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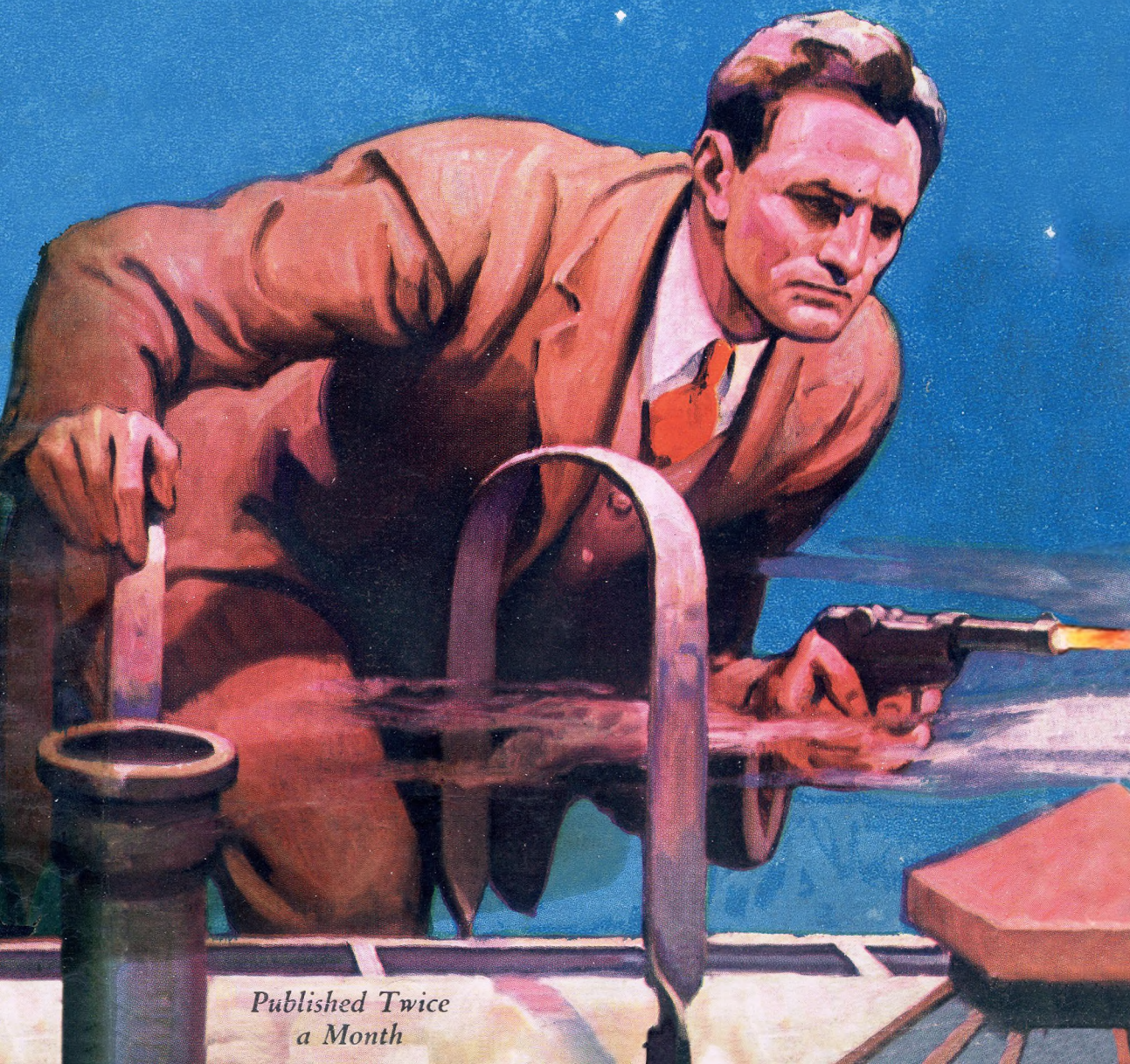
August 15th

Adventure

The Double Cross

By Gordon Young



Published Twice
a Month

"You will please clasp your hands behind your neck"

MR. JOEL CAIRO was a small-boned dark man of medium height. His hair was black and smooth and very glossy. His features were Levantine. A square-cut ruby, its sides parallelled by four baguette diamonds, gleamed against the deep green of his cravat.

Spade inclined his head at his visitor and then at a chair, saying: "Sit down, Mr. Cairo."

Cairo bowed elaborately over his hat, said, "I thank you," in a high-pitched, thin voice, and sat down.

Spade rocked back in his chair and asked: "Now what can I do for you?"

"May a stranger offer his condolences for your partner's unfortunate death?"

"Thanks."

"May I ask, Mr. Spade, if there was, as the newspapers inferred, a certain—ah—relationship between that unfortunate happening and the death a little later of the man Thursby?"

Spade said nothing in a blank-faced definite way.

Cairo rose and bowed. "I beg your pardon." He sat down and placed his hands side by side, palms down, on the corner of the desk. "More than idle curiosity made me ask that, Mr. Spade. I am trying to recover an—ah—ornament that has been mislaid. I hoped—you would assist me."

Spade nodded with eyebrows lifted.

"The ornament is a statuette," Cairo went on, selecting and mouthing his words carefully, "The black figure of a bird."

Spade nodded again, with courteous interest.

"I am prepared to pay, on behalf of the figure's rightful owner, the sum of five thousand dollars for its recovery." Cairo raised one hand from the desk and touched a spot in the air with the broad-nailed tip of an ugly white forefinger. "I am prepared to promise that—what is the phrase?—no questions will be asked?"

"Five thousand is a lot of money," Spade commented, looking meditatively at Cairo.

"It—"

Fingers drummed lightly on the door.

When Spade called, "Come in," the door opened far enough to admit Effie Perine's head and shoulders. She had put on a small dark felt hat and a dark coat with a gray fur collar.

"Is there anything else, Mr. Spade?" she asked.

"No. Good night. Lock the door when you go, will you?"

Spade turned his chair to face Cairo again, saying:

"It interests me some."

The sound of the corridor door closing behind Effie Perine came to them. Cairo smiled and took a short, compact, flat black pistol out of an inner pocket.

"You will please," he said, "clasp your hands together at the back of your neck."

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for August 15th

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EDITOR

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A New Novel of Don Everhard

By

GORDON YOUNG

The DOUBLECROSS

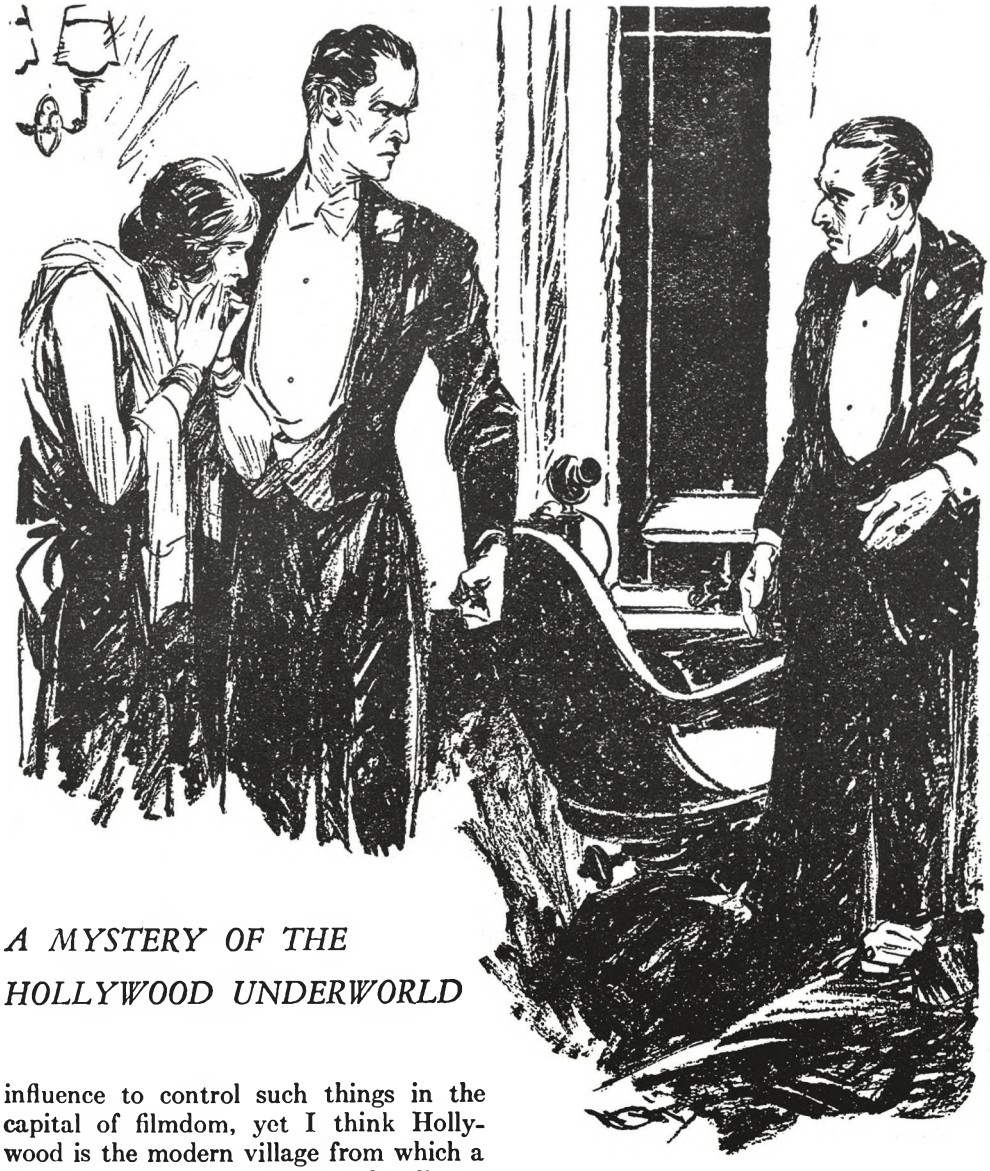
CHAPTER I

MR. DONALD RICHMOND—GENTLEMAN

AS I HAVE said before, and as I shall likely say a few times more, even to myself if there is no one else to listen, I quite approve of those old monks that ran off to deserts to get away from fair maidens.

They didn't want to go, any more than other men then or now; but they wanted to keep out of trouble, both in this world and the next. And if the devil be, as some people say, one who tempts all men and is faithful to none, who cajoles, entices, has a fair outward form, makes you blur eyed and reckless, whispers soft promises with the dimpled smile of allure, then sets fire to you with a flame hot as any in hell, though it be nothing but shame that burns you—I say if it be true that the devil is up to such tricks, why then fair maidens serve him well; and the old monks showed uncommon good judgment when they gathered up their skirts and set off at a trot for the rocky desert's caves.

Though I own, or at least once had given to me, both a gambling and a bootleg concession by the man who had the



A MYSTERY OF THE HOLLYWOOD UNDERWORLD

influence to control such things in the capital of filmdom, yet I think Hollywood is the modern village from which a fellow who wishes to imitate the discretion of the wise old monks would keep farthest away. All shapes and sorts and types of pretty maidens swarm there like bees, bringing their beauty to the cameras, hoping passionately for the luck that gives wealth and fame.

However, those beauties, and some not so beautiful who are already stars, jealously see to it, as well as they can, that other fair maidens are kept out of the picture; and—so I have been told, for this is mere hearsay—an extra girl, to get along and have the wherewithal to pay room and board, with a little left over for such silken things as maidens must wear or be unhappy, needs to be rather homely.

However, I understand from articles by persons who are paid to write of Hollywood that it is a place of homes and churches; and, according to the photographic supplement of the Sunday *Times*,

Hollywooders must spend all their leisure playing with children and dogs on lawns. No doubt the night clubs, gambling joints and bootleggers are supported by tourists from Iowa.

It happened sometime ago that business took me to Los Angeles, where George Renald and his wife tried to make of me a house guest; and I learned some things about pretty girls and how they live, though they dress extravagantly and never visit the studios.

George Renald had owned or managed gambling clubs in various parts of the world. Wherever he cared to open up, men of wealth readily financed him. His clubs paid dividends. So he went to Hollywood and built a magnificent home, about the size of a hotel, which wasn't a home at all, but a gambling joint, so designed and maintained. Liking privacy, and having some need of it in his business, he walled up the grounds. With telegrams and letters he gathered a staff of servants; many were men and women he had employed before.

I had become acquainted with Renald by visiting his poker room at San Francisco some years before. It hurt his pocket and pride, but rather touched his admiration and especially that of Madame Renald, to see me win night after night though he had the best of his housemen sit in against me. He couldn't understand it. He knew that I was deft with cards; but he didn't know that I had carried off one of his packs, by minute study discovered the markings, then practised until I could read them as readily as any of the men he paid "to protect the house"—which is the gambler's phrase for justifying the fact that his games are crooked.

But at times he asked me, with black eyes snapping and his tuft of beard waggling, why there is no law against promoters and financiers. He said their games, too, are crooked. He said also, no doubt believed and perhaps rightly, that the average investor has no more chance of winning than by playing roulette. Furthermore, he insisted that gambling stimulated business conditions.

"When a man or woman won the money was spent on—what? Luxuries! When does a merchant think business is good? When he sells a plain pair of serviceable hose? Not much. It's when he sells a dozen of clocked silk. Look what stores are showing now! Jeweled handkerchiefs. Will a man that sweats for his money buy 'em for the lady he wants to please? Ah, but with a night's winnings in his pocket, sure! Go down and ask the chamber of commerce if it isn't *luxuries* that make business good. And who spends like a lucky gambler? Gambling keeps money in circulation, eh? Well, the fellows that go broke have to scratch around and find more money. Makes 'em industrious!"

The morning after my arrival in Los Angeles, Renald telephoned and said that he was coming right down to the hotel after me, bags and baggage; and would I not stop with Madame and himself as long as I was in the city?

His hospitality did not impress me. I was no longer merely Don Everhard, notorious for being quick and tricky with guns; for being also one of the most elusive cutthroats that, according to many indignant people, ever went unhanged. I had, in fact, almost ceased to be the black sheep among the Richmonds.

THE FOUNDER of our family in California, of the numerous tribe of Richmonds, was old McDonald Richmond, a riotous, lucky, generous and nobly honest old fellow who had gathered great land holdings and tied up the estate in such a way that it remained practically intact until a few years ago when a division was made among the heirs. After my respectable, and for the most part devout, uncles, aunts, cousins and multitude of vague kinfolk had finished their wrangling, by some odd chance it happened that the city property, the orange groves, the alfalfa fields, whatever was suitable for suburban subdivision, and all that was valuable, had been awarded to those who professed

that they did not believe in laying up treasures on earth. I had not intruded any claims whatsoever; but lawyers had advised that it were best to evade a possible law suit by having me assign my rights away in exchange for some remote barren waterless acreage.

I am sure that at least certain of the elderly members of my family thought that it was short sighted, even a blunder, on the part of Providence to allow my desert land the distinction of becoming an oil field.

So I knew very well that Renald was so enthusiastically extending his hospitality to Mr. Donald Richmond who had lately come by some wealth, rather than to Don Everhard.

However, I had no such feelings about Madame Renald. Quite the most disparaging thing that could be said of her was that she loved her husband. She knew that his temptations were silk clad, winsome, often witty and young; and that she herself, for all the artifices a woman may use, had begun long ago to look old.

She was much older than I, and far wiser in the ways of the world; but often we had sat apart from those feverish with gambling, pawing their chips and gazing with fixed eyes, almost as glassy as if staring at Death himself, and we talked intimately of what, just *what*, was worth while in life.

Neither of us thought that happiness, or anything like it, was to be won in a gambling joint. I had no sympathy whatsoever with the sorrows and troubles of rich people. Wealth, I said, may not make happiness, but lack of it surely makes unhappiness. So when rich men, or their sons, turn rotters, well and good; the fault is their own; let them carry the shame of it and not whine about wealth being so much harder to endure than poverty.

Madame was far more kindly and tolerant, had lived longer, seen more, and was without envy. She once said to me with almost motherly affection:

"I wonder, I often wonder about you. You are a strange boy, Don. In a way, in quite the wrong sort of way, intelligent. You think you would not lose your head if you had money, lots of money—but I wonder."

I knew then, as well as now, that money would not make a dunce of me. When I won, money went into the bank—not into clocked hose, according to Renald's theory. And I never in my life saw a nose that I thought pretty enough to be wiped by a bejeweled handkerchief; much less a nose that would induce me to pay for a kerchief of the kind. Not much. Comfort, yes. I like that; and good clothes; some books, but mostly histories, which I find as entertaining though they are perhaps as untrue as fiction.

By people who don't know much about me, I am supposed to be a rather dangerous and tricky man; but I am afraid of stock salesmen, real estate salesmen, any kind of salesmen. I know too much about poker to try the other fellow's game.

I am not a good sport; but my eyes have never been bloodshot, neither of my hands has ever trembled; I sleep lightly and wake with a clear head. All graveyards are full of good sports. My friends say that some day somebody will catch me off guard, then won't I wish I'd spent money and had fun? I've noticed that their idea of fun leads to an awakening with headache powders in the morning.

So there was just a little pride in my willingness to go with Renald and let Madame learn that it took more than an oil field to make a fool of me.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE THAT CHANCE BUILT

I'LL HAVE to admit, after all my jibes, that Renald's house wasn't really in Hollywood.

As nearly as I could tell, Los Angeles is built clear to the ocean, but it seems that many little communities jealously preserve their exclusive individuality.

One day having an idle hour I read the real estate advertising; and whereas old

story book witchmen used to say "hocus pocus" when trying to hoodwink a fellow, the phrase "exclusive neighborhood" seeems designed to serve that bewitching purpose in Southern California.

Also people there do not measure distance by miles, but by minutes. A reckless driver therefore lives much nearer Seventh and Broadway than one who observes the speed laws. I asked Renald how far he was from Hollywood and he said—

"Less than twenty minutes."

He was a man who had lived in various parts of the world, yet the peculiar virus that attacks residents in or near Los Angeles had affected him. He told me how much the city had grown in the last five years, and how much it would grow in the next five; from the tonneau he waved his hand toward this studio, and with a flourish said such and such a picture celebrity lived in that house—all, much as if he were the spieler for a sight seeing bus.

"There—" he said when we were some where on Hollywood Boulevard, pointing—"there's Sigamund's Café. All the picture people go there. Great fellow, Sig. Boss bootlegger of Hollywood. Of course the Big, Big Boss is over him. That's Kozar. You'll like Kozar. He runs the town. Great town, L. A! Great!"

We drove through gates of grilled iron into a rather large estate, then along a freshly clipped lawn studded with shrubbery and large trees that had been transplanted full grown. We passed fountains that were illuminated at night with concealed lights, and stopped at the front door of what seemed rather like a quiet family hotel. At night it took on quite another aspect.

I have been in and out of gambling halls, or "hells," as some people call them, from the time my grandfather carried me, a mere child, into the old and then not illegal palaces of red plush and mirrors where he played faro, until a few days ago when a friend, with passwords, took me through a half dozen guarded doors into one of the biggest clubs in New York; but I had never seen a more extravagant layout in this country than Renald's. It seemed to me folly to have made so lavish an investment in a business that some wild eyed reformer, or more likely a politician who wasn't getting as large a bribe as he hankered for, might wreck. But Renald had grown up in the game and, unlike most gamblers, he never gambled—no more than smart bootleggers drink their own stuff. Renald had put much of his own money into this thing; but he felt that he was not taking any hazardous risk since he had been financed by very wealthy and influential men who gave him protection.

I don't care what the police say about it, I am going to say this: There was never a gambling club in the country that ran forty hours without protection. If it was merely a back room in a barber shop, or the basement of a pool hall, somebody winked at it. In fact, the more honest a chief of police is, the less likely he is to know what goes on. He isn't looking for graft and so doesn't feel about for purses that he can squeeze; he believes what his men tell him, and they tell him what they please.

I don't know how Renald's protection was arranged; but he had it, lots of it; and the arrangement was made by this man Kozar, whose name was seldom in the papers though his influence was felt all through Southern California. I had known of him merely by hearsay for a long time. He had lots of power, a heavy hand, and it was then a matter of wonder among the underworld that the heavy handed Kozar had not long before been killed by some envious rival who wanted to wear his shoes.

Renald took me to the third floor—there were elevators in this house—and into one of the guest suites. Though this was sunny Southern California, and though the house was heated by an electrically controlled furnace, there was in this suite also a large wood burning fireplace.

A man came along after us with my two pieces of baggage.

Renald threw his hands about, beaming as I gazed without comment at the furnishings.

"There! Isn't this better than a hotel? And quiet. Nobody comes to this floor. Madame is out buying a new dress to wear for you. My boy, she has a brother and loves him less than you!"

He bustled to a heavy cabinet of intricately carved wood, opened the doors and pointed with dramatic enthusiasm at the assortment of liquor.

"There! The best! Kozar and I buy it in Scotland and France. Comes straight to Kozar's men. No fake labels here!" He snatched up a bulbous bottle. "Try this. You'll see."

I shook my head.

"Oh, you're not afraid of it, are you?"

"Yes. Always was—always will be."

"You're a queer one!" Renald eyed me as if I had a unique deformity. "Kozar'll be interested in meeting you. He's another queer one. Looks like a big fat toad that's learned to walk upright. But he has a brain. Ha, he knows what he's doing every minute of the day—or rather night. Great fellow. He'll like you."

"Not me."

"What do you mean?"

"I'd just as soon you wouldn't introduce me to anybody as Don Everhard, or even Richmond. No reason to care greatly, except that when I get to where I enjoy being stared at, I'll go into a sideshow. My name's too well known. Call me Mr. Don; and if somebody asks how you spell it, say D-o-n-n-e."

"As you say—as you say," Renald replied with amiable exasperation, quite as if humoring a woman. He waggled a lighter before the tip of his cigaret and puffed. "But what you think of it from what you've seen?"

"I don't see how you can get away with it, protection or not."

"Has its problems, but they don't wear police badges. Of course there are always outside gamblers that are trying to horn in. Kozar attends to them too. You'll like that fellow. But it's women that make the trouble. Quarreling all the time. Jealous, jealous. Bah what fools they are!"

"So!"

"It is so!" he said excitedly.

I HAD always rather suspected Renald's excitability of being purely theatrical. The proprietor of a gambling house is pretty much of a showman; and Renald, a short, dapper man, could be amusingly explosive. Now I scarcely knew how much was for my entertainment, how much to relieve his own feelings as he pranced about, gesticulating with short arms.

"Jealous of one another! How they hate!" He snapped his teeth, showing how one pretty woman wished to bite another. "And some tiger girl that's torn the heart out of a dozen men, all of a sudden she grows sentimental over some baby faced dub and wants me—me!—to give him back what he's lost. There's no understanding 'em. I'll tell you about it some time." He held up his wrist and glanced at his watch. "Kozar's stopping by this morning. Much as you know about the game, Don, you've no idea the amount of money that floats back and forth over the tables here. You don't want to come along and meet Kozar?"

"No, thanks."

"But you'll like Kozar—though there are times when I don't like to meet him. He wants to run things, everything. So I have to jump up an' down an' yell at 'im. Does no good. Can't get him excited. We're going to make changes here on the staff. Be a big shake-up. Some of the boys that think they're sitting tight on good jobs—Kozar's all right, but I think he's *too* suspicious—of everybody! At times I think even of me!" But Renald laughed at that, not really meaning it. "I'll see you at lunch," he said.

He went out and I looked about. So it was luxuries that made business good, eh? Well, I know little about the cost marks on such things as I saw here, but it seemed as if these rooms had been fur-

nished for a prince, an Oriental prince at that. The bed was a great carved affair with a canopy. Why a canopy I don't know. The rugs were, or seemed, an inch thick. The hangings were of velvet, laced with gold braid. I like comfort, and am even—or so I have been called—a bit old-maidish in my neatness. But this was too much. While I was eyeing some queer Frenchy pictures of skinny females in transparent underwear that were spaced about the walls, and feeling that I wouldn't care to have any of my best friends know that I had come to this, some one knocked lightly on the door.

I opened it. A neat little scrawny fellow, dressed like a tailor's dummy, but with the face of a shaved monkey, stood there. It just happens that I remember faces and names; but any one who had once seen this fellow's face would be unlikely to forget it.

He gazed at me with polite blankness and bowed.

"Mr. Donne, I am James. May I unpack your bags!"

"Mr. James—or James what?"

"James Gerson, sir."

He came in and went noiselessly about his duties. I sat in a chair by a window and looked at him.

There was no reason for believing that he knew me, or suspected that I knew his name was not Gerson. He had been pointed out to me one night in New York, as he sat at a table very much like an educated and highly polished monkey, as one of the few gangsters that would stand up and fight, alone, with odds against him. Naturally, I had looked at him for some moments with interest. Now, naturally, I was even more interested. A real gunman playing valet. Something was wrong somewhere.

He walked about quietly with the air of an actor studiously going through a rather unfamiliar rôle, though I would not have noticed that if I had not known something of who he was.

When he had finished opening drawers and putting away linen, perhaps with mental comments on my scanty wardrobe, he came to me and made his little bow of departure.

"Very good," I said. "But now sit down and tell me all about it, Monk."

He was standing, I was sitting; but he was looking into my automatic before he could get his coat tail out of the way.

I carry heavy guns. Light calibers are just about as effective as the .45's until you have to use them. I mean that any old gun serves in a bluff; but in a busy mixup it's such a waste of time to have to shoot twice at the same fellow.

His ugly face was set in a grimace that a wounded animal has when cornered. His left hand was poised hip high and partially behind him as if he were half minded to go on, draw and shoot it out anyhow. He was a very small fellow, but lithe, quick, dangerous. All the valet's suavity was thrown aside as if he had tossed away a silken mask.

"Who the hell're you?" he snarled, and though he half lifted his right hand submissively, the other was still poised rigidly at his side with his coat half pushed aside.

I knew him, or at least his type, well enough to know that he needed an answer that satisfied him or he might think that he could, whatever the odds, take a chance and beat some impertinent meddler by the name of Donne; so when he said again, "Out with it! Who the hell are you?" I told him.

"Everhard."

"Who?"

"Don Everhard."

"That San Francisco guy!"

"Yes."

"Well what the hell you pick on me for?" he asked with an air of injury. Then savagely, answering his own question, "You're in wit' Howard! He put you up to this!"

"Who's Howard?"

"Don't you know Howard?"

"No."

"You don't!" He sneered suspiciously.

I shook my head, and he snarled—"Aw, you're lyin' to me!"

"What need to lie?" I asked, and moved the gun slightly.

"That's right. But say, what you got on me?"

"Not a thing in the world."

"THEN why—" He looked at the gun and bent his head with an oddly inquisitive twist, peering. "I've heard o' you. Wondered what you looked like. You ain't like what I thought. Say—" again suspicion made his tone savage—"how'd you know me?"

"A friend pointed you out to me in a café in New York. So now I wondered why you were here—for what's a valet but a sort of nursemaid?"

He grinned.

"'At's right."

"Pull that chair around and sit down, Jimmie."

He hesitated. Gangster experience had perhaps made him unwilling to turn his back to a man that might shoot.

I assured him that it was all right, saying:

"I never shoot a man in the back. It's too dangerous, being that much harder to convince the coroner's jury that it was done in self-defense."

That rather eased his nerves. I don't say that he trusted me. He and his type rarely trust any one, which is about as much wisdom as they have.

Anyhow, he pulled the chair about and sat down, then asked, with his hand poised at a vest pocket—

"I smoke?"

"Yes."

He looked at me cautiously. Both my hands were in sight, and I had slipped the gun back in its holster. His forehead bulged just as a monkey's does and his deep set small eyes twinkled darkly. I knew very well that he was half wondering whether he could beat me to a gun. A gunman's pride often gets him into trouble; and most gunfighters are as jealous about some other man's reputation as a woman of another woman's beauty.

Jimmie the Monk eyed me carefully, then—

"Y'know, I think you're on the square wit' me, Mr. Everhard."

"I am."

" 'N can I show you a little somethin'?"

"No quick moves, Jimmie."

"I get you. But I'm on the square wit' you too. I'll show you somethin'."

He reached slowly into his vest pocket and slowly held out on his upturned hand a gun that was about the size of a cigaret case, or perhaps smaller, one that could be quite easily palmed by even his small monkey fist.

Doctors, by the spoonful, prescribe pills that wouldn't be much more harmful than bullets from such a toy; or at least so I felt.

"Interesting," I said.

"An' that ain't all," said the unabashed James, about as eagerly as a lonely child showing treasures to a friendly passer-by.

I know now, far more than I realized then, that Jimmie was pleased to be friendly with me. I was somebody quite important in his estimation. He accepted newspaper notoriety just about as Fame's own scroll. I am quite sure that Jimmie was what some people call a moron; even more, he was in some ways almost simple minded. Which didn't at all keep him from being a venomous, frantically savage little devil when aroused.

He laid the toy gun carefully on his knee, jerked back the coat sleeve of his right arm—he was left handed—and disclosed a knife handle strapped, or rather snapped, to his wrist.

"'N' we have this too!" From an inside coat pocket he drew the sort of leather club known as a "billy." "I go heeled," he said. "I got to. Gee! But the real baby is—"

He reached toward his hip. My hand moved just about as a snake strikes, and he jerked himself back quite as if a snake had appeared.

"Ow, you don't think I'd—" Then his flighty brain switched to— "But how d'you do it—that fast?"

"Practise."

"Gee. But hones', Mr. Everhard, ain't we bein' friends?"

I looked at him with cautious scrutiny, knowing that he had long been trained in gang treachery and thought little more of killing than a butcher boy does of chopping a chicken's neck; also that he might hope to strut and snarl proudly among his fellows if he could claim that he had bumped off Everhard. Still there was something about him that I did not wholly dislike, did not wholly mistrust. I couldn't have explained it then. I can't now. There was something, for all of his moments of sneering and savagery, almost pathetic about him. He seemed lonely and, as I have said, was a little simple minded. Anyhow, I am a good judge of character; otherwise, long ago my relatives would have bought a little piece of ground for me in some cemetery.

I put away my gun and placed both hands on the arms of my chair, saying:

"All right, Jimmie. Now let me see your gun."

He drew it, took hold by the muzzle and gave it over. It was a thing of ivory, gold and scroll work. He was proud of it.

"Rather small, isn't it?"

"Dumdums," he said.

"And jam!"

"Never yet. Nope."

"Lucky."

"I'll say!"

Then hastily he knocked his knuckles on the arm of the chair—touching wood. He had, as many people seem to have, though he was more serious about it than most, a feeling that to knock on wood would keep him from being unlucky.

"Always carry it cocked?" I asked.

"Don't you?"

"Yes," I admitted. "But I've known of more than one man to shoot himself because he did."

"Yeah, but Mr. Everhard, I've known more'n one to get shot because he didn't. Too bad, ain't it, you can't carry a hair trigger on an automatic?"

I agreed.

So there I sat discussing firearms with a wild gangster out of the jungles of New York, besides which the jungles of Africa are quiet little neighborhoods filled with kindly folk. And there was something likable about this Jimmie the Monk though it was well hidden under his ugly face. He had a soft rippling voice, but a scatter brained tongue; and though he wasn't quite right in the head, yet he had some humor and queer streaks of common sense.

"This Howard person?" I inquired. "What of him, Jimmie?"

Instantly he chattered:

"They may get me, but they don't take me. Not alive. Not me. No. They'd burn my fingers off to make me talk. Me, I won't talk. Not me—on'y wit' this!"

He lifted the gaudy gun and jerkily pointed it this way and that, showing how he would pick off his enemies. He made me think of a small boy killing Indians with a broom handle for a musket. Yet he was a deadly gangster. Then he began returning his weapons to their hiding places as if stowing away jewels.

"Again, Jimmie, who is Howard?"

"You don't know Howard?" He was evasive now. "Bad, that bird. I had some trouble wit' 'im. That's all. Y'know, jus' trouble. Yeah."

I sensed Jimmie's reluctance to talk of Mr. Howard. I knew that he wished he had not mentioned Howard's name. Jimmie seemed to have a bit of what is a crook's best substitute for wisdom. Wisdom itself is lacking or there would be no crooks; but a tight mouth serves the smartest of them very well. In addressing him as Monk I had jolted, quite accidentally, the name Howard out of his mouth. But he now did not want to talk of him.

Our conversation was interrupted by a knock on the door. Jimmie at once became James, the valet.

I opened the door. A slim sleek fellow stood there. His hair looked varnished, his face was polished with barber lotions, his clothes were pressed into rigid creases; he was humble as a liar caught in the act, looked uneasy but would not look up at you except from under lowered lids. My

description, being accurate, does him no wrong; yet, though I never liked him and had good reasons for the dislike, I must say that he was honest and was Renald's secretary. His name was Thayer. He said that Madame Renald was waiting.

I at once stepped into the hall and asked where I would find Madame. Mr. Thayer led the way with stiff little steps and solemn bearing as if hopeful that I would be flattered by such ceremonial service.

He opened a door, announced—

"Madame, Mr. Donne!"

Mr. Thayer, with discreet noiselessness, withdrew and closed the door.

CHAPTER III

"THE GAME MUST GO ON!"

MADAME was a tall, ripely middle-aged woman whose hair had been burnished into a copper color by the beauty parlor girls. It looked artificial, but she could not endure gray hairs. Few women can, especially when it is noticeable that their husbands like pretty girls. She was miserable, but she did not complain; at least she was not aware that she was complaining. She held to my hand as a lonely woman does to the hand of the one person who she feels is a friend. She asked all about myself and was not satisfied with the answers, but wanted to know more; and her gray eyes scrutinized my face intently, searching for but hoping that she would not find the little telltale marks and lines that throw out signals of ill health or dissipation.

"Still tall and straight, and just the same, with that same look in your eyes," she said, smiling, pleased. "I've been afraid—afraid that you too would change. It seems that all men do."

What we talked of during the next hour is unimportant. She seemed much older than when I had last seen her. How women fight against the years! They, besieged by old age, throw up every defense and make a stand at every wrinkle, like soldiers driven back from one ditch to another.

Nearly all of her life she had been rather an assistant manager to Renald in the gambling houses; and, though this was the most successful they ever owned, Madame was not happy.

"I am afraid for him," she said, then evasively explained that Renald was no longer young, the strain was great, he was at it night and day with worries and work. Too much of a burden at his age. "You don't gamble any more, do you, Don?"

"I do not."

"We've often talked of you, George and I. What a strange boy you were. So arrogantly sure of yourself. I've watched you so many times when you didn't know it. You seem a little milder, more human now. You do smile, now. Then you had such a frozen face, and that cold stare of yours made men uneasy. But I knew you better than any of them. It has seemed to me that you were the one man that anybody could absolutely trust."

All of which was not displeasing, but a little embarrassing; and it made me the more uncomfortable because I realized that Madame would not talk this way unless she were unhappy through having found that some of the people about her were not worthy of trust. I felt resentful toward Renald. She was still fine looking —a fine woman.

Presently she said gaily, or with what served her for the pretense of gaiety:

"But you'll have your head turned here. You'll see the most beautiful women in the world. Young, beautiful! There's Nell Wynn. She looks like an impudent little angel."

Madame then named other women, some famous; but as these were picture celebrities, and as publicity men say that picture stars don't mingle with the night life, no doubt Madame was mistaken. Perhaps it was merely the doubles who visited Renald's while the stars themselves were at prayer meeting in Hollywood's numerous churches.

Renald was late for lunch, but came bustling in happily. He had been with

Kozar. It seems that it was always reassuring to be with Kozar. Even Madame said—

"You will like Kozar."

Personally I had doubts. I have met a few big crooks, and seldom liked them.

When Kozar came to talk business he drove his own car, arrived the back way, put it in a garage there, then came to the house along the arbor walk.

I listened with some interest to that because it wasn't often that big crooks, who had enemies, ventured to go about alone. I asked a question or two and learned that Kozar seemed pretty much of a fatalist. He had his friends who looked out for him, guarded him as well as they could if any special danger was in the air.

I pricked up my ears slightly as Madame said that he often remarked that it was a waste of time to be scared, took your mind off business. She would not go so far as to say that she really liked Kozar—"I don't dislike him. At first he seems repulsive. Fat and heavy, no expression on his face."

The luncheon chatter was pleasant enough to hear, but most of it would be tedious if repeated. Renald was not the first to reproach me for failing to enjoy life, especially now that I had money. He wanted to know why else the good Lord had given us the five senses unless for pleasure? And what was wrong with laughter and gaiety?

"Introduce Mr. Donne—" Madame was playing with my new name—"to Miss Wynn." There was the hidden meaning of a hurt woman's protest in her voice, though she was trying to tease.

"Of course," said Renald readily. Then with what seemed more of an explanation for Madame than for myself, he said, "I am, well, yes, rather a business advisor for Miss Wynn. She is a greatly misunderstood girl."

Her name was really Sally Thomas.

After the luncheon I asked Renald about James Gerson.

"Oh, that fellow. Isn't he lovely? He's one of the ape men Nell Wynn picked up in New York. She used to go about with the ugliest men she could find, just by way of contrast. Beautiful young woman, herself, you know. When he showed up out here, Miss Wynn told me that he was a fine, honest boy, but very sensitive about his ugliness. Doesn't like to be seen in public. She's really a kind hearted girl. Asked if I couldn't give him a quiet job where he wouldn't be seen by many people. So I put him up here on this floor. Does his face annoy you?"

"Not in the least. No."

Some one called Renald on the telephone and, excusing himself, he hurried off.

That night I stood in the shadows, moving here and there to have a glance at whatever was to be seen. Renald had introduced me to his staff so that I was left to stroll about as I pleased.

THERE was much music, much eating, much drinking. Plates and sandwiches were passed among those who could not leave the tables long enough to eat. All play was made with chips, bought at grilled windows from pretty girls. I have noticed that in all places, stores, cafés, shops, where the service is made by pretty girls, you are unlikely to get your money's worth. The play here was astonishingly heavy, but no money was in sight. When house men finger money they must be more honest than most men are thought to be if they don't pocket some. Renald fluttered about like a delighted host, happy to entertain. He was an artist at making people glad to lose their money. Those who arrived passed through the courteous inspection of footmen and doormen, who were not at all watching out for the police but for rival gamblers. Though Kozar made life somewhat unhappy for gamblers and bootleggers who did not belong to his organization, nevertheless these outsiders are always dangerous, as the gang wars of every big city indicate.

Madame, followed by a boy with a tray,

came to where I was sitting in an obscure alcove. The boy put the tray on a stool and Madame poured coffee.

"Did you ever see so many pretty girls in your life?" She arose, peering about. "I don't see Miss Wynn, but she will come. It is early." She started to sit down, then touched my shoulder and pointed, "There's Kozar."

I followed her gesture and saw a very large fat man crossing the room. Many persons looked toward him, some greeted him.

"I want you to meet him," said Madame, and sent the boy to bring Kozar.

He seemed to bulge with fat in all directions. His neck was thick, and head large, and his eye lids drooped sleepily.

"Mr. Kozar, this is Mr. Donne, our very good friend."

Kozar grunted vaguely, looking me over carefully but with as blank an expression as any on the face of a mummy.

Kozar did not appear interested in Mr. Donne. But I was interested in Kozar. Those bulging, heavy, sleepy, half sullen eyes of his were hard as glass and his stare did not merely skim the surface, but went deep. Also it was evident in the half minute or so that he stood by, grunting sluggishly, that there was nothing sleepy about him. He was so fat it really seemed that pillows had been stuffed under his dress suit.

"Won't you sit down?" Madame asked.

Kozar chuckled, his belly shook, he sounded amused but his face was just about as blank as a beefsteak.

"I'm gettin' too fat to set. Hard to get up. Chairs stick to me. I gotta go back to them damn' baths an' get boiled."

While he was talking he kept looking about him with a slow watchfulness that scarcely appeared at all watchful. He ignored me. He was talking to Madame. He liked Madame.

"The boys brought over to my house one of them machines. They tie you up. It shakes you. The boys 'd like to shake me down." Kozar again chuckled, having his little pun.

Kozar walked off with unmannerly abruptness. He did not say goodby to Madame, and did not give me even a parting glance. He was coarse, brutal, overfed, yet there was power in him, and composure.

Madame looked after him broodingly, then for no apparent reason at all she said:

"He doesn't like Nell Wynn. Distrusts her, I mean." She looked searchingly out over the floor. "I would like for you to see her, and tell me what *you* think."

Evidently Madame had been deeply hurt by this girl. Perhaps with a wife's intuitive alarm she sensed that there was more menace in Renald's intimacy with this girl than in the usual affair with which he distressed her.

Presently Madame left me. The boy took away the tray and cups. I looked at my watch. As night life goes it was early, not quite twelve. But I found it tedious to sit there and look on.

There were, I admit, many young women about who in moments of relaxation may have been pretty; but females age rapidly at bridge tables and roulette because they screw their faces into tight muscular knots, hold their breath, stare, quiver, snatch like greedy little thieves for their winnings and wilt like scalded flowers when losses break them. I never knew a woman that did not think she was a good gambler, and I never saw one that was.

And as for gambling, having studied the thing out, I decided that it makes a fool of the man who wins, a wreck of the loser; at best you get something for nothing, and that is always a dangerous bargain; if the game is honest the odds are against you because human nature makes it so since the average man grows increasingly reckless as he wins, and thus he will drop in one unlucky throw what he has gained in ten. This applies to the stock market or crap tables.

No doubt I am entirely wrong in my ideas; otherwise all good Christians and wise statesmen would rise in wrath and abolish stock gambling, as they have tried to eradicate roulette, dice and

poker; but auction bridge being purely scientific, every hostess can run a gambling joint any afternoon and likely enough have it written up in the society news as a social affair. Bad thing, this gambling; but the only way to stop it is to cut the throat of every new born babe and drain its veins, because the fever runs in the blood of all mankind.

I walked up the stairs and paused at the hallway window on the third floor to look out. A double row of automobiles were parked within the high walled enclosure, and chauffeurs strolled aimlessly or gathered in groups to talk. Matches flared at the tips of cigarets. From below I could still hear the hum and bustle, and even at times the staccato click of balls as they jumped in the numbered slots. A good night's business, this. No wonder Renald hopped about happily.

I walked down the hall, opened the door wide and put one foot in the room, then stopped short. The lights were on, the logs were burning in the fire place, and a woman with her hat on and her evening cloak thrown back half off her shoulders sat there with her slim ankles crossed on a footstool. Her flimsy beaded skirts were pulled high and jeweled garters glittered below her knees.

I DIDN'T feel that perhaps I had made a mistake. When I go into a room I know whose it is. If there was any mistake the young lady had made it. Nor did I wonder what she was doing there. I simply guessed that Renald, inspired by what he thought was his sense of humor, had put her up to it—expecting that she could teach me how to enjoy life. The fact that my guess was not entirely accurate merely shows that I had a somewhat low opinion of him, and that I did not at all realize how audacious women could be. I wasn't embarrassed; neither was she.

"Good evening," I said, stepping inside but leaving the door open.

"Good evening, Mr. Richmond." She smiled with what she thought was irresistible sweetness. Unspanked princes and pretty women think that everybody must adore them, and approve of whatever they do. "Do please close the door. It is chilly. That's why I started the fire."

I closed the door.

She was, or seemed, surprisingly young. She did not affect a slithering seductiveness, but appeared to take it for granted that she was fascinating and that I was helpless.

"Have you been waiting long?"

"No, or at least it hasn't seemed so. Though I was a little impatient with wondering just what you would be like, Mr. Richmond."

"Sorry, but you seem to have made a mistake. Richmond must be the chap across the hall. I'm Donne."

"Oh yes, I know. Don Everhard."

"Who told you? Renald—or that Monk?"

"Jimmie."

"Then you are Nell Wynn."

She nodded playfully. but her eyes were steady. She was shrewdly watching out for every little sign that might help her to make a fool of me. Rather a difficult job she had cut out for herself. I have been worked over as if I were putty by more than one woman's fingers, and have had them stick asses' ears on my head; but it has never been done by a greedy little gold grabber. I don't know all the feminine tricks, of course; no man does; but when I meet a pretty woman who is sure of herself, and smiles, and wants to be enticingly agreeable, I know I'm on thin ice, a bad swimmer, and so stay close to the bank. I've always admired Joseph who left his coat tails in the hands of Potiphar's wife and ran.

"Well, Miss Wynn, what can I do for you?"

"Oh, sit down. Be sociable. You aren't angry, are you?"

"Angry? No." I continued to stand. "But what do you want?"

Mentally, I am quite sure, she swore at me. I seemed so stupid. But she smiled sadly, gave me a carefully prepared woebegone look and said:

"Oh, I have heard so much of you. I thought— But you don't seem at all friendly."

"Yes," I thought, "no doubt you've heard about the oil wells." Aloud I said, "No doubt most of what you've heard isn't true."

Then she told me, with a most admiring stare in her eyes that were trying to look as artless as a child's, what a brave man I was and how everybody had talked of me.

I have read somewhere, and am inclined to believe, that the song the Sirens sang to draw men to the little isle where men died under the claws of these same Sirens and were eaten, was nothing in the world but tuneful flattery, which is the sweetest music that a man ever hears.

"Yes, yes," I admitted. "That's all quite true. Being so handsome and everything, I thought I'd come to Hollywood. Do you think I can get on in pictures, Miss Wynn?"

"Now you're being disagreeable. And you don't understand, at all. Of course I didn't come in here like this without—without just having to!"

That, I was sure, was a little impromptu lie. Not having found me as amiable as other men had no doubt given her reason to expect that I would be, she was now casting about for some little trick that would interest me.

Nell Wynn was young but had lived long by her wits; evidently had lived well, too. Her fingers were covered with rings, she wore silk, furs and feathers. Stone Age women wore skins, the modern wear furs; so, as far as women are concerned, civilization would seem to me merely a matter of taming hides. I was intensely suspicious of her. I put her down as crafty and treacherous; not because I was able to read her own pretty face so well as because I know something of these bejeweled girls that flutter about the borderline of the underworld; and she was one of them. Also her slightly formal politeness, with which she had opened the conversation, seemed a little affected. I thought she would be more at ease with snappy bantering familiarity.

"Just had to come, eh?"

"Oh, I'm in trouble," she said, taking up another cigaret and gazing at it abstractedly. "And there just seems to be no one that I can trust."

"Yes," I agreed. "I feel that way too."

"I wonder if you wouldn't help me?" She asked it with an appealing upward glance, not being quite so sure of herself now.

"Umhm."

Her eyes fell. She opened a handbag and drew out a small handkerchief, set with jewels and fringed with lace. Having folded the handkerchief so that the jewels were out of the way, she closed her eyes, daintly touched each side of her pretty nose, put away the handkerchief, and asked as she held up the cigaret—

"A match, please?"

I pointed to the stand at her elbow. She wasn't very pleased to scratch the match for herself. She struck at the mist of hair which, of course, she had carefully arranged before a mirror so that it fell about her forehead, and thus by brushing it aside from time to time she attracted attention to its gold.

"When Jimmie telephoned me that he had met you, I felt that I just had to see you, to tell you—and of course, I will pay!"

"Of course. I understand that the woman always pays."

She looked up quickly; half spitefully her red lips began to curl, then she laughed.

"Oh, hell. You're a funny bird. But say, listen. I am in trouble. You know Renald. I want you to help me. There's a little fool that's been trying to show me he's a man o' the world by bucking these games here. Now he's broke. He thinks I ought to love him because he went broke trying to win money to buy jewels for me. I'm afraid of that little idiot. He swears he'll shoot me. I think Renald ought to give him something back."

It is unimportant that I afterwards found out that much of what she said was true. The wretched boy, whose name I've forgotten, that she called a little idiot hadn't threatened to kill her, but himself. And though she had been at

Renald to refund some of the losses, I think it was largely because she knew she would get the money away from the youngster. She told me the story merely to have something to talk about.

Well, I know more about Nell Wynn now than I did then; and she was a very unwise and, I suppose, evil girl. She was unadmirable in nearly every way, and yet in the end I perhaps liked her better than did other men she knew. She had, I am as positive now as then, been attracted to my room partly by curiosity as to what I was like, but largely by the newspaper stories about the Richmond oil wells—those things, of course combined with her feeling that every man is helpless when a pretty woman has the door closed upon him.

She was dissatisfied enough to be about ready to leave when we heard a faint jar of running feet in the hall and my door was thrown open. The secretarial Mr. Thayer, pale as chalk and wild eyed, gasped:

"Quick! Come quick! Renald has—" He looked toward Miss Wynn, caught his breath, choked back what he had meant to say and added, "Quick! Madame wants you! Something terrible!"

"What?"

Mr. Thayer hesitated, glanced jerkily at Miss Wynn, then said—

"Renald—heart failure—dead!"

Nell Wynn gave a cry and half started from her chair, staring wildly. She hastily fumbled with her handbag, then clapped the bejeweled handkerchief to her mouth as if smothering words that wanted to escape.

"And please, please, Miss Wynn," Thayer begged, "you won't tell any one. The guests—Madame has said the games must go on!"

CHAPTER IV

MISS WYNN PLAYS A NOVEL RÔLE

I WENT with Thayer and Miss Wynn followed as if aware of not being wanted, but too curious to stay behind. Neither of us paid attention to her until we had gone down the stairs to the floor below and reached the closed door of a corner room where Renald had what was called an office, a st[redacted]g, nearly sound proof and almost burglar proof room, where he rarely saw any one but intimate associates.

Thayer knocked; there was no response, so he hastily fitted his key to the door. I pushed by him and went in while he turned to protest with Miss Wynn who asked questions. Though he was an evasive diplomatic sort of secretarial person, he was now confused; and so, reluctantly, let her pass. Then he pulled the heavy door to, shutting us in, shutting out whoever might come and knock.

Madame was there, half bending forward in a trance-like daze with her hands locked and pressed tightly on her breast as she stared down at the body, dapperly dressed in evening clothes, face upon the floor. Renald's eyes were open; his mouth was open as if Death had silenced him in the midst of a scream, and on the left side of his white shirt bosom was a black, powder burned hole, stained with red. He had been shot at arm's length. There was no disorder in the room. The vault at the far end was open, or at least its great thick door stood wide, but the inner gate of chilled steel bars was closed.

Thayer was not merely horrified; he was also frightened—an abject coward. I still have extreme distaste for the man; he was a fool, a mixture of arrogance and unctiousness; he was conceited; he was everything that is disagreeable except disloyal, dishonest and incompetent—all of which did not in his case, as it usually does with other men, keep him from being a most contemptible person.

He tugged at Madame's arm while she stood half stupefied, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, but peered blindly with as fixed a gaze as if she had walked in her sleep and now stood dreaming of one who lay at her feet, murdered.

"Oh, Madame, what shall we do? We're ruined! Ruined! Oh, how to get Kozar! Here's Mr. Donne! What shall we do, Madame?"

I caught at his arm, jerked him about and asked—

"Who did it?"

His body was trembling like that of a man who has got hold of some electrical contraption and can't let go. His words shook jerkily between his teeth, but he answered with hysterical assurance:

"Gam-gamblers. J-j-jealous gam-gamblers. We're too suc-successful. We've been threatened. They w-wanted in on the profits. Oh, I m-must get Kozar!"

He turned and stumbled twice in going ten feet to reach the desk where a telephone stood. His fingers were so unsteady that he dialed the wrong numbers, and the call would never have gone through if Nell Wynn had not taken it from his hands. This was the outside phone so that messages would not be overheard by girls at the switchboard. Kozar was known to have left Renald's shortly after I had met him, but he was not at home. To whoever it was that answered, Thayer shrilly cried that "Mr. Ramsey"—that being the code word for Renald—had been killed. The party at the other end must have questioned him because Thayer almost shrieked:

"Accident—yes! Terrible accident! Have him come at once!"

Tears dropped from Madame's eyes, but she did not sob. She had trained herself throughout the years in self-control to hide the pain that came to her because this man she loved had had a man's weaknesses. Sighs trembled through her breathing. She stepped back stumblingly toward a chair and, when I helped to keep her from falling, she did not seem to notice me, but sat down with face averted and, as she twisted and plucked at her moist handkerchief, muttered—

"Dead—dead."

Thayer came, shivering and excited, to tell her that he had left word for Kozar, but I sent him toward a chair across the room, with—

"Sit down and keep quiet."

He sat down, but he did not keep quiet. His collar choked him, or rather fear choked him, and he pulled the collar loose from its button. He bent forward, groping through his hair with both hands—then straightened up nervously and stared as if the murderer might still be hiding nearby. His senses were scattered, and he had only the haziest recollection of what he had done after entering the office and almost stumbled over Renald's body. I was told later that the cashier, agitated by heavy losses at one of the tables downstairs, and unable to reach Renald by any of the phone calls sent through the house, had asked Thayer to look for him.

I thought it strange that Nell Wynn should remain in the room. She knew that Madame, with good reason, disliked her. I supposed at first she had forced her way in because of a morbid suspicion that Renald's death was from something more than a weak heart, and that she was tainted with that same disgusting curiosity that makes people crowd about on street corners to have a look at what Death has done. However, after one hasty glance she turned away from the body. Nell Wynn could not bear to look upon the dead, neither upon women sickly and enfeebled with age. It was quite as if she thought death and old age contagious. Yet now she remained in the room, standing near the desk, plucking one cigaret after another from the open humidor and discarding each half smoked. I may have been surprised that she remained in the room, yet I did not intend that she should readily leave it.

I crossed to her and asked—

"What is your guess?"

"Oh, I don't know! I can't think. It's frightful. But what was stolen? Was anything stolen?"

She meant that as a question, but it wasn't a question: it was a tense, anxious exclamation, and her eyes glanced hastily about the room.

As I have mentioned, at the other end of the room was a sort of vault, large enough for a tall man to enter without stooping, then to put out his arms without touching both sides at once. The thick steel door, which now stood open,

was set with a time lock; though this, I learned later, was seldom used. There was also an inner door of steel bars, something like that of a jail cell, and called the grille door, which served all the ordinary purposes of protection. There were but three keys; Renald had one, Kozar another, and the other was secreted for an emergency, its hiding place being known only to Renald, Kozar and Madame. Kozar used this vault to store away many of his own personal papers and especially large sums of cash which, in his business, it was necessary to have ready at hand for an emergency any hour of the day or night.

When Nell Wynn asked whether anything were stolen I watched her for a moment, then said softly—

"I wonder."

"Why, whatta you mean? You—oh!" she gasped. As I did not reply she stared the more anxiously, asking, "What can you mean? And why do you look at me that way?"

Without turning from her I called to Thayer—

"Open up that vault!"

I DON'T think I ever met a man more utterly without perception and common sense. True, he knew me only as a Mr. Donne; but he should have known better than to try to argue frantically with even a Mr. Donne that was as much in earnest as I. All my life I've had far more trouble with dunces than with intelligent dangerous persons.

Oh, I mustn't ask that of him. He wouldn't! Madame! Madame! He didn't have the key! Oh, he couldn't touch Renald's body to get the key! Madame! Did Madame hear what I was demanding?

I turned impatiently and put an end to Thayer's blathering, though it scared him almost into a faint. He suddenly believed that I had shot Renald; which was just as well because it helped him to think that I would perhaps shoot him now.

He knelt, sick with fear and sickened, too, by this ghoulish thing I required of him, and searched Renald's pockets, then gasped:

"The key's gone! They've stolen it! Oh—that's why—Renald's—shot!"

Madame had been stirred into an awareness of what was going on, or at least that something was going on. Yet she did not appear to hear Thayer's frantic stammering; and she looked not at me, but at Nell Wynn. I believe that it gave her heart a faint sensation of pleasure to see Nell Wynn draw back with a look of fear from me.

Then Madame arose and without a word went to Renald's desk, reached down and up under it and got the key. Renald kept it there, concealed from even Thayer, for he was uneasy about carrying it on his person lest somebody, hoping to rob the vault, would knock him over the head and go through his pockets. It was possible, though not apparent, that whoever shot him had gone through his pockets.

Madame now turned and handed it to Thayer, saying quietly—

"Do as he told you."

So Thayer went to the vault and opened the grille door, pulling it back until it was caught and held by the snap catch.

"Now, Miss Wynn," I said, "let's go over here and take a look."

From near babyhood she had possessed the not uncommon feminine gift of charming men into an attitude of humbleness, and she had used it with a more than common recklessness. Although she was mystified, and even a little uneasy, she could not realize that any man would presume to be audaciously ungallant toward her.

She crossed the room with me. We went to the entrance of the vault. With my foot I pressed the catch that released the gate-like door which Thayer had opened; then I stepped back and let it swing shut.

At that, she swirled about, amazed and furious. Her small, jewel studded hands gripped the bars, and the better to see me

she pressed her face close against them, peering.

"What do you mean by this? You crazy loon—you think I done it, a thing like that?"

Instead of listening to her I looked at Thayer. His clothes were awry, his hair stood up as if he had dressed without combing it, his eyes popped and his mouth was a-droop. He was a paltry sort of person.

Then I turned to Madame. The best of her life, and all of her hopes, lay there behind us on the floor, dead; a man unworthy of her, but she had loved him with much forgiveness. She was gentle, affectionate, without greed, yet such was her poise, and such her loyalty to the house of gambling which she had grown to detest, that in the very moment when she had dropped to her knees as if struck down by Renald's side, she had said:

"No one must know! The games must go on!"

She was a gambler's daughter and had grown up in the game. It wasn't the money she cared about; it was the name Renald. Indeed, loyalty is so near a virtue the angels have it; though it damns good men and women by holding them to unwise and unworthy purposes, it nevertheless makes men nobler in a bad cause than selfishness in a righteous one.

"Don," she said, "do you think that woman did it? When—when he gave her money, everything?"

"Aw, he didn't give me money! He got money outa me!" said Nell Wynn, trying to shake the steel bars. "Ask Thayer there. I give him jewels worth more'n he ever give me!"

"What about it, Thayer?"

Thayer stammered. I thought at first that he was stammering evasively, but he was merely frightened and all his wits were at loose ends.

"Jewels she said. What of them?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said hastily. "I don't know. There was something, b-b-but I don't know. Mr. Renald never told me."

"All right," I said to Nell Wynn. "Now you tell us about them."

"There's nothing to tell," she said a little sullenly, but mad as a wet cat. "Fellows give me things. I wanted money, that's all. An' why do you think I done it? We were friends."

"Oh, but I don't think you did it, Miss Wynn. I merely think we would be interested in having your guess as to who did it."

"What you mean?" she exclaimed, staring, frightened.

"Well, for instance, what about Jimmie the Monk?"

"Jimmie! Oh—" She tried to laugh.

"You know how carefully Renald chose servants. Yet you palmed the Monk off on him."

"But why? He wouldn't have done it. He liked Renald. An' so'd I. You're a boob detective, you are! Let me outa here. You'll wish you had."

"Yes?"

"I've got friends!"

"Who," I asked, looking at her hard and quite as if I knew much more than I did, "is Howard?"

It was a chance blow, but it hurt. I knew it merely as a name that agitated her friend Jimmie the Monk, and so had tried it out on her. Fright glistened in her eyes. She swayed back, drawing away, but holding still to the bars as if for support. A moment later, a little frantically, she began to throw questions at me. Why had I asked that? What did I know of Howard? Why did I think she knew Howard?

All of her life Nell Wynn must have had things pretty much her own way; being good looking and artful, she had no doubt always before been pardoned if ever suspected; but now she had been tricked into a cell tighter than any jail's because bondsmen couldn't reach her. I was as sure that her hands were stained with guilt as that her eyes were blue, almost purplish. That is, I believed she knew who had killed Renald, and why. She had seemed to know when Thayer came and said "heart trouble," that Renald had been

murdered; it now appeared that not mere curiosity but downright interest had caused her to force her way into the room, in the presence of Madame; and the way she had asked about what was stolen made me feel that Nell Wynn had a personal knowledge of what the assassin was after.

I smiled at her, appearing, or trying to appear much wiser than I was.

She shook at the bars; she pressed against them; she begged; she demanded.

"You know Howard? What'd you know of Howard? You must—you must tell me!"

She swore. I shrugged a shoulder. She, as if suffocating, jerked off her evening coat and let it fall about her feet.

At last I said:

"There are many things to be known about Mr. Howard. Many people know about him. And just today, Jimmie and I had a little talk about Howard."

"Oh—did Jimmie tell you? He didn't! He couldn't! He wouldn't dare!"

"No?"

"I want to see Jimmie. I've got to see him. Thayer, go bring Jimmie Gerson! I've gotta see him!"

I said to Thayer—

"You stay where you are."

And to Nell Wynn:

"Talk fast if you want me to listen. Otherwise I'm going to leave you here for awhile."

She talked hysterically, but told nothing. Tears, either of anger or fear, poured from her eyes. She brought a red mark to her cheek with a swipe of the jeweled handkerchief. I felt that there was something a little sinister and wholly mysterious behind the hysterics; and if the truth was not to be got out of her I would go elsewhere.

CHAPTER V

EVERHARD TAKES CHARGE

SINCE RENALD'S house, for all of its protection, was outside of the law it would have been ruinous to call in the police and let them look about for the murderer. Newspaper men would have followed. The honest cops would have tipped off the boys, and there would have been such stormy headlines that the very politicians who gave Renald and Kozar their protection would have faced about and begun swinging the club on their gambler friends. I've seen that happen over and over and over. Politicians are a cowardly lot; I mean those who take bribes, and most of them do. Why else do they work and sweat and spend money to get into an office that pays a small salary?

And as Madame, with her queer mistaken loyalty, had said the games must go on, Thayer and I lifted the body and carried it through the concealed door that opened on the private stairs, then up to the apartment on the floor above.

I told Thayer to go comb his hair, put on another collar, scrub his face with a rough towel until he got some color back in it, and be convincing in telling people who were asking for Renald that he was sick.

"Say it's ptomaine poisoning—that you have a touch of it too. You look it. And give me your keys to the office."

Then Mr. Thayer gathered his dignity together as if it were a purple robe and with much amazement said—

"W-why you act as if you were manager here!"

"I am."

"W-w-what!"

"Give over the keys."

"I—I don't know you."

"Quite true. But we are going to become acquainted right off if you don't give over those keys, now."

"Why, how—you . . ."

He stared at me and became increasingly irresolute. A nervous hand crept into his pocket, fumbled about and came out with the keys.

"You are to tell no one that Renald is dead. When Kozar comes, let me know."

And Mr. Thayer gave me a rebellious, suspicious look and left the room.

Madame was standing at the mantel, leaning on both elbows with her hands

pressed against her face as if she could not bear to turn and look about her, where every object that she must touch or see was intimately associated with her husband who now lay under a sheet on a bed in the next room. She did not know what to do except wait for Kozar.

I wanted to get to Mr. James Gerson and have a talk that would be, at least on his part, very confidential; but even before Thayer had closed the door I turned to her.

I don't recall just what I said, but I remember what I felt. She had liked me at a time when few people did; and though I have never blamed those who didn't—since I have been told so often I am sure it must be with truth, that I am a disagreeably queer person—nevertheless, I always feel that those who like me and want nothing in return are the sincerest of friends. She had been so kindly, so wise and tolerant, and had so graciously tried to warm a cold blooded, tense, and very distrustful young gambler into a semblance of what a human being should be like to enjoy the things that do make life really worthwhile, that my affection for her was about as great as if she had been a relative that I liked. I very much disliked most of my relatives; and still do.

"Madame," I said, putting an arm about her shoulders, "this is the worst of bad luck, and it isn't going to help for you to stay and see it through. You've hated the thing for ten years that I know of. Throw it all over and come away with me. My guess is that Kozar will get away from you every dollar that Renald put into this house. He has the power, and you have no standing in court because the property involved is used for illegal purposes. Now if you listen to me—"

"Oh, Don, I can't talk—I can't think now. I must wait, wait. The funeral, then—but please! I want to be alone. I must be alone!"

The better to keep anybody from learning that Renald was dead, the maid had been sent away to her room in the wing where the servants had their quarters before the body was brought up the stairs. I rang for her.

It seemed to me that she was not in much of a hurry to come.

I didn't of course know what she thought, and of course I didn't care, when she found me waiting at the door. I said I was sorry to have troubled her, but would she please show me Mr. Gerson's room.

She put her nose up in the air and seemed to debate the question with herself, eyeing me with that insolence which servants, at least in America, so commonly use in the hope of proving to themselves that they are just as good as anybody.

However, she led the way.

It was an enormous house, built according to Renald's design, and one needed a guide to get about. When we came to a turn in a far hall, the maid pointed vaguely and said—

"Third door on the right hand side."

Then she went on without acknowledging my thanks; which was quite all right because I didn't want her about anyhow, since I wished to approach the door quietly.

I went near it on tiptoes, bent my head to listen, then stooped low and looked to see if there was a thread of light at the bottom of the door. The room seemed dark.

I knocked softly, again and again. I tried the door. It was unlocked. I knew very well that if my suspicions were accurate Mr. Jimmie the Monk would not be asleep, and if he wasn't asleep he would have heard the knocking and answered. Therefore he wasn't here. So I went in, struck a match, found the light switch, and looked the room over carefully, though I did not meddle with anything. I know that some people think famous detectives, and those on their way to fame, can enter a room, go through everything in every drawer, then return books, papers, clothing, and all other objects, so accurately to their original order that the owners never suspect that their belongings have been searched—but very few detectives have ever become famous if they tried it.

OF COURSE I could not be sure that Jimmie was still in the house merely because there was here no sign that he had fled hastily. After all, why should he have ducked away and so, inevitably, have become suspected when, if he sat tight, there would be, presumably, no reason to suspect him?

On my way back to Madame's rooms I passed my own; and as the person that invented evening dress did not care a snap about the comfort of the man who carries automatics, and big ones at that, I thought I would stop a moment and adjust my holsters.

I went in, and there was Jimmie under the reading lamp. He had been dozing, and looked sleepy. He, sitting up for me, as I understand a valet should, had fallen into cat-naps over a magazine. Now he remembered that we were "friends," so he grinned and started to chatter.

Right there and then my collar seemed a little tight and the room much too warm. And I began to wonder just how I was going to wiggle out of it without a too humble apology to Nell Wynn. I had been as sure that she and Jimmie were tainted with guilt as some people are that other people are going to hell; but I knew that this Monk did not have anything like poise enough to pretend such innocence as showed in his drowsy eyes, his sociable grin, his glib rattle brained chatter. I had glimpsed the almost maniacal frenzy with which Jimmie, all in a flash, was ready to shoot it out if he thought himself cornered; and I had rather expected that if anything like a confession was to be squeezed out of him it would be only after he was down and dying.

"Pleasant dreams, Jimmie?"

"Naw. Me, I don't sleep good. An' why is it, Mr. Everhard, when you shoot a fellow in your dreams, he won't die? An' the bullet it just seems to drop short like a pea outa a popgun?"

He gazed musingly at me as if hopeful that I might give him an explanation. I was pleased that I had been mistaken and looked at him with a kindly eye, and he grinned back at me.

He came along after me as I went into the bedroom where I took off my coat.

"What you think o' this joint, Mr. Everhard? Swell ain't it? Nothin' beats it in New York." That in the tone of one who can give no higher praise. New York was a city; all other places where people lived, in whatever numbers, were merely burgs. "But say, I seen somethin' funny while ago—"

He forgot whatever it was he had started to tell me, and peered forward like a curious child at my tight fitting holsters. I won't have any slack in a holster because when I flip out a gun I want it to come clear without the holster trying to follow.

"Two of 'em. Cannons, ain't they? Gee! But ain't that 'un on the lef' side turned wrong way to?"

"No, I think not."

"Maybe it's cause I'm lef' handed. Great, bein' lef' handed. I make a jerk wit' me right, see?" He made a jerk with his right hand, illustrating—and I, instinctively, with what would have been to even a watchful eye merely a blur of motion, tipped the nose of a gun over its holster.

"Ow!" said Jimmie. "I was on'y showin' you!"

I am very cautious, also rather quick; and I didn't mean to be dropped by any shallow pated gangster's trick for sneaking the draw. Jimmie turned his back to me and pulled up his coat, showing that he did not have a gun on the right side. He also did not have common sense. I told him so.

"Sure. I'm wise to that," he agreed with enthusiasm. "My brains don't do me no good . . ." He went on talking.

I was before the mirror changing my collar. I watched him in the glass: queer little ugly fellow, monkey-like, child-like, really in some ways half simple minded—and if angry a complete lunatic. Yet he had a glint of humor and a most amiable lack of vanity. He would begin to say something, interrupt himself, say other things.

"After I met you I phoned Nell—I mean Miss Wynn. She lives at the Mirade—big swell place! An' say, she thinks you're a great guy!"

He looked eager to please.

"I'm sure of it," I agreed silently, with an understanding nod at myself in the mirror.

"The papers been full o' you. You know 'at?" Jimmie spoke as if the inky scum spread over wood pulp as it flowed through the presses made a man immortal. "I usta say, 'At guy mus' be good!' 'N' to meet you thataway! Funny.

"Say, an' I jus' seen a funny thing. Y'know that Thayer?" I paused in pulling at the corners of my tie. "I'd been snoozin' in the chair, like when you come in. I musta dreamed I heard a knock, so I takes a look. Poke my head out, an' there's that Thayer in the hall wit' his head down like he was prayin' at Renald's door. All bent over, he was, gettin' a earful. I know 'im. But I says, 'Monk, don't be nosey. How you know but Mr. Renald planted 'im there? You don't. So forget it.' 'N' I sets back an' start to read again. Does readin' put you to sleep too? An' was anything prettier ever born 'n Nell Wynn?"

"By the way, Jimmie, she mentioned that fellow Howard tonight."

He started.

"She did?"

"Yes. She seemed to think you'd told me about him."

Jimmie looked mystified.

"No! Hones'? Hell. How'd she come to do that?"

"It just popped out."

I was tempted to tell him that Renald had been killed, that I had suspected him, and so try to force him to tell things by way of establishing his innocence. However, his tongue ran about in such helter skelter chattering that I thought he might soon drop something that I could take hold on, and pull.

But though he may have been—and was—simple minded, he wasn't so simple as to talk of Howard.

PRESENTLY I explained to him that I was the close personal friend of Mr. and Mrs. Renald; and that here, without their knowing it, under their roof was a "bad actor," a full-fledged gunman with a record that would make any gambling house proprietor uneasy; that I had not told Renald, but that I felt we, Jimmie and I, ought to have a little heart to heart talk.

"Come clean, Jimmie."

"I can't, Mr. Everhard." He looked up with a kind of trustful pleading.

"Why not?"

He shook his head with amiable stubbornness. I waited. He was naturally as talkative as a hungry parrot, and about as coherent. But now he disclosed an unsuspected ability to be silent. The first of the Ten Commandments that an old crook teaches a young one is: "Admit nothing; make 'em prove it; never tell how it happened." Yet in crookdom that rule isn't kept any more than the Golden Rule in Christendom.

"I'd like to, Mr. Everhard, but I can't," Jimmie wailed with plaintive sincerity.

"Why not?"

"It ain't I don't trus' you. Hones', I'm promised. 'F she says spill it, I'll tell it all."

"Miss Wynn, you mean?"

He nodded.

"Then Jimmie, you sit down and think it over. Get all ready to speak your little piece. I'm quite sure that soon she'll tell you it's all right."

Madame Renald was just as I had left her, with grief brooding in her eyes; and on her feet, standing, as if it were too much like giving away to weakness if she sat.

She said at once, speaking to me but much as if talking aloud to herself:

"I ought to go down. Something seems to be wrong. Somebody is plunging on No. 3 and winning. Oh, if Mr. Kozar would only come!"

I learned that word had been sent up by the excited cashier, a man named Watson, that somebody had broke the

bank at No. 3 table; and the house was being hit hard because a crowd had swarmed about it and fought to get their bets down on the color and numbers that this lucky plunger played.

In a case like that something was wrong, either with the control of the table or with the man that controlled it; though in this case Harcourt, the croupier, told the frantic Watson that it was Renald's instruction to let this player, who had asked that the limit be taken off, win all he could carry.

It was no unusual thing to let people win, either by their own luck or by the help of the crooked mechanism, which was merely to protect the house, and many nights was not touched at any of the tables; but there it was in case of need. Often some man was allowed to break the bank; it excited greed in other players, was good news, gave the house an honest name.

Breaking the bank did not mean anything. It never does. That is just a little piece of bunk to make the lucky player inordinately proud of himself when the croupier announces that he has been cleaned out, and sends to the house cashier for more—chips. The very fact that a fellow does win entices him back night after night; then he loses his winnings, loses his own money, loses his head, and so is stripped.

Personally, I did not care how hard the house was hit. I did care about Madame Renald having any cause to be troubled. So I used the house phone, told the girl to call the cashier, Watson; and though it took her some time to find him in all the excitement that was going on, he answered presently and I said:

"Mr. Watson, I'm Mr. Donne. Madame Renald will speak to you."

Then I asked her to tell him that Renald had a heart attack and that I, an old associate, would take charge.

I was met at the door of the elevator by Thayer and Watson—a large fleshy man, slightly gray, who had the round, full, good natured face of a prosperous broker; but now his face looked as if it had been washed with acid. He was like a prosperous broker that has felt the market crumble under his feet. His lips were stained with the cigar that he was chewing to shreds. He glared at me as if suspicious and hopeless. He was agitated and seemed to want to appear, rather than be, agreeable.

Thayer's face had none of the color I had told him to put back into it, but his hair was combed. He showed his dislike of me with a rather sneaking glance, but started to use up some of his politeness with an introduction. Watson abruptly said—

"Donne?"

"Yes."

"And what are we to do?" Watson groaned. "Thayer's just this minute told me."

"What?"

"Renald—murdered!"

"So?"

I turned and looked at Mr. Thayer from shoe laces to eyebrows.

For a moment he stared back with a sort of sullen defiance; but his eyes twitched, his glance fell and he flinched nervously. Apparently Thayer did not think that I was the manager, though I had told him so, and told him also to let no one know that Renald was dead.

"What's to be done?" Watson repeated.

"First, pay Thayer off. Give him a month's salary. He's fired and leaves at once."

"But Donne—" Watson wanted to protest.

"Uh-uh-uh," said Thayer. "Kozar—uh—Kozar will hear of—" He tried with all his power to look and speak threateningly. I waited, willing to listen; but he wouldn't finish the threat.

I thought that was to be the last I would ever see of Mr. Thayer. He was paid off and out of the house in twenty minutes; and, though I certainly didn't want to see him, he was back in less than twenty hours.

Mr. Thayer, the secretary, was a bad penny.

CHAPTER VI

THE PLUNGER

YOU PERHAPS have seen ants about a dead fly. That's what I thought of when Watson and I went into the salon. All the tables but No. 3 were deserted except for the house men, who sat tensely and spoke in low tones.

Every one connected with the staff was uneasy, though for the most part they were a blasé lot, who thought players were boobs, their own jobs something of a bore; but they knew the game, liked the pay and had no other trade.

Nearly all the players on both floors had swarmed below to watch a certain Mr. Harrison who was busy as the devil during shipwreck. Scrambling women and men were banked there; some stood on chairs; and everybody who could get within arms' reach was placing bets, and others called out to friends to place bets for them. Renald, somehow, would never have permitted such commotion.

The situation was ticklish. We couldn't interfere and stop the play. People would then know that they were welcome only as long as they lost, which was quite true, and they ought to have known it anyhow; and in their hearts people do know it, yet are such dunces that the knowledge does them no good.

Mr. Watson spoke in groans. He must have swallowed the cigar on which he had been chewing because I didn't notice him spit it out when he began on another. This Harrison alone had won over eighty thousand dollars and other people were riding with him. He had been at the table scarcely more than an hour; at that rate, by morning the house would be bankrupt, wiped out.

Watson was not only cashier, but one of the minor shareholders in the house, and his pocket suffered.

"What can we do? What can we do?"

I didn't know what Renald would have done in a case of the kind; but he would have been diplomatic and effective. Unfortunately, Renald had kept everything in his own hands, lived in the house, was up night and day attending to big and little details. He had used no assistant manager. There was no one to take charge, and no one knew where to turn for instructions. To the staff, I was a stranger, wholly unknown; they had no confidence in me, no reason for confidence—and they were quite right in feeling that I was a poor one to wear Renald's shoes.

Of course we had to stop the play and make a change; and do it in a way clever enough to keep our guests from being too suspicious. They would be suspicious all right just the moment anybody started to meddle with that table; but there are degrees of suspicion.

I said to Watson:

"There's a switch somewhere in this house—master switch. The electrician will know. Send somebody to play with it for about thirty seconds. But don't keep the light off at any one time longer than he can count five."

"I thought o' the switch, but Lord, what a howl! Can't be done. Too risky."

Then with much patient courtesy and the simplest words, as one might explain chess play to a child, I explained to Mr. Watson that we were not putting out the lights, we were merely breaking the tension about the table.

"You do as I ask you, and I'll have that croupier, Harcourt, away from that table in three minutes, or less. Now introduce me to some man you absolutely trust who'll take Harcourt's place."

"Oh, Maturin, of course," said Watson.

So he hurried across the room and presently returned with a small, haggard Frenchman who had been standing with arms folded, smoking a cigaret, watching the swarm about No. 3.

Watson introduced us, then hurried off to attend to the light switch.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Maturin?" I waggled a thumb across my shoulder.

"I followed orders. If Harcourt got them, then Renald knew what he was doing."

"Rather unusual though, isn't it?"

"In a way, perhaps. But—"

"But what?"

"Harcourt wouldn't dare, Mr. Donne."

"Doublecross the house, you mean?"

Maturin nodded. There was something to that. A gambler's life would go out quick as a match in a gale. The police would probably find the body in some obscure rooming house, and call it suicide. I asked—

"Who's this fellow that's winning?"

"A Mr. Harrison. When he came in tonight, word went about that he was a New York millionaire. A plunger, it seems. He has a party with him. I never saw him before."

"Very well, Mr. Maturin. In a few minutes I'm going to put you at that table. Take all bets, no limit, and let the wheel run free. We don't want to misjudge anybody here tonight because, you understand, it would be too bad—too bad. And you are right. If Renald did give the order, he knew what he was doing."

Presently the lights began to wink and flicker much as sheet lightning does on a summer evening in a far off cloud.

Groans and exclamations, quite as if by a trained chorus, instantly went up from about No. 3; and all faces were turned anxiously toward the lights, excepting possibly such as wisely looked after their chips. Everybody was ready to believe, and some loudly said, that the management was jiggling the lights. But nobody held to the belief a minute later when the lights were again burning steadily.

The flickering had served its purpose in stopping the play, breaking the tension; and while Harcourt, with his eyes on the big globe overhead still hesitated to call out for bets, I squeezed through with Maturin at my heels and tapped his shoulder.

HARCOURT jerked his head about and frowned at me. Croupiers are not tapped on the shoulder. It makes 'em peevish. If you do it, some gentleman in evening clothes, who isn't quite comfortable in trying to be polite about it, will ask you to leave the house.

"I'm Donne," I told him, though I knew that he was aware of that. "Renald's had a heart attack. Wants to see you."

I put it that way so that if Harcourt was on the square and had received such instructions as he said, he would readily understand that even in the agony of a heart attack Renald might want to change his orders.

"What's that? What?"

He twisted his neck as if careless of whether or not he broke it. His slit eyes narrowed. He was a nervy gambler. Renald did not employ the other sort.

"At once," I said with increasing suspicion.

I don't know what sort of protest he intended to offer. My hand fell lightly on his shoulder. It isn't often that I touch a man by way of helping him to understand that it is best to do as I say; but now my hand settled firmly, the fingers closed, and Mr. Harcourt knew that he was coming from that table, then and there, though he came over backwards and was dragged along the floor.

"Sorry to interrupt," I said for the ears of those about the table. "The game will go on. All bets taken. No limit."

I paused, looking into the eyes of Mr. Harrison. I had never seen him before; but without the heap of chips to help in the identification, I would have known that he dominated this table.

"Though Mr. Renald is ill—extremely serious—yet it is the wish of the management that the games go on, just the same."

The cold eyes of Mr. Harrison scrutinized me with frigid severity; which was quite all right. In a flash I knew precisely the same thing about him that Renald's card sharks had known about me some years before when I entered their poker room and, to their utter mystification and annoyance, I coolly, and not without a certain hint of menace that discouraged interference, won. Here too was more than a hint of menace. A man or two was on either side of Harrison, and per-

haps a woman or two as well, whose very attitudes and half sneering scrutiny told me as well as words that they were to back him up and see him through.

This gang of tricky and dangerous gamblers had run the gauntlet of footmen and doormen—perhaps by smearing grease on itchy palms; and here they were, in a very peaceable manner raiding the treasure chest. And there wasn't at present anything that could be done about it; at least not without causing a lot of innocent bystanders to be hurt.

I wished that I had known five minutes before what I knew then. Maturin's orders would have been slightly different.

I now very much wanted Harrison to feel at ease, and so said something trivial about luck favoring the bold. He did not appear the sort of man who very readily showed uneasiness, even if he felt it. No doubt most persons would have called him handsome—most women, anyhow. There were dark circles under his black eyes. His voice was low, soft, but carried well and was not unpleasant.

"Ah, sorry. Sorry to hear it," he said; and, nodding at Maturin who was slipping into the chair, added, "Will make no difference; none at all. I'm not superstitious." He smiled quietly with assurance, as if faintly amused.

My glance moved to the right and left, passing over the faces of his bodyguard. These were tense hard faces, etched with sneers and touched with the glint of triumph, just as much as to say that I might suspect what I damn' well pleased, but what was anybody going to do about it? By knowing that Harrison had so numerous a bodyguard, I knew that he was of importance in crookdom.

Maturin was in the chair. I wanted to bend and whisper something in his ear; but it was likely I would be overheard, and certainly any whispering would be regarded by those about the table with suspicion.

With my hand under Harcourt's arm in a way that did not appear unfriendly to whoever noticed, though it must have felt so to him, we pushed out away from the crowd and met Watson. He hadn't finished chewing the cigar that was in his mouth, yet nervously fumbled with another big black one as if to have it ready the moment the other was in shreds. He began excitedly to question Harcourt, but Harcourt quietly replied that he had followed orders.

"Bah! Preposterous! Renald—nobody would ever give such an order!"

"Nonsense," I told Watson. "Give me pencil and paper."

I wrote rapidly, and gave it over to Watson, saying:

"Read this. Then hand it to Maturin *yourself!*"

Watson, with pop eyed blinking, read:

> Maturin, this is to change previous instructions. Let him win all he can carry. Must be done.
> —DONNE.

Watson exploded apoplectically. His face was puffed, and red as a beefsteak. He waved his arms.

"You're crazy! Ever'body's crazy! This is— There's something wrong!" He broke the unchewed cigar, but did not notice. "I won't give it to 'im! I won't. What's the meaning of all this!"

Quite obviously Watson was the sort of fellow, or at least now in the excited condition, that could not be trusted with confidences; so I could only say:

"You hand that to Maturin yourself, and at once. Anybody but the cashier gives it to him, he might have doubts. Do as I tell you, then Harrison and his crowd will leave this house with empty pockets. Please do as I tell you!"

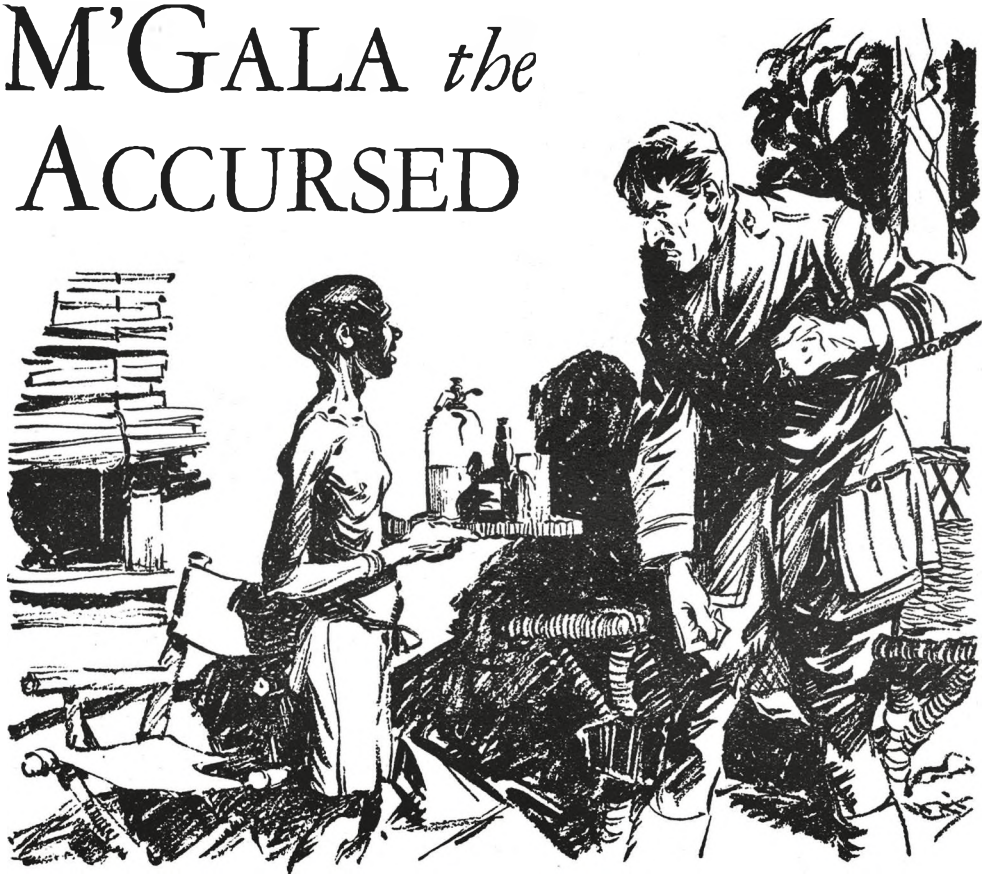
The "please" was imperative. With a bewildered glance at the paper in his hand he mumbled— "All right I suppose—all right," and swiped his dripping forehead with a handkerchief.

TO BE CONTINUED

EDGAR WALLACE *tells a story of*

a "child of the devils" in the wilds of Rhodesia

M'GALA *the* ACCURSED



ONCE upon a time a Secretary of State for the Colonies—as he was then styled—invented a new office and filled it instantly with a relative of his. This new official was styled "Inspector of Native Territories and Protectorate". Later the rank was changed to "Inspector General", but the salary remained the same, one thousand five hundred pounds a year and generous allowances.

There had been successive inspector generals, energetic ones, easy going ones who spent most of their time on leave, but there had never been a really nasty inspector general till Major Commeder Banks was appointed. He was a terribly hearty man, who stood six foot three in his stockings, a broad shouldered, fair haired, handsome, godlike creature, if one could imagine a god that had run slightly to fat.

Nobody knew very much about him ex-

cept that he was well off, had been an officer in the army, and that he had married four times. The heavy mortality among his wives was understood by those who had the misfortune to be brought into touch with him. He was a carping bully. His attitude at best was one of conscious condescension. He seemed to find a delight in bringing misery to all who, for their sins, came under his dominion.

He broke two commissioners and an inspector of police in the first year of his service. He drove into retirement the best administrator the territories had ever had. He so tortured an aged and inefficient paymaster over his accounts that one morning he was found dead with a revolver by his side. His manners were poisonous; he was hated through fifteen degrees of latitude. And when news came to Sanders that, for the first time in his three years' tour of office, Major Commeder Banks was paying a visit to the river, the faces of his two subordinates fell, for the inspector general had a military as well as a civil jurisdiction.

"Tonight we start on those company and store accounts, Bones," said Hamilton seriously. "I'll help you, and the commissioner will lend you his clerk."

"Leave it to Bones," said Lieutenant Tibbets, but half-heartedly. "This naughty old Banks won't rattle me, dear old Ham."

"He won't rattle you, he'll murder you," said Hamilton shortly.

Through the hot night he and Bones pored over a smudged and often corrected ledger.

"What's this two pounds, four and six?" asked Hamilton.

"Two pounds, four and six," said Bones promptly.

Hamilton groaned. Again his quick pen went up and down the column, and again the total was wrong.

"Perhaps it's twenty-four and six?" suggested Bones helpfully.

It was. Hamilton made the correction, and five minutes later found another error. The ledger was a sad sight when they had finished with it.

"The only thing to do is to start a fresh book, get a couple of clerks, working day and night, and by the time his nibs arrives we'll have everything shipshape."

But his nibs came a day too soon. Commeder Banks was, curiously enough in a man who elected to live on the Coast, a very rich man. He had a small steam yacht which had been worked out to the Coast, and it was his joy to pounce on a Tuesday upon a shivering community that had not expected him until Friday.

He came blustering up to the residency, and with him a slim, pale, frightened girl.

"You're Hamilton, eh?" he boomed, and shook the offered hand limply. "And you're Tibbetts?"

"Glad to meet you, dear old Inspector," said Bones, "and your charming daughter, dear old sir—"

Bank's face went as black as thunder.

"My wife," he snapped. "And what do you mean, sir, by calling me 'dear old Inspector'? Discipline is slack here, Sanders, very slack."

"*Mister* Sanders" said Sanders quietly.

For a second their eyes met, the steel and the faded blue, and for once in his life Major Banks was uncomfortable.

"Emmie, you know these people?" he said to the nervous girl. "Messrs Sanders, Tibbetts, Hamilton." He introduced them with a sweep of his hand and walked in front of Sanders into the residency.

Lunch was a trial for everybody except Major Banks. He talked incessantly to everybody except Bones. Evidently that young man had offended him beyond hope of pardon, and it made matters no easier that Bones devoted his marked attentions to Mrs. Banks. But that was because Bones' attentions were invariably well marked.

She was very pretty in a scared way. Sanders judged her to be in the region of twenty-four; she was in fact two years younger, and had married her present husband when she was seventeen.

"What you ought to see, dear old Mrs. Banks, is the N'gombi territory—"

"Don't call my wife 'dear old Mrs. Banks'!" bellowed the major, red in the face. And then he glared at his wife. "The key, my dear!"

He fumbled in his pocket, produced a small Yale key, and Sanders saw the girl shrink back as though she had been struck. The inspector general roared with laughter.

"I'll bet you don't know what that means, my dear fellow? Do you think I lock her up when she's naughty? Not a bit of it. She knows; ask her!"

There was a most tense and uncomfortable moment. Sanders moved uneasily in his chair. The big man waved his finger playfully at his wife.

"No flirtations, Emmie darling! No more Freddies!"

"I never gave him the key, James," she quavered. "You know it's not true."

He silenced her with a gesture. That was all the reference that was made to the mysterious key, and the incident in the past which he held over her head like a whip. But it was characteristic of him that, whatever the key signified, he carried it with him day and night, and would produce it before strangers to humiliate her.

He spent the afternoon examining reports in Sanders' office. They were mainly written in Sanders' own neat hand, and he read them through word by word, checking certain tables showing taxation, with a little book that he had brought with him.

"What is this, Sanders?" he said suddenly. "This doesn't seem right. The N'gombi paid twenty-eight thousand kilos of rubber; you show thirteen."

"That is the Lower N'gombi," said Sanders coldly. "You will find the Upper N'gombi produced fifteen."

The major shook his head.

"Not very much for a big territory, you know, Mr. Sanders," he said disparagingly. "You ought to get twice as much."

"That is a matter for you to discuss with the Government," said Sanders in his iciest tone. "I am only authorized to collect twenty-eight thousand. I will note your strictures and report them to Whitehall."

"I'm passing no strictures," said the major hastily.

He had been warned against Sanders; he knew that the commissioner had many influential friends at home. He made no further comment, but it was not difficult to see that he had passed on some of the dislike he felt for Bones to the commissioner.

AT DINNER that night he was insufferable. He bullied his wife, contradicted Sanders, silenced Hamilton, and would have done the same to Bones, but Bones was a very difficult man to suppress.

"These territories should be reorganized. They're run in the most haphazard fashion—"

"Not at all, dear old Inspector," said Bones blandly. "That's where you're wrong; that's where you're quite wrong, my dear old sir."

The major glared at him. Bones was unabashed.

"Is it usual for a subaltern officer to give the lie—I repeat, give the lie—to a high official of state?" he asked.

"Quite wrong, dear old Inspector, and I'm glad you know it! I couldn't help thinking, when you were contradicting dear old Excellency just now, what perfectly ghastly bad form it was."

The major spluttered and was silent. Hamilton quaked for his subaltern. He quaked a little more when Bones told a story to the girl who was sitting by his side; a story that brought a smile to her pale face.

"Emmie, my dear." The inspector general's voice was silky, but in his hand he held the key. "Don't forget, my dear."

He turned his head by accident at that moment and caught Sanders' eye, and he saw there something so murderous that he was for the moment startled.

It was an unnerving evening. Sanders was glad when his visitors had retired to his own room, which he had placed at their disposal. The real tragedy began next morning.

"I want every account book brought to this office," said the major. "I want no explanations and no assistance. I am perhaps as good an auditor as the next man, Sanders—Mister Sanders. What I should like, if it is possible, is for you to send away the gentleman who is affected . . . You were saying last night that you were due at a sort of palaver up the river. Perhaps you could take Mr. Tibbetts with you."

"How long will your audit take?" asked Sanders, in surprise.

"A week," said the other. "I want every voucher checked, and I'll check them myself. I don't wish to make charges against anybody, but my experience is that there's a deplorable amount of petty peculation going on unchecked."

"Are you suggesting that I am guilty of peculation?" asked Hamilton, who was present.

"Don't snap at me, sir," said the major testily. "You have clerks, have you not? What is most likely to have happened is that, owing to a lack of efficient supervision, there may have been irregularities. I'll say no more than that."

Sanders was due at an important palaver. But, important as it was, it could have been postponed but for the inspector general's suggestion. He expressed his intention of leaving early the next morning. And that day was occupied in the collection of odd documents—many of which Bones found at the bottom of his trunks and stored in odd crannies of his hut—and their arrangement in chronological order.

The inspector general was more amiable that night; he told Sanders something about his wealth. He had large interests in oil fields in America, from which the bulk of his income was drawn. He had the finest house in Sussex; a show place, at which, to use his own words, "royalty had stayed."

The man was an arrant and vulgar snob. He made no disguise that he loathed Bones; never referred to him except as "that pup." He "traveled" a native clerk. Evidently from this man he had learned of the difficulties which the two sweating young officers had experienced in collecting their accounts together, and he gloated over their coming discomfiture.

SANDERS welcomed the dawn that sent him, with Bones and half a dozen Hausas, to the *Zaire* and the clean morning air of the river.

At the appointed place he had an important territorial question to debate with five petty chiefs. He had also the problem of M'gala to settle; and, though he was not aware of it, this was the most important palaver of all.

There was a man of the Lower N'gombi whom nobody loved. Nor was it to be expected that any man should speak well of him, or any woman look on him with a kind light in her eyes. For he was accursed from his birth by certain ghosts and devils, none of which was of itself of any great potency, though in the aggregate they had great power.

On the night M'gala came squalling into the world, the witch doctor, Tiki M'simba, saw each and every devil creep into the mother's hut, and they did not come out again. There was a skeptical man once who pointed out the indisputable fact that Tiki M'simba had quarreled with M'gala's father over a question of salt; but whether vengeance or clairvoyance was at the back of the doctor's vision, all the people of the Lower N'gombi accepted M'gala's misfortune. His mother hated him; his father, when he was still in the sprawling stage, left him on a sand spit, where crocodiles come in the heat of the day to bask.

The first crocodile and Mr. Commissioner Sanders appeared simultaneously. The rifle of Lieutenant Tibbetts deprived the crocodile of any interest in his projected meal, and Sanders brought the little, black, satiny thing aboard the *Zaire* and held a palaver in the nearest village to discover its paternity. This discovery was simply made. M'gala's father came up for judgment.

"Lord, this child is full of devils," said that simple man, and related the circumstance of M'gala's birth.

It took an hour to tell, but the commissioner was very patient.

"Bring me Tiki M'simba," he said at last, and the witch doctor came reluctantly.

"O man," said Sanders in his gentle way which invariably heralded ungentle action, "you may see ghosts and devils and wonderful jujus, but none of these must do harm to any living man or woman."

"Lord," said Tiki M'simba, deceived by Sanders's courteous tone, "I see what I see."

"Also you shall feel what you feel," said Sanders.

They tied M'simba to a tree, and Abiboo, a sergeant of Hausas, whose right arm was diabolically strong, gave him twenty on the back for the good of his soul.

Little M'gala grew up, therefore, in an atmosphere of hostility. He never met M'simba in the village street but that seer did not fix him with a glare that terrified him. Little boys and girls, who played the queer games which little boys and girls play wherever they live, ostracized him. His father built him a small hut, which was the size of a dog kennel, and there he slept and had his meals. For very soon it was learned by ocular demonstration that M'gala brought bad luck.

If he looked at a goat for a long time, that goat died; if he stopped before a house to peer wistfully into its dark interior, some man or woman or child grew sick; if he spoke to any, they suffered pain. Once he watched a party of woodmen felling a tree. As he looked, the tree unexpectedly fell and killed two of them. The fishermen would not let him go on the river because he frightened the fish away.

He grew to youth, herring ribbed, lank, silent, and, in his not unpleasant face, a curious intellectuality such as is not seen in native people. Nobody hindered him, for fear of Sanders. It was rumored that neither poison nor ax could destroy him. Once, when he was fifteen, the exasperated elders of the village, stimulated by M'simba, hired a band of outcast people who lived on the edge of the N'gombi forest to carry him away and do what they would. Four men went in search of him one day, when he was hunting in the forest. They were never again seen alive. Their bodies, mangled by leopards, were found, but no leopards were seen, nor had any hunter found the spoor of one.

He built himself a hut away from his people and at the back of the settlement; and every day he came through the village, looking neither to the left nor to the right. Once he trod upon thorns, maliciously disposed in the path. He leaned against a hut while he cleared his feet of the thorns. A few paces further he was again wounded, and again he leaned on a hut while he pulled the thorns free. That night those two huts were destroyed by fire, and nearly the whole of the village.

Tiki M'simba called a secret council of the oldest men, including the petty chief who was his creature.

"Sandi is now at the river's meeting. One of us will go to him and tell him of all these terrible things. And we will ask him to take M'gala away, because of these happenings."

They chose a man whom Sanders liked, and he came to the junction of the rivers where the *Zaire* was moored. In the evening Sanders gave him an audience and listened patiently to his complaint.

Now Sanders treated all such matters as these with the greatest seriousness, for he knew how largely big events are determined by small causes. And so he did not grow impatient at talks of devils and ghosts, but considered them most profoundly, and even consulted Bones, who always assumed the gravity of a privy councilor deciding the issue of peace and war on such occasions.

"Very remarkable, dear old Excellency," Bones said, "but I have had cases similar. The superstitions of the indigenous native are remarkable. What about me going along and having a little chow about the law of averages? I could show these silly old blighters—"

"I don't think they want lecturing; they want relief. I will send for M'gala and take him to headquarters. He seems a

very intelligent man and I want a house boy."

"Lord," warned the messenger, "this man brings evil to all that he touches. Also he has threatened death to any who beat him. For no hand has been raised against him by your lordship's orders, also—"

"*O ko!*" said Sanders impatiently. "Let me see this wonder. A little beating does no man harm."

He was thinking at that moment of a certain inspector general.

M'gala left his village, and nobody came down to see him off, for fear of what might happen to those who watched his departure. It is a fact that he was hardly out of sight before three fat dogs, the property of Tiki M'simba, dropped dead for no reason whatever, except perhaps heart disease engendered by overfeeding.

ON ITS arrival Hamilton met the *Zaire* with a long face.

"There's the devil to pay," he said. "That swine has found both ledgers, and has openly accused me of doctoring the accounts. He says he'll break Bones, and is preparing a long report for army headquarters."

"What is the trouble?"

It was characteristic of Hamilton and the urgency of the crisis that he greeted Bones with a friendly smile.

"I'm afraid there's going to be hell, Bones," and he told him what he had already told Sanders.

"Everything can be explained, dear old thing," said Bones airily. "If there are a few pounds out, I'll pay them out of my own pocket."

"To be exact," said Hamilton, "you're a hundred and sixty-three pounds out. I've never seen this brute so happy!"

The major was indeed in a jovial frame of mind at breakfast. He rubbed his hands gleefully at the sight of Bones, and that misguided youth so misunderstood his geniality that he committed the heinous offense of slapping him on the back.

"Don't do that, sir, don't do it!" gasped Commeder Banks. "You are a fool, sir, and a criminal, sir—"

"And a cat burglar, dear old Inspector," chortled Bones. "What about our going fishing—you and me and dear old Emmie?"

The girl cast an imploring look at him, but Bones was a notoriously bad reader of signs.

It took Sanders and Hamilton nearly an hour to bring to the young man a realization of the gravity of his position.

"Pull yourself together, Bones," said Hamilton gravely. "This may mean a court-martial. You remember he broke young Verney for exactly the same thing?"

Bones' face dropped.

"You don't mean he's serious, dear old boy? Why, I'm quite friendly with his wife!"

Hamilton groaned.

"You're not only friendly with his wife, but you've done every damned thing that you shouldn't do. He's after your blood and mine, too! He has been trying all the morning to get me to disassociate myself from you and to swear that these accounts were entirely your affair."

All that morning the major worked at his report. Before lunch he came out on to the veranda, dropped into an easy chair and ordered a drink.

Sanders saw the new house boy come awkwardly on to the stoop, balancing a small tray and staring owlishly at the slopping glasses. He thought no more than that it was stupid of his cook to send this raw man. And then he heard a smack, saw M'gala go sprawling on to the floor and there was the tinkle of breaking glass.

"Awkward beast!" roared the inspector. M'gala got up slowly. Never before had he been struck. His eyes were blazing and luminous. Then slowly he turned and, walking down the steps, vanished round a corner of the building. The inspector general was wiping his trousers.

"That's an awkward devil you've got," he snarled.

"He's raw," said Sanders. "I only brought him downriver this morning."

"I should jolly well say he was raw. Do

you know what the brute did? He put his hand on my shoulder to steady himself when he was handing me the glass."

"Oh!" said Sanders blankly, and remembered the stories of M'gala that he had heard.

"I shall have to break that boy of yours, I'm afraid," the major went on to a more pleasant topic. "I don't know how far you're responsible, but that is for the administrator to decide. His accounts are in a shocking state. There's a hundred and sixty-three pounds unaccounted for—Emmie, come here."

He called the girl sharply, and she sprang up from her chair, where she was sitting at the far end of the veranda, and almost ran to him. Sanders saw that she held something behind her.

"What was that letter you were reading?"

If it was possible, she turned even paler.

"There wasn't a mail in this morning?"

She shook her head.

"One you're treasuring, eh? Let me see it."

Even Sanders, sharp eyed as he was, had not observed the girl's surreptitious reading.

"Let me see it."

Sanders saw the color come into her face.

"I won't," she said defiantly. "It is from a friend."

His lips curled in a grin.

"From Freddie?" he breathed.

"From Freddie," she said, and stood stiffly, waiting for the storm.

Again that grimace of his.

"We'll talk about that after tiffin, shall we? Freddie—good Lord!"

He fumbled in his pocket for the key. And then, to his amazement, she snatched it from his hand and threw it across the rail of the stoop.

"You shan't do that, you shan't! Freddie means everything to me—everything! Now you know!"

She turned quickly and ran into the house, and the inspector general sat paralyzed with astonishment. Then he half rose from his seat and fell back again.

"Good Lord!" he said, in an awed voice.

Sanders knew that for the first time in his life a woman had challenged his domination.

"That fellow, Tibbetts—the man you call Bones—he's been responsible—putting ideas into her damned head! What do you want?"

It was his native clerk. A telegram had come through. He snatched it from the man's hand, tore it open and, fixing his pince-nez, read. Sanders saw his mouth open wider and wider, and into his pale blue eyes came a look of horror and bewilderment.

"What's this, what's this, what's this?" he muttered rapidly. "Hoax or something? Read that, Sanders. Read it, my boy!"

His voice was tremulous. Sanders took the sheet and read.

VERY URGENT STOP CALDER CABLES YOUR OIL SHARES DROPPED SEVEN DOLLARS FIFTY TO SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS STOP REPORTED WELLS RUN DRY STOP PANIC IN OIL MARKET STOP SHALL I SELL OR HOLD

"All my money's in that!" wailed the man. "I'm ruined!"

Sanders said nothing. He saw the man reach mechanically for his tope, stagger down the steps and, crossing the square, disappear behind the Hausa lines. He had not returned by four. Sanders had an idea that he might have fallen into the river, and sent a search party for him.

They found him lying face down in the long, rank grass, a revolver gripped in his hand, and, nearby, the dead body of M'gala. Nobody had heard the shot that killed the unlucky M'gala. The spear he had thrust at Banks' throat was noiseless.

And that night, the white faced wife sat in her bedroom, trying not to be thankful that the hand of M'gala the accursed had fallen upon her husband's shoulder.

Salmon Cargo

By

BILL ADAMS

THE SHIPS of the Alaska packing fleet are leaving for the north again, bound for Bristol Bay to fetch the salmon pack. They carry no devil-may-care young apprentice lads. The days of sea apprentices are done.

Once when I was a sea apprentice I made passage with a salmon ship. Never since then have I been able to look a salmon in the eye. It was a long time ago, and with one exception I have long ago lost track of the apprentices with whom I shared the old fourmaster's half-deck. He, when last I heard of him, was master of one of the finest liners afloat. When he wrote to me he said:

"There's no romance at sea. I'd never go to sea again. I'd sooner trundle a truck upon a dock."

And I thought:

"Maybe! Maybe!"

Should he ever see these lines, I think that he will smile, remembering certain boils upon his knee. And I, of course, well know that there is no romance at sea. There never was. It was, and perhaps is even in these days of steamers, a dog's life. No one but the fool of the family ever went to sea. Every young apprentice lad would tell you that. What a lot of families had fools! What manner of men were they, I wonder, who were better than the fools?

There were eight of us, apprentice lads, in the old fourmaster's half-deck. I remember the name, the initials, the face and form of each one as if it were but yesterday that I last said to him:

"So long! Meet me off the Horn!"

One of the eight, poor boy, was not cut out for a sailor. The sea was too hard for him. He was afraid of wind and wave. To climb aloft upon a reeling mast was utter horror to him. His days were days of terror. At the end of our voyage he went to a madhouse. Another, one of the best —the sea seemed always to take the best —fell from the rigging while we were loading salmon. We buried him ashore in a little cemetery over which gray gulls flew. When, with three thousand tons of salmon in her holds, the ship towed down to Flattery there were six sane lads in her half-deck and one who was already more than half insane.

She was a "hungry" ship, our old fourmaster—hardtack, salt pork, pea soup, the main part of our diet. Sometimes the hardtack, having been long at sea, grew soft. Then there were weevils in it. Eat-

ing it by daylight, we shook the weevils from it. Eating it by dark, we forgot them. Often the pork was bad. The peas were ill cooked. The skipper and his two mates lived better than we did. Once I contrived to steal a handful of potatoes from their store. We had no potatoes, and that handful we ate raw, with pepper and vinegar, pretending that we ate cucumber salad. A sea apprentice could always find a jest. Had it not been for the ability to laugh I think that we must surely have perished.

How they load a salmon cargo in these machine made days I do not know. In those days they slid it, case by case, down long wooden chutes leading from wharf to rail, from rail to hatch, and so on down into the holds. Cases came in an unending stream to the hands of the stevedores awaiting them. Sometimes it happened that a case jumped the chute and arrived in the hold broken. In the hold were always a couple of apprentices with hammers and nails to repair smashed cases. A case held four dozen cans. To purloin a can, hide it beneath one's jumper and nail the case up a can short was a simple matter, provided that neither of the mates happened to be looking down from the hatch above. To convey the stolen can to the deck and to hide it safely away in our half-deck was at times a tricky matter. But our supply grew steadily larger while she loaded. By and by the sea chest of each apprentice held as many cans as room could be found for. Once our sea chests were filled there was room beneath our old straw mattresses.

THE SHIP finished loading after dark one starry night. The holds being all but full, the chutes laid away, there was no longer need of repairing any broken cases. But there was still a little room beneath our mattresses. At the last moment, just ere the hatches were put on and while neither of the mates was in sight, two of us managed to purloin a whole case apiece. A pleasant word—"purloin"! It saves one's using "steal", which somehow seems a nasty word.

There was no longer any room for one more can of salmon in our half-deck. Under each of seven mattresses was a secondary mattress consisting of cans of salmon laid upon their bilges. In all we had contrived to purloin exactly sixteen cases. Seven hundred and sixty cans of salmon for seven apprentices, and a five month voyage ahead.

We towed down to Flattery next afternoon, and for our first supper at sea we ate canned salmon instead of only hardtack. We ate canned salmon for breakfast next morning, canned salmon for dinner and for supper. We ate canned salmon, each of us, for breakfast, dinner and supper for many days thereafter. Monotony? Try salt pork, pea soup and hardtack! We had tried them well. Fresh from the chilly Fraser, canned salmon was a most delicious dish.

It was one day when she was rolling slowly through the tropics that that one who is today the master of a mighty liner discovered on his knee a hard red swelling. On the third day he was unable to walk, so he hobbled aft to the cabin. For a week the Blue Nose skipper's wife doctored the knee for him. On the seventh day it burst and a hard core shot out. He limped for a week thereafter.

"It's that infernal salmon. That's what gave me boils," said the sufferer, and he ate no more salmon. So much the more for the rest of us! So much the more for the rest of us *for a time.* For before the first afflicted one was fully recovered, boils appeared upon the wrist of another. At their first appearance he ceased eating salmon and recovered without having to go to the cabin for doctoring.

By the time that we sighted the Diego Ramirez Islands, which lie some fifty-eight miles south and east of Cape Horn, only four of us were left still eating salmon. At breakfast, dinner and supper we feasted; and *we* laughed at the three hungry ones whose shares made us such ample living. Fresh from the chilly waters of the Fraser, canned salmon was still a most delicious dish.

"What in the devil's the matter with

all you boys?" demanded our Blue Nose skipper when just as we were entering the southeast trade winds of the South Atlantic another apprentice went to the cabin with an angry boil upon each of his wrists. For ten days hauling upon a rope was torture to him.

"The pork's a bit stale, I think, sir," said the sufferer.

"What d'ye mean?" snorted the scowling old skipper.

But at noon that day the cook was ordered to serve each of us a little extra lime juice.

By the time the ship crossed the Line in the Atlantic three of us were still eating, still enjoying canned salmon three times a day. In almost four months we had not touched the evil scented pork and scarce had nibbled hardtack. Monotony? No. Luxury to a young sea apprentice. Try spoiled pork awhile!

THE SHIP was to the westward of the Azores when one of us three survivors began to limp.

Only the mad boy and I were left with appetite for salmon, and I without much. Yet, since pork was spoiled and hardtack weevilly, I fared well enough for a sailor and derided hungry comrades.

On a dark night when we had been well nigh five months at sea the mate called me.

"Get aloft to the foreroyal yard and see if you can see a light," said he.

The word went round from lip to lip. We were almost in. Try a five months' passage in a windjammer and you'll know what joy means as the first shore light is seen.

Climbing aloft in the darkness, I struck my knee against the topgallant crosstrees. My knee hurt.

Under my mattress was one can of Fraser salmon. Under the mad boy's mattress were three. I gave him my one can at breakfast time next morning. With green hills of Ireland slipping by beyond the foamy sea, I ate spoiled pork at dinner while my comrades laughed.

Thirty-six hours later we sat down to our last sea breakfast, and at that meal the poor lad who, though his mind was gone, had yet a sturdier body than the rest of us, finished the last can of salmon from the far off Fraser.

There was an old song we used to sing on starry evenings when we sat about the hatch in dog watches at sea. I seem to hear my comrades voices:

"Cheer, boys, hurrah! I tell you for a fact—
There's nothing done in a lime juice ship
contrary to the act!
Oh, what's the use of growling. You know
you'll get your whack
Of lime juice and vinegar, according to the act!"

The old fourmaster has been at the sea's bottom this many a year. In the little half-deck where once we feasted on stolen salmon slimy creatures crawl.

"There's no romance at sea."

None but the fool of the family ever went to sea. Ah, how I wish I were back!

Tonto Charley

by HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

A Story of the Border Riders

PETE'S young years were hard. So, unfortunately, was his constitution. He was born and revolved in the West. His parents emigrated from Missouri and settled in the Panhandle of Texas on the Canadian. A flood swept away all they possessed, including Pete, who was two years old at the time and wrapped in an ancient Army overcoat. His crib was a wooden washtub half filled with cornhusks. The flood hurled the washtub into the low fork of a sycamore. The following day a party of searchers investigated the phenomenon of an undamaged washtub right-side-up in a sycamore. Two year old Pete was discovered gazing incuriously up at the unremembering sky and sucking his thumb.

"Hell, it's alive!" declared one of the search party.

Panhandle ranchers were proverbially poor, but they were prolific. Each of the search party happened to be the sire of

one or two young offsprings similar to the discovery. The searchers drew lots to determine who would have to feed the lone survivor of the Missourian's family. The original discoverer drew the unlucky number. He consoled himself with the thought that the washtub was worth something.

At the age of twelve Pete was doing a man's work, if the individual who salvaged him could properly be called a man. One Fourth of July Pete's foster-father came home filled with corn whisky. Pete happened to get in his way and was promptly knocked down. He scrambled up and would have made a dash for safety had not his foster-sister, a spindly little creature with pale blue eyes and a wisp of a pigtail, clenched her hands and sailed into her father. She was fond of Pete. The rancher cuffed her—cuffed her so hard he knocked her down. Because she did not get up and run, Pete thought she was dead. He flamed into a small, avenging fury.

Snatching his foster-parent's pistol from its holster, he poked it into something soft and yielding. Whether or not he deliberately cocked the gun and pulled the trigger is neither here nor there. He knew how. Following a muffled explosion, Pete's foster-father became absolutely useless as a container of corn whisky. Pete was not exactly a worm, but he had turned.

Retaining the six-shooter, he climbed on to the rancher's sweat caked pony and fled. He did not know what else to do. He rode all night. About daybreak he stumbled upon what he thought was a cow camp, many miles north of the Canadian. He was fed and then questioned. He said he had had trouble with his father, had left home and was not going back. His earnestness amused the outfit. Questioned as to what he did intend to do, Pete replied that he guessed he'd throw in with the outfit as it looked pretty good to him. This caused even more amusement. Pete did not see any humor in the situation.

When it was suggested that they might not have any use for him, he replied promptly that that was all right—he'd just hunt up another outfit and hire out. His nerve and independence won the admiration of one of the most notorious gangs of cattle thieves operating in the Southwest. He was adopted as a sort of mascot. Alert, wiry and vigorous, he became useful to them. Tonto Charley, the roughest and wildest of the gang, took quite a fancy to Pete, treated him as if he were a grown man. The rest of the outfit did not take Pete seriously.

Pete became the adopted son of Hardship and Experience. He soon learned the unwritten rules of the game. The more he learned the less he was inclined to talk. Compared to him the Sphinx was a garrulous old woman. Strangely enough, while he would risk life and limb scouting for his outfit, wrangling horses or rustling cattle, he would no more have thought of stealing anything other than cattle than he would have thought of cutting his throat, and he was rather fond of his throat.

The outfit had been a bit too industrious in their special line, and had about worn out their welcome in Texas and Arizona. Their business, as they called it, was falling off. Their leader, Hemenway, suggested robbing the pay car of a transcontinental railroad then building across the country. From cattle rustling to train robbery was but a short step. But Pete would not take it. The outfit was loafing in the shade of a juniper. a few miles north of Fort Apache. It was noon. Hemenway, Claybourne and two Tonto Basin men, Kemp and Slauson, were discussing the proposed robbery.

Pete, a short distance from them, lay stretched out comfortably on his side, his head supported by his arm. Tonto Charley sat near him, his hat pulled down against the outer glare of the sun. Presently Hemenway rose.

"What do you say, kid?" He addressed Pete, but he looked at Tonto Charley.

"Nothin'," replied Pete.

Tonto Charley chuckled. The foreman frowned.

"Ain't you in on this, Pete?"

"No."

In such a camp, where a word might start a gun fight, and where common, physical courage was taken for granted, a mistake was seldom made more than once. Hemenway made two. He discounted Tonto Charley's intelligence and he questioned Pete's nerve. Pete's nerve had never been questioned, even by himself. Consequently Hemenway's knowledge came as a rude shock. Tonto Charley realized that Hemenway was striking at him through Pete—forcing a quarrel. Immediately Pete told Hemenway where to go—and it was not to Montreal. Hemenway thought that he had young Pete bluffed, that Tonto Charley would take up the quarrel. Claybourne and the two Tonto Basin men saw Hemenway reach for his gun. They did not see Pete reach for his. But they had seen him, often enough, flip a shot at a lizard and get the lizard. No one of the outfit except Tonto Charley realized that Pete had fired until the gun jumped in his hand and Hemenway doubled up, staggered forward and sank down. He twitched once or twice and then lay still.

Claybourne pulled his gun, apparently intending to make a good boy out of Pete, but Tonto Charley had his own ideas about that. He caught Claybourne with a slug just above the belt buckle, even while Hemenway was falling. Kemp and Slauson, sitting cross legged, did not make a move. Tonto Charley, with Pete now standing beside him, invited them to take a hand. They let silence speak for them. Silence, and their attitudes.

"HE ASKED for it," said Tonto Charley, indicating Hemenway with the muzzle of his gun.

"So did Claybourne," said Pete.

After that no one said anything. It was noon. But it seemed chilly. Not because the outfit had lost two men in as many seconds. Rather because Pete had become full grown in even less time than that. It was a swift, uncanny maturity. And yet natural enough, considering Pete's associates. A very reasonable climax to any quarrel involving two such friends as Pete and Tonto Charley.

"Here's where we split," said Tonto Charley.

"How about them horses?" Kemp had begun to recover from his surprise.

"Yes. And Hemenway's got a money belt on him," declared Slauson.

"It was our fight," said Pete.

Tonto Charley stepped between Pete and the two Tonto Basin riders.

"Get the cards, Kemp. One flop, and high man takes everything."

"Suits me."

Slauson knew that Kemp was handy with the cards.

The four squatted in the shade of the juniper and cut the cards. The showdown gave Slauson the ace of spades, Pete the ten of diamonds, Kemp the king of hearts, and Tonto Charley the deuce of spades.

"High man takes everything," laughed Tonto Charley.

Disgusted, Pete walked over to his horse and took up the slack in the cinch. Tonto Charley stood watching Kemp and Slauson strip the dead men of their pistols, loose change and Hemenway's money belt.

"Come on!" called Pete.

Not until Kemp and Slauson had mounted and had headed south, each with a led horse, did Tonto Charley step toward his own mount. And then he seemed in no great haste to ride. He mounted and swung alongside Pete.

"Three, four yellowlegs and an Apache scout coming down through the timber yonder. They're from the fort. When they drop down into that draw, we'll head straight east, up the hill." Tonto Charley chuckled. Pete's dark eyes flashed.

"I don't see no joke!"

"You're doin' fine. But you listen to what I tell you."

Screened by the junipers, they watched the distant soldiers bob along down the rough hillside and disappear into a draw.

"Now straight for the mountain, and keep goin'," said Tonto Charley.

They crossed a ridge, dipped into a hollow, crossed another and higher ridge and, riding craftily, worked up into the mountain timber. Pete wanted to tell Tonto Charley that Kemp had dealt the ace of spades from the bottom of the pack, but Tonto Charley, in the lead, was setting a swift pace through the trackless and shadowy woodlands. East, he had said. But now they were angling over toward the south. Finally they were headed west, back toward the edge of the timber. Presently they struck into a trail and Pete did not have to be told it was the trail to Fort Apache. He wondered why Tonto Charley was trailing the very men it seemed best to avoid.

A few yards back from the open sunlight of the hillside Tonto Charley dismounted and walked out on to a brush covered point of rock. Pete followed, frowning at Tonto Charley's back. Pete gazed down the slant of the tumbling foothills, cut here and there with gaunt, rock strewn arroyos that widened toward the mesa far below. The tops of the distant junipers shimmered in the hot sunlight. Beyond them the mesa ran out to the thin blue of space. Tiny figures, quite distinct in the thin air, moved about among the juniper clumps. The soldiers had found the bodies of Hemenway and Claybourne.

Pete realized, with a twitching of his throat, that the soldiers must have seen Kemp and Slauson riding south with the led horses. He scanned the rolling country toward the south. His quick eye picked up the two riders, drifting along at an easy gait, the led horses bobbing beside them. Tonto Charley touched Pete's arm and gestured toward the soldiers below. They had mounted and three of them were riding south at a sharp trot. The fourth was headed toward Fort Apache.

"Got it figured out to suit you?" asked Tonto Charley.

"They're after Kemp and Joe Slauson—"

"It's awful easy to figure," interrupted Tonto Charley. "About sundown Kemp and Slauson will make camp, and then that Apache trailer and the two yellowlegs will slip up and take 'em. They'll turn 'em over to the sheriff of Apache County. Kemp and Slauson will swear we bumped off Hemenway and Claybourne. But there's those two extra horses and saddles, and Hemenway's gun with his initials on it, and the money belt. That won't look so good."

"Kemp didn't deal straight," said Pete, stubbornly.

"Son, I've knowed Kemp for over ten years."

"You mean you let him get away with that crooked deal?"

"The same. I didn't want the stuff. A dead man's stuff ain't lucky."

"I guess nothing is lucky," said Pete. "I didn't figure to get Hemenway. He asked for it."

"And you sure was quick and accommodatin'. But he had it coming to him. We all got it coming, in this game."

"Not me!" said Pete, quickly. "I aim to pull out—and get a job."

Tonto Charley chuckled.

"I reckon it's about time we both pulled out. It's a right long ride to the river."

"What river? You mean Socorro?"

"The same. And mebbe up the river and over Las Vegas way. The air is cooler up there."

Pete gazed at the heavy, battered face of his companion—a face coarse, broad featured and hard, but not without humor. He never knew when Tonto Charley was in earnest. Charley seemed to take everything that happened as a joke. He seldom laughed outright, but he seldom said anything that was not followed by a chuckle. Pete could not understand him, and, wisely, did not try to. They were friends. That was enough.

"Got it all figured out to suit you?"

"Oh, hell!" said Pete, and mounted his horse.

They turned and rode silently through the still mountain forest of spruce and fir and pine. Again and again the narrow

trail broke down from dark, timbered levels into ragged, rock walled cañons, purple in the afternoon shadows. Often they rode parallel to the stream bed for a quarter of a mile or so before the trail climbed to the timber country again. Toward evening they came out on to a wide meadow. Across the meadow ran a tiny stream, all but hidden by the rich emerald of lush grass. The tired horses drank, snatched hurriedly at the grass and plodded on toward the dark edge of the timber beyond.

Just within the shadows a deer jumped up. Tonto Charley whipped out his six-shooter and fired. The deer leaped high, jackknifed and crashed against a pine.

THEY made a small fire and broiled strips of the tender meat.

"Tomorrow," said Tonto Charley, "we'll be out of this here high country and down where a man can see his own shadow. This high country gives me a chill."

"Better feed and water up here than on the flats." Pete gestured toward the horses, eagerly cropping the thick grass.

"If they took Kemp and Slauson alive, they'll hold 'em for the sheriff," said Tonto Charley. "He's rode down a lot of good horses tryin' to round up Hemenway's bunch. You recollec' Hemenway?"

"Yes. And mebbe you ain't forgot Claybourne."

"He asked for it. But you needn't to git smart. You listen to me."

"I'm listenin'."

"Well, Kemp and Joe Slauson won't last long after the sheriff gets 'em. The cattlemen down here will see to that. And that means we're the last of Hemenway's bunch. Every time we hit a town, word will go back along our trail that Tonto Charley and the kid, Pete, are hangin' together when they ought to be hangin' separate. Fellas we used to drink and carouse with will be the first to carry a bone to the sheriff. It always works that way when a gang busts up."

"You mean it would be better if we traveled separate?"

"I sure do."

A shade of disappointment flickered across Pete's lean, young face.

"All right. I don't need no fire to keep my feet warm."

"It ain't cold feet, kid," chuckled Tonto Charley. "It's plain business. You got a chance. Me, I've had it comin' for quite a spell. You ain't got started, yet."

"You'd make a hell of a preacher," said Pete.

But his levity was forced. He knew Tonto Charley was right. Tonto Charley was an old hand, and never reckless except when drunk. A sudden thought flashed through Pete's mind.

"Say, Charley, was that break Hemenway made a frameup to get you?"

Tonto Charley chuckled.

"You'll be gettin' smart enough to hunt your own grazin', if you keep on. Hemenway had been layin' for me ever since we had some words about a Mexican girl in Tucson, five or six years ago. But he didn't want to start anything as long as business was good. You see, he could use me. But when business got bad, he and Claybourne figured to take one flutter at train robbin', and then break for the Border, leavin' the rest of us holdin' the sack. He knew I was on to him. So he tried to run a whizzer on you, figurin' you would back down, and mebbe I would have somethin' to say. Claybourne, not Hemenway, was to get me if I made a move. But you sure spoiled his play."

"Well, that kind of squares it," said Pete slowly. "I didn't know it was a frameup to get you. I figured, when Hemenway started to ride me, you would take a hand. So I was watchin' him. He always was a whole lot quicker on the draw than you, Charley. So when he pulled, I let him have it. But your gettin' Claybourne was kind of a surprise."

"Sure! Clay was faster than me, but I was watchin' him. And you recollec' Kemp and Joe Slauson was surprised, likewise. They didn't know what all the

noise was about until it was over. If they had, they'd most like started in and smoked us up plenty."

Pete sat crosslegged beside the dead embers of their fire. The air was growing sharp. He shrugged his shoulders. The last long rays of the setting sun shot heavenward, touching the evening sky with shafts of glowing crimson. The tired horses circled on their stake ropes, nipping at the grass. A night bird swooped across the meadow and vanished in the dusk. Pete realized that a man might have plenty of nerve and still feel mighty lonesome, at times. He was glad that he and Tonto Charley were together.

"If it's all the same to you, Charley, we'll ride together." Then, ashamed lest Charley should think he was afraid to ride alone, "But any time we come to a fork in the trail, all you got to do is to rein your horse the way you want to go."

"You'll do to take along, kid," said Charley, and he did not chuckle.

BEFORE the morning mist had lifted from the meadow they again kindled a small fire and broiled strips of the venison. All that day they followed a thin trail across the White Mountains. Toward sundown they rode into a little Mormon settlement tucked away in a wooded valley above the mesa. They were hospitably fed and invited to spend the night there. They camped in the brush back of the tithing house. In the morning they inquired about the road to Holbrook, but once out on the mesa they swung round Springerville and headed for New Mexico. That night they crossed the line and slept in a sheep camp on the edge of the Datils.

It was new country to Pete, who had never been east of the Mogollones, nor north of Deming. The few men they saw were lean, leathery cow hands, and an occasional sheep man, grazing his band along the edge of the Datil plains. The fourth day found them across the divide and headed toward Magdalena. The rains had been heavy that season. They rode a wide, fenceless land of red earth and vivid grass, spotted here and there in the distance with shallow, silver stretches of evaporating surface water—strange bounty in a land so arid in the main.

"Magdalena is where you git lockjaw and I'm tongue tied," said Tonto Charley as they topped a rise and sighted the town.

Pete said little enough when with friends and even less when among strangers. In this instance he said nothing.

"You heard me, I reckon?" queried Charley.

"Twice."

"Now don't you go and git smart with me, kid. I'm tellin' you somethin'."

"About Magdalena? Say, I suppose you think I don't know we're riding cow country!"

"All right. Now what are you goin' to call me, down this way?"

"Joe Adams."

Tonto Charley chuckled.

"Won't go, kid. I got friends in Magdalena, if they're to home. And in Socorro."

"Well, I guess that's your business."

"Say, you're about as friendly as a rattlesnake. I don't know why I'm wastin' my time chousin' along with you."

"You won't be—if that horse of yours throws another shoe. He's lost one already. Lost it comin' down out of Datil."

"Yes. I aimed to tack on a couple of cold shoes in Magdalena. But thanks just the same."

Rounding the shoulders of a low hill, they came suddenly upon a tall, heavy set, dark visaged horseman mounted on a silver maned buckskin—a fine, big horse carrying his rider as if proud of the job. Tonto Charley reined up. Pete swung his horse to the other side of the road so the stranger was between them. The latter drew up, glanced at Pete, then addressed Tonto Charley:

"Hello, Charley. Business poor over on the Tonto?"

"About the same. How are things up this way?"

"Quiet—so far. But it wouldn't take much to liven them up."

"I like 'em lively. What, for instance?"

"Nothing, right now. Did you see anything that looked like a wagon, north of the road?"

"No. But my horse threw a shoe comin' out of Datil. If you find it you can keep it, for luck."

The tall horseman smiled grimly, nodded and moved on. For awhile Pete and Tonto Charley rode in silence, broken, at last, by Tonto Charley—

"You're sure poison, kid."

"You did all the talkin'."

"Yes. But you put him between us, eh?"

"I didn't like his looks, or his talk."

"That was Benavides of Socorro. Some folks say he is half white. Some folks call him 'Black Benavides'. Take your choice."

"Got any more friends like him down in Socorro?"

"Plenty."

"Well, that's your business. I'm goin' to head up into that Pecos country and hunt a job."

MAGDALENA, as a community, paid little attention to Pete and Tonto Charley. The storekeeper catalogued them as strangers while they purchased tobacco and a box of cartridges. Their behavior was above criticism. After they had fed their horses and had eaten a square meal at the restaurant near the loading chutes, Tonto Charley tacked a couple of cold shoes on his horse, out in front of the blacksmith shop.

Two punchers, in from the range to the north, discussed the strangers with their eyes, overlooking no smallest detail of rig, clothing or armament. The punchers mutually confirmed their conviction with a glance. They surmised that the strangers were not working for wages.

Pete asked one of the punchers what time it was. The latter rolled a mildly speculative eye toward the heavens and averred that it was about noon. Later, when Tonto Charley asked Pete why he had spoken, Pete replied that he just wanted to hear what the puncher's voice sounded like.

With red, impalpable dust sticking to boots, overalls, filling shoulder-creases in their shirts, clinging to eyebrows, hat brims and to the quick drying sweat of their horses, they rode down the Blue Cañon above Socorro, having made the twenty-five miles in an easy six hours. They had not exchanged a half dozen words during the ride. But Pete had been doing some thinking. It was evident to him that Tonto Charley had no special plan of campaign. Pete felt that he wanted something definite to catch hold of; that heretofore, Fate had had him by the back of the neck and the seat of the pants and had been running him hither and yon, no matter how hard he dug in his heels. He told himself he would like to get a couple of jumps ahead of whatever was pushing him from behind, and choose a trail for himself. He believed that such a choice would not, and could not, include Tonto Charley. Charley was amazing efficient in a ruckus, a staunch friend, shrewd and careful enough when sober—but a reckless chucklehead when he was drinking. Not hot headed, nor cold blooded—just a grinning chucklehead, willing to play any game for the sake of the excitement in it. Pete felt that to break with him without a good excuse would not be square. Yet to ride with him, now that Hemenway's gang was scattered, could mean nothing but ultimate disaster.

Crossing the bench below Blue Cañon they dropped down into Socorro, entering the town by the back door, as it were. As they passed the first home, a dim adobe, its window a golden square of lamplight in the dusk, its door closed, Tonto Charley gestured.

"Looks warm and comfortable, but it must be hell, comin' back to the same house, every night."

"I dunno, Charley. Say, what are we riding into Socorro for, anyway?"

"Why, just for luck."

"I wonder if your friend Benavides picked up that horseshoe."

Tonto Charley chuckled.

"We ain't lost any luck yet."

Pete had heard considerable about this town by the river, a Mexican town, originally, which had become a sort of halfway house for travelers between Santa Fé and El Paso, north and south, or for those flitting between Fort Sumner and the Mogollones, east and west; a place where a man could get food and lodging, ammunition, liquor—or expeditiously shot, if he overstayed his welcome. He had heard that some one was always in town looking for somebody and that the somebody rode west or south more often than east or north.

A drinking center, a news center, a clearing house for deputies and their like, an oasis for transients, the old town rocked along on the slow tide of its own affairs, only occasionally waking up to obliterate some obstreperous desperado who deliberately ignored the polite hint that Socorro's four doorways were open day and night, and no questions asked.

This much Pete had gleaned from members of his own outfit. But he wanted to see what the town looked like. He knew Prescott, Phoenix, Globe, Tucson, Nogales, and twice he had been in El Paso. Socorro was different. Even in the darkness he sensed it. He was experiencing the feel of the town when Tonto Charley turned down a quiet side street and stopped at the third house from the corner. He sat his horse and gave a peculiar whistle.

The front door of the adobe did not open, but from the back came a quick stab of light, gone instantly. A shadowy figure moved along the side of the house. Tonto Charley answered a low spoken question in Spanish. Dismounting, they led their horses down a lane and into a small corral.

The horses whinnied softly at the rustle of corn stalks as the Mexican came with his arms full.

They entered the kitchen, their saddles on their shoulders. Pete squinted against the sudden brightness. A thin, sallow faced woman sat at the table eating something from a bowl. She nodded as Tonto Charley spoke to her and rose indifferently as he introduced Pete. Her husband, a wizened, bowlegged *vaquero*, with small, deep set eyes, grinned affably but did not offer to shake hands.

"Miguel," said Tonto Charley. "Miguel and I left Tucson together—the same night."

Pete noticed that Miguel's right ear was largely missing. Also there was a deep pucker in his cheek, a sinister, permanent dimple, never devised by nature. The woman fetched food and placed chairs for them. She took her bowl and sat over by the stove.

The three men ate the hot chile-con-carne, drank coffee and smoked. The thumb and trigger finger of Miguel's right hand were missing. Pete surmised that Miguel had been a hard one in his day—before somebody chopped off his thumb and trigger finger. Or, maybe, he got them burned off taking a dally. Once in a while a fellow got caught like that. Their bowlegged host fetched some brandy, stiff liquor that ironed the tired spots out of a man.

They soon got up from the table and stepped out into the early starlight. It was a pretty night, neither cold nor warm. The horses, munching their feed, did not even lift their heads as the three men sauntered up. Pete caught a word here and there as Tonto Charley and Miguel talked of old times . . . of Fort Sumner, White Oaks, the Kid . . . Tularosa, Benavides . . .

It was early. Pete was not interested in their conversation, especially as it was in Spanish.

"Do we bush here tonight?" he asked Tonto Charley.

Tonto nodded.

"Right here, son."

"Then I'm goin' to take a look at the town."

"All right. I'll be here when you get back. Put your gun inside your shirt, and don't fall in the river."

TWICE Pete sauntered round the plaza, past the low roofed white hotel with its series of single rooms fronting the east—door after door with nothing to distinguish one from the other save the number above it. The south side of the plaza was dark, the stores bolted and barred against unsolicited trade. The east and north sides of the square glowed with life, in spots. Dark figures slid slowly past the glimmering patches of light from saloon doorways, to pause and visit with a friend, or to pass from an absorbing shadow into the next patch of radiance, and so on, until lost in the darkness of some outgoing street. Sometimes one of the shadows became silhouetted sharply against the doorway glare, entering or leaving a saloon. A murmuring, a break of laughter, occasionally a word, distinct in the soft night, drifted across to Pete where he stood, musing, conscious of what was going on, yet comfortably indifferent . . . Mexicans, mostly, people of the town, on foot, talking, smoking, loafing away a warm evening . . . Pete tingled as he heard the click and clatter of shod hoofs. The horses came at a brisk, choppy walk—five of them—crowding along the lighted side of the square. The men rode sedately, the horses crowding, not under the spur, but because they were fresh. Pete saw the riders dismount, saw one of their number lead the horses away, whereat the rest of the riders followed a tall figure into a saloon. Pete's curiosity awakened to a point of recollection. That tall man, now—he skylined a whole lot like the Benavides they had met on the road between Magdalena and Datil: size, shape, and especially the swing to his hat, not go-to-hell, or slouchy, but a keen, businesslike swing in the shape of the wide sombrero.

If it was Benavides, reflected Pete, he made a long, hard ride. He had been west of Magdalena when they met, and was headed west. Now he was riding another horse, a fresh horse, and the men with him were on fresh mounts. Well, it was their business.

With no special intent of making it his business, Pete decided to stroll round the plaza again, largely because he was curious. Also, he had grown tired of standing still. Passing the eastern corner of the square, he kept on down the street where the horses had gone. A Mexican lurched out of an alley, muttering to himself. As Pete stepped aside, the Mexican backed off and apologized drunkenly. He had a grievance. Becoming very tired, he had gone to sleep in the corral back of the *cantina*, to be awakened and routed out by the arrival of many horses, one of which had kicked him. And to add insult to injury, the *Americano* who had fetched the horses had laughed at him.

"Whose horses did you say?"

"The horses of Benavides—a hundred. Benavides is a rich man."

Pete stepped round him and walked on down the dark street. Coming back toward the plaza, he decided to warn Tonto Charley that Benavides was in town, for Pete had seen enough when they met on the road to convince him that the Socorro cattleman and Tonto Charley would not waste words the next time they met. Pete found Charley and Miguel in the kitchen, the doors and windows closed. The room was hot, and heavy with tobacco smoke and the rank smell of brandy. Miguel's wife was not there. A bottle and glasses stood on the table. Tonto Charley invited Pete to drink with them. He took a swallow or two, coughed and set the glass down.

"Benavides is in town, Charley."

"The hell he is! Where did you see him?"

"In that blue front saloon on the north side of the plaza."

"Alone?"

"No. He rode with four men. They all had fresh horses. The horses are in that corral back of the *cantina*."

Tonto Charley and Miguel glanced at each other.

"You sure?" asked Tonto Charley.

"Plenty sure. I saw Benavides in there when I walked past, just now. He's in town, all right."

"Well, so am I. How many did you say were with him."

"Four."

"Two deuces, two trays and the jack."

"Charley, you're drunk."

"Nothin' like that, kid. So black Benavides is in town?"

"You're gettin' set for trouble."

Tonto Charley laughed.

"*Nada!* Me, I'm goin' to hit the trail for the Pecos right soon. It's cooler up there. But first, I got to go see if Benavides found that horseshoe."

Tonto Charley rose, took up his belt and gun from the table, picked up his hat and stepped toward the door. Miguel hastily filled a tumbler, emptied it and, rising, carefully adjusted the lamp wick, as the lamp had been smoking. Tonto Charley flung the door open. He grinned as he met Pete's steady, intense gaze.

"We're goin' to see what the town looks like—this evenin'."

Pete shrugged his shoulder.

"Well, put your gun inside your shirt, and don't fall in the river."

Tonto Charley chuckled, stepped out into the night. Miguel stumped after him. The door closed. Pete sat with his chair tilted back against the wall. He made a cigaret and smoked, staring at the crooked flame in the dingy lamp chimney. If Tonto Charley was determined to hunt trouble, that was his business. "*Tonto*" was Spanish for "fool". Anyway, it was about time, thought Pete, that they split up. Charley would never settle down to a straight job. For one thing, he had too many counts against him. He would have to keep moving.

Pete caught himself staring at a pair of spurs hanging on the back of a chair—Tonto Charley's spurs. Charley and Miguel had gone into town on foot. Pete tried to dismiss them from his mind, tried to think of something else. He walked out to the corral and stood staring at the shapes of the two horses, resting. He regretted having mentioned Benavides at all. Yet he felt he could hardly have done otherwise. It was only fair to warn Charley that the other man was in town. Charley had had a chance to pull his freight, easy—slip out of Socorro by one of the three doorways on the river side of town—with a pretty fair assurance that Benavides would not have followed him far beyond his own range.

Instead, Tonto Charley had buckled on his gun and gone out to hunt trouble. But that was not hard to understand. The arrival of Benavides so soon after their meeting on the road west of Magdalena could mean nothing less than his acceptance of any play Tonto Charley might care to make. Pete was disgusted, not so much because Tonto Charley was out looking for Benavides, but because luck had shoved Benavides up in front of them at this time. Pete's pride was touched because Tonto Charley had not asked him to go along, instead of that dried up Mexican.

BUT standing there in the starlight looking at the horses was not doing any good. Pete decided to saddle up and drift out of town before he got tangled in a free-for-all gun fight that would more than likely spoil his plan of getting a job over in the Pecos country. And Tonto Charley was just drunk enough to start such a fight. Pete packed his saddle out to the corral and caught his horse. As he saddled up he remembered how often Tonto Charley had told him a man was a fool who did not keep his horse handy when visiting a strange town.

Well, *tonto* was Spanish for fool. Charley was afoot. Pete hesitated. No, he could not pull out that way. He would try to get Charley out of town before something happened. Charley would listen to him if he would listen to anybody. Only, Miguel and he seemed pretty thick. They seemed to have come to an understanding as to what they were going to do. Pete went back to the house and got Tonto Charley's saddle and bridle and spurs.

It was a pretty night, warm and still. Pete mounted and rode down the dark street back of the house.

Tying the horses to the hitch rail at the northwest corner of the plaza, Pete sauntered past the doorway of the saloon midway in the block. Three or four Mexicans stood near the corner, talking. He heard Benavides' name mentioned. The talking ceased as he came up. He turned and walked back. As he again came opposite the doorway, Miguel stepped out and walked with him toward the corner.

"Tonto Charley is in there—and Benavides," said the Mexican. "Charley saw you when you went past. He says you are to go away."

Pete stopped, swung round and faced Miguel.

"Where do you stand in this deal?" he asked in Spanish.

Miguel thrust out his maimed right hand.

"One of Benavides' *vaqueros* did that, when I had the sheep in the Datils. I have waited a long time. I am going back to the *cantina*. But you are a boy—and it is not your fight."

"All right. If you get a chance, tell Charley I've got the horses out here."

Assuming indifference, Pete swung round and started up the street. Miguel sidled back to the saloon doorway and entered. At the far end of the high bar stood Tonto Charley, facing the doorway. Facing him was Benavides, a bottle and two glasses empty, on the bar between them. Across from them, seated at a table, three cowpunchers toyed with a deck of cards. As Miguel came in two Mexicans sitting at a small table toward the back of the room, rose and stepped quietly out through the rear doorway. One of the card players glanced up.

"Hello! You back here again, Miguel?"

"*Sí*. I am here."

"Sit in—and make it a four hand game."

"Go ahead! Show 'em how to play," said Tonto Charley, chuckling.

Benavides, his back to the bar, watched one of the punchers shuffle the cards. Miguel, standing halfway between the front door and the group at the table, curled a cigaret.

"You boys can entertain Miguel," said Benavides. He turned toward Tonto Charley. "I found that horseshoe, Charley."

"Got it with you?"

"Right here!"

And as Benavides went for his gun, the three punchers leaped to their feet and covered Tonto Charley. Charley put up his hands. The bartender dropped behind the bar. As he did so, Pete stepped into the doorway.

"Look out for the kid!" cried Benavides.

Miguel grinned and, humping his shoulders, jerked out his gun and fired at Benavides. Benavides replied. Miguel staggered, but kept on firing. Tonto Charley, laughing, jumped back and began to throw slugs into the group near the table.

Pete threw a shot at the hanging lamp, shattered it and, drawing down on the lamp beyond, blew it to atoms.

"Come on, Tonto!" he cried shrilly.

Tonto Charley backed down the room in the darkness, firing at the flashes that leaped toward him. Pete called again. Charley's gun was empty. He turned and sprang through the doorway.

"This way!" cried Pete.

"Coming," answered Tonto.

Side by side they lurched up the street and round the corner. They jerked the reins loose, mounted and swept up the side street toward the north. At the first cross street they turned and rode toward the river, the horses stretched out on a dead run. Across the river they slowed to the heavy pitch that led to the mesa level above. Tonto Charley reloaded his gun.

"The Mexican got his," said Pete, "and I saw Benavides drop."

"Got it all figured out to suit yourself?" asked Tonto Charley, chuckling.

"No. They had some fresh horses back there in that corral."

Tonto laughed.

"Miguel wired the corral bars before we went into the saloon. It'll take some time to get those bars loose. That gives us a pretty fair start."

THEY rode steadily northward, saving their horses all they could. Tonto Charley seemed to go to sleep as he rode. Several times Pete spoke to him, awakened him, whereat Charley sat straight and rode for awhile before he again nodded. Just before daybreak Pete's horse stepped into a gopher hole, struggled and, too leg weary to pull himself out soon enough, fell and broke his foreleg between the fetlock and the knee.

"Shoot him," said Tonto Charley. "My horse can carry double."

"I can foot it awhile," said Pete.

They went on, Tonto Charley leaning forward, his hands clasping the saddle-horn. The dawn shot long lances of fire across their trail. The cold, gray edge of the eastern hills melted to gold. With the coming of the light, Pete noticed that the back of Tonto Charley's shirt was wet, that the cantle of the saddle was streaked with dry red.

"Hell! I didn't know you were hit," cried Pete.

"I got mine. Pretty soon you'll have a horse to ride—a good one."

Pete gritted his teeth.

"You'll make it all right, Charley."

A few minutes later, as they dropped down into a shallow draw, Tonto Charley lurched forward and slid to the ground. Pete turned him over, unbuttoned his shirt. What he saw told him Tonto Charley had made his last ride. But he was not dead yet. His eyes were closed, the muscles of his jaw rigid. Each breath was a groan he fought to stifle. Pete eased the saddle on Tonto's horse, placed his own hat where it shaded Charley's face, for Charley's hat had been lost during their getaway. Sitting cross-legged beside him, Pete curled a cigaret and smoked. Presently Tonto Charley's heavy eyelids unclosed.

"Did you take a look at the back trail?"

Pete shook his head. But he rose and, climbing the slope of the draw, surveyed the morning desert. Far to the south he saw a black dot that presently separated into several smaller dots and then drew together again. He came back and sat beside Tonto Charley.

"Nothin' in sight, yet," he told him.

"Don't try to git smart with me, kid. You stayed lookin' too long. You take my horse and git out of here."

"You go to hell!"

Tonto Charley raised on his elbow. He tried to grin, but his lower lip sagged.

"Sure! But give me a little time. What's the hurry?" He lay back, and seemed to have ceased breathing.

Pete leaned over him.

"See how near they are," he said.

"What's the difference?" said Pete.

But curiosity drew him to the edge of the draw. He could count the black dots now. Not over an hour away. Tonto Charley was done for. But he might live an hour or more, yet. Reason told Pete to take Tonto Charley's horse and go. But something infinitely more compelling told him he could not do that—that he would stay, and make a fight of it. Pete knew that if he had been down, Tonto Charley would have fought for him until he was killed.

"So long, kid!"

Pete turned swiftly, saw Tonto Charley put the muzzle of his gun against his temple. Before Pete could cry out, or make a move to stop him, Tonto Charley pressed the trigger. His head dropped back and the gun slid slowly from his hand.

Pete staggered into the draw, knelt and laid his hand on Tonto s face.

"So long," he murmured.

Rising swiftly, he shook the hot tears from his eyes. He caught up the hanging reins of the big, iron gray horse, swung to the saddle, and rode on down the draw. Far above him a buzzard circled in the hot, morning sky.

Within the hour the trailers rode down into the draw and dismounted. One of them stooped and picked up Tonto Charley's gun. Another cursed.

"The kid killed him—to get his horse."

The man who had picked up the gun, shook his head.

"No. Tonto knew he was done. And I've heard he liked the kid a whole lot."

HARDLUCK BILL

OVERNIGHT the first snow of the long Arctic winter had quietly settled down upon the placer camp of Frozentoes. Three inches thick it covered the ground and coated like fluffy icing the squat and solid cabin roofs. Though the time was nearly noon, the virgin whiteness of the Boreal blanket lay as yet almost undisturbed by human feet. Frozentoes was in no hurry and quietly demonstrated the fact. Of the blare and turmoil incident to the early days of the stampede there was scarcely a memory left in the quietly ordered camp. The restless, hot blooded followers of the big strikes had quitted the place in disgust more than a year ago when its character as "low pay diggin's" had begun to reveal itself. Since then Frozentoes had settled down to a life of staid respectability and assured permanence.

Down the unmarred smoothness of snow covered Main Street the lone figure of Hardluck Bill drew a halting and uneven furrow as he progressed painfully with the help of a stout and knobby cane. His white and blue striped parka had

A Novelette of an Alaskan Gold Camp

By AUGUST EBERHARDT

evidently been made for a figure of the average size, for it covered the little old man to the top of the moosehide moccasin which he wore on his left foot. His right foot, which he seemed to favor with extreme care, was thickly wound about with gunny sacking.

Before a substantial log cabin near the center of the scattered settlement Hardluck Bill came to a halt. For a moment, while he rested heavily upon his cane, he raised his twinkling and faded blue eyes to the small sign above the door.

U. S. COMMISSIONER
U. S. DEPT. MARSHAL

The whiskered little prospector limped painfully up the steps and knocked at the door of the cabin. Receiving no answer, he boldly swung the door open and entered. He found the United States commissioner for "Frozentoes and Surrounding District" in the act of poising a rusty pole ax above a tightly frozen pile of cooked brown beans, which lay deposited in the middle of the floor. Hardluck Bill remained standing by the door while he watched the judge, who seemed entirely absorbed in the delicate task of cutting a clean wedge from the pile of frozen beans that had retained the mould of the pot in which they had been cooked.

Years of experience of his own had made the little sourdough appreciative of the ticklish job before the commissioner; so he stood silent, expecting momentarily to see hunks of frozen beans scattering all over the floor. But if Hardluck had hoped for this usual result, the commissioner's skill with the pole ax proved a distinct disappointment. At each carefully guided stroke the rusty old ax cleaved deeper in the exact center of the same groove that it had carved for itself in the preceeding stroke—until finally, without the estrangement of a single bean, a neat wedge dropped from the chill pile.

Hardluck Bill silently acknowledged the judge's performance as being far better than he, himself, could have done under the circumstances. But then, he was not unmindful of the fact that Mr. Zebulon Streber, the Unites States commissioner for Frozentoes and Surrounding District, had been a butcher by trade before his activity in party politics had reaped for him the modest reward of commissioner in a backwoods mining camp.

Mr. Streber took the wedge of frozen beans from the floor and placed it in the frying pan sizzling with bacon fat. Then he turned to his visitor.

"Well, what d'you want again?" he asked bruskly.

"I want to know whether you done anything lately ter get me that compensation money which is due me from the Government," the little man responded. "Doc tells me I must rest my leg durin' winter so's ter be fit again in the spring. But with no grub in my shack, this is goin' ter be a tough proposition fer me."

The commissioner for Frozentoes and Surrounding District had shoved his hands deeply into the grease rimmed pockets of his overalls while, with dark, unshaven chin stuck out before him, he regarded his undersized visitor with the

dispassionate eyes of a lately departed codfish.

"I tole you some time ago that I can possibly get that compensation for you from the Government, but also that my labors in your behalf must be properly rewarded. Any lawyer asks his fee, and I have mentioned to you the consideration for which I will undertake your case."

"But this case don't need no lawyer, which you ain't, anyway," the little sourdough argued heatedly. "The accident happened while I was employed in the Government trail gang; an' consequently I'm entitled to the compensation which the Federal Government has fixed for certain accidents which happen to its employees. In my own case, the doctor tells me, this would amount to five hundred dollars. To get this money, all I need is a plain statement of my case by you as commissioner of the district in which the accident happened. I'm sure willin' ter pay you fer the trouble this causes you, but I'll see myself in hell first afore I hand over to you half o' that compensation money which you demand."

The commissioner gave a shrug of his shoulders.

"All right, Mr. Chesty. If you don't want to pay my fee, all I can say is take your case to some other lawyer who'll do it cheaper."

Mr. Streber's decision seemed final, for he turned his attention to the wedge of beans thawing in the frying pan. He knew very well, as he watched the indignant little prospector slam the door behind him, that if Hardluck Bill wished to see his claim adjusted, he would finally have to come to his terms, since there was no lawyer within half a thousand miles of Frozentoes.

AS THE old prospector limped down the steps in front of the commissioner's house he was met by the other occupant of that house—Mr. Patrick Duffy, the United States deputy marshal for Frozentoes and Surrounding District. Mr. Duffy was built upon lines of generous latitude. A perpetual smile upon his round and smoothly glowing face lent him the air of a benign and philanthropically inclined gentleman in easy circumstances; and there was nothing of the gruff appearance about Mr. Duffy's person that one would expect in a man of his stern calling. But then, Mr. Duffy had long ago found out that it does not cost anything to smile. So he smiled upon everybody, upon all occasions and on general principles. Indeed, it was said that Mr. Duffy's broadest and most amiable smile had found expression upon the occasion when he had sprung the trap at the hanging of the Eat'em-up Kid.

Thus, for a moment, as the deputy marshal passed him, Hardluck Bill was treated to a smile of such beatific sweetness that he forgot his own troubles in the sunshine of the other's presence.

"Here goes at least one happy and contented man," the old prospector murmured to himself as he watched the rotund incarnation of amiability enter the house.

The old miner did not see the happy and contented man kick the peacefully slumbering tomcat into the corner of the room by way of announcing his presence to his partner, the commissioner; nor did he hear him ripping off a few red hot paragraphs of profanity while he peeled his frost encrusted parka over his head, and emptied his pockets of their contents of revolver and handcuffs.

From the few sizzling remarks of which the marshal had unburdened himself the commissioner gathered that the mission from which the marshal had returned had, perhaps, not been an entirely satisfactory and successful one.

"Well, where is your prisoner?" Mr. Streber inquired, looking up from the beans in the pan.

"Prisoner—hang it all! I don't believe we'll ever have any use for that fine new jail of ours. Here I been mushing all last night and this morning after what seemed a clear cut case of attack—only to be told by the man who has been stabbed that

his assailant meant him no harm; as if cutting hunks out of a fellow's carcass were just some people's playful way o' showing their fondness. I tell you—" the marshal spat disgustedly on to the woodpile behind the stove—"I tell you the way people in this sleepy camp manages to keep outa jail seems downright indecent. Nobody ever steals anything around here, you can't get a man drunk enough to want to fight, and the only cases of holdup I ever come across is when I go to the store and try to buy something.

"Yep," he added after a moment of gloomy meditation, "this here Alaska is gettin' so where it's plumb stagnatin' in righteousness and order; and the times where a needy Government official could turn an honest penny on the side seems past and gone."

"I don't see what you got to kick about," Mr. Streber reminded his partner. "You get your hundred and fifty a month whether we have a prisoner or not. But look at me! I'm supposed to glean my salary of fifteen hundred dollars a year out of the fines I impose. And the only chance that's offered so far of my cleanin' at least part o' the salary due me, you spoilt for me by being too slow in making the arrest," he added in bitter accusation.

Mr. Duffy was about to make a heated reply, but seemed to think better of it and said nothing. He was aware that the incident to which the commissioner had alluded had remained a constant source of deep regret to the latter ever since it had occurred—at the time when the law, as represented in the persons of Streber and Duffy, had first entered the mining camp of Frozentoes.

At that time the two officials had established themselves in the log building which they still occupied, and had converted a small backroom of the house into a tight little jail. Scarcely had the last bar been bolted to the window of the improvised jail, when four husky Swedes conspired against the country's peace by painting the town red. This incident, so soon after their arrival in the camp, led the two officials to hope that their business would prosper at Frozentoes; and, humored into generous forbearance by the vision of a heavy taffic in crime, the marshal had allowed the happy quartet of Nordics three full days for the display of their effervescent spirits.

When he finally rounded them up before the commissioner, the latter found to his immense chagrin that the merrymakers had spent their last dollar in an effort to bring life into the sleepy camp. In his wrath at being thus cheated out of his honest earnings, Mr. Streber had condemned the four sobered and unhappy Swedes to two months each in jail.

BUT THE little jail room in the back part of the house proved far too small to hold the foursome of husky prisoners. In this emergency the marshal had an ingenious idea. Why not, he suggested, allow the men comparative liberty by employing them in building a new jail that should be large enough to contain the heavy traffic which they expected? The prisoners showed themselves perfectly willing to exchange the wholesome work in the open for the crowded cell in the marshal's house. Before their term had ended these able woodsmen had presented the Government—in the persons of the commissioner and deputy marshal—with a sturdy, log built jail that seemed well able to take care of any emergency that might arise.

That emergency never did arise. The boisterous jamboree of the luckless Swedes had been but a last flare from the dying embers of Frozentoes' ebullient rush days; and since its erection, no one in the chaste community of Frozentoes had laid himself liable by act or deed to taste the efficiency and general utility of the new and languishing jail.

During these moments of silent reverie Mr. Duffy had been breathing gently upon the frost encrusted window before him. Through the peep hole thus created he now gazed sadly out upon a particularly well built log cabin that stood some twenty yards across the lot. Except for

the stout iron bars in front of the windows, the cabin offered no other suggestion of its sinister purpose.

"How much do you figure we could make, if we had a prisoner?" the marshal asked, turning to his partner.

"Well," replied the commissioner, as he took the hot biscuits from the oven, "there is the jail, for which the Government pays us five dollars a day in rent—if it is used. Then the Government allows you a day guard and a night guard, each of which is supposed to get five dollars a day. That three hundred dollars a month for the guards' wages goes through your hands, but the fact is that you really need no mor'en one man to guard a prisoner; and what's more, there's plenty o' men in this camp willin' to spend the winter at an easy job like guarding a prisoner for less money than the Government allows. Also, the rake-off from the money which the Government allows you for the board of prisoner and guards will amount to a worthwhile little sum each month. Altogether it costs the Government around twenty dollars a day to keep a prisoner in a backwoods camp like this, and if we manage the thing right, we should easily be able to divide more than half o' that money among ourselves."

"Yep, I see," acknowledged the deputy as he sat down to partake of the beans and biscuits which the judge had set upon the table. "Just one prisoner, if we had 'im now, would make things jake for us this winter."

"By the way," he remarked, blowing upon a heaped spoonful of beans, "ain't you made a dicker yet with old Hardluck about that compensation claim of his? I seen he was here to visit you again."

"Ain't likely we ever will." The judge snorted indignantly. "That crabbed old fool thinks half the compensation money is too much to pay as a lawyer's fee. He says he'd sooner starve this winter than pay me more than what he considers I ought to get for my trouble."

The deputy marshal had sunk into a silent reverie. With his smooth round jowls engaged in the business of mastication, he stared unseeingly upon the frost coated window across the room. Suddenly he laid down his spoon and rose from the table. Slipping into his parka, he moved toward the door with the cryptic remark for the judge:

"I believe we'll yet have a winter boarder for our new jail. I have an idea and I'm going to see what it's worth."

II

WITH an unctuous smile once more radiating from his pudgy face, the deputy made his way down the rows of log cabins and false-front store buildings that comprised the placer camp of Frozentoes. Beyond the town, where the wooded hillside rose above the frozen creek, a tiny log cabin nestled in the protection of a dense group of spruce trees. The deputy headed for the cabin and knocked at the door.

Upon being bidden to enter, Mr. Duffy assumed his most winning smile and propelled his ample girth sidewise through the narrow entrance. Through the semi-darkness of the cabin Mr. P. Duffy was able to distinguish a little tin Yukon stove upon a raised bed of sand. A diminutive table was attached to the log wall just below a single pane of glass that served as a window. One half of the cabin space was completely occupied by a bunk that stretched for six feet from wall to wall. Upon the bunk sat Hardluck Bill, who figured on the territorial voter's list under his baptismal alias of William Chesty. The little prospector seemed to fit into his diminutive hermitage like a clam into its shell.

Though Mr. Chesty was short of stature, he was long of whiskers. In fact, as some wag had once remarked, if old Bill had been much shorter he would have found it necessary to tie a reef into his whiskers to prevent stepping on them. At the deputy's entrance the little miner was apparently engaged in bandaging his damaged leg.

"Ain't come ter arrest me, Marshal?" old Bill smilingly greeted the official.

"I don't know but what it might not be the best thing for you, Bill, to spend a few months in a nice, comfortable jail and give that bum leg o' yours a rest and a chance for improving," Mr. Duffy replied with jovial pleasantry.

"Now that ain't seech a bad idear, Marshal," old Bill admitted, dropping for a moment into a contemplative attitude. "I know darn' well jail couldn't be much worser for my sick leg than tryin' ter git along here by my lonely self.

"Fact is," he went on, "I'd be right ready ter take you up on your joke an' glad ter take it easy in jail fer a few months, ef it warn't that you'd probably refuse to accept me in your jail unless I earned the right ter enter by committing some crime first."

"It's no joke I'm tellin' you, Bill," reassured the marshal. "I came here for the purpose of offering to take care of you in the fine new jail I had built, knowing that this is about the only way to see you safe through the winter. But, of course, as you say, you can't go to jail without first being convicted of some offense against the law. That, however, is a matter easily fixed, and I leave it to you to choose the nature of your crime."

The old man sat for some time meditatively stroking his gray beard. Then he shook his head.

"I sure wouldn't mind ter be took care of fer a while, even in jail. But the idear o' havin' ter commit some crime first is what gets me off the notion. In all my life I have never done any worser illegal act than gittin' drunk onct in a while an' raisin' a bit o' cain; an' ter be called a criminal in my old days ain't exactly the thing I'm hankerin' after."

From the deputy's face radiated a disarming smile.

"There's crimes an' crimes, Bill," he argued. "We ain't calculating on murder, arson, adultery, or any o' them heavy ones for our purpose. Any little offense against the law will satisfy our present needs. Something, you understand, for which the commissioner can hand you out about three months. Three months!" He shouted with the voice of an auctioneer dangling a priceless bargain before his audience. "How would that suit you for a term of easy life? Or say four, for good measure. Four months would see you nicely over the worst part of the winter and give your leg a swell chance to heal."

Under the tempter's smooth tongued wiles the old man's objections gradually succumbed. Aware of this, the marshal slid closer upon his seat on the bunk, and while his broad face shone like a refulgent moon in the semi-darkness of the cabin, he modulated his voice into the most seductive timbre.

"What about a little larceny?" he cooed. "Say, you go into Rosenduft's store and walk off with a small ham under your parka. It could be arranged so I'd be right there, Johnny-on-the-spot, you know. See the point?" The farsighted marshal playfully dug a stubby forefinger under Hardluck's whiskers. "We'd kill two birds with one stone that way. It would get you into jail *pronto* and without no trouble; while, at the same time, it would show some o' the ginks around this camp that the eye of the law is wide awake at Frozentoes. I'd be catching you in the act, with the corpus delishious, so to speak. What'ye say? It would be a right smart little crime, to my thinking, and worth four months in any commissioner's court."

DURING the marshal's speech the old man had sat immersed in quiet meditation. Now he rose hastily with a protesting gesture of his hands.

"No-o!" he cried. "Nuthin' in the way o' thievin'. Ef I'm bound ter commit a crime it must be in the nature of an honorable transgression—like, fer instance, gittin' drunk an' paintin' the town red."

To this suggestion the marshal sadly shook his head.

"I'm afraid, Bill, gettin' you drunk enough so's to have you commit four months worth of nuisance would be rather

an expensive experiment at the local price of whisky," he opined.

"It's the one offense as I kin see any real attraction in," the old-timer said with a sigh.

"There's others just as good an' invitin', and cheaper by a darn sight," the tempter murmured. "Just consider a bit of assault an' battery. Here you have a charge that no gentleman need be ashamed of, if he takes care to pick the proper person for the assaultee."

At the marshal's last suggestion a quick, eager light flashed from the old man's kindly blue eyes.

"Assault an' battery, you say? Well, well! Wonder I didn't think of it afore. Now that you mention it, it minds me that I been hankerin' fer some time ter commit an offense o' that nature.

"Howsomever, I'd like ter play safe. Wouldn't want Old Butch ter hand me out anything more than a three months' sentence fer the offense. So, ef you kin give me a hint on jest how much batterin' a feller can do fer a matter o' three months, I'd be mighty obliged to you."

"It's hard to say just how much execution in the way of assault one can safely crowd into a penalty of three months," the official replied after some consideration. "Three months is quite a stretch at that; and in my humble opinion it ought to entitle you to the use of a club to do your battering with."

Hardluck's eyes began to glisten at the deputy's advice. He rubbed his calloused hands in gleeful anticipation.

"Without no club I wouldn't have considered the matter a proper an' legal battery," the old man opined as he reached behind his bunk and brought forth the massive alder club that had served him as a cane since he had received the injury to his leg.

The deputy appraised the murderous looking instrument with a doubtful shake of his head.

"If that's the implement of assault you're going to use, I should say that it looks able enough to get you about thirty years in the penitentiary, out of its proper application," he said. "I'd go sorta slow with a formidable weapon like that, if I were you, Bill. Who is the unlucky guy, anywhere, who you have picked for your victim?"

" 'Bout that I ain't quite made up my mind yet," Hardluck replied. "You see, there's two fellers which I considers both proper subjects fer furtherin' the ends o' justice in this case. An' I don't mind tellin' you that one o' them two as I got my eye on is that political butcher friend o' yours."

"What! The judge?" broke in the deputy in alarm. "Gosh, man, he'd give you life; I'm warnin' you."

"No doubt he would," the old man agreed resignedly. "He's mean enough fer anything. An' that minds me now; kin I trust that old grouch ter hand me out no more of a sentence than the three months which you an' me has agreed on? You see, I wouldn't want ter stay in jail much longer than just after New Year. By that time my leg'll be jake agi'n an' besides, after New Year I'll be took care of otherwise. Deephole Johnson's promised me the job o' watchin' his property over at Gold Run about that time, while he takes a trip to the outside ter buy some minin' machinery. So ye see, I can't take a chance of Old Butch givin' me a longer term than three months; or perhaps committin' me over to the grand jury at Fairbanks."

"No danger of the commissioner sending you out of his district. Both him and me likes to see our jail occupied as much as you are looking for a quiet and comfortable home."

The deputy's words seemed to have made the old man thoughtful. He remained silent for some time, and when he spoke there was just a trace of suspicion in his voice.

"So that's the way you fellers feel about it. You need a prisoner fer the new jail o' yours, an' you think that old Hardluck'll be a likely, quiet sort of a malefactor ter have around. I had a notion it warn't all jest milk o' human

kindness as brung you here," he pronounced sadly.

"Indeed, it was to help you out the best way I can manage that got me the idea of caring for you in jail, in the first place," the marshal hastened to explain. "Of course," he added, "we make a few dollars in rent that the Government pays us for the use of the jail."

"The Government payin' you rent on the jail?" old Bill exclaimed in surprise. "I thought the buildin' was Government property, seein' that all the work o' puttin' it up has been done by them four Swede prisoners."

"The law doesn't expect a prisoner to do any regular work way off here in these frontier jails," the deputy explained. "The work which the prisoners did in putting up that building was done as a special, personal favor to the commissioner and me. So, you see, there can't be no mistake about the ownership of that building, and I feel that we are entitled to the rent which the Government is ready to pay us."

There was considerable doubt expressed in the shake of the old sourdough's head, as he replied:

"Well, maybe so; though it do look sorta complicated, seein' that the prisoners been eatin' the grub furnished by the Government while they was busy on that special, personal favor for you an' Butch. Anyway, 'tain't none o' my business. What I wants ter know right now is: kin I be sure that I won't git no more'n three months in jail in case I does a bit of assaultin'?"

"Three months is the word," the marshal affirmed solemnly.

"That's settled, then." Hardluck nodded, satisfied. "Now I want ter know, kin I bring my belongin's with me when I move over to your place?" he asked, pointing to a large shelf above his bunk heaped with mineral ore. "I want ter pass the time studyin' them ore samples," he explained.

"You can bring a pet moose along if that'll keep you from feeling lonesome," the marshal insured, with large hearted liberality. "Besides," he added, "you'll have the guard with you all day, to play cards, or chew the rag with. He'll be there just to be of service to you, to do the cooking, keep the place warm an' such."

"Fine! How about the grub?"

"Three squares a day," the deputy pledged with an expansive gesture.

"That's more than I gits in a week o' livin' here," Hardluck admitted with a sad glance at a pot of cold cornmeal beside the stove. "Now, about some terbacky?"

"All the tobacco you can use," his generous well-wisher promised. "Just consider these matters settled, Bill. Is there anything else that you think you would wish to have to make things comfortable for you at—at my place?" he asked, rising from his position on the bunk.

"No," responded the old man, quite overcome by the ready philanthropy of his visitor. "The way we got things arranged will see me through fine."

"All right then," pronounced the marshal as he made ready to leave. "When is this assault and battery goin' to come off?"

" 'Soon as I kin git uptown," Hardluck responded, likewise rising from the bunk. "You go now an' git the wheels o' justice ready an' oiled an' I'll tend to the crimin'."

III

IF THERE had ever existed any excuse for naming Frozentoes' principal resort of sociability the Grand Stampede, it was certainly not apparent on the afternoon when Hardluck Bill limped across its ice encrusted doorsill and entered the long, dark, and low ceilinged barroom.

About half a dozen parka clad and moccasined figures formed a whiskered garland around the great, glowing oil drum that did very able service as a heating stove. Each of these silent oldtimers seemed deeply engrossed in some grave and knotty problem of his own; and

it seemed to Hardluck Bill that about the only way whereby that circle of introspective philosophers could be induced to partake in a grand stampede would have been for some wild eyed stranger to drop into their midst and offer to deposit half a case of dynamite in the red hot stove between them.

In marked contrast to his chaste surroundings Toothsome Harry, the husky, resplendent bartender of the Grand Stampede, stood forth like a picture from the *Police Gazette* in a volume of "Lives of the Saints". Everything about Harry was shining. From the top of his oily black hair—pasted in an artful flourish across his two inches of forehead—to the tips of his patent leather boots six feet below, all was glowing, glossy and sleek.

Though his face had a rather unfinished appearance, representing, so to speak, but a muddy outline of what might have been, there was yet something in the rudimentary plane of Toothsome's physiognomy that attracted immediate and absorbing attention. That something lay revealed whenever his mouth opened to smile, in the most prominent, most dazzling white pair of buckteeth ever seen away from a beaver lodge.

Nor did Harry exercise any undue reluctance in the display of his remarkable dental ornament. He loved to smile, and he rewarded his own jokes with the most generous, most expansive and most lasting of grins. He considered himself a humorist of no mean order, though his witty shafts were invariably steeped in the acid of sarcasm.

However, in the exercise of his peculiar gifts, Toothsome proceeded with due regard for the interests of the house and the safety of his own skin. Experience had shown him that the best and most satisfactory targets for his witty barbs were the little fellows, especially such little fellows as had outlived the impetuosity of their youth and had no other comeback left than to gnash their teeth and slink from the presence of the merciless Harry.

Now a man like Hardluck Bill, who was never known to leave anything more valuable in the Grand Stampede than some carelessly distributed libations of tobacco juice on the sawdust floor; a man whose size and age seemed to preclude any active retaliation and who, in addition, was handicapped by a game leg—such a man seemed an eminently safe and worthy subject for the bright bartender's sarcastic raillery. On many previous occasions the waggish Harry had found the auspicious combination too tempting to allow it to pass unchallenged. Now, when he saw the little prospector limping across the entrance of the barroom, he felt it incumbent upon him to disperse the pervading gloom by a few bright remarks at the expense of the impecunious newcomer.

Hardluck Bill had slowly wandered down the length of the bar, past a table where four ancient profligates sowed a belated crop of wild oats by indulging in a game of pinocle. Two steps beyond, and near the end of the bar, he came to a halt in front of the large crayon picture representing Blackjack McDonald, the proprietor of the Grand Stampede, in the characteristic attitude of leading a glass of whisky to its proper and final destination. Standing thus with his back turned on the alert Harry, he did not observe the sly wink which the latter threw in his direction from the corner of his left eye, and for the benefit of the hoary card sharps, who happened to be the talented humorist's particular and most ardent admirers.

"Toothsome 's workin' up to some devilment," one of the whiskered sages predicted expectantly, as he nudged his neighbors and drew their attention to the slowly developing spark of intelligence upon Harry's sketchily drawn features.

"Working up" was exactly the process followed by this gay spark when about to give birth to one of his witty brain children. Rarely did Toothsome's sarcastic thunder roll out of a clear sky. He believed in a long and thorough aim before he allowed the string of his stinging wit to twang. He felt that, the longer the

aim, the deadlier would prove the shaft.

Thus, after about five minutes of hard thinking Toothsome rewarded his expectant admirers with another wink, this time from his right eye, indicating to the four venerables that the geyser of his trenchant humor was rapidly approaching the spouting point.

Hardluck had meanwhile retained his position before the inspiring picture of the proprietor of the Grand Stampede, all unaware, it seemed, of the storm that was brewing behind his back. Suddenly he heard the bartender's voice addressing apparently no one in particular:

"Seems as if some people has all the luck in the world an' can't even tell how they come by it. There's ole Hardluck Bill, f'rinstance. He been scratchin' around the mountains fer forty years in search of a vein without ever findin' as much as a stringer, until that accident happened to his laig las' summer. Since then, they tells me, he's the happy owner of as fine a showin' of a varicose vein as ever cropped out along the calf of a man's laig."

BEFORE this Hardluck Bill had invariable accepted the bartender's personal quips with the humility becoming a guest who contributed nothing more valuable to the prosperity of the house than his presence. For some time he stood, apparently oblivious to the fountain of wit that spouted gaily at his expense. He kept studying the picture of the only man in the house who ever seemed to take a drink. If there was anything to indicate that he felt the sting of Toothsome's irony, it was in that his hand gripped tighter the stout knob on top of his alder club.

The boisterous guffaw of the four ancients that rewarded the latest flashes from the satirical Harry came to an abrupt termination when, quick as a flash, the little man turned on his heel. By some miraculous trick of sleight-of-hand, the stout alder club had suddenly changed its position in the bearer's fist. The heavy knob on its top came swinging through the air with the rapidity of a bolt of lightning and crashed squarely upon the witty mouth of the hapless humorist.

A bloodcurdling scream issued from the throat of the ill-treated wag. A scream so piercing and awful that it aroused even the stoical philosophers by the stove into some show of attention. They came crowding around the injured man where he lay on the floor, bawling at the top of his voice, while his two hundred and twenty pounds of bone and flesh squirmed in spasmodic convulsions as if in evidence of imminent dissolution.

Suddenly, above the howling of the damaged humorist and the confusion of voices arising from the group surrounding him, there sounded an authoritative note from the entrance of the saloon.

"What's going on here?" it inquired with stern brevity.

The voice was the voice of the law, as personified in the presence of Deputy Marshal P. Duffy. While that important person made his hurried way down the length of the room, the assembled crowd could not help but be impressed at the celerity with which the strong arm of justice made its appearance when needed.

"What's been doin' here?" the marshal demanded sternly, while he bent over the unfortunate Harry to learn the extent of his injuries.

"That bully over there 's been tryin' ter murder poor innercent Harry," one of the bartender's admirers volunteered, while pointing an accusing finger in the direction of the undersized and apparently quite unconcerned brute.

"Murder—hell!" was Mr. Duffy's contemptuous pronouncement after a cursory examination of the blood and tear smeared face of the sufferer.

"Git up, you bludderin' ninny!" he addressed the sobbing giant. "There's nothing the matter with you except havin' your buckteeth knocked out." Then, turning to the excited audience, "Who d'you say is the guilty party?"

"There—"one of the bartender's friends once more pointed out the callous evildoer

—"there's the ruffian as started the roughhouse."

The marshal approached the dangerous one.

"What, you, Mr. Chesty?" he exclaimed in well simulated surprise. "The idea o' you takin' advantage of your size and starting a ruckus among these here peace loving citizens!"

Then, while the fleshy hand of the law came to rest heavily upon the malefactor's shoulder, the marshal pronounced sternly:

"You are under arrest, Mr. Chesty. And I warn you that anything you may say will be used against you!"

Evidently the ferocious Tartar had no words to add to the accomplished deed. Quietly he ranged himself in front of the deputy, ready to be led into captivity.

"Bring that blubbering baby along," the marshal ordered, pointing to the blighted humorist. "If the judge happens to be at home we may get a hearing on this case at once."

Thus the procession started, the diminutive fire eater heading the party in front of the marshal, followed at a safe interval by the cowed heavyweight, shedding copious tears while leaning heavily upon the supporting arms of two of his admirers. The body of the procession consisted of a mixed following of sad eyed philosophers and excited and argumentative partisans.

Mr. Zebulon Streber, the United States Commissioner for Frozentoes and Surrounding District *did* happen to be at home when the party reached there. They found him sitting with darkened brow behind a large, legal looking tome. For those among the party who knew the place from earlier visits, it came as a distinct surprise to find the usually dirty and littered floor of the commissioner's room carefully swept for once. It struck them as a happy coincidence—almost, it seemed, as if his honor had had oracular forewarning that his Solomonic skill would that day be called into requisition.

The trial which immediately followed was of the briefest ever witnessed by any of the excited audience that crowded the courtroom. After the tear stained humorist's sobbing report had been corroborated by some of his admiring friends, his Honor turned upon the accused.

"Prisoner, do you plead guilty to the charges preferred against you?" he asked with an ominous frown upon the judicial brow.

"Ef you means did I give this smart Alec somethin' ter remember that it ain't always safe ter make fun of unoffendin' people, then I says, you bet I did, an' glad I done it," the hardened evildoer replied in cheerful affirmation.

In a moment his Honor was on his legs and, grasping a piece of stove wood from the pile beside him, he pounded it on the table in the manner of an auctioneer using his gavel.

"That settles the case," the voice of justice thundered through the suddenly created stillness. "It's six months in the local jail for you, Mr. Chesty. Marshal, lead the prisoner away!"

Before the dumbfounded Mr. Chesty could grasp the reality of the deception that had been worked upon him, the smiling marshal had laid his large, fleshy hands upon his shoulders and had whisked him through the back door, obligingly held open by his Honor, the judge, himself.

Thus was justice swiftly and wisely meted out in the placer camp of Frozentoes, to the satisfaction of almost every one but the man most affected by the judgment. That night, while the whiskered camp philosophers gathered in the Grand Stampede and marveled at the proficiency with which the law was taken care of in the hands of such experts as Streber and Duffy, Hardluck Bill sat upon his virgin cot in the new and lonely jail—that was to be his home for six long months instead of the three which the marshal had promised him—and chewed his whiskers in his rage at having allowed himself to be so easily caught in the snare of the scheming officials.

IV

IF THE acquisition of a prisoner for their new and languishing jail had come to the two needy officials as a blessing in the shape of sundry extra revenues and perquisites, there was yet another person who was benefited by it to the extent of his most ambitious dreams. That person was Joe Potage, an humble camp follower, a hewer of wood and drawer of water, who, finding himself suddenly raised by the marshal to the exalted position of jail guard, felt that he had attained the very pinnacle of human aspirations.

As the long standing and ardent admirer of the smiling deputy, the little Frenchman would have been willing to accept the job of guarding the prisoner for no more reward than to be allowed to dwell within the radiant atmosphere of the marshal's sunny presence. However, his large hearted patron would not allow the admiring Joe to work for him for nothing. Indeed, such was not the great man's way of doing business. Thus, every first of the month his generous wellwisher called the humbly bowing Joe into his office and laid before him two pay sheets to sign. Upon the first of these documents, calling for a hundred and fifty dollars for the month's wages, the little Frenchman slowly and painstakingly would draw a simple cross between the name of "Joe Potage" and the designation "Day Guard". For this service the marshal would hand the grateful signer seventy-five dollars in United States legal tender.

Another pay sheet, calling for the same amount of money, but bearing the name of Ivan Macarovich, would then be placed before the willing deponent. Once more Joe would draw his cross in the space between the name "Macarovich" and the designation "Night Guard." Here again reward would duly follow the good deed; this time in the shape of a big, round silver dollar. Thus Joe Potage—receiving a whole seventy-six dollars each month "for do almos' noth*eeng*," as he expressed it—had ample reason to feel satisfied with his happy lot; and he showed his gratitude in a deep devotion to his smiling and large hearted patron.

During the early days of Hardluck's incarceration both the marshal and the commissioner paid frequent visits to the new jail across the lot, to feast their eyes on their precious acquisition, rubbing their hands while fondly ogling their prisoner, much as if old Bill had been a prize laying hen which they had won in a raffle. On these occasions nothing in the marshal's behavior reminded the prisoner of the slight mistake that had been made in the matter of his prearranged sentence. Since Hardluck Bill himself never alluded to the trick that had been played upon him in any other way than by maintaining an attitude of icy reserve against the blandly smiling official, Mr. Duffy tactfully abstained from touching the sore spot by any show of embarrassment on his part, or the offer of an explanation of his questionable conduct in the matter.

Like most of the frontier jails, the lockup at Frozentoes offered none of the rigorous discipline usually associated with the idea of a penal institution. The heavy door of birch planks was scarcely ever bolted upon the prisoner, and the latter was enabled to come forth for a breath of fresh air whenever he felt so inclined. The willing Joe Potage had made several trips to the former home of his charge and had transferred a number of heavy sacks of ore samples to the old man's new abode; in the study of which old Hardluck relieved much of the tedium of his existence.

Joe, who slept in the outer, or guard room, of the jail building, also did the cooking and served the contracted "three squares a day," which prisoner and guard ate together. As a conversationalist and companion the happy Joe was less stimulating, since most of his remarks tended toward extolling the virtues of his smiling patron, a subject upon which his prisoner consistently refused to show any interest whatsoever.

New Year came and with it a message

from Gold Run, advising the old miner that the promised job of watching Deephole Johnson's property during the latter's absence was now open and waiting for him. By this time Hardluck's injured leg had healed to a point where he could easily have held down the job and thereby earned for himself the necessary grubstake for next season's prospecting. But, inasmuch as he had still to serve three more months of his six months' sentence, Hardluck Bill was regretfully compelled to decline the offer of the job.

If after this bitter disappointment anything more had been lacking to rouse the old man's smoldering resentment against his jailers into a dogged determination for revenge, that exigency was speedily provided for by the ingenious and efficient Mr. Duffy. This observant official had not long remained unaware of his prisoner's improved health, and unwilling, apparently, to see potential industry to go waste, he had forthwith initiated the old miner into the homely duties of providing wood for the residence of his jailers, of making their beds and in a general way ministering toward the greater domestic happiness of the pleased purveyors of the law.

EVERY day thereafter old Hardluck spent an hour or more in the residence of his jailers in his capacity of promoter of the official comfort. But while he concealed a galling humiliation at his new task under an outward show of quiet resignation, his naturally nimble wit was forever on the lookout for the opportunity he craved.

And one day, toward the close of his jail term, he believed he had found the chance for which he had been looking. He had come across it while sweeping up the cigar ashes around Mr. Duffy's littered desk. It came to him in the shape of a letter—a short letter, it is true—but for the far-sighted Mr. Chesty it seemed charged with momentous possibilities. It read:

Fairbanks, March 11.

Dear Duffy:—

A word to the wise! Mr. G. Brown, the new Federal Marshal, has arrived at Fairbanks from the States and has just been sworn in. He is about to start on a trip of inspection through his division, and will reach Frozentoes on the stage that is due there March 20.

You cannot fail to recognize him as soon as he gets off the stage. He is a tall, bulky man and has a large wen on the left side of his nose.

Hoping that this little note will reach you in time to be prepared for the visit of your new superior and thereby help you to keep your job, I am,

Always your friend,

—G.H.S.

"The twentieth of March," murmured old Hardluck as he carefully replaced the little note among the pile of papers on the desk. "That'd be day after termorrow now. An' the weekly stage usually gits here 'bout dark. A large wen on the left side o' his nose? Hm-m, that's somethin' worth rememberin', it seems."

V

FOR THE dual personality of Potage-Macarovich, day and night guard of the jail at Frozentoes, the twentieth of March proved a day of unusual stir and bustle. Early that morning Mr. Duffy had come around and had instructed his faithful acolyte to subject the entire penal establishment to a thorough cleaning and scrubbing. Inasmuch as his prisoner had complained of a recurring pain in his bum leg, the willing Joe had turned to the task single handed. All through the day he had been busy scouring the floor, polishing the stove and making up the two bunks in the prisoner's cell with a neatness and precision that smacked of military drill.

Just as the slow, arctic gloaming of evening began to descend upon the snow covered landscape the deputy paid a final visit of inspection to the jail and noted with a satisfied smile the immaculately cleaned guard room. He opened the door to the adjoining cell and, sticking his head into the room, illuminated it with the sunshine of his smiles. Suddenly the same head shrunk back as if struck by an invisible club.

"Where's Hardluck?" the marshal

gasped, with not a trace of the former smile left upon his ample face.

"Ze Meestaire 'Ardluck? She is in ze cell," the faithful servitor replied with easy assurance and without looking up from his work.

"The hell she is!" the alarmed deputy stormed. "This place is empty!"

The consternation depicted upon the face of his worshiped patron caused Joe Potage to drop his work and to enter the cell of his charge. Dumbfoundedly, the unhappy day and night guard gazed around the empty room, peeped under the bunks and even lifted the lid of a tin tobacco box, as if he suspected his prisoner to have taken recourse to the Tom Thumb trick. In the end he had to concede that the prisoner was really nowhere to be found within his legal habitat.

"*Sacre bleu!* I see heem 'ere just before one mineete," he exclaimed in bovine perplexity. "Per'aps ze little shrimp she walk out when I am busee, when I not pay ze attention."

"Not pay attention?" thundered the enraged deputy, while he shook the unfortunate Joe by the shoulders. "What for, d'you think, I'm handin' you all that money every month—but to pay attention that your prisoner doesn't walk away from you?"

Just then the faint, melodious tinkling of sleigh bells rang across the silence of the snow covered valley. For a moment the marshal strained his ears to the distant sound, and the habitual smile, which had tried to rise to his countenance after his sudden, angry outbreak, died in the very act of being born.

"Do you hear that?" he addressed the crushed day and night guard in a hoarse whisper. "That's the Fairbanks stage, bringing the marshal here to pay me a visit of inspection."

"Ze marshal?" breathed the astonished Joe. "*Zut*, I have believe ze marshal she is you, Meestaire Doofee."

"Me? I'm just his deputy. The man that's comin' is the marshal. He's my boss, you understand? He can fire me just as easy as I shall kick you outa here if you don't produce your prisoner before the stage reaches town."

For a moment the Frenchman stood gaping at the surprise of the revelation. He had always imagined that there could exist no more exalted position than that held by his idol, Mr. Duffy. When he finally began to grasp the idea that the absence of the prisoner might spell ruin and disgrace for his admired patron, Joe Potage waxed heroic in his endeavor to make good his remissness.

"*Mort de Dieu!*" he swore. "I bring back zat bunch of whiskers, if I have to keel heem first to do it!"

"Just a moment," the deputy cautioned the ready homicide. "If you see a stranger with a large wen on the left side of his nose get off the stage, don't make a scene before *him*. He's the marshal I expect."

FOR MORE than an hour, while he paced nervously upon the floor of the jail building, the deputy's round face never showed even a ripple of his habitual smile. Indeed, it was a very anxious full moon face that glowed wanly through the gathering darkness of the guard room, a moon obscured by threatening storm clouds. It did not respond with even one stray beam of friendliness when the commissioner entered and lighted the kerosene lamp upon the table.

"I been hunting for that little runt all over the town, and did not discover him until just now," the judge announced as he screwed up the wick.

"And you didn't bring him back?" the marshal exploded.

"Hold your dogs, old top," advised Mr. Streber. "I didn't bring him back because, when I found him at the roadhouse, he seemed to be in earnest conversation with Marshal Brown."

"With the marshal! Oh, well, the cat is out of the bag. I might as well go to him myself and turn in my badge before he comes here and hands me the sack."

"I doubt if it's as bad as all that," Mr. Streber encouraged his crestfallen partner.

"When I saw the marshal and Hardluck sitting together by the stove in the roadhouse I passed by them a few times casual-like, and the scraps of their conversation I picked up had nothing at all to do with your business here. Seems rather they were talking of mines an' prospecting."

"Maybe the bloomin' idiot isn't even aware that he is talking to the United States marshal?"

Mr. Streber shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't tell," he said. "Anyway, I wouldn't give up as easy as all that, if I were you. I found out that Marshal Brown will leave town again on the stage tomorrow forenoon; and considering the short time left him for his visit to you, we might yet find some means to pull through this unscathed. I've left Joe Potage at the roadhouse, told him to hang around and listen to what they are talking and to report here immediately if anything interesting is about to come off."

Just then the soft, hurried steps of moccasined feet were heard approaching on the frozen snow outside. The door opened, and in the light of the kerosene lamp stood outlined the panting figure of Joe Potage. Throwing both his arms into the air in a dramatic gesture of alarm and despair, he exclaimed breathlessly—

"She is come!"

"Who's she that's coming?" the marshal barked impatiently.

"Ze Meestaire 'Ardluck and ze boss marshal."

"Goodby!" The deputy groaned and sank heavily upon a bench. "Then Brown knows all about this unhappy business of our prisoner running about loose?"

"*Mais non.* Ze marshal she not suspect one theeng 'bout Meestaire 'Ardluck she is ze prisoner. Ze Meestaire 'Ardluck she tell ze boss marshal she owns thees place, and she has invite heem to spend ze night 'ere. She say thees is bettaire place to sleep than ze musty bunks in ze road'ouse. Ze Meestaire Brown she make ze accept, and ze two of them she is come 'ere pretty damn' soon."

"What! Hardluck told the marshal that he owned this jail and he has invited him here as his guest? Well, of all the gall . . ."

"Don't you think we'd better get out of here if this is the case?" said the commissioner.

Removed to their living quarters across the lot, the three of them hastily constituted an emergency council of war. Mr. Streber, whose office as commissioner was in no way affected by the coming of the United States marshal, and who, therefore, was the only one present able to submit a cool headed judgment, reviewed the situation in the following terms:

"There can be no longer any question," he said, "that old Hardluck is well aware of Marshal Brown's identity. By inviting the marshal to the jail as his guest he's trying to play a cruel joke on you; probably got it in for you for a number of reasons, and is now trying to get even with you in this rather original way. Anyway, having gone so far in his little game, I do not think it likely now that he will tell the marshal anything about the true circumstances. He leaves it to you, either to help him to play his little joke to the finish, or otherwise, like a fool, get angry and give the show away."

"What d'ye mean by my helpin' that runt to play this bum joke on me?" the deputy demanded querulously.

"I mean that the only way out of your difficulty is that you must take your cue from Hardluck and conform to anything he is pleased to tell the marshal."

"But what am I going to do to provide a prisoner?" Mr. Duffy questioned in despair. "The marshal knows I have a prisoner here, and he'll naturally want to look at him when he comes to see me."

Once more Mr. Streber was able to come to the rescue with a bright idea.

"We still have our old jail in the back part of our house here, the one we've been using for a lockup before the new prison was built. Now, considerin' that the marshal doesn't know any of us by sight, and certainly can have no idea how the

prisoner looks, it strikes me that almost any man could play the rôle of the prisoner with success during the short time the marshal will have to spare for his visit."

Mr. P. Duffy heaved a heavy sigh.

"There's a chance that your scheme may work," he admitted. "What d'ye say, Joe? D'ye think you could manage to play prisoner for a few hours?"

"*Zut!* No!" the unhappy guard exclaimed. "Ze boss marshal she see me at ze road'ouse. I'm damn' 'fraid she make ze recognize."

Against this plain statement no argument could prevail. For a moment a painful silence reigned in the room. It was presently relieved by Mr. Streber, who spoke as if addressing no one in particular.

"As far as providing a prisoner is concerned, I don't mind helping a friend out of a difficulty, though that same friend may have failed to do as much for me when he had a chance," he offered with a glance at the deputy that made the latter squirm under the memory of his remissness in the case of the four opulent Swedes.

"I feel sure that Mr. Brown has not noticed me at the roadhouse," the commissioner continued, "and since he has no business with me as commissioner, I am free and willing to play the rôle of prisoner."

Thus were the planks laid to bridge the dangerous ditch which the playfully inclined Hardluck Bill had dug for the deputy. And none too soon, it seemed, for presently they heard the voice of the old miner approaching down the street, in animated conversation with another voice, which Mr. Streber and the guard recognized as that belonging to the newly installed United States marshal.

VI

IN THE company of his faithful servitor the anxious deputy stationed himself under the window outside the jail, where they could see and hear everything that went on within. They had scarcely taken up their positions when they saw Mr. Brown enter through the doorway and stop in the middle of the room as if in surprise.

"This looks familiar," they heard him exclaim, while he looked about him with the eyes of a connoisseur amidst such surroundings. "Why the bars on the window, Mr. Chesty? The place reminds me of a jail."

"Ha-ha! Does it?" the old prospector cackled in response. "You ain't the first one as got that impression, Mr. Brown. It's some crazy idea of the fellers as built this place, I s'pose, that made them put bars afore the windows.

"But you must be hungry," Hardluck suggested, changing the subject. "Jest set down there an' look at them ore samples I tole you of, while I go an' get my man here ter cook us somethin' to eat."

"You got a servant here?" Mr. Brown looked up in surprise.

"Waal, couldn't call him a sarvint exackly; he comes more nearer the poor relation class o' dependints, if you know what I mean. Earns his keep here by doin' the chores around the place."

"Hey, Joe, ye raskil!' the two eavesdroppers presently heard the old man call out into the night. "Where you keepin' yourself? Come here this instant—I need some sarvice!"

"You 'ear heem?" whispered the scandalized Joe into the deputy's ear. "He lak for me to cook ze supper. What shall I do?"

"Doggone his impudence!" Mr. Duffy swore under his breath. "Why, go and do anything he tells you," he ordered in desperation.

As a consequence the poor relation's voice sounded presently from the entrance of the guard room.

"All right, Meestaire 'Ardluck," it said. "I am come immediate."

"I got a guest here ternight, an' I want you ter fix us something fer supper that's got some smack to it," the generous host addressed his man.

"Ze grub box she is emptee, and ze

store she make ze close," Joe replied while gazing with a terrified expression over the little miner's shoulder where Mr. Brown was visible in the next room, apparently immersed in a study of ore samples.

"No grub on hand?" Hardluck questioned. "Well, now, that is awkward. But, let me see . . ."

With his face turned toward the window of the guard room, Hardluck Bill was lost for the moment in the perplexing question of how to provide the victuals for the promised feast, when suddenly his attention was drawn to the spectacle of a very pale full moon rising slowly above the level of the window sill. For a moment the celestial orb hovered, smiling wanly into the room. Then, as old Bill moved a step closer to the window, it suddenly disappeared again below the horizon of the window sill, defying in its swift descent all known cosmic laws.

The strange sidereal phenomenon which he had just witnessed had apparently failed to strike its beholder with awe. Instead, the old man's wrinkled face twisted into a grim smile of satisfaction and, while he remained turned in the direction where the bulbous orb had made its miraculous descent, he spoke in a loud voice:

"I tell you what we'll do, Joe. You go over to the depity marshal's house an' see what ye kin borrow from him fer ternight's supper. Tell Duffy my regards, an' ef he couldn't lend us them three willow grouse he's got hangin' in his meat cashe. Likewise ask him fer some potatoes, a can o' mushrooms, a couple of cans o' pineapples an' half a dozen o' his cigars. That'll be about all, I think. I know Pat'll be mighty glad ter oblige an old friend an' neighbor. Now go an' hurry back with the stuff."

As old Bill returned to the jail room the marshal looked up from the study of the ore samples and inquired:

"I heard you making mention of the deputy marshal. Does he live somewhere near here?"

"Yep, he's my next door neighbor. His house is right across the lot."

"You seem to live in pretty good understanding with him?"

"With Pat? I should say so. He's been takin' a good deal o' interest in me ever since last fall when I was laid low with that bum leg o' mine."

"Your leg doesn't seem to bother you much now, Mr. Chesty?"

"No, it's 'bout healed up; an' by the time the snow's gone I expect ter hike it out o' this burg."

"Leave for good?"

"Mos' likely. There ain't much in this place that's liable ter draw me back again."

For some time the marshal looked around the room with a critical eye. Presently he inquired—

"Intend to sell this place when you leave?"

Hardluck shrugged his shoulders in a noncommittal way.

"Pretty poor chance fer sellin' any sort o' property in a slow camp like this," he grunted.

THE CONVERSATION slumped while Mr. Hardluck's man returned with the viands that his friendly neighbor had so generously provided. Under the experienced sourdough's direct superintendence a sumptuous meal soon materialized upon the table, to which all present did full justice—the poor relation going even so far in his onslaught on the unaccustomed dainties as to gorge himself to the point of choking.

By the time the smoke of their cigars rose to the rafters above, Mr. Brown remarked—

"I wish to get up early in the morning, as I want to spend an hour with your friend, Mr. Duffy, before the stage sets out again."

His host nodded comprehendingly, while he pointed to one of the two bunks in the cell.

"Any time you care ter roll in, your bunk is waitin' fer you," he said.

The eavesdropping Mr. Duffy pulled the flops of his fur cap over his frostbitten

ears and slunk from under the jail window in the direction of his home. He had heard enough for that night.

Mr. Zebulon Streber, though quite willing to help a friend out of a tight corner, could see no sense in the deputy's proposal that he should spend the night in the old jail, so as to make quite sure that everything would be in readiness for the marshal's visit early in the morning.

Mr. Streber very much disliked the idea of exchanging the soft spring mattress of his own celibate couch for the unyielding planks of the prison cot, even for one single night. While they were both occupied in removing from the little old jail room in the back part of the house the dried fish that served as feed for the deputy's dogs, Mr. Streber pointed out the irrefutable truth that, even after the removal of the dried fish from the place, there would be left enough of their peculiar fragrance to spoil the sleep of any man not an Eskimo. There would be plenty of time, he argued, for him to move into the musty old jail room after he had refreshed himself for the coming ordeal by a good night's rest in his own bed.

The haunted and nervous deputy considered the commissioner's motion too risky for adoption. He cut short his partner's arguments in the most effective manner—by slamming the jail door on him while Mr. Streber stood in the middle of the room, subjecting it to a final, critical survey.

"No halfway measures goes with me, pardner," the harassed deputy spoke through the barred opening in the door. "Havin' offered yourself to play the part of the prisoner, I feel it's up to me to see to it that you make a complete success of it."

With these words Mr. Duffy turned the key in the lock and left the surprised and enraged Mr. Streber to spend the night as best he might.

Long before the day dawned Mr. P. Duffy rose from a restless and nightmare disturbed sleep. Stationing himself at the back window of the room, he watched nervously to see the smoke rising from the chimney of the jail, an event that would announce the approach of the most crucial hour in his official career.

When at last he beheld the thin, white column curling in the brisk morning air above the jail building, Mr. Duffy busied himself by decorating the table with a property breakfast, that was meant to convey the impression of his utter unpreparedness for the coming visit.

The dreaded moment was presently ushered in by a knocking at the front door. While Mr. Duffy hastily grabbed a cold slice of toast and began to butter it with an unsteady hand, he called out in the most cheerful voice he could muster under the circumstances—

"Come in!"

"Good morning, neighbor," chirruped the voice of Hardluck Bill, as the little prospector breezed into the room and held wide the door for his companion to enter. "I brung you a visiter—Mr. Brown, the new United States marshal.

"Mr. Brown—" he turned to his companion, while he extended his right hand in a ceremonious gesture toward the trembling deputy— "meet my neighbor, Mr. Duffy."

"This—this is a—surprise, indeed," Mr. Duffy stammered as he rose, toast in hand. Mr. Duffy seemed overwhelmed by the unexpected visit from his superior officer.

"Hadn't meant it that way," cordially replied Mr. Brown, shaking hands with his deputy. "I intended to see you last night, but your neighbor, Mr. Chesty, talked so interestingly about mining and also had the kindness to invite me to his residence that it became too late to call."

After Mr. Duffy's hospitable neighbor had returned to his own fireside, the two officials sat down and talked upon matters concerning their department. After some time of this, Mr. Brown pulled out his watch and remarked:

"You have a prisoner here, Mr. Duffy? I should like to have a look at him before the stage leaves."

"Certainly, Mr. Brown. Step right back here," the deputy replied with a wan smile as he led his superior to the barred door in the rear of the building.

VII

MR. ZEBULON STREBER, having passed an exceedingly bad night, felt consequently in exceedingly ill humor and, what is more, Mr. Zebulon Streber did not care a tinker's dam who knew it.

Thus the meeting between the visiting marshal and the pseudo prisoner turned out anything but amiable, at least as far as the acrimonious Mr. Streber was concerned. To the marshal's cheery, "Good morning, my man. How are you?" the prisoner responded with the expressive countenance of a caged and disgruntled gorilla. With a week's growth of beard upon his chin, with a dark and heavily clouded brow above a face naturally inclined to register sulkiness, Mr. Streber, as he paced restlessly to and fro in his narrow cage, played to perfection the part of the hardened evildoer, without even being aware of the extent of his histrionic powers.

His partner's churlish behavior toward the visiting marshal caused the deputy some uneasiness. In his endeavor to relieve the situation, and at the same time bring forward a valid excuse for the prisoner's surly unresponsiveness, the deputy turned to Mr. Brown—

"He's a bit hard of hearing," he explained to the marshal.

Scarcely had the words left his mouth when Mr. Duffy wished ardently to be able to re-inhale into the innermost fastnesses of his system the incautious words he had just spoken; for the marshal being thus informed of the man's defective hearing, felt himself no longer restrained by the dictates of delicacy and good form from dwelling with amiable freedom and openness upon the impressions he had gained of the prisoner.

"You say his time will be up in two weeks?" Mr. Brown inquired of his deputy, while they both gazed in upon the prisoner through the barred aperture in the jail door.

"Yes, two weeks more and I'll be rid of him," the nervous Mr. Duffy affirmed.

"Well, all I can say is that I'd keep an eye on that fellow after he gets out, if I were in your place, Mr. Duffy," the marshal advised earnestly. "He sports about the most unprepossessing mug I have ever come across in my dealings with jailbirds. A distinctly criminal type, I should call that face. Just observe that flat nose, those bulging lips, the wicked, little eyes and the low, simian brow. If these are not sure indications of a wayward and depraved character, then my years of experience with criminals has taught me nothing."

As if in corroboration of the marshal's deductions the deaf prisoner suddenly took it into his head to indulge in a ferocious demonstration of his Saracenic disposition, by hurling a tin wash basin against the iron bars of the aperture, behind which the two officials exchanged their confidential remarks concerning him.

"We'd better leave him alone now," the scared deputy implored his superior, pulling him away from the jail door. "He's got a streak of his moods again."

Much to the deputy's relief Mr. Brown agreed that, under the circumstances, it were really better to leave the prisoner alone. Once more seated in the living room, the United States marshal summed up the result of his observations.

"Everything seems O.K. with your department, Mr. Duffy," he announced, "except the matter of the jail rent. Five dollars a day seems a bit stiff to charge the Government for that little cubby hole that you got there to do service as a jail.

"I am aware that in Alaska it has been the custom for the Government to rent the buildings it needed instead of owning them outright in places like mining camps whose permanence was questionable. Personally, I believe that this system is no longer defensible, and it will be my aim during my term of office to replace the system of rented Governmental quarters with buildings owned by the Government; and I believe that an established camp like Frozentoes offers an attractive opportunity for putting my policy into practice."

MR. BROWN had risen from his chair and stood by the rear window, looking out across the lot.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Mr. Duffy, how admirably suited for a jail the residence of your neighbor, Mr. Chesty, appears?" he asked the deputy while he pointed in the direction of Mr. Chesty's abode.

Somewhat hesitatingly the flushed Mr. Duffy expressed the opinion that the idea had, indeed, occurred to him also.

"No doubt it would," the marshal rejoined. "You couldn't help being struck by the similarity your neighbor's dwelling bears to a jail. And its likeness to a jail isn't just superficial either, as I know from first hand observation of the place. A good padlock for its door is all that the house needs to convert it into a first rate jail. Have you noticed that, Mr. Duffy?"

Mr. Duffy's mumbled reply seemed to indicate that this fact, likewise, had not escaped his observing eye.

"Yeah," Mr. Brown uttered musingly, while with the eyes of a connoisseur he appraised the building across the lot "built exactly as if it had been intended for a jail.

"Don't you think, Mr. Duffy—" the enthusiastic marshal turned upon his deputy—"don't you think that it would be quite a stroke of business if the Government could obtain that building from its present owner and use it for a jail?"

"From its present—owner? Why, I don't know—I'm not so sure . . ." stammered the discomfited deputy.

"There's your neighbor now," Mr. Brown said, pointing through the window. "Would you mind inviting him over here for a moment?"

The invitation being extended by the deputy, the little prospector duly arrived and was waved to a seat by Mr. Brown.

"I have a proposition to offer you," the marshal addressed the old sourdough. "You told me last night that you intended to leave this camp shortly and that you saw no opportunity for selling the residence you leave behind. Now, it has just occurred to me that the Government may want to use the building and, if we can come to terms upon the sale of your property, you may reap a handsome profit from it, instead of having to consider it a total loss."

While the marshal submitted his offer, Mr. Chesty sat back in his chair, his twinkling blue eyes fastened mischievously upon the melancholy countenance of the deputy. Now he rose and, after depositing his quid of tobacco in the stove, he replied to the marshal's proposition:

"Your offer comes sort o' sudden, Mr. Brown. Fact is, I ain't in no position to actually sell you the place. The house was built on Government ground by four men, who changed their minds 'bout occupyin' it after they had it built, an' who have long since left the country. Howsomever, seein' that I am the first an' only man who actually occupied the buildin' after it's been abandoned by its builders, I sort of lay claim to it by the tenure of squatter's rights, as the lawyers calls it. You see now, as how I couldn't actually sell you the buildin', though I could relinquish to you my squatter's claim to the place fer a price."

"That would serve the purpose just as well," replied the marshal eagerly. "And what sum would you consider a fair price for the relinquishment of your claim to the place?"

The marshal's question demanded to be ruminated over with the assistance of another bite from his pluck of tobacco, before the fortunate squatter was ready to name his price.

"Waal," he drawled at last, "considerin' that it 'd cost you about three thousand dollars ter put up a buildin' like that, I'm minded that five hundred dollars fer my relinquishment wouldn't be askin' too much."

The marshal's eyes twinkled with inward happiness at the bargain he saw before him.

"Your price is reasonable enough, Mr. Chesty," he replied. "I'll just write out your agreement of relinquishment, and

we'll have this business over in a jiffy."

While the marshal was thus occupied in writing, his deputy was also busy behind his superior's back in going through a series of hair raising pantomimes for the benefit of the party of the first part in the bargain that was about to be consummated. By his mute and awe inspiring gestures Mr. Duffy meant to enlighten the little prospector on the dreadful calamities that the immediate future held in store for him—in case he persisted in going through with the proposed bargain.

Seemingly unaffected, however, by the revelation of his frightful horoscope, the party of the first part did his part toward the conclusion of the bargain by unhesitatingly signing his name to the document when the marshal handed it to him.

"Fine," approved the marshal after Mr. Chesty's signature had been attached to the paper. "All we need now is your signature as a witness, Mr. Duffy, and our bargain is closed."

Thus encouraged by his superior, the unhappy Mr. Duffy could not well refuse so slight a favor, and saw himself forced to attest the legality of a document whose existence would forever deprive him of the modest revenue his gentle graft had yielded.

Having regained his fountain pen, Mr. Brown executed another piece of authorship—entrusting his valuable ideas to a leaf in his check book on this occasion. When signed, he handed the check to the happy squatter.

"Here you are, Mr. Chesty; the Government's check for five hundred dollars. You'll find no trouble in getting it cashed in any bank in Alaska."

THE SLEIGH bells were ringing from the direction of the roadhouse and the marshal rose to go. Scarcely had the untimely visitor taken his departure, when Mr. P. Duffy came sailing down upon the contented Hardluck Bill and gruffly roused him from the smiling perusal of the brief bit of manuscript which the marshal had left him.

"You sold my jail pretty cheaply, Mr. Chesty," the official thundered while a crimson flood of anger spread over his broad face. "But the mischief is done now an' can't be recalled. So I'll just trouble you to sign your name to the back o' that check and hand it over to me. That way I'll get at least some compensation for the criminal bargain you made."

While the old miner kept a wary eye on the marshal's pudgy, outstretched hands, he calmly folded the valuable scrap of paper and secured it in an inside pocket.

"Hand over that check to you? What for?" he questioned. "What sort of an honest claim did you or your butcher friend ever have on that jail? Neither of you has ever dirtied his hands in puttin' up that buildin'; an' the few dollars you fellers laid out fer fixtures has been repaid to you ten times over by the rent you have so far gotten out of it."

"You don't mean to say that your ridiculous claim to squatter's rights is better than the one we put forward?" the deputy snarled.

"Perhaps not," Hardluck smiled complacently, "but it's at least as sound as yours. Howsomever, what's the use argifyin' when you an' me both knows that the jail has been the rightful property of the Government ever since it was built."

"In that case you have defrauded the Government by accepting that check," the angry deputy alleged.

Hardluck slowly shook his head.

"It don't strike me thataway, rememberin' that all along the Government's been owin' me five hundred dollars in compensation fer the injuries I received in its sarvice," he argued. "Because o' the greediness of your friend Butch I ain't never had a chance ter lay my hands on this compensation money until this mornin'."

"Gosh, man!" the deputy interrupted heatedly. "But the Department of Justice which you swindled out of that five hundred dollar check has nothing whatever to do with your damned compensation. The money for your injuries

should have come along entirely different channels."

"Well, maybe so," old Bill agreed with mild interest. "Fact is, I ain't the sort of a feller ter go fussin' about red tape. I am satisfied ter know that the five hundred dollars which the marshal paid me has come out of the public pocket—the same pocket that owed me my compensation money. Me an' the Government is quits now; an' I don't see how it could have been brung about in a more simple or more honest way."

Against the artless logic of the old sourdough the deputy stood for some time in dumb and angry defeat; when presently his thoughts were switched on to different lines by the tremendous noise of crashing articles of furniture that sounded from the direction of the jail room in the back part of the house. Above the racket of breaking furniture sounded the commissioner's wrathful voice:

"Hey—out there! What's the idea? Am I in here for life? Open the door, goshdarn it, and let me out, I say!"

Thus reminded of his voluntary prisoner, the deputy hurried to the rear of the house to liberate his partner from his cheerless bondage. A moment later Mr. Zebulon Streber, red of face, came storming into the room.

"Did you hear what this chechako of a marshal said about me?" he fumed, shaking his fist in the direction of the departed enemy. "I'm a regular criminal type, I am. I got a dangerous mug on me. *Me!* The United States commissioner for Frozentoes and Surrounding District. Ha-ha!" Mr. Streber sounded a hollow, dangerous laugh. "Ha-ha! Just wait till next fall when I expect to be elected delegate to Congress. Once I get to Washington I shall crush that marshal into a pulp; I shall step on him like one steps on a poisonous insect!"

Mr. Streber accompanied his fearful threats with appropriate motions of hands and feet, meant to indicate the savage violence with which the said crushing and stepping-on operations would be performed on the unfortunate Mr. Brown—in the event of Mr. Streber being elected to the influential office of delegate to Congress.

Just then he became aware of the presence of Hardluck Bill, and his honest wrath increased tenfold at the sight of the smiling cause of his humiliation.

"What, you here?" he snorted. "How dare you sport your unkempt whiskers around our house after you have gotten us into such a fix by your lowdown treachery? To think—" he exclaimed as he raised his fists to the ceiling in a dramatic gesture— "to think that for nearly six months we have nursed a viper at our bosoms! That we have provided a home for—have cared for and coddled this ungrateful wretch through his sickness! And all the thanks we get for our kindness is to have him turn on his benefactors at a critical moment, and strike like the venomous snake he is!"

Then, advancing upon the smiling and imperturbable wretch as if to attack him, Mr. Streber thundered:

"Get out of my sight, sir! Get out of our jail and out of this town! Never let me see your treacherous face again! As a prisoner you are discharged this moment—disgracefully discharged, you hear me? You are fired, sir, if that expression will make my meaning clearer."

Upon this unmistakable hint that his presence here was no longer required, the *persona non grata* rose slowly from his chair and turned toward the door. In passing from the room he batted a sportive eye at the jail guard, who had entered a moment before and stood dumbfounded by the door.

But old Hardluck's quizzical wink roused no humorous response from the crestfallen countenance of Mr. Potage-Macarovich; for the commissioner's angry words had apprised the unhappy Joe that his glorious dual existence as day and night guard of the jail at Frozentoes had reached an unexpected and precipitate end.

Here's a thrilling racing tale

By BARRY LYNDON

CARRIAGE PAID *to* HELL

"THERE'S many a true heart broken in jest; this car's heart was broke the day she was wheeled out o' the shops," said Foreman Burke and stubbed a tool burred thumb at the racing machine which stood in the doorway of the barn.

Jack Royd tucked his crash helmet under one arm and buckled the wristbands of his white overalls as he glanced quickly at the foreman. He looked at the car again.

The machine was very low built, her streamline body hugging down between the splayed wheels. Beneath the staggered radiator showed the fierce strength of her front-wheel drive, and from the narrow cockpit her tail dropped flat and rounded, like a beetle's back.

Her paintwork shimmered in the sunshine as she stood with her grid guarded radiator thrust toward the Boyeaux Circuit, where cars were roaring round in final practise laps; and it seemed to Jack that, for all her squat shape, she had a subtle, vixenish beauty.

"You don't think a car can have a soul, do you?" the foreman asked. "But let me tell you, this bus was never built—she was *created!* Culloch an' Pierce lived for

her, an' they put somethin' else into her besides aluminum castings an' bits of steel."

Burke's fervent, low pitched voice checked then, as though he had to go on in spite of himself. He said:

"Cooper laughed at her when she came out o' the shops, an' that's when her heart was broke. He said she looked like a beetle on castors. For that she turned over with him during her first test run. She didn't hurt herself, but she did everything but kill him."

Jack Royd half smiled as he glanced at the foreman. He had heard a lot about this experimental machine, and he had heard something of Burke's queer ideas concerning it.

"Emory, that Yank crack, had a go at her after that," came the foreman's voice again. "He took her round Brooklands, an' she did everything bar buckjump him over the Member's Bridge. He held her for fifteen minutes, wonderin' where she'd crash him, but she let him off an' stopped by the Fork with a broken feedpipe.

"When Emory got out of her, his nerve was so shook he could hardly stand. He looked at the letters on her engine cover—see 'em there?" The lean, dark eyed man nodded at the red initials between the heavy bonnet straps. "Emory looks at 'er, an' he says, 'I'll say you've got the right initials on her! C. P. H.—that'll be short for "Carriage Paid to Hell". She's all that for any fool who tries to ride her. Take her away; I'm through!'"

Jack slipped two pairs of goggles round his neck as he commented casually:

"Are you trying to scare me off the car, Burke? Probably Emory couldn't make her sit the track. Anyhow, I'm told she's a lot faster than my other machine. That's all that matters."

He glanced into the sun splashed shadows of the barn as he spoke. A Houston racer stood against one wall, its front axle smashed back under the gearbox, and the body a mass of calcined débris from the fire which had followed its crash.

Near the wreck was the car which Jack should have driven for the Boyeaux Circuit. Parts of its power unit were scattered carelessly over the floor, most of them thick with an ugly mess of burned oil, result of the engine seizure which had made it impossible to put his machine right in time for the start.

Carriage Paid had been rushed across from England to make up the Houston team of three cars. The initials on her engine cover came from a combination of the names of the men who had designed her and of the works itself—C. P. H. for Culloch-Pierce-Houston.

"She's fast, all right," Burke agreed, "and she's the latest engineering practise all through. Accordin' to theory she ought to wag her tail at anything else on the circuit." He glanced at the young speedman, then went on.

"She's no beauty, and she's been the joke o' the works because of her looks. You may think I'm a fool, but I've been in this game a long while and I've seen some queer things. I believe this car's turned sour from the way she's been laughed at. Handle her gently, else she may get back on you the way she did Cooper and Emory—his nerve hasn't been the same since."

"Emory couldn't hold her, that was his trouble." Jack tightened his belt as he eyed the car. "So long as she's fast, I'll ride her."

Burke looked him up and down. Royd had clear eyes and broad palmed hands. He bulked big in his racing overalls, and his shoulders were thick with muscles. He had the strength needed to hold a cantankerous machine.

"Cars are like women—they need driving, Burke," he growled as he stepped toward the machine.

The foreman's eyes narrowed as he watched him go, and he shook his head slowly.

"You'll talk different to that when you're a bit older," he grunted, half to himself.

But a girl who had come through the doorway at the back of the barn caught both Jack's words and the foreman's answer.

Lou Royd stood with a wry smile playing about her lips, as she watched her husband ram his crash helmet on his head and buckle the broad webbing strap under his chin.

LOU SAW the car started up, grinning mechanics hovering round its ugly bulk as the bellow of the smoking exhaust filled the barn with crashing sound.

Her expression changed to wistfulness as she marked the taut fabric of Jack's chin strap, stark against the bronze of his cheek and chiseled jaw. Tiny muscles stood out on his capable hands as he smoothed the cordbound rim of the steering wheel.

She had seen his every race since their marriage, and still she could not fathom why he had changed from a big hearted smiling boy to a quick voiced, off handed, impatient man.

She believed that a man needed his wife near him, and she knew perfectly well that Jack hated to have her about the racing camps. She could appreciate the one thing that was ever in his mind; sometime, somewhere, he was going to crash and be hurt. That was, almost, the inevitable end.

They never spoke of it. But she knew that when it came he would need her. Not all his bruskness, not all his armour-plated cloak of indifference could drive her away. If it was his job to risk his life in the wreck scattered realms of high speed, then she could endure the numbing agonies which come to those who can only watch and wait.

Jack could not appreciate that. For him Lou had grown to be a jarring presence in the taut nerved atmosphere of racing camps; she was always in the background, waiting for him, lonely, worried.

She could not explain why she was there, and the chivalry which must be born in a man with the courage to adventure in a world of dust and smoke and howling speed stayed his telling her openly why he did not want her.

It led to half quarrels and bitterness which strained to breaking point the thread that had first linked them. He had tried to drive her away, to bend her to his will as he mastered a leaping car on a deadly turn; the lack of understanding was heading them both to disaster as surely as anything which could come to him on the racing circuit.

Lou watched the car move off, running toward the bunting decked stands. Burke gave her a seat in a hack machine and she rode down to the replenishment pits, joining mechanics there who were timing the two Houstons already on the course.

Some of them were joking about *Carriage Paid.* They talked of what the machine had done to Cooper and Emory, and betted on Jack's chances of never getting the car around the circuit at speed.

Lou saw him pass the wire meshed enclosure, covering two laps steadily while he got the feel of the car. When he passed the Houston pit for the third time, the wide mouthed exhaust was bellowing on a rising note and he signaled with one hand.

"Clock him!" exclaimed Burke. "He's going to let her out this time round. Now we'll see if he can hold her."

Foot hard down, Jack gave the machine full throttle along the straight. The droning scream of the supercharger was flung back in a snarling echo from the empty depths of the stands, and she began to buck on the road as she neared the peak of her speed.

He held her to the crown of the road and he knew that the car must be moving at something above a hundred and twenty miles an hour as the corner at the end of the straightaway whipped up.

The walls below the ruddy tiled rooftops were colorful with glaring advertisements. The outer sandbank, with its palisade beyond, rocked at him like a solid wall. Until the last possible moment he held *Carriage Paid* to her speed, then he cut out his engine and rammed his foot on the brake pedal.

The shuddering screech of the brake shoes burning against their drums struck

through the dying roar of the engine and, instantly, the car became a leaping, mutinous thing, fighting against the check.

She flung at the sandbank in a front-wheel skid, then went broadside into the bend, sliding all over the road as he wrestled her round. Savagely he rammed the throttle wide and flung her at the straight, beyond.

She danced until her thrashing wheels were clipping the dusty grass at the road edges. When he yanked her clear, she hit a bump and leaped sheer, to come down with her steering momentarily askew. The hollow whine of straining tires sounded above everything else as she tried to smash herself to bits against the trees that bordered the course.

STRAINING, using all his strength, Jack fought the kicking car and thrashed her to her limit of thundering speed as the next corner lifted from the dust haze ahead.

He kept her under control until he crashed on his brakes for the turn, and again she tried to climb the outer palisade. He took her round in long, slashing skids, until, full throttled and screaming like a thwarted vixen, she ripped out of the corner and hurtled on.

The car was viciously mettlesome and spirited, and he had to fight her every inch of the circuit, daring her to do her worst and mastering the worst that she could do.

He came past the pits in a tornado of sound, men standing aghast as they watched the car rock by, weaving on the road, heart shaking in its song of furious power, dust slicking from the stamping wheels and the exhaust streaking lurid flame.

Stop watches clicked, and Burke consulted a time chart.

"Seven minutes, one an' two-fifth secs!" he gasped, as he stared after the black, slithering speck in the surging dust. "That's the fastest this circuit's ever been lapped!" he added to Lou.

She stood listening to the drone of the machine as it spun on round the nine mile circuit, the sound dying for the corners, easing for the bends, then rising anew on the distant straights.

There was a vibrant, tormented note in the voice of *Carriage Paid* as she again slashed around the corner which led to the straight, past the pits. Up the road she came, kicking dust from her hot tires, weaving like a spurred horse straining sick against its rein. She rocked up in a mad, speed born flurry of shattering sound.

Jack was fighting the machine with straining nerve and muscle, beating it by the fury of his driving. He felt the car steady on the road as he neared the blurred black line of the pits. It was as though he had beaten its humors, forcing it to a speed so great that its wild juddering and rebelliousness were mastered.

But through the blare of the exhaust, the screech of the blower, the bellowed thunder of the engine, rising to crescendo above all other sound, Lou could hear that shrill cry of torment. She caught Burke's shout as stop-watches clicked:

"Six minutes, fifty-seven secs—dead! He's broken the record again!"

Then, through the stupendous roar of the hard driven machine, the tortured cry was lost in a new sound; a wild, metallic clatter—the death rattle of a dying engine.

Jack's foot stabbed at the clutch pedal and he reached for the brake. The car wavered on the road and slowed as the clattering merged to the harsh sound of dried metal rubbing at speed.

In the pit Burke gasped:

"She's seizing! He's driven her so darned hard he's broke her up."

The car was manhandled from the course back to the barn. Four times the mechanics tested the engine to see whether it had freed itself, but they were almost at the racing camp before the seized-up metal had cooled sufficiently to allow the engine to turn over.

Lou walked at Jack's side. His face carried the marks of driving strain, little

lines at the corners of his mouth and eyes. He said nothing as he watched the men rolling the car ahead.

"You pushed her too hard," Burke growled at him as they stopped by the barn. "You should ha' taken her a bit more steady."

"Steady be hanged!" Jack's eyes were blazing. "She seized up because her lubrication's faulty, like my other bus. If she can't stand hard driving, then she's no good in the race. I rammed the clutch out at the first sound of the death rattle, and I think I caught her in time. We'll strip her right down and clean out every oilway in the engine!"

"Quite right, Royd!" A cool voice spoke from behind, and Lou saw Houston standing there. The owner of the Houston works was a thickset man with heavy lidded eyes. "You're not getting enough oil at the peak of your revs. If that's put right, you can win with this car."

"Barring accidents!" And Jack laughed a little. "She's a brute to hold, but I had her steady when she——"

"You thrashed her until you got her beat, that's why she seized on you," Burke cut in. "You don't understand this car—she wants nursin', coaxing." His dark eyes were alight as he faced Jack. "You said cars were like women, an' you're right; but it ain't drivin' they need. You don't get the best out of 'em that way. You want to humor 'em, be gentle; not rack 'em with hard braking and—"

"Burke! Are you trying to tell Mr. Royd how to drive?"

Houston's cold voice snapped in on the foreman's, and Burke stopped. For one moment he stood looking from Jack to Lou, then he glanced at Houston's grim features.

"Beg yer pardon, sir," he said, and turned to the car.

"This machine seems to worry him," Houston said slowly. "I've heard him talking about what it did, or what he thinks it did, to Cooper and Emory. It's just her springing which makes her a little awkward to handle, Royd. It would tell us a lot about the machine if you could finish well up on the list with it; I'd like you to come inside then, and help with the design. I think you'll be able to hold her in the race."

Houston had watched *Carriage Paid* from the corner at the beginning of the grandstand straight. In his mind was a memory of the way the car had taken that turn, as he went on—

"It'll be a very hard ride for you, I'm afraid, and on the strength of that I'll double the figures in your contract, Royd—double them all around."

Jack looked at him quickly. He knew Houston. He was not the kind of man to do a thing like that without good reason, and Jack guessed the behavior of the machine must have impressed him.

"That will mean double insurance, too," Houston added quietly. "You'll go into the race insured for twenty thousand pounds."

Lou, forgotten in the background, heard his words.

She caught her breath and walked quietly away.

Throughout the rest of the day Burke and his mechanics worked feverishly over the engine of *Carriage Paid*. The damage done was slight but the work took time. Sleeves rolled high, Jack handled tools with the rest, and as dusk settled each became driven by an anxiety which made them forget hunger and the need for sleep.

Few teams ever go to the line without an all night session on one of the machines before the race. It was not the first time that Jack had worked like this, and now he was gripped by an odd frenzy which made him curse Burke for his slow thoroughness.

"This car goes to the start right, or it don't go at all," the foreman growled at him. "I'm here for the night, but there's no need for you to stop. Why don't you turn in?"

Jack did not answer. They worked by the light of four headlamps rigged from the batteries of touring cars; white,

brilliant swaths slitting the darkness of the high roofed barn. At an hour short of midnight Jack, turning for a spanner, found Lou sitting quietly on a packing case, her face pallid in the reflected glow of the beams trained on the car.

"Shall you be long, Jack?" she asked.

"Yes, all night!" He reached for the tool and balanced it in his hand as he regarded her. "There's no need for you to stop here."

"I'd rather." And she smiled a little. "There's a dance on at the hotel, and I shouldn't sleep. Besides, I'm—I'm worrying a little about tomorrow and—that car."

"Then don't worry! I suppose Burke's been telling you some of his fool ideas. The car's all right. You go off and get some sleep."

"I'd much sooner stay, Jack."

"Well, I don't want you to sit moping there. Be sensible and go to bed!"

He spun on his heels. When he looked round again, she had gone.

THE HOURS slipped past, while tiring men gradually built up the engine again. Mechanics went to a nearby *estaminet* and came back refreshed, but Jack worked steadily without a break.

He sent Burke off for half an hour. When the foreman returned, Jack was beneath the car, putting a checking spanner over the work a man had just completed. He heard a mechanic come into the barn and join Burke.

"Y'know, it's funny the way everybody enjoys a race 'cept the men what's in it," the mechanic said presently. "The whole town's lit up an' there's a swagger dance at the big hotel. They got the windows open, an' I saw Mrs. Royd."

"Dancin'?" asked Burke.

"You bet she was dancin'," the man answered. "Must ha' gone straight away from here. Hell of a fine wife to be dancin' when her husband's goin' to break his neck in the morning!"

"What d'you know about it?" Burke's voice was quick, and his feet shuffled on the hard packed earthen floor as he turned. "Why shouldn't she dance? He sent her away from here! Them two's headin' the same road as this car—'Carriage Paid to Hell'!"

On his back, under the engine, Jack's spanner slipped from a nut as he heard the words. The head of the tool raked down his arm, but he hardly felt it.

Lou—dancing! That was not like her.

He squirmed along beneath the car and came up from under the flattened tail. He stepped toward the front of the machine and looked at the power unit.

"Pretty well through now, eh, Burke?" he said; but he did not meet the foreman's eyes. "I'll leave you to it, I think. I'll be along early in the morning. Good night." He pitched the spanner aside as he strode from the barn.

He went straight toward the hotel. The darkness about the circuit was speckled by lanterns and the glowing fires of camping spectators. The town was full of life and movement, although it needed but an hour to dawn.

The grandstands and pits showed black and empty, except where the hammers of workmen thudded as they finished off some seating. Somewhere in the distance the open exhaust of a racing machine was roaring, when men were striving anxiously to tune a recalcitrant engine to efficiency.

The hotel lay back from the road, and wide windows flung broad streams of light on tables set about the lawn. Jack paused and looked through a palm shrouded doorway at couples moving to the alert strains of the band.

A few people stared at him, with his oil smudged overalls and blackened hands, and the streak of blood which had run down where the spanner had caught his arm.

Lou was dancing with some one whom Jack did not know—an Italian, with long lashed eyes and glistening white teeth. Jack watched them for a few moments and he saw Lou smiling up at the fellow.

Jack went on to their room. He found that she had set out his racing kit on a

chair—helmet, goggles, rubber body pads and bars of chocolate carefully broken into handy pieces. He turned to the washbasin, and the faucet was hissing scalding water when he heard the door open. Lou entered.

"Oh, you've got back!" she exclaimed. "Is the car all right now, Jack?"

"It's worrying you a lot, whether it is or not, isn't it?" he growled as he faced into the room. "The car's not right yet, but I came back because I heard the mechanics saying that they didn't think much of a woman who could dance when her husband was going to—race—in the morning!"

"You didn't seem to want me in the barn and I couldn't sleep." Her voice was steady, almost casual, as she added, "I'm sorry if your men thought it queer."

Jack stood looking at her. She seemed tired and completely indifferent. The wound on his arm was throbbing a little, and there was a weight over his eyes. His nerves were on edge from hours of work at high pressure and from memory of the fact that Houston had doubled his insurance. Jack knew what that meant. This time tomorrow . . .

"I told you to go to bed!" he blazed suddenly.

"I know you did!" Lou flung round to face him, her eyes wide and the color draining slowly from her face. "I don't like being ordered to bed and I don't like being told that I'm moping, either.

"You talk about what the mechanics said of me, but every one of them must have heard the way you bullied me in the barn. I'm sick of it. I thought I liked being bullied before we were married, when you did it in fun, but now I can see it's your nature!"

She was quivering, hands tightly clenched and passion driven words founting from her lips.

"You try to treat me in the way you handled that car this morning, but I won't be driven, Jack.

"I could clock you on the circuit, watch other cars for you, do your race bandages—do heaps of things, if you'd let me, but you won't. You treat me as though I were always in the way—and I'll keep on being in the way! I don't want to be shut out of your work and be barked at when things aren't quite right. You're getting hateful, Jack, and I—I—"

She broke off. He was staring at her blankly, with a tablet of soap clenched in his oil grimed left hand. On the smooth skin of the under part of his forearm she saw the red gash which the spanner had left.

"Oh, you're hurt!" Her manner changed as she stepped toward him. "How did that happen? I didn't see—"

"Let it alone; it's nothing!"

They stood regarding each other, Jack's face set and his eyes dark.

Quite suddenly he turned to the washbowl and plunged his hands into the steaming water.

"EVERYTHING all right, sir?"

"Yes, thanks," said Jack and nodded to his mechanic as he yelled the words above the thunder of *Carriage Paid's* engine and the swelling roar of cars lined up for the start. "Stand by with the jack and spare wheels. I'm going to tear my tires to shreds on this bus."

He climbed into the narrow cockpit, his every movement stiff. He was swathed in broad linen tape from ankles to knees and up the thighs; more linen was wrapped firmly about his wrists and forearms, designed to strengthen flesh and muscle when the juddering of the car had shaken his limbs to weakness. Rubber padding about his body shielded ribs and back, and there was more padding where his knees might catch the steering column.

He shook hands with the mechanic and the man went off to the side of the road.

Rival machines blared thunder in Jack's ears as he revved up his engine and listened to its healthy roar. He fidgeted uneasily as he waited for the starter's flag to go up; then slipped into gear when it rose.

The boom and bellow of cars around welled into a tornado of surging sound; then twenty seconds later the flag slashed down, a semaphore arm flashed, a maroon streak shot up and burst with a booming roar as the machines surged forward and *Carriage Paid's* exhaust slammed her defiance.

Jack saw a red Fiat ripping up, with a Mercedes thrusting its low, white bulk beyond. A blue Delage poked its staggered radiator at his elbow, and into his ears dinned the fierce, snarling roar of the challenging cars as he picked up speed and flung the Houston down the straightaway for the first bend.

The pack dropped behind, milling in the dust haze. Out of the sun drenched straight leaped the buildings which marked the first corner, and Jack held the lead as he cut out to take it. Brake shoes screeched as they held the whirling wheels, and *Carriage Paid* stormed between banks of craning spectators, skidding fiendishly.

The Delage ripped past while *Carriage Paid's* hub caps were scraping the sandbank. Jack lost time skidding the bend, but he made it up on the straight beyond and he passed the Delage with his machine slithering all over the road.

He kept *Carriage Paid* to the lead she had snatched; with the crowds straining back from the palisades each time he took a turn, with men leaping to their feet in the stands to watch the car scuttle past, lurching in its terrific speed.

Delage, Fiat and howling Mercedes held together in a mad dogfight behind him, waiting for him to drop out. His cockpit became an inferno of raging sound, and heat from the engine scorched his feet. Oil fumes poured under the dashboard, and his whole body was racked and jarred by the machine's ceaseless battering.

He mastered every trick that she had played. On the corners he left whipping dust behind, and the pungent odor of burned rubber from the tortured tires. A score of times in the first twenty laps death joggled his elbow as the car carried him to the brink of shattering disaster then, on the turn before the grandstand straight, she stripped the tread of one rear tire and burst the other.

He came into the Houston pit, with the bared rim of one wheel screaming on the road surface, to make a double wheel-change in ninety seconds and get off again, but now running fifth because of the time he had lost.

NUMBED from the knees downward, hands cramped by his fierce grip of the steering wheel, the palm of his right fist bloodied from snatching contacts with hand brake and gear levers, he flogged *Carriage Paid* until the car became a fiendish thing struggling desperately against him.

The untended gash on his arm grew to be a throbbing, fiery agony that frayed at his nerve; a searing pain which linked with the hurt of his battered body and dulled his judgment on the turns, so that he became the more brutal as he forced the machine round.

He rode in a welter of heat and oil fumes and stupendous, deafening noise. The cumulative strain of holding the car took toll of his speed, and he was still lying fifth when flag signals from the pit called him in for fuel and oil, half the race behind him.

When he stopped the car and scrambled out, his numbed feet hit the sanded ground with a shock that jarred up to his brain, but he jumped with the mechanic who waited there into the clipped movements of pit work. He burned himself on the hot radiator, but knew nothing of it as he stabbed home the dripping water hose, then snatched at a jack and jerked up the front wheels ready for a change all around.

Deftly his mechanic worked with him, talking the while:

"You're fifth . . . Delage leading. Our No. 2 seized up on the eighth lap. No. 3 ran into the fence at Foux Corner . . . You're the only Houston left in the race now, sir!"

Jack jumped to the pit plank as they finished the wheel changes, snatching at the brimming glass which stood ready. As he drank, he heard Houston's chilly voice:

"You are doing magnificently! The rest of the team are out of it, so try and pull in a bit on the leaders. The Delage is three and a half minutes ahead of you."

Jack slammed the glass down, smashing it because he did not know when his hand hit the tool cluttered plank. Burke was leaning toward him.

"I've been watchin' you on the corners . . . Easier wi' your brakes and she won't skid so much. Coax her round; don't be so heavy handed!"

He glimpsed Lou at the back of the pit, watching him unsmilingly, her eyes wide.

Then they were all left behind as he slid back into the smoking cockpit and sent the car away.

Easier with the brakes . . . Burke ought to be where he was and he would not talk like that. Coax the car . . . How the devil could a man coax a screaming, bucking, kicking vixen?

In four laps the freshness which followed the break at the pits gave place to the old weariness. *Carriage Paid* became still wilder on the turns; her spirit was greater than his strength, and the thought bred a savageness of handling which could have but one ending.

It came on Foux Corner, when he braked with a smashing viciousness which sent the car sliding madly. There was a vicious, triumphant squeal from the brake drums as the car took him round in a tearing skid and slugged her nose at the disaster which lay in the outer palisade.

He saw the wirebound staves loom before him. He trod on the throttle pedal in a desperate effort to make the slithering wheels grip, and he wrenched with all his strength on the steering wheel, trying to slash the tire tail round.

He saw staves breaking under the impact of the grid guarded radiator. Woodwork flew about him in a solid hail as the car answered to the drag of his hands, engine roaring on a screaming note.

The machine ploughed down five yards of the fence, then leaped back to the road in a tangle of wood and smoke and dust, with a stave, snapped up by one rear wheel, thudding full to the side of Jack's head, as though the car flung it in a last vicious effort to send him to crashing destruction.

THE BLOW dulled his fume hazed brain, but he had the car straight on the road now and gasping spectators saw *Carriage Paid* storm away with slivers of shattered wood dripping from her juddering tail.

His head was ringing from the blow the stake had given him, and he drove on subconsciously. He shook his head to try to clear it, then leaned over the side of the car so that the rush of wind struck his face.

A turn whipped up out of the hazy road ahead, and he eased the brakes on. *Carriage Paid* went round steadily, with no sign of skid, close in. He wondered why she did not fight against him as she had done before.

Sick, shaken, he kept the car at speed, somehow, driving by instinct; like a boxer knocked out on his feet, but fighting on. He had not the strength to battle against the car, and he covered two laps before he was himself again.

He glanced at the Houston pit as he passed it. A white disk showed the O.K. signal. It meant that he was gaining, and that puzzled him. He could not have been driving faster since that crack on the head, and yet he must have been. He braked steadily for the turn at the finish of the long straightaway, and the gripping shoes eased the car from its furious speed.

Firmly, easily, *Carriage Paid* took the bend and, unhampered by the scrabble of sliding tires skidding on the torn road surface, she accelerated with a vibrant roar as Jack trod the throttle wide.

Coaxed only because of his shakiness, all her viciousness vanished. Where he had handled her with savage ferocity, he

now humored her with weakened hands. Once, when a car all but fouled him and he had to brake with his old madness, she turned again to a sliding beast. But that was the last time.

On the straight, she rocked as her speed notched toward a hundred and thirty miles an hour, but he held her without strain. Always the white disk showed at the pit, telling him that he was pulling in on the leading machines.

As he puzzled out the difference in the car, Burke's words drilled into his groping, speed dulled mind—

"It ain't hard drivin' they need. You want to humor them, be gentle—not rack 'em with hard braking!"

It came to him that Burke was right.

"Cars are like women."

It was queer the way *Carriage Paid* was running now. She was not tamed; all her old fire was there; she was faster than ever, giving her best because of the way she was being handled.

"Lou's the same!"

The thought struck him abruptly, almost stunnning him with its truth. Vaguely, and yet with the clarity of complete understanding, he compared her to the car. Neither would be driven.

". . . Easier with your brakes; coax her!"

Half formed thoughts whipped through his brain:

"No game for a girl—racing camps . . . She must have worried . . . Hell! Make coffee . . . Clock me in practise . . . Why not, anyway? If I'd gone out —had a crash . . . I'll take that works job Houston mentioned, developing this design. I'll not have to race so often, and— What's that in front? The Delage! Bring him back, *Carriage Paid!* It's all right now. Come on, old girl, show him your tail!"

Her reeking cockpit thick with flowers and the winner's laurel wreath over the battered guard of her radiator, *Carriage Paid to Hell* stood in the barn.

In the Hotel Boyeaux, Lou gently eased the white linen tape from Jack's forearm, then stood looking at the red slash the spanner had left against his skin.

She bathed it and bandaged it with cooling lint, while his gaze roved from her bent head to his racing kit strewn on the floor—scorched canvas shoes, overalls oil blackened to the waist, dusty goggles, crash helmet scored where wheel flung stones had skimmed it, the broken chocolate still on the chair, which Lou had prepared for him but which he had not taken.

"Is that more comfy, Jack?"

She looked up as she pinned the bandage. His eyebrows were heavy with dust; it clung to his cheeks above the oil smudge; and his eyes were mute and pleading.

His arm slid about her shoulder, and she held him close as his dusty cheek pressed against her hair.

"Tired, darling?"

"Not tired—only sorry!" His voice came again, quivering, "So sorry!"

GANGSTER TOWN

By

JOHN WILSTACH

RENNY BOYD, star police reporter, voiced his opinion.

"Let's play tiddledewinks for excitement," he drawled, pushing his chair back against the wall at a dangerous angle.

"Or get a bean bag and toss it for exercise," grinned Houghton of the *News*.

The remarks received no reply from the others, doped with peace and quiet in the press room at police headquarters, housed at City Hall.

"I used to curse General Butler," continued Renny, "but the old boy was always good for a front page smear."

Houghton smiled queerly.

"You had your little playmates running themselves ragged. Remember beating the town on Butler's raid on the exclusive country club?"

"Yep," yawned Carrett of the *Record*, "and the time friend Renny scooped us on that jail break from the Eastern Pen."

Renny's eyes gleamed with a blue flame. Given a news possibility to follow, he was like a hound on the scent. He had proved himself a great police reporter; his contacts were with harness bulls and hush men at strategic points in Philadelphia; friends in the underworld could trust him never to get a cannon into trouble.

For three months not a single big crime story had broken. Inaction was getting on his nerves. Restlessly he strolled down the corridor to the room occupied by Captain Henry, chief of detectives.

"Pretty soft for you ex-pavement pounders," said Renny.

A tall, rangy chap just this side of thirty, he had a slow smile that had let him get away with lots of news larceny.

"All you news birds want is trouble," retorted Henry. "Me, I like quiet. When a crime wave comes along, I duck."

A Novelette of the exciting adventures of a star police reporter

"Know anything very interesting?"

"If I had any inside info I'd keep it to myself."

"By the time a copper learns what's going on, the man's in the casket," said Renny, departing as he had come.

The reporter slow motioned back to the press room. The reporters there might have made fine models for a painter of still life. Eleven o'clock. The bull dog, out of town editions were going to press, yet not a call from district men, nor a single query from city desks.

Renny yawned, surveying this intolerable stagnation. He was supposed to remain until one o'clock, phone his paper for a "good night", and then consider himself off duty. Killing time came hard to one with an eager yearning for action.

"Hell's bells, I'm going over to Hanson's and lift one or two. I'll be back before the paper is put to bed. Any one want to come along?"

Replies were lacking, so he slouched off to the elevator, leaving his paper, the *Courier*, uncovered and unprotected. In Philadelphia, unlike New York, there is no City News Association. Each newspaper is on its own, and being scooped is always an ominous possibility.

The reporter walked to a cozy speakeasy not two blocks from City Hall, where they served Scotch alleged to be right off the boat. Several men were there whom Renny knew. What with crooking his elbow, and conversation, time passed. It will do that. Thinking himself quite safe, a little before one o'clock Renny phoned the night city editor, told him things were as dead as usual, and received his official "good night". An hour afterward he went to his hotel near Broad Street, comfortably glowing.

In the morning he bought the current editions of all the papers on his way to breakfast. One glance spoiled the day. Bad news was splashed all over the front page of every sheet except his own.

Shortly after midnight two notorious New York gorillas had been put on the spot in front of the Lorrell Hotel and sprayed with hot lead from a passing car. The *rap-tap-tap* had indicated a Thompson sub-caliber machine gun. It was really no way for distinguished visitors to be treated. Both of them had cashed in without mentioning names; to do so would have been poor gangster etiquette.

Renny dropped the newspapers into a convenient ash barrel.

He had committed journalistic suicide in this man's town. A bitter shame filled him. Lulled into carelessness, he had lain down on the job. No use to ask for or to expect mercy. In a bleak mood he gulped two cups of coffee in a lunchroom, and proceeded on foot to the office, some blocks down on Chestnut Street.

It was noon. Underwood, the day city editor, would be on the desk. Renny might have drawn his pay, due today, and walked out on his sentence, but decided, instead, to take his medicine standing up.

Fortunately it was too early to greet, or avoid, the general staff of reporters, who came on duty at one o'clock. The big bare city room was deserted, save for Underwood, behind a huge paper littered desk over in the corner of the room. Renny glanced at his own desk, never to be used again, and then advanced, mouth grim and blue eyes half closed.

Underwood looked up, a queer sneer of contempt twisting his mouth.

"So you slipped away to lap up some booze and threw us down, eh? You can imagine how the big boy feels about this—our being scooped on the first crime break in months?"

Renny nodded.

"Faked up any excuse?"

The reporter was silent.

"Well, go downstairs and get your pay."

"Just wanted to come in and get the works given to me direct," said Renny. "You are dead right. I'll blow this burg. So long, old man."

"Good luck, Renny. I know how it happened. News has been so scarce you took a chance. This'll teach you it never pays."

The other nervously fingered a cigaret.

"Lack of action drives me almost mad," he said fiercely. "The war gave me a fever for thrills I can't down. It's in my veins, like a poison, and when I'm slowed up I guess I take to the hard stuff as a substitute."

UNDERWOOD reached over and they shook hands. This was the end of Renny Boyd on Philadelphia sheets. The black mark he had placed against his name was too big and prominent. Late that afternoon he took a train for the West, picking on Canford. He had chosen it because the city had just witnessed the collapse of a reform administration. It was wide open as a shark's mouth. In the political fight, just over, both sides had employed strong-arm methods. Embers were still glowing wickedly. Canford was a pivot point for the State. Here was a cauldron of organized murder and attendant violence. Renny Boyd arrived there the following afternoon, ready to get into any game that promised sitting on TNT.

Renny checked his suitcase at the station and started walking toward the main section of Canford. He had all the confidence in the world. Only thirty dollars in his jeans, but sans worries. Never had he experienced difficulty in hanging his hat in a strange City Room. Roaming reporters, and there are scores of them, can always get on a payroll somewhere.

After ascending a long hill, Renny asked the location of the *Bugle* from a slovenly policeman. The officer, with a chuckle, told him to keep right on going for five blocks. In ten minutes he entered a familiar sort of room. At the end was a long, round copy table; facing it, behind a desk, was a man wearing a green eyeshade, in shirt sleeves, flirting with three telephone instruments at his elbows. A temporary

news monarch, this was the day city editor.

About the room were tables, holding battered typewriters, and a few bored rewrite men were listlessly banging away. The windows, of course, were tightly closed; and the room held an odor of stale tobacco.

Approaching the city desk, Renny waited patiently to get the editor's attention.

That worthy glanced up in the act of lighting a cigaret.

"Afternoon," greeted Renny. "Just drifted in. Expected you might be able to use a crack police reporter, with a nose for news, who can write his own stuff."

"They drive guys like you out of town—if they work on the *Bugle*," the other commented. He studied his visitor with the shrewd, penetrating scrutiny of an old newspaperman, one swift to decision and not easily fooled.

"How come?" asked Renny.

"We're fighting a corrupt administration, allied with the underworld. Our officials have fallen so often they're cracked, and break if you push 'em. The police department is made of putty. We're living under gangster rule."

"Good!" exclaimed Renny, and his eyes sparkled. "Trouble is my middle name."

"That so? We've had three good men leave town—*escorted*, I should say. They aren't crude here, not crude enough to take a mere reporter for a ride. They merely blow his hat off—and he picks it up, punctured with bullet holes. 'Nough. He does what he's told after that."

"Gee, that sounds interesting. I don't scare easy."

"No?"

"No! I was in the Intelligence Department during the war. If we didn't have brains we were asked to demonstrate guts."

"Go inside and tackle Middleton. He does the hiring."

A tall gray haired man was walking nervously up and down a long chamber, worried lines under his eyes, deep furrows from nose to upper lip.

"Mr. Middleton, the city desk sent me along to see you. I'm the best police reporter east of the Rocky Mountains."

He smiled in a way that robbed that cocksure statement of offense.

Middleton stopped in his stride and faced him. He seemed scarcely aware that Renny was a stranger.

"Don't joke, son. This paper's all alone fighting mud and slime creeping over our heads, vile things in it. My brother Mark, owner of this sheet, and I have received numerous threats. Last week a bomb exploded under his house."

"Why not fight fire with fire?"

"Two Federal agents came here in answer to my call to Washington. One had his head blown off, while asleep; the other was found in a ditch outside the city limits. A card was pinned on his chest, 'This is the way we treat rats'!"

"Why's Canford been picked on?"

"Because of being a main artery to Chicago. It's kept open for shipments of booze and needle beer, coke as well. The route is well guarded; hijacking got too expensive. Here in town there are thirty dominating rackets; every trade has a protector, lives under weekly blackmail. An American Mafia exists right under our very noses. The police and city officials get their split at every pay-off."

Renny whistled.

"Who are the local big shots?" he asked.

"Scar Murphy and Cyclone Cassidy."

"You must strike at the top," the reporter murmured. "I think—"

That thought was never expressed.

The telephone tinkled. Middleton strode to answer it.

Suddenly his face grew pallid; a vein throbbed like a taut cord at his temple. He moistened dry lips.

"I can't see him till after the operation?"

His voice broke into a husky sob that he mastered, hanging up the receiver. The eyes he turned to Renny had receded backward into his head, the rims burning redly.

"My God, son," he mumbled, "they've played their hand—shot down my brother Mark as he entered his home on Maple Avenue. A rattle like the exhaust of a car—and it sped away. I just got word from Central Hospital; he's now going on the operating table—and they hold out little hope. But I'll get my revenge, if they cut out my heart!" he croaked harshly.

"Take a brace, Mr. Middleton," suggested Renny quietly. "Any game as rotten to the core as this one can be beaten. I don't ask a job as a police reporter on your sheet now. I have a hunch. It is our luck that my face isn't known in Canford. Listen to me. I know the Philadelphia underworld like a book—a dirty book. I can chisel in as a gangster from there, one having left the city for his health. A crook is a crook anywhere; they'd all turn on their own brothers, and are as suspicious as lice. Yet I'll get the guns who bumped your brother, in the flesh, or casket bound, if you'll only give me a chance. Say the word!"

Middleton looked at him unseeingly.

"What help do you want?"

"Little enough. A flash bank roll—something under a grand—your private phone number, and the help of *one* honest copper. There must be such an exception on the force?"

"Yes, Lieutenant Blake of the homicide squad can be trusted."

"Then get a secret message to him at once."

He unfolded his idea and Middleton's back stiffened.

Renny scribbled down the managing editor's private phone number on an old card, and pocketed the nine hundred dollars sent up from the cash office.

"You're walking into a trap ringed with killers," said Middleton as they shook hands.

"Just watch me come out of the smoke," said Renny confidently.

He had received an assignment to his liking.

"Give me half a chance," Renny mused, "and somebody's going to burn, no fooling!"

II

REACHING the street, Renny followed his first flash of inspiration. He realized that, first of all, he must convince *himself* of this new rôle. First he must imagine himself really a gangster, lamming from a ranked job. Just how would such a gunman go about getting in with the Canford underworld?

Middleton would start the ball rolling. To be on hand to meet it was the question.

With wrinkled brow Renny tried to get into the very skin of the character he intended to represent. Just as soon as he started—which would be immediately—he would unquestionably be traced back by the local mob of sharpshooters, who took nothing or nobody on trust and used the rod more often than not on sudden suspicion.

He must beware of one false move. The first would be fatal.

A passing taxi, cruising for trade, stopped at a signal.

"I want to go to the station and get my suitcase," Renny told the driver, a weazened individual, who looked merely unpleasant, not dangerous.

He sank back in the leather seat. His plan was to check in at some small hotel; then start at once getting in touch. This driver might give him a good steer. A dead one, crooked enough of course, but without courage, it would do no harm to brace him.

The reporter had often heard of "boomers", high class criminals always on the go, forever changing the scene of operation. If the withered driver at the wheel was really what he appeared, use might be made of him, by posing as such a one in need of a steer.

At the station he secured his suitcase and threw it into the tonneau. Then he stepped to the side of the man.

"I'm under wraps," Renny almost whispered. "Expected to meet a pal here who knows the ropes, but he hasn't shown. I'm laying low a bit. Where's a good flop house, feller?"

The driver looked at him with interest.

"Martin's, if you're a right guy," he replied promptly.

"All right, put her in high. I got the dough but I don't savvy those big hotel lobbies and house dicks."

"You need never get leary of anything in Canford. This burg is run the way it's told. But you'll be safe at Martin's as a kid in a crib."

Renny thrilled—just what he hoped for, a regular thieves' hideout. The car presently stopped before an inconspicuous building on a side street. Big bay windows, on the street level, draped with curtains, and exposing two sickly palms, clearly advertised a speakeasy.

The driver carried the suitcase up a short flight of brownstone steps. A ring at the bell, and the shade stirred. Then the door opened.

"That you, Mr. Martin?" said the taxi cruiser. "I brought you a customer."

A giant figure stood in the doorway. Unshaved, lacking a collar, and unnaturally flushed, he was not prepossessing.

"You got a hell of a nerve bringin' a stranger to my place," he growled.

"I'm a regular," remarked Renny in a low voice, "and I can prove it."

He drew the resort keeper backward by the arm and whispered to him.

"They're putting the finger on a certain newspaper owner today, brother. Do I call the turn? If I wasn't strictly K. O. I wouldn't be in the know; you can write that in your little book."

As the man stood, hesitant, not moving a muscle or saying a word, Renny pulled out a big roll, stripped a fiver and flipped it to the taxi driver. Then he pushed him out, closing the door with a bang. That was the proper way to treat the small fry.

Martin's eyes suddenly narrowed, as he recovered a degree of poise.

"You crack so wise—who are you?"

"Renny Jackson, from Philadelphia. I took a runout powder, and heard this is a good burg. I expect to meet a pal who knows his way around."

The reporter suddenly developed an artificial anger.

"If that ain't good enough for you I know where to go," he stormed. "You folks are supposed to have this town all tied up and yet you act like an old woman guarding a litter of kittens. Do I have to get the police to identify me before I get treated human?"

He made a move toward the door.

Martin grabbed him by the arm.

"Don't act hostile; we has to be careful," he explained apologetically. "But I'm not takin' much chances." His laugh was short and disagreeable. "A phoney doesn't last as long in these parts as a snowball coasting to hell."

With a changed manner he picked up Renny's bag and led him up the stairway. Evidently he knew of the plot to get Mark Middleton, but was unaware that it had already gone through.

"Here's a nice room and bath, Jackson," Martin murmured, unlocking a door.

"A swell layout, sure enough," exclaimed Renny, really surprised at the comfortable quarters.

"Now, if you can slip me a card to some swell speakeasy, where I may light on my pal if he's drifted in, I'll stop asking."

The resort owner scribbled on a small pad.

"I have a dump downstairs," he explained, "but we make the stuff in a bath tub. This'll let you into The Pleasant Club; they have some real good stock there and it is a regular hangout for the boys."

"Thanks a lot."

As he hesitated in the doorway Renny quickly threw open his suitcase on a chair and openly secured his Service revolver. Holding the weapon in the palm of his hand, he slid it easily into his side coat pocket.

Then he thrust out the same hand.

"Thanks, old man, you're aces. If you ever come to Philadelphia look me up and I'll tear things apart for you."

"'S'nothing," chuckled Martin, and bowed himself out.

SO FAR so good, thought Renny, closing the door and locking it. He had established himself in one of those crooks' hideaways dotting the country from coast to coast—undergrounds that had made it possible for such criminals as Gerald Chapman and Dutch Anderson to find safe shelter in various cities.

Renny tore up identifying papers into small bits and disposed of them in the bathroom. He must hurry, arrive at The Pleasant Club before the news of the Middleton shooting broke in a newspaper extra. Be on hand for the fireworks.

He glanced at his watch. Half an hour since he had left the office of the *Bugle*, a morning paper. It would take another half hour before the opposition sheet, an evening one, could check up on the outrage, run off an edition, and get papers on the street.

In fifteen minutes he was climbing a dark flight of stairs in a two story building two blocks beyond City Hall, right on the main stem. Renny rang a bell and a sliding panel opened. His card of introduction was recognized instantly.

"Oh, Martin telephoned you were comin'."

The door was opened by a bartender and Renny walked toward an open bar in a big room directly at his left. The place was brilliantly lighted and almost deserted.

Over in a corner sat five men, all carefully attired, playing cards listlessly, as if merely to pass the time. Two ferret faced subordinates lounged with half filled glasses of beer before the brass rail.

Renny stationed himself at the end of the long bar, standing with his back to a shuttered window.

"Give me a slug of Scotch and seltzer," he ordered.

As the bartender mopped a space in front of him, he saw that three of the men at the table were regarding him intently under lowered lids. Had Martin phoned of his seeming foreknowledge of the shooting of Middleton? Probably. Well, he must take chances to arouse interest. To get in with the big shots of the Canford underworld he must pose as more than just another crook.

The bartender placed glasses and a bottle in front of him. Renny poured a small drink and squirted in the seltzer himself. Pulling out a fat roll of bills, he stripped off a ten dollar note and threw it down.

An atmosphere is an odd, sometimes vague thing, but at times it can be felt as though of solid weight. The atmosphere in The Pleasant Club was tense—strained with a certain suspense—as though of waiting for somebody to break the uncertainty with a word. The five men at the table hardly exchanged any comments. Untasted highballs were before them. The two underlings likewise kept their thoughts to themselves.

Renny sipped his drink slowly. This was to be his stand until Middleton, managing editor of the *Bugle*, started the ball rolling. He had plotted successfully to be here to receive it. Then suddenly it came, with all the snap of an explosion.

Newsboys were shrieking in the street:

"Extra! Extra! All about the shooting of the owner of the *Bugle*. Read all about the—"

No more could be heard as the boys hastened away.

An electric current seemed to flash over the room. Automatically the men at the table downed their drinks. The bartender hurriedly gulped a shot of straight whisky.

"The house is going to buy," he said hoarsely.

Clutching at his apron, he wiped sweat from his forehead. Then he gravely set them up all around.

This was the news, obviously, that they had been expecting. They had doubtless been sitting playing cards all afternoon. Two of the five the reporter picked as business men. The three gangsters were establishing an acid proof alibi. That air of tension, taut as a violin string, was broken.

The leader must be that dark, menacing bulk, with a scar running from the right edge of the mouth to the chin. His companions, on either side, short and slim,

elaborately dressed, with eyes like slits and complexions a dead white, must be trailing with him.

The two business men he placed as locals, picked upon as marks, to serve as creditable witnesses if need be.

Renny chatted in a low voice with the bartender on indifferent topics. The latter muttered short answers at the proper times, but his attention was not with the customer.

The quiet was shattered by a loud, peremptory knock at the door. The bartender leaped to close a safe at the back of the room, near Renny, which had been left ajar. They both jumped together. Renny drew his revolver and tossed it inside just as the man jammed against the steel door and nervously turned the wheel.

"Keep that for me till I want it."

Another loud knock.

"Go let them in, Paddy," came an order from the table. "Doors cost money. They'll bust that one into splinters."

THERE was a crash before the house man could obey. The lock and chain gave and a squad of six men entered, all in plain clothes except a police lieutenant.

"Is this a booze raid?" asked the bartender mildly, starting to take off his apron.

"Aw, keep that stuff for the kids' hour on your radio."

The officer in charge turned toward the table.

"You know me, Lieutenant Blake of the homicide squad. I suppose you birds have been playing cards all afternoon, eh? A nice sweet alibi—with a couple of salesmen, carryin' wishbones for backbones, thrown in. Scar Murphy, and you two, Boyle and Shorty, you'll take a visit to headquarters with me."

The three gangsters arose; Murphy flicked an imaginary spot off his blue serge suit.

"All right, Blake," he murmured, "don't get excited. You'll get high blood pressure."

"I won't be alone. Middleton just croaked in the Central Hospital, after being removed from the operating table. They dug four bullets out of him—and some birds are going to pay high for those little pellets."

No one answered him.

"There has to be a goat—a flock of 'em, maybe. The mayor's foaming at the mouth. That was a damn' fool move—bumping off Middleton," Blake continued.

"Perhaps it will teach his lousy sheet a lesson," said Murphy quietly. "But don't talk to *me*. I don't know a thing about this job."

Blake disdained to answer. His gaze wandered slowly toward Renny, of whom he had received a minute description from Tom Middleton, managing editor of the *Bugle*.

"What's your name, fellow, and what do you do for a living?"

"My name is Renny Jackson, and I get along answering foolish questions."

"That so? Where are you living?"

"Any business of yours?"

"It may be. And you may have to talk or sweat. We figure a new hired gun pulled this killing."

"Well, I have a room at Martin's. Any law against that?"

"Why not at a hotel?" growled Blake.

"That's my affair."

"We nose in plenty. We got a hot wire from Philadelphia you were paying us a visit. Better come along quiet."

Renny slapped his pockets.

"I ain't totin' a rod," he said smoothly. "But I was aiming to call on the chief. This is as good a time as any."

"No patrol wagon," snarled Scar Murphy.

"Of course not," retorted Lieutenant Blake, with deep sarcasm. "I got a couple of autos of a good make waiting outside."

Renny fell in line with the three gangsters, the squad closed about them, and they started for the street. A very polite kind of pinch. The reporter felt elated. Tom Middleton had got in touch with Blake, told him to pick him up as a suspect when flagged in a speakeasy popular

with the mob. He had established contact easily. Almost too easily. His status was established as a crook, but he must make it stand.

Two sedans waited at the curbing. The men tumbled in. Renny flipped a coin to a newsboy and grabbed an extra. He glanced at the headlines as he settled into a back seat, and Scar Murphy glanced over his shoulder.

The edition had evidently been issued before the final report of the newspaper proprietor's death.

MARK MIDDLETON DYING
FROM GANGSTER'S BULLETS;
ASSAILANT ESCAPES

Mark Middleton lies in the Central Hospital, riddled with lead from the revolver of some hired killer of our city's underworld. He was shot as he entered his home on Virginia Avenue. At first he was a defender of the present so-called reform administration, but in the past year his newspaper, the *Bugle*, has assailed the powers of law and order, linking them up with the sinister strength of racketeers. Whether Mr. Mark Middleton was shot by a personal enemy, or as part of a plot, has not yet been discovered, but the shooting has all the earmarks of having been done by a gangster. An abandoned car was found several blocks from the scene of the crime. This is being traced, and Chief Thompson has every available detective scouring the city for clues. The police hope to report progress in twenty-four hours. Suspects are being gathered in, and every effort will be made to bring Mr. Middleton's murderer, or murderers, to justice.

"APPLESAUCE," murmured Scar Murphy softly.

The trip to police headquarters was made speedily. Two other cars disgorged their human freight as they drew up. Somebody muttered the name of Cyclone Cassidy, and Renny watched a beefy, crimson complexioned man elbow his way to the street. He was pushing a plainclothesman's arm away from him.

"I'm here because I wanted to come," he growled. "You ain't taking me."

Murphy laughed provokingly The eyes of the two mob leaders met in a swift, hard exchange of glances.

Inside everybody was ushered into the front office. Then, one by one, men were called by name into the chief's room.

Renny edged toward Scar Murphy.

"They have nothin' on me," he said in a whisper, "but I don't want to be held. I have fall money for bail, in case I'm jugged, but I may need a mouthpiece."

The other grinned.

"Don't take this serious, buddy. I'll spring you in case they try to make you—"

"A goat," put in Renny wryly. "Somebody will have to take the hot squat for this."

"Don't kid yourself. The gumshoes'll run around like a bunch of squirrels after nuts—and in a couple of weeks it will all blow over."

"Renny Jackson," bellowed a veteran cop, and Renny walked briskly through the open door.

Several detectives were grouped around the chief of police, at his desk. In the background were gathered a group of newspaper reporters.

There was one vacant chair with a bright light shining on it. Commanded to be seated, Renny slouched into the blinding radiance and faced the chief, a gray haired man with the loose, slack lines under the eyes, and sagging cheeks, that told their own story.

"Now, Jackson, you breezed into Canford this afternoon?"

"Yes, at 2:30."

He passed over a Pullman stub.

"That can be checked up."

"Humph. Where did you go upon your arrival?"

"To Martin's, to secure a room and bath. Then I wandered over to The Pleasure Club, where your homicide squad invited me down here."

"From Philadelphia, aren't you?"

"Yes, what of it? There's no call out for me. I ain't wanted."

"Then why did you leave there?"

Renny's lips grew tight.

"Private business."

The chief turned on his swivel chair, facing the reporters.

"Though he is a suspicious character I don't see how we can tie this man up with the murder. Getting into town at 2:30, he has accounted for his time since, and in any case he couldn't get out to Middleton's home on Virginia Avenue by 2:45. We have established, you know, the exact time of the shooting."

A reporter stepped forward.

"Don't you think these alibis are getting a bit pat? One gangster is at the doctor's, several are in a poolroom under the eyes of a group who know them by sight, others play cards with business men the police have nothing on. The stories are too good to be anything except prearranged."

The police official smiled a bit cynically.

"Carlton, you're on the *Bugle*, so I can't blame you. But if you were arrested as a suspect you'd damn' well try to account for your time. My theory is that some personal enemy of Middleton knocked him off. He had many enemies, outside of those who did not agree with his political and civic views. The police have some evidence they can not divulge at this time. To do so might defeat the ends of justice. Developments in the form of important arrests may be expected at any time now."

Pencils scribbled on copy paper. Of course this was the same old hokum issued by every police head, stalling for time, but it was a statement, anyway, one calculated to quiet a public asking for results.

The chief pressed a button. Lieutenant Blake came in by a side door.

"This Jackson wasn't armed when you took him in?"

"No, sir."

"We have nothing to hold him on, even as a material witness. But we'll keep an eye on him; the city will be an armed camp from now on."

"Oh, you know my address," said Renny lightly, "and I'll be around for a while. I like your town, Chief; it reminds me of Cicero."

There was a chuckle from the newspapermen.

Renny left the room and swaggered toward Scar Murphy, not yet called.

"I was afraid I was going to be sweated," he chuckled. "That was like an afternoon tea."

"Oh, the chief's only a stuffed shirt. I often wonder what's holding him up."

"Scar Murphy!" an officer called, and the gang leader went inside.

Renny was sure he could see the bulge of a gun at his hip. It did not take a medium to see who was running Canford. This investigation was a farce. To prove it, Murphy was out in less than five minutes.

He beckoned to Renny.

"Let's go back to the shop and get the taste of this out of our mouths. For a visitor you're not getting a right welcome."

"No, I never expected to be lagged and need an 'out' my first couple of hours in town."

They reached the street. A police car stood at the curb, a driver at the seat.

"Hello, George. Can you drive us back to the club?"

"Sure, they'll be another hour inside."

As the car started Murphy assumed a friendly manner.

"Who are your pals in Philly? I might have met up with one or another of them."

The words were light, but it was a cross-examination for information nevertheless.

Renny thought quickly.

"Red Brown, Augie Miller and Strong Sullivan were my closest side kicks."

Murphy muttered the names over as if to memorize them.

The reporter had mentioned gangsters prominent, at one time, in their various rackets. He breathed a sigh of relief when his companion said he did not know them. Well, Canford was a long way from Philadelphia.

Yet it was not so far as he imagined. Suspicion can swing a long arm.

At 10:00 that evening Renny told the bunch he was tired and left The Pleasure Club. He had passed a friendly evening, with no definite results as yet, but he did not expect them so soon. There was not

the slightest doubt, of course, that Scar Murphy and his mob, likewise Cyclone Cassidy and his following, had been in on the plot to kill Middleton. To get actual proof was something else again. He was sure he had edged his way into the early stages of confidence of Murphy, and his bodyguard, Boyle and Shorty. He must await a lucky break to put things over.

He had no idea of the sinister mistrust reaching out like a talon to trip him.

After he left, Scar Murphy and Boyle and Shorty were hunched over a table, their heads together. The leader had a telegraph blank in front of him.

"This here Renny Jackson don't look the real goods to me. If we have a rat on our hands I want to know it. And when I get a hunch nothing can hold me back."

"No time to let a stool pigeon put a spoke in the works," muttered Boyle.

"Want to give him the rod?" This from Shorty, softly.

"Naw, I'm going to allow this feller a chance to come clean. I'm wiring to Big Boy Terry, a Philadelphia friend of mine, asking him to get cases on this Renny Jackson. To get the lowdown from Brown, Miller and Sullivan. And if he can't prove him right, to come on himself—catching the first rattler. Big Boy knows every gun worth knowing in the East."

There were murmurs of approval.

Suddenly Murphy slammed his fist on the table and the glasses rattled.

"If Big Boy Terry does pull his freight for Canford, I'll arrange a meeting between him and Renny Jackson!"

"Sure, Chief," chipped in Shorty, "and Kerry's Roadhouse, supposed to be closed, would be just the spot."

"And if Big Boy doesn't immediately give the office that Jackson is A-No. 1, he will sink him with hot lead quicker'n a flash."

Murphy sat back and puffed benignly at his cigar.

"It'll be a nice chance to have some one else do our dirty work," he commented, with a grin.

III

THE GANGSTER who had slain Mark Middleton, owner of the *Bugle*, thinking thereby to stop the newspaper from continuing its attack on corrupt office holders, and a deaf, dumb and blind police force, with greased palms, never anticipated the whirlwind of public opinion that was unleashed.

The following morning every newspaper in the country carried front page stuff with indignant reports of the crime; and editorials, shrieking for speedy justice, kept pace with the news stories. The Associated Press, The United, and The International News, all dispatched special writers to Canford, so quickly and unpleasantly placed, like a black mark, on the map.

Canford's Chamber of Commerce held an early meeting. An angry resolution was passed calling upon Mayor Morris to remove the stain from the fair name of the city—or remove himself. The Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, composed of representative business men, formally demanded that something be done to catch the murderer and clean up the town quickly.

Mayor Morris was more fool than knave, but he knew his police force had cracked badly, and was a hotbed of graft. A drastic shake-up now, however, would be an admission of negligence, and a turnabout of his party.

So he called upon District Attorney Gibbons to take charge of a fair and impartial investigation—to spare neither time, men, or money, and to use his own methods. In fact Mayor Morris took one nervous look at the situation and passed the buck.

District Attorney Gibbons received it with good grace. Several men, in his position, had climbed to the governor's chair on a criminal case of nationwide publicity. Had not Whitman done that little thing in New York State, after successfully handling the Rosenthal affair?

So Gibbons started his private investigation, mustering a squad of detectives he knew could be trusted. There are always

a number of honest men on any force—maybe a majority—but they can not do much if hampered by politics and by superiors who put on the brakes.

One distinct drawback existed in a city like Canford, with a population of about a hundred and fifty thousand. All the members of the law force and the crooks had at least a nodding acquaintance. A number were neighbors. Fifty per cent. had even gone to school together.

Renny did not communicate with Tom Middleton before going to Martin's and retiring. The managing editor of the *Bugle* knew as much about the case, to date, as he did.

After enjoying a good night's sleep, he arose, had a cold shower and dressed leisurely.

Then he took a good look around. A survey of the contents of his suitcase showed that nothing had been disturbed. A glance out of the window, at the back, showed no fire escape; but a thick rope was coiled on the wide window sill, the end mortared in with an iron spike.

Thirty to thirty-five feet below was an alley, leading to a side street.

"A detail to remember in case a quick exit is in the cards," thought the reporter.

But he was possessed of a feeling of false security. Had not his actions and acting been all in keeping, leaving no loophole for dangerous criticism?

Many a Federal agent and secret investigator has come to his death through a peculiar sort of blindness.

While Renny breakfasted and read the paper, Big Boy Terry of Philadelphia was on his way to Canford, blood in his eye.

He would soon find out about this Renny Jackson. The name was a bit familiar; perhaps it was a gun on good standing laying low under an alias. But why this request from Scar Murphy to get information from Red Brown, Augie Miller and Strong Sullivan?

All three gangsters were dead and planted—popped off during the past year in underworld feuds. Big Boy had attended each ornate and elaborate funeral, and helped loot a florist's for flowers.

Consequently he felt as if some joke was being played upon him. Somebody would foot the bill.

While Renny lounged about at Martin's till late in the afternoon, the new arrival from Philadelphia reached Canford and discovered Scar Murphy's hangout without the slightest difficulty.

His huge form blocked the doorway to The Pleasure Club, but Murphy waved him back, and they proceeded downstairs, to enter a car, to be driven by Boyle for a quiet talk.

There were the usual social greetings.

"Scar, I smell somethin' funny. Brown, Miller and Sullivan all kicked the bucket within a year. You know—too much competish for big business—and boys get a leetle hot headed."

Murphy nodded.

"It is funny your man spoke only of knowin' three dead ones who can't buzz one way or another."

"Plenty peculiar."

"Well, mebbe I'll know this gun—mebbe not. If I don't, the sooner he's buried the better. Just as a favor to you, Scar, if Jackson is wrong, I will plug him for you myself."

"That's decent of you, Big Boy. I got it all planned. Kerry's Roadhouse is supposed to be closed for the season. We keep it open for private parties, and other reasons. Run out there and have Kerry serve you a chicken dinner in a private room. I'll take this Jackson out with me—and have you two meet."

"All right with me."

"And if you don't savvy this party and settle his hash, I'm goin' to insist on your takin' back a couple of grand to set 'em up for the boys."

Big Boy nodded, without thanks or surprise. Favors of life and death come high in the underworld.

IT WAS NOT until nearly five o'clock that Renny entered The Pleasure Club. Keeping too close, he thought, might arouse suspicion. He must act natural.

The bartender who let him in grunted a

welcome, and Scar Murphy's greeting, from his special table, was a bit overdone, if anything. He waved to the newcomer to join him, and boisterously asked where he had been keeping himself. Renny murmured something and slipped into a seat between Murphy and Shorty. Boyle was out with the car.

The bar had a dozen or more customers now. Nobody had been arrested; all alibis were accepted by the police; everything was jake again.

Murphy had been drinking more than usual. His face was pale, but the scar that had given him his name stood out a livid red more prominently than ever.

"I have a treat for you tonight, Jackson, if you'll join us—a special chicken dinner that'll make your mouth water."

"Here at the club?" asked Renny absently.

"No, out at our pet roadhouse. Nice place, ain't it, Shorty?"

The bodyguard nodded.

"I'm feeling great," continued Murphy. "I've a load on my mind and tonight it's goin' to be lifted. Eh, Shorty?"

"Sure, Chief."

"Am I in on this?" inquired Renny.

"I should say yes! This is going to be an unusual party. We have a long drive, and we don't want to keep Kerry waiting, so we'd better start now. Shorty has his car downstairs."

He arose and whispered to the bartender. That individual slipped him a pint flask.

"Might be a little cold—on the way back."

Renny said nothing, though he was thinking hard. It seemed impossible that Murphy had discovered his true status, and that he was being taken for a ride. No, that would need more than a driver and one man. A gang always demanded the odds well in its favor.

He trailed with Murphy and Shorty, noting that they kept behind him on the way to the car. He was going where they wanted to take him, that was clear. However, he was armed, and there were only two of them, one minding the wheel.

After the car started Murphy gave vent to a malicious humor. Jackson was either on the level or was going to his execution. If he happened to be a detective, it would give him satisfaction to tantalize him.

"What do you think of that bumping off of Middleton?" he queried suddenly.

"Damn' foolish," returned Renny indifferently. "Nobody cares if members of a gun mob kill each other—a newspaper owner is something different."

"Lots of folks figger he had it coming to him," said the other sullenly. "Anyway, there's one sure thing—they'll never find the trigger man who shot him."

"Left Canford, I suppose?" This listlessly, though Renny was intent on the answer.

"No, he's right here in town, but hiding in the last place any one would ever look for him."

"That's good. Keep him there till this noise quiets down."

"Oh, he won't break cover."

His tone was taunting.

Renny sensed a certain crude hostility and his right hand crept into his coat pocket where rested his gun. The gang leader took a drink from the flask but did not offer one to his companion. They rode on for three-quarters of an hour. Finally the car stopped with grinding brakes in front of a roadhouse, apparently deserted, the windows all boarded up, and a general air of neglect and desolation about the grounds. A chill wind was blowing and autumnal leaves shifted here and there. The few trees were black and bleak.

"Here we are," said Murphy briskly. "I'll go ahead and give the high sign to Kerry. He only entertains certain guests out of season."

He jumped from the car and walked down a path leading to a side entrance. Renny and Shorty were kept waiting several minutes. The reporter could not help but see something strange about the whole proceeding. In fact, though not given to fearful conclusions, he had the feeling that he was walking into a trap.

Too late to back out now. The door finally opened, releasing a flood of yellow light in the dusk, and a tall, thin man, white haired, stood aside for the two men to pass in. They entered what must have been a dance hall in the summer, with a long bar of some sort at the side. Now tables and chairs were piled up at one end. A large table was set for dinner, however, with three places.

MURPHY was standing with his back to the bar, thumbs in his vest, under the armpits. Shorty glided to his side.

All his senses alert, Renny noticed at the back of the large room a door swinging slightly on its hinges.

"You remember telling me, Jackson, about your three Philadelphia pals?"

Murphy's voice had a cold ring.

"Brown, Miller and Sullivan? Sure enough, what of it?"

"Just this, brother. I took the time, being an inquisitive cuss, to have 'em checked off. They're all dead. Pretty cute picking on guys who can't talk back."

"I never said they were alive. They got knocked off and—"

"That don't matter. I went to great lengths to prove you're really a regular. To do so I've brought on a right guy who knows everybody who's anybody in your home town. Come on in, Big Boy Terry, and cast your peepers at our friend here."

Renny stiffened. Of course he knew Big Boy Terry—knew him as a reporter at police headquarters. They had brought Terry in time after time, but never had been able to pin anything on him.

As a reporter he would be judged a spy, anyway. He must get Terry first.

The door, a bit ajar, swung open, and the huge gangster advanced in a half crouch, his right hand slipping inside his coat at the top button. A heavy set creature, but he walked on the balls of his feet, and under lowered brows the staring eyes indicated him ready for the attack.

His mouth opened a bit as he approached Renny, and a flash of recognition crossed his face.

The reporter's right hand had slipped into his pocket, the thumb taking the guard off the automatic. He was ready to shoot it out—but he must wait for that first word.

Terry stopped in his tracks ten feet away.

"Say, I know you—Renny—but why—"

"Because of you, rat!" screamed Renny.

He fired through his pocket—once, twice, three times, the blasts burning the cloth, but the shots finding their mark. Terry made a convulsive effort to draw. The other had started too quickly. Two bullets caught him above the heart, another in the stomach, and he slowly crumpled forward, shaking his head as if to throw off death.

Renny kept his hand on the automatic and swung toward Murphy and Shorty, feeling he held the upper hand. Vindication! Terry had, unconsciously, said just enough—not too much—before he was stopped. That sprawled figure on the floor would never rise again.

"What the hell is this—sending in my worst enemy—the cannon responsible for the killing of my three best pals?" exclaimed Renny in a fury. "You heard him call me by name—he knew me all right—didn't he? Do you want the same dose he got? I'm bad medicine when I get started."

Murphy tried to smile, but it was a poor effort. Both he and Shorty stood stock still, hands, palms open, at their sides. They both knew what it meant to provoke a killer with the taste of blood.

"You're all right, Jackson," Murphy tried to say heartily, but the tone was a bit thin, "and I'm glad you came through."

He pointed toward the table.

"I knew somebody would be among the missing. You see I only ordered places for three!"

Big Boy Terry's body was lugged out of sight, behind the bar, through the combined efforts of Kerry and Shorty. No remarks were made as to its final disposal. Renny asked no questions.

With all his heart and soul the latter

was glad he had stuck to his nickname—short for detested Reginald—while changing his last. This was something of a life saver.

The three men seated themselves and Murphy called for a round of drinks. This time Renny really needed a bracer and he took the shot straight. A long time since the World War and actual bloodshed. His conscience was clear enough, but the nerves inside were crawling.

"So Big Boy Terry and you were already at outs?" asked Murphy.

"Surest thing you know. And I'm glad I was too quick for him."

"You are there with a fast gat. But you can't blame me, Jackson, after all, for checking you up. Things are tricky since Middleton was wiped out."

"I don't ask questions—ordinary," said Renny slowly, "but I understood you fellows had this town sewed up."

"We had. Now I ain't so sure. We're getting away with our stuff too easy. When there's not a cloud in sight, look out. There's been enough for both Cyclone Cassidy and myself. We've been dividing rackets. He protects certain trades, others belong to me. We let the mayor alone, but the chief of police has been in our pocket right along—and most of the captains under him. We have guarded booze and dope routes, and stuff is safe from hijackers from here to Chi. I handle the wet goods, Cyclone the prancing powders. This here roadhouse is a depot. Down in the cellar is enough Scotch to float a battleship and coke to make it turn somersaults."

RENNY laughed. The chief was warming to a pleasant mood, and feeling, doubtless, that he should show some confidence in Renny, after the rough going.

"The shipments downstairs are too valuable not to be guarded," continued Murphy, with a grin. "Getting to 'em without a certain approach will set off time bombs. If hijackers *do* step in, Kerry, who knows the works, steps out—and they get plenty."

"I didn't think they'll ever catch you napping, Murphy, you're too wise for that," returned Renny, flattery in his tone.

But, during a splendid chicken dinner, interrupted by many drinks, Murphy's tongue, though it might wag, and did, on various angles of his manifold rackets, kept off the subject of Middleton's murder. He was getting the gravy from all sides and did not mind impressing this gunman, about whose standing he was quite at ease. Yet there was a place to stop confidences and he did not need any one to tell him just when to be silent.

Renny drank a few more drinks than he wanted, but he kept his head. He knew he could not throw drinks into a cuspidor or over his shoulder, even in tipsy company.

He did, however, plead that he was tired when the two gangsters seemed determined to make a night of it, and managed to persuade them to return to town.

Shortly after 11:30 he left Murphy in front of The Pleasure Club, arm in arm with Shorty, and started to walk toward Martin's. Turning off into a side street, he slipped around the block and then entered a drug store. All four telephone booths were empty. He chose the first and called Tom Middleton's private number.

"You caught me on the way to the office to catch the bulldog edition," said the managing editor in response. "I recognize the voice."

"All right. Grab a pad and pencil. Let that out of town edition stand—but you're going to turn the city run upside down."

"I'm ready. Shoot."

"Here's what I advise—and what you must do—for results. Print beforehand what is going to happen and put the fear of God—and the law—into the other side. Say you have it on good authority that the chief of police will be asked to resign at once by the mayor, and Lieutenant Blake appointed in his place. This will happen

when you go to the mayor—wake him up tonight and slap the facts in his face. Tell him District Attorney Gibbons is to call a special grand jury, and it would indict Chief Thompson in ten minutes—this is a one and only chance to save his own skin.

"Now, here is the situation. The trigger man who killed your brother is right here in town, but so safely hidden it's understood there's no chance of his being stumbled upon.

"The rackets here in Canford are split between Scar Murphy and Cyclone Cassidy, but I don't want Murphy even mentioned as yet. Get my point—I want to create bad blood between the two gangs."

"How will you do that?" asked Tom Middleton.

"Easy. Murphy handles booze—Cassidy runs dope. Kerry's Roadhouse is a big depot, but is guarded against hijackers by some complicated set of bombs. They don't even consider a pinch by the police. However, if the building is surrounded and Kerry nabbed he will lead Blake and his squad to save his own hide. Always trust a crook to think of No. 1. Have the dope seized—but let the booze alone.

"On top of that have Blake arrest Cassidy and a couple of his men on narcotic charges, also as accessories to the murder of your brother. District Attorney Gibbons can demand they be held without bail. Leaving Murphy's bunch alone will create bad feeling—and if they start killing each other off we'll be on the way to catch a blabber.

"Hint that the identity of the trigger man is known, and that he will be picked up when wanted. But don't print anything about Blake's raid and arrests till he makes 'em."

"Of course not. I'll keep the boys and the presses for a special extra tomorrow, after Blake does his stuff. How did you find all this inside information?"

"I had to kill a gangster to do it," said Renny grimly, "but that has nothing to do with this story. Do you think everything can be covered?"

"Boy, it'll be all over the front page tomorrow. Don't worry about my bringing sufficient pressure to bear on the mayor. He always was a weak sister, and when I tell him we're going to connect my brother's murder with his administration he will eat out of my hand."

"Fine. I guess that's all for tonight."

"You're going great, my boy; keep up the good work."

Renny sighed as he hung up the receiver, wondering whether Middleton could come through without a fatal slip. A machine will run if manipulated properly, but one can never figure quite surely the moves of the human equation.

Not a soul had entered the drug store, but Renny knew the game of entering a booth, after another has left it, and asking for the same number back again. So he called Martin's, asking if any message had been received for him. Receiving a negative from the proprietor, he decided to call it a night.

Leaving the drug store, Renny purchased a couple of evening papers and strolled slowly toward his lodgings. The cool night air was grateful after the excitement and the drinks. All in all he felt quite pleased with himself. Middleton had been furnished with sufficient ammunition to bring in an honest chief of police and start discord between Canford's two leading gangs. The arrest of Cassidy and the seizure of his dope, while leaving Murphy's booze alone, would seem like the tip-off of a disgruntled rival. In the crush of battle a squealer might be found.

"When thieves fall out," thought Renny, "one who will talk may fall my way."

REACHING his lodging, Renny did not prepare for bed. Working on morning papers had taken from him, if he had ever had it, the habit of retiring early. He started to read a magazine he had bought on the train.

A clock in the distance chimed 1:00, but he continued to sit in his shirt sleeves, collar off, feet on the table and chair tipped back, smoking away and mildly interested in a creepy tale of the Orient.

A rap on the door broke in on his consciousness. The reporter glanced at his watch on the table. 1:30. Who could be dropping in at this hour of the night? Renny slipped on his coat and cautiously unlocked the door and turned the knob.

As he did so a woman brushed in, a bit out of breath, cheeks flushed. Beautiful, in a dark, vivid way, with that wonderful contrast of wide blue eyes and dark hair, showing under a close fitting felt hat.

A faint perfume came to him.

"Haven't you the wrong room, lady?" he queried politely.

He was taken aback when she quickly closed the door behind her and stood leaning against it, smiling provokingly.

"Surely you are courteous enough to ask me to be seated? Or are you afraid—"

Her voice trailed off charmingly on the last word, and she smiled again. It appeared quite clearly that she, not he, dominated the situation.

"Or are you one of those strong, silent types who never open their mouths except to say something disagreeable?"

Renny flushed, disconcerted by his visitor's manner.

Why, it was she, certainly, who should be called upon to explain. That was so feminine, putting a man naturally in the wrong.

"I'm sorry," he said, slowly, "if I appear inhospitable. I don't mind danger for myself—indeed it is a kind of tonic. But I can see that you are so evidently out of place here."

"You don't suspect that I am a dangerous adventuress?"

"Quite too charming, I'm sure—" his smile was disarming— "but I have had sufficient acquaintance with gun molls and hardened decoys. Of course you know—"

"Who you are? Yes, indeed, and now will you ask me to be seated?"

Renny bowed gallantly. He held a chair for her and she slouched into it; graceful, sophisticated and alluring, he mentally registered.

"Now," he began sternly, folding his arms and attempting to glower at the charming creature, "you must tell me the object of this quite theatrical midnight visit, though, perhaps, I may guess it."

She bit her lower lip.

"And your surmise?"

"That I receive this call from a motive of curiosity."

"Yes," she admitted ruefully, "and at this minute I hate myself for it. I wanted to see with my own eyes the man who was risking his life to punish Tom's murderers—and really questioned why he should take such risks. I desired to find if I might not pierce beneath the surface, with my woman's intuition, and perhaps find an unworthy urge. I feel ashamed."

"Don't condemn yourself, dear lady," said Renny. "You have seen me and observed my boorish manners. What is your verdict—or have you arrived at one?"

"I think you are a brave man," she said earnestly, "and that I am a foolish woman. I have been on the stage for six years; yet in real life I could not mingle —oh, that perfectly horrid man who let me in. He did leer so."

Renny laughed.

"Thanks for your complimentary attitude toward me. I shall try to deserve it. I assume you are one close to the murdered man?"

She nodded.

"Then feel satisfied that everything is being done that can be done. You can only help—with moral support."

The woman arose and thrust out her hand. He grasped it warmly.

"And when this is all over?" she said softly.

"I'll come some afternoon to tea, either in the spirit or the flesh."

Renny, quick to judge, felt no further doubts about the woman. He thought her venture quixotic to the point of recklessness, but sincere. It might have endangered him, but knowing the demoralizing effect of inaction, he forgave her for coming to inspect him like this. Better anything than to sit at home, waiting.

Yet Renny said nothing to commit himself. If suspicious ears listened through the walls, or if this beautiful creature

proved a decoy, his flattering gallantry was too evasive to betray him.

"And now," he continued, "I'd see you to the door downstairs—only that it would seem queer to them. Any honest to goodness moll would find her way out alone."

"Thank you, Mr. Renny," she said in a low voice, smiling. "From now on I shall think of you as working in my service. The modern girl, unlike the maiden of the middle ages, can not give her knight a gage to cherish."

"Memory will be enough," he said lightly, though with an undertone of earnestness.

He bowed her out, and then went back to do a lot of thinking, needing now no story of the Orient to lead his mind into channels of fine imaginings.

DOWNSTAIRS, in a tough dive with a sawdust sprinkled floor, Martin beckoned to a barfly, a broken creature who slumped with his back to the wall, waiting with trembling fingers for some one to buy.

"Wait outside, Yellow, an hour or so," Martin whispered, "and see if a swell looking broad comes out. If so foller her and see where she goes. Don't miss her. She ain't no ordinary jane, and her callin' upstairs don't look on the up and up to me."

The man nodded.

"Here, take a shot to brace you."

Martin poured a stiff drink into a thick glass, and the outcast drank it greedily.

"There'll be more waiting when you get back. Hurry now, Yellow."

The hanger-on slunk out of the dive and into the shadows of the street. Once Yellow had been a good crook, but a ten year term in prison had broken his spirit. He waited, well in advance of Renny's visitor's hurried descent of the stoop. She glanced quickly to right and left and flitted down the street. Yellow followed, keeping close to the buildings.

Near the corner of the second block a machine was parked. The woman unlocked the door and slipped under the driver's wheel. Yellow ran, bent nearly double, and gained a position, precarious to be sure, in the cavity made by the two spare tires tied on the back of the car. Impossible except for a thin shadow of a man. As the automobile started he retained his perch by clutching at the straps holding the tires in place.

The drive was a long one—to the outskirts of Canford. When the car slowed down Yellow fell off, cramped and numb, and crouched behind a withered hedge near the curbing.

The woman quickly ran up the steps of a handsome residence and was lost to sight.

An hour later, exhausted and almost out on his feet, Yellow groaned for a drink, back at Martin's bar.

The proprietor gave him two.

"Take me to the back room. Somethin' important," he muttered.

Martin hustled him into a private office.

"Come on — give it to me quick, no stallin'," the burly divekeeper demanded.

Yellow cleared his throat.

"It looks, boss, as if there's some squealin' goin' on. I jumps on the back of the car, holdin' on like a monkey—and where do you guess it slows down? Direct in front of Mark Middleton's home on Maple Avenue! I couldn't make no mistake—I knows the house well—lived in Canford all my life, 'cept when doing a bit in the State pen."

"Did you wait for the woman to come out?"

"No, I hustles back here quick as I can, nearly busting my pump."

He was breathing heavily.

"I guess that's enough. This Jackson upstairs is in with Scar Murphy's gang. But Cyclone Cassidy gets me my protection," muttered Martin, half aloud. "I'll beat it to him with this inside info. If there's any dynamite going up, I want to be in the clear."

Martin untied his apron, unrolled his sleeves and donned a coat and hat. He elbowed Yellow to the bar, told the bar-

tender to give him all he could hold—a big order—and disappeared into the night.

When a newspaper starts to use heavy artillery, with facts as ammunition, it has some certainty of obtaining results. The regular city edition of the *Bugle* laid down a barrage, a two column splash on the front page.

MAYOR TO OUST
CHIEF OF POLICE;
MIDDLETON'S SLAYER
AT LARGE IN CANFORD

The *Bugle* has been informed on reliable authority that a shake-up in the police department will occur today. Mayor Morris will wield the ax, and the official head of Chief Thompson is due to fall. The investigation that followed the murder of Mark Middleton, owner of the *Bugle*, was of a lax and perfunctory nature. Mayor Morris has expressed himself as anything but satisfied, and demands action and results.

Whether Chief Thompson will be asked for his resignation, or tender it himself, is a matter of conjecture. The *Bugle* can state that he is slated for the chutes. Rumors of his successor all center about Lieutenant John Blake, of the homicide squad. He is an old time officer who can deal effectively with the gangster situation, unhampered by the interference of superiors.

Underground gossip, from criminal sources, traced by a *Bugle* reporter, confirm a suspicion that the slayer of Mark Middleton remains hiding in fancied security in Canford.

Following the appointment of Lieutenant Blake as police head, events promise to move rapidly forward. District Attorney Gibbons, in hearty cooperation, is ready at a day's notice to call a special grand jury.

"The reign of terror caused by yeggs and thugs is to be a thing of the past," said Mr. Gibbons, when interviewed in his office. "Evidence of a conclusive nature is forthcoming that will terrify the underworld."

TOM MIDDLETON'S interview with Mayor Morris, held quite informally at two o'oclock in the morning, pointed to that bewildered office holder the error of his ways. If he would not clean house himself a Federal investigation was threatened, and that was the last thing he wanted. Safer to wash Canford's dirty linen without outside assistance.

At nine o'clock the following morning Chief Thompson's resignation was demanded and received. The same hour Lieutenant Blake moved into the vacated office and fastened the new badge on his uniform.

At a quarter after ten Chief Blake was closeted with Tom Middleton, and sent out word that they must not be disturbed. The managing editor repeated the knowledge furnished by Renny.

Blake's eyes glowed.

"Sure, Mr. Middleton, this town has been aching for a good overhauling. Since prohibition there's been too much heavy dough circulating around, and you can't blame anybody too much. Pity it is the poor patrolman on the beat, and the sergeant at the desk, gets the name—but not the game. I have honest coppers to back me. It is the higher-ups that have gone bad. And I'll prove it, sir, to your satisfaction."

"I'm holding the last edition on the press and hoping for a new front page run for an extra."

The chief grinned, savagely.

"You'll get it," he exclaimed. "I'm going to pull the first slam-bang raid in years. And you'll have the headlines before you finish luncheon."

"I have your word for it."

The two men arose and shook hands.

Tom Middleton went calling on District Attorney Gibbons, and that gentleman's dreams of becoming governor shone in more roseate hues than ever before.

All heroes are not early risers. Accustomed to afternoon and night shifts for years, Renny was not accustomed to starting the day much before noon. This morning was no exception. He bathed, shaved and dressed leisurely, and ten minutes afterward was blowing the steam from a hot cup of coffee in a lunch room near the main street of Canford.

Suddenly he heard an extra being called, jumped from the table and, rushing outside, secured a copy of the *Bugle*, damp and smudgy from the press. Huge head-

lines were splashed across the first page:

CHIEF BLAKE STAGES RAID
ON DOPE DEPOT OF CASSIDY,
HELD IN CUSTODY WITHOUT BAIL
ON NARCOTIC AND MURDER CHARGES

Chief Blake smashed all past Canford conventions of well advertised raids today, when he unearthed a great dope cache in Kerry's Roadhouse, just outside the city limits.

At the point of a gun Michael Kerry was persuaded to lead the police safely through a series of death traps, laid for hijackers, straight to the contraband narcotics. The value of the seizure of dope can not be estimated, but it will run well into hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Timed precisely with the raid on the roadhouse, so there might be no possibility of a tip-off, the alleged dope pedler, Cyclone Cassidy, was arrested just as he was leaving his home on Myrtle Avenue and taken by Detectives Brown and Sesson to police headquarters. District Attorney Gibbons summoned Magistrate Hunt, and had Cassidy held without bail on a short affidavit for forty-eight hours. He faces narcotic charges, which will be eventually turned over to the Federal authorities, and also will be indicted as one of the murderers of Mark Middleton. On the graver accusation he can be held in Canford.

It is evident there has been an underworld leakage. Some one has peached to the police, probably from a motive of revenge.

District Attorney Gibbons would not be interviewed. He sent word to the reporter from the *Bugle*, through his secretary, that he expects a certain prominent gangster, whose name he will not divulge, shortly to "come in and talk." He will be given an immunity bath and become a witness for the State. The net is closing on those who conspired the brutal murder of Mark Middleton.

"All very well," Renny ruminated. "Things are under way nicely. They'll be dusting off the hot box in the big house and getting the juice ready. Only one little matter to which I haven't attended. Merely to produce the murderer, and evidence to present with him."

He whistled merrily as he paid his breakfast check, and started walking toward The Pleasure Club, little figuring that his visitor of the previous evening had helped make it a death trap.

He did not know that he was red hat; that a cannon was out for him.

IV

WHEN Martin had managed to obtain entry to Cyclone Cassidy's home in the wee small hours of the night, after failing to find him in his usual haunts, he discovered the gang leader having one last drink, already muddled from too much alcohol. Not too far gone, however, to register the news of Renny Jackson's visitor.

"Squealers, eh?" he murmured. "Little enough they'll learn. Scar Murphy is a wise boy. I'll talk to him private tomorrow and we'll get your lodger, Martin."

He swayed away to his bedroom, lulled by years of security, protection bought and paid for.

After the arrest and raid the following day, but two glaring facts burned in Cassidy's brain. His dope had been seized and he was under arrest. Murphy's booze, hundreds of cases, was untouched and Scar was at large. So he had been doublecrossed. They were out to pin it all on him, Cyclone Cassidy.

Word was passed to his henchmen through his lawyer.

"So Murphy figures he will duck and leave me holding the bag? Railroading me won't come so cheap," he decided. "I didn't earn the name of Cyclone for nothing."

The Pleasure Club was empty of customers when Renny walked in, nodding to the bartender.

"Too early for a drink," he said, smiling. "The chief hasn't showed yet, eh?"

"No, I guess he ain't got over digesting the newspapers."

"He should worry," said Renny heartily.

Yet he wondered whether or not Scar Murphy would return to face the music.

Personally, to hour and date, Renny knew he had shot his bolt. The machinery of justice was under way, but if called upon for a showdown he realized he had nothing up his sleeve. In the past, splits between gangs had been a godsend—to the police. He had done his best to breed the poison of suspicion between Cassidy and

Murphy. Well, the former was held for forty-eight hours without bail. In that time bad blood must produce results.

Seating himself at a table near the end of the bar Renny waited. Not for long. Scar Murphy and his bodyguard, Boyle and Shorty, sauntered in, newspapers under their arms, and took their usual seats. The reporter was greeted with short nods, as if the minds of the three men were centered on a more important subject. They conversed in whispers too low for Renny to overhear; he noted, however, general expressions of puzzlement.

There was a tap at the outside door. The bartender opened it, and stumbled back, hit over the head with a blackjack.

Four men rushed in, guns out and held low. There was an instant crackle of fire. Their first shots, toward the tables, were high. The next instant the tables were tipped over. Murphy and his companions were crouched behind one, Renny behind his own, smelling acrid smoke.

He peered out. Boyle and Shorty were professional gunmen. Stabs of flames from their automatics claimed two of the invaders. They sprawled grotesquely in the entrance of the passageway. The other two men were nowhere in sight. In that first instant of attack they had taken shelter behind the bar, and were now creeping on hands and knees to a position opposite the first overturned table.

Suddenly they arose, and blue barrels spat over the bar. Shorty made a convulsive leap to his feet and pitched forward, his gun clattering against the cuspidor by the brass rail. At such short range, and aided by the element of surprise, the invaders quickly picked off Boyle and Murphy. First Scar slumped to the wall, head bent on his chest, and then Boyle tumbled over him, limp as a sack.

Renny had been holding his fire. Now the gangsters would turn their attention to him. Both he and the two men behind the bar were in bad positions to shoot without exposing themselves. Fortunately for him the reporter had stationed himself at the extreme end of the bar; at the right of his table was a low swinging door, waist high; he had that covered, and he waited for a head to show over the bar. He could look through a crack that went through the center of the table. It was a case of stalemate, but the odds were two to one.

Suddenly a bullet imbedded itself in the woodwork but did not pierce it. Yet it was splintered. As a protection the table was worthless.

Renny decided to attack. A good offense was always the best defense. He was about to stumble to his feet and shoot it out, when there was a blast of gunfire from the open doorway.

A voice was roaring through the rattle of the guns.

"Throw your gats on the floor, and hands up. The dump's surrounded by the police—and I have ten men here to wipe up the place."

RENNY'S weapon was thrown over the table, and he arose from his cramped position. The two gangsters sullenly popped up from the bar and slung their automatics to the floor. Their hands were elevated shoulder high; so were the reporter's. It was no time for explanations.

"Slip the bracelets on them and take 'em over to the city jail."

For the first time a steel cuff closed over Renny's right hand. The squad was in charge of a tough detective, unknown to him, and his men looked as though they had been disappointed in the lack of fight shown. With the two gangsters, the reporter was pulled downstairs to the patrol wagon and none too gently jerked up the steps and thrown into a side seat. A pair of detectives guarded the entrance, and one stood swinging on the back step.

The officer in charge of the raid was in high glee.

"We got there in good time," he chuckled to a subordinate. "Five dead ones, and three live ones. If we'd been ten minutes later all we'd have found was meat for the morgue."

At the city jail Renny and the two gangsters were not even booked on charges. They were led, handcuffed to their captors, past the warden's office, down a long hallway, a turnkey leading the way. Then they were put into different cells. As Renny was thrust violently into a black hole he collided with a man.

"Pardon me," muttered the reporter. "I didn't expect company. I thought they gave you a room by yourself in this hotel."

A shrill laugh came from the man he had bumped.

"I'm glad to get company," he exclaimed, "and it ain't so dark after your eyes get used to it. Got a cig on you?"

As Renny fumbled in his pocket his eyes did become a bit more accustomed to the gloom. He could see the shadowy figure against the bars, a long wide bunk, and a couple of stools.

A match flared, and Renny saw a pale, thin man, with pinched features, but a certain power in the level gaze.

"I'm dying for news," he began. "I can't get newspapers—the lousy warden is one of those take all and give nothing grafters, and not a damn' soul has been here to visit me."

"What are you in for?"

"Oh, I took sixty days for disorderly conduct."

"When did they throw you in?"

"The day before Middleton was murdered."

"You heard about that, though."

"Yes, everybody did. But I get the office that hell's been breaking loose in Canford and I have no details. Cyclone Cassidy is somewhere in this tier. A couple of other birds beside you were jugged."

Eagerness was in his voice.

"Nothing much to tell," said Renny. "Four of Cyclone's gang walked into The Pleasure Club to clean up. They crippled Murphy, Boyle and Shorty; in turn two of their men are out; I think for keeps. It is hard to tell if any one is killed; takes lots of lead to do it to some. The other two and me, who was with Scar, were given a little ride in the wagon, and here we are."

His cellmate whistled. To kill time, Renny disclosed the removal of the old chief of police, the appointment of Lieutenant Blake, and the raid on Kerry's Roadhouse.

He had an interested listener.

"What's all this leading to?"

"That's easy enough," returned Renny idly. "Some one must come forward and claim immunity by turning State's evidence on the Middleton murder. The man who does will have the laugh on the rest."

"Do you believe that?"

"I sure do. When the pressure gets too strong some one will squeal his way out—and the rest will get the juice."

"I've been a runner for both Cassidy and Murphy," said Renny's cellmate sullenly, "and they always took care of me. Guess the game is cold, now. That's the way with all good things. Since I've been here you'd think I was a gone louse; no one has given me a tumble."

The prisoner was evidently suffering from injured pride. It was no new thing, however, to find a gangster sensitive and touchy. Nerves jumpy from the nature of the racket, a few days of confinement has broken many of them.

Renny gave his cellmate several more cigarets. The reporter wondered how long he might be kept here in jail, and just what measures Tom Middleton and Chief Blake would take to gain his release.

After gaining all the information he desired Renny's cellmate relapsed into silence.

Perhaps an hour passed.

Suddenly a scream rent the air, and there was the heavy thud of a falling body. Followed a deep undertone of voices, wolfish in their low intensity. Mingled with the murmur came the clatter of straining cell doors and the sharp rasp as locks were turned.

"A jail break," exclaimed Renny's cellmate, "and I bet staged by Cyclone. Gee, I'll be glad to crash out of this jug."

In the semi-darkness, as the two men

pressed against the bars of their cell, they could see two burly figures approaching down the corridor. One man jingled keys on a ring. After an instant's interrogation he opened door after door, and prisoners swarmed out.

He paused before their cell.

"Who's inside?" he growled.

The face could not be seen, but the voice was that of Cyclone Cassidy.

"It's me, Ted Robbins. Let me out quick."

A grunt was the reply.

"Any one with you?"

"Yes, one of Murphy's men."

"So."

A match flickered and was held high. Cyclone Cassidy laughed gloatingly, a light in his eyes dancing madly.

"Well, if it ain't my young friend who had a lady visitor who ends up at Middleton's house. You're one sweet stool-pigeon, but you'll carry no more messages. And you, Ted Robbins—a damn' sight safer dead than alive."

As the match burned down he drew a revolver and started shooting deliberately through the bars, the bright flashes of flame searing the darkness.

Renny felt a stab of pain in his right shoulder, then a blinding something pained his head. Darkness enveloped him. He fell backward as Cassidy fired his last shot and joined the others in the jail break. Ted Robbins slumped to the stone floor from the first two bullets, aimed almost point blank.

WHEN Renny regained consciousness he found himself on a narrow cot, in a whitewashed room. He could not move, but looking sidewise, he saw Ted Robbins in another cot beside him, heavily swathed in bandages. His head throbbed and his shoulder ached like a bad tooth.

The door opened and Chief Blake walked in.

"You're two lucky guys," he said gruffly. "You, Renny, got a flesh wound in the shoulder, and was only creased in the head. An inch nearer and you wouldn't be here. Your playmate here was plugged twice in the body, but he will recover to drive many a more truck load of booze."

"Did you catch Cyclone and the others?" asked Renny weakly.

"Sure, had a squad waiting for 'em. We had a tip the warden of this little coop was crooked. He sold out to Cyclone. It was a fake jail break, to cover his tracks."

"Well, we aren't getting ahead any," groaned Renny. "No one has saved his skin by squealing yet."

"No, but some one may any minute," said the police chief gravely. "Honor among thieves is a joke. Just give me twenty-four hours to sweat 'em."

A low voice came from Robbins' cot.

"Didn't yer say, pal, that the first bird to turn State's evidence would get a lifeline?"

"Eh?"

"Get in the lifeboat—get a pardon."

"Yes, immunity," murmured Renny. "I didn't get you at first."

"Stir bugs' talk," commented Chief Blake.

"Sure, I said that," continued the reporter, "but you—you were here a day before Middleton was killed."

Robbins ignored that.

"Is that right, Chief," he whispered. "Will the guy who talks get an out?"

"Yes," said Blake, "the governor told me that today on the phone."

"Then I'm ready to spill the beans. I've only been used as a cheap tool in this game. And then Cyclone tried to kill me like a rat in a trap—and it ain't his fault he didn't succeed. A match don't go to aim straight by. To hell with him and his gang! Let 'em get the chair and like it. This Renny here tipped me off with a right line; he told me the man who first turned rat would have the laugh on the rest. I'll be that guy. I am the trigger man who shot Middleton!"

"What!" exclaimed Renny, trying to sit up in bed.

"Sure, I was nominated to press the finger. After doing the job I dished the murder car—met up with a cop who was

set. He shoved me to a grafting magistrate, and I took sixty days for disorderly conduct—and they drafted me here. That rotten warden changed his books so they read I was jailed the day before!"

"Pretty smart," murmured Blake. "Now come clean and you haven't a worry in the world."

As he started to tell his story Renny remembered what Murphy had said: that the trigger man was in town, but hidden in the last place he would ever be sought.

Robbins told—and retold—his story. The second time it was to District Attorney Gibbons and a court stenographer, implicating the former police chief, a magistrate, a policeman, Cyclone Cassidy and a dozen gangsters, five of whom had been killed in the gun battle at The Pleasure Club.

All would be landed in the police net by nightfall.

District Attorney Gibbons called it a perfect open and shut case. Before he hurried away he took time to congratulate Renny on his success.

Chief Blake lingered a bit.

"Tom Middleton is waiting outside to offer you his paper on a silver platter—and, of course, to get a great exclusive story for tomorrow," he said. "This will be one time a newspaper reporter will get credit. After all, kid, it was your work that cleaned up this case—the police merely obeyed orders. Your advice, not ours, made Robbins talk."

Renny grinned. It was good to know he had not ended marching up against a stone wall.

"The doctor says you can't be moved until tomorrow from this jail ward," the chief continued, "and then Miss Elaine Middleton, daughter of Tom, insists upon your being moved to her home for a period of convalescence. She feels responsible for your being shot."

The reporter felt a pleasant warmth steal through him.

"Between you and me, Blake, that sounds great," he murmured. "This has been a thrilling game, to be sure, but I'm a bit fed up dodging bullets and associating with bandits. The company of a brave and pretty girl will be a welcome change."

ATTILA

By DON FARRAN

"BY WODEN!" roared Attila, and he whacked his thigh,
"Where my horse's feet have passed, the green grass will die!"
His huge chuckle roaming the rafters of the hall,
"The morrow morn we take the road that leads to Gaul.
And there we'll use our swords, nor care if red blood runs—
We were never stay-at-homes, not Attila's Huns!"

Firelight was ruddy there on warriors and their sons.

Yellow men and Tartars with bells upon their shoes,
Men in crimson jackets and boys in bodkin blues;
Horses black as Woden's beard, white as drifting snow,
And weariness a thing that none of them could know.
Riders of the desert and horsemen of the plain,
Old men in the saddle with Youth come back again . . .

Bragging of their many raids and the men they'd slain.

"Cities with their churches as high as hawks can fly,
Made of marble carved from hills black as basalt dye;
The princes ride in coaches lacquered all in gold,
And their store of jewels no man has ever told!"
This Attila roared at them, and their dark eyes shone.
"Will you ride the road with me—must I go alone?"

And their roar was greater than thunder of the Rhone.

Tartars with their bells and boots, Slavs from wolfish den—
Attila's eyes were bright upon his fighting men;
Sheep's-wool hats and goat hair coats, swords upon their thighs,
Covetous the light that gleamed deep within their eyes!
"Remember, when we leave the Crapak mountain pass
Where our horses' feet have trod, never shall be grass!"

The Tartars' bells made music for the moving mass.

Rumors fled the night winds, and up the road from Spain
Theodoric's Visigoths rode the trails again.
From fields of sunny Gaul, Burgundian and Frank
Caught sword and armor up and swept, a serried rank;
With the men of Aetius, hurrying from Rome,
On they swept to Chalons to drive the hordes back home.

Chalons with its grain fields and grape vines in the loam.

So they came to Chalons, and there upon the plain
They saw the embered fires where Tartar men had lain,
Resting for the morrow when black night would be gone.
But now there spread a horde, beneath the rising dawn,
Attila's Huns in saddle, horses held in check,
Eager on their tiny feet, each with curving neck—

Silent as the ocean floor deep beneath a wreck.

There no columned horsemen, awaiting word to go,
But yellow men to flash like arrow from a bow!
Three hundred thousand horsemen under his command,
A locust horde that swarmed across the Gallic land—
(Few indeed the Romans and Visigoths from Spain,
Fighting there at Chalons upon the banks of Seine.)

Yellow peril facing the Western world again!

Old Theodoric fell, an arrow in his thigh,
And over all the shout of Tartar battle cry!
Like swirl of leaves in Autumn scattered by the rain
The Romans spread apart, then closed their ranks again.
(Night found countless Tartars in heaps of many hues,
Men in crimson jackets and boys in bodkin blues.)

Visigoths and Romans had swords that they could use.

"Well," said great Attila, a frown between his eyes,
"It seems the Gauls were warned against our neat surprise.
And all the Western world, or so it seems to me,
Has armed itself from sunny Spain to Saxon Sea!
I'm getting old. I think we'd better find a home;
I've heard about that place—let's find our way to Rome,
And build a basalt palace with a golden dome!"

Aetius dogged their footsteps, hanging on their trail.
The Huns could never sleep for fear of Roman mail;
Horses lost their footing and sank in quicksand hole,
Sickness came upon them and fever took its toll.
"It seems to me," Attila said, "that I recall
A Road to Rome that some one mentioned back in Gaul.
It must be somewhere there *behind* a Roman wall!"

"What's this?" he asked his captain. "Can it be a Pope
Come to say a Mass for us? Nothing less, I hope.
Fix a seat beside me, he isn't looking young."
(*All Gaul knew the magic of old Pope Leo's tongue!*)
" . . . And so," Pope Leo told him, "I'll return to Rome.
Peace be kind upon you and bless your way back home.
A man as old as you should know more than to roam."

Yellow men and Tartars with bells upon their shoes,
Men in crimson jackets and boys in bodkin blues.
Attila curbed his horse into a slowing walk,
"Woden's beard!" Attila mused. "How that man can talk!
He saved that Roman city's treasures from the Hun.
But Thor—" Attila smiled—"*you* haven't always won!
Besides . . . we've done some things that no one else

Sixty Thousand SINGAPORE DOLLARS

A Story of Malaysia

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

WINDY Jack Benster stood on the corner tapping the ground with his malacca stick. The brown, black and yellow traffic of Singapore swirled about him, filling the night with the accents of a score of languages. The races of the East nearly bumped against him to buy *durians* from the fruit vender squatting on the ground near him—the Malay in his *sarong*, the Indian in his *dhoti*, the Japanese in his kimono, the Siamese in his *panung*, and the Chinese in most anything. But Windy Jack did not see them or smell the distressing odor of *durians*. Windy Jack was thinking.

Windy Jack needed money. He had been broke in Singapore before. In fact,

for the past five years Singapore was the very place he had always come when he was broke, because Haiphong Harry had always seen to it that he left with a full wallet—and in a hurry. It seems that Windy Jack's memory retained details of the death of Police Sergeant Dave Clellan in Malay Street, and Haiphong Harry appreciated forgetfulness. That is, he had appreciated it for five years. But the last time he had shown his appreciation, he intimated to Windy Jack that men with long memories often have short lives. He told Jack that Singapore really held no future for him, and that he never expected to see him there again—alive. Windy Jack had detected a note of earnestness in the warning, given six months ago. That was why he was now hesitating about turning off Malay Street into an odorous alley, at the end of which Haiphong Harry's bar attracted some of the hardest drinkers among the lower strata of Singapore's transient and permanent European population.

If Haiphong Harry had ever suspected why Jack was broke, or what he intended to do with the money he wanted, Haiphong would probably have gone into hysterics, called Jack a vain ass and sent him off to get the money properly from Mr. Brown.

There was little doubt he could get it from Mr. Brown, Windy Jack reflected for the twentieth time. Windy had spent his last piaster for first class passage on the French Mail liner that was taking Mr. Brown from Saigon to Singapore, because he saw financial possibilities in the little fellow. And here he was in Singapore, not only without having tapped the Brown bankroll, but actually hesitant about tapping it. This happened because in all of Windy Jack's fifteen years of romancing through the East, of living by lying from Mukden to Macassar, Mr. Brown was the first man who had taken his preposterous exaggerations seriously.

Mr. Brown was a little gray haired fellow from Keokuk, Iowa, who was fulfilling a lifelong dream to see the far places of the earth. He was thin, his topee was too large for him, and he had a timid mouth; but there was an adventurous light in his pale blue eyes. He wanted to taste of strange life in his waning years.

"You're really immense," he had told Windy Jack on the ship. "I was a little bit disappointed in the Orient until I met you. It's all been very interesting, but somehow it was like looking at a moving picture. I saw everything, but I wasn't living in it, if you get what I mean. I didn't belong. But here I meet a man like you who is really part of the East, and—well, it's wonderful."

Thus encouraged, Jack would pull himself up to his full height, smooth his striped silk shirt over an ample stomach, and recount adventures more marvelous still. Encounters with pearl pirates in the Sulu Sea until the very waters ran with blood; perilous pursuit of live tigers in the Bengal jungles for the menageries of the world; turning the tide of a Chinese revolution singlehanded, the source of the wound which forced him to carry a cane.

"Oh, I envy you your life," Mr. Brown had said, shaking his head in admiration.

"It's a bit humdrum now that I've had big business responsibilities forced on me," Windy Jack had replied with a wave of his hand. "Right now I'm going to Singapore to take control of one of the largest tin mines in the Malay States—which means the world, as you probably know."

"Tin! Malay States!" Mr. Brown had repeated. "How could such business be humdrum? I'd be tempted to go back into business myself if I had your chance."

Much to his own surprise, Windy Jack had not immediately capitalized the old man's credulity. He was not used to being believed. If he had been believed when he told the truth about a peculiar Manila transaction fifteen years ago, he might not have spent the intervening time living by his unscrupulous wits. But for fifteen years he had lived for and by incredulous resistance. He lied harder and with more justification, he argued, when folks were skeptical—and they

always were, until the advent of Mr. Brown. That is why he wanted to make good at least one boast to Mr. Brown before he took his golden fleece. He had told the old chap he was quite a figure in Singapore, and he wanted to act the part for one day, anyhow. He wanted to hire an expensive car, and make the old fellow proud to ride with him—for one day. After that, he would see. But for the one day he needed money.

He would not get it standing there on the street corner, he reflected. So, twirling his malacca stick, Windy Jack decided to face Haiphong Harry once more. Perhaps the ghost of Police Sergeant Dave Clellan would still work golden magic.

He turned off Malay Street into the alley.

AS HE entered Haiphong Harry's, a suffocating wave of warm air bore down upon him, laden with the combined odors of whisky, perspiration, tobacco smoke and mildew. Listening to a tinny piano and an asthmatic accordion squeezing the life out of an aged American dance tune back there in the murk of smoke, Windy Jack began to examine faces. He quickly passed over the owl faced Chinese barman and his seafaring clients, the Scotch planters squabbling over an expressionless Russian girl, and the Eurasian ladies with earrings, trying to break into a round table conference of shabby and bewhiskered males. Farther back, on a table raised a little above the rest, he spotted Haiphong Harry himself, talking to a red faced, fair haired man who nodded continually.

Harry was always at this table. Here he could keep an eye on the general peace of the establishment, and still be just out of the uproar in case some customer came in for a consultation on matters of forged passports, smuggling, disposal of stolen goods, and other of Harry's sidelines. Windy Jack recognized the man with Harry as Gus Hoorn, a Dutch engraver who did odd counterfeiting jobs.

As Windy Jack limped forward through the confusion, both men jumped to their feet. Haiphong Harry thrust his right hand into the pocket of his white drill coat. Hoorn did likewise.

Jack hastened to make an amiable gesture with both hands, to show his pacific intentions. Outnumbered, Windy Jack was always a pacifist.

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed. "Who does the hero see on returning wounded from the Chinese wars, but Haiphong Harry himself—not a motion picture!"

Hostility blazed through the slits that were Haiphong Harry's eyes; eyes that showed his Asiatic blood, along with his straight black hair and the dark crescents at the base of his finger nails. Only his dress and his speech bore out his claim to one European parent.

"Windy Jack Benster," said Haiphong Harry, "you're leaving Singapore tonight."

"Why, I just got in an hour ago, Harry."

"But you're leaving tonight."

"Now, listen, Harry, you—" The words stuck in Jack's throat; it was as though he were paralyzed by the gaze from those slits of eyes.

Haiphong Harry kicked over the table to give himself clear range. When the echo of the crash had ceased, a hush fell over the cabaret. The piano stopped on a false chord, and the accordion died with a blue wheeze. Haiphong Harry's lower jaw advanced as he waited for Windy Jack's next move.

Windy Jack merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Why sure, Harry, I'll go if you say so," he remarked, when he had regained control of his Adam's apple. "But I don't think you ought to ship me off before you know what I came here for."

"I know what you came for. Money. You always come for money. But there's no more for you." Haiphong Harry's jaw still protruded.

"Did I ever come here for money? Funny how a man forgets. I'd forgotten—a lot of things. Just had a bad attack

of amnesia. Maybe I drink too much unboiled water. In any case, I haven't come for money. Far from it. I'm well off now. On the verge of a very important transaction, in fact. Very important and exceedingly remunerative."

Haiphong Harry still kept his hand in his coat pocket.

"What do you want here, then?" he inquired curtly.

Windy Jack hesitated for a fraction of a second. He was eyeing the way Harry's pocket was distended. He had to think fast. The appeal to Haiphong Harry's fear was out. How about his greed?

"Why, it was such a big proposition," said Windy Jack, "and you've always been such a friend to me, Haiphong Harry, that I came to cut you in on the deal."

Harry's frame relaxed a trifle. He nodded to Gus Hoorn to set the table on its feet again.

"Sit down," he said. "Let's hear the story."

The piano and accordion once more burst into melody. The owl faced barman set three bottles on the bar. The Russian girl slapped one of the planters who bellowed for a full minute.

Windy Jack sat down.

"I came to port with a rich American," said Jack. "Absolutely one of the richest men in the United States. I've known him for a long time, naturally, or he wouldn't be trusting me with his millions."

Haiphong Harry winked at Hoorn.

"He's probably been out in the sun without his topee," he said sneeringly.

"Millions," repeated Windy Jack with conviction. "I only wish I were at liberty to tell you how many millions are actually involved."

"Don't bother," said Haiphong Harry. "And now that you've entertained us for a while, you can start telling the truth. If you've really got some one in tow, what are you working on him?"

Windy Jack noted with satisfaction that an avaricious gleam had come into Harry's Oriental eyes. He reached over and took a Burma cheroot from Harry's breast pocket and lighted it before he replied.

"TIN," he said at last. "Can you forge me some stock certificates for a Kinta Valley tin mine?"

"We can forge anything," interrupted Hoorn.

Haiphong Harry ignored him.

"What mine are you selling?" he asked.

"Absolutely the biggest mine on the Peninsula," said Windy Jack. "I'm no piker and neither is my friend."

"Then we'll sell him the Kuala Selang mine," said Harry. "Hoorn's made some fine certificates for Kuala Selang. They're ready now."

"Good," said Windy Jack. "You won't regret it. Your share will be a healthy wad, all right. The cash I'm going to collect on this deal will give you cataracts on both eyes." He puffed for a moment on his cheroot. "By the way," he continued, "you haven't a little loose cash on you tonight, have you? I need a few dollars—"

Haiphong Harry guffawed.

"The bosom friend of a millionaire comes to a Eurasian bar keeper for a few dollars, does he? Windy—Windy Jack!"

"No, listen, Harry, don't get me wrong," Windy Jack countered. "I got to do this thing big. When I hunt big game, I use heavy ammunition. I got my man just where I want him, but it'll take a splurge to finish him off. I've got to have a Rolls-Royce tomorrow, for one thing. Then—"

"We'll drive you around in a car," said Harry.

"Don't you believe it," replied Windy Jack. "I got to work this alone. Millionaires are hard to handle, and they've got to be talked to just right. I'll do it myself, or all bets are off."

Haiphong Harry opened his mouth to speak curtly, but instead closed his thick lips in the semblance of a smile. His narrow eyes strayed for a moment to the accordion player, who appeared to be

playing in his sleep. Then Harry pulled a sheaf of crumpled Straits currency from his pocket—little dull red bills the size of cigar coupons. He threw them on the table.

"Here's your entertainment fund," said Harry. "But I insist on furnishing the car and the chauffeur, and Gus Hoorn goes along. I've got to have my protection in this business. Hoorn can be your secretary, if you want, and he can sit up front with the *syce*. But Hoorn sticks with you until further notice. I don't trust you, Windy Jack, and you know it. That's my proposition. *Apa macham?*"

Windy Jack did not relish having Gus Hoorn as a constant companion during the rest of his stay in Singapore. The fact was, he had not yet decided whether he was going to hit up Mr. Brown or not—although it began to look as though he could not help himself. Anyhow, the idea of having a secretary fitted in with his plan of a final exhibition for Mr. Brown.

"Very well," sighed Windy Jack, picking up the red money from the table. "I suppose I'll have to agree to your conditions. Let's get those Kuala Selang tin shares."

Mr. Brown was enjoying the ride. There was just enough early morning haze left in the air to temper the dazzling thrust of the equatorial sun. They had left the heart of the city, with its tangle of bullock carts, autos, and rickshaws, its arcaded Chinese shops and its open drains, and the car was purring along the south coast road for Tanjong Katong. The world was green and smelled pleasantly damp.

Windy Jack Benster had pointed out the Cricket Club on the *padang*, the Public Hall, the banks and offices about Raffles Place, the residences on Orchard Road, and the Botanic Gardens. He was on the point of taking Mr. Brown in to meet his friend the governor of the Straits Settlements, when he suddenly remembered that his Excellency always discussed matters of state with his executive council on Wednesday mornings. Some other time . . .

Now, pointing with his Malacca stick, he was showing off a fine cocoanut estate.

"I used to own those trees myself," he said, "but I disposed of the estate some time ago. I'm devoting myself to tin now, you know."

Here was preparation. It was his first mention of the subject he had been wanting to broach all morning. The counterfeit Kuala Selang shares were in his pocket. The ruddy ears of Gus Hoorn, sitting in front of him, were doubtless straining for words of the business at hand. At any rate, they were a sufficient reminder that Haiphong Harry intended to see that the bargain was carried out. And yet . . . Windy Jack wondered if he could be developing a conscience. It did not seem possible, after all these years.

"When are you going up to your tin mines?" inquired Mr. Brown.

"I intended getting away today," Windy Jack replied. "But I'd promised to show you around a bit, you know."

Mr. Brown smiled at his companion.

"I was afraid you'd stayed over just for me," said the old gentleman, with a wistful look in his blue eyes, "and I want you to know that I'm much obliged to you for taking an interest in a bothersome old fellow like me. It's hard to know just how to thank a man in your position, but— Well, I want you to accept this trifle from me; just a token, you know. I noticed you don't seem to have one. Or are you prejudiced against them?"

He pressed a long narrow plush case into Windy Jack's hands.

OPENING it, Jack found a gold mounted fountain pen. He mentally estimated what he could get for it at a waterfront pawnshop. Even a Chinese would give him considerable for it. He could move on . . . Why, damn this little fellow anyhow; he was making it harder and harder.

"Thank you," he said in a voice that did not sound like his own.

"Now, I was wondering," Mr. Brown went on. "I suppose it's presuming on my part, but you've been so kind that I'd thought to speak to you about it anyway. I have a little money I'd like to invest out here. I've read so much about the fortunes made in rubber and tin since the war. And on top of that I hear it first hand from you. I wonder if you could arrange for me to come in on one of your tin mines. I'd feel safe being in with you."

Windy Jack Benster hesitated. Why the dickens did he hesitate, he asked himself. Here was the very opportunity he had in mind when he spent his last piaster to catch the French Mail out of Saigon. Here was easy money offered on a silver platter, and yet he hesitated. He looked at the ruddy ears of Gus Hoorn in front of him. Hoorn's head was turned a trifle sidewise to catch details of the conversation which had suddenly become interesting.

"How much were you thinking of placing?" asked Windy Jack.

"Oh, I've scraped together about thirty thousand," said Mr. Brown apologetically. "It isn't much—I realize that—but it represents my life's work. Perhaps you could get me in on something modest?"

"Thirty thousand—Singapore dollars?"

"Oh, no. American dollars."

Windy Jack suddenly began perspiring furiously. He wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief he had bought that morning. Thirty thousand—why, that would make sixty thousand Singapore dollars. That was a fortune. It would put him on easy street. It made his previous triumphs over skeptical travelers look like cheap panhandling. Even Haiphong Harry did not turn over sixty thousand Singapore dollars at a single coup. Sixty thousand! Why, that was enough to swing a legitimate deal in something—tin, or rubber maybe.

Gus Hoorn turned around to find out what caused Windy Jack to suspend negotiations. Windy Jack woke up.

"I'll consider the matter," Jack said gravely to Mr. Brown. "It will take a little research on what is available right now. I will probably be able to give you an answer later in the day."

He tapped the *syce* lightly on the shoulder with his stick and ordered him to return to the Raffles Hotel.

"You'll pardon my cutting the ride short," he said, "but there are a number of things that I must go over with my secretary. I will see you later in the day."

Windy Jack had failed to clinch the deal that would put him on his feet again, yet he felt strangely light hearted as he let Mr. Brown out at the Raffles, and gave the *syce* the address of Haiphong Harry's alley.

As soon as the big car swung into the Esplanade, Gus Hoorn turned to complain volubly of the folly of not grasping golden opportunity at the proper moment.

"It's all right, it's all right," insisted Windy Jack. "I know all about handling millionaires. It's all right."

But Hoorn was not convinced. He railed and swore in three languages. He predicted dire things for Windy Jack at the hands of Haiphong Harry for failing to work more quickly. But Windy Jack appeared not to be listening. He seemed to be tremendously interested in the pageant of international shipping in Singapore harbor, and the misty outlines of the Rhiouw Islands beyond.

Sixty thousand Singapore dollars! Windy Jack was thinking of all that could be done with that much money. He knew people who might put him on to something legitimate. Perhaps he could pick up some Chinese open pit tin mine in Perak, that could be developed . . .

Or should he violate Mr. Brown's trust after all—the first trust he had known in fifteen years—and split the sixty thousand with Haiphong Harry?

The car pulled up before Haiphong Harry's place. Windy Jack and Hoorn got out. The place was empty except for the owl faced Chinese behind the bar, who produced drinks. As Jack quaffed his *stengah*, doubt vanished from

his mind. He knew exactly what he wanted to do now.

"When do we go back to see the American runt?" inquired Hoorn.

"We're not going back."

"Oh, yes we are. You know Harry's orders."

"To hell with Harry."

"You don't think you're going to work the runt alone, do you?" sneered Hoorn. "Harry's not going to let you run around loose in this city if he can help it."

"Well, he won't be able to help it," said Jack, throwing a bill on the bar to pay for the drinks. "I'm through."

"No you're not."

"Guess again."

WINDY JACK started to leave. Hoorn seized his arm and jerked him back. Jack clenched his left fist and sent it crashing against Hoorn's jaw. Hoorn stumbled backward and sat down in a fine brass cuspidor that the mate of an American ship had once left with Haiphong Harry in payment of his bar bill.

Going out the door, Windy Jack bumped into Haiphong Harry coming in.

"Sell the tin mine?" inquired Harry, with an anticipatory glitter in his narrow eyes.

"My American friend just got a cable from his stock broker that the bottom dropped out of Wall Street, so he's no longer a millionaire," said Windy Jack. "The deal's off."

He drew the counterfeit Kuala Selang certificates from his pocket and presented them to the Eurasian. Then he rushed away, leaving Haiphong Harry gaping in astonishment, and Gus Hoorn performing a rudimentary toilette with a copy of the *Straits Times*.

He looked behind him as he hailed a rickshaw in Malay street. There was no one in sight, but he felt a cold shiver run down his spine, notwithstanding. Somehow he felt that his decision to enter upon an honest career was not altogether a happy one.

Early that evening Windy Jack Benster returned to the Raffles. He had been making the rounds of solicitors and estate agents all afternoon, and had put his hands on several promising deals that might be swung with sixty thousand Singapore dollars. He was anxious to talk about it with Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown beamed when he entered the room.

"Good evening, partner," he said.

"Good evening, Mr. Brown."

"Well, I've done it."

"What's that, Mr. Brown?"

"I appreciate your delicacy—not wanting to mix business with our friendship. Your secretary explained all that."

"My secretary?"

"The young man that was riding with us today. He came back again with your mining manager."

Windy Jack hung his stick on the back of a chair and sat down. He looked at Mr. Brown rather queerly. Mr. Brown took his expression for one of misunderstanding.

"Yes. That is, I suppose he looks after your mining matters. He spoke as though he did. A dark fellow with narrow eyes. He brought all the papers with him."

"He—he did?"

"Yes. So I went with him to the bank and drew on my letter of credit. He explained how you were doing this for me through your own account, so of course I got the currency—British currency so it wouldn't be so bulky. And now I'm part owner with you in one of the biggest tin mines in the Malay States."

Mr. Brown presented for Jack's inspection a sheaf of Gus Doorn's beautifully engraved stock certificates of the Kuala Selang tin mine.

Windy Jack stood up. He dabbed his forehead with a handkerchief. Then he swallowed. Here he had been all set to play square with this little old chap who trusted him, and Haiphong Harry had stepped in to grab the money right from under his nose. That really confirmed an old theory of his: a sucker and his money are soon parted, so get your part

first. But Mr. Brown had believed in him so implicitly that Windy Jack felt sick at the thought that Harry had robbed him. Symptoms of his momentary illness must have appeared on the surface, for Mr. Brown suddenly said in an alarmed voice—

"What's the matter, Mr. Benster, isn't it all right?"

"Perfectly all right," replied Windy Jack. "Anything in my hands is perfectly safe. Only I hadn't expected my secretary to act so soon. I'd better see him now and verify everything. I'll come back a little later . . ."

Windy Jack took his stick and went out. He had told Mr. Brown that everything was perfectly all right, but he did not quite see how he was going to make it so. He might call the police. They would get the money back from Haiphong Harry, and more too. But that would only show up Windy Jack for the fraud he was. Getting the police in would destroy all the myths of which Windy Jack was so proud, for he had himself introduced Gus Hoorn as his secretary. It looked pretty hopeless. He could pull up and run, only that, too, would ultimately tear asunder the fabric of the fiction he had so carefully spun for Mr. Brown.

There was only one course of action possible now. Windy Jack had to get back Mr. Brown's money from Haiphong Harry. It was no pleasant prospect. Jack would rather attempt one of the many perilous things of which he had boasted, than try to get back money from Haiphong Harry. He would have to bring up the death of Police Sergeant Dave Clellan again. Harry insisted that he was through paying out on that business, but maybe in a pinch he would come to reason. Anyhow, it was Jack's only chance.

The night hung low over Singapore, pressing in the day's heat now being radiated from the streets and buildings, as Windy Jack hurried along Malay Street. Jack was so agitated that he forgot to limp.

It was still early evening as he swung into Haiphong Harry's place, and the bar contained only a few loiterers. Windy Jack stood just inside the door, looking for Harry, but Harry's table was vacant. He saw Gus Hoorn rise from a table near the door, brush past without a word, and walk rapidly into the street. Jack turned to the owl faced Chinese bar man, who seemed to avert his gaze.

"Where's the *tuan*?" Jack inquired.

The bar man pointed upward with his thumb.

"Topside," he said.

Windy Jack hitched up his trousers, running his thumbs around the inside of his belt—which allowed his fingers to verify the presence of a gun in his hip pocket.

"Guess I'll go up and see him," said Windy Jack.

The Chinese looked toward the door. He did not comment.

WINDY JACK moved to the back of the café. He knew Haiphong Harry's upstairs quarters. He had been there before. There were two ways of getting there—a business entrance through the alley, and another through the back of the café. Jack took the narrow tortuous stairs that led from the bar. At the top of the stairs, he fumbled in the hot darkness for a door knob, and then remembered there was none on this door. He pushed against the flat surface, and was surprised to feel it yield under his fingers.

The smell of incense swept toward him as he stepped inside. The room was almost dark. A single amber light burned at the far end, casting a lurid glow over a wide, polished teak table at which Haiphong Harry was writing with brush and ink block. Harry was clothed only in a red silk *sarong*. His torso was bare, and his bronzed skin glistened under the light. He went on writing as Jack stood in the doorway, but seemed to sense his presence.

"Close the door," he said, without looking up.

Windy Jack complied. His hand hesitated on the heavy iron bolt, but he did not throw it. He watched Haiphong Harry for a moment. Then he glanced around the room, which was as much a mixture of cults and cultures as Harry was a mixture of races. In front of him was Harry's shrine. Harry was the only Eurasian Windy Jack knew who retained the religion of his Asiatic forebears. Here in the gloom was a pensive figure of a squatting Buddha, contemplating his thumbs to avoid seeing the multiple charms of the forty handed, eleven faced Kwanyin who stood beside him. Joss sticks smoldered before the two figures.

On the walls, in violation of Buddha's pacific precepts, were murderous weapons from every nation whose ships called at Singapore, and from many who had no ships. There were *kris* from all parts of Malaya, with keen blades and ornate handles. There were *bolos* from the Philippines and curved *kukris* from Nepal. There were spears, machetes, and *samurai* swords, muzzle loading pistols and modern rifles. Then, in the midst of this martial collection, was something that contrasted strangely with it all, again typifying the mixed heritage of Haiphong Harry. In the middle of one wall was a large painting of a nude blond. It was done in the best occidental manner of fifty years ago, a little bit better than pictures of a similar type that used to hang in saloons. The flesh tints were warmly opalescent, and there were bits of diaphanous gauze in it.

Windy Jack strode to the front of Haiphong Harry's table and demanded—

"Come on, Harry, where is it?"

"What?"

"Don't stall around. The money you got off my American friend."

"That? It's right here in my drawer."

"I want it."

In reply, Haiphong Harry threw back his head and laughed.

"By God, Harry, if you don't come across with that money I'll tear you to pieces. I'll twist the ears off your ugly face and push your eyes six inches deeper into your stupid head."

Haiphong Harry smiled as he contemplated the verbal geyser spouting before him. He leaned back for a moment and appeared to think.

"I'll give you a third," he said, "just because the runt is your friend. But you don't deserve it."

"You'll give it all to me," shouted Windy Jack. "You'll give it to me, or I'll know the reason."

"You will know the reason," came the rejoinder, "and before long—now. I expected your visit on the matter we discussed last night. So naturally, I prepared for it . . ."

"Get me straight this time, Harry. I want every last Singapore dollar you got off my friend, or—I'll suddenly remember who killed Police Sergeant Dave Clellan."

Haiphong Harry's eyes became even narrower. Suddenly he sat forward and brought his open palm down on the table top with a resounding whack.

"There's been too much talk about Sergeant Clellan these last few years," he declared, "and it's got to stop."

"There's one way you can stop it," said Windy Jack.

"There's more than one way," replied Haiphong Harry.

A bell jangled somewhere in the shadows. Harry tugged at a cord of scarlet silk that hung over his table. In a moment a door opened and Gus Hoorn crossed the room to hand a rectangle of pasteboard to Harry. He sneered at Windy Jack.

"Have him wait," ordered Haiphong Harry, "and wait with him."

Hoorn left.

When the two were alone again, Harry resumed his air of deliberate calm. He fingered the card a moment as he let his tongue run along the edge of his thick upper lip. Then he handed the card to Windy Jack, who read:

ARTHUR CLELLAN

Lieutenant of Police, Singapore, S. S.

"THE LEFTENANT," said Harry with a smirk, "used to have a brother who was sergeant of police."

"I remember his brother—and I'll remember exactly what happened to him if I don't get sixty thousand Singapore dollars damned quick."

"You refused a fair settlement a minute ago. That's too bad. You cheated yourself."

"We'll see," said Windy Jack.

"We will," Haiphong Harry agreed. "Guess why Leftenant Arthur Clellan is waiting outside."

"Carrying on the friendship his brother had for you, I suppose," said Windy Jack.

"The leftenant is here," said Haiphong Harry, fixing Jack with his narrow black eyes, "because I asked him to come. I expected you just about now . . ."

"Well?"

"The leftenant is here to arrest you for the murder of Police Sergeant Dave Clellan."

"Me? Arrest me?"

Haiphong Harry calmly selected a Burma cheroot from a brass jar before him.

"Naturally, you," he said. "You killed him."

"Why, you damned sneaking half-caste crook! I killed him? You killed him, you Eurasian cutthroat! I might have known that keeping quiet like a white man for all these years wouldn't save me from your back stabbing *chi-chi* tricks."

"You killed him," Harry repeated. "I've got witnesses that saw you do it."

Globules of perspiration sprang out on Windy Jack's forehead.

"Half-caste witnesses, I suppose," he said contemptuously. "They'll perjure themselves to hell."

"Maybe," said Haiphong Harry. "But they'll perjure you out of my way, and that's what I'm paying them for."

He held a lighted match to his cheroot.

Windy Jack leaned his hands on the edge of the table and glared at the Eurasian, enraged at his disdainful calm. He was trapped. Not only were the sixty thousand Singapore dollars slipping from his grasp, but his life was at stake. And Haiphong Harry, content with his treachery, was toying with him.

Jack ran his thumbs around the inside of his belt. His hands stopped with his fingers resting on his hip pockets. He whipped out his gun.

Harry looked up and blew out the match with a cloud of smoke. He chuckled maliciously.

"If you shoot," he said, "you'll be just inviting the leftenant of police to take you in hand."

Windy Jack's finger hesitated on the trigger. Harry was right. He would just be shooting himself into more trouble.

Then, without warning, he dropped his gun into his pocket and dived across the table, his shoulder striking Haiphong Harry full in the chest. His arms clasped the naked torso as the chair went over backward. The two men grappled on the thick rug.

Jack found a corner of the rug and dragged it across his opponent's face, pressing it into his mouth.

Haiphong Harry thrust his burning cheroot into Windy Jack's face. The glowing end seared its way into the flesh of Jack's cheek. He jerked back his head. Harry wriggled free, the smooth skin of his naked torso offering no hold for Jack's fingers.

The Eurasian was only on one knee before Windy Jack sprang again. Haiphong Harry went back, Jack on him, pinioning his arms. The Eurasian writhed, lashing about with his legs. When Jack threw his body to one side to dodge a foul kick, Harry rolled over on top of him, panting heavily.

Windy Jack was on the bottom for a second. Again the two men rolled over, arms and legs locked together. This time Haiphong Harry took advantage of the momentum, completed the turn, and landed on top. Windy Jack struggled to keep rolling, but the legs of the table

checked further movement. The Eurasian leered.

Then Windy Jack twisted one arm free and sent a jab to the point of Haiphong Harry's jaw. It was a short jab, with little weight behind it, but it jarred the leer from Harry's face. The Eurasian struck back. Jack caught his arm and twisted it.

Straining until the veins bulged at his temples, he raised himself slightly, still twisting the captive arm. With his free arm, Harry tried to tear Windy Jack loose, but Jack only twisted the more, shifting his weight. With a grunt of pain, the Eurasian went over on his back. In a flash Windy Jack was on him, his fingers on the Eurasian's throat.

Windy Jack could feel Harry's Adam's apple trembling under the pressure of his thumbs. Harry twisted and writhed. He fought to grasp a finger he could bend back, but Jack hung on. He waited until he heard a gurgle from his adversary.

"Harry," he said, between breaths, "you know what I want. If you get it for me, I'll let you up and we'll call it quits all around. Otherwise I'll choke you till your crooked little eyes pop out."

Haiphong Harry's face had darkened and his tiny eyes had lost their luster, but he tried to form his thick lips into a sneering smile of defiance.

Windy Jack shook his throat until his head bounced on the floor and his teeth rattled.

"Do I get the money back?" demanded Windy Jack.

Haiphong Harry nodded in the affirmative.

"All of it?"

Another nod.

Windy Jack released his throttle hold and got quickly to his feet. He watched Haiphong Harry closely as he sat up, rubbing his throat for a moment. He followed the Eurasian as he arose slowly and moved toward the table, walking close to the wall.

Each moved slowly, warily, as if afraid a sudden step would set the other at his throat again.

SUDDENLY the Eurasian darted out his hand and snatched a Himalayan *kukri* from the wall. He lunged toward Windy Jack, swinging the heavy, curved knife, a weapon as brutal as a meat cleaver. Jack recoiled, cursing himself for having let Harry out of his grasp.

Haiphong Harry advanced and Jack retreated. He backed into the opposite wall. Without taking his eyes from the Eurasian, Windy Jack stretched out his hands on either side, to tear down the first of Harry's murderous mural decorations that came to his touch. He saw the Eurasian sneer, and his stomach contracted.

He had backed into the only part of the wall on which no weapons were hung. He was standing in front of the painting of the nude blond!

Haiphong Harry raised his arm, and there was a whirling flash of steel. Jack dodged. Something stung his side. The *kukri* had pinned Jack's coat to the picture frame, and was biting into his flesh.

Haiphong Harry already had a Malay *kris* in his hand.

"If you want to give yourself up," he said, "I won't kill you."

Windy Jack jumped aside. For reply, he drew his gun. A shot would call the police. What of it? Haiphong Harry's arm went back. Jack pulled the trigger.

Two detonations pounded his ear drums. The Eurasian dropped on one knee, tried to rise, and toppled over backwards. Two thin red streams trickled down his naked torso.

Windy Jack threw his gun on the rug and ran to bolt the door behind which the police officer was supposed to be waiting. At the second door he hesitated. He would have time to make a getaway—but he bolted that door, too. Then he went to the table and tried to open the drawer. It was locked.

Some one was banging on the door, shouting in Malay and English.

Windy Jack took the *kris* from the hand of the dead Eurasian and pried the drawer open.

The stack of bank notes was in the drawer as Harry had said. Windy Jack took them in his hands and looked at the door that led into the café. He would still have time to escape through that exit before the other door fell in. A spasm of pain made him wince, and he started looking through the drawer for paper and envelope. He put the money in the envelope, unscrewed the cap from his new gold mounted fountain pen, and started to write rapidly.

Dear Mr. Brown:

"I have just received a cable from my African estates which makes my presence there imperative. It is an important matter involving millions, so I am leaving at once. I shall be in the interior, far from communication, for a long time, perhaps a year or more. Because of political aspects of the matter I am forced to leave secretly, so can not see you. Inasmuch as I won't be on the ground to supervise your investment, I am returning your money until I can give it my personal attention. I would advise you to return to Keokuk immediately, and I will get in touch with you there as soon as I can."

Very truly yours,

—J. BENSTER

Windy Jack was addressing the envelope to Mr. Brown at the Raffles Hotel, when the door fell in with a splintering crash. A big Britisher with a white uniform and curly black mustaches stood there, gazing at the half naked body on the floor. Behind him were Hoorn, another European police officer, and two Malay constables. At the sight of Haiphong Harry's upturned face, Hoorn turned and fled.

"Don't move!" the big Britisher commanded, brandishing a gun toward Windy Jack. "Who killed this man?"

Windy Jack tried to stand up. Pain clawed his side. He could feel the warm blood running down his leg.

"I did," he said, "after one of the most desperate hand-to-hand fights ever——"

The room reeled. His legs dissolved. Blackness rushed upon him. He was conscious only of a great pain and voices.

"He dead, too?"

"No. Just hacked up a bit. Looks like he shot in self-defense."

"He'll get off easy if he did."

Windy Jack struggled to recapture his ego, which was exploring astral planes. He opened his eyes.

"Defense," he said weakly, "is a mild word. It was a terrific battle. After trying to gouge out my eyes, he stabbed me nine times with a *kukri*. I threw him off. He came back with a blade against my throat. Desperately I . . ."

"The chap's delirious," said the big Britisher. "Call an ambulance."

THIRST

By

WILLIAM
ASHLEY
ANDERSON

YOU WILL find many people ready to tell you exactly how it feels to go twenty-four hours without water. Check up their statements. Did they go without liquid in any form for twenty-four hours? Did they wear heavy clothing and keep completely covered? Was the atmosphere humid or dry? Was the temperature hot or cold? For all these things have a direct bearing on a man's condition when cut off from liquids. Of equal importance is the matter of exertion. It's one thing to lie inert in a damp boat, and another to be marching desperately across hot, parched terrain with nothing but salt meat to chew on.

Large scale map B4, Eyassi, German East Africa, shows a reassuring amount of blue on it. A casual look gives a man a comfortable feeling of refreshment. Down in the southeast corner is Lawa Ja Mweri, lying at the base of the tremendous escarpment that stretches toward Magadi in the northeast. Above and back of the escarpment, a distance that varies from thirty to sixty-five miles, is Eyassi, a wide body of water over forty-five miles in length. Small streams feed it on all sides—according to a superficial view of the map. But there is another smaller escarpment rising above its western shores. Beyond that you see a number of small legends scattered over an otherwise rather empty sheet.

"Forest grass"; "Open thorn"; "Broad grass plains with isolated hills"; "Game plentiful"; "Water scarce".

On closer inspection, you may find on the northeast shore of Eyassi a spot about as large as a thumb print, where a legend reads:

"Mangora Lake. Drinkable water here when remainder of lake is dry."

You realize then that most of this water is salt or dry soda. In the rains there are quagmires, floods, oceans of drinkable water. In the dry season, after hordes of migrating game have eaten away the lush grass and foliage, under the naked blaze of the equatorial sun it turns rapidly into a thorny desert; and the streams that show as little lines of blue upon the map sink from sight into the dry sand.

One time in October I was marching southeasterly through the Meatu district toward Turu, which lies south of Eyassi. I had a column of about one hundred and twenty men, all blacks except for a silent Scotch sergeant who kept the column closed. We had crossed this country headed northwestward a few days before. Our return route diverged somewhat from our trail out, and the map was no longer dependable. We had only the water in our canteens.

The first evening this water was gone; but we bivouacked comfortably because we knew that a water hole lay eight or ten miles beyond.

Before daybreak we were marching toward the water hole. A column of one hundred and twenty men is not fast moving. In the chill and darkness of early morning we moved slowly, and, of course, natural caution held us up until the sun burst above the escarpment. Almost instantly the chill of night was gone, and the heat of the sun began to drum upon the hard, hot plain. By half past nine we were quite ready for a breakfast halt and something to drink, the water we had consumed the day before having been pretty well sweated out by this time.

This short return *safari* was at the end of a long forced march of over a hundred and fifty miles of savage country. I was depending upon game for food; but up till this time in the morning we had sighted nothing. It seemed most likely that game had already migrated toward more abundantly watered regions. The few porters we had were carrying bags of dry *mtama* meal. My own resources were some bits of salty *biltong*, sugar, salt and half a bottle of Worcester sauce. Think of that combination when you're really thirsty!

We approached a shallow *donga* fringed with dusty palms, which was obviously the water hole indicated on the map. We found shallow holes, some still damp, in the sandy bed of a dry water course; but not a drop of water. This was an exasperating disappointment, but not too serious. There was another water hole about fifteen miles beyond. After a short halt, we began the march.

I can't admit to this day that that move was ill advised. The nearest water behind us was more than seven hours back, possibly more. We certainly had to move in some direction, we could not afford to waste precious time in a prolonged halt, and the most likely place for water was forward. Besides, my men were mostly plainsmen, and I, myself, had become accustomed by this time to going long distances with very little water. But I had never run so close to the edge before as I did this day. Later I had another narrow escape, but that was due wholly to accident.

On one foot I wore a heavy ammunition boot, on the other a sandal. My entire costume otherwise consisted of a light shirt, open to the waist, a pair of flimsy shorts, a *topi*, besides pistol, et cetera. In a couple of hours I began to experience the curiously frightening sensation of being dehydrated. By eleven o'clock the sky was white with heat. Heat waves piled up on the horizon like layers of gelatine melting into the sky. I remembered the impression I received as a child when I was told that the sun sucked up the rain. From this hot, baked surface, there was not a drop of water to be sucked up, except the moisture in our own bodies. The white gaping sun seemed actually to be sucking it out of our pores.

I rolled down my sleeves, buttoned up my shirt, did everything I could think of to cover my skin. Then I began to feel a sensation of suffocation. Men accustomed to long marching do not tire in their legs; leg effort, therefore, was automatic and did not bother me. I could almost have walked in my sleep. After a while I began occasionally to struggle for breath, the sort of strangling inhalation a man takes after a hard climb in high altitudes. As time went on, despite the hot dryness of my skin, little shivers flickered over me, somewhat like the sensation from prickly heat, or when a breath of cool air touches a freshly sunburned skin. The mucous surfaces of my mouth, nose and eyes were now suffering from the drying-out process. I had been trying to breathe entirely through my nostrils; at first this had been sufficient, but as the day wore on, I could not get enough oxygen in this fashion. Besides, my nostrils began to burn, and the hairs on the inside, covered with dust, clung together.

I halted punctiliously at the end of

every hour. The men squatted down on their haunches, emitting long whistling sighs; picked at the dry stubble, hoping to chew some moisture out of it; poked around in the tough sod for insects. Nothing was said about water, except that it lay ahead. Sergeant Mackenzie would come up for a word or two, but we usually stood or sat without saying anything more than a few monosyllables or remarking very briefly on things of ridiculous unimportance.

By four o'clock in the afternoon, without a break, without a moment's respite of shade or breeze from the silence of the hot vacuum about us, my eyes were beginning to dry out so that they were painfully gritty. I walked for minutes at a time with my eyes closed, guiding myself by my trailing spear and the sound of the *kilongozi's* footsteps just in front of me. Every little while I experienced a flutter of apprehension as I projected myself forward, wondering what would happen if we found no water; for those one hundred and twenty men behind me were depending upon my judgment, and I knew perfectly well there was no guarantee that water would be found.

The plain and horizon about us were just an uninteresting haze of heat waves. Of course, we frequently saw mirages of rippling water, but these meant nothing to us, since we knew large surfaces of water would only be salt pans anyway. What we longed for was the sight of a *baobab* tree!

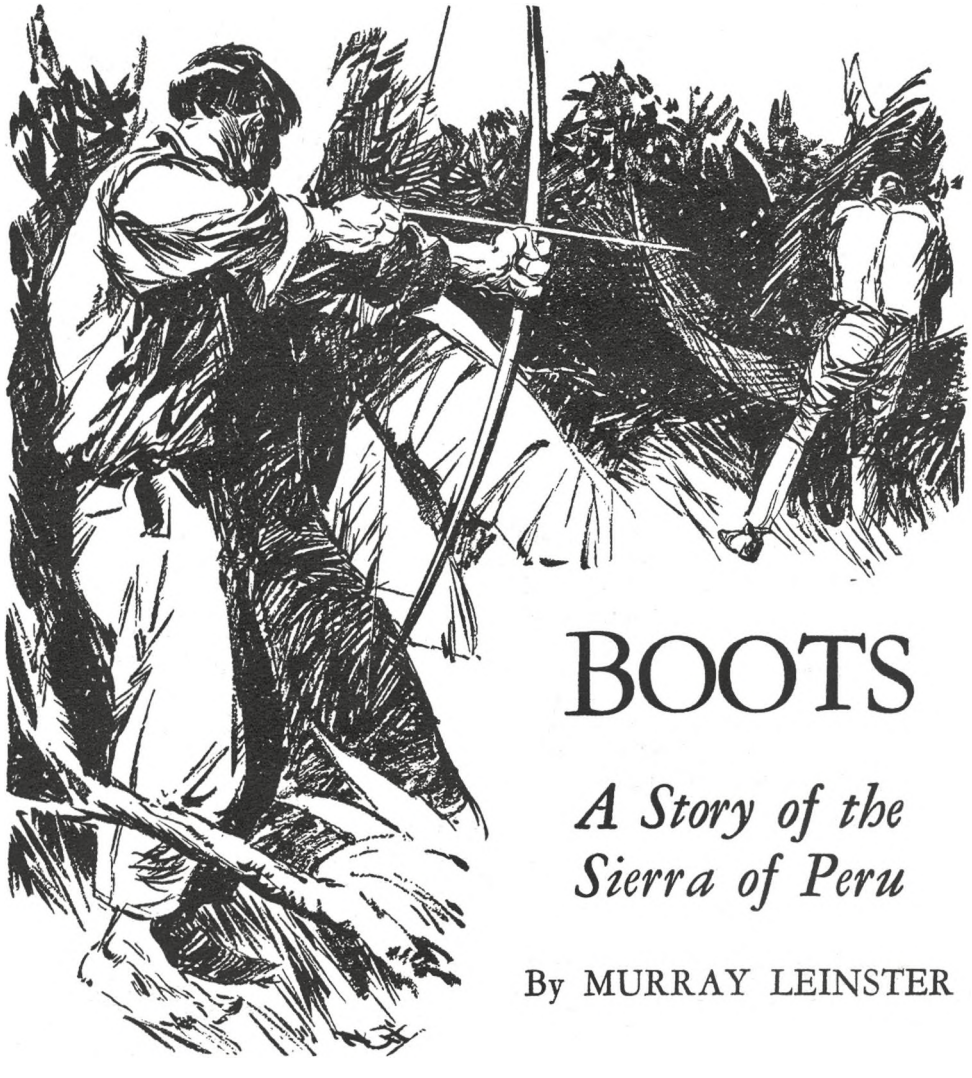
Then began the painful sensation of a gripping throat. That is, whenever I gulped—as we do normally all day long, without realizing it—the dried-out surface of my throat would stick together. Instantly there would be the panicky sensation that I was about to strangle. Putting pebbles in my mouth somewhat relieved this, but after a while I couldn't get much moisture even in this fashion.

Around five o'clock—an hour before dark—we reached our objective, a dry water course. A dusty dry water course, without a sign of water, and many deep, empty holes!

I picked some likely spots, and set the men to digging.

Then I followed the water course weakly for a few hundred yards, and sat down on a rock to pull myself together. I had been sitting there for fully ten minutes when all at once I noticed some animals moving among the rocks across the *donga*. They were baboons—and baboons must drink as well as human beings. So I watched them and followed them. Before long they brought me to a group of palm trees on which grew great numbers of nuts filled with a custard-like substance!

We slaked our thirst on custard. The next morning, two hours march beyond, we caught a shower of rain, and every dust clogged pore in our bodies opened like a mouth to drink in the water.



BOOTS

A Story of the Sierra of Peru

By MURRAY LEINSTER

IT IS doubtful whether Juan was moved to his act of high courage by fear, or whether it was covetousness—which is a sin—or whether it was merely the love of a woman. He did a most amazing thing for one of his breed, and the woman who may have inspired him was marvelous. It is a pity that her name is lost to posterity. And it is a pity that no one knows what motive actually stirred Juan. But the woman was really a miracle of femininity. She was almost half white.

Juan himself was thirteen-sixteenths Araucanian Indian, which as a description means more in Peru than here. He had a tiny clearing up a small jungle stream that nobody has bothered to give a name to, and from time to time he planted something, and from time to time he gathered his crop, and from time to time he fished. In between these activities he thought about the woman and toilsomely acquired as romantic and hopeless an infatuation as a man can acquire with such diluted Latin blood. Which may be important in explaining what he did.

He was fishing when three *gringos*

came paddling down the jungle stream from the mountains, and from the beginning he knew that they were mad. Only madmen traveled with such energy. Only madmen beamed and smiled as did the gray eyed *gringo*, and only lunatics splashed their paddles hilariously and sang snatches of indecorous songs off key, like the red headed *Yanqui* in the bow. The third man gave no such obvious signs of madness, to be sure. His expression was composed and calm. But Juan looked at his eyes, and immediately thereafter Juan was thinking in panicky fashion of certain jungle trails that he knew, and that he could follow, but which no white man could ever unravel.

Long slanting shadows fell athwart the little stream and seemed to give the jungle an expression of sardonic calm; of a quietly malicious amusement which did not in the least detract from its luxuriantly leafy beauty. The jungle is beautiful always, but sometimes its beauty is welcoming, and sometimes its beauty is sinister and secretive. Its beauty just then was like the beauty of those gorgeously flowering vines which drape themselves languorously, caressingly, about the sturdy trees they are slowly murdering.

The canoe came up to the beach where Juan fished stolidly. It touched the shore, and Juan waited unblinkingly when the three white men disembarked and disclosed themselves as scarecrows, as tattered, ragged, nearly naked men whose only apparent claims to consideration were weapons in their belts and skins still lighter than Juan's coppery hide. One of them wore boots.

It was the red headed man who grinned and made a totally incomprehensible demand.

"Hello, old scout! Trot out the feed bag. Bring on the *pâté de foies gras* and the duck *canapé*. You've got cash customers!"

The words were a jumble of harsh sounds to Juan, whose throat was attuned to the nearly impossible gutturals of Araucanian speech. Juan's Spanish, even, was limited to the irreducible vocabulary needed for avoiding kicks.

He blinked stolidly as the red headed man went off into a fit of unreasonable laughter. He was afraid, of course. These men were white men, and they were mad, and Juan was internally in a panic. But he blinked at them without expression.

The *Yanqui* with gray eyes addressed him in Spanish. It was halting, stumbling Spanish, nearly as insufficient as Juan's own. But Juan understood a word here and there. "*Pez . . . carne . . . frijoles.*" These were reasonable demands. He had none of them, but he could understand them, anyhow.

The man with the boots spoke in the unintelligible language these men used among themselves. He was subtly native to these wilds, as the others were subtly alien, and Juan feared him by instinct.

"He won't have anything you asked for, Walker." Juan heard the meaningless syllables in an anguished unease. "We'll just have to do with what he's got."

Juan debated anxiously whether the sounds he had just heard referred to him, whether they indicated an intention to kill him. These were madmen . . .

The *Yanqui* with gray eyes chuckled suddenly.

"How'll we pay him? We've no money, no shells, nor any tobacco. How'll we pay him?"

Looking from one to the other, Juan felt momentarily reassured. He lumbered to his private larder. *Yuca*, and maize, and various roots. He began to grub among them while the red headed *gringo* laughed uproariously. He had to sit down on the beach and laugh. Juan stared stolidly at him as he slapped his knees.

"We can't pay him!" he panted hilariously, rolling on his back to laugh at the graying sky. "We—can't pay him. We've found the Inca's emerald mines and we can't pay for a dollar's worth of grub! Can you beat it? We're millionaires and we can't pay—"

He rolled upon the sand while Juan stared, with stray articles of food in his hands. Thirteen-sixteenths of Araucanian

blood do not sharpen a man's sense of humor anyhow, and Juan quite simply classed these men as maniacs. The gray eyed *Yanqui* bubbled over with laughter likewise and pointed at Juan and gasped out:

"The s-solemn m-mummy! He—he don't know what we're talking about! He th-thinks we're crazy!"

When the gray eyed man laughed at him, Juan did not think of the hysteria that comes of good fortune at last secure. Juan thought explicitly of madmen. They were unpleasant things to have about. It was frequently necessary to shoot them or do something else drastic to them, just in case they became violent. These men were assuredly insane. Ragged and emaciated and laughing while they rolled upon the beach . . . It was not the babbling of fever. It was madness. And Juan thought wistfully of certain tortuous jungle paths it was dangerous to try to reach—while these white men had guns—and then he thought desperately of a long Araucanian bow in his shack behind him. Juan was nearly one-fourth Spanish, but he owned no gun. If he had . . .

A VOICE spat an order at him. It was in Spanish, and only a fraction less comprehensible to Juan than the gibberish in which these *gringos* spoke to one another. But this was the voice of the dark man, the man with boots, and Juan trembled.

He hastened to kindle a fire and cook humbly, while that man watched him ominously. That one man frightened Juan more than any of the others. He was all too familiar a type; the type of certain saturnine, hard bitten men who rove the backwaters of all the new countries of the world. They are not amiable persons, and they are not especially moral persons, but they obtain their desires in highly effective fashion from the natives of backward nations. Those same natives, as a rule, fear them a great deal more than whatever local devils there may be. And, as a rule, with much more reason.

The man with the boots watched Juan coldly while he cooked. Juan's hands trembled a little. He sweated more than the heat would call for; at the same time he shivered. Once, when the man with the boots moved behind him, Juan cringed as if expecting a kick, and his eyes were agonized. A man who is mostly Araucanian Indian can tell you stories which do not redound remarkably to the credit of the white races.

With an exterior showing only the most impassive stolidity, Juan was nevertheless nearly a nervous wreck from pure terror when the food was cooked; yet all that the dark man had done was to look at him. But considering that Juan knew the man's breed and dreaded them sane, and considering that he considered this man probably mad, Juan's terror was as understandable as it was abject.

When they began to eat Juan was a quivering bundle of nerves beneath an appearance of Indian stolidity. He squatted down beside his hut because he was afraid to run away, and he waited in anguished terror for them to discuss the food.

But a slow amazement began to fill him. These men ate as if they were starving. They wolfed down the unappetizing mess he had brought out as his best. They fed themselves eagerly, hungrily, hugely. They grunted with satisfaction as they thrust huge chunks of tough and insipid roots into their mouths.

And Juan watched in bewilderment. He lived upon such victual in private, of course. But up this nameless little jungle stream it was not necessary to live up to his fraction of white blood. In San Teodoro De Los Angeles, naturally, Juan paraded his descent from hypothetical white men. In that metropolis of forty houses, Juan himself would scorn such food with a lofty scorn as befitting only *Indios*, and not worthy of a man in whose veins ran, however diluted, Spanish blood. But these men ate it without even cursing him for having nothing better.

Incredible doubts assailed him and slowly turned to convictions. Unthink-

able thoughts occurred to him and became unassailable facts. And in Juan's slow brain there formed comforting opinions. His fraction of white blood asserted itself for pride. The pride became the starting point for scorn. A very few drops indeed of the superior blood of the white man will make a vast change in an Araucanian Indian's potentialities. Juan regarded his guests with new eyes, though his stolidity was unchanged.

These men were ragged and gaunt. Their shirts were in shreds and showed the sun scorched flesh beneath. In the case of the red headed man bones showed, sticking almost through the skin. Their trousers were ripped, were shredded to almost nothing below the knees. Two of the three men wore what were hardly more than sandals made from uncured hide.

It was at this moment, with his new formed scorn hot within him, that Juan first really noted the dark man's boots. He had seen them before, but then he was an Indian and the *gringos* were white men. Now Juan thought of his own white blood, and the *gringos* . . .

He regarded the boots for a long time. Then he went into his hut and found a jug of *chicha*. He drank of it, wiped his mouth and went out to look again.

The white men were still eating wolfishly. He could inspect the boots at ease. They had been beautiful boots once, and a man who is mostly Araucanian Indian looks upon boots as the distinguishing mark of the superior race. In Bogota, which is in Colombia, a gentleman is a man with a collar on. In Lima, there was a time when a gentleman was a man with a cane. But in the small jungle towns and the sierra of Peru, and most especially to a man who is more Indian than white, a gentleman—why, a gentleman is a man who wears shoes.

Juan looked at the boots unwinkingly for probably ten minutes. Then he went in and took another drink of *chicha*.

Juan, of course, was in love. And in love all men are alike. They desire to shine in the eyes of the woman they temporarily worship. And the woman of Juan's desire was a marvelous woman. She was unquestionably the belle of San Teodoro De Los Angeles, which contained forty houses and was the largest town Juan had ever seen. A miracle of femininity. She was almost half white.

The boots stirred when the three men had stuffed themselves to bursting. Juan remained squatting by his hut. He was still stolid, still absolutely impassive as far as appearance went. But it was not at all the same Juan who thought his own thoughts while the white men spoke in the language that was only a babble to him.

"D'you suppose we can get enough grub from him to see us through?"

The voice was the voice of the red headed *gringo*.

"Only one more day's travel down this stream," said the man with the boots. "Then we can get all we want at San Teodoro."

His tone was curt. It would have made Juan shiver, ten minutes before. Now his eyes shifted to the red headed man as he spoke again.

"But how will we pay him?"

With food in their bellies, the exaltation of spirits the white men had displayed had now gone curiously flat. "We haven't a damned thing he'd want. Of course an emerald—"

The man with the boots laughed. It was more like a bark.

"He wouldn't know what it was."

Juan returned his gaze to the boots. He ignored the uncouth sounds issuing from the lips of the white men. Wearing such boots as these, he would be envied. Even Pedro, though he boasted a Spanish surname and was full three-eighths white, possessed no such footgear. And he would be admired by all the women. The economic factor in feminine admiration bulks large in every climate.

The white men talked, and Juan heard the syllables, the combinations of consonant and vowel sounds, but they meant nothing. He looked at the boots.

"With a belly full," said the red headed

man, "I can think. And I tell you, it looks good. What d'you think we've got there? How much cash?"

The booted man shrugged.

"No use guessing," he said curtly. "Plenty."

"It was a cache," said the red headed man wisely. "We hit on the place where they stored 'em. We got the product of the mine for a couple of months, maybe. All ready to send down when old Pizarro seized the Inca and orders went out to cover all workings."

The dark man stood up suddenly. He flung a word over his shoulder.

"Smokes."

He advanced toward Juan. And Juan raised his eyes from the boots, and they traveled up the dark man's ragged, dilapidated costume, and they penetrated the innumerable rents and tears—the white man's clothes were even worse than Juan's—and Juan's eyes were not at all humble when they reached the white man's face.

Juan veiled his eyes and sat stolidly still when the white man went into the hut. He remained motionless when the white man came out bearing a handful of Juan's precious native-made *cigarros* and the jug of *chicha* from which Juan had just drunk twice.

And he watched while the three white men lighted his *cigarros* and smoked with avid enjoyment, and while they drank his *chicha* with the intense pleasure of men who have been deprived of the luxury of any stimulant whatever for a very long time. In every gesture, in every sign, they acted like beggars suddenly possessed of plenty. Even the man with the boots was smoking with a fierce satisfaction.

"Ah!" said the red headed man, "this is something like comfort!"

The gray eyed *Yanqui* smiled a little.

"You forget," he said dryly. "I've heard you swear no decent cigar could be had under half a dollar. What would this sell for?"

"I said it," said the red head, "and I'll never smoke another one under a dollar! We've earned some luxury now!"

Darkness was settling down. The man with the boots was gazing somberly at the end of his cigar. His features were curiously harsh in the flickering light of the fire Juan had made.

The gray eyed man arose.

"Get in some wood," he said briefly. "It won't take long."

Juan remained squatted, unnoticed in the shadow of his hut, while the two white men brought in wood. It did not take long. The red headed man sang while he tugged his burden back. The gray eyed *gringo* came into the firelight loaded down and smiling. The dark man's face was as harsh and as hard as if carved from granite. He stared at his cigar until the wood went down with a crash. He jumped, then, and Juan noted that his eyes were burning.

DARKNESS fell silently and very suddenly. There was still no breath of wind. The night was hot and humid, as the day had been one of stifling heat. The stream contracted to a little space of smooth and oily water, illuminated by the camp-fire. The jungle vanished save for the wall of the clearing, where leaves and occasionally the mottled trunk of a jungle tree were pricked out by the dull red flames. Small noises began in the jungle. Little, furtive creepings.

The canoe was unloaded. The small clearing about Juan's hut was tacitly adopted as a camping place. The equipment of the three men was old and worn out. The hammocks were laced together with strips of untanned hide where they had ripped. Had they been Indians they would have been no worse provided. One single package from the canoe alone was carefully wrapped and anxiously watched by all three until safely deposited in their midst.

Juan was lost in the darkness. He was motionless, he was silent—and he was eventually forgotten. Now and then fugitive gleams from the small camp-fire

glinted on his eyes. But the thoughts behind the bronze mask of his face were strange thoughts for one of his breed. The white men had eaten of his food without cursing its quality. They had smoked his cigars with a passionate pleasure. They had brought in their own firewood—white men!—while an Indian was nearby idle.

An Indian . . . But he, Juan, was part white himself. His skin was dark, it was true, and no white man had admitted parental interest in the past two generations of his forbears. But boastful myths concerning imaginary forefathers recurred to him. A putative ancestor had been great among the white men, a *jéfe*, no less. A greater man, probably, than these. Certainly a greater man. He would have worn shoes every day and other white men would have called him señor. Yes. Certainly. And these were madmen, no less, and beggarly madmen at that, and it was not fitting that the descendant of a white man whom other white men had called señor should go barefoot while madmen wore boots . . .

"We'll take our evening look," said the red headed man. His voice was strained. And Juan, observing, found the words a mere jumble of sounds or else he might have realized that the hilarity with which these three men had come paddling down the river was a protective hilarity, a constant dwelling upon good fortune for the forgetting of hunger. There was certainly no hilarity in the voices now. The red headed man's tone was harsh, by that immutable law which fixes every man's emotion upon his greatest desire. When hungry, emeralds did not matter. They were encouragement, yes; a means of forgetting starvation by providing dreams.

The man with the boots moved back a little into the shadows as the gray eyed *Yanqui* slowly unfastened the intricate wrappings of untanned hide and unfolded the stiff and stinking cover of that guarded parcel. Other wrappings were inside the first. Juan, squatting motionless in the deepest shadows and quite forgotten, saw the faces of the two men stiffen and grow tense. The face of the third man was invisible.

Juan caught a glimpse of greenish pebbles in the firelight. The men regarded them with hypnotic attention, with a feverish intensity. As one of them moved, Juan saw the pebbles more clearly. Dull, uninteresting small stones. Colored, to be sure—but uncut emeralds are not articles of surpassing beauty. Even by the handful they are not impressive.

The still and silent figure in the shadows found scorn increasing. Juan's impression of these men's madness now was certified. The men were staring at the stones in utter silence. The gray eyed *Yanqui* began to speak monotonous, meaningless words—

"One, two, three, four, five . . ."

His voice went on, while the sodden heat of a breezeless jungle night made sweat pour out on a man's flesh, and while stars glowed luridly overhead, and while dancing moths and night flies from the jungle flittered drunkenly in the ruddy light of the camp-fire before they plunged crazily down into its coals.

Small, slithering sounds in the jungle. Small, furtive lappings from the stream. Tiny, crackling sounds from the fire. The monotonous, rhythmic murmur of a man counting tediously in the stillness. That was all.

The dark man's face was hidden, but his boots were limned clearly in the firelight. Juan's motionless figure was in a position where his eyes could remain fixed upon them. But visions were flitting through his brain. Of himself, in the metropolis of San Teodoro De Los Angeles. As he would be, wearing those boots. Haughty. Condescending. And there was that woman who was the acknowledged belle of San Teodoro.

The counting came to an end after a long, long time. There was stillness. Then the voice of the red headed man—

"We're rich men!"

Slowly, painstakingly, the *Yanqui* with gray eyes was replacing the dull green pebbles in their malodorous packet.

"Yes, we're all rich men," he said quietly.

"I wonder," said the red headed *gringo* harshly, "if you're thinking that if they didn't have to be divided, one of us would be richer."

The man with gray eyes looked steadily across the firelight.

"I've thought of it," he said evenly. "Of course. But don't be an ass. We've only got another day's paddling, and we'll be out in the main stream. Then we'll be safe from the jungle and temptation together—if it's a temptation to you."

The red headed man swore irritably, as if ashamed.

"It hasn't been, until just this minute. And it won't be again." He stopped, and said suddenly, "I'll tell you something. Back up in the mountains we were all nearly crazy. You know it. And I got to thinking about Norma. She's waiting for you. She's going to marry you when you get back."

The other man nodded.

"I was crazy, I guess. I figured that if you died, back up there, I'd have a chance to win her myself when I got out. I got out of my hammock to kill you . . . And that was the night that damned jaguar chased us out into the middle of the river and kept us there till daybreak. He saved your life."

The other *Yanqui* shrugged and bent again to his wrapping.

"You see what a fool I am," said the red headed man savagely. "I'm sorry. Do you want me to let you keep my gun?"

The wrappings were nearly complete about the dull green stones. The gray eyed man shrugged.

"Don't be a fool. You're cured." He smiled suddenly. "There's not a shell among the three of us, anyway."

He put the package carefully down. He stood up and stretched and climbed unconcernedly in his hammock, slung only a few inches from the ground.

"Go to sleep," he said dryly. "We're all fools."

He was still. The red headed man sat staring into the fire for minutes. Then he, too, stood up. But he stared down at the wrapped and laced package of uncured hides. He frowned. The frown became a scowl. Suddenly he kicked the package and growled inarticulately. Within thirty seconds thereafter he was in his hammock. But tossings that continued for a long time showed that it was not easy for him to sleep.

JUAN squatted in the darkness. The flickering firelight fitfully glinted red upon his eyes. They moved from time to time, as he gazed alternately from the tossing hammock to the hide wrapped bundle, and from the bundle to the boots. Juan was wholly scornful now, and his three-sixteenths of Spanish blood was wholly in the ascendant. These men were plainly mad. They made much ado over small green pebbles not even bright enough to be used for beads. They made a long recitative over them in a monotonous voice. They rewrapped the green pebbles, and one then kicked the package. Madness. Pure madness!

A burned through stick collapsed and sent up a slender fountain of sparks. The dark man had been silent, had been as motionless as Juan himself. Yet Juan had seen his eyes darting from one to the other of his companions. He remained motionless now, but his eyes moved from one hammock to the other, and then to the wrapped hide package on the floor.

The stillness was so complete that a sudden snore caused even Juan to start a little. That snore came from the hammock of the gray eyed man. And Juan saw the dark man rise slowly. Juan saw his face clearly, and it was the face of a devil. He saw the long hands work strangely, saw them go to the revolver in his holster, saw them drop away again. And the Indian in Juan felt death in the air.

The jungle may have found the next few moments subtly humorous to watch. As the dark man reached his full height, Juan moved very quietly. As the dark man moved soundlessly toward the ham-

mock in which the wakeful man lay, Juan began to crawl with infinite stealth into his hut. He vanished within its doorway as a startled voice said—

"What's the matter?"

And Juan was feeling his way very delicately about the abysmal blackness of the hut when the man outside hissed sibilantly for silence. No one knows, of course, just why Juan first looked for and found a second jug of *chicha*, from which he took an encouraging draught. It may have been that Juan was afraid, or it may be that he was covetous, or it is of course possible that he was merely in love with a woman. *Chicha*, however, is helpful in all three of those emotions.

He looked out of the doorway and saw the dark man close by the hammock of the red headed *gringo*. He was talking in an urgent low tone. Tumbled, incomprehensible syllables reached Juan's ears. And Juan could see the dark man's face as demoniacal in the fire glow.

"Listen to me," he was saying softly. "Last night, Walker proposed that we should kill you and divide the emeralds two ways instead of three."

Juan felt the *chicha* begin to warm his inwards. He felt for and found another possession of his, in the hut.

"I pretended to fall in with him."

The sounds meant nothing, but Juan could see the dark man whispering when he looked out of the hut again. His head was close to that of the man in the hammock. Juan could not see the expression of the red headed man. He could not see a look of horror and unbelief changing slowly to one of dawning suspicion.

"We were to play with you until tomorrow," the whisper went on, while Juan did certain things which were only possible by virtue of a dash of Spanish blood. "That was so you'd help paddle the last stretch. And tomorrow night——"

While the red headed *Yanqui* listened, staring, the lean fingers of the dark man darted out. There was a little sound—not enough to waken a sleeping man no more than two yards away. And then a horrible, silent, struggle began. The dark man bent over the hammock like some monstrous vulture. His hands were closed about the throat of the man with red hair, who fought frenziedly in the toils of his hampering hammock to tear away the grip that shut off his breath. There was no sound at all except the ghastly rustling of the hammock cloth. Juan deliberately waited as the struggles slackened, as the writhings of the red headed man became less. After all, these men were madmen . . . And the cause of Juan's calmness may have been *chicha* and the motive for his action may have been love of a woman, or covetousness, or it may have been pure fear. But Juan had fitted a long arrow to the string of the tall Araucanian bow in his hands. Standing in the darkness, he drew that arrow to his ear. He released it.

And then everything was very quiet.

Dawn was breaking as the gray eyed *Yanqui* woke. He tumbled out of his hammock. He stared about him. He stiffened and looked about in what was almost terror. He plunged through the ashes of a dead camp-fire toward his companions.

The red headed man was breathing. A little. A very little. The gray eyed man brought him slowly back to life. For the dark man, of course, nothing could be done. An arrow stuck out a foot beyond his back.

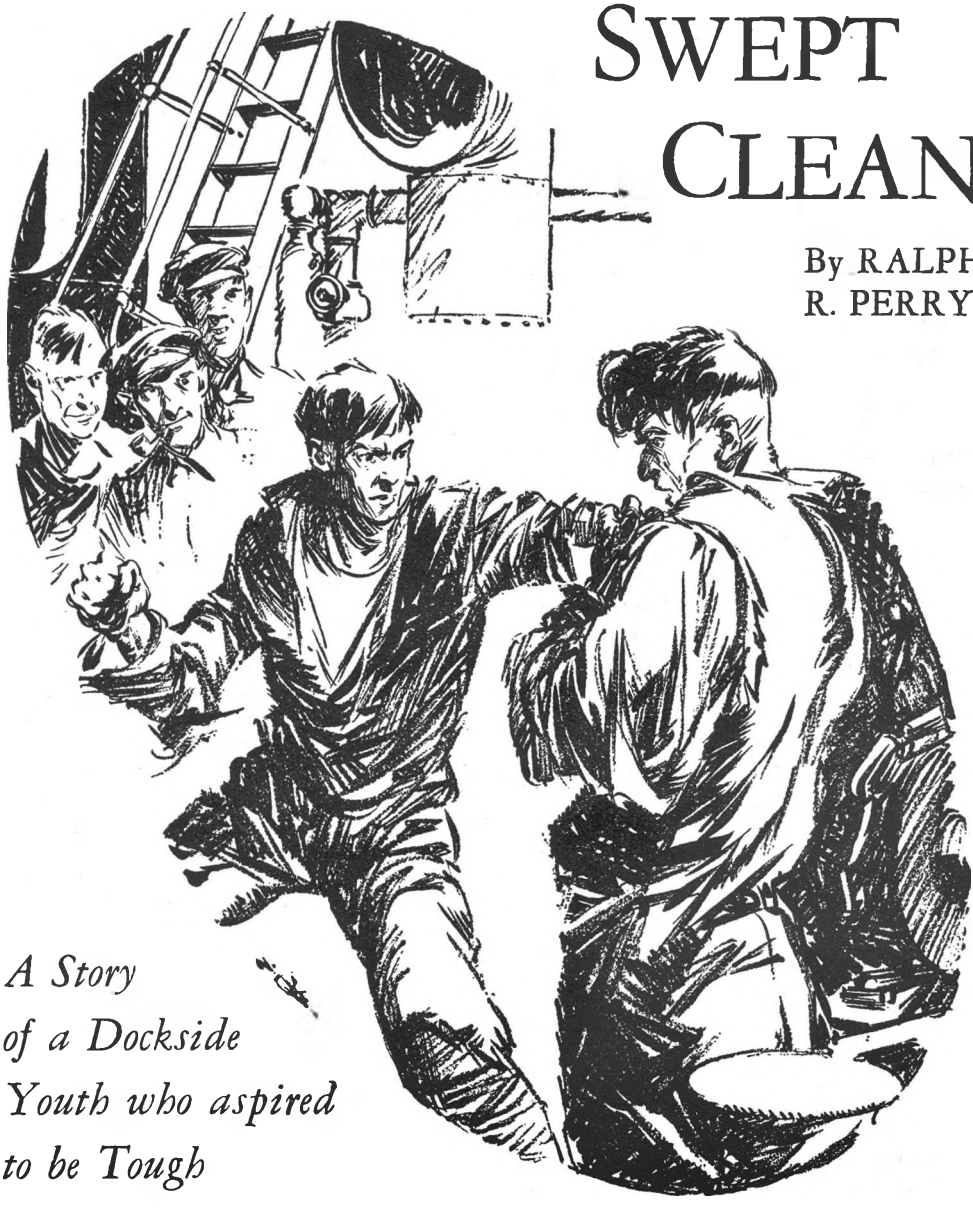
The red headed man could not talk, because of his swollen throat, but by gestures he told what he knew. It was only then that the gray eyed *gringo* looked for the packet of emeralds. Juan had opened that package, and he had fingered the stones, and he had flung them contemptuously aside. Juan, you see, was not a madman. Juan was gone. And so were the dark man's boots.

"M-my God!" said the gray eyed *Yanqui* shakenly. "M-my God! You'd have killed me for a girl, and—he'd have killed both of us for the emeralds—and—and that damned Indian killed him for his boots!"

Which, somehow, seems to point a moral of some sort. But it is elusive.

SWEPT CLEAN

By RALPH R. PERRY



A Story of a Dockside Youth who aspired to be Tough

SPRAY vaulted the squat stone breakwater that shelters the inner harbor of Brest. In the darkness the spout of white that leaped in a hissing line along the barrier was like the shaking of a fist; the rumbling thud of the breakers was a growl. Already a strong breeze blew. Before dawn a gale would sweep the roadstead.

Alone on the deck of the freighter *Kingslake* a carroty haired ordinary seaman shut eyes and ears against the threat of the sea. Red Stickney was charged with more responsibility than a kid making his first voyage should be asked to carry, but Captain Steve Quigley had given him the job. Red was worried, yet he was chesty, too. Up to

this night the only notice the skipper had taken of him had been to bawl him out.

And what bawlings-out those had been! Profanity spewed in a cold, level snarl from the corner of Quigley's thin lipped mouth; small green-blue eyes drilling Red meanwhile to backbone and skull. Red was city bred—a kid with an impudent face and big ears; short, but with a body as compact and wiry as a monkey's.

In twenty years passed on the streets and docks of the Boston waterfront he had not met any one able to compel his respect. Yet Quigley, on the first day at sea, blasted him for dripping paint on the deck. Red could not wisecrack; he could not dodge behind a truck and jeer; he could not laugh off that verbal vitriol. So he admired. In all things Steve Quigley became his model. To be tough, hard boiled, indifferent—that was to be a sailorman right.

Yet Red was finding indifference a difficult task. He was the anchor watch, the only man awake. The *Kingslake* was anchored half a cable's length outside Brest breakwater. She had no steam up and close to her stern the spray leaped higher and higher.

In addition Quigley had made Red watchman. It was the *Kingslake's* last night in port. Those of the crew who made a practise of picking up a few dollars by petty smuggling would bring aboard lace, egrets—anything that could be sneaked ashore in the States under a sailor's sweater. A captain is supposed to prevent smuggling, yet Quigley, on this of all nights, had permitted the regular watchman to go ashore.

Either of Red's jobs was man sized. He realized he was the least experienced sailor aboard, but he was not struggling against a feeling of incapability. He was afraid. The sound of breakers and the sight of foam terrified him. He forced himself to light a cigaret. He snapped the match toward the smother astern, and the captain Red worshipped could not have expressed greater contempt by a single gesture. Then Red spoiled the effect by a shudder. A memory of disaster and physical pain was too strong for his will to control.

In Boston harbor he had once fallen from a boat. Green, foam smeared waves had borne him shoreward, tossed him mercilessly upon spouting fangs of granite. Red shut his eyes. He could still see those rocks—slimy, sharp edged, bearded with weed. Spray had leaped from them, too, but not so high as it sprang tonight.

The desire to run the length of the *Kingslake's* deck, to shake the third mate awake, to shout, "Let's get steam on the ship, Mister!" was intense as thirst. Yet Red did not stir. He could not brand himself as chicken hearted by waking the officer up. Quigley had picked the anchorage. He had gone ashore that evening in spite of plain indications of bad weather; and the third mate, left in charge, had coolly gone to bed, leaving the vessel in Red's hands.

If they were not worried, Red told himself he wasn't. Nevertheless he scanned the harbor lights for some sign of the *Kingslake's* absent boat. When Quigley returned, or Papapolous, the gigantic Greek boatswain, Red's responsibility would lighten. Even the presence of a few of the crew would relieve the strain of waiting alone on the darkened vessel.

Inside the seawall the riding lights of the shipping were still as craft becalmed. Outside, anchor lights jerked and swung as the gale made the exposed ships strain at their anchors. Ashore a steady stream of lights passed to and fro across the high bridge. There were lighted windows, too, though not nearly so many as would have been the case in an American seaport of equal size. A thin, cold rain began to fall, driven by the wind so that it beat through Red's coat and chilled him to the bone. On the breakwater the spouts of spray became continuous. Green water was flying over the stones, and every wave struck the wall with a thud that made the air tremble like the report of a distant cannon.

In the gap Red watched appeared a light. A whaleboat pulled by six oars

loomed slowly out of the dark, barely able to make headway against the wind and sea. When the boat was alongside Red threw a line. He saw by the lantern light that Papapolous and the crew were aboard, but that Quigley was not.

"Hey, Pop! Got to hoist your own boat—no one awake!" Red shouted.

"Hoist not'ing. Gotta go after the skipper," bellowed the Greek. "You, Red! T'row us a heavin' line."

WHILE the crew climbed one by one up a Jacob's ladder the boatswain tied a large, paper wrapped package on to the end of the line. Red pulled hard, expecting something heavy, and nearly fell over backward. There was no weight to the parcel at all. When he held it in his hands he could feel a pasteboard box beneath the paper.

"T'row back the line. There's another," Pop bellowed.

"What're you bringing aboard?" Red demanded suspiciously.

"Package for the skipper."

"You're a liar!"

Red let the heaving line fall at his feet. A big Dane named Larsen, who was the boatswain's friend, instantly stooped to pick it up.

"You go for'ard, *ja?* See about anchor," Larsen suggested blandly. "I hoist the box for Pop."

"Nix," Red contradicted. "You and Pop ain't putting nothing over on the Old Man." He weighed the package in his hands. "What's in here—feathers? Bird of Paradise plumes?"

Larsen shrugged with utter indifference. He was a big, fair haired man. He stood swaying to the slow pitch and quiver of the *Kingslake's* deck.

"The anchor don't feel goot," he said. "What you care about plumes, kid? Pop joost makes a little dough."

"Half a barrel's what he's got," Red snorted. "I wouldn't say nothing if he was trying to slip in a few plumes, but this is wholesale stuff. He'll get nabbed, and Quigley gets fined."

"You damn' fool kid," muttered the Dane, but Red had ceased to pay him any attention.

Failing to get a heaving line, Pop stood up in the boat with a second large package in his arms, somewhat heavier than the first. He eyed the Jacob's ladder, weighing his chances of catching it from a tossing boat, climbing while burdened with an unwieldy bundle.

While he hesitated Larsen snatched for the heaving line. Red stepped on the Dane's fingers, and the latter sprang back, swearing.

"I'm running this, see?" Red said.

Pop laid down his bundle and started heavily up the ladder. The boat was banging against the ship's side, and as soon as he left it a sailor untied the painter and started toward the stern. Until the captain called for a boat it could be secured more conveniently at the taffrail. As the boat moved from beneath him the boatswain bellowed out that it was to be let alone, but the sailor, half drunk, only thumbed his nose. Pop, therefore, came over the rail in a rage.

"You ain't going to slip nothing over on account of me," Red greeted him. "Either you bring your stuff aboard when the Old Man and the regular watchman is on the job, or—"

Red's sentence ended in a gasp, for the Greek's left hand shot out and caught him by the throat. Red squirmed. He aimed a kick at Pop's shins, but the big boatswain only leaned forward, holding Red easily with one hand, keeping his shins out of reach of the sailor's boots.

"You show off, huh, kid? You ain't a man yet," the boatswain growled.

Under the sweeping black mustache Pop was grinning—an evil smile, for his eyes were narrow and hard with malice. The left hand shifted from Red's throat to his shirt collar. With a jerk and a twist Pop pulled Red forward, caught the slack of his pants and lifted him, squirming, above the rail. Beneath Red raced gray backed seas hurrying to dash themselves in thunder against the seawall.

"I put you wise. I show who is tough,"

Pop muttered. "I can't bring my stuff aboard, huh?"

Red was speechless, rigid.

"You brag about the skipper. We all laugh at you. That first package mine. The stuff in the boat his. So w'at you do —if I don't drop you over, huh?"

Through the terror that locked Red's teeth came a queer sound, something between a gasp and a sob.

"So? You ain't tough no more? You are good kid now?" sneered Pop.

He swung Red back over the rail and dropped him on to the deck. For a moment the sailor crouched on elbows and knees. He was breathing heavily. The crew, standing around to watch the fun, tittered. Red lifted a face as white as chalk.

"You big cheese," he said distinctly.

Pop only grinned. His friend, Larsen, laughed, but the other sailors stood silent, uneasy. The two big men were bullies. The crew liked Red, but more than that, the sight of the intense and overmastering fear graven on Red's face embarrassed them. They had seen a soul naked. An oath or a wisecrack did not fit, and they could think of nothing else. The circle of men around the big boatswain and the little sailor stirred. In the silence the seas went booming against the seawall —once, twice, thrice, while the muscles jerked in Red's face as he struggled with a shame nearly as intense as his fright had been.

"I'm man enough to stop you," said Red hoarsely.

Pop lunged for him again, but Red dodged out of arm's length.

"Try to bring that stuff aboard and I'll tell the skipper."

"Snitch, huh?"

"What do I care, so I keep you from getting away with this?"

"Quigley ain't coming back till we sail. You can't find him ashore," sneered the boatswain.

"Guess I can find a cop."

Papapolous doubled his fists and lumbered forward. Holding Red over the rail had been bluff, but now the big boatswain meant to put the sailor out with his fists. Pop was not only smuggling on a scale beyond anything Red guessed, but he was now engaged in a business that amounted to a doublecross, and he intended to silence Red in a way that would serve as an object lesson to still any tongue that might wag among the remainder of the crew.

DIRECTLY Pop cared nothing for Red's threats. The package still in the boat consisted of two suitcases full of cocaine, worth more than fifty thousand dollars wholesale. Quigley had bought it; Pop was smuggling it aboard. The skipper and the boatswain had brought small amounts of the drug into the States on many previous trips, and they had decided to make one killing and retire on the profits. They had purchased the cocaine legally; Red would get no satisfaction either from Quigley or the police.

But indirectly the whole scheme of the smugglers was imperiled. Any one who knew what they had could inform the American Customs and receive twenty-five per cent. of the value of the seizure for the information. The French police would jump at the chance, and so might any sailor in the *Kingslake's* crew who got wise. Quigley and the boatswain could never smuggle such a shipment ashore in New York if the customs were tipped off.

Moreover, Papapolous' greed had been unable to resist the profits to be made in plumes. Red had guessed correctly that the light package already on the ship contained egrets, which the boatswain had purchased on his private account. Quigley would be furious if he discovered that the big traffic in drugs was being jeopardized for the sake of a few thousand dollars' profit in feathers in which the skipper did not share. Pop did not intend the skipper should know. He meant to beat Red till the sailor would cringe if he crooked a finger.

But to his surprise as he moved forward the blood surged back into Red's face.

Street fighting was Red's specialty. The boatswain's size did not worry him at all; he saw an opportunity to make the crew forget that he had squawked like a frightened chicken.

A huge fist swung by Red's head. He ducked, throwing himself sidewise and kicking out with his right foot. His toe caught Pop's knee cap, the big boatswain fell heavily, the breath knocked from his chest as he hit the deck. The crew laughed, and Red circled while the big man climbed slowly to his feet. Red sidestepped another rush, dodging swiftly behind a stay, landing a heavy punch to the kidneys; yet the Greek did not seem to feel it. He plunged after the grinning little sailor.

Despite the grimness of the fighters, the inequality of their sizes gave the contest an aspect irresistibly comic. The circle of sailors spread out to give Red more room.

"Knock him for a loop, kid," a water tender encouraged.

The idea of a knockout on that mountain of flesh was ludicrous. Little by little Red was being crowded toward the stern, but though Pop grunted and puffed and flailed away he could not land a punch. Unless Red tripped over a ringbolt or slipped he could make a monkey of the boatswain.

But the footing was difficult. The ordinary roll and pitch of the *Kingslake* would not have bothered Red, who had become accustomed to both during weeks at sea; but a short quiver, a series of jerks that tended to throw him off balance, almost enabled Pop to land. The boatswain ceased his pursuit, put his head on one side.

"Anchor's dragging," said the water tender sharply. "Come on, black gang! The mate'll want steam!"

From the bridge the mate's whistle sounded shrilly. The circle of sailors broke up, the black gang going below, the deck force going forward at a run. In the moment of confusion Pop leaped, both arms swinging. Red slipped aside, collided with a man who caught both his arms. The sailor kicked backward, twisted free, and smacked a punch into Larsen's face, but he was held too long to avoid Pop's rush wholly. A terrific swing was on its way. Red blocked, rolled with the punch, but the fist that cracked against his ear knocked him clear off his feet. Both Pop and Larsen jumped for him without giving him a chance to rise.

Red was dizzy. He saw a stay, rolled under it. A boot struck his ribs, rolled him down the deck. The pain cleared his head. He sprang up and dodged behind a lifeboat. Pop followed while Larsen ran to the other end of the boat to keep Red from getting back on the open deck again.

"Hey, Bosun, stand by your anchors!" screamed the mate excitedly.

"You say anything, huh?" Pop panted.

He was too big to squeeze himself along the ship's side outside of the lifeboats. Though Larsen was making better progress, Red figured he could climb up, over the boat before either could reach him.

"Bet your sweet life!" he answered.

"Keep him here, Lars. I gotta drop the hook," Pop growled, and went forward at a lumbering run, while his ally squirmed out on to the deck and crouched so that he could see Red's feet.

For him to catch the sailor would be difficult, but he could pen Red where he was. Just to make things harder Red scrambled upon the lifeboat and settled himself on the outboard side, where he could roll across the canvas boat cover and drop to the deck if Larsen tried to crawl underneath.

"This is easier'n playing tag with a couple of freight cars," he jeered.

"*Ja?* You find out," Larsen said stolidly, and stood waiting for the boatswain to return.

THE LEFT bower anchor was dropped, but the wind was now booming in the *Kingslake's* rigging. Behind her stern seas were breaking green over the seawall, and though the curious jerk and quiver

that shook the ship as the anchor dragged along the bottom lessened, it did not cease. Red lined up two lights ashore, only to see them draw apart. To be sure the drift of the ship was very slow. The anchors were not dragging more than a couple of yards a minute. On the other hand, both hooks might come out of the mud with a rush; and it would be an hour before the *Kingslake* could get up steam.

The mate fired a rocket. A blinker began to flash frantically on the bridge, and was answered, after an interval, from the shore. Larsen pulled out a stubby wooden pipe and packed it phlegmatically with tobacco.

"This no fun," he remarked.

Red, watching the spray leap twenty feet high over the seawall, shuddered. Yet he answered belligerently enough—

"What're you bellyachin' for?"

"Not'ing. Only the skipper is dumb for anchoring so close," the Dane answered mildly. "They send out a tug. We can always get away in the boats. But this is a goot ship. Maybe she is wrecked—because the Old Man, he is tough. Care not'ing for the wind. Anchors where he please."

"Shut up, you squarehead! There's a tug starting out."

"*Ja.* The harbor tug. We don't want her snoopin' around, wit' what we got," replied the Dane. "You're a fool, Red. What you care what we do? Pop will kill you. You shut your mouth, he let you off."

"He ain't going to make a monkey out of me," Red snapped. He was feeling hard boiled again, and he enjoyed the sensation.

"You squeak like a rabbit when Pop hold you over the side," said Larsen. His stolid matter-of-factness made Red furious. "That's nothing," he went on. "If you had been in surf, like me, you would be too scared to yell. Hold the captain so, and he would get yellow as an egg, you bet!"

"Bet he wouldn't," snapped Red loyally.

The Dane uttered a hoarse grunt of contempt.

"He swears like fisherman, so you think he is brave man and goot sailor," he said. "Where is he now? On the tug? No. Bet he goes into the backroom at the Grand Café where he sees nothing, hears nothing. What you call pass the buck."

"He don't know nothing about it."

"Every sailor knows. See the lights on the ships?" Larsen retorted. "Ain't the wind been blowing since dark? Other captains are on their ships, but Quigley, he shows off by anchoring where a seaman has got more sense than to come; then he stays ashore and passes the buck. I know him. A wise faller. Makes lots of money. So do the old hands. You shut your eyes to what goes on aboard here, Red. You're a nice young faller. Pop told you the truth. That stuff in the boat is Quigley's."

A tug, a small vessel, had steamed by the *Kingslake* and tossed a line aboard. With her aid the ship stopped drifting and the seaman on the forecastle began to saunter aft, Pop in the lead.

"You say nothing, huh?" said Larsen softly.

"Go to hell. You're both lying," Red snapped.

He balanced himself on the outboard edge of the lifeboat, for Pop was walking purposefully toward him down the dark deck.

"Well, you joost get beat up. I done what I could," said Larsen.

It was an apology, but Red only shrugged. He was not caught yet, and he doubted whether these two slow seaman could lay hands on him. Surely Quigley would be out to the ship before long, and Red had perfect faith that the thin lipped little skipper would stop the smuggling by his mere presence aboard. These two hulks would not have the nerve to try to put anything over on the Old Man.

Papapolous glared at Red while he sized up the situation. From his perch on the outer gunwale of the lifeboat Red grinned back impudently, and continued

to grin when the boatswain started to climb heavily over the center of the boat. Red waited until the big man's weight sagged the boat cover, then slipped to the deck, faked a run around the bow and, as Larsen started in that direction, dodged out around the stern of the lifeboat and ran aft, with Larsen hot on his heels. Pop rolled off the lifeboat and gave chase.

Neither of the big men could run, but they were so close that Red was forced to slide down the ladder to the after well deck. He tried to shake them off by dodging around the hatch, failed, and was herded on to the poop. Still he ran aft, intending to dodge through the compartment which housed the steam steering engine. To his consternation, the door was locked.

The boatswain was behind him. He could hear Larsen running down the passageway on the opposite side; overhead was the overhang of the poop deck. Red had no time to shin up a stanchion. He was cornered. Recklessly he took the only means of escape—swung himself over the taffrail, grasped the boat painter, and let himself slide down toward the whaleboat.

HE SLID into a rushing sea that almost tore his fingers from the rope, but he was strong and, holding his breath, managed to catch the bow and scramble aboard.

From the taffrail Pop and Larsen stared down at him, nonplussed. Red picked up a boat stretcher.

"Try to follow me and I'll crack you on the bean," he gloated. "Wait till Quigley comes back! He'll want to know what I'm doing here."

"I—" Papapolous hesitated—"I cut you adrift!" he threatened.

Red laughed. The act would be murder, certain to be discovered. The boatswain was trying a preposterous bluff. Even Larsen growled out an emphatic protest.

"You git for'ard or I bust in your face," the boatswain growled savagely.

"*Ja?*" Larsen drew himself up. "Get going!"

The cold hand of terror ran down Red's spine, for he heard Larsen moving away. The boat was drawn up close under the overhang of the stern. Red could see Pop bending over the taffrail. His arm moved, and a heaving line struck Red in the face.

"Bend on the package—quick!" the boatswain threatened hoarsely.

"I'll chuck it overboard!" Red retorted.

The roar of the breakers on the seawall was in his ears. The shortened painter made the whaleboat yaw and toss. With the heavy package of flat tin cans in his arms Red had difficulty keeping his feet. He was bluffing, too. He guessed that he held drugs. Nothing else that he knew of was packed in that fashion. The knowledge angered him, made him more than ever determined that the Greek should not get such goods aboard. Yet though he held the package over the water, he was too wise to drop it. Its value was too great. In a rage Papapolous might cut the painter.

The boatswain crouched on the deck. He held the painter with both hands. Red peered more carefully, and saw that the big man was chafing the rope against the rough edge of a steel plate.

"I rub till you tell me to hoist," he growled.

His big shoulders swayed. Papapolous was putting all his enormous weight and strength into the destruction of the line.

A painter, in such a sea, might chafe through naturally. Men might wonder, afterward, why Red was in the boat when it went adrift. They might suspect Pop, yet it was doubtful if they could get proof of foul play, or force Larsen to testify. The Dane would be an accessory.

All this flashed through Red's mind. Fifty yards behind him the spray spouted, flung across the seawall by the wind like foam blown from the teeth of a giant. Pop ground away at the painter. He was bluffing, yes, but the bluff had become a test of courage. The man less strong of

will, less tough of fiber, would yield first. Red was stiff with fear. His throat constricted until he was conscious of the pain—but he coiled the heaving line and hurled it back aboard the *Kingslake*.

"Nothing gets hoisted out of *here*, big boy," he said. Leaving the package in the bow he scrambled to the sternmost thwart, and forced himself to sit down. He determined not to move.

The boatswain ground away at the painter. Even when the painter parted he could hold the boat. Red was bound to quit.

Both forgot the chances of the sea.

In the darkness Papapolous could not see the rope between his hands. He thought he had done no more than fray the line. Actually two strands were cut through, and the effort to hold the boat against the tug of the sea cramped his fingers. The whaleboat yawed. A wave larger than most dashed against the bow. The painter was jerked from the boatswain's grip, drew taut, and snapped.

Papapolous bellowed, "Man overboard!" and ran forward.

Numbly Red got out a pair of oars—fourteen-foot oars, too heavy to handle with one hand. The whaleboat was too heavy for one man to row in such a sea. Red made two futile strokes. He dropped one oar; abandoned any hope of winning clear. With the other oar he sculled, simply to keep the boat from drifting broadside. He could not look at the leaping wall of spray that charged to engulf him. He watched the wave crests, kept the boat at right angles to them, felt himself picked up on each sea, rushed forward.

Fear left him. This thing had happened. It would not last long, now. The sea seethed around him, streaked with the foam of the backwash. The boat hurtled ahead. Its bow dipped in the roaring trough of a breaker. Wood crashed on stone. The seat was tossed straight upward as the boat rose end over end. Red was hurled through the air with a rush of spray, thrown high and far, felt himself falling, and soused into still black water.

Deeply he sank. Salt water was in his mouth and lungs; he rose slowly, swimming without strength or purpose. Spray dropped heavily upon him as his head broke the surface. He had been flung, boat and all, clear over the sea wall. No matter. He would drown in the still water. He was exhausted by the shock.

BUT SINCE the *Kingslake's* anchor had begun to drag a keen watch had been kept upon her from inside the breakwater. Through night glasses half a dozen mates had seen a whaleboat carrying a single seaman break adrift. The three nearest vessels had launched boats and were pulling toward the wall when Red struck. The beam of a searchlight fell upon his head. A boat hook was twisted into his collar and he was lifted from the water by a red faced, blond man wearing the three gold stripes of a chief officer. Red was hung head down till he coughed the water out of his lungs, then lifted to the stern.

"Cripes, you were born to hang, lad!" boomed the chief mate.

"Captain Quigley . . ." Red gulped.

"Never mind *him*," boomed the mate. "Blankets and hot coffee for you, lad. Your ship ain't drifting any more."

"I got to see the skipper," Red said. "At the Grand Café. You can look after me there. I'm all right, anyway."

"Well, I ain't said no, have I?" the mate demanded. "No need to get hard, sailor!"

He turned the boat about, and they pulled rapidly across the inner harbor. At the dockside Red found himself too weak to stand, but the mate, without a word, lifted him out and hailed a cab. At the restaurant they were told Quigley was in an upstairs room.

"I'll go alone," said Red.

"You can go to hell if you like, sailor," came the retort. "I don't want to mix into your game. I've been trying to help, but maybe—" the mate turned on his heel—"you'd have liked it better to swim ashore alone."

Red walked to the stairs. He could hardly climb the steep flight, and he felt ashamed of himself. The mate had been friendly, and he had sent him away angry. Red had not intended that. He had simply been anxious.

Quigley's door was shut. Red opened without knocking, and found the skipper sitting at a small table before a half empty bottle. Though the captain of the *Kingslake* had been drinking, he was not drunk, for he sprang from his chair at the sight of Red's dripping clothes.

"What's wrong?" he snarled.

"Anchor dragged, but a tug got us—"

"You didn't go overboard to tell me that?"

"No, sir. Pop was trying to bring some stuff aboard . . ."

Quigley's eyes narrowed and turned green. The blood faded from his lips.

"Didn't he?" he snarled. "Say, what's the matter, kid? You look sick as a cat."

"Pop said it was yours. It felt like coke . . ."

"You had your mitts on it and let it go!" snarled the skipper. "Why, you little rat!"

Red shrugged. Profanity no longer impressed him, and doubled fists and an angry face never had. His idol had collapsed; if he looked sick, he felt the same way.

"I was in the boat when the painter parted. Got washed clean over the seawall," he answered. "You're needed aboard, Captain."

"What for, if the tug's got the ship?" Quigley reseated himself heavily and sat shaking his head. "Jeez, that's a lot of dough to lose," he mourned. "I'll make it right with you for trying to save the stuff."

"The coke, you mean?" Red interrupted.

"Not so loud! Sure. I spent my last grand for that lot, too."

"Too bad," said Red, with a sarcasm which escaped the captain, and turned toward the door.

"Where you going?"

"Outside. I've swallowed a lot of salt water," the sailor explained.

He was pale and looked nauseated, and the excuse satisfied Quigley. Yet when Red reached the sidewalk he stood hesitantly in the bright lights of the Grand Café. Passing Frenchmen eyed him curiously. His wet clothes dripped, and a gendarme sidled up and asked a question.

"Naw!" Red growled.

Though he understood no French the gestures made it evident he was being asked if anything was wrong. The snarl in Red's voice startled him.

"No, I'm all right," he repeated quietly. What was the use of being hard all the time? Quigley and Pop acted that way, and a fine pair of crooks they were.

After all, he had nothing to say to the policeman. The drug was at the bottom of the harbor, and Quigley could not buy another supply. As for Red himself, he could hide somewhere until the *Kingslake* sailed, and then apply to the American consul. They would think he had gone off his head after his accident.

"Me—goofy." Red sneered. He was tougher than that.

Yet to be tough, purely for its own sake, no longer seemed praiseworthy. Red was in no mood for self-analysis. He did not perceive that he had attained manhood, that for him blind trust and unreasoning fear were things of the past. There was no longer anything he feared—he only wished there were something he could admire.

But he was cold; the stares of the crowd annoyed him. Up the street he started at a brisk walk. He carried himself like a man late for an important engagement, but he was hunting a place where a penniless sailor could dry his clothes.

The MANKUKULAM of the PHILIPPINES

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

ALL POWERFUL is the *mankukulam* in the Philippines. Believed by the peasantry to have occult powers, he is able to terrorize an entire community, and to hypnotize a victim from afar. Witch doctor is the nearest his title will translate in English, and he is often young.

Sometimes the *mankukulam* is a woman, although not often—women usually sticking to the milder practices of the craft, being known as *manhuhulas*. The witch doctor always absorbs neighborhood gossip and stows it away for future reference. He is consulted by those in love and by those who wish to put an enemy out of the way. Always has the *mankukulam* a strange piercing look in his eyes which is apparent even to foreigners. He deals in poisons, incantations, *gayumas*—charms —and *anting-anting*. The latter may take the form of an amulet which protects its wearers from steel, lead, serpents or crocodiles. Practically every Filipino of the lower classes possesses one, and wears it on his person constantly. And the *mankukulam* waxes rich by the sale of such things.

The writer has seen the *anting-anting* in operation, and has seen it both fail and operate successfully. No white man has been able to fathom it. The writer has seen a man thrust a knife repeatedly through his arm and draw no blood, and he has seen a man's hand lopped off at the wrist when his *anting-anting* refused to operate. One thing is certain: no *mankukulam* in the Philippines has ever been able to do injury to an American through use of hypnotism or occult power. Possibly it is because the white man laughs at such things.

The *mankukulam* often undertakes to drive out demons supposed to infest the body of a sick person. He does this with the tail of a sting ray—*Buntot ng pargue*—which is used as a whip and draws blood at each stroke. Sometimes burning splinters are inserted between the patient's toes and doggerel prayers are recited while the unfortunate, held to the floor by strong men, shrieks in agony.

The reports of the Philippine constabulary show numerous cases of the murder of *mankukulams*, for even their alleged magic does not render them immune from death, and sometimes relatives of their victims are brave enough to seek revenge.

When a community decides to rid itself of a *mankukulam*, fire usually is the medium used. It takes but a few minutes to transform a bamboo shack into a fiery furnace and the razor edged bolo waits outside.

Asuangs, or witches thought to have the power of assuming animal forms, are popularly supposed to do the *mankukulam's* bidding; to steal infants for cannibal feasts or devil worshipping orgies, and to work all manner of evil. The Filipino who entertains a stranger always watches the first meal closely. If the stranger refuses salt, then he is concluded to be an *asuang*, and as such, will be driven from the house. Smearing doorways and window sills with garlic will prevent his reentry, if he attempts such a thing under cover of darkness.

LOST EMPIRE

IN THE jungle trail the dusk was blue, making their ragged figures more weird and unreal. They walked in single file, silently, axes and machetes in stiff, weary hands, the guard swaggering a few paces behind them, carbine in the crook of his arm, pipe going to keep the gnats off. It was Bougrot, far ahead, who broke the silence of their march and began to sing.

Some of them looked up, to curse him growlingly. Others only stared at him mutely, for in Cayenne it was said that the little man was partly cracked, did not know what he was doing some of the time. But those last did not see Bougrot's face now; the wide eyes were luminous with subtly withheld desire, the bearded mouth grim with purpose.

It was not a song of Cayenne, of the prison camps, that he sang. It was a marching song of the war, of his old outfit, in which he had been a major, had gotten the terrific mental battle shock which some persisted had unbalanced him. He sang the gay, bawdy words clearly and well now, head back and to one side. On a high note he halted, letting the tune drag out mournfully.

Then he stumbled, seemed to fall over a

A Novelette of an Escaped Convict from the Cayenne Colony who Dreamed of Founding an Outcast State on the Back Rim of the Cordilleras

by ROBERT CARSE

creeper in the trail. He dropped his heavy wood ax, clapped his hands to his ankle below the frayed cuff of his jean trousers.

"Look out!" he bawled in a voice high and squeaky with fear. "Snake! Snake! Bit me . . ."

He began to moan and sway back and forth, lithe, square-built body doubled over, hands about his right ankle. The other convict woodchoppers sprang away from him, gaping down to see the advertised snake, then rushing on. There was only one man who stopped, old Manecu, who had all but killed a Lyons gendarme with his bare hands when drunk one night.

Manecu let slip his long, sharp machete to the matted tangle of the jungle floor, knelt down on one knee beside the moaning, mumbling Bougrot.

"What was it—tarantula, or snake?"

Bougrot cursed in a weak voice, answered that he had not seen the thing, only felt its venomous bite.

"Let's see," began old Manecu. "Take your dirty hands from it!"

Then the Arab guard was beside them, and the two heard the clack of the bolt as he sent a bullet into the barrel of his Lebel carbine. The guard was of a mongrel breed; he held a dark fear of the jungle at any time. And now it was dusk, would soon be night, and the little gang was still a half kilometer from the main camp.

"Get up, you lousy dogs!" he commanded hoarsely in his bastard prison French. "Bougrot, you're always faking, anyhow. Get on your—"

Old Manecu, at the first word of command, had started to his feet, picking up his machete. As he rose he spun, stabbed, evilly, surely. The broad point caught the Arab between gullet and jaw, flung him backward and around as his fingers con-

tracted about the stock of the Lebel and a slug screamed off into the lianas and leaves.

"Lousy dog!" mocked Manecu, and kicked the quivering face with his bare, hard heel before he yanked up the carbine.

Ahead in the trail the other woodchoppers had halted curiously, wondering in a vague way what Bougrot and the dim eyed old Manecu were going to attempt now. The guard's broken shout, the shot told them.

They came rushing back, muttering, crying out. Manecu held the stubby Lebel at his hip, feet spraddled wide across the figure of the dead man, machete discarded for the time.

"Halt!" he commanded them in his clear French. "That's it, boys. Don't get excited. Shut up! Now, Jules, who is it?"

Jules Bougrot, his companion's machete in his other hand, came upright, peering at the dim knot of men down the trail.

"Ricaud!" he called. "You there?"

"By the very God—yes!"

"Come on, then, and walk backwards from those wolves. That's it . . ."

The slim, youthful figure of Ricaud broke from the others and advanced rapidly down the trail toward them. Bougrot stepped aside and let the younger man down the trail pass him and old Manecu, who still stood tensely silent, Lebel at his bony hip.

"Now you!" called Bougrot calmly. "The *bico* swab is dead—and we're free, you're free. Do whatever you damn' well want. Beat it for the camp and tell the other *bicos*, the sergeant, and pray that it will help your records; or beat it into the brush . . . We're going into the bush—Manecu, the lad and I—alone. Get the word—*alone!* No company. And we're in a hurry. They'll miss us at the camp soon, if they didn't hear the gun. If you like what health you've got, don't follow us. Word of a *bagnard!*"

He knelt down beside the stiff figure of the Arab guard, began stripping away ammunition belt, pistol, boots and sleazy jacket, still talking to the silent, stupid group as he did so.

"We're going back down the trail. Be sure and don't follow us. You know . . ."

He came to his feet, left hand holding his booty against his naked chest. He raised his cupped right hand to his forehead, made a mocking, semi-military salute.

"Sorry . . . And, *bonne chance!*"

He stepped gracefully past the watchful Manecu, indicated that the third man, Ricaud, pick up his ax and take Manecu's machete. He gave the younger man a slight push with his fingers then and they set off down the trail. Ricaud held momentary curiosity about the third man, old Manecu; but, he knew, these two had things figured out to a fine point between them.

They had gone perhaps five hundred yards along the dim, swiftly darkening trail when Bougrot halted and ordered the younger man to do the same. While they waited nervously Bougrot pulled on the foul smelling duck jacket of the dead guard, strapped on the ammunition belt and loaded the small pistol that depended in a leather holster from it.

"Here he comes," said Ricaud suddenly.

"You got good ears," complimented Bougrot.

Ricaud's eyes widened with wonder once more. In the other man's right hand the small pistol was raised, ready. But, before they could make out his figure in the jungle dimness, both of them recognized the advancing man as Manecu. For he came toward them at the slow, sliding trot of the bush negro, which neither of them possessed, and which Manecu had learned in his twelve years in Cayenne and his five attempts at escape.

"Where are they?" asked Bougrot, holstering the pistol.

"Still standing there, making monkey talk. Stupid."

"Of course. That's why I didn't want them."

"Has the lad here got all the tools?"

"Yes. My ax, your machete and his

own. Do you think we'd better head for the river?"

"Not now. No. It's too dark."

"But they will have patrols out on all the trails and on the river before dawn."

"I know, but it can't be helped. We'll have to hole in up beyond the woodcutting and take our chances in the morning."

"But they will catch us flatfooted," objected Bougrot. "Don't you think we had better head for the river now?"

"*C'est impossible.* I know the bush pretty well, *bagnard*, but we couldn't go a thousand feet off the trail now—in the dark."

Bougrot swore emphatically, bitterly. Although the two could not see him, they could feel the former doctor's slim body shaking violently, as if with some awful ague of anger.

"We're as thick headed as those fools we chased away from us!" he said in a strange, high voice of fear and rage.

"Bah!" spat back the old convict. "I thought you were nothing but a swell talker! Wasn't I the man who helped you plan this thing? Wasn't I the man who killed the *bico?*"

An incoherent snarl of rage was his answer from Bougrot. Then young Ricaud spoke for the first time:

"You two ever see," he asked calmly, "that big *mora* tree beyond the woodcutting?" He got no answer; went on without it. "I figured it out in camp one night that if a man was handy he could climb those lianas and make a baboon out of himself for a night and stay up in the topside of it."

"By the *bon Dieu!*" broke out the old man. "The lad has got a good one, Jules!"

"Yes, he's smart," admitted Bougrot, his voice now steady and suave again. "But, can you find it in the dark?"

"I don't know," began Ricaud. "I—"

"Don't worry. I will!" broke in Manecu. "You say it's past the woodcutting?"

"Yes. About five hundred meters past it, to the right and towards the river."

"*Allons!*" barked out Bougrot, as if giving a military command. "On our way, then!"

Without word, Manecu swung ahead and the other two fell in behind him. For what seemed a tortured eternity they stumbled along behind him, moss, leaves and creepers lashing at their bodies, every inch of bare skin covered with busy mosquitoes and gnats. Old Manecu seemed to be the possessor of the feline power of being able to see clearly in darkness, and from time to time growled back directions and cautions to the pair behind him.

"Here's the cutting," he said at last. "Watch the piles!"

The two men stared widely to right and left in the black, hot void which contained them, but actually fell over the stacks of green shingles before they saw them.

"I'm at the right corner of the clearing now," said Manecu abruptly. "Which way, lad?"

"Straight ahead for about a hundred paces, then to your right again, I guess. I'm not sure. I'm lost right now . . . But it's the biggest tree you come to."

"Is it the big one in the middle of the swamp with the bunches of roots above the mud?"

"That's it. Yes."

"I'll find it, then. Come on. But go easy, will you, and don't start climbing my back."

THE OTHER two laughed nervously and again took their positions behind him. The next twenty minutes was for each one of them a phantasmic nightmare. They had left the comparative open of the clearing and the trail behind. Now they ploughed through the thick tangle of leaves, creepers, limbs and indescribable growth that blocked their path on all sides. Underneath they no longer had the steady footing of the solid jungle floor. They had entered the soft, stinking mud of a morass. The stuff gurgled and sucked about their knees and thighs, and they had to fight it as they would fight the hands of many strong men. Here, they knew, were without doubt poisonous

snakes, eels. Here, if a man fell, he would not rise unless superhumanly strong and swift. And all of them were burdened, weary now beyond description, beyond thought.

The nightmarish quality of the thing was only destroyed when a croak of victory came from Manecu.

"I have found it!" he called hoarsely. "Come on. You will feel the big roots with your hands."

The two behind opened gaping mouths to shout, but no sound issued forth; they were beyond the power of speech. Jutting out from the vast, rough bole of the *mora* was an irregular formation of scaly bark and roots which buoyed up the immense weight of the tree in the quag. This the two butted against, scraping their knees and arms, despite Manecu's warning of its nearness. But, careless of anything now except escape from the nauseous slime in which they labored waist deep, they stretched out their hands, hauled themselves up over the rough bark.

Lianas and moss brushed against their faces clammily, and they could hear, right ahead, the panting breath of Manecu. The two slumped down on the twisted, massive roots; swiped the mud and gnats from their faces and bodies. A feeling of dull contentment came over both of them, reaction from what they had just passed through.

"On your feet!" bawled Manecu above them.

"Where are you?" demanded Bougrot, staring up into the blackness.

"Halfway up the tree. The lad was right—I found a creeper which will hold your combined weight."

"You're a sacred son of a monkey!" roared Bougrot laughingly, a little silly in his present mood of relief. "But why go up there now? You'll fall off and break your neck when you go to sleep. Why not stay down here and scamper up just before dawn?"

Manecu's laughter was like the baying of a hound.

"If you stay down there you'll fall asleep and won't wake up until you're back in the *bagne*, with the bracelets on you, and the governor's order out for a public execution. You're talking like a ten year old boy, Bougrot!"

Whether the insult was intentional or not, it aroused Bougrot's wrath, and obliquely made him see the truth of Manecu's statement. Without further word he scrambled up over the gnarled roughness of the roots to the wide main trunk of the tree. One creeper was still shaking and swinging, and small bits of bark and moss dropped about him where they had been dislodged by Manecu's passage.

"I'm coming up now," he announced, buttoning the flap of the pistol holster so that he would not lose the precious weapon within.

His response was a wild, demoniacal howl that ended with a twittering, gibbering moan. He started back from the tree, hands twitching for the pistol, gazing up futilely. There was a rushing sound, as if a great wind passed; then the wild, almost human wailing and shouting drowned it out again, only to at last die away also. A peal of hoarse laughter came from above.

"By the sacred name!" yelled young Ricaud. "What are you gargling about, Manecu?"

Another burst of barking laughter came from above. Then Manceu called down:

"I stepped off on to a limb where there was a big red howler sitting. I saw his eyes and yanked out the machete from where I'd stuck it through my belt in back. He jumped me, and I took a swipe at him with the cheese snipper. Don't know whether I sliced him or not, but he sure cleared out of here in a hurry. All the racket you heard was him and the rest of his gang tearing off through the treetops—and chasing the smaller fellows ahead of them. Come on up. We own the joint now!"

Bougrot did not wait any further. He wrapped his hands about the thick creeper, heaved himself up sailor fashion, using knees, ankles and elbows as well as his hands and forearms. It demanded

tremendous energy from him, but the little man had it, for he was held in a sort of hazy, feverish spell in which everything now seemed easy of accomplishment. His raw hands rubbed against the mossy bark of the limb, and he felt Manecu's strong fingers locking themselves under his shoulders. The old man hauled himself, mightily, bracing with his feet on the limb, and the smaller man was soon beside him, lying face down, panting exhaustedly.

A shout came from Ricaud below. He had just hidden the ax and machete among the convolutions of the roots, where Manecu had already secreted the Lebel carbine.

"Coming up now," he called in his calm, boyish voice.

"Come ahead," replied Manecu.

RICAUD, who had once been a merchant sailor, made short work of it, and was soon beside the two. Already Bougrot's head was nodding back and forth and the others were forced to keep their hands constantly upon him, fearing that he would slip off to his death below.

"To hell with this!" announced Ricaud suddenly. "I'll drag up a bight of one of those smaller creepers and lash him fast to the limb; then he can roll around all he wants."

"Good lad," murmured Manecu. "Go ahead. I'll hold him."

When it was done, the two sat back against the main trunk of the *mora*, legs and feet stretched out on the broad limb.

"Comfortable enough, hey?" remarked Ricaud.

"You're right. I wondered at first why the little one wanted you along. Now I understand."

"Thanks, old-timer. Whose idea is this, his?"

"Yes. He and I have been chinning over the thing for weeks."

"Some of the guys in the big jug in Saint Laurent say he's a little cracked. Is that so?"

"So they say. Sometimes he acts it, and sometimes he don't. I think maybe he is—a little. But he's smart; smarter than you and me put together, boy."

"How do you mean?" Ricaud asked.

"Wait until you hear him let loose about the plan he's got for us," the old man told him.

"I'm ready to listen to anything that means getting out of this dry guillotine. I've only been here a year, but if they hadn't sent me out here to the wood camp I would have gone crazy or killed myself in that place in Laurent."

Manecu could feel the other shudder beside him.

"Don't think about it," he advised. "I know what you mean, though. What did they throw you in for, kid?"

"Huh! You don't know me, hey? They say three of us bumped off the chief mate one night; pushed him over the bridge during a storm—"

"Maybe you did, hey?"

"Yeah, maybe we did. But, what's Bougrout got on his chest?"

"It's a long story," Manecu began. "The idea is mostly his and a little mine. Him and me was talking about it ever since he joined this camp from Sainte Jeanne. I've tried to bust out of this place five times, and came back before they caught me every time. That's the only reason I'm here now, and not out on the Isle of Silence. A man can't do it. Guerin and Dieudonné did, but one mug had money and friends, and the other a fistful of luck. If you try to get over the Tunucs-Hunucs into Brazil, you're surer than hell going to die on the way—Indians, river patrols, fever, snakes—and if you do make it down the coast like Dieudonné did, you're going to get picked up by the Brazilian coppers in any town you come into. The good old days you had before the war are over. They'll extradite you without looking at a man twice now."

"What's the racket, then? I had all that figured out for myself after I'd been here two months. That's why I never tried to make a break before."

"The racket is Bougrot's own," Manecu

told him. "Let him tell it to you when we're out of here tomorrow. I'm too damn' weary to do it now, and couldn't make much sense out of it for you, anyhow. Just thank your saint that you're with us.

"I know this lousy country, and he's got the brains. You're a good, clean, husky kid: that's why we asked you. Now get to sleep."

"*Mais oui,*" Ricaud agreed. "You think they'll come across that swamp looking for us in the morning?"

"Let them try!" was the only answer he got.

For a long time Ricaud sat there alone, nervous, wide awake, mind excited and bewildered by the strangeness of his position, by what had happened during the last four hours. At intervals little Bougrot, once a leading doctor in Marseilles, babbled and shrieked in his sleep, straining at the close creeper bonds the lad had lashed about him. Next to Ricaud slept old Manecu, hands clasped viselike about two stout lianas, to keep him from falling from the limb, just as the younger man had seen old sailors act in a storm jerked ship at sea.

He himself imagined that sleep was beyond him, but slowly the inertia which was the result of what he had experienced crept through his brain. For hours the jungle sounds had been discontinued, the habitants sensing the presence of man. But now once again the giant frogs thundered and rumbled in the swamp: the small black and white night monkeys stirred cautiously, eyes like dim emeralds; the mosquitoes and gnats moved about him, making a thin, piping strum of minor threnody. Far above, tropic rain beat heavily at the jungle roof, and the sound to him was drowsy, peaceful. He shivered, for it was damp and chill now in this miasmatic, evil odored place. He nudged closer to old Manecu for warmth, wrapped two thick creepers about his own wrists. Down the limb, Bougrot mumbled, called out.

"Go to sleep!" snapped Ricaud in a low, angry voice.

Then he himself was asleep.

II

SOMETHING slimy and soft crawled over his arm, and he was awake, shuddering. The jungle was bathed in the dim red light of dawn, and the objects about him were vaguely discernible. Within a yard of his body crawled a small tree toad; obviously the creature that had awakened him. He smiled wanly, moved a bit, to moan with pain, for his whole body was aching from the posture he had maintained all night.

Besides him old Manecu still dozed unevenly, hairy fists mechanically tight about his creeper supports. Through the green tangle to his left, down the broad limb, Ricaud could make out the dim fire of Bougrot's eyes; the little doctor was also awake. With the feline sureness he had learned during his years at sea, Ricaud moved down the limb, supporting himself by the creepers that hung from above. He sidled over Manecu's half upright form, reached that of Bougrot.

"How are you now?" he asked softly, cheerfully.

"All right. But get me out of this stuff, will you?"

"Right away. We lashed you up so that you would not fall and kill yourself."

"Huh! Where's the old one?"

"Still asleep." Ricaud bent down and skilfully unbent the knots that had held the other man. "It's coming dawn now. Hear the monkeys waking up?"

"Yes. I've got a good mind to get out of here right now, but we'd better talk with Manecu first—he seems to know more about this jungle stuff than you or I."

Ricaud nodded silently. He himself had no more than a passive part in this escape. These two men had singled him out to accompany them; let the two decide between them the question of leadership. If he, Ricaud, did not like the way they did things he could always leave them and strike off into the jungle fastness himself—not that the idea was very appealing

He aided the stiff and half lame Bougrot to his hands and knees and

watched the little man crawl along the limb to where Manecu slept.

"Manecu!" called Bougrot gently. "Manecu, wake up!"

The old man's eyes opened; a low laugh came from his lips.

"Absolutely, Bougrot! How did you spend the night?"

"Rottenly. Don't you think we'd better get out of here, now?"

"No. They'll surely search as far as the woodcutting, and maybe they'll bring some of those Saint Laurent hounds with them. It's a pretty sure bet neither dogs nor men will try to get through that quag as we did last night; all you have to do is look at it to be sure of that. But, if they should suspect we're here, or if the dogs should smell us and bark, they can cut us off from the river—and we're done."

"But they may hang around all day waiting for us."

"I don't think so. No man wants to sit in the jungle for long."

"You're right about that. How far is it to the river?"

"About six kilometers, roughly. We'll have to reach there before dark, and we will, don't worry."

"I hope so. I'm hungry as hell and dry as a bone right now."

"Guess we all are. Can't help you with the food situation any, but wait a minute."

Manecu swung himself numbly erect and disappeared through the creepers out of sight. When he came back he held in his hands a small mass of minute green leaves.

"Chew on those," he said, dividing the little pile three ways. "They may taste sort of sour, but they aren't poisonous and do contain some moisture."

Silently, the two accepted them, chewed without joy, but steadily, greedy for what little moisture the leaves contained.

FOR ABOUT an hour they occupied themselves so, then a low, snarling sound came from Manecu.

"Slobs!" he hissed. "Hear them? Out by the woodcutting, bungling around like a lot of sick pigs. They couldn't find a silk hat on the Place de la Concorde!"

Bougrot and Ricaud strained their ears; but it was a full five minutes before they, too, heard the faint thrashing sounds of men stumbling through the brush, muffled curses, the clink of buckles, low voiced orders.

They could hear hoarse voices now; the frightened scampering of monkeys as they fled away from the edges of the clearing. Then, with what seemed to be torturous slowness, the voices faded away again, and they could see the dun hided monkeys racing and jerking back to their perches on the edge of the clearing.

Ricaud looked suddenly at Bougrot's face and immediately felt a sick, stabbing sensation at the pit of his stomach. Bougrot's face was like that of a dead man; from it all color, all vitality and expression had gone. His eyes, too, were colorless, vapid; his mouth had fallen open slackly.

"It's all right, *mon vieux*," managed the younger man in a husky whisper. "Have no more fear; they have gone."

A slow flood of color uprose in Bougrot's cheeks and temples; brilliant, terrific light returned to his eyes. He was at once as vital, as forceful as he had been lifeless. Ricaud uttered a silent curse. Never had he seen fear grip a man so . . . A gay smile was about Bougrot's bearded lips now; he all but laughed aloud as he asked—

"Shall we go, old one?"

"Might as well. If all the searching parties are like that one, we can hear them coming a half kilometer away. Me—I'm going down first. Watch how I do it."

Ricaud had always, since his first year at sea, considered himself competent in the way he handled his body; but he watched with amazement now as the old, gray headed man rolled lurchingly over the edge of the limb, caught hold of two heavy creepers and slithered down out of sight. The fellow was nearly half monkey, thought Ricaud. He turned to Bougrot.

"You next, yes?"

A short chuckle broke from Bougrot.

"I guess so. But not with the speed of our hairy friend!"

He lowered himself over the bulge of the limb, caught nervously at the same two creepers used by Manecu and went slowly from sight. When a low shout from below told him that the other had arrived safely at the base of the tree, Ricaud slipped rapidly downward, checking himself with knees and wrists.

The two older men stood side by side on the uneven upthrust of the root buttress, weapons and tools piled before them.

"How about lashing those things to our backs with short creeper lengths?" he asked, shaking the sweat from his face. "I know myself that I could navigate a whole lot better with my hands free."

"That's a good idea, lad," answered old Manecu. "Keep them out of the mud, too. But don't make any noise cutting them—not that there is anybody around to hear, but a loud sound might frighten the monkeys, and so pass it along that there were men in here."

Ricaud nodded at the wisdom of this and picked up his own machete. In a moment he had cut the necessary lengths of liana and helped the other two men to secure their tools and weapons high on their backs and out of the way.

"*Avant!*" muttered Manecu, and slid inch by inch down into the greenish scum which was the top surface of the morass.

Without hesitation, spurred on by the old man's quick entrance into the stuff, the other two followed.

It was even more gruesome now than it had been the day before; for now they could see the nauseous mess they must traverse, and could imagine they saw the small lizards, eels and bloodsuckers who brushed, then clung inexorably, to their nether limbs.

They could not speak, and were dully glad that they could not, for each one of them was eager to keep from the others his quaking terror of what they were passing through. There was perhaps half an acre of the stuff they crossed. At times they were almost shoulder deep in it. Again they came to parts where sodden, grassy hummocks upreared, and black, decayed trees leaned drunkenly. Here, for short intervals, they were able to haul themselves all but clear and scrape from their feet, legs and torsos the tiny black bloodsuckers, leeches and eels that had fastened on to their blue, tortured flesh.

Perhaps it was an hour, two hours, it took them to get through. To them it seemed an æon of such torture as they had never before imagined. But at last old Manecu, a black, terrible figure, staggered up on to solid ground, where once more was the soft, but firm, jungle floor of rotted leaves, moss and dead lianas. Without word to one another they dropped down, on the point of unconsciousness, now that the ordeal was over.

III

HOURS later the other two were stupidly aware of Bougrot moving about them, talking mumblingly to himself. The little man was, without doubt, the weakest physically of the three but now he appeared possessed of phenomenal, abnormal energy. He shook them in turn, questioned them as to how they felt about continuing, warning them that it was now past noon and that darkness would probably overtake them before they could make the Rio Maroni, their first and most important step.

Old Manecu and the young sailor, Ricaud, did not answer at first, heedless of anything in their physical misery. But Bougrot was insistent, went from one to the other in turn, shaking them, cursing them, imploring them to rise up and come on. They swore at him feverishly in their croaking voices, but even that act alone awakened them, denied them further sleep. Eventually they shambled up beside him, bitterly weak with hunger, so parched with the want of water that they could barely speak.

Gesturing with his hands, Bougrot indicated that they strike on toward the river, toward the boundary of French Guiana. There, on the river banks, all three of them knew, they would find fresh,

fairly pure water and maybe some sort of small game they could kill without noise. Manecu, reeling forward on the last weak dregs of his reserve energy, led the way, butting into tree trunks and limbs blindly, tearing at creepers and impeding leaves as if they were human hands.

Once more they slowly lost their sense of time and just wandered on like drunken men, lips working, bloodshot eyes half shut, sometimes falling prone, to remain there for minutes on end before they hauled themselves up and caromed on. Then, before they really consciously knew it, the light ahead and to the west changed, and it was apparent that they were now close to the jungle edge and the bank of the sluggish Maroni. After ten minutes more of slow and careful progress they could hear the rustle of its waters and the high arpeggios of the river birds.

They squatted down while still some hundred yards from the bank and yet thickly screened in the underbrush, hesitant as to what to do. It was old Manecu who formulated their decision. With gestures he indicated that Ricaud release him from the creeper strap that held his machete to his back. When this had been done, the old man took the long, heavy weapon in his hand and searched through the brush, just above the ground. He finally rose about fifty yards from them and returned, bearing a green gourd. This he cleaned out and made into the form of a rough drinking vessel with his machete.

"Come on," he said huskily, blinking at them. "Let's get up there on the bank. As long as we're out of sight, we're safe."

The thought of water, which they had not had since early afternoon of the day before, spurred them all on. Ahead were terrific, almost impenetrable mangrove thickets, and through those they were forced to fight their way with bare hands, afraid to make the slightest noise with machete or ax. The river was right before them now and they stopped, staring.

In the stinking blackness of the bank mud lay crocodiles, dun colored, motionless, half sentient. Through the dim blue gray arch, which lay between dull river surface and jungle roof, innumerable small and varicolored birds flew in endless flight. Boldly, old Manecu clambered out over the black weirdness of the mangrove roots, leaned down and filled his gourd with the warm, muddy water.

They drank in turn and equally, the gourd being offered to Bougrot first by Manecu. They shuddered at the taste of the stuff, but it slaked their thirst, restored their power of speech. Again Manecu filled the gourd and they emptied it, then the gray bearded, gaunt old man left them and disappeared inshore, his machete in his hand.

THE TWO lay in the mangrove thicket in a kind of stupid torpor, half nauseated now from the effects of the sickish water in their empty stomachs. Manecu came back, holding in one hand a long, sharply pointed stick.

"Come," he whispered to Ricaud. "Hold my feet while I get us one of these small fish."

The younger man nodded and followed. Manecu stretched far out over the edge of the mangrove roots as he had done while gaining the gourds of water. Ricaud squatted behind him, powerful fists clenched about the other's bloody ankles to keep him from slipping into the water.

For many long minutes Manecu lay there silently, motionlessly, and Ricaud almost dropped back into sleep again. Then a small, nervous movement of the other man's body warned him and he was fully awake, watching with bright, curious eyes. Manecu had held the keenly pointed dart by his side. Now, with infinite slowness, he raised it till its end was above his head. This posture he maintained for fully a minute. With a small, savage sighing sound he drove it in violent arc downward.

"*Haiel*" he cried softly. "*Voyons!*"

He held up to view a small, bright hued fish, pendant from the dart, the end of which transfixed it neatly. A low, warning whistle came from Bougrot behind,

and both the exposed men gaped with panicky swiftness up and down stream. There was no craft in sight yet, but, like Bougrot, they too now heard the soft jar of paddles striking a canoe's side.

On hands and knees they dragged themselves backward and out of sight beside the quivering, sweaty Bougrot. For five minutes they crouched so, Bougrot and Manecu holding stiffly before them the pistol and Lebel carbine of the dead guard. Where they lay, their view of the river surface was constricted to about five hundred yards, and they could clearly hear the rap and splash of paddles and the grunts of the laboring men before the craft broke into view.

It was a large native dugout manned by Cayenne halfbreeds, most of them former convicts who were still serving out their *doublage* within the confines of the penal settlement. These paddled, stripped to the waist, hairy arms and torsos glistening with sweat. In the bow sat two bearded, saturnine French guards, cocked rifles across their knees, bandoleers from shoulder to shoulder. Aft, sat another pair, one of them at the steering paddle, but with the muzzle of his Lebel jutting up over his outspread knees.

The craft kept a course close in to the French side of the river, swept powerfully along upstream by the strokes of the six paddles. It was from below, from Saint Laurent, recognized the three fugitives. Those in charge, then, did not believe that they had made good their crossing over the river to Dutch Guiana, or that they had managed to escape beyond capture along the Atlantic coast toward Brazil.

It was not a comfortable realization, that thought. These river patrols caught more than half the men who escaped—and there was a ratio of some three a day, Ricaud had heard Bougrot say one noon in the woodcutting. The craft was out of sight now, but the impression it had made still kept them white and sweaty with an awful fear. This patrol would meet another upriver patrol from Sainte Jeanne somewhere farther along. If the upriver patrol did not report good luck, the two would separate again and continue the hunt, all day, and all the coming week. Men, so said the penal authorities in Cayenne, either were captured within that time, or came stumbling quakingly back themselves, or had fully escaped, or died. Usually, they also pointed out, they died—which was a relief, financial and social, to the French Republic. But on each escaped man was a head tax of twenty-five francs, and for that the guards strove eagerly; twenty-five francs went far in the lecherous side alley dives of Cayenne.

Bougrot spoke, just above a whisper.

"They've gone, and will come back, and will not find us. Perhaps two or three more patrols will come and go during the day, and they also will not find us."

"And if they do?" asked young Ricaud nervously.

Bougrot's laugh was metallic, chilling.

"We will kill them and take their canoe. Or they will kill us. Anyhow, we will not go back to that place. Now, for all of us, it means either the guillotine, or the Island of the Devil, for life. And one cannot escape—there."

"And in the meantime?" rumbled old Manecu, who still held in one calloused paw his fish.

"In the meantime," answered Bougrot softly, confidently, "we will rest ourselves, get back our strength. Throw that fish away, *mon vieux;* it is poisonous."

"This!"

"That."

"But the bush fellows eat them."

"Not that kind. Don't argue with me, *mon vieux.* I was a doctor back home, and once studied those things. Throw it away. Good. If you want food that bad you will find iguana back there a little way in the jungle."

"All right," muttered the old man defensively. "But how are we going to cross this filthy wretch of a river, Bougrot?"

"I've got that figured out, too," said Bougrot evenly, smiling just a bit. "We have tools here. Tonight, after dark, we must make ourselves a raft, paddles. Plenty of small logs, lianas, limbs here. Those Cayenne fellows are afraid to come

up here after dark. Then is our chance. But we must mark out the timber we are to use now, know just where it is when night comes. That would be a good job for you after you have found your iguana and we have eaten, wouldn't it, Manecu?"

"Yes!" exploded the old man. "I like to keep busy. This hanging around drives me off my chump. You want to talk to the lad anyhow, don't you, huh?"

"Yes," answered Bougrot at once in his now strangely calm voice. "I do, old one. Go find your iguana."

Silently, the old man dragged away through the mangrove thicket, keen bladed machete held out before him like a sword. Little Bougrot moved a foot or so nearer the wordless Ricaud, hunched himself into a more comfortable position. An unpleasant sensation ran down Ricaud's spine; he looked up to find the other man's eyes searching for his.

IV

"RICAUD," asked Bougrot in his soft voice, "you intend to stay with us after we have made good our break across the river into Dutch country?"

"Yes," admitted the younger man slowly. "I do."

This, he knew now, was to be a description of the scheme old Manecu had spoken about vaguely last night while they had crouched in the top of the *mora* tree in the swamp.

"I don't know how to get back to France. And if I did, I know damn' well they would collar me and ship me back here again—for life. Which is death."

"I thought you had brains," said Bougrot unsmilingly. "Most of the *bagnards* out here are stupid crooks, or are made stupid by what they are subjected to. I, too, have figured that out, Ricaud. You, I, old Manecu, any of the rest of us who have been in the *bagne*, are no longer citizens of France—or any other nation. France does not want us; no other nation does. We must then go on alone, what?"

"What do you mean by that? Where can we go—and live in peace—and without fear of some day being recaptured and brought back to this sinkhole of death?"

"I, too, have asked myself that," said Bougrot, just above a whisper. He raised his blood caked right hand and made a sweeping, impressive gesture out over the leaden surface of the river, toward the west and toward the south. "Up there, beyond Guiana, beyond Venezuela, is a borderland where a man with brains where men with brains, could start a Utopia, an outcast nation, an empire lost from the world."

Ricaud had heard more than once in the prison camps that this man beside him was a little mad. He turned now on his side and gazed full into Bougrot's eyes. The former doctor's face was flushed with unnatural color, his eyes had the weird luminosity of the night before, and when he had last spoken there had been an electric, trembling quality in his voice. But Ricaud also remembered the man's words of just now. It he was a little mad, thought Ricaud, he was lucidly so, and there was also a major element of sanity in what he said. Perhaps now his intensity, the feverishness of his words and gestures, was inspired by hope, was a corollary of the expression of his innermost desires and ideals.

"I do not know much about that country," said the younger man slowly aloud. "What is back in there?"

"Back there the jungle ends. One side, you find the flat llanos—plains—of Colombia. On the other, the wild desolation of Roraima, where no man can live, or has ever lived. To the north is the Rio Orinoco. The west, the Meta and Guayiare Rivers."

"But why are there no men living in there?"

"No men have had the courage, the initiative, to go and live there."

"What is there in that place for men to live on?"

A small sigh which was almost a whimsical laugh came from Bougrot.

"There is small game of all kinds. Fish in the rivers. Diamonds, gold, in the

mountains. Mahogany, ironwood, in the forests."

"And no men come there?"

"Only a few Indian halfbreeds, an occasional renegade or crazy gold hunter."

"How do you know all these things, Bougrot?"

"That is a good question, *mon petit*. Before the war an elder brother of mine was on a scientific expedition in there. He later died in the Sahara; I inherited all his data, all his notes: learned almost all of them by heart."

"But would not those nations around come and drive us out, or jail us, once they found we were there?"

"Not at first, because we would be too weak. Not later, because we would be too strong, and would be doing them no harm, anyhow."

"But from where would we get our strength?"

A smile warmed Bougrot's face and eyes.

"From here. From the penal camps. It is the figures of the *Sureté Generale*—the Criminal Office in Paris—that I quote: 'An average of three men a day escape from Guiana'."

"That means a thousand men a year!"

"Yes."

"But how would they reach that place? It is far away."

"The same way we are to reach it—through the back jungle trails. It will be hard for us, but easier for them, for, later, after we ourselves are established, I plan to set up an 'underground passage' for them with the natives. But that is my work, my worry, and in the future. How about you—you'll join the old one and me?"

"Yes," said Ricaud without hesitation. "I know nothing else to do."

A FAINT creaking sound and the rustling of leaves and lianas came from behind them. Both men turned nervously, hands outclenched for their weapons. Old Manecu's sweat-bright face appeared through the tangle of the mangrove thicket. He grinned at them wordlessly, exposing his yellowed, canine teeth. Then he exhibited to them the small, still warm form of the rodentlike iguana that he had caught in a snare contrived of small branches.

He told them about the capture in a low exultant voice as he cleaned the thing and they watched him, marveling at the old fellow's woodscraft skill.

"We have no salt," he said at last, "and it would be dangerous to start a fire. But I'm hungry enough to eat shoe leather. How about you two?"

Bougrot and Ricaud nodded silently and reached out shaking hands for their shares. When it was finished Manecu wiped his hairy lips on a hairy forearm and grunted with pleasure. He turned halfway to Bougrot, addressing him:

"While you were describing to the kid your future Kingdom of the Moon, Jules, I caught what has just been *aperitif* and dinner, then banged around until I found the logs we'll use tonight to cross this younger sister of the Styx."

"You're getting allegorical," growled Bougrot, staring at the old man.

"Freedom always goes to my head," said Manecu gravely. "I studied at one of the finest secondary schools in France before my mother died and I went sour on the world—and myself. Once I'm out of that lousy *bagne* all the old knowledge, all the old phrases and thoughts come back to me."

"Rejuvenation," suggested Bougrot solemnly. "I've seen it happen before. It all goes to prove my theory that my Kingdom of the Moon, as you have called it, is a very plausible thing."

Old Manecu smiled broadly, pleased at Bougrot's acceptance of him as something of an intellectual equal.

"But," he persisted, "that Happy Happy Land is a long way from this mud hole. What do you say we do a little about jumping on. We've been out twenty-four hours now, and it seems to me that all we've done is squat on our heels like *bicos* in the sun."

"True!" responded Bougrot. "But you

yourself know that we don't dare make a fire, or a noise, start building that raft of ours until darkness is here and there's no further chance of a patrol climbing our backs."

"Darkness will be here in fifteen minutes," said Manecu, who sat hunched on his heels like one of the Arabs he had described.

"No!" said the other two men in chorus, looking out over the slow sweeping river, then up at the jungle roof.

Manecu shook his head slightly and a quizzical smile creased the corners of his eyes and mouth.

"You boys forget that I have been in this hog wallow twelve years. Do you hear the river birds much any more? Aren't the monkeys quieting down? See those little pearl gray ribbons of mist on the water? Now believe me!"

What he had said was so, and the two admitted it aloud.

"Come on, then," urged Manecu. "We've got to cut those logs and drag them up here. It'll be hard enough now, and impossible in the dark—believe me. I've looked the whole thing over. And if a patrol comes along, it comes along, and we're caught. Fate . . . Got to buck it now, once and for all."

"Aye!" husked young Ricaud. "That seems right to me! Show this sailor your timber, old one!"

In single file, Manecu leading, the three went back through the mangrove thicket to where the old man pointed out two straight, slim palmetto trunks.

"Give me that ax and stand back," said Ricaud. "I'm the man for this. You guys go cut lianas for the lashings if you want."

He swept up the heavy wood ax, set his feet, spat on his hands professionally and went to work without further word. The sound of the ax blows seemed like terrific thunder to all three of them, but what old Manecu had said was right—they must make their attempt now or never. They were working in the dim blue world of the tropic dusk when the last of the logs was whipped off by the eager ax blade into a six foot section. Ricaud rested the ax against his knee, swabbed the sweat from his face and turned to the other two. Swiftly, for the time being, the young sailor had made himself leader.

"Take those lianas and the tools, Manecu. Me and Bougrot can handle these four sticks. Hurry it up; it's getting as black as a bunker."

The two stared at the hard faced youngster for a minute, then obeyed. Manecu went first, burdened down with the two machetes, the long handled ax and the lianas. Bougrot came next, bearing on each shoulder one of the heavy palmetto balks. Ricaud brought up the end of the line, powerful young arms flexed about the two weighty timbers he carried.

FROM ahead Manecu called softly back to them warnings of the obstacles they must come to, but even then both of them stumbled and fell brutally before they gained their former position on the mangrove roots above the bank.

"Put your sticks down parallel and about four feet apart, Bougrot," panted Ricaud. "I got the crosspieces here. Now hand us those lianas, Manecu, and the two of you stand clear."

Ricaud went to his hands and knees and in the last dimness of the dusk the other two men watched him as he expertly arranged and lashed the four logs so that at last there lay before them a small, but stout, raft.

"We forgot paddles, poles," he snapped, standing up. "But that's all right. Clip out with your machete, Manecu, and cut some of those long roots. We can lash them together with the leftovers of the lianas and make paddles out of them. That's the way!"

He turned to Bougrot.

"All right," he said in his quick, flat voice of command. "Let's see what power you really got in your back, Bougrot. Heft up the fore part and I'll take the after and we'll slip it down into the stream while Manecu is finishing his paddles."

Bougrot thought that the weight of the thing would literally jerk his shoulders and arms out of his body, but at last he stood back with a low, warning cry and let his part of the raft drop dully down on the black ooze of the bank mud. Ricaud let down his section, too, and the thing slipped a foot or so until one corner of it projected out into the water.

"You know how to paddle and balance yourself at the same time, Manecu?" asked Ricaud of the old man, who was scrambling painfully down toward them, hands and arms laden with the rude mangrove branch paddles.

"Why not? You don't know it all, my young one!"

"That's good," snapped Ricaud, entirely disregarding the implied rebuke. "You paddle forward and I'll paddle aft and steer, then. Bougrot, here, can squat midship and balance the damn' thing while hanging on to the weapons and tools. Let's go! *Allons!*"

The two older men smiled whimsically in the darkness. This youngster had them tight in his dynamic spell of command, all right! Manecu handed the former sailor one of the rude paddles, kept the other for himself, advanced gingerly out to his position on what Ricaud had broadly called the bow. There he squatted, bare, strong toes gripped as tightly as possible about the palmetto balk.

"Push it off a bit as you get aboard, Bougrot," ordered Ricaud in a whisper. "That's it! You two all ready? Paddle, then!"

With a lurch the thing was free from the suction of the bank mud and they were instantly out on the mysterious black bosom of the river. Both men paddled hard right at once, keeping the craft headed as much as possible against the current and on a roughly diagonal course across the river. The current swirled against the rough logs, made a little gasping, reluctant sound, and kept on. Bougrot, who sat amidships with nothing to do but hang on above water and keep intact his precious armload of tools and weapons, was caught up in a vague, mystic wonder at the night, the outcome of this admittedly hazardous venture, the future for all three of them in the thousands of jungle miles they must traverse before they reached that dim, far borderland between Venezuela, Colombia and Guiana—the country so well described by his dead brother.

It was he right here, Jules Bougrot, once leading physician of Marseilles, who had led these other two men, who would once more lead them when they gained the other shore and had made good their first step in the flight to freedom. Was it a chimera he was chasing? An illusion, fever-distilled in the fetor of the Cayenne prisons, which he had described to these two trusting men? That, he recognized, he could not answer himself. He did not know.

"Easy! Easy!" rasped Manecu from ahead. "We are there—and to hell with them now who would chase and catch us!"

The other two men, straining their eyes as they might, could not yet make out the black solidity of the other bank, more sensed than seen by Manecu. The tipsy structure rolled and lurched as the old fellow came to his feet, made a springing bound up and away from it. They heard him land crashingly among brush, fall, roll, curse, then announce aloud that he had caught himself. There came a new, steady, sliding noise, a faint splash, and small ripples broke against the slow spinning raft. A chuckle broke from Manecu, followed by:

"There goes one crocodile who lost a full night's sleep! I almost put my foot down his sewer of a throat when I came bounding ashore. Give her a poke or two more with your paddle, Ricaud, and I'll catch the bow as she swings in."

In stoic silence, not yet able to see more than two feet ahead of him, Ricaud complied. The fore timbers ground against mud and creepers. At once came Manecu's shout:

"I got it! Come on, Bougrot. Hunch along on your hind quarters until you find my foot. Then hand the guns and gear

up to me one by one. When I've got them all safe up the bank I'll tell you, and bear you a hand getting up here. You follow him, *mon petit!*"

Bougrot allowed himself a slight philosophical smile in the darkness as he obeyed; it seemed that the command of this little expedition rotated rapidly from one man to the next. His bare elbow brushed against Manecu's corded foot. The old man's fingers reached down, gropingly touched his body.

"That's the cartridge belt and pistol," said Bougrot, reaching them up. "Got them?"

"Yes. Wait a minute now. All right."

"Rifle—machetes, ax. That's all."

"Come ahead, then."

Hesitantly, remembering Manecu's experience with the sleeping crocodile, Bougrot stepped off into knee deep mud. The sensation of the stuff closing clammily about his legs brought a little involuntary gasp from him, and Manecu reached down, caught him underneath the armpits and dragged him wordlessly to firm ground.

"You, Ricaud," he called. "Come on now. We're both ashore!"

They could hear the third man working his way cautiously inshore along the timbers of the small raft.

"How about this thing?" he demanded as he slithered down into the bank mud, then clambered up to where they squatted.

"Let it go," answered Bougrot, now consciously aware that he was again assuming the rôle of leader. "We're in Dutch Guiana now. Let them try and find us; get us out. The laugh is with us. Some sergeant will probably lose his stripes for this and I hope it's the one who shot young Drouillon in the legs last month, then left him to die."

"Huh!" said Ricaud simply, and leaned forward, to push the raft clear with his foot. "It's served us well, anyhow."

"Manecu, Manecu!" called Bougrot in a low voice.

A sleepy grunt came from behind them; no more.

"The old-timer has got the right idea," said Ricaud in his flat, unmusical voice. "Me for a little shut-eye, too."

"That's so," answered Bougrot, listening to the rustling sounds of leaves and creepers as the youngster curled himself up calmly in the underbrush.

The little man found for himself a comparatively comfortable spot in the thick undergrowth and hunched down, knees brought tightly up against his stomach, to thus alleviate the sharp pangs of hunger.

He was equally as tired as the other two men, but his nervous and mental system was more energetic, made more demands on his weary body. For hours he stayed awake, sweeping an occasional small bat or night butterfly from his face, hands clenched about his knees for the most part, eyes on the black river, where ribs of faint fire showed from time to time as a fish broke the surface phosphorescently.

Constantly his thoughts centered on that vague plan of empire which had been his for long, squalor dulled months in the Cayenne prisons and wood camps. Even to him the thing had been an unreality, an empire of the mind, a weird building of hypothesis on unstable hypothesis. Now the thing had gained its first crystallized edge of reality and the knowledge frightened him. Behind him here were two competent, fearless and intelligent men, who after a half a dozen questions apiece had flung their lot in with his; had agreed to his glittering, confident talk of an outcast empire on the back rim of the Andes and the Cordilleras.

Directing all his superb mental power to it now, Bougrot searched his brain to find the genesis of the thought. It had begun, very dimly, some fifteen years before, when he had been a medical student at the *lycée* and his elder brother had returned from his two years' trip of scientific exploration in the hinterland of the Guianas, Venezuela and Colombia. Then, for years, he had forgotten the thing, for in that time the war had come.

FOUR years . . . Four lifetimes, they had seemed to him, who had fought through them with a famous combat division. That he had come out of the thing mentally unsettled he himself knew. He was not crazy—no. But at rare intervals a red suffused curtain of aberration dropped over his brain and when he emerged again into sanity what he had passed through he recognized as temporary madness. In one of those moods he had murdered a little Jewish attorney who had come whiningly to his office to collect a bill for a Parisian medical equipment firm. He had locked the body in a rear closet of his big, barren office, and there it had remained for months—to be discovered by the police.

He had known absolutely nothing about it until the serious little chief detective had called him aside, smoothly announced the gravely incriminating circumstantial evidence in his possession . . . It was known that *m'sieur le docteur* had been having a hard time since the Armistice. It was also known that he had owed a Parisian firm a sum of some nine thousand francs for surgeon's and medical equipment. In addition, that the little Jew, representing the Parisian firm, had come to the doctor's office to collect at least a part of that sum; witnesses had seen him. That man had not emerged; had just been found in the doctor's rear closet; one of the doctor's small, sharp surgical knives still stuck between his ribs . . . Did *m'sieur le docteur* know anything about it?

No, he had answered, he did not. The little head detective had stared at him, then politely, very politely, asked him to accompany him to the *gendarmerie*. The trial was brief, but sensational. He had been, luckily, the last member of his family and a bachelor. The decision eventually handed down was one of manslaughter, although premeditated murder was indicated by all the evidence; the mitigation of sentence due to his fine family name, his war record and his previous high moral character.

The sentence condemned him to fifteen years hard labor in Cayenne; with the inevitable *doublage* of fifteen years which he must spend within the confines of the penal colony before he could return to France. He would return to France a burned out, babbling husk—or would die in that terrible place that was becoming known even in the country districts of France as the "dry guillotine." No mention of insanity had been made during the trial by either the sharp tongued prosecutor or his own harassed attorney. To all eyes the thing had been the coldly executed crime of a very sane man; the one inconsistent point being the disposal of the body. He, Jules Bougrot, the convicted and condemned, had said nothing about that madness himself. During his long periods of sanity he desperately submerged that searing fact deep in his subconsciousness, and fought with cold fury against it. If, he told himself now, listening to the sounds of the jungle night, he had not feared a recurrence of such a brutal act, he would have pleaded the fact as extenuation, changed his plea to not guilty and demanded that he be admitted to some sanitarium.

But, no. Here he was, in this place of eternal shadow, swamp, heat and fever, leading the way to escape. Leading sane men, who trusted him, to the creation of a far jungle empire, which he, the leader, feared even now to be a mad dream, a chimera of his unsettled imagination!

But what else? What else? Both men had volunteered to go with him. Both had realized the desperateness of their situation, once their actual escape from French Guiana was made good. They, too, knew that a thousand men a year escaped from the penal barracks and camps. And all of that thousand did not die in the jungle wastes, or return to Cayenne in fever spent submission. Some lived, some won through. And those who did in the future would be the basis of his empire of men, of outcast men. The land was there, of that he was sure. But, he must somehow succeed in bringing the men to that place of future empire. And first, he must bring himself and these two

uncomplaining, simple men with him to that same place. There—there he, Jules Bougrot, of Marseilles, was to be king. He chuckled half aloud even as he fell into a peaceful sleep.

It was old Manecu who shook him. Ricaud awoke just at dawn. Before either of them was wholly aroused Manecu had forced them to bathe and drink from the river, pick up their part of the gear and follow him off through the jungle. Manecu led boldly now, swiping way through the jungle tangle with his heavy bladed machete.

Near what they thought was noon they halted on the brink of a small *cano* and sat down to rest. Huskily, they talked over their course. Were they headed right—headed west? Manecu assured them without hesitation that they were; he had been checking himself every so often by the glimpses of the sun he had been able to get through cracks in the jungle roof.

A big black and white monkey blundered into sight on the edge of the *cano*, or little gulley, and with a quick shot of his pistol Bougrot brought it down. The raw, bloody meat assuaged hunger and thirst and they went on. During that afternoon it was far easier going, for they came to long stretches in the jungle where the high, to them nameless, trees kept light and moisture from almost all vegetation below and they walked through miles of what was like a series of grassy parks, leaves and branches scores of feet above them.

Here, near sundown, they came upon a drove of some forty pig-like peccary. The razorbacked, thick set animals had always possessed a dangerous reputation when in droves, but they ran snuffling and screaming now when Manecu drilled one big female with a Lebel slug.

They had no water, but they had the fresh warm blood. The place they were in was comparatively open and comfortable. Ricaud and Bougrot elected to clean and skin the peccary while old Manecu went off to see if he could find the soft timber and hardwood necessary to the construction of his fire making apparatus.

They had been done a long while and were sitting beside the dressed meat, stubbornly driving off ants and flies from it when he came back, bearing what he had sought. Ricaud gathered up tufts of dry grass, shreds of old bark, found a dead mango limb, chopped it up into small bits with the ax.

AFTER a nerve racking hour of manipulation and sawing of the hardwood stick through the center of the soft wood core, green blue flame leaped up, and they had fire. In turn and together they took care of the roasting of the peccary. The next two hours they did nothing but eat; it was their best meal since France.

Darkness came. They propped up the remainder of the meat on green poles beside the roaring, snapping fire, curled up about it and slept torpidly. Dawn. They got up, talked desultorily, ate like famished men and, knowing that they really should not, spent the rest of the day in eating and sleep.

That night contrition and a little fear struck them and they promised one another faithfully to go on the following morning, right after dawn. But there was still a large portion of the peccary meat left, and that day was spent as the previous one had been. But on the third morning there was nothing left, and, cursing themselves for stupid fools, they went on—happily, swiftly, for they were strong, vital men now.

Striking across the far edge of one of the wide, parklike spaces, Manecu's jungle-keen eyes made out the opening of a trail. They grouped about it curiously, a little fearfully, staring.

"White man's *picada?*" asked Bougrot huskily.

"No," answered old Manecu gruffly. "Bush Indian's or nigger's work. You can tell by the way the slash is made and the dead brush cleared back. But a white man with shoes has been along here, and not so long ago, either. Look!"

He pointed down with a long, bony index finger. In the soft, leaf matted

ground of the narrow little trail was the cup shaped imprint of a shoe heel. All three men got down on their knees and examined it. Manecu had been right; it was the mark of a hobnailed European boot. Up the trail they found other imprints. For perhaps half a mile, weapons in their taut, twitching hands, they followed the spoor. At last, at Bougrot's whispered demand, they stopped.

"Who do you think it is, Manecu? What's a white man doing alone away from the river; in this devil's garden? You think it might be a runner from across the river, sent to warn these local coppers?"

"No." Old Manecu calmly shook his head. "They would have sent a detail, if that was so. And this mug has been alternately in a hurry and not in a hurry. Come back here." They retraced their steps a few yards, to a turn in the trail. "See?" went on Manecu, somewhat like a cocky schoolmaster addressing his pupils. "See his marks where he halted here, hesitated, then went on? That man was afraid, was scared by some noise; monkeys or jaguar, maybe, but most probably by the thought that other men were in here."

Ricaud and Bougrot looked at each other; looked at Manecu.

"You think, then," asked Bougrot hoarsely, "that it might be a guy like us?"

"Sure I do. I'm almost positive. It's some escaped French *bagnard* like ourselves, all right. And he's hungry and in a hurry—you can tell that from where he's hunted for water roots. See those torn orchids over there? I think he tried to knock over a small monkey there; either with a machete or a stick."

"Huh," grunted Ricaud. "But where is this getting us? As long as we're sure that isn't a Dutchy guard, or a French detail from across the river, we're all right."

"Right!" approved Manecu, grinning briefly, and swung ahead again, the other two falling in behind.

Darkness came with its usual terrific blinding swiftness, but this time Manecu did not halt, but kept blundering carefully on, hands out to right and left so that he would not go crashing off into the brush. The other two bumped along behind him, wondering dully what his object was in this painful night travel, but so awed by the old man's powers of woodcraft and deduction that they were afraid to ask him. At last he stopped and hissed for them to stop.

"What is it?" whispered Bougrot.

"There's a fire going, ahead in the trail. I'm quite sure it's the guy who went ahead of us. Stay here while I go and find out."

"*Bon.*"

A GRAY wraith in the thick blackness, Manecu was gone. The two knelt, listened. Above the usual night jungle noises they could not hear the faintest movement of the old man. But still they waited, heads down and cocked to one side, tightened nerves jumpy. Finally there was a small rustling sound ahead, and Ricaud could feel Bougrot's body stiffen as he straightened up, pistol in hand. Then a soft laugh came from ahead and they knew that it was Manecu. He was beside them mysteriously, without further sound.

"It's our man, all right. But no *bagnard*. A young lad. Either American or English; I can't tell which because I can't talk his language. He's weak and half mad with the fever, but I made clear to him who I was, and that I wasn't after him or his rotten old gun. You know English, Jules?"

"No."

"I do," grunted Ricaud. "Learned it when I was seagoing."

"Come on, then; you can talk to him."

"Right."

They swept up their gear from where they had dropped it along the trailside and blundered on after Manecu again. Suddenly they came into the ruddy light of a fire. Beside it, head in his freckled hands, sat a long, thin youth. He looked

up at them as they approached and Bougrot and Ricaud saw that his face was gaunt and yellowed with the fever.

"How you come, Jack?" asked Ricaud, scraping up the remnants of his dockside English.

"Bad, brother!" he replied huskily. "Bad as hell!"

"He is an American—no Englishman," said Ricaud instantly to his companions in French. In English, to the seated man: "Where you from, Jack?"

A crafty, cautious look came into the American's eyes, and he fumbled for the safety catch of his rusty old German army rifle.

"Where you from?" he countered croakingly, trying to rise to his knees.

"French side—Saint Laurent—the prisons," answered Ricaud without hesitation. "*Nom de 'cré!* Don't be afraid weet us."

A weak smile went over the American's face. He let slip the rifle, indicated the cleared space beside the fire.

"Sit down, then," he said in very bad French. "I'm from Von der Goltz's plantation, down Galibi way. They're lookin' for me, too." Again the feverish smile creased his bony, hollowed face. "Had a fight with the Dutchy foreman three, four days ago; kicked some of his teeth out. Then I figured I'd better pull out, so I went and asked old squarehead Von for my pay. He said no and I said yes. I got this gun, and the canteen there, but I had to shoot him through the shoulder and kill a couple of his dogs before I could get away."

Ricaud, as spokesman, shook his head in sympathetic understanding.

"Where you going now?"

"British Guiana again; the gold fields. I came to this country for that, anyhow. Been up there once and got the fever and had to quit. That's why I was cutting sugar for old Von, to get me a new stake. But, there you are!"

"*Voilà!*" said Ricaud. "Them t'eeng some tam 'appen. I know."

He turned to the silent Bougrot and Manecu, related swiftly the American's immediate history and pedigree. Both smiled at the sick man.

All four were silent for a moment, staring alternately at the slow bluish gold flames of the fire, then at one another. The nervous, fever spent American spoke first—

"Where you *hombres* bound for?"

Ricaud made French out of the question for his two companions. For a long time Bougrot made no sound, no sign, and the three resumed their scrutiny of one another. At last it was old Manecu who growled out:

"Listen, Bougrot. This lad, Ricaud, and me, we sold our souls to you and said yes to your idea. We'll follow you, see? You're smarter than us, know a whole lot more about a whole lot of things. And we'll let you be boss—or whatever you want to call yourself. But, one question!"

"What?" asked Bougrot very softly, hands wide spread on his kneecaps.

"You've talked to us about this new place we're going to; about how we're going to live there; make a new land, a new nation of men. But where are you going to get the men?"

"I have told you already: from Cayenne, Laurent, Sainte Jeanne; from those who have escaped and will escape. Men like ourselves."

Manecu cursed flatly.

"You're an idealist, a child in some things, Jules! You forget that I have lived for twelve years with those fellows. And two months of those twelve years was enough to show me that the sooner I got away from nine-tenths of those mugs the better off I was."

Bougrot's laugh was like a slap in the face.

"You're a murderer, Manecu. So am I. I'm not quite sure what young Ricaud did, but he can't be any lily either, or he would not have been sent out to the settlement from a French jug. What's the matter with you? Trying to jump out on me now? You said yes to my plans back in the settlement."

"Sure, because the big part of what you

had under your thatch was good stuff."

"Well, what's the matter now? What are you trying to prove?"

"Just that the three of us are several cuts better than those hoodlums and degenerates in Cayenne. There are a few good men there, men who are paying for their one great misstep like ourselves. But the majority of them—bah!" Manecu spat. "You are inconsistent, Bougrot. When I did for the *bico* guard in the trail there, you only chose young Ricaud from the wood gang, and told the rest to hunt for themselves. Why didn't you take them along with us? I know why. You had an instinctive, animal fear of them."

A bitter smile came to Bougrot's bearded lips.

"You are keen, Manecu, and you are right. But without a large number of men we can not live back in there in safety for long. If we find gold, other hard boiled birds will eventually hear about it, and come back to take it from us. We must be self-sufficient, be able to protect ourselves; be an empire of men in numbers as well as organization and thought. And where else are you going to get any quantity of men except from Cayenne—from the place we have come from?"

Old Manecu shrugged, and there was an answering bitter smile about his lips.

"All true, Bougrot," he answered. "But we must have a nucleus of good, strong men, into which we can infiltrate the roughnecks and no-accounts and reform them, or else we ourselves will be chased out, or bumped off. Right?"

Bougrot nodded slowly.

"But what does it mean now? Why all this jabber right here, in front of this fellow?" he asked.

Manecu laughed barkingly.

"Because I think he's a very good man to join us, and I want you to ask him."

"You do!" Bougrot's eyes widened. He turned to Ricaud. "And how about you, *mon petit gars?*"

"I'm with the old one. What he has said shows the only real weakness in your plan, Bougrot. I'm not kicking, mind; I'm just saying Manecu is right."

Bougrot opened and shut his once graceful hands, studied the faces of his two companions, the countenance of the American, who still sat without motion beside the fire, old Mauser across his knees.

"All right, Ricaud," he said suddenly. "Tell him this as best you can: That we're bound for the back country up by Roraima. That I know there is gold in that place. That we are going to live there . . . All the details as you know them; as I've told you. Get that?"

"Yes!" mumbled Ricaud, a little bewildered. "What then?"

"Then ask him if 'e wants to join us!"

"Right!"

NERVOUSLY, knowing that his powers as a linguist were going to be strained to the utmost, the former sailor moved around the fire until he sat knee to knee with the gaunt faced, hard eyed American. Bougrot and Manecu could not understand what was said, but here and there French words and gestures broke through which showed that the younger man was, with as much native eloquence as he had, giving to the gravely listening American Bougrot's fanciful sounding idea of empire. At last the feverish one smiled, grimaced, said a few words in reply. Ricaud rose up and came back around the dying fire to his companions.

"What did he say?" demanded Bougrot instantly.

"He says yes; it sounds good to him. As long as he is sure it will be share and share alike. He says he's been banging all over the world since he was fourteen and all he wants is enough money for tobacco, a woman, some new clothes and a drunk now and then."

"Those Americans!" laughed Bougrot in understanding. "I got to know some of them at the Front during the war. This man is honest, is telling the truth. I an glad you convinced me, old one!"

Bougrot stood up, erect. At once his entire attitude, his posture, expression

changed. He seemed to grow physically larger, to become austere, commanding, regal. Ricaud and Manecu looked at him in astonishment, a thrill of wonder and a little fear holding them momentarily. In that simple act of coming erect Jules Bougrot, an escaped convict like themselves, had changed, lost entity, had assumed a new one. He stood before them now definitely as commander, king, emperor.

They might be his companions, his friends, even, but they were at best his lieutenants, his aides. No feeling of jealousy rankled in them as they looked up at him; subconsciously, ever since he had unfolded to each man his plan of empire, they had known that this moment must sometime come. And now it was here . . .

Both men's forebears had respected, even worshipped, another spurious French emperor, a little man with the magnetic personality and dynamic driving power of Bougrot. Their reaction now was without fear, without thought. He had declared himself, and so had they, by their minutes of silence.

"Come," said Bougrot, his voice musical, grave. "Let us go and welcome him into the empire."

The two came stiffly upright; side by side they followed him around the fire. The American, intuitively understanding, came to his feet also. Knowing no English, Bougrot did nothing but hold out his right hand. It was young Ricaud who spoke.

"It is this man," he said simply, "who is our emperor."

"Good!" barked the tall American gravely. "Good! We're all set now, huh?"

In turn Ricaud and Manecu stepped forward and shook the stranger's fever sweaty hand.

"What do you say we eat?" asked Manecu a moment later, reverting to type now that the brief formalities were over.

"But we have no food left," suggested Bougrot, with his serious little smile. "Ask the American, *mon brave*, if he has any food."

"You 'ave chow?" asked Ricaud.

"Yeah." The American nodded. "A little."

He moved away a yard or so from the fire, brought forth from the tangle of huge jungle ferns beside the trail a sweat blackened canvas canteen and a greasy, cloth wrapped bundle. The latter he opened, to exhibit some cassava cakes, fried plantains and a quantity of *saouri* nuts.

"Go ahead," he invited, "I ain't hungry. This lousy fever takes it all out of me. I only got a little water, though, and I'll have to keep that for myself; I'm burning up right now."

"You are more than generous," said Ricaud in French and tried with poor results to translate it into English. "But we can get more food and water in the morning, yes?"

"Sure. I know this trail. Know all the country pretty well right up to where we're bound."

"*C'est bon!*" grunted Ricaud. "But are you sure you want no food?"

"No. Couldn't keep it down, the way I feel now. Hop to it!"

Ricaud thanked him again and, remembering, offered the cassava, plantains and nuts first to Bougrot, then divided the remainder between himself and old Manecu. They ate swiftly and in silence, for they felt their deep weariness now. Across the fire from them the American had applied himself to the canteen, stoppered it again, put it under his head, his Mauser under his left arm, then dragged his knees high against his stomach and dropped into a feverish, stupor-like sleep.

Manecu rose up once to replenish the fire with a dead branch he found; then he too fell asleep. Ricaud, his brain stirred by the simple drama of the ceremony they had all gone through an hour before, did not sleep for a long time; lay resting on his side, head propped up by one hand and arm. Beyond him sat Bougrot, hands cupped in his lap.

Once Ricaud looked at him. The man's eyes were like bright gems, and on his lined, thin featured face was that new and marvelous expression of authority, of command. Kingship, thought Ricaud, recalling blurred details of his history, kept men awake, unhappy. Perhaps that was why he and old Manecu and the American, Curtin, had not resented Bougrot's announcement of his royalty, his position above them. But it was easier, more healthy, to follow, to be commanded, he mused, remembering his years on the sea. With that thought revolving slowly in his mind he fell asleep.

V

OLD MANECU, as usual, awoke them. Beyond the dead fire the American sat limply, head lolling on his shoulders. The night's sleep on the damp jungle path had not done him any good, Ricaud realized. Then, with amazement, he watched old Manecu. The man had advanced without word to the American's side, deftly lifted up the almost empty canteen and introduced into it a small quantity of black liquid squeezed from leaves and bark he held in his powerful hands. The old convict then rammed in the stopper and shook the contents vigorously.

At last he pulled out the stopper with his yellow teeth, forced the semiconscious youth to rest back and open his mouth, then poured down his throat more than half the contents of the canteen. Curtin cursed, sputtered, shuddered and tried to get up, but Manecu held him stubbornly in his reclining posture. At last the younger man stretched weakly out and seemed to fall into a peaceful sleep. With a smile Manecu stepped away from him and toward his two companions.

"What was that you shoved down his throat, old one?" questioned Ricaud.

"What the bush fellows call *cinchona*, and some other stuff, made out of leaves they showed me, whose names I don't know. Anyhow, the combination, mixed up with what little water there was in that canteen, is like our quinine. We'll have to pack him for half a day or a day, maybe, but then he'll be all right."

With a short, self-conscious smile and a wink for his own jungle knowledge, Manecu picked up one of the machetes and went a short way down the trail. In a few minutes he called Ricaud's name and the younger man joined him. The old fellow had craftily fashioned a light stretcher out of two green poles and a number of creeper lengths, led and knotted back and forth.

"You're a good man to know!" exclaimed Ricaud candidly.

"Here, yes. Not in France, though."

"That goes for us all, I guess," said Ricaud a bit grimly, then picked up his end of the stretcher without further word.

"Shall we go?" asked Manecu when they got back to where Bougrot squatted on his hams.

"Yes." The little man stood solemnly up. "At once, old one. You're a handy man to have around in this place."

"That I know!" grunted the old man, grinning satisfiedly. "Come on, sailor; we go and pick up our sick man, hey?"

"Sure."

They moved away. Behind them, Bougrot picked up and hung about him as best he might the weapons and tools, carrying the Lebel and Mauser rifles in each hand, the machetes and ax stuck through the shoulder straps of the dead guard's pistol belt. Silently, he stepped ahead of them and the little procession went slowly on along the winding, dim, uneven trail.

Coming out into a wide sort of savanna that afternoon, Bougrot, who led, emptied a magazine load from the Mauser into a scampering, bellowing pack of big red howler monkeys and succeeded in bringing down two of the ugly headed beasts. On the far side of the savanna was a deep ravine, its bed threaded by a clear, small brook. Both Ricaud and Manecu were badly tired by their labor of carrying the feverish American. It was an open, healthy place; a good spot to camp.

Manecu found wood. Bougrot skinned

and cleaned the monkeys. Ricaud scrambled down the side of the ravine, filled with water from the brook the canteen and two rough vessels he fashioned out of soft logs with the machete point. There was a roaring fire going when he got back and Bougrot was inexpertly roasting the monkey meat on a spit made from a green stick by Manecu. The old man had found some of his herbs and *cinchona* bark on the jungle edge and was administering to Curtin, the American.

This time the drug aroused and nauseated the thin, stoop shouldered man, but after the nausea had passed he sat up and blinked weakly about him. He motioned to Ricaud with a shaky hand. When the young Frenchman stood beside him he croaked:

"Don't go no farther unless I'm on my feet and can pilot you the way. There's a big Dutchy plantation about ten miles down the trail, there. Kyriwaki River is the other side of it. I came down this way five months ago; I know."

"Good!" said Ricaud. "You feel like a leetle food?"

"Smells good," admitted Curtin. "But it won't do me no good now, Frenchy. Better wait until morning. See you then."

He lay back and was almost at once asleep. Ricaud moved back to the fire and imparted the news to his companions. Old Manecu made a wry expression and turned toward Bougrot.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Better draw watches, hadn't we, and one of us keep an eye open?"

"Yes." Bougrot inclined his head. "We've come too far now to be jumped by some lousy Dutch planter who would turn us in to the governor for our head tax. But you men sleep; I'll stay awake. You've had a hard trick all day, carrying him."

"No!"

"Yes."

It was flat, final.

The two stared at the little man, then were silent. This man, Jules Bougrot, was their leader, was to be their king. In complete quiet they ate the roasted meat, drank, washed their faces, torsos and arms for the first time in many days. For a while the two stayed stubbornly awake, mutely unwilling to see this man they so admired and trusted keep the long night watch all alone. But Bougrot's analysis of their weariness was accurate. They soon slumbered. bodies turned toward the warmth of the fire.

FOR LONG, blank, drowsy hours little Bougrot sat there, trying to keep himself awake. But before dawn he, too, slept, head on his knees, mouth open, body warmed and soothed by the fire.

Through the hazy barrier of sleep about his brain there beat a deep, drumming sound, like vague thunder. Then something warm, hairy, alive, brushed against his naked shoulder and he was on his feet, stiff fingers groping for the bolt and trigger of the carbine. Even as he rammed the first shot into the barrel another weapon racked the dawn beside him and in its spitting flash he made out the bearded face of old Manecu above the Mauser stock.

Dim gray shapes rushed and pounded about them, and there was a grunting, screaming sound. He fired swiftly, from the hip, working the bolt with nervous fingers. One of the gray shapes charged with blind madness right at him. His rifle was empty. Lurching aside, he battered at it with the heavy Lebel butt. The smack of wood against flesh and bone was terrific. Bougrot laughed through white lips as he looked down. He had just killed a big peccary, smashing the animal's heavy spine with his tremendous rifle blow.

But more of the creatures were plunging madly in, and he raised the carbine again towards his shoulder, making ready to strike. Beside him the revolver barked; then Curtin's old Mauser rifle once more. He turned, looked. Ricaud and old Manecu knelt side by side, firing busily, calmly. Between them for protection lay the weakened American, but even he was

occupied, handing up ammunition to the others.

The stumbling, stupid wave of animals broke, fell back, disappeared into the dawn shadows at the jungle edge. Here and there across the wide savanna a wounded beast crawled off and that was all. Bougrot grounded his Lebel butt slowly.

"You all right?" he cried.

"*Mais ouil*" answered Manecu calmly for the others. "It is all done now."

"I fell asleep," admitted Bougrot frankly. "What do you think started it, old one?"

"Some wise old jaguar tried to single out one of the younger beasts from the drove—and scared the whole batch. They just charged madly. We were lucky not to get pulverized into the earth by them at that, though."

As Manecu spoke Bougrot step by step approached the three men, squatted down beside them.

"I am sorry," he said. "It was my fault."

"No," returned Ricaud, speaking for the first time, "you just tried to do too much; that's all."

"Listen," said Manecu in a low voice, "we've awakened the whole jungle."

The four fell silent, listening, awed, even frightened. None of them except perhaps old Manecu had ever before heard anything slightly resembling it. The volleys of shots, the mad, pounding rush of the peccaries, the screams of the wounded and dying beasts had roused up the entire jungle. Above all, crest to the torrent of sound, was the yammering, chittering babel of the smaller monkeys, the cries of startled birds, squeaking of tree toads and other small creatures. Several notes lower was the terrific, growled baying of the big red howler monkeys. Across the open floor of the savanna the sound beat and returned in shuddering, stronger echo. Leaves rustled and shook as in the grasp of a gale. Then, giving the mental effect of a sword piercing thick cloth, came the horrible, high, human shriek of a jaguar.

Instantly, everything stilled. Even the wounded peccaries were silent. Again it was the dawn breeze making slow, soft caress of the jungletop that was the only sound. The four men could just hear one another's breathing. From them, in that one terrific instant, the bravado of civilization, of cosmic knowledge had been torn and they were atavistic, half naked men, staring off into the grayness of the the dawn with fear bright eyes, bodies clammy with a cold sweat.

The jaguar did not scream again. For half an hour the jungle world waited noiselessly, cautious with the fear of death. Up over the ragged roof rim the raw ochre light of dawn flushed, to fuse with the metallic blue and thus become rose, white gold. Then, red and vast, the sun showed and it was day.

Overhead, a buzzard made black flight across the brilliant eye of the sun. Then another, another. Monkeys scampered and coughed timidly. Flies dropped and there came the soft, thin calls of bright colored jungle birds. The four looked at one another suddenly and laughed. It was like a bad dream now—but not one to be readily repeated.

"Let's eat and go!" snapped old Manecu sharply. "We're acting like a lot of school girls on a picnic. How are you, American?"

Curtin looked up, and made partial sense out of the strange language.

"All right," he said in his very bad French. "But let's move—*rapidement—prontol*"

THEY had roast meat left from their meal before, enough for their wants for a day or so. Some of this they bolted down, swigging from the lukewarm water left in the canteen. Ricaud volunteered to fill it again from the stream and when he returned the other three were on their feet and ready for the trail. Not twenty yards away from them the great gray buzzards were already at their grisly work of scavenging the dead peccaries. The young Frenchman heaved a bare bone at them disguestedly before he fell into line,

only to see them circle slowly down again and resume their work.

Old Manecu led now, with the American right behind him, Ricaud at his shoulder to help him along and translate his directions and warnings to the old *Lyonnais*. Bringing up the rear was little Bougrot, with his detached, preoccupied look, which was becoming so familiar upon his lined face once more.

Before noon Curtin pointed out the little used, overgrown side trail which obliqued away from the main one and would take them safely around the big Dutch plantation ahead. The going was slow and difficult now, and Ricaud, Manecu, then Bougrot took turns with the machetes, cleaning trail. The American was still too weak to work, but never complained of his condition, and when he faltered and slipped in the trail, regained his own footing and went on alone, a grim, mechanical smile on his yellowed face.

It was about an hour before the coming of night when they found the river bank. The stream was small, swift, full of snags and rapids even here. At a mumbled direction from Curtin they turned left, upstream, and scrambled painfully through the mangrove thickets until they came abruptly out upon what had once been a small bush negro village. The grass *malocas*, long deserted now, had tumbled in. Jungle had already reclaimed what had been manioc and maize patches. But banana trees still raised their heads above the thicket growths and some of the fruit was ripe, golden.

They made a fire, fried some of the fruit with the meat they had carried with them. Curtin talked with Ricaud for a short time in his badly mixed argot of English-French, then the former sailor called Bougrot and Manecu to them.

"The lad says there is an old dugout canoe hidden over there in the brush by the bank," he told the two older men. "He used it himself when he came through here going downcountry from the Surinam. He says he'll show us where it is now and that we'd better get out of here tonight—as soon as we can."

"When we found him we found no bad luck," grunted Manecu. "Tell him to come on, kid."

Ricaud did, and together the four worked down to the river bank, Manecu holding aloft a flaming faggot for light. It was an old, lopsided, fire charred native dugout, half filled with water from the rainy season. The after end still projected out over the bank mud and was covered with a thick screen of creepers and leaves. There were no thwarts in the thing and a bad crack showed along one side, even in the flickering light of the faggot Manecu held. But, it would serve, stated Ricaud calmly, assuming again his position as navigation authority.

"What's the hurry, though?" demanded Bougrot. "We will probably pile up and get drowned, trying to get across this stream in the darkness. Why not wait until morning?"

"He says not," answered Ricaud. "A bundle of good big faggots, bow and stern, will light us all right, and he knows all the rocks, snags and eddies. The hurry is the fact that the Dutch planter up the river has a big liking for white plantation hands, and doesn't mind plucking them off when they wander along. He says they're all greedy that way in this country, and I even heard the same thing myself back in the jug. We're only a mile or so downstream from the plantation buildings now, and one of his bush niggers might see our fire, report it, and then—*pouf!*"

"*À bas* with the Dutchman!" snarled Bougrot nervously. "To hell with him! Let him try. We're four good men."

"You know that is foolishness, Jules," suggested Manecu calmly. "This American lad hasn't led us wrong yet. It stands up that he shouldn't now. And haven't we enough trouble without begging it?"

"I know," muttered Bougrot half aloud, "but I am thinking of those who come after us."

"Who, Jules?" asked Manecu with a grave expression. "The future citizens of the empire?"

"Yes."

"But they must take care of themselves

until we are strong enough to aid them, *hein?*"

Bougrot shrugged and his face seemed haggard, very old, in the ruddy glow of the faggot flames.

"You are right, Manecu," he said slowly, and his voice was flat and devoid of its usual musical quality. "You men know more about these things than I do. I, Jules Bougrot, am in your hands."

Mentally, old Manecu substituted "your emperor" for "Jules Bougrot," and a great feeling of tenderness and pity for this man at his side came over him. He reached out instinctively, grasped Bougrot's limp hand with his own strong one reassuringly.

"Your time, our need of you will come when we are there, Jules," he said very gently. "But now, we must go on."

"That is so. Yes."

"All right." Manecu turned to Ricaud, to the watching silent American. "On our way, lads! Let's bail her out, slide her down, find paddles, poles."

EAGERLY, already feeling pent-up from their hour or so of inaction, the four men went at the job. The three escaped convicts were skilled at working together now and Curtin, the American, was an excellent fourth. He cut and prepared the two big bunches of faggots which were to light their passage across the stream while the others nursed the logy old dugout into the swift current and loaded it with the gear and the newly cut poles and paddles.

Manecu seated himself in the rounded bow, knees spread wide to aid in the balance. The former sailor was in the steerer's position aft, the two other men amidships, Curtin closer to the stern so that he might more readily give his orders to Ricaud.

Without further hesitation they pushed off, the faggot bunches making weird wings of flame as the breeze of the open stream caught at them. It was a mad, desperate passage, and it seemed to Bougrot that innumerable times they were on the point of keeling over into the black, turgid water. But Curtin knew his course, darkness or light, and the two Frenchmen were expert, calm headed boatmen. Suddenly, they were across; they were safe.

"What about the canoe?" asked Ricaud of the American after they had pulled themselves up through the bank undergrowth with their weapons and tools.

"Let it go. We won't be coming back!"

Silently Ricaud released his grip on the pole which had been keeping the crazy craft in alongside.

"Now what?" he questioned. "There is a trail on this side?"

"Yeah. But we can't find it now. We got to hole down here for the night. Tell your partners it will be clear going now for a couple of weeks. And not to fear that Dutchy, once we're on this side. No man, not even a bush nigger, could find us here at night, and we'll be gone by early morning."

"Good," assented Ricaud, and moved away to his mutely squatting companions.

Perhaps none of them slept much that night, there above the rustling, rocky bedded river, hunkered down among the sweetly rotten stench of enormous orchids, jungle ferns and giant creepers. But none spoke out or moved much during the night and at dawn they rose up singly, to eat, wash and fall in behind the now vigorous American.

They were jungle hard now, and swift men on the trail. The last vestiges of the fever had left Curtin and he swung along at a long gaited, seemingly tireless pace, head a little forward, battered old Mauser in his right hand, canteen at his left hip. The others followed after in silent, compact line, eyes intent on the trail and the flashing feet and ankles of the men ahead of them.

The dense coastal jungle country was thinning out now and more and more they entered into a region of savannas and groves of high, tall trunked hardwood trees. Game was plentiful and Curtin and old Manecu, expert shots, kept them well

supplied with meat. Water was sometimes scarce, but they had hardened themselves to do without it for long hours at a time and did not drink more than small quantities when it was at hand.

Once they went boldly through a little Indian village where not a man was in sight. Women, girls and naked children working about the small clearing stared at them with stupid, uncaring eyes. It was a novel experience for the Frenchmen and that night, as they camped, they questioned Curtin about it. He answered laughingly in his somewhat improved French:

"*Quel diable!* They've seen lots like us before. You wouldn't think so, but we've just been lucky. It's almost time for the rainy season, and any white man who knows anything doesn't want to get caught out in here then."

THREE times in a week and a half they forded small creeks which were too diminutive to bear the name of rivers. Only once were they forced to make a detour of eight kilometers when Curtin and old Manecu concurred in saying that there were fresh tracks of white men wearing boots in the trail. Then, with a laugh, they showed the other two less experienced jungle runners the almost unreadable tracks in the clayey, grass grown trail. Ricaud and Jules Bougrot inclined their heads solemnly in admission of their lack of knowledge, and the little group went on.

In less than a month after they had met Curtin, half dead and fever drugged in the trail, they came to what he told them was an upper fork of the Surinam River. Where he brought them out on its banks it was desolate, totally deserted. The inevitable question— "What now?"—came from Ricaud.

"We'll have to cut down one of those softwood trees, there. Get us up a big fire; burn and cut out a good canoe and paddles. It will take us about a week, but it will be worth it, double and over. This crick hasn't got many rapids in it and takes us up where we want to go; south and west, toward the border."

"Dangerous country?" demanded Bougrot, who had been strangely silent for weeks.

The American hesitated before he answered.

"Yeah," he said finally, "it is. Djuka country . . . Another bad stretch of jungle in a big, lowland valley. I wouldn't go up in there now; I'd keep on across country. But, remember those tracks the old one and I showed you? White men; Dutchmen, soldiers . . . And they're still around here somewhere. And it's going to start raining tomorrow—like hell, and at least for a month solid. So what do you say we get that fire going now? You can feel the rain in the air, too, huh?"

Manecu was the only one who did, but the other pair agreed readily, remembering how expertly the two men had brought them through this far. After it was built and banked with green logs for the night the old man and Ricaud stretched down beside it, faces turned from the light, backs exposed to its heat. Jules Bougrot sat as usual, a little apart, knees drawn up under him, face in his hands, staring broodingly into the white and red play of the flames. Curtin, too, sat upright, rifle propped over one knee, head turning from time to time as he gazed out into the further darkness toward the noisy river.

At last, looking toward the little Frenchman, he realized that Bougrot was gravely studying him. Suddenly Bougrot came to his feet, advanced around the edge of the fire and seated himself beside the other man.

"Tell me," he suggested in his soft voice, "about yourself, American. You have never done that."

Bougrot had spoken in French, which the American had been rapidly learning, and the younger man now replied in the same tongue.

"There is a lot to tell, or a little," he answered readily. "I've been on the loose since I was fourteen. Was a cow hand, a puncher, in Idaho and Nebraska when I was a kid. Served an enlistment in the

Cavalry; was with Pershing in Mexico. Stayed in Mexico—Durango, Guadalajara, Sonora, then south . . . Central America, the oil fields around Maracaibo, then out into this country where we're bound now."

"A true wanderer?"

"You might call me that."

Both men were silent for a time. Bougrot spoke:

"What do you really think of what I, and those other men with us, plan to do?"

"You mean starting a country of your own back in there?"

"Yes."

A not unpleasant smile came about Curtin's mouth and eyes.

"I've listened to men like you before, Bougrot."

"Just what do you mean by that?" asked Bougrot calmly.

The lean, long faced American shrugged.

"I guess it's possible, if you don't make it too big."

"How possible?"

"Not very." Curtin kept his eyes steadily on Bougrot's. "Listen: You three men are runaways. French convicts on the jump. You haven't got a country; need one bad—either one of your own or one you can borrow. Let me go on, Bougrot; let me finish. I got my own country. I can always go back to the States when I want to. You can't. You're all outcasts. I don't know an awful lot about what you guys did to get shipped out to Cayenne, and I don't care a whole hell of a lot. You've treated me square."

"But over a month ago," interposed Bougrot swiftly, "when young Ricaud asked you, you joined your cause to ours."

"Sure. I was licked—alone—hands down, right then. And I figured I would be better off with you, win or lose. You're out to make a living from the jungle, from this back country; so am I. What's good for me is good for you—"

"But—about the success of my empire?" Bougrot interrupted.

Curtin hesitated for perhaps five minutes before he answered:

"You're asking me, Bougrot, and I'm telling you. Not so good. Me? I'm honest with you; I'll play the hand out. I'm young, curious—as I told your partner, Ricaud, there. But the other men you would get to join you? All the backwash of bums from the oil fields, from the plantations the railroads and mines, and prisons—"

"We are from a prison," said Bougrot, his face hard.

"Yes, but that is what you forget, Bougrot; you three were probably the only decent men in the whole Cayenne *juzgado*. You might, in time, collect a few other honest guys like ourselves. But not enough to keep the other customers in hand."

"And if we were able to, we would establish our country, hew for ourselves a corner of the world where we would be independent, could live as we wished. No one wants that land back in there; no one lives there now. You have been there, and you know that what I say is so. And there is water, timber, grazing land, some gold and some diamonds, yes?"

"Yes. You're right. But you forget one other thing, Bougrot."

"What is that?"

"That the *politicos* who own that land, and don't give a damn for it now, will sure change their minds in a hurry when they find out we're making a living there."

Bougrot made no answer, sat utterly motionless, but all the fire, all the energy, went out of his figure, his face and eyes. It was, thought Curtin, as if he were sitting beside a dying man. The American cursed himself bitterly.

"Bougrot," he murmured softly. The Frenchman's eyelids quivered just the least bit. "I've been reading you all the hard side; there's a good side too. You're a better educated, smarter man than me. I've just taken so many beatings in my life I'm sour, that's all. And don't forget I'm willing to follow you as far and as faithfully as those guys sleeping there. I gave you my promise; it's the best thing you've got. All we can do is give the thing a try, anyhow. We shake hands on that?"

A mechanical smile came to Bougrot's lips. He held out his right hand limply. Curtin shook it, tried to transmit some of his own energy, some of his own buoyancy, to the other in that grip. His simple nature puzzled, hurt, by the pain he had been forced to give this other man, he knew nothing better to do than get up and move around the fire and make a pretense of sleep.

BUT SLEEP did not come to him; he forced it bitterly from him, wearied as he was. Under the arm he had thrown up over his face, he watched Bougrot. The little man sat like a somber statue in the outer, vague rim of the firelight for a while, haggard, hopeless face turned toward it. Then, inch by inch, still seated, he swung around until his back was to it. He rested without motion, but Curtin could sense the terrific tensity, the awful nervous upheaval going on within the other.

With utter silence Curtin dragged himself on his elbows to old Manecu's side. His long, hard fingers fastened about Manecu's arm just above the elbow. With a slow, steady pressure he tightened his grip. Manecu's heavy lidded eyes opened. Instantly Curtin placed his other hand palm down across the old man's mouth. Manecu's staring eyes read the message in the American's. He nodded very gently. Curtin slid back. Manecu came to his knees, beside him, gazing toward the now swaying, trembling form of Bougrot. For a moment he and Curtin remained spellbound, volition swept from them in the awed spell brought by Bougrot's actions.

Unearthly, awful, a jaguar's scream pealed through the black jungle night. It was like the sounding of some mad tocsin. And it was as if in preconceived, complete answer that Bougrot leaped to his feet, arms wide, and howled burblingly back. It was only by instinct alone that Manecu and Curtin swung erect and raced after him. Through the forest the man's terrible cries still echoed, rang, returned, echoed again. By their sound the two finally found him.

Bougrot had run in his mad blindness directly toward the river. Just at the bank he had tripped over a protruding root, fallen headlong. He was unconscious, limp, his mouth and forehead bloody when they found him. The two knew no words to give each other. Simply, they carried the heavy, inert form back to the fire. Ricaud met them at the edge of its light, a gun in each hand, his face and eyes blank with horror.

"What in the name of good God was that?" he croaked, trying desperately to regain command of himself.

"A jaguar—then him," said Manecu, just above a whisper. "Let us put him down right here, *ami*. The—the spell has left him now. He will be—sane when this coma he is now in is over."

Unbelievingly, Curtin looked from one to the other. At last he shook his head.

"I always thought," he said slowly in his Anglicized French, "that the little fellow was just a bit cracked. But I thought that you two were level headed. You mean to say you have been following this man when you knew this all the time?"

Old Manecu made a typical Gallic shrug with his shoulders.

"We have both heard it said in the jug that he was sometimes that way. He never showed it to us—"

"Except in his dream of empire, huh?"

Again the noncommittal, almost humorous shrug.

"Curtin, you forget that this lad and I are very desperate men. So is Bougrot. And men in our shape will listen to almost anything."

"You're right in that, old one. I was talking to him about this plan of his just before it happened. Probably it started him off. But God alone knows that."

"What did you tell him?"

"That it was a long, long shot; a hard road."

"Then why have you come along with us, American?" rasped Ricaud, drawing

back his head, squaring his broad shoulders.

Curtin laughed; a short, musical sound.

"Turn and turn about, sailor. And because I like you *hombres*, and because I know that, win or lose for you, I can't lose. I know that country. See, I'm different. You guys are so hard pushed you've only let yourselves think on the good side of things and have let the bad side wait."

"That is so, that," muttered old Manecu. "But you'll go on with us?"

"I gave you my word, didn't I? You think he will remember this when he wakes up?"

"No. They say this is what happened when he killed his man in Marseilles. It probably won't happen again for a long time, and Ricaud and me are always watching for it."

"Huh!" Curtin looked up, held out his hand. "Well, here comes the rain."

The two Frenchmen cursed bitterly and in chorus. They had both before experienced the dreariness, the fever and aching malarial drag of the rainy season along the Guiana coast.

"How about a shed of green poles and leaves over that fire?" snapped Manecu. "This rain will go on for weeks, and we'll lose our fire, all our dry wood and all our chances of burning out a canoe and getting away from here unless we act fast."

"*Vrai!*" cried out Curtin. He stooped down, picked up the ax, looked about for the two machetes, found only one. "Where's the other one; do you know, Manecu?"

All three men began to search hurriedly about the fire for the missing knife. At last old Manecu cracked a blackened thumbnail against his fore teeth in remembrance.

"Bougrot had it in his hand when he leaped up and ran from the fire. He must have dropped it when he fell, down there by the bank."

"You're right," muttered Curtin. "Give me that big brand, there, Ricaud, and I'll go and find it."

He handed the machete and ax to the other two and stepped rapidly off, holding the slow blazing brand in front and above him, a white cloud of gnats and huge moths gathering instantly about it.

FOR PERHAPS twenty minutes the two Frenchmen worked busily and without word, chopping down a palmetto, cutting it into poles of suitable length and sinking them end down in the ground about the fire. They finished laying the crossbeams and began to place the wet palmetto leaves above them shingle-wise when Ricaud spoke:

"What's happened to him huh? He's been gone a long time—machete or no machete."

"Here he comes," said Manecu in his husky voice. "I see the light. Go on!"

"Find it?" asked Ricaud as the American advanced into the fire glow.

"Yes," said Curtin in a strange, hoarse tone, "and these, too!"

"What?"

"Look!"

The two stepped beside him. Resting in the cup of Curtin's outstretched palms were four dull glowing nuggets of rough gold. One, which he had pushed in the center, was almost the size of a hen's egg; two of the others were only slightly smaller.

"Name of a sacred name! Name of a most sacred name! And where?"

"Just where he fell. In the sand of the bank. I stumbled on them, then saw their color in the light of the brand. My pockets are full of them."

"They are worth?" croaked Ricaud, gulping.

"About eight thousand dollars—at least."

"Enough money—" began Ricaud, and stopped, stupefied by the thought.

"Enough money," continued the American calmly, "split four ways, with what else we can pick up there, to buy you three fake passports and get you anywhere in the world you want to go. You're free men."

"And you are an honest one!"

"What the hell, that ain't much news to you or me, is it?" he asked in English. "You need it more than me."

"But, what now?" asked Ricaud; the same old question.

Curtin attempted a Gallic shrug.

"If you're asking me, I'd say pull out of this country and go wherever you want. Money and a little brains will get you out of Caracas, will get you out of anywhere. You might even hire a plane to fly you to Havana—or one of the small islands in the Antilles."

"What will he think—to whom we have given our word to obey?"

Silently, they stared down at the coma wrapped Bougrot, who lay with hands and body limp, mouth half open.

"That can wait!" ejaculated old Manecu nervously. "You're like a pair of kids. Look! The fire is half out now. Get going and put on those other leaves. Do you want to walk—or swim—to the coast, even if he will free us from our promises?"

The two younger men smiled sheepishly. With his powerful fingers Curtin unscrewed the cap from his canteen, forced the precious nuggets down into the body of the vessel itself, returned the cap, hung the thing over his shoulder. When the palmetto thatch was done and a great stack of green logs had been piled underneath the shelter and close to the fire to dry, they sat down to get warm, to rest.

"Let's sleep," suggested Manecu soberly. "We've got lots of work ahead."

But then young Ricaud spoke up about a girl he had met once on the *Malecon* in Havana when his ship was in. Curtin matched it with one of his own memories. Far past dawn they sat talking of women, liquors, foods, brands of tobacco, clothes, music . . . civilized things; things they did not have; things gold would buy . . .

Somewhere up above the thick tree roof the sun rose on a rain lashed world. Into the forest corridors came the vague greenish light of dawn. Slowly it drove back the night shadows, awakened the monkeys, the parrakeets, the jungle world for another day. By the fire the three had talked themselves out, had at last been conquered by their immense inertia. They slept, still sitting up, in the attitudes they had maintained while in conversation.

VI

A BIG, sluggish ant-eater lumbered across the edge of the clearing, frightening a pack of small monkeys who hunted for *saouri* nuts among the leaves and ferns. The bright eyed little pack fled, screaming shrilly. Their screams pierced Bougrot's waning stupor, brought him into consciousness. He sat up, his head pounding, a bitter feeling of nausea at the pit of his stomach, his eyes, his mouth and throat burning. His mind was an aching blank, and for a time the only impressions made on it were the sensory ones. But, gradually, his eyes steadied, cleared, and he took in the nodding, uncomfortable forms of his companions.

Curiously, he stared at the fire shelter. He had no memory of its being built. They had, then, done it while he was asleep. But his last conscious memory was of his direct, futile argument with the level headed American. The fire had died to a smoldering bed of reddish gold embers and white ash. He rose up to replenish it. As he stepped back from dumping on the blackened logs he half stumbled over Curtin's battered old canteen. The act reminded him of his thirst, his flaming throat and mouth.

He picked up the canvas covered thing. It was monstrously heavy in his hand. He jerked out the cork stopper and raised it. Something rattled dully inside it. No water sloshed inside for his eager lips and throat. Puzzled, he lowered it, shook it again. Now he could faintly hear the unmistakable sound of metal chinking against metal.

Almost unknowingly, he licked his black, puffed lips with his harsh tongue, moved close to the fire, and with feverishly swift fingers uncapped the thing. He tipped it up. Into his hands, in gleaming, small cascade, poured a stream

of nuggets, one almost as big as a hen's egg.

"Sacred thunder!" he whispered stupidly. "A thousand sacred thunders!"

He held in his hands roughly seven or eight thousand dollars in gold. With a harsh, snarling cry he dropped the nuggets back into the uncapped canteen, returned the top and cork stopper. He dropped the canteen to the grass, came about on the balls of his bare feet and stared toward the sleeping trio, his hands out like terrible talons. These men—his companions, his subjects—had found gold, and had not told him about it, had hidden the fact from him! He, Jules Bougrot, their emperor! Before they had even reached their land of future empire they had betrayed him.

Red sparks swept across his eyeballs. Hot blood surged up toward his pounding, dimmed brain. Then one clear, sane fact pierced through. These were not the sort of men to cheat him, to betray him. All three of them had been too loyal, too straight. No, they must have found it during the night—while he slept. But, he reasoned with returning clarity, if one of them had stumbled on a surface pocket of gold along the river bank during the night, he would have awakened him. They themselves, stimulated, intoxicated by the discovery of the stuff, had obviously sat up almost all night, talking of it. And had not awakened him . . .

With infinite slowness, for he fought against it with every bit of strength in his subconscious mind, Jules Bougrot realized the truth. He smiled, off into the dim jade corridors of the jungle, and it was like a man smiling in death. He lifted up his face, trying to see the sky, and the great, hard drops of the tropic rain beat down upon his forehead, his cheeks and eyes, washing away the salt tears. For a moment he turned and looked down at the three, then his heels came together and he saluted them, his eyes shut, as if they were a regiment passing in review, and he were their colonel. With a snap his hand came down against his side, the posture broke, and with it went the flaming mood of courage which had sustained him during it.

JUST visible above Curtin's knee was the heavy muzzle of the old Mauser. Bougrot had no conscious thought; he just reached for it. But the grip that seized his ankle was like that of a steel band. He looked down and behind him. Old Manecu lay prone on his side, and in his other hand he held the long, heavy machete.

"No," he said quite softly. "No, my very great one!"

Jules Bougrot could not speak; he just lowered his head in sign of defeat. Manecu released his grip, sprang like a vast gray panther to his feet. His fierce fingers tightened about Bougrot's elbow; side by side they moved through greenish, faint unreality of the dawn light toward the river.

"Wash yourself, drink," said Manecu when they stood on the sand and loose rubble of the bank. "It is what you need."

Bougrot obeyed, like a frightened child. When he straightened up Manecu again took him by the arm.

"Why were you doing that when I awoke, Jules?"

"I had just come across the gold you had in Curtin's canteen."

"He found it in the night, coming down here for—water. There is probably a considerable quantity more there in the same pocket. Perhaps we shall all be pretty well-to-do, maybe rich, Jules . . ."

"Yes." Bougrot's voice was colorless, without intonation. "Money, enough money, will get you through to the coast. And this Curtin, he is a fine fellow, and under no suspicion; he can help you immeasurably."

"No!" Never had Bougrot heard the old man speak with such emphasis. "Look me in the eyes, Jules. That is it. To you we have given our word—gold, no gold. We—we are your men; you are our emperor, land—no land. That we decided during the night. *C'est tout, ça, Jules.*"

"No, it is not all, old one. There is that which happened to me last night. Which happened two years ago in Marseilles—"

"I ask you, for all of us, to forget that, Jules. We know—we understand. And we will watch. *Et alors?*"

"There is nothing more, now," said Bougrot in a low voice. He turned his head swiftly aside. But not so swiftly that Manecu failed to see the quick, hot tears in his eyes. Manecu wrapped a great, prehensile arm about him as he would about a child.

"Come," he said softly. "Let us go back and awaken those other ruffians; get at some breakfast, some work."

Back by the fire, Manecu leaned down, secured Curtin's old German army rifle. His eyes steadied on Bougrot's for a moment, then lowered to the gun.

"You will get us a young monkey with this, eh, Jules?"

"I will get you a young monkey," repeated Bougrot, and the words became a solemn oath.

He took the Mauser from the other, levered a bullet into the barrel, threw off the safety catch, moved away with the quiet stealth of his jungle training.

When he was over twenty paces away Manecu rapidly roused up the other two, brought them shoulder to shoulder.

"I have talked with him; told him," he said hoarsely. "We are going on, toward the empire . . ."

"That is as it should be," said Ricaud. "I have helped kill a man; I have been a tough guy, a *bagnard;* but my word is my word!"

"You're speakin' for me, too," said Curtin. "What say we eat?"

The fire was roaring magnificently and the three were busy sharpening the tools with flat stones and wet sand when Bougrot came back, a red furred monkey dangling from his fist.

"Good man!" smiled Curtin calmly, looking up. "But what one of those Mauser slugs does to a monkey doesn't leave much behind."

It was infectious, warming, that smile. Bougrot smiled back as he sat down to skin and clean the animal. This, he repeated to himself time and again, was the present, the present. Forget the black, bitter past. Forget the vague future. Today . . . now . . . this moment . . . breakfast of roasted monkey meat, *saouri* nuts, the companionship of these loyal, warm hearted men . . . He almost sang as he worked.

Soon they ate. Then a brief, nervous silence settled over them. Curtin spoke to break it:

"The old one has told you that I stumbled on some gold last night, Bougrot?"

"Yes." Bougrot's tone was very calm. "That is great luck for us all."

"You would not mind then if I went back and searched for more while you three went about the burning and cutting of the canoe?"

"No. It is for the good of us all, that."

Curtin gave a smiling, silent nod in answer. He rose to his feet, took the ax and split a four-foot long, shallow slab of wood from one of the logs beside the fire. With one of the sharpened machetes he fashioned cleverly out a hollow sort of bowl; this for the sifting of his nuggets and dust.

"You're an old hand, huh?" said Ricaud admiringly in English.

"Yeah." Curtin grinned broadly. "I've done it once or twice before. See you later!"

Bowl under his arm, whistling happily, he moved off through the insistent pounding of the rain. The three stared after him for a moment, then Manecu asked:

"We're going to get ourselves a canoe, yes? Let's get at it. There's a good tree, there, sailor. See what an impression you can make on it with the ax. Bougrot and I will spell you when you're through."

VII

IN FOUR days they had as the result of tremendous and unremitting labor a well shaped hardwood canoe, three paddles, and what Curtin estimated to be a little more than forty thousand dollars in gold and dust. It was enough,

he suggested dryly on the fourth night, because there was no more. He had searched the stream on both banks for ten miles up and down during the four days, using a small raft he had constructed for himself single handed. The one shallow, wide pocket was the only one he had found; there had not even been traces of others along the wide, flat, sandy banks. It was, he said, the way gold came in this country of sluggish rivers and alluvial soil. But, forty thousand dollars—that started an empire with a bang, didn't it? Even Bougrot smiled broadly at that whimsy.

On the fourth morning they pushed the fire blackened canoe into the stream and shoved off upwater, toward the head of the river, where, Curtin stated emphatically, there was a small branch which obliqued over into the broader, more widely used Essequibo. And beyond the headwaters of the Essequibo, some four or five hundred miles overland, was their goal, their land of empire.

They paddled by day, boldly, riding their luck, confident that well armed and well conditioned as they were, they could fight off almost any attack by natives or small river patrols. It was a bad country, though, Curtin warned them at night beside their small, brush hidden fire. Djuka country; negroes, not Indians. A self-sufficient, powerful and surly tribe, brought originally by the Dutch colonials from the African Slave Coast for plantation hands. Over a century and a half ago they had revolted, taken to the jungle and stayed there, not looking for trouble with the white men, but welcoming it like good warriors when it came.

"But," ended Curtin, "we don't bother them, they won't bother us. Let's sleep."

A low, blue-green mist lay over the dull river surface, hiding the dark jungle walls on each side, blotting out their own sounds in the canoe, dulling away the jungle noises. Manecu and Ricaud were at the paddles fore and aft; the American and little Bougrot rested amidships on the bottom, having just finished their three-hour paddle trick.

To them it had a sound like the beating of a vast heart, swelling, dropping away, returning. Manecu heard it first.

"Drums," he said. "Nigger *obeah* drums."

"Yes," said Curtin, "I've been waiting for it. That's M'tombé, the big Djuka village ahead. They're regular African niggers in their ceremonies and customs. But they won't bother us. Go on. I was down past here last spring, and some of the big bucks, out fishing above the rapids, only stared at me and grinned."

They went on, but, silently, Curtin handed to Bougrot one rifle, reserving the shining old Manser for himself. The drum roar was thunder in their blood and brains now, even their pulses seemed to keep time to it.

"*Mucha dansa-dansa!*" grunted Curtin in Spanish. "They're all steamed up by something."

Then, through the blue bellied pall of mist ahead, lurched the big canoe. Ricaud and Manecu saw it simultaneously, shifted course toward the right bank. A high, vague shout pierced the mists, the awful, blood stirring noise of the Djuka drums. It was the shout of a white man, and the blurred words had been in English.

"Steady," commanded Curtin sharply to the two paddlers. "Steady! That guy is a white man and is in bad trouble. Keep bow-on toward him. Watch it, huh, Lebel?"

FOR A moment they had lost sight of the other craft in the fog maze, but now it drifted drunkenly into view again through a patch of open, opaque water. A tall man in a white shirt and a dark stained sun helmet hunched amidships in it, and as he spoke he waved his hands madly and let slip unnoticed into the stream the paddle he had been using. The four in the dugout were silent for a moment with amazement. Then the white shirted man emitted another frantic, hoarse shout in English, in Spanish.

"Come alongside him quick!" growled

Curtin, but his hand was still on the trigger guard of the Mauser. Expertly, the two brought the dugout in against the other craft.

"Oh, my God!" they heard. "Oh, my God . . . White men!"

The man's hands writhed and quivered as he spoke and the four saw that down his white shirt ran a slow, dark red stream of blood. He coughed, and bloody foam came to his lips.

"Up there! Up there!" he shrieked. "The blacks have got the rest of them—are killing them!"

"Who, buddy?" asked Curtin in his hard, calm voice.

While the man struggled to answer Curtin studied the other craft. It was a beautifully designed steel sponson canoe of a dark olive color. Abaft the cutwater, an inch or so below the gunwale, was stenciled in neat red letters: *Standish University Expedition*. Below, in smaller lettering: *No. 1*.

Curtin looked up, and his face was grim, relentless. Once or twice before had he met fools like this in the jungle. But the man in the neat steel canoe was dead, his head forward on his bloody knees, his sun helmet awry, his disturbed steel-rim glasses dangling from one ear.

"What is it? What is it?" rasped Bougrot, staring.

"A dead damn' fool of a scientist. His partners are up there in the Djuka village fixin' to be quartered. The *hombre* seems to have jumped 'em somehow, and got speared through the lungs doing it."

"A scientist, a doctor?" asked Bougrot incredulously.

"Yeah!" Curtin almost spat the words. "They were up behind the Surinam when I came through downcountry. Science, my neck! Stupid fools! Mixing with Djukas during *obeah*—'looking for source material'. They've got it; will get it! To hell with them! Let them go, Bougrot. We got our job: off into the brush and wait until it's over for a day or so."

"What do you think they did, Curtin?" persisted Bougrot.

"Did? Probably tried to swipe some *obeah* charm from the headman during the thing. Those niggers go crazy during an *obeah* dance. Listen now."

They listened, and the color drained slowly from their faces. Bougrot shifted a bit in the bottom of the dugout so that he could see the form of the dead man in the canoe which Ricaud still held alongside with his paddle blade.

"He has died for science, that man," said Bougrot slowly. "His companions, doctors, scholars, are doing the same thing up there now. Perhaps they are fools, but they have not been cowards. My brother, Jean Louis, was a scientist; died somewhat the same way in the Sahara. And I am your emperor!"

"You mean," asked Curtin quickly, "that we are going up in there and try to haul those guys out?"

"I can only order you. If not, I will go alone."

Curtin smiled wryly, spat into the black swirl of the water.

Bougrot turned with his grave, white face, his gleaming eyes, to the others. But Manecu and Ricaud had already cast off the other craft and were bending to their paddles, upstream. Bougrot whistled softly through his teeth. These men of his! And they followed him—*him!*

But, he and Curtin had been soldiers, and the other two were hard bitten, jungle men. Below the Djuka village, some thousand yards, they dragged up the dugout into the shore brush, stopping only to hide the huge, hollow log full of gold and to sweep up machetes, pistol and ax. Then forward, at a swift lope along the winding river trail, worn wide and smooth by thousands of bare feet.

IT WAS a frightened little Djuka child who saw them first, then piped up a terrified scream before Curtin flung her gently sidewise off the trail. Black men, painted with the bright, ceremonial colors of their gods, turned from their howling, terrible dance about the rows of stakes. They were jungle men, good warriors, but their brains were stupefied with the self-,

inspired madness of their steps, the fiery delirium of their drums. Eight of them fell as they leaped forward, barehanded, screaming, toward the barking guns of the men who stood in the head of the trail.

But others found blowguns, spears, bows, threw themselves flat, ran lithely toward the circle of huts, the jungle. Only a few of them did Ricaud and Curtin hit. About the tall row of stakes slumped four naked white men, still alive, still trembling, mouths open and bloody, eyes like red hot coins. Toward them ran four giant drum-mad Djukas, machetes upraised, mouthing incoherent promises to their gods.

In one hand Jules Bougrot, once a major of the Moroccan Division, held a trade machete. To him, now, it was a sword. He ran, silent, grim, his mouth a white and terrible line across his bloodless face. He carved one black, woolly skull to the nape before the other three turned on him from their work of execution. Another he killed, disemboweling him with an upflung blow. Then died standing up, a blowgun dart through his back, a machete blade deep into his shoulder. Once he cried out:

"*Patriel Patriel*"

Then he fell forward on his face and was still.

The Djukas were fighting men, not cowards. But now, foot by foot, as silently and as desperately as their three attackers advanced, they gave back. About the chrome daubed, ornately carved ceremonial chair of the chief they attempted a stand. Lead cut at them like a vast knife. They squirmed away, yowling to their gods even in death. The rest ran.

The three bloody, naked men did not follow. They stood panting, staring through redshot eyes, waiting—for what they did not know. Then the last of the mutilated men hunched at the foot of the row of stakes rolled over on his face and cried gaspingly out in death.

It sobered the attackers, made them sane. Now they knew that they were victors. Now they knew that they had won, and that Bougrot was dead, and that the thick lipped black men would not come back again, even to snipe them from the jungle edge, for alone, the four of them, they had broken the potent charm of *obeah*.

"Go," said Manecu, and his voice was like the bark of a dog, "and burn their huts so that I can have light. Then rest. Tonight we go downstream. But now I have work to do."

Ricaud and the American gaped at him, opened their bloodcaked mouths to speak, then obeyed. One by one, intense, impermanent torches in the night, the huts flared up. The clearing was ringed with leaping yellow flame. In its light the two younger men watched Manecu with wide eyes.

Blood from his uncounted superficial wounds had dried and caked on his scrawny body until his skin was an awful black and white motley. His hair was stiff with it; his eyes gleamed like strange opals from their shadowed caverns. He seemed like the esoteric priest of a forgotten religion about his rites.

With the ghastly ax he had chopped a shallow pit in the sandy ground at the foot of the stakes. Into it, quickly, without word or second look, he thrust the four bodies of the scientists. Still squatting on his haunches, he used the broad blade of the machete to slip back in the loose sand.

He rose up; with his bare feet he flattened the sand in. Again he dug; deeply, swiftly, this time scooping forth great streams of sand. Slowly he turned. Bougrot's body lay there, stark, terrible. Infinite tenderness was in his motions as he lifted up the little man, arranged his body, then lowered it out of sight into the sandy grave.

"*Le jour de gloire,*" whispered Ricaud huskily, hands close to his lips.

Curtin did nothing but nod. Their eyes went back to Manecu. The old man had picked up the cleverly fashioned, ceremonial chair of the Djuka chief.

One fierce, down sweeping blow of the

machete and he had severed legs from smooth hardwood seat. All about him, in the stiff, grotesque attitudes of death, lay the Djuka warriors who had been killed in that last, awful volley. From them with harsh fingers he stripped bright wooden charm beads—string after string. For a moment he bent busily over his labor and the two staring men on the edge of the clearing could not make out what he was doing. When he arose he held in his hands a small cross.

The two, elbow to elbow, stumbled to their feet and came forward, dragged inexorably by some fundamental thought far below their conscious knowledge. Manecu swerved around, looked at them searchingly with his deep, burning eyes.

"He died for them," he said hoarsely. "This—for them."

Deeply, he sank the cross into the ground. The two made no movement, no gesture; their eyes alone strayed to that other blank grave where lay the man they had followed without question, without murmur through those jungle months which had been veritable years of agony.

"What for him?" barked Curtin. "Him —Jules Bougrot?"

"Those blacks, they will not come back here to desecrate?"

"No. Never. The spell, the charm of *obeah* is broken: their best warriors dead; their huts and fields burned to the jungle edge. They will not come back, ever."

"Good. Then make me a fire so that I can see. Then let me be an hour, two hours, until before dawn. Sleep, talk, eat, but let me be!"

When the dry maize husks and palmetto fronds and poles were flaming high and white, the two moved wearily back, squatted in sleep-stupid wonder to wait. They could no longer deny weariness; a black curtain of exhaustion dropped closely about them. Manecu roused them roughly from it hours later.

The fire was a dull gleam of embers. In the jungle birds stirred and squeaked, monkeys chittered, feeling the coming of dawn. The old man was beyond the point of speech. He reeled and could hardly stand erect. He held out one hand that was like a claw. They stared, and then a low, soft cry came from Ricaud, a cry of pain and of understanding.

Above Bougrot's grave was the hardwood slab which had been the seat of the Djuka chieftain's chair. Of it, sardonically, Manecu had made a headstone. On it he had chiseled, carved, into the stonelike hardwood, the epitaph of the man who had led them:

CI GIT
JULES BOUGROT
L'EMPEREUR
DU PAYS PERDU

"Here lies Jules Bougrot, Emperor of the Lost Empire."

The three looked at one another, and knew no speech for their thoughts, their emotions. It was all there, in that monument, that simple tribute to him, Jules Bougrot, emperor of the lost land of his brain, now forever lost. Gone, now, that man, that dream of outcast empire. And they lived, and wanted to live.

"What—now?"

Ricaud asked it, and it was like the question of a bewildered child. Étienne Manecu, very close to the black verge of exhaustion, gazed waveringly, wonderingly, into the face of the third man. Knowing these men, knowing himself, Curtin brought himself to speech:

"Downstream . . . Maracaibo, Georgetown. I known Americans, Englishmen, there, who will do what we want done for money. And not too much money. Then—then Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, China. The three of us, huh?"

He got no answer, but he needed none. Manecu placed his hands upon their shoulders gropingly. Step by step they dragged across the charred clearing, went down the jungle trail to where the gold, their eternal passport, was hidden. The canoe grated loose from the shingle and sand, floated off downstream in the swift, dark embrace of the current. Behind them in the clearing the only sounds were those of the jungle dawn and the faint whispering of dying embers above the bodies of the dead.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Redskin Rhapsodies

I

WHILE MODERN ethnologists are quarreling over the primitive redskin and how he ever got to America, it is rather amusing to look back at the views of the great French satirist, Voltaire. (Œeuvres, t. VII. 197–198). One suspects that he must have contracted a slight pain in the neck over the disputes which raged between Buffon, Raynal and Jefferson, Dr. S. S. Smith, Adair, Mather, Boudinot, Hubbard, Robertson, Roger Williams and other learned commentators—for it was not like Voltaire to ascribe much of anything to the hand of God.

"Since many fail not to make systems upon the manner in which America has been peopled, it is left only for us to say, that he who created flies in those regions, created man there also. However pleasant it may be to dispute, it cannot be denied the Supreme Being, who lives in all nature, has created about the 48° parallel animals without feathers, the color of whose skin is a mixture of white and carnation, with long beards approaching to red; about the line, in Africa and its islands, negroes without beards; and in the same latitude, other negroes with beards, some of them having wool and some hair on their heads; and among them other animals quite white, having neither hair nor wool, but a kind of white silk. It does not very clearly appear what should have prevented God from placing on another continent animals of the same species, of a copper color, in the same latitude in which, in Africa and Asia, they are found black; or even from making them without beards in the very same latitude in which others possess them. To what lengths are we carried by the rage for systems

joined with the tyranny of prejudice! We see these animals; it is agreed that God has had the power to place them where they are; yet it is not agreed that he has so placed them. The same persons who readily admit that the beavers of Canada are of Canadian origin, assert that the men must have come there in boats, and that Mexico must have been peopled by some of the descendants of Magog. As well might it be said, that, if there be men in the moon, they must have been taken there by Astolpho on his hippogriff, when he went to fetch Roland's senses, which were corked up in a bottle. If America had been discovered in his time, and there had then been men in Europe systematic enough to have advanced, with the Jesuit Lafitau that the Caribbees descended from the inhabitants of Caria, and the Hurons from the Jews, he would have done well to have brought back the bottle containing the wits of these reasoners, which he would doubtless have found in the moon, along with those of Angelica's lover. The first thing done when an inhabited island is discovered in the Indian Ocean, or in the South Sea, is to inquire, whence came these people? but as for the trees and the tortoises, they are, without any hesitation, pronounced to be indigenous; as if it were more difficult for nature to make men than to make tortoises. One thing, however, which seems to countenance this system, is that there is scarcely an island in the eastern or western ocean which does not contain jugglers, quacks, knaves and fools. This, it is probable, gave rise to the opinion that these animals are of the same race with ourselves."

IN VIEW of the prevalent theory that aboriginal North Americans sprang from a band of Kamschatkan adventurers who crossed from Asia on the ice, it seems odd that the roots and stock words of the Kamskadale and the Aléoutean bear so little resemblance to each other. Words like mother, father, god, child and so forth are the slowest to change; it takes something abysmal and important like jazz, Tex Guinan, or bootleg gin to transform a dignified pair of words like sweetheart and idiot, into red-hot-mama and sugar-daddy . . .

English	*Kamskadale*	*Aléoutean*
God	Nionstichtchitch	Aghogoch
Father	Iskh	Athan
Mother	Nas-kh	Anaan
Son	Pa-atch	L'laan
Daughter	Souguing	Aschkinn
Brother	Ktchidsch	Koyota
Sister	Kos-Khou	Angiin
Husband	Skoch	Ougunn
Woman	Skoua-aou	Ai-yagar
Girl	Kh-tchitchou	Ougeghilikum
Young boy	Pahatch	Auckthok
Child	Pahatchitch	Onskolik
A Man	Ouskaams	Toyoch
The people	Kouaskou	
Persons	Ouskaamsit	
The head	T-Khousa	Kamgha
The face	Koua-agh	Soghimaginn
The nose	Kaankang	Aughosinn
The nostrils	Kaanga	Gouakik
The eye	Nanit	Thack

—EMMET KARLE

Attention, New Readers

HERE is a chance to enjoy some of the old-timers. Address Mr. Mackey directly at 31 East Ashley Street, Jacksonville, Florida, with all bids for this collection.

Complete file of *Adventure* from October, 1913, to and including May 15th, 1929. 382 copies in all. I will not break the file. Will sell cheap or swap for old coins or old books. One of the most intensely interesting stories that I ever read commences in the first copy—Oct. 1913. It is called H_2O.
—JOHN H. MACKEY, State Labor Inspector, 31 East Ashley Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

THE CALL

The moon is up! And when the moon is full
I think of nights pitched on a windy field
And streaked with glow of distant fires. Bold nights—
Long gone—with beat of hoof and shout of men.

The moon is up! A soaring, pagan god,
Drenching the night with yellow, mellow light!

Hello? Some one is riding down the trail!
At this late hour? And why? I can not guess!
He checks his horse, dismounts, and comes afoot.
And now his swinging stride hints at a step
I know, yet can not place. Nearer, he comes,
Until the moonlight glistens on his belt,
His bearded chin and open throat—sweaty
And caked with dust. Far come, no doubt! Only
The hat that shades his eyes, or I'd be sure.
Six feet away, and now, I know the man
Yet with so much surprise it leaves me dumb.

He grips my hand. And instantly, his touch
Brings back the rush of steeds. A rolling plain
Beneath the moon. A wild and reckless band—
Loose-reined—their shadows linked across the trail—
Racing to strike before the blood-red dawn.

He laughs—the old, defiant ring. Inquires
About my empty years. What can I say?
Ask him to share the shanty and its bed?
Offer a man like him my leisured ease?
Doing no more than just enough to live?
Roping, branding, herding a few, stray steers?
"Aw, hell!" is what he'd say. "The moon is up!"

Fact is, he scarcely glances at the shack,
But takes my arm in his and walks and talks.
A horse neighs suddenly. He drops my arm
And looks at me. I nod. The moon is up!

—LOWE W. WREN

Freydis

THIS TWO-FISTED DAUGHTER of a Viking *jarl* seems to have left her dents in the armor of history. If I ever meet Mr. James Branch Cabell, I am going to ask him if she was the archetype of his magic lady of the same name. But it is a far cry from Poictesme to Vinland . . .

Comrade Norwood has a word concerning that undiscovered Norse treasure.

MAY I ask comrade Allen Willey, whose recent story of "Norse Treasure in Nova Scotia" greatly interested me, whether he has consulted the Flatey Jarbok account of Thorvard, son in law of Eric the Red, whom he mentions as having been lost from the other ships of the 1007 A.D. voyage and is supposed to have settled in Nova Scotia with his pagan navigator and crew?

According to this account, Freydis, wife of Thorvard and daughter of Eric the Red, was the real leader of a voyage to Vinland (wherever that was) and her brother Leif loaned or rented her his house there which he had built several years ago. Freydis had arranged to take into partnership the brothers Helge and Finnebog, two Icelanders, but just arrived in Greenland. She and the brothers were to split 50-50, and take an equal number of crew. Thorfin Karlsefne, who had spent some time in the colony, appears to have been arbiter of this agreement, which Freydis immediately broke by concealing five more warriors in her ship than the brothers Helge and Finnebog took.

Upon reaching Vinland, she and her forces began an immediate quarrel with the partners from Iceland, which culminated next year in her complaint to her husband, Thorvard, that they had struck and treated her roughly. In consequence, the badgered husband surrounded the *skalli* of the Icelanders, and killed the latter to a man. They would not kill the women; but Freydis called for an ax and killed them herself! She did not believe in competition . . .

Freydis certainly returned home, where her misdeeds eventually leaked out. But her only punishment was a dire prophecy from her brother Leif that she and her progency would not flourish. Whether she took her husband Thorvard home with her the saga does not say. "She went to her abode" in Greenland; and when the story of the murders came to light "nobody thought of them from that time, but ill".

If this is the voyage of 1007 on which Mr. Willey bases his story, then it would seem that Freydis at least was not left behind with a husband to give "Freydisborg" a name. I would like to get his authorities and some detail because I have been collecting data of a certain period to which same will be important—to me—for a romance connecting a number of curious events that seem to point toward greater intercourse between whites and Indians than can be proved historically.

Of course the mere fact that Thorvard and Freydis his wife may be eliminated from the Nova Scotian story does not affect its probability. Some other Norseman would do just as well. But I really hope it *was* Thorvard!

—J. W. NORWOOD, Louisville, Kentucky

Gangster Town

PERHAPS in five hundred years we may get sentimental and romantic about the fine old days of the Racketeers —as we sometimes do of the Privateers, or Robin Hood, or swashbuckling Captain Kidd—but at present it is just as well to be sensible and admit that modern gangdom is a tough problem. However, trailing the satellites of crookdom right to their underworld haunts has always been a fascinating game. Witness two stories in this issue: the Don Everhard serial and "Gangster Town."

You would not need John Wilstach's letter to know that—somewhere—the basis of his story is fact. Read any newspaper, in any town.

There is a slight fact background to "Gangster Town." Many readers will not recall the little crime wave that hit Canton, Ohio, in 1926, but in that year the underworld element tried to run the town and for a while succeeded. Fought by a local sheet, the gangsters imported a trigger man and placed Don R. Mellett, the owner, on the spot. S. H. Lengel, the chief of police, was among those arrested for the murder; he was tried twice and finally acquitted, after he had served months in the pen. Only the other day he was reinstated as head of the police department. Others were run down, including the finger man, and they are all 'doing it all'—as gangsters call life imprisonment, or finally went to 'the wire box' and took 'the last jolt.' My story, of course, does not attempt to follow the facts, and is something entirely different, but I think readers are interested in a factual basis.

Personally I have always been interested in those who think the most noble deed of all is to knock off a copper. Years ago I was a police reporter on the old N. Y. *Sun*, covering Essex Market Police Court and Jefferson Market Court. Since then, doing special newspaper work around the country, I have delighted in getting in touch with underworld types who, strange as it may seem, often appear quite as cultured and harmless as you and I.

Four years ago, when General Butler was running wild in Philadelphia, I was a reporter on *The Public Ledger*, and had some interesting police assignments.

In the last twenty years gangdom has changed from small stuff to big business. Nowadays gun mobs have backers and plan jobs with all the seriousness and forethought of a business campaign. The disposal of loot is even figured out beforehand. And fall money left with some great criminal lawyer in case of a slip-up. A responsible bondsman is on hand, of course, right on top of an arrest.

The real importance of the modern gang has come about through prohibition, and The Harrison Narcotic Act, which forced dope smuggling and peddling on a large scale. Big money then emerged and the large handlers disdain talking in figures lower than 'grands'—thousands.

I like writing about the underworld, and interesting though the characters may be, I can not force myself to speak about a 'square' crook, or a 'right' guy. There is no halo about these birds to me. They have the morals and friendly atitude of wolves who run in the pack and devour the weaker as a matter of course. I have never heard of a dress suit burglar and believe him to be a creature of the imagi-

nation. Also the Big Chief is a man who rules by the 'rod.' Well, I guess that I have been chatting quite long enough. The subject is a hobby with me.

—JOHN WILSTACH

O Print!

"A READER with strong eyes can outlast several generations of authors," says Comrade Newton, and he says it very prettily, interspersed with poetry like a Cyrano de Bergerac duel. We agree with him that authors and magazines often go down the hill. Sometimes they go up . . . and some of the "mags" of 1902 stood still.

As to authors' names in general—a good many of them depress me. But I've quit panning authors: I once had the idea T. S. Stribling was a bum—feature that! An old prospecter friend used to tell of walking over Cripple Creek's undeveloped ore bodies—and on! After that, when some "miner" dilated on the CERTAINTIES of his hole in the ground, Jack would say— "It's a sure cinch you're more than half right! Who am I to pronounce it a grave for dead hopes? CRIPPLE CREEK!" Jack would remind himself, and easily keep a straight face.

So when an author's name annoys me I mutter "T. S. Stribling!" and hope for the best. But I have to take it out somehow:

Pardon! M'sieu Villon

Where are the authors whose stuff "got to us"—
Gallant writers in days of yore?
Picked words sending a warm glow thru us—
Pregnant phrases producing more—
Made us laugh till our sides were sore:
Started—something—that blurred the view!
Where are the lads—I could name a score—
But where are the "mags" of nineteen-two?

I said I could name a score; let's see: Charles E. Van Loan; Helen Green Van Campen; George Fitch; Ralph Bergengren; Harry Allen; Charles Battell Loomis; William R. Lighton; Harris Merton Lyon; Edward Childs Carpenter; O. Henry; K. and Hesketh Pritchard; W. W. Jacobs; George Bronson-Howard; George Randolph Chester; H. Rider Haggard; Clarence L. Cullen; F. P. (Mr. Dooley) Dunne; Charles Victor Fischer; Alfred Henry Lewis; F. St. Mars; William H. Hamby—whoa! . . .

Most of these authors—I don't know where they are but hope I go there! Some of them are very much alive.

Oh, an author who loved and knew us,
Back from the "night's plutonian shore,"
Now and then will refresh, renew us,
Make his bow for a brief encore—
A story, a series—oblivion's door
Opens briefly and lets him thru.
"Where?" Echo answers when we implore.
But where are the "mags" of nineteen-two?

A reader with strong eyes can outlast several generations of authors—I hope this impels Tuttle, LeMay, Lamb, Mundy, Nason, Newsom, G. and Edgar Young, Pendexter, Howden-Smith, Brodeur, Buckley AND OTHERS to grate thru gritted teeth: "If that guy lives to read MY last yarn we'll both be practically immortal! . . ."

Younger authors arise to woo us,
Spreading tales from a goodly store;
Giving us surely all that's due us—
Welcome, lads, from the old heart's core!
You must follow the path they wore—
Your elder brothers, a jolly crew—
Leaving us as they left before—
But where are the "mags" of nineteen-two?

I know "the past is a bucket of ashes," "the best is yet to be," etc., but a man grows old, harder to suit, and more set on what DOES suit him—

L'Envoi

Well, Old Timers, in memories' lore,
A trifle misty, but warm of hue,
THERE are the authors by whom we swore—
THERE are the "mags" of nineteen-two!

—LEONARD NEWTON

It looks to me like the best to be
Is that yarn that's just ahead!

—ANTHONY M. RUD

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For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Wolf Scent

TRAPPING on the Alaskan Peninsula.

Request:—"Having read your reply to Mr. Phyfe of N. Y., am interested in the wolf scent and also the trapping conditions in Alaska. The best part of Alaska for trapping and laws on trapping there. Would be very glad to get formula of wolf scent."

—CLOYED WEIDNER, Othello, Washington.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The wolf scent mentioned is advised by R. K. Stewart, chief predatory animal hunter of Alaska, who may be addressed care of U. S. Biological Survey, Juneau, Alaska.

The base of Stewart's wolf scent is red salmon, ground through a meat chopper and thoroughly rotted. To 1 gal. of this add ¼ oz. zinc valorate in powdered form; ¼ oz. civit musk; ⅛ oz. beaver castor, ground fine; one pint common glycerine and thicken to paste with ordinary flour. He says a small amount of tonquin musk is an excellent addition. The glycerine prevents the scent from freezing readily in low temperatures. Stewart has had 11½ years' trapping for the U. S. B. S., and much time has been spent in Alaska.

If you can get it, a scent made from the contents of wolf bladder, especially female, is a pretty sure catcher. Also, if you can find a "wolf post" (place where they urinate like dogs) and set trap near it you'll win if you have ordinary skill in making a set.

Most trapping for the regular fur animals is being done on the Alaskan Peninsula south of the Yukon and north from the Gulf of Alaska. But there are many trappers up there and last year (winter just passed) was a poor one for several reasons, none of which I believe has much to do with fur scarcity. Down along this coast the trapping has been only desultory for years and the fur has been coming back. I believe a good trapper will stand a better chance, considering everything, to locate a line well back along the course of some of our southern rivers like the Unuk, Chickamin, Taku, Nass, etc. The region around the two first named is good.

Also, you can take quite a bit of fur along the coast anywhere, both on mainland and islands. Resident license here for trapping and hunting is $2.00 a year; non-resident is $50, with residence established by one year of continuous living.

Yucatan

A PARADISE for the serpent hunter.

Request:—"What an encouraging letter you wrote! Quite different from one I received from a professor of anthropology who told me, 'You could not choose any worse month than June, which corresponds to the full bloom of the rainy season. The right time to go to Yucatan is during the winter.'

Anyway, your letter has me still pepped up. We are going, right season or wrong. We are going in a 28-footer. We are going to head from Point Isabel straight across to Campeche, or possibly to the north of that.

What sort of coast is there between Champoton and the north line of Campeche? Is it rocky? Dangerous for small craft? Sandy beach? Cliffs to the water line? Deep water? Is there a string of islands paralleling the coast, like that along the Texas coast?

We are particularly interested in birds and snakes not to be found in the United States. Are there boas, pythons, anacondas or other large snakes there? What kinds of poisonous snakes are there? Where are the snakes the most plentiful? What of the bird life there? What wild animals?

Snakes are our dish. We caught 14 rattlesnakes, five to six feet long, in two hours on Matagorda Peninsula two years ago. On the same trip we got a coral snake of unusual size. It is one of the four venomous species in North America. We sent it to Raymond Dittmars at the Bronx Zoo. We are especially anxious to get some constrictors, if there are any there.

Maybe you can tell me something of what we may expect in the nature of winds and waves on the way

from the lower tip of Texas to the Yucatan Peninsula. We are going to head right across. Are squalls plentiful in June? We will likely be several days going across. The boat will be seaworthy but rough riding.

What is the disposition of the government thereabouts? Are the officials inclined to technicalities? Do you know anything about the law regarding taking out live specimens? We do not intentionally kill anything, but sometimes 'the operation is successful but the patient dies.' In that case we would want to bring out the mounted specimen. There will be a taxidermist in the party.

I hope you will not be too much annoyed by my bothersome questions. I want to know all I can about the country. I wish you could go with us. We always have a wonderful time, wherever we go. And this should be no exception."

—NOLAN SANFORD, Houston, Texas.

Reply, by Mr. W. Russell Sheets:—Glad you liked my information. I figured any one out to catch poisonous snakes might be willing to face wet weather. Take my advice and go in the wet season if you want to see animal or vegetable life at its height. I've lived there for three years continuously.

All around the north coast and down to Champoton you will find a shallow sandy shore and somewhat of an island string of sand bars a mile or so offshore, behind which are swamps which abound in snake and animal life. Jaina, just south of the north line of Campeche, is the most southerly island and is the largest and highest. Shallow shore on down to Campeche town, where bluffs stand out to the shore line and deep water comes in to five feet of the shore. This continues to Champoton where the bluffs recede and deep water continues. Nothing rocky or dangerous.

There are boas, but very rare. No other constrictors to my knowledge. Rattlers of many varieties in northern Yucatan and lizards four feet long around the old Maya ruins. Rattlers are not considered very poisonous. I forget the local names of snakes unfamilar to us that put you out in forty seconds.

They are most plentiful in the chicle districts and one day I found a dead man by the trail with his foot cut off and one of these little vipers cut in two near the scene. When you get back in the big mahogany and cedar country you will find myriad bird life in the tree tops with monkeys, sloths, pumas, tigers; deer abound and biggest of all, tapir in the Rio Hondo—you can sometimes see herds of them walking on the bottom when the water is clear. There are many alligators but I never killed one.

I'm not competent to advise you on winds except you will hit many squalls and God help you if you meet some of the rare ones. You will not find officials too technical. Carry a pocket full of big cigars and use them freely. Don't take in other than shotguns and .22's. Don't try to take out any curios or stones found around the Maya ruins or you may lose everything. I've never heard of any trouble taking out specimens.

Navigation

PILOTS aboard Naval vessels.

Request:—"1. When a battleship comes into New York Harbor (or any other port) does it take on a pilot as the Merchant Marine does? Is it the same in war and peace time? Though I have read somewhere that a Naval officer is his own pilot in any port, I have been contradicted and told that they always take on a pilot.

2. At what time does the first watch go on, on a Naval vessel, and what are the names (or nicknames) of the different watches?

3. Does a Naval vessel carry and use the radio compass? Can you give me a brief description of it and how it is used?"—FRED O'BRIEN, Milford, Conn.

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—1. They sometimes take pilots and sometimes do not according to circumstances. In the merchant service when the captain of a vessel takes a pilot, the pilot is responsible as long as he is in charge. On a Naval vessel the commanding officer is responsible for the ship at all times. The commanding officer must pilot the ship under his command *at all times*, but may employ a pilot when necessary, in his judgment. A pilot is considered merely as an adviser to the commanding officer, and his presence on board a Naval vessel shall not relieve the commanding officer, or any of his subordinates, from full responsibility for the proper performance of the duties with which they or any of them, may be charged concerning the navigation and handling of the ship. Many times it is necessary for the commanding officer to have the advice of a local pilot owing to conditions of charts, navigation guides, currents, and obstructions to navigation, etc.

Ostriches

INTEREST in their feathers is drooping, except among the men of the Highland regiments.

Request:—"I am very much interested in ostrich farming in South Africa, and am writing to ask if you can send me some information pertaining to this industry in that country."

—C. ROBBINS, Somerville, Mass.

Reply, by Capt. F. J. Franklin:—Ostrich farming in S. Africa with its attendant hazards, its heavy outlay and its demand for highly specialized knowledge on the subject is better left alone unless you are born and bred in the industry. The feather trade also has almost totally collapsed since the World War. In the years 1910 and 1911 the export value of ostrich feathers amounted to nearly 15 million dollars. Since 1922, however, these figures have fallen to an average of around one-fifth of these figures.

In certain districts of the Karoo desert ostrich

farming is carried on as a side line to sheep and cattle farming. These birds run nearly wild. Before the war profits of ostrich farming ran over 100 per cent per annum on the capital invested. The industry has, however, gained a little during the past 2 years, and the War Office in London, in order to help the industry, has authorized the wearing of ostrich plumes instead of bear-skin for full dress occasions on Highland Regiments uniforms.

I enclose you a pamphlet on ostrich farming which speaks for itself.

Spurs

THE fashion in fighting uniforms in the days of chivalry.

Request:—"I believe there was a time when suits of armor had spikes at knee, elbow, toe and heel. If so, about when was that?

Do you have any information in regard to the spur (on armor of mounted man)? I have an idea that is where the spur started from—the spiked heel of a mounted warrior."

—E. ZANTOW, Pleasant Valley, Iowa.

Reply, by Robert E. Gardner: The spur antedates plate armor by many centuries. Just when the spur first made its appearance I am not prepared to state, but I have seen spurs dating back to the Tenth Century; and as complete plate defense was not developed until about 1410–30 we are safe in assuming the spur older than the latter. The spur of the Tenth Century was the common prick variety; the simple heel band and straight goad neck predominating.

The Gothic solleret (foot defense) was a long, laminated affair terminating in a point; but this development was not a matter for practical use but of fashion. There is a genouillière (knee defense) figured in a British Royal manuscript dating from the Fifteenth Century which is equipped with a spike set at a right-angle to the side of the limb. It was probably designed to annoy the mount of an antagonist when at close quarters. At no time was armor spiked at toe, heel, elbow and knee.

Early rowel spurs are found on the monumental effigy of Sir John de Creke, Westley Waterless Church, Cambs. Sir John died 1325. There undoubtedly are earlier examples of this type but this date marks the beginning of their general adoption.

Wiliwili

A SCARCE South Sea Island wood, noted for its lightness.

Request:—"In the story 'Kaliho' by Paul Neumann in the March 1st 1929 issue of *Adventure* on page 127, I note the following passage:

'And the cross was made of wiliwili wood, such as we use for the outriggers of our canoes. It is the lightest wood known, *haole*, and I took it. So I took the cross as I have said, and I broke away the beam and fastened beam and pole together like a close held catamaran. We dropped into the ocean the cross and I, and with the east wind I floated, sometimes I swam, and the cross took me safe to Koko head on Oahu.'

I confess my ignorance as to what wiliwili wood is, but if it is real and practical it is what aviators need in crossing the Atlantic ocean from East to West in Northern latitudes.

The lighter weight of the wood resisting the pressure of the air would keep the plane from sinking into the ocean." —E. F. TEST, Omaha, Neb.

Reply, by Mr. James S. Meagher:—Wiliwili wood, although one of the lightest woods known, is not quite as light as balsa wood, I believe. Balsa wood is one of the woods used in airplane construction.

The wiliwili tree is known scientifically as "Erythrina monosperma" and specimens still occur in the Hawaiian Islands.

As the wood of this tree was used for the floats or "ama" of the native Hawaiian outrigger canoes, it was in great demand by the natives in times past. In consequence the larger trees were all cut for this purpose.

The remaining wiliwili trees to be found on the islands today are confined to rather small and stunted specimens which occur in the drier foothills, and I do not believe sufficient sizes are now obtainable for airplane construction. The wood is not used now for any commercial purpose.

Gas

PRODUCTION and distribution of natural gas.

Request:—"Can you tell me anything about natural gas streaming out an oilfield? To what is it employable? I heard it is used as burning-gas for cities. If so, how is it best obtainable?

How can it be best conducted to a far town? Does it pay to exploit it? Do you know any book or magazine giving details?"

—LUIZ CORRADO, San José, Costa Rica.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The natural gas from producing oil fields in the United States has been utilized ever since oil wells were drilled. It is usually controlled by the oil company owning the wells, and is piped from the field to cities and towns, where it is taken directly into the houses of consumers. Sometimes, indeed, where the field is small the gas is not controlled by a company but is simply piped into the various houses and sold at variable prices by the well owner.

The price is usually well under what ordinary manufactured illuminating gas can be made for, and distributed. I've used it in Pennsylvania and found it excellent for heating and cooking. It is used up here both East and West, North and South, wherever there are oil wells.

The gas producing well is simply capped so that conducting pipes may be attached, and the gas under pressure is forced to almost any distance within

reason. If a gas well exists within a few miles of a city unequipped with gas, the inhabitants will be only too glad to use the gas if it is brought to them. This of course requires capital necessary to purchase piping for the main conduit. The distribution to houses might perhaps be arranged on a contract basis; the user to pay for installing his own service pipe, this cost to be rebated over a specified period from his monthly gas bill. There are other ways of handling the proposition, naturally. Yes, it is well worth while if your customers are responsible people, to develop such a well for illumination service.

You may write to the U. S. Bureau of Mines, Washington, D. C., and obtain free data on this subject. Ask especially for *Bulletin No. 9*, on the construction of pipe lines to convey gas to cities, as handled in the Munroe oil field of Louisiana.

Natural gas is also used in this country by commercial consumers, for heat, light, power, manufacture of carbon black, gasoline extraction.

We have over 2½ million domestic consumers, and around 21,000 commercial consumers in the United States. The market value of the gas used is in excess of $200,000,000. Note that there are certain peculiarities existing in natural gas: It must be used *soon* after collecting in the pipe line—companies retain but 24 hours' supply in their systems; there is a difference between the summer and winter supply and pressure; some gas wells require gathering and pumping to consumers; also, when distribution here becomes a public utility, the industry is subject to municipal and State regulation. It is rather complicated business and should be studied thoroughly before embarking in any large way.

Arms

TACKLING a Kodiak bear with a pistol might indicate bravery, but it certainly would not bespeak discretion.

Request:—"During the summer months I carry on experimental work for the United States Bureau of Fisheries in Alaska. I am working on the salmon fisheries and it is necessary for me to follow up the small streams in which the salmon spawn. Here of late we have been bothered by attacks from the big brown and the grizzly bears. Some of the men are carrying the new sporting Springfield rifle for protection. This is, of course, a very hard shooting rifle and provides plenty of protection.

The rifle is, however, heavy, awkward and unhandy to carry while working in the water. One can not keep it on his shoulder all of the time and hence must make a run for it in case of an attack by a bear.

I have just about decided to buy a .44-40 Colt double-action six-shooter which I can carry on my belt and always have ready in case of a sudden attack by a bear. Will the .44-40 shell be heavy enough to stop a bear providing I hit him in the chest or stomach. I realize that I must be a pretty good shot to use such a gun, but I have decided that it will provide more protection than a rifle left in the boat or leaning up against a tree. Will you kindly advise me in this matter?"

—Fred A. Davidson, Beloit, Wis.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I certainly would never advise a man to tie into a Kodiak bear, or one of the big Alaska browns, with any pistol made, unless he were sure the bear was going to kill him anyhow. It takes a heavy bullet, well placed, to kill them as a rule, although one man, cornered, did the trick with a .22 automatic Winchester some years since. Hit him in the brain as he charged at a range of about twenty-five feet, as I recall it from published accounts.

The pistol *I'd* carry, were it a case of defending myself from one of these gentry, would be the twenty-gauge Ithaca pistol, with round ball loads in each barrel; the gun to be used in both hands like a shotgun, and only at the closest ranges. That's the most gun for its bulk and weight I know of right now. Ever use one of them? I have, with one hand at that, both barrels.

If, however, you *must* carry a pistol in place of a good carbine in .30 caliber, which you can do easily by means of the sling ring on the left side, I believe the best would be the .45 Colt, using the UMC black powder load, which develops an energy of 460 foot pounds; while this is far below the energy of a light .30 caliber Winchester, Marlin, Savage or Remington carbine, is the most powerful hand-gun, save the double twenty Ithaca mentioned above, in use today. I know my own Colts and Smith & Wessons for this cartridge do wonderfully hard shooting, and I can plant the bullets close enough to do execution, were I pushed into a corner whence I had to clear the way to escape uninjured.

I don't care for the .44-40 in revolvers, I may add here; I don't care to use rifle loads in the six-shooters, and far prefer a heavy revolver load to the rifle cartridge for the short barrels to which it's adapted.

Use it in both hands if pressed, and you will find it will do pretty well, I believe. But I still recommend a carbine in at least .30-30 caliber.

Colorado

CONDITIONS along the modern range trails.

Request:—"Please tell me about the conditions under which cattle are run in Arizona. Are there many large ranches there? Do they run under fence or on open range? Do they winter-feed? If not, do they use the same range winter and summer?

About how many riders do the larger outfits keep? Would like to have the information you would want if you knew nothing of that country and were considering going there to either run cattle or to work for a cattle company."

—W. D. McAntire, Anad, Montana.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—In Arizona the cattlemen work under three plans, some owning big ranges in fee, like the Bland family in the west and a big company next them, the Blands owning 295,000 acres and water rights of two good rivers and a large creek. The company owning a range 200 miles long. The first run 16,000 head, the second 60,000 head. A great many own small areas and water, then lease grazing land of the State, still others with small places graze in national forests at so much a head. Little fencing other than drift fences to hold cattle on range. I have ridden all over one range where I saw no fence in 50 miles and another where no fence existed in 80 miles.

Same range all the year round in most cases. Using from 2 to 40 riders. My private opinion is that an experienced man would stand the best chance to get a job in calving time or a bit later during the calf roundup.

But unless you are an honest to goodness waddie, your chance is about as good as that of a cobbler trying to get on as a hardrock tunnelman. Several Arizona cattlemen have told me that the State had an abundance of cowpunchers without importing any.

Also they have told me that men who were not familiar with the work cost more than they earned and that cowboys from the north had a lot to learn before they were firstclass waddies in Arizona, because of such a difference in conditions. A first class man in one place being down low in grade in another until he learned its ways, which is natural.

Stamp

WHAT constitutes a stamp "in good condition"

Request:—"In what condition must a stamp be, to be considered a good stamp for a stamp collection?

Where could I sell, or rather could you give me the names of buyers of stamp collections?"

—R. A. SCHROEDER, Bend, Oregon.

Reply, by Mr. H. A. Davis:—If a used stamp. it should be lightly cancelled, free from any defects such as tears or creases and be nicely centered (that is the design be in the center of the perforated border, the perforations not cutting into the design), of original color and brightness and unsoiled.

An unused stamp should have original gum on the back and except for what is said about cancellation for the used stamp, same description should apply.

The Stamp & Coin Shop, 406 Fifteenth St., Denver, Col., advertises to buy stamps, coins and collections. Write them what you have in detail.

Note

BEGINNING with this number, the complete list of "Ask Adventure" experts will appear regularly in the fifteenth of the month issue, instead of the first as in the past.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

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.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

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. **Extend 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.

See next page for complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, Copeland Manor, Libertyville. Illinois.

Yachting HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and Traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3 Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 835 Gladden Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Haitian Agricultural Corporation, Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, 507 No. Harper, Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., 117 North Boulevard, Deland, Fla.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 7 Block "S", Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthyology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology *(a) Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies). (c) Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball JOE F. CARR, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times*, Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1061 Madison Ave., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 504, 2115 F Street N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documented steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean (Siberian Waters).*—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 4322 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, Universal City, California.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.*—CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 5** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M.D., U. S. Veteran's Hospital, Fort Snelling, Minn., and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

✠**Africa Part 2** *Sudan.*—W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 3 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tunis and Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. COLLINS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal and Rhodesia.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Mortimer Park, Santa Susana, California.

✠**Africa Part 8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, 14837 Grand River Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentine and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 457 W. 123rd St., New York, N. Y.

West Indies *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, Coyocutena Farm College, La Libertad, Comayagua, Honduras.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading in Canada Part 1, and fur farming.—FRED L. BOWDEN, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.* JAS. F. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Trips for Sport and Adventure—big game, fishing, canoeing, Northland travel, also H. B. Company Posts, Indian tribes and present conditions.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck".) Box 191, North End Station, Detroit, Michigan.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 7 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.* Also yachting.—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

★**Canada Part 9** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin and Hudson Bay mineral belt.*—LIONEL H. G. MOORE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada.

Alaska. Also mountain climbing.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 3009 Crest Trail, Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 1 *Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.*—E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico.* Also Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance.—H. F. ROBINSON, Albuquerque, Box 445, New Mexico.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colo. and Wyo. Homesteading, Sheep and Cattle Raising.*—FRANK EARNEST, Keyport, New Jersey.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Mina, Nevada.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.* Especially early history of Missouri Valley.—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Mo. and Ark. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Especially wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Minn., and Lake Michigan.* Also clamming, natural history legends.—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 4 *Mississippi River.* Also routes, connections, itineraries; river-steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions about working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears.—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa.

Middle Western U. S. Part 5 *Lower Mississippi River (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Middle Western U. S. Part 6 *Great Lakes.* Also seamanship, navigation, courses, distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties, river navigation.—H. C. GARDNER, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Eastern Maine. For all territory east of the Penobscot River.*—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Western Maine. For all territory west of the Penobscot River.*—DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 1332, New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Adirondacks, New York.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Maryland, District of Columbia, West Virginia.* Also historical places.—LAWRENCE EDMUND ALLEN, 29-C Monongalia Street, Charleston, West Virginia.

Eastern U. S. Part 6 *Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C. Fla. and Ga. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard.* Also sawmilling, saws.—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Appalachian Mountain south of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of
ADVENTURE
September 1st

The PIRATE of D'ARROS

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

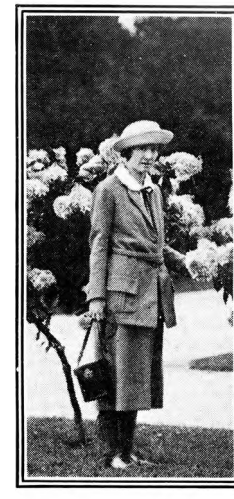
SOMEWHERE on this tiny atoll in the Indian Ocean was hidden a pirate's treasure. That alone detained the cut-throat crew, now that they had plundered the yacht and taken the daughter of its owner captive. And there was not a soul who could call them to account, except the mild-mannered old Zanzibar agent of the place, who had a peculiar genius for throwing knives.

This talent made one of the crew suspicious. Said he to the old man: "Say, do you know you look like Cap'n Herring? An old pirate friend of mine, he was. But the Dutchmen hanged him, down in Batavia . . ."

And—Other Good Stories

THE PINK PEAR, a mystery novelette that is refreshingly different, by BASIL DICKEY; ABLE SAILOR, BRAVE AND TRUE, a story of windjammer men, by BILL ADAMS; CENTER-FIRE PRIDE, a story of a renegade of the herds, by WALT COBURN; THE GUIDANCE OF GUILE, a story of Morocco, by GEORGE E. HOLT; THE LOST PUNCH, a story of the prize ring, by JOHN E. COLOHAN; PSAGA OF A PSALTY PSYCHOPATH, a humorous tale in verse, by JAMES SNOWBALL; BERSERK, a story of the wilds, by F. ST. MARS; TONY'S LULU, a story of the firefighters, by KARL W. DETZER; and the second instalment of THE DOUBLECROSS, a novel of Don Everhard and the Hollywood underworld, by GORDON YOUNG.

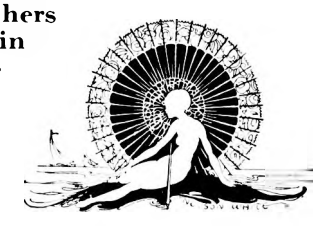
THIS is the time to take advantage of the popularity of Romance, Delineator and the other Butterick publications. New readers in every section of the country are demanding their excellent stories and other features. You can easily be the one in your community to profit financially just as hundreds of other housewives and business men, high school girls and fellows are doing, simply by spending a few hours of your spare time each week acting as local representative and looking after the interests of subscribers to these delightful publications. In her first month, Mrs. E. A. Ellsworth who lives in a small New York state town earned sizeable bonuses in addition to a generous slice of commission in just an hour or two. You can do as well or better.



Mrs. E. A. Ellsworth

Ready Vacation Cash

Your name and address on the coupon below brings you immediate information about the plan whereby you can quickly earn $5—$10—$50 toward your vacation or other needs. And puts you in line for a permanent business of your own with accumulating profits year after year. You need no capital or experience to succeed with this delightful, pleasant and easy plan that has proved so profitable to so many others not only in cash, but also in the many interesting contacts and experiences. Get in line and prove for yourself that your SPARE TIME spells EXTRA CASH.



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Butterick Publishing Company
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Gentlemen:—Certainly I am interested in the profits to be made from the popularity of your publications. Tell me about your plan.

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