source the brain of Hoby Hamilton. It was a scheme of no great shrewdness, but an effective one. Its outcome might be doubtful, but it held enticing possibilities. They were not enticing to Jim.

At ten that evening Jim walked into a small restaurant on the upper East Side and glanced about the tables. It was a commonplace restaurant in appearance, but the initiated knew it to be something more. Jim had come here in search of Joe Lombardo, and he found him.

Joining a small group gathered about coffee cups at one table, he dropped into

a chair and nodded to Lombardo, who was seated opposite, obviously the center of the group. Joe gave him a subtle, wise smile and made him welcome. They talked casually of many things for a time. Then Lombardo rose, jerked his head slightly and strolled to another table. Jim followed.

"What's on your mind, Flash?" Lombardo asked.

"You've probably guessed already, Joe. Remember your invitation with regard to Hoby Hamilton?"

A very special manner of interest kindled in Lombardo's eyes.

"I do," he said.

"Well, I need a hand. Here's the story."

And Jim proceeded to narrate it, while Lombardo listened, tapping ashes from his cigaret, an appreciative expression on his face. He heard Jim through, then spent a moment in reflection.

"Flash, how far does this reform stuff of yours go?"

"How do you mean that, Joe?"

"Well--do you own a gun?"

"No."

"Will you accept the loan of one?"

"Depends entirely what for. The reform stuff is on the up and up, Joe."

"I get you," Lombardo said. "But you want something—and if you're game to take a chance maybe you'll get it."

For a moment Jim stared into Lombardo's eyes without speaking.

"So it seems," he said. "Well, I don't like the kind of chance I'm taking now. I'm not built to like it. You can count me in."

Lombardo's subtle Latin smile appeared again.

"That's all I wanted to hear you say. Leave the rest to me. Here's what you do. Come around tomorrow night at eleven o'clock in a cab and pick me up. Don't get out. I'll watch for you at that time, and it'll be better if we're not seen together. Get me?"

"O. K, boy!"

Lombardo rose, they shook hands and the business was done. And over the throne of Hoby Hamilton, racketeer, a brand new shadow loomed.

ON THE dot of eleven the following evening a taxi coasted to a stop before the small restaurant on the upper East Side. Jim McGuire peered from the window. Lombardo was at the cash counter just within the restaurant, buying cigarets. He sauntered forth and stepped quite casually into the cab.

"On the button!" he snapped abruptly at the driver. "Beat it!"

The cab moved hurriedly.

"Here's the dope," Lombardo told Jim. All his graceful indolence was gone; he was a man of action now. "I'm working on a tip that came to me a few days ago. I didn't know just what to do about it until you came along and gave me an idea. We're going to Foxy Madden's for the evening. I'm going to roll the bones and you're going to hang around and look wise. For all they need know, you can be packing a rod for me for protection for my bankroll."

"Get you!" said Jim.

Something familiar was rousing in his blood.

"Now some time tonight Hoby Hamilton's going to drop in. I think he'll come alone. I want you to be out of sight. Foxy's place is just an apartment, so you can ease into the room next to where the table is. It's a kind of bedroom, and usually not lighted. Stay there. Watch through the curtains and keep an eye on me. If anything starts to happen, take your cue from me, see?"

"Starts to happen? What, for instance?"

"I have an idea. But never mind. You just do as I tell you."

"You're the boss," said Jim.

"And here--slip this in your pocket. I hope not, but it may come in handy."

A compact automatic pistol passed into Jim's hand. He hefted it and found it familiar. It was dropped into his coat pocket. Lombardo gave the cab driver the address through the window and

settled back in the seat for the remainder of the ride.

Foxy Madden's was not a gambling house in the usual sense of the term. Nevertheless, the stiffest crap games in the country were played to a freezeout at Foxy's. A big time gambler himself, he maintained a small apartment for the sake of convenience and protection. Sightseers were barred, but any one with a bankroll of sufficient size was welcome. Craps was the usual game, played on a long, baize covered table in his living room.

Jim followed Lombardo up two flights of stairs at their destination and then waited before a door while an eye inspected them through a keyhole. They were quickly admitted. From a tiny hallway they passed into a larger room where a crowd of men were gathered about the dice table. Madden, a stout, impassive man, glanced up from the chair at the head, and nodded. Jim knew him, and recognized several of the other players, though this was his first visit to the place. He was impressed. This was a rendezvous of the élite, both of the nether and upper worlds.

"I'm going to be busy awhile now," Lombardo told him, "so amuse yourself somehow till you get a chance to fade into the other room. You can do the trick when no one's looking up from the board. See you later!"

And Lombardo edged up to the table.

Jim strolled about the apartment. In the kitchen he found a man wearing an apron busy mixing drinks. Jim took one, passed a word of casual converse and drifted back to the main room. Behind Madden drapes hung across a doorway, and beyond was darkness. Jim strayed in that direction. It was a simple matter to keep on going with an air of complete innocence. Every face was bent over the tumbling dice, and no one observed his disappearance. He set himself to wait patiently.

It was late, and the tedium was brief. There were sounds in the outer foyer, and presently Hoby Hamilton, beaming and bejeweled, strode in. He gave loudly cordial greetings to every one, accepted a drink that was brought him and took the place that was opened for his benefit at the table. He entered directly into the play and bet recklessly.

Jim was now on the alert. He watched Hoby, and also fell to studying the players. Most of those present were known to him by name and reputation. There were a few he could not place. He understood that visitors from other cities sought out Foxy Madden's game when they hit town with a roll, and presumed that these were strangers. What crisis it was that Lombardo so confidently expected, Jim could not conceive. This looked as harmless as any game going on in the back room of a tobacco store or garage anywhere in the city.

After a time, however, Jim's alert senses became aware that something was afoot. One of the strangers quit the play. He drifted from the table, went outside for a drink and on his return remained leaning in the doorway. A second threw up his empty hands as a sign of defeat and withdrew to stand against the wall across the room, lighting a cigar. Jim watched both men. He was somehow unable to feel that their actions were without significance.

Joe Lombardo played on in his quiet, good humored way, punctuating his efforts with a running commentary on his ill luck. His eyes never strayed toward the drapes beyond Madden's back. It had also happened in some manner that Lombardo was next to Hamilton at the table. Jim considered this fact and wondered.

Then the white aproned man emerged from the kitchen bearing a loaded tray and, as though it were a signal, things began to happen.

The two strangers at opposite sides of the room snapped to life. One jerked a chair toward him and leaped upon it. They both swung long barreled revolvers before them and issued crisp, swift orders.

"Stick 'em high! Back from the table.

Everybody seated! Stay that way—and raise 'em high!"

"What the hell?" demanded Madden, for an instant losing his impassive mien.

He was abruptly purple with fury. Joe Lombardo obeyed without hesitation, edging away from the board alongside Hamilton. Hoby cursed, raised his arms and luridly informed the bandits what would be the nature of their fate. They laughed at him.

The man on the chair dominated the room. The other proceeded to pass among the men, being careful not to get in line of fire, thrusting deft hands into pockets and tossing his loot on the green baize. In the darkened room Jim McGuire gripped his automatic and fastened his eyes on Lombardo. There was a tingling along his spine, an ancient and familiar sensation. But he did not move, for Lombardo gave no sign.

Skill and experience were displayed by the bandits. In a few moments the crowd was cleaned and the active member of the team was gathering up the staggering pile of money and jewelry on the table, exultant over the ease of their coup.

And then Joe Lombardo made his move.

Joe simply dropped a hand, swung a revolver from a holster under his armpit and pressed the muzzle into the body of Hoby Hamilton beside him.

"Hey!" shouted the guard on the chair. "Up with the mitt—*up!*"

"The hell!" said Lombardo softly, ironically. "Why should I?"

For an instant no one moved, and Jim beheld an incredible situation crystallize before his eyes. The bandits were paralyzed. Hamilton stood transfixed with a dozen assorted emotions—astonishment, fear, cupidity, rage. The others were simply dumbfounded. Only Joe Lombardo preserved his ease.

"Well," he inquired of the pair, "why don't you use your gats? This rod isn't pointed your way."

The bandits cast glances of something like mute appeal at Hamilton. He stared straight ahead and could not speak.

"I can tell why these two won't burn any powder," Lombardo announced to the company. There came a trace of a snarl into his voice. "Our friend here with the fish face and a gun in his back can tell too. How about it, Hoby? Want to speak your piece?"

"Come on, Joe," interrupted Madden. "Out with it! What's up?"

"Well, since the big shot won't talk—" began Joe with feigned reluctance. He paused, relishing the situation.

And just then Jim McGuire's burning gaze was attracted toward a third and hitherto unnoticed stranger who stood close by on the other side of the drapes. The fellow was swiftly and very composedly drawing and aiming a revolver. And his target was Joe Lombardo.

THE DISTANCE from his hiding place to the latest actor in the drama was short. There was a smile on Jim's face as he crossed it. His hand rose and descended abruptly atop the other's head. The heavy butt of the automatic did the job efficiently. The man dropped in a jerking sprawl without uttering a sound. Obviously he was a member of the gang whose rôle was to lie low and act only if trouble started—as it had.

All eyes turned to this scene of unexpected action and promptly the bandit pair made a break for freedom. Too many miscalculations robbed them suddenly of their nerve. They stopped short at murder and sought only to drop the matter. But the temper of their intended victims was unsympathetic. The way to the door was barred instantly. Voices rose in harsh oaths.

"Drop the gats!" Lombardo cried. "Drop 'em, or I give Hamilton the lead!"

"Shoot it out!" countermanded Hamilton in a sudden shout, and he swung about with an upflung arm that threw Lombardo's weapon aside.

Hoby was with his back to the wall now, his connivance with the bandits clearly revealed to these men who were the powers of his world. Desperation ruled him, and caution was ended.

The lives of several men hung in the balance in that second. There were at least half a dozen guns in the room ready to spit fire. No one had time for reflection—unless it were Jim McGuire, during the brief space which elapsed after he had dropped his man.

Jim had a gun; but he also had a keen sanity that Claire and his months of prison had given him. If he fired, it would be the signal for a massacre.

By what can scarcely be called the result of reflection—it was more a flash of inspiration—Jim McGuire's next act provided the climax. He shoved the pistol in his pocket and, wearing a cruelly exultant grin, made a flying plunge at Hoby Hamilton through an opening in the crowd.

"You, Hoby!" he shouted. "I want you, damn your chiseling soul!"

And he got him, knocking the man off his feet so that the pair went careening across the room. They collided with the pair of bandits standing at bay, and sent them, to their surprise and consternation, sailing wildly into the group by the door. In a second the room was a flailing riot. Guns were useless; friend and foe were too intermingled.

There was happiness in the heart of Jim McGuire. There was satisfaction in his pounding fists. And there was dismay and even terror in Hoby Hamilton, for he was backed into a corner by a cheerfully homicidal maniac.

Hamilton struck viciously for Jim's body, braced against the wall. Jim strove to slide the blows harmlessly off his arms, though not always did he succeed. He sought in turn to accomplish the thorough devastation of Hoby's features and his efforts were not entirely unsuccessful.

"How do you like that, big shot?" Jim was demanding. " 'Brains collect nowadays', says you, eh? Well, collect *that!*"

"You skunk!" Hoby gasped. "You doublecrossing squealer!"

Jim made no reply. But his eyes flamed and his mouth twisted in sudden hate. He cursed once and executed a blow that abruptly turned into a feint. And quicker than the oath that followed, the feint paved the way for a straight unexpected punch that struck Hoby's jaw with the impetus of a moderate sized boulder. It had much the same effect. Hoby's head snapped back against the wall and Hoby himself slid into a heap on the floor.

The fight was over. The two bandits lay on the floor, well in hand. Madden held a couple of the captured guns, and at his order the pair ceased their final struggles. They looked rather the worse for wear and very much afraid.

Jim turned from his completed task. His breast was heaving. Joe Lombardo looked up from where he crouched beside one of the gunmen.

"O.K, Flash?"

"You're damn' right, Joe!"

"Take it easy then. It's all over."

"Once again," said the portly Madden grimly, "you're damn' right! For certain guys I know it's—completely over!"

An hour later quite a crowd had gathered in the small restaurant of inconspicuous appearance on the upper East Side. Jim sat at Lombardo's table, sore of body and beginning to be somewhat restive of mind, yet wearing a slight, satisfied smile such as had not adorned his countenance in a great while. Lombardo was his usual suave self, laughing and declining to give any details of the amazing story which had already seeped through the town and arrived here before them.

Acquaintances demanded to know if it were true that he had "polished off" Hoby Hamilton, and Joe Lombardo merely grinned and assured them that he had not —and left them with the conviction that, whatever happened, Joe Lombardo had at least lost a rival. Finally Joe grinned.

"You want to see me alone, eh, Flash?"

"If you don't mind!"

"Right. Let's walk up the block."

Lombardo gave the others his assurance that he would return shortly, and the two went out. They walked slowly together.

"Give me the lowdown, Joe. You're leaving me way up in the air. I want to know just what happened."

"I guess you need the lowdown after that affair," granted Lombardo. He grinned, his eyes shining in the light of a street lamp. "It was a very curious business. But it worked. It busted Hoby Hamilton, and it's going to fix you with the cops when they get wind of it."

"This is the first chance I've had to ask you one question," continued Jim. "It's this—did it work out according to plans?"

"No, Flash, it didn't." Jim was uncertain whether or not Lombardo sighed. Joe went on, "It did, in a way. Hoby got licked, and that's the main thing. I had a tipoff on the job and knew he was going to raid Foxy Madden's tonight with a gang of imported gunmen from the West. I didn't know the guys, so I had to wait till they showed themselves before doing anything. But once they got into action I was sure I could sink Hoby a mile deep. He expected to play the victim along with the rest of us. I jammed the racket by throwing my gat on him and leaving his hustlers high and dry. They couldn't do anything. And they gave him dead away."

"I see," said Jim. "What was the idea of bringing me along especially, though?"

"Hell, Flash, can't you see? I didn't want just another mutt with a rod along. I needed a smart guy—and I have reason to be damn' glad I brought one. You saved my neck and a couple of others too."

"Well—maybe." said Jim. He was unimpressed. He had achieved his own purpose, which was the main detail.

"I had another idea, too," continued Joe, giving Jim a sidelong glance of close study. "Things might have turned out differently, you know. I more than half expected they might. If I'd had a rod shoved in my back while I was sticking up Hoby, I'd have had to let him go, see? And they would have breezed with the cash. I didn't give you any signal, remember, and wouldn't have."

"No?"

"No, indeed. Hoby trotting off with his gang would have set right with me, because he'd be in the same boat as now—ruined with the guys that count. They let him go tonight because they know how to handle rats like that better than the cops, him and his imported gunmen both. If they'd made off safe with the cash, they'd head for their rooms, all of them, and pack up to catch the first train, bus or trolley out of town."

"Cash and all?"

"No," said Lombardo, laughing softly at a private joke all his own. "I had other plans, if you'd agree to come in on them with me. With you willing, we'd have gone straight to a certain spot where Hoby and his gang were going to meet before leaving town, and we would have gently relieved them of the bankroll."

"Holy smoke, Joe!"

"How about it, Flash? Never mind the bankroll. I know of a few more just as good. We could get along, you and me."

Jim McGuire halted. He faced Joe Lombardo and thrust out his hand.

"Sorry, boy, but it's no go. There's a mighty good reason."

Lombardo was unoffended. He shrugged.

"Too bad! But it's O.K. if you say so." He took the proffered hand. "Well, so long, Flash. And when you get home, do one thing for me. Say hello and give my best regards to—that very good reason of yours."

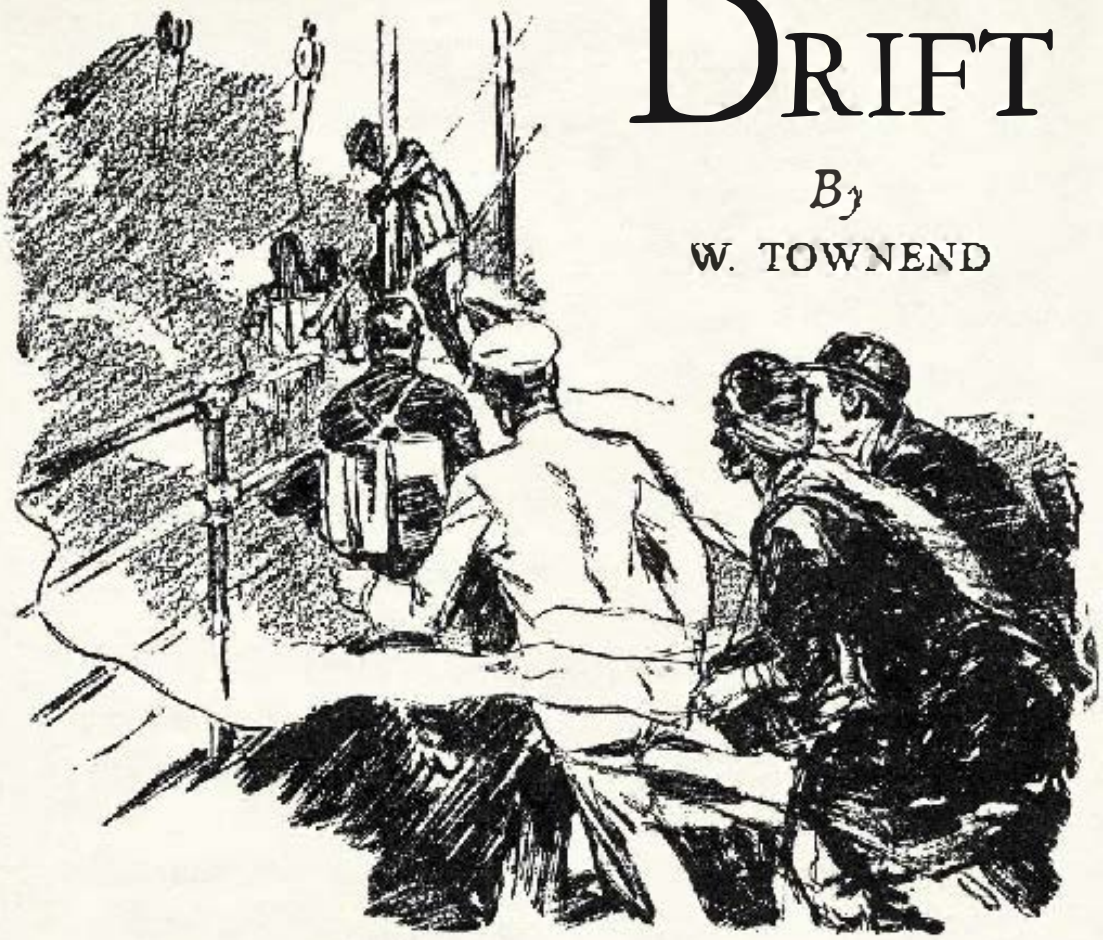
"I sure will, Joe. She'll appreciate 'em."

And grinning, Jim McGuire went his way alone.

DRIFT

By

W. TOWNEND



A Story of a Man who Returned from the Dead

The chief officer threw a bottle into the sea.

"Why did you do that?" said the passenger.

"Intime," said the chief officer. "that bottle will reach the shore. Next year or the year after. Sometime, anyway. It's bound to, if it still exists. That's how we learn the drift of the ocean currents."

HE STOOD on the wharf at Bombay, near the shed where he had a few minutes before been medically inspected, and stared solemnly at the ship which was to take him across the Indian Ocean to Jeddah.

In spite of the steamy, suffocating heat of the dockside, he wore a sheepskin *postin* over his khaki colored cotton garments. The turban wound about his head had once been white. His louse trousers ended halfway between his knee and ankle. His bare feet were thrust into grass soled slippers. Under one arm he carried a bundle.

He was lean and wiry, a little bent in the shoulders, of medium height, not obviously robust, and yet from his appearance capable of enduring extreme hardship. His face was lined and emaciated. The shape of his skull showed plainly

under the taut, yellowish brown skin. His nose was high bridged and slightly crooked. He had a thin, straggly gray beard and mustache. On his sinewy neck there was a long, livid scar.

The second mate, whose first voyage in a pilgrim ship this would be, leaned over the bulwark rail of the afterdeck and studied him with interest. He wondered idly where he came from. He wondered whether he carried a knife and how many men he had killed and what he was thinking of. And then all of a sudden he knew from the look in the deep set, dilated eyes that the man was terrified.

He turned to the mate who had just come up the gangway with the purser and one of the clerks from the agent's.

"What nationality now would you say he was?" he asked.

The mate glanced indifferently at the man on the wharf and said—

"How should I know any more than you?" and walked away.

"He's a hillman," said the clerk.

"Where from?" said the second mate.

"I asked," said the clerk, "but nobody seems to know. Some one told me he's with a party of a dozen or so other cutthroats who traveled across Afghanistan with a caravan from Northern Persia, Khorasan or somewhere near the Elburz Mountains. Myself, I thought at first he looked like a Kurd. Damn' queer how these tribesmen get around, isn't it? That fellow never saw a ship before in his life."

The purser, who had been watching the crowd of pilgrims massed in the shadow of the shed, said—

"Stand by now; here they come!"

With yells of "*Allaho-Akbar*" the pilgrims rushed toward the gangway.

The second mate, who was very young, grinned—this was life, by gad!—and called out in his sternest voice:

"Stop that damn' shoving, you people! Go slow, can't you!"

They paid no heed. They yelled "*Allaho-Akbar*" and came scrambling and jostling up the narrow gangway, laden with huge bundles of clothes and bedding; Afghans, Persians, Pathans, Malays, Punjabis, Rajputs, shoving, fighting, screeching and arguing, as though terrified that unless they hastened now, at this crisis of their lives and pilgrimage, unless they set foot on board this steamer without delay they would be left behind and they would never see their Holy City, Mecca, or make their *Haj*.

When at last they were on board the second mate, still grinning, wiped the sweat from his forehead and cursed the heat and said:

"That's that. How many are there?"

"Nine hundred and eighteen," said the purser. "No, seventeen. Hullo! We're one short. What the hell!"

And then the second mate saw the lean gaunt, elderly hillman in the *pushtu*, still standing on the wharf, staring forlornly up at the ship, to all appearance too frightened to dare venture up the gangway.

"Wake up, you," shouted the second mate. "D'you want to miss your passage, or what?"

The hillman continued to stare at the ship.

Puzzled by his own interest in the hillman, feeling annoyed with himself for what he did, the second mate made his way to the wharf, took hold of the hillman by the arms and without a word guided him up the gangway.

He saw the purser and the old doctor grinning at him and broke into quick, easy profanity.

"Some of you damn' people don't know you're damn' well alive," he growled.

The hillman stood before him, eyeing him humbly, almost as one awaiting punishment.

"Oh, hop into it," he said. "Here, some one, show him where he belongs."

Five minutes later the whistle roared out its warning signal, the bridge telegraph clanged its message to the waiting engine room, the engine room telegraph answered, the moorings were cast off and the big steamer began to move.

This was how the second mate first made the acquaintance of the hillman who was afraid of the ship.

Though he did not know it, life was never to be quite the same afterward.

THE SUN was setting in a blaze of gold and orange and crimson that was reflected on to the smooth, oily surface of the Indian Ocean.

On the after deck the pilgrims, clad in clean white garments, were massed in lines, like soldiers, thought the second mate, facing toward the west and Mecca, their praying mats spread out before them. In unison, again like soldiers, they performed their ritual of worship, led by a white bearded old *hajji*, standing, kneeling, prostrating themselves, touching the deck with their foreheads, in a kind of religious fervor that was so sincere that in spite of his first inclination to feel superior the second mate, watching from the upper deck by the side of the ship's doctor, was moved and impressed.

"Queer business, all this religion, ain't it?" he said flippantly.

"Dunno," said the old doctor. "It all depends."

"On what?"

"On the individual," said the doctor, who for the sake of his health drank more whisky than was good for him. "What suits the Catholic would drive the Protestant crazy. When I look at that crowd on the after deck, I—why, damn it—I marvel. I'm an agnostic myself, naturally; but think what all that bowing and kneeling means to these people. Ever given a thought to Islam? You haven't, I bet. Islam's the power that binds together Arabs, Moors, Algerians, Egyptians, Kurds, Sudanese, Turks—or did, before the war—Afghans, Persians, Malays—God knows what else. Islam. Why, by the Lord," said the doctor in a dreamy, contemplative way, "think what some of those men we're looking at must have suffered to be where they are now. And think what they'll have to suffer to reach Quetta again, or Kabul, or Herat, or Merv. That's Islam, my lad."

The second mate yawned.

"I forget when I was last in church," he said, "but I'm a Christian and because I'm a Christian I'm better than those fellows bowing toward Mecca. I must be."

"Not you," said the doctor placidly.

"I'm harder worked, anyway," said the second mate.

"My dear sir," said the doctor, "you don't know what work means. Four hours on the bridge, eight hours off. D'you call that work?"

"I'd swap jobs with you, Doc, any day," said the second mate. "Ever taken the trouble to count how many fire drills and boat drills we've had since we left Karachi? And if we're not having fire drills and boat drills, we're overhauling the blasted pumps and injectors. And, Doc, listen: before handing over the watch we've got to make a complete tour of inspection of the whole ship. And it's not a superficial inspection, either, Doc; it isn't eyewash, it's the real, genuine thing. The Old Man's panicky because of the cargo we're carrying."

"Manganese ore, bauxite and chromite, and cotton. What about it?" said the doctor.

"Bales of cotton," said the second mate, "bags of linseed, rape seed, castor seed; just about the most inflammable combination known."

And then he saw the hillman just as he had seen him three days before on the wharf at Bombay, gazing up at him from the after deck.

"Doc," he said, "what do you make of that man there? The one at the end of the second row, near the bitts."

"Isn't that the merchant you dragged on board at Bombay?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," said the second mate. "He's a hillman from the Elburz Mountains, or somewhere."

"He's not giving his mind to his prayers, whatever he is," said the doctor. Presently he turned to the second mate. "I was going to tell you something rather curious about that man, but I forgot till this minute. He comes from the most inaccessible country in the whole world, so they tell me, and yet—damn' queer, if you come to think of it—he'd been vaccinated before! How do you account for that, eh? A hillman from the mountains beyond Afghanistan with two different

sets of vaccination scars on his arm. What's more—and in a way this is more extraordinary even than the scars—he's tattooed all over his chest. Doesn't that strike you as a little unusual?"

"Why shouldn't he be tattooed?" said the second mate. "It's not against tribal custom or his religion, is it?"

"Not that I'm aware of," said the doctor. "But why should a tribesman from Northern Persia have a Chinese dragon tattooed on his chest, the kind of thing that you see in Hongkong or Canton or Shanghai and nowhere else—a magnificent dragon, too, wonderfully drawn! We asked him where it had been done. He just looked at us and wouldn't speak. We asked some of the crowd that he's with. They didn't know anything much about him. They told us he came from their country and had crossed Afghanistan in the same caravan as they had and they'd brought him along to make the *Haj* with them. That's all."

"He's a fighting man, anyway," said the second mate after a time. "He's got a bullet wound in his throat. You can see the scar from here."

"He's got another damn' big scar in his head," said the doctor. "The bullet must have skirted slap round his skull, just under the skin. But that doesn't make him a fighting man. The impression I got from him was he was—how shall I put it?—well, timid."

"Timid?" said the second mate.

"You know. Not quite all there. Loco. Weak mentally."

"Oh," said the second mate. He pondered. "Damn' funny about that Chinese dragon, Doc, isn't it?"

TWO MORNINGS later the sleepy stillness of the forenoon was shattered suddenly by howls of rage from the after deck, where between the engine room bulkhead and the No. 5 hatch a crowd of pilgrims stood and watched men fighting in their midst.

Half a dozen men, nine men, ten men—it was impossible to say how many there were—attacked one man, clawed at him, hit him.

Hiding his amusement, scowling, the second mate pushed his way vigorously through the spectators.

"Will you damn' well stop it!" he shouted.

By sheer strength he scattered the mob, until there remained only three men hitting a fourth man with such fury that he was astounded. And then he discovered as he began to drag the three men off the fourth, that the fourth man was the hillman and that the hillman was kneeling astride of yet another man whom he was choking with sinewy fingers gripping his neck.

The second mate, no longer amused, forcibly broke the hillman's grip and dragged him to his feet.

"What the devil's it all about?" he said. "Do you want to kill him, you fool?"

A *haji* in a green turban explained in halting English.

There had been a dispute about water. This man—he pointed toward the hillman—this man had taken water that was not his, out of his turn. So these others say—here the *haji* indicated all the other pilgrims who had been fighting. That man—the man with the bulging eyes whom the hillman had tried to choke—had protested and upset the hillman's bucket of water on to the deck.

The second mate said:

"Tell them if he gives any more trouble they're to report him to me or one of the other officers. Tell them fighting isn't permitted on board ship."

The *haji* in the green turban harangued the pilgrims gathered around.

"And now," said the second mate, "tell this man if he tries to strangle any one again, whatever the reason, we'll put him in irons. Tell him he'll not be allowed to land at Jeddah. Tell him he'll not see Mecca."

The lean, gaunt hillman listened to what the *haji* said, then turned about swiftly and gazed in round eyed horror at the second mate. The second mate,

satisfied that there would be no more fighting, was about to turn when the hillman seized hold of his hand and lifted it to his forehead as though in supplication.

Feeling much embarrassed, the second mate tugged his hand away from him. He was surprised and relieved to see no trace of laughter or scorn on the dark, impassive faces of the pilgrims who watched.

The old doctor who drank too much whisky spoke to him as he reached the upper deck again.

"I said he was weak minded," he said dryly. "He is."

"You said he was timid," said the second mate. "He isn't."

"He'd have let those damn' swine kill him before he'd have relaxed his grip on that other man's throat," said the doctor. "You saved his life."

"I've an idea I saved the life of the man he was choking," said the second mate.

For some time he was silent. Then he said:

"I may be a fool, Doc, but that hillman worries me. What's wrong with him? Timid—hell! Weak minded—I don't believe it. I tell you what it is, Doc; he's like a man trying to remember something that's slipped his memory and nearly succeeding but never quite. You look at those eyes of his; he looks at you, square in the face, but half the time he doesn't see you. He's asking questions. I know, Doc, it's 'Who am I?' That's what he's saying. 'Who am I? Why am I? What am I?' He can't find the right answers and he's afraid."

The doctor took his pipe from his mouth and gazed at the second mate solemnly. His lined, wrinkled faced creased into a grin. He shook his head.

"You're wrong," he said. "If that halfwit hillman of yours was capable of asking questions like that he'd be as sensible as the best of us, because, you see, the cleverest man on earth couldn't find answers."

A WEEK passed. The second mate came to the conclusion that the interest he had shown in the halfwitted hillman was rather absurd. He had been making a mystery out of nothing.

That a Mohammedan from Northern Persia, from the Elburz Mountains or Khorasan, or whatever it was he came from, should have a Chinese dragon tattooed on his chest, magnificently executed, that he should have been vaccinated, was curious, no doubt, but not incredible. The explanation would be simple, he was positive.

Perhaps he might have managed to put the hillman entirely out of his mind had he been able to avoid him. This, however, was impossible. Once he was off the bridge or away from his own quarters he was almost sure to find the hillman waiting for him and watching him. It almost seemed that the man was placing himself purposely in his way, lurking in unfrequented corners of the ship where he was bound to pass on his tours of inspection before handing over the watch.

One day, annoyed by his pertinacity, he stopped and spoke to him.

"Do you want to speak to me?" he said.

The hillman stared at him with the same dazed look in his eyes he had seen before and did not answer.

The second mate beckoned to the *haji* who spoke English.

"Ask him what he wants," he said.

But not even the *haji* could get a reply out of him.

The second mate walked away. He was glad to think that in two days' time the ship would reach the quarantine station at Kamaran and that two days after that they would be at Jeddah, where the hillman would pass out of his life forever.

That night as he stepped over the high sill of his room into the alleyway he saw the hillman leaning against the bulkhead opposite his door.

In the glow of light from the deckhead his face looked incredibly old and gaunt.

"What in hell are you doing here?" said the second mate sharply.

The hillman turned swiftly but he grabbed at his right wrist and held him fast.

And then with a feeling of helpless bewilderment he saw on the lean, dark brown forearm tattooed in blue and red the Royal Arms of Britain.

"What's that?" he asked.

The man shivered as though the hot, stifling alleyway was icy cold and said in a whisper—

"Not know."

"Do you speak English?" said the second mate.

The hillman nodded his head.

"Who are you?" said the second mate.

"Not know," said the hillman huskily. There was a note of such despair in his voice that the second mate was appalled.

"Can't you tell me where you come from?" he said.

The hillman twisted about suddenly and wrenched his arm free and hurried out of the alleyway into the darkness.

All through the long middle watch, pacing to and fro from one wing of the bridge to the other, or standing motionless peering into the darkness, the second mate pondered on what he had discovered. The hillman could speak English; he had the Royal Arms of Britain tattooed on his forearm. He was still pondering, still worrying over the mystery which had now become an obsession, when at a quarter to four the mate climbed the ladder and greeted him with a surly growl.

"Hot tonight," he said. "Hellish hot. Didn't sleep. Didn't sleep a wink. God! Glad when we're out of the Red Sea. Glad when we get shut of our passengers! What a voyage! My God! Pilgrims. I'd pilgrim 'em. Hell!" He yawned. "Well, better slip off, Mister. The sooner you've made the round of the ship, the sooner you'll be able to turn in, though what good it will do you the Lord in his wisdom knows."

The second mate grinned and gave the course and departed, still thinking about the hillman. Twenty minutes later he returned to the bridge.

"O.K?" asked the mate.

"O.K." he answered.

"No sign of fire?" said the mate.

"Not a sign." The second mate chuckled, amused for the moment by the thought of the Old Man and his fears. Then he said, "That hillman we were talking about—the man with the Chinese dragon tattooed on his chest—has got the Royal Arms of Britain tattooed on his arm."

"The hell he has!" said the mate. "Why didn't the doc see it at Bombay when he was being vaccinated?"

"It's the right arm that's tattooed, not the left," said the second mate. "And here's something else. When I asked him what it was, he said that he didn't know. In English. What about that?"

"Speaks English, eh?" mused the mate. "Oh!" Presently he said, "I've got it. He was a sepoy in one of the Indian Army regiments. That accounts for the bullet wounds and the Royal Arms—and the dragon as well. Perhaps he was stationed part of his time in Hongkong."

"No," said the second mate. "No. He comes from Khorasan in Northern Persia, or the Elburz Mountains. That's been proved. They wouldn't have had him in an Indian regiment, any more than they'd have a dago in a Highland regiment."

"Not even in the war?"

"I don't know anything about the war," said the second mate, "but he'd have probably been too old. The poor devil's not young."

"Why 'poor devil'?" asked the mate.

"He's so damned unhappy," replied the second mate. "Tonight when I was talking to him I felt there was another man looking at me through those eyes of his."

"Mister," said the mate, "what you need more than anything is sleep. Beat it! You'll be babbling next of—what is it?—green fields and daisies."

NEVER before had there been so stifling a night as this. The air was like fire to the lungs.

The second mate, more wakeful now that he was in his bunk than even he had been during his watch, sighed.

Lord, how tired he was! He ached with weariness. But his mind was active. And why when he wanted to sleep did he so persistently think of the hillman and all that had happened since the day he had seen him on the wharf at Bombay? Why couldn't he put him out of his mind just for five minutes?

He must have dozed off then for, all of a sudden, he was wide awake, listening to the quick rush of feet and the clanging fire-alarm.

He sprang hastily out of his bunk, slipped on his trousers and jacket over his pajamas, thrust his bare feet into a pair of shoes, seized a cap and ran out through the alleyway on to the deck.

As he reached the open the upper and lower bridges and the bridge ladder were silhouetted against a yellow rush of flame from the fore deck. The mate shouted as he ran past.

"No. 2 'tween decks. The Old Man's in charge of the bridge."

They reached the ladder that led to the foredeck.

Great yellow flames were spouting up through the after ventilator on the port side. Lascars raced along the deck, unrolling hose pipes.

"No time to waste," said the mate. "We've got to get those pipes through the ventilators quick as we can and tell 'em to start the pumps right away."

The second mate slid down the ladder on to the fore deck and grabbed the brass nozzle of a hose pipe.

Dawn came with the ship steaming slowly away from the wind and volumes of black smoke pouring from the No. 2 hold.

"The water's not keeping the fire under," said the captain. "We'll have to set the steam injectors to work."

"Yes, sir," said the mate.

"I think that ought to do it," said the captain. The second mate's cracked lips twisted into a smile. So the Old Man still hoped, did he?

Two hours later, still working on the fore deck, with the steel deck plates now almost too hot underfoot to be bearable, and the blazing sun much too hot overhead, and the ship listing heavily to starboard, the second mate knew that both water and steam had failed. He staggered toward the mate.

"Fire's gaining on us," he said. "What next?"

The mate spoke to the captain, who had just come down to the fore deck from the bridge and stood with the chief engineer, talking.

"What about those cylinders of carbonic acid gas, sir?" he said.

"Carbonic acid gas!" said the captain vaguely. "Why, yes. Carbonic acid gas. What about it?"

"We must try it," said the mate. "It might help."

The old chief engineer nodded and said gruffly:

"It's no' a fire appliance, rightly speakin', but we cud fix up lines o' pipin' to get the gas into the hold. Shall we try it, captain?"

"Why, of course," said the Captain. "I think the carbonic acid gas will do it. I'm sure that it will."

His unshaven face was pale and deeply grimed with smoke and dirt. His eyes were red rimmed and inflamed. He both looked and spoke like a man dazed and not quite himself.

"Poor old chap!" thought the second mate.

And as he turned once more toward the black rolling clouds of smoke, the yellow flames and the hissing steam, he heard him say to the mate:

"Mister, get those port lifeboats out. Else when we come to need 'em, the list will be too much for us," and he knew then that in his heart the captain had abandoned all hope of saving his ship.

"Look," said the third mate and pointed. "That's the first of 'em."

Through the brown haze the second mate saw a tramp steaming parallel to their course.

"There's a cruiser in touch with us by wireless," said the third mate. "Coming up fast."

THE SECOND mate was feeling very tired and very sick. His skin was drawn and scorched by the flames and the fierce sun. His lungs were filled with the fumes from the furnace in the No. 2 hold and the carbonic acid gas. Everything kept going black in front of his eyes. He wanted to crawl away somewhere into the shade and lie down. But how could he? Were things worse for him than they were for any one else? He was an officer and must set an example to the lascars.

The doctor appeared by his side, lined, wrinkled, yellow and more than a little tipsy.

"Come an' rest," he said.

"I can't, Doc."

"The Old Man told me to get you away."

The doctor took hold of him around the shoulders and dragged him up the ladder. Above the roar of the fire and the beat of the engines the second mate was conscious of a deep murmur that rose and fell and was full of menace.

"What the devil's that?" he said.

"Our friends in the steerage," said the doctor.

"What time is it?"

"Half past three."

"God! I thought it was ten o'clock."

"You've got to rest. If you don't, you'll be down with sunstroke or something."

"Not me. I'm too strong."

"The Red Sea's stronger."

The second mate dropped on to the deck and lay stretched out under an awning. His face was scorched and his hands were blistered. He closed his eyes.

Some one was shaking him. He sat up. The purser leaned over him.

"More trouble, Mister. The pilgrims are getting panicky. The Old Man told me to rouse you up."

The second mate rose to his feet at once and walked aft and gazed down at the pilgrims massed on the after deck and listened to their outcries.

The *haji* who could speak English stood at the foot of the starboard ladder.

"They want escape," he said. "They say the boats. They are afraid."

"There's no need to be afraid," said the second mate. "Tell them if we don't get the fire under soon, we'll take them across to the other ship."

The *haji* turned and harangued the crowd. His voice was lost in a wild screeching.

"That sounds bad," said the doctor. "I've heard it before. Men were killed. Don't like it."

The pilgrims surged forward toward the engine room bulkhead and the ladders.

"Stay where you are, damn you!" yelled the second mate. He turned and spoke to the purser. "You'd better stand by that port ladder. Stir some life into those lascars there."

A man leaped at the starboard ladder.

The second mate caught hold of him and hurled him back.

"Get down, you fool!" he roared.

And then the pilgrims broke and came charging toward the ladders, yelling, and the second mate, overwhelmed by weight of numbers, was borne back, fighting furiously.

It was difficult afterward to remember exactly what had happened. He remembered, clearly, hitting at men who screeched in terror and hit back. He remembered—not so clearly—being carried along with the crowd and trying to stem their headlong course. He remembered standing on the boat deck—how he got there he never knew—and fighting to keep the panic stricken mob from rushing the boats. He remembered—this was clear, too—seeing the flash of a long bladed knife aimed at his chest. He remembered some one flinging the man with the knife away from him. He remembered falling on to the deck and the man who had saved him from being knifed standing over him and keeping the mob from trampling him to death. He remembered being dragged to his feet.

But he did not remember what his thoughts were when he found that the man who had saved his life was the hillman.

The hillman fought with dogged fury, hitting straight from the shoulder, like a boxer. The second mate fought by his side.

But what could one man do, or two, against such odds? Pilgrims were clambering into the starboard side boats, swung out ready to be lowered; pilgrims were sliding down the falls into the port side boats already in the water; pilgrims were clawing at each other in a frenzy of fear.

Blood was pouring down the hillman's face. He laughed suddenly and said quite calmly:

"No good, old chap. Better get these boats lowered and have done with it. Asiatics always go crazy when there's any danger. They can't help it."

And then some one smashed the hillman over the head with a lifeboat tiller.

NIGHT had fallen. The engines had stopped. The whole forepart of the ship was alight. Only the crew remained on board.

The captain raised his hands and let them fall again.

"Time to leave her," he said. "Get into the boats."

The roaring of the fire made it difficult to hear him.

The hillman who had not yet regained consciousness lay on the bridge deck.

The second mate said to the doctor, who was quite drunk—

"Give me a hand with this fellow, Doc, will you?"

From the boat that was taking them across to the cruiser it was possible at last to see what little hope there had been of saving their ship.

Great flames soared upward. Great black clouds of smoke reflected the red glare of the fire. The sky was red. The smooth sea was red. The faces of the men in the boat were red.

The captain turned and waved his hand in farewell.

"Goodby, old ship! goodby."

Tears were visible on his seamed face.

The hillman stirred at the second mate's feet.

The second mate bent down and touched him.

"He's not come to yet," he said presently. "I hope he's all right."

"He's had a bad crack over the head," said the doctor and hiccuped. "Pardon. Wonder he's still alive."

"I can't understand it," said the second mate. "He spoke as good English as any of you. He said Asiatics always go crazy when there's any danger. How do you explain that?"

Nobody could explain, so nobody answered.

As they reached the cruiser's deck the hillman opened his eyes.

"How the hell did I get here?" he said in a weak voice. "Put me down."

"It's all right, old chap," said the second mate. "You're safe."

"Who are you?" said the hillman.

"Don't you remember me?" said the second mate.

The hillman frowned and looked in a worried, anxious way at the group of men who stood about him, the rescued officers from the pilgrim ship, in blackened, torn garments, and the cruiser's officers and bluejackets.

The worry lifted from his brown, gaunt face and he spoke to the captain of the cruiser.

"You're in command, I presume. Well, I want to put in a report to the admiral at once. It's important he should know as soon as possible."

The cruiser's captain, a stern, sharp featured little man, gazed in astonishment at the bedraggled, bearded native with the blood stained bandages about his head and said:

"What's important? I don't understand." He turned to the captain of the pilgrim ship. "Who is he? What's he doing here?"

"He's going to tell us," said the second mate.

"They sank us," said the man who, whatever he was, was not a hillman from the Elburz Mountains in Northern Persia.

"Who sank you?" said the second mate.

"The Turks. Who else could it be? Not the Germans, anyway. It was a mine, not a torpedo. Only half a dozen of us got ashore. I managed to find out one or two things that ought to be of great help to us."

"Find out things about what?" said the second mate.

The hillman looked past him at the cruiser's captain.

"About their shore batteries," he said. "There's a way we can land a force on the Asiatic side and command the Dardanelles. I'm positive."

"Good God Almighty!" said the cruiser's captain. "Who are you? What was your ship?" He added, "What year do you think this is?"

"Nineteen hundred and fifteen, of course," said the hillman. "I came as fast as I could. I was very sick. They marched us a long way. Soldiers. The others died. It was too hot. I ran away. The soldiers shot at me. I remember them shooting from a hill. And then—my mind's not very clear tonight; I'm so damn' tired—and then—" He broke off with a sigh. "Queer, I can't remember what happened. But I'm home again. I want to see some more fighting. I'd like to—to settle an account I've got against—against those swine for what they did to us."

"This isn't nineteen hundred and fifteen," some one said. "It's nineteen hundred and twenty-five."

The second mate spoke over his shoulder.

"Why couldn't you keep your damned mouth shut, whoever you are!" He turned once more to the man who had saved his life. "Do you understand now? There's no more fighting. The war's over."

"The war over! Then I'm too late. Did we win?"

The tired eyes gazed into the second mate's face for a while and then closed. The thin body relaxed and lay still.

The old doctor said:

"No hope. He's finished. And after that, by God, I think I could do with a drink!"

The cruiser's captain said:

"His ship must have been sunk off the Dardanelles ten years ago. Where's he been ever since?"

"A prisoner of war in Turkey and Kurdistan and Persia," said the second mate, "out of his mind, knowing nothing of what had happened, but making for blue water. It doesn't seem possible."

"We must find out who he is," said the cruiser's captain. "There'll be people in England who'll be glad to hear. His mother or wife, maybe."

The second mate rose to his feet and looked gravely at the cruiser's captain and said:

"They won't be glad to hear anything of the kind. They'll be heartbroken. He died in nineteen fifteen when his ship was sunk."

There was a moment's silence.

"I believe you're right," said the cruiser's captain.

"Of course I'm right," said the second mate.

RAYMOND S. SPEARS

tells a tale of the Moonshiners of the Southern Hills

BIG MOUNTAIN BUSINESS

JOE-ED MADDER lay in comfort, looking from behind a log through a screen of laurel brush with his right eye in line along the sights of his .30-30 caliber carbine rifle. The sitting of Judge Lascomb at the Signal County Court on the previous week had seen Madder discomfited before everybody in the square.

Red Anse Lowdane and his boys had come riding into town with their horses' hoofs clattering and scampering. They scared a drove of hogs which were scattered all along the highway and street, picking scraps.

Suddenly alarmed, the razorbacks had uttered loud and confusing squeals and then charged in a blind, compact rush, rearing down the grade. Joe-Ed happened to be crossing from the postoffice, where he had been talking to Letty May Carver, on his way to see Sheriff Dett Sorgrell about the promise of an appointment as deputy sheriff. The next thing Joe-Ed knew, he jumped high in the air and came down sprawling and rolling all over the backs of that flock of razorbacks.

Presently, getting a handhold on a corkscrew tail, he jerked around straight,

stretched out his heels, whipper-cracked, and flopped into the dust.

He would have laughed, of course, if the family of Lowdanes had not laughed first, despite their polite and bounden duty to let him begin, seeing as they had started the hogs and the ruckus. Instead of feeling sorry and looking solemn, they threw their heads back, whooping hilariously. Judge Lascomb, Sheriff Sorgrell, the tribe of lawyers, practically every politician in the county, and half the men, women and children to boot, yelled with joy.

Joe-Ed scrambled to his feet, just standing there, tall, humiliated and solemn. Opening his eyes and blowing the dust out of his mouth, he saw the hogs charging out of town, the dust high behind them. Only Letty May Carver was sympathetic at his embarrassment.

The best natured man anywhere thereabouts turned to face all the Lowdanes, rocking, throwing their arms and whooping, utterly careless of the feelings of the victim of the alarmed hogs. So it started.

Joe-Ed Madder had not said a word. Giving himself a shake, he turned back along the street to where his horse was tied to a rail, waiting for him to ride for home. Casting off the halter tie, he swung into the saddle and rode along two sides of the square out of town. The laughter died away. Faces grew solemn. The Lowdanes themselves settled into their saddles, realizing that a good shot was angry. Joe-Ed Madder had ceased being a joke. Just by the corner, when everybody was gazing at him, the rider turned his horse halfway around and, throwing back his head, he laughed, his boisterous *haw-haw-haw* echoing against the two story brick courthouse wall and reverberating along the slopes of Turkey Ridge, which was gloriously colored with the autumnal beauty of foliage.

Jeering, ironical, that snarling far heard growling of humiliation, hatred and vengeance was the last laugh heard that day in Signal County Court. Trouble was in it. Madder was the only member of his family in the county; living over at the end of Turkey Mountain, most of his family relations were over in Catamount County, whose court they attended as need or occasion invited. The Madders were hillbillies and loggers; the Lowdanes were mostly valley and river bottom farmers. No good foreboded in that land if those sensitive, high spirited and brave families fell out, and there was no telling where the angry humiliation of the hog-upset would end.

Joe-Ed Madder would rather have been shot down than be laughed at. He could swing an ax, raft logs, pilot strands down the river, but he preferred to play a banjo, or any stringed instrument—a harp, or even a piano. He often worked all day and played music all night. Ridicule was a knife to his temperamental soul. Daniel Lowdane had moseyed to court with Letty May Carver; he was a burly fellow with no music in his soul. Daniel Lowdane owned in his own right a lot of good corn bottom and one of the family grist mills to grind the grain—some said after it was sprouted.

Joe-Ed Madder had before day come down the mountain through the brush, and now he watched Daniel Lowdane's clearing, but the owner did not show himself. Joe-Ed had murder in his heart when he slipped away from home to follow the mountain trails over to the Lowdane country, but lying there with only just the barking of the squirrels, the whispering of the creek shoals, and raining of the nuts on the dry autumnal leaves as the burrs opened, gave him time when he could not help but think, and thinking reminded him of the things which would follow bushwhacking—a killing, and trouble.

The laughter of the Signal County court week crowd had hurt. The Lowdanes were a proud and haughty family, mean and powerful. They never had treated any one right. They dominated that land. They rode roughshod over every one's feelings. Joe-Ed Madder was the only one of his people in the Signal County domain. If he were tried for murder Lowdane influence would hang

him. If he made feud war, it would ruin his own family, though they could hunt the Lowdanes into their holes, put the fear of manhood into their mean and trifling hearts.

No matter if he did get Daniel Lowdane, the vengeance would have its comeback on Joe-Ed himself; a hung lover would never marry Letty May, no, indeed! And Letty May was worth living for, worth thinking about, worth winning, and so when the shadows of night fell again on Joe-Ed, he had made up his mind to a whimsical resolve.

Slipping along the mountain trails which he had followed with killing hate in his heart, he went back to his cabin where he lived alone as he trapped, hunted and earned his square income. Joe-Ed was honest. For one thing, he made good money playing for dances. With a banjo on his lap and a French harp harmonica held to his lips in a wire frame, he was a whole orchestra, able to go it all night long with nine pieces an hour, eighty-one dances, square and round, never repeating.

They said he could play a thousand tunes at least. Some he learned from talking machines, some he learned from wandering minstrels; others he had inherited from his grandfather who had been a river man. When Joe-Ed arrived in his cabin he ate breakfast, then played tunes all day long—mourning and studying music, trying to see what he ought to do.

That night he slept twelve hours in deep rest. He knew his future, planning it out. Dreaming helped him on details, confirming him in intention. Early in the morning he saddled his Kentucky horse, put a snack in the bags and rode back to Signal Court, where he arrived in the middle of the afternoon, about three o'clock. Few were in the sunshine of the square. They watched him with expressionless countenances, though with quick and apprehensive eyes, wondering if he had come to give himself up on the charge of murder. He looked that way as he swung down at the sheriff office tie rail at the court ground wall and walked deliberately up the path to the jail entrance, where the department had its headquarters in the basement.

But Joe-Ed had not come to give himself up in the way the spectators thought. He hailed, respectfully in the custom of the country, pausing at the jail balcony steps. An answer from within invited him to the door and he entered the presence of Sheriff Sorgrell, who was leaning back comfortably in a swivel chair, his feet on his desk and his hands clasped behind his head.

"Why, howdy, Joe-Ed!" he greeted, dropping his soles to the floor, straightening up, startled.

"Howdy, Sher'f!" the visitor greeted. "Along last year when you was campaigning, Sher'f, I had a talk with you. At that time, I 'lowed to you that if it was so't could be, prob'ly you'd 'point me deputy sher'f."

The sheriff showed his embarrassment, glancing around at the several visitors there—two lawyers, his under sheriff and men Joe-Ed did not know. A vacancy of the previous week in his staff had been known throughout the county. Joe-Ed had not been forgotten. The job had been as good as his, when the drove of hogs hit him.

"Why, Joe-Ed," the sheriff said, "there's no opening."

"I understood there was, Sher'f!"

"Well, there was, Joe-Ed, but—um-m—"

"You sent me word to come in and let me know about that vacancy, Sher'f."

"Yes, suh, Joe-Ed—"the sheriff twisted uncomfortably—" but you didn't come in, so I—um-m."

"You didn't say when I should come, Sher'f."

"Why, I expected you court week, Joe-Ed."

"Who'd you 'point to be your deputy, Sher'f?"

Joe-Ed Madder was not ridiculous now. A promise had been made to him. The fulfilment of the promise had been evaded with a quibble.

"Why, I tell you," the sheriff said, "we 'lowed probably you'd rather be assistant county clerk, Joe-Ed—"

"Who'd you 'point deputy, Sher'f?"

"Daniel Lowdane."

Without a word Joe-Ed turned and left the office. His gait was not quite sbuffling, but it was dejected, yet stiffening ominously as he continued down the sheriff office pathway under the court square park trees to his horse. The animal was a beautiful mount, and when the mountain man swung gracefully into the saddle, it backed out from among the others tied along the railing and with a deer-like rhythm headed away.

The sheriff office group watched the departure. When Joe-Ed glanced back over his shoulder he saw their faces behind the steel lattice work four-inch window squares. They knew there would be trouble, good and plenty, now. The wonder was that Joe-Ed had not waylaid Daniel Lowdane or one of his family, for those Madders were bad. Even Joe-Ed, despite his music, had the look in his bearing of a man not best to bother.

He was riding away from home when he left the Signal County Court. He went out on the pike. This was different, therefore ominous. Joe-Ed knew every one would think something; every one did. Of course, Joe-Ed would take it hard, the appointment of his rival as deputy sheriff.

SIGNAL COUNTY covered the headwaters of a dozen streams. A pike led into the court seat, and out from the one town scattered six or seven wagon roads and trails following up branches and going over gaps in the county ridges. Flats in the stream bottoms and a number of fertile hillsides were cultivated. A good many orchards, patches or berry briers, and hardwood ridges where nut trees, acorns and sugar timber grew indicated sources of supply. Now that sorghum and fruit were ripe, in many a cabin or farmyard great black kettles were bubbling and boiling, bits of fat pork keeping them from running over while the paddler walked around and around, stirring the batches to keep the bottoms from sticking and scorching. They were not always successful, especially as the molasses thickened or the butters came down to jelling and the tired worker had to speed around faster and faster toward the crisis.

A great season of the year, these boilings of sorghum and butter! Neighborhoods celebrated the ripenings. Parties, dances and gatherings were held. The joy of every one was expressed in stepping and courting, making merry to the music of the fiddles and the banjos. Trouble was, Joe-Ed Madder was not around to be the orchestra. Since he rode down the pike, when as every one knew Sheriff Sorgrell had been obliged to disappoint him in the matter of the deputy sheriff certificate, nobody in Signal County had seen him. He left the county at the line, and out yonder no one knew him. Having disappeared, he left the county bereft of its best tunes.

The dances were not so interesting. No one had set much store on the thousand tunes Joe-Ed Madder could play. What did music amount to? The pickers, fiddlers, French harpists who remained were poor makeshifts and had to use the same melodies over and over again, so dancing lost its zest. Lacking music, every one began to hang out, staying at home.

Then what had always been secondary in these merrymakings—moonshine, honeydew, white mule and other shadow joys—appeared to help out the monotony.

The supply had never been great. A good many people never touched it. Mostly, though, every one would take a taste, but no more. A few were foolish, and did not show much sense the way they drank, once they started. The late sorghum and butter boilings were enlivened by stump-and-jug joys. The quality of the music did not matter so much to those who had loosened up the leg joints with more than a good taste. Even when for some few simple measures the time of the music was even, the drinkers could not keep good step.

Naturally, no one was supposed to know where the supplies came from, who toted it and, much less, who 'stilled it. At the same time, when out in the brush the independents began to cut in on the price, their caves and shacks were raided on the branches, the stills destroyed, the mash tubs broken, the jugs and charring kegs smashed. The cases did not come in to county court. Nobody wanted to advertise the matter, but at the same time, sharp eyes noticed that Daniel Lowdane moved to Signal County Court, where he slept in the posse room and ate over in Butterbread Kerry's lunch restaurant. The Lowdanes were honorable that way.

No one said anything about the matter, but any one with any sense would understand how the family felt about it. Daniel Lowdane was a deputy sheriff. He was sworn to uphold the law. When a man has taken oath to do a thing, of course it would not be honorable not to keep his word, true and clean, all according. No matter what Daniel Lowdane might believe about prohibition and Federal Government propositions, in the State statutes which a man in the sheriff department must uphold, was the section that made distilling and liquors against the law.

Duty bound, Daniel Lowdane could not stay home. He just had to move to town. That stood to reason. And appreciating his honor, his family moved all their stills and changed all their routings, just so that when Daniel came raiding with Sheriff Sorgrell, visiting all those hollows, branches and caves, they found the evidences of recent occupation, the frames and stone furnaces; they even smelled the sour mashes and discovered here and there a bottle or a jug that had been overlooked, old stuff, too, which on sampling proved to be everything any one could have hoped for, so that after all, the raiding could not be regarded as a complete and unequivocal failure. Of course, nobody ever does move everything. Not to leave something behind to show good will to whoever came next would be poor judgment; trifling.

The sheriff's posse was gone a week. When they returned to Signal Court they sure rode low in their saddles. They had not brought anything in with them to show for their efforts, but some of them looked more discouraged and sorry of spirits than in many a day. The sheriff himself spent three days in bed, just naturally and absolutely sick.

The autumn rains came. The beginnings of winter were gloomy, probably finding more people feeling miserable than in many years. The parties and dances had not been failures. They had been exciting. No one could complain about lack of interest. Nevertheless, moonshine left a different echo from that of music. The women folks were complaining and trouble as well as merriment was in the air. There had been some fussing, several difficulties, and everybody knew that the way things were, killings were liable at any time to come a-happening.

Signal County was noted for its peace, good will and friendliness. The rough element had always sung low. Families lived in amity and mutual respect. No one was expected to pass up an insult, yet no one ever passed a mean or slighting word. With every one considerate of every one else, just naturally there could not be any trouble, not personal and individual, and not family or factional. It was that kind of country.

People had grown accustomed to the wandering music of Joe-Ed Madder. He played wherever he went. Riding along the road, he plunked his banjo and played on his French harp. On a still evening his fiddling could be heard a mile. Wherever he went he was welcome. Time had been when even the Lowdanes had taken Joe-Ed in for a snack and a sleep. But the family feelings had grown strained on account of Letty May Carver's hesitation regarding Daniel Lowdane and Joe-Ed Madder. To the whole county the rivalry was a calamity of increasing importance. Of course, the loud laughter of the Lowdanes, jeering, boisterous and careless, marked the end of the era of joy and good feeling.

NO ONE would ever forget that spectacle when Joe-Ed rolled along the backs of the drove of hogs, scrambling and grabbing curlycue tails, dropped at last in the smoking dust. All knew that Joe-Ed would have been the first to whoop with laughter at his discomfiture, had any one else but the Lowdanes driven the hogs into him. With his shiftless and overwhelming music went pride and high spirits. Behind him loomed the menace of the Madders over in the next county. They would never let Joe-Ed go alone against the Lowdanes, the moment trouble started.

War in the mountains! In place of joyous freedom, fear and sorrow. In place of parties and dancing, lights aburning and stepping to music would be the curtains pulled down, the lights in the fireplaces covered over and every clearing shivering in the night shadows. People would follow the roads with worry and looks over their shoulders. Men would carry guns. Women would choke back their sobs over the hot bread mixing boards and tears would drip on the tables.

And children would play games of bushwhacking and raiding from the brush. In the dark of the nights, when one heard shots over in the next valley, it might not be 'coon hunters, or turkey roost killers, but murdering of men instead! Perhaps Joe-Ed had ridden away to organize his relations for raiding and battles.

Joe-Ed's record was analyzed. He feared no man. He asked no favors. He had a steady hand, shooting right or left with shotguns, and winning many a turkey shoot with his old .44 repeater, which his father had used before him. For all his music he had another side to him. His smile would come like a flash of sunshine through the wind swept treetops. But his eyes had the look in them that men who know men recognize.

Some one said Joe-Ed was back. The rumor swept the length and breadth of the Signal County ridges and valleys. He was picking a banjo, playing a fiddle, blowing a French harp, same as ever—only now he was daffy! Yas, suh, gone clear loony!

A chill of apprehension and dismay swept through the hearts of those who heard that Joe-Ed Madder was not right in his head any more. His disappearance had seemed explicable and natural, however regrettable. To have the man, whose music and good humor had pleased the whole population, shadowed in his mind was every friend's sorrow. Hardly any one believed the story as it first appeared. Such a thing just could not possibly be—

Yet Joe-Ed drew nearer and nearer, coming mighty slow, and those who had seen him confirmed on their oaths that he was not the same in his head any more. The debonair and merry Joe-Ed was shuffling up the line with his figure draped with three cases, a banjo, a guitar and a fiddle. In his pockets were a score of French harps for blowing music.

His raiment was no less fantastic. His shirt was red with white stripes; his hat was a wide, blue sunshader with stars all around the ribbon. He wore silk short trousers of yellow and green. He wore long gray stockings and fancy dancing pumps, and every step he took he double shuffled to his own music, wild, weird strains of dancing tunes and singing melodies.

"Po'r Joe-Ed!" people exclaimed. "Hit broke his heart, losing out with Letty May Carver."

He arrived in Signal Court, double shuffling to marching time. He arrived on a Monday, when people came to town, trading. Sheriff Sorgrell and his staff were crossing to the restaurant lunch for dinner when they saw him. The posse were stalwart, competent men. One laughed aloud at the gaudy spectacle.

"Huh!" Daniel Lowdane chuckled. "Ain't he plumb ridiculous?"

THE RETURN of Joe-Ed Madder in that absurd suit of short pants clothing eased the hunger for music along Turkey Ridge and throughout Signal County. Wherever he was asked to go, there he

went. He ate chicken and roast pork, game pies and all kinds of good things. The women went out of their way in pity and charity to give him what he could appreciate. The hat was passed for him, too, but he jingled the coins in a bag, holding his ear close to it, listening, and then he would try to pick "Money Music" on his banjo. Little by little he won the tune he heard in silver coins clinking in a canvas bag.

People were afraid that if Joe-Ed carried the money with him he would be shot for it. Back in the ridges were poor devils of humans to whom ten dollars were a fortune. One of these might take it into his head to kill Joe-Ed for the money, but he always came down to the sheriff's office after a dance and solemnly handed his pay to whoever was there, so it could be put in the big county safe.

One day when Daniel Lowdane, the deputy sheriff was there alone, just the same as usual, Joe-Ed brought in the silver, nickel and copper coins. Lowdane started to laugh, but as he looked at the open mouth, the vacant eyes, the swaying figure of the "natural," something deeper than humor struck the man hunter and without a word he took and counted the coins, made a note of the sum—$5.26—and put it in the sheriff's desk for inclusion in Joe-Ed's music income.

Joe-Ed's relations over in Catamount heard about his mental predicament and two of his brothers rode over to see about it. Their arrival put Daniel Lowdane on his guard; in fact he sat in a corner of the sheriff's office all day long with his left hand revolver on his lap, in case there should be trouble; but the two Madders spoke to him, when they learned who he was, and rode away to their own country without doing anything. Starting a war on account of a relation who had gone loony did not seem good sense.

Joe-Ed paid no more attention to his brothers than he did to any one else. He just looked at them, not recognizing them, shaking his head when they tried to have him go away with them, and just minding his own business. He talked in a hollow, bow-wowing voice, and sometimes as he shambled along the roads alone, he could be heard muttering to himself, "Ow-wow-ow-wow." Everywhere he went he picked his banjo, sawed his fiddle, made his guitar hum. Sometimes he would be heard in the moonlight going along the mountain blowing his French harp, and one never knew where he was going to show up.

One thing about him—he would not drink moonshine or mountain wines. One night the Lowdanes gave a party over in their head house, the old pillared mansion. All the family and their married relations appeared. It was a great party, and Daniel Lowdane brought Joe-Ed Madder to play for them. Then Daniel went over after Letty May Carver. She did not know Joe-Ed was to be there, supplying the music. The first she knew of it, she heard the banjo tinkling and thumping a new song, "Jingling Money," but though she didn't recognize the tune she knew the picking.

Letty May shook herself away from Daniel Lowdane and entered the big double room where the Lowdane relations were all sitting back listening. She was almost the only outsider there, but of course, Daniel had brought her and some of the other Lowdane blood boys had brought their sweethearts. She walked across the floor and stood before the picker, who was looking around with restless, staring eyes. He just glanced at her, as she stood there.

Never in the hills and valleys had any one seen just such a spectacle as that pretty girl, pale and swaying, wringing her hands, looking at the man who had courted her, but who was now "gone natural." Color came back to her cheeks in splotches, then left again. She turned and looked at Daniel Lowdane, who was grinning with satisfaction, but the blaze in her eyes blistered his lips and scorched his face to a startled red. If he had anticipated a triumph, Letty May's pity for the one-time lover spoiled Daniel's night for him.

Letty May, with sudden resolve, danced to Joe-Ed's music. She brought him cof-

fee, sweet milk, white chicken and wild turkey meat, hot bread and all the best delicacies of the party.

Some of the blood Lowdane women did not like it so much, but those who had married into the family sympathized with the girl. Daniel Lowdane had no business surprising and humbling her in that way. She gave just exactly the four dances which were his due, the first one, the "Supper March," a round dance and the "Winder." The others she scattered among all the others, though Daniel tried in vain to date her far ahead. She just was not going to disappoint the youngsters, especially the beginners of the dancing play.

THELOWDANESHad a lively time that night. The scores of menfolks cut loose. Come midnight supper time, they were hoeing down strong; but in the sets of the early dark of the morning they were growing rough and rougher. Out around there was a stump. Men who had seldom touched liquor went now and sampled. The Lowdanes were the dominant crowd of the region, and if any one wondered what this family party meant, the folks all knew and kept it just an open seeret. The dance was to celebrate a great event.

Just what the matter was none would more than hint. In fact, the facts were the secret of Red Anse, Ho-Law Jim, Black Pete, Daniel B, and four or five others in the central leading group of Lowdanes. Daniel Lowdane, the deputy sheriff, had been met by a man at the Signal Court, and he had introduced the stranger to Ho-Law Jim so as not personally to be mixed up in the matter.

"Yas, suh," one of the boys said to Daniel, "this yeahs the bigges' business in the hist'ry of our fambly!"

Big business, but kept dark! The party saw the menfolks all working together, organizing. Under cover of the merriment, serious matters had to be attended to. Groups went off by themselves and talked things over. On slips of paper were written lists of names, and these were revised and worked over, fitting the right ones together. The men were expansive, the youngsters boastful and swagger; but quite a few of the women grew more and more scowling and angry, grim in their fears and reluctances.

"Theh's big money into hit!" the men said; and the women—

"Hit ain't right!"

In the morning when the family broke up to scatter out around in their home countries, Joe-Ed Madder would have gone on his way, but Daniel Lowdane, seeing how Letty May looked at it, took the musician over to a little cabin up at the edge of the Lowdane mansion clearing. The cabin had been used by one of the boys when he was first married. It remained pretty and clean, abandoned. Joe-Ed took to it in delight. The idea of having his own home appealed to him.

He went away to dances, but came wandering back the next day or two, and sitting before his fireplace, practised the pieces he could play as no one else could. Of all that Joe-Ed had been, about the only thing that remained unchanged in this moonblink of his was the love of music. He clung to it as though it were his only link with the life and world he had known before he lost his wits.

Now out on the faces of the mountains appeared red sparkles of fires and the glows of furnaces, the shine of light on smoke and the flashing as doors were opened to feed flames. Runs began to smell a bit sour. Wagons came driving into the mountains with mystery loads. At night the highways had traffic far and away livelier than by day. Many a Lowdane spent the noons in bed and the nights abroad.

Of course, the work was tedious. Just sitting in the shacks and around the caves, tending the business, meant long hours when only ten minutes or so an hour of activity relieved the tedium of the slow processes of the great business that was making the Lowdanes rich, wealthy in bank accounts, in ready cash, in bought acreages, in clothes and jewels and new

houses where formerly log cabins had been the rule.

So they had to have something to do. Having so much spare money, one of the boys paid Joe-Ed Madder a dollar to come and play for the crew up Waterdrop Branch one night. Joe-Ed ran off music they had never heard before, singing tunes, just play tunes, which one could not sing to or dance to, but which stirred strange feelings in the heart and back of the head. And so another night, they had him over on Sweet Spring, and then down at the Sleepy Mill, owned by Red Anse, himself.

This Sleepy Mill was run all day, grinding grists of bread corn. At night bags of soft corn, with tiny green tendrils or sprouts sticking out of the kernels, were brought and ground. One had to be right careful with that sprouting grinding, or somebody from outside might get to see it and inform the prohibition Federals. The Lowdanes owned two mills, and they had to grind all day for the food supplies. Come night, and they had to keep running to provide for their own private business enterprises up on the runs.

Making as much as they were, they had money to spend on amusements and reliefs. They kept the work all in the family, for it was not hard. But in the long watch hours, with nothing much to do but keep the stuff running through, whether hoppers or worms, it was music that gave them the greatest satisfaction, the solace most pleasing to bear, and they had Joe-Ed sleeping all day so he could entertain them all night. Up in the brush where cold springs came down the hollows, chilling the steam from stills running in the moonshine, Joe-Ed was taking turns of minstrelsy.

One thing about the Lowdanes. They could do it right. They knew that the surest way to spoil a business is to supply poor quality goods. They stocked back in the cave storage, for six month aging and leaching through hardwood charcoal to take up the fusil bites, making ready for shipping. Of course, transportation was a big problem, about as serious as the making. But roadways, rafting rivers, a tap branch log railroad—all helped solve the difficulty of guaranteeing delivery down yonder. Yes, indeed!

All they had to do was reach the head ends of the underground system provided by their syndicate buyers, receive their checks—good as gold, on the most reliable banks anywhere. Just the beginnings of the old hit-and-miss scale of retail, unorganized production had developed into an income that the rich fellows of steel, copper, railroads, timber and mines would not sneeze at.

Actually, they were figuring on a pipe line to run out the Lowdane products, with gasoline relay pump stations, and everything, the gentleman who was go-betweening said. Of course, the pipes would have to be special-extra, on account of the taste galvanized or plain iron gives any kind of good liquor. The care taken by the Lowdanes, running peach, pear, apple, corn, all the different kinds separate, was appreciated. Their honeydew, 30-70, wild bee and white corn proportionally, was making a genuine hit down in the markets. Quality folks raved about it.

"We'll make millions, all of us!" was the promise.

The Lowdanes looked into the happy land of unlimited wealth. They were not mountain whites any more. They stood on the edge of vast financial importance. They could go to ten dollar a day hotels, the same as the biggest fellows in the world. Their women were wearing silk stockings and short skirts right out like the swellest society in the country. It was not anything for one of the boys to go down yonder and buy an automobile or an automatic, gold mounted, pearl handled pistol, or a two hundred and fifty dollar rifle with engravings and fixings of the most special kind. Why, times were not like they used to be and never would be in the mountains again!

Why, they even had the funniest kind of musician hired regularly, to pick and fiddle for them every night. They did not think a thing of paying him probably

three dollars or even five dollars just to have music where they worked.

Nothing like that had ever been even dreamed of before.

THE LOWDANES quieted down right smart. They looked around them with watchful, careful eyes. They had Daniel on the sheriff's posse, so they did not have to worry much about anything out of the court seat of Signal County. It was strangers who gave them chills of apprehension. In the old days, an outsider might mean a fugitive from Oklahoma, Wyoming, Yankee or Mississippi bottoms justice. Perhaps a revenue collector was deep beneath the surface of a hunter of wild turkeys, a ginseng digger or a collector of folk songs. These did not mean much to any one except the particular individual involved.

Now the whole Turkey Ridge district, and all the people in all the coves, clearings, on the branches, at the fords, running the grist mills, raising corn, having orchards, owning wagons and new automobiles, were stirring to the tentacles of a reaching influence which spread a network throughout the region. Even innocent commissary keepers, sending out orders for ten times as much and ten times as costly things, were perturbed by the undercurrent of dread and suspicion which afflicted the whole county.

Fortunes were at hand where of old only livings had been hoped for. Families which had been hard put for shoes even in winter now had automobiles. This was only just the beginning. The buyer who dealt with the Lowdanes told them in funny English, tempered by a soft and musical European lingo, that probably they would have to ship in carloads of corn for mountain treatment. Yellow corn fit only for cow feed and white corn from away down in the lower country would have to make up for the failure of the mountain patches to supply the demand.

"We can work it through!" the Lowdanes declared, and ordered tons of copper where they had used only a hundredweight or so in the past.

Of course, it takes courage, spirit, ability and quality to meet an emergency like this which called upon the Lowdanes to the full limit of their capacities of production at their stills and transportation to the heads of the tap lines.

Pride was necessary. Half or more of the satisfaction in the great increase in business was having large rolls of ready money, wearing forty dollar hats, buying the finest clothes and nicest hunting boots to be had, throwing away two-dollar jack-knives when they were dull, not bothering to sharpen them, and otherwise enjoying free and easy finances.

In no time, every man-jack of the Lowdane family was going to be a millionaire, even the boys having a complete million dollars for spending money. All the ladies and girls of the family had to do was tell one of the boys going out in the evening to bring back a pair of silk stockings and he would do it, paying three or four dollars and not thinking any more about it than he used to feel about buying a pair of quarter cotton socks for himself.

Nothing could happen. How could it? The bigger the family, the more money it had; the tens of thousands of acres it owned meant the convenience of all those now priceless branches and spring runs. Even the hillbilly branches of the valley Lowdane family were no longer poor white, but lived in elegance and just any way they wanted to. What they cared to buy they bought and paid for, just like sticks of candy. They even had telephones to take orders on. Actually, wires had to be strung from away down at the railroad, clear into the coves and to the last houses from which the branch paths led out into the gullies and valleys where the manufacturing was done. People who had never had ten dollars now had a thousand dollars for pocket money, actually.

Then over the wires came the word one day—

"The French family is coming!"

Just that, and no more. No secret had

been more carefully guarded than this cryptic utterance. It meant that the Federals were on their way, raiding. Some of the Lowdanes had forgotten what it meant, but over their local wires they soon were informed. Every one stood frozen with puzzled fear. Of course, the Federals could not strike everywhere; but where were they going to land? Telephone messages from away down the line gave no information. The syndicate, if it had forwarded the word, added nothing to the dark and dreadful news. Guards out on the edges of Signal County were redoubled.

The alarm reached every cabin, every family, and probably there was not a Lowdane man or boy in the traffic who did not know the raiders were on their way. The stills were abandoned. The cave stores were left unguarded. The Lowdanes retreated to their homes where they waited, cowering and in approaching panic. One phrase had shaken the foundations of their domain.

They waited in nerve wracking expectancy. Dreams of fortune and power vanished in the terror of imminent disaster. Just when they began to breathe in the hope and belief that it was a false alarm, the rising pillars of smoke up the mountain hollows confirmed the report. Standing at their cabins, they saw the rising clouds and saw the whipping of the trees where the flames over the still shacks swept up.

They saw, too, that at the mouths of caves fires were burning. They heard the muffled explosions of volcanic disturbances, where stores of high proof aging 'shine, fruit jacks and strong drinks were burning and containers blowing up with the heat. Telephone messages came. The families at home in the valley clearings were all looking at just such spectacles of the work of raiders. Every still was struck, every stock stored away, and even the two mills where the sprouts were ground for the mash were visited by determined men, and these knew just what to seek and exactly where to find it.

The raiders swept down out of the high places and came to the cabins, to the new homes, to the headquarters mansion of the Lowdanes. Alert, set featured, shrewd eyed men picked the individuals, called them by name and said:

"We want *you!* Here's the warrant!"

A clean sweep! The Lowdanes were rounded up. Not only were all their appurtenances of commerce seized, specimened and confiscated, but every last detail relating to their use was destroyed, even to the troughs and pipes running water into the worm tanks. All the stock was dumped out or burned, or both. The raw materials, the stills, the loads of containers were rendered useless and utterly valueless.

How come? Who had betrayed them? The Lowdanes looked at one another. There was in all this a directness, a system, a certainty that left out not one detail; nothing escaped the raiders. They even captured the personal and cellar stocks in the cabins. Search warrants covered each one of the groups of operations. Hardly an automobile but was confiscated for transportation.

The Lowdanes felt the menace of their own weaklings, the chance of one or another of them turning traitor. All of them were herded down the line, warranted and arrested. Surprised, there had been no chance to plan, to escape, to avoid the disaster which had befallen them.

"You have the privilege of an attorney," they were assured, one by one. "Anything you say may be used against you."

The leaders exclaimed their bewilderment, suggesting everything including silence.

"Don't talk!"

But they saw ahead of them fines and the penitentiary. Not all were full blooded Lowdanes. Some were pretty skimpy in their loyalty. Some had never liked the idea so much and, anyhow, had their suspicions. A score affidavited their confessions. They stood pleading before the judge, and just naturally had to take their medicines. Only Daniel Lowdane was not even arrested. Of course, he had

every chance in the world to know all those business locations, everything that was going on. Dark suspicion fell upon him. Why was he being left scot free?

Daniel Lowdane lost twenty pounds weight in the days of desperate doubts and waiting. He felt the hard, cold suspicion of his own flesh and blood coming to rest upon him. Why had the Federals let him go, taking all the other Lowdanes? Nobody was going to be fooled by that proposition.

The family escaped mostly with fines. The leaders went to jail. None would speak to Daniel Lowdane when the fact had dawned on them that he was all clear, nothing set against him, and they all knew that he had brought in the syndicate representative, in the first place, and Daniel had been the go-between who carried the messages and passed the words.

The close knit family, one day so united and invincible, was on the day after the sentences breaking and scattered. Some were for believing Daniel had just been lucky. Others believed entirely different. He cringed in terror lest he come to the fate of the one who betrays his own friends, spies on his own flesh and blood, lives traitor to his own.

ONE DAY Daniel Lowdane had an idea. Holding his head in his hands, his thoughts turned to all that sequence of peril and difficulty, that seeming success and utter ruin.

"Where's Joe-Ed Madder?" he wondered.

The banjo picker and musician had disappeared. From the day the raid was announced, Daniel had not seen him. The deputy sheriff started up, inquiring around. He telephoned out to his family, the strung wires the only evidence left of their prosperity. None knew where the simpleton was, or what had become of him.

Daniel Lowdane, pariah even in the sheriff department, went out and saddled his horse. He rode back into the mountains. He swung down at the house of Letty May Carver. On the balcony of her house were two suitcases. She was dressed to travel. She turned with whitening cheeks to face Lowdane. In his abstraction and the family panic, he had not been to see her before. Now she stood, brave but doubtful.

"Howdy, Letty May," he said, his voice hollow. "Goin' away?"

"Yes, Dan, I'm going away."

"I 'low I know where you're going." He sat down weakly. "I expect it's Joe-Ed Madder you're going to join out yonder?"

"Is that any of your business?" she asked quietly.

"You know 'tis." He wiped his brow. "We laughed at Joe-Ed. We treated him mean. All us Lowdanes never played fair by him. He was one man and we were a whole family. We 'lowed ourselves to be proud an' strong. An' now, Letty May, I'm begging from him a favor."

"Begging a favor from Joe-Ed Madder?" she asked incredulously.

"One time I was the fam'ly's favorite son," Daniel said. "They all were proud and satisfied with me. Now that hog down the trail's better off'n I am. They all think I traitored them. They all believe I brought in the Federals, sicking the Government on the stills and stocks. Course, I didn't. I even he'ped 'em find a market and keep the blockade raised on shipments. But they won't believe me. I know there's only one man they'll believe. That's Joe-Ed. If he'd just let them know how come—"

She looked at him.

"You know us Lowdanes," Daniel Lowdane went on. "We're honorable. We're proud and high spirited. The worst thing that could happen to us is a split-up, and hit's fallen to us. I can promise for every last one that all his life he'd be grateful to Joe-Ed Madder, if he'd come make peace among us. 'Member that night we celebrated, an' you come to the party, Letty May? You gave one look't him. An' from that minute you blanked me off. I know, now, that you saw he wasn't loony, he wasn't simple, he wasn't crazy. Single handed, he was risking

himse'f in war against the Lowdanes. He never killed one of us. He was fighting the only way he had. It was to get you, Letty May. You know it. I know it. He was a brave man and he won the campaign. I surrender, Letty May. I'm beat. I'm begging for his mercy, that's all."

"But the others 'd shoot him daid if they knew!" she gasped.

"I'll carry the flag of truce to the Lowdane men!" he said. "Tell him so. We're honorable. Every man'll meet him, fair and honorable. Don't you know't the Lowdanes would rather have peace in their family than have all their enemies dead and in their graves? I know them, Letty May. Please, lady, I beg you bring Joe-Ed back! I humble myse'f to you!"

"Daniel, I'll tell Joe-Ed what you say."

"Thank you, Missy Letty May," he said. "Telephone to Signal Court, an' I promise an escort for him. Or we'll meet him theh, all of us!"

"Joe-Ed's brave," she said. "If he comes at all, it'll be right square back to the Lowdane mansion, Daniel."

"He would, o' course!" the Lowdane in disgrace said.

So Joe-Ed Madder and Letty May herself met the committee of Lowdanes at Signal Court, in the sheriff's office. Before the county officials the Lowdanes promised him fair play and to give him a fair start if they decided he had to leave the country on account of war.

And Joe-Ed and Letty May rode out to the Lowdane mansion. The crowd was all there again, unsmiling; they averaged more than two inches shorter in the way the men held their heads. Pride was gone. Fortune had vanished. Much of their hope had come back to earth.

"Joe-Ed Madder," Red Anse Lowdane spoke, when they were all lined up, "can you tell 'f Daniel Lowdane had anything to do with betraying us in this blockading of ours?"

"Not that he knew about." Joe-Ed shook his head.

"He weren't foolish, neither, letting on by accident?"

"Why—" Joe-Ed hesitated—"not 'nless loving the same girl I did was foolish, Mr. Lowdane."

The questioner looked at Letty May and her face colored brightly.

"He'd be'n foolish not to!" Red Anse said, grimly, and every one nodded, while the girl held her hands to her lips, tears in her eyes.

"It wasn't Daniel Lowdane," Joe-Ed spoke up. "Gentlemen, no Lowdane turned traitor against you. The one who mapped out your stills and your stock stores and named your work, if it was grinding, or souring, or distilling, or running, wasn't any friend of yours. It was an enemy. *I did all that!*"

Ferocious hatred flared for an instant as the Lowdanes glared at the bold man who told them to their faces what he had, single handed, done.

"Mr. Madder," Red Anse said, gulping a little, "I'd like to be your friend, account of this favor you done us Lowdanes."

"I'm glad to!" Joe-Ed cried and tears ran down his cheeks. "I don't want to be any man's enemy, gentlemen!"

"Especially a man don't want hard feelings in one's own flesh and blood relations," some one spoke up, sighing with relief.

"And hit's peace among us, Daniel." Red Anse turned to his son. "I hope I never have feelings account of any one, like what I've been through lately, son."

So the Lowdanes flocked around together, and for a time Joe-Ed and Letty May were ignored as they stood holding hands off to one side. But not for long. The women came circling around them, laughing with tears in their eyes. Nothing is more bitter or deadly than when a family breaks up into factions. The Lowdanes were saved. The Madders and Lowdanes would ever remain at peace. Signal County would escape the terrors of deadly feudal war. One man had come in and told them the truth.

"Course, it took nerve!" Daniel said, coming to shake Joe-Ed's hand. "Long as I live, I'll be grateful, man!"

"We'd better have something to eat," Mrs. Red Anse suggested, and Letty May started to help, but they would not allow her.

She was company, honored and loved, because after all she had made this all possible. Women could appreciate the peace and good will.

"If we had music—" some one suggested—"we could clear out and have a dance, while waiting."

"Well—" Joe-Ed grinned—"I'm here."

"Where's your banjo—fiddle?" some one asked.

"Why—" and Joe-Ed colored as his smile faded—"haven't you been up in that cabin? When I pulled out I left the music instruments there."

"You know, Joe-Ed—" Red Anse laughed—"we never thought of looking there! Lawse! Yo' had your fort right in our own clearing. That's brave!"

"Well, you know, I was plumb desp'rite—playing simple and doing what I did!" Joe-Ed said. "Not for anything in the world would I—"

"Well, considering Letty May, nobody's going to blame you!" Daniel Lowdane said, sighing with regret. "I'd done anything myself to win and deserve her. In fact, I did try."

HUNTING OSTRICHES FOR DIAMONDS

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

OSTRICHES are now being hunted in the Kalahari and South West Africa, not for their feathers or their skins, but for the diamonds in their gizzards.

A new kind of prospecting with guns and knives instead of picks and pans has begun in the remote desert spaces; and the few hauls that have been made have been exceedingly rich.

For a long time it has been known that ostriches occasionally swallow diamonds, together with pebbles and broken glass, to help them grind up their food. Some time ago a diamond was found near Walvis Bay in an area where no diamonds had ever been found before. After an examination of the ground, experts came to the conclusion that the diamond must have been deposited there by an ostrich.

Ostriches wander down dried-up river beds to the diamond yielding coastal belt of South West Africa, and return to the interior with diamonds in their gizzards. This fact has just been established by two Pretoria doctors, who have returned from a Kalahari ostrich hunt undertaken with the definite idea of testing the theory.

They found that the wild ostriches made difficult targets, and when they did bring down the huge birds they found very many pebbles and very few diamonds in the gizzards. But they had the proof they desired.

A well known big game hunter was more fortunate. In the gizzards of two ostriches he found seventy diamonds, pure white stones of high value. Some of them were very similar to the beautiful diamonds now being recovered from the new Namaqualand fields; and it is thought that the ostriches had picked them up in that vicinity, south of the Orange River, and fled northward when the diamond rush took place.

Permits have been obtained from the administration of South West Africa for this new kind of prospecting, and several expeditions are being formed to hunt ostriches on a large scale.

The MAD ROSE

A Thrilling Novelette of Brazilian Gallantry

By BURTON W. PEABODY

"São Christovão, patron saint of voyagers, protect thou us."

—*From a Brazilian amulet.*

THE CLASH of steel on steel had sounded in his ears for the last time, so Nelson dos Anjos thought. The tapering *épées* with their bell shaped guards had been carefully polished and their sharp triple points refastened with fresh winding cord; the long sabers had been burnished free of the dark blood which had chanced to flow; all the weapons now hung in rows upon the wall racks of the *Escola Physica*, shining in a delicate barricade that seemed to shut away an irrecoverable past. The period of military training, which every Brazilian youth must undergo unless exempt, was over.

Dos Anjos packed away his blue and scarlet lieutenant's uniform, embraced the uncle with whom he had lived during his college and cadet days in São Paulo, bent for a dutiful kiss over his aunt's slim pale fingers, and set his face toward his native Bahia in the tropic north, there to resume the prosaic life of the tobacco plantations and of the factory belonging to his family.

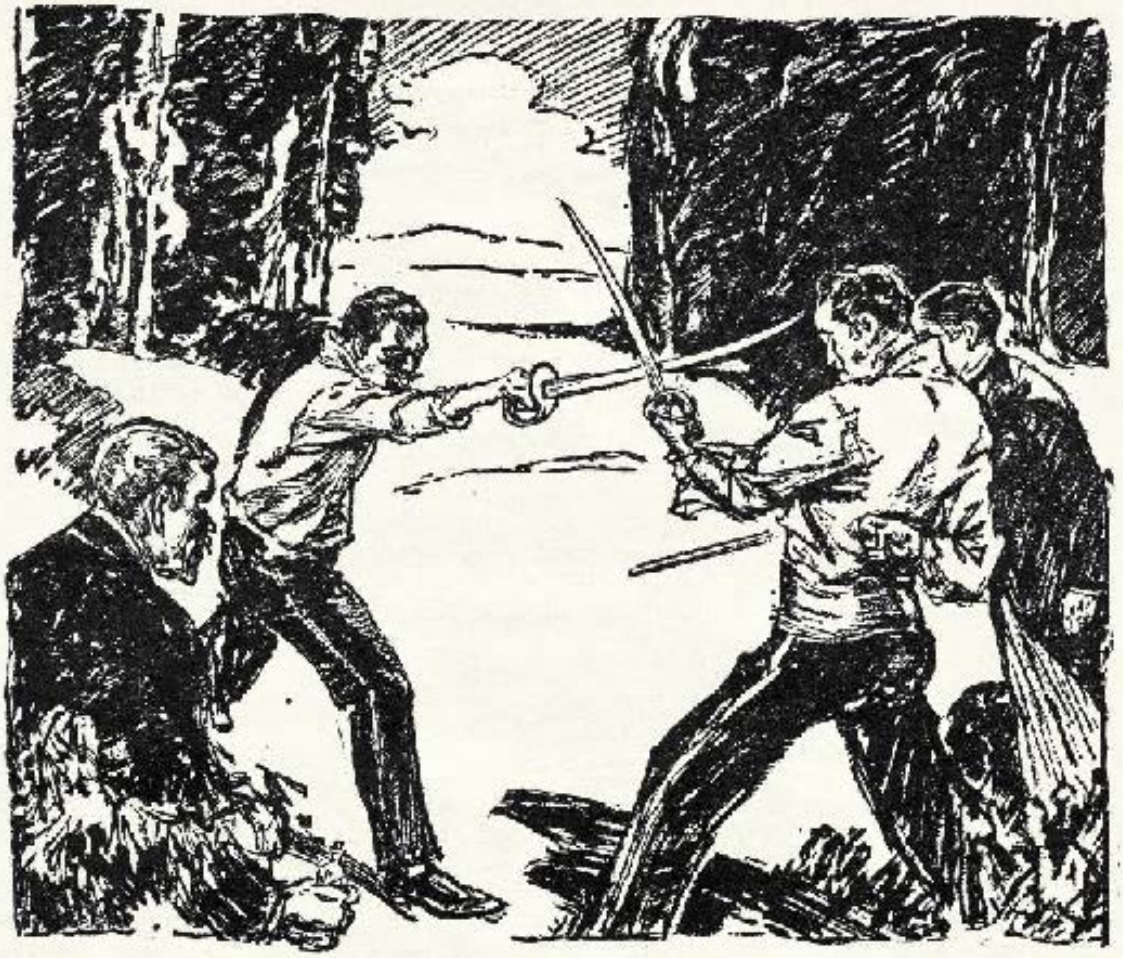
But Nelson dos Anjos was not altogether fitted by nature for a prosaic life. He was of a temperament as lazily hot as the land he came from—romantic, tender, passionate, impetuous—infinitely languid and infinitely sensitive; and it was written in the stars that unless that temperament changed, grew less complex, he would in the course of his occasional voyages up and down the Brazilian coast almost surely live to hear again sometime the clash of steel on steel . . .

The *Moacyr da Veiga*, southbound, and already well down the coast, swung slowly out of Santos harbor and down the inlet to the sea. Over her stern a flock of gulls hung on motionless pinions in air as smooth as glass; the sky was placid, the waters cobalt blue; the slender palms on the receding shore waved only a faintly nodding farewell.

This was at high noon.

A venturing wind came north from the distant shores of Uruguay; the wind talked to the sea, whispering, cajoling; the sea responded, laughing stormily, exposing white teeth.

By four o'clock the few courageous birds which still followed the *Moacyr da Veiga* were rocking, tossing over the vessel's wake with a continual flutter of gray wings; the dreamy rise and fall of the decks had changed to a ponderous seesawing which lifted first bow then stern above the steely horizon; occasionally there was a quiver of the hull, a crash, a hiss of spray, as the low bows drove



through the seething wreckage of a wave; now and again a gull's lonely cry, strangely like the yowl of a cat, but short cut, harsh, rasped out and was lost in that bleak immensity of wind and space.

Languorously oblivious to the turmoil about him, Dos Anjos swayed slowly across the steamer's after well-deck, a peculiar figure to look upon—tall for a Brazilian, somewhat lean and angular of body, thin of waist, a trifle heavy and bony of shoulder—a figure vaguely graceless and uncouth, yet oddly picturesque in a clinging flutter of white trousers, neatly belted sport coat and gray plaid cap.

There was a certain appearance of strength about him, but a graceless, apathetic strength. As the deck pitched, stern high, his body, tilting against the movement, leaned listlessly sidewise upon the air as if reclining upon an invisible wall; as the deck righted, the same invisible wall appeared to push him, without effort or volition on his part, back to a weary perpendicular.

Nelson dos Anjos drifted idly to the rail and paused there, his left hand resting upon it, his right concealed with a queer, habitual gesture in his side coat pocket, thus further distorting the neatness of a garment already twisted awry by the tugging wind; and, reeling slightly with the ship's motion, he casually watched the seven brown monkeys, barefoot, in blue dungarees, who were at this moment making good their victory over the wind whipped tarpaulin that covered the after-hatch of the tossing steamer.

They worked, those seven, with an energy resembling Dos Anjos's own; three of them tugged at greasy rope ends and edges of canvas, battening these to the

sides of the red steel cover; the four others, resting from their labors, stood about in attitudes like geometric figures, with feet apart and skinny elbows akimbo or with straight, lean arms extended and braced against creaking derrick boom or singing ventilator funnel.

Their voices, in singsong Portuguese, came to Dos Anjos on the unsteady wind.

"The ship, how he pitches," murmured one. And then—the words partly lost in a gust ". . . capable of a tempest tonight, eh, comrade?"

"*Não*," said another. "I think that not." The speaker transformed himself from a triangle to a parallelopiped and spoke again through a lull in the gale, "I heard the second officer say to the first steward as he passed on his way to the *salão* that the barometer is steady." His voice was tattered by a whooping gust; the words came disconnectedly to Dos Anjos ". . . yet . . . not surprise me with all this wind . . . something of a sea by nightfall."

Dos Anjos glanced out at the broken sky, at the hills of water, oily and dark, racing to meet them from the south, and wondered idly just what this mariner called a "sea". Then, dismissing all this from his mind, he resumed his slow pacing of the deck and turned his thoughts once more to the grave and baffling problem which had troubled him all this cloudy afternoon.

The problem had come aboard at Santos.

At that port the gangway had sloped steeply upward from the dock; its planks and cross cleats, black with grease and dirt, were made warm and slippery by the autumn sun of April, which rode, hot and brilliant, high in the northern sky. Up that treacherous surface had struggled a typical crowd of South Brazilian passengers — gentlemen, finely tailored and groomed, with the professional rings of lawyers, doctors and engineers sparkling upon their right forefingers; ladies in silks and jewels, with gold lorgnettes; women in shawls, bearing heavy bundles; *caipiras* —backwoodsmen—in corduroy or rain washed cotton suits; ruddy *gauchos* with great mustachios, with battered felt hats, and tasseled woolen *ponchos* flapping to their knees; maidens in Parisiennesque attire, bright hatted, short skirted, who slipped, stumbled, giggled, and glanced self-consciously about, chattering among themselves, as they streamed aboard.

In the midst of that motley line his problem had appeared—a girl so lovely of face that at his first sight of her Dos Anjos's impressionable heart had halted and then thumped fatefully; a girl so majestic in bearing, so whitely patrician of features, that she appeared, among those dusky, heavily powdered others, like a thing of perfect marble amid dolls of painted wood.

An alabaster skin; brows and lashes of deepest black; eyes at once dark and ravishing and cruelly proud . . . And she moved with a regal unconsciousness of her surroundings which was almost like disdain.

WITH breathless wonder, Dos Anjos stared as she stepped upon the deck—a figure all in white except for her pale blue hat and her pale silk stockings; a figure tall, erect and beautifully molded; still with the slender lines of girlhood, yet already endowed with that soft fullness and roundness of contour which comes with warm Brazilian maturity.

Her glance, indifferently sweeping the crowd before her, presently met his; her eyes paused curiously, moved away—came back for a lingering, dazing instant, and once more moved away, leaving him with a sensation of having been, all in a single moment, illumined by deific fires and seared to hopeless ashes.

She had given him a sign of favor, but it had been so brief—so brief; and already she seemed to have forgotten him. She was facing the gangplank again, and now Dos Anjos saw that there were approaching two persons, evidently her parents—an elderly, kindly, white haired woman, and a tall, forbidding, iron-gray man who

wore upon his finger the distinguishing ruby of a doctor of law.

With a demonstrativeness which somehow surprised him and touched him with an unreasoning pang of jealousy, she linked her arms through theirs, and together they moved almost directly toward him across the deck.

He knew perfectly that she, a Brazilian herself and therefore adept in that unspoken language of the eyes which constant chaperonage makes necessary, could not possibly have missed the telltale admiration in his own eyes—could not possibly be unaware of his gaze still fixed upon her; yet now she passed him by as if she had never seen him, without so much as a flicker of those silk-black lashes; swept him by as coolly as did the breeze of that warm autumn noon—as oblivious to him as if he had been but another of the curved ventilating funnels which stood bowing their hollow yellow faces in grotesque obeisance before her.

If only there were some way that he could meet her, impress her, make her see him as an individual instead of as the drab and churlish creature he knew he must have appeared.

He paced the deck—he did not know how long; he watched the seven brown monkeys come out and complete their work, watched them fasten gray tarpaulins over the lashed oil drums and wine casks and surplus coffee bags and vanish droningly forward; he looked out again upon the tumbled sky and sea . . .

That girl—that girl! Some way to meet her, impress her.

HIS thoughts took the form of sudden adventurous dreams. What was it that first mariner had said? Tempest tonight? If only that could come true. Tempest—storm—disaster. Some cataclysm which would hurl that imperturbable young spirit, overwhelmed and terrified, into his heroic arms.

He drew his right hand slowly from his pocket; he hesitated . . . Should he do it? Should he pray?

Some years before in São Paulo, Father Elyseu had given him a silver amulet—an image of Saint Christopher, patron of those who travel. He could not account for what had resulted save as a living miracle, but it was the truth that never had he touched that amulet, never had he prayed to his patron saint without an answer.

Father Elyseu had warned him not to overdo it, not to appeal for aid, except in a grave crisis. It seemed to him that he faced a crisis now—the gravest of his life. Never had anything so troubled him—so fired his heart and seared it—as had this girl.

He looked upon the black, tumultuous waters, and a little chill ran through him. It was a good deal that he was asking. But he must meet her someway—anyway at all, be it even through tempest and disaster—that would impress him indelibly upon her mind.

Hesitantly, reverently, he lifted his hand to where the silver chain and image rested beneath his shirt, and wished.

And it may have been imagination, and it may have been a miracle, but as if in immediate answer it seemed to him that the broken clouds grew darker; a gust of wind wailed eerily through the wireless antenna; it struck with a peculiar *whuff* about his ears; there was a suggestion of an unseen presence in the air. And strangely, too, a wave of mountainous proportions gathered and broke at that moment about the bows; a mist of fine, cold spray blew back and caressed him, saltily; the vessel shook and lifted, then settled back in ominous silence and resumed her even pitching.

Saint Christopher had heard him! He need do nothing now but wait.

Dos Anjos lowered the right hand which had touched the amulet; looked at it thoughtfully—clenched the fingers, straightened them, clenched them again. He returned the hand gravely to his pocket. What would she think of it, he wondered—what would she think of that hand?

The deformity had occurred in São

Paulo. Once, during practise with foils—the most innocuous of all "white arms"—his opponent had charged in upon him, *corps-à-corps*, and in the ensuing mêlée they had both fallen; hisadversary'sweapon had snapped, and its jagged, broken point had penetrated Dos Anjos's long finger to the bone. And then somehow—infection. He had spent a painful interval in the hospital and had come out with three fingers only—three fingers, with a stub between them, and a wide red scar that ran hideously up the back of his hand.

In time the three fingers had strengthened abnormally, but their grip on sword or saber hilt was never quite so sure as that of four.

The scar had whitened too, but its uneven whitening had only served to make it more conspicuous. Strangers still looked at it with revulsion—when it was unconcealed.

In a subtle way that deformity had affected both Dos Anjos's life and his character. It had, if anything, exaggerated his native languor—a hand sagging in the pocket is not conducive to haste; and it had exaggerated his sensitivity not only as to himself, his awkward appearance, but as to the suff'erings or difficulties of others. When there was trouble—especially when there was physical violence done—somehow or other Dos Anjos was always in it. Not violently in it, as a rule — lethargically, rather — restraining the impetuosity of his heart by an act of will; a mild Samaritan, a languorous Quixote, an adventurous but sometimes awkward and blundering Magallães.

All too often there was a touch of absurdity in the situations which befell him; and always, too, the deformed hand and the protecting amulet were concerned in the outcome.

THE LAST time he had appealed to the amulet had been under the most ludicrous circumstance imaginable, although it had not seemed so very ludicrous at the time. The episode had transpired at the waterfront in Santos only two days ago—an incident involving an Indian and a mule.

It was not entirely the Indian's fault that the accident occurred; the brown *crioIha* passing on the sidewalk was plump and pretty, her dress was yellow, her ankles bare; it was inevitable that the burly man perched upon the seat in the rear of the high, heavy, two-wheeled wagon should have turned his head to look. Nor was it the fault of the tall brown mule between the shafts; surely it was the Indian's duty to watch the many holes in the cobbled street.

There was a creak and a crash. The right hand wheel had vanished halfway to the hub. The huge cart rocked at a precarious angle, and for an instant its rocking was made more hazardous by the frantic jerking of the mule. But presently the animal, finding the wagon stuck, paused, stood stock still, and laid back his ears to await the next act of destiny.

Destiny, after a mad scramble in his seat, finally managed to stand erect—a thick boned, massive brownstone figure in a red shirt and corduroy breeches, under a greasy black hat.

In his hand was the short butt of a whip; the thong of it fell behind his shoulder and over the back of the cart almost to the ground; it trembled slightly, weaving like an incredibly long blacksnake.

The Indian wrapped the reins firmly round his left hand, and with his tongue between his teeth, addressed the animal in South Brazilian mule language—

"S-s-s-s-st!"

The phrase was distinctly ominous. The mule flicked an ear uneasily, but did not move. Why move? He had already proven that the wagon was stuck.

Suddenly the long snake became a blur upon the air; it struck the creature's back with a sound like a pistol cap—twice—thrice.

The mule became a bundle of dancing legs, of frenzied flesh. Iron shoes skidded and rang upon the cobbles, with a faint glint of sparks. Life upon the teetering wagon box grew intolerable.

With a curse between his teeth, the Indian put a red-brown heel upon the hub and leaped to the ground. He stood at the head of the quivering beast, wrapping the the reins in solid turns about his left fist. He stepped back, paying out a generous meter or two, then with a terrific heave yanked the animal's head forward and down, and raised his right hand.

The thong lifted from the ground again; it began to writhe upon the air in great black loops, coiling, uncoiling, squirming and snapping, like a snake in agony.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The end of it fell upon the smooth brown neck and shoulders, upon the frenzied head, upon the soft gray muzzle. The shoes upon the cobbles shrilled and rang again.

Dos Anjos, watching indifferently from the sidewalk, suddenly felt his heart go wild.

"*Chega! Chega!*" he cried. "*Deixa d'isso!* Cut it out!"

THE INDIAN ceased instantly and turned toward him as though thunderstruck. Slowly he shook the reins from his left fist to the ground and transferred his whip to it.

"You spoke to me, senhor?"

He stepped massively forward. His right hand now rested upon the red twist of cloth which served him as a belt, and for the first time Dos Anjos had opportunity to observe that there depended from beneath it a beautiful, heavy fourteen-inch sheath knife.

The young Bahian suffered a moment of indecision. He believed he could outrun the Indian, but he did not like to do so. And equally he did not like to stay. He was unarmed and quite unprepared for this emergency.

The Indian stepped closer. He was twice Dos Anjos's size, twice as strong. His right hand worked impatiently beneath his belt.

"Saint Christopher! Saint Christopher!" Dos Anjos did not really pray. He did not touch his amulet. He did not even move. He only thought, "Saint Christopher, protect thou us—"

And at his thought, lo, an immediate change came over the Indian. Miraculously the brownstone face began to weaken and disintegrate, softening and dissolving into collapsing sand. The beady eyes grew wide, white rimmed, as they flashed to Dos Anjos's hidden hand. The man blinked, drew back.

Dos Anjos laughed softly.

"There is nothing in my hand, *meu caro*."

He jerked the hand from his pocket.

The Indian leaped away three meters, and then stood in gaping wonder. The man had spoken the truth; there was nothing in his hand. But, *nome de Jesús*, what a hand! White scarred, red streaked, with the middle finger a stub.

Dos Anjos permitted himself a languid smile.

"That injury was done by a man more fierce than you, *meu caro*. Larger and more fierce. Shall I tell you what happened to him? But—no matter. I say to you again there is nothing in my hand."

Once more the Indian looked, and now he saw that Dos Anjos's hand was concealed at his hip, beneath his coat. And again he blinked. For a moment he seemed to wonder where the pistol was, or if there was a pistol, or if this was the ancient game of the vanishing peas and the magic shell; but he did not ask to be shown. Dos Anjos was glad he did not.

"Listen," he said to the Indian, "do you prefer that I call the police, or will you put your shoulder to the wheel and help your mule out of that depression? One minute," he added, as the Indian moved to comply. "He is breathing too fast to work yet—and so are you. Do me the favor to sit by the curb for a moment while I converse with your mule."

A gray muzzle, soft and warm, rested between Dos Anjos's palms; hot breaths came swiftly, and gradually more slowly. A long, yellow-brown ear lifted, tassel-like, and bent toward him curiously; soft nostrils burrowed against his breast.

And that was the mild, ludicrous sort

of thing which often befell Dos Anjos. But not always. Sometimes he was forced to physical violence himself.

THERE was the day in a *cafetaría* in Rio de Janeiro when one politician had called the lie upon another. There were rising voices, leaping figures, revolvers drawn. Dos Anjos had caught a menacing pistol wrist in mid air; both men had whirled upon him; and only the sight of his infirmity, his mutilated hand, had checked both irate friends from turning their fire upon him.

And there had been other occasions, still less pleasant.

A moonless night in Maranhão. An almost pitch black alley, faintly lighted from a street corner. A woman's scream. Three men, armed with pistols and knives, perpetrating a kidnapping or worse. Luckily Dos Anjos carried a cane that night. And, thanks to Saint Christopher and the darkness and his training in São Paulo, he was able to disarm the three and lay two out unconscious with no injury to himself beyond an insignificant cut in the arm from a thrown knife.

Yes; sensitive though he was to pain and the infliction of pain, Dos Anjos believed he could be heroic when occasion demanded. Heroic—whether with cane, pistol, steel, or unarmed hands.

And he trusted that Saint Christopher would give him an adequate situation now—a situation which would impress him indelibly, unforgettably, upon that lovely disdainful creature in white and blue.

He knew, too—and the thought rather startled him—that the situation would shortly come to pass; the darkening clouds, the stirring wind and sea had already given him the sign.

Since he was soon to meet her, it would be wise, he decided, to learn something about her in advance—her name, who she was.

He left the deck, strode through the long dining salon, where he absently noticed the stewards setting out dishes in the squares of wooden storm racks upon the swaying tables; a few more strides and he was in the forward corridor, where, at one side, he faced a brass arched grille with the word "*Commissario*" in red enameled letters above it.

He paused and rested his elbow upon the counter.

"If you please, senhor."

The *commissario*, seated upon a high stool screwed securely to the floor, swung round stolidly. He was a fat, brown personage, blue uniformed, with epaulets of tarnished gold. From the sides of his broad nostrils disconsolate wrinkles curved downward round his mouth; from his thick lips dangled a frayed straw cigaret, black at the tip which had once been alight.

"*Então*, my good cavalier, what do you wish?"

"If it does not inconvenience your grace—" Dos Anjos spoke with that ornateness of formal Portuguese which surpasses even the bouquets of Spanish—"if it is not an inconvenience, I would desire to know the name of the very pretty girl who took passage aboard at Santos."

The disconsolate wrinkles deepened as the purser's mouth drew down. He stared at Dos Anjos for several seconds before he spoke.

"More or less thirteen girls took passage aboard at Santos, my good cavalier. Girls of a diverse color, white, black, brown and yellow. Not to mention one *petite Francezinha* of numerous pearls and dubious reputation. Unfortunately your designation of the damsel in question is very vague."

DOS ANJOS was not to be outdone in loquacity by a weary purser. He rested his elbow more firmly upon the counter and leaned his weight upon it.

"The girl to whom I refer, senhor, is neither black, brown nor yellow, nor yet a *Francezinha*. She is a girl white, of the whiteness of the purest star, and of the beauty of the same. And she wears no pearls whatever; only a coat and gown of

white, a scarf of the color of cloud and a small hat pale blue."

"Ah," mused the *commissario*. "I commence to suspect that I can imagine exactly the person to whom you refer. But unfortunately, my good cavalier, the names of the passengers are written in the official list which has been put away and not within my head. Moreover—" he waved a fat palm over the paper littered counter— "I am far too occupied to be permitted to give out information except to the proper authority."

"I am sorry," returned Dos Anjos, "but in this case I am the proper authority. It is highly convenient that I know the name of this girl. And moreover—" he lifted his hand to his breast pocket and then slid it casually under the grille—"there is no finer cigar in all Brazil than the Flor Occidental of Bahia. My family is of the firm that makes them, senhor, and I should know. I ask you as a favor."

The *commissario* gazed dejectedly at the luscious brown object in its band of crimson and gold; he stirred a shoulder helplessly and, bending sidewise, spat his blackened straw stub upon the floor.

The name of the girl, Dos Anjos learned, was Iselda Valladares; she and her parents were from the historic old city of São Sebastião do Rio Pardo—San Sebastian of the Dark River—which lies in the interior hills of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, hard by the border of Uruguay.

That complicated matters somewhat. For, of all the proud people of that proud southernmost state of Brazil, the most arrogant, the most jealous of their traditions of family and custom, are those of San Sebastian. Tall and sturdy, with the invigorating strength of a cold climate, they regard with something very like contempt their languid, sun scorched, presumably frail countrymen of the tropic north. And Dos Anjos, a Bahian, betrayed his northern origin in every detail of his speech and his appearance.

Further, the age of San Sebastian is not measured in years; it is measured in centuries—centuries of stubborn resistance upon a contested frontier toward which, even in recent times, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina have turned covetous eyes. And the glory of ancient battles and victories, the fires of pride and prejudice and patriotism, have kept alive in those isolated hills customs that have died out elsewhere.

The men still walk, as the saying goes, with their gloves in their fingertips, ready to take, or give, swift offense; the pistol or sword is easily drawn; and the appeal to the dueling code, though illegal and practically abolished elsewhere in Brazil, is not unknown.

The girls are still hemmed in by the unassailable barriers of two hundred years ago; they still stand in secluded windows or upon high balconies overlooking private gardens or public streets or squares, and bring hope to the heart of a youthful admirer by the signal of a white handkerchief, despair by a red. But that is the limit of their freedom. The Sebastian girl is not permitted to appear upon the streets unchaperoned, even in broad daylight; she is not permitted to see a young man in her own home, even though he be her fiancé, unless some member of her family is present.

Throughout Brazil similar rules of conduct apply with little variance, but in most sections, especially in the cosmopolitan centers such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, there is a certain tolerance; in San Sebastian there is none.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that Dos Anjos felt a slight misgiving about his recent prayer. He had not specified to Saint Christopher that the meeting with the girl was to accord with the strict conventions of man. Suppose it should occur through some turmoil of the elements which placed him alone with her —what would her family say, what would her city say, what would the future hold then?

But perhaps Saint Christopher would not answer. Perhaps he had only imagined that darkening of the sky, that mountainous wave, that singing of the wind; perhaps it was all a coincidence. Some people, he knew, maintained that

belief in amulets was a foolish superstition. The doubt which comes at times to even the faithful crept into his mind.

But Dos Anjos did not know his patron saint; he did not fully know Saint Christopher.

II

DUSK had fallen softly upon the sea; the wind, lessening its strength, sang gently among the masts and spars, yet with a querulous note in it that suggested some impending mystery. The waves, edged with dim fins of white, were veiled in gathering twilight, giving an appearance of flatness, of calm, that was like a false sense of security. The gulls were gone; they had settled to rest long since upon the waters, lost in the wind blown smoke and haze of the steamer's wake.

Up forward two faint couplets tinkled out, and immediately afterward there jangled a brazen bell, swung in some steward's hand. Dinnertime.

In the dining salon Doctor Valladares and his family were already seated when Dos Anjos arrived, but the fact that Iselda faced directly away from the table where the steward placed him gave a peculiar flatness to his meal.

They finished just as he reached his *demi-tasse.* He lingered over the coffee with a deliberation he did not feel, and then wandered casually about the ship. He glanced into the music room and the main *sala,* but without seeing any one of interest; thumbed over some old copies of the illustrated *Careta* and *A Semana* in the smoking room; and decided he would feel less restless in his own cabin.

As he climbed the rear companionway to the canopied starboard upper deck, he remembered that it was at this corner he had seen Iselda that afternoon. The deck now was dark and deserted; it stretched before him in a dipping, shadowy curve—like a roadway built along the face of a precipice. On the left were the dark walls of cabins, with here and there a faint glow of light from an unshuttered door or window. On the right, beyond the steel stanchions and the lifeboats creaking in their davits, lay the black night and the white flecked chaos of the sea. The hiss of water, the damp of it, were borne to him on the talkative wind; and the wind seemed to be rising.

Its direction, too, had changed; it swept in now from off the starboard bow, causing the ship to roll as well as pitch; and the mountains of water, disordered by it, thrown out of step, shouldered each other like wild black horses, with white teeth gnashing at one another.

High overhead, as he looked up past the canopy, the thin, curved crescent of a new moon broke through a rift in the clouds; it hung a little west of the zenith, brightening, vanishing, reappearing, disappearing; riding the black wells and flying vapors of the sky as the steamer rode those plunging black waves with their crests of white. Its pallid light streamed faintly down past the canopy, throwing upon the hand rail and outer edge of the deck a band of greenish silver that broadened, narrowed, broadened again with the ship's rolling, like a magic ribbon. The darkness of the night, its whispering voices, the play of that magic ribbon touched Dos Anjos with a sense of beauty and unearthly life—a feeling of strange, wild sorcery. Half breathlessly he moved forward along the deck past the cabin doors, past the baths, the salt water showers, past the break in the superstructure where the soot-black funnel rose into space, humming in its throat a contented monotone.

FORWARD the break, the solid wall continued. He stopped at the second door, which was his own, and gazed at two pale gold squares of light fifteen meters farther ahead. Those neighbors were cabins No. 3 and No. 5, where were domiciled, according to the purser, Doctor Valladares and his wife and lovely daughter. There was a certain excitement in knowing that she—Iselda—was in one of those cabins, scarcely fifty feet away.

He entered his room, switched on the light and, settling himself in a chair beside the berth, tried to read.

He had been sitting over his hook, in varying degrees of concentration and thought wandering, for a long while; his wrist watch showed him, indeed, that it was well past nine o'clock. His thoughts strayed more and more from the pages. He was distracted by little sounds about him—the chattering of the wind, which rattled and whined at his shutter as if trying to convey some message; distracted too, by the chattering of the electric bulb above his head, which shook with the irregular rolling of the ship and the grinding torque of the engine.

Suddenly the wind wailed more shrilly; there seemed to be an eery urgency in its tone, a mystic power born of the sea; it rocked the vessel slowly, heavily, with the strength of an unseen hand.

The bulb in the low ceiling shook again; it rattled, flickered—and suddenly went out. A superstitious excitement crept up Dos Anjos' spine. The light came on again, dim and yellow; and a prickling still ran through him as he watched it. Yet the trouble was perfectly obvious; nothing about it to arouse superstition. The cheap porcelain socket was too large for the bulb; that was all.

He stepped upon the edge of the berth and, bracing one hand on a steel ceiling beam, tried to fix it. But the bulb would not screw tighter; the contact remained imperfect.

He was just seating himself again and calmly reaching for his book when, without the slightest volition or intent, he suddenly rose to his full height, took two swift steps across the room and crashed his palm heavily against the door.

The room had lurched violently downward, and simultaneously he heard a vast, low thundering of waters around the vessel's bow. The sloping descent of the floor beneath him was checked with ponderous force; slowly it heaved upward; and his weight was pressed upon his feet as if his body had become a mass of lead.

The thunder of waters moved nearer; he could hear it pounding along the steamer's side. Suddenly a wave crashed upon the upper deck and struck his door with an impact as of a solid object. Through the shutter, at the same instant, a small tubful of water sloshed in and spread in a shining black pool across the floor.

Dos Anjos pushed himself free of the door, while the uproar died away aft in a low gurgling and mumbling, and with a surprised glance at the small sea forming beside his berth, turned the knob and stepped curiously outside.

At first to his unaccustomed eyes the deck was like a trough of blackness; the moon seemed hidden in cloud; there was no light. But presently there became visible the edge of a stanchion; the wet surface of the hand rail, limned in greenish silver; and far out upon the black waters appeared a cold flashing of reflected light.

THE UNSTABLE deck had heaved downward once more; now as it rocked slowly upward he saw with clearing vision the surface of the tilting, sinking sea, obscured by strands of spray that rose like white hair off the windy crests; and suddenly, falling through a falling sky, appeared that lean, curved sickle of the new moon, its points bent zenithward, evil, sharp tipped—hanging, weird and sinister, from a vaporous edge of cloud.

Its greenish light streamed over the rail and fell in a band upon the deck and wall behind Dos Anjos; only the outer part of the deck, the scuppers under the solid bulwark and rail, lay in shadow.

The ascent of the deck reversed; the moon moved upward out of sight; the liquid band flowed outward across the deck, running toward the scuppers. The darkness took on form and pallid color, and Dos Anjos, watching, grew suddenly rigid, staring like a man in a trance, like a man in a cataleptic fit, dazed by a hallucination of seeing incredible things.

His first impression was that the gnomes and tritons of that white haired sea, come madly and impossibly alive, had ridden

aboard the steamer on those wind blown strands and had left here, lying upon the deck, one of the fabulous green mermaids of their own dark realm.

His brain told him that he was insane; his eyes told him that he beheld a mermaid. It was like nothing on earth.

Hardly six meters away the creature lay—an imponderable form, dimly green and luminous in the dim moonlight—a thing with a flaring, fish-like tail, a body pale and vaguely human, and a head that might have been either a tangle of wild, dark hair or a bunch of seaweed. Like something out of a fantastic painting it lay—an object faintly green and glaucous, wet and silvery and softly shimmering; a thing of wild sea witchery, half human, half spectral, and strangely beautiful.

Only gradually did it come over his numbed senses that this was a living person he gazed upon; that it was, in dazing truth, the girl from San Sebastian, caught as she returned from the showers by those wanton sea gods, hurled by them upon the deck, and stripped by their impious hands of the dark robe which she had worn and which now clung in twisted disarray about her knees and feet.

A BUZZ of wind in his ears, a slap of cold spray across the face roused him to numb activity. Somewhat like an automaton he moved forward, realizing that he must rescue her from this position of chill exposure. He lurched across the deck, swaying unsteadily and, stooping, gathered her into his arms.

It was not easy; the body was smooth and wet and limp and slippery; it sagged with heavy softness in his arms; the trailing robe was a cumbrous weight of water.

He staggered with her to the open door, crossed the threshold and laid her heavily upon his berth.

In another moment he had torn away the sopping robe; he had removed her soaking slippers and, drawing a sheet and blanket from the foot of the berth, had covered her.

This completed, he straightened up, breathing a little wildly. For the first time his mind was clearing; he realized the appalling enormity of the thing he had done. The Sebastiana—that proud daughter of a proud, intolerant race—here in his cabin, in his berth! It was not to be imagined.

Panic thoughts rushed through his mind, even while he groped for a stimulant in his satchel and moistened a towel at the water spigot.

He knew she was not badly hurt—experience with wounded men told him that. There was no blood, no mark upon her; her breathing was faint but even; her heart beat steadily. What would she say, though, when she recovered consciousness? What would she think; what would she do? What would her parents say?

He laid the moist towel against her forehead; paused with a bottle of cognac in his hand. Name of God, why had he brought her here? What would she say? What would she say? He ought to have carried her to her own cabin.

The mad idea of doing so now occurred to him; but what good would that do now? What would her parents say when he delivered her wrapped up in his blanket? The only thing would have been to carry her back in the wet robe just as he found her—and he had not thought of that in time.

Now he would have to face the storm.

With mingled hope and trepidation he noted the signs of returning consciousness. He saw the cold face twitch imperceptibly; there was a movement of the lips, of the throat muscles; a sharp intake of breath; and with a painful contraction of brows she opened her eyes.

For the first moment or two her gaze was dull, unseeing; then with increasing intensity her eyes fixed themselves upon Dos Anjos; they grew wide and black; and suddenly, with a cry and a wild glance about the room, the girl flung herself upward.

Dos Anjos checked her with a restraining hand.

"Peace, senhora! You are safe."

Instantly sensing her predicament, she

dropped back, clutching the blanket about her shoulders, staring up at him with horrified eyes.

"Where am I? What am I?" There was a hysterical catch in her voice.

"In the room of me, your servant. You are safe, senhora."

"Where am I?" she cried again with rising fright. "How came I here?"

"I brought you here, senhora. A wave struck you—knocked you down—" He made his explanation slowly, for she was evidentally beside herself—scarcely able to comprehend; she seemed on the verge of screaming or of collapsing into tears. "I found you lying on the deck, senhora. You were unconscious."

He realized all at once that her expression was altering. The hysteria was passing; it was changing to a startling and amazing fury.

"You brought me here!" she blazed. "Then let me go! Let me go! Let me out—"

"But, senhora—"

"Let me out, I say! Where is my robe?"

"Your robe is wet, senhora." He pointed to where the dripping thing lay, flung over the back of a chair, its dark green design reeking and black with water. "Your robe is wet—"

"That matters not. Give me my robe. Give me it, I command you. Give me it and leave me—before I scream for help!"

For one who a moment before had been lying unconscious there was an unbelievable determination about her.

Dos Anjos turned away with an impassive shrug.

"*Pois não, senhora.* As you wish."

HE STEPPED to the chair and with his left hand picked up the garment. His right was thrust out of sight, concealed with the habitual gesture he always employed in the presence of strangers.

As be turned back to her he became aware that her excitement had somehow passed; she was studying him with dark, curious eyes. Apparently the languid awkwardness of his movement had allayed both her fears and her fury.

She looked from his swaying figure to the dangling green thing in his hand. From under the blanket she extended a white arm. She touched the robe delicately, withdrew her hand, looked up at him again.

"I can not wear that, senhor. Please put it back."

He flung it once more over the chair.

"And close that door," came her voice. "It is swinging ajar. *Meu Deus*, if any stranger should pass and see me here with you— Name of mercy, what a thing!"

He latched the door and faced her again, his heart queerly thundering.

He saw now that she was gazing with a peculiar contemplation at the chair where lay the robe and the slippers. Suddenly her eyes came up to his and, meeting his glance, lowered swiftly, as though she found his gaze unbearable. A quick flush touched her face, and at this, somehow, a similar flush swept over him, tingling through him like an unsteady fire.

It was difficult to speak; yet speak he must. In her glance he had read an unspoken question—a question she would never put in words.

He answered gently—

"A wave tore it from you, senhora; not I."

The dark eyes lifted once more and lowered in silence. Yet in their silence was an eloquence that might not have been found in a thousand phrases of elaborate Portuguese. Gratitude, trust, respect; appreciation of his sensitivity and intuition.

But the gravity of the situation was not overcome yet. There were her parents to be considered.

The girl pondered, slightly frowning, as to how she could leave his cabin.

"The best," she said, "is to bring my mother. You know where our cabins are? Very well; go then and bring my mother. Say to her I called you. Say to her I wish her to come to the shower. Then bring her here. Only my mother—you understand?

Not my father. He would never comprehend or pardon—"

Dos Anjos stepped out upon the deck and closed the door, still balanced on his pinnacle of ecstasy. Whatever happened now he did not care. The Sebastiana had talked to him in her sweet, calm voice, on terms of freindship, solicitous for his safety as well as her own. O good Saint Christopher!

He took a step and stopped, with a sense of something behind him; once more a prickling ran up his spine. Out of the tail of his eye he was sure he had seen something—something moving back there in the open space—that break in the superstructure, where the funnel rose. It had looked like the shadow of a head, hastily withdrawn.

He turned on his toes and ran to see. He found no one. In the obscurity around the funnel there was only inanimate life, inanimately moving. Lumpy forms of motors, air blowers, skylights; with dim, slowly swaying shadows. Above him a canvas canopy fluttered, snapping in the wind. Beside him the loose cover of a lifeboat pattered and shook, its shadow flitting with bat-like silence through a shifting pool of moonlight on the deck. Was it only these moving shadows that he had seen—only this unliving semblance of living things?

STRANGELY perturbed, he turned toward the bow once more, against the whining wind. He passed his cabin and came presently to those of the family of Valladares. He stopped, looking at the two doors with their shuttered squares of light, wondering which was which.

Behind the farther door he heard a rustling of newspaper or magazine pages being turned. The wind might have caused the noise, he realized; but no—it was too human for that.

He stepped to the door and knocked. No answer; silence within.

He waited, then knocked again a little louder.

Suddenly the door of the adjoining cabin was jerked inward, and a man's head, burly and iron-gray, leaned out, framed in a yellow beam of light.

"*O que é?*" he challenged. "What is it that you want?" And then, as he commenced to discern the young man's figure in the darkness, "What is this?" he demanded. "Speak, senhor! What ungodly purpose brings you knocking at my daughter's door? And at this hour?"

"Doctor Valladares?" asked Dos Anjos calmly.

"The same. But speak! What are you doing at my daughter's door?"

"I knocked at her door by accident, senhor. I seek her mother—"

"Her mother," exclaimed the man, stepping out. "Name of madness, what is this? First you knock at my daughter's door; now you want her mother. Know you not that she has a father? I am the master of this house!"

"Your daughter wishes her mother," Dos Anjos persisted. "She called to me as I passed the shower. She asks that her mother come."

A woman's voice rose affrightedly.

"Oh, what has happened? What has happened? That wave, my dearest—remember, I told you when it struck—"

"Calmness, *querida*. She must be safe. She asks for you—"

By now the white haired woman had appeared in the doorway, with a clasping and unclasping of timid fingers over her breast.

"Your daughter is quite safe—" began Dos Anjos reassuringly.

"Come, *querida*," the man broke in. "Let us go to her. Take my arm—the deck is slippery."

"Just a minute," protested Dos Anjos, feeling suddenly weak in the knees. "Your daughter wants only her mother. She asks that only her mother come."

The man's figure whirled toward him in the darkness.

"And who are you," he rasped, "to give commands to the family Valladares?"

"But, senhor—"

"Do not stand there talking," the father cried. "Your manner tells me that

all is not well. Come, my darling—"

Together they started along the careening deck. Dos Anjos saw, with alarm for Iselda and himself, that he had botched the situation. He could not stop them now; he could only prepare them for what they would soon see for themselves.

He strode up beside them and took the woman's arm.

"Very well, then. I will tell you what happened. Your daughter is not in the shower. She was struck by a wave upon the deck; knocked insensible. But she has recovered and is safe now in my cabin."

"In your cabin!" Valladares cried. "What mad thing is this that you are saying?"

"That your daughter is safe in my cabin—"

"My daughter—in your cabin!" the man repeated. "I do not seem to understand you. I do not understand you." He staggered with the ship's lurching and caught with an unsteady hand at the rail. "Lead me to my daughter. Lead, in the name of God!"

The woman stumbling between them began to weep, and as Dos Anjos threw open the door she hurled herself distractedly upon her knees beside the berth.

"Oh, *minha filha!* My daughter! My daughter! My daughter!"

And at this, to make matters worse, Iselda gave her father a wild, shocked glance, and then buried her dark head close against her mother's breast.

THE MAN looked down upon them, pale and formidable, rocking slightly with the rocking ship, like a swaying tower of gray iron. One hand, white knuckled, clung to the door casing; his eyes, contracted, searched Iselda; turned to the chair where her disordered clothing lay; lifted to Dos Anjos with rage—outrage.

"O God!" he murmured tremblingly. "Had I my pistol here I would shoot you where you stand."

Dos Anjos drew a deep breath and controlled the retort that flamed upon his tongue. The heave of the ship staggered him; and with a profound effort at nonchalance he lifted his left hand to the varnished reservoir above the wash basin and rested it there.

"It is well, senhor, to consider before you shoot. Would you prefer that I had left her unconscious upon the deck?"

"But, *meu Deus!* Here in your cabin! Her robe removed!"

"Would you prefer that I left her in a soaking robe?"

"You could have called to us. You could have brought her to us. You could have respected decency and convention!"

Dos Anjos shrugged futilely.

"In an emergency, senhor, one does not think of convention."

"A cavalier does! A *canaille* does not!"

But in vain did Dos Anjos try to explain the insane happenings of this night. At every word he uttered he saw on the part of Doctor Valladares and his wife, whether they believed him or not, a growing hostility, a growing distrust. Apparently those very qualities which had reassured Iselda—his studied composure, his languorous mildness of manner—conveyed to them a reverse impression, an impression of callous indifference and disrespect.

He saw, as he spoke, the eyes of Doctor Valladares fixed upon him with a mingled outrage and repugnance which made it the more difficult to maintain his own equanimity and which, if anything, caused him to exaggerate his manner of elaborate politeness. He saw that serenely lovely girl, whom he had so longed to meet, watching him and her father now with frightened, tearful eyes; he saw the gaze of all three of them fixed upon his graceless figure, his outstretched sagging left arm, his hidden right hand, as if all these concealed some sinister and Machiavellian design.

And, augmenting this impression, all the while in the shutters behind him the wind crooned tauntingly; the vessel creaked; the treacherous light overhead chuckled and danced and dimmed, as

though impishly abetting him in secret, shadowy crime.

Dos Anjos was minded to tear his hand from his pocket, to shout at them why he concealed it; but instinct told him that such procedure would not help matters now.

Once more he shrugged despairingly.

"I will leave you now. There is nothing further to be said." He stepped past Doctor Valladares and bowed. "My stateroom is yours, senhor."

"True," agreed Valladares grimly, "there is nothing further to be said. Except one thing, senhor. And that is that when you step through that door I will ask you to forget, to erase from your mind forever the memory of this night—of me, my wife, my daughter!"

Dos Anjos turned back to him with exaggerated slowness.

"Your words are a trifle superfluous, senhor. Good night."

Inwardly seething, he strode aft—away from his cabin—away forever from the memory of the family Valladares.

HE FOUND himself in the unroofed space where the funnel rose, and suddenly, with startling uneasiness, the thought of the flitting shadow he had seen came back to him.

Was it possible that some one had been hiding here, he wondered—some one who had seen the girl upon the deck, who had seen him carry her into his cabin? If so there was still a possibility of some grim sequel to this affair.

Formless apprehensions troubled him as he peered among the shapes of motors, blowers, ventilators. Naturally there was no sign of life there now—only the bewitched half-life of the night stirring about him, accursed, malevolent, like a sorcerer's dream.

The crooning wind, the fluttering canopy and pattering boat top, the bat-like shadows in their dance upon the deck, lived only to taunt his senses. The bobbing moon, low over the horizon, was curved in an evil, gloating smile; the hissing laughter of the sea, the plunging of those rolling black horses with their manes of white, all seemed to mock him.

Gloomily he turned back to his stateroom. The light fell in yellow bars through the shutter. He knocked—strange, this, knocking at his own stateroom. There was no answer and he entered.

The blanket from his berth was gone, the sheet likewise; and in their places were others, smooth, clean, neatly turned down at the corner, exposing the crimson monogram of the steamship line.

Gone too was the girl, with her suspicious parents; gone as completely as though the pranking sea, which had cast that startling mermaid at his door, had reached up its spectral arms and drawn her back one more to its dark bosom.

Only a black pool of water, pretending itself a sea by running in a tidal wave under the berth and out again, remained to tell him that the entire night's adventure was not an imagined thing.

As he undressed, his hand touched the chain of his silver amulet and he paused, profoundly thoughtful. But he did not pray. It occurred to him that he had prayed too much already. He recalled once more the rage of Valladares, the tearful girl, the flitting shadow he had seen; and he wondered if perhaps Saint Christopher in his answer had not slightly overdone it.

As a matter of fact, how far the good saint had overdone it, Dos Anjos did not remotely guess. He did not yet know his patron saint; he did not yet know Saint Christopher!

III

SIX WEEKS later Dos Anjos arrived in San Sebastian.

During the intervening time, busily spent among the principal cities of the coast and of that curious inland sea known as the Lake of Ducks, the memory of the *Moacyr da Veiga* and of that incredible meeting with Iselda Valladares had somewhat receded from his mind, and indeed

he had come to look upon the whole episode as utterly closed.

Now, however, as the narrow gage train, with its brass fronted, blustering little locomotive and its three cars the color of small dust-red peppers, joggled and wriggled up through the last of the boulder strewn, rolling blue hills and clanked into San Sebastian, he found the memory of her crowding upon him irresistibly once more. He had come here on business—purely workaday affairs; yet not for a minute was he able to forget that this quaint old place where he now detrained was Iselda's city, Iselda's home.

That thought tinctured the scenes about him with a quality of romance they might not otherwise have possessed. There was romance for him in the creaking victoria in which he rode to his hotel; romance in the passing traffic—the tinkle of bells on burro drawn vehicles; the two-toned jangle of gongs on horse drawn carriages; the patter of hoofs of rough bred ponies bearing riders enthroned amid the primitive refulgence of nickel trimmed saddles and dyed sheep fleeces; the strident honk of a Detroit flivver—as exotic here as something out of an unknown, mechanized future.

There was romance, too, in the low white buildings, plaster walled, clustering close upon narrow sidewalks and rough clay streets; romance—and a suggestion of something volcanically alive—in the heterogeneous population passing by: the Indian faces; the tanned Latin faces, sun swept, wind swept, ruddily brown. Civilians in boots and spurs, with picturesquely wrapped and dangling mufflers instead of collars and ties; with the gleam, from beneath almost every coat, of revolvers in stripped holsters with trigger guards exposed and muzzles shinily protruding ready for instant action.

Soldiers, too, passing in couples or in groups—Federal troopers in yellow khaki, still garrisoned here since the revolutionary troubles of 1926; state troopers in undecipherable insignia, wrapped in great horizon-blue capes, with the wicked tip of a saber dangling at many an ankle and a short cavalry carbine slung in the crook of many an arm . . .

The glamour and uncertainty of human life, the insecurity of civilization in maintaining a foothold upon a wild frontier were suggested at every turn of the streets in San Sebastian.

But if these scenes aroused in Dos Anjos any sense of uneasiness regarding the happenings of the *Moacyr da Veiga*, such feelings were almost entirely allayed by the warmth of his reception by the importing firms he had come here to see. By the end of his second day he felt himself almost a citizen of San Sebastian; several people had already asked him to their homes, including the head of the prominent house of Xavier; and Silva Lourenço, one of a group of young men he had met in another establishment, had invited him to come tonight to visit the city's famed Club Militar. Altogether he was certain that these people had taken an instant liking to his oddly languorous and slow spoken personality, so unlike their own.

HE RETURNED to his hotel that afternoon, contemplating the possibility of communicating in some way with Iselda Valladares.

Since that fateful night on the steamer he had had only two or three momentary glimpses of her, and never another direct word or glance.

Nevertheless an incident had occurred which made it not impossible to telephone the house.

At Rio Grande, after he had disembarked from the steamer, much to his surprise Doctor Valladares had descended the gangplank and approached him as he stood upon the quay among his trunks, and with a somewhat stiff and formal bow had apologized for the violent words spoken on that turbulent night. On behalf of himself, his wife and his daughter, he wished to thank the senhor for his act of rescue; he wished to explain that, however indecorous his conduct might have appeared at the time, they all understood

now that the senhor was guided by the best intent.

In departing the polite Sebastian had doffed his steamer cap and delivered himself of that odd formality so common in Brazil of stating one's name and address—

"Your servant, senhor—Miguel Fonseca de Valladares, of São Sebastião do Rio Pardo."

Dos Anjos had responded in kind:

"Nelson Arturo dos Anjos, of Bahia. Your servant, senhor."

The words really mean nothing. Theoretically they are a bid for further acquaintance; actually, the Brazilians are so prodigal with their courtliest phrases that they almost cease to have significance. And the fact that Valladares had delayed his apology till after Dos Anjos left the steamer seemed delicately to imply that he expected and desired no further intercourse.

Yet the fact remained that he had given his name and address, and in no way could it be considered a presumption if now Dos Anjos telephoned to pay his respects. Whether by any possibility he would be invited to the house or have an opportunity to see Iselda—all that rested upon the laps of the gods.

With mingled hope and doubt Dos Anjos crossed the cobbled interior court of the hotel, glanced through the flimsy directory and lifted the one-piece transmitter-receiver from its stand. He glanced at his watch. It was three-thirty —a rather singular hour if he expected to find a busy man at home. Perhaps he did not expect it.

For, sure enough, it was not Doctor Valladares who answered at all, but a low, clear feminine voice whose familiar quality brought back to Dos Anjos all the intoxication of that night of sorcery aboard the steamer.

"Doctor Valladares is not at home, senhor. He will be at home at six. You desire to leave some message?"

Dos Anjos caught his breath excitedly.

"I desire, senhora. But may I—may I inquire who speaks?"

"Here speaks Iselda Valladares. Who speaks?" she asked in turn.

"Nelson dos Anjos; possibly you do not—"

"Who, senhor?"

"Nelson dos Anjos—a passenger of the *Moacyr da Veiga*—"

"Of the *Moacyr!* Mother of God!" There was a horror in the smothered exclamation which sent a faint chill through him. The voice came again hurriedly, "What brings you here, senhor? When did you arrive?"

"I arrived yesterday—on business."

There was a pause, and then in a voice strangely agitated for one so calm as Iselda:

"Oh, senhor, what a terrible thing! You cannot remain in San Sebastian. Never ought you to have come here."

"*Mas porque não!* Why not, senhora?"

Dos Anjos wondered if he needed to ask. Before his mind a shadow was suddenly dancing—a bat-like shadow, coldly flitting in cold moonlight.

Her answer was in the form of a question which seemed to confirm his thought.

"Listen, senhor, does any one here know that you were a passenger on the—the—on that steamer?"

"I think that not, senhora."

"Then listen—*escuta!* Whatever happens—whatever happens let no one know!"

"But, senhora—"

"*Meu Deus!*" she cut him off. "I can not talk to you thus; I dare not—" A pause; then her voice once more, almost inaudible, as if she were speaking just above a whisper, "Listen, senhor! *Está ouvindo?* Are you listening?"

"I am listening, senhora."

"There is only one way. Will you come to see me—here—at our house?"

Despite his sense of looming catastrophe his heart leaped giddily. Would he go to see her? Would he!

"Name me the hour, senhora," he murmured.

"*Está bem.* Tonight then. Tonight at eight and a half."

Tonight? He suddenly remembered;

he had an engagement for tonight. He had promised to go with Silva Lourenço and his friends to the Military Club. He started to explain to her, but was instantly cut off.

"*Não faz mal*— It matters not in the least."

The coolness of her tone touched him with an icy dismay.

"Senhora, I will come tonight."

"You need not."

"Or at any hour you say."

A short laugh, subdued and without mirth, came over the wire.

"I am not trying to urge you, senhor. I merely desired to help you—out of a situation most grave. Tomorrow will serve equally—provided you keep wise counsel tonight."

"I will come tomorrow then."

"*Está bem.* Tomorrow, at eight and a half. But listen—" her voice sank again, grew soft and sibilant, as though she were speaking with lips close against the phone — "Come not to the door of the house; you hear? Come alone, to the side of the south—to the dark corner where stands the balcony, hid by a tree of roses . . . Is it clear?"

"It is clear, senhora."

"Until tomorrow, then."

"Until tomorrow."

Dos Anjos replaced the phone upon its frame with a trembling hand. Madness again beyond the madness of dreams. Iselda Valladares—the proud and lovely Sebastiana—offering to meet him in the most intimate rendezvous permissible to a Sebastian girl. He would have liked to believe that she was doing this out of a desire to see him, but every sense told him that it was only because of a situation most grave.

THAT evening Dos Anjos went with Silva Lourenço to join some of Lourenço's friends at the Club Militar.

Ever since his talk with Iselda in the afternoon he had been apprehensive of making some false step which would precipitate he did not know what avalanche of disaster. Consequently he was unusually wary, unusually sensitive to his surroundings, as he and Lourenço entered the austere stone building and drifted in amid the crowds of civilians and officers who lounged in groups about the long, smoke filled *sala*.

Of one thing Dos Anjos was immediately aware and immediately thankful—that if he was going to face trouble of any sort, he at least had beside him a very influential and competent defender. He realized from the bows and greetings on every hand that Lourenço enjoyed extreme popularity here—nor did he wonder at his popularity. The young Sebastiano was, he thought, one of the most engaging and striking persons he had ever met. He was both handsome and imposing to begin with. His brows were thickly black and glossy and they met in an aggressive line over an eagle nose and a pair of sparkling and courageous dark eyes. His profile from the left was almost classical, but with an urbane suavity and warmth in the curve of mouth and chin. From the right the suavity was tempered with a peculiar, grim strength, which was made more grim, almost sinister, by a thin white saber scar extending from cheekbone to jaw.

It was, in fact, their mutual wounds—one of the cheek, the other of a hand—which had drawn Lourenço and Dos Anjos so quickly together upon their first meeting.

But there was a magnetism about Lourenço quite beyond that of his features. He moved with an alertness, a verve, a virility which instantly caught the eye; his carriage was athletic, his dress picturesque. He had worn tonight, disdaining an overcoat, a long shoulder cape of velvety blue; this flowed about his upright figure with a martial dignity; his hat of crushed black velour he had removed from his black wavy hair as they entered, with a sweeping flourish, with a flash of dancing, all seeing eyes which seemed to embrace every one in their swift cordiality.

His left hand, in which he now carried

his hat, was flung about Dos Anjos's shoulders as they moved from group to group, with an intimate gesture which seemed to say—

"*Senhores* and *cavalheiros*, let me present my excellent friend."

His actual words of introduction were simple enough, but even they seemed to imply some unuttered distinction—

"My friend, Lieutenant Dos Anjos of Bahia—and formerly of the São Paulo State cavalry."

Civilians and young cadets, junior officers and colonels, shook Dos Anjos's injured hand and looked respectfully into his eyes as though he were a scarred veteran of vast and unknown wars.

They moved through the long room hung with rusted arms and tattered banners and musty, gilded frames portraying heroes of the past, and adjourned presently to the gaming room for a round of billiards.

Two others joined them here; Captain Ruiz, a somewhat surly, thickset, blackish man of forty; and blond, blue eyed young Xavier, a son of the elder Portuguese Xavier at whose house Dos Anjos had had dinner last night.

THESE two played as partners against Lourenço and Dos Anjos while several others gathered about the table to look on. The lead fell to Lourenço, and as he stepped round to the end of the table Dos Anjos noticed Captain Ruiz looking curiously at his crippled hand.

"Of certainty your hand has been badly injured," said Captain Ruiz. "Do you play right handed, Lieutenant Dos Anjos?"

The Bahian shrugged.

"I do. It may not be pretty to look upon, but it is fairly competent."

"Have no fear, Captain Ruiz." Lourenço laughed. "Lieutenant Dos Anjos and I are about to make you twain look like Paraguayan rustics."

And, as if true to his word, Lourenço led off with a series of dazzling shots, driving the white and the red ivory the length of the table, caroming them off the sides, coaxing them into a corner, brushing them together over and over with a velvet touch, smashing them out about table, drawing them together again.

As he marked up his score the captain laughed ruefully.

"*Meu Deus*, Seu Silva, you are a fiend at this."

The captain played next, with a strong but heavy hand, and flubbed his fourth shot.

Silva Lourenço laughed and flung an affectionate hand about Dos Anjos's shoulders.

"Like Paraguayan rustics," he said tauntingly. "Show them, Seu Nelson."

The Bahian bent with a curious, slow droop of his shoulders, steadied the cue tip with his extended left hand, and held its butt with an angular, awkward grip of the fore and ring fingers of his injured hand. He drove with a languorous swing of wrist and forearm; and the cue snapped as if endowed with a life of its own. The balls crashed with surprising force about the table and nestled as if by magic into a corner.

"Bravo!" cried Lourenço.

"*Diabo*," murmured Ruiz with a wry smile. "Another fiend."

Xavier smiled and said nothing. His blond features were strong and honest, and Dos Anjos felt that here, too, he had a friend if he needed him.

The Bahian eased round the table and, with a careless nonchalance that looked as though he must miss, played the balls against each other, slowly, lazily, almost duplicating Lourenço's run. He closed with a score of twenty-two, and was aware that by now a dozen or more interested persons were around the table, watching.

Ruiz looked again at the injured hand while Xavier played.

"I understand that you were in the cavalry, Lieutenant Dos Anjos. Are you as good with the 'white arms' as you are with a billiard cue?"

Dos Anjos shrugged indifferently.

"My hand is not perfect, Captain Ruiz, but it is fairly competent."

It was Lourenço's turn again. He bent eagerly over the table; but his play was never finished.

Captain Ruiz was saying, with a slow drawl:

"A crippled hand. And somehow that reminds me. You recall, Lourenço, the traveler who came up from Rio Grande? The one who was drunk that night and talked too much—and you almost killed him for the thing he told?"

DOS ANJOS saw Lourenço's extended hand suddenly shake upon the green baize table; his cue tip wavered, steadied, wavered again. Slowly he straightened up. His face was queerly pale.

"My God, Captain Ruiz, what are you talking about? All that happened long ago. Lieutenant Dos Anjos has just arrived."

"But, Seu Silva," persisted the captain blandly, "what a strange coincidence. The man said that the person on the steamer had no middle finger on his right hand."

"I did not hear him say that."

Xavier patted Lourenço soothingly on the back.

"Your shot, Seu Silva."

"Yes," said Lourenço in a dull tone. "My shot."

He bent over the table with a cue that shook as if palsied. He struck as if he had not aimed at all, and his white ball, touching neither of the others, went slithering in silent tangents round the cushions.

The crowd of onlookers was suddenly so still that the faint hiss of the whirling ball could be heard.

Lourenço straightened up once more. Tiny beads of perspiration stood on his brow.

All about him was an air of tense expectancy, as if each bystander awaited some deed that now must follow; he was like a man performing a hideous but inescapable ritual.

"Friend Nelson," he said heavily, while the others hung on his words, "tell me—did you, by any chance, come south on the steamer *Moacyr da Veiga?*"

Ice was in Dos Anjos's heart. It seemed to him that black wings of disaster were beating dangerously close to both himself and Lourenço. He did not know if he could fend them off. He remembered Iselda's warning—

"Whatever happens—whatever happens let no one know!"

He managed a languorous shrug; a faint smile.

"Friend Silva," he answered, "I have journeyed on so many steamers of late, both on the sea and in the *Lagôa dos Patos*, I really can not remember."

Captain Ruiz grunted viciously.

"That is not an—"

Lourenço whirled upon him.

"Silence, Captain Ruiz, *por favor!*" He turned back to Dos Anjos, his eyes darkening suspiciously.

"Friend Nelson, you will pardon me a thousand times, but I am obliged to ask a question that can not be evaded. The honor of San Sebastian—a pledge I have made—compel it . . . There was a passenger on the *Moacyr da Veiga* who one night six weeks ago carried a girl of San Sebastian into his cabin. You will easily remember if this was you, or not."

Whirling alternatives flashed through Dos Anjos's mind—evasion, denial; truth, half-truth; defiance. Being a good Brazilian, he would gladly have lied to protect a woman's honor; but this was different—in this case apparently the girl was already sullied. Besides, the black wings were brushing too close for him to risk a falsehood.

He drew himself together casually.

"Senhor Silva, this is not a matter to be discussed publicly. Let us adjourn to a private room—or else continue the game."

"I am sorry," said Lourenço rather quickly, "but the matter has become public property. I am obliged to clear you here." He peered at the Bahian; a little whiteness appeared in the muscles round his mouth and ran lividly along the saber scar. "My God, Dos Anjos! It was you! It was you! If it was not, say it was not!"

Dos Anjos flung out a quieting hand.

"There is no need to shout, Seu Silva. If you insist upon discussing the matter here, I will explain what happened."

Lourenço did not seem to hear him.

"Oh, my God—*meu Deus!*"

He stepped back incredulously; reached his hand toward the cue rack to steady himself, missed it, and swayed like a tall young tree.

"Oh, *meu Deus!* You! You—my friend!"

DOS ANJOS was dully aware of cues clattering on nearby tables; of civilians and officers coming up, gathering round in a tense, thickening circle. The awareness of an impending quarrel was spreading through the club like the spreading of a pestilence.

And the quarrel, he saw with anguish, was going to be between himself and the man he had thought would stand by him. Lourenço's face was changing unbelievably. His first wild horror had passed; he was no longer the hurt friend, the solicitous friend; he was no longer the stricken or even the angry friend; by some incomprehensible metamorphosis he had become diabolized into a person strange, unknown; a person suave and cold and bitter, mouthing his words with a cutting irony.

"And so you come here pretending to be our friend, imposing upon the hospitality of San Sebastian—you, with a disgrace intolerable upon your head! You outrage a girl of San Sebastian, destroy her, stigmatize her before the world—and then come here, our guest! God help your soul, Dos Anjos!"

Dos Anjos, hurt and more than hurt by the swift change in his friend, stood drooping before him, controlling with difficulty his own fast pounding heart. His right hand, dropping unconsciously into his coat pocket, clenched passionately there.

"Lourenço," he appealed, "you are speaking madness. You talk of shame where there is no shame, of stigma where there is no sin—"

"No shame? No shame?" Lourenço cried. "No shame—to carry a maiden into your cabin? No shame, to destroy her, body and soul, before the world—"

"*Basta!*" exclaimed Dos Anjos. "Enough! Enough!" He felt himself trembling; his heart was flaring beyond domination. "I will not stand here while you insult an innocent girl; while you defame her with words, with insinuations."

A flash of something cruel and calculating in Lourenço's eyes warned him to check himself, to control his temper. He paused warily.

The Sebastian laughed, far from smoothly:

"It is not the girl I am trying to insult, my friend. It is you!"

His meaning—the precise significance of his words—crashed giddily through Dos Anjos's mind. An insult, in the sense Lourenço used it, permitted of but one answer—a challenge, a demand for redress.

A feeling of desolation assailed him; somehow he had never dreamed of this. Lourenço, his friend, forcing him toward the brink of mortal enmity.

He glanced helplessly at the circle of watching faces; he saw the face of Xavier, of Ruiz, of others he had just met so cordially; but nowhere was there any flicker of sympathy—neither was there active hostility; only an impersonal, electric interest. The quarrel plainly rested between himself and Lourenço.

Dos Anjos looked at his incredibly hostile friend.

"Lourenço, this is amazing hospitality. You invite me here and—"

"My apologies, senhor!" Lourenço cut him off with a coldly formal bow. He turned swiftly toward the crowd; his eyes caught a man in uniform with a wealth of gold braid upon his breast. "General Astrada," he said, "will you do me the kindness to act in my place as host for the rest of this night? My victoria and driver will be at your disposal if you wish."

"Thank you," cut in Dos Anjos with frigid nonchalance. "I will require neither your driver nor your carriage. Nor a host. I thank the general nevertheless."

A twisted smile crossed Lourenço's handsome face.

"I fear you are wrong, senhor. You assuredly will require a host before this night is over. Not one, but two! Our friend, Raul Xavier, will perhaps act as the other—if you so desire." He paused an instant. "You spoke a minute ago of being insulted, Senhor Dos Anjos."

DOS ANJOS stared at him in bewildered pain. What possessed the man? What vindictive fury made him so hostile to all reason? Tragedy was enveloping them and Lourenço seemed grimly eager to bring it on.

Wearily he stirred his shoulders; the movement was like a gesture of infinite grief, of infinite futility.

"Lourenço," he pleaded, "why can not you let this matter die? Why can not you listen to an explanation? We came here as friends, you and I—"

"Friends?" Lourenço's voice rose angrily, like a wailing steamer's siren; then dropped once more—controlled, ironic, caustic. "I am not friend to a traitorous dog. I am not friend to one who betrays a girl and pretends to be friend to her friends!"

Like a flash of belated intuition—but none the less blinding for its tardiness—there came to Dos Anjos a comprehension of what ailed Lourenço. It could be only one thing; only the fundamental passion of mankind—love of a girl, a sense of hateful rivalry—could change a friend so swiftly to an unreasoning adversary. Lourenço—this must be it! Lourenço, like himself, must be infatuated with Iselda Valladares.

Dos Anjos stood leadenly, stunned by what he guessed, trying to imagine what relations might exist between Iselda and Silva Lourenço, trying vainly to pierce the ramifications of motive and action which opened up before him.

His silence, his inertness, appeared to stir the Sebastian to greater fury. The glossy black brows knitted fiercely; the line of the saber scar was white beside the twisted, sneering lips.

"Oh, you block of clay!" Lourenço mouthed. "Have you no temper, no feeling at all? I commence to think you are a man of butter! A man with a heart of butter! Do you hear me, Dos Anjos, or are you growing deaf? Butter, I said, Dos Anjos—that yellow stuff they smear on bread!"

Dos Anjos's heart was hammering; inwardly he stormed; yet outwardly he still held himself unmoving, languid. He saw that tragedy could not be averted now—the black wings were beating fatefully about his head—but he also saw another thing. Lourenço, instead of seeking cause to challenge him, was striving to infuriate him; striving, apparently, to make him the one to challenge. Why, he could not guess. Under every dueling code he had ever heard of, whatever choice there is of weapons and conditions rests with the man insulted—or with the man more grievously insulted; it matters not who challenges.

Why, then, should Lourenço strive to reverse the situation—try to make him challenge? Was it to bring greater sympathy to himself, his cause; was it for some reason concerning Iselda?

Well, anyway, he could play Lourenço's game; he could meet him, taunt for taunt.

As he framed his reply, he was aware of a changing interest on the part of the crowd; others, too, had caught the spirit of this grim yet piquant game; they were watching like hounds on a warming scent—thrilling at the spectacle of these two young men, already at swords' points, each striving to inflame the other beyond endurance.

"And if you yourself have such temper, such feeling," said Dos Anjos with a mocking shrug, "I marvel that you stand there spewing words. I marvel that you do not do something. I marvel that you do not challenge. Or is it that you are somewhat of a coward, Lourenço? Is it that you are perhaps afraid?"

The Sebastian's face whitened at that sting; yet he ignored its implication. He

stood, handsomely proud and pale, with folded arms.

"I do not challenge a dog, senhor. In San Sebastian we do not challenge dogs. We kick the dog, and when he bites we run him through! You spoke long ago of insult, Dos Anjos. I am amazed that you have not asked redress yet."

"What I call sufficient redress," returned Dos Anjos lazily, "can be stated in five words. In my native land of Bahia we have an expression, *'Uma pancada é mão cortada!' A blow in the face is a hand cut off!* And what do you think about that?"

AS HE spoke he raised his left hand in a slow, lackadaisical gesture as if about to adjust his tie and, reaching out, slapped Lourenço across the cheek with all his might.

What Lourenço thought about that was expressed rather faster than the eye could follow; but still he did not challenge. With lightning swiftness he retaliated—struck Dos Anjos across the mouth with his open palm; and while he staggered, struck him again.

"And that," said Lourenço, pausing, pale and scornful, "is the answer of San Sebastian! For the hand cut off, we cut off twain. And what do you think about that!"

Dos Anjos still reeled from the fierceness of the blows; his face was stinging; his eyes were blind with fury. *Uma pancada!* A blow—insult unpardonable! Beside himself, he fumbled at his hip.

Some one screamed out:

"*Apaga a luz!* The light! Put out the light!"

Instantly, somewhere, a switch was pulled, and the club was plunged into darkness. They employ heroic means of pacification in South Brazil.

When the lights went on again a dozen neutral arms were holding Dos Anjos.

"Take it easy, Seu Nelson. Take it easy, old battler. You can not fight this way. Not here. Take it easy."

"Challenge him," whispered Xavier.

Dos Anjos yielded to the force of superior numbers.

"Very well, then. Release me."

They unpinned him slowly, still watchful for another outbreak of that peculiarly active block of clay.

Panting a little, Dos Anjos regarded the taunting, faintly cruel face of Silva Lourenço.

"Very well then, you coward, I will challenge—since you dared not! Name your seconds. I will request Senhor Xavier to act as one of mine. I leave it to him to select the other."

And thus was arranged that duel between Nelson dos Anjos, the languorous emotional Bahian, and his friend, Silva Lourenço, the stalwart, lightning swift Sebastiano—that duel, at once astounding and ridiculous and dreadful, which will never be forgotten while youthful blood runs red and warm in those south Brazilian hills.

IV

AS ALL the fighting codes decree a minimum of twenty-four hours between challenge and combat, in order that the seconds may have time to arrange details and also effect, if feasible, a reconciliation, Dos Anjos was able to keep his rendezvous with Iselda Valladares before his meeting with Silva Lourenço on the field of honor.

He waited for her at the balcony, at eight-thirty the following night, as he had promised. But for the worry of this new imbroglio in which he had involved himself, the place would have seemed one of high romance, of glamourous dreams. Velvet darkness all about him, moistly balmy, and heavy here with the fragrance of many flowers. A concealing embrasure in the stucco wall that edged the sidewalk; a high, locked gate of iron pickets; and just beyond it, veiled in night-black vines, the wall of the house with the little balcony jutting out above.

What light there was from the distant gas lamp at the street corner was broken into glimmering flecks of yellow by the thick foliage of the tree Iselda had de-

scribed—a tree of those strange, large, loose petaled flowers known in Brazil as the "mad rose," or "changing rose."

The sound of the far away cathedral carillon chiming the half-hour had scarcely died upon the air when Iselda appeared.

Dim and wraith-like, her face floated out upon the darkness of the balcony, framed in a shadowy mist of hair.

Her voice drifted down to him, low, suppressed, like a breath of wind.

"Senhor Dos Anjos—"

"Your servant, senhora."

Her face moved nearer; hovered above the balustrade. Even in the intense darkness she was exquisite; yet he instantly felt a cold aloofness about her; a cold, imperturbable strength and beauty. Whatever excitement he had detected over the telephone yesterday had vanished now.

She asked solemnly—

"Is it true, senhor—the news?"

"Then you have heard?"

Usually an affair of honor, especially in a country where dueling is illegal, is held as a secret among the participants; but after the semi-public crisis at the Club Militar last night it would not have surprised him if the whole city knew.

A jealous suspicion of his antagonist made him ask—

"Silva Lourenço told you?"

"On the telephone," she said defensively. "I have not seen him—yet." She added quickly, "He said you challenged; is that true?"

"I was driven to it, senhora—"

"Driven to it? How could you be driven to it!"

"By intolerable insult, senhora."

"By insult—you!" Her voice took on an edge of hardness, scornful, metallic. "And what of your insult to me—to San Sebastian? What of your behavior?

"Senhor Dos Anjos," she went on without giving him a chance to reply, "possibly I judge you wrongly, but your entire conduct appears that of a blundering cad or else a deliberate seeker of trouble. That night on the steamer—that fearful night; your temerity in coming here; now this!"

"But, senhora—"

"What are you?" she demanded scathingly. "A—a swashbuckler?—a fierce '*Matasete*', a 'Killer-of-Seven'—come to San Sebastian to teach our poor *gauchos* how to fight?"

HE WINCED more painfully than at anything Lourenço had said. Oh, the injustice of this! After he had begged and pleaded with Lourenço to drop the quarrel, to listen to an explanation. A "Killer-of-Seven"—he; a swashbuckler . . . Sothat was why Lourenço had driven him to a frenzy, forced him to challenge—in order to make him appear the aggressor in Iselda's eyes!

If only he could make her see—

"Senhora," he said wearily, "it was not my fault. You judge me wrongly."

"How could it happen if it was not your fault? I had warned you to keep wise counsel. You must have said something—of me, of the ship—"

"No, senhora, nothing. My hand betrayed me."

"Your hand?"

"I have a crippled hand, senhora. Somehow they knew about it and—"

"A crippled hand!"

"Yes, senhora." He drew it from his pocket, held up the three fingers in the shadowy light; dropped it out of sight again. "It was badly injured once."

"Oh," she said faintly. "I did not know—"

"Now you understand why I keep it always hidden. It is not a pretty hand to see."

The dark pools that were her eyes grew wide and black. The ivory hands, resting upon the rail, moved uneasily.

"But, senhor, if you have a crippled hand, how will you fight? What is the weapon? *Meu Deus*—not pistols?"

"*Não, senhora.* Sabers."

"Sabers!" she cried softly.

"Aye—sabers."

"But that is butchery!"

"Yes, senhora—"

Dos Anjos remembered a grizzled old

coronel in São Paulo saying long ago, while discussing "white arms":

"Duels with Italian foils I have seen, *cavalheiros*, and duels with swords and rapiers. But a duel with sabers, never. It must be a thing fantastic."

"Why?" a stripling cadet had asked.

"Because," explained the *coronel* impressively, "with swords or foils or rapiers you can only lunge and thrust; only the tip is sharp; the wounds, however deep, are neat and pretty. But with sabers—with the whole long blade whetted to a cutting edge, and swinging like cleavers, the fighters must emerge, both I should think, looking like slaughtered hogs."

From a cold distance Iselda's voice came down to him—

"Oh, this is dreadful, Senhor Dos Anjos."

He stirred an inert shoulder:

"Yes, senhora. It is going to be dreadful."

She stared down at him for a silent moment as if somewhat mystified by this languid swashbuckler.

But he had meant it; it was going to be dreadful. His seconds had warned him last night that Lourenço was the finest swordsman in San Sebastian—his prowess, indeed, was in part the reason of his popularity. He had already fought a dozen duels, with every kind of weapon; some of his adversaries he had defeated; some had fled the *pista;* some had escaped only by ingloriously pleading mercy—*misericordia.*

DOS ANJOS, on the other hand, had been, not so long ago, the most skilful swordsman in the Paulista Reserve. And last night, still frenzied by the insult of a blow in the face, he had readily consented, crippled hand or no, to meet Lourenço with his own choice of weapon. Whether he could stand up against the man he had neither known nor cared; in the fury of the moment he had felt willing, eager, to kill or be killed.

But now . . .

The girl above him was looking anxiously down; her voice came to him in a changing, troubled tone:

"Senhor—listen. This must not be. You must not fight, you two. You must permit yourselves to be reconciled."

Dos Anjos moved his head in slow negation.

"I fear that is impossible, senhora."

"Why—?"

"Because the insults were mutual and mortal. The seconds so decided. Besides, Lourenço fights for the honor of San Sebastian. He has made a pledge, it seems."

She repeated the phrase meditatively.

"For the honor of San Sebastian . . . Ah, yes—"

The pale face floated up and back, lost in shadow, rapt in contemplation of some mysterious symbol. She returned slowly; wraith-like, immaterially beautiful, like something dreamed.

The deep wells of her eyes brooded over him, warm and close.

"Senhor," she said with a strange gentleness, "I will tell you something. When you came here tonight—when you spoke of challenge, of insult to yourself, I rather hoped that he would kill you. You made me hate you. Your conduct, your manner, the events of the steamer—everything—" she brushed her hand sidewise in a gesture— "but that is past. I do not quite understand you yet; but I commence to feel a certain sorrow—a certain sympathy for you I had not known before."

A fire of hope stole upward through Dos Anjos's heart. Sympathy! A potent word in Portuguese; signifying—as it does not in English—the direct, warm opposite of antipathy.

He looked up at her with fervid yearning and he knew that what he felt she understood. She still bent close above the balustrade.

"Senhora," he murmured with painful ardor, "only to hear you say that, only to know you do not hate me, to imagine that you care, even a little—this will give me heart."

The dark eyes drew even closer; they were near and warm and inexpressibly tender. Her voice was low and pleading.

"Will it give you heart for what I am going to ask?"

"Ask it, senhora," he said impulsively—and then listened in anguish to her response.

"Senhor," she continued, still in that alluring, tender voice, "you are a stranger here. What happens on the dueling *pista* will matter little to you. To Silva Lourenço, it means everything. This is his world, his home.

"You tell me that your hand is bad. If, then, you two must meet as a matter of honor, can you not pretend to lose? Can you not make your hand an excuse—and accept a bloodless defeat?"

It seemed to Dos Anjos that his life, his strength, were oozing out of him; his very blood was draining into the ground. This was how much she cared!

"Oh, *meu Deus!* My God! My God!" he muttered.

He stood bowed and drooping, his eyes upon the thick shadows at his feet.

"Oh, you are cruel, senhora!"

"Yes," she said gravely, "I am cruel. Cruel and kind. There will be nothing gained by the shedding of blood. I do not wish to see you maimed—either of you—"

He lifted his head, with a helpless, despairing anger.

"You mean you love Silva Lourenço, senhora?"

SHE DREW a quick gasp; he saw the white hands leap upward, pause uncertainly, then rise once more and cover her face. What emotions were passing in her mind he would have given the world to know. She stood a moment, utterly still; then the dark head shook imperceptibly; her reply came down to him, muffled and repressed—

"*Não, senhor.*"

Slowly her hands sank to the rail again.

"Listen," she implored in a stricken tone. "I am only trying to save you—to save you both, perhaps. You must not fight in this fearful way! One of you must yield—and it must be you. It is not possible to ask Senhor Lourenço to do so—not after all that has happened. It is not to be thought of. But you can yield, senhor; you can so easily yield. In that way honor will be satisfied, blood will be spared, and there will be no dishonor for you. To admit defeat is not dishonor. I know it is not pleasant, senhor, but—oh, I beg you—I beg you—"

Dos Anjos shifted miserably.

"It is not easy to do what you say. It is not easy to make this duel a pretense. I told you the insults were considered mutual and mortal. The duel selected is that of death."

"Death!" she cried, aghast. And then repeated the word with a sudden, eager vehemence, "Death? What is death? Only a word, senhor."

She leaned fervently above him; the deep wells of her eyes were contracted; her words poured down to him in a hurried, tumbled flow:

"Oh, there are many kinds of death, senhor. I am a Sebastiana; I know. A wound in the arm, senhor—you can call that death. Your sword flies out of your hand—you retreat—you step out of bounds of the *pista*—any of these is death! Oh, death is an easy thing, senhor."

An easy thing! The ground beneath Dos Anjos's feet reeled like a steamer's deck.

An easy thing to play the coward, to face defeat. An easy thing to yield to cruel, vindictive Lourenço.

And if he yielded, what of Iselda?

He looked up at her dully.

"And if I do this, senhora—will I see you again?"

The question appeared to shake her; he saw the strong ivory fingers grow convulsively tight upon the rail. But she answered in a tone fatalistically suppressed and cold:

"In neither case will you see me again, senhor. After all that has happened, how can I permit? If you yield, you will hardly desire to remain in San Sebastian. And if you refuse to yield, if you insist upon enacting this deed of murder—oh, *meu*

Deus!—" she broke off passionately— "I will hate you!"

"But, senhora—"

"*Por favor, amigo*—do not make it more hard for me! Have you not brought me sufficient pain already? The least you can do is to go—go from San Sebastian, without causing me further anguish. The least you can do is what I have asked."

She was leaning closer, closer, over the balustrade; her elbows rested upon it; her hands reached out above him, clasping in entreaty.

"Oh, senhor, senhor! I beg you! Make this sacrifice for me! And remember—" her voice dropped almost to a whisper now; warm, appealing— "remember that whatever happens, you have my regard and my—my admiration, always."

Dos Anjos could not speak. She seemed somehow overpoweringly near to him; her low voice was like a tragic, torturing caress.

"With my heart, my soul, senhor, I beg you . . ."

Dos Anjos drew a desolate sigh.

"*Feito!* . . . I promise!"

The manner in which he was to keep his promise was quickly arranged.

ISELDA had already summoned Lourenço to see her tonight; he was coming at nine o'clock; he would be here in a few minutes. She would ask him to give his word as a Sebastian to accept a bloodless victory. If he did this, if he agreed—and she knew he would—then she would have him give Dos Anjos a signal when they met on the *pista* in the morning. The signal would be a tiny movement of his hand upon his belt, repeated both before and after the saber salute.

They had barely completed this arrangement when once more across the velvet-black night there trembled the chime of the carillon, followed by the low heavy beat of the striking hour.

"Oh," breathed Iselda with a slight start, "you must go, senhor. He will be here now at any instant. But go not to the street corner, you hear. He will come there. Go the opposite way."

For a moment she looked down at him in silence; then, extending her arms to the dark rose tree which nestled beside the balcony, she selected a flower, broke it loose. She moved it toward her lips, and suddenly with both hands crushed it to them. She held it so an instant, and then, reaching toward him over the balustrade, let it fall.

To Dos Anjos the whole gesture was like a final, heart breaking caress. He caught the flower in his cupped hands and stood with a wordless choking in his throat.

"Go with God—" her voice floated down to him with infinite gentleness, "Go with God—and remember tomorrow that I liked you too."

For a fleeting instant she still lingered above him, poignantly lovely, unattainable; for an instant he saw her white hands, tightly clasped together; the black wells of her eyes, tragic and fathomless; he saw her lips, a spot of velvet softness in the dark. And then the wraith-like figure floated slowly up and back—and she was gone.

With a blinding wetness touching his eyelids, Dos Anjos lifted the flower in his hands—and then stood still, his senses startling at a sudden sound. A clattering beat of hoofs, a rumble of wheels, approaching the street corner! The dusty clay of the street had muffled the noise; now, all at once, it was clamorous. He caught a glimpse of trotting horses, of a rocking victoria; he heard the tinkle of bells, a voice upraised—Lourenço's—shouting peremptorily to the driver to stop. The carriage slowed down and vanished in front of the house.

Dos Anjos turned swiftly the other way. Before him the dark side street ran in disappearing twists and angles down a hill. Hugging the wall, he sped like an invisible shadow and had passed the first bend before Lourenço could so much as have stepped out of his carriage.

Retarding to a walk, he discovered that the precious flower was no longer in his hands. He could not remember dropping

it, but evidently in his instant of panic he had done so. It seemed to him like an omen—an evil omen—to have lost this, his only memento of Iselda.

He began to worry about tomorrow's affray and the incredible promise he had made to her. A duel of death—to be terminated by a bloodless victory, a bloodless defeat!

V

THE ENCOUNTER was held, as is usual with affairs of honor, in the secret hour of dawn—the hour when fewest undesired witnesses are likely to be abroad. The place selected was a spot in the hills upon a lonely road, five kilometers out of San Sebastian.

Here, while it was yet dark, several equipages arrived with muted bells; horses were silently tethered and carriage lights extinguished; and in parties of two and three the gaunt shadows of men clambered up past rocks and bushes, assembling at last under a giant *Paraná* pine whose fantastically upcurved branches and umbrella top, black against the faintly graying sky, marked the dueling ground.

First to arrive were Lourenço and his seconds; in a separate group—since the principals are not allowed to meet each other between challenge and combat—came Dos Anjos with his; in yet another group could be discerned the indistinct forms of a surgeon carrying his satchel, an orderly bearing first aid kit and rattling arms, an officer who upon closer view turned out to be General Astrada of the Club Militar; and last, but far from least, there was the man whom the seconds had unanimously selected to act as judge.

The judge's name, Xavier explained to Dos Anjos, was René Corboulet; he was a Qelgian formerly of the martial city of Liège; he himself was a noted swordsman and duelist, a veteran of the World War as well; he could be depended upon as could few men on earth for fair and lightning-swift decisions during combat.

Observing him as they were introduced in the dim half-light, Dos Anjos was oppressed by an overwhelming shame and misgiving for the promise he had made Iselda—the promise to feign this fight and lose by a technical defeat. The man appeared so alert, so upright, so correct, he inspired one with a sense of impeccable honor; he stood like an erect rod of steel; he moved with quick, fine gestures; his eyes, deeply hidden under drooping, shaggy, hound-like brows, appeared to harbor a sympathetic but inexorable understanding of men.

It was not going to be easy to feign a fight before that man. It was not going to be easy to feign a fight before any of them. They had come, all these witnesses, in the solemn cause of honor, elaborately prepared with weapons and medicines and codes of rules, expecting to see mortal insults adequately avenged. It would not be easy now to make the affair a farce.

He wondered what Lourenço thought of all this, wondered if he was going to give him the signal. He almost hoped not. Somehow Iselda's desires no longer counted. He had lost her anyway; he would never see her again. And toward her, here in the unglamourous, misty chill of morning, he now felt only an aching fury—fury at her power over him—fury at her cruel demand that he accept before all these men a craven, ludicrous defeat.

It seemed to him now that he would rather die than yield to Lourenço; Lourenço, who had seen Iselda after he had gone; Lourenço, whom she had coaxed and tempted with only God could say what sweet words of encouragement. Oh, the destroying, traitorous power of a woman's voice, a woman's eyes!

He rather hoped Lourenço would give him no signal; yet if he did he would have to yield. The Sebastian, he knew, was too proud and courageous a man to double-cross him; and neither could he double-cross Lourenço. If he gave the signal he must yield.

So oppressed was he by regrets and forebodings that he only half listened while Corboulet, summoning every one before him, began, with the aid of an electric flashlight, the reading of the doc-

uments in the case—the formal challenge and acceptance, the *cartas-poder*, the *acta* governing the conduct of the actual fight.

Reality came to him in insignificant things—the rattling of the sheets of paper in the judge's hands, the sound of Captain Ruiz over in Lourenço's group clearing his throat, the play of the yellow flashlight beam upon the foggy, graying air, the sound of Corboulet's throaty, foreign voice, rolling his R's, buzzing his Z's.

HE WAS reading the *acta* now and Dos Anjos listened with a more alert attention to the rather gruesome clauses:

"*Par-ragrapho zegundo*," buzzed Corboulet. "*A pista zer-rá de vinte metros*—" The dueling ground would be of twenty meters of length, its direction north and south so that neither man would face the rising sun . . .

The combatants would be returned to the center line whenever either was driven out of bounds, since the rocky terrain beyond the *pista* made footing impossible.

The weapons would be regulation sabers with undulled edges and tips . . .

Saber gauntlets extending as far as the elbow, to protect the wrist and forearm, might be worn . . .

Shirts might be worn, but not closed collars, nor protecting mufflers wrapped about the neck . . .

Rest periods would be of three minutes each, after each five minutes of fighting.

The rules would be those of the Sebastian code of General Astrada, and any point not covered therein would be determined by the judge and seconds under the French Code Bibesco, or the Argentine Army *Codigo* of 1924.

The duel would be that of death.

"Death," repeated Corboulet doubtfully, and peered through the gloom at General Astrada. Under most codes the duel of death is not recognized, since deliberately to plan death is considered murder. "Under your rules, General Astrada, what is the meaning of death?"

"Death or its equivalent, Senhor Judge."

"*Alors*," said Corboulet, "and what is the equivalent of death? Let us have that clearly understood by all."

Dos Anjos listened with keen attention to the general's reply—

"Any wound, or accident, or plea for mercy, Senhor Judge, which the majority of the seconds and the judge shall deem sufficient reparation—that is the equivalent of death."

"*C'est bon*—'*stá bem*," said Corboulet briskly, mixing his native French with Portuguese. He glanced round the semicircle of men. "Is everything clearly understood, senhores?"

The seconds nodded silently.

The Belgian held the flashlight over his watch, then snapped off the switch. It was growing light enough to see.

"*Bien, senhores!* In twenty minutes, more or less, it will be broad daylight. I will give you fifteen minutes to prepare. In fifteen minutes you will face me here."

The interval passed quickly. Dos Anjos's seconds, Xavier and Cesar, had just finished the preparations of removing his coat, rolling up his sleeve, working his muscles with oil and alcohol and rolling down his sleeve again when Corboulet summoned them once more.

"*Bien, messieurs!* It is the hour!"

Dos Anjos stepped forward with nerves that were tingling, edgy—not with fear, he told himself, but with doubt, uncertainty. Uncertainty as to whether Lourenço would fight or give him the signal; uncertainty as to whether he himself in another half-hour would be alive or dead—or under the unbearable horror of having disgraced himself and his seconds before all these men.

IT WAS fully light now, and all about him an incongruous loveliness touched earth and atmosphere. Pink mists along the road and in the nearby trees were dissipating, curling into nothingness; a rosy luminosity tinged the heavens; low in the east, where a bright aura marked

the coming of the sun, a few thin clouds hung, black against the sky, cracked at the edges, spilling gold.

What a scene for a duel of death—or for disgrace!

"*Prompto!*" grated the judge's voice. "Are you ready?"

Lourenço stood before Dos Anjos, bathed in rose and gold, handsome as the dawn. His brows were black and glossy above the eagle nose; the bold eyes, the suave mouth and chin, were lighted with a faint, enigmatic smile.

He was dressed in a flannel shirt of soft gray-blue, with the collar open; and black corduroy breeches tucked into black puttees.

Dos Anjos had refused Xavier's offer of breeches and puttees; intuition told him that for the weakling part he had promised to play the more awkward he could look the better. He had simply flung on the same civilian suit he had worn last night; now as he stood at the line in ordinary trousers and open shirt he seemed to detect in Lourenço's eyes an amused comprehension.

The judge was holding up a coin.

"Crown or cross?" he demanded of Lourenço, and flung it in the air.

"Crown," called Lourenço.

It fell heads; Lourenço had won the first toss.

"Crown or cross?" demanded the judge once more.

"Cross," said Dos Anjos.

But again it fell heads. Lourenço had won the necessary two out of three.

The judge turned to him.

"Will you have choice of sabers or of direction, senhor?"

"Of direction."

Corboulet gestured to the orderly, who now approached Dos Anjos, bearing three sabers which had already been examined by the seconds; he held them out to him, hilt first—three beautiful weapons with heavy nickel guards, plunged into long, curving scabbards that nearly touched the ground.

Dos Anjos gingerly drew forth one of those wicked shafts of light, dropped it back, touched a second for luck; selected the first.

Lourenço selected another; and they faced each other at an imaginary line drawn from the pine tree to a nearby rock.

The Belgian turned to the orderly who, to Dos Anjos's surprise, now handed him, instead of a saber, a scarred and gnarly hardwood cane.

"This," said Corboulet, with a grim, thin smile, "is the judge's weapon. I prefer it to the saber because with it you will not mistake me for a combatant. Moreover, if I am compelled to interfere with you, it will not cut."

He looked at each of the principals with coldly twinkling small blue eyes; then with stiffening authority turned to the seconds:

"*Alors, messieurs!* Take your places. A little farther back, Xavier . . . You, too, Captain Ruiz—farther—a more diagonal position. Hold it; that is good; that will give them room to swing."

He eyed the principals again.

"Are you ready?"

Lourenço looked at Dos Anjos with a barely perceptible tremor of the lips, like an inward smile. His left hand took the conventional saber position upon his hip and then slid significantly forward along his belt. It was the signal—the duel was to be a bloodless pretense.

"Just a minute!"

Dos Anjos paused as if in difficulty. If it was to be a pretense, he must prepare for it by making himself look as monstrously awkward as possible.

"This gauntlet—"

HE STRUGGLED with the massive glove which his seconds had drawn on; got it off at last.

"I fear I can not use it. You see, having three fingers only—" He flexed his crippled hand; turned it with a stiff movement of the wrist. "If I am permitted to fight without it, Senhor Judge—"

The Belgian laughed.

"*Comment cela!* The gauntlet is for your own protection, senhor. Naturally, if you do not wish—"

"I do not wish," said Dos Anjos.

He passed the gauntlet to the orderly and took the saber hilt in his bare hand, closing the three fingers about it clumsily.

Xavier protested violently.

"Friend Nelson, you must not fight thus! You expose your arm—"

"I would rather expose my arm," said Dos Anjos, "than expose my body."

He looked significantly at Lourenço; Lourenço regarded him with a slightly curling lip.

"If my adversary fights without a gauntlet," said he disdainfully, "then so will I. I need no advantage to prove who is the better man!"

He gave the protesting Xavier a withering look, flung his gauntlet to the orderly and grasped his weapon again.

The onlookers stood gaping at his reckless generosity; the judge looked puzzled; Lourenço looked faintly amused. Only he and Dos Anjos understood. There was about to occur one of the silliest things in all the history of dueling.

"Ready!" snapped the judge impatiently.

"Ready!" said Lourenço.

Dos Anjos nodded.

The judge turned his back to the rose-gold east and extended his cane, shoulder high.

His voice cracked out sharply—

"On the line, senhores!"

The adversaries twisted their bodies sidewise, paused for a brief salute and crossed their blades above the cane. Once more Lourenço's hand stole imperceptibly along his belt.

"Back a little! Back!" The judge's cane beat a sharp *rat-a-tat-tat* on Lourenço's blade. "Quick, sir! When I touch your blade with my cane—you obey!"

There was a peremptory vigor about the Belgian's words which did not suggest a farce at all. The amused gleam in Lourenço's eyes changed to a glitter.

"On guard!"

The two men dropped; and it was conspicuous that Lourenço crouched with a forward stamp of his right foot, Dos Anjos with a retreat of his left. All could see that the Sebastian was going to be the aggressor.

"*À vous!*" yelled Corboulet, and leaped away with a falling cane.

The sabers clashed and separated; clashed again; but with a movement so strangely slow and gentle that the seconds gasped. Lourenço did not appear to be himself; he was starting with nothing of his usual *élan*.

Apparently both men were feeling their way — cautiously feeling each other's strength. They were far apart, out of distance from each other; only their blade tips met, hovering high, each pressing rightward against the other in the saber position known as "third". The blades separated, whirled upward in tiny arcs; re-engaged, pressing leftward at "fourth"; returned to "third".

The fight was commencing to look more like an elementary saber exercise than like a duel.

Lourenço, disengaging from "third", rotated his point sidewise to the left and down; the blade hung almost vertically from his horizontal arm and inverted hand, ineffectually menacing Dos Anjos's distant knee. Dos Anjos, with a counter-rotation, met the steel; the two blades clung together, dangling downward, pressing rightward at "second," reversing to "first."

THERE was only one more important position they could try; and now Lourenço tried it —with the first trace of speed the contest had yet shown. Carrying his lowered blade leftward and drawing Dos Anjos's with it, he grazed off his opponent's tip and continued his rotation backward past his own left hip and shoulder and over his head, descending in a spectacular *moulinet* or "windmill whirl" that should have cloven the Bahian's head——but did not. Somehow, despite the stroke's brilliance, it was executed with a disdainful casualness which gave the Bahian time to raise his own languorous blade and parry it above his head at "fifth".

"Watch yourself, Lourenço!" Captain Ruiz growled. "With your blade back you left yourself wide open. The man could have run you through!"

But apparently Lourenço did not have to watch himself. His opponent, that queer, lackadaisical Bahian, seemed to move with an almost inanimate slowness; his parries, *ripostes* and counter-parries grew more and more sluggish instead of faster; he was like a man of comatose tar, laboriously swinging a blade of lead.

Whether Lourenço was toying with him out of sheer contempt, whether he felt a certain pity for his crippled and slow antagonist, whether he was somehow hypnotized by the man's torpescence, his seconds could not guess; but at any rate Lourenço's blade, too, moved now with an unbelievable lack of verve. He certainly was not himself; he was not fighting like himself at all.

The tension created by the judge's fierce vigor relaxed to a dull and stupefied surprise; the men all stood about, dumbly silent; the judge let his cane sink apathetically to the ground.

And then, when the tension was at its lowest ebb, the swift, ridiculous thing happened.

All of a sudden, from complete immobility, Lourenço lunged with a stamping foot; his blade struck Dos Anjos's at third, flew upward in a lightning disengage, feinted, returned to third; and suddenly in he plowed, with a grinding of blades together—body to body—*corps-à-corps*—hilt to hilt; and before any one could see what had happened, before the judge could separate them, Dos Anjos's blade was torn from his three-fingered grasp, and Lourenço's saber, flicking downward while the flying weapon was still in the air, had struck Dos Anjos's upper arm.

"*Halte!*" screamed the judge furiously. His cane flew between the men, but they were already apart. "*Mon Dieu!*" he rasped. "That was very near a foul. To strike a man disarmed! Lucky for you his blade had not yet touched the ground!"

Dos Anjos's seconds rushed forward to examine the wound; the doctor came up with linen and adhesive tape ready.

Corboulet too looked at the cut.

"Hah!" said he, and slapped Dos Anjos on the back. "Only a flea bite. I will give you time out while the doctor dresses it."

"No," said Dos Anjos wearily, "that is all. The duel is ended. I admit defeat."

"What!" gasped the Belgian. "A flea bite and you admit defeat? Name of a name!"

"I admit defeat," Dos Anjos repeated. "The seconds need only agree—"

"Ridiculous!" Captain Ruiz blustered up, chunky, square jawed. "Ridiculous! A flea bite can not end a duel of death!"

The surgeon was applying a strip of tape to the open cut.

Dos Anjos slumped as if with deadening fatigue.

"I ADMIT defeat," he said yet again. "I have been wounded; I have been disarmed; I admit defeat. Surely that is the equivalent of death. My hand is not altogether good; I can not pretend to win. Let the seconds call it death and end it."

Ruiz's thick brows drew together in a displeased frown.

"What say you to this, Senhor Lourenço?"

The Sebastian gave a little laugh of careless, generous contempt.

"Why, naturally, if he admits defeat, if the man is afraid to fight—"

Dos Anjos's blood seethed futilely. He had yielded—he had kept his abject promise; surely Lourenço might have spared him further taunts. Surely he might—

"Silence, senhor!" snapped the referee. "No cavalier insults a man who is vanquished. The appeal is to the seconds; not to you."

Lourenço's handsome face flushed as if he had been struck; his fine lips compressed upon each other without another word.

Scowling, the Belgian turned now to Dos Anjos. His shaggy brows, his glinting blue eyes, his sharp directness and electric

force all seemed to shame him—to probe mercilessly into his mind and soul.

"*Sacrebleu!*" swore the Belgian. "There is something behind all this. A man does not come to a duel of death and then ask to be released on a trivial cut. Not unless there is some fantastic reason. *Alguma r-razão fantastic!* Surely you can not ask me to take your appeal to the seconds without a further explanation."

Dos Anjos shook his head miserably, shamed by the piercing eyes.

"There is nothing I can explain, senhor."

"But, name of a name! You do not call this reparation for mortal insult! If you can not use the saber, senhor, you could have demanded another weapon. You could have asked for pistols. Any one can shoot a pistol."

He swung fiercely upon Dos Anjos's seconds.

"You are responsible for your client, senhores. If he can not use the saber why did you permit?"

Friendly Xavier, white and harrowed, looked sickly at Dos Anjos. Cesar answered, unnerved with chargin—

"He consented so readily, we thought—we thought—"

Corboulet whirled back to Dos Anjos with fiery disgust.

"Bah! How I hate these schoolboy duels! Two brave young men—swinging deadly weapons—fighting a duel of death—and one is killed by a prick in the arm. Bah! *Quelle honte!* What perfidy! If you wanted to fight like this why did you not choose confettior carnival perfumeguns?"

Dos Anjos was beside himself; he could scarcely hold back his agitated tears. The surgeon had finished taping up the painful cut; but worse than that pain was the stinging lash of the judge's fiery words, the abrupt, cold silence that now fell all about him; the knowledge that he had brought the smirch of cowardice upon himself, disgrace upon his seconds—and this for love of a girl whom he had lost, whom he would never see again.

Oh, that mad promise! That mad promise! Why had he ever made it?

Was there not some way out? Saint Christopher, let there be some way out! Let something happen; let anything happen that would deliver him from these cold, reproachful eyes. Let the ground open and swallow him. Let him be struck dead. Anything—anything, to free him from this ignominy.

But it seemed as if even Saint Christopher could not help him now. He stood alone before them all—alone and faint at heart, crushed by shame. They were all waiting silently—waiting for him to speak. He felt that he could not speak; yet speak he must.

He stirred himself; summoned his voice with an effort.

"Why I yield thus," he said, "I can not explain; yet yield I must. And if honor seems still unsatisfied, then let me say that the humiliation I feel in yielding is more than sufficient reparation. That is all I have to say. So let them call it death. I ask for nothing more."

EXHAUSTEDLY, like a man who has finished a soul racking ordeal, he reached for his handkerchief, shook it feebly in the air and applied it to his clammy face.

As he did so he became aware that a queer, dazed hush had fallen—a stillness, a suspense that seemed to hold the world in noiseless immobility. He looked about uneasily and saw that all the men were staring at him—the judge, the seconds, General Astrada, Lourenço—staring, all of them, not at him, but at his feet.

He glanced down quickly and suffered the illusion that the hard clay *pista* had been supernaturally transformed into a garden of flowers. But it was not a garden after all; it was only a scattering of flower petals that he looked upon, petals of the changing hibiscus—the "mad rose"—lying curled and crumpled and vividly white and pink all about his feet.

That flower—that flower of evil omen! So that was what had become of it. He had not dropped it after all. In his moment of panic he must have thrust it into his pocket—and here it was, jerked out

along with his handkerchief, exposed like a shameful secret for all the world to see.

Dos Anjos felt like writhing into the ground which still refused to swallow him. Oh, Saint Christopher! What a joke! What a mocking answer to a prayer!

On the edge of the *pista* some one laughed.

"Thoughtful man," said a voice. "He brings the flowers for his own funeral."

"He is a horticulturist," said some one else. "He desires to see if Brazilian *pampoulas* will sprout on clay."

Everywhere the tension of the preceding moment was breaking into delirious amusement. Gales of merriment swept the crowd. But most tormenting of all to Dos Anjos was René Corboulet, the stern and fiery and upright judge, now shaking with staccato laughter, his fierce brows quirking up and down, his face turned toward the sky.

Lourenço alone appeared to see nothing funny about the situation. He stared at the scattered petals; raised his eyes to Dos Anjos; looked down; slowly raised his eyes again. Gradually the blank amazement of his face deepened and darkened into purple fury.

"O God of mine!" he muttered. "O God of mine!"

Uncontrollable passions swept his countenance, discolored the livid saber scar, distorted his features; jealousy, hate—elemental passions storming for expression.

Still again his eyes moved downward as if he could not yet believe his vision, and Dos Anjos, following his gaze, for the first time caught the blinding significance of those crumpled petals. Petals of the *hibiscus mutabilis*—the changing rose—which alters during its brief life from white to pink, to red, and to lavender. Petals white and delicately pink this morning—they must have been all white last night. White! White! The color of highest favor! And she had given that flower to him! For an instant his senses swam.

Lourenço's quivering voice broke upon him:

"So that was why! So that was why she asked me not to hurt you!" He stood, grim faced and terrible; his saber trembled, shimmering, in his hand. "O God, you can not trust a woman! You can not trust a friend!"

BITTER scorn gathered and twisted through his features—scorn so blasting that it seemed for an instant to dissipate even his fury. With insolent, burning eyes he surveyed the slouching Bahian from head to foot.

"Come!" he snarled. "Pick up your sword, you dog! Pick up your sword before I run you through."

"*Espere!* Wait!" The Belgian, his fit of laughing completely past, leaped between the two youths, threatening Lourenço's saber with his gnarly cane. "You can not fight like this. An appeal has been asked for. The appeal must be taken."

He turned his head toward Dos Anjos, a queer, bright eagerness in his eyes.

"Have you a word to say, senhor, before I appeal to the seconds?"

Dos Anjos found himself trembling, choking with emotion. He had suffered insult, humiliation, derision, to keep his promise, but he had kept it to the letter. Surely she could not ask him to endure more. Surely she could not.

A strength of sobs and laughter shook him. Hot tears were in his eyes; they were burning on his cheeks.

He gasped out chokingly:

"All I want is my saber! All I want is my saber!"

The impassive Bahian was aroused at last.

"*Voilà!*" shouted Corboulet with a queer break in his voice. "The man calls for his saber! Answer, seconds—shall the fight go on or cease?"

The response came almost in unison:

"Let the fight go on!" And Ruiz added with both square fists uplifted and shaking, "The duel of death! The duel of death! Let them fight till one can fight no more!"

Corboulet turned back to the principals, steely cold and grim.

"Hah!" he said eagerly, "I fear we shall have a real duel now! *'Stá bem!* Give him his saber, Xavier! Make ready, senhores! On the line—"

Lourenço strode forward feverishly; once more, incredibly Dos Anjos paused.

"Just a single second," he pleaded. He took the weapon in his frail three-fingered grip, tightened his hold upon it, swung it with pitiful clumsiness. "If this is to be a duel of death, senhores, perhaps I had better shift this weapon."

He transferred the long blade to his left hand, stepped back a pace or two and swung it with a languorous, magnificent gesture that brought a gasp of wonder from the bystanders.

"Aye, that is a little better."

"What is this?" exclaimed Lourenço, with a startled frown. "The man is a *canhota*—a left hander!"

Dos Anjos answered with a croak that sounded like both a sob and a laugh.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. I forgot to tell you that when I was in the Paulista Cavalry I always sliced the bread left handed before they smeared the butter on. That was how I learned to swing this hash knife. Are you ready now, Lourenço?"

"Wait! *Espere!*" Ruiz was instantly beside them, protesting. "The man can not fight like this, Senhor Judge! A *canhota*—a left hander—that is not provided in the *acta*."

Corboulet laughed a little roughly.

"And why is it not, senhor? The *acta* do not forbid—"

"But it gives the man an unfair advantage. Instead of the outside, it places his weapon always on Lourenço's inside."

"Bah!" rasped Corboulet. "If he is on Lourenço's inside, so is Lourenço on his inside. The advantage is identical."

"But the *code duello* provides," insisted Ruiz, "that the weapon can not be shifted during combat."

"Bah again!" said Corboulet. "No living code provides that. The only provision is that the weapons may not be shifted during actual engagement. During rest periods they may be changed at will unless the *acta* of the particular duel state otherwise."

"But the advantage still exists, senhor. No one is accustomed to duelling with a left hander—"

"And did you speak of advantage," cried Corboulet exasperatedly, "when the man fought with three fingers? It all appears to depend upon where the advantage lies! *Mais allons!* Enough of words! On the line, senhores!"

"Aye, enough of words," echoed Lourenço. Now that the protest was lost his manner implied that he had been averse to the protest all along. "Advantage or no advantage, I will carve this prince of perfidy! I will carve this *canhota*—this traitorous dog—"

He was still jeering while the Belgian shouted the commands for stance and guard, while the sabers met above the extended cane:

"Senhor Dos Anjos—" he mouthed the name, accentuating its literal meaning—"Senhor Of The Angels! I will make you of the angels yet—"

With a cry "*À vous!*" the judge leaped away, and in a wordless, awesome silence the fight began.

VI

OVER the *pista* the benignant umbrella pine stood with shocked and prayerful arms upcurved to heaven; upon the ground, in the light of the dawning sun, the shadows of grass and rocks and men stretched far and still; on earth only two objects moved—two grim creatures no longer human, transformed by mutual hate and fear into titan shadows of stealth and death.

They faced each other, crouching, south and north, with kinky knees outbent and bodies twisted sidewise, backs to the dawn; on the south a right handed swordsman, on the north his left handed reflection; and their shining weapons moved as if they, too, were reflections one of the other—up together, down together, forward, back—clinging each to each, with a distrustful, terrible affection.

Gradually the figures grew dissimilar; gradually the right hand swordsman became imbued with flashes of life and swift movement, which his left hand reflection followed dilatorily, like an image in a magically retarded mirror.

Swifter and more frequent grew the flashes of life; slower, more independent, became the responses of the reflection . . . the wary titans were assuming once more the characteristics of men—one of mercurial life, the other of sluggish, inanimate resistance.

Lourenço, with glossy brows knotted over burning eyes; fiercely alert, fiercely cautious; his suave mouth and chin tensed in lines as cruelly sinister as his white saber scar; the weapon in his hand pausing—treacherously motionless—and suddenly converting itself into a dozen flashing blades which simultaneously menaced his adversary and stood in an impregnable barricade about his own person.

Dos Anjos, his face palely brown, inert—no sign of life save a dull and stubborn horror glowing in his eyes, swaying and swinging with a peculiar, weaving lethargy, always in motion, never still, wielding a heavy defensive blade which appeared always tardy, always too late, yet which in some mysterious way arrived over and over in time to bind and thwart Lourenço's oncoming weapon.

It was life against inanimation; steel checked by flowing tar; vivacity numbed by torpor; and it looked impossible, but it was a fact.

Only René Corboulet, perhaps, with his deep knowledge of weapons and of men, could have explained the precise balancing of strength against weakness which enabled the slow Bahian to stand up as he did against the lightning-swift Sebastiano; but not even Corboulet could have foretold how the affray would end. Despite their dissimilarities the men were surprisingly, fearfully equal. Unless victory fell through some lucky fluke or accident, it would probably be won only after a terrific struggle and at heavy cost to both contestants.

Yet it was several minutes before blood was drawn at all. The men still fought at first from out of distance, each with a respectful dread of the other's weapon, a respectful uncertainty of the other's prowess. But presently, as the psychological effect of Dos Anjos's left handed shift of weapon wore off, Lourenço's aggressive style commenced to develop itself.

His training obviously had been of the Italian school—the school which relies upon force of attack rather than upon finesse; the school of the stamping, advancing foot; the intimidating cries and grunts; the lunge or thrust delivered with a paralyzing, fierce "*Hola!*"

Yet there was finesse as well as force in Lourenço's attack. He fought with a clever, baffling change of pace; he flamed from deceptive immobility into startling life; he dropped back to immobility, flamed again; he was in and out, high and low, left and right, with a coruscating blade whose edge and tip carried an incessant menace of death.

He was dangerous and terrible, but he had one tiny fault—a fault which might have been fatal against such a man as Corboulet. His weakness lay in his very fury, in his neglect of one small point of technique—for far too often during immobility or during preliminary feints and parries a betraying shift of balance, a too eager twitch of hand or foot, would telegraph the message of his next intent. The quick eyed Belgian, in Dos Anjos's shoes, might almost have killed him with his cane.

DOS ANJOS was not Corboulet; yet he possessed two advantages which would have been formidable against any man—that awkward looking left handed saber, and that swaying lethargy of movement which, instead of telegraphing, completely veiled his intention. His surprise was not that of the quick start out of immobility which authorities recommend; it was the surprise of a languorous, sweeping blade which seemed forever to linger on the air—a blade which paused with strokes unfinished, arrested in mid-exe-

cution; a blade which changed direction without apparent guidance and flew as if with a magnetic attraction of its own to caress and bind Lourenço's steel.

The first period was nearly ended before either man broke through—and then both scored simultaneously: Lourenço by a misleading triple feint at flank-cheek-flank, followed by a lunge at thigh—"*Hela!*" And Dos Anjos by an unsuccessful low parry of second which changed to a surprising upward slash across Lourenço's chest and armpit.

"*Halte!*"

The judge was between them; the doctor came running to see if damage was done. It was. Lourenço's shirt was fluttering open; so was Dos Anjos's trouser leg; both men were bleeding.

Corboulet bent past the doctor's shoulder.

Pouf! It was only a scratch, each one. Barely through the skin. Wash them and tape them and let them continue.

In less than a minute they were at it again, more wary and more furious than before. The blade tips clattered and rasped together; the combatants swayed and lurched—scuffling forward, back, on gliding, widely bent legs. The Belgian danced lightly beside them, watching, peering, with the eagerness of a referee at a prizefight.

"*Halte!*"

Lourenço had touched again—his point had reached the Bahian's forearm. The doctor swabbed the wound with *agua hygeinica*—peroxide of hydrogen; drew it together with adhesive tape.

"Renew!"

As they re-engaged, General Astrada's shout ended the period—

"Time!"

The men were led apart, panting, to rest and be doctored by the surgeon and seconds. At the end of the interval Corboulet raised his cane at the point they had ceased:

"Renew where you were!"

It was the second period now, and the movement grew brisker. It was observable that Dos Anjos was fighting with a changing style—a swifter but perilously open style: a high, extended arm, and a guard of three positions only—a downward curving point at first and second, a rising fifth; while this protected his head and upper body, it left his thigh and the under side of his arm dangerously exposed. Yet it kept Lourenço back—there was a menace to the Sebastian's head in that high, straight arm.

Lourenço met the menace with a slightly lowered hand and extended point, jabbing from out of distance at the exposed forearm. His blade tip clattered as it struck past his opponent's hilt.

"*Hela! Hela!*"

Dos Anjos was already bleeding; it could not be seen whether he was touched or not.

"Keep your arm down, Bahiano! Keep it down or I will prick it!"

"Prick it if you can, Sebastiano! When I touch you it will be more than a prick in the arm!"

"*Hela! Hela!*"

"*Halte!*"

One of those jabs had touched; the Bahian's arm was dripping blood.

"*Meu Deus*, Dos Anjos—be careful!" This was Xavier. "If he gets your muscle you are gone."

Dos Anjos answered with painfully compressed lips while the doctor taped him.

"He will not get my muscle, Xavier."

"Renew!"

YET AGAIN Lourenço jabbed at the injured arm; he shifted with quickening tempo, feinted at thigh—arm—thigh. Suddenly, in the midst of his feints, Dos Anjos struck his blade away with a sharp, dry beat and, lunging, let his own tip rise like a streak of light.

"*Halte!*" screamed judge and seconds together.

Upon Lourenço's right cheek there had opened up a ghastly crimson line, like a long, deep razor cut. Henceforth Lourenço would carry two scars upon that cheek instead of one.

The surgeon held the cut together with silver forceps, bound it with gauze and courtplaster, criss-crossed it with tape. The gauze turned instantly to a soppy, gruesome red.

Dos Anjos appeared a little nauseated at the sight.

"Call it death," he said unsteadily. "I am willing."

"Death?" Lourenço tore himself from the doctor's arms and out of the twisted corner of his mouth blew a thin trickle of blood. "I will call it death when I am lying still upon the ground—or when you are!"

"Renew!"

Once more the judge danced beside them—but at a safe distance this time. Ah, yes, messieurs, at a safe distance. Pah! He was fighting now, that Sebastian! He was commencing to fight! He was a madman—mad with the sting and outrage of that cut upon the face; mad for revenge—*revanche!*

His blade flew in invisible arcs upon the air; it struck the Bahian's down and back. He came in upon the Bahian's inside, cutting at face, at chest, face, thigh; he whirled in a half *moulinet*—he was on the outside—at *quarte*, at *prime*, at *quinte*—menacing shoulder, flank, head; he whirled to the inside again . . .

The Bahian's blade was slow; it was heavy; it seemed scarcely able to ward off the storm of blows, unable to get set for a *riposte*. The man fell back before the fierce assault; he retreated, gave ground. All at once he slipped—

"*Halte! Halte*—No, continue!"

He was up again; he had recovered; he was on his feet, fighting now—but still retreating.

The seconds skipped along on the edge of the combat, holding their diagonal positions. Nearer in, the judge crouched low by the scuffling figures, watching for injuries, watching their feet. They were almost out of the *pista* now—another minute and Dos Anjos would be driven out.

"*Cuidado!*" the judge warned. "Only two meters to the line! Only two meters—hold it!"

The Bahian seemed unable to hold it.

"One meter! One meter—

"*Halte!*"

Dos Anjos tripped and tottered backward among the rocks and stones; Lourenço, insane, pressed on.

"*Halte!* *Fils de cochon*—son of a pig! *Halte! Halte!*" For a startling moment the judge, single handed, was battling the duelist. "Ruiz! Zanelli! Grab your man! Grab him—grab him, I say!"

Lourenço quieted suddenly in his seconds' arms, and the judge, with a quivering cane, faced all three.

"When I tell you to grab your man, you grab him! Do not hesitate! Do not delay! You do as I say, *vitement*—else, name of God, I will challenge you and we will have three duels here instead of one! Now back to the centerline!"

The Belgian strode back to the frightened umbrella pine and glared about with fiercely twinkling eyes. Pah! It was no Sunday school picnic, that, to be the *presidente* of a duel.

The surgeon plastered up the combatants—both had been injured in that last set-to; both were bleeding; both were trembling, gasping with excitement.

"Ready! On the—"

Lourenço lunged.

"Wait! Wait for the signal!"

The Belgian struck the offending saber upward, and with a twist of his cane and a deft snap near the hilt sent it spinning out of Lourenço's hand. Lourenço, with empty, clenched fists, faced him, cursing.

"*Vou à lier!*" cried Corhoulet. "Mad for a straitjacket! When I tell you to wait, you wait! Wash off his saber, Zanelli."

Non, messieurs; it is no dreamy picnic, that, to preside at a duel.

But, *sacré;* it was growing good, this battle! Both men were hurt enough to be angry now; both were beside themselves—they were *com raiva*—rabid, both. No longer did the Bahian retreat; at the reengage he met the Sebastian's onslaught with an equal onslaught; beat back his attack; held him at distance with a swaying, cleaving, crashing blade, delivering parry for parry, blow for blow.

True, they did not fight, perhaps, those two, like the greatest European masters; they did not fight with the skill of San Malato, or the great Saint-Roque, or Thirifay, or Gob of Liège; but, *bon Dieu*, they did fight! Anything they lacked in skill they made up in fury—and in equality. It was a pity, almost, with sabers flying so, that they had not worn neck mufflers after all, as do the *Polonais* officers, to keep their brave young heads from being lopped off.

THE SECOND period ended; but neither would stop now; neither was badly hurt as yet; neither would give in. The surgeon and seconds examined them, consulted together—*bom!* let them have satisfaction, let them continue!

And again they met. Clatter and thud and scrape of metal, gasp of striving men; sweating bodies that lurched and jerked—glided, swayed; blades that whistled and whetted together, squealed along each other, skated off, missed, swished emptily on air. And sometimes they did not miss . . .

Repeatedly the men were halted for minor injuries; the doctor was summoned to dress them. But wounds? Blood? A duel of first blood, second blood, third blood? Pouf! Blood did not count at all. A wrap of gauze and linen, a strip of tape, a smell of disinfectant in the air, and—all right! all ready! Once more they were at it, fighting with ravening fury. Only the dread of searing steel, the terror of the shining death that flew between them, kept them at distance from each other now—kept each from charging in and exposing himself to mortal injury.

The third period closed with both men still on their feet, panting, bandaged, but still strong.

"The duel of death, senhores! Let them have satisfaction. Let them fight it out." And the struggle went on . . .

Nothing like it, nothing resembling it had ever been known in San Sebastian—a duel so long drawn out, so evenly contested, so fierce.

Every accident, every incident seemingly which could transpire on a dueling *pista* befell in the course of that affray.

The savagery of the combatants had imparted itself by now to all the seconds; at each successive engagement they cheered their men with partisan yells and admonitions; they reviled their adversaries—charged them with fouling, unfairness, favoritism; more than once they threatened challenges among themselves; and only the judge's steely, swift insistence kept their attention centered on the major quarrel.

"*Halto! Halto!*"

One of the seconds shouts the word in Portuguese. Whenever any one calls halt all must obey. But the fighters are so insensate now that neither hears the commands—or if they hear they will not heed. The judge and seconds are obliged to rush in, tear them forcibly apart. Every one is keyed up, tense with the violence and peril of the struggle.

"*Alors!* What happened?" the judge demands.

"*Tocou terra*," pants the second. "He touched earth."

"Who touched earth?"

"Lourenço."

"He did not," barks Ruiz.

"He did! He touched his tip!"

Corboulet checks the oratory.

"No argument—bring alcohol."

And alcohol is brought and the fight is interrupted while the saber blade, already washed and rewashed many times, is swabbed once more in liquid to prevent the danger of infection.

Meanwhile the argument breaks out again:

"*Covardía*," accuses Cesar's voice. "Cowardice! He touched on purpose! He saw my man was pressing him."

"Liar, thou!"

"Silence, senhores! One duel at a time— Renew!"

Clatter-clatter; thud—swish—

"*Halto!*"

"*Sapristi!* And now what?"

"My man is hurt. His chest was touched."

"He was not touched!"

Corboulet peers at him. The man is so gory it is hard to tell.

"*C'est vrai*—he was touched. *Medico.*"

And the doctor responds again.

"Ready! On the—"

"Wait—wait!" This time it is the surgeon's voice.

"*Alors?*"

"You are hurt, Senhor Judge—"

Corboulet glances impatiently at the back of his hand.

"Bah! *Que diable!*"

And time is taken out while the doctor dresses the *presidente.*

For a duel is not like a war, messieurs—it is not a continuous fight; it has its interruptions, its pauses, its disputes, like any other good man-made sport.

BUT THERE was commencing to be a dreadfulness about this affair which was unlike that of any sport. Both fighters by now were caked with sweat and blood; Lourenço's gray shirt front was in ribbons—it fluttered in the morning breeze like the dark tatters of a war stained flag; Dos Anjos's trousers leg above the knee was in open shreds; both men were marked with cuts and gashes whose scars, if they survived this fight, they would carry always.

They were tiring too, they fought now, those wearying titans, with gasping breaths, with sobbing breaths; yet neither would give in—neither would yield. Pain and fury kept them insanely on their feet.

The girl in whose cause the duel was held was forgotten in the violence of the affray—as has been the case in every war since ancient Troy; the hibiscus petals which had precipitated it were forgotten too, trampled and ground to impalpable dust upon the earth.

And still the fight went on.

It was not till early in the fifth period that the men showed definite signs of weakening.

Dos Anjos appeared to weaken first. He felt it coming upon himself—an awful weariness, a nausea, a trembling of arms and legs, a suffocation of lungs that could not get sufficient air. He felt the flying weapon in his hand grow leaden, ponderous; its life was ebbing, its magnetism gone; no longer did it fly of its own accord.

The knowledge of his weakness brought him a sense of fear—fear of the mercurial enemy who still assailed him, whose weapon he must ward off; and the fear increased his weakness.

He could not distinctly see; flickering shadow bands moved up across the landscape, as if a Venetian blind were being lifted jerkily; unstable shadows engulfed the judge and seconds; edges of men stood out in brilliant silhouette, merging into blackness.

He jerked his head—tried to shake away the sweat and blindness from his eyes, marveling that Lourenço did not run him through. He peered at his adversary—and saw that he was apparently weakening too; his blade sagged, motionless, in his hand; he gasped for air; the bright, mercurial life was failing, failing . . .

Profound pity suddenly swept Dos Anjos—pity for his exhausted enemy, pity for himself; a sense of the melancholy pathos and futility of all this bloodshed.

Why could they not call it a draw and end it? He would ask Lourenço to call it a draw. He stepped back, lowering his weapon a little . . .

A second screamed out—

"Watch his foot, Dos Anjos!"

It was too late to watch his foot. From out of distance Lourenço had launched the most hazardous maneuver in all the realm of "white arms"—the *attaque à la flèche*—the "attack by arrow flight", whose violence imperils at once its victim and its executor. Like a sprinter from a mark he had darted forward, passing his left foot in front of his right; another stride, a stamping halt upon the right, and his weapon lashed out straight and true at the Bahian's cringing body. Frantically Dos Anjos tried to twist away; frantically he swung his saber to a left handed parry of "second"—he diverted the blade, but

not enough. He felt it strike, graze off, and a white fire of anguish ran across his hip.

What agony!

There was instant commotion about him; his seconds were holding him up; the surgeon was stanching the flow of blood.

"Better lay him down, Xavier."

"I can stand. I can stand," Dos Anjos cried. "Give me my saber!" Frenzy was upon him. Oh, the treachery of that last attack—that pretense of weakness and then that fearful lunge.

"Give me my saber—name of God!"

"Well, lie down a minute, anyway," commanded the surgeon, "while I take a stitch or two."

Cesar bent over him anxiously.

"Maybe you had better yield, Seu Nelson."

Dos Anjos clambered to his feet again.

"Give me my saber! Give me my saber!"

"Give him his saber," said the judge's icy voice.

THE FLICKERING shadow bands were thicker now; the men, the trees, the landscape were a quivering mirage of sun and blackness; but at the center of the shaking world, close before him—yielding, retreating, fleeing into darkness—were Lourenço's drawn, blue lipped face, Lourenço's body, Lourenço's desperately parrying blade.

He struck the blade aside; he swung; he clove; he scurried forward—feinting, slashing, thrusting, pursuing that elusive adversary into the ever retreating shadows. His blade seemed to touch . . . no, it seemed to have missed . . . He pressed on, and all at once the phantom opposed him—checked him with wooden strength; his blade was hitting a wooden cane. Corboulet's shaggy eyes were before him; arms behind were binding him; and Corboulet's voice was ringing in his ears:

"Madman! *Insensé!* Dos Anjos! *Halte! Halte! Halte!*"

As Lourenço had done before, so he in turn was battling with the judge.

He stood still at last, tottering on his feet. Black winds were storming in his ears; the shadows were whirling closer. Through them, dimly, he glimpsed beyond the judge the body of Lourenço, inert upon the ground—Ruiz and Zanelli stooping over it, picking it up—and then he felt his own body give way, limp and sobbing, in his seconds' arms.

He came to with the smell of ammonia and disinfectant strong upon his nostrils. Over him and his seconds the Belgian was standing, saying over and over in shaken French:

"*Tonnerre de Dieu! Tonnerre de Dieu!* Thunder of God, what a duel!"

Xavier spoke gently:

"Are you all right, old battler? It is over. You defeated him."

Dos Anjos gasped out fearfully—

"Is he dead?"

"No."

"Is he badly hurt?"

"Little worse than you. You struck his rib. He fainted with the pain."

"Let me see him."

"I will turn you over; you will see him. He lies near."

Barely a dozen feet away Ruiz and Zanelli crouched upon their haunches; beside them the surgeon worked over a still figure, pillowed on a blanket.

Dos Anjos struggled agitatedly to his knees—

"Lourenço!"

Captain Ruiz swung round. An odd light touched his stolid features; he bent his head and murmured—

"Lourenço—Lourenço, here is your enemy."

The Sebastian's eyes opened dully; he stared up at Ruiz, then slowly rolled his head till he beheld at last the kneeling wreck of his conqueror. A half hidden look of understanding—admiring, compassionate, with a shadow of ironic amusement in it, too—glimmered behind the tired eyes; it trembled in a faint smile upon the urbane lips. Imperceptibly he moved his hand toward his adversary.

Dos Anjos clutched wildly at his seconds' arms, drew himself upward. Be-

tween them he wavered forward. With a wordless constriction in his throat he dropped to his knees again and pressed Lourenço's hand in his crippled right.

VII

"AND now what?" murmured Xavier. Dos Anjos, reclining between him and Cesar, was dully conscious of the swaying of a victoria, of the sound of bells and hoofs, of wheels that rumbled softly, grating upon small pebbles, hissing through shallow pools of sand. They were on the way to town, and his one aching wish was for a hospital cot and an anesthetic so that he might sleep—sleep, and forget.

Xavier's question roused him again—

"And now what?"

"What of—what?" he mumbled listlessly.

"What of—of her? What of—"

"Oh, *meu Deus!*"

The thought of the girl who a brief hour ago had no longer counted stabbed him now with a torture intensified by his own physical suffering. Iselda—Iselda . . . What would she think of him after all this? His conduct on the steamer, his challenge of Lourenço—now this dishonored promise. Would she understand? Would she ever permit him to see her? Or would she hate him, as she had said? Longing and uncertainty crushed down upon him like an illness.

He felt Xavier's arm steal round his shoulders.

"Courage, old battler. Remember—the flower was white."

"Oh, I know—I know, but—" How could he explain to Xavier the meaning of that flower—that it had been given as a token of farewell? A token, too, of a pledge he had not kept? He spoke drearily:

"You see I lied to her. I told her I would not fight. She said if I fought she would never—she would never—"

Xavier laughed.

"All women say that."

"But—" Dos Anjos faltered— "there are other things. Things that happened before. Her father thinks I am the worst—"

"All fathers think that. Until a young man proves himself. And how you have proved yourself! Your name will ring today through San Sebastian.

"Come, Seu Nelson," he urged. "Surely you have some word for her. She telephoned to me last night and asked me to let her know this morning, as soon as we reach the town, if you are unhurt. You must send some word."

For a moment Dos Anjos could not speak.

"Name of forty saints!" exclaimed Xavier. "Do you not understand, Dos Anjos? A girl of San Sebastian gives you a flower of white; she sends word through your second to know if you are safe—and you lie there languid, cold . . . Do you not understand? Or is it—is it possible that you do not care? You are not trying, old battler!"

Dos Anjos wiped a hand across his eyes with an unsteady laugh.

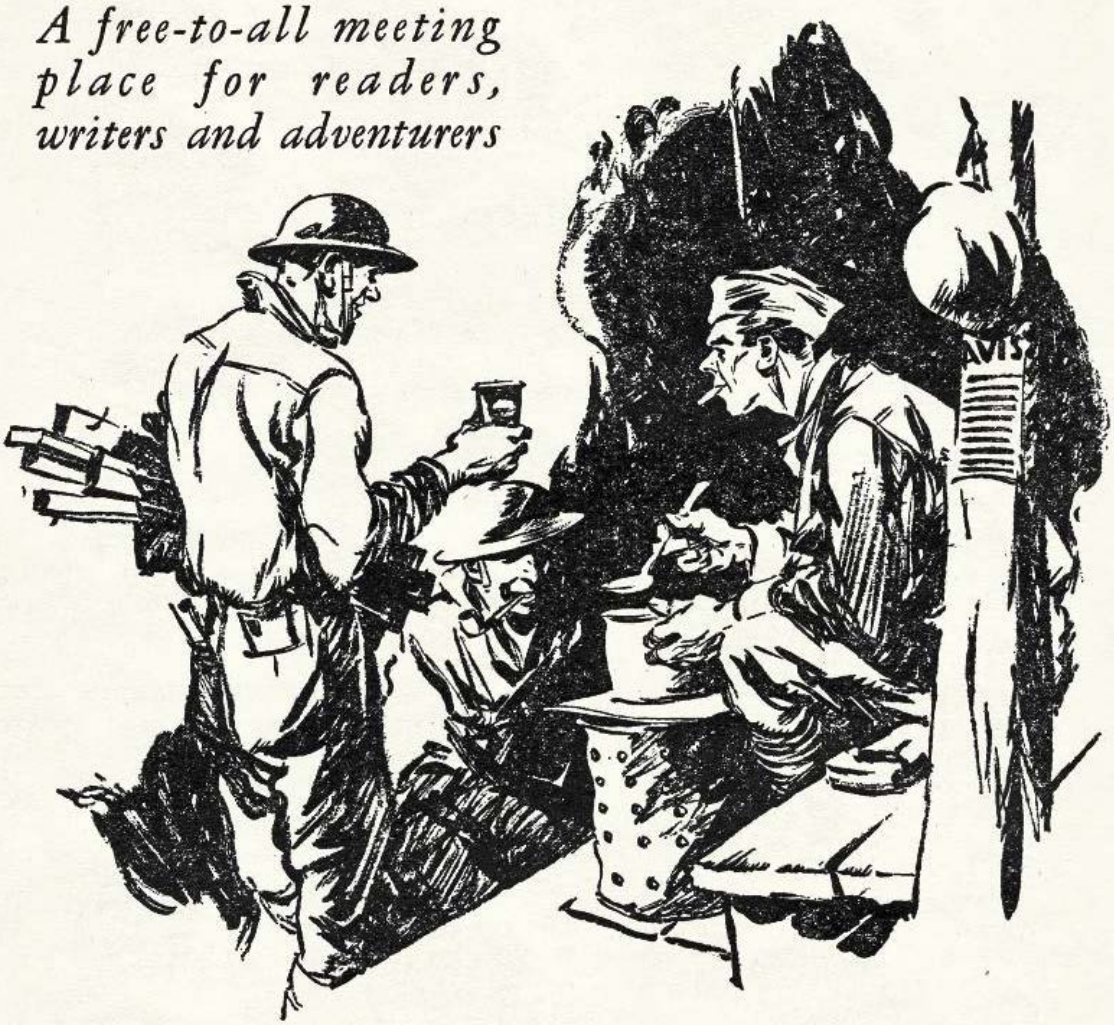
"No," he said. "It's only blood."

"Well," said Xavier gently, "have you some message for her now?"

"Yes," said Dos Anjos, and again he wiped away the blood—if it was blood. "Tell her that I will be there as soon as the surgeon permits—tonight, if the surgeon permits. I will be there—waiting for her at the hour of eight, under the mad rose tree."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers



BEARING on the subject of Crusaders' swords prior to the early sixteenth century, this interesting note from Robert E. Gardner of the *Ask Adventure* department seems to corroborate Harold Lamb's experience in hunting them down. Really authentic pieces are apparently non-existent.

Columbus, Ohio

Excepting the so-called Viking swords (prior to the Norman conquest) of which a goodly number have come down to us, the greater part of the weapons now extant are "finds" dredged from waterways or recovered from burials. Because of this fact the larger portion of swords dating before the beginning of the XVth century have suffered much damage from rust oxidization. However a number of early swords are to be found in the great collections of Europe, (to wit, the Royal Armoury, Turin; the Louvre, Paris; The Imperial Treasury, Vienna; and others) which are complete and authentic.

Preserved in the Dömschatz at Essen is a sword which most certainly dates from the IXth or XIth century. In fact, the blade warrants a much earlier date than is indicated by the mountings. There is a tradition which is well within the realm of the possible, that the blade is Roman of the IVth century and was used at the execution of St. Kosmas

and St. Damian, who died for their Christian faith in the year A.D. 303. Be that as it may, this weapon is complete as of the XIth century and is accompanied by its scabbard. Scabbard and hilt are rich with gold filigree and precious stones.

AMONG the treasures of the Cathedral of Prague is a weapon known as "The Sword of St. Wenceslaus" which can be accepted as authentic of the early XIVth century. It figures in the inventory of the Cathedral Treasury through the years from 1354 and appears to be completely genuine. This sword is 37 inches in length. The blade, which is straight and double edged, has a central groove which tapers towards the point. The tang extends through quillons, grip and pommel. The quillons are straight, 5 inches long, with edges rounded off and tapers to the ends. The wheel type pommel is fashioned of rock crystal. The portion of the tang which passes through the transparent pommel is colored red. A scabbard listed in early inventories as being of gold and adorned with precious stones and pearls—"gemmis et perles"—is missing.

St. Wenceslaus or Wenzel, Duke of Bohemia, died in 936, much too early for the Prague sword to have been his property.

Another weapon of authentic history dating to the XIIIth century is the well known "Sword of Charlemagne" in the Louvre at Paris. We must first discredit the Charlemagne (742-814) attribution of this piece. It is claimed that this sword has been used in the crowning of the French kings since the time of Philip the Bold, 1270-1285, which claim is upheld by its appearance in many of the older portraits of French monarchs. A second sword of Charlemagne, so-called, is to be found in the Imperial Treasury, Vienna. It is of greater age than the Louvre sword but of undetermined provenience.

AMONG those that fell at the battle of Sempach in 1386 were Friedrich von Gruffenstein and his compatriot, Friedrich von Tarant. Both were buried in the church at Königsfelden, Aargu, where they remained undisturbed until 1893 when their vaults were opened. Discovered among the contents of the tombs were the swords of the dead, both of which were in an excellent state of preservation. The sword of Von Tarant measures about 37 inches in length. The blade which is 33 inches long is of flattened diamond section and tapers gracefully to point end. Blade, at hilt 1½ inches wide. The quillons, of the simple cross hilt, are slightly upthrust (toward point end) and are of cylindrical section. The pommel of flattened triangular shape has the characteristic faceting of the period. Both weapons appear to be of Germanic origin and are alike in form and dimension.

A number of XIVth century swords can be viewed in the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum at Zurich, some of which are also traceable to the battle of Sempach.

SWORDS which can be traced to the ownership of a Crusader of, or prior to, the eighth crusade, 1270-1272, are practically unknown. In fact, the writer knows of not a single specimen which is above suspicion. However it is very probable that the museums of Central Europe—Swiss, German, Austrian—contain a number of weapons which can be readily traced to the lesser gentry of their countries who took part in the Crusades. If one is interested in Gothic or pre-Gothic arms, the museums of Central Europe present the greatest possibilities for study. A large number of very early weapons are to be found therein. Some of these blades bear heraldic markings which some day will be identified and Crusader ownership established. Then too, the World War brought about possibilities in that many of the ancient fortresses of the Near East have been opened to the connoisseur. We may expect the announcement of important discoveries which will aid materially in our study of Gothic arms and armour.

—ROBERT E. GARDNER

QUOTING from a reader's letter in regard to King's Corporals:

Denver, Colo.

I just want to thank you—and Redvers—on that good story, "Cry Havoc." The story is true to life, nothing exaggerated, nothing omitted, everything there but the stink.

There are one or two minor faults, however, that do not in any way detract from the readability of the story and could only be picked out by one like myself, an old professional soldier. It is told of Thor that he was promoted to be King's Corporal and then is referred to as a Lance Corporal. Surely, Redvers knows better than that. Lance Corporal is not a rank but an appointment. Corporal is the lowest non-commission *rank* in the Infantry of the Imperial or Canadian army. And surely his Majesty would not confer an empty honor for valor.

—C. EDSON BRADEN

Here is what the author has to say about the apparent discrepancy:

Orillia, Ont., Canada

No King's Corporal appointments were made after the early part of 1916. Up to this time the Canadians had received seven awards of this kind, and then it was discarded. I have never actually seen one, but I myself was made a Lance Corporal by Divisional order, and the O.C. told me that that was equivalent to a King's Corporalship, insofar as that nothing except a field general court-martial could reduce me.

The truth was that I was reduced so often that the O.C. had to evolve some method to keep me out of klink, and that was how I obtained it, as considered a good guide and runner. But it only gave me one stripe and that stripe has stuck with me

ever since, even being inscribed on my medal. So although it was entirely wrong it was carried out. I received five cents extra a day, and a grant of fifty dollars besides my gratuity when I left the army. I merely took that without investigation, and incorporated it in my story.

—W. REDVERS DENT

A NOTE from L. G. Blochman relative to his novelette, "The Sacred Cow," in this issue:

New York City

When a writer goes to the trouble of announcing that his characters are fictitious, the reader usually suspects that they are not. However, I'd like to point out that although the characters in "The Sacred Cow" *are* imaginary, the newspapers are real. But at least one of those has changed somewhat since the last time I was in the Orient: The famous editorial bar of the *China Press* has disappeared. Some years ago the *China Press* changed hands, and the new owners decided the cup that cheers belonged outside the office. They kicked out the editor with it, but the editor sued on his contract and was awarded something like $40,000 Mex by the U.S. Consular court. He stayed on in Shanghai until the money was gone—then he died, gloriously, the boys say, upholding to the last the traditions of his editorial regime.

As for the Calcutta *Englishman*, I don't know, but I doubt if it has changed much in the seven years since I left. It hadn't changed much, comparatively, in the hundred years before I joined the staff. There are linotypes now, of course, and there is the telegraph, and the tea that is served every afternoon to the staff is now made on a gas stove. But the same solid, deliberate, historic atmosphere is probably still there. It must be. It is that complex quality which enables England to rule India.

—L. G. BLOCHMAN

THE topic still is pistol shooting, comrades. Mr. L. P. Holmes craves the floor just a few more moments, and since he was one of the first in the most recent resurrection of this argument, I see nothing we can do about it but let him finish it for us.

Napa, Cal.

I never did believe in turning the the other cheek. Dr. Carl W. Waber has taken a few pokes at me that I'd like a chance to return. I'm not going to question Dr. Waber's ability to shoot, for I know he's one jim-dandy target shot. But perhaps the doctor has been shooting at neat little bull's-eyes so long he can not interpret shooting from any other angle. Now for the argumen .

Doctor Waber says I am wrong in stating that good shooting can be done from the hip. He is quite right—as far as the orthodox bull's-eye work is concerned. However, the original question before the Camp-Fire arose, not from a discussion of what is and what is not in relation to right little, tight little bull's-eyes, but of what and how the old gunfighters of the West shot when it was a case of kill or be killed.

Obviously, when I spoke of shooting from the hip I was not discussing target shooting. I was speaking of the chances to shoot in this manner to a degree of accuracy that would strike a man, or something the size of a man at a distance of twenty or thirty feet. And yes, forty or fifty feet. With a little pra tise, and we ought to assume I imagine that a gunfighter would do a little practising, it isn't any great trick to strike such a figure very regularly. And I know of a chap—but wait, I'll tell you about him a little later.

The doctor speaks of putting up a saucer or tin can at forty feet and trying for it from the hip. I believe the original plan behind hip shooting was to hit a man, and the vulnerable area of a man is quite some bigger than saucer or a tin can. And when the do tor speaks of hip shooting as being a joke and that no man ever lived who was proficient enough to use it with any success beyond a distance of six or eight feet, he's taking in a lot of territory.

With all due respect to the doctor's ability to ruin a bull's-eye all according to Hoyle and regulations and rule A or B or whatever else rule the match requires, he's talking over his head right there. Any one willing to secure a good gun and enough ammunition to practise half an hour a day for a month or two can prove the matter quite nicely.

DOCTOR WAHER quotes me as making a very strange statement in saying that I can do better work at flying targets, i.e., cans and bottles thrown in the air, when using double action instead of single action. He should have quoted the rest I said. In this kind of work I told of throwing the object up with my right hand, then *drawing* and shooting with my right hand. And, strange though it may seem to the do tor, I *can* do better work double acting the gun in such shooting instead of single acting it. What such a procedure would produce with other shooters I don't know and care less. I do know how it works out ith me.

The gun I used to do this kind of shooting with was a Colt's Officer's Model, .38 Special, 7½ inch barrel. A target gun with an action so sweet and light and smooth that double acting it did no throw me off in snap shooting of this kind. The doctor tells of various men finding it hard to make good scores when double acting a gun. Who's talking about target shooting and scores anyhow? I'm not—and wasn't in he first place

Doctor Waber tells us that in firing five shots in ten seconds at a target in a match, the best scores are made by cocking the gun for each shot. Nobody questions that. But the doctor doesn't know

what speed is. He admits that if those five shots had to be fired in two seconds it would be absolutely necessary to double act the gun and that at twenty yards the shots would be scattered all over a ten by ten foot backstop. All right—let's introduce Mr. Ed McGivern of Great Falls, Montana.

GOSH! I wish Ed McGivern would write in and tell Doctor Waher a few things about real *fast*, *double action* shooting. He's got all his dope handy, along with affidavits of proof. It happens that I have an old issue of the *Ideal Handbook* before me with a page of some of Ed's high class work. One little stunt that Ed used to put on for the cash customers was to put six shots in *one* second through a tomato can, tossed into the air at a distance of twenty-five feet. By Dr. Waber's own admission Ed must have double acted the gun to get this speed and I call that pretty accurate shooting. Quite good enough I imagine to make a man powerful sick, were he on the receiving end instead of a tomato can.

Here's another one. Hitting six 2½ inch targets tossed in the air at one time by two assistants (each throwing three targets) in one and three-fifths seconds. Another: three 2½ inch targets in less than four-fifths of one second.

I used to correspond with Ed at one time and here are a couple more stunts he told me of pulling. Putting two whisky bottles (empty) one on top of the other, then stepping back fifteen or twenty feet and first breaking the lower one and then the top one before it hit the ground. Kinda fast, huh? And double acting the gun also. Another was to put a tin can on the top of a 16 ft. post, knocking it off with the first shot and putting the other five through it before it hit the ground.

Ed had dozens of other stunts, and any one who cares to go through the back issues of *Outdoor Life* of some ten or twelve years ago will find it all stated, along with facsimiles of affadivits in proof. They had to build an electric timing machine to find out just how fast Ed was. Unless memory tricks me he would clean out five or six shots in less than a second and put them all in the space of a man's heart at ten feet. On a draw and shooting he would duplicate the accuracy with slightly less speed, but never more than two and a half seconds. Which is some different from spraying them over a ten by ten foot backstop.

ED TOLD me there was nothing magical about his shooting. He always claimed that any one blessed with normal eyesight and muscular control could do surprisingly good work at this type of shooting, if they would only spend the time and money for sufficient practise. And Ed did it by double acting his gun. Incidentally, Ed's favorite gun was a Colt's Officer's Model, .38 Special, 6 inch barrel.

So it would seem that the doctor is arguing from the viewpoint of the man who still hunts the coy and illusive bull's-eye and that he is trying to convert target and paper punching data into the same formulae that the old-timer gunfighters used to use in slapping the other fellow down before they got slapped themselves.

—L. P. HOLMES

THIS note anent lion traps properly belonged in the same issue as "The Slave Runner." The incident Mr. MacCreagh refers to, if you remember, dealt with the imprisonment of the American, *King*, in such a trap by a treacherous native.

How do I know what it's like to be in a lion trap with a big cat prowling about?

I know the best way possible. I've been in one. Only it wasn't lion and I wasn't shoved in by the infuriated local savage. I went in all of my own accord.

Why does any lunatic go into a lion trap of his own accord and stay there all night? That one is easy to answer too. Because it's safer in than out.

It was in the Shan Hills of Burma. I was out and everything went wrong that day. It got late. Camp was ten miles away. Darkness came faster than I could run. It was bad tiger country. Less than two weeks ago a Chinese caravan muleteer had been jumped and carried off a few hundred yards into the jungle. I bought him from the gang and sat up in a tree over him for three nights in the hope that the tiger would come home to dinner. But the wily beast must have winded me. He stayed clear.

When the bitten out parts of the Chinaman began to glow all phosphorescent in the night I quit my useless vigils—and on the fourth night the tiger came and finished up his kill. Tigers are filtby feeders anyhow.

SO I knew that there was at least one healthy man eater in those woods, and probably a few others. But one was a plenty, thank you.

Ever been out in the woods and afraid of the dark? Let some movie hero try it when he knows that some four hundred pounds of striped hunger are padding along where he can't see his hand and where IT can see the white of his eyes.

I knew where there was a trap. A nice new strong trap of stout poles with a fall door. If a tiger couldn't get out, it was hopeful to suppose that it couldn't get in. So I stepped out right smartly for that trap. I threw out the goat—and golly how that trap stunk!—and I let the door fall. Now let them all come.

And they did. Things that snuffled in the dark. Feet that stepped on dry leaves like pistol shots. Little feet that scampered off when bigger feet came. Eyes that glowed out of black nothing, motionless for long years at a stretch, and then winked in lazy indolence and went out like lamps. Spooks that wailed and whispered in the trees and prophesied bad luck.

How do I know what kind of feet or what kind of eyes? Maybe "tiger burning bright", maybe jackal, maybe porcupine—and don't let anybody tell you that a porcupine's eyes won't shine as big or as bright as a tiger's.

Tracks next morning? How could I pick out a track in close jungle—vines, rank grass, fallen leaves—I was never a Boy Scout. If I had been I would have known enough not to have been caught out far from camp in the dark.

—GORDON MACCREAGH

FREQUENTLY we receive inquiries about the originals of our cover paintings. What happens to them after they have appeared on our magazine, and is it possible to purchase them? The answer to the first question is that they go back to their respective artists. To the second, that usually the artist, unless he has previously made other plans for its disposal, is more than willing to sell his work at a reasonable figure.

Consequently, if any of you ever want to procure some particular cover, either as a decoration for your home or as an unusual gift to a friend, please write me and I'll be glad to put you directly in touch with the artist.

BURTON W. PEABODY, whose story, "The Mad Rose" is his first in our pages, rises to introduce himself to the members of Camp-Fire.

New York City

A sketch about oneself should be easy enough to write, but somehow the first person singular is such a pompous pronoun that I rather dread the task. Nevertheless, here is the dope, such as it is.

My history begins early in that period sometimes referred to as "The Mauve Decade" or "The Gay Nineties"; neither of these terms, however, holds the slightest place in my recollection.

The color I first looked upon was the tawny yellow of a cattle-beaten prairie extending from horizon to horizon of a North Dakota landscape; red polled and shorthorn bulls fought for supremacy upon those dry wastes; coyotes barked; caravans of Sioux Indians in horse-drawn "prairie schooners" creaked by occasionally and built their evening cook-fires by some muddy slough.

Prairie fires were a menace in the fall; in winter blizzards of snow, ground to icy powder and driven by the gale in clouds of fog-like density, brought death to exposed herds of cattle and at times to men, and sheeted the plains with a crust of dazzling arctic brilliance. Early summer brought meadow larks, morning glories, pleasant, heavy rains; followed quickly by drought—dry tumbleweed cactus rolling across the plains, windmills pumping at arid wells, housewives saving water from one dish-washing to the next.

"Mauve Decade"? "Gay Nineties"? Perhaps so.

But in any case there was, for me, a grandeur and fascination about those desolate open spaces which abides yet. Evidently my parents liked it too, or they wouldn't have lived there. The men of my mother's family were ranchers who brought their families to Dakota from the north of Sweden—they bear, incidentally, the unusual Scandinavian name of Westlin; my father, a railway construction and maintenance engineer, is of pioneer American stock—a mixture, as nearly as can be traced, of English, Scotch and French, with, perhaps, an infinitesimal dash of Irish. Which surely makes me rather a hybrid.

THE trace of wanderlust which ran in the blood of my forebears seems not to have been entirely lost upon the present generation. I grew up, the oldest of seven children, in a number of different States and in many different towns and cities, finishing high school in the suburbs of New York.

Since then my occupations and peregrinations have been too numerous to mention. At fifteen my body had been very nearly destroyed and my hair turned gray by an attack of inflammatory and cardiac rheumatism; during school vacations and afterward I worked on railroad construction gangs to overcome this physical handicap. Stenographer for awhile, mostly in New York; statistician; correspondent; assistant editor of *The Spur*, resigning this post to enlist in the 7th Infantry N.Y.N.G. the night before they left for the Mexican border in 1916.

The next three years were in the Army. Commissioned in the Infantry, Plattsburgh, 1917; resigned to become a flying cadet; graduated from Cornell ground school, and flew at San Antonio 1917-'18-19, being commissioned there and held as a flying instructor, ending up as trainer of the First Flying Squadron of the Cuban Army, whose members had been sent up to Kelly Field to learn their stuff.

However, if I joined the Army with any expectation of personal excitement I was badly fooled, for I never saw a war, never crashed, and never fired a rifle or revolver except at inanimate targets.

NOR have I had much better luck since. Out of the Army, I did newspaper work for a few months in New York, then embarked in 1920 on the first of several long trips to South America as a sales representative for certain electrical and radio factories. Have spent approximately six years in Brazil, and also have a slight bowing acquaintance with Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, as well as most of the European countries bordering on the Atlantic.

Missed by a few hours being caught in the sanguinary three weeks' rebellion of Sao Paulo in 1924; was in Lisbon, Portugal, just after one rebellion in 1925 and just before another; in fact the only battle I ever actually witnessed was a bloodless one four years ago where Brazil's two dreadnoughts, the *Sao Paulo* and *Minas Geraes*, mutually bent on mutiny, got tangled up in their own intrigue, and the *Minas* stood by with silent guns while the *Sao Paulo*, firing intermittent broadsides, ranout to sea against the crashing thunder of all the land fortifications of Guanabara Bay. Eventually the *Sao Paulo* put in at Montevidéo, Uruguay, where, so I have been told, the guilty officers expatriated themselves and took jobs with Swift & Company in preference to coming back home and getting shot at dawn.

ROMANCE, too, I seem to have missed, at least in its highest sense, for I am unmarried—and therewith goes a gorgeous little tragedy which will probably never be written, certainly not for a long, long while.

As to the business of writing, I have spent so much time doing other things and have completed so few stories as yet that probably the less I say about it the better.

One word—two words, rather—about "The Mad Rose." Some reader of *Adventure* who knows South Brazil is almost certain to write in and say there is no such city in those hills as Sao Sebastiao. The answer is that there surely is, although perhaps its real name is Caceqney, or Bagé, or even Santa Anna. Certain episodes of the story will be so vividly recalled by friends of mine in Brazil that it seemed both politic and convenient to assemble the various incidents and fictitious people in a city of a fictitious name.

One other point, the spelling of *pampoula*. No doubt it should be *papulla*, but I have heard both in dialect, so I took my choice. I can think of no other point in the story that requires defense.

—BURTON W. PEABODY

MORE light on the subject of waterproofing cotton cloth by the natives of Central America.

Berkeley, Cal.

It is perfectly true that the natives of Central America use an ordinary paint brush for applying rubber latex to cotton cloth for waterproofing. Moreover, they also purchase in the nearest *botica* (drugstore) a few ounces of crude sulphuric acid which they use to vulcanize the latex to prevent stickiness.

This is not only among the "civilized" natives, living close to the towns; the simon-pure, unadulterated, wild ones use the same thing when they can get it.

However, when neither brush nor acid is available, the *hulero* can make just as good waterproof packbags using the fresh latex coagulated with the juice of *huamsi* fruits or the pounded tendrils of the local smoke vine.

The latex from the *Castilloa Elastica* (the common rubber of Central America) does not coagulate as well with smoke as does the latex from *Hevea* or the Brazilian rubber.

Mr. Wehde's description of the process is also just as correct. A matter of locale. I have seen both processes in the same territory he mentions, viz., Wanks River.

—S. H. PARSONS.

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Jipi-Japa Hats

WHICH are really what we know as Panama hats—and made in Ecuador.

Request:—"I notice you stated one time that Panama hats are not made in Panama, but are made in Ecuador.

1. What are they made out of?
2. Are they costly down there?
3. What machines are used?
4. Could they be made here?
5. What part of Ecuador produces the best hats?"

—E. L. BOWEN, Holland, Mich.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—Ecuador is the chief producer of "Panama" hats, although imitations are being produced in other countries such as Japan and Jamaica. The Ecuador hat is by far the best of the lot, as the Indians have been making them for centuries. They were trade articles long before the advent of the Spaniards. The name "Panama" hat is supposed to have originated during the California gold rush when men going and returning from the Coast via the Isthmus purchased and brought home these hats. I do not know if this solution is true or not. Many explanations serve to confuse further.

When I was in Panama I heard, and firmly believed, that the name Matachin, a station on the Panama Railroad, was called that from two Spanish words *matar chino* (to kill Chinese) due to the fact that thousands of Chinese grabbed pigtails and leaped in a body into the Chagres during a fever epidemic in the "early days". I have seen this in a dozen books. Father Zahm (Mozans) mentions it in his "Along the Andes and Down the Amazon" and he is a much better Spanish scholar than I be. The word however is an old Spanish word meaning "butchershop" or "slaughterhouse" and there used to be one there, hence the name.

Thus, I say, the name "Panama" hat is supposed to have originated from forty-niners bringing them up from Panama. I do know that the name is nothing like "Panama" where they are made, for I have been there and watched them being woven (not underwater, as the report has it).

Down there along the Ecuadorian coast they are called Hippy-bappy hats (*jipi-japa*) and from what I observed on the ground one can buy them as cheaply in New York as he can on the spot without a band and unblocked.

They are made of the leaf rib of a palm known locally as the *toquilla*, a sort of palmetto similar to the Florida saw palmetto. They are woven by hand, usually, the finer ones in the early morning when the dew is still on the ground.

The Provinces of Manabi, Guyas, of Ecuador, produces the finest hats. The best brands locally are known as "Montecristi" and "Santana". You can pay up to $900 gold for a hat on the spot where it is made. To be frank, it would be a mighty good hat, soft as silk and pliable enough to be pocketed.

Cap-and-Ball

METHODS of carrying and loading ammunition.

Request:—"I have an old Colt 1860 C. & B. Am loading it with 10 grs. FFFG behind the regular Lyman lead. Now, I have never seen a picture of soldiers or old-timers, who carried these guns, in which they disclosed how and where they carried their bullets, patches and powder. It's a mystery. If such a container was used by the Army, would Bannerman have it? I suppose the powder should be in a meta container, etc? I suppose the bullets should be kept so they won't roll around. I am still at sea how to carry this stuff, so any inside information will be appreciated. I think a fellow actually enjoyed shooting more in those days, because he earned it by the time he was through loading, cutting wads, etc."—H. A. SHERLOCK, Canton, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The users of the cap-and-ball revolver generally carried bullets in a pouch, the caps in a small box in which

they were sold, and the powder in a flask with a measuring device on the mouth, calculated to throw the correct charge of black powder.

Fixed ammunition was also available, known as "skin cartridge," the charge of powder and bullet being enclosed in a cylindrical envelope of some transparent material, possibly some sort of gold-beater's skin, and was loaded into the muzzle of the cylinder as is a cartridge into the open chamber of a revolver today, being then rammed home with the rammer lever. These were sold in packages of six cartridges each.

Some used a capping device, that placed a cap on the nipple from a spring-fed charger, but most kept them separate, and capped by hand.

To get the best results, load a greased felt wad between bullet and powder, which lubricates the barrel and chamber, and makes cleaning easier. As I'd been told by the late Henry Walter Pry, and have found practical. It surely makes the old guns shoot well. FFFG powder is about right, and a soft lead ball, preferably round.

The revolvers were carried in holsters on the belt, or small ones in pockets. I have seen many photos of such, in the past.

You can get powder flasks and cappers from Bannerman's, and bullet molds too. I own and use the .36 and .44 Colt cap-and-ball revolver, and for the first shots would rely on them perfectly, if I loaded them as stated above.

U. S. S. *Cyclops*

A FAMOUS mystery of the sea.

Request:—"Would appreciate very much any information you can give concerning the disappearance of the *Cyclops* in 1918."—L. R. JACKSON, Ithaca, New York.

Reply, by Mr. Harry E. Riesenberg:—There has been no more baffling mystery in the annals of the United States Navy Department than the disappearance in March, 1918 of the U. S. S. *Cyclops*, a Navy collier of 19,000 tons displacement (or 10,644 gross tons and 6,004 net tons), with all on board.

Loaded with a cargo of manganese, with fifty-seven passengers, twenty officers, and a crew of two hundred and thirteen aboard, the collier was due in port on March 13, 1918. On March 4, 1918 the *Cyclops* reported at Barbados, British West Indies, where she put in for bunker coal.

Since her departure from that port there has not been a trace of the vessel, and long continued and vigilant search of the entire region proved utterly futile, not a vestige of wreckage having been discovered. No reasonable explanation of the strange disappearance can be given. It is known that one of her two engines was damaged and that she was proceeding at reduced speed, but even if that was true and the other engine had become disabled it would have not had any effect on her ability to communicate by radio.

Many theories have been advanced, but none that seems to account satisfactorily for the ship's complete vanishment. After months of search and waiting the *Cyclops* was finally given up as lost and her name stricken from the Navy registry.

Flanking

WITH a note on bulldogging a steer.

Request:—"I would like to know the proper way to flank or tail a calf for branding. Also to bulldog a steer from your horse."—LAWRENCE TOPJIAN, Monterey, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—Just once or twice on an animal will teach you more than a book. There is a knack to flanking that can only be acquired by practise. Some fellows never learn it. Well, here is the way to do it. Standing beside calf, calf's head to your left, place left hand on neck of calf, run hand down neck and grasp front leg as high up on leg as possible, hit calf in belly with knee and at the same time grasp loose part of flank with right hand; as calf jumps just tip him towards you. Just like that. But try it The secret is to tip the calf just as he leaves the ground. A small calf is of course easy, but try it on one about six months old.

Tailing is usually only done on big stock. One roper on horseback catches the animal by the horns or neck; another catches one or both hind legs and stretches the animal out. Then grasp tail and jerk quickly toward you, which throws the animal. You can tail a calf caught only by the neck, but busting is easier and better on both animal and man.

Confederate Stamp

ON WHICH the portrait of Jefferson Davis resembles Abraham Lincoln.

Request:—"Could you tell me the value of five-cent Confederate stamps, of 1863 on the original envelopes? Also ten-cent with Lincoln's portrait, same date. Also two-cent U. S. Revenue 1868-69, portrait of Washington.

I found a bunch of old letters and papers in an old trunk; some of the letters had stamps on them and some had a 5 or 10 in the upper right corner and the cancel mark in lower left corner. Most of these were written in 1850-51-52; some in the 40's. Have they any value?

A good many of the letters were written during the Civil War and tell of the prices of things, how the people were treated by the soldiers, how the slaves acted, and various battles. Some of the letters are from this vicinity and some from Vicksburg, Miss."—E. W. MORRISON, Florence, Ala.

Reply, by Mr. H. A. Davis:—Relative to the confederate stamps and stampless letters. The 5c

Confederate stamps on cover of 1863 are listed at $2.00 each for a pair. They are much scarcer used singly on cover and are listed in this way at $5.00 each. If it is on a prisoner's letter it is worth $50.00 according to the Standard catalog. There are many varieties of this stamp; one variety printed on both sides is listed at $250.00 in used condition. Are you sure your 10c has a portrait of Lincoln? If it is a Confederate and printed in blue, it is Jefferson Davis, who was President of the Confederacy. This particular portrait would be mistaken by some for Lincoln. There are many varieties, and listed from 20c to $250.00 each. It would be necessary for me to examine them to advise you intelligently of their worth. This also applies to your stampless covers and letters which are worth from 10c to as many dollars according to dates and postal markings.

Great Lakes

THE open season for navigation usually begins in May.

Request:—"1. When does navigation open on the Lakes?

2. I have had experience on the Lakes as a fireman 1st class on a Government boat and also as oiler and water tender. What do you think of my chances of landing a job?

3. What are the wages paid in the different departments of Lake freighters?"

—FRED R. MILLER, Jackson, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. H. C. Gardner:—1. Navigation on the Lakes opens about the first to fifteenth of May, depending largely on ice conditions of the upper lakes.

2. With your previous experience you will have no difficulties getting placed.

3. The wages in your department as oiler or fireman will be $105.00 per month. Coal passers get $75.00 per month. Deckhands $77.00. Wheelsmen and watchmen $105.00. Boatswains $120.00 per month.

Muskrat

THIS little fur bearer prefers moist ground and is a vegetarian.

Request:—"Will you kindly give me what information you can of muskrat fur raising?

Am interested in knowing the food, kinds required, pens and grounds, market for furs, what diseases the animals are susceptible to and the best and cheapest land to raise them on."

—H. T. RAIFSNYDER, Kansas City, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. Fred L. Bowden:—The raising of muskrats for fur is a highly specialized business. By that I mean to say that if a man is to be successful he must put the same amount of thought and study into the raising of fur that he would into any other kind of business. The man who believes that all he has to do is procure a few breeders, dump them into a pen or enclosure and sit down and wait for his fur bearers to make him rich is pre-doomed to failure.

On the other hand, many fur farmers are making a mighty good return from their investment. However, I would state that probably the number of failures in fur farming is somewhat over fifty per cent, and also that a man has to have certain qualifications which are "born in him" to make fur farming a success. Above all he must have a love for animals, and have a desire to study them, and learn their habits, etc. Years ago I used to advise nearly every one of my inquirers to go in for muskrats; of late years however, I have learned to my sorrow that not every man could be successful in this business, even under the most favorable circumstances, hence the above.

I judge from your letter you are considering pen raising. If this is true, my advice is don't do it. I know that many people claim to be making a success of raising muskrats in pens for fur, but I have never yet seen any one who could really show a profit from the actual pelting of furs from muskrats raised in this manner. In order to make a success of muskrat farming you must as nearly as possible approximate the natural habitat conditions of the 'rats, and it surely is not natural for muskrats to live in a small pen.

THE result of pen breeding of muskrats results more times than not in poor quality fur, poor color, poor texture, rubbed, and otherwise below first grade. In nine times out of ten if you ask one of the pen breeders if he is making money he will say surely, but if you inquire far enough you will nearly always discover he is not making his money from actual pelting, but from selling breeders to other prospective fur farmers.

I do not believe it is possible in most cases for the raisers of muskrats in pens to more than pay for the food of the 'rats.

By all means if you are seriously considering this proposition start right and start either on a marsh, swamp, or best of all on a small pond, and be sure that your site is situated in such a place that high water in the spring will not carry away your fences. This is very important. An old pond with bullrushes, flags, cattails, etc., and bushes around the shores is ideal, as in such a place the 'rats will secure much of their natural feed for themselves and be a lot better and more vigorous for doing it.

The muskrat is strictly a vegetarian. He will eat carrots, turnips, beets, apples, corn (green and dry), cabbage, and lettuce. In fact almost any kind of fresh vegetable, and also, like his cousin the beaver, likes bark of some trees and bushes, but not to the extent of his larger relative. Be sure that if you start this type of fur farming that you provide a proper fence around your ranch before securing your stock.

And just another word; in the feeding of muskrats be sure that all food is strictly fresh. The little fur bearers are particularly free from disease, and in

nearly every case of epidemics among fur bearers in captivity the cause can be traced to improper and spoiled food.

Things to watch out for after you start. Build your fence to keep your muskrats in, and mink, weasels, and otter out. If a mink gets inside of your enclosure you might just as well atop all operations until you've killed him, for be sure will play havoc with a muskrat farm. Also watch out for hawks and the larger species of owls.

Alaska

NO MONEY is spared to obtain the latest types of milling and mining equipment.

Request:—"What are the methods used in the recovery of the principal metals of Alaska?

Are there any modern mills up there using selective flotation for the recovering of metals? Please name a few if there are any.

What type flotation machine and grinding machines are most in use up there?

What reagents are used for the treatment of the different ores of that country?"—WM. B. PATTON, Climax, Col.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—On all the producing mining properties of the Alaskan Territory the most modern scientific methods of handling ore are utilized. It might be mentioned, also, that Alaska is today producing most of the chief economic metals.

Properties like the Premier at the head of the Portland canal, one of the richest gold and silver properties on the continent, has a modern tramway and mill. The Salt Chuck Mine on Prince of Wales Island, with a bornite ore carrying platinum and palladinum, also has a modern mill and ships its rich concentrates to the Irvington treatment plant in New Jersey. The Kennecott mines, a very large copper property, uses the most up to date metallurgical processes in the handling of its big output. The Alaskan-Juneau is another large gold property handling a tremendous tonnage of low grade ore in a very modern mill.

Alaska also produces tin, mercury, antimony, molybdenum and many other ores.

In the Fairbanks district where a great deal of gravel is being dredged yearly, very modern and costly machinery and methods are used. Cold water thawing of gravel is employed. Holes are drilled at spaced intervals and pipes introduced into which water is pumped under pressure. In one instance the water is brought through a 72 mile ditch for stripping and thawing. In another case the dredge operations cost $10,000,000 before production started.

A BRIEF sketch of milling procedure at the Kennecott mines will perhaps serve as an illustration of the scientific handling of Alaskan ores. About one-third of the mines production, a crude ore running 40% to 60% copper, goes to the smelter direct. The rest of the product is a sulphide, having a copper content of from 7% to 9%.

In passing, a general statement is necessary, which may be applied to most all mining properties in this region. The climatic conditions along the coast where most of these properties are located, are not so rigorous as in the interior. However the streams are glacial and temperamental, and transportation is difficult, resulting in high freight rates, which also has a bearing on all phases of mining operations. Concentrates must be held to a high grade and extraction processes cannot be carried to such lengths as if the mines were more favorably located.

The Kennecott ore delivered at the mill by tramway, goes first to Buchanan jaw crushers. Then comes a Symonds vertical disk crusher, followed by Traylor rolls. The screening formerly done by trommels, has now been replaced by vibrating screens which gives less copper carbonate slimes. Next in the flowsheet are Hancock roughing jigs and Harts cleaner jigs. The product is then classified and sent to Wilfley tables. All tables produce finished concentrates, middlings and tails. All sulphide in slimes is recovered by flotation. The slimes are the most refractory portions of the mill product. They contain all the clay that comes from the mines, and since carbonates are softer than sulphides or gangue, the proportion of copper carbonate in the slimes is high. The jig tails are sent to an ammonia leaching plant.

The flotation equipment consists of Janney machines, roughers, cleaners and mixers. A Dorr thickener and Oliver filter are used for de-watering flotation concentrates. The flotation reagents consist of sodium sulphide, sulphur, quicklime, coal tar creosote, steam distilled pine oil.

The products of the Kennecott, as is the case with most mines in this country, are shipped by freight steamers to the A. S. & R. Co. smelter at Tacoma, Wash.

I think you will be able to judge from the foregoing description, that no pains or money are spared by mine operators in Alaska, to obtain the very latest types of milling and mining equipment.

Jackeroo

AN AUSTRALIAN word applied to gentlemen's sons who are employed, with special privileges, on sheep and cattle stations.

Request:—1. "What is the pay of a jackeroo?

2. What hours does he work? Does he work every day in the week?

3. What is the minimum age limit?

4. What are his chances of promotion, etc.?"
—ERIC A. LIVINGSTON, Victoria, Australia.

Reply, by Mr. Alan Foley:—1. To the best of my belief there is no fixed scale of payment for a jackeroo, and the position is really as follows:

"Jackeroo" is simply a term applied to gentlemen's sons who secure employment on sheep or cattle stations. The employment is for the purpose of acquiring experience in the raising of sheep or cattle, for the management of the stations, and the direction and control of the staff engaged on these stations.

A jackeroo differs from an ordinary employee in that he lives with the employer as one of the family and on equal social terms, and it is usually assumed that he possesses some means that will enable him at a later date to acquire a holding of his own.

He is not employed as an ordinary hand, but is supposed to be taught all there is to know about the cattle or sheep industry, as the case may be.

Because of the circumstances outlined above you will realize that the question of payment must be an elastic one, as it will depend upon individual circumstances. It is not unusual for a jackeroo to pay a premium for the privilege of acquiring first hand knowledge, and at the best of times a small amount of pocket money is all that can be anticipated.

2. There are no fixed hours of work. Generally there is no Sunday work; but at some seasons of the year there may be a call for a bit of toil on Sunday.

3. There is no minimum age limit.

4. Chances of promotion are not bright. If you have no money to start on your own account when you have learned the business, your best plan would be to hang on until you are thoroughly proficient and then to look around for employment as manager of a station. In the meantime your prospects of getting high wages would not be good. For that reason, if money is necessary to you and you are keen on getting employment on a sheep or cattle station, it would probably be better for you to get any kind of employment that you can. Any old job on a station would be better paid than a jackeroo's, but the opportunities for acquiring knowledge of the finer points of the game would not be so good.

In the foregoing I have given you the real meaning of the duties and prospects of a jackeroo. Sometimes, however, the term is loosely applied to an ordinary station roustabout.

Walking

AS DISTINGUISHED from running, the heel of the foremost foot must touch the ground before the toe of the other foot leaves the ground.

Request:—"Would like to know the official definition of walking as applied to walking contests."
—M. F. JONES, JR., Ithaca, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Jackson Scholz:—The official A. A. U. definition of walking is as follows:

1. Walking is a succession of steps and, in contradistinction to running (wherein both feet may be off the ground at the same time), in walking there must always be contact with the ground with some portion of one of the feet.

2. In track races the following code of rules governing walking must be adhered to, or else disqualification will ensue.

(a) Leg action—As the foremost foot in taking a step touches the ground, the knee must not be bent. The heel must touch the ground first and the toe be the last portion of the foot to leave it. It is imperative that the heel of the foremost foot touch the ground before the toe of the other foot ceases to have contact with it.

(b) Carriage of body—The body must be kept strictly upright.

NOTE—Discretionary power is given to the judge or judges of walking to decide whether, in the event of the body being inclined forward, such attitude is the result of fatigue or arises for some cause beyond the control of the competitor; and if it be, and he or they are convinced that the rule has been broken for such reason only, and that the competitor is still walking fairly otherwise, disqualification need not necessarily follow from this cause alone.

(c) Carriage of arms—The arms may be held in any way the walker likes, but it is advised that they be carried well up.

3. A disqualified competitor must at once leave the track.

Proa

THIS South Seas craft is one of the fastest of sailboats when the wind is right. But it is unhandy for tacking and maneuvering.

Request:—"1. I have seen the statement made by several authorities on small boat sailing that the flying *proa* of the Ladrones Islands was the fastest sailing craft known. If this is so, why has it not been made a feature in yacht clubs and by small boat sailors where speed is a consideration?

2. Is the lateen rig suitable for variable winds and restricted waters?"—WALTER F. SMITH, Washington, D.C.

Reply, by Mr. James Stanley Meagher:—I may say that I am not an authority on small boat sailing, yachting, speed of different craft and etc., but I will give you what I know on the above as well as a few facts from other sources.

The flying *proa* and other types of sailing craft used by the natives in different parts of the South Seas are undoubtedly very fast. To see them skim through the water with a strong wind behind would lead one to believe that they were the fastest sailing boats in existence, and I may venture to say that under certain conditions there is practically no other sailing craft quite as fast.

There are however no authentic records as far as I know as to their actual speed, and when judging the speed of the *proa* it must be taken into con-

sideration that in South Sea waters where the proa is used there are no other really fast sailing craft. Therefore a person in watching and estimating the speed of the *proa* down there would be judging them in comparison with slow and sluggish sailing craft.

Despite these facts however I can not name any other type of craft which could probably exceed them in speed, but I am informed that it is doubtful that the flying *proa* is as fast as the "scow" type sail boat in use on the Great Lakes and Barnegat Bay, which are said to have attained speeds out of all proportion to their size.

This is due to their unusual design, which in strong winds or hard pulls causes them to plane like a power hydroplane when they cease to be governed by the laws applicable to displacement boats. Neither the *proa* nor any other sailing canoe which I know of in the South Seas actually plane in this manner, so that the former type of craft probably has something on the main in speed.

2. The lateen rig is a very fast rig but unhandy for tacking or maneuvering. A *proa* with lateen rig is very slow in stays and is therefore not fast to windward on account of lack of lateral plane.

It is probably on this account that it has not been adopted by yachtsmen who usually demand handiness and speed to windward.

Death Valley

ONE of the most unpleasant places in the West; bitter cold in the winter gales and terribly hot in summer.

Request.—"Could you tell me where I could get detailed information regarding Death Valley, such as minerals, winter climate, sandstorms in particular, and such other as would be of assistance to a tenderfoot planning to pack in with burros?"

—C. W. MALLASTER, Santa Fé Springs, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—Death Valley has practically no minerals save chemicals, like soda, borax and the like, but in the bordering mountains are gold, silver and other metal minerals. Regarding the winter climate, can tell you that my friends who have been there say it is one of the most unpleasant places in the West, terribly windy and cold. The man who built an ore mill there tells me that he had to anchor his cook house to trucks loaded with ore to prevent it from being blown away with him in winter gales.

He showed me a photograph of it so tied down. He says winter there is as hellish as summer, only in the opposite direction.

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They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

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The next issue of
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